



مركز الجزيرة للدراسات  
ALJAZEERA CENTRE FOR STUDIES

## Reports

# The Econ-political Impact of the Gulf Crisis on Sub-Saharan Africa

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Qatar Africa [Getty]

## Abstract

The new Quartet, which consists of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain and Egypt, has lead a land, sea and air blockade for a year with the aim of isolating Qatar socio-politically and economically. Consequently, the Qatari diplomacy has been extra active, and the Emir of Qatar Sheik Tamim bin Hamad al Thani has made official visits to various African and European capitals to make a case for his country.

This paper will probe into the reactions of Sub-Saharan Africa towards the blockade of Qatar; and why some nations in the region joined the blockade and severed their diplomatic ties with Doha. It will also look at Qatar's political and diplomatic initiatives directed at these countries, and assess how different regions, which make up powerful blocks with the African Union (AU) reacted to the blockade. The paper will look at the AU's position itself in this regard, and propose some conclusion about the main question: how has the blockade of Qatar affected its relations with Africa?

Many individuals in the Gulf nations have cross family relationships, and their social livelihood has been tremendously affected by the blockade. Most examples of family desperation where covered by the media and social media in Qatar. The Peninsula, Qatar's daily newspaper

reported on Sara, a 29-year-old Qatari, who was poised to start her senior year in business school in Dubai; but, her dreams dashed when the blockade ensued. One frustrated Saudi mother told the Peninsula “We will have to renew our visas in a year. It’s frightening; we don’t know what will happen.”(1) Furthermore, travel has also been impacted, flights which normally to take an hour or two now take hours. One good example of the flight from Dubai to Doha with the distance of 380 kilometers used to take one hour and 15 minutes. However after the blockade, the quickest time from Dubai to Doha with one connection stopover in Muscat takes three hours and 15 minutes.

Before the blockade, Qatar was importing 80 percent of its food needs from other Gulf Arab neighbours mainly Saudi Arabia and the UAE (2). Since June 2017, Qatar had to look for alternative markets for its food imports. Saudi Arabia and UAE have lobbied other nations to join the blockade. They have used, in some instances, their financial leverage to pressure these countries into joining the blockade. Qatar has countered this campaign by deploying its top diplomats led by Foreign Minister Sheik Mohammed bin Abdurahman Al Thani across the world to try to prevent further escalation.

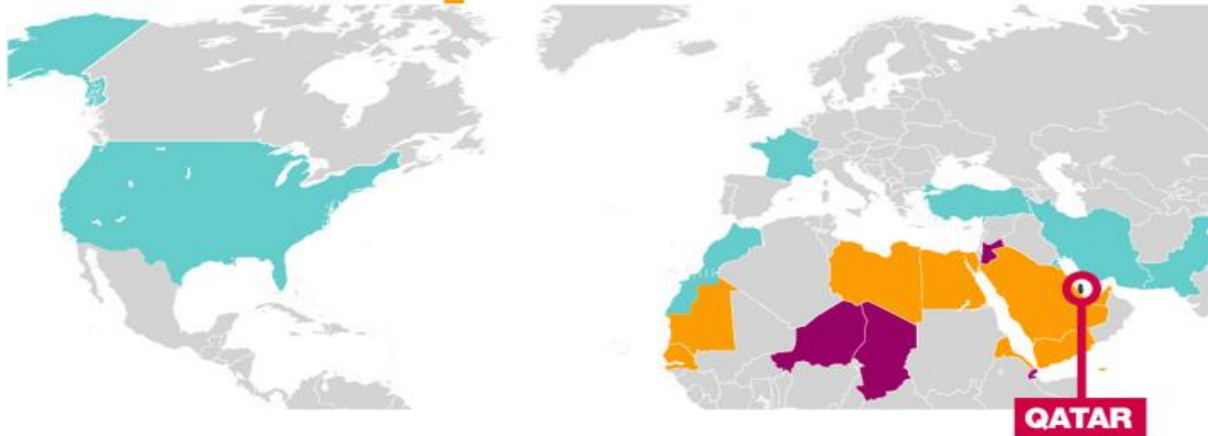
### **The blockade of Qatar exposes “client states” in Sub-Saharan Africa**

The speed and the extent the Quartet’s implemented its blockade on Qatar has revealed the harshness of politics in the region. How did the situation reach this level in such a fast pace? Why was due process involving consultation with Qatar not followed? The political precursor that led to the blockade had a number of flaws worth mentioning. First, Qatari News Agency (QNA) published statements attributed to Emir Tamim in which he purportedly called on Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain to reconsider their “anti-Doha” positions. The purported statements by the emir also included his ostensible views on the U.S., Iran, Israel, Lebanon’s Hezbollah and Palestinian resistance group Hamas (3). Qatar officially rejected these purported statements.

Notwithstanding the denial by Bin Hamad and the government of Qatar, the UAE and Saudi-owned networks in the Gulf insisted on airing the statement, sparking a diplomatic breakdown (4). After the blockade on Qatar, a number of Sub-Saharan African countries followed suit, namely Mauritius, Mauritania, Senegal, Maldives, Chad, and Comoros. Gabon condemned Qatar activities and ran short of completely suspending relations with Doha. Niger recalled its ambassador from Qatar in an act of solidarity with the blockading nations;

but fell short of completely severing ties with Qatar. Djibouti and Eritrea through scattered uncoordinated statements supported the blockade; but have been ambivalent in severing ties with Qatar. Qatar responded almost immediately to Djibouti and Eritrea after the two announced support for the blockade by removing nearly 500 troops it had kept since 2010 (5).

## **Qatar diplomatic crisis**



### **CUT TIES**

**Bahrain, Comoros, Egypt, Eritrea, UAE, Maldives, Mauritania, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Senegal and Yemen**

### **DOWNGRADED TIES**

**Chad, Djibouti, Jordan and Niger**

### **OFFERED MEDIATION**

**France, Iran, Kuwait, Morocco, Pakistan, Turkey and USA**

Qatar Diplomatic Crisis [Aljazeera]

The blockading nations have used a number of tactics to solicit support from some Sub-Saharan African countries to join the blockade. They have in some instances utilised the “deep pocket politics” i.e. use of money to persuade some these countries to join the blockade as it will be demonstrated in the following paragraphs. For an example, UAE spends more on aid to develop other countries than any other nation on earth compared to its wealth, this is according to Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report (6). Most of those countries that benefit from aid are in Sub-Saharan Africa.

## **1. Mauritania**

The position of Mauritania vis-a-vis Qatar remains a mystery. Mauritania has been one of the benefactors of Qatar's goodwill and philanthropy over the years. The Mauritanian Ministry Foreign affairs has repeated the wide claims made against Qatar by the blockading nations in its justification for cutting ties with Doha. In a statement published in Arabic by the Mauritanian Information Agency, the Mauritanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs argued, "The state of Qatar has linked its policies in support of terrorist organizations and the propagation of extremist ideas. This has resulted in heavy losses to human life in these Arab countries, in Europe and throughout the world." (7)

The United Nations World Food Programme (UNWFP) estimates that 42% of the population in Mauritania lives in poverty. Mauritania relies heavily on donor countries, mainly from the Gulf to finance most of its projects in the country. For instance, Qatar Charity (QC) has been very active in Mauritania, and has given large sums of donations to alleviate the country's hardship. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Qatar's English website, "there is a presence of the human cadre of Mauritania in the institutes and national university of Qatar. Moreover, Qatari charitable organizations are active in Mauritania, which formed a framework of positive cooperation that added to Qatar's strong presence in the arena of Mauritania on the official and popular levels".

Recently, the Emirati Red Crescent announced that the proceeds of this year's edition of Ataya, a charity exhibition organised by the Emirates Red Crescent (ERC), will be dedicated to the development of infrastructure and health projects in Dali Gimb, a village in Mauritania, where half the population is suffering from congenital blindness (8). Apparently, the financial interventions of the Emirates in this North African nation has probably swayed Mauritania's position to join the blockade. Qatar has maintained its activities in Mauritania notwithstanding its stance.

## **2. Mauritius**

Mauritius was one of the first African countries to support the measures taken by the Quartet governments against Qatar. According to a statement issued by the Deputy Prime Minister of Mauritius, "Mauritius supports the Saudi step that reinforces international peace, pointing out that the Middle East developments proved Qatar's involvement in terrorism" (9).

Mauritius is home to a multi-ethnic, majority Hindu population most of whom have religious and family connections with the Emirates. It has signed a number of major trade deals with foreign governments and investors including the UAE. UAE and Mauritius signed an important double taxation on income agreement in 2006. The two countries also reached an agreement on mutual protection of investments in 2015, calling both parties to commit to the promotion of investments, through establishing favorable conditions, to help attract investors and permit the establishment of these investments according to laws and legislations; granting investments fair and equitable treatment; protecting investments from any arbitrary and discriminatory measures; maintaining, expanding and selling investments; and liquidating investments (10).

The economic ties between Mauritius and the UAE are extremely substantial, and have led to the normalization of their bilateral relations. While visiting Doha on 23 March 2018, Mauritian Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance Dharmendar Sesungrkur urged Qatari businessmen to invest in various lucrative projects in his country, especially in the financial sector, which are currently being implemented (11).

### **3. Senegal**

Senegal was likewise amongst the first countries to cut ties with Qatar after the blockade in June 2017. It has an obvious axe to grind with Qatar, while Karim Wade a politician from Senegal remains in exile in Qatar. Wade is the son of Senegal's former President Abdoulaye Wade. He was found guilty of corruption in a trial that most Senegalese regarded as politically motivated. The charges were brought two days after he announced his candidacy for the presidency of Senegal. He was sentenced to three years in prison and was given a hefty fine. In 2016, he was granted a presidential pardon, soon after that he flew to Qatar.

Senegal's main opposition party, the Senegalese Democratic Party, chose Wade as their presidential candidate for the 2019 polls while he was in prison. It is unclear whether he is still eligible to run for the presidency after imprisonment. The cutting of relations with Qatar did not therefore come as a shock for many who have been observing politics between the two countries. Qatar and Senegal have since re-established relations. Ahmed bin Saeed Al Rumaihi, Director of the Information Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Senegal on 22 August 2017 tweeted that Senegal has decided to send its ambassador to Qatar back to Doha (12).



According to the Turkish Anadolu Agency, the decision was taken after a telephone conversation between the Emir of Qatar and the President of Senegal Macky Sall. The two countries have a number of memorandum of understandings currently whose execution was hampered by the blockade. The re-establishment of relations between the two countries will culminate in the boost of cooperation in various fields according to senior officials from both sides. In December 2018, the Emir of Qatar undertook a six-nation tour to West Africa included in that tour was Senegal.

#### **4. Maldives**

According to the Maldives newspaper, the Independent, the Qatari government funded the construction of a school in Laamu atoll in 1998 and donated US\$469,471 worth of tsunami aid in 2005. The local telecommunications company Ooredoo Maldives is a subsidiary of the Doha-based Ooredoo Group. Why then did Maldives sever diplomatic and political ties with Qatar?

There is a school of thought which argues that Maldives joined the blockading coalition against Qatar because of a film which was produced by Al Jazeera Investigative Unit, “Stealing Paradise”. The Maldives government has not confirmed those allegations. Instead like all that have joined the blockade, they repeat the mantra accusing Qatar of “sponsoring terrorism and bringing instability to the region”. “Stealing the Paradise” exposed a corrupt deep state in that country, and uncovered a \$1.5 billion money laundering scheme, involving Singaporean and Malaysian businessmen, which leads to the tropical paradise of the Maldives (13). The investigation also revealed corruption at the heart of the tiny holiday nation, involving a top judge and a former vice president in the embezzlement of state funds. The governing party of the Maldives threatened to use controversial defamation laws against anyone involved in reproducing or rebroadcasting “Stealing Paradise”.

Secondly, there is another angle to Maldives’s decision to sever ties with Qatar. Since assuming office in November 2013, President Yameen has fostered closer ties with Saudi Arabia and China. During his second official visit to the kingdom of Saudi Arabia in October 2016, the Saudi government pledged to lend USD 150 million to help repay loans taken for the current administration’s ambitious infrastructure scale-up programme. The Saudi Fund for Development also loaned US\$100 million in 2017 to finance a new passenger terminal at the Velana International Airport, which is to be by the Saudi Binladin group (14).

## 5. Comoros

The tiny state of Comoros is largely dependent on the donations from the Gulf countries. In March 2010, Doha hosted a conference in support of development and investment in the Comoros to help launch infrastructure projects in energy, water, roads, airports, buildings, bridges, and agricultural reclamation in that country. Doha also contributed to the advancement of the economic development of the Comoros, creating jobs and supporting initiatives to establish projects for individuals and companies. Qatar helped fund the Sea Fishing Company and other companies like the Agriculture and Livestock Company, Tourism Company, and a Development Bank (15).

However, the third tailwind in Comoros has improved diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia and its Persian Gulf allies, which have led to significant budget and off-budget support for public investment, including the project to build roads connecting Moroni to the airport and Ouani to Bambao (16). In 2017, the Comoros was usurped by Saudi Arabia and the UAE through the blockade against Qatar. It is a modern-style usurpation that shows how countries are using petrodollars to exploit and manipulate their political agenda at the expense of poor people (17).

## 6. Chad

Chad closed the Qatari embassy in N'Djamena in August 2017, accusing Qatar of seeking to destabilize the country through its northern neighbor. The announcement came days after “heavily armed militia” attacked a Chadian army patrol on the African nation’s northern border with Libya. Chad blamed Qatar for the attack. According to Chad, Qatar is funding terrorists who wish to destabilize the government in that country. Chad has also accused Qatar of funding and giving shelter to Chadian rebel leader Timane Erdimi who is allegedly living in Doha. Erdimi is also the nephew of the Chadian President Idriss Deby. Both are members of the important Zaghawa tribe whose roughly million members live along both sides of the 845 miles long Chad-Sudan border.

According to some Chadian diplomats in Doha, Chad’s decision to sever its diplomatic ties with Qatar was not in response to pressure from the blockading nations. However, Qatar accused Chad of joining a group of “blackmailers” referring to the blockading nations led by Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Bahrain and the UAE. Politics between Qatar and Chad have since



changed. On 21 February 2018, Qatari Foreign Affairs Minister Sheik Mohamed bin Abdulraman al-Thani and Chadian Minister of Foreign Affairs, African Integration and International Co-operation, Cherif Mahamat Zene signed a memorandum of understanding to re-establish diplomatic relations between the two countries. The establishment has culminated in several economic opportunities for Chad, which has renegotiated terms and conditions for the \$1.45 billion loan that was granted by Glencore in 2014. The loan was granted to Chad in order to purchase Chevron's Doba basin assets. In March 2018, Chad and Glencore signed the deal in Paris, France. The win-win outcome for Chad was essentially made possible by Qatar, largely acting behind the scenes (18). Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) is the biggest shareholder in Glencore.

### **How has Qatar fended amidst the blockade in Sub-Saharan Africa?**

In the early stage of the blockade, the Quartet's demands to Qatar were made public. On 12 July 2017, Al Jazeera published a leaked list of 13 including the shutting down of Al Jazeera Media network, close the Turkish army base and scale down Iran ties within ten days (19). Qatar had a firm response insisting that the demands "are so draconian that they appeared designed to be rejected". In the meantime, Qatar Foreign Affairs Minister Mohammed bin Abdurrahman Al Thani has crisscrossed the globe explaining the country's political position and willingness to reach an amicable solution in respect of the ongoing political impasse. He also dedicated time to visit and improve relations with a number of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. The following conclusion will highlight Sub-Saharan African reactions towards the blockade after those interactions.

### **Qatar's charm offensive in West Africa yields results**

Qatar has pressed ahead with its political and diplomatic charm offensive in the region. Perhaps the most important diplomatic initiative was the visit of Bin Hamad and his entourage to West Africa in December 2017. He held a number of important discussions with the leaders of the region including the leaders of Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Guinea, Mali and Senegal. Cote d'Ivoirian leader President Ouattara presented him with the "National Medal of Merit", the highest medal in the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire. Ghana and Mali have strengthened ties with Qatar since the blockade began. Ghana inaugurated the opening of its Embassy in Doha on 07 May 2018. Similarly on 22 January 2018 Bin Hamad received a written message from President of Republic of Mali, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, pertaining to ways of boosting and developing bilateral relations between both countries. The message to Bin Hamad was

delivered by Secretary General at the office of President of Mali (20). It can be concluded therefore that overall Qatar has fended well in West Africa with only Mauritania that has its diplomatic ties still severed with Qatar.

### **Qatar's strong relationship with South Africa culminates into regional political success**

Southern African states have been consistent in their interaction and have demonstrated a strong element of solidarity with the state of Qatar. At the forefront of that interaction has been the Republic of South Africa. None of the Southern African countries joined the blockade when it ensued in June 2018. Furthermore since the blockade began Qatar has received senior political officials from the region, the latest being the President of Zimbabwe Emmerson Mnangagwa. "The New Zimbabwe", an online publication, reported that the meeting on 08 May 2018 between the Emir of Qatar and President Mnangagwa touched on means of boosting and developing bilateral relations and prospects of cooperation between the two countries, particularly in the fields of investment and agriculture (21).

On 11 July 2017, South African Minister of Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) Maite Nkoana — Mashabane led a delegation on her second state visit to Qatar in 12 months. According to DIRCO, Mashabane's visit was "aimed at strengthening the relations" between the Republic of South Africa and Qatar. Between 2016 and 2017 the leaders of South Africa and Qatar have exchanged very significant state visits. In May 2016 President of South Africa former president Jacob Zuma led a senior ministerial delegation to the state of Qatar.

On 11 April 2017, the emir of Qatar Sheik Tamim reciprocated by leading a high-powered government delegation to the Republic of South Africa. On 09 August 2017 Qatar announced that it was waiving entry visa requirements for citizens of over 80 countries, included in the list was the Republic of South Africa. South African citizens are the only Africans currently enjoying this privilege. The waiving of visa requirements for South Africa citizens was followed by a high delegation visit from South African government to Qatar. South Africa is the leading member of a 15 nation strong South African Development Community (SADC)

### **Qatar's engagement with strong states in East Africa**

East Africa is one of the most important regions in Sub Saharan Africa. Less than two months before the blockade was imposed on Qatar, Bin Hamad visited South Africa, Ethiopia and Kenya. During that visit a number of bilateral agreements were signed and exchanged between those countries and the state of Qatar. The Ethiopian visit revealed Ethiopia's keenness to encourage and attract Qatari investments and open the way for businesspeople, from different sectors, to establish joint projects between the two countries that will help in enhancing and activating the Ethiopian economy as well as creating positive opportunities for Qatari investors to interact with foreign projects with good economic and social returns (22). The seat of the AU is in Ethiopia, that has made East Africa very important.

Furthermore, Ethiopia's proximity to the Gulf, historical relations and easy access to the region has made it by extension part and parcel of the political makeup of the Middle East. Large numbers of countries around the world have started to congregate in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia to lobby for African political support. Ethiopia has become a "one stop shop" for many countries wanting to solicit African political support due to the location of the AU in that country. According to a report by Al Jazeera Arabic, Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir held meetings in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, with African leaders on the sidelines of 13<sup>TH</sup> AU Summit to rally support for the countries that have imposed a blockade on Qatar. However, in response, the African leaders unanimously stressed the need for the Gulf crisis to end peacefully. Moreover, Qatar has been very involved in East Africa for much longer, it has played a key role in the dispute between Eritrea and Djibouti, deploying peace force in the boarder over the years. Sudan and Somalia have called for the dialogue and peaceful resolution of the blockade. Regarding Somalia, Qatar has been unrelenting in its support. The latest political effort in this regard was Qatar's participation in a high-level international conference on Somalia, hosted in the British capital London on 07 March 2018. During the conference Qatar stressed its interest to continue to help the Somalia through political support and assistance amounting to about \$385mn (23)

### **Qatar's engagement with the of AU**

Finally, there was a hand full of countries in Africa who joined the blockading nations against Qatar. Most of the countries that initially joined the blockade have since restored diplomatic and political relations with Qatar. Moreover, those countries that joined the blockade did not have significant political and economic relations with Qatar. Instead, most have been overall recipients of Qatar's aid and goodwill.

Second, the Emir of Qatar Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani visited a number of regional political powerhouses in Sub Saharan Africa over the past 12 months including Senegal, Ghana, South Africa, Kenya and Ethiopia. Qatar has also likewise hosted leaders of leaders from Sub Saharan African countries since the blockade ensued. They include, South Africa, Benin, Mali, Ghana, Zimbabwe and many others. Many African countries in Sub-Saharan Africa maintain that the blockade and the political dispute in the Gulf can only be resolve through peaceful negotiations. Their position reflects that of the AU. The AU Commission is of the view that members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) must as a matter of urgency engage each other through dialogue for a speedy resolution to the crisis (24). The blockade has been indeed a wake up call for the state of Qatar especially regarding its attitude and engagement with Sub-Saharan Africa.

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