

Toplumcu Düşünce Enstitüsü Değerlendirme Notu

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Gulf Crisis and Turkey

On June 9, 2017, in a statement on the Middle East, Secretary Tillerson said: i) “... *As we combine efforts to defeat the military, financial, and ideological support of terrorists, we expect to see progress in the Arab world toward greater political expression. An important pathway to attack Islamic extremism and to prevent political activism from escalating into violence is to allow marginalized voices opportunities for political expression.*” ii) “... *We call on Qatar to be responsive to the concerns of its neighbors. Qatar has a history of supporting groups that have spanned the spectrum of political expression, from activism to violence. The emir of Qatar has made progress in halting financial support and expelling terrorist elements from his country, but he must do more and he must do it more quickly.*” iii) “*Others must also continue to eliminate factions of support for violent organizations within their own borders. Again, that was a commitment made by all at the summit. We call on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt to ease the blockade against Qatar. There are humanitarian consequences to this blockade... We believe these are unintended consequences, especially during this Holy Month of Ramadan, but they can be addressed immediately...*” (emphasis added)

Only hours later, in remarks to the press with President Iohannis of Romania Mr. Trump said: “(referring to his visit to Saudi Arabia) ... *I addressed a summit of more than 50 Arab and Muslim leaders — a unique meeting in the history of nations — where key players in the region agreed to stop supporting terrorism, whether it be financial, military or even moral support. The nation of Qatar, unfortunately, has historically been a funder of terrorism at a very high level, and in the wake of that conference, nations came together and spoke to me about confronting Qatar over its behavior. So we had a decision to make: Do we take the easy road, or do we finally take a hard but necessary action? We have to stop the funding of terrorism. I decided, along with Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, our great generals and*

military people, the time had come to call on Qatar to end its funding — they have to end that funding — and its extremist ideology in terms of funding...”

Some considered these statements to be somewhat contradictory in the context of Washington’s Qatar policy. Indeed, but more important were Secretary Tillerson’s references to “political expression” and to “others who must also continue to eliminate factions of support for violent organizations within their own borders.”

And, Reuters reported last Saturday that Iran’s Aseman Airlines has signed a 3 billion dollars-worth final deal for 30 Boeing 737 jets in Iran’s first new business with a major American company since President Donald Trump took office. Aseman is said to be Iran’s third-largest airline. Not a huge arms deal but still a development of political significance...

On June 7, 2017, Turkish Parliament fast-tracked the ratification of two protocols on military cooperation with Qatar paving the way for additional Turkish troop deployments.

And two days later, at an iftar organized by the ruling Justice and Development Party’s (JDP) Istanbul branch, President Erdogan directly addressed the Gulf countries saying that there will be no winners of discord among brothers; that nothing can be achieved through slander and that Qatar does not support terrorism. Referring to the coup attempt of July 15 he said that he knows very well who in the Gulf were delighted at the news, how they followed it and the monies spent. The President then reiterated that Turkey would continue to give Qatar every support. He questioned why those who are happy with the US bases in Qatar are uneasy about a Turkish one. Supporting the call made by Secretary Tillerson for easing the Qatar embargo Mr. Erdogan said: *“I say that the embargo should be lifted altogether. I particularly wish to call upon the Saudi leadership: You are the wisest, the strongest in the Gulf. We call you the ‘Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques’. You should wear the crown not of discord but of brotherhood. You should bring all together. This is what would befit the Custodianship of the Two Holy Mosques. This is what we expect from you. And we feel entitled to such expectations because we are tired of Muslims fighting Muslims.”*

Last Saturday, Bahrain’s Foreign Minister Sheikh Khalid bin Ahmed Al-Khalifa visited Ankara. According to what he and his Turkish counterpart Minister Çavusoglu told the press, GCC countries agree that military cooperation between Turkey and Qatar was launched in 2014, that it was designed as an arrangement to serve the GCC’s security interests and that

will not be used against any other member. But, it seems that little headway was made on the current crisis. Nonetheless, President Erdogan told Al-Khalifa that the problem should be resolved before the end of Ramadan.

Judging by their statements, Presidents Trump and Erdogan are on opposite sides of the Gulf crisis. But, for different reasons, they are not too far from one another on the importance they attach to relations with Riyadh. And obviously, Ankara has serious problems with some members of the anti-Qatar coalition regarding their attitude towards the July 15 coup attempt. Likewise, they don't seem to be happy with Ankara's support to the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas. In a way, President Erdogan's iftar remarks have confirmed the impression that measures targeting Qatar were also conceived as a message to Ankara.

At present, there is a flurry of diplomatic activity. But the question remains what would be an acceptable solution for the parties, particularly for those who have given Qatar an ultimatum. Will the anti-Qatar coalition after a leadership change in Doha remain intact, or would they be content with teaching a lesson on how to pay heed to bigger brothers? What about Al Jazeera? What about Doha cutting its links to Tehran? There are further questions there. What about Syria? What about the emerging humanitarian disaster in Yemen?

The current Gulf crisis is certainly not only about Qatar. To some extent it is about Turkey. But more importantly perhaps, it is also about Iran. Although there may be some discrepancy in statements over Qatar, the Trump administration looks united on a tough line towards Tehran. And, managing a growing crisis between the US, its Gulf allies and Israel on one side and Iran on the other in a new regional realignment would no doubt be a greater challenge for Ankara than taking a position on the isolation of Qatar. Shortly after he assumed office, PM Yildirim said that Ankara needs more friends and fewer enemies. Since then, however, only the opposite has happened. This does not bode well for Turkish foreign policy.

Middle East leaders have been quite outspoken in individually expressing their agony over Middle East's fratricide. All the more so these days because it is the Holy Month of Ramadan. Yet, these leaders represent a collective failure in ending the current sectarian conflict because their countries are parties to it. Turkey now finds it opportune to mention its being the current Chair of the Summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. The

reality is, at a time of utmost need for enlightened leadership, the Organization exists in name only.

In the final analysis, the US, as the only major power with an ability to make a difference in the Gulf area will determine the content of the Qatar deal to be struck at some point within the GCC. And then, tensions, sanctions and threats would seem to disappear; brother would appear to embrace brother; the Trump White House will claim diplomatic victory and the curtain will fall: intermission.