

Press Releases: Remarks to the Staff and Families of U.S. Embassy Riyadh

Remarks

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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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