

“Blood Borders” Unfolding

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Ever since the publication of Ralph Peters article “Blood Borders: How a Better Middle East Would Look,” in June 2006,¹ events in the Middle East have been unfolding as if according to the plan suggested by this retired US military intelligence officer. Beginning with the Broader and Greater Middle East Initiatives floated by the US and the Europeans, in the wake of 9/11, intended to “bring democracy” to the Arab world, we have seen strong nationalist Arab states destroyed. The so-called Arab Spring degenerated into an Arab Autumn of chaos as the democracy experiment in Egypt especially brought to the fore the Muslim Brotherhood, a force antagonistic to the USA and some monarchical states. Alongside, we saw the destruction of Iraq, Syria, Libya and of course a US-supported coup in Egypt bringing to power General Sisi and removal of the Muslim Brotherhood – who are facing all manner of charges as their leaders remain incarcerated. These were the states – admittedly dictatorships – that were militarily strong and relied on their brand of Arab nationalism.

However, this was just one element of the Blood Borders design. Iran was another target but the ignorance of the US regarding the dynamics of the region, led to Iran gaining ascendancy as the power vacuum left by the chaos on the non-monarchical Arab states was easily filled by Iran. The design to bifurcate Iraq into three independent entities so as to create a “Shia Arab state” in the south has not worked out either for the US.

In fact, while the Arab states were being undermined, Iran also gained ground diplomatically as it sought to

negotiate with the West on its nuclear programme resulting in the nuclear deal to which the US also was a party. The net result was to strengthen not just Iran but the moderate forces of the Iranian revolution, which had sought to engage with the Western world. Especially after the Iranian nuclear deal it was difficult for the hardliners in Iran to use the Western bogey to garner support and the results were clearly visible in the latest Iranian presidential elections.

So a new tactic was tried which now sought to “isolate Iran” through its neighbours – especially the Gulf States who had proven to be strong allies of the US – and where the US had military bases. This also fitted in with the Blood Borders design of breaking up the Arab World plus Pakistan and Iran into more “desirable” units. It is in this context that we must see the developments in the GCC.

The GCC split came about after the visit of US President Donald Trump to Saudi Arabia (KSA) where he also addressed members of the grandiose-sounding Islamic Military Alliance to Fight Terrorism (IMAFT) of which Pakistan is also a member. The fact that there are still no TORs or operational parameters of the IMAFT did not prevent a number of leaders from Muslim states being present in KSA during the Trump visit to the Kingdom. Apart from the billion dollars in arms deals Trump signed with KSA, he chose to define certain parameters of the IMAFT for the members of the Alliance and these had to do with isolating Iran rather than countering terrorism and its extremist ideology:

“The government that gives terrorists all three — safe harbor, financial backing, and the social standing needed for recruitment. It is a regime that is responsible

for so much instability in the region. I am speaking of course of Iran.

“It is a government that speaks openly of mass murder, vowing the destruction of Israel, death to America, and ruin for many leaders and nations in this room.

“Until the Iranian regime is willing to be a partner for peace, all nations of conscience must work together to isolate Iran, deny it funding for terrorism”²

This was the start of overt manifestations of fissures not simply between Arab states and Iran but also amongst the Arab states themselves. The first reflection of this was the rupture of diplomatic ties by GCC states and Egypt with one GCC member state Qatar and the imposition of an embargo on Qatar. These countries also denied Qatar the use of their air space – challenging the ICAO regime for civilian air transport.

The lines were quickly drawn with Turkey and Iran³ immediately coming to Qatar’s assistance – the former even sending troops to Qatar.⁴ However, for states like Pakistan a political dilemma, that had been brewing since the Sharif government declared its intent of joining the IMAFT and since General (ret’d) Raheel Sharif went off to KSA to take command of the IMAFT, became more overt and exacerbated. The sudden dash by the PM and COAS to KSA did little to ease this dilemma as the Saudis made clear that Pakistan was not involved in any mediator role in the Qatar-GCC crisis – and only Kuwait and Sudan were playing that role. This went contrary to the image the Pakistani leadership had tried to create within Pakistan.

For Pakistan there is a parliamentary resolution, passed unanimously, in April 2015 on the Yemen crisis, which

states clearly that Pakistan “should maintain neutrality in the conflict so as to be able to play a proactive diplomatic role to end the crisis”. The call for neutrality in an intra-Arab conflict has been highlighted by many in Pakistan, including political leaders, to criticise the PMLN government rushing into the IMAFT and General (retd) Sharif from accepting command of the IMAFT which is now being seen more as an alliance supported by the US against Iran than an anti-terror alliance. President Trump’s thinly veiled references to a Sunni Muslim military alliance in his tweets have also lent credence to this assumption.

Adding to the confusion, on 9 June President Donald Trump accused Qatar of funding terrorism and backing extremist ideology while his Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson urged the Arab nations to end their blockade.⁵ Yet a few days later the US agreed to an arms deal with Qatar.

Of the GCC members, Kuwait and Oman have stayed impartial, trying to broker a resolution of the dispute. Meanwhile, Russia, too, voiced readiness to increase its exports of agricultural products to Qatar. However, with a palace coup in Saudi Arabia where King Salman bin Abdulaziz replaced Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef bin Abdulaziz with his own son, Mohammed bin Salman, the Deputy Crown Prince and Defence Minister, the conflict lines in the intra-GCC dispute hardened. Crown Prince Salman is seen as being the architect of the Yemen crisis and as a hardliner who is also very close to President Trump.

The hardening of positions became more evident when the GCC countries put out 13 demands for Qatar on 23 June to meet before the crisis could be resolved. They were not end goals but the starting point of ending the

crisis. The thirteen points were impossible for Qatar to accept unless it conceded to becoming a vassal state. Qatar was given 10 days to accept these demands:

1. Curb diplomatic ties with Iran and close its diplomatic missions there. Expel members of Iran's Revolutionary Guards and cut off any joint military cooperation with Iran. Only trade and commerce with Iran that complies with US and international sanctions will be permitted.

2. Sever all ties to “terrorist organizations”, specifically the Muslim Brotherhood, Islamic State, al-Qaida and Lebanon's Hezbollah. Formally declare those entities as terrorist groups.

3. Shut down al-Jazeera and its affiliate stations.

4. Shut down news outlets that Qatar funds, directly and indirectly, including Arabi21, Rassd, Al-Araby Al-Jadeed and Middle East Eye.

5. Immediately terminate the Turkish military presence in Qatar and end any joint military cooperation with Turkey inside Qatar.

6. Stop all means of funding for individuals, groups or organisations that have been designated as terrorists by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, Bahrain, the US and other countries.

7. Hand over “terrorist figures” and wanted individuals from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain to their countries of origin. Freeze their assets, and provide any desired information about their residency, movements and finances.

8. End interference in sovereign countries' internal affairs. Stop granting citizenship to wanted nationals from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain. Revoke Qatari citizenship for existing nationals where such citizenship violates those countries' laws.

9. Stop all contacts with the political opposition in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain. Hand over all files detailing Qatar's prior contacts with and support for those opposition groups.

10. Pay reparations and compensation for loss of life and other, financial losses caused by Qatar's policies in recent years. The sum will be determined in coordination with Qatar.

11. Consent to monthly audits for the first year after agreeing to the demands, then once per quarter during the second year. For the following 10 years, Qatar would be monitored annually for compliance.

12. Align itself with the other Gulf and Arab countries militarily, politically, socially and economically, as well as on economic matters, in line with an agreement reached with Saudi Arabia in 2014.

13. Agree to all the demands within 10 days of it being submitted to Qatar, or the list becomes invalid.”⁶

At the time of writing this piece the 10-day deadline has passed and the stalemate continues. What is important to understand is that this is the beginning of creating fissures within the Gulf Arab states. As such it is part of the “Blood Borders” design unfolding. After the destruction of the non-monarchical Arab states, the focus has turned to the Arab monarchies of the Gulf, especially those who were pursuing policies independent of the US

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and its primary ally KSA. Ironically, Qatar has the largest US airbase in the region also so it is a gamble taken by KSA and the US. In the background there is also the growing closeness – albeit covert – between Israel and KSA.

For Pakistan there are many issues to consider. “Blood Borders” included the breakup of Pakistan and the country’s nuclear capability has always sat uncomfortably with the US and other Western states. Pakistan’s nuclear arsenal has been consistently targeted even as India has been given a continuing legitimacy for its nuclear programme from the 123 (nuclear) Agreement signed with the US to the NSG waiver and a special IAEA safeguards agreement with an exit clause.

Separatist Baloch groups have been given asylum and financial support by European states and the US and, despite Pakistan conducting an effective military operation against extremist groups and terrorists on its territory, it continues to be confronted with the demand from the US of “Do More”.

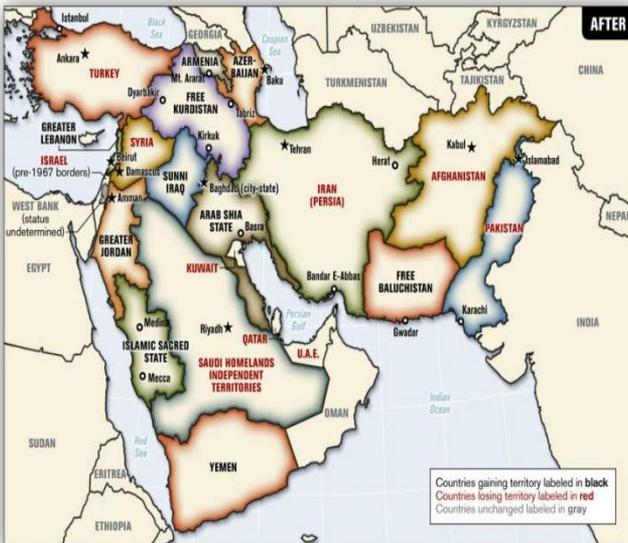
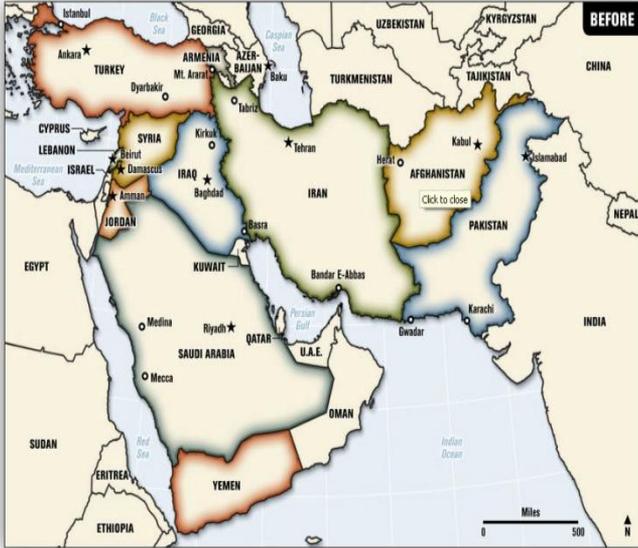
So Pakistan has to factor in the reality that the “Blood Borders” design will not stop in the Gulf but will move eastwards towards Pakistan. Already the US is bringing in India into Afghanistan for an interventionist role and the start of a Pak-Afghan rapprochement has been successfully scuttled – with the Afghan leadership accusing Pakistan of every act of terrorism in Afghanistan where the Afghan government’s writ continues to decline.

It is not enough for Pakistan to merely remain neutral in the GCC crisis, in keeping with the Parliamentary resolution on Yemen. Pakistan has to be more proactive with its diplomacy – especially in trying to bring

together Muslim states like Malaysia, Indonesia and Turkey to act in diffusing the GCC crisis. The GCC crisis has dangerous fallouts for Pakistan as it has its workers in both KSA and Qatar. Also it could get drawn into the crisis if KSA was to ask Pakistan to send forces to defend the Holy Places. Pakistan would not be able to refuse but sending troops at this time would drag Pakistan into the larger Yemen war and the wider GCC crisis. It could also aggravate the sectarian divides in Pakistan if the KSA moves with US backing more aggressively towards Iran. That is why it is imperative for Pakistan to move proactively to defuse the GCC situation.

Beyond that, Pakistan should also actively interact with important regional players like South Africa, Brazil and Argentina and Russia to put forward its case on Afghanistan, the nuclear issue and Indian aggression not only against Pakistan but also in Indian Occupied Kashmir. China has always stood by Pakistan but the latter cannot keep putting extraordinary pressure on this most steadfast ally especially in forums like the NSG. Pakistan also has to redefine its relationship with the US on more equitable and reciprocal terms as the strategic partnership between the US and India clearly reflects where the US is positioned on crucial issues impacting Pakistan. Pakistan has a strong case and a strategic position in the region. It has to be more assertive on critical strategic issues by getting over its psychological confidence deficit.

Appendix



References

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1. Ralph Peters, “Blood Borders: How a Better Middle East Would Look,” *Armed Forces Journal* (June 1, 2006).
<http://armedforcesjournal.com/blood-borders/>.
 2. The White House Office of the Press Secretary May 21, 2017
 3. For details of Iranian response see Reuters
<https://www.reuters.com/article/gulf-qatar-iran-idUSL8N1J806M>
 4. On June 5 Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain cut diplomatic ties with Qatar, accusing it of supporting extremism and announced that they would diplomatically and physically isolate Qatar. Yemen and Jordan joined Saudi Arabia and offices of Al-Jazeera were shut in Saudi Arabia and Jordan.
On June 7, Turkey’s parliament approved a legislation allowing its troops to be deployed to a Turkish military base in Qatar. The bill, first drafted in May 2017, passed with 240 votes in favour, largely with support from the ruling AK party and nationalist opposition MHP. See Reuters <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-gulf-qatar-turkey-idUSKBN18Y2JE>
On June 9, Saudi Arabia and its allies placed 59 Qatari people and entities on a terror finance watch list.
 5. *The Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jun/09/trump-qatar-sponsor-terrorism-middle-east>
 6. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/23/close-al-jazeera-saudi-arabia-issues-qatar-with-13-demands-to-end-blockade>