



RESEARCH PAPER

Resolution of a Diplomatic Blockade through Multi-Track Diplomacy: A Case Study of Qatar's Foreign Policy amid its Diplomatic Blockade

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to highlight all such restrictions tapping on a state as a tool of diplomacy, done by other states to achieve their self-interests, can be resolved by using different tracks of diplomacy while conducting foreign policy of the state. The most important objective of this research is to establish that different tracks of diplomacy can be adopted to successfully survive a diplomatic blockade. A state can endure a diplomatic blockade by following different tracks of diplomacy in an independent foreign policy. Qatar's diplomatic blockade is taken as a case study in this research. It is observed that Qatar successfully overcame its diplomatic blockade from 2017 to 2021. This blockade was imposed by some Middle Eastern states. The research approach for the stated issue includes descriptive nature. Primary as well as secondary data sources are used in this research which include research articles, books, observations, newspaper reports, official government statements, and written content. This paper institutes that the modern tools and techniques of diplomacy can help resolve any sudden crisis in an amicable way by applying the means of Multi-track diplomacy.

Keywords: Arab States, Conflict Resolution, Diplomatic Blockade, Qatar's Foreign Policy

Introduction

On June 5, 2017, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, and Bahrain, led by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, disengaged diplomatic ties with Qatar, marking the beginning of the diplomatic blockade against that country. They forbade ships and aircraft registered in Qatar from utilizing its airspace and oceans alongside Saudi Arabia, restricting the sole land border of Qatar. Later on, Jordan joined them, and the Maldives, Mauritania, Senegal, Djibouti, the Comoros, Yemen, and the Libyan governments located in Tobruk supported them (Al-Jazeera, 2020). This diplomatic blockade has its roots in many historical events. When Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani assumed government in 1995, he believed that Qatar could provide security by merely shifting from a Saudi member to a competing state (Fisher, 2017). Qatar strengthened its links at the same time with groups with whom Washington does not need to have direct talks, such as the Palestinian Hamas and the Afghani Taliban. As the focal point of the structure of its soft power, Qatar set up its news network "Al Jazeera" in 1996. The organization handles delicate policy-centered issues that are generally seen as inappropriate for discussion in public in the Arab world. Subsequently, Qatar's workplaces have been shut on various occasions in a few Arab nations since its origin (Ibrahim, 2020).

Qatar has also been blamed for supporting terrorist activities. While the Saudis have done the same, other nations have accused Qatar of giving financial support to rebel groups active in Syria, including the al-Qaeda affiliate al-Nusra Front (BBC, 2017). Following Qatar's individualistic practices, Saudi Arabia's envoy to Doha was called back from 2002 to 2008 in an attempt to constrain Qatar to check its idiosyncratic tendencies. However, this methodology extensively became unsuccessful (Roberts D. , 2017). After that, Qatar and the abovementioned Arab States took wandering ways in 2011 with the emergence of the Arab Spring, as every nation reacted distinctively to the progressions clearing the area. All things considered, Qatar made the decision to support progressive forces and change in Arab Spring countries including Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya (Fraihat, 2020). Specifically, Qatar had a different stance toward the Muslim Brotherhood than its neighbors did. In the states that experienced the Arab Spring, Qatar backed the Brotherhood and achieved decisions there. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, among different states in the Middle East region, wanted to preserve the status quo instead of change, in this way offering credit to the strongman hypothesis and sponsorship of armed force officers who could re-establish request to the district, as Abdel Fattah el-Sisi of Egypt and Khalifa Haftar of Libya.

When Mohamed Morsi, the head of the Muslim Brotherhood, was overthrown by a military coup on June 30, 2013, the Gulf states became split as Egypt advanced, so causing a fundamental rift between Qatar and the Arab states. As a result, in the middle of 2014, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates withdrew their diplomats from Qatar, signaling the beginning of a protracted emergency (Fraihat, 2020). In March 2014, the mentioned states pulled out their representatives from Qatar. The specific explanations behind the break-in political relations are hazy, yet the news inclusion principally credited this to a few occasions in April and May 2017. The immediate cause and the first factor was the revelation in April 2017 that Qatar had struck a pact with the two Sunni and Shi'ite assailants in Syria and Iraq. The agreement had two objectives. First and foremost, the immediate objective was to secure the return of 26 Qatari detainees, including royals, who had been abducted by Shi'ite aggressors while hawk-chasing in southern Iraq and held captive for more than 16 months (Roberts D. B., 2019). Persuading the two Sunni and Shi'ite assailants in Syria to permit useful guides to pass through and permit the safe escape of common civilians was the second objective (Arango, 2017).

Also, the anti-Qatar coalition has since quite a long ago thought about Qatar as a friendly neighbor to Iran, too provocative in its sponsorship of the Al-Jazeera media network, and an excessively strong supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood. Even though Qatar has been the target of numerous criticisms, the UAE and Saudi Arabia have been particularly displeased with Qatar's support of Islamist advancements (Jamal Bouoiyour, RefkSelmi, 2020). There was also the Riyadh Summit in late May 2017, in which Saudi Arabia and the United States of America signed an arms agreement. Trump provided Saudi Arabia with strong support in its efforts to fight states and organizations that support Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood. Elliott Broidy, a prominent fundraiser for President Donald Trump, and his partner George Nader advocated against Qatar at the highest governmental echelons and anticipated lucrative advisory contracts from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. It is very likely that Trump's support inspired other Sunni countries to side with Saudi Arabia in their opposition to Qatar (Anne Barnard, David D, 2017). Trump's vocal backing of Saudi Arabia, according to The New York Times, has bolstered the nation and sent chills down the spines of other Gulf

States, including Oman and Kuwait, who fear that any nation rejecting the Saudis or the United Arab Emirates will face isolation, as Qatar had (Sanger, Landler, & Schmitt, 2017).

Thus, Qatar was put under a diplomatic blockade by a coalition of Middle Eastern states led by Saudi Arabia on 5 June 2017, as shown in the **figure 1** below (Fanact, 2021). Many sanctions were put on Qatar and a list of thirteen demands was put forward to Qatar by the blockading states. The demands included shutting down the Turkish military base which was under construction at that time, severing ties with Iran, closing the Al-Jazeera news network, stopping terrorist funding, and auditing and accounting by the blockading states for the next ten years (Al-Jazeera, 2017). During that time, the impacts of the blockade were seen on Qatar's trade. Its economy and trade declined. There were food shortages as its airspace, waterways, and the only land border was closed. Its helium supplies were also disturbed which impacted its laboratories and industries. However, Qatar remained persistent that the solution to the crisis did not remain in accepting the demands, instead, it continued to manage its affairs through various tracks of diplomacy which resulted in success. On 5 January 2021, Qatar diplomatic blockade was lifted in the annual GCC Summit held in Saudi Arabia (Ramani, 2021).

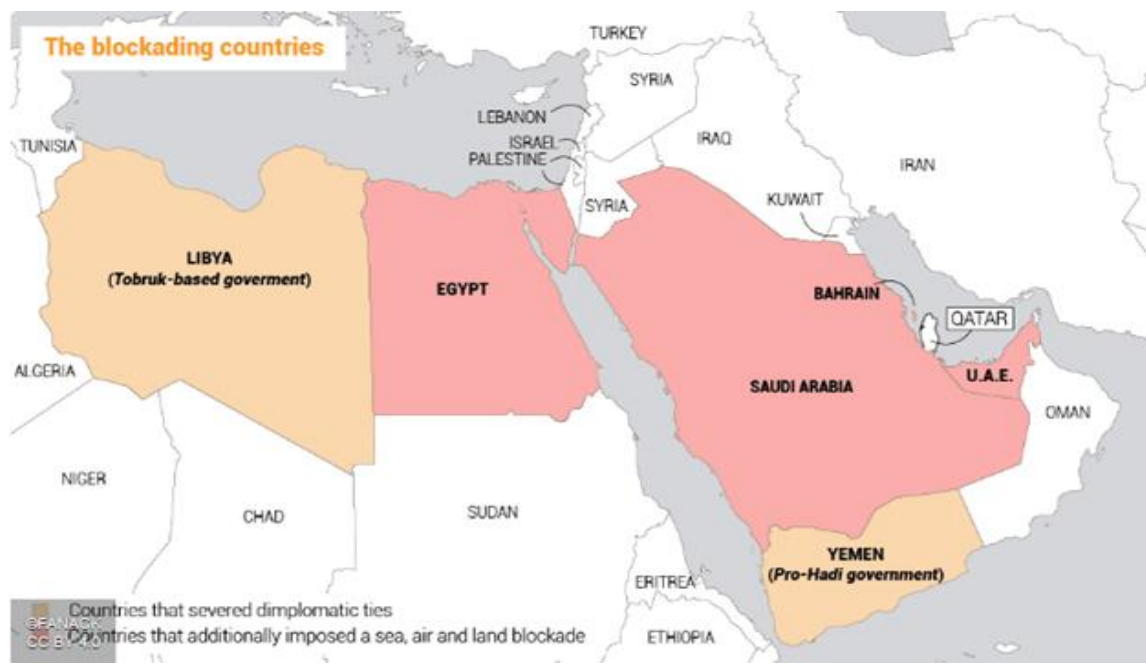


Figure 1: The highlighted states in the figure are the blockading states, while the states in red color additionally imposed the land, air, and sea blockade.

(Source: <https://fanack.com/gulf-cooperation-council/blockade-of-qatar-2017-2021/>)

Literature Review

Qatar is playing a role as a hybrid diplomatic actor in International Relations. It is supporting the US as well as Hezbollah and Iran. It mediates with Israel and Lebanon behind the scenes too. It is playing above its weight in diplomatic relations. However, it should be kept in mind that such a differentiated approach can create risks for Qatar too. (Momani, 2011). Eight years of Al-Jazeera's war coverage of Qatar and Saudi Arabia has been analyzed. It reveals that through Al-Jazeera, Qatar has designed a new technique of public diplomacy by running it as a combination of private and state-sponsored

networks. It is a new tactic in state-sponsored media diplomacy (Samuel-Azran, 2013) Qatar's diplomatic emergency started when a few states including Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, and UAE unexpectedly broke all ties with Qatar diplomatically in 2017. It had a direct effect on customer behavior in Qatar as the general store racks were removed by the patrons hours after Saudi Arabia and UAE blocked the land, air and water routes for Qatar. (Khan, 2017). Additionally, GCC remained a strong union until Qatar was accused of terrorist financing. This GCC crisis, if prolonged, can threaten the regional stability as well as the socio-economic interests of all member states. Thus, the crisis must be addressed through proper discourse in the best interest of all GCC states. (Naheem, 2017). on the other hand the Qatar emergency is an important part of the inter-state crises in the Middle East. Regarding the overall shift in the balance of power, it is set off by certain states' hegemonic tendencies (Atanasiu, 2017). The Diplomatic blockade of Qatar has weakened the GCC and raised questions for USA about the trustworthiness of Saudi Arabia and UAE as security and political allies. This blockade will have important implications for the socio-political stability as well as the regional security of the Gulf. (Ulrichsen, 2018). Qatar blockade is of little importance for the state as it prepares to host FIFA World Cup 2022. The nearer one moves toward the beginning of the competition with the blockade still going on, it will become more troublesome for the boycotting states to conduct the World Cup in such an atmosphere. There will be negative media inclusion, and the blockading states will feel forced to surrender. (Dorsey, 2018). Ten news stories from the BBC and Al Jazeera English were analyzed in order to compare and examine how British and Qatari media outlets discussed the emergency. The analysis revealed signs of public strategy, plan setting, preparation, and nationalization of conversation in the articles from both sources. The political emergency is attributed by Al-Jazeera far more than by the BBC. These results show that even news outlets that claim to be impartial are influenced by public environments while reporting on global conflicts. Finally, the impact of the diplomatic boycott on individuals' attitudes toward the GCC, their interactions with other countries, and internal political matters demonstrates Qatar's unexpected adaptability despite the blockade; specifically the part of normal Qataris, who prepared with regard to the political business as usual. (Al-Khelaifi, 2019). Qatar's strategy for dealing with the blockade is described as "nested power" based on an analysis of its political systems both before and after the blockade. Sports, state diplomacy, and mediation have recently been used to examine the role of soft and nested forces in Qatar. The assessment of how the blockade influenced power dynamics uncovers the remarkable quality and strength of Qatar's soft and nested power (Al-Horr, 2019). Tensions in the Gulf right now, especially between Qatar and the coalition of Arab governments led by Saudi Arabia, highlight the diligence of conflict and crises. Various states inside the region presently routinely participate in interfering activities that challenge previously held standards of non-intervention and sovereignty of states (Milton-Edwards, 2020). Significant changes are seen generally in the dependence between the considered stock markets in crisis periods. This is because during times of crisis, the price of oil fluctuates. Following the oil price increase and the blockade, the exchanges between Qatar and the other governments fundamentally changed (Benlagha, 2020).

Material and Methods

This study is based on a qualitative research design. Owing to the complexity and interdisciplinary nature of the research topic, employing a combination of multiple methodologies can offer a comprehensive understanding of the topic. Content analysis conducted was based on existing literature, including policy documents, academic

papers, news articles, and other relevant sources to identify the tracks of diplomacy used in the resolution of the diplomatic blockade. Historical analysis has also been conducted to trace down the roots of the enmity and strangling ties between Qatar and the blockading states in the crisis. Also, a thorough analysis of foreign policy of Qatar before and amid the blockade has been conducted to gather rich, detailed insights into Qatar's diplomacy.

Results and Discussion

Role of Multi-Track Diplomacy Adopted by Qatar Amid Its Diplomatic Blockade

The diplomatic blockade created many geopolitical and geoeconomic implications for the blockaded state. Qatar viewed the sanctions imposed by the blockading states as a strategy to isolate Qatar and limit its regional influence. It regarded the acceptance of the demands put forward by the blockading states as harmful to its national interest and the diplomatic blockade was resolved by adopting different tracks of diplomacy. In this regard, Qatar enhanced its diplomacy and negotiation through mutual respect and security. It managed its foreign policy in the following way.

Official Diplomacy (Track One): Track I Diplomacy involves formal diplomatic channels, involving government-to-government negotiations and many diplomatic initiatives led by official representatives (McDonald, 2013). It is the traditional diplomacy practiced by states all over the world. In this regard, Qatar strengthened its diplomatic relations with the following states.

Qatar-Iranian relationship: Qatar already had favorable diplomatic links with Iran but later with the initiation of the blockade, their relationship strengthened. There were Government-to-government negotiations that involved the official talks between Qatar's Economy Minister Sheikh Ahmed bin Jassim Al-Thani and Iran's Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade Mohammad Shariat madari, and Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif. As a result, the trade between both states increased to five-fold. Iran supplied Qatar with food through cargo aircraft throughout the blockade. Iran's airspace was also provided to Qatar to enable it to conduct its trade by taking diverting routes. Iran also acted as a trade route for other states like Turkey and Azerbaijan to reach Qatar (Saanun, 2018).

Qatar-Turkey relationship: Turkey was already a great ally of Qatar and it supported Qatar throughout the blockade. There were official negotiations between both states and many agreements related to business were signed. More than 100 cargo aircraft carrying food were dispatched by Turkey to Qatar (AFP, 2017) and their trade increased three-fold. The Turkish military base, Al Hamad Port, was also built in Qatar irrespective of the demands of the blockading states. Turkish President Erdogan visited Saudi Arabia and many Gulf States and asked them to end the blockade, which had a great impact on the resolution of the crisis (Saanun, 2018).

Relations with the USA: Qatar got in touch with the Pentagon and the US State Department to present a fair picture to Trump on the accusations made by the Saudi-led coalition. In addition to a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to stop the financing of terrorism, Qatar signed a \$12 billion deal to buy F15 Jets from the US (Reuters, 2017). Conversely, an agreement was reached by the official representatives of Qatar and the United States about the battle against terrorism financing. This agreement was initiated in conjunction with the official visit of the US Secretary of State to Qatar. Consequently,

the US government dispatched its top diplomat to the Middle East in an attempt to help break the stalemate between Qatar and the coalitions led by Saudi Arabia.

Relations with World Powers: Germany, China, Japan, Russia: Qatar made an effort to leverage the might of the European nations to win their support and fortify ties despite the blockade. Germany, which served as a mediator in the ongoing dispute, continued to support Qatar during the blockade. Additionally, Qatar's diplomacy was successful in establishing contact with China, Russia, and Japan to strengthen collaboration in the effort to resolve the current issue. China's government also assisted Qatar in resolving the issue. Speaking through its spokesperson, Hua Chunying, the Chinese government promised to contribute to the persistent crisis that persists in the Gulf region. Russia was requested to provide mediatory efforts for resolving the crisis. Japan backed Qatar's position in this dispute as well (Saanun, 2018).

Regional Diplomacy with Kuwait and Oman: Qatar used diplomacy to reach out to and fortify its diplomatic ties with neighboring nations that are understanding and impartial, such as Kuwait and Oman. In this context, Qatar interpreted the boycott as an effort to isolate it on a regional scale. In response to this situation, Qatar opened up its foreign policy and engaged with both world and regional forces. It involved Kuwait and Oman to back its stance and clear its position in the crisis on a global level. This also created a huge impact in favor of Qatar.

Unofficial Diplomacy (Track Two): Track II diplomacy includes unofficial channels of communication and engagement. It involves non-state actors, informal mediators, and civil society organizations (Leguey-Feilleux, 2009). Qatar utilized track II diplomacy in various forms. It conducted backchannel negotiations with many states. It appeared on various informal dialogue platforms and advocated for itself by providing various arguments backing its stance. Qatar also raised its stance through its Representatives of National Human Rights and Shura Council, to deepen awareness and provide new perspectives on the side effects of the blockade on Qatar. They also advocated for the infringement of the fundamental human rights of the people of Qatar owing to the food shortages created due to the blockade. It participated in the 38th GCC summit with the theme of creating peace and stability in the Middle East, which concluded with the consensus of formulating a committee for the immediate resolution of the crisis (Anthony, 2017). Qatar also appeared in the 72nd annual session of the United Nations raised its voice for respecting the sovereignty of all states and insisted on the resolution of the Qatar crisis, highlighting that the crisis could become a global crisis if remained unresolved (Yaseen, et. al., 2019; Al-Jazeera, 2017).

Hybrid Diplomacy (Track One and a Half Diplomacy): This is the exchange of official representatives of opposing governments or political entities in public or private sectors that is facilitated or mediated by an outsider who is not a representative of a political institution or group (Mapendere, 2021). By influencing attitudes amongst the parties, this kind of contact seeks to alter the political power structures that gave rise to the dispute. This type of diplomacy was also conducted between Qatar and the blockading states by third parties outside the crisis. Such groups facilitated the resolution of the crisis by providing mediatory efforts to the official representatives of Qatar and the other Middle Eastern states.

Business, or Peacemaking through Commerce (Track Three): Track III emphasizes the contribution of advocacy groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and private sector entities in diplomatic efforts. Qatar signed a three-way trade

deal with Iran and Turkey which enhanced its trade (Karadag, 2017). It signed many trade and business agreements with these states amid the blockade. It also got its food supplies from Oman, India, Morocco, and many other states which helped it in catering its food shortage.

Public Diplomacy (Track Four): Track IV diplomacy includes the usage of media, public outreach, and cultural diplomacy enterprises to form public opinion and build constructive relations between countries. In this regard, Qatar organized global conference on media freedoms, titled “Social Media: Challenges and Ways to Promote Freedoms and Protect Activists” (Gilmore, 2020) in response to calls from blockading states to close down Qatar-funded critical media. It highlighted the freedoms of media and sent a signal to the international community that Qatar will not shut down any of its news networks, including the Al-Jazeera news network. Also, Qatar inaugurated the National Museum of Qatar in 2019 (Martin, 2019) to improve its cultural and public diplomacy. The museum, being called the ‘representation of the nation’, charted Qatar’s history and progress throughout its existence This strengthened the cultural diplomacy of Qatar as well as increased public outreach.

By practicing different tracks of diplomacy and an independent foreign policy, Qatar emerged successfully and relatively stronger than before the blockade. This demonstrates that when trying to resolve a diplomatic problem, multi-track diplomacy works better than traditional diplomatic practices of Track one diplomacy respectively.

Conclusion

It can be deduced that the diplomatic crisis in Qatar were resolved through Qatar's pragmatic initiative of the adoption of multi-track diplomacy. This asserts that multi-track diplomacy has the potential to be transformative when it comes to cope difficult geopolitical issues. It also emphasizes the potential of multi-track diplomacy as a useful instrument for settling modern diplomatic conflicts. Therefore, Policymakers, diplomats, academicians and humanitarian actors are needed to comprehend how does the modern day multi-track diplomacy can be used? to further international relations’ goals of peace, stability, and sustainable resolution of diplomatic issues.

Recommendation

This research looks at both, the diplomatic strategies that can be employed effectively to culminate a blockade and resolve conflicts through the means of multi-track diplomacy. It also signifies the importance of multitrack diplomacy in contrast to conventional diplomatic tactics. In contemporary dynamics of foreign policy, this study can further assist Nation-States effectively navigating a diplomatic blockade through the use of multi-track diplomacy. Finally, multi-track diplomacy is considered more pragmatic and applicable in the contemporary era of globalization of political-economy.

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