

Press Releases: Secretary Michael R. Pompeo's Meeting With U.S. Forces-Afghanistan and Resolute Support Mission Troops

Readout
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC
July 10, 2018

The below is attributable to Spokesperson Heather Nauert:

Secretary Pompeo met with U.S. and coalition troops yesterday at Bagram Airfield in Afghanistan. The Secretary thanked the troops on behalf of President Trump and expressed his appreciation for their hard work and sacrifice. He commended them for delivering security to Afghanistan and providing the Afghan people with an opportunity for a peaceful future.

Secretary Pompeo reiterated that the Taliban cannot win on the battlefield, cannot wait us out, and will ultimately have to settle their differences with the Afghan government at the negotiating table.

The Secretary also answered questions from the troops on both internal governmental and global issues such as North Korea in which he underscored the U.S. commitment to developing a peaceful solution on the Korean Peninsula.

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Press Releases: Secretary Pompeo's Meeting With Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan of the United Arab Emirates

Readout
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Washington, DC
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The below is attributable to Spokesperson Heather Nauert:

Secretary Michael R. Pompeo met today in Abu Dhabi with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan of the United Arab Emirates. The Secretary thanked the Crown Prince and the Foreign Minister for the United Arab Emirates' strong partnership and longtime friendship with the United States. The Secretary expressed his appreciation for the United Arab Emirates' substantial commitments in Syria and Iraq, and the officials agreed to continue collaborating to enhance regional security. They also discussed how to further strengthen robust bilateral economic and trade ties.

On Yemen, the Secretary, Crown Prince, and Foreign Minister agreed on the importance of all sides supporting the UN-led political process, facilitating critical humanitarian and commercial access, and working toward a comprehensive agreement to end the conflict.

The Secretary emphasized the President's desire to see the Gulf dispute eased and eventually resolved, and his hope that our Gulf partners will work jointly and in unity to promote regional security and stability, and stand against Iran's destabilizing activities.

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[Press Releases: Interview With Mina Al-Oraibi of The National](#)

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Fairmont Hotel
Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates
July 10, 2018

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, thank you so much for making the time to speak to *The National*.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Of course, wonderful to be with you.

QUESTION: Thank you. I want to ask you about Iran, basically, because of course, here in the region, we have a lot of concerns about Iran's expansionist policies, and you recently said that Ayatollah Khamenei has to be held to account for destabilizing the Gulf's security. How can he be held to account?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So there are lots of ways. First, a united opposition is very important, and it's one of the reasons I'm here. We have great partners here in the United Arab Emirates, we have great partners with the Saudis and the Bahrainis, many countries pushing back, demonstrating that what we're asking is pretty simple: Iran to become a more normal country.

The tools we'll use will be varied. They'll often be diplomatic. You see the U.S.-led efforts on sanctions, so economic tools. And then it's also the case that we will be prepared to make sure that when Iran does things like launch missiles that come here or go to Riyadh, that we're prepared to defend the region as well militarily.

QUESTION: The recent threat of closing the Strait of Hormuz is one that, of course, the whole world cares about. Is that a realistic threat?

SECRETARY POMPEO: The United States has made very clear we're going to make sure that the sea lanes remain open. It's been a longstanding U.S. policy and we're prepared to make sure that that happens.

QUESTION: Now, if we look at Yemen, we see an uptick of activity from Hizballah and from Iran's support for the Houthis. What can the international community do to stop that and how can we see an end to the war in Yemen?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So I do hope that there ultimately is a political resolution there. The UN, through Mr. Griffiths, is working hard to achieve that political resolution. But at the end of the day, it's going to require a global effort to convince the Iranians that this kind of meddling, this kind of interference, this kind of promotion of violence directed at Arab countries outside of Yemen doesn't make sense for them. And so all the same tools that I described previously are the ones that will ultimately lead to the Houthis and others in Yemen realizing that the war is not worth continuing, that a political resolution is the one that's best for the people of Yemen.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) sorts of actions that can be taken in addition to, of course, the sanctions to convince the Iranians to change their behavior? Because what we've seen in the last few years is whatever pressure has not wielded the results you're hoping for so far.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, remember the last few years, the sanctions were lifted. And so much of this malign activity, this increase in resources provided to Hizballah, the increase in resources provided to the Shia militias fighting in Iraq and in Syria, the support for the Houthis in Yemen, the efforts in Bahrain, those all took place against the backdrop of a relief from sanctions as a result of agreements that were entered into in the JCPOA. America has now withdrawn from those. These sanctions are returning. And I am convinced that the combined effort of the Gulf states and the United States and the Europeans will ultimately achieve a good outcome and convince the Iranian people that this is not the kind of activity their government ought to be involved with.

QUESTION: Are you working on an alternative deal when it comes to the nuclear activities of Iran? Do we expect another deal, a different type of deal?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, if there's another deal, it'll be completely different. It will be of permanent duration and not temporary. It will have a verification regime that is sufficient to ensure that nuclear weapons aren't being hidden or developed in a clandestine way. And equally importantly, it won't just be about the nuclear program. It'll be about their space program, which is really a proxy for their missile efforts. It'll be about their missile program, it'll be about the malign activity, it will be a comprehensive effort to convince Iran to behave in a way that we ask every other country in the world to behave.

QUESTION: Iran's presence in Syria is one that causes concern for Syrians and the region. Are you in talks with the Russians to work together to push out Iran and Hizballah's influence in Syria?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So we have spoken with many parties in Syria, including the Russians, and made very clear, as have the Israelis, that the Iranian presence in Syria is not appropriate and won't be tolerated. So we're working diligently to develop a political solution that not only achieves America's goal of defeating ISIS that's still there, still a challenge for us in Syria, but leads Iran to the place where they conclude it's not worth the candle for them to be in Syria. There's no reason for them to reach out to that country. There's no reason to have military forces on the ground there. And we're going to undertake, along with our partners, a comprehensive program to diminish that activity.

QUESTION: We've seen some Iraqi militia forces in Syria under the leadership of Iranian military commanders or the IRCG commanders. What do you say to the Iraqi Government on that role that they're playing?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So yes, Qasem Soleimani is causing trouble throughout Iraq and Syria, and we need to raise the cost for him, for he and his organization and for him personally. With respect to the Iraqi Government, we're working closely with the Iraqis to make sure that as they move through their government formation process – as the election is now over, as they move through the government formation process, what America wants is an Iraqi – Iraq for Iraqis, not influenced by Iran but rather comprised of the various groups: the Kurds, the Sunnis, the Shias. We want everyone to have a voice in an Iraqi national government that leads to an Iraq that is strong and independent and robust and economically successful as well.

QUESTION: If we go back to Syria, is the U.S.'s position still that Assad must go?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Our first step is to take down the violence. The first thing that America's working on politically is to reduce the level of violence. We have six million-plus displaced persons. We've got to restore the opportunity for the Syrian people to begin to engage politically and develop a stable, non-violent Syria. At that point, the political decisions, the constitution of Syria will be sorted out by the Syrian people.

QUESTION: And I want to ask you finally, on the issue of Qatar, as the Qatar crisis has developed, they've gotten closer and closer to Iran. So as this coalition is put together to face off on Iran's activities in the region, what is your message to the Qataris on that?

SECRETARY POMPEO: My message and the President's message to the entire Gulf (inaudible) is that we hope that they will begin to have discussions and resolve this dispute. We understand there are differences of views. This happens among countries with great frequency. But we do also recognize that these disputes lead to a strengthening of Iran, it allows Iran to create a wedge between Gulf states that have a shared threat from the Islamic Republic of Iran. And so we are hopeful and we are prepared to try and help facilitate

to the extent we can a resolution of this set of disputes.

QUESTION: Okay. Thank you very much for your time.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you, Mina.

QUESTION: I appreciate it.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you very much.

QUESTION: Thank you.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Wonderful to meet you.

QUESTION: You too. It's great to meet you and best of luck on your trip.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you very much.

QUESTION: Eagerly anticipated.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes.

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[Press Releases: Interview With Mohannad Al Khatib of Sky News Arabia](#)

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Fairmont Hotel
Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates
July 10, 2018

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, thank you so much for being with us on Sky News. How are you doing

SECRETARY POMPEO: It's wonderful to be with you.

QUESTION: Thank you. The United States is reinforcing various sanctions on Iran. We've heard statements over the last few days coming from Tehran that basically amount to threats, (inaudible) in the region, that – some went as far as threatening to close the Strait of Hormuz. How would the United States respond (inaudible) such threat?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, it all starts with Iranian bad behavior, the kinds of things that threaten the people here in the Emirates – missiles being launched from Yemen that strike real risk to the people of all of the Gulf states. And so American policy is aimed to deter that.

I've seen these remarks about their threats. The world should know that America is committed to keeping sea lanes open, to keep transit of oil available for the entire world. That's the commitment we've had for decades. We continue to honor that commitment.

QUESTION: Aside from the nuclear issue with Iran, Iran is involved (inaudible) in many destabilizing activities in several countries in the hemisphere: Yemen (inaudible), Syria. What will the United States do in order to limit these activities?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, one of the great things is we have wonderful partners like the Emirates, the Saudis, many countries, the Bahrainis are all working alongside of us to push back against Iranian malign behavior, whether it's their activity underwriting the Houthis in Yemen, Hizballah in Syria and in Lebanon, in Iraq and Syria Shia militias that are inflicting real harm on ordinary citizens.

So we intend to do a number of things, though one that we are most focused on today is ensuring that we deny Iran the financial capacity to continue this bad behavior. So it's a broad range, a series of sanctions aimed not at the Iranian people, but rather aimed at the singular mission of convincing the Iranian regime that its malign behavior is unacceptable and has a real high cost for them.

QUESTION: Iran has said several times that they intend to stay in Syria for the long term. How does the United States view this?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, Iran needs to get out of Syria. They have no business there. There's no reason for them to be there. There's been Iranian influence there for a long time. Iranian forces, Iranian militias must leave the country.

QUESTION: Also on the issue of the Syrian (inaudible), there is a big (inaudible) going on south of Syria today. The armed groups that were supported at one time by the United States are losing ground. How are you looking at this?

SECRETARY POMPEO: It's a very difficult situation. From the United States perspective, we need to achieve a political solution in Syria, one that reflects the diversity of the Syrian nation. We are aiming to set the conditions for a political resolution. We're prepared to continue the conversations often led by the UN in a way that takes down the violence, de-escalates the threats to the people of Syria, allows the some six million displaced persons from Syria to begin to return and to rebuild, and that ultimately achieves a constitution and a political resolution that's consistent with what the Syrian people truly want and deserve.

QUESTION: Are you in agreement with the Russians on what's going on in the south of Syria today

SECRETARY POMPEO: No, we had an agreement with the Russians that they would not move in the south. There was a de-escalation zone that the Russians had agreed to. They now have clearly violated that and we are working with all parties concerned to get each party – the Russians, the Syrians, the Iranians, everyone to honor the commitments that they've made in the various political processes that have been undertaken with respect to Syria.

QUESTION: You had a tweet a few days ago saying that Iran's activities in Yemen, the – (inaudible) the prolonged suffering of the Yemeni people will not be tolerated. What will Washington do in order to (inaudible)?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, we've done a lot of things. We've done work to push back against the threat of al-Qaida in Yemen. We've worked with the Saudis and with the Emiratis to reduce the risk from the Iranian threat there in Yemen through identifying transit of weapons that are moving in and around the region so that the Houthis don't have the material to conduct these threats. We think it's important that every place Iran attempts to use its force we raise the cost for them such that the Iranian people will ultimately reject that use of force.

QUESTION: The U.S. allies in Europe that were part of the 5+1 agreement with Iran are in talks with Iran right now in order to salvage what's left of this agreement. How are you hoping talking to the Europeans about this and how are they responding?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, it's a great question. I'll actually leave here and headed for Brussels. I'll meet with my European counterparts to talk about exactly this set of issues. Frankly, we agree in large part. The Europeans understand the threat that Iran poses. Indeed, just this past week, there were Iranians arrested in Europe who were preparing to conduct a terror plot in Paris, France. We've seen this malign behavior in Europe. The Europeans understand the threat. We are working through a difference. The American people concluded that the JCPOA made no sense, that it was truly a pathway for Iran to have a nuclear weapon. So we are attempting to stop that. We're working now with the Europeans to develop a plan and a path forward to continue to stop Iran from its nuclear program, but also to push back against its missile system and its terrorist behavior.

QUESTION: Some countries in Europe and in other parts of the world intend to

keep on getting oil from Iran even after the sanctions are imposed. How would you look at this?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, that will violate the sanctions that we put in place. Come November 4th, there will be a U.S. sanction that prevents crude oil from passing from Iran to other countries. It will be sanctionable activity. We will enforce those sanctions. There will be a handful of countries that come to the United States and ask for relief from that. We'll consider it. But make no mistake about it, we are determined to convince the Iranian leadership that this malign behavior won't be rewarded and that the economic situation in their country will not be permitted to be rectified until such time as they become a more normal nation.

QUESTION: There is an upcoming summit between President Trump and President Putin in Helsinki soon. Will Syria be a major topic to be discussed?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Oh, I'm confident that there will be a broad range of issues discussed. The issues in Ukraine with the Russians and this topic of Russian involvement in Syria will also be part of the conversation between the two leaders.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, thank you so much for your (inaudible).

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you, sir. Thank you. Thank you very much for your time today.

QUESTION: Thank you.

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[Press Releases: State Department Terrorist Designation of al-Ashtar Brigades \(AAB\)](#)

Media Note
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC

July 10, 2018

The Department of State has designated al-Ashtar Brigades (AAB) – an Iran-backed terrorist group in Bahrain – as a Foreign Terrorist Organization under section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act. The Department has also designated AAB as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT) under section 1(b) of Executive Order (E.O.) 13224. The Department also designated two AAB-affiliated individuals ([Ahmad Hasan Yusuf and Alsayed Murtadha Majeed Ramadhan Alawi, AKA Mortada Majid Al-Sanadi](#)) as SDGTs in March 2017.

Today's designations seek to deny AAB the resources to plan and carry out terrorist attacks. Among other consequences, all of its property and interests in property subject to U.S. jurisdiction are blocked, and U.S. persons are generally prohibited from engaging in any transactions with this organization. In addition, it is a crime to knowingly provide, or attempt or conspire to provide, material support or resources to the organization. These designations support a larger campaign to deter Iran's malign behavior and stop its support for terrorists around the world.

In announcing these designations, Coordinator for Counterterrorism Nathan A. Sales emphasized that, "From Africa, Europe, North America, Asia, and the Gulf, Iran is using terrorist proxies to extend its malevolent influence and upend international peace and stability. Al-Ashtar is yet another in a long line of Iranian sponsored terrorists who kill on behalf of a corrupt regime. Today's designation serves notice that the United States sees plainly what Iran is trying to do to Bahrain through its proxy, the terrorist group Al-Ashtar."

Established in 2013, AAB is an Iran-backed terrorist organization aimed at overthrowing the Bahraini government. AAB has claimed responsibility for numerous terrorist attacks against police and security targets in Bahrain. In March 2014, AAB conducted a bomb attack that killed two local police officers and an officer from the United Arab Emirates. In January 2017, AAB shot and killed a local police officer. AAB has also called for violence against the Bahraini, British, Saudi Arabian, and U.S. governments on social media.

In January 2018, AAB formally adopted Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) branding and reaffirmed its loyalty to Tehran to reflect its role in an Iranian network of state and non-state actors that operates against the United States and its allies in the region. Additionally, AAB members have received weapons and explosives from Iran, training at IRGC-funded camps in Iraq, and senior AAB members have taken refuge in Iran to evade prosecution by Bahraini authorities.

Today's action notifies the U.S. public and the international community that AAB is a terrorist organization and has committed or poses a significant risk

of committing acts of terrorism. Terrorism designations expose and isolate organizations and individuals, and deny them access to the U.S. financial system. Moreover, designations can assist the law enforcement activities of U.S. agencies and other governments. A list of State Department-designated FTOs and SDGTs is available here: <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/list/index.htm>.

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