Qatar is on the Verge of Scoring New Victories

Saudi Arabia, overtaxing itself in its vain efforts to establish dictatorial control over all the countries on the Arabian Peninsula, has recently moved toward a compromise with Qatar to end a devastating three-year conflict. However, as practice still shows - and many sources close to the negotiations say - a complete resolution remains unattainable, despite the offer to make concessions. Prince Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdullah bin Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud told AFP agency that the kingdom and its allies - Bahrain, Egypt and the UAE - that imposed the blockade on Qatar in June 2017 are "on board" with resolving the crisis, and an agreement is anticipated in the near future.

A potential "thaw" appears to be arising as the Gulf states prepare for the inauguration of President-elect Joe Biden, who will welcome the resolution of the scandal that has undermined US efforts to curb its nemesis, Iran. The countries involved in the blockade continue to accuse Doha of being tied too closely to Tehran, and allegedly funding radical Islamist movements - despite Qatar's categorical denials. They initially put forth a list for Qatar with 13 demands, including the closure of Al Jazeera, a popular and influential regional broadcasting company that has irritated the Gulf rulers with its "high-decibel" criticism.

Doha flatly refused. And, after a fierce standoff, the Saudi-led bloc is poised to significantly soften its demands in for a final deal. A person close to the Saudi government said that the kingdom is ready to reopen its airspace to Qatari aircraft, freeing them of fuel-consuming detours, if Doha stops funding its political opponents and putting restrictions on its media.

The blockade severed transportation links, tore families apart, and cost billions of dollars in lost trade and
investment - damage that Gulf economies can hardly afford as they struggle to pull themselves out of the coronavirus epidemic, with their incomes plummeting as a result of declining oil prices and a harsh economic crisis. Ultimately, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates have officially thrown their support behind efforts to overcome the schism between Arab countries.

Another Gulf source that is close to the talks stated that the Saudi process could lead to a certain kind of peace, but not completely address the underlying problems. According to him, the final deal is likely to be a joint document outlining the terms of what perhaps could be a reformatted version of the 2014 Riyadh agreement between Qatar and the other Gulf states - a secret pact believed to emphasize the principle of non-intervention into each other's affairs. According to one Western diplomat in the Persian Gulf, mediators from Kuwait insist on bringing the three main leaders in the Arabian Peninsula on board for the negotiations - Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, and the current ruler of Qatar, Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani. These three will not only have to negotiate, but agree to peacefully coexist. “We are going to review one potential temporary solution for a few weeks... I don't think anyone is waiting for a full resolution. Everyone will be looking at how wholeheartedly the official statement is worded,” diplomats from Doha said, quoting a senior Qatari official as saying that the final deal was “agreed upon in principle” but “limited in scope”. The official, they said, suggested that Saudi Arabia was reluctant to announce the deal before the term for current US President Donald Trump expires, possibly to set up a positive tone for Joe Biden, who promised to take a tough stance on Riyadh in regard to its human rights violations. The US is seeking to lift the air embargo that prompted Qatar to use Iranian airspace, contributing to the roughly 133 million USD that Iranian media reports Tehran receives annually from flights, undermining US efforts to exert economic pressure on it.

Experts believe there are strong signs that the media in both Saudi Arabia and Qatar have begun to soften their harsh rhetoric. Writing to the pro-government newspaper Okaz Daily, which usually criticizes Qatar, Saudi observer Tariq Alhomayed hailed "optimistic" sentiments, and called for "unity and cohesion" in the Persian Gulf.

But the real litmus test was the level of Qatar’s representation at the Gulf Cooperation Council summit (GCC), and the presence of the Qatari emir. The blockade led by Saudi Arabia was calculated to literally strangle Qatar, and force it to join the interests held by the Persian Gulf, and above all to ride on Riyadh’s coattails. But the sanctions only pushed Doha to pursue a course of self-sufficiency, and forced the rich emirate with "deep pockets full of money" to pursue a policy toward, and forge close ties with, Iran and Turkey.

In July, a UN court ruled in Qatar’s favor over the airspace dispute. However, despite Riyadh’s stance involving de-escalation, mistrust between both sides is deeply rooted, and experts warn that the differences are “fundamental and existential, and do not end after just a simple handshake”. It will take a lot of time and sustained effort on all sides to rebuild the old ties, says Kristian Ulrichsen, a fellow at the Baker Institute at Rice University in the United States. Any agreement will be the start of a longer process of reconciliation, not an endpoint or return to the previous status quo before 2017.

And ultimately the course taken by Qatar and its emir, Tamim bin Hamad-al-Thani, led to the surrender of the Arab Goliath - Saudi Arabia - and forced its rulers to admit the fallacy inherent in its policy towards the small but proud emirate. The 41st Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) summit, which was just held in the Saudi city of Al-Ula, was a significant step towards resolving the differences between Qatar and its Persian Gulf neighbors. On the eve of the summit, the restrictions on airspace were lifted, and maritime and air borders with Qatar were reopened, as an act of good faith. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, speaking at the summit, emphasized: “Today we urgently need to unify our efforts to advance our region, and face the challenges that surround us, especially the challenges represented by Iran’s nuclear and ballistic missiles programs, its devastating sabotage projects, and its terrorist and religious sentiments”. This means that this Saudi directly acknowledged that the alleged threat to the kingdom is not Qatar, but the policy adopted by Tehran.

While Saudi Arabia’s solution marks an important milestone on the road to resolving the Persian Gulf crisis, the path to full-fledged reconciliation is far from a guaranteed one. The schism between Abu Dhabi and Cairo, on the one hand, and Doha, on the other, remains the deepest one, since the UAE and Egypt have the most pronounced ideological differences with Qatar over the activities performed by the Islamic organization al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin (the Muslim Brotherhood, an organization banned in Russia). And apparently in this case, it would be worth agreeing with the opinion of the astute and experienced UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Anwar bin Mohammed Gargash, who said: “There is still a lot of work ahead, but we are moving in the right direction”.

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Outlook".