

Press Releases: Remarks With Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani

Remarks
Rex W. Tillerson

Secretary of State

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FOREIGN MINISTER AL-THANI: (Via interpreter) I am pleased to welcome His Excellency, my colleague, the Secretary of State, Mr. Rex Tillerson, during his visit in Doha. Meetings were held between His Excellency the Secretary of State and His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad, the emir of Qatar, as a bilateral meeting between us. During the meeting, His Highness – His Highness expressed respect and appreciation to President Donald Trump for his keen follow-up and his concern with the development of Gulf crisis. He also thanked him for following up with efforts through the visit of the Secretary of State Tillerson to the region.

His Highness shares Mr. Trump's opinion that this crisis has gone on far too long and that it affects the way we face common challenges. He also confirmed the state of Qatar's commitment to the option of a dialogue based on sound and key principles without violating the sovereignty of the state and the international laws. And he also commended the efforts of His Highness the Emir of Kuwait in order to overcome this crisis that leaves us all as, I think, lost, having incurred the large losses. We also hoped that wisdom would be the approach adopted.

We also spoke about the importance of the bilateral relations between the two countries and the strong ties that rely on strategic factors and at different levels, including defense, economy, and education. We would also like to thank the United States and all its vital institutions for supporting the development of these relations and for supporting the development role fulfilled by the state of Qatar, and the fact that they are also participating and furthering development efforts.

We also spoke about regional issues, including the Syrian issue, Iraq, Libya, and the Palestinian policy. We also confirmed our support of all the efforts that would help end the conflict between all Palestinian parties in order to

reach a good ground for feasible and successful peace efforts in line with the Arab initiative of peace.

There were a lot of discussions of many topics to confirm the important role played by the United States in combating terrorism and preserving the safety and the security of our region in partnership with all the regional powers and countries, knowing that the region is unfortunately going through a lot of crisis due to the blockade.

We would like to thank you once again. Secretary of State. You have the floor.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, thank you very much, Excellency, and it's again a pleasure to be in Doha, a place I've visited and known for many, many years. I want to thank His Highness the Emir for the very generous time he gave me so we could have an important discussion about a number of topics, and we just concluded also a very useful bilateral with His Excellency Foreign Minister al-Thani. But we did touch on, obviously, our joint counterterrorism efforts in the region, a topic of great importance to all of us, the ongoing Gulf dispute, and then many other topics which His Excellency just listed for you. All of those were discussed as well.

We also discussed the progress towards implementing the counterterrorism memorandum of understanding, which His Excellency al-Thani and myself signed this past July. And significant progress has been made in a number of important efforts to – in our counterterrorism joint efforts, including sharing of terrorist lists, terrorist financing. We participated in a number of counterterrorism technical sessions and training, and significant steps have been taken to enhance the aviation security. We have additional work to do, but we are quite pleased with the progress and the relationship that has been strengthened between the two countries, Qatar and the United States, to counter terrorism.

The United States will continue to work closely with Qatar as we crack down on terrorists and those who are paying their bills. As you know, President Trump made the financing of terrorism a key outcome of the important Riyadh summit that was held earlier this year. All of our Gulf partners are doing an extraordinary effort to counter terrorism. All have more that we can do together.

And finally, as the Gulf dispute does near its five-month mark, the United States remains concerned, as concerned today as we were at the outset, that the dispute has had negative consequences economically and militarily for those involved, and certainly the United States has felt the effects of that as well. We think it's very important for the GCC to continue to pursue unity. It is most effective when it is unified, and none of us can afford to let this dispute linger.

So we again call on all the parties involved to continue to work towards discussion and dialogue and finding a way to deal with the differences. We ask that everyone minimize the rhetoric and de-escalate the tensions and take steps to do so. It's not a healthy environment that we find for the current

situation.

The U.S. is going to continue to do our part. We're going to continue to support the emir of Kuwait in his efforts towards finding a diplomatic solution, and we will continue to engage all parties as how we can better help them understand concerns and possibly find a solution.

Also though in closing, I want to thank the state of Qatar for their very generous \$30 million contribution that they made toward hurricane relief in the United States. They were very quick to come with those contributions, and we appreciate it. I also want to acknowledge the very strong economic relationship that exists between the United States and Qatar – obviously important U.S. business interests here in Qatar, but Qatar is making important investments in the United States as well, and we welcome those and look forward to expanding the economic relationship between our two countries, important to the longer-term relationship as well.

Thank you, Your Excellency.

MODERATOR: (Via interpreter) We will start taking questions. (Inaudible) Al Jazeera.

QUESTION: (Via interpreter) Good evening, Your Excellencies. (Inaudible) adopting a path towards dialogue. What are the details of this path toward this (inaudible)? And what are the important steps (inaudible) resolve crisis that is entering its fifth month? This is expressing how people are expecting a bigger role and bigger steps to be taken by Washington. Can Washington impose a solution based on, as was mentioned in Riyadh and in other countries, the fact that the United States is on a friendly basis with two (inaudible), what are you told by the Kuwaiti envoy who visited Qatar a few days ago?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, first, let me make clear that the U.S. does not have any intention to impose a solution on anyone in the current dispute. We are staying in very close contact with all of the parties. President Trump himself speaks to the leaders of the countries that are involved, and he has stressed to all of those that he believes that it is time to find a solution to this dispute. The U.S. is prepared to facilitate in any way we can, whether it be facilitating the discussions themselves or offering possible roadmaps for solutions.

But fundamentally, the parties have to come to a point that they're ready to solve this. I think, again, we have expressed our view that we think it's time, that it's time that solutions be sought, and we're going to continue to make those points. We're going to continue to offer whatever assistance we can, whether it be hosting a dialogue or facilitating dialogue, and support the ongoing efforts of – as I said, of the emir of Kuwait. But it is not for the U.S. to impose an answer on anyone.

FOREIGN MINISTER AL-THANI: (Via interpreter) Regarding the Gulf summit, we did not receive any official statement or official letter from (inaudible). However, we hope it is held in a timely manner – on time, that is. And as

mentioned by the Secretary of State, the importance of the GCC as a system for collective security is very high. Unfortunately, it is the victim of this manufactured crisis against the state of Qatar and it has directly impacted due to the irresponsible actions by the blockading countries.

From our opinion as the state of Qatar, holding any GCC meeting would present a golden opportunity at least to commence this dialogue in a civilized way through civilized and well-known official channels. However, if delay is to be adopted, it would be attributed to the hotheadedness of these countries and their willingness to take a confrontational approach. We should at least start discussing the reasons behind this manufactured crisis. We see them always resorting to non-diplomatic manners that have nothing to do with modern ways of establishing state ties, using tribalism and politicizing religion as well as other irresponsible actions.

The state of Qatar is still committed to the GCC as a comprehensive system and we confirm our commitment to it, and I hope the blockading countries share this perspective with us so that they fulfill their responsibility seriously in order to put an end to this crisis, considering that we do not see any logical reasons for (inaudible).

MODERATOR: Michele Kelemen from NPR.

QUESTION: I'm way in the back here, sorry. Yes, hi. I have a question about, first of all, Kirkuk. How much are you worried about the Iranians helping Iraq retake parts of Kirkuk? And what's next with the Kurds? I mean, they feel kind of abandoned by the administration. Tell me a little bit about what you tried to do to head off the referendum and how you deal with the situation now.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, with respect to – excuse me, with respect to Iranian presence in Iraq, Prime Minister Abadi is in full control of his country, he's in full control of the movement of certain military operations.

Now, for our part, we have encouraged restraint and we have encouraged the minimization of any type of conflict between forces involving either the Kurdistan forces, the Peshmerga, or forces that might be part of the Iraqi Government coalition.

The – leading up to the referendum itself the U.S. was quite clear that we did not support the Kurdish independence referendum. We did not believe it was time given that the battle to defeat ISIS is still underway. And while there have been significant victories and significant progress in Iraq, that task is not yet complete. And clearly, what we were concerned about is the referendum would lead to a distraction from the fight to defeat ISIS or Daesh, and that unfortunately is, I'm afraid, what we're now experiencing with these efforts to move forces back to prior positions.

So we hope that the parties will find themselves in a position of restraint. Our view is that there was a lot of movement of forces, whether they be Peshmerga forces or movement of Iraqi coalition forces, during the war to defeat ISIS, and this was all very well coordinated under the prime minister

– Prime Minister Abadi’s leadership, also working with coalition forces as well to defeat Daesh. I think there was always a general understanding though that once the war to defeat Daesh was completed and areas were liberated and they were secure, that everyone would return to their positions where they were located prior to the emergence of Daesh in 2014.

So a lot of this movement that you’re watching and reporting on is really the Peshmerga forces repositioning to locations that they were prior to that fighting and Iraqi forces needing to relocate to locations prior to the fighting as well, and respect what have been the agreed-upon boundaries between the autonomous Kurdistan region and the rest of Iraq. So we have encouraged that the parties do that, that they re-establish themselves in accordance with those previously agreed boundaries. And then we have encouraged the parties strongly to engage in Baghdad to fully implement the Iraqi constitution. The Kurdish people have a number of unfulfilled expectations, rights that were promised them under the constitution that were never delivered upon, and so there are a number of actions that need to be taken by the parties to fulfill the Iraqi constitution itself.

Prime Minister Abadi has, I think, made it clear his commitment to follow through on those constitutional obligations, and we hope the Kurds will engage with Baghdad in a very productive way to see that the constitution is fully implemented. I think many of the Kurds’ concerns will be addressed through that process. So we encourage the parties to not escalate the situation, not lead to conflict, and stay coordinated, and not forget that the war to defeat Daesh is not yet over and that remains the greatest threat to Iraq.

QUESTION: (Via interpreter) (Inaudible.) A question to His Excellency Sheikh Mohammed al-Thani: This crisis started with the policy of the Qatar news agency, and then the blockading countries spoke about what was not seen by the international media. But I’d like to talk about the diplomats of the blockading countries – the foreign ministers, specifically the Bahraini Foreign Minister Sheikh bin-Ahmed, who said that the Qatari crisis is not only about Qatar’s foreign policy, but also its social situation that is based on oppression and discrimination. What is your opinion, Your Excellency?

FOREIGN MINISTER AL-THANI: (Via interpreter). Of course, this crisis has shown us a lot of strange things, including the so-called diplomats’ and foreign ministers’ statements. Unfortunately, we didn’t see them making any diplomatic or mature statements. What is funny about those statements is that we are accused by a country that is known for its social oppression and for causing tension, and they are accusing us of the same. We can tell them that if they don’t have this, they don’t have – and they don’t respect their peoples’ rights, they cannot call on respecting people’s rights. I think they should know that we’re noble.

MODERATOR: Barbara Plett from BBC.

QUESTION: Thank you. Mr. Tillerson, you very strongly indicated in an interview before this trip that you felt the Saudi-led quartet was

responsible for the impasse in the feud with Qatar. You said they weren't yet willing to engage. So I wanted to ask you: One, did you say that to the Saudis? Two, is there any sign they are willing to go for those face-to-face talks you're talking about, and did you extend an invitation to the White House like Mr. Trump said? He said he was willing to invite them to the White House to mediate. And three, do you think the Iranians are benefitting from this crisis?

And a question to Sheikh Mohammed al-Thani, Mr. Tillerson in Riyadh was talking about countering the spread of Iran's influence, especially in Iraq. Do you – are you worried about the spread of Iran's influence in the region, and do you think it is a threat? Thank you.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: With respect to talks getting underway, yes, I did in my meetings with the Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman ask him to please engage, please engage in dialogue. There's not a strong indication that parties are ready to talk yet. And so we cannot force talks upon people who are not ready to talk, so there has been no invitation to the White House because it's not clear the parties are ready to engage. But we are going to continue to work towards that dialogue and toward that engagement. But as I said in response to an earlier question, we cannot and will not impose a solution on anyone.

With respect to Iran gaining, I think the most immediate and obvious gain that Iran has is that it is Qatar's only airspace available for Qatar to operate, and so it puts Qatar in a position of having to engage with Iran in a positive way to meet Qatar's needs. But this really removes a lot of other alternatives for Qatar to seek what's best for its own people as well.

So that's just a simple example of what we are concerned about. But beyond that, anytime there is conflict and destabilization among countries that are typically allies, someone will always come in to exploit those differences.

FOREIGN MINISTER AL-THANI: Well, regarding your question about countering the Iran influence in the region, I believe Qatar position has been clear. Before the crisis, during the crisis and even post the crisis, we are against any negative influence in the region and any interference in the region and in the Arab countries. And we have been very clear expressing those concerns with Iran and with anyone who has such any negative influence there.

We believe that the current crisis is really undermining our efforts to solve the issues here in the region, it's undermining our efforts in countering terrorism since they were claiming that they are (inaudible) the counterterrorism efforts. We see the opposite here; that they are affecting the countering terrorism efforts in the region by imposing such a measure in a country which was just few months ago considered a strong ally for them.

For Qatar, Qatar has been – carried very clear policy on different aspects with Iran, but we remain committed that all the problems here in the region we need to resolve through a dialogue. And this has been not Qatar position only, but Qatar and the other GCC countries' position at our last meeting in December 2016 in Bahrain, where the leaders committed that they have to engage with Iran in dialogue, in a serious dialogue which is based on the

principle of noninterference of each other affairs and stopping any negative influence in the region, and we are remain committed to these principles and to resolve through the dialogue.

MODERATOR: (In Arabic.)

QUESTION: (Via interpreter) Your Excellency Sheikh Mohammed al-Thani, about the Kuwait initiative, all the delegations (inaudible) the Gulf, all the foreign ministers, all have stood behind what the initiative is and supported it. The Kuwaiti foreign minister was here. What did he tell you? (Inaudible) Saudi Arabia? Where is the (inaudible)? What about the Kuwaiti initiative today? Is it standing before the blockade right now? What about the demands of not interfering into Qatar's sovereignty?

FOREIGN MINISTER AL-THANI: (Via interpreter) Regarding our support of the Kuwaiti initiative and the support of all friendly countries to this initiative and them standing behind it, Qatar's position and request from these countries is that the Kuwaiti initiative be the umbrella for any mediation to resolve this crisis, first in view of the position of Kuwait and the GCC, and second, the importance of relying on the GCC as a system, as an agency to ensure safety and stability. There are attempts by blockading countries to pretend that this is normal, to normalize the current situation. Usually such attempts and endeavors to normalize these measures are done when dealing with international relations. However, humanitarian issues cannot be normalized, like separating families, 26,000 people who find themselves homeless because of this crisis.

So you cannot speak of normalization while instigation continues, while there are constant spending irrationally to promote propaganda against the state of Qatar in the west and spread false rumors. So this pretense of normalization is not true. If they truly wish to normalize these measures, let them normalize the way normalization should be carried out in a transparent way and not continue instigating and interfering in Qatar's internal affairs.

We commend and appreciate the efforts of the (inaudible) Kuwait. (Inaudible) spoke about Kuwait's commitment to pursue its mediation efforts despite all the difficulties that they are faced with due to the blockading countries. Thank you.

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