

Qatar as Mediator Needed a Mediator

Mohamed Tirab, PhD

Salisbury University
USA

Introduction

Qatar born as a small country with big ambitions. The political and social changes occurred in the Middle East and North African countries during the Arab spring, revealed how small countries with those big ambitions can be more active, targeting the front seat on the international stage, attempting to play a main role in the global political scene.

Muslim Brotherhood Organization tried to hijack the uprising, especially in Egypt, where the organization historically founded, and Qatari rulers have very strong ties to this Organization. The political changes have their impact to all Arab countries, as well as Gulf rich monarchs. Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), as a (Gulf Copious Club GCC), does not agree with the Qatari path of ideological ties, and political ambitions. This path considered by other members of the GCC, especially the Gulf troika Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and United Arab Emirates, as a security threat. At the same time, as Qatar is expanding its influence as a regional superpower and mediator, Saudi Arabia was suspiciously observing the scene, and waited for the momentum, as Saudi used to lead and play this role exclusively before Qatar ascended the stage.

Saudi Arabia started a diplomatic and political campaign to let Qatar come down and direct its foreign policy according to GCC goals. The conflict escalated and the Gulf troika announced the withdrawal of their ambassadors from Qatar. Then Qatar was in political, diplomatic and economic regional isolation.

Kuwaiti intervened in the conflict as a mediator. Kuwait played a very significant and positive role in stopping the defragmentation within the GCC countries. The resolved dispute played role in stabilization in the region. Qatar the country with ambitions which used all possible means to get to the front seat in the international scene, needed a mediator to find a way to get out of the regional isolation.

Geopolitical Location; Qatar Small Territory Big Ambitions

Qatar is a small country in the east part of the Arabian Peninsula, and Qatar itself is a peninsula bordered by Saudi Arabia- the biggest in the territory, country on the Arabian Peninsula-and bordering the Persian Gulf¹, Qatar also has maritime and land borders with the kingdom of Bahrain and United Arab Emirates a well. Qatar occupies 11,850 square kilometers, and gained independence in 1971 from Britain. The modern history of Qatar started with Al Thani's family, who ruling this small state since 1878², and forming a very modern state.

Geopolitically Qatar surrounded by many challenges, Iran and the concern about the foreign energy policy and diplomatic relations with Israel, and Qatari rulers believe in the necessity of being protected from their biggest neighbor Saudi Arabia, but both countries strongly developed their relations with the United States. Despite those geopolitical factors, but Qatar is investing very much in efforts in getting the front seat at the international stage. To reach that goal Qatar government is steering and orienting its potential economic and media machine, supporting rebellions or to bring them to the negotiations, all that only for the main target, and supporting the goal of getting the front seat. The US protection of Qatar gives the confidence to concentrate the efforts to be independent from Saudi kingdom's influence. That way Qatari foreign policy regarding this issue based on creating distance from the oil market, making the gas the core investment product, becoming the world biggest liquefied natural gas exporter.

¹ Gulf Countries are very sensitive with naming the Gulf as Persian, in all Arabic literature they call Arabic Gulf.

² Information from official of Qatar Government at : <http://www.moi.gov.qa/site/english/aboutQatar/>

Qatar has signed a Defense Cooperation Agreement in 1991 with the United States, after withdrawing its military base in Saudi Arabia³, and they went further in cooperating with the west, and their support to NATO establishing the non-fly zone in Libya, and supporting the rebellions during war in 2011, Taking that in consideration since 2007, we can find that in most regional conflicts, in Africa or in Arab countries, Qatar has involved in it as a mediator. Just like conflicts in Yemen, between the government and Houthi rebel groups, then conflict between Djibouti and Eritrea, and Darfur talks of Sudan in Doha. But Qatar also has been involved in other countries supporting one conflicting party against another, just like the situation in Egypt, when they supported Mursi Government, who represented the Muslim brotherhood, also their support to Syrian rebellions against the Assad regime. Except mediation Qatar also using an open door policy as another tool to reach the goal, by putting conflicting political actors in the region and hosting them at one, just like to host Israel's Trade Office, and providing a refuge to Hamas leaders, or facilitate citizenship to Islamist leaders such as Yusuf Alqaradawi of Egypt, and leader of the international movement of the Muslim brotherhood organization. Then, using their huge media machine, the well-known Aljazeera TV channel, in supporting those tactics and as a propaganda coverage for their strategy to get the goal of the front seat.

Qatar and Saudi Arabia, Conflict for Leadership Seat

As Qatar expands its influence as a regional superpower and mediator, Saudi Arabia was observing – for a while – the situation very carefully, as Saudi used to lead and play this role exclusively before Qatar ascended the stage. Saudi still consider themselves as a political superpower as a minimum in the Arabian Peninsula, while looking suspiciously to growing Qatari power. Qatar involvement in Libyan conflict, by providing direct military support to rebellions against Qaddafi during the uprising in 2011, was a turning point in shifting the Qatari image rapidly from strong mediator to leading Arab superpower.

Political Islamism and Radicalism

Saudi Arabia founded on a base of a coalition of Wahhabism and Saud royal family, to rule the country base on their agreement in the early 20th of twenty's century. At the same time we could find the Wahhabism domination in Qatar social life. But life in Qatar more liberal than in neighboring Saudi Kingdom, as it is difficult to see regular women's face in Saudi Arabian, but you can see Shaikh Mozah, the mother of the ruler, and former first lady, participating in most social and political activities inside Qatar or aboard. Both countries concerning about radical Islamic extremism and terrorism, but Saudi Arabia has a great concern about political Islamism represented in the Muslim Brotherhood International Organization, Saudi consider Muslim Brotherhood Organization a political organization with political ambitions to rule all Muslim countries and the Gulf region as well,

Arab spring, and Muslim Brotherhood

Historically, Egypt is the center of the political Arab world, at the same time Egypt to Saudi Arabia is a cornerstone in its hidden conflict and political war with Iran. Since the Arab spring and with the rise of the Muslim brotherhood, especially in Egypt, Qatar started support them politically, financially, and through its powerful media's machine. For long time Qatar was a proponent and strong supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood, it prolonged to decades, and this is a very strong relationship. Qatar was the biggest supporter to the former president Mohamed Mursi of Egypt, but Saudi and other Arab countries were in their position of considering Muslim brotherhood is an organization with expansionist political goals. For Saudi and other countries in its group, Qatar is a country at the wrong page of the history, by supporting Muslim brotherhood government in Egypt, hosting their godfather and leader Alqaradawi in Doha, and also Saudi suspected Qatar – together with Iran- in involvement in Saudi border's issues with Yemeni Houthi.

Saudi Arabia is not the only Gulf country which has reservation towards the Muslim Brotherhood expansion, in particular in Gulf countries. Some other GCC members are sharing Saudi Arabia the serious concern about it, the closest countries to Saudi Arabia regarding this issue, United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain, Gulf media was been witness of heavy crackdown on so called sleeper Muslim Brotherhood's cells in United Arab Emirates, with security links to Saudi and Bahraini cells, at the same time the royal families' ties between these three Monarchs are very strong, That is why any security concern could be touching even the social structure.

³ This could be one of tension's sources between Qatar and Saudi Kingdom

GCC and Security Concerns

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) founded in 1981, it brings together the six Gulf monarchs, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates. The organization was established in response to the Iranian threat, and the consequences of the Iraq- Iran war. Coordination, integration, and cooperation are the main declared goals. Though the Security issue was among all those mentioned main goals, and core concern⁴. Saudi Arabia has more security concerns than other five GCC members, especially the kingdom is bordering with hot spots, Iraq from the north east, Yemen from the south and Iran through the Persian Gulf, and Saudi Arabia is the only country with both the Red Sea and Persian Gulf. That is the reason of emphasizing this issue of higher rank official in Saudi Arabia, as Foreign Minister Saud Al Faisal called in his speech delivered during the 2004th Gulf dialogue in Bahrain's capital Manama, describing the need "for a collective effort aimed at developing a new more solid framework for Gulf security" Saudis see their security and the Gulf security as well in prosperous Yemen, stable Iraq, and good friendship with Iran⁵. The ruling families and political leaders in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and United Arab Emirates has a very serious concern about the role of Qatar in the Muslim Brotherhood expansion in their countries, the leaders of those monarchs started to come together as one front to resist the Qatari Muslim Brotherhood's coalition. The tension between Saudi Arabia and Qatar lets back to the early years of the twenty's century in 1913, when King Abdul Aziz Al Saud⁶, occupied Qatar (before the foundation of Saudi Arabia)⁷ also in 1990 Saudi Arabia tried to change the regime in Qatar, by undermining Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa, the former ruler⁸, that is why Saudi Arabia for Qatar is real threat more than Iran even.

Qatari support to the Muslim brotherhood is very obvious, as well as Qatar former ruler Sheikh Hamad was the first leader to visit Egypt after Mursi's election, offering Mursi's government eight billion dollars as a financial support. After overthrow of the Muslim brotherhood government led by Mursi, new Egyptian leaders declare Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization, and they withdrew their ambassador from Qatar⁹. The organization also labeled as a terrorist organization in Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates.

Saudi Arabia started a diplomatic and political campaign to let Qatar come down and direct its foreign policy, according to GCC goals, but Qatari rulers an officially declared that they have their independent foreign policy, and have not shown an indication of taking any backward steps. Saudi decided to continue the pressure on Qatar, till Qatari revise their policy. They called for urgent summit in Saudi capital Riyadh, the ministers of foreign affairs came out with a declaration asking Qatar to fulfill its commitment not to interfere in any internal affair of fellow GCC country, and do not support organizations and individuals jeopardizing security and stability, and not harbor hostile media. Saudi Arabia together with Bahrain and United Arab Emirates claimed that they tried their best with Qatar to get back to the GCC consensus, and stay in the main Gulf political stream toward the regional and the Gulf issues, in particular to withdraw its support for the Muslim Brotherhood. But no compromising steps had been taken by Qatar, then on march 5th 2014 the Gulf troika (Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and United Arab Emirates) they announced the withdrawal of their ambassadors from Qatar¹⁰. That was the major crisis ever between the members of the GCC, since it has been founded and a huge challenge. That was one of the Arab spring uprising consequences, though the fragmentation is not an expectable matter in the GCC inter relationship.

⁴Christian Koch in his article The GCC as a Regional Security Organization, published in Konrad- Adenauer- Stiftung KAS International Reports, Berlin Nov.2010. Page 24

⁵ Ibid

⁶King Abdul Aziz Al Saud, is the founder of Saudi Arabia kingdom in 1932, united the separate regions of Hejaz, Nejd, Al-Hasa and Asir into a single state (monarch)

⁷Omar Ali in his article: Will the US side with Saudi or Qatar in the Great Gulf Civil War? Published at Informed Comment website: <http://www.juancole.com/2014/03/saudi-qatar-civil.html>

⁸ Dr. Madawi Alrasheed in her Article; Saudi Qatar tensions divide GCC. Published at Al-monitor website: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/03/saudi-qatar-gcc-tensions-islamist.html#>

⁹Aljazeera famous Qatari Media Center at their website :<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2014/03/will-gcc-survive-qatar-saudi-rivalry-201431864034267256.html>

¹⁰ Ibid

Qatar, a Mediator who Needs Mediator

The biggest and the oldest group of the Muslim Brotherhood organization in the GCC, is in Kuwait, but they dealt with maneuver and astuteness in their relationship with their main body in Egypt in the early ninety's during Saddam's invasion, when the Egyptian main body of Muslim Brotherhood supported Saddam, the Kuwaiti Muslim brotherhood declared in a tactical way their separation from the main body in Egypt, and they emphasized that they are an independent Islamic (constitutional) movement. But they are still a big undercover power in Kuwait. May be that is why the position of Kuwait during the conflict, was not very extreme just as the Troika (KSA, Bahrain, UAE), in their political position and diplomatic actions, by withdrawn their ambassadors. Kuwait initiated mediator's role player. The Kuwaiti ruler – for all conflicted parties- is the most qualified leader through the GCC rulers, to be acted as a mediator and assume such important role.

Despite the fact that differences in those societies which very collective, are usually customarily resolved behind closed doors, the GCC countries as a paradigm for the collectivist societies, give obvious explanation for the Kuwaiti intervention in the conflict as a mediator, two factors should be considering, first is the fact that Kuwaiti ruler 84-year-old a veteran diplomat¹¹ is elder so more respect to him, secondly the number of Muslim brotherhood in Kuwait – as mentioned before- is the biggest in the GCC, and oldest, that is why the Kuwaiti leader could be the ideal mediator for this conflict, and all parties welcomed that very much.

As Christopher Moore mentioned talking about the influence and power in the negotiation and mediation process, that Mediators are often involved in a direct way with the parties of the conflict in identification, management, and help parties, in selecting the most effective influence strategies, with purpose of reaching agreement. He emphasized also, that the mediator could use a variable means of influence with the aim of changing the dynamics of the negotiations. He mentioned three means:

- 1- The management of parties' power and influence.
- 2-Means to influence one or more disputing party (directly or indirectly)
- 3-Utilization of Input, concerns, or pressure of party not part of conflict¹².

In this mediation process the veteran diplomat Kuwaiti ruler, very successfully manage all those three broad means of influence and power, to reach the agreement. Through the negotiation process, all parties have their own concerns, the biggest concern for the GCC troika was the role of Qatar in supporting the Muslim brotherhood organization, and Qatar concerned about mostly about Saudi antipathy toward their country. Qatar came down to the troika's demands, and agreed to the long list of demands raised by the GCC's troika, if really Qatar fully complies them, so that will be a heavy blow to the Muslim Brotherhood Organization in general, and to their leaderships who locating in Qatar, in particular their Godfather sheikh Yusuf Al-Qaradawi¹³. The Gulf troika is very skeptical whether Qatar will make good on its promises. In case if Qatar fulfills those strict conditions of the agreement, it will be the reversal of a decade's worth of hard and at the same time very heavy efforts to create a web of relations, dogmatic influence among the middle East, North Africa, and Islamic world in general¹⁴. One of the main demands is directly related to the core security concern of the GCC that Qatar should expel Muslim Brotherhood members, who currently living in Doha, the document dos haven't said specifically the Egyptian Muslim brotherhood, but they are obviously included. Another important demand of the GCC troika is for Qatar to rein in media outlets, which became a Muslim Brotherhood's propaganda and base for attacking and criticizing the GCC. The GCC troika believes that key part of the deal with Qatari party should bring the end to Qatari naturalization of other Gulf citizens of Islamic oppositional figures and groups. The troika believes that Qatar supports those groups politically and financially as well.

¹¹ Kuwaiti ruler Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah, was foreign minister for four decades.

¹² Christopher W. Moore, in his book: *The Mediation Process. Practical Strategies for Resolving Conflict*. Jossey- Bass.2003 3rd Edition p.379

¹³ Youssef al-Qaradawi, an Egyptian-born cleric, Qatari citizen based in Qatar since 1962

¹⁴ Yasser Al-Zayyat in his article: *Argument making Qatar an Offer It Can't Refuse Saudi Arabia is setting new terms in the Gulf's relationship with its wayward neighbor. But will Doha bridle at the deal?* Published at foreignpolicy.com
: http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/04/22/making_qatar_an_offer_it_cant_refuse_saudi_arabia_gulf_diplomacy

Conclusion

It seemed to be a big defragmentation in that small organization the GCC, that's why the expression of (strict implementation) was highlighted strictly in the agreement signed in Saudi capital Riyadh, when the new ruler of Qatar arrived there to meet the Saudi king and signed the agreement, and again it shows the notion of collective society relation's regulation. Kuwait played a very significant and positive role in stopping the defragmentation within the GCC countries. The resolved dispute played role in stabilization in the region. Prior to Kuwaiti involvement in the conflict, and facilitating the mediation, the dispute was rapidly escalated, as mentioned the troika withdrew their ambassadors, as a diplomatic jest of anger and protestation, and the troika had planned to impose sanctions against Qatar, and that could be beyond the diplomatic jests.

The mediation arranged by Kuwaiti ruler succeed to rectify the relations between Qatar and the GCC troika in general, but it is very important for the Saudi Arabia. The weight of the biggest GCC state- Saudi Arabia showed in the negotiation process, since they put a lot of pressure on Qatar. It is not very clear if Qatar, the state which did all possible to possess that front seat at the international relations' stage, could not need any more mediator to solve its fundamental regional conflicts with the nearest neighboring countries. It is not too clear, whether the Kuwaiti mediation represents a stable agreement and real reconciliation between the GCC troika and Qatar. The recent conflict between the GCC states (the GCC troika vs. Qatar) founds an appropriateness to recalibrate their long term strategies, according to pragmatic view to regional issues, their common security, and to share the decisions through their own GCC's mechanisms. On the other hand it looks like Qatar will move closer towards Saudi Arabia, and will reduce the links and the relations with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. These demands to which Qatar totally agreed, used to be the same demands had been rejected by Doha, before the Troika's ambassadors' withdrawal. Before this conflict Qatar classified as the country with a huge ambition to find a front seat in the international arena, but after a while has been needing a mediator, to get back its place in the regional set, as a GCC system.