Wake Turbulence of the 2017 Qatar-GCC Diplomatic Crisis

by

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Duke University

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Approved:

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David Siegel, Supervisor

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Peter Feaver

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Michael Munger

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of Political Science in the Graduate School of Duke University

2019
ABSTRACT

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Abstract

The bilateral relations of autocratic regimes have gained increasing attention in recent years but remain poorly understood. This literature is often limited by a selective focus on a specific set of international networks and a lack of systematic empirical analysis of cross-border ties across time and space. In this paper, I seek to contribute to our understanding of international linkages amongst autocratic regimes by using changes in state-owned airline patterns to capture the shifts in the underlying geopolitics of the Middle East. I will focus on the 2017 GCC-Qatar diplomatic crisis with an in-depth analysis of Qatar’s changing relationships with its neighbors, specifically Turkey, Iran, Oman, Kuwait, and Morocco, to illustrate how changes in flight patterns offer broader insights into states perceptions, strategies, and alliances in the region.
Acknowledgements

David Siegel has been an integral part of not only this thesis but also my intellectual development over the last two years. He has been an incredible advisor and no words of gratitude can do justice to the amount of appreciation I have, and will continue to always have, for him. I’m also grateful to Peter Feaver who, through his engaging classes, has taught me that the attainment of education is not the ability to replicate, but rather the ability to think. Lastly, I’m thankful to Mike Munger who has made me aware of the ways Ayn Rand continues to subconsciously influence my decision-making processes.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Authoritarian Regimes in the Middle East

During the Arab Revolution authoritarian regimes demonstrated remarkable capacities to adapt to changing external environments even in the wake of increased pressure for democratic reform from actors at home and abroad (Burnell & Schlumberger, 2010). It became apparent that the power of authoritative regimes is not limited to their control of domestic resources but also their ability to exert influence in neighboring countries (Bunce & Wolchik, 2011; Koesel & Bunce, 2013; Levitsky & Way, 2010). Several notable scholars, including Larry Diamond, argue that contrary to liberal internationalist expectations, we are currently witnessing an authoritarian comeback (Diamond, 2008).

In order to understand the international sources of authoritarian stability, scholars have focused on the role that individual states, the so-called Black Knights, play in supporting autocratic regimes abroad, focusing on both authoritarian powers such as Russia and Saudi Arabia as well as other democracies such as the United States (Bader, 2015; Brownlee, 2012; Burnell & Schlumberger, 2010; Levitsky & Way, 2010; Tolstrup, 2015). Although scholars acknowledge that various forms of cross-border ties contribute to authoritarian regime survival, this literature rarely examines cross-border relationships directly, focusing instead on the specific circumstances
under which authoritarian leaders have strengthened their power, studying how they offer, and are offered, support to, or from, fellow authoritarian leaders and the subsequent effects of such authoritarian collaborations, including successfully curtailing democratization processes (Von Soest, 2015). Scholars use crisis events like the Arab Spring to demonstrate how perceptions of similarity drive authoritarian collaborations. Drawing on poliheuristic foreign policy analysis, scholars argue that if regimes share similar institutional and societal structures, offering support to them during times of crisis becomes the only acceptable strategy.

This framework of analyzing authoritarian regimes is frequently driven by typology, which distinguishes between personalist, military, party-based, and monarchical regimes, confirming the notion that regime type fundamentally affects authoritarian governments international posture (Colgan & Weeks, 2015; Escribà-Folch & Wright, 2015; Weeks, 2014; Weiss, 2013). For example, Odinius and Kuntz find GCC membership as a whole seems to have drawn a major dividing line between monarchies and republics, focusing on the basic power structures and policies associated with them, concluding that GCC member actions indicate a strong belief in the importance of a regime type distinction (Odinius & Kuntz, 2015).

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is the regional intergovernmental political and economic union consisting Gulf monarchies, including three constitutional monarchies (Qatar, Kuwait, and Bahrain), two absolute monarchies (Saudi Arabia and Oman), and one federal monarchy (the United Arab Emirates (UAE). While it is true that
GCC lent support to monarchic rulers of Bahrain, Oman, Jordan, and Morocco, it is an oversimplification to assume that the GCC acted as a unified group in the wake of the Arab Spring. In reality, GCC members showed much variation in their responses to the protests. For instance, Saudi Arabia and UAE were the only two GCC members to send security forces to Bahrain. Moreover, while Qatar allowed favorable coverage of the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings on Al Jazeera, Saudi Arabia remained loyal to the ousted presidents (Odinius & Kuntz, 2015).

I argue that the limited perspective of the regime typology framework hinders scholars from identifying the divergences amongst autocratic leaders, specifically those in Gulf states. These misunderstandings are further compounded by the lack of robust public discourse in these autocratic regimes, making it difficult to understand state behavior. As a result, there is little work that empirically traces the changes in the states strategic interactions change over time, let alone predict the changes emerging in geopolitical dynamics of the region. While crises give insight into how authoritarian regimes cooperate, scholars often lack a comprehensive approach that can offer a complete picture of the range of international linkages in play.

I assume that state/regimes pursue their self-interests, as they perceive them, at all times. While I contend, as other scholars have noted, authoritarian regimes seek to maximize their security and power, I posit that they do so in fluid and often rapidly changing regional and international environment. This was best illustrated in the aftermath of the 2017 GCC crisis when Qatar undertook considerable initiatives to
diversify its political and security relationships and not be overly reliant on any one partnership, without necessarily being guided by perceived similarity such as shared history and societal structure as assumed.

Unlike other regions of the world where hierarchical alignments are relatively stable and the states are left with limited options such as bandwagoning or balancing against rising powers, the loss of power of traditional Arab actors in Syria, Iraq, and Egypt has opened unique opportunities for countries in the Middle East to reposition their alliances, develop greater diplomatic strength by forming relationships with influential global powers, and even establish alternative poles of power. These strategic interactions are further facilitated by the autocratic nature of these regimes in which policymaking is highly concentrated amongst a restricted circle of individuals. Elite decision-making structures enable leaders the flexibility to swiftly make the needed adjustments to both their states behavior and airline services, without having to filter through layers of bureaucracy or seeking legislative approval (Ulrichsen, 2019).

In this paper, I will be analyzing changes in state-owned airline patterns to capture the shifts in the underlying geopolitics of the Middle East. The modifications in flight frequencies, along with the expansion and/or termination of airline destinations, offer a real-time understanding of the strategic decision-making process of these regional authoritarian regimes. In order to illustrate the extent to which changes in flight pattern can provide such insight, I will examine the 2017 GCC-Qatar diplomatic crisis. The dispute began on 5 June 2017 when Bahrain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and
UAE instituted an economic and trade embargo that closed Qatars only land border and banned Qatar-bound airplanes and ships from entering their airspace and sea routes. Following the blockade, the governments of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Egypt, Yemen, Jordan, Libya, and the Maldives abruptly severed their ties with Qatar. While the instantaneous flight ban demonstrates the tight control authoritarian leaders have over their national airlines, this paper focuses on Qatars flight patterns since the onset of the crisis.

Although I limit my focus to the recent diplomatic crisis with Qatar, changes in flight patterns offer broader insights into states perceptions, strategies, and alliances in the region. More specifically, the real-time changes in flight patterns since the onset of the GCC-Qatar dispute capture two major shifts in the geopolitical dynamics of the Middle East.

First, changes in air traffic reveal growing divergences amongst GCC members in their approach to Qatar. Although GCC members Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and UAE terminated their diplomatic ties with Qatar, changes in flight patterns show that the other two GCC members, Kuwait and Oman, have taken a more nuanced position on Qatar. Moreover, the decision to terminate diplomatic relations with Qatar were not limited to GCC states, but rather included other Middle Eastern and African states like Chad, Comoros, Egypt, Libya, Maldives, Mauritania, and Senegal, and Yemen. The decision of these countries, and more specifically, Morocco to partake in the GCC conflict indicate broader shifts in the power dynamics of the region.
Second, flight changes show the emergence of unlikely partnerships, including the relationship between Turkey, an electoral democracy, and Qatar, a monarchy. Flight increases between Qatar and Turkey have been followed with rapidly expanding defense relations, including the deployment of Turkish troops in Qatar. Moreover, the emerging flight patterns reveal how US adversaries such as Russia and Iran are using the crisis to make inroads into the previously impenetrable network of security partnerships that have bound the Gulf states under the Western security umbrella for decades.

The order of this paper is as follows: I will start by explaining why flights are a useful tool for capturing real-time strategic decision-making process of Middle-Eastern autocratic regimes. I will then use the data to demonstrate the changing geopolitical dynamics of the region, along with an extensive analysis of Morocco. Finally, I will briefly discuss how broadening the scope of national flights to all the states in the MENA region can capture the geopolitical tectonic shifts currently underway.
Chapter 2

Using Flights as Political Signals

Airline alliances are useful markers for bilateral relationships between countries because all international air services operate within a very rigid framework set by intergovernmental air services agreements (ASA) between the states. Most ASAs, apart from the EU which functions under an Open Skies agreement, are part of a bilateral trading agreement. There are currently thousands of bilateral air services agreements in place between 180 nations. All airline activities between two countries is a direct outcome of those negotiation processes. This regulatory nature of air traffic stems from the Paris Convention of 1919 which established each state to be sovereign over the airspace above its territory. Sovereign airspace, by international law, corresponds with the maritime definition of territorial waters as being 12 nautical miles out from a states coastline, thereby giving the state full authority to determine the nature and extent of air traffic serving it. This means that states have complete authority to determine not only the countries that can land into their states, but also fly through their countrys airspace en route from one destination to another.

2.1 State-Controlled Airspace

In recent years, authoritarian leaders in the Middle East have growingly exploited these privileges, turning their airspaces into virtual battleground. For example, one
of the ways through which the Saudi-led coalition sought to put pressure on Qatar was by imposing an air blockade whereby Qatar was, and remains, forbidden from using the airspace of Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt. The blockade led to Qatar not only losing access to 18 destinations in the blockading states, but has also forced it to re-route its flights over Turkey, Iran, and Oman, incurring losses over 483 million USD due to longer flight times and loss of seats (Pereira, 2018).

In fact, blockading of airspaces is becoming an emerging pattern in the Middle East whereby sudden aviation restrictions are used as a tactic in geopolitical disputes. Months after Qatars blockade was imposed, in September 2017 after the Kurdish Regional Government held a controversial referendum on independence, Baghdad responded by imposing an air blockade on the Kurdish region (Sumer & Joseph, 2018).

While UNs International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) terms of agreement state that Each contracting state reserves also the right, in exceptional circumstances or during a period of emergency, or in the interest of public safety, and with immediate effect, temporarily to restrict or prohibit flying over the whole or any part of its territory, it specifies that it must be on condition that such restriction or prohibition shall be applicable without distinction of nationality to aircraft of all other states. ICAO has issued statements declaring the blockades as a breach of its terms, but the persistence of the blockades have proven that breaching ICAO treaties is a particularly gray area and there is no official body to enforce the treaty itself, making it an ideal tool for authoritarian leaders.
2.2 State-Controlled Airlines

Most, if not all, airlines are partly or wholly owned by the government. More importantly, air services are often dictated operations to serve public convenience and political considerations, which means that carriers cannot start new routes or completely end established routes for economic or operational purposes (Kleymann & Seristö, 2017). This characteristic is magnified in the context of the Middle East where the airlines are not only state-owned but also receive massive government subsidies, allowing them the flexibility to change routes on as little as a day’s notice and incur losses in ways other privatized airlines cannot as they are accountable to investors and lenders. With benefits such as ready access to cheap fuel, lax labor laws, and airports that can operate 24/7 without concern for night-time noise restrictions, Gulf-based airlines have come to be known as government-subsidized vanity projects. By connecting flight changes to the changes in the regional and international environment, I show that airlines do more than merely promote their countries status, power, and prestige; they have become the primary instrument through which Middle Eastern countries lend support, cement alliances, and at times, cause economic damage.

One way countries strengthen their bilateral ties is through forming codesharing alliances. Codesharing alliances allow carriers to market its service using the code of another carrier’s flights, giving it the opportunity to provide service to destinations not in their route structure. These codesharing alliances are initially formed through
lengthy negotiations of bilateral agreements, but may or may not be put into effect immediately or permanently. For example, when Bahrain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and UAE blocked off their airspace to Qatar in June 2017, state-run Oman Air took up the significant role of transporting travelers from and to Doha, mostly through Iranian airspace. In late-August, Oman and Qatar resumed a reciprocal codesharing partnership alliance which allowed Qatar reestablish access to its route network via Oman. The Gulf crisis led to 2017 being a record-breaking year for Omans airports where it saw a 17 percent increase of passengers through Muscat and 24 percent increase in Salalah, along with a rise in flight movement by 11 percent in Muscat and 40 percent in Salalah.

While codesharing alliances indicate attempts of strengthening bilateral ties in times of crisis, changes in flight frequency are useful indicators of shifting relationships. Although air services agreements are the result of lengthy negotiations of bilateral agreements, the operational terms of airlines are, by their nature, open-ended (Kleymann & Seristö, 2017). Given that airlines operate in an unstable international environment, airline service arrangements are almost exclusively concentrated in looser ties and temporary contracts, allowing autocratic leaders the flexibility to modify flight patterns on short notice. Accordingly, the reduction and/or complete termination of flights from one country to another signal attempts to reduce the scope for intrusion by the other in their states affairs, while an increase in flights between two states signal attempts for greater engagement and socialization.
Chapter 3

Data Analysis of Flights and Trade After the 2017 GCC Crisis

The following regressions and graphs present changes in Qatar’s bilateral trade with the countries involved in the GCC crisis, including countries that severed or downgraded diplomatic ties, issued statements condemning Qatar, called for resolution of the diplomatic crisis through dialogue, and/or provided Qatar a secure supply of food and water. The diplomatic position they took had a direct effect on both flight and trade:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Regression Table</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent variable:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flight Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official Diplomatic Position on GCC Crisis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual Std. Error</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Statistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*p&lt;0.1; **p&lt;0.05; ***p&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first graph shows the change in bilateral trade in the second and fourth quarters of 2017, the quarters immediately before and after the onset of crisis. The second graph shows the change in bilateral trade in the following year, comparing bilateral trade during the second quarter of 2017 with bilateral trade during the third
Table 2: Regression Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent variable:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Official Diplomatic Position on GCC Crisis</td>
<td>$101.296^{***}$ (32.091)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>12.485 (47.237)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R$^2$</td>
<td>0.227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R$^2$</td>
<td>0.204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual Std. Error</td>
<td>282.614 (df = 34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Statistic</td>
<td>9.663*** (df = 1; 34)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: $^*$p<0.1; $^{**}$p<0.05; $^{***}$p<0.01

quarter of 2018.

Figure 3.1: Qatar Trade Changes, One Quarter Later
3.1 Political, Not Economic Considerations

It is essential to start by distinguishing that political considerations drive changes in flights and trade. Qatar reacted to the GCC dispute by reducing its dependence on Saudi and American hegemony and diversifying alliances away from the GCC umbrella and the United States, the traditional security guarantor of the region (Coates Ulrichsen et al., 2017). Figure 1 shows that Qatar initially relied on its neighboring states to mitigate the immediate impacts of its crisis. However, in the subsequent months, Qatar quickly started to diversify its regional and international partnerships, as shown in Figure 2.
3.2 Flights Precede Trade

Nearly each of the country in the above figures which had an increase in trade had a prior increase in flight.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3: Regression Table</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent variable:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade Change, in Millions USD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flight Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual Std. Error</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Statistic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: *$p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01$

Figure 3 shows the Qatars change in trade amongst countries which either had or did not have a flight increase in the previous quarter.

In attempts to activate safety mechanisms, Qatar resorted to Turkey to establish air bridges for food imports, and built transit routes through Irans airspace and territorial waters to avoid disruptions to its energy exports. These short-term solutions laid the groundwork for Qatar to develop long-term political and economic ties with both Turkey and Iran. Combining the data on flights to and from Qatar with IMFs Direction of Trade Statistics (DOTS), Figures 3 and 5 Qatars flight and trade exchange with Turkey and Iran, starting from March 2017, three months prior to the
Figure 3.3: Change in trade based on flight increase in prior quarter

Wilcoxon rank sum test with continuity correction results: data: trade by flight W = 19, p-value = 0.01421 alternative hypothesis: true location shift is not equal to 0

onset of the Qatar-GCC diplomatic ties, until August 2018, the month last updated by the IMF. The figures 3 and 5 highlight that the introduction and/or increase of flights precede the increase in trade by a few months, while changes in trade do not lead to subsequent changes in flights. On the other hand, figures 4 and 6, which cover trade quarters starting from 2016 until the third quarter in 2018, illustrate how the increased trade and flights mark a historically significant development in the countries political and economic relations.
Figure 3.4: Qatar and Turkey flight and trade relations over 18 months
**Figure 3.5:** Qatar and Turkey flight and trade relations over 3 years
Figure 3.6: Qatar and Iran flight and trade relations over 18 months
Figure 3.7: Qatar and Iran flight and trade relations over 3 years
Chapter 4

Growing divisions within GCC

While Qatars increased flight and trade with Ankara and Tehran may appear entirely pragmatic since they offered options to escape total isolation, it is important to note that not all GCC members aligned themselves with the anti-Qatar bloc. Unlike 2011 crisis in which only area specialists caught the subtle differences in the responses of GCC members to the Arab Spring, GCC-Qatar dispute overemphasized the marked division of Qatar with the five other GCC members. However, the changes in trade and flight patterns reveal that Kuwait and Oman took a more nuanced position on Qatar.

As Bahrain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and UAE instituted their boycott, Kuwait and Oman immediately showed a marked increase in trade with Qatar. However, only Oman had an increase in flights, as shown in the graphs below. The decision to increase flights, or lack of it, accurately captures the differences in their political positions. Kuwait took up the role of the mediator, embarking on a campaign of shuttle diplomacy around the GCC capitals. Oman, on the other hand, sought to remain outside the dispute, keeping its channels of communication open with all parties. Despite Omans claims of neutrality, Oman Air, the states national carrier, launched additional flights to Qatar and started to direct flights between Qatar and the four boycotting countries, turning Muscat Airport into a regional hub for Qatar
The quarterly trade figures below, however, reveal that Qatar’s trade with both Kuwait and Oman gradually decline in subsequent quarters. It is also important to note that Qatar’s trade with Oman, unlike Kuwait, remain at levels much higher than the ones before the crisis. This can be considered as further verifying the importance of flights as there were no additional flights established between Qatar and Kuwait. Regardless, the fact that trade with Oman eventually lowers is in stark contrast to Qatar’s trade and flight levels with Turkey and Iran which maintain their heightened rates to this day.

Figure 4.1: Flight and Trade between Qatar and Oman

4.1 Fragmentations within the Wider Region

Reactions to the intra-GCC dispute also exposed significant divisions in the wider MENA region. When Saudi Arabia called on brotherly countries to cut their diplomatic relations with Qatar, five countries followed suit, including Yemen, Libya, Maldives, Mauritania, and Comoros, while Jordan, Djibouti, Chad, and Niger downgraded their diplomatic ties. Considering that only Egypt and Jordan of these nine non-GCC members had significant political and economic relations with Qatar previously, their decision to cut ties may be considered as symbolic gestures. However, it cannot be overlooked that even such tepid responses are the direct consequence of
the increasing role of GCC states in regional politics.

As the fissure between the GCC members deepens, substantial pressure continues to be exerted on the monarchies and other parties in the region that have attempted to maintain relations with both Doha and Riyadh. It may even be argued that it is becoming nearly impossible for regional members to not become involved in the crisis without losing favor with any of the parties. Moroccos evolving diplomatic relations with GCC members illustrate how despite all efforts to maintain its reputation as a neutral and conciliatory actor, it was only a matter of time before it was forced to choose sides.

4.2 The Evolution of Moroccos Diplomatic Relations with GCC States

Morocco has historically maintained political ties with the US, Europe, and fellow Arab nations. Given the geopolitical diversity of its allies, Morocco has always been wary of losing autonomy in any international organization. Accordingly, when Saudi Arabia extended an invitation to Morocco and Jordan to join the GCC amidst the Arab Spring in 2011, Rabat took no concrete steps towards acceding (Council, 2011). While Morocco was reluctant of any arrangement where it would be subjugated to Saudi power, it has received political and economic support from Saudi Arabia and other GCC members in the recent years. Mohamed VI, the King of Morocco, has been actively working to strengthen his ties throughout the Middle East and Africa since 2015, a diplomatic initiative which was reflected in Moroccos decision to become
one of the first countries to join the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen. Moroccos initiative not only secured new sources of diplomatic support, but also led to a USD 22 billion Saudi investment in Moroccos military industry in 2016.

Throughout this time, Morocco developed strong relations not only with Riyadh, but also Abu Dhabi and Doha. Accordingly, Rabat found itself in an uneasy situation. Morocco did not yield to calls to boycott Qatar, but rather sent food to Qatar and sought to act as a mediator. Moroccos position was not well received with Saudi Arabia and the UAE whose leaders expected Morocco to abide by the decisions of Riyadh and Abu Dhabi. Saudi retaliated in March 2018 by orchestrating a joint refusal with UAE, Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, and Lebanon to back Moroccos bid to host the 2026 Football World Cup, a move which Moroccan Minister Rachid Talbi Alami deemed as a treason by Arab countries. In response, Turki al-Sheikh, Saudi Arabias Sports Authority chairman and a royal court advisor tweeted, No one asked for our support in the World Cup 2026 file, adding, To be in the grey area is no longer acceptable to us. Given that the GCC-crisis was in its ninth month, the tweet was perceived as Saudis critique of Moroccos neutral stance.

The silent tensions between Riyadh and Rabat continued to simmer in November 2018 when Morocco became one of the few Arab countries to not offer public support to Saudi Arabia over the assassination of Khashoggi. The crisis between Saudi and Morocco reached their tipping point in February 2019 when Morocco suspended its participation in the Saudi-led military coalitions fight against Yemens Houthi rebels.
Two Moroccan officials, speaking on condition of anonymity since they were not authorized to publicly discuss the diplomatic tensions, added that Rabat had also recalled its ambassador to the kingdom.

While the flight data I collected remained focused on Qatar, it does illustrates how Rabat, in parallel to its tight-lipped dispute with Riyadh, has been simultaneously expanding its ties with Doha, as shown in the figures below. The gradual development of the relations between Doha and Rabat offer a plausible explanation for Rabats progressively emboldening reactions to Riyadh over the same period.

Figure 4.3: Qatar and Morocco flight and trade relations over 18 months
Figure 4.4: Qatar and Morocco flight and trade relations over 3 years
Chapter 5

Qatar Expanding Options

While the extensive analysis of Morocco above highlights the tectonic shifts underway in the wider MENA region, the regression and graphs below further reveal Qatar’s attempts at strengthening other international relations, beyond the countries that played a role in the GCC crisis. It is interesting to note Qatar’s budding relations seem to portray a greater awareness for attributes similar to the ones calculated in the polity score.
Figure 5.1: Estimated Coefficient of Flight Change on Change in Trade by Polity Score
Table 1: Regression Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent variable:</th>
<th>Change in Trade (Millions, USD) from 2nd Quarter, 2017 to 2nd Quarter 2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flight Change</td>
<td>33.408***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(12.018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polity Score</td>
<td>13.249***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4.768)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flight Change: Polity Score</td>
<td>−4.922***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.551)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>−11.232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(37.122)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Observations | 81 |
| R²           | 0.236 |
| Adjusted R²  | 0.207 |
| Residual Std. Error | 237.750 (df = 77) |
| F Statistic  | 7.946*** (df = 3, 77) |

*Note:* *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Figure 5.2: Trade Change by Flight Change: All Flights Cancelled to Country (Type -5)
Figure 5.3: Trade Change by Flight Change: Flights with Reduced Capacity (Type -2)
Figure 5.4: Trade Change by Flight Change: No Flight Change (Type 0)
Figure 5.5: Trade Change by Flight Change: Flights with Increased Capacity (Type 2)
Figure 5.6: Trade Change by Flight Change: Increased Frequency of Flights (Type 3)
Figure 5.7: Trade Change by Flight Change: Launch of Flights to Additional Cities (Type 4)
Figure 5.8: Trade Change by Flight Change: Starting Flights to Country (Type 5)
Chapter 6

Conclusion

As discussed above, although the combined trade and flight figures offer new insights, the fundamental reason why changes in flights patterns are arguably far more insightful is because changes in trade changes happen more slowly than changes in flights. Moreover, the problem of using changes in trade as a marker for changes in political alliances is further compounded by the lag between real-time trade and when they are reported in IMFs Direction of Trade Statistics (DOTS). For example, all the above graphs trade relations until August 2018 or the third quarter in 2018 because those were the dates last updated by IMF. On the other hand, there have been numerous changes in flight patterns between August 2018 and March 2019 all of which have been reported immediately. For example, on March 7, 2019, Qatar Airways launched two new destinations, Rabat and Izmir. Due to the fact that each new destination require significant planning and resources, the addition of these new destinations in Morocco and Turkey illustrate the trajectory of their relations as they unfold in real-time.

The fracture within the GCC, highlighted by the changes in flight patterns, suggests that the Gulf states are using the 2017 diplomatic crisis to prioritize internationalization over continued regionalization. While African Muslim states are using the crisis to improve their multilateral ties with Saudi and its allies, Qatar is using
the crisis to pivot towards individual states within the global order, injecting new dynamics into intraregional and international relations. This diversification of the GCC states geopolitical interests marks a profoundly significant juncture in the process of Gulf states repositioning themselves within the changing global order. It also reflects an intense intraregional competitive pressure driving authoritarian regimes to carve out separate niches that can attract international prestige. While the changes in interstate cooperation and the development of new transnational networks are not immediately apparent, flight changes give a real-time insight into how Gulf authoritarian leaders are actively modifying their engagement strategies in the broader processes of globalization.
References


