

Press Releases: Remarks With Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir

Remarks
Rex W. Tillerson

Secretary of State

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FOREIGN MINISTER AL-JUBEIR: (In Arabic.)

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, thank you very much, Foreign Minister Jubeir, and as I commented earlier today, this is my third visit now to Riyadh this year as Secretary of State. It's clearly an indication of the importance of the relationship between the United States and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and in particular I was pleased to come to participate in this inaugural meeting of the Coordination Council that's been established between Saudi Arabia and Iraq. I also want to thank His Majesty King Salman, His Royal Highness the Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, and His Excellency Jubeir for giving me so much time in our meetings today. We had very, very good exchanges.

Again, I think this Coordination Council establishment and this new reopening of relations between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Iraq are extremely important to stability of the region, to the future of Iraq, and for the two countries. I think as Iraq looks towards the future, we know that they want a secure, stable economy, they want the capacity to meet the needs of all their citizens, and in particular, they want to develop the governmental capacities to resist any outside influence, that they are a country that now is able to stand on their own. And I think this does require a repairing and rebuilding of what had been historic relationships between Iraq and its Arab neighbors, which have been lost over the last two or three decades because of the conflict. And I think this engagement is extremely important for the Iraqi people – Iraqi Sunni, Iraqi Shia, the Kurds – that they are able to now reintegrate with their Arab neighbors, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Gulf countries, and others as well.

Now, these areas of cooperation are also going to be, I think, very beneficial to Saudi Arabia as part of the Vision 2030 and the advancement of the Saudi economy, diversifying the economy. There will be new economic

opportunities created from these coordination pillars that have been agreed under the Saudi-Iraqi agreement as well. So again, I think this is extremely important and a very momentous time for both countries.

As I said, I had the opportunity to have very good and extensive meetings with His Majesty, with the Crown Prince, and with His Excellency. During those meetings, we did discuss President Trump's new policy towards Iran, and King Salman gave a very strong endorsement of that policy to counter Iran's malign behaviors in the region. Both of our countries believe that those who conduct business with the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, any of their entities – European companies or other companies around the globe – really do so at great risk. And we are hoping that European companies – countries and others around the world will join the U.S. as we put in place a sanctions structure to prohibit certain activities of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard that foment instability in the region and create destruction in the region both in terms of their involvement in Yemen, but their involvement in Syria as well.

During our meetings, we also discussed the conflict in Yemen, the ongoing Gulf dispute, and a number of other important regional issues, obviously including Syria as well. And as His Excellency just indicated, we did discuss the serious threat that North Korea poses to that region, but to the entire world. We are deeply concerned about that situation. The United States looks forward to continuing the spirit of cooperation and following on the important Riyadh summit that President Trump, at the invitation of His Majesty, attended earlier this year. Many, many important decisions came out of that summit, and other U.S. officials will be visiting the region to follow up on advancing commitments that were made in the Riyadh summit as well.

So I think all of this is evidence of a strong relationship between the United States and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and a real commitment to the security and stability of this region in the world, the fact that you see us here so often. We have a lot to work on, but it's a lot of very meaningful work that is going to bring a greater security and stability to the region. And we have a terrific partner in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. We look forward to accomplishing many things together in the future.

MODERATOR: Vivian.

QUESTION: Vivian Nereim from Bloomberg News. My question is for Mr. Tillerson. How much of your efforts in this push for the Saudi-Iraq council is designed to counter Iranian influence? And does Iraq generally seem interested in distancing itself from Iran or can they do more?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, clearly, I think providing opportunities for Iraq to stand on its own – and so these economic opportunities are vital to, first, rebuilding the Iraqi economy and also rebuilding many – much of its infrastructure. And in doing so, we strengthen Iraq as an independent and whole country, and we do seek to support, as does the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, a whole of Iraq, and that Iraq is secure and stable, and, as I indicated, has the ability to stand on its own. We believe this will in some ways counter some of the unproductive influences of Iran inside of Iraq.

Certainly, Iranian militias that are in Iraq, now that the fight against Daesh and ISIS is coming to a close, those militias need to go home. Any foreign fighters in Iraq need to go home and allow the Iraqi people to regain control of areas that had been overtaken by ISIS and Daesh that have now been liberated, allow the Iraqi people to rebuild their lives with the help of their neighbors. And I think this agreement that has been put in place between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Iraq is a crucial element to assisting the Iraqi people to do that, and in doing so it will strengthen the relationship, again, between Iraq with the Arab world.

FOREIGN MINISTER AL-JUBEIR: If I may add to this, I think I agree completely with what Secretary Tillerson said. The history – the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Iraq have geographic ties, historic ties, familial ties, economic ties, they are neighbors, they share a long border. We have similar ambitions, we have – we are both oil producers, we are both Arab countries, and it is pretty important that our two countries have the best of ties in all areas.

Unfortunately, in the past because of politics, the Iraqis had a radical government under the Baath, which was not very friendly to Saudi Arabia, and then we had Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait, and then we had a war in 2003. So we – the natural tendency of the two countries and people to be very close to each other, as they have been for centuries, was interrupted for a number of decades, and we're trying now to make up for lost grounds. Many people who lived in the Arabian Peninsula moved to Iraq and settled there, lived there for several generations, and came back when the – when Saudi Arabia, the third Saudi state, was founded under the late King Abdulaziz. So we have many Saudis who have family ties to Iraq, there are tribal ties to Iraq, and so Iraq is very, very important to us.

Also Iraq is part of our history. Every Arab and every Muslim takes pride in the Abbasid empire that existed and that flourished in Baghdad. We – this is part of who we are, and so we want to have the best ties with the Iraqis. And the commission was made by both countries to try to work as diligently as we can in order to build the best possible relations. And here we also want to thank our friends in the United States for what they have done with the – with the – working with the Iraqi Government in this area as well as working with us. So we look forward to development of our ties in all areas, we look forward to elevating our relationship to unprecedented levels, the levels that we believe it should be given our humble history and given our common ambitions. Thank you.

QUESTION: (In Arabic.)

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, the United States maintains very strong relationships with all of the countries involved in the Qatar dispute, including Qatar. And the United States intends to maintain those very strong, positive, important relationships. They're important from a security standpoint, they're important from an economic standpoint, so whether it's all four of the Quartet countries or Qatar, no change to the United States posture or its relations – important relationships with the four countries.

As we have indicated in the past, we're hopeful that the countries can engage

in dialogue and find a solution to the differences that exist between them and restore the GCC unity, which we think is a very important and powerful organization in terms of how it conducts itself and how it provides stability to the region. So we encourage dialogue. We hope that there will be a pathway found for the parties to reconcile their differences and to restore the GCC to its former stature.

MODERATOR: (In Arabic.)

FOREIGN MINISTER AL-JUBEIR: Thank you very much.

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