VOA Interview: UN Ambassador Nikki Haley: Full Transcript

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U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley spoke with VOA contributor Greta Van Susteren on Wednesday in New York.

**VAN SUSTEREN:** “Ambassador, nice to see you.”

**HALEY:** “Thank you.”

**VAN SUSTEREN: “Ambassador, I first want to talk about North Korea. The news is that North Korea — DPRK — and South Korea, are going to walk together at the Olympics under that one flag. Your thoughts about that?”**

**HALEY:** “I think it’s good that North Korea and South Korea are talking. But we shouldn’t be misled by the fact that just because they’ve had talks about the Olympics and that this is going to happen, that that’s going to take away the dangerous side of North Korea. Until they actually stop the ballistic missile testing, until they actually show that they are willing to denuclearize, we have to be very careful. They’ve done these talks before —that’s what stalled it for all these years. We have to make sure that they are about action, and that action is to completely stop all nuclear activity that they are doing.”

**VAN SUSTEREN:** “Well, it’s apparently even going a little further that there’s going to be a hockey team jointly between North Korea and South Korea.”

**HALEY:** “I think that’s fine. I think that if they want to do that, that’s fine. But it doesn’t stop the international pressure from everyone that is telling North Korea to stop. So, they can go and have those regional cooperation on that level, but at the end of the day, we still have nuclear missiles in North Korea that they continue to test and they continue to threaten the United States and the world with. So, we’re going to keep that at the forefront.”

**VAN SUSTEREN: “You think this is over divide and conquer, and this is sort of a ... some motive behind Kim Jong Un is not just an interest in Olympics and unification of the peninsula, that there is some message to the U.S.?”**

**HALEY:** “I think this is a distraction. I think this is doing what North Korea has always done, which is when things get hot, start talking. But the problem is, we’re not going to play the same game we’ve always played. We’re not just going to talk and think that they’ve suddenly seen their ways and seen the way out. They have to tell us they are going to stop with the testing. We have to see that the testing actually stops. And then, we have to know that they're going to eliminate the program.”

**VAN SUSTEREN: “Or else. I mean, if they don’t. We’ve had agreements before with North Korea that they have cheated on. We’ve got the situation where they’ve managed to navigate around sanctions. They’ve had some countries that penetrated sanctions. What is the “or else?” And I heard that President Obama said we are not going to let North Korea become a nuclear nation. I’ve heard people in the current president’s administration say they are a nuclear nation, they’ve got a nuclear weapon, they just haven’t figured out how to deliver it. So, where are we on this?”**

**HALEY:** “But we’re not comfortable with them being a nuclear nation, and we never will, because we’ve seen the reckless ...”

**VAN SUSTEREN: “So what do we do?”**

**HALEY:** “Look, just because North and South Korea are holding hands today doesn’t mean that threat hasn’t gone away. The United States and the international community is going to keep up the pressure on North Korea to totally disband. Until that time, we are going to wait and make sure there’s no activity, no testing. But when that time comes, we will decide at that point. All the cards are actually in North Korea’s hands on how we respond. So, if they do the right ... then we are happy to work with them. If they don’t, we’ve got options on the table.”

**VAN SUSTEREN: “It’s interesting. For the first time — correct me if I’m wrong — you are actually able, the United States, the ambassador to the U.N. here, to get China and Russia to go with sanctions on North Korea. How did that come about?”**

**HALEY:** “You know, we’ve done three resolutions now. I think it was the largest sanctions bill that had ever been on a country. I think what we had to do was show the threat, and show that the threat was real. And then also show that the fact North Korea would not be doing this ballistic missile testing if they didn’t have the money to do it. They’re not using revenue to feed their people, they’re using the revenue to build weapons to do these tests. And so, what we said was, we’ve got to cut off the revenue stream. And so, now you see 90 percent of the trade's been cut off. Over a third of the oil’s been cut off. Multiple trade issues have stopped. Investments have stopped. But it’s all about making sure they don’t have enough money to continue the nuclear program.”

**VAN SUSTEREN: “So, you think Kim Jong Un is just going to say, ‘OK, we’re not making money, so we’re going to stop?’”**

**HALEY:** “We don’t know what he’s going to do. But we can’t be OK with just saying, you know, he’s never going to go there. I mean, this is a real threat to the United States, so we have to take it seriously. We have to keep the pressure on. There’s no relaxing from the United States' standpoint.”

**VAN SUSTEREN: “What about the false alarm? We had the one in Hawaii just recently and now Japan. What’s the United States going ... what are we going to do to combat that? We can’t keep sending false alarms out to people.”**

**HALEY:** “I think it’s terrifying. I mean, it’s absolutely terrifying for the people on the ground that get those. But I also think that the administration is going to do everything they can to make sure that all of that is in place and working properly, and those are the things we have to continually need to check up on and continue to make sure that don’t happen.”

**VAN SUSTEREN: “You recently went to Pakistan — I mean, to Afghanistan. Just got back. Why did you go there?”**

**HALEY:** “Well, I wanted to see what the ... how the U.S. strategy was working. And I will tell you, it is working extremely well.”

**VAN SUSTEREN: “What is the strategy, and how do you measure the success of it?”**

**HALEY:** “So, I think you look at ...First of all, the whole Security Council went, which is great, because they could see the U.S. engagement in Afghanistan and what the U.S. was looking to do to make sure Afghanistan never is the source of terrorism going forward. And so, we have to stop the terrorism. Few things — We’ve already told them this has to be Afghan-led and Afghan-owned and that the United States is going to support that process, but they have to have the responsibility to do it, and they have. We’re seeing reforms already on the corruption. They have set retirement into place — moving the age from 72 to 60, which basically did away with 4,000 military leaders, including 70 generals. So now, there’s a younger generation coming into the military. We see girls are now going to school, which wasn’t happening. The status on women is changing. It’s got a long way to go, but it is changing, and they’re really owning up to the responsibility they have. And what we’ve seen more than anything is the Taliban is greatly weakened and has recessed and is close to coming to the table. That’s exactly what we want.”

**VAN SUSTEREN: “I think — and correct me if I’m wrong — one of the things ... problems in Afghanistan is getting terrorist help from Pakistan. Am I correct?”**

**HALEY**: “Well, that’s a threat.”

**VAN SUSTEREN: “That’s a real threat and a real problem, and that as a consequence, we’re cutting off aid, the United States. President Trump has had very harsh tweets after the first of the year, and you’ve had harsh words about Pakistan saying we’re cutting our aid to you.”**

**HALEY:** “Well, I think what you saw is, through all of our meetings with Afghanistan, there was one thing that continued to ring true through all of the meetings. And that is, every time Afghan starts to move in the right direction, Pakistan takes them back, because of the ability they continue to hold over terrorists in Pakistan. From our standpoint, the only way we’re going to have a safe and stable Afghanistan is if we eliminate that threat. We have told Pakistan. We’ve tried to work with them. They didn’t want to do it. We’re just letting them know we mean business. We’re not going to turn around and give a billion dollars in military aid for them to harbor terrorists that shoot at our soldiers. We’re just not going to do that. And so, cutting off that military aid was sending them a message. I hope that brings them to the table, and they realize they have to stop this. It’s not just about Afghanistan. It’s not just about the region. It’s about the world. And we made a strong point in doing that.”

**VAN SUSTEREN: “I don’t pretend to have all the solutions, but when we cut off the aid to Pakistan, quite naturally, the first thing we worry about is whether or not we create a vacuum. We know China has already built a military, or they’re working on a military base in Pakistan. And we’ve got a situation in Pakistan where historically, A.Q. Khan was the one who gave technology to North Korea for the nuclear weapon. So naturally if we alienate — not that Pakistan has been a good friend to us — but to the extent that we withhold money, do we run the risk of creating more of an incentive for Pakistan to work with North Korea, and does China move in on a greater influence in Pakistan, when we’re hoping they’re going to help us in North Korea?”**

**HALEY:** “You know, I know a lot of people have scare tactics and thoughts about 'Oh, but this will happen, and that will happen.' What I know is what has already happened, which is everyone has tiptoed around Pakistan for years, and Pakistan has continued to harbor terrorism. Now, we’re doing things differently. We are not going to reward bad behavior anymore. And so, this is telling Pakistan, 'No more acting like you’re doing the right thing and hurting what we’re trying to do. If you want to be with us, then we want you to be with us. But if you’re going to continue to work against us, we’re not going to pay you to do it.'”

**VAN SUSTEREN: “All right. And the whole idea of money — American money and contributions UNRWA has had — you’ve been very vocal in reducing the amount of contributions the United States makes, and this has to do with what goes on in much of the refugee camps in the Palestinian part of the world. What’s the end point on this?”**

**HALEY:** “Well, I think there’s a couple of things. We mentioned to UNRWA multiple times it needs to be reformed.”

**VAN SUSTEREN: “Reform, meaning? Because I know that Israel is unhappy with it thinking that it’s anti-Israeli and that it’s a fertile breeding ground for terrorism against Israel. Is the reform that way, or is the reform in sort of the bureaucracy and how it’s run and how it distributes the money, aid, to the camps?”**

**HALEY:** “I think we’re looking at overall reform. When we say that we’re basically looking at the fact that you’ve got, basically they’re considering Palestinian as a refugee. Looking at the fact that what they’re teaching in schools is not necessarily the right way to have things run. It is very top heavy from an administration standpoint. But also, the other side of that is again, we’re not going to reward bad behavior. Here you’ve got the Palestinians who are basically saying they’re going to cut the U.S. out of the peace process. They’re saying they no longer want to have anything to do with us. They go and take us to the United Nations and try, basically, are very hostile in what they say and what they do. We’re not going to pay to be abused. It doesn’t make sense. What we’re going to say is, 'Look, we want to help you, but first of all, you’ve got to show us that you’re going to reform something that’s broken.' Secondly, 'Don’t think that you can sit there and say hateful things about us and turn around and write you a check.' It’s wrong in every turn .And so basically, what we’re saying is, 'Look, you can have this little bit, but after that, we’re going to re-evaluate the relationship.'”

**VAN SUSTEREN: “Again, I don’t mean to make this seem, like, simple — like I have all the answers. But the problem is when you do that, you’re also withholding money for refugee camps in nations like Jordan, which is already very financially pinched by having so many refugees in their country. So, we hurt one of our allies, and they’ve got enormous problems every time they don’t get the money from us to help. So, you know, it punishes not just the people who run UNRWA the way United States would like it, but nations like Jordan.”**

**HALEY:** “Greta, why is the United States have to be the only one that bails out everyone? Why do we continue to give the money? You have 120 countries who voted against us, that could more than take up the level of debt that UNRWA has. Why is it the United States ... we need to start being smart about the way we spend. We need to start really looking at foreign policy and seeing what the U.S. goals are and where we want to go. We want a peace process between the Israelis and the Palestinians. We want to make sure that that moves forward. By the Palestinians cutting us out of the peace process, it shows that they weren’t serious, that they’re not serious in truly getting to peace. So, we’re trying to make sure that if we’re going to spend taxpayer dollars, that we’re not spending it on something that doesn’t move U.S. interests forward.”

**VAN SUSTEREN: “I guess my thought is, only Jordan has been an ally. And do we run the risk of creating that vacuum? And as I said, I don’t have the answers, but when we make some of these decisions ... and even though I don’t like to spend a dollar to be insulted, I want to see every dollar spent well in my personal businesses, but do we run the risk that we hurt a nation who has been our ally and been so important in that region to us by making decisions like this?”**

**HALEY:** “But that’s assuming that UNRWA is all we do. We actually ... I not only went to Jordan, I also went to Turkey. We met with their governments. We brought them back and met with the secretary-general in the UN to see how we shift money to better help those host countries, because they’re doing an amazing job with Syrian refugees. So, we do a lot. UNRWA’s one part of it, but we fund a lot of different things. We recently worked with Jordan on how we can better help them with infrastructure. We turned around and worked with Turkey because they wanted help with education. Those things are going to continue to happen. We’re not holding that back, but what we are going to say is, 'We aren’t going to blank-write a check to all of them. We’re going to start to prioritize where and who needs money.' We have a great relationship with Jordan, that’s not going to change. We’re going to continue to fund them. We’re going to continue to assist them where they need it. It’s just not going to be through UNRWA.”

**VAN SUSTEREN: “All right, Iran. Naturally, it’s on the top of all the agendas — the deal that the United States and other nations struck with Iran over their nuclear weapons program. Where do you stand on that?”**

**HALEY:** “It was a bad deal. It was a dangerous deal. We basically gave them billions of dollars to turn around and say they weren’t going to do nuclear and allow them to do everything else, from ballistic missile testing to support on terrorism to, you know, continuing to move arms. It’s incredibly dangerous.”

**VAN SUSTEREN: “If I take that premise that it’s a bad deal, and I have not read the whole deal, and I ... but if the United States backs away from the deal, this was a deal that, you know, that our government made, our former president made. What does that tell another nation? Let’s jump ahead. Let’s say Kim Jong Un, that we want to sit down with him, we want to strike some deal with him. Why would he trust our word, if all of a sudden the next president comes along and says, 'Well, that was a dumb deal.'”**

**HALEY:** “Because if you don’t hold true to what your responsibility is, we don’t hold true to ours. Now is not, 'We’ll give you the money, and we hope you act OK.' Now is, 'Look, if we’re going to be part of this deal, you have to keep your end of the bargain.' And not only that, when you look at Iran, you have to also look at the fact, in what country — in what part of the world — is it OK to send ballistic missiles and use them like they’re doing ... ”

**VAN SUSTEREN: Doing in Yemen?”**

**HALEY:** “Like they’re doing with the Houthis in Yemen. In what way is it OK for them to support terrorism, which they continue to do around the region. In what way is it OK that they continue to support Assad? In the way that he has abused his people. I mean, in what way is all of that OK? That is not part of the deal. We’re in compliance with the deal, but what we’re saying is, 'Look, we’re doing everything with the deal we’re supposed to, but all of these other actions ...' The EU needs to step up. We need to see the international community step up. And Iran needs to step up. And those things need to stop. That’s what you’re seeing the U.S. say, 'If you want us to take your deal seriously, then you have to take all these other actions seriously.'”

**VAN SUSTEREN: “So, correct me if I’m wrong in saying this. Is that the deal itself is that we’re complying 100 percent? That they are complying with the words of the agreement, however on the side, they’re doing these other things that aren’t in the agreement, like supplying weapons to the Houthis? Is that a violation of the deal itself or just other bad behavior?”**

**HALEY:** “That is violations of multiple Security Council resolutions. Those are ...”

**VAN SUSTEREN: “But not the – is that part of the Iran deal?**

**HALEY:** “It’s not part of the Iran deal, which is why we’re in it. But it is absolutely violations of multiple UN resolutions, and we recently had a report that just came out that cited those violations. So that’s not us, that’s actually the United Nations came out and cited Iran for ballistic missile testing, arms sales, support of terrorism, all of those things. So we’re not just being one actor that’s saying this, we’re now showing the international community we still have things that are dangerous, and it’s not safe, and we have to do something about it.”

**VAN SUSTEREN: “You also traveled to South Sudan?”**

**HALEY:** “I did.”

**VAN SUSTEREN: “Been to a refugee camp there, and met with President Salva Kiir. They’re in the midst of a wicked civil war. Where, what’s our, when I say ‘our’ I say the United States, what’s the UN doing about this? What’s the US doing about it? What do you see as our role in that?”**

**HALEY:** “Well we went to South Sudan to see exactly what was happening on the ground and to find out what the situation was, and I had a frank conversation with President Kiir. I said, ‘Look, the US supported you, counted on you, put a lot of investment in you, and we’re not getting a return on investment.”

**VAN SUSTEREN: “What’d he say?”**

**HALEY:** “I mean, he listened. And then we said, ‘This is what has to happen. The fighting has to stop, we have to make sure the humanitarians are getting access, and we need to see a change in your government.’ And his response was, ‘You will start to see a change.’ So now he has issued a memo that encourages all local governors to accept humanitarian actors throughout the country, we’re waiting to see if that follows through like it’s supposed to, he had held off on fighting but we’re starting to see that come back again, these are things we’re going to have to continue to keep the pressure on. I went to multiple refugee camps, and the way the South Sudanese live, no one should live like that. That is a terrible situation that is being done by a, you know, a hostile political actor that needs to be reined in, and the US doesn’t need to support that anymore. So he has the scenario where I basically said the decision was up to him- if he decided to continue to fix things and try and make life better for the people in South Sudan, we’d continue to support him. If he’s not, we’ll completely re-evaluate our situation with South Sudan.”

**VAN SUSTEREN: "In 2012, President Obama lifted the sanctions in Myanmar, in part, from the military in Myanmar, and the hope was that that would advance them towards democracy, and in fact they elected Aung San Suu Kyi to be their president. We’re now in a situation, at least since August, where a million people have been chased by the Myanmar military out of Myanmar into Bangladesh. I’ve been to the refugee camp, I’ve heard stories women have told me that babies were ripped out of their arm, that I’ve seen horrible stab wounds on children, this an absolutely horrible humanitarian catastrophe, and now all these people are in Bangladesh in this refugee camp. What, if anything, is going to be done by the UN or the US to combat this humanitarian crisis?”**

**HALEY:** “It is one of the worst tragedies I think I’ve ever seen. I mean, to see exactly the full scope of the ethnic cleansing that has happened in Burma is terrible. And you look at the fact that they were driven out by the military, they were treated horribly, whether it was throwing babies in fires, raping women, killing families, all of those things, to now have those refugees in Bangladesh, which didn’t have much to start with.”

**VAN SUSTEREN: So what can be done?”**

**HALEY:** “Well I think a couple things. We have obviously worked with the Secretary General at the United Nations, I think he is looking to put a special envoy that goes actually to Bangladesh and Burma to look at the situation, we’ve put harsh pressure on the military, although I don’t know if we’re seeing the changes we want to see.”

**VAN SUSTEREN: “They’ve got two Reuters journalist who were trying to report on what’s going on in the Rakhine area of Myanmar, they’ve got them in custody that kept them away from their families and lawyers for a long time, is there anything the UN and the United States can do about those Reuters reporters. They’re just trying to report on the crisis.”**

**HALEY:** “There’s a lot that we have to do, and we’ve already brought the attention about the reporters, they know that not just us, the world is watching, but Burma is broken. It is absolutely broken, and we can’t look at the fact that the United States dealt with it a few years ago and think that we have to coddle it.”

**VAN SUSTEREN: Military sanctions, sanctions of the military again?”**

**HALEY:** “I think that we need to look at everything. I think we absolutely need to look at everything. And I don’t think that in any way we should be soft on what is happening in Burma with the government or with the military. I think they need to be held accountable for what they’ve done, and I think we need to provide a safe place for the refugees because repatriation is not something that is going to come easily because they’re too scared to go back. And they have a right to still be scared. So a lot has to be done when it comes to that.”

**VAN SUSTEREN:** “One last question, you’ve been an ambassador for a year.”

**HALEY:** “Yes.”

**VAN SUSTEREN: “Your thoughts on being the UN Ambassador.”**

**HALEY:** “I mean, it’s such a privilege, it really is. I feel honored, I’m humbled, the idea of serving your country is already overwhelming, but the idea of serving your country to move the ball and try see if we can make the world a safer place has been really rewarding.”

**VAN SUSTEREN: “Frustrating? Because I mean, when I look at Myanmar, I want to do something yesterday, and I imagine that it’s hard for ambassadors to look at some of these crises and not want them to handle yesterday.”**

**HALEY:** “I think that’s been the hardest part, is seeing the number of people suffering around the world, and wanting to fix it and not being able to fix it fast enough, I think has definitely been the hardest part.”

**VAN SUSTEREN:** Ambassador, thank you so much, hope you come back!”