

The Blockade, Islamism and Intra-Sect Tensions: Explaining Saudi-Qatari Tensions

Introduction:

On June 5, 2017, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates severed diplomatic ties with Qatar, citing Doha's support for "various terrorist and sectarian groups aimed at destabilizing the region including the Muslim Brotherhood, Daesh (ISIS) and Al-Qaeda"¹, and for supporting the "activities of Iranian-backed terrorist groups" across the Middle East. The years that followed were shaped by much hostility, with calls from Saudi officials to dig a canal between the two states – with part of the canal reserved for a nuclear waste facility - cutting Qatar off from the Arabian Peninsula and its only land border in the process. While support for Iran is often cited as the source of this tension, in this intervention we argue that tensions do not emerge from Qatari support for Iran but rather, from competing visions of the role of Islam within the construction of regional order in what we view as a form of intra-Sunni sectarianism. Indeed, as Saudi Arabia and Qatar sought to exert influence on regional politics, their contrasting positions over the role of (political) Islamism(s)² as an ordering principle within domestic and regional politics became a source of friction between the two states.

Before we proceed further, a brief interjection is necessary regarding our understanding of sectarianism. While a vast literature exists exploring sectarian tensions, this typically focuses on inter-sect, Sunni-Shi'a tensions and understanding the ways in which particular identities exist within – and occasionally across – political projects; Yet as Valbjorn

¹ No Author, "Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Severs Diplomatic and Consular Relations With Qatar 2 Jeddah", Saudi Press Agency, June 5, 2017, <https://www.spa.gov.sa/viewfullstory.php?lang=en&newsid=1637321#1637321>.

² We reject the notion that there is one form of political Islam, following the ideas of Shahab Ahmed and others; see Ahmed, Shahab. *What Is Islam?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

and others have observed, to limit the line of inquiry to inter-sectarian tensions risks missing a great deal.³

The focus on intra-sectarian tensions within Sunni or Shi'a branches of Islam – or indeed, within different schools of thought within those branches – views sectarianism as the religiously charged deviation away from a collective whole. Thus, analysis of intra-sectarian tensions necessitates a slightly different approach, requiring a focus on the ways in which boundaries between different communities are drawn. In this vein, we follow the position advocated by Mabon and Ardovini who take sectarianism to be a process of exclusion and othering, a process of boundary making from within a shared community - defined broadly - and conditioned by the peculiarities of time and space.⁴ Following such a definition, while Saudi Arabia and Qatar are ostensibly members of the same faith community, deviation from that community and the propagation of different visions of order amidst competing visions of the role of religion in political life has created a schism which was deepened through processes of boundary making.

These differences have manifested in increasingly fractious relations between Riyadh and Doha which has played out across regional politics as Saudi Arabia and Qatar seek to cultivate relations with particular groups across the region. In particular, this has provoked support for rival factions within Syria's civil war and the adoption of contrasting views about political Islamist groups. From this, we can see Saudi Arabia and Qatar engaging processes of othering and boundary making within and across regional politics, in pursuit of regime interest and survival. Although coming to the fore after the events of the Arab Uprisings, we

³ See the work of Morten Valbjorn, Fanar Haddad, Helle Malmvig, Tamirace Fakhoury, Toby Dodge, John Nagle, Mona Harb and others

⁴ Mabon, Simon and ; Lucia Ardovini, "People, sects and states: interrogating sectarianism in the contemporary Middle East, *Global Discourse*" (6:4, 2016) 551_560 (p. 552).

argue that the roots of these tensions run far deeper and can be traced back to processes of state formation, legitimation and the position of clerics within both states.

Saudi-Qatari Tensions: State Formation, Sectarianism and Geopolitics

Although the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran has dominated analysis of regional politics in recent years⁵, tension between Saudi Arabia and Qatar has become increasingly prominent in recent years, albeit with deep historical roots.⁶ The 2017 withdrawal of ambassadors and ensuing blockade came only three years after Saudi, Emirati, Bahraini and Egyptian ambassadors were withdrawn from Qatar, ostensibly for not implementing a “non-interference” security pact concerned with domestic politics. While the 2014 crisis was ultimately resolved, the 2017 crisis was far more serious, prompting the publication of 13 demands including the closure of Al Jazeera which many viewed as an effort to erode Qatari sovereignty.

Such concerns have deep roots, dating back to the formation of the modern Saudi state. In the 1930s, King Abd al- Aziz al-Saud of Saudi Arabia “informed the ruler of Qatar that those living on the Qatari peninsula were his subjects and part of his *dirah* (territory to which tribal rights of control are claimed)”⁷. The disparity of power between Saudi Arabia and Qatar evident in Ibn Saud’s remarks continued to be felt in the coming decades, shaping relations between the two states. For many Qataris, the blockade was another effort to “to impose guardianship on the state” and related the menace to a deliberate “violation of its (Qatar's) sovereignty as a state”.⁸

⁵ See Simon Mabon, Banafsheh Keynoush, Lawrence Rubin, Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp, Robert Mason and others.

⁶ Ulrichsen, Kristian C. “Qatar and the Arab Spring: Policy Drivers and Regional Implications,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, September 24, 2014, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2014/09/24/qatar-and-arab-spring-policy-drivers-and-regional-implications>.

⁷ Baskan, Birol, and Steven Wright “Seeds of Change: Comparing State-Religion Relations in Qatar and Saudi Arabia,” *Arab Studies Quarterly* (33, no. 2: 2011): 96_111 (p. 108).

⁸ MEE and agencies, “Qatar Hits Back as Saudi, Egypt UAE Cut Diplomatic, Transport Ties,” *Middle East Eye*, June 5, 2017, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/qatar-deserted-gulf-states-and-egypt-1059644938>.

Shared Wahhabi values played into such fears. Birol Baskan and Steven Wright suggest that Wahhabism serves as a “potential political curb” on the relative autonomy that rulers of Qatar enjoy.⁹ For Baskan and Wright, if the *Ulama* in Qatar held too much power they could conceivably align themselves with the Saudi state and thus pose a challenge to the sovereignty and stability of the Al Thani.¹⁰ The threats are compounded as Wahhabi links with Saudi Arabia intersect with intertribal and cross-border connections consolidated with intermarriage and regular transfer of people and ideas.

Qatar and Saudi Arabia adhere to the Wahhabi sect of Islam, part of the Hanbali school of Islamic jurisprudence¹¹ which is commonly considered as the strictest in terms of interpretation.¹² Yet despite this similarity, both countries differ in the way they operationalize or integrate this Wahhabi brand of Islam within the internal dynamics of rule. Saudi Arabia’s Wahhabism is historically institutionalized as the foundation of the kingdom is based on the alliance between Mohamed Ibn Abdel-Wahab and Mohamed Ibn al-Saud in the 18th century, an exchange of oath under which the former found a “sword” to implement his radical views and the latter found a “religious banner” in order to unite the hitherto fragmented or hostile Arab tribes under his command.¹³ This close relationship forged between a religious group and a political leadership has led to the development of a class of religious scholars with an institutionalized power and role in political decision-making. This is perhaps most evident in the need for political elites to secure religious approval for their decisions via bodies such as the office of the Grand Mufti, replaced by the Board of Senior

⁹ Baskan, Birol and Wright, , “Seeds of Change”, p. 108.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 96

¹¹ Hannabalism is one of the four approaches to Sunni Islam, called schools, and it is marked with its strict traditionalism depending on textualist interpretations of Quraan and a focus on dogmatic adoption of specific rites; see Makdisi, George “Hanbalite Islam”, in *Studies on Islam*, trans. and ed. Merlin L. Swartz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).

¹² Freer, Courtney, “Mapping Religious Authority in Wahhabi States: An Examination of Qatar and Saudi Arabia,” *Rice University’s Baker Institute for Public Policy* (March 2019), 1 20 (p.3).

¹³ Baskan, Birol and Wright, , “Seeds of Change”, p. 103.

Religious Scholars in 1971.¹⁴ The clergy even shared key components of the state-running activities including the legitimate use of force with the foundation of religious police force, *mutawa'*, charged with scrutinizing and enforcing morality in public.

In contrast, Qatari state formation was not based on any such alliance with religious scholars but rather came out of the tribal contestations and compromises between Al-Khalifa and Al-Thani. The latter consolidated their claims to power as they led a rebellion against the rule of the former in 1867 and as they also secured the recognition of the British Protectorate controlling the region with the demise of the Ottoman Empire. The ruling elites claim their origin from the Arabian Peninsula's Nejd, the centre and northern part of Saudi Arabia where the Wahhabis first came from. However, this connection with Wahhabism is more figurative and constructed enough that the descendants of Mohamed Ibn Abdel-Wahhab have denied or contested this linkage¹⁵. Furthermore, Qatar did not have an indigenous class of *Ulema*. Some scholars argue that this class has a more "secular character more comparable to Turkey than Saudi Arabia".¹⁶ Yet Wahhabism retains a legitimising component seen in the decision to name one of Qatar's biggest mosques after Mohamed Ibn Abdel-Wahab in what was a deeply unpopular move in Saudi Arabia. Indeed, descendants of Abdel-Wahab living in the Kingdom asked the Qatari emir to change the name of the mosque 'for it does not carry its true Salafi path' shortly before Saudi Arabia regime severed ties with Qatar in June 2017.¹⁷

Islamism: Qatar's Bulwark to Saudi Wahhabism?

¹⁴ Baskan, Birol and Wright, , "Seeds of Change", p. 99.

¹⁵ No Author, "The Descendants of Saudi Wahhabism Founder Distance Themselves From Qatar", *Reuters* (May 28, 2017), [Qatarhttps://www.reuters.com/article/gulf-qatar-idUSL8N1IU0AH](https://www.reuters.com/article/gulf-qatar-idUSL8N1IU0AH).

¹⁶ Baskan, Birol and Wright, , "Seeds of Change", p. 96.

¹⁷ No Author, "The Descendants of Saudi Wahhabism", *Reuters*.

The Qatari regime addressed the absence of an indigenous class of the Saudi-styled *Ulema* through developing relations with prominent foreign scholars, creating a system where power is fully controlled especially as those non-Qatari scholars would be always “reliant on the state not only for employment but also to remain in the country.”¹⁸ One of these scholars is Yusuf al-Qaradawi, a senior ideologue of the Muslim Brotherhood. The Qatari officials directly frame al-Qaradawi, an Egyptian but naturalised in Qatar, as a bulwark to Saudi Arabia’s Wahhabi scholars. Indeed, the former Qatari justice minister and prominent lawyer Najeeb al Nauimi argued that “Saudi Arabia has Mecca and Medina. We have al-Qaradawi”.¹⁹

Much like his counterparts in Saudi Arabia, al-Qaradawi advocated a staunchly anti-Shi’a position. In 2013, he issued a *fatwa* calling on “every Sunni Muslim with any military training to go and fight Shiites and Alawites in Syria”. He also declared that Alawites – the branch of Shia Islam followed by the Assad regime – were even “more infidel” than Jews.²⁰ Yet where Saudi and Qatari clerics have historically differed concerns Sunni Islamist movements. While Qatar has long possessed positive relations with the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas, for elites in Saudi Arabia, the Islamist groups with a political focus – defined broadly – are viewed as a serious threat to the Al Saud. Qatari support for such groups was then taken as a serious challenge to Saudi Arabia’s vision of regional order.

Qatar’s sponsorship of the Muslim Brotherhood goes beyond al-Qaradawi as evidenced in the Arab Uprisings unfolding in the region in 2011. In Egypt, during the presidency of Muslim Brotherhood candidate Mohammad Morsi in 2012-2013, Qatar provided financial

¹⁸ Freer, Courtney, “Mapping Religious Authority in Wahhabi States”, p. 4

¹⁹ Quoted by Dorsey, James M. “Wahhabism vs. Wahhabism: Qatar Challenges Saudi Arabia,” <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2305485>. (July 2013).

²⁰ Schenker, David, “Qaradawi and the Struggle for Sunni Islam,” October 16, 2013, *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/qaradawi-and-struggle-sunni-islam>

aid in the region of \$7.5 billion. After the coup that led to the removal of Morsi in Egypt in 2013, and which was supported by Saudi Arabia and the UAE and opposed by Qatar, Doha continued to support the Brotherhood.²¹ *The Washington Post* reported in November 2013 that a Muslim Brotherhood leadership in exile “starting to take shape here among the shimmering high-rises of Doha.”²² The support also includes media as *Aljazeera* provided a platform and accommodation for several Brotherhood exiles. As one journalist observed, “it is in those suites and hotel lobbies that the future of Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood and, more broadly, the strategy and ideology of political Islam in the country may well be charted.”²³ Saudi Arabia scrutinized this support and moved into the other side such as provide around \$8 billion in aid to his successor Abdel Fatah Al Sisi.²⁴

In Syria, the earlier years of the conflict witnessed what could be a coordinated division between a Qatari sphere of influence on the northern border with Turkey and a Saudi sphere on the southern, Jordanian border.²⁵ The coordination was short lived as Qatar expressed its support to Islamist leaders among Syrian political opposition in exile, to the chagrin of the Saudi Arabia. In Mid-March 2013, Riyadh was angered by the appointment by the opposition in mid-March of Ghassan Hitto as the exiles’ prime minister²⁶. He was seen as Qatar’s Islamist candidate. In May of the same year, Qatar gave ground in the political field, accepting finally that the National Coalition should add a non-Islamist bloc backed by Saudi Arabia.²⁷ These additions reflected a Saudi-led attempt to dilute the influence of the (Qatar-backed) Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood in the council by broadening its member-

²¹ No Author, “Egypt Returns \$2 Billion to Qatar In Sign of Growing Tensions,” September 19, 2013, <https://reut.rs/3ik0iBL>.

²² Hauslohner, Abigail, “Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood Finds Havens Abroad,” *Washington Post*, November 6, 2013, <https://wapo.st/3uZROcc>

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ See Phillips, Christopher, *The Battle for Syria: International Rivalry in the New Middle East* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2020).

²⁶ Karouny, Mariam, “Saudi Edges Qatar to Control Syrian Rebel Support,” *Reuters*, 31 May 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/05/31/us-syria-crisis-saudi-insight-idUSBRE94U0ZV20130531>

²⁷ *Ibid.*

ship and composition²⁸. On the ground, as Qatar supported Sunni Islamist militias that are avowedly opposed to the Saudi and Emirati regimes, tensions between Riyadh (and Abu Dhabi) and Doha escalated.²⁹

Central to this disagreement are competing visions of regional order and the role of Islamist movements within domestic and regional politics. For Saudi Arabia, it was concerned that the fall of regimes such as Assad would result in Islamist regimes hostile to the Kingdom. As a source close to the Saudis recently declared, “The [Saudi] royal family looks at the Muslim Brotherhood as hands down the most serious threat to its existence. Its Shia minority doesn’t come even close”³⁰.

For the Saudis, the rise of Islamist movements created opportunities for Doha to carve out an independent role for itself through different alliances and cultivating separate relations with Sunni political Islamists.³¹ Saudi Arabia’s desire for regional leadership based on its claims to Islamic legitimacy is thus threatened with any potential Qatar-Muslim Brotherhood alliance. In the words of Kristian Ulrichsen, Qatar would have two forms of leverage in states in transition following the Arab Uprisings “individual connections through the Doha-based exiles who returned to their countries of origin, and institutional influence as the Muslim Brotherhood emerged as a powerful player in the post-2011 environment.”³² Ultimately, relations between Qatar and Islamist movements posed a serious challenge to the Saudi (and monarchical) led ordering of regional politics, particularly evident in the social capital exerted by groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood.³³

²⁸ Ulrichsen, Kristian C. “Qatar and the Arab Spring”

²⁹ Khatib, Line, “Syria, Saudi Arabia, the U.A.E. and Qatar: The ‘Sectarianization’ of the Syrian Conflict and Undermining of Democratization in The region,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (46:3), 385_403 (398).

³⁰ Baer, Robert, “Why Saudi Arabia is Helping Crush the Muslim Brotherhood”, *New Republic*, 26 August 2013, <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/114468/why-saudi-arabia-helping-crush-muslim-brotherhood>.

³¹ Khatib, Line, “Syria, Saudi Arabia, the U.A.E”, p.397.

³² Ulrichsen, Kristian C. “Qatar and the Arab Spring”

³³ Baer, Robert, “Why Saudi Arabia is Helping”

The (Rogue) Iran Factor

The spectre of the threat posed by the Islamic Republic of Iran continues to loom large over regional developments in the Gulf, including tensions between Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Since the revolution of 1979, political instability across the Gulf has routinely been framed as a consequence of nefarious Iranian interference, perhaps most obviously seen in Bahrain during the early 1980s which created conditions for the ongoing securitization – and later sectarianization – of life in the Gulf. One consequence of this is the rather crude construction of a line drawn between a collection of Arab Sunni states, and Iran and Shi’a communities. Typically the smaller Gulf states, including Qatar and those with Shi’a communities, sided with Saudi Arabia, most obviously seen in the establishment of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Yet the GCC itself was not without tensions, particularly evident in fears about Saudi power over the organisation. As relations between Doha and Riyadh deteriorated, the ability to discursively construct the existence of nefarious relations between Qatar and Iran – states who share the world’s largest natural gas field - provided an easy means through which to exclude Qatar. Beyond Saudi actions, Bahrain also shifted its framing of the Arab Uprisings from a consequence of perfidious Iranian manipulation to a consequence of pernicious Qatari manipulation.³⁴ The ensuing thaw in Qatari-Iranian relations came amidst Doha’s efforts to secure autonomy and security beyond Saudi Arabia. For example, the 2017-2020 tension with Saudi Arabia pushed Doha towards what some called a “temporary marriage of convenience” as part of its mechanisms of deterrence that included more economic

³⁴ See Mabon, Simon, *Houses Built On Sand: Sovereignty, Violence and Revolution in the Middle East* (Manchester:Manchester University Press, 2020), p.53; and Afzal, Muhammed, “The Qatar Blockade Is Over, But Tensions With Bahrain Are Not,” January 31, 2021, *Associated Press*, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/qatar-bahrain-blockade-ends-tensions-remain>

and diplomatic relations.³⁵ As a sign of their developing ties, Qatar restored its ambassador to Iran in 2017. This move came after initially recalling him in 2016 in solidarity with Saudi Arabia whose embassy in Tehran was attacked after the execution of the Shi'a cleric Sheikh Nimr al Nimr who was found guilty of acts of sedition.

Intra-Sunni Sectarianization

Understanding sectarianism as a process of exclusion and of boundary allows for a more nuanced reading of relations between Saudi Arabia and Qatar. From this approach it becomes apparent that both have sought to (re)draw boundaries to create lines of exclusion and differentiation for both domestic and regional audiences, allowing Riyadh and Doha to exert influence – political, material, and ideational – across the region. Fundamentally, the rivalry is a process of boundary making and closing off, differentiating between different actors on the grounds of competing visions of regional order. In the case of Saudi Arabia and Qatar, this closing off process took on existential importance as it related to foreign policy goals – most notably in Syria and Egypt – but also to domestic questions of legitimacy and survival.³⁶ Within this closing off, identities feature in the sectarianization process as they “are mobilized by actors seeking to propagate particular agendas.”³⁷ The Saudi-Qatari rivalry is emblematic of this, with both Riyadh and Doha seeking to shape regional politics in accordance with their own visions of order.

Processes of exclusion and boundary making are evident in rhetoric from political, religious, social and economic elites. The sectarian component features heavily in much of this, evident in *fatwas* from leading Wahhabi figures in both states. For example, the Wah-

³⁵ No Author, “*Iran-Qatar Trade Volume at \$500 M*”, *Fars News Agency*, June 29, 2015, <http://en.farsnews.com/newstext.aspx?nn=13940507001180> .

³⁶ Mabon, Simon, *Houses Built on Sand*, p. 34 & p. 103.

³⁷ Mabon, Simon, “Desectarianization: Looking Beyond the Sectarianization of Middle Eastern Politics,” *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, (17:4, 2019) 23_35 (p. 24).

habi Qatari judge Anwar al-Badawi, considered the “most trusted” religious authority in Qatar, issued a *fatwa* in 2017 charging that the blockade against his country by Saudi Arabia and three other countries went against the Qura’an and violated Sunnah (the sayings of Prophet Muhammad)³⁸. The *fatwa* was a response to another by Saudi Arabia’s Grand Mufti Abdul Aziz bin Abdullah Al-Sheikh, in which the latter declared that the blockade was to the “benefit the Muslims and benefit the future of the Qataris themselves as well”.³⁹

Yet such language is also prevalent across media coverage of developments and the discursive framing of the other. One dominant theme in Qatari media discourse is that Saudi Arabia re-others its relations with states at the expense of its ties with Qatar. While “Riyadh insists on antagonizing and besieging its neighbour and sister Qatar .. it adopts the rights of the Jews and pushes forward the ‘Jews First’ attitude,⁴⁰” reads one article in a Qatari newspaper. The pattern continued across the years of the rift, with the same Qatari newspaper claiming or quoting others as stating that Riyadh and Tel Aviv are getting closer as they share “similar interests.”⁴¹ Part of these interests include “selling highly sophisticated machines by Mossad [The Israeli intelligence] to help the Saudi regime spy on opponents of Saudi Crown Prince Mohamed Ben Salman”⁴².

Qatari newspapers even adopted the same anti-Shia rhetoric which Wahhabism is notoriously known for. The *al-Sharq* newspaper called it “intriguing and contradictory’ that ‘Riyadh closes the doors in the face of Qatar, a sister state, and gets closer to Iran”.⁴³ On the

³⁸ Benallouch, Chaymaa, “Qatar’s Scholar Challenges Saudi Arabia’s Grand Mufti’s Stance on Gulf Crisis,” *Morocco World News*, June 19, 2017, <https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2017/06/220358/qatar-saudi-arabia-grand-muftis-gulf-crisis>

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ No author, “Qatar al-tatbei al-Saudi-al-Israeli yamdi bi-re’yat al-munazama [The Saudi-Israeli normalization train goes on with an organized sponsorship], *al-Sharq*, May 10, 2018, p. 36.

⁴¹ No author, “Khabeer amni Israeli: al-Mossad yataawan ma Abu Dhabi wal Manama [an Israeli security expert: Mossad cooperates with Abu Dhabi and Manama], *al-Sharq*, July 10, 2017, p. 26

⁴² No author, Tel Aviv zawadat al-Saudia bi-agheza mutatawera li-ta’qub muaarediha [Tel Aviv provided Saudi Arabia with sophisticated machines to trace its opponents], *al-Sharq*, 24 December, 2018.

⁴³ No author, al-Riyadh tughliq al-abwab fi wagh al-Doha wa taftaha amama Tehran [Riyadh Closes Doors In the face of Doha and opens it for Tehran], *al-Sharq*, August 14, 2017, p. 38

opposite, Saudi newspapers of “breaking away from the Arab Gulf consensus” by building “solid and strong relations with Israel”, adopting “Satanic diplomatic plans to befriend everyone in order to increase its regional status and influence”.⁴⁴ Accusations were also made against Qatar and Israel for financing the Renaissance Ethiopian Dam threatening the access of Egypt, another country which allied with Saudi Arabia in its dispute, to its share of the River Nile’s waters.⁴⁵ In other words, both Saudi and Qatari newspapers have drawn on similar tenets of Wahhabism, i.e. the ones appertaining to antagonistic relations with categories such as Jews or Israel as well as Shia or Iran, in order to deliberately re-draw the boundaries between them and all associated meanings of othering.

Conclusion

This politically charged intra-Sunni rivalry has wide ranging repercussions for regional politics. While initially viewed as a rivalry over the role of Iran in regional politics, the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Qatar is perhaps better understood as a consequence of competing visions of regional order and the role of Islam within political life. Intra-Sunni sectarianism can take on antagonistic forms, based on the exploitation of particular communities imbued with meaning shaped by local context. Such developments have allowed Riyadh and Doha to cultivate relations with a range of groups across the region, using material and ideological resources in pursuit of this goal.

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⁴⁵ Imran, Safwat, “Qalaq Misri min sad al-nahda al-Ethiopi wa intehamat li-Qatar wa Israel bil-tamweel [Egyptian Concern over the Renaissance Dam and Accusations for Qatar and Israel of Financing it’, November 23, 2017, *al-Watan*, <https://www.alwatan.com.sa/article/35980>.

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