

# **Press Releases: Serbia National Day**

Press Statement  
Rex W. Tillerson

Secretary of State

Washington, DC  
February 15, 2018

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On behalf of the United States, I offer my sincere congratulations to the people of Serbia on the occasion of your national day.

The United States remains a steadfast friend and partner of Serbia, just as we were 100 years ago when then President Wilson issued a special proclamation calling on a national day of prayer in solidarity with the Serbian people. We look forward to strengthening our partnership in the years ahead as Serbia progresses towards integration into the Western Community of Nations.

We wish all of Serbia's people peace, security, and prosperity in the coming year.

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**Press Releases: Public Designation of Adriatik Llalla under Section 7031(c) of the FY 2017 Consolidated**

# [Appropriations Act](#)

Media Note  
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC  
February 14, 2018

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Secretary of State Rex Tillerson is publicly designating former Albanian Prosecutor General (Mr.) Adriatik Llalla under Section 7031(c) of the FY 2017 Consolidated Appropriations Act due to his involvement in significant corruption. Section 7031(c) provides that, in cases where the Secretary of State has credible information that foreign officials have been involved in significant corruption or gross violations of human rights, those individuals and their immediate family members are ineligible for entry into the United States. The law also requires the Secretary of State to publicly or privately designate such officials and their family members. In addition to the designation of Mr. Llalla, the Secretary is also publicly designating Mr. Llalla's spouse, Ardjana Llalla, his daughter, Eni Llalla, and his other, non-U.S. citizen child.

For more information, please contact [INL-PAPD@state.gov](mailto:INL-PAPD@state.gov).

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**[Press Releases: Background Briefing: Updating on Secretary Tillerson's Trip to Amman, Jordan; Ankara, Turkey;](#)**

# Beirut, Lebanon; Cairo, Egypt; and Kuwait City, Kuwait

Special Briefing  
Office of the Spokesperson

Senior State Department Official  
Amman, Jordan  
February 14, 2018

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**MODERATOR:** So we're going to record this. We'll do it off the – on background to a senior department official traveling with the Secretary.

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** Just a second.

**MODERATOR:** Once he finishes this email.

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** Okay.

**QUESTION:** This is just – do you want –

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** Just ask, ask.

**QUESTION:** Okay. So Tillerson said that the peace plan is fairly well advanced. Are you at the stage where you're – in these meetings this week you're kind of briefly directing – or directly briefing allies on what's actually in it, or –

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** No, we are not.

**QUESTION:** Okay.

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** The President will announce – brief that plan when he is ready.

**QUESTION:** But are you still soliciting feedback, then, at this point on what kinds of things –

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** This is in the hands of the President and his team.

**QUESTION:** But you guys are diplomats.

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** It is in the hands of the President and his team.

**QUESTION:** So the Secretary isn't soliciting any – I mean, he's the chief diplomat of the United States; his job to kind of –

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** The Secretary's interlocutors express their views on a range of issues. Among those issues are the status of the Palestinians, interest in a comprehensive peace, both concerns and hopes with respect to the peace process in all its aspects, and the Secretary welcomes those comments. That's as far as I'm going to go on that one.

**QUESTION:** Can you – I mean, he said today that – I'm Nick Wadhams from Bloomberg. He said today that he had raised some concerns with – he said today about the plan that he had raised some concerns and –

**QUESTION:** With the White House.

**QUESTION:** With the White House and given his feedback.

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** I'm not going to elaborate on remarks which the Secretary has made.

**QUESTION:** Okay.

**QUESTION:** On this Lebanese-Israeli gas dispute, could you – you were in Lebanon and Israel last week to talk about it. What – where do things stand right now?

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** We're in the midst of discussion of this issue. You will understand I'm not going to make any comment on where the issue stands. That's kind of what we do.

**QUESTION:** Okay. They've – I mean, the *Daily Star* was –

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** We're not going to make any comment on this issue.

**QUESTION:** Do you expect – do you see it escalating, or do you see –

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** We very much –

**QUESTION:** – the direction that it's going –

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** We very much hope that in the interests of Lebanon and the Lebanese people, that choices are made which contribute not just to stability, which we always want, but also to the greater prosperity of Lebanon, full stop.

**QUESTION:** Okay. Anyone else got a question?

**QUESTION:** Can I ask you about the Gulf crisis?

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** I suppose.

**QUESTION:** Do you anticipate a resolution anytime soon on that? They've – allegedly some discussion about bringing GCC countries to the U.S. in spring

to hash things out.

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** As you all know, the President – the President and the Secretary, Secretary of Defense have made very clear – no great secret here – that we would very much like to see this conflict resolved – resolved in the interests of the states concerned, resolved in the interests of the United States, and above all resolved for the common interests that the GCC represents as a cooperative mechanism and for a common and strong ability to confront Daesh, the other concerns that we and the states in the GCC have. That’s been our position. We very much hope that a resolution can be achieved. We’ll do all we can to help in that regard. Whether or not one is possible depends on the decisions taken by the leaders involved.

**QUESTION:** But when there was the meetings in Saudi Arabia last year, there was agreement that everyone would convene again a year later. It’s sort of the U.S. turn to host. Is it possible to (inaudible) that meeting?

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** We very – we very much hope it is possible to have a constructive GCC summit, full stop.

**QUESTION:** But could you have that summit?

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** We very much hope it is possible –

**QUESTION:** It looked like –

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** – to have a successful GCC summit.

**QUESTION:** It looked like the Qataris and the Saudis didn’t want to be in the same room together during the Kuwait meeting. That seems –

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** Well, except that I seem to see Saudis and Qataris in that room together.

**QUESTION:** In the family photo?

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** They were certainly sitting at the – look, don’t over read this one. The foreign ministers –

**QUESTION:** Okay, that’s why I’m asking you.

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** The foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia and Qatar were in their seats during much of the events that took place in Kuwait, and when I answered, “We hope to have a successful GCC summit,” that means successful in every sense.

**QUESTION:** Can you preview –

**QUESTION:** But – hold on – just one follow-up. It would be difficult to have a successful summit if this were still going on. You wouldn’t want to enshrine this dispute in the GCC summit and say: Okay, it’s okay to have –

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** We would never say it was okay. We have never said it was okay. But what we have urged all parties involved is if you cannot come to a resolution, which we certainly hope you can, then at least manage this issue in a way that doesn't detract from or derogate from the effectiveness of the GCC as an organization.

**QUESTION:** Can we –

**MODERATOR:** (Inaudible) our last question.

**QUESTION:** Okay. Just looking forward to the next couple of days, you're going to be in Beirut tomorrow. The Secretary addressed the issues in Beirut with Hizballah. We then got a clarification from Washington about what Washington had hoped the Secretary would say about how Hizballah – has – and its malign influences. Can you tell us sort of – I'm not sure if you are even aware of that clarification (inaudible). Okay. Can you tell us what's going to happen tomorrow? Where is the concern in the U.S. Government in terms of Hizballah's – and then also looking forward to Turkey, since I only get one –

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** Can't comment on Turkey.

**QUESTION:** Okay.

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** Really, I just can't. That's a different issue, different set of interlocutors.

**QUESTION:** Different people. Okay.

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** With respect to Lebanon, look, our views there are that the Lebanese people deserve the right to live in peace, prosperity. Both peace and prosperity are threatened by the activities of a non-state actor. We believe there are ways to address this issue by strengthening the legitimate security institutions of Lebanon. That means the LAF, the other state institutions, and it means by continuing to make clear that engaging in activities, whether Hizballah – or whether Hizballah-oriented or Iranian-oriented, it puts Lebanon and the Lebanese at risk. Whether those activities are within Lebanese territory, in Yemen, or anywhere else in the region is not right and it needs to stop. Lebanon deserves the right to advance as an independent sovereign state with state institutions, with state institutions responsible for security, not militias.

**QUESTION:** But is LAF one of those state institutions?

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** It's absolutely one of those state institutions.

**QUESTION:** Okay. It's not shot through with Hizballah?

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** The U.S. has provided extraordinary support and an unswerving commitment to building the LAF. We are very pleased with the actions and progress the LAF has made. The U.S. looks forward not just to continued U.S. support but to international support for the LAF. Absolutely.

**MODERATOR:** Thank you. We'll leave it there (inaudible).

**QUESTION:** Thank you for doing this so late.

**QUESTION:** Thank you.

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** You are quite welcome.

**QUESTION:** We really appreciate it.

**QUESTION:** The Saudis, have they actually (inaudible) for the LAF again (inaudible)?

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** No.

**QUESTION:** Thank you.

**QUESTION:** Thank you, sir.

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## **[Press Releases: The Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations Breaks Ground on the New U.S. Embassy Compound in Mexico City, Mexico](#)**

Media Note  
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC  
February 13, 2018

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As a display of our enduring friendship and important bilateral partnership, U.S. Ambassador, Roberta S. Jacobson broke ground today on the new U.S. Embassy facility in Mexico City, Mexico.

The new U.S. Embassy will provide a secure, modern, and environmentally sustainable platform for diplomacy. The project is expected to be completed in 2022.

Tod Williams Billie Tsien Architects/Davis Brody Bond Joint Venture of New York, New York is the architect for the project. Caddell Construction Company of Montgomery, Alabama is the construction contractor.

As part of the Department's Capital Security Construction Program, the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO) has completed 142 new diplomatic facilities since 1999 with an additional 59 projects in design or under construction.

OBO's mission is to provide safe, secure, and functional facilities that represent the U.S. government to host nations and support our staff in achieving U.S. foreign policy objectives. These facilities represent U.S. values and the best in U.S. architecture, engineering, technology, sustainability, art, culture, and construction execution.

For further information, please contact Christine Foushee at [FousheeCT@state.gov](mailto:FousheeCT@state.gov), or visit [www.state.gov/obo](http://www.state.gov/obo).

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## **[Press Releases: Interview With Michel Ghandour of Al Hurra TV](#)**

Interview  
Rex W. Tillerson

Secretary of State

Crowne Plaza Hotel  
Kuwait City, Kuwait



February 13, 2018

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**QUESTION:** Mr. Secretary, first, thank you for your time and for the opportunity that you give Al Hurra. We start from where you finished your day in Kuwait – it's a long day. How do you view the fact that Kuwait, once invaded by the Iraqi – or by the former Iraqi regime, hosting this conference here for the very construction of Iraq?

**SECRETARY TILLERSON:** Well, I think it's a symbol of how important Kuwait, but also the entire Gulf countries and the Arab world, views the future of Iraq. Iraq was somewhat disenchanted with – from the rest of the Gulf for many, many years, and I think now having seen this outreach and the reconnection of economic activity, re-establishing relationships that will be very important to the future of Iraq, is really encouraging to see.

**QUESTION:** And more than a hundred American companies participated in this – or participate in the Iraq Reconstruction Conference. What role will the American private sector play in the reconstruction of Iraq, Mr. Secretary?

**SECRETARY TILLERSON:** Well, I think importantly, obviously, bringing investment dollars is important to Iraq in order to create jobs and create a growing economy in Iraq. But beyond that, bringing American business practices, bringing American values to Iraq. American businesses are accustomed to dealing with regimes with strong rule of law, and I think that reinforces what's needed for Iraq to be successful longer term.

**QUESTION:** Critics say that the Trump administration won't contribute money toward Iraq's reconstruction and will rely on the private sector and international organizations. What's your response?

**SECRETARY TILLERSON:** Well, the event today obviously was not intended to be a donor conference or a pledging conference. This was really organizing to ensure that business, the private sector, as well as other lending institutions have a good understanding of the situation in Iraq now after the defeat of ISIS/Daesh, of the opportunities that are available, and it is to generate interest and excitement about Iraq as a good business and investment opportunity. And in doing so, a lot of the reconstruction we're confident will be undertaken through both public and private sector approaches, and the lending institutions – OPIC, Ex-Im, World Bank, IMF – all of these are important elements of ensuring Iraq has a successful future.

**QUESTION:** And are you satisfied with the results that you achieved today?

**SECRETARY TILLERSON:** I think the interest was overwhelming. We had a number of companies that came to attend, but also a number of companies that have made announcements of either opportunities that have been secured or opportunities that are well in the works in terms of their discussions with Iraq. And I think that was really the importance, was to showcase Iraq is

now, as I've said in my remarks, open for business.

**QUESTION:** And regarding the future of the American presence in Iraq, how do you view the American presence in Iraq?

**SECRETARY TILLERSON:** Well, if you're asking about American Government presence or military presence, that's a matter that's yet to be discussed with the Government of Iraq, with Prime Minister Abadi. Of course, they have elections upcoming. We are still there in Iraq today to continue to ensure that ISIS/Daesh cannot re-emerge. While we have defeated them by taking all of their territory from them in Iraq, we know – and as Prime Minister Abadi would also acknowledge – there are still elements of ISIS/Daesh that are a threat to Iraq, and we're going to stay for as long as we're certain we have dealt with those threats as well.

[PAUSE]

**QUESTION:** Thank you. Okay. Sorry for the interruption. The international Coalition to Defeat ISIS has made big progress in Syria and in Iraq. What are the main challenges that you still face and what are the plans or the goals for next year?

**SECRETARY TILLERSON:** Well, the ministerial that we had today for the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS was a very important opportunity for all of the members of the coalition to meet together, acknowledge the success that has been achieved in Iraq and Syria. But we know that defeating ISIS or Daesh, it is a global threat, and we are sharing opportunities to identify how foreign fighters may be returning home, how do we document and keep track of people who have been involved with ISIS or Daesh. And so we approved a new set of guiding principles that are – that will guide our efforts in the future, and it's based on a lot of information sharing, collecting information using INTERPOL databases. And so this is really about the next phase of ensuring that we achieve ultimately an enduring defeat of ISIS.

**QUESTION:** Very good. Mr. Secretary, there are concerns in the region based on the last confrontation between Israel, Iran, and Syria, and the concerns based on the fear that maybe a war will break in the region and it will be a regional war. Do you share these concerns?

**SECRETARY TILLERSON:** Well, just prior to leaving for my trip to the region, I had a very lengthy telephone conversation with Prime Minister Netanyahu because of the strikes, and we had a long discussion around the threats that Israel is confronted with that emanate both from Lebanon due to Lebanese Hizballah, but also from Syria. We take the threats to Israel seriously and we take a view that Israel has every right to defend itself from those threats.

We are concerned about Syria not creating instability and opportunities for further threats to Israel, but also to Jordan, to Turkey, to all of its neighbors, and that's why we will remain in Syria until ISIS is fully defeated and we are certain will not re-emerge. And we will remain engaged in the political solution for Syria, which we think is the long-term means of

bringing stability to Syria and restoring Syria's independent nature.

**QUESTION:** But on the ground, what is the U.S. doing specifically to contain Iran's rising influence in Syria, in Lebanon, in Iraq, and elsewhere?

**SECRETARY TILLERSON:** We believe the future of responding to Iran's influence in Syria is through the political process, through the peace process itself. Again, U.S. is present in Syria for one purpose only, and that is the defeat of ISIS, the enduring defeat of ISIS. In doing so, though, we have taken the approach that we also want to take the opportunity to ensure that fighting amongst factions inside of Syria, the re-eruption of the civil war, does not take place. And so we want to use our presence to also be a stabilizing force to support talks in Geneva under the UN Security Council resolution process, allow the Syrian people to write a new constitution, allow them to hold free and fair elections. And through that process, we believe Syria will strengthen its independence and will take its own actions to reduce and ultimately reject the influence of Iran inside of Syria.

Iran's influence inside of Syria is not positive, it is a negative, because they bring with it instability, they bring with it violence.

**QUESTION:** But you're focusing, Mr. Secretary, on defeating ISIS. And Iran, Syria, the Syrian regime, and Russia are gaining ground. What will you do in this case?

**SECRETARY TILLERSON:** Well, I don't see the regime, Russia, and Iran necessarily gaining ground. I see the entire country eventually defeating ISIS. And again, what we're encouraging Russia and others is to de-escalate the violence – once ISIS is defeated, do not promote the violence. And we've asked Russia to persuade the regime to stop the march and the campaign against opposition forces. They have agreed to ceasefire areas and stabilization areas, but they need to enforce those in order to create the conditions for a peaceful solution for Syria's future.

And with respect to Iran's broader involvement in the region, we have spoken very clearly about Iran's destabilizing presence in Yemen, their destabilizing presence in Syria, in Lebanon, and in Iraq as well. It is our view – I think it's the view by and large of the international community – that Iran's presence in these countries is not helpful. It does not bring stability. It does not bring security to the citizens there. We ask Iran to withdraw and send their forces home, and that's what we believe is the right pathway for the future.

**QUESTION:** But they're doing the opposite.

**SECRETARY TILLERSON:** Well, they're not going to go just because we ask them. I think ultimately the will – the will of the Syrian people and restoring a free, whole, democratic and independent Syria, that will result in them rejecting outside interference from Iran.

**QUESTION:** It looks like so far, Mr. Secretary, Sochi and Geneva process are not working. The coordination and the cooperation with Russia is not working

too. Is the U.S. – or will the U.S. continue the same process, or are you looking for something else, supporting again or arming the Syrian opposition to regain the ground?

**SECRETARY TILLERSON:** No, our only effort is to support the UN peace process in Geneva. I think it's important to remember that President Trump and President Putin both issued a joint statement last November on the margins of the ASEAN meeting in Danang, Vietnam, both committing themselves to Geneva as the way to move forward in Syria. We continue to work with the Russians and with other partners in the region to support the Geneva process. The Sochi event in some respects failed to deliver on some of the aspirations that I think the organizers had hoped, but on the other hand, Sochi itself, if you read the statement that came from the Sochi event, it said clearly Geneva is where these issues will be resolved, and it reaffirmed the important role that the UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura has to play in guiding the process forward.

So I think all of the significant parties – Russia, the United States, our coalition, likeminded for Syria – all are supporting the Geneva process.

**QUESTION:** The Trump administration has threatened to react militarily in case the Syrian regime uses chemical weapons. Reports say that the regime has used the chemical weapons six times last month. Would there be any U.S. or international reaction to that?

**SECRETARY TILLERSON:** We're quite concerned about these reports – the use of both chlorine bombs, which is weaponizing chlorine, as well as reports of sarin being used again. I think what's important is today the international community doesn't have a good mechanism to confirm these reports. The UN Security Council has held multiple votes to reissue the mandate for the Joint Investigative Mechanism to allow experts to go into Syria, investigate these reports, and confirm first whether they're true, and second to determine who is responsible.

The Trump administration takes the use of these weapons very seriously, as was indicated by actions taken last year. We need to have independent analysis and investigation of these, and what we really need is for Russia to stop vetoing the mandate for the Joint Investigative Mechanism so we have better information as to exactly what is happening.

**QUESTION:** But nothing happened or changed since you struck (inaudible), when the Syrian regime has used the chemical weapons.

**SECRETARY TILLERSON:** Well, there's been no large, widespread use of sarin in particular. And so we think we have stopped Syria from using that type of chemical weapon. Having said that, these reports are very disturbing. What we do know is there are people that died from the effects of what appear to be chemical weapons. We need better information from experts like would be in the country through the Joint Investigative Mechanism.

**QUESTION:** Mr. Secretary, in this long trip you are going to visit Lebanon, with the tension between Lebanon and Israel escalating, based on maritime and

territorial boundaries. The U.S. has been mediating between the two countries. Are we getting closer to an agreement or to war, do you think?

**SECRETARY TILLERSON:** Well, we – obviously, we want to avoid conflict as best we can, and we will continue to play a role there to strengthen an independent government, again, in Lebanon, to strengthen independent Lebanese security forces. We know that Lebanon is going through what will likely be a long transition period. I think they have taken some positive steps with their law on disassociation, to require that Lebanese forces withdraw from the presence in Yemen and other locations. And we're there to support Lebanon through this long transition.

**QUESTION:** And meanwhile, you are putting more pressure and more sanctions on Hizballah. Is the Lebanese Government coordinating or cooperating with the U.S. in this regard? And how can you pressure Hizballah without affecting the Lebanese Government?

**SECRETARY TILLERSON:** Well, it is – it's a very good question, and we're very mindful of our issue is with Lebanese Hizballah, a terrorist organization; it is not with the Lebanese people, it is not with the Lebanese Government. So we try to be very precise in the actions we take to not harm the Lebanese people.

Having said that, we do need support from the Lebanon Government to deal very clearly and firmly with those activities undertaken by Lebanese Hizballah that are unacceptable to the rest of the world.

**QUESTION:** My last question, Mr. Secretary: President Abbas told the Russian president that he would no longer cooperate if any form – in any form with the U.S. as a mediator with Israel. Do you have any reaction to that?

**SECRETARY TILLERSON:** Well, I understand President Abbas, his concern about certain steps and decisions taken by the United States. My message to President Abbas is the United States is still committed to seeing a successful Middle East peace process, and are prepared to assist in that effort going forward. We hope that President Abbas will find his way back to the table.

**QUESTION:** Thank you so much, Mr. Secretary. We appreciate your time.

**SECRETARY TILLERSON:** Thank you. It's my pleasure.

**QUESTION:** Thank you.

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