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Diploma thesis project

What could De Gaulle teach Qatar? A comparative analysis of the struggle for greater autonomy in Intra-Alliances



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## The Problem

Long before the Qatar crisis in 2017, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) has experienced tense competition within member states for greater intra-alliance autonomy. In this regard, "Qatar appears almost to enjoy annoying the United States and provoking the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) while pursuing a conciliatory policy towards Iran to maximize autonomy" (Hinderson, 2014). Doha's behavior to act beyond the GCC security strategy has largely contradicted the principles and conditions under which the GCC was founded upon, most notably the Iranian threat following Ayatollah Khamenei's revolution in 1979 (Legrenzi, 2011). By doing that, Qatar partially denied its alliance commitments, undermining regional security and strategic interests of its Gulf counterparts but also the GCC's unity while maintaining membership hitherto. In fact, the soft power that Qatar has utilized cannot be neglected. For instance, in the post of the soft coup 1995, the country decision-makers step forward to make new strategies. The establishment of the *Aljazeera* channel had a massive influence over Arabs countries. In the words of the political Scientist and Associate Professor at United Arab Emirates University, Antwi-Boateng (2013); Qatar grand strategy after 1995 "has given the country unprecedented exposure in the world as Qatar is now synonymous with the famous *Aljazeera* brand, which is now universally recognizable". This tv channel changed the mean of media in the Arabs world from specific national channels that have usually reflected governments' agenda into liberal and free opinion sphere. In contrast, *Aljazeera* took advantage to be the first channel, which represents the voice of all Arabs nations, as a means to influence states' domestic affairs. In this regard, Hussein Amin (2004), Professor of Journalism at the American University in Cairo argued that "Al-Jazeera network, which is based in Qatar, took full advantage of the freedom of expression and direct delivery to Arab viewers, airing outspoken commentary that has angered several Arab governments". Consequently, Aljazeera office was closed in some GCC members, such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, and caused diplomatic crisis with Qatar. The different points of view and the variety of interests played a rule in decreasing the trust between Qatar and some states in the region. The Arab Spring in 2011, however, had a crucial impact on the regional order. For instance, Egypt, Emirates, and Saudi Arabia classified some groups as a terrorist, but Qatar had sheltered them and supported their agenda.

This research tries to explain this puzzle. It investigates the drivers that made the state of Qatar to act outside the strategic security structure of GCC. Drawing on

France's struggle for intra-alliance autonomy within North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in the 1960s, this research argues that one of the reasons that led could have led Qatar to act outside the GCC is greater independence within the GCC.

### **Case Rationale**

There are several reasons for choosing de Gaulle's France and analyze Qatar's foreign behavior as a case study. First, both countries have manifested a significant change in their security strategies since the governments were changed. Consequently, such changes have affected their international and regional commitments. For example, De Gaulle "resented the objective deterioration of France's position within the Atlantic Alliance and the 'subordination' of French leaders to their American counterparts" (Martin, 2011). So, when he returned to the power he intended to make France independent and robust in international affairs "with a clear political philosophy that shaped his approach to the world stage". Indeed, "since NATO was the main locus of the Western Alliance, it made sense that de Gaulle would view it as a major stage to demonstrate his country's independence and ability to stand up to the US" (Martin, 2011). Similar to France, when the leadership in Qatar changed 1995, the country's policy moved to different paths. In other words, the change of leaderships caused a change of strategy outlook of the country. For instance, since "assuming power from his father in a peaceful palace coup in June 1995, Qatar Amir, Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, has taken several steps that indicate his commitment to political and economic modernization" (Canfield, 2001). Most importantly, he sought for more independence within the GCC. Therefore, it began to endorse security cases that are against the core strategy of the GCC. The Iranian nuclear program, which deemed to be at the heart of GCC security strategy, while the GCC members condemned the program deal with 5+1 countries, Qatar openly, and surprisingly, endorsed "Iran's right to nuclear technology" (Ehteshami, Quilliam and Bahgat, 2017). Such an act goes against the spirit of the creating of GCC, which was established primarily to counter the Iranian influence in the region following the eruption of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988).

Secondly, both France and Qatar faced multilateral collective defense arrangements - Qatar in the form of the GCC and France in NATO. Both also found themselves at odds with the organizations' main strategic aims, namely the deterrence of the USSR and Iran, respectively. Moreover, "De Gaulle's philosophy of history pushed him to believe in 'Russia' and to call for dialogue many times

during his career" (Martin, 2011). In the case of Qatar, it began to perceive Iran less of threat and even potentially, "a useful security partner" (Ehteshami, Quilliam and Bahgat, 2017). Comparing with Qatar neighboring countries, Iran has no interest in intervening in latter domestic affairs, and arguably is not attractive to the Iranian government. While in the case of KSA, the country has two biggest and holiest Islamic sites, and a Shia minority, which, arguably, could attract Iran to export its revolution to inside the Kingdom. In regards to UAE, Iran had long rivalry with the country since the occupation of three Island (Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb and Abu Musa) in 1970.

By examining De Gaul initiatives towards the Soviet Union in mid-1960, he felt less threat from communist danger. In some cases, he stood with Soviet Union against the United States in the Vietnam war, and supported the soviet position against the nuclear program of West Germany (Martin 2011). Therefore, the French president's behavior was a clear evidence of the rapprochement between French and the Soviet Union. At the same time, such rapprochement sparked a disagreement inside NATO. Martin (2011) argues that France withdrew from NATO first "to reassert their independence and national identity", and second, to decrease the tensions between Eastern and Western Bloc, something that President De Gaul wanted to do.

## **Research Questions**

*The primary question of this research is what could De Gaulle teach Qatar to re-cultivate strong relations within member states of the GCC to deter Iranian threat and enhance regional security?*

To answer this question, there are three secondary questions, as follow:

*What are the implications of the rift in the GCC on Iran's role and Gulf Security?*

*To what extent and in what way does Qatar play a role in enhancing its relations with Iran vis-à-vis the strategic objectives of the GCC since its establishment?*

*What are the critical lessons that de Gaulle could teach Qatar in its pursuit of intra-alliance autonomy?*

## **Literature review**

### ***Alliances and statecraft***

"Alliances can be defined as formal associations of states bound by the mutual commitment to use military force against non-member states to defend members states' integrity" (Reiter and Gärtner, 2000). They "are a critical tool in international politics" (Morrow, 1991). To deter any threat, a small state is seeking a strong alliance that commitment will ensure peace and stability. According to (Reiter and Gärtner, 2000), "alliances will not survive without threat." He adds, "small states join an alliance because they take refuge in alliances to be safe from the big state." Since small states seeking security by joining an alliance, it challenged by intra-alliance power. The disputes among alliance members can be caused by many reasons. These disputes will appear on the surface during their establishment or afterward. Interestingly, small states challenged by dominant states that influence other states' decisions inside the organization. Noticeably, the massive military power country which considers a super-power in an alliance has seen as superiority in alliance (e.g., the United States in NATO and Saudi Arabia in GCC).

### *Qatar and France in an alliance*

When Charles de Gaulle withdrew France from NATO's military structures, he aimed to make the country strong and free of any foreign dictations. Thus, "in 1966, he withdraws France from all of NATO's integrated commands and asked U.S. troops to leave France" (Bindi, 2019). Before De Gaulle decided to step forward into withdrawal, he felt in many cases that the United States was abandoned and not cooperated. (Gregory, 2000) Said, "the overriding issue is that of the dominance of the United States both politically and in the organization, command, and operation of NATO." For example, "French president Charles de Gaulle still resented what he saw as the United States' abandonment during the 1956 Suez Crisis" (Blakemore, 2018). Decades later, France started a move toward NATO by participating in NATO's initiatives to deploy military forces (e.g., in 1995 France deployed soldiers under NATO command), these initiatives followed by "Nicolas Sarkozy formally announced in March 2009 that his country would return to the integrated military command of NATO" (Fortmann, Haglund, and von Hlatky, 2010).

By understanding the risk of the new regime in Iran, Gulf countries were seeking strong alliances to secure their interests and sovereignty. Iranian 1979 revolution was not just a strategic or geopolitical issue that threatened Gulf countries but an actual source of violent clashes in the region (e.g., the Iraq-Iran war). Since the establishment of GCC, there was much crisis inside the organization. Sometimes the disputes were kept behind closed doors, but day by day, some issues arise on the surface — most of the disagreement caused by border disputes. "Despite strong interests in cooperation, the GCC states often require a crisis to break through the barrier of sovereignty sensitivities (Martini et al., 2016).

Qatar has faced a massive struggle to gain intra-alliance autonomy in the Gulf Cooperation Council. The pursuit of intra-alliance autonomy is evident in its efforts to interfere with major conflicts in the region, which in some cases, impact GCC members. The role of Qatar in Libya before and after overthrow Al Gaddafi is a piece of evidence. However, the study by Dorsey (2015) found that Qatar's efforts in the Middle East are not entirely objective. The study discusses that the struggle to attain intra-alliance autonomy is hindered by other factors and desires. It provides crucial information about the role of Qatar in the Middle East, specifically in the issues that impact GCC member's interests.

## **Methodology**

This methodology of this study is qualitative. The use of such methods of research will help to gain qualitative insights into previous findings and explanations about aspects which define the politics of Qatar in the Middle East. Moreover, the explanation will use as the basis of the comparison process with the strategies of de Gaulle in the (NATO) Alliance after World War II. Based on the topic of this study, which also examines the consequences of rifts in two organizations, NATO and GCC, (Pierce, 2008) argues that “comparative politics tend to use the comparative methods.” This comparison will be adopted from primary and secondary data. A combination of the two sources of data will be crucial for the study findings.

Primary data will be obtained from the qualitative interviews with experts, and political elites from the middle east region, political elites provide a significant source of information in Politics research. These interviews will do via Email, Skype, and phone calls. The secondary data will be derived from the literature review by following the classic process, data collection, and data analysis. The data will be collected from the book, WikiLeaks’s, official statements, newspaper archives, online interviews, policy papers, and academic research. “academic journal is likely to be greater quality and authority” (Pierce ,2008). In order to enrich the analysis, this research will examine some geopolitical issues in both Europe and the Middle East regions, “qualitative researchers match background understandings of concepts with fine-grained evidence from cases” (Adcock & Collier, 2001; Ragin, 1987; Mahoney,2007).

## **Chapterization**

This project will be structured in five sections:

<b>Chapter I</b>	<b>Introduction including theory and methodology.</b>
<b>Chapter II</b>	<b>Rifts in NATO and GCC and their consequences to regional security.</b>
<b>Chapter III</b>	<b>Qatar's grand strategy in post-Arab uprisings.</b>
<b>Chapter IV</b>	<b>Future prospects of Qatar in the GCC.</b>
<b>Chapter</b>	<b>Conclusion.</b>

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