

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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[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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