

The Qatari Crisis: Are Arabs Supposed to Unite or Fight Each Other?

HAMZAOUI Ahlem,
Maitre-Assistante A,
Université Badji Mokhtar , Annaba
Algérie.
bh.ahlem19@gmail.com

Abstract

The Arab world is witnessing a series of revolutions and conflicts in many Arab countries. The Arab Spring that took place in the late 2010 led to significant changes in the regimes of a considerable number of Arab countries and had dramatically transformed the political landscape of Arab countries. These seismic changes in the Arab world created new geopolitical dynamics, regional instability and great uncertainty. In 2017, a new crisis emerged in the horizon when Saudi Arabia and its allies (United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Egypt and Yemen) cut diplomatic relations with Qatar and impose a de facto blockade of the country which foreboding catastrophic consequences on the region. This is the most serious diplomatic crisis between Gulf Arab states for decades. It is taking place in a specific context; just after US President Donald Trump specified on 21 May the orientations of his foreign policy in the Middle East. Tensions between Saudi Arabia and its allies on one hand, and Qatar on the other hand, would escalate and worsen the situation rather than figuring out a midway solution to their conflicts.

Key words: Saudi Arabia, Qatar, crisis, diplomatic relations, blockade, escalation

ملخص

شهد العالم العربي سلسلة من الثورات والصراعات في العديد من الدول العربية. أدى الربيع العربي الذي حدث في أواخر عام 2010 إلى تغييرات كبيرة في أنظمة عدد كبير من الدول العربية وقام بتحويل المشهد السياسي للدول العربية بشكل مثير. هذه التغييرات الزلزالية في العالم العربي خلقت ديناميكيات جيوسياسية جديدة ، وعدم استقرار إقليمي وعدم يقين كبير. في عام 2017 ، ظهرت أزمة جديدة في الأفق عندما قطعت المملكة العربية السعودية وحلفاؤها (الإمارات العربية المتحدة والبحرين ومصر واليمن) العلاقات الدبلوماسية مع قطر. وفرضوا حصارا واقعيًا على البلاد ، مما قد يؤدي إلى عواقب كارثية على المنطقة. تعتبر هذه الأزمة أخطر أزمة دبلوماسية بين دول الخليج العربي منذ عقود. إنها تحدث في سياق محدد ؛ فقط بعد أن حدد الرئيس الأمريكي دونالد ترامب في 21 مايو اتجاهات سياسته الخارجية في الشرق الأوسط. التوترات بين المملكة العربية السعودية وحلفائها من جهة ، وقطر من ناحية أخرى ، من شأنها أن تصعيد وتزيد الوضع سوءًا بدلاً من إيجاد حل وسط لصراعاتهم.

الكلمات الدالة: السعودية- قطر - الأزمة-العلاقات الدبلوماسية- الحصار -التصعيد

Introduction

The Middle East was always a region of upheavals and conflicts and the Persian Gulf States is no exception. Though the Gulf countries are united under the “Gulf Cooperation Council” which is a cooperation of several “Arab gulf” monarch states, but they do not have the same foreign policy. On the 5 June 2017; Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Egypt and Bahrain announced a severance of diplomatic ties and closure of transport links with Qatar, swiftly leading to a number of measures being imposed on Qatari nationals and entities. The previous countries accuse and condemn Qatar under the ground of loyalty to Iran, Doha’s support for radical Islamic movements that the Gulf countries believe threaten their stability and dominion. The Gulf countries are also making a statement about Al-Jazeera, the Qatari media group, which they perceive to be undermining their sovereignty. None of these accusations is new. This paper addresses the following questions: what are Qatar’s regional and foreign relations? What are the causes of Qatar’s crisis? And what are the consequences of this crisis on Qatar and on the region?

1. Background

Qatar achieved full independence from the United Kingdom on the 3rd of September 1971. The Arab states were among the first to recognize Qatar, and the country gained admittance to the United Nations and the Arab League in the same year. Qatar established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, and Communist China in 1988. The country was an early member of OPEC and a founding member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Over the past two decades, Qatar has grown its international profile and punched above its weight in international affairs. It has been very confident of itself and believes that it has the capacity to adopt an independent foreign policy. The country is a member of numerous international organizations and maintains bilateral relations around the globe because, as Islam Hassan Research Analyst at the Center for International and Regional Studies- Georgetown University in Qatar argues “the monarchy believes that a way of regime survival here is to have recognition on the regional and international level”. Qatar also uses its massive wealth to purchase influence abroad; its state-funded news media company Al Jazeera serves as a means of exerting international soft power. Qatar buys influence in Western countries through investments and donations.

2. Multilateral Relations

Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani, the Emir of Qatar from 1995 to 2013, helped establish Qatar’s reputation as an influential player in Middle East politics. The first major move in this regard was the founding of Al Jazeera, a state-owned news media company. Qatar has also cultivated close relationships with Western powers, particularly the United States and the United Kingdom. Al Udeid Air Base hosts American and British air forces. Qatar has invested extensively in London real estate, and the country has also made donations to prominent research centers in the United States. At the same time, Qatar maintains ties to Western adversaries, including Iran, Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood, and extremist elements in Syria.

3. Regional Relations

According to American sociologist and historical social scientist Immanuel Wallerstein, “Qatar is seeking to become a major regional player in Middle East politics.”. Wallerstein has argued in the same passage that “Qatar aimed to do the same in the Syrian Civil War, and has provided support to extremist elements in Syria”. Qatar and Saudi Arabia are competing for influence in regional politics. Qatar has been influential in political and religious upheavals in the Middle East. Qatar supported several rebel groups during the Arab Spring financially and by asserting global influence through its expanding news group, Al Jazeera. Qatar’s support for the Muslim Brotherhood and allied groups throughout the Middle East, as well as positions taken by Al Jazeera has led to increasing tensions with other Gulf States. On March 5th 2014, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain withdrew their ambassadors from Qatar in protest at what they claimed was Qatar’s non-compliance with a November 2013 agreement not to “interfere” in countries’ internal affairs. In March 2014, Qatar made overtures to Oman in order to counteract the influence of Saudi Arabia on politics in the region. In April 2017, an alleged hack of state media led to stories quoting the Emir as enquiring US resentment towards Iran and remarking on Hamas. Doha reported it as false and gave no indication of where it originated. However, news organizations in the region reported the Emir’s comments as fact. This led to Saudi Arabia, UAE, Yemen, Egypt and Bahrain cutting diplomatic ties with Qatar on June 5th, 2017.

4. Foreign Relations in the Middle-East

4.1. Bahrain

The territorial disputes with Bahrain over the Hawar Islands and the maritime boundary were solved by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague. In the 2001 decision, Bahrain kept the Hawar Islands and Qit’atJaradah but dropped claims to Janan Island and Zubarah on mainland Qatar, while Qatar retained significant maritime areas and their resources. On March 5th, 2014, Bahrain withdrew its

ambassadors from Qatar to protest Qatar's non-compliance with a November 2013 agreement not to "interfere" in countries' internal affairs. The widely accepted cause for this move was Qatar's support for the organization, the Muslim Brotherhood. On June 3rd, 2017, the Twitter account of Bahraini foreign minister Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa was hacked in a Qatari cyber attack. Two days later, on the 5th, June 2017, Bahrain announced that it would cut ties with Qatar. Hassan argues that "in so far as Bahrain is concerned, the small Kingdom has been toeing the Saudi foreign policy for the past couple of years. It seems that their severing of ties with Qatar was mainly an answer to a Saudi call" (qtd. in Dickinson 78).

4.2. Iran

Qatar and Iran have close ties. Both are members of OPEC, the Non-Aligned Movement, and the Organization of the Islamic Conference. Unlike fellow GCC member states, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, Qatar generally refrains from criticizing Iran's domestic and foreign activities. Qatar has also held several high-level meetings with Iranian officials to discuss security and economic agreements. Iran and Qatar have a close economic relationship, particularly in the oil and gas industries. Iran and Qatar jointly control the world's largest gas field. In addition to ties in the oil and natural gas arena, Iran and Qatar also cooperate in the shipping sector. In January 2016, as a result of the attack on the Saudi diplomatic missions in Iran by Iranian protesters, Qatar recalled its ambassador to Tehran, claiming that the attack was "in violation of international charters and norms". On August 23rd, 2017, it was announced that Qatar would be returning its ambassador to Iran.

4.3. Iraq

Following the 1990–91 Gulf War, in which Qatar and Iraq were on opposing sides, Qatar closed its embassy in Baghdad. Relations gradually improved between the two countries in the late 1990s. Qatar reopened its embassy for the first time twenty-five years in mid-2015, and in September 2015, appointed its ambassador to Iraq.

4.4. Kuwait

In 1990, at the beginning of the Gulf War, Qatar was among the Arab countries to condemn Iraq's occupation of Kuwait. It also pledged military support to Kuwait. Qatari soldiers participated in the Battle of Khafji, the first major ground engagement in the Gulf War. Amir Sabah Al-Sabah was recognized as chief mediator of the 2017 Qatari diplomatic crisis. Kuwait's neutrality and good relations with both parties were the main reasons behind its status as mediator.

4.5. Oman

Oman became the main transit gateway to Qatar after several Arabian Gulf countries cut sea routes to Qatar during the 2017 Qatar diplomatic crisis. Following the onset of the crisis in June 2017, most Qatari-destined goods flowed through the Port of Salah and Sohar. Two direct shipping lines between these two ports and Qatar's Hamad Port were launched the same month. When Qatar Airways were banned from Saudi airspace, Oman stepped in and transported Saudi-based Qataris back to Doha. At the official level, Oman remained uninvolved in the dispute, but its status as an alternative transit route has helped Qatar bypass the blockade imposed by its neighbors. The volume of trade between Qatar and Oman in 2016 was valued at \$814 million.

4.6. Saudi Arabia

In September 1992, tensions arose between Qatar and Saudi Arabia when Saudi forces allegedly attacked a Qatari border post, resulting in the death of two Qatari soldiers and the imprisonment of a third. Since then, relations have improved, and a joint commission has been set up to demarcate the border as agreed between the two governments. Most, but not all, of the border issues have now been resolved. In 2002, Saudi Arabia withdrew its ambassador from Doha due to some reservations over Al

Jazeera content. It was not until 2008 that Saudi Arabia reinstated its ambassador to Qatar. On March 5th, 2014, Saudi Arabia withdrew its ambassador from Qatar to protest Qatar's non-compliance with a November 2013 agreement mentioned above.

4.6.1. Saudi-Qatari Rift of 2014

During a March 2014 meeting of the Gulf Cooperation Council, after which the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain announced the recall of their ambassadors to Qatar. Some economists have interpreted the 2014 Saudi–Qatari rift as the tangible political sign of a growing economic rivalry between oil and natural gas producers, which could have “deep and long-lasting consequences” beyond the Middle East-North Africa area.

4.6.2. Qatar–Saudi Arabia Proxy Conflict

The Qatar–Saudi Arabia proxy conflict, sometimes referred to as the Second Arab Cold War, is the ongoing struggle for regional influence between the monarchies of Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Qatar–Saudi Arabia relations have been especially strained since the beginning of the Arab Spring, which left a power vacuum both states sought to fill, with Qatar being supportive of the revolutionary wave and Saudi Arabia opposing it. Both states are allies of the United States, and have avoided direct conflict with one another. Qatar has had differences with other Arab governments on a number of issues: it broadcasts Al Jazeera; it is accused of maintaining good relations with Iran; and it has supported the Muslim Brotherhood in the past. The tensions may be seen as a subset of the Iran–Saudi Arabia proxy conflict due to Saudi Arabia's longstanding concern about the country's relationship with Iran and Iranian-backed militant groups. However, Qatar also sent its forces to fight against alleged Iranian-backed militias in the current Yemeni Civil War and has supported rebels fighting the Iranian-allied government of Bashar al-Assad in the Syrian Civil War, though these rebels were often at odds with other GCC-funded groups. Qatar was also expelled from the anti-Houthi coalition. Qatar's defense minister Khalid bin Mohammed Al Attiyah called the blockade akin to a bloodless declaration of war and Qatar's finance minister Ali Sharif Al Emadi stated that Qatar is rich enough to withstand the blockade. On August 24th, 2017, Qatar announced that they would restore full diplomatic relations with Iran. On June 5th, 2017, Saudi Arabia cut diplomatic relations with Qatar. The move was followed by a number of other countries in the region and beyond.

4.7. United Arab Emirates (UAE)

In 1995, after Hamad bin Khalifa deposed his father to become emir of Qatar, UAE granted asylum to the deposed Khalifa bin Hamad. Qatar accused UAE, along with Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, of plotting against the new emir, to which the accused countries denied all charges. Several hundred arrests were made in relation to the incident throughout the next two years, and in February 1996, the Qatari Amir Guard was mobilized. The UAE was one of the three countries which withdrew their ambassadors from Qatar in 2014. On the 5th June 2017, UAE cuts diplomatic ties with Qatar, giving the country's diplomats 48 hours to leave the country. Hassan yet again argues that “there has been always competition between al-Nahyans of Abu Dhabi and al-Thanis of Qatar”. This competition goes back to the 1800s. The Arab uprisings ushered a new chapter in the Qatari-Emirati competition. The competition led to the Emiratis playing a major role in the withdrawal of ambassadors from Qatar in 2014. At the beginning of the current diplomatic crisis, particularly after the hacking saga, UAE was trying to maintain the problem. Yet, Al-Jazeera's publishing of Yousuf al-Otaiba's leaked emails got the UAE on board with Saudi Arabia.

5. Foreign Relations in Other Continents

5.1. Egypt

Bilateral relations first began with Egypt in 1972. Lately, relations have not been at its best. Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar, has described the 2013 political transition in

Egypt as a “military coup”. It is worth mentioning that the main problem between the two governments is the Qatari support to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. The Egyptian government, along with those of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates, broke off diplomatic relations with Qatar on 5th, June 2017. The Egyptian Foreign Ministry announced that it was closing its air and sea ports to Qatari transportation. The Egyptian, Saudi, Bahraini, and Emirati governments cited Qatar’s continuing support for “terrorism”, such as the Muslim Brotherhood. In this concern, Al-Rasheed, Madawi declares that “Egypt has had troubled relations with Qatar for many years, except of Mohamed Morsi’s period in power. The Egyptian government has seen Qatar as a source of instability. The Egyptian regime also sees that Qatar challenges its rule by financing the Muslim Brotherhood, and other organizations, which the regime has outlawed and consider terrorist organizations. Thus, the Egyptian regime has been trying to push back on Qatar by any means. The current issue between the Saudi bloc and Qatar seemed to be an opportunity to put pressure on Qatar to stop financing the Muslim Brotherhood, its affiliates, and supporters, and to support the Sisi regime.

5.2. United States

Qatar–United States relations are bilateral relations. They are strategic allies. Beginning in 1992, Qatar has built intimate military ties with the United States, and is now the location of U.S. Central Command’s Forward Headquarters and the Combined Air Operations Center. As of 2015, the following American bases currently exist Al Udeid Air Base, and As Sayliyah Army Base. In 2003, the US military base Doha International Air Base (also known as Camp Snoopy) was closed. Former US Defense Secretary Robert Gates stated in May 2017 that “he doesn’t know instances in which Qatar aggressively goes after (terror finance) networks of Hamas, the Taliban, Al-Qaeda,” and that “my attitudes toward Al-Udeid and any other facility is that the United States military doesn’t have any irreplaceable facility”. Qatar hosts the largest American base in the Middle East, the Al Udeid Air Base, which has been used by the United States in its campaigns in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan. In 2014, the United States sold \$11 billion worth of arms to Qatar, including AH-64 Apache attack helicopters and Patriot and Javelin defense systems. In June 2017, Qatar signed a \$12 billion deal to buy 36 F-15QA strike aircraft from the United States, with Boeing as the prime contractor on the sale. Furthermore, Qatar donated \$100 million in aid to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina ravaged the Gulf Coast in August 2005. When Hurricane Harvey hit the state of Texas from August to September 2017, Qatar’s ambassador announced on September 8th that the country would be donating \$30 million in aid to help rebuild Texas.

5.3. Russia

On 26th December 1991, Qatar recognized the Russian Federation as the successor state to the Soviet Union, after the latter’s dissolution. Russia has an embassy in Doha, and Qatar has an embassy in Moscow. The current Ambassador of Russia to Qatar is Andrey Vladimirovich Andreyev, who was appointed by President Vladimir Putin on July 17th, 2005. The current Ambassador of Qatar to Russia is Ahmed Saif Al-Midhadi, who appointed his Letters of Credence to Russian President Dmitry Medvedev on February 27th, 2009. Relations became strained after Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev was assassinated in Qatar on 13th, February 2004. On the third anniversary of Yandarbiyev's death, Russian President Vladimir Putin traveled to Qatar on a state visit, where he was received by the Emir of Qatar Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani. On November 29th, 2011, Russian Ambassador to Qatar, Vladimir Titorenko, was allegedly assaulted by Qatar airport security and customs officers when he refused to have his valise scanned at the airport. Relations again became strained on February 7th, 2012, when reportedly, after a diplomat from Qatar warned Russia of losing the support of the Arab League about the upcoming resolution on the Syrian uprising, which Russia and China later vetoed, the answer came harsh from Russian ambassador Vitaly Churkin who replied “ if you talk to me like that, there will be

no Qatar today.” and boasted about Russian military superiority over Qatar. Later, Russia denied all these accusations. Russian and Qatari gas producers agree to develop oil refineries in Yamal Peninsula along with halal reindeer meat. On February 12th, 2007 was the framework of the official program of the visit to Qatar of the President of Russian Federation Vladimir Putin signed an Agreement to establish a Russian-Qatari Business Council. Chairman of the Russian-Qatari business Council is a Russian businessman Akhmet Palankoev.

5.4. Turkey

The history of bilateral relations between Qatar and Turkey dated back to the 1970s. In the 1980s, both nations began signing bilateral agreements with one another. Relations gained further traction in the 2000s with the signing of a further number of bilateral agreements. Qatar and Turkey share similar positions on the Syrian Civil War and the Egyptian Crisis. The two formed a single bloc in the Syrian Civil War and supported the same rebel groups. In the Egyptian Crisis, both Turkey and Qatar were opposed to Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's leadership. Their coordination in regional politics has been described as an alliance. It was announced that Turkey and Qatar agreed to establish a cooperation council called “High-level Strategic Cooperation Council” on January 19th, 2015. In 2015, during a Turkish presidential visit to Qatar, Tamim bin Hamad and Tayyip Erdoğan announced the planned creation of a Turkish military base in Qatar; the first for Turkey in the Persian Gulf.

6. The Causes of Qatar Crisis

The primary long term cause of the crisis between the Saudi-led camp and the government of Qatar is Doha's funding and political support for politically active and sometimes violent Islamist groups, often affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood. Qatar's GCC allies feel threatened by the potential influx of secretive organizations, extreme religious attitudes, and political activism; in terms of the threat these groups pose, the Saudi-led camp believes there is little difference between the Brotherhood and the more overtly violent extremist groups they face. Despite Saudi, Egyptian, and Emirati objections and the fact that it is the politically and militarily weaker party, Qatar has continued to support its Islamist allies, and for several reasons: genuine ideological affinity; a sense, at least until recently, that political Islam was an ascendant force in the region; a drive to boost its global influence by being able to engage with these groups on behalf of the international community; and a desire to challenge the status quo, including the rule of traditional Saudi allies.

Qatar's independent foreign policy and willingness to challenge Saudi leadership has consistently weakened the notion of a “Sunni Arab camp.” In addition, Qatar's use of the government-owned media outlet al-Jazeera to magnify the Muslim Brotherhood's influence throughout the Arab world and criticize leaders in Riyadh, Cairo, and Abu Dhabi has long been a serious thorn in regional relations. Already in 2002, Qatar's hostile media coverage of the Saudi government led Riyadh to recall its ambassador from Doha for six years. Saudi Arabia did so once again in 2014, along with the UAE and Bahrain, in response to criticism by Qatar-based and Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi of the Egyptian and Emirati governments.

Second, the Arab Spring which put the leadership and orientation of a number of regional states “up for grabs” stoked the regional competition among most of the Sunni monarchies, Iran, and the Islamists. In some cases, such as Syria, Iran was the main beneficiary. Rather than consolidating efforts among those opposed to both the Assad regime and ISIS and creating a cohesive moderate opposition force, the competition between Saudi Arabia and Qatar drove them to support different and often competing groups in Syria. For example, in the area surrounding Damascus, Riyadh funneled money and weapons to Jaysh al-Islam while Qatar supported its rival Faylaq al-Rahman. This disjointed effort served the interest of the Iran-backed Assad regime, which was agreeing to see rebel groups waste

blood and treasure on each other rather than on the regime, while at the same time providing further evidence for the claim that there was no unified opposition.

In other cases, where Iran's influence was minimal, the struggle between Doha and Riyadh resulted in greater instability and violence. For example, in Egypt, the Saudis supported the traditional military-political establishment while the Qataris supported the Muslim Brotherhood and its political organ, the Freedom and Justice Party. The rivalry between the Gulf States added fuel to the fire of an already bitter local struggle for power and the result has debilitated Egypt, the one-time leader of the Arab world. In Libya, the Saudis and Emiratis have supported secular military leaders like General Khalifa Hiftar, while the Qataris (and Turkey) backed Islamist groups based in Misrata, thereby fueling the Libyan civil war and creating an environment conducive to the growth of the Islamic State. This has had deadly consequences for Libya's neighbors, Tunisia, and Egypt, as well as repercussions hundreds of miles away in Europe.

Third, the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and its Gulf allies with Iran is raging. These are key trade and security partners in the West for decades and if they are divided and very nearly coming to military blows, in this zero-sum atmosphere, Iran stands to gain and the U.S. to lose, Saudi Arabia and the other quartet countries have little to fear for their economies from this crisis, though Qatar does. Elizabeth Dickinson, said "also, because the UAE is so interested in enforcing its demands on Qatar and curtailing its activities in the region, that makes the two countries eager to prove in this phase that they won't be giving up soon and can escalate if necessary".

Fourth, Trump's unqualified support for the Sunni monarchies and autocrats during his two-day visit to Riyadh emboldened the kingdom to start a second and, it hopes, final round in its confrontation with Qatar. Trump may not have intended to touch off this latest crisis when he aggressively demonized Iran and by implication the Shia as the source of all terrorism in the Middle East and North Africa. But his words were interpreted by the Saudis as enabling them to move against Qatar though it is home to a major US base.

7. The Consequences of Qatar Crisis

First, the surge of creative nationalism; the outpouring of nationalist sentiment in the Gulf certainly predates the current crisis, yet has been highlighted recently because of it. Indeed, in a June 2016 report, Kristin Smith Diwan, a senior resident scholar at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, identified a "new nationalism" in the Gulf, which "reflects the decline of the power of the welfare state to engender gratitude and loyalty" while also demonstrating "the elevated demands by and on citizens." Certainly with the passage of conscription laws in Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the introduction of greater austerity measures in the form of subsidy reductions, and the institution of VAT in 2018, the ruling bargain in the Gulf is changing. Nonetheless, the sense of national pride has strengthened. Although this nationalism initially seemed to reflect a sense of military pride and support for the Yemen war, enhanced by state-led efforts to host national events, it has morphed into a more grassroots expression of national commitment. The ongoing crisis and blockade have led to an unprecedented outpouring of nationalist support at the grassroots level.

While in the past, the state has introduced nationalist creative enterprises, for example through National Day celebrations, today they seem to be emerging more organically. GCC nationals are using both traditional and social media, from songs to cartoons, to express their support for their respective national leaders. The most noteworthy, a drawing of Tamim al-Majd by Qatari artist Ahmed bin Majed Almaadheed has gone viral in Qatar. In fact, many are using the drawing as an avatar for social media accounts, demonstrating their support for Emir Tamim. This image has become a springboard for similar political cartoons and drawings elsewhere.

Music has also been used to demonstrate national pride. The locally recorded “One Nation” (an anthem “in solidarity with Qatar”) was released in June and involved both local and international musicians. Its lyrics highlight Qatar’s strength and ends with the following lines: “We stand tall, above it all. Rain will fall, to plant the seeds that feed us all. We stand united, behind our leader with all our might. With you we rise, our nation’s pride.” Not to be outdone, Saudi label Rotana released a “disc track” entitled “Inform Qatar in September.” Songwriter Turki al-Sheikh, an advisor to the Saudi Royal Court, wrote the song, which was performed by seven famous Arab singers, including Saudis Abdul Majeed Abdullah and Mohammed Abdu. Rotana is owned primarily by Prince al-Waleed bin Talal of the ruling family. The song’s lyrics praise Saudi Arabia as “the epitome of might and enshrinement,” while accusing Qatar of “twenty years of scheming, treachery, and conspiracy.”

The traditional “nabati” poetry of the Arabian Peninsula has also become prominent in the Qatar crisis. In June Dubai ruler Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashed al-Maktoum published a poem entitled “The Clear Path” on his Instagram account. In it, he urges Qatar to return to the fold of its former GCC allies “of one origin, people, existence/one flesh and blood, one land and faith... Yet Qatar turns to the nearby stranger, to the weak”. As Andrew Leber notes, the tone of this latest poem differs greatly from that of Shaykh Mohammed bin Rashed’s 2014 “Promises,” which was published in Qatari and Emirati papers. “And I feel the entire Gulf is one country, one land, one wonderful Gulf, filled with honorable men. Descended from one line, the noblest men, nothing shall come between these purest of hearts”. Juxtaposing these two poems illustrates the acrimony that has developed during the second crisis, which apparently has informed citizens’ creative endeavors as well. Indeed, former Million’s Poet contestant Nasser al-Faraana posted a half-hour video on Google’s social media network YouTube on Qatar’s foreign policy, ending with a poem that stated: “By God, with you are the armies of the Christians, them and the apostates [Shi’ite] and the Jews are your friends.”

Second, the siege of Qatar is inextricably linked to the Islamist forces and armed militias in Libya. If the decision to boycott Qatar to cease its funding for terrorist elements in western and southern Libya succeeds, this means weakening the sources of these forces in their political and field interactions.

Regarding the list of terrorist entities associated with Qatar issued by Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, it included Libyan leaders opposed to Haftar and the eastern alliances in general, such as the former Mufti Sadeq al-Ghareani, Abdul Hakim Belhadj, head of the Salafist Party and one of Qatar’s main men since the fall of Qaddafi, Sheikh Ali al-Sababi, who represents the most important and financial link between Doha and the militias and streams of political Islam.

Alongside his brother Ismail al-Sababi, the pair founded several terrorist armed militias, including the Benghazi Defense Brigades, Raf Allah al-Sahati, and the 17 February Battalions, or as the Libyans jokingly call them, “17 Ferrar”, due to their generous Qatari support. In addition, Mehdi Al-Harati, the deputy head of the military council in Tripoli, was accused of coordinating the transportation of terrorists from inside Libya to Syria to fight against the Assad regime.

Third, the direction of Western policies to establish the balance between Al-Sarraj and Haftar is also to be noted. With the weakening of the alliances of western Libya, whether through advancing of the Libyan National Army or weakening of the Qatari regime, this may reinforce Western policies to build a stronger working relationship between Haftar and Al-Sarraj. The Europeans, who have been betting on the support of the Al-Sarraj government in western Libya to form a security backbone to protect the Mediterranean Sea from threats of terrorism and illegal immigration, are now convinced that it is hard to ignore Haftar in the equation of Libyan power. The Libyan National Army’s progress towards the South and the centre, and its proximity to Tripoli and the Libyan West in general, pose a threat to the centre of the weight of European interests, particularly the British and Italian. The latter entered into an

agreement with Al-Sarraj in February 2017 to reduce the threat of illegal migration across the Mediterranean.

Moreover, the repercussions of political chaos in western Libya have affected the U.K. itself, most notably with the recent terrorist attack on a concert hall in Manchester, carried out by a Libyan named Salman al-Obeidi that later was discovered to have prepared for the operation mainly from Tripoli. The European trend is backed by the Trump policy, which, despite its vagueness, indicates that the initial indications are open to the two camps in eastern and western Libya. It is true that Washington supports the Libyan National Army's progress in the fight against terrorism in eastern Libya, but it has balanced it by also communicating with Al-Sarraj government. This was evident during the visit of U.S. Ambassador Peter Bodde and General Thomas Waldhauser, commander of the United States Command in Africa (AFRICOM), to Tripoli on May 23rd, 2017, where the American ambassador stated that Washington was committed to the Government of Reconciliation in Libya and also praised the defeat of IS by pro-government forces.

The same is true for Russia. In spite of its inclination to Haftar as part of its policy of restoring the influence and interests it lost in the Mediterranean country following the fall of the Qaddafi regime, Moscow has also given occasional references to its contacts with the leaders of the Libyan West. Given this stance, in February 2017 Al-Sarraj demanded that it plays the role of mediator, especially with its influence and contacts with the alliances of eastern Libya.

Fourth, the weakening of Qatar's role in Libya will affect the policies of other regional powers, such as Algeria and Tunisia, which have close relations with Islamist factions and militias in western Libya linked to Qatari financing, particularly Belhadj.

The tendency of the balance of power to be in favor of the alliances of the Libyan East in the South and West regions, which are of strategic importance to Algerian and Tunisian security, may lead to the acceleration of these regional powers to absorb Haftar within the security zone in the troubled Sokhirat agreement to ensure that it does not extend its influence towards the capital, Tripoli. The dilemmas of that agreement, which impeded the Government of Reconciliation's attainment of the confidence of the House of Representatives, were concentrated in Article VIII of the additional provisions in the agreement. This transferred the powers of the security posts of the Prime Minister's office and effected the immediate marginalization of Haftar, which was rejected by Alliances of the East.

This regional influence is heightened by the fears of both Algeria and Tunisia that the rules of the regional game in Libya will be changed for the benefit of Egypt and the U.A.E. which seek to reinforce the strength of their allies in the East, centre and South. Nowhere is this clearly than the Egyptian air strikes in Derna and Jafra in response to the Minya terrorist incident of May 26, 2017. The concern of Libya's North African neighbors manifested when the foreign ministers of Egypt, Tunisia and Algeria met in Algiers after more than a week of Egyptian air strikes in Libya, to produce a trilateral statement confirming Libya's unity, a comprehensive political dialogue and a rejection of outside interference.

Conclusion

The Qatar crisis is a major issue in the Middle East and the global arena. If the conflict persists and gets more complicated, one could witness the *near*-crumbling of the GCC, as well as the region, more along the regional fault lines which first erupted with Qatari support to Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt after the fall of Hosni Mubarak in 2011. At the same time, there are chances that Qatar, in the aftermath of this diplomatic standoff, could move closer to Turkey and Iran, which could reshape the entire geopolitical map of West Asia.

The isolation of Qatar is widely being taken as a clear message from Saudi Arabia that in the new order, no softness on Iran or support to radical extremist/terrorist organizations would be tolerated. This

act also projects the self-assuredness of the Trump administration on its policies and stance against Iran—by punishing those who may seem sympathetic to Iran.

The White House tenant unambiguously aligned himself with Saudi Arabia's fiercely anti-Iranian position, in the name of the "war on terror". Though Qatar is a part and parcel of the GCC but other Gulf countries mainly Saudi Arabia, United Emirates and Egypt preferred to cut their diplomatic relations with it claiming that the country is financing the terrorist groups which pose threat to the region's security. Qatar was always financing those groups and the entire world including the GCC was witnessing that and keeping silent. So, why the three previous countries decide to react very late? Belonging to the same region or even religion does not make any sense or difference. Each individual state is defending its own interests according to the new geopolitical order which poses threat to some countries of the GCC.

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