



SAUDI ARABIA AND QATAR: A NON-HURTING STALEMATE

HOW CAN WE ADDRESS A CONFLICT THAT HAS NOT YET HAPPENED?
CONFLICT MANAGEMENT PROGRAM 2019



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**A Non-Hurting Stalemate
How Can We Address a Conflict That Has Not
Yet Happened?**

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Table of Contents

Acronyms

Map of the Region

Introduction I. William Zartman

Part I: Roots of the Conflict

1. Unraveling the Narratives of the Gulf Crisis Rebecca John
2. Family Politics Within the Gulf Patrick Makles
3. Governmental Public Relations Strategies in the Gulf
Adding Fuel to the Conflict Julia Wargo

Part II: Efforts at Resolution

4. Deadlock in Negotiations..... Sarah Aver
5. US and Kuwaiti Mediation Efforts Sabiha Khan
6. Conflict Management: Is Failure an Option? Jasmine Choi

Part III: Economic and Regional Impact

7. Pain or Gain? Economic Consequences of the Embargo Ashley Curtis
8. The Gulf Crisis: Qatar, Iran, and Turkey Aditya Ashok Balu
9. US Military Relations in the Gulf,
Pushing Toward or Away from a Resolution of the Gulf Crisis? Danielle Martin
10. The Fragmentation of the Middle East Dennis Murphy

Conclusion Daniel P. Serwer

Annex: The Agreements and Demands

List of Interviews

Bibliography

Acronyms

BATNA	Best Alternatives to a Negotiated Agreement
CBS	Columbia Broadcasting System
CENTCOM	United States Central Command
DCA	Defense Cooperation Agreement
DFTO	Designated Foreign Terrorist Organization
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FIFA	Fédération Internationale de Football Association
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
HRC	Human Rights Commission
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISIL/ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
LNG	Liquefied Natural Gas
MbS	Mohammad Bin Salman al-Saud
MbN	Mohammad Bin Nayef
MbZ	Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan
MEO	mutually enticing opportunity
MESA	Middle East Strategic Alliance
MHS	mutually hurting stalemate
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NHRC	National Human Rights Committee
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OPEC	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
THAAD	Terminal High Altitude Air Defense
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UN	United Nations
US	United States
USMTM	United States Military Training Mission





Introduction

I. William Zartman

The Arabian Peninsula is torn by an escalating family dispute that threatens to grow into a realignment of the eastern Arab world—the Mashreq—and beyond, although it confines its manifestations of violence to its edges. Basically, the Gulf Conflict is a familiar story as old as Deuteronomy¹ and “Don Carlo”: a rich self-confident young upstart challenges a rich self-confident old father figure (represented by another rich self-confident young upstart); they hoist themselves onto uncomfortably unshakable positions and look for allies.

The challenge that this situation poses to conflict management brought thirteen junior scholars and two seniors to spend nearly two weeks in Riyadh and Doha on 13–25 January 2019 on the 17th annual Conflict Management Field Trip.² The group enjoyed a series of open discussions with officials, experts, and university specialists in both capitals, and a particularly generous occasion to take a royal plane trip in Saudi Arabia to visit the Nabataean tombs at al-’ula (Mada’in al-Saleh). We found the locals—officials and people—in both kingdoms most hospitable and welcoming beyond any attempt to make their story prevail. But we also found that the conflict, a mere family squabble to the outside world, was obstinately intractable, if only because the moment of crisis in 2017 when Saudi Arabia and allies imposed an embargo on Qatar left all sides in a situation inconvenient but quite bearable and even enriching. The only ones who suffered, as usual, have been the common people along the border and on the periphery—Yemen, and further, Syria and Libya—where proxies extended the reach of the rivalry, bloodily. We have sought to understand the reasons behind and the dynamics ahead in this conflict and bring useful recommendations for its management in the following chapters.

Both countries are absolute monarchies, each run by an extended family, with a young new ruler—Sheikh Tamim ben Hamad al-Thani as Emir of Qatar in 2013 ascended to the throne at age 33 and Mohammed bin Salman became Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia in 2017 at age 32. A third relatively young Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi (the largest Emirate), also implicated in the Gulf conflict, rules the UAE. Together this Gulf club of monarchs govern some 40 million people, half of them non-citizens without any political rights—20 million native citizens and 10 million immigrants (35% of the population) in Saudi Arabia, 500,000 citizens and 2 million immigrants (80% of the population) in Abu Dhabi, and 300,000 citizens and 2.3 million immigrant workers (87% of the population) in Qatar.

The tribes of the bulk of the peninsula were united in the first half of the twentieth century by Abdulazziz ibn Saud through military force and Wahhabi Islam to form the Saudi Kingdom, leaving eight sheikhdoms along the Gulf from Kuwait to Oman as British

¹ Deut. 21:18-21.

² Previous books are Korea 2018, Israel/Palestine 2018; Ukraine 2017; South China Sea 2017; Sri Lanka 2016; Senegal/Casamance 2016; Colombia 2015; Mindanao 2014 and 2011; Nagorno Karabakh 2013; Tunisia 2012; Kosovo 2010; Cyprus 2009; Northern Ireland 2008; Haiti 2007 and 2006. Reports from previous Field Trips are available at <https://www.sais-jhu.edu/content/conflict-management#research>.

Protectorates. Oil discovered just before World War II made Saudi Arabia under the al-Saud family the world's leading oil producer by the 1970s. On the coast, Qatar was ruled by the al-Thani family for two centuries; upon the British withdrawal in 1971 the sheikhdoms moved together to form the United Arab Emirates (UAE) but Qatar and Bahrain decided to maintain their own independence. Qatar in turn became the world's largest exporter of liquefied natural gas (LNG), with the highest per citizen/capita income in the world. For the purpose of coordinating relations and external policies among the 5 countries under its leadership, Saudi Arabia instituted the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in 1981.

Two changes upset the family harmony of the members. One was the development of oil and especially gas reserves within other members than Saudi Arabia, notably Qatar, providing the means for policy autonomy. The other was the Arab Spring after 2011 that evoked two different responses from GCC countries, none of whom except Bahrain faced any such challenge to their absolute monarchies. The majority group looked to support the beleaguered regimes, including Hosni Mubarak and then Abdel Fattah el-Sissi in Egypt, Salman bin Hamad in Bahrain, and the successor government of Abed Rabbo al-Hadi in Yemen (after having facilitated the withdrawal of Ali Abdullah Saleh), but they continued an established opposition to Bashar al-Asad in Syria. Qatar felt drawn to support the intifadat with Ennahda in Tunis, the anti-Qadhafi forces in Libya, and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. It performed a longstanding function of mediator in the bringing together the Syrian National Council and the tribal factions in Yemen. Qatar also joined initially into Saudi-led incursions into Bahrain and Yemen, the former to protect the monarchy and the latter to restore Hadi.

Although the selection of options appeared jumbled, they boiled down to Qatari support for Brotherhood factions, and Saudi, with the other GCC members, support for conservative regimes (except for Syria), a split that the Saudis found increasingly offensive. Furthermore, alone among GCC members, Qatar reached out for allies and found support for its position from Turkey, a historic rival of Wahhabi Saudi Arabia since the time of the Ottoman Empire. Qatar's gas field is also shared geographically with Shi'i Iran, another major rival of Saudi Arabia, with whom Doha needs to keep good relations.

Thus, although the division between the two camps was often blurred, the perception on both sides was of a conservative coalition on one hand and on the other a more liberal orientation including parts of the Brotherhood, seen by Qatar as unavoidable but viewed by the others as terrorist. The division also had ramifications on internal self-images. As the Wahhabi bastion of Islamic fundamentalism, Saudi Arabia has been slow to adopt tenets and practices of modernization, whereas the small citizenry of Qatar with its international outreach feels that it is the spearhead of modernity in the region. The Emirates, still smarting from Qatar's refusal to join the UAE and its decision to go it alone, feel that Qatar is a threat to their own image. But when Saudi Arabia under current younger leadership of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman takes up the more difficult challenge in its society of modernization, Qatar feels renewed competition in its own terms and disparages the Saudi efforts instead of welcoming them, to the dismay of the Saudis.

Against this background of growing offenses, the meeting of the GCC in 2014 drew up a bill of particulars, especially implicating Qatar, calling for an end to support for the Brethren and attacks on Saudi Arabia in the press, notably the Al Jazeera television station that is broadly welcomed as a breath of fresh air in the Arab world of government broadcasters (see Annex).³ Qatar signed the agreement along with the rest, but when it made few changes to conform in the next years, Saudi Arabia looked for sterner measures. In 2017, following what is interpreted as a nod from President Trump in his visit to Riyadh, the new Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia and his counterpart in the UAE made the shocking decision of imposing an embargo—i.e., closing their frontiers to commerce from Qatar, not just a refusal to trade as in a boycott, and not a blockade, actually preventing entry to Qatar even from the sea—on Qatar. Bahrain and Egypt joined in. Rumors emerged of the possibility of a military attack and of digging a canal on the border so as to make Qatar an island, as well as of Saudi and UAE involvement in a counter coup in Qatar in 2014. The embargo accompanied a list of 13 Demands issued to Qatar as the price for ending the ostracism, most of them high enough as to be inaccessible, a sharpening of the broken 2014 agreement. Qatar refused to consider the list and both sides have refused negotiations, despite some small words to the contrary. Mediation attempts by the United States and Kuwait have proven unwelcome. The two sides have climbed up on their positions, wrapped in kufiyahs of face and intransigence, and continuing events in the larger region call for further policy responses and opportunities that merely add to the lists of grievances.

While the conflict is clearly stalemated, neither party feels any discomfort (after the initial month). The SAIS Field Trip sensed a marked difference in the tone of the narrative of the two parties, both in Washington and in the Gulf: Saudi Arabians exuded control and confidence, with disdain for Qatar, whereas Qataris were assertive and defensive but assured in reaching out on their own path. The competition for broader regional influence continues. Already in good relations with Hezbollah in Lebanon, Qatar announced a major loan to refloat Lebanese government debt, wading into a Saudi zone of influence. The two parties back rival factions in Libya. In fact, the intractability of the conflict is functional, each side using it to show its true nature and each event benefitting from measures impelled by the conflict.

As such it is vulnerable to external events. On the positive side, the 2022 World Cup might have its participation doubled beyond the capacity of its current host, Qatar (which is confidently deep in elaborate preparations), bringing in Dubai or Abu Dhabi as a back-up and opening communications across the embargo. On the negative side, Jamal Khashoggi, an opposition journalist, was seized and dismembered in the Saudi embassy in Ankara in 2018, arguably on the orders of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, to the shock of the Western world. The incident opened Saudi Arabia to more serious international versions of its own embargo and, if resulting in the dismissal of bin Salman, could bring in a more conservative

³ The surprise at this turn of events is indicated by the fact that an authoritative review of “A New Security order in the Persian Gulf” by recognized experts in 2015 made no mention of any direct GCC disharmony among member states (Wehrey and Sokolsky 2015).

prince. The royal family seems solidly locked in in their support for MbS, despite international pressure for a change.

Both the blocking countermeasures and the lack of deep pain, indeed the benefits, from the standoff make the Gulf crisis an unusually intractable conflict. It does not have the deep social or sharp ideological fractures or the absence of a salient solution of more standard cases of intractability—Palestine, Iran, Nagorno Karabakh, for example. It does have the deep commitment of young ambitious leaders with the added commitment of their extended families behind them and an array of policies and ties that exacerbate the split. Letting bygones go bye in a big family reunion is inconceivable; a tacit acceptance of letting the embargo wear down and the parties going their own ways takes time and hangs on a hope that something does not happen in the meanwhile. Such is the challenge before the following analyses.

Organizing a trip of this nature spanning two countries requires the support of many. The Conflict Management Program is thankful for a grant from the Starr Foundation that permitted a longer trip than usual that included stops in two capitals with no direct connections for 13 students and 2 faculty members, as well as production of this report.

The trip would not have been possible without the cooperation of the governments of the State of Qatar and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Their Ambassadors in Washington, as well as the Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates, gracefully received and briefed the group. All three answered students' questions openly and supported their efforts to find answers. The staff at the embassies of Saudi Arabia and Qatar worked with us to provide visas.

Our study trip would not have been possible without the careful organization of appropriate meetings and transport. We would like to express our gratitude to the Ministry of Education of Saudi Arabia for lining up meetings in Riyadh as well as providing local transportation, including an informative excursion to al-'Ula (Mada'in al-Saleh). In Qatar, we relied on the generous help of the Gulf International Forum, which likewise planned four days of meetings in Doha and provided local transportation there. Throughout, we benefited from informative discussions with those who accompanied us.

The SAIS students and faculty returned to Washington with a wealth of information, an exposure to diverse perspectives, friends in both capitals, and great appreciation for the welcome they received.

Part I: Roots of the Conflict

Unraveling the Narratives of the Gulf Crisis

Rebecca John

When Bahrain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE (the Quartet) cut diplomatic ties with Qatar in July 2017, chief among their grievances was Qatar's support for "terrorist" organizations, in particular, the Muslim Brotherhood. The 13 Demands, a list presented by the Quartet that Qatar would have to meet in order to resolve the crisis, center around Qatar severing ties with these groups, which the Quartet claims threatens the stability and security of the region. The list also includes the closure of the popular Qatari state-funded Al Jazeera network, which the Quartet perceives as providing a platform for extremist ideology.

Further antagonizing the foursome are Qatar's close ties with Iran and Turkey. The Islamic Republic of Iran, a long-time foe of Saudi Arabia, has been accused of fomenting unrest across the region, from Syria to Yemen, and Iraq to Libya. Turkey, meanwhile, also has a long history of rivalry with Saudi Arabia, but under the presidency of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, is seeking to establish itself as a leader of the Sunni Muslim world. Erdoğan is largely supportive of the Muslim Brotherhood in the region and stands accused of being "emotionally connected to the Ottoman Empire" and "wanting to return the region to the Caliphate" (SAIS Group Meeting, Washington DC, 10 December 2018). The 13 Demands calls for Qatar to cut ties with both countries.

In the SAIS meetings in Riyadh and Washington DC, we were often presented with a picture of a Middle East that was divided between an Islamist, backwards-looking coalition comprised of Iran, Turkey, and Qatar, on the one hand; and a progressive, forward-looking one led by Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the UAE, on the other. One interlocutor described the crisis as a "philosophical disagreement" about the future of the Middle East: "secular, pragmatic" (the Quartet), versus "ideological" (Qatar) (SAIS Group Meeting, Washington DC, 24 October 2018). In Riyadh, another also spoke of competing visions for the region: the "light" of modernity represented by Saudi Arabia and its allies; and the "dark" of terrorism signified by Qatar and its friends (SAIS Group Meeting, Riyadh, 15 January 2019).

Qatar, unsurprisingly, rejects this narrative. It does not deny that it has amiable relations with organizations such as the Brotherhood, but claims these relations exist because Qatar "decided to support the will of the people" (SAIS Group Meeting, Washington DC, 11 December 2018). It also does not deny its relations with Iran and Turkey, but considers these ties simply pragmatic; Qatar shares a gas field with Iran, while its relationship with Turkey has evolved only because Turkey came to Qatar's aid in the aftermath of the embargo. In our meetings in Doha, we were often reminded that it was in fact the UAE that has a close relationship with Iran, not Qatar. The suggestion that Qatar had embraced the "dark side," was, of course, "nonsense;" on the contrary, Qatar was the most modern and progressive of the Gulf states and the Quartet was simply "envious" of its success (SAIS Group Meeting, Doha, 20 January 2019).

What is important to Qatar is the protection of its sovereignty. It accuses Saudi Arabia, especially, of “not wanting Qatar to have its own sovereignty, independence, and views.” Instead, Saudi Arabia and its allies want Qatar to be like Bahrain, which, in their view is but a puppet of the Saudi state: “Saudi does not want a country that has a different voice...and it [Qatar] is not a quiet voice, but a loud one” (SAIS Group Meeting, Doha, 20 January 2019).

The conflict between Qatar and the Quartet is one that is being fought, not with guns, but with competing, yet entangled, narratives. Crudely: modernity versus tradition; secularism, or state-controlled religion, versus political Islam. In many ways, these narratives are a recent iteration of debates that have been occupying the region since the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the emergence of the modern Middle Eastern states. In the current crisis, however, these narratives belie more basic concerns: insecurity and ego. In the aftermath of the Arab Spring, the Gulf states, in particular, are a highly insecure group that perceive threats domestically, externally, and perhaps most importantly, existentially. By exploring the respective threat perceptions of the Quartet and Qatar, this chapter attempts to disentangle the narratives of the Gulf crisis. In doing so, I hope to offer a route to resolving it.

Threats, Everywhere

For many observers, “the Arab Spring is the main tool of analysis for what’s been going on in the region over the last 8 years” (SAIS Group Meeting, Doha, 21 January 2019) and is thus a good starting point for attempting to understand the current crisis.

The events that followed the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia in December 2010 sent shockwaves throughout the region. Authoritarian figures who had been mainstays in the region for decades fell. In Tunisia and Egypt, the regimes of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak initially gave way to Islamic movements. Libya, Syria, and Yemen, became embroiled in civil wars with Islamic fragments that continue to this day. Elsewhere, protests were seen in Jordan, Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia. While the monarchies in the region emerged relatively unscathed, the Arab Spring nevertheless left these regimes anxious about their positions.

For regimes such as the al-Saud, the Arab Spring, and its aftermath, laid bare a number of key challenges, or threats, to domestic stability: long-term socioeconomic problems, demand for political reform, and the appeal of political Islam.

Socioeconomic Challenges and Political Reform

Dissatisfaction with the status quo was widely seen as one of the leading causes of the Arab Spring. Ordinary people, according to a 2015 World Bank report, were frustrated by deteriorating standards of living, lack of job opportunities, poor quality public services, corruption, and lack of government accountability. The revolutions of 2010–2011 did little to solve these, leaving the Middle East as a whole to face significant long-term challenges. Chief among these is a “youth bulge;” nearly 65% of the population in the Middle East is under 30, yet youth unemployment is one of the highest in the world.

There has been much discussion about why the traditional monarchies survived the Arab Spring where republican regimes fell. According to Gause, dynastic monarchies such as Saudi Arabia—where monarchies govern as part of a larger corporate ruling body—were mostly able to avoid the Arab Spring owing to a combination of oil wealth and coercion. These countries “had plenty of money in the bank and were willing to spend it quickly and effectively to blunt popular discontent and reassure existing client groups.” Saudi Arabia, for example, where 70% of the population is under 30, announced over \$100 billion in domestic spending in the early months of 2011 (Gause 2013).

While this strategy appears to have worked in the short term, it is less certain that it will work in the future. Oil prices have declined significantly since 2011 and going forward, revenue from oil will likely not be what it was in the past. Saudi Arabia has already been forced to enact austerity measures. While the GCC states are by no means deep in poverty, their “authoritarian bargains,” where citizens have exchanged democracy and accountability for social services and government jobs, are under threat.

Post-Arab Spring, these regimes are acutely aware of these challenges and have recognized the need to implement both economic and social reforms. Mohamad bin Salman’s much-publicized Vision 2030 aims to reduce Saudi Arabia’s dependence on oil, create private sector jobs, and implement social reforms that he says will bring the Kingdom into the twenty-first century. Similarly, the UAE has Vision 2021, and Bahrain also 2030. Egypt, still reeling from the Arab Spring, and considerably poorer than its Gulf counterparts, faces similar challenges, but is currently reliant on handouts from its friends. In 2013, for example, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE put together a \$12 billion aid package for General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi’s regime. Citizens in the Gulf increasingly expect more from their leaders. Yet while the regimes are opening up the economic space, the political space remains firmly closed—they do not want to relinquish power. The strategy is a risky one and should it not work, regimes in the Gulf will likely be met with significant opposition.

Political Islam and the Muslim Brotherhood

A marked outcome of the Arab Spring was the emergence of Islamic movements. Across the region, groups associated with the Muslim Brotherhood gained influence and control, sparking a renewed debate about the role of political Islam in the Middle East. In Egypt, for example, the Muslim Brotherhood, led by Mohammad Morsi, was elected to office in 2012 before being deposed a year later in a military coup. For members of the Quartet (including the current Egyptian leadership), the rise of political Islam, and the Muslim Brotherhood, in particular, was alarming. But who are the Brothers, and why has its rise proven so problematic?

The Muslim Brotherhood (*ikhwan*, or brothers) is the “world’s oldest, largest, and most influential Islamist organization” (Leiken and Brooke 2007). Founded in Ismailia, Egypt, by Egyptian scholar and schoolteacher, Hassan al-Banna, in 1928, the Society of Muslim Brothers began as a “social movement seeking to re-Islamize Egypt.” Al-Banna, who had witnessed the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the abolishment of the Islamic caliphate, and Mustafa Kemal

Atatürk's subsequent attempts to secularize Turkey, was concerned by the extent to which Egypt was becoming Westernized. Initially, the Brotherhood was a grass-roots organization that focused on social justice and socioeconomic issues, but its ultimate goal was to create a Sunni Islamic state "that would be ruled by a just Muslim leader and would instill Islamic values through education in addition to ensuring that such values were obeyed in practice." As the movement gained in popularity, it began to spread throughout the Middle East, establishing branches and generating splinter organizations elsewhere in the region. Today, the Brotherhood is not one single organization, nor does it have a central control structure. Over the years it has evolved into a myriad of different groups and ideas and "whilst all agree on the important role of Islam in politics, Brotherhood affiliates promote different platforms depending on local circumstances" (Freer 2018, 22–23).

In Egypt, the Brotherhood played an important role in the revolution that brought Gamal Abdel Nasser to power in 1952, but soon fell out of favor with the new regime. Increasingly seen as a threat to Nasser's leadership, a ruthless wave of repression saw thousands of Brothers seek refuge in the Gulf. In the decades since, the Muslim Brotherhood's position within Gulf society has been uneasy. Initially, the Brothers were politically inactive and held relatively minor positions within society, but this soon changed following a breakdown in relations between Nasser and King Saud in Saudi Arabia in the late 1950s.

The "Arab Cold War," as it became known, saw the Middle East divided into two competing blocs: a "progressive" alliance led by Nasser, that advocated secularism, pan-Arabism, and socialism; and an "Islamic" bloc led by Saudi Arabia, that promoted traditionalism, adherence to religious principles, and American ties. In this environment, the Muslim Brotherhood became a useful tool for the Gulf monarchies in countering Nasser's ideology. Further, as the region began to build state capacity with the increase in oil wealth in the 1960s and 1970s, the Brothers, who, contrary to Gulf citizens were by and large highly educated, filled many of the positions in the bureaucracy. They were thus able to significantly increase their influence within society (Lacroix 2011, 40). This was especially the case in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, where, according to one of our interviewees, they "infiltrated the education process" (SAIS Group Meeting, Riyadh, 15 January 2019).

As elsewhere in the region, the Muslim Brotherhood in the Gulf has evolved within the national context. In the UAE, *Islah* was established in Dubai in 1974; while in Bahrain, *al-Isbah* and its political wing, *al Minbar*, were founded in 1984. Compared to other members of the Quartet, Bahrain's stance towards the organization is atypical; *al Minbar* enjoys a "special status" and has held seats in the legislature since 2002. In Bahrain, a Sunni minority rules over a Shi'a majority and *al Minbar*, with strong ties to Bahrain's ruling Al Khalifa family, is regularly called on to support domestic stability. In Saudi Arabia, given the central role played by Wahhabism in the founding of the Kingdom, the relationship between religious movements and the state has always been a delicate one. Technically, the Brotherhood was banned, but in the 1960s, an influential social movement, the Islamic Awakening (*al-Sahwa al-Islamiyya*)

emerged. Though not a Brotherhood branch *per se*, “Ideologically, the *Sahwa* could be described as a hybrid of Wahhabism and the ideology of the Brotherhood” (Lacroix 2011, 52).

In the 1990s, the Muslim Brotherhood began to fall out of favor with the Gulf regimes. In the UAE, Islah “had become the most organized nonstate actor in the country,” prompting concerns that it had become too popular, and too powerful, and so was increasingly framed “...as a threat to national security” (Freer 2018, 129). In Saudi Arabia, the Brotherhood provoked the al-Saud’s ire by supporting Saddam Hussein’s 1990 invasion of Kuwait. At the same time, the *Sahwa*, began making demands for political reforms that were more aligned with Islamic ideals and led a campaign against the Kingdom’s decision to allow US troops to be stationed in the country. After a period of social turbulence, the movement was put down, and blame for the unrest was laid firmly at the feet of the Brothers. This was a critical period in Saudi Arabia’s history and the al-Saud remain fearful of the *Sahwa*’s influence.

After 9/11, the Muslim Brotherhood’s relationship with the UAE and Saudi Arabia further deteriorated. The involvement of both Emiratis and Saudis in the attacks led to increased scrutiny of Islamic groups in these countries. In the UAE, the government led a concerted campaign to reduce the group’s influence, and Saudi Arabia began to blame the Brotherhood for the rise in Islamic fundamentalism. In 2002, then Saudi Interior Minister, Prince Nayef, said the group was guilty of ‘betrayal of pledges and ingratitude’ and was ‘the source of all problems in the Islamic world’ (Mintz and Farah 2004). The influence of the Brotherhood in the Gulf receded over the following decade.

The Muslim Brotherhood, the Arab Spring, and Qatar’s Response

It is not surprising, then, that the reemergence of the Muslim Brotherhood in 2011 provoked alarm among the Gulf states. The Arab Spring revealed the Brotherhood, in its myriad forms, to be a formidable political force that despite years in the political desert, was able to mobilize quickly and efficiently when presented with an opening. In a region beset with long-term socioeconomic challenges, for many, the Brotherhood was an attractive alternative to those seeking “bread, freedom, and justice.” Furthermore, its emphasis on a politics tied to Islamic principles was appealing to those disillusioned with the encroachment of Western influence: “the Brotherhood are actually the best-placed independent social movement in the Gulf, benefitting from ideological appeal in states where modernization has been accompanied by secularization and Westernization” (Freer 2018). The Brotherhood thus also presented an existential threat: in Saudi Arabia, for example, though the Kingdom does not eschew the role of Islam in politics, loyalty should be first and foremost to the state and the al-Saud, not religion.

In the aftermath of the Arab Spring, the Quartet (with the exception of Bahrain), launched a brutal crackdown on the activities of the Brotherhood. In Egypt, following the 2013 coup, the security forces are alleged to have killed and imprisoned tens of thousands of Brotherhood members and supporters. The movement was banned from politics and labelled a terrorist organization. In the UAE in 2013, the government arrested 94 political activists

associated with the organization, accusing them of conspiring against the state (Gause 2013, 19). The following year, Islah and other affiliated organizations were designated terrorists. In Saudi Arabia, there was a similar attempt to “purge” the country of the Brotherhood’s influence and the group was declared a terrorist organization in March 2014. In our meetings in Riyadh, the Brotherhood were invariably described as a “terrorist organization,” a “conduit for terrorism,” and “supporting of jihadists.” It was also accused of “plotting to assassinate the King” and being a “secret organization that has taken over Qatar” (SAIS Group Meetings, Riyadh, 14–17 January 2019).

Qatar, meanwhile, had a different response to the Arab Spring—one they acknowledge antagonized their neighbors (SAIS Group Meeting, Washington DC, 11 December 2018). Its first sin was the coverage given to the protests by Al Jazeera. A 2011 Huffington Post article noted that since its inception, Al Jazeera had played a key role in shaping public opinion in the Middle East, stating that “If Al Jazeera takes the side of the people you can bet your bottom dollar that the dictator is doomed.” It concluded that “the Arab Spring would not have been possible without Al Jazeera” (Ismal 2011). “Al Jazeera and the Arab Spring” was a recurring theme during many of our meetings in Riyadh. The Saudis and their allies accused the network of giving wall-to-wall coverage of the Egyptian protests, in reportage that was deemed by its critics of being sympathetic towards Morsi and the Egyptian Brotherhood, to the extent that Al Jazeera became an “enemy of the Egyptian state” (Farhi 2014).⁴

Qatar’s second sin is to not only to have ignored the Quartet’s ban of the Muslim Brotherhood, but instead continued to support it. Qatar has provided significant support to Islamist movements in the region, especially in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. Some examples include giving \$7.5 billion of aid to Morsi’s regime in Egypt; being among the first to back the Libyan Islamists; providing support to Islamist militias al-Nusra Front and Ahrar al-Sham in Syria; and fostering links with Ennahda, the Islamist political party in Tunisia. It has also been criticized for hosting offices in Doha for Hamas, the Palestinian wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Taliban, and al-Qaeda (Freer 2017). Further, it has long been accused of harboring Brotherhood exiles. Yusuf al-Qaradawi, an intellectual leader of the organization has resided in Qatar since 1961 and has his own program, *الشريعة والحياة* (“*Sharia and Life*”) on Al Jazeera. For the Quartet, Qatar’s perceived coziness with the Muslim Brotherhood, and the platform it gives to the likes of al-Qaradawi, is not only unfathomable, but regarded as a deep betrayal: “Why does Qatar want to invest in political Islam—the Muslim Brotherhood—at the expense of its neighbors?” (SAIS Group Meeting, Washington DC, October 2018).

The answer to this question is in fact fairly straightforward: Qatar does not perceive the same domestic threats that its neighbors do. As explained in a meeting in Doha, Qatar, with its small population and high gas reserves, is not under the same pressure that, for example, Saudi Arabia, is (SAIS Group Meeting, Doha 22 January 2019). A prominent Qatari we met in Doha joked, “we’re happy, we’re rich” (SAIS Group Meeting, Doha 21 January 2019). This is not

⁴ It should be noted, however, that it was fairly muted on the protests in nearby Bahrain, which, perhaps too close to home, were brutally putdown by a Saudi-led invasion in which Qatar participated.

to say that Qatar has no problems at all; how it manages its large immigrant population (around 88% of the population) will be one to watch, but for now, the ruling government worries less about dissatisfied citizens than its neighbors. Further, there is a relative absence of political opposition. When we asked about opposition to the regime during our stay in Doha, there was much head scratching. Qatar, too, welcomed the Brothers in the 1950s and 1960s, and a Qatari chapter of the Brotherhood was established in the 1980s; but in a relatively cohesive and comfortable society, the Brothers failed to find a political opening. It was eventually disbanded in 1999. As Kamrava (2018, 8) describes, “This political stability is rooted in the country’s comparative social cohesion (lack of sectarian tensions as in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia), its unitary polity and small size (compared to the UAE and Oman), and a relatively apolitical, small national population (compared to Kuwait).”

Qatar, therefore, does not regard the Muslim Brotherhood as a threat. In meetings, senior Qatari officials framed their support for the organization as one that was in line with “the will of the people” and said, elsewhere, the organization was part of the government and “...that is reality.” Our hosts were critical of the Quartet’s stance towards the Brothers, claiming they fostered “an environment of McCarthyism” towards the organization, particularly in the UAE (SAIS Group Meeting, Doha 20 January 2019).

For Qatar, the threat comes not from the Muslim Brotherhood or political Islam, but from Saudi Arabia. Qatar, a tiny country, has long-feared becoming a vassal state of its larger neighbor. In Doha, one of our interviewees spoke of a deep resentment in Qatar towards the Saudis, stemming from a period of subservience under the reign of Sheikh Khalifa (1972–1995). In 1995, when Sheikh Hamid overthrew his father in a bloodless coup, Qatar, depending on whose side you are on either “became independent” or “became hostile” (SAIS Group Meetings, Washington DC, 10–11 December 2018). Sheikh Hamid, who was the key driver behind Qatar’s impressive growth over the last twenty years, is widely credited with raising its global profile as an educational and cultural hub, and tourism destination. It is clear that this has in turn bred resentment in Saudi Arabia and the UAE. In a meeting with a senior Saudi official, Sheikh Hamid was described as being “disrespectful” and of having ambitions that were “unrealistic.” For the UAE, Qatar’s rise has been particularly problematic, with the two having gone head-to-head commercially, culturally, and economically; for example, Qatar Airways versus Emirates, or which city will be the Gulf’s glitzy tourist destination: Doha or Dubai. With Qatar hosting the 2022 World Cup, Doha is widely seen as having gained the upper hand.

However, what has really irked the Saudis and Emirates, is Qatar’s foreign policy. Sheikh Hamid wanted a foreign policy that was not only independent but distinctive. In this, Qatar saw in the Muslim Brotherhood an opportunity: it enables Qatar to advance its interests globally and at the same time distinguish itself from Saudi Arabia. Further, amidst concerns about the loss of Arab and Islamic culture in the region, “Qatar has essentially imported significant intellectual figures as a means of maintaining authenticity and promoting Arab and Islamic culture. Allowing exiles into the country has also helped the Qatari government appear

sympathetic to popular causes across the Arab world and has afforded it the opportunity to promote political discussion largely divorced from local politics” (Freer 2018, 96). A similar logic applies to Qatar’s relationship with Iran—Saudi Arabia’s *bête noire*—and, to a lesser extent, Turkey.

Iran and Turkey

Prior to 1979, Saudi Arabia and Iran enjoyed diplomatic, and oftentimes, amicable relations. The two were the “twin pillars” protecting US interests in the Gulf. In February of that year, however, Ayatollah Khomeini’s Islamic Revolution shattered whatever bonds of fraternity existed. The implications for Saudi Arabia, which regards itself as the leader of the Muslim world, were huge. Khomeini’s brand of revolutionary Islam was a direct threat to the Saudi monarchy, who Khomeini denounced as a “band of heretics.” In November of that year, inspired by the Iranian Revolution, a group of millenarians seized control of the Grand Mosque in Mecca and called for the overthrow of the monarchy. Though the al-Saud were able to put down the rebellion, conservative elements within the country seized the opportunity to have greater sway over the Kingdom’s direction. Social reforms (particularly those favorable towards women) were reversed, and the *mutawwa’a* (religious police) were allowed to “more rigorously enforce a strict regime of compliance with Wahhabi norms” (Commins 2006, 163–69).

Among the more moderate elements in Saudi Arabia, there is much resentment for the revival of political Islam after 1979. The current Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman, recently blamed 1979 for all the Kingdom’s problems, “We were living a very normal life like the rest of the Gulf countries. Women were driving cars, there were movie theaters in Saudi Arabia, women worked everywhere. We were normal people developing like any other country in the world until the events of 1979” (Khashoggi 2018). Our interviewees in Riyadh expressed a similar sentiment, claiming that after 1979, “conservatives hijacked the country,” and “we got a religion we didn’t recognize” (SAIS Group Meeting, Riyadh, 16 January 2019).

Over the last forty years, the 1980–1988 Iran-Iraq War, 2003 invasion of Iraq, and 2010–2011 Arab Spring have all served to breed hostility and rivalry between the two countries. The last two, in particular, have also provided Iran with an opportunity to significantly expand its reach in the region. A recurring complaint in Riyadh was that Iran was the “biggest problem” in the Middle East and was constantly “interfering in our affairs” (SAIS Group Meeting, Riyadh, 15 January 2019). For example, Saudi Arabia has frequently accused Iran of stoking unrest among Saudi’s Shi’a community, a sizeable proportion of the population, particularly in the eastern part of the country. Iran’s threat to Saudi Arabia is thus two-fold: on the one hand, it challenges Saudi Arabia’s position as the leader of the Islamic world, while on the other, it stands accused of trying to foment unrest in the country.

With regards to Turkey, rivalry between the two countries goes back to the eighteenth century when the Ottomans and Wahhabis clashed over control for the Islamic world. In more recent years, this rivalry has reemerged with the rise of Recep Erdoğan, whose brand of

Islamist populism is at odds with Saudi Arabia's autocratic nationalism. Further, Turkey was supportive of the Muslim Brotherhood during the Arab Spring, and has since provided refuge to its members following the crackdown on their activities elsewhere. Erdoğan, who has often been critical of Saudi Arabia, recently claimed that Turkey "is the only country that can lead the Muslim world." Mohammed bin Salman, meanwhile, has referred to Iran and Turkey, along with hardline Islamic groups, as the "triangle of evil."

Similar to the Muslim Brotherhood, Qatar does not perceive Iran and Turkey to be a threat. Instead, it sees them as an opportunity to build relations with a multitude of actors as a way of diversifying protection against Saudi Arabia, as per its foreign policy goals. As one of our interviewees in Doha explained, "it looks strange from the outside, and infuriates the Saudis, but Qatar is just hedging its bets" (SAIS Group Meeting, Doha, 23 January 2019).

The irony of the Gulf crisis, of course, is that it has pushed Qatar closer to both countries. For Qatar, who, prior to the crisis was heavily reliant on the border with Saudi Arabia, the initial impact of the crisis was huge. In Doha, "the only way out of the blockade was Iran," through whom Qatar now imports most of its goods. The crisis also confirmed Qatar's worst fears about Saudi Arabia. In Doha, the embargo was described as "an act of war" and thus further strengthened Qatar's resolve to expand strategic partnerships with countries such as Turkey (SAIS Group Meeting, Doha, 20 January 2019). Rumors abound in Qatar that the Quartet were planning to invade Qatar, and one interviewee claimed that Turkey, through its relationship with the United States, "helped with that" (SAIS Group Meeting, Washington DC, 11 December 2018).

The strengthened ties between Qatar, and Iran and Turkey, have in turn increased the Quartet's fears about an "Islamist" alliance. According to an analyst in Doha, this "alliance is overblown" and that previously, Qatar had actually taken a "tougher position on Iran" than its neighbors (SAIS Group Meeting, Doha, 21 January 2019). However, it seems unlikely Qatar will step back from relations with the two countries anytime soon. As one of our Qatari interlocutors explained, "our sovereignty is a red line" and the 13 Demands, "are not about negotiation, but about capitulation" (SAIS Group Meeting, Doha, 20 January 2019).

Insecurity

The Gulf crisis is a crisis of insecurity. The region is in a state of flux and amidst growing uncertainty about the future "no one in the region is secure" (SAIS Group Meeting, Doha, 21 January 2019). Threats abound: from below, as populations place greater political demands on their leaders; from the sides as states meddle in each other's affairs; and from above—existentially—in the form of competing ideologies.

Yet these threats are a reflection of two broader themes: identity and power. Identity in the Gulf is multi-layered and exists across a spectrum of family, tribal, religious, national and *Khaleeji*, or Gulfi ties. In recent years, however, there has been a strong emergence of national identity, with the nation state increasingly prioritized as a structure above all others. In this context, it is easier to see why, for example, political Islam is regarded as a threat to Saudi

Arabia: “allegiance should be to the state, not religion” (SAIS Group Meeting, Riyadh, 15 January 2019). There has been a tremendous growth of nationalism in the region, and subtle differences in the countries are increasingly being co-opted as markers of national identity. In Qatar, the Emir, whose portrait adorns many of the skyscrapers on Doha’s increasingly expanding skyline, has become the “personification of resistance,” with the country rallying firmly behind its leader (SAIS Group Meeting, Doha, 23 January 2019).

At the same time, countries in the region are competing with each other across numerous levels. Saudi Arabia and Iran (with Turkey coming up from behind) are jostling for the position of regional hegemon; Qatar and the UAE are competing over who can build the latest Louvre, or biggest education hub—themselves symbols of an emerging national identity. There is also personal competition between the leaders: Mohammed bin Salman in Saudi Arabia, Sheikh Tamim in Qatar, and Mohammed bin Zayed in the UAE are all (relatively) young and ambitious. This new generation is challenging the norms and identities of before, with the result that decision-making structures in the region are not the same as they once were. As one of our interviewees described, “there are still cultural norms that govern our relations” and the new leaders are often perceived as disrespecting these (SAIS Group Meeting, Washington DC, 11 December 2018).

During our time in the Gulf, we were repeatedly reminded about the strong social bonds that existed across the region. Saudis and Qataris, in particular, share deep family, tribal, and religious ties. Yet power and identity have converged to produce a crisis that has served not only to deepen existing insecurities, but rupture the existing social fabric of the Gulf. In both Riyadh in Doha, we heard how a “culture of hate” had emerged where attacks, particularly within the media, had become increasingly personal. There has also been a catastrophic breakdown in trust; as one Qatari explained, “even if the border is reopened, we won’t go back to the way things were” (SAIS Group Meeting, Doha, 20 January 2019). Eighteen months into the embargo, it is clear that the narratives of the Gulf crisis have become further polarized and without a resolution, the culture of hate risks being ingrained in a generation.

Policy Recommendations

To Both Sides

- **Civil society and/or religious leaders could step in to help promote unity.** Countries in the Gulf should be able to express a Gulf identity, and a national identity. The countries need to focus on what unites them rather than what divides them. FIFA’s potential decision to expand the World Cup could provide the perfect opportunity for the Gulf region to unite whilst celebrating their differences at the same time.
- **Strengthen existing institutions in the Gulf,** in particular the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). This could include measures such as adopting a currency union, which would help deepen ties between the countries. Further, countries need to assess why the conflict resolution mechanism within the GCC has not worked in the present crisis and strengthen it.

- **Undertake trust-building measures.**

To the Quartet

- **The Quartet needs to send a clear message that it does respect Qatar's independence and will not try to impinge on it.** The Quartet's actions towards Qatar have served only to confirm the latter's suspicion that Saudi Arabia, in particular, does not respect its sovereignty.
- **Qatar's relationship with Iran should be seen as an opportunity to keep Iran in check.** The embargo has so far served only to push Qatar closer to the Quartet's rivals. Most countries in the region share some form of a relationship with Iran and it is not realistic to expect Qatar to sever ties with it.
- **Reconsider its stance towards the Muslim Brotherhood**, which is not one centrally controlled body. Given the scale and support the movement's factions receive across the region, it is not going to go away. The Quartet should engage in dialogue with the Brothers, and make real distinctions between Tunisia's Ennahda, Egypt's Brethren, and Islamist jihadi groups in Syria, Libya, and Yemen.

To Qatar

- **Small changes and emphases in the direction of the Demands would be helpful**, even though Qatar is unlikely to make larger changes now because they will "lose face." Quietly changing the editorial direction of Al Jazeera would help improve the broadcaster's reputation, and also send a message of goodwill to the Quartet.
- **Reevaluate how far it wants to go in escalating foreign policy actions inimical to Saudi interests.**

Family Politics Within the Gulf Crisis

Patrick Makles

Family conflict is always a controversial matter, whether it is arguing with cousins at the dinner table or overthrowing a sibling in a coup, and often results in irrational behavior. The royal families in the Gulf are no exception. During our trip to Saudi Arabia and Qatar, we naturally heard passionate reactions from all sides that expressed this irrationality.

Some Saudis blame the pride and ego of the Qataris for not having a discussion (SAIS Group Meeting, Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Riyadh, January 2019) while Qataris say the embargo is a result of adventurous, rogue policies of a young leader who miscalculates his influence (SAIS Group Meeting, Qatar Foreign Ministry, Doha, January 2019). A scholar in Riyadh explained that pragmatics are not working due to pride, Arab blood, and ego (SAIS Group Meeting, Prince Saud Al Faisal Institute, Riyadh, January 2019). Another scholar in Doha agreed, describing the situation as being managed ridiculously, stupidity at its best, and not 21st century diplomacy; these are modern countries run by feudal systems where families do not like each other and people are tired of their leaders' policies. This crisis is not a logical conflict, it is personal (SAIS Group Meeting, Hamad bin Khalifa University, Doha, January 2019). Despite such emotional responses, the conflict is by no means a mere family squabble. The reality of the current Gulf crisis is complex and dynamic. No single factor can explain it. How can two socially intertwined neighbors cease dialogue for almost two years? More importantly, why is pragmatism not working in this situation?

This chapter argues that beneath the Gulf crisis, the current leadership of the al-Saud family in Saudi Arabia and the al-Thani family in Qatar are both confronted with their own challenges to domestic legitimacy. Political and social liberalization threaten each monarch's internal self-image, but can also be an opportunity for dialogue, collaboration, and resolution of the crisis. The first part of this chapter presents a brief overview of the al-Saud family in Saudi Arabia and the al-Thani family in Qatar today, highlighting their respective struggles for legitimacy. History is referenced in order to provide context, but emphasis is placed on the development of more recent internal politics since 1995. The second half of this chapter then analyzes how these domestic political dynamics connect to one another and impact the ongoing conflict. Although limited in scope, the analysis of these closed political systems will hopefully provide a better understanding of their role within the region, along with a new lens through which to view the current Gulf crisis.

The al-Saud Royal Family

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a hereditary monarchy monopolized by the ruling al-Saud family. It is considered to be an absolute monarchy because the King wields all decision-making power, subject to many different influences. No political parties or national elections exist, but the Shura Council is a consultative body that receives complaints and suggestions

from the public and can propose laws⁵ (Ehteshami and Wright 2007, 927). The traditional base for the Saudi monarch's domestic legitimacy has always been grounded in elite unity and Wahhabism.

Abdulaziz ibn⁶ Saud is the founding King of modern-day Saudi Arabia. He unified Saudi Arabia in 1932 by strategically securing his own line of descent with over 200 marriages and the birth of 43 sons and over 50 daughters (Al-Rasheed 2010, 71–77). This political strategy effectively cemented the al-Saud lineage, yet causes tension to this day in the form of family rivalries and bids for power and legitimacy.

Current Saudi Leadership

King Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud⁷ is the current King of Saudi Arabia at 83 years old. Salman took the throne in January 2015 after the death of his half-brother, then-King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz. King Salman is one of seven sons to Abdulaziz's favorite wife, Hassa bint⁸ Ahmed Al Sudairi (Stenslie 2016, 129). The Sudairi Seven, as they are known, are considered to be one of the most powerful al-Saud factions. Salman served as Crown Prince from 2012–2015, Minister of Defense from 2011–2015, and Governor of Riyadh for over fifty years.

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman al-Saud (MbS) is the current Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia at the age of 33. MbS was appointed Crown Prince on June 21, 2017 when he was only 31. He was named deputy Crown Prince in April 2015 and Minister of Defense, along with several other titles, in January 2015 (Stenslie 2016, 125). MbS is considered to be the current de facto ruler of Saudi Arabia due to King Salman's declining health.

The Transition of a Generation

The most significant challenge that the Saudi monarchy faces today is maintaining its legitimacy at home as it experiences a generational transition in al-Saud leadership.

Succession in Saudi Arabia has followed traditional norms set by previous leaders since the founding King, Abdulaziz ibn Saud, who died in 1953 before institutionalizing succession criteria for the al-Saud family (Stenslie 2016, 122). The second King, Saud bin Abdulaziz, groomed his own sons for rule rather than his brothers. Then-Crown Prince Faisal bin Abdulaziz deposed Saud to become King in 1964. Faisal established informal succession principles asserting that succession should only include descendants of King Abdulaziz ibn Saud, pass power horizontally from brother to brother (not father to son), maintain balance among the al-Saud family factions, and bypass elder brothers when necessary to have the eldest but most able King.

King Faisal's guiding principles helped influence two future royal decrees. Almost 30 years later, King Fahd bin Abdulaziz adopted "The Basic Law of Governance" in 1992 that institutionalized previous unwritten rules and addressed the right of Abdulaziz ibn Saud's

⁵ It is important to note that Shura Council members are appointed by the King.

⁶ The term *ibn* or *bin* signifies *son of*.

⁷ The term *al-Saud* means that he is a member of the al-Saud family.

⁸ The term *bint* signifies *daughter of*.

grandchildren to claim the throne (Stenslie 2016, 123). King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz⁹ then adopted “The Allegiance Council Law” in 2006, establishing a 34-member council of second and third generation princes to facilitate the transition of power when a king falls too ill. The evolution of informal and formal rules stresses the importance of legitimacy within the royal family to rule.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is currently undergoing a generational change in leadership for the first time since the death of the founding King. Legitimacy is necessary if any of the possible 200 plus third-generation princes desire to lead. Since January 2015, the most prominent contenders to the throne, besides Muqrin bin Abdulaziz and Ahmed bin Abdulaziz,¹⁰ have been third-generation princes including Miteb bin Abdullah,¹¹ Mohammed bin Nayef (MbN),¹² and MbS. Upon becoming King in January 2015, King Salman followed Abdullah’s decree which appointed Muqrin as Crown Prince and MbN as deputy Crown Prince (Stenslie 2016, 124). In April 2015, King Salman challenged Saudi succession norms by replacing Muqrin with MbN and naming his son, MbS, as deputy Crown Prince at the age of 29. The dynamics among al-Saud leaders in dealing with this generational succession has put a strain on elite unity in recent years.

The Rise of MbS

MbS has taken advantage of the legitimacy he has through his father’s rule to solidify his claim to the throne over the last four years. He delegitimized MbN by openly criticizing his older cousin’s management of domestic security as the Minister of Interior (Stenslie 2016, 125). Through the Saudi Arabian-led military intervention in Yemen which began in April 2015, MbS used his authority as Minister of Defense to impose supervision over duties that traditionally belonged to the Minister of Interior as well as the Saudi Arabian National Guard commanded by his other cousin Miteb (Stenslie 2016, 126). These power moves paid off in June 2017 when King Salman replaced MbN with his own son, MbS, as Crown Prince.

MbS further secured his position by placing hundreds of princes and government officials under house arrest at the Ritz Carlton hotel in Riyadh in November 2017 (SAIS Group Meeting, Qatar University, Doha, January 2019). Miteb, one of the detained princes, was dismissed as Commander of the Saudi Arabian National Guard that month. Although publicly explained as an anti-corruption crackdown, MbS took out threatening elite subgroups and silenced critics. In light of recent events, it is argued that King Salman is not managing the

⁹ Abdullah served as the previous King of Saudi Arabia from 2005 to 2015 but was the de facto ruler from 1995 after his brother, then-King Fahd, suffered from a stroke (Stenslie 2016, 117).

¹⁰ Ahmed is King Salman’s full brother and youngest of the Sudairi Seven at 76 years old (Stenslie 2016, 130–133).

¹¹ Miteb was the de facto ruler during the final years of King Abdullah’s reign due to his father’s poor health (SAIS Group Meeting, Qatar University, January 2019). He also previously served as the Commander of the Saudi Arabian National Guard.

¹² MbN is arguably the most experienced leader of Abdulaziz’s grandsons (Stenslie 2016, 124–131). He previously served as Minister of Interior and has had close relations with the United States due to efforts in counterterrorism.

ruling line correctly (SAIS Group Meeting, Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, Doha, January 2019). Traditionally, he should first choose his brother, then his oldest nephew, and then his son. Nonetheless, MbS has suppressed major opposition while under the protection of his father and is the current de facto ruler. He needs to be creative in maintaining legitimacy while leading his country through reform as part of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030.

The late King Abdullah started implementing liberalization in Saudi Arabia long before MbS. The 2005 direct elections for half the seats in municipal councils showed progress at the time (Ehteshami and Wright 2007, 928). King Salman slowed down change to gain more support among conservative elites who remained fearful of regional transformations brought on by the Arab Spring. MbS is going back to Abdullah's more aggressive reform policies. His motivation is to control the pace of political and social liberalization so that it "does not alter the balance of power in the kingdom" (Ehteshami and Wright 2007, 928). Preserving Saudi culture and its Islamic character pleases conservative royal elites and the clerical establishment while modernization expands MbS's base of support to new groups, primarily the youth. This ensures al-Saud legitimacy is protected and strengthened by reform, rather than allowing change to take on "a momentum of its own" (Ehteshami and Wright 2007, 930). Simple steps that do not put the country at risk are important for the current and future Saudi generations, but even more so for the survival of the monarchy itself.

The al-Thani Royal Family

The State of Qatar is a hereditary monarchy dominated by the ruling al-Thani family. It is debated whether Qatar is an absolute or constitutional monarchy. No political parties exist, but Qatar does have a Permanent Constitution which lays the foundations for its Council of Ministers, Shura Council, and Central Municipal Council. Although the al-Thani family has not faced many external contenders for power, its basis for domestic legitimacy traditionally lies within the al-Thani elite.

Jassim bin Mohammed al-Thani, Mohammed bin Thani's son,¹³ was the founding Emir¹⁴ of the State of Qatar, ruling from 1878–1913 (Diab 2018). The modern State of Qatar however, was not formed until independence from the British was achieved in September 1971. A coup in 1972¹⁵ marked one of the first significant events to occur in modern Qatar, exemplifying the contentious nature and infighting among al-Thani leaders.

Current Qatari Leadership

Emir Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani is the current Emir of Qatar at 38 years old. Tamim is the ninth al-Thani ruler of Qatar and has served for almost six years since he was handed power

¹³ Mohammed bin Thani was the first al-Thani ruler in Qatar after being installed by the British during the late 1800s following an uprising against the al-Khalifa family of Bahrain who had previously controlled the territory.

¹⁴ The term *Emir* signifies *ruler*.

¹⁵ Khalifa bin Hamad overthrew his cousin, Ahmad bin Ali, to become Emir of Qatar in 1972. Ahmad then married into Emirati relations and moved to Dubai (Ramesh 2017).

by his father, Hamad bin Khalifa, on June 25, 2013 (Congressional Research Service 2019, 3). Some Saudis consider Hamad, the Father Emir, to still be “pulling the strings” in Qatar (SAIS Group Meeting, Hamad bin Khalifa University, Doha, January 2019). Prior to that, Tamim had been Qatar’s heir apparent since August 2003 when his older brother, Jassim bin Hamad, renounced his title of deputy Emir.

Deputy Emir Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani is the current heir apparent to Qatar at the age of 31 (Congressional Research Service 2019, 1). Emir Tamim, Abdullah’s older brother, appointed him as heir apparent in November 2014 when he was 26.

Shaping a New Qatari Identity

The most significant challenge for the Qatari monarchy today is maintaining its domestic legitimacy as it seeks to define a new Qatari identity.

Historically, Qatar has struggled with internal competition and transitions of power. The main challenge has always been from within, as seen in 1995 when Hamad bin Khalifa overthrew his own father in a coup. Hamad began shifting efforts towards producing liquefied natural gas in order to help develop Qatar a more self-sufficient and sustainable economy (SAIS Group Meeting, Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, Doha, January 2019). This feat marked a significant change in direction. Hamad’s objective was to put Qatar on the world map by carving out his own presence rather than following in Saudi Arabia’s footsteps. His ambition and determination to change was met with resistance both internally and externally. Many al-Thani members were not happy with Hamad, leading to an attempted counter coup in 1996 allegedly backed by Saudi Arabia (SAIS Group Meeting, Georgetown University Qatar, Doha, January 2019). The failed coup to restore Khalifa as Emir involved members of a subgroup from one of Qatar’s largest tribes, resulting in 6,000 of their members being “disenfranchised” (Kamrava 2009, 403). This al-Thani factionalism was the main driver behind Hamad’s liberalization plan for Qatar that began in the 1990s.

Hamad’s modernization of Qatar allowed him to appeal to a broader base of Qataris and to the international community while centralizing his power within the al-Thani family through new institutions “staffed by his loyal supporters, including some of his sons and daughters” (Kamrava 2009, 401). He opened up Qatar’s political system with direct elections for its 29-member Central Municipal Council in March 1999 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, State of Qatar 2019).¹⁶ A draft permanent constitution was proposed in April 2003 and received a 96% approval from a total of 69,000 Qatari votes the following day (Kamrava 2009, 416). The draft constitution promised individual freedoms and proposed elections for 30 out of the 45 members of the Shura Council.¹⁷ About a year later, Hamad ratified the Permanent Constitution of Qatar on June 8, 2004 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, State of Qatar 2019). He had also abolished the Ministry of Information and granted freedom to the press, allowing news networks like Al Jazeera, which he had founded in 1996, to grow (Kamrava 2009, 416). Emir

¹⁶ Qatari men and women vote every four years to elect the Central Municipal Council members.

¹⁷ The other 15 Shura Council members are appointed by the Emir.

Hamad accomplished a lot for political liberalization in Qatar, making democracy look promising, but ensured that civil society was not able to develop independently enough to threaten the monarchy. In doing so, Hamad secured legitimacy among the al-Thani for his son to rule with more manageable internal pressure.

A Leader Formed Out of the Embargo

Tamim has successfully used the embargo to prove himself as a leader; however, he must find a way to implement long-overdue political and social changes in Qatar so that they strengthen his legitimacy rather than hinder it.

Upon taking power, Tamim was a young, inexperienced leader who needed to prove himself. Saudi Arabia saw this as an opportunity to reassert its regional dominance and pressure Tamim by withdrawing its ambassador from Qatar in March 2014. Tamim handled the situation well, but many observers still viewed Hamad as the one who was calling the shots (SAIS Group Meeting, Hamad bin Khalifa University, Doha, January 2019). The embargo in June 2017 changed this when Emir Tamim helped Qatar transform the economic consequences into gains by fully embracing the self-sufficiency and diversification of its supply chains (SAIS Group Meeting, Qatar Foreign Ministry, Doha, January 2019). Massive murals of Emir Tamim began appearing on skyscrapers all over Doha and continue to hang today. Qatar has charted its own course again, but this time under Tamim's leadership. He embraced the embargo to transform one of the most historically fractious families of the Gulf, the al-Thani, into a unified front with the mindset of "we are all in this together" (SAIS Group Meeting, Georgetown University Qatar, Doha, January 2019).

Tamim has established himself as a competent leader, but still faces the challenge of strategically implementing political and social liberalization to broaden his support without upsetting the balance of power. Too much reform too quickly is a direct threat to his legitimacy. Qatar, like Saudi Arabia, is a conservative society with Wahhabist roots, making it difficult to implement drastic political and social changes. Three main groups exist: ultra conservatives, moderate conservatives, and absolute liberals (SAIS Group Meeting, Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy, Doha, January 2019). Absolute liberals are open to elections, but many conservatives still believe that the country needs time to develop itself and determine a system that is compatible with its own society (SAIS Group Meeting, Hamad bin Khalifa University, Doha, January 2019). In addition, the current population of Qatar consists of nearly 90% foreigners (SAIS Group Meeting, Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, Doha, January 2019). Qatar cannot continue relying on foreign and migrant workers for its development without facing future consequences affecting its national identity. Despite these challenges, liberal and even moderate Qataris have been more excited than ever since the embargo. An increased sense of nationalism and pride allows them to no longer feel constrained by a regional hegemon. Tamim needs to proactively determine what democratization looks like for Qatar, while top-down reform is still possible.

Family Politics Within the Gulf Crisis

The recent internal politics of Saudi Arabia and Qatar have primarily been driven by each monarchy's own struggle for legitimacy. The current crisis is a result of the al-Saud and al-Thani leadership attempting to improve their own positions domestically at the expense of the other. This Gulf infighting comes down to who will lead, in which direction, and with what legitimacy.

The 1995 Coup in Qatar

The 1995 coup in Qatar shocked the Gulf when Hamad deposed his father, Khalifa, although Hamad did express early signs of discontent a few years earlier. While King Fahd and Emir Khalifa discussed American presence in Qatar at a meeting during the First Gulf War, Hamad interrupted them and spoke out disrespectfully several times until being kicked out (SAIS Group Meeting, Embassy of Saudi Arabia to the United States, Washington DC, December 2018). The Saudi impression of Hamad was negative: he was outspoken and out of line. The al-Saud stood with Khalifa because he married into Saudi relations and did not challenge the status quo (SAIS Group Meeting, Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, Doha, January 2019). Khalifa traveled to Riyadh annually to kiss the hand of the Saudi King, symbolizing al-Saud regional dominance (SAIS Group Meeting, Georgetown University Qatar, Doha, January 2019). Hamad did not like this leadership of subservience and took action in 1995, causing Saudi Arabia to feel betrayed (SAIS Group Meeting, Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, Doha, January 2019).

The 2011 Arab Spring

Even before the Arab Spring, the al-Saud and al-Thani leaders experienced another significant rupture in trust. The Saudis have an audio tape of a phone call between Hamad and Libya's Muammar Gaddafi in 2008 when Hamad said, "Saudi Arabia will fall in 12 years, we are working on it" (SAIS Group Meeting, Embassy of Saudi Arabia to the United States, Washington DC, December 2018). The 2011 Arab Spring brought uprisings and ideologies to the region that threatened the legitimacy of the al-Saud and al-Thani monarchies. The uprisings in Bahrain hit closest to home while the conflicts in Syria and Yemen also posed a threat. Saudi Arabia and Qatar, however, have a difference in threat perception. Saudi Arabia is fearful of political and social change translating into regionwide instability; Riyadh feels threatened by Qatar's support for rebel groups and improved relations with Iran and Turkey (SAIS Group Meeting, Saudi Foreign Ministry, Riyadh, January 2019). Qatar is deepening its strategic ability by hedging bets and diversifying relationships while Saudi Arabia perceives Doha's support for the Arab Spring as meddling (SAIS Group Meeting, Georgetown University Qatar, Doha, January 2019).

The 2014 Agreement

These tensions led to Gulf leaders meeting in November 2013 to sign a handwritten agreement on Gulf cooperation towards regional stability and security in which Qatar agreed to no longer interfere with or undermine Saudi Arabia (SAIS Group Meeting, Embassy of Saudi Arabia to the United States, Washington DC, December 2018). Qatar allegedly broke the agreement within a few months. In November 2014 King Abdullah lashed out at Emir Tamim in front of other Gulf leaders for doing so (SAIS Group Meeting, Embassy of the UAE to the United States, Washington DC, October 2018). They then signed a supplemental agreement that essentially addressed the same issues as before. Qatar claimed to be fulfilling the agreement and Saudi Arabia did not bring up further concerns until implementing the embargo in June 2017.

It is difficult for Qatar to come to the table with so many pre-conditions in the 13 Demands while it is tough for Saudi Arabia to make concessions if Qatar does not enact confidence building measures. The al-Saud and al-Thani leaders cannot cooperate if the basic elements of communication do not exist. But disagreement should not mean that both sides cannot cooperate. The Saudi and Qatari monarchies seek stability in the Gulf, especially amid new regional dynamics brought on by the Arab Spring combined with a generational change. MbS and Tamim are both young leaders who are facing similar political and social pressures domestically that threaten their legitimacy. Rather than remaining divided on old issues between previous leaders, they can work together on moving forward by using their shared interests to develop smart reform that benefits each other's stability and security in the region.

Conclusion

Analyzing internal politics among family groups in the Gulf is key to better understanding the roots of the current conflict as well as possible opportunities for resolution. The leaders in each country have taken advantage of the crisis to establish their own legitimacy at the expense of the other. The lack of dialogue, along with an increased nationalism causing the people to rally behind their respective leaders, now more than ever is rupturing the social fabric of the Gulf in a way that will have a lasting impact on the monarchies if a resolution to the crisis is not reached soon.

It is in the best interest of the al-Saud and al-Thani rulers to re-establish Gulf unity through collective action to help each other strengthen their own domestic legitimacy. This will require someone to reach out, then things will fall into place (SAIS Group Meeting, Prince Saud Al Faisal Institute, Riyadh, January 2019). In political systems where a few ruling elites wield the majority of power, resolution will be reached when those leaders choose it. Reopening and maintaining dialogue will help preserve stability in the Gulf.

Policy Recommendations

To Saudi Arabia

- **Restart dialogue with Qatar** by acting as the regional leader and reaching out first without pre-conditions.
- **Offer to hold a bilateral meeting with Emir Tamim** to have talks without the pressure of four countries against one.
- **Reduce the embargo** by opening the border to stop pushing Qatar further away from Gulf cooperation.

To Qatar

- **Implement confidence-building measures** by drafting possible actions that can be taken on some of the more flexible issues among the Quartet's 13 Demands.
- **Develop transparency initiatives with Saudi Arabia** to show that Qatar's intentions in the region are not to threaten or undermine Saudi Arabia.

To Both Parties

- **Agree to reopen and maintain communication** between leaders at a minimum.
- **Draft a shared agenda that focuses on developing processes** for moving forward with dialogue and action.
- **Encourage respectful disagreement** while seeking to understand where the other side is coming from.
- **Acknowledge differences and mistakes made between leaders from the past** and identify unhelpful behaviors that impede dialogue.
- **Identify shared interests and purpose** around each monarch's own challenges to legitimacy.
- **Work together on political and social change in the Gulf** and encourage progress on meaningful liberalization that benefits the other country and the region.

Governmental Public Relations Strategies in the Gulf Crisis

Adding Fuel to the Conflict

Julia Wargo

Since the official break-off of diplomatic ties between Saudi Arabia and Qatar, analysts have disagreed on long-term implications of this for individuals, the Middle East, and the world. According to some narratives, the conflict is a brotherly spat, easily resolved when one side demonstrates a willingness to sit down and negotiate. Others see greater implications of the crisis such as on proxy wars in Syria and Yemen, and their implications for the hegemony of Saudi Arabia in a volatile region.

In meetings in Saudi Arabia and Qatar, including in their respective Foreign Ministries, a consistent metaphor used was a fight between light and dark for the region. Saudi Arabia frames its fight as countering terrorism and foreign policy decisions that have directly harmed its interests abroad. Qatar, Saudis say, has aligned itself with backward powers Iran and Turkey. This idea was expressed explicitly with the words, “The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia sees [Qatar’s] dark side, while many other actors see a young small country with modern buildings and automatically take their side” (SAIS Group Meeting with Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Riyadh, 15 January 2019). Qatar in turn frames itself as a small state whose survival is threatened by a power-hungry Saudi Arabia on the verge of invading.

Both sides have invested considerable time and energy in convincing their publics, the region, and the world that they are correct to see themselves as victims striving for a brighter future in the Middle East.

There are a variety of factors fueling and maintaining this conflict, but one of the most visible has been an official governmental strategy of distancing, aided by typical instruments of soft power. These attempts at shaping public opinion through government action have made the resolution of this crisis more difficult with each passing incident.

Weaponizing Public Opinion Against Each Other

The majority of meetings in both countries, and especially in the Saudi Human Rights Commission and National Human Rights Committee in Qatar, mentioned the social component of this conflict and described the rupturing of familial ties as its greatest cost. Social costs listed include Qatari citizens unable to easily visit Mecca and the educational cost of students torn from their study due to the embargo. However, the social dimension to this conflict, including educational, religious, and familial ties, does not preclude the development of hate speech. In fact, both governments are actively using their media channels and entertainment industries to create mistrust and widen the social effect of the crisis.

Saudi Governmental Use of Entertainment and Media to Fuel Othering of Qataris

One of the frequently mentioned examples of this is children’s songs produced in Saudi Arabia that are anti-Qatari. The journalist Khalid Almatrafi, who has almost one million followers on

Twitter, promoted a children's song video that according to the Qatar-based newspaper, Gulf Times, is titled "Pour, oh Rain, in Doha" and wishes alternately for the drowning of Qatar and other times "considers it a Saudi province" (Al-Qudah 2019). Although the song itself didn't reach a large audience, it did provoke responses on Twitter from various users urging Human Rights Watch to intervene since this is the prompting hatred in children.

Other incendiary examples from the Saudi entertainment industry include the September 2017 song called "Teach Qatar" written by a "minister and adviser at the Saudi Royal court" and with a production company primarily owned by Prince Al-Waleed bin Talal, a prominent member of the Saudi royal family (Dahan 2017). The song begins with the words "teach Qatar, and those who stand behind it, that our country is patient. But when matters escalate and become dangerous, you'll see the actions of its men" and features nationalism as well as threats: "Saudi Arabia is the epitome of might and enshrinement... Saudi Arabia is sky, earth and sea" (Dahan 2017). In the first 24 hours, this song was watched over 394,000 times, and now has a view count over 8.5 million, due partly to the involvement of top Saudi and Iraqi singers in its production (Rotana 2017). These instances showcase that members of the Saudi government are actively trying to speak to their domestic audience and alienate Qatar. Qatar in turn suspended dealings with the artists that contributed to "Teach Qatar." Meanwhile, the writer of the song was promoted to chairman of Saudi Arabia's General Authority for Sports days after its release. Other embargoing countries have similar stories, with an Egyptian singer releasing a song featuring lyrics about the foreign minister of Qatar, saying, "How are you so rude? Oh foreign minister of Qatar" (Alaraby 2017).

Poetry has also been mobilized for political aims, with an official court poet for King Salman likening Qatar and its friends to "barking dogs, cawing crows and a devious fox" in front of the court. A Qatari poet fired back with some rather choice words: "Dunk your body in like swines, cover your faces with as much filth as you want. Drag your robe through the mire ... you imbecile, bray on about whoever you want, just not Qatar" (Browning 2017). In a region that values both poetry and politeness so highly, these insults make it less likely that an amiable negotiation can resolve the conflict. This is not merely an embargo; increasingly, emotions are mobilized to exacerbate differences.

Political cartoons and media coverage have also contributed, in all the embargoing countries, to these divides. In the UAE, "newspapers show depictions of Qatar's peninsular outline wearing the black turban of Iran's theocratic rulers, or shaped like a squid with tentacles smothering the whole Arabian Peninsula" (Browning 2017). Al Jazeera has no bureaus in Saudi Arabia, and even hotels are banned from offering the channel (Erickson 2017). When news is lopsided, alienation is inevitable.

In addition to derogatory depictions of Qatar in Saudi and UAE newspapers, Saudi Arabia also has an army of twitter trolls that posts anti-Qatar comments, with many of the accounts set up just before the hack in May 2017 that precipitated the crisis (SAIS Group Meeting with Hamid bin Khalifa University, Doha, 23 January 2019). This is only one of many ways in which Saudi trolls have been utilized, as they also augment pro-government messages.

Qatari Government Use of Entertainment and Media to Fuel Othering of Embargoing Countries

Qatar has also demonized the embargoing countries and in some cases of the United States in political cartoons and media depictions. It paints the United States as possibly having helped precipitate the crisis, and Doha newspapers depict Gulf leaders in thrall to the United States, showing a “fiendish-looking Uncle Sam with a dead dove of peace on a platter, while in another US President Donald Trump is conjured from a genie’s lamp” (Browning 2017).

Qataris focused on Saudi Arabia’s wrongs in all of our governmental meetings as well, othering Saudi Arabia and depicting Qatar as a victim. We heard about Saudi aggression ranging from its alleged almost-invasion of Qatar to its denial of access to Mecca. At times victimhood claims seemed to come at the cost of other concerns. At the National Human Rights Committee in Doha, many officials only briefly mentioned migrant workers or other human rights issues they were working to solve (but claimed to have resolved many of these issues) and instead showcased reports they published in English and Arabic about the human rights cost of the conflict on Qatar, including displaced students, the inability of many pilgrims to do the hajj and umrah, and one case of forced disappearance (SAIS Group Meeting with National Human Rights Committee, Doha, 22 January 2019). The issue of Mecca came up repeatedly. Given the religious ties between the two countries, difficulties in conducting pilgrimages is a human cost directly impacting the public and negatively impacting Qatari views of Saudi Arabia as the custodian of Islam’s holiest site. Also prominent in Qatari discourse are the Saudi role in 9/11 and the Khashoggi murder.

This framing of the conflict by Qatar as a victim and Saudi as an aggressor, and the constant refrain that Qataris “woke up” suddenly to the crisis, did not appeal to a Western audience that sees human rights issues and past support for terrorism in both Qatar and Saudi Arabia. The same is true for both Qatari (and Saudi) use of polarizing language like ‘light and dark.’ This language was overly simplistic, frequently repeated, and seemed to belie deeper issues at work while othering the other party.

Al Jazeera coverage has also been a huge sticking point in the conflict. This coverage was mentioned several times as one of the most vital of all of the Quartet concerns. Al Jazeera mentions Saudi Arabia frequently, and almost always negatively, alongside hosting controversial speakers who are allowed to air opinions that Saudi Arabia interprets as justifying suicide bombing. Although Al Jazeera maintains that they have independence, the government is involved in the leadership and can use it as a tool to manipulate the public against Saudi Arabia.

Public Opinion at Home

In both countries, one of the most common public opinions we were exposed to was the utmost respect given to the leadership. This may in turn have an effect on the crisis and its intractability. The UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar all have young leaders, each wanting to appear strong on the world stage. For Saudi Arabia, part of looking strong is maintaining the

embargo until demands are met. Speakers even mentioned the need for a “regional hierarchy” with the implicit idea that Saudi Arabia should be at the top and Qatar should be following, in order to maintain peace and order in the region (SAIS Group Meeting with Rasanah International Institute for Iranian Studies, Riyadh, 14 January 2019). Each country and leader believes itself to be exceptionally strong and wants to prove it.

Mohammed bin Salman is an important case in point. According to the Arab Youth Survey results, 97% of youth think he is a strong leader, 90% think he will take the country in the right direction, and 91% say that they support King Salman’s decision to appoint his son as Crown Prince (ASDA’A Burson-Marsteller Arab Youth Survey Middle East 2018). These findings were taken from 300 respondents from Riyadh, Jeddah and Dammam.

In informal conversations, university students from King Saud University strongly echoed this support for Mohammed bin Salman. Despite Saudi Arabia’s involvement in the embargo of Qatar, the forced resignation of Lebanon’s Prime Minister, the war in Yemen, and the recent Khashoggi killing, all of which have been the cause of international outrage against the Crown Prince, Saudi youth support is still high, and the percentage of youth in the country rising. Despite detractors who worry about the pace of modernization and opening to the world, Mohammed bin Salman remains popular domestically. This popularity can be linked to increased Saudi nationalism, something that traditionally thrives even more when there is a real, or perceived, threat. The omnipresent posters of Mohammed bin Salman and t-shirts with his face on it sold in Riyadh added to the sense of deification and commodification of Saudi Arabia’s leader.

On the Qatari side, Sheikh Tamim has only gained popularity from the embargo. Massive images of Tamim are plastered on buildings everywhere in Doha, and stickers with his image are handed out for free alongside purchases in the souq. The particular image of Tamim that went viral was popularized after Saudi Arabia broke diplomatic ties and is titled “Tamim is Glory” (Bukhari 2017). Although the image was supposedly spontaneously created, the artist, Ahmed Almaadheed, had previous ties to the Qatari government and visited a royal who offered approval of the image. To a foreigner visiting for the first time, it seemed like a cult of personality, although the government has since taken some of the images down.

Rising nationalism and even optimism echoed everywhere in Doha: from the Chamber of Commerce to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the World Cup-focused Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy. National self-reliance is touted in every industry, but especially in the milk industry, where cows were memorably flown in to replace reliance on Saudi milk. Qataris are proud of the reinforced partnerships with Turkey and Iran, which are seen as absolutely vital to the country’s survival. Qatar’s National Day parade in 2017 for the first time featured Chinese produced SY-400 ballistic missile systems (Finn 2017). In the immediate aftermath of the embargo, Qatari media reported on hundreds of men signing up for the military. These examples demonstrate growing independence from the rest of the GCC, military pride, and nation building and strengthening. The conflict has given Qatar a dividing line with the rest of the Gulf and a more distinct identity.

It seems the Quartet has moved further away from its stated goals than ever. Qatar has been forced closer to Iran and Turkey. Its national identity has solidified and it remains unwilling to compromise on foreign policy with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, and Bahrain. Qatar's refusal to toe the Saudi line has hardened. And the further the Quartet distances itself and the longer the embargo goes on, the more unlikely it is that Qatar will capitulate.

To maintain their popularity and appear strong and save face, it will be difficult for either Qatari or Saudi leaders to back down. Riyadh cannot backtrack from demands without looking too weak to enforce them or acknowledging that the Demands reached too far. Doha cannot negotiate without acknowledging the Demands, which it thinks are illegitimate and infringe on its sovereignty. Both Riyadh and Doha believe they can sustain the conflict and are loathe to back down.

The crisis has increased support for Sheikh Tamim, increased nationalism, and benefited Qatar's economy. Therefore, solving this crisis will require some method of delinking Sheikh Tamim's popularity from his response to the crisis so that Qatari leadership feels secure in its own popularity and power even if the crisis is resolved and relations resume with Saudi Arabia. While the average Qatari citizen is wealthy and happy with the status quo, to the point where he receives money from the government to build a house upon marriage and is paid to go to university, there may be other options available to increase regime popularity. One possibility is giving citizens more of a stake in the government through legislative elections, which the government has already considered but postponed consistently since 2013.

Publicity Campaigns Abroad

Manipulation of media, entertainment, and other soft power tools has not been limited to the Gulf. The United States is also a primary target.

Several meetings pointed to the United States as one of the only potential mediators for this conflict because it is the only actor with leverage over both sides. Speakers in Qatar also hinted that they think President Trump gave tacit acceptance for the embargo, during his first international trip in office to Riyadh in May 20–21, 2017. The timing suggests a link: two days later on May 23, the hack attributing statements to the Emir of Qatar was aired. The logic is that if the United States was involved in giving tacit approval for the embargo, its assistance is needed in resolving the conflict.

Lobbying Efforts in the United States

The United States has been turned into a narrative battlefield, with both countries increasing their lobbying there. In 2017, Saudi Arabia spent \$27 million on hiring lobbying firms versus \$10 million in 2016 (Calamur 2018). Qatar for its part targeted 250 people they saw as 'Trump Influencers,' or people identified as being in his inner circle, in an attempt to change US policy. Doha is also investing heavily in more conventional forms of lobbying (Bykowicz 2018). Before cutting ties in 2017, the Qatari government spent "less than \$300,000 per month with

four firms” and now is spending “at least \$1.4 million per month” with an increased number of firms (Meyer and Toosi 2017).

High-level Saudi government officials readily admit that they have lost the current PR war (SAIS Group Meeting with Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Riyadh, 15 January 2019). Although initially Trump seemed supportive of the embargo and accused Qatar of fomenting terror, by 2018 Qatari officials were meeting with top officials in the United States and the image of Qatar as a fomenter of terrorism is not commonplace in US public discourse.

Ironically, Saudis seem frustrated at Qatar’s ability to funnel money into improving the way they are perceived in the United States since it is working better than their own efforts. Riyadh’s money faces backlash domestically from the US public and government in wake of the murder of Jamal Khashoggi.

Other Investments with Implications for Conflict

Above what it spends on lobbying, Qatar currently has around \$30 billion invested in the United States and plans to increase this amount up to \$45 billion over the next two years (Middle East Eye 2019). Saudi Arabia has invested even vaster amounts in the United States. Just in Silicon Valley from 2013–2018, Saudi invested an estimated \$6.2 billion (Coren 2018). Saudi Arabia is one of the largest foreign holders of US debt and in 2018 were considering \$400 billion in US investment opportunities (Bloomberg 2018).

Qatar and Saudi Arabia are also investing heavily in other projects across the Middle East. In the West Bank, Qatar funded virtually all of Rawabi, a planned city that is drawing luxury brands to Palestine and creating considerable goodwill there at a time when Saudi Arabia is growing closer to Israel. At the end of January 2019, Qatar also pledged to buy \$500 millions worth of Lebanese government bonds to help the weak economy (Parasie 2019). This comes after a Saudi decision to end assistance to Lebanon. Where there is a vacuum in the hierarchy of power, Qatar is stepping in to offer assistance, despite its size. But by trying to garner support through these investments and improve its public image, Qatar provokes Riyadh further. Twenty-four hours after Qatar made its pledge to buy Lebanese bonds, Saudi Arabia turned around and promised full support for Lebanon.

Saudi investment in its own tourism industry seeks to improve the Kingdom’s image abroad and diversify the economy. With the hope of opening resorts on the Red Sea and the archaeological site of Mada’in Saleh, Saudi Arabia thinks foreign tourists will eventually start visiting and lessen the image of Saudi Arabia as a pariah. These initiatives and Vision 2030 reflect hopes to modernize Saudi Arabia. Along with steps like women being allowed to drive and cinemas opening, Mohammed bin Salman is investing time and money in trying to be seen as a reformer both at home and abroad. This sets Saudi Arabia up as a potential rival one day to Qatar and the UAE (and particularly Doha and Dubai) when it comes to portraying itself as the best modernized country in the Middle East to a global audience. For both countries, lobbying and international as well as domestic investments are merely another field for the conflict to play out on.

Conclusion

Saudi Arabia and Qatar are engaged in a conflict that is partly a public relations battle and a fight to win public opinion. Their domestic audiences are mainly supportive of the leaders, but this support works against conflict resolution. Meanwhile, both countries are investing in sowing distrust for the other among their respective populations, in lobbying in the United States, and in regional projects that have political consequences. The combination of these factors is serving to hinder resolution as the struggle becomes one framed in grand terms of light against darkness and right against wrong instead of more manageable issues.

Policy Recommendations

To Saudi Arabia

- **Stop encouraging production of entertainment that is explicitly anti-Qatar.** At this point, it is not useful to release songs or poetry encouraging hatred, especially considering that many Qataris mocked these songs upon their release.
- **Continue reforms and opening up of Saudi to tourism, gradually.** This process may slowly allow the rest of the world, including the United States and Qatar, to regain faith in Saudi Arabia's sincerity towards reform and prompt more sympathy than is currently forthcoming.

To Qatar

- **Delink Sheikh Tamim's popularity from his response to this crisis through actions designed to appeal to public.** This could range from providing an increase in the amount of money each Qatari receives to build a house upon marriage, to moving more quickly on the process of elections to give citizens more of a stake in the government. By being praised for more than helping the country through this conflict, the leadership will be more willing to compromise on the Quartet's demands. This helps to make sure maintaining the conflict isn't the only beneficial path for Tamim.

To Both Parties

- **Both governments should agree to media monitoring by an agreed upon third party.** This monitoring would not apply to negative coverage that is good-faith journalism (such as the Al Jazeera articles Saudi Arabia is so upset about). Both sides are upset with negative depictions by the other country; creating agreed upon ground rules for media coverage and having an enforcement mechanism set up could alleviate these concerns. The enforcement mechanism could go into effect when, for example, a media outlet or song uses agreed upon derogatory language/hate speech or calls for the elimination of the other country.
- **Both governments should create an opportunity for investing the same amount of money separately in a number of projects abroad as a confidence building measure.** Both countries are investing heavily in different areas (proxy wars for example), which is provoking tension, as both fear the other gaining influence. Picking

projects that both governments want to support and jointly investing may foster a sense of shared values and cooperation.

- **Both governments should agree on people to people confidence building measures to repair social othering of Qataris and Saudis, supported by other Muslim-majority countries.** As described, there has been an othering through media of both countries' citizens, who are upset over the religious, educational and familial aspects of the conflict. Both sides should therefore allow for family reunification meetings and increased visits to Mecca to repair the social dimension that is most directly impacting the public and public opinion. Other Muslim-majority countries can be brought in to call for more Qatari involvement in the hajj to preserve Saudi Arabia's reputation as custodian of Mecca.

To the United States

- **Publish more news stories about the increase in lobbying by both countries.** Although the United States already publishes amounts foreign governments spend on representational efforts in the United States, these facts aren't widely known. If Saudi and Qatari lobbying efforts got more focus in the news and domestic audiences, this would create political pressure. This is especially true for Saudi Arabia; US audiences frustrated by the Khashoggi case increasingly view its lobbying in a negative light. This would make lobbying less attractive for both countries and help eliminate the narrative battlefield of lobbying in the United States.

Part II: Efforts at Resolution

Deadlock in Negotiations

Sarah Aver

On June 5, 2017, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, and Egypt announced that they were cutting diplomatic ties with Qatar as well as closing the air, land, and sea routes around the Qatari border. These measures, aimed at isolating Qatar politically, economically, and socially, have deeply impacted the geopolitical landscape of the Gulf region. This chapter will provide an analysis of the conflict, explore new frameworks to analyze its underlying characteristics, discuss the effects of the embargo on Saudi and Qatari societies, and ultimately seek to offer remediating policy recommendations for the future. This chapter argues that the nearly 600-day Gulf crisis displays the fundamental characteristics of an intractable conflict, one in which the parties remain deadlocked due to the absence of a requisite mutually hurting stalemate that would drive the parties to compromise. In other words, the lack of deep pain felt by either side politically and economically translates into a lack of incentive to seek resolution. Overall, direct dialogue between the two parties is the key to addressing the deep-rooted issues at hand, but third-party support will be a necessary element within the process to facilitate an end to the current impasse.

Impact of the Embargo

Short-Term Economic and Financial Impacts

Qatar

Due to the high economic interdependence among Gulf countries, the immediate impact of the embargo was the disruption of supply chains and the flow of goods and services, resulting in temporary shortages in raw materials and agricultural products in Qatar. About forty percent of Qatar's imports entered directly across the land border with Saudi Arabia or indirectly through naval shipping routes that connected to the Emirati ports of Dubai and Fujairah. The closure of Qatar's only land border negatively impacted its economy in the short term due to Qatar's high vulnerability to external shocks caused by its small population size and heavy reliance on its neighbors, as also discussed in Ashley Curtis' chapter.

Additionally, the embargo occurred at a time of general economic slowdown in the Gulf region caused by low energy prices, as in mid-June, oil prices dropped below 50 dollar a barrel. Although Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries have implemented reforms in order to attract foreign investment, foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows have weakened in recent years due to rising uncertainties and geopolitical tensions in the Middle East (International Monetary Fund 2018). Stability in the region is a key element to attract and retain investments.

The embargo has not only decreased international investor confidence in Qatar, but it has also temporarily slowed economic growth. Qatar has been facing a decline in its financial reserves (SAIS Group Meeting, Doha, 20 January 2019). In addition, the conflict put pressure

on the Qatari riyal and the stock market. The riyal lost 10 percent of its value during the initial days of the crisis.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE

The economic implications of the embargo are also felt in Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The conflict has impacted revenue from tourism, business opportunities, and investments from clients in the Gulf region and abroad. In Saudi Arabia, the World Bank expects annual GDP to grow by around 2 percent in 2019. The Saudi Arabian economy is recovering from a mild contraction in 2017, driven largely by higher oil production, greater non-oil exports, and rising consumer spending. Saudi crude oil production reached 10.4 million barrels per day in June 2018, its highest level since December 2016 (World Bank, *Global Economic Prospects: Saudi Arabia 2018*). In this context, the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs argued that, while the embargo has had negligible impact on Saudi Arabian trade and foreign investments, the social impact combined with the negative publicity abroad has been highly costly for the Kingdom (SAIS Group Meeting, Riyadh, 15 January 2019). Saudi Arabia has faced criticism over its perceived bullying of Qatar and its military intervention in Yemen, where it has been accused of bombing civilian targets; criticisms that have been driven primarily by Qatar's effective public relations campaign in the West, and then sharpened by the Khashoggi murder. Indeed, Qatar's lobbying expenditures in Washington are estimated to be around \$24 million since the start of the crisis, significantly higher than \$8.5 million total spent in 2015 and 2016 based on contracts disclosed to the US Justice Department (Delevingne, Layne and Freifeld 2018).

Long-Term Social and Demographic Impacts

Beyond the initial panic within the first week of the conflict, the most devastating aspect of the crisis has been the long-term social impact on societies in the Gulf region. As of June 2017, the State of Qatar counted more than six thousand mixed marriages involving citizens of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Qatar. Networks and social relations across the Gulf that had been built over centuries, and were particularly strengthened by the GCC, are now being disrupted. The interruption of these long-established connections has had negative social impacts in both countries, as families are now no longer allowed to connect with relatives in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the UAE (SAIS Group Meeting, Doha, 20 January 2019). A collective process to heal the damage inflicted upon the regional social fabric represents a potential avenue through which both sides can approach reopening badly needed lines of dialogue.

The crisis has resulted in numerous human rights violations as well. Violations of the rights to education, private property, and family reunification have been reported by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). The authorities of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain ordered their citizens to leave Qatar and instructed Qatari residents to leave their territories within fourteen days, resulting in a denial of access to property and assets. Moreover, the expulsion of Qatari students who were studying in Saudi

Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt, prevented them from pursuing their studies, as reported to the Ministry of Higher Education (SAIS Group Meeting, Doha, 22 January 2019).

Moreover, the disruption of social relationships and the movement of people has put additional pressure on Qatar's second most pressing domestic issue, its demographic crisis. Qatar's population is composed of just 250,000 citizens, with foreign workers comprising the remaining 2.4 million. Thus, ninety percent of Qatar's population is immigrant laborers. An escalation of the conflict between Qatar and its neighbors could force inhabitants to flee Qatar, resulting in a disastrous effect on the Qatari society and, in turn, on its economy. This potential demographic crisis reflects an additional point of pressure that might force Qatar to the negotiation table.

A Blessing or a Curse for Qatar?

Qatar has managed to turn the crisis into an opportunity to accelerate both economic and social reforms within the country. The cutting off of supply lines has forced Qatar to accelerate its long-term goal of economic diversification by reframing its food security strategy, diversifying its trade routes, and developing new international partnerships. The hemorrhage of dollars from Qatar during the first two to three months was followed by economic recovery and expansion. Partnerships (especially with Iran, Oman and Turkey) are deepening, with the aim of reducing Qatari dependency on its other neighbors and vulnerability to future external shocks. Doha's flagship Hamad port launched new direct shipping routes to cope with the crisis, and its activities have considerably increased since June 2017. Qatar's Ministry of Transport and Communications launched new direct maritime routes from Hamad Port to Tunisia, Morocco, India, Malaysia, Pakistan, Oman and China for the transport of goods in the months following the beginning of the crisis. These new 'embargo-busting' maritime routes illustrate Qatar's search for new trade partners in Africa, and South East Asia.

After three months of economic and financial struggle, trust in the Qatari riyal and investor confidence returned, so that the situation is now "macroeconomically perfectly sustainable" (SAIS Group Meeting, Doha, 23 January 2019). The World Bank expects Qatar's annual GDP growth to increase from 1.6 percent in 2017 to 2.4 percent in 2018 and to strengthen in the medium term to close to 3 percent (World Bank, Global Economic Prospects: Qatar 2018). This growth is mostly supported by rising oil and gas output and 2022 FIFA World Cup related spending. Reforms protecting foreign workers and introducing permanent residency rights for expatriates will also help with longer-term diversification efforts. Qataris often refer to the crisis as a "blessing in disguise" because it has helped speed up both economic and social reforms.

New military cooperation agreements have also been fostered as a result of the conflict. While Qatar has been building internal capacity and deepening its military cooperation with both the Turkish and US militaries, especially through the Al-Udeid Air Base, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have been seeking firmer defense commitments with the United States. The search for new military partners outside of the GCC illustrates a mounting mistrust between

Gulf Countries, one which only serves to reinforce the current deadlock by constructing an ever-higher hurdle to a potential resolution.

A Conflict in Stalemate

While social relations across the Gulf have been disrupted, both economies have managed to cope with the crisis successfully. The parties recognize that the conflict has reached a stalemate, but neither party has incentive to negotiate. The current status quo is perceived as preferable to a negotiated agreement. The conflict is not ripe for resolution, as the stalemate is not mutually hurting. The adversaries are pursuing their best alternatives to a negotiated solution (Zartman 2000). The lack of deep pain on both sides, combined with Qatari countermeasures that have minimized the impact of the embargo, make the GCC crisis an intractable conflict even over 600 days later.

An Unusual Intractable Conflict

The conflict has evolved into a mutual, deep-seated mistrust and fear of the other side's intention and capability, mentioned repeatedly in meetings with the news agencies in both capitals (SAIS Group Meetings, Riyadh, 14 January 2019; Doha, 21 January 2019). This lack of trust between the parties highlights the crucial need for greater transparency, reliability and homogeneity of norms throughout the region. Two years after the announcement of the embargo, human interaction between the two nations was drastically reduced. As a result, fears and resentment of the other have increased and potential resolution of the conflict has become difficult to picture, as each government perceives the other's behavior as undermining security and peace in the region. Paradoxically, while all parties perceive the other's actions as 'existential threats,' there is no sense of urgency for Saudi Arabia and Qatar to solve the current conflict.

A list of 13 Demands was issued by the embargoing countries as their agenda for negotiation with Qatar. However, the terminology used contributes to the perception that the opposing parties' objectives are "fundamentally irreconcilable." While Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt want to use a "package approach" in which the initial demands are leveraged as a start for negotiations, Qatar sees the Demands as an "an attempt to undermine Qatar's sovereignty and independence." Indeed, the 13 Demands imply a comprehensive package, where issues are interconnected and inseparable, making it more difficult to find overlap in the parties' acceptable outcomes. It is therefore crucial to unravel the issues into separate points of negotiation in which acceptable trade-offs might be found for all parties.

In contrast, Qatar is asking for an incremental approach to deal with the crisis. The Qataris refuse to consider the list and maintain they have already taken measures and made gestures. So both sides have chosen not to negotiate. This mutual obstinance has resulted in polarization and an absence of a "zone of possible agreement" (Druckman and Rosoux 2016). This demonstrates the need to set a common agenda with realistic goals that are acceptable to all parties.

Conflicting narratives have played a significant role in inhibiting current and future peace talks, negotiations, and reconciliation. Identity denigration on both sides and hatred stemming from “memories” of painful past experience as well as feelings of victimization aggravate the conflict. The two narratives are similar in their focus on victimhood and are becoming more infused with grievances and demonization of the other side as the lack of meaningful interaction between the two societies grows. In this context, media networks are often instrumentalized to convey hate messages (SAIS Group Meetings, Riyadh, 14 January 2019; Doha, 21 January 2019). The use of social media in particular has been a prominent feature of the crisis. These conflicting narratives are one of the leading sources of the widening gap between “us” and “them” that is often described by state and non-state actors on both sides. The lack of meaningful interaction between the two peoples reinforces the belief that the other side is the primary aggressor and creates an identity of victimhood that seems more important to each side than reaching an end to the conflict. The conflicting narratives contribute to the increasingly polarized views each side holds in opposition to the other, and the political stalemate could carry grave implications for future peace in the region if not addressed.

The institutionalization of the conflict tends to perpetuate itself as the GCC fissure is becoming the new norm (SAIS Group Meeting, Doha, 22 January 2019). The normalization of the crisis was surprisingly rapid, and it is now considered the new status quo in the region. All ministries are diversifying their partnerships in order to reduce their dependencies on the adversarial country. The conflict has been internalized and positions have hardened over time.

The longer the conflict remains unresolved, the more difficult it becomes to overcome the mutual entrenchment and the feeling of sunk costs of resources spent. It is now harder to justify concessions on both sides. Leaders reject offers to negotiate or allow mediation due to fear of showing weakness and making decisions that can be used against them politically. With the 13 Demands issued by the embargoing countries, it is now very challenging to find face-saving solutions.

The Role of Third Parties

Neither party has been able to move the conflict beyond intractability through bilateral means alone. The blocking countermeasures and the lack of deep pain demonstrate the necessity for a third-party intervention. The requisite pressure for conflict resolution will come from an outside actor, with sufficient leverage to move the two parties beyond their current deadlock. However, third party mediation will not resolve the deep-rooted issues between the countries. The complexity and multi-layered nature of the conflict requires direct talks between the parties with no formal mediator, but with third-party support and facilitation through a guarantor. Accompanying countries will allow the parties to reach a sustainable political settlement.

Jacob Bercovitch compiled data on international mediation from 1945 to 1990 and argues that the outcome of mediation is affected by the general nature of the negotiation issues. While conflicts over resources and other more tangible issues tend to be most amenable to

mediated settlement, security and sovereignty issues are most often stalemated and difficult to resolve (Bercovitch 1996, 24–25). Drawing on Bercovitch’s framework for mediation outcomes, it seems difficult to imagine a mediated settlement for the Gulf crisis where sovereignty and independence are the core issues, as also discussed in Sabiha Khan’s chapter.

In addition, power structures in the region rely on inter-marriages and tribal fealties among the ruling elite of the GCC countries that have transcended modern borders. Those power structures are built on rigid cultural conceptions of power, bargaining, and pride. An external mediator would hardly understand these internal dynamics. It was clear from the beginning that the Saudi administration did not want external actors playing the traditional role of mediators. Saudi Arabia also wants to make sure that the government’s military and economic power advantage over its neighbor translates into strength at the negotiating table. In this sense, Saudi Arabia was concerned about a neutral mediator who would try to eliminate that advantage by treating the two parties as equals. Saudis keep on insisting that the defining characteristic of this crisis is rooted in Gulf identity. They believe that only Gulf citizens can understand and ultimately solve these issues. This idea often excludes the possibility of using an external mediator (SAIS Group Meeting, Washington DC, 24 October 2018).

The United States and the European Union (EU) have the most leverage on both parties. The United States has the largest military footprint in the Middle East and its largest base is located in Qatar. The EU is the largest trading partner of the GCC, with trade flows totaling €155.5 billion (EEAS 2016). As a result, the US enjoys a relatively dominant position given its unmatched military power projection capabilities and technological supremacy while the EU has substantial influence in the Middle East and can project economic power quickly.

These third-party players can play a pivotal role in the peace process by acting as facilitators and guarantors. The Gulf crisis suggests a need to expand the concept of “third party” beyond the conventional view of the mediator as a neutral outsider. The third party should directly encourage a perception of a stalemate by using both coercion and socialization strategies. An effective, bilateral coercion strategy is needed to “ripen” the conflict for resolution through the bilateral application of “carrots and sticks” to secure the commitment to peace from all the major parties (Haas 1990, 3–5; Stedman 1991, 219–222; Zartman 2000, 244). The application of “carrots and sticks” strategy is necessary to impose costs and create a strong sense of limits to the parties’ demands.

Nevertheless, in order to increase the attractiveness of cooperation, it is not enough to use coercive sticks; it is necessary to offer prospects of a “way out” that is truly appealing to all disputants. In this sense, the coercion strategy has to be combined with an effective socialization strategy that is aimed at selling the prospects of a “way out” through the establishment of norms. These norms would then reduce uncertainties and assure a predictable future for all parties.

Consequently, neither third party would act as a mediator or be allowed to provide input on the substance of the negotiations but would rather serve as a “sounding board” for the negotiating parties along the sidelines of the formal talks. In addition, they would conduct

back-channel negotiation between the parties to provide a communication link between them. Third parties can also oversee the international response to the crisis by assisting the adversaries in formulating the issues, preparing an agenda, coordinating confidence-building moves, and bringing the parties simultaneously to the table (Pruitt 2005).

Conclusion

The path from a crisis to a stable peace is often a long and difficult one. It must often proceed through many stages, including stabilization and peace-building, in order to resolve underlying conflicts, establish justice, assure inclusion and respect for human rights, and ultimately foster reconciliation among the parties to the conflict. The longer a crisis remains, the more severely it damages the political, social, and economical relationships between parties. While dialogue appears to have stalled, a future negotiated settlement is still possible if both sides agree on the strong common social and religious identity shared in the Gulf region. While the rebuilding of trust will take time, exploring areas of common interest represents a good starting point to restore regional partnerships.

Policy Recommendations

To All Parties

- **Enable a secret initial phase to seek out common ground** and understanding of the origin of the conflict and create a **dialogue** for how to reconcile the two narratives. The secrecy of the initial phase will reduce the fear of showing weakness by accepting to enter negotiation.
- **Hold the talks outside the conflicting countries** in order to assure neutral ground for negotiation.
- **Establish a common and realistic agenda** acceptable for all parties with a clear division of issues. A well-prepared and robust process design can contribute significantly to the outcome of a negotiated settlement.
- **Define a timetable and a roadmap** for next steps, including establishing **mechanisms for the implementation and verification of agreements**. Such mechanisms would respond to the mutual and deep-seated mistrust by insuring greater transparency, and reliability in the process.
- **Attack issues separately**, to be able then to establish trade-offs.
- **Establish concrete rules for procedures** at the negotiating table and rules regulating the confidentiality of the talks. Developing such procedures will lay the groundwork for building legitimacy for the process and increasing confidence in it.
- **Hold a high frequency of negotiation meetings** to ensure continuity.
- **Look for incidental non-conflict related opportunities** to work around the embargo, such as the hajj and the World Cup.

To Saudi Arabia

- **Consider exceptions to the embargo**, such as the hajj and the World Cup in Doha in 2022.
- **Consider the measures that Qatar claims to have taken vis-à-vis the 13 Demands**, such as the agreement with the US defining terrorism.

To Qatar

- **Press a discussion of the measures already taken on 13-Demand subjects.**
- **Float some Al Jazeera op-eds about how regrettable to both sides the current stalemate is**, emphasizing the success of measures to seek out separate economic paths but also the unfortunate and possibly lasting impact on public attitudes and the dangers of political escalation that tears apart the region of brothers (and sisters).
- **Applaud the Saudi efforts at modernization.**

To Third-Party Participants

- **Support and facilitation through guarantor(s) and accompany countries** throughout the process to reach a sustainable political settlement. Direct talks between the parties are required, with no formal mediator. The European Union and the United States have enough leverage to politically pressure the parties to go to the negotiation table.
- **Coordinate confidence-building measures.** The leadership of both countries should design and implement small, but meaningful, unilateral concessions as confidence-building measures.

United States and Kuwaiti Mediation Efforts

Sabiha Khan

Third Party Mediation Efforts

On January 8, 2019, CBS News reported that General Anthony Zinni, the US Special Envoy charged with leading third-party mediation efforts in the GCC Crisis, resigned from the State Department. Reportedly, one of the main reasons for Zinni's resignation was his frustration with Doha's perceived intransigence. Zinni's resignation was indicative of a conflict calcifying into an intractable stalemate and the limits of the United States as a mediator.

After Zinni's resignation, it is easy to view the Saudi-Qatar crisis as a hopeless case, with no ability to move towards an agreement. However, the move reveals more about the unsuitability of the United States as the primary third-party mediator in the conflict. Because of the changing power dynamics in the Gulf region, and the complicated nature of the US relationships with Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates, the Americans are not ideally suited to be the public face of the mediation efforts. However, the United States does still hold significant hard power leverage, including deep economic and security ties with important players in the region. This creates a public-private duality of US influence that can be exploited to offer significant leverage over the parties while allowing another party, specifically Kuwait, to formulate a face-saving solution to the Saudis, Qataris and Emiratis.

A Stalemate From the Start

Origins and Aftermath of the Embargo

Before examining the question of mediator selection, it is helpful to determine if the conflict is currently in a phase characterized by ripeness and readiness for mediation or entering intractability.

In June 2017, long-simmering tensions among Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates exploded onto the public stage in what is now known as the Gulf crisis. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, and Bahrain (the Quartet) dramatically severed diplomatic relations with Qatar and imposed an air, land and sea embargo against the small Gulf nation. Several weeks later the embargoing countries issued a list of 13 Demands focused on Qatar's alleged support for terrorism, its engagement in unflattering media coverage of its Gulf neighbors through its Al Jazeera News Network, and its cooperation with Iran (Azzam and Harb 2018, 28). Rather than capitulating to its larger, powerful neighbor, Doha rejected these Demands out of hand as an infringement of its sovereignty.

Ripeness and Hurting Stalemate

The main condition needed for ripeness is a "mutually hurting stalemate." Each side "must realize that they cannot achieve their aims by further violence and that it is costly to go on (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall 2016, 209). Although the conflict has not yet escalated to violence, the idea of mutual pain is relevant.

The Qataris have proven surprisingly resilient in response to the embargo, rallying domestic political sentiment and shoring up support from its regional partners to avert economic decline. Qatar has used the crisis to further a process of “diversifying its regional and international partnerships” started following the first Gulf crisis in 2014. For example, “India...created a direct container service to connect Qatar with two Indian ports within ten days of the start of the blockade” (Ulrichsen 2018). Actions like these are not only helping Qatar avoid pain, but also potentially bolstering its prospects for the future. The Qataris are not feeling the economic pain that is needed to incentivize a move towards negotiations. The leadership is even benefitting from the embargo politically. The Qatari Emir, Sheikh Tamim, has become wildly popular in the wake of the embargo, with Qataris becoming more patriotic and nationalistic. The Emir and his government are incentivized to harden their position and prolong the conflict, rather than break the stalemate. Along with the unexpected economic advantages of the embargo, this gives Sheikh Tamim leverage to maintain a stalemate.

Given the lack of hurting, especially on the part of Qatar, a mediator’s role in stepping into the conflict has dim prospects, as Zinni no doubt learned.

Readiness Theory and Optimism

The relationship and communication between Qatar and Saudi Arabia have been badly damaged since the crisis began. On December 9, 2018, the GCC met for its annual summit meeting in Riyadh. After last year’s meeting in Kuwait ended early due to tensions over the crisis, this year’s summit laid bare the extent of the stalemate. After King Salman of Saudi Arabia sent a personal invitation to Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani of Qatar, Qatar responded by sending the minister of state for foreign affairs, Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi, to represent Qatar in his place. The inclusion of a cabinet member at a meeting of heads of state betrays a lack of optimism about resolving the crisis and a lack of trust among the leaders.

Consideration of Dean Pruitt’s readiness theory (an extension of ripeness) offers further insights into the potential for successful negotiations at this stage. According to Pruitt, “optimism and readiness to escape a conflict” are two mindsets that inform the viability of a potential mediation. In these cases, third parties can act as intermediaries to foster working trust, enhance communication, and contribute to a “circular reassurance process” wherein parties alternate making conciliatory gestures (Pruitt 2005, 255-6). While optimism regarding the conflict and readiness to escape are not present at the current moment, the idea of circular reassurance creates a roadmap for continued action on the part of third-party mediators to try to foster a more optimistic environment. While this is certainly a delicate process, it may be useful in this conflict as it has not escalated to violence as yet and many of the underlying concerns of the dispute center around reputation and ego. As Pruitt concludes, “when a conflict is only mildly escalated, and the disputants’ positions are not far apart, it is easy to persuade them to negotiate, and third-party functions can be mainly facilitative” (Pruitt 2005, 267). While the prospect of negotiation is certainly not “easy,” a third-party mediator could capitalize on the non-violent nature of the conflict to try to create optimism in the long term.

Intractability

The question then turns to the idea of the “long term.” Is this conflict headed towards intractability? The most concerning element of intractability present in the conflict now is the question of identity. The Qataris have rallied around Sheikh Tamin and experienced a surge in nationalist sentiment. The emergence of a distinct Qatari identity creates the possibility that a “zero-sum identity” will take hold between the Qataris and Saudis. Zartman describes this as “perhaps the most difficult to deal with because it is a broad popular perception rather than an elite matter, and thus more difficult to manipulate. Zero-sum identity underwrites competing solutions and makes it hard for a single salient solution to emerge. It also clouds the parties’ perceptions of a hurting stalemate, since it provides the righteous cause that thrives on pain” (Zartman 2005, 61).

The 13 Demands can be read as a list of positions, but not interests. The 13 Demands explicitly call on Qatar to cease their support for terrorist organizations and shutter Al Jazeera (Dwyer 2017). Underlying these positions is a prevailing sense that the two countries are moving in opposing directions that will inevitably clash. Each country feels that its existence is threatened. However, while the 13 Demands represent the maximalist positions, the states do indeed share common interests that they are both working towards, including maintenance of the GCC, regional security, and economic cooperation. Furthermore, there is a significant amount of intermarriage between Gulf families in Saudi Arabia, UAE and Qatar. Family reunification is another shared interest among the countries, especially among the domestic populations. Rather than discouraging mediation, the emergence of zero-sum identity is a risk that should encourage swift action before the cultural and familial ties between the two nations become more distant and the idea of a distinct Qatari identity becomes more entrenched.

Kuwaiti Mediation Efforts

Kuwait, also a GCC state, has previously tried to act as a mediator in the crisis and has remained a trusted and preferred mediator (SAIS Group Meeting, Riyadh, 15 January 2019). Kuwait’s Emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad Al Sabah is the eldest Gulf leader, and in accordance with cultural norms (SAIS Group Meeting, Doha, 20 January 2019) is treated with respect and deference within the region. However, that deference has limits, as evidenced by the previously failed attempts at mediation (Azzam and Harb 2018, 23).

Kuwaiti-led mediation efforts did not yield a comprehensive solution, but they have accomplished specific measures that helped to ease tensions between the Gulf States earlier in the crisis, as well as in 2014. In 2017, when the embargo was enacted, “Kuwait succeeded in preventing military action against Qatar. The Kuwaiti role during such a precarious time was confirmed by the Kuwaiti Emir in his first meeting with [US President Donald] Trump in DC.” In fact, during this Washington meeting, Sheikh Sabah “succeeded in persuading Trump to exert more effort to help resolve the crisis” and Trump placed calls to Crown Prince Mohamed bin Salman and Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad soon after (Azzam and Harb 2018, 26). Later it emerged that “the reduction of the Quartet’s initial 13 Demands to 6 Principles was also the

result of Kuwaiti mediation with some additional support from American diplomacy” (Gulf International Forum 2018). Indeed, the 2017 effort was undertaken in conjunction with the State Department, with former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson “shuttling among Arab capitals in an attempt to resolve the dispute among its closest allies in the region” (Calamur 2018), in accordance with Kuwait’s preference for the United States to take a more active role in mediation efforts.

At the start of the crisis in 2017, both Qatar and the Quartet countries went straight to their Best Alternatives to a Negotiated Agreement (BATNA), skipping over interests, options, and criteria almost entirely and focusing on the hard line of the 13 Demands. The challenge is to move back into a negotiation phase and to have an actual conversation about interests, options, and criteria. Referring to Beardsley and Grieg (2009), Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall (2016, 214) write that “mediation is especially important at a stage when at least some of the parties have come to accept that pursuing the conflict is unlikely to achieve their goals, but before they have reached the stage of accepting formal negotiations.” In the immediate aftermath of the crisis, the Kuwaiti-led mediation was centered on the goal of avoiding economic disaster for the region, and the Saudis were still pushing to exert control over Qatar through the 13 Demands (Milton-Edwards 2017). In that initial moment, the Saudis still believed they could achieve their goals through public pressure. As the embargo persisted and the projected economic disaster did not follow, the Saudi goal became a more remote possibility.

Saudi Arabia’s embargo was meant to compel quick acquiescence on the part of the Qataris. Instead, the Qataris were able to create workarounds to avoid economic disaster, shore up support among their partners, and gain significant domestic political support. This was an embarrassing miscalculation for the Saudis and the Quartet. They have steadfastly maintained that the 13 Demands are a hard line in public, but in private have conceded that they are indeed negotiable (SAIS Group Meeting, Embassy of Saudi Arabia, Washington DC, Senior Saudi Official, 10 December 2018). A third-party mediation by Kuwait at this point would provide political cover to the necessary concessions a shift in Saudi Arabia’s position would entail.

US-Led Mediation Efforts

The US diplomatic response has been criticized as inconsistent and chaotic during the crisis. Given Zinni’s recent resignation, the prospects of US-led mediation are unlikely. However, the United States still plays an outsized role with each party. Despite the importance of these relationships to US interests, various figures within the Trump Administration have sent mixed messages to the disputant parties, and to the Kuwaiti mediators. Each relationship is examined below in the context of previous action and potential leverage in any negotiation.

US-Saudi Relationship

In the Trump Administration, the relationships between President Trump, King Salman, Crown Prince Mohamed bin Salman, and Jared Kushner were reinforced during Trump’s first State

Visit as President of the United States. It has also been widely reported that the President's key advisor and son-in-law Jared Kushner is personally close to Mohammad bin Salman (Kirkpatrick, Hubbard, Landler and Mazzetti 2018).

Beyond these familial and personal ties, the US-Saudi relationship is crucial for the interests of both the US administration and the Saudi regime. In fact, "the United States is the main guarantor of the security of the Saudi regime. It sells more arms to Saudi Arabia than any other Western country. In Washington, Saudi Arabia is still considered a strategic partner (albeit an embarrassing one, from the perspective of the American public and media). The United States treats the Kingdom as an important ally in the fight against terrorism, a player in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and a check on Iran's rising influence in the Middle East" (Al-Rasheed 2018).

Both from a reputational standpoint and a security-driven perspective, the Saudis need the support of the United States. If the United States chose to pressure the Saudi government on the Qatar issue, that pressure would be consequential given the importance of the partnership. While Trump himself has been unwilling to push back on the Saudi regime in any significant way until this point—especially in the aftermath of the murder of Washington Post Journalist Jamal Khashoggi (White House 2018)—there are other players in the administration who may be able to push a more nuanced position regarding the Qatar embargo. This person could be next US Secretary of Defense given the importance of the US-Qatar defense relationship.

US-Qatar Relationship

The US presence at Al-Udeid Air Base in Qatar creates the perception that Qatar is under the protection of the United States. However, one day after the embargo was enacted, Trump "shocked both Doha and his own secretaries of state and defense by issuing a series of tweets that backed the move and suggested that Qatar supported extremism" (Ulrichsen 2018). Conversely, former Secretary of Defense James Mattis and current Secretary of State Mike Pompeo were seen to be pushing for an end to the crisis out of concern for US strategic interests in the largest US military facility in the Middle East (Azzam and Harb 2018, 31). This contradiction was the source of confusion and insecurity on the part of the Qataris. They responded by signing a \$12 billion defense deal with the United States that had been initiated earlier, which the Department of Defense and the State Department used "to publicly reaffirm Qatar's value as a US partner. A State Department spokesperson noted that the deal was 'a tangible show of support for our defense relationship.' The Qatari government responded to Trump's tweets by visibly increasing its cooperation with the US government on issues of common interest and concern" (Ulrichsen 2018).

Qatar also took a step towards counter-terrorism partnership with the United States, signing a Memorandum of Understanding in July 2017 on the topic and engaging in a high-profile counter-terrorism dialogue in Washington. These moves had a positive effect for the Qataris, who saw Trump essentially reverse his stance on Qatar. "In a January 2018 telephone

call with Emir Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, the president praised Qatar as a partner in the fight against terrorism and called for a quick resolution to the Gulf crisis” (Ulrichsen 2018).

The incoherence of the Trump Administration’s initial efforts, as well as the importance of its security relationship with Qatar, underscore the duality of the US role in the conflict. While the Americans have a strong enough presence and importance in the region to necessitate their involvement in a third-party mediation, the contradictory approaches taken early in the conflict undermine the credibility, impartiality and legitimacy of the Trump Administration and its surrogates as direct mediators.

The Role of the United Arab Emirates: A Potential Spoiler?

Crown Prince Mohamed bin Zayed of Abu Dhabi represents the new generation of leadership within the United Arab Emirates and is the driving force behind Emirati foreign policy decisions. The UAE’s interests are closely aligned with the Saudis. The core of their issue with Qatar revolves around power dynamics within the Gulf region as well as personal animus between the ruling families. According to some in Qatar, the Emiratis are perceived as the power behind Mohammed bin Salman’s throne and are seen as the “brains” to Saudi Arabia’s “brawn” (SAIS Group Meeting, Doha, 20 January 2019). In other words, the Qataris believe that the UAE masterminded the crisis and is perpetuating it.

Given their potential influence and powerful antagonism towards Qatar, the UAE could act as either as a skeptic or as a spoiler to any negotiated agreement. The task for mediators would be to determine how to handle them. Stedman argues that “skeptics may be managed by offering inducements and incentives to include them in the agreement or by being persuaded or socialized into acquiescing.” Spoilers, on the other hand, “need to be marginalized, rendered illegitimate or undermined” to move forward with an agreement (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall 2016, 222). Given the outsize importance of reputation, pride and ego in this conflict, marginalizing the UAE risks further inflaming tensions. Mohammed bin Zayed may also be too important an influence over Mohammed bin Salman to ignore completely. Instead, the third-party mediators should adopt the skeptic strategy and attempt to offer sweeteners and incentives for the UAE to join a deal as it is being formulated.

Conclusion

The conflict can be mediated by the Kuwaitis with US-backing, focusing on Pruitt’s readiness theory. Small-scale, focused efforts can help move past positional demands and avoid an inevitable slide towards intractability.

On the part of Saudi Arabia, the 13 Demands themselves are seen as negotiable. Riyadh’s chief concerns are reputational. It has publicly taken a hard line on the Demands, and does not want to capitulate or be seen as admitting a mistake. The conflict itself currently lacks a hurting stalemate and optimism. A Kuwaiti-led, US-backed effort aimed at pre-negotiation concessions towards normalization of relations would be the most effective path forward to reestablish working trust and cede small concessions to create optimism.

In the effort at mediation under Zinni, the US response was confused and contradictory at times. As a result, both sides alternately viewed the United States as biased. Given larger trends in US foreign policy in recent years—including the Obama Administration’s Pivot towards Asia—the United States is not seen as a stable and vital actor in the region. The United States does have influence as an economic and military partner, but its influence would be better used in partnership with Kuwaiti leadership.

Policy Recommendations

To Saudi Arabia and the UAE

- **Begin signaling through the Kuwaitis that specific points in the 13 Demands are negotiable, including shutting down Al Jazeera entirely.**
- **Ease travel restrictions for families and religious pilgrims.**
- **Be open to pre-negotiation meetings led by Kuwait.**

To Qatar

- **Discuss, through the Kuwaitis, the possibility that Sheikh Tamim will attend the next GCC meeting along with the other heads of states.**
- **Continue collaborating with the United States on counter-terrorism operations.**
- **Be open to pre-negotiation meetings led by Kuwait.**

To Kuwait

- **Kuwaiti Emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad Al Sabah should reengage in shuttle diplomacy and lead a series of pre-negotiation meetings, with the aim of creating a sense of optimism through small points of collaboration.**
- **Small-scale measures should be used to generate trust, thus focusing on relationships and reestablishing communication.**
 - Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) on terror financing, travel during the hajj and ummrah, family reunification, and food and medical aid shipments would be useful.

To the United States

- **In order to reduce confusion and the potential for mixed signals, appoint another Special Envoy and empower that person to be the lead negotiator for the United States and work closely with the Kuwaiti mediation effort.**
- **Engage in negotiations to enter into MOU’s on terror financing signed by all GCC states and the United States in order to further US interests on that issue as well as create a sense of optimism and readiness for larger-scale negotiations.**

Conflict Management: Is Failure an Option?

Jasmine Choi

Conflict management often involves a reconciliation process with the necessary requirement of change in a party's attitude, behavior, institutional practices and symbolic expressions (Ross 2007). This is a complex process with no single universal approach or formula to treat the symptoms that emerge. The Western approach to conflict management is generally thought to be pragmatic, aiming towards a "win-win" outcome so that there is a balance of compromise to ensure that no one party is bearing a larger cost than the other.

Such is not the case for Arab-Islamic approaches, whose goals are to preserve the long-established customs of the region and maintain the status quo. In fact, they aim for continuity in that they never break apart from what "has been" culturally, socially, politically. When analyzing the ongoing June 2017 Gulf crisis—resulting in an embargo against Qatar by three GCC countries, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates and their ally, Egypt—one must first understand the true reason for its current stalemate and acknowledge the possible end scenario of a frozen conflict, like the one seen in South Korea-North Korea relations.

This chapter will discuss the stalemate, traditional Arab-Islamic conflict management techniques, and the Arab Gulf states' approach to the dispute. It will then analyze what we can expect in terms of next steps.

Current State of the GCC Crisis

Following the severance of ties with Qatar, the Quartet countries issued a thirteen-point list of Demands on June 22, 2017, giving Qatar a mere ten days to comply. The thirteen-point list was presented to the Qataris by Kuwait.

Thirteen-Point List of Demands

The list included big challenges to Qatar politically and economically. The most prominent requests were:

- 1) curb diplomatic and military ties with Iran;
- 2) sever all ties to terrorist organizations like the Muslim Brotherhood, al-Qaeda, Hezbollah;
- 3) close down the Al Jazeera network;
- 4) stop all means of funding for individuals or organizations that have been designated as terrorists by the GCC and the United States;
- 5) stop all contacts with the political opposition in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain;
- 6) pay reparations and compensation for loss of life caused by Qatar's policies with the sum amount determined by the Quartet countries;
- 7) align with the other Gulf and Arab countries militarily, politically, socially and economically in line with an agreement reached with Saudi Arabia in 2014;

8) a quarterly review of Qatar to monitor for compliance after agreeing to the Demands.

Qatar refused to acquiesce to the Demands, defying any measures destructive of its sovereignty (SAIS Group Meeting at Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Doha, 20 January 2019). The Quartet then imposed an embargo. The repercussions were dire: the flow of medicine and food was cut off, families were unable to connect across the Gulf, and Qatar had to liquidate \$38B worth of its reserves.

Conflicting Narratives

Both sides now consider the conflict (or “rift” as some may like to call it) a “stalemate” with little to no desire to budge from either side. It has become a test to each of pride and ego—a game of who folds first. In the minds of the Quartet countries, the sole way for reconciliation would be for Qatar to comply with their Demands. Qataris had been allegedly supporting the Houthi rebels in Yemen, the direct enemies of the Saudi coalition (SAIS Group Meeting at King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies, Riyadh, 15 January 2019). The Quartet also claims that Qatar has been financing and supporting terrorist organizations, such as the Muslim Brotherhood and al-Qaeda. Accordingly, the 13-point list of Demands asks that Qatar disengage itself from any direct opposition to Saudi efforts by abandoning its cooperation with their foes overseas and ending support to extremist groups. The Quartet also contends that the tension has been exacerbated by Al Jazeera, the most popular news channel in the Arab region, which has been critical of the region’s authoritative figures and frequently reports false news and terrorism. The Quartet believes it has been patient long enough, and urgently called for adjustments in Qatar’s foreign policy to restore cohesion and security in the region.

By contrast, Qatar believes the Demands are outrageously disproportionate and irrational, and that the Quartet lacks sufficient evidence for its allegations. From the Qatari point of view, the Quartet does not want Qatar to exercise its sovereignty and independence. Additionally, the Quartet overstates the nature of Qatar’s relationship with Iran. With \$340 million worth of deals at stake, Qatar feels that severing economic relations with Iran over baseless accusations would be neither rational nor justified. Qatar denies allegiance to the Muslim Brotherhood, pointing out that the organization is present in Bahrain, Tunisia and Morocco (SAIS Group Meeting at Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Doha, 20 January 2019). Furthermore, Qatar believes that the grievances stem from Saudi Arabia’s envy and disapproval of Qatar’s rapid rate of social progress. While Qatar’s female labor force participation rate is among the highest (58.1%) in the Arab world as of late September 2018 (World Bank 2018), Saudi Arabia lags with a female participation rate of 22.3%, which is not surprising for a country that has only recently allowed women to drive. Thus, the Kingdom’s plans for social and economic reform with Vision 2030 are largely seen as its attempt to remain competitive on the Arab stage. When asked about what they foresee as the next move, Qataris give a mere shrug. “Above all,” they say, “one red line will never be crossed, and that’s [Qatar’s] right to sovereignty and political independence” (SAIS Group Meeting at Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Doha, 20 January 2019).

Evidently, the two sides do not see eye to eye, providing contradictory narratives and making it impossible to find common ground. While it may be true that both sides have yet to experience economic hardships as a result of the embargo, freedom of movement among the five states has greatly diminished, affecting the livelihood of families whose relations sprawl across the entire Gulf region. With no end to the crisis in sight, it appears the only urgency expressed by anyone in reconciling the two sides is seen at the micro level among civilians who yearn to re-connect with loved ones across the border.

The Traditional Arab-Islamic Conflict Management Approach

In Arab-Islamic societies' approach to conflict management, there are unique mechanisms involved in addressing disputes that set them apart from the approach of Western societies. While Westerners generally work towards settling on an equitable, win-win solution for all the disputants, Arab-Islamic societies concern themselves with preserving social relations, ensuring no long-held relationships are disrupted. An explanation for this difference can be drawn from historical events in the Arab region. It is necessary "to understand the deep cultural, social and religious roots that underlie the way Arabs behave when it comes to conflict reduction and reconciliation" (Irani 2000). A detailed comparison of the differences between the Western approach and the Arab Gulf approach is vital to our ability to answer questions, such as "why did the Quartet countries choose such a steep list of Demands?" and "why does Qatar refuse, despite facing economic and social repercussions?"

Socio-Economic, Cultural and Anthropological Background

Ecological realities of the Middle East have brought to the surface three important modes of survival: nomadic, village, and urban. In the past, communities of pastoral nomads, village farmers, and city merchants were economically interdependent, in constant contact with one another, often resulting in conflict. The traditions of pastoral nomadism have left an imprint on Middle Eastern culture, society and politics.

Socially speaking, Middle Eastern people are dedicated to their families. In the absence of centralized state governments, distinctive rituals of conflict mediation and kin-based collectivities (like the tribe) influenced most of the socio-economic and political functions of the communities. Patriarchal figures, called *zaim* (leader), dominate family lifestyle. They are the primary decision makers who maintain the cohesiveness of the family as well as the social life, and in doing so, have the final say in important family matters.

This kinship system functions as the basic unit of identification for people and is present in nearly every aspect of life and most social institutions. We see this at the state level in the Gulf Kingdom where the *zaim* is typically the King and/or the Crown Prince. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) operates as a family; the House of Saud dominates the country. Thus, like in many other monarchies, the decisions made by the King are rarely questioned or opposed by the rest of the country, either due to reverence or fear.

Sulha

Dispute settlement practices are rooted in kinship and *sulha* (Abu-Nimer 1996). The nature of the kinship system automatically evolves a dispute started between two individuals into a group issue. The Western approach to reconciliation focuses on the individual while the Arab-Gulf approach focuses on family and social connections. This serves as the foundation of the Arab practice of *sulha*. A centuries-old conflict resolution tradition of mediation, its motivating considerations are a fusion of the community's desire for stability and the accused parties' need for reconciliation and regaining face (Phillips 2011). The term "*sulha*" translates to stopping conflict and settling into peace, also known as reconciliation, cooperation and forgiveness, by relying on the recognition of collective responsibility. The practice arose to restore order between tribes so that disputes do not shake the stability of the larger community.

Sulha is a distinctive conflict management technique because it involves a mediator who understands the kinship system and the importance of social relations. The third-party actor or mediator, known as *jaha*, is often played by the eldest and longest serving figure in a Gulf family, who ensures his method works towards restoring relations. Every step in the intervention process is based on the social norms and customs of the community. Any bargaining to reach a settlement of the dispute is done on the basis of preserving the social values. Respect for the *jaha* causes the parties to accept the terms that resolve the conflict and avoid escalation. A third-party mediator is likely to be most successful if he has personal understanding of these values.

Furthermore, *sulha* was the method preferred by the Prophet, who vocalized his skepticism of official court proceedings, which were "devised by man and therefore fallible." The Quran suggests that the trial process was not a truth-finding mechanism that would lead to substantive justice (Al-Ramahi 2008). Western approaches to conflict assume that conflict can be managed to the satisfaction of the parties, that written legal instruments are the ideal outcome, and that negotiation is best facilitated by a third party who is neutral to the situation. On the other hand, Arab approaches to conflict management are based on the assumption that disputes are disruptive to society, that conflict is about group affiliation and not individual interest, and that social expectations and shared cultural values dominant during the process are the driving forces towards reconciliation. Such values are emblematic of Islam: messages that "the notions of brotherhood and solidarity impose upon the community the duty to care for its members" are scattered throughout the Quran (Bassiouni 2012).

An Intractable Stalemate

Sulha reflects the Arab Gulf's assumptions and expectations about the importance of social order to the vitality and functionality of the entire region. This strong emphasis on maintaining social order explains the Quartet's decision to impose austere measures against Qatar. The Quartet countries saw the embargo as necessary to maintain regional cohesion, stability, and security.

Neither the Quartet nor Qatar seeks immediate resolution. The protracted conflict is a stalemate with one side justifying its decision as restoring Gulf stability and the other claiming its right to exercise independence in international affairs. Saudi Arabia has made clear the Demands that Qatar has to meet in order to achieve normalization of relations: relinquish relations with Iran and adjust its foreign policy to be more favorable towards the interest of the rest of the Gulf region, but Qatar does not budge.

Concept to Practice: Failed Attempts of Both Western and Arab-Islamic Approaches

The current state of the GCC conflict suggests that the traditional technique of *sulha* has not been an effective means of bringing resolution. *Sulha* teaches Arab-Islamic societies to involve third-party mediators who have stake in the situation. Until now, there has been no successful *jaha*. Many have looked to Kuwait to solve the issue since Emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad Al Sabah and his family have been the longest serving in the Gulf and thereby a respected *jaha*, yet Kuwait has not been successful. Jordan has not taken a proactive role and does not appear to feel the obligation to become one. The United States was perceived as a potentially successful mediator, due to its influence, presence and alliance with Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar (SAIS Group Meeting with Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, Doha, 21 January 2019). However, it has also not been successful in assuming the role.

The Western approach does not promise much more success in resolving the dispute. In order to bring a destructive conflict to an agreed-on end, Western studies see merit in the ability of “the adversaries to believe that an option exists that is better than continuing the fight” (Kriesberg 2007); in other words, acknowledging a mutually hurting stalemate (MHS). Qatar has no such intention. On December 3, 2018, Doha announced its plans to depart from OPEC, the Saudi-led cartel of oil-exporting countries. Qatar’s decision to leave OPEC speaks volumes about its plans to continue diligently working towards a more self-sufficient economy. Saudi Arabia has experienced much less negative impact on its economy after the embargo and therefore does also not see urgency in reconciling.

Similarly, a mutually enticing opportunity (MEO), another Western requirement for conflict resolution, has yet to emerge. An MEO serves as an attractive outcome that can open ways for a negotiation phase (Zartman 2001). The negotiators can establish a way out of the conflict by creating a sense of possibility and a new perspective for either side. Currently, there is no MEO in sight.

Perhaps the failed attempts of both the Arab-Islamic and the Western approaches provide a suggestion of something that has traditionally been unthinkable in either practice: is failure to reconcile a third option, and should the international community prepare to see a GCC region without cohesion? With Doha having left OPEC, we are now looking at a new norm in the future, one without cooperation between the two sides.

Isolated “Push Factors”

If the Gulf conflict is to end, it appears the stimulus would need to come from the international community, not from within the region. With the right amount of external pressure, the stalemate might be broken. Two non-Gulf countries currently have a stake in the crisis, suggesting some possible next steps.

Regional cohesion is in the interest of the United States, whose administration fears Iranian ascendancy across the Middle East. The GCC dispute has undermined US plans for countering Iranian efforts. Additionally, relations between the United States and Saudi Arabia have grown questionable in light of the killing of Jamal Khashoggi. CNN’s latest report of American arms—which were shipped to Saudis and Emiratis to aid the Saudi coalition in the Yemen crisis, but were found in the possession of al-Qaeda and anti-US Iranian fighters—also further strained the relationship.

Turkey is also interested and has leverage. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan hopes to see a diplomatic settlement that would favor Turkey. The Saudis fear that the Turkish authorities will leak more evidence about the Jamal Khashoggi case, weakening the Saudi government.

If the United States and Turkey were to leverage these “pain points” against Saudi Arabia, they have the potential to help break the stalemate. For instance, they have the power and influence to address some of the main dispute points that set off the embargo: the Quartet and Qatar’s inability to agree on a definition of “terrorists” and to what extent economic partnership is considered political alliance and allegiance. The United States and Turkey, if desired, can help both sides reach a consensus by setting third-party standards.

Conclusion

The approach to conflict management varies across societies. Westerners generally believe that the primary objective of the conflict is to reach productive compromise with a win-win solution for all disputants. On the other hand, Arab-Islamic societies believe that preserving social relations and acting on behalf of the wider community are crucial mechanisms of conflict management. However, neither practice and method has worked to bring resolution to the crisis.

When considering the failed attempts of the traditional Arab-Islamic practice of *sulha*, given the lack of proper *jaha* figures, and the failed Western applications of a mutually hurting stalemate or mutually enticing opportunity, we must look at a third option: doing nothing. Neither side has experienced, or will experience, the pressure required. If nobody is hurting enough to experience a mutually hurting stalemate and embarking on a search to ripen the conflict is something that is not worth doing, perhaps the conflict should continue. Unless the United States and Turkey feel strongly enough to add real pressure, the protracted conflict does not appear to be nearing its end.

Policy Recommendations

To Saudi Arabia

- **Enable travel for family members who have been physically separated since the start of the embargo, under reasonable circumstances.** Civilians are the ones dealing with the immediate impact of the embargo. For as long as the travel restrictions hold out, they will not be able to reunite with their families.
- **Prepare to face external pressure from the United States and Turkey to begin negotiation talks with Qatar again.** Both countries are interested in a unified Arab world and may potentially use these allegations against Saudi Arabia to pressure it into negotiations. Saudi Arabia should expect to begin talks with Qatar again and therefore may need to consider revising some of the thirteen concessions to make room for negotiation.

To Qatar

- **Prepare to provide tracings of all financial transactions to countries (i.e., Iran) linked to terrorist organizations.** Saudi Arabia alleges that Qatar has close ties to Iran and has been loosely funding terrorist organizations; Qatar denies this fact. If there is pressure from third parties for reconciliation, Qatar should prepare to provide fact-check materials.

To Third-Party Mediators: United States, Turkey, Jordan

- **Set criteria for terrorist organization financing.** The United States, Turkey and Jordan should team up to help the region align on what constitutes terrorist financing. Establish a collective Gulf Region terrorist organization list akin to the United States' Designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations (DFTO).
- **Do a thorough fact-check analysis.** Both sides accuse the other of making false accusations. A fact-check and deep investigation is in order to figure out who is providing an accurate account of the situation.

Part III: Economic and Regional Impact

Pain or Gain? Economic Consequences of the Embargo

Ashley Curtis

Qataris awoke on June 5, 2017 to a troubling new reality—the borders they depended on for traveling out of the country and importing goods were suddenly closed. Since that date, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt (the Quartet) have prohibited goods and aircraft bound for Qatar from crossing their territory. Qataris remained ignorant about the precise reason until two weeks later when the Quartet made ending the embargo conditional upon meeting 13 Demands, including closing Al Jazeera, ending contact with the Muslim Brotherhood, expelling Turkish troops, and severing diplomatic ties with Iran.

Qatar's foreign ministry considers the Quartet's behavior to be an act of war, particularly their attack on Qatar's currency, stocks and bonds (SAIS Group Meeting with Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Doha, 20 January 2019). The Quartet disagrees, categorizing the embargo an act within their sovereign right to decide which countries to diplomatically and commercially engage. Notably, the Quartet countries have refrained from blocking Qatar's liquid natural gas (LNG) exports, which they acknowledge would qualify as an act of war (SAIS Group Meeting with Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Riyadh, 15 January 2019). This chapter will survey the economic consequences in the region, address the efficacy of the embargo at meeting the Quartet's objectives, and propose recommendations.

Quantitative Measures of the Embargo's Efficacy

For many years Qatar maintained a positive fiscal balance, saving surplus revenue to hedge against potential future downturns. That trend reversed in 2015 and 2016, with the fiscal balance dipping into deficit. If the Quartet's embargo were successful at imposing economic pain, we would expect to see a continued negative trend in Qatar's fiscal balance in 2017 and 2018, suggesting it had stifled the country's economic activity. However, we see the opposite—the fiscal balance actually improved, rising through 2017 and becoming positive in 2018. Indeed, the fiscal surplus grew from a deficit of 8% of GDP in 2016 to a surplus of 3.8% of GDP in 2018 (International Monetary Fund 2017). Similarly, if sanctions were inflicting significant economic damage we would expect to observe a negative GDP growth rate. Again, we see the opposite—the growth rate increased from 1.6% in 2017 to 2.3% in 2018 and is expected to rise further next year. A year into the embargo, Qatar had a smaller fiscal deficit, rising foreign reserves, a positive current accounts balance, and a stable banking system (Ulrichsen 2018). These indicators show that the sanctions have not imposed the kind of economic damage that would give the sender countries leverage.

At the same time, Qatar did experience the start of a banking crisis at the beginning of the embargo that could have proven catastrophic for the Qatari banking system and the country's monetary stability. Foreign depositors withdrew their capital from commercial banks *en masse* and by the end of 2017, non-resident deposits had shrunk by \$13 billion. The Quartet countries withdrew their entire deposits, and depositors from other countries demanded a

higher risk premium. In line with the “theory of policy” concept that each monetary policy objective requires its own discrete tool, the central bank’s obligation to mirror fluctuations in the Saudi riyal with its own currency restricted its ability to combat capital flight through monetary expansion. Although the currency peg limited the central bank’s freedom to employ monetary tools against the embargo’s consequences, the country’s massive public savings provided the government great freedom to implement aggressive expansionary fiscal policy. Accordingly, the government staved off the banking crisis by introducing a flood of public sector deposits to outweigh the non-resident withdrawals. This approach was very successful, and the net interest rate spread actually improved during this time. By June 2018, \$9 billion of the \$13 billion in lost foreign capital had returned to the country (Wheatley 2018). Despite these positive numbers, the Qatari central bank sustained damage by losing large amounts of its foreign reserve holdings and paying a higher risk premium to investors (SAIS Group Meeting with Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Doha, 20 January 2019).

Qualitative Measures of the Embargo’s Efficacy

Since the embargo, the Qatari government has taken steps in line with the spirit of the Quartet’s demands. Before the crisis began, Qatar had declined to sign a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on terrorism with the United States. In 2018, the country agreed to sign that MOU, which Saudi Arabia attributes to the pressure applied by the Quartet’s isolation (SAIS Group Meeting with Human Rights Commission, Riyadh, 16 January 2019). Additional steps include designating a number of terror financiers and allowing the US Treasury to maintain an ongoing presence in the country’s central bank to ascertain that funds are not routed to terrorists. Saudi Arabia acknowledges these improvements but emphasizes that Qatar continues harboring known terrorists and interfering in other Gulf countries’ domestic affairs through incitement (SAIS Group Meeting with Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Riyadh, 15 January 2019).

Qatar’s implementation of the policies it committed to in the 2014 Riyadh Agreement represents an important area of divergent opinion between the two countries. The parties place asymmetrical importance on this issue; nearly all Saudi delegates highlighted Qatar’s failure to implement the agreement as a top concern, while the Qatari representatives spoke to the agreement only in response to direct inquiries. When asked whether Qatar had fulfilled the agreement, the foreign ministry and major think tanks in Doha responded with a measure of confusion; they stated that to the best of their knowledge Qatar had fulfilled the agreement, but they were unable to explain how (SAIS Group Meetings with Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Doha, 20 January 2019; Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, Doha, 21 January 2019). Since Saudi officials cite this failed agreement as a central element of the conflict, a declaration by Qatar’s leadership establishing specific actions the country undertook to fulfill the requirements could greatly mitigate tensions and build confidence. This action would not affront Qatar’s ardently defended right to establish its own sovereign foreign policy, since the country signed the agreement of its own will and volition before the embargo was even in place.

The embargoing countries understood Qatar's signature to mean that it would cut support for Islamists by silencing Arab nationalists like Yusuf al-Qaradawi and reducing Al Jazeera's service as a platform for Muslim Brotherhood leaders. Qatar's suggestion that it fulfilled the agreement is feeble and unsubstantiated—Qatar either understood the agreement differently, or never intended to fulfill it in the way the other signatory countries expected (Ibish 2017).

Factors Limiting the Embargo's Efficacy

Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG)

Qatar is the leading exporter of LNG in the world. Years of accruing large surpluses from gas revenue provided the government the resources necessary to increase public investment and infrastructure spending during the embargo, creating a buffer against economic downturn. Qatar's continued ability to export LNG has been critical to its economic resilience. Qatargas has retained access to the UAE owned Dolphin pipeline as well as Egypt's Suez Canal throughout the embargo. The UAE itself depends on Qatari LNG to generate half of its electricity, constraining it from curtailing Qatargas' activities (Diapola 2017). Had the UAE and Egypt revoked territorial access to the company, Qatar would have suffered more acute economic effects from the embargo. Still, Qatar's revenue flows would have remained largely insulated from the embargo by the fact that 95% of its revenue comes from its LNG exports to Southeast Asia rather than regional importers (SAIS Group Meeting with the Foreign Ministry, Doha, 20 January 2019).

Diversification

Prior to June 2017, Qatar imported nearly all of its food through Saudi Arabia or the UAE. With these routes closed down, the country had to develop alternative ways to ensure that the supply chain was not cut off by strengthening traditional alliances and forging new ones. It established new trade infrastructure, an air and sea bridge via Iran and a direct container service with two ports in India. Volume of trade with other allies skyrocketed to fill the gap; Turkey increased exports to Qatar by 50% and trade through Omani ports increased 144%. In addition, Qatar increased its own domestic production of food, particularly vegetables and dairy. The country was already trying to diversify its economy away from hydrocarbons prior to 2017, and the sanctions expedited that process (Ulrichsen 2018).

Unrealistic Demands

The Quartet undermined its own campaign simply by making removal conditional upon too many high bar demands that threaten Qatar's identity. Vocalizing this sentiment, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani said that "the blockading countries are demanding that we have to surrender our sovereignty to end the siege, something which... Qatar will never do" (Aboulenein and Strohecker 2017). The international community has sided with Qatar's assessment that the list is too draconian; the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human

Rights said the Demands were unreasonable, and the State Department and UK foreign ministry stated that the Quartet's Demands must be made more "actionable" (Wintour 2017).

Qatari officials have said the Demands are so rigid that they suspect the list was never meant for serious negotiation, and that the embargo is instead meant to punish Qatar for pursuing a foreign policy friendly to Arab Spring values. The Quartet insists that there is no room for negotiation, validating the Qatari foreign ministry's opposition to the list as demands for complete capitulation rather than discussion (SAIS Group Meeting with the Foreign Ministry, Doha, 20 January 2019). This puts Qatar in a position where any small concessions it makes will not be enough to roll back the embargo, but full compliance is out of the question.

Failure to Secure International Buy-in

Qatar's sense of insecurity from its small size and population underlies many of its policy decisions. One strategy it has employed to minimize this insecurity is "strategic hedging"—establishing extensive foreign ties to maximize the number of countries that have a vested interest in Qatar's flourishing; these countries understand that if Qatar is destabilized, their assets and supply lines would suffer (SAIS Group Meeting with Georgetown University, Doha, 23 January 2019). As a result, the Quartet was relatively unsuccessful in marshaling international partners to join the embargo, gaining only a handful of small economies like the Maldives and Djibouti. Had the Quartet achieved the international buy-in they had hoped for, the level of economic pain may have been enough to force greater behavioral change from Qatar.

Qatari Perspectives on the Embargo's Effects

Narrative of Strength

Qatari representatives maintain that the country's economy is stronger as a result of the embargo, as greater self-reliance and trade ties with new allies have made it immune to external shocks (SAIS Group Meeting with Department of Commerce, Doha, 20 January 2019). Other improvements include deepening the Doha port to serve as a hub between Kuwait and Oman, increasing the country's strategic reserves of food and water, and diversifying domestic production. These are all initiatives that Qatar began to implement even before the crisis, but the embargo catalyzed the process and moved the country to make 10 years of economic reforms in one year (SAIS Group Meeting with Georgetown University, Doha, 23 January 2019). Saudi Arabia's foreign ministry suggested that the Qatari government's narrative is misleading, arguing that Qatar's June 2018 decision to seek relief from the embargo by challenging its legality in the International Court of Justice indicates that the country is feeling an economic pinch (SAIS Group Meeting with Foreign Ministry, Riyadh, 15 January 2019).

Admission of Pain

Despite the general economic resilience and optimism, Qatar's Foreign Ministry laments that the embargo has slowed down the country's growth momentum, depleted currency reserves

and forced Qataris to abandon their commercial assets in Quartet countries. The embargo has also decelerated infrastructure construction for the 2022 World Cup, since contractors are unable to import heavy machinery across the land border (SAIS Group Meeting with Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, Doha, 22 January 2019). Furthermore, although diversifying the country's portfolio of domestically produced goods provides benefits in many ways, it comes at a price; it is costly for Qatar to produce goods for which it does not have a competitive advantage. Such products are more expensive when produced domestically than imported, and the government has subsidized their cost to stymie public opposition to rising prices. If the cost of living were to rise significantly, the country's 90% migrant population may have incentive to leave, which would upset the country's fragile economic structure (SAIS Group Meeting with Brookings Doha Center, Doha, 22 January 2019). Although the government is quite able to bear these subsidization costs, they create economic discomfort, even if not rising to the level of causing acute pain.

Government representatives and scholars alike suggested that the social pain imposed by the embargo is more difficult to endure than the economic pain. There has historically been a great deal of personal interconnectivity among the people of the gulf countries, and many Qataris have family members and close friends in the Quartet countries. The Quartet's ban on their citizens entering Qatar and vice versa therefore imposes not only logistical challenges on these individuals, but also great emotional stress. An additional component of the social pain caused by the embargo includes growing hostility between citizens themselves in the conflicting countries; unlike past diplomatic feuds when hostility was contained to the conflicting governments and did not trickle down to the individual level, media coverage of this crisis has caused great social damage by building an "us versus them" mentality on the individual level.

Economic Implications for Iran

Increased Exports

Iran benefits from the GCC crisis, not only because the internal division weakens the GCC as a regional counterweight, but also because the embargo has forced Qatar to rely on Iran for trade. It is a particularly timely symbiotic relationship: Iran has struggled to place its raw materials and agricultural exports in international markets since the United States reinstated sanctions, and these are precisely the goods that Qatar needed to secure through a new route because of the embargo.

While Qataris emphasized the importance of having a good working relationship with Iran to allow collaboration in their shared gas field, North Dome/South Pars, they maintained the idea that the relationship is purely transactional. They downplayed the amount of trade between the two countries, emphasizing that commerce with Iran decreased in 2018. Scholars at Qatar University explained that Iran immediately offered to replace all commodity goods that had been cut off from Qatar, but that Qatar declined the offer, opting instead to trade with Turkey (SAIS Group Meeting with Qatar University Gulf Studies Center, Doha, 23 January

2019). Other sources report differently on this topic. While it is true that Iran has failed to increase trade with Qatar to the same degree as Turkey, Iran's Department of Commerce reports that exports increased from \$60 million before the embargo to \$250 million by the 2017–18 fiscal year (Financial Tribune 2018).

Increased Transport Route Traffic

Aside from export goods, Iran has been critical to Qatar's continued economic resilience by facilitating movement of goods and people. Qatar Airway's reliance on Iranian airspace for nearly all of its flights has proven an incontrovertible boon for Iran's revenues, as the airline must pay Iran a \$2,000 fee per flight (Bearak 2017). The embargo has further benefitted Iran by redirecting goods bound for Qatar through Iran's Bushehr port after the two countries and Turkey signed a transportation pact to boost maritime shipping shortly after the embargo began (Financial Tribune 2017). Oman has benefitted similarly—as ships bound for Qatar adjusted their supply routes, cargo traffic through the port of Sohar spiked 30 percent (Economist 2017).

Qatar's Strategic Relationship

Qatar cut diplomatic ties with Iran in 2016 as a sign of solidarity with its GCC neighbors after an Iranian mob attacked Saudi Arabia's embassy in Tehran with explosive devices. However, outside of a similarly extreme circumstance, the Quartet's demands that Qatar completely sever diplomatic ties, end military cooperation, and decrease trade ties is a nonstarter for Qatar because of commercial interdependence; the two countries share a prolific gas field, and Qatar depends upon unimpeded access to the Strait of Hormuz to export LNG. Qatar will not take aggressive steps against Iran because it would risk Iranian retaliation and endanger this cooperative economic relationship.

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)

FDI in Qatar

Qatar has made a concerted effort to remain attractive to foreign direct investment in spite of the conflict, signaling to investors that it prioritizes business considerations above political disturbances. For example, it has refrained from retaliating against the UAE by cutting off its gas supply in order to preserve its reputation as a stable gas supplier, reassuring trade partners like South Korea and Japan to renew their contracts (SAIS Group Meeting with Qatar University Gulf Studies Center, Doha, 23 January 2019). The country has also made legislative efforts to remain attractive to investors, passing an "FDI law" allowing foreigners to own 100% of equity in all sectors and increasing the maximum percentage of shares they can hold in companies listed on the Qatar stock exchange (West 2018). These initiatives have proven effective, and FDI has returned to above average levels after reaching an all-time low in early 2018 (Trading Economics 2019).

FDI in Saudi Arabia

Attracting foreign direct investment is a pillar of Saudi Arabia's 2030 development goals. It is particularly important for the country to maintain a stable investment environment amid its current economic transformation. The National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) of Qatar alleges that Saudi Arabia does not have a secure investment environment because the travel ban has denied thousands of Qataris access to their factories and commercial companies located in Saudi Arabia, causing huge personal losses (SAIS Group Meeting with National Human Rights Committee, Doha, 22 January 2019). Saudi Arabia's balance sheet does indicate a sharp drop in FDI inflows in 2017, down to \$1.4 billion from a five-year average of \$29.2 billion. However, the Economist Intelligence Unit attributes this to a number of large-scale one-off investments and low oil prices. Analysts also point to the arrest of prominent business leaders and the Khashoggi murder as drivers of increased risk perception, but do not mention the embargo as a similar driver (Economist Intelligence Unit 2018).

Conclusion

The sanctions are macroeconomically sustainable for Qatar, so it will not "roll over and die" to end the embargo (SAIS Group Meeting with Georgetown Qatar, Doha, 23 January 2019). If the Qataris change their position, it will be for political reasons rather than financial because the social pain is more acute than the economic suffering. The Quartet must reform its strategy in response to the reality that the embargo has not delivered the amount of leverage it sought; it should lessen the severity of its demands to be commensurate with the limited amount of economic leverage it has achieved. Qatar, in turn, should seek to reestablish its legitimacy as a state that can be engaged diplomatically by proving compliance with the 2014 Riyadh Agreement. These actions will help re-establish cooperation, fostering regional stability and denying Iran the opportunity to continue capitalizing on Qatar's isolation.

Policy Recommendations

To Saudi Arabia

- **The Quartet should condition embargo relief upon making the tone of Al Jazeera Arabic less incendiary.** If the Quartet's goal is indeed to provoke behavioral change from Qatar, they should make removing the embargo conditional upon only one or two demands where a zone of possible agreement exists. Triaging in this way makes getting *some* concessions far more likely, as opposed to the current stalemate which is unlikely to result in any behavioral change at all.

Qatar is macroeconomically able to weather the embargo, and therefore the concession demanded by the Quartet must be commensurate with the relatively low level of economic pain that the embargo has caused.

- **Reforming Al Jazeera's editorial board is the demand most likely to produce an outcome acceptable to both parties and therefore has a real chance at being achieved.** This is a relatively small concession for Qatar, because the royal family was

already considering dialing down the editorial board's strongly pro-Muslim Brotherhood narrative at the time that the embargo began (SAIS Group Meeting with Georgetown University Qatar, Doha, 23 January 2019). Both representatives from the UAE and from Saudi Arabia indicated that changing the editorial board's policies instead of full closure of Al Jazeera would likely satisfy the Quartet's interest of quelling purported extremist incitement (SAIS Group Meeting with the UAE Foreign Ministry, Washington DC, October 2018; SAIS Group Meeting with King Saud University, Riyadh, 14 January 2019). This represents a promising zone of possible agreement where both parties could gain—Qatar receiving sanctions relief and the Quartet quieting the voice of incitement.

Beyond limiting the Muslim Brotherhood's media platform, this action would serve a second Quartet interest—countering Iran. Since the current level of pain imposed on Qatar by the embargo is not nearly enough to compel the country to cut critical ties with Iran, the Quartet would actually accomplish Iranian isolation more effectively by removing the economic embargo in exchange for Al Jazeera reform; doing so would remove Qatar's dependence on Iran for airspace and shipping routes and at least nominally reunite the GCC as a regional counterweight.

To Qatar

- **Qatar should clarify and substantiate the status of its 2014 Riyadh Agreement implementation.** Qatar's clarification should include an explanation of how it believes it implemented the agreement's requirements of noninterference the other countries' domestic affairs, cooperation on regional issues, and refusal to support extremist groups (Ibish 2017). Saudi representatives argue that they had to resolve their disagreement with economic statecraft rather than diplomacy because Qatar's failure to implement the 2014 agreement proved that it cannot be trusted to honor its agreements; they claim to be imposing consequences for Qatar's noncompliance in order to establish reliable norms (SAIS Group Meeting with Rasanah, Riyadh, 14 January 2019). Therefore, **if Qatar can show that it can be trusted to honor agreements, both parties can save face and the Quartet will be more willing to resolve the issues with diplomacy rather than economic force.**

To the United States

- **The United States should bring to the Saudis' attention the substance of some of the Qatari moves (e.g., in terrorists) while emphasizing the need for mutual respect, and should work to bring the two sides together on areas of common interest (e.g., Yemen, Syria, energy policy) including an open skies agreement which is a major plank of American interests and policy.**

The Gulf Crisis: Qatar, Iran, and Turkey

Aditya Ashok Balu

Qatar and the Embargo

Following the embargo against Qatar by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt on June 5, 2017, Qatar embarked on a mission of self-sustenance. The group of four cited as justification Qatari support for opposition Islamist groups and its ties with Iran, which the Quartet claims aimed to destabilize regional security by harboring and funding terrorists—mainly the Muslim Brotherhood. Qatar, which does not see the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization, rejected all allegations, viewing the Quartet move as an attempt to undermine Qatari sovereignty. The embargo came at Ramadan, when the Islamic population in the country would need to break its fast with dairy among other edibles. Once a country dependent on its only neighbor-by-land for milk, food, and airspace access, Qatar was forced to look elsewhere for operational normalcy.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia shuttered the land border and the UAE halted exports to Qatar from its ports. According to the International Monetary Fund, a sixth of Qatar's imports were produced in the embargoing countries. However, Qatar was swift to reroute its supplies through Omani and Indian ports, and its imports from Iran and Turkey instead. Air activity was rerouted through Iranian airspace through a prepared plan, and Turkish military presence—which the four embargoing countries demanded be drawn down—was boosted instead. The immediate aftermath saw bank and food runs across Qatar, emptying milk and other food items from market shelves, but within no more than a day these shelves were fully restocked. Qatar went to the extent of flying around four thousand cows into the country from Turkey, for local production of dairy—marking an awakening of Qatar to the importance of self-sustenance. Overnight, the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, turned into a celebrity-hero, and national spirit saw a significant ramp-up. Cartoons and posters of the Emir were posted all over Doha, from small posters on shop windows and street walls to huge banners on buildings.

Major Consequences for Qatar

Low oil prices and rifts in regional diplomacy took a toll on Qatar's economy. Non-oil economic growth slowed from 5.6% in 2016 to about 4% in 2017; real estate fell by about 11% by the end of 2017; a drop of \$40 billion was seen in resident private sector deposits and foreign financing—such as nonresident deposits. Qatar's Central Bank reserves took a major hit—from \$31 billion in 2016 to \$15 billion in 2017. Tourism declined: the previously 50% of Qatar's tourists from neighboring Gulf countries reach a meagre 10%. An 8.6% fall in tourists from other countries was also observed, over the span of a year. Qatar had to reroute construction supplies, as it is busy preparing to host the FIFA World Cup 2022, which needs new roads, hotels and stadiums (Associated Press 2018).

With no short-term hope for an end to this conflict, Qatar will need to lure investors with favorable legislation. Allowing 100% foreign ownership of local businesses, as in the UAE, is one option being considered.

Gerd Nonneman, a Qatar resident and professor of International Relations and Gulf Studies at Georgetown University's branch in Doha, claimed no shortage in daily life at all, but felt a professional barrier with his colleagues and friends across the land border (Associated Press 2018). Political pressures prevented them from continuing to speak or engage with him anymore. There is a powerful social factor to this crisis, in addition to the political and economic factors.

Qatar's Strengths

Qatar showed remarkable vision in preparing for an embargo. In 2014, rhetoric from Saudi officials that "they would end Qatar" did not pass unnoticed. Qatar was better poised to deal with such a problem, relative to any other country. With a population of 300,000 Qatari citizens, it has the highest per capita income in the world. The Central Bank drew from ample reserves to inject money into the economy and local banks. The sovereign wealth fund—the Qatar Investment Authority—sold some of its stakes overseas in 2017, a part of its \$318 billion in assets, giving it a lot of maneuvering room. By January 2018, the reserves started increasing from \$15 billion to \$18 billion. Additionally, joint ownership in the world's largest oil field along with Iran and a low level of external financial vulnerability both helped.

Qatar Petroleum, the national oil and gas company and the world's largest producer of LNG, is a big supplier to China, Japan, India, and Britain. These countries, which fuel their economies with gas, have remained crucial to Qatari exports. Even the UAE, despite the embargo, still needs and gets about a third of its natural gas needs from Qatar, resupplying about 200 million cubic feet of that to Oman.

Haya Alwaleed al-Thani, a college senior related to the ruling al-Thani family in Doha, says, "Growing up, we were always told about the importance of Gulf unity and always raised being taught by our parents and grandparents that we are one community, we are linked with shared ethnic roots and shared cultural values." Now feeling "deceived and betrayed" by the GCC embargoing countries, she goes on to say "I think our leadership's ability to react quickly and ensure the same high quality of life is maintained regardless of the political circumstances has made me feel very proud... As a Qatari citizen, I have never felt so proud" (Associated Press 2018). Although mixed family nationalities in the region were affected by the Quartet's embargo, the surge in Qatari nationalism could therefore be seen as a worthy trade-off.

Qatar and Iran

Iran undoubtedly has plans to be a regional hegemon in the Middle East, in opposition to Saudi Arabia, by creating a Shia alliance to regain former glory from the days of the Persian Empire. The embargo has cast doubt on a pan-Sunni alliance against any potential Iranian encroachment plans, by pushing Qatar to strengthen ties with Iran. Iran is one of the biggest

winners from the Gulf crisis, which had the opposite intent. Iran has gained, politically, more maneuvering space in the Gulf, particularly in relation to Qatari and Kuwaiti ties.

Economic Incentives

The strongest need to maintain relations between Qatar and Iran is their joint ownership of the world's largest natural gas field—the North Field in Qatar and the South Pars in Iran. This tie was one of the major reasons cited by the embargoing countries for their move, aimed at trying to get Qatar to reduce economic activity with Iran. Even with common sense, this strategy is poorly conceived, if it hoped to achieve what it set out to, for Qatar could not be expected to act in bad faith with Iran on its economic lifeline—natural gas production and exports. Consequently, this cemented Qatar-Iran ties concerning their interest in maintaining and increasing oil and gas exports for economic survival and growth. Qatar's Economy Minister Sheikh Ahmed bin Jassim al-Thani, Iran's Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade Mohammad Shariatmadari and Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and other government ministers met for talks on their business links on November 26, 2017. Qatar noted that they wanted to boost bilateral trade five-fold, from \$1 billion to \$5 billion.

Iran, already exporting a large amount of its fruit and vegetable produce to Qatar, now also acts as a critical trade route for goods that are produced in Turkey and Azerbaijan. Qatar, Turkey and Iran signed a three-way trade agreement in Tehran to make mobility of goods among the three countries simpler. In less than six months following the embargo, bilateral trade increase by 117%. This included, according to figures released by Iran's customs administration, a 30.8% growth in volume of non-oil goods, and a 60.57% in terms of their value, over a five-month period. Indeed, just a few weeks after the embargo, Qatar, Iran and Turkey signed a land transportation pact to cut costs and time in transit of goods—a landmark milestone in the countries' economic history. Qatar has also announced a plan to increase its gas production by 30%.

Airspace Dependency

Qatar Airways, which flew to eighteen cities across the four embargoing countries, felt the major brunt of the move, seeing short-term financial losses as expected. In what Qatar Airways termed its most challenging year in the past 20, it reported a loss of \$69 million and a 19% drop in seat occupancy on departure flights, attributing it directly to the “illegal blockade.” Qatar Airways flights were rerouted to fly over Turkey, Iran, and Oman for the most part.

Qatar is said to have begun negotiations with Iran for a license to use Iranian national airspace back in 2015. Following the tensions between the countries in the Gulf region, on 6 June, 2017, at the request of the International Civil Aviation Organization and Qatar, the Civil Aviation Organization of Islamic Republic of Iran issued permits to Qatar Airways to use its airspace. Prior to the embargo, Qatar Airways flights would enter Saudi Arabian and then Egyptian airspace to head in the directions of North Africa or Southern Europe. Now, they

would have to pass through Iran, Iraq and Jordan before entering North Africa (Mehr News Agency 2017).

Growth and investments, however, have not stopped. Qatar Airways has a 20% stake in British Airways-owner IAG and bought a stake in Meridien—an Italian carrier, in 2017. Since the embargo, Qatar Airways has added 24 new destinations and reported \$541 million in profits at the end of 2017 (Al Jazeera News 2018).

The American Headache

Even though the Trump administration seems to have given Saudi Arabia the “green light” for the embargo, the Gulf crisis is a headache for the United States. Gerald Feierstein, a former career diplomat and Gulf expert at the Middle East Institute, on the topic of the embargo and the Gulf crisis said, “What it’s done has really marginalized the GCC as an effective organization that could work with us,” and that it has “exposed divisions (that) Iran can exploit” (Tharoor 2018). A statement from Qatar suggesting that it would not “fuel a war” against Iran, raised concerns in Washington that the US air base in Qatar base would not be available to engage the Iranians from, in the event of military escalation in the future. Michael Greenwald, the former US Treasury attaché to Qatar and Kuwait, feels that Iran is the only victor in all of this and that “this new power dynamic for Iran” is what is most troubling in this crisis (Tharoor 2018).

The idea that Iran is the demon in the region is slowly giving way to the idea that the Quartet governments are themselves an autocratic conspiracy intending to quash any “Arab Spring” political aspirations in the region. Qatar, with little effort, is now able to position itself as a supporter of grassroot Arab and Islamic aspirations, instead of one among the cynical monarchs who are hostile to any sort of democratic change (Tharoor 2018). This is significant, especially in the aftermath of the Khashoggi incident, given that the United States needs to keep its base operations in Qatar strong, and that the US Senate is pushing the government to rethink relations with Saudi Arabia. Qatar is no longer seen as a supporter of terrorism, since it increased counter-terrorism operations in 2017 in cooperation with the United States (Counter Extremism Project 2019).

The mistrust fostered between Riyadh and Doha is America’s biggest headache. In 2017, the UAE and Saudi Arabia jointly had a plan to launch a military invasion to capture Doha. Rex Tillerson, the then Secretary of State, is said to have pressured the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia to back down—a move that is rumored to have caused his dismissal due to the UAE’s lobbying in Washington for his removal (Al Jazeera News 2018). The Gulf crisis will make it hard for Qatar to trust Saudi Arabia ever again, and thereby that much harder for Doha to avoid increased cooperation with Iran for the sake of national security, especially after their warm welcome in their worst of times. The Trump administration has also shifted its stance on the crisis. It is now less supportive of the UAE and Saudi Arabia (Fraihat 2018). It is sensible for the United States to gravitate back to Qatar, given Saudi Arabia’s Khashoggi debacle and Qatar’s seemingly growing ‘innocence,’ not to mention the roughly ten thousand American

troops stationed in the forward Headquarters of the US military's Central Command, Washington's biggest base in the Middle East.

Qatar and Turkey

Turkey was quick to the rescue when the embargo shocked Qatar. Cargo ships and hundreds of planes loaded with food were swiftly sent flowing from Turkey, whose President, Erdoğan, spoke out strongly against the embargo. One of the reasons that brought these two countries closer was that one of the thirteen Demands made by the embargoing parties was the closure of the Turkish base in Qatar. Contrary to expectations, bilateral relations between Qatar and Turkey strengthened at a quick pace.

Food Security

Within 48 hours of the embargo, Turkey had sent milk, yoghurt and poultry to Qatar, saving Qatar from facing a huge shortage of vital imports that it was previously receiving from Saudi Arabia. According to Turkey's Aegean Exporters' Association, Turkish exports to Qatar increased by 90% just four months into the embargo. Although prices jumped in Qatar due to the longer transit, the new land trade route agreement between Qatar, Iran, and Turkey will soon regularize prices. Sinan Kiziltan, Chairman of the Aegean Aquatic Products and the Animal Products Exporters' Union, feels confident that these high-quality Turkish products will have a permanent home in Qatar, regardless of the lifting of the embargo in the future (Al Jazeera News 2017).

In the meantime, Qatar has invested \$444 million in a food storage and processing facility at Hamad Port in Qatar. It also aims to achieve 70% self-reliance in food production by 2024.

Military and Diplomatic Ties

On June 7, 2017, two days after the embargo, Turkey's Parliament ratified two deals drafted earlier that made it possible to put more Turkish troops on Qatari soil and to enable military training cooperation aimed at strengthening Qatar's defense capabilities, both in counter-terrorism efforts and in maintenance of regional stability. Subsequently, Qatar received 5 armored vehicles and 23 military personnel from Turkey on June 18, with plans to increase that number to 3,000.

Qatari Investments

According to Qatar's Chamber of Commerce, Turkey is one of Qatar's biggest clients for non-oil exports. Qatar has also been investing in Turkish economy and companies long before the embargo. With over \$20 billion in investments to Turkey, Qatar is the second-highest in investment value compared to any country. According to Turkish media, Qatar was set to increase this by a further \$19 billion in 2018, with \$650 million going to agriculture and

livestock. Simultaneously, Turkish companies handled projects worth \$11.6 billion in Qatar, the majority projects for the FIFA World Cup in 2022 (Al Jazeera News 2017).

Conclusion

Qatar has gained international trust for three main reasons: 1) Qatar signed an MOU on terror financing with the United States in 2017; 2) Qatar has opened up its bank records to the US Treasury, to show that they haven't been 'financing terrorism'; and 3) Qatar has successfully managed its own publicity (SAIS Group Meeting, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Riyadh, 15 January 2019). Doha also has "recycled credibility"—they have used think tanks, academia, and the media to push up their credibility (SAIS Group Meeting, Rasanah International Institute for Iranian Studies, Riyadh, 14 January 2019). Furthermore, the Khashoggi incident dealt a huge blow to Saudi Arabia's credibility. This leaves Qatar with more wiggle room as far as international pressure is concerned. It seems to be taking all the right steps, and not engaging in petty rhetoric with any of the embargoing countries, while smartly managing its economic growth and diversification.

There is no anti-embargo alliance, per se. Qatar does not seem to be cozying up to Iran in order to try to destabilize the region. In fact, Saudi Arabia is seeming more like a 'bully' by the day, bent on trying to make Qatar 'do it's bidding' at all costs. This is viewed by Qatar as an attack on its sovereignty, and rightly so. Saudi Arabia and the UAE have upped the ante so high that they no longer know how to climb back down without losing face—which leaves them with insufficient reason to desire an end to this crisis. Similarly, Qatar is quite happy with the eye-awakening experience in its aftermath, now diversifying its investments across a larger group of countries and becoming more self-reliant in their own food and dairy production.

To achieve balance and strategic depth in the region, the four elements Qatar would require are 1) a vibrant indigenous intellectual component; 2) strategic geo-political, economic, and financial depth; 3) symbolism and legitimacy; and 4) military and hard-power elements (SAIS Group Meeting, Rasanah International Institute for Iranian Studies, Riyadh, 14 January 2019). Of the four, one of the speakers at the Rasanah International Institute for Iranian Studies believes Qatar only has money and none of the rest. For this main reason, Qatar-Iran-Turkey cooperation is unlikely to end so long as Saudi Arabia and the other GCC states that are participating in this embargo project untrustworthiness in the eyes of the Qatari rulers, for this cooperation is expected to compensate for what Qatar lacks. The standoff is unlikely to end, but Qatar's cooperation with Iran and Turkey are here to stay for a reasonably long period of time, regardless of the embargo's status.

Policy Recommendations

These recommendations are directed at ending not just the embargo, but also towards creating a longer-lasting stability in the region.

To Saudi Arabia

- **Focus on improving credibility rather than saving face in their escalation of demands.** The embargo is failing. The 13 Demands were too ‘demanding.’ Qatar will be unlikely to ever respond to such harsh demands. Talks must begin without preconditions for Saudi Arabia to see any willingness to collaborate from Qatar.
- **Use Kuwait for successful back-channel in negotiations.** Since neither party is willing to come to the forefront for negotiations, use Kuwait as a mediator to back-channel talks with the Qatari government. This back-channeling can help pick a starting point for official negotiations, rather than continue a zero-sum game.
- **Counter Iran’s “expansion” through dialogue and alliance-building.** The Middle East is watching an alliance against Iran form, but is also seeing sectarian divisions mounting from both sides. In order to avoid religious divisions to influence politics, use confidence-building measures to create long-lasting ties with Iran and Turkey, instead of competing in a three-way contest to become a regional hegemon.

To Qatar

- **Steadily and constantly increase measures to strengthen counter-terrorism operations in the region as a whole.** This is a confidence-building measure to show the embargoing countries that even if Qatar does not agree with the idea of calling the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization, that it is doing all it can to deal with terrorism actively. This would also further inspire international confidence, and thereby put more pressure on the embargoing countries to end the standoff.
- **Show willingness to begin talks under some preconditions, if not all.** Show willingness to respond to certain conditions, but make clear which demands cannot be part of preconditions before talks. Instead of playing a zero-sum game, this would provide a path to pre-negotiations, and would avoid a zero-sum game.
- **Avoid using the Al-Udeid Air Base as a point of leverage in any negotiations.** The United States needs to know that it can launch operations against Iran if they choose without complications. This standoff in the Gulf is exactly that—a complication. If the United States decides it is less of a headache to shift its base to a different country, Qatar will be more vulnerable to a military attack from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

To Iran

- **Iran should further develop bilateral ties with Qatar in a transparent manner.** There is no reason to decrease or halt trade growth with Qatar. Indeed, even the UAE has more trade links with Iran than Qatar does. It does not seem like Qatar’s cooperation with Iran on the oil and gas field has any real bearing on the standoff. However, Iran and Qatar need to cooperate transparently, so as not to raise suspicion.

- **Iran should relax the concerns of the Gulf states with respect to its supposed plans for ‘expansion.’** Iran, if it seeks regional stability, should try to convince the Gulf States that it has no intention of expanding territory or creating sectarian divisions across the region.

To Turkey

- **Turkey should continue building on the bilateral ties it has created successfully with Qatar.** Turkey has established itself as a reliable friend to Qatar in its time of greatest need. To ensure that Qatar is capable of standing up to a potential bully, Qatar-Turkey cooperation must grow.

US Military Relations in the Gulf Pushing Toward or Away from a Resolution of the Gulf Crisis?

Danielle Martin

The Middle East has long been an important focus of US foreign policy, particularly from a military perspective. In 1980 President Carter stated, “An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force” (Geyelin 1980). Since then, US military relations in the Gulf have been built on economic interests (arms sales), and shared security concerns within the region. US military presence in Gulf has been *quid pro quo*: security cooperation and military assistance in exchange for access to military bases and coordination efforts in the region. As a result, Washington holds substantial influence in the Gulf as it is able to project military power or coordinate with countries whose security interests align with the United States. Issues arise, however, when Gulf country actors have competing perspectives and ideas on security of the region. In these situations, the United States tries to push these actors toward agreement and resolution or attempt to maintain the status quo to avoid disrupting regional security.

On June 5, 2017, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) led an effort to embargo Qatar with the support of Egypt and Bahrain. The US response has been mixed and contradictory at times. President Trump was quick to take sides and praised the Saudi-led efforts to isolate Qatar. He even went as far as appearing to take credit for the Saudi moves. He insisted that the isolation of Qatar was a victory for stopping all forms of support for “extremists” and claiming that Qatar was “a major source of support for extremism.” Putting pressure on Qatar would signal the beginning of the end for “terrorism” (Kabalan 2018, 33–49). This came just two weeks after President Trump’s speech in Riyadh in which he praised Saudi counterterror efforts and offered general support for Saudi regional policy, notably in the conflict in Yemen (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia 2017).

As both Qatar and Saudi Arabia are strategic US allies in the region, President Trump’s initial response dissented from a long-established US tradition of neutrality and mediation in the event of conflict between allies. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson attempted to lessen the blow to Qatar, insinuating that all Gulf countries needed to do more to curb the financing of extremism. Other senior State Department officials also seemed to deviate from President’s Trump stand on Saudi Arabia questioning, “Were the actions really about their concerns regarding Qatar’s alleged support for terrorism? Or were they about the long-simmering grievances between the GCC countries?” (Kabalan 2018, 33–49). Understandably, given the mixed signals coming from the Washington, many international actors were perplexed about the US stance on the Gulf crisis.

Since then, the Gulf crisis has evolved into a stalemate; however, it is not mutually hurting. With the exception of Trump’s initial oversight, the United States has maintained a balanced military approach in the Gulf. This balance has arguably prevented further escalation,

but it also allows the stalemate to become more tolerable. This chapter will argue the United States should leverage its military relations with both parties to ripen the stalemate and create room for negotiation.

This chapter will first attempt to elucidate the complicated web of US military relations with both Saudi Arabia and Qatar including the sale of weapons, military bases, and joint training operations. Second, the chapter will discuss the role of terrorism, the Muslim Brotherhood, and regional counterterrorism efforts, and their effect on the Gulf crisis. Third, it will provide an analysis of regional security concerns including Iran, Syria, and Yemen. Finally, it will conclude with policy recommendations for the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar.

US Military Relationship with Saudi Arabia

The US-Saudi Arabia security relationship for decades has been anchored by critical infrastructure cooperation, long-standing military training initiatives, high-value weapons sales, and counterterrorism initiatives (Blanchard 2018). While differences arise over the tactics of how to maintain regional security, the United States shows no sign of changing course. Both the United States and Saudi Arabia appear to be deepening and strengthening their military alliance.

Since mid-2017 when Mohammed bin Salman was elevated to Crown Prince, the United States and Saudi Arabia have ramped up efforts to counter Iran, expanded arms sales, and increased support for the Saudi-led international coalition forces in Yemen. In May 2017, President Trump and King Salman bin Abd al Aziz agreed to a “Strategic Partnership for the 21st Century” during Trump’s visit to Riyadh. In addition, at the Summit the United States and Saudi Arabia announced a “Joint Strategic Vision for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United States of America,” which aims to promote a peaceful Middle East through security and economic cooperation. As part of this newfound security vision, both countries are working to develop institutional partnerships to combat both ideological extremism and financing for extremist violence (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia 2017). The United States continues to express willingness to arm and train Saudi security forces, even if this support means that the United States is increasingly intertwined with regional disputes.

US Weapons Sales to Saudi Arabia

The United States is the single largest arms supplier to the Middle East and the Saudis are the primary consumer. For many years, Saudi Arabia’s armed forces have relied on US arms sales to support their regional security efforts. The United States seeks to improve interoperability, reduce the need for US deployments, deter Iran, and support US industry (Blanchard 2018). Since 2009 US government-proposed arms sales to Saudi Arabia have an aggregated value of more than \$120 billion (Thomas 2017). The sheer amount and number of technologically advanced weapons sent to Saudi Arabia each year reinforces US-Saudi ties. The Saudis want to further solidify the military relationship and make access to weapons easier. “We want a

NATO-type relationship with the US” one Saudi official proclaimed (SAIS Group Meeting, Riyadh, 15 January 2019).

As part of Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030, the Kingdom aims to domestically procure 50% of all military needs by 2030 (Thomas 2017). The United States is supporting this ambition. In May 2017, Lockheed Martin signed an agreement with the Saudi Government to assemble 150 Black Hawk helicopters in the Kingdom. This is only a small portion of a larger purchase of over \$28 billion that includes technologically advanced air and missile defense, combat ships, tactical aircraft, and rotary wing technologies and programs (Arab News 2017). During President Trump’s visit to Saudi Arabia in May, he claimed that Saudi authorities signed Letters of Offer and Acceptance for new US-Saudi arms sales totaling over \$110 billion (Thomas 2017). The new arms package includes allocations for combat ships, Abrams tanks, patriot missiles, tanks, heavy equipment recovery systems, Chinook helicopters, and a THAAD anti-missile system. In addition, there was a memorandum of intent signed for an estimated \$18 billion program that would upgrade the Saudi military defense communication infrastructure and command and control operations (Thomas 2017). Likely the entire \$110 billion in arms sales will not all come to fruition; however, it does illustrate the Saudi’s intent to improve its capacities.

US Military Bases in Saudi Arabia

The United States has one primary military compound in Saudi Arabia, the Eskan Village Air Force Base in Riyadh. The United States withdrew the majority of its forces in Saudi Arabia in 2003 (Wallin 2018). While the decision was reached by mutual consent, some Saudi leadership welcomed this news, especially those who supported rising nationalism in the royal family. Yet others worried about the perception of the withdrawal on Saudi Arabia’s strategic importance to the United States (Time 2003). Despite this change, Saudi-US relations have remained strong. Many of the current military personnel in Saudi Arabia are part of the US Military Training Mission, which is not active in combat. The build-up of infrastructure and the existence of Al-Udeid air base in Doha relocated many personnel and assets that were previously stationed at Prince Sultan Airbase, Saudi Arabia (Wallin 2018).

US Joint Training Operations with Saudi Arabia

The primary functions of the US military personnel in Saudi Arabia are training, security assistance, and overall security cooperation. The United States Military Training Mission (USMTM) to Saudi Arabia’s is to “train, advise, and assist” (US Central Command 2019). Joint training operations occur at 10 locations throughout the Kingdom. The goal is to promote US national security by increasing the capability and capacity of the Saudi Arabian Armed Forces, who once trained can help enforce the US security agenda in the Middle East. Part of the \$110 billion of arms sales includes training on the use of technologically advanced weapons, ensuring they would be utilized to their full capacity. One such program, the naval blanket order training program, would continue at an expected cost of \$250 million. In June

2017, the United States also approved a continued blanket order training program estimated at \$750 million that would include specialized flight training, technical training, professional military education, mobile training teams, and English language training (US Department of State 2019). While blanket orders may not reach their maximum for decades, the sheer volume highlights their importance.

US Military Relationship with Qatar

US–Qatari defense and security relations are extensive and long-standing. In 2003, the US military pulled the majority of its troops out of the military bases in Saudi Arabia and relocated its regional headquarters to Al-Udeid Air Base southwest of Doha. Since then, military relations between the countries have been stable. As Qatar is a relatively small Gulf state, it has long depended on the defense and security presence of the United States.

In November 2018, during a visit to Washington by Qatar’s Minister of State for Defense Khalid al-Attiyah, then Secretary of Defense James Mattis hailed Qatar as “a longtime friend and military partner for peace and stability in the Middle East” (Congressional Research Service 2018). This reaffirmed the two nations’ strong bilateral military relations.

US Weapons Sales to Qatar

When it comes to arms sales the French continue to be the largest supplier to Qatar. Recently, however, Qatar has begun to diversify its arms mix to include an increased amount of US equipment and weapons. Qatar has become the second largest US foreign military sales customer, with an estimated \$25 billion in new sales in 2018 (Congressional Research Services 2018). While the dollar value pales in comparison to Saudi Arabia’s arms sales, the trend is significant. From 2011 to 2015 alone, Qatari arms sales increased by 279%, when compared to the previous four years, similarly Saudi Arabia increased its spending by 275% (Middle East Eye 2016). The main reason for the Qatari increase of equipment and arms purchases from the United States is interoperability. The Qataris are looking to make their tanks, aircraft, and other weaponry more compatible during joint US-Qatari exercises, particularly in Libya and Syria (Congressional Research Services 2018). In November 2018, the US State Department approved an arms sale to Qatar in the amount of \$215 billion, which would include missiles, training, and a National Advanced Surface to Air Missile System (Defense Security Cooperation Agency 2018). Another request approved was for equipment and support to upgrade the Qatari Air Force Operations Center, which is valued at an estimated \$197 million (Defense Security Cooperation Agency 2018). Both deals are pending Congressional review and approval.

Qatar has a native population of approximately 300,000. While Qatar will benefit from the increase in arms sales, it is severely lacking in trained personnel to operate these technologically advanced weapons. Even with US support and training, the Qataris lack citizens to do the work.

US Military Bases in Qatar

For military bases, Qatar clearly has the Saudis beat. Qatar is home to the largest US military base in the Middle East, Al-Udeid Air Base, which houses the Combined Air Operations Center, US Special Operations Command Central, CENTCOM Forward HQ, and US Air Forces Central Command. Since its establishment, Qatar has invested over \$5 billion dollars to maintain and expand the base (Wallin 2018). This is in addition to the \$8 billion spent since 2002 to support US and coalition operations at Al-Udeid (Congressional Research Service 2018). Working in Qatar is convenient, as Qatar places no significant restrictions on US military use of the base (SAIS Meeting, Doha, 21 January 2019).

The 2018 Strategic Dialogue between the United States and Qatar focused on the expansion of defense and security cooperation. The Qataris offered to expand and enhance Al-Udeid airbase over the next two decades in return for an “enduring” and “permanent” US military presence in Qatar (Congressional Research Service 2018). Currently, the base holds 10,000 military personnel. Expansion is planned to include 200 new housing units as well as new ramps and cargo facilities. Qatar’s Defense Minister Khalid bin Mohammad al-Attiyah stated that with the upgrades at Al-Udeid, “It will very soon become a family-oriented place for our American friends there. We want more of the families to be stable and feel more comfortable in their stay” (Brimelow 2018). In addition, Qatar has begun to expand its Hamad Port to accommodate expanded US Navy operations. While the United States has not confirmed if the Al-Udeid base will become “permanent,” the Qataris will make the efforts necessary to ensure it becomes a long-term US security presence. Qatar also hosts As Sayliyah Army Base located just outside of Doha. As Sayliyah base serves as a strategic prepositioning point for armored equipment.

US Joint Training Operations with Qatar

The United States and Qatar have a formal Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) that was initially signed in 1992 and was renewed in 2013 for an additional 10 years. The DCA addresses military access to facilities and most importantly training and capacity building for Qatari military forces (Congressional Research Services 2018). The Qatar force is comprised of about 11,800 personnel whom the United States is actively training. Joint exercises include military decision-making and counterattack implementation. These exercises are part of establishing the “enduring and permanent” military partnership between the United States and Qatar.

Even with the embargo of Qatar, some military exercises involving both Qatar and Saudi Arabia are allowed to continue. Qatari forces participated in a GCC military exercise “Gulf Shield” in Saudi Arabia in March to April 2018 (Gulf Business 2018). Saudi officials claim that the GCC crisis would not affect joint military operations with the United States and other GCC allies (SAIS Group Meeting, Riyadh, 15 January 2019). However, the assessment in Doha is different. Technically the Qataris are allowed to enter Saudi Arabia and participate in GCC military exercises, but they encounter bureaucratic obstacles. By the time issues are

resolved, they have often missed the opportunity to participate in these military exercises (SAIS Group Meeting, Doha, 22 January 2019).

Terrorism

One of the main US goals in the region is to prevent the emergence of safe havens for terrorist organizations, something both the Saudis and Qataris say they support. But there is no universally accepted definition of a “terrorist organization.”

The Muslim Brotherhood

When the Arab Spring unfolded in 2011, the division between Qatar and Saudi Arabia became apparent. The Saudis preferred preserving the status quo and thus opposed the Muslim Brotherhood; meanwhile, the Qataris supported the change in leadership and provided support for the Muslim Brotherhood branches in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya. Saudi Arabia had at one time welcomed to its soil Muslim Brotherhood members who were persecuted or unsafe in their home countries. However, when the Arab Spring occurred, Saudi Arabia saw the Muslim Brotherhood as an existential threat. The Brotherhood challenged the Kingdom’s authoritarian, monarchical Islam and instead spread the concept of populist Islam. Saudi Arabia began a campaign to re-brand the Brotherhood as a risky terrorist organization. The Qatari stance differed and instead embraced the Muslim Brotherhood movements because they represented political Islam that Qatar thought could foster regional stability. Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the UAE labeled the Brotherhood a terrorist group. Qatar’s support of them was essentially supporting “terrorism.”

In the absence of a universally accepted definition of a “terrorist” both sides looked to the United States for determination on the Muslim Brotherhood. The United States was averse. The Trump administration did not designate the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization and instead sought to designate violent affiliates as terrorists, rather than the entire umbrella organization (Lake 2018). This response did not directly support either side.

Counterterrorism Efforts

Both Saudi Arabia and Qatar are trying to align themselves strategically with US counterterrorism efforts in the Middle East. In May 2017 during President Trump’s visit to Riyadh, the Saudis inaugurated the Global Center for Combating Extremist Ideology. This center aims to be a state-of-the-art effort to counter terrorism using artificial intelligence to track online radicals and extremist thought and to obstruct the propagation militant recruitment (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia 2017). This is the first time a Gulf country has used cyber-technology to confront the intellectual sources and media dissemination that promotes extremism around the globe. The US government has described the Saudi government as “a strong partner in regional security and counterterrorism efforts” (Blanchard 2018). Saudi Arabia has actively tried to stem the flow of financing to terrorist organizations, maintain strict oversight of the banking sector, tighten regulations on the

charitable sector, strengthen penalties for terrorism financing, prevent Saudis from traveling in support of extremist groups and continue efforts to counter bulk cash smuggling for illicit financing (Blanchard 2017). US–Saudi ties on counterterrorism are strong.

While the United States and Saudi Arabia are generally aligned on who is deemed a terrorist organization and counterterrorism efforts (with the exception of the Muslim Brotherhood), Qatar and the United States hold some opposing viewpoints. For example, the United States has declared Hamas a terrorist organization, while Qatar strongly supports Hamas and actively contributes to its efforts. In July 2017, Qatar and the United States signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on broad US-Qatar counterterrorism cooperation (Congressional Research Service 2018). In an effort to implement the MOU and gain support from the United States (and possibly other GCC countries), in March 2018 Qatar designated 19 individuals and 8 entities as terrorists, 10 of which were also listed on other GCC countries and the US terrorist lists (Congressional Research Services 2018). In addition, Qatar continues to participate in the State Department’s Antiterrorism Assistance program aimed at increasing its domestic security capabilities. As part of the MOU, Qatar has made efforts to prevent terrorism financing and stem the flow of suspected terrorists through Qatar. The Qataris even approved a new law to strengthen terrorism-linked cyber offenses and restrict overseas activities of Qatari charities linked to illicit financing.

However, despite the seemingly positive progress, the United States has stated that “entities and individuals within Qatar continue to serve as a source of financial support for terrorist and violent extremist groups...and that, over the past decade, Qatar had made less progress in countering terrorism financing than had Saudi Arabia” (Congressional Research Service 2018). This does not bode well for Qatar, a nation looking to gain favor with the United States.

Shared Security Concerns Within the Region

Saudi Arabia and the United States are closely aligned in their efforts on Syria and Yemen, in both of which they aim to keep Iran in check. Meanwhile, since the Gulf crisis, Qatar has tightened its relationship with Iran. After the embargo was announced, Iran was quick to offer support, allowing flights to be rerouted over Iranian airspace, sending food, and increasing trade routes.

After the embargo, Qatar ended its support for the Saudi-led (and US supported) efforts in Yemen. The Qataris claimed they had been “expelled” from Yemen by the Saudi-led coalition (Hassan 2018). Shortly after that allegation, the Qataris were also accused of supporting the Houthis. Two alleged examples of Houthi support come from the claim that Qatar donated \$1 million of aid for reconstruction purposes to Saada, which was subsequently diverted to Houthi forces. A second wave of cash in the amount of \$20 million of humanitarian assistance was also allegedly funneled to Houthi forces (Hassan 2018). There has yet to be hard evidence of this alleged connection. Meanwhile, the US government continues to provide limited military support to the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen, as the United States is caught in

a difficult place. Both the United States and Saudi Arabia share concerns about Iranian ties to the Houthi movement. The United States seems trapped in an intractable conflict in which Saudi use of US origin weaponry appears to have contributed to the masses of refugees in the region and resulted in numerous civilian casualties and damage to infrastructure (Blanchard 2018). Because of these statistics, the United States does seem to be ready to change course as the Senate invoked the War Powers Act of 1973. The Act is intended as a congressional check on presidential ability to wage war by allowing lawmakers to order the executive branch to end military conflicts not approved by Congress (Wilkinson 2018).

In Syria, the Saudis, Qataris and the United States have led various efforts against the Iranian-backed president Bashar al-Assad. The United States has roughly 2,000 troops still deployed in Syria and has spent nearly \$30 billion on the war (Bremmer 2018). The Saudis have actively contributed to US efforts there including undertaking airstrikes, co-leading the Coalition's Counter Finance Group, establishing the Etidal Center, and providing over \$1 billion in humanitarian assistance. In August 2018, the Saudis announced a contribution of another \$100 million to provide assistance to coalition support stabilization efforts in Syria (Nauert 2018).

Despite the Qataris increased relations with Iran, in Syria the Qataris oppose Iranian influence. On December 19, 2018, President Trump made an unexpected call, declaring victory over ISIL in Syria, and announced the withdrawal of all US troops, yet implementation has been slow (Macaron 2018). The results of this decision will be played out in the months to come, but the Saudis have already shifted their strategy. They fear a power vacuum in Syria. In December, the Saudis were actively investing inside Syria through the "King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center" (Lillywhite 2019). The goal is normalizing relations with Syria (Lillywhite 2019). With the United States pulling out, the Kingdom aims to gain leverage inside Syria and lessen Iranian influence. Meanwhile, the Qataris have taken the opposite approach. Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed Bin Abdulrahman al-Thani recently reaffirmed the Qatari position, stating "the Qatari government sees no reason to reopen its embassy in Damascus, nor any other signs for a normalization of ties with the Syrian government" (Middle East News 2019).

Net Assessment

The military relations the United States holds with both Saudi Arabia and Qatar are balanced. Both the Saudis and the Qataris are actively procuring new arms sales and training opportunities with the United States. Historically, Saudi Arabia has been the largest consumer of US arms; however, recently the Qataris have created an arms race. Both countries appear to be "showing off" for President Trump with the quantity of weapons they can purchase, even if they lack the training and personnel to operate them. Neither Qatar nor Saudi Arabia wants direct confrontation (SAIS Group Meetings, Riyadh and Doha, January 2019). The massive arms sales are clearly a strategic diplomatic move to gain favor with the United States rather than for direct military efforts against each other. Qatar has an advantage on Saudi Arabia

when it comes to US military bases. In the wake of the Gulf crisis, Qatar has been expanding US military ties and looking to make US presence in the region “permanent.” Without the US bases in Qatar, it is likely that the Gulf crisis would look different. The United States helps to abate any fear of Saudi aggression and levels the playing field, which is arguably why the current stalemate is persisting and shows signs of becoming intractable. Both sides can tolerate the stalemate as they realize the crisis will not escalate further. Even during the crisis, both sides participate in joint training exercises with the United States, but both sides are only “playing nice” to appease Washington. Once a joint exercise is over, they retreat back to a stalemate, seemingly the new status quo.

On the topic of the Muslim Brotherhood, the United States has chosen the middle ground. The United States did not deem the entire Brotherhood a terrorist organization (which would favor Qatar), but also recognized the Saudi perspective and designated some factions of it as a terrorist organization. On counterterrorism, the Saudis have the advantage. While the Qataris have been making progress on counterterrorism efforts, the United States still has concerns over Doha’s link to financial support for terrorist and violent extremist groups. It could be argued that this small “gain” for Saudi Arabia is offset by the strong military bases that Qatar hosts. For shared security concerns in the region, the United States is closely aligned with the Saudis on Yemen and Iran. For a while, it appeared the United States and Saudi Arabia were also aligned on Syria, but with the US withdrawal, the Saudis have shifted their approach. Meanwhile, the Qatari and US perspective on Syria appears to remain aligned, with both nations avoiding normalization of relations.

Based on this analysis the United States has no reason to favor one side over the other, as both are strategic regional partners. The United States has maintained a balanced military approach. In areas where one side may show advantageous, the other side makes up the difference in other areas.

Conclusion

The Gulf crisis has proven to be hard fought, with neither side willing to compromise. At the start of the crisis, the United States sent mixed signals; however, since then it has maintained balanced military relations. This balance has made the current stalemate more tolerable for both sides. The stalemate is not mutually hurting and given the US presence the crisis will not escalate further.

Both countries remain strong military allies with the United States. Qatar has an advantage on Saudi Arabia when it comes to the position of US military bases, but arguably Saudi Arabia is edging out Qatar on counterterrorism (in the eyes of the United States). On arms sales, both sides are in a race to see who can purchase the most weaponry, even if they lack the capability to use it. They use arms sales as a way to gain favor with President Trump. For regional security concerns, on Iran and Yemen, the Saudis and United States align. As of recently, their alliance on Syria is diverging, while the United States and Qatar remain aligned. As long as the United States continues a balanced approach in the region, the situation will not

reach the point of a mutually hurting stalemate. To make room for negotiation of the Gulf crisis, the United States instead should leverage its military relations with both parties to ripen the stalemate.

Policy Recommendations

To the United States, Saudi Arabia and Qatar

- **Establish clear security principles for the region.** Given the range of conflicts in the Middle East and the array of armed groups, the Gulf countries would greatly benefit from a strong united front outlining clear security goals for the region. During the Gulf crisis, Saudi Arabia and Qatar have essentially started a weapons race in an effort to gain favor with the United States. While the Saudis and Qataris do not share all the same security objectives, they do share similar values when it comes to limiting Iranian influence in Syria, controlling the spread of ISIS, and combating extremism.

To the United States

- **Establish a clear policy and stance for moving forward on the Gulf crisis.** The changing US policy toward the Gulf crisis has made it difficult to find a quick solution as a mutually hurting stalemate for both Saudi Arabia and Qatar has not been reached. The US military presence and policy in both Qatar and Saudi Arabia have contributed to the status quo scenario, in which both sides can endure the embargo, and neither side is pushing toward resolution.
- **Use military policy to drive Saudi Arabia and Qatar towards mediation.** The United States should strategically use its military bases, arms sales, and joint training opportunities as a “carrot” for encouraging both sides towards mediation of the conflict. Given the US presence in the region and ability to offer “carrots and sticks,” it is the actor best positioned to mediate and bring an end to the Gulf crisis.
- **Determine a face-saving resolution for the conflict.** At this point, the Gulf crisis has dragged on for over a year and a half. Both sides are at a point of intractable stalemate, dug deep into their positions. Likely the only way a resolution will be reached is if the United States can craft a proposal that allows for face-saving on both sides of the aisle.

To Saudi Arabia

- **Recognize Qatar as having a separate foreign policy agenda.** Qatar has time and time again proved that it is trying to separate itself from regional neighbors on foreign policy, especially as it relates to Iran, Turkey, etc. Saudi acceptance could open room for dialogue and the opportunity to collaborate when foreign policy agendas that aligns. While the Saudis may oppose the Qataris amicable relations with Iran and Turkey, closer relations with Qatar on other fronts could allow the Saudis to have greater influence on Qatar in the long run.

To Qatar

- **Increase transparency.** There are many allegations against Qatar as it relates to counterterrorism, especially in light of the Gulf crisis. Qatar would benefit from increasing transparency of its actions and financing, particularly as it pertains to regional security concerns. This would be a step in the right direction to extend an olive branch and re-build some level of trust with embargoing nations.

The Fragmentation of the Middle East

Dennis Murphy

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) crisis is the most overt example of the fragmentation of the Middle East to occur since the first Gulf War. The efforts of the Quartet [defined as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), United Arab Emirates (UAE), Egypt, and Bahrain] to isolate Qatar and subordinate its foreign policy have failed. Far from preventing the collapse of the traditional strategic landscape, the GCC crisis has accomplished the opposite. Further fragmentation is likely given this failure, as competition between regional actors will further disrupt the region. This paper explores the relationship between regional fragmentation and the GCC crisis, the direction in which fragmentation is developing, and what the United States can do about it.

Fragmentation and the GCC Crisis in America's Shadow

Fragmentation Has Facilitated the Crisis

American hegemony in the Middle East was most strongly established during the period from the Gulf War to the Iraq invasion. Following the Bush administration's reckless interventionism, the Obama administration sought to de-escalate American engagement in the region through offshore balancing, and in the process facilitated fragmentation. America's hegemony was still present through funding, arms sales, and political influence, but local actors needed to take the lead and rely less upon American military personnel (Dueck 2015). The message was clear: Turkey, Egypt, KSA, UAE, and others must be more involved in the security of their own region. While it was generally assumed that these actors shared the US strategic objective of degrading and eliminating terrorist networks, the delegation of authority and leadership would have major consequences following the Arab Spring.

Clear, decisive American action was required to constructively engage with the region during the Arab Spring, yet the United States doubled down on offshore balancing. Red lines were announced, and then crossed. While the United States played a role in the downfall of Qadhafi, it refused to take leadership after the fighting ended, opting instead to allow others to try and fail to stabilize Libya. The United States, though involved in support of the Arab Spring, was distant and ineffectual. "Leading from Behind" might not have been said by President Obama, but the label would stick (Kessler 2011). It was not the Arab Spring that facilitated fragmentation, but the decline of American hegemony.

Major regional actors acted in response. Iran's role dramatically expanded, particularly in the fight against ISIS in Syria and Iraq. Turkey's foreign policy diverged from that of the United States, as it pursued its own national security interests. Egypt faced its own revolution and counterrevolution, taking a strong stance against the Muslim Brotherhood. The UAE provided the financially struggling Egyptian government with needed liquidity, and also engaged against the Muslim Brotherhood throughout the region. The two nations coordinated their foreign policies, notably in the Libyan civil war. The KSA's foreign policy grew more

forceful in the region, with the United States playing a prominent role in supporting and recognizing Saudi leadership. Qatar also expanded its foreign policy, hedging this way and that way. Each regional player exploited the turmoil of their neighbors to increase their own influence. Libya, Syria, and Yemen contained intense proxy conflicts. National actors, unwilling to engage in outright warfare against each other, opted instead for an externalization of their rivalry. Their disputes were fought with the lives of countries weaker than themselves.

The KSA and UAE came into alignment under the leadership of Mohammad bin Salman (MbS) and Mohammad bin Zayed (MbZ) (Cafiero 2018, 33). Egypt's close ties to the UAE would bring Cairo into the fold. The KSA's strong influence over Bahrain would do the same. The foundations of the Quartet were laid, as they were now positioned to act against Qatar. The Quartet's major concerns included Al Jazeera and Qatar's failure to fulfill the terms of the 2013 Shikrat Agreement—a prior attempt to change Qatar's foreign policy. However, no immediate action was taken against Qatar. Indeed, the GCC crisis might never have occurred without one more vital piece to this puzzle. While the Obama administration's policies led to an escalation of regional power rivalry following the Arab Spring, the United States remained a vital ally for many of these nations. The Quartet likely would not have acted against a country possessing a major US military base if it did not believe that it received permission. President Donald Trump provided that permission.

Trump's Green Light, The GCC Crisis, and Immediate Aftermath

While the Arab Spring laid the groundwork for active rivalries among the regional powers of the Middle East, one notable event preceded the GCC crisis: Trump's visit to the Middle East. Trump signaled to the Quartet that action against Qatar could be undertaken with no US action to stop it, as shortly after the GCC crisis took place, Trump tweeted his support for their actions. Trump argued that there “could be no funding of radical ideology,” and declared that he believed the Quartet's claims that Qatar was funding terrorism (al-Jaber 2018, 92).

The KSA, UAE, Egypt, and Bahrain issued 13 Demands for the Qataris and announced an immediate cessation of trade and diplomatic relations. Each member of the Quartet theoretically played a role in the formulation of those demands. Al Jazeera and Qatar's support for the Muslim Brotherhood were principal grievances. The UAE Ambassador to the United States published a statement in the Wall Street Journal (2017) denouncing Qatar as a dishonest dealer that wants to have it both ways, calling out and condemning Qatar's hedging policy (SAIS Group Meeting with Ambassador Youssef Al Otaiba, Washington DC, October 2018). War may have been likely between the Quartet and Qatar (al-Jaber 2018, 93).

Qatar was isolated and its economy disrupted. The Quartet mobilized vast media and lobbying campaigns to blacken Qatar's reputation and subjugate it (al-Jaber 2018, 100–102). It also unsuccessfully attempted to use bots to delegitimize the leadership of Qatar and create a sense of panic in the streets (SAIS Group Meeting, Doha, 23 January 2019). Though the Qatari government prepared for the possibility of the Quartet's actions, it was a dramatic occurrence that saw markets emptied of food for a brief period.

The Quartet believed they received the support of the Trump administration to pursue regime change in Qatar. If the embargo were successful, Qatari foreign policy would be subordinated to the Quartet. The Quartet argued that Qatar was supporting its enemies in Yemen (SAIS Group Meeting, Riyadh, 15 January 2019). This could have been a moment when Saudi leadership shone.

Instead, the United States did not fully support the Quartet. Action against Qatar, far from being a master stroke that could curtail its independent foreign policy, failed miserably. The efforts of Secretaries Mattis and Tillerson likely avoided further escalation of the conflict and ended the possibility of war and regime change (SAIS Group Meeting, Doha, 21 January 2019). The opening the two secretaries provided allowed Qatar to strengthen its position. While there was a possibility that Qatar might cave under pressure early in the conflict, the current situation is one that Qatar can live with (SAIS Group Meeting, Doha, 22 January 2019). The Quartet acknowledged its inability to effectively isolate Qatar when it reframed the GCC crisis, dishonestly, as a peaceful act of voluntary separation (SAIS Group Meeting, Riyadh, 15 January 2019). The Qataris also know they have won, claiming the GCC crisis hurt the Quartet far more than it hurt Qatar (SAIS Group Meeting, Doha, 20 January 2019). The Yemeni theater of war is now toxic to the KSA. It may serve to be a breaking point between the KSA and UAE, as it is now rumored that the Saudis may be waiting for an opportunity to “throw the Emiratis under a bus.” The GCC crisis and the war in Yemen threaten to undo the Quartet, as the key players have fundamental disagreements about next steps (SAIS Group Meeting with General Anthony Zinni, Washington DC, November 2018; SAIS Group Meeting, Riyadh, 16 January 2019).

This unprecedented series of events highlighted the fragility of the situation in the Middle East. Qatar’s successful defensive policies have cemented its existence as a powerful and influential player in Middle Eastern politics. If the Emiratis and the Saudis part ways, the idea of Saudi Arabia as a leader in the region is dead.

Other Causes of the GCC Crisis

While fragmentation was necessary for the GCC crisis to occur, it alone does not explain the behavior of the Quartet and Qatar. Qatar’s independence is seen as a slight by both the KSA and UAE, and the crisis’ original intent was to curtail an independent Qatari foreign policy. The KSA attempted to conquer the small nation at the beginning of the twentieth century and is rumored to regret its failure (SAIS Group Meeting with General Anthony Zinni, Washington DC, November 2018). The UAE also has a grievance: when that Union was founded, the Qataris refused an invitation to join as the eighth member (SAIS Group Meeting with Joost Hiltermann, Washington DC, October 2018). The Quartet’s hostility to Qatari independence explains some of their intolerance to Qatar.

The conflict is also ego-driven. The Qatari leadership, historically deferential to the leadership of the KSA, often travelled to Riyadh and paid homage to the King. Qatar thereby acknowledged deference to its southern leader. Current Qatari leadership regrets the apparent

subordination of their country. Its independent-minded foreign policy is an act of pride, driven out of a sense of historic humiliation. The KSA and UAE leadership, Muhammad bin Salman (MbS) and Muhammad bin Zayed (MbZ), are similarly unwilling to appear subordinate to a relative upstart. Bad blood between the leaders of these royal families further cements the divisions among the three countries (SAIS Group Meeting, Doha, 23 January 2019).

The KSA claims that Qatar has ties with al-Qaeda and the Muslim Brotherhood. To them, Qatar is a malicious actor who subverts its neighbors. The Qatari Emir is said to have coordinated with Qadhafi against the KSA, sought to divide the Kingdom into three parts, engaged in proxy wars, and at one point had many Saudi citizens on its payroll. Accusing Qatar of being a chronic violator of agreements and far too close to Iran, the KSA paints itself a paragon of virtue (Sais Group Meeting with Ambassador Khalid bin Salman, Washington DC, December 2018). The UAE has similar accusations, stating the Quartet's actions in the GCC crisis were to stop the Qataris from hurting them (SAIS Group Meeting with Ambassador Yousef Al Otaiba, Washington DC October 2018).

The GCC crisis also has roots in the Arab Spring. Qatar embraced the Arab Spring and saw it as an overwhelmingly positive development for good governance, while the Quartet supported authoritarian counterrevolutions (SAIS Group Meeting, Doha, 21 January 2019).

Other GCC crisis starting points can be invoked. Some scholars claim that Qatar is disdained because it supports a future where the Middle Eastern nations can look to their own regional powers for protection and stability (SAIS Group Meeting, Doha, 21 January 2019). Other experts look outside the Quartet and Qatar to blame Iran, Erdoğan, and others. Some see the threat of Iran everywhere, and suggest the GCC crisis can be blamed on the Iranian Revolution (SAIS Group Meeting, Riyadh, 15 January 2019). Others believe Erdoğan's neo-Ottomanism and his sympathies with the Muslim Brotherhood are partially responsible. Qatar and Turkey were developing military ties before the GCC crisis (SAIS Group Meeting, Doha, 23 January 2019).

The above characterizations of the conflict are important, but there are two dominant reasons why it happened in 2017. Fragmentation is the primary cause of the GCC crisis. The approval provided by President Trump following his meeting in Riyadh was its trigger. The GCC crisis is the most overt and far-reaching example of this fragmentation occurring, but it is also a byproduct of a series of US policy decisions starting from the First Gulf War. Fragmentation will become worse.

The Further Fragmentation of the Middle East

Now that the Quartet's gambit to isolate Qatar has failed, and their alliance has weakened, it is likely that the Middle East will continue to fragment. The Quartet countries, Qatar, Iran, and Turkey are the dominant local actors in the region, and Russia is playing an active role as the second most dominant foreign actor after the United States. If each pursues its own interests, then chaos will replace the period of American hegemony. It is a tragic irony that the policy of

offshore balancing the United States pursued may ultimately lead to a resurgence of al-Qaeda and similar terrorist groups.

Qatar as an Independent Actor

The GCC crisis cemented Qatar's position as an independent regional actor and weakened the Quartet. While the United States eventually proved instrumental in the preservation of Qatari independence, some suggest that Qatar is uneasy about its relationship with Washington, as it might be an unreliable ally. Turkey may prove more reliable, even if less powerful. Qatar now has a vested interest in supporting the Muslim Brotherhood, given the common threat they share in the Quartet. Qatar's foreign policy may more overtly embrace any lingering supporters of the Arab Spring in areas where the Quartet is active, as it no longer has a reason to soften its stance (SAIS Group Meeting, Doha, 23 January 2019).

Qatar views the KSA and UAE as threats and is committed to maintaining its sovereignty. The Qataris feel betrayed. A stronger national identity has emerged from the hardships associated with the GCC crisis. Prior relationships and strategies, such as Qatar and the KSA's coordinating strategies to contain Iran and develop pro-Sunni policies, will be completely abandoned (Cafiero 2018, 32). In their place, a more intimate affiliation with Turkey is likely to emerge. Qatar, however, should be wary of Iran. Iran acted as a necessary lifeline for Qatar, and their interests are in alignment vis-à-vis the Quartet, but that will not necessarily be the case in the future. Qatar and Iran have clashed many times in the past, showing that they are not true friends (SAIS Group Meeting, Doha, 21 January 2019).

A consequence of the GCC crisis is that Qatar has less money. It had previously been engaged in several civil wars in the region (Congressional Research Service 2019). It is now more difficult for Qatar to support its previous foreign policy. The isolation of Qatar, however, has harmed the Quartet more than Qatar, as the Qatari economy's outlook continues to improve while the loss of reputation and regional support for the Quartet remains staggering (International Monetary Fund November 2018). Though Qatar has been hurt less than the Quartet, and Qatar can live with the status quo, this does not make the crisis desirable for Qatar. If it is possible for Qatar to resolve the GCC crisis on its own terms, it will.

The Quartet

The Quartet represents the largest force for regional stability, as it is an alliance of several regional powers with a coordinated foreign policy. However, there are signs that the Quartet may be breaking apart. The GCC crisis has damaged the reputation of the Quartet and strengthened Qatar's relations with the West (Hassan 2018). The Yemeni civil war has increased strain between the KSA and UAE (Fenton-Harvey 2018). It is also a foreign relations and humanitarian disaster (Walsh). While it is not certain that these two events will lead to the break-up of the Quartet, it is reasonable to argue that the Quartet will be more durable should they be resolved.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

In addition to the GCC crisis and the Yemeni Civil War, the KSA and the leadership of MbS is under pressure for the murder of Jamal Khashoggi. The Crown Prince is, however, untouchable from the KSA point of view. The Minister of State, Adel al-Jubeir, stated publicly that the leadership of the KSA (and by extension MbS) is a “red line” that must not be crossed (Al-Jubeir 2019). In its weakened state, the KSA’s leadership pointed the finger at everyone else, declaring that Qatar is engaging in a form of hybrid warfare to undermine the Kingdom’s international legitimacy, Turkey is coordinating with Qatar to tear down MbS, and Iran is funding terrorism and revolt along the Yemeni border (SAIS Group Meeting, Riyadh, 15 January 2019). The regime is floundering, and it is trying to find solid footing where it can.

Saudi hegemony was the reflected glow of American power. The Quartet’s decision to isolate Qatar may have been a decision taken only under the understanding that they would receive strong US support. Perhaps if the KSA had not attempted to exert its regional leadership through intervention in Yemen or coordinated action against Qatar, the illusion of the KSA’s power and influence could have been maintained into the future. Now they must make do. The emperor has no clothes when it comes to Middle Eastern leadership. Perhaps in a desire to maintain the status quo, the Saudis will invite other outside powers to the region. China and India are ideal targets but may not engage to the extent that the KSA desires, as the Saudis are looking for additional patrons to shore up their position in the region.

The UAE and Egypt

The UAE and Egypt are anti-Muslim Brotherhood and anti-Islamist. They oppose political Islam and promote secular governance where they can. A case in point is their strong support for Khalifa Hiftar in the Libyan civil war, and they may do likewise elsewhere. When speaking to a senior Emirati official, we were asked what kind of Middle East we wanted to imagine: one of Islamists and terrorism, one of Iranian domination, or one of secular, modern societies (SAIS Group Meeting with Ambassador Yousef Al Otaiba, Washington DC, October 2018).

Egypt and the UAE are reactionary, authoritarian modernizers. They are opposed to the Arab Spring, though they are willing to make minimal, tightly controlled compromises in order to jumpstart domestic change. These two nations are also pro-US and have pinned their hopes on a continued US presence in the region. If possible, they will continue to coordinate with the KSA, but the UAE is increasingly supportive of a secular socialist secessionary South Yemen and frustrated by the KSA’s behavior (Cafiero 2018, 51–52). If this frustration continues, then the Quartet is on fragile ground.

Iran

Iran benefited enormously from the GCC crisis and will expand its influence as a result. Infighting terminated the KSA-Qatar strategy of containing Iran. Qatar is forced to rely on Iran, providing Iran with powerful leverage it did not previously possess. When Qatari interests clash with Iran’s, Iran may exploit its position to force the Qataris to back down. Tehran has a

far freer hand in Iraq and Syria following the GCC crisis, and Iran will hold tremendous influence along the KSA's border with Yemen for years to come. Without strong, coordinated efforts at containing Iran, the status quo is eminently favorable to Tehran.

Turkey

The GCC crisis greatly enhanced Turkey's regional position. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stood with Qatar during its time of need and signed an alliance with it. Turkey embraced the Arab Spring and is sympathetic to the Muslim Brotherhood. While hitherto unsuccessful, it is likely that Turkey and Qatar will form a closer relationship for the establishment and propagation of political Islam. Even if Qatar's behavior in the past was primarily conducted out of a need to hedge, its vulnerability to and active contention with the Quartet will propagate externalized conflicts between the parties. If Turkey and Qatar can properly leverage their relationship, then a politically Islamist orientation may become more prominent.

Russia

Russia is the second most powerful foreign actor in the region after the United States. Rand describes its role as promoting "its ability to interact with many state and nonstate actors in the Middle East." Though it possessed an initially weak hand, Russia leveraged it well. The West can no longer effectively isolate or challenge Russia's influence in the region, as most of the major actors have cultivated close ties with Moscow, including Israel, Turkey, KSA, Egypt, and even Qatar. Russia is often used as a balancer and signaler (Sladden et al. 2017). Should the United States stop its arms sales to the region, Russia has offered itself as a willing alternative. Qatar in particular was "widely understood" to have plans to invite Russia to establish itself in the country should the United States withdraw from either of its major bases there (Neubauer 2018, 137). The more the region diverges from the traditional hegemonic order, the more effectively Russia can exploit its current position to the detriment of the United States.

Smaller Powers

Many of the smaller powers in the region balance between larger neighbors, hoping to avoid conflict. Kuwait and Oman are clear examples of nations wedged between Iran, the Quartet, and Qatar. These nations are keen to offer mediation for the GCC crisis, and they can be expected to fear for the future stability of themselves and the region. Oman is vulnerable to the UAE, should it attempt to exploit or manufacture a succession crisis (SAIS Group Meeting, Doha, 23 January 2019).

Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Libya are the battleground for other nations' conflicts. When Iran goes to war with the Saudis, they do so with the blood of Syrians and Yemenis. When Qatar goes to war with the UAE and Egypt, they do so with the lives of young Libyans. Regional powers will likely exploit existing conflicts and nurture new ones that emerge in the region in an attempt to bleed their opponents. The longer such fragmentation endures, the more

vulnerable peripheral nations that have not yet experienced much fighting become. Those too weak to fight in other nations may be forced to fight in their own lands.

Al-Qaeda and ISIS

The United States remains influential in the region regarding counterterrorism operations, but hard-won gains may be undone. Wherever there is a civil war in the Middle East in which proxies are engaged, al-Qaeda has found a way to affiliate itself with an ally of a regional power. The Free Syria Army often coordinated with jihadist groups (Heller 2017), Libya Dawn relied heavily on al-Qaeda affiliates to resist the UAE and Egypt's secular proxy, and most recently the KSA and UAE may have provided weapons to al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula to fight against the Houthis in Yemen (Rodrigo 2019; Elbagir et al. 2019). The consequences are far reaching. Not only are the battles between regional powers fought in smaller nations, they will strengthen al-Qaeda in the process.

None of the major powers have a vested interest in strengthening ISIS, but even though the territorial caliphate is extinguished, the organization is not. ISIS fighters are as numerous as they have ever been. It is likely that they will exploit civil wars and proxy conflicts to re-establish themselves, just as they did half a decade ago in Syria and Libya.

What Can the United States Do About It?

The Middle East will experience greater fragmentation, including warfare between proxies of the regional powers. With American leadership in the region less prominent than it once was, local and external actors have positioned themselves to fill the void. The proposed Middle East Strategic Alliance (MESA) was an attempt to halt fragmentation and establish effective coordination of regional actors' foreign policies, but the GCC crisis has largely put a stop to that (Farouk 2019). Unless the GCC crisis can be resolved, MESA is unlikely to become a reality. The United States remains engaged in trying to encourage an end to the GCC crisis, but time will tell if they are successful. What else can the United States do about it?

There are three options. The first is to attempt to reset the clock and close Pandora's Box. In this course of action, the United States would try to re-exert strong regional hegemony. To pursue this policy option, the United States would take on a greater leadership role for dispute resolution in the region. This would be difficult to accomplish, require extensive investment, and necessitate a long-term commitment to the region. There is little domestic will for the United States to play the role of Middle East hegemon. Americans have war fatigue. Both President Obama and Trump ran on platforms of less involvement in the Middle East. Turkey, Egypt, UAE, KSA, and Qatar all have their own national interests, and reestablishing American leadership would require significantly more involvement than the American people may be willing to tolerate.

The second option would be to maintain the status quo and hedge among the regional powers according to US national interests, primarily counterinsurgency and counterterrorism. The policy of offshore balancing requires the United States to work with local partners to

engage against al-Qaeda and ISIS. While strengthening ties with the Quartet is likely to be politically untenable in the aftermath of the murder of Jamal Khashoggi and the events surrounding the Yemeni civil war, the United States remains dependent upon local actors to prevent the next 9/11-type terrorist attack. The United States would continue to advocate for de-escalation of the GCC crisis and peace talks in Yemen, as regional tensions and active wars make combating al-Qaeda and ISIS more difficult. This option is the path of least resistance for the United States, neither requiring greater involvement in the region, nor sacrificing its current position of leadership.

The third would be to scale down US involvement in the region over time. If Russia wants to emerge as a big player on the scene, let them. If the regional powers end up facilitating the rise of terrorist groups, then the United States would hope that the regional powers take care of it before a threat to the US homeland emerges. This policy should only be pursued if the administration believes that there is nothing to be gained from further engagement in the region. It may be tempting to the frustrated policy maker to give up on the task of regional hegemony, but this is a policy that can only be adopted once. After the United States is out, it would be difficult to return later, and the United States would never be as trusted as it once was.

Policy Recommendations

To the United States

- **Continue to encourage a de-escalation of the GCC crisis.** The United States has tried to deescalate the GCC crisis. They should continue to do so. The costs of trying are low, while the potential dividends (such as MESA) are enormous.
- **Do not increase cooperation with the Quartet.** The murder of Jamal Khashoggi and the civil war in Yemen make it politically toxic for the United States to form closer ties with the Quartet. The United States should continue cooperation on fighting al-Qaeda and ISIS, and hedge on other issues.
- **Encourage an end to the fighting in Yemen.** The Yemeni civil war is a human rights disaster that is the subject of international condemnation. Weapons provided to the Quartet are now in the hands of al-Qaeda, and the longer hostilities continue the more opportunities will be available for al-Qaeda to benefit from the civil war.
- **Encourage a greater emphasis on combating al-Qaeda and ISIS.** The fragmentation of the Middle East can be traced to the policy of offshore balancing, as the United States empowered local actors to defeat al-Qaeda and similar groups. Regional actors should be encouraged to focus on eliminating al-Qaeda, rather than providing opportunities for its return.

To the Quartet

- **De-escalate the GCC crisis.** It is now impossible to effectively isolate Qatar. Continuing to try will harm the Quartet partnership and weaken its position in the Middle East.

- **Withdraw from Yemen.** The civil war is toxic to the international reputations of the Quartet, and disputes over the conduct of the war have created deep fissures between the KSA and UAE. Do what is necessary to end the fighting and rebuild the country, and then leave.
- **Seek an outside patron.** The United States possesses little interest in re-establishing strong regional leadership. If the Quartet can find other nations to support it, such as France, India, or China, then it may be possible to make up for its lost influence in the United States.
- **Work to resolve internal disputes.** The partnership between the KSA and UAE is vital for the continued existence of the Quartet. There has been reports of friction, disagreement, and even credible claims that the partnership may be coming to an end over disagreements. Work to resolve those disputes, so that the Quartet is strengthened.

To Qatar

- **De-escalate the GCC crisis.** Qatar benefited from the GCC crisis, and no longer has to be deferent to its peninsular rivals. However, just because Qatar can live with the status quo does not mean it should accept it. Qatar should identify the terms on which it would be most willing to deescalate the conflict, and work with mediators to accomplish them.
- **Work with Turkey to organize an effective counter to the Quartet.** The Quartet desired to contain Qatar's foreign policy and failed. Qatar is most closely in alignment with Turkey, and it would make sense for both nations to coordinate effectively.

Conclusion

Daniel P. Serwer

When I proposed the idea of a study trip to Doha and Riyadh, which SAIS colleague Evgeny Finkel had suggested, Bill Zartman signed up right away, but regional experts doubted it could be done. The rift, they said, was too deep. If one capital knew we were going to the other, they would not want to talk with us and might not even give us visas. We would not be able to travel directly between the two capitals, which lie only 300 miles apart.

We found the gulf in the Gulf profound, but not unbridgeable. Both governments welcomed the SAIS initiative. In Riyadh, the Education Ministry took charge of our schedule and provided local transportation, for which we were grateful. In Doha, we relied on the Gulf International Forum, a think tank that has excellent connections in Doha and likewise provided local transportation, for which we were equally grateful. Both the Saudi and Qatari ambassadors met with us before our departure, as did the UAE ambassador. We had to travel between the two capitals via Kuwait, but other than that inconvenience we found warm welcome for our efforts to understand and appreciate the GCC conflict and its ramifications.

Both Doha and Riyadh wanted us to see their brighter sides. Many of our interlocutors were anxious to claim two leadership titles: prime modernizer in the Gulf and most deeply rooted culture. The Saudis insisted we visit Al-'Ula, where they are preparing pre-Islamic ruins and monuments for international tourism, as well as Diriyah, the ancestral home of the House of Saud and now a historical site in Riyadh. The Qataris likewise were anxious to show us Katara Village, which aims to illustrate Qatari history and culture and had just completed its third “diversity” festival. The message in both places was clear: we are people with deep and diverse cultural and historical roots that are pre-Islamic; and we are determined to be leaders of a modernized Arab world in the 21st century.

The competition was most concrete in infrastructure. The Qataris have the advantage, as they have been at it longer and are investing upwards of \$200 billion in infrastructure in addition to \$8-10 billion for World Cup 2022 facilities. But Riyadh is building fast as well, with Gulf-style office towers replacing the more traditional low-rise residential and commercial structures. In both capitals, crossing the street on foot is often difficult and the automobile is a necessity, but they are also both building subways.

The modernizing impulse goes deeper than architectural displays and infrastructural extravaganzas. We spent time with the human rights commissions in both capitals. The Saudis were anxious to talk about citizen and youth engagement, music festivals, and women driving, but the emphasis was still on stability, even if that requires sacrifice of some rights. The driving activists, some Saudi interlocutors alleged, are charged with illicit foreign connections. Leadership is required to consult broadly, but once a decision is made, it and the leader who makes it need to be respected. Without Mohammed bin Salman, several Saudis told us, reforms would end and the Kingdom would sink back under control of religious conservatives.

The Qataris indicated a felt need for stronger civil society and enlarged freedom of expression, but only among citizens, who constitute about 10% of the population. Their appreciation of and support for the Emir is evident everywhere. Political activity among both Qataris and expatriates is forbidden, but there is now a law permitting naturalization that has not yet been used. Workers' rights are more respected than in the past, as acknowledged by the International Labor Organization. Accidental deaths in World Cup construction have been far lower than some had projected. Qataris have been promised parliamentary elections this year or next, but many fear the electoral process will amount to no more than a tribal census, with the larger and richer families winning more power than they have at present.

We found precisely the same fear of electoral processes expressed in Riyadh. In fact, there were more than a few moments we felt as if we were in a hall of mirrors, with distorted reflections of what we had heard in the other capital. Saudis and Qataris accuse each other of coup attempts, undermining each other's royal families, attacking or getting ready to attack each other's troops in third countries, doing diplomatic or commercial business with Iran, missing opportunities to negotiate, using mass media and popular culture to promote hate, and supporting extremists and terrorists. Both capitals also claim close friendship with Washington, commitment to being reliable energy suppliers to world markets, and attractiveness to foreign investors. More than once Freud's "narcissism of small differences" crossed my mind.

But the differences are not small on some profound issues, as Rebecca John describes in Chapter 2, which leads off Part I on the roots of the conflict. Most important are the future of political Islam and especially the Muslim Brotherhood. Like other political organizations, the Brotherhood is prohibited in Qatar, but the Qataris see political Islam as unavoidable in other countries as Arab societies open up. When the Arab Spring flowered, Doha therefore backed the Muslim Brotherhood, most notably in Egypt but also in Libya and Syria. As one of our briefers put it to us, the Qataris see the political Islam as an antidote to extremism.

This was deeply offensive to the UAE, where the Brotherhood is regarded as an internal threat to the monarchy, and to Saudi Arabia, where an on-again-off again relationship with the Brotherhood has not prevented it from taking offense at Qatari support for it. The UAE and the Kingdom regard the Brotherhood as a route to extremism, not an antidote: a "gateway drug" leading to perdition. These sharply differing political choices have led to hostile foreign policy alignments: the Qataris with Turkey, whose ruling party has roots in the Muslim Brotherhood, and the Saudis with the Emiratis, Egypt, and Bahrain (which since the Arab Spring follows wherever the Saudis go), hence the Quartet.

Not surprisingly, these ideological fissures are reflected in popular culture in both countries, not least due to government efforts to add fuel to the fire, as Julia Wargo documents in Chapter 3. Music, poetry, cartoons, social media, television, and even street art have been weaponized against "the other." This has redounded to the benefit of Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince and Qatar's Emir, both of whom have seen bumps upward in public popularity and confidence. Any climb down from the conflict will require not only an elite bargain but also a concerted effort to undo at least some of the mutual popular hostility. The information warfare

has extended to the United States, where the Kingdom and Qatar have jacked up their lobbying expenditures, in addition to their investments.

Ideology and popular opinion are however relatively weak reeds in the Gulf, where forgetfulness is not a virtue and leadership decisions are personal. Historical narratives and family feuds are stronger. In Chapter 4 Patrick Makles takes us on a tour of the frictions between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, with brief reference to the UAE. Each has its source of grievance. The UAE still resents Qatar's refusal to join the Emirates. Qatar resents Saudi Arabia's alleged attempt to reverse Emir Hamad al-Thani's 1995 coup. Saudi Arabia resents an alleged Qatari plot to assassinate King Abdullah. The UAE and the Kingdom also claim that Qatar aided their enemies in Libya and Yemen, causing the deaths of Saudis and Emiratis. The Saudis resent Qatar's success in attracting and hosting the American force that Riyadh asked to leave the Kingdom.

In part II, our authors focus on efforts to date to resolve the GCC conflict, which so far have been futile. The Emir of Kuwait has failed, as has the Trump-appointed envoy tasked with supporting the Kuwaitis, retired General Anthony Zinni. He has resigned. Many people we talked with thought Kuwait and the United States were still better suited to the task than anyone else. No one suggested a serious alternative. So the question arises: why did they fail and what are the prospects for success?

In chapter 5 Sarah Aver explains that the GCC conflict has reached an impasse because neither Riyadh nor Doha feels enough pain to make the sacrifices required to resolve it. They have reached stalemate, but not a mutually hurting one. Nor is there a mutually enticing way out. No rockets are being launched, no army is mobilized to attack, and no ships are sinking. Citizens, especially in Qatar, are feeling pain from the embargo's barriers to travel, family reunification, and property claims, but neither government is particularly sensitive to its citizens' concerns. At least in public, the claims of the disputants are still zero sum: Saudi Arabia says it will settle for nothing less than the initial demands. Qatar prefers an incremental approach and has made some tacit moves like allowing the United States to monitor its finances to ensure no money goes to terrorists, but those are never framed as compromises or concessions to Saudi Arabia. The conflict has become both intractable and normalized. It represents the new regional status quo.

Sabiha Khan in Chapter 6 examines the US and Kuwaiti mediation efforts from the perspective of the "ripeness" and "readiness" concepts commonly in use in the United States and Europe. She concludes that the GCC conflict is neither ripe nor ready, thus accounting for the failure of both Kuwaiti and American mediation efforts. The Quartet and Qatar have both preferred their "best alternative to a negotiated agreement." The incoherence emanating from Washington—which initially encouraged the Saudis but later saw the need to preserve its military assets in Qatar—has been unhelpful. The same can be said of the UAE, which Khan ranks as "skeptical" about prospects for an agreement but could become a "spoiler." She concludes that Kuwait can still mediate the GCC conflict with US backing. Small-scale,

focused efforts might help move the parties past their positional demands and avoid an inevitable slide towards deeper intractability.

A closer look at traditional “Arab-Islamic” processes of conflict mediation and the contrast with Western techniques are at the heart of Jasmine Choi’s Chapter 7. She describes the Western techniques as focused on achieving win-win outcomes serving the interests of both protagonists, whereas the tradition in the Gulf favors outcomes that preserve social relations. The Quartet demands in her view are aimed at maintaining traditional relations in the Gulf, whereas the Qataris want to have their own independence and sovereignty recognized and accepted. The frustrations of both US and Kuwaiti mediation efforts raise the question of whether failure is inevitable. But Choi also sees the possibility that Turkey or the United States could still use their leverage to good effect by renewing efforts aimed at forcing a resolution.

In Part III, our authors turn to the economic and regional impact, which has been surprising. The Arab Gulf looks from afar like a uniquely advantaged region, amply supplied with readily exploited oil and gas that is easy to transport to markets near and far. For the United States, there is little difference between an air base located in Saudi Arabia and one located in Qatar or the UAE. But this uniformity leads more to competition than unity.

Unresolved, the GCC conflict has had undeniable economic impacts, which Ashley Curtis examines in Chapter 8. Doha’s need for good relations with Iran, a source of irritation in Riyadh, stems from the giant gas field it shares with Tehran. The Quartet boycott appears to have had no impact at all on Qatar’s gas production and exports, which it is moving to increase sharply. Doha responded to the Quartet boycott with pre-planned emergency measures to ensure vital imports and has now also enhanced trade with Iran and especially Turkey. Doha is also increasing investment in LNG export facilities in the United States. Qatar has increased domestic production, especially of food, to enhance resilience. Curtis thinks Saudi Arabia has arguably suffered more than Qatar, because of the Quartet’s inability to get its way combined with the impact of the Khashoggi murder on foreign investment in Saudi Arabia.

Aditya Balu in Chapter 9 focuses on the Qatar-Iran-Turkey triangle, which has helped Doha to survive what otherwise would have been a devastating blow to Qatar’s independence and sovereignty. Tehran has unquestionably been helpful, but the relationship is more a marriage of convenience than a strategic alliance: in addition to the vital gas production from their joint field in the Gulf, Qatar gets the airspace and imports it needs while Iran splits the GCC and causes headaches in Riyadh and Washington. From Turkey, Qatar gets food and military support, while Turkey gets Qatari investment. The triangle is a reasonably balanced one. In Balu’s view, there is no reason to think it will not hold as long as the conflict with the Quartet lasts.

The United States is still a major military factor in the Gulf, even if Washington has proven less than adroit in its diplomatic handling of the GCC crisis, as Danielle Martin documents in Chapter 10. American arms sales and military training in Saudi Arabia are critical to the Kingdom. Sharply increasing Qatari arms purchases from the United States and the multi-billion-dollar Qatari investments to support the US presence at Al-Udeid Air Base are

the linchpins of Doha's relationship with Washington. Both the Kingdom and Qatar are increasing counter-terrorism cooperation with the United States. Martin's net assessment gives Qatar the advantage in hosting a big US base, but the Kingdom is more advanced in counter-terrorism cooperation. She judges Washington wise in maintaining a balanced approach of military cooperation with both Riyadh and Doha, which provides leverage with both.

Dennis Murphy takes a far more pessimistic view in Chapter 11, where he views the GCC crisis as both a result of regional fragmentation and the likely cause of worse to come. The United States has been a factor in two ways: American hesitancy to engage in the region in the wake of the Arab Spring left vacuums others sought to fill, and President Trump's initial support for the Saudis precipitated the GCC crisis and deepened the rifts. Further fragmentation will ensue: Qatar is enjoying its independence while the Quartet is under strain. Iran and Turkey have benefited while Russia may be able to position itself as an alternative to the United States. The weaker countries of the region—including Syria, Yemen, and Libya—are finding themselves reduced to battlefields in proxy wars that have provided opportunities for extremists like al-Qaeda and ISIS to exploit. The United States is now left, Murphy says, with unpalatable options: try to restore the status quo ante, accept the current situation and try to make the best of it, or scale down US commitments to the region. He opts for accepting and trying to make the best of it.

None of our authors pushes for US withdrawal from the region. They lean instead toward trying to manage the non-hurting stalemate in ways that would ease tensions and improve prospects, within well-defined red lines. Qatar, they think, will not give in on its claims to sovereignty and independence. Saudi Arabia will not yield its hegemonic claim to seniority, or *prima inter pares*. The Quartet might reconsider its attitude towards the Muslim Brotherhood in some countries, though not in the UAE. But within the parameters, there are confidence-building measures that merit consideration.

Most frequently mentioned are measures that would decrease the human and social costs of the embargo, including improvements in Qatari access to the hajj as well as Quartet participation in the 2022 World Cup, a change in Al Jazeera's editorial direction to avoid what to the Quartet countries sounds like incitement addressed to their own populations, renewed people-to-people and civil society contacts, and eventually opening of the Qatari/Saudi border to commerce. Such moves might be undertaken unilaterally, but with the expectation that the adversary would respond in some comparable fashion.

The embargo has had profoundly negative impacts on some individuals in the Gulf, particularly Qataris cut off from family and property in the Quartet countries. It is also encouraging Qataris to wean themselves from "Gulf" (*Khaleeji*) identity, shared with Saudi Arabia, the Emirates and Bahrain, in favor of a more distinct Qatari identity. If the Saudis and Emiratis ever intend to repair relations with Qatar, easing these social burdens and reconnecting Qataris with Gulf identity is urgent. Allowing the current drift to continue will make future reconciliation much more difficult.

So too will allowing the cultural manifestations of the conflict to continue. The crudeness of popular expressions of distaste by Saudis for Qataris and by Qataris for Saudis is creating popular barriers that will be difficult to erase. This is another area where confidence-building measures would be appropriate. Both Riyadh and Doha have more than sufficient capacity—they are, after all, authoritarian monarchies—to mitigate hate speech in their respective media. Several of our authors think they should do so, to avoid permanent and self-sustaining damage. Third party monitoring might be helpful, as Doha and Riyadh are unlikely to agree on what constitutes incitement.

That would help, but more will be required to overcome the rift. Military cooperation is perhaps the place to start, since it appears to have survived the crisis a bit better than other cooperative enterprises. Both Qatar and the Quartet are in principle open to the American proposal of a Middle East Strategic Alliance, which however is unlikely to sprout quickly or pass muster easily in the US Congress and Doha doubts it is doable under current circumstances. More immediate is the need to revivify the GCC, which both Qatar and Saudi Arabia continue to view in a positive light, even if they disagree on how easy it is for Qataris to continue to participate in its cooperative activities.

Countering terrorism through non-military means is another possible area of improved mutual understanding and cooperation. Saudi Arabia and Qatar do not agree on whether the Muslim Brotherhood is a terrorist organization, but they do agree about the Islamic State and al-Qaeda. Doha claims to have already taken steps, verified by the Americans, to ensure that no one under its sovereign control is financing violent extremists. Riyadh claims likewise and vaunts its Global Center for Combatting Extremist Ideology. Neither is convinced about the other, however. More transparency between them could go a long way towards improving relations, even if the unresolved question of the Brotherhood continues to haunt Qatar's relations with the UAE and Egypt, where the Brotherhood is viewed as an active internal threat.

We found less agreement on the issue of relations with Iran. The Saudis tended to portray Doha as allied with Tehran, or even worse in Tehran's pocket. Qataris deny this bluntly and offer examples of Emirati and Saudi cooperation with Iran. The region would benefit from improved transparency on this question as well. Several of our authors have suggested some basic fact-finding is required: who does what to help Tehran, not only through economic but also through military means in third countries like Yemen.

On American policy, our authors continue to hold out hope that Washington can play a constructive role, mainly by using its influence with Riyadh and Doha to support Kuwaiti mediation. No one advocates dropping the close military relations the United States enjoys with the protagonists of the GCC crisis or tilting heavily to one side or the other. Nor do any of our authors think restoration of the status quo ante is possible. But after an initial period of vacillation between President Trump's support for the Saudis and the State and Defense Departments' commitments to Qatar, the United States has managed to maintain good but parallel relations with Saudi Arabia and Qatar, with both continuing to participate in

discussions of the Middle East Strategic Alliance. This may not be ideal, but it has so far proven workable.

As for the prospects of third-party mediation, Kuwait is the consensus choice for mediator, *faute de mieux*, even if our authors think the mediation continues to require US support, including leverage on the principal adversaries. The GCC conflict is however one between dynastic absolute monarchs in an Arab-Islamic context, where the role of third parties is defined in traditional ways that make Kuwait's Emir the senior monarch and preferred third party. His initial efforts were successful in avoiding a vicious spiral to violent conflict. He now needs to reinvigorate the effort through fact-finding aimed at transparency and other confidence-building measures.

Kuwaiti hesitation is easy to understand. While the long-term prospects of fragmentation in the Gulf may be catastrophic, the near-term impacts have proven tolerable. Saudi Arabia seems to be suffering a bit worse in economic terms than Qatar, but both protagonists have the resources they need to survive and even thrive. The region has far bigger problems than the embargo of one of its smallest, but richest, states. Syria, Libya, and Yemen are still bleeding, and Iraq is still binding up its wounds. Kuwait itself needs to be cautious: it would not want to be perceived as tilting toward one protagonist or the other, for fear of both international and domestic repercussions.

One possibility is a low-profile effort aimed at confidence-building measures, which for all we know might already be proceeding behind the curtains of diplomatic secrecy. There is little to be gained at this stage in a more public mediation. Neither Saudi Arabia nor Qatar is inclined to soften its public stance, and in both countries the pressure for public berating of the other country is strong. The two countries may be absolute monarchies, but both royal families have managed to gain in popularity and legitimacy from the crisis. By contrast, they have little to gain from looking or sounding soft or pliable.

That said, there is one, ironic, source of hope for an end to the current impasse: the day an Emir and a Crown Prince decide to end it, Qataris and Saudis will line up to support their leaders. Several of our authors recommend restarting high-level dialogue between royals, which has evaporated. For now, the absolute monarchs are enjoying their new-won popularity, but what is absolutism good for if not the power to make unpopular decisions? Serious scars will remain, but in both Riyadh and Doha there is an expectation that the GCC conflict will end someday. Its persistence is causing comfort to the GCC's enemies, both in Iran and among violent extremists. The royals should take notice.

That said, none of our authors are sanguine, and several fear degeneration in a sanguineous direction, more likely in third countries rather than in Qatar and Saudi Arabia. The Quartet bandwagon and the Qatari hedging with Turkey and Iran could still lead to monumental clashes. That would be catastrophic for American ambitions to counter Iran and terrorism as well as for both Riyadh and Doha's ambitions to modernize. Somehow the longer-term interests in peace and stability need to prevail, which means that neither Saudi Arabia nor

Qatar will get everything it wants and both will have to swallow some bitter pills. The sooner they come to that realization, the better.

List of Briefings and Interviews

Washington DC briefings Fall 2018

- **Joost Hiltermann**, Director of the Middle East and North Africa program at the International Crisis Group
- **Hussein Ibish**, Senior Resident Scholar at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington DC
- **General Anthony Zinni**, former special adviser to the Secretary of State on Middle East concerns
- **Bryan Segraves**, Office Director for the Gulf at the Office of the Secretary of Defense
- **Ambassador Patrick Theros**, Strategic Adviser for Gulf International Forum
- **Ambassador Khalid bin Salman**, Embassy of Saudi Arabia
- **Ambassador Meshal bin Hamad M.J. al-Thani**, Embassy of Qatar
- **Ambassador Yousef Al Otaiba**, Embassy of the United Arab Emirates

Saudi Arabia (Riyadh) Briefings 14–17 January 2019

Monday, 14 January 2019

- **Ministry of Education**
 - Minister **Hamad al Sheikh**
 - Deputy Minister **Hamad Nasser Almhrej**
- **King Saud University**
 - **Mezyad Alterkawi**, Director of International Cooperation and Scientific Twinning
 - **Dr. Ali Alamazi**, Chair of Mass Communication
- **Riyadh Newspaper**
 - **Adel Ali Al Homeidan**, Deputy Editor in Chief
 - **Hani Fareed Wafa**, Deputy Editor in Chief
 - **Yasser S. Al Breakan**, Managing Editor, Riyadh Daily
- **Rasanah International Institute for Iranian Studies**
 - Vice Chair **Ahmed Al Garni**
 - **General (ret.) Hassan Aljazeri**
 - **Abdulaziz Almulhem**
 - **Dr. Saeed Alghamdy**
 - **Nawad Alessa**
 - **Hanan Alolyani**

Tuesday, 15 January 2019

- **Prince Saud al Faisal Institute of Diplomatic Studies**
 - **Dr. Abdullah Hamad Al-Salamah**, Director General of Prince Saud Al Faisal Institute of Diplomatic Studies
 - **Dr. Saleh Alrajihi**, Supervisor of Center for American Studies
 - **Dr. Mansour Al-Marzoqi**, Assistant Professor and Supervisor of the Center for Strategic Studies
 - **Dr. Khaled Al Ali**, Department of Research and Publishing

- **Etidal Global Center for Combating Extremist Ideology**
 - **Dr. Sultan Alkhuzam**, Director of Global Collaboration
 - **Mohammed Bin Baraka**, SPO Team
 - **Ali Alzahim**, Ideology Team
 - **Bayan Almutawa**, Analysis Team
 - **Maram Alhoti**, Media Team

- **King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies**
 - **HRH Prince Turki Al Faisal**
 - **Dr. Abdullah bin Khaled al-Saud**

- **Ministry of Foreign Affairs**
 - **Adel bin Ahmed Al-Jubeir**, State Secretary
 - **Dr. A. Al-Rassi**, Under Secretary

Wednesday, 16 January 2019

- **King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue**
 - **Dr. Abdullah bin Mohammed Al-Fozan**, Secretary General
 - **Dr. Fahad Sultan Alsultan**, Executive Manager

- **Human Rights Commission**
 - **Dr. Bandar M. Alaiban**, President
 - **Dr. Saied A. Ashshowwaf**, Member of the Council

Qatar (Doha) Briefings 19–23 January 2019

Sunday, 20 January 2019

- **Ministry of Foreign Affairs**
 - **Khalid Fahad Al-Khater**, Director, Policy and Planning Department
 - **Abdulaziz Mohammed Alhorr**, Director of the Diplomatic Institute

- **Qatar Chamber of Commerce**
 - **Hassan Ahmed Abakor Osman**, Economist
 - **Mahmood Omar Nasser**, Protocol and Social Media

Monday, 21 January 2019

- **Al Jazeera Centre for Studies**
 - **Ezzeddine Abdelmoula**, Manager of Research
 - **Arafat Shoukri**, Senior Researcher
 - **Haoues Taguia**, Research Department
 - **Mohamed Abdelaati**, Researcher

- **Al Jazeera News**
 - **Abdulkareem Aouir**, Executive, International Communications and Engagement

- **Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy, World Cup 2022**
 - **Hassan al Thawadi**, Secretary General
 - **Mahmoud Qutub**, Executive Director, Workers' Welfare

- **Central Command**, Unclassified briefing

- **Gulf International Forum**
 - **Khalid al Jaber**

Tuesday, 22 January 2019

- **Doha Institute for Graduate Studies**
 - **Sultan Barakat**, Director, Center for Conflict and Humanitarian Studies

- **Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies**
 - **Marwan Kabalan**, Chief, Policy Analysis Unit

- **National Human Rights Committee**
 - **Sultan Hassan Al-Jamali**, Assistant Secretary General of National Human Rights
 - **Amna Yousef Al-Obaidan**, Head of Regional and International Mechanisms
 - **Aisha Ihenzab**, Assistant Director of Awareness and Programs, Department

- **Brookings Doha Center**
 - **Alhasan Zwayne**, Director of Development
 - **Adel Abdel Ghafar**, Fellow
 - **Omar Rahman**, Visiting Fellow

- **Beijing University**
 - **Professor Wu Bing Bing** and 19 students

Wednesday, 23 January 2019

- **Qatar University**
 - **Mahjoob Zwerie**, Professor of Contemporary History and Director, Gulf Studies Center
 - **Majed Mohammed Al-Ansari**, Professor of Political Sociology and Manager, Policy Department

- **Georgetown University**
 - **Gerd Nonneman**, Professor of International Relations and Gulf Studies
 - **Mehran Kamrava**, Professor and Director, Center for International and Regional Studies

- **Hamid bin Khalifa University**
 - **Abdullah Saleh Baabood**, Professor
 - **Steven Wright**, Associate Dean and Professor
 - **Marc Owen Jones**, Professor of Middle Eastern Studies
 - **Wajd Zaghouani**, Professor of Middle Eastern Studies

The Agreements and Demands: The Handwritten 2013 Agreement

Between King Abdullah Bin Abdel Aziz al-Saud of Saudi Arabia, the king of Saudi Arabia, and Sheikh Sabbah Al-Ahmad Al-Jabber Al-Sabbah, the Prince of Kuwait, and Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, the prince of Qatar, in Riyadh in November 2013:

1. No interference in the internal affairs of the Council's states, whether directly or indirectly. Not to give asylum/refuge or give nationality to any citizen of the Council states that has an activity opposes his country's regimes, except with the approval of his country; no support to deviant groups that oppose their states; and no support for antagonistic media.
2. No support to the Muslim Brotherhood or any of the organizations, groups or individuals that threaten the security and stability of the Council states through direct security work or through political influence.
3. Not to present any support to any faction in Yemen that could pose a threat to countries neighboring Yemen

Accordingly, it has been decided that the Riyadh Agreement, and its executive measures, and the components of the supplementary agreement, requires the full commitment to its implementation. The leaders have tasked the intelligence chiefs to follow up on the implementation of this results of this supplementary agreement and to report regularly to the leaders, in order to take the measures they deem necessary to protect the security and stability of their countries.

The 2013 Implementation Agreement

Between the foreign ministers on its detailed implementation mechanism following the initial agreement three points that comprise the 2013 document that we had last night:

1. Sets annual meetings for the foreign ministers for review
2. GCC heads of states take the necessary measures against other non-abiding states.

Required measures

A. Concerning domestic affairs of the GCC:

1. The commitment of all media networks owned or financed—directly or indirectly—by a member state to not discuss topics harmful to the GCC states. A list of such media outlets would be prepared and updated periodically.
2. Each member state commits to not giving its citizenship to whoever is proven to have been involved in opposition activities against their governments. Each country will report the names of its citizens, involved in opposition, to the countries they

reside in. This is in order to stop their activities and take the necessary measures against them.

3. Take all the necessary precautions that guarantee no interference in the internal affairs of other states: such as: 1. No financial or media support by official or societal institutions, individual or activists. 2. No refuge or encouragement or support or making the country a platform for opposition. 3 preventing external groups, parties and organizations that target the GCC from finding a place inside GCC countries. 4. Prohibits financial or intangible support to external organizations hostile to the GCC.

B. Concerning foreign policy:

Committing to collection discourse of the GCC and not to support entities that pose a risk to the GCC including:

1. No support of the Muslim Brotherhood, whether financially or through media.
2. Agreeing to expelling the non-citizen Muslim Brotherhood members, within the agreed time frame and coordinating the lists of these people
3. NO support to the outside groups that pose a threat to the security and stability of GCC whether in Yemen, Syria or any of the sites of sedition.
4. No support or offering refuge to those who commit acts in opposition to any of the GCC states, whether they are current or former officials or others, and not facilitating a place for these people inside the country or allowing them to harm another GCC country.
5. Shutting down all academies and centers that train and rehabilitate GCC citizens to work against their own governments.

C. Concerning internal security of GCC:

Bilateral meetings between security officials to discuss the details of the security files.

The 2014 Supplementary Riyadh Agreement

Between King Abdullah Bin Abdel-Aziz al-Saud, the king of Saudi Arabia, and Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabbah, the Prince of Kuwait; King Hamad Bin Eissa Al-Khalifa, King of Bahrain; Shiekh Tamim Bin Hamd Bin Khalifa al-Thani, Prince of Qatar; Sheikh Mohamed Bin Rashed Al-Maktom, the vice president and prime minister of the United Arab Emirates; and Mohamed Bin Zayed al-Nahyan, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, and deputy Commander of the Armed Forces of the UA, in Riyadh on 16 November 2014:

1. Stressing that non-committing to any of the articles of the Riyadh Agreement and its executive measure amounts to a violation of the entirety of the agreement.
2. What the intelligence chiefs have reached in the aforementioned report is considered a step forward to implement the Riyadh agreement and its executive measures, with the necessity of the full commitment to implementing everything stated in them (agreement and the Intelligence report) within the period of one month from the date of the agreement.
3. Not to give refuge, employ, or support whether directly or indirectly, whether domestically or abroad, to any persons or a media apparatus that harbors inclinations harmful to any Gulf Cooperation Council state. Every state is committed to taking all the regulatory, legal and judicial measures against anyone who [commits] any encroachment against Gulf Cooperation Council states, including putting him on trial and announcing it in the media.
4. All countries are committed to the Gulf Cooperation Council discourse to support the Arab Republic of Egypt, and contributing to this security, stability and its financial support; and ceasing all media activity directed against the Arab Republic of Egypt in all media platforms, whether directly or indirectly, including all the offenses broadcasted on Al Jazeera, Al Jazeera Mubashir Masr, and to work to stop all offenses in Egyptian media.

Accordingly, it has been decided that the Riyadh Agreement, and its executive [implementation] measures, and the components of the supplementary agreement, requires the full commitment to its implementation. The leaders have tasked the intelligence chiefs to follow up on the implementation of this results of this supplementary agreement and to report regularly to the leaders, in order to take the measures they deem necessary to protect the security and stability of their countries.

The 13 Demands in Full

1. Curb diplomatic ties with Iran and close its diplomatic missions there. Expel members of Iran's Revolutionary Guards and cut off any joint military cooperation with Iran. Only trade and commerce with Iran that complies with US and international sanctions will be permitted.
2. Sever all ties to "terrorist organizations," specifically the Muslim Brotherhood, Islamic State, al-Qaeda and Lebanon's Hezbollah. Formally declare those entities as terrorist groups.
3. Shut down Al Jazeera and its affiliate stations.
4. Shut down news outlets that Qatar funds, directly and indirectly, including Arabi21, Rassd, Al-Araby Al-Jadeed and Middle East Eye.
5. Immediately terminate the Turkish military presence in Qatar and end any joint military cooperation with Turkey inside Qatar.
6. Stop all means of funding for individuals, groups or organizations that have been designated as terrorists by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, Bahrain, the US and other countries.
7. Hand over "terrorist figures" and wanted individuals from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain to their countries of origin. Freeze their assets, and provide any desired information about their residency, movements and finances.
8. End interference in sovereign countries' internal affairs. Stop granting citizenship to wanted nationals from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain. Revoke Qatari citizenship for existing nationals where such citizenship violates those countries' laws.
9. Stop all contacts with the political opposition in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain. Hand over all files detailing Qatar's prior contacts with and support for those opposition groups.
10. Pay reparations and compensation for loss of life and other, financial losses caused by Qatar's policies in recent years. The sum will be determined in coordination with Qatar.
11. Consent to monthly audits for the first year after agreeing to the demands, then once per quarter during the second year. For the following 10 years, Qatar would be monitored annually for compliance.
12. Align itself with the other Gulf and Arab countries militarily, politically, socially and economically, as well as on economic matters, in line with an agreement reached with Saudi Arabia in 2014.
13. Agree to all the demands within 10 days of it being submitted to Qatar, or the list becomes invalid.

The 2017 6 Principles

Between the foreign ministers of the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Bahrain in Cairo on 5 July 2017 in response to Doha's refusal to meet the original 13 Demands as a violation of its sovereignty. Diplomats from the four countries at the UN in New York on 13 July confirmed that the six broader principles which do not have a deadline superseded the original demands.

1. Commitment to combat extremism and terrorism in all its forms and to prevent their financing or the provision of safe havens.
2. Prohibiting all acts of incitement and all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify hatred and violence.
3. Full commitment to Riyadh Agreement 2013 and the supplementary agreement and its executive mechanism for 2014 within the framework of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) for Arab States.
4. Commitment to all the outcomes of the Arab-Islamic-US Summit held in Riyadh in May 2017.
5. To refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of States and from supporting illegal entities.
6. The responsibility of all States of international community to confront all forms of extremism and terrorism as a threat to international peace and security

<https://www.thenational.ae/world/gcc/arab-countries-six-principles-for-qatar-a-measure-to-restart-the-negotiation-process-1.610314>

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