The Gulf Crisis: An Insight Into Kuwait’s Mediation Efforts

Abdulhadi Alajmi
Kuwait University, State of Kuwait, Kuwait

Mediation is an important peaceful means of resolving international disputes. In such cases, the mediator invites member states in dispute to roundtable negotiations to bring about a reconciliation. In the late GCC crisis between Qatar on one hand and Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt on the other, Kuwaiti mediation tries to bridge the gap and prevent escalation that might lead to military confrontation against Doha to force a change of regime. However, this mediation is always in danger of an elongated crisis that might worsen the situation and hinder the parties reaching a reconciliatory settlement of their dispute. This is a challenge that confronts the Kuwaiti mediator and jeopardizes the very existence of the GCC in case the Kuwaiti mediator fails to reach a settlement. The dispute went beyond a limited geographic one with Egypt joining the boycott and the symbolic presence of Turkish troops in Qatar. As such, the dispute has created an unprecedented political rift among Gulf States and their rulers and somehow worries the existing regimes. This worrying situation threatens the core principles of some of these States, including those who are still neutral towards the dispute.

Keywords: Kuwait, mediation, dispute, Gulf crisis, Qatar, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

The Kuwaiti Mediation Efforts and the Gulf Crisis Test

Mediation efforts are considered an important peaceful means that contributes to the settlement of international disputes whereby the mediator takes it upon themselves to solve existing disagreements through negotiations and discussions and sitting down at one table.1

Mediation has emerged in the charter of several international organizations in a very explicit way; foremost amongst these organizations are the United Nations and the League of Arab States. These mediators sometimes call for the interests of some of the neighboring or regional parties and even the international community especially when a conflict between two or several states occurs. These mediation efforts strive to settle such conflicts quickly and satisfactorily to all parties concerned. The aims of the mediation are to narrow divergences between views and allow discussions between the conflicting parties. The mediators themselves have to be impartial and acceptable by all the parties of the conflict.

In the recent Gulf crisis, Kuwaiti mediation efforts were an attempt to bridge the Gulf rift that occurred between more than half of the GCC countries—Qatar, on the one side of the rift, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain on the other—especially with regards to an escalation of tensions to an armed conflict that might lead to regime change in Doha.

Kuwaiti mediation efforts are confronted by the constant threats represented by the long duration of the crisis and the failure to reach a satisfactory settlement. This not only jeopardizes the Kuwaiti position but also that of the Gulf Cooperation Council, rendering the latter useless.

1 Ago (R), science juridique et droit international, R.C.A.D.I. 1956, p. 859.
Thus, the Kuwaiti decision-maker realizes that length of time is a factor which will limit his ability to preserve Kuwait’s political prestige and to find quick solutions to settle the conflict, especially with the intensity of the regional and international presence as a multi-element influencer which imposes itself on any solutions or agendas that are suggested by the mediator to settle the situation. This reflects a very complicated issue that will require complex solutions.

Therefore, the recent Gulf crisis is a complicated mixture that faces the Kuwaiti mediator in terms of his ability to see the facts and what lies “underneath the surface”. Between the conflict, problem, or maybe the setback, the parties concerned, especially Kuwaiti mediation efforts, are not familiar with the political issue that is represented by the recent crisis; particularly the intensive presence of scenes of complexity, intersection, and mutual conflict at the same time.

After the setbacks or the “faltering” of the most current mediation efforts, the crisis is back to square one. Kuwaiti efforts face an unusual challenge that they have not faced since the 1990s, particularly since the Iraqi invasion. A challenge that has contributed to the clash of agendas of the mediators involved on the one hand and the complexities of internal affairs and the multiplicity of powers on the other hand.

The crisis has gone beyond the immediacy of the Gulf region; as Egypt and Turkey have become components, the latter having military forces in Qatar. This has created a deep political rupture for the Gulf and its regimes (Mitroff & Pouchant). The crisis might also threaten the impartial countries, Kuwait and Oman.

**Kuwait’s Mediation Efforts Between Reality and the Unknown**

The aim of analyzing the role of each country and its position is to highlight its actual value and what it can offer, its vital interests and the role it can play as a party in a conflict or crisis, or as a mediator.

When looking at Kuwait one realizes that it is located in the middle of a triangle of three major powers with large geographic and population densities (Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia). It is not surprising that each one of these countries has a history of conflict and attempts of expansion of which Kuwait itself was the target. Kuwait is fully aware of its position and its existential “jeopardy” vis-à-vis the above countries.

This recent Gulf crisis is not seen as simply a geopolitical conflict by Kuwait, rather it reminds Kuwait and has all the elements of the Iraqi invasion of 1990, sans military action. Even though military action has, for the moment been postponed and replaced by the 13 demands, the “ghost” of military action looms large as there have been countless incidents of air and sea space penetrations on the part of the parties in the crisis.

**Why the Efforts Are Overlapping**

The ability of the Kuwaiti mediator in accurately identifying the components of the crisis and its causes is an important factor. The recent Gulf crisis events are rapidly evolving, almost daily. It is also difficult to decide the cause of the conflict and those who are driving it. Add to this is the importance of being able to offer appropriate views that meet the minimum requirements of the disputed parties.

Parallel to this, the mediator is faced with the obstacle of the causes of the crisis itself. The crisis probably

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3 For example, Kuwait was the target of Saudi aggression in the years 1793 and 1797 and has gone through the bitter experiment of the Saddam invasion of 1990 from its Iraqi neighbor and of course the constant Iranian threats at the present time.
4 These demands that have since been reduced and some even abandoned, but remains the possibility of reducing more or even increasing.
revealed an important fact to the Kuwaiti mediator which is that historical disagreements, postponed or overcome at times, are subject to the ability of the parties concerned to maintain one another’s interests. Any confusion or reversibility in the political interests, in particular, will lead to a more dangerous setback, which is actually what occurred here. There is also the unsolved “surplus power” that some parties feel they possess. Another factor is the temperament of some parties in dealing with the crisis.

This crisis and its rapid worsening was the main cause behind the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Sabah al Ahmed’s announcement in his last speech⁵ (took place during the opening of the second ordinary session of the 15th legislative session of the National Assembly, 24th October, 2017) following a visit to Saudi Arabia, where he warned of the “collapse of the Gulf House”, stressing that any escalation would have damaging and destructive consequences to the security of the Gulf and its peoples.⁶

The Kuwaiti mediation effort undeniably achieved an important step as it was able to hold the 38th Gulf Summit in Kuwait on 5 of December 2017, despite the fact that this success was accompanied by a low representation of several participating countries; namely that of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, thus forcing the Kuwaiti mediator to reduce the duration of the summit to one day instead of the usual two.

The Kuwaiti mediator is certainly in the middle of an unusual crisis which is molded with a legacy fraught with fear and unease; a legacy that is torn between history from one side and the view of failure from the other. The minimal loss of this legacy is the end of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) system which survived the first Gulf War (1980s) and the second Gulf war (the last decade of the 20th century) (Sa’id Idris, 2000). The GCC system has witnessed torn countries and people that became a victim of ongoing wars and conflicts and thus lead to the sovereign decisions to be in the hand of direct foreign interventions; Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen are examples of this. Thus, the motives, flexible attitude, and the keenness of the Kuwaiti mediator and its confirmation that its role as a mediator will remain as it is during the crisis are understood.

When discussing Kuwait’s mediation role, it is important to note Kuwait’s investment in the GCC. The Kuwaiti mediator views the GCC as a realistic and permanent experiment compared to other systems. It was able to maintain its existence since its establishment in 1981 and no one could deny this fact. An alternative for such a system, for everyone in general and Kuwait in particular, is absent and no party has any guarantees in case this system disintegrated or some parties withdraw from it.⁷ There are certainly some differences in the policies of some GCC countries but this, compared to other issues and problems, can be contained and controlled. Kuwait has actually succeeded several times in resolving the issues. This could be explained by the strong desire on the part of the four Gulf States, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the Emirates, with the exception of Egypt on several occasions. Kuwait considers this issue a Gulf issue that is governed by the idea of permanence and national characteristics that Gulf countries and their people have in common. “The Kuwaiti mediator views these as characteristics that drive him to continue to fix the situation and fortify the Gulf “house”.⁸ These words still draw attention to the crisis and indicate that the issue will remain inside this context and that Kuwait is only concerned with the Gulf parties.

⁵ Speech in front of the Parliament 24th October, 2017.
⁶ See http://ahewar.org/rate/ys.asp.
⁷ The Kuwaiti Amir has warned in a similar case during an American press conference that Kuwait was able to stop military options that were being considered by some parties to the crisis.
⁸ It is important to note that the US State Department always insisted that an important step in solving the crisis is to have direct talks among the Gulf countries.
Historical Legacy or a Tied Fate

Mediation, whatever its source, form, and mechanism, cannot be embodied as practice. The mediators and the rest of the parties have to understand that the political outcome that is desired must not result in one party being loser and the other victorious.

Kuwait’s role on the diplomatic level is significant. It has performed several actions and made efforts to reproduce the success it has achieved throughout history. This policy is derived from a long heritage of playing the role of mediator and successfully intervening in solving disputes and struggles within the Gulf area.

Therefore, the Kuwaiti mediation efforts seem to rely on its historical heritage which is rooted and stable in this regard, in addition to the structure of the authority and the political system that remained powerful from its inception to this day. This is evident in Kuwait’s active role and influential presence in several international, regional, and Arab issues. Kuwait was active on a diplomatic level for several decades that coincided with the establishment and the emergence of the emirate itself.

History reveals the roots of Kuwait’s political and diplomatic development through several stages. Four centuries ago, the visit of Kuwait’s first ruler, Sheikh Sabah I, to the Ottomans after the establishment of Kuwait, and away from Bani Khalid (Burn, n.d.), confirms that the Kuwaitis sought early to be present as a party that seeks peace and did not desire any conflict with other parties in the region. Perhaps that led the Bani Khalid to contact the Sheikh of Kuwait to address this situation. Sources point out that they contacted the Sheikh of Kuwait (Sabah bin Jabir), and then signed, with his son Abdullah on behalf of his father, a friendship and good neighbor agreement under the condition that Kuwait should not join their opponents (Qal’aji, 1962; Al-Din, 1987). One Western historian describes this visit stating, “Influential people held a meeting and agreed to send an envoy to the Pasha in Basra to explain that they (Kuwaitis) do not intend to harm anyone”.

During the reign of Kuwait’s second ruler, Sheikh Abdullah al-Sabah, the Ottoman authorities asked him to hand over some refugees. He refused despite the fact that the British told him that the governor of Baghdad intended to attack Kuwait if he refused to hand over the refugees. He replied that he was “ready to fight and protect his guests”. This was the new approach adopted by the Kuwaiti authority as it continued to follow the same neutral approach when dealing with controversial issues and political conflicts between some of the neighboring parties at the time.

Sheikh Mohammed al-Sabah (r. 1892-1896), the fifth ruler of Kuwait, performed the role of a mediator when two rival siblings were vying for power in Bahrain. The Kuwaiti mediation efforts were successful and Sheikh Mohammed al-Sabah (Al-Nabahani, 1923) arrived in Bahrain to end the dispute in 1864.

We should also point out that, following the independence of 1961, the Kuwaiti political process continued to follow a balanced approach to solve pending issues between Kuwait and other parties. The Kuwaiti-Iraqi crisis in 1961 is a proof of this, as Kuwait was able to maintain the peace by moving the crisis into the corridors of the Security Council and the League of Arab States.

At the beginning of the conflict between Egypt and Saudi Arabia in 1965, which developed into military threats that would undoubtedly cast a shadow over the Gulf region especially since Egypt’s military was already present in Yemen, the Kuwait Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Salem intervened as a mediator with the approval of the rest of the parties. Kuwait succeeded in holding a dialogue session which the three parties (Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen) participated in.

Kuwait was also present in the Bahraini case after the withdrawal of Britain from the Gulf in 1971 and the
consensus on conducting a referendum for independence of it. Kuwait had an active part once again through the mediation efforts it made. It became the center of attention for a number of British officials especially since the Kuwaiti attitude seemed calm and pragmatic in this case, in the contrary to the position of other parties and other Gulf States. The Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah supported those who said that the issue should be referred to the United Nations who would determine the appropriate way to identify the opinion of the Bahraini people on the issue of self-determination.

Kuwait also made good and satisfactory mediation attempts to reach an agreement with Iran regarding this issue. Kuwait led secret negotiations that were attended by the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.9

When a military conflict occurred in 1971 between East Pakistan (Bangladesh) and India on the one hand and the State of Pakistan on the other hand, Kuwait was one of the first Gulf countries to recognize the independence of Bangladesh. In the same year, the Foreign Minister of Kuwait was the head of the mission formed by the Islamic Conference Organization together with the Foreign Ministers of Somalia and Lebanon.

Moreover, when the conflict broke out between South and North Yemen in 1972, Kuwait continued its mediation efforts to pave the way for resolving the dispute between Yemenis. In the same region in 1984, when conflicts arose once more, Kuwait introduced itself as an impartial neutral mediator. It created a suitable atmosphere for an effective mediation to solve the crisis that erupted between its Arab brothers (Oman and Yemen).

Kuwait’s mediation efforts were also present when conflict between Senegal and Mauritania took place in 1989. Kuwait was keen on deploying the Minister of State for Foreign affairs in an attempt to activate the mechanisms and means of resolution and allow direct dialogue between the two parties to solve the crisis amicably away from any escalation or military conflict between the two countries.10

During the Palestinian-Jordanian crisis, which broke out in 1970 and was accompanied by unfortunate events that came to be known as “Black September”, the Kuwaiti role contributed in pacifying and defusing the dispute between the Palestinian Liberation Organization and Jordan. Similar to Kuwait’s influential role in 1989 in Lebanese affairs, its mediation efforts, along with other parties, helped to establish the Taif Agreement. Kuwaiti mediation efforts were also present in the dispute between Turkey and Bulgaria back in the eighties. The Emir of Kuwait, Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, played a prominent role in the resolution of matters between the two countries.

Kuwaiti mediation efforts played a major role in cooling off issues between Saudi Arabia and Libya especially since the two countries (Libya and Saudi Arabia) had had several differences throughout history. This discrepancy reached its the highest point at the Arab Summit in 2010, as King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and Libyan President Muammar Gaddafi clashed during the summit.

As for Iraq, prior to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, Kuwait did not, at any stage or period, escalate things between itself and the strongest and largest neighbor in terms of geographical size and military strength. Even in Iraq’s dispute with Syria, Kuwait was neutral and made positive mediation efforts in this crisis. It attempted to make efforts to get the neighboring countries to negotiate as it was the most appropriate thing to do to resolve disagreement between them, especially as these were political differences and not military or

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When signs of a crisis in Gulf relations emerged during the Gulf Summit, hosted by Kuwait, the subject of a single currency was raised and Oman was the first to reject it. Kuwaiti mediation efforts succeeded in easing things between the parties and it was agreed to postpone the case. Not to mention that Qatar was in some cases subjected to such dangers, previous to the current crisis. Before the Arab Spring revolutions, when the Egyptian-Qatari conflict appeared on satellite television, media outlets, and newspapers Kuwait made a lot of efforts to contain the crisis between the two countries. Moreover, when the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood collapsed in Egypt and Qatars stood firm against this, Kuwait’s efforts and mediation were once again deployed, in an attempt to bridge the rift in relations between Egypt and Qatar.

This brief presentation of examples of Kuwaiti policy efforts and effectiveness in mediation is an undeniable proof of Kuwait’s important role in solving issues. On the other hand, the outstanding question is: Will this conventional history support mediation efforts in an unconventional crisis?

**Kuwaiti Mediation Efforts Are Plausible…but Remains at Square One**

In order to understand the basic elements of danger facing the Kuwaiti mediator, it is necessary to address the current crisis and the fact that it has become an unusual ideological challenge for the mediator. This crisis could affect the mediator’s previous efforts, target its course of movement, and put it in a sensitive position. Indeed, Kuwait intervened on June 5, even though the crisis predated this in its start time and also its issues.11

This article addresses the role of Kuwait and the future of its current mediation efforts and does not address of other problems and aspects related to this issue; both in terms of policy or economics, which had been addressed and analyzed in several other articles and studies.

After the withdrawal of the ambassadors of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain from Qatar in 2014, Kuwait increased its mediation efforts significantly. Although it has achieved some success in the past, it has failed in solving some issues. Recent moves seem more determined and shaped more firmly. The mediation effort had more ground to work on and it was relatively stable, which resulted in increasing hopes. These hopes were boosted by the people who were performing the mediation efforts, represented by the head of the political leadership itself, the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad.

The Kuwaiti mediator is aware that he has the elements that qualify him for success. The most important characteristics of these elements are the following:

1. The Kuwaiti mediator focuses on the environmental dimension. For example, devoting most of the efforts to the four Gulf States (by only visiting them) despite the fact that there are major parties involved in this crisis including Egypt and Turkey; in addition to some countries that have already cut off their relationship with Qatar, such as the Comoros. The direct visits made by Kuwait’s most powerful representative, formed a special Gulf dimension for the crisis. It sent messages to the people of the region itself that the crisis will remain mainly a Gulf issue.

2. Kuwait has focused during most of its speeches on stating that this crisis involves brothers and

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11 The Kuwaiti mediator is today much more aware than in previous times because of the fact that most of the parties in this crisis are members of the Cooperation Council and any discovery or failure will be followed with a reactive outcome, the least disastrous would be the “hammering of the nail on the coffin of the Gulf Cooperation Council” and even defining the Kuwaiti mediator as with or against (one or more of the parties involved).
neighboring countries and it is an urgent problem that can be and needs to be solved. Therefore, certain parties should stay away if they fail to provide solutions or proposals that help to solve this issue. These messages implied that Kuwait refused to internationalize the issue. It was also an attempt to stop the Gulf region from being a scene for unresolved conflicts between existing international forces that are already deployed in nearby areas (Syria, Yemen, and Iraq).

3. The Kuwaiti mediator had a clear-cut position in the crisis from the first few moments. It asserted constantly that its efforts would remain ongoing as long as the crisis persisted, but the Kuwaiti mediator was aware that timing is a double-edged sword; that is, the longer the crisis takes the crisis, the more complex it becomes and the gap widens, which make it detrimental to these efforts. Thus, this could be the reason behind Kuwait’s fears and pessimism about the collapse of the Gulf system; a pessimism and fear that justifies concern about the effectiveness of completing the mediation efforts. This all has made Kuwait seem incapable of performing its role to solve the situation. Thus, the Kuwaiti mediator needs to overlook this problem of time and be ready to accept it to solve this crisis within its environmental framework.

4. The parties concerned with this conflict understand that Kuwait’s efforts do not have the authority to make or impose a decision which makes them accept and accede to its intervention in this matter. Kuwait, for example, has not encountered complex problems with Doha’s foreign policy, a problem of the kind that has angered the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Egypt. This is an additional factor that gives Kuwaiti efforts a wider area of movement and communication between the parties to the conflict.

5. The flexibility of the Kuwaiti mediation, in addition to its simplicity and quickness, leaves the parties with the freedom of choice without pressure or using working-papers or agendas of any kind. It also takes into account the interests of the parties more than their positions.

A Transitional Scene or a Political Reality

The fundamental elements embodied in the nature of the role of mediation in the current crisis are closely related to some of the previous events and conflicts between the countries in disagreement. The differences between Qatar and the rest of the parties to the crisis, including Egypt, have existed for decades. The Arab Spring Revolutions, especially the January 2010 revolution in Egypt, were a major concern for some systems in the Gulf region. Qatar supported those revolutions from day one and the Al-Jazeera network was one of the most important forums for the people of the countries where the revolutions occurred, despite the opposition of some Gulf countries, especially Saudi Arabia and the UAE. In the wake of the overthrow, by the army, of the democratically elected president of Egypt, Mohamed Morsi in 2013, Qatar’s Sheikh Tamim, who took power in succession of his father in 2013 after the latter’s concession of the throne to his son, visited Saudi Arabia in what seemed like a “subpoena” by the Saudis. The young prince was told of the necessity of adopting a policy, with regards to the Egyptian issue, that is consistent with the policies of the Gulf Cooperation Council. Perhaps in this particular request there were important indicators of the Qatari side, specifically Qatar ignored or challenged these requests. Qatar refused to remain neutral when it came to the Arab Spring revolutions and

12 And in spite of Kuwait knowing-or owning-what evidence that there might be an announced escalation-that is the use of force by all three neighbors against Qatar. And this was indeed in the mind of the Kuwaiti representative even more evident when Turkey sent its forces.
13 It should be noted that Kuwait was aware from the very beginning of the crisis that the Qatari side took quick and precautionary actions to counter the siege imposed on it, without having to rely on Gulf States. Everyone knew that Qatar will not rely on Gulf States within the GCC and that there are regional and international actors who have indeed stepped into the crisis.
counter-revolutions. In 2014, suddenly after the Riyadh Agreement, Bahrain, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia recalled their ambassadors from Doha citing Qatar’s interference in their internal affairs as the cause. This was a new turn in the course of the crisis for Kuwaitis—as well as the Omanis—who did not act in a similar fashion. A new issue rose to the surface; in April Qatar paid a ransom to some of the Iraqi militias and the Syrian opposition to liberate Qatari hostages. Qatar was defying Saudi Arabia’s foreign policy, especially with regard to Syrian and Iraqi matters. Saudi Arabia was quick to accuse Qatar of supporting armed terrorist groups. Kuwait did not comment on this matter nor did it take any actions similar to those taken by Saudi Arabia. On May 23, 2017, Qatar claimed that the site of Qatar News Agency was broken into and described the alleged statements attributed to Sheikh Tamem that were broadcast in Saudi Arabia were all fabricated and therefore false.\(^\text{14}\)

On June 5, 2017, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and the Kingdom of Bahrain, supported by Egypt (which is outside the framework of the Gulf Cooperation Council), announced that they had cut off relations with Qatar. They closed air, sea, and land routes between them and Qatar. The four countries gave Qatari residents and visitors, in their lands, a few days to leave. That was followed on June 8, 2017 by the publication of a list, that included 49 individuals, 12 organizations, and one group, who were all said to support terrorism that Qatar financed. This was accompanied by the publication of these afore mentioned countries’ 13 demands, which were handed over to the Kuwaiti mediator to be presented to Qatar, which declined these demands through the same mediator.

What was remarkable is that the Kuwaiti mediator became the only candidate that was capable of dealing with the mediation burdens, especially after the emergence of confusion and the absence of some of the major powers in this role. It also appeared that the Kuwaiti mediator was working alone without following a certain agenda and did not wait—as was mentioned—for any of the major powers to coordinate with him, more specifically the United States of America. The latter may have been viewed by Kuwait with suspicion and uncertainty because of its ambivalent attitude.\(^\text{15}\) The Amir of Kuwait requested, on the same day in which relations were cut off with Qatar, not to escalate things and provide an opportunity to solve the tension. Kuwait also refused to coordinate with Turkey despite the ratification of the Turkish Parliament, on the 7th of June, 2017, a law that included deploying 5,000 Turkish troops to one of the Turkish military bases in Qatar.

Nonetheless, the results of these efforts were not satisfactory, not to mention that the roots of some political ideologies are also beginning to show clearly, especially the issue of the Muslim Brotherhood and the position of Qatar and its political leaders and elite. Kuwait is aware of this and how difficult it is to change any of it.

The author believes that the Kuwaiti mediation efforts which until now have been characterized by dynamism, flexibility, and a balanced vision and have not been able to provide an appropriate forum, despite holding the 38th Gulf Summit for the conflicting parties to meet and work and agreeing to an acceptable solution. On the other hand, it succeeded in other measures, including ensuring privacy between the parties concerned and making sure that the crisis remained in the framework of the united Gulf House.\(^\text{16}\)

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\(^{15}\) What supports this argument is the contradictory statements stemming from the US Secretary of State and President Trump: Trump made several statements regarding the Qatari issue that were close to the Saudi Position particularly his hope that the isolations of Qatar will bring an end to the “terrorism scare”. See French News Agency, June 5, 2017 seen on June 5, 2017 also https://arabic.cnn.com and https://www.afp.com/ar/news/27/doc-p98fr.

\(^{16}\) It was revealed, by the Amir of Qatar, during his interview on CBS, October 2017, on President Trump’s request to come to Camp David, his willingness to do so in person. This, in spite of the leaders of the other parties being missing, is a ground-breaking achievement on the part of the Kuwaiti mediation efforts.
Qatar’s Position…a Bridge for the Kuwaiti Mediator

Qatari policy views the current Kuwaiti mediation efforts as a last resort before the crisis reaches a critical mass stage. Qatari statements, referring to Kuwait’s stand, reflect gratitude and welcoming. In addition, Kuwait’s statements are always balanced. This had a huge impact on moving things forward, as they revealed reportedly that Doha was willing to negotiate. This perhaps gives the Kuwaiti mediator enough wiggle room to continue the negotiations between the parties in the crisis. Up to this moment, Qatar seemed the most spacious and quiet bridge that the Kuwaiti mediator could cross to solve the crisis. Perhaps Kuwaiti mediation knows that pressuring Riyadh, Abu Dhabi, or Manama to do anything will point the finger at Kuwait and accuse Kuwait of lining up with Qatar. Kuwait would have a lot to lose if that happened.

Therefore, there is no alternative but to seize the opportunity of Qatari flexibility and Qatar’s willingness to sit at the negotiating table. The success of Kuwait in contacting all the parties in this crisis at this stage will probably save the day. Everyone will eventually find themselves compelled to accept the intervention of foreign parties, but when, where, and at what loss or gains, no one knows!

The Gulf Summit…Kuwait Resumes Its Efforts

Kuwait declined requests to relocate the 38th Gulf Summit. Moreover, strategic threats and tensions escalated after the announcement of a partnership between Abu Dhabi and Riyadh and after the killing of Saleh in Yemen. Despite all the conditions, there seemed to be an extraordinary Kuwaiti insistence to hold the summit and gather the parties, even though the Kuwaiti mediator, a few days before the summit was not sure that the leaders of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain would attend. Kuwait seemed to be close to cancelling the summit. Speculations increased in the last few moments because of unusual diplomatic activities. For the first time since 1981, most of the Gulf leaders were absent. Therefore, the Amir of Kuwait insisted on welcoming the guests at the airport personally. Minister of State of Foreign Affairs Anwar Gargash represented Saudi Arabia, the Deputy Prime Minister Mohammed bin Mubarak Al Khalifa represented Bahrain, a Deputy Prime Minister represented Oman, while the Emir of Qatar was the representative of his country.

Despite aspirations and hopes that the parties will sit at one table to negotiate, “charges against Doha after the assassination of Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh in Sanaa”, added more pressure to the efforts of the Kuwaiti mediator. This was evident at the preparatory meeting of foreign ministers which reflected the continuing divisions.

Kuwait’s ability to bring together the parties of the crisis at one table was a good step, compared to other international efforts which had failed so far. Kuwait’s efforts to be a substitute and host to “Gulf 23” also reflected a state of political détente. The Amir of Kuwait, who is clearly more concerned that geopolitical conditions sooner or later will put the fledgling system and all its countries in crisis, calls for the commissioning of a committee to amend the system’s statute to ensure a mechanism to resolve disputes between the member states. However, it is surprising that the final statement of the shortest summit, in the history of the summits, did not focus on resolving the crisis or discussing it. Observers noticed that the summit was held to prevent the dissolution of the GCC Council and conceal the fractures that hit, and is still hitting, the

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17 This is especially the case when one sees that the crisis, by that time, had taken a Geopolitical form with the input of both Turkey and Iran. And that Qatar has maintained, in its external and internal statements, that it will support the Kuwaiti mediation and will do so until there is a resolution to the crisis.

18 Fearing the exclusion of Qatar, as the Bahraini foreign secretary had asked for Qatar’s membership to the GCC suspended.
Gulf system. One could conclude that the situation will remain as it is and this crisis is here to stay.

**The Future of Kuwait’s Mediation Efforts**

Just before warning of the collapse of the Gulf House, the Amir of Kuwait declared that he was surprised by the outbreak of the crisis after the Riyadh meeting of 2017. The declaration was made in September 2017 in a joint press conference with the US President, in the White House. He added that there was no disagreement between Qatar and the rest of the countries during the summit, adding that success in stopping the military option meant that hope of resolving the Gulf crisis had not ended.

Whether there are direct parties pushing for authorization and disclosure or not does not change the fact that Kuwaiti mediation efforts still take into account the option of the use of power which remains strongly present in the imagination of the decision-maker in Kuwait. The question that remains is to what extent the mediator will be able to efficiently keep his efforts going. The answer to this question is subject to two main factors that must be taken into account:

1. The Kuwaiti mediator, who has remained neutral till now, will not be able to move forward with these efforts unless they are turned into tangible results that can be seen. The reality is that the Kuwaiti mediator is surprised by the developments that often bring him back to “square one”. This raises questions about the ability of the Kuwaiti mediator to continue despite his assertion that the efforts will remain as long as the crisis remains.

2. It must be taken into consideration that there are new factors that may affect the position of the Kuwaiti mediator. It is clear that the outcome of his mediation efforts is not stable at this stage, which may increase the complexity of the crisis and its impact on the domestic situation of the GCC countries including Kuwait and Oman who are not part of the conflict. This raises the question of whether the prolonged duration of the crisis will lead to a qualitative or even a minor change in the position of the Kuwaiti mediator if the Kuwaiti mediator assesses that the continuation of the situation as it is or an increase in its severity will have greater consequences than military intervention or internationalization. It is too early to talk about this option or factor, despite the fact that the air and sea penetrations that prompted Qatar to file a complaint with the Security Council had significant ramifications.

With the continued acceleration of the crisis and the Telerson dismissal, as the secretary of state, it can be said that the level of optimism which was high during the negotiation period is now very low. This view is backed by the response of the Qatari Foreign Minister to the question about the possibility of resorting to the military option. He addressed the reporters in Washington and said: “Although Qatar hopes it will not resort to such measures, it is well prepared and can rely on its partners.”

The most prominent question in the meantime and what several reports and the BBC have indicated revolves around “the role of one Gulf country in the crisis”. Will the dismissal of Telerson change the Trump’s administration attitude towards Kuwaiti Mediation efforts? The answer is that the dismissal will indeed, not only affect the parties of the crisis but is also a great setback for Kuwait’s mediation efforts (Which Tellerson himself was comfortable with). At the same time, the commentaries of analysts, politicians, and journalists published in some newspapers and foreign websites should not be neglected: “the Gulf conflict has nothing to

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19 See Bloomberg News and BBC Arabic March 13, 2018.
do with the dismissal of Telerson”.

It is necessary to rule out the assumption that existing Kuwaiti mediation efforts take into account that its future interests will be better served without putting all its eggs in one basket or placing its bet on one side or another etc. It is also important to understand the future impact of these efforts, but will this assumption survive the quick changes of events?

The Kuwaiti mediator may not rely heavily on the media statements that come from the parties to the conflict. Repetitive statements that state that Doha is willing to negotiate are met by the UAE foreign minister, Abdullah Bin Zayed’s assertions that the “four countries are keen on ending the Gulf crisis as soon as possible”. There is also the foreign minister of Saudi Arabia (al-Jabir) and his statement about the willingness of the boycott countries to negotiate with Qatar and that “the military solution is not an option”. The Kuwaiti mediator realizes that these media statements were not followed by practical actions; this is not new, although it could contribute to the growth of the crisis. It should be taken into consideration that Kuwait’s efforts are not treated with doubt and suspension, unlike other Gulf efforts. For example, Omani efforts are mostly unwelcome. The Saudis previously accused Masqat of affecting national security and economically cooperating with Tehran. Moreover, old feuds between Riyadh, Abu Dhabi, and Muscat could affect the way Saudis and Emiratis deal with Oman; they think Oman is on Qatar’s side because it has stayed close to Doha since the beginning of the crisis.

The gap between the demands of the various parties and the conditions for the re-establishment of relations through negotiation is growing. Some concerned parties are maximizing the issues because lengthening the period of the crisis could lead to political and economic gains. We can say that the acceptance of Kuwaiti mediation by all the parties is considered an opening to a solution, not a final one. All the parties should accept this intervention which will lead to concessions and compromises and even dictations and conditions needed until a solution and settlement are achieved. Mediation is a path that all the parties (victor and loser) agreed on under the framework of the Gulf institute.

Conclusion

The vision Kuwait has had for its mediation in foreign political efforts has been the same for centuries. The nature of this mediation is bound to the abilities of the current political system and its historical heritage and what is has to offer, impartially, for all of the parties in a conflict.

We realize that Kuwaiti mediation when we analyze it is leading to success. This success was expressed in the earlier statements of the Amir of Kuwait, when he said, “We received a response from Qatar and it is ready for negotiation” and that “resolving the Gulf crisis is coming soon”. However, drastic changes have occurred which led the Kuwaiti mediator to announce that he fears for the collapse of the Gulf House!

How then to predict the chaotic future of the crisis? The author will not force the opinions on anyone but convinces that Kuwait is performing its most vibrant role at this stage. The success of the Kuwaiti efforts and its ability to continue them is determined by two factors:

1. To mitigate or neutralize the demands that effect sovereignty and impose trusteeship on any party.

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21 For example, the British site Middle East I.
22 This statement was made by the Saudi Foreign Minister on the Egyptian TV program “This Capital” on November 2017.
23 When we use the term “internal” we mean the Arab family and the GCC in particular. That is why Kuwait seems to be the most neutral of states to deal with the crisis even more than the US or the Europeans.
2. The mediator’s ability to maintain and sustain itself on the basis of realistic considerations depends on the flexibility of the situations and historical experience. However, efforts, until now, have not made any progress in resolving the issue and changing any static attitudes. What matters is that this historical legacy is still present in the mind of the Kuwaiti decision-maker and will continue to be inherited and practiced. It will work under the same ideology and at the same level of practicality and effectiveness.

This is probably what was hinted by the Kuwaiti decision-maker when he noted that “history, the people of the gulf, and the next Arab generations will not forgive those who contribute to escalating the Gulf conflict, even if it was only by means of a single word”.

References