# The Qatar Crisis

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## The Project on Middle East Political Science

The Project on Middle East Political Science (POMEPS) is a collaborative network that aims to increase the impact of political scientists specializing in the study of the Middle East in the public sphere and in the academic community. POMEPS, directed by Marc Lynch, is based at the Institute for Middle East Studies at the George Washington University and is supported by Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Henry Luce Foundation. For more information, see http://www.pomeps.org.

# The GCC Crisis in Perspective

On June 5, 2017, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates launched a campaign against Qatar. Tensions between these Gulf Cooperation Council members were nothing new, but few anticipated the sudden escalation or the intensity of the campaign. The anti-Qatar campaign leaders then failed to achieve a rapid resolution of the crisis in their favor through a Qatari capitulation. More than four months later, the GCC remains badly divided and both sides are increasingly entrenched in their positions.

To make sense of this political conflict, POMEPS is pleased to release this collection of essays by a wide range of leading scholars published in *The Monkey Cage* and in *POMEPS Studies* over the last several years. The collection is divided into four major sections: the origins and course of the current conflict; regional responses; how the Arab uprisings impacted the GCC; and background on the divisive question of Islamism and the Muslim Brotherhood.

**(1) The Crisis:** The first set of essays, written in the days immediately after the blockade began, Kristian Ulrichsen, Gregory Gause and Michael Stephens explained the background and stakes. Marc Owen Jones detailed the role of cyberwarfare, including the alleged hack of the Qatari News Agency and the use of bots to generate the impression of a popular wave of outrage.

The campaign did not unfold as expected, however. The Anti-Qatar Quarter proved unable to quickly force Qatar to agree to their demands. Deadlines came and went, as the list of demands evolved and new forms of pressure were contrived: an expensive public relations campaign, the promotion of an alternative Qatari leadership in exile, a campaign to strip Qatar of the World Cup. The conflict therefore soon settled down from a a crisis into a longer-term division.

Qatar, while suffering some economic pain from the blockade, quickly found alternative sources of food and other goods, along with military assistance from Turkey. It pointedly maintained working relations with American officials, and began its own public relations campaign against the UAE. It also, as Jocelyn Sage Mitchell shows, enjoyed an unusual burst of patriotism at home as the population rallied behind the emir.

**(2) Regional Responses:** The regional response to the campaign was mixed, with most Arab leaders seeking to avoid taking sides. Saudi Arabia and the UAE found immediate support from Bahrain and Egypt, as Karen Young explains. But they proved unable to expand the coalition. GCC stalwarts such as Kuwait and Oman sought instead to mediate the conflict, as Stacey Philbrick Yadav explains, while, as Youssef Cherif details, most North African states tried to remain neutral. Meanwhile, Turkey came strongly to Qatar's assistance, solidifying lines of regional political division.

The internal divisions of U.S. policy likely prolonged the conflict. The 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.

Military planners keen to sustain the intensifying military campaigns against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria and the Taliban in Afghanistan had little patience for any disruption in access to the al-Udeid air base in Qatar. Others in the White House were more sympathetic to the Saudi-Emerati bill of complaints. The Trump administration therefore delivered mixed messages, with the President and key foreign policy officials publicly contradicting each other. American mediation efforts thus proved largely futile despite mounting frustration with the standoff.

**(3) The GCC after the Arab Uprisings:** This summer's political crisis did not come out of nowhere. The third set of articles look back at a longer history of the politics of the Gulf Cooperation Council. Sean Yom, Russell Lucas and Curtis Ryan each explain in their own way the emergence of monarchical solidarity against the Arab uprisings, with the rulers of the Gulf banding together initially to protect their thrones and the survival of their allies. That initial solidarity soon gave way to proxy war across the region, with Saudi Arabia and the UAE aligned against Qatar in Egypt, Libya, Syria and Tunisia.

**(4) The Muslim Brotherhood:** While multiple issues have been raised against Qatar, the most potent has been UAE and Saudi anger over alleged Qatari support for the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist movements. The final set of articles offers deep perspective on the Muslim Brotherhood in the Gulf, with Stephane Lacroix, David Roberts, Guido Steinberg, Courtney Freer and Kristin Diwan offering detailed critical analysis of the many dimensions of Islamism in the Gulf.

Download the full collection as a free, open access PDF here.

*— Marc Lynch, Director of POMEPS, and Stephanie Dahle, Assistant Director of POMEPS*

# The Qatar Crisis

# What's going on with Qatar?

*By Kristian Coates Ulrichsen*

Tensions have resurfaced in a sustained media onslaught that has again cast Qatar as a threat to stability and security in the Persian Gulf. At the heart of the latest argument among members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) are incendiary comments attributed to Qatar's Emir Tamim at a military graduation ceremony May 23.

A report published on the Qatar News Agency (QNA) website later that day alleged that the emir stated that Qatar had a tense relationship with President Trump's administration, described Hamas as "the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people," and called Iran "a big power in the stabilization of the region." Qatar TV later reported the emir's alleged speech on its evening news program before the government communications office claimed — belatedly, on May 24 — that the QNA website had been hacked and false statements posted on it.

**Campaign to discredit Doha**

Regardless of whether they were made or fabricated — and people present at the military graduation insist that the emir made no speech whatsoever — Tamim's remarks caused immediate uproar in regional media, much of it based in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Both countries blocked Al Jazeera and other Qatar-based media outlets in the aftermath of the allegations, and new articles have been published daily in the week since. Almost without exception, each article has taken the emir's speech as fact and proceeded, on that basis, to accuse Qatar of being the weak link in the threat to regional stability from Iran and terrorism — and to demand that Qatar choose sides between the GCC and Iran.

The ferocity and the sheer scale of the "Qatar-bashing" articles suggest that an orchestrated campaign is underway to discredit Doha regionally but also — crucially — in the eyes of the Trump administration.

This comes three years after a nine-month standoff between Qatar and three of its neighbors — Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain — rocked the six-member GCC. In the time since, Tamim and Abu Dhabi's influential crown prince, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed, exchanged frequent visits, and Qatar's decision to deploy 1,000 soldiers to Yemen in September 2015 seemed to indicate that the 2014 upheaval was a thing of the past. What, then, has changed, and why has a seemingly dormant dispute suddenly flared up again and in such a visceral manner?

**The Trump factor**

A convergence of factors appears to have shifted the geopolitical landscape in the Persian Gulf. The Trump administration signaled that it intends to follow a set of regional policies that are aligned far closer to those of Abu Dhabi and Riyadh than Doha. Both Mohammed bin Zayed and Saudi Arabia's Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman were high-profile visitors to Washington in the run-up to the Riyadh summit with Arab and Islamic leaders.

Further, the policy inexperience of many within Trump's inner circle has presented an opportunity for both the Saudis and the Emiratis to shape the administration's thinking on critical regional issues such as Iran and Islamism, both of which were evident during the Riyadh visit.

Whereas the Obama administration sought to enhance U.S. engagement with the GCC as a bloc, Trump focused instead on Saudi Arabia and the UAE as the twin pillars of its regional approach. Strong bonds reportedly have formed between Trump's adviser and son-in-law Jared Kushner and Mohammed bin Salman in Saudi Arabia as well as Yusuf al-Otaiba, the influential UAE ambassador in Washington.

Key principals within the Trump administration, such as Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and CIA Director Mike

Pompeo, hold views on Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood that are virtually indistinguishable from those in Riyadh and Abu Dhabi. Saudi Arabia and the UAE are emerging as the two spearheads around which U.S. regional policies are realigning, including a set of hawkish defense and security interests; the joint raid conducted by U.S. and UAE Special Forces in Yemen in January may well be only the first of numerous joint initiatives across regional conflict zones in the months and years ahead.

Whatever signals may (or may not) have been passed in private, there has been a noticeable increase in domestic and regional assertiveness in the immediate aftermath of Trump's Saudi trip. In Bahrain, the deadliest raid by security forces on opposition forces since 2011 resulted in five deaths just two days after Trump assured the Bahraini king of a new era in bilateral relations.

The Saudi-Emirati media campaign against Qatar happened to coincide with a high-profile event in Washington, where analysts and former senior U.S. officials cast doubt on Qatar's reliability as a regional security partner. Ruling circles in Persian Gulf capitals may feel emboldened by the new political climate to see how far they can go in pursuit of hawkish domestic and regional policies and what, if any, pushback they encounter.

**Playing out in public**

There are differences between this latest disagreement and the past — not least in the way the current standoff is being played out in the media rather than behind the closed doors of leaders' meetings — and no act equivalent to the withdrawal of the ambassadors. In fact, few officials have publicly joined the feeding frenzy and have been careful not to single Qatar out by name in calling for brotherly unity against the Iranian "menace."

The carefully controlled public spaces in GCC states mean it is inconceivable that such attacks on a fellow member state could have been made without, at the very least, a degree of official sanction behind the scenes. By allowing the media campaign to run into a second week with no apparent letup, policymakers in Riyadh and Abu Dhabi may be hoping to pressure the leadership in Doha into making concessions or watching to see whether figures within the Trump administration take the bait without having to resort to official threats or sanctions. Where this leaves the GCC as an entity in the age of Trump is anyone's guess.

*Kristian Coates Ulrichsen is a fellow for the Middle East at Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy.*

# Hacking, bots and information wars in the Qatar spat

*By Marc Jones*

U.S. investigators claim Russians might be behind some the hacking of the Qatar News Agency that prompted a diplomatic crisis in the Gulf, but that seems unlikely given current GCC tensions and the homegrown nature of the cyber battle leading up to the spat. While the recent diplomatic breakdown between Qatar and its Gulf neighbors exposes the political differences between the Gulf Cooperation Council member states, it also highlights the emergence of new types of cyber and information warfare. Instead of the Gulf states simply turning their methods of surveillance and propaganda inward to their citizens, they could now be using these methods against one another.

**Spate of high-profile hacks**

Initially, tensions flared after the state-run Qatar News Agency posted controversial statements May 23, allegedly made by the young Qatari emir, Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad al-Thani. The comments affirmed the good relations between Qatar and a number of other countries and organizations, including Iran, the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas.

Thani also allegedly noted the importance of Iran as a regional power — an apparent dig at attempts by Saudi King Salman bin Abdul Aziz and President Trump to isolate Iran during last month's summit in Riyadh.

Qatari officials quickly denied that Thani made such comments and claimed their news agency — and its various social media accounts — had been hacked. Despite this, the Saudi and UAE press showed an almost unequivocal desire to dismiss the hacking story, instead accusing Qatar of supporting terrorism in the form of Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood and Iran.

In what is unlikely to be a coincidence, an anonymous group of hackers describing themselves as "GlobalLeaks" then released a trove of emails belonging to the Emirati ambassador to the United States, Yousef al-Otaiba. The emails, which appear to be genuine, showed extensive communication between the UAE and the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, a pro-Israel, Washington-based think tank. Much of the discussion is between Otaiba, and John Hannah, FDD's senior counselor and a former U.S. deputy national security adviser.

The correspondence suggests a certain determination from the UAE to prevent Iran from allowing its recent nuclear deal with the West to improve its position in the region.

Tellingly, a proposed agenda for a meeting between UAE officials and the FDD included a discussion on UAE/U.S. policies that could help influence Iran's internal situation. This would include various political, economic, military and "cyber tools." What these cyber tools mean is not elaborated on, although the conversation reveals the opaque roles certain organizations play in manipulating regional politics.

**The mobilization of Twitter bot armies**

The hacks came after Qatar said they were recently targeted by an orchestrated smear campaign, accusing them of supporting terrorist groups. Qatar's claims seem credible. Just four days before Qatar's hacking claims, an Arabic hashtag translated as *Qatar is the treasury of terrorism* was trending. On the hashtag, social media accounts — many of them bots — echoed similar themes of criticizing Qatar for its relationship with Iran, the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas.

After the alleged emails purporting that Thani made pro-Iranian comments were published, a resurgence of the bot armies appeared on Twitter, most of which criticized Qatar and the various entities highlighted in the communications between the FDD and Otaiba.

My analysis shows the presence of propaganda bots on numerous hashtags. One of these Twitter trends was #AlJazeeraInsultsKingSalman, and my analysis shows 20 percent of the Twitter accounts were anti-Qatar-bots. Many of them were posting well-produced images condemning Qatar's relations with Hamas, Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood.

Other images shared in the Twitter campaign singled out Qatar's media channels as sources of misinformation. Almost all of the bot accounts tweeted support toward King Salman and Saudi's new relationship with Trump. During the Riyadh summit, these same bots posted thousands of tweets welcoming Trump to Saudi Arabia.

**Legitimizing misinformation**

What these bot armies represent is not an organic outpouring of genuine public anger at Qatar or Thani, but rather an orchestrated and organized campaign designed to raise the prominence of a particular idea. In the case of these bots, the intent appears to be legitimizing the discourse that Qatar is a supporter of terrorism by creating the misleading impression of a popular groundswell of opinion.

The fact that these bot armies existed before Qatar's claims that they were hacked — and were in place quickly following the alleged hacks — indicate that an institution or organization with substantial resources has a vested interest in popularizing their criticism of Qatar. The purpose of this cyber propaganda may also be to shape the online discourse in favor of pressuring Qatar to abandon any thought of rapprochement with certain organizations or countries.

**New frontiers in Gulf cyberwarfare**

Who is behind these hacks is unclear, but given that much of the bot propaganda appears to be the sewing of animosity between the Arab states and Iran, there is danger to regional stability if left unchecked. Twitter — once seen as an important resource for disseminating news across the GCC — may become a wasteland in terms of finding useful information from non-verified sources, undermining its usefulness as a tool for generating legitimate discussions.

All the Gulf states have stringent freedom of expression laws that carefully control the Internet and the media — and monitor the behavior of their own citizens. Yet what's interesting about the recent public display is that it highlights the use of cyber tools as forms of intra-GCC diplomatic warfare, tactics previously directed at countries like Iran, and not usually neighboring Gulf states.

With Trump's recent visit to Riyadh designed in part to shore up Gulf support for fighting Islamist terrorism, Qatar's perceived conciliatory approach to groups deemed by the Saudis to be terrorists is seen as weakening the alliance. Emboldened by Trump's hostility to Iran, it is likely that the UAE and Saudi Arabia felt confident in using the summit as a foundation for tackling their issues with Qatar's policies. However, as Qatar leaders have attempted to position themselves as mediators in disputes involving regional pariahs such as Iran and Hamas, forcing Qatar to toe an uncompromising line may be detrimental in terms of using diplomacy to improve overall regional stability.

*Marc Owen Jones is a Gulf research fellow at the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies at the University of Exeter, and a researcher at Bahrain Watch.*

# What the Qatar crisis shows about the Middle East

*By F. Gregory Gause III*

The crisis among the Persian Gulf monarchies — pitting Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates against Qatar — might be resolved in the short run but is very unlikely to be solved for the long term. Kuwaiti mediation and American prodding might bring the two sides to some face-saving compromise, where the Qataris accept some of the 13 demands forwarded to them by the Saudis and Emiratis, but the fundamental differences between the two sides will not be easily composed.

For those who see the current regional crisis in the Middle East through an exclusively sectarian lens, the fact that Iran quickly jumped to Qatar's defense is just another example of the larger Sunni-Shiite conflict.

The real underlying conflict is not about Iran but about very different understandings of how political Islam should relate to the state among the Sunni powers of the Middle East. Qatar, the UAE and Saudi Arabia are all Sunni majority in population and ruled by Sunni monarchs, but have very different stances on this issue. Turkey and Egypt, the two largest Sunni republics, are also on different sides.

In a recent article, I contended that the inability of Sunni Middle Eastern states to form an effective alliance against Iran stems from the profound differences among them about the nature of the threats they face.

Qatar and Turkey, the UAE and Egypt, and Saudi Arabia represent three different positions on this thorny question. The Qatar crisis is only the most recent, and clearest, manifestation of this intra-Sunni conflict.

**Qatar and the Muslim Brotherhood**

Qatar bet on the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood throughout the Arab world long before the Arab Spring, providing support for Brotherhood groups in the region; safe haven for Brotherhood exiles like the Egyptian preacher Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Hamas leader Khaled Mashal; and a platform for populist and electoral Sunni Islamist views in the regional satellite channels of the Al Jazeera network.

This populist Sunni Islamist stance, while certainly not liberal democratic, seeks power through electoral means. This vision was shared by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who saw in the Muslim Brotherhood's successes after the Arab Spring the possibility of a bloc of similar regimes, with Turkey at its head.

A post-Assad Syria would be the next member of that bloc, which is why Erdogan was the first regional leader to call for the Syrian president to step down.

**Saudi Arabia's religious rule**

Saudi Arabia represents the antithesis of populist, bottom-up Sunni Islam. The monarchy long ago made its Salafi religious establishment, known as Wahhabi, a partner in supporting its rule.

The Saudi men of religion are now state bureaucrats, advocating a puritanical and xenophobic social interpretation of Islam and endeavoring to spread that interpretation throughout the Muslim world by loyally supporting the monarchy and by counseling that it is the duty of good Muslims to obey the rulers. This is top-down, not bottom-up, political Islam.

**Top-down Islam inside borders**

The United Arab Emirates, while allied with Saudi Arabia, represents a third trend in political Islam. Official Islam in the Emirates is tightly tied to state authority and subservient to it. Unlike in Saudi Arabia, the Emiratis have no ambition to propagate Islam beyond their borders. Just the opposite — they support anti-Islamist forces

in Egypt, Libya and elsewhere. This is top-down Islam, but in one country.

In this they are joined by Egypt, once the center of Arab politics, but now, given its domestic economic and political problems, more a follower than a leader. The great center of Sunni Islamic learning in Cairo, al-Azhar, certainly has ambitions beyond Egypt's borders. But it does not have the financial capacity to challenge the Saudi-funded institutions of global Salafi Islam.

It is interesting to note that the UAE has made overtures toward al-Azhar, perhaps looking to fund its own challenge to both global Salafism and the Muslim Brotherhood, in the name of a tamed state Islam.

**Ideological conflicts inside the region**

Add in the Salafi Islamist militant position represented by the Islamic State and al-Qaeda, and the ideological conflicts within the Sunni world become even more fraught. They share the puritanical Salafi interpretation of Islam with Saudi Arabia but hate the Saudi rulers as sellouts to the United States.

They are a bottom-up, populist movement but reject the electoral course taken by Erdogan's party and the Muslim Brotherhood. State Islam within the existing regional borders is the antithesis of their message of a united Muslim community. The Islamic State and al-Qaeda have attacked the Turkish, Saudi and Egyptian regimes on numerous occasions.

The Sunni states cannot act in concert because, even though they might all worry about Iran, they see each other as potential, if not actual, threats to domestic regime stability. The Egyptians and the Emiratis view the Muslim Brotherhood as their major domestic threat, and thus see Qatar and Turkey as the allies of their domestic enemies.

That is why Cairo and Abu Dhabi are insisting that Qatar shut down Al Jazeera. The Saudis worry that Qatar, which officially shares the Salafi Wahhabi brand of Islam, can play into its own domestic politics, mobilizing opposition to their regime.

Egypt is unwilling to get behind the Saudi effort to unseat Bashar al-Assad in Syria because it fears Islamist groups like the Brotherhood will benefit. Saudi Arabia has historical ties to the Brotherhood but has recently distanced itself from it, and sees populist, electoral political Islam as a domestic threat.

Turkey worries that successful pressure on Qatar might lead to regional pressure on itself. Turkey and Saudi Arabia have both been on the same side as the Islamic State and/or al-Qaeda in regional fights — Turkey in Syria and Saudi Arabia in Syria and Yemen — but can neither control nor trust the Salafi Islamist militants, who seek to overthrow them at home.

President Trump's vision of a Sunni world united with the United States against both Iran and terrorism is unlikely, as long as the Sunni regimes of the Middle East hold such divergent views about the relationship of Islam to politics. In a Middle East supposedly dominated by a sectarian Sunni-Shiite conflict, the Sunnis don't have their act together.

*Gregory Gause III is a professor of international affairs and the John H. Lindsey '44 Chair at the Bush School of Government at Texas A&M University.*

# Why key Arab countries have cut ties with Qatar — and what Trump had to do with it

*By Michael Stephens*

The decision by five Arab states to sever ties with Qatar marks another chapter in a multiyear saga of turbulent relations between Qatar and its neighbors. A split between Doha and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) was brewing for years. At the heart of the problem lies an irreconcilable difference between the Persian Gulf countries about how to interpret the events of the 2011 Arab Spring and, more important, how to react to them.

In contrast to its GCC neighbors, Qatar actively promoted regime change across the Arab world. The Qataris mobilized finances and offered favorable media coverage to many Islamist actors, including the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Hamas in Gaza, the Ennahda party in Tunisia and myriad militias in Libya and Syria.

In response, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia worked forcefully to block Qatar's interests in the region, helping to depose Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, funding rival opposition factions in Syria and supporting the government of Gen. Khalifa Hifter in Libya.

**A new Qatari emir, a difficult start**

Although the Saudis and Emiratis began to resist Qatar's regional activities, Qatar's rulers were no pushover. The emir, Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa al-Thani, and his cousin, Prime Minister Hamad Bin Jasim al-Thani, were seasoned operators on the international stage. For 20 years, they built "Brand Qatar" by forming a crosscutting swathe of alliances across the region, stretching from Mauritania to Afghanistan. And so the decision by Hamad to hand power to his son Tamim in August 2013 presented an opportunity for the Saudis and Emiratis to put pressure on the young monarch to force him into line.

In an environment increasingly hostile to Qatari foreign policy, Tamim lacked the experience of his father and uncle to handle the challenges. Al Jazeera was hemorrhaging viewers regionally, and Qatari foreign policy increasingly struggled in Libya, Syria and Egypt in the face of GCC pressure.

Sensing their opportunity, the Emiratis, Saudis and Bahrainis urged Tamim to scale back Qatar's regional activities. Following six months of failed negotiations, the three countries pulled their ambassadors from Doha in protest in early 2014.

With the help of Kuwait's emir, Qatar agreed to acquiesce to each of the three countries in a series of bilateral negotiations, leading to a repair in relations by the GCC summit in December 2014. But it was not until December 2016, when Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdul Aziz came to Doha, that the rift was publicly mended.

**Qatari ambitions remained**

But for all the goodwill that was shown, the core problem that underlay the split had never healed. While the Qataris had toned down Al Jazeera and evicted a few Muslim Brotherhood members from Doha, their ambition to be a regional actor remained, as did their myriad of friendships with a host of political Islamists across the region — friendships that the UAE in particular found hard to accept.

In recent months, Qatar has once again drifted outside the GCC consensus. Particularly galling for the UAE and Saudi Arabia has been Qatar's interaction with Islamist groups linked closely to the Muslim Brotherhood and al-Qaeda. Worse still to them are its business dealings with Iranian regional affiliates. In April, Qatar was involved in communications with the al-Qaeda-linked Hayat Tahrir al Sham organization to guarantee population transfers in the country. Qatar appeared to have brokered the deal by communicating with Iran, which in return managed to

secure the release of 26 Qataris royals kidnapped in Iraq in return for a princely sum to be paid to Iranian client militia Kataib Hezbollah.

**The Trump factor**

Qatar also helped Hamas publicly rebrand itself— and the group launched its new policy objectives at a Doha hotel in May. Islamist rebranding has been a favored tactic Qatar uses with Syrian opposition groups, particularly the Islamist Ahrar al Sham, and, unsuccessfully, with the leader of the now defunct al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra. This attempt to legitimize Islamist groups is an issue the Emiratis in particular find difficult to accept.

The United States has served as a key actor from which the Saudis can take their lead. As Riyadh has moved closer to the United States in recent days, helped with a promise of purchasing more American arms during President Trump's visit in May, there is little doubt the Saudis felt emboldened to ratchet up the pressure against the Qataris.

The Emiratis also have found themselves in favor with the new Washington administration, whose strong dislike for both Iran and Sunni Islamists fits well with UAE policy priorities. Accordingly, there is a newfound confidence in Saudi Arabia and the UAE that strong measures to force the Qataris back into their box will find support in Washington.

Qatar's support for Hamas seems to have been a card the gulf states have played effectively to curry favor with U.S. decision-makers amid the warming relations between the gulf and the Israelis. The UAE and Saudi Arabia appear to be preempting U.S. policy by sounding notes that will find favor with pro-Israel, anti-Iran, and anti-Islamist legislators in Congress, albeit for reasons much more applicable to intra-GCC politics than the regional strategic goals of the United States.

**Upping the stakes**

Given that diplomatic attempts to isolate Qatar in 2014 seem to have had no long-term effect on Doha's behavior, it is not surprising that the Saudis have decided to dramatically up the stakes this time around by closing off Qatar's only land border and— along with the UAE and Egypt— blocking all air travel to the emirate, with Egypt denying Qatar Airways the use of its airspace.

The closure of land borders and the disruption to air traffic will have serious consequences for the Qatari economy and its society that will quickly prove prohibitively expensive, even for a rich state like Qatar. And so, serious concessions will have to be made if relations in the GCC are to normalize to the usual levels of mutually suspicious friendship.

*Michael Stephens is a research fellow in the Middle East Department and head of the Qatar operations of the British-based Royal United Services Institute for Defense and Security Studies.*

# Three big lessons of the Qatar crisis

*By Marc Lynch*

While Secretary of State Rex Tillerson is currently in the Gulf attempting to broker an end to the crisis between Qatar and four Arab countries, the conflict shows no signs of a resolution. The crisis broke on June 5, shortly following President Trump's visit to the region. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Bahrain declared a blockade of Qatar with no evident immediate cause. The anti-Qatar quartet released an extreme list of 13 demands which seemed intended to be rejected.

After Qatar brushed aside the Quartet's July 3 deadline, the list of 13 demands was whittled down to six. Secret agreements from the resolution of the last round of the crisis were leaked in an effort to increase pressure on Doha by demonstrating its failure to abide by previous agreements. Despite Tillerson's active diplomacy, the spat seems no closer to resolution. What began with the expectation of Qatar's rapid capitulation, with the threat of regime change or war raised by influential columnists, has instead settled down into a "long estrangement."

Should this have been a surprise? Here are a few big things we have learned about the international relations of the Middle East from the crisis:

**There are limits to Saudi-UAE leadership.**

After hosting dozens of Arab and Muslim leaders for President Trump's summit, Saudi Arabia and the UAE evidently expected a rapid victory over Qatar and widespread regional support. It has not worked out that way. The effort to demonstrate Saudi-UAE hegemony over the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Arab Middle East has instead demonstrated the continuing divisions of the regional order.

As with their disastrous war in Yemen, Saudi Arabia and the UAE radically overstated their prospects for success and failed to have a plausible plan B in case things did not go to plan. The anti-Qatar quartet seems to have overestimated Qatari fears of isolation from the GCC and their own ability to inflict harm on their neighbor.

Economic boycott could only marginally harm one of the wealthiest countries in the world, while the U.S. military base provided an effective military deterrent. Military threats had little effect once the U.S. military made it clear that it had no interest in UAE suggestions that it move the U.S. air base from Qatar. The demand to close Al Jazeera attracted widespread global condemnation as an assault on media freedom, while four fiercely repressive and anti-democratic regimes had a difficult time mounting plausible criticisms of Qatar's undemocratic system.

While the failure to coerce Qatar seems predictable, it is more remarkable that Saudi Arabia and the UAE failed to expand the anti-Qatar coalition beyond the four core members. Bahrain hardly has an independent foreign policy, since its brutal repression of protests in 2011, while Egypt views Qatar as part of its own domestic power struggle with the Muslim Brotherhood. Neither needed much enticement to join.

But no other country has wholeheartedly supported the campaign. The GCC itself has been divided, as Kuwait and Oman have sought to play mediating roles. North African states, and even heavily dependent Jordan, have hedged, struggling to stay neutral and wait out the crisis.

Meanwhile, the effort to isolate Qatar created openings for other regional power players. Most dramatically, Turkey sent military forces to Qatar to deter any invasion. This was a symbolic gesture, given the unlikelihood of an overt attack, but one which further fragmented established norms of Gulf security.

Iran has taken the opportunity to improve its relations with not only Qatar but also Oman and Kuwait. That Saudi

Arabia and the UAE were willing to rip apart the GCC over their grievances with Qatar suggests that their fear of Iran is not quite so all consuming. The power struggles and political competition between the Sunni powers, as well as their continuing existential fears of popular uprisings and Islamist challengers, remain more urgently threatening than the more widely discussed conflict with Iran.

**Nobody understands U.S. policy toward the crisis — and it matters.**

The Trump administration has sent bewilderingly mixed messages on the crisis. Trump himself issued several strongly pro-Saudi/Emirati statements and tweets which have emboldened the quartet. But the Pentagon made clear that it has no intention of moving its military base from Qatar. Tillerson has focused on mediation and the need to de-escalate the crisis, ostentatiously signing an agreement with Qatar on terrorism financing which seemed to sideline the key demand of the anti-Qatar quartet. Nobody knows who really speaks for the United States, and all are actively working to mobilize their own allies within the Trump administration.

Many expected that Trump's full-throated embrace of the Saudi-UAE worldview during his visit to Saudi Arabia would signal a return to close partnership between the United States and its traditional Gulf allies. But the resulting chaos and intra-alliance conflict suggests that the problems dividing the United States from its Gulf allies are more structural than personality-driven.

Like the Obama administration, the Trump administration is now experiencing a very similar alliance politics dynamic, as the Gulf regimes continue to pursue their own domestic and regional policy agendas with little deference to Washington's priorities, such as the campaign against the Islamic State.

The battle over "terrorism" is really about proxy wars and regime security.

The Qatar crisis is an outgrowth of proxy wars that have consumed the region since the 2011 Arab uprisings. In those proxy wars, the Gulf states (much like Iran and Turkey) have routinely supported unsavory local armed proxies of varying ideologies and backgrounds in their pursuit of locally effective allies on the ground. From the very beginning of the Libyan war, Qatar and the UAE channeled money and guns to their preferred armed groups. That has had profoundly destructive effects on Libya's post-Gaddafi trajectory and is a key reason for the failure to rebuild an effective Libyan state.

The contentious arguments over whether to include the Muslim Brotherhood in the definition of terrorism are similarly rooted in proxy wars and domestic regime security fears. Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have pushed for years to label the Muslim Brotherhood a terroristorganization, despite an expert consensus that it is not. The real issue is that Qatar and the Muslim Brotherhood are on the other side in the struggle for regional influence. The polarization between Islamists and their opponents ultimately led to a UAE-Saudi-backed military coup in Egypt, a fate narrowly avoided after Ennahda voluntarily stepped down from power in Tunisia.

The evidence of Qatari involvement in funding and supporting Islamist militant groups in Syria is stronger. But other Gulf states and private networks have been equally irresponsible in their channeling of support to Islamist militant insurgent groups for the past half-decade. Saudi Arabia was heavily involved in the arming of Syrian rebels, while Kuwait was for years the epicenter of Gulf fundraising for Syrian insurgents. The sectarian and hard-line Islamist rhetoric in Qatari media, including Al Jazeera, was little different from the discourse widely circulating in other Gulf media and across its Salafi Islamist networks. In early 2015, Saudi Arabia joined Qatar and Turkey in backing Jaish al-Fatah, a hard-line Islamist militant coalition which included many of the figures and groups currently being condemned. The extremist and sectarian rhetoric which external forces brought to the Syrian insurgency was a problem extending far beyond Qatar.

**What have we learned?**

The Qatar crisis has proven that conflicts among the "Sunni" states continue to be as intense as their regional struggle with Iran and that regime security concerns continue to drive their policies. Regional powers miscalculate the likely outcome of their policies with impressive frequency, a cautionary note for those hoping for the region to ride out the current turbulence. This makes the mixed messages from the Trump administration especially dangerous at a critical time in the Middle East.

*Marc Lynch is a professor of political science and international affairs at George Washington University, where he is the director of the Project on Middle East Political Science. He is also a non-resident senior fellow at the Carnegie Middle East Program and the co-director of the Blogs and Bullets project at the U.S. Institute of Peace.*

# Regional Responses

# How Egypt wound up in the center of a Gulf Cooperation Council dispute on Qatar.

*By Karen E. Young*

Egypt is at the ideological center of the ongoing dispute between Qatar and its fellow Gulf Cooperation Council members Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.

Since the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings, Egypt has been a bellwether for both political and economic reform in the wider Middle East and North Africa. It is also the focal point of experimental efforts of the gulf states to exercise policies of financial and political intervention. How the current GCC crisis unfolds in Egypt can tell us much about the new norms of foreign intervention — whether economic, political or military — in the region.

**How and why do GCC states support Egypt?**

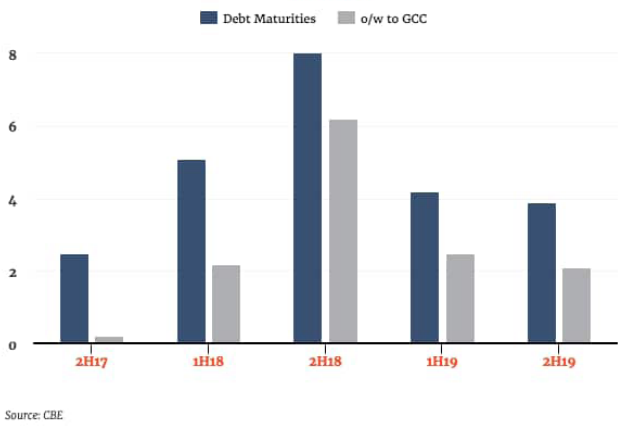
Well before the boycott of Qatar began in June, Egypt was a key battleground for gulf countries vying for international influence. While Qatar backed the Muslim Brotherhood, Saudi Arabia and the UAE supported the military and current regime of President Abdel Fatah al-Sissi.

In an effort to shore up Egypt's political stability since its 2013 coup, the UAE and Saudi Arabia have used a number of financial tools, including deposits into the Egyptian central bank, favorable loans, in-kind donations of oil and gas shipments, and promises of foreign direct investment in sectors like real estate and agriculture. There has been some volatility in the flow of GCC financial support to Egypt over the past four years. The past year has been especially difficult for Egypt, as it sought assistance from traditional multilateral finance sources like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund to address its fiscal crisis and stabilize its currency. The UAE and Saudi Arabia are turning on the support flows again to Egypt, in foreign direct investments from state-related entities, particularly in real estate.

However, this foreign aid and investment is not charity, even when its target is a primary foreign policy priority. Economic statecraft, particularly from the UAE, is often funded by investment vehicles made up of the private resources of public figures, which could benefit the state and its related commercial entities.

While Egypt holds a useful geographic and political position, its economic interests remain precariously divided between factions in the GCC dispute. While it is no longer indebted to Qatar for loans extended after 2011 (having made repayments in 2016 and 2014), outstanding debt payments to other gulf states will weigh heavily on its spending commitments in the coming years.

*Figure 1*



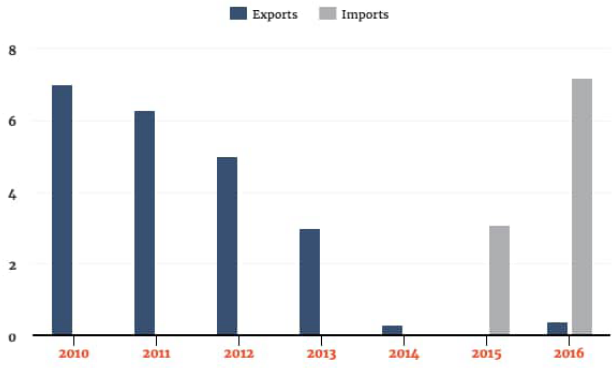

Source: CBE

**How Qatari natural gas complicates Egypt's position**

Egypt also remains dependent on Qatar for its supplies of liquefied natural gas (LNG). Behind Qatar's primary export markets in Asia and India, Egypt is a major purchaser of Qatari LNG. Egypt's own ability to meet its energy needs has been decreasing because of both supply and financial obstacles. The reliance on natural gas became problematic in 2014, when domestic gas production fell by 22.3 percent from 2009 levels. New exploration contracts were halted after the uprisings of 2011 and 2013, as demand for electricity production surged from a growing population.

*Figure 2*

**Egyptian LNG Imports and Exports**
*(in million metric tons)*

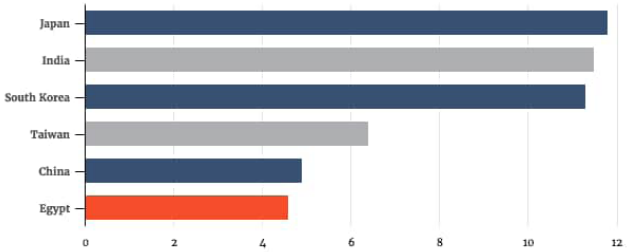



*Source: IGU*

Qatar exported more than 30 percent of total global supply of LNG in 2016. Its largest customer base in the Middle East are the UAE, Egypt and Jordan. Qatar's conflict with the UAE and Egypt now calls into question the sustainability of that commercial relationship.

*Figure 3*

**Qatar LNG Exports in 2016**
*(in million mt)*




*Source: Platts Analytics' Eclipse Energy*

Egypt's control over the Suez Canal puts it in a powerful position to determine the flow of Qatari LNG to Europe, but it also risks Egypt's reputation should it attempt to disrupt trade flows through the international gateway. For now, Egypt has found a middle ground, barring Qatari vessels from stopping along the way in Egypt's ports and its economic zones, but allowing passage via the canal. If the GCC crisis were to escalate with increased commercial sanctions on Qatar and its trading partners, the economic consequences would be global.

**Testing austerity measures**

Egypt is also a test case of some of the austerity measures the GCC states need to implement at home, though GCC states are generally much better positioned to pick and choose among structural reforms. Egypt is going through a full-fledged structural adjustment, with a fiscal deficit, inflation problem, and disincentives to foreign direct investment and tourism — its main source of foreign currency earnings. The GCC states are watching how the reduction of subsidies of wheat and gasoline will affect Egyptian society. Egypt remains a test case of how society responds to mechanisms of economic governance at the behest of a strong security state.

Some scholars argue that the opportunity cost of government spending on energy consumption — in the form of subsidies — props up inefficient industries at the cost of other government portfolios. More spending on energy means less state funds are available for health and education, which make better long-term investments. Egyptians face high unemployment and obstacles to economic inclusion, especially for women. Working abroad in the GCC has been a necessary respite for many Egyptian families, though the future is uncertain for those in Qatar.

For now, investment in Egypt's political stability and economic growth remains a foreign policy priority of the UAE and Saudi Arabia. Governments and policymakers might take advantage of the learning opportunities the experimental nature of the varied economic reform agenda unfolding across the MENA region.

The dispute between Qatar and the quartet including Egypt and the GCC states (Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain) is in many ways a dispute about the exercise of economic statecraft. Qatar uses its economic resources to support regional political movements from below and the opposing states support what they term secular governance with a strong overarching state. These competing visions of governance have deep pockets, sustained by aid and investment portfolios that have the capacity to reshape, and disrupt, the political economy of the entire region.

*Karen E. Young is a senior resident scholar at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington. She is the author of "The Political Economy of Energy, Finance and Security in the United Arab Emirates: Between the Majilis and the Market," (Palgrave, 2014). Follow her @ProfessorKaren*

# Everyone is taking sides in the Qatar crisis. Here's why these four North African states aren't.

*By Youssef Cherif*

Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt — the "Boycott Quartet" — have been trying to isolate Qatar since their embargo began in June. But in North Africa, their search for supporters failed remarkably. Despite the Gulf Cooperation Council's significant investment there, most North African countries have maintained a neutral position rather than siding with either camp. Why haven't they?

While many view this decision as a traditional diplomacy of neutrality, my research shows that the strategy is jointly driven by fears of hegemonic expansionism and the lure of Qatari investments. North African regimes saw the quartet coalition as a rising threat to regional security and so have indirectly balanced with the weaker player, Qatar.

**GCC investment in North Africa**

Since 2011, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar have competed for political and financial influence in North Africa. Qatar's sway peaked in the first two years following the Arab uprisings, as its allies — mainly political Islamists — led transitions in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Morocco.

But its role shrank after 2013, following the military coup in Egypt that overthrew the Muslim Brotherhood government, the Islamist Ennahda party's withdrawal from power in Tunisia and the quasi state-collapse in Libya.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have expanded their efforts in North Africa. They poured billions into Egypt after the coup, and have pledged to invest in Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. The UAE government has armed proxies and intervened militarily in Libya.

**Morocco: A Saudi ally seeking neutrality**

Rabat's position was perhaps the most surprising. Morocco is Saudi Arabia's closest ally in North Africa, and Morocco has strong economic ties with both Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Yet the kingdom not only stated its neutrality, but it has also sent food shipments to Qatar. Why?

Partly, self-interest. Qatar has recently increased its investments in Morocco. It also supported Morocco in brokering the Skhirat agreement on Libya. The ruling Islamist PJD party, moreover, has publicly sided with Qatar. Days ago, Qatar announced a lifting of visa requirements for Moroccans.

Morocco also has various disagreements with the other GCC countries, which promised to investheavily in the kingdom and even invited it to join the GCC, but little materialized. Morocco has joined the war in Yemen and other Saudi-led initiatives, but with limited results.

Meanwhile, the UAE's history of supporting separatist entities — Somaliland, eastern Libya, southern Yemen and now possibly Gaza — is also concerning for Morocco, which has its own Western Sahara question.

By remaining neutral, Morocco is showing its discontent to its allies. However, the Saudi monarch's decision to spend his August holidays in Tangier shows the enduring strength of that relationship.

**Algeria: A resource-rich hegemon fearing expansion**

The official statement out of Algeria was also neutral, advocating dialogue. However, 31 Islamist members of parliament formed a parliamentary committee in solidarity with Qatar, and Qatar's ambassador in Algiers has held weekly public meetings with high-level officials.

Even though Saudi Arabia and the UAE have pledged to invest heavily in Algeria, they disagree on the oil production strategy that should be adopted by the

Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). Libya is another point of contention; the Emirati-Egyptian axis backs a military solution, which Algiers thinks could compromise its security. It also fears that an axis victory could make Libya a Saudi ally in OPEC.

Qatar, conversely, has just invested in a $2 billion steel project in Algeria. It also lobbied with Algeria in OPEC to reach an agreement to reduce production. Algiers fears that an isolated Qatar may withdraw from the deal, affecting oil prices. Furthermore, the two countries have similar views on Libya. Algeria is, moreover, Iran's closest North African partner, while Iran sides with Qatar on this crisis.

**Tunisia: The delicate balance of a democracy**

Since 2011, Tunisia has been a site of GCC competition for regional influence. But Tunisia's foreign minister stressed his country's neutrality in the current crisis. Ennahda — whose leadership is actually close to both Qatar and Saudi Arabia — echoed this position.

In June, the UAE sent two envoys to Tunisia. Qatar has also sent its minister of state for foreign affairs. Iran's foreign minister also stopped in Tunisia during his North African tour to discuss the crisis. In July, the Saudi minister of commerce and investment landed in Tunis with a 50-strong delegation, reiterating "Tunisia 2020" conference pledges of $800 million, and adding contracts worth $200 million.

Nonetheless, the "Tunisian model" is often bashed in Egyptian and Emirati media, while the UAE snubbed Tunisia diplomatically and economically since 2011. Qatar, however, remains the biggest Arab investor in Tunisia and an important diplomatic partner.

**Libya: Oil prospects and civil war alliances**

Engulfed in a civil war, Libya has rival governments based in the country's west and east.

In western Libya, Qatar remains a major player with strong alliances in Tripoli and Misrata. But Tripoli's Government of National Accord (GNA) has recently taken steps away from Qatar as it attempts to broker a peace deal with eastern Libya. Yet while it may be decreasing its dependence on Qatar, the GNA cannot stand against it without risking major infighting in its control zone. It will also need the emirate to strengthen its negotiation role (with the government in the east).

Tripoli has so far refrained from issuing any statement on the GCC rift.

Eastern Libyan leaders, by contrast, participated early in the anti-Qatar campaign. They accuse Qatar of supporting terrorism and fomenting divisions in Libya. In fact, the UAE has been running a military airport near Benghazi since 2015, while Egyptian and Emirati fighter jets occasionally operate in Libyan skies. Eastern Libya is often seen as an Egyptian-Emirati satellite, which makes its alignment expected.

**The future of North African relations with the gulf**

Direct hegemonic pressure from the Boycott Quartet and "softer" economic power exerted by Qatar have led the major North African countries to adopt positions of neutrality. But as eastern Libya shows, this is not a consistent position in the region. Mauritania, a junior member of the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), is also anti-Qatar, and so are most of the countries forming the AMU's southern belt (Chad, Niger and Senegal).

Far from following a default policy, each country made unique calculations that led it to choose neutrality. Countries that usually have little else in common reached similar political conclusions. But this also means their decisions may change if the quartet increases pressure, putting them again at odds

*Youssef Cherif is a Tunis-based political analyst and a member of the Civic Activism Network at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.*

# Oman is a mediator in Yemen. Can it play the same role in Qatar?

*By Stacey Philbrick Yadav*

On Tuesday, President Trump spoke with Oman's Sultan Qaboos bin Said shortly after a visit to Washington by Oman's minister of state for foreign affairs. Though a less visible negotiator than Kuwait, Oman has been active in efforts to mediate the crisis in the Gulf Cooperation Council. Can Oman continue to avoid taking sides in this conflict — and will its neutrality allow it to arbitrate effectively?

Oman's role in the war in Yemen offers insight into its potential for mediating the Qatar crisis. During my recent research in Oman, it was clear that while it has benefited from Qatar's economic and political isolation, Oman's ability to fully pursue these opportunities cannot not be considered in isolation of its ongoing efforts to broker peace in Yemen, nor its domestic economic environment.

**Oman's unique history of neutrality**

Omanis interviewed for my research were quick to situate their policy of political neutrality as both long-standing and organic. With a documented history as go-between for the Arab Gulf states, Iran and the United States, Oman has served as a back channel for regional agreements large and small. Collectively, Omanis I spoke with portray their foreign policy as one of nonaggression, but it is clear from Oman's past actions that this is not just a passive strategy. Since the beginning of the war in Yemen two years ago, it has negotiated the release of hostages, served as a go-between with Iran, helped evacuate American diplomats and hosted peace talks.

**Doing what the United Nations cannot**

While the U.N.-sponsored peace process in Yemen has all but entirely stalled, Oman has some options that the United Nations lacks, given the latter's state-centric configuration and power dynamics among members. Oman's flexibility is evidenced in its willingness to host different Yemeni factions in Muscat, particularly Houthi representatives and their allies aligned with former president Ali Abdullah Saleh. Oman has also dispatched its own representatives to Riyadh to meet with the internationally recognized government of President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi and members of the coalition that supports it.

More informally, Yemenis outside of the warring factions find a ready ear in Muscat. This means that Omanis have a well-grounded sense of the progress of the war, its costs to combatants and civilians alike and its risks to the region. Yet those with whom I spoke bristled at the suggestion that Oman was engaged in a parallel track and instead characterized their work as helping to inform and support the U.N. process.

**What constitutes neutrality?**

Critics of Oman's dealings with the Houthis and their Iranian supporters argue that its bilateral relations with Tehran extend beyond neutrality. Members of the Saudi-led coalition, most especially Saudi Arabia, have put tremendous pressure on Oman to fall in line with fellow GCC members. Omani diplomats report being blindsided by the coalition's decision to intervene militarily in 2015, but express no regrets about not joining. Though Saudi Arabia denied responsibility, the Omani ambassador's residence in Sanaa was hit by a Saudi airstrike in what one Omani diplomat described to me "as direct a message as one can imagine."

Oman has not maintained its neutrality in Yemen only out of altruistic humanitarian considerations. While the country does send aid — both officially and privately — and allows medical evacuees to be treated in Muscat hospitals, the 179-mile border has been secured in ways that limit movement of people and goods. This reflects Oman's concern about the conflict's potential for spillover,

as well as its wariness how regional realignments are playing out in Yemen.

**Concern over regional power plays**

First among these concerns is the growing role of the United Arab Emirates in southern parts of Yemen. This includes the UAE's potential support for southern secessionists, which antagonizes the Hadi government and its Saudi patrons. It also reflects anxieties about potential Emirati development of a military base on the Yemeni island of Socotra at the mouth of the Gulf of Aden, with Qatari and Iranian-backed media reporting a rumored long-term lease. Emirati and Saudi forces have also openly clashed over development of the port of Aden.

Some Omanis interpret the UAE's quest for territory and influence in the south as an effort to specifically challenge the Chinese-financed development of the Omani port project at Duqm, or more generally to strategically encircle the sultanate.

**When neutrality is an economic boon**

The Gulf economy is heavily reliant on transport, so it's no surprise that Emirati moves in South Yemen may threaten Oman. But the Qatar crisis has also been a boon to Omani ports. Oman has welcomed Qatari shipping through its ports and rerouted air traffic through its airports and airspace with the help of Oman Air. Whether it's the business executive making his weekly shuttle between his firm's Dubai and Doha offices, or pilgrims returning from Saudi Arabia via Doha's global hub, Qatar Airways generates an estimated 30 percent of its revenuefrom flights within the Gulf. The state-owned company now relies largely on Oman to retain at least some of that revenue, offering Oman a return on its neutrality Yemen likely never will.

Such economic considerations are significant in light of Oman's current 21 percent budget deficit. Indeed, the Economist explicitly described Qatar's isolation as "a silver lining" for Oman, given that economic diversification has actually been reversing in the sultanate, where oil exports generate a staggering 80 percent of government revenue even as prices fall. The expansion of its port and air traffic and partnerships with Omani state enterprises offer one potential lifeline.

**How sustainable is Oman's neutrality?**

However, Oman's commitment to neutrality in two simultaneous Gulf conflicts — one military, one diplomatic and economic — may be too much to bear long term. Given Oman's tenuous economic position, Saudi Arabia and the UAE could attempt to secure its support in Qatar by threatening economic isolation of its own. That this has not yet happened supports Omani perceptions that their neutrality may be criticized publicly but remains valued privately as an essential back channel.

Of the two crises, Yemen is more central to Oman's stability and security. To safeguard its neutrality in Yemen, Oman will therefore need to work quickly to put out the fire in Qatar.

Though it may seem a counterintuitive move, Oman's decision last week to recommit to its bilateral ties with Iran may hold Saudi Arabia and the Emirates at bay long enough to negotiate a settlement and allow Oman to refocus on Yemen. While some have posited that the Trump administration distrusts Oman, this week's diplomatic engagement in Washington may suggest that Oman is poised to once again play its well-rehearsed role as regional broker.

*Stacey Philbrick Yadav is an associate professor of political science at Hobart and William Smith Colleges and serves on the executive board of the American Institute of Yemen Studies. She is the author of "Islamists and the State: Legitimacy and Institutions in Yemen and Lebanon," (I.B. Tauris, 2013).*

# Why did Qatar just change its residency laws?

*By Jocelyn Sage Mitchell*

For more than two months, Qatar has been under a political and economic blockade led by Saudi Arabia. Just last week, Qatar approved a draft law that gives permanent residency status to certain noncitizens, including children of Qatari women married to non-Qatari men.

With everything the besieged country has been doing — changing its shipping routes, finding new importers of basic food products, and solidifying its defenses — why is Qatar spending time changing its residency laws?

**Qatari leadership is using this crisis to its advantage**

By pushing through domestic policy goals that will reshape not only the country but the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) as a whole, this move is an indication that the Qatari leadership is using this crisis to its advantage.

It is also the clearest sign yet that Saudi Arabia's influence over the six-country GCC is waning. The Saudi-led blockade was an attempt to force Qatar back in line with the more conservative members of the GCC. But Qatar's move on residency laws demonstrates that the blockade is having the opposite effect intended.

**Citizenship laws in the GCC: Exclusive and patriarchal**

The six monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula formed the GCC in 1981 as a unified front to protect against Iraqi and Iranian encroachment. Iraq's invasion of oil-rich Kuwait in 1990 demonstrated the hollowness of GCC protection against external threats, but the GCC has been very good at protecting its autocratic rulers against internal threats. Under Saudi Arabia's influence, the GCC has followed a conservative path, acting (or failing to act) as a unified bloc on sensitive domestic issues and giving each country a measure of political cover from citizen dissent.

In line with the GCC, Qatar has always enforced citizenship laws that pass down citizenship only from father to child. Being born in Qatar gives one no claim to citizenship: Even children of Qatari women married to non-Qatari men do not get citizenship upon birth.

Qatar's new law is the first in the union to bestow noncitizens with the economic benefits akin to those under full citizenship — including free education, free health care and preferential hiring — as well as the stability of permanent residency rather than temporary visas that must be renewed annually.

**Public support for legal changes**

In my 10 years of living and working in Qatar, I investigated Qataris' hunger for changes. In 2013 and in 2014, I conducted two surveys of Qatari citizens' attitudes on gender roles, economic satisfaction, political efficacy and policy preferences. Both times, 9 out of 10 Qataris — both men and women — supported a change in the laws to allow Qatari women to pass their citizenship on to their children.

Qataris are not silent about these concerns: Local media frequently broadcast complaints from those who are excluded from citizenship and its corresponding state-distributed benefits, including public-sector salary increases, land ownership, education scholarships, employment — and even the ability to marry and have children.

While the Qatari government acknowledged these concerns and pledged to review the laws in its National Development Strategy, there had been no movement.

**Why change the law now?**

While Qatar has frequently charted an independent course in external affairs, Saudi pressure and conservative voices from established families within the country have kept Qatar from experimenting with internal change. It seems that the humanitarian crisis caused by the blockade has

given the Qatari regime the domestic political cover to act. Thousands of citizens across the GCC are intermarried. But with spousal transfer of citizenship difficult at best, most retain their home country's citizenship even when marrying, living and working in another GCC state.

When the crisis began, the blockading countries recalled their citizens from Qatar and forced Qatari citizens to leave their countries, splitting families across the region during the holy month of Ramadan. Qatar's granting of permanent residency to previously excluded members of society is a shrewd political move to use the immediate humanitarian crisis of the blockade to solve a longer-term domestic problem. And public approval was immediate: On Twitter, Qatari citizens and expatriate residents largely expressed support, with many encouraging further expansion of residency and citizenship laws.

**This may be just the start for Qatar**

The permanent residency law may herald more change to come. A GCC-wide value-added taxon goods and services was set to unroll in 2018 to help these states with budget deficits and unsustainable energy subsidies. The splintering of GCC unity throws this initiative into doubt.

Already, Qatar's plans for increased taxes internally have been shelved: A promised "sin tax" on alcohol in July never materialized, suggesting that Qatar is less interested in making money than in keeping its expatriate community, including important business interests, happy. Qatar is also hinting that it will change the rules of foreign investment and ownership to attract additional business away from its blockading neighbors.

Similar to the strategy pursued by Kuwait in the 1960s and 1990s to gain political legitimacy in the face of Iraqi territorial threats, we may see increased political changes in Qatar as it seeks to differentiate itself, including the long-awaited elections for the national (advisory) legislature.

Qatari citizens themselves may expect this step: My 2013 survey showed, again, an overwhelming majority of Qataris (90 percent) agreeing that electing their national legislature, as promised by their 2004 constitution, would be a good thing. A Qatari citizen recently told me, "If there ever was censorship revolving around political topics, at this time there is none — political conversations are occurring in the majlis and in public, too."

With the blockade settling in for the long haul, Qatar's move to expand *its residency laws may be the first of several attempts to make progress on societal issues that have been simmering for far longer than the blockade itself. Qatar's next moves will continue to illuminate the unintended consequences of a miscalculated blockade.*

*Jocelyn Sage Mitchell is an assistant professor in residence of political science in the liberal arts program of Northwestern University in Qatar.*

# The GCC after the Arab Spring

# Collaboration and community amongst the Arab monarchies

*By Sean Yom*

The Arab uprisings resulted in regime change in several Middle East republics but none of the monarchies (Morocco, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates). Since 2011-12, scholars have expressed renewed interest in the so-called durability of the Arab kingships, attempting to explain their cultural heritage, institutional endowments, and rentier wealth.[1] Yet we should study not only what these royal autocracies are in terms of structure, but also what they do, in terms of agency. We must understand how they made certain choices and implemented new policies in an effort to survive.

In doing so, we can observe authoritarian diffusion since 2011, in particular how the spread of common norms and ideas has helped catalyze unprecedented policy convergence among these eight regimes sharing a revitalized pan-royal identity. Many of the Arab monarchies have implemented shared policies in areas such as societal policing, sectarian inflammation, media suppression, and Gulf Cooperation Council expansion. This brief essay suggests that we cannot explain such convergence, the kind of inter-regime cooperation that Thomas Richter and André Bank invoke in their introductory essay, without first locating its ideational origins. Put another way, diffusion matters in this context as a causal variable, as the mechanism engendering a new pan-royal identity that, in turn, has facilitated policy collaboration and convergence among eight authoritarian monarchies.

There is some precedent for theorizing this. For one, comparative scholars know that much like liberal democracies share "best practices" and norms, authoritarian regimes can diffuse "worst practices" regarding their repression, financing, and governance. Essays in this volume by Steve Heydemann, Maria Josua, and May Darwich show how Arab regimes have picked up specific practices of coercion and financing from one another during both war and peace. The other theoretical foundation comes from international relations. IR theorists know well how not just material interests but ideas enable disparate political groups to behave in concerted ways across borders. Work on epistemic communities as well as security communities uses that contested term, "community," to show how shared truths (i.e., consensual ways of viewing the world and processing information), allow actors to perceive one another as equal parts of a bigger collectivity that share a common identity and thus fate.[2] The metaphor of community provides a striking way to interpret how Arab monarchies (i.e., not just kings but also senior princes, cabinet ministers, and advisers tied to the palace) are coming to see and treat one another – as not simply strategic allies in a materialist sense, but also members of an embattled community of royalism whose way of political life is under attack.

What makes the Mideast monarchies distinctive, however, is that these regimes have tended to emulate and learn from one another far more than their republican allies since the Arab uprisings. Simply being a non-democracy is not enough: one must be a member of that endangered species called absolute monarchism to reap the fruits of this brand of diffusion. The closest historical equivalent to such selectivity within a broader landscape of regional authoritarianism is perhaps Operation Condor, the decade-long effort by the military intelligence services of Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay to eliminate leftist dissent. From 1975 through the mid-1980s, these leaderships exterminated numerous dissidents whose very existence threatened their shared model of right-wing bureaucratic-authoritarianism. The collaboration among Arab monarchies since 2011 may well inaugurate a more modernized, stealthier version of such selective international cooperation. Little reported in the Western media, the interior ministers of the Arab League have met annually under the auspices of the Arab Interior Ministers Council, based in Tunis since the early 1980s. Like

Operation Condor, these summits have allowed regime watchdogs to innovate and share new technologies of repression.[3] Further, outside the region, autocratic "great powers" Russia and China counter liberal democratic norms by diffusing their own models of security and stability, in particular utilizing mechanisms like coercion and competition to promote authoritarianism in their respective spheres of influence.[4]

**A Royal "We"**

The Arab uprisings threatened all autocracies in the Mideast, but they made royal voices especially doubtful about their viability in the modern world. By viability, I mean the prospects for survival not simply as dictatorships (as there are plenty everywhere), but rather as biological enterprises built upon the twin pillars of familial succession and near-absolute control over the state apparatus. During 2011, calls for malakiyyah destouriyyah (constitutional monarchy) from newly mobilized voices in these societies – not just suppressed minorities, but also students, workers, clerics, professionals, and others – resonated. For palace hardliners, the notion of constitutional monarchism was a "virus" contagiously spreading across their societies.[5] It cut as deeply as protest buzzwords like isqaat (downfall) due to its normative implications: it reminded absolutists that they were among the last royals left in the world clinging onto the coercive reigns of state ownership. One Gulf prince admitted that even the oil-rich kingdoms were not "100 percent immune" to the uprisings, for at stake were principles of political representation rather than questions of economic well-being."[6] Indeed, some royals felt that this crisis posed a greater threat than the heyday of Arab Nationalism, which swept away royalism in Egypt, Iraq, Yemen, and Libya, for two reasons. First, unlike the turbulence of the 1950s and 1960s, absolutist royalism by 2011 had become virtually extinct everywhere else; outside the Middle East, only Swaziland and Brunei still abided by its tenets. Second, whereas Arab Nationalism was conveyed as a regional threat emanating from republican capitals like Cairo and Damascus, demands for constitutionalism came from the monarchies' own societies.

Such existential fear compelled many leaders to fall back on the common norms that bound their familial regimes together. Between private dialogues and public media articulations, these consensual truths were many. One prominent example was the internalized principle of dynastic superiority, or "blood over ballots." Blood over ballots establishes not only the distinction between monarchism and republicanism but also enshrines eternal political inequality: all else being equal, the worst member of a royal family still has more legitimacy to rule than the best commoner from society. Whereas father-son succession in dynastic republics like Syria or Azerbaijan was justified ex post facto on pragmatic grounds of national cohesion or effective leadership, monarchical power-holding rests upon a genetic argument implying that blood alone renders the ruling family's claim to power immune to popular contestation.

These and other consensual truths rendered visible a new pan-royal identity that coalesced by spring 2011. This identity manifested through increased communication among the monarchies, which included not only direct lines between kings but also the lower-level exchanges between cabinet ministers, senior princes, and private emissaries. While much of this interaction was hidden from the Arab media (and even when uttered, was glossed over with opaque euphemisms), one indicator of this shift was the increased level of talks involving only the monarchies. Frequent summits of foreign ministers representing just these eight countries exemplified this.[7] These meetings brought together not just official emissaries but also various senior princes who could build upon previous interfamilial links crafted by decades of intermarriage, cross-investments, and social networks. Other cases of direct cross-royal exchanges were more obvious, such as the Jordanian regime emulating its Moroccan counterpart in promulgating constitutional "reforms" by summer 2011 in order to appease peaceful yet stubborn protests.[8]

The diffusion and coalescence of this pan-royal identity – an Arab royal "we" – should not imply that the Arab monarchies intended to form some grand confederation.

Neither does it herald the sublimation of underlying identities (e.g., tribal, national, geographic, familial), or even the elimination of past rivalries. Social scientists know well that identities are not only malleable but also compete with one another; the existence of one does not preclude the subsistence of another. The brief ideological spat between the Qatari and Saudi monarchies over which political faction to back in transiting states like Egypt and Tunisia, for instance, occurred at the same time that they both participated in more frequent monarchical meetings and communications. Pluralism is part of any communal social order, and only by considering the full range of patterned behaviors and ideas can we gain a textured appreciation of how complex this realm of ideas and beliefs is.

**Monarchical Cooperation**

Starting in 2011, then, pan-royalism was a new source of collaborative policymaking among these monarchies. It was notably stronger than the old fear felt by the Gulf kingdoms in the aftermath of the 1979 Iranian Revolution. There, the threat generated by the new Islamic Republic was conveyed in sectarian terms, and localized to the Arabian Peninsula – dictated more by place and religion rather than reactionary critiques of monarchism itself, and not exactly the catalyst for any new Gulf-oriented (khaliji) identity amongst Saudi Arabia and its five neighboring kingdoms.[9]

Still, how can we ascertain whether pan-royalism palpably spurred new forms of monarchical collaboration? One way is to examine specific cases of policy convergence and consider rival materialist explanations. Take, for instance, the effort to expand the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) by bringing in Morocco and Jordan alongside the six Gulf kingdoms. Completely bypassing the Arab League, this idea was first advocated in February 2011 and, despite some stumbles, is still discussed in foreign ministerial meetings. Some observers saw the initiative as an effort to convert the GCC, an otherwise ineffectual security alliance, into a broader "monarchies' club" that could create a symbolic firewall protecting the royal autocracies from everyone else.[10]

Establishing close ties to the oil-rich Gulf made strategic sense to resource-poor Jordan and Morocco, since they would receive far greater economic and invest aid. Yet what realistic benefit would it bring to the Gulf kingdoms? Neither the fly arc of Moroccan fighter jets nor the defensive prowess of Jordanian infantry would be much use in potential war against Iran. Likewise, the GCC intervention in Bahrain in March 2011 demonstrated that Saudi Arabia alone could help its smaller allies squash domestic threats. Geography likewise cannot explain this impetus from the Gulf to better protect its monarchical brethren. The Saleh regime in neighboring Yemen had long lobbied to gain entrance into this alliance, but to little avail; even at the height of its unrest, no official suggested inserting Yemen into the GCC in order to preserve this allied dictatorship.

Rather, the GCC expansionist policy reflected novel framework of pan-royalism kindled in the fires of the Arab uprisings. The heightened perception among monarchical voices that they were more alike than different ironically also explains why some of the smaller Gulf kingdoms slowed down the expansion process by 2012, preferring instead a longer timeline of negotiated admission. Reportedly, some in smaller Gulf kingdoms like Kuwait, Qatar, and Oman feared the contagious spread of popular protests from Morocco and Jordan to the Gulf, given the similarities these countries apparently shared.[11]

Another example of greater monarchical collaboration occurs in the realm of domestic policy, with the practice of "cross-policing," in which royal governments smother domestic critics of other Arab monarchies, even if those critics never opposed their own dynasty. Since 2012, there have been dozens of cases of cross-policing across the monarchies. Only a few have broached the Western media, such as the incarceration of Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood official Zaki Bani Irsheid for criticizing the United Arab Emirates, or the startling detention of Kuwaiti parliamentarians due to their censure of Saudi policies and Bahraini treatment of Shi'a. These cases are but the tip of the iceberg.

Cross-policing is hardly a new practice and has occurred between republics and monarchies in the past as well as the present – for instance, the Sissi regime in Egypt cracking down on anti-Saudi dissent. Yet two aspects of specifically royal cross-policing suggest that something deeper and ideational is operating: timingand domain. In terms of timing, virtually all cross-policing cases among the monarchies began after the November 2012 Joint Security Agreement issued by the Gulf kingdoms and to which Morocco and Jordan assented. The JSA, first proposed in late 2011, called for signatories to "suppress interference in the domestic affairs" of other kingdoms, among other new requirements that blurred the boundaries between these kingdoms.[12]

Second, the act of cross-policing has required syncretic legal framing and transnational coordination between the monarchies to a far greater degree than necessary given past practices of ad hoc crackdowns. Since 2012, the majority of the Arab kingdoms have promulgated revised "anti-terror" statutes that have not only extended the criminalization of speech to include all the monarchies but also expanded the purview of state monitoring itself to new areas, such as online social networks. Further, there have been almost no cases of cross-policing occurring from monarchy to republic; for instance, Jordanian censors are keen on preserving the image of the Gulf kingdoms, but seldom make trouble for critics of Egypt. In short, many of the Arab monarchies have systematized their legal strategies of suppressing reformist sentiments.

Other examples of greater monarchical collaboration since the Arab uprisings that demand further research include the deliberate amplification of Sunni chauvinism during 2011-12 that went hand-in-hand with retrenching monarchist power, as well as democratic diffusion-proofing, or common strategies of sanitizing media discourse and manipulate the public sphere in order to better insulate the domestic citizenry from external democratic norms.

At the same time, this exploratory probe comes with a disclaimer. As constructivists have long understood, empirically proving that an idea, truth, or identity fundamentally caused a certain policy shift is difficult. Perceptions are notoriously intersubjective, and even the best evidence may reflect hindsight bias. Still, there is abundant reason to consider how the diffusion of pan-royalism and the creation of a new communal order can help explain the origins and trajectory of monarchical collaboration since 2011, either as a substitute or else a complement to more traditional rationalist explanations. At the most, this proposition begs for further study; at the least, it dispels any lingering assumption that monarchism does not matter in the modern Middle East.

*Sean Yom is an associate professor of political science at Temple University.*

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# How a few young leaders are shaking up foreign policy in the Gulf Cooperation Council

*By Russel E. Lucas*

Why did Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates begin the boycott of Qatar that has roiled regional politics for the past two months? Many recent studies of Middle East foreign policy subscribe to the idea that such decisions can best be explained by the preservation of regime security. However, recent events show how this decision-making may be more specifically about succession security.

Regional foreign policy is not just about preserving the survival of a particular monarchical regime but ensuring the leadership of a particular set of individuals within the ruling family.

**A shake-up in the Saudi line of succession**

Succession security has recently come to the fore because of the rapid ascent of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. The normally glacial and opaque process of Saudi leadership changes was disrupted when the 81-year-old King Salman bin Abdul Aziz took over after the death of his brother King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz in 2015. Since then, King Salman has upended his brother's plans for succession by removing both his 71-year-old younger brother, Muqrin bin Abdul Aziz, and the son of Salman's older brother, 57-year-old Mohammed bin Nayef, from the line of succession.

In the process, King Salman's 31-year-old son rose from obscurity to defense minister and now to crown prince. Recent reports that his predecessor, Mohammed bin Nayef, was removed from his position as crown prince through house arrest and a forced abdication expose the tension underlying the transition.

Since King Salman's health is questionable at best, it may not be long until his son takes his place. The crown prince is seen as the architect of the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen's civil war. Saudi Arabia's embargo of Qatar also appears to be an initiative of his. These foreign policies, accompanied by the grand economic plans in Saudi Vision 2030, aim to shake up Saudi policies and forefront the crown prince's agenda.

**A dynamic crown prince in the Emirates**

The Qatar embargo is also strongly supported by the United Arab Emirates. While the 68-year-old UAE president and emir of Abu Dhabi, Khalifa bin Zayed al-Nahayan, nominally rules the federation, he has ceded most of the activities of leadership to his 56-year-old brother, Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed. The crown prince has pushed much of Abu Dhabi's — and by extension the UAE's — recent dynamism.

Since Abu Dhabi bailed out its neighboring emirate after the 2008 financial crash, Dubai's ruler, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Maktum, has been clearly relegated to the sidelines in the federation.

**An alliance of "young sheikhs" amid a geopolitical power struggle**

The two "young sheikhs" — Salman and Zayed — have found common cause against their 37-year-old counterpart in Qatar, Emir Tamim Bin Hamad al-Thani.

The Saudi and Emirati dispute with Qatar has roots in the larger geopolitical and regional balance of power, but their timing has a much more personal dynamic. The decline of U.S. influence in the Gulf — first under the Obama administration's retrenchment and now under President Trump's randomness — has left regional powers scrambling to fill the void.

The Persian Gulf monarchies survived the 2011 wave of popular mobilization through the judicious use of historical and economic assets. Since then, however, they have reacted differently to increasing Iranian power and the reverberations of the Arab Spring. Qatar actively supported the rise of new voices such as the Doha-based Al Jazeera television network and political players like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Saudi Arabia and the UAE, in contrast, acted to preserve autocratic regimes. Venues like Bahrain, Egypt, Libya and Syria have witnessed the competition between Qatar and its rivals in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

**The domestic side of international agreements and boycotts**

In 2013, Qatar and the rest of the GCC reached a series of agreements to mend these tensions. These agreements seemed to be linked to Emir Hamad's abdication for his son Tamim a few months later. The perceived continuing influence of Hamad has contributed to the current crisis. Yet these foreign policies also serve a domestic purpose in succession dynamics. Mohammed bin Nayef's opposition to the Qatar embargo may have been the final straw resulting in his being removed as Saudi crown prince. Meanwhile, the embargo has allowed Tamim to step out of his father's shadow thanks to a wave of popular support.

The Qatar boycott also serves as a message to leaders of Kuwait and Oman, two GCC members that are not boycotting Qatar. With the Kuwaiti emir and crown prince in their 80s and the Omani sultan younger but more ill, leadership will soon transition in these two monarchies as well.

**The international impacts of domestic succession politics**

Previous rounds of succession security crises led to

instability in the Middle East. During the 1950s and 1960s, palace coups reshuffled monarchs in the region while military coups removed their Egyptian, Libyan and Iraqi counterparts. Successions in the 1990s in Jordan, Morocco, Bahrain and Qatar led some to see the harnessing of populist policies by new monarchs as the herald of democracy — which it was not.

While the rules and tools of succession processes are becoming more routinized in the region, the implications of leadership shifts in a number of countries has more than just domestic ramifications. Diplomatic efforts at resolving the impasse will need to provide not just reassurances to states and governments, but to individuals as well. Today's young sheikhs may secure their succession — only to imperil the rule of their dynasty.

*Russell E. Lucas is an associate professor of Arab studies and director of global studies in the arts and humanities at Michigan State University.*

# How Trump's alignment with Saudi Arabia and the UAE is inflaming the Middle East

*By Marc Lynch*

President Trump took to Twitter Tuesday to offer a full-throated endorsement of this week's surprisingly aggressive moves by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates against Qatar. Trump cast the moves against Qatar as the realization of his visit to Saudi Arabia: "So good to see the Saudi Arabia visit with the King and 50 countries already paying off. They said they would take a hard line on funding extremism, and all reference was pointing to Qatar."

Trump's tweets may not have been coordinated with the rest of his administration, or he may not have thought through the implications of promoting a blockade of a country hosting America's most important military base for the campaign against the Islamic State. But his position builds naturally upon the full embrace of the Saudi-UAE position on regional issues articulated during his visit to Saudi Arabia. During that visit, he prioritized confrontation with Iran and an escalated campaign against "radical Islamist terrorism," while removing questions of human rights and democracy from the agenda.

This embrace of the Saudi-Emirati axis was likely intended to rebuild American leadership of its regional alliance structure. But the focus on Iran and on Islamism misses several other critical lines of conflict in the region. As I outline in my recent book, the intra-Sunni political battle between the Saudi/UAE axis and Qatar has long been as central to regional politics as has the conflict with Iran. The campaign against the Islamic State has relied upon de facto cooperation with Iran. The focus on the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamist extremism has often been a cover for a more general campaign against any form of democratic change or popular activism.

**The campaign against Qatar**

The competition between Qatar and the Saudi-Emirati coalition has long been one of the key lines of regional politics. Since the mid-1990s, Qatar has contested Saudi hegemony over the Gulf and competed as a regional power broker. The Qatari television station Al Jazeera in the 1990s challenged the carefully controlled Saudi-owned Arabic

language media. Qatar competed with Saudi Arabia over the mediator role in arenas ranging from Lebanon and Palestine to Somalia. It also built networks that included not only the Muslim Brotherhood but also the young online activists who would later become pivotal players in the Arab uprisings.

Its hosting of personnel and assets belonging to the United States and other allies at the Al-Udeid Air Base made it a critical node in the American regional security architecture, and offered protection against external threats — whether from Iran or Saudi Arabia.

The uprisings of 2011 produced a rare moment of unity among the Gulf Cooperation Council states. Qatar supported the intervention into Bahrain, and allowed Saudi Arabia to take the lead in formulating a GCC response to Yemen. Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE worked together to push successfully for military intervention in Libya and less successfully for a similar intervention in Syria.

But this cooperation faded quickly as the sense of existential threat passed, and competition quickly intensified in almost every arena. In both Egypt and Tunisia, Qatari-backed coalitions initially prevailed, as the Muslim Brotherhood won both elections in Egypt and Ennahda won in Tunisia. But Egypt's President Mohamed Morsi was overthrown in a military coup backed by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, while Tunisia's Ennahda government voluntarily stepped down from power in favor of the Saudi and UAE-backed Nidaa Tounes. In Libya and Syria, the rival coalitions poured money, guns and media support into local proxies, to enormously destructive effect.

This regional proxy war came to a head with the June 2013 abdication of Qatar's Emir and the dismissal of Hamad bin Jassim, the architect of Qatari foreign policy. The 2014 crisis between Qatar and the Saudi/UAE axis, which closely paralleled this week's campaign albeit at a lower level, seemed to have forced the new emir into line. The sudden resurgence of the conflict should therefore be seen as more of a resumption of a long-standing structural feature of Gulf politics than something dramatically new.

What's different is the absence of any obvious proximate cause, the norm-shattering intensity of the Saudi-UAE campaign, and the confused American position. What is also new is the availability of Russia as a potential alternative for Qatar, should the American security guarantee prove worthless.

**Iran and the Islamic State**

The Saudi summit sought to prioritize both pushback against Iran and an escalated campaign against the Islamic State. Today's terrorist attack against Iran's parliament and the shrine of Ayatollah Khomeini puts the tension between these two goals into sharp relief. The armed assault has been claimed by the Islamic State. If true, this would complicate the notion popular with the Saudi media (and recently repeated by Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis) that the Islamic State and Iran are effectively allied.

Escalation against Iran could have serious and immediate negative repercussions for the campaign against the Islamic State, particularly in Iraq. The United States has worked very closely with the Iraqi security forces in the campaign against the Islamic State in Iraq, despite Iran's commanding role in Iraqi politics. Escalating confrontation with Iran or with Shiite militias could fatally undermine that cooperation just as the endgame in Mosul appears close. It could also put U.S. advisers and troops embedded with Iraqi forces at risk.

It's more than just a military problem. If deteriorating relations with Iran undermine the effective reconstruction of Mosul in Iraq and other territories recovered from the Islamic State, it would lay the foundations for the rapid regeneration of the Sunni Islamist militant insurgency under another banner. So too could the sharp escalation in civilian casualties by coalition forces in Mosul — or the unleashing of Shiite militias to carry out sectarian massacres after its liberation. The sectarian nature of the public campaigns against Iran also resonates easily with that of the many Sunni Islamist militant groups beyond the Islamic State.

**Autocratic Retrenchment**

The top priority of Arab regimes has always been self-preservation. The Arab uprisings posed an existential threat to their survival, and they have worked ever since to prevent such challenges from undermining their control. Since 2011, there have been major advances in the cooperation among these autocratic Arab regimes against democratic challengers. This has been justified across the Gulf and in Egypt as a response to the threat posed by the Muslim Brotherhood.

But the Muslim Brotherhood is much more the excuse for repression than its cause. Arab regimes opposed to any form of democratic challenge find the Muslim Brotherhood a convenient way to justify their increased repression. It is telling that upgraded security crackdowns have targeted all forms of civil society and activism, not just Islamists. Trump has signaled full support for these anti-democratic practices. The increased repression does little to address the mounting economic problems and dysfunctional governance of these regimes and likely increases the risk of renewed political instability.

Trump's embrace of the Saudi-UAE vision during his Middle East trip looked dangerous at the time. The unfolding implications over the last two weeks suggest that those risks may have been understated.

*Marc Lynch is a professor of political science and international affairs at George Washington University, where he is the director of the Project on Middle East Political Science. He is also a non-resident senior fellow at the Carnegie Middle East Program and the co-director of the Blogs and Bullets project at the U.S. Institute of Peace.*

# Regime security and shifting alliances in the Middle East

*By Curtis R. Ryan*

The 2015 announcement of a major deal between Iran and six major world powers, including the United States, was but the latest in a list of major jolts to the Middle East regional system. In the last several years alone, the region has been rocked by the pro-democracy uprisings of the original Arab Spring, the dark turn toward civil wars, insurgencies, and increasing terrorism in Syria, Libya, and Yemen, as well as authoritarian backlashes from Egypt to Bahrain. These events have shaken the system of regional alliances and alignments—including in inter-Arab relations—as states have tried to adjust to drastic changes in regional politics and security.

For all the jolts, changes, and challenges to the regional system, however, some key aspects of regional politics continue to operate along familiar lines. If 2011 was the year of regime change, the years since have seen the return of essentially reactionary regime security politics, against both internal and external challenges. Regime security dynamics, in other words, are all too familiar and pervasive. This doesn't mean that regional politics hasn't changed. Rather, it means that regional regimes are still playing with the old playbook, even as societies have changed dramatically and both democratic and militant movements alike challenge states. Regime security remains the key driver of alliance politics in the Middle East, perhaps especially so in inter-Arab relations.

**Regime Security is Still Job One**

Even before the Iranian nuclear deal, the region was already beset by crises and rising violence, and inter-Arab solidarity remained as elusive as ever. Yet the 2015 summit of the Arab League promised more than the usual platitudes to emerge from the organization. This time, the Arab regimes insisted, the summit would be meaningful and finally lead to regional cooperation to restore some semblance of regional order. At least rhetorically, the Arab states seemed united: calling for a joint Arab military force for "rapid reaction" against militancy and terrorism. The force was to consist potentially of as many as 40,000 troops, to be drawn heavily from Egyptian, Jordanian, Moroccan, and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) ground, air, and naval forces. But despite the flurry of temporarily unified rhetoric, actual activity failed to match the aspirations of yet another Arab League Summit—to the surprise of no one—because, despite the lofty rhetoric, states and regimes in the region have different interests and different security priorities.

No matter what the next regional jolt will be, the focus of regional regimes on their own individual security will still remain job one and will underlie their responses. Even when the Arab regimes agreed to work together against militancy and extremism, they had different security threats in mind. For Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, the key threat was Iran and Iranian influence in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Yemen, and allegedly even within Saudi Arabia and Bahrain themselves. For the UAE and Egypt, the core threat remained the Muslim Brotherhood and other similar Islamist movements. For Jordan, meanwhile, the Muslim Brotherhood seemed a loyal opposition compared to rising Salafi movements within the kingdom and the transnational jihadists of the Islamic State who had taken huge swaths of Syria and Iraq, frequently testing Jordan's borders. While Jordan supported its allies (especially Egypt and the GCC), its main security concern remained the Islamic State.

But aid and economic security are also part of regime security, leading aid dependent states such as Jordan, Morocco, and Sudan, not only to give diplomatic or verbal support for Gulf security, but also to send war planes to take part even in war efforts. For these states, regime security concerns were not rooted in fear of Houthi rebels or even of Iranian regional ambitions, but rather in maintaining the good graces (and relatedly, the security and well-being) of rich aid donors such as the Arab Gulf states. In that sense, when the Jordanian foreign minister referred to Gulf state security as a direct interest of Jordan, he was not merely being figurative. In terms of aid, investment, trade, labor remittances, and oil, the security of the Arab Gulf states does indeed correlate directly to regime security in Jordan, Egypt and other resource-poor states.

**Regime Security, Security Dilemmas, and Alliances**

Regime security, I argue, is the key driver of alliance politics in the Middle East. Traditional international relations theory previously had focused on Neorealist concerns with system-structure, anarchy, and external threats to explain alliance politics, with occasional reference to the Middle East (Walt, 1987). But among scholars of the region itself, these types of macro-level theories rarely matched the empirical realities of regional politics. It was for that reason that in my own research, I found myself turning to another subfield, comparative politics, to better explain the international relations of the region, with particular attention paid to the insecurities of regimes in both their domestic and regional settings. I argued that a regime securityapproach, rather than a Neorealist framework, better explained Arab foreign policies and alliance choices (Ryan 1995). I later developed those ideas in a more detailed study of Jordanian foreign policy as the kingdom maneuvered within inter-Arab relations (Ryan 2009).

Even as regional alliances, alignments, and coalitions change, these overall regime security dynamics continue to underpin regional international relations. Arab regimes, I argue, remain frequently trapped in internal and external security dilemmas of their own making, obsessed with ensuring the security of their ruling regimes against both internal and external challenges. Politics in the Arab

world, and indeed elsewhere as well, continues to include internal as well as external security dilemmas. In the latter, states unwittingly undermine their own security even as they bolster their military preparedness and defenses, by triggering alarm in their neighbors. In the former, however, regimes also face an internal or domestic security dilemma, in which their own security measures serve to create fortress regimes, ever more distant from their own societies, resistant to change, yet vulnerable to discontent from an alienated public. Both versions refer to the dangers of a deepening cycle of insecurity.

Alliances then serve as not just country-to-country defense pacts but also looser transnational support coalitions of ruling elites, as regimes help prop each other up against perceived security threats. These can be both material and ideational. Laurie Brand has written on the former, in the form of a political economy of alliance making and budget security; while Gregory Gause and Lawrence Rubin have made clear that that latter—ideational threats—can be every bit as dire in the eyes of regimes as those of a material nature. (Brand 1994, Gause 2003/4, Rubin 2014). The importance of ideational as well as material political struggles in the international relations of the region can be seen especially in what some have called a "New Middle East Cold War' (Gause 2014) or a "New Arab Cold War" (Valbjorn 2007, Bank and Valbjorn 2012, Ryan 2012).

A key fault line in Arab politics is the regime's perception of its own security and stability. When this faces a significant challenge, regimes respond by re-arranging domestic support coalitions, increasing the active role of the internal security apparatus, and—in foreign policy—shifting alliances and alignments to better ensure regime security. Regimes are continually tempted to provide quick fixes to regime security concerns via foreign policy and alliance choices, however, because adjusting external relations seems less risky to them than genuine internal restructuring and reform. The foreign policy focus of regime security politics, in other words, also has domestic consequences, often bolstering existing authoritarian systems and thwarting hope for greater domestic change.

Focusing on regimes and their security concerns (internal and external, economic and military, material and ideational) allows us also to use a regime security approach to link otherwise competing paradigms. Constructivist scholars, for example, have also challenged traditional I.R. theories, with emphasis on identities, ideas, and changes in domestic and regional public spheres (Barnett 1998, Lynch 1999). A regime security approach is not just compatible with, for example, realist and constructivist approaches, but also provides a bridge between them. And if anything, events since the start of the regional Arab spring have only underscored the relevance of a regime security approach to understanding regional international relations and alliance politics.

**Insecurity and Shifting Regional Alliances, 2011-2015**

Just a few years ago, in 2011, the Arab League met in the wake of the first wave of the Arab Spring, with new semi-democratic regimes sitting uncomfortably alongside increasingly nervous dictatorships. For some of the latter, the greatest threat appeared to be not Israel, not Iran, and not militant jihadist movements, but rather domestic democratic grassroots activism and demands for regime change. But for some, an even greater threat came from "reformist" and potentially revolutionary Islamist movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood.

The rise of Islamist regimes (an-Nahda in Tunisia, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt) led alliances such as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to close ranks and even to invite non-Gulf states such as Morocco and Jordan to join the GCC. They may not have been fellow Gulf states, but they were fellow Arab and Sunni monarchies with extensive ties to Western powers. As the tide of the Arab Spring rose and toppled regimes (all authoritarian republics) the monarchies coalesced together in pursuit of a kind of collective regime security. Yet the Syrian war continued to divide the core of the alignment itself, as Saudi Arabia and Qatar were more often than not at odds with one another in their (failed) attempts to determine regime change elsewhere. Saudi Arabia, for example, tended to oppose Islamist groups affiliated with the

Muslim Brotherhood, while the regime in Qatar actively supported Brotherhood movements.

Non-Arab states such as Turkey played ever-larger roles in regional politics, as Turkey's AKP-led regime, in alliance with Qatar, backed Islamist movements across the region. When former President Mohamed Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood regime rose to power in Egypt, many Arab regimes (aside from Qatar) were deeply alarmed. Islamists had, after all, taken power following a popular revolution and a democratic election. Egypt's regime change led to a closer alliance of Egypt, Qatar, and Turkey, but in the same vein, another regime change would then rearrange regional alliances once again. The 2013 coup d'état of General Abdel Fatah al-Sissi in Egypt ousted the Islamist regime, restoring secular and essentially authoritarian rule, while preserving the power and privileges of the vast Egyptian armed forces. The shake-up in regional alliances and inter-Arab relations was immediate. Within 24 hours of the regime change, Jordan's King Abdullah II visited Cairo to support the new regime. Qatar pulled its financial support but was soon outshone by the vast support showered on Egypt by Saudi Arabia and the UAE (Ryan 2014).

The Arab Spring had given new urgency to the politics of regime security. The toppling of four regimes, each in a completely different way, still got the attention of all surviving regimes in the region. But now the post-Morsi regional system saw the strengthening of regimes committed to thwarting regime security threats and committed to propping up themselves and their allies. Specifically, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Jordan emerged as key allies, similarly suspicious of—or even outright hostile to—the Muslim Brotherhood. Three of the states outlawed the Brotherhood entirely, while Jordan allowed the movement (as old as the Jordanian state itself) to continue to operate legally within the kingdom. Still, it was the perception of an internal, and to some extent transnational, threat to their own legitimacy, security, and stability that lead each of these regimes to work closely together—far more closely than they had in responding even to severe regional crises like the Syrian civil war or the rise of extremist threats like al-Qaeda and the Islamic State.

By 2015, the early hopes of the Arab Spring seemed dashed by counter-revolution, military coups, civil wars, and rising regional terrorism. The 2015 Sharm el-Shelkh summit looked like it would be dominated by discussions of the Islamic State (or Da'esh), but instead took place at the start of Arab military intervention in Yemen to prop up the (Arab League-backed) regime of President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi. In 2011, the idea of Arab states routinely crossing borders to intervene militarily directly in the affairs of neighbors would have seemed highly unlikely. But by 2015, a Saudi-led coalition of Arab states was bombarding another Arab country.

The Hadi regime was backed by Saudi Arabia and many Arab states, while Houthi challengers were backed in part by Iran. In any case, the Yemen conflict amounted to multiple dueling regimes, backed by still other regimes, with Yemeni society paying a terrible price for regime and prospective-regime miscalculations and failures. Not even the Syrian civil war, al-Qaeda, or the Islamic State had triggered similar attempts at regional realignment or pan-Arab security cooperation. Rather, it took seemingly less intense threats—democratic street activism, the Muslim Brotherhood, or Iranian backing of local Shi'a movements—to trigger existential regime security fears, with corresponding shifts in alliances and even in direct Arab military action.

The nuclear agreement between Iran and major world powers then shocked the regional system yet again. And certainly Saudi Arabia tried to lead an essentially Sunni and Arab alliance against Iranian inroads in Arab politics. But despite misunderstandings to the contrary, the agreement did not amount to a U.S. realignment away from Egypt, Jordan, or the GCC states toward Iran. Regional Arab allies feared abandonment by their main great power patron, to be sure. And indeed, abandonment, and its counterpart entrapment (that is, having an ally drag one into an unwanted conflict) are the two traditional concerns in yet another security dilemma—one between allies themselves (Snyder 1984, 1990). But the United States increased its support, especially militarily, to each of these regimes and even more so to its ally Israel. In real material terms,

the U.S. alliances were closer, even as inter-personally the regime-to-regime distrust between allies had increased, making the alliances seem distant and uncertain.

However, the U.S.-Iran dimension had more in common with U.S. arms control deals with the Soviet Union during the Cold War. They were deals between adversaries, with ambitions to work together on some issues, but against one another on others. They were not, in short, the beginnings of new alliances or a massive regional realignment on the part of the United States. It was likely, however, to lead to further changes within the region: including deepening the already-existing alliance of Saudi Arabia, UAE, Egypt, Jordan, and other GCC states—and perhaps leading to rapprochement with Qatar.

Still, perception matters more than reality in political life, so the perceived realignment still seems to dominant narratives within Arab regional politics, as the system adjusts to what is indeed a dramatic change in regional politics. But it remains only the latest of a series of regional shocks: the Arab Spring, the Syrian civil war, the rise of the Islamic State, the Iranian nuclear deal, each of these has shaken the regional system. And in each case, regimes responded by putting regime security concerns first, rearranging regional alliances accordingly, and ultimately allowing their many security dilemmas to dampen (or worse) the democratic hopes and aspirations of those who had led the original 2011 Arab Spring demonstrations and uprisings. As much as regional politics has indeed changed in such dramatic ways over these last four years, regime security dynamics and security dilemmas continue to drive regional alliances, with profound implications for both internal and external politics.

*Curtis Ryan is a professor of political science at Appalachian State University in North Carolina.*

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# Bankrolling containment: Saudi linkages with Egypt and Tunisia

*By Ruth Hanau Santini*

Transborder linkages between autocratic states have been shown to support authoritarian regime stability (Tansey, Koehler, and Schmotz 2016). In the Middle Eastern context, attempts by Saudi Arabia to first prevent and then contain political change in the wake of the Arab Spring have received particular attention (Kamrava 2012; Rieger 2014; Farouk 2014). Going beyond such contributions, this memo points to some indications that Saudi Arabia is consolidating ties with not only Egypt under al-Sisi, but also post-revolutionary Tunisia.

While Saudi aid flows have played an important political role in Egypt since the fall of Mubarak – first starving the Morsi-government of funds and then increasing payments to unprecedented levels after the 2013 coup (Farouk 2014) – Saudi involvement in Tunisia had traditionally been limited. However, after the strengthening of old regime elites with the 2014 parliamentary and presidential elections, the Tunisian government began to shift its foreign policy in a more pro-Saudi direction.[1] Saudi engagement in Tunisia has consequently increased, including the signing of an agreement in the field of security cooperation in December 2015.[2]

While Saudi-Tunisian cooperation is very much in its infancy, it is linked to a set of domestic Tunisian dynamics. We show how the rapprochement was partially made possible by a process of learning among Ennahda elites after the coup against Morsi in Egypt, which led them to accept a greater involvement of Saudi Arabia in the economic and security domain as an additional guarantee policy for their political survival.

**Transnational Dimensions of the Arab Spring**

That diffusion and learning have structured the spread of contention in the Arab Spring uprisings has long been recognized. Demonstration effects contributed to the spread of protests from Tunisia, to Egypt, to Yemen, Libya, and Syria (Weyland 2012), and social learning was countered by authoritarian learning as incumbents drew lessons from events in neighboring states (Heydemann and Leenders 2011). Beyond such forms of transnational diffusion by learning, research has also focused on how specific regional actors – principally Saudi Arabia and the wider Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) – sought to influence and contain political change at home and abroad

during the wave of contention in 2011 (Kamrava 2012; Rieger 2014; Farouk 2014; Matthiesen 2013).

On a more general level, Saudi reactions to the Arab Spring can be understood as at least partially driven by linkage patterns between the kingdom and specific Arab Spring countries. The tighter the linkages in terms of trade, migration, and diplomatic interaction, the higher the likelihood that Saudi Arabia would intervene on behalf of an authoritarian incumbent under stress – although such interventions were not necessarily successful as the Egyptian case demonstrates (Tansey, Koehler, and Schmotz 2016).

In this memo, we raise the question of whether a new set of linkage patterns might be emerging at the moment, particularly with respect to the strengthening of Saudi-Tunisian ties along with the continued backing of the Egyptian military regime by Saudi money. Saudi efforts have a strong security component in the form of military cooperation in joint exercises and membership in military alliances on one hand, and through cooperation in the field of domestic security on the other. This contributes to the diffusion of norms of securitization in the form counter-terrorism discourses.

This dynamic is somewhat surprising in the Tunisian case. While Saudi Arabia had actively – albeit unsuccessfully – supported the Mubarak regime in Egypt during the mass uprising, Saudi policy towards Ben Ali's Tunisia in late 2010 and early 2011 was characterized by benign neglect. Thus, just days before Mubarak's fall in February 2011, late King Abdallah openly took the side of Mubarak, attempted to convince the United States not to put further pressure on the Egyptian ruler, and promised that the kingdom would compensate Egypt should the U.S. cut military assistance.[3] At the time of Ben Ali's flight from Tunisia, by contrast, the kingdom made it known that, even though it played host to the deposed president, Ben Ali was not to engage in political activities while being a guest in Saudi Arabia.[4] In brief, initial Saudi reactions to the uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia reflected the strength of ties between the kingdom and the two countries. While a history of strong Saudi-Egyptian ties meant that the kingdom actively intervened on behalf of Mubarak, the relatively weak nature of Saudi-Tunisian ties under Ben Ali did not trigger a similar response.

This contrast becomes even more pronounced if we look at the immediate post-revolutionary period. In Egypt, Saudi Arabia and other GCC member states promised financial support for the country's transitional leadership, but froze the disbursement of funds upon the election of the Muslim Brotherhood's Muhammad Morsi to the presidency. Thus, while the Morsi administration in Egypt could only rely on Qatari money flowing into its coffers, Saudi payments resumed immediately following the July 3, 2013 coup (Farouk 2014; Rieger 2014). What is more, even during the period of Muslim Brotherhood rule in Egypt, military cooperation between Saudi Arabia and the Egyptian Armed Forces was maintained. The – up to that time – largest joint Egyptian-Saudi maneuvers (Tabouk 3) took place from May 8 to 20 2013, just weeks before the military intervention in Egypt,[5] while the two countries' air forces still held joint exercises on 22 June 2013 (Faisal 10), not even a fortnight before the coup.[6] Saudi support to the Egyptian military-led regime after the coup thus does not come as a surprise but rather represents the continuation of long-standing Saudi support for the old regime and the military elite in Egypt.

Saudi Arabia, along with Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, also reacted swiftly to the overthrow of Egypt's first freely elected president in July 2013. On July 9, not even a week after the coup, the three GCC countries pledged a total of 12 billion USD in aid to Egypt, including a combination of grants, loans, central bank deposits, and preferential access to oil.[7] The political message of such aid was made blatantly clear when the late King Abdallah defended the Egyptian military's repression of pro-Morsi protestors on August 14, 2013 that left more than 1,000 dead in a single day.[8] Speaking two days after the massacre, Abdallah accused those "interfering" in Egypt's internal affairs of promoting terrorism.[9] Three days later, on August 19, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal announced that the Kingdom would compensate Egypt for potential losses in U.S. aid as a result of the events.[10]

This move effectively weakened the impact of the U.S. decision to (temporarily) freeze military aid to Egypt and was interpreted as an affront to the U.S. position in Egypt.

Recurrent warnings that aid levels could not be maintained and political friction between Egypt and Saudi Arabia over the conflicts in Libya, Syria, and Yemen notwithstanding, Saudi Arabia has maintained high levels of aid to Egypt. As of May 2016, the total volume of pledges by Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE since the coup amount to some 60 billion USD, roughly equivalent to a yearly average of 20 percent of government expenditure.

**Strengthening Ties?**

In contrast to Egyptian-Saudi relations, ties between the Kingdom and Tunisia had traditionally been weak. As Sons and Wiese argue, Saudi policy makers did not perceive Tunisia as a central player and were less concerned about the influence of Islamist actors in the post-2011 context (Sons and Wiese 2015, 54–55). Despite Tunisia's peripheral position, there are signs of a Saudi-Tunisian rapprochement, not least in military and security cooperation.

Relations between Tunisia and Saudi Arabia had been lukewarm ever since the fall of Ben Ali. The late Saudi King Abdullah was concerned by regime change in Tunisia as Ben Ali "had served as a strategic ally for Saudi Arabia in the fight against terrorism, in securing stability in North Africa and in countering Iranian influence in the region" (Sons and Wiese 2015, 55). Saudi fears increased when the October 2011 elections were won by Ennahda, especially since the Ennahda-led troika government was seen as close to Turkey and Qatar, who provided significant financial help throughout 2012 and 2013.[11] A sign of this regional alignment was when Tunisia cut relations with the Syrian government in February 2012. Moreover, then President Moncef Marzouki called on Egypt to release Morsi in front of the UN General Assembly in September 2013 and referred to Egypt's problematic and undemocratic transition, triggering the temporary withdrawal of the Egyptian and UAE ambassadors to Tunis.[12] However, Tunisian foreign policy did not experience a U-turn similar to Egyptian foreign policy under Morsi. Tunisia's attitude vis-à-vis Teheran (a red line from the Saudi perspective), for example, did not change significantly.

Tunisia's foreign policy stance toward Saudi Arabia softened following the resignation of Ennahda's Ali Larayedh as prime minister, who was succeeded by the technocrat Mehdi Jomaa in January 2014. With the October 2014 elections won by Nidaa Tounes, the December 2014 Presidential elections won by Nidaa's Beji Caid Essebsi, and the ensuing participation in the new government led by Nidaa in February 2015, the policy continued to ease. In addition to the change of leadership, two other context-specific factors need to be stressed: first, Essebsi's decisive role prioritizing better bilateral relations and second, the change in Saudi posture vis-à-vis Islamist parties in the region since mid-2015.[13]

Tunisian ties with the Gulf have since increased, as exemplified by the participation of Tunisia in Saudi Arabia's 34 state Islamic anti-IS alliance, agreed in December 2015. This came after Tunisia's announcement to participate in the U.S.-led anti-IS coalition in September 2015 as part of the Essid government's commitment to "fight terrorism and extremism" at home and abroad.

Relations warmed further with the December 2015 signing of a Memorandum of Understanding for bilateral cooperation for security and defense during President Essebsi's visit to the Kingdom. Afterward, Essebsi referred to this strengthening of ties as an inevitable development in light of the challenges faced by Riyadh, justified by Tunisian Arab identity.[14] As part of this process, the two sides agreed to a yearly meeting of a mixed military commission allowing for more regular and structured exchanges of information and training in the civil protection field. Additionally, Saudi Arabia promised to provide Tunisia 48 F-5a military planes.[15] Less than two weeks after Essebsi's visit to KSA, Saudi Minister of Foreign Affairs Adel El-Gobeir visited Tunisia in what was described as just one of several meetings to be held between Tunisia and KSA to unify their positions

toward international issues, especially terrorism, based on the reinforcement of their cooperation in the political, economic and security fields.[16]

In February 2016, Tunisia participated in joint military training organized by Riyadh. The "Northern Thunder" exercise took place at the northeastern borders of Saudi Arabia in the Hafr al-Batin military facility home of the GCC Peninsula Shield Force, the Gulf's rapid response unit. The training gathered 150,000 troops from 20 different Arab countries and was by far the largest operation since the liberation of Kuwait in 1991.[17] While the stated goal was deterring the Islamic Republic of Iran from potentially aggressing Sunni Gulf states, more likely the show of force had to do with the desire of projecting strength and distracting public opinion from the protracted Yemen war. From its vantage point, one has to remember that, since the July 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action between Iran and the international community, Riyadh has warmed up its attitude vis-à-vis Sunni regional players, including Qatar, and including leading Brotherhood-related figures. This included Ennahda leader Rachid Ghannouchi, who was invited to Saudi Arabia in July 2015, a move that further vindicated the lessons Ennahda leaders drew from the Egyptian experience.[18]

**Learning and the Saudi-Tunisian Rapprochement**

The rapprochement could not have happened without Tunisia's main Islamist party, Ennahda, changing its stance vis-à-vis the Kingdom. Starting from late 2013 and even more so in 2014, Ennahda leaders consciously moderated their stance towards Saudi Arabia. In the words of a senior Ennahda member of Parliament: "There are no problems with Saudi Arabia anymore. Ghannouchi has reassured them that we do not aim at exporting the Tunisian model. Tunisia wants to become the region's Switzerland."[19] Moderating foreign policy alignments, in other words, became a strategy for Ennahda, especially in light of the 2013 scenario in Egypt. Ennahda MPs have often referred to the lesson learned from the coup against Morsi not only in terms of reasserting a non-majoritarian view of democracy, but also in more carefully assessing their regional alliances and the changing balance of power.[20] According to a senior Nidaa MP, the rapprochement was facilitated by Essebsi: "The coup against Morsi was a tournant for Ennahda. But in order to smooth relations with Riyadh, given their previous alignment with Qatar, the rapprochement was facilitated by Beji Essebsi. As a matter of fact, they are more in line with Beji's foreign policy than most of Nidaa party."[21]

One example was the toning down of Ennahda's democratic rhetoric with respect to the Gulf, frequent reference to the non-exportability of the Tunisian revolution, and the uniqueness and specificity of the Tunisian political setting.[22] Over time, even the initial references to the AKP experience as a model demonstrating the compatibility of Islam and democracy have been eclipsed and substituted with references to European experiences such as the German CDU or the Italian Christian-Democrats, further pointing to the European-ness of the Tunisian cultural and political referents for Ennahda, watering down the previous axis with Turkey. The failed July 2016 coup against Erdogan in Turkey has further complicated the position of Ennahda and its relations with Turkey. Following the coup attempt, Ennahda spokesperson Zied Ladhari immediately defended Erdogan, depicting the Turkish president and the AKP as 'brothers' and declaring the attempted coup 'outrageous and dangerous'. Interestingly, however, this was framed within a discourse of defending democracy as rule of law, separation between the military and civilian affairs, and respect for the ballot box, rather than in terms of defending Islamists in power.[23] Moreover, having lost a vote of confidence, the government in Tunis is undergoing a deep reshuffling of cabinet positions, including that of the prime minister. Ennahda, which has recovered its position as the largest political party after a recent split within Nidaa, will likely increase its share in government positions and thus improve its visibility. Ennahda will therefore once again be in the spotlight and will have to carefully assess its foreign policy stances.

**Conclusion**

While Saudi involvement bankrolling the return of Egypt's security apparatus is well known and documented (Farouk 2014), Saudi Arabia has played a much more limited role in Tunisia, both economically and politically. As we have attempted to show, however, there are signs of a Saudi-Tunisian rapprochement. Taking note of the Egyptian scenario, members of Tunisia's Ennahda party have begun to accommodate Saudi interests in their foreign policy stance, a dynamic further solidified by the strengthening of Tunisia's secular elites with the 2014 parliamentary elections, as well as by cautious Saudi moves towards Sunni Islamist actors in the wake of the Iran nuclear deal.

While Saudi-Tunisian military and security cooperation is in its infancy, it nevertheless represents a significant step. Increased Saudi-Tunisian military cooperation, as well as closer ties in the field of civil defense and counter-terrorism, could potentially weaken pressures for reform in Tunisia's security sector, undermining efforts to restructure security provision in the country, per U.S. and EU demands for better civil-military relations, particularly accountability and human rights.

*Ruth Hanau Santini is a nonresident fellow with the Center on the United States and Europe at the Brookings Institution and an assistant professor of Political Science at the Università Orientale in Naples, Italy.*

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# Who is Saudi Arabia's new crown prince?

*By Kristian Coates Ulrichsen*

The elevation of Mohammed bin Salman to crown prince of Saudi Arabia is a calculated risk with potentially enormous consequences for the kingdom. If he succeeds with his vision to transform the Saudi economy by 2030 and reduce the country's reliance on oil revenue, the crown prince — widely known as MBS — could enjoy a reign that lasts for decades, given that he only turns 32 in August and could take Saudi Arabia well into midcentury.

Were this to happen, the future King Mohammed would go down as the ruler who renewed his kingdom and regarded as the 21st-century equivalent of his grandfather, Abdulaziz, whom he so closely resembles physically. However, if the vested interests that have built up over decades prove immune to serious overhauls or MBS takes what proves to be one risk too many, history may remember him instead as an impulsive leader who talked a good game but could not ultimately back up his words with implementable actions.

The oldest son of King Salman's third wife, MBS rose rapidly to prominence after his father became crown prince of Saudi Arabia in June 2012. Unlike his much older half-brothers, MBS did not travel abroad for his education, and instead remained at his father's side and studied law at King Saud University in Riyadh, where his father was governor until 2011.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that a strong bond developed between father and son, which may explain why it was MBS, rather than any of his older and professionally accomplished half-brothers, who eventually became Salman's gatekeeper — first as special adviser and then, in 2013, as head of the crown prince's royal court. In April 2014, MBS was promoted to a cabinet-level position as minister of state, and in January 2015 he succeeded his father as minister of defense when Salman became king.

With the succession to King Abdulaziz having passed among his many sons since his death in 1953, a key question for many Saudi-watchers, particularly those outside the kingdom, was how the royal family would manage the generational transition that had to happen sooner or later. On his first day as king, Salman settled the issue by nominating his nephew, Mohammed bin Nayef, deputy crown prince, signaling, for the first time, a pathway to the grandsons of Abdulaziz. Three months later, in April 2015, Salman removed the existing crown prince, his youngest surviving half brother Muqrin, replaced him with Mohammed bin Nayef, and brought MBS into the line of succession as the new deputy crown prince.

With these acts, which were unprecedented in the modern history of Saudi Arabia, Salman set two precedents; first, that his successor would come from the next generation of royals, and, second, that an incoming king could alter the line of succession that he inherited from his predecessor. Salman's predecessor, King Abdullah, also cycled through two crown princes, but he outlived them both and did not remove them as Salman has done.

A potential area of concern both for MBS and for the king may have been that Mohammed bin Nayef might have been tempted to follow Salman's practice and amend the crown prince when he took the throne. In such reasoning, the only way to ensure that MBS followed his father as king would have been to create a direct line of succession that bypassed Mohammed bin Nayef.

The upper echelons of the Al Saud are, famously, a black box closed to outsiders, and we may never know the precise reasons (or timing) for the removal of Mohammed bin Nayef and appointment of MBS. It may indeed be the case that Mohammed bin Nayef's health was failing. He has reportedly suffered from the aftereffects of an assassination attempt in 2009 when a member of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula blew himself up just meters away.

It certainly is the case that over the past two years there has been a steady concentration of power and responsibility around MBS, and that a string of appointments made in April — including his 28-year-old brother Khalid as Saudi ambassador to the United States — were perceived by many as consolidating MBS's position across the diplomatic, economic, security, defense and intelligence spectrum. With Saudi Arabia facing a volatile regional situation and beginning the array of economic overhauls associated with his Vision 2030 economic retooling, there may simply have been an appreciation of the need for decisive, long-term leadership.

How this plays out within the Al Saud and among Saudi Arabia's regional and international partners will be important. Two anonymous letters written in September 2015 appeared to indicate a level of disquiet among at least a section of senior royal family members toward MBS — the announcement that MBS's appointment as crown prince by 31 of the 34 members of the Allegiance Council may have been intended, in part, to portray a united front against any recurrent acts of dissent. Within the Gulf Cooperation Council — the hawkish axis that binds Saudi Arabia and the Abu Dhabi emirate through MBS and Mohammed bin Zayed — will likely strengthen still further, but may, in the process, intensify the centrifugal pressures that are weakening the GCC among the three states – Kuwait, Oman and Qatar — that do not share the hard-line approach to regional security.

Internationally, the rise of MBS to crown prince — and possibly king sooner rather than later — may be viewed with a degree of ambivalence in Western capitals, including Washington. Many in the security and counterterrorism establishment in D.C. had forged productive working relationships with Mohammed bin Nayef that smoothed relations strained by 9/11, and scrambled to get to get the measure of MBS after 2015 (similarly, the lengthy interviews MBS gave to Western media, including the Economist, Bloomberg, and, most recently, David Ignatius of The Washington Post, may have been designed to sell the prince to a Western audience).

Finally, the close ties that are said to have developed between MBS and Jared Kushner could be instrumental in packaging the "new" Saudi Arabia under a similarly ambitious political neophyte dismissive of tradition and willing to think outside of the box as a cornerstone of the administration's approach to the Middle East, for good or ill.

*Kristian Coates Ulrichsen is a fellow for the Middle East at Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy.*

# Saudi Arabia Just Let Women Drive. Don't Mistake it for Democracy.

*Stéphane Lacroix*

On September 26, Saudi Arabia granted its female citizens the right to drive, reversing a decades long prohibition. The latest in a number of changes shaking the conservative foundations of the kingdom, this widely publicized reform occurred in the wake of dozens of high profile arrests. While Saudi Arabia commonly imprisons independent political voices, the recent arrests were unusual in several ways.

The Saudi regime is in the midst of profound political change. Understanding its latest decisions requires a nuanced look at its fragmented politics and the current regime's liberalizing agenda.

**Why are these arrests unusual?**

While some media outlets reported these arrests as targeting "Islamists," those detained in fact represent a broad range of ideological affiliations. The Islamists include both ultra-conservatives and progressives with widely different views. Conservatives such as Muhammad al-Habdan and Abd al-Aziz Al Abd al-Latif have relentlessly campaigned for more social conservatism and reject democracy. Meanwhile progressives like Salman al-Awda vocally supported the 2011 Arab uprisings, called for the establishment of a constitutional monarchy and even opposed state repression of homosexuality.

The list of detainees also includes several young reformist intellectuals active in the Saudi pro-democracy movement since 2011. Among them is Abdallah al-Maliki, author of a 2012 book on the religious legitimacy of popular sovereignty. Mustafa al-Hasan, the founder of a pan-Gulf youth forum encouraging the development of civil society institutions was also arrested. Other detainees include 'Isam al-Zamil, a young entrepreneur who used his million follower-strong Twitter account to offer a knowledgeable critique of Saudi economic performance and Hasan al-Maliki, a prominent critic of Wahhabism and a regular target of conservatives.

In the past, the police would discretely summon public personalities wanted by authorities. This time, however, most of the detainees were arrested at home, in front of their families. According to my interviews, several dozen more sheikhs, intellectuals and activists were interrogated and threatened. These arrests were reportedly carried out not by the Ministry of the Interior but by a new security body created in July, the "presidency of state security," under the direct authority of the royal court.

What explains these changes in policy? An official statement on September 12 described the arrests as part of a security campaign against "intelligence cells for the benefit of foreign parties." This means Qatar. Most of the detainees had indeed avoided a stance in the current crisis. After four months of boycott without much progress the Saudi authorities may have decided to create a diversion by scapegoating supposed domestic "Qatari agents."

However, these arrests have deeper causes that need to properly analyzed.

**How the Saudi government supported then turned against Islamists**

Until the early 1990s, the Saudi regime maintained close relations with a range of Islamist groups. Starting in the 1960s, the kingdom took in thousands of Muslim Brothers persecuted by Arab nationalist regimes. In the 1980s, more radical Islamists fighting in Afghanistan enjoyed the kingdom's protection.

Those foreign activists influenced Saudi society, leading to the development of a powerful indigenous Islamist movement, the Sahwa, or "awakening." In 1990, after Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait, Sahwa activists spearheaded a movement against the royal family's invitation to base U.S. troops on its soil. This dissent landed the movement's main figures, including Salman al-

Awda, in jail and sowed the seeds of distrust between the regime and Islamists, local and foreign.

In 2002, then interior minister prince Nayef denounced the Muslim Brotherhood as the "source of all evil in Saudi Arabia." That distrust only continued to grow with the Arab Spring, as Islamists won the first democratic elections in Tunisia and Egypt. Inspired by the uprisings, many Saudi Islamists circulated petitions calling for reforms in the kingdom, including the February 2011 declaration "Towards of State of Rights and Institutions," backed by some 9000 signatories.

Backlash against Islamists gathered steam in 2013. The Saudi regime supported the overthrow of Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood president Mohammed Morsi then designated the Brotherhood and "all organizations that resemble it" terrorists. In March 2014, Saudi Arabia and its allies launched a first campaign against Qatar largely because of Doha's support for Islamists. Since then, Saudi Islamists have recognized their peril. But previous rounds of arrests were limited to human rights activists and lesser-known Islamists.

**The end of a careful balancing act of political fragmentation**

Until the 2015 death of then-King Abdullah, the regime dealt with political conflicts through cooptation. Under this "paternalistic authoritarianism," repression was generally a last recourse. The Saudi state was fragmented, balancing power between the royal family and the religious establishment, as well as among prominent members of the royal family itself, each with a fiefdom and clientele. Governing Saudi Arabia was a constant game of checks and balances, which allowed for some political pluralism, however constrained. The 2000s were marked by a lively debate between "Islamists" and "Liberals." Decision-making remained the exclusive prerogative of the royal family, but these debates were important.

That system is now being dismantled. In the past two years, crown prince Muhammad bin Salman (MBS) has risen rapidly, seizing control of most of the state's powers. With the support of his father, King Salman, MBS has successfully sidelined competing royal factions, most notably former crown prince Muhammad bin Nayef who is now reportedly under house arrest. MBS simultaneously weakened the independent authority of the religious establishment, recently revoking the religious police's authority to arrest "moral offenders."

In place of the horizontality and consensus seeking that previously characterized the Saudi system, there is now a vertical line of power ending with MBS. In my interviews, his supporters have justified this shift by the need for efficient decision-making during times of crisis rather than the political inertia that once marked the Saudi system.

Central to that narrative is MBS's modernizing project for Saudi Arabia outlined in his "Vision 2030," an ambitious plan of economic and social reforms announced in 2016. A significant part of that plan consists in "liberalizing" Saudi society from above. For a kingdom worried about its image abroad, allowing women to drive in the wake of massive arrests is of course no coincidence.

Domestically, the decision was justified as an economic necessity with no mention of the hundreds of women activists who campaigned for three decades for that right. Doing so could have risked suggesting the government was reacting to social pressures and encourage further dissent.

Though mostly popular, the modernizing reforms have little to do with empowering civil society or promoting democratic governance. They are better understood as a bid to make the Saudi leadership yet another "modernizing autocrat" in the region. The new social pact offered is simple: fewer political freedoms in exchange for the promise of state-driven social progress and economic results. Saudi Arabia is no longer the exception it once was.

*Stéphane Lacroix is an associate professor of political science at Sciences Po, Paris and a research fellow at the Centre de Recherches Internationales (CERI).*

# The Muslim Brotherhood in the Gulf

# Saudi Arabia's Muslim Brotherhood predicament

*By Stéphane Lacroix*

A few days after the July 2013 coup that overthrew Egyptian President and Muslim Brotherhood figure Mohamed Morsi, Saudi Arabia was one of three Gulf countries to announce the provision of billions of dollars in financial aid to Egypt, thus openly marking its support for the new regime in Cairo. In fact, there are even indications that Saudi officials had been in touch with Egyptian officers and some anti-Brotherhood Egyptian businessmen weeks before the coup, and that they had made it clear that they would welcome Morsi's ouster.

In some ways, this was a surprising development. Contrary to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where officials had been outspoken in their opposition to the Brotherhood since 2011, the Saudi government had generally – at least in public, except on one occasion discussed below – avoided explicit attacks on the Brothers. How can this position be understood? My contention here is that the Muslim Brotherhood has been treated by the Saudi regime as simultaneously a domestic and a regional security issue, and that those two dimensions have fed on each other.

The relationship between the kingdom and the Muslim Brotherhood started in the 1950s, when Saudi Arabia gave shelter to thousands of Brotherhood activists from Egypt, Syria, and elsewhere. This happened in the context of the Arab cold war, which prompted an alliance between the two major opponents of Arab nationalism: the regional one – Saudi Arabia, and the domestic one – the Muslim Brotherhood. As a result of its massive presence in Saudi Arabia, the Brotherhood became entrenched both in Saudi society and in the Saudi state. This Muslim Brotherhood influence led to the politicization of Saudi Islam, and the emergence of a Saudi Islamist movement known as the Sahwa. Though the Sahwa groups (*jamaat*) bore varying degrees of Muslim Brotherhood influence, with the *Sururis* adopting a much more Salafi outlook, one of the *jamaat*, known as "the Saudi Muslim Brotherhood" (*al-ikhwan al-muslimun al-saudiyyun*), went so far as to claim the same name – though it presumably functioned independently from the mother organization and its members did not pledge allegiance to the general guide in Cairo.[1]

The relationship between the exiled Brothers and the Sahwa movement, on the one hand, and the Saudi state, on the other hand, remained close for at least three decades. Yet, the Gulf war created the first major strain. Several Brotherhood branches openly criticized the U.S. military intervention called for by King Fahd, while the Sahwa launched its own domestic *intifada* to demand radical political reforms. By 1994 to 1995, the regime had crushed the Sahwa's *intifada*, but what remained was a deep resentment toward the Brotherhood, which it held responsible for this unprecedented episode of dissent. In a clear sign that the government saw a direct link between the Brothers and the Sahwa, several prominent exiled Muslim Brotherhood (or Muslim Brotherhood-linked, even if not formally members) figures were expelled from the kingdom, such as Sayyid Qutb's brother Muhammad, who taught at Umm al-Qura university. Some measures were also taken to curb the influence of the *jamaat*. In 2002, in a rare display of anger against the organization, Prince Nayef bin Abdul Aziz al-Saud, then minister of interior, openly accused the Muslim Brotherhood of being the "source of all evil in the Kingdom."[2]

The next few years witnessed some form of normalization in the relationship. The Sahwa was reintegrated to the Saudi religious and social spheres, in exchange for which Sahwa leaders avoided all criticism of the government. This was not only the result of a more accommodating stance on the part of the government; after the death of the most respected figures of the official religious establishment, Sheikhs Ibn Baz and Ibn Uthaymin, the royal family counted on the Sahwa to act as an alternative religious establishment, which could at least produce legitimacy by default. The royal family's relationship to the Muslim Brotherhood outside the kingdom simultaneously

improved, and contacts that had been suspended were re-established.[3]

With the start of the Arab Spring, the Sahwa was tempted to seize the opportunity and make a political stand. Several petitions were published in late February 2011: "Towards a state of rights and institutions," signed by tens of Sahwa figures including Salman al-Awda; and "A call for reform," signed by Nasir al-Umar and an array of Sahwa clerics. Al-Awda, in particular, has remained critical of the regime ever since, for instance publishing an open letter to King Abdullah in March 2013. It is true that none of those Sahwa leaders supported the call for demonstrations in Riyadh on March 11, 2011, the so-called "day of anger" (which never materialized). Yet, in the meantime, Abdullah had announced an aid package of tens of billions of dollars, some of which was reserved for religious institutions. Despite this, by appearing to back – at least in word – a movement of change that was gaining the whole region, the Sahwa had reawakened the fears of the regime. Thus, when Islamist governments came to power throughout the region, the Saudi regime's main worry was that its own Islamists would feel emboldened. The situation in Egypt was especially unsettling for the Saudi regime: As the biggest Arab country and one that has close human and economic ties to Saudi Arabia, it has the largest potential to influence developments in the kingdom.

Being well aware of the necessity to appease the kingdom's fears and to obtain Saudi Arabia's support for the Egyptian economy, Morsi chose Saudi Arabia for his first official visit – a very strong symbol. This, however, wasn't enough to ease Saudi Arabia's distrust of the Brothers. Morsi's apparent willingness to build a "constructive relationship" with Iran – he went to Tehran in August 2012, the first visit of an Egyptian president since Anwar Sadat, and invited Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to Cairo – certainly made things worse. In royal family circles, many were convinced, it seems, that if the Muslim Brotherhood had to choose between Saudi Arabia and Iran, it would choose Iran.[4] All of this led to Saudi Arabia's support for the coup in Egypt.

This put the royal family in a difficult position at home. During the summer, all the major Sahwa figures signed petitions and statements denouncing the coup, and – in more or less explicit terms – the Saudi government's support for it. And while some, like Nasir al-Umar, stuck to pure religious rhetoric, arguing that it is "forbidden to rebel against a Muslim ruler" and that what happens in Egypt is "a struggle between the Islamic project and the westernizing project opposed to Islam," others framed their arguments in more or less explicit terms as a defense of electoral democracy. On August 8, 2013, for instance, 56 sheikhs, some of them known to be close to the Saudi Muslim Brotherhood, condemned the "removal of a legitimately elected president" and a violation of "the will of the people."[5] They added: "We express our opposition and surprise at the path taken by some countries who have given recognition to the coup … thereby taking part in committing a sin and an aggression forbidden by the laws of Islam – and there will be negative consequences for everyone if Egypt enters a state of chaos and civil war." On Twitter, in the wake of the August 14, 2013 massacre in Cairo, thousands of Saudis replaced their pictures with the Rabaa sign in solidarity with the Brothers.

This, it seems, was seen by the Saudi regime as a confirmation of its fears. The response was drastic: On the one hand, the government decided to increase its support for the new Egyptian government, providing it with a few extra billion dollars; on the other hand, it launched a new campaign to weaken the Sahwa at home. According to certain sources, a countrywide plan aimed at ridding Saudi universities from "Muslim Brothers" (however this may be understood) was designed.[6] For the first time, all Muslim Brotherhood books were banned at the Riyadh book fair.[7]

But the more drastic measure came on February 4 when a royal decree announced that, from now on, "belonging to intellectual or religious trends or groups that are extremist or categorized as terrorist at the local, regional or international level, as well supporting them, or showing sympathy for their ideas and methods in whichever way, or expressing support for them through whichever means, or offering them financial or moral support, or inciting

others to do any of this or promoting any such actions in word or writing" will be punished by a prison sentence "of no less than three years and no more than twenty years." This decree has several important consequences. First, it endorses the Egyptian designation of the "Muslim Brotherhood" as a terrorist movement. Second, it forbids expressing any form of mere sympathy for the Brothers. Third, it is meant as an impending threat toward the Sahwa and all the groups that are part of it (obviously, the "Saudi Muslim Brotherhood," but groups such as the Sururis could also theoretically be targeted). To increase the pressure, the Saudi ministry of interior made those points explicit in a March 7 statement, which contains a list of groups the kingdom deems "terrorist," including the Muslim Brotherhood. Also considered "terrorist," the statement adds, are "all groups that resemble those in the list, in ideology, word or action."

All of this also had consequences on Saudi Arabia's relationship with Qatar, which is seen by the kingdom as the Brotherhood's regional patron. Although the two countries had not been on good terms since the late 1990s, and even less since the start of the Arab Spring, Saudi Arabia's March 5 decision to withdraw its ambassador to Qatar in conjunction with Bahrain and the UAE – in protest for Qatar's refusal to stop backing the Brothers – is an incredibly strong step.

This indicates a clear escalation on part of the Saudi regime against both the Brothers and the kingdom's Islamists, the Sahwa movement, and shows the extent to which Riyadh has been considering the two issues as inseparable. There remains one core issue on which the regime, the Sahwa, and the Brothers tend to broadly agree: Syria. Yet, if there is some truth in recent reports of a Saudi willingness to adopt a more "cautious" strategy in Syria, this would mark the end of the last field of cooperation between Saudi Arabia and those Islamist movements, and a radical shift in Saudi Arabia's political strategy – the consequences of which, regionally and domestically, are yet to be seen.

*Stéphane Lacroix is an associate professor of political science at Sciences Po in Paris, France.*

**References**

[1] Stéphane Lacroix, *Awakening Islam : The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia*, HUP, 2011. Chapter 2. *Saudi Arabia*, HUP, 2011. Chapter 2.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] Muhammad Qutb, who had been living in Qatar, was allowed to come back.

[4] As one Saudi intellectual put it to me in a conversation, "the regime sees them as Islamists before being Sunnis."

[5] Some of the same sheikhs, along with Sururi figures, issued another statement on 13 January 13, 2014 criticizing in very harsh terms Egypt's largest Salafi party, Hizb al-Nur, which supported the army's "coup" against Morsi and by doing so "harmed the interests of Islam and Muslims, in Egypt and outside" (*Bayan hawla al-mawaqif al-siyasiyya li-Hizb al-Nur*, http://www.almoslim.net/node/198580?page=1).

[6] *Khittat al-sa'udiyya li-tathir al-ta'lim al-jami'i mi al-ikhwan*, al-'Arab, July 15, 2013.

[7] *Al-sulutat al-Sa'udiyya tamna' kutub al-ikhwan fi ma'rad al-Riyadh al-duwali li-l-katab*, al-Islamion, March 2, 2014

# Qatar, the Ikhwan, and transnational relations in the Gulf

***By David B. Roberts***

Qatar has often found itself at the heart of intra-Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) disputes. From the early 1990s to 2008 Qatar was involved in a cold war with Saudi Arabia, while its Bahraini bilateral relations have been fractious for more than a century. More recently Qatar's relations with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have ebbed and flowed, while Saudi Arabia's leadership is becoming, once again, increasingly irritated with Qatar. The latest iteration of these regional difficulties was crystalized when Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain took the unprecedented step of withdrawing their ambassadors from Qatar *en masse in early March.*[1]

The roots of the difficulties are clear: Qatar's evident preference for channeling its support through and therefore bolstering the Ikhwan (the Muslim Brotherhood). Given how increasingly difficult and costly this policy is becoming for Qatar with its regional relations, it is worth re-examining existing understandings as to why Qatar supports the Ikhwan. Subsequently, recent bilateral issues will be examined to draw conclusions to inform a cost benefit analysis of Qatar's continuing Ikhwan-supporting policies.

**Qatar and the Ikhwan: the roots**

Understanding Qatar's links to the Ikhwan typically relies on quasi-academic, short articles in lieu of any notable academic sources. While many articles note that, for example, Yusuf al-Qaradawi – arguably the Ikhwan's most prominent cleric – left Egypt for Qatar in the early 1960s, few note the scale of the influx of Ikhwan (or Ikhwan associated) scholars to Qatar around that time. [2]

Abdul-Badi Saqr arrived in 1954 from Egypt to be the director of education and subsequently run the Qatar National Library after being recommended by a prominent Cairo-based religious sheikh.[3] Under his leadership an influx of Ikhwan teachers "stamped the education system with their Islamic ideology."[4] When Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad al-Thani (r.1972-1995) took charge of the education portfolio in 1956 to 1957 he was concerned about increasing Ikhwan domination of education so he sacked Saqr and replaced him with the Arab nationalist Syrian Abdullah al-Daim. However, he didn't last more than a year thanks to the pressures of the British resident keen to evict such an ardent pan-Arabist. Even while trying to avoid the domination of Ikhwan or pan-Arab thinkers, Khalifa still oversaw significant recruitment from Cairo. In 1960 the head of Islamic sciences at the education department, Abdullah bin Tukri al-Subai, went to Al-Azhar to recruit teachers and thinkers. Ahmed al-Assal arrived in Qatar in 1960 and taught in schools, lectured in mosques, and helped form Ikhwan groups. Abdel-Moaz al-Sattar – Hassan al-Banna's personal emissary to Palestine in 1946 – went to Qatar to be a school inspector and then director of Islamic Sciences at the ministry of education and co-authored numerous textbooks for the nascent Qatari school system in the early 1960s. Kemal Naji took on various roles including the director of education from 1964 to 1979, the head of the publication committee, and was also the foreign cultural relations advisor of the ministry of education. Qaradawi left Egypt for Qatar in 1961. Initially he ran a revamped religious institute and subsequently established and became dean of the College of Sharia at Qatar University. Today he is widely considered to be one of the most influential and well-known Ikhwan intellectuals; a facet helped since the mid-1990s by his popular talk show "Sharia and Life" broadcast on Al Jazeera, which afforded him a large pan-regional audience.

Despite the prevalence of Ikhwan or at least Ikhwan sympathetic thinkers throughout Qatar's various bureaucracies – but particularly its education system – few would suggest that today's policies are a result of domestic pressure from Qataris inculcated into an Ikhwan ideology. The lack of apparent transference of Ikhwan ideology stems from a variety of factors.

Qatar is a country where the Wahhabi creed of Salafi, Hanbali Islam prevails. Qatar's ruling family hails from the same central Arabian tribal group (the Bani Tamim) as Wahhabism's founder, Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahhab and Qatar's leaders have long adhered to its scriptures. Even in the 21st century when nothing about Qatar's orientation or policies chimes with a typical understanding of the puritanical Wahhabi creed, the national mosque opened in 2012 was named after al-Wahhab himself. Though the state overall was receptive to the influx of the Ikhwan, the ground for proselytization was not so accepting.

Indeed, the Ikhwan is "barely [actively] involved in Qatari domestic affairs."[5] In distinct comparison to Saudi Arabia, Qatar has limited the institutional opportunities available for religious scholars of any description to exert influence domestically.[6] Religious schools as founded by Qaradawi in 1961 remain niche and in 2008 to 2009 only taught 257 students, the vast majority of whom were not Qatari.[7]Institutionally not entertaining the notion of religious influence on politics, there is no office of Grand Mufti in Qatar and the ministry for Islamic affairs and endowments was only established in 1993.[8]

The Ikhwan's lack of penetration in Qatar is also explained by its inability to perform a variety of its usual social functions. Running local sports clubs or operating food banks – typical Ikhwan activities elsewhere in the region – are popular but inevitably undercut the state's legitimacy.[9] In 1972 when Khalifa bin Hamad al-Thani took over seamlessly from Ahmed bin Ali al-Thani, he augmented his wider legitimacy and diversified his support from nigh on exclusively based on the al-Thani to a far wider base. He did this through a budget splurge creating jobs, building houses, augmenting pensions, and increasing wages.[10]

The Ikhwan, therefore, though having little discernable direct effect on policy in Qatar was an important part of the background makeup of the state. The two entities came to develop a mutually beneficial relationship so long as the Ikhwan in Qatar were, inevitably, outward facing. It is no surprise that the Ikhwan soon began to use Qatar as "a launching pad for its expansion into the Emirates and especially Dubai" from the early 1960s.[11] The Ikhwan search for an outward focus found real traction with the influential Al Jazeera platform afforded to Qaradawi from 1996 onward and is personified in the official closure of the Ikhwan branch in Qatar in 1999.[12]

**Utility of Ikhwan links for Qatar**

In the 1950s, 1960s, and subsequently there have clearly been those in the Qatari elite who have been motivated to a degree by a religiously-inspired agenda. This in and of itself is a motivating factor explaining the push for the influx of Islamic scholars to Qatar alongside the prosaic need to staff emerging bureaucracies with educated functionaries. The same impulses explain Saudi Arabia's reliance on Ikhwan teachers and professionals from the 1960s.[13] Equally, for some in Qatar there may have been wider motivating factors, some of which prevail to this day.

Qatar's status as a Wahhabi country was firmly established by the modern-day founder of the state, Sheikh Jassim.[14] As such this was an inviolable plinth of the state's makeup. Yet it was not one that could be actively used to augment legitimacy or to promote Qatar as a state for Wahhabism that is indelibly linked to Saudi Arabia. To augment the status of Wahhabism in Qatar, to explicitly instil it through education systems in schools or to give its religious scholars an official place in government, would have been to intractably instill the necessary deference of Qatar to Saudi Arabia as the custodian of the two holy places and the al-Wahhab legacy.

Instead, supporting the Ikhwan allowed a different group to develop Qatar's systems. This avoided a reliance on Saudi-scholars or jurists to design and staff Qatar's systems in a Wahhabi image inevitably tilting toward Riyadh. Also, Qatar's leadership was in a stronger position and could set and enforce guidelines as to the group's limitations to a greater degree.

Otherwise, this hosting of Ikhwan scholars allowed Qatar to augment its regional status with Ikhwan ideology being

more widespread than Wahhabi thought. This allowed Qatar to fashion for itself a place as a key spoke in the Ikhwan wheel. Ikhwan members that Qatar attracted over the years with its "open door" policy were to prove useful in the Arab Spring.

**Recent problems: A changing calculation?**

For the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Ikhwan is – today – anathema. It has not been forgiven for supporting Iraq President Saddam Hussein in 1990, is blamed for radicalizing Saudi youth, and is something of a threat as a large, well organized religiously-driven group.

The UAE too harbors deep suspicions about the Ikhwan and has consequentially taken a hard line and sentenced dozens of Ikhwan to jail sentences. For the UAE's de facto leader, Muhammad bin Zayed, the Ikhwan is an issue of abiding importance; indeed leaked U.S. diplomatic cables give an unvarnished, personal view of his steadfast concerns about the group's activities in the UAE.[15] That the Ikhwan profited from the Arab Spring, gained power, and proved that they can effectively mobilize tens of thousands of citizens could only augment Zayed's suspicions and concern.

There have been numerous spats involving Qaradawi in recent years, but recently there has been an escalation. On January 31, in a Friday sermon broadcast as usual by Qatar television, Qaradawi criticized the UAE describing it as being "against Islam." Amid a furor on social media, the UAE's foreign ministry summoned the Qatari ambassador to account for why his ministry had not denounced Qaradawi's comments though Zayed subsequently insisted that relations were fundamentally sound nevertheless. Qaradawi did not give a sermon on the next two Fridays, leading to speculation that he had been censored by the Qatari government or even stripped of his nationality. However, his absence was due to illness and he returned on February 21[16] to once more criticize the UAE, albeit in a more conciliatory manner, drawing on the predictable Emirati editorials bemoaning Qatar's inability to muzzle Qaradawi.[17]

Qaradawi also irked Saudi officials at the end of January, when he accused them of supporting Defense Minister Field Marshal Abdel Fattah al-Sisi et al in Egypt who were "far from God and Islam."[18]Contemporaneously, accounts of Qatar's support of Houthi rebels against Saudi Arabia's interests are reportedly the last straw for Saudi's leadership, increasingly angry over a litany of other issues,[19] to the extent that according to Al Arab, Saudi Arabia was considering closing the Qatari-Saudi land border, Saudi airspace to Qatar, and scuppering the imminent Qatar Airways deal to operate flights in the kingdom.[20]Scurrilous social media exchanges also indicated the possible excommunication of Qatar from the GCC.[21]

Mediation by the emir of Kuwait has reportedly calmed the situation and this is not the first time in recent years that Qatar has been publically rebuked: There was a February 2012 GCC meeting about Syria and Iran without Qatar because it "is considered unreliable when it comes to Iran."[22] However, that such threats are emerging to the public sphere is at least a cause for concern. While their implementation may be highly unlikely, Saudi Arabia has recent evidence of undertaking a surprising, complete reversal of policy directed by the king in the rejection of the U.N. Security Council seat in October 2013.

**Conclusion**

Qatar's support of the Ikhwan is not as much of a preference as it may seem. It originated as the result of a structural necessity to staff positions without inculcating any systems that would automatically defer authority to Saudi Arabia. Equally it also continues to make Qatar an important spoke of the wider Ikhwan wheel, expanding its importance regionally. These networks played the central role in Qatar seeking to augment its influence during the Arab Spring. Though many of these gambles subsequently misfired, this strategy could be recycled at some stage in the future.

However, this entire policy thrust leaves neighboring countries uneasy. The Ikhwan's importance has

transcended from a potentially influential group to one with demonstrable capabilities in a revolutionary era. Qatar's policies seem to underestimate the depth of antagonism they create. For Qatar, a country with a small native population where there has typically existed a strong ruler-ruled sociopolitical bargain, the Ikhwan has never posed any kind of threat. To the UAE, which is convinced it has found plotting Ikhwan elements with relatively poorer Emirates in its federation, the Ikhwan is seen as a genuine threat to its leadership. Similarly in Saudi Arabia, a country that had to employ an Arab Spring-inspired budget of $130 billion and continues to struggle with a slow burning insurgency in its critical eastern region, stoking or supporting Ikhwan actors is seen as a deeply grave concern.

The emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, cannot submit to regional pressure, for this would look weak, send the wrong signals as to Qatar's status under his charge, and it would also be difficult to overturn his father's policies. Yet some accommodation needs to be made. Tamim was the first leader to sign and ratify the GCC security pact, which likely contains draconian provisions related to the censure of speech and the extradition of citizens that Tamim himself would not propose, so he is willing to compromise.

In the current climate many of Qatar's Ikhwan links have either been checkmated or otherwise degraded in utility. It would be beneficial, therefore, to keep these relations on a low profile. Qaradawi is virtually untouchable because he was so supported by Tamim's father – a facet Zayed may well understand – and because any such move would be seen as a capitulation. But to show a willingness to tackle Gulf states' concerns, Tamim could direct a clearing-house in Al Jazeera Arabic: the channel whose reputation has sunk lower across the Arab world as its clear support of the Ikhwan has grown. Restoring balance to Al Jazeera would not only show Qatar's willingness to act, but could lead to the slow resuscitation of the channel's credibility and as one of the key fonts of Qatari soft power this is a worthy goal.

*David B. Roberts is a lecturer in the Defence Studies Department at King's College London.*

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[18] Amena Bakr, "Influential Cleric Urges Saudis to Stop Backing Egypt's Dominant Military," *Reuters* (January 28, 2014)

[19] "*Al Alaqat Al Saudiyah Al Qatariyah Mutazmah Jidan Wa Al Harb Al Alamiyah Tshtaal Bayn Al Biladayn Qa Amir Al Kuwayt Ytwasat Lil-Thdah Qa Ttwyq Al Tawatr* [Qatari-Saudi Relations in Crisis as a Media War Flares up between the Two Countries; the Emir of Kuwait Mediates to Calm Tensions]," *Al Rai Al Yaum* (November 22, 2013)

[20] *"Sabr Al Saudiyah Yunafth Wa Ijraat Mutwqaah Dud Al Dawhah* [Saudi Arabia's Patience Is Running out and Action Is Expected against Doha]," *Al Arab* (February 19, 2014)

[21] For example, follow the Twitter hashtag '#السعودية على تتآمر قطر' to see the toing-and-froing of accusation and counter accusation.

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# The future of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Gulf

*By Kristin Smith Diwan*

The Muslim Brotherhood (MB) is going through the most difficult stage in its political history since the Nasserist period. However, unlike the 1950s and 1960s, the Brotherhood can neither count on political support from nor find a safe haven in the conservative monarchies of the Arab Gulf. An intra-Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) feud that pitted the pro-MB Qatar against the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia has come down decisively in favor of the anti-MB forces. Combined with the significant challenges that the MB in the Gulf was already facing from disaffected youth cadres and Salafist competitors, the current hostile environment will make it impossible for the MB to maintain their previous level of social and political influence inside the Gulf countries.

The MB has a long and influential history in the Arab Gulf. It was brought to the region during the MB's earliest days, in some cases through personal contacts with the MB's founder, Hassan al-Banna. The group deepened its presence in the 1950s and 1960s as crackdowns on the MB organizations in Egypt and Syria forced activists to seek refuge in the Gulf. Their influence grew as governments found them suitable allies in countering Arab nationalism and manning rapidly expanding state ministries. Brotherhood members organized in informal networks and where possible established societies for social reform along with Islamic charities. In those states that had political openings and active parliaments – Kuwait, Bahrain – the MB formed political societies which competed in elections and came to increasing political prominence in the 1990s. While their experience varies significantly from country to country, it is fair to say that the MB played a substantial role in shaping Gulf societies and had a significant impact on national politics.

Despite this pivotal role, MB influence in the Gulf was not unchallenged. The entry of Salafis into politics in the 1980s introduced new Islamist rivals who competed with and at times surpassed the MB in parliamentary elections, government posts and societal influence. Throughout the 2000s, the MB faced disparagement from a growing Salafi trend accusing them of political opportunism and questioning their commitment to Islamic doctrine.

At the same time the MB faced challenges in recruiting the younger generation. In contrast to the more informal Salafi networks, the MB has a hierarchical structure based upon deference to elders and compliance with the decisions of the organization. The MB's lengthy process of admission and advancement has appeared more onerous as alternatives for public engagement and entertainment outside of religious societies have increased in the expansion of public spaces such as restaurants and cafes and virtually through social media. The openness and diversity of views found in these spaces and expanding media has increased the disaffection with the secrecy and discipline of MB organization. Some youths also chafed at the unwillingness of the MB to adopt more confrontational methods to achieve political change.

Indicators of the younger generation's frustration with the culture and gradualist policies of the MB can be seen in the emergence of independent blogs by MB youths, the issuance of independent statements by MB youth cadres taking positions that diverge from the MB organization and in the prominence of ex-MB youths among Gulf opposition organizations and networks that emerged around the time of the Arab uprisings of 2011. At the same time, social media enabled new means of organization outside of Islamic organizations, empowering new unaffiliated youth movements in the Gulf.

Gulf MB organizations have begun to adapt to these cultural changes. Evidence of this adjustment includes the shortened recruitment protocols implemented by Saudi Brotherhood networks; the proliferation of open volunteerism programs across the Gulf, some instrumentalized by the MB to capture a broader cross-section of youths; the more creative use of video and popular music by MB-affiliated initiatives; and new programs crafted especially for youths within the MB

organization. Nonetheless, the broader generational challenge remains.

In addition to these competitors and challenges, the MB has faced a less permissive environment in the Gulf since the events of Sept. 11, 2001. International scrutiny of Islamist movements and their financing understandably increased, but that is not all. Gulf ruling families also began to shift their political calculations. This rethink began in Saudi Arabia in the mid-1990s as the Saudi ruling family faced their most serious challenge since 1979 in the form of the Islamic awakening or Sahwa that openly challenged it, albeit in limited mobilizations. It became clear that the ruling family resented the Muslim Brotherhood for this counter-politicization of the religious field in the bitter comments of then-Interior Minister Nayef bin Abdulaziz Al Saud in 2002, blaming all of Saudi Arabia's problems on MB betrayal. Meanwhile, political successions in both the UAE and Kuwait brought new and much less sympathetic leadership – and in the case of Abu Dhabi emirate, outright hostility – toward the MB organization.

There are exceptions to this trend: The Qatari leadership has been supportive of the MB abroad, and the Bahraini leadership needs the support of Sunni Islamists to counter the Shiite opposition. Still, when the Arab uprisings initially appeared to empower the MB, goodwill among Gulf leaders was absent or contingent and mistrust was plentiful.

In several Gulf countries the MB sought to use the regional wave of popular mobilization to establish new political constraints on Gulf ruling families. MB members joined public petitions in the UAE and Saudi Arabia calling for political reforms to include elections for the Federal National Council (FNC) and Shura Council. In Kuwait, the MB has consistently been in the coalition of political societies protesting initially for the resignation of the prime minister and later for constitutional amendments to further empower the parliament toward the creation of a full parliamentary monarchy.

The crackdown on the MB was initiated in the UAE, where the government arrested nearly 100 Emirati members of the MB-inspired al-Islah organization with the charge of "forming a secret organization plotting to overthrow the regime." This hardline position gained traction across the Gulf as the regional dynamic shifted with the overthrow of the MB-led Mohamed Morsi government in Egypt. MB activists in both Saudi Arabia and Kuwait were public in their criticism of their governments' political and financial support for Egypt's new military-led government. They also were openly supportive of the rebels in their deepening civil war in Syria. Both positions likely contributed to the decision of the Saudi government to adopt a new anti-terrorism law in early 2014 which took the extraordinary step of specifically naming the MB among a list of banned terrorist groups. The UAE followed with its own anti-terror law in November 2014, officially designating the MB and significantly its civil society organizations in the West as terrorist organizations. The UAE and Saudi Arabia also pressured Western governments to follow suit, leading to an official inquiry into the MB organization in Britain.

The UAE-Saudi campaign to delegitimize and diminish, if not destroy, the MB was then brought to bear on regional maverick Qatar. The strength of the UAE and Saudi Arabia's resolve can be seen in their hardline tactics, including the withdrawal of ambassadors from Qatar and the threat of economic blockade. Their demands focused on Qatar ending its support for Egypt's embattled MB but significantly also pressed for the cessation of support for MB dissidents within the Gulf region in line with a security agreement signed by GCC interior ministers in 2012. According to leaked copies of that unpublished agreement, it commits Gulf states "to cooperate with each other to hunt down those who are outside law or the system, or who are wanted by states, whatever their nationality, and to take necessary action against them," to include active pursuit across borders and extradition.

These new legal frameworks – implemented at both the national and GCC level – place MB members under continuous risk of prosecution. In practice, with the exception of the UAE, there have not been campaigns of arrests against the organization. Nonetheless, the comprehensive nature of the laws – the Saudi terrorism law deems not only belonging to the MB a crime, but

also associating with it at home or abroad or showing any support or sympathy for its causes via any form of media – act as a check on MB activities.

Even in those countries without such terrorism legislation, the threat of prosecution or extradition via the GCC security agreement remains. This has dampened the once open and extensive campaign in support of the former Morsi government and jailed MB members in Egypt. It has also prevented Gulf MB activists from supporting each other: Several Kuwait MB members faced possible extradition after a case brought by the UAE accusing them of materially supporting the Emirati al-Islah. More recently, a former MB member of Kuwait's parliament had a case filed against him by the Kuwait parliament for criticizing Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan, the crown prince of Abu Dhabi.

The extent of the political challenge for the MB across the Gulf is on view in Kuwait and Bahrain, where the MB openly maintains political societies. Despite the unquestioned loyalty of Bahrain's MB and its key role in standing by the ruling family in Bahrain's ongoing political crisis, the government undertook electoral redistricting in September 2014 widely perceived to be to the MB's disadvantage. In the November parliamentary elections, the MB won only one seat, while they did not even choose to run candidates in municipal elections where they previously had good representation. They also had their ministers in the cabinet dropped and are having their influence curbed in Bahrain's Ministry of Education.

Kuwait's Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM), the political wing of Kuwait's MB, has observed an opposition boycott of the parliament since the emir unilaterally changed the electoral system in 2012. This has been a costly strategy, depriving the movement of the benefits that accrue from legislative presence, both in publicity and in access to government revenue streams, jobs and contracts. It has also left them without the parliamentary platform to confront policies damaging to their future such as the current purge of MB from the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs and constraints placed on MB and Salafi charitable activities.

The threat of political retribution against its numerous charities and civil society organizations has led the Kuwaiti MB to take the momentous decision to separate the political apparatus represented by the ICM from the *nizam* or mother organization. While this is expected to be an ongoing process the ICM already has independent decision making authority and has plans to accept non-MB members in the future.

The MB's troubles have redounded to the benefit of their Salafi competitors. In Bahrain, Salafi candidates gained on the MB in Bahrain's parliamentary elections of 2014 and now hold 50 percent of the municipal council chairmanships. In Kuwait, Salafi loyalists maintain representation in parliament and enjoy excellent relations with the Kuwait government.

While the Gulf's MB groups – with the exception in the UAE – have been spared the massive crackdown witnessed in Egypt, they face an uncertain future. The antagonistic political and legal environment should significantly hamper recruitment and the functioning of their many civil society organizations. Moreover, as the Islamist movement most committed to and dependent upon political participation, the MB will suffer more than their Salafi competitors from the growing intolerance for Islamic political activism. At the same time, a retreat to a less public position – the secret society model – is less viable in today's networked era.

Yet it remains an open question whether Gulf political authorities have provided sufficient alternative pathways for engagement with MB's constituencies. State-affiliated ulama have been losing credibility for decades, and new formations to counter the MB such as the Emirati-based Muslim Council of Elders have yet to prove their popular appeal. This leaves the Islamic political field up for grabs at exactly the time it faces its most ambitious suitor: the Islamic State.

*Kristin Smith Diwan is an adjunct professorial lecturer at the American University School of International Service and a visiting scholar at the Institute for Middle East Studies at George Washington University.*

# The 'third image' in Islamist politics

*By Kristin Smith Diwan*

Since at least the 1990s, Islamists have felt the pull of domestic politics as semi-authoritarian states opened up room for Islamist parties or proto-parties in national parliaments and structured national dialogues. The preponderance of academic studies followed them with analyses of organizational change; the moderation of Islamist parties; and the contribution of Islamists to either persistent authoritarianism or democratization depending on the analysts' leanings. The jihadist literature such as studies of al-Qaeda countered this trend by necessity,[1] but there is no mistaking the strong contribution of country-based research done by scholars of comparative politics to our understanding of Islamist politics. [2]

Today's Islamist politics in the Middle East augur a sharp turn towards the international. Resurgent authoritarianism, inter-state security cooperation, proxy wars, and sectarian polarization mean that the actions of Islamist movements are unintelligible without consideration of the international environment. Individual movements cooperate across borders, and the competition among rival movements is regional. The third image[3] – the international system and actions to alleviate security dilemmas fed by anarchy – takes center stage, decisively shaping the behavior of states and movements alike.

**From Domestic Politics to Regional Strategies**

Resurgent authoritarianism is stifling representative domestic politics, closing down or narrowing the arena for political participation. Security crackdowns are sending Islamists – both Sunni and Shia – to jail or to exile. Once abroad, Islamist political activists are forging new transnational connections, and rethinking their strategies and ideas in light of their shared experience of political suppression.

Cooperation is not limited to the Islamist movements. The five years since the citizen uprisings have seen a pronounced jump in inter-state security cooperation as well as foreign interventions. In such an environment the political and security calculations of Islamist movements can no longer be restricted to their own state authorities.

More broadly, the current flux due to state collapse, civil wars, and proxy wars opens up big strategic questions about the future of Islamism and the survival of the state system in the Middle East. Most indicative of this transformational environment is the rise of the Islamic State, which challenges Middle Eastern states and Islamic movements alike. Domestic debates among Islamists today are dominated by questions of foreign policy and geopolitics centered on the proper course of state action in this unsettled and unsettling environment. The terms of the competition amongst Islamist movements are increasingly set by their strategic and doctrinal positions on regional conflicts and on the future of the region.

Sectarian polarization, fed by the competition between regional heavyweights Saudi Arabia and Iran, in most cases pulls Sunni movements closer to their governments, and makes captives of Shia communities in Sunni-led states. This environment is completely inimical to the cross-sectarian cooperation needed to empower domestic opposition coalitions, weakening the movements for constitutional reform which showed some strength at the end of the first decade of the millennium and into the Arab Spring.

**The Gulf Intervenes**

This shift towards transnational and interstate action – as both movements and states have sought to define the future trajectory of political life and to decide the outcome of regional political struggles – has been accompanied by the ascendancy of the Arab Gulf in regional affairs.

In the Gulf, the challenge to domestic reform movements came early in the Arab Spring, as regional dynamics affected the balance of opposition coalitions. In Kuwait,

a diverse opposition of Muslim Brotherhood, movement Salafis, tribal populists and leftist nationalists initially allied to push for greater popular sovereignty. Still the question of the role of the Muslim Brotherhood in regional politics plagued the opposition enterprise.

An early expression of solidarity with the mounting Bahrain protest movement by Kuwait's prominent Muslim Brotherhood leader Tareq al-Suwaidan was quickly silenced. Fellow Muslim Brothers and other Sunni Islamists adopted a sectarian view of the Bahrain uprising and fell in line in support of the loyalist position of the Muslim Brotherhood in Bahrain, exacerbating relations with Kuwait's Shia. Later the success of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in parliamentary and presidential elections escalated fears of the group's regional ascendancy, costing the Kuwait opposition liberal support, and weakening the opposition coalition.

The rise to power of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt altered state calculations as well. In June 2013, a prominent group of Muslim scholars gathered in Cairo to encourage Sunni support for jihad in Syria. The gathering included prominent Egyptian Salafi preachers; the Qatar-based, Muslim Brotherhood-allied Youssef Qaradawi; and the popular Saudi Salafi Sheikh Mohammed al-Arefi. The Brotherhood-led government's leadership in mobilizing transnational Islamist support from within Gulf societies for a more activist regional agenda portended trouble for conservative Gulf states. In the ensuing month the Morsi government would be overthrown, Mohammed al-Arefi detained for questioning in Saudi Arabia, and Qatar subjected to unprecedented political pressure from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to reverse its maverick support for the regional agenda of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The campaign against the Muslim Brotherhood and all independent forms of political Islam defined the increasingly assertive policies of the UAE. In the early days of the Arab uprisings the government cracked down on the Muslim Brotherhood organization within the country. Yet their prosecution of the movement did not stop there. On the basis of a newly negotiated Gulf security agreement, the UAE began threatening extradition of Muslim Brotherhood members in Kuwait accused of financially supporting their Emirati brethren; one former MP was sentenced to five years in jail for insulting the Abu Dhabi crown prince. The UAE later joined Saudi Arabia in withdrawing its ambassadors from Qatar and threatening to blockade the fellow Gulf nation for its backing of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and within the Gulf. The UAE's foreign interventions in Egypt, Libya, and Yemen have been driven in large part by its desire to defeat the Brotherhood's political program.

Still the regional wars, particularly the civil war in Syria, commanded the attention of the region's Islamists and provided an open arena for mobilization. The uncoordinated efforts of Qatar, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia to back rival rebel factions within the Syrian opposition was matched by the independent initiatives of Salafi preachers and activists. Kuwait became a center for bundlers collecting private donations to support Syrian fighters. It had a radicalizing effect. The sectarian narrative begun in the civil war in Iraq intensified dramatically with Syria, as Sunni Islamists within Gulf societies and elsewhere used sectarian rhetoric to mobilize arms and men to counter the Hizbollah and Iran-backed Assad government.

New leadership in Saudi Arabia brought resolve to militarily confront perceived advances by Iran and allies across the region. The Saudi-led Sunni coalition to confront the Houthi advance in Yemen introduced yet another arena for regional contestation. Yet unlike in Syria, the Saudi actions in Yemen served as a vehicle to recapture the support of Sunni Islamists for the state, both for the execution of the Yemen war and stepped up confrontation with Iran. Sunni political movements of all stripes – Salafi, Ikhwan and reformist – have expressed enthusiastic backing for the Yemen intervention.

As states wrestle with how to secure their interests regionally while establishing control over transnational Islamist mobilization, national integration becomes critical. Yet early indications do not augur well for a return to the policies of the 2000s, when states provided greater political opening and expanded representation. Instead

Gulf states appear to be confronting the challenge of the new regionalized Islamist landscape by a combination of stick and carrot: more vigorous prosecution as represented in new terrorism laws, and nationalist appeals under the leadership of ruling families. The recent execution in Saudi Arabia of 47 detainees based on terrorism charges, including members of al-Qaeda as well as the firebrand Shia cleric Nimr al-Nimr is indicative of new state red-lines. Yet in keeping with the new international imperative, the success of their national strategies are likely to be determined by the outcome of regional confrontations, as much as by domestic measures.

*Kristin Smith Diwan is a senior resident scholar at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington. She works in both comparative politics and international relations and specializes in Arab and Islamist politics. Her current projects concern Gulf political economy, the politics of sectarianism, generational change, and the evolution of Islamism in the GCC.*

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# The Gulf States and the Muslim Brotherhood

*By Guido Steinberg*

In July 2013, the Egyptian military under the leadership of General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi toppled the government of President Mohamed Morsi, the first Muslim Brother who was elected head of state in the Middle East. When the new rulers subsequently cracked down on the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), arresting its leadership, outlawing the organization, and declaring it a terrorist organization, many observers regarded this as a decisive defeat from which the Brotherhood would not recover. Not only had the old regime reinstated itself and decided to destroy the organization root and branch. But it had also been supported by a powerful coalition of Gulf states comprising: Saudi Arabia as the old and new conservative lead country of the Arab world, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) as the financial powerhouse of the Arabian peninsula, and Kuwait as the latest convert to the anti-MB front in the Gulf. Looking at the sequence of events, it is very likely that Saudi Arabia and the UAE had been consulted in advance of the coup in order to secure their support after the crackdown. And in fact, the Gulf states promised and delivered billions in aid for the military rulers in the coming months, effectively showing how important the defeat of the MB had been to them.

The conflict between the MB and its enemies has not ended yet and is rather likely to shape the history of the region for the coming years, if not decades. In spite of the repressive capabilities of the Egyptian and other authoritarian states and the financial and political support by the rich Gulf states, the Brothers remain the only organized alternative to the old regimes, and North African and Middle Eastern populations are not likely to submit to a new and even more repressive form of authoritarian rule in the way they did until 2011. First, the military rulers will be confronted with growing economic problems in Egypt, which are too big to be solved only by the infusion of cash from the Gulf states. Furthermore, the powerful example of Tunisia remains, where the Ennahda party as the local branch of the MB remains part of a political system, which has managed to avoid the return to authoritarian rule and has the greatest chances of all the transformation states to become a success story. Second, the Gulf states will not be able to fund the Egyptian government on the current scale forever. Threatened with the impact of the U.S. shale revolution and possibly growing exports of oil and gas from Iraq and Iran (not to speak of an expected slowdown of economic growth in Asia), Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Kuwait will sooner or later be confronted with tighter budgets and will have to redefine their priorities. Thirdly, although the MB as an organization is weak in the Gulf states, its thinking has spread in all the Gulf states in the past decades and has influenced generations of students, the result being the emergence of powerful movements like the Sahwa al-Islamiya (Islamic Awakening), combining politicized and sometimes revolutionary MB thought with Wahhabi social and cultural conservatism. Therefore, even a continued crackdown in the UAE and Saudi Arabia (where the group is less pronounced anyhow) will not end in an eradication of the movement; the more so because the MB has retained a powerful supporter in Qatar – which has not altered its policies after the change in government in June 2013 – and has a long tradition in Kuwait, where it will remain active notwithstanding a more hostile attitude of the government in recent years. Instead, conflicts between the Gulf states over their respective policies concerning the MB are likely to continue, with Saudi Arabia and the UAE not being able to reign in Qatar.

**The threat perception**

The Gulf states' policies toward the MB are shaped by a profound belief that the organization might pose a threat to their very survival. This is somewhat surprising, given that Saudi Arabia and its neighbors gave refuge to thousands of Muslim Brothers, when they escaped repression in their Egyptian, Syrian, and Iraqi home countries between the 1950s and 1970s and were employed in the emerging educational systems in the Gulf. Relations deteriorated when prominent members of MB-affiliated organizations like the Sudanese Hasan al-Turabi, the Turk Necmettin Erbakan, and the Afghan Gulbuddin Hekmatyar supported President Saddam Hussein after Iraqi troops had occupied Kuwait in 1990. After 2001, the Saudi Interior Minister Crown Prince Nayef bin Abdul Aziz al-Saud (d. 2012) even attributed responsibility to the MB for the emergence of international Islamist terrorism. Nevertheless, most observers took Prince Nayef's remarks as the personal view of the leading Saudi representative of an authoritarian security state rather than as a policy statement of the whole government.

How deep Saudi animosity toward the MB went only became clear after the organization won elections in Tunisia and Egypt and became an important player in Libya and in the Syrian opposition. It became obvious that the Gulf states (with the exception of Qatar) regard the MB as a strategic threat because they fear that it might export the successful revolutions in North Africa to the monarchies of the Gulf countries, where the Brothers have a presence in all states. Secondly, Saudi Arabia sees Brotherhood ideology as a school of thought competing for allegiance among the Gulf populations and challenging the religious legitimacy of the Saudi state, which is based on the ruling family's alliance with the Wahhabi reform movement.

**The future of the Muslim Brotherhood in the transformation states**

The fear of the Gulf states might at first sight seem somewhat paranoid, as only Kuwait has a major organized Brotherhood presence. In Bahrain, where the Brotherhood is represented in parliament, it supports the regime in its struggle with the Shiite opposition. In Saudi Arabia, the MB is prohibited, in Qatar it dissolved itself 15 years ago, and in the UAE it has suffered a crackdown that has effectively ended its activities in Abu Dhabi and Dubai.

The Saudi, Emirati, and Kuwaiti view becomes more understandable, though, when taking into account historical experience. In the 1950s and 1960s, Gamal Abdel Nasser's Egypt challenged the Gulf monarchies by propagating Arab nationalism and socialism as a powerful alternative to the monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula. Partly as a result of the spread of nationalist ideas, the monarchies in Iraq (1958), Yemen (1962), and Libya (1969) were toppled by nationalist officers and in Saudi Arabia a coup was foiled in 1969. Furthermore, Egypt's aggressive regional policies led to the "Arab Cold War," as coined by Malcolm Kerr, of the 1960s, which was fought out in Yemen, where Cairo and Riyadh supported the two conflicting camps. The Gulf states today fear a repetition of the crisis of 1960s under Islamist auspices. In their view, a revolutionary, republican, and transnational movement like the MB would use its power to try to topple the remaining monarchies in the region.

Now that the rise of the MB has been stopped in Egypt and Tunisia, it remains unclear where the organization is heading. Although Egypt has decided to destroy the MB, it remains to be seen whether the state will be able to stop its clandestine activities. In a worst-case scenario, the MB might even decide to return to violence – something the regime wants to make the world believe has already happened. Furthermore, enhanced repression might provide the Brotherhood with new support in the future. On the other hand, the case of Syria shows what happens if the authoritarian regime in question is hostile to the Gulf states and the MB is not considered a partner by them. Saudi Arabia and the UAE have invested heavily in weakening the position of the MB in the Syrian opposition. The net result has been that the MB has lost influence among the insurgents and it has become next to impossible to create a central command, with Salafist and jihadist groups increasingly dominating the fighting. By fighting the MB, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have weakened the only viable alternative to the regime of President Bashar al-Assad in Syrian, and have allowed for much more dubious forces to gain ground. Without a strong MB, any regime change in Syria will only create chaos.

**Differing approaches**

The Gulf states' policies regarding the MB also suffer from a lack of coherence, because Qatar is not ready to follow the Saudi and UAE lead on the matter. Qatar's political and financial support for the MB both domestically and regionally have made coordination within the GCC impossible. As Qatar shows no signs that it is ready to change its attitude, containing the MB will prove to be a difficult task for Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Just like Saudi Arabia, Qatar has hosted numerous Muslim Brothers fleeing the repression in their home countries since the 1960s. But in contrast to Saudi Arabia, it has allowed the Egyptian Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi (born 1926), who remains the MB's supreme religious authority, to spread his worldview in Qatar and abroad. With the help of Al Jazeera TV channel, Qaradawi established himself as the most popular religious scholar in the Arab world and has promoted the cause of the Brotherhood worldwide. Furthermore, by fall 2011, the Qatari leadership seemed to have made the strategic decision to support the MB as the coming power in North Africa and the Levant. It not only used its soft power to promote the aims of the MB, but also assisted the Libyan revolutionaries by sending a token force and supporting Islamist insurgents with money, weapons, and training. Qatar does the same in Syria, where it closely cooperates with Turkey in its support for the insurgents – especially the Islamists and Salafists among them. Additionally, it built strong relations to the Islamist governments in Tunisia and Egypt, clearly looking for new allies in the Arab world.

This policy differed strongly from Saudi Arabia's approach, which supported the Egyptian military leadership. It long hesitated to help the insurgents in Syria, where the local Muslim Brotherhood dominated the political opposition. Diplomatically, Saudi Arabia tried to break the preeminence of Qatar's supporters in the Syrian National Coalition in late 2012 and early 2013, triggering a bitter power struggle between the different factions and personalities in this institution. These events were rightly interpreted as part of a Saudi-Qatari struggle for supremacy, which at first did not lead to any open conflict between the two. This is most likely due to that both governments – Saudi Arabia more than Qatar – act out of a fear of Iranian hegemony in the Middle East and the Gulf and therefore share the goal of toppling the Assad regime. But in March, the situation changed, when Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Kuwait withdrew their ambassadors from Doha, in a move designed to force Qatar to change its policies with regard to the MB. It remains to be seen how the new Qatari emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, will react, but it is unlikely that he will bow to the immense pressure of his neighbors.

*Guido Steinberg is a senior associate at the Middle East and Africa Research Division of the German Institute for International and Security Affairs.*

# From Co-optation to Crackdown:
## Gulf States' reactions to the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood during the Arab Spring

*By Courtney Freer*

Examining recent statements made by Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) governments about the Muslim Brotherhood, it is difficult to believe that its members were almost universally welcomed into the Gulf states in the 1950s, with some of their ranks holding ministerial positions into the 2000s. The rise of Islamist opposition movements during the Arab Spring led governments across the region to focus keenly on the Muslim Brotherhood as it emerged as the primary voice of political opposition. I argue that the reason for such a focus on the Ikhwan inside the Gulf lies beyond regional politics alone; rather, the persistent presence of Muslim Brotherhood movements inside the GCC states led their governments to articulate different policies toward such groups. Indeed, each of the Gulf states has developed a distinct strategy to manage the Ikhwan, ranging from a soft form of co-optation seen in Qatar to a harsh crackdown in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

That such policies diverge so widely demonstrates the degree to which each Gulf regime considers the Ikhwan threatening to its hold on power. As the whole, government treatment of these organizations in the GCC varies according to the degree to which regimes consider them linked to broader opposition movements. The more the Brotherhood is seen to collude with secular opposition or hold political sway through government positions, the more dangerous it are considered, and thus likelier a crackdown will result. The link between activities of local Brotherhood branches and support for the Ikhwan abroad, however, is less direct. Those states which co-opt rather than shut down Brotherhood movements tend to feel less threatened by them not only domestically, but also abroad. Still, domestic calculations about the political threat posed by the Brotherhood are remarkably subjective and often rest on individual rulers' opinions about and experiences with the organization.

**Bahrain: Loyalist Brotherhood**

Bahrain provides an example of Muslim Brotherhood co-optation due to the political salience of sectarian identity in that state. Because oppositional Islamist movements tend to be Shiite, the Muslim Brotherhood has traditionally been allied with al-Khalifa ruling family. This is not to say that the Bahraini Ikhwan is politically inactive; the Bahraini Brotherhood has a social branch (al-Islah Society) and a political bloc (al-Minbar Islamic Society). As a parliamentary bloc, al-Minbar tends to support the monarchy's political and economic agenda while also pressing for the implementation of Islamist social policies.[1] Its primary policy demands seem to comprise "generic support for the security services and rejection of government concessions to the main Shi'a opposition society, al-Wefaq."[2]

To maintain its position in the government's favour, al-Minbar has been careful to distinguish itself from more oppositional Brotherhood groups elsewhere in the region, especially in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. In the words of its president Ali Ahmed in 2014: "All eyes of the voters are on us as they say we are the Muslim Brotherhood, which is not right. It is the ideology that we follow, but we do not have the organization in Bahrain – neither do we support it."[3] Al-Minbar went so far as to denounce protests during the Arab Spring as Shiite or Iranian agents.[4] Because it has never positioned itself as an opposition movement, the Bahraini Ikhwan has not played a major role in articulating policies, aside from those already supported by the government, and, as a result, though they have disagreed on certain policies (like government land ownership), tensions between the two are almost nonexistent.

**Kuwait: Ikhwan in Opposition**

The Kuwaiti Muslim Brotherhood has altered its original focus from revising social policy to concentrating on political reform and stamping out corruption, in particular with the advent of the Arab Spring. While its social arm, Jam'iat al-Islah al-Ijtima'i (the Social Reform Association) extends outreach through educational and charitable activities, the Kuwaiti Muslim Brotherhood's political arm, the Islamic Constitutional Movement (or ICM) has tempered its demands for social and cultural reforms that would "Islamize" Kuwaiti society while focusing increasingly on demands for broader political reforms.

Though the government, accustomed to Brotherhood activism, has allowed the Kuwaiti Muslim Brotherhood substantial political freedom, crackdown on the opposition as a whole, rather than solely on Islamists, has become more prevalent. Indeed, the government has attempted to stem the tide of the opposition's reform efforts with dissolutions of parliament (two in 2012 alone), the revision of electoral laws to favor traditionally pro-government candidates, and the shielding of ministers from interpellation to maintain al-Sabah ruling family's primacy. In response, the ICM, with other blocs, has boycotted the last two parliamentary elections.

Outside parliament, the ICM has increasingly privileged the advancement of a pro-democracy agenda in partnership with other opposition blocs. In 2013, the ICM signed on to a document articulating demands for reform, drafted by secular opposition leader Musallam al-Barrak, former ICM parliamentarian Jama'an al-Harbash, and Tariq al-Mutairi of the liberal Civil Democratic Movement. Political trends ranging from secular leftists to Salafis have signed the document, which calls for expanded parliamentary authority, an independent judiciary, and a modified criminal code — none of which is forms a traditional "Islamist" platform. To further the coalition's aims, the ICM has thus dropped its once primary demand of amending article two of the constitution to proclaim shari'a as the sole source of legislation.

The April 2016 sentencing of former ICM MP Mubarak al-Duwailah may point to a targeted crackdown on Islamists, informed by the Emirati example, however. Al-Duwailah was sentenced for two years in prison[5]on charges of endangering ties with an ally and insulting leaders of an allied state following his statements, on Kuwait's parliamentary television channel, about Abu Dhabi Crown

Prince Shaykh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan being "against Sunni Islam."[6] It remains to be seen to what extent the Kuwaiti response becomes harmonised with the Emirati, though a full-scale crackdown remains unlikely due to the broad support base that the Ikhwan enjoys inside Kuwait.

**Oman: Past Crackdown, Present Uncertainty**

The Muslim Brotherhood is less relevant as a political force in Oman, since Ibadi Islam is the dominant strand of the religion in that state.[7] Nonetheless, the Brotherhood did have an affiliate there. In fact, in 1994, authorities cracked down on the movement, arresting hundreds of people presumed to be Ikhwan-linked on charges of subversion.[8] Among the accused were a former ambassador to the United States, a former air force commander, and two ministerial undersecretaries, suggesting that sympathisers may have held sway in segments of the government.[9]

Today, the Omani Brotherhood lacks institutionalized capacity and major political or social influence due to the lack of Sunni activism as a whole (Sunnis are a minority in the country) and government crackdown in the 1990s. Remaining Islamist movements in Oman are Idabi or Jamaat al-Tabligh, neither of which is ideologically similar to the Ikhwan. The Omani government, since it cracked down on its Brotherhood in the 1990s, has largely stayed out of the fray while its Gulf neighbours have clashed about the political threat presented by the Ikhwan in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, perhaps due to the fact that the group there does not pose a substantial political threat or cohesive group.

**Qatar: Cooperative Co-optation**

The Qatari Muslim Brotherhood, which formally chose to dissolve itself in 1999, has tended to focus on social policy rather than political reform. Indeed, the organization never formed a political arm. Without means to disseminate its ideology through an official publication or even a formal meeting place, the Qatari Ikhwan does not appear to harbour ambitions beyond continuing intellectual and spiritual pursuits.

Possibly because of the lack of a political opening and partly due to general satisfaction with the prevailing system, the Islamic sector in Qatar has not become politically active in any nascent pro-democracy movement. Further, because the government has been public about the need for democratic reforms, there is less space for Brotherhood agitation in this field. In addition, because many Brotherhood members hail from prominent families, the organization is "hardly subversive."[10] In its current, loosely organized form, members are able to meet without fearing consequences of a crackdown from authorities. Furthermore, their goals *of da'wa* and Islamic education are achievable without the implementation of a structure that the state may find objectionable.[11]

Because Islamist demands in Qatar have been confined to the social sphere, the government has not forced a confrontation with Brotherhood supporters and instead has articulated willingness to work with other Islamist organizations. Its attitude about the Brotherhood abroad thus is largely informed by its peaceful experience with the Ikhwan at home, rather than by an ideological affiliation with the organization.

**Saudi Arabia: Cycles of Co-optation and Crackdown**

The Saudi Brotherhood has maintained a somewhat low profile, largely eschewing public criticism or calls for change in favor of more grassroots activity. Such activity reached a pitch in the early 1990s, when a number of Brotherhood figures joined the Islamic Awakening (al-Sahwa al-Islamiyya, hereafter Sahwa) movement, which focused on opposing the deployment of foreign troops on Saudi soil to liberate Kuwait and included protests and petitions demanding political reform to allow for greater public participation in politics.[12] For its part, the ruling family seems to have vacillated between supporting and co-opting its local Brotherhood affiliate, depending on the degree to which it considers the group to be aligned with Sahwa and other reform movements that could threaten the Kingdom politically.

By 1995, the regime had quelled the Sahwa campaign, but continued to harbor a distrust and dislike of the Brotherhood, as it considered the group the primary force behind "this unprecedented episode of dissent."[13] Indeed, in the years that followed, the government moved to diminish independent Sahwa activities and expelled several prominent Muslim Brotherhood or Muslim Brotherhood-linked, figures, since they considered the groups to be one and the same.[14] In 2002, Prince Nayef bin Abdul Aziz al-Saud, then-minister of interior, went so far as to accuse the Muslim Brotherhood of being the "source of all evils in the Kingdom."[15]

The relationship changed in later years. After the death of the most respected figures of the official religious establishment, Sheikhs Ibn Baz and Ibn Uthaymin and in the midst of its fight against jihadism, the ruling family needed a Sunni support base to back its legitimacy.[16] Al-Saud family's relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood outside the kingdom thus improved, and it become more tolerated inside the state.

This relationship soured during the Arab Spring, however, when, members of the Sahwa movement in 2011 began to call for far-reaching political reforms through petitions.[17] To make matters worse, in August 2013, 56 sheikhs— some of whom are linked to the Saudi Muslim Brotherhood— criticized the overthrow of Brotherhood leader Mohammed Morsi in Egypt, which the Saudi government had supported, dubbing it the "removal of a legitimately elected president" and a violation of "the will of the people."[18]

Certainly, "in 2011 and 2012 there was some interaction between Sahwa Islamists, liberals and political reformers of various persuasions."[19] As a result, the government came to consider it dangerous and thus took a harsh stance toward the Brotherhood, culminating in the removal of Ikhwan sympathisers from university posts and the designation of the organization as a terrorist group in February 2014.[20]

This stance seems to have been tempered in the past year, however. Foreign Minister Saud bin Faysal stated in February 2015 that his government has "no problem with the Muslim Brotherhood."[21] Such a change in rhetoric may be part of the Saudi government's attempt to gain favour among Sunni Islamists as it wages war in Yemen and against ISIS, positioning itself as the protector of "proper" Sunni Islam. In turn, it may also reflect the policies of King Salman, who, as long-time governor of Riyadh, developed ties with a variety of Islamists in the Kingdom.[22]

**United Arab Emirates: Crackdown and Securitization**

Jam'iat al-Islah wa-l-Tawjih al-Ijtima'i (Reform and Social Counselling Association, hereafter Islah), the Emirati branch of the Muslim Brotherhood initially resembled the Qatari branch in its focus on social policy and education. Islah also developed a political reform agenda alongside its social program, however, pressing for more representative government and more equal distribution of wealth.[23]

Fearing that the Emirati Brotherhood could gain a broader following as a political bloc, the government resolved to squash it before the Ikhwan became too powerful to influence politics on an institutionalised level. Allegations about Islah's misconduct from Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, who claimed in 1994 that Islah's charity had funded Egyptian Islamic Jihad, provided the first opportunity for the Emirati government to move against the organization. That year, the government dissolved Islah's elected emirate-level boards of directors[24] and placed them under supervision of the Ministry of Social Affairs. Furthermore, the government banned Brotherhood members from holding public office.[25] A second crackdown, involving hundreds of arrests, occurred following the 9/11 attacks, as the Emirati government was eager to prove itself harsh on any type of Islamism after Dubai was revealed to be a financial hub for terrorism and after two Emiratis were involved in the attacks.[26]

Although liberal and Islamist activists had worked together to draft a petition urging political reform in 2011, the government exaggerated links between them to

dramatize the danger to the prevailing system. By the end of 2012, 94 alleged members of Islah had been arrested as security threats, with the government claiming to have received confessions from imprisoned Islah members that their organization had an armed wing and intended to overthrow the existing order to re-establish the caliphate, a claim not substantiated by any independent Islah documents or public statements.[27] Still, in November 2014, the UAE dubbed Islah a terrorist organization.[28]

Emirati Foreign Minister Shaykh 'Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan denounced the Brotherhood as "an organization which encroaches upon the sovereignty and integrity of nations" and called on Gulf governments to work against its expanding influence.[29] Such language illustrates government attempts to use fears about emerging Islamist political parties in the region as an excuse to dismiss such groups' demands for political reform within the UAE. The crackdown on the Brotherhood also sent a strong signal to any potential opposition movements that crackdown would be swift and complete.

Inside the GCC, different Muslim Brotherhood organizations have varying priorities in terms of political versus social platforms and have adopted differing organizational forms. As a result, government responses have fluctuated, with successful co-optations in Bahrain and Qatar, crackdowns in Oman, the UAE and at times in Saudi Arabia, and with a relatively hands-off approach in Kuwait. Such responses illustrate the degree to which such states consider the Ikhwan threatening to their economic and political agendas.

The fact that Brotherhood movements survive in some of the world's wealthiest rentier states also demonstrates the flexibility of the organization and its ability to adapt its shape and activities to suit different political environments. Due to such flexibility, the Brotherhood is likely to remain politically relevant in the region, even where structural restrictions remain. Just as Tarek Masoud points out in the Egyptian context, political Islam is also far from dead in the Gulf region.

*Courtney Freer is a research officer at the Kuwait Programme at the Middle East Centre at the London School of Economics.*

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