**Remarks to the Press**

United States Department of State

March 15, 2019

<https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2019/03/290394.htm>

Remarks

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Secretary of State

Press Briefing Room

Washington, DC

March 15, 2019

SECRETARY POMPEO: Good morning, everyone. Today I’d like to make brief remarks on two foreign policy issues. But first, I want to offer my personal condolences to the nation of New Zealand in the wake of the grotesque mosque attacks in Christchurch. The thoughts and prayers of the American people are with the victims and their families today. The United States condemns this hateful assault. We pledge our unwavering solidarity with the government and people of New Zealand in this hour of darkness, and we stand ready to offer any and all assistance.

Now, I’d like to comment on the Senate vote this week to end support for the Saudi-led coalition fighting in Yemen. We all want this conflict to end. We all want to improve the dire humanitarian situation. But the Trump administration fundamentally disagrees that curbing our assistance to the Saudi-led coalition is the way to achieve these goals. The senators who voted “aye” say they want to end the bombing in Yemen and support human rights. But we really need to think about whose human rights.

If you truly care about Yemeni lives, you’d support the Saudi-led effort to prevent Yemen from turning into a puppet state of the corrupt, brutish Islamic Republic of Iran. If we truly care about Saudi lives, you’d want to stop Iran-backed Houthis from launching missiles into Riyadh. If you truly care about Arab lives in the region, you’d support allied efforts to prevent Iran from extending its authoritarian rule from Tehran to the Mediterranean Sea and on down to Yemen. And if we truly care about American lives and livelihoods, and the lives and livelihoods of people all around the world, you’d understand that Iran and its proxies cannot be allowed to control the shipping lanes that abut Yemen.

We’re deeply aware of the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, and we deplore it. The United States has given more than $2 billion to help the Yemeni people since the start of the conflict, and Saudi Arabia has given over $500 million in 2018 alone and has pledged an additional $500 million this year. The Islamic Republic of Iran has provided zero dollars for humanitarian assistance.

The way to alleviate the Yemeni people’s suffering isn’t to prolong the conflict by handicapping our partners in the fight, but by giving the Saudi-led coalition the support needed to defeat Iranian-backed rebels and ensure a just peace. We hope – I met with Martin Griffiths yesterday – we hope that agreements can be implemented to de-escalate, but we must make sure that this crisis comes to an end.

Second item I wanted to talk today about is the International Criminal Court. In a speech last year in Brussels, I made clear that the Trump administration believes reforming international institutions, refocusing them back on their core missions, and holding them accountable when they fail to serve the people that they purport to help. We seek to partner with responsible nations to make sure that international bodies honor the principles of liberty, sovereignty, and the rule of law. Nation-states come together to form these institutions, and it’s only with their consent that these institutions exist.

Since 1998, the United States has declined to join the ICC because of its broad, unaccountable prosecutorial powers and the threat it poses to American national sovereignty. We are determined to protect the American and allied military and civilian personnel from living in fear of unjust prosecution for actions taken to defend our great nation. We feared that the court could eventually pursue politically motivated prosecutions of Americans, and our fears were warranted.

November of 2017, the ICC prosecutor requested approval to initiate investigation into, quote, “the situation in Afghanistan,” end of quote. That could illegitimately target American personnel for prosecutions and sentencing. In September of 2018, the Trump administration warned the ICC that if it tried to pursue an investigation of Americans there would be consequences. I understand that the prosecutor’s request for an investigation remains pending.

Thus today, persistent to existing legal authority to post visa restrictions on any alien, quote, “whose entry or proposed activities in the United States would have potentially serious adverse foreign policy consequences,” end of quote, I’m announcing a policy of U.S. visa restrictions on those individuals directly responsible for any ICC investigation of U.S. personnel. This includes persons who take or have taken action to request or further such an investigation. These visa restrictions may also be used to deter ICC efforts to pursue allied personnel, including Israelis, without allies’ consent. Implementation of this policy has already begun. Under U.S. law, individual visa records are confidential, so I will not provide details as to who has been affected and who will be affected.

But you should know if you’re responsible for the proposed ICC investigation of U.S. personnel in connection with the situation in Afghanistan, you should not assume that you will still have or will get a visa, or that you will be permitted to enter the United States. The United States will implement these measures consistent with applicable law, including our obligations under the United Nations Headquarters Agreement. These visa restrictions will not be the end of our efforts. We are prepared to take additional steps, including economic sanctions if the ICC does not change its course.

The first and highest obligation of our government is to protect its citizens and this administration will carry out that duty. America’s enduring commitment to the rule of law, accountability, and justice is the envy of the world, and it is the core – at the core of our country’s success. When U.S. service members fail to adhere to our strict code of military conduct, they are reprimanded, they’re court-martialed, and sentenced if that’s what’s deserved. The U.S. Government, where possible, takes legal action against those responsible for international crimes. The United States directs foreign aid to strengthen foreign nations’ domestic justice systems, the first and best line of defense against impunity.

The United States also supports international hybrid legal mechanisms when they operate effectively and are consistent with our national interest. These would include, for example, the mechanism handling Rwandan and Yugoslav atrocities and international evidence collection efforts in both Syria and Burma. But the ICC is attacking America’s rule of law. It’s not too late for the court to change course and we urge that it do so immediately. Thank you.

MR PALLADINO: We have time – the Secretary has time for a few questions. Let’s go to Associated Press, Matt.

QUESTION: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes. Morning, Matt.

QUESTION: Just very briefly on the ICC decision, are you doing this today because they haven’t closed or dropped the pending Afghanistan investigation or is there some other reason?

And then secondly, I’m wondering if you’ve had a chance to see and if you could respond to what the North Korean deputy foreign minister said overnight about the U.S. giving up a golden opportunity by walking away in Hanoi and blaming you personally and Ambassador Bolton for creating this atmosphere of hostility.

SECRETARY POMPEO: So with respect to the reason for the actions we’re taking today, it’s part of a continued effort to convince the ICC to change course with its potential investigation and potential prosecution of Americans for their activities and our allies’ activities in Afghanistan, trying to stop them, trying to prevent them from taking actions that are deeply inconsistent, in our view, with the course of action that has been laid out for the ICC, even though we’re not members. That’s a model that we’ve talked about before, and we are now implementing what we had already said that we would do.

I did have a chance to see the remarks overnight from Choe Son-hui. In Singapore, after a great deal of work, the two leaders came together and began a course of action which has led to the toughest sanctions that have existed against North Korea – global sanctions, UN Security Council resolution sanctions that remain in effect. The demands of those sanctions are the complete denuclearization of North Korea, the missiles, the weapons systems, the entire WMD program. That’s the requirement laid out by the United Nations Security Council.

The two leaders met. Chairman Kim made a commitment to denuclearize. We continued to work between Singapore and Hanoi to deliver on that. We’ve had hostages return. We have them having stopped missile testing and nuclear testing. We are hopeful that we can continue to have conversation, negotiations. I saw the remarks that she made. She left open the possibility that negotiations would continue for sure. It’s the administration’s desire that we continue to have conversations around this. As the President said when he was in Hanoi, the offer that they made simply didn’t rise to the level that was acceptable given what they were asking for in exchange for that.

MR PALLADINO: Let’s go to BBC, Barbara.

QUESTION: Just a quick follow-up on North Korea: What’s the next step, then? Because there has also – she also hinted that Kim Jong-un would make a statement possibly lifting the moratorium on tests.

And then secondly, if I could on Golan, the human rights ambassador said on Wednesday that removing the word “occupation” or “occupied” from the Golan and the West Bank was not a policy change, but we know that Israel is afraid of Iran and Hizballah threatening Israel from the Syrian side of the Golan, so in your view, does that strengthen the Israeli case for annexing the occupied bit?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So I don’t have anything to add about the change in language that we used. It was characterized properly. There is a real risk. The proxies that are in the region, in southern Syria and in the vicinity of the Golan Heights, are presenting risk to the Israelis, and we’ve made clear the Israelis have a right to defend themselves. With respect to what was said last night about Chairman Kim potentially considering ending the moratorium, I can say only this: In Hanoi, on multiple occasions, he spoke directly to the President and made a commitment that he would not resume nuclear testing, nor would he resume missile testing. So that’s Chairman Kim’s word. We have every expectation that he will live up to that commitment.

MR PALLADINO: CNN, Michelle.

QUESTION: Thanks. This week – on North Korea again – the State Department has said that talks have continued with North Korea. On what level have they continued?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, I’m not going to talk about the negotiations. They’re ongoing.

QUESTION: So --

SECRETARY POMPEO: I’ve been very consistent about that.

QUESTION: Does this --

SECRETARY POMPEO: I intend to be.

QUESTION: Well I mean, saying what level they continued on doesn’t necessarily give anything away.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, I understand.

QUESTION: But – but this announcement, then, was – did this come out of left field from your point of view? And if I could, on the ICC, you mentioned that this is already being implemented. Could you give us a number or an assessment of how many people will immediately be affected by sanctions?

SECRETARY POMPEO: No.

MR PALLADINO: Last question. Washington Post, Carol Morello.

QUESTION: Sir, do you think the attacks on you personally made by the North Koreans will hamper your ability to continue negotiations or do you think you’re going to have to pull back in some way? Because they clearly are accusing – clearly, they flatly accused you of creating an atmosphere of mistrust and hostility.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah. Well first, they’re wrong about that, and – I was there. I have – my relationship with Kim Yong-chol is professional. We have detailed conversations. I expect that we will continue to do that. He’s the counterpart that the North Koreans have put forward for me. It’s not the first time – I have a vague recollection of being called “gangster-like” from a visit that I took one time previously, and following that we continued to have very professional conversations where we tried our best to work together and represent our respective sides. I have every expectation that we’ll be able to continue to do that.

MR PALLADINO: All right, thank you all.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Great, thank you all. Have a good day.

MR PALLADINO: All right, thank you.