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## **Saudi Diplomacy Fallen to the Ground Part1: Unconditionally Reconciled GCC Summit**

### **1. Qatari Emir attended GCC Summit**



GCC summit was held in AlUla in northwestern Saudi Arabia on January 5, 2021<sup>1</sup>. In AlUla there are several ancient archaeological sites of Nabataean, which were designated as the first UNESCO World Heritage Site in Saudi Arabia. The region is the centerpiece of the tourism industry that Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman (commonly known as MbS) is focusing on in Vision 2030.

The regular summit is usually held in December every year, but this time it was postponed to January. There are two differences between this conference and the past. One is that the leaders met together. Due to the new influenza epidemic (COVID-19) that has spread all over the world since the beginning of last year and is still rampant, all international conferences including the G-7 are held by video conferencing. The same is true for the G20, which is hosted by Saudi Arabia, and OPEC or OPEC + meetings, which are the core of the country, are also held remotely. It is unusual for GCC leaders to meet together this time.

The second is that Qatar's chief Tamim attended for the first time in three years. In June 2017, Saudi Arabia suddenly notified Qatar of a diplomatic severance. UAE and Bahrain, the same GCC member states, followed Saudi Arabia, and Egypt was in tune (Qatar Boycott). Since then, Tamim has been absent from the summit. However, at this conference, the AlUla Declaration to eliminate the Qatar boycott was adopted, and the reconciliation between the leaders of Saudi Arabia and Qatar was directed<sup>2</sup>.

### **2. The cause of the Qatar boycott and its subsequent course<sup>3</sup>**

Four countries, including Saudi Arabia, broke up with Qatar for supporting the Islamic Brotherhood, which Qatar considers to be a Sunni terrorist organization, through its ties with Shiite Iran. The UAE, which is one of the strongest of the four countries, has made 13 demands on Qatar, including breaking ties with Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood and closing Al Jazeera TV<sup>4</sup>. Qatar naturally rejected those requests.

The isolated Qatar asked Turkey for help and asked for military presence, importing groceries and other daily necessities from the country. Qatar Airways also called on Iran to use territory as an alternative to blocking its passage over Saudi Arabia. For Turkey, which is in a slump, or Iran, which is an isolated Shiite, the request from the rich Sunni state Qatar would have been "fishermen's interest". The Saudi and UAE speculations that Qatar would soon succumb were dismissed. It was clear that the GCC's internal conflict had no benefit to Member States, and while Kuwait tried hard to mediate, the Qatar boycott remained stalemate for several years.

The situation changed in the second half of last year. US President Donald Trump achieved great results in normalizing diplomatic relations between Israel, UAE and Bahrain. He subsequently sent his son-in-law, Jared Kushner, to GCC countries and persuade them to regain cohesion<sup>5</sup>. The United States has embarked on it because GCC is an important ally against Iran. The United States has a Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar with 10,000 soldiers<sup>6</sup>. US also has a naval base for the 5th Fleet in Bahrain. After the signing of peace treaties with UAE and Bahrain, Israel's threat is now limited to Iran, and the United States needs the GCC as its defense front line against Iran.

### **3. Saudi Arabia misses in its diplomacy and UAE scorns the Kingdom**

Saudi Arabia searched for the chance to end the Qatar boycott. In the chaos of the Yemeni Civil War, Saudi Arabia was annoyed by domestic conflicts between the Hadi-led Yemeni government and the Southern Transitional Council, and was frightened by rocket attacks of Houthi rebels. Furthermore, in the Khashoggi's murder case, the reputation of Crown Prince MbS fell to the ground. Saudi government had to take necessary measures to recover the fame through diplomacy. Saudi Arabia left 13 conditions on one side and decided to restore relations with Qatar.

Kuwaiti Emir, who struggled to mediate, was passed away just before the summit. This incident ignited King Salman's decision. When Qatari Emir arrived at the airport of AlUla, Crown Prince MbS greeted and hugged the Emir, and MbS had individual talks with the Emir as the gesture of friendship. While Saudi Arabia made a big compromise, Qatar only showed generosity to withdraw the suit of WTO against Saudi Arabia and UAE. It was no exaggeration to say that Saudi diplomacy was one-sided defeat.

UAE remained very dissatisfied. UAE made utmost effort to eliminate the shadows of Iran and Muslim Brotherhoods from Qatar. In fact, before the summit, UAE ambassador to the United States Yousef Al Otaiba denied an easy compromise, saying that the Qatar issue would not be resolved soon<sup>7</sup>. However, Saudi Arabia, who was eager to be the GCC leader, hastened Qatar's return to regain the solidarity of GCC without sufficient reward.

It was sure that Jared Kushner, senior advisor to US President, have attended the GCC Summit in order to advertise himself to the world media at the joint signing ceremony of the AIUla Declaration. At joint signing of Abraham accord between Israel and the UAE, President Donald Trump has invited the top leaders of both countries to the White House in Washington. In the same manner, it was no doubt that a picture of Jared Kushner as a witness was planned at the AIUla Declaration signing ceremony. In the photo Kushner might be together alongside Emir of Qatar, MbS and government representatives from UAE, Bahrain and Egypt.

UAE might be disgusted at Saudi Arabia. The AIUla Declaration signing ceremony, which should have been the biggest achievement of this summit, was not held. The attendance of Kushner and the Egyptian delegation became void. The sin of Saudi Arabia cannot be overlooked.

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<sup>1</sup> Families rejoice as GCC Summit cements the ties that bind Gulf countries

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1787871/middle-east>

2021/1/5 Arab News

<sup>2</sup> Saudi Arabia restores full diplomatic relations with Qatar

2021/1/5 Arab News

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1787711/saudi-arabia>

<sup>3</sup> <http://ocininitiative.maeda1.jp/0456GccSummitDec2018English.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <http://mylibrary.maeda1.jp/0416GccDispute2017July.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Kushner eyes Gulf crisis on trip to region

2020/12/2 Kuwait Times

<https://news.kuwaittimes.net/website/kushner-eyes-gulf-crisis-on-trip-to-region/>

<sup>6</sup> ditto

<sup>7</sup> Qatar dispute unlikely to be resolved soon: Otaiba

2020/11/17 The Peninsula

<https://www.khaleejtimes.com/news/government/qatar-dispute-unlikely-to-be-resolved-soon-otaiba>