

Qatari Emir Skips GCC Summit in Riyadh



Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani

DOHA (Dispatches) – Qatari Emir Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani has decided to skip the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) held in Riyadh on Sunday, sending the country’s state minister for foreign affairs to head the delegation, amid ongoing diplomatic crisis with Qatar’s Persian Gulf neighbors, Qatari Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ahmed AlRumaihi said on Sunday. “Qatari State Minister for Foreign Affairs Soltan Al-Muraikhi arrived in Riyadh at the head of Qatar’s delegation to attend the summit of the cooperation council ,” AlRumaihi said via his official Twitter feed.

The state minister has no portfolio, meaning that he is not responsible for any particular area of the Qatari government’s activities, performing mainly representational functions on the part of the Qatari government.

Bahrain’s foreign minister criticized Qatar’s emir on Sunday for not attending the summit in Saudi Arabia,

an absence that suggests a rift between Doha and three Persian Gulf Arab states is unlikely to be resolved soon.

“Qatar’s emir should have accepted the fair demands (of the boycotting states) and attended the summit,” foreign minister Sheikh Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa said in a tweet.

In response, Ahmed bin Saeed Al-Rumaihi, director of the information office at Qatar’s foreign ministry, said: “Qatar can make its own decisions and had attended (last year’s) Kuwait summit while the leaders of the boycotting countries did not.”

The official Qatar News Agency said in a tweet on December 3 that the monarch had got “an invitation from the King of Saudi Arabia” for the meeting, but it did not say whether Sheikh Tamim would travel to Saudi Arabia.

The Arabic language Al Aan online newspaper, citing diplomatic sources, reported late last month

that Secretary General of the [P]GCC Abdul Latif bin Rashid al-Zayani was going to visit Doha to invite the Qatari emir to attend the 39th annual summit of the regional grouping.

Last month, Kuwait’s Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled al-Jarallah confirmed that all six GCC countries would be attending the annual summit of the council, which is set to take place on December 9.

Jarallah said the summit could present a “hope to resolve the [Persian] Gulf crisis and solve the differences.”

The report came as a surprise since Saudi Arabia, along with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, has been embroiled in a diplomatic and trade boycott against Qatar for a year and a half.

Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt all cut off diplomatic ties with Qatar on June 5 last year, after officially accusing it of “sponsoring terrorism.”

The administration of the Saudi-backed and former Yemeni president, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, Libya, the Maldives, Djibouti, Senegal and the Comoros later joined the camp in ending diplomatic ties with Doha. Jordan downgraded its diplomatic relations as well.

Qatar’s Foreign Ministry later announced that the decision to cut diplomatic ties was unjustified and based on false claims and assumptions.

On June 9, 2017, Qatar strongly dismissed allegations of supporting terrorism after the Saudi regime and its allies blacklisted dozens of individuals and entities purportedly associated with Doha.

Later that month, Saudi Arabia and its allies released a 13-point list of demands, including the closure of Al Jazeera television network and downgrade of relations with Iran, in return for the normalization of diplomatic relations with Doha.

The document containing the demands by Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the UAE and Bahrain also asked Qatar to sever all ties with the Muslim Brotherhood and the Lebanese Hezbollah resistance movement.

Qatar rejected the demands as “unreasonable.”

To Track Khashoggi

Zionist Regime Okayed Spyware Sale to Saudis

RIYADH (Dispatches) – A new report suggests that the Zionist regime’s authorities approved the sales of phone hacking spyware to Riyadh so that it could ensnare dissidents. The regime’s alleged intentions were to forge an alliance with a major power in the Arab world in its fight with Iran for influence in the Middle East.

Washington Post columnist David Ignatius said, citing U.S. intelligence officials speaking on conditions of anonymity, that Saudi officials sought to obtain Pegasus, state-of-the art mobile spyware, from Israeli cyber intelligence firm NSO Group Technologies.

The Saudis reportedly carried out some of the transactions with NSO via its Luxembourg-based affiliate called Q Cyber Technologies. Despite some Israelis voicing concerns about sharing the powerful malware with Riyadh, the sources claimed that the Zionist regime gave its consent to the purchase of Pegasus by Riyadh.

The report came after Saudi dissident figures revealed to the media how their phones had been hacked as part of Saudi government’s extensive

use of Pegasus.

Omar Abdulaziz, a Saudi activist based on Montreal, Canada, has launched a legal action against the NSO after it was revealed that it was the hacking of his phone conversations and chats with slain Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi that led to his assassination in Turkey in early October.

“The hacking of my phone played a major role in what happened to Jamal, I am really sorry to say,” said Abdulaziz in an interview with the CNN.

Khashoggi’s brutal assassination in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul sparked massive international outrage against Saudi Arabia. Many believe the death, which Turkey and the U.S. officials believe came on the orders of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, or MbS, exposed Riyadh’s massive crackdown on the dissent.

Saudi Arabia has expanded its secret ties to Israel under MbS. The son of King Salman who is viewed by many as the Kingdom’s de facto ruler, has made it clear that he and the Zionists stand on the same front to counter Iran and its growing influence in the Middle East.

Putin to Zionist PM:

Middle East Needs ‘Strict’ Stability

MOSCOW (Dispatches) – Russian President Vladimir Putin has advised Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu not to disturb stability in the Middle East following the recent Zionist operations near the Lebanese border.

Speaking over the phone, Putin and Netanyahu discussed the occupying regime’s operations, the Kremlin said in a statement on Sunday.

“The president of Russia stressed the importance of ensuring stability in the region,” the statement said.

Ties between Damascus and Tel Aviv have been strained since Russia’s delivery of the S-300 missile defense system to Syria following the September downing of a Russian spy aircraft during an airstrike by the Zionist regime.

Russia has blamed the regime for the incident, which killed 15 Russian crew members. The Defense Ministry has said the Zionist regime’s jets used the Russian plane as cover to attack Syria.

In their late Saturday talks held at the initiative of Netanyahu, Putin told him that the regime must improve its military coordination with Russia, the Kremlin said.

The Russian leader also emphasized the importance of the upcoming talks between their military experts to examine the circumstances of the September incident.

Israel has recently deployed additional troops along Lebanon’s border under the pretext of “cutting off” Hezbollah tunnels near the

occupied territories.

Netanyahu has boasted that the Israeli operation was “only a small piece of the big picture” of what he called efforts to ensure its security.

The operation has drawn rebuke and ridiculous even from Israeli leaders, with opposition leader Tzipi Livni criticizing Netanyahu for overdramatizing the campaign “for political gain.”

“We are not now in a situation where our soldiers are behind enemy lines. We are talking about engineering activity ...,” she said, accusing the Israeli premier of “blowing the incident out of proportion.”

Intelligence and transport minister Israel Katz said Friday that Israeli forces may need to go into Lebanon to deal with the alleged tunnels.

An Israeli incursion into Lebanon would likely spark a major confrontation with Hezbollah. The Lebanese resistance movement has warned that Israel would “regret” invading Lebanon.

In his talks with Netanyahu, Putin “stressed the importance of ensuring stability in the region in strict accordance with Resolution 1701 of the UN Security Council,” the Kremlin statement read.

He was referring to the 2006 UN Security Council resolution issued after the Second Lebanon War, the last major conflict between Israel and Hezbollah which ended with the victory of the Lebanese movement.

U.S. Wants to Continue Support for Saudi War in Yemen

ABU DHABI (Dispatches) – The United States wants to continue support to the Saudi-led war in Yemen that has left thousands of civilians dead, a State Department official said on Sunday.

Since the Oct 2. murder of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi at the kingdom’s Istanbul consulate, the U.S. administration has come under pressure at home over the nearly four-year-old conflict.

The Senate last month voted to advance a resolution to end U.S. military support, which includes arms sales and intelligence sharing, for the Western-backed coalition that war in 2015.

“There are pressures in our system ... to either withdraw from the conflict or discontinue our support of the coalition, which we are strongly opposed to on the administration side,” said Timothy Lenderking, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Persian Gulf Affairs.

“We do believe that the support for the coalition is necessary. It sends a wrong message if we discontinue our support,” he told a security forum in the United Arab Emirates.



U.S. President Donald Trump (R) holds a chart highlighting arms sales to Saudi Arabia during a meeting with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Washington on March 20, 2018.

Last month, the U.S. Senate voted to advance a resolution calling for an end to U.S. military support for the Saudi-led coalition, including arms sales and intelligence sharing.

It came in the wake of the gruesome murder of dissident Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi inside the kingdom’s Istanbul consulate on October 2.

The CIA is said to have concluded that Saudi Crown Prince bin Salman had “probably ordered” the murder.

A recent briefing by CIA Director Gina Haspel hardened U.S. senators’ resolve to act against bin Salman and pull back from Yemen.

The murder has also brought the Saudi war on Yemen, especially its

huge civilian toll, and the US role in the conflict under scrutiny.

Last month, the United States halted its refueling of Saudi aircraft, which have been blamed for thousands of civilian deaths in airstrikes in Yemen.

The U.S. official’s reassurances of continued support come as Sweden is hosting the first UN-led peace talks in two years between the warring parties.

“We do believe that the support for the coalition is necessary. It sends a wrong message if we discontinue our support,” Lenderking said.

The discussions began on Thursday between delegations from Yemen’s Houthi movement and the country’s former Saudi-backed regime but there has been no breakthrough yet.

The brutal Saudi-led war was launched in March 2015 in an attempt to reinstall Yemen’s former Riyadh-allied regime and crush the Houthis, who have been running state affairs in the absence of an effective government.

In their latest joint statement, UNICEF and the World Food Program said that up to 20 million Yemenis — two-thirds of the country’s population — are food insecure.

8 Dead, 10 Captured After Taliban Attack Military Base in Afghanistan

KABUL (Dispatches) – At least eight soldiers were killed and ten others captured by the Taliban after an attack on a military base in the Bala Baluk district of Afghanistan’s province of Farah, the Pajhwok news agency

reported Sunday, citing local officials.

According to the Pajhwok news agency, the Taliban militants also seized all weapons and ammunition upon leaving the base.

Two attackers were wounded in

the fight, the media added, citing a spokesman for Taliban.

Afghanistan has long been suffering from an unstable political, social and security situation due to the activity of various terrorist and radical groups.

The Afghan National Defense and Security Forces, supported by a U.S.-led coalition, are conducting joint offensive operations to combat terrorism across the country.

In another development, at least

nine militants have been killed and 15 others arrested as government forces targeted Taliban hideouts in Dehyak district of the eastern Ghazni province on Saturday, spokesman for provincial government Aref Nuri said

Sunday.

The operation, according to the official, was launched in Sulimanzai village where a gathering of Taliban militants was underway, killing 14 militants on the spot.