

Press Releases: Remarks at the Saudi Arabia-Iraq Inaugural Coordination Council Meeting

Remarks

Rex W. Tillerson

Secretary of State

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

October 22, 2017

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Your Majesty, Prime Minister, Excellencies, and delegation members, it is indeed a pleasure to return to Riyadh, particularly for this endeavor. I thank His Majesty King Salman for his hospitality and for hosting us today for this important event. I am grateful to both His Majesty and Prime Minister Abadi, for indeed it is a joy and an honor (inaudible) the Saudi-Iraq Coordination Council.

This event highlights the strength and breadth as well as the great potential of the relationship between (inaudible), and I am honored to take part in this ceremony. The U.S.-Saudi relationship remains strong as does the U.S.-Iraq relationship. Your important relationship between the Kingdom and Iraq is vital to bolstering our collective security and prosperity, and we take great interest in it. The United States supports enhanced cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Iraq across many pillars of the Coordination Council.

We are encouraged to see that Saudi Arabia and Iraq have made important strides in your bilateral relationship as evidenced by the recent opening of the Arar border crossing in August and the resumption of flights between Riyadh and Baghdad last week. Both represent the beginning of what we hope will be a series of even more tangible actions to improve relations, to strengthen cooperation, on a host of issues.

We are grateful for this progress and urge you to continue to sustain this vital relationship for the stability of the region. I also appreciate Prime Minister Abadi's leadership in the Government of Iraq. In recent months, you all have watched the impressive achievements in Iraq's fight against ISIS/Daesh, particularly the swift victories of Iraqi Security Forces in Tal Afar and Hawija.

As major military operations near conclusion, Iraq's financial needs for

stabilization and reconstruction are evident. The Joint Coordination Council will not only lead to closer cooperation in the fight against Daesh, but it will also help support the rehabilitation of facilities and infrastructures in the areas liberated. The council will also contribute to reforms that will grow and diversify Iraq's private sector. Such reforms will encourage foreign investment that is vital to Iraq's reconstruction efforts. This will be critical for winning the peace that has been earned through hard-fought military gains.

We are grateful that this council meeting underscores how important it is for the region that Iraq have a growing, stable economy and a government with increasing capacity to provide for all of its citizens. This event will lay the foundation for improved cooperation on these and other issues for the future of Saudi Arabia and Iraq to continue to build a relationship for the benefit of both members and the broader region. The United States and friends support continued cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Iraq, and again, we congratulate you on this important conclusion of the Coordination Council. Thank you.

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[Press Releases: Remarks With Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir](#)

Remarks
Rex W. Tillerson

Secretary of State

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
October 22, 2017

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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Press Releases: Terrorist Attack Against Egyptian Security Forces

Press Statement
Heather Nauert

Department Spokesperson

Washington, DC
October 21, 2017

The United States strongly condemns the terrorist attack against Egyptian security forces near the Bahariya Oasis yesterday, which killed dozens of Egyptian personnel and wounded many others. We offer our profound condolences to the families of the deceased and the government and people of Egypt, and extend our best wishes for the full and speedy recovery of those injured.

The United States stands with Egypt at this difficult time, as we continue to work together to fight the scourge of terrorism.

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Press Releases: Venezuela: Illegitimate Parallel Institutions

Press Statement
Heather Nauert

Department Spokesperson

Washington, DC
October 19, 2017

The United States condemns the Venezuelan government's latest anti-democratic action: requiring newly elected governors to submit to the illegitimate Constituent Assembly to be sworn into office. The use of this illegitimate, parallel institution to take over the country's constitutional authorities is alarming. This maneuver, on the heels of the October 15, fraudulent elections, is another example of the Maduro regime's authoritarianism and disregard for the will of the Venezuelan people. We support a complete election audit by credible, internationally recognized entities, and the establishment of an independent National Electoral Council.

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[Press Releases: Cool Cats: Celebrating Snow Leopard Conservation](#)

Media Note
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC
October 19, 2017

Acting Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs Judith Garber will

showcase U.S. government efforts to conserve snow leopards at an event at the U.S. Department of State on October 19. The event will celebrate the successful completion of a U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and World Wildlife Fund project on Conservation and Adaptation in Asia's High Mountain Landscapes and Communities, and will highlight the international cooperation and conservation efforts of 12 snow leopard range countries.

Sometimes referred to as the "Ghosts of the Mountains," snow leopards are found in the mountains of Afghanistan, Bhutan, China, India, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Nepal, Mongolia, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. This iconic big cat is the top predator in its habitat and heavily impacts the ecosystem in which it lives. Snow leopard populations are being threatened by habitat loss, human-wildlife conflict and wildlife trafficking. According to current estimates, there are only between 4,000 and 8,000 left in the wild. In September 2017, IUCN, International Union for Conservation of Nature, down-listed snow leopards from "endangered" to "vulnerable to extinction," but their success in the wild remains tenuous. International Snow Leopard Day is October 23.

Representatives from the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, USAID, the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Embassy of Mongolia, the Snow Leopard Trust, and the Global Snow Leopard and Ecosystems Protection Program will also speak at the celebration, joined by representatives of all twelve range countries.

The United States is committed to working with international governments to protect snow leopards. USAID and the World Wildlife Fund's Conservation and Adaptation in Asia's High Mountain Landscapes and Communities project has successfully promoted conservation of snow leopards and their habitat; improved water security; and fostered sustainable natural resource management and development in snow leopard range areas.

For more information, contact Tory Peabody (PeabodyVW@state.gov) and follow the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs on Twitter @StateDeptOES and #snowleopards.

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