

Committee: Security Council

Topic: The question of the blockade of Qatar

Chair: Bibienne Yeoh

School: Royal Russell

Summary

It has been two years since Saudi Arabia, alongside neighbouring Gulf countries, announced its blockade on Qatar. Since then, there has been little development in the situation causing disruptions in a large range of civil, economic, social and cultural rights. The blockade has caused separation amongst multinational families, disruption in international students' education, eliminated cross-border jobs and an increase in food prices. By mid-September of 2017, Qatar's National Human Rights Committee had received 3,346 complaints¹.

Qatar has been able to source replacements for the massive food shipments it previously received from Saudi Arabia, however, trading and business opportunities have taken a big hit. There has been no sign of the end of the political dispute which has seemingly destroyed the credibility of the Gulf Cooperation Council. And by allying itself with Turkey and Iran, it is possible that Qatar has increased the distance between itself and the USA, Europe and the rest of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Definition of Key Terms

Terrorism: the intentional and lawful use of violence against civilians in pursuit of political motives

Blockade: the act of sealing off a place to prohibit the import or export of goods as well as people leaving or entering

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC): the political and economic alliance of the six Middle Eastern countries (being Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman) established for the purpose of achieving unity among its members based on their common objectives and similar political and cultural identities

Muslim Brotherhood: a transnational Sunni Islamist organisation founded in Egypt as an Islamist religious, political and social movement

Al Jazeera: an independent news organisation partially funded by the Qatari government, launched in 1996 to provide comprehensive news and debate as well as challenge established narratives. It currently has 80 bureaus around the world. They have been accused of being a propaganda outlet for the Qatari.

¹ 2017 Qatar's National Human Rights Committee Estimate

Background Information

Article 4 of the GCC charter states that the alliance between the respective Gulf countries was formed to strengthen relations among its member states and to promote cooperation among the countries' citizens.² Previous tensions between Qatar and other Gulf countries, pertaining Qatar's alleged support for political Islamic movements or armed groups alongside concerns about the Doha-owned Al Jazeera Media Network and Qatar's relations with Iran, did not shake this until 2017 when Saudi Arabia, UAE and Egypt announced they were to sever diplomatic relations with Qatar.

Qatar has, since then, refused to comply with its neighbouring countries' demands on the grounds that they threatened sovereignty or violated international law. The state has acknowledged that they have provided assistance to some Islamist groups but denies aiding any group linked to al-Qaeda or the Islamic State (IS). However, this has not convinced its fellow Gulf nations to discontinue the blockade.

Despite the diplomatic concept of severing ties involving the closing of diplomatic missions by the country that is taking the step, there have been over 89 diplomatic missions still open and operating in Qatar as of 2017. Not to discredit the 34 countries have maintained their diplomatic relations via a regionally accredited embassy. Qatar's relations with Turkey and Iran, on the other hand, could ultimately isolate itself heavily from the rest of the Gulf countries, especially in regards to the relations with Saudi Arabia.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Saudi Arabia: The tensions between Qatar and Saudi Arabia have always been present. Saudi Arabia was the first to sever relations with Qatar, calling 'brotherly countries' to follow suit (Yemen, the Eastern government of Libya, Maldives, Mauritania and Comoros did so accordingly). They closed off Qatar's only land border that brought in 40% of Qatar's food supplies³, banned ships flying the Qatari flag (or those serving Qatar) and withdrew Qatari troops from the Saudi-led war in Yemen. Their stance against Qatar led to the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt imposing land, sea and air blockades on Qatar

United States of America: The United States of America under the Trump administration has voiced many concerns regarding the blockade of Qatar. The main reason being that Qatar hosts the largest American military facility in the Middle East - the al-Udeid air base. In 2017, the White House confirmed President Trump's eagerness to alleviate the situation, stating that "the president offered to help the parties resolve their differences, including through a meeting at the White House if necessary"

Kuwait: Kuwait's emir has been an active mediator from the beginning of the crisis in attempts to bridge the gap between the blockading countries and Qatar.

Other: Despite the fact that Egypt, Yemen, Maldives and Libya's eastern based government cut ties with Qatar, they did not impose restrictions on their citizens living in Qatar. Jordan, Djibouti, Chad and Niger have not cut diplomatic relations - instead, they downgraded them. UAE and Bahrain severed relations with Qatar on the 5th of June 2017, following Saudi Arabia's lead in granting Qatari citizens 14 days to leave their territory at the time of the blockade.

² Charter of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), art. 4

³ Wintour, P., 'Gulf plunged into diplomatic crisis as countries cut ties with Qatar', The Guardian

Timeline of Events

2014	Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain pulled out their diplomats, claiming that Qatar supported armed groups. However, the border remained open and Qataris were not expelled. Further tensions revolved around Qatar's alleged support for political Islamic movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood alongside complaints about the Al Jazeera Media Network
23 May 2017	False statements made to the emir of Qatar was aired on several UAE and Saudi-owned networks in the Gulf two days after President Trump met Gulf Arab leaders in Riyadh
24 May 2017	Authorities in Saudi Arabia and the UAE blocked Al Jazeera's website
5 June 2017	Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Egypt issued statements announcing the severing of diplomatic relations with Qatar
7 June 2017	Jordan announced that it would scale back diplomatic ties with Qatar and shut down the Al Jazeera bureau in Amman
5 July 2017	Qatar refused to comply with the list of 13 demands put forth by the boycotting countries, claiming they would not agree to any measures that threatened sovereignty or violated international law
18 July 2017	Qatar's Gulf neighbours presented the 6 broad principles on combating extremism and terrorism in place of the 13 demands
July 2017	Qatar filed a wide-ranging legal complaint at the World Trade Organisation to challenge the trade boycott by Saudi-Arabia, Bahrain and UAE

Relevant UN Treaties and Events ^{[E]1}

8 June 2017: Egypt's deputy UN Ambassador called for the United Nations Security Council to launch an investigation into accusations whereby Qatar allegedly funded an active terrorist group in Iraq to free 26 Qatari hostages

21 May 2018: Qatar acceded to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights as well as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

June 2018: Qatar filed a case at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on the stance that the UAE-imposed measures violated the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

23 July 2018: the ICJ ruled that the UAE must allow Qatari families separated by its measures to reunite; Qatari students to complete their education in the UAE; and allow affected Qataris access to the UAE's courts – this was successfully implemented.

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

Despite the fact that the topic at hand is heavily debated upon, there have been very limited attempts to resolve the issue albeit courageous. For one, Qatar contested before the International Court of Justice sanctions imposed by the UAE. They argued that the UAE's order for all Qataris to leave the country violated its obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. As a result, the court issued provisional orders for the UAE to allow former Qatari residents to complete their education, access courts and reunite with family members residing in the UAE.

Other attempts to alleviate the effects of the issue involved Qatar acceding to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) in May 2018. However, this also led to a reduction in the scope of the treaties' human rights protection and undermined the objective and purpose of these treaties. An example of this would be Qatar's rejection of Article 3 of the ICCPR on the 'equal right of men and women in the enjoyment of all civil and political rights' as it violated their Constitution - stating that only male descendants of the Al Thani dynasty may inherit rule over the state.

Kuwait still maintains an active position, as the mediator, in closing the gap between Qatar and the boycotting countries but with little success.

Possible Solutions

The more obvious method of resolving the issue is to encourage the discontinuation of the boycott by the four main countries. This has been brought up by Germany, at the start of the blockade, when they called for greater diplomatic efforts to resolve the Qatar crisis in order to avoid any escalation into violence. However, this will be easier said than done. Another way in which the situation could be alleviated would be to generate domestic support for Qatar's position and leadership as well as rally international support.

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Links for Further Reading

- <https://gulfnews.com/world/gulf/qatar-crisis-to-continue-in-2019-gargash-1.61211040>
- <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/07/qatar-play-role-resolving-gulf-crisis-170727223916633.html>
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