On June 5, 2017, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt cut off diplomatic ties with the state of Qatar, accusing her of state-funded terrorism and agitating regional instability; all land, air and sea links to the country were severed within a short period of time and, with the exception of Egypt, the blockading states recalled their own ****citizens and gave the Qataris residing and working in their countries 14 days to leave their territories. Qatar responded by extending its arm to new regional allies, solving disputes with Iran while taking decades-old relations with US and Turkey to a whole new level. As soon as the crisis initiated, Qataris had swarmed supermarkets fearing food shortage and the stock market collapsed as the Saudis closed the border.With threats lingering of military invasion, Doha turned to Turkey, which deployed troops to Qatar. Turkey also provided the much needed replacement of food supply with Iran also sending the goods. Months after the crisis, there were reports appearing of Emirates, UAE airline, jet interceptions by Qatar, reports of Qatari Sheikh forced detention and even a Saudi plan to turn Qatar into an island - cutting the peninsula off with a maritime-canal, turning the border area into a military zone and nuclear waste site. While the Saudi Crown Prince, Muhammad-bin-Salman insists that the present standoff is unimportant, it perhaps maybe be even more important than it seems since future of GCC seems uncertain and current crisis could have long lasting implications. Saudi Arabia and its allies have in fact blamed Qatar for intra-Gulf crisis and accuse the gas-rich nation of terrorism financing. Just weeks following the blockade, Qatar’s imports fell nearly 40 percent from the same time a year earlier. Today those numbers have jumped backed to normal as Doha, the world’s largest exporter of LNG - liquefied natural gas, reacted by developing new trade routes, supporting up its banks with state funds while helping local firms in developing domestic output of some goods  especially food. Qatar has also started development of the world’s largest LNG field that is shared with Iran.

It is not the first time Doha has been in a row with its hostile neighbors. In the year 1992, when Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al ****Thani became de facto ruler, border clashes between Qatari and Saudi troops over a long-running territorial dispute resulted in two deaths. Relations later worsened further after Saudi’s took a stance against Sheikh Hamad when he took over from his father. Qatar’s foreign policy approach had evolved after its mistrust of its neighbors. **O**ver the next two decades, until his son, Sheikh Tamim , came to power in 2013, Sheikh Hamad al-Thani masterminded his country's development into a crucial player in global energy, financial, investment and property markets. Qatar has invested massively and owns properties across the globe especially London. Qatar also became a significant foreign policy actor in the recent years, challenging Saudi Arabia as the spear head of the Gulf and its dominance over regional and diplomatic issues. These efforts were facilitated by close security ties with Washington, rising gas income following the increasing demand for LNG as replacement for oil and the unparalleled influence of Al Jazeera, the only major independent cable news network in the Middle East owned by Qatar.In 2002, a five year long diplomatic spat occurred after top Saudi officials accused Al Jazeera of being a platform for rebelling Saudi stance also blaming it for being major critic of Saudi policies. Though the UAE and Qatar also clashed over Al Jazeera and were involved in their own territorial dispute, they often cooperated inside the GCC to close the power gap with Saudi Arabia. In a highly symbolic move staunchly opposed by Riyadh, in the early 2000s, they even announced their plan to build a path over the Khor al-Odeid waters that, if completed, would have enabled them to bypass Saudi territory, demonstrating their independence from their larger neighbor.
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, home to Islam holiest sites, also has the Gulf’s largest territory, population, economy and army. It also has the largest oil reserves and deeper relations with the West. After becoming GCC partners in 1981, Saudi threat has lingered over the Gulf nations. They have been particularly wary of Saudi attempts to achieve regional dominance in the security sphere. GCC members have repeatedly vetoed Saudi proposals for a Gulf-wide security charter since the beginning, being wary of Kingdom’s beguile attempts to dominate. During 2011 Riyadh Declaration, the Saudi attempt to transform the GCC into a fully fledged union with a joint GCC military command received no major support; it was backed only by Bahrain.
As with Qatar foreign policy paths deviated, the UAE moved closer to Saudi Arabia in its opposition with Qatar. Disputes matured during the Arab Spring, when both the nations found themselves on opposite sides on major issues, for example, the revolution in Egypt and the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood and the future of post-Qaddafi Libya. Even though Qatar never let its small size and strength become an obstruction to achieve its independent foreign policy, Saudi-UAE continued to force Qatar to accept their domination after Arab Spring. This explains the short-term withdrawal of ambassadors from Doha by the UAE and Saudi Arabia, also Bahrain, in 2014, a move intended to send a clear message to Doha that its contrasting policies would no longer be tolerated by its bigger Gulf partners.
Looking back in the past, Qatar has been very supportive of its neighbors. When the Saudi-led coalition launched an offensive against the Houthi rebels in 2015, Qatar sent troops to Yemen to support the Kingdom. In early 2016, Qatar withdrew its ambassador from Tehran in an act of solidarity with Saudi Arabia, following an attack by angry protesters on the Saudi embassy in Tehran. The Qatar also considered providing financial support for the ailing Bahraini economy. Both Prime Minister of Bahrain, Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa and Bahraini Crown Prince Salman Al Khalifa paid separate visits to Doha in 2017 to discuss how Qatar can help in this matter. Relations with the three GCC countries were improving at a steady pace after the resolution of the 2014 crisis. As a result of being forced to reroute flights to and from Doha through Iranian airspace, Qatar sent back its ambassador to Tehran. Instead of reducing Qatar's ties with Iran, it strengthened them, while Turkey has, for the first time, become part of Gulf security, through its military presence in Qatar.

 Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani

With the unusual policies dictated by UAE, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, and Saudi Arabia, Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman, crisis would be here for a while. Both the Crown Prince, ambitious for reforms, have held different believes than their predecessor when it comes to foreign policy but their eager to extend their influence and show power is apparent. Both Riyadh and Abu Dhabi seems to restructure the previous security mechanism of the region. It was after his father ascension to the throne in ****2015 when Crown Prince emerged as sole figure leading the oil rich nation; soon after he started Yemen war being the Defense minister. Other intra country crisis soon followed together with authoritarian policies of both Crown Prince. The launch of the blockade in June 2017 by the UAE-Saudi axis was intended to curb the growing influence of Qatar in the region and to diminish its political and economic power. A blockade was long due because of Qatar’s neutral foreign policy and its cooperation with Turkey and Iran; Qatar also has less conservative government and enjoys greater political autonomy. These reasons overshadowed its importance as a GCC nation. The principal victim of all the crisis is the GCC. GCC already have failed to act as a platform to solve regional disputes let alone play part in easing inter-regional tensions; it also failed begin dialogue to help Kuwait and Oman who find themselves in middle of crisis. Kuwait's emir, Sabah Al Ahmad Al Sabah, was his country's foreign minister when the GCC was launched in 1981. His attempt to find "rapprochement among the brothers" has earned him the deserved praise but little could be achieved. This fragility was liberally demonstrated when Qatar's Sheikh Tamim was the only GCC leader to accept an invitation to attend the first GCC summit since the crisis began, with Saudi and UAE governments later announcing the launch of a new joint economic and military cooperation committee in attempts to isolate Qatar even further.
The GCC has had a poor history, failing in particular to institutionalize military and security cooperation; GCC members could not even agree upon a unified currency like Euro. GCC failed to prevent the destructive 8-year war between Iran and Iraq in the 1980s, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, and the start of ****anti-government protests in Bahrain in 2011. However, in spite of all failures, the GCC members have had minor disagreements in past as  today Gulf remain stable in an otherwise dangerous neighborhood plagued with terrorism.Imagine a small country with her land and sea borders closed, air-space restricted, embargoed by her hostile, powerful neighbors and constantly being threatened of ‘using force’ by her neighbors, you would expect her economy to crash let alone thrive but that is not the case with this Persian Gulf emirate. International organizations have suggest that Qatar has not only managed to turn her dire financial prospects but also improved her human rights record and geopolitical standing. The ‘Gulf crisis’ or more specifically the ‘Qatar crisis’ was intended to break Qatar’s economy and forcing the young Sheikh, Tamim bin Hamad-al Thani, to give in to a set of demands from the coming from Saudis - shut down Al Jazeera, accepting Saudi dominance and cut ties with Saudi arch enemy Iran. The small emirate with population of about 2.5 million people, has refused to comply with any of the demands and remained insubordinate in the face of pressure from Saudi Crown Prince MBS - Mohammed Bin Salman in his campaign for regional domination. The current blockade has made it difficult for Qatar to develop intra-regional relations, attract foreign investment and develop trade links while also hampering the progress made in counter-terrorism as regional security cooperation and intelligence sharing has come to halt. In fact, Qatar now intends to look for new trade partners by developing inter-regional cooperation, offering her LNG as an alternate to expensive oil to the energy hungry countries like Japan and India. According to an International Monetary Fund reports, Qatar’s banking system has recovered from initial outflows and the economy growth is expected to further improve as the country’s fiscal deficit had narrowed to about 6 percent of GDP in 2017 from 9.2 percent in 2016.With Qatar’s foreign reserves increasing to 169173.90 QAR Million in September from 166397.40 QAR Million in August of 2018 though still short of the all-time high of 175606 QAR Million in August of 2016.
Qatar has been spotlight because of human rights abuses as its foreign labor policy, the Kafala system, has been dubbed as modern-day slavery. Human rights activists have long called for boycotts of the 2022 World Cup, due to be hosted in Qatar, because of large number of deaths involved in construction of venues which still needs more years. Qataris already live under a monarchy, having very limited civil liberties; both men and women are slated to vote in the first free elections for the country’s traditional parliament in 2019. Despite all the facts presented above, Qatar still has some of the most progressive human rights standards in the Gulf region with much improvements seen after the start of crisis due to reforms being introduced. The reforms include legislation that would improve labor standards for migrant workers, including a domestic workers law, and a draft law granting permanent residency to children born to Qatari mothers and foreign fathers and to some foreign residents living in the country.
Qatar, one of the most heavily invested countries in the world which exerts an enormous influence on global politics largely because it has invested hundreds of billions of its energy wealth, through its national wealth fund, in companies and property overseas in certain countries. In fact there is a “Qatari quarter” in London with Wealthy Qataris now owning a $1.4 billion chunk of London’s posh Mayfair neighborhood. Qatar now plans on moving on with legislation that will allow full foreign ownership of companies operating in the country, a broader step than what Saudi Arabia is proposing. To diversify the economy, Qatar’s Emir has directed the Qatar’s Ministry of Economy and Commerce to provide many incentives to foreign investors; this includes exemption from customs duties and prospect of exemption from income tax.”
Qatar has also been signing lucrative arms deals with its allies especially the U.S. Qatar also host the largest U.S. military base in the Middle East; the emirate paid almost $1 billion to build the Al Udeid Air Base in the 1990s, where U.S. CENTCOM is headquartered and the British Royal Air Force also operates. Donald Trump's victory in the 2016 US presidential elections changed the picture of crisis dramatically. With a new president in the White House willing to back them, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi wanted to resume the conflict and bring it to a decisive conclusion. Shortly after the Saudis announced their blockade, U.S. President, Donald Trump, joined in and called Qatar “a funder of terrorism at a high level” - a ratification of the blockade surprised even the U.S. State Department. This could, however, be expected with the Saudi-American joint cooperation at many levels after the advent of Muhammad bin Salman. Later that same week the U.S. signed a $12 billion deal to sell fighter jets to Qatar, as two U.S. warships arrived to carry out ****joint military exercises with the emirate. After months of smart work, Qatar succeeded in changing the anti-Qatar stance of President Trump and later, in December 2017, Qatar announced it would buy fighter jets and armored vehicles from France as part of 12 billion euro deal. The emirate has even gone as far as too engage in talks to purchase Newsmax - a right-leaning news agency owned by a close-friend of Trump. Qatar still faces allegations of decades of funding terrorism, supporting proscribed opposition political movements, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and sponsoring Hamas, which Qatar calls ‘baseless’, but Saudis have also been accused of funding Islamic extremism.Qatar, one of the most heavily invested countries in the world. For such a tiny nation, it exerts an enormous influence on global politics largely because it has invested hundreds of billions of its energy wealth, through its national wealth fund, in companies and property overseas in certain countries. In fact there is a “Qatari quarter” in London with Wealthy Qataris now owning a $1.4 billion chunk of London’s posh Mayfair neighborhood. Qatar now plans on moving on with legislation that will allow full foreign ownership of companies operating in the country, a broader step than what Saudi Arabia is proposing. To diversify the economy, Qatar’s Emir has directed the Qatar’s Ministry of Economy and Commerce to provide many incentives to foreign investors; this includes exemption from customs duties and prospect of exemption from income tax.”
Did the blockade fail? As the Qatari crisis is near to completing its second year there is little indication it will resolve anytime in near future. Qatar may have incurred heavy financial costs as a result of the blockade, estimated at about 43 billion, but apparently it has been, as of yet, beneficial to the Qatari economy and the civil liberties of those residing in the tiny energy-rich emirate. Qatar is already the richest country in the world on a *per capita* basis. Even the multi-million-dollar Saudi-UAE facade campaign to taint the image of Qatar and link it to financing terrorism failed to produce the intended results. The two GCC countries waged a furtive information war to shift US policy towards it. They hired PR firms, lobbying groups, and paid think tanks to hold anti-Qatar public events but it was all in vain. It can be said that Qatar has emerged as the sole winner of the crisis.
What do you want to see next on our blog? Write us now.

 Source: aa.com.tr

Map of Qatar is seen in illustration June 5, 2017  REUTERS/Thomas White