

Press Releases: Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Southeast Asia Patrick Murphy on the Situation in Burma

Special Briefing
W. Patrick Murphy

Special Representative and Policy Coordinator for Burma

Via Teleconference
Washington, DC
September 8, 2017

MS NAUERT: All right, thank you very much. Good afternoon, everyone, and thanks so much for joining us for today's call on the situation in Burma. I know there's a lot of interest in this subject. Today we're joined by Patrick Murphy, who is the deputy assistant secretary of state for Southeast Asia in the Bureau of EAP, East Asian and Pacific Affairs. Today's call will be on the record. It will be embargoed until the conclusion of the call. And with that, I will turn it over to Deputy Assistant Secretary Murphy. Great to see you again.

MR MURPHY: Thank you very much, Heather, and good afternoon to all. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to talk to you today a little bit about Burma, a country that has great importance for the United States. With regards to the situation in northern Rakhine State, we continue to be very focused on a couple of key objectives. First and foremost, restoring humanitarian assistance so that those in need can be assisted by the international community and by Burmese authorities. That restoration of access would also allow accurate assessments of those needs. This is a complicated part of the country, and more specifically, a complicated part of Rakhine State itself, and there are some knowns about actual needs and conditions.

We're very keen to see access restored for the media as well so that journalists can help tell us a more accurate picture of developments there – again, a very complicated part of the country. We continue to condemn attacks of a variety of nature – attacks on security forces; attacks on civilians; attacks by civilians – and we're very concerned about the sustained allegations of abuses being committed that is resulting in the displacement

of many people. We're urging all parties to take steps to calm tensions. And on a parallel basis, for authorities and partners of the Burmese authorities to continue to address the underlying challenges that are behind the most recent eruption of violence.

There have been a few developments since Heather had an opportunity to talk with you all yesterday. UN and related agencies are getting a better assessment of those people who have crossed the border from Burma into Bangladesh, and indeed, it looks like numbers are even higher than has been discussed in the last few days. So the movement since August 25th is quite significant, and we don't have any reason to doubt, in fact, that the movements are probably well over 200,000 people.

What is less well known are the numbers of internally displaced persons, IDPs, and that would encompass a variety of populations – not just the Rohingya, but ethnic Rakhine and other minorities who habitate inside Rakhine State.

We continue ongoing discussions, primarily through our ambassador, Ambassador Scot Marciel, and his team in Rangoon, with the government – both the civilian authorities and military authorities. We're also discussing with other donors and partners, the Red Cross entities, primarily focused on a humanitarian operation to restore a presence and assistance for humanitarian needs in northern Rakhine State.

We continue ongoing discussions with neighboring countries, including Bangladesh, which is among several countries in the region who have hosted Rohingya over many, many years, and we're quite grateful for that hospitality and that safe haven.

With that, please, I'd like to answer any questions that you have.

MS NAUERT: Okay, go ahead. And with that, we'll take your first question.

OPERATOR: Thank you. And for questions, you may queue up by pressing *1. Once again, *1. And first in queue is Dave Clark with AFP. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Oh, hi. Thanks for taking this call. Obviously, the Burma Government is a recent convert to partially elected rule. Who is responsible for security in Rakhine? Obviously, the government, but is it under military command? Is it under command of the civilian government? And who should be held responsible for any security force massacres there or any failure to protect the civilians from non-security force attack?

MR MURPHY: Thank you for that question, Dave. I think you pointed to one of the complexities of Burma. Well, in the bigger picture we are very appreciative of the fact that the country's undergone a transition to elected civilian government – in fact, the first civilian government in half a century. This represents the country's best opportunity for progress in several generations. The reality is that that elected government inherited a constitution which accords the armed forces of Burma considerable authorities. And among those authorities is a preeminent role in northern

Rakhine State.

So our discussions are both with the elected civilian government, which has overall responsibility for the country, but as well with military and other security force leaders. And our messaging is quite consistent. There needs to be a responsible reaction to the attacks on security forces that began this crisis on August 25th. Security forces, in fact, need to be there to protect civilian populations and to address the threats posed to the governing structure. At the same time, they have a responsibility to carry out those activities in accordance with rule of law and international human rights.

This is a series of messages that we carry both to the civilian government and to the security leaders there.

MS NAUERT: Okay, next question please.

OPERATOR: Thank you very much. The next question is from Matthew Pennington with the Associated Press. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Hello, Patrick, and thanks for doing this call. Do you feel that the U.S. has much leverage with the Burmese authorities, particularly with the military in this situation? Because there's been a lot of international condemnation, but it seems that the flood of Rohingya from the country continues, and the violence continues. And would the U.S. consider re-imposing sanctions on some entities in Burma, such as the military, for implication in rights abuses?

MR MURPHY: Matt, I don't think we have approached the relationship with Burma in terms of leverage. It is, in fact, a partnership. And since the transition to elected government, we have a dialogue and a conversation that is very comprehensive. And as partners, we are looking to help this transition to democracy succeed. As I mentioned earlier, this is the best opportunity in generations for Burma to get on the right track, and the new government inherited a host of enormous challenges – national reconciliation and peace that has eluded Burma since independence in the 1940s, communal conflicts, and the particular case of Rakhine State. This is a longstanding problem, many, many years, and the new government has been grappling with it from day one.

So our approach as a partnership is to help them build their capacity to have the tools to address the underlying problems. Now, that doesn't mean that we withhold our concerns and our criticism when warranted. And indeed, now we are calling for a cessation of the violence and tensions that tend to lead to violence.

In terms of sanctions, our sanctions were in place for the better part of two decades, primarily designed to facilitate the transition to democracy and improve human rights. The decision to lift the vast majority of those sanctions was based on the successful election and the early actions of the new government to address human rights concerns. That doesn't mean they have resolved all of their work; a lot of room for improvement. But as partners now, we can encourage, we can facilitate, we can assist. And even in a very

complex situation like Rakhine State, that's what we're trying to do.

There are some shortcomings, the Government of Burma and the armed forces, and we are pointing them out, and focused on the very immediate needs, and that is primarily ending tensions, restoring humanitarian access, and beginning this difficult process of the underlying challenges that lead to these tensions.

MS NAUERT: Okay, thank you. Next question, please.

OPERATOR: Thank you. That will come from David Brunnstrom with Reuters. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Yes, thank you very much. You've mentioned the security forces should be doing more. Do you think that Aung San Suu Kyi, as a civilian leader, should be speaking out more, expressing concerns about the treatment of the Muslim minority? Many thanks.

MR MURPHY: I think, first and foremost, it's important to point out that Burma is a very diverse country with hundreds of ethnic groups, a long, complicated history both to achieve independence and to find its way in the modern era. There is discrimination against many ethnic minorities. And in Rakhine State, the plight of the Rohingya in particular is one of the greatest human tragedies anywhere in the region. They're not the only ethnic minority facing challenges even in that area. I mentioned earlier the ethnic Rakhine, themselves a minority population, suffering from underdevelopment and limited rights over many, many years. But the Rohingya certainly stand out, and the fact that over a million of them inside the country have been devoid of basic rights for generations has been a longstanding issue and a longstanding concern for us in the United States. It needs to be addressed.

I think in positive terms what the Government of Burma has done is to acknowledge and accept the fact that they need to address the challenges in Rakhine State. It was a year ago that Aung San Suu Kyi and her government established the Rakhine Commission under the leadership of former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. On August 25th, the very same day of these attacks which appeared to be timed with this development, the Rakhine Commission released its final report and recommendations.

Aung San Suu Kyi and her government have embraced those recommendations, and now we encourage the full implementation. It won't be easy. There are over 80 recommendations, but many of them address the underlying conditions in Rakhine State that cause so much friction and challenge. We want to work with the government, ensure they are focused on this task, have the capacity to address it. But as I say, it was Aung San Suu Kyi who established the commission and in turn has embraced their recommendations. That's encouraging. That's a process that we want to be behind and partner with.

MS NAUERT: Okay. Next question, please.

OPERATOR: Thank you. That will come from Kylie Atwood with CBS News. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi. Thank you for doing this. I am curious. You mentioned that you have been talking with the government about the shortcomings of their army and security forces. Could you detail any of those shortcomings that you've actually pointed out thus far? And I just want to clarify that at this point you do not think that Muslims are being targeted specifically; you think it's anyone in the Rakhine region? Thank you.

MR MURPHY: Thank you, Kylie. We have a very robust dialogue with the Government of Burma that covers many facets of our relationship and the challenges in the country. In fact, we have a formal partnership. I joined Ambassador Marciel a year ago November to launch that partnership in the capital Nay Pyi Taw, and some 22 Burmese ministries were represented at the table – both civilians and military entities, and the government and the military acknowledged many of their shortcomings and challenges.

I think when we talk about the shortcomings of the armed forces in particular, this is one that the government has identified. The constitution affords the armed forces of Burma, also known as the Tatmadaw, considerable authorities: control over three key ministries, 25 percent of parliamentary seats, one of the vice president slots. And it's the government that hopes and aspires to some constitutional reform so that democracy can be fully consolidated. That's an inspirational but an admirable one, and to the extent that we can, we want to support it.

Inside Rakhine State, this is a particular case where the security forces have the majority of authorities. Now, I've been there. I've been to northern Rakhine State. This is a challenge for the new government. As I mentioned earlier, there has been longstanding discrimination against ethnic minorities throughout Burma, and it's very, very much present in the case inside Rakhine State for a number of different populations. This is a country that has challenges with religion, but many religions operate and are active in the country, not just the majority Buddhist, but there's substantial Christian organizations, and Muslims are present in virtually every major town and city across the country, plus some other religions like Hinduism and animus groups.

Primarily this is an ethnic issue in Rakhine State. The Rohingya have been treated separately; they're not acknowledged as a recognized nationality, and as I mentioned earlier have been devoid of basic rights for many, many years.

The commission on Rakhine State that the government established and has now produced recommendations gets at a lot of these basic rights like the path to citizenship, efforts to improve development. This is one of the most impoverished part of a country that is already quite poor. The government has embraced these recommendations, and now it's all about implementation. And I think that's what we want to be focused on.

MS NAUERT: And the last question, please.

OPERATOR: Thank you. That will come from Michelle Kosinski with CNN. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi, thank you. I understand that this is a longstanding conversation and a long process, but in this latest escalation and the violence that we see out there, in these multiple conversations that the U.S. has had with that government, how receptive are they to doing something more quickly?

And oh, there was something else I was going to ask you. I'm doing too many things at once here. I guess just about their level of receptivity to these conversations, and have they committed to doing anything in the short term even if it's just allowing more access to, say, journalists there? Thanks.

MR MURPHY: I will reiterate in addition to the challenges here being longstanding, they're very complex and there are some new, troubling dimensions. On August 25th, the attacks on security forces were quite substantial, quite coordinated. This is relatively new. And there were casualties. That creates a lot of concern, a lot of fear, and a requirement for security forces to respond.

Obviously, in the response is where we're focused. It needs to be in accordance with rule of law and respect for human rights and in ways that protect local populations. With the movement of large number of people both across the border and internally it's quite clear that they are fearful of their security. So what we are doing with the government is not only seeking instant and very urgent reaccess for humanitarian assistance and the media but also efforts to calm tensions, that security forces act responsibly, and indeed that civilians act responsibly, because another complex, new dimension is there are local militia among local populations who are attacking civilians that adds to this cauldron and hotspot nature of northern Rakhine state.

We are finding the discussions with the government to be productive. Naturally, when humanitarian access and media access is restored we'll be able to say those discussions have produced results. But they are productive, they are ongoing, and we are identifying very willing partners within the government who understand the situation and indeed would like to see access restored for humanitarian organizations, for the media, and efforts to calm tensions.

That's our immediate focus. As I also noted, on a parallel basis it's not too early to start with implementing the recommendations of the Annan commission. Thank you.

MS NAUERT: Okay. Thanks, everyone, for joining us, and thank you, DAS Murphy, for your expertise. The embargo has now been lifted, and have a great weekend. As a reminder, that was on the record. Thank you.

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Press Releases: Secretary of State Tillerson Travel to the United Kingdom

Press Statement
Heather Nauert

Department Spokesperson

Washington, DC
September 8, 2017

U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson will travel to London from September 13 through September 14 for UK-hosted meetings on DPRK and Libya. In London, Secretary Tillerson will meet with senior British officials, including Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson and National Security Advisor Mark Sedwill. Secretary Tillerson will discuss a range of issues with his counterparts, including the need for increased pressure to counter the threat to global security posed by the DPRK's nuclear and missile programs. The Secretary will also participate in a ministerial on Libya with UN Special Representative of the Secretary General for Libya Ghassan Salamé.

Follow Secretary Tillerson's travel via @StateDept on Twitter and go to the Department's Flickr account for the latest trip photos. Stay connected at <https://blogs.state.gov/engage>, and keep track of all of the Secretary's travels at <https://www.state.gov/secretary/2017travel/index.htm>.

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Press Releases: Tajikistan Independence Day

Press Statement
Rex W. Tillerson

Secretary of State

Washington, DC
September 8, 2017

On behalf of the Government of the United States of America, congratulations to the people of Tajikistan as you celebrate your independence on September 9.

Since gaining independence in 1991, Tajikistan has been a strong partner to the United States in promoting regional security and stability. For 26 years, our partnership has been based on mutual respect and cooperation, especially in the areas of security, energy, and economic development. This cooperation has benefitted our two nations and the Central Asian region as a whole.

I am confident that our partnership will continue to benefit our countries and achieve success on issues of mutual interest and concern in the next year and beyond.

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Press Releases: Remarks With Kuwaiti First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah al- Khaled al-Hamad al-Sabah at the U.S.- Kuwait Strategic Dialogue

Remarks

Rex W. Tillerson

Secretary of State

Washington, DC

September 8, 2017

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, good morning, everyone, and welcome to the State Department. The United States is very pleased to be hosting this Strategic Dialogue with our friends from Kuwait. We welcome Foreign Minister al-Khaled, Deputy Foreign Minister al-Jarallah, Ambassador al-Sabah, and the entirety of the Kuwaiti delegation. Thank you for being here. Thank you for traveling here.

This Strategic Dialogue deepens our close relationship, grows bonds between our people, and enhances practical cooperation for the security and prosperity of both of our nations. President Trump and I had a very productive meeting at the White House with His Highness the Emir yesterday. The President reaffirmed our friendship and discussed a number of shared objectives in the region. As a concrete demonstration of our close relationship and partnership, we have agreed to a number of initiatives that will deepen the ties between the U.S. and Kuwait.

Our governments have agreed to enhance Kuwait's military capabilities, the next steps of which will be the provision of F/A-18s. FBI Director Wray and Minister of Interior Khaled signed a counterterrorism information-sharing arrangement which will strengthen our fight against terrorism. Customs and Border Patrol and the Kuwait director general of customs also signed an agreement today to share customs information, which will also be very important in those efforts.

The U.S. and Kuwait are signing two more memorandum of understanding today. The first is an education MOU between the Department of State and Kuwait's

ministries of education and of higher education. This MOU will help prepare Kuwaiti students to study in the United States and encourages relations between U.S. and Kuwaiti institutions of higher education. We've also finalized an MOU between the Department of Commerce, SelectUSA, and Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority to encourage additional bilateral investments in both countries.

We recognize His Highness the Emir's leadership and continue to support Kuwait's efforts to help bring about a settlement to the GCC dispute, including Egypt. The United States and Kuwait both recognize the importance of GCC unity to meet the challenges of the region that we all face together, not the least of which are the threats from Iran. We appreciate that Kuwait hosts the U.S. military facilities and makes significant contributions to America's initiatives directed at Kuwaiti and regional security. We are pleased we are increasing our security cooperation and our information sharing to prevent threats we both face.

The United States also has a deep appreciation for Kuwait's leadership on humanitarian commitments which help stabilize the region. In recent years, Kuwait has provided more than \$9 billion in humanitarian support in Syria, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon. Kuwait is the second largest single-country donor to these efforts worldwide after the United States. And lastly, we thank the large Kuwaiti delegation for their hard and diligent work with our teams to advance the bilateral agenda. We look forward to implementing the new agreements and strengthening our partnership for years to come, and we certainly look forward to a very productive session this morning.

I now invite the foreign minister for his remarks. Thank you.

FOREIGN MINISTER AL-KHALED: (Via interpreter) In the name of God, most compassionate, most merciful, my dear friend, Secretary Tillerson, U.S. Secretary of State, your excellencies, members of the two participating delegations in the second round of the U.S.-Kuwaiti Strategic Dialogue, ladies and gentlemen, peace of God be upon you all.

At the outset, I am very delighted to express on my behalf and on behalf of the Kuwaiti delegation our deepest thanks and gratitude for all the warm welcome and generous hospitality since we have arrived to this great capital, Washington. And as well we thank the two delegations and the members of these delegations for all their efforts exerted in preparing for this distinguished meeting and all these distinguished efforts.

We also would like in this context to reiterate our deepest, heartfelt condolences for all the destruction that happened in Texas because of Hurricane Harvey – all the losses of lives and all the destruction. We pray to God that the United States of America be spared the dangers of the looming Hurricane Irma, and that God protects your country and the American people, our friends, from any harm.

My dear friend, Secretary Tillerson, ladies and gentlemen, today as we meet, this comes to follow up on the historical and important meeting that happened between His Highness, the Emir of Kuwait, Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-

Sabah – God protect him – and His Excellency President Donald Trump to continue and follow up on all what they discussed, and try to implement it and execute it to shape the outlook, the future of the outlook of our relationship for the 25 year to come in a way that reflects the vision of our leadership and the aspiration of our people. In this context we certainly much value what was said by President Trump when he met the Emir of Kuwait, His Royal Highness, Emir of Kuwait – God protects him – reaffirming the commitment of the United States of America to the security, the safety, and the stability of Kuwait.

In culmination for the strong bonds between our two countries we send – we signed during the visit of the Emir of Kuwait, His Highness, to Washington during the second round of the strategic dialogue, we signed seven agreements and memorandum of understanding in the fields of counterterrorism, customs, petroleum, higher education, scientific research, investment, electricity and power, and water in addition to 16 agreements that were previously concluded, for a total of 23 agreements – total of agreements concluded between our two friendly countries.

The size of the Kuwaiti representation in the second round of the strategic dialogue and the various representation of these various sectors present with us today that come from 10 various sectors and represent the various fields, vital fields of cooperation between our two countries – political, military, security, commerce, investments, education, cultural, and other fields of cooperation – this importance of Kuwait – to the importance of this dialogue.

At the political level, I must underscore and praise the coordination and the continuous communication and interaction between our two friendly countries and the conversion of positions and visions in numerous issues and numerous dossier of mutual interests to the two countries.

At the military level, Kuwait supports and provides facilities to the U.S. armed forces, the U.S. military that works within the global coalition to fight and combat the so-called Daesh, ISIS, the so called ISIS. And while we assert, as well, the importance of the defense agreement between our two countries that was concluded back in 1991. In this context, we certainly value and continuously praise the historical leadership role of your country in leading the international community and the global coalition to liberate Kuwait from the evil of the Iraqi aggression. And we certainly value the sacrifices of our soldiers and your soldiers, the brave soldiers, both Kuwaitis and the Americans, to restore legitimacy and to restore the right of the Kuwaiti people.

And yesterday, at the security level as well, we signed the arrangement HSPD-6 to fight terrorism and share information in that context and also to have cooperation to address the security holes in Kuwait International Airport. We have reached an advanced level of cooperation, and we also continue to continue the implementation of the security arrangements in the passenger terminals at Kuwait International Airport and to also create an office for American Customs and American Border Security and also focusing on cyber security as one of the major topics of our cooperation in this next phase.

At the economic and investment level, yesterday, Wednesday, we held – and there was an economic forum that was favorably and widely received with the participation of the deputy prime minister and minister of finance from our side and the commerce secretary from the U.S. side and presence and participation of a number of the participants from the Kuwaiti and American business communities to discuss the opportunities for mutual investment and to – also, we look forward to hosting this forum next year in Kuwait. Our volume of the investments – Kuwaiti investments in the U.S. has reached more than 400 billion U.S. dollars in various sectors. With regard to the volume of the commerce and trade between our two countries, until the mid of this year has reached 4 billion U.S. dollars. Kuwait further looks forward to implementing and increasing this volume in the future.

At the level of the educational and cultural exchange, Kuwaitis in the United States have started to come to the U.S. universities since 1946. That is 70 years ago. Well, we have thousands of Kuwaiti citizens studying in the U.S. universities. And since our last round of this dialogue, we have increased the number of Kuwaitis coming to study in the U.S. In this context, we affirm our aspiration to increase the number of Kuwaiti students studying in U.S. colleges that has reached currently 15,000 female and male students.

My friend Secretary Tillerson, ladies and gentleman, in conclusion I would like to reiterate my thanks and appreciation to you for all your efforts to make sure that the second round of this strategic dialogue be held on time, on schedule. I wish all the working groups that will meet in a few moments all the success, hoping that they will – the outcome would be concrete efforts, and the goal is to deepen the strategic bond between our two countries and to explore the various spaces to expand our cooperation over the next decades. Hoping to hold the third round of this strategic dialogue in Kuwait next year. And thank you very much for your good listening.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Thank you.

QUESTION: Secretary Tillerson, will you be discussing North Korean guest workers in Kuwait?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: We have discussed that.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, do you have any reaction to the appeals court decision on the travel ban yesterday?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: I do not have any particular – any particular comment on that.

QUESTION: Will you be discussing the situation in Qatar in your meeting today?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: We have discussed this issue. We discussed it yesterday in the meeting between His Highness the Emir and the President. We've had further consultations on it this morning. Thank you.

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Press Releases: Joint Statement by the Governments of the United States of America and Kuwait on the Second United States-Kuwait Strategic Dialogue: “Continued Commitment to Long-Term Partnership”

Media Note
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC
September 8, 2017

U.S. Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson and Kuwaiti First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah al-Khaled al-Sabah co-chaired the second U.S.-Kuwait Strategic Dialogue on September 8, 2017, in Washington, D.C. Complementing the visit of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmed al-Jaber al-Sabah and his meeting with President Donald J. Trump at the White House on September 7, this dialogue advances our strategic partnership in defense, security, trade, investment, education, consular, customs, and border protection issues. Our two countries renewed their commitment to promote the stability and security of the region, including the defeat of ISIS and other violent extremists.

When we launched this dialogue we set out to strengthen a bilateral relationship that benefits both our peoples in tangible ways. This second session discussed specific areas of cooperation to develop this partnership, for the good of the United States and Kuwait, and for the stability and security of the Gulf region and the Middle East more broadly.

Political Cooperation

We discussed the most pressing regional political issues, including the ongoing rift amongst some members of the GCC and Egypt. The United States reiterated its gratitude for Kuwait's mediation, and the United States and Kuwait call on all parties to reach a swift resolution through dialogue. Our two countries share the view of the importance of GCC unity in addressing the region's many challenges.

We also look forward to working together as Kuwait assumes its non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council 2018-19.

Kuwait is a significant contributor to stability in the world's most troubled regions and has long been one of the world's most generous humanitarian donors. Kuwait continues to be a key source of direct assistance to internally-displaced persons, as well as to the refugees that are hosted in other countries. Secretary Tillerson expressed U.S. appreciation for Kuwait's offer to host a donors' conference for Iraqi reconstruction in early 2018.

Moreover, we have discussed the destabilizing behavior of Iran, ongoing war in Syria, conflict in Yemen, Libya, and the Middle East Peace Process.

Both countries called upon the international community to exercise further pressure on North Korea to stop its destabilizing activities in the region and implement UN Security Council resolutions. The United States praised Kuwait's positive steps in regards to implementing UN resolutions.

Defense Cooperation

The United States is proud to have contributed to the liberation of Kuwait over 26 years ago, and reiterates its commitment to Kuwait's security. Today, both countries work closely together to ensure that the Armed Forces of Kuwait are best equipped to defend their nation. The two sides agreed to do their utmost to expedite Kuwait's acquisition of needed U.S. equipment, including the latest efforts at enhancing Kuwait's defensive capabilities through the addition of the F/A-18 Super Hornet to Kuwait's Air Force.

The United States and Kuwait share the responsibilities of cooperation on defense and the joint fight against terrorism. As an enduring symbol of our commitment to carry the partnership into a secure future, we agreed today on the priority of moving forward with modernizing the military facilities in Kuwait, guided by our Joint Military Commission.

Security Cooperation

Both Kuwait and the United States know firsthand the need for constant vigilance in the face of global terrorist threats and are committed to take further steps to prevent the financing of terrorism. Recognizing the benefit in combining our resources to defeat this scourge, our nations agreed to coordinate taking specific steps to increase information sharing (e.g., biometric information) that will help deter terrorist attacks. Our growing security cooperation seeks to deny refuge or sanctuary to those who plot violence and murder.

The United States, Kuwait, and our other Global Coalition partners stand

together in the shared fight against ISIS until it is defeated. We discussed the necessity of stabilizing those areas retaken from ISIS. Preventing the flow of foreign fighters has been a major part of our effort to defeat ISIS, and Kuwait is a co-lead of the Coalition Working Group on Foreign Fighters. The flow of foreign terrorist fighters to the region has declined significantly which emphasizes the importance of further cooperation regarding foreign fighters returning from conflict zones to rehabilitate and reintegrate them into their society, but more must be done.

Kuwait took positive measures toward enhancing security in Kuwait International Airport toward meeting the international and partner organization requirements.

We also agreed today to prioritize the protection of our people, our national assets, and our infrastructure from the threat of cyber-attacks. The U.S. public and private sectors stand ready to support Kuwait as it implements its National Cyber Security Strategy. Those charged with cyber policy met here in Washington to strategize long-term cooperation in this critical field.

Trade and Investment

Two days before the Strategic Dialogue, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce hosted a U.S.-Kuwait Economic Forum featuring leaders in industry and investment. The message of mutual investment and prosperity was underscored by the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of Commerce's Select USA and the Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority. The Kuwaiti side stressed its priority to take steps that facilitate doing business in Kuwait. The United States and Kuwait will seek to alleviate any hindrances to bilateral investment in our two countries.

The Educational Ties That Bind

Education is one of the sturdiest building blocks of the U.S.-Kuwait partnership. The United States Department of State and the Kuwait Ministry of Higher Education signed a memorandum of understanding today that will encourage student exchanges and educational cooperation. Five generations of Kuwaitis have studied in the United States. Both parties seek to encourage more Kuwaitis to join the more than 15,000 Kuwaitis studying or preparing to study in the United States, and intend to cooperate more closely to explore ways to enhance the academic and professional success of students at quality educational institutions. The United States welcomed Kuwait's intent to establish additional chairs at American universities.

Consular Affairs, Customs, and Border Protection

We continue to expand our people-to-people contact. We reaffirmed our commitment to the protection of our nationals in Kuwait and the United States, solidifying our international obligations regarding consular notification and access to detained citizens. We signed a Customs Mutual Assistance Agreement to improve information sharing, training, and enforcement of our customs and immigration laws. In the coming months, we will work to facilitate the secure travel of our nationals and further

synchronize our border security partnerships.

Kuwait expressed to the U.S government its interest to become a pre-clearance border point to the United States, and explained to their American counterparts through numbers of meetings that the political will and resources are available to support that request.

Looking Ahead

This strategic dialogue process commits the United States and Kuwait to increased cooperation in the areas of greatest practical benefit to our governments and our peoples. Today, we set a roadmap for the advancement of our relations in the coming year. Individual working groups will be cooperating on numerous tasks in the coming months, including: modernizing military facilities; facilitating needed defense systems; extending counter-terrorism information sharing and cooperation, and stopping terrorist financing; expanding our trade and investment; taking effective measures to protect intellectual property; and broadening our educational and research connections; and facilitating travel procedures. We look forward to making progress in these areas when the Dialogue meets next in Kuwait in 2018.

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