

## **Qatar diplomatic crisis: Trump pushes Gulf unity in call with Saudi king, Kuwait tries to mediate**

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**Washington:** Hours after taking credit for diplomatic boycott of Qatar by Arab nations, US President Donald Trump on Tuesday spoke of Arab unity and told Saudi Arabia's King Salman that a united Gulf Cooperation Council is "critical to defeating terrorism and promoting regional stability."

The two leaders spoke on phone at Riyadh's initiation after a few Arab nations, led by Saudi Arabia, cut all diplomatic ties and imposed a blockade on its smaller neighbour Qatar over alleged funding for terror groups.

"The two leaders discussed the critical goals of preventing the financing of terrorist organisations and eliminating the promotion of extremism by any nation in the region," the White House said in a statement.

"The president underscored that a united Gulf Cooperation Council is critical to defeating terrorism and promoting regional stability," the statement said.

It's a change in tone for a president who had seemed to welcome the crisis brewing among America's Mideast allies.

Trump had appeared to side with Saudi Arabia and other countries against Qatar in a series of tweets Tuesday that seemed to endorse the accusation that Qatar funds terrorist groups.

"During my recent trip to the Middle East I stated that there can no longer be funding of Radical Ideology. Leaders pointed to Qatar - look! So good to see the Saudi Arabia visit with the King and 50 countries already paying off. They said they would take a hard line on funding extremism, and all reference was pointing to Qatar. Perhaps this will be the beginning of the end to the horror of terrorism," Trump said in a series of tweets.

Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the UAE, Yemen, Libya's eastern-based government and the Maldives have all cut diplomatic and other ties with Qatar.

The Gulf Cooperation Council includes Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Oman and Kuwait.

Saudi Arabia said its action was due to Qatar's embrace of various terrorist and sectarian groups aimed at destabilizing the region, including the Muslim Brotherhood, al-Qaida, the Islamic State group and militants supported by Iran in the kingdom's restive Eastern Province.

Qatar long has denied funding extremists, although Western officials have accused it of allowing or even encouraging funding of Sunni extremists like al-Qaida's branch in Syria, once known as the Nusra Front.

Meanwhile, Kuwait is trying to mediate a resumption of diplomatic and commercial ties between Qatar and its Arab neighbours. Kuwait's Emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad Al-Sabah arrived in Saudi Arabia on Tuesday for talks aimed at resolving the rift between Islamic nations.

The state-run Kuwait News Agency reported that Kuwaiti ruler Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al Sabah spoke with Qatar's emir Monday evening and urged him to give a chance to efforts aimed at easing tensions.

The call came after a senior Saudi royal arrived in Kuwait with a message from the Saudi king. An Omani diplomat

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travelled to Qatar on Monday.

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