

# **Prasanta Kumar Pradhan**

## ***Qatar Crisis and Challenges to GCC Unity***

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### **Abstract**

*This paper argues that though the GCC, as a regional organisation, has been seen as a symbol of unity in this volatile region, the present crisis seems to have reached a status-quo that challenges the very unity of the organisation. This paper also argues that though there are still possibilities that diplomacy may succeed in bringing the neighbours to work in unison like before, post Qatar- blockade, the unity of the organisation will be a little shaky and will not revert back exactly to how it was before.*

### **Introduction**

On 5 June 2017, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Bahrain along with Egypt announced that they were cutting off ties with their neighbour Qatar. They alleged that Qatar had ties with several terrorist organisations, was financing and harbouring terrorists and extremist groups as well as terrorist individuals in Qatar, which had culminated in their taking such a drastic action. Qatar's growing ties with Iran had also been perceived by these countries as a threat to the security of their region. They further alleged that Qatar was using its satellite television network, *Al Jazeera* as a propaganda tool to delegitimize other countries in the region. Qatar rejected all these allegations as 'baseless' and stated that such behaviour by its neighbours is an infringement on its sovereignty and a violation of international law.

The resulting situation has created a tension in the region and challenged the unity of the organisation of the six member Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) which had comprised of Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, and Oman. The subsequent actions and statements of leaders from both sides further exacerbated the geopolitical situation in the Gulf region. In the past too, there

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have been several instances of differences emerging among the members of the GCC, but all have always been resolved amicably through negotiation and dialogue. But the present crisis seems to be more than a family feud among the Arab Gulf Sheikdoms and is turning out to be an existential challenge for the GCC as the small cracks in the unity of the organisation are now widening into chasms of much larger proportions.

### **GCC as a Symbol of Unity**

The GCC was formed in 1981 with the aim of bringing the Gulf sheikhdoms together to ward off any outside threat and cultivate deeper political, economic, cultural ties among themselves. The similar nature of political and economic systems further motivated them to forge ties amongst themselves and remain united. The Iranian Islamic revolution of 1979 which brought Ayatollah Khomeini to power challenged the Gulf monarchies. The Monarchies thus joined hands together to fight against any potential political, ideological and security challenges emanating from an ideologically motivated, Shia-majority Iran. The solid relationships and unity among the royal families was an important aspect for the formation of the GCC which in turn shaped the security and strategic environment in the Gulf region. Over the decades, the GCC has emerged as a strong regional organisation in the otherwise unstable West Asia.

In the economic field, GCC has witnessed a number of successes and milestones. A GCC Customs Union was introduced in 2003. They also signed a GCC common market in 2008 to encourage cross-border investments amongst themselves. In 2009, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait proposed formation of a GCC Monetary Council which would ultimately result in adopting a single GCC currency which, however has not been fructified so far. Their growing economies primarily by dint of the vast oil and gas reserves in their countries made them a powerful economic bloc not only in the region but also in the world. A number of countries came forward to sign free trade agreements with the GCC and their huge energy reserves have been the primary bargaining chip for them.

Their shared concerns about the regional security in the Gulf made them join hands together. The concern of a growing Iran with a nuclear programme was a common binding factor for the GCC member states. The GCC has a Peninsula Shield Force – a military force comprising of militaries of all the six GCC countries to defend the member countries from external aggression. The GCC defence planning council coordinates the militaries of the member countries.

Politically, the GCC has remained a unified bloc though differences have persisted among the member countries over a number of issues. The GCC

countries have remained allies of the USA and the latter has military forces deployed in all the GCC states since the Gulf War in 1991. Iran has been perceived as a common adversary for both the GCC and US. In recent years, the GCC has interacted with all the major powers of the world and also with a large number of countries from Europe, Asia and Africa and Latin America.

### **Arab Unrest and Differences within the GCC**

The Blockade of Qatar is not an isolated incident in the geopolitics of the Gulf region. It is the result of an accumulation of allegations against Qatar and the refusal on the latter's part to comply with the expectations and demands of the Saudi-led group. The blockade is a deliberate attempt on the part of the Saudi led group to punish Qatar for not confirming to their views on regional security. Tension has been simmering between Qatar and its neighbours since the beginning of the popular unrest in the Arab world. The subsequent regional geopolitics and their competing national interests further widened the gap. Consequently, Saudi Arabia and Qatar have emerged as the two main actors in this geopolitical game.

Arab Spring changed the geopolitical and security situation in the region, which made the Gulf sheikhdoms cautious not only to save their regimes but also protect their national interests in the fluid security environment. Aggressive pursuit of foreign policy objectives, uncompromisingly safeguarding their own national interests and the intense desire to play a role in the regional politics have driven the countries to take such stubborn positions.

Both Qatar and Saudi Arabia are politically proactive and economically influential not only in the Gulf region but also in the wider West Asian and North African region. They have used their political and economic clout to shape the course of popular protests in West Asia and North Africa. Their competing interests have led to clash of interests on several occasions. A major clash of interest between the two broke out in Egypt in the aftermath of the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak from power. Muslim Brotherhood led by Mohamed Morsi came to power in Egypt in 2012. This came as an advantage for Qatar as it has always maintained strong ties with the organisation and it engages with some of the top leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood. On the other hand, it came as a challenge for Riyadh as it had cultivated strong ties with the Mubarak regime and had a chequered history of relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood. Similarly, in Syria, though both Saudi Arabia and Qatar support the Syrian opposition coalition, they supported different factions of the opposition due to ideological differences. Riyadh reportedly supports the Salafist elements in the Syrian opposition while Qatar supports a wide spectrum of the opposition but

primarily the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>1</sup> Saudi Arabia was not an active player in Libya though it supported harsh measures against the Muammar Gaddafi regime. Qatar was not only vocal against Gaddafi, it also supplied weapons to the Libyan opposition forces fighting against the Gaddafi regime.<sup>2</sup> Such proactive Qatari role in the regional developments certainly did not go down well with Saudi Arabia.

Since the establishment of the GCC, Saudi Arabia has been the most dominant player in the organisation. It has to a large extent determined the agenda and vision of the organisation. Saudi Arabia's frayed relationship with Iran has been one of the important determinants of its regional policy. The GCC's position against Iran over regional issues is well known and Riyadh has articulated its anti-Iran stance repeatedly at various international platforms. Since the Arab unrest began, Saudi Arabia has been further infuriated with the active Iranian involvement in other regional issues such as in Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Hezbollah, and Hamas among others. It, thus, expects a hardliner anti-Iran stance from its GCC neighbours. The smaller Sheikhdoms of the GCC, over the years, have adopted their own independent foreign policies, which sometimes have gone against the wishes and interests of Riyadh. For instance, countries like Oman and Qatar have established ties with Iran showing their independence in making decisions in their own regional policies. Oman played an important role in the signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) between Iran and the P5+1. Similarly, there have been differences among them over other regional issues such as the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, developments in Egypt, Syria, and so on. Riyadh, apparently, has not been able to accept this fact, resulting in the emergence of differences within the organisation. Riyadh's acceptance of its smaller neighbours playing a determining role in the affairs of the region and beyond, would to a large extent, determine the unity of the GCC as an organisation. Accumulation of differences over a number of geopolitical and security related issues over the years have created these cracks among the Gulf Sheikhdoms.

### **Conflicting Perceptions**

Amidst all these allegations and counter-allegations, both the sides have justified their actions. The Saudi led group has based its arguments on the core concerns of regional security, and countering the threat of terrorism. Anchoring their arguments in the need to stop support to terrorism and its financing, they have put forth their image as champions against terrorism and have called themselves the Anti-Terror Quartet (ATQ). The Saudi-led bloc has accused Qatar of supporting terror and extremist groups in the region. The group believes that

Qatar's alleged support for Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, Taliban and other extremist groups represents immense security challenges for the region. Saudi leaders have stated that Qatar needs a course correction in its regional and foreign policy and must return to the mainstream. This was reflected in Saudi Foreign Minister Adel Al Jubeir's statement, where he said that, "Nobody wants to hurt Qatar. It has to choose whether it must move in one direction or another direction."<sup>3</sup> He also added that, "We want to see Qatar implement the promises it made a few years back with regard to its support of extremist groups, (and in) regard to its hostile media and interference in affairs of other countries."<sup>4</sup> Similarly, UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Anwar Gargash said "We have reached a *cul-de-sac* in terms of trying to convince Qatar to change course. Qatar's 'fingerprints are all over the place' in terror funding. Enough is enough."<sup>5</sup>

Qatar, on the other hand, anchors its arguments on the norms of sovereignty as an accepted principle of international law, diplomacy and relations among nations. For Qatar, the blockade and the subsequent list of demands by the Saudi-led group is a violation of principle of sovereignty and international law. While rejecting all the allegations of supporting terror and extremist groups Qatar's Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdul Rahman Al Thani alleged that the neighbours of Qatar are "demanding that we have to surrender our sovereignty" which is something it would never do.<sup>6</sup> He also stated that "Qatar continues to call for dialogue, despite the violation of international laws and regulations, and that it is a clear aggression and an insult to all international treaties, bodies and jurisdictions."<sup>7</sup> He further clarified that Qatar "never compromised collective security of the region" and stated that his blockading neighbours are guilty of "extraordinary, unprovoked and hostile actions."<sup>8</sup>

In July 2017, the Saudi-led group sent a list of 13 demands to Qatar to comply thus leading to further aggravation of the conflict. The demands, among others, included severing ties with the terrorist organisations, scaling down ties with Iran, closing the Turkish military base in Qatar, shut down *Al Jazeera* and its affiliates and to cease contact with the political opposition in their countries.<sup>9</sup> They also added that complying with their demands is a precondition for any future negotiations with Qatar. Such demands by the Saudi-led bloc is reflective of their obstinacy vis-a-vis Qatar. Such an inflexible approach towards their neighbour has made the situation even more protracted and convoluted.

Qatar dismissed these demands and alleged that the demands are "meant to infringe the sovereignty of the state of Qatar, shut the freedom of speech and impose auditing and probation mechanism for Qatar."<sup>10</sup> Facing such massive isolation by its neighbours, Qatar has fallen back on the sovereignty norm as a

prime determinant of its approach towards the issue. While it supports dialogue and negotiation to ease the tension and reach any acceptable solution, it has maintained that its national sovereignty is not negotiable. Thus, by putting the principle of sovereignty at the forefront of its defence, Qatar has not only played it safe but also found a legitimate and acceptable position for itself to show its political righteousness and expediency to the world. Emir Sheikh Hamad strongly announced that Qatar's sovereignty is red line for Qatar.<sup>11</sup>

### **Neutrality and Mediation by Kuwait and Oman**

So far Kuwait and Oman have been mediating to diffuse the tension in the aftermath of the blockade. Kuwait and Oman do not have any issues with Doha's foreign policy which has irritated the Saudi-led bloc. Kuwait and Oman have also maintained neutrality in the Saudi-Iran conflict except the issues which are agreed upon in GCC as a collective. Caught between two stronger and wealthier neighbours, these two smaller countries have the herculean task of persuading them to come to the negotiating table. Immediately after the Saudi-led block announced to cut off their ties with Qatar, Kuwaiti Emir Sabah Al Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah visited Riyadh and Doha. He reportedly carried a list of demands from Riyadh to Doha. Though Kuwait immediately joined the mediation, it has not been successful till now. Kuwaiti Emir has made trips to Riyadh and Doha, and has carried messages from both sides for each other. Though both sides have accepted Kuwait as a mediator, they have been using Kuwait to pass on their messages to the other party rather than expressing their desire to sit on the negotiate table to resolve the deadlock. Despite Kuwait's best efforts, there is still no direct communication established between Saudi Arabia and Qatar – the major parties in the conflict. The mediation by Qatari emir has not been able to bring the conflicting parties together, but it has certainly prevented the conflict from escalating further.

Like Kuwait, Oman also does not want to get involved in the regional conflicts involving its neighbours. Oman, in the past, has helped to bring Iran to the negotiating table and playing a role in the signing of the JCPOA. It has also attempted mediation in Syria and Yemen though without much success. Omani ruler Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said is the only surviving leader of the GCC who was present during the formation of the GCC in 1981.<sup>12</sup> So it has been his endeavour to keep the organisation united and to bring a political solution to the conflict among its members without any further damage to the unity among the Gulf monarchies.

Ironically, the two main actors in this conflict – Saudi Arabia and Qatar – have mediated in a number of conflicts throughout the region in the past. They

have used mediation as a foreign policy tool to enhance their image and prestige in the Arab world and beyond. But in the present turn of events, the regional mediators who earned respect for bringing warring parties to the negotiating table have locked horns between themselves. Thus, what is required in the current situation is an adept mediator who can bring both the countries to the negotiating table.

### **Evolving Regional Geopolitics**

In the aftermath of the announcement of the blockade, Iran was the first country to seize the opportunity by extending cooperation to Qatar. On the face of the blockade, Iran's support came both as a political support as well as a foreign policy tool in the hands of Qatar. Iran supplied essential commodities such as food and medicines to Qatar immediately. In June 2017, Iran claimed that the volume of its exports to Qatar was over 1,100 tonnes of food to Qatar every day.<sup>13</sup> Iran also allowed Qatar to use its airspace. While Iran has called for a negotiated settlement of the crisis, it certainly seems to be the largest beneficiary of the unfolding situation. The situation serves Iran's geopolitical interests. Besides, conflict between the countries of the GCC adds to Iran's strategic advantage in the region. Saudi Arabia has, in the past, always used the GCC as a unified bloc portraying it as a Sunni dominated organisation against the Shia majority in Iran. Saudi Arabia intends to keep Iran off the political, security and strategic affairs of the Gulf region. But isolating Qatar has pushed it in further proximity to Iran. Qatar's Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani stated that by adopting strong measures against Qatar, the Saudi-led group is giving Iran, "Qatar, like a gift".<sup>14</sup>

Bahrain too, has stood firmly with Saudi Arabia in isolating Qatar. Expressing the need to bring Qatar on the right track, Bahraini Foreign Minister Sheikh Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa stated that the blockade would 'continue as long as it takes'<sup>15</sup> for Doha to mend its ways. At the same time Bahrain is concerned about the growing Iranian influence in the region and the growing warmth in Iran-Qatar relationship in the aftermath of the announcement of the blockade. Thus, while Bahrain wants Doha to fall in line by mending its policies and wants to penalise Qatar for its policies, at the same time, it also wants to keep Iran away from becoming a close ally to Qatar and interfering in the regional politics of the Arab Gulf. Their traditional perception towards Iran propels them to think that Iran is "a rogue power that can bring destruction to this neighbourhood."<sup>16</sup>

With the growing hostility exhibited from its Arab neighbours, Qatar has changed its approach towards working with Iran. Disregarding pressure from

the blockading countries, Qatar has restored its diplomatic relations with Iran in August 2017. Qatar along with other GCC countries had originally recalled their envoys from Iran in January 2016 when an angry mob had ransacked the Saudi consulate in Mashhad in Iran, in reaction to the execution of the prominent Saudi Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr Al Nimr by the Saudi authorities. Qatar's decision to fully restore the diplomatic ties with Tehran shows the Qatari determination of going in its own way without succumbing to the pressures from its GCC neighbours. Furthermore, the Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif visited Doha in October 2017, and met with Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani. After the meeting, Sheikh Tamim stated that Qatar is comfortable with its ties with Iran.<sup>17</sup> Thus, Doha's defiance has further infuriated the blockading quartet. The behaviour of the blockading countries as well as Qatar shows that the unity of the GCC could be sacrificed for their own national security and strategic interests.

Similarly, Turkey's open support for Qatar has redrawn the lines of geopolitical alliances in the Gulf region. Turkey condemned the Saudi-led blockade of Qatar terming it as "inhuman and against Islamic values" and added that "its as if a death penalty decision has been taken for Qatar".<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, Turkey sent its military to aid Qatar as per an earlier agreement between both the countries. Both Turkey and Qatar are engaged in talks since last several years over their defence and military cooperation. Turkey and Qatar signed a defence industry cooperation agreement in 2007, and a military training agreement in 2012. Further in 2014, both agreed for the establishment of a Turkish military base in Qatar. In April 2016, Turkey and Qatar signed a military accord in Doha among others, comprising of deployment of the Turkish military forces in Qatar.<sup>19</sup> After the announcement of blockade by the Saudi-led bloc on June 5, 2017, the Turkish parliament quickly approved the legislation of Turkish troop deployment in Qatar. Both the countries have supported the protests in Egypt against the Mubarak regime and have condemned the military coup staged by Sisi which overthrew the Muslim Brotherhood government led by Mohamed Morsi. Both these countries have maintained close ties with the Muslim Brotherhood and the Hamas which are banned by the other countries. A horrid ideological battle is also reflected in the Turkish decision to side with Qatar. Turkey and Qatar have strong links with the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood while Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain and Egypt consider it as a terrorist group. Notably, both Turkey and Qatar are the main backers of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Syrian theatre.

The crisis has brought Iran and Turkey on the same side of this geopolitical battle. Iran and Turkey have remained 'uneasy neighbours'<sup>20</sup> for decades with a



few periodic instances of cooperation between them. Any developments at the regional level have often impacted the bilateral relationship between the two. While in the recent past Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has been critical of Iran's role in the region stating that "there is Persian nationalism in the Middle East... we have to counter these efforts,"<sup>21</sup> he now finds Iran on the same side, staunchly supporting Qatar. The relationship between Turkey and Iran had been adversely affected since the beginning of the 'Arab Spring' and both countries had found themselves at opposite ends in the conflicts in Syria and Iraq. But now, both the countries have come together in support of Qatar after its blockade. This provides another opportunity for both these countries to join hands together. If this happens, the geopolitics of the West Asian region would undergo a tectonic change with Qatar, Turkey and Iran on one side and the Saudi-led group on the other.

### **The US Factor**

The US is the most powerful external player in the Gulf region, and has substantial influence over the Gulf Sheikdoms. It has strong ties with all the members of the GCC. Soon after the announcement of the blockade, President Trump in a series of tweets supported the action of the Saudi led group and alleged that Qatar was supporting terrorism in the region. President Trump's immediate reaction of this nature to the blockade of Qatar was both alarming and atypical of the US approaches towards the GCC so far. Traditionally, the US has maintained a cordial and balanced approach towards the members of the GCC as it has significant interests in all the GCC countries which include huge military deployments in all the GCC countries. The Obama administration engaged with the GCC as a collective, while at the same time maintaining strong ties with the individual countries. During the Obama administration, forums such as the US-GCC strategic cooperation forum and a US-GCC security committee were formed. Obama engaged with the GCC as a collective bloc to fight against terrorism and particularly they had joined hands together to fight the ISIS.

But under the Trump administration, it seems as if Saudi Arabia and UAE have emerged as the two new favourites over the other GCC members. While President Trump's initial remarks showed his biases against Qatar, other statements coming out of his officials were more moderate and reflective of the continuing US policies towards the GCC. Trump has now toned down his approach and expressed his interest to mediate in the conflict. US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has made trips to the Gulf and appealed for a political solution to the conflict. Tillerson during his visit to Doha in October 2017 stated that the

GCC is “most effective when it is unified” and expressed support from the US for the mediation efforts by the Kuwaiti Emir.<sup>22</sup> The approach of the US towards the conflict would play a crucial role and could impact the unity among the GCC member states.

### **Future of GCC Unity**

The tussle within the GCC is not a completely new phenomenon. Several differences had emerged within the organisation in the past too and the differences had been addressed with negotiations and dialogue and resolved. But this time, the isolation of Qatar by the Saudi-led group was a bit too much. Both sides are sticking to their stands, and as a result the conflict has aggravated and continues to linger. The regional geopolitics has also unfolded with new regional alliances and thus a shift in the balance of power in the Gulf region. The idea of Gulf unity has been challenged as the major Gulf countries have been divided over most of the crucial issues of security and regional cooperation. The fault lines of conflict and cooperation in the Gulf region seem to be oscillating like a pendulum. With the mediation efforts of Kuwait and Oman, the countries of the region may eventually succeed to strike a deal among themselves. But the unity among the Gulf Sheikhdoms will not regain the same footing as before. Too much bad blood has been spilled between the countries, especially between Qatar on one hand, and Saudi Arabia, UAE and Bahrain on the other. This will have long term repercussions for unity among the GCC members.

Bahrain and the UAE have remained Saudi allies and in the present situation their commitment to Saudi Arabia remains undiluted. Their interests in the politics and security of the Gulf region are converging. In the GCC, Bahrain has remained a trusted ally of Saudi Arabia. Both the royal families enjoy a strong bonding and have similar perceptions over a number of crucial regional issues. The Bahraini authorities were able to control the protests because of the timely Saudi help under the Gulf Peninsula Shield Force. Bahrain was the first country to blatantly announce that it will not participate in any meetings of the GCC where Qatar is present. Further, targeting Qatar, Bahrain has imposed visa requirements for the Qatari nationals.<sup>23</sup> Though Bahrain has cited its national security and safety as reasons for taking such a decision, its larger intention to further isolate and harass Qatar is not invisible. Since decades, the GCC countries have maintained a visa free entry for their nationals in all the GCC countries. This has been a symbol of the existing unity and trust among the members of the GCC for decades. Bahrain’s decision in this regard will have a negative impact on its ties with Qatar, further widening the rift. Moreover, Bahraini Foreign Minister Shaikh Khalid Bin Ahmad Al Khalifa went to the extent of

saying that Qatar's membership from the six-member GCC should be suspended. He argued that suspending Qatar from the GCC is the right step to preserve the organisation.<sup>24</sup> The anger in Manama can also be gauged from the fact that Bahrain is being pressurised into filing a complaint against Qatar at the UN and the International Criminal Court (ICC) for interfering in its internal affairs by supporting terrorism and extremist forces, and supporting anti-government forces against the government in Bahrain.<sup>25</sup>

Similarly, the UAE has enjoyed a strong relationship with Saudi Arabia in this region. Both these countries have shared interests in major regional, political, and security issues. The UAE has been a key player in the decision to isolate Qatar. A major triggering factor for the announcement was a leaked email of the UAE envoy to US, Yousef Al Otaiba, revealing that, UAE, in collaboration with the Washington DC based think tank Foundation for the Defence of Democracies, was planning to organise a conference, focusing on Qatar's destructive role in the region and its support for the terrorist organisations and individuals. This generated a lot of negative emotions in Doha. UAE has also been critical of Qatar's restoration of full diplomatic ties with Iran and has urged Doha to cease its support for terrorist and extremist groups.<sup>26</sup>

While Saudi Arabia, UAE and Bahrain are trying their best to isolate Qatar, the latter on the other hand, is defying the blockade imposed by its neighbours. Two other GCC members - Kuwait and Oman – have maintained studied neutrality over the issue. Both these countries have chosen to mediate and ease the tension by bringing their neighbours to the negotiating table. In the ongoing turbulence in the Gulf region these two countries represent a saner and more moderate voice. Thus, the situation is currently moving from bad to worse because of the inflexible approach of Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain and Qatar; and the unsuccessful mediation attempts by their neighbours Kuwait and Oman. Such a prolonged stalemate situation can only have a colossal effect on the future unity of the GCC as a regional organisation.

## **Conclusion**

The present crisis is reshaping the regional geopolitics in the Gulf region and it will have a severe impact on the unity of the GCC. Though the GCC has, in the past, witnessed several internal disputes among the member states, never have such differences appeared as destructive for the unity of the organisation, as the situation is unfolding now. While the GCC is undergoing a rough patch, the future unity of the organisation is a large question mark now. The stubbornness in the statements of the leaders, their respective sanctimonious positions, and their unwillingness to talk has resulted in a status-quo in the GCC. Iran and

Turkey – the two non-Arab players have emerged as decisive role players in the Gulf region. In the present situation, when Qatar remains isolated from its neighbours, it has found friends in Iran and Turkey who have offered political, diplomatic and economic support to deal with the situation. Both Iran and Turkey have found this as an ideal opportunity to spread their tentacles in the regional politics of the Gulf. This also changes the geopolitical situation in the Gulf region, especially in terms of the balance of power between Iran and Saudi Arabia. The entry of Iran and Turkey as potential players in the Gulf, further infuriates the ‘blockading quartet’ and dampens any attempt of restoring unity among the GCC member states. Oman and Kuwait have maintained neutrality and distanced themselves from the conflict. Thus, the emerging fault lines in the regional geopolitics in the Gulf region seems to be in all likelihood, a ‘divided GCC’ with Qatar, Iran and Turkey joining hands together vis-a-vis the ‘blockading quartet’. Mediation attempts have also not paid off till now.

The unfolding situation looks depressing for the future of the relationship among the Gulf monarchies who had set an example of unity and integration of the politics, economy and security in the form of the GCC. The crisis is, ostensibly, going beyond a family feud in the tribal monarchical system of governance in Arabia and is threatening the unity among the GCC monarchies.

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