QATAR'S COMMUNICATION STRATEGY AND THE RESOLUTION OF THE DIPLOMATIC CONFLICT IN THE GULF

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Abstract

On the 5th of June 2017, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Bahrain announced the rupture of diplomatic relations and the closure of borders with Qatar in response to its alleged support for terrorist activities destabilising the region. In order to revert the situation, 13 demands were made, which Qatar refuses to meet.

Qatar was isolated within the Gulf Cooperation Council and its international image was damaged, particularly after the Trump Administration backed the blockade. In these trying circumstances, Qatar has managed to resist by developing a public diplomacy that integrates the analogue and digital environments in which communications play a vital role. Qatar has protested its innocence before regional and international public opinion, and it has denounced the anti-Qatar campaign and fake news stories that flooded social media, particularly Twitter, before and during the first months of the crisis.

It has developed a communication strategy showing its willingness to open dialogue, respect for international bodies where it defended its cause, together with diplomatic activities reinforcing its positions before very diverse actors such as the United States, international bodies, Kuwait and Turkey. Qatar used this strategy to transform its *online* influence into *offline* diplomatic influence until it succeeded in getting Kuwait to act as mediator, with the support of the United States, in order to put an end to the blockade, which was the top goal of its foreign policy.

Keywords

Communication; blockade; digital diplomacy; Qatar; public diplomacy.

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1. Introduction

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) was created in 1981 and it is formed by: Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, Oman and Qatar. It is a political and economic alliance with the goal of fostering cooperation in all areas. The presidency of the GCC rotates every year and it is headquartered in Riyadh. The highest decision-making entity, the Supreme Council of Heads of State, meets annually.

The GCC constituted an example of cooperation for the Arab world until the 2017 crisis. From an economic point of view, it is the Arab space with the highest degree of integration, its highest achievement being the creation of a common market that came into effect on the 1st of January 2008. This involved the free movement of people, goods and capital. Despite some failed initiatives such as the creation of a single currency in 2010, the GCC has succeeded in connecting the electrical grids of the six countries and started a project in 2009 to connect railway networks transporting both passengers and goods. The diplomatic crisis changed the outline of this project created to connect Saudi Arabia and Qatar, which was later expanded to the rest of the countries (Keynoush, 2020)².

Cooperation in the area of Defence came into effect with the creation of the *Peninsula Shield Force* in 1984, with headquarters in Saudi Arabia, and was expanded in 2004 with the signature of a pact for sharing intelligence. The Shield Force has been deployed numerous times, the most significant occasion taking place in 2011 when the Bahrain government requested help in order to control the strong protests in its territory.

The diplomatic crisis undoubtedly marks a before and after for the GCC and puts into question the entirety of the cooperation carried out throughout 36 years. It also casts doubts on the possibility of making more progress in the area of political and economic integration. In addition, it has affected the geopolitics of the Middle East and generated new alliances and alignments, which have effects that are difficult to predict.

¹ Article translated by Najual Traductores & Intérpretes.

² <https://insidearabia.com/gcc-railway-project-held-up-by-financial-problems-and-qatars-exclusion/>.

This article aims to offer a perspective on how Qatar has used public diplomacy (PD) in the digital environment. The objective is to analyse how Qatar's PD has managed communication and determine the basis on which its PD has created an official narrative for defending its case before the international community, both in traditional media as well as in social media, especially on Twitter. The ultimate goal was to end the blockade without meeting the demands of the countries that imposed it. In order to achieve this goal, Qatar needed to translate its *online* influence into *offline* influence.

1.1. Milestones of the diplomatic crisis in the Gulf

The announcement of the rupture of diplomatic relations took place on the 5th of June 2017. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain unilaterally declared the closure of land, air and maritime borders with Qatar, as well as the interruption of trade in goods and services. These actions were followed by the expulsion of all the Qatari residents that were present in their territories and the immediate recall of all their citizens that were residing in Qatar.

On the 8th of June, the quartet³ published a joint declaration including a list of 59 people and 12 foundations in Qatar that were linked to terrorism. On the 22nd of June, it published a list of 13 demands for putting an end to the crisis, which included the closure of the television chain *Al Jazeera*, the end of Iran's diplomatic missions in Qatar, as well as the closure of the Turkish military base that was under construction in Qatar. If Qatar accepted these demands, a period of ten years would begin in which the quartet would audit *in situ* whether these conditions were met or not.

Qatar did not accede to these demands since it considered that they compromised its sovereignty, and thus faced an unprecedented financial boycott aggravated by its geographical location. Qatar is a peninsula with a single land border with Saudi Arabia, and its main supply lines are the container ships moored on the ports of the UAE. In addition, the closure of the neighbouring airspace of the GCC grounded a large part of Qatar's air fleet. Qatar was forced to look for alternatives in order to secure supplies, air routes and security. Moreover, it had to defend itself before the international community against what it considered to be infringements on the rights of its citizens and companies, and it had to protest its innocence at being accused of promoting terrorism in the region. All these actions came at a great financial and reputational cost that cast doubts on, among other things, the country's suitability to host international events such as the FIFA World Cup in 2022.

For three years and seven months, Qatar managed to survive the blockade, forge new alliances and restructure its economy by means of an active foreign policy in which communications have played a vital role. The end of the diplomatic crisis was announced on the 4th of January 2021 when Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs officially announced that Saudi Arabia was opening its air space and its borders with Qatar that same afternoon. The following day, the fortieth summit of the GCC began on the Saudi city of Al-Ula, where the reconciliation between the countries of the Gulf was confirmed.

³ The terminology used by Qatari media in English referred to the group of countries as "the quartet" or *the blockading countries*. They were often mentioned as a group led by Saudi Arabia.

1.2. Public diplomacy in the digital era

The term public diplomacy (PD) appeared in the United States in 1965, coined by Edmond Gullion. Its definition has evolved alongside international relations, particularly since the end of the Cold War. (Manheim, 1994) defined PD as "the actions that the government of a nation takes in order to influence the public opinion and the elites of another nation with the aim of making the foreign policy of said government favourable to it". More recent definitions state that PD consists of "indirectly influencing the behaviour of a foreign government by exerting influence on the attitudes of its citizens" (Noya, 2006: 6). It is important to point out that PD aims to influence not only foreign policy matters but also any matter that may affect a country's national interests. In this regard, (Lee & Hocking, 2010: 11), recognise that PD is concerned with promoting a state's strategic objectives.

Since it wants to exert influence on a foreign public with certain goals in mind, PD can be mistaken for propaganda. The difference is that PD is "a two-way street" that in addition to exerting influence on a foreign public, it also establishes a sort of dialogue with it (Melissen, 2011: 18). Similarly, (Hayden, 2012) states that in a digital environment, audiences are active agents, so this diffuses the boundaries between PD and traditional diplomatic activities, which include communication.

At this point it is necessary to mention the term digital diplomacy (DD), which relates to the use of digital technology and social media for diplomatic ends. Currently there is not a unified definition of DD nor a unified focus of research (Manor, 2017). Some authors state that DD is just diplomacy that uses digital technology media and involves changes in the exercise of diplomacy but no changes to its objectives. In this regard, (Hocking & Melissen, 2015:9) declare that the digital revolution produces fundamental changes in diplomatic functions, including negotiation, representation and communication. In the digital era, DD must be capable of building a network of networks of followers and influencers, as well as knowing how to link the effects of DD with tangible foreign policy outcomes in order to convert online influence into offline diplomatic influence (Bjola, 2018).

In this context, the communication function of PD experiences a type of hybridisation between the environments of new media and diplomatic channels. According to (Hocking & Melissen, 2015: 11), this results in an adaptation between analogue and digital, so that traditional media are adapting to new ways of conceptualising, sharing and viewing news. According to (Rubio, 2015 :16), PD has expanded its scope to global public opinion, and this transformation "has been accelerated by digital media (Twitter), the rise of international television stations (CNN and Al Jazeera) and the advent of transparency in our lives (Wikileaks)". Nowadays, almost no one questions that PD practices on social media influence the perception of a country by target audiences, although measuring their impact is complex (Sevin & Ingenhoff, 2018). The conclusion applied to DD in the United States that "network technologies give the power back to the nation-state and to large institutions" (Ross, 2011) is more debatable, though interesting.

2. Communication as a new battlefield in this diplomatic crisis

Like a product of its time, this conflict had one of its battlefields in cyberspace, where cyberattacks, disinformation, the use of bots and campaigns in social media were carried out in favour and against the countries involved. When reviewing the literature related to communication management by official bodies during this crisis, it becomes apparent that there are not many studies published, and that qualitative analyses of communications in social media are predominant though with two different focus.

The first group studies the content of the messages of public bodies in social media as a DD tool, while the second group focuses on analysing the *hashtags* of the most popular tweets during the first months of the crisis. Among the first group, (Mitchell, 2019) does an outstanding qualitative and quantitative analysis of the digital discourse in the six countries of the GCC during the diplomatic crisis, which is centred around sensitive topics such as the FIFA World Cup in 2022, the role of women, and the demarcation of borders. This author concludes that "the politicisation of the online public sphere in the region does not represent a fundamental change in the diplomacy of the region but rather a new battleground for old regional rivalries."

One of the most complete studies was carried out by (Al-Mansouri, Al-Mohannadi & Feroun, 2021) that analysed the communications on Twitter by the ministers and the ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of the four GCC countries involved in the crisis during the period between the 5th of June and the 13th of September 2017. The study is limited to messages in Arabic and on Twitter, since it considers it the only social media platform used by the Gulf States for their PD activities addressed to the public in the region. These authors note that the minister and the MFA of Qatar are the second most active in the number of tweets published, and that the predominating subject is the visits and meetings with their counterparts from other countries, followed by terrorism. The focus on the latter is radically different from the rest of the countries involved in the conflict, since it always highlights Qatar's commitment to fighting international terrorism. These authors compare their conclusions with the analysis carried out by (Akdenizli, 2018) based on the tweets in English published by the government bodies in the Gulf. According to these authors, there are differences in the frequency, wording of the statements, target audience and subjects discussed.

In addition to the above-mentioned analyses, (Jones, 2017) studies the use of bots and considers it proven that 20% of the Twitter accounts posting anti-Qatar content were bots. The same author expands the scope of his research (Jones, 2019) and highlights the anti-Qatar propaganda using tweets with tags against the emir and his "regime", against Al Jazeera, and those linking Qatar with terrorist groups or with Iran. This author casts doubt on the use of Twitter "as a tool to generate valid discussions about public opinion, even though it is a very important tool for sharing news". In a similar way, (Leber & Abrahams, 2019), consider proven the manipulation of discourse on the internet and the mass production of messages using bots with the goal of earning supporters.

The second group of analysis focuses more on the topics that support *people to people* communications, among which (Allagui & Akdenizli, 2019) should be highlighted, which studies the information war and the role played by media and new technologies as tools to divide people and propagate the crisis. The authors conclude that "either voluntarily or by force, social media users backed the positions of their governments". This backing

loses significance in light of the threats that the majority of the States levied against the citizens that backed the propositions of the opposing countries.

Among this second group there is also an article published in the Singaporean newspaper *The Straits Times*⁴ about the content of the tags featured in messages that appeared during the first days of the crisis on Twitter, Facebook and Snapchat. This article is useful for reflecting on and remembering the reactions of the users supporting their countries or making references to matters such as the celebration or potential cancellation of the Football World Cup in Qatar. It is interesting to note that many expatriates originating from numerous countries, and particularly Asian countries, also participated in the discussions that took place on social media.

In spite of its limitations, peer-reviewed literature shows that the countries involved in the crisis used social media as a PD instrument. However, it seems that the messages published on social media aimed at the regional public had a purpose more related to propaganda. In the case of Qatar, it involved showing national unity and support for its leaders, refuting accusations and showing a prominent activity abroad as proof that the country was not isolated.

As for the messages published in English on social media by official government bodies or media, these reflect the official narrative, and they are an additional media channel trying to influence international public opinion. In the case of Qatar, taking into consideration the centralisation of official government communications and that most of the media is owned by the state, it can be stated that communications on social media reflect the official narrative and they are another tool of PD. As a result, faced with the technical limitations involved in analysing the contents on social media of all of Qatar's official government media and their international impact, the analysis of news published in English on the websites of government media for the international community can serve for the purposes of this analysis. This indirect way of studying both the content of the narrative as well as the priority target audience makes it possible to understand the core ideas on which the Qatari version of the crisis has revolved around, and get a perspective about the organisation of the communications used to achieve the objectives of its PD.

3. Analysis of Qatar's official government communications during the crisis

All matters related to official government communications in Qatar are handled by a government body called The Government Communications Office ([GCO](#)). This body answers to the prime minister and it is the main source of official government news. As a guide for this study, the timeline of the crisis that appears on the website of the GCO has been followed, which reflects the most significant events for Qatar. Similarly, the news published in English by official government media have been used, mainly Al Jazeera, but also by the MFA and the QNA. In addition, evidence of the impact that some of these news had on international media and institutions was sought.

⁴ <https://www.straitstimes.com/world/middle-east/qatar-crisis-spills-onto-social-media>.

This section is divided into three blocks. The first one details Qatar's version of what transpired before the official announcement of the rupture of diplomatic relations, and it is obviously a retrospective view of events. The second one focuses on presenting the relevant facts to Qatar and that have an international impact when it comes to seeking support. This section has a subsection dedicated to U.S. related news and another subsection making reference to sharing news related to Kuwait and Turkey. The conclusion of the analysis is detailed in a third section presenting how the end of the diplomatic crisis was communicated.

3.1. Presenting the relevant facts before the crisis

The official timeline of the GCO presents three relevant facts that took place before the crisis. The first one is the publication of an article in a U.S. media outlet, which is not mentioned by name, on the 20th of April 2017. According to the GCO, it is the first in a series of thirteen articles with unfounded accusations aimed at smearing the reputation of Qatar in the U.S.

The second one is the summit in Riyadh between the U.S. and the countries of the Muslim World League, in which Qatar commits to fight terrorism together with the countries of the GCC. In addition, Al Jazeera⁵ highlights in its chronicle of the summit the differences between the respectful speech about Islam given by Trump at the summit and the measures taken by his Administration "against several Muslim majority nations and his previous comments about Islam". Moreover, it highlights the signature during the summit of the biggest arm sales contract in the history of the U.S., which was agreed with Saudi Arabia.

The third relevant fact was the hacking of QNA's web and the social media accounts of other governmental institutions on the 24th of May 2017⁶. One year later, Al Jazeera⁷ reported that the attack was carried out by a "pirate cell" working from inside a Saudi ministry. These attacks consisted of publishing false statements attributed to the emir or the QNA on social media in order to start a smear campaign that would reach its highest point during the diplomatic crisis of the 5th of June. It also highlights that before and after the day of the rupture of diplomatic relations, Saudi Arabia and its allies created 187 Twitter accounts.

3.2. Narrative of the facts relevant to Qatar during the crisis and their international impact

Once the crisis was declared, the measures of the blockade began to be enforced. Thus, on the 19th of June 2017, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the UAE ordered their citizens residing in Qatar to immediately return to their countries of origin and banned any Qatari citizens from entering or remaining in their territories. That same day, Qatar denounced

⁵ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/5/21/riyadh-summit-discusses-ways-of-rooting-out-terrorism>,

⁶ Days later, an article published in the U.S. press did not give credence to the statements attributed to the emir of Qatar nor to a fake interview of the QNA declaring that, among other things, Iran was the great stabilising power in the region: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/06/01/whats-going-on-with-qatar/>

⁷ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/6/4/qatar-state-news-agencys-hacking-linked-to-riyadh>.

these unilateral measures before the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights of the UN⁸ For the GCO, these measures represented a violation of fundamental rights since they “divide families, interrupt studies or force businesses to close”⁹.

On the 8th of January 2018, Al Jazeera¹⁰ shared the news that a report of the UN concluded that the blockade was illegal. This report was based on the conclusions of a representative of the High Commissioner for Human Rights of the UN, who travelled to Qatar in November 2017. The statement of Ali bin Smaikh al Marri, chairman of the Committee for Human Rights of Qatar, is transcribed in the same news story, highlighting that “the blockade not only seriously affects diplomatic relations and it is not only an economic boycott, but its measures are also unilateral, abusive and arbitrary, and they affect Qatari and expatriate citizens.”

This news story was widely shared in numerous international media and institutions throughout 2018. The reaction of the U.S. media is detailed in point 3.2.1. In turn, Amnesty International¹¹ condemned the damage caused to thousands of people in the Gulf. Additionally, it rejected the coercion exerted on the citizens of the States imposing the blockade, which included threats of prison sentences to anyone who expressed sympathy for Qatar and to those who had not left the country. The Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor also published a report denouncing the measures of the blockade as “a flagrant violation of human rights” (Euro-Med Monitor, 2018).

Concurrently, Qatar began legal actions via government channels to denounce that the blockade breach international agreements related to human rights or free commerce. Each one of these complaints was echoed in mainstream and social media. Table 1 shows the most significant requests before international bodies.

One of the most remarkable cases that was taken before the WTO was the pirating of BeIN Sports, a company with the rights to broadcast Premier League matches in the Middle East and North Africa. Al Jazeera¹² reported that the hack was carried out in an operation called “beoutQ”. The WTO created a panel to investigate the complaint. Another interesting case was Qatar Airways’ request of international arbitration against the four states of the blockade on the 22nd of July 2020. It claimed \$5 billion in damages for the closure of airspaces and the cost overrun of having to trace longer routes.

Table 1. Qatar's requests before international bodies

Action	Date	Resolution	Date
Qatar requests starting proceedings against Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the UAE and Egypt before the ICAO for the blockade of airspace, which infringes on article 84 of the International Convention of Civil Aviation.	30/10/17	The ICAO accepts Qatar's request.	29/06/18

⁸ The United Nations Human Rights Training and Documentation Centre for South-West Asia and the Arab Region has been headquartered in Doha since 2009.

⁹ The public body Doha International Family Institute (DIFI, 2018) published a about the consequences of the blockade on Qatari families and on other families of the Gulf.

¹⁰ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/1/8/qatar-un-report-proof-saudi-led-blockade-illegal>.

¹¹ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2018/06/one-year-since-gulf-crisis-qatar-bahrain/>.

¹² <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2018/12/18/wto-to-investigate-saudi-rights-breach-over-qatars-bein>

Dispute with the UAE before the WTO due to the measures restricting commerce and the rights of intellectual property.	23/10/17	The Dispute Settlement Body of the WTO accepts Qatar's request and creates a panel to study the complaints. The panel is created. Qatar withdraws from the dispute	22/11/17 28/05/19 19/01/21
Qatar requests provisional measures against the UAE before the ICJ for violating the Convention against all kinds of racial discrimination.	11/06/18	The ICJ orders provisional measures. The ICJ dismisses the case	23/07/18 04/02/21
Appeals presented by Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the UAE and Egypt before the International Court of Justice against the decision of the ICAO.	04/07/18	The appeals are rejected and Qatar's right to continue its procedure before the ICAO is recognised.	14/07/20
Legal action taken against Saudi Arabia before the WTO for blocking BeIN Sports' network and pirating its contents.	10/18	The WTO accepts investigating Qatar's accusations.	18/12/18

Source: author's own research (WTO: World Trade Organization. ICAO: International Civil Aviation Organization. ICJ: International Court of Justice).

3.2.1 Relevant news for Qatar related to the United States

Trump's initial show of support for the countries promoting the blockade seemed to affect bilateral relations. In the days after the announcement of the diplomatic rupture, some U.S. media reported on the humanitarian tragedy caused by the blockade and presented the arguments put forth by Qatar's official government communications detailed on section 3.2. An article in *The Washington Post*¹³ described the panic felt by all the residents in Qatar, not only Qatari nationals, at the possibility of running out of supplies, and detailed specific cases of people affected. *Los Angeles Times*¹⁴ also highlighted the situation of the citizens of the four countries of the Gulf affected by these measures and mentioned the reactions of the international bodies.

There are three facts in relation to the U.S. that are mentioned in the timeline of the GCO. The first one is the signature of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on the 11th of July to cooperate against international terrorism and its financing, which the MFA reports in detail. Other news published in the two months following the announcing of the blockade cast doubts on whether bilateral relations had been affected¹⁵.

The second milestone highlighted by the GCO was the inaugural United States-Qatar Strategic Dialogue meeting, held on the 30th of January 2018. This was interpreted as a new mechanism for strengthening bilateral relations. Some experts believe that this meeting was the first message sent to the boycotting countries that their goal of isolating Qatar had failed (Kabalan, 2018)¹⁶.

¹³ https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/qatari-capital-brims-with-fear-uncertainty-and-resilience-as-arab-crisis-intensifies/2017/06/10/bf1b2060-4d4b-11e7-987c-42ab5745db2e_story.html

¹⁴ <https://www.latimes.com/world/middleeast/la-fg-qatar-blockade-20170619-story.html>.

¹⁵ On the 24th of July works began to expand the Al Udeid military base hosting 11,000 American troops, and on the 2nd of August the Minister of Defence of Qatar visited the U.S.

¹⁶ http://arabcenterdc.org/policy_analyses/the-us-qatar-strategic-dialogue-messages-and-implications/.

The third fact in the Qatari timeline took place in Washington when the emir of Qatar was welcomed by Trump on the 10th of April 2018. It appeared that Trump's position was now "more impartial and supportive of finding a solution to the crisis" in the Gulf (Kabalan, 2018). The subsequent meetings of the Strategic Dialogue on the 13th of January 2019 and the 18th of September 2020 strengthened bilateral relations and supported Qatar's good reputation in the international sphere.

3.2.2 Narratives affecting third countries

This section makes reference to two countries that are key for Qatar's cause for very different reasons, though there are no news stories that made reference to them in the GCO's timeline. Kuwait was mentioned especially in communications by government bodies such as the MFA in matters related to the U.S. The news of the signature of the MoU on the 11th of July 2017 also confirmed Qatar's support for Kuwait's role as mediator. From that moment on, each news story asserting Qatar's bilateral relations with the U.S. included a reference to Kuwait's mediation in solving the crisis via diplomatic means. Al Jazeera also recognised Kuwait's role as mediator¹⁷.

As for Turkey, in the first weeks of the blockade the government media highlighted its military support and provision of supplies. One year after the crisis, Al Jazeera published a long article detailing that bilateral relations had been strengthened¹⁸. Qatar is now the second biggest investor in Turkey, has backed the Turkish currency when it fell against the dollar, and it is planning to expand its investments. Turkish companies increased their exports to Qatar and were given contracts for projects related to the FIFA World Cup for over \$11 billion. An outside observer can see that one of the "bothersome" alliances for the blockading countries has strengthened its ties with Qatar across every field. Government media also covered the official visits made by the emir and the Turkish president in the last two years.

3.3. Presenting the reconciliation

The GCO featured a single piece of information about the summit of the GCC at Al-Ula¹⁹. The content was quite neutral in tone and highlighted that the goals of the summit were promoting good-neighbourliness, "emphasising the illegality of infringing on the sovereignty of any of the member states", in addition to not interfering in their internal affairs. Al Jazeera did not publish too many news stories either about the end of the blockade, and the matter was treated, indirectly, through the opinions of experts. An example is (Aboueldahab, 2021)²⁰, who highlighted that in order to move on, the Gulf region must recognise the social and political damage caused because "the fissures in the Gulf social fabric cannot be reverted nor forgotten so easily." This expert suggested putting into place a process of transitional justice²¹.

¹⁷ Particularly in the news story about the death of the emir of Kuwait.
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/9/29/sheikh-sabah-the-gcc-has-lost-his-voice-of>.

¹⁸ <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2018/8/16/turkey-and-qatar-behind-the-strategic-alliance>.

¹⁹ <https://www.gco.gov.qa/en/top-news/41st-gcc-summit-al-ula/>.

²⁰ <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/1/20/mending-the-gulf-rift-calls-for-reconciliation>.

²¹ This process includes reparations, compensations, researching and unearthing the truth about what took place, applying criminal liabilities among other measures.

Therefore, reconciliation must go beyond merely restoring diplomatic relations and opening the borders. Al Jazeera's²² web page published a podcast summarising the consequences of the blockade for the population of the Gulf and the economic burden it has entailed. It also highlighted how the blockade strengthened Qatar's cooperation with Iran and Turkey. This piece of media does not omit a single offence, and neither does it leave any sensitive topic aside.

4. Outcomes

The analysis of the previous section shows that the narrative constructed by Qatar to explain the facts that took place before the diplomatic rupture is based on the idea that it was "a plot orchestrated wilfully and with the clear intention of damage Qatar's image". This plot involved all kinds of dishonest actions such as the hacking of government websites and the spread of fake news promoting the idea that Qatar supports international terrorism.

As for the narrative used during the crisis, it was based on two core ideas that try to prove that Qatar was treated unfairly and that it was a victim of the quartet:

1. The blockade is a violation of the fundamental rights and the security of the population residing in the four Gulf countries involved.
2. Qatar is a loyal ally of the U.S and has strengthened its cooperation with it in order to maintain the stability in the region and fight against terrorism.

The first core idea is aimed at the international community and it has two ideas that derive from it. The first one is that the blockade is illegal because it violates the fundamental rights of the Qatari people and the citizens of the other three countries of the GCC implicated in the conflict, as well as those of expatriates. Qatar defends before the international community the rights of the people that were forced to leave their place of residency. The defence of the expatriates with lower incomes received some coverage in Asian media, especially at the beginning of the blockade, since it put at risk even their food security. The second idea is related to the complaint before international bodies about the breach of international agreements by the countries of the blockade, which affect Qatari companies. The underlying idea is that Qatar respects international agreements and takes the international institutions it belongs to seriously.

The second core idea aims to show that bilateral relations are still alive in spite of the crisis. Qatar hopes to earn the sympathy of part of the U.S. public opinion and show the different attitudes of their Administrations regarding the conflict. The dichotomy between the U.S. Ministry of Defence and Trump's attitude until September 2018 is very remarkable. From that date on, the U.S. supported the diplomatic solution and Kuwait's mediation.

²² <https://www.aljazeera.com/podcasts/2021/1/13/why-the-blockade-against-qatar-is-ending-now>.

5. Conclusions

In light of the facts, it seems evident that the Qatari PD met its objective of putting an end to the blockade without meeting the demands and achieved it through diplomatic means.

Qatar has centralised the construction of its narratives. This has facilitated spreading the message through official government channel, both in traditional and social media.

Qatar has created strong narratives that have convinced their target audiences. These were international institutions and the U.S. public opinion.

It has earned credibility thanks to its arguments and a stance that was both firm yet always open to dialogue, without making unwarranted retaliations. Using international institutions to solve its problems in the framework of international legality has given Qatar an image of transparency and legality.

This smart strategy has allowed Qatar to convince the reluctant Trump Administration and show the world that the accusations that gave rise to the blockade were part of a smear campaign. Qatar has been the champion of *fair play* while subtly showing, at the same time, that it has found other alternatives for ensuring its security across every field. After many of the arguments of its opponents have fallen apart, the end of the blockade represents the beginning of a new stage in the relations of the GCC.

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