Secretary Michael R. Pompeo At a Press Availability

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**SECRETARY POMPEO:**  Good morning, everyone.  Good to see you all.

I want to start today talking about multilateralism.  The Trump administration wants multilateral institutions to function, to actually work.  But multilateralism just for the sake of it, just to get together in a room and chat, doesn’t add value.

That brings me to the International Criminal Court, a thoroughly broken and corrupted institution.  The United States has never ratified the Rome Statute that created the court, and we will not tolerate its illegitimate attempts to subject Americans to its jurisdiction.

In June, the Trump administration authorized the imposition of economic sanctions against foreign persons directly engaged in ICC efforts to investigate U.S. or allied personnel, and those who materially assisted in those – in that effort.

Today we take the next step, because the ICC continues to target Americans, sadly.

Pursuant to Executive Order 13928, the United States will designate ICC Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda, and the ICC’s Head of Jurisdiction, Complementary, and Cooperation Division Phakiso Mochochoko for having materially assisted Prosecutor Bensouda.

Individuals and entities that continue to materially support those individuals risk exposure to sanctions as well.

Additionally, the State Department has restricted the issuance of visas for certain individuals involved in the ICC’s efforts to investigate U.S. personnel.

On the multilateral front further, I look forward to seeing my ASEAN and Indo-Pacific counterparts next week at a host of virtual meetings.

We’ll have discussions that will be wide-ranging, including on COVID, North Korea, South China Sea, Hong Kong, and Burma’s Rakhine State.

I’ll also raise how the Trump administration is restoring reciprocity to the U.S.-China relationship.  And today we continue that necessary work.

For years, the Chinese Communist Party has imposed significant barriers on American diplomats working inside the PRC.

Specifically, the Chinese Communist Party has implemented a system of opaque approval processes, designed to prevent American diplomats from conducting regular business, attending events, securing meetings, and connecting with the Chinese people, especially on university campuses and via the press and social media.

Today I’m announcing the State Department has established a mechanism requiring approval for senior Chinese diplomats in the United States to visit university campuses and to meet with local government officials.  Cultural events with groups larger than 50 people hosted by the Chinese embassy and consular posts outside our mission properties will also require our approval.

Additionally, we’re taking further steps to ensure that all official PRC embassy and consular social media accounts are properly identified as government accounts, Chinese Government accounts.

I have David Stilwell, our Assistant Secretary of East Asia-Pacific Affairs, with me today.  He’ll take questions.

We’re simply demanding reciprocity.  Access for our diplomats in China should be reflective of the access that Chinese diplomats in the United States have, and today’s steps will move us substantially in that direction.

Further on China:

Under Secretary Krach sent a letter recently to the governing boards of American universities, altering them to the threats the Chinese Communist Party poses to academic freedom, to human rights, and to university endowments.

These threats can come in the form of illicit funding for research, intellectual property theft, intimidation of foreign students, and opaque talent recruitment efforts.

University governing boards can help ensure their institutions have clean investments and clean endowment funds by taking a few key steps:

Disclose all PRC companies invested in endowment funds, especially those in emerging-market index funds.

Divest from Chinese companies on the Commerce Department Entity List that are contributing to human rights violations, military coercion, and other abuses.

And simply understand the recommendations issued by the President’s Working Group on Financial Markets, which examined the risk to investors of Chinese companies that are listed on U.S. stock exchanges.

Staying on China, but moving beyond our borders:

We’re hoping for a peaceful resolution to the situation on the India-China border.  From the Taiwan Strait, to the Himalayas, and beyond, the Chinese Communist Party is engaged in a clear and intensifying pattern of bullying its neighbors.

That bullying is also evident in the South China Sea.  Last week, the United States imposed sanctions and visa restrictions on Chinese individuals and entities responsible for the CCP’s imperialism there, doing things such as unlawful energy surveillance, activities in the economic zones of our ally the Philippines and other countries.

We also remain concerned – we’ve talked about this before – the activities of more than 300 Chinese-flagged vessels near the Galapagos, which are almost certainly engaged in illegal fishing.

In light of this maritime lawlessness, it’s no surprise that Beijing’s candidate in the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea election last week received more abstentions than any other candidate.

China is the most flagrant violator of the Law of the Sea Convention, and nations all across the world are registering their disapproval.

We’re also concerned about Chinese actions in Tibet, in light of the general secretary’s recent calls to “Sinicize” Tibetan Buddhism and fight “splittism” there.  We continue to call upon Beijing to enter into dialogue with the Dalai Lama or his representatives without preconditions, to reach a settlement that resolves their differences.

We’re also tracking the situation in Belarus closely.  Deputy Secretary Biegun traveled there last week at my direction.  Belarusians deserve the right to choose their own leaders through a truly free and fair election under independent observation.

We demand an immediate end to the violence against them and the release of all who are unjustly detained, and that includes U.S. citizen Vitali Shkliarov.

We’re closely coordinating, too, with our transatlantic partners, and are together reviewing significant, targeted sanctions on anyone involved in human rights abuses and repression.

Turning to the Middle East, where I just got back from a productive trip and where we have senior officials there today:

The region is changing rapidly thanks to President Trump’s leadership building up ties between Israel and its neighbors.  The Abraham Accords are clear proof of just that.

So is the first-ever direct flight from Tel Aviv to Abu Dhabi, which took place this week, and the first direct flight between Israel and Sudan, which I was honored to make during my trip.

Additionally, at every stop, I urged my counterparts to stand united against the Islamic Republic of Iran’s threats the region.

Which leads to my next point:

Forty years ago – forty years ago this month, the Iranian regime arrested nine members of the Baha’i National Spiritual Assembly of Iran.  No one has heard from them since.

Sadly, we must conclude that these nine individuals met the same fate as the more than 200 other Iranian Baha’is who have been executed for peacefully practicing their faith.

We ask the international community:  When will Iran’s regime be held accountable for those crimes?

In Africa, we welcome the news that Sudan’s civilian-led transitional government initiated a historic peace agreement with several opposition groups.  That’s good news.  They suggested to me when I was visiting them that would likely occur.  Good on them.

And here close at home in the Western Hemisphere, the United States candidate Mauricio Claver-Carone is the right person for the presidency of the International[**[1]**](https://www.state.gov/secretary-michael-r-pompeo-at-a-press-availability-12/#footnote1) Development Bank. The vote, currently scheduled for September 12th, should not be delayed.  It should happen that day.

And on Venezuela, 34 countries have no\ joined the growing list – the growing international consensus in favor of a transitional government.  More and more nations know that the fraudulent National Assembly elections scheduled for – scheduled by Maduro for December 6th of this year will neither be fair nor free.

We also call on free and fair elections in Haiti as soon as technically feasible.

And with that, I’m happy to take a handful of questions today.

**MS ORTAGUS:**  Okay.  Let’s start with Vivian.

**QUESTION:**  Yeah, great.

**SECRETARY POMPEO:**  Hi.

**QUESTION:**  Hi.  I wanted to ask you about your decision to address the RNC from Jerusalem.  There was guidelines sent to State Department staff advising against participation in any partisan politics.  And so what message does that send to the men and women of the State Department?  Also, obviously the House Foreign Affairs Committee has raised this issue as part of its complaint against you.  And so if you can address all those issues, please.

**SECRETARY POMPEO:**  All I can say in my role of Secretary of State – I did this in my personal capacity.  All I can say in my role as Secretary of State is the State Department reviewed this, it was lawful, and I personally felt it was important that the world hear the message of what this administration has accomplished.

**MS ORTAGUS:**  Okay.  Christine.

**QUESTION:**  Thank you.  The yearly U.S. Government China report – military China report came out yesterday.

**SECRETARY POMPEO:**  Yes, yesterday.

**QUESTION:**  It says that China intends to double its nuclear warheads in the next 10 years and grow its global and naval presence.  How do you think the U.S. and its allies should respond, and what do you think is the most alarming trend of China’s military?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:**  So what was in that report yesterday doesn’t come as news to anyone who has been following this issue for the past years.  This administration is the first one that has truly called out the Chinese Communist Party for this military aggression, this build-up that has undertaken, and then of course responded to it.

We’ve done a number of things.  First, the President has put the largest defense budgets in American history in front of Congress and they’ve passed it, 700-and-plus billion dollars two years running, so we’re making sure that America has the tools it needs to respond to any threat, including threats that emanate from the Chinese Communist Party.

Second, on particular pieces of this – I’ll give you an example.   The nuclear weapons.  We have implored the Chinese to be part of our strategic dialogue.  We’ve suggested it’s in their best strategic interest; it’s in our best strategic – it’s in the world’s strategic interest to reduce the risk from these most dangerous weapons systems.  And we’re in productive conversations with the Russians on this very – if the Chinese Communist Party is serious about participating on the global stage and being a nation of size and scale that is part of this community, then it has an obligation.  When you build out a nuclear arsenal with the kind of missile testing – more missile tests in China last year than I think all Western nations combined – if you’re going to be serious, you have to use those in a way that is consistent with how nations undertake their obligations under the nuclear proliferation treaties, all those obligations – written, unwritten, signed, and unsigned – and then they should enter in these strategic conversations, while we want to make sure that the risk of using those weapons systems in particular is diminished.  And we stand ready to have them join this conversation with the Russians.  I hope that they will.

**MS ORTAGUS:**  Nadia.

**QUESTION:**  Good morning, Mr. Secretary.  A deputy to President Erdogan just said that Washington partial lifting of arms sale to Cyprus will agitate the conflict in the eastern of the Mediterranean.  How do you respond to that?  And how do you assess Turkey’s influence in the Middle East?  And on Lebanon, sir, if I can, the French president just wrapped a visit to Beirut.  He met with all political leaders, yet we have Assistant Secretary David Schenker in Beirut and he did not meet with any political leaders.  Is this a message?  And are you coordinating with the French on any initiative?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:**  So as for Lebanon, we are certainly in close conversations with the French.  We share the same objective.  Ambassador Hale was in Beirut several weeks back now.  He met with a number of political leaders.  The objective is the same.  Business as usual in Lebanon just is unacceptable.  I think President Macron said the same thing.  This has to be a government that conducts significant reforms, real change.  It’s what the people of Lebanon are demanding.  And the United States is going to use its diplomatic presence and its diplomatic capabilities to make sure that we get that outcome.  I think the French share that.  I think the whole world, frankly, sees the risk.

Look, the risk stares you in the face: missile systems, precision-guided missiles that Hizballah holds in the south – we all remember the history of Lebanon.  Everybody disarms but Hizballah.  This is the challenge that is presented.  And so those people who are either part of that or are playing footsie with Hizballah should know that that’s not productive.  It’s not what the people of Lebanon want and it’s not what the regional security situation demands.  So I’m confident that the United States, the French, and all of us who are working there on the ground, both to meet the immediate needs in the result that flowed from the explosion that took place now several weeks back as well as the longer-term challenges that are presenting in Lebanon.  We’ll all work on it together.

**QUESTION:**  And on Turkey?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:**  You asked – you asked about the decision we made yesterday or announced yesterday with respect to Cyprus.  It’s been a long time coming.  We’ve been working on this for an awfully long time.  We know that this decision was announced in light of heightened tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean, but we thought it was the right thing, and so I made the decision we would move forward with it on the timeline that our decision was reached.  President Trump’s been in conversations with President Erdogan.  He’s spoken to the prime minister in Greece.  We are urging everyone to stand down, to reduce tensions, and begin to have diplomatic discussions about the conflicts that exist there in the Eastern Mediterranean – the security conflicts, the energy resource conflicts, the maritime conflicts.  They need to sit down and have conversations about this and resolve this diplomatically.  It is not useful to increase military tension in the region.  Only negative things can flow from that.

**QUESTION:**  Thank you, sir.

**MS ORTAGUS:**  Sir, should we try to take more?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:**  I’ll take a couple more.

**MS ORTAGUS:**  Okay, go ahead.

**QUESTION:**  Thanks, Mr. Secretary.

**SECRETARY POMPEO:**  Hi.

**QUESTION:**  How do you justify the U.S. not joining the WHO-led COVAX effort to provide a vaccine globally when more than 170 other countries have joined?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:**  There is no nation that has been or will be as deeply committed to delivering vaccines all around the world as the United States of America, not just in terms of dollars.  We will dwarf every nation in terms of the financial resources, the goodness of the American people, to give our money to make sure that these vaccines are delivered all around.  No nation will match us; it won’t even be close.

But it also imperative that when we do that, we need to do so in a way that’s effective, that’s not political, that is science-based.  And what we have seen demonstrated from the World Health Organization is that it is not that.

**MS ORTAGUS:**  Jose.

**QUESTION:**  Yes.  It’s a question on Mexico.  U.S. energy groups have written letters to you and other senior administration expressing concerns about developments in the energy sector in Mexico.  They complain about the lack of legal certainty, investors’ rights for U.S. companies in Mexico taken – by actions taken by the Mexican Government.  What is the Trump administration willing to do to defend U.S. interests in Mexico in the energy sector, and has this been risen to the presidential level?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:**  Yeah, most importantly – I’m familiar with this issue – we want American companies to have the opportunity to invest down in Mexico.  It’s what the USMCA was designed to achieve.  We think there’s been real progress there.  But make no mistake:  We’ve been clear this isn’t about – you talked about what we’d do to defend American interests down there – this is in Mexico’s best interest.  It’s in Mexico’s best interest to have American investment, the technology that is brought to develop Mexican energy resources to benefit the people of Mexico.  And so we’re in constant conversations with the Mexican Government about this, certainly at every level of the United States Government.  It’s important.  We think this cooperative set of agreements that was reached between the United States, Canada, and Mexico can deliver on those outcomes in a way that NAFTA never could, and so we’ll continue to work on that challenge.

**QUESTION:**  Thank you.

**SECRETARY POMPEO:**  Thank you all.  Have a wonderful day.

**MS ORTAGUS:**  We’ll keep Stilwell here for anyone who’d like to stay.

**SECRETARY POMPEO:**  Thank you, David.

**QUESTION:**  I appreciate it.

**MS ORTAGUS:**  Okay.  Let’s try to get to everybody that hasn’t gone yet.  Reena, I don’t think you have.

**QUESTION:**  Yeah.  Okay.  To talk about the – if there’s an escalation at the Indian-Chinese border, the LAC, where does the United States stand there?  And it also says – the Chinese foreign ministry has come up with a statement saying that the U.S. role and cause for Tibet is the cause for Tibet.  How do you respond to that?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY STILWELL:**  For the conflict in the Himalayas, like all things, especially related to the PRC’s differences of opinion with its neighbors, is we advise them to return to dialogue, resolve these things peacefully without coercion, use of force.  That applies to the many conflicts that are going on in China’s periphery right now.  You mentioned Tibet.  Xinjiang – very concerned still about what they’re doing there.  Hong Kong activities, South China Sea – I could go on and on.  What we’ve seen since the corona outbreak from Wuhan is it seems the PRC is trying to take advantage of the situation, and India, I think, is one of those examples of that.  So to our friends in Beijing, I would ask them to follow their commitment to resolve these things through peaceful means and dialogue.

**QUESTION:**  Just a follow up.  In case there’s an escalation, will the U.S. share intelligence with India?  Will they assist India?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY STILWELL:**  We’ll defer that question to others who are more closely related to the Indian part.

**MS ORTAGUS:**  Nick, go ahead.

**QUESTION:**  Hey, thanks for doing this.  Since we have you, can you just explain why you think this move that the Secretary announced is necessary?  And as you know, as a former military man, there are servicemembers’ pensions that also have Chinese companies in them, and if you could address that.  And then just while we have you, on Taiwan, is there support from the Department of State on a free trade agreement and those talks?  And did Taiwan’s recent easing of beef and pork imports ease, shall we say, some internal opposition, maybe outside this building, to those talks?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY STILWELL:**  Great questions.  On the Taiwan question, especially on the trade aspect, I will gladly defer to USTR on that one.  However, we did announce, though, that Under Secretary Krach would begin a economic dialogue with the – with Taiwan to look for those areas.  As you saw, we moved the TSMC chip manufacturing into Arizona, or we’re moving in that direction, which is great news both for the U.S. and for Taiwan.  So we’re early on in this new position, but it’s a very welcome decision out of President Tsai to remove one of those last obstacles.

As far as TSP, you heard the Secretary mention, again, in a letter from Keith Krach to universities, to better understand what your money is going into, where your endowments are being funded, and understand about the need for transparency on those things.  As you know, Chinese companies investing in the U.S. are not subject to the same audit restrictions that any other company, and then when we tell the Chinese that they do need to submit themselves, subject themselves to those requirements, they complain they’re being treated unfairly somehow.  And so let’s, as they say, make truth – seek truth through facts.  Let’s clarify all this and make the words and the reality match.

Finally, on the announcement the Secretary just made about reciprocity, this is not new.  We’ve been doing this since last October, as you remember.  We asked the Chinese diplomats to notify us about their travels to all of these locations to see governors, mayors, school boards, all these other things that we know they’re doing.  And we did that in an effort not to reduce the relationship, the interaction, but to get them to understand that we are going to insist on getting this relationship back in balance, because it is clearly way out of balance.  And balance, to me, equates to stability, and that the instability in this relationship causes all of us concern.  We’re taking steps to fix that.  Thanks.

**MS ORTAGUS:**  Carol.

**QUESTION:**  Sir, thank you for being here to answer our questions.  So, as you know, the Chinese pretty much always respond in kind whenever the U.S. places sanctions or some sort of new restrictions.  So what are you anticipating this time and can you give us a sense where this is all leading?  And are you already starting to prepare some particularly stiff sanctions to be enforced after September 20th, since they’ve made it clear they will not go along with UN sanctions on Iran?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY STILWELL:**  Let me talk to the anticipated PRC response.  I depend on you all – I mean, I mean that sincerely – to help people understand that what they’re doing is grossly out of proportion to our simple desire to balance this relationship.  And so we have seen – we’ve seen both.  We’ve seen sometimes where they have understood that this was long overdue and there’s been no response.  And especially in terms of media, they have taken some very unfortunate steps of late, and they continue to do things to media in the PRC, especially those reporters who understand what’s going on, those with language skills, and those who investigate issues they would rather not – the world not know.  Finances of elites got New York Times and Bloomberg in big trouble when I was out there in 2011, 2012.  Most recently, The Wall Street Journal published a very balanced op-ed that was titled “Sick Man of Asia,” and that – they bounced two Americans and an Australian for that.

And so if there’s concerns about reciprocal – what they call “reciprocal,” or “retaliation” is a better word – let’s make sure we paint a very clear picture of what is – what they’re doing, what that real balance looks like.  There’s 150 or more Chinese diplomats here – Chinese state media folks who work for the ministry of propaganda here in the U.S. operating without restriction, and there’s only a handful of American journalists left in China right now.  Let’s paint that picture so everybody understands what we’re talking about.

**MS ORTAGUS:**  Kim, go ahead.

**QUESTION:**  Thanks.  Can you comment on the possible impact of China blocking the export of artificial intelligence and its fallout with the possible sale of the American branch of TikTok?

And also are you concerned about the announcement that there are going to be increased COVID tests throughout Hong Kong?  Apparently there is concern among activists that this will be used for DNA collection.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY STILWELL:**  To your second question, I can’t speak to what the intentions are in Hong Kong.  I have noted folks in Hong Kong are – they have concerns, as you would imagine.  Both of your questions are related because they deal with information and China’s collection of that.  For an analog, though, I would point you back to before we had the so-called vocational training centers – the Uyghur internment camps – we had mass genetic testing, and it was massed – it was portrayed as health checks for Uyghurs.  And so they were collecting DNA on Uyghurs under the guise of doing health checks.  So the – given that example, I think the Hong Kong people are rightly concerned.

And then as far as the TikTok and AI, I’m not an expert on tech, but I do know that information is the new currency.  It’s like oil.  It’s something everybody can use and needs and all that, but in a country that does run under the auspice of rule of law, I think people can trust that their information will be used for good things and not for nefarious outcomes.  The PRC doesn’t have that reputation.  We know what they do with information.  They target individuals with it.  I think it’s the greatest state security apparatus anybody’s ever seen.  Anybody who’s been there, every street corner, not just one camera, it’s got like eight on every corner.  And so we know that we use facial recognition, all those things to affect your social credit score, to affect your ability to get a job or put your kids into school.  So I think the Hong Kong people are rightfully concerned.

**MS ORTAGUS:**  Anybody else?  Nick?

**QUESTION:**  Can I just follow up on that?  So just to try and get to TikTok specifically, I know that there’s only so much you can say, but as Kim mentioned, the Chinese changed the export rules over the weekend and it seems that may stop a sale to a U.S. company.  Do you believe that the Chinese are trying or do you believe it will stop a sale to a U.S. company in the sense that the new rules essentially require ByteDance, the parent company, to seek approval first?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY STILWELL:**  I think there’s two forces at play here.  Obviously, the Chinese desire to prevent the U.S. from protecting itself by making sure that this software operates – I mean, we’re not the first ones – remember, India led off with this with – and I think there are over 60 right now – apps that are not available for use in India for the right reasons.  I will point to the irony, though, of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson using Twitter to say it’s completely out of bounds for the U.S. to block apps, Chinese apps in the U.S. on our own Twitter accounts.

But all that is to note that – again, I can’t speak to the exact details, but there’s an economic versus security balance here that we all have to deal with, and allowing this sale would allow the profits and all that to continue, whereas blocking this sale – obviously there’s a financial loss, but a – for the Chinese, that should hopefully dampen their decision.

**MS ORTAGUS:**  I’m going to attempt to try the dial-in, see if it’s working this week.  We have Charlotte Cuthbertson from Epoch Times.  Is our dial-in working?  Charlotte?

**QUESTION:**  Thank you very much for doing this call.

**MS ORTAGUS:**  Great.

**QUESTION:**  Just to go back to the potential of the Taiwan deal, if the administration were to move forward with that, what kind of backlash would you anticipate from the Chinese regime on that?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY STILWELL:**  Yeah, second question about Chinese response – that’s all about Beijing’s decision matrix, but our job is to obviously think through what those are and anticipate them.  And if you look at the language from the three communiques and the Taiwan Relations Act, the announcement we made earlier this week, the economic relationship, cultural exchanges, all those things are fully allowed.  There’s nothing that prohibits those things.  And so they should – there should be no lash back.  The efforts to increase prosperity between the two countries should have no effect.

**QUESTION:**  (Inaudible) Kim.  I’m from the JTBC South Korea TV news channel.  Let me ask you about North Korean issue.  So you – State Department issued an industry advisory on North Korea ballistic missile procurement yesterday.  I’d like to know the background of it.  Have you find any specific signals, such as North Korea trying to export their techniques, or is it just a warning before – it’s a warning?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY STILWELL:**  I can comment broadly on North Korea.  I kind of xleave that to the special representative, Steve Biegun, and Alex Wong.  You can definitely pose the questions if you want specifics on that, but I would note that this administration has done more – like, my first tour as a military guy in Korea was in 1981.  I’ve been involved in this for quite a long time.  And this administration has gone far further than any other in taking strong actions to let North Korea know that they’re going to have to negotiate.  They can’t just sit back and threaten and launch and all the things they’ve been doing.  And so this is another step in that direction, is to demonstrate to North Korea that there is a brighter future for your people, but you’re going to have to step up and negotiate and talk about these things rather than remain isolated.  Thank you.

**MS ORTAGUS:**  We’re going to try the phone line one more time.  We should have Sangmin Lee from Radio Free Asia.  Sangmin, you on the phone?

**QUESTION:**  Yeah, I have a question about the cyber security threat from North Korea.  Several days ago, the U.S. Government issued several advisory against the North Korean cyber threat.  So how do you assess the North Korean cyber threat in the way?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY STILWELL:**  I think we all remember the Sony Pictures hack from 2014.  That was Operation Deny Christmas for me and my family.  (Laughter.)  We spent every day thinking through that one.  It is a clear threat.  As you know, a lot of those cyber actors are operating in other places in a dispersed manner.  Getting at this is going to be difficult.  We’re – again, I’ll defer to the folks in Homeland Security and who deal with cyber threats specifically, but again, there’s strong evidence that they do operate in that regard.  And the goal, I find, is to get currency, is to get funding to continue with missile procurement and the rest.  So the quicker we can slow or stop that, the better off we’ll all be, safer we’ll be.

**MS ORTAGUS:**  Anybody else in the room, finally?  Speak now – oh, we exhausted you.  Great accomplishment.  Thanks, everybody.

**QUESTION:**  I have a question —

**MS ORTAGUS:**  Okay.

**QUESTION:**  (Inaudible.)  I’m sorry, I have —

**MS ORTAGUS:**  Well, you could ask – you could ask —

**QUESTION:**  No, I mean, I want to ask about annexation, so you’re probably best —

**MS ORTAGUS:**  Oh, okay, no —

**QUESTION:**  — you’re best qualified to answer it.

**MS ORTAGUS:**  What’s your question, Said?

**QUESTION:**  My question is that we are a little bit confused on the U.S. position on annexation of the West Bank because Mr. Kushner says one thing, Mr. Netanyahu says one thing, and the Secretary has not really clarified it.  So can you explain to us your position on annexation?  Is it – as a result of rapprochement or normalization between UAE and Israel, has it been put off indefinitely?

**MS ORTAGUS:**  I have to look exactly at what we said, but I believe that the Government of Israel and the Secretary and Kushner, when we talked about the Abraham Accords, said that it had – I think the word that we had used is “postponed” having given a timeline, but would just say that we still fundamentally believe the vision for peace that we put out in February, I think it was, is the right vision for peace for the Middle East, and we’ve seen by the first agreement between Arabs and Israelis in 25 years that this is the positive way forward that we hope for everybody in the Middle East – Israelis, Palestinians – and we hope the Palestinian leadership will come to the table.

And so we will see.  We’re making progress.  And it was – as the Secretary said earlier, it was quite an honor and experience to be on the first flight last week – the first nonstop flight from Israel to Sudan, so that was a great moment.

Okay.  Thanks, Said.  Thanks, everybody.  Have a great day.

**QUESTION:**  Thank you.