

Press Releases: Remarks With Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir at a Press Availability

Remarks

Rex W. Tillerson

Secretary of State

Courtyard Riyadh Diplomatic Quarter

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FOREIGN MINISTER AL-JUBEIR: Are we ready? Okay. Good evening, everybody. I would like to welcome all of you to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It's a great pleasure and honor for me to welcome my colleague and friend Rex Tillerson on his first visit to Saudi Arabia as Secretary of State. Mr. Secretary, while this may be your first visit as Secretary of State, you have been here many, many, many times over many, many years. You know our country and our region extremely well. And I believe your country is fortunate to have you as Secretary of State during this period. We in the region feel very fortunate having you at the helm of the State Department.

We – today was a truly historic day in the relationship between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United States and, we believe, the beginning of a turning point in the relationship between the United States and the Arab and Islamic world. The – His Majesty the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and President Donald Trump signed a Joint Strategic Vision Declaration, which sets the stage for the building of a truly strategic relationship between our two countries. It will – our relationship will evolve into an even more strategic partnership. It will deal with ways to cooperate in terms of violent extremism, financing of terrorism, terrorism, increasing defense capabilities, working on a defense architecture for the region – initially between our two countries and then looking at how other countries can join. The Strategic Vision also includes trade and investment, education, and working in all fields in order to enhance our common interests and deal with the challenges that face both of our countries.

This is unprecedented. We have not had an agreement, I believe, signed by a king of Saudi Arabia and a president to codify the strategic relationship and where we want to take it moving forward, so this was a great accomplishment, and Mr. Secretary, thank you for your efforts in this regard.

The – in addition to the signing of this Strategic Vision Declaration, the two countries signed a series of agreements, both commercial as well as government to government; that involve trade, investment; that involve infrastructure, that involve technology, that involve defense sales; that involve Saudi investments in American infrastructure as well as American investments in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, whether in the form of building up our defense manufacturing capability or other areas. The total value of those investments is in excess of \$380 billion. I will not get into the details because I believe our colleagues have briefed the media about this extensively. We expect that these investments over the next 10 years or so will provide hundreds of thousands of jobs in both the United States and in Saudi Arabia. They will lead to a transfer of technology from the U.S. to Saudi Arabia, enhance our economy, and also enhance the American investments in Saudi Arabia, which already are the largest investments of anyone.

The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and President Trump had a very, very good and very wide-ranging conversation. They discussed, of course, the challenges facing the region and the world. They began by talking about the bilateral relationship and ways to enhance it and improve it in all areas. They discussed the scourge of terrorism, extremism, terror financing, and how we can work together to eradicate it. They discussed the nefarious activities of Iran and the fact that action has to be taken in order to ensure that Iran does not continue with its aggressive policies in the region and that Iran adhere to the letter by the agreement made between it and the P5+1 countries; that Iran cease its support for terrorism, adhere to the UN Security Council resolutions with regard to ballistic missiles, and cease its human rights violations. The – and its interference in the affairs of the country – of the region.

They discussed the situation in Syria. They discussed the importance of working towards peace between Israelis and Palestinians. The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques expressed the Kingdom's optimism that President Trump, with a new approach and determination, can bring a conclusion to this long conflict. He certainly has the vision and we believe he has the strength and the decisiveness, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia stands prepared to work with the United States in order to bring about peace between Israelis and Palestinians and Israelis and Arabs.

They also discussed the situation in Yemen and of course they discussed trade and investment. It was a – they had a great lunch where the conversation actually began before the meetings. The visit, as I mentioned, is a truly historic visit. We are very honored that President Trump chose to come to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on his first visit, and we look forward tomorrow to hosting the U.S.-GCC summit in Saudi Arabia and the Arab Islamic American Summit, which is historic and unprecedented, that brings together the Islamic world with the United States into a partnership and begins to change the conversation from one of enmity to one of partnership.

The President is to be commended for his foresight and his vision in taking this very bold and very historic step which has the potential of changing our world. If we can change the conversation in the Islamic world from enmity towards the U.S. to partnership with the U.S., and if we can change the

conversation in the U.S. and in the West from enmity towards the Islamic world to one of partnership, we will have truly changed our world and we will have truly drowned the voices of extremism and we will have drained the swamps in which – from which extremism and terrorism emanates.

I cannot overstate the importance of such a gathering, and I believe after this visit the President will go to Israel and will go the Vatican, where he will essentially address the Jewish world and the Christian world and try to bring together the three major monotheistic religions in the world into a partnership so that we move from any discussion of a conflict of civilizations and move towards a discussion of a partnership of civilizations.

And I want to stop here and thank my friend Rex Tillerson for indulging me for taking up so much time. Welcome to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Thank you for all your efforts, and congratulations on a extremely, extremely productive and historic visit.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, thank you, and thank all of you for being here this evening, and in particular I want to thank my longtime friend and colleague, Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir. Adel and I have known each other for many, many years when our facial features were much younger. We remember those days, but we have remained friends for all these many years, and now colleagues. And I'm really proud to be here today with him to talk about this new strengthening of the U.S.-Saudi partnership and relationship.

As Adel just described it, today truly is a historic moment in U.S.-Saudi relations. The United States of America, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are really dedicating ourselves to a new strategic partnership, new for the 21st century, and to charting a renewed path toward a peaceful Middle East where economic development, trade, diplomacy are hallmarks of the regional and global engagement. It's something that we will be working closely together on.

This growing partnership is really grounded in trust, trust between our two nations that we are pursuing the same objectives – cooperation and a shared interest. The elements of this declaration that was signed today, the Joint Strategic Vision, there are many, many elements, and there's a lot of work now to implement those elements and really put them into motion. And so that is going to require significant ongoing engagement and dialogue between our two nations, and so I think you will find that we will be meeting with a great deal of regularity in order to review how these things are progressing. And that is only going to serve to further strengthen, I think, our cooperation, and also I think sends a very strong message to our common enemies. It strengthens the bonds between us and it does chart this new pathway forward and will guide our path forward.

At the core of our expanding relationship really are our shared security interests. America's security at home is strengthened when Saudi Arabia's security is strong as well. And the United States of America and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are embarking on a number of new initiatives to counter violent extremist messaging, as you just heard Foreign Minister Jubeir

describe.

We're also going to be pursuing new approaches to disrupting financing of terrorism and advancing defense cooperation. Today, the United States and Saudi Arabia are conducting vital new expansions of the security relationship that really spans over seven decades. But I think one of the real hallmarks of today is the economic cooperation. And if you have strong economic engagement between two countries, that really is foundational to a strong security relationship as well.

As you heard Foreign Minister Jubeir mention, today we announced 23 foreign investment export licenses leading to upwards of more than \$350 billion of historic direct investment; 109 billion of that is in arms sales to bolster the security of our Saudi partners. And these are going to result in literally hundreds of thousands of American jobs created by these direct investments in purchases of American goods, American equipment, American technology, but also investment into the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as well.

And I think it's important to note that this is an indication of the confidence the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has in the United States investment climate. And I think as they evaluate the future investment climate of the United States, what they are seeing already are the positive impacts of President Trump's actions to improve the business climate in the U.S. for investment in job creation, and they intend to be a part of that with these investments.

Similar to this is a great vote of confidence in the United States in the business environment in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as they continue to advance in their own reforms and seek new opportunities for their own people to create jobs as well.

So strong economic relationships are the foundation for strong security relationships as well.

The intended sales of the defense packages in particular fall into five broad categories: border security and counterterrorism, maritime and coastal security, air force modernization, air and missile defense, cyber security and communications upgrades. And I think you can surely identify in all of these the importance that all of those areas have to U.S. national security as well.

Obviously, along with this will go a lot of training and support to strengthen our partnership with the Saudi Armed Forces as well, which just further strengthens our mil-to-mil relationship.

The package of defense equipment and services supports the long-term security of Saudi Arabia and the entire Gulf region, in particular in the face of malign Iranian influence and Iranian-related threats which exist on Saudi Arabia's borders on all sides.

Additionally, it bolsters the Kingdom's ability to provide for its own security and continuing contributing to counterterrorism operations across

the region. And the important part of this is this huge arms sales package reduces the burden on the United States to provide the same equipment to our own military forces and will strengthen Saudi security forces for the future so that Saudi Arabia is more capable of carrying a greater share of the burden of their own security, which, as I indicated, is important to the U.S. national security as well. So it lowers the demands on our own military, but it also lowers the cost to the American people of providing security in this region. So extremely important to the future of the relationship but also to the cost of providing security for American citizens in this region. It does commit the – it does demonstrate the commitment to our partnership with Saudi Arabia, as I indicated, expanding hundreds of thousands of new jobs.

I think the other important announcement which Adel just mentioned was the new counterterrorism initiative. The new Global Center for Combatting Extremist Ideology, which will be opened in Riyadh, will be a Saudi-led hub for defeating extremism in the information space. As you've heard us say often, we have to defeat ISIS on the battlefield, but we really have to defeat ISIS in the cyberspace. This is their recruiting tool. This is how they message to lone wolves around the world. And this center is going to concentrate heavily on how to enter that space from the standpoint of experts that live in this part of the world and understand how to message to those who might be influenced by radical messaging.

Our partners in the Gulf Cooperation Council, including Saudi Arabia, will be signing a new agreement tomorrow to close gaps in many of these areas, including the financial infrastructure which terrorists can exploit, and we command them for refusing to let terrorists conduct financial operations in their countries. We are calling on all countries to crack down on the way financing and funds reach terrorist organizations.

All of these new initiatives will bolster our joint efforts to deter regional threats from Iran in Syria, Iran in Yemen, and on Saudi Arabia's borders, as I mentioned.

These new steps forward will serve the national security interest of the American people and the Kingdom both. We're very proud of this relationship that we are embarking upon with the Kingdom and are very appreciative of the leadership of His Royal Highness King Salman in putting these initiatives forward. We've had a really productive day today, a truly historic day in this relationship.

Thank you.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary?

MODERATOR: We have time for just a few questions.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary?

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QUESTION: Good afternoon. (Inaudible.) My question is (inaudible) of this summit and the shared character of both King Salman's character and President

Trump. Now, you had said earlier in your briefing that Saudi Arabia and the United States share some objectives. Having said that, are there any crucial and solid actions that will be announced or taken towards Iran's policy of expanding in the region?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: We are closely coordinating our efforts in terms of how to counter Iran's extremism and its export of extremism, in particular its support for foreign fighters, its payment of foreign fighters, its support of militia that are operating not just in Yemen but in Iraq and in Syria.

We are coordinating carefully around how we view the nuclear agreement, the JCPOA, to be used in containing Iran's nuclear aspirations. And it's not just between ourselves and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, but as you're well aware, we have a group of likeminded that is focused on Yemen, a group of likeminded that is a coalition of countries focused on Syria.

So I think the leadership really starts here in the Kingdom, with the strong leadership of His Royal Highness as well as the Crown Prince, the Deputy Crown Prince, and certainly the Foreign Minister. They have been wonderful and very strong conveners of others who are likeminded in terms of this fight against terrorism broadly, but specifically Iran's role in supporting extremist organizations.

MODERATOR: Margaret Brennan.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary – and I have a question for you (inaudible). Secretary Tillerson, two questions. Will you ever pick up the phone and call Iran's foreign minister? Have you ruled out diplomacy with Iran? And secondly, on Yemen, how does pouring in more weapons via Saudi Arabia actually hasten an end to that brutal war?

And Minister al-Jubeir, can I get your reaction to the election – the reelection of Hassan Rouhani and what guidance you have given to the Trump administration about whether to stick by what they have (inaudible) nuclear agreement with Iran?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, in terms of whether I'd ever pick the phone up, I've never shut off the phone to anyone that wants to talk or have a productive conversation. At this point, I have no plans to call my counterpart in Iran, although, in all likelihood, we will talk at the right time.

In terms of the situation in Yemen, our emphasis is on finding a political solution. We view it as a tragic situation, obviously of millions of people on the brink of starvation, because of the impact of the fighting. But we also think it's important to put the pressure on the parties to come to the table and talk.

So I want to make it clear that we have efforts underway on both fronts. I think the rebels in Yemen and those that have taken over the government in Yemen, have overthrown the government, have to know they cannot sustain this fight. They have to know that they will never – they will never prevail

militarily. But they're only going to feel that when they feel the resistance militarily, so it's important we keep the pressure on them. And many of the armaments we're providing to Saudi Arabia will help them be much more precise and targeted with many of their strikes, but it's important that pressure be kept on the rebels in Yemen.

At the same time, we are actively engaged with others in the region to see if we cannot advance a process by which we can bring this thing to a halt politically. We have a lot of work ahead of us in that regard.

FOREIGN MINISTER AL-JUBEIR: Thank you. Margaret, with regard to the reelection of Rouhani, this is an internal Iranian matter. Who they choose for their president is their business, as it should be.

From our perspective, we judge Iran by its actions, not by its words. The Iranians have in the past said some things and done something else. They want to have better relations with us, but then they attack our embassies and assassinate our diplomats. They plant terrorist cells in my country and in countries allied to us. They supply militias that want to destabilize countries, like Hizballah and like the Houthis and others in Syria, with weapons. They intervene and meddle in the affairs of Arab countries like Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen. They support terrorism. They created the world's foremost terrorist organization, Hizballah. They provide comfort and support for al-Qaida with many of the al-Qaida leaders living in Iran for now more than 15 years. They are – they have a relationship with the Taliban that destabilizes Afghanistan.

And so when Iran does all of these things, when they execute terrorist attacks in my country – in 1996, Khobar Towers bombings, where the Iranian military attache in Bahrain, Brigadier General Sharif, he was the control officer, where the heads of the plot escaped and fled to Iran and have been living in Iran ever since – this is not the behavior of good neighborliness, and this is not the behavior of a country that wants others to treat it with respect. This is the behavior of a state sponsor of terrorism who deservedly is on the list of state sponsors of terrorism and who deservedly is sanctioned by the international community for this behavior.

So if Iran wants to be a normal country and wants others to treat it like a normal country, it has to act in accord with international law and the values and the morals of the international system that have existed for centuries. We welcome an Iran that's open to the world. We welcome an Iran that lives at peace with its neighbors. We welcome an Iran that doesn't interfere in the affairs of other countries. But this is not the Iran we see.

So when you come back to your question of what do we think about the reelection of Rouhani, we want to see deeds, not words. And we will continue to judge Iran based on its deeds, and we will continue to base our policy vis-a-vis Iran based on Iran's deeds.

If I may say something, Mr. Secretary, about Yemen. The perception is that we are fighting in Yemen for a reason – or that we have no objective or no goals. The perception is that this was an aggressive war. It was not. People

forget how this started. Saudi Arabia and the GCC worked together to come up with the GCC initiative, which created the transition from President Saleh to President Hadi. Yemen was in a transitional period.

The Yemenis set up what they call their National Dialogue, which includes elements of all walks of Yemeni life and all regions of Yemen – women, students, tribal people, different religious sects – and they came up with a blueprint, a vision for what Yemen should look like going forward: a federal system, rights for everyone, and on and on and on. And then they were going to codify that into a constitution, then the Houthis staged their coup. They attacked the city, they seized the government, and they took total control of a country that is critically important to the security of the region.

Now we have a radical militia allied with Iran and Hizballah in possession of ballistic missiles and an air force that has taken over a friendly government. A friendly government asked for support; we intervened. From day one, we have said there is no military solution. The solution is political. The Houthis have to go back to the negotiating table and implement the outcomes of the national dialogue in Yemen.

The Houthis are less than 50,000 in a country of 28 million. It is unacceptable that they would be allowed to seize power and get away with it. And so we and a coalition of countries have been fighting to restore the legitimate Government of Yemen, which now is in control of 80 percent of the territory.

We have made mistakes and we have acknowledged those and we have investigated those, but we have been charged with things that we didn't do. We were supposed to have attacked a wedding that never happened. We were supposed to have bombed the old city of Sana'a, which never took place. We were supposed to have destroyed cranes in Hodeidah port, which we didn't do; the Houthis did it from the ground up. But these charges were leveled at the Kingdom and the coalition, and they were not correct. But the image prevailed that we were waging an aggressive war against the country, and the Houthis were made to look like they were victims when it was they who started this and it was they who lobbed more than 40 ballistic missiles at our country's towns and cities. It is they who have violated thousands of times ceasefire arrangements that were put in place. It is they who have made 70 agreements and reneged on – more than 70 and reneged on every single one of them – not the coalition, not the legitimate government.

When it comes to assistance, Saudi Arabia has been by far the largest provider of humanitarian assistance to Yemen. The areas under government control have no problem distributing aid. The areas that the Houthis control, they steal the aid and they sell it to fund their war machine. The starvation that exists in Yemen exists because the Houthis laid siege on towns and villages and will not allow humanitarian supplies to get in. That's why people are starving, not because of the bombing. The starvation is because the Houthis steal ships coming into Hodeidah and, like I said, sell the products to fund their war machine. We have distributed aid to every area of Yemen that we can. We are running the largest hospital in [inaudible], incidentally, the Houthi capital, the hospital that the Kingdom built 30

years or so ago and has been operating ever since in order to help the Yemenis. This hospital has been operating even through the hostilities because we have no enmity against any Yemeni.

We – but we will not allow Iran to fall prey to a radical militia allied with Iran and Hizballah. We know what that ends up looking like when we look at the past in our region. And so we appreciate the position of the Trump administration in terms of providing support for our efforts in Yemen both diplomatically, logistically, and so forth. We appreciate their understanding of what's at stake here and we appreciate – and we believe that because of this support, we will be able to put enough pressure on the Houthis-Saleh to bring them to negotiating table and to make an agreement based on the GCC initiative, the outcomes of the Yemeni National Dialogue, and UN Security Council 2260.

MODERATOR: (Inaudible.)

QUESTION: (Inaudible) would you please elaborate more on the Saudi-U.S. vision that was signed today, especially on the technology and communications?

FOREIGN MINISTER AL-JUBEIR: The vision that was signed today is, as we both mentioned earlier, truly historic because it's unprecedented. We have the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and the President of the United States signing an agreement on – signing a declaration that's – that outlines a vision for how we want to elevate an already strategic relationship to an even higher level. We want to intensify the consultation, we want to intensify the cooperation, whether it's in counterterrorism, whether it's in defense, whether it's in technology transfer, whether it's in education, whether it's in trade, whether it's in investment, and we want to create a mechanism that is headed by both the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and the President or whoever they designate that would be a group that would meet periodically in order to see how we can implement a lot of the visions or the strategies or the initiatives that we have.

The expectation is that – well, the United States, as I mentioned earlier, is the largest investor – oil investor in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Incidentally, ExxonMobil, the Secretary's former company, is the largest single investor in Saudi Arabia. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been a good home for American investments, and American companies have been good partners who have transferred technology to the Kingdom, who have provided jobs to Saudis, and who have also helped, most importantly, small and mid-sized businesses gain work and gain technology and gain jobs. So this is very good.

The vision and the economic agreements that were signed that Rex spoke about earlier will increase American investment in Saudi Arabia tremendously and will provide more opportunity for Saudi individuals and for Saudi small and medium-sized businesses to benefit from those investments, including the technology transfer as, in reverse, American – the American people will benefit from Saudi investments in the United States, which will, again, provide hundreds of thousands of jobs.

So I have – like I said, this is a truly historic summit. This is a turning point in the relationship that will take it from a strategic relationship and partnership towards a truly strategic relationship and partnership.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary?

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MODERATOR: We'll take our last question from Jen Jacobs. We'll take our last question from Jen.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, two questions. Can you say if the election today of Rouhani will change anything in Iran? And also, Secretary Tillerson, would you be able to say does the White House know who this person of interest is that's being investigated in the Russia investigation?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, let me – I'll – I'm going to answer both of those as well and then turn it to the foreign minister. I do not have any information or knowledge regarding the person of interest that's been referenced.

I might comment on the Iranian elections as well that what we hope – what I would hope – is that Rouhani now has a new term, and that he use that term to begin a process of dismantling Iran's network of terrorism, dismantling its financing of that terrorist network, dismantling the manning and the logistics and everything that they provide to these destabilizing forces that exist in this region. That's what we hope he does.

We also hope that he puts an end to [Iran's] ballistic missile testing. We also hope that he restores the rights of Iranians to freedom of speech, to freedom of organization, so that Iranians can live the life that they deserve.

That's what we hope this election will bring. I'm not going to comment on my expectation. But we hope that if Rouhani wanted to change Iran's relationship with the rest of the world, those are the things he could do.

FOREIGN MINISTER AL-JUBEIR: As a sign of how truly strategic our partnership is, I agree with what Rex said. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary?

MODERATOR: Thank you, everybody. Thank you very much.

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