

Kuwait Times
 THE LEADING INDEPENDENT
 DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF
 ESTABLISHED 1961

Founder and Publisher
YOUSUF S. AL-ALYAN

Editor-in-Chief
ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-ALYAN

EDITORIAL : 24833199-24833358-24833432
 ADVERTISING : 24835616/7
 FAX : 24835620/1
 CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 163
 ACCOUNTS : 24835619
 COMMERCIAL : 24835618

P.O.Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.
 E MAIL: info@kuwaittimes.net
 Website: www.kuwaittimes.net

Focus

QATAR-GULF CRISIS TURNS HOSTILE ON THE SOCIAL MEDIA

By David Harding

The diplomatic crisis surrounding Qatar and other Gulf countries has remained a peaceful one for now, but open warfare has been declared in the media—both traditional and social. Since Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and allies abruptly severed all ties with Qatar on June 5, the anger felt by ordinary citizens in all countries has played out online.

Twitter, Facebook and Snapchat erupted in the hours after the “blockade” was imposed on Qatar, and #cuttingtieswithQatar was briefly the number one trend worldwide in the immediate aftermath of the announcement. The diplomatic crisis has also had the likely unintended consequence of reflecting both the level of connectivity among countries online and the massive popularity of social media in the region. Internet penetration in Qatar is a whopping 93 percent, according to a 2016 study by Northwestern University in Qatar.

The study reported internet penetration also at 93 percent in Saudi Arabia and at 100 percent in the UAE. The role of social media has continued to rise even as the dust of the crisis begins to settle. A UAE hashtag claiming the Emirates would snatch the 2022 football World Cup from Qatar — #UAEwillhosttheWorldCup—has reached a level of popularity, notoriety and amusement far beyond the region. The response from Qataris on Twitter? #youaredreaming. Another hashtag trending in the UAE, #Qatarfundterrorism, mirrors accusations by the Emirates and its allies that Doha funds extremist groups in the region.

‘Clearly orchestrated’

Saudi Arabia, the UAE and others have said Qatar’s alleged role in extremism was behind the boycott. Doha denies the accusations. One angry Twitter user in the UAE wrote in Arabic: “A mini-state with a history of coups and treachery, what would you expect from Qatar?” In Saudi, another user tweeted cuttingly: “You have disturbed us Qatar, with your three streets, two restaurants. Even the Al-Suweidi neighbourhood is bigger than Qatar. It’s just a matter of weeks and it will become a Saudi city.” Meanwhile in Qatar, “Oh God, keep Qatar safe” was trending in Arabic, as well as #iloveqatar among the country’s sizeable English-speaking expat community.

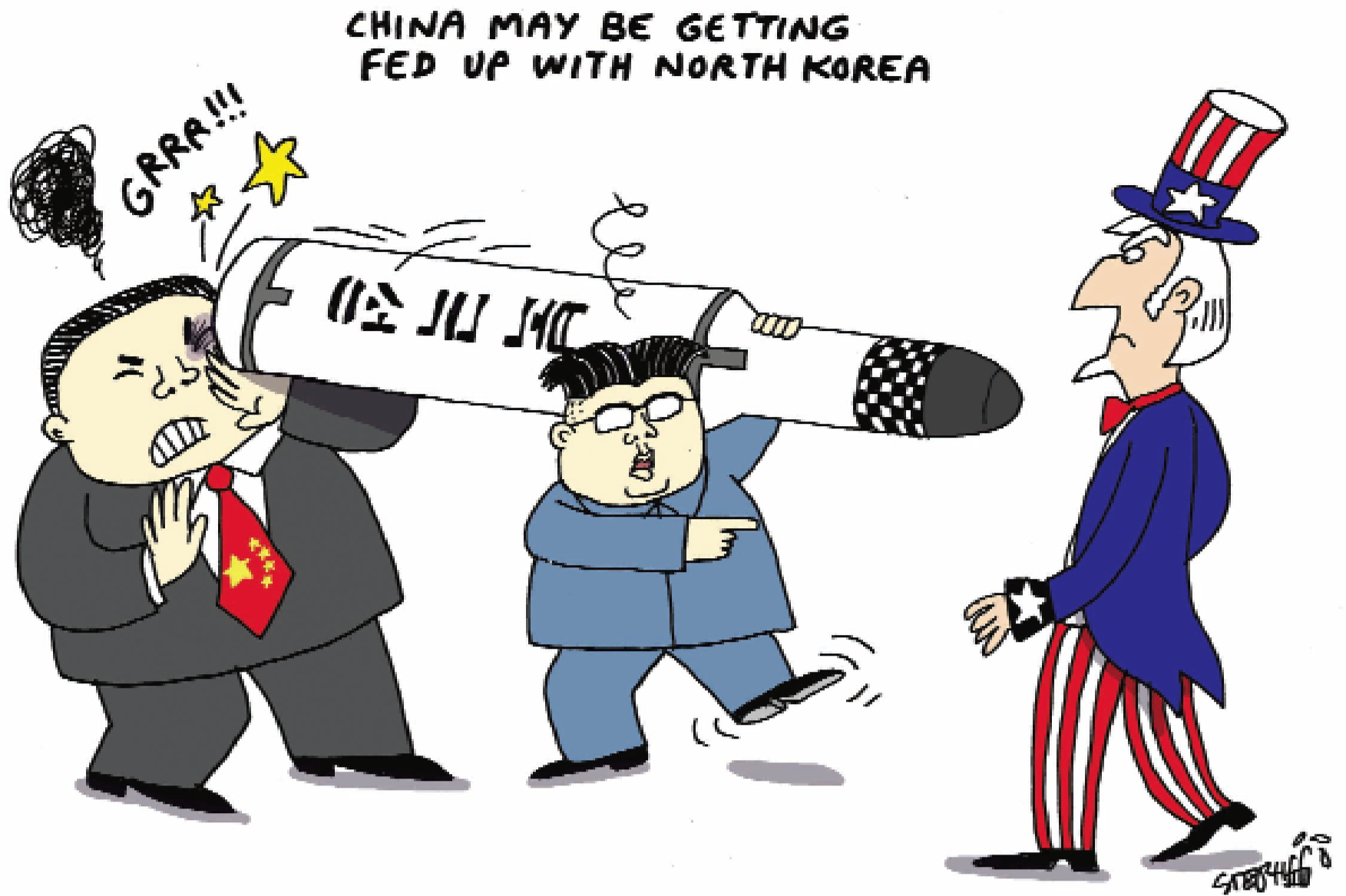
The media are now “an integral part of the ‘war arsenal’ of many states” in the region, said Khaled Hroub, professor of Middle East politics and Arab media at Northwestern University in Qatar. “Official and semi-official media, mostly TV broadcasting and social media, along with encouraged ‘national media volunteers’ have been deployed in phases like battalions, clearly orchestrated and seemingly under a control-and-command structure at the highest level.” The UAE and Bahrain warned last week that anyone expressing sympathy with Qatar on social media could face lengthy jail terms.

#Qataristomach

Beyond the vitriol, the online conflict has had its lighter moments. An online survey by a former political advisor to the Abu Dhabi government asked if it was right to cut ties with Qatar, but was deleted after 65 percent of respondents decided it was not. And Twitter users had great fun at the expense of Jamil Al-Ziabi, the editor of a Saudi newspaper, who said he was concerned about Qataris having to get used to food shipped from Iran and Turkey, after Saudi Arabia cut exports. “I am really worried because I don’t believe Qatari stomachs can get used to such products so quickly,” Ziabi said. This sparked another trending hashtag in Arabic — #Qataristomach. The hostilities have spilled beyond social media battles into more traditional forms of media—all the way back to billboards.

Doha-based broadcast giants Al-Jazeera and beIN Sports are now blocked in various countries across the region, including Saudi Arabia and the UAE. And in Doha, perhaps the most powerful slogan has been the ubiquitous “We are all Tamim”, complete with a profile drawing of Qatar’s Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani. The message has been spotted everywhere in the past week — on huge billboards in Doha, on cars and even on T-shirts. The slogan and drawing even appears to have made its way to Kerala, India, from where large numbers of the huge two-million strong migrant workforce in Qatar hail, and taken on a life of its own in the Malayalam dialect. — AFP

All articles appearing on these pages are the personal opinion of the writers. Kuwait Times takes no responsibility for views expressed therein. Kuwait Times invites readers to voice their opinions. Please send submissions via email to: opinion@kuwait-times.net or via snail mail to PO Box 1301 Safat, Kuwait. The editor reserves the right to edit any submission as necessary.



ENERGY MARKET SEEN AS VULNERABLE TO PROLONGED GULF CRISIS

By Omar Hasan

While the Gulf’s bitter diplomatic crisis is unlikely to affect energy prices in the short term, a prolonged rift that disrupts Qatar’s gas supplies could send prices soaring, analysts say. With rising US shale oil output driving a global supply glut, the decision by Saudi Arabia and its allies earlier this month to sever diplomatic ties with Qatar provided only a fleeting boost to prices.

“Given the severe supply glut in the oil markets globally, it is quite unlikely that the Gulf spat would lead to a spike in oil prices in the short or medium term,” M R Raghu, executive vice president of Kuwait Financial Center (Markaz) said. Qatar said on Monday that it would comply with an agreement by the OPEC oil cartel and other producers to extend production cuts for nine months until the end of March to rebalance the market.

Qatar’s share in the output cuts of 1.8 million barrels per day is just 30,000. While its daily oil output of around 600,000 barrels represents less than one percent of world crude production, Qatar is a major player in liquefied natural gas (LNG). The tiny emirate is the world’s leading LNG exporter, accounting for a third of international supplies, mainly to Asia and Europe. Advisory firm Oxford Economics said Qatar’s exports of oil and gas are unlikely to be significantly affected, with its main sea routes—including through Omani and Iranian waters—still accessible.

But using Iranian waters could involve higher costs, said Jean-Francois Seznec of the US-based Atlantic Council’s Global Energy Center. “It may have a small indirect impact in the case of continued tension. Insurance rates will start increasing rapidly and those rates would have to be paid by Qatar,” Seznec said. Most of Qatar’s almost 80 million tons of LNG supplies are shipped in tankers, mainly to Japan, South Korea and India, as well as to several European countries. One-third of Britain’s gas imports, for example, come from Qatar. Other European customers include Spain and Poland.

Politically fraught

The air, sea and land restrictions imposed by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt have not so far affected maritime routes for Qatari LNG vessels which can pass through the Strait of Hormuz. Any disruption to Qatar’s LNG exports could anger the European Union. “If Qatar gas finds it increasingly difficult to reach world markets, especially Europe, then the European Union may feel threatened by the prospect of having to depend on more Russian gas imports, a decision that is highly fraught politically in many EU capitals,” Kuwait Financial Center said in a report Monday. Qatar also pumps more than two billion cubic feet of gas daily through a pipeline to the UAE mainly for power generation. A small part of the pipeline exports goes to Oman.

So any disruption to Qatar’s gas supplies would be painful for several countries. And a serious escalation of Gulf tensions or a military confrontation—while seen as highly unlikely—could cause energy

prices to soar. “If the conflict develops into a military confrontation ... I would expect a very large spike in prices to around \$150 a barrel of oil,” from below \$50 per barrel now, Seznec said. Gas prices would also increase several-fold, he added. This would be accompanied by a major leap in insurance premiums. For oil prices to triple as predicted by Seznec, the conflict must disrupt oil and gas supply lines from most of the Gulf nations, including Saudi Arabia, the world’s largest crude exporter.

The six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states—Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE—account for a fifth of global crude exports or about 13 million bpd. Income from energy exports makes up over 80 percent of public revenues for the six members. Raghu said an escalation of the crisis could mean “sea routes getting blocked and cost of transshipment of global gas rising.” Major importers of Qatari LNG like Japan, South Korea and India may face shortages of supplies leading to a scramble for alternative suppliers in the long term, he said. — AFP

MOONLIGHTING POLICE LEAVE BODY CAMERAS BEHIND

LOUISIANA: When police officers in America’s cities put on their uniforms and grab their weapons before moonlighting in security jobs at nightclubs, hospitals, and ballparks, there’s one piece of equipment they often leave behind — their body camera. That’s because most police agencies that make the cameras mandatory for patrol shifts don’t require or won’t allow body cameras for off-duty officers even if they’re working in uniform, leaving a hole in policies designed to increase oversight and restore confidence in law enforcement.

Police departments contend that they have only a limited number of body cameras or that there are too many logistical hurdles and costs involved. But that argument doesn’t sit well with those who say it shouldn’t matter whether an officer is on patrol or moonlighting at a shopping mall. “As long as they have real bullets, they need to have the body cameras,” said John Barnett, a civil rights leader in Charlotte, North Carolina, where shootings involving police have put use of the cameras under scrutiny.

An Associated Press survey of the 20 biggest US cities found that nearly all have officers wearing or testing body cameras, but that only five — Houston; San Antonio; San Francisco; Fort Worth, Texas; and San Jose, California — have rules requiring them for uniformed officers working outside their regular hours. The departments that have body cameras or are testing them, but do not require moonlighting officers to wear them, are New York City; Los Angeles, Chicago; Philadelphia; Phoenix; San Diego; Dallas; Columbus, Ohio; and Charlotte. Denver also has them and is planning to add cameras for off-duty work.

“There shouldn’t be a distinction,” said Lt Elle Washburn, who oversees San Jose’s body camera program. “You’re still in uniform, still have powers of arrest.” Just about every police agency makes it clear that officers working in uniform still represent the department and are subject to police rules even when they’re off duty and paid by someone else. Trouble can happen anywhere and anytime, and when it does, there’s little difference between an on-duty and off-duty officer. Within the past three years, there have been shootings — some fatal — involving moonlighting officers in Missouri, North Carolina, Texas, Arkansas, Ohio and Indiana, but the overall number isn’t known because departments don’t keep those statistics. In Louisiana, a moonlighting officer who wasn’t wearing a body camera was sentenced in March to 40 years in prison for manslaughter in the fatal shooting of a 6-year-old boy following a car chase.

A key piece of evidence came from an on-duty officer’s body camera showing the boy’s father had his hands raised and sticking out his window as the moonlighting officer and a former officer both working as deputy city marshals collectively fired 18 shots. Once the shooting stopped, the footage showed blood on the door and an officer’s realization the boy was in the passenger’s seat. Minneapolis and Atlanta are among the cities requiring the cameras for off-duty work, and some others are moving that way, including Cincinnati, which is spending about \$1.2 million on 350 cameras and equipment so all officers will have one and be able to use them on secondary jobs — it’s now optional. Moonlighting officers without the cameras to back them up can be more vulnerable to false allegations, said Cincinnati police Capt.

Doug Wiesman. And it might be tough to explain why an off-duty officer who used deadly force didn’t have a camera, he said. “It’s a mistake not to have them,” Wiesman said. “Your officers are wearing that uniform. Who cares who’s paying them?” But most places turn off the cameras when it comes to the millions of hours officers put in work for private employers — a widespread practice but not one tracked in detail. New York City’s new guidelines covering body cameras specifically say they can’t be used in any off-duty activities, including paid details run by the department.

Among the 170 departments that have received US Justice Department grants for body cameras, it’s rare to find in their policies any mention of equipping moonlighting officers, said Michael White, who works with those cities on training and technical assistance.

“It’s an evolving issue, but I think it’s something departments will need to start addressing,” said White, also a criminology professor at Arizona State University. “It should be a part of the uniform just like anything else.” White, who developed a checklist to evaluate body camera policies, said requiring them for off-duty details wasn’t really on his radar until an independent monitor overseeing changes in Cleveland’s department proposed the idea in March. But so far Cleveland’s plan has been met with resistance from the city administration and police union, which say using the cameras for secondary jobs could lead to added overtime

costs for officers returning the cameras to the station for charging and for uploading of videos. Some departments say that they have only enough cameras to cover regular shifts and that they’re still wrestling with more pressing worries about guidelines on when officers must activate the cameras and the increased costs to store the additional footage, which is more than the cameras themselves and can run into the millions. “Great questions that I wish I had answers for,” said Ken Allen, a retired officer who now assists with coordinating off-duty jobs in Atlanta, where cameras are required for secondary jobs if the officer has already been assigned one. Eighty percent of the department’s officers work off-duty jobs either on days off or after their workday, he estimates.

Police administrators in Charlotte want to reach a point where uniformed officers working second jobs have the cameras, but a main concern is whether the batteries will last beyond their normal shift, said Lt David Moorefield. Just over two years ago, moonlighting Charlotte officers in separate shootings killed a teen with a gun at a mall and seriously wounded a suspect in a restaurant brawl who attacked the officer. Both shootings were ruled to be justified. Susanna Birdsong, a lawyer with the American Civil Liberties Union in North Carolina, said that uneven use of the cameras is setting up police agencies for controversy and that they’re “only effective if a department’s policy is a strong one.” — AP



ATLANTA: Cobb County police officer wears a body camera as he works an off-duty security detail at an Atlanta Braves baseball game in Atlanta. — AP