

air campaign. Over the weekend, a U.S. serviceman was killed in a raid against al-Qaeda militants in Yemen, the first such loss since Trump took office.

Trump chats with Saudi, Abu Dhabi leaders about 'safe zones'

By Nahal Toosi

Politico

January 29, 2017

President Donald Trump held calls Sunday with the king of Saudi Arabia and the crown prince of Abu Dhabi — pledging cooperation against terrorism, requesting their support for the creation of safe zones in Syria and beyond, and indicating he will enforce the Iran nuclear deal instead of abandoning it.

The White House readouts of the calls include no mention of one especially sensitive topic: Trump's Friday executive order that includes a temporarily ban on the entry of citizens from seven Muslim-majority countries: Iran, Iraq, Sudan, Syria, Yemen, Libya and Somalia.

Although neither Saudi Arabia nor the United Arab Emirates are among the seven targeted countries, many of their subjects are outraged by the executive order, which critics have dubbed a "Muslim ban." At the same time, skeptics have noted that Saudi Arabia was home to 15 of the 19 Sept. 11, 2001, hijackers, making its exclusion from Trump's order especially puzzling.

In his call with Saudi King Salman, the president "requested, and the king agreed to support, safe zones in Syria and Yemen, as well as supporting other ideas to help the many refugees who are displaced by the ongoing conflicts," the White House said.

It was not immediately clear what Trump meant by "requested" safe zones in those two war-struck countries or what the Saudis are willing to do. Past talk of creating such havens has run into the reality that U.S. lawmakers are cool to any move that could lead to the deployment of American troops in the Middle East.

Trump and Salman also "agreed on the importance of rigorously enforcing the [nuclear deal] with Iran and of addressing Iran's destabilizing regional activities."

The language about Iran suggests that Trump is acquiescing to requests from even some critics of the nuclear deal not to abandon it. That being said, if the U.S. pursues enforcement too rigorously, it's possible that Iran may feel it is being unfairly targeted and walk away from the agreement, which gives it relief from sanctions in exchange for dismantling its nuclear program.

The Saudi monarch also invited Trump to "lead a Middle East effort to defeat terrorism and to help build a new future, economically and socially, for the people of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the region." That segment was left unexplained.

The White House gave fewer details about Trump's conversation with Abu Dhabi's crown prince, Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, other than to suggest the call went well and covered traditional subjects such as fighting terrorists.

"The president also raised the idea of supporting safe zones for the refugees displaced by the conflict in the region, and the crown prince agreed to support this initiative," according to the White House readout.

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DAVID ADAMS PRINCIPAL

☎ 202.879.9325 / ☎ 202.594.0078 / W www.podestagroup.com

1001 G Street NW, Suite 1000 West, Washington, DC 20001 f 🐦

EMAIL RECIPIENTS

First Name	Last Name	Mailing Organization	E-mail
David	Fite	Committee on Foreign Relations	david_fite@foreign.senate.gov
David	Kinzier	Committee on Foreign Relations	david_kinzier@foreign.senate.gov
Stacie	Oliver	Committee on Foreign Relations	stacie_oliver@foreign.senate.gov
Algene	Sajery	Committee on Foreign Relations	algene_sajery@foreign.senate.gov
Margaret	Taylor	Committee on Foreign Relations	margaret_taylor@foreign.senate.gov
Tim	Rieser	Office of Senator Patrick J. Leahy	tim_rieser@appro.senate.gov
Paul	Grove	Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs, Committee on Appropriations [Senate]	paul_grove@appro.senate.gov
Michael	Casey	Select Committee on Intelligence	mike_casey@ssci.senate.gov
Kerry	Sutten	Select Committee on Intelligence	kerry_sutten@ssci.senate.gov
Tom	Hawkins	Office of the Senate Majority Leader	tom_hawkins@mccconnell.senate.gov
Christian	Brose	Committee on Armed Services [Senate]	christian_brose@armed-services.senate.gov
Elizabeth	King	Committee on Armed Services [Senate]	elizabeth_king@armed-services.senate.gov
Michael	Kuiken	Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer	michael_kuiken@schumer.senate.gov
Eric	Sayers	Committee on Armed Services [Senate]	eric_sayers@armed-services.senate.gov
Jessica	Lewis	Committee on Foreign Relations	jessica_lewis@foreign.senate.gov
Edward	Burrier	Committee on Foreign Affairs	edward.burrier@mail.house.gov
Douglas	Campbell	Committee on Foreign Affairs	doug.campbell@mail.house.gov
James	McCormick	Committee on Foreign Affairs	jamie.mccormick@mail.house.gov
Mira	Resnick	Committee on Foreign Affairs	mira.resnick@mail.house.gov
Ed	Rice	Committee on Foreign Affairs	edmund.rice@mail.house.gov
Thomas	Sheehy	Committee on Foreign Affairs	tom.sheehy@mail.house.gov
Jason	Steinbaum	Committee on Foreign Affairs	jason.steinbaum@mail.house.gov
Matthew	Zweig	Committee on Foreign Affairs	matthew.zweig@mail.house.gov
David	Bortnick	Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs, Committee on Appropriations [House]	david.bortnick@mail.house.gov
Alice	Hogans	Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs, Committee on Appropriations [House]	alice.hogans@mail.house.gov
Erin	Kolodjeski	Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs, Committee on Appropriations [House]	erin.kolodjeski@mail.house.gov
Craig	Higgins	Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs, Committee on Appropriations [House]	craig.higgins@mail.house.gov
Steve	Marchese	Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs, Committee on Appropriations [House]	steve.marchese@mail.house.gov
Paul	Arcangeli	Committee on Armed Services [House]	paul.arcangeli@mail.house.gov
Kari	Bingen	Committee on Armed Services [House]	kari.bingen@mail.house.gov
Alexander	Gallo	Committee on Armed Services [House]	alexander.gallo@mail.house.gov
Jenness	Simler	Committee on Armed Services [House]	jenness.simler@mail.house.gov
Robert	Simmons	Committee on Armed Services [House]	bob.simmons@mail.house.gov
Michael	Bahar	Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence	michael.bahar@mail.house.gov
Timothy	Bergreen	Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence	timothy.bergreen@mail.house.gov
Damon	Nelson	Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence	damon.nelson@mail.house.gov
Wyndee	Parker	Office of the House Minority Leader	wyndee.parker@mail.house.gov
Jonathan	Burks	Office of the Speaker of the House of	jonathan.burks@mail.house.gov
Daniel	Silverberg	Office of the House Minority Whip	daniel.silverberg@mail.house.gov
Marin	Stein	Office of Representative Nita Lowey	marin.stein@mail.house.gov

Saudi Arabia's King Salman, in a telephone call on Sunday with U.S. President Donald Trump, agreed to support safe zones in Syria and Yemen, a White House statement said.

Trump, during his presidential campaign last year, had called for Gulf states to pay for establishing safe zones to protect Syrian refugees.

A statement after the phone call said the two leaders agreed on the importance of strengthening joint efforts to fight the spread of Islamic State militants.

"The president requested, and the King agreed, to support safe zones in Syria and Yemen, as well as supporting other ideas to help the many refugees who are displaced by the ongoing conflicts," the statement said.

The Saudi Press Agency, in an initial readout of the call, made no specific mention of safe zones, but said the two leaders had affirmed the "depth and durability of the strategic relationship" between the two countries.

The agency later said "the custodian of the Two Holy Mosques had confirmed his support and backing for setting up safe zones in Syria", but did not mention Yemen, where a Saudi alliance is fighting against the Iran-aligned Houthi group.

A senior Saudi source told Reuters the two leaders spoke for more than an hour by telephone and agreed to step up counter-terrorism and military cooperation and enhance economic cooperation.

But the source had no word on whether the two leaders discussed Trump's order to put a four-month hold on allowing refugees into the United States and temporarily ban travelers from Syria and six other Muslim-majority countries.

The source said Saudi Arabia would enhance its participation in the U.S.-led coalition fighting to oust Islamic State from its strongholds in Iraq and Syria.

The White House statement said the two leaders also agreed on the need to address "Iran's destabilizing regional activities." SPA confirmed the report but made no specific mention of Iran.

From: David Adams
Sent: Tuesday, January 31, 2017 2:12 PM
To: David Adams <dadams@podestagroup.com>
Subject: King Salman's call with President Trump

Good afternoon all – With all the coverage of President Trump's executive order over the last few days, I wanted to take a moment to flag the phone call between the President and King Salman that took place on Sunday. In particular, I wanted to note the King's commitment to fighting terrorism and to strengthen economic and energy cooperation. Below is the White House readout as well as a few news stories regarding the call. Please let me know if you have any questions. Best, Dave

Readout of the President's Call with King Salman bin Abd Al-Aziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia

The White House

Office of the Press Secretary

January 29, 2017

President Trump spoke today with Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abd Al-Aziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia. The two leaders reaffirmed the longstanding friendship and strategic partnership between the United States and Saudi Arabia. They agreed on the importance of strengthening joint efforts to fight the spread of radical Islamic terrorism and also on the importance of working jointly to address challenges to regional peace and security, including the conflicts in Syria and Yemen. The President requested and the King agreed to support safe zones in Syria and Yemen, as well as supporting other ideas to help the many refugees who are displaced by the ongoing conflicts. They also agreed on the importance of rigorously enforcing the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran and of addressing Iran's destabilizing regional activities. The President voiced support for the Kingdom's Vision 2030 economic program. Both leaders expressed a desire to explore additional steps to strengthen bilateral economic and energy cooperation. The two leaders also discussed an invitation from the King for President Trump to lead a Middle East effort to defeat terrorism and to help build a new future, economically and socially, for the people of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the region. The President and King Salman closed by underscoring their personal commitment to continued consultations on a range of regional and bilateral issues.

Saudi king agrees in call with Trump to support Syria, Yemen safe zones: White House
Reuters

January 30, 2017

By Glen Carey and Justin Sink

Bloomberg

January 29, 2017

Two days after moving to block the entry of citizens of seven majority Muslim countries, President Donald Trump's talks with two Gulf Arab leaders contained no public mention of the ban. The focus, instead, was on anti-terrorism efforts and confronting a mutual foe: Iran.

Trump spoke by phone on Sunday with Saudi Arabia's King Salman, whose country is home to Islam's holiest shrines, as well as Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed. The call with the Saudi monarch lasted more than an hour, according to a senior Saudi person who spoke on condition of anonymity. In addition to fighting terrorism, they agreed to tackle Iran's "destabilizing regional activities," the White House said.

The remarks shed more light on Trump's Middle East policy by signaling he wants to improve ties with the Sunni-ruled Gulf Arab monarchies that felt shunned by the U.S. under the Obama administration, which focused on clinching a nuclear deal with Iran. The new U.S. president, however, stopped short of repeating his earlier vows to repeal the accord, saying he agreed with the Saudi king on "the importance of rigorously enforcing" it, according to the Trump administration.

"If you are the incoming U.S. president, you will have a huge advantage with the Saudis and the Gulf states — just by not being Obama," Crispin Hawes, London-based managing director at Teneo Intelligence, said in a phone interview. "The impression Trump gives is that he sees political relationships in a bilateral framework. The Saudi-U.S. relationship on every observable level functions very well. At a starting point if you are King Salman, this is all good."

Both Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, whose capital is Abu Dhabi, are engaged in proxy confrontations with Shiite-ruled Iran in some of the Middle East's bloodiest conflicts. The Islamic Republic was one of the seven countries included in the 90-day immigration ban on Friday, the others being Syria, Iraq, Sudan, Somalia, Yemen, and Libya.

Safe Zones

Trump asked the two leaders to help secure safe zones in conflict areas in the region to support the displaced. King Salman also agreed to back "other ideas to help the many refugees who are displaced by

Both countries share views about Iranian policies in the region, the Saudi source said, suggesting Trump agreed with Riyadh's suspicion of what it sees as Tehran's growing influence in the Arab world. Iran denies it meddles in Arab countries.

The White House statement said the two also discussed what it called an invitation from the king for Trump "to lead a Middle East effort to defeat terrorism and to help build a new future, economically and socially," for Saudi Arabia and the region.

The two also discussed the Muslim Brotherhood, the senior Saudi source said, adding in a reference to the late al Qaeda leader, "it was mentioned that Osama bin Laden was recruited at an early stage" by the organization.

Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates designated the Brotherhood a terrorist organization. Riyadh fears the Brotherhood, whose Sunni Islamist doctrines challenge the Saudi principle of dynastic rule, has tried to build support inside the kingdom since the Arab Spring revolutions.

U.S. officials and people close to Trump's transition team have said a debate is under way in the Trump administration whether the United States should also declare the Brotherhood a terrorist organization and subject it to U.S. sanctions.

Trump also spoke with Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. In what appears to have been a reference to the Muslim Brotherhood, the Crown Prince was cited by UAE state news agency WAM as saying "groups that raise fake slogans and ideologies aim to hide their criminal truth by spreading chaos and destruction."

The White House said Trump had also "raised the idea of supporting safe zones for the refugees displaced by the conflict in the region, and the Crown Prince agreed to support this initiative."

(Reporting By Steve Holland in Washington, Samia Nakhoul in Beirut and William Maclean and Reem Shamseddine in Dubai; Writing by Yara Bayoumy; Editing by Meredith Mazzilli)

Trump's Calls With Gulf Allies Offer Insight on Mideast Policy

the ongoing conflicts," the White House said. The two leaders "agreed on the importance of strengthening joint efforts to fight the spread of radical Islamic terrorism and also on the importance of working jointly to address challenges to regional peace and security, including the conflicts in Syria and Yemen," it said.

Saudi Arabia is one of the U.S.'s oldest allies in the Middle East. Saudis and other Gulf Arabs criticized former President Barack Obama for not offering enough support in the showdown with Iran.

Ties were also strained last year after the U.S. Congress passed a law that allows victims of the Sept. 11 attacks to sue the kingdom. Fifteen Saudi nationals took part in the attacks on New York and Washington.

Saudi officials, however, have welcomed Trump's election and praised his energy policies as well as his choice of Rex Tillerson, the former chairman of Exxon Mobil Corp., as secretary of state. The kingdom is considering New York as a possible venue for the share sale of its oil giant Aramco, in what could be the world's biggest initial public offering.

"The Saudis welcomed his appointment," Tenno's Hawes said. "Tillerson is someone who has tremendous diplomatic experience in the region," he said. "He is a known quantity. Right now, I think this is going as well as Saudi policymakers could have hoped."

Bin Laden

Trump and the Saudi king discussed ways to boost economic ties, which the senior Saudi person said would increase trade and create jobs. The call also tackled how the late al-Qaeda leader, Osama bin Laden, aimed to destroy the kingdom's ties with the U.S. by recruiting Saudis to launch the 9-11 attacks, the person said.

Trump has ordered a review of U.S. strategy to combat Islamic State fighters operating in Iraq and Syria. In a memo Saturday, Trump ordered the Joint Chiefs of Staff to develop a plan within 30 days to eliminate the terror group.

It's unclear how or whether the strategy would deviate from the Obama administration's efforts, which has involved deploying U.S. special forces, supplying and equipping local armies, and building a coalition