

Deconstructing the Gulf Crisis: Post-Colonialism and Competing 'Projects' in the Middle East

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ABSTRACT *This article deconstructs the stated reasons behind the quartet's blockade on Qatar, including i) Iranian-relations; ii) funding 'terror;' iii) supporting 'political Islam' – Hamas, Muslim Brotherhood, etc.; and iv) destabilizing the Arab world through Al Jazeera, and scrutinizes their veracity. In actuality, these accusations are mere obfuscation. Henceforth, understanding the quartet's motivation requires employing post-colonialism as an explanatory variable. It does so by assuming the preponderance of U.S. military power in the GCC produces three conflicting ideal-types: i) Saudi-led quartet Arab project, 'subservient' to U.S. hegemony; ii) Iranian-led partisan project, resisting/increasing engagement to U.S. hegemony; iii) Turkish-led 'civic Islam' project, pivoting from engagement to resisting U.S. hegemony. In this, three-rivalry is the roots of the blockade and the larger meta-strategy at behind the blockade.*

Keywords: Middle East, Qatar, Gulf Crisis, Post-colonialism, U.S. Hegemony

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Introduction

On September 7, 2017, in Washington, D.C., at a press conference with President Trump, Kuwait's Emir Sheikh al-Sabah was asked by the veteran *Al Jazeera* journalist Said Saeed about the ongoing Qatari blockade that was initiated by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Specifically, he asked about the "complicated issue at the heart of this dispute."¹ Responding, Sheikh al-Sabah disparaged the negative role of the media, which he claimed was exacerbating tensions between the disputants. Then, continuing, he downplayed the challenges ahead by highlighting the strong, brotherly bonds in the Arabian Gulf. Lastly, in closing, almost as if needing to feature the achievement of Kuwaiti intervention, he said: "Thank God. Now, what is important is that we have stopped any military action."² A sudden silence fell over the room. Astoundingly, Kuwait's diplomatic shuttling between squabbling neighbors was not a futile effort, as naysayers had it.³ Rather, it was vital in preventing all-out war. This remarkable feat certainly was worth underscoring and did not go unnoticed, with media abuzz by that startling revelation.⁴

Immediately afterward, the quartet – Saudi Arabia, UAE, Egypt, and Bahrain – responded by thundering 'war was never on the table!'⁵ However, that was not believable. Several journalists corroborated the quartet's invasion plans, conceptualized with former Blackwater mercenaries from Latin America.⁶ The genie, so to speak, was out of the bottle. From this, there was another fall-out – the widespread collapse of the quartet's credibility. Their intent to negotiate, in the light of their war-mongering, was derided, especially considering Gargash's bellicose avowals of "no negotiation."⁷ Here, too, the quartet was mortified by this blatant undressing of sorts, which stymied their claims of the moral high ground. How could that be believable considering their invasion plans during the Holy month of Ramadan?

To begin, the unprecedented blockade on Qatar was orchestrated by Saudi Arabian Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) and Emirati Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed (MBZ) on June 5, 2017. However, preceding groundworks had begun months, even years before.⁸ Paid-for opinion pieces trashing Qatar were circulated in numerous Western newspapers, traced to UAE Ambassador Yusuf al-Otaibi and the right-wing Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD).⁹ From there, the pre-blockade strategy moved to the climactic phase, erupting with UAE's hacking of Qatar's News Agency.¹⁰ Curiously, the quartet refused to acknowledge Qatar's disclaimer and continued to re-broadcast the fake news.¹¹ Then, without any official writ or explanation, came the blockade. An air, land, and sea embargo was heartlessly decreed, affecting even basic foods and medicine.¹² Worse, the quartet threatened to punish their own citizenry with 15-years imprisonment for mere expressions of sympathy with Qatar.¹³ And, nearly a month later, there was still no offi-

cial explanation of 'why?' Just *ad nauseum* avowals by Adel al-Jubeir that: "they (Qatar) know what to do."¹⁴ Kicking patients out of hospitals, manhandling Qatari women near Islam's holiest sanctuary, and condemning thousands of camels to a mean death by thirst, was incomprehensible.¹⁵ Where did such deep-seated hostility originate?

Implicit in this triangular rivalry is the root-cause of the blockade: a pendulum swing between autocracy, partisanship, and an emergent civic Islam

The accusations against Qatar, primarily, focus on four contentious points: i) Iranian-relations; ii) funding 'terror;' iii) supporting 'political Islam' – Hamas, Muslim Brotherhood, etc.; and iv) destabilizing the Arab world through *Al Jazeera*. Now, a fifth accusation/condition has been hurled at Qatar – rather unbelievably and not worth scrutinizing– which is to relinquish the World Cup bid, thereby resolving the crisis.¹⁶ In actuality, these accusations do little more than concealing the actual motive behind the crisis: the flip-flopping of explanations being indicative of the quartet's obfuscation. And, accordingly, this question is repeatedly asked: what does the quartet want? In fact, Charlie Rose posed the question, on October 29, 2017 during the broadcast of his flagship *60 Minutes* show, to Sheikh Tamim – Qatar's young, resolute Emir.¹⁷ His response was telling –to usurp Qatar's sovereignty.¹⁸

Essentially, the unspoken goal of the Saudi-led quartet –its meta-strategy– is to impose a singular vision in the GCC and, plausibly, the entire Arab and Sunni-Muslim world. Arguably, the Saudis appear to entreat U.S. patronage, in exchange for privileged status, on the basis on what they could 'deliver.' Plausibly, that means agreeing to U.S. strategy vis-à-vis Jerusalem, Iran, Turkey, the Muslim Brotherhood or, even, the Muslim world. Of course, this strategy seems to include usurping Qatar's riches, a simple cash-grab, considering their financial woes. Nevertheless, it seeks to achieve its objectives by either scenario: Saudi pre-eminence and tutelage over Qatar enforced through indirect rule, effectuated by submissive-tribes, leaving it a vassal-state or direct invasion to establish Saudi supremacy over its recalcitrant neighbor. Initially, President Trump tweeted support, only to backtrack afterward. However, serious obstacles surfaced along the quartet's way, not least Iran.¹⁹ They, too, have benefactors, and vow to U.S. hegemony, more persuasively, that they can 'deliver.' And, lastly, there is an emerging third way, 'civic Islam' force led by Turkey.²⁰ Henceforth, implicit in this triangular rivalry is the root-cause of the blockade: a pendulum swing between autocracy, partisanship –both with differing levels of U.S./foreign provision, and an emergent civic Islam. Certainly, what is transpiring in the GCC, between competing blocs, is a microcosm of the meta-contestation in the Middle East.

In total, this article approaches the Gulf crisis three-fold: First, it deconstructs the quartet's stated-logic for the blockade, underscoring inconsistencies. Sec-

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ond, it uses post-colonialism theory and ideal-types, as explanatory variables, to unravel competing regional trajectories and describe how different states/alliances –or rival ‘projects,’ engage with U.S. hegemonic power in the GCC. Moreover, post-colonialism provides persuasive insights when studying rentier-states who outsource their security. Thirdly, it describes a three-way rivalry between: i) Saudi-led descendant autocratic project; ii) Iranian-led ascending, but unsustainable, partisan project; and iii) Turkish-led emergent civic Islam project.

Kansas City Shuffle

To begin, a ‘Kansas City shuffle’ is an idiom that conveys misdirection, prodding focus in a particular direction, when what matters occurs elsewhere. This characterizes the quartet’s strategy and explains their exaggerated infatuation with Iran, terrorism, and corruption. Leave aside MBS’ purported \$1.3 billion spent on ‘Salvatore Mundi,’ a yacht and a French Chateau²¹ or allegations that Saudi Arabia funds ‘terror’ more than any GCC member-state.²² Granted, unraveling the blockade differs, contingent on who describes it. For the U.S., it may be to protect Israel, control regional energy sources, and hold Saudis to their Middle East peace plan. For Iran, it presents opportunities for trade and facilitates its regional ascendancy. For the Saudi-led quartet, it may be a mechanism to ingratiate itself to a wayward benefactor (U.S.), reap financial rewards and enforce its writ on the Arab heartland as well as its credentials as the sole-spokesperson for the Sunni-Muslim world. Surely, these are important, but our aim is to deconstruct and evaluate the quartet’s stated accusations against Qatar.

Firstly, concerning Iran, Shaikh Tamim was transparent in acknowledging their healthy, diplomatic relations. It is normal, considering they share a major natural gas field. However, Qatar’s policy differences with Iran are serious, even more than blockading countries, irrespective of noisy condemnations. Ultimately, both countries exact statesmanship and compartmentalize their objectives, avoiding zero-sum binaries.²³ Their relationship is practical, due to mutual economic interests and geography. Hence, some level of engagement is inevitable and insisting on cutting this relationship entirely, is a non-starter.

Furthermore, the quartet’s hyperbole about Qatar-Iran relations is acutely hollow considering the UAE’s robust trade with Iran and hosting 500,000 Iranian residents.²⁴ Besides, 80 percent of GCC-Iran trade originates in UAE –measuring, nearly, \$20 billion yearly.²⁵ Actually, UAE-Iran relations are longstand-



U.S. President Donald Trump and Kuwait's Emir Sheikh al-Sabah speak at a press conference, Washington D.C., September 7, 2017.

CHIP SOMODEVILLA / Getty Images

ing, multi-faceted, even if contradictory. “Over the past decade Abu Dhabi has emerged as a strategic hawk on the Iranian nuclear issue even as Dubai functioned as a loophole...”²⁶ Similarly, Egypt too, has cooperated with Iran. Even to support Assad’s brutal regime with weapons transfer –irrespective of their possible use against Saudi-supported rebels.²⁷ Consequently, it is all rather murky, but such a specious allegation cannot be taken seriously. So, why isn’t Saudi Arabia reproaching its partners for this glaring mutiny?

Secondly, the accusation that Qatar officially supports terror groups in Yemen, Syria, Afghanistan or elsewhere, is without merit. Actually, Qatar’s military presence in Yemen was at the request of ‘big brother’ Saudi Arabia.²⁸ Internally, they were squeamish of a bombing campaign targeting the poorest Arab country. This holds for Syria, too, as evidenced by Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim, who said: “Qatar, along with Saudi Arabia and the U.S., had jointly coordinated the arming and funding of Syrian opposition groups.”²⁹ Indeed, Qatar repeatedly has taken the back-seat, even against its own better judgment, at Saudi behest.³⁰ And, this is equally true for opening a Taliban office in Doha, requested by U.S. authorities.³¹ Here, perfectly perceptible, is realpolitik at work, where participation is demanded, then, unabashedly, you’re blamed for it. Just like Britain accusing Iraq of developing chemical weapons, while they, behind-the-scenes, were outsourced to construct those facilities.³²

Third, the accusation that Qatar’s support for Hamas, Islah, or Muslim Brotherhood drove the blockade is derisory. Explaining, Shaikh Hamad bin Jassim

By deconstructing the 'power-games' behind the blockade, through the prism of post-colonialism and interjecting U.S. hegemony as a neo-imperial force, we identify the larger meta-strategies of competing forces

stated the designation 'Muslim Brotherhood' is misused to sweep several organizations under a single, derogatory label.³³ And, now, the quartet is reaching out to 'Islah' – the hitherto condemned Yemeni Muslim-Brotherhood.³⁴ Factually, these political movements are not considered 'terrorist' to Arab civil society. What they do represent is an alternative to the status quo – which Qatar advocates for, and the quartet opposes. Furthermore, these movements pose no clear-and-present-danger to quartet ringleaders. Admittedly, for Egypt, it's plausible, considering Sisi has imprisoned, tortured, and murdered thousands. Yet, for the Saudi/Emirati nexus, such 'ikhwanji' fears are unsubstantiated. Certainly, the quartet views any democratizing force as destabilizing, but neither group has a real presence in their borders, thus leading us to question the use of the Brotherhood bogeyman.

Fourth, the quartet's demonization of *Al Jazeera* is poorly orchestrated. Again, the quartet's strategy produces the opposite of their stated objectives – which was to mute *Al Jazeera*. Paradoxically, in the foregoing 10 years pre-blockade, there was hardly a piece that criticized the quartet-ringleaders. *Al Jazeera* staff were clearly informed in 2007 to not publish/broadcast pieces even moderately anti-Saudi.³⁵ Now, in a stunning reversal, the gloves are off – *Al Jazeera* is broadcasting/publishing damning criticisms. Statistically, more negative content about blockading-countries has aired, in the last months, than in the previous decade. Visibly, the quartet has either been uniquely incompetent in achieving its objectives and the net outcome of their harangue against *Al Jazeera* is that they are a target. Or, they targeted *Al Jazeera*, not for their own purposes, but to pay homage to their benefactors.

Finally, *Amnesty International* rebuked the quartet for its rant against *Al Jazeera* as an insult to freedom of expression.³⁶ Replying, the UAE declared that they did not believe in it.³⁷ All in all, it's bewildering how such statements are intended to elicit U.S./EU support. And, shortly thereafter, UAE's U.S. Ambassador, Yusuf al-Otaiba, spoke to Charlie Rose about partnering with U.S./EU to create a 'secular' society in the Gulf.³⁸ It is this double-talk that reveals how the discordant quartet sings out-of-tune. They champion moral laxity, criticize free speech, and disparage equality in their dystopian, misogynistic secularity. Then, outrageously, UAE's Dhahi Khalfan doubles-down to tweet 'bomb *Al Jazeera*.'³⁹ Criminalizing dissent, punishing feelings, and denouncing freedom of expression were bound to backfire. Altogether, the quartet's justifications are illogical. Consequently, their strategy – the four contentions, 13 demands, and

six principles– is not meant to be taken seriously and the real rationale behind the blockade should be sought elsewhere.⁴⁰

Post-Colonialism Theory and Ideal-Types

Considering the quartet's reasons for the blockade are insufficient as explanatory variables, this study sought alternatives. Thereupon, it found post-colonialism convincing by how it informs, instructs, or compels different players/groups to make certain choices. In particular, this study wishes to expose the development of competing discourses, narratives, and 'projects' in relation to the U.S. hegemonic power in the GCC. Mirroring this, Deputy Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdul-Rahman al-Thani claimed, at the Rome 2017 MED Conference, that behind the blockade was a larger 'power-game,'⁴¹ who is behind it and what it entails, was undisclosed. Nevertheless, to understand that 'power-game' and ensuing contestation, this study employs post-colonialism theory.

Firstly, there is disagreement on what post-colonialism is, since its impact is multi-disciplinary. For instance, in world literature, it scrutinizes the anti-colonial narrative by probing the maturation of the subaltern.⁴² Relatedly, in the study of identity, post-colonialism reveals how colonizers manufactured, facilitated, and/or manipulated identity-formation.⁴³ Since, as Fanon highlights, post-colonial societies did not develop an inclusive, widely-agreeable social contract, because colonizers problematized social cohesion.⁴⁴ They did so by ignoring/manipulating local axiology and fluctuating punishment/reward cycles based on wide-ranging acquiescence to hegemony. Also, post-colonialism, as Chowdhry and Nair describe, impacts international relations. Yet, it remains understudied and requires better investigation.⁴⁵ All in all, post-colonialism is a powerful explanatory variable, by describing the psychosomatic milieu of decolonized societies –i.e. GCC, and its structuring of race, gender, class, security, and agency.⁴⁶

Furthermore, in *Post-Colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics*, Gilbert and Tompkins persuasively describe post-colonialism as “an engagement with, and contestation of, colonialism's discourses, power structures, and social hierarchies...”⁴⁷ Likewise, Ashcroft *et al.* in *Key Concepts in Postcolonial Studies*, describe post-colonialism as “the study and analysis of European territorial conquests, the various institutions of European colonialisms, the discursive operations of empire, the subtleties of subject construction in colonial discourse and the resistance of those subjects, and, most importantly perhaps, the *differing response to such incursions and their contemporary colonial legacies* in both pre- and post-independence nations and communities.”⁴⁸ This, precisely, is how this study will define and use 'post-colonialism,' while placing emphasis on 'differing responses' to colonial incursions and their contemporary legacies –read the U.S. hegemonic power in the GCC. By deconstructing the 'pow-

er-games' behind the blockade, through the prism of post-colonialism and interjecting the U.S. hegemony as a neo-imperial force, we identify the larger meta-strategies of competing forces.⁴⁹

Importantly, decolonized societies acquire a post-colonial distinctiveness which is inherently conflictual based on contradictory social-interfaces between identities –whether ethnic, tribal, national, global, or gender. This is what Bhabha describes as hybridity.⁵⁰ Regardless, each projection is apportioned influence distinct to the cultural/socio-economic power by the hegemon. Of course, this does not assume that social actors/groups are without agency. But, hegemony invokes, promotes and encourages actions which would otherwise not occur. And, this also does not presume other factors are not involved in understanding GCC rivalry, such as purported U.S. apathy encouraging regional adventurism. Still, none of that diminishes the authoritative role U.S. hegemony plays in the GCC, for which the theory of post-colonialism offers deep insights.

Correspondingly, responses to the U.S. hegemonic-power in the GCC produce three conflicting groups/projects –or Weberian ideal-types.⁵¹ Admittedly, ideal-types are broadly used to isolate patterns and larger groupings but are not a complete representation of concrete reality. Weber developed the 'ideal-type' as a key conceptual tool while acknowledging that no scientific system is proficient enough to replicate the entirety of our concrete reality.⁵² Still, it is essential to the investigator as a quantifying yardstick to establish convergence as well as divergence in empirical reality. It provides the basic method for comparative analysis and 'is formed by the one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytical construct.'⁵³ On a micro-level, ideal-types involve an emphasis on characteristic modes of behavior, emphasizing collectivities, rather than to the social actions of individuals. On a macro-level, it reveals larger patterns or convergence. Henceforth, the use of 'ideal-types' allows us to construct hypotheses, linking them with the conditions that brought the phenomenon or event into prominence, or with consequences that follow.

Specifically, the emergent ideal-types are: i) Axis of Autocracy: Saudi-led quartet which is subservient to the U.S. hegemony, and mimics Fanon's settler violence on its own population;⁵⁴ ii) Axis of Partisans: Iranian-led project that resists the U.S. hegemony with increasing negotiation/compliance and mirrors Fanon's "feudals" –an empowered minority with perks for fulfilling the hegemon's meta-strategy;⁵⁵ iii) Axis of Civic Islam: Turkish-led project that, initially, negotiates/engages with the U.S. hegemony, with increasing resistance, which approximates Fanon's natives –the majority population of the Middle-East.⁵⁶ Of course, politics is hardly an all, or nothing, affair. Each of these ideal-types

contains degrees of submission, resistance, or negotiation towards the realities of power and certainly more study is required concerning these competing-blocs. However, each political actor may reasonably be stated to situate themselves in a particular camp, even though there are deep-relations that both Turkey and Qatar have with the U.S., and that the UAE has with Iran. Nevertheless, this article only wishes to feature this meta-contestation between 'projects' and, in some small way, contribute to a better understanding of the blockade.



The quartet is a descending force, losing respect, money, and influence in the Middle East

U.S. Hegemony and Competing 'Projects' in the Gulf

Three factors, arguably, highlight U.S. hegemony in the Gulf: i) The U.S. replacing the British as a new colonial power; ii) Being the principal interlocutor; iii) GCC-U.S. military/security partnerships. Firstly, the Saudis invited the U.S. to the Gulf as British colonial pre-eminence withered in 1931. Since then, the U.S. effectively replaced the British as 'Chieftain' and now remains the GCC's go-to guy. How else would one explain the *force majeure* of Trump's tweets?⁵⁷ Or, that no security arrangement, or blockade, is possible without the U.S. consent? Secondly, quite amusingly, Colonel David Des Roches, a decorated U.S. Army officer, oft describes the U.S.' role in the GCC as that of a principal interlocutor.⁵⁸ In sum, the Gulf crisis underscores the U.S. power as the 'principal interlocutor' –deep-seated in the GCC psyche and palpable in the manner all sought the U.S. intervention.

Thirdly, the GCC-U.S. military/security relationship showed an intensifying trajectory from 1951.⁵⁹ However, it was not until the 1979 Iranian Revolution that it skyrocketed. In fact, there is credible evidence to suggest the U.S. encouraged the formation of the GCC in 1981 as a response.⁶⁰ Looking closely, from 1979 to 2017, including recently signed-agreements, Saudi Arabia's adopted military-budget is an astronomical \$1,740,865.6.⁶¹ This includes the \$110 billion trade deal, with an additional \$240 billion over a 10-year period.⁶² Concerning the UAE, since 1997 to 2016, the UAE's military expenditure is approximately \$200 billion.⁶³ Kuwait's military expenditure, since 1988, is nearly \$195 billion, while Oman and Bahrain's are, roughly, \$125 billion and \$20 billion.⁶⁴ Lastly, Qatar since 1988 has spent approximately \$40 billion, including \$12 billion on the purchase of the U.S. F-15 Fighter jets.⁶⁵ Intriguingly, even with these hard statistics, doing research on the U.S.-GCC military/security relationship is not so clear-cut. Weapon sales, service, training, transportation costs, software, and various related military expenses fall under several categories making concrete expenditure difficult to verify. Still, unquestionably, the vast majority of total

GCC military expenditure from 1979 has gone to the U.S. coffers⁶⁶ and after the 1991 Persian Gulf War, a permanent physical U.S. military presence was in place. Clearly, the depth of this military partnership produces all kinds of dependencies, but, plainly, the GCC is America's moneymaker.

Axis of Autocracy: Post-Colonial Settlers

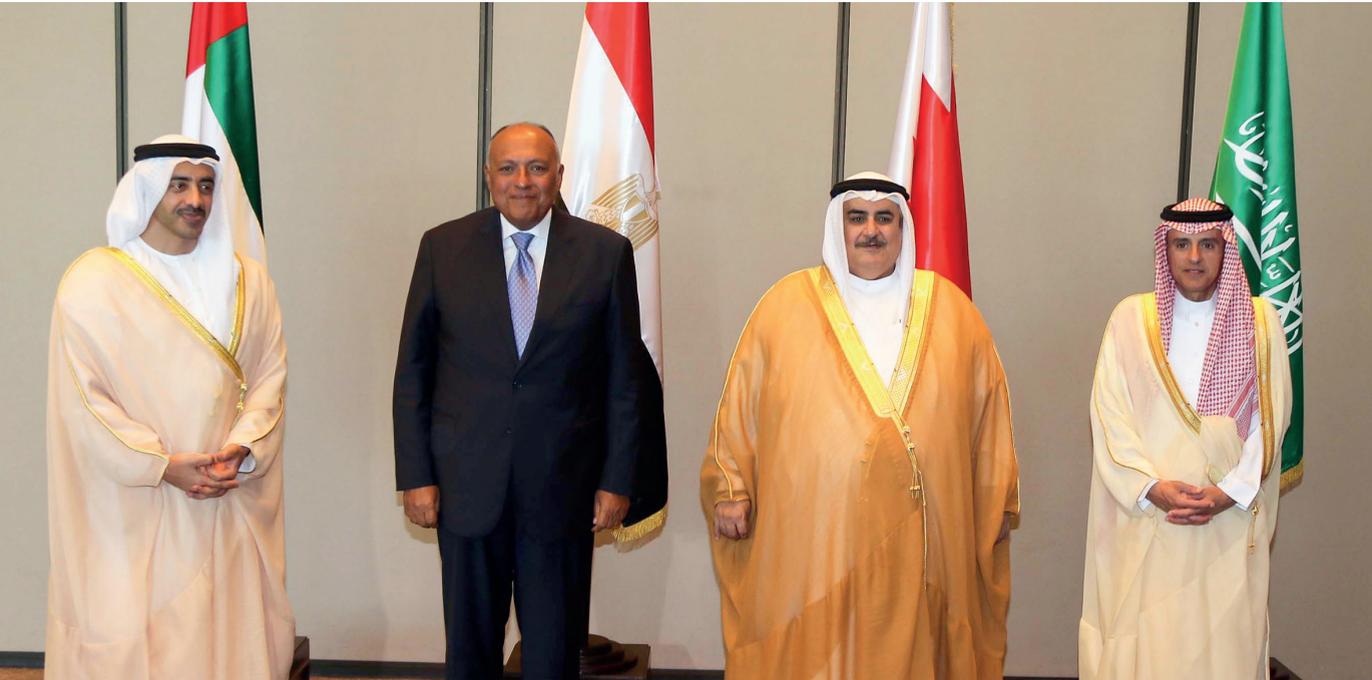
The first ideal-type emerging in response to the U.S. hegemony in the GCC is the 'Axis of Autocracy,' namely, the Saudi-led quartet.⁶⁷ In short, Saudi Arabia, led by MBS, is decidedly 'subservient' to the U.S. hegemony. Perhaps, now is more so than ever.⁶⁸ Indeed, Trump is on record having boasted that "We've put our man on top!"⁶⁹ Moreover, GCC area specialists such as Lacroix, suggest MBS was 'chosen' as the Saudi successor due to his pliability.⁷⁰ In turn, MBS describes Trump as 'the right man at the right time.'⁷¹ The UAE too, demonstrates this 'subservience' by celebrating their 'unparalleled' commitment to America.⁷² Concurring, Hearst writes "the crown princes and de facto rulers of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain, Mohammad bin Salman, Mohammad bin Zayed, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi are all personally dependent on Trump" through military/political support.⁷³ If any further evidence were required, to highpoint this evolving partnership, consider the Imam of Mecca's outra-

geous claim that the Saudi-led quartet and America are paragons of global peace.⁷⁴

The quartet's failure in convincing the Jordanian King and Mahmoud Abbas to ignore the extraordinary OIC session on Jerusalem is further evidence of their weakened status

Secondly, the quartet is a descending force, losing respect, money, and influence in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia's economic woes, internal feuding and inability to achieve its own objectives expose it as a lame-duck leader. MBS has imprisoned his own family members, inviting former Blackwater mercenaries to torture them.⁷⁵

The Saudi war in Yemen is a humanitarian disaster, they lost in Lebanon, failed in Libya, are useless in Syria, and their gamble on Qatar backfired.⁷⁶ Moreover, they were unable to convince Jordan, Oman, or Kuwait to follow their lead.⁷⁷ Unquestionably, the U.S. must surely deem them an unreliable partner. But, the Saudis tenaciously hang-on, pleading 'remember me.' They, and other quartet members, will, in fact, do anything; like, the UAE funding the failed coup in Turkey,⁷⁸ or by delivering Jerusalem on a silver platter. But, it failed in Turkey and will fail in Jerusalem –as the U.S. will soon discover. No amount of coercion, as witnessed by the rescinded resignation of Saad Hariri, bribing Mahmoud Abbas, restricting Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi, or temporarily arresting Jordanian billionaire Sabih al-Masri, will revive its decaying authority. The quartet's failure in convincing the Jordanian King and Mahmoud Abbas to ignore the extraordinary OIC session on Jerusalem is further evidence of their weakened status.⁷⁹



Foreign Ministers of the UAE, Egypt, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia (L-R) gather in Bahrain to discuss the Saudi-led blockade on Qatar, July 30, 2017.

Stringer / AA Photo

Thirdly, the quartet is anti-democratic, racist, and capitalist. In fact, its opposition to the Arab spring is due to its repugnance of equality. Certainly, people's right to choose would endanger their privilege hence they loathe freedom, rule of law or institutions, in a word, democracy.⁸⁰ Intertwined with that, is racial and economic perversion, distorting divine writ and religious legacy. In fact, purveying the publications of Saudi's Ministry of Religion provides ample evidence that describes Turks, Persians, and others, negatively. This policy is evident in the heated exchange between Iran's former Foreign Minister Mottaki and Saudi King Abdullah. When King Abdullah reproached Iran for meddling in Palestinian affairs Mottaki protested saying, "They are Muslims!" "No, Arabs" countered the King, "You, as Persians, have no business meddling in Arab matters."⁸¹ Even now, the garbled UAE Foreign Minister re-tweeted a dishonest comment describing Medina's legendary Ottoman governor, Fahreddin Pasha, as anti-Arab.⁸² Furthermore, the quartet is unreservedly pro-capitalist, celebrating an unbridled, exploitative crony-consumerism. Nothing quite represents it as MBS's mindboggling endorsement of Neom –the 'first capitalist city in the world' where everything has a price.⁸³ A farcical word jumbling the prefix neo with the letter 'm' from the transliterated Arabic word 'mustaqbil' (future), representing an unholy, contortionist idea for a city without humanity.

Lastly, the quartet's subservience to the U.S. hegemony was cogently verbalized during Adel al-Jubair's interview with CNN's Becky Anderson, when she raised

concerns on the quartet's strategy. Countering, al-Jubair high-pointed four blockade successes: i) Allowing American treasury officials into Qatar's banking sector; ii) Coercing Qatar to sign a U.S. counter-terrorism memorandum of understanding for terror financing; iii) Changing Qatar's laws to allow foreign government provided evidence, read the U.S.; iv) Compelling Qatar to disassociate with Syria and Hamas, allowing the U.S.' Middle-East 'peace plan' to advance.⁸⁴ Clearly, the 'victories' the Saudi-led quartet celebrates are America's and, acutely, represent clientelism. Admittedly, more should be explored about the quartet's advocacy for racial superiority, religious fanaticism, and exploitative capitalism. How it compartmentalizes life producing a *mélange* of hideous contradictions, weaving religious garb, hyper-sexualization, inequality, bigotry, and iconoclastic puritanism together. All this deserves greater scrutiny yet our aim is only to highlight the quartet's ideal-typical subservience to the U.S. hegemony.

Axis of Partisans: Post-Colonial Feudal

The second ideal-type emerging from the U.S. hegemony is the Iranian-led 'Axis of Partisans,' which takes a perplexing and paradoxical trajectory, oscillating between resistance and submission. This is apparent by deconstructing four intervals: i) 1979 Iranian Revolution; ii) 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War; iii) U.S. Invasion of Iraq (2003-onwards); iv) 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). In the beginning, under Mohammad Reza Shah, Iran was vigorously pro-American, anti-Russian and had deeply-entrenched relations with Israel.⁸⁵ In fact, it was Israel that provided Iran with missile technology through a secretive deal called Project Flower.⁸⁶ That time-tested relationship was temporarily spoilt following Ayatollah Khomeini's popular revolution, replacing a pro-American dictatorship with the modern world's first theocracy.⁸⁷ However, then came the ultimate game-changer, the 1980 Iraqi invasion, altering the Iranian moral compass. Henceforth, Iran negotiated several secret military deals with both the U.S. and Israel –even while publicly denouncing them.⁸⁸ Eventually, "the revolutionary regime's ideology and lurid rhetoric successfully veiled a fairly consistent pursuit of *realpolitik*."⁸⁹ Behind the scenes, Iran took great pains to avoid conflict with Israel or the U.S., irrespective of loud Friday chants of 'Death to America.'

Looking closely, the Iran-Iraq war was bloody, merciless, and futile, with over a million casualties.⁹⁰ Both sides suffered several battlefield setbacks, consequently seeking more weapons to pulverize one another. The rapidly shifting sands of war had America worried that either side may gain a surprise victory. To impede that, the U.S. and Israel cooperated to ship several billion dollars' worth of American arms and spare parts to Iran and militarily support Iraq.⁹¹ The depth of this ruse saw Iran purchase over \$500 million worth of arms from Israel during the 1980-1983 period, according to the Jaffee Institute for Strategic Studies at Tel Aviv University.⁹² In 1985, Iran secretly reached out to the U.S. to purchase missiles in the notorious Iran-Contra Affair.⁹³ Enemy, or no enemy, politics outplayed ideology. Both the U.S. and Israel were bleeding both

countries for their strategic interests as David Kimche, the former head of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, plainly states “our big hope was that the two sides would weaken each other to such an extent that neither of them would be a threat to us.”⁹⁴

Interestingly, the crisis presented Iran with a unique opportunity, by opening a door their revolution had shut. Having nowhere to turn, they had to reach out

to America or risk losing the war –the go-between was Israel. Inadvertently, Saddam Hussein had actualized the Arab threat against Iran and intensified the geostrategic forces that had created the Israeli-Iranian axis decades earlier under the Shah.⁹⁵ Ideological zeal could carry Iran only so far and the revolutionary-oligarchy debated intensively whether creed, singularly, should direct state decision-making. “As the hardships of the war increased, the debates increasingly tilted in favor of the pragmatists...Saddam’s assault and Iran’s isolation intensified the shift in Iranian foreign policy –in its conduct though not in its rhetoric– away from ideology and toward practicality and expediency.”⁹⁶ By the end of the war, Iran had won hard-fought political space that had it inching closer to the the U.S./Israeli interests.

Then, Iran’s pivot to America was obvious following the disastrous U.S. invasion of Iraq (2003). It was a boon for Iran, and the political space, hitherto created, was kicked wide-open. Unable to control the insurgency, the U.S. waylaid Iran for support –who, jubilantly, accepted.⁹⁷ Yet, arguably, it was not mere support. Iran was asked to effectively ensure Iraqi compliance to overall U.S. diktats. To wit, the late Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal told the U.S. Council on Foreign Relations in New York on September 21, 2005, that Washington is essentially handing Iraq to Iran on a silver platter.⁹⁸ Storming out, he infamously roared, that the U.S. is ‘handing the whole country [Iraq] over to Iran without reason!’⁹⁹ Clearly, “Iran has a large number of allies in Iraq’s Parliament who can help secure its goals. And its influence over the choice of interior minister, through a militia and political group the Iranians built up in the 1980s to oppose Mr. Hussein, has given it substantial control over that ministry and the federal police.”¹⁰⁰ While the level of influence is debatable, it is refutable that potent influence exists, however, this situation deeply upset the U.S./Saudi relations.

Then, following the JCPOA or ‘nuclear deal,’ the U.S.-Iranian rivalry turned 180 degrees. That moment, as Parsi describes, was truly *losing an enemy*.¹⁰¹ Now, the ‘partisans’ are an ascendant force –recall Qasim Suleiman’s boast of controlling four Arab capitals.¹⁰² In fact, a key advisor to the Iranian Prime Minister stated “Baghdad is the new capital of the Iranian empire.”¹⁰³ Still, it is

The Iranian-led axis repels with one hand and kisses the other; using resistance, negotiation, and submission to traverse the complex terrain of the U.S. hegemony in the GCC

The Turkish-led axis' pivot away from the U.S. begins with Western hypocrisy towards the Arab spring, talking about freedom and democracy but contributing to disempowering those forces

largely implausible that Iran could achieve this feat without some level of the U.S. complicity. To date, “Barack Obama’s Administration and the other parties to the interim nuclear deal with Iran now seem to be saying they are willing to release to Iran between a third and a half a trillion, that is 420 billion dollars, over the next 15 years in order for Iran not to give up the program, but to freeze it.”¹⁰⁴ Additionally, under Obama, the U.S. has negotiated the return of \$1.7 billion of Iranian assets.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, the UK, too, has recently returned £400 million, not including owing another £976 million.¹⁰⁶ In total, “the amounts in question would give Iran the means to not only shore up its own weak economy, but also to extend its influence, buy weapons, and underwrite terrorist groups to an even greater extent than it has been doing throughout the period the country has felt the squeeze of sanctions.”¹⁰⁷ Plainly speaking, enemies don’t pay each other billions, no matter what.

Now, with the election of Trump, U.S.-Iranian relations are severely strained, especially considering the U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA. Nevertheless, for the time being, the other signatories to the JCPOA agreement are promising to abide by it. Even with those caveats, the partisan Iranian axis’ confounding trajectory is both resistant/subservient to U.S. hegemony, rhetoric aside. Indeed, the Iranian-led axis is not a monolithic entity, even if predominantly Shia. In Iran, ideology and pragmatism are engaged in ongoing internal contestation. “During the Iraq war, in 1982, Iraq offered Iran peace, if they both, jointly attacked Israel –Iran refused. Instead of opting to balance the Arabs by aligning with Israel, or to seek accommodation with the Arabs by taking the lead against Israel, Tehran chose to do both by differentiating between its operational policy and its rhetoric...”¹⁰⁸ Currently, the Iranian-led axis repels with one hand and kisses the other; using resistance, negotiation, and submission to traverse the complex terrain of U.S. hegemony in the GCC. It is neither pro-democracy nor anti-dictatorial, neither pro-Arab spring nor exclusively against, neither socialist nor capitalist, it is a bit of everything –above all, its own. Hopefully, they resist two temptations: unchecked power and aggravating sectarianism.

Axis of Civic Islam: Post-Colonial Natives

The third emergent ideal-type is the Turkish-led ‘Axis of Civic Islam’¹⁰⁹ shifting from cooperation to resisting U.S. hegemony. It is distinguishable by four events: i) the Arab spring; ii) July 15 coup attempt; iii) the Qatar Blockade; and, iv) Jerusalem embassy crisis. Admittedly, this axis is in its formative stage –build-

ing alliances, strengthening partnerships, and diversifying trade relations. It is unclear how well thought-out this axis' vision, strategic direction, and policy objectives are. Nevertheless, Turkey is central and Qatar is vital, as evident in the Qatar-Turkey Supreme Strategic Committee, which is a unique partnership based on mutual defense, shared vision, and outreach.¹¹⁰ Pakistan, unequivocally, should more compellingly partner with this axis, since both countries display a robust affinity to one another. President Erdoğan refers to Pakistan as a 'home, away from home,' and is the only foreign leader to directly address Pakistan's Parliament, thrice.¹¹¹ Moreover, there are deepening linkages with the *al-Nahda* party in Tunisia and developing ties with Sudan, and a competition over who wins Jordan and Morocco. The growth of this 'project' would pose a threat to both autocrats and partisans, though, there is room to negotiate with the latter. Reasonably speaking, only this project is inclusivist enough to alleviate the complex, religious, and cultural heterogeneity in the Middle East.

First, the Arab spring thrust the relationship between Islam and democracy into the limelight. "One after another hitherto unassailable autocrats hastily conceded, forcefully relinquished or had power sequestered over their brutalized corpse. Tunis, Tripoli, Cairo, Sana'a, Damascus, Manama, and lesser, though nevertheless still pivotal, protests in Amman, Algiers, and Rabat shook aging despots into a stupor."¹¹² To many, the monumental street protests vindicated their belief that Islam and democracy are compatible¹¹³ and it was a serious rebuke to those who caricatured Arabs as fatalistic. Turkey was overjoyed offering all kinds of diplomatic, political, and economic support. Qatar, too, applauded the courage of the Arab street offering unprecedented funds. Yet, not all were excited. The autocrats' aversion to the Arab spring was, precisely, because democracy, pluralism, and inclusivity would endanger their privilege.¹¹⁴ Consequently, they persevered to undermine it, paying billions to counter it.¹¹⁵ The partisans, too, were distrustful. In fact, their immediate response to the Arab revolutions was negative.¹¹⁶ Iran's establishment viewed the Arab spring as upsetting a balance that they understood, and disapproved of its association with the Green Movement.¹¹⁷ Publicly, they praised it, but were wary of it and, clearly, worked against it in Syria.¹¹⁸ Of course, the U.S. policy is "based on the notion that supporting autocratic rulers who were willing to guarantee U.S. interests and stability was a necessary evil, since promoting democracy in the region would empower political actors with an Islamist agenda."¹¹⁹ Here, the Turkish-led axis' initial enthusiasm turned to dismay, putting it at odds with America. This axis' pivot away from the U.S. begins with Western hypocrisy towards the Arab spring, talking about freedom and democracy but contributing to disempowering those forces.

Second, Turkey-U.S. relations suffered a deadly-blow when a treacherous faction, within the Turkish military attempted a coup d'état on July 15, 2016. With meticulous planning, putschists orchestrated "a number of coordinated attacks



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan visiting the Turkish forces in Qatar, sent there during the Qatari blockade imposed by other Gulf States.

KAYHAN ÖZER / AA Photo

in both Ankara and İstanbul in an illegitimate attempt to seize key government institutions, including the Presidential Compound and the National Intelligence Agency (MIT).¹²⁰ Tanks, combat aircraft, attack helicopters, and thousands of troops were simultaneously dispatched all over the country in their failed bid to usurp power. However, what was quite extraordinary, and ultimately proved fatal, was Turkish tenacity. Truly, such united resistance from all sections of society not only revealed democracy as a non-negotiable value, but illuminated the pervasiveness and the inclusivity of Turkey's principal social imaginary led by the AK Party.¹²¹ However, in the midst of it, droll censure from the U.S. raised eyebrows across Turkey. Ridiculously, both John Kerry, then the U.S. Secretary of State, and Federica Mogherini, the EU's foreign policy chief, issued statements cautioning President Erdoğan to respect democracy.¹²² With millions mourning, this was devastating for the U.S.-Turkey relations. "The clear implication was that Europe and America were more concerned for the thugs who had tried to seize the state than they were for its democratically elected leaders."¹²³ Responding dismissively, President Erdoğan berated the West for its two-facedness and for "siding with the putschists."¹²⁴ At this point, serious allegations against the UAE, and broader Saudi-led quartet surfaced, as they seemed to support the coup.¹²⁵ Then, senior Turkish officials directly accused the U.S. of complicity, especially when news of the putschists operating from İncirlik air base spread.¹²⁶

Third, the Qatari blockade positioned Turkey squarely against President Trump who, recklessly, tweeted his support for the Saudi-led quartet. In fact, he seemed to be 'egging' them on.¹²⁷ Interestingly, the quartet's initial unofficial demands had no mention of removing Turkish soldiers from Qatar. That was,

An encouraging development that arose from the Jerusalem crisis was allowing Turkish leadership to shine, furthering cementing the credibility of its 'civic Islam' model

curiously, added as a condition for normalization nearly a month later, further confounding what they wanted. Granted, America was torn. While Trump seemed to incite conflict, Tillerson and other U.S. officials worked to resolve it. Nonetheless, Turkey seized the moment and was not willing to allow a military invasion of an ally. Turks understood the long-term implications of another war and took significant risks to rally to Qatar's defense. Turkey-U.S. relations were going from bad to worse.

Lastly, the Turkish-led axis's abhorrence of the U.S. policy is evident with Trump's irresponsible decision to move the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem. This, vividly, indicates the completely different trajectories each side pursues. Unmistakably, Turkey is no push-over and as President Erdoğan made clear –Jerusalem is a red line for Muslims.¹²⁸ This is a complex, long-standing issue that behooves Trump. His bewildering policy includes bullying and blackmail at the United Nations, without considering legitimate Palestinian grievances. Not even the killing of a double-amputee or arrest of 77 children could prompt him to denounce merciless Israeli violence inflicted upon Palestinians.¹²⁹ He disregards the United Nations, *Human Rights Watch*, *Amnesty International*, International Court of Justice, and the Geneva Convention. The U.S. policy, under Trump, considers international law as little more than a nuisance. "Ever since the U.S. government recognized Israel in 1948, no one has ever doubted where Washington stood in terms of the conflict between Israel and the Arabs. But while the U.S. has always been pro-Israel, it tried, at least in theory, to adhere to international law and the worldwide consensus –not anymore."¹³⁰ International law and the Geneva Convention clearly stipulate that Israelis are prohibited to alter the status or demographics of the areas under their military control.¹³¹ The farce has now been openly exposed and this, effectively, disqualifies America as a neutral mediator, putting the final nail in the coffin of the two-state solution.¹³²

Interestingly, an encouraging development that arose from the Jerusalem crisis was allowing Turkish leadership to shine, furthering cementing the credibility of its 'civic Islam' model. That, in turn, further challenged the U.S. hegemony. Immediately, after America's disastrous Jerusalem announcement, Turkey called for an emergency Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) meeting, marked by the quartet's absenteeism. Thereafter, they hustled for a Security Council vote, which the U.S. vetoed, demoralizing their authority. Then, the Turkish-led axis

worked hard, even with other quartet members, who for dubious reasons penned the General Assembly resolution that had a whopping 128 members voting in favor. This result was despite the U.S. threats and blackmail –a first in international diplomacy. Clearly, the Turks outmaneuvered the U.S. and President Erdoğan, conscious of that diplomatic success, proudly acknowledged ‘what Muslims can do when united.’¹³³ Out of adversity, Turkish leadership reinforced the long-standing international consensus that the status of Jerusalem, claimed as a capital by both Israel and Palestine, should be settled in a mutually agreed peace deal.

Conclusion

This article deconstructs the reasons for the quartet’s blockade on Qatar and scrutinizes their veracity. By doing so, it found their justification to be without merit. To reiterate, the accusations against Qatar, primarily, focus on four contentions: i) relations with Iran –preposterous considering 80 percent of the entire GCC-Iran trade is from the UAE; ii) funding for global ‘terrorism’ –clearly unsubstantiated without real evidence; iii) support for Islamic-orientated political movements, such as Hamas, Taliban or the Muslim Brotherhood –a specious complaint considering Qatar’s involvement has been under the direction or, in association with, the U.S. and/or Saudi Arabia; and, lastly iv) destabilization of the Arab world by *Al Jazeera* –which is simply the quartet’s attempt to control the narrative, especially those that uncover the moral depravity of Arab autocratic leadership.

Considering the quartet’s reasons for the blockade are unsatisfactory, this article employed post-colonialism theory as an explanatory variable. It did so by assuming that the preponderance of U.S. military power in the GCC is an ongoing manifestation of post-colonialism, producing three conflicting ideal-types: i) Saudi-led quartet: Arab project ‘subservient’ to the U.S. hegemony; ii) Iranian-led partisan project: resisting, with increasing submission to the U.S. hegemony; iii) Turkish-led ‘civic Islam’ project: pivoting from partnering to resisting the U.S. hegemony. In this three-way rivalry are the roots of the blockade and the larger meta-strategy at work, not just in the GCC, but the wider Middle East. These deeper meanings have to be excavated from beneath an incredible surface froth of misleading rhetoric and disinformation.¹³⁴

Essentially, the unspoken goal of the Saudi-led quartet –its meta-strategy– is to impose a singular vision on the Arabian Gulf and, as wishful as it may be, throughout the Arab and Muslim-Sunni world. However, Qatar is unwilling to play along. By supporting the Arab spring, establishing deep relations with Turkey, and by being too wealthy and ambitious for their neighbors, Qatar increasingly drew their ire. Admittedly, it’s questionable whether Qatar could have ever won their approval. With an internal house in complete disarray,

major fiscal mismanagement, increasing failures –both domestic and regional– the Saudis are in free-fall. Initiating the blockade seems to have been a way to enforce its writ and regain their role as the U.S. hegemon's chief patron –all the while enriching itself with what it thought was easy prey. MBS is soon to find out the seriousness of his miscalculations. Having gambled and lost every initiative taken, whether in Yemen, Qatar, Syria, Libya, and Palestine, he is progressively seen as amateurish.

Also, a significant obstacle in the Saudi-led quartet's pathway is the Iranian-led counter 'project.' It was fiscally empowered due to the huge financial support following the nuclear deal. And, with every indication, this axis was increasingly winning the patronage of America –rhetoric aside. Clearly, the 'partisans' were an ascendant force, but its rising trajectory has been somewhat stupefied by Trump's policies. Yet, that is dependent on what Iran may be willing to concede. For that reason, this article views the Persians as potentially working more closely with the U.S., irrespective of misleading loud, lousy criticisms of both towards each other. The partisan's bargain with U.S. hegemony in a much more erudite manner completely different from the actions of the groveling quartet. Henceforth, implicit in this rivalry is the root cause of the blockade –a pendulum swing from a Saudi-led autocratic project to an Iranian-led partisan one– both being supported by various domestic and international stakeholders scheming for advantage over each other. Neither will truly 'win' –even if the Iranians continue to outmaneuver the Saudis. To be able to deliver, they need the support of the majority of the people in the Middle East, which neither authoritarian trajectory has.

Both the Saudi-led autocrats and Iranian-led partisans may be further understood using Nader Hashmi's and Danny Postel's 'sectarianization' theory. Of course, an in-depth analysis is beyond the scope of this paper, but it shares important insights into both authoritarian ideal-types and their contestation. To wit, "sectarianization is a process shaped by political actors operating within specific contexts, pursuing political goals that involve popular mobilization around particular (religious) identity markers. Class dynamics, fragile states, and geopolitical rivalries also shape the sectarianizing process."¹³⁵ This, insightfully, explains the contestation between our ideal-types, not as a function of ancient blood feuds rooted in putatively primordial hatreds and antagonisms between Sunnis and Shi'a –which is nothing more than lazy and Orientalist reliance on 'sectarianism' as a catch-all explanation for the ills afflicting the Middle East today. Instead, as Hashmi and Postel explain, "sectarianization is rooted in the theme of political authoritarianism...This form of political rule

Turkish-led 'civic Islam' project must reach out to the partisans, and segments of the autocratic axis, to pull the rug from under them and tactfully embrace them in a common vision

has long dominated the politics of the Middle East, and its corrosive legacy has deeply sullied the policies and societies of the region. Authoritarianism, not theology, is the critical factor that shapes the sectarianization process.”¹³⁶

There is, still, a third way –the emergent ‘civic Islam’ force– currently led by Turkey, with Qatar deeply-embedded to this axis. Yet, this requires urgent coherence, direction, and expansion. It is this ‘civic Islam’ that ought to find support by international and regional stakeholders. Of course, this need not be combative or contain zero-sum binaries. Turkey and Qatar should seek out allies, develop partnerships with both states and non-state actors, disgruntled, or otherwise, loosely-tied to the other projects –even reach out to opposing projects. This will allow for the creation of an inclusive, pluralistic, accommodating multi-denominational ‘civic Islam’ project for the Middle East that is both representative of the majority and gives space to minorities. Ultimately, what is at stake is peace and prosperity for billions of people –this is the bona fide battle for the soul of the Middle East, at a meta-strategy level, between deeply divided competitors with variant visions for the future.

Interestingly, over the last decade, the repugnance towards authoritarianism foreshadows the increasing empowerment of Islamic-orientated ‘revivalist’ political forces. Yet, those political forces are engaged in an ongoing combative contest for power with their adversaries –internally and externally– against autocrats and partisans. Skillfully, Sadiki outlines four factors that ‘civic Islam’ needs to come to terms with, namely, constituency, political recruitment, change, and maneuvering.¹³⁷ Additionally, the influence of ‘civic Islam’ requires securing local constituencies, seek out more recruits through plurality and inclusion, adapting to their changing circumstances, and negotiation with ideological counterparts.¹³⁸ Their success and longevity depend on how much they seriously consider the aspirations of their own people with compassion, penetrate and impede the effectiveness of the entrenched deep state with a ruse, maintain their own camaraderie in the face of setbacks, and are willing to give up power to prevent violence. Besides, their responsibility is larger than securing power in the state, since they must set down the rules of the game and rigidly adhere to it, even if that requires a loss of power. But, it is not just that. Turkish-led ‘civic Islam’ project must reach out to the partisans, and segments of the autocratic axis, to pull the rug from under them and tactfully embrace them in a common vision –at least those who are open to this possibility.

Finally, several pundits, especially during the initial blockade phase, foresaw Qatar yielding.¹³⁹ Of course, that did not occur –the tenacity of the Qataris blindsided the quartet, confusing them as to ‘now what?’ For that reason, the blockading-countries were, astutely, described as “a child, who after having climbed a really tall tree, did not know how to climb down.”¹⁴⁰ Even now, it seems as if the quartet has no real plan or will to reconcile. This, in spite of Qa-

tar's Emir Shaikh Tamim candidly, stating that if the quartet walks one mile towards reconciliation, "he is prepared to walk 10,000 miles."¹⁴¹ Sadly, the quartet shows no signs of compromise. In fact, the situation seems to be getting worse with threats of turning Qatar into an island.¹⁴² Hence, sooner or later, another attempt at usurping Qatar's sovereignty cannot be ruled out. ■

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