

Press Releases: Department Press Briefing – March 22, 2018

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TRANSCRIPT:

2:57 p.m. EDT

MS NAUERT: Hi, everybody. How are you today? Good to see you. Okay, a couple announcements I'd like to start out with this afternoon. Where's your colleague, Matt Lee? Where'd he go off? Well, we can't start without you. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: I'm sorry.

MS NAUERT: Okay.

QUESTION: Get my glasses.

MS NAUERT: I hear ya. The other day I actually walked down here with mismatched shoes.

QUESTION: Really?

MS NAUERT: Yeah. One shoe was leopard and the other shoe was gold. And I've just misplaced my toppers. I'm so sorry. So could you bear with us for one second? My apologies.

How's everybody?

QUESTION: Good.

QUESTION: Pretty good.

MS NAUERT: Okay. Pretty good.

QUESTION: Isn't wearing mismatched shoes a fireable offense in your former profession?

MS NAUERT: It probably would be, yeah. (Laughter.) I thought about

getting away with it. I said, "Nobody's going to care here." But my male colleagues convinced me otherwise.

QUESTION: You could've started a new trend.

MS NAUERT: Gold and leopard, I don't know.

QUESTION: The State Department's happening.

MS NAUERT: Thank you so much. Sorry about that.

Okay. A couple things going on today. First, I'd like to announce a project that we're pretty excited about, and this is in – over in Jordan. We're pleased to announce today that the Department of State and the Government of Jordan have inaugurated a new regional counterterrorism academy in Jordan. The department was represented for the opening by the Assistant Secretary for Diplomatic Security Michael Evanoff and the U.S. Embassy in Amman's Charge Henry Wooster. The academy was funded, constructed, and equipped through the department's Antiterrorism Assistance Program. Once it's fully operational, the new training center will double ATA's regional counterterrorism training capacity in the country of Jordan.

Through the ATA program, Jordan has become a regional training hub for Jordanian police and police from at least 21 other nations. The department's ATA program receives funding and policy guidance from the Bureau of Counterterrorism and is ministered by the Bureau of Diplomatic Security and its Diplomatic Security Service. So we're pleased to announce the opening of that.

Secondly, it had to be moved from yesterday because of the weather, it will now be held tomorrow, and that is the International Women of Courage Awards here at the State Department. Tomorrow our Deputy Secretary of State John Sullivan will present the 2018 Secretary of State's International Women of Courage Award, with remarks from First Lady Melania Trump, to honor 10 extraordinary women from around the world. It's now in its 12th year. The Secretary of State's IWOC Awards recognizes women around the globe who have demonstrated exceptional courage and leadership in advocating for peace, justice, human rights, gender equality, and women's empowerment, often at great personal risk and sacrifice. Since the inception of this award in 2007, the State Department has recognized more than 120 women from 65 countries.

Following the award ceremony in Washington, the honorees will travel individually to Austin, Texas; Cleveland, Dallas, Pensacola, Phoenix, Raleigh, Salt Lake City, San Antonio on the International Visitor Leadership Program. American organizations and businesses will host the awardees and collaborate with them on strategies and ideas to empower women in both the United States and abroad. The awardees will reconvene in Los Angeles for a closing ceremony before returning home to their home countries. We congratulate these 10 extraordinary women, and we look forward to honoring them here tomorrow. That event is open press,

so we hope to see you there.

And then lastly, a short while ago, you probably saw and heard Secretary Tillerson speaking to our State Department colleagues, thanking our colleagues and their family members for their service. He reminded us that people make the difference here at the State Department in the work that we do each and every day. So on behalf of the building, I'd like to thank Secretary Tillerson for his service and sacrifice that he has made for the country. It's a lot to leave family, to leave a good job, to leave grandkids and a beautiful ranch. So that is a reminder of the sacrifice that he made.

The other day, in a brief reception with some staff, he mentioned that becoming secretary of state helped him fill a hole, and by that he meant sacrificing to serve his country. It was a way that he did that, and that has now been satisfied. So, sir, I would just like to say that we would wish you all the happiness, success, joy in your new life, and thank you for your service as you now return to normal life.

And with that, I'd be happy to take your questions.

QUESTION: Thanks. Just on that really briefly, you – did you speak with him today? I mean, does he still feel that that – given the manner of his dismissal and the fact that he was the subject of so much rumor, speculation, a lot of it what he called or alluded to as “mean-spirited” in his remarks, does he still feel like the sacrifice that he made was – filled the hole that –

MS NAUERT: I only said a quick word to him today at the reception, or at the – before he left the building. But the other day he was talking about that. That was just two days ago that he said that it – how much it meant to him.

QUESTION: Can I ask you – this is a bit unusual – this report about the charges being dropped against President Erdogan's bodyguards. Was the State Department involved or did the State Department seek for these charges to be dropped on Valentine's Day, the day before Secretary Tillerson met with President Erdogan?

MS NAUERT: I can tell you that the department had no role in the decision to drop those charges. That was entirely coming out of the Department of Justice.

QUESTION: Okay. Did you have any – you said you don't have – didn't have any role. Was there any contact, any cooperation, any coordination with them?

MS NAUERT: Not that I'm aware of. This is completely a Department of Justice decision.

QUESTION: And was the Secretary or were members of his team aware that this had happened?

MS NAUERT: I am told that the Secretary was aware of the decision before he met with President Erdogan in Turkey. He noted that the timing was coincidental, but he also noted it was a good example of how we have an independent judiciary in our country and that the Department of Justice made those decisions and took it from there.

QUESTION: So he did raise it in his meeting with President Erdogan?

MS NAUERT: I am told that the Secretary did not discuss this issue with President Erdogan in any type of a quid pro quo, that the Secretary was certainly aware of it and believed it was a – noted that it was just an example of how our judicial system works here and that it was a coincidence in timing. He went on to talk about – apparently, I'm told – that courts operate free of political influence.

QUESTION: Okay. So, but he didn't talk about it in terms of how this is a way that the U.S. can show that it's willing to improve relations with –

MS NAUERT: I am told the answer to that is unequivocally no.

QUESTION: Okay. So you are – you keep prefacing this with "I am told, I am told," which is fair enough –

MS NAUERT: Well, I didn't ask this question. The story just came out this morning. I've not spoken to him today.

QUESTION: No, no, I guess –

MS NAUERT: And I was not there.

QUESTION: Right. Well, no – this is the – this is one of the problems. No one else was there except for the foreign minister.

MS NAUERT: I understand.

QUESTION: Which was noted as unusual, as being unusual, at the time. And I would just wonder that wouldn't it have helped to have at least one other U.S. Government official in the room when this meeting was going on so that there could be – this kind of thing wouldn't – you wouldn't have to say, "I am told." It would be coming straight from –

MS NAUERT: Matt?

QUESTION: Yeah.

MS NAUERT: I understand.

QUESTION: All right.

MS NAUERT: I completely understand.

QUESTION: Heather, can I have –

MS NAUERT: Yeah.

QUESTION: I think I've just one bit on Tillerson. He's meant to – is he still officially leaving or leaves this – the position on March the 30th?

MS NAUERT: March 31st will be his last day as Secretary of State, so he still retains that title, that commission. The deputy secretary is handling everything else day-to-day.

QUESTION: And was it always a plan for him to leave this early? I mean actually leave the building.

MS NAUERT: This was something that was under consideration. At what point this decision was made, I don't know.

QUESTION: Oh, so it wasn't a surprise, like as in the last few hours that he would then leave or –

MS NAUERT: Well, this wasn't a sudden thing that all of the sudden he decided –

QUESTION: Oh, okay.

MS NAUERT: – to pack a backpack and head on home. This was something that he was considering for some time.

QUESTION: And then on another issue, on China. As you saw the President today launched – signed a presidential memorandum on kickstarting a process that could – could see up to about \$50 or \$60 billion in tariffs in – on Chinese goods. What was the U.S. role in – the U.S. State Department's role in this decision? And do you believe that this could – in fact, a lot of people think, believe, that this could begin some kind of trade war. Do you believe that this could in any way affect your relationship with China as you're trying to tackle regional issues such as North Korea?

MS NAUERT: Well, let me take the last part of your question first. We have a longstanding relationship with China. There's a lot of work that is left to be done with two massive, massive countries. One of the key things that we will be dealing with with regard to China is the DPRK, and let me remind you that they voted in support of UN Security Council resolutions on sanctions for North Korea. So we don't believe that that has changed, that we ask them to continue to adhere to those resolutions.

And so we have a complex relationship certainly with China, but we have a lot of areas where we have to work together with them. And they recognize that it's not just in the United States' best interest, but it's in China's best interest. And I think the President overall has been very clear from the first day on the campaign trail, longstanding concerns that he has and administration-wide people have, with China's unfair trade practices. Two large economies – it's natural for us to

have to address things that we don't agree on. One of them is certainly trade. The President has fought very hard for advancing opportunities, economic opportunities for American businesses, but also the American – also the American people.

QUESTION: Do you believe that the President –

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: Okay.

QUESTION: The President didn't actually impose those restrictions today, as many had said or reported before. Do you believe that this could be leaving some kind of door open to the Chinese to negotiate some kind of –

MS NAUERT: I'm not going to speculate on that. The U.S. Trade Representative issued a pretty thorough report about their concerns with China's unfair trade practices. I can give you a copy of that if you like. And so they are handling much of this.

QUESTION: I'm just trying to get to the relationship, which is a foreign policy in a diplomatic relationship –

MS NAUERT: Sure.

QUESTION: – which also affects – those moves also affect this building. So do you see any kind of impact on your – on the relationship between this department and China?

MS NAUERT: Well, as I said, I think China recognizes and we recognize that we have to work together on a lot of areas of mutual interest. But the President has made very clear from the beginning – remember it was a year ago – I think it was a year go this time that he sat down with President Xi when – at Mar-a-Lago. And one of the issues that was brought up, that the President brought up with President Xi, was China's unfair trade practices. We had our four strategic dialogues last year, all of them completed. One of them specifically was on China's unfair trade practices. So this would – announcement would come as no surprise to the Chinese. The President is looking out for the best interests of the American public and American companies, and this is one step that the administration has decided to make.

QUESTION: May – well, can I just follow up quickly?

MS NAUERT: Yeah. Hi, Elise. Sure.

QUESTION: Thank you. He also has been saying all along that he was holding off on doing – the President – holding off on such measures because he was seeking North Korea – Chinese cooperation on the North Korea issue. And then you just kind of noted that China has signed on to several resolutions working with the United States on these type of sanctions. So isn't that a little bit of an inconsistent message? He got

the cooperation and then imposed the tariffs anyway.

MS NAUERT: No, I – look, China has engaged in unfair trade practices for years and years, and this President has decided to call them out on it and to hold them to account.

QUESTION: But don't you think – that's a fair point, but at the same time, do you think it was wise to kind of tie the imposition of these type of tariffs to Chinese cooperation on other national security issues, which you are getting?

MS NAUERT: Look, China has been cooperating with us for the most part – we always say that they can do more – on the issue of North Korea and denuclearization. This is not just something that the United States is asking for, cooperation on denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. Many countries are, including China. So it's not just in our interest to get Kim Jong-un to give up his weapons programs. It is in the interest of China as well, and we think that China recognizes that.

QUESTION: No, I totally see your point. But now that the President has been making Chinese cooperation on North Korea such a big issue and he's imposed the tariffs anyway, aren't you concerned that perhaps that cooperation will wane?

MS NAUERT: Look, China recognize it – that it is also in their best interest to push for denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula, and I don't think that they're going to back away from that because we impose tariffs – rightfully so – to benefit and to help out American workers and American companies. This is no surprise. We should not act as though this is any surprise.

QUESTION: Has the State Department heard from the Chinese today?

MS NAUERT: Not to my awareness.

Okay. All right.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: Hey, Nick.

QUESTION: Just on Tillerson.

MS NAUERT: Yeah.

QUESTION: Can you just explain what he's doing until the 31st-ish, since he still has the title of Secretary of State?

MS NAUERT: My understanding is that he's headed back home, and beyond that, I'm unaware, but he – when he met with Director Pompeo the other day, he offered to stay in touch and provide assistance if Director Pompeo should need any assistance.

QUESTION: But if there's no sort of formal duty, why is he retaining that title for –

MS NAUERT: My understanding is that because his commission is up on March the 31st.

QUESTION: Okay. And then just to follow up on the redesign, what is the status now of the redesign, now that he's left the building? Is that being frozen, or –

MS NAUERT: It's called the Impact Initiative now. The status of it is that it goes forward. We will largely maintain sort of an even course, a steady course, between now and the time that if Director Pompeo – if the secretary-designate does become the next secretary of state, we want to keep things calm for him, ensure an orderly transition, hand things over to the secretary-designate, if he becomes the secretary of state. Hopefully the Senate will confirm him. We would certainly like a speedy confirmation if they agree that he is the best person for that. And then we'll hand over all the information to Director Pompeo, and he can make a decision about what he would choose to do with the redesign. We talked about this the other day. Some things are sort of no-brainers, like getting us in the cloud, getting us up to speed with our IT. Other things he may want to do away with, but that would be his choice.

QUESTION: But the groups that have been meeting between USAID and State and the money that was spent on outside consultants and things like that, is that going to continue to be spent? Will those groups continue to meet?

MS NAUERT: I would imagine that any contracts that we have in place would continue to go forward until those contracts – I mean, this is just a guess – that contracts would stay in place until those contracts expire. But if there's anything more for you I have on that, I'll let you know, okay?

QUESTION: When you say the deputy secretary is doing all the day-to-day duties, that means that he's handling anything that would be at the Secretary's level involving interagency or foreign governments.

MS NAUERT: That's correct.

QUESTION: The Secretary, although he retains the title, does not speak on behalf of this administration to foreign leaders anymore.

MS NAUERT: That is correct.

QUESTION: That is correct?

MS NAUERT: That is my understanding.

QUESTION: So –

MS NAUERT: I mean, he may get a phone call from somebody congratulating

him on his future, but –

QUESTION: On being fired? (Laughter.) I'm just curious because, I mean, he's going to keep security while – for the – as long as he's – even though he's not doing anything that is related to the nation's business, he's still going to have Diplomatic Security agents. He'll still, presumably, have access to classified information and the SCIF –

MS NAUERT: My understanding is that he –

QUESTION: – in his house –

MS NAUERT: My understanding is that he was processed out today.

QUESTION: Oh, okay. So all of that is gone and he does not have security provided by the State Department anymore?

MS NAUERT: I don't know about security. That's a very good question. I will look into that. I'll ask our DS and get back with you on that.

QUESTION: Okay. So literally the only thing he still has is the title?

MS NAUERT: That is my understanding, yes.

QUESTION: Got you. Thank you.

MS NAUERT: And the deputy secretary is handling all the meetings, all the bilateral meetings, all the big decisions that are now being made at the State Department. It's all on his plate, so he's doing two jobs.

Hi. Go right ahead.

QUESTION: Yeah. On Turkey. The situation – the military operation from Turkey in Syria is still going on.

MS NAUERT: Yes.

QUESTION: You expressed your concerns last week. How about working group announced by Secretary Tillerson in Ankara last month? Is it working? Is it meeting? Is it working towards a solution for Manbij? I saw the readout of President Trump call with President Erdogan a few minutes ago. There wasn't even a mention about Syria, about this situation. What are the steps you can –

MS NAUERT: Well, as you well know, just because a readout states a certain number of things or issues were addressed does not mean that other things weren't discussed as well. Often more delicate things we will handle in private conversations. So I'd have to –

QUESTION: It means they didn't think it was worth mentioning (inaudible)
–

MS NAUERT: Not necessarily. No. No, no, no. Don't – you cannot make that assumption. It sometimes means that things are delicate and we choose to

not put it in a readout because it's delicate, and we sometimes think that we can best handle complicated negotiations in a more private fashion. In some countries it's – that's more important than with other countries. I'd have to refer you to the White House though for any additional details on the President's call with President Erdogan.

But I can tell you that was something – the mechanism was something that was agreed to between Secretary Tillerson and Secretary – Erdogan about a month ago. We did have the first of that joint – not joint mechanism – the first of that mechanism meeting here in Washington about two weeks ago. We had about two dozen Turkish officials who came to the United States meeting with about two dozen State Department officials – was on – I think it was a Thursday or Friday. And that was here at the State Department, so I'm guessing you all missed that, right? We snuck – got them in and out the doors without you guys all realizing, right? So those conversations are happening.

Deputy Secretary Sullivan spoke with his counterpart over the weekend and then the President spoke to President Erdogan. So clearly those conversations are very important. As a NATO ally with a lot of stuff going on in Syria, we have a lot to talk about with the Turkish Government.

QUESTION: But Heather, you're not saying that readouts of conversations that are issued by this administration should not be taken as faithful representations of the content of what was discussed?

MS NAUERT: I'm just saying, look, a readout gives a broad overview of what was discussed, but not everything in the readout is going to be what was discussed. Some things we don't put in every single detail about that, and that's private diplomatic conversation, and that's standard, normal from administration to administration. You know that.

QUESTION: Does the mechanism plan to meet again or –

MS NAUERT: We – when we have a meeting to announce, we'll certainly let you know.

QUESTION: Can we move on –

QUESTION: Turkey. Turkey.

MS NAUERT: Okay. Okay. Hi. Yeah. Go right ahead. I'll come back to you.

QUESTION: I often ask you about the Palestinian teenager, Ahed Tamimi.

MS NAUERT: Yes.

QUESTION: Yesterday, the Israeli court, behind closed doors, sentenced her to eight months in prison for slapping an Israeli soldier. On the same day, they reduced the sentence of an Israeli soldier who killed an incapacitated Palestinian in cold blood to almost the same amount of time. Is, in your view, the Israelis sort of deal with the Palestinians

with a different scale of justice altogether?

MS NAUERT: Said, I think I'm not going to answer that question. That would be entirely up –

QUESTION: You –

MS NAUERT: No. That would be entirely up to law enforcement. I'm not there to see all the details of the case, so it would be very unfair for me to comment on that. You know we have talked many times about the importance of fair trials, about the importance that all individuals be treated humanely, that – I mean, this is nothing new. We've had this conversation many times before.

QUESTION: So you think that by sentencing this young girl to eight months in prison for slapping a soldier is basically – justice was being served?

MS NAUERT: How many times have I said this? We believe that all people, especially children, should be treated humanely and fairly and their human rights should be respected. We've talked about that many times before. My – our position has not changed.

QUESTION: So you're not appalled by any measure by the fact that a young girl gets sentenced to eight months in prison and a person who killed another person in cold blood be – serve almost the same amount of time?

MS NAUERT: I am not saying that. I am just saying I'm not going to weigh in on a case that took place in another country. That would entirely be a matter for them to address with you, okay?

Laurie, hi.

QUESTION: To go back to Turkey –

MS NAUERT: Sure.

QUESTION: – the foreign minister yesterday said in response to your comment that there may not be an agreement on Manbij but there is an understanding. Is there an understanding? If so, could you explain it?

MS NAUERT: We're going to start splitting hairs here, right, between agreement, understanding, all of that. I can just tell you that our talks with the Turkish Government are ongoing. Those talks have not been concluded at this point, and we look forward to continuing our conversations with the government.

QUESTION: Okay. They also seem to threaten an attack on Manbij as well. What is your response to that?

MS NAUERT: U.S. forces are located in Manbij. We have made it very clear with the Turkish Government that we continue to operate there. We have made our concerns very clear with the Turkish Government that we have a

right to defend ourselves, the U.S., along with its coalition partners on the ground there. And we have encouraged Turkey to de-escalate overall, and that's why we continue to have conversations with that government.

QUESTION: And you have no intention to leave?

MS NAUERT: We have no intention to leave, but beyond that I'd have to ask you to talk to DOD.

QUESTION: Okay. And the Iraqi Kurds are very happy now that the airports have been opened. But there's one important issue outstanding, and that's visa regulations. Up until now, people with American and EU passports could travel to the Kurdistan region airports without visas, if you had a U.S. or EU passport. That now may change. Do you have a reaction to that, and are you concerned that a country like Iran, which has influence with the Iraqi interior ministry, might be exercising control over this?

MS NAUERT: I can tell you I've just heard that report. It's still hypothetical, so I just don't want to comment on something that's a hypothetical like that. Okay? Hey, Abbie.

QUESTION: Hi. Do you have any information on reports of the death of a U.S. citizen – Andrew Dorogi, an Amherst college student – in Mexico City?

MS NAUERT: Yes. I just heard about this as I was coming out here, that a young man had died in Mexico. And I just want to express our condolences. Anytime an American citizen should lose his or her life overseas, that is certainly a tragedy. I'm not able to comment on any specifics of his case, but our thoughts and prayers go out to the family. I know that we are offering or at least have – or have provided assistance to the family. Our consular officers who are so compassionate and do such a great job of helping families in very difficult circumstances, and I know we're offering our assistance to them.

QUESTION: Are you able to say whether the U.S. is at all engaged with Mexican authorities on the nature of the death –

MS NAUERT: I'm sorry, I'm just not aware of that at this point. But I would imagine that we would have conversations with Mexican officials.

QUESTION: India?

MS NAUERT: Hey, how are you?

QUESTION: Good. Do you have any comments on or update on the Government of India reaching out to their U.S. counterparts about the details about this big scandal that has broken in India about – involving Cambridge Analytica or their suspended CEO Alexander Nix? Have they reached out to you for any cooperation?

MS NAUERT: Not that I'm aware of. I'd just have to refer you back to the Government of India on that if they had a contract with them. I'm just unaware. Okay?

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: Okay. Hi. Nike, hi.

QUESTION: Yeah. If I may, I would like to switch gear to Africa, Kenya. Do you have anything on – the embassy of Kenya is starting a campaign to help locals to identify fake news, and then to help them to stop, reflect, and verify before forwarding any misinformation. First, on that, and secondly, is any other – are any other American embassies doing the same thing?

MS NAUERT: Yeah. So I'm aware of that program that's taking place out of our embassy. I believe it's being run out of one of our American centers, which if you're traveling overseas and you've never been to one of our American centers, it's a pretty neat place to go. It's a place where young people or older people can go and kind of hang out and work on college applications and all that. I had the opportunity to visit one in Bangladesh, which was a neat opportunity.

So I believe it's being run out of our American center. The idea, I think the genesis came from our ambassador who is serving there. And the idea is if you ever talk to somebody who, no offense, but in their early 20s, they don't know how to identify legitimate news sites. I have these conversations with our babysitters all the time, and they'll come to me –

QUESTION: It's not just people in their early 20s.

MS NAUERT: (Laughter.) They'll come to me with a piece of news saying, "Hey, Heather, take a look at this." And I ask, "What is the source of that news?" And they'll say it's some blogger or vlogger who apparently is a YouTube star, and I've never heard of him, but I'm much older than they are so what do I know? The point being is that that seems to be an issue, especially with younger people nowadays, perhaps with folks around the world as well, where they don't know how to go to legitimate sites or they don't ask the questions and verify themselves what the source is of this information.

So I think the ambassador was just trying to help teach young people in particular how to identify real news and how to identify fake news. And so I think it's probably a good idea. If it's going on in other embassies, I'm just not aware of it. Okay? Janne, hi.

QUESTION: Thank you very much. On North Korea. Excuse me. I'm sorry. South Korean Government proposed that U.S. and South Korea-North Korea three-partner – trilateral party talks. Will the U.S. accept this, trilateral talks?

MS NAUERT: I can tell you – and you've seen – probably seen this report

in the news by now, that South Korea and North Korea are planning to have a meeting ahead of our summit, which – we have not announced any dates yet at this point. They're planning to have a meeting. We are in close coordination with the South Koreans and the Japanese, for that matter, about all of these meetings and all of these talks. So we have no comment or plans on a possible three-way summit, but we're still going under the operating premise that we will be meeting with North Korea.

QUESTION: Yeah, only bilateral talks with the North and –

MS NAUERT: Yes.

QUESTION: – United States –

MS NAUERT: Yes.

QUESTION: Do you have – anything heard from North Korea regarding the –

MS NAUERT: Not at this point, not at this point. I don't have anything for you on that. I'll let you know.

QUESTION: So can I just follow up? A quick question on the – on Janne's question.

MS NAUERT: Yeah, sure.

QUESTION: So you don't have anything from North Korea. Are you just basically kind of making plans going ahead on what the North Koreans are telling you? I mean, wouldn't you like to hear from the North Koreans that they're –

MS NAUERT: Well, that's why I go back to our close relationship with South Korea. I mean South Korea has been our – perhaps our best interlocutor in dealing with this issue. As neighbors, as two countries that had preliminary meetings already, they worked out some of this framework at the Olympics. And so we trust our allies and partners, and so we trust South Korea certainly.

QUESTION: But don't you feel a little bit uncomfortable about going ahead and making preparations for a meeting with another country that you haven't even had an official confirmation directly from?

MS NAUERT: This is just complicated diplomacy, Elise, and I think that's just the way it works. We are looking forward to having these meetings and conversations, and we trust our South Korean allies, and we trust the Japanese. And this is – U.S. Government-wide program which we're standing by.

QUESTION: I understand, but don't you need, at some point, some kind of official confirmation –

MS NAUERT: Look, I'm not going to get ahead of that.

QUESTION: – from North Korea?

MS NAUERT: I'm not going to get ahead of that; I'm not going to speculate. I think where we are right now, we're doing just fine. Okay?

QUESTION: Syria?

QUESTION: Jordan?

QUESTION: Question on Syria.

MS NAUERT: Okay. Hold on. Connor, go ahead.

QUESTION: Just get your response to the budget that was passed yesterday or today, the President is expected to sign. They actually gave you a four percent increase over last year's budget, not the nearly one third cut that the administration had proposed. Just your response to that, and if you plan on actually spending all of that money.

MS NAUERT: I guess I would say thanks, Congress, and thanks to U.S. taxpayers, and we will take our lead from OMB and from Congress on that. Okay.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: Syria?

QUESTION: What does that mean? You'll take your lead from OMB on –

MS NAUERT: Well, what we end up being given –

QUESTION: Yeah?

MS NAUERT: – we look forward to that.

QUESTION: Well, the White House says it's going to sign it, so this almost \$56 billion, which is as he mentioned, almost four percent more than last year, and a lot more than what the administration was asking for, that Secretary Tillerson – or soon to be ex-Secretary Tillerson – endorsed. So can you assure the people who are working for this building that this money will – that you will take it and you will spend it?

MS NAUERT: I'm not aware if we ever just sit on money, but look, I can just say we thank the Congress and thank them for their work, and for the faith in the State Department. And a lot of folks complained last year when we didn't have enough money, and now if we're getting more money, I don't see the need for complaints.

QUESTION: But you're not – I get – what I'm getting at is that you're not opposed to this, the building. The administration is not opposed to an increase in funding for the function 150. I can't imagine that we would be imposed to –

QUESTION: Opposed.

MS NAUERT: I'm sorry, I can't imagine that we would be opposed to an increase in funding. We have – we're in a transition period now where we will hopefully have a new secretary coming in, and he can make some of those determinations at that point.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: Wait, hold on. Go ahead, Rich.

QUESTION: Syria.

QUESTION: Just really quickly.

MS NAUERT: Yeah.

QUESTION: Is the transfer of the \$40 million from the Pentagon to the State Department for the Global Engagement Center complete, and is there a status update on getting the expansion of that office started?

MS NAUERT: Sure. So part of what we're doing is awaiting the funds from the Department of Defense for the Global Engagement Center. That's \$40 million. That memorandum of understanding was signed a few weeks back. Last I checked as of Tuesday or so, that money had not been sent over yet, but I know that DOD had to look through some of its various programs and decide where it was going to take that money from. I think it wasn't just sitting in a pot earmarked for the Global Engagement Center. So what we are doing is taking a look at our overall priorities. Look, one of the big issues that has been going on for far too many years now is the horrific fight against ISIS. And so the Global Engagement Center has been engaged in fighting ISIS and trying to turn around that messaging.

We don't want more people to join ISIS; we want to turn people away from ISIS. So that has been one of their priorities. And then, about a year and a half ago or so, an additional priority was added to the Global Engagement Center, and that is countering state-sponsored propaganda. So that is something that's still getting ramped up. Part of my job here will be to really focus on this. I see that as a very important issue. When we look at the propaganda that we see coming out of governments, including Russia, including Iran, including China. And there are others out there that exist, but those are just the top three that come to my mind. When we see that propaganda coming out that we believe needs to be corrected, changed, influenced in some way, that is a priority of ours, and so we really look forward to staffing up this operation and resetting that as a priority for the Global Engagement Center. I've had a lot of conversations every single day since I got back here from Israel with my counterparts over at the NSC and here in the building about the importance of that and what our plans are.

So when we have something more about our intentions and our goals and achievements on the Global Engagement Center, I'd be more than happy to bring that to you.

QUESTION: Heather –

QUESTION: And as you've gotten into the details of it, do you think 40 million is sufficient or –

MS NAUERT: Well, look, it certainly sounds like a lot of money to me, but I think it's a good place to start. Okay?

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: (Inaudible) on Syria? Syria?

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: Okay, okay, okay. Go ahead. Said, I already called on you. Go ahead, sir.

QUESTION: So on –

MS NAUERT: Hold on. Come on. We can go to somebody else, right?

QUESTION: Turkish jets –

MS NAUERT: Our Kurdish friend. Yeah, go ahead.

QUESTION: Thank you. Turkish jets attacked three Kurdish villages in northern Iraq and killed four civilians. I am just wondering if you are aware of those reports. And also Iraqi foreign ministry called it a violation of the sovereignty of Iraq. Do you share that view?

MS NAUERT: I am not familiar with that report. I'm sorry. I just haven't seen that yet. I will take a look at it and see what we can get for you about that. Okay?

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: Okay, okay.

QUESTION: You made a Jordan announcement.

MS NAUERT: Yes, I did.

QUESTION: Yes. So can you tell us more about this so-called counterterrorism site? Jordan – if you look at human rights organizations, there's use of torture in Jordan. What is the State Department position on torture, including methods like waterboarding? Does the State Department regard that as illegal?

MS NAUERT: I think that the United States' long-term cooperation with our strong partner in the Middle East, Jordan, is very well known, very well established. Our relationship with Jordan is as strong today as it was a few years ago, as it was 10 years ago, 15 years ago, and much further back than that. They have an excellent military. They have an excellent police force. They are close cooperating partners of the

United States and, frankly, many other countries as well. I think our position –

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: I think our position on that, on the part of the U.S. Government, is very clear. We will work with this government and we work with many other governments around the world in the fight against terrorism, in the fight against ISIS.

QUESTION: So you're fine with torture, including waterboarding, with cooperating –

MS NAUERT: Are we doing this again? Are we doing this? Are we rolling back the clock to 15 years ago again today?

QUESTION: Well, it's just that the CIA –

MS NAUERT: It's my friend from The Nation here.

QUESTION: – the CIA nominee destroy – among other things oversaw a site in Thailand that's been accused of conducting torture and destroyed the video evidence of it –

MS NAUERT: I'm pretty sure that I work for the State Department –

QUESTION: Right.

MS NAUERT: – and not the Central Intelligence Agency. So if you have –

QUESTION: So – but I'm not winding back the clock –

MS NAUERT: So if you have any questions about that –

QUESTION: This administration is –

MS NAUERT: – I'd refer you over to that building.

QUESTION: This administration is winding down the clock, so I'd like an answer to the question rather than a divergent that I'm winding back the clock, because this administration is winding back the clock.

MS NAUERT: I don't know – I don't know how you –

QUESTION: So you don't want to answer the question.

MS NAUERT: I don't know how you think that. I think our position on torture, on human rights, is very well known.

QUESTION: What is it?

MS NAUERT: We support the Government of Jordan. We do not support, we do not encourage, any of that kind of use that you – that you allege.

QUESTION: Is waterboarding legal, in your view?

MS NAUERT: The U.S. Government has declared that. I don't recall the exact year, but a few years back, maybe it was seven or eight years ago, said that that is not a technique that the U.S. Government endorses. There was a time that the U.S. Government had told personnel that it could use that.

And I will remind you, let me just remind you and go on a little sidetrack here, that our military forces, when our Special Ops go through that training to become Special Forces, Navy SEALs, all of that, they go through that training. They go through what you're referring to as torture. I just want to put that out there, that that still exists today.

QUESTION: So the State Department view is that waterboarding is torture and is illegal?

MS NAUERT: I'm not going to go back and have this conversation –

QUESTION: It's a simple question.

MS NAUERT: – with you once again. Okay?

QUESTION: It's a simple question.

MS NAUERT: I think we've taken enough time on this and let's move on.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: On Syria, what is –

MS NAUERT: Said, go right ahead, and then we'll come to China.

QUESTION: What is your – can you share with us what is the update on Ghouta? Because the Syrian Government and the Russians claim that 90,000 civilians have departed the – Eastern Ghouta and the militants are being moved to the north and so on. Could you update us on what is the situation?

MS NAUERT: Yeah. Overall, I think the humanitarian situation in Eastern Ghouta remains dire. We've seen the reports of many thousands of people attempting to leave. We've also heard reports about people attempting to leave and then being killed as a result.

We continue to call for the ceasefire that was supported by 15 other countries at the United Nations Security Council almost a month ago.

QUESTION: Fourteen.

MS NAUERT: Pardon me?

QUESTION: Fourteen.

MS NAUERT: Fourteen countries?

QUESTION: Fourteen other countries.

MS NAUERT: Fourteen other – oh, pardon me, Matt, fourteen other countries. Fifteen – that includes the United States.

QUESTION: Okay. So –

MS NAUERT: So we continue to call for that ceasefire to be put into – in force, and that has not happened just yet. Most importantly right now, aside from that ceasefire, is getting the humanitarian aid in that needs to be gotten in. By the way, did anyone see that video of Bashar al-Assad driving around Syria, as though it was a normal place, like he was just some normal dude going out for a drive? It was like Car Talk. I don't know what was up with that, but what that man should do is stop killing his own people – stop killing innocent civilians, adhere to the UN-led ceasefire resolution that was passed by 15 countries, Matt, which included the United States.

QUESTION: So, you're – it's not –

MS NAUERT: Adhere to that, let the humanitarian aid get in.

QUESTION: Yeah. You cannot independently confirm that 90,000 people have left Istanbul?

MS NAUERT: I cannot confirm that. We're not there. We're not on the ground. But we talk to aid groups all the time, and I just don't have the recent updates on any numbers.

Conor, go ahead.

QUESTION: Can you update us, though, on what the U.S. is doing to try to implement the ceasefire? Have you made any more calls to other leaders in the region or to Russia?

MS NAUERT: Yeah. So this is something that is – comes up all of the time. The U.S. Government is in constant communication with our foreign allies and partners about the situation here. We have – Ambassador Haley is hard at work on some activities and actions at the United Nations. There may be – and I don't want to get ahead of anything that she could announce, but certainly looking at other resolutions, and that may be something that we can put in sort of our arsenal, if you will.

One of the important things is holding someone responsible for the use of chemical weapons. We know that those have been used in Syria on innocent civilians. Russia destroyed the Joint Investigative Mechanism at the United Nations. That was the mechanism that would hold an individual accountable – an individual country accountable – for chemical weapons violations. Russia stood in the way of that. We are looking at other types of mechanisms that could be used. JIM, the Joint Investigative Mechanism, was the gold standard. So we hope that we can

get something else in place to hold them accountable. I mean it's a – it's a government-wide effort here on the part of State Department, having communications with the Department of Defense, the National Security Council, and many other countries overseas. So we're working on it, hoping that we can get something going. Yeah.

QUESTION: Speaking of chemical weapons –

MS NAUERT: Yeah.

QUESTION: – I assume it goes without saying that you guys would support an OPCW investigation into this spy poisoning case in –

MS NAUERT: Well, OPCW is investigating the spy poisoning case.

QUESTION: Yeah. But the Russians have said that they – they don't buy – that they won't –

MS NAUERT: Yeah. Okay. So, as many of you know, Russia – yeah, I think it was yesterday – said that this could have come – the poisoning could have come from yet another country, which is ridiculous. I mean, we put out a statement about that, saying that is a joke that it could have come from another country. We've seen Russian claims like this before, when Russia claimed not to be responsible for its little green men in Ukraine, where Russia claimed to not be responsible for the downing of the Malaysian Air flight in 2014 over Ukraine. We've seen Russia continue to perpetuate the conflict in eastern Ukraine. They make a lot of claims. I think it's pretty clear we stand by the Brits, as do many other countries, that Russia's responsible for this.

Okay. We're going to –

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: Heather –

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: We're going to have to wrap it up and leave it there.

Go right ahead, sir.

QUESTION: Thank you very much, madam. As far as China actually is concerned, finally this president took action against China, because I have been saying for many, many years, according to the press report, China has been using as far as prison labor and also cheap labor. So my question is: Are you sending message to China that respect human rights and rule of law, freedoms of press and freedom of religion, among others? And also, stop arresting the prison – the innocent people for their cheap labor.

MS NAUERT: Yeah. Sir, despite what our friend here from *The Nation* may think, the United States consistently stands up for human rights. China

is one of those countries where we have those conversations, where we talk about the importance of freedom of religion, human rights, fair trials, and all of those other things and ideals that the United States Government holds near and dear to our hearts, because that's fundamentally what we believe in. We speak to other governments, China in particular, about media freedoms and all of those things consistently in all our diplomatic conversations.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: I'm going to have to leave it at that.

QUESTION: One more.

MS NAUERT: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

QUESTION: Heather, can you tell us about Saudi Arabia?

QUESTION: I want to ask you about –

QUESTION: Can you talk about the meetings with Saudi Arabia –

QUESTION: Bahrain.

QUESTION: – since Bahrain was just invoked?

MS NAUERT: Go right ahead. Go ahead.

QUESTION: Or, do you –

QUESTION: Heather, I've got one –

QUESTION: Before you get to – before –

QUESTION: So she's mentioning my name and not respond –

QUESTION: Excuse me. Before you get to Saudi, can you –

MS NAUERT: Yeah.

QUESTION: I have this question I've been trying to ask for three days now about this case in Bahrain, about Duaa Alwadaei, who was convicted yesterday and sentenced to two months in absentia. Do you have anything to say about that, given what you just said about the calls for free – fair trials and –

MS NAUERT: Yeah. Sure. And that is something that we talk with our partners in Bahrain. We have those conversations with the Government of Bahrain, with Saudi Arabia. We have difficult conversations with countries that we also have relationships with. That is a fact. We hold our ideals near and dear to our hearts. Those consistently come up in our private conversations with other governments, who don't adhere to those ideals that we believe are so important. You ask about – you ask –

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: Excuse me. I'm talking to Matt here. You ask about Duaa Alwadaei. She is residing in London. So we saw the report that a Bahraini criminal court sentenced her in absentia to two – I believe it was two months in prison for allegedly insulting a state institution. Really? For allegedly insulting a state institution, they sentenced her to two months in prison. So we would say to the Government of Bahrain – and this is a way that we can deliver a message to governments around the world – we strongly urge the government to abide by its international obligations and commitments to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, and that includes the freedom of expression.

Okay.

QUESTION: Heather, when you were – earlier, about Israel you refused to comment.

QUESTION: Heather, yesterday –

MS NAUERT: Go ahead. Go ahead. Go ahead. Go ahead.

QUESTION: Excuse me, sir. Excuse me.

QUESTION: You refused to comment on Israel.

QUESTION: Heather, yesterday Susan Thornton met with an official from Taiwan. Can – do you have a readout of that?

MS NAUERT: I do not. I do not. I'm sorry. I don't.

QUESTION: There was a tweet and a photograph of them meeting yesterday.

MS NAUERT: Okay. I'll see if I can provide a readout of that meeting for you, okay? Okay.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: Sir, I will let you take that last question. Then we got to go. Go ahead.

QUESTION: So you talk about – first of all, could you address Saudi Arabia and why is it that your closest ally in the region seems to be Saudi Arabia and Israel? You talk about a trial in Bahrain, but you don't address it when it comes to the – when the – when it comes to Israel. Why is that?

MS NAUERT: Look, that is a very sensitive matter, and we handle conversations with different governments differently about sensitive matters. We don't take the same approach with every single government, the kinds of conversations we have.

QUESTION: So Israel's off the hook?

MS NAUERT: No, I'm not saying that at all. Not saying that at all. We have to leave it there. Thank you.

QUESTION: Thanks, Heather.

(The briefing was concluded at 3:42 p.m.)

DPB # 19

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