



Victoria Nuland
Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing
Washington, DC
March 12, 2013



INDEX FOR TODAY'S BRIEFING

U.K./ARGENTINA/FALKLANDS (MALVINAS)

- Recent Democratic Referendum / U.S. Position
- Freedom of Expression

SYRIA

- Mutual Consent Clause / Syrian Opposition Coalition (SOC) / Rome Meeting

UZBEKISTAN

- Human Rights

SYRIA

- Israeli President Shimon Peres / Israeli Concerns
- Internal Decisions Postponed
- Free Syrian Army (FSA)
- Al-Nusrah, Al-Qaida Affiliates / Support of Good Governance

TUNISIA

- U.S. Wants to See Tunisians Express Themselves Through Political Process

NORTH KOREA

- UN Security Council Resolution 2094
- Provocative Rhetoric / National Security Advisor Donilon

BURMA

- Use of Phosphorous for Crowd Control / Freedom of Assembly
- U.S. Continues a Rigorous Human Rights Dialogue with Burma

TRANSCRIPT:

The video is available with [closed captioning](#) on YouTube.

12:51 p.m. EST

MS. NULAND: All right. Happy Tuesday, everyone. I have nothing at the top. Let's go --

QUESTION: Really?

MS. NULAND: -- to what's on your minds.

QUESTION: You don't have anything to start off about the awesome referendum in the Falkland Islands?

MS. NULAND: I was hoping you would ask, Matt. Was there a question in there?

QUESTION: Yeah. What do you think about the results of this? Do you think that the three people who voted against should get their way and that you should -- you'll start encouraging the Brits to hand over the islands to the Argentines, or what do you think?

MS. NULAND: Well, we take note of the results of the recent democratic referendum in the islands, where the residents voted to retain the islands' current political status as a British overseas territory. The residents have clearly expressed their preference for a continued relationship with the United Kingdom. That said, we obviously recognize that there are competing claims. Our formal position has not changed. We recognize the de facto U.K. Administration of the islands, but we take no position on sovereignty claims.

QUESTION: So you don't think that this referendum enhances the -- or augments the British claim?

MS. NULAND: What we have said is that the residents have clearly expressed themselves and expressed their will, but we also acknowledge the competing claims.

QUESTION: Well, I'm sure, but you do agree with the principle of self determination? You do agree with that, correct?

MS. NULAND: Let me say it one more time, that the residents have expressed their clear preference. We acknowledge that there are conflicting claims, and we recognize the U.K. de facto administration.

QUESTION: Can you explain to me why it is that on this issue you refuse to give the Brits any leeway? I mean, they are your closest ally, arguably. And you're just – you've just refused to – all they're asking for – they're not asking for much here. They're just asking you to recognize the vote. And if you do agree with the principle of self-determination, I don't understand why it wouldn't – this wouldn't affect your policy.

MS. NULAND: And as I said, we've been very clear about what we see in this referendum and the will that's been expressed by the people of the island, but that doesn't change the fact that there are competing claims. Our own legal position has not changed.

QUESTION: So are you going to now take a look at your position and perhaps review it going further down the line?

MS. NULAND: Again, I think I just stated where we are. I don't have anything further to announce.

QUESTION: So no change in the U.S. position?

MS. NULAND: As I said, conflicting claims, but we recognize the de facto U.K. Administration of the islands. We don't take any position on sovereignty claims. We do think it's important for the parties to continue to have – to be constructive in their approach and focus their own efforts on a resolution.

QUESTION: So would you consider this referendum a failure then? Because part of the reason for holding it was to demonstrate to the world that the people who live in the Falkland Islands want to remain British and to validate that position before international bodies and other governments. If the United States, which, as Matt said, is the closest ally of Britain, is not going to change its longstanding neutrality on this position, then by definition the referendum has failed to convince you of that.

MS. NULAND: Well, as I said, we have been very straight up here about acknowledging what happened in this referendum, which is that the residents have expressed their preference. But with regard to our legal position, it is as I stated.

Said.

QUESTION: Can we change topics?

MS. NULAND: We can.

QUESTION: Syria. Your Russian counterpart, Lukashovich, contradicted what you're saying. He's suggesting that your understanding of the Geneva points is not quite – is not proper, that there is nothing in the Geneva points that really calls for Bashar al-Assad to depart, to step aside. So how do you respond to Mr. Lukashovich?

MS. NULAND: I saw the Russian Foreign Ministry statement. I frankly didn't quite understand what they were disputing in our position. We have said all along that if you read Geneva, it talks about creating, by mutual consent, a transitional governing structure with full executive powers. What we have said – we have never asserted that the document said anything about Assad. We have simply asserted that once you have that mutual consent clause in there, based on our consultations with the opposition, we don't see anyway Bashar al-Assad would be acceptable under the mutual consent clause.

QUESTION: But the concept of mutuality would require two sides. In this case it would be the Syrian Government, correct?

MS. NULAND: We've talked about a process whereby, as has the Syrian opposition itself – Syrian Opposition Coalition President al-Khatib has said, that he would be willing to sit down with regime representatives who didn't have blood on their hands to try to implement Geneva. So obviously we would support that as well. The question is whether there are such people who would be prepared to negotiate in good faith.

QUESTION: And finally, today the Foreign Minister to the European Union, they came out apparently disagreeing on supplying the Syrian rebels with arms. Do you have any comment on that?

MS. NULAND: I frankly didn't see the results of the European Union discussions. We had – as you know, when Secretary Kerry was in Europe, we had very good discussions with a number of our allies about how they can join us in ratcheting up support for the opposition. So I know that the discussions are continuing about how to interpret the lightening of the embargo that they've already done, and they need to continue to have that discussion.

QUESTION: Do you see a split among your allies, the Europeans on one hand not wanting to arm the rebels, and then the Arabs on the other hand like Qatar and Saudi Arabia who are arming the rebels with a lot of weapons?

MS. NULAND: Well, without getting into what individual countries are doing, if you look at the countries that were represented at the meeting with al-Khatib and the Syrian opposition in Rome, every country that was there – I think there were 11 in all – are helping support the opposition. We're doing it all in different ways. And as the Secretary has said, the totality of effort that we're all putting in is on the upswing and that's important for the opposition at this stage.

Arshad.

QUESTION: Staying with Syria, we have a story out saying that Syria has received something like \$100 million worth of gas oil shipments recently.

MS. NULAND: The Syrian regime has?

QUESTION: Well, I deliberately used the word Syria as in the country.

MS. NULAND: Yeah.

QUESTION: Because, as I understand the sanctions, you cannot sell – you are allowed to sell such refined petroleum products to Syria, but you can't sell them to the state-owned oil trading companies. And so what I think is happening, or what our story describes, is these are being sold to private Syrian companies, and I wonder if – and thereby skirts the sanctions – and I wonder if this is a source of concern for you that some of this gas oil, which runs heavy machinery but could also have military uses, may be getting in despite your efforts to constrict the flow of such goods to the Syrian Government?

MS. NULAND: Well, I haven't seen your story, Arshad, so maybe if you can share it afterwards, we'll look into precisely how it's sourced and what we're talking about and how it compares with our own view.

You know where we've been, which is – both in our own sanction approach to Syria and in the sanctions we're trying to strengthen and enhance among the

Friends of the Syrian People – to focus particularly on anything that could fuel the Assad war machine, particularly the kinds of fuels that go into tanks and other military materiel as compared to cooking oil and that kind of thing. But let me look at what you've got and we'll go from there.

Please. Can you tell me who you are?

QUESTION: I am Ana Baron from Clarin, Argentina. I have a follow-up, of course, on the Falklands/Malvina. There is here in Washington two members of the legislative organ of the Malvinas to Falklanders that came to visit congressmen and also government official. I was wondering if they are coming to the State Department and if someone is going to receive them here.

MS. NULAND: Let me take that and look into it. I'm frankly not sure.

QUESTION: Okay. The second question is about freedom of the press in Argentina. There have been allegations that the government is putting pressure in two companies – three companies, big companies of supermarket. One of those is American, is Walmart, in order not to advertise in the main newspapers which are Clarin and La Nacion. And there has been the Inter-American Society of the Press that has said that this is an attempt against freedom of the press because, of course, these newspapers need this advertising; it's one of the main revenues.

So I wanted to know if you have a position on that.

MS. NULAND: Frankly, I haven't seen that issue come forward, but let us look into it. You know where we stand generally around the world on freedom of expression. We support it. We think it's fundamental to democracy in any country. It's fundamental to – it's a fundamental human right, obviously.

Scott.

QUESTION: Can we get a readout on the Uzbek Foreign Minister meeting, specifically on any human rights issues that Secretary Kerry would have raised?

MS. NULAND: Well, as Secretary Kerry said himself in the spray before the meeting, we always raise our human rights concerns and our view with the Uzbeks that the more progress they can make in democratic rights, human rights in Uzbekistan, the more stable and prosperous and secure the country will be. I'm not going to get into details of the bilateral other than to say, as we always do, it came up this morning.

QUESTION: Can we go back to Syria?

MS. NULAND: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Okay. Today, the Israeli President Shimon Peres called on the Arab League to send in forces, to send in Arab army into Syria. He says that international interference by foreign countries – in this case, Arab countries are not foreign – would be a good idea. Do you support that idea?

MS. NULAND: I have not seen President Peres's comments. This is something that he said today?

QUESTION: Yes.

MS. NULAND: He's made no secret of his concern about the complete carnage in Syria and the threat that an implosion of the state would cause for Israel. Obviously, our course of action here has been to support the Syrian opposition and to maximize the pressure on Bashar al-Assad. So that's the way we work on this.

QUESTION: But do you think the idea itself merits a discussion or a serious discussion of the upcoming Arab summit? Because they did that back in the '70s. They sent in what was called then the Arab Deterrent Force to Lebanon led by Syria. So do you support something similar to this?

MS. NULAND: Again, let me look at what President Peres has actually said before I comment on it. It's certainly the case that at the Arab Summit, we expect Syria to be a main topic of conversation. That was clear in the meetings that the Secretary had when we were in the Gulf and when we were in Egypt.

QUESTION: And finally, there was also – the meeting that was supposed to take place today was postponed once again, and it – apparently it was because of fundamental differences between the opposition groups, much like Moaz al-Khatib on one hand and Haytham Manna on the other and so on, on the issue of interference. Do you have any comment on that?

MS. NULAND: You're talking about the opposition meeting where they were going to --

QUESTION: Right, yeah.

MS. NULAND: -- look at leadership decisions?

QUESTION: Yes, yes.

MS. NULAND: We've seen the same thing that you have, that they have postponed decisions on that. We have, as you know, continually encouraged them to focus first and foremost on unity, on pluralism, both in their membership and in the way they talk about the future of Syria, and in being effective in terms of delivering services and support, particularly in liberated areas of Syria.

So obviously, they need to make their internal decisions when they think they are ripe, but we are interested in ensuring that they are also able to help the Syrian people as they work forward.

QUESTION: Just forgive me if --

MS. NULAND: Matt.

QUESTION: -- this has been already answered, but have any of these --

MS. NULAND: You mean you didn't read every transcript while you were away?

QUESTION: No. No, I did not.

MS. NULAND: I'm so disappointed.

QUESTION: I apologize.

MS. NULAND: Okay.

QUESTION: I will – (laughter) – read them all when I get back to my desk, just to make sure.

MS. NULAND: Excellent, excellent.

QUESTION: Have any of these rations and bandages actually made it to the Free Syrian Army yet?

MS. NULAND: My understanding is that we're in consultation with the FSA leaders now on exactly what they need that we might be able to provide and how we're going to get it in. Let me just check for you whether any of the actual material has started to flow. But as you know, we only made this announcement about a week ago, and we need to make sure that we're effective in the way that we do it.

QUESTION: Right.

QUESTION: Do you have a dollar figure for how – for that?

MS. NULAND: I think we said at the time that we were not going to put out a public dollar figure.

QUESTION: So you're not going to put it out?

MS. NULAND: We're not.

QUESTION: Why? Is it embarrassing?

MS. NULAND: No, because this is going to be something that grows over time, and we are going to seek support from the Congress as it moves forward and as we see the needs.

Jill.

QUESTION: Toria --

QUESTION: Well, why not? Wait, I don't understand that. I mean, something that grows over time? Lots of things grow over time. I mean, why not just say what the amounts are?

MS. NULAND: Because we're going to be scoping it with the FSA as we talk to them, and we're not there yet.

Jill.

QUESTION: No, no, but I don't – I still don't understand why the resistance to – once you've figured out what the amounts are, why not just say it? It's taxpayer dollars.

MS. NULAND: When we're ready to talk about it and when we're ready to notify it appropriately, we will certainly tell you.

Jill.

QUESTION: What's the latest on the visit – upcoming, eventually – of the opposition to Washington? Do you have any news?

MS. NULAND: We talked about this a little bit at the end of last week, I think. The invitation has been extended, both to Syrian Opposition Coalition President Khatib and to the FSA – to the Syrian military group leader General Idris. When we saw – when the Secretary saw President Khatib in Rome, he made clear that he wants to come to Washington at an appropriate time but that his priority now is on all of the things that we talked about in answer to Said's question on maintaining unity, on broadening the membership, on being effective on the ground, and that he wants to focus on those things before he makes long foreign trips. But we've made clear that the door is open whenever he and General Idris want to schedule.

QUESTION: So that's another sign then that they are still not unified?

MS. NULAND: No, I think it's a sign that their priorities are on the Syrian people rather than on foreign travel at the moment. But we'll see when they are ready to come together.

QUESTION: Is there an update on helping the opposition find an office in Washington?

MS. NULAND: To my knowledge, they haven't at this point yet sought an office in Washington. They're focused on their office in Cairo, which is the main headquarters of the SOC. And I think we mentioned that some of the additional funds that Secretary Kerry announced when he was in Rome will support that office in Cairo.

QUESTION: But there was a plan, though, to open an office in New York and an office in Washington. Do you --

MS. NULAND: They have talked about it, but I don't think that we've had any decisions come forward from them^[1].

Said.

QUESTION: Sorry, Victoria, but are you aware that there are some areas that are called liberated areas that are actually run by Jabhat al-Nusra and they are imposing something called the Sharia council and they are imposing the rule of very strict fundamentalist Islamic rule? Are you aware of that?

MS. NULAND: Said, you might have been away, but we talked about this quite a bit just before the trip that we do have extreme concerns about efforts by al-Nusra and other al-Qaida affiliates to infiltrate the legitimate opposition. We talked a lot about some of these areas where they've been successful in gaining some political control, and about two weeks ago I spoke about a number of villages and towns outside of Aleppo where there's actually been a negative reaction from the population to efforts to impose Sharia, to efforts to bring in outside imams, to efforts to impose justice in a manner that was not considered democratic, transparent, et cetera.

So this is one of the main things, as you know, that we work with the opposition on, ensuring that as they move forward, and particularly as they begin to support good governance in liberated areas, that they do so in a manner that comports with the best democratic traditions that demonstrates their effectiveness in protecting the human rights of all and delivering justice in a manner that meets international standards.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MS. NULAND: Please. Yeah.

QUESTION: How is that work going with the opposition? Because when we were in Rome, al-Khatib said that there were three things that he was tired of hearing from the international community, and one was the focus on terrorists in Syria and al-Qaida affiliates.

MS. NULAND: Well, we have to have this conversation all the time. I think in the private conversations that we have had with the Syrian opposition, they certainly recognize the risks of extremists hijacking the Syrian revolution, of hijacking Syria's future, which they consider just as dangerous as the risk that Iran and Hezbollah become the main props for the Assad regime. So everybody sees the perils here. This is why in the work that we are doing to support the Syrian Opposition Coalition in liberated areas we are focused so much on administrative training, judicial training, educational training, all of these kinds of things, in a manner that comports with the future democracy we want to see in Syria.

Please.

QUESTION: Any reaction to the formation of a new government in Tunisia today? I mean, the parliament is expected to approve the new government.

MS. NULAND: I think we mentioned, Samir, that we were looking forward to the parliament taking action on the Prime Minister's suggestion. I don't think they have yet acted, but we'll obviously have something to say after they do.

QUESTION: Is there any reaction to – there was a cigarette vendor, I believe, who set himself alight outside the parliament?

MS. NULAND: We saw that. Obviously a tragedy for him and for his family, and we understand that they are doing their best to give him medical assistance. Our view in Tunisia, as it has been across the region, is that we want to see people who are frustrated, people who have concerns, whether they're political concerns or economic concerns, express themselves peacefully, express themselves through the political process, not to resort to violence, including violence against self, but now that there is a political process, to use it and to express themselves democratically.

QUESTION: Wait. So you're opposed to people setting themselves on fire?

MS. NULAND: We are. It's --

QUESTION: Does that go for Tibet as well?

MS. NULAND: It's – well, in the Tibetan case it speaks to the extreme frustration of not having a democratic process in which they can express themselves and get their grievances addressed. And we've talked about that very clearly here.

Please.

QUESTION: On North Korea?

MS. NULAND: Yes.

QUESTION: On the new designations you announced yesterday, have you been working with any of your partners or China to try to get them to implement the same designations?

MS. NULAND: Well, we're always transparent with our partners with regard to steps that the United States will take on its own hook to implement and strengthen UN Security Council resolutions, so it's a regular pattern for us that after the multilateral sanctions are set that we then announce implementation of them in a U.S. context. So we've been very transparent with the Chinese Government, as we have with our other partners, and particularly in making the case that we made in the public statements yesterday that this bank is aiding and abetting the D.P.R.K.'s proliferation efforts.

QUESTION: So this is an extension of the UN resolution?

MS. NULAND: Under UN Security Council Resolution 2094, there is a whole effort underway to further squeeze down the ability of the D.P.R.K. to proliferate, et cetera. This is an action that we took nationally to implement the spirit of that resolution.

QUESTION: And some more comments today from the North Korean leadership, including that they threatened to attack an outlying island of South Korea. Does that have implications for U.S. posture in the region?

MS. NULAND: As National Security Advisor Donilon made clear yesterday, as the Secretary has been making clear, this kind of provocative rhetoric, this kind of action that they're taking, is just going to take the country in the wrong direction. You would note that National Security Advisor Donilon also left the door open yesterday for a different set of choices by the D.P.R.K. if they are going to – if they are willing to come towards us and implement their international obligations. They can have a better future for their people, but this kind of trash-talking is not going to take them there.

QUESTION: I'm presuming the question is probably better directed at Pentagon, but what are the measures that you're implementing in the region to make sure that you can defend your ally to the best of your capabilities, as Mr. Donilon said yesterday?

MS. NULAND: Well, let me just repeat what he said: "We will defend the United States; we will defend our allies, Japan and Korea. I'm not going to get into specific measures." If you'd like to ask the Pentagon if they'd like to get into it, I will send you to them.

QUESTION: You want – are you trying to open the door to a round of vitriol between you and the North Korean Foreign Ministry by calling them trash talkers? Is that the idea?

MS. NULAND: I'm just calling --

QUESTION: Are you going for – you want to be described like John Bolton was famously described?

MS. NULAND: I'm just calling it like we see it. Just calling it like we see it.

Okay. Anybody else?

QUESTION: I have one more.

MS. NULAND: Jo.

QUESTION: Sorry. On Myanmar.

MS. NULAND: Yeah.

QUESTION: There was a report out today that back in November the Myanmar Government used smoke bombs containing phosphorus against a rally outside a copper mine in northern Myanmar. This was happening about the same time as United States was lifting the import sanctions on Myanmar, and I wondered if I could have a comment on that, please.

MS. NULAND: We do note the report, which appears to confirm that security forces in Burma used smoke bombs containing phosphorus to disperse protestors. We have opposed the use of phosphorus as a crowd control agent. And we have urged the government to ensure that its security forces exercise maximum restraint, respect due process under the law, and protect the right of freedom of assembly in accordance with international standards. This phosphorus, as you know, can be quite damaging to humans. There are other crowd control elements that are better suited.

QUESTION: What does this say about – generally about the passage of reforms in Myanmar and how they might be being implemented by the government?

MS. NULAND: Well, it's no secret that this is a work in progress in Burma. As we said from the beginning, we would take steps to open our relationship as they take steps, but we are continuing, as you know, as part of that, to have a rigorous human rights dialogue with Burma, which includes issues like police conduct, freedom of assembly, these kinds of things. So this is something that we're obviously watching very closely and continuing to work with the Burmese on as they open their country.

Thank you, all.

(The briefing was concluded at 1:17 p.m.)

DPB # 42

[1] The Syrian Opposition Coalition announced the opening of their Washington DC office and plans for their New York office on February 26, 2013.