Against the backdrop of Trump’s already recognizably disastrous policy along many foreign and domestic vectors, he has nevertheless been vigorously looking to leave “a significant mark in American history” as his legacy. One of the areas of focus for this activity has been reconciling certain Arab and Muslim countries with Israel, which culminated in the signing of the peace agreements between Tel Aviv and Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, and Sudan - the White House proclaimed that this was “an important step towards building peace in the Middle East,” American-style.

Another important initiative by the outgoing US administration is the reconciliation of Qatar with its other Arab neighbors.

It is worth reiterating that on June 5, 2017, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen, Libya and the Maldives severed diplomatic relations with Qatar, announced a financial, trade, and transportation boycott against it, and expelled Qatari citizens. They accused Qatar of providing ideological and practical support to jihadism, and specifically to the Muslim Brotherhood organization (banned in the Russian Federation), one which those who set up the boycott deem extremist and subversive. The reason stated by these countries was “the continuing actions taken by the state of Qatar aimed at destabilizing the situation, interfering in domestic affairs, incendiariism in the media, supporting terrorism, and providing financial assistance to groups associated with Iran.”

In terms of how harsh the wording was, these countries even went one better than Washington, which did not label either Qatar or Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, who was in power back then, as sponsors of terrorism (the official list put out by the US State Department that contains those that adhere to evil principles worldwide only included...
Iran, Sudan, and Syria at that time). Although, of course, these countries clearly expressed their desire to please their master in the White House. On top of that, just a few weeks before that Trump had visited Riyadh for a summit of Muslim states, where he made very tough statements regarding Iran that clearly encouraged the Saudis, and they took that as giving them the green light for further action, deciding to use that path to take on Qatar. That is why it is quite understandable that the main target for accusations of “Qatar’s friendship with Iran” was Iran, not Qatar. The relationship with Tehran is what sparked a quarrel among the Arab monarchs of the Persian Gulf, and all the while Qatar has always spoken out in support of Iran, realizing the full disastrousness of taking that kind of position. Qatar and Iran jointly operate a large gas field, and on November 24, 2020 the seventh meeting of the Iran-Qatar Joint Economic Commission was held in the Iranian city of Isfahan, which ended with the signing of a memorandum of understanding to help bolster bilateral trade relations.

In 2017, Qatar’s neighbors put forth 13 demands for it, including shutting down Al Jazeera TV channel and a Turkish military base that also provides shelter to the Muslim Brotherhood. Moreover, had it not been for the Turkish military base in Qatar, perhaps Saudi Arabia and its allies would have invaded it long ago.

As far as the United States’ own interests in Qatar go, they are multi-faceted. And interest in Qatar is not on the wane nowadays, since its involvement in various conflicts, including regional ones, has not yet run its course in the plans laid by the United States and its allies. Relations between Qatar and the United States began to develop and expand at an increased pace after the 1991 Gulf War. At the same time, bilateral ties in the military and political field have received the greatest boost in their development. Washington particularly values how Qatar allots land for various American military installations, and purchasing American weapons worth many billions of dollars. It should also not be forgotten that one of the largest US military installations abroad is Al Udeid Air Base (AFB), which is located south of the Qatar’s capital, Doha. This base was used during all the actions that the US air force took against Iraq, and from 2001 to the present it has been a bridge to help support military operations for Western coalition troops in Afghanistan. Additional evidence of close ties between the United States and Qatar is the current role played by Doha as a platform to hold talks for Washington to try to resolve the situation in Afghanistan. This is the reason why, besides for the purposes of holding additional consultations with the Qatari military establishment - in Doha on December 17 US Army general and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley held talks with the Afghan Taliban (an organization whose activities are prohibited in the Russian Federation).

The White House has moved actively to make peace among its Arab allies following a recent tour of those countries in the region by Jared Kushner, Trump’s son-in-law and adviser. He held talks with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who effectively rules Saudi Arabia, and the Qatari Emir, Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, who gave assurances that they were willing to resolve the mutual crisis in their relations. According to a number of Arab publications, during his trip Jared Kushner also called on Riyadh and Doha to “reconcile with Israel before Donald Trump leaves the White House,” but the Qatari authorities rejected this American proposal.

This summer, Washington’s efforts to resolve the conflict and achieve a truce with Qatar almost ended in success, but at the last moment the agreement was frustrated by Abu Dhabi, which is believed to be the main entity that initiated the blockade against Qatar, and it “dissuaded” Riyadh from any rapprochement with Doha. Nonetheless, efforts along the lines of reconciliation have continued recently, including those that involve Kuwaiti mediation.

And just the other day, the crown princes of the Saudi Arabia and the UAE met in the Saudi city of Neom, on the Red Sea coastline, to discuss how to settle the Qatari crisis. According to Arab media outlets, bin Salman and bin Zayed managed to reach a preliminary agreement on reconciliation with Doha, and the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi promised that he would not obstruct the path toward reconciliation if Riyadh wants to resolve this conflict. At the same time, Kuwaiti media reported that the countries in the Arab Quartet - Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt - intend to take action to reconcile with Qatar at the next Gulf Cooperation Council summit, which was postponed from this December to early January 2021 due to the coronavirus pandemic.

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