**Press Briefing by U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Nikki Haley**

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U.S. Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley

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AMBASSADOR HALEY: Good afternoon. Well, we have had a very productive and strong week at the U.N. You saw the United States had a very strong presence with the President, the Vice President, and many members of the national security team, as well as his economic team. The United States was out in full force, and I think the U.N. felt it, but I think it was extremely productive.

If you look at the beginning of the week, and we started with U.N. reform. You had the President and the Secretary General rolling out massive reforms for the U.N. What was extraordinary was we had 130 countries that have now signed on to that reform. That's over two-thirds of the General Assembly, which is who is going to vote on this at the end. So that was a great start to the week.

Then you saw the President's address to the General Assembly, and I think it showed the strength of the United States, but it also asked the world to come together and it asked all the countries to come together as we fight these rogue regimes, and mainly North Korea and Iran. And I think what you saw were a lot of countries responded, they were very positive to the speech, and they appreciated how blunt and honest he was. I think that's been the overall theme from the international community this week, is how straightforward he was and how refreshing it was as they heard him speak.

We also today met with our allies, Japan and South Korea. Obviously a lot to talk about with North Korea. And so we had good conversations with them. And the President reassured, obviously, Japan and South Korea, but they also talked about strategies going forward for North Korea.

On Iran, that was a topic of conversation throughout the week. I think everyone was talking about the destabilizing activities that they can continue to do throughout the Middle East, whether it's in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, and the list goes on. So it is something that we will continue to talk about and continue to move forward to make sure that we're stopping any of their reckless behavior as well.

We also co-hosted a meeting with Secretary Boris Johnson, as well as the Dutch Foreign Minister, Bert Koenders, on human rights reform, and really talked about the fact that it needed to be representative of its name. We have a lot of bad actors on that council. Both the President and the Vice President spoke about it in their speeches, and the need to see better-quality countries that are on that council in order for it to be effective, and obviously for the United States to stay on it. If we don't see changes in the Human Rights Council, we'll continue to advocate for human rights, but we'll do it on our own if we have to.

And then the Vice President attended a Security Council meeting yesterday on peacekeeping reform. We have made great progress these past several months in terms of reforming peacekeeping so that it's actually going towards a political solution, it's transparent, it's accountable, but we're also giving the troops the equipment they need and the ability to be trained in order to do their jobs. And so we're just seeing smarter peacekeeping, and I think that all came together in the peacekeeping reform vote that we had yesterday.

One of the topics that everyone had to talk about this week and all had an opinion on was Burma. And as we're dealing with the crisis in Burma and we're seeing how much migration has taken place from the Rohingyas going out of Burma, every country is concerned. They're concerned that the military continues to be aggressive, and they're concerned that the government continues to be in denial. And so I think you'll continue to see the international community talk about that. I think you will only see them get more active on that as we go forward.

And finally, today, the Security Council took a great step forward. It was a measure that I think the international community had been working on a long time, we certainly worked with our British friends on it -- and that was ISIS accountability in Iraq. If you look at the fact that there have been massive -- mass graves, there have been all types of terrible conducts to women and girls in those areas.

Whether it's what's happened with the Yezidis or the Christians or the Sunni and Shia Muslims, what we now have is a part of the U.N. body that's going to be able to go in there and actually collect evidence and make sure that it can be used in trial so that the victims finally have their say and get their day in court, or at least their families do if they've lost loved ones. So that was a big day for the Security Council today.

And with that -- there was obviously a lot more. I think the President met with multiple countries. There were lots of bilats. There was a lot of talk and planning and productivity. But overall, we can say it was a solid week at the U.N. this week, and it was highly successful.

But with that, I'll answer any of your questions. Yes.

Q Thank you very much. Why do you expect this latest round of sanctions will work when an array of sanctions have failed in the past against North Korea?

AMBASSADOR HALEY: This is in reference to what Secretary Mnuchin talked about? This is pretty amazing, because when you look at the sanctions that we have in place, North Korea is already feeling it. You can already hear of the lines at the gas stations that they have, and the fact that they are having a severe reduction in revenues is the sanctions are working.

What this does is take it a step further. This says: Anyone that deals with North Korea, any financial institution that deals with North Korea is going to be punished. And so I think it's important. And it's like Secretary Mnuchin said: If you're going to support North Korea, then you have to be prepared to be sanctioned as well.

Q And you say that sanctions have been working, and yet North Korea hasn’t stopped its nuclear provocations. Do you think that these sanctions are going to actually get North Korea (inaudible)?

AMBASSADOR HALEY: We always knew that the sanctions may not work. What the goal of the sanctions was always intended to be is to cut the revenue so they could do less of their reckless behavior. If they don't have the funding for the ballistic missiles, for the nuclear production, then they can do less of it. That's the goal of the sanctions. It doesn’t mean that it's necessarily going to change Kim's attitude or his belief on what he wants to do, but it will slow down the production of the nuclear process going forward.

Q Ambassador, thank you. When the President spoke in his speech about totally destroying North Korea if forced to defend ourselves or our allies, what exactly did he mean? Under what circumstances would he consider totally destroying North Korea?

AMBASSADOR HALEY: Well, I think that's just common sense. I mean, if you look at it, we have said multiple times, the President said it, members of his team have said it: We don't want war. That's the last thing anyone wants. We don’t want loss of life. That's the last thing anyone wants.

But at the same time, we're not going to run scared. If for any reason North Korea attacks the United States or our allies, the U.S. will respond, period. That's what's going to happen. What you're seeing now is we continue to go through diplomatic measures, we continue to exhaust everything we have. And the key right now is that other countries actually support the sanctions and follow through with them, and they also continue to isolate North Korea until we can get them to come to the negotiating table. But until then, that's just the reality. If they were to strike the United States, of course we would have to respond back.

Q So just to clarify, you're specifically saying that that is if North Korea attacks first?

AMBASSADOR HALEY: I mean, we can't play out the scenarios on what's going to happen, but obviously it would take something very serious for the President to have to make a decision to do something back. But there's a lot of things between where we are now and that situation that can be done. There are a lot of military options that can be done.

And so the President is not going to spell out specifically what he's going to do, when he's going to do it, or where he's going to do it. But there are many options that he's discussed with his national security team that, should North Korea do anything irresponsible or reckless, that he has to choose from.

Q Ambassador, thank you. Just a quick one on the sanctions on Korea and then I have a question on Iran. On Korea, the administration has said that this is not aimed at China but you heard the President say today that China has, you know, told its central bank not to do business with North Korea. Secretary Mnuchin said that he called the Chinese. So how is this not -- and especially you've talked about how China is really the main financial backer of North Korea. So how can this not really be directed at China?

And then on Iran, is there a way to talk about -- to ramp up pressure -- as what you were talking about Iran's destabilizing activities throughout the Middle East, which I think a lot of your allies agree on -- without the violating the agreement, per se, as Secretary Tillerson said? I mean, is there a way to get allies to rally around more terrorism type and other sanctions while keeping the nuclear provisions in place?

AMBASSADOR HALEY: So, first of all, with the sanctions on North Korea, it only impacts those that continue to do business with North Korea. So if China does business with North Korea, yes, it will impact them. If there are countries in Africa that do business with North Korea, it's going to impact them.

So really it depends on countries that choose to continue to support North Korea over the rest of the world that's asking them not to.

In reference to Iran, you have a couple of processes that take place. On October 15th, the President has the decision to make on whether to certify or decertify, and that's U.S. law. That has nothing to do with the JCPOA or the Iran Deal. That's U.S. law. And U.S. law requires the President every 90 days to decide whether the Iran Deal and other elements of the U.N. resolution -- which would include ballistic missile testing, which would include arms smuggling, which would include support of terrorism, those things -- it asks the President to look at all of those things.

And if he still thinks that the deal is in the best interest of the United States, then he certifies. If he thinks that the deal is -- that the situation is not in the best interest of the American public, then he doesn't certify.

At that point, it goes to Congress and he works with Congress on how to reshape the situation. But the Iran Deal and U.S. law are two different things.

Q Are you saying that he could decertify without specifically withdrawing from the deal?

AMBASSADOR HALEY: That's right. I mean, that's just the option that he has and that's the Corker-Cardin law that came into effect that allowed that to happen.

What I will tell you from a U.N. perspective, what we're looking at and what you're going to hear us very vocal on is the fact that 2331, the resolution that was in place, what we saw was it basically wrapped in with the nuclear deal; it said if Iran did any of these things, it would be in violation.

And since then, the Secretary General has come out with a report that said they have violated all of those things -- their support for terrorism, their arms smuggling, the idea that they continue to do ballistic missile testing -- and they need to be called out for that.

And that's something that you will see us do as we go forward in the United Nations, to make sure that they know that just because we did this nuclear deal, it doesn’t give them a pass on all the other things that they're doing wrong.

Q Ambassador, you said in your opening remarks that one of the topics that everybody had an opinion about this week and is talking about was Burma. The President gave a 4,600-word address to the global U.N. body in which he didn't mention the word Burma or Myanmar at all. Did you have any direct input in the speech? Did you press him to address Burma in the speech? And were you disappointed that he did not?

AMBASSADOR HALEY: Well, I can tell you he's very concerned about Burma because he's talked to the national security team and asked exactly what was going to be done. He asked the Vice President to speak about it in his speech, which is why the Vice President has. And he's been very involved in the decision-making. I think that he, like every other leader, can tell you we're all scratching our heads over Burma, because all this has happened in three weeks.

You have almost half a million people who have left, and the tragedies and the abuse that's happened there is something that a lot of us can't stomach. So, no, it's mainly -- if you listen to all the leaders, everybody is just trying to figure out who can move the officials in Burma, and where to go. So --

Q Did you ask the President to try and address this? And (inaudible) spoken publicly about it.

AMBASSADOR HALEY: Well, he's very concerned about Burma. And I think that I did talk with the Vice President about it quite a bit and that's why he was passionate about it. But really he was speaking because the President asked him to.

Q Have you or President Trump spoken directly with Aung San Suu Kyi, and have you done so in the last few days? Or anybody in the administration talked to her about what's happening? And would you (inaudible) publicly to do more in her role as state counsel?

AMBASSADOR HALEY: Not only have we pressed her, we've pressed the military. So we had two things happening. Secretary Tillerson did call her and did discuss the situation with her, but then also, General Dunford is calling the head of the military to say, "Look, we've had a relationship with you but this cannot continue, and we need to know what you're going to do about it."

Q Yes, Madam Ambassador, you've been very vocal on the shortcomings of the Iran Deal and Iran's behavior, perhaps beyond the strict confines of your job here. Where does that come from? Is this your own sort of direct opinion after hearing about Iranian behavior here, or through conversations with the President? Or just talk a little bit about that.

AMBASSADOR HALEY: I had conversations with the President. He was very concerned about Iran. He was very concerned about the deal. And so I went to learn about it and to find out from the IAEA, to look at the resolution, to look at the violations. And so it was just digging deep on the situation of what we found, and then that's why I gave the speech on the scenario that the President is being faced with on the decisions to be made.

This situation, it's not an easy situation by any means, because you look at North Korea and you look at the fact that for 25 years we were looking at bad deal after bad deal after bad deal, and broken promise, broken promise, broken promise.

So here we are again, and we don’t want to be dealing with the next North Korea. And so that's why he's taking it so seriously and saying we need to look at every aspect of this and make sure that it truly is in the best interest of the American public.

Q The German Foreign Minister said today that any disavowal of the Iran Deal would reduce the likelihood of getting any similar disarmament deal with North Korea. Do you share those concerns that any actions on the Iran Deal might reduce the possibility of getting a deal with North Korea?

And separately, as a point of clarification, do you support a full oil embargo on North Korea?

AMBASSADOR HALEY: So I think let's go back to Iran in the first place. What I will tell you is, a lot of countries are going to have their opinions on whether the U.S. should stay in the deal or not. But those countries don’t have Iranians saying "death to America." They're not saying "death to Germany." They're not saying all of those things. What we can see is terrorist attacks happening everywhere with ties to Iran. And that's something we need to be careful about.

And so it has never moved the U.S. to care about what other countries say. What does move the President is, are we doing everything in the best interest -- security interest for the American people. And that's what you're seeing is playing out.

In terms of comparing Iran to North Korea, that's exactly what we're doing, is we had so many bad deals with North Korea and everybody looked the other way. And every time they broke that deal, they looked the other way. Well, where are we now? They now have a hydrogen bomb. They now have ICBM. So if we don’t do something and we make the same mistakes we made with North Korea, we will be dealing with Iran that has nuclear weapons and ballistic missile technology. And so that's the concern and that's what we're trying to do with that.

Q Madam Ambassador, the President said this week that he's made a decision on Iran. Can you tell us what it is?

AMBASSADOR HALEY: No.

Q All right. I wanted to try. On a separate issue, the President also addressed Venezuela in his remarks this week at the U.N., and he also had a meeting with Latin American leaders. Can you tell us a little bit more about what he said to them? And I understand in particular that they suggested that the President place an oil embargo on Venezuela would be the most effective way of addressing that problem. Is that something that the United States would consider?

AMBASSADOR HALEY: Well, I think that -- I was in the dinner with our Latin American friends, and I could tell you there was a lot of concern from all of them on what's happening in Venezuela. They have all tried; we saw they tried through the OAS, and Venezuela got out of that. We've tried to do it through multiple avenues to get to Maduro and let him know what's not acceptable. The U.S. has moved forward on sanctions, and they were not opposed to that.

So, yes, there were some conversations on what they recommended going forward, but I don’t think I should share that. I can tell you that there's a lot of support in Latin America to see Venezuela start to respect its people and go back to the democracy it's supposed to be. And I think every one of them was concerned about what's happening right now.

Q Can you share just your own thoughts about an oil embargo on Venezuela, though? Is that something that --

AMBASSADOR HALEY: Well, you know -- I mean, look, if things don’t improve, all those options are always there, and so that's what we're watching to see. First it was sanctions and now we'll look and see. It's not off the table, I can tell you that.

Q Ambassador, thank you. There's been a lot of speculation about your political future and your future within the Trump administration. Some people are even saying that you're gunning to be Secretary of State and trying to push Rex Tillerson out. Can you please address these speculations?

AMBASSADOR HALEY: I mean, there's going to be chatter about things. Ever since I was a legislator, people have talked about what I'm trying to do or what I'm supposed to do. What I'm trying to do is do a good job, and I'm trying to be responsible in my job, and I'm trying to make sure that I inform the American people everything that I know. That's what I'm trying to do, and I'm trying to serve the President and this country the best I can.

If people want to take it to mean something else, that's their issue -- it's not anything I spend time on.

Q But do you want to be Secretary of State?

AMBASSADOR HALEY: No, I do not.

Q So you don’t want to be -- (laughter) --

Q Ambassador, how can the U.S. maintain its diplomatic credibility and get a nuclear deal with North Korea when it is willing to consider blowing up, damaging, putting in peril the existing diplomatic deal with Iran on its program? Doesn’t this undermine U.S. credibility?

AMBASSADOR HALEY: It does not undermine U.S. credibility. What it shows is that the United States is going to always watch out for its people, and that just because there was some agreement that was agreed to -- the smartest thing any country can do is go back and look at it and say, "is it working"; not have too much pride to say, "Oh, I signed it, I have to continue to be a cheerleader." Is it working?

And I'll ask you, do you think that deal is working when Iran continues to test ballistic missiles? Do you think that deal is working when they are supporting terrorists everywhere, from Lebanon to Yemen to Syria to Iraq? Do you think it's still working? And do you think it's still working when they're smuggling arms and now working with North Korea? Is that in the best interest of the United States? I would question that. Because what you're looking at is a country that says "death to America," working with other countries that may also want the same thing. And the President has the responsibility to make sure nothing happens to Americans. And I think that's what he's trying to do.

Back in the back.

Q Thank you, Ambassador Haley. I'm from Bangladesh. Just I want to know -- I have two questions on Myanmar, Burma. Bangladesh prime minister had a conversation with President Trump, and after the conversation she said in international news agency that President Trump is not willing to resolve this issue. But we can understand the United States is doing a lot to resolve this issue. So will you make any comment about this (inaudible) to the international news agency?

Secondly, will you give any time limit to the Myanmar, Burma authority to return back the refugees, as Bangladesh is facing a huge crisis to accommodate these numbers of refugees in the Bangladesh territory?

AMBASSADOR HALEY: I think the United States has been taken aback that so much has happened and gone in such a terrible direction in the last three to four weeks. And I think what you're seeing is every member of the national security team is talking about it, and every member of the national security team right now is calling their contacts and their counterparts in Burma, as well as making sure that we're supporting Bangladesh in what they're doing.

Bangladesh has been unbelievable in taking on these refugees. But at the same time, we have to look at the refugees as now they have no home. And it's no way for any one person to live. The human rights situation is terrible, and we want to make sure that we're doing all we can.

So what I can tell you is it's all hands on deck in terms of the National Security Council trying to look at it and say, what steps are we going to take next.

Okay, last question.

Q After losing ground in Iraq and Syria, the Islamic State is looking at Libya as a new possible base. Are you in favor of sending back the U.N. system to Libya -- the UNHCR to manage the refugee camps? And what is the United States ready to do to prevent (inaudible) infiltration in Libya?

AMBASSADOR HALEY: Well, first of all, I'll tell you that if you look at the situation, I think that we have made amazing progress in Iraq and Syria in terms of defeating ISIS. And that's almost been complete and we're very proud of that.

In terms of Libya, that's been something that the National Security Council is meeting with and deciding what our next plans are going to be, and I'm sure they'll roll that out when they're ready.

Thank you very much.