

# Press Releases: Secretary of State Tillerson Travel to Sydney and Wellington

Press Statement  
Heather Nauert

Department Spokesperson

Washington, DC  
May 30, 2017

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U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson will be in Sydney, Australia, June 5–6, with Secretary of Defense James Mattis to participate in the 2017 Australia-U.S. Ministerial Consultations hosted by Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop and Australian Defense Minister Marise Payne.

Secretary Tillerson, Secretary Mattis, and their counterparts will discuss the full range of U.S.-Australian cooperation on bilateral, regional, and global issues. The Secretaries will coordinate our policies and identify ways to further strengthen the alliance and deepen cooperation between our two governments.

The Secretary will then travel to New Zealand to reaffirm our strong ties and discuss coordination on shared strategic interests with Prime Minister English and Foreign Minister Brownlee.

Follow Secretary Tillerson's travel to Australia and New Zealand via @StateDept and @USAsiaPacific on Twitter and go to the Department's Flickr account for the latest trip photos. Keep track of all of the Secretary's travels at <https://www.state.gov/secretary/2017travel/index.htm>.

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# Press Releases: Background Briefing: Senior State Department Officials on the OAS Meeting on Venezuela

Special Briefing  
Senior State Department Officials  
Via Teleconference  
May 30, 2017

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**MODERATOR:** Thanks very much, and thanks to everyone who has joined us this afternoon for our background call on Venezuela. I'll first introduce our speakers and then restate the ground rules, and then turn it over to them and ultimately to your questions.

Today we are joined by [Senior State Department Official One] and we'll refer to him on background attribution as Senior State Department Official Number One. We're also joined today by [Senior State Department Official Two] and we'll refer to him as Senior State Department Official Number Two. As a reminder, again, that's the attribution: Senior State Department Officials One and Two. And we're going to embargo this call just until the conclusion of the call.

And with that, I'll turn it over to our first senior State Department official.

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL ONE:** Thank you. Good afternoon, and thank you all for joining the call. If I can, today I'd like to just provide some brief context regarding United States policy towards Venezuela ahead of the foreign ministers special meeting being held tomorrow at the Organization of American States.

Because of the regime's poor choices and poor management, Venezuela now faces an interlocking series of crises – political, economic, humanitarian, and social. It is in this context that we embrace multilateral efforts to seek sustainable, peaceful solutions in Venezuela.

Working with the Organization of American States and with the democratic governments throughout the Americas, we are supporting a unified regional approach to help Venezuela find a peaceful, democratic, and comprehensive solution to its current problems.

This is slow work. It's methodical work. It's multilateral work. And it is a process. Tomorrow's meeting is the first, though, in a long process, because it's the first meeting in memory in which the foreign ministers of the Western Hemisphere are all getting together for precisely one and only one purpose, which is to discuss the situation in Venezuela today. And it's also not likely to be the last such meeting.

What it is we seek at this point is to establish a mandate for new diplomatic engagement in support of good-faith negotiations amongst all Venezuelans. To this end, we have discussed the creation of a contact group of select countries to accompany a new negotiation or mediation process moving forward.

But let me also note that in the context with the OAS, it's also important that what happens in diplomatic salons and halls also is recognized for its import not just in the halls of diplomacy but for its impact in the streets and in the news and in the homes of everyday Venezuelans.

What is happening there in Venezuela today, the people need to recognize – and in fact, I think it's quite clear now that they do – the common Venezuelan citizen recognizes that they are not alone, that the hemisphere is in solidarity with them, that the hemisphere is supportive of their just calls for democracy, and for their common understanding that what is happening in their country today is not – is neither democratic nor acceptable, and that the United – sorry, that the United States, as a member of the OAS, but the OAS as a group, as the community of democratic nations, stands with them in their time of need.

We therefore believe it's important that the OAS member-states support diplomatic engagement for two key reasons.

First, as I suggested, as a principle, OAS member-states need to act collectively to ensure that the nations of our hemisphere support democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. These are principles reflected not only in the OAS Founding Charter and in the 2001 Inter-American Democratic Charter, to which all member-states have agreed, including Venezuela.

But also, second, speaking on a practical level, these interlocking crises that Venezuela is now facing that I mentioned earlier, they will only be resolved through good-faith negotiations amongst all Venezuelans. Again, this is a problem amongst Venezuelans with the United States and with the OAS in support and solidarity for a pacific solution.

As with previous efforts at negotiations last fall, the main responsibility for showing good faith in any negotiations now is on President Maduro and the Government of Venezuela. We seek the full diplomatic strength of our hemisphere to help make such negotiations possible at this time.

We continue to call upon the Government of Venezuela to fulfill the commitments it made last fall to hold prompt elections, to respect the constitution and the national assembly, to provide for the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners, and to tend to the humanitarian needs of the 31 million Venezuelan people. We also continue to

call on all sides to abstain from violence.

As President Trump has said, quote, "A stable and peaceful Venezuela is in the best interest of the entire hemisphere, and America stands with all the people in our great hemisphere yearning to be free."

And with that, I will turn the floor over to my colleague now, so he can make a few comments about the dynamics of the OAS, and thereafter perhaps we could take your questions. Thank you.

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL TWO:** Okay, thanks, [Senior State Department Official One]. [Senior State Department Official Two.] I just wanted to add that tomorrow's meeting of the region's foreign ministers provides us with an important new opportunity to highlight the increasing level of concern about the unfolding situation in Venezuela that nearly all countries in the region feel, and on the need for good-faith negotiations to deal with developments there, as [Senior State Department Official One] mentioned.

We have a unique opportunity at this meeting to signal our collective concern about the crisis in Venezuela and discuss a mediation effort to avoid further violence and re-establish the rule of law. As the premier multilateral political institution in the region, the OAS is the right forum to address this matter, consistent with the commitments under the OAS Charter and the Inter-American Democratic Charter that [Senior State Department Official One] referred to.

OAS member-states have been working over the last several months to explore potential options for international mediation efforts and to establish a contact group to facilitate mediation in Venezuela, and a majority of countries in the region now appear to support the need for such an effort.

We hope tomorrow's meeting will allow for broader discussions on how best to move this diplomatic initiative forward, and we also will be looking to the upcoming OAS general assembly in mid-June, in Mexico, to provide another high-profile opportunity to report on progress and further advance our efforts.

So that's all I have for now.

**MODERATOR:** Okay, we'll be happy to take your questions now.

**OPERATOR:** Thank you. As a reminder, if you do have a question, press \* then 1 on your phone keypad; and if you are using a speaker phone, please pick up the handset before pressing the numbers. Also, it has been requested that you limit yourself to one question and one follow-up question; and for any additional questions, you will need to queue up again and we'll take questions as time permits.

Our first question is from the line of Luis Alonso with Associated Press. Your line is open.

**QUESTION:** Yes. Hi, good afternoon. Thank you for doing this. You hear me well?

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL ONE:** Sure can.

**QUESTION:** Okay, great. Thank you. I would like to ask – well, I think it's a basic question. In the scenario that the OAS adopts a declaration tomorrow, what impact could such a declaration have if we consider that Venezuela has so far refused any OAS mediation and, as a matter of fact, already started a process to leave the organization last month?

And so a second part of the question: I understand that only 22 member-states have confirmed attendance to the meeting tomorrow. Does that level of attendance undermine in any way the decision that may – the possible decision tomorrow of a declaration? Thank you.

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL TWO:** Thanks for the question. I think that many of us in the OAS environment believe that the OAS's discussion of Venezuela up until now and going forward through the ministerial creates – has an important impact on the context in which the Venezuelan Government and the opposition are operating.

Certainly, as [Senior State Department Official One] mentioned, for those fighting in defense of democratic institutions in Venezuela, having the OAS speak to what the international obligations the Venezuelan Government has is very important, and doing that at the ministerial level tomorrow is really the exciting new development.

And so we're hoping that the ministers will be able to further address some of the steps the Venezuelans have been taking – the Venezuelan Government – and try and validate the concerns that many people have expressed.

As to the participation level, I think many countries are still accrediting representatives, so I think it's too early to worry about the number you mentioned. And we're anticipating quite robust participation. We've already got many or most of the leading foreign ministers in the region coming.

So, [Senior State Department Official One], I don't know if –

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL ONE:** I think that pretty much covered it. We'll just have to wait to see on the accreditation issue.

And just one thing to add in terms of Venezuela's announced – announcement as having initiated the two-year process to leave the OAS. In the meantime, they are still, of course, full members of the OAS; but more importantly in the current context, whether it's a contact group or anything else, it's up to the Government of Venezuela, number one, to take responsibility for a solution but also to decide whether to accept the offer of assistance provided by the OAS. It's for them to decide what they will do, but it's also for the OAS membership to decide how to engage and to offer assistance. But ultimately, it's up to the Government of Venezuela to decide whether to accept assistance or not.

**QUESTION:** Thank you.

**MODERATOR:** Next question, please.

**OPERATOR:** Thank you. Yes, thank you. And our next question from the line of Gustau Alegret with NTN24. Your line is open.

**QUESTION:** Thank you for doing this. What have been the objectives of your diplomatic work with U.S. allies in the region, as you mentioned recently? Could you mention at least the – one or two results of this diplomatic work? Because the Venezuelan opposition, but not only them, have been very critic with the position of some of the countries, especially ministers of foreign relations and presidents, and the lack of energy. So could you mention the result of this diplomatic work that you mentioned at the beginning of this conference call? Thank you.

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL TWO:** Thanks for the question. I think that we have seen a growing level of support over the last several months for increased OAS engagement on Venezuela. It isn't easy, because the Venezuelan Government has never supported such engagement up until now, and so has resisted it, encouraged other countries to resist it as well. And they've been a very influential country in the region in recent years, so it's not easy to go against their wishes. But I think we've seen an increasing number of countries that have been so concerned about events on the ground in Venezuela, including that humanitarian situation, and the spillover effects in neighboring countries, that they've been willing to take a firmer position. And that's why, in fact, we were able to convene the ministers meeting that will happen tomorrow.

So I think that as [Senior State Department Official One] mentioned earlier, it can seem slow – like slow, frustrating work sometimes, but we believe that the OAS role on Venezuela is an important one, and we're happy to see that other countries increasingly agree.

**MODERATOR:** Next question, please.

**OPERATOR:** Thank you. We'll go next to Tracy Wilkinson with *LA Times*. Your line is open.

**QUESTION:** Hi, thank you. A couple of very basic questions – one relates to Luis's question about attendance. If I remember correctly, isn't it a lot of – or several of the Caribbean nations who have resisted this? I remember at one point I think it was Senator Rubio issued a fairly stark threat to them that they better get on board. My question is: What have you all been doing to try to get them on board? And then the second question: In the future diplomatic engagement that you talked about – I think you said a four-nation contact group would be the mechanism – what U.S. role do you envision in that? For example, would the U.S. be one of those nations? Thank you.

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL TWO:** So on diplomatic efforts, as I just mentioned, the situation itself in Venezuela and its deterioration has been I think the greatest – has had the greatest impact on the positions of countries in the OAS. There's more and more concern about what we're seeing, and so more and more countries have gotten over their reluctance to question or go against the wishes of the Venezuelan Government, because it's really hard to stand by and do nothing in the face of the kinds of institutional

steps we've seen in Venezuela, and the increasing humanitarian suffering.

We, of course, also have extensive relationships in the Caribbean, and we talk all the time, and have tried to highlight for some of our colleagues the difficulties that we're seeing. They're seeing it for themselves, of course, also though. And in terms of the contact group, I think that at this point countries are still discussing what that might look like, who should be in it, what – how should it pursue solutions. But really, the new development is that I think a majority of countries now believe that international support for a good-faith mediation effort is important and worth supporting in the OAS context.

**OPERATOR:** Thank you. We'll go to Nick Wadhams with Bloomberg. Your line is open.

**QUESTION:** Hi, thanks very much. I just had a somewhat specific question regarding reports that Goldman Sachs has eventually confirmed that they bought bonds issued by Venezuela's state oil company. And this came in for pretty severe criticism from the opposition. This was \$865 million in bonds. Do you have a comment on that specific case, or do you feel that that is helpful, and more broadly can you speak to the issue of concerns that the U.S. may have, and certainly concerns that the opposition has about Wall Street banks basically throwing a financial lifeline to the Government of Venezuela? Thank you.

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL ONE:** Thanks. Yeah, we're aware of the reports that Goldman Sachs Group recently purchased a significant amount of bonds issued by PDVSA, the Venezuelan state oil company. For details, though, on the actual purchase or the specifics of the agreement or what it might or might not mean, I'll just have to refer you to Goldman Sachs at this point.

But because of the sort of strategic economic decisions made by the government itself, as I mentioned earlier, they have a whole series of interlocking crises right now, and the situation economically is worsening precisely because of these sorts of continuing bad choices being made by the government. They may get them through the day, but the longer-term consequences of that seem to be quite damaging for the institutions as well as for the society. So I'll just leave it back at this point and refer you to Goldman. I know the opposition, the MUD, the – Mesa Unidad de Dialogo<sup>[1]</sup>, the opposition groups have also come out I gather with their own statement about this which you can take a look at as well.

**QUESTION:** Thank you.

**OPERATOR:** Thank you. And our next question from the line of Jay Solomon with *The Wall Street Journal*. Please, go ahead.

**QUESTION:** Thanks for doing this. I have another question about PDVSA. Russia's largest oil company, Rosneft, last week said that basically they accumulated a huge stake in Rosneft and also by de facto Citgo. Is that a concern now of the U.S. Government that Russia could basically have some sort of control over U.S. energy assets? Thank you.

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL ONE:** Yeah. I'd seen some of the same reports that, quite frankly, were a bit quizzical to me because they seem to assert a few things that did not jibe with our understanding of it. But for specifics on this, I'm going to have to refer you to the Department of Treasury in any event as lead on this. They could definitely take your question, though.

**OPERATOR:** Thank you. And we have a question from Conor Finnegan with ABC News. Please, go ahead.

**QUESTION:** Thanks very much. I have just two quick questions. To follow up on Nick's question, I know that you say you want to defer to Goldman on the actual payments, but can you speak more broadly to how any sort of U.S. financial institutions' role or engagement with Venezuela complicates the negotiations, especially with the OAS? And then secondly, I know there are four demands that the U.S. is making, but is there any sort of future government within Venezuela that could include President Maduro, or has the U.S. come to the conclusion that he has sort of lost legitimacy? Thanks.

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL ONE:** Sorry, I'm going to ask you to repeat the first question again. I was focused on the second for a second there.

**QUESTION:** Yep, no problem. Just to speak more broadly about what kind of impact relations between U.S. institutions, financial institutions, and the Government of Venezuela has on our diplomatic push to bring Venezuela to the negotiating table.

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL ONE:** Yeah, thank you. You had mentioned what you sort of called four U.S. demands. Actually, they are the commitments that the Government of Venezuela first of all made in the Vatican-backed process last fall, number one. Number two, they're the core demands not of the United States but of the Venezuelan people today in the streets. And third, they're also common understanding, organizing principles, if you will, for all the countries that are going to be assembling at the OAS. You asked about the OAS role in this this week. So that's where the OAS is coming in, is taking that as its four organizing principles, if you will, pursuit of those four core priorities.

As far as what this means more largely for such financial agreements might mean, I refer you to the statements by the national assembly of Venezuela that have thrown down a red flag, if you will, cautioning all financial institutions, Venezuelan and foreign alike, as to the potential illegitimacy of any such agreements that are being reached without the legally required, constitutionally required approval by the national assembly of Venezuela depending on the particulars of the international agreement. But in particular, assuming additional foreign debt, that requires the national assembly's approval. So it's – clearly there is concern, I would think, in the minds of anyone who is looking to engage in such purchases of debt today. That's highly problematic.

And the second question you had was on the legitimacy of the current –

**QUESTION:** Yeah.

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL ONE:** – government. How is legitimacy defined in a democracy? Through elections. That's one of the core four principles people have been asking for, what the opposition's been calling for. They have announced a potential date for gubernatorial elections this December, but it would only be after a new constituent assembly that might or might not totally overthrow the entire constitution in an anti-democratic fashion, number one; and number two, might not ever get to those now a year old, overdue regional elections to say nothing of the municipal election that are also due this year, to say nothing of what people are asking for today, which is for national presidential elections to restore legitimacy to whomever might rule Venezuela moving forward.

At the end of the day, this is a – this process – it's all about consensus. It's about finding a way forward for Venezuelans to depolarize their situation, and the best way to do that is through elections. So I'm going to leave it there.

**MODERATOR:** Okay, thanks very much, everyone. With that, we will conclude today's call. As a reminder, the attribution for our two speakers will be Senior State Department Officials One and Two, and with that, we will conclude our embargo. Thank you very much.

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[1]Mesa de la Unidad Democratica

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## **[Press Releases: Briefing on the President's Trip to the Middle East](#)**

Special Briefing  
Stuart E. Jones

Acting Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs

Briefing Room  
Washington, DC  
May 30, 2017

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**MS NAUERT:** Hi, everyone. Hope you're doing well and you all had a nice weekend. Welcome back to the State Department and thank you so much for joining us today. We know a lot of you are interested in the President's trip overseas, so we wanted to provide you with a briefing on that today.

Acting Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs Stuart Jones joins us once again. Stuart accompanied the President and the Secretary on their first leg of the trip, to Saudi Arabia and also the Middle East. In Riyadh, the President was warmly welcomed by the Saudi king and leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council as well as more than 50 Muslim-majority nations. In speaking with those nations and members of those nations, the President asked the leaders to confront and cast out promoters of violent extremism, and also close off avenues of their support. The President's messages were warmly received, and the assembled leaders expressed their gratitude to the United States for taking a leadership position once again, and the promise of unyielding commitment to the fight against global terrorism.

A few agreements from that trip that Stuart will highlight today:

First, the U.S. commitment to expand our decades-long security relationship with the Saudis. That culminated in the signing ceremony that pledged more than \$110 billion worth of foreign military sales. They also talked about \$80 billion worth of commercial sales. In addition to supporting the long-term security of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, this will bolster the kingdom's ability to contribute to counterterrorism operations across the region, and that will reduce the already heavy burden on the United States.

Next, the Global Center for Combating Extremist Ideology – ETIDAL, as it is known in Arabic – has now been established in Riyadh. The program is now in its infancy, but it's important to note that that program is Saudi-led and Saudi-financed. The goal is to combat, expose, and refute extremist ideology in cooperation with other governments. That program will partner with the United States and other nations. When it's fully operational, it will host visiting experts from cooperating nations.

And with that, I'll turn it over to Stu Jones, who can provide additional color on the trip with the President and the Secretary.

**MR JONES:** Thank you, Heather. Good morning, everybody. How's everybody? Thank you.

So it was my great honor to accompany the President on the first four days of his trip, first to Saudi Arabia and then to Israel and the West Bank. So in Saudi, there were – I think there were three components to the visit: there

was the bilateral component; there was the Gulf Cooperation Council/GCC component; and then there was the OIC component.

Bilaterally, as Heather mentioned, the United States and Saudi Arabia affirmed a strategic partnership for the 21st century. And underneath this, we've agreed to establish a Strategic Joint Consultative Group which will meet at least once a year, and this will bring together all the elements of the U.S.-Saudi bilateral relationship: security, commerce, and cultural engagement – everything that we do with the Saudis. There's going to be a working group, and this will be under the Joint Consultative Group.

Also, as Heather said, \$110 billion in defense deals and \$80 billion in commercial agreements. The \$110 billion includes \$6 billion, for example, for Lockheed helicopters, Blackhawks. That's a done deal. That's fixed. Many of those deals are also represented in MOUs and letters of intent, which are more forward-looking and haven't been concretized, but will be. Same thing with the \$80 billion in commercial agreements. This includes \$12 billion, for example, in GE power plants, but it also includes the \$20 billion that the Saudis have committed to Blackstone Group for investment in the United States in infrastructure, and that's intended to be a \$40 billion fund aimed at investment in U.S. infrastructure.

So that was sort of the commercial component of the trip.

As you know, the President inaugurated the ETIDAL center, which is the Global Center for Countering Extremist Ideology, and that center will monitor online extremism; do its analysis; it'll do counter-messaging. So the United States is still working out exactly how we're going to participate in this. As Heather said, this is a Saudi project. They've invited our participation. We need – the ball is in our court. We need to come back to the Saudis and say how we're going to participate in this and what we're going to contribute. But we certainly will benefit from the Saudi expertise in this area.

Secondarily, there was the GCC component. You've all read a very strong communique coming out of that meeting. It was a strong statement against terrorism, including against counterterrorism – excuse me, against terrorism, including against terror finance. And in that communique, it makes reference to – sorry – in addition to that communique, there is a multilateral MOU which establishes a center for countering terrorist finance. Now, at this point, that center is a virtual center, but it's envisaged that that will become a brick-and-mortar center as well. And in the communique, there's a strong commitment by all the GCC countries to combat extremism through counterterrorism financing, through counter-messaging, and through countering the ideology.

And very importantly, in that communique, the last provision, the last article in the communique says that all the GCC leaders will reunite in Washington in a year to review how we're doing. And this is in particular an issue of the Secretary. The Secretary wanted to make sure that there would be follow-up in all the elements to these agreements.

Also in the GCC summit document, there's a very strong statement expressing

concern about Iranian malign interference in the region. This speaks specifically to Bahrain, to Yemen, Syria. And this is a very strong message to deter this sort of Iranian interference.

Then, as you know, the last part of the day on the second day of the summit, on Sunday, the Saudis convened the Organization of Islamic States<sup>[1]</sup>. They had 55 states represented, 33 heads of state. It was a tremendous event; you saw the President's remarks – very strong statement, very strong statement by King Salman, but also by the prime minister of Indonesia, by King Abdullah of Jordan. There was a tremendous spirit in the room, very positive statements against extremism.

So this was the entire Islamic world coming together, the United States expressing our respect for Islam, and all these states coming together with the United States and jointly condemning extremism.

So that was the Saudi portion, then the next day we flew on to Tel Aviv. Of course, the President had bilateral meetings with Prime Minister Netanyahu and with President Abu Mazen, Mahmoud Abbas. Message there was a very clear message to – of support for Israel, support for Israel's security, and also eagerness to get going on the peace process.

At the time of the visit, the Israeli side presented a series of economic measures to improve economic conditions in the West Bank. You've seen the White House statement welcoming those measures. Those are very positive measures. We look forward to more.

**MS NAUERT:** Any questions?

**QUESTION:** I have a question.

**MR JONES:** Sorry, I'll let – Heather's supposed to do this. So my –

**QUESTION:** Okay. (Laughter.)

**MS NAUERT:** I'll just – I'll facilitate. Forgive me, I'm still getting your names (inaudible). Thank you.

**QUESTION:** No worries. Yeganeh, with Reuters. Hi, thanks so much. So regarding the Saudi portion of the trip, what would you say to critics who say that President Trump's speech basically served to give Saudi Arabia and other countries in the region a free pass on human rights abuses, a dynamic that a lot of people say actually contributes to growing extremism and that sort of repression actually leading to extremist ideologies taking hold and resulting in the attacks that we're seeing?

And also, there seemed to be not a ton of discussion of Saudi Arabia's role in spreading the Wahhabi or extremist visions of Islam. What would you say to those?

And then I think we reported a few weeks ago that you had planned to retire, if you wanted to give any comments on your impending retirement, why that is coming about? I believe it was pretty unexpected.

**MR JONES:** So on the issue of Saudi and other human rights, I mean, the human rights continues to be part of our bilateral dialogue with Saudi and all the other countries in the region. But the fact that it wasn't featured in the speech doesn't mean that it's not part of the bilateral dialogue, and that it's not part of what we're constantly talking about. And I think the fact that – you can argue that by taking it out of the public debate and having those conversations directly and quietly will be more effective.

**QUESTION:** So you're continuing to have those conversations directly and quietly?

**MR JONES:** Absolutely.

**QUESTION:** And then on your retirement?

**MR JONES:** On my retirement, this was a personal decision that I made over a year ago when I was coming back from Baghdad, and I decided that I want to do other things after public service. So I've been delighted to serve the previous administration. I've been delighted to serve this administration during this period. This is just a personal decision, and I've tried to avoid any media attention to this matter because I didn't want this to be confused with anything else.

**QUESTION:** Just on the Wahhabi question.

**MODERATOR:** We've got to move on. Josh.

**QUESTION:** Sure. Thanks for doing this. Of the \$110 billion in approved sales, can you say what portion of that represented new agreements that were struck since the President took office in January as opposed to ones that were kind of already in the pipeline under the previous administration? And I have a follow-up on that.

**MR JONES:** Yeah, a fair question. I can't tell you because there were so many deals, and obviously some of them were in gestation well before the change in administration. Some of them have come into focus since the change in administrations. But I couldn't – I haven't – we haven't racked and stacked those.

**QUESTION:** Okay. And by approving a lot of these sales to Saudi Arabia, is the U.S. asserting that in the last however many months Saudi Arabia has taken some specific steps to address satisfactory U.S. concerns about the high numbers of civilian casualties in their effort in Yemen and in other protections that we wanted to see them take prior to giving them those kinds of weaponry?

**MR JONES:** So the reason why the United States is eager to go into these arrangements is because we want to partner with Saudi Arabia in the security realm to face this – the threats in the region, specifically from malign Iranian influence. As you know, the day of the summit the – there was a ballistic missile shot into Saudi Arabia from Yemen by the – presumably by the Houthi forces. So we want our security partner, the Saudis, to have the – what they need to secure their borders and to secure their region, and also

to send a strong message that we will stand by our security partners.

Now, there's – again, we are constantly discussing quietly our understandings with the Saudis about how these are going to be used. We provide a lot of technical assistance about how these systems are going to be managed. Right before the visit, the Secretary authorized us to notify Congress on the sale of precision guided munitions to the Saudis, which will help enable them to precisely target enemy targets in the conflict that they're now having with Yemen, which is – so, but I wouldn't – but what you seem to be saying is: Are there conditions? And I wouldn't say that –

**QUESTION:** No, the question is: Have the Saudis done anything to improve their targeting and lessen the chances of civilian casualties since we initially cut off those PGM sales over that concern?

**MR JONES:** Yeah. And I would say that's a continuing source of conversation between us, and we're constantly trying to improve that process.

**MODERATOR:** All right. Nadia.

**QUESTION:** Thank you. I have two questions, actually. You referred to GCC countries and the memo of understanding about drying the funds for terrorism, I'm sure you've been following this rift between Qatar and the rest of the GCC. Some have been accusing them of funding Jabhat al-Nusrah, which is a terrorist organization. How does this complicate your work, and this has happened just after the President's visit?

And on the Israeli-Palestinian question, after meeting with Netanyahu and President Abbas, is this any framework for the peace forces to go forward? Is there any talk about direct or indirect talks between Netanyahu and Abbas?

**MR JONES:** Yeah. So in regards to Qatari – Qatar joined the communique on countering terrorism finance. They joined the MOU on countering extremist financing. So we see Qatar as a partner in this effort and we look forward to working with them. And of course, for all of us, for all of us in the MOU, the GCC members and the United States, we are going to continue to meet and to hold each other to a high standard of performance.

**MODERATOR:** Barbara.

**MR JONES:** On the – sorry, real quick on the Israeli-Palestinian process, I would say that there's no formal mechanisms that have yet been established.

**MODERATOR:** Barbara (inaudible).

**QUESTION:** Just to follow up on the – on this issue with the Israel-Palestine format, there's reporting in the Israeli press and Middle Eastern press that there's going to be a summit organized in the next month. Is there discussions about the possibility of a summit involving Mr. Trump, Mr. Netanyahu, and Mr. Abbas in the wider region?

And secondly, a question about Syria since we're talking about the Middle East. This movement – the conflict along the southern border with the Syrian

regime backed by the Iranian moving towards areas where the U.S.-backed forces are stationed, what do you see as the goal there? There's suggestions that the Iranians are behind this, wanting to get a path through to Damascus into Lebanon. And how big of a point of conflict do you expect this to become?

**MR JONES:** So I don't know how much of a conflict it's going to become. I think as we have said repeatedly, we're very concerned with Iranian influence in Syria. We don't see the Iranian presence there as enabling a political solution or a security solution for Syria.

In regard – again, I don't have any information on a summit on the peace process.

**QUESTION:** That means nothing being discussed, or you can't say anything?

**MR JONES:** I don't have anything on that. I'm sorry.

**MS NAUERT:** Final question. David.

**QUESTION:** Thank you. While you were over there, the Secretary criticized the conduct of the Iranian elections and Iran's record on democracy. He did so standing next to Saudi officials. How do you characterize Saudi Arabia's commitment to democracy, and does the administration believe that democracy is a buffer or a barrier against extremism?

**MR JONES:** I think what we'd say is that at this meeting we were able to make significant progress with Saudi and GCC partners in both making a strong statement against extremism and also – and also putting in place certain measures through this GCC mechanism where we can combat extremism.

Clearly, one source of extremism, one terrorism threat, is coming from Iran, and that's coming from a part of the Iranian apparatus that is not at all responsive to its electorate.

**MS NAUERT:** Okay.

**MR JONES:** Okay, thank you.

**MS NAUERT:** Let's wrap it up. (Inaudible.) Everybody, thank you.

[1]Organization of Islamic Cooperation

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## **Press Releases: Acting Assistant Secretary Thornton to Travel to Brussels**

Media Note  
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC  
May 26, 2017

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Acting Assistant Secretary for the East Asian and Pacific Affairs Bureau Susan Thornton and Ambassador Joe Yun, Special Representative for North Korea Policy, will travel to Brussels, Belgium, to meet with European counterparts to discuss issues of mutual interest in the East Asia and Pacific region May 30-June 1, 2017.

For updates, please follow the East Asian and Pacific Bureau on Twitter at @USAsiaPacific.

For press inquiries please contact [EAP-P-Office-DL@state.gov](mailto:EAP-P-Office-DL@state.gov).

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## **Press Releases: On the Occasion of the Federal Democratic Republic of**

# Ethiopia's National Day

Press Statement  
Rex W. Tillerson

Secretary of State

Washington, DC  
May 26, 2017

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On behalf of President Trump and the people of the United States, I congratulate Ethiopia as you celebrate your National Day on May 28.

A warm friendship connects the Ethiopian and American people. We remain committed to working with Ethiopia to foster liberty, democracy, economic growth, protection of human rights, and the rule of law.

Current global challenges demand close coordination and open dialogue. I look forward to working with Ethiopia on the UN Security Council, and hope that together we can find solutions to common challenges and issues of mutual importance.

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