



DEBATE

Thierry de Montbrial

We have time for two or three questions. I see a hand. Yes, please?

Mohamed Ibn Chambas

Thank you very much. My question is specifically on the Sahel. We are seeing countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad under a lot of pressure from violent extremists, and these are majority Muslim countries, so it is not out of the question to express and to wish for some more solidarity from countries in the Middle East such as Qatar in order to fight these terrorists and violent extremists. Thus far, to be honest, we have seen France working through a force that has been deployed in support of G7 Sahel countries, and Germany making some efforts along with the US.

However, the nature of the threat is similar to what we saw in Northern Iraq and Syria. A global coalition is required to support these four countries which have a huge responsibility to effectively control huge territories. Would your country be willing to play a more active role in the context of a global effort? ECOWAS countries have met and said that we must draw a line, that we cannot let this threat go beyond Burkina Faso. We must face terrorism and violent extremism squarely, but we need a global coalition, because the same Islamic State is showing itself as the Islamic State West Africa Province, and it must be defeated in West Africa.

I would like to hear, Your Excellency, what your country can do in the context of this global effort to face terrorism and violent extremism in the Sahel.

Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani

First of all, it is very important to watch very closely what is happening in the Sahel region. We believe that the threat of terrorism and extremism is now transnational, not limited to the Middle East but migrating between one place and another with almost complete freedom of movement. What is happening in the Sahel region is very dangerous and is threatening international peace and security, not only Africa, and all of us in the international community should be united in fighting this phenomenon.

Right now, the available mechanism in place for helping and supporting the Sahel countries is the French-led initiative, the G7 Sahel I think they call it, and Qatar is contributing directly to this. For example, we are already supporting Mali and Burkina and have sent them support for the military equipment they need for their fight. Meanwhile, we have another initiative that addresses the grassroots in terms of terrorism and violent extremism by providing education and building schools over there. For example, in Mali two years ago we launched a programme to educate one million children via an institution in Qatar, and we are doing the same in the other Sahel countries.

However, it is very important to emphasise the importance of resolving the conflicts in that region in order to have a safe environment for the people, but also so that the terrorists do not find fertile ground. For example, regarding the Northern Mali issue, we need to put an end to this conflict, we need to find a way forward to resolve it, and there are a lot of efforts from friendly nations who are trying to help resolve this issue.

Overall, the Sahel remains very important, not just for Africa and for Europe but for all of us in the region.

Thierry de Montbrial

We have time for maybe two more questions. Well, three. Bertrand Badré, M. Tanaka, and Joseph Maïla.

Bertrand Badré



Bertrand Badré, Founder of Blue like an Orange Sustainable Capital. You mentioned in your introductory remarks your recent trip to New York for the UN General Assembly, and one of the main things you did was to present, alongside France and America, the Climate Finance Action Plan. Coming back to the region, this renewed focus on issues like climate, water, etc., which are shared within the region, might be a catalyst for more in-depth cooperation between the various countries in the region. Thank you very much, Your Excellency.

Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani

I am not sure whether I understood your question clearly, but I will try to explain what I understood. Climate change is a global matter that everybody should be concerned about, and it should be a matter that unites countries. We believe it is very important to unite countries in order to unite the region, but what we have seen until now is that nothing practical has been done to bring the countries together.

One example is climate change, but another example for us in the Gulf is the issue of water, which is vital for all the Gulf countries as well as Iran. We have not had a dialogue around this issue, which is existential for our people in that region. Therefore, there is still a lack of maturity in the countries in that region in terms of talking about the common topics rather than just limiting their discussions to the controversial issues that they are having differences over.

We have seen a sort of agreement in OPEC around oil production, but this is because it is a direct win-win situation for the countries that are part of OPEC, and there was nothing directly touching the people of the region; we have not seen any moves like this. We believe that Qatar, though a small country, is a global player at the end of the day. We care about a lot of global issues, and we are trying to see to which areas we can contribute positively, and we do it, such as with climate change and the green fund that was launched in New York. We see a need for this, and we see a need for the small states to be supported and helped through these kinds of mechanisms. Our contribution was directed to those small states and islands which will suffer an existential threat in the near future because of climate change.

Nobuo Tanaka

Thank you very much Thierry for inviting me. Firstly, as a former executive director of the IEA, I am an energy expert, and as a Japanese, I have to say that Qatar helped us by providing us with a huge amount of gas after the 11 March 2011 catastrophe, the tsunami in Japan, so I first have to thank you very much for your great help as a good friend. I have to start by thanking you.

My question today is not about energy. My question is about gender. The Sasakawa Peace Foundation, of which I am chair, is promoting the empowerment of women in Muslim countries. We have communicated with some countries, and there are many empowered women there. The UN says that if women are involved in peace negotiations, these are much more likely to be concluded successfully than if men are involved, and peace negotiations continue longer when carried out by women. Therefore, it is statistically correct that if women are much more involved in peace talks in the Middle East, this very important issue should be left to the women of the Middle East in order to create a better and longer-lasting peace.

Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani

Thank you, but your question is very tricky. Should I say that, yes, this would help, then I will be asked about it by my fellow men, and if I say it will not work, then all the women will hate me. What I would like to start with is that we have full respect for the role of women in the Middle East. They have contributed throughout history in a very constructive manner, and what they did for our region and for the countries has been highly appreciated and recognised by everyone.

We believe that the participation of women should be in all fields, not only in peace negotiations or in specific areas, and they are participating, in fact, in the region. Comparing the participation of women 10 years ago with what is going on now, there is a very big shift, and this is not new to the Middle East, by the way. Women have always throughout history been participating hand-in-hand with the men, but for a few decades they have been more behind the scenes and not on the front lines.



Regarding peace negotiations, trust me, if the women can achieve it, maybe one day the men will screw it up, so let us put them hand in hand together and let them negotiate for peace. I do not see exclusive roles for men and women; I see an exclusive role for visionary leaders to come and talk about the new initiatives that bring people together.

Thierry de Montbrial

Thank you very much. I will give the floor to Mona Makram Ebeid, from Egypt, and Volker Perthes, from Germany.

Mona Makram Ebeid

Hello Mr. Minister. We are glad to see somebody from Qatar, because we do not see them anymore in any country in our region. I am glad to hear what you have to say, but exactly what we would like to see for regional security is to have cooperation between the countries and not to have this division we have now. It is not only in the Arab League, but it is also in the Gulf Cooperation Council, and Qatar could play quite a role in trying to get what you call the big countries together. Egypt is one of them, in case you have forgotten. I am trying to remind you that it is a country of 100 million people, and it is quite open today to having some sort of reconciliation, because the division that was caused within the Quartet has only been detrimental to the whole region.

Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani

First of all, thank you for your kind welcome. Qatar has been a strong believer in cooperation and dialogue, and talking about the division and what is happening within the Gulf, it is counterproductive not only for Qatar but also for the entire region, and we see how it has paralysed the situation. Qatar never used the diplomacy of denial which I mentioned in my remarks, and we remained open to engaging and talking with everyone within the Gulf, including Egypt. We have no problem with the other Arab countries. Qatar is a small country, and I have a problem with countries which initiated hostilities against my country and threatened its existence.

Given what they have done, we have said that we are always open to and welcome any initiative that will lead to unity. Unity does not mean that we should love each other but that we should live with each other; that is what we are talking about. Regarding Egypt, it is an important country in the region, and we have reiterated this several times. It is one of the leaders in the region, and it has huge potential in terms of leadership in the region because of its population and its resources. We hope that one day this leadership will emerge with other countries like Iraq. We hope that Syria can one day recover from all that is happening and how it has been hijacked by a war criminal until now, and that all these countries can lead the future of our region.

We in Qatar are open to everyone. We want to see those big countries assume their leadership role and move forward for a better future for our region.

Thierry DE MONTBRIAL

Thank you very much. It is already quite late, I see many hands, I will take only two: Volker Perthes and Joseph Maïla.

Volker Perthes

Thank you very much, Volker Perthes, from Germany. Deputy Prime Minister, I appreciate what you said about regional dialogue, but let me, in a way, follow up on what Mona Makram Ebeid from Egypt asked you, namely, to speak about the regional role of Qatar itself. A couple of years ago, Qatar tried to be a leader in the region, partly by sponsoring diplomacy and mediation, in Darfur or in Lebanon, for example, but also by quite aggressively funding and supporting both political and armed opposition in Syria, and that did not succeed very well, to say the least.

How would you, in retrospect, evaluate your own role and your own attempt to change the situation in one of the countries of the region?

Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani



First of all, just to correct some of your statements, Qatar has not been trying to be a leader in the region in the last two years or before that; Qatar has been very active diplomatically in the region for two decades in resolving conflict. We never punch above our weight. We are small in size, and we know we are a small country, and we know that Qatar played a leadership role over the two decades. We have helped in resolving conflicts, whether in Sudan or in Darfur. There were genocides there, people have been displaced, and Qatar was the one who brokered the agreement. We helped and supported Lebanon in resolving the crisis between Djibouti and Eritrea, and a lot more than this.

Talking about Qatar's involvement in regional issues, we care about our region, we want stability for our region, and we want a better future for the people of the region. However, when it comes to a choice between the people and some leaders who are authoritarian and are waging wars against their own populations, we will definitely stand with the people. When you mentioned that Qatar funded certain political groups or certain armed groups in Syria or anywhere else, this was a total misstatement, because whatever we have done over the past years, we did it through a collective mechanism so that everybody saw what was happening and where our money was going. Regarding Syria, we were working jointly together with the US, with Saudi, with Jordan, with the UK, with France, with everyone – it was one joint operation for funding the armed groups, because it was an international consensus to remove a war criminal from his place after he bombed his people with chemical weapons.

When you are talking about other areas in the region, for example Libya, we have been very much coherent with international resolutions, with Security Council resolutions, and we did not do anything outside this context. We worked hand in hand with the NATO forces in 2011 to help the people over there. When there was a dispute between them in 2015, they came up with an agreement, and we continue to support the legitimate government. There are a lot of other countries which you did not mention and are funding the different forces and militias which undermined the legitimate government, and now everybody is calling for strict adherence to the Security Council resolution, and no one has talked about Security Council resolutions for the past five years, since the conflict restarted in Libya.

Regarding other countries, you can check and verify Qatar's real position, and not what you might read in some newspapers which have been propagated from I know not where. Go and check what is happening on the ground, check with the governments, and you can see that Qatar always supports the will of the people and legitimate governments while other countries are trying to undermine those legitimate governments and the will of the people. Therefore, Qatar is not associated with any political party, it is not associated with a certain agenda in the region – we want to see stability in the region. Qatar is not a political party. Qatar is a state, and whether it is small or large does not matter. What matters is really the effectiveness of the country and its role.

Joseph Maïla

Thank you very much, Your Excellency, for your comprehensive take. I have three quick and very concise questions. The first one follows the question put by Volker Perthes. What is the role today of Qatar in trying to mediate within the Gulf crisis? Can we expect mediation some day between Iran and the US in order to work for de-escalation in the Gulf? Regarding my second question, two years ago you opened a link, a rapprochement, between Qatar and Russia. What is this about? The third one will be very much linked to the actuality. Two days ago, Turkey was on the move in the northern part of Syria. What do you expect from that, and how is Qatar looking at this new move, which might add violence to violence? Thank you very much for your answers.

Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani

Regarding your question about the situation in the Gulf, Qatar, of course, has a very strong alliance with the US, and this partnership has been in existence for more than four decades now. We also have a friendly relationship with Iran, because Iran is part of our region and it is just across the border from us. Unfortunately, when we have been blockaded by our neighbours and have not been allowed to use their airspace, Iran were the ones who opened their airspace and ports to us, despite our differences and disagreements with them on certain issues.

Therefore, we are in a very dangerous situation when tensions arise between our strongest ally and our neighbour, which now represents an existential threat for Qatar. We always have an open channel with both countries, trying to de-escalate and defuse the tension. We have never been asked by any of the countries to mediate between them, but



both countries have responded positively to our calls for de-escalation, and we hope one day that this rapprochement can happen one day and that we can reach an agreement. An agreement between the US and Iran is important, but more importantly, I see an agreement between Iran and the region.

Regarding the second question, on our relations with Russia, we are a small country and we have strategic alliances with a lot of countries, for example Japan, the US, the main countries of Europe like France and Germany, and we have a lot of investments and cooperation. We do not see anything that prevents us from having a relationship with Russia, and we are not planning to have anything other than a friendly and mutually beneficial relationship for both countries. Our relations have been growing in a steady manner, we have built this partnership, especially in the economic and energy sector, and both Qatar and Russia are two of the largest exporters of gas, so we have to have this sort of understanding between both of us.

Regarding Northern Syria and Turkey, if we look at what happened in the last two days with the Turkish intervention in Northern Syria, we see that it happened because of the threat for Turkey. I do not think that we now have to blame Turkey when we did not try to help in solving the problem in the first place. There have been negotiations for almost a year and a half to eliminate the threat from the border, and these negotiations did not lead to anything, so now Turkey is between two options – either they stay in their place and wait for some of the terrorist groups which are threatening their security to grow stronger and come right to their borders, or they take an action which will not be liked internationally.

What we want to assure you is that Qatar has a firm position on the integrity of Syria. We do not accept any division over there, we do not want to see demographic change, and we believe that Turkey has proven that they do not have a destructive role in Syria. What they did in the northern part of Syria earlier by helping the temporary government has already been proven to everyone. Therefore, we hope that what is happening now in the northern part of Syria will ensure the security of Turkey, which is an important country and an important ally, not only for Qatar but also for all of the European countries. There is also major participation by the Syrian opposition, the Free Syrian Army, which will take over afterwards in policing the area.

Thierry de Montbrial

Thank you very much, Mohammed. Your presentation and interventions raised a lot of interest.