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Saudi-Qatar Relations: A Study of Conflict and Cooperation

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Abstract
This paper reveals the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Qatar is dynamic, shifting between confrontation and collaboration at various periods. Despite their often-divergent attitudes and behaviors, both of these countries are GCC founding members and had a good cordial relationship before their diplomatic crisis in 2017. Both countries possess good coordinate relationships in the socio-political, economic, and military affairs in different periods of time; however, since the emergence of the Arab Spring, Qatar's new channel Al-Jazeera was highlighted the Arab springs and had a positive notion towards the new development. As far as different literature is concerned, their relationship was changing in nature. The article's main objective is to analyze the Saudi-Qatari relationship in a holistic manner critically and how they benefited from each other. This descriptive study will cover both countries' economic relations, political tensions, diplomatic conflicts, strategic dimensions and several external factors that affect their relationship.
Keywords: Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Conflict, Cooperation, Arab Spring, External Factors

1. Introduction:

The changing political and diplomatic relation between Saudi and Qatar has far-reaching results and reflections in a changed world scenario of power games. The relationship between Saudi and Qatar is a timely issue which deserves greater consideration. It is becoming very dynamic and important, especially as both countries assume greater roles in regional and international politics. Relations between Saudi Arabia and Qatar relate to both the present and the historical connection that exists between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the State of Qatar. The relationship between the two nations was amicable before the year 2017. When it came to questions of foreign policy, Qatar was mostly dependent on Saudi Arabia for leadership (Richard, 1982). The ascension of Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani to the throne allowed Qatar to restore its autonomy in international affairs. Since then, Qatar's position has often diverged from that of Saudi Arabia on a variety of geopolitical topics. The government of Qatar established Al Jazeera in 1996 as an effort to increase its level of soft power. As one of the most viewed news programs in the Arab World, Al Jazeera was able to drive a hole between the two countries bilateral ties due to the station's consistent criticism of the king of Saudi Arabia (Fisher, 2017). Additionally, the network served as a forum for Islamist organizations, many of whom are seen as posing a danger to the monarchy in Saudi Arabia.

The Saudi-led military operation in Yemen included the participation of 1,000 Qatari soldiers. On June 5, 2017, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates cut all relations with Qatar. They were joined in this action by Egypt. Qatar's "embrace of numerous terrorist and sectarian organizations aiming at destabilizing the region" was cited

ISSN- 2394-5125 VOL 7, ISSUE 09, 2020

as the justification for this decision. As part of this effort, the four countries headed by Saudi Arabia cut off Qatar's access to their airspaces, territorial waterways, and land borders. In addition, Saudi Arabia terminated Qatar's participation in the military operation in Yemen.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is geographically the largest sovereign state in West Asia and the reserves of gas are the third largest in the World. Qatar borders Saudi to the east. The Kingdom was founded in 1932 by Ibn Saud. Qatar get independence from England in 1971. Its location in the Centre of the Gulf region and near the major petroleum deposits is strategically important for Qatar emerged as a significant power in the Arab World with the high-income economy, backed by the World's largest LNG reserves and oil reserves. Saudi and Qatar are rising giants of west Asia. Both are the World's most resourceful country and major economic potential. The far-reaching growth in Saudi-Qatar global diplomatic and economic influence has also enhanced the significance of their bilateral relationship.

The geopolitical significance of the west Asian region is both a source of interest and tension. Despite leading producers and exporters of Oil and natural gas resources, Saudi and Qatar present the picture of turmoil in the west Asian region. Both Countries are witnessing unprecedented turbulence all around its border. They are one of the important countries in the current global security system and their security and stability are important for the global economy. The importance of the present study lies in its timing and focus. The relevance of this study also lies in the fact that Saudi-Qatar relations have a very important position in Saudi overall diplomatic relations, and it will be very important in the future. The study is also significant in terms of reformatting Saudi's foreign policy vis-a-vis Qatar. In addition, the concentration on the diplomatic, economic and strategic dimensions is significantly important because of the various diplomatic and strategic challenges facing both countries. There are certain issues Saudi alleged that Qatar supports Iran, special ties with the terrorist organization, using fake propaganda by the Aljazeera news channel, allowing Turkish military base in Qatar. These could potentially hamper the relationship between the two countries. So, because of all these facts and issues, this study is very important to understand the relationship between two countries and also will be useful to understand the GCC country's policy in the present era. This study is useful for future researchers, policymakers, and Administrators.

2. Diplomatic relations prior to the 20th century:

The British, who had sovereignty over the majority of the Persian Gulf at the time, did not acknowledge Qatar as an independent nation until 1868, when the two countries reached a maritime agreement. Around the middle of the 1800s, the House of Al Thani established a concentrated seat of authority under their control. However, prior to the signing of the agreement in 1868, control of Qatar often shifted between the House of Al Thani, the Saudis, and the House of Al Khalifa. This continued until the signing of the agreement in 1868 (Stapley, 2014).

Shortly before 1810, Rahmah ibn Jabir Al Jalhami, Qatar's then-temporary ruler, allied with the Saudis and gave them some control over the country in exchange for financial support. This included allowing the Saudis to levy taxes on Qataris and promoting the spread of Salafism as the state religion. In 1811, the Al Khalifa of Bahrain and the Sultan of Muscat destroyed Saudi defenses in Qatar and Bahrain. As a result, the Al Khalifa were able to assume suzerainty over Qatar, which the Saudis had previously held. Since the Saudis were

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engaged in a protracted conflict with the Ottoman Empire in the west during this period, they did not devote many troops to Qatar's defense, and they did not challenge the Al Khalifa immediately afterward. Instead, they allowed Qatar to continue to be ruled by Al Khalifa. Despite this, in the years that followed, there were Qatari tribes that would eventually swear allegiance to the Saudis because they favored their rule more than that of the Al Khalifa. Because of this, the Al Khalifa family decided in the 1830s to establish its own government officials in the Qatari Peninsula in order to investigate the possibility of cooperation between the Qataris and the Saudis.

3. Bilateral Cooperation:

Saudi Arabia-Qatar relations refer to the current and historical relationship between the Kingdom of Saudi and the State of Qatar. Prior to 2017, the two countries maintained cordial ties. Their relations in the socio-economic and political landscape are mentioned in the following-

a) Economic Cooperation:

Prior to the diplomatic issue in Qatar, up to 80 per cent of Qatar's food supply came from its neighbours in the Persian Gulf, the majority of which came from Saudi Arabia. The bulk of food was moved across the border on foot via the Salwa Border Crossing, located between both nations. This border crossing was blocked in June of 2017, and commerce between Qatar and the nations that blockaded it was prohibited at the same time. As a result, Qatar was cut off from its principal source of food supplies. In addition, Qatar could not receive imported medicines, of which between 50 and 60 percent was provided by Saudi Arabia and the other Arab nations located in the Persian Gulf. Through establishing trade lines with Turkey, Iran, Kuwait, and Oman, Qatar could get through the embargo (Adiyaman and Albay, 2017). In May of 2018, Qatar said that it would begin restricting the sale of goods that were imported from Saudi Arabia and the three other states that were blocking its access to the sea.

b) Military Relation:

At the time of the 2011 unrest in Bahrain, Qatar offered soldiers to the Peninsula Shield Force in an effort to put down the mostly Shiite protesters. In 2015, during the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen, Qatar sent 1,000 soldiers. Saudi Arabia cut off ties with Qatar in the Yemen war when the diplomatic crisis began in June 2017. In April of 2018, the Joint Gulf Shield 1 Drill was conducted in the Saudi city of Ras Al-Khair, and a Qatari contingent was authorized to attend. Previously, Qatar's security was dependent on Saudi Arabia. However, with establishing a Turkish military facility in Qatar in 2014, Qatar can now rely less on Saudi Arabia (Bahauddin, 2017).

c) Border Disputes:

An unreleased border treaty between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, made in 1965, was also a long-standing point of contention between the two nations. Saudi- Qatar ended 35 years of border disputes and signed an accord in 2001.

d) Political Relationship:

Until the late 20th century, when Emir bin Khalifa Al Thani assumed the throne, Qatar toed the Saudi line in its foreign policy. Both countries were staunch critics of the Khomeini Iran regime and Israel. Saudi and Qatar were two of six co-founders of the GCC in 1981. After the independence of Qatar, Saudi policy for Qatar was very friendly, and it tried to fully

ISSN- 2394-5125 VOL 7, ISSUE 09, 2020

support it. Qatar followed the Kingdom of Saudi lead on several issues, such as Saudi-led intervention in Bahrain, Yemen and recalling its ambassador to Tehran over the 2016 attack on the Saudi diplomatic mission in Iran.

Saudi Mediation of Bahrain-Qatar disputes: Saudi Arabia has a decades-long history of mediating disputes between Qatar and its neighbour Bahrain. The Saudis were responsible for mediating a dispute between the two over Zubarah's ownership and also helped the two reach an agreement over the Hawar island.

e) Political Tensions:

Ascension of Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani: From the time he came to power in 1995, Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani had the idea that the only way Qatar could feel safe was to stop being a vassal state of Saudi Arabia and start becoming a competitor of Saudi Arabia. Hamad bin Khalifa took control in a country that was better able to forge its own course than ever because of the vast money it had amassed through hydrocarbon exploitation. First and foremost, he established Al Jazeera in 1996 and established connections with Iran and Israel, both of which infuriated the Saudis (Fisher, 2017). Hamad bin Khalifa's attempted coup d'etat was thwarted in 1996. Saudi Arabian, Bahraini, Egyptian, and UAE government officials were reportedly the plot's architects, according to information gathered by Qatar.

Early-to-late 2000s: In early 2002, the United States struck a military deal with Qatar, culminating in the Al Udeid Air Base building. This came about due to Saudi Arabia's refusal to host U.S. soldiers as they trained for the Iraq War (Borger, 2002). As a result of the U.S. base, Qatar was assured security from any potential military operations by Saudi Arabia and its allies, which was a crucial step in the country's departure from Saudi hegemony (Fisher, 2017). Mohsen Al-Awaji, a religious activist in Saudi Arabia, was featured in an Al Jazeera program in which he voiced his opposition to his country's participation in Afghanistan and its stance on the Palestinian dilemma in July of 2002. In an effort to get Qatar to rein in its independence, Saudi Arabia recalled its ambassador from Doha from 2002 to 2008. The overall result of this strategy was a failure (Roberts, 2017).

2014 Saudi–Qatari rift: In March 2014, the GCC met, and after the meeting, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain declared that their respective embassies in Qatar would be recalled. Since Qatar has supported Islamist organizations like the Muslim Brotherhood, this has happened. Some economists believe that the dispute between Saudi Arabia and Qatar in 2014 was the first visible political symptom of a rising economic competition between oil and natural gas producers, and that this conflict might "have significant and long-lasting ramifications" outside the Middle East and North Africa region (Firzli, 2014).

2017-19 Qatar diplomatic crisis: Saudi Arabia formally severed relations with Qatar on June 5, 2017. The Saudi government has severed diplomatic ties with Qatar over what it calls the country's "embrace of various terrorist and sectarian groups aimed at destabilizing the region," such as the Muslim Brotherhood, al-Qaida, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, and groups supported by Iran in the city of Qatif in the Kingdom's Eastern Province. Islam Hassan contends: "Beginning at the turn of the millennium and continuing into the present day, Qatar has pursued a policy of diplomatic independence that has sometimes run counter to Saudi Arabia's regional strategic objectives. Relations have been tense between the two countries for the last several years, especially since the Arab revolutions, due to Qatar's refusal to conform to Saudi foreign policy and its dealings with states and non-state groups

ISSN- 2394-5125 VOL 7, ISSUE 09, 2020

that the Saudis find objectionable. The hacking incident surrounding Qatar News Agency and the comments falsely ascribed to Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad have reignited tensions between the two countries. This occurred when Mohamed bin Nayef challenged Mohamed bin Salman for control of Saudi Arabia. During Trump's visit to Saudi Arabia, Mohamed bin Salman sought the U.S.'s approval for a military strike against Qatar. If successful, the move would boost bin Salman's standing at home and pave the way for his eventual ascension to power."

Some analysts have said that despite the strategic and economic power gap between the two countries, Doha may end out on top in the long run "to pay an incalculable price for defying geo-economic gravity for so long. Due to the Saudi-led boycott, Qatar has turned to more costly imports from Iran and Oman. However, this short-term solution is untenable, since Iran is also subject to different trade restrictions, and Qatar lacks the sophisticated naval infrastructure that might have helped it weather the storm" (Firzli, 2017).

Doha's talks to purchase the Russian-made air defense system prompted a threat of military action from Saudi Arabia, Doha's Gulf neighbour. Foreign Minister of Qatar Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani responded in an interview with a T.V. station, saying that this threat is an example of "impulsive behaviour" that is harmful to GCC stability. Saudi Arabia initially declared in early November 2019 that it would not be sending any teams to the 2019 Arabian Gulf Cup in Qatar. However, by late November 2019, the Kingdom has reversed course and said that it will be sending teams.

4) Saudi Qatar Conflict:

Historically, Saudi-Qatar ties have been tense, rivalries between these two gulf countries are not new. They have a long history of territorial disputes as well as political and personal differences. There are several bilateral, regional, and global issues hindering the onset of normal relations between the two neighbours and turns into crisis. These are-

A) ***The Regional Leadership Race in Crises***: the competition over regional leadership in crises could particularly see in three cases-

Syrian Crisis: Both countries are against the presence of the Syria regime, they do support two different opposition groups fighting the regime. While Saudi provided money and weapons to the Jaysh al Islam and Al Nusra group, Qatar supported its rival Faylaq al Rahman. The Saudi and Qatar support for Syrian rebels had their own geopolitical and geostrategic reason.

Egypt Crisis: While Saudi supported the military regime in Egypt, Qatar threw its support behind the Muslim Brotherhood (Morsi for President). The Al Sisi coup finalized the Islamic Brotherhood Govt. in Egypt.

Libya crisis: While Saudi supported Secular military leaders like Gen Khalifa Haftar, Qatar supported the Islamist group based on Mustafa.

Both sides see the great power politics in the region and therefore are trying to have a part in the overall formation of the future Middle East. The motivation and deep roots of the conflict come to the Arab Springs and the vacuum created after the decline of U.S. power in the Gulf led to the competition within the Gulf between Saudi and Qatar.

B) ***Personal Leadership Race:*** In the part of the World where politics is highly personalized, no wonder Qatar and Saudi. Competition of personal leadership, much of the current intra-GCC animosity, can be traced back to the personal acrimony and competition among the ruler to position itself as regional leaders of the Arabian

Peninsula. The rise of two young and assertive crown princes in Saudi Arabia MBS and UAE Mohd Zayed, both with an aspiration for regional hegemony has inevitably accelerated the collision course with young Emir of Qatar, Tamim bin Hamad. Tamim, who ascended to the throne in June 2013, shares the vision of his father, who sought hegemony and active on some of the most sensitive fronts in the broader in MENA.

C) ***Terrorism*:** Saudi Arabia said it decided to cut diplomatic ties due to Qatar's embrace of various terrorist and sectarian groups aimed at destabilizing the region including the Muslim Brotherhood, Al Qaida, Hamas and Hezbollah. Saudi alleged that Qatar supports these groups against the Saudi ideological difference with these groups.

D) ***Media-Rivalry*:** When Al Jazeera, a media organization based in Qatar, first went on air in 1996, it quickly established itself as a major player in the Arab media landscape. Many Middle Eastern countries viewed Al Jazeera with suspicion, and they all restricted their citizens' access to foreign media as a result. The network has, among other things, condemned the authorities of Arab nations, denounced Islamist and terrorist organizations, and offered interviews to Israeli government officials. The Saudi government views Al Jazeera as a propaganda outlet funded by the Qatari government that is actively working to destabilize the Middle East (Salem and Alam, 2021).

Saudi Arabia withdrew its ambassador from Qatar in 2002 primarily because of coverage on Al Jazeera of a peace deal between the governments of Saudi Arabia and Israel. In 2008, he was finally let back in. Starting off as a competitor to Al Jazeera, Saudi Arabia launched Al Arabiya in 2003. One of Al Jazeera's harshest detractors has been Al Arabiya (Salem and Alam, 2021). Due to the network's airing of inflammatory remarks made in interviews and aimed against the Persian Gulf monarchies, as well as its willingness to give a platform for Islamist organizations, Saudi Arabia cut down Al Jazeera's operations in the country during the 2014 Qatar-GCC conflict (Cockburn, 2014).

Saudi Arabia halted Al Jazeera's broadcasts at the start of the diplomatic crisis with Qatar in June 2017. Its headquarters were also closed, and access to its websites was restricted. After more than two weeks, the Saudi-led quartet issued their list of demands to Qatar, and one of them was that the government of Qatar shut down Al Jazeera and other media outlets linked with Qatar.

On Jun 13, 2017, shortly after the diplomatic crisis had begun—Saudi Arabia blocked the Qatari sports network beIN Sports. When it comes to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), beIN Sports is the exclusive broadcaster of several of the biggest European leagues. The government of Saudi Arabia has banned the network, citing "concern about the rights of its people and residents," without providing any more details. Several months later, a pirate channel dubbed beoutQ began airing beIN Sports' shows in Saudi Arabia. Qatar stated that the Saudi government was behind the plot and that beoutQ was established to undermine Qatar's influence and soft power (Fernholz, 2018). The diplomatic crisis between Qatar and Saudi led other countries to erupt in such a context in the region. Apart from that, some external factors pushed the emergence of the gulf crisis.

Iran as a Factor: During the Crisis, Qatar maintains relatively good relations with Iran to promote a regional of engagement with shitte Iran to secure the source of its wealth. They

ISSN- 2394-5125 VOL 7, ISSUE 09, 2020

share ownership of the South Pars/North Dome gas condensate field by far the World's largest natural gas field with significant geostrategic influence. The Saudis believe that Qatar is trying to put a delicate balance of power on the ground by allowing Iran to generate power in Qatar through economic, military and security measures. Qatar is doing anything extraordinary with Iran against Saudi. The Iranian presence in Qatar makes Saudi rulers nervous about the level of the Iranian influence right on their doorstep.

Turkey as a Factor: Turkey has good relations with Saudi Arabia and Qatar, but Riyadh has strong regional supremacy in the region and Turkey is a strong military power. Despite the good relations with three Sunni countries, Turkey set up a military base in Qatar before this crisis. Turkey has developed a warm relationship with Qatar over the past decade. They had developed working and cordial relation with Iran, and recognized Hamas as the legitimate representative but Saudi differs from both in these issues. The reason of Turkey's approach in Saudi Arabia-Qatar issue is first hegemony and second is ideology because Turkey and Saudi Arabia have different ideologies despite both belonging to the same Sunni domain. The economic factor in the region is also one of the reasons for frequent crisis creation in the west Asian region.

USA as a Factor: There is a widespread narrative that western power wants to divide and rule the Arab World where western profits from arms sales are noted. The USA will continue to be a major arms supplier to its Gulf partners, particularly, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Despite having a good relationship with Saudi Arabia refused to host U.S. troops preparing for the Iraq War in early 2002 then, the U.S. signed a military agreement with Qatar culminating in the opening of Al Udeid Air Base. This was an important phase in Qatar's pivot from Saudi influence since the U.S. base guaranteed Qatar's protection against any possible military interventions by Saudi Arabia and its allies. The internal divisions of U.S. policy likely prolonged the conflict. The recent campaign against Qatar followed shortly after U.S. President Donald Trump's spectacular visit to Riyadh, which seems to have led Saudi Arabia and the UAE to believe they would have American support against Qatar.

5) Conclusion:

At the end, it can be concluded that Qatar and the Saudi bloc disagree on several topics, including the broadcasting of Al Jazeera, which backs the Arab Spring, Qatar's comparatively excellent ties with Iran, Saudi Arabia's primary competitor, and Qatar's historical backing for the Muslim Brotherhood. Due to Saudi Arabia's longtime worry about the nation's ties with Iran and Iranian-backed terrorist organizations, the Kingdom portrays the dispute with Qatar as a subset of the Iran-Saudi Arabia proxy struggle. This is done in order to justify Saudi Arabia's treatment of the conflict with Qatar. Qatar, on the other hand, argues that the crisis is an effort by Saudi Arabia to regain the control it exercised over Qatar throughout the 20th century. The relationship between the two nations was positive before to the year 2017. When it came to foreign affairs questions, Qatar was mainly dependent on Saudi Arabia for assistance. Both countries were instrumental in establishing the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in the 1980s, which was established to ensure the security of Gulf monarchies. Before the diplomatic crisis, they had maintained good relations in socio-political and economic domains.

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