



# **Qatar Embargo (2017)**

# Letters from your Qatar Embargo Dais

Hello Delegates,

My name is Joshua Weiner, I am a senior here at Stuyvesant High School, and the Secretary-General of Stuyvesant's Model United Nations team. I will be the chair for your committee at StuyMUNC 2019.

It is exciting and saddening that my Model UN career is coming to a close with this StuyMUNC, and subsequently I intend to make this committee interesting and a lot of fun for delegates. This has been an activity which I have participated in since my freshman year, and I really value everything I have learned from working with delegates from around the country and the world. For those of you for whom it is your first time in committee, you have a lot to look forward to. For those of you who are more experienced delegates, you know what I'm talking about by now. No matter the level of your experience, it is my goal to make this committee a welcoming environment with interesting discussions to engage all of you. Yet, my life is not solely centered around Model UN, I enjoy computer science as much as I do international affairs. For fun, I like to run, play tennis, and play the guitar. In addition, I am a huge college basketball fan (the NBA lacks the raw excitement).

I look forwards to meeting you in April, and wish you luck with school until then! In the meantime, please feel free to reach out with any questions and concerns you may have.

Joshua Weiner - Chair

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Dear Delegates,

My name is Kendrick Yuen, I am currently a junior at Stuyvesant High School, and I am your Director for Qatar Embargo at StuyMUNC! I only joined the MUN scene in the beginning of this school year, so I still have much to learn from everyone at this

committee. So far, my MUN experience has been fantastic, many people are polite in committees, and I found it to be extremely enjoyable overall. In a way, me being your director, is me wishing to see the other side of committees, the running and managing of them. This is actually my first time dais-ing for a committee, so I apologize for any mistakes I might make, but I will try my very best!

Aside from MUN I previously and still participate in our school Ultimate Frisbee Team, and in a Boy Scout troop. I have learnt much from these teamwork centered extracurriculars, much of which I employ at committees. As such, I hope to make this committee a friendly and polite place to be, without limiting individual delegate choices.

I have much to learn from all of you, and I would love it if you reached out to me with any questions and/or concerns! I look forward to meeting you at our committee! Until then, stay safe, and stay snug! It's cold out.

Kendrick Yuen - Director

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## Background

Qatar is a peninsular nation, and one of the smallest states in the Persian Gulf. Despite its geographic location – sharing its only land border with Saudi Arabia – Qatar is a relatively moderate country considering the hardline fundamentalist views that typically permeate Middle Eastern powers. While the official state religion is Wahhabism, Qatar is home to about fourteen million internationals and the government is relaxed in its stance regarding the practice of other religions. Most importantly for this committee, however, the foreign policy stance of Qatar is a constant balancing act between ameliorating its global allies and its regional partners. An example of this can be seen as one of the United States's most important military bases is located just outside of Doha, yet Qatar acquiesces to anti-American sentiment amongst its regional allies via actions such as funding the U.S.-critical news network *Al Jazeera*. In addition, Qatar is what is known as a “petrostate”, in that a majority of its revenues come from oil, however, there has been a recent push among Qatari leadership to change this – mainly through the development of Qatar as a financial sector.

In June of 2017, the nations of Bahrain, The Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan, The Maldives, Mauritania, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, and the United Arab Emirates all severed diplomatic relations with Qatar and imposed an economic embargo by banning Qatari airplanes and ships from entering their airspace and sea-routes. It is with this perspective, and the knowledge of Qatar's increasingly global presence within affairs and events such as the 2022 FIFA World Cup, that this committee will look at the crisis, its implications, and ways in which to move forward.

## History of Qatar

Known for its prominence as a shipping hub in the Persian Gulf, Qatar's history has been shaped by seafaring. In its early history, the coastline was a stopping point along maritime Indian Ocean routes, linking Iraq to India, and Iran to China. This,

combined with a lack of surface natural resources, meant Qataris during and since have been dependent on trade for necessary goods and services.

Qatar as a modern state has been ruled by the al-Thani family, which helped not only to shape the nation's independence, but also curate a unique blend of modern ideals and Islamic tradition. From negotiating the very existence of Qatar in the 19th Century from British and Ottoman control, to crafting a national identity based on Sunni Wahhabism, the al-Thani family has been able to promote alliance amongst the Qatari people toward the regime. Negotiation and balance have been core to the country's existence since its very founding.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the peninsula of Qatar was under the control of the Ottoman Empire. The Al-Thani family at this juncture appealed to the British for patronage in their quest for support against the occupation of the Ottoman Empire and to unite competing tribal groups. Through this struggle for dominance, the al-Thani family was able to successfully able to leverage British support for dynastic political control over the peninsula. However, this exchange meant that from 1820 until 1971, with their independence, Qatari foreign policy was controlled by the hegemony of the United Kingdom. It is worth noting, that while the British never directly colonized the nation Qatar at this time was not an independent entity. Since independence, Qatar's rulers have continued strong-yet-distant foreign ties with Western powers, a product of the collaboration between the Emirs and British which resulted in the cooperative-hegemonic-pacifism foreign policy practiced by the British. It is worth noting that the power of the al-Thani differs from that of the al-Sabah or al-Saud of Kuwait or Saudi Arabia, respectively, in that it is not historical but rather political – a result of an 1868 treaty between Muhammad bin Thani and Colonel Pelly of Britain.

The British were not the only ones interested in control of Qatar, the Ottomans – at that time a greater regional power – were as well. In fact, the Ottomans were opposed to British expansion and control within the region, and Sultan Abdulhamid II attempted to consolidate power and secure the Empire's borders. Therefore, while Mohammed bin Thani signed a treaty with the British, his son – Jassim bin Mohammed al-Thani

– agreed to non-tributary status within the Ottoman Empire. Yet while British influence grew, a growing Ottoman influence was blocked, and an invasion was repelled by Jassim al-Thani in 1892. In 1916, the British signed the Anglo-Qatari treaty with Sheikh Abdullah bin Jassim al-Thani: recognizing Qatar as a British protectorate and Sheikh Abdullah as its leader. The British would be responsible for the development of the Qatari oil industry as well – laying the economic and political foundations for the modern Qatari state.

One of the issues faced with Qatar’s relatively contemporary history - and one that its leaders have struggled to grapple with - is the subsequent lack of national identity. One of the ways in which this was done by changing the country’s National Day from September 3rd to December 18th – the day on which Jassim bin Mohammed al-Thani united several local tribes and repelled an Ottoman invasion. Note, that because many Qataris were ambivalent about or even against the British leaving on September 3rd, 1971, this new date aims to add legitimacy and coherency to a national identity shaped around the al-Thani regime.

## **Resources/Economy**

One will find most – nearly all – of Qatar’s population along its coastline. This is due to the fact that the year-round heat makes the majority of Qatar’s land untenable for human life, only 5% of the land is suitable for herding and grazing, while 3% is cultivable. Subsequently, Qatar is unique in that it has had to rely on shipping from other nations to fill its breadbaskets. According to Theodore Karasik, a senior advisor for Gulf State Analytics, “Qatar receives 99% of its food from outside. Furthermore, most of the food is required to travel over their sole land border with Saudi Arabia to get to the country’s population centers.

Qatar’s biggest economic driver is oil exports. The history of oil in Qatar dates back to the founding of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (later British Petroleum, or “BP”) in 1908. The growth of the British oil industry within Qatar grew as Sheikh Abdullah signed a contract with APOC in 1935 - granting them the right to drill for all

petroleum off of the peninsula's coast. After the 1940's collapse of the Qatari pearl industry - which employed nearly half of the population at the time - oil became the new paradigm for the British protectorate.

The Qatari economy at the end of the 19th century was dominated by the pearl industry, as demand for the product skyrocketed in the West. The entire industry was almost exclusively centralized to the peninsula. However, as Japan began to mass-release Mikimoto pearls in the 1920's the Gulf – and specifically Qatari – trade of the product began to slide. When the Great Depression hit Western economies in the 1930s, demand for Qatar's niche product all but evaporated. This would lead to what is now remembered in Qatar as the "Years of Hunger", nearly two decades in which mass economic migration ensued and the merchant class was extinguished. As discussed in the paragraph above, the al-Thani family was signing contracts with British petroleum companies to exploit Qatar's gas reserves during this time. However, Qatar did not ship its first quantity of oil until 1949. Furthermore, the impacts of the industry didn't reach most levels of society in the country until the 1960s.

Qatar's oil industry is largely comparable to their pearling industry from the late 19th century, in that it is highly dependent on global demand for the product. This means that the country's economy is largely in the hands of international supply-and-demand and therefore extremely vulnerable to price changes. The government, in an effort to help control this, was a member of the GCC (a political summit in the region, yet often responsible for joint-oil practices), and as of 2017 (when this committee is taking place) a member of OPEC.

A result of Qatar's uniquely homogenous economy is their odd population skews, with nearly 88% of the population being non-Qatari migrant workers. They outnumber native born Qataris 14 million to two million, and since a majority of immigrant workers are male (to work in construction and oil), the male population of Qatar sits at about 70%. This migrant and gender skew has lead to real issues for Qatar's growth, with analysts projecting that robust social services for native Qataris and cheap foreign labor has reduced Qatar's ability to innovate, as well as the incentive to train and educate its

population. As outlined in their National Development Strategy for 2011-2016, however, the government has placed an increasing focus on infrastructure and education – such as funding Qatar University and the Education City initiative.

## **A Modern State**

The British announced their plans to abdicate the Persian Gulf in the late 1960s, due to the skyrocketing costs of maintaining a foreign military presence and liberal pressures within the country that reflected a broader European rejection of colonialism. While Arab nationalists across the Middle East celebrated a new much sought-after independence from British rule, the Emirs of Qatar actually resisted this move to the point of offering to subsidize the British presence in the region to maintain their presence. However, the British left Qatar officially in 1971.

All was not well in the new country, however, as one year later in 1972 Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad al-Thani – the grandson of Sheikh Abdullah – seized control of the throne in a peaceful coup. Under his reign, the state sought to modernize. Yet, falling oil prices in the 1980s and an economy still overly reliant on oil saw Sheikh Khalifa cede power (again nonviolently) on June 27th, 1995 to his son Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani. Since 1995, Sheikh Hamad has sought to diversify the Qatari economy and bring the state into the modern era. Since then, Qatar has developed into a financial hub within its capital city of Doha, and placed an increasing value on education with a concentration in renewable energy, yet any real manifestation of this has yet to be seen beyond the ultra-modern Doha skyline.

### **Migrant Workers**

As stated before, non-Qataris make up nearly 88% of the total population of the country, with most employed in construction and oil with low-skilled jobs. The government allows for aggressive recruitment of international labor from Southeast Asian nations, and turns a relatively blind eye to the treatment of these laborers. Abuse of migrant workers is rampant and many are victims of human trafficking. The system



by which workers come to Qatar is known as the *kafala* system, in which foreign workers arrive under the oversight of a Qatari sponsor. Many sponsors are known to demand high sums from workers to pay for their passage into the country, and will then confiscate the passports of laborers upon their arrival: effectively trapping them in Qatar. Workers live in poor conditions on the outskirts of urban areas, receive almost no time off, are given zero benefits, work dangerous hard-labor in the hot Gulf sun, and are banned from unionizing.

The Qatari government largely turns a blind eye to this practice despite international pressure because the greatly reduced cost and effectiveness of the *kafala* system has been the key construction factor behind the massive urbanization of Qatari cities. In response to pressure from the United Nations and NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) such as Amnesty International, the government investigated 11 new cases of foreign-worker abuse in 2015, which led to zero convictions or prosecutions. In essence, the Qatari government is going through the motions of addressing the issue to placate the international community, yet not actually acting upon them.

## **Actions of Qatar in the Middle East**

Deriving from its history of shrewd negotiation, Qatar has tried to distinguish itself as an international mediation hub, fostering cooperation and mediation efforts in Sudan, Yemen, and Eritrea to name a few. This focus has put Qatar in a more prominent negotiating stance typically seen from large western powers such as France or the United States, and has eroded the platform for such actions typically held by the Saudis through organizations such as the Arab League, OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries), or the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council).

Qatar has invoked the ire of many of its neighbors, as they see the state as having traveled out of its bounds as mediator and into the role of agitator in the region. The government began to take a hawkish foreign policy position in 2011 with the rise of the Arab Spring: spending billions in funding for Libyan rebels to overthrow dictator Muammar Gaddafi, financially backing the al-Nahda Party in Tunisia, and supporting

the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. In fact, the Qatari government was the largest donor to the presidency of Muhammad Morsi when the Muslim Brotherhood took hold of Egypt after its 2012 Arab Spring. Furthermore, Qatar has continued to back certain anti-government rebels in Syria (individual groups which the United States and Saudi Arabia oppose) and fund Hamas active in the Gaza Strip. While certainly controversial, Qatar's financial efforts had earned them increased support in a region whose governments are changing against traditional powers such as Saudi Arabia.

The successes of Qatar in 2011 and 2012 shifted in 2013, as the region began to cast a critical eye upon both Islamic fundamentalist parties and the Qatari government bankrolling them. A military coup in Egypt deposed Muhammad Morsi and led the Egyptian government to return nearly \$2 Billion and relations between the two countries quickly deteriorated. Even in Libya, the public saw Qatar as empowering marginal and more-radical Islamic factions than the popular mainstream – despite the fact that Qatari flags and rebel flags had flown next to each other for the better part of two years. Wherever the Qatari government meddled by supporting fringe Islamist groups, the general populace expressly opposed such actions – leading the Emirs to decrease their support to the Muslim Brotherhood and seek better political relations, with mixed results.

The Saudi Led embargo of the nation of Qatar is largely due to the nations alleged support for terrorism. Qatar acknowledges that it has in fact, provided assistance to some groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas. However, the nation denies aiding groups such as al-Qaeda or the Islamic State known for their highly militant actions. To this day, the coalition of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Yemen, Egypt, the Maldives, and Bahrain stand strong, in the hope that they can 'starve' the nation of Qatar out in a modern day siege.

While the country of Qatar does not yield, more evidence is brought to the table by the coalition. They accuse Qatari government of support Hamas, a labeled terrorist group in the United States, Israel, Egypt, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, the Qatari government had provided aid to ISIL and other Sunni groups in 2014 along with

Saudi Arabia, following its trend of supporting extreme Islamic factions in the region. Nonetheless, the Qatari government denies much of these accusations, despite known designated terrorists and terrorist financiers still living on (and operating from) Qatari soil.

Overall, the Qatari government has been accused of helping many terrorist groups ranging from al-Qaeda to even more peaceful groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood. The nation denies many of these accusations strongly, citing no solid evidence, and that the nation of Qatar stands strong against the aid of terrorists. The coalition nations are not devoid of their own accusations either. Amongst their numbers, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates are also listed as providers of vast sums of money to various militant/terrorist groups in the Middle East.

## **Media Platforms**

One of the most controversial projections of the Qatari government has been the creation and maintenance of the *Al Jazeera* network. As of 2017, the network is the most-watched satellite network in the Arab World, and therefore holds significant influence in the politics of the region. The Qatar-based *Al Jazeera* was launched in 1996, and has characterized itself both as an alternative to Western media and the state-run media outlets characteristic of the Gulf States. *Al Jazeera* is known to be openly critical of regional governments (save the Qatari government) and has therefore received much criticism from other Gulf States, such as after the media platform covered controversial actions in the UAE via leaked emails. Furious Arab nations saw this as an attack orchestrated by the Qatar government. Many Gulf States and other nations claim that *Al Jazeera* is simultaneously the propaganda arm and an agent foreign policy for the Qatari government. Controversially, the network often hosts speakers critical of existing governments and goes so far as to air significant time to individuals from designated-terror organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood. Subsequently, on June 9, 2017, *Al Jazeera's* network became victim to a cyber attack. Furthermore, *Al Jazeera* offices within the nations part of the coalition formed against Qatar were shut

down forcefully, and it is predicted that if *Al Jazeera* isn't changed, there won't be any peaceful resolution. Despite this, *Al Jazeera* is considered a major global news organization, with 80 bureaus around the world still reporting regularly, despite the standing embargo.

## **The Embargo**

In a Saudi Arabia led embargo, the nations of Egypt, Yemen, the Maldives, the UAE, and Bahrain blockaded the small nation of Qatar from all methods of transportation including air, water, and land. As Qatar's only border is shared with Saudi Arabia, and the coalition nations dominate the Persian Gulf, Qatar is in a precarious economic, strategic, and political situation. Despite blows to its economy, and international airlines, the nation was quick to find alternative routes to Oman, Turkey, and Iran. Before the political crisis, Qatar received the vast majority of its food from foreign countries, shipped over land via Saudi Arabia. However, as this is no longer possible, finding itself with a food crisis on their hands the Qatari government with the effort of its citizens and increased reforms has transformed the country into a hotbed of domestic agricultural growth, and cultural diversity.

Still, as the embargo goes on and Qatar utilizes its vast media arms to drum-up opposition to it, the international community demands justification for its continuation. At the beginning of the embargo, several nations such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates gave Qatari citizens only two weeks to leave the country, and demanded Qatari diplomats leave in as little as 48 hours.

Two members of the coalition, however have remained stubbornly above the dispute: Kuwait and Oman. They continue to trade with both sides – with much seafaring international trade to Qatar being directed through Oman – albeit having cut off diplomatic ties with Qatar. Despite the apparent tension between the nations, there is room for negotiation. The UAE continues to allow a Qatar-to-Oman fuel pipeline running through to its territory to continue operations. The UAE has also continued to cooperate with Qatar in the co owned Bunduq offshore oil field. In fact, as the embargo

persists, many firms within the UAE are feeling the economic pressure of losing many big contracts with their regional neighbor, as reported by the Economist: leading to increased resentment of the economic stance as workers are laid off.

Qatar has also found an ally with Iran, who has been diametrically opposed to Saudi-hegemony in the region for several decades. It is with the Iranians that Qatar maintains a majority of its trade and receives food shipments: the embargo having become a boon to the Iranian economy as Qatari companies seek investment opportunities within the Gulf power. Furthermore, Qatar Airways, whose flights under the embargo were no longer allowed to fly over coalition airspace, have been redirected over Iranian airspace – with each flight being charged a hefty fly-over fee to the Qatari government.

## **The World Cup**

While the stalemate holds, in a previous held bid in 2009, Qatar had been selected to host the 2022 Fifa World Cup. This would be the first ever World Cup to be held in the Arab World, and the first Muslim-majority country. Furthermore, it will be the first geographically Asian World Cup since 2002. However, as the feud continues, the concerns over the nation's ability to host the World Cup have increased. Nations across the world question whether the smallest nation to ever host the World Cup is suitable. As the political stakes increased, in 2017, a stash of emails were hacked and released, revealing plot to reposition Qatar and to gain support for its hosting of the World Cup via American journalists. This greatly disturbed the International Community, as it questioned whether a nation capable of doing such things in the shadows is fit as a host.

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