

QATAR UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

THE CHANGING REGIONAL ORDER: THE CASE OF GULF COOPERATION

COUNCIL AND THE BLOCKADE OF QATAR IN 2017

BY

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ABSTRACT

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Title: The Changing Regional Order: The Case of Gulf Cooperation Council and the Blockade of Qatar in 2017

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“The Changing Regional Order: The Case of Gulf Cooperation Council and the Blockade of Qatar in 2017” illustrates the facts and potential causes of the diplomatic breakdown of the GCC states that was intensified with the blockade of Qatar in 2017. The unjustified and abrupt embargo imposed by the blockading countries has adversely impacted the unique political and economic framework of the entirety of the GCC states for the last three years. The GCC alliance had been long appreciated for its geographical proximity, cultural and historical uniqueness and as a model for a progressive society. However, the movement or the threat that emerged against Qatar has exposed the vulnerability of the GCC alliance. The imminent threat led Qatar to the formation of alliances with other powers in order to strengthen its economy and military, and thereby to mitigate the consequences of the embargo.

In order to understand and validate the political behavior of alliances in the GCC, the researcher refers to Walt’s threat theory and examines how Qatar in particular has adopted ‘balance’ with other alliances and at times chosen ‘bandwagon’ with the dominant powers to resist the ‘threats’. In addition, the thesis follows a qualitative method for the collection of data and analysis of details that supports the research on the changing regional order of the GCC states.

The thesis throws light on the political uncertainty and the economic volatility

that affected the instability of the GCC. It explores the historical linkage of the crisis dynamics of these states, including ones such as the long lasted territorial disputes, and the ideological differences associated with the Arab Spring movement etc. It exposes the hegemonic and personalized objectives of the Saudi led coalition that took stringent measures against Qatar and caused the Gulf crisis. It brings out the involvement of the US with Saudi Arabia and the UAE that intensified the crisis of 2017 which was caused by the personalized ambitions of the Trump administration, and the vested objectives of the US for the alliance with the GCC. The thesis also analyzes how the diplomatic rift impacted the GCC's political and economic atmosphere, and examines how Qatar is undergoing the stringent sanctions imposed by its neighbours by adopting resilient measures that strengthen the country to achieve self-reliance in various levels.

DEDICATION

This humble work is dedicated to the spirit of my father; may Allah rest his soul and have mercy on him. He was my role model, my idol, my inspiration and my first teacher.

To my beloved mother, the epitome of dedication and giving. Her words of encouragement and push for tenacity still ring in my ears.

To all my relatives and friends for their encouragement and moral support to make this endeavour a reality.

“Work hard in silence. Let your success be your noise”

Frank Ocean

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The diplomatic tension in the Gulf states in 2017, after the eruption of the Arab Spring in 2010, has built up a hostile situation in the Gulf region, especially in the diplomatic alliance of six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations: Saudi Arabia, Oman, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain. The Arab conflicts that swept across the region have always generated adverse change in the stability and regime of the states, though some states were not radically affected by the movement. In order to comprehend the key issues that affected the growth and stability of the Gulf states over the last decade, it is important to examine the historical context, including the Iraq-Iran war 1980 which disturbed the entire region for more than a decade and failed to continue the peace talks. As a result of the major conflicts, including the Iraq-Kuwait war 1990, the US-Iraq conflict 2003, and the War on Terror in the 9/11 era, the Gulf states were prompted to ideologically stand together against the forces and collectively focus on security, political and economic coordination among member states. These historical events were turning points for the Gulf regimes to stand together, and the impact of 9/11/2001 convinced the Gulf states that the western powers viewed them as actual enemies who were refusing democracy and fostering terrorism (Al Sayegh, 2004). However, the emergence of the Arab Spring, which started in Tunisia and spread along the entire Arab region to different extents affected the stability of the region drastically. The outcome of the movement lingered in various phases based on ideological or political reasons, and the sanctions imposed on Qatar by neighboring GCC states in 2017 raises a number of questions about the validity of GCC alliance.

A retrospective analysis of the objectives of the GCC charter signed in 1981 by the six states by Al-Zayyat, Y. (2017) indicates the fact that the core objective of the charter had been defied and the GCC proves ineffective in the region to sustain peace, economic growth and political collaboration among its members. Abou-El-Wafa (2007) examines the vital principles of GCC alliance signed in Abu Dhabi on May 25, 1981 by the member states with an aspiration to have dynamic collaboration with each other and to sustain economic, cultural, political identities which are imbedded within the Arab and Islamic cultures. Martini, Wasser, Kaye, Egel and Ogletree (2016; P. XI) elaborate the structure of the GCC that focuses on three main perspectives: the security dimension, the political dimension and the economics of the region. To be precise, the alliance of the GCC countries had largely enhanced the economic and political situation of the region, and succeeded in preserving domestic stability and political structures after the wars. In addition, remarkable progress in establishing massive infrastructure, introducing advanced educational, health and housing services and elite life styles all arose or were achieved as a result of the stability and security of the GCC to a certain extent. What should be observed is that the GCC had been instrumental for the establishment of peace, by its intervention, in the Gulf region. In contrast, these states are undergoing a critical period of crisis, as they are exposed to numerous challenges caused by the diplomatic collapse in 2017 that poses a threat to their stability and growth. Martin, G. (2018) criticizes that the GCC organization was never alive, as it failed to integrate its objectives. The thesis intends to examine and answer how the crisis has catalyzed the GCC states for the emergence of coalition and alliance with other powers that affected the political and economic atmosphere of the states.

1.2 Research Problem

The geopolitics of the GCC alliance has always been subjected to conflicts, political uncertainty, and economic volatility. The blockade of Qatar in 2017 questions the alliance of the GCC states, as the Saudi led coalition justified their diplomatic rift of their alliance with Qatar upon a set of unsubstantiated allegations. In fact, the research is intended to understand the fundamental causes that are imbedded in the breakdown and its implications. Primarily, it will explore the past events that are linked with the crisis that erupted in 2017. It is critical to understand the entrenched reasons that caused the disruption of the alliance, in spite of the fact that each share similar cultural, political and economic identities. Secondly, the study will attempt to demonstrate the political behavior of the US with the GCC affairs, as the US has been the critical security partner of the GCC states for decades. Significantly, the US leadership supported the sanctions on Qatar. Finally, it is crucial to examine how the changing power dynamics and the diplomatic rift of 2017 redesigned the political and economic map of the GCC alliance, apart from the social implications for the past three years.

1.3 Significance of the Research

The thesis will provide vital insight on what the GCC could do for restoring its alliance as a major political leadership entity by establishing their harmony and mutual respect with each other. The GCC alliance, certainly, envisioned a stable political and economic atmosphere in the region as it is integral for any society for its holistic development. On the other hand, the emerging power dynamics in the alliance has disrupted harmony and weakened stability. It is thus significant to diagnose the intrinsic issues that served as a catalyst for the diplomatic rift in 2017, and the motives of the embargo imposed by the Saudi led coalition which led to the uncertainty of the GCC alliance.

1.4 Research Questions

In order to develop a comprehensive thesis that illustrates “The Changing Regional Order: The Case of Gulf Cooperation Council and the Blockade of Qatar in 2017”, the researcher aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the historical context behind the GCC crisis which was triggered in 2017?
2. How did the stance of the US escalate the crisis and affect the regional order?
3. How have Qatar and the region been impacted by the changing power dynamics?

1.5 Research Hypothesis

Based on the above research questions, the past events that affected the political atmosphere of the region such as, the border disputes, the Arab Spring movement, the diplomatic rift of 2014 are evidently associated with the diplomatic breakdown of 2017. The thirteen conditions demanded by the blockading countries in order to resolve the embargo assert that the fundamental accusations against Qatar are in the list. Due to the fact that the US is the security partner of the GCC, its stance will always determine the stability of the region and the severity of the crisis. Furthermore, the diplomatic crisis which erupted in 2017 will have long lasting impact, not only on the economic or political aspects of the region, but on the mutual trust of the GCC members as well. Even if the crisis will come to an end due to the mediation efforts as in the past, it will be tentative and the repercussions of the blockade will last a long time. However, as the impact of the blockade of Qatar is affecting the entire geopolitics of the region by aborting all their developmental projects, the crisis will be resolved due to the influential role played by mediators like Kuwait.

1.6 Literature Review

This section has been structured into three areas with an aim to present an overall view of the study, and is organized thematically. The first section will explore the prominent historical background that explains the origin of the crisis dynamics of the GCC states and the diplomatic breakdown of 2017. The second section will pinpoint how the changing foreign policy of the US intensified the Gulf crisis of 2017 and the alliance of the GCC states. The third section will explore the key areas such as the politics, and economy that have been impacted by the blockade of Qatar.

The diplomatic outbreak of the GCC in 2017 erupted with the alleged hacking of the QNA and the subsequent sanctions on Qatar. However, this thesis asserts that political uncertainty of the GCC intensified with the blockade of Qatar was not based on an abrupt political scenario in 2017, but it has been enrooted with several past issues.

1.6.1 Historical Events that are linked to the Crisis of 2017

This section illustrates the context that led to the blockade of Qatar and the underlining motives behind the sanctions through a review of the current academic literature. Researchers like Ulrichsen (2020; P. 67) point out that the blockade was originated with the hacking of the Qatar News Agency in April 2017. The hackers, using a Russian IP address, carried out a fabricated quote of Sheikh Tamim of Qatar that praised Iran and criticized the US at 11:45 PM on May 23, 2017. It went live at 12:13 AM on May 24, 2017, and it was immediately obtained by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, including a UAE based user who accessed the hacked news forty times in less than thirty times. It was also reported that a UAE user refreshed the QNA website several times at 11 PM. Following the incident, there was a sea of online assault with hash tags like ‘Qatar is the treasury of terrorism’. In spite of the official denial of the

news by Qatar, the state media of Saudi Arabia and the UAE telecast the false remarks. Twelve days after the incident of the fabricated news, on June 5, 2017, the four blockading countries Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt severed their economic and diplomatic alliance with Qatar and intensified the rift with a sea, air and land embargo. Surprisingly, a few African countries also aligned with the quartet by downgrading their relationship temporarily with the country (P. 79).

Apparently, although many researchers like Ulrichsen describe the context of the embargo, they do not underline the target of the coalition behind the diplomatic breakdown. Although the officials of Qatar vehemently denied the false remarks attributed to Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani and backing extremists, the blockading countries severed their diplomatic ties with Qatar abruptly. Admittedly, the geopolitical crisis carried out by the Saudi led coalition asserts the point that conflict was a predesigned movement to cause the instability of Qatar. Their expanded coalition of the blockading countries with other nations strongly underlines the above argument that the diplomatic breakdown with Qatar was a desired goal in order to isolate the country that had been triggered by a set of reasons.

In fact, the diplomatic turbulence in the GCC can be demonstrated as decade long, scaled up with Arab Spring of 2010, and worsened with the embargo on Qatar in 2017 by the Saudi led leadership. As Lim (2017; P. 1) states that “the rest of the region has been looking for an opportunity to clip Qatar’s wings” due to its controversial stance for change. The alleged news on the website of QNA led the Saudi led powers to crack down their diplomatic ties with their neighboring country claiming that Qatar supported the Islamic fighters in Syria and the Muslim Brotherhood, and above all that Qatar is hosting refuge for Taliban members.

Colombo, S. (2012; P. 2) supports the argument that the political scenario of the Arab world was transformed with the emergence of the Arab Spring. Though the movement originated in Tunisia in 2010, it quickly spread to the shores of the GCC to reach Bahrain, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen and Jordan. The activists demonstrated the protests with a view to create more participatory and representative governing systems, which promotes a fairer economic system. Thus, the movement was closely linked with political, economic, and social dissatisfaction compounded with corruption, nepotism, and a lack of employment opportunities. As a matter of fact, some of GCC countries witnessed public protest in various forms. For example, Oman and Bahrain were affected with prolonged protest while other states experienced short lived disturbances and the GCC countries reacted to it differently. In addition, Colombo, S. (2012; Pp. 3-10) outlines that Al Jazeera, the broadcaster in Doha, covered the turmoil caused by the Arab Spring in many Arab countries in 2011.

Absolutely, this was a political crisis, prompted by the dreams and aspirations of a new generation who were frustrated by the dictatorial governments but they were stimulated by the social media. Young people became obsessed with turning their dreams into reality, taking to the streets, using the power of networking and learning from the experiences of other youth groups from around the world. Protest erupted in the poor Arab nations such as Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen, whereas, the rich countries were better able to resist the movements. Al Jazeera gave a new face to broadcasting that values democracy, which scared Arab regimes and led them to accuse the media of supporting Islamist groups. It turned to be the first reason for the chaos in the region where it angered Saudi Arabia, UAE and Bahrain and prompted the withdrawal of their ambassadors from Qatar in 2014. It can be argued that the Saudi led coalition was disturbed by the progressive and influential role of Qatar in the Middle

East and thus both countries shared their political ambition to limit Doha's regional autonomy or oversized role in the regional politics.

As Cafiero (2019; Pp. 151-164) asserts, the coalition was also enraged by Doha's criticism against Saudi Arabia's autonomous regimes broadcasted on Al Jazeera, and thus it tried to put pressure on Qatar via sanctions and demands with a purpose to limit the role of Qatar or tie it within the shadow of Saudi Arabia. When the Arab Spring started, Qatar was accused of extending its role throughout the MENA region by backing up the Islamic faction in Egypt, Libya and Syria. Moreover, researchers like Quamar (2017) also emphasizes the fact that Saudi Arabia viewed the independent foreign affairs policy of Qatar as problematic for the region, as it plays a wider role in mediating regional conflicts by adopting an independent stance, which in turn weakens the Arab Gulf position in the regional politics. He also points out that Saudi Arabia resents the diplomatic ties of Iran and Qatar, as Iran was already accused of destabilizing the Gulf region and interfering in Arab affairs.

The unique foreign policy and mediation roles played by Qatar are unlike other GCC members, and had been disapproved by the rest of the GCC members, especially by the Saudi led coalition. Accordingly, one of the thirteen conditions demanded for lifting the embargo from Qatar by the blockading countries was to cut off its relation with Iran. However, the stance of Saudi led coalition against Qatar for its foreign policy and ties with Iran can be deemed as obviously contradictory, as other GCC members as the UAE, Oman and Kuwait maintain a number of trade deals with Iran. These countries have already expanded their ties with Iran and are having upward trade transactions, despite the political tribulations since the embargo. The contradictory stance underlines the indifference of the coalition against Qatar for its exceptional independent foreign policy and unique position in the international community in spite of its smallness.

Precisely, this section highlights the gap in research of the historical context behind the GCC crisis of 2017 as the literature demonstrates an absence of studies that determine the crisis was not purely based on the hacking related controversies. Accordingly, my research question addresses this very important gap with comprehensive knowledge, arguing that its cause was the ire of the blockading countries against the unique independent policy that Qatar secures and its exceptional voice in the issues of the region.

1.6.2 US Stance and the Breakdown of the GCC Alliance

The US administration, under the leadership of Donald Trump, played a noticeable role for aggravating the Gulf crisis that erupted in 2017. Unlike the previous US administration, Trump handled the Middle East affairs causing much damage to the US alliance with the GCC. Admittedly, his own ambitions prompted him to act against Qatar in accordance with the whims of the Saudi led coalition.

Cafiero (2019; Pp. 151-164) examines the role of the US that monitored regional powers to negotiate with Qatar. Particularly, the Obama led administration of the US kept a neutral position in dealing with the Gulf crisis in order to maintain a close alliance with the GCC members and pushed both sides to ally with the 2014 Riyadh Agreement. During crisis, the Obama administration also made it clear to Saudi Arabia and UAE that any military action against Doha would lead the US to adopt firm response. The pressure by the US seemed to cause some temporary effect on their relationship. In 2016, Abu Dhabi pressurized Doha to change their foreign policy, whereas, the Obama administration did not support Abu Dhabi's efforts.

Trump's victory in the elections of 2016 opened an opportunity for Saudi Arabia and UAE to influence the US through their designed methods. During his presidential

campaign, Trump had criticized the Muslim Brotherhood as a radical group, and at the same time supported Riyadh and Abu Dhabi in blaming Obama's response to Egypt's Arab Spring revolution of 2011. It is argued the double sided approach of the US to the Gulf crisis worsened the Gulf crisis today. Cafiero (P. 137) elaborates that Trump's historic visit to Saudi Arabia in May 2017 worsened the situation and it appeared that the efforts of Saudi Arabia and UAE to pressurize the White House to adapt resistance against Qatar that would isolate the country turned successful. Even though Trump appreciated Qatar as being a crucial strategic partner and a host of US Central Command (CENTCOM), the White House showed a green light for Saudi-UAE led military campaign against Qatar. Obviously, Trump's visit ignited the blockading countries to stand against Qatar with their sanctions. On the other hand, within three hours of his criticism against the high-ranking Qatar officials, the Pentagon officially thanked Qatar for their support for America's military and for 'enduring commitment to regional security,' and agreed to sustain its deal with Qatar. In addition to that, as Ghabra, S. (2018) points out, although Trump was in favour of the sanctions against Qatar during the early stages of the crisis, both US and Qatar defense agencies carried on their business deal of purchasing the US military airplane. Later, the high-level pressure within Trump administration prompted the President to reverse his stance and acknowledge Qatari partnership with the US.

Furthermore, Mr. Trump handled the Middle East affairs with his vested interests, and due to his lack of foreign policy knowledge of the US, the crisis turned to be aggressive. Solhdoost (2018) and Kabalan (2018) argue he associated with the countries like Saudi Arabia or the UAE for his business concerns. For example, it was reported that Trump signed \$350 billion for Saudi investment during his first visit to

Riyadh. Being basically a business man, Trump viewed the support to the coalition would benefit him in the long run.

Despite the US government intervention in the Gulf crisis, it can be noted that there was a defined agenda for them. The mediation efforts seemed to restore the alliance of the GCC, whereas, it can be affirmed that the US wanted to sustain its business deals with the GCC. Fraithat (2020) emphasizes that the strategic endeavor of the US during the crisis has been to enhance the security collaboration of the GCC countries and to unite the states for counter terrorism, and thereby escalate the arms trades in the region, which served the underlined objectives of the Trump administration. It is also observed that the US maintained a position in the region by not allowing the conflicts to worsen or slow down its efforts to resolve the crisis. However, in reality, according to the researcher, Trump was not concerned with ending the conflicts but rather the chief concern of the US had been to increase its arms sale, get into further security agreements and thereby “manage its conflict with Iran better”.

This section points out the gap in research of the stance of the US that had been playing a significant role in the GCC as a longtime shield for security. On the other hand, my research question addresses the gap by arguing Trump’s poor foreign policy management, ignorance of his historical knowledge of the US in dealing with the Middle East affairs and lack of administrative qualities turned out to be the triggering cause of the conflict in the GCC of 2017. Furthermore, as Trump had to oblige to the blockading countries for his business motives and support them for their movement against Qatar, he did not prioritize the foreign policy of the US over his personal interests.

1.6.3 Diplomatic Rift and its Impact on the GCC

The fundamental purpose of the Saudi led coalition to sanction blockade on Qatar and withdraw diplomatic alliances with the country was to create political and economic uncertainty in the country and isolate it from the rest of the world. However, the diplomatic breakdown had an overreaching impact on the whole region at different levels, including the blockading nations. On the other hand, the political and economic uncertainty imposed on Qatar helped the nation positively achieve self-reliance in various fields.

Baabood, A. (2019, Pp. 168-173) outlines the impact of the crisis in the GCC as whole. He states that the blockade on Qatar has highly affected regional organization, including the objectives of the GCC Market Treaty of 2007, which aims to create a free movement of its citizens, goods and capital between its member states, but now the sanctions on Qatar has damaged the atmosphere. Certainly, the blockade has impacted the development programmes, particularly in Qatar, as it is preparing for the FIFA World Cup 2022 and the country has been heavily dependent on Saudi Arabia, for especially construction materials. It has also harmed the families of both the countries and their movement has been restricted. Baabood's article also highlights how the crisis damaged the economic progress of all GCC states. The GCC states had involved in various dialogues that would boost up the trade and economic atmosphere with the international partners such as the US, EU, China, India and Turkey, which were interrupted. Thus, Baabood points out that the turmoil in the region has adversely affected the credibility of the GCC with other international countries and organizations. In addition, the scholar clarifies his certainty that the blockade proves the incompetency of the GCC organization as it has been constituted to facilitate the role of a mediator between the disputing members. Moreover, he underlines that the other GCC members,

like Kuwait and Oman, were not informed of the blockade initiated by the other GCC countries.

By imposing an economic blockade on Qatar, the blockading countries were persistent to redesign the political map of the Gulf. On the other hand, their stance led the non-Arab nations like Malaysia, Indonesia and Pakistan to take on a neutral stance. Dorsey (2017; Pp. 1-3) observes that the thirteen demands imposed on Qatar were to humiliate the tiny state and turn it to a vassal in the region. In addition, he states that the crisis has been more political than economic. In fact, the isolation of Qatar has benefited the nation by moving it closer to Iran, Turkey and Russia, which would accelerate its regional cooperation. Dorsey also asserts that the move will definitely weaken the GCC monarchy and will redesign the political map of the region. In short, the article notes down that if Qatar wins the conflicts with its policies, it will expose the limitations of Saudi and UAE in the emerging region.

Pointedly, over the past three years Qatar gained the resilience to survive during difficult times and it defied accusations of the blockading countries. It could convince the international community about the severity of sanctions and violations of diplomatic terms carried out by the Saudi led coalition, and could restore the diplomatic network with a few countries that had allied with the blockading countries.

Küçükaşcı (2019; P. 1) also agrees with the same point as Dorsey (2017) that Qatar has remarkably redesigned its political and economic map due to its strategic approach. As a matter of fact, the Saudi led coalition has failed to achieve any of their proposed objectives by their sanctions. Although Qatar's logistical supply chain and shipment routes have been blocked, Qatari nationals were expelled from sieged countries, and flights have to take long routes due to the blockade on airspace by Saudi

Arabia and Egypt, the people of Qatar have overcome the challenges significantly due to Qatar's effort to enrich its diplomatic ties with the wider world. Moreover, Qatar has escalated its relations with Turkey including military cooperation and supplying of necessary shipments. As a result, more Qatari investments are entering the Turkey markets and vice versa. Similarly, the relation with Iran improved positively and the Iranian air, ground and sea spaces have been opened for Qatar. The previous scholars note that one of the proposals by the sieged countries has been the closure of the Turkish military base and ties with Iran, but the ties of Qatar with Turkey and Iran improved further. This study substantiates the strategic step of Qatar for building alliances with the nations outside the GCC entity in order to mitigate and retract any possible threat scenario raised against it. Building up of security measures with other powers also suggests that Qatar has lost its confidence with the GCC alliance, as it has been lobbied by a few members like Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Moreover, the GCC as regional bloc could not carry out any effective steps for ending the rift among the states.

The blockade of Qatar helped the nation adopt a revolutionary reformation with its political and economic spheres. Wright (2019; Pp. 145-148) underlines the fact Qatar has proved resilient, in spite of the blockade on trade, currency and pressure of macro-economics. He illustrates that the strategic intention by the embargo was to destabilize the economy and political harmony. In other words, the proposed objectives were done in order to damage Qatari's trade, destroy Qatar's economy and destabilize its currency. In addition to pressures on the economy and political system and leadership of Qatar, cyber warfare was engaged with a mission to spread disinformation that could impact the international standing, intensify social division and distract investors. In contrast, Qatar proved resilient against these challenges, as Wright points out that this crisis positively strengthened Qatar and paved a way for economic diversification and self-

sufficiency. The embargo thus failed to achieve its intended goals, and rather it enhanced the self-sufficiency that led to further development of this tiny nation.

Al Jazeera (2018) covers the repercussion of the blockade in its documentary. It reports how the media, especially social media, was used negatively against Qatar. Social media flooded with targeted text and hashtags against the country, such as the Turkish army patrolled the streets of Qatar, which were intended to bring down the spirit of the nation. The channel points out the fact many of the accusations were proven to be off base or beyond reality. The documentary focuses on the fact the people of the Gulf states were one, their sadness was the same, their pain was the same, their security was the same and the people still stand by the same, and let the people of the Gulf stand united and stay away from political differences which could be resolved by the governments. The documentary also depicts the predicament of the people who are badly affected by the blockade, such as the students, families, and the foreigners such as truck drivers who were commuting goods through the borders of the neighboring countries and the people who were employed to deliver the cargo. The documentary also illustrates how Qatar survived the unforeseen crisis. The blockade forced them to restructure their production and distribution of food products such as vegetables and fruits, and doubled up the production of meat products for the benefit of local market. The farms were equipped with modern farming methods by creating appropriate climate that suits the farming of anything.

Küçükaşcı (2019), observes that although in the beginning, Qatar had to encounter various crisis due to the blockade, it has been able to improve its diplomatic relations widely, and boosted its economy beyond all pressures and sanctions. In short, Qatar has come out of the Saudi-UAE influence by the blockade, and the draconian

measures taken by Saudi Arabia and UAE to isolate Qatar have resulted with a boomerang effect on these countries.

Indeed, the section fills the gap in research on the impact of the blockade of Qatar caused by the power dynamics and the impact on the entire region. My research addresses the research question that Qatar was impacted by the blockade positively, as the nation could achieve self-reliance in various spheres and the country could withstand its sovereignty and expand its relations with a world beyond the GCC.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this thesis is outlined in accordance with the concept of the Balance of Threat Theory demonstrated in the scholarly book, *The Origins of Alliance* by Stephen M. Walt (1987). According to him, the nations form alliances or coalitions in order to prevent domination or superior powers. As per the concept of alliance, it can be seen that the GCC alliance was formed in 1981 amid the Iran-Iraq war, which posed a threat to the entire region.

However, the eruption of Arab Spring exposed the rift among the GCC alliance, as Qatar supported democratic ideologies which were perceived to be a threat by other Arab states. In fact, the stance of Qatar against the norms of the general GCC states led to the formation of coalition among the GCC itself by states like Saudi Arabia and the UAE to oppose Qatar. The coalition caused the embargo and the political uncertainty in the GCC.

Qatar tied up its military alliance with Turkey and the US when the blockading countries of Qatar exposed threats to the sovereignty of the country by imposing the embargo and the attempt to isolate the nation. The alliance formation with other powers was inevitable for Qatar as it is a small state, and this is a way to secure its economy

and protect itself from any aggressive political movement, especially from its neighbours. Admittedly, the alliance sent a strong warning for any potential military action against Qatar towards the blockading countries.

The coalition of Saudi led countries turned against Qatar, contrary to the GCC framework with an allegation that Qatar supported terrorism. In a way to get international support for the blockading countries, they used their strategy against Qatar by aligning support from the sub-Saharan African countries such as Mauritius, Mauritania, Senegal, Maldives, Comoros, and Chad etc.

The principal reason for choosing the concept of the Balance of Threat Theory for the framework of this thesis has been to demonstrate various dimensions of the threat posed on Qatar by the Saudi led coalition and its alliance formation with greater powers. The theory has been found more appropriate than any other theories to explain the aggravated diplomatic scenario in the region since 2017.

1.7.1 Theoretical Perception on Balance of Threat

Stephen M. Walt's Balance of Threat Theory is an improvement on Kenneth N. Waltz' - Balance of Power Theory that explains the alliance formation of the states. Walt has attempted to improve the Waltz theory by adding three more factors that determine the level of threat (Walt, 1985; Pp. 23-24) other than aggregate power such as geographical proximity, offensive power and aggressive intentions.

- ***Aggregate Power:*** According to Waltz (1979; P. 118) aggregate power refers to the total amount of resources that a state possesses such as population, industrial and military capability and technological powers; the greater total resources or power, the greater the threat it can pose to others. Aggregate power can persuade other states for balancing or bandwagoning.

- ***Geographic Proximity:*** According to Balance of Threat, the states that are nearby are exposed to greater threat than the one that is far away. In other words, power declines with distance. Proximity also determines the stance of a state for balancing or bandwagoning. Generally, the small state bordering greater powers is vulnerable, and go for balancing.
- ***Offensive Power:*** Walt (1987; P. 24) defines “offensive power as the ability of state to threaten the sovereignty or territorial integrity of another state an acceptable cost”. The states with aggregate power can generate offensive power by deploying its large military capacity.
- ***Aggressive Intentions:*** Aggressive intentions of the states also pose threat to other states. The aggressive intentions are perceived as threats that can provoke reactions of other states. Perceptions of the intention play key roles for forming alliances with other states.

The factors related to Balance of Threat are relevant to the threat scenario faced by Qatar. It can be pointed out that Qatar, being a small state and due to its proximity to the greater powers, has always been exposed to the offensive powers like Saudi Arabia and the UAE. In addition, the independent stance of Qatar on international affairs, its unique leadership qualities and foreign policy annoyed the coalition to pose threats on it for the purpose of their uncertain intentions and objectives. Furthermore, the coalition could gain support for their movement against Qatar from other small countries due to their resources.

1.7.2 Perception of Alliance - Balancing and Bandwagoning

Walt (1985) examines the reasons for alliance formation as a response to threat, and how the international states choose friends to deal with the threats in a way to

prevent the stronger powers from dominating them (P. 18). The concept of alliance is defined as a formal or informal relationship of security cooperation between two or more sovereign states (Walt, 1985; P. 1). In order to form an alliance, states may either balance the threat either by standing together or bandwagoning with the state that is exposed to the prime threat. The imbalance of power takes place when the strongest state or coalition in the system attains majorly increased power and the imbalance of threat theory happens when the most threatening state or the coalition turns more dangerous due to its geographic closeness or aggressive intentions (Walt, 1987; P. 265). According to Walt's balance of threat theory, reflected in his interview (Walt's Interview, 2013), the behavior of a state gets driven on the context of threats and the alliances are formed not to balance the powers but to balance the threats. Balancing refers to an alliance formed between two or more states for the objective of preventing domination imposed by powerful states (Walt, 1987; P. 18). It is observed that the states ally with greater powers in order to increase its power. For example, Qatar allied with the American military which has the Al-Udeid Air base situated in Qatar (Taylor, 2019) in addition to the Turkish base, Tariq bin Ziyad (Asharq Al Awsat, 2019). These military cooperation and alliances have helped Qatar in balancing the imminent security threat in the region posed by the neighboring blockading states. For example, under the leadership of Obama, the US shielded Qatar from the possible military movement by Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain during the Gulf crisis in 2014 (Cafiero, 2019; Pp. 127-128).

Al-Shamari & Al-Mohannadi (2020, P. 83) illustrate how Qatar perceived threats from Saudi Arabia and was forced to pursue regional and international alliances. According to the researchers, the rift between Qatar and Saudi Arabia was intensified during the Gulf crisis. It was reported that King Salman of Saudi Arabia had visited

Qatar two months before the blockade and emphasized the importance of alliance between Qatar and Saudi Arabia. The Qatari Foreign Minister also had visited Saudi Arabia and talked with Prince Mohammed bin Salman on the event of the hacking of QNA and just before the embargo. Furthermore, Saudi Foreign Minister Adel Al-Jubeir had given a lecture at the Qatari Foreign Ministry and praised Qatar for its diplomacy just two weeks before the sanctions. The meetings were friendly and promising. On the other hand, the sudden transformation that ended with the diplomatic breakdown led to the loss of confidence between the countries. The researchers, Al-Shamari and Al-Mohannadi (2020), ask how the Qatari leadership can trust the countries that had praised it just before the blockade and then suddenly turned against it with the accusation of terrorism and openly declared their ambition to take over the Qatari leadership.

The analysis asserts that Qatar was forced to frame bilateral alliances with international and regional allies apart from the GCC security framework, as predominantly it lost trust with its neighbours and perceived threats from them.

On the other hand, according to Walt, bandwagoning means an alliance with the source of danger or threatening state instead of balancing against it (Walt, 1985; P. 4). It is observed that bandwagoning is dangerous, as the state needs to risk all its resources despite its weakness (Walt, 1985; P. 8).

Similarly, it can be pointed out that Qatar has followed the principle of bandwagoning by its alliance with Iran, though Iran has been believed for long as a source of threat by the GCC States. In the event of the blockade and the threat imposed on Qatar, it was apparent that the real threat for Qatar emerged from its long preserved GCC fraternity. Enhancing its alliance with Iran turned out to be a vital step and it has

been strategic for Qatar, as the alliance has provided huge economic support for the country and enabled each of them to benefit from a number of trade agreements.

Ulrichsen (2020; P. 184) supports the point how Qatar adopted the policy of bandwagoning with its neighbours to ease the tension. According to him, after the diplomatic rift of 2014, Qatar closely aligned its foreign policy with its GCC members. For example, Qatar joined the Arab military coalition that defends the Saudi border with Yemen in 2015 and cooperated with Saudi Arabia in Syria, and the bandwagoning policy of Qatar restricted further escalation.

1.7.3 Ideological Solidarity

The concept of balancing also resembles the hypothesis of ideological solidarity which refers to the alliances that result from states that hold similar political, cultural or other traits (Walt, 1985; P. 33). In this context, it can be observed that Iran and Qatar share similarities in its polities, challenges from other countries, and distinct foreign policies that helped the nations to extend their economic or military assistance and create effective alliances with each other. Qatar could balance the threat and refused the concrete blockading points held against it due to the alliance (Naji, 2017). Similarly, it can be pointed out that Turkey considers Qatar as one of its vital allies especially due to the fact they also under go increasing isolation internationally (Girit, 2017). Obviously, the similarities also play a key role in maintaining alliance between Qatar and other nations along with Qatar's unique diplomatic foreign policies.

1.7.4 The Balancing Behavior of Qatar

Balancing is defined as allying with others against the prevailing threat of hegemony. Accordingly, the perspective of the Walt's theory of threat is significant in order to analyze how the decision of the blockading countries compelled Qatar to

perform balancing its behavior by ensuring an alliance with others due to the threat scenario that was triggered and developed in 2017 by the blockading countries. The coalition formed among the blockading countries and their allies decided to break off their diplomatic ties with Qatar and abruptly closed the borders and airspace and posed the threat with its coalition. Though the embargo was not militarized, Qatar had to enhance its security ties in a strategic alliance with the US, Iran, and Turkey with a view to balance the threat, as well as invest in its economic alliance with the rest of the world in order to cement its sovereignty. The alliance was intended to oppose the threat imposed by the opposing coalition and to reject the proposals directed by them, as it was conceived by Qatar that the terms reflected an intervention on its sovereignty. Furthermore, Qatar could survive the threats, according to Smith (2019), “if they need to just by pumping out more gas”, as “the gas money can prop everything up.” In short, it can be asserted that due to its resilience and resources, the balancing approach of Qatar enabled it more to resist or reduce the vulnerability of threat produced by the coalition than bandwagoning with them.

1.7.5 Criticism Against Walt’s Theory

In fact, Walt’s theory of threat has been viewed differently by the scholars of the International Relations. According to the reviews of Robert Keohane, in his scholarly article, “Alliances, Threats and the Uses of Neo-realism,” the concept of the balance of power theory is contradictory with the threat theory. In his view, the factor of power is greater than the factor of threat (Keohane, 1988; P. 172).

John Vasquez also criticizes Walt asserting that Walt’s assessments are just fabrication of Kenneth Waltz’ theory of Balance of Power in which Waltz stressed the point that the states follow the balancing behavior against the power of the state rather

than threats. According to Waltz, threats and power are independent variables (Vasquez, 1997).

Similarly, Sorokin perceived the concept of Walt as balancing against threats instead of power is deficient. According to him the states strive for security by enhancing its military rather than support from others. He also redefined the definition of alliance proposed by Walt as “formal agreement between sovereign states for the purpose of coordinating their behavior in the event of specified contingency of a military nature” (Sorokin, 1994; Pp. 422-423).

In spite of the fact that the above scholars do have diverse views on the threat theory of Walt and its perception, upon reviewing the case study of the alliance formed between Qatar and its allies, it can be stated that the view of Walt is concrete enough that the threat determines the formation of alliances. Moreover, the concept of threat theory is precisely demonstrated, as it was in the context of the threat on its sovereignty, security and economy imposed by the blockading countries, that Qatar got into forming alliances with more powerful countries such as the US, Turkey, and Iran. These countries ensured all assistance to enhance the economy and military of Qatar immediately after the blockade. Admittedly, the alliances strengthened the economy and military efficiency of the country and avoided potential military movement against it by the blockading countries, as the theory elucidates. For example, as Çavuşoğlu (2020; P. 101) points out on the event of the embargo, Qatar strategically calibrated its alliance with other countries for securing its food supply, trade routes and military enhancement. Accordingly, the Turkish Government sent its troops to the Tarik bin Ziyad military base in Qatar to help the nation expand its military force. Similarly, the Qatar Emiri Armed Forces (QEAF) expanded its naval, land and air forces in alliance with the US, British, and French Military Forces.

Overall, the thesis elicits the concept of the Walt's theory of threat and elucidates the fact Qatar emerged by expanding its alliance as a strategic movement to oppose the threat imposed by the Saudi led coalition. It is important to understand the threat perception theory and the formation of alliances that the countries get into. The reason for balancing or bandwagoning as a response to threat depends upon the nature of threat that the states poses. If the country determines to pose the threat by strengthening its walls or has the potential to assure its security, it will adopt the strategy of balancing. On the other hand, bandwagoning is determined by various interests or fear of greater powers. Although, as it is remarked, the small states usually adopt bandwagoning, in the case of GCC, theory of balancing or bandwagoning is equally relevant due to the greater potential of each state.

1.8 Research Methodology

The researcher adopted the qualitative method for studying the research questions adopted in this thesis. According to Berg (2001) the qualitative method is used to unveil thoughts and opinions, and it includes historical analysis (historiography), document and textual analysis. It is a method that relies primarily on the collection of elements from history which includes past events and experiences, and to relate it to the current time and the future.

Considering these as guiding lines, this thesis has been structured to investigate the prompting reasons that intensified the Gulf crisis and the prevailing current conflicts that have challenged the stability of the Middle East. Moreover, the researcher has attempted to present deep analysis of the reasons and effects in the light of the review conducted.

In addition, while reviewing the literature texts, it has been ensured that the scholars had relied on the primary as well as secondary resources for compiling the research work and have listed the various resources.

1.8.1 The Inductive Approach

As Trochim, Donnelly and Arora (2016) demonstrate an inductive approach has been followed to accomplish the qualitative method, that is the move from the specific to general or data to theory. The approach is based on elaborated observations of the world, and the researcher commences the research with the topic and develops empirical generalization with the goal of finding powerful evidences. Thus, the approach is applied to reasoning based on data (Zalaghi and Khazaei, 2016). Theories are framed from these observations and data it is believed that the inductive researcher can logically generalize the observations (Godfrey et al., 2010).

The thesis is structured with three principal research questions and related sub questions as per the area for analyzing specific details and data. The researcher has mainly depended on two techniques for obtaining the resources. Firstly, the primary resources such as official data published on official websites and online published interview of people that describes the impact of the blockade. Secondary, the resources like books, journals, articles which are published by researchers, and research platforms like Jstor, Academia etc. for collecting data related to the research line, analyzing it and reaching the conclusion.

The researcher utilized the qualitative method primarily to evaluate the reasons for the crisis in the GCC related to the diplomatic movement on Qatar and to pin point the impact of the break of alliance. These resources were analysed thematically as per

the research questions and the subtitles. The methodology of research from the general perspective to the specific points enabled analysis of the problems systematically.

1.8.2 Restrictions and Limitations

The researcher depended on books, articles, documentaries, newspapers reports and various items which have been published in course of time for extracting relevant facts. However, limitations existed. Firstly, related to lack of authentic resources, especially to examine the recent developments like the impact on economy and politics, and unbiased reviews on the stance of the US. Secondly, it was a hurdle to filter the information to meet the research objectives that are free from vested opinions and remarks by the publishers. Thirdly, on search engines like Academia or Jstor, some of the references are given in abstract and was difficult to view or had to be paid for the full access. Despite these restrictions, relevant resources have been accessed in order to accomplish the task.

Moreover, in line with the research norms, while evaluating and reviewing the sources, the author's point of view has often been cross analysed by identifying the author's purpose whether it is to inform or persuade. It has thus made sure that the author held unbiased views on the subject line and listed out the references, and they have been verified to ensure the credibility of the materials.

In view of assessing the reliability and validity of the resources material; the official publications on government websites, related journals published by rated presses and books published by academic institutions were accessed.

To ensure a balanced approach, the researcher has often compared similar viewpoints expressed and reported by other scholars. Moreover, while the review was

being undertaken, it was often ensured that the underlined major objectives of the research were linked to the process and to the reference materials.

The chief purpose of this thesis has been to unveil the facts and potential reasons related to the diplomatic breakdown that was intensified with the blockade on Qatar, and the ongoing instability of the Gulf region which are adversely impacting its political, economic and social framework for the past several years. The thesis elicits the threat of political uncertainty that has been lurking in the GCC in various forms and dimensions that has affected their economic-political network over the years. The methodology used for the analysis of the data obtained from the scholarly studies establishes the fact that the root cause of the conflicts in the Gulf region associated with the blockade of Qatar is the historical and hegemonic attitude of the Saudi led leadership of the GCC. It can be thus summed up that the blockade or the diplomatic conflict is the expression of frustration by the Saudi led coalition that has been brewing for a long time, and was backed up by the distorted and personalized foreign policy of the US.

The researcher concludes the thesis based on the exploration and analysis of the research questions and the sub questions that the conflict in the GCC has adversely impacted the political framework and the economic progress of the GCC states. Furthermore, the unresolved rift demonstrates the fact that the GCC has considerably failed to play the key role of sustaining the stability in the region, and in conducting debates and peace talks in order to mitigate the resentments.

1.9 Structure of the Research

The thesis has been devised with five chapters. Chapter one provides the introduction of the research that consists of the research problem, significance of the

research, research questions, literature review, theoretical framework and the research methodology adopted for the research. In line with analyzing the historical context behind the crisis in the GCC states that was aggravated with the blockade of Qatar in 2017, chapter two examines the domination of the British, border disputes, the changing political behavior in these countries and the details of the Arab Spring that turned out to be the prime reason for the prevailing disturbance in the Gulf region. Chapter three focuses on the strategic stance and alliance of the US with the GCC, particularly the personalized foreign policy under the leadership of Donald Trump that catalyzed the rift among the GCC states. It also reviews the difference of mediation roles played to mitigate the rift among the states by countries like Kuwait and the US. Moreover, chapter four cross examines how the entire GCC, especially Qatar, was affected by the diplomatic collapse and political uncertainty in the region in political and economic dimensions. Finally, the thesis ends with chapter five by presenting the conclusion for the overall thesis.

CHAPTER 2: HISTORICAL CONTEXT BEHIND THE 2017 GCC CRISIS

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an explanation on the crisis dynamics of the GCC countries. The conflicts among the GCC states are divergent in nature which vary from the issues associated with competition between royal families, the border disputes, foreign policies, possible conflicts of interests, security threats and difference in religious opinions, which are internal and external in nature. In fact, the fears of potential threats and conflicts have been part of these states for decades in contrast to the cultural uniqueness, kinship ties, geographical proximity and shared history of these states. However, in June 2017, the GCC, which was widely considered as one of the most stable unions in the Arab region, entered into the worst turbulence in its 36 years of existence, shortly after the visit of Donald Trump to the GCC. Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Egypt turned against Qatar by imposing sanctions against the country and by severing diplomatic relationships. Though the reasons claimed by the blockading countries in support of their actions against Qatar are considered that of a contemporary nature, they seem to be rooted in the past.

Thus, the chapter proposes to analyse the timeline of the major conflicts of the GCC states that strained the bilateral relationships with each other ever since the British hegemony in the Arab region, and argues that the root causes of the blockade of Qatar imposed in 2017 are multifarious in nature. In order to do so, it references the research works of eminent researchers over the years. Therefore, the chapter has been presented in four segments:

1. British Domination on the Gulf States
2. Disputes between the Ruling Families on Borders
3. Political Transformation in the GCC Security

4. Transformation within the Ruling Family and Security Standards

2.2 British Domination on the Gulf States

In order to form a coherent understanding of the conflicts in the Gulf states, it is important to review the political behavior of the states during the British dominance in the region. The British dominated the Gulf states for 150 years until their withdrawal in 1971. Although the presence of the British over the region for decades was due to their strategic and commercial interests, their hegemonic rule brought an element of control over the conflicting Sheikhdoms. As a result of the dominating presence of the British Empire rooted in the Arab states, the political and economic atmosphere of the Middle East evolved significantly and reformed the region radically. On the contrary, we need to believe that the so-called stability in the region was peripheral in nature and the disputes were dormant in reality during this period.

The major jurisdiction of the Arab Sheikhs before the discovery of oil had been centered on the administration and the protection of their people from inland attacks. When the pearling industry emerged to be the major source of income in the region during the 19th century, piracy and raids threatened the coastline, and the protection offered by the Sheikhs was of little use at sea. However, due to the agreements signed with the British from 1820, peace and stability was restored in the Gulf (Mirabella, 2014).

Nevertheless, when the pearling industry started to decline in 1930s, the exploration for oil turned to be the major concern of the region, and the threats from the rival powers on land were an ongoing problem. As the rulers of the Trucial States, Muscat, Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain lacked efficient military power to tackle the

security issues, they were compelled to seek the protection of Britain between 1820-1971 (Onley, 2009; Pp. 1-5).

Strategically, the primary reason the British got involved with the Sheikhdoms in the Gulf states was for the protection of the British shipping between Persia, Iraq, Muscat and India, as marine activities were of great security concern, due to the rise in pirates within the Persian Gulf. The British were convinced that the stability of the Gulf Sheikhdoms was crucial for their shipping routes around the Gulf for carrying out their commercial expeditions. In short, the economic interests of the British formalized their dominance in the Gulf region (Hay, 1954; P. 433). The British could establish its base in the region primarily due to the emerging conflicts and insecurity spread in the region as well as for the commercial reasons of the British itself. It was absolutely a need for the British then to launch their dominance in the Gulf region. As Stephen Walt (1987; P. 168) demonstrates in his theory, the Gulf states formed the alliance with the British considering it a superpower capable of safeguarding each state from potential threats. Moreover, it had large military capacity and economic power.

By signing the General Treaty in 1820, the Arab rulers agreed to the hegemony of the Britain in the region and to have limited ability to act independently without the consent of Britain. Accordingly, the Pax Britannica was established in the Gulf states with a series of maritime defense treaties known as the Maritime Truce, such as the agreement with the Trucial States in 1835, Bahrain in 1861, Kuwait in 1899 (de facto), and Qatar in 1916, in order to secure economic and political stability of the region. By this treaty the Arab rulers officially surrendered their right to have war at sea and in return the British assured the protection (Allday, 2014).

As per the treaty, these states were forbidden to establish any agreements with any other power except the British, to give residence to the agents of other governments without the consent of the British, or to alter the borders, and certainly it helped the British to act in an autocratic style.

Britain's relations with the Sheikdoms were conducted by the diplomats from the British governments of Bombay and India office supervised by the East India Company and India office. After the Indian Independence in 1947, the relations were carried out by the diplomats from the foreign office in London. In order to protect the waters of the Gulf, the government of Bombay also established a treaty called Persian Gulf Squadron in 1821. Thus, in short, the British played the roles of protector, mediator, arbiter, and guarantor of settlements in the Gulf states and the Sheikdoms could secure their positions from external and internal rivals. On the other hand, with the discovery of oil in the Gulf states (1908-1964), the British policy diversified and became concerned with protecting Britain's oil supply in the Gulf. This led their expansion of military protection and by the 20th century, they started to influence the internal affairs of the Sheikdoms such as oil, infrastructure, and aviation etc. (Onley, 2009; Pp. 10-11).

It is to be observed that the Arab nationalism, which had elements of Islamic heritage and shared sense of history and pride in culture, was strongly expanded in the Gulf in the 1950's and 1960's that captured attention of the globe, and the British rulers faced negative criticism widely by isolating the GCC countries from the rest of the Arab world, and for protecting the undemocratic oppressive rulers in the region. Moreover, the Soviet Union strongly supported the Arab nationalists to get rid of the British imperialists, and accordingly Kuwait attained independence from the British in 1961.

The presence of the British had maintained stability in the region for a century and half as the British could deal with the Sheikdoms collectively by establishing treaty of relations. However, following the British announcement of their withdrawal, the Gulf states reacted differently. The Iraqi government demanded the complete withdrawal of the British forces from the region. The Saudi government also welcomed the withdrawal, viewing that the countries in the region could defend themselves. Other states believed that the withdrawal would result in a power vacuum in the region. Similarly, Bahrain's status was threatened by the Iranian claim and the British stay was considered to be the role of guardian of their sovereignty (Al-Mubarak, 1976).

The dormant disputes on borders were intensified after Britain declared intent to withdraw from the region. Within a few days after the independence, Iraq declared Kuwait was historically part of Iraq and intended to annex it. Thereby, Kuwait sought the protection by the British force but the pressure from the nationalists compelled the British to replace their troops with the Arab League Peace keeping force. It was obvious for other Arab states that liberation from the British would trigger various border issues with each other and wars would break out and disturb the stability of the region, thereby suspending the oil supply. By the lesson learnt from the Kuwait crisis, the Arab rulers were compelled to establish the Persian Gulf joint task force in 1962 with the collaboration of the British. However, in 1968, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Harold Wilson declared the seizure of the Pax Britannica and the withdrawal of its troops from the Gulf states by the end of 1971, after 150 years of its presence in the region pointing out the reason that its role was a heavy financial liability for the British.

Apparently, all of the Gulf states had territorial disputes and the withdrawal of the British from the region indicated impending crisis in the region. Most the US

officials considered the withdrawal of the British as the split of trust and called it betrayal, similarly, they feared that the absence of the British would prompt the Soviets to establish their base in the region that would threaten the West to access oil. In the last months of the withdrawal, the Trucial States, Qatar and Bahrain became independent and were admitted to the UN.

Although Oman had been an independent nation, it also had enjoyed the British protection, and the British forces continued its presence until 1977 to fight against the Dhofari rebels who were supported by the Chinese, North Korea, the Soviet Union, Cuba and the new Arab Communist government of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (Shamsunahar, 2018). Just before the withdrawal by the British from the Arab states, Iran seized three islands that belonged to Ras-al-Khaimah and Sharja. Following the withdrawal of the British Force, the US marked its supremacy in the region with the start of the Iran-Iraq conflict in 1981 (Alasfoor, 2007).

In spite of the fact that the British hegemony in the Arabs states lasted for more than a century and could bring on external and internal aggression, their presence could not eliminate the territorial claims and political ambitions of the states.

2.3 Disputes between the Ruling Families on Borders

The rationale of this section is to illustrate and analyse the territorial disputes which have been prevalent for decades, particularly among Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Oman, Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain. Though the disputes over the borders were passive for long, the repercussions of the 1990-1991 Gulf war intensified the scenario and border conflicts dramatically turned into a political agenda of the region and preoccupied the ruling families. Significantly, the conflicts intensified more than ever, owing to the strategic location of the Gulf states, exploration of the natural resources

and the escalated competition with each other. Moreover, the disputes on territorial borders often led to armed confrontations, diplomatic or bilateral agreements or bringing the conflicts to the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

Even though the discovery of the natural resources was the prime factor behind the territorial disputes and disruptions, it was the same reason that led the parties to settle the disputes that were triggered in various contexts. There are many underlying causes for the disputes, however, what is apparent is just the tip of the iceberg. Okruhlik & Conge (1999; P. 231) point out that the interrogation on international frontiers around the Arabian Peninsula obtained paramount importance thanks to the competition for natural resources and the marking of political identity in the political map of the region. Mostly, there are eight major territorial disputes among the Gulf states, such as, between Saudi Arabia and Qatar over fifteen miles of territory, Iran and the UAE over the islands of Abu Musa and the Tunbs, Saudi Arabia and Yemen over the boundary of old division of North and South Yemen, Saudi Arabia and Oman, Bahrain and Qatar over the Hawar Islands and the surrounding reefs, Iraq and Kuwait over the islands of Waba and Bubiyan and Umm al Qasr, Oman and Yemen, and Oman and the United Arab Emirates. From the aforementioned territorial disputes, Saudi Arabia is involved with a significant number of disputes with its neighbors.

Okruhlik & Conge (1999; P. 233) assert that the territorial disputes are mostly rooted in the legacies of colonialism and foreign intervention. Factually, it is stated that the boundaries were imposed by the imperial powers of the past. The demarcation of borders emerged to be a substantial matter only after these regions were excavated for oil exploration, international companies and local rulers held up defining territorial limits of sovereignty of a nation. For instance, Britain and Kuwait agreed on the international boundary which was bilateral in nature when Britain withdrew from the

Arabian Peninsula. However, the neighboring states were not part of this treaty, and thus these demarcations were not approved by others. As the borders were not outlined precisely or were ambiguous in the existing documents, the dispute became complicated over the time. For example, the boundary line between Iraq and Kuwait marked as ‘the southernmost palm tree’. Above all, Britain attempted with its influence to systemize and formalize an emerging system in the region.

The researcher Guzansky (2016; P. 1) underlines the vulnerability of the borders of the Gulf region which are lines drawn in the sand. European colonizers marked the lines just on sand that never turned into the acceptable line in the later years, especially due to the obvious reasons that oil and gas resources are the optimum potential source of revenue for the states, and as a matter of fact, it is mandatory to know where one state’s oil field starts and ends. The ambiguous lines always turn out to be chaotic; primarily it is about billions of dollars and revenue. The conflicts were complicated by the absence of a viable regional security system. The Gulf war of 1991 was a major catalyst that exposed political realities and the states dynamically rose up in order to gain greater strength of self-definition and self-assertion.

2.3.1 The Hawar Islands, islands dispute between Qatar and Bahrain

Wiegand (2012; P. 1) examines the dispute of Qatar and Bahrain over the Hawar Islands, the fashts (shoals) of al-Dibal and al-Jaradah, and territorial waters of the Persian Gulf and Zubarah, a district on the Qatari peninsula for sixty-five years (1936-2001). In spite of the proximity of the territory to Qatar, Bahrain argued its presence on the Hawar Islands and their claim is legitimate. The dispute links to the past when the current Bahraini family took over most of the region and the conflict reached its peak in May 2000 with the army deployment that created a war like situation but was frozen by the Saudi intervention, as observed by Seddiq (2001). The dispute over the years

escalated and even the GCC could not effectively establish a lasting solution. It escalated in many events even challenging the cooperation of the GCC, deploying armed forces against each other, engaging bilateral negotiations and agreeing to mediation by Saudi Arabia.

Furthermore, the mediation attempts by Saudi Arabia were based on the principals for the framework for reaching a settlement and the Saudi's proposed negotiations and the attempt by the GCC were delayed mostly due to two reasons. Firstly, there was little incentive to determine the dispute. Secondly, Saudi Arabia and the GCC in general were not able to act neutrally because of other disputes between each other. In addition, Qatar was simultaneously in territorial dispute and clashes with Saudi Arabia. The dispute between Qatar and Bahrain was resolved by the mediation of the ICJ in 2001 and according to the ruling, the Hawar Islands and Al-Jaradah were awarded to Bahrain and Zubarah, the Janan Islands and Al Dibal were rewarded to Qatar. The ruling was acknowledged by both the parties making it a remarkable case. It is said that this is the only dispute between two Arab states settled by the ICJ. However, Wiegand (2012) argues that the two states tried to solve the dispute with the mediation of ICJ in order to act unbiased because of specific reasons such as the inability of other regional Arab states to mediate the issue.

2.3.2 Border Dispute between Saudi Arabia and Qatar

The British and Ottoman governments established their borders in the southern part of Saudi Arabia in 1913-1914, known as the Blue Line and Violet Line, which limited the borders of the country when it was officially founded in 1926. However, Saudi Arabia declined to acknowledge the lines, claiming an additional 200,000 square miles in parts of Qatar, Abu Dhabi, Oman and Yemen. The British accepted their demand, as they thought it was just empty desert, by extending the borders slightly,

which is known as the Riyadh Line. Ironically, Saudi Arabia was not satisfied with the upgraded boundaries and consequently, a number of border disputes erupted over the course of time in the southern Gulf (Wiegand 2014; P. 37). Even though the border between Saudi Arabia and Qatar was limited in 1965, from Duhat as Salwa in the west to Khwar Udaid on the Gulf in the east, conflicts often erupted and led to an aggressive clash in 1992, causing the death of two Qatari soldiers and one Saudi soldier. Gradually, an accepted demarcation of the land boundary was agreed in 1996 between Qatar and Saudi Arabia and completed the process in 1999 signing demarcation maps of their common borders (Seddiq, 2001).

The territorial disputes in GCC states have been lessened in many ways over the years by the diplomatic mediators from Egypt, GCC member states, the United States, the United Nations and the International Court of Justice at Hague. It can be seen that GCC could not act effectively for the negotiation of the member states or failed to settle the disputes that involve each other, primarily due to the fact that Saudi Arabia got involved with most of the disputes and conflicts (Okruhlik & Conge 1999; Pp. 247-248).

By discussing the historical background of the territorial disputes, it can be understood that Britain had a major hand in lining the borders of the Gulf countries just like any other colonized countries in order to secure and expand their territorial supremacy, and substantially, their withdrawal from the region resulted in turbulence leading to divergent claims and tensions on the boarders which erupted mostly due to the discovery of natural resources.

2.3.3 Gulf Wars – Security Challenges and Threats

After the withdrawal of the British force, the eruption of the Gulf wars in 1980 was a major chaotic incident that intensified the turbulence of the Gulf states, and eventually it led to the heightened interference of major international powers like the US. According to Walt (1987; P. 18) when the states fail to resist a potential hegemon, it allies with the dominant power placing its trust in its continued benevolence.

Several researchers present a comprehensive picture of the Gulf wars that caused numerous challenges in the Gulf region. Kamrava (2005) identifies the prime reason for the First Gulf War in 1980 was triggered by Iraq's invasion in Iran and it lasted for eight years. In fact, this war led to the Second Gulf War which was caused by Iraq invading and occupying Kuwait in 1990-1991. Kuwait was then liberated by the US and the Allied forces. Swearingen (1988) states that the Iraq-Iran war of 1980-1988 is classified as the third war which resulted in the most destructive military conflict since World War II. More than one million people were killed, one million were made refugees, and thousands became prisoners of war. Bassil (2012) also added that the wars in the Gulf region can be broadly classified under issues like political power, economic resources, and religious control.

Fürtig (2002) underlines the fact that as a result of the Gulf wars, hostilities developed among some countries in the Gulf associated with border conflicts, and the production and exportation of oil. The US pursued actions to eliminate deadly weapons from the terrorists linked to Iraq and Al-Qaida which resulted in the killings of the armies and the citizens. Another study by Kikalishvili (2014; Pp. 40-43) claims that the Gulf wars were caused by the nations both within and outside the Gulf who wanted to fulfill their vested interests. Eventually, with the coalition of countries led by America started the Operation Desert Storm and ended the first Gulf war.

Freedman & Karsh (1991; Pp. 6-8) demonstrate how the war strategies in the region have drastically affected the lives of the people in various ways, domestically and internationally. The conflicts resulted in the refusal of access to ports, airfields, and other facilities which intensified the tension among the countries involved. Furthermore, the war in Iraq led to the deaths of several thousands of US service leaders apart from the thousands of citizens.

2.3.4 Formation of GCC Alliances

In order to apply the Walt's theory in case of GCC states, it is vital to reflect the source of threat faced by the states from the region. According to the theory, the states formed alliances in order to prevent stronger powers from taking over them and to defend themselves from states or coalitions against possible threats (Walt, 1987; P. 18). Admittedly, due to the pertinent political and military threat that emerged in the Gulf region following the withdrawal of the British from the Gulf in 1971 and Iranian Revolution in 1979, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) was formed in 1981 with grand ambitions to create a regional economic and political bloc comprising of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman. Apparently, the GCC was a strategic political and economic alliance that was intended to ensure hegemonic leadership and influence in the region, and to secure the states from imminent threats from the neighboring countries. The unity among these countries was inevitable due to the fact that these states possess almost half of the world's oil reserves. Moreover, it had an instrumental role to play in the region in the event of the ongoing turbulence in the Gulf states in various forms that affected the economic, political and cultural atmosphere. In fact, the Charter of GCC elucidates the facts that the decision of the formation was not a momentary event but a realization of a historical, social and cultural reality. It is certain, there lies deep religious and cultural ties which coordinate

the member states (Secretariat General of the Gulf Cooperation Council). Pointedly, the alliance was supposed to enhance the economic uniqueness of the region, secure political stability and play an instrumental role as a mediator to mitigate the differences among the states.

However, it can be asserted that the GCC's progress towards economic and political integration has been inactive, and failed to achieve its aims and aspirations that have been outlined in the charter. It is observed that the GCC was formed with a purpose of enhancing the collective security of its members, particularly to guard from the repercussions of the Iranian revolution and the threat posed by it. Yet, the blockade imposed on Qatar by Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain strengthened the presence of Iran in the region and thereby exposes the lack of efficacy of the GCC even to mitigate tension amongst the member states. By imposing the sanctions on Qatar, the trio claimed to isolate Qatar diplomatically and economically, with the allegation that it supported terrorist groups around the region. The GCC has been thus fragmented, apparently into three parts: the Saudi-Emirati-Bahrain group that imposes threats and sanctions, the Omani-Kuwait group that stays neutral, and finally Qatar itself, which expands and stands uniquely with its relationship beyond the GCC.

Al-Shamari & Al-Mohannadi (2020; P. 80) evaluate the shift of security threat that emerged in the GCC states after the Iran and Iraq war and the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq. Before the blockade, the sources of threat were perceived as being from outside the GCC, such as Iran and Iraq that were viewed as direct threat for the region. However, during the Gulf crisis that was ignited with the blockade of Qatar, the source of threat erupted from within the GCC.

It would appear that the shift of threat from external to internal emphasizes the collapse of the GCC security alliance and the replacement of regional security with national security, as the above studies support. In other words, due to the unprecedented crisis in 2017, the GCC states are seeking alliances outside the region in order to secure their states from the possible regional threats.

2.4 Political Transformation in the GCC Security

For decades, the GCC's political and diplomatic environment was on the verge of turmoil related the differences of foreign policy, and territorial reasons, among others. As a result, questions about the stability and progress of the region were of continuous concerns. Zweiri, Rahman, & Kamal (2020; P. 5) recall the exceptional socio-political transformation of Qatar and its reputation in international politics during the leadership of The Father Amir Sheikh Hamad, and the two failed coup attempts by Saudi Arabia on Qatar that occurred in 1995 and 1996. Although efforts were carried out by the US in 1990's and 2000's to ease the conflict between the countries, Saudi Arabia withdrew its ambassador from Doha on the context of criticism published against it in Al Jazeera in 2002. The 2017 blockade on Qatar came along, in which the Saudi-UAE led coalition was the newest conflict that divided the GCC states into different aspects. The scenario was apparently connected with the Arab Spring movement during which Qatar and Al Jazeera were accused of destabilizing the region by supporting the Muslim Brotherhood and their allies. Moreover, on further analysis of literature it stands clear that the allegations raised against Qatar by the blockading countries and the blockade sanctioned against it disclose a historical linkage that is linked with multiple events which occurred in the past.

2.4.1 Arab Spring Movement and its Impact on the GCC

Conceptually, the nature of power control is an absolute tool in modern governments, and with power a state can execute its politics and achieve strategic goals. However, extreme application of power leads to oppression and mistrust of the people. Apparently, the Arab Spring movement was the result of such a political phenomenon that spread across the Gulf region.

According to Majumdar & Jones (2011), the invasion of Iraq in 2003 had an impact for provoking the Arab Spring, and it is assumed that the Iraq invasion was the foundation or a major catalyst of the movement, especially for the pursuit for freedom. Though it is difficult to pin point the exact reasons of the Arab Spring, it can be understood that the movement erupted due to the widespread hopelessness, especially among the youths, caused by the decades long rule by corrupt tyrants and economic mismanagement. Similarly, the protesters were instigated with the restriction of freedom of expression, talk about politics, talk about the president and religion and consequently, the people were mobilized with the help of social network such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter where they were allowed to express themselves (Choubassi, Elias & Mourad, 2019; Pp. 1-5).

Colombo (2012; Pp. 3-10) points out that the political scenario of the Arab world was transformed by the aftermaths of the Arab Spring. Though the movement originated in Tunisia in 2010 and forced out the Tunisian President, Bin Ali, from power, it quickly spread to the GCC to states such as Saudi Arabia, Oman, Bahrain and other Arab countries like Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen and Jordan. Although the protesters were encountered with violent reactions by the ruling regimes, the protest turned into large scale. The protesters demanded more participation and representative governing systems which would promote fairer economic systems.

The movement resulted in radical changes in the political systems of many Arab countries or they were forced to reform their approach and statesmanship to ease possible outbreaks. Both El-Katiri (2013; Pp. 1-8) and Çetinoğlu (2010) reported that almost all GCC countries witnessed public protest in various forms and the countries reacted to it differently. Many states introduced generous welfare programs to have greater share of their countries wealth and created employment packages in order to influence the citizens. The outbreak of the Arab Spring demonstrated how the GCC was incapable of dealing with the repercussions of the political movement in the region and failed to discharge its duties more effectively.

Al-Shamari & Al-Mohannadi (2020; P. 81) demonstrate that the initial outbreak of the conflict in the GCC erupted with the stance of the alliance on the Arab Spring Movement in 2011 which turned to the root reason for the Gulf Crisis of 2017. When the movement spread across the Arab world, the GCC states were split into four groups. The UAE belonged to the first group that stood for 'Strong Rejection' for any radical change. Secondly, Oman and Kuwait held a position of neutrality, as they did not issue any official statement that illustrated their position towards the movement. Thirdly, Saudi Arabia expressed unannounced rejection for the revolutionary change. Finally, Qatar belonged to the fourth group that announced its stance for the uprisings in the Arab world. It was the only GCC country that announced its support for Egyptian revolution to over throw President Hosni Mubarak.

ALDosari (2020; P. 62) demonstrates in her study, the Arab Spring exposed the threat on the security of the GCC states for the first time in the history of their alliance. The threat was not a military threat but it was ideological, particularly posed by the Muslim Brotherhood, which was raised against the Arab dictators in the region. The support of Qatar for the movement throughout the Arab Spring disturbed states like

Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain. They endeavored to fight against Qatar as they did not want the country create for itself (Markiz AlThuqil AlArabi, Arab center of gravity in the region P. 61) the position in the Arab region as a leader for foreign policymaking in the region and international relations.

The aftermaths of the Arab Spring instigated the radical action of the GCC states against Qatar, with accusations that the policy of Qatar was against the GCC norm of noninterference. Qatar also faced the allegation that it supported the destabilization of the region led by the Arab Spring campaign that spread across the region, along with Qatar sponsored Al Jazeera, the independent media network. These states withdrew their ambassadors from Qatar in 2014 which severed their diplomatic relationships greatly. The states demanded Qatar support Abdelfatah al Sisi to fight against the Muslim Brotherhood and restrict the independence of Al Jazeera as well. Qatar was also criticized for having ties with Iran and Israel. Qatar expressed its regret over the unprecedented decision of the member states against it.

It is to be argued that the hostility against Qatar among other Arab countries escalated due to its ideology for change that was reflected with the movement of the Arab Spring. On the other hand, the political campaign was considered as a threat. In addition, the criticism against Al Jazeera points to the fact that its independent policy for giving voice to everyone in the region challenged the dominant approach of other regional media that promotes only the voice of the vested group.

According to Walt's (1985; Pp. 23-24) theoretical conception on balance of threat, aggressive intentions can pose threats to a state. Admittedly, the blockading coalition turned hostile to Qatar, due to its distinguishing position in the Middle East with the revolutionary principles and ideas that lead the country to a new awakening of

learning which cannot be claimed by any other countries in the region. Furthermore, the contrasting stance or exceptional position of Qatar in international politics which cannot be appreciated or accepted by the Saudi led coalition, was instead resented by them.

For instance, Krieg (2019; P. 94) highlights the vision of Hamad bin Khalifa, the former Emir, and how he conducted the state of affairs that was based on societal, intellectual and economic liberalization that secures the state from the Saudi state and its Wahhabi clergy and traditions that enslave individual liberty. As far as the Emir was concerned, globalization meant liberalizing the society, providing access to the wealth of the country and to liberal education that promotes liberal public discourse. Qatar was also criticized for maintaining a dual status. For example, its positions as being with Arab world and sustaining a relationship with Israel, and playing the role of a mediator between Hezbollah and Lebanese government, between Khartoum and the rebel group in Darfur, and between Yemen and Houthis. The movement of Qatar and the recognized role being an intermediate definitely annoyed the greater powers like Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Cafiero (2019; Pp. 151-164) also views the possible underlining reasons of the blockade of Qatar that supports the balance of threat (Walt. 1985; Pp. 23-24). He argues that the blockading countries were annoyed by the influential role played by Qatar in the region and they shared their political ambition to limit the role of Qatar in the regional politics. Criticism broadcasted on Al Jazeera about Saudi Arabia's authoritarian regime upset the Saudi leaders. Accordingly, they tried to put pressure on Qatar by listing a set of terms and demands with the purpose of restricting the country and maintaining the domination of Saudi Arabia. Agreeing with Kabalan (2018), Cafiero (2019) also evaluates the fundamental reasons of the blockade. Since the time

of the former Emir of Qatar, the role played by Qatar is significant and dynamic in the region and globally.

According to Walt (1987; P. 24) bandwagoning is caused by a threat from a proximate power, and Qatar's alliance behavior with the US can be justified by the threat that the country faced from its neighboring states. In fact, the small state status of Qatar made it adopt a bandwagon approach with the US. Accordingly, Qatar's military cooperation and bandwagoning with the US, Iran and Turkey helped the country to balance the threat posed by the Saudi led coalition. In short, the geographically proximate states of Qatar raised threats against its economic and military security with their offensive power and aggressive intentions.

The diplomatic rift of 2014 marks a precise prelude of the Gulf crisis of 2017. The three neighbouring countries of Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain withdrew their ambassadors from Doha as a protest against Qatar for its unwavering foreign policy and its link with the Arab Spring movement of 2010.

The Egyptian movement erupted in 2011, led by Muslim Brotherhood and was influenced by the Arab Spring movement that commenced in Tunisia. The demonstrations spread across the country drew millions of desperate young Egyptians, provoked by the rising unemployment and poverty against Hosni Mubarak. The Brotherhood emerged as a dominant political force in Egypt that believed Islamic principles should standardize public and family life, and replaced the dictator eventually with the elected leader member of the Brotherhood, President Mohamed Morsi. However, the Egyptian Military coup removed President Mohamed Morsi on 3 July 2013 and placed an interim president. The events led to wild protests and the worst massacre in the history of Egypt. The military backed government declared a state of

emergency and designated the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization (TRT World, 2020).

It can be argued that Saudi Arabia and Egypt had shared mutual interest and bilateral relationship traditionally and the fall of Hosni Mubarak increased Saudi Arabia's vulnerability. Moreover, the US asked Mubarak to step down which dismayed the royals, it was considered as the US betrayal. Accordingly, it has been remarked that Saudi intelligence provided funding for the fall of Morsi, the elected President of Egypt and supported General Sisi, who had served in Saudi Arabia as military attaché. It was also reported to have promised Sisi that if the US cut off any military or economic aid to Egypt after the replacement of regime, they would be supported by Saudi Arabia (Riedel, 2013).

Qatar was accused of becoming involved with the internal affairs of Egypt against the interests of the royals and the GCC, and for supporting the Muslim Brotherhood that was perceived as a threat for the domestic security. The Saudi led coalition supported the military backed government of Egypt, and they withdrew their ambassadors from Doha on 5 March 2014, signaling a protest on Qatar's support for the Brotherhood (Arosoaie, 2015). Ibish (2017) also reports that Qatar was criticized for promoting extremism through the Al Jazeera and other Qatari media network. The three GCC states became infuriated towards the country. The diplomatic action was carried out in response to the security agreement signed by the GCC members in January 2014, that agreed to a policy of non-interference in the affairs of any member state, nonsupport for any party, organization or individual that threaten the stability and security of the states directly or through political influence or media. The coalition also justified the diplomatic drift by claiming that Qatar failed to observe the terms of the First Riyadh Agreement that was came into effect on 23 November 2013 in Riyadh

meeting (Hassan, 2015). However, in order to reestablish the rift the in the region and to ally with the GCC, Qatar asked seven senior members of the Brotherhood to leave the country (Arosoaie, 2015). Hassan (2015) accounts the crisis lasted for eight months but the scenario witnessed rift, official boycott, and increasing level of public confusion. Due to the mediation efforts of Kuwait, the situation returned to normal and the three countries returned their ambassadors to Doha.

Both the first meeting and the Riyadh Agreement clearly assert an attempt by the coalition to discourage and restrict the independent foreign policy of Qatar and the withdrawal of their ambassadors demonstrated a clear signal that the region was on the verge of a crisis caused by the clash of different ideologies. Admittedly, the return of the ambassadors suggested an end of the crisis and Qatar did not modify its foreign policy principles. The words Khalid bin Mohammed Al-Attiyah, Foreign Minister of Qatar assert the steadfastness of Qatar:

“Qatar has chosen not to remain on the side-lines of history... deciding to play a significant role in world affairs, communicate with other countries, mediating in conflicts, work to end violent conflicts, and care for refugees” (Hassan, 2015).

2.4.2 Blockade and Gulf Dispute

The Trump administration played a catalytic role for the political conflict of the GCC. The blockade of Qatar is as an obvious instance of disinformation fabricated by Saudi led coalition and the US. It is stated the crisis got worse with the election of Donald Trump of 2016 and his visit to Saudi Arabia, as it provided a moment for Saudi led coalition to renew their conflict with Qatar, supported by the words of Trump.

Arguably, the US policy exhibited different approaches in its dealing with the GCC. Especially in its dealing with the hegemonic approach of Saudi Arabia. While

Barak Obama limited its support of the US to Saudi Arabia's dominance over the Gulf states, Donald Trump started a different partnership with it that aggravated the Gulf crisis. Donald Trump declared his strong support to the Saudi led alliance in the region that emboldened their conflicting movement against Qatar.

Bianco & Stansfield (2018) give a brief account of the events that lead to the embargo on Qatar. It was reported on the Qatar News Agency (QNA) that Qatar's Foreign Minister, Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, decided to withdraw the ambassadors of Qatar from Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Egypt. It was quickly announced by the officials that report was fake and the agency had been hacked. Even so, the media outlets of Saudi Arabia and the UAE published the misleading comments and accused Qatar of funding terrorist groups and supporting Iran and Iranian militants that question the stability of the GCC. Qatar also faced accusations by the media that it maintained secret association with Iranian backed militias to destabilize the monarchies of GCC. The media related this the accusation with the report of the Financial Times that published Qatar had a ransom deal to free its 26 Qatari falconry members who had been kidnapped by Kata'eb Hizbollah in April 2011, even though the Prime Minister of Iraq stated that the sum of around \$700 million was received by the Iraqi government for the rescue operation.

The Ministry of Interior (MOI) of Qatar and the US intelligence officials reported that the UAE was behind the hacking, and accordingly the Qatar government intimidated all broadcasters in the region within 45 minutes of the false news and the hacking. However, the UAE and Saudi Arabia media outlets continued their cyberwar by broadcasting the fabricated news and offensive allegations against Qatar.

Miller (2018) asserts that the crisis in the region turned to a new severed form with the blockade of Qatar, resulting in the cutting of diplomatic ties, closing their land borders, sea-lanes, airspace and banning the citizens from traveling to Qatar and vice versa launched by the Saudi led coalition. The sanctions imposed on Qatar were without any forewarning and caused turbulence in the stock market and the food supply was a huge concern, as the major route was immediately closed down by Saudi Arabia. However, the country could stabilize its economy by strengthening its domestic supply chain and establishing overseas supply routes. Qatar maintained a consistent position against the allegations raised by the blockading countries throughout the time and denied any support to terrorist groups. It also defended its diplomatic relation with Iran against all accusations. Moreover, Qatar was asked to shut down Al Jazeera. However, it was underlined by Qatar that the blockade and the measures imposed on it are unjustified actions upon its foreign policy, and asserted its denial of any aid to terrorist groups.

It is striking to point out that both the blockade of 2017 and the failed coup of 1996 on Qatar took place during the holy month of Ramadan, and both the actions were carried out by the same Saudi led alliance. Ulrichsen (2020; Pp. 31-32) illustrates the background events of 1996 that just after the accession of Hamad bin Khalifa as the Emir of Qatar, the Saudi led alliance attempted for a military coup, titled Operation Abu Ali, on Qatar to return Khalifa bin Hamad to power and thereby isolate Qatar. However, the plan did not happen due to the strong support given to the Hamad bin Khalifa by the US and the UK. Similarly, during the 2017 crisis, the alliance did not get any international support for their joint mission, other than from Donald Trump's initial support. Qatar improved its relationship with its neighbours, but in reverse the same countries revived their memories in 2017 with the blockade. The diplomatic

conflict can be seen again in 2014 when these countries withdrew their ambassadors from Qatar, citing they wanted to protect their security and stability, and interestingly it was just after Tamim bin Hamad came to leadership in 2013. Ulrichsen states, the withdrawal “represents the culmination of three years of mounting animosity over the Arab Spring” (2020; P. 43). The rifted lasted for eight months until an agreement in 2014 due to the prolonged attempts of Kuwait.

In other words, the conflicts that have been occurring in the Arab region is the outcome of highly personalized foreign policy followed by individual countries, and more specifically, as Kinninmont (2019; P. 7) mentions, the foreign policy of these countries is decided by a handful of key individuals who engage with petty foreign policy games in the region. The UAE believes that the Muslim Brotherhood is a major element of challenge and threat to its security. On the other hand, Qatar does not view the Muslim Brotherhood as a potential threat for the security, rather it is concerned with the opposition that would erupt in the ruling family. The UAE criticizes Qatar of supporting Emirati activists, and Qatar criticizes Saudi Arabia for the unsuccessful coup in 1996 and 2005.

Extreme religious opinions also turned to be a reason for the unjust siege on Qatar. The blockade was instigated in Ramadan, blocking food trucks entering Qatar during the time the entire Muslim population was fasting. Siddiqui (2018; Location 820) criticizes the Saudi led coalition for linking religion with politics during the current crisis. Later, the official clerics and religious institutions of Saudi Arabia published their justification for using religion. They stated that Qatar was involved in political actions that challenge Islam. The researcher recalls how religion was used to gain public opinion in the past in contrast to the modern governments that is based on policy. The instrumentalist theory holds the point that nationalism, ethnicity and religion play

significant role in politics and policy for ensuring certain political ends. Thus, religion was used to justify foreign policy actions in regards to the blockade on Qatar. Saudi Arabia's Grand Mufti, Sheikh AbdulAziz al-Sheikh, argued in his fatwa that the actions against Qatar were for the public welfare using the Islamic legal term 'maslaha' of all Muslims, not only for Qataris, as Saudi Arabia is Muslim country. Moreover, the Mufti pointed out that the revelation of Prophet Muhammad happened in Mecca, and Saudi Arabia continues to be the guardian of the holy cities. By this statement, it is inferred that the Grand Mufti holds Saudi Arabia to be the leader of the Muslim world. The blockading countries sought the support of religion to legitimize their actions in spite of the fact the holy Qura'n explicitly teaches that one should maintain the ties of kinship and brotherhood, as was raised by a few Islamic scholars.

As per the balance of threat (Walt, 1985; Pp. 23-24), small countries that are closer to the greater powers are vulnerable to threat. Miller (2016; Location 1389) looks at the scenario from a different perspective related to the small size of the country. Qatar was one of the smallest countries in terms of its population, territory and military capability when it entered the UN in 1971 and its size was criticized for being the part of an international organization. However, the country has turned to be a major player in the investment, global market, financial and global energy. In short, over the years Qatar has built, "a bold new way to engage with the world while maintaining the country's independence", as viewed by The New York Times in 2008. Currently the Gulf Crisis is a good example of conflict between a small state and a major power; the anti-Qatar coalition is bigger than Qatar in every respect. Despite its size, the country could mediate between Fatah and Hamas in Palestine in 2006, be key player of peace in Lebanon, and offer financial diplomacy for conflict resolution between Yemen and Darfur where Saudi Arabia and the US failed. Moreover, as part of enhancing its

security measures, Qatar successfully allied with Washington. In a nutshell, it can be stated that the wider bilateral alliance and the diplomatic achievements achieved by Qatar generated jealousy and tensions among the blockading countries.

The views shared by Miller are significant, as it can be seen that Qatar, in spite of its small size, won the bid to stage the biggest sporting event, the FIFA World Cup in 2022, being the first Muslim and Middle Eastern country to do so. The blockading countries played strategically by creating the crisis in the region in a way to tarnish the image of the small state in front of the world and disrupt the infrastructural and diplomatic activities of the country.

Overall, it can be pointed out that blockade of Qatar was not based on any solid reasons as accused by the Saudi led coalition, rather it was certainly a preplanned political movement that was executed with vested objectives by the Saudi led coalition. The evidences that can be linked are the revolutionary transformation of Qatar and again the unilateral voice for a radical change, which is contradictory to ideals of the rest of the Arab world. In spite of the official refusal by Qatar of the offensive allegation, the blockading countries proceeded with their decision, without even sitting for a diplomatic discussion that would eliminate the differences of opinion and strengthen the political and economic atmosphere of the entire region. It signals that the disputing parties have crossed the red line of any political discourse and affirms that GCC alliance is governed by vested interests and is no longer instrumental.

2.5 Transformation within the Ruling Family and Security Standards

The world is changing at its fast phase in all areas, and the Gulf countries, particularly the GCC states, have changed drastically over the years in terms of infrastructure, economic practices and social life. However, the political atmosphere of

the countries has changed little. In reality, the Gulf countries are following authoritarian monarchial type of regime which is secular in nature. Arguably, the states remain rigid by adopting the classical political structure granting limited political rights to their citizens, whereas, during 90's the political scenario changed and the citizens were given more rights, including regarding women's participation and increased human rights. In short, historically the leadership of the GCC got its recognition (Alkhatib, n.d.; Pp. 3-4).

As stated by Peterson (2012; P. 5), for the last 40 to 70 years, the political scene of the Gulf states has been transformed, having evolved through three major leaderships: hereditary leadership, oil era (1970-1980) and oil regimes after 1990s to present. According to him the hereditary leadership constitutes the pre-oil era. In addition, Aydin (2013), added that the tribal tradition gave legitimacy to these regimes of these regions along with international support like the role of the British for most of the states. The rulers had to depend on the external influences to control frictions and invasion due to their minimal population sizes.

The introduction of the oil era from the beginning of the exploration of oil in the region till independence constitutes the second phase. The wealth derived from oil helped the ruling families extend their control over their states and expanded the infrastructure. Moreover, the ruling families exerted strong control over their population, maintaining severe censorship of all media and restricting public protests.

The third phase constitutes the current era from the 1990's until the present, which holds certain relaxing of the strong and often heavy handed authoritarianism exercised by the rulers, especially after the Arab Spring uprising in 2010. More importantly, this era has witnessed an educated and refined generation that holds less

dependency on the regime. Furthermore, unlike the previous era, the public has access to internet, satellite television and freedom of expression is granted to a certain degree.

El-Katiri (2013; P. 9) discusses the phenomenal changes occurring in Saudi Arabia after the Arab Spring movement. Various political groups that include liberals, Islamists, and female groups are advocating for a drastic political and constitutional reform that would transform the state to a constitutional monarchy. The reformists include academics, businessmen, and writers etc. who range from liberals to pan Arab nationalists. Accordingly, in March 2011, the Saudi citizens were granted the right to elect half the members of the municipal councils, and the women were granted the right to participate in the municipal elections.

The political situation is complex in Bahrain due to the political tension between the ruling elite and the opposition Shia forces. Similarly, there exists a wide gap for political reformation, according to the researcher. Even many radical groups are demanding for an absolute political change in the state from monarchy to republic. The UAE also faces voices for democratic reformation and voting rights for the citizens from the opposition Islamist Group, the Reform and Social Guidance Association.

Kinninmont (2019; Pp. 19-21) analyzes the change in the policy system that emerged in Saudi Arabia soon after the de facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman ascended, in contrast to King Abdullah. He adopted a sudden dramatic formulae for maximum effect but not a strategic action. The military intervention and coup in Yemen is an example of such an action led by Saudi Arabia. Similarly, the sudden announcement of the boycott on Qatar was also in contrast to the diplomatic policies that prevailed in the region. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's new style of policymaking also resembles that of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed in Abu Dhabi

and they both maintain mutual partnerships, thus the UAE was able to pressurize other states to impose stress on Qatar. Additionally, it is noted that both the crown princes are intolerant to criticisms. The approach of Saudi Arabia and the UAE in their dealing with the GCC issues underline the fact that they are striving to play leadership role in the region, which definitely questions the independent foreign policy and sovereignty of each member state. It is also pointed out that the GCC politics has had a strong element of personalization and some citizens criticize the GCC for acting as Club of Kings rather than of nations.

The significant steps adopted by Qatar before 2017 in a way demonstrate its solidarity with the GCC. Particularly, both as Bianco & Stansfield (2018; P. 621) and Ulrichsen (2020; P. 48) examine, since 2014 Qatar had aligned with Saudi Arabia and the UAE. It extended its support to Saudi Arabia for its actions in Syria, and joined the Saudi led operation in March 2015 against Houthis in Yemen. Additionally, Qatar was also a founding member of the Islamic Military Alliance to Fight Terrorism (IMAF), a Saudi led alliance established in December 2015. Moreover, Qatar had joined hands with Saudi Arabia that cut ties with Iran by withdrawing its ambassador from Tehran. On the other hand, Qatar maintained its foreign policy, as it did not support the policy of the Saudis and Emiratis in labelling Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist group, and continued to host important personalities of the Brotherhood. The Foreign Ministry of Qatar often stated that there were no any compelling reasons to adopt severe measures against the organization.

The Saudi led coalition never appreciated the unique foreign policy of Qatar and its acceptance in the region and in the wider world as a peace maker. It supports the theory of Walt (1987; P. 18) that the offensive power of the greater powers, that include the Saudi led bloc, poses a threat to Qatar and wanted to dominate Qatar and

make it a silent follower, despite its sovereignty and identity. Moreover, it never expected Qatar would turn out to be a prominent agency that upholds revolutionary perspectives. Above all, the rising economic prosperity being achieved by Qatar can also be a subjective reason for the blockading countries to halt its growth with the sanctions.

In spite of challenges, as Miller (2018; Location 48) assesses, Qatar could achieve forming an international opinion that Qatar is a victim of direct assault on its foreign policy caused by an alliance of larger powers, and their movement challenges the security and stability of the Arab region. In short, the blockade has created huge shadows on the diplomatic relationship of the GCC countries. Ulrichsen (2020; P. 255) remarks the scope of settling the disputes at the political level is complicated due to the anti-Qatari opinions prevailing in the senior leadership of the capitals like Abu Dhabi, Riyadh, Manama, and Cairo. The root of the crisis lies in Abu Dhabi and will indeed end there itself. Moreover, the content toxicity and spread of misinformation on social media complicated the situation beyond resolution. The above observations precisely highlight the fact that as long as the cyber war exists, any diplomatic resolution will be hard to establish in the region. The blockade of Qatar was initiated on the event of hacking of the QNA and the situation got worsened with the unfiltered and uncensored flow of misinformation on public media, and the same media networks restrict a possible solution and limit the unification.

In short, the geographical proximity of Qatar to the greater powers, the aggressive intensions on the underlined resentments and offensive power of the Saudi led bloc turned out to be fundamental reasons for the Gulf crisis that were triggered in the GCC states with the blockade.

2.6 Discussion

Having analyzed the conflict dynamics of the Gulf states, particularly that erupted with the blockade of Qatar in 2017, it is to be concluded that the sanction has been the result of an ongoing political situation in the region and it had been enrooted for decades. Admittedly, the movement paralyzed the six-member Gulf Cooperation Council that was created for ensuring political and economic stability. By imposing the embargo on Qatar, the Saudi led coalition acted like an uncivilized kingdom, as it aimed at pressing the country economically, politically and socially, and imposed threats on the country. Moreover, the demonstration of thirteen conditions for freezing the blockade that include the closure of Al Jazeera, cutting off economic relation with Iran etc. apparently suggest the submission of Qatar's identity for the authoritarian and vested interests of the blockading countries.

In fact, it is undeniable that any solution to the crisis in the region can emerge from mutual respect of dignity and sovereignty of each country. The crisis definitely questions the individuality of any modern society that supports principled ideals that are divergent from the yester years. The society of the present era is beyond the boundaries that look for universal brotherhood. Thus, the differences should be eliminated by sitting around the table and recognizing the geopolitical identities. All in all, the strength of GCC countries depends upon how united they stand. Accordingly, it is mandatory for the states to forget and forgive their differences for the progress of the region.

CHAPTER 3: STANDPOINT OF THE US ON THE 2017 GCC CRISIS

3.1 Introduction

The rise of oil era and the withdrawal of Britain in 1971 marked the entry of the US in the Gulf region and they assumed the responsibility of the Gulf security. Since then, the US has shared a significant partnership with the GCC countries individually and collectively for strategic reasons that benefit both the parties which, of course, ensured the regional order. However, the blockade of Qatar imposed by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt in 2017 underlines the fact that the US administration played a catalytic role led by Donald Trump for triggering the diplomatic breakdown of the GCC alliance. By siding with the blockading countries, instead of demonstrating a conflict resolution agenda, the US administration explicitly deviated from its fundamental principles of foreign policy. Despite the mediation efforts staged by the US to ease the rift between Qatar and the blockading countries, it is apparent that the US has been focusing on securing its own interests rather than bringing out an ultimatum to resolve the crisis.

Thus, the principal purpose of this chapter is to argue the statement that the changing perspective of the US foreign policy has affected the regional order of the Gulf countries and escalated the Gulf crisis. In order to explore and validate the statement, the chapter intends to deal with three sections:

1. Shifting Position of US Interest in the Middle East Under Different Leadership
2. Failure of Donald Trump as the Actor of US Foreign Policy with the Gulf Crisis
3. Difference of Mediation Roles Played by the US and Kuwait to Resolve the Gulf Crisis, and their Strategic Reasons

The study will consider how the existing scholarly literatures analyzes the role played by the US over the years in the Gulf countries focusing on the changing perspective of the US role in the region during different presidential administrations. Accordingly, it focuses on three sections. Section one analyses the strategic alliance of the US with GCC countries and how the unstable policy of the US under George W. Bush, Barak Obama and Donald Trump administration affected the atmosphere of the Gulf region. Section two examines how the US policy under the leadership of Trump aggravated the Gulf crisis due to his lack of quality. Finally, section three explores the varying mediation roles played by the US being the super power and Kuwait being a neighbor state. All the sections demonstrate the statement that the lack of stability in the US policy and the US-Gulf alliance affected and aggravated the crisis.

3.2 Shifting Position of US Interest in Middle East Under Different Leaderships

The US interest in the Middle East evolved for decades under different leaderships, and obviously their strategic, diplomatic relationship and interactions affected the regional order. Situated among three continents, the GCC countries hold strategic positions and these countries have been a busy arena for great power intervention and influence for decades. The successive US leadership was always identified as a security partner of this region and promoted friendly alliance with the GCC countries.

It can be stated that the US operates with the GCC countries due to several reasons that include security, energy, political and commercial domains. Kaban (2018; P. 41) illustrates that the regional order of the Gulf countries has been a major concern for the US since the time of the Cold war. It was prominently due to the reason that the GCC holds an international market for energy supply, and ensured a strong

bond with the GCC organization and at state level with the US. The researcher accounts that the US Qatari partnership started since the withdrawal of the British from the region in the 1970's, and particularly after the Gulf war in 1991. Both countries agreed on military cooperation and developed further their bilateral relationship in 2002 with the setting up of the US military headquarters at Al Udeid Air Base which is the largest in the Middle East, situated at the south west of Doha. It is said that Qatar invested around \$1 billion for constructing the base which is a home for the US Combined Air and Space Operations Center that can cover over 18 destination countries.

It is an undeniable fact that all the GCC countries have long secured their partnership with the US as the protection shield to secure the states from external and internal threats. According to Walt (1987; Pp. 264-265) the states in the Middle East form alliances chiefly to deal with threats from their neighboring states. It is due to the reason that their neighbors are more dangerous than the superpower, mostly because of the geographic proximity, aggregate power and offensive intentions. The US military bases in the GCC states are an indirect form of balancing against potential threats.

Significantly, the alliance benefited both the parties, including with military advantages. However, the strategic alliance of the GCC with the US has majorly weakened, particularly since the change in US administration under Obama's presidency. In other words, the alliance of the US with the GCC has fluctuated, as the US is preoccupied with its own agenda which is against the alliance principles of the GCC nations. There has been a distinct difference between executions of the US foreign policy for dealing with the GCC affairs under different leadership.

Al-Qahtani (2018; P. 3) examines the differences of the US foreign policy practiced especially between Bush and Obama towards the Middle East. In fact, the US

adopted a foreign policy in the region known as Carter Doctrine which meant that any assault on the Middle East would be treated as a threat to the US interests and it would be defeated accordingly. In time, the US policy relied on three axes such as enhancing the military potentiality of the GCC, enabling the GCC countries to adopt a collective security system, and making each state to develop appropriate defensive framework in order to maintain the bilateral security. However, after the September 11 incidents, there erupted conflict between the US and some of the Gulf countries that were exposed to the US pressures. The Bush administration stressed on certain objectives such as a) war on terror b) elimination of 'Axis of Evil Countries' that included Iran and Iraq, due to their strategy for nuclear weapons and c) the establishment of democracy in the Middle East.

Al-Qahtani (2018; Pp. 10-11) also notes down that the US administration related the cause of the September 11 incident was impacted by lack of political and economic freedom in the Middle East. Accordingly, the US policy in the Middle East also stressed on political and education reform in the region, particularly in Saudi Arabia as 15 of the Saudis had taken part in the September 11 attack. It can be seen that the Bush leadership adopted a strategic view that focused on democracy and political reform that values human rights. The GCC countries supported the US assault on Afghanistan combating terrorism. One of the major issues of the Middle East during Bush's time was the invasion of Iraq. In order to conduct a comprehensive fight against Iraq, the US was also given land facilities by the GCC countries. Iran was severely pressurized by the Bush administration, who stated that Iran supported terrorism and possessed nuclear weapons. Above all the Bush administration adopted the foreign policy which was in accordance with the GCC countries.

It can be argued that the US leadership under Obama witnessed change in the approach of its foreign policy with the Middle East, as he adopted a flexible diplomacy by following soft power mechanism instead of using military force. In particular, Obama inherited the policy of Bush that emphasized democracy and was criticized to change the Iraqi regime under the cover of democracy with force by damaging human rights. He also stressed on the point that the change for democracy must come from inside, and it is observed that his campaign for democracy led to the intervention of Islamic groups like Islamists in Iraq, Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt that led to outbreak of the Arab Spring movement in 2010.

The Arab Spring caused a shocking change in the politics and strained the bilateral relations of the US with the Middle East. Yetiv & Oskarsson (2018; P. 36) observe that the Arab Spring caused a shocking change in the politics and strained the bilateral relations in the Middle East. Obama's support to throw off the president of Egypt created speculation in the US interests in the Middle East, as it was opposed to the policy of the Saudi led alliance. Saudi warned US that it would aid Egypt, if the US stopped funding Egypt, which amounted to \$1.5 billion yearly. The alliance between the US and the GCC countries was markedly affected due to the emergence of the US and Iran relationship. The nuclear deal, Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) signed in July 2015 between the International powers (5+1: The five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, including the United States, plus Germany) and Iran prompted the GCC countries to suspect that the US ignored the interests of the GCC by accepting the nuclear ambitions of Iran.

The failure of the US to act collaboratively with Gulf countries in line with the GCC policy aggravated the scenario in the Middle East. Katzman (2015) and Bahi (2017) demonstrate that the GCC states criticized the Iranian nuclear deal as it would

affect the regional security, and would give more opportunities for Iran to possess more resources, modernize its weapons and get opportunities for aiding regional conflicts while it would also improve the US-Iranian relationship. Moreover, it would enable Iran to emerge as a regional leader and project its power and dominance in the region. On the other hand, Obama viewed that by the nuclear deal Gulf security would be improved, the political economy of Iran would be progressed, Saudi Arabia and Iran could cooperate for a political solution in Yemen, the territorial disputes between the UAE and Iran on Abu Musa and Tunb islands in the Persian Gulf could be resolved, and finally, Iran can integrate its energy solutions with Kuwait, Oman and Bahrain. However, it can be seen that the US failed to convince the Saudi led countries of its strategic objectives. Rather the agreement led to further tensions and escalated arms sale in the region.

Scott (2016; P. 67) reports, in view of the strained relation, Obama sent an invitation to the leaders of the GCC countries to attend the meeting at Camp David with an ambition to ease their concern and strengthen the security corporation in the Middle East. The meeting was attended by only the Emir of Qatar and Kuwait, and the other GCC countries sent their high-ranking officials. Jointly the members agreed on the new US-GCC strategic partnership that would promote the US interests and would stand against any external assault.

The security concern of the GCC on the Iranian nuclear agreement supported by the US became evident, as Iran tested a ballistic missile in October 2015 against the UN Security resolutions, and Obama refused impose any sanctions against Iran. Both Quilliam (2019; P. 115) and Al-Qahtani (2018; P. 14) assert that the change of the US policy with the nuclear plan with Iran affected its dealing with the GCC and it was remarked that the reformed US-Iran relation would challenge the GCC security. The

GCC countries termed the renewed alliance as the betrayal of GCC interests by the US. According to the study of Asisian (2018), the objective of the Obama doctrine was to establish a neighborhood between Saudi Arabia and Iran and to create 'cold peace' in order to bring an end to the hostility in the region.

However, the nuclear deal caused wider rift in the Gulf region and increased the purchase of military weapons especially with the US in order to cope with any adverse conditions. The agreement turned out to be an opportunity for the US to sell their large quantity of weapons. It can be affirmed that the stance of the US was not about the diplomacy, but about arms merchandise and sales. Markedly, Trump absolutely reversed the policy of the US upon Iran, declaring that it was developing ballistic missiles and supporting terrorism and extremism. Accordingly, the US withdrew from the JCPOA on 8 May 2018 and restored the sanctions against Iran within six months of his arrival. The Trump administration went on further by emphasizing on 'America first' (Han & Hakimian 2019; P. 14).

It can be noticed that Iran has increased its missile tests after Trump has come to power and imposed sanctions on it, which, in fact, has strained the atmosphere in the Middle East. In other words, Trump administration acted upon Iran as per the agenda purposed by the blockading countries that never wanted Iran to have a significant role or position in the Middle East. Admittedly, the stance of the blockading countries and the US have triggered the crisis in the Middle East.

In conclusion, the study argues that the US foreign policy towards the Middle East does not have any continuity, and obviously, the flexibility of policy under different leadership has affected the security atmosphere of the Gulf region. Bush leadership failed to achieve its objectives, as he adopted hard power to pressurize the

governments. Obama leadership preferred soft power mechanism to implement the US interests such dialogues and negotiations etc., but could not cater to the interests of the GCC states uniformly. Trump adopted unstable policies to follow his personalized ambitions under the cover of the US objectives which were not in line with the US foreign policy of the region.

3.3 Failure of Donald Trump Being the Actor of US Foreign Policy on the Gulf Crisis

Over the decades the US has played a significant role in the Middle East, being the mediator of peace. However, due to the lack of experience in dealing with the principles of US foreign policy in the Middle East, Trump played ‘know-nothing’, and his undiplomatic and derogatory remarks on Qatar led to unprecedented discord in the Gulf region in accordance with the blockade.

Cafiero (2019; Pp.127-128) examines the blockade of Qatar imposed by the Saudi led coalition in 2017 by pointing out the fact that Trump’s presidency was the major catalyst for the crisis. In spite of being the key mediator of all the GCC states for long, Trump aggravated the scenario by altering the US foreign policy. On the other hand, under the leadership of Obama, the US frustrated any possible movement against Qatar during the Gulf crisis in 2014 led by the Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain. Arguably, the entry of Trump was an instrumental opportunity for the Saudi led alliance to distort the foreign policy of the US, as he had indicated his preference for disregarding the conventional decision making lasted for decades and to renew the US foreign policy that was contrary to his predecessors’ perspective of international affairs. The study indicates the fact that the US current foreign policy is not concrete and clear

towards the GCC countries for perpetual stability, and the dilemma of the US under different leadership sustains the crisis in the region.

Ulrichsen (2020; P. 2) also criticizes the lack of values of the US leadership led by Trump by stating that in the recent history of the US never has a presidential administration come to office with an apparent lack of policy making experience and lack of interests or values.

Cafiero (2019; P. 134) points out the failure of Trump for demonstrating the existing foreign policy of the US by stating,

“To the rulers of Saudi Arabia and the UAE, the Trump White House appeared to be operating in the same personalized top-down manner as their own royal courts in Riyadh or Abu Dhabi”.

In addition to that, the inexperience of Trump along with his circle of senators for pursuing the diplomatic approach to the Middle East issues, his acute opposition to Iran, Muslim brotherhood and the tweets demonstrated how the Trump’s interest, being as the president-elect and as the commander-in-chief, was influenced by Saudi led coalition. The researcher argues the US has been the center of the crisis from the beginning and *“the Anti-Terror Quartet”* would not have sanctioned the blockade on Qatar if Trump had not won the election in 2016. It is argued that the Trump presidency was the most significant factor that persuaded the blockading countries to alienate Qatar from the GCC coalition.

Cafiero (2019; P. 134) also observes during the campaign for presidential election, Trump characterized the Muslim Brotherhood as the radical group and thus supported the views of Riyadh and Abu Dhabi by criticizing Obama’s view on the Arab

Spring movement of 2011. Frank Gaffney, an advisor of Trump, stated that the movement of the Sunni Islamist is based on;

“Destroying Western civilization from within” and “its penetration and manipulation of the Republican Party and the conservative movement in America which is the most successful influence operations”.

Kabalan (2018; P. 36) criticizes the stance of the Trump on the crisis in the Gulf, saying it was contradictory since the beginning. The president campaigned and supported the thirteen draconian demands of the anti-Qatar alliance. Surprisingly, he even boasted for the movement that isolated Qatar, and stressed that segregating Qatar was a victory for him by alleging that Qatar acted as a major source of extremism, and imposing pressure on Qatar marked the start of ending terrorism.

Arguably, the hostile words of Trump supported the agenda of the blockading countries to impose the blockade of Qatar and it substantiates that his words were deliberate as prompted by the coalition. The stance of the US had been a key element for decades that determined the stability of the GCC states. The previous leaderships of the US followed the line of foreign policy that obviously protected the interests of the US and the GCC, irrespective of varying differences of opinion. However, it proves that Trump was not bothered by the requirement for securing the US policy rather he was, unquestionably, controlled by the pre-drafted words of the coalition.

Researchers like Ulrichsen (2018) also agree with the statement that the unexpected victory, lack of policy making ability and political inexperience of Trump gave a way for outsiders to shape the foreign policy under of the new president, and that led to less rooted values. It was absolutely a favorable time for Saudi Arabia and the UAE to personalize the US policy for their own motives, projecting their views, and

lobbying the US as a “*gate keeper*”. It is reported that Mohammed bin Zayed, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, travelled to New York for a short informal meeting at Trump tower without any media notice. He met Jared Kushner, son in law of Trump and who was responsible for advising the White House related to MENA foreign policy, Steve Bannon and Michael Flynn the campaign advisors and who became the National Security advisor of the White House later. In particular, Jared Kushner developed a close relationship with Yousef al-Otaiba, the ambassador of the UAE to Washington. His words were quoted by *Politico*, an American Political Media, as “*he did all the asking, and I did all the talking*”. Ulrichsen (2020) and Cafiero (2019; P. 137) report that Jared Kushner made an unannounced visit to Riyadh in order to deepen the relationship with Mohammed bin Salman, and both of them were said to have spent several nights by “*swapping stories and planning strategy*” obviously for the favor of the Saudi led alliance coalition against Qatar. The above reports validate the view that the blockade of Qatar was a preplanned operation, and the blockading countries could successfully lobby the US administration for certifying their targets.

In addition to these developments, it is to be underlined that Trump and his team had vested interests in their dealing with the crisis, or they were obliged to act in accordance with the script of the blockading countries. Ulrichsen (2018) and Krieg (2019; P. 106) share the point by noting that Elliot Broidy, one of the fundraisers of the US election for Trump who had worked with George Nader, a business magnate of Lebanese, pressurized the White House to assume an anti-Qatari position. It is also reported that both Yousef al-Otaiba and Elliot Broidy were acting in accordance with Mohammed bin Zayed. In order to push the White House to enact harshly on Qatar, they were promised of worthwhile business contracts in the UAE. Similar to the active

lobbying efforts of Broidy at the White House with the tune of the UAE, the advisors of Trump, the Hudson Institute and Foundation for the Defense of Democracy were convinced of the monetary support from Abu Dhabi in order to project Qatar as the terrorist sponsor. Apart from these movements, the UAE attributed the hacked emails of QNA, that became a catalyst for the embargo, to Qatar's Emir. Certainly, the framework work was with an intention to get the approval of Trump for the blockade. Their endeavors materialized in influencing the policy makers of Washington, and notably, the first foreign visit of Trump as American President was to Saudi Arabia in May 2017, which was contrary to his predecessors whose first visit were to Canada or Mexico (Ulrichsen 2018; P. 75).

It can be seen that by the time Trump's preference to make his first foreign visit to Riyadh, the Saudi led coalition had been successful in their attempt to persuade the US administration to support the hostile actions on Qatar. Arguably, the blockade was sanctioned with the knowledge of Trump, and his inflammatory tweet immediately after the blockade proves the claim;

"During my recent trip to the Middle East I stated that there can no longer be funding of Radical Ideology. Leaders pointed to Qatar... 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. Perhaps this will be the beginning of the end to the horror of terrorism" (Ulrichsen 2018; P. 76).

Lynch (2017) criticizes the tweets of the president stating that his words gave absolute approval for the unprecedented hostile movement against Qatar. In fact, according to the researcher, the words of Trump might not have been in accordance with the acknowledgement of the rest of his administration nor they were aware of the

repercussions of supporting the blockading countries against Qatar, which hosts the largest military base of the US in the Middle East. However, Trump also expressed his stance for confrontation with Iran by embracing the agenda of Saudi led axis.

In fact, Trump's statements prove that he was unaware of the substantial partnership fostered between both Qatar and the US, chiefly, the strategic military alliance held between both of these countries or ignored the relevance of the relationship.

The studies of Ulrichsen (2020; P. 37) and Des Roches (2017) assert that particularly, since the relocation of the US Central Command (CENTCOM) to Qatar during the tenure of Bush in the 2000s when Saudi Arabia had pressed the US Central Command to relocate its Air Operations Command Centre out of Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia, Qatar welcomed the US to host its headquarters in its own soil. The advisers of Trump were fully convinced of the vitality of maintaining the diplomacy with Qatar, as the base at Al-Udeid is situated at a strategic location for the US operations, which is capable of handling any US aircraft along with the capacity for fueling and ammunition storage. Moreover, the base is the headquarters of the US Special Operations Central Command and US Air Force Central Command with its advanced infrastructure built with substantial funding from Qatar. The researcher also points out the second military facility of the US situated in Qatar called As-Sayliyah Army Base which offers several comprehensive services like warehouses and is fully equipped. During the American Operations in Iraq in 2003 As-Sayliyah Army Base was very crucial for the US operations. The bases also have enabled the US to carry out its operations in Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq and other missions. As a matter of fact, it can be seen that the relocation of these bases from Qatar upon the hostile remarks by Trump would have ignited an inexplicable impact on the US imposed by Qatar. The bases were

not about the huge investment alone, but deploying the base from a secure unit would invite lots of complications for the US, as CENTCOM was not only for protecting Qatar, but they also had to demonstrate and project their power for various objectives. Ulrichsen (2020; P. 71) emphasizes the preparedness of the sanctions on Qatar in his studies. Coincidentally, on the same day of the hacking of Qatar News Agency, Foundation for the Defense of Democracies (FDD), which had been funded by the UAE, had an anti-Qatar conference which was attended by prominent think tanks in Washington. Robert Gates, the former US secretary of defense during Bush and Obama administrations, was the notable participant in it. The agenda of the conference consisted of 'The Muslim Brotherhood, Qatar, The US-Qatar relationship: risks and rewards' etc. In his speech, Robert Gates stated, "...tell Qatar to choose sides or we will change the nature of the relationship, to include downscaling the base". It emerged that he had been in contact with Al-Otaiba, the ambassador of the UAE to the US, the night before the FDD event. These words of Robert Gates indicate the strategical preparation of the hostile sanctions on Qatar maneuvered with the support of the US.

The Trump administration failed to perceive the hidden motif of the blockading countries that had been devising for long, and his support on them marked a huge impact. Krieg (2019; Pp. 107-108) reports that the coalition had been preparing for their assault on Qatar since the Arab Spring. He compares the approach of both Qatar and the UAE with their difference in ideology and execution of soft power in relation to the Arab Spring movement. While Qatar invested money and its efforts with a view to support the people who are struggling under authoritarian regimes with the help of Al Jazeera networks, the Emirates invested in counter revolutionists in order to reverse the achievements of Qatar, and went further strategically to campaign against Qatar. In other words, contrary to the policy of Qatar, the Emirates weaponized its policy

utilizing the communication network. They used their allies of conservative advisers of the US, media, and main policy makers since 2014 with a purpose to assault Qatar. It indicates the fact that the blockade of Qatar was not based any reasons rather it was a meticulously preplanned agenda of the blockading countries that lasted for a period of time, supported by the Trump leadership.

Cafiero (2019; Pp. 138-140) also agrees with Lynch (2017) that Trump's abrupt action proved his lack of administration against Qatar by stating an example that shortly after the controversial tweet by the president, Rex Tillerson, the then US Secretary of State and chief foreign affairs adviser to Trump, and Jim Mattis, Secretary of Defense pressurized the president to adopt a neutral and moderate policy regarding the blockade of Qatar, with an objective to settle the dispute in order to safe guard the interests of the US in the Middle East. Accordingly, with in a short span of time after Trump's harsh tweets on the high officials of Qatar, the White House refused to comment on Trump's tweet and declared that America was obliged to the Doha's support for its regional order and stability. Interestingly, Trump also changed his stance soon, and conveyed his gratefulness to Emir of Qatar for supporting the US effort against terrorism. Moreover, he signed to \$12 billion fighter jet deal with Qatar. Further to the relaxing stance of the US, Tillerson visited to Qatar, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia with a purpose to resolve the crisis. Furthermore, on July 11, Doha and the US signed to a memorandum on combating terrorism and similarly, both the countries exchanged their first strategic dialogue on counterterrorism. Rex Tillerson appreciated Qatar's response to the actions of the blockading countries as 'very reasonable'. It is also to be highlighted that Trump spoke to the CBN News in the same month, saying Washington is "*going to have a good relationship with Qatar and not going to have a problem with the military base*". Obviously, the reversal of stance by Trump was caused by the pressure held by

Tillerson, according to Ulrichsen's statement, as he "*knows probably more than anyone else in the US the true value of the Qatari partnership to the US*".

Another major factor that compelled Trump to reverse his tweet against Qatar was obviously the economic interests of the US over Qatar that has lasted for a long time. For example, as the study of Enos and Stohl (2017) illustrates, the huge investment carried out by the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) and Qatar's Sovereign Wealth Fund (SWF) supported the economy of the US, especially in cities like New York, Chicago and Phoenix to recover from its economic recession in 2008. Moreover, the major US academic institutions and universities located in Qatar, such as Cornell, Carnegie Mellon, Georgetown, Texas A&M, and Virginia, have enabled the educational and economic association between Qatar and the US. Furthermore, Doha plays a key role in arms purchase from the US which is a major concern. For example, Qatar invested \$9 billion for purchasing weapons like missile defense equipment, javelin missiles and apache attack helicopters and \$1 billion for the construction of the base. In spite of his provocative tweet that supported the blockading countries, Trump thanked the emir of Qatar later for its efforts to counter terrorism and extremism, and appreciated the emir as a "great friend. you have become a very big advocate and we appreciate it" Ulrichsen (2020; P. 211).

Solhdoost (2018) agrees with Kabalan (2018) that Trump lacked a clear foreign policy and was more invested in personal gains. The researchers assert that Kushner, who was responsible for the Middle East affairs, associated the US foreign policy successfully with the countries that offer and promote business deals. As is evident, he asserts, the first foreign visit of Trump to Riyadh was a business trip, because during this visit, Trump signed \$350 billion for Saudi investment. The researchers point out during the campaign for the US presidential election, Saudi Arabia and the UAE had

discussions about business concerns with Jared Kushner and Michael Flynn, and it was conducted through the mediator, George Nader, who became the advisor of Trump. Nadir also had interactions with Elliot Broidy, the major fund raiser of Trump. In short, his partnership with Elliot Broidy led to him to win the deal of \$200 million for his personal business in the UAE. It is highlighted that Trump was obliged to side with the two countries, and naturally rejected Qatar and Iran. It makes the point clear that the foreign policy of the US was not a priority for Trump more important than with his financial concerns.

The massive sanctions imposed upon Qatar by the blockading countries with the support of Trump indicate the reality that their actions were caused by strategic miscalculations. As the alliance had anticipated, the US did not venture out further by sidelining Qatar. Rather, it can be seen that the US adopted a strategic role when it realized that it had to lose more than gain from the crisis standing against Qatar, and accordingly, it pivoted to play a neutral role or as a mediator by creating a feeling that it was trying to mitigate the crisis. From the analysis, it can be concluded that the major motive for the US to revise its policy was for sustaining its interests that involve economic and military goals which compelled Trump to act differently. However, the inconsistent decisions taken by Trump need to be examined and reveal the fact that Trump was driven with vested interests more than sticking to the foreign policy of the US.

In conclusion, it can be affirmed from the above studies that the blockade of Qatar was triggered by the unstable US foreign policy held by Trump who openly expressed his intolerance and the absence of diplomatic principles for protecting his personal interests and obligations to the Saudi led bloc. Furthermore, Trump failed to initiate a constructive discourse to ease the crisis in the region as the previous leadership

committed but ensured the ongoing business deals superior to the international relationship.

3.4 Difference of Mediation Roles Played by the US and Kuwait to Resolve the Gulf Crisis, and their Strategic Reasons

The diplomatic conflict sanctioned against Qatar can in fact be termed as the Gulf crisis, as the impact of the crisis was not inclusive to Qatar, but its repercussion reached the social, political and economic spheres of the entire region. The crisis would have led to heavy impact on the region unless the small states had not intervened timely with their efforts.

There have been a number of mediation attempts conducted by various agencies after the blockade in order to deescalate the conflicts between Qatar and the blockading countries with a view to restore stability in the region. Particularly Turkey demonstrated its solidarity with Qatar in the field of commerce, education and military cooperation for meeting any challenge, and carried out a number of joint maritime exercise that precisely checked over any impending military action on Qatar by the blockading countries. The European countries like France and the UK expressed that it was extremely important for the GCC countries to stand united for the stability of the region and supported the mediation efforts of Kuwait. As Walt (1987; P. 33) expressed, the motive for the mediation roles played by the other countries were to restore an ideological solidarity among the GCC states that had been emergent from the alliances of states that share political, cultural or other traits. However, although the US had been the guarantor of security in the Gulf region, it did not appear to conduct mediation roles effectively. On the other hand, Kuwait initiated significant attempts to mediate the rift between Qatar and the Saudi led coalition.

The constructive role of Kuwait in the GCC for unifying the opposing members can be interpreted as unbiased as it did not hold any vested interests apart from ending the conflicts. The evidence for the exceptional stance of Kuwait is commented and interpreted by Baker (2017). According to him, both Qatar and the Saudi led coalition approached Kuwait when the diplomatic ties were damaged in the region, but both the parties had different objectives for seeking the mediation of Sheikh Sabah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Emir of Kuwait. As far as Qatar was concerned, Kuwait was a trustworthy friend and believed it could easily resolve the rift. On the other hand, the Saudi led coalition perceived that Kuwait could mediate in the crisis in order to restrict the influence of the other parties. In spite of wide support by the international community on the mediation role of Al-Sabah, Kuwait could not achieve the desired goals primarily due to the noxious efforts of the US played by Trump and lack of enthusiasm by the coalition.

Ulrichsen (2018) also reports the efforts of Kuwait taken under the leadership of Sheikh Sabah to lessen the crisis in the region. Although his attempts could not succeed completely, it was basically due to his constant diplomatic efforts that the blockade did not lead to the military action in the region.

Fraithat (2020) demonstrates that the mediation roles can be categorized as the superpower intervention. For example, the initiative of the US and the small state intervention which was carried out by Kuwait. It can be stated that the mediations efforts carried out by both the powers were based obviously on certain strategic reasons, and both the parties had a strong connection with the primary parties that enabled them to conduct the negotiation talks.

The vital reason for Kuwait for resolving the crisis was centered on strengthening the GCC alliance as a whole for ensuring the security and stability of the region. Another major evidence that asserts the incredible mediation role played by Kuwait in the GCC is during the tensions that escalated with the Arab Spring in 2010. The movement escalated particularly in Egypt, and the change of power happened due to the involvement of Qatar by supporting the uprising with the media coverage of Al Jazeera network created unrest in the GCC. In fact, due to the support given by Qatar for the democratic process in Egypt, there occurred diplomatic conflict against Qatar by the Saudi led GCC countries, and the mediation efforts and timely intervention initiated by Kuwait at Riyadh deescalated the tension into worsening further. Kabalan (2018) accounts the meeting of the GCC countries proposed to agree upon certain norms such as ending media campaigns, keeping aloof from intervening the foreign affairs of other countries, stopping supporting of political revolutions, avoiding giving citizenship for the people of other states who oppose to their governments and defending common interests. The agreements did not reach the objectives and the respective countries withdrew their ambassadors in March 2014. Kuwait made efforts then to unite the members and the countries agreed with the Riyadh Supplementary Agreement in November 2014 by abiding the set norms mainly supporting the Arab Republic of Egypt and its security and wellbeing. The efforts of Kuwait resolved the crisis and the ambassadors returned to Doha. Notably the next GCC summit was conducted in Doha on 14th December 2014.

Assuredly, Kuwait could actively intervene the affairs of the conflicting members and could pressurize or soften the parties to resolve the dispute and restore the harmony in the region fundamentally due to its neutrality. Moreover, Sheikh Sabah, being a well-respected and accepted mediator by other GCC countries, could effectively

mediate the talks. In short, Kuwait's neutral position enabled the state to conduct the discourse unlike other mediators.

On the other hand, the US intervention in the Gulf crisis of 2017 had been categorical and it differed extensively from the efforts carried out by Kuwait. Arguably, the inflammatory tweets of Trump escalated the crisis, in spite of the fact that he appreciated the efforts of Qatar in its stance against antisocial movements in the later stage and conducted peace talks. However, the position of the US throughout was skeptical as it had deliberate goals to attain from the crisis.

Al Ansari (2018; P. 45) reports that the worst weakness of the White House to resolve the conflict was its want of readiness. It is argued the US did not have the genuine interest to end the Gulf crisis, rather it pressured the Gulf states for purchasing more weapons produced at Washington that would support the job opportunities of his people. Evidently, as Fraithat (2020) notes, Trump stated about his meeting with Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, the Emir of Qatar, in May 2017 that both the US and Qatar had been friends for long and appreciated the deal with Qatar for the purchase of "*lots of beautiful military equipment*". Accordingly, Qatar had a deal of \$12 billion with the US a few days before the blockade for the purchase of F-15 fighter jets. In addition to it, during the visit of Qatar's Emir to the US in 2019, Trump praised Qatar for its move for purchasing a significant volume of weapons from the US. Apart from the arms deal, during the crisis the business deals also expanded to other areas. For instance, Qatar Investment Authority announced to enhance its investments in the US from \$30 billion to 45 billion in two years. The researcher also accounts the arms deals agreed between the US and Saudi Arabia on the context of the crisis. Trump often stated that Saudi Arabia and the US had a deal of \$110 billion after his first visit to Riyadh.

Another key strategic objective for the US to undertake mediation roles had been for shaping new agreements with the GCC countries that fulfill their security interests related to counterterrorism and enhancing security measures. Both Cafiero (2019; P. 140) and Fraithat (2020; P. 88) note down, Qatar and the US got into a security agreement just after the blockade in 2017, known as Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for “Combating terrorism financing”. Similarly, in 2019, the US agreed on an MoU with Qatar in order to support Al Udeid Air base in Doha with a purpose of enhancing the security measures. During the ceremony when both the parties signed the agreements, US secretary of state, Mike Pompeo said:

“As the host of hundreds, excuse me, as the host of thousands of US military personnel and the US Central Command (CENTCOM) forward headquarters, this base is key to American security and our shared efforts to promote regional stability” (Air force Technology, 2019).

It can also be asserted that although the GCC conflict has helped the US positively expand its military collaboration with the GCC countries during the crisis of 2017, a major consideration for the US for initiating talks on resolving conflicts in the GCC had been its strategic concern on the Iran issues. Apparently, it believes that the divided GCC negatively impacts the effort of the US to challenge the influence of Iran in the region. Noticeably, Qatar strengthened its diplomatic and economic activities with Iran when the sanctions were imposed on it. As a matter of great concern, the unification of the GCC had been vital for the US to maintain its interests in the region. Precisely, more than conducting mediation efforts in order to unify the GCC alliance as Kuwait had been attempting to achieve, the US was bothered by the enhanced influence of Iran in the region during the crisis, and it wanted to counter the efforts. According to David Schenker, the US diplomat for the Middle East: *“Kuwait and the*

United States have tried to mediate a rift that has undermined Washington's efforts to form a united front against Iran, which is struggling for regional supremacy with Saudi Arabia" (Al Jazeera, 2020).

It was under this perspective that the Arab NATO was formed in 2018 by collaborating the GCC countries, Egypt and Jordan. The primary objective for the force was to 'act as a counter balance against Iran'. According to Miller & Sokolsky (2018) Arab NATO *"Serves as a bulwark against Iranian aggression, terrorism, extremism, and will bring stability to the Middle East"*.

Overall, the divergent mediation roles set by the US and Kuwait explicitly assert the fact that the conflict in the GCC broke out in 2017 was dealt by these countries with different strategies and perspectives. When Kuwait went on with its measures to unify the states that had been standing aloof from its alliance, the US utilized the occasion for marketing its weapons and securing the ambitious goals of Trump. As Baker (2017) highlights the efforts of Kuwait remain futile, and the fundamental line is: *"Without at least neutralising Trump's negative influence in the crisis and applying pressure on the Saudi-led bloc to participate in meaningful negotiations, Kuwait will likely have no chance to succeed in its mission"*.

3.5 Discussion

The perspective of the US in its dealing with the GCC affairs has drastically affected the balance of the GCC over the years under different leaderships. Irrespective of being the major security partner of the GCC states and sharing strategic alliance with them, the US under Trump leadership played a key role for the unprecedented disruption of the GCC alliance in 2017. It was basically due to his lack of competency in handling the US foreign policy and personalized approach with the blockading

countries that the crisis became unresolved. The mediation roles initiated by Kuwait for mitigating the conflict have had a positive outcome as its intervention helped to reduce the rift and positively impacted the countries. On the other side, the intervention by the super power headed by the US has not been effective till the date, as the intervention has been framed with vested strategic interests that promoted increased arms purchases in the region. In short, if there is a genuine 'WILL' for a change, the US can significantly mediate with the states by persuading them for the restoration of stability of the GCC.

CHAPTER 4: THE REGIONAL IMPACT OF CHANGING POWER DYNAMICS

4.1 Introduction

The Gulf crisis that escalated with the diplomatic breakdown and the implementation of blockade of Qatar in June 2017 by the Saudi led coalition has triggered major repercussions in the Gulf region since then. In spite of significant mediation efforts conducted by various parties like Kuwait and the US, the stability of the region has not been restored till the date. Primarily, the political crisis has immensely affected the social framework of the families that share close knit cultures in the region beyond the differences of borders for centuries, as they were alienated immediately after the sanctions. Arguably, the embargo was intended for profound economic instability and heightened political uncertainty over Qatar, in line with the contradictory stance of the US. On the other hand, the blockade has disturbed and impacted the entire region at various dimensions over the past three years. It has exposed remarkable resilience of Qatar against the political and economic threat imposed by the boycotting countries.

The chapter proposes to analyze how the geopolitical tensions of 2017 have impacted the political atmosphere and the economy of the Gulf region and redesigned the map of the GCC alliances, by exploring the following research sub-questions:

1. How has the diplomatic rift impacted the political atmosphere of the GCC?
2. To what extent does the blockade and the surrounding geopolitical tensions affect the Gulf economics?
3. How has Qatar undergone the challenges of the embargo?

The chapter has adopted many scholarly resources to examine the impact of the Gulf crisis that was intensified by the embargo on Qatar since 2017. Primarily, the reviews consider the intended objectives of the blockade of Qatar desired by the blockading countries, and analyze different segments such as how the conflict transformed the Gulf region by splitting its political atmosphere, and its economy. Moreover, the chapter analyzes also how Qatar has been forced to undergo the crisis by adopting unique strategic policy.

4.2 How has the Diplomatic Rift Impacted the Political Atmosphere of the GCC?

The diplomatic sanctions against Qatar in 2017 can be stated as a political movement that was imposed by the political coalition of powers like Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt. The chief accusation charged against Qatar was that it supported terrorism and their regional rival, Iran. Owing to the political influence of the coalition, other countries like Yemen, Mauritius, Mauritania, the Maldives and Libya also supported the sanctions by suspending their diplomatic relations with Qatar. Apparently, the blockading countries cut off their relation with Qatar on the event of the online war, that is, related to the hacking of the state-run Qatar News Agency (QNA). The Agency was accused of publishing statements that were attributed to the Emir of Qatar, Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani appreciating Iran and the Islamist groups like Hamas, Hezbollah and the Muslim Brotherhood. On the other hand, Qatar denied the accusations charged against it and criticized the movement for the abrupt blockade on it. In fact, a deep analysis of the scenario reveals that the sanctions were the result of a meticulously calculated, collective political movement with an objective to isolate Qatar. However, the outbreak has impacted the entire region and has divided the political unity of the GCC states. The following studies demonstrate the answer for the question.

As it has been analyzed previously in chapter two al, H. A. M., Tok, M. E., & Gagoshidze, T. (2019; P. 331) point out that Saudi led coalition, in order to get the support for the blockade from their allying countries, accused and campaigned that Qatar supported terrorism, especially through the media network of Al Jazeera and notably with the relationship with Iran. The researchers assert that the UAE was behind the hacking of the QNA, and though they refused the involvement, the US intelligence department confirmed it:

“The UAE orchestrated the entire crisis by hacking into Qatari government websites and planting false and provocative statements attributed to the Qatari Emir, which the Saudis and others then used to begin the pressure campaign against Doha”.

The Arab Centre for Research & Policy Studies (2020) points out that the blockade was carried out soon after the Riyadh Summit on May 20-21, 2017 which was attended by Donald Trump, the US president and the leaders of fifty Muslim majority countries. It was reported that the QNA was hacked just on the third day after the summit with the aforementioned statements. It can be seen that as the above study states, there was an absence of a real reason for the sudden diplomatic breakdown, in spite of the official clarification and denial of the fabricated statements officially published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA).

The political movement by the coalition led by Saudi Arabia was not absolutely based on the fake news and not developed overnight, whereas it has been researched that the sanctions were the outcome of meticulous and strategic political plans built over the years in order to isolate Qatar. The accused fake news was merely a reason or justification for their unreasonable radical movement, but it turned out to be a catalyst for massive political war launched to isolate Qatar from the international community.

Frisk (2019; P. 1) reports the immediate impact of the political movement in the region followed by the sanctions was the expulsion of Qatari citizens from the blockading countries and prevention of their citizens to enter the borders of Qatar, sanctioning the embargo that banned Qatar to access the land, air and sea routes. Certainly, the hacking instigated the war of words between Qatar and the Saudi led alliance which led to an intensified political atmosphere. The Arab Centre for Research & Policy Studies (2020) emphasizes that the severe steps taken against the people were first time in the history of the Arab states and the intentions behind the harsh terms were hostile. Certainly, it was with a purpose to force Qatar to surrender to the terms designed by the blockading countries who were supported by the US.

In spite of the fact that the root reason for the immediate closure of the diplomatic relationship with Qatar was upon the said accusations, the Saudi led alliance dictated thirteen hardcore conditions for lifting the blockade of Qatar. The terms assert the point that the blockading countries purposed to delimit the unique foreign policy of Qatar which is beyond their imagination. On the other hand, the words of the Emir of Qatar about the sanctions as “unjust, unlawful and unjustified”, clearly signify the point that Qatar is determined to safeguard its sovereignty, independent policy of decision making, and sticking to its unique independent foreign policy by rejecting the 13 conditions.

The blockade of Qatar has severely impacted the GCC organization and, admittedly, exposed the weakness of the alliance, as it failed to restore harmony among the conflicting nations even after three years. Kinninmont (2019; P. 19) supports the view that the conflict in the GCC with the blockade has proven that GCC as political alliance is in question due to the fact that even the economic cooperation has been severely damaged. Politically, the GCC maintained its position as the regional leader

by representing the Arab countries that were most stable, whereas currently, it lacks the efficiency to settle the internal disputes and differences of views among the states. The researcher states the basic reason for its lack of efficiency to resolve the crisis is the fact that the GCC has been strongly personalized by the younger generation of the leadership, which is definitely contrary to the visionary objectives of the older generation of leaders. Apparently, it is different from the founding objectives of the GCC alliance that appreciated fraternity and coherence, and addressed the threats as a union. Although, in the past, there were border disputes and historical grievances between the states, the leaders of the past valued the unity more important than the separation. Apparently, Gulf politics is not led by the founding leaders today, and consequently the traditional value of mediation is no longer impacting the GCC positively. In other words, as the researcher asserts, the GCC is acting as a “Club of Kings” rather than of nations.

It is noticed that the GCC summit was conducted twice after the emergence of the Gulf crisis of 2017, but the association did not bring the heads of the states together for the discourse of any amicable talks. It proves the fact that the crisis has actually divided the GCC into three blocks, such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain on one side, Oman and Kuwait as a neutral team, and finally, Qatar as a separate entity.

Obviously, the first bloc that represents Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain strongly campaigned their stance for the expulsion of Qatar from the GCC alliance, whereas, Oman and Kuwait tried for maintaining and sustaining the unity through mediation roles, which, of course, is a distinctive feature of the association. It is also reported by Kinninmont (2019; P. 19) that due to the effect of the mediation, all GCC members agreed to send their representatives for the annual summit of the GCC that was held in Kuwait in December 2017, but noticeably, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and

Bahrain had merely low ranking representation for the summit. However, surprisingly, Saudi Arabia and the UAE declared the formation of a renewed bilateral or ‘Strategic Partnership’ which clearly would stand out from the rest of the bloc of the GCC. Based on the divergent approaches of the individual states, even if the current crisis is settled, it is likely that the mistrust and division will be a common feature among the GCC countries for long run.

Martin (2018) also upholds the same view of Kinninmont (2019; P. 19) by noting that “the style of leadership” in the GCC states make it hard for practicing the principles of the GCC, as it is a “rules based institution, possessing a charter requiring all GCC leaders making critical decisions to do so by unanimous agreement”. He also reports “The decision to impose the blockade did not go before the supreme council, effectively revealing the hollowness of the institution” (Martin, 2018).

4.2.1 Formation of New Alliances

Kinninmont (2019; P. 29) notes that owing to the political crisis of 2017, the states are building new alliances in the region today, other than considering the GCC as a primary regional alliance. Admittedly, the rift has mobilized bilateral alliances between small states and larger powers. For instance, the alliance between Saudi Arabia and the UAE has been enhanced since 2017, and Qatar and Turkey have strengthened their alliance in the event of the crisis in order to secure their political and economic framework. Additionally, Qatar aligned with Iran for strategic reasons, mostly to balance itself from the shocks of blockade and the threat on its sovereignty imposed by the Saudi led coalition.

Ulrichsen (2018) criticizes and holds the same view of Kinninmont (2019; P. 29) that the crisis has reshaped the politics of the Gulf region which will have long

standing impact. Undoubtedly, the GCC had been the most stable organization in the region for about 36 years, and it has been ruined beyond any repair. A hostile alliance running from Riyadh to Abu Dhabi has emerged. In short, the attempt to isolate Qatar has widened the political division among the Gulf states and it is afraid that it would further introduce far reaching implications in the political and economic frameworks of the Middle East.

The blockading countries also embraced several tactics to isolate Qatar in the international politics after blockade, and the approach aligns with Balance of Threat theory of Walt (1985; Pp. 23-24) that aggregate power persuades the smaller states to balance with greater powers like the Saudi led coalition. The study of Fakude (2018) demonstrate how the blockading countries used their strategy against Qatar by aligning support from the Sub-Saharan African countries and notably, this movement of the coalition justifies the study of Walt (1987; P. 41) about the theory of formation of alliance. According to his observation “the provision of economic or military assistance can create effective allies, because it communicates favorable intentions, because it evokes a sense of gratitude, or because the recipient becomes dependent on the donor” (Walt, 1987; P. 41). It can be demonstrated that the blockading countries utilized “deep pocket politics” through bribing or investing money, via diplomats and lobbying agents by persuading the African countries to support their sanctions against Qatar. The countries mostly included are: Mauritania, which had been aided by Qatar’s Charity to fight against poverty and for most of its developmental programmes, yet it declared its support for the blockade. According to the researcher, it was caused by the Emirati financial interventions led by the Emirates Red Crescent (ERC). Irrespective of its support for the blockade, Qatar has continued its charity mission. In fact, Mauritius was forced to raise its support for the Saudi led coalition, due to a number of its trade deals

with the Emirates. Senegal extended its support for the reason that Qatar gave the political asylum for Karim Wade, who is the son of the former President of Senegal. However, the country restored its relation with Qatar later. Maldives is another country that supported the blockading coalition following the ‘campaigning mantra’ that Qatar supported terrorism and the country had a deal of USD 150 million funding with Saudi Arabia for their infrastructural projects. Similarly, Comoros was also persuaded by Saudi led coalition following the public investment in the country conducted by Saudi Arabia. Mauritania also denied Qatar as a loyalty to the ERC for its infrastructural projects and financial investments there. Though Chad had cut ties with Qatar, it also restored its alliance with Qatar later. Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, tweeted on the decision of Chad:

“We welcome the resumption of diplomatic relations between Qatar and Chad and the return of ambassadors between the two friendly countries, a memorandum of understanding was signed today in Doha”.

The above study asserts that the six countries were compelled to raise their voice against Qatar based on the huge investments and infrastructural projects carried out in their lands. Again, it supports the argument on the alliance formation proposed by Walt (1987, p. 43) that “The more valuable the asset offered and the greater the degree of monopoly that the supplier enjoys, the more effective the asset will be as an instrument of alliance formation”.

It can also be figured out that the Gulf crisis has silenced the international community, as very few nations came forward to resolve the crisis through dialogues. According to Kinninmont (2019; Pp. 29-33), the reluctance of the international actors,

especially the Western powers, to make the GCC governments end the conflict, is criticized for their strategy of 'divide and rule' the Arab world in order to increase the arms sale in the region. It is also noticed that the GCC leaders like Saudi Arabia and the UAE do not incline to listen to any foreign advice. Accordingly, the Western powers fear that the pressure on the GCC leaders will affect the trade and investment that they have with the GCC states. Even though Trump supported the blockading countries in the initial phase with his tweet that the actions against Qatar would be the beginning of the end of terrorism, he revised the stance with a counter tweet stating his appreciation for Qatar's efforts against terrorism. In fact, as the study points out, the stance of the US was primarily based on the economic interests that they could gain by keeping a supposed neutrality or taking a role of a mediator between the states. Trump declared in September 2017 that he would conduct the mediation role to end the conflicts, but it has not been materialized. Moreover, in 2018, the US recommended for a joint summit of the GCC countries along with Egypt and Jordan to plan out the formation of the Middle East Strategic Alliance (MESA), nick named as Arab NATO in order to bring all militaries of the region for a collaborated movement. Primarily, it was with a strategic view of the US to send a strong signal to Iran. Obviously, the US initiated for the formation of MESA to counter Iran and to revive the GCC alliance, as it was badly weakened due to the blockade.

Farouk (2019) also holds the same view of Kinninmont (2019; P. 34) and notes why the US wanted for a new alliance after the rift in the GCC. It was for the purpose of the security reasons but it also involves their economic reasons. Moreover, the US wants the Arab countries to control the price of the oil led by Saudi Arabia and support the US policies which are against Russia and China. Ironically, the new alliance sleeps in the papers. As the Gulf crisis has weakened the GCC alliance and Gulf politics to a

great level, it made the US to become more involved over the issues of the GCC. Even the proposed formation of MESA by the US initiative intended for their strategic purposes in order to strengthen their influence in a wide angle without direct additional defense mechanism of the US. Furthermore, with the new alliance was perceived that the US arms deals in the region would be accelerated, and limit the involvement of the other actors like the European countries, Russia and China in arms deals in the Middle East.

According to Farouk, it had been reported that Saudi Arabia and the UAE collaborated to purchase arms from non-US agents. China had a deal of ballistic missiles and drones with the Gulf countries, and they set up a military base in Djibouti, close to the US military presence. In short, the MESA would help the US dominate the Gulf region politically, economically and militarily, and it was primarily caused by the weakened position of the GCC.

Kinninmont (2019; P. 33) observes that the conflict in the Gulf region does not affect the strategic interests of the US. Other than the flow of oil, gas and arms, there are numerous benefits for them. Notably, the US is able to pressurize the GCC states to fight against terrorist financing, and thus, the crisis is an opportunity for them to enhance their influence in the region.

In conclusion, the study summarizes how the blockade and severing of diplomatic relation has caused uncertainty in the political atmosphere of the GCC states that persuaded other states to balance with greater powers and to utilize the opportunity to benefit them economically. The sanctions were not supported widely by the international community apart from a few African nations that were reportedly lobbied by the Saudi led coalition. However, the rift has undoubtedly exposed the fragility of

the GCC alliance, as it has failed to be instrumental for restoring the objectives or coordinating the states. On the other hand, the diplomatic breakdown has divided the members further and compelled them to form different alliances outside the main stream.

4.3 To What Extent Does the Blockade and the Surrounding Geopolitical Tensions Affect the Gulf Economics?

The diplomatic rift and the overnight blockade imposed on Qatar by the Saudi led coalition proposed to weaken the economy of Qatar. Admittedly, Qatar had been depending on other countries for almost all consumer goods experienced the shock and the threat to a great level, but the nation could balance its economy gradually by adopting a revised strategic policy. Despite the fact that the blockading countries had intended to turn Qatar to a deadlock, the study explains how the diplomatic crisis has challenged the overall economy of the GCC states for the last three years and how it has gradually strengthened the economy of Qatar by leading the country towards self-reliance.

According to Çavuşoğlu (2020; P. 101), the blockade sanctioned against Qatar is termed as contrary to the principles of GCC Common Market Agreement that came to effect in 2007. The agreement was supposed to uphold free movement of people, goods and capital between the member states. On the other hand, with the eruption of the conflict, the agreement was invalidated. It establishes the fact the GCC as an institution has lost its relevance because of its failure to function as an institution that launches any conflict resolution measures and establishes unity among the states.

Young (2017) also examines how the blockade disturbed the shared economy of the GCC with the emergence of the Gulf crisis in 2017. She points out that there had

been an upward trend in the trade sector of the GCC for a decade, as the GCC as a joint venture made efforts to ensure the increase of trade and human capital flows. They had also considered for a uniform monetary policy, stimulation of the infrastructure investment, promotion of joint rail network, sharing electricity and a common energy supply system. In short, the GCC had a progressive vision that would strengthen the economy of the region through vast cooperation. However, the blockade ruined all the visionary projects of the region or brought it to a standstill. The researcher asserts that the economy of the region was badly affected due to ban of human capital, and the new situation fails to attract the skilled migrants. The GCC states had been the best investment partners, whereas, the blockade forced them to discontinue their participation in the economy of each state and the impact is marked significantly.

The air blockade was one of the major challenges for Qatar, as the flights that operated from Doha were banned to fly over the blockading states and it increased the economic pressure of Qatar. With no notice, around 18 services were forced to cancel its operations that accessed the airspace of the blockading states. These routes were vital for Qatar that offered shorter distance to North African and European countries. Alternative airspace was established over Iran and Turkey that caused higher operating costs, but it benefitted mostly Iran, and reportedly, its revenue was increased as a result of using its airspace. According to the report of the Reuters (2019), there was a loss of \$639 million for the Qatar Airways by the end of March 2019 due to the air restrictions, which marks a steep loss in comparison with \$69 million of the previous year. The losses were caused by the restriction of the GCC routes, increased fuel costs and fluctuations in foreign exchange rates. However, Qatar opened around 11 new routes in 2019 itself and it has brought about 31 new destinations since the embargo. In spite of the challenges, the airline tried to lessen the losses by increased routes and services.

The words of Akbar Al Baker, the Group CEO of Qatar Airways, illustrate the remarkable recovery of the Airlines:

“Despite facing challenges that are unparalleled in the airline industry, I am very proud that we have grown our fleet, expanded our network and seen overall revenue increase to QAR 48 billion (\$13.2 billion), a rise of 14%,” (Reuters, 2019).

The other GCC states have also undergone similar challenging situations as faced by the Qatar airlines following the diplomatic rift. For example, according to the words of Alex Macheras who is an Aviation Analyst, Emirates Airline faced a decline of 85% in its profit in the first half of 2018-2019, thanks to the decrease in the number of local passengers travelling to Qatar and routes like Doha-Dubai-Osaka or Bangkok and the company had to cancel its 380 airbus orders. According to the report, the UAE airlines, that include Etihad Airways, are struggling, and was forced remove a number of pilots, suspended the purchase of 10 Airbuses and accordingly it lost \$1.9 billion in 2017 itself. In short the investments of the GCC states in the aviation sector was badly impacted by the conflicts in the region (El Bern, 2019).

Charfeddine & Al Refai (2019; P. 3) demonstrate that the abrupt closure of diplomatic ties led to the interruption of trade routes and flow of investment to Qatar that affected the business opportunities and financial loss in the whole region. The fact is that Qatar imported 90% of food materials, and 40% of these imports were from Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Qatar had to find alternative trade routes such as Turkey, Iran, Kuwait, Oman, Morocco, and Lebanon, that caused additional financial pressure on the country and brought down the investments from the private sectors. Accordingly, the crisis caused an outflow of \$49 million from Qatar during the months of June and July 2017. As a result, the Central Bank of Qatar had to adopt strategic measure to

tackle the issues. The Gulf crisis affected economic reforms significantly, as each state had been associated with each other and that impacted the credit outlooks. In fact, these states were maintaining associated trading partnership, monetary and fiscal policies and moreover, they had shared investments in real estate for the infrastructure developments and the other economic sectors. In view of hosting the World Cup 2022, Qatar had several infrastructure projects that demanded importing of construction materials through ports of Saudi Arabia and the UAE which were disrupted with the sudden sanctions against it. In addition to tackling the crisis, Qatar had to ensure the trust of the investors.

Furthermore, the stock market faced severe challenges, as the investors sold off their shares for the following days of the blockade, especially those of the GCC states. Prior to the conflict, the GCC nationals had about 9% of the share in the stock market of Qatar which almost \$150 billion. Although the share was relatively low, the foreign and regional investors helped with panic situation that caused the loss of 7.6% on the first day itself and relatively it dropped on in the successive days. Similarly, it also spread across that the blockading countries attempted to devalue the Qatari riyals with the economic and financial warfare. However, the government of Qatar strategically tackled the issue by redirecting billions of dollars from its sovereign wealth in order to secure the value of the Qatar currency.

For the last three years, the GCC economy has undergone severe reforms and faced the impact of the crisis at a large scale. Yet, it has enabled the Qatar economy to develop its resilience positively. The biannual report of the World Bank (2019, April) examined the major challenges of the GCC states, highlighting that the economic growth significantly fell down in 2019. The GDP growth was estimated to drop from

0.8% compared to 2% in 2018, whereas, it predicted that the GDP would recover by 2020-2021.

According to the report published by the World Bank (2019, May), Qatar has overcome the economic uncertainties imposed by the blockading countries. However, the major issues prevailing in the region include instability of the oil prices, regional issues and global financial challenges that affect capital flows. As per the report observes, the growth rate of Qatar, in particular, will rise to 3.4% by 2021.

Bouoiyour & Selmi (2020) affirm that the crisis has sent shock waves throughout the world, and the nations involved with the crisis have lost billions of dollars due to the slowdown of the trade, investment and economic growth chiefly instigated by the decrease in the oil price. According to their study, the most adverse impact was experienced by Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The other countries like Bahrain, and Egypt were also badly affected by the blockade but not to the same degree. More than the economic implications of the geopolitical risks, the study has been focused on the financial uncertainty, economic instability and macroeconomic effects on international level which have struck the stock markets, portfolio allocation and broadening of opportunities. The researches analyze the impact on economy in three categories such as: a) comparison of conditional volatility process of the stock market of the GCC countries before and after the diplomatic breakdown, b) Testing whether the crisis has worsened the volatility outcomes across the Gulf region, c) Assessing the volatile effects in various markets in order to identify the risk bearers, as it would be useful for the portfolio managers and designers of policies to reduce further uncertainty caused by the crisis.

These studies reveal that the entire region has been affected significantly, and all the stock markets became volatile over the time. Accordingly, the political instability has also worsened the exports of the states. Above all, Qatar proved its resilience during the time of aggravated political crisis. In spite of the vulnerability of the economic activities, Qatar resisted the embargo positively by managing its business with effective measure like increasing foreign partners, enhancing the management of gas resources, and integrating the investment meditation, apart from the country's dependence on hydrocarbon sectors.

Bouoiyour & Selmi (2020) also contend that as far as Qatar is concerned, the diplomatic rift has turned out to be a catalyst for the improvement of food production and reducing its reliance on other countries for food products. Admittedly, the Qatar government also regularized its reforms to encourage business activities, widening opportunities and promoting direct investment from the multinationals. On the other side, Saudi Arabia also reformed its policies to resist the vulnerable economic situation by implementing economic diversification policies and privatizing programmes in order to attract foreign investors. However, it is reported that such steps of the Saudi government could not create any desired effect in the economy and attract foreign investors, which is a prominent strategy for diversifying its economy from relying on oil revenues as part of the fulfillment of the Saudi Vision 2030. Overall, the researchers claim the Gulf crisis has divided the Arab world further, created no winners out of the breakdown, and compelled the small states to adopt tough policies.

The studies indicate that the economic activities and commercial ties in the GCC states were disrupted adversely due to the crisis in the GCC, and the investors minimized their investments and dependence on the stock markets of these countries at large levels. The crisis obviously discouraged the investors due to the fluctuating

performance of the GCC stock markets and the uncertainty of the political tensions. On the other hand, the crisis strengthened the resilience of Qatar and helped the nation achieve self-reliance in multiple spheres. It also underlines the fact that stability of the political atmosphere is a necessity for restoring economic growth in the region.

4.4 How has Qatar Undergone the Challenges of the Embargo?

Qatar has become the most controversial state of the Gulf region over the past decade, primarily due to its capacity of handling the geopolitical issues diplomatically in the region and maintaining the brand profile of international mediator. Its effective use of soft power and independent foreign policy has obviously provoked the other neighboring states that triggered diplomatic rift in the region. The Gulf crisis of 2017 that has fractured the political and economic stability of the Gulf region by imposing the blockade on Qatar is the overall impact for the unique stance of the nation, and it has entered the fourth year. The abrupt diplomatic breakdown has adversely affected the entire region and created a stalemate in every aspect of progress. In spite of the collaborated mediation attempts hosted by countries like Kuwait and the US, there has been little progress, and the sanctions remain static till the date. It can be observed that the principal strategies of the blockading countries by the embargo against Qatar was to isolate the country politically and deteriorate its economy. This section analyses how Qatar has been impacted by the collective movement and been able to cope with the boycott.

Lambert & Hashim (2017; P. 273) report a comprehensive view of the immediate shock wave experienced by Qatar when the diplomatic ties were cut off against the country by the blockading countries. First and foremost, it is observed that the *Laissez Faire* policy of the GCC states on Food Security was abruptly disrupted

with the embargo, and the supply chain to the country was stopped badly. Prior to the sanctions, Qatar had depended heavily on its neighbouring GCC states for its food supply and other goods by accessing their territory. The joint action of the Saudi coalition cut off the access for Qatar to Jebel Ali Port of the UAE that had been the major cargo transit point and the routes through their lands. It affected the transport of basic food stuffs, animal and agricultural products that include dairy and poultry products. The farmers were the worst hit due to the closure of the routes, as their cattle were stranded on the borders without the access of food and water. The researchers assert that Qatar had been prepared enough to encounter such a demanding situation, notably related to the excess reliance for food supply since 2008, when there was a steep hike with the food price internationally. This occurred again in 2012, when Saudi Arabia banned the export of chicken, and when the GCC countries took vigorous steps against Qatar in 2014 along with diplomatic actions. Markedly, for a long time, Qatar had been adopting strategic plans to equip itself to improve its self-reliance on food and water security, and significantly, establishing an agricultural and food supply alliance.

4.4.1 Resilience and Growth of Qatar

Al-Ansari (2020; Pp. 34-35) evaluates how Qatar developed its resilience in the event of the crisis over these years. More importantly, the operation of Hamad Port was a prioritized action plan for the government after the blockade, and it enabled 22 shipping routes between regional and international sea ports apart from 120 navigation destinations that helped the cargo operations significantly. In addition to it, the port increased its storage capacity over the course of time and achieved the one million mark TEU (Twenty Foot equivalent mark). It is also marked that the significant contribution of Hassad Food Company has activated the local market and supplied a range of food products such as egg, poultry, fresh fruits, vegetables in order to balance the crisis.

Similarly, around 10 international supply routes were newly launched that include, Turkey, Kuwait, Oman, Azerbaijan and Lebanon. Furthermore, the researcher denotes that in order to secure long-term food security, it was mandatory for the government to adopt strategic plans to promote domestic agricultural activities. Accordingly, commercial and small scale farming units were also encouraged to enhance their production and strengthen the local markets. Over the period of the blockade, various bodies such as the Ministry of Municipality and Environment, the Ministry of Economy and commerce, the Qatar Development Bank, Hassad Food and Baladna came forward to collaborate with the small scale and large scale production units and projects that helped the nation face the economic challenge. For instance, Qatar Development Bank devised various schemes to increase agriculture production. Notably, it launched recently a ‘green house programme’ with a purpose to encourage agri-products at household levels by having residents invest in growing their own food, and that was supported with financial and technical mechanism. Similarly, Hassad Food also recently started a project named IKTEFA with a view to increase productivity by supporting the local farmers.

As many researchers point out, the blockade made a way for Qatar to target for self-reliance, especially in its line for food security. Despite the fact that the whole nation faced a lot of struggles at the initial stage, both the Government and private sectors took the initiative to secure its market with the food supply in a short period. For example, the Government took prompt steps to find alternative trade routes for establishing its supply chain.

Arguably, the independent foreign policy enabled Qatar to expand its ties across the GCC during the time of crisis. Al-Ansari (2020; P. 36) demonstrates how the dynamic soft power strategy of Qatar made its effort for channeling new routes

successfully. The Government, within a short period of the blockade, got into deals with its international partners, such as Turkey for filling its shelves with essential supplies like dairy products. To the surprise of the international media, a Qatari citizen imported around 3400 cows by air in order to support the nation at the time of crisis. This was followed by Baladna, a dairy farm industry that aimed to multiply its number of cows to 10,000 that would produce 500 tons milk products per day that would ensure 100% of self-reliance on dairy production.

Ibrahim (2020) also accounts the same points as Al-Ansari (2020) about how Qatar reacted to the challenges positively. Over the past three years, Qatar has strengthened its food security at a significant level by tackling various geographical challenges and practicing modern agricultural methods that require limited water resources. For example, three years ago the local production of vegetables and fruits in Qatar was around 10%, whereas, it has increased to 30% today and there has been a growth rate of 50% for animal crops and 84% increase for dairy production. Accordingly, Qatar has secured the remarkable number one position for Food Security in the Gulf region and is ranked 13th across 113 countries as per the annual Global Food Security Index report (GFSI) published in 2019 by the Economist Intelligence Unit. The report has assessed the measures taken for food security, affordability, quality and safety (Lim, 2020).

According to Walt (1987; P. 149), alliances are formed to balance against threats projected by regional powers. Thus, in order to prevent threats, the states generally enhances their military or political power by adding the military or political power of another state to their own. Çavuşoğlu (2020; P. 101) demonstrates the statement of Walt (1987; P. 149) by noting that Qatar followed a strategic approach immediately after the sanctions that enabled the nation to convert the challenges into

advantages. With the emergency situation of possible food shortage and security concerns of the country, Qatar renewed its trade relations and military alliances with various countries and secured its food supply. Apart from the food supply, the Turkish Government immediately sent several troops to the Tarik bin Ziyad military base situated in Qatar that helped the country to expand its military force. The Qatar Emiri Armed Forces (QEAF) adopted further steps by maximizing its naval, land and air forces in collaboration with the US, British, and French Military Forces. Qatar thus enabled its security in all dimensions to balance the threat. The researcher asserts that Qatar was able to transform its strategic plans due to its worldwide relations and being the largest supplier of LNG to several European and Asian countries.

Ulrichsen (2018) accounts how Qatar diversified its strategies to overcome the pressure of the blockade when the traditional trade routes were cut off. Qatar expanded its association with regional and international partners to a large scale at a greater level. Pointedly, the Qatar Investment Authority and associated agencies accelerated investments across Asia, Europe, North America etc. in several areas that include tourism, energy, food, security and infrastructure projects. These investment ventures enabled the trading and shipping routes of Qatar to enhance its economic missions. For example, within ten days of the start of the blockade, Qatar could access with two Indian Ports for direct container service. Furthermore, the huge natural gas reserves and its position as the largest exporter of LNG enabled Qatar to increase its association with the international partners for long-term projects, and thereby strengthen its security and stability.

According to the study of Petcu (2020; P. 339), in the event of the embargo Qatar Airways lost 20% of its passenger traffic, as the flights had to re-route over Oman, Iran and Turkey and thus the flying hours became longer and detracted the customers.

Consequently, it was reported a loss of US \$69 million for the fiscal year 2017-2018 and a loss of \$500 million during the following fiscal year. In spite of the estimated financial loss in the future, the airline adopted strategic steps announcing the acquisition of 49% stake in the Italian airline Meridiana. The researcher asserts, the strategy of the airline to minimize the impact of the embargo proved to be in line with the national strategy. Accordingly, until 31 March 2019 since the first day of the embargo, the airline launched 24 destinations. Apart from launching new routes, the airline also diversified its investment significantly. For example, it acquired 25% shares in Moscow's Vnukovo International Airport in March 2019. It purchased 5% of the total issued shares capital of China Southern Airlines in January 2019 in addition to 49% shares in Air Italy, 21.43% shares in IAG, 10% shares in Latam, and 9.99% in Cathy Pacific (P. 340).

The above analysis marks the substantial resilience of Qatar Airways during the crisis by making up new strategies, finding new business partners and thereby strengthening the economy. Evidently, even though the sanctions restricted the regional investments and the airline had to face various challenges initially, the blockade helped the company to diversify its portfolio by developing defensive strategies such as purchasing stocks in various airlines and improving connectivity with foreign markets.

The second condition insisted by the blockading countries on Qatar was to shut down immediately the Turkish Military base in Qatar and stop the military alliance with Turkey. Başkan & Pala (2020) present an account of steps taken by Qatar contrary to the condition. It is reported that both the countries strengthened their alliances in various fields and the crisis enhanced their alliance. Reportedly, the economic and trade relation increased by 57% that is worth \$1.4 billion by the end of 2018 and around 180 companies started its operations in Qatar with various projects at worth \$18 billion.

Apart from these agreements, about 15 agreements on trading of food, construction materials and pharmaceutical sectors came into effect in a short period time. The Turkish economy was also boosted up due to the blockade and its enhanced bilateral relationship was enhanced with Qatar, especially in the aviation sector and tourism industry. Additionally, both the countries signed a military treaty that enabled around 3000 Turkish troops to deploy in Qatar, and other major military support that included air force and navy. Accordingly, there has been a steep deal of 225% defense exports to Qatar by April 2019 that included 100 third generation advanced Altay battle tanks and joint defense industries.

The studies prove that the strategy of the Saudi led coalition to isolate Qatar opened doors for other regional powers like Turkey and Iran to play an influential role in the region being aligned with Qatar. By sending troops to Qatar immediately after the diplomatic rift, Turkey hoisted a shield over Qatar against any possible military movement by the blockading countries. Iran also renewed its relation with Qatar. Admittedly, the new alliance other than the GCC partners enabled Qatar to resist the pressures of the embargo and balance the regional threat imposed by Saudi led the coalition.

It is also remarkable to note how the isolation efforts on Qatar enabled the country to manipulate its resources for increasing its resilience on its security level. Ulrichsen (2018) illustrates, for example, apart from forming new alliances for enhancing security reasons, in 2018 the Qatari Ministry of Defense created Barzan Holdings which is a strategic investment for producing arms that would support defense and security of the country. The major objectives of the company are to manage the procurement of arms, get into new association with defense and security companies and thereby equip the research and development of the country. For instance, Barzan and

Turkish defense contractor Aselsan came into an alliance to localize and transfer technological assistance in Qatar.

AFP (2020) notes a significant contribution of the Barzan Holdings during the time of Covid-19 pandemic and regional isolation. The company that produces rifles and grenades came up with 2000 ventilators weekly that save human lives with its partnership with Wilcox, a US defense manufacturer. The words of Nasser Hassan Al-Naimi, the Managing Director of Barzan Holdings, about the blockade signifies how Qatar has moved ahead with its determination to achieve self-reliance, saying the blockade has “worked as a catalyst and got us to where we are today, It has been a blessing in disguise and allowed us to realize our true potential and make sure that everything that we need strategically... is manufactured here”.

Ibrahim (2020) agrees with Ulrichsen (2018) that the crisis management and the resilience attained from the illegal blockade equipped Qatar to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic situation efficiently. Since the country diversified its economic activities and self-reliance on domestic supply, the economy of the country became strong to resist any challenges. Andreas Krieg, Assistant Professor of Defense Studies at King's College London, agrees with the words of the researcher:

"The blockade has prepared Qatar well to deal with the supply chain disruptions we have seen globally during the COVID-19 crisis. Qatar has achieved a lot more self-sufficiency across the food and agricultural sector, as well as the transport sector, making Qatar more autarkic and independent in managing supplies chains”.

In fact, the studies indicate the point that the unique position of Qatar on the international platform made it possible to diversify its economy, maximize the projects with the collaboration of the private sector and advance its agricultural and dairy

products. Overall, the country could reaffirm its sovereignty, establish its voice for stability and achieve remarkable resilience over the pressure imposed by the regional powers.

Qatar also survived the political pressure against securing an individual voice against the Saudi led coalition. For example, Çavuşoğlu (2020; P. 103) reports the refusal of Qatari Emir in 2018 to attend the GCC Summit that was invited by Saudi Arabia and the stance of Qatar could be termed as strategic as the attendance of Qatar would have been used for restoring the heavily damaged image of Saudi Arabia. The Emir of Qatar also refused to attend the summit of 2019 as a mark of its reaction for the continuing terms of the blockade. The movement of Qatar to leave the OPEC, further, suggests the refusal of Qatar on the Saudi autonomy that controlled the energy affairs of OPEC. Moreover, Qatar's investment of \$500 million in Lebanon, its concern over Palestine, Sudan and Iraq have obviously challenged the KSA-UAE alliance in Gulf countries, and these all demonstrate how Qatar could carry over its independent foreign policy and mediation roles. Overall, during the period of blockade, Qatar could enhance its strategic steps and manage the crisis effectively. Admittedly, the determination of Qatar to face the challenges was materialized by the leadership of Tamim bin Hamad. His words illustrate his vision and resilience of the nation to withstand any challenges: "We don't live on the edge of life, lost without direction, and we are not answerable to anyone or wait for anyone for instructions. Qatar is known for its independent behavior now and those who deal with us know we have our own visions" (Çavuşoğlu, 2020; P. 104).

Overall, the findings substantiate the statement and reveal that Qatar has positively transformed itself to a significant level over the past three years caused by

the geopolitical turmoil. The political and economic embargo strengthened the country from the initial stalemate uncertainty and turned it to a potential nation majorly due its strategical plans and resolutions. Its effective use of soft power and unique diplomacy has enabled the country to form alliances with other countries to prepare itself against any possible aggressive movement by the Saudi led coalition. The alliance of Qatar with other nations has also opened doors for boosting up its economy and military capacity. Moreover, the crisis has enhanced the country to manage its own resources and become self-reliant in various fields. In short, the underlying purpose of the Saudi led coalition to deteriorate the economy of Qatar and segregate the country from the international community has not brought out any desirable impact on Qatar due to its unique international policy and exceptional resilience. On the other hand, the impact of the blockade is equally shared by the GCC states, as the economy of these states is challenged and vulnerable to any political threat. In addition, the sanctions on Qatar have drawn sharp criticism on the blockading countries from the other nations, as the coalition caused deep division in the region.

4.5 Conclusion

The Gulf crisis of 2017 is entering the fourth year without any progressive measures and little reconciliation attempts among the conflicting GCC states, in spite of mediation efforts by various agencies. Admittedly, the studies substantiate the fact that the GCC alliance has been weakened by personalized interests of the Saudi led coalition that triggered of the Gulf crisis of 2017. The blockade has adversely affected the political atmosphere of the GCC states and inflicted financial loss not only on Qatar but also on all the blockading countries. Despite the vulnerability of Qatar's economy that has been exposed by the embargo, the country is demonstrating significant resilience with various strategic measures that includes increased international

partnership at various levels. Moreover, due to the enormous energy deals and strategic investments that Qatar has been securing with international partners, it has turned out to be a challenge for the blockading countries to isolate Qatar politically or impact it economically.

It is apparently a need of the Gulf region to restore the alliance of the GCC entity and to end the political differences, as the region is facing other major crises such as the decline of oil price and the challenges caused by Covid-19, which are affecting negatively the atmosphere of these states. Overall, it is a serious mistake for the states to ignore their historical bonds, shared cultural associations, relevance of protecting the states and standing together to face the challenges by respecting the sovereignty and individuality of each state.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The thesis, “The Changing Regional Order: The Case of Gulf Cooperation Council and the Blockade of Qatar in 2017” has been based on the presumption of the threat on the alliance of the GCC states. The volatility of alliance of these states has been significantly affecting the stability of the political and economic framework apart from the integrity of their cultural uniqueness which has long been persevered. The researcher has used Stephen Walt’s Threat Perception theory to emphasize the argument that the states form alliances with other countries on the context of various threats that materialize mostly from geographic proximity, collective power and aggressive targets. The research was set on analyzing the diplomatic rift that occurred with blockade of Qatar in 2017 with the purpose of studying various reasons that led to the political and economic uncertainty.

The research has been framed with three questions that turned out to be crucial for exploring the research title at various aspects. The first question has analyzed the historical context behind the current crisis in the GCC states which was triggered in 2017. The sub topics such as British domination on the Gulf states, disputes between the ruling families on borders, political transformation in the GCC security and transformation within the ruling family and security standards demonstrate the point that the conflict dynamics of the GCC have been entrenched for decades. The outbreak of the Arab Spring challenged the GCC alliance, as Qatar and the Al Jazeera network stood for the change that questioned the authoritarian and corrupt regimes. The stance of Qatar was considered to be against the GCC alliance and it led to the diplomatic friction until the blockade. It was also a critical for large states like Saudi Arabia to acknowledge the leadership roles and independent foreign policy of a small state like Qatar. In short, the diplomatic rift that has erupted in the region since the GCC

formation emphasizes the fact the GCC alliance was just a charter on paper without the realization of its underlined objectives. Furthermore, it is asserted that the diplomatic breakdown of 2017 was caused principally by the hegemonic approach of the Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which wanted to defame Qatar in the regional and international front on the charges of supporting terrorism and thereby isolate and destabilize its economy, security and stability. In short, the thesis validates the statement that the current crisis in the Gulf region was deliberately created by a bunch of leaders who are led by personalized policy and objectives.

The second question looks upon the position of the US and its alliance with the GCC and its vacillating stance of foreign policy that aggravated the conflict in the GCC in 2017. The chapter analyzed the difference of US alliance with the GCC under different leadership, playing role of security partner and the role of a mediator. The research agrees that the US has been playing a significant role in the GCC by shielding the states from potential internal and external threats, but admittedly it has been based on its various vested interests of the US. Particularly, the eruption of political rift in 2017 was aggravated by the personalized financial commitments of Trump with Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Although the US aligned with the demands of the blockading countries by supporting the fabricated allegations with a view to promote the business ambitions of Trump, the leadership reversed its statement against Qatar on the same set of goals. Accordingly, the revised alliance of the US and Qatar opened further economic and military deals, and the US initiated mediation roles. The chapter also brings out the significant steps taken by countries like Kuwait to restore the GCC alliance.

The third question exposes the facts on how the GCC alliance was adversely impacted by the personalized motives of the Saudi led coalition that caused the Gulf crisis in 2017. Over the last three years, the GCC has been exposed to various

challenges that question their growth and stability. The Saudi led coalition cut off their alliance with Qatar and sanctioned the unjustifiable embargo with an intention to isolate Qatar internationally, but in contrast, Qatar cemented its alliances with others nations to strengthen its potential. The foreign policy and the alliance that Qatar adopted with major powers were among the most significant strategies that limited the plans of the blockading countries from further movement against the country. Moreover, the thesis demonstrates that the embargo has impacted adversely the political and economic spheres of the entire GCC. As the region is vulnerable and volatile to any political uncertainty, the investors were discouraged to enact the investments or diversify the economy. Even though the Saudi led coalition intended to inflict so much damage to Qatar on its economy and unique foreign policy, the crisis enabled the nation positively to overcome the challenges supported by its excellent strategic measures. In short, the study sums up the findings of the thesis by stating that the changing regional order in the GCC states is caused by the lack of leadership qualities and foreign policy of the Saudi led hegemony.

5.1 Suggestions for Future Research

This thesis is confined to analyze the impact of the diplomatic collapse on the spheres of economy and politics of the GCC. By studying and adding more theories, future researchers can explore various aspects of the impact of the rift, in the course of time, such as how it has affected the social aspects, destabilized the combined missions of these states to tackle geo-economic challenges and futuristic plans that would promote enhanced growth. Furthermore, the study on the independent foreign policy of Qatar can be diversified based on its commendable self-reliance and significant growth rate. If there is a progressive change in the current situation, there would be a number of phases that could be focused on further to promote a stable framework for the GCC.

Finally, the embargo that lasted for 43 months was resolved on 5 January 2021 on Al-Ula declaration. The diplomatic rift and the embargo that had been building for 43 months between Qatar and its neighbours was resolved in accordance with the Al-Ula declaration on 5 January 2021. The blockading countries lifted the sanctions against Qatar during the 41st GCC summit and restored the ties due to the effective and steadfast efforts of Kuwait. Although the declaration marks a historic breakthrough in the GCC, it can be pointed out that the declaration does not propose any stipulated conditions or pressure on Qatar to comply with, and it is evident that the blockading countries acknowledged the independent foreign policy of Qatar and its efforts for securing its sovereignty. Furthermore, it suggests that the agreement looks for building a renewed atmosphere in the region that calls for unity and strengthening the relations that has been fragmented over the past years.

In fact, the agreement reinforces the fundamental objectives of the GCC charter that stresses the importance of collective cooperation and integration to encounter various challenges in the region that has been severely impacted due to the diplomatic rift. It also highlights the requirement of achieving security, peace, stability and prosperity in the GCC as a single unified economic political group especially during the pandemic days (Al Jazeera, 2021).

In short, the re-establishment of GCC alliance and its objectives can bring immense outcomes to the region economically and politically. On the other hand, the rift can return in a different form in the future as long as the political ideology of these states are different.

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