

The GCC Crisis at One Year

Stalemate Becomes
New Reality

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Arab Center Washington DC

المركز العربي واشنطن دي سي

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INTRODUCTION

Khalil E. Jahshan



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INTRODUCTION

Khalil E. Jahshan

June 5, 2018 marked the first anniversary of the crisis in the Gulf Cooperation Council, when Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain severed diplomatic relations with neighboring Qatar and imposed an air, land, and sea blockade against it. A few weeks later, they issued a long list of demands for their fellow GCC member to implement in return for defusing the crisis. The three Gulf states were quickly joined by several other Arab and non-Arab countries, including Egypt, which severed or curtailed their diplomatic relations with Doha.

The 12 demands circulated by the boycotting parties included stipulations pertaining to Qatar allegedly supporting extremism and terrorism, interfering in the internal affairs of its neighbors, cooperating with Iran, harboring dissidents and opposition figures from other countries, engaging in critical and unfriendly media coverage of its neighbors, and subverting regional security and stability. A 13th demand contained an imprimatur for implementation within 10 days. Doha immediately rejected these demands as unreasonable and impossible to meet and refused to enter any negotiations under conditions it deemed as infringing on Qatar's national security and sovereignty.

Since that fateful day in the summer of 2017, many developments have unfolded in what started as a local "family squabble" but quickly emerged as a dynamic and fast-paced regional conflict with significant international implications. The most noteworthy of these developments include the following:

1. The rallying by a predominant majority of Qataris around their political leadership in the face of this attack emboldened and empowered the government to effectively overcome the costly blockade and the intensive propaganda campaign the bloc of countries waged. The people of Qatar,

both native and expatriate, united as a nation and remained relatively calm under intense pressure; this surprised the blockading parties and foiled their strategy of “shock and awe,” which had aimed for a quick collapse of the Qatari regime. Such backing by the Qatari people gave the emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, and the government of Qatar the confidence and the maneuverability to respond promptly and forcefully to the economic, social, political, and security challenges the crisis presented. Clearly, the ordeal has nudged the relatively small population of Qatar to “recreate” themselves as Qataris; it also spurred them to redefine their relationship with their leadership and their neighbors on a more realistic and lasting basis.

2. The surprising and shifting balance in the first phase of the propaganda war that emerged between the parties allowed Qatar to quickly regain its footing and assume an offensive posture in its own defense. The seemingly overwhelming propaganda machine mobilized by Saudi Arabia and the UAE against Qatar, particularly in the United States, began to lose focus and momentum rather quickly, thus allowing the Qataris to recover from the initial shock and take effective measures to defend their national and sovereign interests and find workable alternatives to their past political alliances and economic relationships.
3. The gradual change in US policy toward the crisis—directly related to the two developments mentioned above—clearly tipped the balance in favor of Doha as the winner of this battle. It also deprived the blockading parties from the momentum they gained in the earlier phases of the conflict, when the US administration, and particularly President Donald Trump, took their side and added fuel to the fire through his biased tweets. Most analysts attributed that change to the stabilizing role played by Secretary of Defense James Mattis and former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, and to the effective public relations counterattack by the Qatari government which highlighted the country’s significance and added value to US interests in the region. It is worth noting that this battle is only the first phase in a protracted confrontation promised by Doha’s detractors; indeed, winning the battle is no guarantee for winning the ultimate conflict. In addition, one must cautiously factor in the uncertainties of American politics that could reverse any gains that have been realized in the US stance in favor of Qatar.

This booklet represents the second volume that Arab Center Washington DC (ACW) has published on the GCC crisis since it erupted in 2017. The first, entitled

Crisis in the Gulf Cooperation Council: Challenges and Prospects, dealt with the emergence of the crisis, its root causes, and prospects for its resolution. This volume aims at updating the reader about the GCC crisis by putting it in the context of two overarching themes. The first examines and covers the clear and dangerous stalemate governing the crisis and the attempts at mediating its resolution. In his contribution, Imad Harb investigates the different aspects and manifestations of the stalemate in events, pronouncements, and developments since June 2017. Marwan Kabalan and Charles Dunne discuss the early Kuwaiti and American mediation efforts, respectively, that met with numerous obstacles and ultimately failed to break the impasse. Finally, Majed al-Ansari offers a commentary about what the State of Qatar expects from mediation efforts and what factors would be conducive to resolving the ongoing crisis.

The second theme of the book discusses the different repercussions of the GCC crisis in a series of analyses by ACW's resident and nonresident fellows and colleagues from other research institutions. Kristian Coates Ulrichsen examines the effects of the crisis on the integrative political process in the Gulf Cooperation Council by considering the missed opportunities to strengthen the alliance. Gabriel Collins discusses the economic impact on Qatar following the Saudi Arabia-led boycott and siege of the country. A paper compiled by ACW's research team looks at different aspects of the military impact on Qatar, while David Des Roches amplifies this approach by examining the effects of the crisis on the GCC's collective military effort. Tamara Kharroub then exposes the multiple humanitarian costs the crisis has exacted from Gulf citizens. Finally, Joe Macaron and Abdullah Baabood analyze, respectively, the regional and international implications arising from the intractable stalemate.

As an independent, nonprofit, and nonpartisan research center focused on the Arab world and on US-Arab relations, ACW remains committed to its core mission of identifying, analyzing, and advocating for peaceful solutions to regional conflicts. This has remained true since the inception of the GCC crisis. The mediation efforts by the State of Kuwait and the United States over the past year remain available and valid in assisting the parties involved to end their blockade of Qatar and engage in direct negotiations to solve their dispute diplomatically, in an environment of mutual respect and trust. Surely the ultimate goal is to resume cooperation on the serious regional challenges affecting the countries' common security and stability.

Finally, a word of gratitude is due to all the contributors to this volume. The credit for the success of this publication is all theirs. Special thanks also go to the staff of Arab Center Washington DC for their professional assistance, particularly to Imad K. Harb and Zeina Azzam for editing this publication.

I

STALEMATE AND MEDIATION

- **Measures of Stalemate in the GCC Crisis**

Imad K. Harb

- **Kuwait's GCC Mediation: Incentives and Reasons for Failure**

Marwan Kabalan

- **A Difficult Position: US Mediation in the Gulf Dispute**

Charles W. Dunne

- **Perspective: Can Washington Resolve the Impasse?**

Majed M. al-Ansari



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MEASURES OF STALEMATE IN THE GCC CRISIS

Imad K. Harb

The current existential crisis in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) began in May 2017 with a hacking operation of the Qatar News Agency website and the publication of false pronouncements attributed to Qatar's emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani. The stalemated crisis clearly has deleterious effects on collective action, Gulf security, and overall stability in the Middle East. Its intractability has stymied mediation efforts and wide counsel by regional and international players concerned about the fate of an erstwhile alliance that for close to four decades was the center of gravity and guarantor of stability for the Arab world. This situation makes clear that only compromise and a healthy dose of humility and contrition by those who precipitated the crisis may resolve it and help restore the entente's stability.

This paper investigates manifestations of the stalemate that characterizes the current GCC crisis, which shifted dangerously when the May 23, 2017 hacking operation turned on June 5, 2017 into a diplomatic conflict that threatens the fate of the GCC. On that day, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, and Egypt severed diplomatic relations with Qatar and imposed a land, sea, and air siege and blockade that isolated it from the neighborhood.¹ The blockading countries depict the peninsular nation as a sponsor of terrorism, a traitor to GCC united action, a collaborator with Iran, and a threat to security and stability. Indeed, the crisis has become a defining moment in the politics of the Gulf region and a case study of how a number of intervening domestic, regional, and international variables may coalesce to cause the collapse of a political, economic, social, and military alliance.

The State of Affairs

Since June 2017, much has transpired to deadlock the GCC crisis, originally assumed to be short-lived. The blockading countries have dug in their heels in demanding what Qatar believes are unattainable goals regarding its domestic affairs and external sovereignty. They have rejected dedicated and serious mediation efforts by Kuwait and the United States, precipitating a sense of distrust with these two allies and damaging the prospects for developing tools for conflict resolution in the Gulf. Moreover, on the eve of the GCC annual summit in Kuwait in December 2017, Saudi Arabia and the UAE announced the establishment of a bilateral alliance that, if fully realized, could do away with the GCC—the original, supranational coalition founded for everyone's benefit in 1981. Since the crisis began, the duo has conducted a propaganda campaign depicting Doha in sinister terms to isolate the Qataris. They have also violated Qatar's airspace on numerous occasions.²

While it would be inaccurate to say that Qatar has escaped the blockade and crisis unscathed, developments indicate that it has fared better than expected on a number of important fronts. Following a period of fear and unease, confusion, and tension, Doha set out to secure itself militarily, politically, and economically, cashing chips it had long accumulated through its diplomacy of strategic hedging.³ While the US Department of Defense reaffirmed the strategic importance of Qatar's Al-Udeid Air Base,⁴ Turkey quickly announced its readiness to send troops to Doha.⁵ In July 2017, Qatar and the United States signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on fighting terrorism and its financing, which was broadened further with new memorandums in January 2018 as part of the US-Qatar strategic dialogue. Qatar activated its diplomatic machinery around the world and secured much-needed international support. Some countries that sided with the boycotting nations changed their positions, as was the case with Chad in February 2018.⁶ Qatar also set out to address its food shortages by establishing new trade routes almost overnight and enhancing existing ones with Oman, Turkey, Iran, India, and others.

Nevertheless, whatever the balance sheet of missteps, mistakes, and successes by states in the GCC crisis, evidence points to a net loss for the collective interest of the alliance. Indeed, if allowed to fester further in 2018, as Saudi-Emirati machinations at isolating Qatar continue, the stalemate will produce its own realities on the ground. The discourse of the independent nation-state will finally dominate that of collective and united action and security as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, and others seek to assert their individual sovereignty. In addition, the sentiments of single state elites will likely triumph over the pan-Gulf ethos of cooperation and common cause as the boycott and blockade thwart cross-border interactions. International actors are also not likely to wait in order to cooperate with the GCC as a collective and may be eager to strike deals with individual countries.

After all, states and their elites can only wait for so long to set national and individual priorities, and in a chaotic security environment beset with conflict, such as much of the Middle East at present, the sooner individual preferences are satisfied, the better. The same can be said of international actors, especially investors, who look for long-term stability as a barometer for their plans. As the blockade against Qatar continues, the individual states of the GCC and their elites are likely to drift farther apart and establish more ties to entities outside the Gulf. This is likely to completely fray and atrophy intra-GCC bonds in the service of international connections outside the Gulf.

Stalemate, Measured

Compared to the 2014 conflict between Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain versus Qatar, the current crisis is more serious and dangerous, despite the relatively long period of the last one: from March to November, when the three returned their ambassadors to Doha.⁷ In fact, the troubles ending in November 2014 were limited to withdrawing ambassadors—itself a significant event—but did not involve the imposition of an endless economic blockade, the isolation of Qataris from their Gulf neighbors and expulsion from the three countries, or threats to overall security in the alliance. The current crisis manifests conditions that characterize a stalemate and portend a potentially unchangeable status quo.

Failure of Mediation. The failure of mediation efforts and of calls by regional and international actors for reconciliation between GCC states is the clearest example of a stalemate in the GCC crisis. The impasse appears to be driven more by individual whims and preferences than by legitimate concerns. In fact, it is hard to see how the Saudi and Emirati positions could change in a positive direction after mediation since the UAE was behind the original hack of the Qatar News Agency and the planting of false statements attributed to Qatar's ruler. As incontrovertible evidence of this complicity surfaced, exposed by the Qatari government,⁸ the boycotting nations resorted to old accusations of Qatari support for terrorism and terrorist organizations and of Qatar's collusion with Iran against collective GCC interests.

As the analyses of mediation efforts by Kabalan and Dunne in this volume make clear, Kuwait's emir, Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad Al Sabah, employed a strategy of shuttle diplomacy despite his advanced age, but to no avail. Kuwaiti officials also did their share of futile shuttling. Kuwait's undertaking was fully supported by the Sultanate of Oman and encouraged by the positive response of Qatari authorities.⁹ Sheikh Sabah's neutrality in the conflict, however, may not have earned support from the blockading countries; since the early days of the GCC crisis, they appeared to operate according to the binary principle of "you're either with us or against us." Absence of compromise on the part of Saudi Arabia and its cohorts also stymied Sheikh Sabah's efforts,

as he could not in full conscience force Qatar to accept the original June 2017 set of 13 demands¹⁰ and the subsequent list of six principles¹¹ that Qatar saw—and continues to see—as interference in its domestic affairs and an infringement on its sovereignty.

American efforts at reconciliation were no more successful. Ignoring President Donald Trump's initial ill-advised and biased pronouncements on the side of Saudi Arabia and the UAE, former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson announced his support for GCC unity and visited the area twice, but he failed to overcome Saudi-Emirati-Bahraini intransigence.¹² He also dispatched diplomat Timothy Lenderking and retired General Anthony Zinni to try to mediate between the parties.¹³ While failing to break the logjam—in the process discovering that even the United States can encounter difficulties in trying to end the crisis—Tillerson negotiated and signed with Qatar an MoU on fighting terrorism financing.¹⁴ Interestingly, he could not achieve the same result with the blockading countries, a fact that showed that Saudi Arabia and the others did not even try to appear interested in addressing the very issue they accused Qatar of supporting.

Not wanting to step into the Department of State's diplomatic territory, the US Department of Defense also attempted to remind everyone of the importance of GCC unity for regional security. Secretary of Defense James Mattis did his best to aid Tillerson in telegraphing the official US position, despite President Trump's statements.¹⁵ From the beginning of the crisis, the Department of Defense expressed its strong belief in the centrality of Qatar's Al-Udeid Air Base to its missions in the Gulf, the Middle East, and Afghanistan and its disinterest in moving the base from Qatar. Indeed, US forces in the Gulf executed a series of exercises with Qatar's armed forces as if nothing were afoot in intra-GCC relations.¹⁶ If the blockading countries hoped that President Trump's initial criticism of Qatar was to define American policy toward Doha, Tillerson's and Mattis's conduct should have convinced them otherwise and prompted them to accommodate mediation efforts. But as the intervening months have clearly shown, they still reject such efforts and insist on unattainable goals, in the process prolonging the impasse.

An Alternate Alliance. Another sign of intractability in the GCC crisis was the December 2017 announcement by Saudi Arabia and the UAE of the establishment of a new political and military alliance.¹⁷ The alliance came into being just as the 2018 GCC summit was getting underway in Kuwait City. On the one hand, the announcement represented a grudging acceptance that pressuring Qatar had failed to produce the desired outcome: to make Qatar succumb to Saudi-Emirati dictates and end its independent foreign policy. But it further meant the hollowing out of the GCC as the sole entity for collective action. In fact, and perhaps expressing views coordinated with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, Bahrain had called for suspending Qatar's membership in

the alliance before the summit began.¹⁸ On the other hand, the level of Saudi-Emirati-Bahraini representation at the summit—ministers or deputy ministers attended the meeting opposite sovereigns Sheikh Al Sabah of Kuwait and Sheikh Tamim Al Thani of Qatar—indicated that the leaders of the blockading countries were opposed to a rapprochement.

The convening of the summit itself was obviously a last-ditch effort by the Kuwaiti emir to try to salvage what he could of GCC unity. By then, however, he had lost Saudi and Emirati support for his efforts. In September 2017, in a joint press conference with President Trump in Washington, Sheikh Sabah said that Kuwait's efforts had thwarted a resort to military action against Qatar. He also spoke of Qatar's readiness to openly discuss the demands made by the blockading countries.¹⁹ Riyadh and Abu Dhabi were displeased with Sabah's portrayal of Doha in a positive light, especially that he exposed their purported plan to invade the Qatari peninsula—something they vehemently denied—which made them appear as open aggressors and deprived their siege of any legitimacy. Indeed, during the ill-fated Kuwait summit the leaders barely held one session and Sheikh Sabah was fully aware of the great distance that had grown between Kuwait and the Riyadh-Abu Dhabi alliance.

Even the communiqué that was issued after the foreign ministers' meeting—which is usually held before that of the heads of state—ignored the crisis altogether. The statement merely contained old affirmations of the importance of collective action in the service of common interests. GCC Secretary General Abdullatif al-Zayani, absent throughout the crisis, read a document that spoke of pursuing plans for economic, political, security, and military integration,²⁰ just as three of the GCC's six members were finishing six months of siege of a fourth member and threatening its independence and sovereignty. Qatari Foreign Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani pointed to the lack of discussion of the proverbial elephant in the room, criticizing the blockading countries as unwilling to engage in dialogue to resolve the conflict.²¹ In hindsight, one could only look at the foreign ministers' meeting and the summit—the latter breaking after a single session—as pro forma gatherings meant merely to show muted respect for the Kuwaiti elder statesman, Sheikh Sabah.

Insistence on Unmet Demands. Yet another sign of the deepening stalemate is the adamant insistence by the blockading countries on Qatar's implementation of their 13 demands of June 2017. Among other things, these demands related to Qatar's purported support for terrorism and financing of terrorist organizations, Doha-based Al Jazeera television network's coverage, Turkey's relations with Qatar, and Qatar's relations with Iran.²² The demands were formulated in response to pressure from the US Department of State on Saudi Arabia and its cohorts to clearly identify the reasons for their boycott and siege of the Qatari peninsula.²³ Later, after American officials stated

that Qatar could not be expected to implement the demands, they were summarized in six “principles” that “include commitments to combat terrorism and extremism and to end acts of provocation and incitement.”²⁴

These demands continue to be a major complicating factor in breaking the deadlocked crisis. As expected, Qatar rejected them when they were issued²⁵ and continues to do so, if for no other reason than the fact that they represent a serious infringement on its independent foreign policy, decision-making, and sovereignty. And yet, the Saudi-led bloc insists that if Qatar truly wants to resolve the crisis, it would do well to abide by the demands—apparently forgetting that the list came with a 10-day expiration date when it was issued. The blockading countries also still reject calls for reconciliation and dialogue. Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir rejected a proposal in February by Qatar’s Sheikh Tamim for a new security pact in the Gulf that would emulate the security bloc of the European Union and assure peace for the region.²⁶ Speaking condescendingly during a trip to Egypt in early March 2018, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman said that the crisis does not occupy his time and is indeed the responsibility of a lowly bureaucrat at the foreign affairs ministry,²⁷ thus basically downplaying the crisis and announcing his disinterest in resolving it.

Finally, the set of MoUs that Qatar signed with the United States in January 2018 as the culmination of the US-Qatar Strategic Dialogue²⁸ may well point to a *fait accompli* regarding the feasibility of GCC collective action of the pre-June 2017 period. Those memorandums, while not necessarily precluding such action, indicate that Qatar now clearly sees that it has to seek a stronger and firmer strategic relationship with the United States, one that could substitute for its perceived long-term break with its GCC neighborhood. Qatar may also seek this relationship because it may unfortunately need to protect itself from the adventurism of Saudi and Emirati leaders who had no qualms about originally attacking it and now have no compunction about maintaining an illegal siege of its territory. It was telling that one of the memorandums—regarding defense cooperation—contained a statement in which “the United States expressed its readiness to work jointly with Qatar to deter and confront any external threat to Qatar’s territorial integrity that is inconsistent with the United Nations Charter.”²⁹

Overcoming the Stalemate?

It is hard to see how the present stalemate can be overcome. All interactions between three GCC members with a fourth have been suspended, with no end in sight. Nor are Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain expressing any interest in a compromise acceptable to all parties concerned. In fact, the announcement about Saudi plans to build a canal along the kingdom’s border with Qatar—effectively making the Qatari peninsula an island—points to the lengths to which Saudi decision-makers are willing

to go to separate themselves from their Qatari neighbors.³⁰ As a party to the crisis, Egypt—with its visceral antagonism to Qatar—also adds complications that only prolong the impasse. In essence, the GCC, the Arabian Gulf, and the Arab world may have to reconcile themselves to a conflict that they may not be able to resolve.

As Kuwait appears to have folded its reconciliation tent, at least for a while, the United States seems to want to try again to mediate the crisis. The meetings already held and those to be convened between President Trump and leaders of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar are unlikely to lead to a break in the stalemate.³¹ Even if the US president succeeds in forcing a reconciliation, what transpired since June 2017 should not be seen as just water under the bridge. The severity of the siege, the blockade of Qatar, and the unprecedented animosity displayed by the blockading countries are unlikely to be forgotten easily by Qatar and its people. The repercussions on the political, economic, social, regional, and international levels may also take long to recede. Importantly, the break in the bonds of the admittedly amorphous collective Gulf Arab identity will not easily mend. The stalemate has indeed succeeded in perpetuating itself, to the detriment of all parties concerned and of the GCC alliance as a whole.

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KUWAIT'S GCC MEDIATION: INCENTIVES AND REASONS FOR FAILURE*

Marwan Kabalan

Kuwait has been a mediator in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) since the first crisis of 2013-2014 between Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Bahrain, on the one hand, and Qatar, on the other. Its good relations with all parties of the GCC and equal distance from each of them have allowed Kuwait to act in a neutral manner. The sixth GCC state, the Sultanate of Oman, is uninvolved in the current crisis and cannot undertake such a mission because of tense relations with Saudi Arabia and the UAE. These resulted from Oman's ties with Iran and its intermediation between the Islamic Republic and the United States regarding Iran's nuclear program—in the lead-up to the November 2013 interim deal and the final 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

An Earlier Kuwaiti Mediation

The Arab Spring uprisings of 2011 helped precipitate a state of tension and anxiety among ruling elites in the Arabian Gulf, especially in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and specifically after the protests engulfed Bahrain and Oman. Conservative regimes in the Gulf felt abandoned when, during the Obama Administration, the United States decided to end its support for traditional allies such as Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. And while Qatar and its Al Jazeera television network played an active role in covering the protests and supporting the uprisings, the Gulf's regimes preferred to quietly weather the storm, hoping—erroneously—that it would not affect them.

After an initial period of euphoria and enthusiasm, mistakes by revolutionary forces in the Arab world, coupled with objective circumstances, forced Qatar to

**This paper is a translation from its original Arabic.*

seriously reconsider its foreign policy. By 2013, the old Arab regimes and counterrevolutionary forces were able to stage a comeback. Two decisive developments were essential in the counterrevolution. The first was the full reconstitution of the military regime in Egypt in July 2013 through a coup, supported by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which went against the democratic process and the achievements of the January 25, 2011 revolution. This specific development also aimed to blame Qatar for allegedly fomenting change in Arab societies and to limit whatever influence Doha might have succeeded in garnering. The second development was the Bashar al-Assad government's counter-attack, with Iranian assistance, against revolutionary and opposition forces that protested his regime in 2011 and demanded a political transition from authoritarian rule.

After Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi's coup in Egypt in July 2013, a crisis developed between the three countries—Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain—and Qatar because of Doha's earlier support for the democratic process in Cairo that had brought the Muslim Brotherhood to power. Kuwait intervened, and in November 2013, an agreement was reached¹ in Riyadh at a meeting of the GCC foreign ministers. Included in this agreement were commitments by all the states² to do the following: end the mutual and negative direct and indirect media campaigns; avoid granting citizenship to citizens of other states who are opposed to their home governments; refrain from interfering in other states' affairs; safeguard common interests; and stop supporting dangerous political trends (meaning opposition members and the Muslim Brotherhood).

But this agreement failed to resolve the crisis. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain proceeded to withdraw their ambassadors from Qatar in March 2014, citing disagreement with the way Al Jazeera covered the aftermath of the military coup in Egypt. Kuwait used its offices again to mediate between the antagonists, who signed the Riyadh Supplementary Agreement on November 16, 2014 which stipulated that GCC states refrain from hosting or employing unacceptable individuals and commit to supporting the Arab Republic of Egypt and its security and economic wellbeing. The agreement ended the crisis and resulted in the return of the ambassadors to Doha. The following December, the regular GCC Summit was held in Doha and a new stage in Qatar's foreign policy soon began.³

The 2013-2014 crisis was limited in its scope to the withdrawal of ambassadors from Qatar. What was more serious for all GCC states, however, was the trajectory of the Obama Administration's policy in the Gulf and toward Iran. While Obama supported the Arab uprisings in his first term, he concentrated in his second term on wooing the Islamic Republic in the hope of reaching a deal regarding its nuclear program. This policy resulted in a feeling of American abandonment among Gulf Arabs, aided by an expanding Iranian hegemonic role on the ground. Gulf states felt weakened and vulnerable. A Saudi-Emirati thaw ensued with Qatar, especially since military and

financial support was needed for the intervention in Yemen in March 2015. Indeed, Qatar was a member of the Saudi-led Arab coalition to confront the Yemeni Houthis who had rebelled against the government of President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi and controlled the capital Sanaa. Qatar's participation ended when its troops were expelled from the coalition following the eruption of the crisis.⁴

Mediation During the 2017 GCC Crisis

Despite Qatar's adherence to previous agreements and its commitment to GCC collective action regarding Syria, Yemen, Iran, and the war on terrorism, a new media campaign was launched. Saudi Arabia and the UAE felt encouraged by the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States and renewed their aggressive policies, beginning with a media assault in the United States right before the US-GCC meeting in Riyadh in May 2017. The Qatar News Agency was hacked⁵ and false statements were broadcast in the name of Qatar's emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani. And according to Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, 13 anti-Qatar articles were published in western newspapers in the weeks prior to the hacking operation.⁶

The anti-Qatar campaign was not limited to hacking and false news; it included disparaging the ruling family and sowing doubt about its legitimacy—an unprecedented development that threatens all ruling families in the Gulf. The attacks were soon followed by a cutoff in diplomatic relations as well as accusations of supporting terrorism, enhancing relations with Iran, and destabilizing other Gulf regimes. Kuwait's emir, Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad Al Sabah, quickly visited Riyadh, Doha, and Abu Dhabi to head off the crisis. With the severing of diplomatic relations there came a blockade of Qatar that isolated it from the Gulf, cut off its humanitarian supplies, and disallowed Qataris from returning to their places of work outside of Qatar and gave them two weeks to leave the blockading countries.

From the beginning, Saudi Arabia and its cohorts were not enthusiastic about Kuwait's mediation. Their immediate objective was to force Qatar to succumb to their conditions. However, Qatar withstood the pressure and Sheikh Tamim committed his country to "refrain from taking any retaliatory action," while his foreign minister expressed support for mediation.⁷ Kuwait's Sheikh Sabah expressed his sorrow about the state of affairs in the council that he and others worked hard for 37 years to build.⁸ On June 22, the blockading countries provided, through Kuwait, a list of 13 demands of Qatar, following criticism from Heather Nauert, spokeswoman of the US Department of State.⁹ Qatar rejected the demands,¹⁰ which made Kuwait's mediation even more essential. Kuwait's efforts were supported by the Omani Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Yusuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah, who visited Kuwait City,¹¹

as did British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson,¹² Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Angelino Alfano,¹³ former US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson,¹⁴ French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian,¹⁵ and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan,¹⁶ among others.

Kuwait's Sabah then appointed Foreign Minister Sabah al-Khalid Al Sabah and Minister of State for Ministerial Affairs Mohammed Abdullah Al Sabah to conduct mediation efforts.¹⁷ He also was in direct contact with Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz and Egypt's President Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi.¹⁸

Kuwait's efforts were accompanied at different intervals by parallel efforts by then US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson. In July, Tillerson signed a memorandum of understanding with Qatar. He also appointed Retired General Anthony Zinni and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Arabian Gulf Affairs Timothy Lenderking as emissaries to resolve the crisis.¹⁹ United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres also supported Kuwait's mediation,²⁰ as did Federica Mogherini, EU's foreign policy chief,²¹ and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, who also offered Russia's assistance, asserting that his country maintains relations with all parties.²² But it all ended in failure.

Sheikh Sabah also visited President Donald Trump in Washington in September 2017, where he announced that his mediation indeed averted a military escalation in the Gulf. This statement and his assertions about Qatar's readiness for dialogue prompted criticism from the blockading countries.²³ However, Sheikh Sabah succeeded in persuading Trump to exert more effort to help resolve the crisis. A call from Trump to Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Qatar's ruler, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad, failed to change the status quo when the crown prince reneged on a pledge to return to a dialogue about the crisis.²⁴

The 2017 GCC Summit

Sheikh Sabah's efforts continued despite setbacks. He tried to use the GCC's Head of States Summit, in December 2017, as a venue for dialogue between leaders and personally invited King Salman of Saudi Arabia to attend and contribute to the resolution.²⁵ He also sent his foreign minister to invite and meet with the ruler of Qatar.²⁶ Indeed, his efforts in October and November showed that he was concerned about the success of the GCC summit in ending the conflict. When Kuwait announced the date of the conference, there was a general understanding that the majority of heads of state would attend. On the eve of the summit, even US Secretary of Defense James Mattis came to Kuwait, a gesture that was understood as an American endorsement of the meeting and its goal. Interestingly, Sheikh Sabah had rejected a call to change the venue of the meeting from Kuwait City lest Qatar gets disinvited by the new host—just as Bahrain's foreign minister floated the idea of freezing Qatar's membership in the GCC.²⁷

A preceding GCC foreign ministers meeting, however, failed to issue a communiqué, a bad omen for the fate of the summit.²⁸ The summit itself was to be held on December 5 and 6, but it ended after only one hour because of the level of representation of some states. Alongside Sheikh Sabah of Kuwait and Sheikh Tamim of Qatar, only foreign ministers or their deputies from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Oman attended. Concomitantly, the meeting was accompanied by the announcement of the creation of a Saudi-Emirati coordinating committee, headed by Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed, for cooperation on political, economic, and military matters. In effect, the summit meeting was doomed.²⁹

A final communiqué read by GCC Secretary General Abdullatif al-Zayani pointed to the poignancy of the moment. It ignored the GCC crisis completely, as if the GCC as a body was not experiencing a defining moment. It extolled the GCC leaders' commitment to joint action to defend against any challenges and the importance of relations between its peoples. This was unfolding while Qataris were prevented from entering Saudi Arabia and the Emirates, Bahrain reinstated fees on visas to Qatari visitors, and a blockade was imposed on the Qatari peninsula.

Potential Reasons for Kuwait's Failure

The Kuwaiti and accompanying efforts to mediate in the GCC crisis failed to achieve any practical results for many reasons. Chiefly, the reality of multiple players with different preferences, agendas, and relations with Qatar was dominant. The presence of Egypt as a party to the dispute from outside the GCC added complications. Indeed, since the start of the crisis, GCC states imposing a blockade on Qatar felt that Egypt added strategic heft to their power to make Qatar succumb to their demands. They also reasoned that Egypt could be a good strategic counterbalance to Turkey, which had declared its support for Qatar early on. By the same token, Israel played a role in the crisis by pushing for a firm stand against Qatar, a country that helps the Palestinians politically and financially.

Importantly, there was ambiguity in the American position vis-à-vis the crisis in its early stages. Despite the positions of the Departments of State and Defense and their support of Kuwait's mediation, President Trump's posture was not conducive to a clear stance by his administration. At the beginning of the crisis, he voiced support for the Saudi and Emirati positions. Later, he began to vacillate until he finally sided with the Department of State and the Department of Defense after his meeting with Qatar's Sheikh Tamim in September 2017. This was augmented by another meeting with Kuwait's emir in Washington in the same month. However, despite Sheikh Sabah's urging to do more to resolve the crisis, Trump merely placed telephone calls to Qatar's ruler and the crown prince of Saudi Arabia, neither of which produced a breakthrough.

Trump's original position and his confused response to the crisis may have given the blockading countries reason to insist on their positions. They even perceived his later public statements about resolving the crisis as a ploy, especially that they appeared to always count on the presence of his son-in-law, Jared Kushner, by his side. As is well known, Kushner has had good and cordial relations with Riyadh and Abu Dhabi.

In the end, Kuwait's mediation needed American help and sustenance, especially from President Trump. Absent that, Sheikh Sabah lacked important pressure points to use to convince the blockading countries that they should lift their siege and agree to mediation. Kuwait's effort at reconciliation was reduced to one of "letter carrying" between the parties, a situation that diminished the country's role and influence. The most noteworthy example of this state of affairs was the failure of the GCC summit meeting, one that was largely precipitated by the absence of the GCC decision-makers at the summit. Indeed, that meeting exposed the intractability of the crisis and the inability of old and traditional diplomatic efforts and tribal customs to force the hand of younger leaders in Saudi Arabia and the UAE who have allowed the crisis to get to this stage.

Conclusion

Since the beginning of the GCC crisis in June 2017, doubts have been swirling about the future of the GCC. Before then, it was considered the premier organization for joint Arab action and coordination. Kuwait's failure to reconcile GCC parties, the announcement by Saudi Arabia and the UAE about a new organization, and Bahrain's call for freezing Qatar's membership in the entente have made continuing with joint coordination more difficult than ever.

There is an obvious schism in the GCC between two opposing factions: one includes Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain and represents the politics of siege, and another includes states that work to preserve their independence and free decision-making, especially Qatar and Oman. Kuwait steers a middle-of-the-road course. Still, there are many in Kuwait who decry what they see as designs of hegemony from the larger states in the GCC over the smaller ones. The failed GCC meeting actually exposed the deep fissures that have afflicted the GCC organizing principles.

In the end, the GCC crisis will continue as long as there is no real will in the White House to assist the Kuwaiti mediation effort by pressuring the blockading countries to lift their siege and allow for reconciliation. In the present circumstances, there is no dialogue between the different parties that could abort the real implications of the siege. There should be widespread refusal to allow the siege of Qatar to become business as usual and permanent. The ongoing blockade of Qatar will otherwise continue to sap the country economically and weaken it politically and in the media, and could have detrimental effects on the interests of all GCC states.

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A DIFFICULT POSITION: US MEDIATION IN THE GULF DISPUTE

Charles W. Dunne

Strengthening and maintaining the Gulf Cooperation Council are among the top goals of any American administration that seeks to preserve peace and stability in the Gulf region. This is especially true at a time of considerable regional strife and the growing possibility of confrontation with Iran. Nevertheless, Washington's handling of the crisis pitting Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and their allies against Qatar has left much to be desired. The US response has been at various times inconsistent, neglectful, and diplomatically chaotic, as the White House initially undercut then-Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's efforts to resolve the confrontation.

Despite some progress in the months since the crisis began, the standoff appears no closer to resolution. The persistence of this conflict undermines US aims in the region, provides opportunities for Iran, and may have a lasting impact on the viability of cooperative security arrangements in the Gulf.

Trump's Original Foray

President Donald J. Trump stood before a large gathering of Arab and Muslim leaders in a conference hall in Riyadh on May 21, 2017, to deliver an address¹ on the struggle "to conquer extremism and vanquish the forces of terrorism" by "strengthening partnerships, and forming new ones, to advance security and stability across the Middle East and beyond." Trump praised US regional allies for their contributions and singled out, among others, Qatar as "a crucial strategic partner" for hosting 11,000 US troops and Central Command's forward headquarters at Al-Udeid Air Base, the largest US military facility in the Middle East.²

Sixteen days later, the day after Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Yemen, Egypt, and the Maldives cut diplomatic ties with Doha, Trump had changed his tune completely. On June 6, he tweeted³ criticisms of Qatar as a supporter of terrorism. Speaking in the Rose Garden on June 9, Trump expanded on his criticism (and contradicted a more measured statement made earlier that day by Secretary Tillerson), claiming that Qatar has “historically been a funder of terrorism at a very high level.”⁴

What Went Wrong?

Qatar has long hewed to an independent foreign policy line, frequently drawing the ire⁵ of Saudi Arabia, the peninsula’s largest state and de facto leader. Qatar’s friendly relationship with Iran and its ownership of the Al Jazeera network, which is frequently critical of other Gulf governments, are principal irritants. But Qatar’s support for the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and its offshoots is viewed as a singular threat by Saudi Arabia and its allies; the demonstrated ability of these Islamist groups to win elections and endanger the existing political order in the wake of the Arab Spring uprisings terrified many regional governments—Saudi Arabia and the UAE in particular. Qatar’s willingness to provide political and financial support to the government of Egyptian president Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood after his election in 2013, as well as its sheltering of MB dissidents (and other Islamists critical of Gulf governments) after Morsi’s overthrow the following year, earned Doha the lasting enmity of Riyadh and Abu Dhabi.

It is likely that Saudi Arabia, working in tandem with the UAE, was largely responsible for Trump’s apparent volte-face on Qatar. Riyadh skillfully parlayed a glitzy royal welcome,⁶ designed to impress and flatter the visiting American president, into a successful pitch for holding Doha principally responsible for funding Islamist radicalism, despite the kingdom’s own well-documented record⁷ of doing the same. Trump himself seemed to confirm this in his June 6 tweet with a reference to unnamed “leaders” fingering Qatar during his Saudi trip. Presidential son-in-law Jared Kushner’s close relationship⁸ with both Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and his UAE counterpart, Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed, also provided a useful channel to convey the two Gulf countries’ views to the president. The support for Saudi Arabia that Trump conveyed during the summit may have provided all the political cover Riyadh needed to move against Doha.⁹

The Saudis had other allies in the White House as well. Former Trump advisor Steve Bannon, speaking at an event on Qatar at the conservative Hudson Institute¹⁰ in October 2017, noted that the White House was preoccupied with Doha and its alleged involvement in spreading “radical ideology.” Likening Qatar to North Korea, Bannon explained that “Qatar had to be called to account for their continued funding

of the Muslim Brotherhood.” Another former Trump advisor, Sebastian Gorka, also insisted that Qatar was in trouble with the administration, telling Al Arabiya television that Qatar should “stop backing the wrong people starting with the [Muslim Brotherhood].”¹¹

Public Relations Battle

The escalating crisis quickly prompted a public relations competition as the main protagonists lined up lobbying firepower in an effort to win over official Washington. SCL Social Limited, a firm with ties to Steve Bannon, received a \$330,000 contract from the UAE for “a global media campaign” aimed at Qatar. (Breitbart News, where Bannon had served as executive chairman since he left the White House in August 2017 before being forced out in January 2018, published no fewer than 80 anti-Qatar articles since the crisis began.)¹² Both the UAE and Saudi Arabia signed significant contracts with other public relations firms as well.¹³ Qatar itself hired seven different lobbying groups¹⁴ over the course of three months in 2017, spending nearly \$5 million to wage the influence war.

The State Department Lumbers into Action

With the White House initially adopting an anti-Qatar position in line with that of the Saudis and Emiratis, it was left to the State Department to try to devise a diplomatic solution that would protect US military, security, and political equities in the Gulf.

The Department of State initially sought to defuse the confrontation through intensive diplomatic contacts, which at one point early on involved more than 20 phone calls and meetings between Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and the parties to the dispute, other regional leaders, and international actors.¹⁵ Tillerson, who had built strong personal relationships with many Gulf leaders during his years as chairman and chief executive of ExxonMobil, hoped to leverage these ties to bring about a rapid conclusion to the crisis. His office repeatedly urged Saudi Arabia and its allies to specify what they wanted from Qatar as a starting point for negotiation. This proved remarkably difficult. The Saudis and their partners delayed for two and half weeks, as the State Department became increasingly testy and openly questioned the motives of Saudi Arabia and the UAE.¹⁶ Finally, on June 23, the boycott parties issued a list of 13 demands Qatar would have to accept.¹⁷ These included ending contact with the Muslim Brotherhood, shutting down the Al Jazeera network, cutting ties to Iran, and halting support for terrorist groups. While some of these demands seemed reasonable on the surface, they were widely viewed—and not only in Doha—as an attempt to end

Qatar's independent-minded foreign policy, firmly subordinate Doha to Saudi authority, and eliminate Qatar as a relatively safe haven for political opponents of the Saudi, Emirati, Egyptian, and Bahraini governments.

Qatar rejected the demands out of hand on grounds of national sovereignty. Tillerson appeared sympathetic, noting in a statement that "some of the elements will be very difficult for Qatar to meet, [but] there are significant areas which provide a basis for ongoing dialogue leading to resolution."¹⁸ He called on the parties to negotiate directly.

Even so, the State Department seized on the demand regarding Qatari support for terrorism as something it could work with. Tillerson launched a round of public and private diplomacy to iron out a compromise whereby Qatar would bend over backwards to close the terrorism file, handing the Saudis a plausible claim of "victory" while enabling the Qataris to insist that their sovereignty remained inviolate.

The result of the US effort was a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on terrorism, signed by Tillerson and Qatari Foreign Minister Mohammed Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani in Doha on July 11, 2017. (The agreement had in fact been under negotiation for weeks, preceding the crisis.) The memorandum, which the Qataris claimed was the first of its kind in the Gulf,¹⁹ laid out bilateral commitments for "increasing information sharing, disrupting terrorism financing flows, and intensifying counter-terrorism activities."²⁰

But Tillerson was unable to sell the MOU as the way out during stops in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, which was also acting as mediator, nor did he succeed in bringing all sides to the negotiating table. In August, the State Department dispatched retired General Anthony Zinni, the former US Central Command (CENTCOM) commander, and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Arabian Gulf Affairs Timothy Lenderking to the Gulf²¹ in an effort to convince the boycotting parties that Qatar's agreement to address the terrorism issue should suffice to end the confrontation. In announcing the trip, Tillerson noted that Qatar had been fulfilling its commitments to the United States under the MOU, affirming that "we are committed to see this disagreement resolved, restore Gulf unity, because we think it's important to the long-term effort to defeat terrorism in the region."²² Despite high praise and high hopes expressed by Washington experts for both the diplomats and their mission,²³ the two were stonewalled.

Tillerson, clearly frustrated, began to blame Saudi Arabia and its boycott partners for the continuation of the dispute. Just before another fruitless trip to the Gulf in October 2017, the secretary told Bloomberg Politics that "there seems to be a real unwillingness on the part of some of the parties to want to engage. It's up to the leadership of the quartet when they want to engage with Qatar because Qatar has been very clear: They're ready to engage."²⁴

Despite these discouraging developments, both the State Department and the Pentagon continued to press forward. Trump himself seems to have been persuaded by Tillerson and Secretary of Defense James Mattis, through persistent efforts over a period of months, to perceive that Qatar was now acting in good faith and that US objectives in the Gulf would be best served by a unified GCC. In a call to Saudi King Salman in August 2017, Trump “urged that all parties to the Qatar dispute find a diplomatic resolution that follows through on their commitments made at the Riyadh Summit, to maintain unity while fighting terrorism.”²⁵ The president praised the “tremendous relationship” between Qatar and the United States during a meeting with Qatar’s emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, on the margins of the UN General Assembly in September, and expressed confidence that the standoff in the Gulf could be “solved pretty quickly.”²⁶ In mid-January, Trump was sufficiently satisfied that Qatar had addressed key terrorism concerns to speak with the emir by telephone to thank him “for Qatari action to counter terrorism and extremism in all forms,” noting pointedly that Qatar was “one of the few countries to move forward on a bilateral memorandum of understanding” on the issue. Like Tillerson, Trump underscored the importance of a unified GCC to countering regional threats, including Iran.²⁷

Qatar’s vigorous efforts to demonstrate its bona fides as a strong partner for the United States has also paid dividends. In addition to the counterterrorism MOU and the full-court lobbying press, Doha has proved helpful on Iraq (pledging \$1 billion for Iraqi reconstruction at an international pledging conference in February),²⁸ hosted prominent American Jewish leaders on trips to Qatar featuring meetings with the emir,²⁹ and continued a rapid pace of investment in the United States. By contrast, the maximalist position adopted by the Saudis and the Emiratis toward Qatar did them no favors in Washington,³⁰ despite their own public relations efforts, making them appear unreasonable and intransigent in comparison to Doha.

Current Impacts

With US diplomatic efforts to achieve a lasting resolution seemingly at an impasse, the United States finds itself in an uncomfortable but not dire situation, at least for the present.

The impact on military readiness has been minimal. Normal air operations continue out of Al-Udeid Air Base, and coalition forces, including Saudi and Emirati troops, continue to work in the Combined Air Operations Center, which provides command and control for missions in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere in CENTCOM’s 20-nation Area of Operations (AOR). Qatari and American diplomatic efforts have been instrumental in ensuring continuity of operations during the political standoff.

The United States has, however, cancelled some Gulf war games because of the stalemate, an indication of possible future effects on joint readiness and defense planning.³¹ Joint maritime operations conducted out of US Naval Forces Central Command in Bahrain have been impacted due to the forced withdrawal of Qatari naval officers from the facility.³² And GCC military planning, never robust to begin with, has come to a standstill.

While the short-term impacts on military operations in the CENTCOM AOR are limited, there is reason for longer-term concern. Any confrontation with Iran will require clear channels of communication and coordination among allied forces in the Gulf. In addition, there must be some sort of understanding on mutual defense responsibilities should a major conflict break out involving Iran, the Gulf States, and the United States. None of this is assured at the moment.

In addition, a less-discussed feature of the political standoff presents a worrisome risk: the real possibility of military conflict between Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, and Qatar.³³ While talk of war has subsided, the possibility has not disappeared entirely, and the theme continues to crop up from time to time in the Saudi media. Alleged violations of Qatari airspace by UAE warplanes in December 2017 and the “interception” of two UAE passenger aircraft by Qatari fighters in January 2018 have highlighted the risks of miscalculation.³⁴ Should a clash break out, whether through design or by accident, the consequences would be devastating for Gulf security and Washington’s continued ability to manage conflict in the region.

It is also worth noting that Iran has benefited considerably, strengthening political ties to Qatar as it emerged as an economic lifeline during the boycott’s early days—just the opposite of what Saudi Arabia intended. Indeed, the dispute hinders efforts to “[counter] the spread of Iran’s malign influence,” as Defense Secretary James Mattis said during the US-Qatar Strategic Dialogue in January 2018.³⁵

Other potential consequences, should the standoff continue indefinitely, include negative effects on internal political stability in the Gulf such the following:

- The Qatari populace appears firmly behind their emir in the present crisis, which has become a source of national pride and defiance. That might change, however, if the impasse persists and the economy suffers severely. Engineering some form of “regime change” in Doha, which the Saudis and the Emiratis once appeared intent on bringing about, is unrealistic at present but likely remains an unstated desire of the two countries.
- Saudi Arabia has worries of its own. Through the agency of the energetic Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, it has intensified tensions with Iran, become involved in a devastating war in Yemen, bungled an effort to bring down the Lebanese government, and launched the confrontation

with Qatar. These mounting external problems, combined with internal political, social, and economic upheaval, could eventually call into question the crown prince's leadership and unsettle the power structure.

- The UAE, while relatively less exposed than the Saudis, has nevertheless taken something of an economic hit—particularly in Dubai and Sharjah—as Qatari investment and business ties have dried up.³⁶ The costs in lost sales and other opportunities have yet to be calculated. Economic pain in the UAE stemming from the Qatar crisis may well have a political effect down the road.

Signs of instability in any of these three countries should be a source of great concern to Washington inasmuch as the consequences for the regional security order it has so carefully nurtured over the decades could be severe. The persistence of the dispute makes this more likely the longer it goes on.

US Policy Options

At the beginning of 2018, there appeared to be renewed urgency on President Trump's part to convene a US-hosted summit with GCC leaders to close the basic political gaps between the feuding parties. The idea had been raised as early as June 2017, shortly after the crisis first erupted, but the State Department was unable to bring the parties to the table at the time.³⁷ But this has not so far come to pass, although Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Qatar's ruler Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani came to Washington in order to lay the groundwork for the summit. With the Trump Administration busy with investigations, Iran, and the North Korean nuclear issue, only time will tell what becomes of the idea.

Here is where President Trump's self-regard as a master of persuasion and the art of the deal could play a crucial part. By leveraging his personal relationships with the protagonists and pushing American ideas for a win-win solution—perhaps an all-GCC pact on terror financing, including active monitoring components—the president might be able to effect at least a long-term truce that would protect Gulf stability and security arrangements.

At the same time, the administration would do well to speak with one voice on the issue, insisting on the importance of Gulf unity in the fight against terrorism and the centrality of Qatar to that effort. Fortunately, both the State and Defense Departments appear to be on the same page, and unhelpful static from the White House has died down. Indeed, in April 2018, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo carried a message to Saudi Arabia that basically demanded that the kingdom end the crisis.³⁸ The White House should be encouraged to remain in sync with its lead foreign affairs agencies

and press more strongly, both privately and publicly, for reconciliation between the feuding parties.

Finally, the administration would do well to engage Congress in forestalling stronger anti-Qatar actions, which would more than likely perpetuate the crisis in the Gulf. While Doha has managed by and large to rehabilitate itself with the US administration and some important external influencers, Congress is a different story. Considerable anti-Qatar sentiment, based on the country's alleged support for the Palestinian group Hamas, is rife on Capitol Hill.³⁹ The best way to head this off is for the administration to effect some sort of accommodation among the parties and satisfy Congress that transparent and verifiable Qatari commitments on terrorism financing are in place and working.

The confrontation in the Gulf has not yet wreaked irreparable harm on US interests or on regional security. But the longer the dispute drags on, the more difficult and complicated any resolution becomes and the higher the risk to stability. The United States would be wise to push hard, and soon, for a real breakthrough.

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PERSPECTIVE: CAN WASHINGTON RESOLVE THE IMPASSE?*

Majed M. al-Ansari

The White House—and more specifically, President Donald Trump—played a negative role in the GCC crisis when it started. The president initially supported the Saudi-led blockading countries, criticized Qatar and accused it of malfeasance, showed hesitation and confusion, and refrained from giving sufficient support to US institutions working to resolve the crisis. Of course, this situation characterizes American behavior around the world regarding several international issues beyond the Arabian Gulf. What could yield some positive results may be a new American push to end the crisis, such as Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's message to Saudi leaders last April to finally end the Qatar blockade.

There is much speculation about Trump's desire to host a summit with Gulf leaders to resolve the crisis. It is hard to know when this might take place. But questions arise about whether the summit could even be held and whether it would achieve anything since the parties' positions have not changed. The blockading countries continue to insist on their unachievable demands, Qatar stands firm on defending its sovereignty and rejecting others' diktats, and Washington remains confused despite the president allowing the Department of State some freedom to lead on this and other issues.

Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Qatar's ruler Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani have already visited the United States, but United Arab Emirates Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed has postponed a similar visit that was supposed to organize the summit. Looking at the current trajectory of developments, Saudi Arabia and the UAE will undoubtedly try hard to achieve one of two goals: postpone the dialogue indefinitely or push the White House to change its stance once

**This paper is a translation from its original Arabic.*

again to pressure Qatar. From its side, Qatar appears adamant about an agreement with international guarantees and mutual commitments that the White House would facilitate after pressuring the blockading countries for concessions. What President Trump cares about is that the dialogue takes place under his direction and tutelage so that he can claim that he has kept his promise to resolve the crisis.

The problem has been, and remains, finding a face-saving resolution for the conflict. The blockading countries want their people and the world to see that their blockade has succeeded in bringing Qatar to heel after imposing their siege during Ramadan of 2017 and levying sanctions deleterious to Qatar and to their own people. Mohammed bin Salman desperately needs to show that he succeeded in at least one affair after his failure in Yemen and the episode with Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri, among others. President Trump wants to exploit a potential success in the Gulf to increase his transactions there and cover for the irresolution of the Palestine issue. For its part, Qatar still refuses to concede its sovereignty or international prestige since compromising on either would be a dangerous slippery slope for the future.

Limited and temporary initiatives seem to have been possible, such as the telephone call the Saudi crown prince made to Qatar's emir in September 2017, although it failed to break the logjam. President Trump will pressure the parties to get concessions, but no one trusts that he is reliable enough to be an ally or partner, knowledgeable of the game states play, or able to serve as an honest broker. All are likely to make symbolic concessions and gestures. However, the matter deserves radical changes in the thinking of the blockading countries, from blackmail and imposition of demands to a real attempt at protecting common purposes and interests.

The original announcement about an upcoming summit and then its indefinite postponement indicate that each party to the conflict acts as if it is hostage to its position. The situation also shows that the Trump Administration is not ready to apply the necessary pressure for a solution. Qatar today considers that offering concessions is no longer useful since it has passed the test of the political, military, and economic blockade. While it still understands the moral imperative and political efficacy of a resolution, it is not convinced that normalization with its neighbors is possible in light of their leaders' insistence on unachievable demands and visceral hatred of the Qatari regime. This is why Qatar would only be satisfied with American pressure on the blockading countries to make major concessions while it offers only symbolic ones. This indeed is an outcome of the neighbors' insistence on a zero-sum game that, if played by Qatar, would lead to the latter's complete capitulation—a totally unacceptable result that would point to the fragility of its political system.

The Saudi Arabian situation is more complicated. Mohammed bin Salman is trying to consolidate his position and cannot accept defeat, or even an easing of tensions in the

Qatari or Yemeni affairs where he has expended much political capital and announced stark positions. He thus needs a clear and decisive symbolic victory. Additionally, his relationship with President Trump puts bin Salman in a difficult position as he anticipates a looming economic crisis generated by the continuing Yemen hemorrhage. Still, he is not subjected to direct and sustained American pressure to change his stance on Qatar; in fact, bin Salman is benefiting from the UAE's stubborn position regarding reconciliation, since Abu Dhabi appears to be more capable of withstanding the pressure for now.

As for the UAE, its choices have become more limited. While it apparently succeeded in forcing former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson out, it suffers from the weakened Jared Kushner front in the White House and from its involvement as a party in Special Counsel Robert Mueller's investigations. Recently, Abu Dhabi began to be seen as less cooperative in resolving the GCC crisis; and indefinitely postponing Mohammed bin Zayed's visit to Washington may be a clear indication that the honeymoon between him and Trump is over. Still, despite these developments, the UAE raises the ceiling of its demands and continues to secretly hinder and thwart reconciliation.

Finally, Washington's biggest shortcoming is its lack of readiness: it has no clear strategy toward the Gulf except for the president's insistence on blackmailing Gulf states into buying more American weapons to help the American job market. This blackmail may serve Washington's interests in the short term through the president's use of the carrot and stick approach. But in the end, the blockading countries may arrive at the realization that the most Washington can offer is a neutral position that will not benefit them.

The Trump Administration also suffers from a great shortage of professional cadres, especially diplomats. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo lacks sufficient knowledge of the region and needs to appoint able leaders in his agency and ambassadors in the region's capitals. The national security team is also limited as the new National Security Advisor John Bolton shapes it to his liking after General H.R. McMaster's departure. Furthermore, the administration faces imminent decisions regarding a quickening series of foreign policy issues like North Korea's nuclear program, the president's withdrawal from the nuclear deal with Iran, and Syria's complicated war. All this while scandals continue to hit the White House, causing instability in dealing with foreign affairs.

It is therefore obvious that the general atmosphere is not ready for a comprehensive dialogue under American direction. The most likely scenario is a continuation of the status quo since no party to the dispute feels desperate enough to change it, least of all the blockading regimes. On the other hand, the real losers are the citizens of the countries of the dispute who are related by bonds of marriage, blood, and tribal alliances.

II

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MISSED OPPORTUNITIES AND FAILED INTEGRATION IN THE GCC

Kristian Coates Ulrichsen

The crisis that erupted on June 5, 2017, when three members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) turned on a fourth—for the second time in three years—has highlighted the limitation of integrative institutionalization in the 36-year-old GCC. At every stage in the Qatar standoff, the GCC as an institution has been absent from policy debate and formulation. It has not been used as an avenue for voicing initial grievances by Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) against Qatar, or as a mechanism for conveying the conditions the three states (plus Egypt) wished to form the basis for negotiation, or as a venue for the subsequent—failed—attempts to mediate an end to the crisis. While the GCC summit took place in Kuwait in December 2017, against the expectations of many, the two-day event broke up in acrimony and was overshadowed by the announcement of a wide-ranging cooperative partnership between Saudi Arabia and the UAE. As the center of gravity in Gulf politics refocuses on a hawkish security-centric and regionally interventionist axis running between Riyadh and Abu Dhabi, the GCC will struggle to regain its relevance and repair the damage done to ties of trust and confidence by the crisis.

This paper begins by outlining the factors that undermined attempts to create and strengthen integrative mechanisms in the GCC since its formation in 1981. These include the power imbalance between Saudi Arabia and the five smaller GCC states, the tension between personalization and institutionalization in decision-making structures in individual Gulf capitals, and the lack of consensus on “big ticket” foreign and security affairs or willingness to pool sovereignty where necessary. The second section examines specific examples of missed opportunities in integration that meant that, in practice, the GCC functioned best as a loose collection of relatively like-minded states.

To the degree that a shared interest existed, it was based on a limited set of common threat perceptions—but even those broke down after 2011 amid the sharp divergence in regional approaches toward the Arab Spring and its aftermath. The final section of the paper analyzes the implications of the blockade of Qatar for the future of the GCC and the realignment of policy-making around far more assertive leaderships in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

GCC Genesis and Inherent Conditions

The GCC came together in a matter of months in early 1981 after several years of inconclusive talks and competing visions of what form a regional organization should take. Foreign ministers of all eight Gulf states (the six future GCC states plus Iraq and Iran) first met in Jeddah in July 1975 to discuss a Saudi proposal for a collective security agreement in the Gulf, and a further meeting of the eight countries took place in Muscat in November 1976 where regional security arrangements were again discussed. Both meetings broke up without agreement and served more to highlight the lack of consensus among the eight littoral states when it came to sensitive issues of defense, security, and foreign policy.¹ Even after the Iranian revolution of 1978-79 and the Iraqi invasion of Iran in 1980 removed Iraq and Iran from consideration in the proposed regional arrangement, differences among the six Arab Gulf states remained. When representatives of the six states met in Kuwait in February 1981, they had before them three very different proposals from Kuwait, Oman, and Saudi Arabia that emphasized, respectively, economic integration, military cooperation, and collective security.²

A little more than three months after the initial meeting in Kuwait on February 4, 1981, the GCC was formally launched at a summit in Abu Dhabi on May 25. The speed with which the new organization was drawn up—along with the compromises between the three competing visions of coordination—meant that key issues of institutional design were left unaddressed. The GCC was neither a political nor a military alliance; it lacked an integrative decision-making institution, akin to the European Commission, or any treaty-based foreign policy-making power. The six member states have been reluctant to grant supranational powers to the General Secretariat based in Riyadh, and the requirement for unanimity—rather than majority voting—on substantive matters at the Supreme Council (of heads of state) and the Ministerial Council (foreign ministers) has meant that individual countries and their rulers, in practice, have had veto power over policies they did not approve.³

Two further impediments to the accrual and consolidation of authority at the regionwide GCC-level were the imbalance in size and power between Saudi Arabia and its five smaller neighbors and the nature of decision-making in all six of the monarchies that made up the GCC. At various times in the twentieth century, Saudi leaders

exhibited expansionist designs in the Arabian Peninsula: against Kuwait in the 1920s, Qatar in the 1930s, and Oman and Abu Dhabi in the 1950s.⁴ Although the majority of border and trans-boundary disputes were resolved prior to the formation of the GCC, they had left a legacy of residual wariness in other Gulf capitals over expressions of Saudi power and influence within the organization. In 2009, Saudi officials placed restrictions on Emirati citizens entering the kingdom whose UAE identification cards featured a map that included territory designated as Emirati, although it was contentious territory claimed by both sides.⁵ Several months later, in March 2010, a short yet sharp naval clash was reported to have occurred as the UAE Navy opened fire on a Saudi patrol vessel and forced its surrender after it strayed into disputed waters.⁶

The personalization of policy-making in each Gulf capital has also militated against the institutionalization of authority within the GCC. Decision-making responsibility is concentrated among small circles of senior members of the ruling families in each GCC state, especially in the sensitive “sovereign ministry” fields of internal affairs, defense and security, and foreign policy.⁷ To varying degrees, the reluctance of ruling establishments to delegate power across domestic political structures also makes it unlikely they would agree to pool sovereignty with each other. Broader influence on policy-making is often informal, takes place “outside of the procedural framework of government,” and builds on preexisting mechanisms that seek consensus through consultation.⁸

The impact of greatly personal decisions on GCC developments has become manifest on several high-profile occasions. One came in 1995 when the Qatari delegation withdrew from the final session of the annual GCC Summit and began a partial boycott of GCC meetings to protest the appointment of a Saudi diplomat, Jamil al-Hejailan, as the new GCC secretary-general.⁹ This came at a delicate moment in Saudi-Qatari relations as Saudi Arabia was widely believed to be behind an attempt to restore ousted Emir Khalifa bin Hamad Al Thani to leadership in Qatar. Both the UAE and Bahrain responded to Qatar’s walkout from the GCC Summit by welcoming Khalifa bin Hamad on a regional tour, during which he met with UAE President Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan and was provocatively escorted by Bahrain’s Crown Prince Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa in a Bahraini naval vessel within sight of the Qatari coastline.¹⁰

In May 2009, years of preparation for a GCC currency and monetary union collapsed when the UAE withdrew suddenly and without warning from the project less than a year before it was due to launch in 2010. Emirati officials had campaigned vigorously to host the GCC Central Bank in Abu Dhabi and reacted with visceral anger to the decision to locate the bank in Riyadh instead.¹¹ Four years later, in December 2013, expectations that the GCC summit in Kuwait would hold discussions of Saudi-backed proposals for a deeper Gulf union in response to the Arab Spring uprisings

were punctured comprehensively when Oman's Minister of State Responsible for Foreign Affairs, Yusuf bin Alawi, chose the annual Manama Dialogue in Bahrain to state publicly that, "We are against a union. We will not prevent a union, but if it happens we will not be part of it."¹²

Importantly, the GCC suffers from an inability to reach consensus on "big ticket" issues, especially if they relate to defense, security, or foreign policy. The late King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia surprised fellow Gulf rulers in May 2011 when he called for Morocco and Jordan to apply for associate GCC membership, as the matter had not been discussed beforehand.¹³ When King Abdullah's suggestion to broaden the GCC failed to gain traction, he proposed to deepen the GCC into more of a full-fledged union at the December 2011 GCC summit in Riyadh. However, a subsequent midyear "consultative summit" in Riyadh, in May 2012, ended without agreement as the most the six states could agree on was to refer the issue of union to a committee for further consideration. The outcome was a blow to the Saudis, who had played up the talk of (and prospects for) union in the runup to the meeting, just as they would do 18 months later before the December 2013 summit in Kuwait.¹⁴

Missed Opportunities for Integration

The GCC made the most progress in technocratic and more apolitical areas. An array of technical committees has worked painstakingly and outside the public gaze to standardize regulations in economic and industrial sectors across the six member states. These committees, grouped under the GCC Standardization Organization, have provided the most tangible and effective example of coordination detailed in the Unified Economic Agreement signed shortly after the GCC was formed. The Unified Economic Agreement envisaged the harmonization of oil and industrial policy across GCC states, the creation of a uniform system of tariffs, and the free flow of labor and capital across a common internal border.¹⁵ It incorporated the Gulf Organization for Industrial Consulting (originally established in 1976¹⁶) and the Gulf Investment Corporation in 1982 to oversee and support collaborative industrial and investment policies.¹⁷

Progress toward the goals outlined in the Unified Economic Agreement was slow and halting, as illustrated by the aforementioned failure of the single currency and monetary union. Nevertheless, a customs union was launched in 2003 and was followed five years later by a common market that became operational on January 1, 2008.¹⁸ In theory, the common market extended equal rights to citizens of GCC states to take up employment and residence, access education and healthcare, and establish companies and buy or sell shares in each member state. In practice, however, the segmented nature of individual labor markets and comparatively low cross-border trade

flows among the six GCC states meant the impact of the common market was less pronounced than might otherwise have been expected. Moreover, GCC finance ministers took more than a decade from the launch of the customs union (in 2003) to reach agreement on the imposition of a common external tariff (in 2014). In November 2016, a Commission of Economic and Developmental Affairs was formed at the GCC Secretariat in Riyadh as a springboard for further integration, but it was overtaken just seven months later by the rupture within the GCC over the standoff with Qatar.¹⁹

Several examples, in addition to the currency and monetary union, highlight the missed opportunities that held back attempts to foster greater cooperation, leading to less integration in major policy areas. Although the instances of technocratic cooperation listed above were impressive, they were not immune to geopolitical rivalry or tension among member states. At the GCC Summit in November 1989, Qatar proposed a GCC pipeline to export gas from its soon-to-be-developed North Field to Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the UAE. As energy analyst Justin Dargin noted in 2007, Qatari officials “initially thought the GCC pipeline to be a more pragmatic financial venture than the construction of a capital-intensive LNG facility.”²⁰ Bahrain, however, withdrew from the project due to an ongoing territorial dispute (at the time) with Qatar over the Hawar Islands, while Saudi Arabia backed out to protect its own gas initiatives and withdrew a preliminary grant of transit rights that blocked the plan to include Kuwait in the pipeline.²¹ As a result, when the Dolphin Gas Project became operational in 2008 it consisted only of a subsea pipeline from Ras Laffan in Qatar to Taweelah in Abu Dhabi, with overland onward transmission of gas throughout the UAE and to Oman. Even this limited cooperation was a red flag for the Saudi government, which attempted to halt the construction of the pipeline from Qatar to Abu Dhabi by claiming—as it did with Kuwait—that the pipeline crossed Saudi territory and thus required Saudi consent.²²

Friction between Saudi Arabia and the UAE in the mid-2000s contributed also to the failure of another planned GCC energy initiative. In December 2006, the GCC Supreme Council, which comprises leaders of member states, passed a resolution to launch a joint Arab nuclear program that would be implemented by the six GCC states. The secretary-general of the GCC at the time, Abdulrahman bin Hamad Al Attiyah, briefed the director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Mohammed El Baradei, on the GCC-led Arab nuclear proposal in early 2007, and the GCC and IAEA agreed to cooperate on a feasibility study for a regional nuclear power and desalination program.²³ Just as the idea was gaining traction, however, GCC officials were blindsided in April 2008 when the UAE published its own independent policy plan for nuclear energy, established the Emirates Nuclear Energy Corporation as an Abu Dhabi-based public entity, and invited bids in 2009 for construction of its first nuclear power plant at Ruwais, which is set to begin operation in 2018.²⁴

Other GCC-wide plans have been affected initially by the impact of the post-2014 oil price slump and associated economic slowdown and later by the fracturing of the GCC over the current GCC crisis. The planned GCC Railway was suspended for economic reasons after sliding government revenues made the regionwide rail-link unfeasible. The project highlighted the challenge of aligning policy across the six Gulf governments as each member state had individually awarded contracts for its own sector of the line and based decisions on whether to continue or cancel the project on national, rather than GCC, interests.²⁵ Meanwhile, the Qatar row erupted just as the GCC was preparing to implement a shared Value Added Tax (VAT) that was set to come into operation on January 1, 2018. In the event, only Saudi Arabia and the UAE went ahead with the introduction of VAT (and, even then, in a far from uniform manner), while the deep cracks the crisis exposed in the GCC made it harder to envisage the creation of new integrative mechanisms to share information and collect data across the political divide.²⁶

The varying examples of workable and unworkable cooperation illustrate the missed opportunities for further integration during both the decade-long era of high oil prices and record budget surpluses after 2003 as well as the political and security pressures for closer coordination after 2011. Intra-GCC trade increased significantly in the nine years between the launch of the common market in 2008 and the Gulf crisis in 2017, even as the single currency foundered and the customs union remained incomplete.²⁷ In the security realm, the failure to reach agreement on closer political union in 2012 and 2013 did not impede the ratification of the GCC Internal Security Pact in 2013 or the creation of a unified terror “blacklist” by the ministers of interior of the six GCC states in 2015.²⁸ Ironically, given the accusations later made by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, Qatar was the first GCC state to ratify the internal security pact in August 2013 in one of the first moves Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani made after assuming power.²⁹

The GCC Crisis

The implementation of the internal security agreement showed that member states were prepared to share information and act collectively if they perceived a common threat. Developments since 2011 have gravely weakened, if not shattered, the notion of collective self-interest that underlay the decision to establish the GCC back in 1981 and provided a baseline of cooperation ever since. The regional upheaval of the Arab Spring and the role of Islamist groups in political transitions in North Africa underscored the dramatic divergence in threat perceptions that conditioned policy responses in Doha and the new Abu Dhabi-Riyadh-Manama axis. Indeed, the triumvirate of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the UAE came to view Qatar as hostile to regional security not

once but twice. For Qatar, the diplomatic row of 2014 and wide-ranging blockade that began in June 2017 meant that officials in Doha recast the Saudis and Emiratis as a real threat to their national sovereignty and physical security.

Much has been said and written about the current iteration of the Gulf crisis, which began on May 23, 2017 with the hack of the Qatar News Agency and implantation of false statements attributed to Sheikh Tamim that formed the basis for a subsequent media onslaught by Saudi and Emirati outlets. Two weeks later, on June 5, 2017, Saudi Arabia and the UAE joined with Bahrain and Egypt to sever diplomatic ties with Doha and impose a comprehensive land, air, and sea blockade of Qatar. The abrupt closure of Qatar's only land boundary had an immediate, if only temporary, impact on the movement of necessities such as food and medicine into Qatar. Many of these had been trucked in from Saudi Arabia (and farther afield from Jordan and Lebanon) or brought by ships that docked at ports in the UAE for onward transmission of their cargoes, again by truck, to Qatar. A December 2017 report on the crisis by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) estimated that Qatar had imported 93 percent of its construction material, 76 percent of its sugar, and 59 percent of its dairy products from its three Gulf neighbors that made up, with Egypt, the so-called Anti-Terror Quartet.³⁰

The GCC crisis has also exposed the absence of the GCC from virtually every stage of the current crisis, which rendered it marginalized and irrelevant to further developments that are realigning the centers of gravity in Gulf politics. The GCC was chosen neither as the mechanism to communicate the initial grievances against Qatar nor as a facilitator of dialogue or mediation between the disputing parties. It could not even be involved in preventing potential military escalation, which was a possibility—as stated by Kuwaiti Emir Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jaber Al Sabah during a September 2017 press conference at the White House with US President Donald Trump.³¹

The irrelevance of the GCC and its potential death knell as a fully functioning organization of six members became evident during its annual summit in Kuwait City on December 5, 2017. Qatar was the only state that sent its ruler to Kuwait to attend the summit, which many felt was taking place only out of respect to its host Emir Sabah, a former foreign minister of 40 years' standing who, at 88, is regarded as the elder statesman of the Gulf. A meeting of foreign ministers the day before the summit broke up in acrimony and the summit itself lasted for less than a session of the planned two-day meeting as it, too, descended into recrimination and finger-pointing by representatives of the three blockading Gulf nations.³² Officials in Abu Dhabi, moreover, chose the morning of the GCC Summit to announce details of a far-reaching partnership with Saudi Arabia to cover "all military, political, economic, trade and cultural fields."³³

Even accounting for the many examples of tension between Saudi Arabia and the UAE documented in this paper, it is this new alignment that looks set to shape policy-making in the Gulf in a “post-GCC era,” both in terms of its protagonists’ actions and the counterreactions of other Gulf states. As an institution, the GCC is likely to endure rather than be formally terminated or dissolved, but experience elsewhere in the Gulf suggests that it will simply become ever more marginal to the point where it effectively disappears from the policy-making landscape altogether—the same fate as that of Saudi Arabia’s old Petromin oil company, which was left to wither away as ARAMCO became the premier entity in the field.³⁴ For their part, it is hard to see how Qataris could ever again trust an organization that manifestly failed to prevent three of its members from turning against them twice in three years. At the same time, officials and publics in Kuwait and Oman have watched with wariness and a sense that they, too, could be vulnerable to Saudi or Emirati pressure to follow a particular line in regional policy-making, especially if and when they undergo their eventual transition to new leadership.

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ANTI-QATAR EMBARGO GRINDS TOWARD STRATEGIC FAILURE*

Gabriel Collins

"The experience of the past thus clearly suggests that blockades or embargoes do not always produce the results originally sought when the decision for action was made."

—Robert A. Doughty and Harold E. Raugh Jr., "Embargoes in Historical Perspective"¹

Introduction

Centuries of history reveal a simple strategic truth: embargoes and blockades frequently fail to coerce states into making policy changes sought by the embargoing countries and often create unintended consequences.² Embargoing Qatar was a risky decision without a clear endgame that does not appear to have taken into account the ample—and easily accessible—historical records of the many campaigns that have failed, as well as those that succeeded.³ The reality is that when the target of an embargo or blockade (1) has a small population, (2) is credibly well-resourced, (3) is not substantially dependent on the embargoing countries as trade partners for goods that cannot be obtained from other sources, (4) has access to seaborne commerce, and (5) has had significant time and warning to prepare for exactly such a contingency, the action against it will very likely fail to coerce it into making the concessions sought by the embargoing entities.

Even when the target is vulnerable—such as Saddam-era Iraq—economic embargoes generally take significant time to work. Research by sanctions experts before the

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first Gulf War suggests that embargoes aimed at achieving “ambitious” goals can take at least two years to succeed, and additional evidence accumulated since then does not undermine their basic conclusion.⁴ Many of the same countries embargoing Qatar are also blockading Yemen, and after more than two years they have still been unable to force a decisive strategic resolution, despite intensive use of military force. The evidence suggests that even an embargo lasting five years or more would likely still fail to coerce Qatar into making the concessions desired by the embargoing countries.

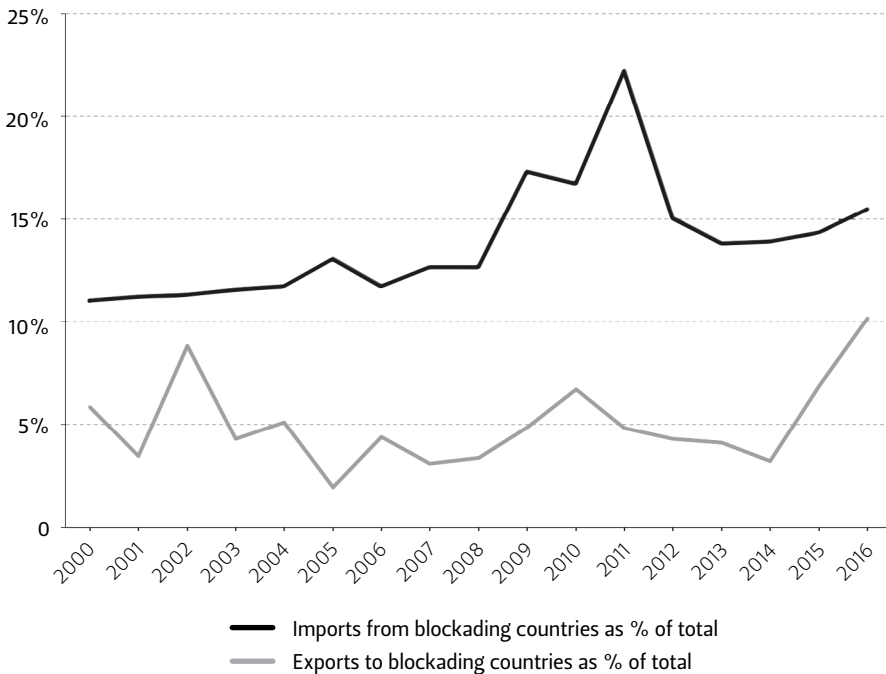
The list of 13 demands presented in June 2017 by the anti-Qatar coalition—Bahrain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), or the Anti-Terror Quartet (“the quartet”)—suggested a supremely ambitious set of goals behind the embargo, including “red lines” that touch directly on Qatari sovereignty and which Doha will continue to reject.⁵ The stage is thus set for a contest of endurance, one that with every passing month looks more likely to result in favor of Qatar. The embargo and its slow-motion strategic failure have already unleashed consequences that will haunt the region for decades to come, and more effects will become clear as time rolls on.

This paper provides evidence of the anti-Qatar blockade’s trajectory from initial shock to emerging strategic failure using actual market data. It also discusses potential paths forward, and the economic and security ramifications of those options.

The Initial Shock

A significant portion of the initial shock caused by the quartet’s embargo came through disruptions to Qatar’s food supply, most of which was imported and came by land from Saudi Arabia. These routes were immediately cut off when the embargo began and motivated drastic initial responses, including airlifting dairy cattle to replace milk supplies lost when the Saudis closed the border, as well as shipping food from Iran and Turkey.⁶

Qatar’s trade patterns bolster its embargo resistance. In 2016, slightly more than 15 percent of Qatari imports came from the blockading countries, a small enough share that building new trade networks to replace those lost imports in a fairly short time is a realistic possibility.

FIGURE 1 — THE BLOCKADING COUNTRIES' SHARE OF TOTAL QATARI IMPORTS AND EXPORTS (2000–2016)

SOURCE Observatory of Economic Complexity

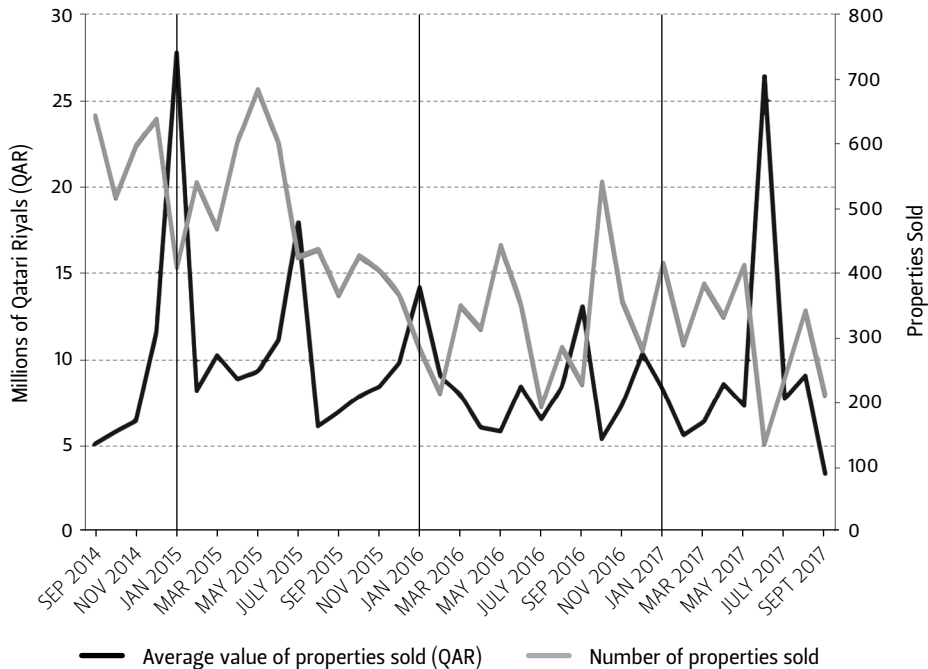
The “rapid rebuild” thesis is enhanced by the fact that Qatar’s imports from its neighbors—food and basic material supplies—are highly fungible and can be procured from many other sources. Less easily replaceable goods—such as gas turbines and critical technology components for liquefied natural gas (LNG) liquefaction plants—are sourced outside the Gulf region and generally lie beyond the reach of the anti-Qatar coalition. Of equal importance, Qatar’s key LNG buyers are located outside the Gulf region, and those that can supply advanced technology goods—such as Japan, China, and South Korea—all have compelling strategic interests in seeing Qatar remain a stable baseload global energy supplier.

Qatar’s Response

The embargo’s initial effects on both the personal and economy-wide levels were palpable. Worried residents crowded into grocery stores, while central bank reserves and foreign liquidity declined significantly as depositors from the quartet pulled funds

from Qatari banks.⁷ The average value of properties sold spiked to a near-term high of more than 26 million Qatari riyals (QAR) in June 2017, perhaps reflecting a sellout by wealthy asset owners from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and other states seeking to reduce or eliminate their real property holdings in Qatar.

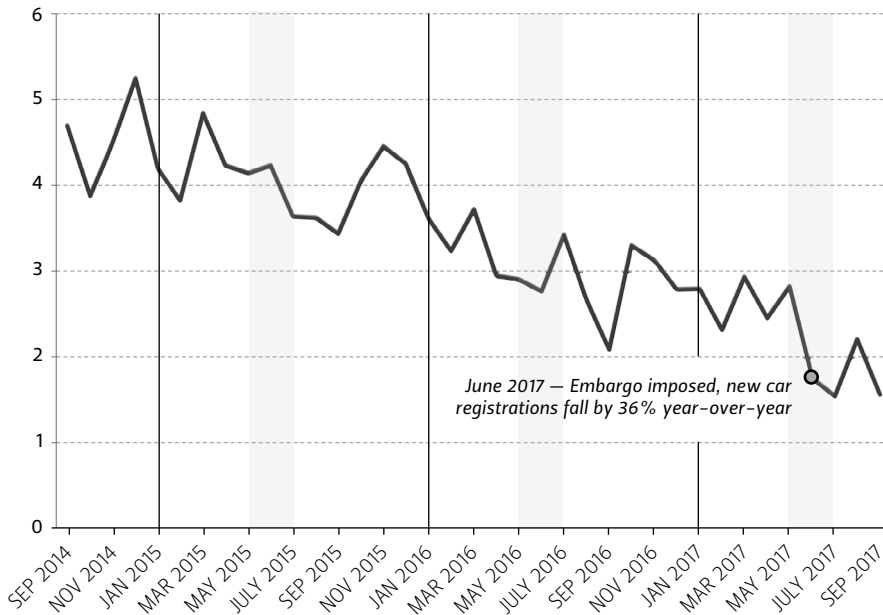
FIGURE 2 — MONTHLY PROPERTY SALES IN QATAR



SOURCE Qatar's Ministry of Development Planning and Statistics

New car registrations—a proxy for car sales—also declined sharply in the wake of the blockade, falling from 2.8 per 1,000 residents in May 2017 to 1.8 per 1,000 residents in June and 1.6 per 1,000 residents in July of the same year. These levels were the lowest seen in more than two years and indicated dented consumer confidence, since new vehicles are big-ticket items that often require a household to commit tens of thousands of dollars—a material portion of household disposable income, even in a wealthy society like Qatar's. Vehicle sales had already been on a gradual downward trend prior to the blockade as the local car market matured and roads became saturated with traffic. Nonetheless, the sharp departure from the trend after the embargo was imposed suggests that it impacted consumer confidence, at least in the short term.

FIGURE 3 — NEW VEHICLE REGISTRATIONS PER 1,000 RESIDENTS IN QATAR BY MONTH



SOURCE Qatar's Ministry of Development Planning and Statistics

Announcement of LNG Capacity Expansion

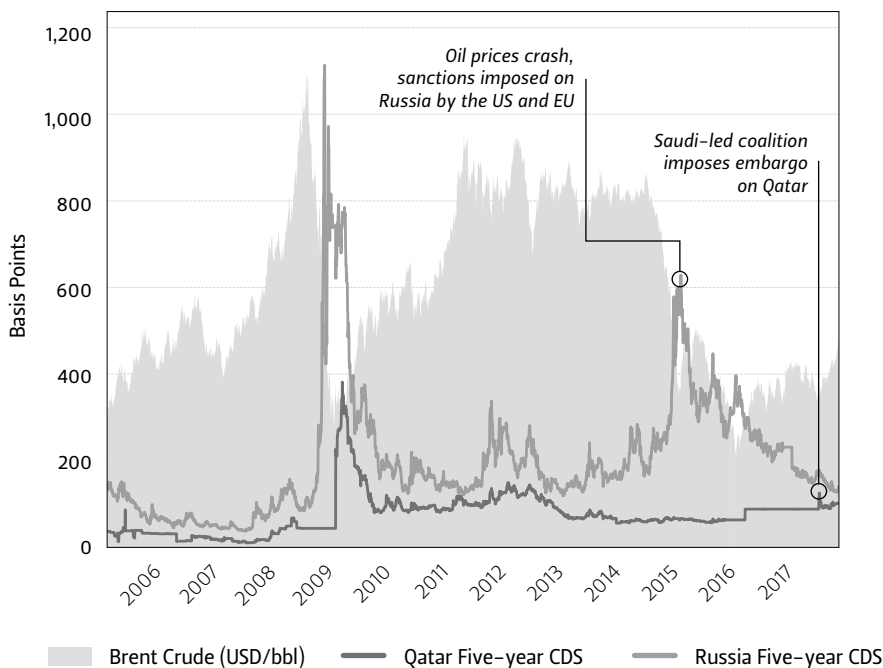
Since Qatar is the lowest-cost global LNG supplier, its July 2017 announcement that it would expand LNG export capacity to 100 million tons per year (up from 77 million) was largely a warning shot across the bow of competing exporters. But it also served other strategic purposes by (1) affirming the country's systemic importance to global gas markets and (2) demonstrating that even in a low-price environment, the country's revenue generation potential would continue to be capable of underpinning its sovereignty and economic capacity to withstand exogenous financial pressures, including embargoes by neighboring powers.

To put the planned capacity expansion into a strategic perspective, consider the following: Qatar plans to expand LNG output by 23 million tons per year. At a sale price of \$5 per million BTU and with each ton of LNG containing 51.7 million BTU of energy, this would translate into nearly \$6 billion per year in incremental revenue from gas alone. Condensate and natural gas liquids produced alongside the methane (the principal component of natural gas) would likely add significant additional revenues, since these products are generally more valuable than natural gas on an energy content basis.

In 2016, Qatar imported about \$5 billion in goods and services from the countries now embargoing it and exported roughly \$5.6 billion of goods and services to them. This suggests in purely economic terms that the incremental revenue gains from the planned LNG capacity expansion could offset more than half of the combined loss of bilateral trade caused by the embargo. The offset effect is enhanced by the fact that a material portion of Qatar's trade with the embargoing bloc comes through its gas sales to the UAE via the Dolphin Pipeline—the region's first cross-border gas supply project, which can supply approximately 2 billion cubic feet of gas per day to the UAE. The Dolphin project is integral to UAE energy and water supply security and, despite the embargo against Qatar, continues supplying gas to the UAE.⁸ Future demand for Qatari gas could be reduced by domestic discoveries and alternative energy supplies, such as the 2,400-megawatt Hassyan coal power station now under construction in Dubai.⁹

Furthermore, even without an increase in LNG exports, the “lost” trade volumes caused by the embargo do not just disappear. Rather, they are likely temporary disruptions that will be replaced over time as Qatar builds relationships with new trading partners.

FIGURE 4 — QATAR AND RUSSIA FIVE-YEAR CDS SPREAD VS. BRENT CRUDE OIL PRICES



SOURCES Bloomberg, author's own analysis

More Signals of Failure: Commodity Prices vs. Embargo

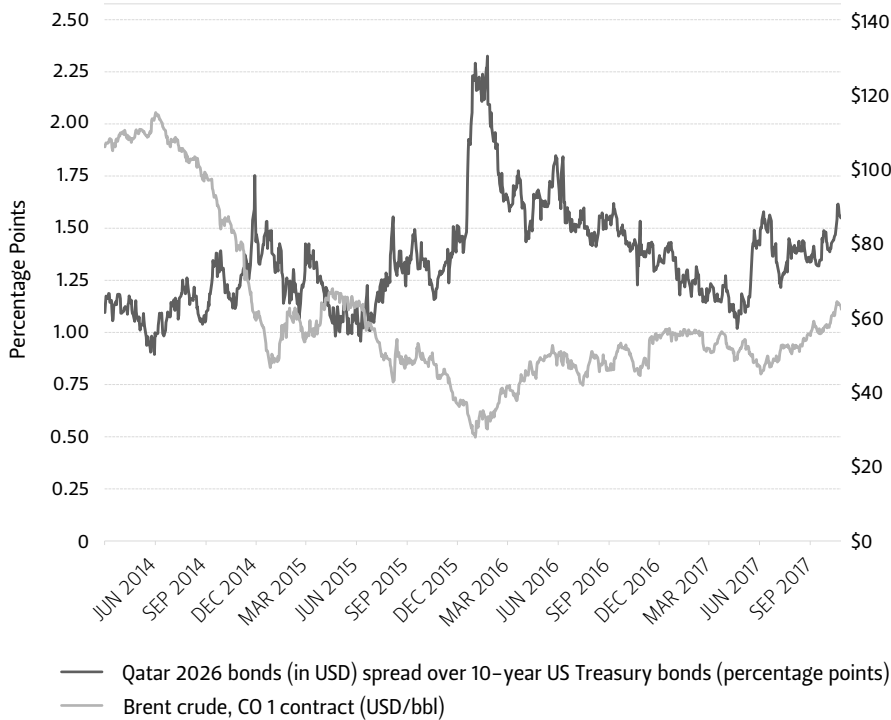
Financial markets recognize Qatar's fundamentally strong position, and traders are pricing a future that sees Doha successfully resisting the embargo. Credit default swap (CDS) prices for five-year Qatari sovereign debt (basically, insurance payments in case of default that serve as a proxy for economic stress) spiked in early July 2017 immediately after the embargo was imposed. The cost of insuring \$10 million of five-year Qatari debt rose from an annualized rate of approximately \$88,000 per year in June 2017 to a high of \$125,200 per year in early July 2017. This cost has since fallen back to approximately \$102,000 per year (101.89 basis points).¹⁰

Yet this upward bump pales in comparison to how markets priced default risk in the wake of the global oil price collapse in late 2008 and early 2009, when it cost as much as \$381,000 per year (annualized) to insure \$10 million in five-year debt against default. The historical context provided by the credit default swap data—particularly when compared to other resource exporter countries such as Russia—reveals three important facts:

1. First and foremost, global investors do not view the Saudi-led embargo as an existential threat.
2. Sudden, sharp commodity price drops impact markets' perception of Qatari credit-worthiness much more than trade warfare by regional actors.
3. Although default risk is generally inversely correlated with oil price movements in major exporters—even in the event of major commodity price declines—Qatar's credit risk profile changes much less per dollar-decline in oil prices than is the case for other major exporters such as Russia or Mexico.

The price spread between Qatar's 10-year term treasury bonds and 10-year US Treasury bonds also reflects market perceptions of risk. And once again, this metric also supports the notion that crude oil and commodity prices have a far stronger effect on Qatar's international financial risk profile than adverse actions by its neighbors.

FIGURE 5 — SPREAD BETWEEN QATARI 10-YEAR BONDS AND 10-YEAR US TREASURY BONDS VS. BRENT CRUDE OIL PRICES



SOURCES Bloomberg, author's own analysis

What it Takes for an Embargo to Work in the Gulf Region

The most recent successful use of economic warfare in the Gulf region was the US-led sanctions campaign that helped bring Iran to the nuclear negotiating table and ultimately culminated in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action signed in Vienna in July 2015.¹¹ The sanctions regime ultimately worked for three fundamental reasons:

1. The United States and the European Union—whose members are collectively a cornerstone market for Iranian oil—presented a united diplomatic front, and EU members agreed to embargo Iranian crude shipments.
2. Nearly all crude oil traded globally is priced in US dollars, which means that there must be a dollar-clearing function in order for transactions to occur. The *pecunia franca* status of the dollar gave the United States enormous jurisdictional leverage and allowed it to cut off dollar-clearing transactions for Iranian oil that touched US soil.

3. The United States' massive global financial heft—both from the size of its domestic market and its financial power projection through the omnipresence of the dollar in oil markets—allowed it to present buyers of Iranian crude oil, and financial institutions that facilitated such transactions, with a stark choice: either cease doing business with Iran, or face exclusion from the United States and associated portions of the global financial architecture.¹²

Unlike the United States, quartet members lack capacity for projecting offensive global financial power. The recent Saudi anti-corruption actions are *prima facie* evidence of this, as the Saudis had to apprehend the person first in order to capture the money. In contrast, the United States can track, freeze, and interdict financial assets around the world with the alleged perpetrator *in absentia*. As such, Qatar's opponents will likely find it extremely difficult to exert offensive financial pressure anywhere beyond the immediate geographic region.

A lack of extraterritorial reach may help explain a recent surge in quartet members' lobbying activities in Washington, DC, where successful influence over US legislation could effectively harness American power to serve their own narrow strategic goals.¹³ Some quartet lobbying efforts appear to be influencing certain legislators, as suggested by the text of House Resolution 2712, a.k.a. the "Palestinian International Terrorism Support Prevention Act of 2017," which specifically names Qatar as a supporter of Hamas.¹⁴

Quartet lobbying efforts against Qatar are likely to fail. Chairman of the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations Bob Corker (R-Tennessee) has been deeply critical of the quartet's blockade of Qatar, noting that "when you live in glass houses, you shouldn't throw stones," and is unlikely to support Senate passage of House bills aimed at sanctioning Qatar.¹⁵ Sen. Corker has also publicly pledged to block further US arms sales to GCC countries until there is a clear diplomatic path to resolving the crisis.^{16*} Finally, as with the blockade itself, time is not on the quartet's side on Capitol Hill either, since additional time provides more opportunities for members of Congress to properly comprehend Doha's strategic importance to US interests across the broader Middle East. The upside of all this is that despite the dogfight in Washington, Qatari assets and financial activities in Europe, Asia, Australia, and North America are likely safe—even if the quartet seeks to escalate its economic warfare campaign.

* Editor's note: Senator Corker lifted his block on these sales in February 2018; see <https://bit.ly/2F5L25M>.

Economic and Security Implications

When embargoes prove ineffective, this forces the embargoing countries to either back off, maintain an ineffective campaign, or escalate their efforts, often using military force.¹⁷ Such an outcome can ultimately undermine the embargoing countries' diplomatic influence. In the current case, rivalry between Arab neighbors has likely permanently damaged the GCC, creating a large set of strategic openings that Iran can exploit.

The chances of a negotiated settlement appear low for the foreseeable future. The blockade against Qatar is on the wrong end of powerful diplomatic and strategic dynamics and is likely to weaken as time progresses. Yet escalating pressure against Qatar also does not seem a realistic option, since moving the embargo from its current footing into a *bona fide* blockade backed by military force would likely trigger a strong reaction from Washington. The September 28, 2017 meeting between US Secretary of Defense James Mattis and Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani at the Al-Udeid Air Base highlights Qatar's strategic importance to American interests. It also carries important symbolic weight, given Mattis's apparent influence with President Donald Trump.¹⁸ Likewise, Al-Udeid remains deeply enmeshed in the fabric of US air campaigns in the region, with video footage from November 2017 showing a B-52 bomber taking off from the base to bomb heroin production facilities in southern Afghanistan.^{19*}

Conclusion

At this point, it is difficult to envision Qatar making unilateral concessions that could lead to the embargo being lifted. The worst of the post-blockade capital flight is likely over. The country is rebuilding its trade links and food supply chain to bypass imports previously obtained via Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and LNG exports remain robust, underpinning Qatari cash flow.

The embargo could remain in place for years and Qatar could very likely withstand the effects with decreasing impact each year as it increasingly emphasizes economic relationships outside the Gulf region. For instance, Qatar is net self-sufficient in steel production (including rebar, which is critical for construction as the country prepares for the 2022 World Cup).²⁰ Likewise, the new Hamad Port—capable of storing enough cereal grains to satisfy multiple years of local consumption, handling more than 3.5 million 40-foot shipping containers per year, and accepting 1.7 million tons per year

* Editor's note: Since September 2017, there have been numerous meetings between American and Qatari officials that culminated in the signing of four MOUs related to areas of mutual concern during the US-Qatar strategic dialogue discussions in January 2018. See <https://bit.ly/2FwqIJL>.

in general cargo—is already replacing import trade that formerly came by land from Saudi Arabia and by sea from the United Arab Emirates.²¹

To the extent that incremental supplies of cement, certain steel products, and other goods may be needed for World Cup 2022 and other projects, seaborne supplies procured from India, Iran, and Turkey—among other potential partners—can very likely fill any gaps left by the cessation of land shipments from Qatar’s neighbors.

The embargo is now passing from the phase in which original motivations mattered into a new realm that is much more about hard, cold, long-term consequences. As the anti-Qatar coalition’s campaign grinds on, these consequences will begin to reveal themselves more fully.

We do not know how the embargo will culminate and precisely what the long-term consequences and ramifications will be. But past uses of economic warfare demonstrate a range of unpleasant and unanticipated surprises ranging from the loss of influence of a failed embargoing country, to potential domestic political instability, to escalation as one or both sides seek to break out of a strategic stalemate. As the embargo continues, diplomatic and political relationships between many Arab countries will likely suffer further damage, and Iran’s relative influence in the region could rise as a result. The ultimate consequences of increased Iranian influence across the region remain debatable, but from the perspective of the countries embargoing Qatar as well as that of the United States, this is clearly an unintended consequence.

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¹⁷ Consider, for instance, the 2003 invasion of Iraq, which came after more than a decade of sanctions and an embargo maintained through multiple channels, including periodic military force, failed to coerce Saddam Hussein into renouncing Iraq's weapons of mass destruction development programs.

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QATAR'S MILITARY RESPONSE TO A NATIONAL EMERGENCY

Prepared by ACW Research Team

The Qatar Emiri Armed Forces (QEAF) considered the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) crisis that erupted on June 5, 2017 a national emergency, one that required an organized and forceful response. On that date, Qatar's GCC neighbors—Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain—as well as Egypt severed diplomatic ties with the Qatari peninsula and effectively imposed a siege through a land, sea, and air blockade, under the banner of “fighting terrorism.” The blockade's motives, though not publicly endorsed by the quartet, were seen in Qatar as a clear attempt at a counter-revolution against the 2011 Arab Spring in order to maintain the political status quo in the Middle East.

With the quartet's troops on the Qatari border and a well-developed media attack in full swing, the Saudi-led bloc appeared intent on pressing the Qataris to surrender. To these countries' dismay, however, events since June 2017 have shown a solid unity between Qatar's leader, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, and his people, who rallied behind him. Segregated from its neighbors and finding that it had to operate as an isolated island, Qatar strengthened itself economically and politically. In addition, having acted as an intermediary between East and West and as mediator in disputes in the past, Qatar had friends on its side.

In Qatar, locals and expatriates united to form civic associations to fight the quartet's disinformation campaigns on food security and the threat of forced regime change, and to educate the masses to keep calm. The QEAF quickly mobilized and became active on social media to assure stability and social peace. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Khalid Al Attiyah availed himself to local and international media outlets and those concerned about the situation on the ground to update them

on Qatar's options and the possibility of military escalation if his country's sovereignty would ever be in doubt.

On the international stage, Qatar's pragmatic politics paid off: allies from across the globe pushed the quartet for an immediate de-escalation. Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad Al Sabah, the emir of Kuwait, immediately called for a halt to further escalation and acted as a mediator to bring the parties to the negotiating table. Former US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson tried shuttle diplomacy—contrary to the White House's initial position—with the backing of key US defense personnel and the Pentagon to help bring order to the GCC house. This took place in tandem with the customary joint military exercises of the QEAF and its US allies on the ground in Qatar. Germany and France also called for an end to the GCC crisis. Most pivotal of all, however, was Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's decision to deploy troops in support of Qatar in the immediate aftermath of the hacks into the Qatar News Agency headquarters the previous May, the event that sparked the GCC crisis.

Solidarity in Qatar

Perhaps the most palpable point of failure of the quartet's attempt at regime change in Qatar was the bloc's misunderstanding of the country's domestic politics and their effect on the social fabric of Qatari society. In an October 2017 interview with CBS News, Sheikh Tamim reiterated this point when he said, "They underestimated the Qatari people."¹ Qatar's government, although not a democracy, is a consultative monarchy whose members live and work among the people. Qataris not only enjoy the leading GDP per capita² in the world, but also a high quality of life. The Qatari government offers them free education, health care, and utilities—electricity and water—as well as high wages and no taxes. Qatar lauds itself as the sports hub and arts center of the Middle East. The government is also planning to include local representatives in legislative body elections, expected to commence in 2019, thus enhancing political participation among an increasingly educated population.

As a result, the Qatari people were unaffected by the fake news broadcast from the quartet's news stations on Qatari television. In an emotional speech at the 72nd session of the United Nations, Sheikh Tamim stated: "Allow me, on this occasion and from this podium, to express my pride in my Qatari people, along with the multinational and multicultural residents in Qatar..."³ Saudi, Emirati, Bahraini, and Egyptian news outlets continued to broadcast as before in Qatar and their sponsored articles flooded Qatar's internet. The government in Doha did not crack down on its own media and internet, as its neighbors had done.

Simultaneously, the QEAF was strengthened by an increase in vigilance and by signing further MOUs with its allies and conducting joint military exercises. When

Minister Al Attiyah noted that the blockade had spurred Doha to develop and improve the QEAF, he was assuring Qataris—and asserting to the international community—that Qatar's sovereignty was not up for debate.

Turkey's Immediate Stand with Qatar

Within two days of the blockade, the Turkish parliament ratified a deal to deploy Turkish troops in Qatar instantly. This was aimed at enhancing Qatar's army by training its forces as well as increasing cooperation between the two countries, carrying out joint exercises.⁴ Expanded military trade ties followed. Turkey emphasized that a stable Qatar was key to a stable region. The GCC, a durable and steady organization since it was formed in 1981, would be potentially compromised by Qatar's destabilization. Indeed, such a development posed a threat to the entire Arab world, which is yet to recover from the extremism that followed the counterrevolutions after the start of the 2011 Arab uprisings. Turkey continues to act as an honest broker between both sides to end the crisis. For its part, the Saudi-led bloc has shown no interest in reaching a solution; therefore, Turkey's attempt at mediation was short-lived. Nonetheless, Turkey continues to assist Qatar militarily.⁵

This show of Turkish solidarity with Qatar has fostered bilateral ties in the fields of military cooperation, commerce, and education. The two countries' ministers of defense stressed the importance of joint military cooperation in the face of external interference in the Arabian Peninsula. The Qatar Emiri Naval Forces (QENF) carried out a joint "rapid response" maritime exercise with their Turkish counterparts.⁶ Similarly, the Qatar Emiri Land Force (QELF) undertook the "Iron Shield" exercise with Turkish forces.⁷ The QENF commander also visited the Turkish battleship TCG Gokova at Hamad Port, in preparation for assuming joint maritime exercises. The QEAF has also been working with its Turkish equivalent. In November 2017, Qatari Minister Al Attiyah and Turkish Minister of Defense Nurettin Canikli both attended the QEAF launch of the Agusta Helicopter Simulation Flight Training Center in Qatar. Later that month, President Erdoğan visited the Turkish military forces in Qatar to oversee and evaluate the preparations taken by the Turkish detachment and joint military cooperation.⁸ Such visits highlight the importance Turkey places on Qatar's stability for the region and the QEAF's important role.

Europe

Qatar has always enjoyed a warm relationship with its European allies, particularly France, the United Kingdom, and Germany, and most recently, Italy. European-GCC trade also continues to increase with year-on-year growth. But above all, the

Europeans host military, naval, and air bases in almost every GCC member state; it is therefore imperative that the GCC remains stable. European countries have been vocal in their support for Kuwait's mediation efforts, especially Germany. After US President Donald Trump's speech in which he lamented Qatar as a sponsor of terrorism "at the highest level," thus contradicting his State Department's and the Pentagon's positions, the German government was quick to call for ending the crisis.⁹ Further, when the quartet published its list of 13 demands from Qatar, Germany publicly rejected those demands, insisting that both sides engage in fair dialogue. Still today, Germany continues to show unwavering support for Kuwaiti mediation. This is demonstrated by the efforts of Germany's foreign minister, Sigmar Gabriel, to broker a resolution that satisfies all parties. German-Qatari cooperation in the fight against non-state-actor terror groups continues as Germany's commander of the German Air Force, Lieutenant General Karl Müllner, met with Qatar's chief of staff, Lieutenant General Ghanim bin Shaheen al-Ghanim, to discuss the fight against the Islamic State. Qatari-German relations are vital for the region and for GCC-EU relations.¹⁰

Similarly, Italy has taken measures to ease tensions in the Gulf. Its stance on mediation has remained the same throughout the crisis while Qatari-Italian trade ties have increased visits at the ministerial level. In November 2017, the QEAF agreed to purchase seven Italian warships, amounting to almost \$6 billion, in an effort to diversify its naval capabilities.¹¹

A staunch ally of Qatar, France is also concerned about the ongoing crisis and has backed Kuwaiti mediation efforts. In a visit to Qatar, French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian urged the quartet to lift its sanctions on Qatar and furthered Qatari-French relations with new MOUs, bilateral trade agreements, and joint military exercises.¹² French Minister of Defense Florence Parly received QEAF Chief of Staff al-Ghanim to discuss the development and support of bilateral relations and ways to enhance them.¹³ Moreover, Minister Al Attiyah visited French air bases in France, overseeing the special training received by members of the QEAF. Further Qatari-French joint exercises are in the pipeline.

The United Kingdom, a longstanding ally of Qatar, condemned the blockade, calling for lifting the sanctions. The UK reiterated that it is in no one's interest to escalate tensions in the GCC, which would weaken the fight against terrorism in the region. Demonstrating its commitment to Qatar's Special Naval Forces, the British Royal Navy Special Forces underwent a joint naval exercise in Qatari territorial waters.¹⁴ Ahmed bin Mohammed Military College carried out joint tactical training with the British Armed Forces, while the QEAF executed joint air exercises with the British Royal Air Force. Further, Defense Minister Al Attiyah met with his British counterpart in December to sign a letter of intent between both countries.¹⁵ The German,

French, Italian, and British's stance on the GCC crisis played a pivotal role in preventing a Saudi-led military aggression against Qatar.

The United States

Despite the White House's initial support for the quartet's accusations against Qatar, the State Department, Pentagon, and US military personnel disagreed with the White House's earlier remarks and were supportive of Qatar. Like Turkey, Germany, Italy, France, and the United Kingdom, the United States realized and stressed that Qatar is a key ally in the fight against terrorism, especially since it hosts the US CENTCOM. In his round of shuttle diplomacy, former US Secretary of State Tillerson asserted that Qatar's stability was of vital importance for the region, lobbying the quartet to come to Kuwait's negotiating table. Further, on Tillerson's first visit to Qatar after the crisis broke out, Washington and Doha signed an MOU to combat terror financing.¹⁶ President Trump thereafter made a U-turn in his position against Qatar, expressing the need for an immediate solution to the GCC crisis. The president also praised the emir of Qatar during his April 2018 visit to the White House, referring to him as a dear friend and a close ally of the United States in its fight against terrorism. Military cooperation also increased. The commander of the Emiri Air Defense Forces, Brigadier General Hamad bin Mubarak al-Douai, met with Lt. Gen. Michael Garrett, the commanding general of the US Army Central (ARCENT), to discuss exchanging expertise, enhancing bilateral defense relations, as well as planning future joint projects. On August 21, 2018, the Special Forces of the QEAF conducted the Air Drop joint exercise with the US Special Forces in Sealine, Qatar, one of many events that strengthened US-Qatari military ties.¹⁷

Qatari officials are working closely with their American counterparts to amplify mutual strategic interests. In January 2018, Washington and Doha held the inaugural US-Qatar Strategic Dialogue at the Department of State in Washington, DC.¹⁸ Former Secretary of State Tillerson and Secretary of Defense James Mattis hosted Minister Al Attiyah and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani for open discussions about mutual interests, such as combatting extremism, investments, energy, trade, and security.¹⁹ Discussions were also held on the potential expansion of the Al-Udeid Air Base in Qatar. Through its National Vision 2040, Qatar aims to improve the base and its facilities to better accommodate US military personnel and their families. Minister Al Attiyah mentioned that the vision aims to provide a comfortable environment by building more housing facilities, recreational centers, and schools.²⁰ In addition, Qatar plans to build new ports to provide quick repair stops for the US Navy. Within the framework of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, the QEAF also signed an MOU with NATO for security cooperation and information sharing.²¹

Taking all of these elements into consideration, it is clear that the GCC crisis deepened Qatar's bilateral relations with other countries and institutions, strengthening existing alliances and creating new ones for regional stability.

Improving the QEAF

Despite the GCC crisis, the Qatar Emiri Armed Forces have managed to improve their capability immensely in a short time. The naval forces have been restructured and advanced, with current joint training from the British Royal Navy and future additions from Italy. The QEAF carried out joint exercises with US forces and will receive 36 F-15 fighter jets from the United States,²² 12 Rafale jets from France,²³ and 24 Typhoon fighters from the UK.²⁴ In addition, land forces have been training with their counterparts and will continue to carry out similar exercises.

These joint exercises, improved capabilities, and MOUs illustrate the growth of the QEAF since the crisis began. It has strived to equip itself with the necessary know-how and tools to protect Qatar's sovereignty. Indeed, the GCC crisis has been the catalyst for this accelerated reform.

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GCC MILITARY COOPERATION: A RECEDING VISION

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The United States and its western allies had strong hopes for the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) heading into 2017. Finally, an American-GCC heads of state summit and defense ministerial meetings had been convened, the deal to limit Iran's nuclear program seemed to be holding, and the Gulf states were cooperating closely with the United States and its allies on a broad range of areas, buying record numbers of American weapons and playing a major role in combatting the so-called Islamic State.

A year later, however, the Gulf Cooperation Council as an organization is wounded, or perhaps moribund, owing to the confrontation between Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain on one side, and Qatar on the other. The December 2017 GCC summit was drastically curtailed amid acrimony and recriminations, and it appears that the annual Washington-GCC annual summit will be postponed from May to September 2018.

This paper will explore the military implications of the continuing GCC crisis as it affects the security of the GCC states and the strategic considerations of the United States and other western countries. It will examine the overarching trend of US-GCC security relations prior to the standoff, the emerging trends since it began, and future consequences of these dynamics.

Longstanding Trends: Countering Bilateralism and Multilateralism

For at least a decade, the United States has sought to transform its military relations with the GCC states from bilateral—i.e., with individual states—to multilateral,

** Remarks do not represent the views of any US government agency.*

with all six states in the council simultaneously. This idea appeals to American military planners for several reasons. First, the US military is chronically pressed for personnel and resources;¹ it is unwilling to provide personnel and units for advising, training, and exercises to six countries when it can do this at once with one organization comprising all of them. Aside from the obvious economy of scale, this approach allows for greater tactical, operational, and doctrinal commonality. Put simply, it allows the GCC and US militaries to practice for war in the same way they would fight a war, collectively and cooperatively.

In order for true military multilateralism to take root in the GCC, there needs to be greater commonality of purpose, military thought, and equipment in the region. This is lacking at present. GCC states seem to be engaged in duplicative but nationally self-contained efforts.² For example, Bahrain is currently one of the smallest states in the world—as measured by area, population, and wealth—to have a fleet of supersonic fighters. It is far more practical for Bahrain to rely on its partners for fighter air cover and to focus scarce resources, both fiscal and human, on other areas such as ground air support. Instead, Bahrain is embarking on an extremely expensive effort to recapitalize its F-16 fleet.

At the same time, GCC member states are squandering the potential of pooled maintenance and operations by fielding a variety of fighter airplanes. Saudi Arabia (and soon Qatar) flies the Boeing F-15; Qatar and the UAE fly the Dassault Mirage; Kuwait flies the Boeing F-18; and the UAE, Oman, and Bahrain fly the Lockheed F-16. The member states of the GCC would struggle to maintain any one of these aircraft in combat conditions without extensive foreign contractor support; indeed, to field this broad range of aircraft without a strong domestic maintenance and training infrastructure is close to military malpractice. And yet, the diversification of equipment continues, often for opaque reasons.

The only standing operational integration body for this range of aircraft is the American Air Force Central Command operations center, located at Al-Udeid Air Base in Qatar.³ While there is an air center of excellence in Abu Dhabi, it remains underutilized. GCC air forces trumpet their participation in American exercises such as Red Flag, but GCC efforts there are secondary⁴ because of the bilateral-multilateral dilemma.

A commonality of military thought is also lacking. Each of the GCC countries has its own network of military academies, which commission officer cadets, and staff colleges, which train mid-career officers to serve as battalion-level commanders or on operational staffs. Most of the GCC countries have war colleges designed to train colonels to be generals as well. There simply are not enough serving officers in the GCC militaries (outside of Saudi Arabia) to provide the throughput for this system and to

justify the mission and expense. While there are often one or two officers from a different GCC state in each class, this is not a sufficient level of exchange for truly interoperational military thought and doctrine.

NATO—which has far more military forces than the GCC—has a defense college devoted specifically to alliance interoperability and commonality.⁵ It also has a school for operational and tactical commonality. There is no GCC equivalent to this. Again, as with equipment, we see duplication and repetitive national structures. Prestige and pride of ownership, it seems, have overtaken concerns of alliance interoperability. Here, however, the dynamic is slightly different. While institutions in Saudi Arabia and the UAE have a strong American presence, Qatar, Kuwait, and Oman have tended to use British instructors and the Bahrainis are more independent. Even with this level of diversity, however, it is striking that GCC member states tend to look beyond the GCC for their benchmark of professional military education.

Unfortunately, the GCC has yet to reach its full potential. The various member nations tend to view multilateral US-GCC exercises and operations as less desirable than bilateral ones with the United States. The GCC crisis has exacerbated this situation as several US-GCC military workshops have been cancelled.

The War in Yemen

The war in Yemen has had a profound effect on GCC solidarity. Both Kuwait and Oman have chosen not to participate in the war, and there have been accusations that Oman is not vigorously policing weapons shipments from Iran to the Houthis through its territory.⁶ Qatar originally was a participant in the coalition—when it contributed aircraft and troops—and had planned to increase its military contribution, but the GCC crisis and blockade ended that. Indeed, the war has damaged the prospects for GCC military integration in two ways: by bruising relations between GCC members fighting the war, and between GCC weapons importers (primarily Saudi Arabia) and their weapons suppliers.

As the war has dragged on, several trends that will work against effective GCC unity have emerged. The first is the efficient and agile performance of the Emirati forces, compared to the relatively inflexible and ineffective performance of the Saudi forces.⁷ While there are exceptions to this generalization, most of the fighting in the south of Yemen has been under Emirati direction and generally successful, characterized by maneuver and the use of local proxies. Most of the Saudi effort has been in the north of Yemen and relatively ineffective, static, and focused on air power. Political cleavages have emerged: the UAE seems to be receptive to a divided Yemen (in which it holds a position of power in the south) while Saudi Arabia still insists on a unified Yemeni state, albeit under Saudi tutelage.⁸

The war may lead to a decrease in weapons sales to the GCC countries. As the civilian casualties of the Yemeni war stack up, there is increasing scrutiny in the West of arms exports to the GCC, particularly to Saudi Arabia. The Yemen war has coalesced the inchoate western unease with the undemocratic nature of the Gulf states and has brought policies about weapons sales to the forefront. Already, Germany and Norway have suspended some weapons transfers to Saudi Arabia.⁹

Addressing GCC Concerns about American Resolve: Weapons and Bases

The Yemen war has also illustrated the baked-in GCC concern about America's reliability as a security partner.¹⁰ GCC countries have welcomed President Donald Trump's renewed commitment to the region, his aggressive approach to Iran, and his willingness to sell advanced weaponry to them—even if the Obama Administration did the same.¹¹ They also remain unnerved by Obama's lack of consultation prior to the conclusion of the Iran deal and by the former president's perceived recognition of an Iranian security role in the Gulf. While the internal thoughts of GCC leaders are rarely shared, it seems fair to conclude that these leaders no longer take America's commitment to the region for granted.

GCC members have tried to protect their interests in the face of this perceived American unreliability in two ways. First, they have sought to reinforce their relations and ties with the United States, particularly in the realm of security. Saudi Arabia, of course, bundled a number of existing weapons purchases together with some new acquisitions in a massive package that could cost as much as \$110 billion.¹²

Abu Dhabi also has sought to bolster its ties with Washington by weapons purchases, bases, and training.¹³ The UAE was the first foreign customer for the advanced THAAD air defense system; it also fields the Patriot missile system both in the Emirates and in Yemen and has sought approval for another \$2 billion worth of Patriot missiles. The UAE fleet of US F-16 fighters exceeds some US Air Force capabilities; keeping this fleet up to date requires the regular purchase of state-of-the-art American missiles and precision-guided munitions. The UAE revels in its close ties with the United States; its ambassador in Washington is considered to be one of the most effective in Washington.¹⁴ The air base at al-Dhafra, outside of Abu Dhabi, is a major hub in American air operations,¹⁵ and the UAE Armed Forces War College has American instructors provided by the Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies of National Defense University in Washington, DC. A number of prominent retired American security officials, such as Richard Clarke¹⁶ and former US Central Command Deputy Commander Robert Harward, have lived in the UAE and provided services there.

Second, several of the GCC states have sought to hedge against American inconstancy and broaden their arrangements and ties with external weapons sources and security providers. Qatar¹⁷ and Saudi Arabia¹⁸ both operate Chinese surface-to-surface missiles, for example; while they arguably would have preferred to buy such missiles from western sources, the United States and other countries would not sell these weapons. The UAE has also sought to enlist a broad number of states as military partners, such as France and Australia.¹⁹

In some ways, the Qatar standoff has been beneficial for the development of closer Qatari military ties with the United States. Historically, Qatar has neglected its military; as a small but very rich state, it has relied on American military presence to ensure its national sovereignty, and until recently, has spent relatively little on its armed forces. Instead, Qatar had focused on soft power, spreading its influence through what David Roberts calls “MICE”: Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Events.²⁰

Since the blockade of their country, Qatari leaders seem to have decided to establish themselves firmly in the camp of American military customers; within weeks of the crisis, Qatar signed a \$12 billion deal for F-15 fighters²¹ (in the past the Qataris only flew French fighters²²). In December 2017, Qatar became the first Gulf state to buy the FPS-132 air defense radar for \$1.1 billion.²³ The Qatari defense minister announced a month later that his government was funding improvements to Al-Udeid Air Base, to include family housing units and a school for the children of American officers whom he hoped would be stationed there.²⁴ If hundreds of American families are moved to Al-Udeid, this would mark a significant enhancement in the bilateral relationship between the two countries; currently, only in Bahrain are significant numbers of American military families posted alongside their service members. Moreover, it is likely that the memorandums of understanding signed during the January 2018 US-Qatar strategic dialogue will increase military and security cooperation between the two countries.

Military Cooperation as a Resolution Mechanism

The Gulf Cooperation Council mission professes expansive and somewhat noble political objectives. Although the GCC claims that it is similar to multinational government groups such as the European Union and the African Union, in reality, it was formed primarily as a security organization and does little beyond this function. It has a standing military force, Peninsula Shield, which is based in Riyadh. This force has deployed in the past but is primarily a command center to be augmented with troops when circumstances warrant.

Simultaneously, much of the focus of American engagement in the Gulf has been on security. A major diplomatic accomplishment of the Obama Administration with

the Arab world was the establishment of the Camp David GCC summit as a regular event.²⁵ Even though attendance was less than hoped for in the first such meeting in 2015—one must take into account the age and infirmity of some leaders—the Obama Administration succeeded in achieving the long-standing goal of bringing all the GCC leaders together in one forum with the American president.

The Trump Administration held the US-GCC meeting of May 2017 in Riyadh—it was part of the famous “glowing orb” visit. If the schedule holds, 2018 would signal that it is time for another Camp David meeting. The security issues that the GCC could best address as an entity—such as missile defense—are as urgent as ever. To be sure, President Trump would be loath to fail where Obama succeeded.

This means that the Trump Administration will be incentivized to resolve the GCC crisis, if only in order to avoid having a black mark on its record. While it is unlikely that the deep wounds from the GCC standoff will be entirely healed or forgotten, it is possible that Washington could prod Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Qatar into a formal reconciliation, albeit a cool one. Given current political circumstances, if the United States does broker a reconciliation among the GCC states, the deal would be led by the American military and not by diplomats. This is not because American diplomats lack savvy or skills, but rather because the GCC states at this time see limited value in taking counsel or advice from American diplomats—especially with the chaos surrounding American foreign policy after the firing of Secretary of State Rex Tillerson. There are no Senate-confirmed ambassadors in the GCC, but it is noteworthy that the American military infrastructure there is in place and is uninterrupted from the time of the Obama Administration. When American diplomats speak to foreign leaders, they often have to raise unpleasant subjects such as the need for political reform and respect for human rights. While these concerns are also part of the military dialogue between America and its partners, they are not as prominent.²⁶

The Trump Administration’s perceived distaste for standard procedure and precedent, embodied by the extraordinary role and expansive portfolio of Jared Kushner—President Trump’s son-in-law and a diplomatic novice—has spurred a natural preference to deal with the American military instead of diplomats. In addition to Tillerson’s sacking, there has been a drumbeat of articles about the Trump Administration’s hostility toward the State Department and desire to reform it by neglect, benign or otherwise.²⁷ The American military, on the other hand, is a priority for the Trump Administration; Secretary of Defense James Mattis is a former commander of American forces in the Middle East and is widely seen as a figure who lends legitimacy to Trump’s policies. Taken together, these trends indicate that an American-brokered end to the GCC crisis will be facilitated by a military—and not a diplomatic or political—impetus.

Still, it would be folly to trust the depth of military reconciliation in the GCC. The apparent visceral and personal nature of the GCC crisis calls for caution. It is likely that any reconciliation, American-brokered or otherwise, will be limited to photo opportunities and will serve the practical issues on which the United States focuses.

Conclusion

The future of military cooperation in the Gulf region will not fulfill the hopes and expectations of GCC or American military planners. There will be substantial duplication of certain military capabilities while others are likely to remain lacking. The United States thus will be inclined to continue to base more forces in the region than might be desired. On the other hand, weapons sales, rather than more media-friendly manifestations of soft power, will persist as the most visible indicators of cooperation between the United States and GCC countries.

Concomitantly, the military aspects of the GCC will remain the most effective, functional, and advanced organs of multilateralism in the Gulf. American leadership in this field remains relatively constant and predictable. The Gulf states may have no choice but to continue to move down this well-paved road rather than detour across the treacherous and broken ground of political and economic integration.

A focus of American military efforts on GCC reconciliation may rectify GCC disunity slightly and help de-escalation. But make no mistake: this would not be a cure to underlying conditions. Extraordinary American initiatives may mitigate the GCC states' irritation and help minimize conflict between them, but in the end, it falls to them to find more commonalities than differences in their quest for peace, stability, and prosperity.

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UNDERSTANDING THE HUMANITARIAN COSTS OF THE BLOCKADE

Tamara Kharroub

The rift among the states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) that started on June 5, 2017 resulted in the severance of diplomatic ties with Qatar and an imposition of a blockade on the country by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, and Egypt. It also violated the rights and freedoms of average citizens in the Gulf. From the right to medical care, education, employment, and family unity to freedoms of movement, expression, and religion, the recent GCC crisis has caused tremendous suffering among families and individuals throughout the Arab Gulf region, including citizens and migrant workers.

With the impasse and stalled mediation efforts, the GCC crisis and the ensuing blockade continue to have great impact on the region's politics, society, and economics. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) issued a report¹ in December 2017 investigating the impact of the GCC crisis on human rights. It identified four categories of people affected by the blockade and ensuing measures: nationals of Qatar residing in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt; nationals of those countries residing in Qatar; migrant workers and families in Qatar; and residents in countries at large who have been affected by the restrictions imposed by the Saudi-led quartet. Below is a summary of the primary violations of rights and freedoms that these populations have suffered since the beginning of the crisis.

Right to Freedom of Movement and Residence

Immediately after severing ties and initiating a blockade on Qatar, the countries of the quartet ordered their citizens to leave Qatar and imposed a ban on travel from and

to the country. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain withdrew their diplomats from Qatar, while Egypt maintained a small staff under protection in Doha. They also gave Qatari nationals residing in or visiting those countries 14 days to leave and instructed Qatari diplomats to evacuate within 48 hours. The blockading countries also threatened their citizens with punishment if they chose to remain in Qatar. For example, Saudi Arabia added Qatar to the list of countries under a three-year travel ban with a penalty of 10,000 Saudi riyals (about \$2,600). Similarly, Bahrain threatened to withdraw passports of those who violated the ban.²

According to a December 2017 report by the National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) in Qatar,³ 11,387 individuals from the three Gulf states were living in Qatar and 1,927 Qataris were living in those three countries. All of them were forced to leave their countries of residence and return home. The NHRC also recorded 1,354 complaints by Qataris related to their right of movement and residence.

The closure of land, sea, and air borders with Qatar has greatly affected travel and freedom of movement, as these restrictions on movement were neither formally communicated nor legally based. These measures also violate Article 26 of the 2004 Arab Charter on Human Rights,⁴ which was ratified by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain and prohibits arbitrary and collective expulsion of foreigners.

Right to Family Reunification and Nationality

The NHRC in Qatar received thousands of complaints and recorded 629 cases of family separation due to the GCC crisis and blockade.⁵ According to OHCHR, the official data of the State of Qatar show 6,474 cases of mixed marriages involving citizens of Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain.⁶ When authorities in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain ordered their citizens to leave Qatar and expelled Qatari nationals residing in their countries, they deprived thousands of people of being with their children and families, caused them psychological distress, and denied them the ability to support their families financially.

Those who chose not to comply with their governments' demands feared not being able to renew their passports and possibly losing their nationality in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain. While the three countries have dealt with "humanitarian cases of mixed families" as an exception and granted them freedom to travel back and forth, Qatari authorities maintain that the measures were insufficient.⁷ Many individuals remain separated from their families and fear repercussions by the governments of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain if they travel to reunite with their family members.

The rights to family life and protection of family units and children are enshrined in Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,⁸ Article 33 of the 2004 Arab Charter on Human Rights,⁹ Article 23 of the International Covenant on Civil

and Political Rights,¹⁰ and Articles 2 and 9 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.¹¹

Freedom of Expression

There were several ways that the freedom of speech and opinion and the right to communication and information were violated throughout the GCC crisis.

First, the blockading countries implemented measures that criminalize expression of sympathy with Qatar on social media and elsewhere. Saudi Arabia classified sympathy with Qatar as a cybercrime and imposed a five-year prison sentence and a fine of three million riyals, while the UAE imposed sentences ranging from three to 15 years in detention and a fine up to 500,000 dirhams, and Bahrain imposed five-year prison sentences.¹² Second, the three countries blocked media outlets funded by Qatar, including Qatar TV, Al Jazeera Network, and beIN Sports; they also prohibited hotels from offering access to these channels,¹³ thus limiting availability of information and freedom of the press. Third, the blockading countries have instilled fear among individuals regarding contact with family members in Qatar, thus depriving them of the right to communicate with family and conduct business and daily transactions. Although telecommunications channels with Qatar remained functional, many people reported difficulty in communication. Postal services were terminated.

These measures are in direct contravention of the freedom of expression, which is a human right recognized under Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,¹⁴ Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,¹⁵ and Article 32 of the 2004 Arab Charter on Human Rights.¹⁶

Right to Health Services and Medical Care

The crisis impacted medical treatment and access to healthcare. Many Qataris who were receiving medical care in one of the blockading Gulf countries had to return to Qatar, consequently interrupting their treatment. Additionally, the restrictions on financial transactions influenced patients' ability to pay for medical care. On the other hand, 260 patients from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt who had been receiving treatment in Qatar were granted continued access to healthcare by the Qatari Ministry of Health.¹⁷

According to the Qatari NHRC, hundreds of patients were affected by these policies, and many severely, such as pregnant women, children, infants, and people with disabilities who were not exempted or given special treatment by the blockading countries.¹⁸ The suspension of trade relations has also affected Qatar's access to medicines and medical supplies, including lifesaving items. Before the blockade, more than 50

percent of Qatar's pharmaceutical supplies came from other Gulf countries, especially the UAE, where international companies are based.¹⁹ Obtaining medical supplies from outside the Gulf region has greatly increased costs and caused delays in access to health care for Qatari nationals and residents in the country.

Discriminating against individuals in the provision of medical treatment based on political disputes is a violation of human rights principles. Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights guarantees everyone's right to health and medical care.²⁰

Right to Education

Restrictions on movement and residency have greatly affected individuals' right to access education. The Qatari NHRC recorded 236 complaints from Qatari nationals studying in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain, in addition to hundreds of students from those countries studying in Qatar who may not have filed complaints.²¹ Qatari students were expelled from the three Gulf countries, thus they were arbitrarily denied access to education and deprived of this basic human right. There were also 268 Qataris studying in Egypt who faced severe restrictions on obtaining student visas and reentry into Egypt after the summer holiday. In response, the Qatari NHRC approached its Egyptian counterpart and managed in November 2017 (after five months) to ease restrictions on student visas and allow Qatari students to complete their studies.²²

Qatari students attending universities in the UAE had their course registrations withdrawn, were told to return to Qatar, and were forced to transfer to branches of their universities in other countries, thus incurring additional costs. Those who attempted to transfer to universities in other countries and in Qatar faced challenges in obtaining transcripts and dealing with blocked online access to student accounts, requiring them to procure official documents in person. Some were unable to transfer credits and others found that their fields of study were unavailable. According to the Qatari Ministry of Education, 201 Qatari students were not able to continue their education.²³

The right to education, including access to higher education, is recognized by several international conventions such as Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,²⁴ Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,²⁵ and Article 41 of the 2004 Arab Charter on Human Rights.²⁶

Right to Work and Property

The Qatari NHRC reported that hundreds of people lost their jobs due to the crisis and recorded 109 complaints from those who were denied access to their work and places of employment as a result of the blockade. These included 66 in Saudi Arabia, six in the UAE, and 37 in Bahrain.²⁷ Among those who had been working in the media

industry in Qatar, many Egyptian nationals returned to Qatar after initially being forced to leave the country by their government. Most Saudi nationals remained in Saudi Arabia after leaving Qatar.

Additionally, Qataris working or running businesses in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain were forced to leave for Qatar; they lost access to their jobs, properties (including companies, residences, and livestock), financial assets, and income. Tens of thousands of people incurred monetary and property losses;²⁸ as many as 1,900 cases were reported.²⁹

The suspension of financial transactions has also led to a lack of means to receive salaries, pay bills, or even support family members who are nationals of the blockading countries.³⁰ For example, many Saudi nationals employed by Qatari businesses in Saudi Arabia lost their jobs and were not able to receive salaries.

The right to work and be compensated are enshrined in Article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,³¹ Articles 6 and 7 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,³² and Article 34 of the 2004 Arab Charter on Human Rights.³³ The right to private property and protection from deprivation of personal property are also protected under Article 17 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights³⁴ and Article 31 of the 2004 Arab Charter on Human Rights.³⁵

Access to Goods and Trade

When Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain closed air, sea, and land transport channels with Qatar, the Qatari economy was negatively impacted to a significant degree, especially at the beginning of the siege, as Qatar was dependent on its Gulf neighbors—namely Saudi Arabia and the UAE—for imports of goods. According to customs authorities in Qatar, 76 percent of sugar, 67 percent of oil, 59 percent of dairy products, 93 percent of construction material, 47 percent of timber and gravel, and 51 percent of cables for construction had been imported from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain.³⁶

As a result of the GCC crisis and the suspension of the flow of goods, the costs of transport and goods increased and the price of commodities in Qatar rose by 83 percent. The government had to intervene to maintain the threshold.³⁷ In addition to imports, most of Qatar's trade flow had taken place via Saudi Arabia and the UAE (by land, air, and sea). As a result, the blockade limited people's ability to access and afford necessary items including food and medicine. Moreover, due to the closure of airspace, flights to and out of Qatar had to be rerouted through a narrow corridor around Saudi Arabia, thus increasing the time and costs of travel and related goods.

Right to Worship

The restrictions on movement between Qatar and the other countries also affected the exercise of the freedom of religion. Saudi Arabia is home to two of Islam's holiest sites, Mecca and Medina, to which Muslims regularly travel to perform *hajj* and *umrah*. The arbitrary closures of borders by the blockading countries, especially Saudi Arabia, have severely impacted the right of Qataris to practice their religion. Qatari nationals and residents of Qatar were denied the right to perform *hajj* and *umrah*, especially during the month of Ramadan, and those who were already in Saudi Arabia were prevented from completing their religious rituals.

In addition, Saudi authorities have imposed further constraints on Qataris wishing to perform *hajj* and *umrah*, including closing electronic registration, suspending payments, and refusing to coordinate with the Qatari Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs.³⁸ The travel ban imposed on people from Qatar violates their right to practice their religion and worship, which is considered a fundamental human right enshrined in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,³⁹ among other international conventions.

Incitement to Violence

The Qatari NHRC reports observing hundreds of cases of hate speech and incitement to violence against Qatari targets and individuals by leading figures and media personalities in the blockading countries.⁴⁰ Hate speech took the form of songs and television dramas and comedies, caricatures, articles, and incitement to bomb Qatar and replace its leadership.

The Saudi-led quartet provided a list of 59 individuals and 12 institutions it alleged had financed terrorist organizations and received support from Qatar.⁴¹ Among them was Jaber Al Mirri, editor-in-chief of the Qatari daily newspaper *Al Arab*, who reported having received 10 death threats.⁴²

As a result of incitement and hate speech based on their national origin, Qatari citizens experienced discrimination, harassment, physical attacks, and damage to their property. This is in clear violation of Article 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights⁴³ and Article 4 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination,⁴⁴ which prohibit calls for discrimination and violence based on national, religious, or racial backgrounds.

Rights of Non-Gulf Migrant Workers

Migrant workers in Qatar and the three blockading Gulf countries, who hail primarily from South Asia, have also felt the repercussions of the GCC crisis and

blockade. Based on interviews conducted by Human Rights Watch, migrant workers experienced economic hardship as a result of the rise in food prices, having to use half of their salaries on food. Furthermore, workers have been stranded without food or water or money in Saudi Arabia due to border closures and restrictions on financial transactions, as Saudi Arabia had allowed Qataris to bring workers across the border to Saudi Arabia to work on their properties before the blockade. Some construction workers have reported being concerned about retaining their jobs because their employers have run out of building materials.⁴⁵

Migrant workers in the Gulf countries had already been facing difficult conditions and uncertainties. With the GCC crisis and the isolation of Qatar, their rights have been further limited and meager living conditions have become worse.

Conclusions

The GCC crisis and the arbitrary and broad measures taken by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt to isolate Qatar have punished both the government of Qatar and the Qatari people. Moreover, the restrictions were implemented outside any legal frameworks and the individuals affected have not been accorded legal recourse. As such, these actions constitute disproportionate and discriminatory practices based on Qatari nationality and links to Qatar. Additionally, according to the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee, “the use of economic, trade or other measures taken by a State, group of States or international organizations acting autonomously to compel a change of policy of another State or to pressure individuals, groups or entities in targeted States to influence a course of action without the authorization of the Security Council” are considered unilateral coercive measures.⁴⁶

In response, Qatari human rights entities have considered legal action against Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain. However, these three countries—as the powerful parties to the crisis—are experiencing minimal economic effects and little political pressure from the international community, so it is unlikely that a resolution will materialize or amends for human rights violations will be enforced anytime soon. Saudi Arabia’s domestic human rights violations and the humanitarian disaster it has caused in Yemen without consequences make it probable that the current blockade of Qatar will become the new norm under the watch of the international community.

The crisis has become highly politicized and polarized in Washington, DC, and around the world, with millions spent on media campaigns and lobbying efforts, while the human rights of average citizens continue to be violated and ignored. With this protracted crisis, the blockade will continue to affect the rights and freedoms of individuals across the countries involved. A serious effort must be undertaken to enforce the blockading states’ obligations under human rights principles and international law.

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GCC DIVISIONS AND REGIONAL CHALLENGES

Joe Macaron

The idea of establishing the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) did not transpire in 1981 merely from the need to create a union between six individual member states (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates). The decision to join forces was primarily motivated by the need to address the challenges posed by the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran. The six countries have differed for decades regarding risk assessment and responses to evolving regional challenges; however, their differences reached a high point in 2017. The embargo on Qatar, led in June 2017 by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Bahrain, is calling into question the regional role and impact of the GCC.

The GCC and Its Region

As a regional organization, the GCC has faced four main challenges since its inception nearly four decades ago. First, the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran brought the urgent sense of unity but did not provide the necessary tools for common action. The May 1981 GCC charter, which focused mostly on economic and cultural affairs, was an early indication that the six members were not comfortable ceding their prerogatives on foreign policy and security decisions. In the 1980s, the GCC employed a foreign policy that essentially tried to avoid the spillover of the 1980-1988 Iraq-Iran War.

The second alarm was sounded by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, which exposed the vulnerability of the GCC's security and its dependence on the United States. The Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein, once the GCC's shield against Iran, became the new enemy. The liberation of Kuwait in 1991 and subsequent diplomatic

efforts with the United States and the United Nations dominated the GCC agenda in the 1990s.

The third challenge was the 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, which precipitated the US war on terror and ultimately led to the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. The GCC did not play an active role in the American battle against al-Qaeda or in the removal of Saddam Hussein from power. The fourth upheaval, the Arab Spring in 2011, initially motivated the GCC to explore opportunities to reshape the Middle East. However, this convergence of interests was short-lived, and differing understandings of the Arab uprisings could now lead to the GCC's demise—or at least its irrelevance as an institution.

With Iraq, Egypt, and Syria no longer the Arab world's political centers of gravity, Saudi Arabia and the rest of the GCC countries became the last standing pillars of power. From 2011 to 2014, and to varying degrees, GCC states played decisive roles in the fast-paced uprisings in Egypt, Syria, Yemen, Libya, and Tunisia. The GCC also had an ambitious agenda to strengthen and expand its membership. There was a 2011 proposal to create a "Gulf Union" to deal with Iran's growing influence, but Saudi wishful thinking faced the reality that member states wanted to retain their independence.¹ In 2011 as well, and most likely as a response to the Arab Spring protests, there was talk of Jordan and Morocco possibly joining the GCC, but nothing of that nature transpired.²

When there was unity among the Gulf countries in 2011-2012, GCC actions on critical foreign policy issues were consequential. In Yemen, the GCC proposed an initiative that replaced President Ali Abdullah Saleh, in return for political impunity, with his deputy Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi. In Libya, the GCC, together with the League of Arab States, provided a cover to the NATO-led intervention to oust Muammar Qadhafi, in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1973. In Bahrain, the GCC deployed troops from its military arm, the Peninsula Shield Force, to end the country's uprising. It also contributed \$10 billion each to Bahrain and Oman in 2011 to address their socioeconomic issues.³ In Syria, Saudi Arabia and Qatar worked with Turkey to provide weapons to Syrian rebels in their confrontation against the regime. However, the GCC's divisions began to unravel soon after as Islamists rose to power in Libya and Egypt.

Furthermore, the rise of the so-called Islamic State (IS) between 2013 and 2014 and negotiations with Iran about its nuclear program in 2013 and 2015 led to a policy shift in Washington, and this stirred tensions between Washington and its Gulf allies. A GCC divide ensued not only in countries where Iranian influence was omnipresent, such as Syria, but also in North Africa, where the dispute was whether Islamists should be in power. The lack of a US strategy and intent to play a role in the Arab Spring did not help the GCC in formulating a common and carefully reviewed approach toward

these popular uprisings. This became evident in July 2013 when Saudi Arabia and the UAE backed the Egyptian military in ousting President Mohamed Morsi, who was supported by Turkey and Qatar. This development illustrated their deep divide on foreign policy, which set the stage for the growing mistrust among GCC members.

To assess the impact this institutional disunity is having on GCC foreign policy issues, it might be useful to categorize them around the two most contentious ones: the role of the Islamists and the deterrence of Iran.

The Arab Spring Domino Effect (in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya)

As the Arab Spring was unfolding in 2011, the domino effect saw the resignations of Tunisian President Zine El-Abidin ben Ali in January and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in February, followed by NATO's ousting of Libya's leader, Muammar Qadhafi, in October. In those three cases, Islamists were on an unprecedented rise in 2011 and 2012. Saudi Arabia and Qatar quickly took opposite sides; while Riyadh preferred preserving the status quo as much as possible, Doha was cheering for change and providing support for the Muslim Brotherhood in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya.

As President Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi seems intent on consolidating power in Egypt, there are no indications that he will soften his views on the Muslim Brotherhood, even if GCC tensions tentatively ease. With his reelection secured in March 2018, Sisi might show some flexibility if encouraged by the United States and Arab allies.

The GCC countries might have common interests in working together in Tunisia and Libya. North Africa, in general, has remained neutral in the current GCC dispute as all Gulf countries, with varying degrees, have investments in the region. Islamists lost influence in Tunisia and Libya in 2013-2014, although they continued to be part of the political process. In Tunisia, a relatively stable political system could benefit from Gulf countries encouraging political parties, like the secular Nidaa Tounes and the Islamist Ennahda, to work together and avoid a political stalemate.

General Khalifa Haftar emerged in 2015 as a major player in eastern Libya, challenging the Islamist-backed National Salvation Government. The UAE and Qatar took opposing sides in Libya, but their influence and degree of intervention have been arguable. With the quasi international consensus—including the United Nations—to support the government of Prime Minister Fayeze al-Sarraj, there are plenty of opportunities for GCC cooperation to close the gap between the players in eastern and western Libya. UN envoy Ghassan Salamé has adopted an action plan to move the peace process forward,⁴ and the GCC countries can help to ensure a smooth and peaceful transition instead of a military confrontation.

Detering Iran (in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, and Palestine)

Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen are the countries where the GCC has sought to deter Iran and its proxies—but with no clear or coordinated strategy. In Syria, Saudi Arabia and Qatar worked together to topple the regime of President Bashar al-Assad. After the GCC blockade of Qatar started in 2017, armed groups connected to Riyadh and Doha clashed with each other in northern Syria. At present, the GCC has no influence in Syria beyond Saudi Arabia's supervision of the already weak High Negotiations Committee as well as contacts with Syrian armed groups. GCC countries agree that Assad should leave power and they will not invest in the reconstruction of Syria unless that precondition is met. However, this convergence of interests might not necessarily lead to actual cooperation.

In Iraq, the GCC countries have been engaging the Iraqi government since 2017 as the war against IS was waning. At the International Conference for Reconstruction of Iraq, held in Kuwait in February 2018, the member countries of the GCC pledged a total \$10 billion in financial support to help rebuild Iraq.⁵ But this monetary support, which constituted a third of the \$30 billion in pledges, did not translate into a coherent GCC approach in dealing with Iraq. Baghdad is hoping that its Arab neighbors' engagement with their country will help smooth over Saudi-Iranian relations.

In the case of Lebanon, the most nuanced difference among GCC members was the Saudis' intransigence on compromising with Hezbollah. In 2016, Qatar supported the deal that put President Michel Aoun in office while Saudi Arabia was reluctant to do so. After the saga of Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri's resignation⁶ while in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia is now attempting a comeback to Lebanese politics. In general, the GCC's influence in Lebanon might be limited moving forward, most notably in the May 2018 Lebanese parliamentary elections.

On the Palestinian issue, Qatar's influence in Gaza could play a role in moderating the views of Hamas and moving Palestinian reconciliation forward. However, considering Cairo's role in the talks between Fatah and Hamas, Qatari-Egyptian relations might not help in this regard. To be sure, a peace process between Palestinians and Israelis would not be fully effective without reuniting the West Bank and Gaza under a unified Palestinian leadership.

In Yemen, the GCC could agree on a way forward that ensures the unity of Yemen by encouraging a conflict resolution process, motivated by attention to the strategic point of Bab al-Mandab. For years, Qatar has played a mediation role between President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi and the Houthis; it also has a connection to the Muslim Brotherhood-inspired Islah Party. For its part, Oman has long served as the back channel between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis. The Saudi and UAE war in Yemen since 2015 made Qatar take a backstage role in the Yemeni conflict. Since last year, Saudi

cooperation with the Islah Party and the UAE's support of separatist forces in southern Yemen have added new complexity to the conflict and could lead to a de facto partition of the country.⁷ The failure to achieve a military victory or resolve Yemen's war has exacerbated divisions in both the north and the south. The only way out of the Yemeni quagmire requires GCC cooperation; otherwise, the bloody stalemate will most likely continue to the detriment of all concerned.

GCC Relations with Israel

GCC relations with Israel are complicated, to say the least. One issue that Gulf countries have generally agreed on has been their attempt, separately, to make overtures toward Israel since the 1990s—while remaining publicly united in their support for Palestinians rights as well as the US-led peace talks between Palestinians and Israelis. These overtures were motivated by an interest to have closer relations with Washington, or they represented a convergence of interests against Iran.

Former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin made an unprecedented visit to Oman in December 1994⁸ and the two countries agreed to open trade offices in January 1996.⁹ In October 2000, Oman suspended the operations of the trade office under public pressure following the second Palestinian intifada; however, the two countries discreetly continued their bilateral interactions. Rabin visited Doha in 1996 to officially start trade relations, and Qatar's prime minister, Sheikh Abdullah bin Khalifa Al Thani, met in March 2008 with defense minister Ehud Barak to discuss Gaza.¹⁰ Even after Qatar expelled Israeli diplomats for their government's policies toward the Palestinians, the Qatari-Israeli limited engagement continued. The head of Qatar's Gaza reconstruction committee, Mohammed Al-Emadi, reiterated pragmatically in February 2018 that "when you want to work in Gaza, you have to go through the Israelis."¹¹

Saudi Arabia is currently communicating with Israel about plans to organize direct flights for Muslims in Israel to Mecca as part of the Hajj pilgrimage.¹² In November 2017, Israel's energy minister Yuval Steinitz revealed that both governments have covert contacts and are sharing intelligence.¹³ In 2015, Israel opened its first diplomatic mission in the UAE, part of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) based in Abu Dhabi.¹⁴ In January 2016, Steinitz made a secret visit to Abu Dhabi.¹⁵ The Israeli and Emirati Air Forces held a joint exercise in March 2017 along with the United States and Italy.¹⁶ In July 2013, the Israeli foreign ministry opened a Twitter account to serve as "the virtual Israeli embassy to GCC countries."¹⁷ Kuwait is the only GCC member that remains reluctant to have any contact with Israel. In 2014, Kuwait even boycotted a UAE regional conference on renewable energy after learning that a high level Israeli delegation would be attending.¹⁸

While these steps toward rapprochement are short of diplomatic relations, they represent a trend that the GCC is undergoing individually and not as an institution. As Egypt and Jordan normalized their relations with Israel, GCC countries were reluctant to normalize until a peace deal between Palestinians and Israelis materialized. However, the lack of any peace talks in the past decade and the shift of focus toward the Arab Spring convinced some GCC countries that they should take these steps. President Donald Trump's administration also wanted its traditional allies to cooperate to increase the potential of containing Iran. The core of the peace initiative, adopted by the Arab League in 2002, was to offer normalization to Israel as a *quid pro quo* for returning Arab lands occupied in the 1967 War and establishing a Palestinian state there. These steps could further undermine the Gulf countries' ability to pressure Israel on the Palestinian issue. Most notably, the lack of a coherent approach in dealing with Israel might not only weaken the GCC approach but it would also deprive the Gulf countries from a multilateral cover to justify the unpopular decision to engage Israel.

Can the GCC Remain Relevant?

In the past decade, GCC members have differed on how to deal with the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood to power and with Iran's expansionist role, two issues that are motivated by and have implications for the states' own domestic politics. Unless the debate is settled around these two issues, it would be difficult for the Gulf countries to work together and lead an effective foreign policy.

There is obviously no clear consensus on how to deal with Iran. Bahrain accuses Tehran of meddling in its own domestic affairs. For their part, Oman, Qatar, and Kuwait prefer to avoid a confrontation with the Islamic Republic. The UAE is inclined to defy Tehran politically but is engaged in lucrative economic trade with Iran. Saudi Arabia has been leading a confrontational policy against Iran for a few years, but its tone and actions against Iranian regional influence are subsumed by a shifting focus to domestic politics. At this point, disunity among GCC states and the evolution of regional politics since 2014 will most likely not stand in the way of Iran's growing influence in the Levant.

The Muslim Brotherhood is also another challenge as Islamists have had a presence throughout the Gulf since the 1950s, when Egyptian members fled the regime of President Gamal Abdel-Nasser. They had an impact on developing the Gulf countries' educational systems. The Muslim Brotherhood supported the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, prompting its Kuwaiti fellows to break ranks and declare their independence from the umbrella group.¹⁹ After the Arab Spring, Saudi Arabia and the UAE saw the

emergence of Islamists in countries like Egypt and Libya as a potential source of inspiration for Islamists to defy their home governments—a development that could reach their own populations.

What kept the GCC relevant in the past decades has been its relative unity and effectiveness as an institution as well as the strategic importance of its members as energy exporters, aid providers, and investors. The current critical juncture, with the GCC divided and cash-strapped, could further weaken or paralyze the role of the institution and its members. The GCC needs to debate these issues to reinvigorate its active role, most notably in Yemen, Tunisia, and Libya.

The challenge is how to recover from the summer 2017 crisis. President Trump is leading a belated attempt to resolve the GCC crisis and has invited to Washington the leaders of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE for discussions. The scenario of a GCC collapse seems unlikely at present; however, there are no indications yet that the institution could be reinvigorated to the pre-2017 status. The distrust among GCC members will most likely persist and it might take years to normalize relations. The result is not only weakening the GCC regional stance but also the Arab countries' ability to influence political developments in their own neighborhood.

The role of the Muslim Brotherhood at large is not close to being settled, and this requires the GCC states to hold open and frank discussions. While sustaining GCC disunity serves Iranian interests, there should be recognition that a GCC strategy to deter Tehran is possible only if the Trump Administration has a coherent plan to push back Iranian influence across the Middle East. The self-inflicted damage of the GCC crisis, as well as the reality of cash strapped-Gulf countries, might have already undermined the GCC's ability to project power regardless of the possibility of restoring the functionality of the institution. The White House's effort to restore GCC unity, with the objective of combatting terrorism and deterring Iran, could turn the page of this crisis—but the underlying tensions might linger if they are not addressed bilaterally and multilaterally by the GCC leaders themselves.

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THE INTERNATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE GCC STALEMATE

Abdullah Baabood

The GCC crisis has imposed harsh measures and demands on Qatar's sovereignty that contradict diplomatic protocols, neighborly relations, and international humanitarian law.¹ Its continuation impacts global energy supplies and disrupts existing international trade patterns. The crisis also weakens the GCC as a regional organization, one that is important for international cooperation and the stability of the region. Indeed, the GCC plays a significant role in regional security and counterterrorism cooperation as well as in the wider regional stability of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

The current crisis is related directly to—and has repercussions for—the civil wars in Syria and Libya, Iranian influence in the Arab world, US ties with Qatar, US military operations in the region, Qatar's food security, the 2022 World Cup, the price of oil, and the overall security of the Middle East. Its continuation, coupled with the growing divide in the Sunni camp, will likely empower Iran and increase its influence. To that end, this paper will provide an overview of the importance of the GCC to the international economy by looking at the alliance as a pivotal regional organization with important connections to international players.

Global Energy Implications

While the dispute between Qatar and the so-called anti-terror quartet (ATQ, comprising Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt) is essentially a regional issue, the economic impact has global implications. The region's strategic value for global energy supply has long been recognized. Gulf oil and gas production

and reserves play a crucial role in meeting global energy needs, and the resultant oil wealth and financial surplus have a profound impact on the global economy. Equally important, the GCC states have the potential and ability to invest huge financial resources into oil and gas exploration and production, meeting the ever-increasing demand for petroleum and petrochemicals by economies on the rise, such as those of China and India. According to the British Petroleum (BP) “Statistical Review of World Energy 2017” report, the GCC states together produced 24.4 percent of the world’s total crude oil production in 2016, with Saudi Arabia in the lead pumping 12.3 million barrels per day.²

Moreover, the GCC states control 29 percent of the world’s crude oil reserves, highlighting the relative global importance of the Gulf petroleum sector. Saudi Arabia alone held 15.6 percent of global oil reserves, while other GCC states also held significant crude reserves: Kuwait at 5.9 percent, the UAE at 5.7 percent, Qatar at 1.5 percent, and Oman at 0.3 percent. Equally relevant is the gas production in the Gulf region; the same BP report notes that the GCC states produced 13.5 percent of the world’s natural gas in 2016, with Qatar making up the largest share at 5.7 percent. GCC states also held 22.3 percent of the world’s natural gas reserves, of which Qatar’s share was 13 percent. Qatar is also the world’s largest exporter of liquefied natural gas, which adds further to the region’s—and Qatar’s—importance in meeting global energy demands.

While the immediate repercussions of the blockade may be minor, there are several longer-term consequences worth considering. Any escalation of the crisis could lead to a major energy disruption that affects oil prices. For example, within a month after the crisis erupted, Qatar announced plans to increase its natural gas production by 20 percent from its North Field, which it shares with Iran. The decision represented the lifting of a decade-long moratorium on North Field production increases, one that had been in the works prior to the GCC crisis. Nevertheless, the decision to bring more gas to the market, regardless of an expected glut in the years ahead, is bound to have significant impact on global energy markets affecting other international producers like the United States and Australia.³

Global Economic Implications

Although they are very small territories—Qatar and the UAE have populations of 2.2 million and 9.1 million, respectively—the Gulf states play an outsized role in the global economy.⁴ The six member countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council represent an important region from a trade point of view. The region is witnessing an ongoing and momentous period of economic development, making it even more important for trade, investment, and work opportunities. In particular, Qatar is one of the major and most active construction markets in the GCC region as the country is due to host the

World Cup in 2022. As a consequence, the construction industry in Qatar has been expanding at a rapid pace in recent years with many international firms active there. To be sure, a regional diplomatic crisis could greatly undermine the industry's growth prospects.⁵ The crisis will also have an impact on millions of construction workers from different countries who are being pushed dangerously close to homelessness and poverty.⁶

In addition, the GCC states' financial surpluses and sovereign wealth funds (SWFs) are among the highest in the world, adding more weight to these countries' influence in terms of international finance. Currently, combined GCC funds have reached close to \$2.9 trillion in total assets, which accounts for almost 40 percent of total global sovereign wealth funds.⁷

Qatar's SWF is estimated to be worth \$335 billion and its investment arm, the Qatar Investment Authority, holds significant shares of Volkswagen and Barclays. It has also invested in attractive real estate around the world, like London's Shard building and Harrods luxury department store.⁸ These funds provide Qatar a buffer to mitigate economic losses inflicted by the crisis; in fact, Qatar was estimated to have recalled more than \$20 billion from its overseas investments to help minimize the effects of the blockade on its economy.⁹

The blockade of Qatar has affected supply chains and the flow of goods and services in the region, causing significant losses for businesses in countries on both sides of the dispute.¹⁰ Banks from the ATQ countries have pulled deposits from and reduced business with Qatar, and international banks have been more cautious about conducting business with Qatar; HSBC, for example, sidestepped a major deal in Qatar's new dollar bond.¹¹ Multinational corporations may be less willing to invest or open branches in a region that is so politically unpredictable; this is a cause for concern for the already feeble private sectors of the GCC states and for the inflow of foreign direct investments. It also affects the technology transfer that is vital for the overdue diversification of the regional economy, which attempts to address overdependence on the production of oil and gas.

The Effect on the GCC as a Regional Organization

The sudden and unforeseen nature of this diplomatic spat is evidence of how policies and loyalties in this tumultuous region can shift overnight. Although Oman and Kuwait have not taken sides (with Kuwait, supported by Oman, attempting to foster mediation efforts), the GCC has effectively buckled as the UAE announced—at the GCC summit in December 2017 in Kuwait City—the formation of a new political and military alliance with Saudi Arabia.¹²

Indeed, the biggest loser of this diplomatic crisis has undoubtedly been the GCC as an organization. Despite much criticism over the years, it has been somewhat effective in providing a semblance of security and stability to an otherwise unstable region, and it could boast some success at both regional and international levels (e.g. at the United Nations, the Arab League, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and others). Through a series of security and defense agreements, the GCC was able to create a security community among its member states, thus adding to building a robust regional security mechanism. Individually and collectively, the GCC states have succeeded in maintaining multi-faceted economic, defense, and security cooperation with international partners including the United States, European Union (EU), NATO, China, and India. Such agreements have helped global economic cooperation and integration, aided in building further levels of security frameworks and in confronting regional unrest, and worked toward challenging and thwarting Iran's goal of exporting its revolutionary ideology across the Arabian Peninsula.

Rising oil prices have allowed the monarchies of the GCC to pacify domestic calls for reform with increases in public spending, while the GCC's Peninsula Shield Force, consisting of Saudi Arabian troops and a UAE police force, demonstrated capability in containing mass protests in Bahrain (whose majority Shia population proved more challenging for the regime to subdue). While the region around it began to unravel, the GCC looked to move closer toward integration, even culminating in Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah surprising many by calling for "a transition from the stage of cooperation to a stage of union in a single entity"¹³ at a GCC summit in Riyadh in December 2011. Notwithstanding this development, the proposal for a Gulf Union never materialized into anything substantial; Gulf leaders had valid concerns that it may pave the way for Saudi Arabia's dominance over such a union.

The recent crisis validated these concerns and emphasized the failure of the GCC as an organization both in adopting a common foreign policy and in dealing with disputes among member states. The blockade runs against the letter and the spirit of the much-vaunted achievement of the GCC Common Market, signed in 2007, which calls for the free flow of people, goods, and capital between its member states.¹⁴ The blockade of Qatar has impaired the GCC Common Market, especially the freedom of movement enjoyed by GCC citizens, preventing families of different member states with marriage and tribal ties from visiting one another.¹⁵ Furthermore, the lives of nationals from the ATQ countries living in Qatar have been disrupted; having to leave the country affected their employment and the education of their children.¹⁶ Moreover, the measures taken against Qatar were not carried out through the GCC's decision-making mechanisms, thus highlighting the volatility and vulnerability of the organization and raising serious questions about its future role as a collective group.

More significantly, though, the GCC is involved in a number of strategic dialogues and trade and economic negotiations with international partners including the United States, the EU, China, India, Turkey, and others. With a disunited GCC, these international negotiations and dialogues have become hard to pursue, causing puzzlement and disenchantment among the alliance's global interlocutors. The crisis has also caused a disruption in international trade, especially among international firms that have gained a presence in a GCC member state but operate across the GCC's common market rules.¹⁷ Even more alarming to international business is how the blockading states are using their economic clout to pressure corporations not to deal with Qatar (HSBC, mentioned above, is a case in point).

The Effect on Qatar's Relations with Turkey and Iran

Initial fears over food shortages precipitated by the blockade, coupled with Qatar's heavy reliance on imports, have been countered with a strengthening of Doha's ties with Turkey and Iran. Both countries supplied essential food and water aid in the early days of the crisis.¹⁸ Qatar's bilateral relations with Turkey have grown deeper in recent years as evidenced by Doha's purchase of military drones and armored vehicles from Ankara, the strengthening of economic ties, and the establishment of a Turkish military base in Qatar. Despite Turkey's initial efforts to act as a mediator, the Gulf crisis has only served to consolidate its bilateral relations with Qatar. On June 7, 2017, Turkey's parliament authorized fast-tracking the deployment of 3,000-5,000 Turkish troops to a military base in Qatar in order to assist with internal security and potential popular unrest.¹⁹

The blockade has also had the unintended effect of strengthening Qatar's relations with Iran. Qatar had withdrawn its ambassador to Tehran in retaliation for the January 2016 attacks on Saudi diplomatic missions in Iran, though an announcement was made on August 23, 2017 that Qatar would be returning its ambassador to Tehran.²⁰ Additionally, Iran has allowed Qatar's national airline the use of its air space in the face of the ATQ's air blockade, and Qatar's foreign ministry issued a statement indicating a willingness to improve bilateral relations with Iran.²¹ Iran will no doubt be seeking to capitalize on the infighting and disunity among the GCC states by strengthening its economic and diplomatic ties with the smaller GCC states—to the detriment of Saudi Arabia's regional hegemonic ambitions.

Implications for Regional Security and Counterterrorism Cooperation

Given the strategic importance of the Gulf, regional security and the maintenance of a balance of power are of utmost importance to the international community—and particularly to global powers like the United States, a guarantor of Gulf security. Qatar is an indispensable part of the regional security system and regional balance of power, and it is especially important to the United States as Washington depends heavily on Qatar for operational purposes in the region. The United States has two strategically important bases in Qatar: Al-Udeid Air Base and As-Sayliyah Army Base.²²

Al-Udeid is the largest American overseas air base with two active runways capable of handling any type of aircraft as well as fueling and ammunition storage facilities. It is exclusively Qatar-funded. The base also houses the forward headquarters of US Special Operations Command Central (SOCCENT) and US Air Force Central Command (AFCENT) with their advanced command-and-control infrastructures.²³ Camp As-Sayliyah, on the other hand, serves as a forward logistics facility for an Army armored brigade and has some warehouses. Essential facilities for operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, these bases are not easily replaced or relocated.²⁴

The Qatar crisis has created an urgent quest for determining the future contours of the Gulf security system. Any alteration of the GCC structure may result in a total rearrangement of power in the region, which could consequently affect US regional interests. As a major player, the United States seeks to remain capable of administering power in the region, providing regional security assurance, and maintaining the regional balance of power. The ongoing crisis adds more complications to what is already a challenging and volatile environment.

It is generally believed that a united and cooperative GCC is in the best interest of the United States both for security of the region and counterterrorism cooperation—and as a bulwark against Iranian expansion in the region. By instigating the crisis, Saudi Arabia has alienated a key ally not just in its struggle against Iranian-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen but in the region as whole. A disunited GCC and a breakdown in relations and dialogue between its member states present an obstruction to achieving coordinated multilateral efforts in Libya, Iraq, and Syria as well, and thus a significant blow to regional security and stability that has wider international implications.²⁵

The GCC and Regional and International Dynamics in MENA

At present, the MENA region is facing a difficult period of severe political instability, fragmentation, polarization, and sectarianism. There are even cases of failing states. The preexisting political instability, augmented by the Arab uprisings that began

in 2011, has caused major security concerns throughout the region. Popular uprisings and political upheaval have resulted in acute state dysfunctions and the emergence of security vacuums in Libya, Syria, Somalia, and Yemen, while Iraq is still reeling from the consequences of the 2003 US invasion. Egypt, the largest and perhaps the most pivotal Arab country, is facing serious economic, political, and security challenges under the military rule of the Sisi government.

These adverse conditions have caused grave suffering to the people of the Middle East, spurring a further rise of radicalization, terrorism, and displacement. The situation of refugees, who are fleeing their homes in search of refuge in Europe and elsewhere, increases tensions and exacerbates global security concerns.

Given the structural fall in oil prices and the resulting decrease in government revenues, there is less available money from the Gulf to invest in or assist the MENA region to help it recover from the current crises. The inadequate financial pledges to rebuild Iraq provide a recent example.²⁶ The GCC states' financial surpluses are now being spent largely to meet their own budget deficits and the associated costs of the intra-GCC feud, including buying expensive weapons in a bid to gain political support for their respective positions.

Intra-GCC conflict and disunity have offered further opportunities for other regional and international powers to gain an extra foothold in this tumultuous and strategic region. The longer the GCC conflict persists, the more external allies become preoccupied and entangled in this feud; this diverts their attention from aiding other countries in the region.

Unprecedented attacks on state sovereignty have spread uncertainty and mistrust on both domestic and regional levels while political insecurity and the rolling back of US influence in the region have paved the way for regional and international powers to exert their authority and compete for regional dominance. Iran, Turkey, Israel, and Russia, for example, have found ample room to maneuver and interfere in regional politics, leading to new reconfigurations of power and perhaps altering the existing political structures, redrawing political maps, and splitting loyalties.

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