

The Crisis in Qatar

Yet another clumsy attempt by the Three Rogue States to weaken Iran

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First, a quick who's who

We will probably never find out what truly was discussed between Trump, the Saudis and the Israelis, but there is little doubt that the recent Saudi move against Qatar is the direct results of these negotiations. How do I know that? Because [Trump himself said so!](#) As I mentioned in a recent column, [Trump's catastrophic submission to the Neocons](#) and their policies have [left him stuck with the KSA \[Kingdom of Saudi Arabia\] and Israel](#), another two rogue states whose power and, frankly, mental sanity, are dwindling away by the minute.

While the KSA and Qatar have had their differences and problems in the past, this time around the magnitude of the crisis is much bigger than anything the past. This is a tentative and necessarily rough outline of who is supporting whom:

Supporting the Saudis (according to Wikipedia)	Supporting Qatar (according to me)
United Arab Emirates , Bahrain , Egypt , Maldives , Yemen (they mean the pro-Saudi regime in exile), Mauritania , Comoros , Libya (Tobruk government), Jordan , Chad , Djibouti , Senegal , United States , Gabon.	Turkey , Germany , Iran.

Questions, many questions

The situation is very fluid and all this might change soon, but do you notice something weird in the list above? Turkey and Germany are supporting Qatar even though the US is supporting the KSA. That's two major NATO member states taking a position against the USA.

Next, look at the list supporting the Saudis: except for the USA and Egypt they are all militarily irrelevant (and the Egyptians won't get militarily involved anyway). Not so for those opposing the Saudis, especially not Iran and Turkey. So if money is on the side of the Saudis, firepower is on the side of Qatar here.

Then, Gabon? Senegal? Since when are those two involved in Persian Gulf politics? Why are they taking sides in this faraway conflict? A quick look at the [10 conditions the Saudis demand that the Qataris fulfill](#) does not help us understand their involvement either:

1. Immediate severance of diplomatic relations with **Iran**,
2. Expulsion of all members of the **Palestinian** resistance movement **Hamas** from Qatar,
3. Freezing all bank accounts of **Hamas** members and refraining from any deal with them,
4. Expulsion of all Muslim Brotherhood members from Qatar,
5. Expulsion of anti-[P]GCC elements,
6. Ending support for 'terrorist organizations'
7. Stopping interference in Egyptian affairs,
8. Ceasing the broadcast of the Al Jazeera news channel,
9. Apologizing to all [Persian] Gulf governments for 'abuses' by Al Jazeera,
10. Pledging that it (Qatar) will not carry out any actions that contradict the policies of the [P]GCC and adhering to its charter.

The Saudis also handed over a list of individuals and organizations they want banned (see [here](#)).

Looking at these conditions it becomes pretty clear that Iran and the Palestinians (especially Hamas) are high on the list of demands. But why would Gabon or Senegal care about this?

More interestingly, why is ISRAEL not listed as a country supporting the KSA?

As always, the Israelis themselves are much more honest about their role in all this. Well, maybe they don't quite say "we done it" but they write articles like "[Five reasons why Israel should care about the Qatar crisis](#)" which lists all the reasons why the Israelis are delighted:

1. It hurts Hamas
2. It brings Israel closer to Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the Gulf
3. It shows US influence is back in the region
4. It delegitimizes terrorism
5. It bolsters Israel's hand in general and Israel's government in particular

That kind of honesty is quite refreshing, even if it is primarily for internal, Israeli, consumption. [Quick check with a Palestinian source](#) - yup, the Israelis are backing the KSA. This is hardly surprising, no matter how hard the western corporate media tries to not notice this.

What about the USA? Do they really benefit from this crisis?



Al Udeid Air Base (Source: Wikipedia)

The USA has what might possibly be the largest USAF base worldwide in Qatar, the [Al Udeid Air Base](#). Furthermore, the forward headquarters of [United States CENTCOM](#) are also located in Qatar. To say that these are crucial US infrastructures is an understatement – one could argue that these are the most important US military facilities anywhere in the world outside the United States. Thus one would logically conclude that the very last thing the US would want is any type of crisis or even tensions anywhere near such vital facilities yet it is quite clear that the Saudis and the Americans are acting in unison against Qatar. This makes no sense, right? Correct. But now that the US has embarked on a [futile policy of military escalation in Syria](#) it should come as no surprise that the two main US allies in the region are doing the same thing.

Besides, was there ever a time with the Trump Administration's policies in the Middle-East made any logical sense at all? During the election campaign they were, shall we say, 50/50 (excellent on ISIS, plain stupid about Iran). But ever since the January coup against Flynn and Trump's surrender to the Neocons all we have seen is one form of delusional stupidity after another.

Objectively, the crisis around Qatar is not good at all for the USA. But that does not mean that an Administration which has been taken over by hardcore ideologues is willing to accept this objective reality. What we have here is a very weak Administration running a rapidly weakening country desperately trying to prove that it still has a lot of weight to throw around. And if that is, indeed, the plan, it is a very bad one, one bound to fail and one which will result in a lot of unintended consequences.

Back to the real world

What we have here is a severe case of smoke and mirrors and what is really taking place is, yet again, a clumsy attempt by the Three Rogue States (USA, Saudi Arabia, Israel) to weaken Iran.

Of course, there are other contributing factors here, but the big deal, the core of the problem, is what I would call the rapidly growing "gravitational pull of Iran" and the corresponding "orbital decay" of the entire region closer and closer to Iran. And just to make things worse, the Three Rogue States are visibly and inexorably losing their influence over the region: the USA in Iraq and Syria, Israel in Lebanon and Saudi Arabia in Yemen – all three have embarked on military operations which ended up being abject failures and which, far from showing that these countries were powerful, showed how weak they really are. Even worse is the fact that Saudis are facing a severe economic crisis with no end in sight, while Qatar has become the richest country on the planet, mostly thanks to an immense gas field that Qatar shares with Iran.

It could appear that Qatar is not such a big threat to Saudi Arabia after all, being – unlike Iran – another Salafi country, but in reality this is very much part of the problem: over the past couple of decades the Qataris have felt their new wealth give them means completely out of proportion with their physical size: not only did they create the most influential media empire of the Middle-East, al-Jazeera, but they even embarked on a foreign policy of their own which made them key players in the crises in Libya, Egypt and Syria. And yes, Qatar had become a prime supporter of terrorism, but so are the United States, Saudi Arabia or Israel, so that is just a hollow pretext. The real Qatari 'crime' was to refuse, on purely pragmatic reasons, to join into the massive anti-Iranian campaign imposed on the region by

Saudi Arabia and Israel. Unlike the long list of countries which had to voice their support for the Saudi position, the Qataris had the means to simply say “no” and chart its own course.

What the Saudis now are hoping for is that Qatar will yield to the threats and that the Saudi-lead coalition will prevail without having a “hot” war against Qatar. How likely they are to achieve this result is anyone’s guess, but I am personally rather dubious (more about this later).

What about Russia in all that?

The Russians and the Qataris have butted heads many times over, especially over Syria and Libya where Qatar played an extremely toxic role in being the prime financiers of various takfiri terrorist groups. Furthermore, Qatar is Russia’s number one competitor in many LNG (liquefied natural gas) markets. There were also other crises between the two countries, including what appears to be a [Russian assassination of the Chechen terrorist Leader Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev](#) and the subsequent torture and trial of two Russian Embassy employees accused of being involved in the assassination (they were sentenced to life in prison and eventually sent back to Russia). Still, the Russians and the Qataris are eminently pragmatic peoples and the two countries mostly maintained a cordial, if careful, relationship which even included some joint economic ventures.

It is highly unlikely that Russia will intervene directly in this crisis unless, of course, Iran is directly attacked. The good news is that such a direct attack on Iran is unlikely as none of the Three Rogue States really have any stomach to take on Iran (and Hezbollah). What Russia will do is use her soft power, [political](#) and [economic](#), to slowly try to reel Qatar into the Russian orbit according to the semi-official strategy of the Russian Foreign Ministry which is to “*turn enemies into neutrals, neutrals into friends, friends into allies*”. Just like with Turkey, the Russians will gladly help, especially since they know that this help will buy them some very precious influence in the region.

Iran, the real target of it all



Members of Iranian forces take position during an attack on the Iranian parliament in central Tehran, Iran, June 7, 2017. Omid Vahabzadeh/TIMA

The Iranians are now openly saying that [the recent terrorist attack in Tehran was ordered by Saudi Arabia](#). Technically speaking, that means that [Iran is now at war](#). In reality, of course,

as the real local superpower, Iran is acting with [calm and restraint](#): the Iranians fully understand that this latest terrorist attack is a sign of weakness, if not desperation, and that the best reaction to it is to act the same way the Russians reacted to the bombings in Saint Petersburg: stay focused, calm and determined. Just like the Russians, the Iranians have now also offered to send food to Qatar but it is unlikely that they will intervene militarily unless the Saudis really go crazy. Besides, with [Turkish forces soon deployed in Qatar](#), the Iranians have no real need for any displays of military might. I would argue that the simple fact that neither the USA nor Israel have dared to directly attack Iran since 1988 (since [shooting down by the US Navy of the Iran Air Flight 655 Airbus](#)) is the best proof of the real Iranian military power.

So where are we heading?

That is truly impossible to predict, if only because the actions of the Three Rogue States can hardly be described as “rational”. Still, assuming nobody goes crazy, my personal feeling is that Qatar will prevail and that the latest Saudi attempt to prove how powerful the Kingdom still is will fail, just like all the previous ones (in Bahrain 2011, Syria 2012 or Yemen 2015). Time is also not on the side of the Saudis. As for the Qataris, they have already clearly indicated that they are [unwilling to surrender](#) and that [they will fight](#). The Saudis have already taken the outrageous decision to impose a blockade of a fellow Muslim country during the holy month of Ramadan. Will they really now further escalate and commit an act of aggression against a fellow Muslim country during that month? They might, but it is hard to believe that even they could be that ignorant of the Muslim public opinion. But if they don't, then their operation will lose a lot of momentum while the Qataris will be given time to prepare politically, economically, socially and militarily. Qatar might be small, and the Qataris themselves not very numerous, but their immense pockets allow them to quickly line up any amount of suppliers and contractors willing to help them out. This is case where the famous “market forces” will act to Qatar's advantage.

The [Qatari Foreign Minister is expected in Moscow on Saturday](#) and it is pretty obvious what the talks will be about: while Russia will not put all her political weight to support the Qataris, the Kremlin might accept becoming a mediator between the KSA and Qatar. If that happens, that would be the ultimate irony: the main outcome of the Saudi-Israeli-US operation will make Russia an even more influential player in the region. As for Qatar itself, the outcome of this crisis will probably articulate itself along Nietzschean lines: *“That which does not kill us, makes us stronger.”*

Conclusion

I see this latest crisis as yet another desperate attempt by the Three Rogue States to prove that they are still the biggest and baddest guys on the block and, just like the previous ones, I think that it will fail. For example, I just don't see the Qataris shutting down al-Jazeera, one of their most powerful “weapons”. Nor do I see them breaking all diplomatic relations with Iran as those two states are joined at the hip by [the immense South Pars gas condensate field](#). The immense wealth of the Qataris also means that they have very powerful supporters worldwide who right now, as I write these lines, are probably on the phone making calls to very influential people and indicating to them in no unclear terms that Qatar is not to be messed with.

If anything this crisis will only serve to push Qatar further into the warm embrace of other countries, including Russia and Iran, and it will further weaken the Saudis.

The Three Rogue States have the same problem: their military capability to threaten, bully or punish is rapidly eroding and fewer and fewer countries out there fear them. Their biggest mistake is that instead of trying to adapt their policies to this new reality, they always chose to double-down over and over again even though they fail each time, making them look even weaker and their initial predicament even worse. This is a very dangerous downward spiral and yet the Three Rogue States seem unable to devise any other policy.

I will end this column by comparing what Presidents Putin and Trump are doing these days as I find this comparison highly symbolic of the new era we are living in:

Trump, after bombing a few “technicals” (4x4 trucks with a machine gun) and trucks in Syria, the proceeded to tweet that Comey was a liar and a leaker.



The Russian version of the G8: the SCO
(Source: The Unz Review)

As for Putin, he participated the latest meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) which welcomed both Pakistan and India as full members. **The SCO now represents over half of all the people living on our planet and one quarter of the world’s GDP.** You can think of it as the “other G8”, or the “G8 that matters”.

I submit that this quick comparison of agenda really says It all.

UPDATE1: Secretary of State Rex Tillerson is [now telling the Saudis to ‘cool it’](#). The Saudi-Israeli plan is beginning to collapse.

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