

Erdoğan urges Saudi king to solve Qatar row

Hurriyet Daily News, 13.06.2017



President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has urged Saudi Arabian King Salman, the elder statesman in the Gulf region, to take the lead in resolving the ongoing crisis over Qatar.

“I think that as the elder statesman of the Gulf, the king of Saudi Arabia should solve this affair and show leadership,” Erdoğan told members of his party in parliament on June 13. The president said he would conduct a trilateral teleconference call with French President Emmanuel Macron and Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani regarding steps to resolve the Qatar diplomatic crisis.

The president also denounced the isolation of Qatar as “inhumane and against Islamic values” and said the methods used against the Gulf state were unacceptable and analogous to a “death penalty.”

“A very grave mistake is being made in Qatar; isolating a nation in all areas is inhumane and against Islamic values. It’s as if a death penalty decision has been imposed on Qatar,” Erdoğan said. “Qatar has shown the most decisive stance against the terrorist organization of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant [ISIL] alongside Turkey. Victimizing Qatar through smear campaigns serves no purpose,” he said.

Erdoğan rejected accusations that Qatar supported terrorism, arguing that the country had been a staunch opponent of ISIL. “Qatar is a country which, like Turkey, has adopted the most resolute stance against Daesh [ISIL],” said Erdoğan. “Let’s stop fooling ourselves.”

Earlier, Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu stated that U.S. President Donald Trump would discuss the crisis with Erdoğan in the near future. Speaking in the parliament ahead of Erdoğan’s speech to lawmakers from his ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), Çavuşoğlu said the two leaders would conduct a phone call to discuss the issue.

He also vowed that Turkey would keep supporting Qatar while noting that the dispute should be resolved before the end of the holy month of Ramadan toward the end of June. Çavuşoğlu emphasized that Egypt, which is participating in the anti-Qatar blockade, is following Iran and Russia’s policies on Syria. “Even Egypt gives arms to the [Syrian] regime,” the minister said.

The sanctions of the Gulf countries were “disproportionate and wrong” and “neither humane nor Islamic,” stated the minister. Turkey assumed responsibility for mediation in order to resolve the crisis as the country is co-chair of Islamic Cooperation Organization summit, the minister noted. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt cut diplomatic and transport ties a week ago, accusing Doha of backing terrorism and groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood.

The sanctions have disrupted flows of imports and other materials into Qatar and caused many foreign banks to scale back their business with the country. A number of nations, including Turkey, have been engaged in intense diplomatic efforts to find a solution to the crisis between Qatar and the other mostly Arab countries. The president has previously spoken by phone with the leaders of Qatar, Russia, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia in a bid to ease the row.

Erdoğan says Iraqi Kurds' independence referendum 'does not serve anybody's interest'

Hurriyet Daily News, 10.06.2017



A referendum to be held by the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) on independence this fall will not serve anybody's interest, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has said, expressing his regret for Arbil's decision.

"The [referendum] statement by the northern Iraqi authority in Iraq deeply saddened us," Erdoğan told. "A step toward the independence of northern Iraq is a threat to the territorial integrity of Iraq, and it is wrong," he added. The KRG announced that it will hold a referendum over the future status of the semi-autonomous region on Sept. 25, sparking fresh questions about the already fragile regional stability.

"We would wish that these steps would be taken as a result of consultations. We have always defended the territorial integrity of Iraq. A step in such a crucial process does not serve anybody's interest," he said.

Along with Turkey, the United States and many global and regional powers expressed their disturbance with the KRG's plan to go to a referendum amid tumultuous politics in the region due to the ongoing civil war in Syria and the fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

Turkey confirms internal fight in Free Syrian Army

AFP, 15.06.2017



Groups inside the FSA forces are involved in internal conflict, Turkish sources have admitted, amid reports that Turkish-backed rebels fought with each other in the Syrian town of al-Bab, leaving several dead and scores injured.

“The components of the Free Syrian Army are clashing with each other in al-Bab, which was liberated by Turkey,” a Turkish security source confirmed to daily *Hürriyet*. “Just after the Raqqa operation that was undertaken by the U.S. with the YPG, the clashes around al-Bab intensified at the start of the Qatar crisis,” an official information note from the government said regarding the recent fighting.

“There is contradictory information about the number of dead and injured. But the accurate information received by Turkish authorities indicates that 33 people have died and 55 have been wounded in the clashes within the FSA,” it added.

The confirmation came after international news organizations reported clashes within opposition groups including the Sultan Murad Division and the Ahrar al-Sham. The heavy clashes have accelerated in recent days, Reuters reported on June 11.

“Rebel infighting has been a major weakness of the revolt against President Bashar al-Assad’s rule since its earliest days, with the rebel factions divided by both ideology and local power struggles,” Reuters reported.

The information note stated that the split in the FSA was triggered by the diplomatic crisis over Qatar for concerns over “financial resources.” “There are significant indications of a split within the FSA over the lack of financial resources. A group of 60-70 people, including high-ranking officials in the Sultan Murad Division, joined the regime’s forces. There are also a few numbers joining the YPG,” it said.

“The rumors stating that ‘with the Qatar incident, the flow of money will end. Kurds and regime powers will have a say in the future of Syria’ spread quite seriously,” the note stated indicating that “there is speculation that over 100 groups will join Syrian regime forces in the following days.”

Turkey, EU to hold political dialogue meeting in Brussels

Hurriyet Daily News, 13.06.2017



Officials from Turkey and the European Union will meet June 13 in Brussels for a political dialogue meeting to review the current status of issues on their mutual agenda and to discuss ways of moving forward after a period of tension.

The discussions will set the stage for higher-level gatherings at the ministerial level for political, energy, and economy dialogue meetings. European Union Ministry Undersecretary Selim Yenel and Foreign Ministry Deputy Undersecretary Mehmet Kemal Bozay will represent Turkey at the political directors meeting.

The current status of possible upgrades to the customs union, the migrant deal between Ankara and Brussels, visa liberalization for Turks to the Schengen area, the fight against terrorism, as well as future meetings for high-level dialogue on political, energy and economic relations will be studied.

Ankara expects to discuss visa liberalization for Turkish citizens to Europe, but the EU has made it clear that there are 72 criteria for the finalization of the agreement. Ankara has failed to meet five of the remaining benchmarks. Turkey has fulfilled the majority of the remaining criteria, but Brussels has demanded that the Turkish government revise the law on combatting terrorism in accordance with the EU regulations.

The regulations expected to be fulfilled by Turkey for visa liberalization are as follows: the signature of an operational cooperation agreement with Europol, the signing of a legal cooperation agreement with EU member countries, the preparation of third-generation passports, the review of the law on the protection of personal data and the revisal of anti-terrorism legislation.

Visa liberalization is part of a migrant agreement signed in 2016 between Turkey and the EU, in which Ankara agreed to take back all Syrians who crossed to the Greek islands illegally from Turkey, while the EU promised to take in the same number of Syrian refugees from Turkey.

The migrant deal planned to stop illegal migration via the Aegean Sea by cracking down on human traffickers and improve the conditions of nearly 3 million Syrian refugees in Turkey, but became a source of tension between the bloc and Ankara, as the latter criticized Brussels for failing to deliver the humanitarian funds promptly.

Turkey has asked the EU to speed up the flow of funds for refugees and to accept more migrants. Officials will also discuss the current status of talks to upgrade a Customs Union agreement on industrial goods by expanding it to agricultural products, services and public procurements. The European Commission notified the European Council that it was ready to negotiate with Turkey and called for a mandate in late 2016.

Ankara has demanded the opening of accession chapters 23 and 24, related to the rule of law and fundamental rights, as part of accession talks, but Brussels has been reluctant to move the talks further due to the concerns of some member countries regarding the state of fundamental rights in the country.

“The criteria are very clear and well-known, and if Turkey is interested in joining, as the foreign minister told us today ... it knows very well what that implies, especially in the field of human rights, rule of law, democracy and freedoms,” EU foreign affairs chief Federica Mogherini stated at a Malta meeting in April where the majority of bloc members decided to maintain dialogue with Turkey in reply to some calls to halt the accession talks.

Relations between Ankara and Brussels were especially strained after the July 2016 coup attempt and the political spat between EU and Turkish leadership have toned down after the April 16 referendum for a constitutional amendment in Turkey.

Ankara has criticized the bloc’s stance against the activities of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) in EU cities and their position against the Fethullahist Terror Organization (FETÖ) members, blaming them for not showing timely support to Turkey after the coup attempt.

The rigidity eased after a May 25 meeting, which brought together Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, European Commission head Jean-Claude Juncker, and European Council President Donald Tusk, where the parties agreed to work on a positive agenda.

Brexit talks to start Monday

Politico, 15.06.2017



U.K. Brexit Secretary David Davis and the EU’s chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier agreed on Thursday that talks on Britain’s departure from the European Union will begin on schedule on Monday June 19, two EU sources familiar with the matter told POLITICO.

The U.K. government and the European Commission confirmed the start date, with the Brits saying the talks would be led by Davis. The agenda for Monday’s talks is yet to be finalized, according to an EU source familiar with the preparations. The meeting is scheduled to run from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. — “Brussels time, of course,” the source said.

Barnier will speak English but wants the option of switching to French, so translation will be provided, the source said. The timetable for the talks getting started had been thrown into doubt by last week’s election setback for U.K. Prime Minister Theresa May. Her Conservative Party lost its parliamentary majority in a snap election that she called to seek a stronger mandate for the Brexit negotiations.



However, British officials have insisted since the vote that they would stick to the timetable, which would enable May to attend a summit of EU leaders next Thursday and Friday with the negotiations already under way. Brexit is on the agenda of the summit, as well as the agenda of ministerial meetings earlier in the week to prepare for leaders' talks.

Confirmation that the negotiations will start on time came as the EU's deputy Brexit negotiator Sabine Weyand held talks with U.K. officials in Brussels on Thursday — a meeting described by a European Commission official as “talks about talks.”

May's EU adviser Oliver Robbins was in Brussels on Monday for a working lunch with the EU chief Brexit negotiator, Michel Barnier. The EU's deputy Brexit negotiator Sabine Weyand is meeting U.K. officials in Brussels on Thursday to work out whether Brexit talks can start on schedule next week.

However, further details about the talks were thin on the ground. At a high-level panel discussion on Brexit at the 2017 Prague European Summit, Stefaan De Rynck, an official in the European Commission's Brexit negotiation team, noted that in Barnier the EU has “a stable, mandated, accountable chief negotiator.” It was unclear if use of the word “stable” was a dig at Theresa May, whose campaign mantra was “strong and stable.”

De Rynck, in response to a question, said he did not yet see any need to “lower the political temperature” around the talks. On the EU side, he said, “We're going to be rational about this, cool-headed, trying to find the common interests and see where the differences lie.”

Martin Povejšil, the Czech Republic's ambassador to the EU, who also sat on the panel, said the EU was ready to talk. And while Brexit posed many challenging issues, Povejšil said he expected the EU27 to remain unified on the most fundamental positions. “Indivisibility of the four freedoms,” Povejšil said. “If we stick to that, we are on the same side.”

European Commission First President Frans Timmermans told the Prague event that the EU would be happy to see the U.K. change its mind and stay in the bloc. Asked if he supported statements by French President Emmanuel Macron and German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble that the EU's door remained open, Timmermans said: “By all means; we didn't ask the U.K. to leave.”

Emmanuel Macron is no anti-Trump

Foreign Policy, 16.06.2017



The meeting between Emmanuel Macron and Donald Trump at their first international summit last month — and the now-infamous handshake that accompanied it — certainly caught the world by surprise.

To some observers, it looked like Macron, white-knuckled and determined, was trying to position himself as a leading voice in the European resistance to the U.S. president. The weeks that followed have only fueled this impression: In an interview with a French newspaper after the handshake, Macron mischievously declared that the act was “not innocent.”

The French president continued his happy trolling a few days later, announcing, in a speech in English following Trump’s announcement that he would withdraw the United States from the Paris climate agreement, that France would “make the planet great again.” (The slogan was even later turned into a website to attract American researchers to France.)

The two men are indeed very different. Though they can both point to business experience, Macron once taught philosophy and can recite Molière from memory; Trump was a reality television star who famously starts out his day on Twitter.

More importantly, they won on opposite worldviews: In the debate over open and closed societies, Macron unabashedly embraced the former, with a free market, pro-EU platform, while Trump advocated closed borders, “America First,” and protectionism.

Trump himself made little secret of the fact that he would have been happy with the election of Marine Le Pen, Macron’s second-round opponent, calling her “the strongest on what’s been going on in France” just before her resounding loss. Macron himself sharply criticized the U.S. president during his campaign and was endorsed by former President Barack Obama.

It is tempting to see in Macron’s election a direct repudiation of Trump’s populism and, thus, to see the man himself as Europe’s best hope for standing up to Trump. That would be a mistake. In fact, Macron and Trump, different as they are, are likely to get along rather well.

First, the election of Macron wasn’t quite the repudiation of Trumpism that it seems. Macron may have run on a liberal platform — but he was no Hillary Clinton. A newcomer to politics, running for office for the first time with a party created a year ago, Macron managed to capture some of the anti-establishment anger that doomed traditional politicians in France and the United States. Macron explicitly ran against the economic failures of both major French parties, the Socialists and Les Républicains, to reform France’s rigid labor market and fight high unemployment. Like for Trump, few “experts” would have bet on Macron’s victory just a few months before the election.



His likely pending victory at the parliamentary elections this weekend will usher in hundreds of new MPs who have never previously held elected office while incumbent parties will be swept away. In addition, his first bill will be aimed at “moralizing” French politics by imposing term limits and barring MPs from hiring family members or working as consultants. You could almost describe it as ... draining the swamp?

The U.S. president will find in this former investment banker a pragmatic dealmaker more interested in defending French interests than lecturing Washington about liberal values. Macron sees himself as a realist and claimed the “Gaullo-Mitterrandien” tradition of realist French foreign policy during the campaign.

Shortly after the G-7 meeting, he invited Russian President Vladimir Putin for a bilateral summit in Versailles; the press coverage focused on Macron’s strong words against the Russian media outlets RT and Sputnik and their interference in the French presidential campaign. Lost amid the excitement, however, was the straightforward fact that Macron chose to invite Putin to France so early in his presidency to begin with, to discuss cooperation, especially against terrorism. For years, this French attitude of independence has raised eyebrows in Washington; these days, it fits perfectly with Trump’s agenda.

Macron and Trump might also find unexpected common ground on what they expect from Europe. Shortly after Trump’s inauguration, the then-candidate Macron wrote that it was an opportunity for Europeans to finally speak with a common voice:

“We must defend and strengthen a union that allows European countries to speak with a louder voice on the world stage. Mr. Trump’s recent critical remarks about the EU highlight how important this is.” From one perspective, this push for a more integrated and autonomous Europe looks like a challenge to American dominance; from another, it seems to dovetail with Trump’s wariness of free-riding allies.

The French president intends to make the eurozone more effective by promoting better budgetary coordination and the creation of a common finance minister. This will mean convincing Germany to accept deeper integration of the common currency area and to give up trade surpluses that have reinforced imbalances within the EU.

While Macron won’t question France’s commitment to NATO, he will nevertheless encourage his European partners to increase their coordination on intelligence sharing, border control, and fighting terrorism. France and Germany have already started discussing proposals for a European defense fund to join forces in developing common technologies on drones and military transports, as well as fund joint efforts in Africa.

Instead of embracing movements like Brexit that weaken Europe and leave it even more dependent, the America First president should welcome European leaders who want to strengthen the continent and shoulder more responsibility for defending their own interests and security. The Obama administration was happy to outsource European affairs to Angela Merkel’s prudent leadership. By contrast, French officials never forgave the administration for its about-face on the infamous red line incident in Syria, when the Obama administration failed to respond to the Bashar al-Assad regime’s use of chemical weapons.



During the campaign, Macron supported the Trump administration's strike on the Shayrat airbase. Paris — always more comfortable with hard power than Berlin — could be a more natural partner for the Trump administration. Paris — always more comfortable with hard power than Berlin — could be a more natural partner for the Trump administration.

Like Donald Trump, Macron has repeatedly said his top foreign-policy priority would be fighting Islamism, a term that does not stir the same nervousness among the French political establishment, left or right, that it does in the United States. The new French president supports raising France's defense spending to 2 percent of GDP.

He also shows signs of continuity with France's assertive foreign policy of recent years. While Macron poached key figures from the right on economic affairs for his cabinet, the only outgoing Socialist minister he kept was the 69-year-old Jean-Yves Le Drian, who, for five years, was François Hollande's defense minister. Le Drian, widely respected in French military circles, will be Macron's Europe and foreign affairs minister and is best known for leading the military intervention against al Qaeda in the Sahel (for which the United States provides logistical and financial support).

He was the first French official to visit the United States after the election to meet the transition team. His presence in the new cabinet sends a clear message, as does the fact that Macron's first visit outside of Europe was to visit troops in Mali. While there, he repeated the message that France would be "uncompromising" in its fight against terrorism. France has 3,000 troops stationed in Mali, its second-largest deployment after Operation Sentinelle on its own soil to fight terrorism. Macron has vowed to continue both operations.

Trump is unpopular in Europe, no doubt, which may in part be why so many have invested their hopes for an anti-Trump champion in Macron. But the widespread loathing for the U.S. president, real though it may be, is unlikely to have a major impact on Macron's decision-making. The French Constitution grants the president much more leeway than it does, say, the German chancellor in making foreign policy; he is especially unfettered by parliamentary control.

Their initial handshake was uncomfortable, there's no doubt. And it remains unlikely that Macron and Trump will be taking in any Molière performances together anytime soon. But sometimes a rough handshake can nonetheless be the start of a fruitful relationship.

Trump is right to reset US- Cuba policy

Foreign Policy, 02.06.2017



Reports are coming in that this Friday, in a Miami speech, President Donald Trump will unveil his revisions to former President Barack Obama's controversial policy to normalize U.S. relations with the Castro dictatorship in Cuba.

While no specifics have as yet leaked, it is largely expected that President Donald Trump will tighten certain aspects of the myriad executive orders Barack Obama issued to circumvent the U.S. embargo, primarily in the areas of liberalized tourist travel and other commercial exchanges with the island (the embargo was codified by Congress in 1996).

Trump is also expected to make the case for more reciprocity in the relationship — in that Obama's deal was woefully one-sided, with the Castro regime accruing windfall economic benefits from increased U.S. trade and travel without conceding anything in terms of its one-party state, closed economy, and repression of human rights.

It is a point that President Trump has driven home previously. During the campaign last October, he called the Obama administration's negotiations "a very weak agreement." As president-elect in November, he tweeted, "If Cuba is unwilling to make a better deal for the Cuban people, the Cuban/American people and the U.S. as a whole, I will terminate the deal."

Media reports are suggesting the Trump administration may also specifically target commercial dealings with entities controlled by the Cuban military. Media reports are suggesting the Trump administration may also specifically target commercial dealings with entities controlled by the Cuban military.

That's because under Obama policy, the military has been steadily expanding its reach into all facets of the tourist industry, among other sectors of the Cuban economy. Its holding company, GAESA (Enterprise Administration Group), owns the best hotels in Cuba and most retail outlets, rental car companies, and import entities. It is run by Raúl Castro's son-in-law, Gen. Luis Alberto Rodríguez López-Callejas, one of the most powerful men on the island. Estimates are that GAESA companies account for more than half of the business revenue generated in Cuba — and that number is rising.

Blocking transactions that serve only to reinforce the regime's control over the Cuban people would restore badly needed integrity to U.S. policy. (It should be noted, however, that even the supposed "private enterprises" in Cuba — such as home restaurants, rentable apartments, taxis, and so on — are known to be so thoroughly penetrated by the regime that the line between ordinary Cubans and regime is impossible to discern. In the past, I have written that in reassessing Obama's policy towards Cuba, one need only to hold it to the standard his administration set for itself: namely, whether it works to "improve the lives of the Cuban people.")



Thus, all executive orders issued by Obama and commercial deals struck under the Obama administration ought to be judged according to whether they help the Cuban people or whether they buttress the Castro regime. Any activity found to be sustaining the regime's control rather than directly benefiting the Cuban people should be scrapped. That, and restoring common cause with Cuba's beleaguered human rights and dissident communities, should be front and center of a reconfigured U.S. Cuba policy.

As far as broader commercial transactions with the Castro regime, the Trump administration should consider resurrecting the Arcos Principles for Foreign Investment in Cuba, named after the late revolutionary fighter-turned-dissident and inspired by the Sullivan Principles, which sought to govern commercial transactions with the apartheid regime in South Africa. Essentially, it would mean urging any commercial entity doing or looking to do business in Cuba to commit to promoting human rights and fair-labor hiring and employment practices.

For example, U.S. companies engaged in Cuba should demand that wages be paid directly to Cuban workers in convertible pesos known as CUCs. Current practice is that Cuban workers earn a few hundred dollars a week, paid to the regime, which then pays workers in worthless Cuban pesos, known as CUPs.

Defenders of Obama's policy assert that it was not meant to produce change overnight, that the pre-Obama approach was an ignominious failure, and that changing policy now would only hurt the Cuban people.

Defenders of Obama's policy assert that it was not meant to produce change overnight, that the pre-Obama approach was an ignominious failure, and that changing policy now would only hurt the Cuban people — as if it is the responsibility of the United States and not the Castro regime to provide for the Cuban people's welfare. (It is a particularly odious aspect of the Castro regime that it has always tried to leverage the suffering of the Cuban people for sympathy and concessions from abroad.)

Moreover, these advocates have no special claim to being frustrated over the lack of change in Cuba; everyone who cares about Cuba is frustrated. That doesn't mean we all have to agree that the appropriate policy response is to open up trade and travel with the Castro dictatorship and then hope for the best.

Still, no one is expecting that President Trump's reset of U.S.-Cuba policy is merely going to be a return to the status quo ante. As stated, a defensible U.S. Cuba policy is one that supports the Cuban people with as little support to the regime as possible. President Obama professed to want to help average Cubans have a better day; a more fitting U.S. policy is to stand with those Cubans who want a better future.



Announcements & Reports

Central Asia at 25

Source : Bruegel
Weblink : <http://bruegel.org/2017/05/central-asia-at-25/>

What Factors Cause Individuals to Reject Violent Extremism in Yemen?

Source : Rand
Weblink : https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1727.html

Actualising East: India in a Multipolar Asia

Source : Brookings
Weblink : <https://www.brookings.edu/research/actualising-east-india-in-a-multipolar-asia/>

Upcoming Events

13th Asia Europe Economic Forum (AEEF)

Date : 26 June 2017
Place : Beijing - China
Website : <http://bruegel.org/events/13th-asia-europe-economic-forum/>

Emerging Markets and Europe: Time for Different Relationships?

Date : 27 June 2017
Place : Brussels - Belgium
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/524-emerging-markets-and-europe-time-for-different-relationships/>

What future for Europe's Social Models?

Date : 27 June 2017
Place : Brussels - Belgium
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/526-what-future-for-europes-social-models/>

Challenges for Growth in Europe

Date : 27 June 2017
Place : Brussels - Belgium
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/521-challenges-for-growth-in-europe/>



Global Governance of Public Goods: Asian and European Perspectives

Date : 28 June 2017
Place : Paris - France
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/529-global-governance-of-public-goods-asian-and-european-perspectives/>

The Future of the Welfare State

Date : 28 June 2017
Place : Berlin - Germany
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/541-the-future-of-the-welfare-state/>

Vision Europe Summit 2016

Date : 28 June 2017
Place : Lisbon - Portugal
Website : <http://bruegel.org/events/vision-europe-summit-2016/>