

Press Releases: Press Availability in Geneva, Switzerland

Press Availability
Rex W. Tillerson

Secretary of State

Geneva, Switzerland
October 26, 2017

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, obviously this has been a – although a number of days, not a long trip, but it's been a lengthy trip in terms of the number of stops. And so I have a number of, I think, observations I want to offer you. So I've put them down on paper here so I don't overlook some things. So I'm going to go through that and then welcome your questions at that point.

So as you know, we're now at the last stop of this weeklong trip to important capitals in the region, many of which are still in broad and significant conflict. At each stop, we have reaffirmed the United States will continue to provide global leadership, promote security, stability, and prosperity for all people. And in doing so, obviously we will deliver the same to the American people.

That was evident in Riyadh, where we began the trip. I was very honored to take part in the inaugural Joint Coordination Committee alongside His Majesty King Salman and Prime Minister Abadi. That event highlighted the strength of the United States bilateral relationship with both Saudi Arabia and Iraq and how we continue to promote greater cooperation between them. We believe a deepening Saudi-Iraqi relationship is not only vital for stabilization and reconstruction of Iraq but also for the stability of the entire region.

In the spirit of the Riyadh summit earlier this year, the United States continues to work closely with Qatar and our Gulf partners to crack down on terrorists and those who finance them. All of our Gulf partners are putting forward a renewed effort to counterterrorism. We must expand those efforts through greater cooperation, coordination, and information-sharing among all.

The United States remains troubled and concerned about the far-reaching consequences of the Gulf dispute. Our message is clear: The GCC is strongest when it is united. We will continue our efforts to open lines of communication to pursue that unity, and as President Trump has said, we remain ready to assist with any mediation efforts.

U.S. leadership has been and continues to be instrumental and necessary in Iraq, and I welcomed the opportunity to meet with Prime Minister Abadi separately on the heels of the Joint Coordination Committee meeting. Under the prime minister's leadership, ISIS is in retreat. In the words of President Trump, "the end of the ISIS caliphate is in sight." With the coalition's support, the Iraqi Security Forces have successfully liberated now more than 90 percent of the territory ISIS once held in Iraq, allowing more than 2 million Iraqis to return home. And today, Iraqis are rebuilding their communities. More than 360 Iraq-led, UN-implemented, coalition-funded stabilization projects are underway and will continue.

We know these victories on the battlefield are not sufficient to create a stable, prosperous Iraq, so we continue to seek greater international support to shore up the Iraqi economy and bolster ongoing humanitarian and stabilization efforts. We are glad to see expanding connections between Iraq and its neighbors, as the Coordination Council meeting in Riyadh clearly illustrates.

The tensions that have played out in northern Iraq over the past month are concerning. The United States is a friend to all Iraqis, including our friends in Baghdad and our friends in Iraq's Kurdish region. We are disappointed the parties have not yet been able to reach an entirely peaceful resolution of the recent tensions.

Subsequent to my meeting with Prime Minister Abadi, I had a very lengthy telephone call with Kurdistan President Barzani. The United States stands ready to assist Baghdad and Erbil to chart a positive course forward in support of a unified, federal, and democratic Iraq through peaceful, political means. I called upon both sides to avoid all conflict between Iraq and Peshmerga forces, and I encouraged Prime Minister Abadi to accept Erbil's overtures for talks on the basis of the Iraqi constitution.

The remainder of the trip focused on South Asia and the President's new strategy for the region and Afghanistan's future. As President Trump made clear, achieving peace, stability, and prosperity in Afghanistan requires the involvement of regional partners – most importantly, Pakistan and India. Our goal is to work with our regional partners to root out terrorist safe havens in Afghanistan and Pakistan so that South Asia can enter a period of peace and prosperity. The road to a stable, sovereign, unified, and democratic Afghanistan requires the Afghan Government to advance their commitment to reform. President Ghani assured me that he and his government are working towards reforms, particularly anticorruption efforts to achieve real progress for the Afghan people.

Pakistan is a key partner for the stability of the region. We have a long history of positive partnership with Pakistan, but Pakistan must do more to eradicate militants and terrorists operating within its country. The people of Pakistan have much to gain from a stable, peaceful Afghanistan, and a region that denies safe haven to terrorists. This was my principal message to Prime Minister Abbasi, Chief of Army Staff Bajwa, and the Pakistani leadership.

In India, I continued to share our message about the President's South Asia strategy and India's role. We're grateful for India's generous contributions to the development of Afghanistan, and we hope to see greater involvement from them. As I outlined last week in Washington, we will work to make the U.S.-India Strategic Partnership the foundation for greater peace, stability, and growth of the Indo-Pacific region. We support India's responsible rise and want to find new ways to partner with them and other likeminded countries in Asia. I had a very comprehensive discussion on economic and security links with Prime Minister Modi, National Security Advisor Doval, and Foreign Minister Swaraj. It is essential that our two democracies work together to address the challenges facing both of our peoples.

And I just completed a few moments ago a fruitful discussion with UN Special Envoy de Mistura regarding ongoing developments in Syria. With ISIS on the brink of defeat, we continue our efforts to de-escalate the violence in Syria and support the Geneva process called for under UN Security Council Resolution 2254 to allow the Syrian people to chart a new political course. As we've said many times before, the United States wants a whole and unified Syria with no role for Bashar al-Assad in the government.

The United States remains committed to providing leadership in every region of the world. And as we lead, we will continue to ask more of others to take up their responsible roles as well so that they can ultimately provide for their own people and uphold their own sovereignty. As we do, we'll provide greater security and prosperity for the American people.

MODERATOR: Thank you. For questions, we'll start with Nick and go down the table.

QUESTION: The statement on Assad seems to differ but – from what you had said in Turkey this summer, I mean, a clear call for him to leave. Does that reflect a change in position that we've been – you had indicated it was really up to Syrians to decide themselves.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, it's our view that – and I've said this many times as well – that we do not believe there is a future for the Assad regime, the Assad family. I think I've said it on a number of occasions. The reign of the Assad family is coming to an end, and the only issue is how should that be brought about. And we believe it can be brought about and will be brought about as part of the UN Security Council – implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 2254, which, as you know, has a very specific prescribed procedure for elections and the development of a new constitution.

I think what – the only thing that changed is when this administration came into office, we took a view that it is not a prerequisite that Assad go before that process starts, rather the mechanism by which Assad departs will likely emerge from that process.

QUESTION: I've heard European diplomats describe Syria as a triumph of Iran, because Iran has been so essential for the Assad government. How do you make sure that's not the case? And did you get any assurances from de Mistura as he – is there a timeline for these negotiations to start?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: I do not see Syria as a triumph for Iran. I see Iran as a hanger-on. Iran has not particularly been successful in liberating areas. The Russian Government, providing significant air support for Syrian regime forces, have been successful. They've had their successes. We've had our successes, enormous successes, with our coalition forces. So I don't think that Iran should be given credit for the defeat of ISIS in any way in Syria. Rather, I think they have somewhat taken advantage of the situation with their presence there.

In terms of Iran's future influence in Syria, again, I think that will ultimately emerge from the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 2254, through the new constitution, the elections, and whatnot.

QUESTION: Sir, talk about your meeting with the Pakistanis. Their official news agency has talked about how the United States has presented them with a list of 75 terrorists that the Pakistanis claim they're – that none of them are Pakistanis, that the head of Lashkar-e Tayyiba is not on that list, and that they provided you with a list of 100 terrorists that they would like the United States to go after. Could you talk about what you specifically laid out for them when you talked to them the other day?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, I think what you just described is a very healthy exchange of information on terrorists, which is what we really hope to achieve with Pakistan. We have provided them specific asks, beyond just names of individuals. We've provided them specific asks. But we've also invited greater sharing from them as well. So we expect to receive information from them that will be useful.

And the specific location on any given day of where certain individuals or certain cells may be located – they do move around. As you know, the Pakistan-Afghan border is quite porous; in fact, it's ill-defined. And so we're less concerned about are they in Pakistani territory, in Afghanistan territory, or – as we are obtaining information so that we can eliminate them.

QUESTION: I'll stay on the Pakistan theme. The reaction that we are reading from Pakistan today is that your visit did not go over well, that there was a sense that you were lecturing Islamabad from Delhi and from Kabul. I want to ask you if you think – what practically you think you've accomplished that you would not have accomplished without being there.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, I would not have characterized my direct discussions with them as lecturing at all. It was a very good and open exchange. In fact, we probably listened 80 percent of the time and we talked 20 percent. And it was important to me, because I have not engaged with Pakistani leadership previously. And so my objective was to listen a lot, to hear their perspective.

We put our points forward. We put our expectations forward in no uncertain terms. There has been significant engagement prior to my visit, and there'll be further engagement in the future, as we work through how we want to, as I said, exchange information and achieve the objective of eliminating these

terrorist organizations, wherever they may be located. We had – it was very frank, very candid. We had the joint meeting with Prime Minister Abbasi and the full leadership team. And then I had a second meeting with Army General Bajwa and a couple of his close advisers, so we could have a more thorough discussion about some of the specifics.

But I think it was a very open, candid, and frank exchange, and it's – there's nothing to be achieved by lecturing, but we should be very clear about expectations and what we're asking. And either people will step up and meet those expectations or they won't. We're going to chart our course consistent with what Pakistan not just says they do but what they actually do.

QUESTION: Can I – I'm curious about the first two, first three – several stops, but in terms of the Saudi and Iraq rapprochement. I think it's pretty clear that since almost the – very early on, February or March, that there has been significant progress or – in bringing the two closer together. But I just wonder how hopeful or how realistic it is for them to – Riyadh and Baghdad to come together in such a way that it does, in fact, achieve the purpose of not just helping to rebuild Iraq but also blunting the Iranian influence, when just a couple days after your meeting in Riyadh and your going to Baghdad Abadi is in Tehran.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, I think – and I think Prime Minister Abadi, in fact, commented – or at least I read some comments he made on that – on the visit to Iran. I think we have to be realistic and understand and recognize Iraq has a very long border with Iran. There are long – not just decades, centuries-long relations between Iran and Iraq, and we're not going to eliminate all contact between those two countries. There are legitimate contacts that should continue – economic, trade, things like that. What we're saying to Iraq is, "You must develop the capacity to stand on your own and resist that influence." And the way that we can help Iraq do that is to ensure the Iraqi people understand, because there has been – and I think Foreign Minister Jubeir mentioned this in the press avail we had in Riyadh – there's been more than three decades of isolation almost between Iraq and the GCC countries, long – and he explained why.

But historically, centuries-long, those are their tribal brothers in Iraq. These are all the same people. Iraqis are Arab. Iraqis are not Persian. So whether it's Iraqi-Sunni or it's Iraqi-Shia, it's Iraqi-Shia Arabs. They're not – they're not Persians. And one of the – I think the things that the Saudis are keen to achieve is a reconnection with their longstanding tribal brothers. And when we had early discussions back in February and I had one of my first meetings with Foreign Minister Jubeir in Hamburg, we talked about the importance of – that this is an opportunity for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Take the lead and reconnect with their Arab brothers in Iraq.

And he very bravely – if you remember, he very bravely then, I think in early March, made that first approach by going to Baghdad and made the first visit. That then resulted in our encouraging Prime Minister Abadi to reciprocate by coming to Saudi Arabia. That began to open the doors. And so we've worked hard to facilitate and encourage that. They will do it on their own. We're

there to encourage it and to the extent we can help facilitate that opening. And it's moved a long way in a short period of time. The kingdom is very committed to it. In my meetings with the crown prince, he's very committed to that rapprochement. The Kuwaitis have committed there's going to be a reconstruction conference jointly held with the Iraqis next year, early next year in Kuwait.

So I think these are – it's important to facilitate Iraq, again, standing on its own, that it doesn't have to look only to the east. It has important partners – security partners, but more importantly, economic partners – to the south. And I think this is how we strengthen Iraq as an independent country, and they can make their own decisions then.

QUESTION: Can I go back to Pakistan for a second? Is it accurate to say that the message you received from the Pakistanis was, "We will not be coerced," that they delivered to you a message of defiance in the face of the U.S. trying to pressure them? And did – that's kind of one question. And the second question is: Did they respond at all to you about the U.S.'s strategy of deepening relations with India?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, in answer to your first question, that would be a complete mischaracterization of the meeting.

QUESTION: Okay, okay.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: It was a very open, frank conversation that began with a retracing of the history between the U.S. and Pakistan, which, by and large, has been a very, very positive history. We've had a deterioration in that relationship over the last 10 years, but prior to that we had very strong relations with Pakistan. Throughout the Cold War to the post-Cold War, the post-9/11, they were a tremendous partner in the post-9/11 years in terms of helping us apprehend a number of the individuals that were involved in the 9/11 attacks.

So what's happened has happened more recently, and I think what was important to me is that let's reconnect and remember that it hasn't always been this way. So there was no lecturing and there was no lecturing of them back to me either. I view it as a respectful relationship. We have some very legitimate asks, some very legitimate concerns that we need their help addressing. I said to them, "You can do it or you can decide not to do it. And if you decide you don't want to do it, just let us know. We'll adjust our plans accordingly and we'll deal with it ourselves."

And it's not – that's not a threat. It's just a matter of fact. We have to deal with the conditions on the ground. And as you know, the entire South Asia strategy is a conditions-based strategy, and so the same message to Pakistan was: "Here's what we need for Pakistan to do. We're asking you to do this; we're not demanding anything. You're a sovereign country. You'll decide what you want to do, but understand this is what we think is necessary. And if you don't want to do that, don't feel you can do it, we'll adjust our tactics and our strategies to achieve the same objective a different way."

QUESTION: And what was their response?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: I think they share the same concern we have about the presence of terrorism. They are – they have been victims of terrorism. The Pakistanis have suffered significant losses fighting terrorism themselves. My conversation with them was about what we feel is important for Pakistan's future stability. And yes, what they can do will have an important impact on creating conditions for reconciliation and peace talks in Afghanistan, but it's not just about Afghanistan. It's about our concern for Pakistan's long-term stability as well.

MODERATOR: Gardiner.

QUESTION: And the India question – and the India question, whether that came up, the deeper relationship with India.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: There was not a lot of discussion about that, other than they clearly have their differences with India, they have their concerns along their border with India. I made the observation to them, "You have two very troubled borders. You have one in Afghanistan, you have one with India," and that we're willing to help on both of those borders, and we're not just here to talk about the situation on the Afghan border. We're also here to talk about how can we lower the tensions on the border with India, and there are legitimate concerns on both sides of that border as well.

QUESTION: Sir, as you know, your power rests in how closely you are seen to represent the President. There are significant doubts in the countries we visited when we talked to diplomats that you are the – the President's clear representative. They're worried about what they see as some chaos in Washington. How do you respond to that, and how do you reassure your interlocutors that you are indeed speaking for the President of the United States?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, I reviewed this trip with the President prior to my departure. Every stop, I told him here's where I plan to go, assuming I can get into certain locations, here's the objective, here's what I'm attempting to achieve, any guidance he wanted to give me before I left. So – and this is the normal way I do things when I go out on the road, is we sit and talk before I leave, and I spoke to him on Friday right before I headed to Andrews. So if something comes up along the way, obviously, then we can talk.

So far this week, I know that he's been getting readouts of all of my meetings as well. Nothing's come up because they've pretty well gone according to what we expected at this point, no real big surprises. So I'm out implementing the foreign policy that's been adopted by the President at the – through the interagency process of the National Security Council. We develop the policy, the President approves it, and then it's up to me. My responsibility is to go out and execute that policy. And so this trip was about executing against the South Asia policy, executing against the recent free and open Indo-Pacific policy.

MODERATOR: Okay. Felicia.

QUESTION: On that note, what was the reception at all? This new policy, did people understand the policy? That – people are saying now that ISIS is on the decline, there is no comprehensive U.S. policy, so we're kind of back to the beginning.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: For which – for which?

QUESTION: In Afghanistan and that – in Afghanistan primarily, it's –

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, no, I think the South Asia policy, which deals with Afghanistan, Pakistan, India – and as you recall, when that was released and described, we were very clear to people that this is not just about Afghanistan. That in fact, as we looked at past policy decisions that have been taken about Afghanistan, as I studied those and we began to formulate the essentials of this policy, the framework which then we flesh out through the interagency, my observation was we had always looked at Afghanistan in isolation and we kept trying to solve Afghanistan in Afghanistan. And that, to me, made no sense.

So we – as we began to think about it at the State Department, we zoomed it out and we said, well, what else is affecting this? And of course, immediately, Pakistan comes into the viewfinder, but then suddenly you realize India has an influence. And in fact, there's a Central Asian influence with the C5 countries and we've already had meetings with them in New York on the margins of the UN General Assembly to begin to talk about the situation in Afghanistan with them. You zoom out further and China has a role to play.

And so what we've done is really expand the elements that could lead to success in Afghanistan and build the policies and the strategies around incorporating what others could do. And maybe it's only a piece of it, but that piece could be critical to achieving the ultimate success. So what we've been doing is explaining everyone's role to them, and the receive – what we've received in the region is enormously positive over the South Asian strategy. People have said this is the first time we've seen a strategy. I think many have said, yes, we've been fighting a war in Afghanistan for 16 years; when we've been fighting, it was 16 one-year strategies. There was never anything in mind as to how does this come to an end. And we have put in place a very comprehensive approach that lays out a roadmap of how we think we can achieve it. We now have to go execute.

QUESTION: When you say "When does this come to an end," when did the conditions-based requirements – like, what is the timeline on that? Conditions-based could mean another 16 years, couldn't it?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: No, it will not be another 16 years. As the President was clear, it's not an unlimited time, it's not a blank check, and it's not – we're not going to say, "Date certain here." That's the mistake everyone's made in the past. That's what – that's how you end up with 16 one-year strategies. It's conditions-based.

As I said, we have articulated specific role and responsibilities for regional players, and we need to see them delivering on their part of that solution. It is all built around creating conditions where the Taliban and the leadership of the Taliban that is – that has the will to do so is ready to say, “Enough is enough.” And what we’ve made clear to the Taliban: You will never achieve a military victory. And this is the conversation we do have through backchannels to them and through the Doha office: Do you want your children and grandchildren fighting this same fight? Because that’s the way it’s going to be if you don’t find a different way to go forward.

The Afghan Government has a specific responsibility to create the conditions that are inviting the Taliban to come to the table. And as I said in my remarks, I think, in Afghanistan, there is a role for the Taliban in this government. Please come. Please come and take up your role, but you must come on the condition that you renounce terrorism, you renounce violent extremism, and you will never take up those efforts again. So that’s – there is a very specific strategy and we’ve never had one before.

QUESTION: Might you say –

QUESTION: Sir, would you say anything about North Korea? They’ve been threatening to blow up that bomb over the Pacific again.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Yes, I’ve heard the threats. (Laughter.) I’ve heard the threats.

QUESTION: Just really, really briefly, in your speech – the CSIS speech – you talked about the anchors, the Indo-Pak region and the four anchors – U.S., Australia, Japan, and India.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Japan – yeah.

QUESTION: And I’m just wondering – so the Indians are the first to hear this, I guess, directly from you post-speech – is this something that they’re excited about? I presume they are, but I just want to – or were they –

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Yes, but it’s an –

QUESTION: Are they a little bit nervous about –

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Yes, but I would be the first to acknowledge it is a new approach as well, and I think that we’ve had a – the U.S. has had positive relations with India for 70 years but it’s never quite moved to that next level, and I think that’s in part due to – on both sides. From time to time, the other side has taken a step back from the relationship for their own reasons. What we’re trying to put in place is make the case that this needs to move to a different level and be sustained, as I said, for the next 100 years.

We have the standing trilateral with Japan, India, and the U.S., and actually, a lot of this – we began the early conversations around the corners of what this was going to be in that last trilateral just to get some reaction. I think Japan, they understand it probably better than anyone

already, and we have talked to the Australians about participating as well. Everyone has to decide that's the right thing to do. So we're – this is week one –

QUESTION: Right.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: – of executing this one.

QUESTION: On the North Korea point, did –

MODERATOR: We got to go, guys, thanks.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Did India deny the U.S.'s request to close the North Korean embassy in India? I was just looking at the foreign minister's comments.

MODERATOR: Probably best to ask them.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Yeah, I think they just indicated they think that office has value as a conduit for communications.

QUESTION: And do you agree?

QUESTION: Is this then –

SECRETARY TILLERSON: It could. It might. (Laughter.)

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Press Releases: In Recognition of Intersex Awareness Day

Press Statement
Heather Nauert

Department Spokesperson

Washington, DC

October 26, 2017

In recognition of Intersex Awareness Day, the United States stands in solidarity with intersex persons and their advocates around the world.

We recognize that intersex persons face violence, discrimination, harassment, and persecution on account of their sex characteristics. At a young age, intersex persons routinely face forced medical surgeries without free or informed consent. These interventions jeopardize their physical integrity and ability to live freely.

On Intersex Awareness Day, we reaffirm our strong commitment to promoting a world where all persons can freely and equally express themselves with dignity, regardless of sex characteristics. When those most marginalized in society are afforded equal protection and opportunity, global security and stability are strengthened. Increased recognition, understanding and awareness of intersex persons and their human rights strengthens democracy for all.

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Press Releases: Austria's National Day

Press Statement
Rex W. Tillerson

Secretary of State

Washington, DC
October 26, 2017

On behalf of the Government of the United States of America, I congratulate the people of Austria on the anniversary of your national day on October 26.

Austria's efforts to promote peace, prosperity, and security in Europe and beyond are commendable. The United States shares these values and is proud of the close relationship our nations have built, as well as our joint commitment to continued cooperation to advance these values. Our positive trade and investment relationship helps to promote the prosperity of both our nations and our citizens. Excellent and effective military and law enforcement cooperation ensures our interests remain secure even in the face of international threats. Strong cultural ties, underpinned by the robust academic and professional exchanges that connect our countries, advance a deeper understanding and a stronger friendship between Austrians and Americans.

The United States remains committed to the strong Austrian-American partnership and to the people of Austria. Congratulations on your national day.

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[Press Releases: Kenya Elections](#)

Press Statement
Heather Nauert

Department Spokesperson

Washington, DC
October 25, 2017

The United States urges all Kenyans to remain calm, reject violence, and uphold the principles of their Constitution in the election scheduled for tomorrow. We are deeply concerned about the continuing efforts of both

parties to interfere with and undermine the independent operation of the electoral commission, the judiciary, and other essential institutions. We also condemn the attack on the bodyguard of the Deputy Chief Justice.

It is essential that there be immediate, open, and transparent dialogue between all parties and the IEBC to resolve the issues. Now is not the time for strife to divide Kenya, it is a time for all Kenyans to come together.

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Press Releases: Press Availability With Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj

Press Availability
Rex W. Tillerson

Secretary of State

Ministry of External Affairs Jawaharlal Nehru Bhawan
New Delhi, India
October 25, 2017

MODERATOR: Good afternoon, friends, and thank you for joining us for this media interaction. To begin the proceedings, may I request The Honorable External Affairs Minister of India to deliver her statement to the media.

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS MINISTER SWARAJ: (Via interpreter) Secretary of State Secretary Tillerson, and friends from the media, I'm delighted to welcome Secretary Tillerson on his first visit to India as Secretary of State. I would like to welcome on behalf of the Government of India, the people of India, and myself a very warm welcome to the Secretary of State.

This visit of Secretary Tillerson has been a very fruitful visit. He has been to Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan. And after visits to these countries, he has come to India, which means that he has covered six countries in five days. But what I'm very happy to note is that – and the final destination has been to the country of – a very close country. And you say that when you visit a friend's country, you take care – you get rid of all your fatigue. And I hope that you are feeling a little relaxed. I hope that you're not feeling tired, but will take back new energy with you.

Friends, in the last – over the month, this is our second meeting. I had the pleasure of meeting Secretary Tillerson in New York last month on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly. Our strategic partnership with the U.S. is of high priority for us. As Prime Minister Modi has said, we consider the U.S. as an indispensable partner in every sector of India's march forward. Secretary Tillerson, we appreciate the clear vision that you have presented of the India-U.S. global partnership in your speech in Washington last week. I would like to tell you that we fully share your strong desire to strengthen this relationship between the two largest democracies of the world.

I'm very happy to let you know that considerable progress in the implementation of the decisions taken during Prime Minister Modi's visit to

the U.S. Our defense engagements have intensified. We are consulting closely on security and counterterrorism issues, and commencement of U.S. crude oil purchase by India has added a new dimension to our energy partnership. I wish to express my appreciation to Secretary Tillerson's individual efforts in this regard.

In our discussions today, we identified the next steps to carry forward our cooperation. We discussed in detail the issue of terrorism, which has emerged as the foremost security challenge for the entire world. We discussed ways for effective implementation of the new strategy of President Trump on Afghanistan and South Asia so that the strategy achieves its desired goals. We share the grave concern at the recent escalation of terrorist violence against Afghanistan. These attacks demonstrate that safe havens and support systems continue to be available to the terrorists.

Secretary Tillerson and I agreed that we will work closely to ensure that no country provides safe havens for terrorists, and those who provide support to terrorists or use terrorism are held accountable. We agreed that Pakistan should take immediate steps to dismantle safe havens for terrorist groups and bring the perpetrators of Mumbai and Pathankot and other terrorist attacks. We believe that effective action by Pakistan against all terrorist groups without distinction is critical to the success of the new strategy of President Trump.

India is committed to working closely with the Government of Afghanistan and the international community, including the U.S., towards securing a democratic, peaceful, prosperous, stable, inclusive, and secure Afghanistan. We have agreed to hold India-U.S.-Afghanistan trilateral meeting at an early date.

We have also agreed to hold the inaugural meeting of the new bilateral mechanism on domestic and international terrorist designations in India in December. We also discussed the security challenges in the Indo-Pacific region, and connectivity issues. During prime minister's visit, both our countries had agreed on a set of principles that would guide connectivity initiatives in this region, particularly the respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity. We also reaffirmed the importance of freedom of navigation, overflight, and unimpeded commerce in accordance with international laws in order to achieve a free, open, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region. Secretary Tillerson and I agreed that we will work together and with other partners to promote cooperation based on these principles.

We have also agreed to hold the inaugural meeting of the 2+2 dialogue mechanism at an early date. We agreed to encourage industrial partnership between our defense companies. We believe that further liberalization of the legal framework and full implementation of the bilateral understanding on India's major defense partner status will facilitate co-production and co-development. We appreciate the intent that U.S. administration has shown under President Trump to make available to India advance defense platforms. We look forward to making further progress in this area.

Friends, we have also deliberated on our vibrant economic partnership and

agreed to work more closely to unlock the immense potential in our bilateral economic cooperation. The sustained growth of the Indian economy will unleash more opportunities for great India-U.S. economic engagement. Our cabinet colleagues will hold in-depth discussion in Washington, D.C. over the next two days.

Friends, people-to-people contacts have played a critical role in the development of India-U.S. relations. This is in part – this is most evident in our mutually beneficial digital partnership, driven by our skilled professionals. Secretary Tillerson has very correctly pointed out that no two countries encourage innovation better than the U.S. and India. In this regard, we discussed the very significant contribution to the U.S. economy of Indian-skilled professionals who travel and work under H-1B and L-1 visa programs.

I have also sought Secretary Tillerson's support for resolution of the long-pending issue of totalization, and I have asked that no – nothing by the U.S. should be done which will affect or adversely affect India's interests. Innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic partnership have been an important foundation of our relations. Our economic innovation partnership will be further strengthened by the Global Entrepreneurship Summit that India and U.S. will co-host next month. We look forward to welcoming the U.S. delegation led by Ms. Ivanka Trump, advisor to the President.

Friends, I thank Secretary Tillerson for the continued U.S. support to India's membership of the multilateral export control regimes and permanent membership of the UN Security Council. We both agreed that enhanced global role – we must take forward the agreements made between our two leaders, and this trip has enhanced it.

I now invite Secretary Tillerson to give his remarks. Thank you.

MODERATOR: (Inaudible) request our Honorable Secretary of State to deliver his statement to the media.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, let me begin by thanking Prime Minister Modi and Minister Swaraj for their very warm welcome to India. It is a real pleasure to return to India, a vibrant democracy that shares so many values with the United States.

India and the United States have had close relations now for more than 70 years and we are natural allies, in the words of Prime Minister Modi. We are grateful for his friendship and his vision of a closer U.S.-India relationship and a vision we certainly share. The United States supports India's emergence as a leading power and will continue to contribute to Indian capabilities to provide security throughout the region. In this regard, we are willing and able to provide India advanced technologies for its military modernization efforts. This includes ambitious offers from American industry for F-16 and F-18 fighter planes. I'm grateful to my friend and colleague, Secretary of Defense Mattis, that he was able to visit India last month, and he and I both look forward to the inaugural 2+2 dialogue early next year.

In August, President Trump announced a new strategy for South Asia, one that redoubles our commitment to Afghanistan, and with it, to peace, stability, and the greater South Asian region. India plays an important role in this effort. In the fight against terrorism, the United States will continue to stand shoulder to shoulder with India. Terrorist safe havens will not be tolerated.

We acknowledge with gratitude India's generous contributions to development in Afghanistan, including construction of the Salma Dam and the Afghanistan parliament building, and the \$3 billion it has provided already in development assistance. We also look forward to further cooperation in the broader Indo-Pacific region as we both promote a rules-based approach to the commons and a transparent and sustainable approach to economic development. We're glad to be joined in this effort by our close mutual partner, Japan, and I was honored to participate in a trilateral discussion on these topics with my friends, Minister Swaraj and Minister Kono, in New York last month.

In addition to our partnership on regional and global stability, India and the United States continue to benefit from our strong economic bonds. Our two countries have a history of trade that dates back to the 18th century, long before the independence of either of our nations. We are pleased that recently, we celebrated an important milestone of our deepening economic relationship. The first shipment of American crude oil arrived in India at the beginning of this month, marking the first U.S. oil export to India in more than four decades. Continued oil sales have the potential to boost bilateral trade by up to \$2 billion per year.

In fact, the U.S.-India trade relationship, which reached nearly \$115 billion last year, touches many parts of the lives of both of our citizens. U.S. companies and products are an everyday presence in the lives of Indians and we see increasing investments from Indian companies in America, including a Mahindra vehicle plant that will open this month in Detroit, the first ever Indian automobile manufacturing plant in the United States. India and the United States also share a spirit of entrepreneurship and innovation, including the dynamic Indian American community. We're proud to cohost the Global Engagement ^[1] Summit in Hyderabad next month, where the spirit of private enterprise will be on full display. GES, the first ever to be hosted in South Asia, will be an important opportunity for India and the United States to showcase the entrepreneurship of our people, advance women's economic empowerment, and harness the power of young innovators in both of our countries.

But at the core of our strong bond is our shared values. Our democracies were founded on a commitment to individual liberty and the rule of law. It's this foundation that underpins all that we work together on, from combating terrorism and safeguarding a rules-based Indo-Pacific region to increasing free and fair trade even as we look for more areas of cooperation. As President Trump said during Prime Minister Modi's trip to the United States in June, and I quote, "The future of our partnership has never looked brighter." India and the United States will always be tied together in friendship and respect. We look forward to an even brighter future. Thank you very much, Excellency, for hosting me and for the very fruitful and useful

dialogue we've had. Thank you.

MODERATOR: Thank you, sir. (Inaudible) two questions. One will be from the media accompanying the U.S. Secretary of State and another one for – from the Indian media. The first question goes to the accompanying media which is with the U.S. Secretary of State.

MODERATOR: Jonathan, go ahead.

QUESTION: Jonathan Landay with – oh. Jonathan Landay with Reuters. Madam External Affairs Minister, you say India fully shares Secretary Tillerson's vision for greater – for greatly expanding U.S.-Indian relations and for India to play a greater security role in the Indo-Pacific region. In that context, the Trump administration is pressing countries around the world to cut diplomatic and trade ties with North Korea, to strangle the hard currency flows that fund North Korea's nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs. India and North Korea maintain embassies in each other's capitals, and bilateral trade in 2013 reportedly totaled more than \$90 million, some 60 million of it Indian exports that include petroleum products critical to North Korea's military. Is India prepared to shut down trade with Pyongyang and close the embassies to demonstrate its readiness to expand its strategic partnership with the United States?

Mr. Secretary, in 2016, India and Afghanistan signed an agreement for India to develop the southern Iranian port of Chabahar and build a railway line to southern Afghanistan, creating a trade corridor that would free Afghanistan from reliance on Pakistan's port of Karachi, to which India has no access. India is investing millions in the project, which will allow it to expand trade and assistance to Afghanistan, a key pillar of your administration's new South Asia policy, yet the Trump administration also has embarked on a new strategy that takes a more aggressive stance towards Iran in order to blunt its expanding influence in the Middle East. Isn't there a major risk that the two U.S. strategies will clash in Chabahar, that Iran could put the brakes on that project, seriously undermining India's ability to fulfill the role envisioned for it in the Trump administration's plan for stabilizing Afghanistan? How do you prevent that from happening given the serious tensions between the United States and Iran? Thank you.

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS MINISTER SWARAJ: (Via interpreter) Thank you very much. The topic you have raised with regard to the DPRK – and we have actually had a very open discussion between myself and Secretary Tillerson and both of the points that you have touched upon, which means reduction of trade and closing down of the embassy. In fact, I have talked to Secretary Tillerson about these two topics with regard to trade. The trade between us and DPRK has reduced considerably. In fact, I can very safely say it's at a minimal level.

Now, with regard to the embassy, the size of the Indian embassy in Pyongyang is very small, but the fact remains there is an embassy, and I mentioned to Secretary Tillerson that some of your friend countries' embassies should in fact stay there because we should leave some channels of communication with the DPRK. Many times you have to talk to the other person there. Sometimes you need dialogue to lead to solutions of problems, and I think there should

be one embassy in that country of a country that you call a friend state. And I do understand that Secretary Tillerson has understood my stance on this very intelligently and he's understood the fact that we have considerably reduced the volume of trade and our embassy is small. But I still feel that the embassy should remain there and he has appreciated this point.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: With respect to the recently announced policy of the United States towards Iran, I think it's important to keep a few things in mind. That policy, as you know, had three important pillars to it. One is dealing with the nuclear plan of action. The second important pillar of that policy, though, is to deal with Iran's other destabilizing activities – their ballistic missile programs, their export of arms to terrorist organizations and their destabilizing export of foreign fighters, involvement in the revolution in Yemen, Syria, and other places. And the third pillar, though, which, again, doesn't get talked as much about, is a support for moderate voices inside of Iran, that we know there are strong feelings and values inside of Iran that we want to promote in terms of one day the Iranian people being able to retake control of their government. They live under this oppressive revolutionary regime, and we do not want to harm the Iranian people. Our fight is not with the Iranian people. Our disagreements are with the revolutionary regime.

So with that context, as we are taking actions to impose sanctions on the regime – and, in particular, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard – it's our objective to deny financing capacity and to disrupt the activities related to these malign behaviors. It's not our objective to harm the Iranian people, nor is it our objective to interfere with legitimate business activities that are going on with other businesses, whether they be from Europe, India, or agreements that are in place that promote economic development and activity to the benefit of our friends and allies as well. We think that there isn't – there's no contradiction within that policy and, in fact, we're calling on some of these same counterparties to join us in imposing sanctions on Iran's activities, and in particular, the activities of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps and their subsidiaries to punish them for the destabilizing activities that we see Iran carrying out in the region.

So we do – we don't see a contradiction there and we have very open dialogue and discussions with all of our friends and allies around the policy to ensure it's well understood. But also, if we see areas of concern, we'll engage with our friends and partners on ways that we believe they can help put the pressure on Iran to push back on the destabilizing activities of Iran that I think are of a concern to many in the world.

MODERATOR: Thank you, sir. Thank you, ma'am. The second question goes to the Indian media. Ashish?

QUESTION: Thank you (inaudible). Good afternoon, excellencies. I am Ashish from India TV. My question, Secretary, for you is that you just mentioned that safe havens of terror won't be tolerated, but we have seen off and on how Pakistan state has been harboring terrorists and supporting cross-border terrorism. So – and whenever the complicity is pointed out to them, sir, they very easily get – giving some tactical condition or some false assurances. So

since you have just come from Pakistan to India, how do you look forward to deal with this issue, to solve this issue, which is very crucial to us?

(Via interpreter) Ma'am, thank you. As you just mentioned about the H-1B visa, can you please tell me when you had a discussion with regard to H-1B visa – you know that this has a very deep impact on many professionals – what are the kind of resolutions that have been taken to resolve this?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: In our discussions with Pakistani leadership yesterday in Islamabad we had a very open, frank exchange around the concerns the United States shares with other regional partners and allies – India, but also Afghanistan – that there are too many terrorist organizations that find a safe place in Pakistan from which to conduct their operations and attacks against other countries. We have extended to Pakistan certain expectations we have of their government and their leadership to deal with, in particular, these organizations, the leaders of these organizations, and we are attempting to put in place a mechanism of cooperation through information sharing, but not just information sharing; action – action to be taken to begin to deny these organizations the ability to launch attacks against others.

Quite frankly, my view – and I expressed this to the leadership of Pakistan – is we also are concerned about the stability and security of Pakistan's government as well. As these terrorist organizations have enlarged their numbers and have enlarged their strength and their capability within Pakistan's borders, this can lead to a threat to Pakistan's own stability. It is not in anyone's interest that the Government of Pakistan be destabilized. And so we think we have a mutually shared interest in not just containing these organizations, but ultimately eliminating these organizations. I think all of us have to commit ourselves to the eradication of terrorism, of violent extremism in whatever form it takes. And this is going to require international and global efforts and a common view and a common objective and mission.

And so these are the expectations that we have put in place with the leadership of Pakistan. We want to work with Pakistan in a positive way because we think this is in their interest as well longer term.

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS MINISTER SWARAJ: (Via interpreter) You have asked a question with regard to H-1B visas. Firstly, I would like to clarify that so far there has been no change in the policy of H-1B visas; however, some of the bills have been presented in the American Congress. If these bills pass, then some of our skilled professionals will be affected adversely and that is the reason why India has attached great priority to this issue.

When I met with Secretary Tillerson in New York, then also I raised this issue, and just recently, we had a visit from a congressional delegation and, again, I raised this topic with them. And in fact, today also I have brought up this topic with Secretary Tillerson, and the way I put it across is this: that between – India and U.S. share a very, very deep relation and when you leave – keep that in place, I don't think a skilled professional doesn't think that there will be any action taken which will not be in the interest

of the skilled profession.

And, of course, you have asked us how have we come to looking for a solution. I think H-1B visa can be changed into two ways. Firstly can be an executive order or it can be through passing a bill by the Congress, and we are obviously looking at it from both the sides. With regard to E.O., we are talking of the administration like we've talked to Secretary Tillerson.

With regard to bill passing in Congress, we are looking at getting their acceptance within the congressmen, like I mentioned that I just spoke with the congressional delegation also, so these are the two ways in which we are approaching getting closer to a solution so that we can ensure that the interests of our people are not affected adversely. We are talking to congressmen, we are talking to the administration that this kind of an E.O. is not passed or such a bill is not passed.

Thank you.

MODERATOR: Thank you, sir. This concludes today's press interaction. Thank you all for participating.

[1] Entrepreneurship

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