

Emerging New Alliance System in Middle East and Implications for Gulf Cooperation Council

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Abstract

Ideological factor has always remained the corner stone in the formation of alliances and regional politics of Middle East. Recent years have seen a drastic shift in the traditional politics of Middle East. Qatar Crisis highlighted a wedge within the GCC framework. Meanwhile; Qatar's tilt towards Iran and the Saudi's aggressive policies uncovered the rise of new dynamism. The study uses the theoretical assumptions of Structural Realism to draw conclusions about Qatar, Iran and Turkey's behaviour. However; the data is gathered through both Primary and Secondary sources. Political environment of Middle East is undergoing a significant shift by emergence of new alliances which are not directed by sectarian divide. Iran- Qatar- Turkey Troika has emerged as a new pole and in better position than Saudi Arabia and UAE. The Sunni bloc is seen declining as not only Qatar, but Oman and Kuwait also pursuing the policy of hedging towards Iran. The study aims to explore factors that led to engagement between Iran and Qatar, impact of Iran-Qatar relations on GCC and the emerging Iran, Qatar and Turkey alliance and its implications on the Middle East.

Key Words: Middle East Dynamics- Beyond Sectarian Divide, Iran- Qatar Axis and GCC

Introduction

Since decades, the politics of the Middle East has been under the deep shadow of sectarian divide. Iran and Saudi Arabia are two states which have been playing an active role in the regional affairs of the Middle East. There are two opposing coalitions in the region that divide the members of the Middle Eastern region. These are; Saudi or Sunni coalition and Iran led coalition of shite states. Saudi Arabia and Iran have been key strategic rivals in the Persian Gulf politics since 60-70 years. This region has also been facing geostrategic ups and downs in relation to Iran and Saudi Arabia. Recently, a new phase of rivalry may be traced in the region with rising issues among the GCC countries.

The fundamental objective behind the formation of the Gulf Cooperation Council was economic cooperation among Gulf nations. With the passage of time the major goal of GCC transformed to serve as an anti-Iran coalition. Saudi Arabia has always played a leading role in GCC, as it is the most powerful state in GCC. GCC helped Saudi Arabia in enhancing its geostrategic role in the Persian Gulf and on the other hand contained the role of Iran. But with the passage of time strong resentment towards the Saudi's role took its roots in Qatar-Saudi relations that have weakened the aim of GCC.

The revolution of 1979 not only resulted in a domestic socio-political transformation of Iran but also had a spillover effect in the region. Arab gulf monarchies started perceiving a threat to their ideology and positions which led them to take measures to tackle the threat. Drastic changes in economic sectors as well as the geopolitics since 1979 led to an increase in international prestige and power of Arab countries. On the other hand, the revolution reduced an Iranian influence and weakened its standing within the region. It also created a power vacuum. The presence of abundant natural resources in the Southern part of Persian Gulf states such as; Saudi Arabia and Qatar also added to their power. The increase in both power and prestige of Arab states

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encouraged them to play an active role in regional politics. Simultaneously, the failure to check their power and capabilities within the GCC framework resulted in the demise of compatibility within the anti- Iranian coalition.

However; the European and regional states see an unprecedented Iranian influence in the region. Post-revolutionary Iran exercises more control over Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen than it did before the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. Moreover; members of Saudi led coalition and Israel see the increase of Iran's military influence in the region with the help of its network of proxies as a threat to regional security.

Despite Qatar's small geographical expansion in the region, it plays a prominent role in regional politics. Other than Saudi Arabia, Qatar is the only state which has claimed Wahabi Sunni Islam as its official religion. Before the Qatar blockade, Qatar held little or no importance in the eyes of Iran but since the tensions within the Sunni bloc has risen up, Iran has changed its policy towards Qatar. For decades; geopolitical dynamics have been greatly and carefully navigated by Qatar in its relations with its largest neighbours; Saudi Arabia, Iran and Iraq. One of three Persian Gulf power is considered as a primary threat by Qataris. Qataris usually respond to this threat and have been engaging in close relations with the latter two. Doha is consistently involved in deepening its ties with Iran and Iraq as a counter balance so that pressure is exerted on Saudi Arabia.

Iran is continuously involved in formation of complex regional alliances and has succeeded in establishing strong and deep relations with Turkey and Qatar. Furthermore; the recent crackdown between the relations of Saudi Arabia and Qatar also provided space to Iran to strengthen its ties with Qatar.

A greater division among the Arab states is now prominent as both Riyadh and Abu Dhabi have created a regional front since the last few years. It has resulted in the creation of new openings for the Iranian influence. The policy of imposition of blockade on Qatar to stop Qatar from supporting Muslim Brotherhood has also pushed Qatar from being an active partner of Saudi Arabia in Yemen war to have strong ties with Iran in all spheres of states relations. The engagement of Iran and Qatar due to blockade also has paved ways for Iran to establish close ties with Turkey. It also has led to allegations on Turkey by Riyadh for the formation of "Triangle of Evil" with Iran and the extremist groups in the region.

The growing relations between Iran and Qatar have given rise to a new phase of politics that is beyond sectarian lines. The formation of strategic alliance between Iran and Qatar is beyond the ideational factor that give rise to new form of dynamism* in the Middle East.

Building Blocks to Inquiry and Proposition

Ideational factors have been the most prominent features in relations between the Middle Eastern states. The formation of the Gulf Cooperation Council strengthened the prestige and influence of Saudi-led Sunni coalition but the failure of members to deal with the incompatibilities within the GCC framework has created a crack within the Sunni coalition. The tilt in Iran-Qatar policies has led them to engage in closer ties and is also shaping a new phase of regional politics. The pragmatic transformation in relations between Iran and Qatar are reshaping the regional security complex focusing on economic and strategic challenges beyond the historical ideational factor.

Iran-Qatar growing relations have potential to reshape the Middle Eastern security complex under new political dimension of convergence of economic and strategic interests despite diverging ideational outlook.

Literally Discourse

Hugh Lovatt, Julien Barnes-Dacey, Thomas Erdbrink and Ayaan Hirsi Ali in their articles have explained the tensed relations between Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar. It gave Iran a chance to develop strong ties with Qatar and Turkey. New ways for increasing Iran influence have been opened due to blockading Qatar that has pushed Qatar to build strong relations with Iran and has also provided Iran a chance to develop ties with Turkey.

Giorgio Cafiero in his article discussed that, after the Iranian revolution the gulf states formed GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) but the organization always faced a divide among its members due to their relations with Iran especially relations of Oman, Kuwait and Qatar. As these three states accepted Iran's leadership role in the region. The foremost demand of Qatar blockade dealt with Qatar Iranian ties which are perceived as a threat to GCC security.

NjehAsisian, Jawad Zarif, and YoelGuzansky in their articles focused on the Iran-Qatar relations that political, military and economic measures of Qatar is allowing the presence of Iran to maintain the balance of power. Saudi Arabia feels threatened from Iran-Qatar relations. Iran do not want Qatar as an unstable neighbour and Qatar independence to be threatened by Saudi Arabia. Qatar is hedging with Iran to balance against Saudi Arabia's regional influence. Qatar is also pursuing independent foreign policy. Meanwhile; Iran sees Qatar as a bridge between Iran and other Gulf states.

A book *Security and Bilateral Issues between Iran and its Arab Neighbours* has also been reviewed to get an insight about the historical relations among Iran and Qatar prior to the Iranian Revolution. The book describes the relations among both decades wise. Furthermore; the book also highlights oil and gas as a factor for their engagement.

Theoretical Framework

This research has been conducted in accordance with the assumptions of Neo-Realism. Kenneth N. Waltz was the one who first outlined neo-realism or structural realism in his book *Theory of International Politics*. Neo-realism takes states as the unitary actors and similar in their function as they act rationally in the international system. The neo-realist also acknowledges other actors too like international organizations and transnational corporations but also claims that they have no impact on developments in the international system until states allow them to do so. The structural realism believes in the anarchic nature of the international system, the distribution of capabilities serves as a power constraint in shaping the state behaviour. It also deals with how states act in a self-help system for its survival. Structural realism is divided into two mainstreams; Offensive realism and Defensive realism. Offensive realism says that the anarchic nature of the world forces states to maximize their power and seek domination to secure themselves from future threats. For defensive realists the anarchic nature of the system compels states to adopt defensive, moderate and restrained strategies.

Why Neo-Realism?

Neo-realism is a relevant theory because it provides a system level analysis. It can best explain the actions of Qatar in the self-help system. Moreover; it also elaborates the institutional weakness of GCC and impact of Iran-Qatar relations on GCC. It also deals with how Qatar's action affects the balance of power between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Through the lens of neo-realism, the changing balance of power due to Iran, Qatar and Turkey relations can be analysed.

Historical View of Iran- Qatar Relations and Gulf Cooperation Council

Iran and Qatar do not share commonalities in terms of ideology, history and population but their strategic and policy preferences converge their interests and play a vital role in their close relations. During 1970's, the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East saw a significant shift with the rise of Iran as a military and economic power. While it also saw the emergence of a brand-new state "Qatar" struggling to carve its own way out of the Shadow of SaudiQom. The outbreak of the longest war in the history of Middle East "Iran-Iraq War" redrew the strategic landscape of the Persian Gulf and the greater Middle East. Arab national states rally behind Iraq including Qatar. Though; Saudi Arabia and Kuwait directly supported Iraq, but Qatar was less direct and mute in policy of supporting Iraq.

The comparatively moderate approach of Qatar was influenced by its domestic concerns at one hand for not taking a chance to upset its relations with its Shiite community and on the other hand due to the fear of overreaction by the emerging Persian Gulf power "Iran". In return of Qatar's neutrality, Iran supported Qatar in its territorial dispute with Bahrain over the territory of Fasht-al Dibal Island.

Again in the 1990's, the political architecture of Persian Gulf changed. The death of the revolutionary leader Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989 resulted in the inauguration of a "second republic" causing the change in diplomatic relations. The small GCC states along with Qatar, began considering Iran as potential security partner. Even Qatari foreign minister at that time said that "there is no limit" in consulting Iran on security matters. In 1990, Iran and Qatar announced that they had agreed for a joint project of \$3 billion for the development of the South Par gas field.

The second half of the 1990's and 2000's is seen as the era of steady warm relations between Iran and Qatar which consisted of state visits and diplomatic exchanges. Mutually beneficial strategic relation was built between the two, when Qatar considered Iran as a counterforce of its strategy of hedging against Saudi Arabia, and Iran considered Qatar as an effective counterbalance to its contentious relations with Saudi Arabia, UAE and Bahrain. During 2006, Qatar was the only country which voted against UNSC resolution against Iran 1496, which included imposition of multilateral sanctions and suspension of Iran's nuclear enrichment.

In 2010, both signed a security pact to enhance their cooperation in the areas of drug smuggling, money laundering and forgery. Qatar's Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem Al- Thani also stated that "Qatar will not allow any country to interfere in its relations with Iran". While in 2015, Qatar supported the major development between Iran and West that was the signing of JCPOA and called it a "major breakthrough" which will contribute in the maintenance of regional and international peace.

There has always been a disagreement among the GCC members on how to best deal with the threats arising out of Iranian activities. Saudi Arabia and Bahrain have always directly and strongly opposed the Iranian influence. But Qatar, Kuwait and Oman have tended to pursue the policy of strategic hedging in maintaining their political and economic relations with Iran. Before the Qatar blockade 2017, Qatar had always pursued a neutralist approach which avoided antagonising both Iran and Saudi Arabia. Despite its balancing acts, Qatar supported the Saudi Campaign in the Yemen War during the years of 2015 and 2016. Qatar also agreed to end its diplomatic mission in Iran after the 2016 attack on Saudi diplomatic mission in Iran. But still Qatar felt it significant to maintain its cordial relations with Iran because it felt that Iran did not pose an imminent security threat. In 2015 security and military agreement was signed between Qatar and Iran's Revolutionary Guards to grant them the right to train the Qatari army.

Analysing the Emergence of new Alliance System and implications for Arab World

The Underlying Factors behind the Iran- Relations Post 2017

There are various factors which have led to the convergence of interests between Iran and Qatar. The foremost is the geo-political and geo economic significance. Qatar considers its relations with Iran very significant due the security and economic interests. Qatar is ranked among the world largest exporters of gas and produces approximately 77 million tonnes of natural gas every year. Qatar shares its largest gas field with Iran known as North Dome at Qatar side and South Par is at Iran's side. The export of gas from the field provides a huge share in the Qatar revenue and any disruption in this field would severely impact the Qatar economy. Due to this Qatar is one way dependent on Iran, and that is why Qatar is naturally not taking outright position just like other states i.e. Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and UAE take against Iran.

Secondly; the way UAE and Saudi Arabia have dealt with Qatar, the recent action of Saudi led group to impose a blockade on Qatar is another reason which pushed Qatar towards the opponent pole of the region that is Iran. These are the two underlying factors which are the major reasons which pushed Iran and Qatar close to each other.

Thirdly; Whether Qatar is a rich country, and its per capita income is ranked among the ten top economies but still it's a small island state. Its territorial strategic depth is not capable of defending Qatar against a strong opponent if it wants to overwhelm Qatar. The incapability to deal with the existential threat Qatar needed the support from another pole.

Fourthly; Qatar's increasing insecurities also became another reason behind the tilt of Qatar towards Iran. Security is a prime concern of every state. Whether there is US presence in Qatar in the shape of Al Udeid base and the recent decision of US to shift it to South Carolina from Qatar due to threats perception that the base will be an Iran target. Insecurity that is created by the Arab world particularly Saudi Arabia and UAE in the shape of a blockade pushed Qatar towards Iran for security in time of need. The only attraction for the US in Qatar is the presence of its fifth fleet but the fact is that its US Strategic partner is Saudi Arabia. Moreover; US also remained silent on the Saudi move to put a blockade on Qatar and put Qatar into a suffering condition. This insecurity due to non-supporting behaviour of the US and its policy of temporarily shifting its air force command from Qatar influenced and is now reinforcing Qatar's decision to get closer to Iran.

Fifthly; the current leadership in Qatar is different from the traditional monarchs. The current ruler of Qatar is a young and western educated leader. The ruler of Qatar is trying to promote Qatar's positions in the region as an emerging power of the Middle East. This ambition to make Qatar a regional power is one of the reasons that he is not taking the line of Saudi Arabia. Because within GCC one thing is pertinent that every state must take the line of Saudi Arabia. And if any state refuses to submit then it must face the taste of refusal like Qatar has tasted. So, when you are not submitting, you are pushed towards another pole i.e. Iran. Iran was also looking to create a wedge in GCC that is Iran's strategic interest and it got the opportunity in the form of Saudi led blockade on Qatar in the form of 13 demands. The rift within the Sunni bloc has given the opportunity to Iran to use Qatar at any time against its opponent Saudi Arabia.

Sixthly; after Arab Spring, there has been a significant shift in Qatar's role due to the visionary leadership. Qatar has been playing its role in Yemen, Libya, Sudan and Syria by supporting its stakeholders. And these stakeholders are not those stakeholders which are supported by Saudi Arabia and UAE rather Qatar took a different line by supporting Muslim Brotherhood and its factions. When the Arab spring was in its initial stage, an idea was generated that there is a new realignment in the Middle East. In this re-alignment, Turkey wanted a leadership role, it believed that if Arab spring could end autocratic rule and monarchic regimes then the new governments will be Islamic Governments.

Surprisingly; in Egypt and Tunisia, Islamic governments came into rule and to develop good relations with these newly formed governments was the motive of Turkey. Qatar was also trying to engage in good relations with these new governments of Mohammad Mousavi in Egypt and Ennahda Party in Tunisia. The ambition of Qatar was to seek good relations in this new setup of the Middle East. Particularly; taking about Muslim Brotherhood which have its roots in nearly all states of Middle East, Qatar supported all factions Muslim Brotherhood which were fighting in Middle Eastern states. But Saudi Arabia labelled Muslim Brotherhood as "Terrorist Organization" in this way the interest and thinking of Saudi Arabia and Qatar were not converging which resulted in blockade on Qatar. Being a tiny state, it had to look for help from the opponent's group and both Turkey and Iran helped it internally to deal with the crises which were the outcome of the blockade.

Lastly; Doha considers Iran as less threatening because Qatar constitutes a very less number Shia community in its population. So, it feels less threatened that Iran can create a wedge within the population of Qatar and could lead to instability of internal dynamics of Qatar.

Iran Qatar and Turkey Troika

The political environment of the Middle East is going through a significant shift with the emergence of a new alliance of Turkey, Qatar and Iran. The formation of a new regional alliance is resulting in fears of Saudi Arabia and other gulf states. However; the formation of this alliance is new and became prominent after the allegations of Saudi led bloc on Qatar. Qatar found both Iran and Turkey as promising partners to deal with the Saudi storm. Turkey and Iran supported Qatar when the blockade was imposed, Iran allowed its ships to pass whereas Turkey ensured its military presence in Qatar to provide security.

Turkey, Qatar and Iran are getting close to each other and the root causes behind it are the assertive policies of Saudi Arabia and UAE. Also, the overall issues of Muslim Ummah is the reason of their emerging alliance as they share common views like on issue of Palestine. Moreover; Iran, Qatar and Turkey strongly condemn the US move to recognize Golan heights as Israeli Territory.

The convergence of Iran and Qatar interests are beyond terrorism, Qatar wants protections from Iran and Iran wants to exploit the chances to enter the gulf and weaken its influence through engagement with Qatar. Furthermore; Iran also wants to re-emerge as Persian empire. Turkey's interest in forming an alliance is totally different. Through engaging with Qatar, it wants to gain economic benefits in exchange of sending its military base to Qatar. Moreover; Turkey also wants to regain the glory of Ottoman Empire. For this, Turkey is supporting terrorist groups like Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamic militant groups. Not surprisingly, Qatar also support Muslim Brotherhood on the basis which blockade was imposed on Qatar by Saudi led Arab group.

The withdrawal of the US from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action also acted as a pushing force for these countries to engage with each other. On one side, the US has withdrawn from JCPOA and on the other side they evacuated their forces from Syria which threatened the territorial integrity of Turkey which led Turkey to

take offensive measures. In line with these two events, another step which combined Turkey, Iran and Qatar on one page is the US lack of response on the Qatar Blockade. When these three states felt insecure from the America's direct and indirect action, then they would naturally come closer to transform in an alliance against US and its ally i.e. Saudi Arabia and Israel.

The US withdrawal from JCPOA, evacuation of forces from Syria, silence over the Qatar crisis and bases in all GCC states led to the re-grouping of the states. Lebanon is under the Iran influence due to Hezbollah, Iran also has its influence in Syria due to war and in Iraq because of the US invasion in Iraq in 2003 which created instability. Now Qatar is also tilting as it considers Iran as a counterbalance. Furthermore; not allowing Turkey to be a member of European Union and the insecurity due to Kurds empowerment in Syria pushed Turkey to look in its backyard. Moreover; US after using Kurds as a tool against ISIS left Kurds on them for fate which created a vacuum in Syria and that vacuum is filled by Iran, Turkey and Qatar.

Moreover; another political goal behind the coalition of these three states is their common foe, Saudi Arabia. As far as economic objectives are concerned in 2018, the bilateral trade between both states accounted to top \$8 billion dollars and in 2019 it is expected that it will cross the previous year.

During the last months of 2017, Iran, Qatar, Turkey and Pakistan increased their bilateral trade. In less than six months, Iran trade with Qatar increased by 117%. Moreover; Turkey, Iran and Qatar also signed a Land Transportation Pact which would help in reducing cost and time of transferring exchange goods. This pact is significant alone to carter the issues created by the blockade. The pact also includes the formation of a working group in order to facilitate the transit of goods that would not rely on the land, air and sea of which Arab states had access. Qatar has also heavily invested in Turkey which accounts for approximately \$20billion.

As far as the close relations between Turkey and Qatar and concerned they are not born out of religious or ideological affinity rather they are due to the necessity of time. For years, Qatar and Turkey have had relations with Hamas. The warmer relations among Tehran, Doha and Ankara have a potential to threaten Israel and can result in close relations among Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Israel. Recently; in 2019, Turkey has developed its permanent military base in Qatar named "Tariq ibn Ziyad base" in which the Turkish army will perform under the Turkey-Qatar Joint Force Command.

Not surprisingly, Saudi Arabia has been threatened through the alliance of Turkey and Iran along with their support to Islamic militant groups. Mohammad bin Salman claims that Iran, Turkey and radical groups combinedly form a "Triangle of Evil" or "Axis of Evil".

The terms are evoking the thinking of former US president George W. Bush, he labelled North Korea, Iran as the axis of evil; the most threatening enemies of the US. As per the Al Jazeera report, the Saudi King Mohammad bin Salman called the alliance of Iran, Turkey and Islamist militant group as trinity of evil. The relations between Turkey and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have been soured since Mohammad bin Salman took the power. The souring of relations has its roots in Saudi allegations on Turkey for supporting Muslim Brotherhood. As per the statements by the Saudi King the "axis of evil" is also now covering Qatar.

However; the Shia dominant Iran have no direct or formal ties with the Muslim Brotherhood, but Iran supports the Palestinian Sunni Movement "Hamas". Though the US, Saudi Arabia and Israel accuse Iran for gaining influence with the help of sponsoring Shiite Militant groups. Iran, Lebanese Shia movement Hezbollah and Syrian allies claim themselves as "the axis of resistance movement".

More recently; in the trilateral Syria summit held at Ankara; Turkey, Iran and Russia agreed to form a constitutional committee for drawing a political solution on the issue of Syria. The leaders of Iran, Turkey and Russia showed their hope for political resolution and declared that they share common sensitivity when it comes to the issue of territorial integrity of Syria.

The Iranian, Qatari and Turkish alliance has also now decided to create an economic alliance with Malaysia for using gold a way to trade and free themselves from the threat of sanction of which the most common targets are "Muslim Countries". According to leaders of these four states, gold dinar and barter trade are the best way to counter the threat of sanctions. In this was economic pressure cannot be laid on them to alter their policies.

After the Saudi Arabia and other gulf countries rift with Qatar, the Saudi Arabia asked Qatar to keep itself out of the coalition fighting in Yemen. Rightly after the Qatar crisis, Qatar was alleged of backing Houthis and Al Qaeda efforts to destabilize the Yemeni situation. But the involvement is more complex. The Yemeni people are

facing threats from groups on two ideological fronts, Houthis and Hezbollah are apparently supported by Iran. Muslim Brotherhood and its faction Al-Islah, which are in coordination with Government of Hadi are supported by Turkey and Qatar. But the political sources from Yemen state that there is a linkage between AL-Islah and Houti's which show the relations between Iran and Qatar.

Turkey and Qatar are strong regional allies, both shared a converging foreign policy for Sudan. Both supported Sudanese government. In both cases the countries have sided with hard-line religious groups, including Muslim Brotherhood influenced parties. Sudan was a great hope for Turkey in order to extend its influence on the Horn of Africa. For this Turkey sent its military delegations, invested in agricultural projects and leasing Suakin island. After the brutal military crackdown on protests Sudan has attracted the world's attention. Since 2018; there have been protests in Sudan on economic issues and calls for the end of long-time rule of Omar al-Bashir and demands for a democratic transition.

In the line of Middle Eastern politics trend the Sudanese issues have also taken the shape of proxy war between two power houses of the Middle East (Saudi Arabia and UAE) and the newly formed alliance of Qatar and Turkey. Saudi Arabia and the UAE have been quietly squabbling with Qatar and Turkey for several years over their respective regional outlooks. Riyadh and Abu Dhabi have been pushing for the anti-revolutionary status quo, which inherently supports the two nations' long-standing monarchies. Doha and Istanbul, on the other hand, are ardent supporters and promoters of Islamist factions in the region, primarily the Muslim Brotherhood.

For years Turkey had enjoyed strong relations with Omer al -Bashir. Moreover, in 2018 a \$4 billion trade deal was also signed between Qatar and Sudan. Qatar has also invested to construct the Sudan Red sea port of Suakin which is also a naval outpost to Turkey on the coast of Suakin. But the recent military took over in Sudan has proven itself to be a serious setback for Turkey. The current military rule in Sudan is pro-Saudi and has received extensive aid from Saudi Arabia which is resulting in a serious and hard bargain for Turkey and has put its projects on hold along with the projects in which Qatar was a partner.

New Alliance System and Implications for Gulf Cooperation Council

GCC is already in crisis, the phenomenon of blockade against Qatar clearly exhibits that there exists a wedge in between GCC. If we look back to the history of the Gulf Cooperation Organization, GCC was formed as an alliance typically formed against Iran because of the threats perceived after the Iranian Revolution in 1979. GCC cannot be named as a Regional Security Alliance because Iran and Iraq were not taken as a member of GCC. Rather it's an organization in which one regional country was targeted.

In recent years; two important events are significant with respect to the binding of GCC. One is when there was an uprising in Bahrain when all GCC states sent their forces to rescue the Khalifa monarchy in Bahrain but after that we have seen a divergence of interests within the GCC states. Other is divergence of policies after the emergence of "terrorism" as threat. Saudi and UAE leadership considered that the source of domestic terrorism was due to the Muslim Brotherhood. Firstly; The Muslim Brotherhood was present in Qatar. Secondly; since the start of Arab Spring Al-Jazeera has shown the reality of what is happening in the Arab World that also went against the interest of monarchies of Saudi Arabia, UAE and Bahrain. Not surprisingly; the threat to interest of Arab monarchies called to push Qatar to end its support to Muslim Brotherhood and to close Al-Jazeera. But refused to accept their demands. So, the wedge is already there in the Sunni led bloc.

What Iran can do is to create further wedge within the GCC. If Qatar further closes with Iran it would impact the effectiveness of GCC. Furthermore; Oman and Kuwait have also been adopting the policy of hedging via a viz Iran. For Oman, Iran is important because of the Strait of Hormuz. Both Iran and Oman are adjacent states to the Strait of Hormuz. Both do not want the choking of the strait. As far as Kuwait is concerned, its policy towards Iran is shaped by its insecurities related to Iraq. History always plays an important role in the foreign policy. Its experiences with Iraq, particularly the Gulf War 1990-91 influence the Kuwait behaviour with respect to Iran. Since; Iraq is totally under the strategic influences of Iran this causes Kuwait not to take a strong position against Iran as the biggest vulnerability of Kuwait is that there must not be any government in Iraq which would again invade Kuwait. This shows the further weakening of GCC. To sum up; the recent crack within the GCC framework has shown that the ideological bonding to keep the GCC intact is becoming weak.

The emerging alliance in the Middle East consists of Qatar which is getting closer to Iran and Turkey. Iran, Qatar, Turkey have the same priorities and interests whether in Syria, Yemen or Sudan. Furthermore; these states are pursuing their policies in a sense which shows their cooperation and symptoms of being an alliance.

The formation of alliances also shows the probability of more convergence of economies. There is also an economic reason behind the policy of Iran and Qatar in Syria which is the construction of a gas pipeline which will pass through Syria to transfer gas to Europe. This will also fulfil the objective of Europe to decrease its dependence on Russia for the import of gas.

If we see globally; Russia has always filled the space created by the US, like Russia has agreed to protect a safe corridor along with Turkey. Russia is present militarily and diplomatically there. If at global level balance of power is shifting towards Russia and at regional level it is shifting towards Iran, Qatar and Turkey. But the Russian position in the Middle East is also dependent on the new presidency of the US. Again, a shift in US policies with a new administration can change the strategic balance between US and Russia in the Middle East. The US still has so much physical presence in the Middle East that it can regain its hold on the Middle East.

Currently there are no chances of change in Saudi and Qatar relations. Saudi Arabia is not in a compromising situation about blockade at least soon. The monarch of Saudi Arabia and UAE are pursuing their aggressive role and want others to follow their lines. Not only Qatar but Kuwait and Oman also cannot follow Saudi Arabia and UAE lines because of its geopolitical situation.

Nevertheless; the ambitions of Oman and Kuwait are not like Qatar. Qatar is trying to achieve a regional status so that it can play a regional role. For instance, Qatar is ambitious to organize a World Cup and is also trying to play a diplomatic role in different issues. Irrespective of the fact that it is a small state, but Qatar is seeing its emerging role in Middle Eastern politics with Iran and Turkey. If we see in the current politics of the Middle East, Iran in connection with Turkey and Russia are the stakeholders which are mobilizing the entire peace process like Astana Peace Process on the other hand US and Saudi Bloc is at backfoot. Furthermore; US recognition of Golan Heights as Israeli territory has given the chance to Iran to have a presence on Golan Heights by supporting Hezbollah. In 1974; there was a disengagement agreement between the US and Syria that all terrorist operations on the Syrian side of Golan Heights will be protected by Hafiz al Asaad. This agreement had its roots in UNSC resolution 242 which also called Golan Heights at Syrian side a Syrian territory and this stopped Israel from gaining possession of Golan Heights. But now, when the US has violated the disengagement agreement and core principle of 242 resolution so no protection of terrorist operations is applied to Syria and this chance is taken by Iran by supporting Hezbollah in Golan Heights to attack Israel.

Considering the current scenario of the Middle East, the power of Saudi Arabia is in a declining phase rather Turkey and Iran are in better positions. The position of Saudi Arabia is affected due to its foreign and domestic policies. Saudi claim of Muslim leadership is at falling stage. Saudi's change of policy towards Israel like the de-facto recognition of Israel "We have religious concerns about the fate of the holy mosque in Jerusalem and about the rights of the Palestinian people. This is what we have. We don't have any objection against any other people," said Prince Mohammed. Further; its silence on the humanitarian crisis in Yemen has also hit the image of Saudi Arabia. Moreover; adoption of western values in the domestic policies have also added more to the decline of Saudi leadership. Whereas Iran and Qatar have always remained stick to their stance especially related to the Muslim Ummah.

Balance of power in the Middle East has always remained unstable. If there was balance of power, then it always remained tilted towards America and its allies. The Obama Administration's move for JCPOA was to create a balance because Iran was insecure from the Saudi power and Arab world was insecure from the Nuclear ambitions of Iran. Engagement of Iran was to create stability in the Middle East and ultimately to maintain a balance of power. But now the US withdrawal from JCPOA has tilted the balance of power at the side of Iran.

The KUALA LUMPUR SUMMIT with a reason to form a forum to work for issues of entire Muslim Ummah also show that now the organizations are not formed based on sectarian divide. However; KUALA LUMPUR SUMMIT was led by Turkey, Iran, Qatar and Malaysia. The formation of a new platform to deal with the issues of Muslim of the world, can be as a counter organization against IMCTC as IMCTC was formed as an Islamic Military alliance but only included Sunni world and neglected Iran and Syria. Also due to the difference in policies of GCC members, GCC has become almost ineffective as the crisis in GCC is increasing by further moves of its members as they are pursuing the policy strategic hedging towards Iran.

Lastly; the alliances in the Middle East are Fluid or liquid in nature. The alliances in the Middle East are issue based. Like the formation of Turkey, Qatar and Iran alliance after the Qatar crisis. Each state is pursuing its national interest whether with ideological divergence or convergence.

Conclusion

Post Qatar blockade, the politics of the Middle East has seen a significant shift. The traditional trend of formation of alliances on the sectarian lines have come to end by the increased relations between Iran and Qatar. The bonding of sectarianism is no more effective to keep the Sunni bloc intact as there is a new dynamism in the Middle East. The new dynamism indicates the formation of alliances or convergence of interest beyond the ideational outlook.

Iran and Qatar have now convergence of interest and policies despite their divergence of sectarian lines. The actions and policies of both states reinforce the concept of Structural realism. Anarchy prevails in the Middle East, which pushed Qatar for self help for its survival. The imposition of a blockade on Qatar gave a sense of threat to Qatar survival and sovereignty. Moreover; the US silence on the blockade also led to sense of helplessness in the anarchic world. The only suitable options for Qatar was to engage in good relationship with Iran and Turkey. Both the states provided financial as well as routes support to Qatar. Recent killing of Iranian general Qassem Suleimani in an airstrike ordered by President Donald Trump and Iranian response to launch strike on US forces based in Iraq has also reinforced the anarchic situation in Middle East.

Iran, Qatar and Turkey are the emerging pole of Middle East. Iran and Turkey have the ambition to revive their historical legacy of Persian and Ottoman Empire. Considering the current situation of Middle East Iran and Turkey are in better position than Saudi Arabia. According to a Russian Think Tank Katehon, "the emerging alliance of Iran, Turkey and Qatar have potential of being more influential and stronger than the demonic trio of the USA - Israel - Saudi Arabia". The regional standing of Saudi Arabia is in declining phase. Firstly; due to its aggressive policies. Secondly; its silence over the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. Thirdly; it's increasing relations with Israel.

The imposition of the blockade on Qatar have showed the cracks within the GCC framework. This show that the very foundational cause for creating GCC to counter the emerging power of Iran is no more effective to bound the its member state. Not only Qatar but also the Oman and Kuwait are pursuing the policy of hedging towards Iran because of their national interest. Under the current circumstances, Oman, Qatar and Kuwait do not seem to follow the lines of UAE and Saudi Arabia because of their geo-political and geo- strategic interests. And Iran can further create a wedge a in GCC. The main aim of Iran and Turkey is to gain regional dominance. So far Qatar is concerned it also want to play its role in the regional politics despite it's a small state. Qatar sees Iran and Turkey important to gain its regional ambitions.

Iran, Qatar and Turkey are not only converging their political interests but also economic and strategic interest. They are engaged in creating economic alliance by shifting to gold dinar and strategic alliance in shape of KUALA LUMPUR SUMMIT. The idea behind is that all Muslim Ummah is united and there is no sectarian divide like it is embedded in the IMCTC.

To sum up the whole debate the current political environment of Middle East shows that sectarian fault lines are no more relevant and significant for engaging in relations and formation of alliance. New alliances are formed which are not under the influences of ideational factors rather they are directed by the national interests and a fluid in nature.

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