

Chapter 9

A New Chapter in Gulf Cooperation: Saudi Arabia's Role in Reconciling Bahrain and Qatar

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the reconciliation signs between Bahrain and Qatar, focusing on Saudi Arabia's mediating role. The February meeting of their foreign ministers at the Gulf Cooperation Council in Riyadh marks a critical step towards mending their long-standing feud. The study looks into the causes behind the rapprochement, such as regional political shifts, economic ties, and international influences, and discusses the hurdles still facing this process, including unresolved territorial and ideological disputes. It concludes that Bahrain and Qatar's reconciliation could significantly contribute to the Gulf and the Middle East's stability and cooperation.

INTRODUCTION

The Gulf region, also known as the Arabian Gulf or the Persian Gulf, is a critical geopolitical area that has been shaped by historical, cultural, economic, and political forces. The region includes countries such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, and Kuwait, which are known for their vast oil

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and gas reserves (Gough & Stallman, 2004). The region's importance to the global economy stems from its significant energy resources, which have made it a major player in the global energy market.

In 1981, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) was formed as a political and economic union of six Gulf countries: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE (Ibid). The GCC's primary objectives are to promote economic cooperation, political coordination, and security integration among its members. The GCC also aims to strengthen their position in the global economy and to enhance their collective defense capabilities (Legrenzi, 2016).

The Gulf region has been the site of various conflicts and tensions, both within and outside of the GCC. The region's strategic importance has made it a target for outside interference, including regional and global powers, seeking to influence the region's political and economic affairs (Christie, 2019). Moreover, internal tensions and rivalries within the GCC and between the GCC and other regional actors have shaped the region's political and economic landscape.

The Gulf region's importance for global energy markets cannot be overstated. The region holds the majority of the world's proven oil reserves and has become a crucial player in the global energy market. The Gulf states have played a significant role in shaping global energy policies, including through the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) (Askari & Dastmaltschi, 2019). The region's energy resources have fueled its economic growth, made it a major trading partner with other countries, and shaped its geopolitical influence in the world.

In this context, the recent signs of reconciliation between Bahrain and Qatar, two neighboring GCC members, have significant implications for the Gulf region and the broader Middle East (Alkhazen, 2023). The role played by Saudi Arabia in bringing the two countries together, as well as the factors that led to this development, are critical to understanding the prospects for greater cooperation and stability in the region.

Bahrain and Qatar have had a long-standing feud that has been fueled by a range of political, economic, and social factors. The tensions between the two countries stem from territorial disputes, ideological differences, and political rivalries that have been shaped by historical events and regional dynamics. The origins of the feud can be traced back to the early 20th century, when the two countries were British protectorates (AlShehabi, 2017).

One of the main causes of the feud between Bahrain and Qatar is the territorial dispute over the Hawar Islands and the adjacent maritime areas (Askari, 2013). Both countries claim sovereignty over the islands, which are strategically located in the Gulf region and are rich in oil and gas reserves. The dispute has resulted in several diplomatic spats and military confrontations over the years and has been a major source of tension between the two countries (Dehnavi & Rahiminejad, 2021).

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