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Qatari Emir Visits Moscow for Talks With Putin

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Vladimir Putin shaking hands with Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani. **kremlin.ru**

Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow on Thursday for talks focused on bilateral trade, the war in Gaza and Syria's relations with Moscow following the ouster of its longtime ruler.

"Qatar is one of our priority partners, especially in the Middle East," Putin said during the meeting at the Kremlin. The Gulf country has played a key mediating role in efforts to reunite Ukrainian children taken to Russia with their families.

The Kremlin leader acknowledged that trade between the two countries remains "modest" but noted Qatar's partnership with the Russian state oil giant Rosneft and expressed hopes for new "interesting" projects through OPEC.

Qatar's emir agreed that current trade volumes do not reflect the depth of the relationship and said he was "proud" of joint investments in pharmaceutical manufacturing. He added that more business deals were expected to be signed during the visit.

Putin's spokesperson Dmitry Peskov had said earlier that the two leaders would also "exchange views" on Russia's war against Ukraine, but the Kremlin's readout of their public remarks made no mention of the conflict.

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Speaking about the ongoing war in Gaza, the emir accused Israel of violating the January ceasefire agreement brokered by his country, Egypt and the United States.

Qatar will "strive to bridge perspectives in order to reach an agreement that ends the suffering of the Palestinian people, especially in Gaza," he said.

Putin, in his turn, praised Qatar's "serious efforts to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict" and described the civilian toll of the war as "a tragedy."

"A long-term settlement can only be achieved on the basis of a UN resolution, first and foremost through the establishment of two states," the Russian leader said.

On Syria, where Islamist-led rebels ousted longtime leader and Kremlin ally Bashar al-Assad in December, Putin said Moscow wants to see "a sovereign, independent and territorially whole" Syria.

The emir said Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa, during a recent visit to Qatar, had expressed his commitment to maintaining historical ties with Russia "based on mutual respect and the respect for the interests of the two peoples."

The Kremlin has signaled it seeks to build ties with Syria's new leadership while maintaining its military presence in the country.

Thursday's talks were also attended by Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Finance Minister Anton Siluanov, Deputy Prime Minister Denis Manturov, Central Bank Governor Elvira Nabiullina, senior Putin aide Yury Ushakov, Rosneft CEO Igor Sechin and Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov.

AFP contributed reporting.

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