

Will Qatar's Relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood Change after Gulf Reconciliation?

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Brief Analysis

Qatar must adequately manage its ties to the Brotherhood if it wants to ensure sustainable Gulf ties.

Qatar's support for the Muslim Brotherhood and its various branches is one of the central reasons behind its crisis in relations with Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the UAE, and Bahrain. Now that these four countries and Qatar have finally resolved this crisis diplomatically, the Qatari government's ongoing relationship with the Brotherhood may serve as an indication of whether the diplomatic solution will be durable in the future.

The most important outcome of the Gulf summit held in Al-Ula in Saudi Arabia on January 5, 2020 was formal reconciliation between Qatar and Saudi Arabia. The summit's [closing statement \(https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/1/7/closing-statement-of-41st-gulf-cooperation-council\)](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/1/7/closing-statement-of-41st-gulf-cooperation-council), signed by members of the GCC and Egypt, turned a new leaf in relations between Qatar and the four countries, resuming diplomatic ties that had been severed since 2017. Curiously, however, the statement did not directly address the conflict itself, nor did it mention whether the recently feuding states had reached an agreement on the issues that originally caused the rift.

These unaddressed issues inspired the [six principles \(https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2017/7/7/the-turning-point-of-the-gcc-crisis\)](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2017/7/7/the-turning-point-of-the-gcc-crisis) that these four countries' foreign ministries announced during their meeting in Cairo on July 5, 2017, which were to be the foundation of any resolution reached with Qatar. The most important of these principles was "committing to combatting extremism and terrorism in all its forms, preventing its financing and the provision of safe havens, stopping acts of incitement and violent and hate speech; and ensuring full compliance with the Riyadh Agreement of 2013, the Supplementary Riyadh Agreement and mechanisms for implementation in 2014 through the framework of the GCC."

The Riyadh Agreement mentioned in the six principles was ratified by the late King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud

of Saudi Arabia, the former Emir of Kuwait, Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah, and the current Emir of Qatar, Tamim bin Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, on November 23, 2013. The [agreement \(https://www.cnn.com/2017/07/10/politics/secret-documents-qatar-crisis-gulf-saudi/index.html\)](https://www.cnn.com/2017/07/10/politics/secret-documents-qatar-crisis-gulf-saudi/index.html) prohibited Gulf states from supporting or harboring members of resistance organizations that threatened their governments' security and stability.

Qatar appeared to be in compliance with the terms of the agreement in 2017. According to [documents obtained by Al Arabiya published on \(https://english.alarabiya.net/News/gulf/2017/07/10/Al-Arabiya-publishes-the-Riyadh-Agreements-of-2013-2014-signed-by-Qatar\)](https://english.alarabiya.net/News/gulf/2017/07/10/Al-Arabiya-publishes-the-Riyadh-Agreements-of-2013-2014-signed-by-Qatar) July 10, 2017, Qatar had agreed to stop providing support to the Muslim Brotherhood, expelled non-citizen Brothers from Qatar, and would not shelter any persons from GCC countries to avoid undermining relations with the Gulf. Furthermore, Qatar would not support any organization or entity in Yemen that could jeopardize their internal affairs or relations with neighboring countries.

Nonetheless, in the same year, Egypt, the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain accused Doha of breaking the terms of the agreement, and, indeed, Qatar is currently harboring many Brotherhood leaders and activists within its borders, some of whom are wanted by the Egyptian government. Additionally, Qatar is still providing both state and popular support for the International Union of Muslim Scholars, the clerical arm of the Brotherhood, and has strong relations with the Hamas movement. Following Hamas's control of Gaza Strip in 2007, Qatar has pumped hundreds of millions of dollars into Gaza, supported Hamas diplomatically, and received its exiled leader Khaled Meshaal. Qatar also still funds a wide-reaching global network of TV stations and websites that support Brotherhood ideologies in one way or another.

As a result, the statements issued by Abu Dhabi and [Manama \(https://www.mofa.gov.bh/Default.aspx?tabid=8266&language=ar-BH&ItemId=15226\)](https://www.mofa.gov.bh/Default.aspx?tabid=8266&language=ar-BH&ItemId=15226) following the Al-Ula summit took stringent positions against Doha, suggesting that the summit was an agreement to restore relations in return for addressing unresolved issues through bilateral negotiations with Qatar, whether by the formation of special committees for this purpose or through traditional diplomatic routes. For its part, Qatar agreed to the idea of bilateral negotiations. In [an interview with Al Jazeera \(https://www.aljazeera.net/news/politics/2021/1/6/%D9%88%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%82%D8%B7%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%A7-%D8%AD%D8%AF%D8%AB-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A9\)](https://www.aljazeera.net/news/politics/2021/1/6/%D9%88%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%82%D8%B7%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%A7-%D8%AD%D8%AF%D8%AB-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A9), Qatar's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, emphasized his country's desire to address and resolve each of these issues individually, even if the process took time.

The issues to be addressed by such committees vary by country. The problems between Qatar and Bahrain revolve around Manama's accusations that Doha was supporting Bahraini Shia opposition groups and granting citizenship to members of Bahraini tribes, including former officers from the Ministries of Defense and the Interior. Qatar's problem with Egypt, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia stems primarily from its support of the Muslim Brotherhood and some of the figures and organizations associated with it; these countries have also complained about negative media coverage from Al Jazeera—Qatar's state-funded media outlet.

There are several potential approaches that the Qatari government may take in addressing these concerns. One likely scenario is that Qatar will try to rearticulate its relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood in such a way that ensures the Brotherhood's activities continue only within the limits that will no longer pose a challenge to Qatar's relations with other Gulf states. In addition, Qatar itself would refrain from any actions that might anger Egypt, Saudi Arabia, or the UAE. **Q** This solution may somewhat please Saudi Arabia, which does not face serious problems with the Muslim Brotherhood, but it is unlikely to satisfy the UAE or Egypt, which both consider Qatari support for the Muslim Brotherhood a major problem.

The other possible scenario is a tacit response to the four countries' demands in the form of gradually cutting back its relations with the Muslim Brotherhood, including preventing the Brotherhood from undertaking actions against these countries, at least in spheres in which Qatar has influence. In this scenario, Qatar would maintain only the asylum side of its relationship with the Brotherhood, i.e. offering residency to wanted members of the Brotherhood and refusing to hand them over to other countries, especially Egypt.

It is too soon to tell which of these two directions Qatari policy will take. During the upcoming bilateral talks that Qatar is supposed to hold with the four countries, it may reveal to what extent it is prepared to give up its alliance with Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi of the Muslim Brotherhood which has endured and strengthened since Sheykh Tamim's father, Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, ruled the country. The alliance has flourished under Tamim, who gained power in 2013, and sought to consolidate his rule through strengthening his relationship with Turkey, the other supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood, while investing in crises in which the Brotherhood is a party in both Egypt and Libya.

After the Al-Ula summit, Qatar tried to send various signals in this regard— at times indicating its willingness to consider all the issues with an open mind, while at others insisting that the summit's outcomes were not the product of any concessions it was making. At least according to new coverage by the Arabic version of Al Jazeera, it seems there has been a change in Qatari politics. The channel's coverage has shifted, avoiding certain topics it used to cover, such as criticizing human rights in Saudi Arabia, or the foreign policy of the UAE, which Al Jazeera had routinely described as a form of sabotage.

Additionally, Al Jazeera did not devote much space this year to the tenth anniversary of the January 25 revolution in Egypt, limiting itself to some relatively neutral reports. It also removed a number of videos that were critical of the Egyptian government from its websites. Al Jazeera had previously provided extensive coverage and welcomed guests to its programs, mostly from the Brotherhood and other opposition groups, to applaud former Egyptian president Mohamed Morsi, and to challenge the legitimacy of El-Sisi's regime. This kind of change is likely the product of official instructions, either to modify Al Jazeera's editorial policy, or at least to tone down its language.

In conclusion, the Muslim Brotherhood remains the key issue of contention in relations between Qatar and its Gulf neighbors. In 2014, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE **classified the Brotherhood as a terrorist organization** (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-emirates-politics-brotherhood/uae-lists-muslim-brotherhood-as-terrorist-group-idUSKCN0IZOOM20141115>). Saudi Arabia and the UAE have also waged war against the Brotherhood in political, religious, and security arenas. It will be up to Qatar to find an alternative solution to official support for the Brotherhood if it wants to ensure continued reconciliation with Gulf countries. ❖

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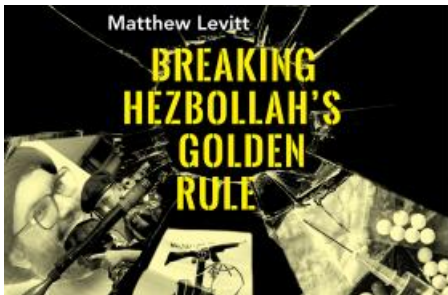
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