

**Forum:** Political Committee

**Issue:** Controlling the sanctioning of Qatar as a means of ensuring political sovereignty

**Student Officer:** Yağız Erdoğan

**Position:** Deputy Chair

## Introduction

On Tuesday, May 23, 2017, the website of Qatar's official media organization, Qatar News Agency, was hacked, along with other websites belonging to the Qatari government. Through the website, the hackers published statements falsely attributed to Qatar's Emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani. In these seemingly official statements, the leader of Qatar had expressed support for Iran, Israel, Hezbollah, and Hamas. Despite the Qatari government's direct denial of the statements and announcement that its websites were hacked, government-controlled news organizations throughout the Arab world, most prominently the Saudi-owned Al-Arabiya and Emirates-based Sky News Arabia, publicised the statements, attributing them to the Emir of Qatar. The day after the hack, the website of Qatar-owned Al Jazeera News was blocked in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Less than a month after the initial incident, a group of Gulf and Arab countries consisting of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Egypt, and Yemen cut all diplomatic relations with Qatar. An embargo over the land, sea, and air soon followed, and was implemented by all nations surrounding Qatar, except for Iran.

This incident, however, was only one in a series that led to the diplomatic breakdown. Qatar had previously been accused of supporting terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq, as well as interfering in the domestic affairs of fellow Gulf countries. It also had a foreign policy that differs from other Sunni Arab countries, favoring positive relations with Iran, a Shia-majority country. All of these were cited as reasons by the blockading countries as justification for their actions against Qatar.

Currently, the blockade has lasted for almost two years, and has greatly disrupted Qatar's socioeconomic position. It has exacerbated the preexistent diplomatic conflict between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, turning it into an all-out sanction/blockade. But despite its considerable impacts, the diplomatic crisis has not led to the country's economic nor political collapse. The government has used its vast reserve funds, and increased imports from regional partners such as Turkey and Iran, to counteract supply shortages caused by the blockade. Nevertheless, Qatar has seen its tourism revenue go down, and its credit rating downgraded. And even though the crisis might not be a fatal one, it certainly contributes to rising tensions and polarization within not only the Gulf region, but the Middle

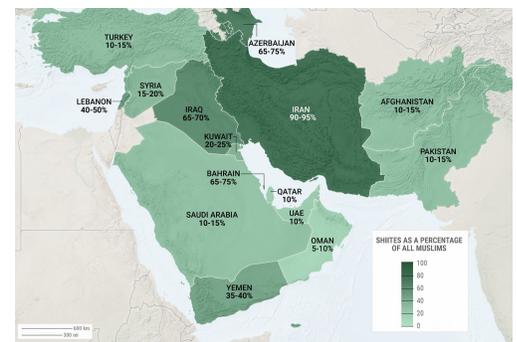


Figure 1: Shia as a percentage of total population

East as a whole. It is an issue that the UN is yet to address, and it does not seem to be solving itself any time soon.

## Definition of Key Terms

**Sunni Islam:** Sunni Islam is one of the two major denominations of Islam. Around 85 to 90% of all Muslims are said to adhere to the Sunni faith.

**Shia Islam:** The second of the two major Islamic denominations, Shia Muslims make around 10 to 15% of all Muslims worldwide. These groups are mostly concentrated in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon and Azerbaijan.

**Sectarianism:** Defined as discrimination based on religious sect, sectarianism is often characterised by conflicts between the sects or between different denominations of the same religion. Sectarian division and violence has played a major role in establishing political alliances and rivalries, and shaping the geopolitical environment of the Middle East in the modern world.

**Bloc:** An alliance between a group of countries, non-state actors, or both, with common interests. It may also be used to denote a group of actors with common goals, but without a formal alliance. A bloc is not necessarily defined by its participants, as is the case with its usage in this report.

**Blockade:** An effort to completely cut off the transportation of people and goods, through both physically isolating a nation and applying sanctions. This might come in the form of blocking naval access, shutting down land border crossings, or restricting surrounding airspace.

**Embargo:** An official ban on trade with a country, in order to exert financial pressure. It differs from a blockade in that an embargo is a legal act concerning economics and transactions, and can be applied by any country that has trade relations with the target country, whereas a blockade can only be implemented by physically adjacent countries.

**Sanction:** An economic or military-related coercive measure, applied to a state or non-state actor, with the aim of making them conform to the demands of the sanctioning nation(s). In the context of international diplomacy, a sanction can either be applied by states on their own, or it can be applied by the UN Security Council as a whole, mandating all UN Member States to comply. A sanction differs from both an embargo and a blockade, in that it can be applied by a nation with no direct economic ties or borders with the nation receiving the sanctions.

**Proxy conflict:** A conflict and/or aggression between two or more parties who project political disputes between them onto relatively less powerful nations, with the aim of not confronting each other directly, through the employment of satellite states and proxy forces (governments, militias etc.) to become indirectly involved in the conflict. The prime example of a proxy conflict would be the Cold War, where the United States of America (USA) and the Union of Soviet

Socialist Republics (USSR) projected their power onto factions of civil wars in countries such as Afghanistan, Vietnam and Korea, to avoid Mutually Assured Destruction. A proxy conflict may also be called a proxy war, or a cold war (a generic term, not the Cold War).

**Arab World:** An often used phrase to refer to a collective group of countries with Arab-majority populations, namely Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Yemen. Not to be confused with the Muslim World, which would also include countries like Iran and Indonesia.

**Arab Spring:** A series of demonstrations, protests and armed revolts against authoritarian regimes throughout the Arab World between 2010 and 2012, dubbed the “revolutionary wave.” The protests initially began in Tunisia and spread to Yemen, Bahrain, Syria, Libya, and Egypt, and the rest of the region. The Arab Spring left power vacuums in many countries, which were sought to be filled by regional powers such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Qatar. Saudi Arabia mostly supported incumbent regimes (except for Bashar Al-Assad in Syria), and Qatar mostly supported the revolutionary wave. Iran, opposing Saudi Arabia in every possible way, supported most revolutionary waves, but also the Shia-lead Assad government in Syria. This puts Qatar in a middle position between the two regional powers in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

**Arab Winter:** Referred to as the aftermath of the Arab Spring, the Arab Winter is characterised by the reversal of the moderate and anti-extremist values championed during the Arab Spring protests, and a return to authoritarianism, and violent Islamic extremism. The Arab Winter was when various events that started during the Arab Spring as peaceful demonstrations devolved into armed conflicts, among them the Iraqi Civil War (2014-2017), the Egyptian Crisis and military coup d'état that installed Abdel Fattah el-Sisi as president, the Libyan Crisis (2011-present) that turned into yet another civil war in 2014 after the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, the Syrian Civil War (2011-present) and the Yemeni Crisis and Civil War (2011-present).

**Wahhabism:** Wahhabism has formed as, and continued to be, the guiding force in Saudi Arabia to this day, as the agreement that has endured for almost 300 years guarantees the Al ash-Sheikh family with religious authority over the Sharia-ruled country.

**Nasserism:** An Arab nationalist, anti-imperialist, secular, socialist political ideology named after Gamal Abdel Nasser, the second President of Egypt. Its socialist aspect differed from Eastern Bloc socialist ideologies in that it was a form of Arab Socialism. It is characterised as a part of the Non-Aligned movement, and was a major force against the relatively more conservative ideology of Wahhabism during the Arab Cold War.

**Arab Cold War:** A term coined by Malcolm Kerr, it refers to a series of proxy conflicts within the Arab world between 1952 and the 1970s, with the two main belligerents of Saudi Arabia and Egypt. It can be seen as a regional equivalent to the US-USSR Cold War, of which it is

considered by many historians to be a part. The Arab Cold War was characterised by the conflicts between traditionalist, conservative monarchies and newly-established republics, those being the Wahhabist and Nasserist, respectively. The Wahhabist side was led by King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, included Jordan, Morocco, Oman, Bahrain, and Kuwait, and was supported by the US and the Baghdad Pact. The Nasserist side, on the other hand, was led by Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, included Syria, Algeria, Libya, Iraq, Yemen, Tunisia, Somalia, and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), and was supported by the USSR/Eastern Bloc. As a result of regime changes, many countries changed their sides throughout the conflict, including Syria (Wahhabist 1961-1963), Yemen (divided into two), Sudan (Nasserist in 1969-72), and Libya (Nasserist since 1969, Wahhabist before). The Arab Cold War ultimately resulted in the defeat of Nasserism after Nasser's death, and the resurgence of Islamism throughout the Arab world.

## **General Overview**

### **The Geopolitical Context of Differing Factions in the Middle East**

To understand diplomatic relations in the Middle East, the implications of the proxy conflicts between the two major blocs throughout the last few decades must be reviewed.

Even though there are varying definitions for these blocs, and neither is defined officially, the remainder of this report will refer to them as the "Sunni Bloc", lead by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the "Shia Bloc", lead by the Islamic Republic of Iran. The emergence of these two blocs can be traced back to the Iranian Revolution of 1979, where the US-supported Pahlavi Dynasty was overthrown by an anti-American, Islamic Republic. The US then improved its ties with Saudi Arabia (who still stands as a strategic ally) and with Saddam Hussein of Iraq (who the US later invaded). During this time period, Saudi Arabia and Iran consistently opposed each other in regional conflicts, such as the Lebanese Civil War and the Soviet-Afghan War.

Thus, the Middle East became another proxy conflict region for the more macrocosmic proxy war, the Cold War. It can be said that the Cold War, despite ending in the 20th Century, reflected itself upon the region on a smaller scale, resulting in a proxy conflict, namely that between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which still continues to this day. The Brookings Institute has referred to this conflict as the New Middle East Cold War (Gause), so-called because "Arab Cold War" was already widely used to refer to Wahhabist-Nasserist conflicts in 1950-1972.

As of 2019, the Sunni Bloc, lead by Saudi Arabia, includes the UN Member States of the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Jordan, Egypt, Hadi-led Yemen, Sudan, and Djibouti, and the proxy non-state actors of the People's Mujahedin of Iran (MEK), the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (KDPI), Jaysh al-Islam, Ahrar al-Sham, and the Ahvaz National Resistance. It is also supported by the United States and all NATO Members, except for Turkey. The Shia Bloc, lead by the Islamic Republic of Iran, includes the UN Member State of Syria, and the proxy non-state actors of Hezbollah, the Supreme Political Council in Yemen (also known as the Houthi Rebels), and the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF). It is also supported by Russia, and has ties to other

countries considered to be closer to the Russian/Eastern Bloc.

Qatar, who was categorised within the Sunni Bloc until 2017, currently does not fit into either of these blocs. However, Qatar's foreign policy always differed from other Sunni Bloc countries.

### **The Foreign Policy of Qatar**

In 1981, Qatar was a founding member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), founded as an economic/trade union. It constitutes the bulk of what has been referred to in this report as the Sunni Bloc. All of its members, including Qatar, have Sunni-led governments and Sunni majority populations. Despite these commonalities, however, Qatar has always distanced itself from other GCC Members, and has deliberately opposed Saudi Arabia, with the aim of emerging as a regional power on its own, rather than being a vassal state of Saudi Arabia in the Saudi-Iranian proxy conflict. This led to what has been dubbed the Qatar-Saudi Arabia diplomatic conflict, also referred to as the Second Arab Cold War (the First being the previously mentioned Nasserist-Wahhabist conflict).

This guiding aspect of Qatar's foreign policy was more or less put into place after June 1995, when a palace coup d'état was orchestrated by Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, who deposed his father and installed himself as the Emir of Qatar (Cockburn). Since then, Qatar has, for the most part, distanced itself from other GCC Members. It has pursued an independent foreign policy from other GCC countries, which have acted uniformly in conflicts throughout the Middle East. Critically, Qatar has maintained balanced relations with other nations, involved itself as a mediator in international disputes, and attempted to 'play all sides' in regional conflicts.

For instance, Qatar is home to the US CENTCOM headquarters, and the Al-Udeid Air Base, the largest US base in the Middle East. On the other hand, it simultaneously maintains good relations with the US's most prominent enemy in the Middle East: Iran. Despite this, Qatar has opposed Iran's position in Syria. Furthermore, Qatar has had diplomatic ties with Israel, but also directly funded the anti-Israel group Hamas. In this attempt at 'playing all sides', however, Qatar seems to have greatly damaged its relationship with GCC countries, who expect national cooperation against their rivals, namely the Shia Bloc and Iran (Nuruzzaman).

The most notable deviation of Qatar from other GCC countries is their tendency to maintain good relations with Iran. Their joint ownership of the South Pars/North Dome field, by far the largest oil and natural gas reserve in the world, and their joint support of Hamas, combined with Qatar's refusal to denounce Iran's actions relating to an uprising in Bahrain and their vote against a UNSC Resolution to denounce Iran's nuclear program (Resolution 1696, 31 July 2006, S/RES/1696), contributed to the divide between Qatar and its neighbours, so much so that Saudi Arabia withdrew its Ambassador in Doha between 2002 and 2008 in an attempt to restrain Qatar. Needless to say, Their actions to deter Qatar were not successful.

Qatar has not only maintained diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia's chief rival, Iran, but has also consistently supported the Muslim Brotherhood, a Sunni Islamist organization, denounced

as a terrorist organization by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain. The three countries had been wary of this support, since the Muslim Brotherhood, despite being a Sunni organization, was not adherent to the Wahhabist doctrine, meaning that they could disrupt the ultraconservative status quo of the three monarchies. Qatar has also been accused of supporting terrorist groups like ISIS, Al-Qaeda, and Jabhat al-Nusra. However, it has denied these accusations.

To sum up: Qatar's unwillingness to fit into the orthodox set of ideals practiced by the Sunni Bloc and the GCC, combined with their amicable relationship with Iran, and support for the Brotherhood and Hamas, have contributed to the underlying tensions between Qatar and its three neighbours, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain. These tensions, despite looming over Qatar's relationship with the three countries, had not caused direct hostility between them. Until the Arab Spring, that is.

### **Qatar and the Arab Spring**

Following the start of the Arab Spring, the Wahhabist countries of the GCC, namely Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain (referred to hereafter as the GCC Three), immediately took action to support the incumbent regimes in countries undergoing revolutions or civil wars. Afraid to lose their grip on power, Saudi and Emirati royal families sent troops to neighbouring Bahrain in 2011, where they successfully suppressed a pro-democracy uprising (Nuruzzaman). This was also seen as an extension of the Saudi-Iranian proxy conflict, since the rebel group in Bahrain was predominantly Shia. Saudi Arabia took similar actions throughout the Arab Spring, most notably with its operations against the Assad government in Syria. At the same time, Iran directly supported the Assad regime, and indirectly supported other pro-democracy uprisings.

Where does Qatar fit into all of this? Being a relatively stable state, (especially in contrast to others in the Gulf region like Bahrain), Qatar was able to play a major role in supporting anti-authoritarian uprisings during the Arab Spring (Ulrichsen). However, as was the case up until the Arab Spring, Qatar did not pick a definitive side between the US-supported Sunni and Russian-supported Shia Blocs. In Syria and Libya, Qatar supported and even spearheaded NATO operations, playing an interventionist role, much to Iran's dissent. In Bahrain, on the other hand, Qatar refused to "acknowledge" the role of Iran in the uprisings, as was requested by the GCC. Most importantly, Qatar utilised its state-owned Al Jazeera Media Network to widely publicise the early uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, which were broadcasted throughout the Arab world. Al Jazeera was already an established source for their reporting on the US invasions of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, and used its platform from 2011 onwards to spread the Arab Spring's pro-democracy sentiment, in what was arguably the most effective use of soft power by the Qatar. Apart from these, Qatar supported Islamist groups throughout the Arab World (most notably the Muslim Brotherhood), consequently putting them on opposing sides with the GCC in conflicts in Egypt, Tunisia, and Syria.

At this point, even though it might seem contradictory for a monarchical state like Qatar to use its media platforms and financial resources to aid pro-democracy demonstrations and conflicts,

Qatar's ultimate aim of solidifying itself as an independent actor and mediator was further solidified during the Arab Spring, after which they took part in peace negotiations in Afghanistan between Taliban and the Afghan government, and in Yemen between the Houthi rebels and the Hadi government (Nuruzzaman). Furthermore, the organizations that they have supported were all Islamist, whereas the Sunni Bloc led by Saudi Arabia supported dictatorships, and the Shia Bloc of Iran supported both Sunni rebel groups in Arab countries, and also the Assad regime. This reveals that Qatar has, in fact, been the most consistent actor in the Arab Spring, at least in regards to the sides they have picked in conflicts. This is not to say that Qatar's actions are *not* contradictory within their own right.

In pursuit of their goals during the Arab Spring, however, Qatar worsened its already weak diplomatic ties between with other GCC Members. During this period, hostility against Qatar escalated to severe allegations of supporting terrorism throughout the Sunni Bloc.

### **The 2014 Ambassador Crisis**

The sum of these events resulted in the GCC Three (KSA, UAE, Bahrain) pulling their ambassadors from Qatar in March 5, 2014 (Kirkpatrick). According to an Al Jazeera report, the three countries cited "Qatar's failure to comply with the 'first Riyadh Agreement'" signed in 2013, the details of which are unknown to this day. A joint statement by the GCC Three stated that they had "withdrawn their envoys 'to protect their security' since Qatar [failed] 'to refrain from supporting organizations or individuals who threaten the security and stability of the gulf states[...]' and also 'to refrain from supporting hostile media'" (Kirkpatrick). As a response to this action, Qatar pulled its own ambassadors from the three nations.

This initial crisis went on for over 8 months, until the ambassadors of the three countries returned to Doha in 16 November 2014, following attempts by fellow GCC member Kuwait to reconcile relationships between the three countries and Qatar. After this, the Riyadh Supplementary Agreement was signed between the parties, the contents of which were, again, never fully disclosed.

The official statement that accompanied the withdrawal of the ambassadors, including indirect yet obvious references to Al Jazeera's role in the Arab Spring and Qatar's support of Hamas and the Brotherhood, was what set the stage for the diplomatic crisis to come. Despite being averted, the 2014 Ambassador Crisis strained the relationships between Qatar and the three countries, and put them in a more volatile position than ever.

### **The Aftermath of the 2014 Ambassador Crisis**

The Ambassador crisis lead to the gradual formation of new factions and blocs within the GCC, which was already a small collection of countries to begin with (Ulrichsen). The aforementioned GCC Three can be classified as an establishmentarian, conservative faction, supported by El-Sisi's regime in Egypt. Qatar, on the other hand, stands on its own, supported by the Muslim

Brotherhood. Oman and Kuwait make up the so-called non-aligned faction, largely due to their disinvolvement with regional affairs and lack of intervention in foreign conflicts.

In a seemingly unrelated incident, a group of 28 Qatari hunters, including members of Qatar's ruling family, the House of Al Thani, were captured when they went on a falcon hunting trip in southern Iraq in December 2015.

The kidnappers were Kata'ib Hezbollah, the branch of Hezbollah in Iraq, an Shia group supported by Iran. The BBC stated in a report that it had acquired text messages between Qatar's ambassador to Iran and the Emir, where negotiations for a ransom to release the 28 hunters were discussed. The text messages had been leaked by an unknown government "hostile to Qatar", and mentioned a ransom payment of over \$1 billion. The kidnappers also appeared to demand that Qatar participate in the "four towns agreement", in which Qatar-backed Salafist rebels who sieged two Shia towns controlled by the Assad government were requested to lift the siege, in exchange for the same to be done by Assad forces sieging two rebel-controlled towns. The negotiations lasted 16 months, ending in April 2017. Through a payment of between \$500 million and 1 billion, as well as the ratification of the four towns agreement, the 28 hostages were released. A Qatar Airlines plane transported the undisclosed amount of money to the location, where it was exchanged for the hostages (Wood). Three different sources, namely the Financial Times, the New York Times, and the Government of Qatar, disagree on the amount and recipients of payment. According to FT, \$700 million were paid to Shia militias in Iraq, an additional \$120–140 million to Tahrir al-Sham, and \$80 million to Ahrar al-Sham, the former being an Al-Qaeda affiliate. The NYT claimed that \$500 million was paid to Kata'ib Hezbollah, and Qatar, not disclosing the total amount, stated that all of it went to the Iraqi government.

This incident provided grounds for Saudi Arabia and the UAE to allege Qatar of supporting terrorism. Both countries had already done so, basing their allegations that Qatar, while moderating the peace talks in Afghanistan, had included Al-Qaeda in the negotiations. Qatar, despite denying cooperation with Al-Qaeda and their affiliates in Iraq, was unable to avoid the repercussions brought on by the Hezbollah hostage deal. The diplomatic relationships between Qatar and its Gulf neighbours were already strained, riddled with constant allegations of interference in domestic affairs, support for terrorism, and siding with opposing Blocs within the region. The hostage deal was the last straw in a long series of events, and finally resulted in the collapse of Qatar's foreign diplomacy.



Figure 2: Countries who cut ties with Qatar

## The Hacking of Qatari Websites, Severing of Diplomatic Ties, and the 13 Demands

As outlined in the Introduction section of this document, statements that were falsely attributed to the Emir of Qatar were published by hackers on the Qatar News Agency website on May 23, 2017 (Cyberattack). These were later

published by Sky News Arabia and Al-Arabiya, both of which are media organizations founded by the UAE and Saudi Arabia, respectively, with the aim of countering the narrative of the vastly more successful Al Jazeera, demonstrated by the fact that Al Jazeera was blocked in Saudi Arabia and the UAE a day after. After the initial hack, a back-and-forth cyber attack wave started, where Al Jazeera, in late May, published the hacked emails of the UAE's ambassador to the US, which included demands to shut down the US air base in Qatar, along with other correspondence. Then, on 9 June, Al Jazeera itself was hacked.

However, the severing of all diplomatic ties with Qatar came a few days earlier than the hack on Al Jazeera. On the early morning of June 5, Bahrain was the first to announce the withdrawal of its entire diplomatic mission, and to order Qatar to do the same. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt soon followed. An announcement published by the Saudi News Agency accused Qatar of "harbouring a multitude of terrorist and sectarian groups that aim to create instability in the region." Qatari visitors and residents were given two weeks to leave the GCC Three. Throughout June 5, Saudi Arabia closed off Qatar's only land border. All flights of Emirates, FlyDubai, Saudia and Air Arabia were cancelled; all surrounding countries, except for Iran, closed their sea borders and airspaces. An additional group of countries including Yemen (Hadi government), Libya (Haftar government) and the Maldives cut all ties with Qatar. The government of Qatar responded to the blockade by stating that "the measures [were] unjustified and based on claims and allegations that have no basis in fact."

Days after the initial blockade, the four countries (hereafter called the "boycotting countries") gave Qatar a 13-point list of demands, the application of which, they stated, would end the blockade and waive the sanctions. The demands were, in no particular order, to:

1. downgrade diplomatic relations with Iran;
2. cease military cooperation with Turkey;
3. sever ties to "terrorist organizations";
4. stop funding "terrorist organizations";
5. hand over all "terrorists" wanted by the boycotting countries to their countries of origin;
6. shut down Al Jazeera;
7. stop interfering with the domestic affairs of other countries and naturalising (granting citizenship to) the citizens of the blockading countries;
8. financially compensate the blockading countries for damages caused by Qatar's foreign policy over the years;
9. seek harmony and align itself with Gulf and Arab countries;
10. hand over all information Qatar has on political opposition groups that it supported in the boycotting countries;
11. shut down all news outlets owned or funded by Qatar, including Arabi21, Al Araby Al Jadeed, and the Middle East Eye;
12. agree to all the demands within 10 days of them being given to Qatar, after which the demands become void;
13. and to agree to be monitored through monthly audits for the first year of their application

of the demands, then quarterly for the second year, and annually for ten more years.

Needless to say, after reviewing the demands, Qatar refused to comply. Regarding the motives behind the demands, director of Qatar's Government Communications Office, stated that "the illegal siege has nothing to do with combating terrorism, it is about limiting Qatar's sovereignty, and outsourcing our foreign policy."

### **The Economic Impact of the Sanctions and Blockade**

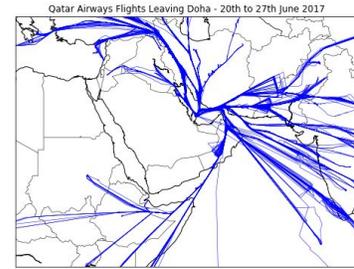
Undoubtedly, the sanctions imposed on Qatar, combined with the land, sea and air blockade, have put the country in a perilous position. However, while many other countries would have collapsed in the face of such measures, Qatar was able to maintain its economy and has even strengthened diplomatic ties with regional powers. As for the economic aspect, Qatar initially faced a problem of food shortages. Before the sanctions were put into place, around %60-80 of all of Qatar's imports passed through the boycotting countries, which included most of the food supplies. Only %1 of food was produced domestically. After the sanctions and subsequent blockade, Qatar, the richest country in the world in terms of GDP per capita, faced the possibility of a food shortage. However, such supply shortages faced by Qatar, were mitigated by two main strategies: the first was to shift trade alliances, and rely on other friendly nations such as Turkey and Iran for the temporary supply of essential goods; and the second strategy was to radically increase the production of local goods, for essential goods and commodities alike. Immediately, Iran sent 4 cargo planes full of food supplies, and Turkey pledged food and water supplies to go along with their planned military base. Thousands of cows were brought into Qatar to counteract the shortage of milk, since the country relied entirely on imported milk from Saudi Arabia. There were also steps decrease Qatar's dependence on its neighbours, such as the opening of a \$7 billion port on the Gulf coast, where ships originally shipping supplies to Qatar through Saudi or Emirati ports will be rerouted to.

Plus, Qatar had, before the sanctions were put into place, and still has, one of the largest National Wealth Funds in the world. Possessing over a trillion dollars in assets, the The Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) owns many assets throughout Europe, concentrated in the UK, France and Germany. This makes Qatar more resilient to sanctions from surrounding countries, since many of its financial assets are based not in Qatar, but other countries with significantly less turbulent markets. The QIA's additional \$340 billion in reserves allowed Qatar to mitigate the immediate consequences of the four boycotting countries applying sanctions and blockades all at once.

Finally, based on Qatar's credit ratings it can be observed that despite a net downturn, an economic crisis was more or less averted. Standard & Poor's Global Ratings also stated that the country's reserves are enough to withstand the withdrawal of all Gulf country deposits in Qatar's banks. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) forecasted a %2.6 growth in Qatar's economy, which, despite being lower compared to previous years, can be regarded as an achievement for any country in the position of Qatar.

## The Geopolitical Impact of the Sanctions and Blockade

Along with major changes to Qatar's trade and commerce, the country has also had to adapt to belligerence exhibited by the four blockading countries on both a regional and an international scale. In terms of travel, it has had to reroute all Qatar Airways



flights, and face the consequences of major airlines cancelling all flights in and out of the country. Plus, the only land border Qatar has, the one with Saudi Arabia, has been closed for two years. This means that the only major means of transporting goods in and out of the country is by shipping, which is currently being done through the aforementioned new port. All of these factors have meant that Qatar is left with only one sea and air border through which it can transport people and goods, the Iranian border. This has inevitably caused more cooperation between the two countries, as illustrated by Qatar lifting its self-imposed ban, in 2017, on developing gas fields in the South Pars/North Dome Gas-Condensate field, which it owns and operates jointly with Iran. Iran's airspace is also where virtually all planes in and out of Qatar pass through.

As for Turkey, it has solidly stationed itself on the side of Qatar, having previously supported the same sides as Qatar throughout many of the conflicts in the Middle East, especially during and after the Arab Spring. Qatar has allowed for Turkish military operations within its territory, and even the establishment of a Turkish military base.

Qatar itself has also significantly improved funding to its military, and purchased more military equipment than it ever has before the sanctions started in 2017. Some have speculated that these actions were in part motivated by a fear of the US leaving the Al-Udeid Air Base, which has long defended Qatar against any possible acts of aggression by a military power in the region. However, the Pentagon has denied that the US will be leaving Al-Udeid, stating that the diplomatic crisis "would not affect the US military posture in Qatar".

## Major Parties Involved and Their Views

**Qatar:** As the main belligerent of the issue, the State of Qatar has been faced with sanctions, embargoes and an all-out blockade by a group of boycotting countries, its relationship with which has been explained in detail in this document.

**Saudi Arabia:** As the de-facto leader of the group of countries referred to as the "Sunni Bloc", the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has, along with the UAE, been the leading force in the collective actions of Gulf nations against Qatar. The Wahhabist dynasty ruling it has, unlike Qatar, long opposed political factions throughout the Arab world.

**Iran:** Saudi Arabia's chief rival and de-facto head of the "Shia Bloc", the Islamic Republic of Iran is one of the two main belligerents of the Saudi-Iranian proxy conflict, which has directly and indirectly contributed to the sanctioning of Qatar, and played a major role in shaping 21st century Middle Eastern politics. Iran is currently one of the two nations in the Middle East considered to have friendly relations with Qatar.

**Turkey:** Being the second of the two nations friendly to Qatar, Turkey is the largest military power in the Middle East. It has not only used the Qatar crisis as a way to establish regional alliances, but also to extend its military sphere of influence. Similar to Qatar, Turkey is not a country that fits neatly into regional Blocs or international alliances. It has been a long partner of the US through its membership in NATO, but has also opposed the US in a variety of military conflict. For instance, Turkey has consistently opposed NATO operations after the Arab Spring, and president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has been a vocal supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood. In Syria, Turkish-backed Free Syrian Army (FSA) troops directly confronted US-supported Rojava, and Turkey supports the opposing side in the Yemeni Civil War as well. In relation to the issue, Turkey shares both a strategic and a practical goal with Qatar.

**United States of America:** The United States of America finds itself in a very awkward position in not only the Qatar crisis, but in the Middle East as a whole. As has been made evident throughout this report, conflicts in the Middle East usually involve more than two sides, each supported with a variety of organizations, groups and states. The US, who has taken upon itself to meddle in violent regime changes throughout the world, has thus created many allies and enemies in the region. A strong ally to Israel, the US also maintains alliances with Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, all of which tend to be hostile towards each other. To maintain balance between its allies, however, the US does not directly involve itself in conflicts in which two or more of its allies face each other, but rather, engages in proxy conflicts through non-state actors. As for Qatar, where the US possesses a large military base, US relations have generally been positive. Despite this, President Donald Trump has taken a different approach to the issue, echoing the allegations of terrorism made by Saudi Arabia in a tweet that read "So good to see the Saudi Arabia visit with the King [...] They said they would take a hard line on funding extremism, and all reference was pointing to Qatar. Perhaps this will be the beginning of the end to the horror of terrorism!" This put a question as to the nature of US-Qatar relations after the blockade. However, statements by other governmental branches such as Congress and the Pentagon have maintained that the US is still allied with Qatar.

**United Arab Emirates:** Acting as the secondary power within the Sunni Bloc, the UAE has essentially taken the same actions as Saudi Arabia in nearly all aspects of the Qatar crisis. Along with Saudi Arabia, it has lead operations against Qatar. The UAE is the most consistently pro-Saudi nation in the Gulf.

**Bahrain:** Bahrain is the third major actor in the Sunni Bloc, mostly following the actions of Saudi Arabia and the UAE. It was the GCC country most affected by the Arab Spring, causing its government to be especially hostile to Qatar's involvement in the uprising.

**Egypt:** Under the control of pro-Saudi leader Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, Egypt has operated closely with the three other boycotting countries in the Gulf region, and proved itself to be a strategic partner of the Sunni Bloc, despite its location outside of the Arabian peninsula.

**Yemen (Hadi-led government):** The ongoing civil war in Yemen has caused the emergence of two governments, namely the Hadi and Houthi ones. The Hadi-led government has pledged support for the boycotting countries, and is an ally of Saudi Arabia.

**Muslim Brotherhood:** As has been indicated throughout the report, and especially in the section titled “the Foreign Policy of Qatar,” the Muslim Brotherhood is a transnational, Sunni Islamist organization that is currently supported by Qatar, Turkey, and Iran. It is opposed by Saudi Arabia, due to its support of anti-authoritarian demonstrations throughout the Arab Spring.

## Timeline of Events

|                                     |  |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| <b>January 1978 – February 1979</b> | The Iranian Revolution overthrew Shah Pahlavi, and installed Ayatollah Khomeini, thus starting the Saudi-Iranian proxy conflict. |
| <b>25 May 1981</b>                  | The Gulf Cooperation Council was founded in Abu Dhabi, UAE.  |
| <b>27 June 1995</b>                 | Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Hamad bin Abdullah bin Jassim bin Mohammed Al Thani assumed power in Qatar.                         |
| <b>30 September 2002</b>            | Saudi Arabia withdrew its ambassador from Qatar as a response to Al Jazeera’s critical reporting of Saudi Arabia.                |
| <b>31 July 2006</b>                 | Qatar was the only country to vote against S/RES/1696, expressing concern at Iran’s nuclear programme.                           |
| <b>18 December 2010</b>             | The Arab Spring began in Tunisia.  |
| <b>23 November 2013</b>             | The First Riyadh Agreement was signed.   |
| <b>5 March 2014</b>                 | The GCC Three (KSA, UAE, Bahrain) withdrew their ambassadors from Qatar, citing its breach of the First Riyadh Agreement.        |
| <b>16 November 2014</b>             | The ambassadors of the GCC Three returned to Qatar.  |
| <b>16 December 2015</b>             | 28 Qatari hunters, including members of the Al-Thani royal family, were taken hostage by Kata’ib Hezbollah in southern Iraq.     |
| <b>6 April 2016</b>                 | Two men from the group were released.  |
| <b>20 May 2017</b>                  | US President Trump met with the leaders of 55 Arab and Muslim countries in Riyadh.   |

|                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| <b>23 May 2017</b>   | The website of the Qatar News Agency was hacked, leading to the release of statements falsely-attributed to the Emir. |
| <b>14 April 2017</b> | The rest of the hunters were released, after negotiations between multiple parties.                                   |
| <b>5 June 2017</b>   | Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt cut all diplomatic ties with Qatar, and imposed sanctions and a blockade.   |
| <b>22 June 2017</b>  | The 13 demands were given to Qatar by the boycotting countries.   |
| <b>24 June 2017</b>  | Qatar rejected the 13 demands.  |
| <b>23 July 2018</b>  | The ICJ found the UAE guilty in Qatar v. United Arab Emirates.  |

## UN Involvement

The United Nations has not been directly involved with controlling sanctioning of Qatar, nor the blockade. However, it has, through the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), published a report regarding the human rights implications of the Qatar crisis. The report stressed that a diplomatic conflict between UN Member States had been unfairly projected onto their citizens, resulting in the separation of families, breach of economic rights, the rights to health, education, freedom of movement, and, most critically, freedom of speech.

## Relevant UN Documents

- Report on the impact of the Gulf Crisis on human rights, December 2017
- Comment by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein on impact on human rights, 14 June 2017
- Application of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, 23 July 2018 (Qatar v. United Arab Emirates)

## Treaties and Events

There have been no treaties signed to resolve the issue.

## Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

There has been no substantive attempt to resolve the issue. Qatar has expressed willingness to negotiate the terms of the physical blockade, namely the airspace, but no actions were taken upon such requests. A variety of countries from all across the political spectrum called for diplomatic talks to solve the issue, and Kuwait has attempted to act as a mediator. Nonetheless, no treaty was signed, and no agreement was agreed to since the initial application of sanctions

in 2017.

## **Possible Solutions**

Considering how inactive the UN has been on this hugely important issue, delegates have a lot to work with.

It should first be kept in mind that the issue is “Controlling the sanctioning of Qatar as a means of ensuring political sovereignty”, which means that a resolution on the issue should specifically focus on the aspect of Qatar’s independence and national sovereignty, and that it does not necessarily need to end all sanctions currently applied to Qatar, but rather, to control them.

With this information, different approaches to the issue can be considered. One approach would be attempting to cautiously re-establish diplomatic ties between Qatar and the boycotting countries. Such an approach would require major compromises to be made between both sides of the agreement: the Sunni Bloc would most probably retain at least some portion of their 13 point demands list, and Qatar would not be willing to hand over classified information it has, or significantly downplay the foreign influence for which it spent 24 years to construct. Although far-fledged, this approach might be pursued a delegate of a moderate, non-aligned country within the region, with the aim of re-fostering inter-Gulf relationships.

A more realistic approach would be to further solidify Qatar’s ties with Iran, Turkey, and other potential regional allies, which could be done by founding official organizations. Despite being more feasible in the short run, this approach also has its problems, namely that it would deepen to the already existent political divide throughout the Middle East and the Arab world. Plus, Qatar already has ties with the two countries, meaning that such an approach might not do much to change Qatar’s economic or social standing.

Between these two extremes of Sunni Bloc and Shia Bloc advocacy lie a variety of approaches, either combining solutions from the two other approaches to find a middle ground, or creating new solutions to create a third path. Such solutions might include a deal between Qatar and the boycotting countries, which, despite not formally re-establishing diplomatic ties amongst the countries, would allow for the passage of goods and people deemed to be “essential”. Other agreements or talks could be proposed, with their aims varying from the re-opening of Gulf airspace to Qatari planes, to unblocking Al Jazeera and other affiliated news websites, in exchange for decreased hostility against the boycotting countries.

Whatever the approach, any resolution would be better off if it took cues from the aforementioned OHCHR report, where many human rights violations are reported in detail, and the ICJ verdict in Qatar v. United Arab Emirates. In each case, whatever the approach of the resolution might be, it should keep in mind the importance of Qatar’s sovereignty, and actively look for ways to maintain it. Economic independence, although not an immediate source of concern for Qatar, may be considered, along with their dependence on currently-allied and/or friendly countries for certain goods. Such dependencies might be attempted to be mitigated

through the diversification of trade routes and sources.

More aggressive measures might also be taken. Violations of Human Rights by the boycotting countries might not be tolerated by certain Member States, which can also be reflected in a resolution (although preferably not be its main focus).

At the end of the day, however, delegates must consider the complexities of not only the Qatar crisis, but the wider implications it has on the stage of Arab and Middle Eastern politics, hopefully proven at this point to be a nuanced topic without clear sides in conflicts, and layers upon layers of historical and religious context to further complicate things. These considerations should be combined with the realization that the Qatar crisis, as the OHCHR report says, “has been characterized by the absence of dialogue among the States concerned, [and] strong resentment about the lack of action by regional organizations and about the role of the GCC, which many considered as de facto defunct.” When combined, this information should result in a resolution that tackles the issue of the sanctioning of Qatar, maintain the national sovereignty of the Gulf nation, and ultimately ensure the freedoms of expression, movement, and communications, and the rights to property, healthcare and education, for not only Qataris, but the citizens of all countries involved in the conflict.

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