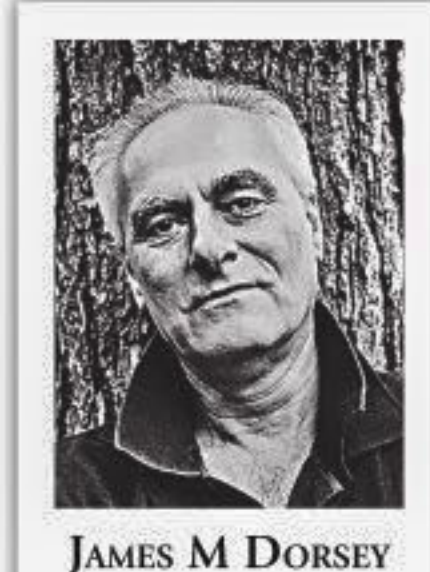


# Diverging Gulf responses to Kashmir and Xinjiang ripple across Asia



JAMES M DORSEY

**R**ECENT diametrically opposed responses to repression of Muslims by China, India and other Asian countries highlight deep differences among Gulf states that ripple across Asia. The different responses were evident in Gulf reactions to India's unilateral withdrawal of Kashmir's autonomy and Qatar's reversal of its support of China's clampdown on Turkic Muslims in its troubled, north-western province of Xinjiang.

The divergence says much about the almost decade-long, fundamentally different approaches by Qatar and its main detractors, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, towards an emerging, more illiberal new world order in which minority rights are trampled upon. The UAE and Saudi Arabia lead a more than two-year-long economic and diplomatic boycott of Qatar in a so far failed attempt to force the Gulf state to alter its policies.

The feud and divergence reflect the Gulf states' different efforts to manoeuvre an environment in which the United States has sent mixed signals about its commitment to Gulf security, and China and Russia are seeking to enter into US dominance of the region.

In what was perhaps the most surprising indication of differences in the Gulf, Qatar appeared to reverse its tacit acquiescence in China's clampdown, involving the re-education camps of an estimated one million predominantly Turkic Uyghur Muslims. Qatar did so by withdrawing from a letter it initially signed together with dozens of other countries expressing support for China's human-rights record, despite its clampdown in Xinjiang.

In a letter to the United Nations

Human Rights Council (UNHRC), Ali Al-Mansouri, Qatar's ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva, advised the council that "taking into account our focus on compromise and mediation, we believe that co-authorizing the aforementioned letter would compromise our foreign policy key priorities. In this regard, we wish to maintain a neutral stance and we offer our mediation and facilitation services."

Signatories of the letter included Qatar's detractors—Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt—as well as Kuwait and Oman, who together with the feuding Gulf states are part of the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

The withdrawal coincided with a US warning that kowtowing to China's "desire to erode US military advantages" in the Middle East by using its "economic leverage and coercion" and "intellectual property theft and acquisition" could undermine defence co-operation with the United States.

"Many investments are beneficial, but we're concerned countries' economic interests may blind them to the negative implications of some Chinese investments, including impact on joint defence co-operation with the United States," said Michael Mulroy, the US Defence Department's top official responsible for the Gulf.

The Qatari move also came against the backdrop of the Gulf state, home to the largest US base in the region, being the only country in the greater Middle East to host an expansion rather than a reduction of US facilities and forces. Qatar is believed to have funded the expansion to the tune of USD 1.8 billion. The United States has withdrawn some of its forces from Syria and is negotiating with the Taliban a US troop withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Nevertheless, Qatar, an enlightened autocracy that has yet to implement at home what it preaches abroad, was unlikely to reap the full soft power benefits in liberal Western democracies of its withdrawal from



Indian security personnel stand guard along a deserted street in Jammu.

PHOTO: REUTERS/MUKESH GUPTA

the pro-Chinese letter, despite Uyghur and human rights activists welcoming its move. It was unclear what prompted the Qatari change of heart that followed an incident last month at Doha's Hamad International Airport that drove home the limits of China's ability to flex its financial, economic and political muscles to control the fallout of its clampdown beyond its borders.

The limits were evident when Ablikim Yusuf, a 53-year old Uyghur Muslim seeking protection from potential Chinese persecution, landed at the airport. After initially intending to deport Mr Yusuf to Beijing at China's request, Qatar reversed course. But rather than granting Yusuf asylum under its newly adopted asylum law, the Gulf's first, Qatar gave him the time to seek refuge elsewhere. Even that was in sharp contrast to countries like Egypt and

Turkey that have either deported Uyghurs or entertained the possibility.

As a result, Qatar's withdrawal drove one more wedge into the Muslim world's almost wall-to-wall refusal to criticise China for its assault on the Islamic faith. Turkey, Qatar's ally in its dispute with Gulf states, has been walking a tightrope as well, attempting to balance relations with China and domestic public criticism of Chinese policy in Xinjiang.

Kazakhstan this month silenced a detained Kazakh rights activist of Uyghur descent by forcing him to plead guilty to a hate speech charge and abandon his activism and public criticism of China in exchange for securing his freedom.

The Qatari withdrawal complicates the Turkish and Central Asian balancing act and strengthens the position of the United States

that is locked into multiple trade and other disputes with China. The withdrawal and the US criticism of Chinese policy in Xinjiang put Muslim states, increasingly selective about what Muslim causes they take up, in an awkward position.

The UAE, in sharp contrast to Qatar, has not only maintained its support of China, but also, alongside Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, ignored requests for support on Kashmir by Pakistan, their long-standing regional Muslim ally. In addition, the three Gulf states are rewarding Indian prime minister Narendra Modi for his undermining of Kashmiri autonomy and imposition of unprecedented security measures.

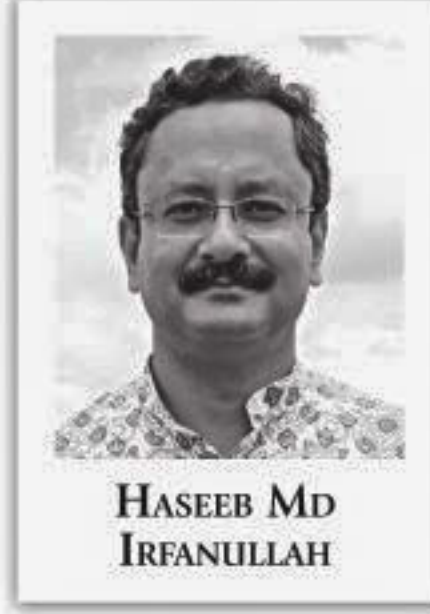
PM Modi has recently received United Arab Emirates' highest civilian honour; he then travelled to Bahrain for the first-ever visit to that country by a sitting Indian prime minister. Meanwhile, Saudi national oil company Aramco announced a USD 15 billion investment in an Indian oil company as Modi was clamping down on Kashmir. For its part, Qatar, has remained largely silent about Kashmir, advising its nationals to leave the region.

If the policy divergences in the Gulf say anything, they suggest that differences among the region's rivals as well as in the greater Middle East are likely to deepen rather than subside. A study last year by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace concluded that conflict in the region was fuelled by a "death of regional communication channels, dispute resolution mechanisms, and norms for warfare as well as a surplus of arms imports."

There is little on the horizon to suggest that this state of affairs is about to change any time soon.

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# Rohingya refugee crisis through the lens of climate change



HASEEB MD IRFANULLAH

**O**NE of the depressing aspects of the Rohingya refugee crisis in Bangladesh is that we understand the problem and know the solution, but it is difficult to be sure how we will get there and when. Our response to global climate change

may add a different perspective to this dire refugee situation.

There are three basic responses to climate change, also called climate crisis or climate emergency. The ultimate solution to climate change, if I am allowed to say so, is the reduction of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere as soon as possible, so that the on-going and expected changes in the climate can slow down, and hopefully, revert back in the long run. This is possible by radically changing our fossil-fuel-based systems into a renewable-energy-based one. We call this response "mitigation".

Unfortunately, even drastic actions to reduce greenhouse gases will take time to produce a positive impact, even if all countries become really serious about it. Its negative effects on an already warm world will thus continue for a long time. This brings in the second response to climate change, or "adaptation", where we adjust to the harmful effects of climate change. If floods continue to stay for a longer period of time, we grow flood-resistant rice to minimise our food loss, for example.

Our adjustments to climate change impacts, however, may fall well short due to the severity of climate-induced natural disasters. Then comes the third response, which is to tackle the "loss and damage"



Rohingya refugees walk towards the Balukhali refugee camp after crossing the border in Bangladesh's Ukhia district, on November 2, 2017.

PHOTO: DIBYANGSHU SARKAR/AFP

caused by the changing climate. Given the intensity of calamities, we may lose our precious possessions to the insatiable hunger of climate change.

Now, let us examine our responses to the Rohingya refugee crisis in Bangladesh in light of the above responses to climate change. We all agree that there is no other solution to this refugee crisis except returning all Rohingya refugees to Myanmar. This is the only mitigation option to address this crisis. Period.

Since mitigation is taking time, we are currently going through the adaptation phase of this crisis. The government of Bangladesh, the host communities, the UN agencies, and international and national organisations, with generous financial support from many donors, are trying to adjust to the crisis. We

are maintaining an environment in the 30-odd refugee camps spread over Ukhia and Teknaf sheltering nearly a million Rohingyas so that they do not fall victim to any tragedy.

We have been facing loss and damage from day one of this two-year-old crisis. We cleared 6,000 acres of forestland, mostly covered with natural greenery. A recent report by the Bangladesh Forest Department estimated a damage of Tk 460 crore from tree loss, while the overall ecological damage comes to another Tk 1,400 crore.

After adopting the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 1992, it took the world 23 years to agree upon concrete actions called the Paris Agreement. Over all these years, discussions went on from who to blame for climate

change, to who to reduce how much of carbon and by when, to why we should compromise on our pace of economic growth. But the main problem is, unless all countries agree upon doing their bit in reducing carbon emission drastically, there is no other way to cool down the already-heated-up atmosphere. After all, we all breathe the same air.

Nevertheless, climate change has always been surrounded with uncertainties. The best way to fight such uncertainties is to use the available information, technologies, and resources to create some form of certainties within the uncertainties, which we call climate predictions. This approach actually worked in climate change discussions and led to the Paris Agreement.

The limited, but commendable, progress that we have made at the global level is because countries have realised that climate change is real and happening now, that we need to make a drastic shift towards low-carbon-emitting economy to keep the global temperature rise well below two degree Celsius to save the world from irreversible destructions, and that we need to allocate resources, build capacities, and develop technologies to support that shift as well as to adapt to climate change.

The Rohingya refugee crisis is directly affecting Bangladesh in an unprecedented manner. The sheer number of refugees—with 55 percent of children without access to proper education, thousands of men without work to keep them engaged, hundreds of thousands of girls and women vulnerable to exploitation—has indeed become a "ticking time-bomb". We do not need a computer modelling to predict that.

The cost of not resolving this refugee crisis soon will not only make Bangladesh suffer more, but also the region and

beyond, through violence, trafficking, and radicalisation. Like climate change mitigation, countries, forums, and actors at regional and global levels need to recognise that the Rohingya refugee crisis is essentially a global crisis and they should work together towards a single urgent solution—that is, proper repatriation of all refugees to Myanmar as soon as possible.

To be realistic, a complete return of all Rohingyas will take time. Based on the anticipated realisation that Rohingya crisis is a global emergency, donors need to continue funding to ensure basic facilities in the refugee camps in Bangladesh. In addition to humanitarian support, they also need to channel resources for the development of the host communities in Cox's Bazar and for the restoration of the camp sites in a post-repatriation era.

The UN and the global community have not been successful in taking immediate, proper measures to resolve the Rohingya refugee crisis. There is no other option but to take a diplomatic approach to resolve it. Bangladesh is now leading the way in that direction working with all concerned countries, as we have been seeing, especially in the recent months. These countries now need to continue responding to Bangladesh's call.

Last month in Dhaka, former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon praised Bangladesh for being on the forefront of tackling climate change. He called Bangladesh the "best teacher" in climate change adaptation. With her diplomatic leadership, Bangladesh indeed is walking towards the same direction in refugee crisis resolution.

Dr Haseeb Md Irfanullah is a biologist-turned-development-practitioner with a keen interest in research and its communication. He is an independent consultant working on environment, climate change, and research system. Haseeb tweets as @hmirfanullah

**ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY**

August 26, 1947

**DON BANKHEAD BECOMES THE FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN PITCHER IN MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL.**

He played in Negro league baseball for the Birmingham Black Barons and the Memphis Red Sox from 1940 to 1947, then played for the Brooklyn Dodgers from 1947 to 1951.

**CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH**

**ACROSS**

- 1 Cookbook entry
- 7 Abound
- 11 Like O. Henry tales
- 12 Arm bone
- 13 Like the fish in fish and chips
- 15 Driver's reversal
- 16 Minute
- 18 Broadcasts
- 21 Stallion's mate
- 22 Elvis's birthplace
- 24 Seventh Greek letter
- 25 Young fellow
- 26 Near the ground
- 27 Place for mixing at home
- 29 Locale
- 30 Oboe part
- 31 Longing

**DOWN**

- 1 Chest protector
- 2 Pitching stat
- 3 Barracks bed
- 4 Properly pitched
- 5 Virtue
- 6 Beige
- 7 Rutabaga's cousin
- 8 Quarterback
- 9 Hydrocarbon suffix
- 10 Furious
- 14 Businessman's
- 16 Spud
- 17 Furious
- 19 Museum piece
- 20 Sleepy mammal
- 21 Kitten cry
- 22 Black goo
- 23 Have debts
- 25 Soup server
- 28 Defeated
- 29 "A Streetcar Named Desire" role
- 31 Surmise
- 33 Words of approximation
- 34 Auction signal
- 35 Exploit
- 36 Earl Grey, for one
- 37 Ailing
- 38 Twisty fish
- 39 Parched

WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO [dsopinion@gmail.com](mailto:dsopinion@gmail.com).

**BEETLE BAILEY** by Mort Walker

WHAT HAS BEETLE DONE NOW? NOTHING

I WAS JUST BREAKING IN SOME NEW SHOES!

**YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS**

BEAST SOLAR  
ELITE TWINES  
TIMON TRENDS  
POKE KIT  
MALLRATS  
ACALACTORS  
THIGH HOSEA  
TETHER PLAN  
TEAMWORK  
PAMLEIA  
ALIBI STARR  
STING RHINE

**BABY BLUES** by Kirkman & Scott

IT'S SUCH A BEAUTIFUL DAY, I FEEL LIKE DANCING!

IT'S SUCH A BEAUTIFUL DAY, I FEEL LIKE BREAKING SOMETHING!

WHAT'S THE WEATHER GONNA BE TODAY?

MOSTLY SUNNY, WITH A CHANCE OF GRUDDING.