

Qatar says relations with Israel undermine Palestinian statehood

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Sheikh Mohammed said division was not in the interest of concerted Arab efforts to get the Israelis to negotiate. (Photo: Khalid al-Mousily/Reuters)

Doha, November 16 (RHC)-- Qatar's Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani has said Arab states that establish ties with Israel undermine efforts for Palestinian statehood. In recent months, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain and Sudan agreed to formal relations in deals brokered by United States President Donald Trump's administration.

The Palestinians have denounced these agreements as a “stab in the back” and a betrayal of their cause. They fear the moves by Bahrain and the UAE will weaken a long-standing pan-Arab position.

The UAE, Bahrain and Sudan broke with this position, which had demanded Israeli withdrawal from already illegally occupied territory and the acceptance of Palestinian statehood in return for normal relations with Arab countries.

“I think it’s better to have a united [Arab] front to put the interests of the Palestinians [first] to end the [Israeli] occupation,” Sheikh Mohammed told the online Global Security Forum on Monday. He said that division was not in the interest of concerted Arab efforts to get the Israelis to negotiate with the Palestinians and resolve the decades-long conflict.

However, for the states who established ties, “it is up to them at the end of the day to decide what is best for their countries.”

Until this year, Israel had only current formal relations with just two Arab states – its neighbours Egypt and Jordan – established under peace deals reached decades ago. US and Israeli officials have said more Arab states could soon follow after the recent deals.

Sheikh Mohammed said Doha maintains some relations with Israel, though only on matters concerning the Palestinians, such as humanitarian needs or development projects. Qatar supports a two-state solution with occupied East Jerusalem as the capital of a Palestinian state, a stance the foreign minister reiterated.

Referring to a dispute that erupted in 2017 when the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Egypt severed diplomatic and transport ties with Qatar and imposed a land, air and sea blockade against the country, Sheikh Mohammed said there are no winners in the crisis.

“We are hopeful that this will end at any moment and what we need right now is to have serious engagement in a good faith with other countries – and this is what Qatar is prepared to do,” he told the Forum. “There is no winner out of this crisis and all of us are losing,” he added.

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