

Qatar Diplomatic Crisis

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Abstract

Qatar diplomatic crisis depicts a worrisome future of not only GCC countries, but it has posed a serious challenge to the regional security apparatus. This Research paper analysis the diplomatic row occurred between Qatar and Saudi led camp. Research Paper intends to highlight the historical context of the rift and reasons for diplomatic crisis yet again. The forthcoming socioeconomic and Political consequences for region particularly Qatar and future of Gulf Cooperation Council. The Diplomatic case will assess various mediations offered to resolve the conflict including Shuttle diplomacy and back channel means and last part will delineate the fresh thaw in making prior to an attack on Saudi key national asset ARAMCO oil field and Saudi-led camp's participation in Qatar Football tournament.

Key Words:

Mediation, Shuttle Diplomacy,
Muslim Brotherhood,
Terrorism, Back Channel
Diplomacy, GCC, Conflict
Resolution, Thaw, National
Interests

Introduction

Two years ago, a diplomatic row erupted between Qatar and Saudi led coalition sparking a major crisis in Gulf region. Simmering regional rapture boil on June 5, 2017 which resulted Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain along with Egypt severed diplomatic relations with Qatar. They accused Qatar of supporting Islamists movements and seeking closer ties with Riyadh's regional rival Iran.

Saudi along with its allied simultaneously announced trade embargo on Qatar. The trade restrictions included closing of air space to Qatari planes, banning seaborne vessels. Liquefied Natural gas (LNG) exports from Qatar, which resulted 30% of global LNG trade, as well as smaller amount of crude-oil and LNG by-products are affected. On June 22, Saudi sent Doha a list of 13 demands which included stop supporting Terrorists groups, shutting down of Doha's English channel Al Jazeera, curing relations with Iran and closing Turkish Military base it hosts. Qatar was given merely 10 days deadline to comply with demands or face fresh sanctions. Unsurprisingly, Qatar vigorously rejected the allegations of terrorism funding, denied the demands and settled in for a siege. Qatar has been in a continuous engagement in International relations, Since Saudi and its allies announced blockade, Qatar is on its front foot in diplomatically to ease the tension. Its has also pleaded the case to International court of Justice over the gross violation through its influential News outlet. This rift has historical linkages with Saudi's hegemonic desire and Qatar's geostrategic position to play its role in geopolitics of Gulf states. Before explaining the case, it is imperative to know the geopolitical location of Qatar.

Geopolitical Importance of Qatar

Qatar is tinny independent, sovereign and influential State located midway of the western coast of the Arabian Gulf. Its maritime and land boundary extends to Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates and Iran. It has historically played pivotal role in Gulf region. Qatar is still strategic partner of United States hosting two big Military bases and more than ten thousand US military stationed in Al Udeid and As Sayliya Military Bases. Despite these Qatar has effectively used its foreign policy to establish good relations with Saudi's arc rival like Iran. Qatar's offensive was witnessed on backdrop of Arab spring in 2011 when it helped the rebel groups across the Middle east to change regimes. It had established warm relations with Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood leader Muhammad Morsi, Hamas in Gaza, the myriad militia operating in Libya and Syria and Ennahda party in Tunisia. These independent acts caused an immense insecurity in Gulf States particularly Saudi Arabia which possess hegemonic ambitions in the region. Saudi-led camp wanted to teach lesson to a tinny yet influential state in back in 2014 when gulf states raptured its diplomatic relations. Relations were somehow gained right track after signing an agreement between these countries to not meddle in internal politics of gulf states. However, the episode was

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repeated when Saudi Arabia along with its other GCC partners not only severed diplomatic ties with Qatar but also called their ambassadors a citizen from Qatar this time. Qatar was accused of supporting terrorism and punching above its weight once again Now Qatar is completely in diplomatic isolation. To understand the current scenario, we need to trace the roots of this conflict.

Roots of Gulf Crisis

Gulf crisis is deteriorating with each day passing. The already fragile Middle East received a severe blow when Saudi and its allies' broke relations with gulf state Qatar. This decision widened the cracks in Gulf Cooperation Council. Qatar from the last decade with highest per capita gross domestic product has stepped up as independent regional actor. From the days of Shah Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, the father of current Emir Shah Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, Qatar has pursued a maverick foreign policy independent of its neighbors. It has not only showed sympathy to groups that embrace political Islam but appeared to seek to encourage the uprising that swept the Arab countries back in 2011. It had excellent rapport with Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt and President Morsi. Therefore, when President Sisi overthrew Morsi, Qatar-Egypt's relations went downhill. During the Arab Spring, The Libyan Crisis, The Pearl of Spring in Bahrain, the Syrian Civil War and the Palestine Intifada, Qatar has supported the anti-government rebels with money, weapons and diplomacy. Qatar's actions in Middle East have been irritants to its neighbors and the vocal satellite channel Al Jazeera has tweaked and exposed the ambitions of regional governments. It has violated the Taboo for more than two decades. Qatari leadership has adopted a pragmatic approach to advance its national interests by triangulating Saudi Arabia, Iran and United States. It has established friendly relations with Iran, despite hosting on its soil the Central Command Al-Udeid Air Base of US Military.

The current crisis seems like an episode of 2014 rifts when Saudi Arab, UAE and Bahrain called their ambassadors back from Qatar over allegations of Qatar's meddling in Domestic affairs these gulf states. This time following the abrupt breakdown of relations of Saudi-led camp and Qatar, the survival of Gulf Cooperation Council is now hanging in the balance which is one the main functioning organization among of Arab States. When this latest rapture occurred in 2017, Saudi Arabia along the coalition produced thirteen demands from Qatar to show strict compliance within fourteen days. Following are the crux of those demands; First to curb diplomatic ties with Iran and close its diplomatic mission. Second, cut off relations to all terrorist organizations and handover terrorist figure. Third, stop all funding for individuals or organizations designated as terrorists by Saudi Arabia, The UAE, Egypt, Bahrain, The United States and other countries. Fourth Shutdown Al Jazeera and other Qatar-funded news outlet. Fifth Qatar is bound to close a Turkish Military Base and half military cooperation inside Qatar. Sixth to end interference in other sovereign country's internal affairs. Seventh Qatar to pay reparations and compensation for the loss of life caused by Qatar policies. And lastly align itself with other Arab countries militarily, politically and economically.

These demands made very serious situation for Qatar to tackle with. Qatar rejected all these demands instead surrendering it opened diplomatic front to confront the injustices caused by Arab states. The cracks have even widened since there is not sight of hope to resolve the issue after more than two years. There were multiple efforts to resolve the diplomatic crisis that has put GCC in cold functioning process. Efforts includes state level leaders, diplomats and shuttle diplomacy and back door channel diplomacy to maintain the unity in Gulf region.

Mediating the Diplomatic Crisis

On August 1st, the news website Intercept revealed that former US secretary of the State Rex Tillerson stopped Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirate (UAE) from attacking Qatar in June 2017. Where crisis erupts diplomacy becomes relevant because diplomatic crisis can only be handled through effective diplomacy. Diplomacy is seen as a mean by which states try to secure their foreign policy goals and objectives in wider international system in order to advance and fulfill national development agenda, mainly through negotiation. Qatar has undergone under severe political and economic crisis amidst GCC diplomatic standoff. However, it is using its all effective methods to overcome this barrier. The diplomatic effort of Qatar to circumvent the grave economic and political embargo on the country by several erstwhile Saudi and its allied camp seems to be working. Qatar is outstretching full spectrum policy to minimize the threat posed by these countries. Relations with Oman, Kuwait, Iran and Turkey reflects the long enduring objective of Qatar to cope up with this diplomatic crisis. In realm of

Public Diplomacy, one small which has successfully used diplomatic tools to achieve its foreign policy goals is an Arab Emirate in Middle East called Qatar.

Shuttle and Back-Channel Diplomacy of United States and Kuwait

Shuttle Diplomacy was for the first time used by then Secretary of the state Henry Kissinger to broker the ceasefire between Israel and Egypt to stop the Yom Kippur War in 1973. Shuttle diplomacy is often used when two states or parties do not formally talk or engage but still want to negotiate over crisis. In Shuttle Diplomacy third party serves as mediator between two parties or states which otherwise do not engage directly. The third-party travels shuttles between two states which are in tussle diplomatically or even militarily. Shuttle diplomacy is used by two main states which one way or the other way has influence over GCC countries. United States with its vast influence have the capacity to resolve the long-standing diplomatic issue while Kuwait with past record of tackling in 2014 showed its capacity and willingness to bring mediate the tussle through diplomatic means, Then Secretary of the State Rex Tillerson arrived Kuwait on July 11, 2017 to ease the tension and draw a map for resolution of the rift that had shackled the Gulf Cooperation Council's unity and strength. The leader in Arab world who is clearly equipped to undertake this crisis towards mediation is the Emir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al Sabah. Indefatigable local leader endeavored to resolve the rift between gulf countries back in 2014 as well. The latest episode of diplomatic crisis in GCC countries is yet another hallmark for Kuwait's Emir to overcome. He has strived to shuttle between the Gulf countries and resolve the long-standing issue through negotiation. Stalemate of GCC crisis is very imperative for Kuwait because Kuwait is one of the founding members of Gulf Cooperation Council. It will affect Kuwait by hanging the GCC in row.

United States mediation provided another hope to resolve the conflict. Through Back channel Diplomacy former US secretary of the State Rex Tillerson interacted with leaders of Arab states to bring the issue to solution table. Even it was revealed that through Back Channel means former Secretary of the State Rex Tillerson prevented Saudi, UAE military attack on Qatar. Trump's mediation is also very crucial. He initially accused Qatar of supporting terrorism, later when crisis escalated, he offered mediation. He changed his stance from accusing Qatar of harboring terrorists to great friend. On June 14, President Donald Trump and Qatar Emir had a telephonic conversation according to white house. Trump emphasized on resolution of diplomatic crisis to mitigate regional security threat. United States leadership is on path to resolve the diplomatic rapture through back channel diplomacy by conducting various meeting with GCC leaders separately. United States will never see a weaken GCC vis a vis Iran. Its long-term objective of United states to maintain unity of Sunni Arab states to contain Shiite Iran and proxy like Hizballah.

Efforts by other Countries to Ease Tension

Similarly, France is amongst influential countries in Europe to offer mediation in Qatar Diplomatic quarrel. France has appointed the most experienced ambassador to both Qatar and Saudi Arabia as special envoy for managing conflict in GCC countries. The Envoy Bertrand Besancenot at the age of 65 assigned this task as he has served in both Saudi Arab and Qatar. Despite this French Foreign Minister said that he is talking to all countries to help in search for a solution and dialogue between Arab states concerned. Foreign Minister paid visit to both countries to ease the tension.

French President is seemed to be very active in mediation because of the vested interests of France in Gulf Region. Macron's Foreign Policy is resembling somehow Gaullo-Mitterandist Consensus which is based on three tenets like openness, independence and ambiguity. President wants to revive its openness through trade investment in Gulf region and to establish warm relations through mediation in Middle Eastern countries. This independent act will show the strength of France in international arena. That's why France is key player of western bloc representing European Union to resolve the diplomatic standoff in Qatar and GCC countries. Macron has sought to bring the involved parties towards a mediated settlement that restores ties between Qatar and Quartet (Saudi Arabia, Egypt, United Arab Emirates and Bahrain).

Possible Future of Qatar Diplomatic Crisis and Consequences for Gulf Region

So far, all the diplomatic efforts have been failed but the leadership of many countries like United States, France and Kuwait are hoping for the solution this crisis. They all emphasis on negotiation as the only mean to settle the rift between Gulf States.

To analyze through diplomatic thought, Cardinal Richelieu's Negotiation Continuella remains the fundamental to this diplomatic chaos. It's been two and half years since Qatar is kept under political and economic siege. So far, Saudi-led camp has failed to achieve its objective from Qatar blockade. Saudi and Sunni allies have rather instigated the issue by pushing the Sunni Qatar to Iranian bloc. Qatar is emerging with yet even powerful narrative in region. Saudi and its allies must think of negotiation as only option to deal with Qatar. United States, Kuwait and Oman played pivotal role in pushing both parties to broker a peace deal. War can only be prevented through a composite dialogue. As the historian says, years of negotiation is better than dialogue. Apart of these Pakistan, Germany and Russia also provided good office to mitigate the dispute reckoning the Arab unity. World leadership is emphasizing on dialogue to resolve the issue because the already tumultuous region can bear the burden of wars. Instability in Middle is can hike to an unprecedented level if timely agreement is not brokered. World leaders ought to come forward and play a constructive role in circumventing the politically chaotic region. To maintain the geopolitical order of Middle East all GCC states need to build trust level and fight the menace like terrorism and extremism collective. By isolating one country can only deteriorate the situation and destabilize the region, GCC as an organization can receive a serious blow to curb terrorism. A hegemonic approach is not going to yield positive results as each state needs accommodating space to act. Such unilateral actions can push Qatar to the wall where it would remain with very few options including to join Anti-Saudi led camp. Qatar in a reciprocal ought to curb it relations with United states department designated terrorist groups and circumvent its sympathy for such an organization which pose threat to not only Saudi led cam but to the unity of region.

This aggressive move will not only strengthen the position of Iran but also serious damage to Gulf Cooperation Council. Aftermath of the Qatar blockade it is considered as big blow to the organizational structure of GCC, bringing it on the verge of extinction. Although it hardly possible to envision the GCC formally dissolved but it is very likely it will become rather an irrelevant organization. Gulf region has witnessed a long history of such dysfunctional and very marginalized organizations as an attempt for security setup such as Baghdad Pact and CENTO etc. After the its inactive role in Qatar diplomatic crisis GCC looks likely to share the same fate as its previous security pacts had shared. It is also lead to uncertainty in the region which will create environment for Kuwait and Oman to balance their relations with other Saudi allies. As both Oman and Kuwait have massive resources as like that of Qatar, which will ultimately lead these countries pursue Qatar like foreign policy in global politics.

Turkey is another country standing resilient on Qatar side. Turkey and Iran soon after blockade sent food for humanitarian assistance. Turkey has criticized Saudi's policies to fuel sectarian conflict. Qatar and Turkey's interests converges in Syria, Libya and Muslim brotherhood in Egypt. Qatar is heavily investing in Turkey, in case of stagnant diplomatic standoff Turkey will suffer. Turkey military base is also present on soil of Qatar with thousand military stationed. Tayyab Erdogan has urged the gulf countries to reach a diplomatic stalemate so that the unity of GCC could remain strengthened.

A Fresh Thaw in Making

After two and half years, situation seems to be coming on track amidst key events happening in 2019. The series of these events once again rekindled the hopes for a possible thaw in Gulf countries. Events like the Murder of Jamal Khashoggi and leakage of audio in Turkey's embassy pressurized KSA and King Muhammad Bin Salman to find allies in this accusation. Earlier this month one the most significant event occurred when Anti-Terrorists Quartet (ATQ) announced to participate in Arabian Gulf Football Tournament in Qatar. It was first important event signaling the easiness of tension between Qatar and other GCC countries. The standoff is gradually de-escalated when Qatari Prime Minister Abdullah Bin Naseer Bin Khalifa Al Thani attended an emergency GCC conference in wake of Drones attacks on keys Saudi oil installation ARAMCO. Its first high level visit from Qatar since rift had occurred.

These all de-escalatory moves are not happening in isolation rather there is certain regional factors contributing to compel Saudi revise its policy towards region particularly Qatar. The events like Drone attack on Saudi oil field, war mongering environment prevailing between Saudi and Iran, resultative phase of Yamen war, Khashoggi's murder and its subsequent accusation on Muhammad in Salman. Prior to all these developments, United States policy of protection towards Arab states received a big blow when the most expensive Patriot Anti-

missile System could not protect Saudi's key national oil field. This vulnerability exposed the ultimate trust on United States and its advanced technology. Secondly Trump's decision to pull out its military out turbulent region Middle East and leaving its ally Kurdish Protection Unit (YPG) alone further delineated United States trust. These developments however showed that US cannot be trusted.

The events demonstrated that Saudi and its led camp needed to revise its foreign policy towards region and United States. A strong and united GCC stands as the outmost fundamental to confront with these challenges. A breakthrough in such frozen regional disputed environment is quite possible to meet. After 14th September Drone attacks it is realized to improve regional organization for security than looking towards West. Kuwaiti president had long ago suggested to open doors for negotiation to this regional diplomatic crisis. It is safe to say that the summit of GCC which is likely to held in coming month December will further help in easing tensions between Qatar and Saudi-led Camp.

Conclusion

The geopolitical order is raptured to an unprecedented level adding more chaos to the already turbulent region of Middle East. Qatar remains under siege for more than two and half years. Saudi after a series of developments is in dire need of consolidation of its relations with all GCC states particularly Qatar. Saudi and its led camp need to cooperate for issues bilaterally. However, pushing a country to wall can only widen the gaps between Qatar and GCC states. This aggressive move will not only strengthen the position of Iran but also serious damage to Gulf Cooperation Council. Aftermath of the Qatar blockade it is considered as big blow to the organizational structure of GCC, bringing it on the verge of extinction. Although it hardly possible to envision the GCC formally dissolved but it is very likely it will become rather an irrelevant organization. Gulf region has witnessed a long history of such dysfunctional and very marginalized organizations as an attempt for security setup such as Baghdad Pact and CENTO etc. After the its inactive role in Qatar diplomatic crisis GCC looks likely to share the same fate as its previous security pacts had shared. It is also lead to uncertainty in the region which will create environment for Kuwait and Oman to balance their relations with other Saudi allies. As neither Oman and Kuwait have massive resources as like that of Qatar, which will ultimately lead these countries pursue Qatar like foreign policy in global politics.

Shuttle Diplomacy, back-channel negotiations somehow brought the two conflicting parties together for peace deal to broker, but regional events delineated the thaw even more apparent. Breakthrough is considered in making ahead football tournament in Qatar and Quartet's participation creates ground for dialogue between these states. The coming GCC Summit in December will further dilute the tense relations prevailing in Saudi and Qatar.

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