

Rex Tillerson Airs Concern About Jared Kushner's Secret Dealings with Foreign Leaders

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Rex Tillerson, the former Secretary of State, revealed in recently released testimony to the House Foreign Affairs Committee that he was blindsided by Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, who held discussions with world leaders, influencing foreign policy while excluding the State Department. Tillerson reported that both he and General Mattis were surprised in May 2017 when Kushner and Steve Bannon held a private meeting with the rulers of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates who discussed their intention to impose a blockade on Qatar, yet the White House later denied prior knowledge of the closure.

In newly disclosed testimony, former secretary of state Rex Tillerson said President Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, operated independently with powerful leaders around the world without coordination with the State Department, leaving Tillerson out of the loop and in the dark on emerging U.S. policies and simmering geopolitical crises.

In a transcript of his testimony to the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Tillerson also described the challenge of briefing a president who does not read briefing papers and often got distracted by peripheral topics, noting he had to keep his message short and focus on a single topic.

"I learned to be much more concise with what I wanted to bring in front of him," Tillerson told the House panel during a seven-hour session in May.

He stood by his previous characterization that Trump does not dive deep into details and said he learned not to give the president articles or long memos. "That's just not what he was going to do," he said.

The Washington Post and other news outlets received an advance copy of the redacted transcript before it was published by the committee Thursday.

On several occasions, Tillerson said he was blindsided by Kushner's discussions with world leaders.

In one instance, Tillerson said he learned that Kushner was meeting with Mexico's foreign secretary, Luis Videgaray, because he happened to be in the same Washington restaurant while the two men hashed out a "fairly comprehensive plan of action" that Tillerson didn't know about.

"The owner of the restaurant . . . came around and said, "Oh, Mr. Secretary, you might be interested to know the foreign secretary of Mexico is seated at a table near the back in case you want to go by and say hello to him," Tillerson said. "And so I did."

Tillerson said he saw the "color go out of the face" of the foreign secretary as he walked into the room. "I said: Welcome to Washington. . . . Give me a call next time you're coming to town."

In another instance, Tillerson explained in detail being stunned by the 2017 Persian Gulf crisis in which key Arab allies severed ties with Qatar, another key U.S. ally. He said he was in Australia at the time with then-Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, and both were caught off guard.

"I was surprised," he said.

He also said he was not aware of meetings that had been occurring between Arab leaders and Kushner, including a private huddle May 20, 2017, between Kushner, Trump's then-adviser Stephen K. Bannon and the rulers of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. During the meeting, Arab leaders discussed their intention to impose a blockade on Qatar, though the White House later denied prior knowledge of the June 5 closure.

"What's your reaction to a meeting of that sort having taken place without your knowledge?" Tillerson was asked by committee staff.

"It makes me angry," Tillerson said. "Because I didn't have a say. The State Department's views were never expressed."

White House spokesman Hogan Gidley said that such a gathering to "discuss the blockade never happened, and neither Jared, nor anyone in the White House, was involved in the blockade."

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https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/tillerson-jared-kushner-left-him-in-the-dark-on-conversations-with-foreign-nations/2019/06/27/c877a780-64c8-43d5-8567-d4cb2c9b948b_story.html?utm_term=.1930c38b5697