



H.E. Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani Minister of Foreign Affairs State of Qatar

Gulf Affairs: How would you describe the pillars of Qatari foreign policy? What is Qatar’s approach to the ongoing conflicts in Yemen, Syria and Libya?

Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani: Qatar’s foreign policy is based on four pillars: encouraging peaceful resolution of international disputes, supporting the right of peoples to self-determination, respecting sovereignty (which includes non-interference in the domestic affairs of other states) and cooperation with all nations that seek peace.

What distinguishes Qatar’s foreign policy is that it is based on deep-rooted principles—most importantly, it is devised with a future outlook. We implement a policy not for our generation, but for the generations to come.

Qatar’s priorities in the region and beyond are to maintain an open-door policy, and to encourage dialogue and political settlements. Qatar’s regional positions, particularly in Yemen, Syria and Libya, have been in coordination and in line with the positions of the international community and United Nations resolutions.

Gulf Affairs: In recent years, Qatar has been active in mediation efforts between Hamas and Fatah, the US and the Taliban, and in the Sudanese conflict. Can you elaborate on the philosophy behind these efforts? Any notable achievements?

Al-Thani: Since being elected as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, Qatar has mediated nearly 10 regional and international conflicts—investing diplomatic and political efforts between various factions, entities and countries. Qatar’s mediation efforts are at the request of the concerned parties, are done without interfering in the internal affairs of others and are rooted in a vision to achieve the convergence of views—they are meant to find sustainable solutions for conflicts and differences of opinion. Qatar also hosts negotiations between conflicting parties and contributes as a facilitator of dialogue between them.

Over the years, these mediation efforts resulted in many successes that brought about and maintained international peace and security. Qatari mediation played an important role in the Doha Peace Agreement in Darfur, releasing Djiboutian prisoners of war in Eritrea, releasing hostages in Syria and ending the presidential vacuum in Lebanon.

Gulf Affairs: Qatar was the last GCC country to sit on the UN Security Council, which it did from 2006 to 2007. What was the significance of this achievement?

Al-Thani: As part of Qatar’s vision to promote peace and security in the Arab region and wider world, Qatar aimed to be a significant player in the UN Security Council. The achievement was not only the election of Qatar as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council in 2006, but it was in the efforts that Qatar pursued toward its goals of peace and security in the region and beyond. Adopting a preventive diplomacy, Qatar led the negotiations in Lebanon, and, for the first time in the history of the country, joined the UN peacekeeping forces stationed in Lebanon (UNIFIL).

In the context of respecting international law and justice, it is also noteworthy that Qatar’s tough negotiations marked the establishment of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. Another significant achievement was the proper transfer of the former president of Sierra Leone to The Hague, where Qatar guaranteed that victims witnessed his trial. Since Qatar believes in the key role regional organizations can play, we contributed in drafting resolutions related to the establishment of The African Union/UN Hybrid operation in Darfur (UNAMID) in 2007. And while Somalia was a forgotten issue, Qatar worked hard to bring it to the surface—the end result was the establishment of the national reconciliation government in 2006–2007.

Gulf Affairs: A comprehensive military cooperation agreement with the Republic of Turkey was entered into recently, and it includes the deployment of Turkish troops to Qatar. Can you explain the basis for this agreement?

Al-Thani: Turkey is a NATO member and an important regional player. The country is also a strategic partner in pursuing stability and peace in the Middle East. The cooperation agreement is part of the strategic cooperation that we have initiated through the High-Level Strategic Committee established in 2015. Qatar shares similar agreements with the US, UK and France. Together, we all support the coalition fighting against ISIS.

IV. Interviews

Gulf Affairs: Given the recent intra-GCC tensions, what impact do you believe this might have on GCC unity in the long term? What is Qatar's long-term vision for GCC cooperation?

Al-Thani: Qatar believes in a strong and united Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) based on shared values and goals that work toward common strategic, economic, political and security interests. Qatar, as a proud member of the GCC, believes in the council's potential to enhance economic cooperation. Qatar is also a signatory to many future GCC projects, the most significant being the project to integrate all current and future GCC railway networks.

The current crisis has certainly had a negative impact on GCC cooperation, as one of the key tenets of cooperation is the free movement of goods and people. The crisis will have undeniable negative effects on short-term projects and will cause an inconvenience to the lives of many citizens. That being said, we hope that no long-term impact will occur as a result of the crisis.

Despite the fact that this self-inflicted baseless embargo has been the coalition's most unfortunate development since its formation in 1981, the GCC must reach a renewed basis of understanding and cooperation to ensure it can overcome future challenges.

Gulf Affairs: How significant has the role of soft power and international investment been in fortifying Qatar's position as an important regional player? In light of recent difficulties with GCC neighbors, is this having an impact on the country's ability to make deals with major energy consumers and investment partners?

Al-Thani: Qatar views its commitment to its energy partners as absolute. Qatar is committed to the diversification of its economy and expanding its economic partnerships around the world—whether through investments or trade based on common goals of economic development and prosperity for all. We continue to uphold our agreements and supply energy partners without obstruction or delay regardless of the illegal blockade. Although the blockade's initial impact was aimed at affecting the economy, Qatar immediately implemented its contingency plan and established one of the largest ports in the Middle East with more than 150 destinations around the world. We believe that our relationship with energy consumers is long-term in nature, and we do not see this crisis affecting our relations with our energy partners.

Gulf Affairs: How would you describe the current state of Qatar-Iran relations?

Al-Thani: Qatar and Iran are neighboring states, linked by geographic air and sea borders as well as a shared gas field. We are concerned about the security, peace and stability of the region, which is precisely what drives us to work responsibly on converging the views of the two countries together despite all differences. This approach helps assure desirable outcomes for the entire region. The State of Qatar refuses to look at Iran through the sectarian lens or to frame the region's conflicts in the Sunni vs Shia paradigm. The nuclear deal provided an opportunity to reintegrate Iran into the international community, and we believe that if differences remain they may yet be resolved through dialogue.

Gulf Affairs: How have Qatar-US relations developed since President Donald Trump took office? Can you elaborate on the recently-signed agreement with the US on combatting terrorism financing?

Al-Thani: A strong relationship and partnership between the United States and the State of Qatar has been developing for decades, and it is characterized by an exceptional and a distinguished strategic bilateral political, military and economic relationship. The establishment of the largest US military base in the Middle East in Qatar reflects the depth of the relationship, and it also reflects the United States' confidence in Qatar and its agenda in combatting terrorism and promoting peace in the region.

His Highness the Emir of Qatar has discussed ways to enhance this partnership with President Trump, who himself is committed to further cooperation in all domains. The recently signed agreement with the United States on counter-terrorism cooperation is the only one of its kind in the region, and it further confirms the cooperation between the United States and Qatar. It also sets a precedent for other countries in the region. This agreement with the US thus strengthens our existing efforts to counter terrorism and complements our vision of a more peaceful Middle East.

Gulf Affairs: Qatar is a crucial supplier of LNG to many Asian countries, and is home to a large number of migrant workers from the Indian sub-continent. To that end, how has Qatar's foreign policy toward Asian countries developed in recent years?

Al-Thani: Asia's importance to global peace and security as well as the economy is not new. Qatar has historically strong relations with many Asian countries, and has enhanced them in recent years. Specifically, China, Japan, South Korea and India are Qatar's largest trading partners. Qatar became the first GCC country to introduce a clearing bank for the Renminbi, and, in 2014, upgraded relations with China to that of a strategic partner. In 2016, Qatar and India signed a pact regarding visas, cyber security and investments. In August 2017, Qatar lifted the visa requirements from the citizens of many Asian countries wishing to visit Qatar, as well as launching additional direct shipping routes to Pakistan and India. Qatar is keen on building long-lasting and strategic relations with all nations in Asia, based on the pursuit of mutual interests and common values.