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Qatar's Foreign Policy  
Between Realism and Idiosyncrasy  
By

Reine Mattar

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THESIS APPROVAL FORM

Student Name: Reine Mattar I.D. #: 200903922  
Thesis Title: Qatar's Foreign Policy: Between Realism and Idiosyncrasy  
Program: MA in International Affairs  
Department: Social Sciences  
School: Arts and Sciences

The undersigned certify that they have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis and approved it in Partial Fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of **Master of Arts in International Affairs**.

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Bassel F. Salloukh

Signature

Date 17/6/2014

Committee Member: Dr. Sami Baroudi

Signature

Date 17/6/2014

Committee Member: Dr. Tamirace Fakhoury

Signature

Date 22/7/2014




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*To my sister, two brothers  
and loving parents*

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# Qatar's Foreign Policy: Between Realism and Idiosyncrasy

Reine Mattar

## ABSTRACT

Qatar's foreign policy has received increasing attention due to the small monarchy's huge resources, and the activism of its main decision-takers: Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa and Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem. Before the Arab Spring Qatar diversified its power resources and adopted a multi-issue perspective in addressing threats to its economic and political security. After the Arab Spring Qatar found its foreign policy confined to a single-issue in addressing the popular uprisings that broke out in the Middle East. This thesis argues that the change in Qatar's foreign policy after the Arab Spring was not an abrupt shift from its zero problem policy in the region. Qatar pursued a consistent policy towards the affairs of the region through its different investments and mediation efforts. Qatar's foreign policy can only be explained through combining realism and the unique idiosyncratic ambitions of its ruler.

*Keywords: Qatar, Foreign Policy, Arab Spring, Realism, Idiosyncrasy.*

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# Chapter One

## Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction

The 2003 US invasion of Iraq unleashed a devastating geopolitical contest in the Middle East. After the vacuum created by the removal of Saddam Hussein and the consequent change in the geopolitical map, threats and opportunities for the small Gulf monarchies emerged. In 2010 the Arab uprisings created a vacuum at the leadership level in a number of states, and the geopolitical contests that had shaped the regional system before the uprisings “resumed with a vengeance” (Salloukh, 2013). Meanwhile, the shift from an Arab state system to a Middle Eastern one (Brynen, Moore, Salloukh, & Zahar, 2012) created a window of opportunity along which new alignments developed. The significance of this shift soon materialized in the emergence of several alliances, it also accentuated the regional balance of power. Consequently, explaining Qatari foreign policy became more complex after the Arab Spring. This thesis examines Qatari foreign policy vis-à-vis this regional contest through a realist paradigm combined with the idiosyncratic traits of the Qatari leaders steering this small monarchy’s foreign policy.

In the years before the Arab Spring, Qatar was increasingly involved in diversifying its political portfolio through the soft power of public diplomacy. Its vast financial resources sponsored an active foreign policy that was carefully deployed to establish the country’s regional relevance and foster international recognition. The quest for security in the Gulf is essential in understanding some of the foreign policy choices of Qatar. At different occasions Western allies proved unable to intervene and save a

regional ally from imminent threats (the fall of Iran's Shah 1979, the invasion of Kuwait). In addition, for Qatar, Hamad bin Jassem asserted that "History shows that no enemy remains hostile forever, nor do friends remain friendly forever" (Pipes, 1996). In this respect, the small state has been trying to endorse a controversial set of allies, but also, and even more importantly, to appeal to the large Arab public opinion either by offering a platform where they find "the other opinion", by "becoming a venue on the international sporting circuit" (Peterson, 2006), by maintaining close relations with popular Islamic movements, or by actively siding with the people against regimes during the Arab Spring.

After taking the lead in mediating conflicts in the region, Qatar set itself on an unconventional course during the Arab Spring, supporting regime change in other countries in the region. This thesis explains the change in Qatari foreign policy after the Arab Spring. It argues that the objectives of Qatari foreign policy are complex. In part, foreign policy is used to balance against traditional threats (Saudi Arabia and Iran) and against any feeling of animosity from Arab governments who had a history of working to undermine some regimes in the Gulf (Khalaf, 2013). However, Qatar's foreign policy is also proactive and is guided by the idiosyncratic ambitions of its then Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa and his Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem. Qatar pursued a realist model of "regional balancing", but also of accumulating political capital and regional influence in order to brand itself on the international level as a powerful regional ally and perhaps a great power soliciting deserved stature in the international arena. Although, before the Arab Spring, Qatar was investing its great resources in different countries in the region- where economic opportunities are sponsored by the political elite - after the Arab Spring the Qatari leadership took a firm stand against

authoritarian “ally” regimes (with the exception of Bahrain), supporting the people in their demands for democracy.

The Middle East regional sub-system stands out as a typical model where states seek to maximize their autonomy and security through power accumulation and balancing (Hinnebusch & Ehteshami, 2002). The foreign policies of Middle East states are shaped by the way their leaders negotiate the often conflicting pressures emanating from three conceptually distinct environments: the domestic level, the regional systemic level and the international level. In the particular case of Qatar, the influence of personality plays a great role in foreign affairs especially when policy crises and wars involve conditions which favor such influence. Moreover, core-periphery relations, where states choose to either balance against the Western system or keep regional states in check and bandwagon with the Western system, are also important. While the Persian Gulf has for a long period seen a tacit contest between three major players - Iraq, Iran and Saudi Arabia - this thesis contends that the change in the geopolitics of the region after 2003 has made way for new players to take part in the reshaping of the regional security system.

Up until the turn of the century, researchers looked at the small Gulf states as a stretch of indiscernible entities whose interests are guided by virtue of state-building initiatives and were dominated by larger rentier states that acted either in an aggressive manner (the Gulf war), or in a manner that overshadowed their independence (Saudi Arabia acting as big brother). However, the modest literature on Qatar’s foreign policy has drawn more interest given the recent emergence of Qatar as a skilful mediator before the Arab Spring, but most importantly its role after the Arab Spring as a regional actor supporting regime change. Lina Khatib (2013) described the new role Qatar assumed has

been described as a “shift” from the “familiar foreign policy tactics centered on mediation” that was gradually consolidated through “an ever-expanding foreign policy that has seen the country’s regional and international profile rise exponentially” since the 1995 bloodless coup by its Emir Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani (p. 418).

The existence of the Gulf monarchies itself has defied “most of the usual assumptions about how states are formed and how they normally behave” (Crystal, 1995, p. 2). Qatar’s foreign policy under Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa has proved to be a magnified example of the need of such states, as Crystal explains, to “expend rather than accumulate wealth” (Crystal, 1995, p. 3). On the other hand, more reasons have also allowed for Qatar’s freedom of action. The vacuum on the regional level has been detrimental for some states, but for others, it has produced a set of opportunities. No doubt, small states in different parts of the world may now be assuming bigger roles, ones that were usually undertaken by larger states. This has been made possible since the concept of international dominance is no more dependent on military prowess or capabilities, or the size of army and superior combat skills.

This research refutes the claim that Qatar made an abrupt change in its foreign policy with its engagement in regime change in Libya. It argues that since the middle 1990s, Qatar has sought to diversify its political power through a variety of instruments but with a consistent search for a maximization of soft power. This thesis looks at the environment within which the country is situated and the changes (world discoveries in the energy sector, financial crises) on the international level and their impact on Qatar’s positioning in the region. It suggests that Qatar’s foreign policy falls under the same realist approach it adopted before the Arab Spring to increase its regional power. It highlights the role of Qatar’s Emir and Prime Minister in steering the country towards

global stature and underscores the importance of the idiosyncratic variable in setting the foreign policy of the small emirate.

## **1.2 Qatar's Power Politics**

The geopolitics of the Middle East appears more inconsistent and less stable after the Arab Spring as is seen by the short-lived alliance between Turkey, Qatar and Egypt. Geopolitics is “being re-formed and the regional balances of power have changed”; this explains in part why some countries that had not had a say in global politics are now assuming a greater role in regional dynamics (Tziarras, 2011). In a world where great powers like China chose diplomacy and soft power to secure their oil and mineral resources, there is nevertheless a wide consensus in the literature of the need by great powers to prove their hard power capabilities in order to assume high stature in international structures. Pursuing power has always resulted in an altering of the regional and global balances of power, even if it does not achieve the aims it was set for. While different scholars have argued for the utility of soft power, others call for smart power where a state's resources are strategically deployed in projecting power and influence instead of muscle flexing (Wilson, 2008). Conventionally, power is “the ability of states to use material resources to get others to do what they otherwise would not” (Barnett & Duvall, 2005). Yet even within the realist tradition power can take multiple shapes. In the past few decades, the concept of power resources has been assuming greater attention. Understanding power helps explain reasons behind policy decisions. This thesis is important given that it examines Qatar's foreign policy within a frame of multi-dimensional view of power politics. Less visible expressions of power are still under-

researched. The literature in international relations is shifting from a focus on material forms of power, such as military and economic prowess, which are the most visible dimensions of power, towards less visible ones. The traditional one-dimensional view of power concentrates mainly on hard power. Alternatively, Qatar's foreign policy model falls within the broader scope of multi-issue dimensions of power politics. Power is most effective when least open to observation, it can be discussed within different contexts. Regional institutions for example produce cooperation but, as Barnett and Duvall argue, they also shape "the bargaining advantage" of parties involved and "establish parameters for change" (2005, p. 40). These institutions are no proof of power. Joint action, which includes persuasion or agreement over interests, is a simple manifestation of liberal policy. However, when liberal institutions - such as the Libyan-Qatari Joint Investment Fund and the Egyptian-Qatari Businessmen's Council - serve as means to assert influence, the outside party (in this case Qatar) that shapes this capacity and allows for the materialization of certain social ambitions (of the ruling elite in Libya and Egypt, respectively) would be asserting its influence through soft power. In other words, Qatar engaged in such institutions as a way to extend its influence or soft power all over the region.

Although Steven Lukes' view of power is based on social structures, it still lends a frame of analysis to power dimensions within the regional order. Lukes (2005) contends that "observing the exercise of power can give evidence of its possession, and counting power resources can be a clue to its distribution, but power is a capacity, and not the exercise of the vehicle of that capacity" (p. 70). Power is not only "intentional and active" (Lukes, 2005, p.5); looking at the exercise of power and evaluating it from a perspective of who prevails in the decision making situations is a valid claim, but is not

always sufficient to explain the relation of cause and effect. While power is not only reflected in concrete decisions, behavior, issues and observable conflict of interests, it can also be exercised by preventing people from having “grievances by shaping their perceptions, cognitions, and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they can see or imagine no alternative to it, or because they see it as a natural and unchangeable, or because they value it as divinely ordained and beneficial” (Lukes, 2005, p. 28). Power also shapes perceptions and preferences in a way to ensure the acceptance of a role one might seek within the existing order, one such example is the acceptance of a leadership role that commands regional and international recognition. Power is not only coercion, influence, authority, force and manipulation all in favor of reaching compliance (through the threat of deprivation when conflict arises over values or course of action). Luke highlights the importance of non-decision-making as a projection of influence towards the party subject to power, where differing preferences are self-denied by the latter unconsciously. However, the absence of grievances does not certainly mean consensus (Lukes, 2005).

Before the Arab Spring, the literature on Qatar’s foreign policy focused largely on its proactive mediation and peace-building efforts and the modalities that shape its status regionally and globally. These efforts, the literature indicates, are motivated by a combination of international prestige and survival strategies. Mehran Kamrava (2011) points out that Qatari officials were hailed for their “perceived neutrality” and were received with much “goodwill” wherever they set foot. While mediation “often takes place under the aegis of one of the major powers” (p. 540), preserving peace in this region has been a highly challenging mission where conflicts often resume despite the high level of involvement of the mediator. By setting itself well defined diplomatic



strategies as mediator, Qatar managed to use its not-so-conventional relations with the states and actors of the region to diffuse conflicts that may have spilled over and threatened its security. Qatar's decision-makers acknowledged that they carefully selected the conflicts where Qatar played a mediation role (Kamrava, 2011, p. 540). Qatari diplomats argued that they were ready to get involved in Lebanon, Sudan and Yemen because of the "fairly positive" chances of success. The question that presents itself is what would then explain their involvement in Libya and Syria after the Arab Spring?

### **1.3 Qatar in the Arab Spring**

While the near past has only proven to the small monarchies how vulnerable they may be in an unstable environment, the attitude of small states is usually "more defensive" than their larger counterparts. They are also more cognizant "of their limitations and vulnerability and ... may be more inclined to ensure their international security through a policy of effective alliance-building" (Peterson, 2006, p. 740). Strategies of survival for small states include reaching a *modus vivendi* with their neighbors, allying with a powerful protector against larger neighbors, and finding "a unique niche whereby ... [they provide] a service or commodity that benefits neighbors, the region, or the broader world." (Peterson, 2006). These survival strategies appeal to soft power politics. They do not foreclose direct intervention as a potential scenario, especially when conditions of statehood for small states are a more challenging question than they are for large states. The controversial foreign policy that Qatar adopted during the Arab Spring marks an uncommon attempt of a small Gulf monarchy to assert its

power when regional heavyweights are at headlock. But this was not the first instance where Qatar found itself compelled to act. The Iraq-Iran war and the second Gulf war demonstrated how Gulf monarchies cannot remain neutral during conflict. As wise as that decision may seem, the cost of remaining on the sidelines can be greater than they can handle (Khalaf, 2013). Similar to the security vacuum that the region saw with the Iran-Iraq war, the 2003 war on Iraq initiated a new contest that became most apparent with the Arab Spring.

Scholars suggest that the foreign policy of Qatar after the Arab Spring "does not appear to be based on a coherent political strategy" (Khatib, 2013, p. 417). Khatib (2013) warns that the "discrepancy between image and actions" meant that Qatar would be susceptible "to international and domestic sources of instability" which would negate the very reason for its active foreign policy: preserving national security (p. 418). However, this view does not present a new explanation concerning the drivers of Qatar's "shift into intervention". Instead, it asserts that the role Qatar took in Libya against Qaddafi in 2011 "was motivated by its goal of appealing to and exercising leverage on the international community" and was part of the process of "adaptation Qatar had to undertake to sustain its leading regional position" (Khatib, 2013, p. 421). The fact that Qatar was the first Arab country to grant recognition to Libyan rebels and the National Transitional Council, and sent six Mirage fighters in the NATO-led campaign (Qatari Mirage fighter aircraft did not participate in strikes, as noted by Khatib) in April 2011, may lead to such a conclusion. Had Qatar stopped at this point it would have confirmed their theory. But Qatar's support for the rebels continued on the ground to a degree that was met with distrust and skepticism from European states, among others. Another case in point is Qatar's own admission of the need for the international community to provide

more tangible support for the Syrian revolution. Qatar's intervention in Libya was not conventional in the sense that rarely did Qatar interfere diplomatically with one side of a conflict against the other. Why then would a small state pursue the same goals it had already achieved through "soft power" (Kamrava, 2011; Peterson, 2006; Ulrichsen 2012), but with greater costs and risk?

How foreign policy makers adapt their decision strategy to the stakes-threat characteristics of a decision task is a subject that requires a closer observation and a practical profiling of the decision makers. The salience of the values of decision makers is a variable that cannot be ignored when assessing Qatar's foreign policy. While some scholars argue "that elevated threat encourages rational decision processing", and that "heuristic processing was more prevalent in less threatening situations" (Astorino-Courtois, 2000, p. 489), many believe that Qatar's foreign policy proved the opposite. But to say Qatar is adapting to political trends and had always adopted pragmatic solutions suggests no variation in its foreign policy. Even more, it assumes that Qatar is only reacting to regional events when the reality is that Qatar pursued a committed policy in supporting regime change in Libya and Syria. If anything, this goes to show the strategic significance that its leadership saw in opposing those regimes.

Alongside this pragmatic view of Qatari foreign policy, another perspective contends that far from a clear strategy, Qatar's foreign policy after the Arab Spring appears "opportunistic in that Syria presents a possibility of weakening Iran" (Haykel, 2013, p. 2). The highly idiosyncratic style of rule in Qatar and the fact that "the regime is not ideologically committed to anything", reinforces the idea that Qatar's foreign policy is not anchored in the principles it is calling for outside its borders (human rights, democracy, freedom of opinion, etc.) but is rather a mere reflection of the personal

ambitions of its main decision-takers. Haykel (2013) argues that “The policies that Qatar pursues are based on ad hoc decisions made by the Emir for the purpose of preserving his rule”, which means that “[...] Qatar cannot be relied on entirely to remain consistent or to do the right thing” (p. 2).

This thesis argues that Qatar’s Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa was more consistent in his decisions and foreign policy for two reasons. First, after the Emir assumed power, he followed the same policy of cooptation vis-à-vis the Muslim Brotherhood that had been adopted by the Qatari leadership before Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi moved to Doha in 1961. This suggests that the foreign policy of Qatar, with all the changes that had occurred after the accession of Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa to power, did not change in regards to the Muslim Brotherhood. It also clearly indicates that Qatari foreign policy does not only revolve around idiosyncratic variables. In addition, it shows that for a small monarchy in a turbulent region but with great resources, successive Qatari rulers have similar threat perceptions. Halliday (2005) contends that the Muslim Brotherhood network that acts within a shared political framework lacks centralized coordination. Qatar’s support for the group in its different incarnations aims at filling this void and serves as a tool by which it challenges states in the region and reaches beyond its geographical limits.

Second, Qatar’s mediation efforts did not end after the Arab Spring. In fact, Qatar is still considered a resourceful mediator in regional and extra-regional conflicts. One such case is when the Eritrean president asked Qatar to mediate the long-standing conflict with Ethiopia in December 2012. The foreign policy of Qatar after the Arab Spring may involve a measure of pragmatism. However, this thesis argues that the decisions of Emir Hamad showcase the use of foreign policy within the paradigm of a

realist rentier state with an ambitious leadership. This thesis accepts that Qatar is creating a unique brand for itself, building it “from the ground up”, not by copying the United Arab Emirates or Saudi Arabia, but by creating an “aura and demand for a new brand” (Peterson, 2006). It argues that Qatar’s power politics model is an extension of a realist foreign policy enmeshed with the idiosyncratic traits of its decision-takers and the power and pressures ensuing from having vast resources. By identifying and “exploiting a unique niche”, costly and unreliable as it may seem, Qatar’s foreign policy is driven by the realist imperatives of geopolitics, its vast oil and gas resources, and the ambitions of its main decision-takers. In a competitive environment such as the Middle East, the combination of these three drivers creates a foreign policy situated within a realist paradigm of power politics.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

Before the Arab Spring, Qatar’s mediation efforts earned it a great regard in the region and among its allies in the West. Until 2010, Qatar was hailed for its achievements in exercising diplomatic skills and diffusing conflicts. The regimes in Libya, Egypt and Syria had Qatar’s strong support before the Arab Spring. The review of secondary data shows the significant commitment Qatar invested in these regimes as well as in seeing them removed. After the Arab Spring, Qatar shelved its mediation efforts and resorted to hard power politics in support of regime change. What explains this change under the same leadership and economic preponderance?

Qatar went from being an ally of many authoritarian regimes to a proponent of regime change after the Arab Spring. Why would a small state risk its regional portfolio

especially at a time when longstanding regimes are falling? What explains this change in support to the rulers in Egypt, Libya and Syria when Qatar had been one of their supporters? Why did it support regime change in some places but not in others? Qatar is geographically distant from the zones of conflict that erupted during the Arab Spring, why did it choose to participate in resolving conflict by siding with one side against the other? How do we explain its foreign policy after the Arab Spring and competition with Saudi Arabia? Is Qatar's action during the Arab Spring a sign of power or weakness? Can the failure to act when the stakes are as high, be considered an action that carries more rewarding outcomes and thus be a contingent form of power? Is Qatar's emergence as an influential player the outcome of regional vacuum and imbalance, or is it the perfect example of a small state that can overcome inherent weaknesses and guarantee its survival?

During the Arab Spring, Qatar stretched its freedom to act independently of the United States and other Gulf countries to a degree not seen before by a regional small state. Why did it pursue such a strategy risking its alliance with the US and other European countries, and why did it choose to challenge regional heavyweights in different zones of conflict? How then can we explain the foreign policy of Qatar during the Arab Spring?

## **1.5 Methodology**

In order to explain Qatar's foreign policy this research uses secondary data in analyzing the shift in policy after the Arab Spring. It examines the different dynamics that went into play before and during the Arab Spring. The analysis serves to explain the

role of agency behind the change in state policy. It looks at the security threats perceived by its leadership, the pressures from both the international and regional systems and the consequent reaction within a paradigm of realism. The importance of oil and gas cannot be overstated. This thesis uses statistical data on the liquefied natural gas (LNG) trends worldwide and argues that despite the increase in demand, Qatar faces constant challenges in competing with new sources of energy. The continuous efforts in developing energy resources and decrease in consumption is a priority to ensure sound economies in all industrial countries. The impact of any dramatic change on the demand for Qatar's oil and gas resources, can have dire consequences on the small monarchy. The future of oil and gas is a game changer for Qatar.

The most enduring paradigm in the region is realism, and as a small monarchy where a concern with power and security appear paramount, Qatar is one other example of states that adopt "an approach which focuses on security and the maximization of power" (Halliday, 2005, p. 25). While realism has the ability to explain relations between authoritarian states that do not trust each other, it undermines the impact of idiosyncratic variables. This thesis looks at a number of interviews with both Qatari decision-takers in pinpointing the decisions of the state before and after the Arab Spring. Elite decisions help in defining the idiosyncratic traits of the Qatari decision takers. Before the Arab Spring Libya, Egypt and Syria were three countries where Qatar invested heavily. This was interpreted as a direct support for the regimes in power.

Many scholars tend to look at the foreign policy of Middle East states through a realist or idiosyncratic lens. This thesis contributes to the literature on the Gulf monarchy with a qualitative explanation of Qatar's foreign policy before and after the Arab Spring. The breadth of literature on Qatar during the Arab Spring is abundant;

however, it was absorbed by one single element: the fact that Qatar has stepped out from a tradition of unpublicized alliances and adopted a policy of soft and hard power posturing. This approach has disrupted any attempt to understand why Qatar is pursuing such policies.

This research argues that Qatar has similar resources, geopolitical pressures and national security concerns as other Gulf monarchies. Yet, no other Gulf monarchy has been as active as Qatar in asserting its security and maximizing its power before and during the Arab Spring. Qatar's Emir and Prime Minister played a major role in steering the country's development and foreign affairs, even if agency alone cannot suffice in explaining the foreign policy choices of the state. This thesis suggests that the support the Emir had from the United States and western allies provided the small emirate with is not enough to explain its foreign policy. By engaging in realism, Qatar allowed itself greater foreign policy choices. It is necessary to say that Qatar did not simply echo US policy even if it accommodated it in many cases. Scholars caution that Qatar's "reliance on the US for defense and security ought not to be conflated with a policy of bandwagoning and aligning foreign policies and priorities in a way to match those of the United States" (Kamrava, 2013, p. 90). Understanding Qatari foreign policy necessitates having a comprehensive approach that includes other bilateral configurations of politics with states like Saudi Arabia, the United States, United Kingdom, Japan, and China, among others. The security concerns that Qatar inherently suffers from act as a driver of foreign policy but also as a demotivational element that limits its ambitious choices. Notwithstanding, Qatari decision-takers engaged in a high-risk, high-stake foreign policy choices that other small states were hesitant to follow.



This thesis goes against the argument that says Qatar adopted a reactive policy towards the affairs of the region after the Arab Spring. It argues that Qatar broke with tradition in the region and was pursuing a proactive policy in foreign affairs. The Gulf monarchies can no longer be seen as one unit. The 2008 economic crisis left many states exhausted economically. Qatar felt the reverberations of this crisis but not on an economic level. The pressure on its leadership materialized in a change of priorities from domestic to exclusively regional focus and a heightened involvement in foreign policy.

## **1.6 Map of the Thesis**

This thesis is divided into five chapters. The next chapter traces the state formation of Qatar and the key variables that shape its interaction with the regional and international systems. The third chapter looks at Qatar's foreign policy before the Arab Spring and traces the economic liberalization adopted by the Emir and the country's investments in Libya, Syria, and Egypt. Chapter four looks at the change that transpired with the Arab Spring and Qatar's reaction to it, and discusses Qatar's foreign policy before and during the unrest. Chapter five concludes that Qatar's foreign policy is driven by realist imperatives of geopolitics, vast oil and gas resources, and the ambitions of the country's main decision-takers. These three foreign policy drivers are responsible for the controversial behavior exhibited by the small state of Qatar.

## **Chapter Two**

### **The Dynamics of Qatari Foreign Policy**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

In order to understand the dynamics of Qatar's foreign policy it is necessary to track its formation as a state, its inherent characteristics, the social fabric that persisted throughout its recent history, the abundant natural resources that make up its rent-based economy and the idiosyncratic element taking foreign policy decisions. The relatively recent history of the Gulf monarchies and the rapid expansion of rents seen by these states allowed their rulers greater versatility in foreign policy behavior. Qatar's formation and the accession of the Al Thani family to power are events that occurred in a relatively uncontested context. The Al Thanis were one of few traders who had remained in Katara despite the dire climate conditions in the country and the severe losses suffered by the pearling industry, while Qatar's independence came at the evening of major oil discoveries. But as these dynamics interacted domestically to form the state of Qatar today, they are constantly influenced by different sources of pressure. This Chapter opens with an introduction to Qatar's formation as a state, the circumstances that surrounded its independence as a small state rich in oil and gas resources, and highlights the role of the idiosyncratic element in its foreign policy.

#### **2.2 State Formation**

A look at the history of the small monarchy, its formation, transitions before it reached the stature it has today is useful. One variable, oil, is invaluable in providing the

Qatari decision-takers with the tangible and intangible resources their active diplomacy needs. However, before oil, Qatar had little resources to attract the attention of any of the powerful clans that settled in Arabia. It had poorer harbors and an inhospitable climate which made the early fishing settlements there “ephemeral”. According to Crystal, Al Thani tribe had migrated from central Arabia to eastern Qatar, early in the eighteenth century. The few clans that were settled in Qatar on a more permanent basis were not as prominent to spread their authority to all the provinces of the land. Muhammad Al Thani was a successful merchant, powerful enough to command tribute from the surrounding towns. The insecurity that reigned over the small towns of Qatar was the result of a weak economy that would not secure enough prosperity for strong clans to subsist. Although Al Thani did not enjoy undisputed recognition, “like other clans, [the Al Thanis] balanced secession with fragile alliances” (Crystal, 1995, p. 29). They moved to Doha from Fuwairat in the middle of the nineteenth century. With the signing of the 1868 treaty, the British were now paying more attention to Qatar as a separate entity rather than a Bahraini dependency (Crystal, 1995). The British later acknowledged Qatar as an autonomous political unit and gave special regard to the Al Thanis. However, it was the presence of the Ottomans that preserved the country’s independence from Bahraini and British intervention. Later in the 1880s, Mohammad’s son Qasim (1876-1913) appealed to the British for protection from the Ottomans. Crystal’s (1995) detailed historical layout of the formation of Qatar (and Kuwait) pins out an important theme in Qatar; “Because the institutionalization of power occurred later in Qatar, it occurred in a new international environment and was therefore more closely connected to the problem of acquiring international recognition” (p. 34). Given that international recognition transpired before the consolidation of internal power, no pattern of politics and

succession was established and “the power of the family factions to challenge the ruler became partially institutionalized”.

It is useful to look at the variables that play out in the decision making process and the impact of oil as a key variable to understand the favorable conditions that contributed to the pursuit of an active foreign policy in Qatar under Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa. Oil and gas intervene in an ongoing process of state formation and regime consolidation. The autonomy of the ruler from other social groupings has been one of the impacts of the state’s reliance on rent. The elites the ruler depends on are not local but multinational. The case of Qatari foreign policy under Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani contributes to the literature as it exemplifies a sophisticated model of foreign policy behavior. In a democracy, “different categories of issues are assumed to evoke the participation in the decision-making process of different numbers of actors, who vary in their motivation and ability to act as well as in their readiness to engage in political bargaining and compromise” (Potter, 1980, p. 407). In the case of Qatar, the ability of the Emir to rule necessitated first and foremost a consolidation of support by the Al Thani family. The Al Thani ruled Qatar since 1876, but contestation to the emir’s rule by members of his own family has historically been decisive when it comes to his survival. While some literature “uses Qatar as a case study to demonstrate how a policy of political reform may be adopted for reasons that have little to do with economic necessity” (Rathmell & Schulze, 2000, p. 47), Qatar is also a case that demonstrates that the centralization of rule in the hands of a few decision makers encourages bolder decisions and a more active engagement in transformative politics.

The structure of political arrangements, the distributive policies and the centralization of power that characterize the rentier state, Crystal (1995) observes, are

essential in understanding state formation in the Gulf monarchies. Of the many advantages oil came with, it created more cohesive political institutions where ruling family members shared power with the ruler. By sharing power with the ruling family, the rulers "became less absolute and less powerful relative to their own relatives" (Crystal, 1995, p. 12). However, in the eyes of society, the ruling family was more powerful. In Qatar, contentions and rivalry between ruling family members ended up in a series of forced abdications. Despite family divisions, the issue of power being transferred to another family has not been raised. This dates back to the early days of the discovery of oil and the transformation it affected on the political alliances. Before oil, politics were dominated by a ruling coalition between the ruler and the merchant families, as Crystal suggests. After the economic crises in the interwar period, Qatar was exhausted economically. The merchants chose to exit the state. So on the eve of oil, Qatar's society was missing a merchant class as well as a politically seasoned class that might be able to challenge the ruler. The general impact of oil on the transformation of the state was similar in the Gulf countries, however it is not the same in each of them. The cohesion of Qatar's society and small sized population have allowed for rapid changes. This cohesion contributes to the state's stability, an attribute not commonly found in the region. The importance of oil is that it allowed the state to survive and develop. It allowed for a distributive structure to emerge and provided a strong support for its elite to reach out to the region from a position of power. Oil is a power resource that creates great potential for a small state. In the world of politics this great potential comes with equally great pressure to use power resources in a way that would maximize state power and ensure its survival.

## 2.3 Oil and Gas

With its current rate of oil production Qatar's known oil reserves will run out in 2023. However, the small monarchy will still rely on its natural gas reserves located off its northeast coast. It is worth noting that the literature on energy security distinguishes between oil and natural gas supply dynamics, as each produces different situations for politics. Oil supply is traded primarily on international markets in short-term agreements and by flexible means of transport. Besides securing access to oil, the process of oil supply is not generally employed as a foreign policy tool. On the other hand, Brenda Shaffer (2013) asserts, natural gas is delivered in pipelines and through long-term agreements and by means of permanent infrastructures, it lacks the flexibility found in oil supply. The political relations between gas trading states is of the essence in this respect.

Brenda Shaffer looks at the stability of gas supply, and relations between exporting and importing states. Two relations are most relevant to this thesis as they define the strategic importance Qatar maintains for LNG importing states. First, disruption in gas supply can be initiated by supplier, transit or consumer states. In the case of LNG, supply is confined to a supplier-consumer relation, it does not include transit states but is rather reliant on "floating pipelines". Second, the supply and consumer states can either be both non-dependent, or one side is dependent and the other is not, or interdependent. Meanwhile the significant asymmetry of the degree of dependence between those states will most likely be exploited (Shaffer, 2013, p. 115). Compared to the supply of natural gas, LNG supply has seen very few cases of disruption. Moreover, Shaffer (2013) notes that states who look to serve as long-term

gas exporters “will not quickly sacrifice their standing as reliable suppliers for fear that in the long run customers will seek other sources of supply or different fuel” (p. 117). So unless an exogenous factor arise, usually LNG exporters are keen on maintaining a certain level of production and export. Qatar’s proven reserves of gas are one of the largest in the world making it third to Russia and Iran with more than 250 trillion cubic feet (7000 km<sup>3</sup>). According to a report from Mediterranean Prospects, a European research organization concerned with the Middle East, the Middle East was the fastest-growing exploration area in the world between 2000-2011, with proven gas reserves surging by 33.6%, that is from 59.4 trillion cubic meters (tcm) in 2001 to 78.9 tcm in 2011. This significant raise increased the regional share of world reserves from 31.4% to 40.4%. The largest reserve additions, the report notes, are those of Qatar +10.8 tcm, Iran +7.1 tcm, and Saudi Arabia +1.7 tcm (Hafner et al., 2012).

The use of natural gas for the generation of electricity and the increase in demand for electricity are two drivers for the short term projection of gas demand. The demand for any source of energy varies according to many interrelated factors (naturalgas.org). The variations in Residential and Commercial Demand, Industrial Demand, Electric Generation Demand, and Transportation Sector Demand are four sectors that will shape the long term projections of demand on LNG. Between 1980 and 2010, global consumption of dry natural gas rose from 53 trillion cubic feet (tcf) to 113 tcf (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2012). Natural gas consumption will continue to grow significantly in decades to come mainly because of the reduced appeal of nuclear energy (after the Fukushima disaster) and given the number of new discoveries that have led to lower prices and access to supplies in many new markets (Shaffer, 2013). The relation between natural gas supply and foreign policy has gained greater attention

especially with the rising global consumption of natural gas. In 2011, the US State Department established the Bureau of Energy Resources which is tasked with promoting US energy diplomacy, in addition to energy transformation, energy transparency and access among different parties (Shaffer, 2013). Energy security is a concern for industrial powers, this makes oil and gas a valuable currency and a good political bargaining tool for states who have it. However, the economic and political value of such huge reserves is prone to change. Energy researcher Daniel Yergin contends that, “When it comes to energy, the rule of the game is to expect the unexpected,” he adds, “So much effort is going into research, development and innovation all across the energy spectrum, 10 years from now we may well see the next game changer” (Krauss, 2013).

One of the game-changer developments in the energy spectrum is “tight oil” or “shale oil”, a synthetic crude oil derived from oil shale. The production of shale oil has increased American oil output by more than 50% since 2008. Oil production in the US increased from 5 million barrels a day in 2008 to 7.4 million barrels in 2012. The increase in tight-oil supplies combined with the increase in gas-efficient cars lead to a sizeable decline in oil imports in the US. In 2005, US domestic consumption oil imports reached 60%, compared to 35% in 2013 (Yergin, 2013b). Another game-changer development happens to be in Japan; Qatar’s number one importer of LNG consuming 25% of the Gulf state’s exports. Although still at its early stages, Japan’s extraction of gas from offshore deposits of methane hydrate from the undersea hydrate reservoir could provide “an alternative source of energy to known oil and gas reserves” (Tabushi, 2013). Natural gas remains the dominant fuel in many parts of the world, but there are several global trends that may affect its ascent. Scientists today are working on ways to better store wind and solar energy, research is underway to develop a fission reactor that uses



its own nuclear waste; which reduces the threat of proliferation and extends the life of available uranium supplies, other developments concern bio fuels made of nonfood materials. In addition, plans are underway to convert coal into combustible gas; which could emit half the CO<sub>2</sub> of conventional coal-fired plants (Krauss, 2013).

Doha became a prominent energy provider for world economies by having the world's third largest natural gas reserve and by tapping into its resources. Experts caution that shifts and transitions in globalization may result in confusion and conflict if “thinking and institutions fail to keep up with change” (Yergin, 2013a). The disaster at the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear plant in 2011 pushed many European countries to react to the imminent threat that may result from nuclear reactors (The Economist, 2013). However, nuclear reactors present an advantage that no other mainstream source of electricity does: they generate large amounts of power without producing carbon dioxide. An alternative way to make use of nuclear reactors is to substitute solid fuel cores by liquid fuel cores which are not subjected to the radiation damage, and use a liquid fluoride salt (Thorium) as a coolant. There is consequently no high-pressure water to deal with; instead reactors operate at atmospheric pressure which means that there is no need for containment vessel (The Economist, 2013). In addition, the relatively miniscule toxicity that is produced by liquid-fluoride thorium reactors can provide an answer for a cleaner, safer and sustainable source of energy around the world, especially when 32 new reactors are under construction in China, ten in Russia and seven in India while eight of nine nuclear plants in Britain are reaching the end of their life (The Economist, 2013). That being said, the pressures of staying ahead in the energy market presents a challenge for energy providers. Qatar depends heavily on its oil and gas resources. Oil is not only responsible for the emergence of the Gulf states into the

international scene, for Qatar oil *is* survival. In this sense, Qatar's huge reserves retain values long as gas demand is high, and Qatar's survival is guaranteed as long as LNG is a competitive energy resource. But new discoveries, abrupt changes, and the emergence of new energy providers translate into pressures on the Qatari leadership which needs to ensure its ability to secure its share as energy provider in world markets, invest its rents in consolidating the regime, and ensuring state survival. Foreign policy Natural gas is a valuable resource which has been used to sustain most of the state sectors.

## **2.4 Qatar as a “Small” State**

The Qatari leadership has on occasion admitted that geographic constraints are responsible for the choices it makes in addressing threats. The history of the Gulf monarchies has been anything but ordinary. After the British Labour government announced its decision to withdraw its military and diplomatic protection from the Gulf, the small Gulf states were set on an uncharted path to sovereignty. In 1971, Bahrain, Oman, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar received their independence and soon enough the region was a scene to the first oil boom. As oil became a prominent feature in these states, the stability of the oil monarchies became a strategic goal for international patrons and conventionally powerful states dependent on their oil. Gregory Gause (2010) observes that the acceptance of the legitimacy and sovereignty of the regimes guaranteed the stability among them until 1979. After the Iranian Revolution, cross border identities served as means of securing regime survival and stability in the face of threats. The development of oil states and their transition into distributive states which occurred in the 1950s and 1960s happened at the height of the Arab nationalist

wave in the Arab world (Crystal, 1995). The endurance of the rentier model might have, at one time or another, been in question. Oil, however, had managed to sustain the development of a new set of economic and political agreements that ushered these states into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In the Middle East, the permeability of the region and its unique security complex allowed regional states and actors a longer reach in forming alliances as well as fending off threats from rivals. Gause points to cross border identities as “power resources”; they offer ambitious leaders access to the “domestic politics of their neighbors, using ties with groups across border as levers of influence, on other governments” (2010, p. 10). By virtue of the realist paradigm that governs the Middle East state system, states seek to maximize power or security, spread their influence and defuse threats from without, waging wars when regime stability is at stake (Gause, 2010). The Iran-Iraq war which lasted from 1980 until 1988, and the Iraq war on Kuwait 1990-1991, are a devastating example of the consequences of change in the status quo of the geopolitics in the Persian Gulf.

The pattern of regional alignments during that period, the wars that were waged and the competition that broke between the three main players, did not seem to take into consideration the small patch of territory on which sat the newly independent monarchy. Qatar was left to its state-building and regime consolidation processes (notwithstanding its role in the battle of Khafji in 1991 when it engaged with American and Saudi forces to retake the city from Iraqi forces). Geographically distant from areas of tensions, small sized, equally challenged in demography and barely tapping on its huge natural gas reserves, Qatar could easily be mistaken for an inconsequential entity.

The norms of the international state system are a great leverage for a small state. They grant all states, big or small, the same rights and claim to sovereignty. Nonetheless, if “Location and chance, a series of accidents” (Crystal, 1995, p. 35) made it possible for Qatar to survive before the oil age, even after the discovery of oil the British officials in Qatar were not yet convinced the area would produce interesting amount of oil and were not ready to disrupt the status quo “over what was long viewed as a relatively unimportant area” (Crystal, 1995, p. 116). With this relative lack of concern from outside powers, Qatar was left to its domestic arrangements. Another fact that contributed to the survival of the small monarchy was social cohesion and the lack of sectarian tensions in the state. This allowed the ruler to engage in international relations more freely than his counterparts in other states in the region.

Although in the realist tradition the domestic affairs of a country are not accounted for, it ought be mentioned that in Qatar, this element is particularly useful in keeping the country safe from outside influences especially when sectarianism is used “as geopolitics by other means” (Salloukh, 2013). The state in Qatar emerged independently from religious forces and lacked any major urban centers that act as legitimate sources of power and might exert pressure on the ruling elite. The state maintained its primacy over these forces but retains some mild influence of Wahhabi conservatism. The absence of sectarian tensions and the policy of “simultaneous co-option and political incapacitation” (Kamrava, 2009) enhanced the capacity of the state. By making sure the continued depoliticization of other political actors, the state gained more capacity and autonomy by engaging in society through a set of government and non-governmental institutions. The state’s immunity to social resistance is achieved by ensuring instruments through which power is projected remain under the purview of the

state. It is also ensured by co-opting social groups and classes that enjoy the power to mobilize resources and challenging the state agendas. In this respect, Kamrava (2009) adds, “much of what the state does or does not do is determined by the precise nature of its relationship with social actors that are, or could potentially become, politically consequential” (p. 409). This is not to say that the large Al Thani family are deprived from the institutional means to meaningfully alter or influence the ruler’s autonomy or agendas, but rather that the close attention given to the domestic level at a certain point in time has allowed the Emir to engage in high-stake high-risk policies while maintaining an easily governed state.

Small states have always been seen by scholars as peripheral entities that need protection from a more powerful patron. Qatar’s foreign policy was shaped in a way to reinforce its diplomatic relations with all countries in the region. However, with the gradual shift in the regional dynamics and the weakening of the large regional states, which became clear during the Arab Spring, small states found an opportunity to assert their position in the international system. The fact that Qatar stepped out of the norm of small weak states has not drawn attention to it alone, but has also brought vigor to the literature on the role of small states. What had been conceived as “weakness”, by virtue of a small size and population, in the past decades, has served Qatar well. It kept it relatively safe during the regional struggles, while traditional greater powers undermined one another. In addition, the fluctuation of oil prices, the exhaustion of resources, international sanctions, the 2008 economic crisis, and many other destabilizing factors suffered by states in the region, have not directly affected Qatar. However, “Transforming resources into power involves more than institutional and structural dynamics; it also involves agency” (Kamrava, 2013, p. 59). The next section unpacks the

role of agency in foreign policy. It looks at the idiosyncratic element and the risks and stakes at hand.

## **2.5 Qatar's Idiosyncratic Element**

Theoretical limitations disrupt the ability of one single theory to explain the irregularities seen in international politics. Although constructivist features may surface in the making of Qatari foreign policy, they cannot satisfy the wider scope of policy-making realities. This thesis explains how agency has enlisted constructivist and liberal structure at different stages for the benefit of a self-interested state within a realist tradition of power politics. The most dominant driver behind the decisions of Qatar's Emir was to secure international recognition and approval. The fluid dynamics of the Middle East region are constantly affecting the different sets of constraining and enabling properties of foreign policy behavior. While leaders are faced with a number of choices as actors in foreign policy, Margaret G. Hermann (1980) defines a set of different characteristics that combine to form their orientation in foreign affairs. For realists, foreign policy is shaped by certain objective conditions such as history, geography, socio-economic conditions, but also by the human agent taking certain decisions rather than others, and balancing between personal aspirations and the changing dynamics of regional and international politics.

The personal characteristics of leaders, their motives, beliefs, decision style and interpersonal style relate directly to the decisions they make. In a monarchy, the ruler processes information and decides on action according to his own interpretation of events, perception of threat, and other power considerations. The personal characteristics

of the ruler “interrelate to form a personal orientation to behavior or a general way of responding to one’s environment” (Hermann, 1980, p. 12). This personal orientation is transformed by the ruler into a general orientation to foreign affairs, which is ultimately considered as the orientation of the state. Personal orientations, Hermann argues, are tempered by some circumstances rather than others. “Interest in foreign affairs acts as a motivating force. An important consequence of interest in foreign policy will be increased participation in the making of foreign policy”, (Hermann, 1980, p. 13). Having good external relations serves to fulfill a personal preference and specific style of rule, but it is also a means to an end. The natural predispositions of a monarch would be to preserve his rule and protect the realm. Increasing the profile of the state, enhancing international recognition and engaging in mediation efforts to diffuse conflicts are means to leverage the standing of the state and ensure the survival of the monarchy against threats. The rule of Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa marked an obvious change in the foreign policy of the small monarchy compared with the rule of his father. State institutions, foreign relations, international investments and regional engagement were now in full throttle. The 1995 coup meant that the new Emir had many issues to address at the same time.

Until recently, the issue of succession had been a highly controversial matter among the Al Thani family. In 1913 Sheikh Abdallah bin Qasim Al Thani came to power after his father’s death. However his claim was contested by 12 brothers and many cousins, (Abdallah then appealed to Britain to reinforce his claim to power). This early incidence established a tradition of contestation among the royal family whenever succession was in order. Of the many changes that Emir Hamad made in his 18 year rule, he established a Ruling Family Council in 2000 under his chairmanship and whose

members he appoints, and amended the constitution where the rule of the State within the Al Thanis was streamlined to “the line of the male descendants of Hamad Bin Khalifa Bin Hamad Bin Abdullah Bin Jassim” (Article 8, The Permanent Constitution of Qatar). This gave the Emir and his heir exclusive constitutional immunity and legitimacy on the domestic level and greater freedom to act in international politics.

Elite factionalism nonetheless presented an obstacle that the Qatari new ruler would overcome gradually after assuming power. Faced with potential opposition from conservative members of the Al Thani family who still pledged support to his father Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad, Sheikh Hamad launched a liberalization campaign aimed at securing the approval of the international community. This comprehensive campaign included the institution of a plethora of organizations which also reinforced the state’s abilities in relation to other elites and key social and political actors. Al Thani factionalism was not the only reason why the new Emir made promises of liberalization. In the early days of his rule, the Al Thani family’s more conservative elements echoed the conservatism found in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, a challenge that materialized with the failed 1996 counter-coup attempt against the new Emir. These elements would soon lose ground as the Emir’s activism initiated a massive campaign of economic investments, political liberalization and development. Yet the idea that shoring up royal factionalism is the main trigger of this campaign might not be explanatory enough. After all, Sheikh Hamad was the heir apparent and assumed the position of Commander in Chief of the Armed forces. He had managed to have his own loyalists in the state’s cabinet (a cabinet reshuffle in 1989 and 1992 appointed Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem bin Jaber Al Thani as Foreign Minister in 1992 who retained his post after 1995), so he had enough elite support domestically to allow for his ascension to power. In addition,



forced abdications were not unprecedented in the history of the state (nor in the region). Yet before the Emir assumed power, Qatar had not before seen the tremendous efforts that earned it its place regionally and internationally.

While it is unlikely for a monarch to concede power or compromise on calls for regime change, taking steps towards political liberalization is one undertaking through which Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa seemed to challenge other rulers in the region. However, political liberalization efforts in Qatar were put on hold in February 2008, when Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jasseem announced that Qatar was not yet ready for parliamentary elections. This coincided with a global crisis which had only started to unfold.

According to Larry Elliott, the Financial Crisis of 2007-2008 unveiled itself in 5 phases, the first one was in August 2007 when BNP Paribas announced that it was ceasing activity in three hedge funds that specialized in US mortgage debt. It was then clear that there were “tens of trillions of dollars worth of dodgy derivatives swilling round which were worth a lot less than the bankers had previously imagined” (The Guardian, 2011). The size of the losses was unknown, so was the exposure of individual banks. Although this event and its reverberations had a limited impact on Qatar, it presented an interruption of a configuration that caused a reshuffle in priorities for many economies, mainly the United States. In addition, the state in Qatar could have shelved its ambitious efforts of political liberalization earlier than 2007 had it really been only focused on reinforcing the Emir’s position in regards of the royal family. This is not to justify the claims of the Emir to adopt democracy in his monarchy. It only aims to highlight the importance of international considerations in the decision making process for the Qatari ruler.

There is a highly visible distinction in Qatar's foreign policy before and after the rule of Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani. The highly active style of rule of the Emir and Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem bin Jaber has earned the state a significant stature on the international level that started with him taking office. In 15 years he and Sheikh Hama bin Khalifa managed to transform the country into "the fastest growing economy in the world ... with a real GDP growth rate of 19.40 percent" (Economy Watch, 2010). The slow pace with which the country's economy was progressing and the conservatism of some of the members of the ruling family contrasted with the rule of the new Emir and the country's "top diplomat". The fast pace with which royal decrees were issued spread change all around the Emiry Diwan. Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa did not seem to need a lot to reinforce the institutional, economic and political support for his reign. When the new Emir took power it was an opportune moment in history. Once again outside circumstances had conspired in favor of Qatar. After the "failed experiment" of BBC Arabic Television (BBCATV), which was set up in 1994, "the Emir of Qatar ... provided \$140 million to hire veterans of the BBCATV experiment. They became the core staff of Al-Jazeera, which began broadcasting in 1996", (Seib, 2005, p. 601). In 1995 Qatar Foundation was established. In 1997 the Qatar General Broadcasting and Television Corporation was set up, a year later the Ministry of Information was abolished. In 2003, the Qatar Investment Authority was formed. A wave of restructuring and modernization spread all over the country's institutions. There is no question that both the Emir and his PM were the reason behind the noticeable development the country.

The dynamism of the Qatari leadership is a unique case that changed the history of the small monarchy. Although this thesis does not offer a deep personality analysis, it

asserts that agency and idiosyncratic traits contribute greatly to understanding Qatar's foreign policy. At different historic junctions, interviews with both the Emir and Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem are useful and quite informative on the decisions and positions Qatar chose in domestic and international politics. It is important to note that there is a distinction between the goals that this leadership aimed to accomplish and the means that it used to accomplish those goals. International recognition is a result of the decisions taken by the two Sheikhs. Earning international recognition is an end Qatari decision-takers sought in order to leverage the country's political standing, protect its stability and insulate it from regional security threats. For example, Qatari foreign policy aimed at expanding the country's resources by turning ambitions into reality (ex. as in its bid to host the 2022 World cup). For Qatari decision-takers, unperceived changes in regional realities necessitated more proactive policy decisions that were rarely exhibited by other rulers in the region. Seeking to assert its independence and sovereignty Qatar chose to host al-Udeid American Air Force base and Al-Sayliyah Army base but still managed to have good relations with Iran. It also maintained its relations with Israel and Palestinian Hamas group at the same time. In a region where the prospects of war are always accounted for, states compete for power or security (Walt, 1998, p. 38). The change in Qatari leadership in 1995 caused a revisiting of the public and foreign policies of the state. Qatar adopted a clear realist approach that focuses on the effects of the regional system where the state chooses to balance rather than bandwagon against more powerful rivals. For realists, anarchy encourages all states to try to maximize their relative strength for the simple fact that no state can be sure when revisionist forces might emerge. The perception of threat and the ability to contain it are two driving forces that shape the foreign policy decision of the state of Qatar.

## 2.6 Conclusion

This chapter illustrated the different dynamics that interact in the making of Qatar's foreign policy. Qatar's formation and transition into an international and regional player is supported by huge resources. The country's geographical position adds to the vulnerabilities of this small state. This has been counterbalanced by oil and gas as key variables that leveraged its position in the region and made its stability a matter of interests to different world countries. It also permitted Qatar's ruler greater freedom in pursuing a diverse portfolio of power politics. Nonetheless, even though the monarchy boasts great resources, the leadership that manages these resources is entrusted with protecting them from any threat. Human perception of risk is a driving force that can provide an explanation of what otherwise may look like controversial policies. Idiosyncrasy is unpredictable but it is also enshrined in a set of motives and beliefs. In an absolute monarchy, the rule is highly personal, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa portrays a particular decision style that is clearly reflected in the country's foreign policy. The next chapter examines Qatar's foreign policy before the Arab Spring, and focuses on the policies it used in facing the different challenges inherent to its size, resources and geographic location.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Qatar's Foreign Policy Before The Arab Spring**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The security dilemma in the Middle East often prompts a change in focus from domestic to foreign affairs. In the absence of conflict, powerful states are concerned with increasing their regional profile. When conflict breaks out, the perception of threat is heightened and many considerations that were valid prior to conflict lose ground. The Arab Spring presented many challenges to a small state like Qatar. The emergence of a Middle Eastern system and the regional alliances that are being reshaped after the fall of long standing authoritarian regimes, presented leaders in the region and beyond with many challenges.

This chapter explains how Qatar's foreign policy before the Arab Spring was not at odds with its foreign affairs choices after the Arab Spring. It asserts that Qatar followed a coherent policy vis-à-vis the region. The tactics it used, however, were tailored according to the conditions that prevailed at the time. In a region where the political is closely tied to the economic, Qatar's investments in Libya, Syria and Egypt before the Arab Spring were means to ensure its own survival by diversifying its economic portfolio. Two reasons are behind this choice: the 2008 financial crisis and the change in US investment policies. The initiation of economic liberalization policies in a number of regional states, namely Syria, Libya and Egypt also helped in making these policy choices. Mediation is another proof of the coherence of Qatar's leaders in their foreign policy. Mediation and diplomacy are at the heart of politics. Qatar's mediation

endeavors tackled some of the region's oldest conflicts where regional parties of interest found themselves at a deadlock. The role Qatar undertook in mediating these conflicts earned it international recognition, it also gained the country access to local politics in different states, making allies wherever it set foot. The goal that Qatari decision-takers set for their country before the Arab Spring was not simply to become a principle regional mediator; they rather used mediation as a foreign policy tool that leverages their political standing in the region and internationally. Qatar's economic investments and mediation efforts before the Arab Spring were means to an end. The ultimate goal was the maximization of power and security. This chapter looks at Qatar's strategic use of its resources and mediation efforts within a paradigm of power politics. It looks at the monarchy's foreign policy within realism and explains how lucrative economic investments and well-planned mediation efforts served as means to increase the countries power portfolio.

## **3.2 Economy as Power Politics**

### **3.2.1 Economic investments**

Scholars interested in Qatar's rise in the international system have charted the emergence of the small state highlighting its various peacemaking initiatives. Barakat points at political and economic liberalization, independence in foreign policy, and state branding as three pillars upon which the state carved its unique position in the world (Barakat, 2012). The enormous economic liberalization efforts Qatar made in a short period were due to its huge oil and gas resources. The goals of political liberalization in Qatar have been addressed in several papers (Lambert, 2011; Rathmell & Schulze,

2000). This research accepts the view that the Qatari leadership adopted political liberalization measures, limited as they might have been, in order to generate international attention through a number of “democratic” and “modern” reforms that seemed uncharacteristic in the Arab Gulf (Lambert, 2011). The political reforms initiated by the regime (in a top-down style of implementation) serve another important goal: by opening the debate about women’s political rights and democratic elections as early as 1997, Qatar was loudly challenging other Gulf and Middle Eastern countries, barricading itself against any attempts to fail the newly established rule. The significant transformation that the country saw in the last two decades touched on all aspects of state building and international relations. Qatar’s branding strategy helps to reinforce the profile of the small state, increase its influence and consequently establish its relevance within the complex economic, political and security systems in the region and the world.

In the 1980s Qatar’s economy faced a downturn due to falling oil prices and reduced oil earnings. By the end of 1996, Qatar started exporting Liquid Natural Gas (Business Startup Qatar, 2012). Its GDP Growth reached 28.7 percent in 1997; a significant increase compared to 7.6 percent a year earlier (Economy Watch, n.d.). In 2011, 47 percent of Qatar’s LNG exports went to Asia and 42 percent to Europe (Economy Watch, n.d.). Europe’s share of Qatar’s LNG exports has significantly increased mainly as the UK replaced its declining domestic gas production with Qatari LNG exports. The diversification of LNG export destinations is one way through which Qatar is trying to support its trade portfolio. In 2007, Qatar was exporting LNG to eight different countries and in 2011 its exports reached 23 different destinations. Some of these export destinations included the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Thailand, Singapore, and Jordan (Economy Watch, n.d.). This diversification has

been marked with the shift from the US as an importer of Qatari LNG due to the huge increase in its LNG supply domestically.

Economic liberalization is not a personal preference of the Emir of Qatar, it is an integral feature of rentier states whereby states built on oil revenues grew originally from the imperative to “expend rather than extract revenues” (Crystal, 1995, p. 2). According to a Mckinsey Global Institute research, the surge in oil prices in the early 2000s (average crude oil prices hit \$100 a barrel in 2008) meant that exports of crude oil will earn the states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) \$5 trillion to \$9 trillion from 2007 to 2020. GCC investments abroad are set to a 30 to 60 percent margin on condition their domestic investments remain at a quarter percentage, and oil prices do not linger below \$50 a barrel. The report cautions that “A flood of liquidity into global markets could cause asset price bubbles, fuel profligate lending, and result in a poor use of global capital” (de Boer, Farrell, Figuee, Lund, Thompson & Turner, 2008). It suggests that GCC states need to carefully invest oil wealth in order to avoid cycle of unproductive spending and debt. Oil wealth not invested locally will spill over into global capital markets. The study names at least 6 types of Gulf investors active in global financial markets.

First are the central banks whose primary objective is stability, and who invest in foreign assets with the objective of stabilizing their currencies against balance of payment fluctuations. They hold foreign reserves mainly in the form of cash and long-term government debt (largely US Treasury bills). Second, traditional sovereign wealth funds, that hold diversified portfolios of foreign financial assets, including equity, fixed income, real estate, debt securities, and alternative investments. Third, new-generation government investment funds which often seek direct investments in domestic and



foreign corporate assets (spreading the wealth into smaller investment pools). Other investors include government-controlled companies, high-net-worth individuals and private companies. After the 2008 financial crisis, Gulf investors emerged as “lenders of last resort” for several global banks that suffered heavy losses resulting from the US subprime mortgage debacle. Investment strategies began to shift inwards, according to the report, where Gulf investors started looking for foreign investments that help build local skills, transfer technology and diversify their economies. In brief, the trend seems to suggest that Gulf investors were increasingly interested in direct investments that give sovereign wealth funds, primarily, access to different forms of wealth creation.

Investments restrictions and the freezing of many Arab funds after the attacks of September 2001, also prompted the six Gulf Cooperation Council states to diversify the investment of their surpluses regionally (Clerc & Hurlaut, 2011; Mohieldin, 2008). By investing its massive wealth domestically and in other markets, Qatar’s economy was more and more intertwined within a variety of markets and sectors in the region. The challenges that lay ahead for the small state are immense. Food and water security (Qatar meets about 90 percent of its food requirements through imports), and environmental development and protection, are two imminent topics that threaten the viability of the state; import-price volatility and environmental degradation cannot be contained or reversed. The deliberate liberalization policies that were initiated by the Emir since the middle 1990s aimed to expend oil wealth and gain political leverage in a way to sustain the survival of the small monarchy. Qatar’s survival depends on diversity. Diversifying its import sources, investment portfolio, political initiatives and trade partners fall under the state’s survival strategy.

In order to diversify its economy, Qatar took measures to grow non-hydrocarbon sectors by developing small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs), holding promotional activities (the Asian Games 2006, the World cup 2022), developing international real estate projects (Diar Real Estate Investment Company), launching international brands (Qatar Airways, Al Jazeera), investing in energy-intensive industries (aluminum, petrochemicals and steel) and research and development facilities, and bringing world-class educational institutions home. Qatar is also investing funds in asset classes (equities and fixed income and private equity), as well as through direct investment (Qatar Investment Authority, n.d.). Countries in the Middle East such as Egypt have been an attractive destination for foreign direct investments by the GCC countries, investments linked to privatization, infrastructure and new equity increased from 4.56 percent in 2005 to 25.2 percent in 2007 (Mohieldin, 2008).

Qatar's economic liberalization efforts may be an inherent element of the trajectory of rentier states, but they also served other goals. After the 2008 financial crisis Qatar had to redirect its foreign investments to the Middle East. This was misinterpreted as support for some authoritarian regimes. The reason for that redirection was that Qatar was faced with limited opportunities where it could both invest its huge oil rents and earn political advantage. The next section highlights the investments Qatar made in Libya, Egypt and Syria. Economic investments in these three cases were used to gain political leverage and invest oil rents in lucrative markets. In realism this translates as the maximization of power and security where economic investments serve as an instrument of foreign policy.

### **3.2.2 Investments in Libya, Egypt and Syria**

Before the Arab Spring, Qatar's investments in the Arab countries that witnessed popular unrest were varied and considerable in size. Before the collapse of the Gaddafi regime in Libya, several Libyan-Qatari agreements were concluded covering common investments that surpassed \$10 billion. In 2007 Libya, having the largest oil reserves in Africa, was trying to reintegrate into the international markets, it undertook a \$126.5 billion five-year infrastructure redevelopment plan to modernize water and sanitation facilities and build airports, schools and houses (Gulf Daily News, 2008). A Libyan-Qatari Joint Investment Fund was established between the Libyan Investment Authority (LIA) and the Qatar Investment Corporation (QIC) in August of that year. A Libyan-Qatari Bank was also agreed to between QIC and the Central Bank of Libya. In addition, an agreement concerning the establishment of a joint company for real estate development between Al-Diar real estate investment company (Qatar) and the Libyan Arab Foreign Investment Company. The two countries agreed to set up new energy and water projects in addition to recreational facilities and residential resorts in Libya. Qatar's economic liberalization was based on maximizing the potential of its oil and gas industry and investing the competitive advantage gained from that industry into other sectors, particularly finance and tourism (Economy Watch, 2010). The attention that Qatari investments have earned was due mainly to their size. The ability to strike a generous deal has been key in reaching a diverse portfolio of high-end investments and stakes.

In July 2007, Egypt adhered to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Declaration on International Investment and Multinational Enterprises. The Declaration is a commitment by member states to "providing national

treatment to foreign investors and promoting responsible international business conduct” (OECD, n.d.). Qatar’s economic relations with Egypt have seen an upward trend since the 1990s as well. In May 1996 the two sides signed an agreement on the establishment of a joint Egyptian-Qatari Businessmen’s Council, an agreement on encouraging and protecting investments followed in 1999, after which they signed a Memorandum of Understanding on standardizing specifications and measurements, an agreement on avoiding double taxation was initiated in 2005, and one on scientific cooperation (2005 – 2008), in addition to other agreements on youth and sports (Egypt State Information Service). Qatar and Egypt working groups met on different occasions to discuss ways of improving cooperation between their countries and increasing investments in Egypt. Trade exchange reached \$186 million in 2008 between the two countries as compared to \$122.3 million a year earlier. According to official figures, the investments were channeled into 112 companies in the fields of tourism, industry, agriculture, and communication and information technology (Egypt State Information Service). Estimated at \$168.1 million in 2008, Egyptian exports to Qatar included food products, machines and equipment, in addition to rice, cement, iron and steel, as well as vegetables, fruits, medical equipment and pharmaceuticals. Qatar’s exports to Egypt, which included Mineral fuels and plastics, marked a sum of \$18.3 million.

At the turn of the century, political change in Syria coincided with the emergence of large hard currency reserves in the Gulf due to the rise in oil prices. According to the International Monetary Fund 2005 report, the trade deficit in the country and the exhausting of domestic oil resources which were until then the main source of income for the state, pushed the state towards increasing taxes and attracting private investments, local and foreign (Clerc & Hurlaut, 2011). Syria underwent a

transformation of the legislative and national regulations towards liberalizing its economy. The new fiscal law (2006), the new trade code (2007) and the new law pertaining to corporations (2008) among others changed the terms of foreign investment from a system of exemption taxes, to a system of tax allowances and incentives, and allowed for a more advantageous tax system, free profit repatriation and easier access to property and renting for foreigners. The High Investment Council and a Syrian Investment Agency were created (2007) as well. From 2000 to 2009 property investments and planning regulations including housing legislations and town planning systems that was set up during the 1960s and the 1980s were revised. With so little that can be done on the local market Gulf monarchies saw in the region an opportunity to invest their wealth. The proportion of investments from Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE in Syria grew from 36 percent of stocks in projects announced in 2005 to 72 percent in 2007 (Clerc & Hurlaut, 2011). Founded in 2008 with a capital of \$5 billion Syrian-Qatari Holding company is the largest Syrian holding company in the country. In 2009 it launched a series of projects that included building and operating power stations, deploying modern irrigation technology, building and operating a production plant to produce phosphate-based fertilizers, developing Syria's first medical city, and a dairy farm with state-of-the-art equipment and technology (Zawya, 2009). Plans were announced in 2010 to establish two power plants in Syria with the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the Qatar Electricity & Water Company and Syrian-Qatari Holding Company. Other residential and commercial projects were also initiated in 2008 by Qatari Diar property development arm of QIA.

Before the Arab Spring Qatar's foreign policy aimed at encouraging positive political relations with the countries of the region in favor of its economic liberalization

efforts. The welcoming environment found in Egypt, Syria and Libya, though not always realistically rewarding as it is ambitiously announced, created favorable conditions between the investor country and the three other countries that were starting to open their markets for international investors. The highly personalized approach of Qatar's foreign policy applies in other sectors; economic investment relations were held at the top state level. In Middle Eastern countries where the economy is directly controlled by the political system, Qatar needed to have the approval of the ruling elite before it could access their markets even when those same markets were in dire need of foreign investments, and even when the state remained a partner in any investment project.

Qatar's economic investments in different countries are means to an end. Capital earns value when it is invested in profitable sectors. In Qatar, the state's Investment Authority Fund is in charge of maintaining the value of its gas rents through assets, and capitalizing on the current prosperity the state enjoys. Diversifying the economy prepares the country for abrupt change in the world energy market. That being said, accessing markets in the Middle East region is conditioned by having positive relations with the ruling elite that control these markets. Having such relations with the regimes in Libya, Syria and Egypt before the Arab Spring was necessary for Qatar to enter these markets. After the Arab Spring the Qatari decision-takers chose a different strategy.

### **3.3 Mediation as Power Politics**

In its efforts to brand itself Qatar took on different initiatives to diversify its economy and establish a solid reputation regionally and internationally. Projects included developing residential resorts, hosting cultural, sports and international events,

dispensing aid to disaster-stricken areas, in addition to creating and recreating Al-Jazeera media outlet. In the midst of that, Qatar's regional and international relations grew stronger. The activism of the Emir and Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem was relentless. In three highly notable mediation cases (Lebanon, Sudan, and Yemen) Qatar used its resources and capabilities to resolve conflicts and neutralize threat when patron countries - Syria, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, respectively - failed to offer solutions. Qatar's membership in the UN Security Council during 2006–2007, seemed to have bolstered its diplomatic efforts. It increased the emirate's regional mediation and negotiation activities. The publicized diplomatic track echoed in a region where communal shifts can easily become international crises. Qatar's mediation processes were carefully managed and closely followed. The commitment showed to mediating internal conflicts in each case did not waiver until agreement was reached. In this sense, Qatari mediation was successful.

By assuming a role in the region Qatar consolidated its political independence. The small monarchy endeavored in what is described as a niche in regional peace-making. With the ascension of a new ruler in 1995, state institutions witnessed a make-over, and in 2003 the country held a referendum over a new Permanent Constitution which was approved by the citizens. The Constitution states in Article 7 (Qatar Constitution, wipo.int):

“The foreign policy of the State is based on the principle of strengthening international peace and security by means of encouraging peaceful **resolution of international disputes**; and shall **support the right of peoples to self-determination**; and shall not interfere in the domestic affairs of states; and shall cooperate with peace-loving nations.“

Mediation is at the heart of international relations. Mediators calculate domestic and foreign considerations when engaging in such a role. But mediation does not happen in a vacuum, the political environment influences the mediation process, which takes place within a context of regional and international politics. The contextual factors that surround a mediation process consist of the dispute, the contending parties and their relationships, the mediator, and the international context. As for the mediation process, it is conditioned by the nature of the mediator activities or the strategies used (Kleiboer, 1996). J. Michael Greig (2001) advances that the ripeness of conditions is an element scholars recognize in evaluating international mediation. Short-term (the immediate result of the mediation process) mediation success, and extended-term (the change in the relationship of rivals beyond the immediate outcome of mediation) conflict management are two ways of resolving conflicts when mediators are faced with enduring rivals. Moreover, “factors conducive to the achievement of short-term mediation success differ significantly from those that promote extended-term improvement in the rivalry relationship” (Greig, 2001, p. 691). The dynamics that play out in the success of each case are distinct. While efforts invested in mediation aim to reduce the polarization of contending parties it can also have a reverse effect on the resolution of conflict. Mediation theory recognizes that mediation has the potential of causing a deterioration in the relations of the disputants given that rivals continually update their beliefs about their opponents. Greig (2001) clarifies that history, prior experience and unsuccessful mediation affect disputant behavior and may lead to more aggressive strategies against one another. He concludes that disagreement in the literature persists on the notion of ripeness where temporal factors, contextual factors, costs and distribution of power among disputants, affect mediation success.



While the main motive to engage in mediation is political, for Saadia Touval mediation is foreign policy. Aside from the dynamics that enter into dispute and conflict resolution, mediation is “strategic action” within the international and regional political systems. Agency in Qatar’s foreign policy is highlighted here again given that mediation derives from “the mediator’s perceptions of the international system, from its domestic needs, and from its foreign policy objectives and strategies” (Touval, 2003, p. 92).

Conflicts in the Middle East are deep and complex. They are long enduring and tend to resurface at different occasions. Mediators who engage in defusing conflicts weigh the advantages and rewards. But while the perceived severity of consequences at the break of conflict make a strong imperative for other states to intervene between conflicting parties, the mediating state does not focus its efforts only on ending the conflict, it also pursues what Touval describes as a “broadly conceived foreign policy in which the effective reduction of the conflict among the disputants plays a part, but only a part” (2003, p.92). The mediating state’s foreign policy considerations, needs and concerns shape the tactics and strategies of mediation. Touval argues that aside from the perception that mediation is an obligation that serves peace-building and is morally desirable, it is a kind of intervention in a conflict situation, which involves being knowledgeable of the domestic affairs of another state. More importantly, engaging in mediation may facilitate the development of regional consensus about the mediating state and increase the mediating state’s positive image internationally. Still, having policy goals, domestic and international considerations, the mediator may not be as flexible towards the terms of settlement between both parties. The mediator, who is a political agent, is interested in aligning the terms of settlement to specific ends.

Viewing mediation as foreign policy necessitates the evaluation of the outcome of mediation in terms of its contribution to the settlement of a dispute, but also “its contribution to the attainment of the primary goals that motivated mediation in the first place” (Touval, 2001, p. 95). Diverse goals can be achieved through mediation such as peace building, ensuring and furthering state and regime security, playing a central coordinating role in regional affairs (Kamrava, 2013a), the promotion of regional and international consensus for the foreign policy of the mediating states, and “the expansion of the mediator’s geopolitical influence” (Touval, 2005, p. 95). Qatar chose mediation as a foreign policy instrument in addition to its diplomatic and economic policies. It serves as a goal at an early stage, and as a means to a more complex set of goals at a later one. Power is necessary in mediation, it is a strategy employed by a third party in order to negotiate a successful resolution to conflict (Kleiboer, 1996). Power can be diplomatic or economic. It can also come from the ability of the mediator to manipulate the dynamics of the mediation process. Power is a means to an end but by conducting successful mediation and creating an aura of demand for the mediating country, power is also an end in itself. Mediation is an intermediary intervention, it is a “form of conflict management in which a third party assists two or more contending parties to find a solution without resorting to force” (Kleiboer, 1996, p. 360). While this research will not evaluate the success of conflict resolution, it looks at mediation from a power politics perspective where it serves to model a unique foreign policy behavior. The interest of this thesis is to show how making mediation central to foreign policy falls within a consistent Qatari approach towards the issues of the region and world. The next section focuses on the mediation efforts undertaken by Qatar before the Arab Spring.

### **3.4 Qatari Mediation: From Peace Broker to Power Broker**

Before the Arab Spring, Qatar played an active role resolving conflicts in the Middle East. In each of the high profile mediation cases Qatar took a role traditionally assumed by regional powers. In the case of Sudan, Qatari mediators succeeded where Egypt did not act; in Yemen it was Saudi Arabia that was road-sided by Qatar's dynamic decision-takers; and in Lebanon, Syria had failed to defuse the eight month deadlock that weighed heavy on the country.

Up until the middle 1990s, Qatar was viewed as a "Saudi vassal". However, the change at the leadership level, with the accession of Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa to the rule, brought a new element to the dynamics of foreign policy that would steer the country's resources and geopolitical reality in a new course. The new era was soon distinguished by a highly personalized style of rule that is most apparent through the Emir's involvement in foreign policy and mediation. Qatar's engagement in mediation was a statement of the country's autonomy and independence. By resolving conflicts in Sudan, Yemen and Lebanon Qatar was challenging regional powers in their own backyard.

In the case of Sudan, the Qatari Minister of State for Foreign Affairs met with officials from the US State Department, the French, Libyan, and Chinese Foreign Ministries, the United Nations, the African Union, and the Arab League in the hope "to secure their approval for Qatar's substantive involvement — in fact, leadership — in mediation efforts" (Kamrava, 2011). In parallel the minister embarked on a fact-finding mission to Khartoum and the Darfur region. He also visited neighboring countries that either were involved in previous mediation efforts (Djibouti) or that housed Darfurian

refugees (Chad). The Qatari emissary gathered information from all parties near and far in his efforts to resolve these conflicts. The resolve and style of mediation earned Qatar the trust of all parties. Kamrava (2011) notes that Qatari officials secured the approval of the relevant international stakeholders, did due diligence to ensure that interested members of the international community supported their efforts, conducted a fact-finding mission to ensure they had all the ropes of the issue in their hand. Eventually they invite the contending parties for negotiations. In February 2009 negotiations between the Sudanese government and Darfurian rebel group the Justice and Equity Movement (JEM), resulted in the signing of a memorandum of understanding.

In the case of Lebanon, political tensions after the armed confrontation between Hizbullah and the government of Prime Minister Fouad Siniora in 2008 threatened the stability of the country. In Doha, Lebanese politicians found themselves forced to compromise and signed the Doha Agreement on 21 May 2008 (Ulrichsen, 2013). This included electing a compromise presidential candidate, General Michel Suleiman, and the formation of a national unity government. For long Lebanon had been a battleground for regional powers. Until the Doha negotiations, “the Syrians, Iranians, and Saudis had either stood idly by or had actively pushed Lebanon toward the abyss, and, had it not been for the 11th-hour intervention of the Qataris, the country would have once again imploded” (Kamrava, 2011). Despite the post agreement calm that reigned over the country the negotiations had solved “none of the underlying factors hampering the development of a stable consociational governance structure in Lebanon”, however it was still a triumph for Qatari diplomacy (Moran, 2009).

In the case of Yemen, Qatari mediation started in May 2007. The country had seen many rounds of bloody fighting until Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa announced his

country's willingness to intervene. In February 2008 Houthi rebels and the Yemeni government signed a formal peace treaty in Doha. In the agreement Qatar pledged a considerable sum for reconstruction funds, and agreed to serve as home to many Houthi rebel leaders. Fighting continued intermittently in 2008 and in Summer 2009 the Yemeni government under President 'Ali 'Abdullah Salih launched a full-scale assault on rebel stronghold areas (Kamrava, 2011). The situation remained unstable until 2010 when the Emir personally intervened with President Salih to stress the need for peace in the country. A new agreement was signed in August 2010.

Mediating conflicts is a complex process especially in a highly penetrated region such as the Middle East. For a small monarchy to assume a great role usually undertaken by great powers, the challenges are great but so are the rewards. Using mediation as a diplomatic tool to leverage its political standing, Qatar was inserting itself in some of the most irresolvable issues in world politics. By the admission of many, it was successful.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

Qatar's foreign policy before the Arab Spring relied on economic investments and mediation as instruments of great political value. The dynamics involved in the decision making process helped the country achieve its world reputation of peace broker and rich investor. Before the Arab Spring, Qatari leaders were driven by considerations of power and security maximization. The emergence of the idiosyncratic element as a unique decision-taker in Qatar is supported by huge wealth and a series of coincidences that kept the country safe from consistent regional instability. The need to expend oil and gas revenues regionally was faced with having to establish strong political relations

with the regimes of any country in the region where Qatar saw beneficial economic opportunity. Accommodating the regimes in Syria, Libya and Egypt aimed to make way for Qatar to engage in lucrative financial ventures. As for mediation, diplomacy is a great tool that paves the way for a small country to stress its relevance in the region and world.

## Chapter Four

### Qatar's Foreign Policy During The Arab Spring

#### 4.1 Introduction

The Arab Spring is a unique event that has not been experienced in the post-colonial Arab world before. At different instances in history, upheavals in the region were usually headed by a clear leadership, mainly army officers. The uprisings of the Arab Spring were reflective of the popular loathing for leaders under the same regime, hence the phrase “*al-Shaab Urid Isqat al-Nizam*” (the people want to topple the regime). This chapter recaptures the main regional changes that took place during the Arab Spring. It examines Qatar's position after the start of the uprisings and depicts the role of Al-Jazeera as a foreign policy tool within Qatar's strategy of power politics during the Arab Spring.

Before the Arab Spring, Qatar was seen as a world class mediator searching for the next big investment opportunity. However, financial investments and mediation were not a goal in itself that Qatar was set to achieve. They ultimately served as instruments to maximize power and security especially that these investments and power brokering agreements came at a time when international investment opportunities became very limited for the small monarchy. The next section lays out the general context of the Arab Spring. This is followed with a discussion of Qatar's role in Libya, Egypt and Syria, and the role played by Al-Jazeera in the uprisings. The rest of the chapter traces the overlap between realism and idiosyncratic variables in the making of Qatar's foreign policy during the Arab Spring.

## 4.2 The Arab Spring

The Arab Spring is still unfolding and the most that can be said of this period is that it is a transitional phase. Explaining foreign policy strictly within this volatile period risks compromising research outcomes. In this respect it is useful to consider that the permeability of the Arab world is a characteristic that boasts great explanatory potential. However this feature has its limits.

Despite no sign of the Arab region being “ripe for regime change” and the aggravation of “economic strain and political discontent” (Brynen et al., 2012) across the region, the Arab Spring found its way from North Africa to the Levant. In late 2010, what started as popular protests in Tunisia soon sparked regional upheavals that fractured the structure of authoritarian regimes in many Arab countries. As civil protests grew in Tunisia, Zine el-Abidine bin Ali found no support from the military institution and left the country on 14 January 2011. On 27 January people gathered in Yemen’s capital in a major demonstration against president Ali Abdullah Saleh. For more than 10 months Yemenis protested against the ruler and on November 23, Saleh signed a GCC initiative transferring his powers to the vice president in return for immunity from prosecution under pressure from the Gulf countries. Presidential elections were held on 21 February 2012. In Egypt popular protests started on 25 January and grew larger than anything the regime had experienced or anticipated. Despite repeated speeches by the former President Hosni Mubarak, he was later forced to leave power on 11 February. The military took charge of the country and organized new elections. As the best-organized political force in the country and given the lack of consent and unity among the political opposition groups, the Muslim Brotherhood emerged with considerable



support among the masses and proved to have a significant ability to mobilize that support (Brynen et al., 2012, p. 25). Libya too was inspired by the Tunisian Spring. In February 2011 demonstrations lead to the regime losing control of Benghazi and other towns. Civil war raged in the country in the absence of a military institution that would prevent the regime from responding with excessive brutality. Libyan rebel fighters, with support from countries in the region, such as Tunisia and Algeria, and from Qatar and the NATO, managed to rid the country from a long standing dictator. Qaddafi was killed on 20 October 2011. Anti-regime protests in Syria erupted on 19 March 2011. The rapid mobilization of protests in Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt dislodged age-old authoritarian regimes that were thought to be integral to the nature of Arab societies. As things unfold still in Syria at the time of writing, “declining popular legitimacy” (Brynen et al., 2012, p. 37) and the resentment towards the ruling elite were two of many considerations that allowed protests to hold in Tunisia and Egypt. The response of the regimes in all three countries were shaped by the nature of the regimes and the military-society relations. The response from the international community towards the repression in Libya and Syria, which have both descended into violence, has been controversially different. Qatar’s response to the violence in Libya and Syria is bound by the particularities of each case.

#### **4.2.1 Qatar and the Arab Spring**

Qatar’s dynamism during the Arab Spring was subject to close observation. On a number of occasions, Gulf security takes precedence for Qatar. The careful foreign policy it holds vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia was most apparent when mediating conflict in

Yemen and during the Bahraini unrest in 2011. Qatar supported the GCC decisions and initiatives in both Yemen and Bahrain during the Arab Spring. Nonetheless Qatari military forces did not take part in the Peninsula Shield Force to Bahrain. For both Qatar and Saudi Arabia, instability and political transitions reaching their own territories are a threat that takes priority over many other considerations. The threat is seen as a common one, and the result is increased cooperation between the two Gulf states and less confrontation (Khatib, 2013). Qatar's involvement in countries that witnessed popular uprisings during the Arab Spring may have been constrained by the nature of the conflict that broke out in each of them, and the position of the international community towards each case, but the post-Arab Spring commitment Qatar has shown - by using and gathering "political currency" (Khatib, 2013) or consolidating "transnational linkage" (Brynen et al., 2012) through economic support - falls within its general policy of power politics.

The literature on Qatar's foreign policy during the Arab Spring has not been able to fully understand the complex goals it aimed to achieve by lending its support to rebels and opposition figures. The three cases of Libya, Egypt and Syria all present different but interrelated scenarios for Qatar's foreign policy. Each case exhibits a different dynamic and a momentum that varies according to the nature of the conflict and its persistence. This next section retrieves the main events that occurred and Qatar's role in each of them; it focuses on the nature of intervention that will be discussed in the second part of the chapter.

#### **4.2.2 Libya and the Arab Spring**

In the case of Libya, Qatar led Arab countries in the attack against the regime of Muammar Gaddafi. On 12 March 2011, the Arab League voted for a no-fly zone over Libya (opposed only by Syria and Algeria) in a special meeting in Cairo that would pave the way for NATO action. The United Nations Security Council voted five days later in favor of a “ban on all flights in the country’s airspace — a no-fly zone — and tightened sanctions on the Qadhafi regime” (United Nations Security Council, 2011). The UNSC resolution 1973 under Chapter VII would not only introduce a no-fly zone over Libya but would authorize the use of air strikes to stop the advance of forces loyal to Gaddafi. Qatar was the first Arab country to recognize the rebel government and announced it was transferring diplomatic recognition of Libya from the official government to the Transitional National Council on 28 March 2011. Backed by the GCC in its decision, it helped the rebel government sell Libyan oil and supplied them with millions of dollars worth of aid. It urged Gaddafi to stop the war while Al-Jazeera had been broadcasting footage from anti-Gaddafi demonstrations live from different cities. It hosted the first meeting of the Libya Contact Group (formed in March 29) on 13 April 2011. Qatar’s support for the rebels included armaments, basic infantry training and special exercises for fighters. It also sent six Mirage fighter aircraft in the NATO-led campaign. Doha officially confirmed shipping French-made Milan missiles to the rebel stronghold of Benghazi (Black, 2011). It assisted rebels setting up a satellite TV station, Libya al Ahrar, broadcasting from Doha. Libyan rebel officials in Benghazi, praised Qatar for its support calling it their “staunchest ally” (Levinson & Rosenberg, 2011). Qatar consistently pressed for tough and urgent international action. At the end of the day, Qatari flags were flying over rebel-held Benghazi. Western leaders praised the Qatari government. The French Defense Minister was quoted saying "This is the first

time that there is such a level of understanding between Europe and the Arab world” (Krauss, 2011). After Gaddafi’s was killed, Qatar’s support continued. But it provoked a different kind of reaction from Libyans as well as US officials especially after the attack which killed four Americans at the United States diplomatic compound in Benghazi in September 2012. Some suggested that Qatar’s provision of arms lacked on-the-ground intelligence and experience, which were critical in keeping the security situation under control (Risen, Mazzetti & Schmidt, 2012). Qatar was not only financially supporting the National Transition Council, they also backed rivals Abdel Hakim Belhaj, (February 17 Martyr’s Brigade), and Sheik Ali Salabi, a radical cleric who was exiled in Doha (Imonti, 2012). Libyan politicians in the NTC took an increasingly vocal position against Qatar suggesting that it had its own agenda in Libya and was “bypassing official channels” and dealing directly with Islamist groups (Sotlof, 2012).

#### **4.2.3 Egypt and the Arab Spring**

In Egypt, thousands of Egyptians took to the streets in January 2011 in protests against poverty, unemployment, government corruption and Mubarak’s rule. Daily protests continued until February 11 when Mubarak resigned and handed power to the army. Political unrest continued even after the election of Mohamed Morsi. Qatar’s support to Egypt under the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood president was announced in great cash flows that totaled \$8 billion in direct disbursement (deposits, grants and government bonds) and promised 18 billion in investments over 5 years. Barely a year after the president-elect took office, the inexperience of the Islamist group failed to contain popular discontent. Qatar’s financial support did not seem to compensate for the

economic trouble the country was facing. On 3 July 2013 the Egyptian army ousted Morsi after a wave of popular protests that started on June 30. Within two hours Saudi Arabia had announced its support for the Egyptian military. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait started rolling aid to Egypt totaling \$12 billion. Qatar's deposit at the central bank was returned. Billions of its aid dollars were returned or cancelled by the new army-backed government. On 2 August 2013 Qatar shipped a consignment of LNG as aid to Egypt the first of five shipments it had promised President Morsi's government. Egyptian authorities designated the Muslim Brotherhood a "terrorist" group on 25 December 2013. Ties between Qatar and Egypt continue to deteriorate as the country detains 20 Al-Jazeera journalists, while Egypt's foreign ministry summoned Qatar's chargé d'affaires on 4 February 2014 demanding an end to media campaigns against Egypt and the extradition of Youssef al-Qaradawi (Fick, 2014).

#### **4.2.4 Syria and the Arab Spring**

In Syria, what started out as peaceful demonstrations against the regime spiraled into a civil war that is still raging three years later. In January 2012, Qatar announced it will fund Syrian rebels in their fight against president Bashar al-Assad (Hider, 2012). Reports spoke of intermediaries among them Syria's Muslim Brotherhood receiving weapons coordinated by a few US operatives including automatic rifles, rocket-propelled grenades, ammunition, and antitank weapons (Schmitt, 2012). But with the potential of conflict to intensify significantly in Syria, states like the US, France, and others were clearly reluctant to decisively intervene against the regime despite the

increasing toll of death on the ground. An extension of an unarmed UN-Arab League observer mission failed to produce any results. The international community was divided over the conflict in Syria. Three draft resolutions were presented at the UNSC and were vetoed by Russia and China on 4 October 2011, 4 February 2012 and 19 July 2012. The two felt that in Syria, like Libya, the “responsibility to protect” was being used to “engineer regime change (Nye, 2012). However, the nature of intervention in Libya and Syria is different. Qatar called for support for Syrian rebels on several occasions. Qatar’s Hamad bin Jassem said during a “Friends of Syria” meeting in Morocco in December 2012 that the rebels were on the verge of victory and called the UNSC to impose a ceasefire and pave the way for a transition of power (Reuters, 2012). The crisis in Syria dragged. In April 2013, Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem, declared that “As there is no clear international opinion to end the crisis in Syria... we are supporting the opposition with whatever it needs, even if it takes up arms for self-defence.” (Freeman, 2013).

#### **4.2.5 Al-Jazeera**

The media coverage by Qatar’s Al-Jazeera during the Arab Spring has been subject to much polemic. Before the outbreak of unrest in the Arab world, the celebrated freedom enjoyed by the media outlet (funded by the state) had marked a real difference in news reporting and gained increased popularity among the Arab masses. On different occasions, a number of governments such as in Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, Libya, and Syria shut down Al-Jazeera offices in reaction to what they said were false news. The Arab regimes’ hostility towards Al-Jazeera increased its popularity among the masses, and cemented Qatar’s positive image. In this sense, Al-Jazeera was a public diplomacy

conduit reflecting favorable outcomes. At an early stage, it was the channel's coverage of the US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq reflecting the general Arab disapproval of the wars that put it in the Arab audiences' ultimate favor. Being able to influence public opinion in the Arab world is a rare currency. Decades of public diplomacy efforts by Arab and non-Arab states had failed to accomplish such an ambitious goal. Ahmed Souaiaie (2011) argues that the channel's popularity and influence in the region meant that Arab governments were interested in controlling its coverage of their regimes. As such, he gathers Qatar was able to "leverage this desire for control over media coverage into political advantage", Al-Jazeera's coverage of these regimes became a "bargaining chip in regional negotiations" (2011). After popular uprisings erupted in the region, the continuous coverage of the revolutions and the fall of the Tunisian and Egyptian regimes further increased the popularity of the channel. Al-Jazeera also played a role in inspiring popular movements in the Libyan and Yemeni protesters. But the channel's neutrality and independence was criticized when the Arab Spring protests reached the Gulf States. Its coverage of the unrest in Bahrain, eastern Saudi Arabia and Oman was considered biased by some observers (Souaiaie, 2011). Another point of contention regarding Al-Jazeera is the events in Egypt and the support that the state of Qatar expressed to the Muslim Brotherhood and the popular discontent it was met with.

During the Arab Spring Al-Jazeera continued to serve as a tool of foreign policy, an international media network that can pose a threat to regimes in the region and offers a platform for its allies. The position of Qatar after the Arab Spring took shape in "siding with the people" against authoritarian rulers and their regimes. This was evident in diplomatic efforts leading the Arab League to draft resolutions and requests of isolating

authoritarian regimes and taking action against them “to protect the innocent”. It was also reported through material support for rebels in Libya and Syria.

Before the Arab Spring Qatar was seeking a role for itself in mending regional crises; that role was achieved through mediation. During the Arab Spring it is this same quest for relevance that motivates its intervention. Having an influential media outlet in a region laden with turbulence is a power resource. When Qatari leaders found themselves compelled to voice their opposition to the oppressive regimes in Libya, Egypt and Syria, they used their international standing as ally of Western countries to support the popular movements against their regimes, polish the standing of their own regional allies, and increase their countries international profile as a righteous humanitarian actor that has the means and intention to intervene.

### **4.3 A Realist Model of Power Politics**

#### **4.3.1 Realism and Oil**

In a time of relative stability, achieving economic prosperity is a priority. It consolidates the position of the ruler and allows for an increase of power and an attenuation of potential threat. When conflict arises, “alliance decisions of regional powers are best explained by leaders’ concerns about their own hold on power domestically, and how regional events and regional rivals could affect their own security at home” (Gause, 2010, p. 1). For the Gulf rulers one of the most important threats is the ideological one. Ideology has the power to bring about the “mobilization of bias” (Schattschneider as cited in Lukes, 2005). Ambitious rulers use identity issues to mobilize transnational support, which leaves other states in need to counter the effect of



transnational identities in order to fend off conventional and ideological threats that aim at challenging their own polities.

Qatar has similar resources, geopolitical pressures and regime security concerns that other Gulf monarchies possess. Yet, no other Gulf monarchy has been as active as Qatar in asserting its security and maximizing its power during the Arab Spring. Qatar's Emir and Prime Minister played a major role in steering the country's development and foreign affairs. The support the Emir had from the United States and international allies provided the small emirate with various direct and indirect international sponsors. This has allowed Qatar to engage more freely in an independent foreign policy. The level of American involvement in the Gulf and Middle East region has varied with time, as Gause explains (2010, p. 6). In the case of pursuing greater foreign policy choices, Qatar had the resources, the ambition and the security concerns to act on. These concerns that Qatar inherently suffers from have been addressed through a realist policy of investing oil and gas resources, and using international support to fend off security threats. It allowed Qatari decision-takers to engage in high-stake foreign policy choices that other small states are hesitant to follow. But if countries like the UK, Japan, China, India, and others are in constant search for new sources of energy, Qatar depends on them for the purchase of its oil and gas, and for protecting its security. The current regional configuration of power, to which oil is central, has allowed Qatar to assume a greater role in brokering agreements of grand value, and of propagating its influence in more than one area.

#### **4.3.2 The Idiosyncratic Element and Power Politics**

The dynamics of Qatar's foreign policy presented pressures and opportunities for its decision-takers. It is within this interplay of different realities, before and after the Arab Spring, that Qatar's foreign policy was set to maximize the country's capabilities. The idiosyncratic element decides where to invest the country's resources and chooses its international allies. The great gas resources Qatar has have allowed it to engage in a diverse set of power tools. Rather than focusing on one outlet or medium, Qatari decision-takers invested in building different, at times controversial, alliances. They were committed to resolving a list of regional conflicts and took part in the toughest negotiations succeeding in brokering solutions where great powers had failed. Joining their growing political leverage to their economic prowess, Qatari leaders sent their military forces where they perceived it beneficial. The diversification of resources and the multi-dimensional use of power is a survival strategy that aims to create a portfolio of power politics where a small monarchy faced with great geopolitical and security pressures invests its economic strength into different power channels. After the Arab Spring Qatari foreign policy was criticized for focusing on a single power resource. This was the result of different types of pressure that occurred simultaneously and necessitated what Qatari political decision-takers perceived as necessary action.

In *Power: A Radical View*, (2005), Steven Lukes offers a conceptual map of power. Looking at power from an issue-scope perspective, there is a clear distinction between single-issue and multi-issue power. "To have single-issue power is to lack liquidity - what you can buy with it is highly restricted - whereas multi-issue power is fungible and can be spent in several alternative ways" (p. 75). It is in this spirit of power politics that Qatar has been engaged in international affairs; the wider the scope within which it can reach significant outcome the more power it had. In power politics,

broadening the scope means that the state is increasing its ability to bring about greater outcomes. Lukes (2005) claims that the contextual range of power, which is also broken into two levels, differs, between what one is able to do in a specific time and place given the conditions prevailing at that moment and time, and between the “ability that one can deploy across a range of (standard) contexts”. Power resources are what help actors overcome obstacles. The greater one’s context-transcending ability to minimize or overcome obstacles the more powerful one is. International affairs literature spoke extensively about Qatar seeking to establish a niche for itself whereby it offers to bring about outcomes that other political actors fail to deliver. In this sense a niche is “the ability to bring about what I actually intend, and the ability to bring about what I might, hypothetically, intend”, “if I have such an ability, you can normally count on me to bring about the desired result if I so choose.” (Lukes, 2005, p. 76). Creating an aura of demand is a successful outcome of the exercise of ability.

The perception of security threats and the search to maximize power ensuing from the long enduring realist paradigm in the Middle East cannot fully explain why states make the foreign policy choices they do. To that, other conditions of agency, economic strength, regional security, and inherent weaknesses and strengths are added. Although what remains of the status quo that prevailed at the eve of the Arab Spring is conditioned by the stability of the Gulf monarchies, Gulf monarchs are left to set their own foreign policy choices even if they generally flow in the same direction as that of their international allies. One can find many examples in the last few decades where international and regional allies failed to intervene directly in order to protect a distressed Gulf ally in the region. This has motivated Qatar among others to seek to protect itself from perceived belligerency as well as tacit threats.

### **4.3.2 Interpreting Qatari Foreign Policy after the Arab Spring**

Enjoying economic preponderance has allowed Gulf states to seek to achieve political strategies independently. Not only did oil permit the emergence of these small states as recognizable entities in different economic sectors and international forums, it also reconfigured the balance of power such as to leverage their position in international politics. The transition that the Middle East region has been going through for the past three years has yet to settle. Political transition in Tunisia has not echoed the same peacefulness in Libya, Egypt or Syria. The intertwined Gulf regimes' security and stability remains the first consideration for the small monarchies; the stakes in risking the fall of a fellow monarch are too high for any of the Gulf rulers. While realism dictates that states shall seek a maximization of power, being part of the Gulf security system is a source of strength and a strategic power resource that has managed to benefit the six states. By providing energy resources, and economic and diplomatic power resources to countries around the world, Gulf states gained greater freedom of action. The some-what justifiable overstretching of the concept of the dependence of Gulf states on American protection has failed attempts to delineate the interests of other industrial countries such as Japan, China and other European countries, in ensuring their stability. A simple observation of the size of trade between Qatar and China is proof to that. Qatar-China trade reached \$8.45 billion in 2012 (Doha Bank, 2013), compared to \$4.6 billion with the US (Gulf Times, 2013). These numbers give an idea on the importance and strategic value that Qatar's stability has earned through its oil resources. Qatari leaders are well aware of such a calibration in the balance of power. As Hamad bin Jassem noted, "Qatar and the GCC do engage in "burden-sharing" to defend the Gulf; American troops are not just protecting us. In any case, Protecting Qatar is in the

interests of the United States, Europe, Japan, and others. We provide the land, we accept pre-positioned equipment” (Pipes, 1996). As such, it is safe to say that the way politics are made is dependent on the degree of economic wealth. From early on, the importance of economic wellbeing was a priority for the Qataris, “the al-Thanis were actively engaged in trade. Compared to Kuwait, Qatar’s Shaikhs were merchants first, rulers second” (Crystal, 1995, p. 150). Still, while this thesis offers an explanation of Qatari foreign policy, it situates it within a geographic and historical framework and it keeps away from over generalizing facts especially when human behavior is an unpredictable element.

The dynamics that prevailed before the Arab Spring allowed the Emir to take on a proactive role in reaching out to the different actors in the region. Qatari foreign policy not only served to brand the small monarchy and reinforce a Qatari identity among its population (and subsequently assert its legitimacy), it also set the country on a multidimensional foreign policy through which the state diversifies its power portfolio in a way that would increase its value and competitiveness and provide it with different alternatives in overcoming challenges. With an unmatched momentum and a personalized approach to mediation, Qataris were pulling more than their weight in resolving conflicts and supporting neighboring states between 2003 and 2010. However, the most strenuous challenge was yet to come. A closer look at what observers described as a “shift” in Qatari foreign policy after the Arab Spring shows that Qatar’s position towards the Arab unrests is not limited to its own reaction to events, but also to the inaction of other countries in the region and world. This research has presented the different sources of pressure on the Qatari leadership; the region within which Qatar is geographically situated and its inherent weaknesses, the fast paced changing oil and gas

industry - while energy security is the only guarantee to its national security, and the global economy and crises that affected Qatar's investment strategies, on Qatar's decision-takers. For some, the Arab Spring was an opportunity where main regional and international actors strategized in order to readjust the map of power to their benefit. For a small country like Qatar, it was a highly volatile period where a highly idiosyncratic style of rule was faced with a high-risk, high-stake, time-constrained scenario that necessitated action to ensure the country's security against the sudden change that broke out.

When looking at the foreign policy of Qatar after the Arab Spring, Qatar's political decisions were carefully deployed to counter the emergence of new un-called for sources of danger. The mobilization of masses and the size of threat that ripples when revolutions break poses many challenges on different regimes and structures in any given region. In the Middle East where security is a primary concern, the challenges for a small Gulf monarchy are already great. This reality, added to other factors, helps to understand why Qatar chose to act in favor of one side against the other during the Arab Spring rather than take a more defensive approach in weathering the storm.

Oil gave the Gulf countries their strategic significance, it also heightened the perception of threats by their leaders. Be it a threat to regime survival or a security threat that may target their resources, producing allies in the Middle East is essential for the Gulf countries. Before the Arab Spring the sense of stability and legitimacy that was still lingering in the region was consecrated by acknowledging the legitimacy (accommodating) of authoritarian regimes. With the Arab Spring, and while other Gulf monarchies subjugated the protection of their security to Saudi Arabia or simply chose not to act, Qatar found itself on a different path which is controversially outspoken. It is

important to note that this path is different compared to other Gulf states, it is however consistent with the approach the Emir chose towards the politics of the region since he assumed power in 1995. Qatari foreign policy after the Arab Spring is a continuation of strategic positioning towards the region and international community. Until recent times Qatar was under the presumed protection of Saudi Arabia. The competition that Qatar has shown towards Saudi Arabia serves, among other goals, to detach Qatar from a process of unilateral decision making in the Persian Gulf. This effectively resulted from economic strength, but also from the conscientious decision that Saudi Arabia may not be able to defend Qatar should any of its policy decisions spark aggression from rivals. Saudi Arabia, whose policy is best captured through the lens of realist balance of power, is confronted with Sunni-Shi'i sectarian tensions which overlay its regional policy (Gause, 2007). Qatar does not suffer from such tensions. The Saudi government's effort to mobilize public support behind its policy in the hope of balancing Iranian power puts Qatar under the spotlight and constrains its policy of "Friendly Relations with All" (Pipes, 1996). The Emir reiterated this fact time and again, "We are a small country and we can live with anything around us. We will not be an enemy to anybody, but of course we will not allow anybody to use us against others" (Spiegel, 2009). Free from rigid sectarian tensions Qatar has the flexibility to both engage and block Iran simultaneously (Spiegel, 2009). Now that the small state has managed to become a stakeholder not only in the region but also internationally, it goes to show the importance of the role of agency in foreign policy decision-making. Regional circumstances have so far been opportune and accommodated the Qatari ambitions. The "very cohesive and focused vision of the country's foreign policy objectives and its desired international position and profile among the ruling elite", (Kamrava, 2013, p. 66) have lead it to achieve long

strides in extending its reach regionally and internationally. Agency may be responsible for Qatar's success in seizing its moment in history, but it cannot change the constraints of its milieu.

Oil and gas reserves have given Qatar economic independence, which in turn sponsors political independence. The fact that Qatari leaders pursued power explains the country's unprecedented course of action. The conditions that governed the geopolitics of the Middle East prior to the Arab Spring are not the same as those after. Qatar's foreign policy is a metamorphosis of power politics that changed from multi-issue power before the Arab Spring to single-issue power during the Arab Spring. Relying on a single-issue power which maybe met with discontent from those excluded from the exercise of power may create obstacles for those who are in fact exercising power.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

It has been the aim of this thesis to adjust some of the reductions and exaggerations in interpreting Qatar's foreign policy in light of the Arab Spring. Many observers advanced their theories trying to make sense of why a small state like Qatar would engage in such unconventional "interventionist" politics "risking" its own security and international stature engaging with one side of conflict against the other especially when it had successfully been assuming a revered role as regional mediator. Scholars accused Qatar of not being a reliable ally or a consistent political actor (Haykel, 2013), adapting to political trends and lacking a coherent strategy (Khatib, 2013), while others lent it an ambitious model of "Subtle Power" (Kamrava, 2013b) and situated its behavior in international relations within a policy of hedging. From a general point of



view, Qatar did not engage with one regime against the other. It claimed its support to the “people” in Libya, Egypt and Syria, against their respective regimes. A policy it had adopted and defended since the middle 1990s. It failed however to show the same level of support in Bahrain due to geopolitical considerations. By pursuing a consistent policy of co-optation with Islamists, such as the Muslim Brotherhood and other political actors opposed to the status-quo regimes in the region, Qatar secured its relevance in regional affairs during the Arab Spring. A policy of balancing and engagement provides means to a small state like Qatar to prepare for threat by building and strengthening alliances, while also engaging with other states, building economic ties, strengthening diplomatic relations, and as John Hemmings states, “creating binding multilateral frameworks” (Hemmings, 2013). Hedging, he adds, is a policy pursued when the perception of threat is high whereby a state addresses “risk by pursuing two opposite policies towards another state”. In a region where regimes see one another as source of threat, for a state like Qatar keeping these regimes checked by supporting all of them at once and none of them in particular, lowers this threat. As for subtle power, Kamrava explains it is “the ability to exert influence from behind the scenes”. But if power is a dispositional concept which identifies an ability or capacity that may or may not be exercised, the conflict that emerges at the observable exercise of power resulting from a “latent conflict” - which “consists in a contradiction between the interests of those exercising power, and the real interests of those they exclude<sup>11</sup>” (Hemmings, 2013, p. 28), or even the subjects whose covert rebellion is expressed - challenges this form of power.

Unpacking the concept of power into various hard, soft, smart, and subtle variations can help understand how states manage to reach the outcomes and goals they set, or fail in attaining them. Before the Arab Spring, Qatar is one example of states who

have resorted to a multidimensional concept of power in order to overcome the challenges perceived by its leadership. The direct engagement it opted for during the Arab Spring disagrees with subtle endeavors. It rather confined its *intentionality* into a context bound policy resolved to exercise power for the sake of a single-issue. The success of Qatar in adopting progressive policies in record time is impressive. It owes it to a focus on different power instruments that aim at leveraging the state in its region. This comes at a time when voices in the US administration have been calling for a shift in the country's foreign policy in order to "diversify the network of security relationships" (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2013) of the US. It might be another reason for Qatar and other Gulf monarchies to diversify their own security relationships.

The repositioning of the US towards Asia and its withdrawal from the Middle East as it becomes more self-reliable on its own energy resources, in addition to the demographic changes and the increase in energy demand especially in China and India will introduce a new set of political considerations in Gulf politics. Even more, "The glut of domestic natural gas will mean significant exports by 2023, according to most energy analysts. Companies are petitioning to build more than a dozen export terminals. Though many will probably not be approved or attract necessary capital, it is likely that American exports of liquefied natural gas will reduce European dependence on Russian gas and allow Japan, China, South Korea and other countries to rely less on coal." (Krauss, 2013). As for the monarchy's ambitions, they are bound by a regional configuration of power that either inhibits or leverages state foreign policy. A reconfiguration of power in the Middle East is underway, after it is settled many states will be revisiting their foreign policies.



# Chapter Five

## Conclusion

### 5.1 Summing Up

The 2003 war on Iraq unleashed reverberations that echoed far in the Middle East system based on realist geopolitical calculations. The vacuum that resulted allowed small states to assume greater roles and compete with regional heavyweights. This thesis offered an explanation of Qatari foreign policy based on power politics, by comparing its leaders' decisions before and after the Arab Spring. The significance of this historic event after decades of authoritarian rule was accompanied by a controversial Qatari foreign policy that aimed to accomplish various goals. However, this thesis argued that the dynamics of three main elements - realism, oil and idiosyncrasy - in the emirate were geared toward power and security maximization since 1995, when Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa became ruler. The literature on Qatar's foreign policy tends to focus on mediation as an end in itself. This thesis argued that the emirate's peace building initiatives as well as its economic investments in the region were means to an end for the small state to become a regional and perhaps international power. The literature on Qatar after the Arab Spring aimed at defining the logic or strategy the Emir had conceived in conducting the foreign affairs of his country. This research suggests that the dynamics of Qatar's foreign policy were highly consistent and came as a result of the country's history, resources and leadership.

After examining Qatar's foreign policy under realism, this thesis looked at the idiosyncratic element that guided the monarchy's foreign policy. Sheikh Hamad bin

Khalifa's rule shaped Qatar's rise as an international actor. He did so by organizing his country's investment portfolio, making allies everywhere he set foot and building the monarchy's reputation as an advocate for peoples' rights. Nonetheless, faced with what they perceive as external threats, Gulf rulers choose different strategies to assert their power and protect their regimes. In the early years of his rule, Sheikh Hamad resolved as many sources of contention with his neighbors as he could. Border conflicts in the Gulf - where the presence of oil and gas fields heightens the importance of territories - risked military confrontations between the Gulf states. In 2001, Qatar put an end to its border disputes with both Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, eliminating any potential territory-related issues with its neighbors. By having relatively fewer domestic sources of pressure, and by securing its borders from unnecessary disputes with its neighbors, Qatar was free to engage in international politics.

International affairs theorists took great interest in Qatar's emergence as a powerful state but could not present an argument for why it chose to put aside its role as mediator and adopt direct engagement in conflict resolution. Some of the literature on Qatar suggests that the Qatari model has "challenged the existing academic literature on the role of small states in comparative politics and international relations" (Ulrichsen 2012, p. 2). However, this view takes the rentier state model and sets a norm of behavior that other states can achieve, regardless of geographic considerations or economic capabilities. The uniqueness of the Qatari model depends on the vast wealth the country has, as well as a leadership that invests this wealth in opportune circumstances. Qatar chose to gain international attention and regional influence either by hosting international events, mediating conflicts, investing in world capitals, or engaging

directly to facilitate change. It did so through a multi-issue model of power that allows it to address the different external threats to its survival.

After decades of cross border identities of Arabism and Islam breaking at the shores of the Gulf monarchies, Qatar, under Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa, found itself with great wealth facing enormously great threats. Before the Arab Spring as well as after the popular uprisings broke out, the Qatari decision-takers sought to actively surround the monarchy with allies and fend off threats to its security. These efforts came in multiple forms and involved attempts to achieve economic and political liberalization. In this context, Qatar's attempts provoked increased interests from larger countries in the region and beyond regarding the goals of small states. They also consolidated Qatar's position as a key player in the Middle East. Qatar's rise on the international arena and popularity among the Arab public lead some observers to misinterpret its foreign policy and consider the choices it made after the Arab Spring as a shift from its traditional track. However, this research investigated Qatar's policy before the Arab Spring and found that Qatari leaders, motivated by the same realist considerations, were faced with enormous challenges that required them to take action in what they perceive can preserve their interests and power. The transition from a multi-issue power dimension to a single-issue dimension came at high cost. But the Arab Spring is a transition phase. The end of Sheikh Hamad's rule in 2013 ushered a new era in the emirate's history. The important question to ask now is - not if, but - how will the new emir rearrange his country's foreign policy in a way to maximize power and security.

## **5.2 Qatar's Future Challenges**

The challenges that Qatar faces given its size and geographic location are ones that impact any foreign policy the monarchy adopts. However, the risks that are entailed in conducting foreign affairs in a region transitioning towards a yet unknown shape are high. Qatar has been investing in transnational groups as one of several power resources. By providing patronage to cleric Yusuf al-Qaradawi, the “Qatari state has been able to effectively place itself above religious criticism and to largely stem the possibility of the emergence of a home-grown Islamist movement” (Kamrava, 2013b, p. 78). The cooptation of the Muslim Brotherhood is one way Qatar can reverse the direction of this movement. But this co-optation does not seem to have played out well in Egypt, especially if we examine the reaction of Saudi Arabia to Qatar’s growing regional role after the popular uprisings. For the kingdom “the Brotherhood presents a strategic threat to its model of governance because the group opposes the hereditary power structures of the Arab monarchies, including of the House of Saud” (Neubauer, 2014). In this sense, Qatar’s direct support to the group during the Arab Spring was interpreted as a direct challenge to Saudi Arabia’s strategic interests and lead the Kingdom to recall its ambassador to Qatar on March 5, 2014 “to protect the security and stability” of its nation (Black, 2014). But Saudi Arabia is not the only player in the region that finds the Brotherhood a source of threat especially when “The most common claims of Islamist movements is that they reject the division of the Muslim world into different states and peoples” (Halliday, 2005, p. 239). The United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Bahrain, which are all Qatar’s Gulf allies do not look at the Brotherhood in a positive way. Qatar’s foreign relations with these countries, as well as its relations with Iran, will require the new emir to adopt a more cautious foreign policy.

During the rule of Sheikh Hamad, Qatar created demand for its role in regional conflicts, and proved its willingness to intervene in resolving them. Not only did Qatar assert its relevance to the politics of the region, it also reserved a place for itself at the international arena. Nonetheless, some observers have cautioned that Qatar has put itself in the heart of international affairs which entails greater risks and adds to the security threats it is already facing. This thesis has argued that Qatar's direct intervention in the popular uprisings of the Arab Spring came as a result of the different inherent vulnerabilities, regional sources of pressure and the perception of threat of its decision-takers who were faced with a high-stake high-risk situation. As Halliday notes, the revolutions of the 20th century, whether in Turkey (1908), Russia (1917), China (1949), Ethiopia (1974) or Iran (1979), all overthrew one state or system of legitimacy to create another stronger and more interventionist alternative (2005, p. 42). For the Qatari leadership inaction during the Arab Spring would have incurred a cost that it could not afford. But while the alliance that Qatar forged with Islamist movements aimed to reinforce its independence before the Arab Spring, using such power resources during the uprisings placed the country in direct confrontation with Saudi Arabia. Qatar also found its relations with Egypt deteriorating with the military ousting the Moslem Brotherhood. The new regime in Egypt took a firm stance against Qatar's Al-Jazeera arresting its reporters and accusing them of aiding "terrorist organizations". As for Syria, the resilience of the regime and the inability of opposition groups to achieve considerable progress despite the support Qatar and other countries provided may be one additional source of threat Qatar will need to address in the future.

In June 2013, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa abdicated in favor of his son Sheikh Tamim. This event came at a critical time when the Arab Spring uprisings in Syria and



Egypt were still raging. So far the new emir has shown little visible change in the foreign policy that was set by his father and Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem. This does not mean that pressures are not being exercised on the small monarchy to adopt different policies, or to take a step back from its proactive involvement in the region. In the midst of this, an interesting shift that has been clearly taking place is the new US foreign policy towards the Middle East and its allies in the region. Saudi Arabia's recent opposition to what it considers a soft US policy towards Syria suggests that the kingdom is not willing to sit aside and risk losing its influence in the region, with or without US intervention. As such, the perception of threat of the new emir of Qatar and his decisions in mitigating those threats will be subject to close observation. The challenges that lay ahead are numerous and may require the new ruler to the kind of foreign policies that will defuse tensions with Doha's two main regional threats: Saudi Arabia and Iran. After all the small state, and despite its huge resources cannot afford to do otherwise.

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