

The Perceptual Shock of Qatar Foreign Policy in 2017 Crisis: Systemic Factors, Regional Struggles Versus Domestic Variables

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Abstract

The Qatar crisis of June 2017 commenced without a warning and restored overlooked regional security dynamics to the state, the political elite, and the Qatari society at large. Qatar was cautious about the diversions of its foreign policy from regional security perceptions of its neighbors, even before the crisis, despite its failure to predict imminent political consequences, emerging from some states within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). In the aftermath of the crisis, critical narratives of the neighboring states on Qatar's independent policies intimidated at the top leadership level and necessitates an analysis of the crisis, navigating through domestic settings facing systemic and regional pressures. This article aims to analyze the impact of the crisis on the perceptions of Qatari decision-makers, its society, and its tribes using the “perceptual shock” concept of neoclassical realism. It contends that despite the ongoing regional isolation of Qatar by the Saudi-led quartet, comprising Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Egypt, Qatar's state apparatus and its relations with the society continued to strengthen due to the complex relationship between the domestic variables and systemic factors, and their relation to regional dynamics.

Keywords

GCC, Gulf security, neoclassical realism, perceptual shock, Qatar blockade, regional isolation

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Introduction

On June 5, 2017, Qatar experienced a sea, land, and air blockade by its three Gulf neighbors and Egypt. It came as a shock to the Qataris who define themselves as part of the Gulf society. It also brought a shock to the Qatari decision-makers' perception toward the unity and trust issue within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) institution. The severity of the blockade made Qatar leadership reassess the regional dynamics, which undermined the tiny gas-rich monarchy's sovereignty and independence. This urged Qatar to seek new alliances, several suppliers for its market, and trade routes to keep the country economically stable and militarily secure. Such responses testing Qatar's capacity reminded them of the deep power trends in the Gulf, which radically changed the decision-making processes and state behaviors. Neoclassical realism coined and defined perceptual shock as "a single event makes decision-makers aware of the cumulative effects of gradual long-term power trends" (Rose, 1998, p. 160). As in the Qatar case, these events occur abruptly and alert decision-makers, political elite, and society at large. The foreign policy behavior of Qatar after 2017 evolved around its articulated security perceptions toward the GCC members and the neighbors. Hence, the article argues that the blockade, which came as a perceptual shock to the Qatari decision-makers and its surrounding society, has not only further strengthened the state apparatus but also consolidated its bonds with society. The perceptual shock, which appeared due to the rapid development of the blockade, dramatically changed the Qatari decision-makers' perception of the international structure and regional dynamics. Thus, the domestic strength of the state enabled the Qatari decision-makers to rapidly overcome the perceptual shock of the blockade, withstand both challenges and demands from the blockading states, and justify the Qatari arguments over the issue of noninterference in domestic affairs and foreign policy decisions.

Following the imposition of the blockade, the Qatari decision-makers made concessions (Bazoobandi, 2019) to the public and persuaded the society, including the locals and expats, to support the decisions by Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani like increasing economic and military relations with Turkey, and economic relations with Iran, mostly to the extent of the transportation of the food supplies. The crisis not only created a sudden shift in the perceptions of the decision-makers but also society's perception of the GCC as a regional organization and the reliability of its neighbors. This period also witnessed a significant rise in national pride and patriotism among Qataris and non-Qataris alike. Due to its abundant hydrocarbon wealth and society's solidarity helped the country sustain and readjust itself to the regional isolation. The crisis raised questions for regional states over their alliances and policies in key political and military sectors.

There are plenty of studies that attempted to analyze the ongoing crisis by highlighting different perspectives. Zafirov (2017) explained the Qatar crisis by revealing its implications in political, economic, and security realms and argued the failure of the blockade against Qatar. Milton-Edwards (2020) explored the reasons behind the failure of mediation attempts through the perspective of conflict management and resolution. Sadiki and Saleh (2020) interpreted the crisis

through the lenses of social constructivism and stressed the issue of normlessness in the crisis. Fraihat (2020) compared the mediation initiatives of small states and the superpowers, particularly Kuwait and the USA, and concluded the effectiveness of the small-state mediation in crisis de-escalation comparing to the superpower mediation that increased the escalation between the blockading states and Qatar. Through the lenses of neoclassical realism, this article aims at shedding light on the interplay between the domestic influences and systemic incentives and their complex impact on the foreign policy decisions of the states, which drastically shifts the dynamics of regional security politics of the states. At this juncture, it claims to bring an alternative regional insight to the understanding of the Qatar crisis by adding the significance of the relation between unit-level variables, regional perceptions, and systemic imperatives in understanding their shifting capacity of the states' foreign policy directions at the times of crisis.

Since literature tends to explain the Gulf states' foreign and regional security policies from a neorealist, neoliberal, and constructivist perspective, this article extends the argument to neoclassical realism, which was coined by Gideon Rose in 1998.¹ Neoclassical realism is defined as a middle ground between structural realism (neorealism) and constructivist theories of international relations (Rose, 1998). Neoclassical realism analyzes foreign policy dynamics, decision-making processes, and leaders' security perceptions by questioning under which circumstances the internal characteristics of states guide national responses for international constraints (Taliaferro et al., 2009). It accepts that unit-level variables both constrain and facilitate the ability of states to respond to systemic imperatives. The case of Qatar illustrates the state's ties with its society and tribes to reinforce the state's decisions for the controversial issues of the region. Hence, the consolidated state apparatus in the face of the Arab quartet helped Qatar widen its arguments of noninterference in foreign policy decisions and domestic politics at the international level.

The article does not claim that Qatar and its neighbors have historically had good relations, or the Qatar crisis suddenly shifted the nature of their relations and their perceptions of each other. Rather, it emphasizes that Qatar was already aware, though limited, of possible adverse effects of its policies independent of the blockading quartet before the crisis. Before the Arab Uprisings of 2010, Qatar polished its mediating role to gain an opportunity to be a pivot actor in the Middle East, which had been dominated by Saudi Arabia and Iran after the fall of Saddam's regime in Iraq in 2003. After the Arab Uprisings, Qatar construed the new regional environment as defined by the introduction of the multiple non-state actors. The new post-Arab Uprisings dynamics forced by Saudi and Iranian hegemonic ventures, spurred Qatar to become a pivot actor and re-estimate its regional preferences, thanks to its abundant material wealth, which enables the state to act independently. The most striking cause of the blockade was the rigid rhetoric of the Arab quartet states of openly criticizing the Qatari foreign policy as well as its regional alliances that were not appreciated by the quartet with the claim of destroying the unity of the GCC members and stability in the region. However, Qatar responded by highlighting the significance of the societal factors

at the discourse level and stressing upon the injustice, inequality of demands, and lack of efforts for a diplomatic dialogue.

Neoclassical Realist Framework

Neoclassical realism attempts to synthesize the classical realist focus on human nature and domestic variables with neorealism's stress on the structure of the international system in shaping the state's behavior (Smith, 2016). In other words, it views foreign policy as a result of the complex relationships between the constraints of international structure and intervening domestic agents. Neoclassical realism offers a broad approach that allows the researcher to balance the leaders' psychological traits and domestic dynamics with the structural constraints of the international system in foreign policy analysis. In contrast to neorealism, neoclassical realism places domestic-level intervening forces such as perception of leaders and elites, intra-elite struggles, pressures of domestic audiences, importance of perception and misperception, and social cohesion as the key to the analysis of foreign policy process (Joseph, 2015). By incorporating domestic-level factors like the personal traits and perceptions of statesmen, state-society relationships in their examination of international politics, neoclassical realists refuse to leave the state inside the black box like neorealist would prefer to do (Schmidt, 2005). While neoclassical realism's emphasis on material elements as driving forces for a state's foreign policy in the anarchical international system makes them realists, interests and international imperatives are equally important for their analysis (Kropatcheva, 2012).

Neoclassical realists principally aimed at elucidating the foreign policy directions of states. While pressures of the international system are the major drivers of states' behavior, domestic factors do play important roles in translating those pressures into specific foreign policy decisions. States choose the appropriate alternative in a particular situation in accordance with perceptions of decision-makers and elites. This process is followed by making specific policy recommendations and concrete policies, which are shaped by dynamic settings. By considering the role of variables operating at the domestic level, neoclassical realists provide a concise account of the foreign policy behavior of states. The independent variable is the state's relative power perception within the international system, which encourages or discourages a particular action. Intervening variables are determined through the process of mediation between the domestic settings of a state and the systemic pressures that produce particular foreign policy actions as the dependent variables of the process.

According to neorealism, a state's behavior is prone to change according to specific foreign policy decisions, and states respond to the changes in the international as well as regional environment based on the preferences of decision-making actors and elites. This article views the states as influence-maximizers (Zakaria, 1998) compared to neorealist assumptions of states as power-maximizers, resource-maximizers, or security-maximizers. Changes in states' relative power perceptions of threat assessments in their environment or a perception shift among

the elites might emerge as a function of regime vulnerability and put a negative impact on the social cohesion, which would be reflected in the continuity or change in foreign policy, like appeasement and balancing (Schweller, 2004). Neoclassical realists do not consider power as an end in itself but rather a means for states to increase their influence or to control their environment that they inhabit (Schmidt, 2005). In this view, one can argue that the struggle for power between states is highly influenced by intervening variables placed at the domestic and state level rather than human nature (Schmidt, 2005).

Neoclassical realism has become popular in recent years as a practical and nuanced international relations theory for the researchers who attempt to include the influence of the domestic sector, perceptions of the elites, society, and decision-makers in understanding the foreign policy decisions of the states. In recent literature of the neoclassical realism, Kissane (2011) wrote on the neoclassical realism in understanding the issues that revealed the struggles of realism such as the timing of the outbreak of wars, the rise and fall of superpowers, and the issue of regionalization. Więclawski (2019) questioned the dilemmas of realism in interpreting the domestic structures and foreign policy-making process of the states. Rathbun (2008) argued that neoclassical realism helps neorealism to avoid falling to mistakes of underestimating the domestic politics and ideas in foreign policymaking of states.

There are also plenty of case studies applied to neoclassical realism in recent years. For instance, Eder (2014) adopted the neoclassical realism in understanding the China–Russia relations in Central Asia; Orban (2008) applied it to new Russian imperialism; Gvaliaa et al. (2019) explained the Georgia’s foreign policy in relation to the domestic and systemic constraints; Rosa et al. (2020) conducted neoclassical analysis of the military behavior of Italy from 1946 to 2010; Marsh (2014) explored the roles of domestic politics and elite perceptions in US foreign policymaking in the case of Operation Odyssey Dawn; McLean (2016) used neoclassical realism to explore the ways that have been utilized by foreign policy elites in Australia to shape the security responses of the decision-makers; Juneau (2015) studied the Iranian foreign policy through the lenses of neoclassical realism; He (2017) studied the bilateral relations between the USA and China in terms of the neoclassical realism; and Gelot and Welz (2018) analyzed the role of the African Union (AU) during the Libyan crisis of 2011. Although these studies did not specifically focus on the concept of perceptual shock, they illustrated the interpretative potential of neoclassical realism in understanding the foreign policy directions of the states in different regions.

Background of the Regional Split Between the Gulf Cooperation Council and Qatar

Neoclassical realism offers substantial insights into the issues of change and continuity in the Gulf politics, particularly in threat assessments of Saudi Arabia and the UAE toward Qatar. The conventional explanations focusing on domestic or structural factors are insufficient to examine Qatar’s foreign policy actions.

Saudi and the Emirati foreign policies have evolved differently according to Qatar's foreign policy imperatives, depending on both sides' threat perception. One can observe this in the cases of the Yemeni and Syrian civil wars and the Muslim Brotherhood issue, which fundamentally separated Qatar's regional security understanding than the Arab quartet. Neoclassical realism provided a comprehensive understanding of the regional politics of the Gulf states, as it focused on the power of structural relations, constraints of the international system, and the cognitive factors on state leaders' and elite's perceptions and misperceptions. In accordance with Zakaria's description of states as influence-maximizers, it is possible to evaluate the Saudi interventionist behavior as a product of its previous status as a regional hegemon and its current status as a regional power challenged by its previous ally—Qatar. Following the Arab Uprisings, Qatar's foreign policy calculations have drastically changed, concerning the regional dynamics and its neighbors' assessments of the international structure, which determined the new dynamics of relations with Saudi Arabia. At this point, neoclassical realism helps to systemize the insights of decision-makers by identifying the appropriate intervening variables, which cannot be understood by neorealism's structural variant (Kitchen, 2010).

Foreign policy choices of states depend on perceptions of leaders and the political elite of relative power of that particular country. Thus, foreign policy is determined by internal and external factors that demonstrate the inseparable linkage of power and politics and calls for an examination of the contexts within which foreign policies are formulated and implemented. For instance, Christensen (1996) argued that elites tend to get their demands by making concessions to their public along the way, suggesting that foreign policy is not influenced by systemic incentives only. The case of Qatar, in terms of its tribal groups and prominent families, illustrated the need for inclusion of domestic actors and dynamics in understanding the attitude of the Qatari decision-makers, which made the Emir seek the consent of the societal actors who further strengthened his rule against the conspiracies of coup d'état. The Royal elite's calculations and perceptions of their relative power and domestic constraints acted as the intervening variables between international pressures and Qatar's foreign policy decisions.

Before the period of the Arab Uprisings, Iran and Saudi Arabia emerged as two prominent powers in the Gulf regional rivalry, changing the nature of the regional system from a tripolar to bipolar one, with the elimination of Iraq as a regional rival from the regional dynamics in 2003. However, the post-Arab Uprisings period shifted the nature of regional dynamics into a multipolar one in which the Saudi hegemony was challenged by the regional crisis and wars like the Syria and Yemen civil wars and the Qatar crisis. Intervening variables were shaped by Saudi and Iranian regional threat perceptions on the domestic constraints over regime stability before the Arab Uprisings. Hence, foreign policy decisions of Iran and Saudi Arabia emerged due to the domestic settings mediating systemic pressures.

When the Arab uprisings broke out in 2010, the survival of the established governments was the top priority for Saudi Arabia and the Emirates. However, Qatar and Turkey preferred to support—mostly through media outlets—the political maintenance of the Muslim Brotherhood, especially after the 2012

election of Mohamed Morsi as the President of Egypt. The Qatari decision-makers interpreted the Arab Uprisings as an opportunity to align the country with the norms of democracy and freedom favored in the Western context (Ulrichsen, 2014). In contrast to Saudi Arabia and the UAE, Turkey and Qatar considered the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood as a less threatening event, which might have turned the regional dynamics in their favor (Baskan, 2016). However, the conflicting foreign policy decisions of Qatar with the Arab quartet were considered as damaging for the unity of the GCC members and against the security assessments of the neighbors. When the uprisings began in Syria, Saudi Arabia and Qatar backed opposition groups inside Syria to control, expecting the quick fall of Assad's regime. In 2013, the split between the regional priorities of Saudi Arabia and Qatar had become clearer because Qatar and Turkey began providing aid to Ahrar al-Sham. On the other hand, both Qatar and Saudi Arabia previously have funded the al-Nusra Front against the Assad regime until Russia's intervention in September 2015. However, Qatar was condemned by Saudi Arabia and the UAE for continuing to give financial aid to the al-Nusra Front despite the decision of both to end their support for the group (Negri, 2018).

Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE used their dominance on the Arab and international media to control the emerging narratives of the crisis, events, and wars in the region. Despite Al Jazeera's silence about the domestic politics in Qatar, it was efficient in boosting the protests in Tunisia and Egypt, as well as sponsoring the protests against the regimes of the Arab world (Lucas, 2014). Saudi Arabia viewed the Arab Uprisings as the indicators of the upcoming of democracy and, hence, as a serious threat to the regime's survival and interests of the royal family, especially with the rise of the political power of Shia communities in neighboring Arab countries.

However, Saudi Arabia's reactions toward the upheavals and opposition groups were different in each case. While upheavals in Bahrain and Yemen were considered as a threat to the Saudi regime and authority in the region, the Syrian conflict was seen as an opportunity to increase its influence both in the region and at home (Al-Rasheed, 2013). Despite ISIS being considered as a major threat to the Saudi regime security, Riyadh was also afraid of the defeat of the ISIS by the other groups like Shia Iraqis and Kurdish Iraqis, which would pave the way for the enhancement of Iran's influence through its societal ties with the Shia communities of the neighboring countries across the region (Sandhya, 2015). In the end, the complex nature of Saudi fears made the country join the air strikes against the ISIS, intervening in the Syrian conflict in favor of the opposition groups and staging air strikes against the Houthi rebels in Yemen. Saudi Arabia was concerned about the transformation of secular and authoritarian Arab regimes into Islamist regimes with democracy in mind, thereby having the potential to undermine Saudi Arabia's Islamic credentials that have positioned it in a special place in the region (Al-Rasheed, 2013).

To prevent this, Saudi Arabia chose to control the Arab Uprisings in a way to protect its Islamic credentials in the eyes of the emerging Islamist regimes. According to Al-Rasheed (2016), this was because of the Saudi ability to create a counterrevolutionary approach through a successful establishment of diplomacy.

Overall, in contrast to the North African and Levant states, where the uprisings did not pose a serious spillover potential to the state legitimacy of the Gulf states, protests in Bahrain and Oman were taken seriously by the Saudi decision-makers due to their potential to decrease the rentier state capacity and encourage the rise of political resilience in the Gulf states (Kamrava, 2018). However, Qatari narratives and actions have been contrary to the kingdom's regional priorities, especially in Egypt, Syria, Yemen, and Libya.

The Qatar Crisis as a Perceptual Shock: Opening the Black Box

The process of severing relations by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt with Doha in 2017 paved the way for a sudden perception shift in the Qatari leadership and society. The persistence of the blockading states' policy and Qatar's resistance to it shifted the regional dynamics in economy, politics, diplomacy, and military. The results have been observed not only in Qatar's relations with its neighbors but also in the shifted relations between regional actors such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt.

The perceptions of the Qatari decision-makers of internal variables are important to understand the country's reactions toward international, regional, and domestic events. The Qatar blockade came as a perceptual shock to the Qatari decision-makers and caused a sudden shift in the perception of its leaders toward regional threats, domestic threats, and national power. Rose argues that "the single event makes decision-makers aware of the cumulative effects of gradual long-term power trends" (Rose, 1998) and brings sudden awareness to the state and society in their perceptions of each other and regional security. In a similar vein, being exposed to sea, land, and air blockade, Qatar's perception toward the rigidity of the blockading neighbors shifted suddenly. Qatar and its neighbors shared fragile relations based on the shift from their understanding of the regional dynamics in the post-Arab Uprisings period.

Moreover, the Qatar crisis changed the discourses of both sides instantly, which exposed the differences in their regional power and security perceptions. Following the crisis and wars of the post-Arab uprisings period, neighboring states' definition of Qatar moved into an antagonistic trend in the economy, politics, and society. It incrementally began to be expressed at the leadership discourse level. However, Qatar's response seemed less panicked about the continuing blockade, as it endeavored to find new economic and strategic partners to become more independent from the political and economic standings of its neighbors and, more importantly, transformed its state-society relations in a constructive way. The crisis made the Qatari leadership more aware of the need for strengthening or forming new alliances, diversifying the liquefied natural gas (LNG)-based economy, reducing dependency on neighboring states (namely Saudi Arabia and the UAE), and consolidating the state apparatus with the society.

Qatar and the Arab quartet experienced several crises throughout their history, but one might conceive the recent one as a catastrophe due to its unfriendly

discourse and rapid implementation in various fields and caused a sudden shift in Qatar's perception of the regional dynamics. Previously, relations had been restored after each crisis and carried along, except the crisis in 2017. However, taking the evolution of relations among the GCC states into consideration, it could be perceived that it was not the first time that Qatar had refused to act in accordance with the regional preferences of other Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia and the Emirates. Given the historical record of Qatar's relations with the Arab quartet, one could expect the current crisis to follow a similar trend toward a rapprochement after a while but has proved just the opposite until now.

The early 1990s experienced tribal clashes on the border with Saudi Arabia. What remained particularly clear in the historical memory of the Qataris was the 1994 coup d'état attempt against Qatari Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani. The attempt was alleged to be organized by Saudi Arabia and the UAE against the Emir's policies for strengthening Qatar as an independent and self-sufficient state with a flexible foreign policy (Fromherz, 2012). On the other hand, the establishment of Al Jazeera in 1996 was a further annoyance to the GCC neighbors as the channel was accused of broadcasting Al-Qaeda and other dissident groups. In 2002, Saudi Arabia withdrew its ambassador from Qatar, and tensions recurred in 2006 when a pipeline deal between Qatar and Kuwait was blocked by Saudi Arabia (*The National*, 2018a). The most crucial disagreement between Saudi Arabia and Qatar was the latter's support for the Muslim Brotherhood that was named as a terrorist group by neighboring countries. During the Arab Uprisings, Qatar's support for the Brotherhood was interpreted as undermining stability in the region, and Al Jazeera was perceived as the organization's platform for disseminating its regional security and ally preferences. In 2014, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain withdrew their ambassadors from Qatar, claiming Qatar did not adhere to the GCC agreement on maintaining security in the region. Relations were restored in the same year, and the Riyadh Agreement was ratified with the commitment of non-interference in the internal affairs of each other, although it included shutting down of Al Jazeera and the end to cultivating close relations with Iran (*The National*, 2018b).

For the Qatari decision-makers, it was far more important to convince the people of the legitimacy of the leaders' regional preferences. They prioritized the concepts of justice, equality, and dialogue on their discourse toward the blockade and demands. For instance, the leadership defined the crisis as an aggressive act toward the Qatari nation, a direct threat to dominate the state and weaken its sovereignty and independence. Sheikh Tamim described it as "...a futile crisis, manufactured by our neighbors" (Browne, 2018) and underlined the responsibility of the Middle Eastern people to ensure the sovereignty of Qatar. In a similar vein, Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani argued that the blockading states violated the sovereignty rights of Qatar by imposing a list of unrealistic demands in an immature diplomatic manner (France24, 2017). Qatar's response to the blockade can be argued to evolve constructively through underlining the necessity for a diplomatic attitude, avoiding a hostile language, avoiding to intervene in domestic politics, and underlining the significance of justice and equality instead of imposing unilateral demands.

After 2 years of the blockade, the dependent variables of the threat perceptions of the Saudi Arabia–UAE–Bahrain axis, domestic constraints of the blockade, and the axis' stress on Qatar's disrespect for the GCC unity began to be expressed in foreign policy decisions of the state of Qatar as clear indications of conflicting positions. The Qatari decision-makers' perception of influence-maximizing was reshaped by the severity of the blockade, and Qatar attempted to gain more influence regionally. But it needed approval from Qatari society and tribal factions, which gave legitimacy of the foreign policy decisions during crisis. The Qatari decision-makers had to make concessions to the public and persuade the society about the legitimacy of their foreign policy actions regarding the blockade. The crisis not only created a sudden shift in the perceptions of the decision-makers but also society's perception of the region, the GCC neighbors, and the state of Qatar. This period was marked by a rise in national pride among the Qatari society and state leaders alike. Given its material wealth and society's approval, Qatar seemed to delicately cope with the consequences of being pushed into regional isolation by its neighbors.

Domestic Settings: Tribal Support and the Blockade

Decision-makers' interpretations of domestic settings of the crisis were decisive for overcoming the threats of coup d'état and foreign intervention. Domestic actors and their influence on Qatar's foreign policy decisions as the intervening variables of the blockade helped to mediate the systemic pressures. They produced distinctive foreign policy outcomes. Moreover, tribal affiliations and structure are a substantial part of state–society relations in Qatar, and its urban neighborhoods are tribal ones where people gather around the family council or majlis and discuss personal and community matters. Tribal majlis, where people follow traditional modes of discussion and consensus, hold a significant place in creating public opinion and sentiments. Given the unwritten social contract between Qataris and the Emir, tribes of Qatar respect Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani who provides them access to the system. This is not to argue that there are no opposing voices of dissident groups within each tribe toward the Emir's policy. Yet, internal opposition to the Emir's policies is mostly suppressed.

Following the outbreak of the crisis, rumors about the possibility of a coup d'état from the tribes, who were dissatisfied with the Emir's policies, were prevalent as the intervening variables of the crisis. To illustrate, Abdulaziz bin Khalifa al-Thani, Emir's brother living in Geneva, was said to take over power and form a political front against the Emir with collaboration from other leaders within the family. Saud bin Nasser al-Thani, a dissident of the al-Thani family, announced a plan to form a political front based in London against the Emir whose regional policies claimed to be tolerated for a long time (*Egypt Today*, 2017). Moreover, Sheikh bin Nasser thanked Saudi newspapers that published articles against Emir's policies. Sheikh Sultan bin Suhaim was another actor in the crisis who was believed to be residing in Saudi Arabia. His father was the brother of the

former Qatari Emir, Sheikh Khalifah bin Hamad, who was also removed from office in a bloodless coup by Sheikh Hamad al-Thani and served as the first foreign minister in the 1970s. Sheikh Sultan expressed support for Sheikh Abdullah bin Ali, another member of the Qatari royal family, who called on the Qatar leadership to adhere to the demands of the Arab quartet to resolve the crisis, and then his assets were frozen (*The National*, 2017).

Furthermore, Sheikh Sultan participated in the Banu Yam tribe² meeting as well as another one between the Bani Hajjer and al-Qahtaan tribes in the east of Saudi Arabia who boycotted the Qatari regime. In the meeting, Sheikh Sultan stated his intention to rescue Qatar from the chaos: “We are the founders [of Qatar], and we will purify it from its squalor” (*The National*, 2017). Not long before the blockade, the period of Arab Uprisings displayed Qatar encountering calls for the downfall of the Emir, like a Facebook page entitled “Freedom Revolution March 16 Qatar,” calling for the downfall of Emir, which attracted the likes of 1,646 people. The followers of the page had demanded the removal of a US military base from the Qatari soil, exclusion of the former Emir’s influential wife Sheikha Moza bint Nasser from public affairs, political reform, and cutting ties with Iran and Israel (Reuters, 2011).

Qatar domestically showed a unified attitude toward the coup d’état rumors and the articles criticizing the al-Thani family in blockading states’ newspapers. One of the controversial issues was the attitude of the al-Marri (al-Murra) tribe of Qatar, another descendant of the Banu Yam tribe, that constitutes 60% of the Qatari population and played a major role in the failed coup d’état attempt in 1996 (*Gulf News*, 2017). According to Qatari sources, the family renewed its loyalty to Sheikh Tamim and denounced the blockade on Qatar (*The Peninsula*, 2017). The tribe also criticized the sources that used its name in political disputes to destroy the social fabric and political cohesion of the Qatari society. However, according to some Egyptian sources, the al-Marri tribe leaders manifested their discontent when the regime turned to Turkey for military protection (Maguid, 2017). Before this, in 2005, the Banu Yam tribe in Saudi Arabia gathered at the Qatari border to protest the Emir, who revoked the nationality of Sheikh Talib bin Mohamed Bin Lahoum Bin Sherim—leader of the al-Murra tribe (*Saudi Gazette*, 2017).³ In response, Qatar revoked the citizenship of about 5,000–6,000 members of the Al-Ghofran clan of the al-Murrah tribe and exiled them to Saudi Arabia.

Nevertheless, the tribe held ministerial positions between 1996 and 2013 until Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani took over from his father. Lately, the Al-Ghofran family members, a branch of the al-Marri tribe, urged the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council to support their struggle to regain their rights in Qatar that was accused of launching systematic repression of the tribe (*Gulf News*, 2017). Despite these allegations, the state idealized social and political cohesion and strengthened ties between society and state. Even if one assumes that there are domestic critics of the Emir’s policies, they seem to be developing behind the scenes or pending for a better occasion to appear, in accordance with the region’s current political scene.

Systemic Incentives: Regional Actors' Quandary

Regional pressures and systemic incentives within the political setting of the Gulf were among the main drivers of Qatar's foreign policy actions. Domestic settings shaped by the decision-making actors, elites, and tribal groups played an important role in translating regional pressures into specific policy decisions. Likewise, decision-makers of the blockading states, besides the allies of Qatar, have expressed their concerns to persuade their public about the legitimacy of the blockade. The cumulative effects of the blockade gradually increased Qatar's threat perception from the neighbors and contributed to the robustness of its perceptual shock from the blockade. The Saudi concerns have included, in particular, Qatar's growing relationship with Iran and its support for the Muslim Brotherhood.

However, while Qatar hosted Yousef Al Qaradawi, the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, in Doha, Saudi Arabia remained a firm supporter of Egyptian leader Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. In addition to the threat perception of Saudi Arabia from the non-state actors, states, and political groups, Al Jazeera can be seen to be posing a real threat to the kingdom, given its international broadcasting. It was a platform, according to Saudi decision-makers, that allowed "extremists" to speak on-air and constituted a threat to regional security, especially during the Arab Uprisings, which was instrumental in dividing Qatar and Saudi Arabia, as illustrated in the speech of Sheikh Tamim of Qatar: "We stood by the people... They stood by the regimes. I feel that we stood by the right side" (Walsh, 2018).

On the other hand, Bahrain adopted a counter-narrative against Qatar of helping the government against protests in 2011, which were later controlled by Saudi troops and Emirati police. Furthermore, after the blockade, Sheikh Khalid bin Ahmed, Bahraini Foreign Minister, claimed that the rates of terrorist attacks had dropped significantly since Bahrain began rejecting the entrance of the Qatari citizens to the country (*The National*, 2018b). Another regional actor contributing to the Gulf politics was the UAE, which gave a rigid response to Qatari actions. The most striking dimension in the Emirati response can be observed in the statement of Dubai's Security Chief Dhahi Khalfan on Twitter when he said that the crisis would cease if Qatar declined to host the 2022 World Cup (Rumsby, 2017). The Emirati demand linking the end of the crisis to Qatari withdrawal from hosting the World Cup seemed to be unreasonable. It also made the Qatari decision-makers and outsiders to question the sincerity of the motivations of the blockade. However, Qatar joined the Peninsula Shield exercise at the King Abdulaziz airbase of Saudi Arabia in February 2019 for 2 weeks to enhance cooperation with the GCC forces and showed its commitment to the joint armed forces.

The cumulative effects of the blockade pushed Qatari decision-makers to move closer to other regional actors such as Iran, Turkey, and Russia, which increased the Saudi and UAE threat assessments within the regional dynamics. The Iranian decision-makers tended to express their open support for Qatar and intention to ensure the stability in the region. To illustrate, one can refer to President Hassan Rouhani's support for Sheikh Tamim of Qatar in a meeting: "We try to act

rationally because the opponents in the region are young and unripe and irrational in their approach with Qatar...Iran's airspace, sea and ground transport links will always be open to Qatar, our brotherly and neighbor country" (Erdbrink, 2017). Moreover, the blockade seemed to have a positive impact on the Iranian economy as Iran's exports to Qatar reached US\$215 million in February 2018, while imports from Qatar experienced a 157% growth in January 2018 (*Iran Daily*, 2018b). Despite the challenges and sanctions, Iran has remained an integral economic actor for the GCC and utilized the crisis successfully as a means of maximizing its influence.

Qatar's relations with Iran always developed cautiously, given the common threat perception of the GCC states, dominated by Saudi Arabia (Baabood, 2018). Due to the mutual distrust toward Iran within the GCC, Qatar had limited relations with Iran but continued to develop economic ties, though. Qatar's ties with Iran are also critical for protecting its natural resources as both share the North Dome/South Pars gas field, where Qatar derives 60% of its export revenue. Moreover, due to the withdrawal decision of Total air and gas company from the contract to develop a portion of Iran's South Pars gas field, Qatari decision-makers' concerns increased over the efficient utilization of Iran's portion of the shared field, as Iran needed technical expertise from Western companies (Mogeienicki & Sudetic, 2018). This factor contributes to our understanding that Qatar's perception of Iran can change based on the shifting positions of the other players in the contest.

Russia, as a decisive regional actor, especially in the complex context of the Syrian war, took a neutral stance, while signaling a willingness to overcome the crisis with mediation. Russia's Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Viktorovich Lavrov used shuttle diplomacy with Doha, Kuwait City, and Abu Dhabi to demonstrate Russia's commitment to promoting a resolution to the Qatar crisis and its interest in the GCC's survival as a regional organization. President Vladimir Putin reinforced a positive image of the relations between Russia and Qatar by underlining the 30th anniversary of bilateral relations in 2018 with the expanding volume of trade and investment exchange (Bukhari, 2018). Russia adopted a balanced response quickly without damaging its relationship with any sides; for instance, it maintained military and technical cooperation with Qatar and Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt without giving priority to any of them.

Turkey's supportive regional policy toward Qatar from the beginning of the blockade was a clear message of Turkish decision-makers' political stance in regional dynamics, which resulted in a serious challenge to the Saudi-UAE-Bahrain axis. Turkey gave supportive speeches at the leadership level and supplied all the necessary goods and commodities by air and sea routes to Qatar. Since the first hints of the crisis, Turkey has acted as a negotiator with Kuwait and described the bilateral relations with Qatar as brotherly (Al Jazeera, 2017). While Turkey declared that the blockade was a certain violation of international law, Erdogan accused "unspecified 'enemies' of trying to 'fire up tensions between brothers'" (Press TV, 2017). Despite the amicable relations, one cannot underestimate Turkey's geopolitical calculations, which had already been attested to by establishing the military base in Qatar in 2014. This was an opportunity for Turkey to have a resource-rich ally who needed economic and military support. Before

the crisis, both countries had similar political stances vis-à-vis the Syrian war, the fall of Morsi during the 2013 coup, and Qatar's support for the failed coup attempt toward Turkish government in 2015. Eager to enter the Qatari market, the Turkish government ordered Turkish suppliers to take advantage of the GCC crisis by increasing prices. Turkey quickly demonstrated its capacity to meet Qatari demands by, for instance, air transporting tons of vegetables, chicken, and dairy products per day by 200 planes from Turkey (TRT World, 2018). At the leadership level, Turkey openly sides with Qatar. However, it is still far from jeopardizing relations with other actors, especially with Saudi Arabia, despite the diplomatic crises with the kingdom since the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

After the Blockade: Excluded but Still Allowed to Bet?

Qatar's prevention of political or military intervention of the external powers in the crisis has been commonly explained by factors like the country's LNG revenues. Material wealth certainly helped the country to survive the blockage of the neighbors, but societies and tribal support that the Emir had shared played an equally decisive role in minimizing the impact of the crisis. For Kamrava (2013), the state–society ties in Qatar have been the sole example of a state's utilization of its wealth to construct a deep relation with the society by making the society feel grateful for its development. However, the crisis itself seemed to unite the society in a more efficient way than the pre-crisis period. During the crisis, Qatari society showed a strong sense of solidarity toward the possibility of an external threat from the blockading neighbors. In the 2019 GCC Summit, Sheikh Tamim stated his confidence with the Qatari people in overcoming the effects of the blockade. The Qatar decision-makers even claimed the benefits of the blockade for the society in the sense of uniting the people and state more than before (Al-Mutairi, 2019). Moreover, the blockade revealed the changing idea of national identity among Qataris as distinct from the transnational Gulf/Khaleej identity (Griffin, 2018).

Additionally, the socioeconomic effects of the blockade included the government's decision to provide permanent residency for some expatriates (Bazoobandi, 2019). The solidarity among society showed that Qatari political leadership could not be delegitimized by Saudi Arabia and the Arab quartet. According to the "Qatar against the Blockade 2017" survey by the Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI; *Iran Daily*, 2018a; Qatar against the Blockade 2017 [dataset], 2018), the crisis made positive changes in state–society relations like transparency of politics and Qataris' greater interest in political participation (Qatar against the Blockade 2017 [dataset], 2018). According to the survey results, 81% of Qataris believed that the state began to take citizens' opinions seriously. For instance, Qatari people's sense of belonging to the GCC dropped to 52%, while 59.5% of the respondents were positive toward Qatar's membership in the GCC. Moreover, the results revealed that Qataris became more critical of the GCC as a unified organization, but they still preferred socially to

identify themselves within the GCC. Besides forming the collective memory of citizens of Qatar and the GCC countries, the crisis with anti-Qatari rhetoric paved the way for the GCC losing its influence as “a practical unit and an aspirational reality” (Ulrichsen, 2019).

The Qatari decision-makers attempted to overcome the perceptual shock of the blockade, both at the leadership and at the societal level, through employing a counter-narrative, which were broadcasted to the world via media tools. Since the early days of the blockade, the main defense mechanism was that the country’s solid economy had not been negatively affected by the blockade (Qatar Has Demonstrated..., 2017). To illustrate, Qatar’s nominal GDP rose to US\$191 billion (over QR 695 billion) in 2018 compared to US\$166 billion (QR 604.48 billion) in 2017. Qatar’s real GDP increased by around 1.58% in 2017 compared to 2.69% growth in 2018, and 2.82% in 2019 (Shoeb, 2018). Besides the rise in its GDP, Qatar has also targeted a US\$200 billion infrastructure investment plan as part of its hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup and has established a new “Smart Nation” program to provide information technology solutions to the transport, logistics, health, sports, and environmental sectors. Qatar’s healthcare spending included projects like expanding the Hamad Medical Corporation and establishing new health centers, which came at a cost of around US\$6.2 billion in the 2018 budget (The State of Qatar, 2020). Qatari policymakers emphasized the self-confidence of the Qatari side throughout the conflict and believed that Qatar had made every diplomatic effort to end the crisis.

The crisis shifted Qatar’s preferences regarding economic relations with the countries in accordance with Qatar’s perception of its relative power within the regional system. It revealed the fact that small states need to diversify their economy as well as their political allies, military alliances, and security partners (Ulrichsen, 2019). According to the survey by the SESRI conducted in December 2017, 90.3% of the respondents were very satisfied with Qatar’s approaches in dealing with the blockade (Qatar against the Blockade 2017 [dataset], 2018), despite sanctions on the transportation of the food items to Qatar and 87% of the respondents questioning the quality of available products in Qatar from the time when the blockade began (Qatar against the Blockade 2017 [dataset], 2018).

As a response to the blockade, in May 2018, Qatar banned products imported from the four Arab neighbors by claiming “to protect the safety of consumers in the state of Qatar and to combat improper trafficking of goods” (*Gulf News*, 2018). Those products had been imported into Doha, Qatar, on multiple daily routes from the regional re-export hub at Dubai’s Jebel Ali Port. The government also encouraged local production of vegetables, dairy, and other staples. After the blockade, the main countries of destination for export shifted from Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Oman to Oman, Kuwait, China, Jordan, and Germany. Moreover, Qatar needed to find new supply routes, particularly for food items, and Turkey, Iran, Oman, Kuwait, and India became the new destinations for its food supply. The new supply routes are the sea route from Turkey to Doha, the land route through Turkey, and then over sea to Doha and from Aqaba by sea to Doha (Neubauer, 2017).

While relations collapsed with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain, “neutral” Gulf neighbors like Oman and Kuwait developed trade relations with Qatar, while Iran increased its food supply to Qatar. Oman and Kuwait historically preferred to play a neutral role in crises, especially to mediate between Saudi Arabia and Iran. During the Qatar crisis, both adopted the same policy, and Qatar was permitted to operate a long cruise ship, *Grand Ferry*, connecting Doha to Oman and Kuwait. After the sailing of the cruise ship, it had been announced that Doha Port witnessed an exponential increase in the number of tourists visiting the country (Al Jazeera, 2018).

The blockade paved the way for Qatar to diversify its economic partners and trade routes, which came as relatively positive consequences. It forced Qatar to figure out new trade routes and provide additional support to its local economy, especially after paying to airlift staples for its population after Saudi closed its land border. Besides developing closer ties with regional powers such as Iran, Turkey, Oman, and Kuwait, Qatar seems to feel more alienated from the Arab quartet in figuring out new trade routes to maintain its economy. Vice-Chairman of Qatar Chamber Muhammed bin Ahmed bin Towar Al-Kuwari announced that since the blockade, Qatar has continuously developed and established alternative trade links through the opening of Hamad Port and the start of a new trade network from Turkey, Iran, and Qatar, and things have changed significantly (*Iran Daily*, 2018a). Al-Kuwari emphasized the expected influence of the new trade routes: “In addition, we are also developing and expanding the Ruwais Port. We have two links from Ruwais Port connecting Iran’s two important provinces – Bushehr Port and Bandar Abbas, a port city and capital of Hormuzgan Province...” (*Iran Daily*, 2018a). By 2017, Turkey and Iran proposed a 1,700-km trade route from Mardin in Turkey to Iran’s Bushehr Port, which is capable of transporting goods like milk, vegetables, and fruits by truck in approximately 22 hours, which is far shorter than the 11-day sea route between Turkey and Qatar (*The Peninsula Qatar*, 2017). With the establishment of new trade routes, Qatar aims at diversifying the safety and low-cost routes of its imports, maintaining the standard of living of its citizens and residents, as well as showing the country’s capability of finding alternatives during a period of crisis.

One of the major outcomes of the crisis was Qatar’s announcement of its exit from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) ahead of its annual meeting in Vienna in December 2018, citing increased priority toward developing its gas resources. The decision came as an unexpected outcome of the crisis, which came as an interplay between the intervening variables at the regional and domestic settings. Qatar’s decision to exit was notable because it was the first state in the Middle East to leave the group, and more importantly, it came within a crisis period. The rationale behind the exit was announced by Qatar’s decision-makers to focus more on the natural gas field, which is the real source for the country’s wealth. Qatar is one of the smaller OPEC crude oil producers with an output of some 600,000 barrels per day (Colgan, 2018) despite the fact that it was the first country to join OPEC after the five founding states Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela had formed the OPEC group in 1960. Saudi Arabia

Table 1. World's Proven Crude Oil Reserves by Country (Middle East) (million barrel)

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Change 2018 to 2017
Middle East	802,511.90	802,847.50	807,729.50	804,639.00	803,184.00	-0.2
Iran	157,530.00	158,400.00	157,200.00	155,600.00	155,600.00	
Iraq	143,069.40	142,503.00	148,765.50	147,223.00	145,019.00	1.5
Kuwait	101,500.00	101,500.00	101,500.00	101,500.00	101,500.00	
Oman	5,151.00	5,373.00	5,373.00	5,373.00	5,373.00	
Qatar	25,244.00	25,244.00	25,244.00	25,244.00	25,244.00	
Saudi Arabia	266,578.00	266,208.00	266,208.00	266,260.00	267,026.00	0.3
Syria	2,500.00	2,500.00	2,500.00	2,500.00	2,500.00	
United Arab Emirates	97,800.00	97,800.00	97,800.00	97,800.00	97,800.00	
Others	3,139.50	3,139.00	3,139.00	3,139.00	3,122.00	0.5

Source: OPEC (2019).

alone produces roughly 10 million barrels per day (Colgan, 2018). It is the leading oil-producing country in the Middle East with 267,026 billion cubic meters, according to the OPEC (2019). On the other hand, Qatar was the largest exporter of LNG in the world in 2018 with 104.8 billion cubic meters as illustrated in Table 1, directed to South Korea, India, Japan, and China in Asia and Italy, the UK, and Spain in Europe (Qatar LNG Exports Outlook, 2018).

Since its withdrawal from OPEC comes amid a crisis, it is reasonable to question whether Qatar's decision came as a political result of the blockade. If one looks into the response of the OPEC toward crises among its members throughout the years, the organization has traditionally calmed tensions and crises. Despite its declining influence on the global oil market, OPEC has served as a useful forum for states to engage in dialogue and cooperate in areas of mutual interest. For instance, during the Iran–Iraq War from 1980 to 1988, OPEC remained neutral to both countries, and thus none of them withdrew their membership from the organization. In a similar vein, despite the hostility between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which has been reflected in asymmetric warfare(s) across the Middle East, the two countries have engaged cooperatively with each other through OPEC in the past. Lately, the organization's utility for Qatar has been discussed by Qatari decision-makers like Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim al-Thani, former prime minister, has stated: "... organization has become useless and adds nothing to us. They are used only for purposes that harm our national interest" (Kanady, 2018). Similarly, Saad Sherida Kaabi, Qatari Minister of State for Energy Affairs, stated that the departure did not come because of the political crisis, as the country did not have a certain authority over the institution to claim an effect (Knecht & Gamal, 2018). One should also include President Donald Trump's objections to OPEC regarding the high oil prices in understanding the logic of Qatari decision-makers to legitimize their decision at least to calm the critics.

It seems plausible to portray Qatar's exit as a dependent variable of the blockade, as OPEC has long been criticized of being an ineffective diplomatic bridge dominated by Saudi Arabia over the smaller producer countries. Likewise, for the Qatari decision-makers, OPEC is an organization controlled and managed by Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, according to the decision-makers of Saudi Arabia and the UAE, Qatar's exit would not have any serious impact on the future of the OPEC, but it is a symbolic move to deepen the rift between Qatar and blockading Gulf neighbors (Kerr & Raval, 2018). However, Saudi and Emirati decision-makers are aware of the need of the OPEC to redefine itself through refining different crude oil products and encouraging sharing technology among members. In December 2018, OPEC had agreed to cut production by 800,000 barrels per day systematically, which subtly revealed Saudi's declining ability to manipulate the market through OPEC and, in turn, the rising influence of Russia (DiChristopher & Meredith, 2018). At this juncture, OPEC seemed to focus more on the deficiencies within the organization, rather than Qatar's exit, but without forgetting or turning a blind eye on its departure that came after 58 years amid a regional crisis.

Conclusion

The crisis alerted the state and reshaped the perceptions of Qatari decision-makers, political elites, and society toward the GCC neighbors and other regional actors. While Qatar continued and improved relations with Turkey and Iran by building new trade routes and transferring foods and items, the crisis alienated Qatar from the Arab quartet in terms of politics, economy, and the military. Moreover, the Qatar crisis has strengthened the state apparatus and its relations with the Qatari society. The LNG wealth helped the country to overcome the economic consequences of the blockade and to adjust itself to regional isolation. More significantly, the unified attitude of the Qatari society against the blockade by approving the Emir's foreign policy decisions highly boosted the self-confidence of the state for future events and crisis. This process also witnessed the rise of national pride among the society and decision-makers. Overall, the severity of the blockade alerted regional states, particularly small states of the region, to rethink their alliances, while allowing Qatar to consolidate its influence over the society and claim the state capacity of surviving under the economic constraints of the blockade conditions.

The domestic or structural factors alone are not enough to understand the complexity of Qatar's management of the crisis; rather, systemic factors and regional pressures must be filtered through domestic variables such as decision-makers, elites, and tribal groups within the Qatari political system to understand foreign policy behaviors. The Arab Uprisings provided Qatar with an insight into the changing regional environment under the control of multiple actors rather than the hegemony of Saudi Arabia or Iran. The crisis directed the country to realize its regional priorities and ally preferences, diverging from the Arab quartet, hence, forcing the Qatari decision-makers to overcome the perceptual shock of the blockade at both the leadership and societal levels. To cope with this situation, they employed counter-narratives against the arguments of the blockading states broadcasted through the media. Qatar utilized the concepts of injustice, inequality, lack of dialogue, and lack of respect for state sovereignty to legitimize its regional stance. What was different than the previous crisis between Qatar and the Arab quartet states was the capacity of the crisis to make a sudden shift in regional politics and the regional perception of the Qatari leaders. Thus, its influence was not only observed in Qatar's relations with the GCC countries but also its relations between other regional actors like Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Russia.

Qatar has been regionally isolated and excluded since July 2017 but is it still in the regional game to bet as a small state? The answer will depend on the capacity and willingness of the Qatari government to give priority on the societal level rather than repressing the political audience in foreign policymaking. The Qatar crisis also constitutes a sample for the small states to cope with the regional constraints through domestic support and taking the strength of people factor into their political agenda in the times of crisis. At present it seems that Qatar is in favor of continuing to avoid an antagonistic discourse toward its neighbors and blockading states. The Qatari decision-makers prefer a discourse of reestablishing diplomatic relations besides calling the blockading states to adopt a respectful

manner to the regional preferences of Qatar as a sovereign regional actor. However, it is worth keeping in mind that regional behavior and political rhetoric of states are prone to change according to specific foreign policy decisions and preferences of decision-making actors and elites over the sudden shifts in the security and political and economic dynamics of the regions.

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Notes

1. Before Gideon Rose coined the term, John A. Vasquez and Randall L. Scheweller had similar debates as “neo-traditional realism” in 1997.
2. A large tribe located in Najran Province in Saudi Arabia and the principal tribe of that area. They reside in countries such as Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Wadi Amad of Yemen (*The Peninsula*, 2017).
3. According to Saudi sources: “Qatar has revoked the citizenship of high-profile poet Mohammed Al-Marri and Sheikh Shafi Nasser Hamoud Al-Hajri, the elder of the tribe of Shaml Al-Hawajer along with a group of his family” (*Saudi Gazette*, 2017).

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