



THE VICIOUS GULF CRISIS: WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR INDIA

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Ramadan is often seen as a zealous month all around the world. This occasion is marked by benevolence, friendship, and trust. However, for the Arab world, this Ramadan had been quite an arduous month, especially for Syria, as it still faces the wrath of Islamic State. Tehran too saw a pair of terrorist attacks claimed by the Islamic State, however, Qatar remained in the focus as it received the most recoil from major Arab countries like Egypt, UAE, KSA, Bahrain, Yemen, Libya and a Sunni South Asia country, Maldives. On 05 June 2017, these countries cut off diplomatic ties with Qatar abruptly, escalating it to an ongoing crisis. The Qatari citizens residing in these countries were given two weeks time to return to their home while the diplomats were asked to leave within 48 hours;¹ quite a gesture for their Muslim brothers! All this has added another layer of complexities in an intimidating Middle East.

The Qatar Crisis

President Donald J. Trump's recent visit to the Middle East proved quite provocative, for his statements might have instigated the Gulf crisis. Already, Qatar shares bittersweet relations with its neighbours such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia etc. Qatar's relations with these countries had severed in all these years because of its support for the Muslim Brotherhood and its closeness with Iran. It can be argued that the country has become a proxy between the wider Saudi- Iran conflicts. Bahrain is agitated over the disputed Hawar islands. Additionally, Qatar also accuses UAE along with Saudi Arabia to have planned a coup against the Emir, hence sharing a turbulent history with UAE as well.² Thus, one can argue that this newly emerged Gulf crisis is a result of Qatar's drifting views from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

The recent crisis started with misinterpreted news wherein Qatar's Emir was reported saying that Saudi Arabia and the United

States were responsible for atrocities in Iran. However, Qatar's Attorney General said it was fabricated and the boycotting countries had planted this hacking.³ This resulted in strong allegations on Qatar being a sponsor of terrorism. However, one can argue that the grounds on which Qatar faced a wrath from these Arab nations were -its closer relations with Iran and its support to terror groups like Al Qaeda's Syrian affiliate Nusra Front, Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic State.⁴ It is noteworthy that all boycotting countries have also knocked off all the trade routes with Qatar; land, air or water.

Repercussion for Qatar

"When a nation or a group of Muslims place another under a siege, it goes against the moral and ideal Islamic behaviour and is definitely forbidden." Qatari Imams hold this view towards the recent Gulf crisis. They call the economic siege on Qatar as 'haram'.⁵ Qatar is undoubtedly one of the richest nations in the world and receiving a backlash from fellow nations would plunge its economy. For starters, Qatar Airlines is on the verge of bankruptcy due to this crisis. Qatar stocks are facing massive decline. International investors halt their deals and Qatari currency is under massive pressure.⁶ The NHRC Chairman of Qatar was reported saying, "Qatar blockade is a New Berlin Wall". Qatar, against all odds, is trying to find a way out from this chaotic situation. It is becoming clear that Qatar will require a contingency plan to revive its

economy. Its natural allies, Turkey and Iran are backing Qatar by sending food supplies and conducting joint military exercises.⁷ While Pakistan sits neutral, a tripartite Iran, Turkey, Qatar relationship seems glaring.

As the world awaits how the Qatar crisis would play out, German and Russian leaders are trying to bring nations to the negotiating table. The boycotting states have posed a list of thirteen demands to end the standoff.⁸ As the ultimatum nears, Qatari officials stand uncooperative. Qatar discards this siege as a violation of international law. While the ordinary life in Qatar remains unaffected, the future of GCC is still unpredictable.

What Does It Mean For India?

"If there is one region with whom India has uniformly excellent relations, it is the Gulf",⁹ India's external affairs minister was reported saying. However, the rift in Gulf will eventually affect Indian economy in the long run, the airline sector for starters. Indian linkages to Qatar are, decades long. Qatar holds a huge Indian diaspora. There are about 700,000 Indians residing in Qatar, which is twice the number of native Qataris. This crisis doesn't sound good for India's Make in India campaign as India tops the list of remittances received from Qatar, estimated to be \$63 billion in 2016.¹⁰ Also, India imports ninety percent of its natural gas from Qatar.¹¹ It is apprehended that the Indian GDP will definitely face a setback after the deteriorated relationship.

Other than the economy, India also shares a vigorous relationship with Qatar in defence and energy sector. India has categorically announced that it seeks to maintain good ties with Saudi/UAE as well as Qatar. To start with, India is managing the crisis by sending in more flights to bring back its domestic workers.

At the immediate level- India will have to deal with the NRIs and bring its citizens safe. However, in the long run, India has to play a balanced role as at the same time staunchly castigating violent extremism and terrorism in the region, which is required for a stable GCC. India intends for a long lasting relationship; with Qatar on the boil, India needs to play her trump cards carefully.

(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies [CAPS])

Notes

¹ Associated Press, (2017), "Saudi Arabia Accuses Qatar of Backing Terrorism, Cuts Ties", *NBC News*, June 05, 2017, Available at <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/egypt-saudi-arabia-among-gulf-states-cutting-ties-qatar-n768161>, Accessed on June 23, 2017

² Samir Salama (2017) "Qatar's History of Turbulent Relations with UAE", *The Gulf News*, 02 April 2014, Available at <http://gulfnnews.com/news/uae/government/qatar-s-history-of-turbulent-relations-with-uae-1.1312739>, Accessed on June 26, 2017

³ AP (2017) "Qatar Diplomatic Crisis", *BBC NEWS*, 6 June 2017, Available at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-40173757>, Accessed on June 26, 2017

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Hisham Aljundi (2017) "Economic siege of Qatar is against Islamic teachings& values", *Qatar Tribune*, June 11, 2017, Available at <http://www.qatar-tribune.com/Latest-News/economic-siege-of-qatar-is-against-islamic-teachings-values-imams>, Accessed on June 28, 2017

⁶ Patrick Wintour (2017) "Qatar given 10 days to meet sweeping demands by Saudi Arabia", *The Guardian* Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/23/close-al-jazeera-saudi-arabia-issues-qatar-with-13-demands-to-end-blockade> Accessed on July 2, 2017

⁷ AP (2017) "Turkey, Iran back Qatar in Dispute with other Arab States", *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, June 08, 2017 Available at <https://www.rferl.org/a/turkey-iran-back-qatar-dispute-saudi-arabia-other-arab-states/28535012.html>, Accessed on June 28, 2017

⁸ Patrick Wintour (2017) "Qatar facing further sanctions as ultimatum deadline looms" *The Guardian*, July 2, 2017, Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jul/02/qatar-facing-further-sanctions-as-ultimatum-deadline-looms>, Accessed on July 3, 2017

⁹ Devirupa Mitra (2017), "With strong ties across the region, Sushma Swaraj says Qatar- Gulf crisis, not a challenge for India", 6 June 2017, Available at <https://thewire.in/144177/sushma-swaraj-gulf-qatar-conflict/>, Accessed on June 27, 2017

¹⁰ AP (2017) "Indian expats tops the list in remittances from Qatar", *Qatar Tribune*, 2 September 2016, Available at <http://www.qatar-tribune.com/news-details/id/21610>, Accessed on June 27, 2017

¹¹ Sanjeev Choudhary "Qatar row: India's natural gas import to remain unaffected", *Economic Times*, Jun 5, 2017, Available at <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/energy/oil-gas/qatar-row-indias-natural-gas-import-to-remain-unaffected/articleshow/59002349.cms>, Accessed on June 28, 2017