

# [Press Releases: On the Occasion of Christmas](#)

Press Statement  
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Washington, DC  
December 25, 2018

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On behalf of the Department of State, I would like to wish a Merry Christmas to all those celebrating today, together with Orthodox Christians celebrating in early January.

This joyful occasion brings Christian communities together to rejoice in the birth of Jesus. In addition to celebrating and spending time with loved ones, the spirit of Christmas reminds us of Jesus' message of hope, mercy, and love of neighbor. This season reminds us to care for the less fortunate, including those communities around the world today who are not able to observe this holiday freely due to persecution or instability.

Again, a very Merry Christmas to those celebrating around the world. May you be surrounded by family, friends, and neighbors during this festive season.

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## [Press Releases: Venezuelan Navy](#)

# [Actions in Guyana](#)

Press Statement  
Robert Palladino

Deputy Spokesperson

Washington, DC  
December 23, 2018

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On December 22, the Venezuelan Navy aggressively stopped ExxonMobil contracted vessels operating under an oil exploration agreement with the Cooperative Republic of Guyana in its Exclusive Economic Zone.

We underscore that Guyana has the sovereign right to explore and exploit resources in its Exclusive Economic Zone. We call on Venezuela to respect international law and the rights of its neighbors.

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# [Press Releases: Tsunami in West Java and Southern Sumatra, Indonesia](#)

Press Statement  
Robert Palladino

Deputy Spokesperson

Washington, DC  
December 23, 2018

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The United States conveys our deepest condolences for the loss of life and destruction from the tsunami that struck West Java and southern Sumatra, Indonesia, on December 22. We continue to monitor the situation closely and are in close communication with Indonesian authorities. Our thoughts and prayers are with all those in Indonesia affected by the natural disaster. We are currently not aware of any U.S. citizens directly affected, but stand ready to assist as needed.

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## **[Press Releases: Increasing U.S. Security Assistance to Ukraine's Navy](#)**

Press Statement  
Robert Palladino

Deputy Spokesperson

Washington, DC  
December 21, 2018

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In response to Russia's dangerous escalation and unjustified November 25 attack on three Ukrainian naval vessels near the Kerch Strait, the Department of State, subject to Congressional approval, will provide an additional \$10 million in Foreign Military Financing to further build Ukraine's naval capabilities. We do so in solidarity with Lithuania and the United Kingdom, also planning to increase their security assistance to Ukraine. The United States calls on Russia to immediately return to Ukraine the seized vessels and detained Ukrainian crews, to keep the Kerch Strait and the Sea of Azov

open to ships transiting to and from Ukrainian ports, and to respect Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, extending to its territorial waters.

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## **Press Releases: United States Actions To Promote Democracy in Nicaragua**

Press Statement  
Robert Palladino

Deputy Spokesperson

Washington, DC  
December 21, 2018

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Yesterday, the President signed the Nicaragua Human Rights and Anticorruption Act of 2018 ("Nica Act"), signaling his further commitment to promoting democracy, human rights, and rule of law in Nicaragua.

The signing of the Nica Act supplements a series of actions the United States has taken against the Ortega regime. In November, the Administration sanctioned two of Ortega's closest associates under a new Executive Order issued by President Trump to counter the worst abuses of the Ortega regime in Nicaragua, including its dismantling of democratic institutions and serious human rights violations and abuses. Those sanctions are in addition to the ones imposed previously against other high-ranking Nicaraguan officials under E.O. 13818, implementing the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act. The State Department imposes visa restrictions against officials responsible or complicit in such abuses in Nicaragua on an ongoing basis.

The United States is taking these actions in Nicaragua because the Ortega

regime continues to stifle dissent; harass and repress independent media; and arrest, torture, and intimidate civilians for simply exercising their human rights and fundamental freedoms. The recent cancellation of legal status for nine human rights and civil society organizations, and the expulsion of experts investigating the human rights situation in Nicaragua under the auspices of the Organization of American States' independent Inter-American Commission on Human Rights are just the latest examples of the Ortega regime's wanton disregard for fundamental freedoms, democratic processes and institutions, and human rights.

The Nica Act sends another strong message that the United States will continue to press the Ortega regime for a return to democracy and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. We stand with the people of Nicaragua as they demand early, free, fair and transparent elections.

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