

Qatari royals in exile call for national meeting to end crisis

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London

Opposition towards Qatari government policies from within its royal family appears to be widening, with a second member of the al-Thani tribe calling for Doha to sever ties with terrorist organisations and resolve its disputes with neighbouring countries.

Paris-based Sheikh Sultan bin Suhaim al-Thani appeared in a recorded segment on Sky News Arabia, endorsing calls by his uncle Sheikh Abdullah bin Ali bin Abdullah bin Jassem al-Thani for a national meeting to resolve the dispute with a Saudi-led quartet of countries.

“Our brothers in the Gulf and the Arab world have ostracised us because of fatal errors that were committed against them alongside ugly practices done against their existence,” Sheikh Sultan said, adding that Doha had become an incubator of those who corrupt and a platform to serve their agendas.

He said his “worst fear is that one day the Qatari citizen will become associated with terrorism. I am most fearful that we would be rejected from everyone worldwide, along with the rupture with our neighbouring countries.”

“I endorse all calls for a meeting hoping that all the members of the ruling family, distinguished members and thinkers to engage in this meeting so they can become one hand to protect Qatar from enemies and deserters,” Sheikh Sultan said.

Sheikh Abdullah called on the people of Qatar to unite to “be messengers of peace” to resolve the Gulf crisis.

“To my family, the dignitaries, the businessmen and all the people of Qatar, I invite you to meet to be messengers of wisdom and peace and advocates for uniting the hearts,” he wrote on his official Twitter account.

The Riyadh-based member of the Qatari royal family said the crisis was “getting worse, as it has reached a point of direct incitement against the stability of the Gulf and interference in others’ affairs, thus pushing us to a fate that we do not want to reach.”

“Our duty is not to remain silent in this crisis,” Sheikh Abdullah said before calling for a “national and family meeting to examine the crisis and return things to normal.”

He gave out his personal e-mail address and urged members of the royal family and the public in Qatar to contact him with inquiries and set a date for the meeting.

The developments come less than a week after a Qatari opposition meeting in London. The idea of exiled Qatari businessman and



Renewed hope. Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud (L) and Qatari Sheikh Abdullah bin Ali bin Abdullah bin Jassem al-Thani at the king's vacation home in Tangier.

(Saudi Press Agency)

activist Khalid al-Hail, the conference involved members of Qatar’s opposition in exile gathered to highlight their grievances against the government in Doha.

“Uniting the Qatari opposition, as envisioned at the conference is a significant step in the right direction,” wrote Saudi writer Abdullah al-Otaibi in Al-Ittihad, an Emirati daily.

“The opposition can then focus on reaching out to international Western decision-makers, think-tanks and media outlets to provide a permanent platform for answering questions and providing information and analyses of Qatar’s political, economic and military decisions against the Qatari state or its people,” Otaibi wrote.

The coast guard of Bahrain, one of the countries that cut diplo-

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Sheikh Sultan bin Suhaim al-Thani

matic ties with Doha over what was described as Qatar’s interference in their countries’ internal affairs and support for radical groups, announced that Qatar has seized three Bahraini boats with 16 sailors onboard during a three-day period.

“This raises the number of boats seized by Qatar to 15 and the number of sailors in its custody to 20,” Bahraini Coast Guard Commander Alaa Siyadi said. He urged Doha to show commitment to proper legal procedures in accordance with international conventions on maritime safety.

In June, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt joined Bahrain in severing diplomatic ties with Doha. International mediation efforts have yet to yield tangible results.

British government must not turn a blind eye to Doha’s dangerous foreign policy



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The United Kingdom has much to lose from a permanent split in the Arabian Gulf. A landmark conference aimed at promoting trade between Britain and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) this year in London is reported to have been postponed because of the dispute between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt.

Talks over a potential UK-GCC trade deal, a cornerstone of Britain’s post-Brexit international trade policy, are on hold until GCC members are willing to sit together at the negotiating table.

A united GCC is in Britain’s interests and, for that reason, the British government is entirely right to urge a resolution to this dispute but there will be no resolution unless the causes of the crisis are addressed.

Qatar stands accused by its neighbours of supporting extremism and terrorism. These claims must be taken seriously. No matter how much Qatar invests in the United Kingdom, the British government must not turn a blind eye to Doha’s dangerous foreign policy.

At its very core, this dispute is about competing visions for the future of the Middle East. The quartet countries support stability and security across the region. Qatar, for tactical and ideological reasons, has backed political Islamists whose objective across the region is revolution.

This is most obviously apparent in Qatar’s support for the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Doha was an early backer of Muham-

mad Morsi’s abortive Islamist government. Other parts of the Gulf view the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organisation. They argue that the Brotherhood’s ideology is a gateway to terrorism.

The Qataris argue that this crisis is simply a dispute over designations. They say that the groups they support are not terrorist organisations. They argue that hosting Hamas and the Taliban in Doha and providing their officials with funds and safe haven do not constitute support.

In some cases, Qatar’s claims might be accepted. The status of the Muslim Brotherhood divides international opinion, although the British government views membership as a “possible indicator of extremism.”

Other examples are more clear-cut. Western media have been

reporting on links between Qatari intelligence officials and leaders of the al-Qaeda affiliate al-Nusra Front, which rebranded itself as Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, in Syria. A US think-tank cited 18 instances in which Qatar facilitated ransom payments to al-Nusra Front.

In Libya, Qatar has long supported militias linked to al-Qaeda. There is Al Jazeera footage of Hamad al-Marri, who leads Qatar’s special forces, alongside members of a Libyan al-Qaeda affiliate, which is designated as a terrorist group in the United Kingdom. There is no dispute over the designations of these groups and Qatar’s support for them cannot be ignored.

It is clear Qatar takes a wilfully soft approach to terror financiers. Five Qatari citizens feature on the British Treasury’s sanction

list accused of financing al-Qaeda or al-Qaeda-affiliated groups. All five men are designated terrorists by the United States and the United Nations. Qatar claims they “have been arrested, prosecuted, banned from travelling and had assets frozen” – and yet there is no suggestion that they are in prison. Should the British government not ask why that might be?

Qatar has ignored these issues in the belief that it has the wealth and resources to ride out the crisis. It has opened its cheque-book and signed defence deals with Britain, Italy and others. It has engaged in headline-grabbing, soft-power initiatives, such as Paris Saint-Germain’s extravagant purchase of Neymar. Qatar has sought closer ties with Turkey and renewed diplomatic relations with Iran.

Rather than seeking dialogue with its neighbours, its actions have made a resolution to the dispute more distant.

Western officials have shuttled between Gulf capitals seeking to end the impasse but the crisis risks collapsing the GCC. At a time when the Middle East is engulfed by war and instability, a division of this kind would be a deeply undesirable outcome. A united GCC is in all our interests.

If Qatar is innocent of the charges against it, then let it demonstrate its innocence. The fact that it has ignored them and engaged in ad hominem attacks against its accusers should raise suspicions. If the country is guilty, then its actions are a threat to global peace and security. If Qatar’s investments are the price for our silence, then we are selling it too cheap.



Strong ties. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz (R) shakes hands with British Defence Secretary Michael Fallon after signing agreements in Jeddah, on September 19.

(Saudi Press Agency)

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