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CENTER for DIPLOMATIC AFFAIRS and POLITICAL STUDIES

THE EFFECTS OF ISRAEL NORMALIZATION PROCESS ON QATAR AND TURKISH-QATARI RELATIONS

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Panel Notes

On 14.10.2020 at 7.30 pm “The Effects of Israel Normalization Process on Qatar and Turkish-Qatari Relations” panel held online by DIPAM. Moderated by DIPAM Founding Member Assoc.Prof. Esra P.

Albayrakoğlu; Istanbul Medeniyet University Faculty Member Prof. Dr. Özden Zeynep Oktav, Director of the Gulf Studies Center of Qatar University Dr.

Mahjoob Zweiri and Feyza Gümüşlüoğlu from EkoTürk TV participated as speakers.

Moderator, who express aim of the session as a provide substantial informations about effect of next round of Arab-Israeli normalization process and its influence over Qatar and Turkish-Qatari relations, informed about the panel content and introduced the speakers. First, the Moderator, who wanted to start the panel with Dr. Mahjoob ZWEIRI, asked Zweiri how he interpreted the next round of Arab-Israeli normalization. Moderator stated that Qatar famous with their policy of a delicate balance between the different actors such as Iran, Turkey, UAE and USA, asked Dr. Zweiri whether this rapprochement between Israel and the UAE will put any pressure on Qatar.

Dr. Zweiri, based on the developments in recent weeks, drew attention to official statements showing that Doha has made a very clear view on the normalization process and he state that normalization with Israel is not aimed. Emphasizing that Qatar will lean towards normalization after Israel's abiding by international decisions and the solution of the problem between Israel and Palestine, Zweiri stated that nothing that the Palestinians would basically accept will not be accepted by Qatar. He especially emphasized that Qatar believes that Israel should withdraw to the pre-1967 borders. However, the speaker said that this does not mean that Qatar is not looking at what is happening in the region, and stated that at the end of the day Qatar plays a role in mediation as an important player in the region and is trying to bring security and stability to the region. He also stated that Qatar has a strong allied relationship with the USA and that she understands and cares well the dynamics in the region. He

also stated that Qatar cannot approve of everything Washington says and therefore there is a kind of difference between being a friend, ally of the USA and following what the USA is says. Saying that this difference is very clear, Dr. Zweiri give as an example of Qatar's continue to use of Iran's airspace, although the USA was not satisfied with this.

Saying that Qatar's position has been very clear so far when it comes to normalization, Zweiri stated that Qatar 100% supports Palestinians. Dr. Zweiri, who state that Qatar standing beside between Turkey about support to Palestinians and provide better life conditions for them, also noted that Qatar contributed to the people of Gaza, helped 1.5 million people in Gaza and was trying to support the Palestinian authority in Ramallah.

Saying that normalization means a kind of recognition for Israel and the normalization of the Embassy relations, Zweiri mentioned the importance of this process for Israel in the region. The speaker stated that the normalization movement took place during the period of fragile and unfavorable relations in which the Gulf Cooperation Organization was involved, and stated that Israel was trying to gain maximum benefit from this fragility within the organization. Emphasizing that the developments are a challenge, Zweiri stated that Qatar is trying to reduce the effects and risks of this process.

Moderator Albayrakoğlu reminded that the Gulf Cooperation Organization is not a security-based organization and stated that the conflicts within the organization are getting bigger. Stating that Qatar is famous for mediating between the parties

and trying to bring peace to the region, the moderator stated that the UAE is ready for the same thing. The moderator asked Zweiri about Iran's position in this process.

Zweiri explained why the UAE cannot be successful in mediation, especially when it comes to the Arab-Israel conflict; Being suspicious of the Palestinians and the Palestinian Authority, UAE's unreliability and UAE only watch over its own interests. He stated that Qatar behaving more peacefully on this issue and trying to bring stability to the region. As for Iran, the speaker stated that Iran is faced with real difficulties and stated that for the first time in history, Israel, Iran's biggest enemy, was standing right behind the door. Zweiri stated that Iran established its own security theory on the fact that the enemy should stay away from the borders, not even close to the borders. In Abu Dhabi, Dubai or Bahrain behind the western border of Iran, the speaker said that Israel will be established and will have the power to do many things, and also stated that Israel is a capable and technologically advanced enemy. He stated that Iran feels normalization as a threat and is worried about the consequences if it continues. Speaker stated that Iran's very clear messages about the fact that this normalization would cost the UAE and Bahrain in case of any harm to it, and warned these countries to be careful, reflected the anxiety in Iran's political environment. Speaking about the anxiety and discomfort of Iran, who believes that the UAE and Bahrain have created a chaotic environment by bringing Israel to the region, the speaker stated that normalization put Iran in a very critical position along with the US pressure and sanctions.

Moderator Albayrakoğlu, stated that she agreed with what Dr. Zweiri said and stated that the F-35s that the USA planned to sell to the UAE would further complicate the military balance in the region. Moderator who emphasize that this process will bring Iran more closer to Russia, asked Turkey's position in this process to Prof. Dr. Özden Zeynep Oktav.

Oktav said that what Zweiri said is important to her and wanted to talk about Qatar's mediation role and its perspective on the normalization process. Saying that the Abraham Accord, which was signed, includes full diplomatic and commercial relations, Oktav said that Qatar refused normalization due to the issue between Israel and Palestine. Stating that the concept of "normalization" in this process is an abnormal word, the speaker stated that with this agreement, Israel will dominate the Middle East and Gulf regions.

Saying that the normalization process is not a positive development from Qatar's point of view, Oktav said that Qatar thinks that Israel will be a rival in energy issues in the Gulf region. She stated that Qatar is an important actor in energy in the region and mentioned the relations between Qatar and Iran in the context of energy. Expressing her own opinion, the speaker stated that she was skeptical of the argument that Israel would bring peace to the region with the normalization movement. Looking at the process from Qatar's point of view, she stated that this process aims to isolate Iran and this situation will direct Iran to Russia and China. Speaker stated that in this process Qatar will consolidate its relations with Turkey.

Underlining that the Palestinian Question is no longer a focal point before the countries of the region, Oktav talked about the differences between the Middle East and Gulf countries and evaluated the different perspectives of these countries towards Israel. The speaker, who especially evaluated the situation of Bahrain, said that Bahrain is among the wings of Saudi Arabia. The speaker stated that even though Saudi Arabia did not make it clear, Mohammed Bin Salman was happy with the process and had very good relations with the UAE.

Oktav said the normalization move with Israel threatens Turkey and emphasize that Turkey, Iran and Qatar, described as malign countries in the region by US and Israel supporters. The reason for this is; Turkey's increasing military power, S-400 missile defense systems which is taken from Russia and military bases in 13 countries, including Qatar. Speaker note that this military empowerment of Turkey seen as a threat for especially US, Israel and some Gulf countries.

Turkey's support both in Egypt and Syria to Muslim Brotherhood, Oktave, in this case the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, stated that he perceived as supporting terrorism by the UAE and Bahrain. Oktav, who said that Turkey support Muslim Brotherhood both in Egypt and Syria, stated that this situation is perceived by Saudi Arabia, UAE and Bahrain as supporting terrorism. Turkey's support to Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas is threatening for these countries and Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas has seen as having the ability to destabilize the Gulf monarchies. Speakers stated that Turkey is a country seen as destabilizing region by the Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and UAE. She was also stated that

Qatar is also seen in the same position amongst these countries with Turkey.

Saying that the main reason for Qatar's refusal to normalize is Qatar's relationship with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, Oktav stated that the relations between the three countries are not good nowadays. She noted that Qatar is currently following the events with a very sensitive diplomacy and does not want the normalization of relations with Israel. Qatar, does not want to spoil relations with Turkey and Iran and speaker state that Qatar do not want the Israeli domination in the region. She noted that Qatar, which does not want Israel to rise in the region in terms of military and energy, wants to pursue a balanced policy with Israel. She also reminded that after the Qatar crisis, Qatar used Iran's airspace and still continues to use it. Despite all this, Oktav pointed out to the Israeli office in Qatar, said that Qatar is the first country in the Gulf in this context and underlined that Qatar wants to continue diplomatic relations with Israel.

Saying that Israel also sees Qatar as a very important state, Oktav stated that Israel wanted to establish full diplomatic and commercial relations with Qatar. She especially emphasized that Israel, who knows the importance of Qatar as a communication channel with Hamas, knows that Qatar has a much more role in mediation than the UAE. For this reason, she stated that Qatar maintains its importance in Israel's perspective. The speaker said that the normalization process will weaken Iran in the Gulf, as it erodes Iran's role in the region, and said that she agreed with what Dr. Zweiri said about Iran. Oktav who note that Turkey is not the supporter of this normalization process, also mentioned recently Turkey and Israel's interests are overlap both in

Nagorno Karabakh and Eastern Mediterranean and this situation will affect the normalization process in the future.

Moderator Albayrakoğlu, stated that agreed with what Prof. Dr. Özden Zeynep Oktav said. She emphasized the importance of Qatar in energy and drew attention to its departure from OPEC and stated that Qatar focused more on gas production in terms of LNG. Stating that Iran is trying to export its oil from the Gulf of Oman instead of the Strait of Hormuz, the Moderator saw the possibility that the energy pipeline in this context might cause anxiety between Qatar and Iran, but also underlined that Qatar was not disturbed. The moderator, who was curious about the views of Feyza GÜMÜŞLÜOĞLU, one of the speakers, about the normalization movement, said that Gümüşlüoğlu knew well the Gulf relations and was curious about his thoughts on Qatar's relationship with Israel. Moderator, also has been asked Gümüşlüoğlu diplomatic and commercial relations between Turkey and Qatar have led to questions about the size and future of bilateral cooperation in the military field. Moderator Albayrakoğlu was asked about the potential impact on the normalization process of military cooperation between Turkey and Qatar.

Feyza Gümüşlüoğlu, saying that she will evaluate the issue from a historical perspective, stated the following: "The real question should be" Is the relationship between Israel and Qatar abnormal? "Instead of" Will Israel and Qatar normalize? " The speaker, who wants to focus on this question, stated that if we go back to the 90s, for the first time from the Gulf countries, Qatar has daringly entered the normalization movement with Israel. Reminding that

Israel opened an office in Doha after this period, the speaker found it interesting that Qatar do not look favorably on this process in today's relations. Claiming that Qatar's relationship with Israel is not abnormal anyway, the speaker stated that, given the historical background, it is not like the UAE and Bahrain, but still can be included in this normalization movement. Gümüşlüoğlu, who attributes Qatar's non-normalization at this point to several reasons, first attributed it to the blockade by the UAE, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia on the allegation of supporting terrorism, and in order not to follow the footsteps of Bahrain and the UAE and not to act like them. Turkey and Iran's great diplomatic and logistical support during Gulf crisis can be seen as a second reason. In particular, Turkey's military support and military bases which is located in the Qatar is a reason. Speakers also mentioned, Turkey and the countries of like-minded Turkey, seen UAE's normalization treaty as a betrayal to Palestinians. Stating that Iran's attitude towards the UAE is much harsher, the speaker stated that, based on the speeches of Iranian government officials, they see this agreement as a shameful act and a strategic stupidity.

The speaker said that Turkey also has diplomatic relations with Israel, has said when it comes to the foreign policy issues Turkey looks issues from pragmatic perspective. In this context, speaker said that Qatar can convince Turkey for, but it also be much more difficult to convince Iran. Gümüşlüoğlu who draw attention to Qatar's energy cooperation with Iran, Qatar's efforts to avoid being disappointed that Turkey and Iran has also been highlighted.

Referring to the pressure on Qatar, Gümüşlüoğlu claimed that this pressure will continue if Trump is elected. The speaker stated that she believes that Qatar must pursue a very strong diplomacy in order to manage the pressures of the USA, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and UAE, and that this poses difficulties for Qatar. Gümüşlüoğlu, who said that she believed in the future of normalization in the end, made such a claim. Referring to Turkey and Qatar relations speaker, said that the two countries are looking for their own ways for solving the Palestinian Question. Gümüşlüoğlu, who thinks that they will focus on a Palestine-based solution instead of an Israel-based solution, reminded that approximately two or three weeks ago Hamas and El-Fatah representatives met in Istanbul and then went to Qatar to meet with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Moderator Albayrakoğlu evaluated the UAE's cooperation with Israel and mentioned that Israel would force the UAE to put more pressure on Iran. Referring to the normalization agreements with Egypt and Jordan in the past, the Moderator pointed out that these agreements only ended the war between them rather than economic and trade. Then the moderator ask Israel's activities over Palestinian territories and possible annexation of Israel's effect over Turkey and Qatar's approach to issue to Prof. Dr. Özden Zeynep Oktav.

Oktav, said that diplomacy is the main conflict resolution area for possible settlement between Israel and Turkey-Qatar axis and note that it was not likely to be a military tension. All of the speakers stated that they agree with this interpretation.

Moderator Albayrakoğlu emphasize military cooperation between Turkey and Qatar and asked about Turkey's and Qatar's stance in case the US put pressure on Qatar to take a side to Gümüşlüoğlu. Gümüşlüoğlu, who underline that in each case, Turkey and Qatar would continue to be in cooperation, stated that the relations did not deteriorate, as can be seen in the Obama and Trump's presidency.



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ABOUT DISCUSSANTS

Assoc. Dr. Esra PAKİN ALBAYRAKOĞLU, is the Founder Member of DİPAM. She completed her BA program at Bilkent University, Department of American Culture and Literature and received her MA and PHD degrees from the International Relations Department of the same university. He is a full-time professor at Bahçeşehir University and a visiting professor at the National Defense University. Her expertise is on security and defense issues regarding Turkey and the Gulf. Her recent publications include the article “Turkey in Africa: From Aid to Arms” in the book “Turkey in Transition: Politics, Society, and Foreign Policy” which is compiled by Ebru Canan Sokullu and the article “Turkish Parliamentary Debates on the American War in Vietnam (1964-1971)” in the book Turkish Foreign Policy (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017). She is able to follow literature in English, French and German, and can use Russian at the basic proficiency level.

Dr. Mahjoob ZWEIRI, is graduated from University of Jordan as BA and MA, then took his PhD from University of Tehran. He has academic articles and publications about International Relations, the Gulf , Iran and the Arab World. He also held various positions at the University of Durham.

Dr. ZWEIRI is now the Director of the Gulf Studies Center at Qatar University.

Özden Zeynep OKTAV, works as the head of the Department of International Relations at Istanbul Medeniyet University. Oktav's works include the following books: Turkey in the 21st Century Quest for a New Foreign Policy (2011), Limits of Relations with the West: Turkey Syria and Iran (2008), The Changing Dynamics of the Arab Gulf and Saudi Arabia- US-Iran Relations (2011), Turkey in the 2000's: Opportunities, Risks and Crises (2015), GCC-Turkey Relations: Dawn of a New Era (2015), Violent Non-State Actors and the Syrian Civil War: ISIS and YPG Cases (2018).

OKTAV has published many articles on Turkey and Middle East relations. Oktav also participate in Cambridge and St. Andrews universities as visiting researcher.

Feyza GÜMÜŞLÜOĞLU, graduated from Istanbul University Faculty of Economics in 2009. In 2011, she started journalism with Anadolu Agency Doha correspondent. She published his first book, Being an Opposition in Syria, in 2013. She gave weekly interviews in Qatar's The Peninsula newspaper. She worked as a research assistant at the Middle East Institute in Washington DC. Her articles in Turkish and English were published in various newspapers, magazines and think tanks. She completed her master's degree in Marmara University, International Political Economy.