

An Opinion on Neighbours Cut Off Gas Rich Qatar: What It Means and Its Implications

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This paper is an opinion proffered by the author and uses a few newspaper articles, including his own critical analysis, to capture the subtle nuances involved, in terms of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt cutting off most diplomatic and economic ties with Qatar. In an unprecedented move designed to punish one of the region's financial superpowers for its ties with Iran and Islamist groups in the region. Oil gained and Qatari stocks plunged after this announcement that these countries will suspend air and sea travel to and from the gulf emirate. It was also announced that Saudi Arabia will also shut land crossings with its neighbours; potentially depriving the emirate of imports through its only land border. According to Carey and Sabah (2017:1) "Qatar called the accusations baseless and said they were a part of a plan to impose guardianship on the state, which in itself is a violation of sovereignty."

Qatar is one of the world's richest countries and of strategic importance, being the biggest producer of liquefied natural gas. A country with a population smaller than Houston in the United States of America. According to Carey and Sabah (2017) its \$335 billion (R4.28 trillion) sovereign wealth fund holds stakes in companies from Barclays and Credit Suisse Group. It also hosts the forward headquarters of Centcom, the US military's central command in the Middle East." Emboldened by the warmer US ties under President Donald Trump, the Saudi – led alliance is seeking to stamp out any opposition to forming a unified front against Shiite – ruled Iran. And while the escalation is unlikely to hurt energy exports from the Gulf, it threatens to have far reaching effects on Qatar. "There are going to be implications for people, for travellers, for business people. More than that, it brings the geopolitical risks into perspective said Tarek Fadlallah, Chief Executive of Nomura Asset Management" (In Carey and Sabah, 2017). Brent crude rose as much as 1.6 percent to \$50. 74 a barrel on the London - based ICE futures Europe exchange, before paring gains to 0.4 percent in London.

Heightened tensions between Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest crude exporter, and Iran typically draw market attention to the Strait of Hormuz, through which the US Department of Energy estimates about 30 percent of the seaborne oil trade passes. Qatar's QE Index for stocks tumbled 8 percent, the most since 2009 in Doha. Dubai's benchmark index fell 1.2 percent. The five countries involved in the dispute are US allies, and Qatar has committed \$35 billion to invest in US assets. The Qatar Investment Authority, the country's sovereign wealth fund, plans to open an office in the Silicon Valley. The action is an escalation of a crisis that started shortly after Trump's last month trip to Saudi Arabia, where he and King Salman singled out Iran as the world's main sponsor of terrorism. Three days after Trump left Riyadh, the state run Qatar News Agency carried comments by Qatari ruler Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani criticizing mounting anti – Iran sentiment. Officials quickly deleted the comments, blamed them on hackers and appealed for calm", according to Carey and Sabah (2017). They further report that Saudi and UAE outlets then launched verbal assaults against Qatar, which intensified after Sheikh Tamim's phone call with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani in apparent defiance of Saudi criticism. "Qatar is right in the middle of the Gulf Co – operation Council (GCC) countries and it has tried to pursue and independent foreign policy, according to Sluglett, director of the Middle East Institute of the National University of Singapore. The idea to bring Qatar to heel" (Sluglett, In Carey and Sabah, 2017).

Disagreements among the six GCC members have flared in the past, and tensions with Qatar could be traced to the mid – 1990s when Al Jazeera television was launched from Doha, providing a platform for Arab dissidents to criticize autocratic governments in the region except Qatar's. It also played a key role in supporting anti – regime movements during the Arab Spring, acting against Saudi and UAE interests by bankrolling the Muslim Brotherhood's government in Egypt. Qatar also hosts members of Hamas's exiled leadership and maintains ties with Iran. Rightfully so and there is nothing

wrong to stand on the side of justice and the exploitation of Muslim people and their countries by the USA and its Western Allies and the lackeys of the Middle East. This is the issue that the Muslim world has to deal with and therefore, standing on the side of Qatar and Iran, given the Western perpetrated onslaught on Muslim countries perceived to be anti – West must be consolidated, in order to challenge them propping up dictators and, from unnecessarily enhancing the terrorism debates. The status quo of Western Imperialism, unbridled capitalism and neo – liberal policies must be challenged by both progressive Muslim governments and, the free world, in order to usher in a world that is more acceptable to the world order.

In 2014, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain temporarily withdrew their ambassadors from Qatar. That dispute centred on Egypt following the army – led ouster of Islamist President Mohamed Mursi. This time, Saudi Arabia cited Qatar's support of terrorist groups aiming to destabilize the region, including the Muslim Brotherhood, Islamic State al – Qaeda. It accused Qatar of supporting Iranian backed terrorist groups operating in the kingdom's eastern province as well as Bahrain. This is a figment of the imagination of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, the UAE and its other allies propped up by the USA and its Western Allies, to split the Muslim World even further, consolidate its imperial motives, place fear into the dictatorial regimes of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the UAE, that there is an imminent threat by Iran and Qatar to their way of life and the Western way of life. Such moves from the West sees them gaining large contracts running into millions / billions of dollars in the purchase of arms and the reconstruction of many Muslim countries that are continually bombarded by the West and, Saudi Arabia, like in Yemen, which now is suddenly a partner of Saudi Arabia. It is hypocrisy at its height ushered in by the concept of unnecessary fear. This is the reality and the world must stand up to these dastardly crimes perpetrated upon innocent people by the West and, especially the USA and its Arab allies, led by Saudi Arabia. The USA and its Western allies have perpetuated a myth that there is a rift between Muslim Shiite's and Muslim Sunnis, like they divided and ruled in both Anglophone and Francophone Africa and, the genocide conducted in India by British colonialism. History repeats itself with gay abandon and the West should be charged for Genocide at The Hague.

This action ushers in the biggest diplomatic crisis to hit the region in years. Iran according to (Agency Staff, Riyadh, and 2017:4) issued “a neutral statement on the crisis urging Qatar and its neighbours to resolve their differences through political and peaceful methods and dialogue between the parties.” This shows that Iran is not involved in sponsoring terrorism but in reality wants to see peace in the Middle East but not in terms of the Western Agenda. The Arab allies of the USA do not see the bigger picture of destabilizing the region solely based on a Western Agenda and weakens the Muslim world. Turkey on the other hand also announced that, it will give any kind of support for the situation to be normalized.

What the Split Means

While the deterioration in relations has been steady for a while, the rapidity and the, extent of the current breakdown is surprising. In this regard Pillay and Ian's (2017: 3) and Farid Essack (2017: 3) state that “it can be attributed to the speed of the Trump's administration's embrace of Saudi Arabia and the isolation of Iran.” Qatar has always had a more pragmatic relationship with Iran, while Saudi Arabia is driven both by its view of Iran as a major political rival, but more important, Saudi Arabia's intense commitment to Wahabi sectarianism. Farid Essack states that “Wahabism is an austere interpretation of Islam that is at the heart of Muslim fundamentalism including the Taliban and Islamic State”. Qatar as small as it is, is no pushover. In terms of GDP, public relations and above all the presence of the very independent Al Jazeera have enabled it to punch above its weight. The Middle Eastern Arab countries and the West must take cognizance of this factor or rue the decision to isolate an emerging liberal Muslim democracy that is Qatar, which has a major role to play among Muslim countries and, in terms of influencing the geopolitics of Muslim nations. In other words the Muslim world is crying out for pragmatic leadership and both Iran and Qatar can offer this to the Muslim world. For all intents and purposes, this must be stopped by any means by the West and its Arab puppet allies. This is solely the agenda of the West, led by the USA, to continually destabilize progressive Muslim countries that stand up to its nefarious plots and crimes against humanity. The isolation of Qatar makes no sense at all.

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