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Trump's Qatar Crisis

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Tiny Qatar, the mouse that roared, has now managed to enrage the larger part of the Arab world and defy the newly-minted Mideast expert, Donald Trump.

This month, an angry alliance of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt, with some background support from the puppet regimes of war-torn Libya and Yemen, declared an embargo of Qatar for 'supporting terrorism.' They immediately cut off food and goods deliveries to the sandy peninsula on which Qatar sits, boycotted its oil and gas exports, and denied their airspace to Qatar's airline. There is talk of a US and Arab coup aimed at 'regime change' in Qatar.

Veteran Mideast-watchers are used to endless spats between the region's Arab rulers, but this one was a big deal. It seems that Trump, who recently visited Saudi Arabia, had orchestrated the boycott and isolation of Qatar to show its upstart rulers who was boss. Moreover, his pro-Israeli advisors devised the plan and Trump backed it publicly.

Here was another example of a US leader, with only comic book knowledge of the region, mucking things up royally. The 'terrorists' Qatar is accused of supporting were the Muslim

Brotherhood, a venerable, moderate movement dedicated to welfare and education. After the Muslim Brotherhood won a democratic election in Egypt, the Saudis and Israel colluded to overthrow it. The result was the US-backed ruthless military dictatorship of ‘Field Marshall’ al-Sisi, which has killed, jailed, and tortured thousands of opponents.

Trump apparently green-lighted the siege of Qatar because it owns the outspoken al-Jazeera TV network, the only really outspoken media group outside of Israel, which the prickly Egyptians and Saudis hate with a burning passion. Qatar’s ruler, Sheik Hamid al-Thani, has been the principal supporter of the besieged Palestinians in Gaza and their political arm, Hamas, which is branded “terrorists’ by the US and Israel.

Qatar has long been friendly with the Afghan resistance movement Taliban, which is also branded ‘terrorists’ by its foes. By contrast, Qatar has been an important backer of Syria’s anti-Assad rebels – who are also supported by the US, Britain, France and Turkey.

While Trump of Arabia was blasting the Qataris as ‘terrorists,’ a word of no meaning whatsoever but beloved of propagandists, the Pentagon’s top brass were tearing their hair out. Qatar just put in a \$12 billion order for US F-15 jets, keeping its production lines, that were slated to be scrapped, open and running, creating 60,000 American jobs.

Qatar is home to one of the largest and most important US military bases in the Mideast, al-Udaid, where 10,000 US servicemen are stationed. US warplanes from Udaid fly missions against ISIS insurgents, into Afghanistan, and to Libya. Only the US base at Incerlik, Turkey, rivals al-Udaid. Udaid played a key role in the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. France also runs air operations out of al-Udaid and a base in Abu Dhabi.

Qatar has only 313,000 native-born citizens. Expats comprise 2.3 million. Residents of Qatar joke that it’s the best-run Indian city in Asia.

Indeed, Indians keep the city operating and provide much of its technical cadres. As in all the Gulf States, known to their former British rulers as ‘Trucial States,’ armies of pitifully-paid coolies from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh do the grunt work and are treated as virtual slaves. Still, Qatar enjoys the world’s highest per capita income. It’s a worthy example of how to put oil money to work properly. When I was a columnist for its leading newspaper, I always marveled at the order and discipline of the kingdom as compared to its neighbors.

Here in a nutshell is what’s happening. Qatar has been the most progressive, modern-thinking Gulf state. Its rulers, the al-Thani family, have tried to support moderate, progressive movements in the Arab world and Afghanistan with money and media support.

Qatar’s efforts at modernizing are being met with furious opposition by the leaders of Mideast reaction – feudal kingdom Saudi Arabia, military dictatorship Egypt and their feudal satraps in the UAE and Bahrain. Trump’s green-lighting this foolish venture shows how poorly informed and dunderheaded he is. The other Gulf States should grow up and stop acting like feuding Bedouins.

Interestingly, Turkey, an old friend of Qatar, just announced more of its troops will go to the sheikdom, where Ankara has a small base. The other war-like actors in this tempest in a teapot will think twice before defying the Turks who have NATO's second biggest army.