TILLERSON SAYS INVESTMENT IN IRAQ IS CRITICAL TO AVOID ISLAMIC STATE'S RETURN

-

14.02.2018

The Washington Post, February 13 2018

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson on Tuesday declared Iraq open for business and urged governments and investors to help rebuild the country or risk seeing a return of the Islamic State.

Tillerson said the U.S. Export-Import Bank would sign a memo that would facilitate financing for $3 billion in American goods and services. He listed several large U.S. corporations that already have deals with Iraq totaling $2 billion, and he lauded the investment opportunities.

That is far less than the $88 billion Iraq needs to restore basic water and power and rebuild schools destroyed during the Islamic States reign over vast swaths of Iraq and Syria. And it is unlikely that the conference will net Iraq anywhere near that sum.

Tillerson said the conference was not about donating but about understanding the business opportunities available.

Earlier in the day, Tillerson outlined the consequences of not stepping up to stabilize territory liberated from the militants.

The end of major combat operations does not mean we have achieved the enduring defeat of ISIS, Tillerson said at a meeting of countries that participated militarily and financially in fighting the Islamic State, using a common acronym for the group. ISIS remains a serious threat to the stability of the region, our homelands and other parts of the globe.

Tillersons attendance at the conferences in Kuwait underscored the difficulty the administration faces in turning President Trumps populist rhetoric into policy.

On Monday, Trump suggested that the United States had spent too much in the region and tweeted, it is now time to start investing in OUR Country!

On Tuesday, Tillerson described the fight against the Islamic State as far from complete and announced $200 million in U.S. aid to stabilize war-torn communities in Syria so residents can return home.

In Iraq and Syria, ISIS is attempting to morph into an insurgency. In places like Afghanistan, the Philippines, Libya, West Africa, and others, it is trying to carve out and secure safe havens, he said. We have seen in Iraq and Syria the consequences of an ISIS territorial presence. History must not be allowed to repeat itself elsewhere.

The meetings in Kuwait held strong resonance rooted in time and place. The city is awash with flags and lights leading up to Liberation Day on Feb. 26, the 27th anniversary of the countrys liberation from Iraq after the Gulf War. Now Kuwait was welcoming Iraqs head of government to a conference designed to help Iraq.

Iraq stands united and strong over the ruins brought by terrorism, said Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, citing 150,000 units of housing that were damaged or destroyed. Iraq has what it takes to stand back on its feet.

However, even the rich nations in the Gulf are more cost conscious today, after years of low oil prices.

Tillerson is deeply concerned that regional rivalries and disputes are diverting attention from the fight against remnants of the Islamic State, al-Qaeda and other militant groups. One flash point is in northwestern Syria, where Syrian Kurds allied with the United States are being attacked by troops from NATO ally Turkey.

Tillerson travels Friday to Ankara for a visit Turkish officials have characterized as a make-or-break moment for the U.S.-Turkish relationship.

Some Middle East experts, and even diplomats inside the State Department, say the administrations proposals to cut foreign aid and the State Departments budget may carry costs beyond money.

If communities in Iraq and Syria cannot return to normal life, we risk the return of conditions that allowed ISIS to take root, Tillerson said Tuesday.

Kaynak/Source: