

# The Impact of the GCC Boycott On Qatar Foreign Policy

---

Sri Wahyuni<sup>1</sup>, Shireen Safa Bawa Baharuddin<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

*Seeing peace in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) seems to be illusion. The <sup>3</sup>rampant physical and ideological clashes fill up the news headline daily. The diplomatic crisis among Arab countries in particular Qatar and its neighbors is rooted since 1970 over borders dispute, and so then the Arab Spring phenomenon came up in addition to Qatar's Foreign Policy in which claimed by the opponent neighbor countries as a risk and security threat. The tension extends to the level of breaking off diplomatic relation between Qatar and UEA and its allies on 5th June 2017. The embargo prevailing on Qatar has profound significant impact in many aspects of both of Qatar and the GCC countries. Subsequent consequences and aftermath has been facing for both. The following pages will be outlining on foreign policy, precisely Qatar foreign policy after the boycott imposed by the GCC countries in 2017. Defining the term foreign policy and its function in international order can be found in the introduction part. Chapter one of the contents is the background of the GCC boycott on Qatar and what does the embargo mean for the GCC countries as well as Qatar. The impact of the blockade on Qatar foreign policy will be outlining in chapter two following with the conclusion of the topic discussed in the remaining pages.*

**Key words: Boycott, Qatar, Foreign Policy**

## Introduction

Foreign policy is an essential part of a state to determine its position among other states in the global order. Through foreign policy, a state tries to represent itself in international community which covers all aspects such as military, economy, education, and many others. Moreover, Foreign policy holds the key to pursue a state's goals through enhancing its tactic and strategies.

According to (Calvert, 1986), Foreign Policy can be understood as decisions and activities which largely concern relations between one state and the others. (Rosenau, 1968) defines Foreign Policy as leading authority on the theory of

---

<sup>1</sup> Master student of Human Science in Political Science, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), wachyoua@gmail.com - +60108315903

<sup>2</sup> Shireen Safa Bawa Baharuddin, Student of Human Science in Political Science, International Islamic University Malaysia, Shireensafa0@gmail.com - +60146703225



international relations and foreign policy, systematic decision-making by constitutionally authorized officials of individual states.

Foreign policy connotes as a set of strategies and tactics of state to pursue its various interests, objectives and goals and so then determine its actions in the international arena. It refers to how the sovereign state behaves through its policies and decisions towards other states in the international system. It is part of a crucial stage that has to be taken and imposed by a state.

However, achieving a state's agendas and objectives in the international arena with self-reliance is not possible. Therefore, Foreign policy comes with its instruments to ensure that a state's goals are going on the right track. Moreover, in the international system when each state is envying towards its self-interests, Foreign policy again plays a crucial part of determining its stance and position among other states. The process of making decisions and implementing them as a set of foreign policy requires intricate process of diplomacy, observation and critical analysis.

Seeing peace in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) seems to be illusion. The rampant physical and ideological clashes fill up the news headline daily. The diplomatic crisis among Arab countries in particular Qatar and its neighbors is rooted since 1970 over borders dispute, and so then the Arab Spring phenomenon came up in addition to Qatar's Foreign Policy in which claimed by the opponent neighbor countries as a risk and security threat. The tension extends to the level of breaking off diplomatic relation between Qatar and UEA and its allies on 5th June 2017. The embargo prevailing on Qatar has profound significant impact in many aspects of both of Qatar and the GCC countries. Subsequent consequences and aftermath has been facing for both.

The following pages will be outlining on foreign policy, precisely Qatar foreign policy after the boycott imposed by the GCC countries in 2017. Defining the term foreign policy and its function in international order can be found in the introduction part. Chapter one of the content is the background of the GCC boycott on Qatar and what does the embargo mean for the GCC countries as well as Qatar.

The impact of the blockade on Qatar foreign policy will be outlining in chapter two. The remaining pages will be presenting the conclusion of the topic discussed.

### **Conceptual Analysis**

#### **Behind Qatar Diplomatic Crisis**

The conflict between Qatar and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) especially the UAE - Saudi Arabia allies in long term due to the crisis between the Saudi-led camp and the government of Qatar accused on Doha funding violent Islamist group and political support. The UAE-Saudi allies feel threatened by the potential influx of secretive organizations, extreme religious attitudes and political activism. Qatar independent foreign policy and willingness to challenge Saudi leadership has consistently weakened the notion of a “Sunni Arab camp”. Furthermore, Al-Jazeera, the media outlet in Qatar where they use to influence the Muslim Brotherhood through the Arab world and criticize leaders in Riyadh, Cairo and Abu Dhabi has long been a serious thorn in regional relations. Based on article (Philip Gordon, Amos Yadlin and Ari Heisten) for instance, in 2002 Qatar hostile media coverage of the Saudi government led Riyadh to recall its ambassador from Doha for six years. In 2014, Saudi Arabia along with UAE and Bahrain response to criticism by Qatar-based and Muslim Brotherhood affiliated Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi of the Egyptian and UAE governments.

Second, the tension over Doha accommodating stance toward Iran. It mostly threatens to the security of the other Sunni-majority states. Over the pass years, the Qataris have taken steps such as voting against a UNSC resolution calling Iran to halt its nuclear enrichment program and signing a bilateral counterterrorism agreement with Iran. Recently, the Emir of Qatar congratulated Iran President, Hassan Rouhani on his winning in reelection. Based on article (Philip Gordon, Amos Yadlin and Ari Heisten) the government of Qatar irritated many of its Gulf allies in April 2017 by authorizing the payment of \$700 million to Iran and Kata'ib al-Hezbollah, the Iranian –backed Shia militia in Iraq, in exchange for the freedom of members of Qatar royal family taken captive in Iraq.

Third, President of the United States (US) Donald Trump visit to Saudi Arabia in his first foreign visit which in Riyadh, Abu Dhabi and Cairo. These three regions give a green signal to punish Qatar for its support of Islamist groups. President of US expressed an unqualified commitment to Riyadh and its allies in the region. The focus is on containing Iran and fighting against radical Islam, signaling there would be no fallout from the US if they took steps to push Qatar back into line. Moreover, Trump even took drastic decision on Twitter for bringing about the regional blockade of Qatar and denounced Doha leaders as “high-level funders of terrorism.” Thus, the Saudi-led move an opportunity to the GCC partners.

Lastly, the competition among most of the Sunni monarchies, Iran and the Islamists such as in Syria and Iran. Rather than problem with those opposed both the Assad regime and ISIS and creating a cohesive moderate opposition force, the problem between Saudi Arabia and Qatar drove them to support different and competing groups in Syria. For example, based on article (Philip Gordon, Amos Yadlin and Ari Heisten) in the area surrounding Damascus, Riyadh funneled money and weapons to Jaysh al-Islam while Qatar supported its rival Faylaq al-Rahman. Furthermore, the struggle between Doha and Riyadh in greater instability which such as in Egypt based on article (Philip Gordon, Amos Yadlin and Ari Heisten) the Saudis support the traditional military-political establishment while Qatar support the Muslim Brotherhood and its political organ, the Freedom and Justice Party. The conflict became more tension and serious where in Libya, the Saudis and Emiratis support secular military leaders such as General Khalifa Hifter while the Qataris backed Islamist groups based in Mistrata where by the Libyan civil war and creating an environment conducive to the growth of the Islamic State.

With the causes between GCC states and Qatar, the Qatari are most affected in terms of politically, socially and economically. In logistical implications where almost 80% of Qatar food requirements come from Gulf Arab neighbors and only 1% being produces domestically and even imports from the Gulf states usually crossing the land border with Saudi Arabia. Emirates Post of the UAE, halted postal services to Qatar in June 2017. After the cutting of the relations, local reports indicated residents swarmed grocery stores in hopes of stockpiling food. Mostly,

the food delivery trucks were idled along the Saudi-Qatar border. For instance, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have stopped exporting sugar to the Qatar.

Next, the routes flights also are affected. Emirates suspended flight service to Qatar. Meanwhile, Gulf Air, Egypt Air, FlyDubai, Air Arabia, Saudi Arabian Airlines, Etihad Airlines and Royal Air Maroc suspended flights to and from Qatar. Not that only, the UAE, Bahrain, Egypt and Saudi Arabia banning overflights by aircraft registered in Qatar which is (A7). Qatar Airways also suspended the flight operation to Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain in the response. Thus, Qatar has rerouted flights to Africa and Europe, paying a “hefty” overflight fee for each flight. Due to blockade of Qatar Airways, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt and Oman has taken action that travelers from or to Doha mostly through Iranian airspace, while still allowing Qatar passport holders to book flights. Based on article (2017 Qatar diplomatic crisis), the travel embargo has had a significant impact on foreign nationals living and working in Qatar, with about 100000 Egyptians and citizens from other countries stranded there, unable to book direct flights or obtain travel documents for their return. Moreover, not only the airspace but also sea, air and land travel. This is where the private jet travel is also affected. The countries that cut diplomatic ties with Qatar need to make a technical stop in a third country. Aircraft that registered in Qatar cannot fly to the countries that have been cut diplomatic ties and Qatar also cannot fly to the countries also. Egypt, the UAE and Saudi Arabia banned sea and air travel to and from Qatar.

Furthermore, Qatar imports estimated 40% of food overland through Saudi Arabia. The rest shipping routes mostly through the UAE ports of Dubai and Fujairah to refuel. With the imposed sanctions by Gulf States to Qatar, the UAE banned Qatar-flagged ships at Fujairah. Also it banned vessels from Qatar which from the port and at the port from sailing directly to Qatar.

Last but not least, is the media ban where Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Bahrain and the UAE banned the access to Qatari news agencies, including the famous Arab news outlet, Al-Jazeera. Al-Jazeera Network office has been shut down in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, whoever that wear (t-shirt) that support Qatar companies will be arrested. In June 2017, the UAE also initially banned sport channel which is beIN

Sports channels. However, a month later, the UAE restored normal access to beIN Sports channel via its local telecom providers. There is no official reason were given for the restoration, but the beIN Sports channels aired various significant sports competition such as Prime League, La Liga and UEFA Championship League. Not that only, based on article (2017 Qatar diplomatic crisis) the UAE announced that publishing expression of sympathy towards Qatar through social media or any type of written or verbal form are consider illegal under UAE's Federal Penal Code and the Federal Law on Combating Information Technology Crimes. The punishment is 3 to 15 years' imprisonment, a fine of up to 50000 emirati dirhams (\$ 136,000) or both. Bahrain also does the similar statement where penalty up to 5 years' prison and fine.

### **Qatar Foreign Policy on Response to the Sanction**

It has been six months since the GCC blocked Qatar. The blockade seems went away from its agenda since Qatar remains hold its stance to ignore the 13 demands including to close down the Doha-based television network Al Jazeera, while The GCC tighten the bond within its allies to put more pressure on. Instead of releasing the tangle, both parts are going into more disastrous actions affected both economic sector.

Apparently, the impact on economic sector is not haunting them as political interests are profoundly play an essential priority part over economy. Tracing the relationship among the Gulf countries, evidently political interests are in the frontline.

The GCC campaign apparently shows unexpected result as Kuwait and Oman have started to mediate the crisis, while other neighboring countries Jordan, and North Africa preferred to watch outside the ring battle. The UAE- Saudi look unsatisfied by the game played by Qatar.

On the other hand, uninvited guests like Turkey offer their hand in the crisis by sending military forces to Qatar, in spite of that Iran views strategic opportunity to take advantage from the crisis by strengthening its relation with Qatar. Military backup is offered by Iran in addition to economic agenda between two countries.

The diplomatic crisis is only one of many other disputes involving the two sides. In addition to sectarian issue that has been rooted for many decades back under the issue “sunni-shiite”. The sectarian issue has shaped political alliance into the sunni countries and shiite countries. However, the ongoing cold war in the Gulf is more than religion issue. The political pattern in the Middle East does not have any specific pattern but it is more like a tangle interests.

In term of maintaining its security, Qatar’s position noticeable in the safe zone holding the US with its military base in Doha in addition the backup from Turkey and Iran to prepare for any immediate actions due to high tense in the region that might explode at anytime.

Amir Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani never seen to take a step backward to transform the country as a strategic prestigious hub, involved more in the international arena proved by winning the bid for hosting the soccer world cup 2022 and social charity foundations spread out all around the world in addition to multitude investment projects.

In the economic sphere, the blockade issue seems does not affect Qatar eventough previously Qatar relied on its neighbor countries in term of supplying basic goods, instead, the moment is used to foster the domestic production and self-reliance enhancing the Qatar agriculture and industry to endeavor their effort overcoming the crisis in addition to open up trade relation with other partners in the international order.

In labour sector, Qatar in which has never had a minimum wage policy introduced a package of major labour changes covers a minimum wage \$200 and a minimum wage in addition to free accommodation, food and health care plans, covered by employers (AFP, 2017).

Throughout the Gulf Cold War, Qatar incessantly endeavors to burnish its name over the UAE-Saudi led accuse and to strengthen its position in the Middle East through media campaign facilitated by its prominent a state-owned news media company Al Jazeera. Aljazeera posted on Qatar Foreign Policy under the new Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani in which states that the Qatar international relation is



focus on creating peace in the region and its neighbor adopting an open foreign policy and combining both soft power and smart power diplomacy. “Qatar's international relations doctrine focuses on the consolidation of peace and stability, as proscribed by its constitution. It is based on the principles of encouraging settlement of international disputes by peaceful means, supporting the right of people to self-determination, non-interference in the internal affairs of other states, and cooperation with peace-loving nations.” (Abdullah, 2014)

In regard to the blockade, Qatar has been changing its stance and policies more likely use hard power diplomacy if it is needed at anytime. Military forces have been prepared in addition to the back up support from Iran, Turkey and the US air force base in Doha. The complicated tangle political pattern of the Middle East leads us into many perceptions and predictions.

<b>Purposes and Actions in Qatar Foreign Policy</b>	
Security	Purposes and Actions in Qatar Foreign Policy
	Purchase and Develop its weapons
Autonomy	Enhance its relationship with Turkey, Iran and the US
	Develop sustainable gas resources
Welfare	Explore new trade relation with Oman, Turkey, Kuwait, and others.
	Boost up its domestic production (agriculture, industry)
	Develop sustainable gas resources
Prestige & Status	Campaign on the fight against terrorism
	Develop and advance its military power and sources
Other Purposes	Contribute on the fight against terrorism through optimally involving in the global agenda against terrorism (United Nations forum)
	Promote and fund Islamic charity in the global scope through Qatar Foundation
	Boost up its media power through media campaign and news

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, the impose sanction by the Gulf States to Qatar affected many countries also. The conflict has disrupted trade, affect workers and families and delay projects in Qatar and its neighbors. In short term, the costs will fall more heavily but not exclusively on Qatar. But, in the longer crisis persists, the more damaging it will be for Qatar relationship with its neighbors. The UAE and Saudi Arabia should take stock of their actions and carefully recalibrate the social, economic and political costs to their own countries. Qatar should avoid escalating the conflict and look for ways to mediate with its neighbors and take steps to address some of their concerns. Meanwhile, the response in Qatar Foreign Policy shows that Qatar plays different strategy adding hard power diplomacy beside of soft power and smart power diplomacy if it is needed at anytime. Strengthening its security will be the priority for Qatar as well as encouraging economic sector to survive throughout the Gulf Cold War. However, the crisis has potential to extend or to end in short time depends on the political interest mood.

## REFERENCES

- Abdullah, J. (2014, November 21). Aljazeera. Retrieved November 21, 2017, from Aljazeera: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2014/11/analysis-qatar-foreign-policy--2014111811274147727.html>
- AFP. (2017, November 17). Punch. Retrieved November 18, 2017, from Punch: <http://punchng.com/qatar-sets-200-as-minimum-wage/>
- Calvert, P. (1986). *The Foreign Policy of New States*. New York: Prentice Hall.
- Rosenau, J. N. (1968). *Political Science and Public Policy*. Chicago.
- Wikipedia. 2017 Qatar diplomatic crisis. Retrieved on 11 November 2017 from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2017\\_Qatar\\_diplomatic\\_crisis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2017_Qatar_diplomatic_crisis)
- Philip Gordon, Amos Yadlin and Ari Heisten (13 June 2017). *The Qatar Crisis: Causes, Implications, Risks, and the Need for Compromise*. Retrieved on 11 November 2017 from <http://www.inss.org.il/publication/qatar-crisis-causes-implications-risks-need-compromise>.
- Alaraby. (2017, June 9). Retrieved November 22, 2017, from Alaraby: <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/politics/2017/6/8/%D9%82%D8%B7%D8%B1-%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%>