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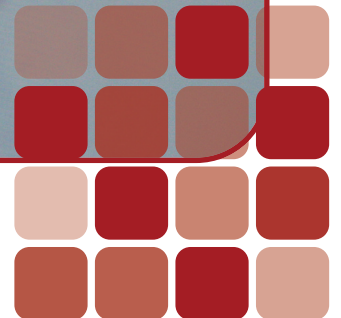
Analysis

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# TRIBE AND TRIBAL IDEOLOGY IN ARABIAN GULF STATES FOREIGN POLICY MAKING: A CASE STUDY OF THE QATAR CRISIS



NOOF ALDOSARI





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# TRIBE AND TRIBAL IDEOLOGY IN ARABIAN GULF STATES FOREIGN POLICY MAKING: A CASE STUDY OF THE QATAR CRISIS

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## Introduction

Largely unacknowledged in the international media, the blockade against Qatar, led by Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain and Egypt has been in place since June 2017, the standoff persisting until today. The quartet's justification for continuing the blockade is Qatar's foreign policy. According to them, Qatar finances and supports terrorism in the region. Basing their allegations on the 2014 agreement that Qatar signed with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), they claim that Qatar has violated this agreement. Qatar, on the other hand, denies these allegations and has garnered regional and international support for its position.

The ramifications of this action have stirred up a crisis which continues to affect the social and political relationships between the Gulf States, most importantly the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). In imposing the blockade, the leaders have undergone a tremendous shift in their foreign policy towards their fellow GCC member. The crisis has given rise to numerous questions, predictions and concerns, including whether it signifies the first domino in the gradual collapse of the GCC.

Nonetheless, upon analysing the historical relationships between the Arabian Gulf states, it is found that the Qatar crisis is not a new phenomenon in the Gulf but part of the political struggles that have spanned the life of these states. However, the political struggles of the present day differ from the conflicts of the past because of the new political context and, most importantly, the political ideologies that the leaders of the Gulf states have come to adopt. Hence, the characteristics of the *Khaliji* (Gulf) leaders, especially those imposing the blockade, are best understood within the framework of their political ideology and political discourse. This can be analysed through what I call the role of “tribal ideology in *Khalijism*”<sup>1</sup>, which has existed in the context of *Khaliji* politics both before and after the formation of the Arabian Gulf states.

My paper will focus on understanding the reasoning of the leaders of the blockade by studying their foreign policy discourse — their foreign policy decisions, the role of tribal ideology and their use of the tribe in their foreign policy making towards Qatar. My paper will employ the method of discourse theory and discourse analysis.

## A History of Blockades Against Qatar

The 2017 Saudi-led blockade against Qatar is not the first in the history of Gulf politics. In fact, it is the third blockade since the rule of Al Thani. The first one was imposed in 1878, during Muhammed Ibn Thani's rule and the second was applied in 1913 when Abdullah Bin Jassim came to power.

Before relating what happened, it is important to note that during these historical conflicts in and before the formation of the Gulf States and the withdrawal of British colonial power, Gulf rulers had different political ideologies regarding international alliances, sovereignty and foreign relationships. Moreover, each Gulf ruler was dependent on the support and loyalty of different tribes for stabilising their political rule. These tribes were an important political card that the Gulf rulers used along with that of their own political tribe.

The first blockade against Qatar occurred when Imam Faisal Ibn Turki Al Saud of Saudi Arabia (1843–1865) invaded Qatar. Prior to the invasion, Al Khalifah (ruler of Bahrain) heard of his intention and sent a letter to Muhammed Ibn Thani (emir of Qatar, 1847–1878) and Jaber Ibn Naser (Chief of Al Nu'aym Tribe in Qatar), informing them that Imam Faisal was about to invade Qatar from Ryad, and that the Qatari rulers should resist. At that time, Al Nu'aym tribes differed among themselves, and they sent word to their chief, Jaber Ibn Naser, that they were unable to fight back against Imam Faisal



as they could not guarantee their ability to rout his army, which might loot their money and livestock. Therefore they agreed with their chief that they should reconcile with him. This eventually took place, and Imam Faisal granted them amnesty and safety on the condition that they left Al Mazrou'ah and went to settle in Al Zubarha<sup>2</sup>.

Following their capitulation, Imam Faisal Ibn Turki arrived in Mesaimeer and fought against Mohammed bin Khalifah, the ruler of Bahrain, and his armies, together with Muhammed Ibn Thani. Imam Faisal withdrew from this battle, which is known as the Battle of Mesaimeer. After this battle, Muhammed Ibn Thani feared that he would be unable to guarantee that Imam Faisal wouldn't return and invade Qatar a second time. The population consisted largely of pearl divers, who, if they left the country, would leave no one behind to defend their people. He approached Sheik Muhammed bin Khalifah and presented his argument, reminding him that if the army were to withdraw, there would be no one left to defend the country from Imam Faisal. Thus he wished to reconcile with Imam Faisal. This angered Muhammed bin Khalifah, who stated: 'You are a traitor, and we don't accept your decision, and we will not reconcile with Imam Faisal'. The Mesaimeer Battle of 1850 ended in a reconciliation between Imam Faisal and Muhammed Ibn Thani<sup>3</sup>.

The peace accord between Muhammed bin Thani and Imam Faisal was a setback for Muhammed bin Khalifah. This new alliance made his position insecure, and he became intent on invading Qatar. On the other hand, Imam Faisal asked Muhammed Ibn Thani to be prepared for any reckless move on the part of the Bahrainis. Muhammed bin Khalifa wrote to Saeed bin Tahnoon AL Falahi (ruler of Abu Dhabi) to side with him against Qatar; he responded by forming a joint army in order to invade Qatar.

Their invasion was preceded by a blockade. Their armies marched to the gates of Doha, and

prevented the city from having access to the sea, to the extent that no ship was able to sail to Doha. Hence, Imam Faisal provided Doha and its people with a route through Al-Hasa.<sup>4</sup>

However, Saeed bin Tahnoon feared that the Qatari — Saudi alliance would strengthen, and Mohammed bin Khalifa returned to seek refuge in Faisal, and the blockade of Doha failed, not lasting longer than a few months. It turned out that Saeed bin Tahnoon's main aim was to prevent Qatari ships from pearling, while Bahrain aimed to dislodge Qatar's sovereignty over its territory<sup>5</sup>.

The second blockade took place when Sheikh Abdullah bin Jassim (ruler of Qatar) rebuilt the Al Zubara Castle in 1937. During this period, he reconciled with the Nu'aim tribe in northern Qatar, which angered Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, the Governor of Bahrain, who had been attempting to keep Zubarah a disputed area. Hence, he declared an economic blockade of Qatar, despite knowing that it was Bahrain that supplied Qatar with food, and where the Qataris sold their livestock. They maintained their stranglehold until 1943, when, under pressure from Britain, they lifted the blockade and softened their approach to Qatar in order to exploit the newly discovered oil<sup>6</sup>.

## **Background to the Study: the difference between tribe and tribal ideology**

The above description of the historical struggle between the Gulf rulers is intended not only to show that the 2017 blockade of Qatar was not the first one, but also to set the scene for understanding the political context to *Khalijism* by demonstrating that every Gulf ruler has his own political concept of the alliance, as well as other political concepts concerning international relations and foreign policy making. Historically, as distinct tribes, the Gulf rulers (i.e. Al Thani and Al Khalifa) adopted different political ideologies which became part and parcel of the

nature of their political rule, and specifically the relationships among the Gulf states.

It is worth noting that in the Arab and Islamic context, political history can be seen as being full of tribal political struggles waged to impose the ruling tribes' different political ideologies.

The Arab and Islamic historical context is reflected in *Khalijism* and in *Khaliji* politics; therefore, I conclude that *Khaliji* leaders' political thought is characterised by being heavily influenced by tribalism, especially Ibn Khaldun's concept of *asabiyyah*<sup>7</sup>. My genealogical analysis of *Khaliji* tribalism illuminates *Khalijism* and its relationship to what I call the different 'tribal political ideologies' in *Khalijism*. These different tribal political ideologies do not originate from an anthropological perspective on the meaning and role of tribes, but from an ontological political perspective, which specifies a type of political thinking<sup>8</sup>, language, and ideology that should be used even if the tribe in question does not exist.

The basic tenet for tribal ideology in *Khalijism*, however, is '*asabiyyah*', which uses different tools within its political discourse to overpower, govern, or make policy. The tribal political ideology, although influenced by the history of tribes and tribalism in the Arab and *Khaliji* contexts, is not exactly representative of tribes and tribalism *per se*. Rather, it began with the formation of the nation state. By adopting different tribal ideologies, each with its own constituency that adhered to a specific ideology, the leaders established what Althusser called the 'ideological state apparatus'. The different tribal ideologies in the Gulf represent the different ways the royal families governed the various Gulf States. Therefore, second to *asabiyyah* in shaping tribal political ideologies, is context. When talking about the role of language, history, and thought in the Arab political mind, it can be seen that *Khaliji* leaders relate to Arab and Islamic political history. The Islamic state was founded and governed by different ruling families, starting from

the Umayyad and Abbasid and lasting until the Ottomans. Each had their own particular political thinking and political ideology in their governance and policy making. Moreover, after the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the movement towards globalisation, the liberal market economy, and western international laws and norms, these tribal political ideologies have been continuously shaped and reshaped.

Thus, *Khaliji* leaders are the same. Today, we have the *Khaliji* ruling families: Al Thani (Qatar), Al Sabah (Kuwait), Al Saud (Saudi Arabia), Al Nahyan (UAE), Al Khalifa (Bahrain), and Al Said (Oman). Each family has its own political history, political language and discourse, from which it constructs its own social order and political reality. In each state, one will find different concepts of the 'tribe', which are all constituted within the tribal ideology of the different countries' ruling families, and therefore within the ideological state apparatus.

### **Tribal ideology in *Khalijism***

The role of tribalism in state formation in the Gulf is most relevant in the cases of Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and what is now the UAE. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Gulf littoral experienced British-imposed maritime peace and subsequent exclusive agreements. The consequence of this was the extension of 'supratribal authority' in coastal settlements to recognition of a ruler of a particular territory, however loosely defined<sup>9</sup>. Hence, tribalism and tribal leadership in the peninsula serve as an evolutionary mechanism for the ruling families in the modern Arabian Gulf states. Furthermore, during the formation of Arab Gulf states:

Borders – and therefore territorial domains – in the Gulf were left undefined until the establishment of air routes (which required the security of aerodromes) and oil concessions. The creation of states in a fuller sense followed. Shaykhly families were transformed into ruling castes (Heard-

Bey) and gradually the political role of tribes overall was reduced – in Saudi Arabia in the 1920s and 1930s, in Oman with the putting down of the rebellions from the 1950s to 1970s. Nevertheless, tribalism continues to play a social role. Persistent distinctions between *hadar* and *badu* are more problematic in some states than others, and are particularly important in Kuwait. Reference to tribal heritage underpins national myths in the modern Gulf States, despite the long presence of significant non-tribal and even non-Arab communities. Tribal descent is what makes the nationals of these states distinct from the overwhelming Asian, northern Arab, and European populations. Often it underpins citizenship. The ruling family represents, if only in an idealised sense, the apex of the tribal cum national system. The result is a state-tribe symbiosis.<sup>10</sup>

*Khaliji* ruling families led the social and political hegemony around the meaning of the tribe in the Arabian Peninsula before and during the

formation of the Gulf States. Since then, the tribe has lost its significance as an autonomous political power: the struggle for power has become confined to the ruling families of the Gulf States. Before the formation of the nation state and up until the independence of the Gulf States from the British Empire, the loyalties of different Arab tribes were assumed by the ruling families in support of their rule. Within each *Khaliji* emirate, a tribe would show its disloyalty not by overpowering or overthrowing a ruling family, but by supporting another ruling family of a different *Khaliji* emirate against its political leaders.

The *Khaliji* ruling families were capable of producing and constructing the meaning and uses of the tribe through their different tribal ideologies.





This continued even after the slowing down of the formation of the nation state; when the tribe became less and less powerful in the *Khaliji* leaders' formation of national identity and citizenship, and instead started to represent sentimentalism and nostalgia for the old ways, in terms of both *Badu* and *Hadar*. Furthermore, it also represents the “*ideology of parentage*”<sup>11</sup>, which plays a role in social antagonism between different layers of society in their struggle for social, political, and economic advantages.

The *Khaliji* ruling families were capable of producing and constructing the meaning and uses of the tribe through their different tribal ideologies. Here we can see the importance of discourse and discourse analysis in terms of language: through the use of tribal language within state discourse, *Khaliji* ruling families were able to establish hegemony over the meaning of ‘tribe’. Their tribal political language was embedded within the discourse of the state in order to legitimise the new political and social meaning and role of the tribe in *Khaliji* states. For example, in Saudi Arabia:

...both numerous state-endorsed folkloristic festivals and tribal poetry competitions, but also proposals from the Saudi Shura Council to delete tribal names, and official decrees to ban tribal slurs from the kingdom's National Camel Festival. During the kingdom's municipal polls in November 2005, candidates were prohibited from using ‘historic or tribal names’, reflecting continued unease about tribes as political entities. The Saudi Council of Senior Scholars has banned the creation of tribal income support schemes, showing their distrust of tribal self-organisation<sup>12</sup>.

Because of the establishment of the Gulf nation state, tribes have no political power, and their political and social meaning has become defined through royal families as the supreme tribe governing the state. A tribal ideology of patronage and kinship can only disrupt the social

system and the meaning of citizenship in different state sectors. They have no autonomous political identity, or the power to overrule the state.

The Gulf States are quite unique in that each Gulf ruler used ‘tribe’ as part of its ideology when establishing the nation state. Thus, each and every Gulf citizen defines their nation and national characteristics in relation to the ruling family tribe. Thus, in order to be an Omani national, you must belong to the Omani Sultan Al Saeed tribe. Therefore nationalism is defined through the citizens' political allegiance to the ruling family tribe. The different ruling families in the Gulf states made use of this phenomenon in their different tribal ideologies; using their tribe was one of the tools for building Gulf nation states. However, this doesn't mean demolishing tribes as important social elements in the Gulf States, since tribal culture is still held in high regard in these states.

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### The Blockade Leaders' Tribal Ideology

I have previously stated that tribal ideology in *Khalijism* has to do with the political ideologies of the ruling families of the Gulf States. In the Qatar crisis, blockade leaders with distinct tribal ideologies appeared to share similar ideological beliefs regarding Qatar, and which have influenced their foreign policy making against the country. One might call this the ‘blockade leaders’ tribal

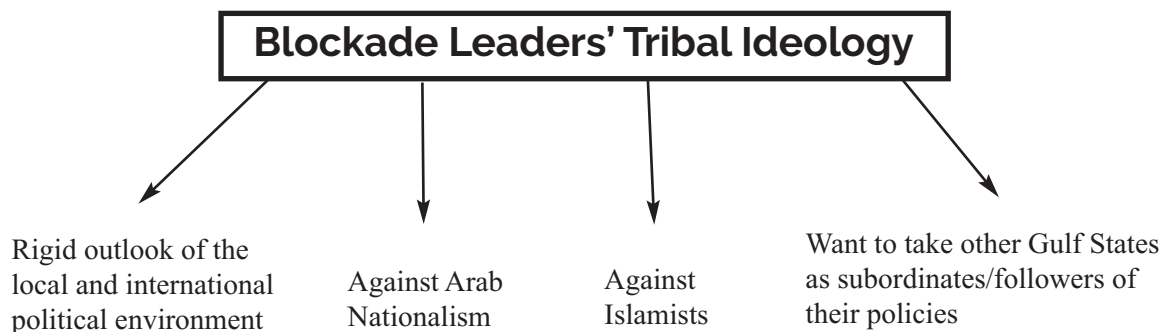
ideology'. The following diagram deconstructs these ideological beliefs:

Since 2017, throughout the crisis, leaders of the blockade have used various different tools to ensure the success of their blockade. These include making use of a Qatari who fled the country after having been imprisoned because of personal debt. This ex-prisoner was presented as a member of the external wing of the Qatari opposition party. In fact, there is no opposition party either within Qatar or outside the country. The instigators of the blockade have asked other countries to support their campaign, and some states have agreed to sever relations with Qatar, including Yemen, the government of Eastern Libya, the Maldives, Mauritania and Comoros. Other states haven't cut all ties but instead have chosen to downgrade their relations with Qatar. Most of the cards played by the leaders of the blockade against Qatar have failed to win them the game. They have now turned to the tribal issue in the belief that this is their ace.

Throughout history, *Khaliji* ruling families have used the tribe as a tool in their battles against other ruling families. During the Qatar crisis, however, for the first time in the history of *Khaliji* states' political struggles, leaders of the blockade have used tribal language, which is normally used to stabilise the state, in order to stir up political instability. The blockade leaders argue that under the Qatari ruling family, tribes have not been able to enjoy their full

rights as citizens. They have used the principle of citizenship to agitate Qatari tribes, claiming that an injustice has been done to them. Thus, the states leading the blockade – Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Bahrain – have constructed their own tribal ideology to use against Qatar.

Leaders of the blockade are aware that in the Arabian Peninsula 'tribe' represents the confusion between 'state' *vis-à-vis* 'tribe' in the political mentality, because of their imagined historical community and the identity that each tribe has created for itself. However, in the present time, all that is left is an image of "existing tribes in history", a symbol that no longer has any real power. Yet leaders of the blockade against Qatar continue to use the notion of 'tribe' to bring down the regime, in order to support their own 'tribal ideology'. The leaders' use of the tribe in this context is symbolic: in the political language of the Arabian Gulf, tribal language persists within the unconscious mind of Arabian Gulf leaders, both in times of peace and in war. It is interesting to note that the leaders of the blockade have used tribal ideology in a covert manner, while also using the discourse of the state. The propaganda machine of tribal ideology targeted the older generation of Qatar's ruling family, supporting dissent within its ranks in order to overthrow the system. Dissenting tribes were encouraged to march in protest against the Qatari ruling family. However, the language of tribal dissent was not carried over to the international sphere.



*Illustration (1): Deconstructing Blockade Leaders' Tribal Ideology*

During the crisis, the blockade leaders invented a political role for ‘tribes’ in Qatar, which was intended as a reflection of the symbolic power of these tribes. This also reawakened memories of the antagonism between the different ruling families, such as that between Al Thani, Al Saud, Al Nahyan, and Al Sabah. Tribalism as a symbolic structure resides within the blockade leaders’ unconscious minds and is therefore present in their political language, which employs the language of tribal mentality in its discourse. It is interesting to note that the blockade leaders’ tribal ideology used two separate political discourses in its foreign policy against Qatar — that of the tribe but also of the state.

### The discourse of the tribe

In this discourse, Gulf leaders are perceived as the ruling tribe rather than ‘a tribe’ in general. Therefore, during the crisis, blockade leaders — and especially Saudi Arabia — demanded that Qatar remove the name Muhammed ibn Abdulwahab from its grand Mosque. The leaders claimed that the ruling family of Al Thani was not a descendent of the Tamim tribe, and therefore was not part of Imam Muhammed ibn Abdulwahab’s<sup>13</sup> family tree. According to the Asharq Al-Awsat newspaper:

The Al-Sheikh family in Saudi Arabia issued on Saturday an explanatory statement deeming as false and fabricated the Qatari ruling family’s claim that it is a descendant of Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulwahab. Signatories of the statement included the Minister of Islamic Affairs, Sheikh Saleh bin Abdulaziz Al-Sheikh, chairman of the Shura Council, Sheikh Abdullah bin Mohammed Al-Sheikh, Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Abdullah Al-Sheikh, and more than 200 top members of the Al-Sheikh family. The family also confirmed in its statement — signed by Al-Sheikh’s sons in Saudi Arabia — that Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulwahab bin Sulaiman bin Ali bin Mohammed has four children only.<sup>14</sup>

This demonstrates how the political discourse of the blockade leaders used *Nasab* (parentage/genealogy) to remove the Al Thani ruling family from an ancient and distinguished Arab tribe (the Tamim Tribe). It also served to punish the Qatari ruling family for claiming to be part of the Whabai/Salafi sect, in both the religious and the political sense. Another possible interpretation of this move is that the blockade leaders are using political language to send a message of insult, together with a political and religious threat.

Secondly, the blockade leaders used the discourse of the tribe to support a political dissident from the Qatari ruling family, one Sultan bin Suhaim Al Thani, son of Suhaim bin Hamad bin Abdullah bin Jassim bin Muhammed Al Thani, who is the brother of the former Qatari Emir, Khalifa bin Hamad Al Thani. Their use of Sultan (who is in exile) is intended to present him as the representative of the opponents of Qatari ruling family. Part of the propaganda mechanism of the blockade leaders was to use Sultan as a symbol of the new Qatari opposition against the state. They did this through the use of tribal discourse, bringing a member of Al Thani’s ruling family and tribe in conflict with the real Al Thani ruling family.

### The discourse of the state

In an interesting twist in the discourse, although the leaders of the blockade used tribe as a tool in their foreign policy against Qatar, this was in terms of the state. For example, they made use of the principle of citizenship in order to agitate the tribes in Qatar, especially the al-Murrahtribe, persuading them to claim that state institutions had treated them unjustly.

It was easy for the leaders of the blockade to use tribe as a tool against Qatar but it was difficult to make an effective movement out of it. The following shows the role played by tribe in the blockade leaders’ foreign policy against Qatar:

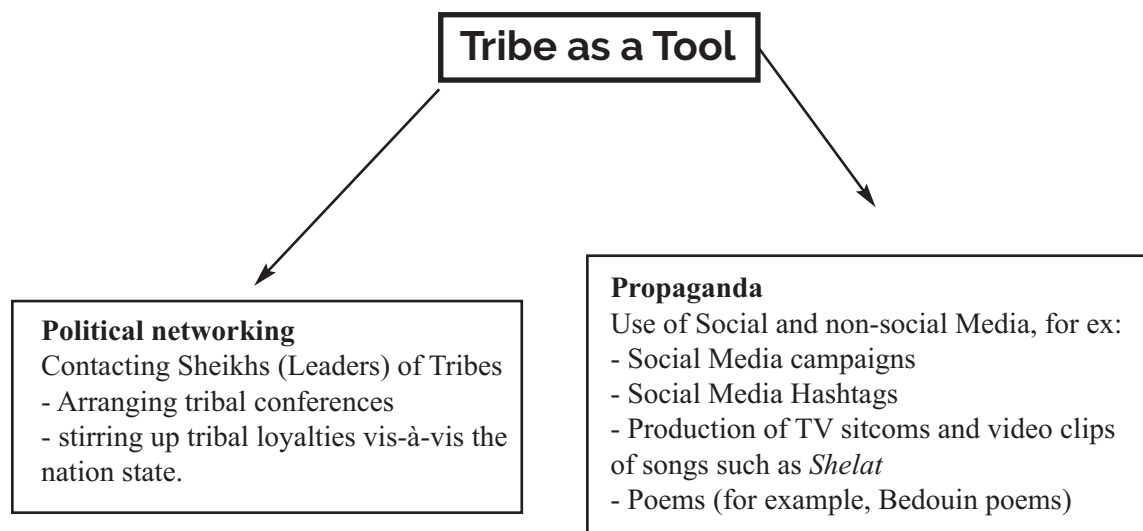
Illustration (2) How blockade leaders used Tribes as a tool in their foreign policy against Qatar.

Furthermore, in the early stages of the Qatar crisis, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman mobilised the tribes in the Eastern Province to demonstrate their loyalty. The Saudi and Emirati governments have been trying (with little success) to mobilise dissident tribal factions against the Qatari government. On the Qatari side, the tribal leaders publicly pledged their loyalty to the Qatari emir following the onset of the blockade<sup>15</sup>.

For example, Saudi Arabia and UAE arranged a number of conferences/gatherings for the al-Murrah tribe and their leader. This is not the first time in the history of Saudi foreign policy towards Qatar that the al-Murrah tribe has been used against Qatar's ruling family. According to an article in the Middle East Forum entitled: "*For Saudi Arabia, All Politics is Local*", Saudi foreign policy is built on its use of tribalism. They give an example of the first time Saudi Arabia used the al-Murrah tribe in this way in the following lines:

In 1996, the Saudi government used its ties with the al-Murrah tribe that dwells on both sides of the kingdom's border with Qatar to organise an attempted coup against Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani.<sup>16</sup>

History repeated itself when the Saudi-led blockade made use of the al-Murrah tribe. This became evident when the leader of the al-Murrah tribe<sup>17</sup> was seen to be active in the blockade. Mohammad Bin Salman was recorded talking with the al-Murrah tribe leader, who resides in Qatar. This video clip went viral on social media, stirring up various tribes both inside and outside Qatar. The leader of the tribe was recorded as saying that the al-Murrah tribe had been treated unjustly by the regime in Qatar, and that they intended to switch their loyalty to Al Saud. Other Qatari members of the al-Murrah tribe vehemently denied these allegations, as did the state; in general, the political leadership in Qatar have tended not to pay much attention to the way the blockade leaders act toward them. Nonetheless, the political discourse around tribes and tribalism transformed Qatari civil society; all the tribes in Qatar, including that of al-Murrah, pledged political loyalty to the state of



*Illustration (2) How blockade leaders used Tribes as a tool in their foreign policy against Qatar.*



Qatar, and the main trending social media hashtag in Qatar was 'My Tribe is Qatar'.<sup>18</sup> The crisis has shown that contemporary tribes in Qatar are not the same as those predating the nation state; they have evolved into social institutions which are part of civil society.

Furthermore, political scholars and policy analysts affirm that during moments of crisis in Arabia tribal sentiments come to the fore. This is especially so in Libya, Yemen and Iraq; however, these states are generally considered to be failed states and where tribal powers still prevail, this stands as evidence of the weakness of state political institutions. For example, in the Libyan crisis, it is the tribes that hold sway over the country's destiny. Mohammad Shahomi, Committee Secretary of the Tribes Conference said that: 'the reason in fact for returning to the tribes is that since sixty years of political practices it's proved without doubt that there is nothing to build on (meaning no state institutions), failed political parties ... the Libyan society needs to start from zero and this means returning to the social component which is the tribe'.<sup>19</sup>

Nonetheless, in the political context of the Arabian Gulf states, and especially after the formation of the nation state and citizenship thereof, tribes are not easily persuaded to become political dissents. Because, unlike Libya, the Gulf States are considered to be successful states in which tribes have no role in consolidating state power.

Nonetheless, leaders of the blockade continue to arrange and sponsor tribal conferences and meetings for al-Murrah and other tribes in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which support al-Murrah against Qatar. An example of such gatherings is the "Meeting of al-Murrah" in Saudi Arabia. In this meeting, Talbi bin Shreem, leader of the al-Murrah tribe, delivered a speech in which he clearly stated that his tribe is loyal to the Al Saud regime. (See video of this speech in the footnotes)<sup>20</sup>. In his speech, he asserted that the current king of Saudi Arabia is the leader of the

Arabian Gulf and the entire Muslim Ummah. Leaders of the blockade also brought the political dissident, Sultan bin Suhim, to this meeting where he held an interview<sup>21</sup> with the blockade countries' state media, calling himself a representative of the opposition. He was made to appear with the leader of the al-Murrah tribe to give the impression that the al-Murrah tribe supported him as the possible future leader, who would return to govern Qatar if the blockade was successful. The blockade leaders thought that by bringing the two together, their coup scenario would be complete. In their minds, this event prepared the ground for disrupting political stability in Qatar.

The speech the blockade leaders had prepared for Sultan made him look like a puppet rather than a true political dissent. The speech contained the following statement: 'I stand before you today in solidarity with Shiek Talib ibn Shreem and with every Qatari who lost his nationality (Qatari citizenship) unjustly or didn't grant his rights or been arrested for demanding their rights. We call on the world to recognise the ongoing violations against the Qatari people who are unable to enter their country and are afraid of entering, even though I am one of them. I'm forced to leave my country and I cannot enter it safely, however our situation will be better because of God's power'<sup>22</sup>.

Leaders of the blockade also used poetry readings, as well as modern and traditional songs as ammunition in their propaganda campaign (the participants were mostly from different Arabian Gulf tribes). A well-known Qatari poet called Mohammed ibn Futahis al-Mari, who became a political dissent supporting the al-Murrah leader, first invoked the catchphrase, "states perish but tribes never do". The UAE leaders supported his political stance and he was also invited to the above political event to voice his political dissatisfaction with the Qatari regime for not respecting the leader of his tribe, Talib bin Shreem.

The Qatar crisis is but one representation of the politico-ideological struggles between various rulers of the Gulf States. These struggles became more pronounced with the outbreak of the Arab Spring.

The event mixed past and present political struggles between Qatar and leaders of the blockade, reflecting the historical power struggles between the different ruling families of the GCC tribes. Nonetheless, these political events did not result in any concrete political action against Qatar, and served only as political propaganda invented by the leaders of the blockade.

### **Failure of the influence of tribe not tribal ideology against Qatar**

The Qatar crisis is but one representation of the politico-ideological struggles between various rulers of the Gulf States. These struggles became more pronounced with the outbreak of the Arab Spring. Since then, the Gulf rulers have split into different camps within the Gulf Cooperation Council; each camp differs in its political views and ideologies regarding the current and future situation of the Arab region. It is quite clear that some Gulf rulers find Qatar's foreign policy in the region to be unacceptable. Hence, in the first instance, the blockade was meant to alter the direction of Qatar's foreign policy through a regime change. However, leaders of the blockade failed in their attempts to effect such a change; instead they stipulated that as a condition for lifting the blockade, Qatar had to comply with thirteen demands, one of which was to scale back its diplomatic ties with Iran and to stop financing terrorism.

A specific political agenda against Qatar emerges from the political language and discourse

of the blockade leaders during the crisis, which is to limit Qatar's regional role and prevent it from building strong regional alliances, such as the one it has with Turkey, which impacted on and curtailed the Saudi-UAE alliance during the Syrian revolution. The Qatar crisis provides evidence of the role of *Khalijism* in Gulf politics and Gulf state foreign policy making. It has led to political struggle in that the Gulf States' ruling families have adopted different political ideologies which represent their tribal ideology. Therefore, tribal ideology explains *Khaliji-Khaliji* political struggles, especially in foreign policy making.

The tribal ideology of the leaders of the blockade has and still does affect the GCC as a regional institution meant to promote joint co-operation between the different members of the Gulf States. One of the institution's goals is to defend its members from threats to their security, yet some of its own members now threaten Qatar's security and state sovereignty. This leads one to question the role of the institution and to what extent tribal ideology has resulted in the division of the GCC into different camps, something which may reshape not only the institution's political role but also the regional and geopolitical setting represented in the different regional and international alliances between the Gulf States.

Hence, in the Qatar crisis, the blockade leaders' tribal ideology has served to call into question the nature of the relationship between GCC members and the impact these different relationships will have on the regional stability of the Gulf. As shown, tribal ideology is influencing their foreign policy making decisions which in turn is having a negative effect on the GCC and calling into question the meaning of its existence as a Gulf security alliance. Indeed, having two different camps split between supporting and opposing a blockade of Qatar undermines the very existence of the GCC.

However, the blockade leaders' use of 'tribe' and tribal ideology as a tool against Qatar, especially in the first year of the crisis, proved un-

successful. By means of skillful diplomacy, Qatar has managed to prevent the outbreak of tribal conflict in the country. More importantly, it paid no attention to the stirring up of tribal sentiment which was meant to disrupt Qatari domestic stability, choosing not to be drawn into the discourse of the tribe but maintain one single political discourse — that of the state. Qatar's legal and diplomatic political communication with the leaders of the blockade has been characterised by a firm commitment to state sovereignty. Therefore, the blockade's use of tribalism has been a failure.

The crisis has shed light on the role of the Gulf States' politico-ideological struggle as represented in *Khalijism*. In short, in order to end this crisis, would the *Khaliji* leaders be able to establish any kind of political accommodation or convergence between their different tribal political ideologies?

## Conclusion

Observers thought that the use of the tribe as a tool in the blockade leaders' foreign policy against Qatar would put the Arabian Gulf states in danger of civil war, or even bring down the Gulf States itself. From my personal observation, this is an exaggeration. Analysts have not taken the time to look closely at the political discourse of the Arabian Gulf states, nor have they analysed

the political language of the Gulf State leaders. In addition, these observers failed to distinguish between tribe and tribal ideology in the context of the Qatari crisis. In fact, the crisis served as the climax of different *Khaliji-Khailij* ideological and political struggles as concerns foreign policy making. This can clearly be seen during and after the 2011 Arab Spring. Subsequently, Qatari foreign policy started to turn against the blockade leaders' ideological convictions and, most importantly, their political views on the region. This led the Saudis to instigate the blockade against Qatar.

Finally, tribal ideology in *Khalijism* is not about the tribe itself, but concerns the ruling family, its historical role and its contemporary ideological and political language. Tribal ideology may encompass varying types of political concepts, including the modern, postmodern, Islamic, liberal, and so on. This is shown clearly in their governance, political systems and institutions and has an important influence on their different domestic, regional and international activities. Thus, tribal ideologies are capable of adapting, rejecting, shaping, and reshaping themselves through *asabiyyah* and other political and social contexts in response to political, social, cultural, and economic ambitions and achievements, whether domestically, regionally, or internationally.

## Endnotes

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- <sup>9</sup> <https://bitlylink.com/aDBp3>
- <sup>10</sup> "Is the Libyan Tribe part of the solution or part of the problem in Libyan Crisis" (Arabic). Monte-Carlo International Radio, 2015
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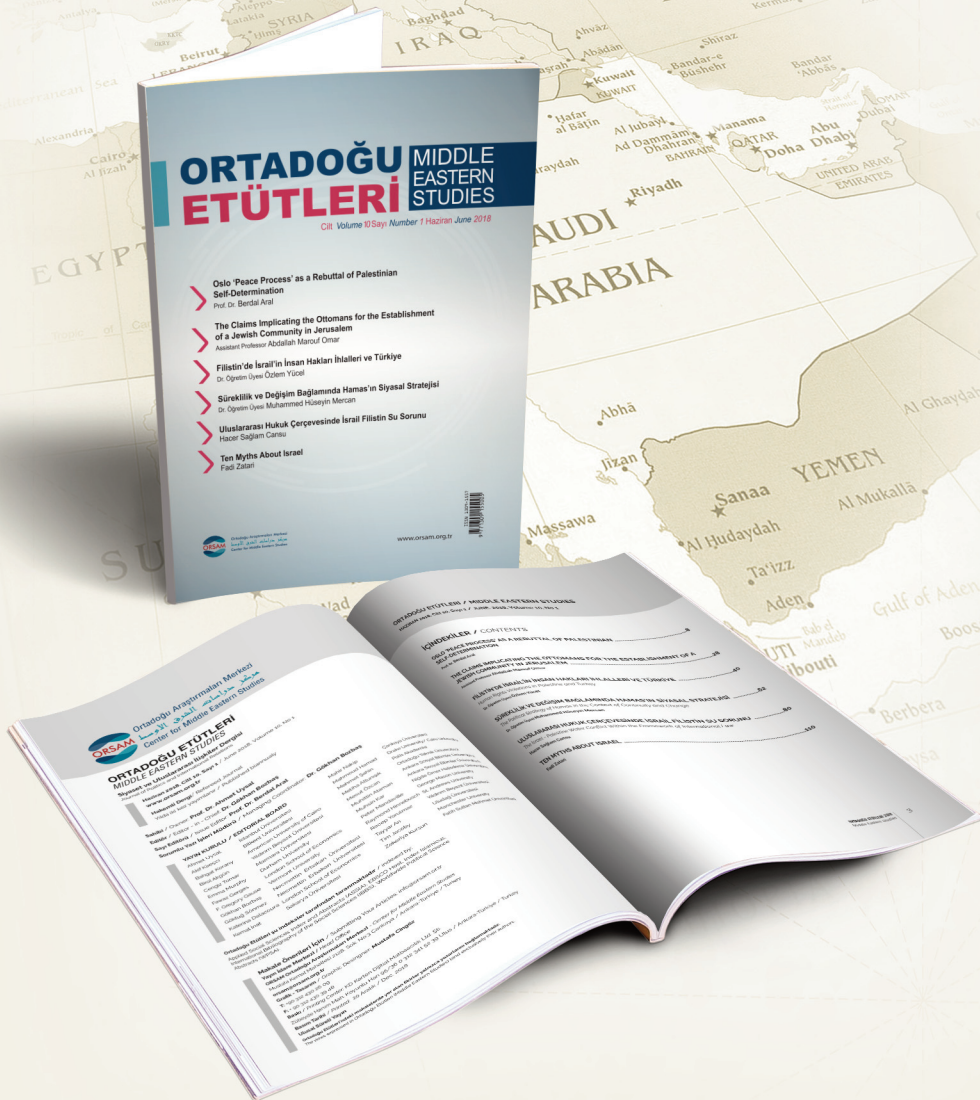
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