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A Securitization Approach to Qatar's Foreign Policy Making

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ABSTRACT

The securitisation of military and political sectors has been underway for decades in the context of Qatari politics. Conceptualising the role of security in Qatar's foreign policymaking is the primary purpose of this study. Qatar's security tools and strategies in the initial era of the Gulf Crisis 2017 are central elements of this research using the Copenhagen school's securitisation framework. The Gulf Crisis started in June 2017 and took more than 3 years for the parties to warm the relations again. This research depicts the early process of the Gulf Crisis 2017 through categorising threats and vulnerabilities posed to Qatar's military and political security.

KEYWORDS

Securitisation; Qatar; Foreign Policy Making; the Gulf Crisis 2017

Introduction

Security has played a vital role in Qatar's foreign policy making since the early days of its founding. This is not only because Qatar was a latecomer to global politics as a small state gained independence in 1971, but also the extreme social, economic, and political change the country has gone through was drastic and required a safe zone for policymaking. Qatar's foreign policy strategies have overlapped with its security policies to maintain independence, legitimacy, and stability in domestic and external politics. Thus, as a vulnerable small state, sustainable welfare in social and political manners has been critical for Qatar.

The early era of the Qatari state until the mid-twentieth century was focussed on guaranteeing military security in addition to regime security. Foreign policy on the matters of political and military security utilised regional alliances (the GCC) and 'bandwagoning' Saudi Arabia, the hegemonic power of the region. However, when Sheikh Hamad came into power in 1995 with a non-violent coup d'état, the nature of foreign policy, and military and political security within it, took on a distinct structure.¹ Sheikh Hamad, the Father Emir, had an ambition to secure Qatar militarily and politically with the help of fixed principles in foreign policy up until the Arab Spring. This

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¹B. Haykel, 'Qatar's foreign policy. Policy brief', Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre (NOREF), (February 2013); L. Khatib, 'Qatar's foreign policy: the limits of pragmatism', *International Affairs* 89(2), (2013), pp. 417–431.

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was the period of the construction of the Qatari state with the implementation of soft power (mediation, branding), and institutional and idea-based (Al-Jazeera) developments, guaranteeing military security through third-party support. What made policy effective in Father Emir's period is his direct influence on the construction of State institutions and increase of a public image on a global level. Thus, Sheikh Hamad personally lay the foundations for fixed principles in policymaking, including mediation, branding, aggressive internationalisation, pragmatism, alliance building, niche diplomacy and Omni-balancing.

Qatar also uses non-traditional foreign policy tools, which became more visible after the Arab Spring, with military intervention in Libya, Bahrain, and Yemen. Use of military force and obtaining new alliances (such as with Turkey), despite unrest in the GCC, are two essential non-traditional elements of foreign policy. Although some studies argue that Qatari foreign policy, in terms of military and political security, has become interventionist, militarised and risky, the present study does not agree.²

Changes in the Qatari foreign policy coinciding with the Arab Spring and leadership change have prompted these criticisms from regional partners. Sheikh Tamim came into power on 25 June 2013. The new era in regional politics had already begun at the end of 2010 with the Arab Spring when Sheikh Tamim was Heir Apparent to the State of Qatar. Sheikh Tamim was already participating in decision-making activities and was well informed on policies before his accession as Heir Apparent. He was also preoccupied with regional conflicts in the first week after his accession, with a military coup d'état in Egypt against Morsi. The regional atmosphere would not be receptive to dramatic alterations or decisions, even in the case of a leadership change. As such, changes in the military and political sector were gradual rather than under the direct influence of a particular event. This is why Qatari policymaking has begun to utilise non-traditional foreign policy tools in addition to fixed ones, especially after the Arab Spring, to continue to ensure military and political security in a chaotic political period.

The Gulf Crisis 2017 started another drastic transformation in regional politics; however, this time, Qatar was at the centre of controversial strain, which made securitisation even more crucial than before. The siege that took more than 3 years has indicated the importance of securitisation for keeping Qatar in the safe zone with bringing vulnerabilities regarding its geography, history, physical base, ideas and institutions.

The Gulf Crisis started in June 2017 and took more than 3 years for the parties to warm the relations again. However, this study only focuses on Qatar's initial response to the list of 13 demands categorising them with military and political security sectors in this critical diplomatic rift. Qatar's security tools and strategies in military and political manners in the initial era of the Gulf Crisis 2017 are central elements using the Copenhagen school's securitisation framework. This paper aims to represent a comprehensive outlook for utilising military and political sectors to analyse securitisation in foreign policymaking. Conceptualising the role of security in Qatar's foreign policymaking is the primary purpose of this study. This paper aims to represent a

²S. Al-Qassemi, 'Qatar's annus horribilis', *Al-Monitor*, (26 June 2014).

comprehensive outlook for the utilisation of military and political sectors in foreign policy, which requires an in-depth analysis of the policymaking starting from Sheikh Hamad era to the Gulf Crisis 2017. The preliminary argument of the securitisation assessment that the foreign policy has underpinned military and political security in the State because Qatar, as a small and thus vulnerable monarchy, primarily seeks to survive with the help of military support and political legitimacy. In this regard, after a brief summary of security sectors and threats and vulnerabilities towards them, the paper scrutinises strategies and securitisation in three sections: alliances, Arab Spring and backlash of security tools. The next part renders initial stages of the Gulf Crisis of 2017 through representing the clusters of referent objects and the responses to threats. The final chapter is devoted to discussing conceptualising the sectors' roles in foreign policy of Qatar with special attention to two main partners in the early blockade days: Turkey and Iran. By discussing whether there has been any change in the implementation of military and political security in foreign policy or not, the research concludes that Qatar's securitisation policy has maintained its importance in policy-making with adaptations.

Securitisation in Foreign Policy Making: Military and Political Security Sectors

Military security is at the top of the security agenda if there is a lack of military security; all other sectors are vulnerable to risk.³ The borders of the military sector are somewhat fluid, and that it has implications for the political security as well. In terms of the synthesis of the military and political sectors, they share the main referent object (the state) and securitising actor (the government). More importantly, the security of the regime, state institutions, and state sovereignty are inter-connected, and how securitisation is constructed in these sectors shows many commonalities in the case of Qatar.

Referent Objects

The state is the most crucial and effective legitimate referent object of military security.⁴ In this paper, the Qatari state is the centre of sovereignty and security, as the primary referent object in the military sector. The leading tribe or nation of the state is also a referent object, especially when there is a disagreement between the rulers and the ruled. However, this is not the case in Qatar. When there is a threat to the security of the Al-Thani tribe, this cannot be differentiated from vulnerability of the Qatari state; there is no clash, as is the case in Bahrain between Al Khalifa and Shia citizens. Religion is another possible referent object in military security and is commonly cited in the Middle East region as a reason for military action. One example of this is Shia-Sunni tension in the Gulf and its effect on Qatari militarisation. At the sub-state level, society, gender, and race are possible referent objects. However, there is not yet examples of them in the case of Qatar. Hence, the

³B. Buzan et al., *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), p.141.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 49.

referent objects of Qatari military security are limited to the state, the nation (Qatari people), and religion (Islam).

The political sector is concerned with non-military threats to sovereignty, and the organisational stability of social orders is key in political security.⁵ There are two dimensions to political security. First, is the unit level, consisting of non-military threats to the organisation of political units of the state. The second is the system level referents of political principles, which refer to the political security of international society or international law. Hence, sovereignty, state institutions, and political principles are the three referent objects of political security.⁶

Securitising Actors

Who is responsible for guaranteeing the security of the referent objects defined above in the military and political sectors? Legitimate leadership of the state is mostly achieved by governments, as the authorised securitising actor. There is a difference between democratic and undemocratic states concerning the role of governments in securitising political issues. In democratic countries, governments' interests are separated from national interests, which means that securitising actions are not always state-centred. However, in undemocratic states like Qatar, the authorised political leadership, in this case, Sheikh Tamim, is the main securitising actor. The Qatari state's military and political security cannot be differentiated from the rulers' security; they are the same. Hence, due to the political nature of Qatar, securitising acts by a legitimate state authority consists of rulers' and the state's military and political security.

In the military sector, in addition to the central role of the Emir, state or non-state agents are functional actors that are neither referent objects nor securitising actors. However, they still influence the dynamics of security and consist of defence bureaucracies, armies, defence, military, finance, foreign ministers and the arms industry. The political sector differs from the military sector with the addition of two further securitising actors, the leading international media and NGOs/INGOs. The role of the media in political securitisation—termed as 'the CNN factor'⁷—emphasizes the contribution of the media to the visibility of the case. Qatar provides an example of the media as a securitising actor through Al Jazeera, which raises awareness of any political situation that the state of Qatar wants to focus on. The contribution of NGOs or INGOs has a half-response in Qatar through the role of the Qatar Foundation.

Military Security: Geography and History

Military threats primarily focus on national security because this has a direct influence on the security of the entire state and all sectors; they are the existential threat *par excellence*. However, it is essential to mention that military vulnerabilities are not always related to the military capabilities of the state. There is a number of variables other than the military condition of the state that can play a vital role in the

⁵B. Buzan et al., *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, pp. 141–150.

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 147.

establishment or maintenance of military security, such as *geography* and *history*.⁸ Especially in the case of Qatar which is a small state surrounded by rivalry powers and located in a peninsula full of natural sources, these vulnerabilities require attention.

First, geography affects military threats through *distance* and *terrain*. For instance, the defence is more difficult for states when they need to travel over longer distances. In the Qatari case, a very first potential military threat in the nation-state period to Qatar affected by geographical distance was the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, which affected the role of the military and political security in Qatari foreign policy in two ways. The first was the unique Qatari support in the battle: 'Sheikh Hamad ... had commanded a mobile battalion ... and had been responsible for the liberation of the Saudi Town of Khafji'.⁹ Hence, the very first Gulf crisis in 1991 was a historical moment in Qatari foreign policy, where the state of Qatar participated and succeeded in a real military intervention. On the second point, history, Qatari military and protection changed after the Kuwait war. Between 1971 and 1991, Saudi Arabia tried to provide military protection not only for Qatar but also other Gulf monarchies. However, the first Gulf crisis 'exposed the Saudis' inability to protect themselves and their allies from regional threats, driving home the need to more firmly anchor Qatar's security within the US protective shield'.¹⁰ The Kuwait war marked a new era in Qatari foreign policy, as the military security of the state was taken under the umbrella of American power.

The world-class powers can engage and defeat military threats at great distances. However, they are typically more concerned with physically closer threats, such as their neighbours than with distant powers.¹¹ This is based on the premise of *regional security complex theory* which refers that the vital military vulnerabilities and threats for the small states come from its neighbours.¹² A security complex is 'a set of states whose major security perceptions and concerns are so interlinked that their national security problems cannot reasonably be analysed or resolved apart from one another'.¹³ The GCC states are in a security complex, and Qatar is under the impact of military and political threats through this sub-regional phenomenon since the early years of the founding of the state.

The *Terrain* is the second component of the geographical factor, and 'tends to amplify or reduce vulnerability to military threats'.¹⁴ Are there any obstacles to military movement in Qatari territory? Has Qatar benefitted from logistical obstacles to invasion? Qatar is a peninsula that occupies the north-eastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula. There is a strait between Bahrain and Qatar, and the country shares maritime borders with Iran and the UAE, and a land border with Saudi Arabia. For any transportation out of the state, Qatar must use either the Saudi border or the sea. As a tiny peninsula, it cannot be said that Qatar has a strategic debt to prevent invasions.

⁸Ibid., pp. 57–61.

⁹M. Kamrava, Qatar: Small State, Big Politics (Cornell University Press, 2015), p.116.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 71.

¹¹B. Buzan et al., Security: A New Framework for Analysis, p. 11.

¹²Ibid., pp. 10–15.

¹³Ibid., p. 12.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 59.

Moving to the second factor, *history*, this can amplify threat perceptions, due to historical enmities and repeated wars. When regional security complexes are taken into consideration, the Shia–Sunni tension raised by the Iran–Iraq war is still on the agenda, and proxy wars in Yemen and Syria can be categorised as historical enmities. Qatari foreign policy changed significantly when Sheikh Hamad came into power in 1995. However, before this period, there were essential transformations and milestones in the Gulf’s geopolitical conditions, which triggered the appearance of military and political based attempts in the state’s foreign policy. The initial one was Britain leaving the region, previously the leading protector of the small Gulf monarchy since signing the General Treaty in 1916. When the United Kingdom declared in 1968 that they would withdraw from the region in 3 years, a substantial threat was posed to the Gulf monarchies that did not possess any military equipment, human resources, or political power to guarantee their survival. At the same time with the withdrawal of Britain in 1971, Qatar declared its independence and Saudi Arabia became the new protector of the Gulf states.¹⁵

Political Security: Ideas, Physical Bases, and Institutions

Threats to and vulnerabilities of political security relate to three components: *ideas, physical bases, and institutions*. Threats towards physical base are more directly related to military, economic, and environmental security. Thus, ideas and institutions alone are components of political security. Ideas can be defined as the foundations upon which political institutions are built on.¹⁶ What holds a state together is particular ideas, which are mostly rooted in nationalism or political ideology. When these ideas become threatening, they engender the political stability of a state that has the ideas and their structured version of institutions. Threats to ideas and institutions are threats towards the internal legitimacy of the political unit. There is also the external recognition of the state, which requires respect for its sovereignty. *Existential threats* to a state’s sovereignty will weaken its domestic legitimacy, and the state’s position against these internal and external political threats will depend upon whether it is weak or strong.

For instance, one of the milestones in Qatari security regarding the role of institutions in the protection of the military and political sectors in foreign policy was the establishment of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979 became an existential threat to the military and political survival of the Gulf monarchies because Ayatollah Khomeini openly declared his intention to overthrow Gulf monarchies that were not practising Islamic style governance but Western-supported monarchies. The establishment of the GCC was an attempt to achieve a level of collective military force and ability to mobilise against any threat to the Gulf countries by segregating Iraq and Iran.¹⁷

¹⁵S. Wright, ‘Foreign policy in the GCC states’, quoted in M. Kamrava ed., *International Politics of the Persian Gulf* (N.Y: Syracuse University Press, 2011), pp. 72–94.

¹⁶B. Buzan et al., *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, pp. 151–154.

¹⁷A. Khalaf, ‘The elusive quest for Gulf security’, *MERIP Middle East Report* 148, (1987), pp. 19–33.

The Abrupt Turnout: the Gulf Crisis 2017

Conceptualising Qatar's security tools and strategies in foreign policymaking until the Gulf crisis of 2017 is preliminary and indispensable to delineate the importance of military and political sectors for the oil monarchy's security architecture. Thus, although the early era of the Gulf Crisis 2017 is the central case study of the research, the paper represented the military and political sectors along with the milestones of Qatar's security strategies in the previous section. Categorising Qatar's responses to the crisis as political and military or institutional and reactionary helps depict the role of security in the early responses.

A wave of shocking political change in the Gulf commenced on 23 May 2017, with Qatar National News Agency's (QNA) exposure to a cyber-attack.¹⁸ Under the influence of the cyber-attack, the QNA website started publishing pro-Israel and pro-Iran news as Emir Tamim spied them. The QNA authority verified none of the released news items, and according to a rapid announcement, the website was hacked; however, the UAE and Saudi Arabia responded harshly whereby over a short period it blocked Qatari media outlets, including Al Jazeera.¹⁹ Lately, Qatar took the UAE to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) over hacking the QNA website, supporting the case with evidence following the Washington Post release of information.²⁰

The biggest diplomatic crisis in Gulf history erupted immediately after the Riyadh Summit convened on 20 May 2017, heralding the first official foreign visit of then President Donald Trump. In addition to his first visit to the region, the Riyadh Summit was overtly critical with the inauguration of the Global Centre for Combating Extremist Ideology, a joint venture by the Kingdom and America, alongside concluding a \$110 billion military and arms deal.²¹ This productive visit conceived tension in the region but came into prominence with its economic aspects, articulated by Trump: 'That was a tremendous day. Tremendous investments in the United States... Hundreds of billions of dollars of investments into the United States and jobs, jobs, jobs'.²² While the region slid to a chaotic period, Qatar started applying two main strategies against the siege: institutionalisation of its response with conducting a judicial process about human right violations and seeking international support for its legal situation. The underlining question here is to what extent Qatari policymakers have securitised their response to the siege? Firstly, it discusses threats and vulnerabilities posed to military and political security since 2017; secondly, referent objects and securitising actors are defined to indicate securitisation of the state's initial response to the blockade. Combination of securitisation framework with the current regional

¹⁸'Qatar to 'prosecute perpetrators' of Qna Hacking', Al Jazeera, (24 May 2017); 'Government communications office statement regarding hacking of Qatar news agency and false statements', Qatar Embassy USA on Twitter, (24 May 2017).

¹⁹'Qatar-Gulf crisis: all the latest updates', Al Jazeera, (2 August 2018).

²⁰'Qatar to take UAE to ICJ over QNA website hacking', The Peninsula Qatar, (15 September 2018); K. D. Young and E. Nakashima, 'UAE orchestrated hacking of Qatari government sites, sparking regional upheaval, according to US intelligence officials', The Washington Post, (July 16 2017).

²¹C. E. Lee and M. Stancati, 'Donald Trump, Saudi Arabia sign agreements in move to counterbalance Iran', The Wall Street Journal, (20 May 2017).

²²Farmer, 'Donald Trump hails 'tremendous investments' in the US after signing deals with Saudi Arabia', The Telegraph, (20 May 2017).

dispute aims to explicate -precisely- a substance of securitisation and proposed institutional or reactionary responses to the siege.

A Glance at the Initial Process

The first day of the crisis had continuously surprised observers of the region with hourly participation by the blockade states. Bahrain was the first country to withdraw its diplomatic mission and call upon Qatari diplomatic missions in Bahrain to leave the country within 48 h. Around 30 min following Bahrain's announcement, Saudi Arabia cut diplomatic ties with Qatar and announced that all Qatari troops are pulled out of Yemen.²³ These troops operating under coalition forces were of limited number and influence. According to statements of Defence Minister, Al Attiyah, they are almost symbolic because they represent border security.²⁴ However, what this Saudi act signifies is the isolation of Qatar from anything regarding politics and security the GCC has started. Minutes after, the Kingdom, the UAE and Egypt announced their alignment with the decision of the previous states.²⁵ Hence, these first four countries, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Egypt, became known as the Arab Quartette.

As affirmed by the Saudi Press Agency: 'The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has taken this decision as a result of the serious and systematic violations committed by the authorities in Doha over the past years with the aim of creating strife among Saudi internal ranks, undermining its sovereignty and embracing various terrorist and sectarian groups aimed at destabilising the region. Accusations by the Arab Quartette followed the same line of blaming Qatar for its support for Islamist terrorism and Iranian designs on the region.'²⁶ A limited time was accrued to Qatari nationals and diplomats to leave these blockade supporting countries. Although Saudi authorities officially gave 14 days to the Qatari residents to leave, after severing ties, the real case proved more rapid. Since it was Ramadan, many Qataris were visiting the Holy Lands for Umrah, and on the day of the blockade, when they returned from the Kaaba, they were already checked out from the hotels and had only 48 h to leave. Since the blockade states cancelled flights to Doha, they went back via Oman or Kuwait to Qatar after expulsion from the Holy Lands during the sacred month of Ramadan.²⁷

Turkey, Kuwait, Iran, Israel and the US were the intermediary parties attempting to call the Arab countries to deescalate the tension. Although US Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, underlined the unity of the GCC and its harmonised fight against radicalism, President Trump tweeted in the opposite direction on 6 June: 'During my recent trip to the Middle East I stated that there can no longer be funding of Radical Ideology. Leaders pointed to Qatar-look!'²⁸

On 5 June, Iranian foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, tweeted on his account urging the parties for a de-escalation of the strain: 'Neighbours are permanent; geography can't be changed. Coercion is never the solution. Dialogue is imperative,

²³Qatar-Gulf crisis: all the latest updates', Al Jazeera, (2 August 2018).

²⁴S. Lennie, 'Qatar's 'so-called brothers' have a long history of meddling', TRT World, (18 July 2017).

²⁵Qatar-Gulf crisis: all the latest updates', (2018).

²⁶Saudi Arabia severs all ties with Qatar, closes off borders', Al-Arabiya English, (5 June 2017).

²⁷Personal interview with an anonymous Qatari citizen, November 2018, Doha.

²⁸B. Dogan-Akkas, 'What is behind the crisis in the Gulf?' The New Turkey, (7 June 2017).

especially during blessed Ramadan'.²⁹ Turkish Foreign Minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu, was another official supporting unity and cooperation between the Gulf Countries: 'Countries may of course have some issues, but dialogue must continue under every circumstance for problems to be resolved peacefully. We are saddened by the current picture and will give any support for its normalization' and stated his country's position to '...do what is required of it to find a solution in the shortest period to this disagreement between fraternal countries'.³⁰

During the first day of the siege, Maldives, Libya and Yemen joined the blockade states and Etihad, Emirates, Fly Dubai, Air Arabia and Saudi airlines had cancelled all scheduled flights to/from Doha by Tuesday. However, the most alarming move came by the middle of the day, when an extensive line occurred along the Saudi border of Qatar, which is the only land border to Qatar. In the middle of Ramadan, a holy month for Muslims, the Saudi Arabia Transport Authority announced that the Kingdom had decided to close its land and sea border with Qatar. This was quite influential on drawing public attention towards this sudden diplomatic rift because almost half of the food products came to Qatar via the Salwa border.³¹ Iran and Turkey immediately reacted to this alteration of the border policy and Reza Nourani, chair of the Iranian Union of Exporters of Agricultural Products stated that Iranian food products could reach Qatar in 12 h.³² The problem of food security was central to the first couple of days of the crisis not only due to a lack of Qatar's food self-sufficiency but also due to the special conditions promoted by Ramadan. People were looking for more food products in the summer days with the effects of Ramadan, and panic buying occurred in a variety of supermarkets. Qatar promptly reacted to the political action of the Arab quartette and an official reaction came through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Information Office stating: 'Such measures are unjustified and are based on baseless and unfounded allegations'. Qatar has been quite clear regarding the alarming impact of the blockade on foreign policy making and defined that in the very first official statement: 'The fabrication of reasons for taking action against a sister country in the GCC is clear evidence that there is a legitimate justification for these measures'.³³

There is no doubt that Qatar has played a hard game in the region, accommodating both hedging and balancing strategies in the Gulf and in the Arab world. It conducts good diplomatic relations with Iran while housing the USA's largest military base in the Middle East. It has connections with the Muslim Brotherhood alongside regional countries who are against the Ikhwan's activities, even its existence. It joined the Saudi-led military coalition in Yemen to fight for the unity of the Yemeni state challenged by internal turmoil.³⁴ It supports opposition movements in Syria and backs the Turkish government in regional politics and hosts a Turkish military base. This multi-dimensional and hyper-active foreign policymaking have improved soft power

²⁹Zarif and Javad, 'Neighbors are permanent; geography can't be changed. Coercion is never the solution. Dialog is imperative, especially during blessed Ramadan', Twitter, (5 June 2017).

³⁰'World reacts to Gulf diplomatic rift', TRT World, (5 June 2017).

³¹'Qatar-Gulf crisis: all the latest updates', Al Jazeera, (2 August 2018).

³²J. Saul and M. El-Dahan, 'Qatar food imports hit after Arab Nations cut ties: trade sources', Reuters, (5 June 2017).

³³'Qatar regrets the decision by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain to sever relations', Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Qatar, (June 5, 2017).

³⁴A. Barnard and D. Klrpatrick, '5 Arab Nations move to isolate Qatar, putting the US in a bind', The New York Times, (5 June 2017).

and the political impact of Qatar, globally. However, Qatar's hedging with multiple actors backlashed already in 2013 and the Gulf Crisis 2017, leads to today's accumulated tension. Thus, when the Arab quartette started boycotting Qatar over alleged support for terrorism, Qatar's alliances and cooperation with third parties were on the agenda of these states. On 22 June 2017, the blockade states announced 13 requisite demands that are the source for assessment of referent objects and securitising actors in order to end the Gulf Crisis.

Threats and Vulnerabilities: Referent Objects

With the atmosphere prompted by the blockade, both military and non-military threats to the Qatari sovereignty, and to social and organisational stability have been raised. Both two dimensions of political security, the unit level and the system level, has been shackled since 5 June 2017, considered as a sub-group of political threats, which are not directly related to the military, the economy, the environment, or identity. As posited by Buzan et al. all security is political; thus, what triggers the military insecurities of Qatar also escalated political securitisation, sovereignty, state institutions, and political principles. These theoretical principles framed by Buzan et al. guide assessment of securitisation in Qatari context, particularly, in the post-blockade era.

The Arab Quartette's 13 demands to Qatar provides the critical threats and vulnerabilities to military and political security. The Arab quartette issued the list of demands and gave Qatar 10 days to comply. According to the 13th demand, if Qatar agrees to comply, it will be audited once a month for the first year, once per quarter in the second year and will be under control for 10 years. However, the document released by the blockade countries did not clarify what are the obligations if Qatar refused to meet the requests.³⁵

Among the 13 demands, 2 specify clarification of the procedures, 2 focus on the media outlets Qatar owns and were to be better discussed within societal security. However, excluding 2 procedural points, 11 demands directly attack Qatar's sovereignty and independence. It should be noted that these demands were not an indication of a joint GCC policy making, rather an independent initiative by the four previously mentioned Arab countries (Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt) and one of whom (Egypt) is not a member of the GCC. Hence, its impact on Qatar and legitimacy regarding sanctions placed on Qatar are questionable. Besides this, the long list of demands overlaps, while categorising and defining them under the securitisation theory framework.

The First Cluster: Threats to Geography, Physical Base and Institutions

Three main categories of referent objects were identified, after examination of threats and vulnerabilities posed by the embargo states. The first cluster of referent objects arise from the *sovereignty of the Qatari state*, by jeopardising regime security, territorial unity and the nation's welfare, due to the combination of actions instructed by the

³⁵Arab States issue 13 demands to end Qatar-Gulf crisis', Al Jazeera, (12 July 2017).

Arab quartette; the list of demands involving the air, sea and land blockade, and the Saudi attempt to dig a canal to turn Qatar into an island.³⁶ Hence, the common point of the demands of the blockade states is that they pose threats to independent decision making of a sovereign state by imposing conditions on it to cut ties with specific countries and non-state organisations (Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood) (Article 1 and 3), to end military cooperation with Turkey (Article 2) and to shut down highly prestigious state-supported media institutions (Article 6 and 11).

In addition to the list of demands, the so-called Salwa Canal project is a direct attack on Qatar's physical foundation, highlighting its geographical vulnerability. The project was shared on April 2018 by the Saudi local newspapers (Sabq and Al Makkah) and confirmed by Saud al-Qahtani, a senior adviser to Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, on Twitter by saying: 'As a citizen, I am impatiently waiting for the details of the implementation of the East Salwa island project. This great historic project will change the region's geography'.³⁷ After the release of the news on the canal, the Saudi authorities called five unnamed international companies to provide tenders to dig a 60-kilometre canal that will turn Qatar into an island by 25 June 2018. The plan for the elimination of Qatar's only land border is expected to cost \$747 million, starting from Salwa up until Khor Al Adeed. The information given on the canal states that it will be 200 m wide and 15–20 m deep, allowing ships up to 295 m long and 33 m wide to navigate it.³⁸ This dramatic move by Saudi Arabia is interpreted as psychological manipulation of the Qataris, rather than a real activated plan.³⁹ The decision to turn the tiny emirate into an island translates political division into a geographical one.

Although the Saudi-led siege states pressured Qatar to abolish its relations with Iran, Qatar's economic ties with Iran are quite limited compared to the UAE's. Iran's trade with the Emirates was recorded as \$16 billion by March 2018, with a 21% increase compared to 2017. On the other side, the trade volume between Qatar and Iran is quite limited and worth \$250 million by March 2018 and had increased only 2.5% from 2017. Although the UAE is a leading country in promoting anti-Iran propaganda raised by the blockade, neither its economic nor diplomatic relations with Iran considering the number and status of Iranians residence in the UAE, were not perceived as a threat, as opposed to Qatar's relatively limited ties with the Islamic Republic.

The Second Cluster: Threats to Ideas and Institutions

The second cluster of referent objects may be summarised as threats to norms, institutions and principles of the Qatari state by forcing change on its policies for

³⁶Agance France-Presse, 'Saudi Arabia may dig canal to turn Qatar into an island', The Guardian, (1 September 2018).

³⁷A. Taylor, 'Saudi media says Kingdom could turn Qatar-its neighbor and rival-into an island', The Washington Post, (21 June 2017).

³⁸Ibid; S. Dadouch and M. Chmaytelli, 'Saudi official hints at plan to dig canal on Qatar border', Reuters, (31 August 2018).

³⁹A. Taylor, 'Saudi media says Kingdom could turn Qatar-its neighbor and rival-into an island', The Washington Post, (21 June 2017).

conducting diplomacy, mediating disputes, and naturalising citizens of various countries to be a hub for diverse political groups (Article 4, 7 and 10). The second cluster of referent objects is derived from accusations to Qatar regarding its alleged ties with terrorist organisations and figures (Article 3, 4, and 5); interfering in the internal affairs of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt; failing to comply with conditions of a 2014 agreement; and coercively paying an unspecified amount of compensation to the Arab quartette states.

Before further discussion, three points define the second cluster of demands by the siege countries. Firstly, allegations blaming Qatar for its relations with terrorist organisations and groups are not based on substantial evidence. Defining a group or figure as a terrorist is, by nature, a controversial issue. Members of the Brotherhood and the organisation itself are not on the terrorist groups' list for the security framework of the Qatari state. Hence, this diverse approach adopted by the Gulf states regarding the Ikhwan leads to political conflict between them. Hence, emphasis on terrorist organisations and figures in the list of demands does not necessarily refer to an international stance. However, for Qatar's alleged ties with the rest of the groups which are also tagged as terrorist by the state of Qatar, (such as ISIL, al-Qaeda, Fateh al-Sham (formerly known as the Nusra Front) and Lebanon's Hezbollah) there is not any proof indicated by the Arab quartette.

The second issue is based on Article 8 in the list of demands and calling for an unspecified amount of payment. This demand of the siege state does not have any basis in the context of international relations. There must be an official body controlling these states and have authority over them to ask for compensation. However, neither these demands are under an international organisation whereby Qatar must obey the resolutions nor are their solid reasons or proven humanitarian violations accommodated by Qatar to face a sanction of a payment.

The Third Cluster and Riyadh Agreement

A third cluster to be highlighted as a referent object of international prestige and the image of Qatar is mentioned in the 2014 agreement in Article 9, of the Riyadh Agreement . Referent objects of this cluster are under the impact of vulnerabilities from history, ideas and institutions that are dimensions based on both military and political sectors. The Riyadh agreement was first signed in 2013 and then 2014; however, it was a secret deal between the Gulf countries and was not publicly known until its release on 10 July 2017 by the Saudi Arabian based, Al-Arabiya Newspaper. Thus, when the crisis erupted, no one was aware of the agreement between the GCC states. After its leak on the Al Arabiya website, on 11 July, CNN translated documents into English and published them in an extended coverage and this research refers to this available version.⁴⁰ The Riyadh agreement was signed in 2013 among the leaders of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Qatar promising a new phase of fraternal relations for the Gulf countries.⁴¹

⁴⁰Exclusive: documents prove Qatar failed to comply with GCC Agreements', Al Arabiya English, (10 July 2017).

⁴¹J. Scitutto and J. Herb, 'Exclusive: the secret documents that help explain the Qatar crisis', CNN, (10 July 2017).

The second agreement was signed in 2014 by the King of Bahrain, Emir of Kuwait, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, the Emir of Dubai and the Emir of Qatar, while another supplementary agreement was signed amongst the intelligence chiefs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, the Kingdom of Bahrain, and the state of Qatar. The supplementary agreement has four articles and calls for the implementation of the 2013 agreement. The 2014 agreement has two parts; one concerns domestic affairs of the GCC. The second part of the 2014 Agreement is for the foreign policies of the GCC states.⁴²

On 6 July, after almost a month after the blockade started, the Arab quartette modified their list of demands and reduced it to six principles.⁴³ Both in the 13 lists of demands and the six principles, the Saudi-led bloc did not communicate with the Qatari authorities to transmit the statements but instead shared it with the public and the media, meaning that the Qatari's were informed indirectly. In this case, Saudi Arabia's UN Ambassador, Abdallah Al-Mouallimi, was the responsible official to convey the siege states' new list to the public in a briefing for a group of UN correspondents in Cairo. The six principles can be defined as a generalisation of the 13 non-negotiable demands asked previously; however, they are a reviewed version with the elimination of the specific cases of demands centred on Al Jazeera, the Turkish military base, relations with Iran. The six principles can be summarised as the final version of underlying the referent objects of political and military security.⁴⁴

Responses, Strategies and Securizing Actors

The very first reaction of the Qatari state to the blockade came through the information office of the foreign ministry on June 5: 'The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar (the MOFA) expressed deep regret over the decision of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and the Kingdom of Bahrain to close their borders and airspace and cut off diplomatic relations. Such measures are unjustified and are based on baseless and unfounded allegations'.⁴⁵ With this initial statement, the State of Qatar interpreted the allegations and act of the blockade states as unjustified. Following this, the text released by the MOFA refers to terrorism claims underlying its institutional connection and obligations to the GCC: 'Qatar is an active member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), committed to its Charter, respects the sovereignty of other countries, does not interfere in their internal affairs, and carries out its duties in combating terrorism and extremism'. The overall text referred to the claims as: 'The fabrication of reasons for taking action against a sister country in the GCC is clear evidence that there is no legitimate justification for these measures ...' The main referent object of sovereignty is defended and stated that '... a violation of its sovereignty as a state which is categorically rejected'.⁴⁶

⁴²J. Sciotto and J. Herb, 'Exclusive: the secret documents that help explain the Qatar crisis', CNN, (10 July 2017).

⁴³'Saudi-led bloc modifies demands to end Qatar crisis', BBC, (19 July 2017).

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵'Qatar regrets the decision by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain to sever relations', Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Qatar, (June 5, 2017).

⁴⁶Ibid.

While the crisis turned into reality, it is quite important to state that the attitude of Qatar and the blockade countries towards their citizens were divergent. In the very first statement by the MOFA, Qatar maintained: 'These measures taken against the State of Qatar will not affect the normal course of life of the citizens and residents of the State and that the Qatari Government will take all necessary measures to ensure this and to thwart attempts to influence and harm the Qatari society and economy'.⁴⁷ However, on 9 June, the blockade countries start warning their citizens that any potential for expression of sympathy with Qatar on social media will be justified.⁴⁸

On the other side, in the following days, on 11 June, Qatar Ministry of Interior tweeted saying '#Mol Qatar says no action against residents from those countries that cut ties with #Qatar'.⁴⁹ When the list of 13 demands was unveiled, the first reaction of the Qatari state was interpreting them as neither reasonable nor actionable. Sheikh Saif bin Ahmed Al Thani, director of the Qatari state's communications office, stated that: 'This list of demands confirms what Qatar has said from the beginning-the illegal blockade has nothing to do with combating terrorism, it is about limiting Qatar's sovereignty, and outsourcing our foreign policy'.⁵⁰ Despite his call for a solution, Tillerson ended up with saying the demands were 'very difficult for to Qatar comply with'.⁵¹

The UK's Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, agreed with Tillerson that the demands must be measured and realistic.⁵² Hence, Qatari policymakers received essential international support regarding the problematic nature of the demands. The key policy-maker during the process of the blockade Qatar's foreign minister, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, emphasised through a press release in Rome on 11 July that there is no fear by the Qatari side of a potential military operation but 'Everything should be based on a proper process and proper framework and agreed on principles among the parties', 'this list of demands made to be rejected it is not made to be accepted or not made to be negotiated'.⁵³

Emir Tamim was silent until his presence on Qatar TV on 21 July when he addressed the nation for the first time after the beginning of the blockade. He focussed heavily on the international support that Qatar had received from Kuwait, the US, Germany, France, and Britain. The quick response of Turkey to food insecurity was underlined with referring to a Strategic Cooperation Agreement that the parties had signed. Through referring to Qatar's international partners and support, Emir Tamim emphasised the importance of Qatar's foreign policy-making with multiple actors which were threatened by the 13 demands; hence, special emphasis was placed on Qatar's foreign relations via his words: 'I also thank all those who opened their air-space and territorial waters when our brothers closed theirs'.⁵⁴ Qatar's international

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸'Blockading Qatar: a timeline', The Peninsula Qatar, (6 August 2017).

⁴⁹'Mol_Qatar says no action against residents from those countries that cut ties with Qatar', Ministry of Interior on Twitter, (11 June 2017).

⁵⁰'Saudi-led demands not 'reasonable or actionable': Qatar', Al Jazeera, (24 June 2017).

⁵¹'Qatar-Gulf crisis: all the latest updates', Al Jazeera, (2 August 2018).

⁵²P. Wintour, 'Qatar given 10 days to meet 13 sweeping demands by Saudi Arabia', The Guardian, (23 June 2017).

⁵³Information Office, 'Foreign Minister says siege countries made demands meant to be rejected', Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Qatar, (1 July 2017).

⁵⁴'Emir speech in full text: Qatar ready for dialogue but won't compromise on sovereignty', The Peninsula Qatar, (22 July 2017).

prestige, image, norms, institutions and principles were threatened by the list of demands. Emir Tamim clearly stated his country's stance regarding these referent objects: 'They have tried to undermine two principles that humanity has made sacrifices for. First, the principle of sovereignty and the independent will of States; secondly, freedom of expression and the right to information. Freedom of expression is meaningless if the citizen does not have the right to access information'. When norms and principles of Qatari foreign policy-making is considered, the initial speech of Emir Tamim was not surprising calling for dialogue, diplomacy and mutual respect for sovereignty under the rule of law: 'Any solution to the crisis must be based on two principles: first, the solution should be within the framework of respect for the sovereignty and will of each State. Secondly, it should not be in a form of orders by one party against another, but rather as mutual undertakings and joint commitments binding to all'.⁵⁵

Regarding allegations of Qatar's relations with terrorist organisations, both Emir's first address to the nation and speeches on the UN General Assembly in 2017 and 2018 directly rejected such contentions instead of emphasising Qatar's contribution to international peace; 'Qatar is fighting terrorism, relentlessly and without compromises, and there is international recognition of Qatar's role in this regard'.⁵⁶ In his speech in the opening session of the 72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly, Emir Tamim securitised sovereignty and independence of the state with his emphasis on the practical drawbacks of the blockade. 'The countries who imposed the unjust blockade on Qatar have intervened in the internal affairs of the State by putting pressure on its citizens through foodstuffs, medicine and ripping off consanguineous relations to force them to change their political affiliation to destabilise a sovereign country. Isn't this one of the definitions of terrorism?'⁵⁷

In the same direction with the Emir, Qatar's Defence Minister, Khaled Al Attiyah, defined the blockade as 'a bloodless declaration of war'.⁵⁸ However, reactions and securitising acts were not limited to speeches but rather supported by international engagement and institutionalisation of the state's response to the blockade. Qatar securitised its international prestige and image by making its response to the blockade countries institutionalised and internationalised rather than limiting it to regional mechanisms, like the GCC. There are examples of Qatar's institutionalised response, both domestically and internationally. On 9 July, a Compensation Claims Committee is chaired by Attorney General Dr Ali bin Fetais Al-Marri with the cooperation of the National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) to collate cases in which Qatari people and residents are affected negatively by the blockade.⁵⁹ The number of complaints submitted by individuals and companies reached 6297 by September 2017, and they were under examination by several local and international law firms from Switzerland,

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷In full text: the speech of Qatar Emir at the opening session of UN general assembly', *The Peninsula Qatar*, (19 September 2017).

⁵⁸'Blockade a 'bloodless declaration of war' on Qatar', *Gulf Times*, (30 June 2017).

⁵⁹'Compensation claims committee to receive complaints on siege', *The Peninsula Qatar*, (10 July 2017); 'NHRC welcomes establishment of compensation claims committee', *Qatar Tribune*, (10 July 2017).

Britain, and the US.⁶⁰ The Qatari state is responsible for the payments and fees for suing those responsible from the blockade countries to defend the rights of the citizens and residents. Three major sections of the compensation committee are responsible for separate cases, including violations of human rights regarding individual damages. The second cluster of complaints relate to business-oriented damages, and the third one concerns government institutions affected by the blockade.⁶¹ Although the information released considering the structure and practical role of the Compensation Committee, there is not any available updated data whether any of these cases are started or completed for or against the applicants of the Qatari state.

Another institutional response of the state was to lodge a formal complaint to the Dispute Settlement Body working under the WTO by the Ministry of Economy and Commerce in August 2017, against countries that have imposed a siege. Also, The National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) of Qatar cooperated with a team from The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) between March to November 2017 to assess the impact of the crisis on human rights. The role of the team from OHCHR is vital to be clarified because they published a report on the violations of human rights. This included seven subtitles detailing restrictions on media and freedom of speech, suspension of the freedom of movement, separation of families, impact on economic rights and rights to health and education.⁶² Since the first day of the blockade, social media was actively used both by Qatar and the siege countries. Qatar started a lawsuit in the US against individuals who are engaged in 'conducting an illegal social media and internet campaign to spread false information and damage Qatar's economy'.⁶³ As another internalisation step, Qatar carried the Emirati fighter aircraft violation of its airspace to the UN assembly, citing four airspace violations by the Emirati forces between December 2017 and February 2018. Qatar also applied to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for international arbitration regarding violations by the blockading countries. A particular case opened for violations conducted by the UAE against Qataris and residents of Qatar on June 2018, and in July an order issued granting Qatar's request for provisional measures against illegal practices of the Emirati state. Qatar called for an investigation of the Central Bank regarding terrorism allegations.⁶⁴

The disclose of the Riyadh agreement was simultaneous with the arrival of Tillerson to the region conducting shuttle diplomacy between Jeddah, Doha and Kuwait. In this respect, the Qatari foreign minister stated in a press conference: 'These are clear efforts to diminish ... the mediation by Kuwait, and the efforts of the United States to mediate this crisis', questioning timing of the leak.⁶⁵ Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed al-Thani also underlined that under the rules of the GCC charter and Riyadh agreement, any grievances between the GCC states should be handled by

⁶⁰Blockade a 'bloodless declaration of war' on Qatar', *Gulf Times*, (30 June 2017).

⁶¹'Foreign Ministry secretary general: compensation claims committee receives 2,945 individual cases from NHRC', Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Qatar, (25 July 2017).

⁶²'First report statement: regarding the human rights violations as a result of the siege on the state of Qatar', NHRC, (14 June 2017).

⁶³'GCC crisis', Government Communication Office of Qatar.

⁶⁴*ibid.*

⁶⁵'Qatar questions timing of Riyadh Agreement leak', *Al Jazeera*, (12 July 2017).

applying conflict resolution mechanisms. While Qatar is accused of violating the Riyadh agreement, the Qatari state officials did not accept these contentions. They argued instead that this anti-Qatar policy making has been started before and does not have any relation with the Riyadh agreement, Emir Tamim's rule or hacking of the QNA, via words of Defence Minister, Al Attiyah: '... that all the accusations against Qatar; against the Emir of Qatar that he is taking a policy which is against the GCC this is not true...It's about something which they insist of doing since 1996, until today'.⁶⁶

Conclusion

The securitisation of military and political sectors has been underway for decades in the context of Qatari politics. As Kamrava aptly posits, 'perhaps one of the most striking features of the international relations of the Persian Gulf is its securitisation'. Thus, the concept of securitisation, referring transformation of a political case to a security manner, has a place in Qatar's construction of foreign policymaking due to the threats and vulnerabilities posed by political and military means. Conceptualising the role of security in Qatar's foreign policymaking is critical to reaching a comprehensive assessment of the oil monarchy's strategies. Thus, the paper depicted the elements of the military and political security sectors along with the examples from the security architecture of the Qatari state since its independence in 1971.

The central case study, the Gulf Crisis 2017, posed immediate and substantial threats to Qatar's military and political security. Notably, the initial process of the siege was critical for the maintenance of Qatar's security that can guarantee its independence, legitimacy, stability, and welfare. After scrutinising Qatar's security strategies in the initial era of the crisis, the research concludes that Qatar's securitisation policy has maintained its importance in policymaking with adaptations. The State employed a combination formula including institutional and reactionary responses against the threats in the early era of the diplomatic unrest. As discussed throughout the paper, the Gulf crisis 2017 is a momentous episode in Gulf history, and it is part of longstanding issues in the Gulf political complex. Although the parties have agreed on warming relations after Al-Ula Summit in January 2021, it is still an evolving process to bolstering Gulf unity.

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⁶⁶S. Lennie, 'Qatar's 'so-called brothers' have a long history of meddling', TRT World, (18 July 2017).

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