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[OFFICE OF THE SPOKESPERSON](#)  
PRESS CORRESPONDENTS ROOM  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

**NOVEMBER 15, 2019 MODERATOR:** So I want you to know this is [Senior State Department Official]. He's back from travels in the Far East and is going to start off with some remarks and then go into Q&A. This will be treated on background, attribution to a senior State Department official, the whole thing. Okay?

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** Should we distribute now or do you want --

**STAFF:** Yeah, sure. It's up to you.

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** While she's passing that out, I just want to note that I've been doing this for five months now and this is my fourth trip to the region. The trips are sometimes planned based on activity, like in this case the East Asia Summit and the Fuji Dialogue in Japan and other things, and other times are just part of a larger plan to be out visible and working a key region in the U.S. national security plan.

So again, it's a great place to be. We're handing out both the Indo-Pacific Strategy Report, which looks at how we've been doing so far, and we plan to continue to update you as much as possible, both in terms of press availability but also in documented ways such as this.

One of my – actually, my top priority is messaging and is getting the word out as clearly as possible to you, to the region, to whoever needs to hear it, rather than stay silent and allow people to guess or suggest what we might be thinking or doing. So thank you for coming and for the opportunity to, again, get the un-muddled word out.

I want to read to you, just because it was six stops in two weeks and it really became a blur after a while, so I'm just going to quickly cover the high points of each stop, and then we can go back for Q&A on specifics.

So I'll start off with the Mt. Fuji Dialogue in Tokyo, where I participated with a number of important folks. Former National Security Advisor McMaster was there at the Fuji Dialogue – good chance to talk to him and interact. We also had very good discussions with senior Japanese leaders on the margins of that event.

In all these meetings, I emphasized that the U.S.-Japan alliance is the cornerstone of peace, security, prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region, and that the President is committed to working



with Japan to jointly strengthen our ever-important alliance. We also discussed celebrating the 60th anniversary of the alliance in 2020.

In trade, I emphasized that our recently signed trade agreement would help create jobs, expand investment, reduce our trade deficit, and promote fairness. We also spoke about cooperating with Japan on 5G and data security, and I emphasized that the new agreement on digital trade will expand vital digital trade between our countries.

As far as the greater region, I thanked Japan for being such an important partner in the Indo-Pacific in economic matters, security, governance, and human capital.

As far as North Korea, I reassured Japan that our commitment to defense of our allies is ironclad. I said that the United States remains prepared to defend ourselves and our allies from any attack or provocation. I thanked Japan for being a strong ally in the pressure campaign against the DPRK through the implementation of UN sanctions, particularly in deterring ship-to-ship transfers of illicit coal and petroleum. I also told my interlocutors that we appreciate Japan's hosting U.S. and allied aircraft on Okinawa for the Security Council resolution enforcement efforts.

As far as Japan-ROK relations, I stressed that recent DPRK missile launches have highlighted the critical value of the ROK-Japan security cooperation and information sharing. I told them that when tensions arise between Japan and ROK, the only winners are Pyongyang, Moscow, and Beijing.

From there, we spent about three days in Myanmar, in Burma. I met with senior government leaders in Nay Pyi Taw, including State Councilor Aung San Suu Kyi. I traveled to an internally displaced personnel camp in the Rakhine State and heard directly from the Rohingya there. I met civil society leaders in Rangoon, and we discussed Burma's ongoing progress to a more peaceful and democratic country.

In all these meetings, I reaffirmed the U.S. decades-long support for Burma's democratic transition and economic transformation. One thing I will take away from these trips is the enduring connection and sense of goodwill that exists between the people of Burma and the United States.

In the capital Nay Pyi Taw, we frankly discussed some of the challenges our bilateral relationship faces and ways to move forward. Myanmar must work with the international community to improve the situation for the Rohingya and other ethnic minority groups and create the conditions for safe, voluntary, dignified, and sustainable return of displaced persons from within Burma and Bangladesh.

In addition, we discussed ongoing violence in many parts of the country, to include Rakhine State, Shan State, Kachin State, the need to re-energize the national peace process, and the



negative effect on civilians of all of this from all communities. Particularly distressing is the continuing lack of humanitarian access to displaced people in these areas. I stressed again the need for accountability for those responsible for serious human rights abuses.

In the economic realm, we discussed areas for deepened engagement, including responsible investment and economic development. This can promote inclusive economic growth and better business practices. It can also help limit the military's economic interests.

Burma is heading into their second national elections in decades. We are the leading donor, contributing 24 million for the November 2020 elections as we continue our support for Burma's transition away from decades of isolation and military rule.

During my conversations, I heard about the geopolitical challenges in the region. I told the partners that the U.S. will work with them to address complex national and regional challenges for the betterment of the people of Burma.

In sum, my visit impressed upon me the significant challenges we face but also the opportunities for a better future if we can make progress together. As Burma leaves behind the dark days of military dictatorship, more and more people have a shot at a better future. And in that regard, this is not just a U.S. initiative. We've got lots of support from partners in the region – Japan, Korea, and others. I'd be happy to discuss that.

On to Kuala Lumpur, met with the foreign minister on the 31st of October where I reaffirmed our diverse partnership in trade, investment, security, educational, and cultural relations. On the same day, I made remarks at the Institute of Strategic and International Studies Malaysia and was pleased to announce the recovery and anticipated return of approximately \$1 billion in assets associated with the 1MDB corruption scheme, highlighting our ongoing successful law enforcement cooperation with Malaysia to combat corruption and help protect its national prosperity and sovereignty.

On the 31st of October, I also met with Deputy Defense Minister Liew Chin Tong, noting the strength of our military-to-military relationship, evidenced by nine military exercises we held together – hold together each year, the most Malaysia has with any country.

We discussed the shared goal to improve Malaysia's maritime capacity given that Malaysia is the largest recipient of funding from our Maritime Security Initiative. We also examined ways to expand exchange opportunities for Malaysian armed forces officers as we will be providing \$1.5 million in IMET, International Military Education and Training, funding for Malaysia in FY20.

As far as the Indo-Pacific strategy, on the 31st of October I met with Malaysian Investment and Development Authority Chairman Abdul Majid. I highlighted our focus on catalyzing investments in infrastructure, energy, and the digital economy through the Indo-Pacific. I urged high standards of transparency and financial sustainability as Malaysia reviews its infrastructure



projects with China to ensure that Malaysia can attract high quality private-sector-led development while still preserving Malaysia's sovereignty.

On November 1st, I had a breakfast meeting with America Chamber of Commerce members, encouraged U.S. companies to continue embodying U.S. values as they invest in Malaysia noting that the U.S. is now the largest source of foreign investment in Malaysia with \$2.8 billion U.S. of approved investments in the first half of 2019 alone.

In my meetings with the foreign minister and the deputy defense minister, I noted China's Nine-Dash Line posed a direct threat to the freedom of seas and rules – as well as the rules-based order. I reiterated that we were not seeking confrontation, but we have to challenge China's unlawful maritime claims.

In my meetings with the foreign minister and the deputy defense minister, I held productive discussions on ways to effectively respond to human rights challenges in the Rakhine State and urged Malaysia to respect the principle of non-refoulement.

From there, we moved to Bangkok for East Asia Summit and bilateral activities. This trip also provided important opportunity to provide – or to further strengthen the U.S. relationship with Thailand, a key partner and a long-time ally in Asia. This is the third visit to Thailand this year in five months, demonstrating U.S. commitment to maintaining our enduring friendship with the Thai – with Thailand and the Thai people. Bilateral meetings reinforced U.S. support for Thailand's continued progress to uphold democratic institutions and human rights. Continued progress – excuse me – to uphold democratic institutions of human rights and fundamental freedoms is essential to our partnership with Thailand.

I got to meet with members of the parliament – again, showing that this democratic process is working – their standing committee on legal affairs, justice, and human rights, and they welcome the diversity of opinions and voices in Thailand's parliament. I appreciated the opportunity to meet these members, many of whom are holding elected office for the first time, as we discussed the important issues of law, justice, and human rights in Thailand.

We also met with civil society there, as well as nongovernmental organizations, highlighting the opportunities and the challenges of their efforts. We discussed ideas for U.S. engagement with civil society throughout the Indo-Pacific region, and in our meetings with Thailand's government, opposition parties, and civil society, we consistently message that democratic institutions must be strengthened, human rights and fundamental freedoms must be respected.

I met with Permanent Secretary Busaya for the third time while I was there, congratulating Thailand on its successful chairmanship of ASEAN this year, which took on enormous amount of work, and also thanked Thailand for working so well with the U.S. Government and our business community to co-host the Indo-Pacific Business Forum on the sidelines of the East Asia Summit.



As far as the East Asia Summit, Thailand was very successful in – National Security Advisor O’Brien, in acting as a special envoy to the President, he announced that the President is inviting ASEAN leaders to a special summit in the United States in 2020. In Bangkok, the National Security Advisor O’Brien met with the leaders of Laos, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam, among others.

Support for a strong united ASEAN remains at the heart of our Indo-Pacific strategy. We see great convergence with ASEAN’s outlook on the Indo-Pacific and our vision for the region and the visions of our allies and partners in championing transparency, inclusiveness, good governance, and respect for international law. We’ll spend some time on this stop because this was a – we got a lot of work done in Bangkok.

U.S. FDI in ASEAN is \$271 billion, greater than our FDI in China and Japan combined. In Bangkok, we announced the start of negotiations to link the ASEAN Single Window with U.S. electronic customs systems, which will further facilitate \$334 billion in annual two-way trade between the United States and ASEAN. So 271 billion in investment and 334 in two-way trade.

On the security front, we discussed how Beijing’s coercive behavior in the South China Sea prevents ASEAN claimants from accessing oil, gas, and fisheries resources. U.S. security assistance to the Indo-Pacific was \$1.3 billion over three years, much of that in Southeast Asia. Our inaugural ASEAN-U.S. maritime exercise and U.S.-ASEAN Cyber Policy Dialogue advanced our strategic partnership.

In the world of human capital, our Young Southeast Asia Leadership Initiative, YSEALI, and the U.S.-ASEAN internship program continue to bring our people close together. We also launched ASEAN Innovation Circle to promote development through grassroots collaboration on the digital economy and entrepreneurship.

So during – on the sidelines of EAS, the Indo-Pacific Business Forum, cohosted by the Thais – and we really appreciate their help on that – it was a great success. We had some – about a thousand business and government leaders attend from the U.S. and then from across the Indo-Pacific.

On the U.S. side, we had Commerce Secretary Ross, Under Secretary of State Keith Krach, and leaders from USAID, OPIC, and Ex-Im banks, USTDA, Treasury, and other agencies. We also had 17 U.S. ambassadors and chiefs of mission come to Bangkok with delegations from their host countries. They advanced billions of dollars in new U.S. commercial deals.

I encourage everyone to read the fact sheet that we provided on the Indo-Pacific Business Forum. Rather than read the data to you, you can get it from that. We also published a longer report on our Indo-Pacific strategy, which you also have, and things we’re doing with allies and partners in the region.



Two stops to go – Korea and then the PRC.

In Korea, in Seoul, I enjoyed productive discussions with senior ROK leaders. In all of these meetings, I reaffirmed the alliance with the Republic of Korea. It continues to be the lynchpin of peace and security in the Indo-Pacific. As far as the ROK and Japan, in my meeting with senior ROK officials I stressed the importance of the GSOMIA to our collective security and urged ROK not to terminate this important information-sharing agreement. We discussed the importance of U.S.-ROK-Japan trilateral cooperation. While the U.S. will not mediate between our two key allies, I made clear that we will remain engaged and continue to urge the ROK and Japan to de-escalate tensions and find creative solutions to their differences. We will not mediate, but it does not mean that we're not involved. I mean, I just had another meeting this morning – the drumbeat has been steady to encourage both sides to find a path back to the productive relationship that they had.

On economic relationship while I was in Seoul, I joined Under Secretary Keith Krach in meeting with Korean business leaders. Under Secretary Krach was in Seoul for the U.S.-ROK Senior Economic Dialogue, and I was pleased to see U.S.-ROK released a joint statement that reaffirmed the strength of our bilateral economic relationship and our commitment to continue expanding our robust economic cooperation and commercial ties.

Besides these meetings in Seoul, I also enjoyed meeting my ROK counterpart on the margins of the East Asia Summit in Bangkok, where we released a joint factsheet highlighting U.S.-ROK cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. We discussed ways to enhance the U.S.-ROK bilateral relationship, including closer coordination between our Indo-Pacific strategy and Korea's New Southern Policy, which have many areas of overlap.

Last stop was in Beijing. In Beijing I had a useful meeting with my counterpart, Vice Foreign Minister Zheng Zeguang, and we discussed a wide range of issues. Underscored that we want to see a constructive, results-oriented relationship with the PRC, but that we need to see tangible progress on important issues. As Vice President Pence and Secretary Pompeo have done in recent speeches, I was very candid about the differences we have with the PRC Government, but we're very open to cooperation where it is in our shared interests, in both sides' interests.

Regarding Hong Kong and Xinjiang, I also raised with them our concerns with Hong Kong and Xinjiang with Vice Minister Zheng Zeguang. Beijing must continue to exercise restraint in Hong Kong and act in accordance with its commitments in the Sino-British Joint Declaration. Continuing to undermine Hong Kong autonomy would only inflame tensions.

Likewise, regarding Xinjiang, I urged Beijing to respond to the growing concerns of the international community the repression of Muslim minorities.

The topic of reciprocity, I discussed how it just – reciprocity is essential to constructive relationships in any diplomatic relationship. President Trump has been very clear about this. He



has said that reciprocity is his favorite word. So whether it's the freedom of U.S. diplomats to do their jobs in China, or Beijing living up to its obligations to take back Chinese nationals that have been ordered for removal from the U.S., the U.S.-China relationship must operate on principles of reciprocity and fairness. I was happy to have the opportunity to underscore this with the vice foreign minister.

On North Korea, I urged Beijing to maintain pressure on the regime, noting the space for a diplomatic solution is quickly closing and that Beijing must take action to prevent sanctions evasion that occurs in its jurisdiction, such as a failure to stop ship-to-ship transfers of coal and oil that takes place in Chinese waters.

I have also urged Beijing to ensure that they meet the December 22nd UN-mandated deadline to repatriate the thousands of North Korean guest workers in China. These guest workers provide a valuable source of revenue for Pyongyang. This is not – has not been reported widely in public, but these workers – whether in China, Russia, the Middle East, or Africa – are subject to terrible deprivations that fall far short of international standards to protect workers.

I raised the issue of fentanyl and the fentanyl crisis in the U.S., and encouraged greater PRC counter-narcotics enforcement, noting recent convictions by the Chinese Government. I pressed for full enforcement of the PRC's class scheduling of fentanyl. I gave Vice Foreign Minister Zheng a copy of a powerful recent article in *The New York Times Magazine* about the PRC's role in the U.S. fentanyl crisis, and I commend that article to you all to review. The article shows why this issue is an intense concern for the administration, the Congress, as well as U.S. public.

Thank you for your patience.

**QUESTION:** You need to take shorter trips. (Laughter.)

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** Yeah, sorry. But again, I thought we'd get it all out there upfront.

**QUESTION:** That's okay. That fentanyl story, that was the failing, fake news *New York Times* that you were --

**MODERATOR:** All right, Matt. What's the question?

**QUESTION:** -- talking to the Chinese about?

I want to ask you about Korea and not – is it correct that what the North Koreans have said today, that you guys want to resume talks next month? I mean, I know that you have been wanting to do it as soon as possible, but is it – is that a target from your point of view? And then just on the U.S.-South Korea military alliance and the story that came out I guess last night about



you wanting a 500 percent increase in what they pay, how is that the – I mean, how is that the behavior of a good, close, and loyal ally?

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** So on North Korea, I will happily defer to Special Representative Biegun on that one. My getting in the middle of that is unhelpful, and it's not productive given the level of visibility on this subject. So I – if – yeah, please pass those questions to Steve Biegun.

As far as the negotiations on the Special Measures Agreement, SMA, the point the administration's been making all along is that – and my point – has been that the relationship changes as the security dynamic in the region changes. It's linked to North Korea and others – security risks and threats. We review these agreements over time and we update them in order to ensure that both sides are being treated – this workload, this balance is being treated and addressed fairly. So as far as the details on the negotiation, it would be exceptionally, exceptionally stupid of me to weigh in on actual numbers and process, but I think you would – all would understand that sharing the load is in both countries' interest, to make sure the relationship stays balanced and --

**QUESTION:** Well --

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** -- self-respect – or respectful.

**QUESTION:** Yeah, but – well --

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** Okay. Good.

**QUESTION:** You mentioned Hong Kong, and you said you had stressed the importance to Beijing of exercising restraint. What have you told them would be the consequences of not exercising restraint if they were to send in PLA units or People's Armed Police units? How would the U.S. respond? What have you said to the Chinese?

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** Well, I think what you're getting at is did we draw a red line and say cross this line and X will happen, and you understand that that would not be a wise approach. In diplomacy I've learned that ambiguity is a useful tool, but there is no doubt in Beijing's mind of our interest. We've stated it at all levels that they abide by the '97 – the joint declaration, the need to ensure that Hong Kong maintains its autonomy and the – there would – there are consequences. Those consequences are written in law in the Hong Kong Policy Act and other places. So they're aware of those consequences as well, and so I don't think there's any need to go any further detail on that. The – again, if you read the Hong Kong Policy Act and what happens when we determine that Hong Kong does not retain sufficient autonomy, there'd be significant economic hits and other things.





**MODERATOR:** Carol.

**QUESTION:** In Burma, did you walk away with anything concrete, any kind of commitment from the government to treat the Rohingya better? Or did you hear anything give you any confidence that they're going to not only treat the people better but allow more access that you had sought for humanitarian and other reasons?

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** Well, I like to think I'm pretty good at diplomacy, but this has been a problem that's working on – we've been working on this for a very long time. It's not going to go away soon. And in our meeting with Aung San Suu Kyi, she was very gracious. We had a very productive and wide-ranging conversation. The subject of course of the Rakhine State and the Rohingya internally displaced population came up. She acknowledged our concern. She – the Burma side is working toward a solution. I think that we all agree that they could be doing more on this, one, to address the issues of identity cards, citizenship, and then the plight of the people who have been in these camps for seven-plus years. These things all need to be addressed.

So it's not going to – there's going to be no overnight resolution, but I do think that, as part of this diplomatic effort, the continuing raising of this issue is important. And so we did that, she took my points, and we'll move on, continue to work it.

**MODERATOR:** Shaun.

**QUESTION:** Can I just follow up on that? The International Criminal Court, as of yesterday, is taking up the case of Myanmar. There's also been legal action in Argentina. How does the United States feel about this? Does it think that this could be a productive way to, as you say, to ensure accountability?

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** I might say that this just broke last night, Gambia then the – the basin – OIC pushing on this. Anything we can do to highlight this issue and to move forward on it, I think, would be useful. I think that process – I'm not going to comment on whether ICC is the right way to go or not. I just think that highlighting it and getting the government in Nay Pyi Taw to take action is important. I would hope that similar attention would be paid to another crisis of its type in Xinjiang, where there's a Muslim population that's being – is suffering greatly for the simple fact that they're Muslim. And so these things all need attention.

**MODERATOR:** Conor.

**QUESTION:** Just to follow up on that as well, government has really been the impediment to progress on these issues in terms of accountability or the safe and voluntary, dignified return of



Rohingya from Bangladesh. Why move forward on the economic relationship? What kind of – do you think that sends the wrong message when the U.S. should be instead putting more pressure on the government, perhaps using that as leverage?

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** Well, one of the things we heard in the IDP camps is they don't have any jobs. They have nowhere to go. They just sit there waiting for food and help to come to them, and that's a terrible way to live. So I mean, there's a lot of ways you can approach it. It seems to me that if you could create some sort of economic growth that comes from industry bringing in – either developing Burmese industry or bringing in outside industry and developing the economic foundations, eventually we create at least something like a job that would help people support themselves. Where there's economic stress there tends to be political stress, and the more we can do to help with prosperity, the better. But as I said in my statement, that includes kind of extricating the military out of the economy and moving it – and, of course, the political system – and making it more something akin to what we're used to out here.

**QUESTION:** Did you get any assurances from them that they would allow economic development in the – in northern Rakhine State? It's something the government has blocked, or that they would try to extricate the military. How do you condition aid or development on those kinds of things?

**QUESTION:** What confidence do you have that this money is going to be used for what it's intended?

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** The beautiful thing about investment is it doesn't go into pockets of government; it goes into buildings and machines and things like that that you then fill with people to do jobs. So rather than sending money direct to government, it seems like investment in business and industrial activity in Myanmar seems a decent way to go. I mean, resource-wise, they are flush. There is a lot they could do there. Obviously, you need a secure background to do that in, so that's a concern. But again, there's lots of opportunity there. We look forward to working with them on this. Again, patience is advised, as it has been all along.

**MO QUESTION:** Sarah Ampolsk, Kyodo News. I want to ask you about GSOMIA. You mentioned the meeting you had earlier, I believe, with the new Korean ambassador. The Koreans are still saying that they're planning to pull out by the deadline, and I know you talked about this a lot when you were in both Tokyo and Seoul. Was there – is there any movement on that that you're seeing on the part of the Koreans, even and especially in this morning's meeting? Are they being swayed at all, or are they really just telling you that they're planning to pull out by the 22nd?



**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** I would definitely push that question to the Korean side and the Japanese side. As I have said before, this is a bilateral issue that started with the decision on forced labor in Korea and then a number of responses to that, the most recent – and the one that involves the U.S. – being GSOMIA.

What we're doing is encouraging them to work together. Being in the middle and brokering this thing, as you know – and we've said all along that's not in our interest. It's not in their interest. They need to get together and talk more. They need to resolve these things themselves. We are doing all we can to foster that – those conversations. And --

**QUESTION:** But do you see those conversations – insofar as you are working to foster those bilateral conversations between the ROK and Japan, do you see movement in that area based on your conversations?

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** I do. I mean, I've seen the relationship – to use a naval metaphor, for a long time the bow was going down. The bow is beginning to rise. I mean, it starts with the prime minister's trip to Tokyo for the enthronement; and then most recently, at the East Asia summit, we had a bilateral with the prime minister and the president. The photos I saw from that were positive and smiling, so these are all things – and really all it needs is a kickstart, right? They just need to get something that allows them to move forward again on the relationship. And so we're doing all we can in that regard. I'm hopeful, but like I said, I'm probably too close to the subject, so I would ask **them**.

**DERATOR:** What's your name?

**MODERATOR:** Nike.

**QUESTION:** Yes, a follow-up on Hong Kong. With the confrontation between the police and protestors took a violent turn recently, in your estimation, do you see the chance to get to a humane solution getting – appear to be dimmer? And in your discussion with Zheng Zeguang, what is your takeaway with what China is going to do next? Thank you.

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** The U.S. has been clear all along on the first thing is the violence has to stop. And waiting around to point blame as to who started what violence – there are so many options there. It could be any number of things. So the point is a blanket statement that violence has to stop, period. It doesn't matter what side it's on, and I think there's instigators on both sides. And who says there's only both sides? I mean, there – I think there's three or four sides in this. So that – once you get past the violence, the protests then can be addressed, and the protest, as you recall, began with a law that would allow them to extradite folks from Hong Kong into the mainland for trial there.



There have been incidents in the past – go back to the Hong Kong booksellers’ issues where, with or without a extradition law, people have been forcibly removed from Hong Kong and other places, brought to the PRC for punishment and trial. I think they just announced that a professor from Taiwan – had just been announced that he’s been held for a while. And so I think generally speaking, we would like to see a more transparent legal regime, and I think that’s what the Hong Kong people are looking for as well.

But let’s go back to the root causes. This extradition law was perceived by the people in Hong Kong as significantly infringing on their sovereignty, which contradicts the joint statement and other things. So first off, let’s get – knock down the violence, address the protests, have a conversation with the people. These are things we’ve been suggesting all along for the Hong Kong government and for Beijing to get to resolution of some kind here.

**MODERATOR:** I think you have time for one more. Ben.

**QUESTION:** Is the U.S. coming to the aid of the protesters at some point?

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** The – that question was just asked, but at this point, the best thing we can do is lay the groundwork for a peaceful conversation vice a violent protest. The violence is understandable in many cases, but it’s not productive. It’s unhelpful. We’ve told the Hong Kong side that as much, and --

**MODERATOR:** We issued a statement a couple days ago on that.

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** Yeah.

**MODERATOR:** Ben.

**QUESTION:** Could I just get your thoughts on – next week, Prime Minister Abe will become the longest-serving prime minister in Japan. How does having sort of one continuous, stable administration in Japan help the U.S.-Japan relationship?

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** It’s an interesting point, and I knew it was coming. I didn’t know it was that soon. Well, so, one, congratulations for a long run, and some – what I see as very positive progress in advancing Japanese economic interests and political stability and all those things. Obviously, the U.S. – it’s good for stability and continuity in a relationship like this. That doesn’t mean that we back one candidate. If, in the process of democratic elections, another candidate is elected, we support the process of democracy and not necessarily the outcome who that is. And so – and that’s a message we’ve been sharing in many places is it’s – we can’t support one or other candidates.



2020 is a big year for elections, though. January 2020, we have Taiwan elections, we have – what, two or three in November coming up. We just went – reviewed a bunch of them.

**QUESTION:** Including here.

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** Yeah, and us. And so they can be contentious, they – sometimes uncomfortable, but that’s – the process is worth preserving because we see what the alternative looks like in some other countries, so.

**MODERATOR:** All right. I got to get you out or I’m going to get in trouble.

**QUESTION:** Can I --

**QUESTION:** Since you mentioned Taiwan election, two month into the election, how do you assess Beijing’s behavior? Is there any indication they tried to influence the outcome of the presidential elections?

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** I don’t see that. I don’t see a lot of statements coming out of Beijing. Whether that’s happening in the background, again, I can’t really comment on that. But again, we would encourage Beijing to allow those elections to happen without interference because we’ve seen what happens in the past when they do interfere. Things don’t quite work out as maybe they planned. Thank you.