

Press Releases: End of Ordered Departure at U.S. Embassy Havana

Media Note
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC
March 2, 2018

The U.S. Embassy in Havana has operated under ordered departure status since September 29, 2017, due to health attacks affecting U.S. Embassy Havana employees. It will reach the maximum allowable days in departure status on March 4.

On Monday, March 5, a new permanent staffing plan will take effect. The embassy will continue to operate with the minimum personnel necessary to perform core diplomatic and consular functions, similar to the level of emergency staffing maintained during ordered departure. The embassy will operate as an unaccompanied post, defined as a post at which no family members are permitted to reside.

We still do not have definitive answers on the source or cause of the attacks, and an investigation into the attacks is ongoing. The health, safety, and well-being of U.S. government personnel and family members are of the greatest concern for Secretary Tillerson and were a key factor in the decision to reduce the number of personnel assigned to Havana.

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Press Releases: Department Press Briefing – March 1, 2018

Heather Nauert
Spokesperson

Department Press Briefing
Washington, DC
March 1, 2018

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TRANSCRIPT:

2:37 p.m. EST

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

A couple announcements to start off with today. We're going to have to keep today a little tight because we have some guests joining us here at the State Department in a short while.

I'd like to start off with telling you about something that's taking place here tomorrow, and that is – who watched the women in the hockey – in hockey in the Olympics? Weren't they fantastic? Well, they are coming here to the State Department tomorrow. So our Deputy Secretary John Sullivan and our Under Secretary Steve Goldstein look forward to welcoming the gold-medal-winning 2018 U.S. women's hockey team here at the State Department tomorrow. I'll be meeting with the team prior to a reception that we're hosting for them. They are coming here as a part of our overall sports diplomacy program, so we're really looking forward to hosting them. If anyone's interested in meeting them or talking with them, we might be able to facilitate that. So just let us know.

Secondly, I'd like to mention the Secretary's upcoming trip to Africa. It'll be his first trip as Secretary of State to the continent. Secretary Tillerson will travel to Chad, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Nigeria from March 6th through the 13th. Secretary Tillerson will meet up with leadership in each country as well as the leadership of the African Union Commission, based in Ethiopia, to further our partnerships with the governments and the people of Africa. In particular, he plans to discuss ways that we can work with our partners to counter terrorism, advance peace and security, promote good governance, and spur mutually beneficial trade and investment. During the trip, he'll also meet with U.S. embassy personnel and participate in events related to the U.S.-Government-supported activities there.

Next, I want to highlight that today marks the day the Peace Corps was created by President Kennedy back in 1961. In the decades since, nearly 230,000 men and women from across the United States have volunteered to help combat hunger, fight disease, educate students, and create new economic opportunities in countries and communities around the world. Peace Corps volunteers represent many of our country's highest ideals, including ingenuity, hard work, and sacrifice. For many volunteers, their experiences ignite a love for their host countries and fuel a lifelong passion of government service. Hundreds of returned Peace Corps volunteers currently working here at State and USAID – our department is just one example of how volunteers continue to serve their country after they return. Many of you have met my colleague, Elie; he was a Peace Corps volunteer. I can't remember where, but somewhere he was. So thanks to all of our Peace Corps volunteers who continue to serve here at the State Department.

Lastly, the Kabul peace process conference took place in Kabul, Afghanistan yesterday. And we'd like to congratulate the Government of Afghanistan on its success. The meeting represented a historic step forward in demonstrating the resolve of the Afghan people to commit a peace process that brings an end to the war with the Taliban. President Ghani made clear in the speech that if the Taliban wants peace in Afghanistan the door to that is open. The Taliban should recognize that the Afghan Government and the Afghan people are offering confidence-building measures to show that real peace is possible. President Ghani made clear that there are no preconditions for peace. The United States and the international community strongly support the path to peace that president Ghani laid out in his speech. We echo the calls from across the Afghan Government and civil society for Afghanistan to join peace talks with the Afghan Government and to participate in the country's political system.

And with that, I'd be happy to take your questions. Matt, where would you like to start?

QUESTION: Well, actually, I just – I want to – briefly on that Afghan statement that you just read.

MS NAUERT: Yes.

QUESTION: When you said there were “no preconditions for peace,” does that mean that the Taliban no longer have to accept the Afghan constitution, lay down their weapons, renounce terrorism, et cetera?

MS NAUERT: I would have to refer you to President Ghani for that, because that's a statement that President Ghani made, and this just came out a short while ago, so I can try to get you some more information. I can't –

QUESTION: I get that, but this was the U.S. position as well. I mean, this had a U.S. position for a long time, that –

MS NAUERT: I would certainly think that –

QUESTION: – they would have to accept –

MS NAUERT: – our position has not changed, that we continue to call upon those to uphold the constitution of Afghanistan.

QUESTION: All right. Then what I wanted to ask is about the statements made by President Putin this morning regarding these new weapons that he said had been tested. I'm wondering what your – what the diplomatic reaction to this is from this building.

MS NAUERT: Yeah. Certainly – I mean, I can tell you many of us watched that speech with great interest here from the State Department, and I would imagine across U.S. Government as well. One of the things I want to make clear – and we've talked about this type of thing before – that we're not going to react to every word or idea that world leaders express. It was certainly unfortunate to have watched the video animation that depicted a nuclear attack on the United States. I mean, that's something that we certainly did not enjoy watching. We don't regard that as the behavior of a responsible international player. So I just want to make that very clear. It's – we just don't consider it to be responsible.

QUESTION: So you are reacting to – you say you're not going to react to – but you –

MS NAUERT: To every – but –

QUESTION: But you feel compelled in this case to –

MS NAUERT: Feel compelled to say, look, we saw it and we don't think it's responsible. We don't think that kind of imagery, seeing the portrayal in a cheesy video of that kind of attack being conducted on the United States as being a responsible action.

QUESTION: Okay. Can I ask your forbearance to – there's an issue with some of our Japanese colleagues, who've got a very tight time schedule. They want to ask about North Korea.

MS NAUERT: Okay. Certainly.

QUESTION: Can I ask you to go to them?

MS NAUERT: Sure.

QUESTION: Thanks. So apologies to everybody else.

MS NAUERT: Where are our Japanese colleagues back there on North Korea, who want –

QUESTION: Is it on? Did he leave?

QUESTION: Yeah.

QUESTION: Really, he's right there.

MS NAUERT: Is there somebody in particular?

QUESTION: Over here. Sorry.

MS NAUERT: Hi. How are you?

QUESTION: So we haven't got the readout of President Moon Jae-in's phone call, but Japanese wires are reporting the content of that. And we –

MS NAUERT: I just did, so hold on.

QUESTION: Okay.

MS NAUERT: Let me find it, okay?

QUESTION: Great.

MS NAUERT: And I'd be happy to provide you with that.

QUESTION: And we would also be wondering State Department's –

MS NAUERT: Pardon me?

QUESTION: We would also be wondering – want a statement from the State Department about that as well.

MS NAUERT: Certainly.

QUESTION: Great.

MS NAUERT: So let me provide a readout for you.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MS NAUERT: President Trump spoke today with President Moon Jae-in of the Republic of Korea to congratulate him on the success of the 2018 Olympics. President Trump thanked President Moon for his hospitality to the United States presidential delegation to the opening and closing ceremonies, led by Vice President Mike Pence and advisor to the President Ivanka Trump respectively.

President Moon briefed President Trump on developments regarding North Korea and inter-Korean talks. President Trump and President Moon noted their firm position that any dialogue with North Korea must be conducted with the explicit and unwavering goal of complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearization. The two leaders committed to maintain close coordination. And anything beyond that, I'd be happy to try to get for you later, okay?

QUESTION: Great.

MS NAUERT: All right. Hi.

QUESTION: So is the U.S. going to be participating in the Korean decision to send a special envoy to North Korea?

MS NAUERT: I mean, I can just tell you that the United States is latched up very closely with the Republic of Korea and Japan, and so we closely coordinate a lot of our conversations and meetings with them, and I'll leave it at that.

QUESTION: But will the U.S. be sending anyone in addition to the South Korean?

MS NAUERT: And we would go where?

QUESTION: To –

MS NAUERT: No, no. Okay. Let's move on.

QUESTION: Can we –

MS NAUERT: Laurie.

QUESTION: Yeah. Several questions.

MS NAUERT: Hold on. One second. What's that Arshad? Hi, Shadar.

QUESTION: Well, you – all that you commented on with regard to President Putin's statements really had to do with the animation and not with what is the fundamental issue, which is –

MS NAUERT: Hold on. I have more on that, if you'd like.

QUESTION: Oh, yeah. I do. I would.

MS NAUERT: Matt paused and deferred to our Japanese friend. So –

QUESTION: And now we're going to Kurdistan.

MS NAUERT: So if we want to go back to President –

QUESTION: I'm happy to go wherever you want.

MS NAUERT: – if we want to go back to Putin, we can do that. Okay.

QUESTION: I have just a follow-up.

MS NAUERT: Oh, goodness. Okay.

QUESTION: I mean, we're looking for a statement on North Korea – I mean, South Korea sending an envoy to North Korea, if that's all right with you. What is the State Department's –

MS NAUERT: Yes. So I think I just answered the question here from

Alicia, that is the United States is latched up very closely with South Korea. We have many conversations with our ally. Those conversations continue. We have a broad range of conversations with them. We share the principle of the denuclearization and the complete and verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, and that hasn't changed. I'll just say that we are in close contact with them.

QUESTION: Thank you so much.

MS NAUERT: Okay. You're so welcome. Okay.

QUESTION: Russia?

MS NAUERT: Hold on. Back to – do you have something on North Korea?

QUESTION: No.

MS NAUERT: Okay. All right. Let me go to Arshad. We're a little disorganized today. Okay. Arshad, go ahead.

QUESTION: So you responded to the broadcast of an animation –

MS NAUERT: Correct.

QUESTION: – which is, after all, a cartoon, but not to the substance, which is Russian claims of having new weapons systems that could threaten the United States. So can you respond to that?

MS NAUERT: Yes.

QUESTION: For example, is it not the case that at least one of these weapon systems has been under development or was under development many decades ago and then went away and –

MS NAUERT: Okay. Let me start with that.

QUESTION: Yes.

MS NAUERT: That is certainly a concern of ours. President Putin has confirmed what the United States Government has known for a long time, that Russia has denied prior to this: that Russia has been developing destabilizing weapon systems for more than a decade, in direct violation of its treaty obligations.

President Trump understands the threats facing America and our allies in this century and is determined to protect our homeland and preserve peace through strength. U.S. defense capabilities are and will remain second to none. We have a new defense budget that's over \$700 billion. We believe that our military will be stronger than ever. The President's nuclear posture review addressed some of this. It made it clear that we're moving forward to modernize our nuclear arsenal and ensure that our capabilities remain unmatched.

QUESTION: Can you read the first sentence again, which I didn't quite understand?

MS NAUERT: Yeah.

QUESTION: Yeah.

MS NAUERT: Sorry. What?

QUESTION: Can you read the first sentence again, which I didn't understand?

MS NAUERT: Sure, certainly. President Putin has confirmed what the United States Government has long known but which Russia has denied previously: Russia has been developing destabilizing weapons systems for more than a decade in direct violation of its treaty obligations.

QUESTION: And which treaties is it violating?

MS NAUERT: Some of these that are not in – that they are not in compliance would be the INF treaties. That's an area of particular concern to us. Since 2014, they've not been in compliance with that. They've been developing intermediate-range ground launch cruise missiles in direct violation of the INF treaty.

QUESTION: What are you going to do about that?

MS NAUERT: That is not for me to say what the United States is going to do about that. We continue to have conversations across the various agencies and departments in the U.S. Government.

QUESTION: Is there an indication that those weapons that they showed today are actually operational?

MS NAUERT: That's not something I'm able to answer. Some of those would be intelligence matters, some of those would come out of the Department of Defense.

QUESTION: But I mean – so – but these weapons – like, you said that confirmed what we've long been known that he's developing, but do you believe that they've actually developed them or they're still in the development process?

MS NAUERT: Some of this is new information that we are seeing today. Some of this is information that we've been tracking for some time. Some of this information the United States Government will not be able to publicly provide to you, and that's part of it today.

Okay. Hi, Rich.

QUESTION: Heather, does the Secretary plan on speaking with Foreign Minister Lavrov in – specifically in regard to this morning's speech? And does this morning's speech change at all the U.S. attempts to try to

work with Russia in certain areas or change this relationship, or is this seen as sort of election year politicking on his part?

MS NAUERT: Well, I think you have to consider the audience that Putin sat before today when he made that announcement and consider the fact that it's basically his equivalent of our State of the Union address. We also would note that there is an election that's coming up. So we think he was playing to the audience, certainly.

In terms of Secretary Tillerson and whether or not he plans to speak with him about it, that I'm not sure. This is something that we have many conversations with the Russian Government, not just here in the United States between the Secretary and his counterpart, but with other officials as well.

Okay, Laurie, let's move on. Okay.

QUESTION: Russia – yeah, on another aspect of Russia which Kurdistan is interested in, General Votel said Tuesday that Russia plays both fireman and arsonist in Syria. Is that a position you would agree with?

MS NAUERT: Yes. I mean, I think I've been pretty clear, as has the Secretary, about Russia's responsibility in Syria. Russia has a responsibility to stop Syria and to stop aiding Syria in attacking its own people. We look at the situation in Eastern Ghouta today, since there was the UN ceasefire that was voted upon unanimously on Saturday – excuse me – yes, on Saturday – and the fighting continues. They are continuing to kill innocent civilians. We have seen more than 100 people die since Saturday alone. This ceasefire is clearly not working. Russia has called for these joke-like humanitarian corridors. Russia needs to just do what the United Nations had agreed to and voted on, and that is a countrywide ceasefire. This is not working. Russia's responsible for this in part because they continue to train and equip and work with the Syrian Government. We've been watching that very carefully. It's a tremendous concern of the U.S. Government.

QUESTION: And he said that there needs to be more pressure on Russia to do the right thing in Syria. Are you thinking of anything now that would constitute pressure on Syria that General Votel said was necessary?

MS NAUERT: In terms of pressuring Syria or in terms of pressuring Russia?

QUESTION: I'm sorry, pressuring Russia.

MS NAUERT: In – we are having conversations with the Russian Government, I can tell you that. The United Nations is having a series of meetings where they're talking with other countries, like-minded countries, on exactly what is going on in Syria right now. You recall the Secretary signed on to the chemical weapons program that Paris – that France put together about a month ago or so. They are expected to hold their next round of conversations sometime in March, sometime later this month.

So there are a lot of different ways that we are keeping a close eye on this. What we do – I've said this before out of this building – is diplomacy. We will continue to reach out to many like-minded countries. Let me remind you of the 15 countries that signed on to the ceasefire resolution over the weekend. We're having lots of conversations with those countries that share our concerns.

QUESTION: Heather –

QUESTION: Thank you, and if I could just ask you about Iraq. The parliament passed a resolution –

MS NAUERT: Yeah. Let's – let's – hold on, let's stick with anything related to –

QUESTION: You mentioned something about a –

MS NAUERT: Hold on. Let – excuse me –

QUESTION: – joke-like humanitarian corridor. Is that –

MS NAUERT: Yeah. Okay, let's talk about that.

QUESTION: Yeah, okay.

MS NAUERT: Let's stick on Syria for right now.

QUESTION: So – and you're saying that the ceasefire is not holding?

MS NAUERT: I think just said the ceasefire is clearly not working.

QUESTION: So what – I understand. So what are you proposing doing?

MS NAUERT: And here's the thing: This idea of a so-called humanitarian corridor, which is a narrow little banner, that if you look at the video that you see on TV, people aren't using that. Why are people not using that? Well, it didn't work in Aleppo very well, did it? People are afraid to use it. They are afraid if they try to leave Eastern Ghouta, that they could be conscripted into working with Bashar al-Assad, that they someday may not be able to go home, or they could be killed. People are fearful of that.

That does not go far enough. The idea that Russia is calling for a so-called humanitarian corridor, I want to be clear, is a joke. What needs to happen instead is a nationwide ceasefire that was voted upon unanimously at the United Nations last Saturday. Fifteen countries supported it. Let me remind you, so did Russia. So did Russia.

I want to be clear also that there are a few exemptions to that ceasefire so no one tries to parse my words. Al-Nusrah, al-Qaida, and ISIS – those are the exemptions. Anything else on Syria?

QUESTION: How about –

QUESTION: But I think –

QUESTION: Russia?

QUESTION: – Said's question here is: What is the United States going to do about it, because so far, as you've said, the ceasefire hasn't held –

MS NAUERT: Right.

QUESTION: – has never even been implemented. Beyond just talking to people about it, is the United States going to take action?

MS NAUERT: Well, again, what we do in this building, we do diplomacy. Okay? We have conversations with countries all around the world, and that's exactly what we're engaged in. Ambassador Haley at the United Nations is doing her part at the United Nations, we're doing our part here out of the State Department. We're engaging in talks with the Russians in Geneva, the State Department is. We are investigating various mechanisms that would hold Russia and the Syrian regime accountable –

QUESTION: What kind of mechanisms?

MS NAUERT: For using chemical weapons on its own people. We have talked about the OPCW and their role in identifying substances that were used.

QUESTION: What about sanctions on –

MS NAUERT: Hold on.

QUESTION: I mean, just – what about sanctions –

MS NAUERT: Elise – Elise, let me finish, because you're asking me a question about some of the things that are being done. There are other mechanisms in place. Paris I mentioned. The accord, the agreement that Secretary Tillerson and 25 or 26 other countries signed onto. We have a new member just as of yesterday. I'm trying to remember if it was Norway or the Netherlands. Let me get back to you on that. There is that.

A lot of these meetings are happening. We will hold Russia accountable and hold Russia responsible. And let me again urge you – I know a lot of you are so obsessed with Russia and what Russia did in the United States in the 2016 elections. I would urge you to –

QUESTION: I –

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: – to show your outrage –

QUESTION: I'm sorry, I really –

QUESTION: Actually, I don't think that's true in this room.

MS NAUERT: Hold on. Hold on. I would assure you –

QUESTION: Maybe in some other briefing rooms around town.

MS NAUERT: Okay, maybe in other briefing rooms –

QUESTION: Not this one.

MS NAUERT: – but let me ask reporters to turn that around. Fine to ask about Russia's role in influencing or trying to influence the 2016 elections, but look at Russia and what it's doing in killing people in Syria. I would urge you to do that.

QUESTION: I think – I mean, I'm sorry, I think that everybody in this room is asking about that and talking about that. And I don't – I reject your assertion that everybody in this room is obsessed with the –

MS NAUERT: I don't – I don't think I said everybody in this room is obsessed, but in general – in general.

QUESTION: But the point is –

QUESTION: Okay, well, it's just not – it's just germane to the questions –

QUESTION: But the point is you haven't gotten a single question about that topic. You haven't gotten one question about –

QUESTION: It's not germane to the question at hand, and the question at hand is: What is the U.S. going to do to hold Russia accountable when in the past the U.S. has imposed sanctions on Russia for its actions in Ukraine? Are there sanctions not just for chemical weapons, but are there sanctions being considered for supporting the Syrian regime for its barrel bombing of civilians in Eastern Ghouta and elsewhere?

MS NAUERT: You know we never forecast sanctions, but I can tell you there are a lot of options that are now being considered.

QUESTION: You're talking about countrywide ceasefire. Would that – should that include Turkey in the North?

MS NAUERT: We have talked about this in the past. We talked about this on Tuesday.

QUESTION: Today. I mean, today you are calling for a countrywide ceasefire.

MS NAUERT: Yes.

QUESTION: Should this include Turkey?

MS NAUERT: Yeah. That –

QUESTION: Should Turkey cease all military operations?

MS NAUERT: We look at the entire part of the country, and that's what was called for – a ceasefire throughout the country.

QUESTION: Sorry, you went – you spoke about that at length on Tuesday, right?

MS NAUERT: Correct.

QUESTION: Yeah.

MS NAUERT: Yes, I did.

QUESTION: And the Turks have for two days running said that you should read the resolution, and they rejected your interpretation.

MS NAUERT: Well, okay, let me –

QUESTION: You have a comment on that?

MS NAUERT: Let me go back and read the resolution one more time. I think I was pretty clear, and I think you all understood it as well, that the resolution calls for – and this is the UN resolution – it affirms that the cessation of hostilities shall not apply to military operations against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, ISIL, also known as Daesh; al-Qaida; and al-Nusrah Front, and that other individuals, groups, undertakings, and entities associated with al-Qaida, ISIL, and other terrorist groups, as designated by the Security Council.

So I think that the United Nations and the resolution is pretty clear and that it speaks for itself.

QUESTION: A question on Iraq.

QUESTION: Are you still considering –

MS NAUERT: Okay, let's move on. Okay, go ahead.

QUESTION: All right. So just to go back to the Russian missiles for a minute, as you say, Putin seems to have confirmed that he's developing these weapons that would breach the various treaties, including the INF treaties. The United States is also modernizing its nuclear arsenal. Do you still consider yourselves bound by these treaties that Russia, apparently, has already broken?

MS NAUERT: We are in compliance with the treaties. We put up –

QUESTION: You're in compliance currently, but do you –

MS NAUERT: We put –

QUESTION: Would you – you intend to remain within the compliance?

MS NAUERT: I'm not aware that we – we certainly would intend to remain in that. I'm not the arms control and verification expert, so if you

want a deeper dive on that, I can certainly put –

QUESTION: It's a matter of policy whether you –

MS NAUERT: Pardon me?

QUESTION: It's a matter of policy, diplomatic policy, whether you remain in a treaty or not.

MS NAUERT: We believe that we remain in the treaty. Okay?

QUESTION: Thanks.

QUESTION: Are you still considering (inaudible) negotiate with Russia in the bigger sphere?

QUESTION: Who is the arms control expert?

MS NAUERT: Our – we have our AVC Bureau. They're our experts there.

QUESTION: Right. Who is the under secretary?

MS NAUERT: The – cute, Matt. (Laughter.) Okay, let's move on.

QUESTION: Are you still considering –

MS NAUERT: I'm sorry. Who are – your name is?

QUESTION: Alexander Khristenko, Russian TV. Are you still considering negotiations with Russia on global security issues and nuclear arms issues after today's announcement?

MS NAUERT: Would – are – so your question is would we cut off conversations and negotiations?

QUESTION: I mean do you change something in your attitude toward this?

MS NAUERT: Well, look, it's certainly concerning to see your government, to see your country, put together that kind of video that shows the Russian Government attacking the United States. That's certainly a concern of ours. I don't think that that's very constructive, nor is it responsible. I'll leave it at that. Okay?

QUESTION: It was not attacking the United States. It was not attacking the United States. It was two missiles sent to different directions. So why do you say that they are –

MS NAUERT: Are you – oh, you're –

QUESTION: Sorry. I'm from Russia. Channel One in Russia.

MS NAUERT: You're from Russian TV, too.

QUESTION: Yes, yes.

MS NAUERT: Okay. So hey, enough said then. I'll move on.

QUESTION: Wait, I'm sorry. What does that mean?

MS NAUERT: What does what mean?

QUESTION: I mean, it's – they're not – they're not officials of the Russian Government. They're just asking a question about Russia.

MS NAUERT: Oh. Oh, really? Okay. Well, we know that RT and other Russian news – so-called news organizations –

QUESTION: They're a –

MS NAUERT: – are funded and directed by the Russian Government. So if I don't have a whole lot of tolerance –

QUESTION: As are other media in this room, Heather.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: Heather, can I just ask you one thing about the video?

MS NAUERT: Oh, my gosh. Yes.

QUESTION: This video that you're talking about, the cartoon.

MS NAUERT: Yes.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: Excuse me. The – as I understand it, and I could be wrong, the video that was played doesn't actually show the missiles hitting anything. Are you – but I'm just asking. Is it the assessment of the U.S. Government that had the missiles in the video ended up at their presumed target, that presumed – that that target was the United States?

MS NAUERT: Matt, I think it's certainly looks like that. I'd ask you to go back and take a look at that.

QUESTION: Okay.

MS NAUERT: It's pretty clear what their target is, okay?

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: So this is – let's move on from this.

Nazira, you have a question about Afghanistan?

QUESTION: Yes, Heather. Thank you very much. As you mentioned, Kabul Process conference. What was the U.S. expectation from that conference?

Still United States will satisfied or something else? The conclusion. What was the conclusion from it?

MS NAUERT: Well, look, I can tell you that we were certainly a part of it, that the United States was pleased to have representation at the Kabul Process conference, and we congratulate the Government of Afghanistan for holding that conference. I mean, I think that that is a – certainly a good step forward in doing so.

We continue to have conversations with the Government of Afghanistan and continue to engage them on a daily basis through our ambassador there or through our acting assistant secretary here. We support the cause of peace in Afghanistan, recognizing that peace talks have to be Afghan-led and Afghan-owned.

Okay, all right. Said.

QUESTION: Very quickly.

MS NAUERT: Yes.

QUESTION: There was a news item yesterday, both in the Saudi press and in the Israeli press, that there is some sort of a peace proposal that will be coming out shortly. It was – so I wonder if you have anything on that, if you could share anything on that with us.

MS NAUERT: The report that we saw – I think it is an unfortunate report because it prejudices people against a plan on the part of the United States that is not yet complete. We have not released our plan. When it is ready to be released, the White House will go ahead and put that out. And some, I think, are trying to not only prejudice it but to try to draw conclusions about what is in that plan.

QUESTION: Is the Secretary of State involved in this process?

MS NAUERT: Yes, the Secretary of State has been involved in meetings and conversations about this entire process.

QUESTION: And lastly, there's going to be a big conference in town this weekend. It's the AIPAC conference. Is anyone from the United – from the State Department attending or speaking at that meeting?

MS NAUERT: I would imagine so, but I just don't have any confirmation to read out to you for that. Okay. All right.

QUESTION: Religious –

MS NAUERT: We're going to – we're going to have to wrap it up, but –

QUESTION: One on religious freedom.

MS NAUERT: Hold on. Hi.

QUESTION: Yes. Ambassador-at-Large for Religious Freedom Sam Brownback told VOA in an interview that what happened in Rohingya is a religious cleansing against Muslim. (Inaudible) is already released on our website. My question for you is: Is it the United States position that Rohingya crisis is religious cleansing against Muslim; and secondly, is religious cleansing now a new category that the U.S. would imposing sanctions. Thank you.

MS NAUERT: So part of your question – is that a new category? No, there is not a new category that would include that. The Secretary had defined this after taking a very close look at this as ethnic cleansing. It is a long road to making those sorts of determinations, getting a lot of information and evidence that we have to compile. The Secretary made that determination back in the fall. Okay.

QUESTION: I have a question on Iraq.

QUESTION: A follow up on –

MS NAUERT: Yeah. Hi, Lalit.

QUESTION: The Burma – Burma has increased its troop presence in the border with Bangladesh. Bangladesh is opposing it. Do you have anything on that?

MS NAUERT: Bangladesh is?

QUESTION: Has opposed the presence of additional troops for the Burmese on the border.

MS NAUERT: Yeah, I can just tell you that we're watching that carefully. I can certainly understand that that would be a concern of the Government of Bangladesh, but we're watching that one closely. And that's all I have for you, okay?

QUESTION: A question on Iraq?

MS NAUERT: We're – we have to wrap it up.

QUESTION: A question on Iraq.

MS NAUERT: Let me get – I've gotten to you already. Let me get to somebody else.

Miss, hi.

QUESTION: Hi, I'm Cristina Garcia with the Spanish newswire EFE.

MS NAUERT: Yes, hi.

QUESTION: I have a question on Venezuela. So today Venezuela has decided to postpone the election to May, and also there is now an opposition candidate running. I want to know does it affect the sanctions that the

United States is considering and if you have some update on those sanctions. When will they come – before the election, after the election? I know you don't forecast sanctions, but that's (inaudible).

MS NAUERT: Yeah, so I'm not going to have anything for you on the sanctions. I can just tell you that we're considering a lot of different economic and diplomatic options in dealing with Venezuela and, hopefully, its return to its constitution as we have watched the situation deteriorate in Venezuela over the past year or so. We have said we are considering all options to restore democracy to Venezuela, including individual and potentially financial sanctions.

QUESTION: And what about the election that has been postponed? Does the United States like this step a little?

MS NAUERT: Last I had known, the election was set for April the 22nd, I believe. So it – you're saying it's been pushed from there?

QUESTION: Yes, for May. Take place in May.

MS NAUERT: Okay, all right. I had not heard that, so my apologies. I'll see if I can get anything more for you on that. Okay?

QUESTION: Thanks.

QUESTION: Heather, can we –

MS NAUERT: All right.

QUESTION: Can we stay in WHA for a second, just to – I just want to ask you. This is a bureau that over the course of the last couple weeks has – seems to be – have – well, doesn't seem to – is losing a tremendous amount of institutional knowledge and experience, the latest being Roberta Jacobson announcing her resignation today, effective in a month or so. But this is after your ambassador in Panama and Tom Shannon also announced their plans to resign. I'm wondering if there's concern in this – in the building about WHA and the loss of knowledge and experience there.

MS NAUERT: Yeah, so you're referring to our ambassador, Roberta Jacobson, who serves in Mexico. She's been with the State Department for – I believe it was 31 years. And if you look at the amount of time that many of these individuals have invested in their careers at the State Department – her, 31 years; Ambassador Joe Yun was – I believe it was 30-some years; Under Secretary Tom Shannon was – I think it was 35 years – that's a tremendous amount of time to be working in any one industry, building, service, government agency, or department. People choosing to retire for personal reasons – and that's perfectly fine with us.

We thank her for her service. She has certainly done a tremendous job in representing U.S. interests with the Government of Mexico. We thank her for that. But when people choose to retire – and we've noticed that they've all served for about the same period of time – it is not

uncommon that people will eventually choose to move on.

QUESTION: Well, yeah. That's not my – that is not my question.

MS NAUERT: Yeah.

QUESTION: But I mean, the three people and the careers that you've just mentioned, that's 95 years cumulative experience. And my question to you was not – ambassador – people move on, yes. But I'm wondering if there is any concern at all on the seventh floor that this particular – this region in particular, WHA, is losing such a huge wealth of talent and –

MS NAUERT: Well, we have a –

QUESTION: – experience.

MS NAUERT: We have –

QUESTION: You don't have an assistant secretary even nominated; you have an acting one, which is okay. The President gets to choose ambassadors; that's his prerogative, and that's fine. But I'm just wondering more broadly, regardless of the reason for their departures, if there is some concern that WHA – which the United States is actually in this region, right; so these are –

MS NAUERT: We certainly are, yes.

QUESTION: – our closest neighbors – if there's a concern that this is – that you're losing this amount of experience.

MS NAUERT: No.

QUESTION: No?

MS NAUERT: I mean, we are thankful for their service. They have served our country and this department with dignity and with distinction, and we are grateful to them for that. We have a tremendous number of qualified, good people who are here in this building who work for us every day.

QUESTION: Right, but you don't have –

MS NAUERT: All around the world.

QUESTION: But you don't –

MS NAUERT: And it doesn't mean that just because there are a few people sitting in the bureau, or a few people out at post doing those jobs, that there aren't other experts. You all may not know their names; it doesn't mean that they don't exist and they aren't excellent at their jobs. There's also the fundamental belief that people should be promoted in their careers, and we look to the future generations of people who are younger in this department to be able to bring them up through the

ranks and take over these positions.

QUESTION: I'm all in favor –

MS NAUERT: Do you want somebody –

QUESTION: I'm all in favor of youth.

MS NAUERT: – around forever? (Laughter.)

QUESTION: I'm all in favor of youth; that's wonderful. Remind me again who the nominees are for Mr. Feeley – Ambassador Feeley in Panama. Who's going to – who's been nominated to replace him? Who's been nominated to replace Ambassador Jacobson? Who's been nominated to replace Under Secretary Shannon, and who has been –

MS NAUERT: Matt, I would refer you then to the White House for those nominations. You know very well –

QUESTION: And who – has anybody?

MS NAUERT: You know very well where nominations come from.

QUESTION: That nobody has. So if you're interested in promoting the youth and the experience, or midlevel people who should go into the – then one would think that you would have replacements in line.

MS NAUERT: And Matt, you well know –

QUESTION: And there – the point is –

MS NAUERT: – that some of these are political positions –

QUESTION: Yes.

MS NAUERT: – and some of these are career positions, and we work every day to find the people who are the best fit for those positions.

QUESTION: But the point is is that people are not – I think there would be less concern – well, according to you there is no concern at all that these people are leaving – but there would be less concern for people on the outside who are – who do think that this is an issue, if there were people in line to replace the people who are leaving. And the fact of the matter is is they're not.

MS NAUERT: Just because you're not aware of it does not mean that that does not exist. Okay?

QUESTION: They haven't been nominated.

MS NAUERT: Okay. There are people in mind and in line for those types of positions; perhaps you've just not heard about it yet, okay?

We've got to go.

QUESTION: I have a question on Iraq, Heather, please.

MS NAUERT: I will talk to you after the briefing, then.

QUESTION: No. The Iraqi parliament voted Wednesday to call for a timetable for the Iraqi – for foreign –

(The briefing was concluded at 3:12 p.m.)

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Press Releases: 2018 P3 Impact Award Applications Are Now Open

Media Note
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC
March 1, 2018

The U.S. Department of State [Office of Global Partnerships](#) (S/GP), along with [Concordia](#) and the [University of Virginia Darden School of Business Institute for Business in Society](#), have opened the application process for the fifth annual [P3 Impact Award](#), which honors exemplary public-private partnerships (P3s) from around the world.

The P3 Impact Award was created by the three partners in 2014 to recognize and honor best practices of public-private partnerships that are improving communities in the most impactful ways. Finalists from past years have been highlighted in special features of the Darden School's thought leadership website, [Ideas to Action](#), and in the Concordia Annual Summit programming.

Sanitation Marketing Systems in Bangladesh, a partnership between the

Bangladesh Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE), the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), UNICEF, iDE, and Rangpur Foundry Ltd. (RFL), [was the winner of the 2017 P3 Impact Award](#). This group strengthens the sanitation system in Bangladesh and prevents the spread of disease by facilitating scalable, sustainable access to improved sanitation.

The winning partnership for the 2018 competition will be announced at the [Concordia Annual Summit](#) in New York City from September 24-26, 2018, and receive a full scholarship for a weeklong [Darden Executive Education](#) course. All finalists will again be featured in the Darden School's *Ideas to Action* website, promoted across the partners' websites, highlighted through social media campaigns, and recognized throughout the Summit.

Applications are being accepted through April 16, 2018, and will be reviewed by an independent panel of judges. Judges will review the applications based on the partnership's operational structure, measurable social impact, innovative approach, financial effectiveness, and scalability. Finalists will then be selected and notified in July.

Full criteria and application instructions can be found on the [P3 Impact Award](#) website.

For further information, please contact the Office of Global Partnerships (S/GP) at partnerships@state.gov or visit <https://p3impact.secure-platform.com/a>. For media inquiries, please contact Anita Ostrovsky at OstrovskyA@state.gov.

Follow [@GPatState](#), and [#P3Impact](#) on Twitter or [S/GP on Facebook](#) for updates.

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[Press Releases: Ambassador Nathan A. Sales, Coordinator for Counterterrorism on the Conference on Mobilizing Law Enforcement Efforts to](#)

Defeat ISIS

Special Briefing
Nathan A. Sales

Ambassador-at-Large and Coordinator for Counterterrorism

Via Teleconference
February 28, 2018

MR GREENAN: Thank you, and thank you, everyone, for joining us today for this call. It's an on-the-record conference call about the just-concluded two-day International Conference on Mobilizing Law Enforcement Efforts to Defeat ISIS. Ambassador Nathan Sales is with us today. Ambassador Sales is the State Department's coordinator for counterterrorism. He's going to share some of the highlights from the event with us. He'll have some opening remarks, and then we'll take your questions.

And as a reminder, this briefing will be embargoed until the conclusion of the call. Now I'll turn it over to Ambassador Sales.

AMBASSADOR SALES: Well, thanks very much, and I'd like to say a word of thanks to all of the journalists who are on the call today. Thanks for taking the time to have this conversation. This week we hosted a conference on international efforts to defeat ISIS using civilian tools and law enforcement tools. We hosted this conference in coordination with INTERPOL as well as the International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law in Malta. We welcomed about 90 countries and organizations to the Harry S. Truman Building here in Washington to address this critical issue.

And here's what we're trying to accomplish in this conference: As we defeat ISIS on the battlefield, the group is adapting to our success. It's important to understand and to emphasize that the fight is by no means over. It's simply moving to a new phase. We're moving from a predominantly military effort to an increasingly civilian and law enforcement effort. It's increasingly important for us to supplement our military lines of effort to defeat ISIS with civilian tools, civilian initiatives that can ensure the group's enduring defeat.

So yesterday I opened the discussion by sharing an overview of what the United States has been doing in this space to counter ISIS using law enforcement and other civilian capabilities. So let me give you a summary of three of the key tools that we highlighted.

First of all, terrorist designations and sanctions; second, the use of

passenger name record data to secure borders; and third, biometrics to screen for terrorists who might be trying to board planes or cross borders.

So first of all, I announced the decision by Secretary Tillerson to designate seven ISIS-affiliated groups and two ISIS-affiliated leaders. The groups are ISIS-West Africa, ISIS-Somalia, ISIS-Egypt, ISIS-Bangladesh, ISIS-Philippines, the Maute Group, and finally, Jund al-Khilafah Tunisia. The two individuals are Mahad Moalim, who is a leader of ISIS's Somalia affiliate, as well as Abu Musab al-Barnawi, who is a leader in the ISIS West Africa affiliate.

These terrorists, both groups and individuals, have spread ISIS's bloody campaign to all corners of the globe. I'll give you a few examples. In December of 2016, ISIS-Egypt bombed Cairo's Coptic Christian cathedral, an attack that killed 28 people. ISIS-Bangladesh murdered 22 people in a July 2016 assault on the Holey Artisan Bakery in Dhaka. The Maute Group is responsible for the siege of the Philippines city of Marawi and the September 2016 Davao market bombing, which killed 15 people and wounded 70 others.

Yesterday's designations joined the eight other ISIS-affiliated groups that we previously designated. We have listed these groups and individuals to illuminate ISIS's global network and to emphasize once again that the campaign against ISIS is far from over. These designations will deny ISIS the resources it needs to carry out terrorist attacks because we don't just want to stop the bomber, it's also essential to stop the money man who buys the bomb.

Second, during the conference, we also discussed passenger name records, or PNR. PNR is the information you give an airline when you book a ticket – a phone number, an email address, a seat assignment, and so on. It's an incredibly powerful counterterrorism tool. PNR can help analysts identify suspicious travel patterns, flagging threats that otherwise might have escaped notice. It can also illuminate hidden connections between known threats and their unknown associates. Let me give you just one example.

In December of 2009, a U.S. citizen by the name of Faisal Shahzad received explosives training in Pakistan for people affiliated with the Pakistani Taliban. In February of 2010, Shahzad arrived to JFK on a one-way ticket from Islamabad. He was referred to secondary because he matched a PNR targeting rule, so customs officers interviewed him and released him. Three months later, on May 1st, 2010, a car bomb failed to detonate in Times Square. Investigators tied Shahzad to the car. Customs then placed an alert for Shahzad in its system. So when he booked a flight to flee the country, the system flagged it and he was arrested at JFK as he attempted to fly to Dubai. He was convicted, and he's now serving a life sentence.

The PNR system that the U.S. uses, and indeed pioneered, is now an international obligation. Last year, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2396 – unanimously, by the way – and at the instigation and urging of the United States. This new resolution requires all UN members to develop the same kind of system that the United States has been using for years. We used this week's discussions at the conference to urge other countries to

live up to their obligations under this new Security Council resolution and develop and deploy those systems quickly.

Finally, at the conference we discussed biometrics. Biometrics are a critical tool for verifying that travelers really are who they say they are. Terrorists will try to mask their true identities using any number of subterfuges, aliases, fake passports, and so on. It's a lot harder for them to fake their fingerprints, and that's why we collect biometrics from visitors to this country. We take their fingerprints, we take their facial scans, and we use that data to run against our watch list of known and suspected terrorists. Here's one example. Just a few weeks ago, authorities arrested a man in Oklahoma who was suspected of trying to join al-Qaida. They were able to identify him because his fingerprints matched those taken from a document retrieved in Afghanistan. It was an application for al-Qaida's Farouq camp, which is where four of the 9/11 hijackers were trained.

Again, thanks to UN Security Council Resolution 2396, this civilian tool is now a global norm. The resolution requires all UN members to collect biometrics to spot terrorists if they attempt to board planes or cross borders. We're urging our partners to implement this obligation as quickly as possible.

So in conclusion, our discussions this week covered these three tools and a number of other civilian capabilities that we're using along with our partners to defeat ISIS. ISIS is a resilient organization, and it's an organization committing – committed to continuing its fight against us notwithstanding the loss of its so-called territory – so-called caliphate in Syria and Iraq. It's incumbent upon us in the United States, along with our international partners, to adapt to meet that new challenge. As the military phase of this struggle in Syria and Iraq winds down, we'll be standing up and reinforcing our civilian and law enforcement capabilities to defeat this group in an enduring way. Thank you all, and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

MR GREENAN: Thank you, Ambassador. We'll now go to our questions.

OPERATOR: Thank you. Ladies and gentlemen, if you'd like to ask a question, please press * then 1 on your touchtone phone. You will hear a tone indicating you have been placed in queue. You may remove yourself from queue at any time by pressing the # key. If you are using a speaker phone, please pick up the handset before pressing the numbers. Once again, if you have a question, please press *1 at this time. And one moment, please, for your first question.

Your first question comes from the line of David Clark from AFP. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi. Thanks for doing this. I just wanted to ask about the new designations you announced as part of this, the ISIS affiliates. Does the decision to list them all separately from the general ISIL designation reflect the belief that they are more autonomous than they used to be? And can you speak to how closely they – you believe they cooperate with sort of

like an ISIS-central if there is still one?

AMBASSADOR SALES: Thanks for the question, David. I think what we're seeing is ISIS becoming increasingly decentralized. I mentioned a moment ago about how ISIS is evolving and adapting, and I think their trend towards decentralization is a good example of that. You're seeing groups from all corners of the world motivated by the same bloody and deadly ISIS ideology who are using the same sorts of techniques targeting innocent men, women, and children, targeting soft targets, and so we wanted to designate groups across the world to remind – well first of all, to reflect reality that ISIS is a global network that spreads its propaganda and spills blood on a global basis, and also to draw attention – to draw the world community's attention to the fact that just because the false caliphate in Iraq and Syria has fallen, that doesn't mean that ISIS is powerless. And it's very much to the contrary. We're seeing a decentralized network fan out across the globe to continue the bloody work.

MR GREENAN: Thank you. Next question, please.

OPERATOR: Your next question comes from the line of Lalit Jha from PTI. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi. Hi, Ambassador. Thank you for doing this. Can you give us a sense of whether ISIS presence in Bangladesh? And also in Afghanistan and Pakistan, how you are coordinating with the countries in the region, in particular India, to address the challenge of ISIS in South Asia?

AMBASSADOR SALES: Well, thank you for the question. South Asia is one of the areas of the world where ISIS has an increasingly robust presence. Bangladesh is a good example of this. As I mentioned before, the Holey Artisan Bakery attack in July of 2016 in Dhaka killed 22 people. We're also tracking in South Asia the ISIS Khorasan affiliates of ISIS becoming increasingly ambitious and increasingly active.

We are working with our partners in the region to develop a shared understanding of the threat that these organizations pose to us in the United States and pose to local governments, and we're also working with those partners to develop a set of responses. Those things – those responses include things like information sharing, exchanging data about known and suspected terrorists, improving border security efforts to spot terrorists as they travel from conflict zone to conflict zone. And I'm confident that by bringing together partner nations who have a common understanding of the threat we face that we'll be able to address this.

MR GREENAN: Thank you. The next question, please.

OPERATOR: Your next question comes from the line of Conor Finnegan from ABC News. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Hey, thanks very much for holding the call. Two questions, if I could. Did you make any progress in the past two days convincing these other countries who attended the conference to take their captured foreign

terrorist fighters and prosecute them? I know that's been an issue for a lot of them and they're hesitant to do it. And then you mentioned in your speech yesterday morning that prosecution isn't always appropriate and that was why the President announced keeping Guantanamo Bay open. Has the administration made any sort of determination of when it is and isn't appropriate to prosecute versus to send someone to Guantanamo Bay? Thank you.

AMBASSADOR SALES: Conor, thanks for those two questions. First of all, on the international front, we've been very clear here at the State Department with our friends around the world that they shouldn't look to other countries to solve their problems for them. If a country sees its citizens traveling to Syria and Iraq to fight with ISIS, it's up to that country to prosecute those individuals rather than expecting the SDF to do it or the Iraqis to do it or, ultimately, the United States to do it. So we've been consistent in our expectation, in communicating our expectation to our partners that they shouldn't look for other people to solve this problem, but rather should conduct these prosecutions of their citizens themselves.

As far as the domestic piece of your question, the U.S. approach going forward on detentions: As you know, the President's executive order in which he directed that the Guantanamo Bay detention facility remain open included a requirement that the Secretary of Defense, along with other interagency partners, conduct a review of the criteria for transfer to Guantanamo Bay in the future. That process is underway right now, so we don't have anything to announce at this time, but stay tuned.

MR GREENAN: Thank you. Next question, please.

OPERATOR: Your next question comes from the line of Tejinder Singh from IAT. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Yes, good afternoon. Thank you for doing this. Ambassador, you mentioned Bangladesh, Pakistan in your comments and in your answers, but you do not seem to focus at all on India or Sri Lanka. What is the threat level you feel from India, especially the second biggest Muslim population, second biggest global population? So is that – there is no threat from India or you are – what are the steps you are taking in that respect?

AMBASSADOR SALES: Well, thanks for the question. India is an incredibly important, incredibly valuable, and incredibly close counterterrorism partner of the United States. As you know, the President and the prime minister held a very, very productive series of meetings earlier in the administration, and in response to that set of meetings, the U.S. Government and the Indian Government have forged ahead to create a really powerful partnership. We've announced in the United States a number of designations related to terrorist threats that India faces. Previously, we entered into an arrangement with India to share information about known and suspected terrorists, bilateral exchange of information about these known and suspected threats. I think the future is very bright for U.S.-India counterterrorism cooperation, and I look forward to working with my counterparts in the Indian ministry of foreign affairs to bring to fruition the vision of President Trump and Prime Minister Modi.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MR GREENAN: Thank you very much. Next question, please.

OPERATOR: Your next question comes from the line of Robin Wright from *The New Yorker*. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi, thanks for doing this. I have two questions. First of all, you talked about decentralized control, and that brings up the question of the leadership of ISIS and Mr. Baghdadi. Do you have a sense how much control he or those around him have? There have been a number of reports about his injuries. Can you give us a sense of how much you think he actually is running ISIS today?

And secondly, have you seen the movement of ISIS fighters who are within – who once were within the caliphate to – for example, to places like Idlib, where they joined other groups, whether it's al-Qaida or other militias? Do you have a sense that there is a kind of graying of who is ISIS and who is al-Qaida?

AMBASSADOR SALES: Thanks for the questions, Robin. Let me address that second question or group of questions first. So ISIS was born out of al-Qaida in Iraq. The relationship between ISIS and Iraq – or, sorry, al-Qaida in Iraq and ISIS has been a complex one over the years. But as ISIS has lost territory, we're concerned that battle-hardened veterans who've experienced combat in the war zone might take their talents to other organizations. Whether their units were destroyed or whether they became disenchanting or demoralized or whether they became persuaded by other strands of terrorist ideology, there's always a risk that they might migrate to other organizations, al-Qaida included. I don't have any intelligence to share with you on the extent to which that is actually happening, but it's certainly a general concern that we have and that we're very much focused on.

Remind me what your first question was?

QUESTION: About Baghdadi and –

AMBASSADOR SALES: Oh, yeah.

QUESTION: – how much control he has and the reports of his injuries or incapacitation.

AMBASSADOR SALES: On the second part there, I have to defer to colleagues in the Intelligence Community who could speak more authoritatively than I could on that – or not, as the case may be. As far as the relationship between ISIS core and ISIS networks and affiliates around the world, we're facing a really complex series of threats because in addition to those regional entities like ISIS-Bangladesh or ISIS-Philippines that have a measure of autonomy in planning operations, planning attacks, we also have to continually worry about core ISIS's ambitions to carry out attacks outside the conflict zone – the external operations of the sort that we saw in Paris in November of 2015 and in Brussels in the spring of 2016.

So as ISIS metastasizes around the world, the threat becomes more complex, and that's exactly why we had this conference here in Washington this week to remind our allies and partners of the need to continually take action now in a civilian space to take the fight and keep the pressure on the dispersed tentacles, but also the core as well.

MR GREENAN: Okay. Thank you very much. Next question, please.

OPERATOR: Your next question comes from the line of Jeff Seldin from the Voice of America. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Thanks very much for doing this. One quick follow-up to the question Robin just asked: Do you have a sense that ISIS core is still – despite the fact ISIS is spreading out, still maintains a significant degree of command and control that would allow them or is allowing them to plan and carry out attacks?

And then my questions were: What has the use of the PNR and the biometrics – what is it showing you about the patterns of movement for either foreign fighters or would-be jihadists in terms of how they're flocking to these different groups around the world and where they're going? And in Africa specifically, to what degree are groups like ISIS and al-Qaida affiliates competing with each other for operatives or competing with each other to get more jihadists to their side, more experienced fighters to their cause? Thank you.

AMBASSADOR SALES: Well, on the movement question, I think some of the countries to which ISIS fighters might travel or from which they might come, a number of those countries have not yet stood up PNR systems of the sort that we have in the United States and of the sort that a number of our close partners have. So it's difficult for those countries to authoritatively track the movement of persons across their borders, especially including the movement of possible foreign terrorist fighters or other terrorists. That's one of the reasons why the United States led the effort in the UN Security Council to make mandatory the obligation for all UN members to collect and use PNR data to develop those systems that we have here in the United States, and that Europe – the European Union has directed EU member-states to implement by May of this year.

As far as the competition between ISIS or al-Qaida is concerned for recruiting new members or peeling off disaffected members of the other organization, that's certainly a concern. The schism between, the split, the difference between the two organizations' tactics – all of that heightens the sense that they are competing for one – against one another for adherence.

And from the United States standpoint, that's not a great position for the rest of the world to be in. We live in a world where we confront the threat of ISIS core, we live in a world where we're increasingly seeing a dispersed ISIS network that's capable of mounting attacks whether independently or in coordination with each other. And to that we add a resilient al-Qaida that has largely been out of the headlines in recent years, but that certainly has the capability and intent to conduct mass casualty attacks of its own.

Again, one of the reasons why we are so keen to host this conference here in Washington this week was to draw the international community's attention to precisely that dynamic. We confront a dangerous security environment in which multiple terrorist threats face us and in which those terrorist threats might be competing against one another. All the more reason for us to get serious about things like biometrics and PNR, law enforcement capabilities, and so on.

MR GREENAN: Thank you very much. The next to the – to the next question, please.

OPERATOR: Next question comes from the line of Ellen Nakashima from *The Washington Post*. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Thank you. And thank you, Ambassador Sales, for doing this. I might have missed the first – a little bit of the beginning. I came in late. But I wanted to get back to the question about prosecutions, especially because you were talking about how we're mobilizing law enforcement to counter terrorism. And you mentioned you were communicating your expectation to partners that they should be able to conduct prosecutions themselves, and at the same time, the Justice Department, which you were a part once, has had a very successful track record in prosecuting international terrorists. To the extent you're talking about mobilizing law enforcement to counter terrorism, how much of a role should the civilian prosecutions play, how effective are they as a deterrent? And then, I have a follow-up question about the Beatles.

AMBASSADOR SALES: Thanks, Ellen. I appreciate the question. I think law enforcement can be an incredibly effective tool. Prosecution can be an effectively – an incredibly effective counterterrorism tool. There are circumstances where prosecution is the first option. Of course, it's not the only option, and there are other tools in the counterterrorism toolkit that we have to consider using on a case-by-case basis. One of those tools might be military detention. If you capture somebody on the battlefield, and for various reasons you assess that a law enforcement response is not appropriate, then the President's executive order makes clear that we will use military detention as one of several possible options.

Law of arm conflict detention is a tool that the U.S. military has used in armed conflict from time immemorial, and the President is preserving that tool for use here. And there's other non-prosecution, non-military responses as well that may become especially important as we deal with the problem of FTFs returning home with their family members. When somebody comes back to Europe from the war zone in Syria and brings a six-year old child with them, what do you do with that child? This is somebody who's been, in many cases radicalized, in many cases exposed to violence, whether on the internet or observing atrocities firsthand. A law enforcement response probably doesn't look appropriate there, so you're going to need to look at non-prosecution options to include things, like, medical interventions, community interventions, interventions by religious organizations to try and alleviate some of the suffering that that child experienced, some of the trauma that that child experienced in the war zone.

QUESTION: Thank you very much. But with the case – going back to the hardened terrorists, in the case of the two remaining Beatles, el-Sheikh and Kotey – the ISIS guys, your – the State Department’s position has been that they should be tried in the UK. And at the same time, we know that prosecutors here are eager to take a case and try them. Why would you want to see these guys going back to the UK to be prosecuted when two – some of the – there are American hostages who were beheaded by them, and there’s a strong (inaudible) American interest in seeing them brought to justice? And we have the tools here in the civilian courts, as you’ve noted.

AMBASSADOR SALES: Yeah, thanks for the question.

QUESTION: Explain your – yeah.

AMBASSADOR SALES: Yeah. So I’m not in a position to describe any diplomatic conversations we may be having with the Brits about a way forward for these particular detainees. What I can tell you is that courts in the Anglo-American legal tradition are quite capable of dealing with these sorts of cases, and our interest in the United States is seeing that justice be done. You have a pair of battle-hardened terrorists who committed atrocities against citizens of a number of countries. American citizens were victims, British citizens were victims, and other citizens of other countries were victims. And so our commitment is to ensure that they face justice for the crimes they committed.

MR GREENAN: All right, thank you very much. We’ll go to the last question, please.

OPERATOR: Your final question comes from the line of Abigail Williams from NBC News. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi there. Thanks for doing the call. I just wanted to follow up on one of my previous colleague’s questions regarding some of the affiliates in Africa of ISIS and their connection to groups like Boko Haram and al-Shabaab. I wondered if you could speak more generally about the trends that you’re seeing there as far as whether or not they are becoming more closely aligned with ISIS, and then also, given that you said that the tools – the U.S. tools that you hoped everyone would implement under the UN Security Council resolution – aren’t effective there or aren’t in place there, what it is that you’re looking from those countries to slow that association with ISIS.

AMBASSADOR SALES: Yeah, thanks very much. Let me take the first question first. The relationship between ISIS entities and al-Qaida entities in Africa – well, as I’m sure you can expect, it’s a rather fluid situation. There are times when you see groups in alignment and there are times when previously aligned groups split off and separate, and ISIS-West Africa and its relationship or lack thereof to Boko Haram is a good example of that. Previously unified groups splits with the remnants, aligning themselves with different international leadership.

So what are we doing about the situations – and I don’t mean to limit this to Africa in particular, but what are we in the United States doing to help

other countries implement their obligations under the UN Security Council resolution? Well, one thing that we're doing is when it comes to, for instance, passenger name record data, we have offered to make available our system to countries that want it. It's known as ATSG, Automated Targeting System Global, and for years we have made that available to countries that want to deploy a capability to keep track of people crossing their borders. We're not the only ones. The Netherlands also is exploring ways to make their own system available through international channels. So that's one example of what we're doing to help stand up the capabilities of partner nations that have the political will to act but may not have the full resources they need to act.

MR GREENAN: All right, thank you very much, and thank you everyone for joining us today. We are now lifting the embargo on this call. Again, it was on the record to Ambassador Nathan Sales, the State Department's coordinator for counterterrorism. Ambassador Sales, thank you very much, and thanks, everyone. Enjoy the rest of your day.

AMBASSADOR SALES: Thank you all.

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[Press Releases: State Department Welcomes Gold Medal-Winning U.S. Olympic Women's Ice Hockey Team](#)

Notice to the Press
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC
February 28, 2018

Deputy Secretary of State John J. Sullivan and Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs I. Steven Goldstein will welcome the gold medal-winning 2018 U.S. Olympic Women's Ice Hockey Team to the State Department on March 2, 2018, at 9:30 a.m.

The team, fresh off their Olympic victories in PyeongChang, will be recognized for their efforts to empower women and girls around the world through sports. The event will highlight how sports are advancing people-to-people relations around the world, especially through the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs Sports Diplomacy initiatives.

Also delivering remarks will be Senior Vice President of the National Hockey League (NHL) Susan Cohig and Olga Dolinina, a 2014 Ukrainian alumna of the [U.S. Department of State and espnW Global Sports Mentoring Program](#) (GSMP). Cohig is a longstanding mentor for GSMP, which pairs emerging global leaders in sports with American female executives to create opportunities for a new generation of girls through sports. Also in attendance will be Hilary Knight, one of Team USA's forwards, who was a 2014 State Department Sports Envoy to Belarus.

While in the area, as part of [Hockey Weekend Across America](#), the team will also be celebrated at the NHL Stadium Series game between the Washington Capitals and Toronto Maple Leafs on March 3 at the Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium in Annapolis, Maryland.

For more information please contact eca-press@state.gov.

Final access time for writers and stills is 9:00 a.m. from the 23rd Street NW entrance. Due to limited space for cameras, please RSVP to eca-press@state.gov if you plan to cover this event with a camera to receive a preset time.

Media representatives may attend this event upon presentation of one of the following: (1) a U.S. Government-issued photo media credential (e.g., Department of State, White House, Congress, Department of Defense or Foreign Press Center), or (2) an official photo identification card issued by their news organization, or (3) a letter from their employer on official letterhead verifying their current employment as a journalist.

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