

Saudi, UAE Demands to End Qatar Crisis: Commands, Diktats, and Ultimatums

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On June 5, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Egypt, Yemen, and other countries severed diplomatic and economic ties with Qatar, essentially instating a blockade against it. After over two weeks of mediation efforts by Kuwait and the United States, the Saudi-led coalition presented Qatar a list of 13 demands that included the following: scaling down diplomatic ties with Iran; shutting down the Turkish military base in Qatar; severing ties and funding to “terrorist” organizations and individuals; handing over dissidents from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, and Bahrain who reside in Qatar and freezing their assets; ending interference in those countries’ affairs; shutting down the Al Jazeera news network and other media outlets; aligning Qatar’s policies with those of other Gulf and Arab nations; paying reparations and compensations; agreeing to the demands within ten days; and consenting to monthly audits.

The list came after the US Department of State publicly expressed its frustration with the Saudi-led coalition’s response to its mediation efforts and called for “reasonable and actionable” demands and evidence for the accusations.

Are the demands leveled at Qatar “reasonable” and “actionable,” and was evidence provided? What are the likely intentions behind the final list? And what are the implications of this move for regional and international political dynamics? Analysts at Arab Center Washington DC provide an assessment and analysis of this list of demands on the State of Qatar.

Choosing between Saudi Arabia and Iran – Joe Macaron

Topping the list of demands by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt is Qatar’s relationship with Iran. Specifically, these demands have three components: 1) closing the Iranian diplomatic mission in Doha; 2) expelling members of Iran’s Revolutionary Guard and cutting off military and intelligence cooperation with Tehran; and 3) ensuring that trade and commerce with Iran comply with US and international sanctions without jeopardizing GCC security. Doha has been walking on a thin rope since Saudi-Iranian relations further deteriorated in January 2016. Qatar’s geographical predicament has always been to live, on the one hand, with the physical border and traditional ties with GCC neighbors Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and on the other hand, to keep peace with a traditional foe – Iran – across the Gulf, with which it shares the world’s largest gas field. However, with the Saudi border closed since June 5, Qatar’s path to survival must go through Iran. Demanding that Doha give up that route without offering a face-saving exit will certainly not help mediation efforts.

Diplomatic and trade ties between GCC countries and Iran are not new. Tehran has a diplomatic mission in both Kuwait and Oman, with the new Iranian ambassador arriving just last month to Muscat. The extent of trade between Iran and most of the GCC countries is significant, most notably with the UAE. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) forecasted

that the UAE's economy would gain \$13 billion from lifting international sanctions on Iran as a result of the nuclear deal. While the talks are not yet substantiated about the presence of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard in Qatar, where the United States has over 11,000 military personnel, there is indeed an open channel between Qatari and Iranian officials in places like Syria, where ceasefires are often coordinated. Demanding that Qatar give up that open channel is tantamount to asking Qatar to end its complex regional role and its independent foreign policy. In this list of demands, Doha is presented with a choice between surrendering or pivoting all the way to Iran. There should be a third way.

Impact of Interference in Turkish-Qatari Relations - *Mustafa Gurbuz*

The demand to shut down the Turkish military base in Qatar reflects the strained relations between the new Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohammed bin Salman, and Ankara. Turkey had cultivated strong relations with the now-sidelined Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, and in the past two years, Erdoğan's multiple invitations to bin Salman to visit Ankara were rejected. The demand also reveals bin Salman's willingness to impose economic sanctions on Turkey as Riyadh knows well that Erdoğan would not give in and may even increase Ankara's support for Doha. As expected, Turkish officials were swift to declare that any demand for Turkey's closure of its military base would represent unjustified interference in Turkish-Qatari relations.

Such escalation will hurt both Turkey and Saudi Arabia in the long-term as the two regional powers have shared common interests in Syria and Iraq, especially since the beginning of the Syrian civil war. The major beneficiary of the row is Iran. Turkish-Saudi cooperation was perceived as essential to curb Iranian influence in Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan. Now, however, reports by Turkish media regarding alleged Saudi plans to support Kurdish groups in Syria indicate the growing level of mistrust between Ankara and Riyadh. Worried that its financial relations with the GCC might be endangered, Turkey sought to defuse tensions in the Gulf. Yet, Mohammed bin Salman's ambitions may push Ankara to pursue more assertive policies instead.

Allegations of Supporting and Financing Terrorism - *Radwan Ziadeh*

The vehement accusation that Qatar supports "terrorist, sectarian and ideological organizations" takes us back to the endless and ubiquitous argument throughout the Arab world regarding the very definition of "terrorism." Defining terrorism in accordance with international law is a complicated process characterized by long political debates about the differences between "resistance groups" and "terrorist groups." As a result, authoritarian states in the Middle East use the term to marginalize and eliminate their political opponents both politically and physically. Such is the case of Egypt today, where the military regime argues that the Muslim Brotherhood is a terrorist organization despite the fact that it is

not designated as one by the United Nations, the United States, or the United Kingdom. Without internationally recognized designations, the list of “terrorist organizations” provided by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt cannot be considered a legitimate condition for settling this crisis.

In addition, Qatar has been part of the international coalition against ISIL in Syria. It also took a significant role in tracking the financing of terrorist organization like ISIL and the Nusra Front (an al-Qaeda-linked group in Syria), as many US officials have publicly acknowledged. In fact, Qatar does not host any individuals on the US terror list, which is likely why the list of demands did not name individuals. To be sure, Qatar received five individuals handed by the US government at the request of the Obama Administration to assist in closing the Guantanamo Bay prison. Finally, the claims against Qatar of supporting and financing terrorism have not been supported by evidence and will not stand in court if Qatar were to go the International Court of Justice to dispute such allegations.

Omitting Hamas from the Demands to Avoid an Arab Public Backlash – *Yousef Munayyer*

One interesting omission from the reported list of demands put forward by the states blockading Qatar was any mention of Hamas, the Palestinian group that currently administers the Gaza Strip and has routinely clashed with Israel. While the United Arab Emirates has designated Hamas a terror organization, Saudi

Arabia had not taken such position. Thus, it was notable when Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir stated in press conferences in recent weeks that Qatar had to stop supporting terror organizations including Hamas. However, the official list of demands presented to Qatar excludes Hamas, although it includes several other organizations by name.

It is hard to tell what could be behind this lack of clarity in the position of the blockading countries. It could simply be that once they were prepared to publish a list of demands, they became fearful of public reactions to steps that would seem too convenient for Israel. Public opinion has demonstrably shown that Arab publics oppose normalization with Israel, and demanding Qatar end support for Hamas, especially as Gaza struggles under siege, would put these regimes on record appearing to further Zionist objectives. But given the fact that it is the UAE that had the strongest anti-Hamas position of the group, recent developments between Gaza and Egypt may have also led to this omission. Exiled Palestinian politician Mohammad Dahlan, who is supported by the upper echelons of the UAE, has been trying to find a path back into Palestinian politics for some time. With the West Bank path closed to him due to Fatah’s opposition, his recent flirtation with Hamas in Egypt might offer him a Gaza pathway back into Palestinian politics, where he hopes to challenge Mahmoud Abbas.

Freedom of the Press Should be a Red Line – *Tamara Kharroub*

The list of demands, once again, target the Al Jazeera news network. The Saudi-led coalition demands that Qatar shut down Al-Jazeera and all its affiliates, as well as all other news outlets “funded directly or indirectly by Qatar.” According to the list, this includes, but is not limited to, Arabi21, Rassd, Al-Araby Al-Jadeed (The New Arab), Mekameleen, Middle East Eye, and others. This targeting of media organizations and the request to suppress information and expression is a clear attack on the freedom of the press, in direct violation of human rights principles and international law. In fact, organizations like Human Rights Watch and Reporters Without Borders have condemned such demands as violations of the freedom of expression.

The campaign to isolate Qatar is believed to be primarily driven by the Saudi-led agenda of targeting any press that is critical of authoritarian regimes and repressive policies. This stands against widely respected universal democratic principles and freedoms of the press, opinion, and speech. Whether one agrees with Al Jazeera’s approach or its reporting, the media giant has proven to be one of the few news outlets in the region that provide professional journalism, alternative viewpoints, and relative objectivity, in an increasingly restrictive Arab media environment. The demand to shut down media and press outlets violates the Arab public’s right to information. Violations of these basic rights and freedoms

should be a red line. After all, governments do not have the right to shut down media organizations or silence speech they deem critical of their policies.

Citizens Suffer a Humanitarian Toll – *Abdulwahab Al-Qassab*

The list of demands presented by the Saudi-led coalition includes requests to hand over nationals of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt who reside in Qatar and whose respective countries perceive them as “terrorist figures, fugitives and wanted individuals,” in addition to freezing their assets and providing information to their governments. This demand threatens the human rights of these individuals who have already been drastically affected by the blockade. Mixed families of Qataris and members from the four besieging countries, for example, have fallen victim to the arbitrary siege. It is believed that thousands of families will be negatively affected by those demands. As of June 20, more than 1,750 complaints were received by the National Human Rights Committee of Qatar pertaining to various issues such as restriction of movement, family reunification, student education, and violation of private property rights.

As for the several hundred thousand Egyptians in Qatar, a number close to the population of Qatari nationals, the official Egyptian position has put the future and lives of this large community in peril. Although the Qatari government expressed its intention not to deport any of the citizens of the four countries,

the fact remains that the demands of their governments seriously affect the human rights of many of the people concerned—these are individuals who went to Qatar in the first place to protect their lives and the lives of their families, which had been threatened in their countries of origin. A look at the 13 demands presented to Qatar reveals the Saudi-led intentions to avoid a just and workable solution that respects fundamental human rights and humanitarian law.

How the Saudi Bloc's Demands Impact State Sovereignty - *Marcus Montgomery*

The Saudi-led bloc's demands are an outright assault against state sovereignty. The demands that specifically include issues of sovereignty center on Qatar's alleged interference in its neighbors' internal affairs and cooperation with opposition groups within those countries. Additionally, the Saudis, Egyptians, Emiratis, and Bahrainis expect Qatar to pay reparations for damages and to align unequivocally with the political, military, economic, and social policies of the rest of the Gulf and Arab nations.

In perhaps the most glaring example of the abrogation of Qatari sovereignty, the leaders of the siege expect Doha to agree to the list of demands in 10 days and submit to further compliance audits over the following decade, including monthly audits in the first year. Undoubtedly, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, and Bahrain are intent on destroying any semblance of autonomy in Qatar by expecting it to comply with the group's ultimatum. Qatar

will most likely refuse to be coerced into allowing Saudi Arabia to dictate its sovereign affairs and policies. Whatever Qatar decides, these countries clearly feel emboldened by the new US position that the Sunni Arab countries are a monolith united against Iran and are bent on whipping dissenters into line.

The Future of the GCC - *Imad Harb*

If one looks at the relations exercised by other countries in the GCC, some of the demands presented to Qatar are contradictory. For example, all the other GCC states have relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran, with different levels of cordiality. Oman, for instance, has better relations with Iran than all the GCC states, but Saudi Arabia and its allies are not demanding the same from Muscat. In a sense, this demand, and the concomitant one that IRGC personnel be expelled from Doha, is simply a ruse since if Qatar could not fulfill it, then it will likely be accused of colluding with Tehran. Besides, if Qatar were to downgrade such relations (which are not that warm anyway, compared with Oman's or Dubai's, and Qatar does not host IRGC personnel), it will then deprive itself of a potential card to play in negotiations for an end to the crisis. Another aspect is that Iran today can provide necessary supplies during the current blockade and Doha would do well to keep that lifeline open.

As for the future of the GCC, it is hard to keep assuming that the 36-year-old regional alliance will survive this crisis. The demands and the developments since the beginning of this affair

point to a Saudi Arabian plan to finally do away with the old alliance. With Oman seemingly outside of the fray and Kuwait trying to be neutral, Saudi Arabia appears to be looking for a "useful GCC"—i.e., one that can be fully malleable to its wishes. But the problem with such thinking is that if this comes to pass, there would be no impediments on the road to a full

military conflagration with Iran. Such a scenario is now more possible than ever given the virulence of rhetoric and the riskiness characteristic of the current Saudi leadership that Mohammed bin Salman seems to be shaping under his father's tutelage.

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