

BETWEEN BLOCS AND BLOCKADES: QATAR'S DIPLOMATIC DILEMMA AND STRATEGIC MANEUVERS

Abstract: *The article aims to analyze the dynamics of the 2017 Qatar diplomatic crisis in the context of the transforming geopolitics of the Gulf. The goal of the article is to examine the political causes of the crisis, which are directly related to regional competition and the change of power balance in the Gulf region, and to reveal why Qatar's diplomatic crisis was resolved years later without any concessions from Qatar. The article focuses on Qatar's foreign policy ambitions, Saudi Arabia's harsh opposition against it, and Doha's further expansion, which ultimately led to Qatar's five-year blockade. The study also examines the resolution of the crisis and the normalization of the relations between Saudi Arabia and its allies with Qatar, which was conditioned by the imperative to stabilize the security environment in the region. Saudi Arabia wanted to demonstrate that Riyadh will continue to be the most influential player in the Gulf region. Qatar did not make tangible concessions but accepted the rules of the game.*

Keywords: *Qatar, GCC, USA, crisis, sub-region, security complexes.*

Introduction

The article aims to examine the political causes of the crisis, which are directly related to regional competition and the change of power balance in the Gulf region. It also examines the resolution of the crisis and the normalization of the relations between Saudi Arabia and its allies with Qatar, which was conditioned by the imperative to stabilize the security environment in the region. The goal of the article is to reveal why Qatar's diplomatic crisis was resolved years later without any concessions from Qatar. The theory of regional security complexes developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Waever was used to retrieve the answer to the abovementioned question. According to the theory, the realities of global politics can be understood by the characteristics of the regional sub-systems within the international system. The regions function as sub-systems, where the balance of power and hostile or friendly relations between the states of the region are

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interconnected to such an extent that it is impossible to consider the security problems of these countries separately from others. This interconnectedness creates regional security complexes (RSC). RSCs are security macro regions or subregions. The authors utilized the securitization theory to explain the development of hostile or friendly relationships between states and built RSCs based on it. According to their formulation, securitization is an over-politicized process during which the political community forms ideas about a particular factor or phenomenon being a vital threat or danger to the state. This leads to the need to take urgent and exceptional measures to resist or neutralize it (Galstyan 2021, 107-108).

The security sector is an essential part of RSCs. Buzan and Waever have identified five main security sectors: military, political, economic, social, and environmental. The military and political sectors are the primary areas where countries aim to ensure security. However, in the Gulf, the social sector is of particular importance. In this regard, the Sunni-Shiite conflict in the Middle East is essential for this sub-region (Grabowski 2020, 22). Sunni-Shiite tensions are only a facade that is used to legitimize power and meddle in the internal affairs of other states. These religious divisions are used as a strategic tool to mobilize supporters for a particular cause or agenda (Grabowski 2020, 29).

To be recognized as an RSC, a collective of states or entities must exhibit a level of security interdependence that sets them apart from neighboring security regions. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) stands out in this regard, functioning as an alliance against external threats and uniquely serving as a platform for consolidating the domestic security of a group of monarchical regimes (Buzan and Waever 2003, 47-48).

The first chapter of the article describes the outbreak of Qatar's diplomatic crisis in 2017 and explores its roots and reasons. The chapter shows the connection of the crisis's outbreak with the policies of the newly-elected U.S. President, Donald Trump. The crisis began with a statement made by Qatar's Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, which was seen as critical of President Trump's administration and supportive of Hamas and Iran. Soon after, several Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the UAE, and Egypt, cut diplomatic ties with Qatar and imposed a blockade, accusing it of supporting terrorism and destabilizing the region. It outlines how Qatar evaded the blockade, primarily through Iran and Turkey's political and economic support.

The second chapter uncovers that the Qatar crisis presented a complex geopolitical challenge for the United States as the future of the Gulf security system was in question. The U.S. faced the challenge of maintaining the balance of power in the Gulf region and

protecting its interests. The high-ranking officials of the U.S. began to take steps to resolve the crisis, but it was not easy. One of the reasons for the inability to resolve the crisis was the need for a unified position among the U.S. ruling circles. Big political shifts within the GCC states could easily sweep away the U.S.'s positions in the Gulf.

The third chapter shows the diplomatic crisis's resolution in the context of the Gulf's transforming geopolitics. The resolution was achieved through the Al-Ula Declaration of 'Solidarity and Stability.' This declaration restored full ties with Qatar, even though Qatar did not meet the preconditions set by the blockading countries. This way of resolution proves that the Arab states of this sub-region are connected by a complex network of systems that no Gulf state can afford to ignore.

The Qatari crisis resolution showed that the GCC countries, led by Saudi Arabia, did not want to aggravate the situation further and question the security of this sub-region. This was the reason for settling relations with Qatar without any concessions. Saudi Arabia managed to prevent the unrest in the Gulf security complex and prevent shifts in the regional order of the Gulf. By restraining the penetration of external forces, the GCC countries normalized their relations and restored the security environment in this sub-region.

The outbreak of Qatar's diplomatic crisis

Qatar's diplomatic crisis has doubted the Gulf security system. The regional security complexes are based on distinct security interactions among states, called enmity and amity. These relationships might result from border or ideological disputes and historical ties (Grabowski 2020, 20). There are three types of security complexes based on patterns of amity or enmity. The first is conflict formation, where major powers build alliances due to the fear of violence. In the second one, states still perceive each other as a potential threat but take specific measures to reduce the security dilemma and mutual tensions. In a multilateral security complex, the expectation is that none of the states involved would engage in aggressive actions against each other, nor would they plan to do so (Grabowski 2020, 21). Factors such as history, politics, culture, and ethnicity generate patterns of amity and enmity. The regional security complex is defined by the history of mutual hatred, friendships, and specific issues that lead to conflict or cooperation based on fears, threats, and friendships. In the Gulf, long-standing partial enmities between Shia and Sunni states and non-state actors play a crucial role in this matter (Grabowski 2020, 22). Securitization statements are issued by political leaders and actors of Saudi Arabia

and Iran who try to convince the public to recognize Sunni dominance and revolutionary Shiism in the region as a threat to national or regional security (Grabowski 2020, 26).

Another threat to this security complex is political Islam. The close relationship between Doha and the Muslim Brotherhood has been crucial in shaping Qatar's foreign policy direction. By providing a platform for individuals with religio-political and radical views from the Arab Islamic world, Qatar has gained considerable leverage in terms of ideological influence across the Middle East region (Sargsyan 2019, 294-295). However, Doha acquired some regional countries' reluctance towards itself. Qatar became a platform for the Muslim Brotherhood to infiltrate other countries in the Arab world, primarily through the use of Al-Jazeera. The Muslim Brotherhood has utilized Al-Jazeera to propagate its beliefs by infiltration across different Islamic countries, except for Qatar (Dorsey 2013, 12). However, the conflict is concerned not only with support for the Muslim Brotherhood but also with a struggle for leadership among Arab countries (Grabowski 2020, 24). Since the coup in 1995, Qatar has been working towards reducing its dependence on Saudi Arabia and pursuing an independent foreign policy. In addition, Doha aimed to create a new image for the state as a progressive and influential regional actor through regional connections and relationships (Roberts 2019, 2).

The Arab Spring created new conditions for Qatar. Doha was heavily involved in promoting the uprisings and revolutions of the Arab Spring. At the same time, Qatar pursued an ambitious agenda to manage regional resources and exert control over the Arab world. Doha's program of political Islam was a key tool in advancing its geopolitical and geo-economic strategy. This program was one of Qatar's most effective tools for achieving its objectives (Sargsyan 2021, 156). During the Arab Spring movement, Qatar had a historic opportunity to influence the reconfiguration of the region and diversify its foreign policy further to expand its position of power within the Middle East (Dihstelhoff and Lohse 2020, 35).

Qatar's aspirations for regional influence became more realistic when it started cooperating closely with Turkey. This cooperation was made possible by the strong ties of both countries with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. As a result, a political axis was formed between Turkey, Qatar, and the Muslim Brotherhood, with the latter receiving enormous financial and diplomatic aid from both countries (Sargsyan 2021, 156). Political instability caused by popular uprisings in critical regional powers created a vast power vacuum in the region and posed serious challenges to both the status quo and the revisionist blocs. Meanwhile, a new alliance of Turkey and Qatar attempted to take advantage of this vacuum (Yeşilyurt and Yetim 2020, 132).

On November 23, 2013, the GCC adopted a declaration urging Qatar to stop supporting groups destabilizing the Arab world. The final declaration was primarily aimed at Qatar's support for the Muslim Brotherhood. The declaration stated that if Qatar continued supporting the Muslim Brotherhood, the issue of suspending Qatar's membership in the GCC and the League of Arab States would be raised (Sciutto and Herb, 2017).

In March 2014, the three member states of the GCC and Egypt withdrew their ambassadors from Doha. Saudi Arabia and the UAE attempted to convince Qatar to alter its foreign policy by ceasing its support of political Islam actors, who pose a security threat to the GCC states (Dihstelhoff and Lohse 2020, 40). Due to Kuwait's mediation efforts, the dispute was resolved within weeks by signing the 'Riyadh Agreements' (Ulrichsen 2020, 45; 59). Despite the agreement, Qatar continued cooperating with political Islamists in the region (Cherif 2017, 20-21). The underlying issues that caused the tensions were not addressed, and Qatar's ambitions remained unchanged, which led to the unfolding of the Gulf diplomatic crisis.

On January 20, 2017, Donald Trump was inaugurated as the 45th president of the United States. It is noteworthy that Trump made his first official visit as president to Saudi Arabia to participate in a joint summit with the leaders of the Arab Islamic world. During his speech at the summit, Trump called for a fight against terrorism and extremist ideology, citing groups such as the Islamic State, Al Qaeda, Hezbollah, and Hamas. He also announced that the U.S. would cooperate with any country willing to combat the extremism (White House, 2017). A few weeks after this summit, a diplomatic crisis erupted in the Gulf over Qatar. The Riyadh summit and Trump's support played an important role in unfolding the 2017 Gulf crisis. This gave Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt the green light to punish Qatar and gain favor with Washington (Zakheim, 2017).

One of the reasons for the Gulf crisis was the statement of Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, which presented Qatar's relations with President Trump's administration as strained and characterized "Hamas" as the only legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Furthermore, he described Iran as a guarantor of regional stability and a powerful state that could not be opposed; he also condemned the GCC countries' policy against Tehran (Ulrichsen (a), 2017). The statement was publicized on Qatar's National News Agency website on May 23, 2017.

On May 24, the Public Affairs Office of Qatar's government belatedly claimed that the National News Agency had been hacked, disseminating false information ('Qatar Says,' 2017). The New York Times wrote that the hacking incidents were part of a long-standing cyberwar between Qatar and other Gulf states that only recently came to light. In

May 2017, the email account of the UAE ambassador to the United States, Yousef Al Otaiba, was hacked. The Huffington Post noted that the emails revealed links between the UAE and the U.S.-based pro-Israel Democratic Defense Fund, which were seen as an attempt to 'embarrass' Al Otaiba (Akbar Shahid, 2017). The event deepened the existing confrontation between the two sides.

In the early morning of June 5, Bahrain's Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced cutting diplomatic ties with Qatar. Similar announcements from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt quickly followed his statement. On the same day, Saudi Arabia blockaded Qatar's only land border, and by the end of the day, Qatar was under an air, land, and sea blockade. Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the UAE, and Bahrain accused Qatar's relations with Turkey and Iran as well as supporting terrorist groups and destabilizing the whole region (Lynch (a) 2017, 14).

On June 23, the Quartet (Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, UAE, and Egypt) submitted a 13-point demand letter to Doha through Kuwait's mediation. The demands required Qatar to close the Al-Jazeera news network, shut down all media outlets that Qatar finances directly or indirectly, and stop the Turkish military presence in Qatar and any joint military cooperation with Turkey within Qatar (Wintour (b) 2017, June 23). It should be noted that the close military-political cooperation established earlier between Qatar and Turkey allowed Turkey to increase its role and influence in the Gulf subcomplex. The blockading countries had to restrain this penetration to avoid irreversible transformations in the sub-complex because that period was an opportunity for Ankara, allowing it to boost its popularity across the broader Middle East and shape its brand as a role model (Amour 2020, 411).

The demand letter also envisaged the severing of relations with Iran and the termination of ties with the Hezbollah and several other organizations. Among the demands were the extradition of 'terrorist figures' and wanted persons from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, and Bahrain to their countries of origin, the freezing of their accounts, and the provision of information on their whereabouts, movements, and finances (Wintour (b) 2017, June 23). The Arab Quartet demanded that Qatar should stop granting citizenship to people who are wanted by these countries and cease all contact with the political opposition of these countries. Qatar was required to hand over all documents related to its past contacts with those opposition groups. The Quartet demanded that Qatar align its military, political, social, and economic decisions with those of the Gulf Arab states following the 2014 Riyadh agreements. Doha had to meet these demands within ten days (Wintour (b) 2017, June 23). Qatar rejected all the demands, arguing that they

questioned Qatar's sovereignty and violated the norms of international law ('Qatarcrisis,' 2017).

According to the report by The Washington Post on July 16, 'an analysis of data available to the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency officials indicates that the UAE organized the hacking attack.' Intelligence officials stated that the UAE officials discussed the hack on May 23, a day before the operation was executed (Bartz and Cooney, 2017). However, Al Otaiba denied these claims and insisted that his country had no role in the alleged hacking attack (Qiblawi and Dewan, 2017). Qatar's Ministry of Interior announced that their experts have evidence that the UAE organized the hacking attack (Younes, 2017).

Qatar overcame the blockade by implementing a flexible and effective foreign policy. The Qatari authorities found alternative ways of importing goods, such as changing shipping routes and identifying new importers of staple foods. The country experienced economic growth due to these efforts (Pashayan 2018, 86). Opening the \$7.4 billion Hamad underwater port in September 2017 also helped the country accommodate more cargo ships (Finn and Weir, 2017). Furthermore, the government launched the Qatar National Food Security Strategy (2018-2023) in 2018, which focused on promoting local food production, securing strategic reserves, and safeguarding domestic markets (United Nations, 2018).

The Gulf crisis contributed to the rapprochement of Qatar and Iran on the one hand and Qatar and Turkey on the other. Turkey tried to maintain a neutral profile during the first few days of the crisis and to serve as a mediator between the factions. However, very soon Turkey began to take a clear pro-Qatari position in the dispute (Dihstelhoff and Lohse 2020, 50). Ankara provided food and essential goods shipments to Qatar. According to the bilateral agreement signed in 2014, Turkey deployed a military contingent to strengthen military cooperation with Qatar (Gurbuz, 2017). President of Turkey Erdogan openly criticized the Arab states' decision to isolate Qatar in 2017 ('Turkey's Erdogan,' 2017). Two days after the blockade, Turkey's parliament officially approved two military cooperation agreements that had been previously reached during an extraordinary session. In December 2019, the Turkish-Qatar military headquarters was opened ('Erdogan: Turkey-Qatar,' 2019). The presence of Turkish and American military bases has played a crucial role in mitigating further military confrontations, as the boycotting countries were compelled to factor in this reality before engaging in any military aggression against Qatar (Pashayan 2018, 87). Thus, the military bases have acted as a deterrent to any potential military escalation, ultimately leading to a peaceful conflict resolution. In November 2017, Iran, Qatar, and Turkey signed an agreement to

facilitate land and sea cargo transportation, expand trade relations, and establish a working group to assess the agreement's effectiveness (Middle East Monitor, 2017).

Two months after the blockade began, Doha restored diplomatic relations with Tehran, which were severed in 2016. Iran offered to provide essential goods and food through its ports and the U.S. airspace for flights to Europe (Walsh, 2017). These processes showed that much of the GCC's identification of the Islamic Republic of Iran as the major threat to domestic and Gulf stability had failed to drive Arab Gulf states' foreign policies. Differences over the principles of political Islam, among other issues, have led to the changes in threat perception and balancing behavior (Santini 2017, 107). With their demands on Qatar, blockading states have again posited political Islam as a primary concern besides Iran in the formation of regional axes. Since 2017, political Islam has been a crucial factor in the foreign policies of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, and Turkey (Dihstelhoff and Lohse 2020, 51). The confrontation and polarization in the Gulf region and the broader Middle East between revisionist and status quo blocs for regional hegemony can also be considered a rivalry between different versions of Islamism (Yeşilyurt and Yetim 2020, 137).

Although Qatar's blockade did not escalate into a military conflict, it seriously impacted the region's political, economic, and social systems. The blockade of Qatar dealt a great blow to the GCC, causing its members to struggle to restore the organization's modernity and effectiveness (Ulrichsen 2020, 29).

The endeavor to suppress and isolate the state of Qatar proved unsuccessful. Despite the challenges, the country successfully operated to achieve its strategic goals of the 'Qatar National Vision 2030'¹, consolidating its position in the Middle East and Near East through regional cooperation and integration.

The U.S. role in the Qatari crisis

The global powers can deeply penetrate an RSC. These powers become involved in the region's security structure and shape it according to their interests. External powers adapt and internalize the role of regional entities shaping the regional social structure. They can influence the concepts and behavior of regional actors and adjust their policies to shape the regional structure according to their interests. The GCC states, except for Qatar and Oman, have a security alignment with the U.S. and have a common enemy,

¹ Qatar's National Vision 2030 is a comprehensive roadmap that envisions the country's transformation into an advanced society by 2030. It outlines the country's long-term objectives, including sustaining its development and providing a high standard of living for its people. This vision serves as a framework for creating national strategies and implementation plans, guiding Qatar's path to future development.

Iran. Therefore, the Gulf can be defined as penetrated by this global power (Grabowski 2020, 22).

The Qatar crisis created an urgent problem for the U.S. The future of the Gulf security system was in question. For the first time since 1990, the U.S. faced the problem of maintaining the balance of power in the Gulf region and protecting its interests. Any shift in the power dynamic could result in a complete reconfiguration of power in the region, which would inevitably impact the U.S.'s regional interests (Asisian 2018, 6). The U.S. interests in the region include protecting energy production and transportation, counteracting Islamic radicalism and terrorism, and preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction. To achieve these goals, the United States is receiving support from medium and small powers in the Gulf. In return, Arab monarchies receive direct support, such as arms sales, and indirect support from the U.S. (Grabowski 2020, 25).

Donald Trump's approach completely contrasted with Obama's policy in the Middle East (Lynch, 2016). Trump had planned to relay more responsibilities to U.S. allies in the Middle East without losing its regional strength. One indication of the U.S. involvement in regional affairs is the creation of the Middle East Security Alliance (MESA)¹ by Donald Trump. However, there is no consensus on Iran's perception as a direct threat in this bloc. Indeed, the U.S. presence in the Gulf triggered a considerable arms buildup, which caused the Gulf to become the most militarized in the world (Grabowski 2020, 26).

As the crisis began, Trump's tweets directed against Qatar became the subject of intense debate. (Wintour (a) 2017, June 6). Trump's remarks were in contrast to the statements made by U.S. officials who were involved in resolving the Qatari crisis. Richard Tillerson, the Secretary of State, and George Mattis, the Defense Secretary, sought to persuade the president to consider Qatar's importance to checks and balances in the regional system (Kabalan (a) 2018, 43-44). The U.S. Department of Defense opposed further escalation of the conflict due to the presence of the largest U.S. Air Force base in Qatar, Al-Udeid, and the U.S. Central Command (Cafiero 2019, 129).

Moreover, Qatar has played a key role as a mediator in resolving the ongoing tensions between Israel and Hamas (Ulrichsen (b) 2017, 9). This role gained importance in the context of the implementation of the 'Deal of the Century' to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli issue. Qatar's involvement was important as it had to provide economic support to the Gaza Strip. Additionally, the U.S. leverages the Qatari mediation mission to conduct behind-the-scenes diplomacy with Iran (Glazova 2019, 99).

¹ MESA is a U.S.-sponsored alliance of Arab countries along the lines of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). It is often referred to as the "Arab NATO." Prospective MESA members include Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, the UAE, Oman, Jordan, and Egypt.

One of the reasons for the inability to resolve the crisis was the need for a unified position among the U.S.'s ruling circles. On the one hand, Trump supported Saudi Arabia's accusation of Qatar in the financing of terrorism. On the other hand, the U.S. Secretary of State emphasized the role of Doha in the fight against terrorism (Lynch (a) 2017, 15). In the summer of 2017, The Washington Post noted in one of its publications that 'no one knows who speaks for the United States' (Lynch (b), 2017).

President Donald Trump prioritized building relations with Saudi Arabia and the UAE as two pillars of his regional policy. This approach was also facilitated by the close personal ties of the Trump family with Crown Prince Salman of Saudi Arabia and the UAE Ambassador Al Otaiba. Furthermore, Trump's son-in-law and advisor, Kushner, played a significant role in promoting this policy. As a result, the president's close circle supported the pressure on Qatar (Ulrichsen (b) 2017, 6; Glazova 2019, 100).

In July 2017, the U.S. Secretary of State Tillerson was dispatched to the Middle East to manage the conflict in the Gulf (Harris, 2017). Tillerson recommended resolving the dispute through U.S. mediation. He publicly pointed out three negative consequences of Qatar's blockade: humanitarian concerns, regional cooperation in the fight against terrorism, and the reduction of American and international business activity in the region ('Qatar Blockade,' 2017). Tillerson played a significant role in persuading President Trump to largely withdraw the allegations against Qatar. This development marked a significant shift in the U.S. approach towards Qatar (Ulrichsen, 2018).

In January 2018, the State of Qatar and the U.S. signed a memorandum of understanding to establish a 'Strategic Dialogue' between the two countries. This agreement was considered a pivotal step in developing bilateral relations between the parties. The document emphasized the importance of an immediate resolution of Qatar's crisis, aiming to contain and counter any external threats to Qatar's territorial integrity. The U.S. emphasized the importance of maintaining freedom of navigation, air traffic, and unimpeded trade. This meant Washington's rejection of Qatar's blockade (Kabalan (b), 2018). Despite all his efforts, Tillerson failed to bring the parties to the negotiating table, and his proposed plan proved unsuccessful. In March 2018, Tillerson left the Gulf without meaningful breakthroughs (Gaouette et al., 2018).

Tillerson's resignation raised questions about whether the U.S. will change its stance regarding the Qatar crisis (Cafiero 2019, 140). Following this event, Saudi Arabia and Qatar authorities embarked on high-level visits and costly campaigns to win political favor with Washington (Delevingne et al., 2018). Riyadh, Abu Dhabi, and Doha tried to win the support of the White House, Congress, American media resources, and influential expert community members. They spent considerable resources lobbying and influencing

U.S. public opinion (Glazova 2019, 101). Opposing parties' desire to get the White House's approval sometimes resembled competition. The Qatari public campaign was supported by thirty American lobbying firms that the Qatari embassy funded to promote Qatari interests in the American power structures (Grafov 2020, 188).

Qatar's support for Hamas was the card that the anti-Qatari quartet effectively used to curry favor with U.S. decision-makers. The UAE and Saudi Arabia aimed to gain the support of pro-Israel, anti-Iranian, and anti-Islamist lawmakers in Congress (Stephens 2017, 13).

Since March 2018, the Trump administration has been focused on creating an anti-Iranian front. The U.S. was convinced that Iran had launched a campaign against U.S. forces and interests in the Gulf and, therefore, began to strengthen its military presence in the region (Grabowski 2020, 19). The competition between regional actors in the Gulf no longer aligned with U.S. interests (Glazova, 2019, 103). The desire to pressure Tehran and weaken its position in the region prompted Washington to take steps to end the crisis within the GCC (Cherkaoui, 2018).

The overcoming of Qatar's diplomatic crisis

During Saudi Crown Prince Salman's visit in March 2018, Trump endorsed Riyadh's purchase of American military equipment (DeYoung and Mufson, 2018). In early April, Trump expressed his support and appreciation to Qatar for its efforts in 'fighting all forms of terrorism and violent extremism.' Furthermore, he stated that Washington and Doha are effectively implementing the stability process in the Gulf region (Ahmann et al., 2018).

In late April 2018, the Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, traveled to Riyadh to bring the opposing parties to the negotiating table. During this visit, Pompeo cited the need for joint efforts to confront Iran, stabilize Iraq and Syria, finally destroy ISIS, and stop the war in Yemen (Harris, 2018). The U.S. demanded that Saudi Arabia and the UAE end the blockade and normalize their relations with Qatar. The Arab Quartet maintained its stance towards Qatar and did not change its policies towards the country at that time. The Quartet aimed to send a clear message to all countries in the region that Saudi Arabia and the UAE will not allow Qatar to become a fifth column for Iran in the Gulf and will not tolerate Doha's special connections with Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood, which they perceive as a threat to regional stability (Glazova 2019, 104).

To end the Gulf crisis, Trump suggested that the leaders of the conflicting parties meet at Camp David in May 2018. He emphasized that the parties should make a breakthrough in resolving the crisis before the meeting (Neubauer and Cafiero, 2018).

However, the leaders of the conflicting countries failed to reach an agreement, and Trump's initiative failed. As a result, the meeting was postponed until autumn 2018 and then again until 2019 (Glazova 2019, 106).

After the Saudi journalist Khashoggi's assassination in Istanbul, Trump stated that he did not see any obstacles to blocking Saudi investment for that reason (Stone, 2018). This statement attracted attention to Trump's business ties with Saudi Arabia from not only journalists but also members of Congress. As a result, they demanded an explanation from Trump about the situation in the Gulf and his ties through various letters (Raskin, 2024). The White House hoped Riyadh would become the region's main pillar of American interests. However, the assassination of Khashoggi and the actions of the Saudi authorities hindered the implementation of Washington's political initiatives.

The Qatar crisis raised doubts about the U.S.'s role as a security guarantor in the Gulf. Saudi and UAE authorities were more concerned in 2019 when the U.S. did not immediately intervene after attacks on UAE tankers. The lack of U.S. response prompted a reassessment of the situation in the Gulf (International Crisis Group, 2021). Washington gradually began to appear on the sidelines of the Qatar crisis.

Kuwait and Oman initially adopted a neutral stance and endeavored to mediate to reconcile the parties. However, the Quartet declined Oman's offer of mediation, which was based on Oman's strong ties with Iran (Altiok 2023, 606). Both Qatar and the Quartet found Kuwait's mediation mission to be acceptable. The Emir of Kuwait, Sheikh Sabah's personality, and Kuwait's neutrality played essential roles in this achievement. The international community also welcomed Kuwait's mediation efforts. A clear example is the UN report on the Gulf crisis, which emphasized the importance of Kuwait's mediation (Altiok 2023, 607).

After several attempts to open talks between Saudi Arabia and Qatar, on December 4, 2020, Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud announced that 'a final agreement is being reached' (Bin Salman, 2020). In his turn, the Foreign Minister of Qatar, Al Thani, announced that 'certain steps have been taken that will put an end to the crisis' (Gambrell, 2020). Subsequently, on December 30, 2020, the GCC announced that the King of Saudi Arabia had invited the Emir of Qatar to participate in the GCC Summit scheduled for January (Asharq Al-Awsat, 2020).

On January 4, 2021, the Emir of Kuwait announced that Saudi Arabia would lift the blockade of Qatar and reopen the borders. On January 5, 2021, the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, arrived in Saudi Arabia to attend the Council of Ministers summit in Al-Ula city. The leaders signed the Al-Ula Declaration of 'Solidarity and Stability.' Saudi Arabia and other countries of the anti-Qatar camp restored full ties

with Doha ('Qatar blockade,' 2021). The summit agreement highlighted the need for greater military, foreign policy, and economic integration among the GCC member states (Khalid, 2021). One of the reasons for signing the declaration by these countries was not only the fact of pursuing a coordinated policy with Saudi Arabia but also their interest, which at that stage was connected with the presidential elections in the United States and Joe Biden's victory (Thafer, 2021).

It is worth mentioning that although Qatar did not accept the Quartet's demands, the Arabic version of Al Jazeera has become more cautious when discussing Saudi Arabia and other countries. The channel's coverage has changed, avoiding specific topics it used to cover, such as criticizing human rights in Saudi Arabia or the UAE's foreign policy (Salman, 2021). Al Jazeera was a major project on its way to becoming a media empire that was part of a soft power toolkit, like political Islam, especially the Muslim Brotherhood. Qatar had to keep those tools at any cost, for the formation of which much money had been spent for years.

Conclusion

Qatar's diplomatic crisis severely impacted the region's political, economic, and social systems. It was aimed at revising the region's status quo and weakening Qatar's position. However, the challenges posed by the crisis turned into opportunities for Qatar. The blockade strengthened Qatar's position within the region and on international platforms. The efforts to isolate Qatar created new opportunities for regional power players, particularly Iran and Turkey, to expand their economic and political ties with Qatar. This particular sub-region has always had a system dominated by one power, but in recent years, Qatar has challenged that system. This challenge was also one of the main causes of the diplomatic crisis. Despite this, Qatar remains a small state but a middle power and has not been able to achieve dominance over the region.

The Qatari crisis has highlighted the vulnerability of regional security. Iran's active policy, Qatar's diplomacy in power balancing, and Turkish soft and hard power in this subsystem were signals to address this regional dispute. The Shia (Iranian) threat versus the Sunni (Wahhabi) threat and the neo-Ottomanism threat versus Sunni Wahhabi were also decisive in overcoming the crisis. The crisis resolution revealed that neither the Gulf countries nor the international community were ready for radical changes in the Gulf security system. The parties recognized that the region would collapse and weaken if they failed to reconcile because external players would take advantage of it. The GCC

countries have their development visions¹, and the crisis-tense situation could jeopardize all those projects as they can only be implemented with adequate security measures. It is considerable that several years after the Qatar Crisis, Saudi Arabia signed a reconciliation deal with Iran.

The Qatari crisis resolution showed that the GCC countries, led by Saudi Arabia, did not want to deepen the situation further and question this sub-region's security. This was the reason for settling relations with Qatar without any concessions. Saudi Arabia managed to prevent the unrest in the Gulf security complex and prevent shifts in the regional order of the Gulf. By restraining the penetration of external forces, the GCC countries could normalize their relations and restore the security environment in this sub-region.

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