

Press Releases: Background Briefing: Updating on Secretary Tillerson's Trip to Amman, Jordan; Ankara, Turkey; Beirut, Lebanon; Cairo, Egypt; and Kuwait City, Kuwait

Special Briefing
Office of the Spokesperson

Senior State Department Official
Amman, Jordan
February 14, 2018

MODERATOR: So we're going to record this. We'll do it off the – on background to a senior department official traveling with the Secretary.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Just a second.

MODERATOR: Once he finishes this email.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Okay.

QUESTION: This is just – do you want –

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Just ask, ask.

QUESTION: Okay. So Tillerson said that the peace plan is fairly well advanced. Are you at the stage where you're – in these meetings this week you're kind of briefly directing – or directly briefing allies on what's actually in it, or –

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: No, we are not.

QUESTION: Okay.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: The President will announce – brief that plan when he is ready.

QUESTION: But are you still soliciting feedback, then, at this point on what kinds of things –

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: This is in the hands of the President and his team.

QUESTION: But you guys are diplomats.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: It is in the hands of the President and his team.

QUESTION: So the Secretary isn't soliciting any – I mean, he's the chief diplomat of the United States; his job to kind of –

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: The Secretary's interlocutors express their views on a range of issues. Among those issues are the status of the Palestinians, interest in a comprehensive peace, both concerns and hopes with respect to the peace process in all its aspects, and the Secretary welcomes those comments. That's as far as I'm going to go on that one.

QUESTION: Can you – I mean, he said today that – I'm Nick Wadhams from Bloomberg. He said today that he had raised some concerns with – he said today about the plan that he had raised some concerns and –

QUESTION: With the White House.

QUESTION: With the White House and given his feedback.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: I'm not going to elaborate on remarks which the Secretary has made.

QUESTION: Okay.

QUESTION: On this Lebanese-Israeli gas dispute, could you – you were in Lebanon and Israel last week to talk about it. What – where do things stand right now?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: We're in the midst of discussion of this issue. You will understand I'm not going to make any comment on where the issue stands. That's kind of what we do.

QUESTION: Okay. They've – I mean, the *Daily Star* was –

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: We're not going to make any comment on this issue.

QUESTION: Do you expect – do you see it escalating, or do you see –

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: We very much –

QUESTION: – the direction that it's going –

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: We very much hope that in the interests of Lebanon and the Lebanese people, that choices are made which contribute not just to stability, which we always want, but also to the greater prosperity of Lebanon, full stop.

QUESTION: Okay. Anyone else got a question?

QUESTION: Can I ask you about the Gulf crisis?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: I suppose.

QUESTION: Do you anticipate a resolution anytime soon on that? They've – allegedly some discussion about bringing GCC countries to the U.S. in spring to hash things out.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: As you all know, the President – the President and the Secretary, Secretary of Defense have made very clear – no great secret here – that we would very much like to see this conflict resolved – resolved in the interests of the states concerned, resolved in the interests of the United States, and above all resolved for the common interests that the GCC represents as a cooperative mechanism and for a common and strong ability to confront Daesh, the other concerns that we and the states in the GCC have. That's been our position. We very much hope that a resolution can be achieved. We'll do all we can to help in that regard. Whether or not one is possible depends on the decisions taken by the leaders involved.

QUESTION: But when there was the meetings in Saudi Arabia last year, there was agreement that everyone would convene again a year later. It's sort of the U.S. turn to host. Is it possible to (inaudible) that meeting?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: We very – we very much hope it is possible to have a constructive GCC summit, full stop.

QUESTION: But could you have that summit?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: We very much hope it is possible –

QUESTION: It looked like –

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: – to have a successful GCC summit.

QUESTION: It looked like the Qataris and the Saudis didn't want to be in the same room together during the Kuwait meeting. That seems –

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Well, except that I seem to see Saudis and Qataris in that room together.

QUESTION: In the family photo?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: They were certainly sitting at the – look, don't over read this one. The foreign ministers –

QUESTION: Okay, that's why I'm asking you.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: The foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia and Qatar were in their seats during much of the events that took place in Kuwait, and when I answered, "We hope to have a successful GCC summit," that

means successful in every sense.

QUESTION: Can you preview –

QUESTION: But – hold on – just one follow-up. It would be difficult to have a successful summit if this were still going on. You wouldn't want to enshrine this dispute in the GCC summit and say: Okay, it's okay to have –

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: We would never say it was okay. We have never said it was okay. But what we have urged all parties involved is if you cannot come to a resolution, which we certainly hope you can, then at least manage this issue in a way that doesn't detract from or derogate from the effectiveness of the GCC as an organization.

QUESTION: Can we –

MODERATOR: (Inaudible) our last question.

QUESTION: Okay. Just looking forward to the next couple of days, you're going to be in Beirut tomorrow. The Secretary addressed the issues in Beirut with Hizballah. We then got a clarification from Washington about what Washington had hoped the Secretary would say about how Hizballah – has – and its malign influences. Can you tell us sort of – I'm not sure if you are even aware of that clarification (inaudible). Okay. Can you tell us what's going to happen tomorrow? Where is the concern in the U.S. Government in terms of Hizballah's – and then also looking forward to Turkey, since I only get one –

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Can't comment on Turkey.

QUESTION: Okay.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Really, I just can't. That's a different issue, different set of interlocutors.

QUESTION: Different people. Okay.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: With respect to Lebanon, look, our views there are that the Lebanese people deserve the right to live in peace, prosperity. Both peace and prosperity are threatened by the activities of a non-state actor. We believe there are ways to address this issue by strengthening the legitimate security institutions of Lebanon. That means the LAF, the other state institutions, and it means by continuing to make clear that engaging in activities, whether Hizballah – or whether Hizballah-oriented or Iranian-oriented, it puts Lebanon and the Lebanese at risk. Whether those activities are within Lebanese territory, in Yemen, or anywhere else in the region is not right and it needs to stop. Lebanon deserves the right to advance as an independent sovereign state with state institutions, with state institutions responsible for security, not militias.

QUESTION: But is LAF one of those state institutions?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: It's absolutely one of those state institutions.

QUESTION: Okay. It's not shot through with Hizballah?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: The U.S. has provided extraordinary support and an unswerving commitment to building the LAF. We are very pleased with the actions and progress the LAF has made. The U.S. looks forward not just to continued U.S. support but to international support for the LAF. Absolutely.

MODERATOR: Thank you. We'll leave it there (inaudible).

QUESTION: Thank you for doing this so late.

QUESTION: Thank you.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: You are quite welcome.

QUESTION: We really appreciate it.

QUESTION: The Saudis, have they actually (inaudible) for the LAF again (inaudible)?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: No.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Thank you, sir.

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