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THE FOUR ERAS OF QATAR'S FOREIGN POLICY

Las cuatro etapas de la política exterior de Catar

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For the first two centuries of Qatar's modern history its leading Sheikhs secured security by allying with at least one more powerful political entity at a time, while maintaining a largely inoffensive and muted posture. But an emerging leadership in the 1980s had new ideas. Security was still predicated on one central protective relationship, but this dependency was diversified as Qatar embedded itself into energy, security, financial, and political dynamics, if not also the wider consciousness, of key states around the world. Additionally, the state cultivated a reputation as a relatively neutral actor so that, overall, Qatar was well positioned for the eventual departure of its central ally. Yet Qatar's reputation as an uncontroversial, peaceable, quasi-neutral state was undermined as its leadership systematically chose sides during the Arab Spring. Without the capacity, resources, or experience to effectively involve itself in the Gordian conflicts that emerged from the Spring, Qatar gained a reputation as a dangerous dilatant, stoking anger among key allies in the Arab and western worlds. Its young Emir must now navigate a hazardous path, stuck between path dependency promoting the maintenance of old associations and the reality that Qatar struggles to control and use these relations effectively.

Abstract

Qatari Foreign Policy; Qatar Arab Spring; Tamim Foreign Policy; Qatar Islamists

política exterior de Catar; Primavera Árabe de Catar; política exterior de Tamim; islamistas cataríes

Key words

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Fechas

Durante los dos primeros siglos de la historia contemporánea de Catar, sus jeques dirigentes mantuvieron la seguridad mediante alianzas con al menos una entidad política más poderosa cada vez, mientras mantenían una postura mayormente inofensiva y silenciada. Pero el liderazgo emergente en los años 1980

Resumen

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trajo nuevas ideas. La seguridad aún se basaba en una relación central de protección, pero esta dependencia se diversificó mientras Catar se integraba en dinámicas energéticas, de seguridad, financieras y políticas, y también en una toma de conciencia más amplia, con estados clave alrededor del mundo. Además, el estado cultivó una reputación de relativo actor neutral por lo que, en conjunto, Catar estaba bien posicionado para una posible marcha de su aliado central. Sin embargo, la reputación de Catar como un estado no conflictivo, pacífico y casi neutral se vio socavada al escoger bando sus líderes durante la Primavera Árabe. Sin la capacidad, recursos o experiencia para implicarse eficazmente en los conflictos gordianos que surgieron tras la Primavera, Catar obtuvo una reputación de peligroso dilatador, avivando ira entre aliados clave de los mundos árabe y occidental. Su joven emir debe ahora recorrer una senda peligrosa, atrapado entre el camino de la dependencia que promueve mantener antiguas asociaciones y la realidad que Catar forcejea para controlar y usar esas relaciones eficazmente.

The historical record suggests that foreign policies of the leading Sheikhs on the Qatari Peninsula can be divided into four distinct phases without much contention. In turn, each era is characterised by a central idea which dominates policy practice.

According to an aphorism of expatriate lore in the Persian Gulf, until the millennium the State of Qatar was known for being unknown and not much else. Such a sentiment characterises the initial phase of Qatar's foreign policy. Indeed, it took two centuries of development for the rudimentary aims of the state's policies to significantly alter away from subsistence, basic development, and securing regime and state security through basic alliance-forming. Neither swapping local powers as allies (the al-Khalifah, Wahhabis, the Sultan of Muscat) for region and world-spanning Empires (the Ottomans and the British) nor the onset of independence from Britain fundamentally altered the state's basic orientation.

The second phase of Qatar's foreign policy emerged with a new generation of leaders in the 1980s who had profoundly different ideas as to the state's orientation. Though the then-Crown Prince, Hamad bin Khalifah al-Thani, pursued the installation of one central ally to guarantee Qatar's security like leaders before him, he augmented this plinth by actively and aggressively diversifying Qatar's dependency on its security guarantor as never before. His plan to assiduously augment Qatar's importance to key international states was accomplished by developing a reputation in impartial conflict mediation, as a region-leading educational hub, opening-up international relations with Israel and Iran, founding the al-Jazeera TV station to spread Qatari soft power, establishing the state's sovereign wealth fund, and founding and quickly expanding Qatar's liquid natural gas industry (LNG). Qatar's history amply demonstrated that the suzerain power – whomever and however powerful that may be – disengaged eventually. The policy of this era thus meant that Qatar was well placed to consider replacing its unitary-sourced security guarantee with a multi-party-sourced security "guarantee".

But with the 2011 Arab Spring, Hamad bin Khalifah actively sought intervention in foreign conflicts by overtly supporting one side, in stark contrast to Qatar's amelioratory and relatively neutral historical stance. This third revolutionary era of Qatari foreign policy covers the state's failed policies particularly appositely in Syria, Libya, and Egypt. The actors that Qatar tended to support were often – though not always – to be found on the Islamist spectrum, a facet that was to enrage local allies leading to a crisis with Qatar's fellow Gulf states, another part of the overarching foreign policy's failure.

Though Hamad bin Khalifah's son took over in 2013, he is yet to put his stamp on state foreign policy. Not only is there no evidence that Tamim bin Hamad has a particular interest in foreign affairs, but the legacy of his father's policies is likely to broadly direct policy for some time. Nevertheless, the fourth era of Qatari foreign policy under Tamim bin Hamad, the post-revolutionary era, will soon emerge and its foundations need to be examined.

Plotting how and why each of these eras evolved is the overarching goal of this article, which will allow for a historically-informed reflection on Tamim bin Hamad's future foreign policy options. It highlights that balance has been a central feature of Qatar's foreign policies until Hamad bin Khalifah sought to actively intervene during the Arab Spring. This era of Qatari foreign policy activism has, in the short and medium term at least, failed. It is questionable whether Qatar's small and inexperienced bureaucracy – or indeed any bureaucracy however experienced – could possibly manage such a changeable, complex situation. As Tamim bin Hamad slowly defines foreign policy under his auspices, he might profit from heeding the history of his father's first foreign policy era. Then, Qatar was establishing a strong reputation built primarily on the fonts of its soft power. Once again, these attributes, and not the hard power tools of the military, are – history suggests – best placed to secure Qatar's regional ambitions.

1. Qatari foreign policy: emergence

Sparse historical records of activity on the Qatari peninsula led one Arab author to conclude that prior to the mid-18th century "its inhabitants led a peaceful life and confronted no major events thought worthy of historical recording" (Al-Rashid, 1981). Qatar's modern history began with the migration of members of the Utub tribal confederation from Kuwait to the peninsula in the 1760s (Rentz, 1997). A competitive dynamic that characterised wider socio-political life on the peninsula emerged between the newly immigrated tribes of the Utub (primarily the al-Khalifah) and those that existed on the peninsula previously, primarily the al-Musallam (Al-Rashid, 1981).

The reason that the Utub migrated south in the first place was to farm and profit from the pearling beds off Bahrain

The reason that the Utub migrated south in the first place was to farm and profit from the pearling beds off Bahrain. Unable to settle there as the land was already claimed by proxies loyal to Persian forces, they settled nearby on the Qatari peninsula's west coast, barely forty kilometres away. The town they took over from the al-Musallam, Zubarah, soon benefitted from regional developments. One of the region's great ports – Basra – was closed by a devastating plague in 1773 and a Persian blockade from 1775-1779. This diverted trade elsewhere and Zubarah grew largely because it was established as a free port (i.e. with no taxes). Thus ensued decades of minor skirmishes for control of Zubarah and then, as the 19th century progressed, the wider peninsula.

This central dynamic of squabbling competition and skirmishes over towns and other assets was the determining feature of political relations in the region. This was what drove the nascent foreign policy of the leading Sheikh in Qatar at that time. Specifically, the al-Khalifah leaders and their successors faced one central, perennial problem: they were relatively weak.

Much of the Qatari peninsula was a hostile environment, devoid of tillable land or generous springs. *The Times* of London describes the clash between the pre and post-oil rich Arab world as being felt more in Qatar than anywhere else: "in this barren promontory [Qatar]… For centuries it was a symbol of desolation. Nothing grows in Qatar's flat wastes" (Editorial, 26 October

1960). Indeed, until to this day, as the Qatar Airways inflight magazine curiously boasts, Qatar is the only country in the world "with no natural surface water" (Magazine, 29 March 2011). Such adverse conditions placed a basic limit on the life that the peninsula could support, a key factor underpinning why the forces on the Qatari peninsula were so often relatively weak and outnumbered. This weakness forced Qatar's leaders to seek alliances and with regional powers to secure security with as much autonomy as they could muster.

In the face of marauding raids from Wahhabi forces in the 1790s, the al-Khalifah were driven from Qatar to Bahrain and lost the prosperous Zubarah to the Wahhabis. But in Bahrain they were attacked by forces of the Sultan of Muscat. Grasping the need for a suzerain, the al-Khalifah reputedly paid a tribute to Persian forces for protection (Warden, 1856). This was not successful, and some returned to Qatar to engage the Wahhabis in their new fight for Bahrain against the Sultan of Muscat. This pact was successful and the al-Khalifah won the day in Manama and submitted to joining a Wahhabi "tribal commonwealth" by 1802 (Al-Rashid, 1981).

In the face of marauding raids from Wahhabi forces in the 1790s, the al-Khalifah were driven from Qatar to Bahrain and lost the prosperous Zubarah to the Wahhabis

Though this Wahhabi support was crucial, the al-Khalifah soon chafed under its rule. In 1805, they sought but failed to swap Wahhabi for British protection, but by the end of the decade, they had stopped paying their tribute to Diriyah, the Wahhabi capital. After the Wahhabis reasserted their control, the chased and weakened al-Khalifah sought help from the Sultan of Muscat, their erstwhile enemy, to relieve themselves of the Wahhabi yoke (Lorimer, 1915). This was successful, and the al-Khalifah returned to the thrones in Bahrain and Qatar under the Sultan of Muscat's aegis, until they began chafing under the Sultan's rule and sought further changes in their overarching suzerain relationship.

This dynamic continued to characterise the foreign relations of those ruling on the Qatari peninsula (Abdulla, 1981). As the nineteenth century developed, Qatar's leaders swapped smaller regional suzerains for extra-regional, more powerful ones: the Ottoman and British Empires. Though there was a vast difference in material power between, for example, the Ottomans and the Sultan of Muscat, the basic dynamic was the same. Qatar's leaders, still weak and vulnerable to regional raids, continued to need protection. To secure it, they signed up to agreements with the Ottomans and then the British who in return would secure Qatari interests, while placing their own demands on local rulers.

Just as with the Sultan of Muscat or the Wahhabis, though Qatar's leadership needed and appreciated the protection afforded to them, they chafed and resented the demands placed upon them. Indeed, Qatari rulers transposed their local tactics to this new quasi-international level, attempting to play London and Istanbul off each other in the 1880s and 1890s (Rahman, 2005). Though this was not immediately successful given that the UK government was concerned about unduly antagonising the Ottomans, it made the transition to the UK sphere of influence with the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire swift and easy: in 1916, Qatar signed up to most of the statutes in the UK's Trucial States agreements and officially became a cog in the British Empire.

Qatar rested relatively contentedly under British aegis for over half a century. During this time its leadership was primarily concerned with domestic development, something that only meaningfully began in the decades after oil was first exported in 1949. Though Qatar ebbed and flowed with the waves of pan-Arabism in the 1950s and 1960s, taking in – like all Gulf states – dozens of educated member of the exiled Muslim Brotherhood to build their nascent ministries (Roberts, 2014), Qatar's external relations remained limited.

Without any discernible clamour for independence, in 1968 Qatar and its fellow Trucial states were informed that the UK was pulling out of the Persian Gulf region three years hence. This energised its leadership to engage with regional allies to consider joining together in a proto-United Arab Emirates (Smith, 2004). The bitter Bahrain-Qatar historical rivalry was one important factor precluding such an arrangement so Qatar became an independent nation in 1971.

Yet the state's vulnerability remained. But by this time, the de facto leader, Khalifah bin Hamad al-Thani, had been conducting various bilateral meetings in Saudi Arabia focusing on their joint border. Within six months of independence, Khalifah bin Hamad took over power and implemented his plan. He had arranged for Saudi to acquiesce to his usurping of the sitting Emir and for the Kingdom to provide some unspecified vestiges of protection for Qatar. In return, Khalifah would defer to and support Saudi Arabia as Emir (Roberts, 2008).

Without any significant foreign policy gambits, Qatar under Khalifah bin Hamad existed in a kind of stasis, contentedly cosseted by Saudi Arabia

This sequence of events is testified to by interviews conducted in Doha (Roberts, 06 November 2012), open-source documentation referring to Khalifah's meetings in Saudi Arabia (Boyle, 1997), and, most importantly, evidence of subsequent bilateral relations. Qatar was the only other state to observe the full forty days of mourning after the death of King Faisal in 1975 and it followed the Kingdom's lead on all major matters of policy (Metz, 1994). Similarly, their bilateral defence agreement signed in 1982 also hints at the nature of their relations which are referred to as unusually close by academics (Quandt, 1981) and journalists (Searight, 1985) alike.

It should be noted that when Khalifah bin Hamad took over in 1972, he did not entirely subsume Qatar's foreign relations under Saudi Arabia's auspices. He certainly diversified Qatar's Embassy contacts in Doha and in foreign capitals, he engage increasingly in foreign aid when finances allowed (Roberts, 2008), and he sought to publicise the state in Britain through adverts in newspapers (15 May 1972). All of this has certain echoes of Hamad bin Khalifah's policies that were to come to fruition in the 1990s and 2000s, though these changes were to be more than merely cosmetic. Overall, therefore, the modern incarnation of Saudi Arabia followed on from the UK, the Ottomans, Saudi Arabia's Wahhabi forbearers, and other local powers in providing the overarching security framework for the State of Qatar.

2. Qatari foreign policy: evolution

Without any significant foreign policy gambits, Qatar under Khalifah bin Hamad existed in a kind of stasis, contentedly cosseted by Saudi Arabia. In a region where Bahrain and Kuwait in particular were roaring ahead with economic development and innovative foreign policies tactics making a name for themselves, it is little wonder that Qatar became known as the state known for being unknown.

But in the 1980s a new generation of leaders emerged. Led by Khalifah bin Hamad's son and Crown Prince, Hamad bin Khalifah al-Thani, a small group evidently had a vastly different idea of how best to secure the state. Far from seeking security almost through anonymity existing quietly under Saudi Arabia's aegis, Hamad bin Khalifah sought to deeply and drastically diversify Qatar's international relations, foster a reputation for the state as an impartial, almost neutral mediator, as well as one of the most dynamic, forward-thinking entrepôts in the Persian Gulf. These changes were driven by a variety of factors.

Initially, Hamad bin Khalifah seemed to be preoccupied with emphatically demonstrating Qatar's independence from Saudi Arabia. Given its domineering history with Qatar and the basic

demographic and geographic realities, with Saudi Arabia being significantly larger than Qatar, there has long existed a natural assumption in Saudi Arabia that Qatar is little more than a vassal state. An assumption that Khalifah bin Hamad might not have believed, but certainly fed.

Equally, given the direction in which Hamad bin Khalifah steered Qatar in as he grew in power, there is no doubt that he found himself at odds with the Kingdom's posture on a range of issues. Under his direction, Qatar expanded education along an American model, far from the restrictive, conservative Saudi example (Zellman et al., 2007). The astonishing visibility and power of his second wife, Sheikha Moza bint Nasser al-Misnad (Khalaf & Kerr, 2013), also marks a deep difference with Saudi Arabia and its systematic disempowerment of women. And in international relations, Hamad bin Khalifah adopted a mature approach to speak to all actors, whether Sunni (Hamas), Shia (Hezbollah), Zaydi (Houthis), or Jewish (the Israeli government). This too separated him from Saudi Arabia's restrictive approach.

Thus the more Hamad bin Khalifah became the domineering voice in Qatari politics as the 1980s developed, the worse Qatar-Saudi relations became. The changing nature of their relations was indicated by, for example, Qatar diplomatically recognising the Soviet Union and China in 1988 without waiting for Saudi Arabia to do so first (Krahl, 2013), as would have been expected. Also, after initially approving of the plan, Saudi Arabia blocked Qatari attempts to build a regional gas pipeline network (Wright & Krane, 2014).

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But it was the invasion of Kuwait that proved to be a watershed in the Qatari-Saudi relationship. This was, after all, an example of another small, energy rich, but intrinsically defenceless Gulf country (Kuwait) being invaded by a much larger neighbour (Iraq) amid wider bilateral relationship difficulties. Clearly, Black Swan events like this could happen. Not only was Qatar unable to avoid seeing the invasion as a warning-by-analogy, but the Kingdom's impotence in calling for Western military intervention in the face of the invasion was not only embarrassing, but exploded any notion of Saudi Arabia providing Qatar with any vestige of protection.

These issues coalesced into Hamad bin Khalifah assiduously seeking to reprise Qatar's historic foreign policy practice of seeking a central alliance on which to rely. Operations Desert Shield and Storm profoundly changed the international context in the Persian Gulf region. Instead of America being looked on as a questionable ally (largely because of its close Israeli relations), it became the indispensable ally and provider of implicit security guarantees. Qatar thus assiduously began courting the US, not least by building a $1bn air base to entice further US cooperation. By 1992, the two states had signed various defensive agreements for joint military exercises and regarding basing arrangements (Blanchard, 2007). And not before time, for in late-1992 deadly skirmishes erupted on the Qatari-Saudi border, typifying the deteriorating bilateral relations. Hamad bin Khalifah later reflected on these issues, noting that at that time Qatar was "not ready to face the burdens" of confronting Saudi Arabia (Salman, 2009). Henceforth, Qatari-Saudi relations only deteriorated, culminating in Saudi Arabia supporting one, perhaps two, failed counter-coups to reinstall Khalifah bin Hamad after the 1995 bloodless coup installing Hamad bin Khalifah (Weaver, 2003).

Though Hamad bin Khalifah's central foreign policy tenet of basing Qatar's security on one central alliance is a central thread of consistency in Qatar's foreign policies from the late-18th century, he pursued new, innovative strategies and policies too. Indeed, overall, Hamad bin Khalifah revolutionised many aspects of the State of Qatar and entirely repositioned the state internationally.

Reflecting on Qatar's foreign and security policy under Hamad bin Khalifah, it is apparent that the overall tenor of his foreign policies during the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s was designed to diversify the dependence on American security understandings.

Hamad bin Khalifah oversaw a complete overhaul of Qatar's energy economics. Oil production rose from 3.7 million barrels per day (mbpd) produced in 1995 to 16.9 mbpd in 2000 (OECD, 2013). But more importantly, the development of Qatar's liquefied natural gas (LNG) that Hamad bin Khalifah's key advisor Abdullah al-Attiyah spearheaded stands in stark contrast to the ambling pursuit of their predecessors of this industry (Dargin, 2011; Hashimoto et al., 2004). These energy transformations – though particularly the LNG investment – were the central enablers of the masterplan underpinning the majority of the state's policies for two reasons.

Hamad bin Khalifah oversaw a complete overhaul of Qatar's energy economics

Firstly, LNG propelled Qatar from being merely a rich country to a super-rich country with two streams of hydrocarbon-based income. The LNG boost to the state's coffers fundamentally allowed Hamad bin Khalifah to undertake the litany of expensive policy pursuits of the 2000s and 2010s. He invested untold billions in Qatar's education system, notably building an entire education "city" and attracting top Western universities. His various diplomatic forays into mediation across the region were often underpinned by financial strength, as in the 2008 Lebanese example and multi-year Darfur negotiations, as a carrot towards settlement of differences (Kamrava, 2011). And the head-long pursuit to augment Qatar's soft power was an expensive proposition. Not only has al-Jazeera, Qatar's (in)famous TV news station lost money every year since its inception, but many billions have been spent on fine art, constructing world-class museums, hosting a litany of world-class sporting tournaments, and hosting global conferences on every possible topic. All of this was undertaken to boost Qatar's visibility and to reinforce and spread a progressive message about the state.

Secondly, by building the capacity to become a central supplier of gas to countries across the world, Qatar plays an important role in a range of the world's most important states. In 2013 Qatar provided Argentina with 14 % of its LNG, Belgium 40 %, Brazil 4 %, Canada 83 %, Chile 5 %, China 38 %, France 19 %, India 85 %, Japan 18 %, South Korea 33 %, Kuwait 86 %, Mexico 23 %, Spain 23 %, Taiwan 50 %, Thailand 74 %, the UAE 84 %, the UK 93 %, and the US 8 % (OECD, 2014).

Even though on occasion Qatar only provides a small part of a state's LNG imports and LNG is, of course, not the only energy source for a country, Qatar is evidently crucial to several countries. Most notably, taking into account the role of LNG in each state and Qatar's contribution therein, Qatar is acutely important to states like Belgium, China, France, India, Japan, South Korea, Spain, Taiwan, and the UK. This is a list of financially, militarily, and politically powerful states that are heavily interdependent upon Qatar's continuing prosperity and security. Qatar's importers also included, in 2013 and 2014, four permanent members of the UN Security Council and three non-permanent members (Argentina, Korea, and Chile).

A third direct consequence of the gas-infused wealth was the creation of a fiscal surplus that was ploughed into the creation of a sovereign wealth fund, the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) in 2005. This fund soon became one of the most recognised funds in the world with a rash of acquisitions, typically of the bluest of blue chip shares and companies, in the world's leading markets.

A reading of Qatar's history until this era would see successive (all) Qatari leaders scrambling to secure an alliance. In the early days, these were changed with alacrity and speed from one local ally to the next. More stability came – decades where there was no need to find another alliance – when Qatar hitched its wagon to the Ottoman Empire. But even this once great empire disintegrated. It was then replaced by the largest empire of its era, the British. Yet once again, this power, that once dominated the Persian Gulf, disappeared as an actor of importance. Any Saudi guarantees, however implicit or explicit, were deeply undercut by the state's recourse to international forces for Operations Desert Storm and Shield. Though the United States, the latest power to de facto provide security for Qatar, remains the world's strongest ever military power, comfortably superior to any other nation on earth, reading Qatar's history in this way, once can discern a sense of Qatar preparing for the eventually inevitable withdrawal of US forces – just as all other forces had withdrawn before them – by so evidently making Qatar a crucial player to a range of states across the world. Whether for energy or investment, because of Qatar's al-Jazeera-led soft power coursing through the region as the 2000s developed or its role as a regional educational hub, Qatar had transitioned from a state of demonstrable unimportance on the periphery of international relations to one that was front and centre and almost irreplaceable to several key states around the world.

From a policy that expressly exhibited a desire to talk to all sides in any given conflict, as the 2010 Arab Spring began Qatar took sides as never before

3. Qatari foreign policy: revolution

From a policy that expressly exhibited a desire to talk to all sides in any given conflict, most notably including improving relations with Iran and Israel to become almost uniquely placed among Arab states, as the 2010 Arab Spring began Qatar took sides as never before. Whenever Qatar engaged or sought to act in the emergent revolutions that often descended into civil war, it tended to direct its actions through and to support broadly moderate Islamist groups like the Muslim Brotherhood (Roberts, 2014). Nevertheless, this was not necessarily as much of an active choice it may seem.

Firstly, it was not as if there were a significant range of actors available that Qatar could support. There is no secular, leftist or other denominational organisation comparable in history, organisation, strength, or range across the Arab world to the Muslim Brotherhood. As a way to "reach" or otherwise (attempt to) support millions of Arabs at once, there is no organisation like the Brotherhood in the region. In other words, from a utilitarian perspective, supporting the Muslim Brotherhood is an obvious choice for an actor looking to quickly build influence across the region.

For an opportunistic actor like Qatar, without a long-established Foreign Ministry that had built up a diverse array of connections or that otherwise had channels through which to spread its influence, channelling support to the Brotherhood, a group whose time looked like it had come in the earlier days of the Spring (as embodied in the person of Muslim Brotherhood President of Egypt, Mohammed Morsi), made some sense.

Equally, there is a certain history to Qatari-Brotherhood relations. Since the 1950s members of the group or those associated with it have lived in Qatar playing key roles establishing the state's institutions (educated Brothers played similar roles throughout the Gulf region). Moreover, Qatar has hosted the Arab world's most influential Imam, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who is widely seen as synonymous with the Muslim Brotherhood, since 1961. He has long played a central role in

directing Islamic studies in Qatar as well as educating Qataris more generally in the 1970s and 1980s via his Qatar TV-funded television channel (Roberts, 2014). But he is more famous internationally for his prime-time al-Jazeera television show during which he espoused his Islamic teachings and further boosted his importance as a regionally-famous Islamic preacher (Gräf & Skovgaard-Petersen, 2009).

These kinds of informal links proved to be critical in directing Qatari financial, political, diplomatic, and military materiel support to Islamist rebels. This can most clearly be seen in the Libyan case with Qatar funnelling support via the Islamist preacher Ali al-Sallabi and onto his brother, Ismael al-Sallabi, and also to the former head of the al-Qaeda associated Libyan Fighting Group, Abdulkarim Belhaj (GSN, 2011; Coker et al., 2011).

But, cautioning against the notion of Qatar as exclusively seeking to support Islamists, another conduit for its support was the Sufi Aref Ali al-Nayed; an important middle-man for a time at least before he turned against Qatar's policies (Malas, 2011; Fitzgerald, 2014). Similarly, the secular Mahmud Shammam is another Libyan that the Qataris worked with, when he was chosen in 2011 to lead the new Libyan TV station broadcast from Doha (Hounshell, 2011).

But with the possible exception of Tunisia, where moderate Islamists have managed to maintain a leading place in the political system (and there are also plenty of allegations of Qatari support of moderate Islamists (Kausch, 2013)), wherever Qatar has supported Islamists such as in Libya, Egypt, or in Syria, the Gulf state has ended up losing ground.

The perception throughout the Arab world is that Qatar is a state that actively seeks to support the Muslim Brotherhood

In Egypt, after the overthrow of the Muslim Brotherhood-led Mohammed Morsi government that was so triumphantly and exorbitantly supported by Qatar, Egyptian-Qatari relations troughed as Doha took a hard line against what it perennially described as the Sisi-led coup. Qatar's money was returned, Egypt's Ambassador (who also happened to be named Mohammed Morsi) was withdrawn from Doha, and Qatari support was replaced with support from the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain (El Baltaji, 2012).

In Libya, not only did the Qatar-sponsored political party – Belhaj's "al-Watan" [nation/homeland] party – fail spectacularly at the 2012 elections, but the state descended into a civil war and Qatar's previously dominating position as the rebels overtook Gaddafi disintegrated too (Monitor, 2012; GSN, 2012).

Overall, while the reality may be more nuanced, the perception throughout the Arab world was – and remains – that Qatar is a state that actively seeks to support the Muslim Brotherhood and similar Islamists (Dickinson, 2014). And this perception, that is particularly prevalent among Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) allies, has been the source of increasing difficulty for Qatar's leadership. Indeed, these policies antagonised its neighbours Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain to such a degree that they withdrew their Ambassadors from Doha in Spring 2014 (Kerr, 05 March 2014). They followed this up with a vociferous campaign to pressure Qatar to alter its ways and follow the mainstream GCC policy. For a time, the Gulf allies implicitly threatened to extend their vendetta against Qatar to blocking its land border or Saudi Arabia's skies to Qatar Airways planes (Kerr, 14 March 2014). Though these escalations seemed unrealistic and over-the-top at the time, so too had the very notion of withdrawing their Ambassadors *en masse* from Doha in the first place.

Outwith the success of the al-Nahda movement in Tunisia (that denies any links to Qatar in any case), the short and medium term shows the failure of Qatari foreign policies during the

Arab Spring (Neubauer, 2014). Qatar is in a weaker position in 2015 than in 2010. Its regional allies launched an unprecedented, public, embarrassing action against Qatar, effectively blackmailing changes in its policies. Qatar became reviled in the most populous country in the Arab world and received similar treatment elsewhere in North Africa. Additionally, whether because of supposed corruption in its FIFA World Cup 2022 bid, its depressing migrant worker rights record, or its support of a range of Islamist groups, some of whom are in no way whatsoever moderate, its western allies have seen an unprecedented surge of anti-Qatari sentiment (Hauslohner, 2013).

The German Development Minister, several UK Parliamentarians, and US Congressional hearings have all openly accused Qatar of supporting terrorism on one way or another (Barclay, 2014; Pecquet, 2014; Reuters, 2014). These voices join with a crescendo of negative wider publicity aimed at Qatar, and have created a worrying climate for the state. With American politicians actively calling for or at least questioning the removal of the al-Udeid military base from Qatar and at least one major NATO country having considered designating Qatar as an official state sponsor of terrorism, the consequences of Qatar's failed foreign policies are beginning to undermine, albeit tangentially, some of the founding plinths of its security. Certainly, Qatar still has many allies around the world, and doubtless the more sensible politicians in western capitals grasp that the state is not as nefarious as it is typically presented in the media. But Qatar has invested so heavily on broadening the state's appeal for so long now, that to see such innovative, progressive policies of the 1990s and 2000s undermined by poor policy execution or simply not communicating what policies Qatar is undertaking is unfortunate.

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Moreover, if Qatar is to prepare for the loss of America as a "protector", as history and common sense dictates will happen eventually, Hamad bin Khalifah's plan to position Qatar as a state centrally important to a variety of countries is also being undermined. Qatar's oil and gas will be a strong lure for relations for the foreseeable future. But soft power is about building relations and creating an attractiveness independent of such base resources and needs. With its initial revolutionary media support, promotion of women's empowerment, installation of western education systems at the heart of society, mature foreign relations including with Israel, and its obvious (if not always successful) attempts to mediate peace as a matter of policy, Qatar was, arguably, making not insignificant headway towards this goal. But no more.

4. Qatari foreign policy: post-revolution

Having taken over as Emir in summer-2013, the then-33-year-old Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani inherited a state mired in a range of evolving, complex international intrigues. Initially, he pursued the same approach as his father Hamad bin Khalifah and we are yet to see what a truly Tamimi foreign policy might look like. But this is not surprising. There are several reasons as to why Qatar's foreign policy was always likely to continue along a similar path post-Hamad bin Khalifah.

Firstly, Qatar is a young state without mature institutions and so exhibits a form of path dependency. Thus the informal paths of communication used by Hamad bin Khalifah when supporting one group or another remain the same as for Tamim bin Hamad. So while an Emiri decree could, technically, change policy, in reality, it is not that simple.

Look, for example, to the early years of Hamad bin Khalifah's rule. When he was in power, though his rule was unquestioned, he still created duplicate ministries (Supreme Councils of

Education, of Health, and of Planning) because the reality was that he could not press through the changes and the policies he wanted through the old institutions. Either they were fundamentally incapable of doing the work of implementing the changes, or general institutional malaise would slow change to a crawl.

Aside from practical impediments of changing policy, secondly, one must question whether Tamim could actually order such a change for another aspect of the path dependency problem is the effect of legacy pressures on policy. While Hamad bin Khalifah is not ruling from behind the scenes – if he wanted still to be in power, he would not have given it up when under no duress to do so – he is an iconic leader who casts a long shadow. It is questionable whether Tamim bin Hamad could simply or quickly jettison some of the central plinths of his father's foreign policies just as it is questionable as to whether Hamad bin Khalifah would have given him power had he (Hamad) an inkling that his son would take power and immediately begin unpicking his life's work. The fact that Tamim's mother, Hamad's second wife Moza bint Nasser, is still a key player in Qatari domestic politics reinforces this problem.

Having taken over as Emir in summer-2013, the then-33-year-old Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani inherited a state mired in a range of evolving, complex international intrigues

Thirdly, one should question whether Tamim bin Hamad has any real interest in foreign policy. In the decade that he was Crown Prince, he seldom focused explicitly on foreign policy; never took a portfolio, led a mediation effort, or otherwise focused on a niche issue in Qatar's international relations. Even though the then-Foreign Minister Hamad bin Jassim al-Thani was a centrally important figure in Qatar, there is little doubt Tamim bin Hamad could have taken a niche issue if he so chose. But Tamim evidently preferred to focus on establishing pet-projects like his sovereign wealth fund, Qatar Sports Investment, to buy the likes of Paris St German the French football club, or the Qatar National Food Security Programme.

Fourthly, Tamim bin Hamad was immediately distracted upon ascending to the throne, evidently deeply concerned about Qatar's fiscal position with state revenue dropping by a third from 2014 to 2015 (Kerr, 29 June 2015). This was shown by the emphasis on issues of financial prudence in his first speeches on assuming the throne and by the subsequent depth and breadth of budget cuts that his government employed (Law, 12 February 2014). He was also soon distracted by the vociferous diplomatic pressure exerted upon Qatar by Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the UAE when they removed their Ambassadors in Spring 2014 to force Qatar to alter its foreign policy.

In sum, no coherent fully-formed Tamimi foreign policy is yet in evidence. Nevertheless, as the pique of the regional Ambassadorial dispute has passed and Tamim bin Hamad matures into the role of Emir, the state's foreign policy will increasingly come to reflect his rule and his government.

Thinking about his potential future orientation, there is logic to maintaining Islamist links to a degree. Qatar has paid a high-price thus far for supporting such groups and individuals, and its government may well be loath to give them up as the pressure eases. Also, it is far from clear how Qatar could diversify its support, such is the state's limited foreign ministry capacity and the levels of divisiveness that Qatar has sowed throughout the region.

Nevertheless, Tamim bin Hamad has evidently sought to, at the very least, hint that Qatar under his rule may attempt to diversify contacts. The only person regularly mooted as an influential foreign policy advisor and who evidently has some trust (judging by the amount of money that Tamim bin Hamad trusts him with) is Azmi Bishara, a Christian Palestinian former Knesset member

(Black, 27 June 2013). Bishara has been responsible not only for establishing an Arab think-tank in Doha (which will soon grow into a higher education institute) but a new news channel and online newspaper in London called *al-Arab al-Jadeed*, a venture designed to diversify Qatar's media portfolio from the Islamist-associated al-Jazeera (Kilani, 28 November 2014).

It is also true that Tamim bin Hamad has had to pare-down his state's overt association with certain Islamist elements, most notably the Muslim Brotherhood as a direct result of regional pressure (Hassan, 22 April 2014). Nevertheless, Tamim bin Hamad has played a savvy game against threats from Saudi Arabia and the UAE. He effectively waited-out the rival states, slowly agreeing to certain conditions, calculating correctly that Saudi Arabia's desire to preserve the unity of the GCC in the face of a resurgent Iran would overcome its desire to drive-home significant change in Doha.

Similarly, regional links to Islamists have been maintained elsewhere. In particular, using its contacts in the Levant and Iraq, time and again, Qatar secured the release of hostages such as the last US serviceman held by the Taliban in Afghanistan in June 2014 and five Tajik soldiers in June 2015 (Kucera, 15 June 2015). Qatar has also been using is contacts with the al-Qaeda-associated group, *Jabhat al-Nusra*, to attempt to bring the group into more of a normal, political alignment. This is the only reasonable explanation for the interviews aired with the extremist group's leader, Abu Mohammed al-Jolani on al-Jazeera in May and June 2015 (Roberts, 6 March 2015; Editorial, 28 May 2015).

Judging by Qatar's mauling in the international press and how Qatar has raised hackles in the west, much of the positive reputation that Qatar built up has evaporated

But Tamim bin Hamad felt acute pressure from Western allies too. Reportage of Qatar's role supporting Islamists became so contentious that serious questions were raised in western legislatures about Qatar's suitability as an ally, with, as noted, some US Congressmen and women calling for the removal of the al-Udeid base. Presently, these calls seem unlikely to genuinely threaten Qatar's core security arrangement. But that such a notion is being contemplated highlights how acutely Qatar's articulation and prosecution of its foreign policies have failed and thus how much ground Tamim bin Hamad has to make up.

But this failure has come at a time of introspection in the Gulf region as to its relationship with the region's core security provider. The US pivot to Asia, the nuclear deal with Iran, and a more Middle East-averse US foreign policy hints that America is positioning itself to leave the Persian Gulf region (Roberts, 14 May 2015). Though this might not occur for a decade or more, the second era of Qatar's foreign policy, when Hamad bin Khalifah was burgeoning a positive, often innocuous image for the state, was appositely placing Qatar to face the eventual US withdrawal.

Judging by Qatar's mauling in the international press and how Qatar has raised hackles in the west as well as in the Persian Gulf, much of the good will and positive reputation that Qatar built up has evaporated. Its mediation efforts, its focus on education, and its mature speaking-to-all-sides foreign relations, are trumped, it seems, by repeated accusations of Qatar's support of Islamists.

5. Conclusions

Leaders on the Qatari peninsula have never had an easy time. Historically, the land itself has intrinsically limited the population it could sustain, which contributed to Qatar remaining among the smallest and weakest groupings of people in the Persian Gulf region. Leaders thus made savvy decisions with whom to ally, making cost-benefit calculations as to which domineering

regional power posed the most threat and which would provide protection with the least onerous demands. In the late-18th and early-19th centuries, these decisions were made and remade quickly and alliance structures changed frequently.

This basis for Qatari security continued, though the shifting alliance structure slowed down with the introduction of the Ottoman and British Empires with whom Qatari leaders sought protective arrangements. Though relations were far from simple, these two Empires provided for Qatar's overarching security for around half-a-century each.

The discovery and export of oil did not change the fundamental Qatari security dynamic; indeed, it reinforced the Qatari leadership's need for a suzerain to protect them, the state, and their precious commodity. After the British withdrew from the Gulf in 1971, Qatari leaders turned to Saudi Arabia. While no explicit security arrangements are in evidence, the tenor of their relationship demonstrated by Qatar's foreign policy shows that, at the very least, Qatar's leadership sought to neutralise one potential threat to its state – from Saudi Arabia itself – by so assiduously conforming if not genuflecting to the larger state's leadership.

Reenergising Qatar's soft power and its reputation as a progressive state is crucial to its future security orientation

The new leadership emerging in the late-1980s were, however, unhappy with such an arrangement and wanted to signal and demonstrate Qatar's complete independence. Equally, they possessed a fundamentally international perspective and judged that Qatar's security was best secured by making Qatar important to as wide a range of states as possible. Though a security relationship was founded with the United States, conforming to the historic Qatari tactic of alliance-forming, Qatar's leadership actively sought to diversify this dependence. History told them that, however big or important the state, it would leave their region eventually.

For a time, then, Qatar acted as if it sought to transcend its regional politics. By assiduously attempting to ally with everyone – Iran and Israel included – it was almost as if it were attempting to foster a quasi-neutral reputation for Qatar to inure the state from regional conflict.

But such a tactic veered significantly with the Qatari reaction to the Arab Spring. Then, as never before, Qatar explicitly chose sides and often attempted to support Islamists across the region. Partly this was because Qatar sensed that the moment for Islam to actively direct politics in the Arab world had arrived. Supporting such groups was an inevitable consequence of Qatar's weak foreign policy apparatus which relied heavily on informal links that tended, by historical circumstance as much as any active policy, to involve Islamists who had taken refuge in Qatar over the years.

But such a policy failed. In many places during the Arab Spring that Qatar involved itself with financial, military, or diplomatic support, the situation became more complex and eventually disintegrated into civil war. Though Qatar was far from alone in such meddling, it has been ascribed by the popular press much of the blame.

Thus Tamim bin Hamad inherited a difficult situation in 2013. As and when his personal policy preferences come more to the fore as he matures into the role of Emir, they will be checked the Scylla of his father's legacy and the state's limited formal and informal contacts that are so crucial to directing policy, and the Charybdis of humiliatingly being blackmailed (or at least curtailed) by regional states to abandon Qatar's contacts with Islamists.

His approach of maintaining Islamist links throughout the Levant, but demonstrably putting the contacts to peaceable use – by obtaining hostages from assorted groups – is a sensible way to rekindle Qatar's reputation. Yet the state's evident relations with an extremist group like

Jabhat al-Nusra, though such actions are doubtless undertaken with the connivance of western intelligence and security agencies, still look bad for the state. Given Qatar's inability to disseminate any message as to why it retains relations with al-Nusra, the state will continue to be pilloried. And so while maintaining this niche relationship carries a certain utility as far as western allies are concerned, Qatar will continue to pay a high price.

Instead, Tamim bin Hamad could lead the reprise of the pre-Arab Spring Qatari foreign policy tenets. Saving money through drawing down on its support of a variety of armed causes around the region, Qatar could reinvest this in its education system that has been hit hardest by the financial cuts under Tamim (Kerr, June 2015). Similarly, Qatar could plough its aid through UN organisations as opposed to its own ad hoc mechanisms, to symbolise and publicise a reversion to Qatar's "butter not guns" approach to its international relations.

Either way, reenergising Qatar's soft power and its reputation as a progressive state is crucial to its future security orientation. US security understandings will diminish eventually and then Qatar will need to find a new suzerain or fend multilaterally for itself. In such a situation, Qatar wants to be an attractive state; not one with a negative, divisive reputation.

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