

## DEBATE

### **Thierry DE MONTBRIAL**

Thank you very much, Your Excellency. Thank you. You raised a number of questions, which are very important and in the spirit of this World Policy Conference, namely to promote dialogue, negotiations, diplomacy and so on. These are very important points and I now invite interventions. I will start with Jim Hoagland from *The Washington Post* and then Renaud Girard from *Le Figaro*.

### **Jim HOAGLAND**

Mr Minister, you have very eloquently outlined the impasse that has developed, the stalemate between you and Saudi Arabia on one side. The United States has a very strong military relationship with Qatar, but has taken a position of neutrality in this conflict. At what point will that American position begin to affect the military relationship between Qatar and the United States?

### **Sheikh Mohammed BIN ABDULRAHMAN BIN JASSIM AL-THANI**

Qatar and the US have enjoyed, and are still enjoying a very good and strong relationship when it comes to the military, but also in other areas: in the economy, investment and education.

The strong military relationship between Qatar and US has been affected not in terms of its strength, however the global efforts to fight terrorism has been affected by this crisis. When we are hosting around 11,000 US troops in Qatar, and we have the centre of command for the global coalition, and this country is under blockade, of course this relationship is affected. When we have our soldiers in our bases fighting from some of the blockading countries, who have now been expelled, there is a direct impact on the global efforts in countering terrorism - namely Daesh.

There is an impact. Even on our joint training with the US, everyone has noticed that the Defence Department has suspended training with Gulf Countries until the crisis is resolved. There is a series of things which represent a great impact on the security relationship, not only between Qatar and US, but on US-GCC relationship and the US policy towards the Middle East and countering terrorism.

Regarding the neutrality of the US position, the US has been very consistent from the beginning and very clear. They want this crisis to be solved.

Yes, we are the country which is subject to this aggression from these four countries. We expected more allies and friends to stand with us and to show they are rejecting the violations of international law, that they are rejecting the humanitarian impact of this crisis. However, the US has been one of the frontiers in this. They have rejected the blockade, they have rejected that this crisis continues, and they are trying to call for dialogue.

When you have a conflict or crisis, there are always two parties. If one of the parties is unwilling to engage and talk, you cannot put an end to this. Even if he comes to the dialogue table by force, he will never come with good faith or with the intention to solve the problem. Qatar will remain in its position. The best way forward for us is dialogue, and whenever they decide they want to solve this crisis, Qatar will be there on the table, waiting for them with our friends and our allies.

### **Renaud GIRARD**

Good morning, Minister. The Turkish government has sent military troops to secure your country. What is the strength of this military alliance with Turkey? How do you see the future of the relationship between Turkey and Qatar? Iran is much closer geographically to you and they also helped you with food and humanitarian aid. How do you assess your

future relations with Iran and how do you assess the stability of the Gulf in the future with Iran on one side and Sunnis monarchies on the other side of the Gulf? Thank you.

### **Sheikh Mohammed BIN ABDULRAHMAN BIN JASSIM AL-THANI**

Thank you sir. First, regarding your question about the Turkish forces. Qatar and Turkey have a very strong and strategic relationship in defence and economy. We have very strong investment ties and bilateral trade ties. Turkey is an important regional country. It is an important country in the region, it is a NATO member. We have the largest presence of troops, through the US presence, but we have also different defence cooperation agreements with other countries such as France and the United Kingdom - Turkey is one among these countries. Having them and having some of their troops in Doha helps the country's security. But also in the context of a wider range of cooperation between our countries.

We also have our military representation in Turkey, in Incirlik Base. Our cooperation is governed by the global coalition of countering Daesh. Turkey will remain an important regional player. It will remain a strong partner and strong ally for Qatar. But this doesn't contradict any other partnerships or alliances.

Once you surrender your sovereignty to give up on military relations with Turkey it will be a starting point, and we could then be asked to also kick out the US troops, or end our defence cooperation with France and UK. To impose or dictate is unacceptable for any sovereign nation. If this was reflected in their demands because of their security concerns, they need to understand that the demands cannot be imposed on a sovereign state. If there is any conflict or any difference there should be dialogue, engagement and understanding; rather than demands from one country to another. If they have any security concerns, we are willing to sit and engage in a dialogue to address their concerns. Their security concerns are our security concerns. We are from the same region. If there is a threat, we would both be exposed.

Regarding the future of our relationship with Iran, it has been consistent for years. We didn't change our policy. Although now we have difference situations and circumstances. When Qatar is blockaded from three sides and I have just one way to send my shipments, it is required to intensify my communication with them.

But, at the end, the differences in policies between Qatar and Iran will remain there because the policies are based on principles based on assessments. How should we overcome differences? By confrontation? This will never work. This is what we have been calling for since 2015. The irony here is in 2015 when the JCPOA has been signed, President Obama called all the member states to Camp David to address their security concerns with Iran. He encouraged the Gulf States to have dialogue with Iran. When president Rouhani expressed his willingness for dialogue to the Emir of Kuwait, all of the Gulf leaders agreed to engage in dialogue which is based on principles. This agreement remained until the end of 2016. When the same countries were invited to engage in a dialogue about Qatar no one responded to this positively, and no one expressed their willingness to engage in dialogue.

In summary, our relationship with Iran will remain the same, and the differences will be there until we address our mutual security concerns. But we cannot afford a further escalation between Qatar and Iran, or between any country in the region and Iran. We believe in dialogue and we believe in engagement. Iran is a neighbouring country for us - we share borders and we share a gas field together. We have more things between us that we need to address through dialogue that we cannot address by escalation or by avoiding talking to each other. If we are going to continue avoiding talking to each other, the problem will remain there and it will never reach an end. And sometimes it could reach a level that will create another crisis which the region cannot afford.

### **Itamar RABINOVICH**

Mr Minister, Qatar has been a supporter of Hamas in the Gaza Strip. More recently, Hamas has grown close to Egypt and the reconciliation between Hamas and the Palestinian authority is considered by many to have been inspired to a great extent by Egypt. Does that mean a distancing between yourselves and Hamas?

**Sheikh Mohammed BIN ABDULRAHMAN BIN JASSIM AL-THANI**

Let me make it very clear here, Qatar has never supported Hamas. Qatar has always supported the people of Gaza and the reconstruction of Gaza Strip. Hamas is a party which has a position in Gaza, but Qatar's support has always been very transparent and visible for everyone, including your government. They know where the money goes and they know the contribution of this support to the peace and stability of the Strip of Gaza - which prevents Gaza from any potential war.

Here, we have used the principle in our policy in supporting the people, the reconstruction and the resilience of the community as a means to peace and stability. We have witnessed the stability since 2014.

Hamas' relationship with Qatar is a political representation in which they have their office in Qatar, which has been very useful for everyone. When they were in Qatar, Qatar was a facilitator for different engagements. Whether to end the wars in Gaza in 2008, 2009 and 2014, Qatar has been a facilitator for the reconciliation which was the first system for any peace deal between the Palestinian and the Israelis.

Now, regarding Hamas' relationship with Egypt and Egypt's contribution with the reconciliation. Qatar was the first country who was welcomed after this reconciliation between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority because we believe in the uniting of the Palestinians as a precondition for any peace deal. Whoever is brokering this deal, Qatar will be helpful and welcoming. Qatar has provided the funding of the reconstruction of the government facility in Gaza because we believe in the unity of the Palestinians. Not because Hamas today is in Egypt.

I think the question needs to be asked for the countries who are using this narrative with western audiences that it is the reason for them to blockade Qatar. Their reason and their claim that Qatar is supporting Hamas, when they have never disconnected from Hamas and they have never considered Hamas to be a terrorist organisation. Further, we now start to find Hamas in Egypt being praised by the Egyptian government and the other governments.

Qatar's position has been very clear, transparent and visible to everyone. We will continue to support the people in Gaza because they are people who are in need. We believe that our support and our contribution in Gaza has contributed to the peace and stability of the region and we will be the first to celebrate any national unity between the Palestinians themselves.

**Thierry DE MONTBRIAL**

Thank you very much, Minister. I think it was a very interesting and useful conversation. Thank you very much again.