

Press Releases: Remarks at the High-Level Opening Session of the Inaugural U.S.-Qatar Strategic Dialogue

Remarks

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Secretary of State

Secretary of Defense James Mattis, Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani, and Qatari Defense Minister Khalid bin Muhammad al-Atiyah

Washington, DC

January 30, 2018

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, good morning, all. And the United States is very pleased to host this inaugural U.S.-Qatar Strategic Dialogue. I want to welcome Foreign Minister al-Thani, Minister of Defense al-Atiyah, and the entire Qatari delegation to Washington. And I want to express my thanks and appreciation to Secretary Mattis for joining us for this dialogue as well.

Qatar is a strong partner and a longtime friend of the United States. We

value the U.S.-Qatar relationship and hope the talks today deepen our strategic ties. In today's Strategic Dialogue sessions, we will discuss important areas of cooperation, including trade and investment, security, counterterrorism, energy, and aviation. The United States believes enhanced trade will contribute positively to both our countries' economic development, and create jobs for the American people and Qatari citizens while furthering the region's security and stability.

The United States welcomes the understandings we reached on civil aviation yesterday. These exchanges addressed concerns important to U.S. aviation industry stakeholders and strengthened our economic cooperation. The President has made this matter a priority, and the outcome we achieve will ensure a level playing field in the global aviation market.

I'm also pleased to announce that the U.S. and Qatari governments will sign a memorandum of understanding that creates a framework for the United States to provide technical assistance and training to the Qatari Government on combatting human trafficking. This MOU also provides for the creation of a bilateral government working group to discuss labor practices in Qatar. Through our continued cooperation, we hope to partner with Qatar to build institutional capacity to eliminate human trafficking, an area in which Qatar has already made significant strides.

With respect to counterterrorism, following President Trump's challenge to all of our Gulf partners during the Riyadh summit last year, Qatar has made significant progress to improve efforts to combat terrorism. As a result of the memorandum of understanding our countries signed in July, the United States and Qatar have increased information sharing on terrorists and terrorist financiers. We have participated in counterterrorism technical training and taken steps to improve aviation security. We look forward to building on this foundation and implementing next steps.

We will also discuss other critical regional security issues, including the ongoing battle to defeat ISIS, Daesh, the Gulf dispute, the situation in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, and Iran's role in the region. As the Gulf dispute nears the eight-month mark, the United States remains as concerned today as we were at its outset. This dispute has had direct negative consequences economically and militarily for those involved, as well as the United States. We are concerned by the rhetoric and propaganda employed in the region, playing out daily in Arab mainstream and social media.

It is critical that all parties minimize rhetoric, exercise restraint to avoid further escalation, and work toward a resolution. A united GCC bolsters our effectiveness on many fronts, particularly on counterterror – countering terrorism, defeating ISIS, and countering the spread of Iran's malign influence.

The United States and Qatar will be signing three documents today outlining our cooperation in the important bilateral and regional areas mentioned, including three at this ceremony.

The first is a memorandum of understanding that establishes the convention

for this U.S.-Qatar Strategic Dialogue on an annual basis going forward, so that we can continue to build on the close partnership between our two countries.

The second document is a joint declaration outlining the United States cooperation with Qatar on matters of shared regional and security interests.

The third document is a memorandum of understanding that creates a framework for the cooperation between the United States and Qatar to combat human trafficking.

I look forward to the outcomes of today's inaugural U.S.-Qatar Strategic Dialogue and our continued collaboration over the years to come. And with that, I'd welcome remarks from Foreign Minister al-Thani.

FOREIGN MINISTER AL-THANI: Thank you, Mr. Secretary. Good morning, dear friend Secretary Tillerson, dear friend Secretary Mattis, your excellencies member of the two delegations of the U.S.-Qatar Strategic Dialogue, ladies and gentlemen. I am delighted to express on behalf of the Qatari delegation our deepest gratitude for the warm welcome. This year we are celebrating the 45th anniversary of the U.S.-Qatar alliance. Our work today represents a milestone in a historically deep and continuous relationship between Qatar and the United States in defense, economic, education, and political unions.

Holding this immensely significant first session of Qatar-U.S. Strategic Dialogue come as an expression and a celebration of the enduring and the close affiliation between our two countries. In a recent January phone call between the President of United States Donald Trump and His Highness the Emir of Qatar, there – they have emphasized their mutual determination to strengthen the bilateral relation. A number of major agreements will be signed today covering defense, trade, investment, and energy – all area where Qatar is committed to investing in America's economy.

Qatar is already investing more than \$100 billion in the U.S. economy, including \$10 billion earmarked for infrastructure. Qatar and U.S. private sector have devoted substantial resources to the other, U.S. companies doing business in Qatar within construction, energy, and services industry. Qatari companies are investing in the U.S. financial services, health care, and technology markets.

From Qatar hosting six prominent U.S. universities in our education city, to Qatar investment in the LNG Golden Pass in Texas, our countries have shared interests – interests that translate into job opportunities for the American and Qatari people. To make all these investments flourish, regional security is essential. So today we will also discuss a range of security issues, including shared threats and further opportunities of regional cooperation.

This joint endeavor take place despite the difficult circumstances that Qatar currently faces as a part of a larger regional crisis taking place in the Middle East. The state of Qatar and its people have been illegally and unjustifiably blockaded. This blockade disrupts the joint efforts in providing stabilities for the – stability for the region. Let me express my

profound gratitude for the effort of the President Trump, the U.S. Congress, and Secretaries Tillerson and Mattis and Mnuchin in taking a just position on the illegal activities of the blockading states throughout this Gulf crisis. We look forward to our continued cooperation on regional security to deliver long-lasting peace and security for the Middle East.

In addition to security, both countries are committing to improving labor standards and joining forces to stop all forms of human trafficking. Qatar and U.S. are committed to delivering justice to our citizens.

In closing, I reiterate my appreciation for your effort to ensure that this first round of the Strategic Dialogue will be held successfully. We look forward to hosting the second round in Doha next year. Our mutual goal is to deepen strategic bonds between our two countries and go forward together to yield the greatest mutual benefit. Thank you.

SECRETARY MATTIS: Excuse me. Secretary Tillerson, thank you for hosting this inaugural Qatar-United States Security Dialogue with our counterparts, Foreign Minister al-Thani and my friend, the Minister of State for Defense al-Atiyah. The United States enjoys a longstanding defense relationship with Qatar. A strong and valued military partner, Qatar is a longtime friend in the region. Even in the midst of its own current challenges, Qatar and the United States maintain excellent military-to-military relations, hosting Al Udeid Air Base, home to our Combined Air Operations Center, the United States Air Force Central Command Forward Headquarters, and U.S. Central Command's Forward Headquarters, providing critical counterterrorism support to the Defeat ISIS/Defeat Daesh coalition and President Trump's South Asia strategy.

We are grateful to Qatar for their longstanding support of America's present and continuing commitment to regional security, a commitment that includes information sharing and counterterrorism training. It should be noted that just this last week, the Qatari Air Force completed its first two C-17 flights from the Gulf to Afghanistan and back, providing logistical support to the NATO counterterrorism campaign in Afghanistan. As Secretary Tillerson stated, a united Gulf Cooperation Council bolsters our effectiveness on many fronts, particularly on countering terrorism, defeating ISIS/Daesh, and countering the spread of Iran's malign influence. It is thus critical that the GCC recovers its cohesion as the proud Gulf nations return to mutual support through a peaceful resolution that provides for enhanced regional stability and prosperity.

I look forward to a lasting Qatar-U.S. security relationship, a relationship that will continue to bolster our efforts against common security threats and violent extremism. So thank you, and Minister al-Atiyah.

DEFENSE MINISTER AL-ATIYAH: Secretary Tillerson and General Mattis, thank you. Distinguished colleague, I reaffirm the remark raised by Sheikh Mohammed regarding our special relation with the U.S. Qatar and the United States have long enjoyed special relationship, a relationship built on a mutual respect and trust. We have stood together many time in the face of tyranny, fought those who defied the rule of law, and walked jointly to confront the complex and expensive challenges that face our region today.

The relationship extend beyond the security, defense, and political. It extend in the educational, as Sheikh Mohammed said, energy sector, commerce, and social tie. I speak of the special relation that we share with our friend and allies here in the United States, and there is no better way to demonstrate the uniqueness of this relation than by looking at our military-to-military partnership.

As some of you are acutely aware, Qatar and the United States have been strategic military allies for quite some time now. We have shared our friend burden and have carried on our own weight in the effort to bring peace, justice, and stability to our region and beyond. This integral meeting marks an important moment in our relationship with our friend here in the U.S. We look forward to building on the existing infrastructure of our historic and strategic relationship through exploring a way in which we are able to expand our bilateral coordination and further our effort to – in realizing our shared objective of peace, security and prosperity for our nation and beyond.

The state of Qatar has never waived its commitment to stand with friends and allies, especially when the – when they needed us the most. When other in the region were no longer able to accommodate U.S. present of their soil, Qatar eased restriction and expedited its offer to host its ally. Al Udeid airbase, which currently hosts 11,000 of your brave men and women, has been at the epicenter of the global fight against terrorism. Qatar has spared no effort in increasing the readiness and efficiency of Al Udeid operation by investing billions of dollar in the direct infrastructure and maintenance of the strategic airbase.

We are looking toward the future of our military partnership with the United States as we plan for the year ahead. Qatar and its trusted ally have reaffirmed their commitment toward the stability and prosperity of both nation. The recent purchased of the F-15s fighter jets signal a new era of cooperation. This strategic bird will assure our readiness to protect our own border and aid our allies further in our collective fight toward peace and stability. Creation of tens of thousand of jobs directs – new jobs, and ten of thousand more of indirect creation job.

The initiative has been jointly constructed – ensure – and I'm referring to the military initiative which we are looking to achieve in Qatar, and we call the 2040 one – has been jointly constructed to ensure the safety of the forces serving in Al Udeid and facilitate future capacity building by alleviating the classification of Al Udeid to permanent U.S. base. The cooperative initiative will include the exchange of military personnel and the expansion of Al Udeid airbase, and include on-base housing for the American service member and their families, new state-of-the-art schools, as well as building quality recreational entertainment and service facility. Qatar has demonstrated its commitment to well-being of the community of American service member in Al Udeid and their family who serves alongside them by facilitating for needs. The initiative aim to serve the needs of the community living in Al Udeid and ease their transition and assimilation.

In the current Gulf conflict, the disruption of CT offered the stabilizing allied forces' effort in the region. Brave men and women of Qatar, since our

inception, there has been those who wish to impose their domain over us. Qatar did not waver then and it will not waver now. And to protect the sovereignty and fight of its independence, the brave people of Qatar stood firmly with their leader in face of the mounting hostility directed toward their country. They refused to be manipulated or used as a pawn in an arbitrary and pointless conflict. We are here today to work for these men and women, and for the men and women of your great country, to explore economic, social, military and social opportunity that would progress our effort toward prosperity and stability. Thank you. Thank you, sir.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Thank you very much for those opening statements, and I think now we're going to sign the three memorandums.

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