

# Monthly Monitor Report

## August 2015



## Gulf State Analytics Monthly Monitor

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>QATAR'S ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION AND THE WORLD CUP</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>DECENTRALIZING PEACE IN YEMEN</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>WHERE DOES OMAN AND IRAN'S PIPELINE LEAVE SAUDI ARABIA?</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>BAHRAIN MONITOR</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>KUWAIT MONITOR</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>OMAN MONITOR</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>QATAR MONITOR</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>SAUDI ARABIA MONITOR</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>UAE MONITOR</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>ENDNOTES</b>	<b>22</b>

## QATAR'S ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION AND THE WORLD CUP

By *Taimur Ali*

Not long ago Qatar was known merely as a micro-state in the Middle East. Despite the Persian Gulf emirate's carbon reserves, Qatar was largely under the shadow of its more powerful neighbors. Yet, in December 2010 Doha secured the bid to host the FIFA World Cup 2022, bringing the tiny Gulf Arab nation into the international spotlight and causing a surge in global media attention, particularly on social media.<sup>1</sup>

Qatar, with the world's highest GDP per capita, has seen tremendous prosperity in recent years. Many have simply attributed the emirate's remarkable economic growth rates to the World Cup, claiming that hosting the event is the principle factor driving Qatar's boom. In light of the ongoing investigation into the World Cup 2018 and 2022 bids and the possibility of Doha being stripped of its right to host the event, Qatar's future has been cast into doubt.<sup>2</sup> However, this narrow view of Qatar's prosperity overlooks Doha's well-devised and multifaceted development strategy that Qatari officials created and began to implement years before the World Cup came into the picture.

According to a report by Deloitte, Qatar is estimated to spend USD 200 billion on the World Cup<sup>3</sup>, a tremendous investment compared to South Africa's USD 4 billion in 2010 and Brazil's USD 15 billion in 2014.<sup>4</sup> A large proportion of this money is being spent on infrastructure development, which serves not only for the event but for the emirate's development in general. Given that these projects are not only centered on the World Cup, there will not be a major setback in terms of spending if Qatar loses the hosting rights. According to a report by the Bank of America Merrill Lynch published in 2014, the estimated cost of losing the World Cup would be USD 16 billion, including lost revenue and cancellation of stadiums and other specific projects.<sup>5</sup> This equates to a loss of 1-1.5 per capita GDP per annum each year until 2022, a figure

that is not drastic given Qatar's average GDP growth rate of 7 percent till 2015.<sup>6</sup> Given the urgency with which Qatar is diversifying its economy—evidenced by recent growth in various sectors such as services, tourism, arts, and culture—these figures highlight how the current FIFA investigation does not pose a substantial threat to the emirate's development.

In 2014, Qatar boasted the highest growth rate in the services sector in the Middle East, with an expected growth rate of 7.8 percent in 2015.<sup>7</sup> This is largely due to the underdeveloped financial sector that is rapidly expanding, given that Qatar is looking to invest its wealth to sustain economic growth while becoming less dependent on hydrocarbon revenues in the future. Also, as Doha challenges Dubai and Manama as a financial hub of the Middle East, a growing number of investment banks, consultancies, and sovereign wealth funds are opening offices in Qatar due to the large returns on offer. This trend is expected to continue as investors are increasingly drawn to Qatar and the emirate seeks to increase its investments abroad, as highlighted by Qatar's acquirement of assets in important cities worldwide such as London and Washington D.C.

A major driving force behind the emirate's development is Doha's aim to establish itself as a popular tourist destination, which is related to Qatar's developments in arts and culture, the hospitality sector, and transportation infrastructure. Exhibitions at the Museum of Islamic Arts (MIA) already draw a lot of international attention, and Qatar Museums (QM) plans to expand its range by opening numerous other museums such as the National Museum and Sports Museum. These initiatives will surely attract tourists to Qatar, particularly given the lack of such projects elsewhere in the region. Performances by world-renowned orchestras, promotion of foreign film, drama, and music are other major sources of attraction, both for tourists and for expats as job opportunities.

Another side of the narrative, which often prevails in the Western media, is that taking away the World Cup will remove the only incentive Qatar has to curb human rights violations. This claim is based on the nu-

merous reports published by various media outlets about the deaths of construction workers, their poor living conditions, and the lack of free media to address such issues.<sup>8</sup> Qatari officials have released statements countering these accusations, questioning the validity of the statistics presented, and maintaining that the Gulf nation is pursuing meaningful efforts to improve the situation.

Undoubtedly, drastic reform is necessary in terms of labor rights, the *kafala* (sponsorship) system, improving corporate accountability, and speeding up the judicial process. Although these reforms are being gradually implemented, the motive is not the 2022 World Cup, but rather Qatar's image as a tourist, financial, and cultural hub. The World Cup has garnered Qatar much negative attention from human rights organizations like Amnesty International, and the emirate has taken the onus upon itself to improve, regardless of the mega event, due to the various other aspirations it has.

If the FIFA investigation leads to Qatar being stripped of the World Cup, both the emirate and the Arab world will suffer a significant loss in the short-run, as will the sport itself. FIFA World Cup 2022 presents an ideal opportunity to truly globalize the sport, promote the game in the Persian Gulf, and create positive publicity for the region. However, the loss will barely go beyond a brief slump in popularity for Qatar, cancellation of a few projects and slowing down of some others. Some analysts even maintain that this would not necessarily constitute a negative development given the risks of the Qatari economy's overexertion.

Regardless of how the FIFA scandal evolves, Qatar's steps to achieve massive development are unlikely to be largely impacted given the emirate's commitment to economic growth and diversification, of which the World Cup is only one tool out of many. Yet, such an outcome of the investigation remains less probable given that since December 2010, the Qataris have displayed their ability and enthusiasm to host the event while dismissing all accusations of corruption as mere fallacies on the part of the media.

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## DECENTRALIZING PEACE IN YEMEN

*By Adam Simpson*

The Yemeni crisis is entering a new phase. A conglomeration of forces ostensibly linked to exiled President Abdorabbo Mansour Hadi has, for now, pushed the Houthi rebels and their allies out of the South. Aided by Saudi airpower and Emirati armored divisions, anti-Houthi cadres are consolidating territory in central Yemen. These forces have announced plans to soon move on Yemen's capital, Sana'a.<sup>9</sup> Hadi's exiled government is already making plans for Yemen's future, with the ousted Yemeni president affirming his intention to impose a federalist model "whether it is wanted or refused."<sup>10,11</sup> Perhaps the most significant outcome of the National Dialogue Conference (NDC) was an understanding that decentralizing Yemen is the only sensible way of maintaining Yemen's broader unity. However, Hadi's tough talk is unproductive. The implementation of decentralization processes requires local support and is often vulnerable to security crises and exploitation by corrupt political actors. Furthermore, such efforts require a confidence in the central government that Hadi fails to inspire.

Despite the deepening divisions across Yemen, virtually all factions have negative views of Hadi. Even among his supposed anti-Houthi allies—the separatist Southern Herak and the Islamist Islah party (Yemen's Muslim Brotherhood branch)—Hadi is viewed with tremendous disdain. Undoubtedly, the Houthis and their allies, cronies of the former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, will act to secure their own interests, as they did in their bungled coup attempt. Yet, regardless of how the Yemeni crisis ends, Hadi's enemies and their constituencies will have to be considered and accommodated in any successful federal project.

Hadi's government has been supported fervently by the Saudis and other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members and quietly by Western powers. His lack of popularity within Yemen, however, is deeply problematic. The Saudi-led international coalition arrayed behind Hadi is unlikely to relinquish its insistence on his leadership. While Hadi's leadership lacks longevity as long as it fails to garner meaningful support on the ground, his initial test of competence will revolve around accessing humanitarian aid that can be distributed robustly and without political conditions or regional favoritism. Whatever political processes Hadi seeks to pursue, the public will remain uninterested in his ideas as long as ten million children remain in dire need of assistance, and famine looms on the horizon.<sup>12,13,14</sup> Yet Hadi's government does not have the resources to meet these needs. Furthermore, aid efforts alone will require an enormous amount of support from the international community that created and sustained the exiled president's war effort. Therefore, the reconstruction of Yemen will require a concomitant herculean effort.<sup>15</sup>

The closest attainable grand bargain to satisfy all of these disparate and aggrieved factions is the already existent outcomes of the NDC, yet championing the NDC alone will not build faith in Hadi. Instead, the government-in-exile should focus on attaining new micro-agreements based on local constituencies, while building the functional power-sharing bodies that can cultivate confidence in its national and subnational efforts. Territorial and political autonomy is necessary for securing participation in the many areas where trust in the central government is at an all-time low.

Loyalty to Hadi remains a farfetched objective. Yet his government is in a position to secure allegiances—however fragile—as a practical interlocutor based on rational self-interest. Saudi Arabia's bombardment and the Houthis' shelling have only resulted in widespread devastation to the war-torn country's infrastructure. Using reconstruction as a carrot for broader participation in Yemen's renewal—an incentive not without controversy—is infinitely more productive than the authoritarian language employed to cow political skeptics. Hadi's tough talk is only threatening if

the leader is given more credit than he is due. Based on his perception across Yemen's political spectrum, however, his talk remains merely unbelievable and serves only to undermine the vital project that the exiled president seeks to undertake.

The gravest challenge facing Hadi's government will be to fill the security vacuums that are emerging amidst the conflict while at the same time building the federal structure. Although al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has agreed to leave Mukalla, it will likely take away money and arms pilfered from the city's banks and military bases.<sup>16</sup> Alongside reports of AQAP fighters buttressing the popular committees, thus forcing the Houthis to retreat, other reports indicate that the terrorist group is digging into neighborhoods in Aden—despite the government's partial denial.<sup>17,18,19</sup>

Beyond AQAP, numerous armed groups have emerged, including the Southern Herak, a formerly non-violent group pushed by the ongoing conflict to take up arms. As Yemen's military is split between Saleh and Hadi loyalists, local insecurity threatens to further balkanize the country. Demobilization of subnational armed groups and militias requires a sense of security among the population. Attempts to forcibly disarm such groups are neither prudent nor possible; thus the government should focus on building and professionalizing community-based security forces that emphasize transparency and consultation. Given the low probability of Yemen achieving any semblance of stability in the near-term, is it critical for such initiatives to be pursued at the local level as the opportunities become available.

Though the enormity of Yemen's turmoil leaves the country at a considerable deficit moving forward, in many ways sectors of the country long beholden to corruption and clientelism now have a clean slate—if not a vacuum—on which to build. Hadi is not the ideal leader to pursue the delicate path of decentralization and federalism, but without serious amendments to the political calculus of his GCC and Western allies that in turn support his exiled government, Hadi's leadership role remains an unfortunate fact, the pitfalls of which must be mollified as much as possible. The risks

of decentralization are high, yet given the alternative of continued internecine conflict and humanitarian disaster, Yemen's unity remains a critical component of stability and renewal.

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## WHERE DOES OMAN AND IRAN'S PIPELINE LEAVE SAUDI ARABIA?

By Akhil Shah

Recent reports suggest that officials in the Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Iran have given the go-ahead for the rumored 173-mile underwater gas pipeline connecting the two nations. As of March 2013, only an "understanding" had been reached. The new reports raise clear implications for the wider Gulf region, particularly Saudi Arabia.

For decades, and especially since the "Arab Spring" uprisings several years ago, Saudi Arabia has attempted to bind its smaller Gulf neighbors in a tight bloc to counter perceived Iranian aggression. On numerous occasions, Riyadh has provided military and economic support for its fellow Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. The Saudis have also pushed for the establishment of a Gulf union comprising the Council's six member states. The kingdom's objective has been to further bind the GCC together in a united political and economic front vis-à-vis Iran.

The Sultanate's foreign partners—particularly the United States—have, until recently, strongly discouraged any relations with Iran. Yet Oman's dealings with Iran have not created major issues in terms of Muscat's alliances with Washington and Riyadh. Following the historic nuclear deal that the P5+1 (the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany) and Iran signed on July 14 in Vienna, however, Saudi Arabia finds itself increasingly threatened—po-

litically, economically, and militarily. Not only does Iran sit on the world's third largest oil reserves, it also presents a genuine challenge to Saudi Arabia's traditional role as the anchor of geopolitical order in the Middle East.<sup>20</sup>

## Iran and Oman: A Marriage of Convenience

According to the *Oil and Gas Journal*, Oman is ranked twenty-third in the world in terms of its oil reserves, but much of that is used for exportation instead of domestic consumption. As far back as 2005, the energy starved Sultanate of Oman agreed to buy gas from Iran, and in 2007 there was a draft deal in place for the Omanis to buy Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) as well. However, due to the complicated relations that Iran had with the West, Muscat came under considerable pressure to find alternative sources of LNG. According to WikiLeaks cables from the U.S. Embassy, Washington tried to convince Oman to purchase LNG from Qatar instead of Iran.<sup>21</sup>

However, with Iran and the P5+1 having approved the nuclear deal, Oman is set to purchase more gas from Iranian producers. In 2007, Oman was one of only three countries that were dealing economically with the Islamic Republic. Before the decision was made to begin to build the pipeline, Oman had already agreed to buy twenty million cubic meters of natural gas per day from Iran. Figures suggest that this amounts to ten billion cubic meters of natural gas each year, for 25 years, in a deal worth USD 60 billion.<sup>22</sup> This figure will increase significantly by around 2018, when the pipeline is expected to be completed. It will stretch the width of the Gulf region at an estimated cost of USD 1 billion.

## Strategic Implications for Saudi Arabia

Currently Saudi Arabia exports roughly USD 1 billion a year to Oman, the majority of which is oil and gas. However, this gas deal with Tehran has Iran replace Saudi Arabia as Oman's main source of LNG. Economically, Oman will gain significantly from the switch to Iranian gas. The pipeline will be a USD 1 billion investment that will come directly from Oman. However, in

return, the Sultanate will receive shares of the revenues made from the sale of gas. While some of the gas Oman receives from Iran will be used for domestic consumption, officials in both Muscat and Tehran have stated that portions of the gas flowing through the pipeline may be sold abroad through a jointly owned Omani-Iranian company to be set up at a later date.

This latter point is potentially the most worrisome from Riyadh's perspective. Over the past year, Saudi Arabia has considerably increased its market share in the oil market, but this has come at a steep price. Oil prices are now below USD 44.2 and 46.65 per barrel (according to both the ICE and NYMEX indices), deepening Saudi Arabia's budget deficit.<sup>23</sup> Iranian oil and gas will soon be sold to a much wider market (the EU has already lifted sanctions on two of Iran's largest oil producers). Not only will this crowd out Saudi market share, but if Iran is able to maintain its relatively cheap prices, it may weaken Saudi dominance as well. This poses a major risk to the kingdom, given its economic dependence on oil. In fact, analysts have predicted that Saudi Arabia will be bankrupt within two years if current market conditions do not change.<sup>24</sup>

A partnership between Muscat and Tehran would be a real blow to the Saudis. Oman is seen as a neutral country not only regionally but also globally. Muscat played a significant role in the lead-up to the P5+1 and Iran nuclear negotiations and consequently continues to gain more respect on the international stage. Oman's deal with Iran (cheap gas and the potential for a lucrative partnership) may incentivize other nations to explore deeper economic relations with the Islamic Republic. Qatar is already rumored to be in discussions with Iran about constructing a pipeline to Doha. In 2014 India was also in negotiations with Iran and Oman about extending the pipeline to the Indian coast. Considering that Saudi Arabia annually exports USD 29.2 billion worth of oil and gas to India, perhaps this is one of the many reasons why officials in Riyadh have voiced grave concerns about the Iranian nuclear deal.<sup>25</sup>

If history is any guide, deeper economic relations between Iran and the smaller GCC states, such as Oman

and Qatar, will affect political matters. Within this context, Saudi Arabia views the Omani-Iranian pipeline with apprehension. As former Major General Anwar Eshki indicated in a speech at the Council for Foreign Relations, Saudi Arabia is worried about Iran's alleged search for regional hegemony, a direct geopolitical challenge to Saudi Arabia's historic role as a dominant power in the Middle East.<sup>26</sup> From the Saudi vantage point, Iran's ability to provide an abundant supply of gas to the smaller Arab monarchies of the Western Persian Gulf provides Tehran with a platform from which the Iranians can project their power up to the very borders of Saudi Arabia.

Since the inception of the Islamic Republic, the Saudis and Iranians have fought constant proxy wars in the region. Differing religious and political outlooks have created tremendous tension between the two sides. If the rumors surrounding Qatar are true, and more countries begin to follow, Saudi Arabia will face intense pressure. Not only will its leadership come under question as a result, but it may face increased proxy fights as Iran seeks to displace it as regional hegemon.

For years, Riyadh has voiced concerns about Iran's alleged efforts to spark a revolution in the oil-rich Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, home to the vast majority of Saudi Arabian Shi'ites. Yet the actual threat that Iran poses to Saudi Arabia relates far more to Riyadh's international status than to any domestic problems. Indeed, if the Islamic Republic can provide more gas and oil to Arab countries and continue to cultivate relations with Oman and other Middle Eastern states, Saudi Arabia may find itself playing a less influential role in the region. As Iran's economy grows and its economic fundamentals strengthen, the country will become an increasingly competitive broker of gas. Saudi Arabia, with its spiraling budget deficit, is not in the same position. If Riyadh fails to implement sound strategies to counter this geopolitical threat, the kingdom may find itself increasingly sidelined.

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## BAHRAIN MONITOR

- Security forces impose blockade on Sitra to subdue the Shi'ite opposition
- Manama accuses Tehran of arming terrorist groups in the island kingdom, arrests number of suspected militants

### August 3

#### Bahrain's cabinet demands justice for perpetrators of July 28 terrorist attack

Bahraini officials demanded that the legal proceedings be finalized to bring to justice the individuals who perpetrated a terrorist attack on July 28, in which two police officers were killed. Prime Minister Prince Khalifa Bin Salman Al Khalifa has designated the perpetrators of the attack as well as the individuals who incited the attack or provided the perpetrators with any form of support or assistance as essential partners in the attack. A member of the cabinet who spoke at the session was quoted as saying "the adoption of unified stances and rallying behind the country's leaders was the best way to fend off sedition and foil the attempts of tendentious sides to subvert the kingdom's security and stability."<sup>27</sup>

### August 5

#### Bahrain security forces enforce blockade on Sitra

For the ninth consecutive day, Bahraini security forces continued to enforce the blockade upon Sitra (a Shi'ite island near Manama, which is considered the heart of the Arab Spring uprising in Bahrain) as the ruling Al Khalifa family has increased its efforts to subdue the opposition. Bahraini security forces are pursuing efforts to thwart protestors from accessing the only causeway connecting the island to the mainland. In addition to blocking the island's bridge, security forces have also, according to local sources, attacked several homes on the island, and have made dozens of arrests.<sup>28</sup>

*Analysis: The ongoing Sitra events are symptomatic of Bahrain's sectarian tensions. GCC interlocutors state that Manama views the uprising and crackdown as being necessitated by the Iranian nuclear deal. Bahraini Shi'ites want to make their voices heard about discrimination while the world's attention is on the nuclear agreement and the ongoing struggle against Daesh ("Islamic State"), which Bahrain's military has joined.*

### August 7

#### U.S. government approves USD 150 million sale of F-16 equipment to Bahrain

Officials in Washington announced the potential sale of USD 150 million in equipment to the Bahraini government for the maintenance of its Lockheed Martin Corporation F-16 jets, despite the efforts of two U.S. senators who brought about legislation to bring back an arms sales ban, which was eradicated by the Obama administration earlier in 2015. The Pentagon's Defense Security Cooperation Agency, which controls all foreign weaponry sales, told lawmakers that Manama requested weaponry valued at approximately USD 150 million. The Defense Security Cooperation Agency stated that the deal was necessary to maintain the operational readiness of Bahrain's aging F-16 fleet, which is currently being utilized in attacks upon Daesh ("Islamic State") forces.<sup>29</sup>

*Analysis: The sale's approval is meant to give Bahrain a boost as a U.S. non-NATO ally at a time when Manama is stepping up its role in the fight against Daesh in Iraq and Syria. The sale, however, is meeting criticism from human rights groups who see the sale as illegitimate because of the ongoing sectarian crackdown against the Shi'ites of Bahrain. Given that the Obama Administration seeks to boost GCC allies' confidence in the wake of the Iranian nuclear deal, Washington is showing its full-fledged support for the Sunni minority government.*



## August 9

### Suspension of *Al Wasat* is lifted

Bahrain's Information Affairs Authority (IAA) lifted its suspension of *Al Wasat*, a Bahraini daily newspaper. The IAA, which had temporarily suspended *Al Wasat* on August 6, said that the decision to suspend the daily was made following "a lengthy process of warnings and meetings between the paper and the regulator failed to resolve the publication's legal and regulatory non-compliance." In a statement carried by the Bahrain News Agency, the IAA stated that "the resumption of the newspaper's operations follows discussions between the IAA and the newspaper's management team to rectify past legal and regulatory failings, and a commitment from the newspaper to meet the necessary standards in the future."<sup>30</sup>

## August 10

### Bahrain accuses Iran of meddling in regional affairs

Bahrain's foreign minister requested that the Islamic Republic of Iran discontinue exacerbating situations throughout the Middle East under the pretext of assisting in the fight against Daesh. Sheikh Khalid Bin Ahmad Al Khalifa attempted to reach out to Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif through Twitter when he wrote, "my brother Javad Zarif, stop exporting the weapons that have caused wars and sedition, and do not use the Daesh argument. We are capable of defeating them." The tweet was a response to a statement made by Zarif in which he reiterated Tehran's "firm decision to continue the development of its defense program as well as its arms aid to those states in the region that are fighting terrorism."

Iranian officials have been quick to credit their work as vital in the protection of countries and capital cities from Daesh and other terrorist organizations. In November 2014, Brigadier General Ismail Qaani, Lieutenant Commander of the Quds Force, stated that Baghdad had been protected from Daesh "thanks to Iran's support and assistance." He went on to say that

Daesh fighters "sought to surround Baghdad but they failed in reaching their ominous goals thanks to Iran's support."<sup>31</sup>

### Greater unity urged by Bahrain's Crown Prince and Prime Minister

Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa met with Prime Minister Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa at Gudaibiya Palace to discuss a range of domestic, regional, and international issues. The two reiterated that "there is no place for extremism in Bahrain," giving credit to the citizens of Bahrain for their tolerance and co-existence, which they said has helped counter extremism. The two leaders also spoke about Manama's resolve to stop all attempts by extremist organizations to divide the Bahraini population or undermine any gains which have been made by the government.<sup>32</sup>

## August 12

### Opposition figure to face trial for incitement against Bahrain's government

Bahrain's state-run news outlet, *BNA*, reported that an opposition figure previously released from jail upon a royal pardon faces new charges for "threats and [for] inciting hatred against the political regime." *BNA* did not identify the individual. Yet Bahrain's *Akhbar al-Khaleej* and *al-Wasat* newspapers referenced Ibrahim Sharif, the former head of the secular National Democratic Action Society.<sup>33</sup>

## August 13

### Bahrain's Interior Ministry confirms arrest of five suspects in attack

Bahrain's Interior Ministry confirmed that five individuals suspected of participating in a deadly bomb attack have been detained. Officials in Manama have also identified two more suspects and three others who allegedly received financial support and training from Tehran and from Hezbollah's Iraq branch. The attack, which occurred in Sitra on July 28, killed two

police officers and injured six additional individuals. Chief of Police, Major-General Tariq Al Hassan, stated, "Police investigations have found that those arrested had connections to the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, as well as Hezbollah, and have been linked to a number of terrorist incidents in Bahrain over recent years."<sup>34</sup>

## August 14

### Bahraini police patrol attacked near capital

Bahrain's Interior Ministry reported that Bahraini police forces had been attacked near Manama. Sources stated that police forces were sent to a village near Manama after a youth organization, "February 14 Coalition," called for Bahrainis to engage in anti-government protests. In response to the attack, Bahrain's interior ministry tweeted, "police patrol gutted in an attack by rioters with Molotov cocktails while police were securing a mosque in Sanad" and also "no injuries reported."<sup>35</sup>

## August 18

### Bahrainis demonstrate, demanding release of political activists

Large numbers of Bahraini citizens took to the streets to voice their demands for political reforms and the release of all political prisoners in the island kingdom. Bahraini security forces reportedly fired tear gas at anti-regime protestors in the village of Ma'ameer. Security forces have implemented a large-scale crackdown following a July bombing that killed two police officers, seriously injured a third, and caused moderate injuries to five others.<sup>36</sup>

### Bahrain's Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemns Bangkok bombings

Bahrain's Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement strongly condemning an attack in Bangkok that killed and injured dozens. "The ministry expresses condolences to the bereaved families and to the people and Government of Thailand, and wishes a quick recov-

ery for those injured as a result of these inhumane actions that never respect the value of human life... The Ministry of Foreign Affairs stresses the Kingdom's support to the Kingdom of Thailand in its efforts in consolidating the security and safety of citizens, residents, and visitors, as well as the development and progress across the country. The ministry reiterates Bahrain's firm stance that denounces any act against innocent people or leads to destabilization of security and stability of any state or harms its economy."<sup>37</sup>

## August 20

### Bahraini King appoints four new ambassadors

King Hamad appointed new Bahraini ambassadors, including one female ambassador, to four nations: Shaiikh Fawaz Bin Mohammad Al Khalifa was appointed to serve as the Head of the Bahraini Diplomatic Mission to the United Kingdom; Dr. Mohammad Abdul Ghaffar Abdullah to France; Dr. Bahia Jawad Al Jishi to Belgium; and Ahmad Abdul Rahman Al Saati to the Russian Federation.<sup>38</sup>

### Manama strongly condemns jihadist attack in Egyptian capital

Bahrain's Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemned a car bomb blast in Egypt which targeted a national security building in the Shubra district of Cairo. Daesh ("Islamic State") later took responsibility for the terrorist attack, which resulted in six injuries. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs went on to say that Bahrain supports the Egyptian government's actions to safeguard the security of those living in Egypt, the protection of all Egyptian institutions, and conveyed its appreciation of the Egyptian government's relentless efforts in achieving its aspirations for continued prosperity.<sup>39</sup>

## August 23

### Former member of Bahraini Parliament facing charges of financing militants

Bahrain's state-run news agency, *BNA*, reports that Bahraini officials have detained a former member of

parliament, charging him with having financed militant forces. The state news agency did not provide the suspect's name but quoted the director of criminal investigations, saying that the suspect was detained on August 18 upon his return from a trip to collect funds in Iran. Al-Wefaq (Bahrain's dominant Shi'ite opposition faction) stated that it had not been in contact with one of its top officials, Sheikh Hassan Issa, since his arrest on August 18, but stopped short of confirming that he was the suspect mentioned in the report.<sup>40</sup>

### **Bahraini opposition figure pleads not guilty to new charges**

Judicial sources in Manama announced that a prominent Sunni opposition figure has pleaded not guilty at the outset of his latest trial for "promoting political change through forceful means." Ebrahim Sharif, who headed the Wa'ad political society, was released from jail on June 19, having been detained for four years for his role in the 2011 Shi'ite-led protests against the ruling monarchy. Following his release, Sharif was arrested three weeks later on charges of promoting "violent disorder" in a "direct attempt to undermine stability in the kingdom and overthrow the regime." Addressing the Higher Criminal Court, Ebrahim Sharif told officials that the charges he faces are based upon "assumptions" and not facts.<sup>41</sup>

## **August 24**

### **Bahrain accuses Iran of promoting sectarian division**

Bahrain's Minister of the Interior, Shaikh Rashid Bin Abdullah Al Khalifa, declared that "with regards to Iranian interference in our internal affairs, if the alleged reason is that Iran cares about the situation of Shi'ites in Bahrain, this is an unacceptable sectarian excuse." The Minister continued, "Bahrainis are all equal under the constitution and the law. We do not

have second-class citizens. The Shi'ites of Bahrain feel that they are second class only when they are in Iran, especially if they are of Arab origin." Shaikh Rashid addressed the issue of foreigners meddling in Bahrain's domestic affairs. "We need to contain everything that could lead to divisions and hatred within our nation. We need to adopt a patriotic approach that celebrates our national identity and reinforces the values of tolerance and acceptance of others, so that everyone emerges a winner."<sup>42</sup>

## **August 25**

### **Human Rights Watch: Trial of Bahraini opposition figure significantly unfair**

Human Rights Watch has released a statement accusing Bahrain of carrying out an unfair trial in which a top Bahraini opposition figure faces a four-year prison sentence based upon speech-related charges. Human Rights Watch officials are demanding that Bahraini authorities vacate Sheikh Ali Salman's conviction, which violates the right to freedom of expression, and are calling for his immediate release.

Human Rights Watch officials have reviewed trial documents that demonstrate the judge's refusal to allow Sheikh Salman's lawyers to present potentially exculpatory evidence, including recordings of the speeches for which he has been imprisoned, on grounds that "the intent of them is to raise doubts about the substantiating evidence that has persuaded the court." The Middle East director for Human Rights Watch, Sarah Leah Whitson, stated that "the court's refusal to consider crucial defense evidence confirms the political nature of Sheikh Ali Salman's prosecution" and "the manifest unfairness of the trial means the authorities should release Salman immediately."<sup>43</sup>

## KUWAIT MONITOR

- Main suspect in the June 26 attack admits Daesh (“Islamic State”) affiliation
- Interior Ministry breaks up a three person “terrorist cell” situated near the Iraqi border
- Tensions flare between Kuwaiti and Saudi authorities over Khafji oilfield

### August 2

#### Saudi Defense Minister threatens to attack Kuwait

Saudi Defense Minister Mohammad bin Salman threatened to attack Kuwait as tension stemming from the Khafji oilfield has increased. Middle-East Panorama quoted intelligence officials as saying, “Mohammad bin Salman threatened that his country would attack and occupy Kuwait, claiming that not only Khafji oilfield but also entire Kuwait is part of the Saudi territories based on historical documents.” Kuwaiti officials have expressed that the continued halt in operations in the Khafji oilfield, which it shares with Saudi Arabia, will bring about large losses, which Kuwait expects the Saudis to compensate for at a later date. Kuwaiti Oil Minister Ali Al Omair told Saudi officials that they must “take adequate measures to resume production at Khafji.”<sup>44</sup>

*Analysis: This report is from the Iranian press, which, on a regular basis, sends out dispatches about problems within the Saudi Arabia and Riyadh’s relations with its GCC allies. Therefore, the info war angle must be taken into consideration. However, there is always some truth to the Iranian reports. Indeed, there are political problems between Saudi Arabia and Kuwait regarding the Khafji oilfield. Saudi Defense Minister Mohammed bin Salman is likely threatening Kuwait with the Iranian press amplifying the message into a negative assertion.*

### August 4

#### Main suspect in Kuwait mosque attack admits Daesh (“Islamic State”) ties

Abdul Rahman Sabah Saud—the main suspect in the June 26 attack in Kuwait City—confessed in court to having ties with Daesh. The suspect confessed to joining Daesh one day prior to the June 26 suicide attack, which resulted in 26 deaths. Saud, who has admitted that he drove Saudi bomber Fahad Al Qaba’a to the mosque in Kuwait City, was detained two days after the attack in a hiding spot, which was owned by two other suspects in the attack. He also confessed that he transported an icebox, which contained the explosives belt used in the attack. Two Saudi nationals, who have since been detained for their roles in the attack, delivered the icebox to Saud.<sup>45</sup>

*Analysis: Daesh’s ability to function throughout the GCC makes this unfolding story interesting. Daesh was able to not only recruit the attacker in one GCC state (Saudi Arabia), but also shuttle that operative to the target state (Kuwait) with handlers on the ground. According to GCC sources, Daesh supporters in Kuwait are much larger in number than previously thought, with a wide array of the group’s social media users reporting every movement of security, police, and also, US ARCENT forces and personnel.*

#### Kuwaiti Minister downplays differences with Saudi Arabia regarding shared oilfields

In a move to downplay current tension between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia over their sharing of oilfields, Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al Sabah spoke of the two Gulf Arab kingdoms’ strong historical connection.

Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah conveyed that Kuwait’s current differences with Saudi Arabia regarding the shared oilfields of Al-Khafji and Al-Wafra are simply “technical” and will be taken care of quickly to best serve the greater good of each country. He stressed that Saudi Arabia serves as the historical and strategic depth of Kuwait, ruling out any potential disturbanc-

es to bilateral relations. Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah stressed the long-lasting social, cultural, economic, and political ties between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.<sup>46</sup>

## August 5

### Kuwaiti Al Ahli Bank to take over Piraeus Bank's Egyptian division

Kuwait's Al Ahli Bank received the needed approval from Egypt's central bank to take over 98.5 percent of Piraeus Bank's Egyptian branch. Al Ahli Bank officials stated that the decision to purchase the Egyptian branch was reached the previous day in an assembly, yet the bank continues to wait on the final approval from the Egyptian Financial Supervisory Authority. Ahli Bank received the approval from the Kuwaiti Central Bank the previous month to move forward in its purchase of the Egyptian branch.<sup>47</sup>

## August 6

### Kuwait denies banning Saudi newspaper

Kuwait's information ministry denied reports claiming that the ministry banned the Saudi-owned *Al Hayat* newspaper. According to Shamekh Al Rasheedi, head of public relations and media for Kuwait's information ministry, "the reports that have been circulated on Kuwait imposing a ban on *Al Hayat* are not true and lacked credibility." Reports have circulated both online and in non-Kuwaiti publications that claim Kuwait banned the Saudi-owned newspaper following its reporting on and columns pertaining to the current oil crisis between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. The reports say that the Saudi newspaper was banned largely over an opinion piece written by Saudi commentator Dawood Al Sharyan.<sup>48</sup>

### Kuwait court frees 11 suspects in June 26 mosque attack

A Kuwaiti court freed eleven suspects in the June 26 attack on a Shiite mosque while the main suspect in the attack told the court that he had been told that worshippers would not be harmed in the attack. A

travel ban does remain in place for the eleven freed suspects, including two women. The main suspect in the attack, Abdulrahman Sabah Saud, renewed his confession during the second trial, saying that he was responsible for transporting the Saudi suicide bomber to the Kuwait City mosque which was attacked. However, he insisted that the bomber, Fahad al-Qaba'a, told him that the mosque would be blown up only after all worshippers had exited.<sup>49</sup>

## August 9

### Kuwait to approve USD 1 billion in raises for public sector employee

Under a government proposal, approximately half of Kuwait's employees within the public sector will receive double-figure salary increases, totaling USD 1.15 billion. According to a report issued by the National Bank of Kuwait, those to be excluded from the pay increase are individuals working in the defense sector, National Guard employees, police officers, and firefighters. A pay raise averaging 18 percent is expected to be given to 45 percent of Kuwait's public sector employees, who make up over 90 percent of Kuwait's total workforce, and who have been seen as underpaid for a long period of time. The proposal being reviewed by the National Assembly will standardize salaries and will include adjustments to account for automatic annual inflation, which will diminish underserved raises in pay.<sup>50</sup>

## August 12

### Kuwait awards Italian consortium USD 1.57 billion contract for refinery work

Kuwait's state-run news agency, *KUNA*, reported that a consortium consisting of Italy's Saipem along with another firm were awarded a USD 1.57 billion contract for work to be performed on Kuwait's al-Zour oil refinery. According to *KUNA*, Khalid al-Asousi, a spokesman for Kuwait National Petroleum Company, announced that the contract, which was the lowest offer submitted for the project, has a duration of 45 months.<sup>51</sup>

## August 13

### Kuwaiti forces break up 'terror' cell

Kuwait's Interior ministry announced that security forces broke up a new "terror" cell consisting of three individuals and uncovered large amounts of weaponry, ammunition, and explosives. The explosives were found in Abdali, near the Iraqi border, as well as at two additional residences in undisclosed locations. The ministry said that security forces uncovered "19 tons of ammunition," as well as 316 pounds of TNT, rocket-propelled grenades, hand grenades, guns, and detonators. The three individuals arrested in the raid are Kuwaiti citizens and all three have confessed that they belong to a "terror" group.<sup>52</sup>

## August 15

### Kuwait approves nearly USD 10B in future infrastructure projects

Kuwait's finance ministry stated that Kuwait City has approved the construction of numerous power plants, desalination facilities, as well as additional infrastructure projects totaling USD 9.9 billion. The Finance Ministry has not set a timetable for most of the projects, except for a sewage plant scheduled to begin operating by 2020. The ministry did not disclose the methods in which the total financing of the projects will be achieved, but did say that 50 percent of all project financing will be raised through stock market offerings.<sup>53</sup>

## August 16

### Kuwaiti newspapers: Iranian arms seized in Kuwait

Two Kuwaiti newspapers reported that a large arms cache, uncovered in Kuwait several days earlier, had been smuggled into Kuwait from Iran. Kuwait's Interior Ministry stated that authorities found ammunition, explosives, weaponry, and grenades in holes under houses near the Iraqi border. Three men who

owned the residences were arrested. According to *Al-Anba* newspaper, the weapons had been smuggled into Kuwait from Iraq for use by soldiers of an Iranian-supported Hezbollah cell. However, citing unnamed sources, *al-Rai* and *al-Qabas* reported that the weaponry had been smuggled into Kuwait by sea from Iran. Both agencies stated that the information came from confessions made by the suspects during interrogation. *Al-Rai* reported that "the suspects have disclosed that there is a direct Iranian line in supplying weapons to Kuwait by sea."<sup>54</sup>

## August 23

### KUNA: Kuwait protesting Iran gas field activity

Kuwait summoned the Iranian *chargé d'affaires* and presented him with an official protest concerning reports that Iran had published information regarding investment opportunities within a disputed gas field, which has been a source of contention between Kuwaiti and Iranian authorities since the 1960s. State-run media ran the following declaration by a foreign ministry official: "The foreign ministry is taking all the necessary measures to safeguard the rights of the state of Kuwait within the context of reinforcing its ties on the regional and international levels and which conform to international law."<sup>55</sup>

## August 25

### Kuwait's military denies taking over Durra gas field

Kuwait's General Command denied accusations that Kuwait's army had seized control of the disputed Durra gas field, stating that their maritime force was positioned in international waters. Meanwhile, Parliament Speaker Marzouq al-Ganem requested that the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Oil provide clarity over the issue of the Durra gas field. According to Kuwait News Agency, the speaker called upon the government to provide the nation with full transparency regarding the situation.<sup>56</sup>

## OMAN MONITOR

- Muscat hosts a delegation from Damascus to discuss Syrian conflict
- Oman joins Germany and Iran in calling on Saudi Arabia to cease coalition bombings of Yemen

### August 6

#### Syrian officials visit Oman, sparking hope for diplomatic opening

Damascus sent a high ranking delegation to Oman to discuss the ongoing Syrian crisis. The delegation was led by Syria's foreign minister Walid al-Moallem, marking his first visit to a Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) state since the Syrian civil war erupted four and a half years earlier. During the visit Moallem met with his Omani counterpart Yusuf bin Alawi. Although specifics of the meeting have not been disclosed, Syrian news agencies say that both sides were in agreement that the "time has come for unifying constructive efforts to put an end to the crisis in Syria."<sup>57</sup>

*Analysis: Muscat is trying to broker a Syrian peace deal along with other GCC countries. Whether or not Oman is coordinating or not with Saudi Arabia and the UAE is unknown. One GCC interlocutor noted that Oman is trying to play "middleman" between Syria, Iran, and the rest of the GCC. In contrast to other GCC states that sponsored the anti-Assad uprising in Syria, Muscat reacted to the crisis with a neutral stance and maintained diplomatic relations with Damascus. The Syrian Foreign Minister's visit marked the first from a Syrian official to the GCC since the conflict erupted in 2011.*

### August 7

#### Oman helps secure the return of Isabelle Prime to France following her captivity in Yemen

Isabelle Prime, a French citizen captured in Yemen six months earlier while working as a consultant on a World Bank-funded project funded by World Bank, arrived in Paris after being released by her captors. Prime and her translator, Sherine Makkaoui, were captured as they traveled to Sana'a on February 24, 2015. French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius noted that the French government paid no ransom to Prime's captors. Fabius also praised Oman for its "enormous help" in bringing about her release. *Oman News Agency* reported that officials in Muscat acted upon a request from Paris and played a pivotal role in negotiating Mrs. Prime's freedom in conjunction with "some Yemeni parties." Oman, which shares a 187 mile border with Yemen, has facilitated in the release of additional captives as of recently, including American journalist Casey Coombs, released from Houthi captivity earlier this year.<sup>58</sup>

### August 10

#### Officials urge Oman-India gas pipeline to be expedited

In the aftermath of the signing of the Iranian nuclear deal, Indian officials urged for the proposed under-sea gas pipeline, which would transport Iranian gas to India through the Arabian Sea, to be expedited. The project—the Middle East to India Deepwater Pipeline (MEIDP)—was developed over ten years ago but has yet to come to fruition due to the international economic sanctions on Iran. Once operational, the gas pipeline, which is being overseen by South Asia Gas Enterprise (SAGE), is expected to transport approxi-

mately 31 million cubic meters of gas per day to India. Speaking at a joint Oman-India conference, the Confederation of Indian Industry's northern region chairman Shreekant Somany stated, "there is a need now to expedite the undersea gas pipeline from Oman, which is strategically located as a gateway to the Gulf and the Middle East."<sup>59</sup>

## August 18

### German and Omani foreign ministers call for Yemen cease-fire, Iran joins talks

Foreign ministers from Germany and Oman called for a cease-fire in Yemen, and a top Iranian diplomat also arrived in Berlin to join discussions focused on ending the Saudi-led coalition's ongoing military campaign. German Foreign Minister, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, at a press conference with his Omani counterpart, Yusuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah, criticized Riyadh's airstrikes in Yemen. Steinmeier stated, "The recent bombings of ports and road blockades in Yemen have made it much more difficult for international humanitarian organizations to deliver aid to civilians." While critical of recent airstrikes, Steinmeier also focused upon progress being made, voicing his support for Oman's diplomatic efforts in assisting the UN to broker a political solution to the fighting. The German official explained, "We have agreed today to remain active in appealing partners in the region towards reaching for at least a cease-fire in the very near future."<sup>60</sup>

## August 25

### Analysts predict Omani banks funding cost will rise following Fitch downgrade

Analysts warned that five Omani banks, downgraded by Fitch, will not experience an immediate impact, but will likely see a rise in future funding costs. One day earlier, Fitch downgraded the long-term issuer default rating for Bank Muscat, National Bank of Oman, Bank Dhofar, Bank Sohar, and Ahli Bank due to falling oil prices and the impact such prices have had on Oman's current fiscal landscape. A Fitch official stated, "The downgrades reflect Fitch's view that the Omani sovereign's ability to support the banking system has weakened." He continued, "Lower oil prices and higher-than-budgeted government expenditure have led to a major deterioration of Oman's fiscal position."

Despite downgrading five Omani banks, Fitch maintained its previous rating for HSBC Bank Oman, due to support it receives from its parent company, HSBC Holdings.<sup>61</sup>

## August 26

### Despite drop in oil prices, Oman committed to currency peg

Central bank executive president Hamood Sangour al Zadjali stated that, despite the recent drop in oil prices, Oman remains committed to maintaining the peg of the Omani riyal to the American dollar.<sup>62</sup>



## QATAR MONITOR

- **Doha hosts flurry of diplomatic meetings between international/regional actors following Iranian nuclear deal**
- **U.S. Department of Treasury sanctions two Qataris for alleged terrorist ties**
- **Qatar extends diplomatic overture to Iran**

### August 3

#### Russia's Lavrov meets Hamas leader in Qatar

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov met with Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal in Qatar, where he extended an invitation to Meshaal to visit Moscow. In a statement released from Gaza, the Hamas leader said that a group led by Meshaal spoke with Lavrov about the current situation in the Gaza Strip. Meshaal and Lavrov also spoke about "Zionist terrorism in the West Bank and its assaults on Muslim and Christian sites in Jerusalem." According to sources, Meshaal accepted the invitation to Moscow.<sup>63</sup>

*Analysis: Lavrov's meeting with Meshaal is a continued attempt by the Kremlin to find a solution to the Palestinian problem. Russia wants to be seen as a mediator on the Palestinian issue, which is not new. However, given Hamas' ties to Iran, and now Saudi Arabia, Lavrov probably sees a good opportunity to act now with the Syrian settlement in play. Overall, the Kremlin is pushing hard its vision of the Near East at a time when Washington is treading carefully.*

#### Following Iranian nuclear deal US Secretary of State John Kerry addresses GCC foreign ministers in Doha

Secretary Kerry, speaking after a meeting with fellow foreign ministers representing the six nations of the GCC, stated that Iranian behavior may improve fol-

lowing the signing of the new nuclear deal. However, Washington and its Gulf State allies are prepared should Tehran not change its ways, according to Kerry. While cautiously optimistic, Kerry also acknowledged worries held by Gulf States regarding the nuclear deal. Kerry stated, "Our goal is to fully implement this agreement and to hope that Iran's behavior will be ameliorated. Obviously we all know about the support of Hezbollah for the Shia militia in Iraq, the support for the Houthi, other involvements in the region, support for terror historically." Kerry continued, "now everybody can hope that perhaps there will be a turning of the page, but we are preparing for the possibility that that may not happen."<sup>64</sup>

*Analysis: Kerry's comments delivered an important fact. Washington, under the U.S.-GCC Dialogue, is to dispatch an official working group to each GCC state, starting with Saudi Arabia, to further develop and define GCC state requirements in the wake of the Iranian nuclear agreement. Key issues include ballistic missile defense, border security, transnational crime, and maritime security. Washington's intention is to demonstrate its understanding that Iran poses a military threat to the Arab monarchies of the Western Persian Gulf.*

#### U.S. Secretary of State meets with Emir of Qatar in Doha

Secretary Kerry and his delegates met with Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani in Qatar. Kerry and the Qatari emir discussed several topics, primarily bilateral cooperation between Doha and Washington. Additionally, they discussed the conflicts in Yemen and Syria, as well as counter-terrorism efforts and strategies for bringing out greater security in the Arab world. Most importantly, the two addressed the Iranian nuclear agreement within the grander context of establishing the Middle East as a region free from weapons of mass destruction.<sup>65</sup>

*Analysis: Kerry's meeting with the emir also addressed the future of the Qatar-based al-Udeid Air Base. According to both GCC and American interlocutors, in theory al-Udeid is supposed to be downsized. Assets are to be transferred to East Asia with a further reliance on Djibouti for air operations in the Gulf. In addition, the U.S. wants to punish Qatar for its support for Syrian extremist groups and harboring al-Qaeda and Taliban militants.*

### **Qatari Foreign Minister backs Iran nuclear deal**

Following talks in Doha with U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, Qatari Foreign Minister Khalid bin Mohammad Al-Attiyah expressed support for the Iranian nuclear deal, describing it as the best available option. Attiyah told a press conference in Doha that "this was the best option among other options to come up with a solution...through dialogue."<sup>66</sup>

*Analysis: Qatar's support for the Iran deal must be seen in the context of other Gulf states. While Qatar seems eager about the agreement for commercial purposes, its GCC allies are nervous about the deal's geopolitical implications as documented in open sources. GCC interlocutors are again upset with Qatar's "cheerleader" approach to Iran without considering the impact on the GCC as a whole.*

## **August 4**

### **Foreign Minister promises "best World Cup ever"**

Foreign Minister Khalid al-Attiyah expressed his confidence that Qatar will host the "best World Cup ever" and suggested that criticism of Qatar's successful bid was partially based on racism. Qatar's bid for the 2022 World Cup is under renewed scrutiny after the launch of an American and Swiss investigation into alleged FIFA corruption. Attiyah reiterated that Qatar always has and will continue to cooperate with investigators and that the event will go ahead as planned and will be a large success. Attiyah struck back at international criticism

directed towards Qatar, indicating that there have been racist undertones in some of the criticism. He went on to say that "some parties cannot digest that a small, Arabic state... is hosting such an event, as if our region, our Arab region is not entitled to have such an event."<sup>67</sup>

## **August 5**

### **Foreign Minister issues diplomatic overture to Iran**

Foreign Minister Khalid al-Attiyah urged "serious dialogue" with Iran following the nuclear deal, despite his criticism of Tehran's support for the Syrian regime.<sup>68</sup>

### **U.S. targets two Qatari nationals allegedly guilty of financing al-Qaeda division in Syria**

The U.S. Department of Treasury imposed sanctions on two Qataris, alleging that they provided financial support to al-Qaeda and its Syrian offshoot (aka Jabhat al-Nusra). The two Qataris in question, Saad bin Saad Mohammed Sharyan al-Kaabi and Abdul Latif Bin Abdallah Salih Muhammad al-Kawari, were targeted as "global terrorists" under a law which allows the ministry to freeze all assets of individuals involved in terrorism-related activity and prevents Americans from engaging them in business dealings.

A Washington official accused al-Kaabi and al-Kuwari of operating expansive networks to fund extremist organizations. The U.S. official stated that the sanctions imposed against the two Qataris would hopefully have a large impact upon their ability to raise any further funds within the region.<sup>69</sup>

## **August 8**

### **Following Qatari Foreign Minister's Comments, Egypt reaffirms rejection of outside interference**

In the aftermath of a remark made by Qatar's Foreign Minister Khaled al-Attiyah, in which he asserted that Doha would like to see Egypt engage in a "national di-

ologue which involves all,” adding that Qatar is available to mediate between conflicting political parties in Egypt, tension between Cairo and Doha renewed itself. In response to Attiyah’s comments, Egyptian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ahmed Abu Zeid stated that Cairo rejects “all forms of foreign interference in its internal affairs.” Abu Zeid maintained that the statements made by Qatar’s Foreign Minister are “unacceptable” and “prejudge Egyptian court rulings and governmental decisions.”<sup>70</sup>

## August 18

### Qatari newspaper reports delays in reform to protect salaried workers

*The Peninsula Qatar* reported that officials in Doha have delayed introducing new labor laws designed to ensure that companies pay employees their full salaries on time, as Qatar continues to face scrutiny

regarding its treatment of migrant workers building stadiums for the 2022 World Cup. The Emir approved an amendment to the labor laws in February, which call for companies to pay workers through electronic bank transfers. Companies were given a period of six months before the Wage Protection System began, yet Qatar delayed the postponed the date until November 2, citing the companies not being ready.<sup>71</sup>

## SAUDI ARABIA MONITOR

- **Officials from Riyadh and Moscow meet to discuss Syria**
- **Kingdom beefs up support for anti-Houthi cadres in Yemen**
- **Houthi militants reportedly seize territory in southern Saudi Arabia**

### August 6

#### Riyadh delivers tanks to anti-Houthi militants in Yemen

According to tribal and military sources in Yemen, Saudi Arabia sent “dozens of tanks, armored vehicles, and personnel carriers, as well as hundreds of Yemeni soldiers trained in Saudi Arabia” into Yemen to beef up support for fighters loyal to exiled Yemeni President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi.<sup>72</sup>

### August 11

#### Saudi and Russian diplomats discuss the Syrian crisis

Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir met his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov in Moscow to discuss the conflict in Syria. The two disagreed on certain issues, including the future of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and the Ba’athist regime’s role in international efforts to fight Daesh (“Islamic State”). Jubeir stated, “We believe that Assad is part of the problem and not part of the solution.” Yet, both officials concurred that Syria’s opposition groups must direct more energy toward finding a peaceful settlement. This meeting came before Lavrov’s meeting with figures from the Syrian National Coalition, which marked their first visit to Russia.<sup>73</sup>

### August 17

#### IMF calls on Riyadh to implement fiscal changes and decrease reliance on oil for economic growth

The IMF stated that Saudi Arabia should pursue a “sizeable multiyear fiscal adjustment” through the imple-

mentation of revised energy subsidies, controls on public sector wages, and the expansion of non-oil derived revenue. The IMF also urged Riyadh to impose a value-added tax and land tax.<sup>74</sup>

### August 18

#### Saudi-led coalition strikes Yemen port of Hodeida

The Riyadh-led military coalition’s warplanes bombed the Houthi-controlled Hodeida port. The strike destroyed four cranes and warehouses, according to *Reuters*, in a vital port for the supply of aid to Northern Yemen. Saudi Brigadier General Ahmed Asseri asserted that the strikes targeted a naval base where Houthi militants deployed anti-ship weapons, yet international human rights groups condemned the coalition’s bombing of the port.<sup>75</sup>

#### Houthi militants seize territory in southern Saudi Arabia

Al-Masirah, a Houthi-run television station, broadcast footage of Houthi militants in Saudi territory, claiming to be approximately one mile from Najran, a city with 1.6 million situated near the Saudi-Yemeni border. One Houthi insurgent asserted that Saudi Arabia’s Shirfa military base came under Houthi control. The aired footage featured Houthi fighters chanting, “God is great, Death to America, Death to Israel, A curse upon the Jews, Victory for Islam.” One militant held a copy of the Koran and declared, “The enemy is depending on America and Israel. We depend on God.”<sup>76</sup>

### August 26

#### Saudi Arabia intercepts ballistic missile fired from Yemen

According to Saudi Arabian military officials, the kingdom intercepted a ballistic missile targeting Saudi Arabia’s Jizan province that was launched by Yemeni army units fighting with Houthi insurgents. Saba, the Houthi-run media agency, reported that the missile firing came as “a response to the brutal Saudi aggression on Yemen.” Riyadh retaliated with strikes targeting the presidential palace in Sana’a.<sup>77</sup>

## UAE MONITOR

- Abu Dhabi deploys brigade to southern Yemen
- Indian Prime Minister Modi visits UAE, leaves with a USD 75 billion investment plan

### August 2

#### UAE say that 41 will face trial for seeking to “seize power and establish a caliphate” in the emirates

State-run media reported that UAE authorities stated that 41 people – UAE nationals and foreigners – will be tried on terrorism charges. UAE authorities alleged that the group adhered to a “Takfiri” ideology, had guns and explosives in their possession, and communicated with militant organizations in foreign lands.<sup>78</sup>

### August 3

#### UAE deploys brigade to Yemen

According to the *New York Times*, Yemeni and U.S. military officials stated that the UAE deployed a military brigade to fight along anti-Houthi militants in Yemen. Reportedly, several days earlier Emirati troops arrived in Aden in tanks and armored vehicles. The article reported that, although not confirmed, sources stated that GCC-backed anti-Houthi fighters seized control of the al-Anad air base, strategically situated 30 miles north of Aden at the intersection of the country’s southern and western provinces, following several weeks of failed attempts.<sup>79</sup>

### August 17

#### Indian officials praise UAE decision to allocate land for first Hindi temple in Abu Dhabi

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi wrapped up a two day visit to the UAE, securing a plan to establish a USD 75 billion fund to be invested into India’s infrastructure (expanding the country’s railways, ports, airports, and roads). Emirati and Indian officials stated their aim to increase bilateral trade by 60 percent within five years. Modi said that the UAE’s plans to build the first Hindu temple in the Gulf state’s capital was “a great step.”<sup>80</sup> Modi’s visit to the UAE, in which he met with Abu Dhabi’s Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and Dubai monarch Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, marked the first of an Indian premier in 34 years.<sup>81</sup>

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