

Press Releases: Remarks at the Office of Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi

Remarks
Rex W. Tillerson

Secretary of State

Prime Minister's Office
Baghdad, Iraq
October 23, 2017

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Prime Minister, for receiving me in Baghdad. It is truly a pleasure to be here to have this opportunity to visit with a very important partner in the fight to defeat ISIS, to defeat Daesh. And we congratulate Iraq under your leadership for the tremendous progress and victories – the liberation of Mosul last July, taking one of Daesh's stated caliphate capitals away from it, the recent liberations of Hawija and Tal Afar. These are all very important victories, and we applaud the efforts on the part on the Iraqi forces to defeat Daesh. As you point out, there is still more that has to be done to ensure that Daesh is defeated once and for all and is eliminated from all of Iraq.

We are concerned and a bit saddened by the recent differences that have emerged between the Kurdistan Regional Government and the Iraqi central government. We are – we have friends both in Baghdad, and we have friends in Erbil, and we encourage both parties to enter into discussion and dialogue. I think if both parties commit themselves to a unified Iraq, to a – to the Iraqi constitution, I think all differences can be addressed and the rights of all can be respected and Iraq will have a very secure and a prosperous future.

We had an opportunity to share in an important event in Saudi Arabia, the creation of the Coordination Council. We think this is an important milestone in restoring relationships between Iraq and the Gulf, the GCC countries, and Saudi Arabia that's going to lead to very important economic development in Iraq as well – all for the good of the people of Iraq – and strengthening the security and stability of the region.

We look forward too to furthering U.S. economic activity with Iraq, and we look forward to a future of a secure and stable Iraq with a great partnership

between Iraq and the U.S. for many years to come. Thank you again.

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[Press Releases: Press Availability at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan](#)

Press Availability
Rex W. Tillerson

Secretary of State

Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan
October 23, 2017

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, I want to start by thanking President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah and the Afghanistan leadership for meeting with me this morning. I thought it was very important to stop here in Afghanistan coming to the South Asia region as part of the recently announced South Asia policy and strategy that President Trump has put forth.

I also want to thank – I have Ambassador Llorens and General Nicholson with me – for their leadership, both our diplomatic as well as the incredible military effort of the men and women in uniform here as well, and all of the effort that they've put forth to work towards a peace, which is really our objective.

I think the U.S. has made it clear in terms of our support for Afghanistan, support for a sovereign, unified, and democratic Afghanistan, charting a path to peace, prosperity, and self-reliance. It is imperative at the end that we are denying safe haven to any terrorist organizations or any extremists to any part of this – the world.

(Brief interruption.)

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Okay.

QUESTION: I'm so sorry.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: That's all right. We also want to work with regional partners to ensure that there are no threats in the region as well. And this is very much a regional effort, as you saw was rolled out in the strategy itself. So we're demanding others also deny safe haven to terrorists anywhere in the region. We are working closely with Pakistan in that regard as well.

President Ghani has assured me of his firm commitment to reform, continuing reforms here in Afghanistan, as well as his new anti-corruption strategy and policies that is going to underpin much of the effort here. We also discussed preparations for parliamentary elections next year in 2018. It's very important that those elections go forward as well. And finally, we discussed regional developments and agreed on the vital importance of all regional stakeholders to work with us, work with the United States, but also work with our other partners, the NATO partners and others who take a great interest in this region, to fight against terrorists, fight against insurgents, to support peace and stability for Afghanistan.

We have a lot of hard work, some challenges ahead of us. But the United States and our partners here in Afghanistan are committed to seeing this through.

With that, happy to take a question or two.

MODERATOR: John.

QUESTION: Sir, what kind of message – let me back that up. You've said in the past that if the Pakistanis do not take firm action in denying safe haven for the Taliban and other extremists, they could suffer a cut in U.S. – further cuts in U.S. assistance – the United States, I believe, has given Pakistan a menu of other actions that it could take – unless it takes those actions within a certain timeframe. Are you able to give us details of what that menu is and what the timeframe is?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: I'll be traveling to Islamabad tomorrow, in fact, to meet with Pakistani leadership as well, and we have made some very specific requests of Pakistan in order for them to take action to undermine the support that the Taliban receives and the other terrorist organizations receive in Pakistan. And we've said in this whole strategy this is a conditions-based approach, and so our relationship with Pakistan will also be conditions-based. It will be based upon whether they take action that we feel is necessary to move the process forward of both creating the opportunity for reconciliation and peace in Afghanistan, but also ensuring a stable future Pakistan. In our conversations with Pakistani leadership, we're as concerned about the future stability of Pakistan as we are in many respects here in Afghanistan. Pakistan needs to, I think, take a clear-eyed view of the situation that they're confronted with in terms of the number of terrorist organizations that find safe haven inside of Pakistan. And so we want to work closely with Pakistan to create a more stable and secure Pakistan as well.

MODERATOR: Gardiner.

QUESTION: Sir, this sort of has the feel of a forever war. Is there a part of this strategy – as you said, it's conditions-based, but it seems as though that condition means a U.S. military presence far off into the horizon. Isn't it?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, the President has made it clear that we're here to stay until we can secure a process of reconciliation and peace. It's not an unlimited commitment; he's also made it clear it's not a blank check commitment. That's why it is a conditions-based commitment.

But I think if you consider the current situation in Afghanistan – and we were talking about this a few minutes ago – and you look a few years in the past and what the circumstances were, Afghanistan has come quite a distance already in terms of creating a much more vibrant population, a much more vibrant government, educational systems, a larger economy. And so there are opportunities to strengthen the foundations for a prosperous – a prosperous Afghanistan society.

Clearly, we have to continue the fight against the Taliban and against others in order for them to understand they will never win a military victory. And there are, we believe, moderate voices among the Taliban, voices that do not want to continue to fight forever. They don't want their children to fight forever. So we are looking to engage with those voices and have them engage in a reconciliation process leading to a peace process and their full involvement and participation in the government. There's a place for them in the government if they're ready to come renouncing terrorism, renouncing violence, and being committed to a stable, prosperous Afghanistan.

MODERATOR: Michele.

QUESTION: Have you spoken with the Pakistanis since your big speech on India? Are you trying to reassure them about what India's involvement is here? And I understand Ghani is going as well.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: I've not spoken to anyone in the Pakistani leadership since the speech I gave on India. That's certainly something we'll be talking about during the visit tomorrow. But I think our view of the relationship with India is one that's of strategic importance not just for this specific region, but in the context of that speech it was about a free and open Indo-Pacific region stretching all the way to – from Japan to India.

So it's a broader relationship. We do, though, believe that India has a very important positive role that India can play in the process to achieve a peaceful, stable Afghanistan as well. They already are providing important economic activity – creating jobs – which is important for the future Afghanistan. And we think they – we want to encourage that as well. We think they can be a very positive influence on creating the right environment for the future in Afghanistan.

MODERATOR: All right, guys. Thanks so much.

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Press Releases: Ongoing U.S. Humanitarian Assistance in Response to the Rakhine State Crisis, Burma

Media Note
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC
October 22, 2017

The U.S. government has provided nearly \$40 million in life-saving emergency assistance in direct response to the Rakhine State crisis since August 25. This brings the total U.S. humanitarian assistance in FY 2017 to displaced Burmese in Burma and the region to nearly \$104 million.

U.S. assistance goes to our international organization partners on the ground, including the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the World Food Program (WFP), which help provide protection, emergency shelter, food and nutritional assistance, as well as health care and psychosocial support for the more than half a million displaced Burmese in Burma, Bangladesh, and the region.

We applaud the Government of Bangladesh's generosity in responding to this severe humanitarian crisis and appreciate its continued efforts to ensure assistance reaches people in need.

We call for an immediate end of the violence in northern Rakhine State, and for the Burmese government to allow refugees to return home voluntarily, safely, and with dignity. We welcome Burma's commitment to bringing long-term peace and stability to Rakhine State by implementing the recommendations of the Annan Commission report.

The United States also calls upon the Burmese government to allow for

unhindered humanitarian access to people in Rakhine State, Burma, so we can more fully address pressing humanitarian needs. We also urge other donors to join us in providing additional humanitarian assistance for those affected by the crisis.

For further information, please contact PRM Press at PRMPress@state.gov.

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[Press Releases: Remarks With Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani](#)

Remarks

Rex W. Tillerson

Secretary of State

Doha, Qatar

October 22, 2017

FOREIGN MINISTER AL-THANI: (Via interpreter) I am pleased to welcome His Excellency, my colleague, the Secretary of State, Mr. Rex Tillerson, during his visit in Doha. Meetings were held between His Excellency the Secretary of State and His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad, the emir of Qatar, as a bilateral meeting between us. During the meeting, His Highness – His Highness expressed respect and appreciation to President Donald Trump for his keen follow-up and his concern with the development of Gulf crisis. He also thanked him for following up with efforts through the visit of the Secretary of State Tillerson to the region.

His Highness shares Mr. Trump's opinion that this crisis has gone on far too

long and that it affects the way we face common challenges. He also confirmed the state of Qatar's commitment to the option of a dialogue based on sound and key principles without violating the sovereignty of the state and the international laws. And he also commended the efforts of His Highness the Emir of Kuwait in order to overcome this crisis that leaves us all as, I think, lost, having incurred the large losses. We also hoped that wisdom would be the approach adopted.

We also spoke about the importance of the bilateral relations between the two countries and the strong ties that rely on strategic factors and at different levels, including defense, economy, and education. We would also like to thank the United States and all its vital institutions for supporting the development of these relations and for supporting the development role fulfilled by the state of Qatar, and the fact that they are also participating and furthering development efforts.

We also spoke about regional issues, including the Syrian issue, Iraq, Libya, and the Palestinian policy. We also confirmed our support of all the efforts that would help end the conflict between all Palestinian parties in order to reach a good ground for feasible and successful peace efforts in line with the Arab initiative of peace.

There were a lot of discussions of many topics to confirm the important role played by the United States in combating terrorism and preserving the safety and the security of our region in partnership with all the regional powers and countries, knowing that the region is unfortunately going through a lot of crisis due to the blockade.

We would like to thank you once again. Secretary of State. You have the floor.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, thank you very much, Excellency, and it's again a pleasure to be in Doha, a place I've visited and known for many, many years. I want to thank His Highness the Emir for the very generous time he gave me so we could have an important discussion about a number of topics, and we just concluded also a very useful bilateral with His Excellency Foreign Minister al-Thani. But we did touch on, obviously, our joint counterterrorism efforts in the region, a topic of great importance to all of us, the ongoing Gulf dispute, and then many other topics which His Excellency just listed for you. All of those were discussed as well.

We also discussed the progress towards implementing the counterterrorism memorandum of understanding, which His Excellency al-Thani and myself signed this past July. And significant progress has been made in a number of important efforts to – in our counterterrorism joint efforts, including sharing of terrorist lists, terrorist financing. We participated in a number of counterterrorism technical sessions and training, and significant steps have been taken to enhance the aviation security. We have additional work to do, but we are quite pleased with the progress and the relationship that has been strengthened between the two countries, Qatar and the United States, to counter terrorism.

The United States will continue to work closely with Qatar as we crack down on terrorists and those who are paying their bills. As you know, President Trump made the financing of terrorism a key outcome of the important Riyadh summit that was held earlier this year. All of our Gulf partners are doing an extraordinary effort to counter terrorism. All have more that we can do together.

And finally, as the Gulf dispute does near its five-month mark, the United States remains concerned, as concerned today as we were at the outset, that the dispute has had negative consequences economically and militarily for those involved, and certainly the United States has felt the effects of that as well. We think it's very important for the GCC to continue to pursue unity. It is most effective when it is unified, and none of us can afford to let this dispute linger.

So we again call on all the parties involved to continue to work towards discussion and dialogue and finding a way to deal with the differences. We ask that everyone minimize the rhetoric and de-escalate the tensions and take steps to do so. It's not a healthy environment that we find for the current situation.

The U.S. is going to continue to do our part. We're going to continue to support the emir of Kuwait in his efforts towards finding a diplomatic solution, and we will continue to engage all parties as how we can better help them understand concerns and possibly find a solution.

Also though in closing, I want to thank the state of Qatar for their very generous \$30 million contribution that they made toward hurricane relief in the United States. They were very quick to come with those contributions, and we appreciate it. I also want to acknowledge the very strong economic relationship that exists between the United States and Qatar – obviously important U.S. business interests here in Qatar, but Qatar is making important investments in the United States as well, and we welcome those and look forward to expanding the economic relationship between our two countries, important to the longer-term relationship as well.

Thank you, Your Excellency.

MODERATOR: (Via interpreter) We will start taking questions. (Inaudible) Al Jazeera.

QUESTION: (Via interpreter) Good evening, Your Excellencies. (Inaudible) adopting a path towards dialogue. What are the details of this path toward this (inaudible)? And what are the important steps (inaudible) resolve crisis that is entering its fifth month? This is expressing how people are expecting a bigger role and bigger steps to be taken by Washington. Can Washington impose a solution based on, as was mentioned in Riyadh and in other countries, the fact that the United States is on a friendly basis with two (inaudible), what are you told by the Kuwaiti envoy who visited Qatar a few days ago?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, first, let me make clear that the U.S. does not

have any intention to impose a solution on anyone in the current dispute. We are staying in very close contact with all of the parties. President Trump himself speaks to the leaders of the countries that are involved, and he has stressed to all of those that he believes that it is time to find a solution to this dispute. The U.S. is prepared to facilitate in any way we can, whether it be facilitating the discussions themselves or offering possible roadmaps for solutions.

But fundamentally, the parties have to come to a point that they're ready to solve this. I think, again, we have expressed our view that we think it's time, that it's time that solutions be sought, and we're going to continue to make those points. We're going to continue to offer whatever assistance we can, whether it be hosting a dialogue or facilitating dialogue, and support the ongoing efforts of – as I said, of the emir of Kuwait. But it is not for the U.S. to impose an answer on anyone.

FOREIGN MINISTER AL-THANI: (Via interpreter) Regarding the Gulf summit, we did not receive any official statement or official letter from (inaudible). However, we hope it is held in a timely manner – on time, that is. And as mentioned by the Secretary of State, the importance of the GCC as a system for collective security is very high. Unfortunately, it is the victim of this manufactured crisis against the state of Qatar and it has directly impacted due to the irresponsible actions by the blockading countries.

From our opinion as the state of Qatar, holding any GCC meeting would present a golden opportunity at least to commence this dialogue in a civilized way through civilized and well-known official channels. However, if delay is to be adopted, it would be attributed to the hotheadedness of these countries and their willingness to take a confrontational approach. We should at least start discussing the reasons behind this manufactured crisis. We see them always resorting to non-diplomatic manners that have nothing to do with modern ways of establishing state ties, using tribalism and politicizing religion as well as other irresponsible actions.

The state of Qatar is still committed to the GCC as a comprehensive system and we confirm our commitment to it, and I hope the blockading countries share this perspective with us so that they fulfill their responsibility seriously in order to put an end to this crisis, considering that we do not see any logical reasons for (inaudible).

MODERATOR: Michele Kelemen from NPR.

QUESTION: I'm way in the back here, sorry. Yes, hi. I have a question about, first of all, Kirkuk. How much are you worried about the Iranians helping Iraq retake parts of Kirkuk? And what's next with the Kurds? I mean, they feel kind of abandoned by the administration. Tell me a little bit about what you tried to do to head off the referendum and how you deal with the situation now.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, with respect to – excuse me, with respect to Iranian presence in Iraq, Prime Minister Abadi is in full control of his country, he's in full control of the movement of certain military operations.

Now, for our part, we have encouraged restraint and we have encouraged the minimization of any type of conflict between forces involving either the Kurdistan forces, the Peshmerga, or forces that might be part of the Iraqi Government coalition.

The – leading up to the referendum itself the U.S. was quite clear that we did not support the Kurdish independence referendum. We did not believe it was time given that the battle to defeat ISIS is still underway. And while there have been significant victories and significant progress in Iraq, that task is not yet complete. And clearly, what we were concerned about is the referendum would lead to a distraction from the fight to defeat ISIS or Daesh, and that unfortunately is, I'm afraid, what we're now experiencing with these efforts to move forces back to prior positions.

So we hope that the parties will find themselves in a position of restraint. Our view is that there was a lot of movement of forces, whether they be Peshmerga forces or movement of Iraqi coalition forces, during the war to defeat ISIS, and this was all very well coordinated under the prime minister – Prime Minister Abadi's leadership, also working with coalition forces as well to defeat Daesh. I think there was always a general understanding though that once the war to defeat Daesh was completed and areas were liberated and they were secure, that everyone would return to their positions where they were located prior to the emergence of Daesh in 2014.

So a lot of this movement that you're watching and reporting on is really the Peshmerga forces repositioning to locations that they were prior to that fighting and Iraqi forces needing to relocate to locations prior to the fighting as well, and respect what have been the agreed-upon boundaries between the autonomous Kurdistan region and the rest of Iraq. So we have encouraged that the parties do that, that they re-establish themselves in accordance with those previously agreed boundaries. And then we have encouraged the parties strongly to engage in Baghdad to fully implement the Iraqi constitution. The Kurdish people have a number of unfulfilled expectations, rights that were promised them under the constitution that were never delivered upon, and so there are a number of actions that need to be taken by the parties to fulfill the Iraqi constitution itself.

Prime Minister Abadi has, I think, made it clear his commitment to follow through on those constitutional obligations, and we hope the Kurds will engage with Baghdad in a very productive way to see that the constitution is fully implemented. I think many of the Kurds' concerns will be addressed through that process. So we encourage the parties to not escalate the situation, not lead to conflict, and stay coordinated, and not forget that the war to defeat Daesh is not yet over and that remains the greatest threat to Iraq.

QUESTION: (Via interpreter) (Inaudible.) A question to His Excellency Sheikh Mohammed al-Thani: This crisis started with the policy of the Qatar news agency, and then the blockading countries spoke about what was not seen by the international media. But I'd like to talk about the diplomats of the blockading countries – the foreign ministers, specifically the Bahraini Foreign Minister Sheikh bin-Ahmed, who said that the Qatari crisis is not

only about Qatar's foreign policy, but also its social situation that is based on oppression and discrimination. What is your opinion, Your Excellency?

FOREIGN MINISTER AL-THANI: (Via interpreter). Of course, this crisis has shown us a lot of strange things, including the so-called diplomats' and foreign ministers' statements. Unfortunately, we didn't see them making any diplomatic or mature statements. What is funny about those statements is that we are accused by a country that is known for its social oppression and for causing tension, and they are accusing us of the same. We can tell them that if they don't have this, they don't have – and they don't respect their peoples' rights, they cannot call on respecting people's rights. I think they should know that we're noble.

MODERATOR: Barbara Plett from BBC.

QUESTION: Thank you. Mr. Tillerson, you very strongly indicated in an interview before this trip that you felt the Saudi-led quartet was responsible for the impasse in the feud with Qatar. You said they weren't yet willing to engage. So I wanted to ask you: One, did you say that to the Saudis? Two, is there any sign they are willing to go for those face-to-face talks you're talking about, and did you extend an invitation to the White House like Mr. Trump said? He said he was willing to invite them to the White House to mediate. And three, do you think the Iranians are benefitting from this crisis?

And a question to Sheikh Mohammed al-Thani, Mr. Tillerson in Riyadh was talking about countering the spread of Iran's influence, especially in Iraq. Do you – are you worried about the spread of Iran's influence in the region, and do you think it is a threat? Thank you.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: With respect to talks getting underway, yes, I did in my meetings with the Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman ask him to please engage, please engage in dialogue. There's not a strong indication that parties are ready to talk yet. And so we cannot force talks upon people who are not ready to talk, so there has been no invitation to the White House because it's not clear the parties are ready to engage. But we are going to continue to work towards that dialogue and toward that engagement. But as I said in response to an earlier question, we cannot and will not impose a solution on anyone.

With respect to Iran gaining, I think the most immediate and obvious gain that Iran has is that it is Qatar's only airspace available for Qatar to operate, and so it puts Qatar in a position of having to engage with Iran in a positive way to meet Qatar's needs. But this really removes a lot of other alternatives for Qatar to seek what's best for its own people as well.

So that's just a simple example of what we are concerned about. But beyond that, anytime there is conflict and destabilization among countries that are typically allies, someone will always come in to exploit those differences.

FOREIGN MINISTER AL-THANI: Well, regarding your question about countering the Iran influence in the region, I believe Qatar position has been clear. Before

the crisis, during the crisis and even post the crisis, we are against any negative influence in the region and any interference in the region and in the Arab countries. And we have been very clear expressing those concerns with Iran and with anyone who has such any negative influence there.

We believe that the current crisis is really undermining our efforts to solve the issues here in the region, it's undermining our efforts in countering terrorism since they were claiming that they are (inaudible) the counterterrorism efforts. We see the opposite here; that they are affecting the countering terrorism efforts in the region by imposing such a measure in a country which was just few months ago considered a strong ally for them.

For Qatar, Qatar has been – carried very clear policy on different aspects with Iran, but we remain committed that all the problems here in the region we need to resolve through a dialogue. And this has been not Qatar position only, but Qatar and the other GCC countries' position at our last meeting in December 2016 in Bahrain, where the leaders committed that they have to engage with Iran in dialogue, in a serious dialogue which is based on the principle of noninterference of each other affairs and stopping any negative influence in the region, and we are remain committed to these principles and to resolve through the dialogue.

MODERATOR: (In Arabic.)

QUESTION: (Via interpreter) Your Excellency Sheikh Mohammed al-Thani, about the Kuwait initiative, all the delegations (inaudible) the Gulf, all the foreign ministers, all have stood behind what the initiative is and supported it. The Kuwaiti foreign minister was here. What did he tell you? (Inaudible) Saudi Arabia? Where is the (inaudible)? What about the Kuwaiti initiative today? Is it standing before the blockade right now? What about the demands of not interfering into Qatar's sovereignty?

FOREIGN MINISTER AL-THANI: (Via interpreter) Regarding our support of the Kuwaiti initiative and the support of all friendly countries to this initiative and them standing behind it, Qatar's position and request from these countries is that the Kuwaiti initiative be the umbrella for any mediation to resolve this crisis, first in view of the position of Kuwait and the GCC, and second, the importance of relying on the GCC as a system, as an agency to ensure safety and stability. There are attempts by blockading countries to pretend that this is normal, to normalize the current situation. Usually such attempts and endeavors to normalize these measures are done when dealing with international relations. However, humanitarian issues cannot be normalized, like separating families, 26,000 people who find themselves homeless because of this crisis.

So you cannot speak of normalization while instigation continues, while there are constant spending irrationally to promote propaganda against the state of Qatar in the west and spread false rumors. So this pretense of normalization is not true. If they truly wish to normalize these measures, let them normalize the way normalization should be carried out in a transparent way and not continue instigating and interfering in Qatar's internal affairs.

We commend and appreciate the efforts of the (inaudible) Kuwait. (Inaudible) spoke about Kuwait's commitment to pursue its mediation efforts despite all the difficulties that they are faced with due to the blockading countries. Thank you.

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[Press Releases: Remarks to the Staff and Families of U.S. Embassy Riyadh](#)

Remarks
Rex W. Tillerson

Secretary of State

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
October 22, 2017

SECRETARY TILLERSON: It's great to be in Riyadh and great to be here with you. And as you know, this is the third time back to Riyadh now for me already in the short time that I've been serving in this position. Of course, traveled to Riyadh many times in my prior life, so Saudi Arabia is a place that's quite familiar to me. I have many, many longstanding friendships here and have made many new ones in this position as well. So again, really pleased to be here. It's a pleasure to see all of you as well.

And I think the frequent visits, not just my own but President Trump's historic Riyadh summit, one of the very earliest initiatives on the part of the President, along with frequent visits by other top officials from the administration and there'll be others coming in later this week, I think really speaks to and clearly demonstrates the importance of this relationship, the U.S.-Saudi relationship, to this regional security but also to our own national security as well. And as such, it speaks to the

importance of your role, your mission, the work that you take – undertake for us here. So we appreciate all that you do in representing us.

We particularly appreciate the locally employed staff, and I understand we have some members of that staff – we were talking coming in to the building here. Some of you have been here since this building was stood up many years ago, and that's a tremendous asset to us to have that kind of continuity. As our Foreign Service officers and others rotate through posts, and you've seen many come and go, you really provide a great sense of continuity for the mission here and extremely important for our efforts here. So we appreciate you.

I also want to acknowledge the families that are here stationed in Mission Riyadh but also in the consular officers throughout the Kingdom. Your support for your spouses that are here are really crucial to their ability to carry out their mission. And I know having lived overseas myself from time to time, I know what it's like to be on the other side of the world from your roots back home. You end up missing a lot of family events. I missed a few birthdays, missed a wedding or two. But you're serving on behalf of your country. I know your families back home are extraordinarily proud of what you're doing as well, and we appreciate the sacrifice that everyone makes to undertake the responsibilities of serving here in Saudi Arabia on our behalf.

Great to see a lot of the family members here. I always love to see Boy Scouts in uniform. Many of you probably know something of my past, having served as a past national president of the Boy Scouts, and I'm the middle of three generations of Eagle Scouts. My father was an Eagle Scout, and I have a son that's an Eagle Scout, and I managed to get through it myself, so great to see some scouts in uniform here as well.

But a real – a real honor to be here. I do want to say a real quick word because I know there's a lot of interest in what we're doing back home with what we're styling as the redesign of the State Department. And this is very much a bottom-up, a bottom-up, employee – your colleagues – led initiative. Many of you, I hope, participated early on when we had the listening tour, we called it, exercise. We had over 35,000 of your colleagues, and I'm sure many of you responded to the survey that was conducted early on. We had 300 face-to-face interviews with various members of the State Department at all types of positions and including people out in mission.

And this was so that I could get some baseline understanding of what are the issues that you're faced with, what are the challenges, what are things we can do to help you get your work done more effectively and more efficiently. So out of that we've created a number of working teams. There are five core teams that are working on a number of work processes and addressing all kinds of issues, from hardware issues like our IT systems, which I know everyone knows we need some upgrading to, and other ways that we can make you efficient. But we're looking also at how we train people for assignment, lengths of assignment, how do we allow you to contribute more, what are the obstacles to getting your work done, what are the interface issues, how can we clear some of the obstacles out for you. So this is very much led by your colleagues, and then my role is to try to clear and do some blocking and

tackling for all of that effort as well.

So the work's underway. We're going to be saying more here as we get towards the end of the year. We have some what we're calling quick – we believe they're quick wins and things that we'll be able to do right away and implement throughout 2018 that we hope you're going to see the effects of that are going to make your work easier, more efficient. And ultimately, the objective is that you have a very fulfilling, rewarding career. You've dedicated yourself. This is what you want to do. We want to allow you to be successful and to have a very fulfilling career and realize all of your own aspirations as well. So it's something that I'm quite committed to, and we have a great team of folks back home helping us, your colleagues helping us in that regard as well.

So again, I want to thank all of you for the commitment you've put forth here at Mission Riyadh and elsewhere. I want to thank again the families and our locally employed staff as well. All of you are extremely important to what the United States is attempting to do in the region, to our national security, but also creating these strong people-to-people bonds. And we clearly have very strong people-to-people bonds here with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and that's in no small part due to you, how you represent the United States of America. You are the face of America to the people of Saudi Arabia, and how you do that day-to-day is really important to our success.

So again, I thank all of you. It's great to see you this morning. I wish I could make it all the way to the back of the room. And I'm going to shake a few hands and be around a little bit, but thank you very much for allowing me a few minutes to talk with you this morning. Thanks so much.

(Applause.)

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