

Forum: Disarmament and International Security (First Committee)

Issue: The Question of the Blockade of Qatar

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Introduction

On May 23, 2017, Qatar woke up to news of a hack that had attributed false arguments to the emir of Qatar. The remarks were aired in several UAE and Saudi-owned networks in the Gulf, thus leading to a diplomatic breakdown. Qatar was accused of supporting "terrorism", maintaining too close relations with Iran, and meddling in the internal affairs of its neighboring countries. Countries in the region such as Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Egypt issued statements severing diplomatic ties with Qatar. Saudi Arabia shut its land borders with Qatar, and along with three other countries, imposed land, sea, and air embargoes on Qatar. The incidents came two days after President Trump met with Muslim and Arab leaders in the Riyadh.

The Qatari blockade has gone on far longer than anyone had anticipated. It has been over a year since the remarks were aired and embargoes placed upon the country. Since then, the socioeconomic and political status of Qatar has been greatly affected. The blockade has disrupted business, education, and transport links among Qatar and its neighbors, while also tearing families apart.

Definition of Key Terms

Embargo

An official ban on trade or other commercial activity with a particular country

Emir

An aristocratic or noble and military title of high office used in a variety of places in the Arab countries, West Africa, and Afghanistan

Terrorism

The unlawful use of violence and intimidation, especially against civilians, as a means to create terror among people, or fear to achieve a financial, political, religious, or ideological aim

Gulf Co-Operation Council (GCC)

A regional intergovernmental political and economic union consisting of all Arab states of the Persian Gulf – Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman – except for Iraq

Background Information

History of the Gulf Co-Operation Council (GCC)

The GCC was established in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia in May of 1981 with the purpose of achieving unity among its members based on their common objectives and their similar political and cultural identities. Arguably the most important article of the GCC charter is Article 4 which states that the alliance was formed to strengthen relations among its member nations and to promote cooperation among the countries' citizens.

However, back in 2014, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain broke diplomatic ties with Qatar although the dispute was resolved within weeks. In March 2014, these countries broke ties with Qatar, accusing Doha of interfering with their internal affairs, promoting extremism through Al Jazeera and other Qatari media networks, and supporting the Muslim Brotherhood throughout the region. In April 2014, Qataris signed the Riyadh Agreement that called for an end to incitement in the media; however, this clause was never applied. As such, the current day dispute ultimately rests on what Saudi Arabia and the UAE say that the current dispute with Qatar rests on the unfulfilled promises from 2014 and additional demands regarding Iran.

The Qatari Blockade

Riyadh and Abu Dhabi were angered by Qatar's support for popular Islamist movements such as more established organizations like the Muslim Brotherhood. They feared that these groups could upend the Gulf's more conservative monarchies. As to deal with the threat posed by Qatar, the blockading countries of Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt presented 13 Demands to Qatar on June 22, 2017. These demands, however, were met with a negative response from Qatar. Qatar's Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdul Rahman Al Thani, in response, stated that Qatar's neighbors were "demanding that we have to surrender our sovereignty" and that it would be something Qatar would "never do". Ministry of Foreign Affairs responded to the initial announcements by saying there was "no legitimate justification" for the actions taken by the four countries and that the decision was "a violation of national sovereignty". Both the emir of Qatar and the country's foreign minister had stated that they would be willing to negotiate with the boycotting nations and welcomes calls from international leaders for dialogue. In response to Qatar's statement, on July 18, diplomats from the four blockading nations stated that they no longer insisted for Qatar to comply with the 13 demands but instead commit itself to

six broad principles. The principles were: commitment to combat extremism and terrorism in all its forms and to prevent their financing or the provision of safe havens; prohibiting all acts of incitement and all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify hatred and violence; full commitment to Riyadh Agreement 2013 and the supplementary agreement and its executive mechanism for 2014 within the framework of the GCC for Arab States; commitment to all the outcomes of the Arab-Islamic-US Summit held in Riyadh in May 2017; to refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of States and from supporting illegal entities; and the responsibility of all States of international community to confront all forms of extremism and terrorism as a threat to international peace and security.

As such, states in the six-member Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) cut diplomatic and economic ties with Qatar. They closed their airspace to Qatari aircraft and stated that foreign airlines would have to seek permission for overflights to and from Qatar. Qatar's only land border was also closed by Saudi Arabia and ships flying the Qatari flag or those serving Qatar were banned from docking at many ports. Only two states in the six-member GCC, Kuwait, and Oman, did not cut ties with Qatar.

Demands

The blockading countries of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt issued a list of demands for Qatar to follow. The demands are as follows:

- Downgrade diplomatic relations with Iran, expel Iranian military representatives from Qatar, and limit economic cooperation.
- Shut down the Turkish military base under construction in Qatar and cease all military cooperation with Turkey.
- Sever ties to all "terrorist, sectarian and ideological" groups and add them to current and future "terror lists".
- Stop all funding of individuals, groups and organizations designated "terrorists" by the blockading countries, the US and others.
- Hand over all listed "terrorists" and criminals wanted by the four countries and the US and to share all information about them.
- Shut down Al Jazeera and all affiliated stations.
- Stop meddling in other nations' affairs and naturalizing citizens of the four blockading countries. Sever relations with elements opposed to blockading governments and hand over all intelligence gathered on them.
- Financially compensate the four countries for loss of life, property and income caused by Qatar's policies over the years.
- Seek harmony with surrounding countries - militarily, politically, economically, etc - to ensure Gulf security and the application of the 2013/2014 Riyadh Agreement.

- Hand over all information it holds on opposition elements it supported, with clarifications of the forms of support it gave them.
- Shut down all news outlets funded directly and indirectly by Qatar, including: Arabi21, Rassd, Al Araby Al Jadeed, Mekameleen and Middle East Eye.
- All demands must be agreed to within 10 days or they will become null and void.
- An agreement with Qatar on these points was to include clear goals and a schedule for reporting on progress (monthly for a year, quarterly for the second year, and annually for 10 years after that).

Updates on the Qatari Blockade

In September of 2017, the Qatari Emir had stated in a speech at the United Nations General Assembly that "the countries who imposed the blockade on the state of Qatar interfere in the internal affairs of many countries and accuse all those who oppose them domestically and abroad with terrorism. By doing so, they are inflicting damage on the war on terror." As such, Qatar has refused to "to yield to dictations by pressure and siege".

Recently, Qatar has been pouring tens of billions of dollars into its military. By 2025, the nation will have doubled its naval forces as a massive new base comes online and its national service program expands. Qatar has used its massive wealth to launch a sweeping modernization of its military. Since the rift between the GCC in 2017, Qatar has announced purchases of three different fighter jet systems, including 36 American F-15s, 12 French Rafale fighters and 24 Eurofighter Typhoon aircrafts. Construction for a new naval base south of Doha will also begin construction early 2019. Although Qatar is faced with the challenge of recruiting enough manpower for its military, defense officials have stated that they are working on getting as many Qataris into the armed forces as possible. The nation has also expanded their compulsory national service program to 12 months from three.

Qatar has also stated that they will be withdrawing from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in January 2019. Qatar's Energy Minister Saad Sherida al-Kaabi states, "The withdrawal decision reflects Qatar's desire to focus its efforts on plans to develop and increase its natural gas production from 77 million tonnes per year to 110 million tonnes in the coming years." Currently, Qatar is the world's biggest supplier of liquefied natural gas (LNG),

Qatar-Gulf crisis: The 13 demands presented by the blockading countries

Qatar rejected the accusations and list of demands by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt.

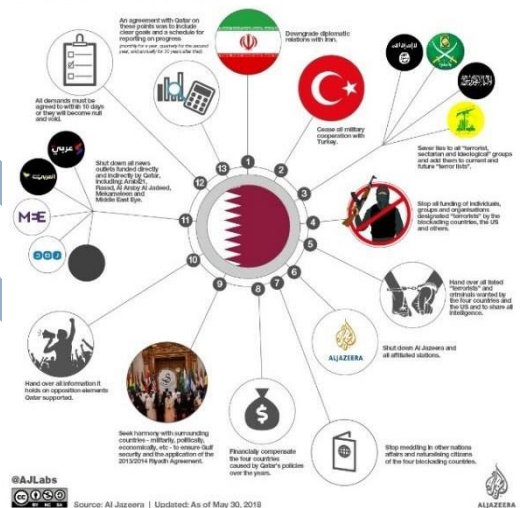


Image #1: 13 Demands Presented

producing almost 30 percent of the world total. Al-Kaabi added that the decision to increase the supply of natural gas is to “develop a future strategy based on growth and expansion, both in its activities at home and abroad.”

Impact on Qatar

International Affairs

Qatar has managed to keep its significant international influence owing to its geographical location and immense wealth. Due to the blockade, Qatar has been thrown out of the alliance waging war in Yemen which the Qataris joined reluctantly, largely to please the Saudis. As such, they have been freed from the negative reputational fallout suffered by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, thus allowing for Qatar to come out as a more trustworthy party which harbours no preconceived ideas about Yemen’s territorial integrity. The blockade has also created a widespread perception globally that Qatar is being bullied by Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Qatar has been able to rehabilitate its tarnished reputation from the Arab Spring. They have also been perceived to have taken the moral high ground by largely refraining from retaliation against the blockading countries but instead engaged in measured diplomacy and followed international law. All these actions have thus turned public opinion to Qatar’s favour. The blockade has also allowed for Qatar to take an independent stance on the Iran nuclear deal and not be compelled into publicly supporting the US withdrawal. As such, the blockade has granted an advantageous position for Qatar with many likeminded Arab, European, and Asian states.

Society

Due to the airspace blockades, Doha’s Hamad International Airport has seen much less activity. Qatar’s Civil Aviation Authority confirms Qatar’s commitment to the highest international aviation quality and safety standards. Qatar Airways has had to cancel flights to 18 regional cities and reroute flights to other destinations due to airspace restrictions. The International Civil Aviation Organization, the United Nation’s airspace organization, approved new routes that would allow for Qatar Airways to cut through Emirati and Bahraini airspace.

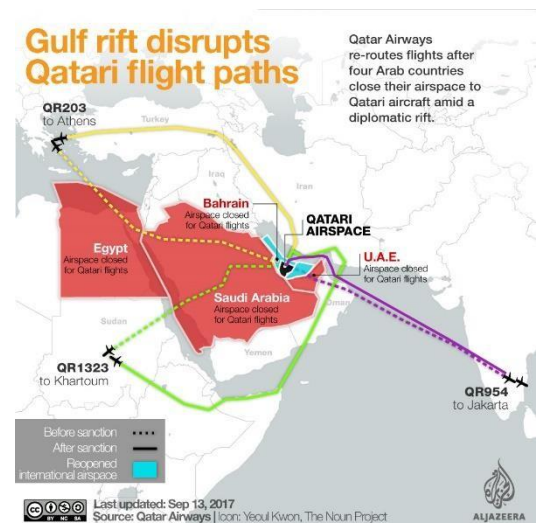


Image #2: Rerouted Qatari Flight Paths

A cult of personality has also grown around the young emir, Sheikh Tamim, as portraits of the emir can be seen around Qatar. There has also been outrage at Al-Jazeera’s reporting from

countries in the region. Within Qatar, however, Al-Jazeera is regarded as an emblem of independence and sovereignty.

For the citizens of Qatar, blockading countries of Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Bahrain gave Qatari citizens 14 days to leave their territory and banned their own citizens from travelling to or residing in Qatar. As such, Qatar is largely isolated from the rest of the region; however, their citizens have come to develop a greater sense of nationalism and pride in their country.

Economy

Qatar's economy has experienced lower growth and higher import costs as a result of the blockade. Qatar is dependent on imports by land and sea for its 2.7 million population. 40% of its food used to come through the land border with Saudi Arabia. As such, once the blockade began, residents rushed to stock up. The hoarding, however, quickly ended after Turkey and Iran began to send food by air and sea. In the first four weeks, Qatar's stock market had lost about 10% or about \$15 billion in market value. Stock value, however, has since recovered \$6 billion of its pre-crisis value. Companies working on the 2022 World Cup that has been projected to be held in Qatar have had to secure new sources for building the infrastructure needed for the event. Shipping costs have also gone up in the nation. To get through the restriction on access to ports in the UAE, Qatar has begun shipping cargo through Oman. Exports of liquified natural gas have so far not been affected.

Despite the negative effects of the blockade on the economy, the current Qatari Finance Minister says that Qatar has enough resources to defend its economy and currency. In fact, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) forecasted in March 2018 that the economy will grow by 2.6% in 2018 and that the crisis has been "manageable" for the country.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

United States

Donald Trump had accused Qatar of sponsoring terrorism at a "high level". The blockade came just a few weeks after Trump's visit to Saudi Arabia in May 2017. As such, many have speculated that the president had given approval of this move. Trump tweeted his support of King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman's decision.

Recently, Trump has taken more of a conciliatory approach, encouraging dialogue between the rival states. He has also welcomed Qatar's emir to the White House for talks. In response, Qatar's Foreign Minister has thanked US President Donald Trump on his efforts, stating that "the United States [has] reaffirmed its commitment to a united GCC" as "they want a GCC to operate together and more effectively". On June 14, 2018, US President Donald Trump and Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad

Al Thani held a phone conversation, according to a White House statement. During the phone call, the two leaders discussed possible cooperation between the two states and the importance of Gulf unity as to prevent instability and insecurity in the Gulf region. As such, the United States is looking to “build some momentum” towards resolving the Gulf crisis ahead of a possible summit in the autumn.

Trump is also pushing the initiative of a creation of the Middle East Strategic Alliance to confront Iran. He states that the Middle East Strategic Alliance (MESA) is an attempt to help the Gulf maintain stability and an alliance for countries to work towards security and prosperity in the region.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia cut off all access to all diplomatic and economic ties with Qatar in June 2017 as they accused Qatar of financially supporting and harbouring terrorists. Currently, Saudi Arabia is defying US calls to mend ties with Qatar. With the recent Khashoggi killing, at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on Oct 2, there has been pressure on Riyadh. Washington imposed sanctions on 17 Saudi officials for their role in the Khashoggi killing.

United Arab Emirates

The United Arab Emirates cut off all access to all diplomatic and economic ties with Qatar in June 2017 as they accused Qatar of financially supporting and harbouring terrorists. On July 23rd, 2018, the United Nations top court issued a provisional ruling stating that measures put in place by the United Arab Emirates as part of its blockade against Qatar has amount to racial discrimination. As such, the UAE was ordered by the United Nations highest court to immediately allow Qatari families to reunite.

The impact of the Qatari blockade can also be seen in banks in the UAE that have Qatari shareholders as they have been weighing on their business and raising questions about the future. The UAE government have warned some businesses and banks from entering into deals with Qatari companies. As a result, some UAE companies and banks have shied away from business with the United Arab Emirates, Commercial Bank International and Al Khaliji France.

Bahrain

Bahrain cut off all access to all diplomatic and economic ties with Qatar in June 2017 as they accused Qatar of financially supporting and harbouring terrorists. On May 27th, 2018, Bahrain’s foreign minister Sheikh Khalid bin Ahmed al-Khalifa accused Qatar for prolonging the crisis by taking its case to Western allies rather than dealing with the crisis inside the Gulf Arab bloc.

Turkey

Turkey has provided aid to Qatar during the blockade by sending food through air and sea to the nation. The “expanding cooperation” between Turkey and Qatar “has an ever-growing importance” as stated by Fikret Ozer, Turkey’s ambassador to Doha. As such, Turkey has opened up an Investment Support and Promotion Agency office in Qatar on March 29th, 2018. On February 1st, 2018, Doha had hosted the Turkey-Qatar Business Forum to boost bilateral trade and ease transportation through Iraq and Iran. In November 2018, Turkey’s current president, Erdogan, had visited Qatar to attend the third meeting of the Turkey-Qatar Supreme Strategic Committee.

Iran

Iran’s President Hassan Rouhani – under pressure at home due to the impact of US sanctions on the economy – has been pushing for an even closer cooperation with Qatar. Rouhani had proposed for the two countries to set up a joint shipping line to promote bilateral trade. Rouhani had also dropped the idea of Iranian companies helping with the preparations for the 2022 World Cup which will be hosted in Qatar, stating that “Iranian companies are completely ready to export their technical and engineering services to Qatar”.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
May 20 th , 2017	US President Donald Trump meets 55 Arab and Muslim leaders in Riyadh for a summit focusing on unity in the “fight against terrorism”.
May 23 rd , 2017	The controversy started on May 23, 2017, when hackers posted fake remarks attributed to Qatar’s emir on the Qatar News Agency website criticizing US foreign policy and praising Iran.
June 5 th , 2017	Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt sever ties with Qatar
June 23 rd , 2017	Four blockading nations issue a set of 13 demands.
June 24 th , 2017	Qatar rejects the 13-point demand
July 19 th , 2017	Blockading countries turn their 13 demands to “six broad principles”
July 23 rd , 2017	Qatar takes the United Arab Emirates to United Nations court

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- United Nations General Assembly meeting in New York September 2018
 - During the UN General Assembly meeting, Sheikh Tamim said the blockade on Qatar has harmed the reputation of the GCC countries.
- The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD)

- Interim International Court of Justice has found international law on discrimination on basis of national origin may have been breached. The case has found that the UAE may have discriminated against Qatari nationals after the Qatari Blockade in 2017.
- The International Court of Justice had stated in a provisional order that the UAE must immediately reunite families and allow students previously resident there to continue their studies. Moreover, Qataris should also be allowed access to judicial services in the UAE.

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

Qatar has launched a five-year development plan that focuses on making itself more self-reliant in the face of a boycott by other nations in the region. The five-year development plan, also known as the National Development strategy for 2018 – 2022, pledges to “rationalize energy consumption and encourage development of renewable energy while raising self-sufficiency levels for farming and fishing production”. The plan aims for Qatar to satisfy 30% of its demand for farm animals and 65% of its demand for fish domestically by 2022. The plan also deals with current social conditions by encouraging Qatari citizens to play sports and working to improve the health of young people within the country.

Qatar’s emir is scheduled to tour Latin American countries as Doha seeks new alliances during the blockade. So far, Qatar’s emir will be going on a tour of Ecuador, Peru, Argentina, and Paraguay to “discuss ways to strengthen relations and bilateral cooperation in various fields”. These visits show that Qatar is not stuck nor isolated in one corner of the world. They are also aimed at diversifying opportunities as well as international partners and alliances for Qatar.

Possible Solutions

When considering possible solutions to the Qatari blockade, it all ultimately depends on whether Qatar wants to continue down this path alone or with a partner on the international stage.

One strategy would be for Qatar to keep its head down, maintain the current crisis-management mode it has on as of right now and build resilience with the hope that the anti-Qatar alliance will crumble in time. In fact, the Trump’s grand alliance with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Israel may prove to be more fragile than it appears. This fragility of the alliance may be attributed to the ongoing investigation into Trump’s election campaign and the corruption scandal with Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Another strategy would be for Qatar to reach out to Iran. For most of the blockade, Qatar had steered clear of Iran. Iran’s Shia Muslim power is Sunni Muslim-ruled Saudi Arabia’s main regional rival. The longer the crisis continues, the more plausible it becomes for Qatar to draw closer with Iran as well as to other Arab states intimidated by growing Saudi assertiveness and Emirati intervention. Qatar could

also potentially work with the European Union to rescue the Iranian nuclear deal as to create closer ties with Iran and the European nations.

Qatar could also seek to forge new economic and security alliances for the region. The nation could position itself in the global gas market in such a way that it has an advantage on its main competitors: Australia, the United States, and other nations. Qatar could also revisit the idea of establishing a gas cartel alongside Russia, Algeria, and Iraq. An economic alliance may lead to more concrete security arrangements based on shared economic interests. In general, Qatar should be working towards establishing long-term international confidence in its economy.

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