

# **World Reaction and the Role of Turkiye, Iran and Asian Countries in Maintaining Qatar Sovereignty: A Case Study of Gulf Crisis**

## ***Reaksi Dunia dan Peranan Turkiye, Iran dan Negara-negara Asia dalam Mengekalkan Kedaulatan Qatar: Kajian Kes Krisis Teluk***

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**Abstract:** This research examines how nations such as Turkey, Iran, and Asia responded to the Gulf of Qatar crisis and assisted Qatar in retaining its sovereignty. The United States became aware of the situation and collaborated with Middle Eastern countries. This study examines in chronological approach the roles played by the Anti-Terror Quartet (ATQ), which consists of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Egypt. Countries providing Qatar with political, social, and economic support will be investigated to identify the consequences on Qatar and the nations who provide such support. The data gathered from this study will be analyzed qualitatively. Turkiye and Iran, according to the data, are already collaborating with Qatar to play a very effective and aggressive role. Despite their geographical distance, Asian countries assist Qatar in maintaining its independence. Asian countries would rather work with Qatar than support the ATQ. The conflict will be resolved if the ATQ countries take professional action against Qatar. These issues will continue to impede the Gulf region's progress unless they are resolved.

**Keywords:** gulf, crisis, block, border, action;

**Abstrak:** Kajian ini mengkaji bagaimana negara seperti Turki, Iran, dan Asia bertindak balas terhadap krisis Teluk Qatar dan membantu Qatar dalam mengekalkan kedaulatannya. Amerika Syarikat menyedari keadaan itu dan bekerjasama dengan negara-negara Timur Tengah. Kajian ini mengkaji secara kronologi peranan yang dimainkan oleh Anti-Terror Quartet (ATQ), yang terdiri daripada Kerajaan Arab Saudi, Bahrain, dan Mesir. Negara yang menyediakan sokongan politik, sosial dan ekonomi kepada Qatar akan disiasat untuk mengenal pasti akibat ke atas Qatar dan negara yang memberikan sokongan tersebut. Data yang diperolehi daripada kajian ini akan dianalisis secara kualitatif. Turkiye dan Iran, menurut data, sudah pun bekerjasama dengan Qatar untuk memainkan peranan yang sangat berkesan dan agresif. Walaupun jarak geografi mereka, negara-negara Asia membantu Qatar dalam mengekalkan kemerdekaannya. Negara-negara Asia lebih suka bekerjasama dengan Qatar daripada menyokong ATQ. Konflik akan diselesaikan jika negara-negara ATQ mengambil tindakan kerjasama terhadap Qatar. Isu-isu ini akan terus menghalang kemajuan rantau Teluk melainkan ia diselesaikan.

**Kata kunci:** teluk, krisis, blok, sempadan, Tindakan;

## Introduction

Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt cut diplomatic and trade ties with Doha, and imposed a sea, land and air blockade in Qatar on 5th June 2017 (Al Jazeera, 2017). Saudi Arabia had also demanded that "brotherly countries" cut relations with Qatar. Yemen, Eastern Government of Libya, Maldives, Mauritania, and Comoros followed suit. Senegal had also cut relation with Qatar but has since returned its ambassador. Jordan, Djibouti, Chad, and Niger have all downgraded their relations with Qatar, but they have not cut them.

According to Ismail Numan Telci (2019), Jordan supported the blockade coalition during the Gulf crisis due to its political and economic dependence on Saudi Arabia. Tens of thousands of Jordanian workers reside and work in the UAE. Prior to the Qatar crisis, Saudi Arabia provided Jordan with annual financial assistance, while its citizens provided Jordan with significant economic vitality during the summer months. The Gulf Cooperation Council, on the other hand, provided financial assistance to Jordan. 2017 marked the conclusion of the \$ 3.6 billion, five-year aid programme. Due to these financial concerns, Jordan joined the blockade against Qatar.

Kuwait and Oman, two of the six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), did not sever ties with Qatar (Zafirov, M., 2017). In addition, 89 countries maintain active diplomatic missions in Qatar, and 34 countries maintain diplomatic relations through a regionally accredited embassy. Qatar has long pursued an ambitious foreign policy with distinct priorities from those of its neighbours, but two major issues have angered them in recent years. One is Qatar's support for Islamist groups. Qatar acknowledges helping some, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, but denies aiding militant groups associated with al-Qaeda or the so-called Islamic State (IS).

## Reaction After Gulf Crisis

### *Reaction of Qatar-Arab States relations*

In November 2017, Qatar opened a military liaison office in Kuwait to "strengthen the bond between Qatar's armed forces and Kuwait's military command" according to Qatar's military attached in Kuwait. In addition, new shipping routes have been established and supplies have been carried in via Oman. During the June 2017 Gulf crisis, Jordan downgraded diplomatic relations with Qatar and closed the Amman office of Al Jazeera. Nonetheless, on March 11, 2018, the Qatar Chamber hosted a Jordanian business delegation in Doha to discuss opportunities for expanded economic cooperation and investment. The

Jordanian delegation, led by Nael Al-Kabariti, chairman of Jordan's Chambers of Commerce, also extended an invitation to Qatari businessmen to visit Amman to explore investment and partnership opportunities with Jordanian businesses (BBC News, 2017).

### *Reaction of Qatar-US relations*

According to Dorsey, J (2018), they are bilateral relations and strategic allies. Qatar's Defence Minister, Khalid bin Mohammad al-Attiyah, said that Qatar will expand the US airbase at Al Udeid. Al Udeid Air Base (Arabic: قاعدة العديد الجوية) is a military base southwest of Doha, Qatar, also known as Abu Nakhlah Airport (Arabic: مطار أبو نخلة). According to media reports in June 2017, the base hosted over 11,000 U.S. and U.S.-led anti-ISIL coalition forces and over 100 operational aircraft.

On 14th January 2018, US President Donald Trump thanked Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani for "action to counter terrorism and extremism in all forms", the White House said in a statement that suggested a warming of ties between the two countries. In addition, Qatar's Foreign Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani stated that his country is willing to participate in a US-GCC summit next spring, provided that the blockading countries' motivation is based on real will and not coercion. According to a government statement, the US-Qatar strategic dialogue initiative is aimed at stepping up cooperation between the two countries, "which share long-standing strategic interests at the political, economic, security, educational and cultural levels" (Al Jazeera, 2018).

### *Reaction of Qatar-Russian relations*

According to Giorgio Cafiero and Theodore Karasik (2017), the Qatari government has extended an invitation to the Russian president. The Emir of Qatar, Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, conferred with the President of the Russian Republic of Ingushetia, Yunus-bek Yevkurov, on February 3, 2018, in Doha. During the meeting, they reviewed the Qatar-Ingushetia relationship and discussed aspects of economic, trade, and investment cooperation, as well as ways for developing them.

## Turkiye Helped Qatar Maintain Its Sovereignty

Qatar and Turkey have a deliberately strategic political, economic, and military relationship. Qatar and Turkey established the Supreme Strategic Committee in 2015 to oversee and strengthen their relationship. The committee conducts regular meetings between the leaders of the two countries. Since the beginning of the Gulf

crisis, Turkey has supported Doha's leadership, sending a signal to Saudi Arabia that Qatar is not alone. Turkey took numerous measures to aid Qatar in maintaining its sovereignty.

The Turkish ambassador, Fikret Ozer, stated that the country intends to station air and naval forces in Qatar in addition to the ground personnel already stationed there. He informed reporters in Doha during a press conference. According to the 2014 agreement between Qatar and Turkey, all ground, air, and naval forces will be stationed in Qatar, he said. Through negotiations, Ankara and Doha would determine the timeline for the construction of the necessary infrastructure and the deployment of these forces" (Al Jazeera, 2017).

Many Turkish firms have been awarded construction contracts in Qatar, with some replacing the Saudi and UAE firms that had to terminate activities in the country after the blockade. Similarly, Qatar's investments in all sectors of the Turkish economy have increased. There is also a steady increase in the number of Qatari tourists visiting Turkiye, although the absolute number is relatively small because of Qatar's small population of just 2.7 million of which only 12 percent are citizens. Qatar expanded its imports of Turkish products and boosted investment in the country (Al Jazeera, 2017).

There are worse things than being banned by Saudi Arabia and the UAE. They block entry of food, drink and medicine to Qatar using their air, land and sea borders. Turkiye, opportunistically, rushed to supply food and necessities in the days after the blockade, with Turkish imports between June and December 2017 valued at US\$523 million (\$703.6 million) between June and December 2017.

Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani arrived in Turkiye to meet the Turkish president. In November 2018, Erdogan had visited Qatar to attend the third meeting of the Turkiye-Qatar Supreme Strategic Committee. In addition to the economic significance that major Asian nations have placed on Qatar, governments in China, Japan, South Korea, and the rest of Asia have never perceived Doha as a threat.

According to Fernandez, J. (2018), Turkey is also interested in fostering greater cooperation. Ahmet Arslan, Turkish minister of transport, maritime and communications, stated from Turkiye during a promotional event for the turkishsouq.com website, "Our cooperation with Qatar will not be limited to e-commerce, it will become widespread in other fields and will pave the way for the two countries to work together elsewhere." In addition, Turkiye deploys additional soldiers to Qatar. According to Qatar's Defence Ministry, a contingent of Turkish soldiers has arrived at a Doha military base. The

soldiers will join a group that has already arrived at the Tariq bin Ziyad military base in the Gulf state.

## **Iran Helped Qatar Maintain Its Sovereignty**

From the start of the Gulf crisis Iran has backed the leadership in Doha, sending a clear signal to Saudi Arabia that Qatar is not alone. Many actions did by Iran in order to help Qatar maintain its sovereignty. Iran invites Qatar to Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) meeting. Iran's Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani invited Qatar Parliament Speaker Ahmed bin Abdullah al-Mahmoud to attend the 13th summit of the OIC parliament speakers to be held in Tehran on January 17-18, 2018, as reported by Iran's News Agency (IRNA). The countries blockading Qatar are members in the OIC but have strained diplomatic relations with Iran. They have demanded that Qatar followed suit with Iran.

According to Selmi, R., and Bouoiyour, J. (2019), Qatari-Iranian trade has been growing significantly, despite the centrality of Qatar's relationship with Iran to the blockade's justification. Immediately following the imposition of the blockade, Qatar was forced to continue the flow of products and services through Iranian airspace and shipping lanes. Iran has also continued to provide construction materials for the numerous infrastructure projects underway in Qatar in preparation for the World Cup in 2020. Despite Qatari-Iranian relations being an aggravating factor in the dispute, Qatar's imports of Iranian products and services have increased by 63% to \$69 million (\$92.8 million) since the beginning of the year. The strengthening of Qatari-Iranian relations has the potential to exacerbate the regional rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran, as Qatar grows closer to Iran with no indication of restoring relations with Saudi Arabia. Since the outbreak of the crisis, Iran, with whom relations have significantly improved in recent months, has endeavoured to break Qatar's isolation, including by increasing food exports to the emirate.

## **Asia Countries Helped Qatar Maintain Its Sovereignty**

According to Kristian Coates Ulrichsen and Theodore Karasik, Asia can assist Qatar in maintaining its economic stability through oil and gas relations. Asia's oil- and gas-hungry, vibrant, and dynamic economies place a high value on their relations with Qatar, the world's leading producer and exporter of liquefied natural gas (LNG). In addition to the economic significance that major Asian nations have placed on Qatar, governments in China, Japan, South Korea, and the rest of Asia have never perceived Doha as a threat.

The Anti-Terror Quartet (ATQ) countries discovered no support for their anti-Qatar campaign in Beijing, Tokyo, Seoul, and virtually all other Asian capitals. As a result, they have joined the international community in supporting the Kuwaiti emir's efforts to mediate a resolution to the Gulf dispute (Pradhan, P., 2018). Significantly, Sino-Qatari relations have contributed to Doha's ability to maintain a firm position in the ATQ. On Qatar National Day, the Qatari military displayed a recently acquired Chinese SY-400 short-range ballistic missile system with an approximate range of 250 miles.

By selling missiles to Doha during the GCC crisis, Beijing has further strengthened ties between resource-hungry China and the world's leading LNG exporter and producer. Japan has played a significant role in Qatar's foreign policy after the blockade. Deep Japanese-Qatari relations, which were formally established in 1972 and cultivated during the 1990s, when Japan played a pivotal role in the development of Qatar's burgeoning LNG sector, were crucial to Doha's ability to withstand the blockade.

Japan has been highly dependent on the oil- and gas-rich GCC states, which account for 15 percent of its LNG trade (second only to Australia) and eight percent of the Asian country's oil imports. Even as the Japanese seek to diversify their sources of hydrocarbon imports beyond the Middle East, the future of Tokyo-Doha relations will be essential to Japan's economic health (Naheem, M., 2017). Qatar has remained solvent during the blockade by continuing to export LNG to Japan, South Korea, and other Asian markets, foiling an obvious objective on the part of the Saudi/UAE-led bloc. Although Japan is often overlooked in analyses of Qatari foreign policy, the deep relationship between Doha and Tokyo has been an extremely important factor in Qatar's strategy to remain resilient throughout the crisis.

Doha's partnership with India, which will play a pivotal role in Qatar's post-blockade foreign policy, is largely responsible for the country's capacity to maintain food security. As Qatar's desert climate and dearth of fresh water have hampered (but not prevented) the expansion of local agricultural production, Doha's food security has remained dependent on imports.

Prior to the Gulf dispute, Qatar imported roughly 90 percent of its food through the Abu Samra crossing on the Qatari-Saudi border. The ATQ anticipated that the suspension of this crossing would lead to a food security crisis in Qatar, compelling officials in Doha to concede to the bloc's demands. However, by turning to India in addition to Middle Eastern nations closer to home (primarily Turkey, Iran, and Oman), Qatar was able to restructure food import lines rapidly enough to avoid a crisis.

Prior to the Qatar crisis, India supported Qatar's efforts to expand its domestic agricultural production through collaborative business and investment ventures. Five years ago, Qatar invested USD 500 million in Bush Foods Overseas, a basmati rice producer based in New Delhi, and the emirate has turned to India for assistance in increasing livestock and agricultural production in Qatar. Throughout the blockade, these investments have been profitable for Qatar, which has also benefitted from India's food shipments to the emirate via the Mundra and Jawaharlal Nehru Ports. India's decision to assist Doha in avoiding the negative impact of the blockade on Qatari food imports falls within the context of the historically significant relations between India and Qatar. The largest expatriate working community in Qatar consists of approximately 700,000 Indian nationals.

The ten-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has been important to Qatar's foreign policy, both before and after the GCC's diplomatic row broke out. In October 2017, the Emir of Qatar visited three ASEAN countries, Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia, on a trip planned prior to the eruption of the Gulf dispute. By paying official visits to these three dynamic Southeast Asian nations, Emir Tamim signalled Doha's increasing desire to strengthen its ties with the ASEAN bloc. Ultimately, this strategy has undermined the ATQ's ability to globally isolate Doha. Even though the majority of Qatar-Asian trade is conducted between Doha and Japan, China, India, and South Korea, Qatar's economic ties with Southeast Asia have helped Doha withstand the storm over the past ten months.

In 2016, 5.3% of Qatar's exports were shipped to Singapore, the ASEAN nation with the most trade with Doha. During Emir Tamim's three-country ASEAN tour, his first stay in Singapore built on his father's 2005 and 2009 visits to the island nation. The Qatari Emir's visits resulted in Doha and Singapore signing seven bilateral agreements in a host of domains from investment to business and training. By visiting Singapore, Emir Tamim strengthened his relationship with President Halimah Yacob. She outlined her vision for expanding Singapore's ties with Doha, highlighting the potential for bilateral ties to reach the "next level" of cooperation.

When the Emir of Qatar visited the capital of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, he and Prime Minister Najib Razak signed four bilateral memorandums of understanding ranging from judicial cooperation to education and diplomacy. The Malaysian prime minister praised Doha's commitment to combating violent extremism in the Islamic world, demonstrating that the ATQ had failed to persuade Kuala Lumpur to view the purported Qatari threat through a Saudi/Emirati lens. After Emir Tamim left Kuala Lumpur, Qatar's state-owned airline, Qatar Airways, announced that it would

commence direct flights between Doha and Penang in 2018. Penang is Qatar Airways' second destination in Malaysia.

The Qatari Emir also visited Indonesia, an important country for Doha's efforts to diversify its relations with large economic players in Asia and those who play a significant role in the greater Sunni Muslim world. While in the most populous Muslim nation, Emir Tamim met with President Joko Widodo, and the two leaders discussed methods to expand bilateral ties in energy, tourism, infrastructure, and investment (James M Dorsey, 2017).

## Conclusion

Qatar has demonstrated that it can withstand the blockade and prospering even if the siege becomes permanent. After overcoming the initial psychological and financial blow, Qatar has strengthened its security ties with the United States and Turkey and expanded its diplomatic and trades with old and new partners around the world. However, the blockading nations led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) continue to blame Doha for the deterioration of intra-Gulf relations, while also attempting to diminish its significance. Moreover, independence from Saudi and UAE influence has become a source of national pride for Qataris, highlighting how this rift has shaped modern-day Qatari identity.

For the blockading states, reconciliation with Qatar would require abandoning narratives about Doha's alleged support for Al Qaeda, the Houthi rebels, Hezbollah, etc., making peace with a state that allegedly still supports such extremists and appearing weak in the process, or pressuring Qatar into actions that could create the illusion that the blockade "succeeded."

Qatar attempts to avoid exerting pressure on Egypt, despite the fact that it has also been subject to Egyptian pressure. Regarding the topic of Qatar granting visas to Egyptians, Doha cannot pretend that the blockade, alleged financial warfare, and threats from the ATQ have not occurred over the past nearly two years. However, Akbar Al Baker, the Group Chief Executive Officer of Qatar Airways, recently stated, "When you open your arms to Qatar, Qatar will open its arms even bigger for you. But if you become an adversary of Qatar, then we will also treat you as an adversary." The Gulf crisis will not resolve in the near future. Qatar tells the United Nations Assembly that "only international action can resolve the world's enormous and diverse cross-border challenges" (United Nations, 2019).

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