

Press Releases: Press Availability With Argentine Foreign Minister Jorge Faurie

Remarks

Rex W. Tillerson

Secretary of State

Buenos Aires, Argentina

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FOREIGN MINISTER FAURIE: (Via interpreter) Good afternoon. Thank you for making the effort on this Sunday afternoon, on such a fine day. We were just chatting with Rex about the spectacular summer sky we've got today, so thank you for making the effort to come and share this talk with us.

For the record, I would publicly like to state my appreciation for the visit paid by Secretary of State Tillerson to Argentina. He has come to us as part of a regional tour around other countries in the region. We were very pleased to know that he had a chance to visit Bariloche yesterday, which allowed him to have some contact with one of the highly positive elements of Argentina's reality, which is the potential in tourism, Bariloche being one of the most beautiful areas we have to showcase to the world, and we hope he had a chance to enjoy it.

Over the course of this morning, we had a discussion of several matters relating to our bilateral relations in the political field, in the economic field as well. We have talked about the regional situation, exchanging our shared views. We also talked about multilateral mechanisms that we are a part of, our two countries, and how we view the evolution of these regional and international organizations. At the same time, we have shared our concerns, such as peacekeeping and the safeguarding of democracy in our region, obviously referring to the concern our two countries share with regard to the actions of drug trafficking groups and the links that drug trafficking has with terrorism issues, and we've also discussed possible actions with regards to how to jointly combat these two interlinked elements in the context of joint actions.

We also talked about the work coming up in the context of the G20 with the current Argentine presidency, also discussing the views of the United States, which will be very important to us. I also very specifically thanked him for

the support of the United States over the course of last year and in 2016 for Argentina to enter the OECD. And I would like to seize this opportunity to publicly thank the United States for its support right from the first moment when the disappearance of – the *ARA San Juan* submarine disappeared. They were there to provide us with support, technical and otherwise, to look for the submarine. And we Argentines, the whole people, are thankful for all of the efforts made by the United States and by the people of the U.S. and we're indebted to you.

We shared a luncheon with the Argentine ministers of the treasury, defense, production, agro industry, security, and energy. With each of them in the context of our bilateral relations, we have issues to deal with, and I think it was an opportunity for each of these departments to share the expectations of Argentina in each of those portfolios, and I think Secretary Tillerson is now taking home with him an overview of Argentina's position and of our concerns with regard to different areas.

Again, this is an important visit. Before leaving the United States, Mr. Tillerson offered a very interesting lecture at the university of Austin, Texas, his natal state. The university offered an opportunity for him to present ideas on relations with Latin America. I thought that was very valuable, as he referred not only to what Latin America means in terms of the special relationship we must have during the course of this year in view of the many high international profile events to take place in countries around the region, which obviously include the G20 under the Argentine presidency.

But he also talked about the need to look closely at energy security. Argentina has very important potential, and fortunately, Argentina also has that significantly in order to take part in a mechanism in which energy security internationally is guaranteed. During our lunch, he mentioned that energy security is one way to stabilize the international process, and our countries in Latin America can make specific contributions, and Argentina feels particularly well placed to do this jointly with the United States and with other partners, which also gave Minister Aranguren an opportunity to talk about some of the possibilities we have in that field.

The region, like the United States, defends democracy, civil liberties, and political freedoms. This is why Argentina has in recent years made a point of staunchly defending this value as one of the attributes of our region, and along those lines, we have exchanged and shared our views with Secretary Tillerson.

Before taking questions from you, I would like to give the floor to Rex for him to make a statement on the visit. Thank you.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, thank you very much, Foreign Minister Faurie, Jorge, for your very kind words and the welcome that you've given us in Argentina. And it was a – it's a pleasure to be back in Buenos Aires, but it was also a pleasure to spend yesterday in Bariloche, indeed, one of the most beautiful places on planet Earth. And I very much enjoyed the chance to visit the park, an opportunity to meet with the president of the national park administration, Chipi Breard. We had a very interesting exchange. I was –

learned a lot about the amount of interchange between the United States National Park Service and the national park administration in Argentina, where we're both benefiting. And we talked about how we might expand that further, and so I'm taking some ideas back from that discussion to the U.S. that I'll pass along to our Interior Secretary as well.

But just it's an area of cooperation that a lot of people don't know about between our two countries, and what I've learned from that – there's probably other areas of cooperation that don't get a lot of publicity between our countries.

But the U.S.-Argentine relationship is really growing stronger every day as we work together to build a more secure, more prosperous hemisphere, and Argentina has an extremely important role to play in that under the leadership of President Macri. Argentina has reemerged as a strong advocate for democracy and the rule of law, and we in particular welcome Argentina's leadership to promote democracy, including, in particular, in Venezuela. We must continue to work to fulfill the requirements of the Inter-American Democratic Charter. We simply cannot allow and stand idly by to see a total destruction of democracy in Venezuela. The Venezuelan people deserve better, and President Macri has been clear in that regard as well.

President Macri is also leading Argentina to a future of a long-term foundation for greater prosperity, and the United States sees great opportunity and is committed to our joint economic and trading relationship, both two-way trading relationships, and we've had a lot of discussion about trade and investment in each other's countries as well, fostering and protecting innovation, joint science – areas of science and technology of interest, encouraging entrepreneurship. So we see many, many areas for continuing to grow this relationship. And we're also deepening the relationship in other areas, and Jorge mentioned some of these; in particular, strengthening our partnership to combat transnational criminal organizations, counternarcotics efforts, money laundering, terrorist financing, as the minister mentioned. And we are grateful for the close cooperation and collaboration we have in countering these trans-criminal organizations as the U.S. takes a very regional approach to beginning to address these illicit activities.

The United States does welcome Argentina's return to global leadership and we wish them all success for this year's G20, their presidency term, and also the upcoming G20 that will be hosted here in Argentina. We very much look forward to participating and we know it'll be an important agenda that Argentina will put in place.

I also want to thank Argentina for their strong statements of support in our efforts to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula, and echoing our efforts to denuclearize the DPRK.

Before I conclude, I do want to extend my respects to the family members of the *ARA San Juan* and crew for their service, and we acknowledge that.

I also want to extend condolences to the five Argentines who lost their lives

in the terror attack in New York City this last October. We mourn their loss with you as well.

So thank you again, Jorge, for the very warm welcome in hosting me today. It was a very productive lunch meeting. Many important issues were exchanged, and very useful to me already on this visit. So thank you very much again.

FOREIGN MINISTER FAURIE: (Via interpreter) We are now ready to take a few questions. I think that's already been organized.

QUESTION: Nick Wadhams with Bloomberg News. Mr. Foreign Minister, Argentina has spoken quite a lot about the need to isolate Venezuela diplomatically, but there are some concerns that those words have not been put into action. Could you respond to that claim?

And also for both of you, particularly Secretary Tillerson, did you discuss the possibility of oil restrictions on Venezuela as President Macri has asked? And is that something the U.S. would be willing to consider, particularly given the damaging effects it might have on U.S. refiners? Thank you very much.

FOREIGN MINISTER FAURIE: (Via interpreter) First of all, allow me to say that Argentina's position since the inauguration of President Macri's administration with regard to Venezuela has been absolutely clear. We do not recognize the political process and authoritarian deviation of Venezuela. We do not recognize the Constituent Assembly, and we are against the restrictions on all sorts of freedoms in Venezuela, especially civil and political freedoms, and the ban on political leaders that are not allowed to take part in the political process underway. The electoral system is fully controlled by the current government of Maduro. So we have supported all regional mechanisms that have acted with a view to not accepting the legitimacy of decisions adopted by the Maduro government.

With regard to possible sanctions, it is always our idea that sanctions should not affect the situation of the Venezuelan people, the purpose being to control the financing for the current government, whether it be direct or indirect. That is extremely important and something that we have discussed with Secretary Tillerson.

As for the sales of oil and trade in oil that exists, that is particularly important. We should closely follow up on this and ensure subsequent monitoring to ensure an appropriate balance between what the Venezuelan nation needs and what is being used by the leaders of the Venezuelan Government. We have also talked about sharing these efforts, not only within the context of the Lima Group countries, but also to gradually open up dialogue with the CARICOM countries in order to re-dynamize the work of the OAS, which has been stagnant in that regard. The commitment of Argentina to the recovery of democracy and full respect for the institutions and structures on which a true democratic system relies in Argentina is absolute, and we are always closely following the situation in Venezuela, which has now drifted towards sanitary and humanitarian crisis of extraordinary proportions, which obviously and primarily affects neighboring countries like

Colombia, but this has led, among many other things, to a major flow of Venezuelan immigration into Argentina. We have embraced and welcomed them, helping them to reintegrate and spend a time of their lives in our country.

Thank you.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: We did discuss Venezuela fairly extensively, including what additional steps could be taken to increase the pressure on the Maduro regime to return to the constitution, return to their constitutional process, and that's all we've asked – is that they return to the constitution, return to free, fair, and verifiable elections. And that is our only objective.

Obviously, sanctioning the oil or in effect prohibiting the oil to be sold in the United States, or for the United States as well to sell or provide oil to Venezuela, or refined products, is something we continue to consider. I think, as the Foreign Minister indicated, we – our disagreements are with the Venezuelan regime, not the Venezuelan people. And the Venezuelan people are suffering mightily under the current circumstances, and Jorge just described those. You know them well: the number of Vens that find they must leave the country, whether it's to Argentina or to Colombia or to Brazil or to Guyana, simply to receive medical care, medical treatment, or to find food. The situation is becoming quite dire in Venezuela.

So one of the aspects of considering sanctioning oil is what effect will it have on the Venezuelan people, and is it a step that might bring this to an end, to a more rapid end and a more rapid close? Because not doing anything to bring this to an end is also asking the Venezuelan people to suffer for a much longer time.

So we are looking at options, and in particular, we're looking at how to mitigate, and I think as you framed it in your question, how to mitigate the impacts on U.S. business interests, but also there are other regional countries that it would affect as well, and we want to be mindful that we're not – we do not want to harm them with an action we take either.

So it is under study, it's under consideration, and we've had – we've had exchanges: when I was in Mexico City; we had an exchange today about it. And I think the point being that all of us in the region want to see Venezuela return to its constitution. We just – this is heart-wrenching to watch what is happening to the Venezuelan people.

QUESTION: (Via interpreter) From *Clarín* newspaper, Natasha Niebieskikwiat. In the name of my colleagues, I would like to ask Secretary Tillerson if you have asked or if your government will ask Argentina and the region for Venezuela to be excluded from the Summit of the Americas to be held in Lima? And what does Foreign Minister Faurie think about this? Would Argentina be in favor of leaving Venezuela out?

And I would also like to ask the Secretary of State what did you discuss with regard to your expressed concern with regard to Chinese presence in the region and Argentina in particular? Any special requests on that?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: With respect to Venezuela's participation in the Summit of the Americas, we're respectful of the host country, Peru, in this regard. And so we do not in any way want to impinge upon Peru's role as the host nation, and so I think it is something that they will think about and others will think about.

I think it is – it will be challenging as to how we have productive talks because we don't know what the agenda of Venezuelan participants might be. But again, I don't want to suggest one way or the other; I really want to leave that to the host country of Peru to decide out of respect for their government.

And as to China, we did not discuss China today that I recall. If it came up, I don't remember. (Laughter.)

FOREIGN MINISTER FAURIE: (Via interpreter) On the meeting in Lima, what Secretary Tillerson stated is our common view. It is up to the host country to decide on a particular arrangement. Obviously, none of the participating countries is interested in discussing other matters than those related to the agenda set by Peru for that meeting.

(In English) Any other questions?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: I think I have Pete.

QUESTION: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Secretary. As Defense Secretary Mattis mentioned yesterday, chemical attacks are continuing in Syria carried out by the regime. Russia and Iran continue to support that regime as these attacks continue. When you discussed counternarcotics and counterterrorism, did you discuss reports that the Hizballah organization, which is fighting in Syria, is able to raise money in this region, including in Argentina?

And Mr. Secretary Tillerson, the Congress gave you a mechanism for increasing sanctions on Russia, and so far you've chosen not to use it. Can you explain why?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: We did discuss the chemical weapons concerns in Syria today with Argentina, and I'm sure the foreign minister will make his own points on it. He's been a very, very strong proponent of following the chemical weapons accords and eliminating chemical weapons use that all of us have committed ourselves to.

And it is quite concerning to us the reports we're receiving of weaponizing chlorine in particular, but other potential use of chemical weapons in the Syrian conflict on innocent Syrian civilians and citizens, including children. So we are examining the situation carefully.

We also have called upon Russia to fulfill its role as the guarantor of eliminating chemical weapons from the Syrian regime and have called upon Russia to cease their vetoing of the resolutions necessary to reauthorize the Joint Investigative Mechanism of the OPCW to investigate these matters and give us a fair report as to what is happening on the ground.

With respect to Hizballah, we also did speak today in our discussions about all of the reasons why we must jointly go after these trans-criminal organizations – narcotics trafficking, human trafficking, smuggling, money laundering – because we see the connections to terrorist financing organizations as well. And we did specifically discuss the presence of Lebanese Hizballah in this hemisphere, which is raising funds obviously to support their terrorist activities. So it is something that we jointly agree we need to attack and eliminate.

FOREIGN MINISTER FAURIE: (Via interpreter) Indeed, as the Secretary of State just pointed out, we discussed the situation in Syria, a current international issue of great interest. Argentina has a longstanding tradition in terms of defending peace and condemning the use of different kinds of weapons which particularly harm civilians. Specifically, we are a country that clearly condemns the use of chemical weapons. The secretary-general of OPCW was from our country for two terms, and our commitment is clear in that regard, and we have conveyed to the Secretary of State our belief in the importance that the use of chemical weapons should be prevented and should not extend in any war theater, in this particular case in Syria.

As regards the actions of terrorist groups in the region, we are very closely watching developments because one of the significant features of Latin America and South America nowadays is that it's a zone of peace, and this zone of peace should not be jeopardized by the actions of external groups, whether they use the region to search for financing, whether they seek to act within our regions. And as Secretary Tillerson said, we need to intensify every possible exchange, not only in terms of dialogue but also in terms of information on the actions of these groups which take advantage of transnational crime to foster their interests, which Argentina certainly does not agree with.

Last question, please.

QUESTION: Martin Torino, *El Cronista Comercial* newspaper. I would like to ask if you have reached an agreement on biodiesel or whether you are going to take the matter up to WTO. And I would like to ask for Minister Faurie if you intend to make a submission to the U.S. tribunal in that regard, as Indonesia did.

FOREIGN MINISTER FAURIE: We have been discussing with Secretary Tillerson with regard to the bilateral economic relationship, although it's not the specific portfolio of the Secretary of State. But obviously, government interaction enables us to convey Argentina's interest in settling the biodiesel matter. And I think we have ongoing dialogue which gives an opportunity to seek bilateral solutions which we have been working on over the course of the last two or three months. Most recently, Secretary Wilbur Ross visited the embassy of Argentina on the occasion of Ambassador Oris de Roa's taking office, and he restated the interest in continuing to look for solutions. And once this process has been completed, we'll be able to address these issues you mentioned.

(In English) Thank you.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Thank you very much.

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