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## Roots and Goals of the State of Qatar's Contradictory Foreign Policy: Implications for U.S. National Security Interests

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**ROOTS AND GOALS OF THE STATE OF QATAR'S CONTRADICTORY  
FOREIGN POLICY: IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY  
INTERESTS**

A Master's Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of  
Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science, Defense and Strategic Studies

By

Osarodion Izevbigie

December 2019

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# **ROOTS AND GOALS OF THE STATE OF QATAR'S CONTRADICTIONARY FOREIGN POLICY: IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY INTERESTS**

Defense and Strategic Studies

Missouri State University, December 2019

Master of Science

Osarodion Izevbigie

## **ABSTRACT**

Qatar's foreign policies and the tools used in achieving them pose various risks and dangers to the interests of the United States, and its allies. These tools involve the use of the media, terrorist organizations, hedging, investments, hyperactive diplomacy, and strategic alliances. Through these tools, Qatar aims to achieve influence and objectives, which are normally beyond the political circumference of small states. For instance, as a tool of influence, Qatar maintains relationships with terrorist organizations, which has serious implications for the U.S. fight against terrorism. However, as an ally, Qatar has advantages for the U.S. through its purchase of U.S. defense arms and its hosting of U.S. airbases in the region. In this light, Qatar is a challenging conundrum for the United States. This paper, offers recommendations on how U.S. policymakers can mitigate against the negative impacts of Qatar's foreign policies, while still maintaining a healthy, and positive relationship with Qatar.

**KEYWORDS:** Gulf Cooperation Council, Qatar, Asymmetric, Foreign policy, Middle East, United States of America

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A Master's Thesis  
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In the interest of academic freedom and the principle of free speech, approval of this thesis indicates the format is acceptable and meets the academic criteria for the discipline as determined by the faculty that constitute the thesis committee. The content and views expressed in this thesis are those of the student-scholar and are not endorsed by Missouri State University, its Graduate College, or its employees.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	Page 1
Brief Geopolitical History of Qatar	Page 5
Significance of Qatar's Geopolitical History on its Strategic Calculus in its International Relations	Page 13
Understanding Qatar's Need for Asymmetric Tools	Page 15
Qatar's Asymmetric Tools in Achieving its Foreign Policies	Page 21
Strategic Hedging Among Competing Actors	Page 21
The use of Al Jazeera as a Political tool of Influence and Power	Page 25
Investment and Branding	Page 35
Mediation and Hyperactive Diplomacy	Page 43
Strategic Defense and Security Alliances	Page 47
The Diverse Interests of the United States in the Middle East	Page 51
The Political Stability and Security of its Allies	Page 51
Counter Terrorism and Security	Page 55
The Stability and Security of Israel	Page 59
Implications of Qatar's Asymmetric Tools and Foreign Policy on U.S. Interests in the Middle East	Page 62
Qatar's Policy of Strategic Hedging Supports Islamist Movements that Destabilize the Middle East and U.S. Allies in the Region	Page 62
Al Jazeera's Message Counters U.S. influence in the Region and Threatens U.S. Allies in the Middle East	Page 64
Qatar Using USA Military Presence as a Security Cover to Undermine the USA and its Allies	Page 66
Understanding the Gulf Cooperation Crisis and the Impact of U.S. Foreign Policy	Page 69
Events Leading to the 2017 Gulf Cooperation Crisis	Page 71
Understanding the Role of America's Foreign-Policy in the GCC Crisis	Page 73
Implications of U.S. Foreign Policy Position in the Gulf Cooperation Crisis	Page 76
Recommendations for USA's Foreign Policy Approach towards Qatar	Page 82
The United States Can Discourage Qatar from Being Complicit in its Counter Terrorism Efforts by Strategically Employing Different Instruments of States Power	Page 82
The USA Can Increase Pressure on Qatar by Seeking an Alternative Location for its Military Bases	Page 83

The United States Could Diplomatically Engage the GCC to Strengthen Relations between Member States in Order to Settle Inter-State Rivalry	Page 84
The United States Should Encourage Qatar to Return to its Prior Role as a Mediator of Conflicts in the Region	Page 85
Conclusion	Page 87
Bibliography	Page 89



## INTRODUCTION

Qatar's rise to prominence in international affairs has stirred up the curiosity of international relations scholars and observers. This is due to Qatar's internal and geopolitical realities, which ordinarily are insufficient to facilitate such a rise. Qatar has been able to carve out a niche for itself, in an international system that has long promoted the cliché of hard power and superior military capabilities as the basis for influence on the global stage. This rise has forced a degree of discourse among observers and experts, challenging realist theories on power in the international system.

Qatar is a small country, with a very small population located in the Middle East geopolitical zone, where larger and stronger neighbors, such as Saudi Arabia and Iran, surround it. Historically, Qatar used to be an appendage of Saudi Arabia; however, it has managed to change its fortunes from a vassal state with no independent foreign policy to a force to be reckoned with in global affairs.

Not many know of Qatar's prior position within the orbital influence of Saudi Arabia, given the present clout of Qatar. Qatar's rise is an ideological product, of an overwhelming desire by its leaders, to place Qatar on the world map. This desire started to bud into fruition as the younger generation of Qatari leaders began taking over the reins of power. This process started with the bloodless coup carried out by the former Emir of Qatar, Hamad bin Al Thani, who overthrew his father Sheikh Khalifa Bin Hamad Al-Thani in 1995. From that time till now, Qatar has pursued foreign policies that punch far above its weight, with the intent of establishing its presence regionally and internationally. Qatar implements its foreign policies using unique tools

that give very peculiar results, to say the least. Qatar uses these tools strategically to facilitate and enhance its geopolitical clout.

These tools involve the use of the media through Al Jazeera, fostering political relationships with terrorist organizations, strategic hedging, investments and branding, hyperactive diplomacy and mediation, and strategic defense and alliances. These tools give Qatar an asymmetric ability to shortcut the traditional elements of hard power, which enables Qatar to maneuver the various hurdles that plague the ability of small states to project influence, and power in world affairs. For example, through the state-funded Al Jazeera network, Qatar is able to increase its strategic reach over a substantial population of the Arab world. This gives Qatar an asymmetric capacity to influence geopolitical events in the Middle East, relative to its size, as was the case during the period of the Arab spring.

Through Al Jazeera, Qatar was able to play an outsized role during the years of the Arab spring, dictating the geopolitical direction of that period. The influence of Al Jazeera during the Arab spring was compelling, given its popularity among Arabs. In fact, Qatar became the face and voice of the revolution, earning it constant recognition among world leaders. In this light, Qatar uses these tools to gain recognition, and influence in the international arena, which fits in with its overall desire, to be a major participant in world affairs regionally and internationally.

The use of these tools, however, comes with peculiar challenges that have long been a source of tension between Qatar and its allies, especially with the United States. These challenges are due to the nature of the tools that Qatar employs in carrying out its foreign policies. A typical example of one such tool is strategic hedging, which can be defined as a balancing act often used by small states in interacting with larger states with competing interest, through the simultaneous use of contradictory policies meant to appease all sides. In other words,

Qatar often uses strategic hedging to “eat its cake and have it.” With this tool, Qatar as an ally of the U.S. hosts the Al Udeid airbase, which is the largest American military base in the region, while simultaneously; Qatar also hosts several terrorist leaders and organizations, such as Hamas and the Taliban.

Qatar also uses the tool of strategic hedging in interacting with its Gulf allies in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which are also allies of the United States. Qatar does this by maintaining a relationship with the Gulf Cooperation Council, while it concurrently maintains ties with entities like Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood, which are adversarial to the interest of some members of the GCC. In this light, Qatar can be described as the “chameleon of international relations.” Pundits, international observers, and allies are often perplexed with its contradictory foreign policies and stance on a range of regional and international issues. These ambiguities in Qatar’s foreign policies are because of its attempt to have good relations with everyone.

With recent happenings placing Qatar in the eye of the storm, it is clear that its policies are producing results that go against the geopolitical objectives of the United States, which is a key ally of Qatar and the GCC. The onus has thus fallen on the United States, to provide leadership and direction, in a region marred with complex challenges. Events such as the ongoing Gulf Cooperation Council Crisis, shed light into some of the regional concerns of the United States, as the key actors involved in this crisis are critical drivers of U.S. policies in the region. The cause of the crisis, though not to oversimplify it as a black and white issue, is heavily linked to Qatar's contradictory policies.

The United States has had long-standing issues in its relationship with Qatar. For instance, in many cases, Qatar has gone against U.S. interests, leaving the U.S. vulnerable to the

aftermath of its actions. Such was the case with Qatar's decision to back extremists in Libya, as well as Qatar's support for groups deemed as terrorist groups by the United States.<sup>1</sup>

This paper seeks to analyze Qatar's policies and its effects, both regionally and internationally, from a U.S. perspective. Ample focus will also be given to understanding Qatar's motivations for pursuing such maverick policies, as well as its strategic objectives. This paper will also focus on how the United States can achieve a balance in its relationship with Qatar, and help the U.S. navigate complex geopolitical hurdles it faces when dealing with Middle Eastern states.

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<sup>1</sup> Shapiro, Jeremy. "The Qatar Problem." *Foreign Policy*, 28 Aug. 2013, [foreignpolicy.com/2013/08/28/the-qatar-problem/](http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/08/28/the-qatar-problem/)

## BRIEF GEOPOLITICAL HISTORY OF QATAR

The paucity of information on Qatar and its history is in no small measure, due to its prior insignificance as an actor on the global stage. Sparse historical records of activities on the Qatari peninsula led one Arab author to conclude that prior to the mid-18th century, “its inhabitants led a peaceful life and confronted no major events thought worthy of historical recording.”<sup>2</sup>The irrelevant status of Qatar geo-politically, can be further understood in light of the brevity of space that was given to it by John Gordon Lorimer, who is regarded as the pioneer historian of Qatar. Thus, it is no surprise that an aphorism of expatriate lore in the Persian Gulf, states, “Until the millennium, the state of Qatar was known for being unknown and nothing else.”<sup>3</sup>

As an actor on the international stage Qatar has long been in the shadows geo-politically, only interacting within the compass of its stronger neighbors, or its security guarantors, which has been a major factor of its existence. A timeline down the geopolitical history of Qatar reveals certain truths about the Sheikdom, and its interactions. Qatar used to be a geo-strategic playground, for much of its existence in the calculus of its stronger and expansionist neighbors. Before the consolidation of state power and independence under the house of Al-Thani in 1916, (the ruling family in Qatar from the Ma'adid clan, which is part of the Banu Tamim Tribal confederation)<sup>4</sup>, the peninsula served as a near frontier, a place where conflicts and ambitions of much more powerful, populated, and influential neighbors could be played out.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Roberts, David B. “The Four Areas of Qatar’s Foreign Policy.” *Comilas Journal for international Relations*, no. 5, 2016, pp. 1-17. [revistas.upcomillas.es/index.php/internationalrelations/article/download/6740/6544](http://revistas.upcomillas.es/index.php/internationalrelations/article/download/6740/6544)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Syeed Ahmad Haroon. “Anniversary of the National day for the ascension Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed, the Founder of the State of Qatar to the Rule of the Country on Dec. 2015.” *Diplomatic Forum*, [www.diplomaticforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/3-Qatar-Sepecial-Suppliment-2017.pdf](http://www.diplomaticforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/3-Qatar-Sepecial-Suppliment-2017.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Fromherz, Allen J. *Qatar: A Modern History*. Georgetown University Press, 2017.

Qatar's emergence as an independent state started after the signing of the 1868 agreement between Qatar and Britain. This British initiated this agreement to stall further clashes between Bahrain and Qatar, which affected British safe naval passage through the Persian Gulf. Bahrain had long eyed the territory of Qatar, and asserted its authority over it in such a way that British lieutenant Macleod observed, Bidaa (the town that will become Doha) is "completely subject to Bahrain."<sup>6</sup>

However, the significance of this treaty was the British recognition of Muhammad Al-Thani, as the substantive leader of Qatar independent from Bahrain's subjugation, since he was the official representative of Qatar in the signing of the treaty in 1868. The British choice of Muhammad Al-Thani, marked the beginning of a long royal dynasty of Al-Thani leadership still ruling Qatar today. Sheikh Muhammad Bin Al-Thani's rise to prominence, despite the presence of more established and powerful clans, gives a micro picture into Qatar's geopolitical achievements today.

The Al-Thani clan were basically newcomers relative to the other tribes, and not on a trajectory that signaled they were destined for Qatari leadership. In fact, in his secret Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, J. Lorimer, a well-respected British diplomat, noted that "nothing is known of the manner in which Al-Thani (Bin Muhammad) had by 1868, predominant influence in Qatar."<sup>7</sup>

The rise of Muhammad Al-Thani can be seen as a symbolic parallel to Qatar's rise in modern times. Sheikh Mohammad Al-Thani's rise, however, was not by mistake; it was as a result of deliberate calculations, and an in-depth understanding of the need to posture himself as a valuable asset to the British Empire. With the British Empire recognizing Muhammed Al-Thani as the leader of Qatar, the next step was to consolidate his power internally.

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<sup>6</sup>Fromherz, Allen J. *Qatar Rise to Power and Influence*. IB Tauris, 2012.

<sup>7</sup>Fromherz, Allen J. *Qatar: A Modern History*. Georgetown University Press, 2017.

Although the British had developed good relations with Qatar and had substantial influence over its affairs, the Ottoman Empire still sought to incorporate Qatar as part of its territory. Muhammad bin Thani, the leader of Qatar, remained an ally to Britain, however, the Ottomans, in a bid to weaken British influence, recognized his eldest son Jassim Al-Thani as ruler. This move by the Ottomans was significant, because at this time, Muhammad bin Thani was old, and his son Jassim Al-Thani was the de facto ruler of Qatar. Despite attempts by the British and the Ottomans to cause a fractious relationship between Muhammed bin Thani and his son Jassim Al-Thani, the Al-Thani's were able to balance the interest of the opposing sides by playing them off each other.<sup>8</sup> The balancing act carried out by the Al-Thani's, has set the tone for Qatar's hedging tactic in its international relations today.

After the death of Mohammed bin Thani, his son Jassim bin Mohammed Al-Thani, who had been the de facto leader, took full control as ruler of Qatar. His rule is symbolic in the history of Qatar, and he has been recognized as the genuine founder of the State of Qatar.<sup>9</sup> He led Qatar through various significant events that characterized the period of his administration. Under his reign, Qatar faced numerous attacks from neighboring tribes, such as the Bani Hajir, Naim, Manasir and Awamir tribes.<sup>10</sup> Jassim also experienced stiff opposition from the leaders of Bahrain and Abu Dhabi, and in fact, was imprisoned by the ruler of Bahrain, after he traveled to Bahrain to discuss the capture of some of his countrymen. His capture led Qatar to war with Bahrain, and he was later released in exchange for Bahraini prisoners.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Fromherz, Allen J. *Qatar: A Modern History*. Georgetown University Press, 2017.

<sup>9</sup> "Our History." *Qatar National Day*

[web.archive.org/web/20120110191814/http://www.ndqatar.com/english/qatar/pages/ourhistory.aspx](http://www.ndqatar.com/english/qatar/pages/ourhistory.aspx)

<sup>10</sup> "Doha and Bidha 1871-1915: The Re-Establishment of Ottoman Rule." *The Origins of Doha and Qatar Project*, [originsofdoha.wordpress.com/history-of-doha/doha-and-bidha-1871-1915-the-re-establishment-of-ottoman-rule](http://originsofdoha.wordpress.com/history-of-doha/doha-and-bidha-1871-1915-the-re-establishment-of-ottoman-rule)

<sup>11</sup> Lockerbie, John. "History of the Peninsula." *Islamic Design*, Catnaps.Org, [www.catnaps.org/islamic/design.html](http://www.catnaps.org/islamic/design.html)

Jassim's diplomatic skills have been credited as part of the major reasons why Qatar was able to emerge as an independent entity, despite strong competitions from the Ottoman and British Empires to subjugate Qatar under their rule. Jassim was able to maintain a steady relationship with the Ottomans, while simultaneously opposing the imperialistic tendencies of Britain. However, Jassim's relationship with the Ottoman Empire began to deteriorate, especially after the Ottomans refused to aid him in his expedition to reclaim Al Khor (now a municipality in Qatar) from Abu Dhabi's occupation.<sup>12</sup> Qatar's relationship with the Ottomans was strained even further, as Jassim Al Thani stopped paying taxes to the Ottoman Empire, in order to protest certain administrative reforms.<sup>13</sup>

The Ottomans responded by arresting Jassim Al Thani's brother. Fearing the possibility of death or imprisonment, Jassim Al Thani fled to Al Wajbah with some tribesmen. Having captured his brother, the Ottomans moved to capture Jassim Al Thani in Al Wajbah, sending a force of about 200 soldiers, 100 mounted gendarmes and 40 cavalries.<sup>14</sup> However, the Ottoman army came under unexpected fire from Qatari troops, in what is now known as the battle of Al Wajbah. The battle of Al Wajbah represents a significant time in Qatar's historical quest, for independence and political freedom.

The Qatari soldiers decisively defeated the Ottoman troops, leading to the waning down of Ottoman influence in Qatar. By the turn of the twentieth century, the Ottoman Empire was in rapid decline, leaving Britain as the dominant power in the region. This gave way to the signing

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<sup>12</sup>“Doha and Bidda 1871-1915: The Re-Establishment of Ottoman Rule.” *The Origins of Doha and Qatar Project*, [originsofdoha.wordpress.com/history-of-doha/doha-and-bidda-1871-1915-the-re-establishment-of-ottoman-rule](http://originsofdoha.wordpress.com/history-of-doha/doha-and-bidda-1871-1915-the-re-establishment-of-ottoman-rule)

<sup>13</sup>Ibid

<sup>14</sup>“Doha and Bidda 1871-1915: The Re-Establishment of Ottoman Rule.” *The Origins of Doha and Qatar Project*, [originsofdoha.wordpress.com/history-of-doha/doha-and-bidda-1871-1915-the-re-establishment-of-ottoman-rule](http://originsofdoha.wordpress.com/history-of-doha/doha-and-bidda-1871-1915-the-re-establishment-of-ottoman-rule)



of the Anglo-Ottoman convention of 1913, which limited the jurisdiction of the Ottoman Empire in the Persian Gulf states, also relinquishing its right to Qatar.<sup>15</sup>

By 1916, the British Empire and Sheikh Abdullah Bin Jasmin Al-Thani, the new ruler of Qatar, signed the Anglo-Qatari treaty. This treaty effectively made Qatar a protectorate of the British Empire and ensured British commitment to protect Qatar against aggression, especially from Ibn Saud Abdul-Aziz, who was to later become the future king of Saudi Arabia. The need to protect Qatar from the aggressive territorial expansion of Ibn Saud was key in the calculus of the British Empire. This was because the British viewed him as a potential ally of the Ottoman Empire, which by this time were adversaries of Britain as a result of World War One.

The prospect of Qatar being absorbed into the territorial space of Saudi Arabia was very plausible. Qatar also feared the spread of Saudi Arabia's Wahhabi ideology, which could potentially bring Qatar under the ideological influence of the Saudi Kingdom. Even till now, Qatar makes a distinction between its "Wahhabism of the sea," as opposed to Saudi Arabia's "Wahhabism of the land," to maintain its separate identity from Saudi Arabia.<sup>16</sup>

The 1916 Anglo-Qatari treaty was very symbolic in establishing Qatar's leadership structure. It formally recognized Sheikh Abdullah Bin Jasmin Al-Thani, as the ruler of Qatar, and the Al-Thani clan as the ruling family in Qatar. Despite the treaty, Sheikh Abdullah Bin Jasmin Al-Thani still felt that the British did not offer Qatar enough protection from Bin Saud, and that his position as ruler was not secured from internal dissent.<sup>17</sup> This was true because, the British Empire was reluctant to get entangled in the leadership selection of Qatar, viewing it more as a family affair.

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<sup>15</sup> Wilkinson, John. C. *Arabia's Frontiers: The Story of Britain's Boundary Drawing in the Desert*. London: I B. Tauris. 1991, Goggle Books, [books.google.com/books/about/Arabia\\_s\\_Frontiers.html?id=NtdtAAAAMAAJ](https://books.google.com/books/about/Arabia_s_Frontiers.html?id=NtdtAAAAMAAJ)

<sup>16</sup> Baskan, Birol and Steven Wright. "Seeds of Change: Comparing State-Religion Relations in Qatar and Saudi Arabia." *Arab Studies Quarterly*, vol. 33, no. 2, 2011, pp. 96-111

<sup>17</sup>Fromherz, Allen J. *Qatar: A Modern History*. Georgetown University Press, 2017.

With the discovery of oil, Qatar's political and economic value increased, and various oil companies were interested in seeking oil concessions from Sheikh Abdullah. Sheikh Abdullah used this development to encourage competition with the British Empire and its Anglo Persian Oil Company (APOC), which also wanted oil concessions. With the advent of big American oil companies such as Standard oil California, Britain became alarmed. The British Empire pressed Abdullah to grant concessions to APOC, in order to prevent the United States from gaining the upper hand in oil negotiations.

Sheikh Abdullah's tactic of encouraging competition between various oil companies and Britain worked in his favor. He was able to secure British commitments to protect Qatar from the aggressive territorial expansion of Saudi Arabia and also quell internal dissent by gaining British assurance to recognize his favorite son, Hamad bin Abdallah as heir apparent.<sup>18</sup> In a sudden turn of events, Hamad died and Abdallah abdicated the throne to his other son, Sheikh Ahmad bin Al-Thani. However, Sheikh Ahmad was more interested in spending his time in Europe than governing at home. This paved way for his nephew Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad Al Thani the crown prince to consolidate his power, by carrying out a bloodless coup against his uncle.

Sheikh Khalifa is a symbolic figure in Qatar, in that he announced Qatar's independence from Britain, and also withdrew from the 1916 Anglo-Qatari treaty, which effectively ended British control over Qatar.<sup>19</sup> However, he did not reveal secret negotiations with the United States to replace the UK as the special military protector for Qatar, and the ruling family.<sup>20</sup> This phase of Qatar's history is valued by its people and celebrated as the dawn of Qatar's statehood and political maturity.

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<sup>18</sup>Fromherz, Allen J. *Qatar: A Modern History*. Georgetown University Press, 2017.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid

<sup>20</sup>Ibid

The geopolitical landscape of Qatar drastically changed after the crown prince, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, ousted his father Sheikh Khalifa in a bloodless coup. This move sent tremors to many Gulf leaders, especially Saudi Arabia. This was due to the independent foreign policies that Hamad bin Khalifa had always advocated, which opposed those of Saudi Arabia.<sup>21</sup> Hamad Bin Khalifa was the expression of a younger generation of Qatari's, which sought to diversify Qatar's international relations and break from Saudi Arabia's sphere of influence. The reign of Emir Hamad Al-Thani, saw Qatar become a very active actor regionally and internationally, which Saudi Arabia believed was an attempt to shrink its clout.

Hamad Bin Khalifa's ambition to shift Qatar away from its vassal status to Saudi Arabia was due to certain factors. One of which was his experience as a military commander in the first Gulf war. He witnessed firsthand Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, and the inability of Saudi Arabia as the de facto leader of its Gulf allies to deter Iraq or protect Kuwait. In this light, Hamad Bin Khalifa along with the younger generation of Qatari leaders resented the fact, that Qatar was made to pay homage to Saudi Arabia, even though their security could not be guaranteed.<sup>22</sup> Another factor was Qatar's need for a dominant protector over its territory, especially since the British abdicated its position as the preeminent power in the Gulf. Noteworthy, was also the desire of the younger generation to turn Qatar into a regional power, and to a large extent, a global player in world affairs.

Hamad Al-Thani's reign sent a clear signal to the Middle East particularly, the GCC axis that Qatar was pushing for a more prominent role in the region, and on the international stage. In light of this, he began implementing initiatives that naturally would not have been taken without

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<sup>21</sup>Cockburn, Patrick. "Emir of Qatar Deposed by His Son. Palace Coup: Sheikh, Overthrown in Bloodless Takeover While on Visit to Geneva, Vows to Return." *Independent*, 28 June 1995, [www.independent.co.uk/news/world/emir-of-Qatar-deposed-by-his-son-1588698.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/emir-of-Qatar-deposed-by-his-son-1588698.html)

<sup>22</sup>Kamrava, Mehran. *Qatar: Small State, Big Politics*. Cornell University Press, 2013.

the implicit or explicit consent of the Saudi led GCC block. Initiatives such as the establishment of Al Jazeera, a western-style media network, which was a complete departure from the norm in scope and coverage, as well as Qatar's rapprochement with Israel, were unprecedented in the region.

Hamad Bin Al Thani also began developing Qatar's natural gas resources, which has become its main source of income. Qatar has been able to carve out a niche for itself in the Arab world, with its various ventures and pragmatic policies, which give it an asymmetric advantage to cope with its geopolitical environment. Though Qatar is an absolute monarchy, it flirts with democracy as a way to disassociate itself from its Gulf neighbor's, and prove to western countries like the United States that Qatar is uniquely different.

In 2013, Qatar's ruler Emir Hamad bin Khalifa demonstrated Qatar's distinction from the Middle East mainstream by transferring power to his son the crowned prince. In a region known for leaders that die on the seat of power, Qatar sets another first. The decision by Emir Hamad, to abdicate the throne in favor of his younger son, might have been connected with his experience as a leader, who had to remove his father from the throne. In this light, he intended to create precedence for future generations of leaders to follow in terms of succession, preventing the use of coups as a way to gain power. This example goes a long way to show how Sheikh Hamad has been able to bring order and structure in his household, which also reflects positively for his country as a whole.

## **Significance of Qatar's Geopolitical History on its Strategic Calculus in its International Relations**

Qatar's history gives stunning insights into its experiences and how it shapes Qatar's view of the world. Qatar has experienced firsthand the challenges associated with small states finding their footing in a world described by Thucydides, where "the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must."<sup>23</sup> Qatar has indeed been on the receiving end for much of its history. Located in a complex geopolitical region, Qatar's neighbors often saw Qatar as a prize up for grabs and did not accord it the respect and status given to legitimate states.

Some scholars and historians have described Qatar's achievement of statehood as miraculous, and somewhat lucky, given the challenges it had to face. Its emergence as a coherent political entity is a raw display of ambition, skilled use of diplomacy, and visionary leadership, all employed by taking advantage of different opportunities. These traits still characterize the strategic culture of Qatar today.

Qatar's history has shaped it to see the protection of its sovereignty as a primary security objective, even going through unorthodox routes to secure it from the external influences of hostile forces. Since Qatar has faced many incursions into its territory for a substantive part of its history, Qatari leaders have become adept at deciphering the political and security climate to maneuver the various threats to its sovereignty. Leaders thus make perceptive decisions with whom to ally, making cost-benefit calculations as to which domineering regional power poses the most threat, and which would provide protection with the least onerous demands.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Barry, James A. *The Sword of Justice: Ethics and Coercion in International Politics*. Greenwood Publishing Group, 1998. Google Books, [books.google.com/books?id=8iOPAAAAMAAJ](https://books.google.com/books?id=8iOPAAAAMAAJ)

<sup>24</sup>Roberts, David B. "The Four Areas of Qatar's Foreign Policy." *Comilas Journal for International Relations*, no. 5, 2016, pp. 1-17. [revistas.upcomillas.es/index.php/internationalrelations/article/download/6740/6544](http://revistas.upcomillas.es/index.php/internationalrelations/article/download/6740/6544)

In the late-18th and early-19th centuries, these decisions were made and remade quickly, and alliance structures changed frequently.<sup>25</sup> This also holds particularly true in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Qatar has moved away from its traditional reliance on Britain and Saudi Arabia as its regional protector since the aftermath of the Gulf war, which changed Qatar's attitude towards its security and international relations. Qatar believed Saudi Arabia offered little in terms of security and demanded too much of its sovereignty. Thus, Qatar's history points to the fact that in times of challenges, Qatar is open to switching alliances to serve its interest.

Qatar's enormous wealth is an integral part of its success as a country, and Qatar's history reflects the strategic use of this wealth as a tool to achieve many of its foreign policies. According to the international monetary fund, Qatar's per capita GDP is \$127,600, making it the richest country on earth.<sup>26</sup> With large reserves of oil and gas, Qatar has been able to attract investments from countries, which enhances Qatar's strategic value to those countries such as the U.S.A and Britain. (More information on Qatar's strategic use of its wealth and investments will be given below).

As a country previously "known for being unknown," Qatar's wealth serves as a fuel for Qatar's policies that have transformed the small state, from a position of a political dwarf to a major actor in international affairs with its independent foreign policy.<sup>27</sup> As part of its strategic calculus to be visible, Qatar's financial resources have succeeded in attracting the needed attention, sufficient to increase its political standing in the international arena. In this light,

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<sup>25</sup>Roberts, David B. "The Four Areas of Qatar's Foreign Policy." *Comilas Journal for International Relations*, no. 5, 2016, pp. 1-17. [revistas.upcomillas.es/index.php/internationalrelations/article/download/6740/6544](http://revistas.upcomillas.es/index.php/internationalrelations/article/download/6740/6544)

<sup>26</sup> Smith, Oliver. "16 Facts about Qatar, the Richest, Safest, most Polluting Country on Earth." *The Telegraph*, 18 December 2017, [www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/middle-east/qatar/articles/facts-about-qatar/](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/middle-east/qatar/articles/facts-about-qatar/)

<sup>27</sup> Neil, Quilliam. "The Middle East's Shifting Energy Politics." *Chatham House. Institute for International affairs*, 15 Feb. 2019, [www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/middle-east-s-shifting-energy-politics](http://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/middle-east-s-shifting-energy-politics)

Qatar's uses its wealth to power many of its foreign policies that are geared towards increasing its clout regionally and globally.

### **Understanding Qatar's Need for Asymmetric Tools**

**Qatar's Geography and Size.** With a total size of 11,586 sq. km, Qatar is easily one of the smallest nations in the Middle East. The size of Qatar relative to its Gulf neighbors, such as Saudi Arabia and Iran, can be easily seen as insignificant. Qatar's size is particularly important in light of the realities and dynamics of security, politics, and economy. The role of size in the security and economic potential of a country cannot be overemphasized.

Geo-politicians such as Sir Halford Mackinder, Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan, Karl Haushofer and Nicholas J. Spykeman, attached great importance to geography.<sup>28</sup> The geography of a country plays an essential role in the security calculus of that country. For instance, the Alps of Switzerland was a great insulator against the extraordinary destruction that bedeviled Europe, both in World War One and World War Two. The same goes for India, which has been guarded by the great Himalayas in the north and surrounded by sea or ocean, and thus, enjoys a bit of protection and avoids frequent foreign invasion.<sup>29</sup> In the case of Qatar, however, its geographical realities and size, places it at a strategic disadvantage, as it offers no natural protection against threats.

Qatar is shaped by constant geographical extremes.<sup>30</sup> As a country located in the desert, Qatar's agricultural potential is significantly dwarfed. This leaves Qatar very vulnerable to economic insecurity caused by food scarcity. According to the Food and Agricultural

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<sup>28</sup>Ghosh, Peu. *International Relations*. PHI Learning Pvt. Ltd., 2016. Google Books, [books.google.com/books/about/INTERNATIONAL\\_RELATIONS.html?id=aaKIDAAAQBAJ](https://books.google.com/books/about/INTERNATIONAL_RELATIONS.html?id=aaKIDAAAQBAJ)

<sup>29</sup>Aneek, Chatterjee. *International Relations Today: Concepts and Application*. Pearson Education India, 2010. Google Books, [books.google.com/books/about/INTERNATIONAL\\_RELATIONS.html?id=aaKIDAAAQBAJ](https://books.google.com/books/about/INTERNATIONAL_RELATIONS.html?id=aaKIDAAAQBAJ)

<sup>30</sup>Fromherz, Allen J. *Qatar: A Modern History*. Georgetown University Press, 2017.

Organization of the United Nations, Qatar's "agricultural sector is limited by several factors, such as scarce water resources, low water quality, unfertile soils, harsh climatic conditions, and poor water management, which leads to low crop yields."<sup>31</sup> Qatar's arable land is estimated at just three percent of the total area of the country,<sup>32</sup> making it almost infeasible to become self-sufficient in the productions of its crops.

Although there is a small amount of cultivated land in the north of the country, and there have been many attempts at desert agriculture, only some five percent of the land can be used for herding and grazing.<sup>33</sup> Qatar's water resources are also very limited, with an annual rainfall of 75mm (3 inches), compared to London's average of 558mm (22 inches); Mumbai's of 2431mm (96 inches) and New York's of 1268mm (50 inches).<sup>34</sup>

Qatar's size also places it at a disadvantage in times of war or conflict. As a state with a minuscule territory, Qatar lacks the strategic depth needed to directly, and confidently confront adversaries, without running the risks of being overtaken in a short period. Qatari leaders are acutely aware of this fact, having witnessed the rapid capture of Kuwait by Iraq due to its small size.

**Qatar's Geopolitical Realities.** There are only a few places on earth that can be compared to the regional, political, and religious complexities of the Middle East. The geopolitical dynamics of the Middle East, often leave political scientist and international relations scholars overwhelmed, due to the intricate relationships that exist between, and among

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<sup>31</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. "Qatar." [www.fao.org/nr/water/aquastat/countries\\_regions/QAT/](http://www.fao.org/nr/water/aquastat/countries_regions/QAT/)

<sup>32</sup>Fromherz, Allen J. *Qatar: A Modern History*. Georgetown University Press, 2017.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid

<sup>34</sup> Steff, Gaultier. "The Average Year in Qatar, Weather Wise." *Gulf Times*, 11 Jan. 2014, [www.gulf-times.com/story/377439/The-average-year-in-Qatar-weatherwise](http://www.gulf-times.com/story/377439/The-average-year-in-Qatar-weatherwise)



regional and international actors. In this light, Qatar is fully aware of its vulnerabilities in such rough geopolitical terrain as a small state.

Qatar is one of the world's most vulnerable political entities, surrounded by powerful and expansionist neighbors.<sup>35</sup> Qatar is bordered by Saudi Arabia and shares maritime borders with Bahrain, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates.<sup>36</sup> Among the nations that share land or maritime borders with Qatar, Qatar is one of the smallest in size, military, and population. This makes Qatar an easy target in times of chaos like it has been for a substantial period of its history. In this light, the goal of survival characterizes Qatar's interactions and relationship with its neighbors and the Middle East in general. Survival in the face of coercion, disputes, and wars of which, it often gets caught in the middle. This strategic goal of survival is highly evident because of its geographic position.

Qatar is located between Iran and Saudi Arabia, which are historic, religious, and political rivals. This leaves Qatar in the crosshairs of bitter wars and disputes often fought by these two states. The conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran, while historical and religious in origin, has evolved into a geopolitical competition.<sup>37</sup> Saudi Arabia, as the predominant Sunni state and the custodian of the two most holy sites in Islam, finds it necessary, and in fact, pertinent to curtail the influence of Iran. Iran, on the other hand, the foremost Shia power since the Islamic revolution of 1971, has been on a geopolitical rampage to increase its sphere of influence. The competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia, often lead to dicey situations for Qatar, which has to walk a fine line navigating its relationships between these antagonistic countries.

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<sup>35</sup>Fromherz, Allen J. *Qatar: A Modern History*. Georgetown University Press, 2017.

<sup>36</sup>"Qatar." *One World Nations Online*, [www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/qatar.htm](http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/qatar.htm)

<sup>37</sup>Ighani, Helia. "Managing the Saudi-Iran Rivalry." *Council on Foreign Relations*, 24 Oct. 2016, [www.cfr.org/report/managing-saudi-iran-rivalry](http://www.cfr.org/report/managing-saudi-iran-rivalry)

Worse still for Qatar, is its sixty-kilometer border with Saudi Arabia, which is Qatar's only land border, and by implication a very important port for the movement of goods and services. The border holds a strategic place in Qatar's calculus, due to its fluctuating relationship with Saudi Arabia, which has direct consequences for its economy, because of Saudi Arabia's ability to manipulate the borders to hurt Qatar. This scenario is currently playing out, as Saudi Arabia has closed its border to Qatar because of the 2017 GCC crisis.<sup>38</sup>

As part of the geopolitical realities surrounding Qatar, it has to contend with the fact, that the exercise of its sovereignty has become a source of gross discontent among the Saudi Arabia dominated axis of the Middle East. Nevertheless, Qatar is determined to carve out a niche for itself, distinct from the mainstream of Arab politics.

**Demographics and Population.** The population and the demographic composition of a state is a very important metric for measuring the economic and the military potential of that state. Qatar has been experiencing phenomenal growth in its population size due to high levels of immigration. The website of the Central Intelligence Agency, estimates Qatar's population to be 2,363,569.<sup>39</sup> However, immigrants make up about 88.4 percent of the population, the majority of which, are low skilled workers from South Asia, while Qatari's make up only 11.6 percent.<sup>40</sup>

Qatar's population growth is a mirror image of its success and relevance as a major economic and socio-cultural hub, especially, considering the fact, that by 1940, the entire population of Qatar had fallen to 16,000 due to extreme poverty.<sup>41</sup> As Qatar continues to develop its economy and infrastructures, through its abundance of oil and gas, expatriate workers play

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<sup>38</sup>Finn, Tom, and Ibrahim Saber. "Qatar-Saudi land border deserted after frontier shut." *Reuters*, 12 June 2017, [www.reuters.com/article/us-gulf-qatar-border-saudi/qatar-saudi-land-border-deserted-after-frontier-shut-idUSKBN1931PO](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-gulf-qatar-border-saudi/qatar-saudi-land-border-deserted-after-frontier-shut-idUSKBN1931PO)

<sup>39</sup>*World Fact Book: Qatar*. Central Intelligence Agency, 10 July 2019, [www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/qa.html](http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/qa.html)

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid*

<sup>41</sup>Fromherz, Allen J. *Qatar: A Modern History*. Georgetown University Press, 2017.

very important roles in its workforce, particularly in the low skilled sectors. The need for expatriate workers has also increased due to Qatar's hosting right to the 2022 world cup, which has tremendously augmented the need for construction<sup>42</sup>

However, Qatar's population size poses a deep challenge to its security, because, it is insufficient to create an adequate military force to defend its territory or deter adversaries. Qatar's total military strength is 12,000, which is relatively small when compared to its neighbors; Saudi Arabia totals 256,000 while Iran has a total of 934,000. This makes Qatar vulnerable to aggression, or invasion. In this light, the strength of Qatar's military or security apparatus cannot guarantee its security.

This vulnerability is a major reason Qatar has always sought defense alliances with stronger states. Qatar's defense architecture is often interwoven to those of these dominant states, in the form of trade and military bases. For instance, the United States has military bases in Qatar, in part because; Qatar created the right conditions for them. The deficiency of a strong population for military purposes is a factor that Qatar considers in its strategic decisions and international relations.

**Leadership Ambitions.** Modern-day Qatar is a product of vision and ambition on the part of its leadership. For an extensive part of its history, Qatar was contented with the limited role it played in international affairs, differing to Saudi Arabia for regional leadership. This arrangement was the norm, until Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani became Emir of Qatar, through a bloodless coup that ousted his father, Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad Al Thani in 1995.<sup>43</sup> Sheikh Hamad schooled in Sandhurst military academy, London, and was appointed to the rank of Major General, and later Commander-in-Chief of the Qatari Armed Forces, overseeing a

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<sup>42</sup>Françoise De Bel-Air. "Demography, Migration, and Labor Market in Qatar." *Gulf Research Center*, Explanatory Note No. 8/2014, [gulfmigration.eu](http://gulfmigration.eu)

<sup>43</sup>Fromherz, Allen J. *Qatar Rise to Power and Influence*. IB Tauris, 2012.

major recruitment and resources drive.<sup>44</sup> Under his leadership as an army commander, he defeated Iraqi forces at the Battle of Khafji in the first Gulf war, earning Qatar significant praise from world leaders.

Sheikh Hamad had an intense passion to develop the international clout of Qatar away from Saudi Arabia, and the mainstream of Gulf politics that sought to keep it in the shadows. In this light, he began developing the architecture of Qatar's rapid rise and growth in diverse sectors, such as the economy, education, and media. Sheikh Hamad's cousin, Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabir, who was the foreign minister from 1992-2013 and prime minister from 2007-2013, was also a key ally in the grand plan to get Qatar to its current international status. Although, Sheikh Hamad has handed over power to his son, Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani, and other younger crop of Qataris, Qatar's fundamental foreign policy has not changed. The new Emir still pursues the same maverick policies that his father designed, which still forms the basis of Qatar's international relations today.

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<sup>44</sup>Hall, John. "Emir of Qatar profile: Who is Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, How Did he Turn Qatar into the World's Richest Nation and why has he Decided to Abdicate." *Independent*, 25 June 2013, [www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/emir-of-Qatar-profile-who-is-sheikh-hamad-bin-khalifa-al-thani-how-did-he-turn-Qatar-into-the-world-8672997.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/emir-of-Qatar-profile-who-is-sheikh-hamad-bin-khalifa-al-thani-how-did-he-turn-Qatar-into-the-world-8672997.html)

## QATAR'S ASYMMETRIC TOOLS IN ACHIEVING ITS FOREIGN POLICIES

### Strategic Hedging Among Competing Actors

Strategic hedging can be defined as “a behavior, in which a country seeks to offset risks by pursuing multiple foreign policy options that are intended to produce mutually counteracting effects, under the situation of high uncertainties and high stakes.”<sup>45</sup> In this regard, veteran American military analysts Anthony Cordsman described “Qatar as a country of opposites” using a strategy that “depends on the careful balancing of many competing forces.”<sup>46</sup>

Qatar's survival as a state has hinged largely on its flexibility and adaptability to its geopolitical surrounding. In a global stage saturated with actors with diverse competing interest, Qatar manages to pull through, not by technological superiority, but through the deft use of diplomacy and negotiation.<sup>47</sup> Balancing its interest and relationships among diverse actors, through strategic hedging is a prime tool for Qatar in achieving its foreign policies.

Qatar's former foreign minister, Khalid bin Mohammed Al Atiyah, voiced in clear terms, the basis for Qatar's hedging policy in its international relations. He stated that “we don't do enemies...we talk to everyone. We cannot change geography; this is for sure, so whoever is in the vicinity of our geography has to be our close friend.” This statement by the ex-minister gives considerable insights, into Qatar's paradoxical approach in its international interactions. For this reason, much of Qatar's foreign policy lurks in the gray area, leaving allies and partners perplexed as to Qatar's stance on regional and international issues.

As a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Qatar is politically aligned with its Arab Sunni neighbors, which are also allies of the United States. In its classic hedging policy, Qatar

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<sup>45</sup>Kamrava, Mehran. *Qatar: Small State, Big Politics*. Cornell University Press, 2013.

<sup>46</sup>Ulrichsen, Kristian Coates. *Qatar and the Arab Spring*. Oxford University Press, 2014.

<sup>47</sup>Fromherz, Allen J. *Qatar Rise to Power and Influence*. IB Tauris, 2012.

also maintains a robust relationship with Iran. However, this relationship is anchored to a large extent, on the world biggest gas field, which Qatar shares with Iran. As noted in a leaked U.S. diplomatic cable, Qatar's relationship with Iran is “seen as an expression of Qatar's strong desire for a stable strategic environment and for a working relationship with Iran, that ensures Qatar's continued freedom to share the two countries shared gas field, the largest non-associated gas field in the world.”<sup>48</sup> Qatar's policy towards Iran is thus, crafted with this economic reality in mind.

Qatar is well aware of Iran's penchant for destabilizing the political atmosphere of Arab states and seeks to avoid it. In this light, Qatar's deems it necessary to maintain a cordial relationship with Iran, no matter how tenuous it might be. Qatar is also mindful of the position of the United States regarding the destabilizing regional, and international activities of Iran. However, Qatar still advocates for Iran diplomatically. This is because, as an ally of the United States Qatar has been subject to numerous threats from Iran. For Example, Iran's ex-President Ahmadinejad, once warned Qatar in a private meeting in Tehran, that it would be a primary target in the event of a war with America, or Israel as a result of hosting United States Central Command (CENTCOM) in Qatar.<sup>49</sup> This geopolitical reality is what Qatar hopes to mitigate through hedging in its relationship with Iran and its allies.

Qatar has also been using its hedging policy to balance its relationship between Iran and its GCC allies in the Syrian crisis. Qatar plays an active role like the rest of the Gulf States to oust Basher Al Assad, which is a key ally of Iran. However, Qatar still views Iran as a partner of convenience and keeps a substantial window open for communication and diplomatic engagements. The aftermath of the 2017 GCC crisis showed the importance of this window. Iran

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<sup>48</sup>“Qatar: Balancing Geographic Interests with Iran, Strategic Interests with U.S.” *WikiLeaks*, Public Library of U.S. Diplomacy, [wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09DOHA442\\_a.html](http://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09DOHA442_a.html)

<sup>49</sup>Ulrichsen, Kristian Coates. *Qatar and the Arab Spring*. Oxford University Press, 2014.

was quick to send cargo planes of food, fruits, and vegetables, in the wake of Saudi blockade of Qatar's only land border.

In this light, it is no surprise that Qatar having degraded its diplomatic presence in Iran for some years has now fully restored diplomatic relations with the Islamic republic. Even though the Gulf monarchies view Iran as an existential threat, Qatar's hedging policy has largely lessened the possibility of an aggressive move from Iran against it. Qatar has also proved adept at navigating the murky waters of U.S.-Iran tensions, as it strives to maintain cordial relations with both countries.

A key manifestation of Qatar's hedging policy is in its relationship with Islamist groups and individuals, who like Iran, are loathed by the Gulf monarchies and the United States. Qatar has been known to provide a haven for Islamist groups and individuals, considered terrorists by its allies. It has been reported that Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the notorious terrorist that masterminded the 9/11 attacks, was given refuge in Qatar, by a Qatari royal and former interior minister.<sup>50</sup>

In its hedging fashion, Qatar hosts the largest U.S. airbase in the region and pledges its support in the U.S. led fight against terrorism, but Qatar has also found a way to legitimize the presence of a political office for the Taliban within its territory. An author with the New York Post expressed his surprise, while engaged in a conversation with an expat in Qatar after he “told me that he attended the opening of an IKEA store in Doha, and watched dumbfounded as Taliban members tested out the same couch as U.S. servicemen.”<sup>51</sup> This imagery of friend and foe is Qatar's vision of hedging, where Qatar is a neutral zone for conflicting parties.

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<sup>50</sup>Alfadhel Khalifa A. “How Qatar Threatens Peace.” *The Washington Times*, 21 June 2017, [www.washingtontimes.com/news/2017/jun/21/qatar-threatens-middle-east-peace/](http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2017/jun/21/qatar-threatens-middle-east-peace/)

<sup>51</sup>Schanzer, Jonathan. “Time for the U.S. to Stop Qatar’s Support For Terror.” *New York Post*, 20 Apr. 2015, [nypost.com/2017/04/20/time-for-the-U.S.-to-stop-qatars-support-for-terror/](http://nypost.com/2017/04/20/time-for-the-U.S.-to-stop-qatars-support-for-terror/)

Qatar's engagement with Islamist organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood, Al Nusra also known as Jabhat al-Nusra, and Hamas, is part of a wider plan to observe the political trend of the region. It has been widely reported that Qatar also has links to the Islamic State and Al Qaeda.<sup>52</sup> Qatar's relationship with Islamist groups is predicated on a political bet that Qatar made, on an assumption that Islamist movements and parties will become the premier bloc of power in the region.<sup>53</sup> Qatar also uses this classic hedging policy to strategically oscillate, between actors it perceives as having the political and ideological upper hand in the region.

This calculus largely explains Qatar's support for the Muslim Brotherhood, while being an ally of the United States, and a political partner of many Arab states, most of which oppose the Brotherhood. Qatar has come to appreciate the organizational capacity, and populist appeals, the Muslim Brotherhood garners in the region, despite the fact, that Qatar's allies disdain the Brotherhood. Qatar has been a sanctuary for key Muslim Brotherhood figures, including Yusuf al-Qaradawi, its spiritual and ideological leader. Yusuf al-Qaradawi resides in Qatar and conveys his views on a weekly show called Sharia and Life on the Al Jazeera network.<sup>54</sup> Hamas, which has been designated a terrorist organization by the United States, has also been a major recipient of aid, and political legitimacy from Qatar in the form of "humanitarian assistance."

For Qatar, these groups are strategic to its stability and are part of a broader plot to shape the geopolitical outlook of the Middle East to a more "Qatar friendly" region, especially since the Arab Spring showed their potential as a political force. Qatar views these Islamist organizations, as wild cards that might prove useful at the right time. A practical example was

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<sup>52</sup> Keatinge, Tom. "Why Qatar is the Focus of Terrorists Claims." *BBC News*, 13 June 2017, [www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-40246734](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-40246734)

<sup>53</sup> Ghaddar, Hannin. "Qatar Bets on Islamists." *Wilson Center*, 13 Feb. 2011, [www.wilsoncenter.org/article/qatar-bets-islamists](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/qatar-bets-islamists)

<sup>54</sup> Ross, Dennis. "Qatar Needs to Stop Funding Islamists." *USA Today*, 5 May 2017, [www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2017/05/08/Qatar-funding-islamism-muslim-brotherhood-hamas-column/101300766](http://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2017/05/08/Qatar-funding-islamism-muslim-brotherhood-hamas-column/101300766)



Qatar's support for Egypt's President Morsi's administration, who was a member of the Muslim Brotherhood. Qatar intended to pivot on the Muslim Brotherhood's success in Egypt, as a starting point to further its strategic reach in the wake of the Arab Spring.<sup>55</sup> Qatar's deep tie with the Muslim Brotherhood has also raised the confidence of the Qatari leadership, that it can control the political decisions of Islamist organizations. Unlike the old order of autocrats that rule the region, Qatar sees Islamists as more approachable politically.

Qatar's Alliance with the Brotherhood and its affiliates, also serves as a hedge against the dominance of Saudi Arabia, not just politically, but also ideologically. Qatar prefers the ideological construct of the Muslim Brotherhood, to the very austere Wahhabi ideology of the Saudi's.<sup>56</sup> Qatar believes that the Muslim Brotherhood gives it a populist form of legitimacy, needed to rival the religious prowess associated with Saudi Arabia as the keepers of the holiest sites in Islam. Qatar also uses hedging as a strategic policy to test out the geopolitical foundations of the Middle East. This helps Qatar detect, which actor or trend holds a firm and strategically strong solid ground for Qatar to further its geopolitical influence.

### **The use of Al Jazeera as a Political tool of Influence and Power**

The use of the media is one of Qatar's most strategically potent tools in amplifying its influence, and shaping geopolitical perceptions and directions, regionally and internationally. Qatari emir, Hamad Al Thani, created the Al Jazeera network in 1996, as part of a strategic plan to challenge the conservative status quo of the Middle East, by bringing to light, thoughts, aspirations, political, and social perspectives from a Qatar point of view. The creation of Al

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<sup>55</sup>Trager, Eric. "The Muslim Brotherhood Is the Root of the Qatar Crisis." *The Atlantic*, 2 July 2017, [www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/07/muslim-brotherhood-qatar/532380/](http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/07/muslim-brotherhood-qatar/532380/)

<sup>56</sup>Roberts, David. "Qatar and the Muslim Brotherhood: Pragmatism or Preference?" *Middle East Policy Council*, vol. 21, no. 3, [www.mepc.org/qatar-and-muslim-brotherhood-pragmatism-or-preference](http://www.mepc.org/qatar-and-muslim-brotherhood-pragmatism-or-preference)

Jazeera network marked the beginning of a new era in Qatar's interaction and international relations. Al Jazeera has become the gateway through which the Qatari leadership can reach a substantive population of the Arab world to influence the political, social, and cultural narratives on a scale that is ordinarily far above its weight.

As a new tool in the hands of Emir Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, Al Jazeera was first used strategically to deflect the stinging criticisms directed at him from the Saudi led media, after ousting his father through a bloodless palace coup in 1995.<sup>57</sup> The Saudi elites supported his father as a loyal pawn of Saudi Arabia. However, the Saudi leadership despised the new emir for his pro-active and independent foreign policies. Thus, Al Jazeera became a powerful weapon in the hands of the Emir to shield himself and his country from being painted as a pariah. Al Jazeera has now become the global mouthpiece of Qatar's leadership.

The creation of Al Jazeera was facilitated by journalists from the fall out of BBC Arabic TV station, which no longer had access to Saudi provided satellite, after strong Saudi objection to its critical reporting on its ruling elites.<sup>58</sup> Al Jazeera became an instant success story in just five years. By 2001, Al Jazeera had succeeded in becoming the most watched Arab television station for news, and within ten years, more than three-quarters of Arabs identified Al Jazeera as being either their first or second choice for news.<sup>59</sup>

The rapid success of Al Jazeera was due to its appeal to the hearts and minds of the larger Arab population, who yearned for “real news,” as opposed to the doctored programs they had to watch in mainstream Arab media outlets. The news products and programs that were mostly

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<sup>57</sup> Cockburn, Patrick. “Emir of Qatar Deposed by His Son. Palace Coup: Sheikh, Overthrown in Bloodless Takeover While on Visit to Geneva, Vows to Return.” *Independent*, 28 June 1995, [www.independent.co.uk/news/world/emir-of-Qatar-deposed-by-his-son-1588698.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/emir-of-Qatar-deposed-by-his-son-1588698.html)

<sup>58</sup> Ruddick, Graham. “Al-Jazeera: the Qatar Broadcaster at Center of Diplomatic Crisis.” *The Guardian, Guardian News and Media Limited*, 24 June 2017, [www.theguardian.com/media/2017/jun/24/al-jazeera-the-Qatar-broadcaster-at-centre-of-diplomatic-crisis](http://www.theguardian.com/media/2017/jun/24/al-jazeera-the-Qatar-broadcaster-at-centre-of-diplomatic-crisis)

<sup>59</sup> Telhami, Shibley. “Al Jazeera the Most Feared Network.” *Brookings Institution*, 15 June 2013, [www.brookings.edu/articles/al-jazeera-the-most-feared-news-network/](http://www.brookings.edu/articles/al-jazeera-the-most-feared-news-network/)

broadcast from most Arab state-controlled media, were nothing more than documentaries on the “goodness and mercies” of the Arab rulers, while “real” news and events were filtered to protect the rulers and advance their immediate interests.<sup>60</sup> However, Al Jazeera like its founders became a three hundred and sixty degree break from the norm. It was instituted by the Emir to "report the news as they see it."<sup>61</sup>

Al Jazeera covered news that were of deep concern to the average Arab individual, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the U.S. anti-terror campaign, which led to the second Gulf war against Iraq. Its critical coverage of Arab rulers, not even sparing the Saudi Arabia regime, did not go unnoticed, even though critical coverage of Qatar was conspicuously missing. Al Jazeera soon became a source of worry for many leaders in the region. In 1999, when the longtime Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak visited its cramped studios, he was said to have remarked in utter shock that, “all that noise from this matchbox?”<sup>62</sup>

The strategic nature of Al Jazeera was described in one of the leaked cables by American diplomats in Doha it stated, “Al Jazeera is heavily subsidized by the Qatari government and has proved an effective tool for the station’s political masters.”<sup>63</sup> In another leaked document, Al Jazeera was described as an “instrument of Qatari influence...an expression of Qatar’s foreign policy.”<sup>64</sup>

Qatar uses Al Jazeera in a variety of ways that are tailored to meet its goal. One of which is to implement a distinct blend of contradictory foreign policies, meant to produce different

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<sup>60</sup>Telhami, Shibley. “Al Jazeera the Most Feared Network.” *Brookings Institution*, 15 June 2013, [www.brookings.edu/articles/al-jazeera-the-most-feared-news-network/](http://www.brookings.edu/articles/al-jazeera-the-most-feared-news-network/)

<sup>61</sup>Ponnai, Kevin. “Qatar crisis: Can Al Jazeera Survive?” *BBC News*, 8 June 2017, [www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-40187414](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-40187414)

<sup>62</sup> Carlstrom, Gregg. “What's the Problem With Al Jazeera?” *The Atlantic*, 24 June 2017, [www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/06/al-jazeera-Qatar-saudi-arabia-muslim-brotherhood/531471/](http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/06/al-jazeera-Qatar-saudi-arabia-muslim-brotherhood/531471/)

<sup>63</sup>Booth, Robert. “WikiLeaks Cables Claim Al-Jazeera Changed Coverage to Suit Qatari Foreign Policy.” *The Guardian*, *Guardian News and Media Limited*, 5 Dec. 2010, [www.theguardian.com/world/2010/dec/05/wikileaks-cables-al-jazeera-qatari-foreign-policy](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/dec/05/wikileaks-cables-al-jazeera-qatari-foreign-policy)

<sup>64</sup>Ibid

outcomes that serve its overall strategic interest. In this light Al Jazeera as a media platform supports Qatar's contrasting messages, values, and political positions which it deems necessary to achieve its goals and objectives. For example, Qatar's foreign policy supported the Arab Spring by pushing for democracy, while simultaneously supporting extremist and Islamist ideologies, which are usually not associated with democracy. Qatar actively used its Al Jazeera network to support this conflicting policy, by giving voice to the massive protests that were taking place in different Arab countries, while simultaneously, giving considerable airtime to certain Islamist and extremist movements that appeal to the Arab public.

Although the very notion of supporting democracy and extremist ideology is inconsistent, to say the least, Qatar took advantage of the uniqueness of the Arab Spring to pursue this policy. The Arab Spring was unique in the sense that Arab protesters yearned for democracy, and representative government, however, the majority of these protesters supported Islamist movements and parties to lead these democratic reforms.<sup>65</sup> This odd mix of democracy and extremism gelled well with Qatar's strategic objective of gaining influence in the region. In this light, Qatar sought to change the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East to make it more strategically advantageous for its objectives by supporting Islamist's movements and parties.

Qatar's relationship with Islamist leaders and movements has to be understood to appreciate its support for these groups during the Arab Spring; the Muslim Brotherhood been the most prominent of them. Qatar's ties to the Muslim Brotherhood dates back to the arrival of Yusuf Al Qaradawi in Qatar, after his exile from Egypt.<sup>66</sup> Qaradawi is the spiritual and

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<sup>65</sup> Wegner, Eva. "The Islamist Voter base During the Arab Spring: More Ideology Than Protest?" *Project on the Middle East Political Science*, pomeps.org/2017/04/27/the-islamist-voter-base-during-the-arab-spring-more-ideology-than-protest

<sup>66</sup> Warren, David. H. "Qatari Support for the Muslim Brotherhood is More Than Just Realpolitik, it has a Long, Personal History," *Maydan, Ali Vural Ak Center for Global Islamic Studies at George Mason University*, 12 July 2017, www.themaydan.com/2017/07/qatari-support-muslim-brotherhood-just-realpolitik-long-personal-history

ideological leader of the Muslim Brotherhood movement. His views on politics, women's right, and a host of other issues are highly controversial and have been known to support acts of terrorism. He has been credited with much of the religious, and educational reforms in Qatar, and has a very close relationship with the ruling family.

His program *Sharia and Life* on Al Jazeera is reputed to be one of the most popular programs in the Arab world, attracting millions of viewers.<sup>67</sup> He is the founder of the Islamic Union of Muslim Scholars, which is headquartered in Qatar. Qaradawi is also known to use his influence in the Arab world to support Qatar, adding to Qatar's influence. To this end, the Qatari Leadership has not hidden its intentions of integrating extremist and Islamist, into the political fabric of the Middle East, especially the Muslim Brotherhood.

In an interview with Al Jazeera, former emir, Hamad bin Al Thani, downplayed the concerns normally associated with extremist and Islamist organizations. He instead blamed the radical views of these movements on tyrannical governments, and believed that if offered democracy Islamist movements will embrace participatory politics.<sup>68</sup> Going further, he stated that if the promise of real democracy, and justice of the Arab Spring is fulfilled, "I believe you will see this extremism transform into civilian life and civil society."<sup>69</sup>

In line with this oxymoronic view of transforming extremism into civilian life, Qatar utilized Al Jazeera as a rebranding tool to paint extremists as moderates, and make them more appealing to the already receptive Arab populace. Yusuf Al Qaradawi was particularly instrumental in garnering support for the Muslim Brotherhood, and its affiliates in different

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<sup>67</sup>Warren, David. H. "Qatari Support for the Muslim Brotherhood is More Than Just Realpolitik, it has a Long, Personal History," *Maydan, Ali Vural Ak Center for Global Islamic Studies at George Mason University*, 12 July 2017, [www.themaydan.com/2017/07/qatari-support-muslim-brotherhood-just-realpolitik-long-personal-history](http://www.themaydan.com/2017/07/qatari-support-muslim-brotherhood-just-realpolitik-long-personal-history)

<sup>68</sup>Dagherand, Sam and Charles Levinson. "Tiny Kingdom's Huge Role in Libya Draw Concern." *The Wall Street Journal*, 11 Oct. 2011, [www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970204002304576627000922764650](http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970204002304576627000922764650)

<sup>69</sup>Freer, Courtney. *Rentier Islamism: The Influence of the Muslim Brotherhood in Gulf Monarchies*. Oxford University Press, 2018.

countries through Al Jazeera. He spoke out against the regime of former Egyptian President, Hosni Mubarak on Al Jazeera, and was a key supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood president, Mohammed Morsi.<sup>70</sup>

In a live interview on Al-Jazeera, lasting a full twenty-three minutes, Al-Qaradawi issued a fatwa calling for the killing of late Libyan dictator Mu‘ ammar al-Gaddafi.<sup>71</sup> Noted, was the fact that this fatwa tallied with the foreign policy of Qatar, which was to remove Gaddafi from power. It is no surprise that throughout the Arab Spring, Qaradawi's fatwas were, for the most part, broadcasted through Al Jazeera, and were never contradictory to Qatar's policies in the region.

Al Jazeera's interview with Abu Muhammed al-Joulani, the head of Syria's Al Qaeda's franchise, the Al Nusra front, further buttresses Qatar's use of Al Jazeera as a “blending tool” for the contrasting notion of extremism and good governance. Veteran Middle East journalist Diana Moukalled noted that the interview “resembled propaganda because he was not challenged or asked investigative questions,” she also observed that “the interview was between two people in total harmony,” reinforcing the fact that Al Jazeera is a tool of Qatar's foreign policy.<sup>72</sup>

In this interview, al-Joulani presented himself and his organization as the paradoxical “good Jihadist.”<sup>73</sup> He declared that “We are not murderers, we are not criminals...we’re standing against tyranny (in Syria),” going further to reassure the west, he added that he will not “use Syria for attacks against the West and Europe.”<sup>74</sup> It has been widely reported that this public relations stunt, was an attempt by the Qatari government to remove Al Nusra from the United

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<sup>70</sup> Kirkpatrick David. D. “After Long Exile, Sunni Cleric Takes Role in Egypt.” *The New York Times*, 18 Feb. 2011, [www.nytimes.com/2011/02/19/world/middleeast/19egypt.html?mtref=www.google.com](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/19/world/middleeast/19egypt.html?mtref=www.google.com)

<sup>71</sup> Mekay, Emad. “Too Late, Qaddafi Seeks the Aid of Muslim Clerics.” *The New York Times*, 2 Mar. 2011, [www.nytimes.com/2011/03/03/world/africa/03iht-M03-FATWA.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/03/world/africa/03iht-M03-FATWA.html)

<sup>72</sup> Moukalled, Diana. “Embellishing Al-Nusra Front’s Image.” *Al Arabiya*, 2 June 2015, [english.alarabiya.net/en/views/news/middle-east/2015/06/02/Embellishing-Al-Nusra-Front-s-image.html](http://english.alarabiya.net/en/views/news/middle-east/2015/06/02/Embellishing-Al-Nusra-Front-s-image.html)

<sup>73</sup> Jacinto, Leela. “Head of Al Qaeda’s Syria Branch plays ‘Good Jihadist’ for TV.” *France 24*, 28 May 2015, [www.france24.com/en/20150528-syria-nusra-front-qaeda-good-jihadist-tv](http://www.france24.com/en/20150528-syria-nusra-front-qaeda-good-jihadist-tv)

<sup>74</sup> Ibid

States terror list, which prevented Qatar from supporting it financially. Within a short time after this interview, Al Nusra announced also on Al Jazeera that it has cut ties to Al Qaeda, paving way for more extensive support from the Qatari government.<sup>75</sup>

Qatar also uses Al Jazeera as a political foundation to advance its strategic objective, of projecting power away from the mainstream of Arab politics, and traditional heavyweights led by Saudi Arabia. Qatar has long been known to resent its historically subservient status to Saudi Arabia, and actively takes measures to increase its reach through Al Jazeera. Al Jazeera's willingness to go geopolitical leftist against the established order has been profound and reflects Qatar's stance on a range of issues.

For example, in order to prove its political independence from Saudi Arabia, Qatar permitted Al Jazeera to interview Israeli officials, even interviewing members of the Israeli Knesset (parliament) to the amazement of the Arab world.<sup>76</sup> Qatar cautiously seeks to maintain a close and working relationship with Saudi Arabia. Nevertheless, it has not stopped Qatar from pursuing policies that sometimes anger the Saudi's, in a bid to prove its political independence. For instance, Al Jazeera has in the past granted interviews to dissidents of the Saudi Arabian regime, much to the anger of the Saudi monarchy.

Al Jazeera is like a political mirror that reflects Qatar's position, feelings, and viewpoints on different matters. For example, by watching Al Jazeera you can understand the overall health of Qatar-Saudi relationship. In times of political tension between the two nations, Al Jazeera tends to take a critical stance on Saudi Arabia, and in times of rapprochement and cooperation, Al Jazeera has been known to strike a friendly tone on issues relating to Saudi Arabia.

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<sup>75</sup>Fisk, Robert. "Don't be Fooled by Reports that Al-Qaeda and Nusra Have Split for the Good of the Suffering Syrian People." *Independent*, 29 July 2016, [www.independent.co.uk/voices/dont-be-fooled-by-the-news-that-al-qaeda-and-nusra-have-split-for-the-good-of-the-syrian-people-a7161776.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/dont-be-fooled-by-the-news-that-al-qaeda-and-nusra-have-split-for-the-good-of-the-syrian-people-a7161776.html)

<sup>76</sup>Telhami, Shibley. "Al Jazeera the Most Feared Network." *Brookings Institution*, 15 June 2013, [www.brookings.edu/articles/al-jazeera-the-most-feared-news-network/](http://www.brookings.edu/articles/al-jazeera-the-most-feared-news-network/)

Finally, Al Jazeera is also used as a supplemental tool by the Qatari leadership to enhance the strategic hedging policy of the Qatari government. This is done through the dual nature of Al Jazeera, with its English and Arabic Channels intended to reach different audiences. The language and messages that Al Jazeera carries through its different channels are vastly different. The English version of Al Jazeera is a western oriented platform, through which Qatar brands, and presents itself and its views to the western world.

However, the Arabic version of Al Jazeera is deliberately crafted to fit certain Arab populist narratives, such as anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism, which allows Qatar to identify on the side of the Arabic people.<sup>77</sup> In other words, with Al Jazeera English Qatar is western, while with Al Jazeera Arabic, Qatar is for the Arab masses even if it means identifying with narratives that do not suit the interest of the United States. This is a classic strategy by Qatar, which embodies the all too familiar use of conflicting policies meant to serve Qatar's interest.

Al Jazeera's anti-Semitism was first noticed in the aftermath of events such as its coverage of the second Palestinian intifada against Israel in 2014. Al Jazeera deliberately framed the conflict, calling Palestinians killed by Israeli soldiers' martyrs, while Israelis killed were just called people.<sup>78</sup> As noted by Arab scholar Fouad Ajami, Al-Jazeera's reporting "barely feigned neutrality."<sup>79</sup> To further, sensationalize the event to stir up anti-Semitism, Al Jazeera repeatedly played a disputed account of Israeli soldiers shooting a twelve-year-old Palestinian boy, Mohammed al-Durra, and in fact, made it the emblem of the intifada.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Carlstrom, Gregg. "What's the Problem With Al Jazeera?" *The Atlantic*, 24 June 2017, [www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/06/al-jazeera-Qatar-saudi-arabia-muslim-brotherhood/531471/](http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/06/al-jazeera-Qatar-saudi-arabia-muslim-brotherhood/531471/)

<sup>78</sup> Kessler, Oren and David A. Weinberg. "Fail Jazeera'-Why the Network is Imploding." *New York Post*, 5 May 2015, [nypost.com/2015/05/21/call-it-fail-jazeera-network-drowning-in-scandals/](http://nypost.com/2015/05/21/call-it-fail-jazeera-network-drowning-in-scandals/)

<sup>79</sup> Berman, Ilan. *Digital Dictators: Media, Authoritarianism, and America's New Challenge*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2018

<sup>80</sup> Ibid



During the 2014 standoff between Palestine and Israel, Al Jazeera was blatantly biased and left no stone unturned in ensuring that its coverage was favorable to the Palestinian cause.<sup>81</sup> According to Gulf scholar David Weinberg, the network followed guidelines released by Hamas' Interior Ministry on how to report the events in Gaza.<sup>82</sup>

In another flagrant show of anti-Semitism from al Jazeera, its Arabic channel threw a party for Samir Kantar, a Lebanese man who killed three Israelis including a four-year-old girl in 1979, upon his repatriation in a prisoner exchange between Israel and Hezbollah.<sup>83</sup> "Ghassan Ben Jeddo, then the network's Beirut bureau chief, was filmed exclaiming, "Brother Samir, we wish to celebrate with you."<sup>84</sup>

However, the true ideological danger of Al Jazeera was brought to full display during America's intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq. Al Jazeera's coverage of these events focused on compelling graphics, showing the impact of America's military campaign on mosques, and even going further by showing torn Qurans to incite religious fanatics.<sup>85</sup> Al Jazeera's footage was deliberately aimed at setting an agenda, to frame the event as an assault on the Islamic values, and beliefs of these countries, which the United States laboriously sought to counter.

An Al Jazeera Arabic reporter on the ground in Afghanistan surrounded by rubble, suggested, "Afghans are looking towards brothers of faith...to help free the country," and

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<sup>81</sup> Berman, Ilan. *Digital Dictators: Media, Authoritarianism, and America's New Challenge*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2018

<sup>82</sup> Schanzer, Jonathan. "Assessing the US-Qatar Relationship." House Foreign Affairs Committee Sub Committee on Middle East and North Africa. 26 July 2017, docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA13/20170726/106329/HHRG-115-FA13-Wstate-SchanzerJ-20170726.pdf

<sup>83</sup> Safi, Marlo. "Al Jazeera Writes Another Chapter in its Own Ugly History." *National Review*, 24 May 2019, www.nationalreview.com/2019/05/al-jazeera-anti-semitic-video-controversy-radical-agenda/

<sup>84</sup> Ibid

<sup>85</sup> "Changing the Channel: Why Al Jazeera is under threat." *The Economist*, 1 June 2017, www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21724366-arab-worlds-leading-news-channel-independent-voice-or-propaganda

wondered why Arab states and Muslims were satisfying “America's ignorance.”<sup>86</sup> This was a clear call for the Muslim world to attack the United States. Despite the effort of then President George Bush in reaching out to Qatar’s Emir Hamad bin Khalifa, the daunting, and biased coverage of the U.S. was still the norm. Such sensational reporting reflects the beliefs and attitude of Al Jazeera’s staffs, which have been widely reported to be leftist, pan-Arab nationalists, or Islamist.

Al Jazeera also gave ample coverage of Osama Bin Laden, who used the network as a platform to reach the Arab world and incite its people against the United States. Al Jazeera frequently obtained tapes from Al Qaeda quite questionably, and aired them unfiltered; prompting the U.S. to the possibility, that Al Qaeda was utilizing Al Jazeera to send messages across to its member using hidden languages and signs. Till this day, Al Jazeera still gives considerable airtime to Islamist extremists and terrorist figures, all in the name of being accommodating of different opinions.

In this regard, Yusuf Al Qaradawi looms large as a well-respected preacher and authority in the Arab world. Millions watch his show on Al Jazeera, “sharia and life.” He is an advocate for suicide bombing, calling it a duty greater than a right.<sup>87</sup> Al Qaradawi stated further “doubting it (suicide) is like joining the Zionists and Americans in condemning our brothers in Hamas, the Jihad, the Islamic factions and the resistance factions in Iraq.”<sup>88</sup>

Beyond giving airtime to extremists, Al Jazeera incongruously attempts to re-brand known terrorist organizations and individuals, by painting them as moderate. This was the case

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<sup>86</sup> Pippa, Norris et al. *Just Framing Terrorism: The News Media, The Government and The Public*. Psychology press, 2013, pp.126, Google Books, [books.google.com/books?id=gvRgFCvR-wcC&dq=al+jazeera+says+america+invasion+is+an+attack+on+islam&source=gbs\\_navlinks\\_s](https://books.google.com/books?id=gvRgFCvR-wcC&dq=al+jazeera+says+america+invasion+is+an+attack+on+islam&source=gbs_navlinks_s)

<sup>87</sup> Barnett, Anthony. “Suicide Bombs are a Duty, says Islamic Scholar.” *The Guardian, Guardian News and Media Limited*, 28 Aug. 2005, [www.theguardian.com/politics/2005/aug/28/uk.terrorism](http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2005/aug/28/uk.terrorism)

<sup>88</sup>Ibid

of Abu Mohammad Al Julani, the leader of the Al-Nusra front. A U.S.A designated terrorist organization, with ties to Al Qaeda, and an active actor in the Syrian civil war. He was invited to speak on Al Jazeera and was giving a public relations treatment by its interviewers, who were reported to have been told not to associate Al Nusra with Al Qaeda. In this light, Al Jazeera sought to give Al Nusra political legitimacy, internationally and regionally and might have played into Al Qaeda's plan to normalize its presence in Syria.

Al Jazeera has now joined the social media space as Al Jazeera plus, which from all indications continue to broadcast anti-Semitism shown in a video on its platform denying the holocaust. The video now deleted claimed that Jews exploit the Holocaust and that Israel is the genocide's "greatest beneficiary."<sup>89</sup> Although, the journalists who were behind the video were suspended, nevertheless, Al Jazeera has been churning out anti-Semitic tropes for a long time.<sup>90</sup> These acts of targeted anti-Semitism and anti-Americanism, especially, on its Arabic channel are deliberate ways Qatar appeals to its broad Arab population.

## **Investment and Branding**

Qatar has been one of the most dynamic international investors in many regions of the world, especially in Europe and the United States of America. With a Gross Domestic Product of 155.8 billion dollars,<sup>91</sup> and a with Purchasing Power Parity of 129,126 U.S. Dollars, Qatar is easily the richest nation in the world per capita.<sup>92</sup> Oil and natural gas are Qatar's main economic

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<sup>89</sup> Haaretz "Al Jazeera Pulls Video Claiming Holocaust Was 'Different From How the Jews Tell It.'" *Haaretz*, 19 May 2019, [www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/al-jazeera-pulls-video-claiming-holocaust-was-different-from-how-the-jews-tell-it-1.7255111](http://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/al-jazeera-pulls-video-claiming-holocaust-was-different-from-how-the-jews-tell-it-1.7255111)

<sup>90</sup> Safi, Marlo. "Al Jazeera Writes Another Chapter in Its Own Ugly History." *National Review*, 24 May 2019, [www.nationalreview.com/2019/05/al-jazeera-anti-semitic-video-controversy-radical-agenda/](http://www.nationalreview.com/2019/05/al-jazeera-anti-semitic-video-controversy-radical-agenda/)

<sup>91</sup> *World Fact Book: Qatar*. Central Intelligence Agency, 8 June 2018, [www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/qa.html](http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/qa.html)

<sup>92</sup> Greggson, Jonathan. "The World's Richest and Poorest Countries." *Global Finance, Class Editori*, 13 Feb. 2017, [www.gfmag.com/global-data/economic-data/worlds-richest-and-poorest-countries](http://www.gfmag.com/global-data/economic-data/worlds-richest-and-poorest-countries)

engine and government source of revenue, driving Qatar's high economic growth and per capita income levels.<sup>93</sup> With a population of about 2.3 million people and an indigenous population of about 300,000, Qatar's economy is able to survive any short or medium term political or economic change to oil or gas given its solid sovereign wealth fund.

Qatar shares the world largest natural gas field with Iran, which it calls the north field, with reserves projected to last tens of decades at the current production level.<sup>94</sup> Qatar's economic position as a leading exporter of liquefied natural gas is further strengthened, with the increase of its customer base from seven in 2010, to twenty-one in 2013, with Asia remaining as the center of its interest.<sup>95</sup> Qatar's sovereign wealth fund is valued at 335 billion dollars, making it the fourteenth largest sovereign wealth fund in the world.<sup>96</sup> Qatar is a major investor in key areas, such as technology, real estate, transportation, banking, and agriculture.

International investment is Qatar's unique way of diversifying its economy and increasing the awareness for its "brand." For Qatar, these investments are also a prime way it makes itself relevant in the economic and political calculus of the states it chooses to invest in. In light of this, Qatar created the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) in 2005 to handle the country's windfall from liquefied natural gas sales, of which it is the world's biggest exporter.<sup>97</sup>

The Qatar Investment Authority, according to its website is devoted to "investing and managing the funds we are responsible for, in a professional, strategic and prudent manner; and by simultaneously developing QIA into a dynamic, multinational, world-class organization."<sup>98</sup>

The Qatar Investment Authority is committed to the aggressive expansion of its investments, not

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<sup>93</sup>*World Fact Book: Qatar*. Central Intelligence Agency, 8 June 2018, [www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/qa.html](http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/qa.html)

<sup>94</sup>Ibid

<sup>95</sup>Kamrava, Mehran. *Qatar: Small State, Big Politics*. Cornell University Press, 2013.

<sup>96</sup>Sergie, Mohamed. "The Tiny Gulf Country with a \$335 Billion Global Empire." *Bloomberg Business, Bloomberg*, 11 Jan. 2017, [www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-01-11/Qatar-sovereign-wealth-fund-s-335-global-empire](http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-01-11/Qatar-sovereign-wealth-fund-s-335-global-empire)

<sup>97</sup>Ibid

<sup>98</sup>"Qatar at a glance." *Qatar Investment Authority*. [www.qia.qa/About/QIAGlance.aspx](http://www.qia.qa/About/QIAGlance.aspx)

only in western economies, which has traditionally been its region of prime choice but also in African countries.

Qatar's foreign policy objectives, in investing in different international markets, make its decisions strategic. This is due to the nature and pattern of its investments, which target high profile ventures in countries that are dominant in world affairs. Given its strong rationale for investing in certain countries, Qatar's investment also serves as a second bottom line, which is advancing Qatar's international standing with these countries.<sup>99</sup> Qatar does this by investing in countries that have strategic value militarily, and politically, with the goal that these countries will extend such valuable assets to cover up for its deficiencies in those areas.

Just as Qatar was able to understand the international climate to forge closer and strategic ties with the U.S., resulting in the Al Udeid base, Qatar also saw the global financial crisis as a strategic opportunity to foster economic ties in Europe for strategic benefits. Qatar's grip in strategic locations in Europe, especially in countries like Britain and France, makes Qatar a major stakeholder in the economic input of these countries. Qatar intends to use this leverage in times of strategic need. For instance, if Qatar is faced with an invasion similar to that of Kuwait, countries enjoying Qatar's investments will be quick to respond in defense of Qatar.

Qatar's investment in London is extensive. In fact, it is hard to walk around London and admire the sights without admiring something paid for by Qatar.<sup>100</sup> Property research company, Datscha, revealed that Qatar Investment Authority owns 879 commercial and residential properties in London, of which about 26 million sq. ft. is commercial property.<sup>101</sup> In all, Qatar's

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<sup>99</sup> Kamrava, Mehran. *Qatar: Small State, Big Politics*. Cornell University Press, 2013.

<sup>100</sup> Robertson, Jamie. "Qatar: Buying Britain by the pound." *BBC Business, the BBC*, 9 June 2017, [www.bbc.com/news/business-40192970](http://www.bbc.com/news/business-40192970)

<sup>101</sup> Ibid

investment in the United Kingdom is estimated to be around 30.6 billion British pounds.<sup>102</sup> These include, but not limited to; its 15% stake in British Stock exchange, investments in Barclays bank, where Qatar has a seven percent stake, investments in Canary Wharf where it has a twenty-four percent stake, investments in Harrods of which it now owns after purchasing the prestigious mall for 1.5 billion British Pounds.<sup>103</sup>

Qatar also has substantial investments in other parts of Europe. Qatar has a 17% stake in Volkswagen, a Germany based automotive company valued at 11 billion dollars, a 2.13% stake in Royal Dutch Shell oil cooperation, and many more. In France, Qatar has invested over 15 billion dollars in various project and ventures, earning it a “preferential investor treatment,” which exempts Qatar owned investment institutions from capital gain taxes on property in France.<sup>104</sup> Qatar also has considerable investments in Greece and Italy. Qatar has a 9.75 investment in Russian owned Rosneft, valued at 6.8 billion dollars.

According to the U.S. State Department, in recent years Qatar has begun to invest heavily in the United States through its sovereign wealth fund and has opened an office in New York to coordinate its investments.<sup>105</sup> Qatar's investment in the United States has been on an increasing trajectory, as it seeks to amend its ties with the U.S. government, which has been on a downward spiral. This is due to Qatar's questionable activities and policies, which undermine its neighbors and U.S. interest in the region. As Qatar's diplomatic rift with its Gulf neighbor's threatens its security, Qatar has given investment in the U.S. more priority.

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<sup>102</sup>Talbot, Valeria (a cura di). *The Rising Gulf. The New Ambitions of the Gulf Monarchies. Edizioni Epoké*, 2016.

<sup>103</sup>“Qatar's Global Spree Shows no Signs of Slowing.” *Independent*, 31 Oct. 2010, [www.independent.co.uk/news/business/analysis-and-features/qatars-global-spree-shows-no-signs-of-slowing-2121112.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/analysis-and-features/qatars-global-spree-shows-no-signs-of-slowing-2121112.html)

<sup>104</sup>Talbot, Valeria (a cura di). *The Rising Gulf. The New Ambitions of the Gulf Monarchies. Edizioni Epoké*, 2016.

<sup>105</sup> *Qatar*. U.S. State Department Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs, U.S. Department of State, Investment Climate Statements, 2017, [www.state.gov/e/eb/rls/othr/ics/2017/nea/269996.htm](http://www.state.gov/e/eb/rls/othr/ics/2017/nea/269996.htm) Qatar-amid concerns-of-shortages-idUSKBN1920EG

Qatar has traditionally viewed its investment in the U.S. Al Udeid airbase as a strategic bridge and extension of U.S. security. However, the U.S. critical stance on Qatar's support for extremists, has strained this bilateral relationship with the U.S. This has prompted Qatar to invest more directly in the U.S. homeland, as a way of improving its relationship with the U.S. This economic move by Qatar coincides with the Economy laden “American first policy” of the Donald Trump Administration, which has been a plus for Qatar.

In this light, the Chief Executive Officer of Qatar Investment Authority, Sheikh Abdullah bin Mohamed bin Saud al-Thani, stated Qatar's plan to invest the remaining part of its forty-five billion dollar U.S. investment capital in the infrastructure of the United States.<sup>106</sup> This is in addition to Qatar's substantial investments in U.S. markets, which include a broad array of sectors. Qatar has more than a 10 percent stake in New York-based luxury jeweler, Tiffany & Co, a 44-percent stake in the \$8.6 billion redevelopment project in New York known as Manhattan West, and a 9.9% stake in the iconic Empire State Building.<sup>107</sup> It also has a majority stake in the city project in Washington D.C, which has been described as Washington’s biggest project in two decades.<sup>108</sup>

Qatar has been a major importer of American weaponry and arms and has increased its defense expenditures from United State defense corporations. In 2014, Qatar was the United States largest customer for foreign military sales, purchasing more than \$10 billion in advanced

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<sup>106</sup> Cornwell, Alexander. “Qatar Sovereign Fund Says Most of Future U.S. Investments in Infrastructure.” *Reuters*, 13 Sept. 2017, [www.reuters.com/article/us-gulf-qatar-qia/qatar-sovereign-fund-says-most-of-future-u-s-investments-in-infrastructure-idUSKCN1B01BL](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-gulf-qatar-qia/qatar-sovereign-fund-says-most-of-future-u-s-investments-in-infrastructure-idUSKCN1B01BL)

<sup>107</sup> Associated Press. “Qatar Buys a Piece of Empire State Building.” *New York Post*, 24 Aug. 2016, [nypost.com/2016/08/24/qatar-buys-a-piece-of-empire-state-building/](http://nypost.com/2016/08/24/qatar-buys-a-piece-of-empire-state-building/)

<sup>108</sup> Fisher, Mark. “Qatar is suddenly investing heavily in the U.S., bankrolling D.C.’s City Center, Other Projects.” *The Washington Post*, 13 Dec. 2013, [www.washingtonpost.com/local/qatar-is-suddenly-investing-heavily-in-the-us-bankrolling-dcs-city-center-other-projects/2013/12/17/1ffaceca-5c6a-11e3-95c2-13623eb2b0e1\\_story.html?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.16492d24ed04](http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/qatar-is-suddenly-investing-heavily-in-the-us-bankrolling-dcs-city-center-other-projects/2013/12/17/1ffaceca-5c6a-11e3-95c2-13623eb2b0e1_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.16492d24ed04)

military equipment (Apache helicopters, Patriot missile defense, and Javelin missiles).<sup>109</sup> Qatar also purchased eight C-17s and four C-130Js via direct commercial sales.<sup>110</sup>

In 2017, Qatar signed a 12 billion dollar deal with the U.S. to buy F-15 fighter jets a deal a Qatari official stated as "proof that U.S. institutions are with the U.S."<sup>111</sup> Qatar views its investment as a form of "relationship investing" to create a positive climate for deeper political ties. Qatar intends to cultivate these relationships with countries that can be called friends in times their political weight will be needed, as it has done in the current GCC crisis.

In this regard, it is no surprise that Qatar has increased its investments in the United States, as part of an economic charm offensive to gain the trust of the U.S., especially after the GCC crisis.<sup>112</sup> From all indications, Qatar's economic move coupled with political lobbying has been yielding some positive results, judging from recent statements made by U.S. policymakers. Remarks made by the U.S. Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense at the inaugural U.S.-Qatar Strategic Dialogue shows that Qatar is beginning to find itself in the good books of the United States.

The U.S. Secretary of State in this summit described Qatar as a "longtime friend and partner," while U.S. Secretary of Defense praised Qatar for its "longstanding support of America's present and continuing commitment to regional security."<sup>113</sup> In a meeting at the White House, President Donald Trump praised Emir Tamim of Qatar, stating, "you've now become a very big advocate (against terrorism) and we appreciate that." Going further, it became apparent

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<sup>109</sup> *U.S. Security Cooperation with Qatar*. Bureau of Political Military Affairs, U.S. Department of State, [www.state.gov/t/pm/rls/fs/2017/266860.htm](http://www.state.gov/t/pm/rls/fs/2017/266860.htm)

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>111</sup> "Qatar Buys F-15 Fighter Planes in Billion Dollar U.S. Deal." *BCC News*, 15 June 2017, [www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-40287570](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-40287570)

<sup>112</sup> Harris, Gardiner. "In Charm Offensive, Qatar Pushes for a Comeback in Washington." *The New York Times*, 9 Feb. 2018, [www.nytimes.com/2018/02/09/us/politics/trump-qatar-lobbying-embargo.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/09/us/politics/trump-qatar-lobbying-embargo.html)

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*



that Qatar's "relationship investing" had a lot to do with the President's change of heart. Especially, after he noted that Qatar "buys a lot of equipment from us, a lot of purchases in the United States, and a lot of military airplanes, and missiles." These statements are in stark contrast to the harsh comments that were directed at Qatar in the wake of the GCC crisis, and shows how Qatar uses investments to strategically achieve foreign-policy objectives.

Internally, Qatar has been able to transform itself from an obscure desert to a land of exquisite and exotic buildings, with magical touches of artistry brilliance and art, coated with luxury, fit for any royalty on earth. Qatar is constantly keeping pace with current and future trends in real estate development, technology, transportation, sports, culture, and education, to ensure Qatar's relevance as a global destination for travelers and tourists. These investments have increased its profile internationally, making Qatar one of the most visited countries in the world today.

Qatar investments in very conspicuous and flamboyant projects in its homeland also help divert attention away from its controversial policies, which cast the small country in a bad light. This may very well be the reason why Qatar has taken deep interest in hosting popular sporting events, in tennis, golf, and, athletics.<sup>114</sup> Qatar's successful bid to host the 2022 International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) world cup, remains one of its most important achievements in its branding efforts. This is because the world cup is the most watched sporting event in the world. Qatar is also a very staunch investor in European football clubs, further increasing its visibility.<sup>115</sup> For Qatar, these investments help their influence and increase their global presence worldwide.

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<sup>114</sup> Palmer, Justin. "Major Sporting Events in Qatar." *Reuters*, 18 Nov. 2018, [www.reuters.com/article/us/sportqatar/major-sporting-events-in-qatar-idUSKCN0J21JB20141118](http://www.reuters.com/article/us/sportqatar/major-sporting-events-in-qatar-idUSKCN0J21JB20141118)

<sup>115</sup> Conn, David. "How Qatar Became a Football Force: From Barcelona to PSG and World Cup." *The Guardian*, 18 Nov. 2013, [www.theguardian.com/football/2013/nov/18/qatar-barcelona-psg-world-cup-2022](http://www.theguardian.com/football/2013/nov/18/qatar-barcelona-psg-world-cup-2022)

Sheikha Moza Bint Nasser, the wife of former Qatar emir, Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, is a spectacle of modernity, and a very conspicuous figure in Qatar's rebranding project. She carries with her, a very plush air of Qatar's soft power and influence, through which Qatar displays its attractiveness to the western world with Arabic characteristics. As the Chair of the Qatar Foundation for Education Science and Community Development, she is the brainchild behind many of Qatar's ventures in education, foreign aids, and investments.<sup>116</sup>

Sheikha Moza's effort in shaping Qatar as a modern state is patterned heavily to accommodate western investments, especially in education. Qatar's educational city according to its website caters to the “rising number of international and regional travelers drawn to Qatar.”<sup>117</sup> It has seen an impressive flow of American educational institutions, such as Georgetown's School of Foreign Service, Northwestern University, Cornell, Carnegie Mellon, Georgetown, Texas A&M, and Virginia Commonwealth universities.<sup>118</sup> These institutions add credibility to Qatar's ambitions to carve a niche for itself as a progressive state.

Although Sheikha Mozah portrays the progressive values of the western world in her initiatives, she also characterizes Qatar's contradictions in her policies. For Example, she chairs the Arab Democracy Foundation, which aims to support the work of Arab civil society organizations that promote democratization and citizen participation.<sup>119</sup> However, she is also a key figure in Qatar's undemocratic system of government, with its poor human rights record for

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<sup>116</sup> Anthony, Andrew. “Sheikha Mozah: The (Un)acceptable Face of Qatar’s Global Expansion.” *The Guardian, Guardian News and Media Limited*, 13 Dec. 2014, [www.theguardian.com/theobserver/2014/dec/14/sheikha-mozah-acceptable-face-qatar-global-expansion](http://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/2014/dec/14/sheikha-mozah-acceptable-face-qatar-global-expansion)

<sup>117</sup> “Destination: Educational City.” *Qatar Foundation*, [www.qf.org.qa/content/the-foundation/issue-87/destination-education-city](http://www.qf.org.qa/content/the-foundation/issue-87/destination-education-city)

<sup>118</sup> Anderson, Nick “In Qatar’s Education City, U.S. Colleges are Building an Academic Oasis.” *The Washington Post*, 6 Dec. 2015, [www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/in-qatars-education-city-us-colleges-are-building-an-academic-oasis/2015/12/06/6b538702-8e01-11e5-ae1f-af46b7df8483\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.770c045bcc5f](http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/in-qatars-education-city-us-colleges-are-building-an-academic-oasis/2015/12/06/6b538702-8e01-11e5-ae1f-af46b7df8483_story.html?utm_term=.770c045bcc5f)

<sup>119</sup> “Arab Democracy foundation.” *Georgetown University, Berkeley Center for Religion Peace and World Affairs*, [berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/organizations/arab-democracy-foundation](http://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/organizations/arab-democracy-foundation)

women and immigrant workers. In this sense, Sheikha Mozah is a symbol of the deep ambiguities that render Qatar such a curious proposition.<sup>120</sup>

### **Mediation and Hyperactive Diplomacy**

The tool of mediation is a special component of Qatar's strategic arsenal, used in asymmetrically increasing its regional and international influence. Article 7 of Qatar's constitution, states that its foreign policy “is based on the principle of strengthening international peace and security, as a means of encouraging the peaceful resolution of international disputes.”<sup>121</sup> This plays in line with Qatar's overall objective to “carve out an image” for itself, an image of a credible mediator and a peacemaker.<sup>122</sup> (Although Qatar’s adventurism since the days of the Arab spring has dented its image as a credible mediator, it is unlikely that Qatar has abandoned mediation as a foreign policy tool.)

Qatar's desire to mediate and act as an intermediary in regional conflicts has deep traditional and religious roots. The *Hakam*, which invokes a figure of maturity and impartiality as a mediator of disputes between tribes, is part of ancient Arab tradition and was a key part of Prophet Mohamed's legacy.<sup>123</sup> The *Hakam* in a dispute is usually associated with wisdom and justice. Qatar desires to be seen amid conflicts and disputes, as a regional and international actor with well-meaning intentions, capable of providing credible mediating efforts. For Qatar, mediation and hyperactive diplomacy is a gateway to influence and stability, since mediating states are usually accorded respect from the international community.

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<sup>120</sup>Anthony, Andrew. “Sheikha Mozah: the (Un)acceptable Face of Qatar’s Global Expansion.” *The Guardian, Guardian News and Media Limited*, 13 Dec. 2014, [www.theguardian.com/theobserver/2014/dec/14/sheikha-mozah-acceptable-face-qatar-global-expansion](http://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/2014/dec/14/sheikha-mozah-acceptable-face-qatar-global-expansion)

<sup>121</sup>Ulrichsen, Kristian Coates. *Qatar and the Arab Spring*. Oxford University Press, 2014.

<sup>122</sup>Barakat, Sultan. “Qatari Mediation between Ambition and Achievement.” *Brookings Doha Center*, 12 Nov. 2016, [www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Final-PDF-English.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Final-PDF-English.pdf)

<sup>123</sup>Fromherz, Allen J. *Qatar Rise to Power and Influence*. IB Tauris, 2012.

Through diplomacy and mediation, Qatar has been active in several conflicts. This has increased Qatar's standing and respect in the international community as a go to actor for negotiations and dispute resolution. For instance, the United States has been known to "consult" with Qatar on certain issues, due to Qatar's extensive contact with a wide range of actors of significant importance, such as extremist movements and leaders.

Qatar sees mediation as a very intricate part of its foreign policy, intended to remove the large shadow cast by larger neighbors such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt. In this regard, it is not surprising that Saudi Arabia and Egypt have frowned at Qatar for some of its diplomatic initiatives. For example, according to leaked U.S. diplomatic cables, a high-level Egyptian diplomat in Doha claimed in 2010 "frankly, Egypt is angered by Qatar's mediation [in Darfur] purely because it involves a country in Egypt's back yard." This statement is a clear indication that Qatar's leadership role is beginning to take strong roots in the Middle East.

Qatar, before to the Arab spring, had meticulously courted the image, and reputation of a neutral party in disputes. This element of neutrality was a great booster for Qatar's credibility in its mediation endeavors, regionally and internationally. Unlike the great powers on the global stage or the regional powers like Saudi Arabia, the disputing parties always welcomed Qatar's non-partisan position in international politics.

A classic example is Qatar's mediation effort in the 2008 Lebanon crisis, which remains one of Qatar's greatest diplomatic achievements. The mediation process overseen by Qatar was successful, because, the warring sides trusted Qatar's credibility, as opposed to other countries that had offered to intervene in the crisis.<sup>124</sup> The outcome of this effort resulted in the "Doha accord." Political pundits have noted that Qatar's status was further enhanced, as it succeeded

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<sup>124</sup> Worth, Robert F. "Qatar, Playing All Sides, is a Nonstop Mediator." 9 July 2008, *The New York Times*, [www.nytimes.com/2008/07/09/world/middleeast/09qatar.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/09/world/middleeast/09qatar.html)

when powerful countries failed. The Doha accord stands as a hallmark and emblem of Qatar's diplomatic prowess and good neighborliness, which is what Qatar, intends to portray in its international relations.

Qatar's mediation has certain peculiarities that stand out from the crowd of other small states, which also engage in diplomatic efforts to increase their international standing, such as Norway and Switzerland. One of which is Qatar's flair for visibility, attention, and the attraction that comes with closely monitored and scrutinized regional or international disputes. A mediator familiar with Qatar's diplomatic initiative stated that Qatar “often ends up placing more emphasis on the ‘news’ of mediation rather than the outcomes.”<sup>125</sup> Qatar appreciates the goodwill that comes from offering a lending hand to the international community, occupied by different challenges, which serves as an impetus for its leadership to do more.

Qatar fully understands that the more mediation successes it records, the more Qatar is able to further its reputation and standing internationally. Since 2005, Qatar’s extensive involvement in regional mediation, in countries such as Sudan, Lebanon, Yemen, Iraq, etc., has led analysts to dub the country ‘the non-stop mediator.’<sup>126</sup> However, Qatar’s role in the Arab Spring and other Middle Eastern disputes has damaged its reputation as an impartial mediator. Qatar decided to take sides with Islamist movements, based on its assumption that they will be the foundation of political power in the Middle East. On the long run, this has proved false, and Qatar has lost a great deal of the credibility it once enjoyed, in mediating between conflicting parties, due to its neutrality.

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<sup>125</sup> Dorsey, James M. *Shifting Sands: Essays on Sports and Politics in the Middle East and North*, World Scientific, 2017. Google Books,

[books.google.com/books/about/Shifting\\_Sands\\_Essays\\_On\\_Sports\\_And\\_Poli.html?id=KUVBDwAAQBAJ](https://books.google.com/books/about/Shifting_Sands_Essays_On_Sports_And_Poli.html?id=KUVBDwAAQBAJ)

<sup>126</sup> Worth, Robert F. “Qatar, Playing All Sides, is a Nonstop Mediator.” 9 July 2008, *The New York Times*, [www.nytimes.com/2008/07/09/world/middleeast/09qatar.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/09/world/middleeast/09qatar.html)

In fact, Qatar has come under heavy criticism for some of the groups it supports in its bid to mediate. For instance, Qatar's hosting of Hamas leaders and its financial aid to the Gaza Strip, has drawn criticism from the U.S., as support for a terrorist organization.<sup>127</sup> Although, Qatar says it only supports the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people, nevertheless, Hamas violent positions on a range of issues are deemed too extreme to support in any way. Despite the fact, that Qatar's back-channel access, and mediation were initially its unique selling points, its adventurism has caused widespread regional and international irritation, making Qatar a victim of its own success.<sup>128</sup>

Another critical aspect of Qatar's mediation efforts, are the huge sums of money the Qatari government occasionally pays to terrorist organizations as ransoms for hostages. It is reported, that Qatar paid as much as a billion dollars to former al-Qaeda affiliate in Syria, and to Iranian security officials to secure the release of members of the Qatari royal family.<sup>129</sup> Qatar has also facilitated the release of citizens of other countries from terrorist organizations, by paying tens of millions of dollars as ransoms on behalf of their government.<sup>130</sup>

In a congressional testimony to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, David Andrew Weinberg stated, that Qatar's "reckless enthusiasm" for paying ransoms in its negotiations is part of "Doha's broader efforts to turn money and extremist connections into political power, even if

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<sup>127</sup>Katzman, Kenneth. *Qatar: Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy*. 1 Mar. 2017, Congressional Research Service, [fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R44533.pdf](https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R44533.pdf)

<sup>128</sup>Dr Feiler, Gil and Hayim Zeev. "Qatar: The Limits of Nouveau Riche Diplomacy." *The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, Bar-Ilan University*, No. 131, 25 Apr. 2017, [besacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/MSPS131\\_EN.pdf](https://besacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/MSPS131_EN.pdf)

<sup>129</sup>Keatinge, Tom. "Why Qatar is the Focus of Terrorists Claims." *BBC News*, 13 June 2017, [www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-40246734](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-40246734)

<sup>130</sup>Weinberg, David. *Terrorist Financing: Kidnapping, Antiquities Trafficking, and Private Donations*. Hearing before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade, 17 Nov. 2015, [docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA18/20151117/104202/HHRG-114-FA18-Wstate-WeinbergD-20151117.pdf](https://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA18/20151117/104202/HHRG-114-FA18-Wstate-WeinbergD-20151117.pdf)

doing so inevitably results in the strengthening of violent extremists who act in the service of al-Qaeda.”<sup>131</sup>

### **Strategic Defense and Security Alliances**

Qatar's capacity to build a military force sufficient to meet its strategic security requirements is virtually non-existent. As stated above, Qatar has one of the smallest population sizes in the Persian Gulf.<sup>132</sup> Unlike many of its regional counterparts such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Kuwait, Qatar does not have a credible military force of its own. This fact has long featured in the security calculus of Qatari leaders for decades. For this reason, Qatar actively seeks out alliances and partnerships that promise both political and territorial security assurances from adversaries.

Qatar's international relations with dominant foreign powers are strategic and deliberate. For Qatar, international relations are not just political relationships, but multi-faceted tools in achieving its national interest especially its security. This approach to international relations, for security benefits, has been a central part of Qatar's international interactions with foreign powers for decades. Security was, in fact, the dominant strategic reason for which Qatar and the British Empire interacted before it gained its independence in 1971. The British Empire protected Qatar from the expansionist and the dominant foreign policies of actors such as Saudi Arabia and Bahrain.

Qatar's emergence as an influential player in regional and global politics has particularly increased its need for security. Especially, since the regime of Sheikh Hamad bin Al-Thani,

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<sup>131</sup>Weinberg, David. *Terrorist Financing: Kidnapping, Antiquities Trafficking, and Private Donations*. Hearing before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade, 17 Nov. 2015, docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA18/20151117/104202/HHRG-114-FA18-Wstate-WeinbergD-20151117.pdf

<sup>132</sup>Kamrava, Mehran. *Qatar: Small State, Big Politics*. Cornell University Press, 2013.

whose grand vision for Qatar regionally, and internationally brought the small state to prominence. Qatar has pursued foreign policies that have traditionally been outside the forte of “small powers.” In an international setting where small states are expected to roam within the sphere of influence of larger powers; Qatar has actively sought to define and create its circle of operations. Such steps have caused negative reactions from Qatar’s neighbors, which view Qatar’s actions as threats to their geopolitical ambitions. In this regard, Qatar’s strategic partnerships are a shield, by which Qatar can asymmetrically protect itself from the threats that come with its oversized role.

The first Gulf War brought to the fore, the vulnerability of small states like Qatar in the Persian Gulf region, with no significant defense apparatus and posture, to deter or pose significant damage or cost to a determined adversary. Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait accentuated Qatar's need for a security ally to deter potential adversaries, especially, after the absence of the British security umbrella it once enjoyed. In this light, Qatar has sought and maintained a close relationship with the United States to boost its security on a strategic level. Following the end of the Gulf War, Qatar and the U.S. signed a defense cooperation agreement in June 1992, which permitted U.S. access to bases, propositioning of U.S. material, and joint U.S. military exercises.<sup>133</sup>

This relationship, between the U.S. and Qatar, is proof of Qatar's ability to intersect itself with the strategic interest of the dominant powers. Qatar is adept at understanding international trends, and like sea-waves rides them to its interest. Although U.S.-Qatar relationship began to take deep roots after the signing of the 1972 defense alliance agreement, Qatar's willingness to collaborate with the U.S. in the famous “war against terror” deepened this relationship. Qatar

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<sup>133</sup>Looney, Robert. *Handbook of U.S.-Middle East Relations*. Routledge, 22 May 2014, Google Books, [books.google.com/books/about/Handbook\\_of\\_US\\_Middle\\_East\\_Relations.html?id=yFqhAwAAQBAJ](https://books.google.com/books/about/Handbook_of_US_Middle_East_Relations.html?id=yFqhAwAAQBAJ)



followed the international “anti-terror wave” with keen interest. Qatar did not only court the United States, but it also financed the U.S. Al-Udeid base on its soil to the tune of one billion dollars, making it the largest U.S. base in the region.<sup>134</sup>

The Al-Udeid base houses the forward headquarters of the U.S. Air Force Central Command Combined Air, and Space Operations Center, and the 379th Air Expedition Wing.<sup>135</sup> It has been a prominent feature in the ongoing counter-terrorism operations in the Middle East, with some experts stating that some U.S. capabilities in the Al-Udeid base will be difficult to relocate quickly to another destination.<sup>136</sup> The constant upgrade the base enjoys, with Qatar's significant approval and contribution, is vital to understanding the role the base plays in Qatar's national security policy.

Qatar views the base as an anchor for its security. It is more than an airbase to Qatar, in its strategic calculus; the base is a deterrent against adversaries and potential invaders. Qatar willingness to have U.S. troops and allies on its soil is a major factor that makes the small state of Qatar “strategic” to the U.S. militarily. Qatar has gone and continues to go to great lengths to ensure that U.S. presence in its territory is entrenched as much as possible. Even to the point of allowing the sale of alcohol in U.S. military bases, which is unusual for a country that brands itself as a follower of the Wahhabi version of Islam. In fact, in 1999, Qatar's former emir, Sheikh Hamad, reportedly told U.S. officials that he would like to see as many as 10,000 U.S. servicemen permanently stationed at Al Udeid.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>134</sup>Blanchard, Christopher M. *Qatar: Background and U.S. Relations*. Congressional Research Service, 4 Nov. 2014, [fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL31718.pdf](https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL31718.pdf)

<sup>135</sup>London, Brad. “Qatar Host U.S. Largest U.S. Military Base in the Middle East.” *CNN. CNN U.S. Edition*, 6 June. 2017, [edition.cnn.com/2017/06/05/middleeast/qatar-us-largest-base-in-mideast/index.html](https://edition.cnn.com/2017/06/05/middleeast/qatar-us-largest-base-in-mideast/index.html)

<sup>136</sup>Hammond, Joseph. “Moving Al-Udeid Base from Qatar Discussed in Washington D.C.” *Small Wars Journal*, [smallwarsjournal.com/blog/moving-al-udeid-base-from-qatar-discussed-in-washington-dc](https://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/moving-al-udeid-base-from-qatar-discussed-in-washington-dc)

<sup>137</sup>“Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar.” *Global Security*, [www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/udeid.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/udeid.htm)

Qatar also has a defense partnership with Turkey through a defense partnership agreement signed in 2016. The defense agreement provides for Turkey's installation of a military base in Qatar, and joint military drills aimed at improving Qatar's army and boosting military cooperation.<sup>138</sup> France and Britain also maintain a substantial military presence in Qatar. Aside from hosting foreign troops on its soil, Qatar is a major buyer of defense and military hardware and capabilities, which Qatar uses to curry favors from countries it seeks to partner with.

In light of the current Gulf Cooperation Council crisis, Qatar's foreign minister has made it clear, that in the event Qatar faces military aggression it “has enough friends in order to stop them...”<sup>139</sup> These friends are undoubtedly, the well cultivated and courted allies of Qatar, which continue to benefit one way or the other from Qatar's strategic benefits. As soon as the GCC crisis started amid unprecedented diplomatic and economic isolation of Qatar, Turkey immediately sent foodstuffs to Qatar and fast-tracked a legislation to increase its military presence there.<sup>140</sup> Even Iran, whom Qatar would not take a hard stance on, compensated Qatar by sending food and fruits. The U.S. Department of Defense also lent Qatar a goodwill message as a sign of solidarity, despite contrary messages from its Commander in Chief.<sup>141</sup> This goes a long way to demonstrate how Qatar can strategically intersect itself with dominant powers, in ways that make it difficult for these states to ignore Qatar’s value to them.

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<sup>138</sup>“Turkey: Qatar Military Base for the security of Gulf.” *Al Jazeera*. 13 June 2017, [www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/06/turkey-Qatar-military-base-security-gulf-170610150500657.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/06/turkey-Qatar-military-base-security-gulf-170610150500657.html)

<sup>139</sup> Ibid

<sup>140</sup>Al-Haj, Saeed “Analysis: The Implications of Qatar-Turkey Alliance.” *Al-Jazeera*, 18 June 2017, [www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/06/implications-Qatar-turkey-alliance-170618110726262.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/06/implications-Qatar-turkey-alliance-170618110726262.html)

<sup>141</sup>Stewart, Philip. “U.S. Military Praises Qatar Despite Trump Tweet.” *Reuters*, 6 June 2017, [www.reuters.com/article/U.S.-gulf-Qatar-USA-pentagon/u-s-military-praises-Qatar-despite-trump-tweet-idUSKBN18X2G2](http://www.reuters.com/article/U.S.-gulf-Qatar-USA-pentagon/u-s-military-praises-Qatar-despite-trump-tweet-idUSKBN18X2G2)

## **THE DIVERSE INTERESTS OF THE UNITED STATES IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

It is pertinent to understand the interest of the United States in the Middle East, to be able to comprehend how Qatar's foreign policies and the tools used in achieving them, affect or undermine the geopolitical position and objective of the United States. The Middle East is of strategic value to the United States and remains so until this day. The United States has vital geopolitical, economic, and security interests in the Middle East, and as such, it is always in the interest of the United States to maintain a coherent policy and posture to realize its objectives. The interests of the United States in the Middle East are as follows:

### **The Political Stability and Security of its Allies**

The political stability of the Middle East region is of strategic benefit to the United States and its interests. The U.S. has a long political history with the Middle East and began deepening its involvement in the region after the start of the cold war. This was because it became imperative for the United States within the context of the cold war to defend and expand its geopolitical sphere of influence in the region. President Dwight Eisenhower once described the Middle East as the “most strategically important area in the world.”<sup>142</sup> Although, the cold war is over and the United States remains the world's only superpower, the Middle East as a geopolitical zone, still looms large in the strategic calculus of the United States.

As the primary security guarantor and partner of many Middle Eastern countries, the United States has a strong interest in the region. In this light, despite the ambivalence of U.S. policymakers about U.S. involvement in the Middle East, U.S. interests in the region are still

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<sup>142</sup>Chomsky, Noah. *Hegemony or Survival: America's Quest for Global Dominance*. Henry Holt and Company, 2007, Good Books. [books.google.com/books/about/Hegemony\\_Or\\_Survival.html?id=7idg2XjTVroC](https://books.google.com/books/about/Hegemony_Or_Survival.html?id=7idg2XjTVroC)

significant, and the prospect that Middle Eastern troubles will impact America if left unattended is as high as ever.<sup>143</sup> It is thus, in the interest of the United States, to maintain a substantive level of influence and power projection capabilities, coupled with right foreign policies to achieve its objectives.

The impact of history in Middle Eastern affairs, worldview, and international relations cannot be overstated, and it is displayed in the peculiar nature of challenges that face the region. The Middle East experiences relentless wars, disputes, and conflicts making it one of the most volatile regions in the world. These conflicts and disputes are so intricate and volatile that wars, for the most part, lurk just a few miscalculations away.

The regional order of the Middle East is very fragile, and can easily give way to chaos and crisis that can threaten the international system in a myriad of ways, and most importantly, threaten U.S. interest. A very glaring example is the 1973 oil crisis that caused shock waves throughout the U.S. economy. This crisis was due to U.S. decision to support Israel in its war against Egypt and Syria, leading to Arab countries imposing an oil embargo on the U.S. and some allied Western nations. The impact of the crisis on the world economy and the United States was quite profound. Especially, after the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) joined by Syria, Egypt and Tunisia, imposed a total embargo on shipments of oil to the United States and selectively curbed exports to other consumers in Western Europe and Japan.<sup>144</sup>

The price shock of 1973 is reported to have shrunk the U.S. economy by approximately 2.5 percent, increased unemployment and inflation, and spun the economy into a severe and

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<sup>143</sup>Brands, Hal. "Why America Can't Quit the Middle East." *Hoover Institution*, 21 Mar. 2019, [www.hoover.org/research/why-america-cant-quit-middle-east](http://www.hoover.org/research/why-america-cant-quit-middle-east)

<sup>144</sup>Verassto, Frank and Guy Caruso. "The Arab Oil Embargo-40 Years Later." *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 16 Oct. 2013, [www.csis.org/analysis/arab-oil-embargo%E2%80%9440-years-later](http://www.csis.org/analysis/arab-oil-embargo%E2%80%9440-years-later)

extended recession (1973–1975).<sup>145</sup> The 1973 oil crisis has been referred to as the most severe financial depression after the great depression.<sup>146</sup>

In this same way, the Iranian revolution of 1979 also had a great effect on the interest of the United States, politically and economically. The Iranian revolution put great stress on the American people psychologically, because, of the hostage crisis, which lasted for 444 days.<sup>147</sup> The invasion of Kuwait by Iraq's Saddam Hussein is another typical example of the importance of the Middle Eastern region to the United States, and its interest. As explained by then President H.W Bush, “Our jobs, our way of life, our own freedom, and the freedom of friendly countries around the world would all suffer if control of the world's great oil reserves fell into the hands of Saddam Hussein.”<sup>148</sup>

Failure to have acted swiftly in ousting Saddam Hussein from Kuwait could have impacted negatively on the U.S. and the world economy. This was because Saddam Hussein's occupation of Kuwait would have left him with a substantial amount of the world's oil reserves, giving him the power to dictate oil prices, creating economic panic and chaos worldwide. However, despite a resounding and impressive victory over Iraq, the war set off an economic recession caused in part by a spike in oil prices.<sup>149</sup>

The examples above are indications of the need for the United States to ensure the geopolitical stability of the Middle East and friendly regimes. The importance of U.S. Middle

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<sup>145</sup>Verassto, Frank and Guy Caruso. “The Arab Oil Embargo-40 Years Later.” *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 16 Oct. 2013, [www.csis.org/analysis/arab-oil-embargo%E2%80%9440-years-later](http://www.csis.org/analysis/arab-oil-embargo%E2%80%9440-years-later)

<sup>146</sup> Mitchel, Dan. “These Were the 6 Major American Economic Crises of the Last Century.” *Time*, 16 July 2015, [time.com/3957499/american-economic-crises-history/](http://time.com/3957499/american-economic-crises-history/)

<sup>147</sup> *444 Days: Selected Records Concerning the Iran Hostage Crisis 1979-1981*. National Archives, the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, [www.archives.gov/research/foreign-policy/iran-hostage-crisis](http://www.archives.gov/research/foreign-policy/iran-hostage-crisis)

<sup>148</sup> Hoffman, David and Patrick E. Tyler. “Bush Announces Sadam as Threat to Arabs, West.” *The Washington Post*, 16 August. 1990, [www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1990/08/16/bush-denounces-saddam-as-threat-to-arabs-west/f3ba4a06-7aba-4c94-91c6-8191738be667/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.c0f983ea43d8](http://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1990/08/16/bush-denounces-saddam-as-threat-to-arabs-west/f3ba4a06-7aba-4c94-91c6-8191738be667/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.c0f983ea43d8)

<sup>149</sup> Tyler, Patrick .E. “Profound Effect on U.S. Economy is seen From a War against Iraq.” *The New York Times*, 30 July 2002, [www.nytimes.com/2002/07/30/world/profound-effect-on-U.S.-economy-is-seen-from-a-war-against-iraq.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2002/07/30/world/profound-effect-on-U.S.-economy-is-seen-from-a-war-against-iraq.html)

Eastern allies and partners, in the economic, security, and other vital sectors of the United States is evident. These strategic partnerships contribute to U.S. prosperity and safety. The interest of the United States in the Middle East is best secured in a strategic environment of peace and political stability. The U.S. thus, makes it a point of duty to ensure the political climate of the Middle East is favorable to its interests.

The political coloration of the Middle East has taken on a very distinct tone since the Arab spring. The Arab spring began a new chapter in the geopolitical dynamics of the Middle East, leaving it more vulnerable to conflicts, and wars than almost any other time in its history. The wave of revolutions that has swept the Middle East has changed the political landscape, with longtime autocrats gone, and some new regimes put in place.

With this chaotic landscape, political instability permeates the region at unseen levels, leading to many failed states devoid of any semblance of government and order, especially with the outbreak of civil wars and conflicts in countries like Syria and Yemen. The geopolitical significance of these conflicts to the United States stems from U.S. involvement with some of these conflicts, along with its snowballing, and domino effect that characterizes conflicts in the Middle East. This spillover of disputes and conflict create uncertainties and increase unpredictability, which can lead to more conflict if not properly managed.

In this light, Iran plays a particularly adversarial role in the Middle East, as Iran's expansionist policy creates fear and discontent among allies, who rely on U.S. leadership to deter Iranian influence in the region. According to the U.S. National Security Strategy, "Iran continues to sow violence and remains the most significant challenge to Middle East stability."<sup>150</sup> In recent times, Iran has again shown its penchant for acting as a destabilizing force against U.S. interest

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<sup>150</sup>*National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. The White House, Dec. 2017, [www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf)

in the Middle East, by threatening the freedom of navigation on the strategic Strait of Hormuz, in response to U.S. sanctions.<sup>151</sup>

Iran's role in the Yemeni civil war has exacerbated the conflict with its backing of Houthi rebels, who fight against the internationally recognized regime of President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi.<sup>152</sup> Iran's support for the brutal and autocratic government of Assad in Syria also goes against the objectives of U.S. policymakers in the region. As noted by the National Defense Strategy, "Iran is asserting an arc of influence and instability" which challenges U.S. goals in the Middle East.<sup>153</sup>

### **Counter Terrorism and Security**

Countering-terrorism in the Middle East is of strategic importance to the United States, and a source of significant concern for U.S. strategic thinkers and policymakers. The 9/11 attacks on the United States by Al Qaeda, brought to the fore the strategic importance of the Middle East region in the security orbit of the United States. Before the 9/11 attacks, the United States had been subject to several terrorist attacks. One of such attacks was in Yemen, when Al Qaeda attacked the USS *Cole* in the port of Aden with a boat filled with explosives, killing 17 American

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<sup>151</sup> Shahla, Arsalan and Nasser Ladane. "Iran Raises Stakes in U.S. Showdown With Threat to Close Hormuz." *Bloomberg*, 22 Apr. 2019, [www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-04-22/iran-will-close-strait-of-hormuz-if-it-cant-use-it-fars](http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-04-22/iran-will-close-strait-of-hormuz-if-it-cant-use-it-fars)

<sup>152</sup> Kalin, Stephen and Noah Browning. "Saudi Arabia and UAE Suffer Yemen Setback as Allies Fall Out." *Reuters*, 2 Feb. 2018, [www.reuters.com/article/U.S.-yemen-security/saudi-arabia-and-uae-suffer-yemen-setback-as-allies-fall-out-idUSKBN1FM1S3](http://www.reuters.com/article/U.S.-yemen-security/saudi-arabia-and-uae-suffer-yemen-setback-as-allies-fall-out-idUSKBN1FM1S3)

<sup>153</sup> *National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*. Department of Defense, Feb. 2018, [fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/IN10855.pdf](http://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/IN10855.pdf)

sailors.<sup>154</sup> Also included is the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center, which killed six people and injured over a thousand, which was also perpetrated by al Qaeda.<sup>155</sup>

The 9/11 attacks demonstrated the changing security landscape, caused by the growing inter-connectedness of the world due to globalization. It used to be that the United States had for years derived its sense of security from its unique geographical position, bordered by the sea, and its notable influence over its neighbors. The global landscape has changed, with the improvement of technology, communication, and transportation. Terrorists seek to take advantage of these changes to further their destructive goals, such as spreading propaganda through social media, and the potential use of offensive cyber capabilities against target countries.<sup>156</sup>

As terrorist organizations seek to increase the lethality of their attacks, they have alarmingly turned to the acquisition of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). The spread of nuclear weapon technology and advanced manufacturing technology remains a persistent problem, while recent advances in bioengineering raise another concern, increasing the potential, variety, and ease of access to biological weapons.<sup>157</sup> Terrorist organizations such as the Islamic State have been reported to use chemical weapons in Syria.<sup>158</sup> Thus, raising concerns of the possibility that a terrorist organization with WMD capability would seek to use it against the U.S., if they could.

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<sup>154</sup> Lamothe, Dan. "The USS Cole was Bombed 15 Years Ago. Now it's a Floating Memorial To those Lost." *The Washington Post*, 12 Oct. 2015, [www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2015/10/12/the-uss-cole-was-bombed-15-years-ago-now-its-a-floating-memorial-to-those-lost/?utm\\_term=.949080817278](http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2015/10/12/the-uss-cole-was-bombed-15-years-ago-now-its-a-floating-memorial-to-those-lost/?utm_term=.949080817278)

<sup>155</sup> Philips, James. "The Changing Face of Middle Eastern Terrorism." *The Heritage Foundation*, 6 Oct. 1994, [www.heritage.org/homeland-security/report/the-changing-face-middle-eastern-terrorism](http://www.heritage.org/homeland-security/report/the-changing-face-middle-eastern-terrorism)

<sup>156</sup> Berman, Ilan. "Technology is Making Terrorists More Effective and Harder to Thwart." *National Interest*, 22 Feb. 2019, [nationalinterest.org/feature/technology-making-terrorists-more-effective%E2%80%94and-harder-thwart-45452](http://nationalinterest.org/feature/technology-making-terrorists-more-effective%E2%80%94and-harder-thwart-45452)

<sup>157</sup> *National Strategy for Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction Terrorism*. The White House, Dec. 2018, [www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/20181210\\_National-Strategy-for-Countering-WMD-Terrorism.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/20181210_National-Strategy-for-Countering-WMD-Terrorism.pdf)

<sup>158</sup> Ibid



Terrorist organizations that operate in the Middle East, such as Al-Qaeda, Al-Nusra, and The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS), are still major threats to the U.S. ISIS in particular mirrors the modern face of terrorism, with its diverse pool of young talents which are able to harness technology to further their agenda. In this regard, ISIS as an organization has been able to make extensive use of technology to carry out operations and logistics which increase their reach and lethality. For example, through the use of social media, ISIS has been able to recruit individuals and spread its propaganda, at levels not seen before from a terrorist organization. The Islamic state is also reported to have employed drones in Syria, as tools for surveillance, and reconnaissance.<sup>159</sup> Although the territorial gains of the Islamic State have been largely reduced, ISIS as well as other terrorist organizations like Al-Qaeda, are still dangerous to the United States.

The continuous presence of wars and conflicts in the Middle East region has created quite a number of failed or weak states. These conflicts and wars are largely due to geopolitical tussles between regional powers, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia in Yemen. In Syria, foreign powers such as, Iran, Russia, U.S.A, and Turkey have diverse interests, which have directly or indirectly contributed to the Syrian war.<sup>160</sup> These wars and conflicts have created the fertile ground for the breeding of terrorism, and violent extreme organizations. Thus, terrorist groups fill the political and administrative void in many parts of the region, which offer various alternative structures for governance.

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<sup>159</sup> Berman, Ilan. "Technology is Making Terrorists More Effective and Harder to Thwart." *National Interest*, 22 Feb. 2019, [nationalinterest.org/feature/technology-making-terrorists-more-effective%E2%80%94and-harder-thwart-45452](http://nationalinterest.org/feature/technology-making-terrorists-more-effective%E2%80%94and-harder-thwart-45452)

<sup>160</sup> Friedman, Uri. "Syria's War has never been More International." 14 Feb. 2018, *The Atlantic*, [www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/02/syria-civil-war-next/553232/](http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/02/syria-civil-war-next/553232/)

This poses a threat to the United States, as terrorist organizations such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda are determined to destroy the United States.<sup>161</sup> In this light, a terrorist organization that is allowed the laxity to function as a government will most likely allow its territory to be a staging ground for terrorist's attacks. It was this scenario that enabled Al Qaeda to carry out the 9/11 attacks on the United States from Afghanistan, as the Taliban government permitted Afghanistan to be used by them.

Islamist organizations such as Hamas and the Taliban seek to entrench themselves into the political fabric of state institutions. Hamas, which has been designated as a terrorist organization by the United States, has been very active in the administrative and governmental structure of the Palestinians in the West Bank.<sup>162</sup> Although the Palestine people elected Hamas in a democratic process, this group is a destabilizing factor to the security of Israel, which is a U.S. ally. The same goes for Hezbollah, the so-called "party of God." Hezbollah functions as a legitimate party in Lebanon; however, it has been a powerful asymmetric tool, in the arsenal of Iran for unleashing mayhem against Iran's enemies, especially Israel, whom it has fought a major war with.<sup>163</sup>

Terrorism in the Middle East has taken a particularly ugly turn, as proxy wars in the region have become fiercer, and some states are beginning to throw caution to the wind by sponsoring known terrorist groups to score geopolitical gains. These actions hamper U.S. efforts to fight terrorism and promote instability. The continuous funding of terrorist organizations poses

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<sup>161</sup> *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. The White House, Dec. 2017, [www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf)

<sup>162</sup> Davidson, Adam. "Hamas: Government or Terrorist Organization?" *National Public Radio*, 6 Dec. 2006, [www.npr.org/2006/12/06/6583080/hamas-government-or-terrorist-organization](http://www.npr.org/2006/12/06/6583080/hamas-government-or-terrorist-organization)

<sup>163</sup> Feltman, Jeffery. "Hezbollah: Revolutionary Iran's most Successful Export." *Brookings Institution*, 17 Jan. 2019, [www.brookings.edu/opinions/hezbollah-revolutionary-irans-most-successful-export/](http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/hezbollah-revolutionary-irans-most-successful-export/)

a threat to the homeland in the long run. In this light, the United States has a vital and significant interest in stopping funding for terrorist organizations.<sup>164</sup>

### **The Stability and Security of Israel**

Israel and the United States of America have a strategic relationship, which has lasted for decades, going back to World War Two.<sup>165</sup> These two nations share deeply valued ideals and fundamental beliefs in democracy, and the rule of law. These make Israel particularly valuable to the United States, as the only viable and working democracy in the Middle East. Israel is thus expected to be a strategic buffer and a democratic ally in a region that is saturated with autocratic and dictatorial regimes. Israel as a strategic ally has extensive military, technological, and intelligence cooperation with the United States, which helps the U.S. in navigating the complexities of the Middle East.<sup>166</sup>

Israel serves as a valuable partner for U.S. security interest in the Middle East and has taken on security missions that would have been politically, and militarily difficult for the United States. For example, Israel's bombing of Iraq's and Syria's nuclear facility in 1981 and 2007 respectively, would have presented the U.S. with political problems, if it was to be carried out by U.S. forces. However, Israel was able to succeed in destroying the targets which could have had wide-reaching implications for the U.S., had these countries been able to develop nuclear weapons. Noteworthy, is Israel's contribution to U.S. counter-terrorism efforts in the Middle

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<sup>164</sup> *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*. U.S. Department of State Archives, 2001-2009, [state.gov/s/ct/rls/wh/71803.htm](http://state.gov/s/ct/rls/wh/71803.htm)

<sup>165</sup> Lockie, Alex. "Here's Why the U.S. and Israel are such Close Allies." *Business Insider*, 18 Feb. 2017, [www.businessinsider.com/U.S.-israel-allies-2017-2](http://www.businessinsider.com/U.S.-israel-allies-2017-2)

<sup>166</sup> Eisenstadt, Michael and David Pollock. "Friends with Benefits: Why the U.S.-Israeli Alliance Is Good for America." *Washington Institute*, 7 Nov. 2012, [www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/friends-with-benefits-why-the-U.S.-israeli-alliance-is-good-for-america](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/friends-with-benefits-why-the-U.S.-israeli-alliance-is-good-for-america)

East, as its insights and knowledge about the Middle East are unparalleled, and its reach in the region is unmatched.<sup>167</sup>

In this light, the political, economic, and security stability of Israel is of vital importance to the United States, due to its strategic gains and benefits. The United States and Israel share similar perspectives on security threats to their homelands and citizens, which itself has become a cementing factor in their relationship. One of such threats is the Islamic Republic of Iran. Iran has been described by some analysts as an obstacle to America's leadership and interest in the region. A view shared by General Joseph Votel, commander of the U.S. Central Command, who stated in a congressional hearing that Iran plays a “destabilizing role” in the region.<sup>168</sup> Iran's disdain for the U.S. is well known, and there is no greater buffer against Iran and its activities than the state of Israel. Israel's role in helping the U.S. contain Iran is highly valuable and has led to outstanding results in the realm of intelligence, and counter-terrorism efforts relating to Iran.

Iran, as a threat to the state of Israel, has sometimes been described as existential in scale, given Iran's determination to destroy Israel. Iran is a state supporter and sponsor of terrorism and uses different terrorist groups to harm the interest of the United States and Israel. As the primary benefactor of terrorist groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, Iran can extend its sphere of influence right to the borders of Israel. The dangers of which can be seen in the 2006 Israeli-Lebanon war, with the extensive use of Iranian made and supplied advanced weapons, armories, and gears by Hezbollah.<sup>169</sup> Due to the training that members of Hezbollah were exposed to by

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<sup>167</sup>Lockie, Alex. “Here's Why the U.S. and Israel are such Close Allies.” *Business Insider*, 18 Feb. 2017, [www.businessinsider.com/U.S.-israel-allies-2017-2](http://www.businessinsider.com/U.S.-israel-allies-2017-2)

<sup>168</sup> Daniels, Jeff. “General Calls Iran 'Destabilizing' Force, Suggests U.S. 'Disrupt' Regime by Military Means.” *CNBC*, 29 Mar. 2017, [www.cnbc.com/2017/03/29/general-calls-iran-destabilizing-force-suggests-us-disrupt-regime-by-military-means.html](http://www.cnbc.com/2017/03/29/general-calls-iran-destabilizing-force-suggests-us-disrupt-regime-by-military-means.html)

<sup>169</sup> Erlanger, Steven and Richard A. Oppel Jr. “A Disciplined Hezbollah Surprises Israel with its Training, Tactics and Weapons.” *The New York Times*, 7 Aug. 2006, [www.nytimes.com/2006/08/07/world/middleeast/07hezbollah.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/07/world/middleeast/07hezbollah.html)

Iranian military officials, it is been reported that the level of competence and effectiveness of Hezbollah in that war came as a surprise to the Israeli's.<sup>170</sup>

This is an evidence of the danger Iran poses to Israel's security, and from media reports, Iran has been sending lots of missiles to Hezbollah, apparently in anticipation of another Israeli war.<sup>171</sup> Such activities expose Israel to attack from Hezbollah and destabilize other allies in the region. Iran is also a staunch supporter of Hamas, which has been responsible for the deaths and destruction of many Israeli lives and properties. Iran has been supplying arms and missiles to Hamas, knowing full well that such missiles will be used against Israel in times of conflicts.<sup>172</sup> Iran's willingness to attack and provoke Israel is made bare by the writings on its missiles. Iran missiles are usually launched with the inscriptions “death to Israel” inscribed on the exterior.

As the U.S. seeks to protect these interests, it is pertinent to know how Qatar’s actions help or harm them. These various interests of the United States are affected in numerous ways, as Qatar conducts its foreign policies using its asymmetric tools. Qatar’s actions have sometimes harmed these interests, like Qatar’s support for Hamas, which undermines U.S. counter-terrorism effort and Israel stability. In this light, these interests of the United States are key to understanding its calculus in its relationship with Qatar, and how it should respond to them.

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<sup>170</sup>Erlanger, Steven and Richard A. Opiel Jr. “A Disciplined Hezbollah Surprises Israel with its Training, Tactics and Weapons.” *The New York Times*, 7 Aug. 2006, [www.nytimes.com/2006/08/07/world/middleeast/07hezbollah.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/07/world/middleeast/07hezbollah.html)

<sup>171</sup>Somberg, Dana and Maariv Hashavua. “Israeli ambassador: Iran is Smuggling Weapons to Hezbollah on Commercial Flights.” *Business Insider*. 22 Nov. 2016, [www.businessinsider.com/iran-smuggling-weapons-hezbollah-commercial-flights-2016-11](http://www.businessinsider.com/iran-smuggling-weapons-hezbollah-commercial-flights-2016-11)

<sup>172</sup>Williams, Carol. “Iranian Officials say they have Armed Hamas for Fight with Israel.” *LA Times*, 4 Aug. 2014, [www.latimes.com/world/middleeast/la-fg-israel-gaza-hamas-iran-20140804-story.html](http://www.latimes.com/world/middleeast/la-fg-israel-gaza-hamas-iran-20140804-story.html)

## **IMPLICATIONS OF QATAR'S ASYMMETRIC TOOLS AND FOREIGN POLICY ON U.S. INTERESTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

### **Qatar's Policy of Strategic Hedging Supports Islamist Movements that Destabilize the Middle East and U.S. Allies in the Region**

Qatar is partly responsible for the vast majority of the regional decadence that has occurred in the Middle East since the Arab revolution. In Qatar's calculus, Islamist organizations would evolve to become the main players in the governmental structures of the Middle East. This election of Islamist parties into power through democratic means further strengthened this assumption.<sup>173</sup>

In order to ensure that the new geopolitical climate of the Middle East will be favorable to Qatar, Qatar began supporting Islamist movements generally and the Muslim Brotherhood particularly. As noted in the section on strategic hedging, Qatar's foreign policy during this time was to hedge its bet on the potential for Islamist movements to reshape the power structure of the region. In this light, Qatar viewed Islamist movements as potential allies and sought to align with them.

However, Qatar's actions have proved to be detrimental to U.S. interest for political stability in the region today. Many of the Islamist groups that Qatar gambled on, due to their popularity among citizens have turned out to be destabilizing forces in the region. In Syria, Qatar as an ally of the U.S., along with other Gulf allies such as Saudi Arabia, support moderate groups

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<sup>173</sup>Haqqani, Husain. "Islamists and Democracy: Cautions from Pakistan." *Journal of Democracy*, vol.24, no.2, 2013, [www.journalofdemocracy.org/sites/default/files/Haqqani-24-2.pdf](http://www.journalofdemocracy.org/sites/default/files/Haqqani-24-2.pdf)

backed by the United States.<sup>174</sup> However, Qatar is also reported to be simultaneously supporting groups outside of U.S. designated factions, in the ongoing civil war. This has led to a very haphazard approach to the Syrian crisis. Many of these groups are reported to have strong links with al Qaeda, and the Islamic State.<sup>175</sup>

In Libya also, Qatar's haphazard support for rebels, irrespective of the nature or affiliations of these groups with terrorism and extremism, has contributed to the degradation of Libya's political stability. For instance, Qatar backed Islamist militia commanders, such as Abdelhakim Belhadj, who was once the head of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, an Al-Qaeda affiliate group sanctioned by both the United States and the United Nations.<sup>176</sup>

Furthermore, while the United States and its partners tried to promote the Transitional National Council (TNC) as the legitimate government of Libya, Qatar repeatedly and unhelpfully pushed for a more prominent role for alternative opposition groups that were dependent on Qatar.<sup>177</sup> Many of these groups as reported were extremist, which intended to further their terroristic agenda using Libya as a base. This made it extremely difficult for the U.S. to implement its plan for state building in Libya after U.S.-NATO overthrow of Qaddafi left the country in shambles.<sup>178</sup> This is because; many of these extremists acquired the resources to struggle for power with the Transitional National Council, creating chaos and anarchy in the country.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>174</sup>Perry, Tom and Suleiman Al Khaledi. "Gulf Crisis Seen Widening Split in Syria Rebellion." *Reuters*, 14 June 2017, [www.reuters.com/article/U.S.-gulf-Qatar-syria/gulf-crisis-seen-widening-split-in-syria-rebellion-idUSKBN195170](http://www.reuters.com/article/U.S.-gulf-Qatar-syria/gulf-crisis-seen-widening-split-in-syria-rebellion-idUSKBN195170)

<sup>175</sup>Ibid

<sup>176</sup> Schanzer, Jonathan. "Qatar's Support Of The Worst Of The Worst In Libya Must End." *Newsweek*, 6 Aug. 2017, [www.newsweek.com/Qatar-support-worst-worst-libya-must-end-646280](http://www.newsweek.com/Qatar-support-worst-worst-libya-must-end-646280)

<sup>177</sup>Ibid

<sup>178</sup> Shapiro, Jeremy. "The Qatar problem." *Foreign Policy*, 28 Aug. 2013, [foreignpolicy.com/2013/08/28/the-qatar-problem/](http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/08/28/the-qatar-problem/)

<sup>179</sup> Ibid

Qatar's support for the Muslim Brotherhood particularly threatens the political stability of crucial U.S. allies in the region, such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Although, the actions of the Muslim Brotherhood vary from country to country, it rationalizes attacks against American forces and interests, rejects the very concept of peace with Israel, and promotes religious intolerance.<sup>180</sup> If the Muslim Brotherhood becomes the dominant power in the Middle East, America's ability to maintain a strong presence in the region could be eroded. However, allies like Kuwait and Jordan allow members of the Muslim Brotherhood participate in their governments. Nonetheless, Qatar's support for the Muslim Brotherhood differs from that of Kuwait and Jordan. Qatar intends to promote political Islam as the regional order of the Middle East, which can challenge the political stability of allies like Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain.

### **Al Jazeera's Message Counters U.S. Influence in the Region and Threatens U.S. Allies in the Middle East**

As noted above, Qatar's Al Jazeera news network has been a very dynamic and potent force in setting the agenda of a large population of the Middle East. Al Jazeera Arabic is by far the most popular and most watched network in the Middle East, and it is very effective in shaping regional outcomes.<sup>181</sup> Under "normal" circumstances, as an ally of the United States, Qatar's impressive reach through Al Jazeera could translate to good gains for the U.S., in its attempt to win over the hearts and minds of the Arab world. However, this has not been the case.

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<sup>180</sup>Ross, Dennis. "Qatar Needs to Stop Funding Islamists." *USA Today*, 5 May 2017, [www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2017/05/08/Qatar-funding-islamism-muslim-brotherhood-amas-column/101300766](http://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2017/05/08/Qatar-funding-islamism-muslim-brotherhood-amas-column/101300766)

<sup>181</sup>"Changing the Channel: Why Al Jazeera is Under Threat." *The Economist*, 1 June 2017, [www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21724366-arab-worlds-leading-news-channel-independent-voice-or-propaganda](http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21724366-arab-worlds-leading-news-channel-independent-voice-or-propaganda)



As noted above, Al Jazeera is a tool in the hands of the Qatari government and its activities as a media powerhouse, have in many cases affected the interest of the United States negatively.

Al Jazeera has often hampered the geopolitical interests of the U.S., making it difficult for the U.S. to achieve key geopolitical objectives. For instance, due to Al Jazeera's sensational reporting during the second intifada, Egypt found it increasingly difficult to remain moderate.<sup>182</sup> Finally, Hosni Mubarak recalled the ambassador to Israel, stating, "I had to do something."<sup>183</sup>

Al Jazeera's actions have also caused a geopolitical turmoil in the GCC, due to its critical reporting of U.S. allies, such as Saudi Arabia, and the UAE despite banning such for its own government comes to the fore with the ongoing GCC crisis. These activities by Al Jazeera have further put a strain on the GCC, fracturing an important political bloc. In this light, the State Department in its 2017 "Country Report on terrorism" noted that the "Gulf dispute that broke out in June froze most GCC-wide engagements."<sup>184</sup> This break down in GCC relations might affect U.S. strategies to contain Iran's activities in the region, as well as maintain geopolitical order in the Middle East.

Al Jazeera's message as noted above, is a staple outlet for anti-Semitism. Al Jazeera's programs especially on its Arabic channels continue to fuel anti-Semitic conspiracy theories. Al Jazeera's anti-Semitism seems to have inspired one of the London Bridge bombers, Youssef Zaghba in 2017. His mother and sister according to The Times, stated, Al Jazeera as a source for his radicalization.<sup>185</sup> To reiterate this point, Ayoob Kara former Israeli communications minister,

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<sup>182</sup>Berman, Ilan. *Digital Dictators: Media, Authoritarianism, and America's New Challenge*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2018

<sup>183</sup> Ibid

<sup>184</sup> *Country Reports on Terrorism 2017*. U.S. Department of State, [www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2017/](http://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2017/)

<sup>185</sup> Kington, Tom, et al. "Youngest Knifeman Youssef Zaghba was Excited about Marriage and New Job." *Times*, [www.thetimes.co.uk/article/youngest-knifeman-youssef-zaghba-was-excited-about-marriage-and-new-job-mssfz332x](http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/youngest-knifeman-youssef-zaghba-was-excited-about-marriage-and-new-job-mssfz332x)

called Al Jazeera a network that supports terrorism and supports religious radicalization, due to its scathing and sensational coverage of Israel.<sup>186</sup>

He has also issued fatwas supporting suicide bombings against Israeli's, and Americans in Iraq. He is widely credited for an upsurge in suicide bombings, due to his vast influence in the Arab world. Al-Jazeera's reporting on Israel has been consistently egregious. Even among other spates of Palestinian unrest in recent years, Al-Jazeera has remained a strident proponent of the Palestinian cause, tacitly endorsing knife and vehicular attacks, or other acts of violence.

### **Qatar Using USA Military Presence as a Security Cover to Undermine the USA and its Allies**

Qatar hosts the forward operating base of the U.S. Central Command, Air Force 379th Air Expeditionary Wing, the forward operating headquarters of U.S. Special Operations Central Command (SOCCENT), and U.S. Air Forces Central Command (AFCENT).<sup>187</sup> Apart from being the largest U.S. base in the region, the base is equipped with two runways, which can accommodate any airplane in the U.S. inventory.<sup>188</sup> In this light, this base is of immense value to the United States, and it has served as the preeminent base for launching attacks against terrorist targets in the region.

Qatar uses this base as a way of intersecting itself into the security interest of the U.S. Qatar has learned overtime in its international relations, to position itself with the interest of great powers to be valuable to them. It has been an occurring theme in Qatar's history, and it is

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<sup>186</sup> Martin, Chulov. "Israeli Government Moves to Impose Ban on Al-Jazeera News Network." *The Guardian*, 6 Aug. 2017, [www.theguardian.com/world/2017/aug/06/israeli-government-impose-ban-al-jazeera-news-network](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/aug/06/israeli-government-impose-ban-al-jazeera-news-network)

<sup>187</sup> Al Ansari, Salman. "The Case for Moving Al-Udeid Airbase from Qatar." *The Hill, Capitol Hill Publishing Corp*, 9 Oct. 2017, [thehill.com/opinion/international/354555-the-case-for-moving-al-udeid-airbase-from-Qatar](http://thehill.com/opinion/international/354555-the-case-for-moving-al-udeid-airbase-from-Qatar)

<sup>188</sup> Ibid

still a very potent policy tool for Qatar. This is also the logical sequence at play in regards to the U.S. military presence in Qatar.

Qatar believes as long as it hosts the U.S. airbase, its value will outweigh the fall out of its contradictory policies that anger its neighbors and the United States. This base is thus, strategic to Qatar in the pursuit of its maverick foreign policies, which requires considerable security assets to achieve. Qatar uses the base as a cover to shield itself from the possible backlash that can arise as a result of its foreign policies. In this light, Qatar is definitely of the strategic mindset that the U.S. military base is an assurance that the United States will support it as a valuable ally, irrespective of what it does and its consequences.

This calculus, also explains why Qatar feels little or no pressure to follow the position of its GCC allies. For example, while the United States and its Gulf allies have a shared objective of shrinking the influence of Iran in the region, Qatar has sometimes been the weak link in fulfilling that objective. Although this is partly due to its economic relationship with Iran, Qatar nevertheless, seeks to benefit from the security assurance provided by America, while still maintaining friendly relations with Iran.

This is not to suggest that as an ally of the U.S., Qatar is bound to always posture itself aggressively towards Iran, however, oftentimes Qatar has proved willing to undermine the U.S., and its allies to please Iran. For instance, Qatar was the only state to have voted against a UN resolution calling for Iran to stop its nuclear enrichment, much to the surprise of the United States and the Gulf allies.<sup>189</sup> In addition, just recently, Qatar's Foreign minister criticized a

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<sup>189</sup>Wright, Robin. *The Iran Primer: Power, Politics and U.S. Policy*. U.S. Institute for Peace Press, 2010, Google Books, [books.google.com/books/about/The\\_Iran\\_Primer.html?id=MDgwl59s\\_hUC](https://books.google.com/books/about/The_Iran_Primer.html?id=MDgwl59s_hUC)

Mecca summit for been too hardline against Iran, and stated that Washington's policy toward Iran did not take the geopolitical realities of the Middle East in consideration.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Simeon, Kerr. "Qatar expresses doubts over Gulf states' hawkish approach to Iran." *Financial Times*, 3 June 2017, [www.ft.com/content/66744ee6-861a-11e9-97ea-05ac2431f453](http://www.ft.com/content/66744ee6-861a-11e9-97ea-05ac2431f453)

## UNDERSTANDING THE GULF COOPERATION CRISIS AND THE IMPACT OF U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

The 2017 Gulf Cooperation Council crisis is an aggregate of Qatar's numerous missteps, because of its foreign policies and the tools used in achieving them. It is a diplomatic crisis that has seen Qatar politically, diplomatically, and economically isolated by half the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, along with Egypt.<sup>191</sup> These GCC members are Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates. This crisis is significant, due to the scale of isolation Qatar has been subjected to, which analysts have called unprecedented in the history of the GCC.<sup>192</sup>

Saudi Arabia has closed its borders to Qatar, which happens to be Qatar's only land border. In addition to the land blockade, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt have also imposed an air blockade on Qatar, preventing Qatar from using their airspace, as well as a sea blockade, thus, disrupting Qatar's trade and transportation sector.<sup>193</sup> To further drive home their point, these states have expelled Qatari citizens, and have been told to leave irrespective of the fact they might have family members in these states.<sup>194</sup> The many sins of Qatar given by the aggrieved countries are Qatar's alleged support for terrorism, its relationship with Iran, and Al Jazeera's critical reporting on the Gulf Monarchies and their internal affairs.<sup>195</sup>

Qatar has long been a geopolitical challenge for many of its allies in the region. The eagerness to punish Qatar can be seen with the instant and coordinated effort of the Gulf States in

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<sup>191</sup>Verrasto, Frank A., and Jon B. Alterman. "Qatar Crisis: Turmoil in the GCC." *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 14 June 2017, [www.csis.org/analysis/Qatar-crisis-turmoil-gcc](http://www.csis.org/analysis/Qatar-crisis-turmoil-gcc)

<sup>192</sup>Finn, Tom and John Irish. "Qatar says it will not Negotiate Unless Neighbor's Lift Blockade." *Reuters*, 19 June 2017, [www.reuters.com/article/us-gulf-qatar-idUSKBN19A1G6](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-gulf-qatar-idUSKBN19A1G6)

<sup>193</sup>Ibid

<sup>194</sup>"Amnesty International Public Statement." *Amnesty International*, 14 Dec. 2017, [www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/MDE2276042017ENGLISH.pdf](http://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/MDE2276042017ENGLISH.pdf)

<sup>195</sup>Daniels, Owen. "A Widening Gulf: Qatar Crisis Creates a Headache for the United States." *Atlantic Council*, June 2017, [www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/a-widening-gulf](http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/a-widening-gulf)

isolating Qatar, in the wake of allegations that the Qatari Emir made incendiary and critical remarks at a speech against the United States, and had offered support for Iran, and backing to Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>196</sup> The Emir was presented with a joint list of thirteen demands by the blockading states led by Saudi Arabia, which was later changed to Qatar committing to six broad "principles," as a condition for diplomatic and political normalization.

<sup>197</sup> These principles include:

1. Commitment to combat extremism and terrorism in all its forms and to prevent their financing or the provision of safe havens,
2. Prohibiting all acts of incitement and all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify hatred and violence,
3. Full commitment to the 2013 Riyadh Agreement, and the supplementary agreement and its executive mechanism for 2014 within the framework of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) for Arab States,
4. Commitment to all the outcomes of the Arab-Islamic-U. S Summit held in Riyadh in May 2017,
5. To refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of States and from supporting illegal entities,
6. The responsibility of all states of the international community to confront all forms of extremism and terrorism as a threat to international peace and security.<sup>198</sup>

From these demands, it is clear that there is a general discontent in regards to Qatar's international relations and policies, which the United States and its Gulf allies see as a major deviation from the regional order and collective interest.

Noteworthy is the fact that the 2017 Gulf Cooperation Crisis is not the first crisis to hit the regional bloc. The "Qatar problem" has long been a thorn in the flesh of GCC members, especially Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates. In 2014 Saudi Arabia along

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<sup>196</sup>Milton-Edwards, Beverly "GCC crisis: How to Resolve the Diplomatic Rift." *Brookings, Brookings Institution*, 15 June 2017, [www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2017/06/15/gcc-crisis-how-to-resolve-the-diplomatic-rift/](http://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2017/06/15/gcc-crisis-how-to-resolve-the-diplomatic-rift/)

<sup>197</sup> Khan, Tamir. "Arab Countries' Six Principles for Qatar A Measure to Restart the Negotiation Process." *The National*, 19 July 2017, [www.thenational.ae/world/gcc/arab-countries-six-principles-for-Qatar-a-measure-to-restart-the-negotiation-process-1.610314](http://www.thenational.ae/world/gcc/arab-countries-six-principles-for-Qatar-a-measure-to-restart-the-negotiation-process-1.610314)

<sup>198</sup>Ibid

with the UAE, and Bahrain withdrew their ambassadors from Doha, accusing Qatar of continuous support for terrorism, and meddling in their internal affairs.<sup>199</sup> The crisis lasted for about eight months, from March 2014 to November 2014, and was the first significant crisis to rock the GCC.

### **Events Leading to the 2017 Gulf Cooperation Crisis**

Although, the immediate cause of the 2017 GCC crisis is ostensibly due to an alleged speech attributed to the emir of Qatar, which angered Saudi Arabia and its allies, however, the underlying causes are deeper.<sup>200</sup> Understanding the events leading to the first crisis in 2014 is key to comprehending the present GCC crisis, along with the different regional and political positions taken by each actor involved.

The 2014 GCC crisis was an eight-month diplomatic rift, which saw the withdrawal of the ambassadors of Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Bahrain from Qatar. The crisis started in the wake of the Arab Spring, which was uprooting regimes, and governments with such revolutionary force. Qatar followed the new trend, and supported this change wholeheartedly, much to the anger of its GCC allies.<sup>201</sup> However, there is a deeper connotation to Qatar's support of the Arab Spring, which has to do with Qatar's political history and interactions with its neighbors.

The ousting of Sheikh Khalifa Bin Hamad Al-Thani by his son, the former Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani in a 1995 bloodless coup, marked a drastic change in the political climate of the country. (This has been explained in the chapter on the geopolitical

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<sup>199</sup>Aboudi, Sami, et al. "Saudi Arabia, UAE and Bahrain End Rift with Qatar, Return with Ambassadors." *Reuters*, 16 Nov. 2014, [www.reuters.com/article/us-gulf-summit-ambassadors/saudi-arabia-uae-and-bahrain-end-rift-with-Qatar-return-ambassadors-idUSKCN0J00Y420141116](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-gulf-summit-ambassadors/saudi-arabia-uae-and-bahrain-end-rift-with-Qatar-return-ambassadors-idUSKCN0J00Y420141116)

<sup>200</sup>Gordon, Philip et al. "The Qatar Crisis: Causes, Implications, Risks, and the Need for Compromise." *The Institute for national Strategic Studies*, 13 June 2017, [www.inss.org.il/publication/qatar-crisis-causes-implications-risks-need-compromise/](http://www.inss.org.il/publication/qatar-crisis-causes-implications-risks-need-compromise/) תירבע

<sup>201</sup>Ulrichsen, Kristian Coates. "Qatar and the Arab Spring: Policy Drivers and Regional Implications." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, Sept. 2014, [carnegieendowment.org/files/qatar\\_arab\\_spring.pdf](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/qatar_arab_spring.pdf)

history of Qatar.) However, one key component of this stage in Qatar's political development was its unrelenting desire to carry out its individualistic foreign policies. Qatar, no longer wanting to be seen as an appendage of Saudi Arabia, expressed its desire to be “known and be noticed”<sup>202</sup>

With this change, came a trend of systematic hostility against Qatar, and its leadership from Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the UAE, which were of the view that by deposing Sheikh Khalifa, Doha failed to respect the Gulf values, and traditions.<sup>203</sup> To Qatar's disgust, the United Arab Emirates offered the deposed Emir safe haven to establish a “temporary quarters,” after he had reiterated his desire in various visits to Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt to regain back his throne.<sup>204</sup> These strings of meetings eventually lead to a series of counter-coups, reportedly sponsored by some of the Gulf States to reinstate his father.<sup>205</sup> Qatar responded by arresting the supposed coup plotters and was of the view that its neighbors were after its political stability.

This incidence, coupled with historical grievances against its neighbors spurred Qatar to challenge the Saudi dominated geopolitical order of the Middle East, which Qatar felt was unfair to it. Marc Lynch, a political scientist at George Washington University, observed that since the 90s, “Qatari foreign policy is a combination of: ‘What can we do to get ourselves on the map?’ and ‘What can we do to annoy the Saudis?’”<sup>206</sup> The Arab Spring thus presented Qatar with the opportunity to influence the geopolitics of the Middle East, in a way that could achieve these objectives. These included supporting regimes, and movements that were contrary to the political interest of states Qatar deemed “problematic” geo-politically, first of which was Saudi Arabia.

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<sup>202</sup>“Al Jazeera.” *The New York Times*. 6 Mar. 2005,

[www.nytimes.com/2005/03/06/books/chapters/aljazeera.html?mtref=www.google.com](http://www.nytimes.com/2005/03/06/books/chapters/aljazeera.html?mtref=www.google.com)

<sup>203</sup>Salaman, Samir “Qatar's History of Turbulent Relations with the UAE.” *Gulf News*. 2 Apr. 2001,

[gulfnnews.com/news/uae/government/Qatar-s-history-of-turbulent-relations-with-uae-1.1312739](http://gulfnnews.com/news/uae/government/Qatar-s-history-of-turbulent-relations-with-uae-1.1312739)

<sup>204</sup>Ibid

<sup>205</sup>“Life Sentences for Qatari Coup Plotters.” *BBC News*, 29 Feb. 2000,

[news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/660887.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/660887.stm)

<sup>206</sup>Fisher, Max. “How the Saudi-Qatar Rivalry, Now Combusting, Reshaped the Middle East.” *The New York Times*, 13 June 2017, [www.nytimes.com/2017/06/13/world/middleeast/how-the-saudi-qatar-rivalry-now-combusting-reshaped-the-middle-east.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/13/world/middleeast/how-the-saudi-qatar-rivalry-now-combusting-reshaped-the-middle-east.html)



The first GCC crisis brought to the fore, the inherent mistrust, and suspicion hovering over Qatar and its political relationships. Issues such as Qatar's support for Islamist's strikes a chord at the heart of GCC states like Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, which sincerely believe that Qatar has a cynical plan to undermine them. A belief fueled by Qatar's nonstop romance with actors that seek to do so.<sup>207</sup> The current GCC crisis, which started in 2017, is a continuation of the unfinished business of 2014. Although, the 2014 GCC crisis ended with the signing of a “Riyadh agreement,” the crisis was not necessarily resolved.

### **Understanding the Role of America's Foreign-Policy in the GCC Crisis**

The 2017 GCC crisis unlike that of 2014 has a different dimension, which adds an uncertain geopolitical element to the crisis. The crisis is coming in the wake of a radical change in U.S. approach to foreign policy, as a result of the election of a new administration. The escalation of the 2017 GCC crisis, can be somewhat attributed to this change in U.S. policy spearheaded by President Trump. As noted by the Congressional Research Service, President Trump’s visit to Saudi Arabia, for the 2017 Riyadh summit in May 2017, caused passed “differences” to be “erupted again.”<sup>208</sup> Prior to this current administration, the United States had been cautious on issues regarding the Middle East, and its Gulf allies, but such caution has not been the case with the current United States administration, under President Donald J. Trump, which pursues a distinct “America First” policy.

This policy, as advocated for by President Trump, carries with it, an inherent mistrust for multilateral and inter-governmental organizations or agreements, that restrict the individual

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<sup>207</sup>Special Report: the Gulf. “Why Gulf countries are feuding with Qatar.” *The Economist*, 21 June 2018, [www.economist.com/special-report/2018/06/21/why-gulf-countries-are-feuding-with-qatar](http://www.economist.com/special-report/2018/06/21/why-gulf-countries-are-feuding-with-qatar)

<sup>208</sup>Katzman, Kenneth. *Qatar: Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy*. Congressional Research Service 13 June 2019, [fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R44533.pdf](https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R44533.pdf)

ability of the United States to carry out policies it deems fit for its interest. The interest of the United States in the Middle East has fundamentally stayed the same. However, U.S. foreign policy in achieving these objectives under the America-First strategy has circumvented the traditional routes conventionally favored by past U.S. governments. For instance, the United States unilaterally recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, moving drastically away from the decisions of past U.S. administrations to handle the Israel-Palestine state dispute multilaterally by involving major stakeholders in the conflict.<sup>209</sup>

The United States has chosen to accomplish its Middle East objectives by collaborating with individual states, which it deems capable of steering the affairs of the region to its favor. Most notably, Saudi Arabia, and its ally Israel, these states in turn act as “regional overseers.” This foreign policy approach began to take shape after the Riyadh summit with about fifty predominantly Muslim nations.

President Donald Trump addressed the summit, and spoke on diverse issues, with terrorism, and the menace of Iran being the crux of his speech. The president, taking a hardline against terrorism, stated that all present stakeholders should “drive out” terrorists and extremists, and that “this summit will mark the beginning of the end for those who practice terror and spread its vile creed.”<sup>210</sup> The president's language was also very tough on Iran, insisting that the Iranian government gives terrorists “safe harbor, financial backing, and the social standing needed for recruitment,” and further stated that “all nations of conscience must work together to isolate Iran.”<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Domonoske, Camila. “Beginning Of A New Approach: President Trump Declares Jerusalem Israel's Capital.” *National Public Radio*, 6 Dec. 2017, [www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/12/06/568838360/watch-president-trump-to-speak-on-jerusalem](http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/12/06/568838360/watch-president-trump-to-speak-on-jerusalem)

<sup>210</sup> *President's Trump's Speech to the Arab Islamic American Summit*. White House Statements and Releases, White House, 21 May 2017, [www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-trumps-speech-arab-islamic-american-summit/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-trumps-speech-arab-islamic-american-summit/)

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid*

The content and language of the Riyadh speech sing harmoniously in tune with past presidents of the United States, as regards U.S. Middle East policy. For example, former President George Bush, described terrorism as America's greatest threat, and Iran as a part of the axis of evil. However, the strategic environment created by President Donald Trump's America's First policies changed the geopolitical dynamics of the region in a very distinct way.

As noted by the European Council of Foreign Relations, the actions carried out by the Saud-led bloc against Qatar were made possible due to President Trump's "permission to do so."<sup>212</sup> Saudi Arabia and its allies were able to convince the U.S. president that Qatar was a perennial supporter of terrorism, and its relationship with Iran is a source of instability in the region.<sup>213</sup> These accusations struck the heart of the president's "America's first" policy, due to his administration's hardline stance on terrorism and Iran. A welcome development for Saudi Arabia, given the ambivalent attitude that the past Obama administration had towards Saudi Arabia, denying the Kingdom the free hand to act as it pleased while striking a conciliatory tone with Iran.<sup>214</sup>

The president seemed to believe that constraints such as agreements and political relationships have limited the ability of the United States to act decisively, in accordance with U.S. interest. In this light, irrespective of the fact that Qatar is a strategic ally of the United States, and both countries share a symbolic political relationship, Saudi Arabia and its allies were still able to persuade President Trump to support a hardline stance against Qatar. With this

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<sup>212</sup>Ibrahim, Fraihat. "The Middle East's new Battle Lines." *European Council of Foreign Relations*, [www.ecfr.eu/mena/battle\\_lines/qatar\\_flashpointidUSKCN0J21JB20141118](http://www.ecfr.eu/mena/battle_lines/qatar_flashpointidUSKCN0J21JB20141118)

<sup>213</sup>Wintour, Patrick. "Donald Trump Tweets Support for Blockade imposed on Qatar." *The Guardian, Guardian News and Media Limited*, 6 June 2017, [www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/06/qatar-panic-buying-as-shoppers-stockpile-food-due-to-saudi-blockade](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/06/qatar-panic-buying-as-shoppers-stockpile-food-due-to-saudi-blockade)

<sup>214</sup>Aleem, Zeeshan. "Saudi Arabia's Diplomatic War with Qatar Explained." *VOX, Vox Media*, 6 June 2017, [www.vox.com/world/2017/6/6/15739606/saudi-arabia-ties-Qatar-trump](http://www.vox.com/world/2017/6/6/15739606/saudi-arabia-ties-Qatar-trump)

assurance came a barrage of attacks by Saudi Arabia and its allies against Qatar, aimed at isolating the small country.

In a dramatic twist from the norm as experienced by previous U.S. administrations, which had chosen to deal with the “Qatar problem” diplomatically, President Trump openly sided with the Saudis. In a joint press conference with President Iohannis of Romania, President Trump stated that “the nation of Qatar, unfortunately, has historically been a funder of terrorism at a very high level, and in the wake of that conference, nations came together and spoke to me about confronting Qatar over its behavior.”<sup>215</sup> In a series of social media statements, the president seemed to imply that Qatar was the only actor that needed to be reprimanded for supporting terrorism. The president’s position further strengthened the Saudi Bloc to take unprecedented actions against Qatar, which in the end, could prove too costly as explained below.

### **Implications of U.S. Foreign Policy Position in the Gulf Cooperation Crisis**

The United States under the administration of President Trump, seemed to have approached the Middle East, and all the problems associated with it, from a black and white perspective. This comes with inherent difficulties, as the Middle East is a region saturated with many intricate challenges that create complex phenomena and gray areas for observers, scholars, and policymakers. Thus, a policy approach towards the Middle East should also reflect its idiosyncrasies and peculiarities.

The failures of American interventions in Iraq, Libya, and Afghanistan are proofs of the complexities associated with the Middle East. These interventions failed because past U.S. administrations failed to take into account the geopolitical intricacies associated with the Middle

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<sup>215</sup> *Remarks by President Trump and President Iohannis of Romania in a Joint Press Conference.* The White House, 9 June 2017, [www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-president-iohannis-romania-joint-press-conference/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-president-iohannis-romania-joint-press-conference/)

East. In this light, a black and white approach to solving the G.C.C crisis could fail because, the GCC crisis is a complex issue arising from the geopolitical, historical, and social interactions of the Gulf states.<sup>216</sup>

By appearing to have picked sides against Qatar through a string of tweets, the U.S. president might have certain facts associated with other GCC states. Qatar rightfully should be called out, as a prime sponsor of terrorism in the region, However, GCC states, such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait are not absolved from the same offenses levied against Qatar.<sup>217</sup> Saudi Arabia is reported to be the second-largest source of fighters for ISIS.<sup>218</sup> Moreover, it is a known fact that Saudi Arabia's wahhabism doctrine is an ideological staple for terrorist organizations worldwide.<sup>219</sup> The UAE and Kuwait have also been reported to be complicit in their obligations to combat terrorism.

The root cause of the GCC crisis is thus more than Qatar's support for terrorism. The similar roots and familial ties, which the Gulf States share, should be brought into consideration, which means big political issues could also be family like disputes.<sup>220</sup> In this light, Saudi Arabia has always viewed itself as the natural leader of the GCC family and has wielded its ideological and geopolitical influence among the GCC States.<sup>221</sup> However, as noted above, Qatar has chosen to pursue its independent policy, which appears to be the core of the GCC crisis. In this light, it

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<sup>216</sup> Hansen, Stig. "Why the United States Needs Qatar, and Why the Current Conflict is Best Settled Peacefully." *Harvard Kennedy School Belfer Center for International Affairs*, 15 June 2017, [www.belfercenter.org/publication/why-united-states-needs-qatar-and-why-current-conflict-best-settled-peacefully](http://www.belfercenter.org/publication/why-united-states-needs-qatar-and-why-current-conflict-best-settled-peacefully)

<sup>217</sup> Haddad, Mais. "Qatar Crisis And The Fight Against Terrorism." *Small Wars Journal*, 19 June 2017, [smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/qatar-crisis-and-the-fight-against-terrorism](http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/qatar-crisis-and-the-fight-against-terrorism)

<sup>218</sup> Ian, Bremmer "The Top 5 Countries Where ISIS Gets Its Foreign Recruits." *Time*, 14 Apr. 2014, [time.com/4739488/isis-iraq-syria-tunisia-saudi-arabia-russia/](http://time.com/4739488/isis-iraq-syria-tunisia-saudi-arabia-russia/)

<sup>219</sup> Hannah, John. "It's Time for Saudi Arabia to Stop Exporting Extremism." *Foreign Policy*, 3 May 2019, [foreignpolicy.com/2019/05/03/its-time-for-saudi-arabia-to-stop-exporting-extremism/](http://foreignpolicy.com/2019/05/03/its-time-for-saudi-arabia-to-stop-exporting-extremism/)

<sup>220</sup> Ramesh, Raandeep. "The long-running family rivalries behind the Qatar crisis." *Guardian Newspaper, Guardian News and Media Limited*, 21 July 2017, [www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jul/21/Qatar-crisis-may-be-rooted-in-old-family-rivalries](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jul/21/Qatar-crisis-may-be-rooted-in-old-family-rivalries)

<sup>221</sup> Kouskouvelis, Ilias and Zarras Konstantinos. "Cairo and Riyadh, Vying for Leadership." *Middle East Forum*, Vol. 26, No. 2, [www.meforum.org/57912/egypt-saudi-arabia-leadership](http://www.meforum.org/57912/egypt-saudi-arabia-leadership)

could be self-defeating if the United States tries to achieve its Middle East objectives by overly trusting the foreign policy, goals, objectives, and intentions of one state in the region over another.

This political scenario is filled with a number of strategic problems for the United States. Saudi Arabia, which seems to have emerged as the pivot of America's strategy in the Middle East, might be using the legitimacy and endorsements of President Trump to pursue individual geopolitical gains as opposed to addressing specific U.S. concerns about Qatar.<sup>222</sup> This is very plausible, especially after reports that Saudi Arabia and the UAE tried to carry out military intervention in Qatar.

The unprecedented nature and escalation of the GCC crisis is a clear indication that Saudi Arabia and its allies took Presidents Trump's statements at the Riyadh summit as a blank check to do as they please.<sup>223</sup> This could have profound geopolitical consequences for the Middle East and the U.S. desire for stability, and cooperation among allies in the region. This is due to the fact, that Saudi Arabia, which is the principal political driver behind the recent move of the GCC to isolate Qatar is governed de facto by the young, and inexperienced crowned prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, also known as MBS. Prince MBS gained prominence after he was made the minister of defense in 2015, and was appointed crown prince in 2017 by his father, King Salman bin Abdulaziz.<sup>224</sup>

His policies as defense minister have seen Saudi Arabia become a more active actor in the region, from the civil war in Yemen to its lead role in the GCC's isolation of Qatar. This

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<sup>222</sup>KIzer, Kate. "Trump has emboldened MBS to act with impunity." *The Hill, Capitol Hill Publishing Corp* 15 Oct. 2018, [thehill.com/opinion/international/411502-trump-has-emboldened-mbs-to-act-with-impunity](http://thehill.com/opinion/international/411502-trump-has-emboldened-mbs-to-act-with-impunity)

<sup>223</sup>Malley, Robert and Jon Finer. "Fixing Trump's blunders on Qatar." *The Washington Post*, 9 June 2017, [www.washingtonpost.com/pb/news/global-opinions/wp/2017/06/09/fixing-trumps-blunders-on-Qatar/?outputType=accessibility&nid=menu\\_nav\\_accessibilityforscreenreader](http://www.washingtonpost.com/pb/news/global-opinions/wp/2017/06/09/fixing-trumps-blunders-on-Qatar/?outputType=accessibility&nid=menu_nav_accessibilityforscreenreader)

<sup>224</sup>Ulrichsen, Kristian Coates. "The Future Has Arrived for Mohammed bin Salman." *The Atlantic*, 9 Nov. 2017, [www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/11/saudi-arabia-salman-corruption/545444/](http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/11/saudi-arabia-salman-corruption/545444/)

young prince has a penchant for direct and confrontational policies, which often prove to be strategic quagmires in the long run. In his bid to curb the influence of Iran in Yemen, he entered into an unending war with the Houthi rebels, whose backing by Iran was grossly overstated. In fact, he gained just the opposite, as Iran ratcheted up its support for the Houthi's in response to Saudi led intervention, which has turned the Yemeni conflict to what the United Nations has described as a “man-made human catastrophe.”<sup>225</sup> His blockade on Yemen is a testament to his political brashness, which according to reports is gradually leading Yemen to the brink of one of the worst famines in history.<sup>226</sup>

In this light, having the implicit endorsement of the president of the United States to carry out his unguided policies usually laced with paranoia, will most likely put the region in deep geopolitical pandemonium. In fact, according to media reports, after instigating the blockade against Qatar, Prince Salman was allegedly planning to take military actions against Qatar.<sup>227</sup> A move, if followed, would have devastated the tenuous political structures, which the U.S. has tried to build over the years to maintain its interest in the region.

As the GCC crisis lingers, one of the greatest implications for the United States is the high probability of Qatar aligning with Turkey and Iran. This is very plausible, given the scale of isolation, that Qatar has being made to face, with the various states imposing blockades which can amount to a declaration of war. The blockades are particularly harmful to Qatar's economy and political survival as a whole, given the fact, that Qatar imports over ninety-nine percent of its

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<sup>225</sup>Stephen O'Brien. Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator. Statement to the Security Council on Yemen. *United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, United Nations*, 12 July 2017, [www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/statement-and-speech/ERC\\_USG%20Stephen%20O%27Brien%20Statement%20on%20Yemen%20to%20SecCo%2012July2017%20-%20FINAL.pdf](http://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/statement-and-speech/ERC_USG%20Stephen%20O%27Brien%20Statement%20on%20Yemen%20to%20SecCo%2012July2017%20-%20FINAL.pdf)

<sup>226</sup>Erickson, Amanda. “Saudi Arabia Lifted its Blockade of Yemen. It’s not Nearly Enough to Prevent a famine.” *The Washington Post*, 1 Dec. 2017, [www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/11/19/yemen-is-on-the-brink-of-a-horrible-famine-heres-how-things-got-so-bad/?utm\\_term=.3301fd701c68](http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/11/19/yemen-is-on-the-brink-of-a-horrible-famine-heres-how-things-got-so-bad/?utm_term=.3301fd701c68)

<sup>227</sup> Emmons, Alex. “Saudi Arabia Planned to Invade Qatar Last Summer. Rex Tillerson’s Efforts to stop it may have Caused him his Job.” *The Intercept*, 1 Aug. 2018, [theintercept.com/2018/08/01/rex-tillerson-qatar-saudi-uae/](http://theintercept.com/2018/08/01/rex-tillerson-qatar-saudi-uae/)

foodstuff from outside, being a small state with a landmass made up of mostly deserts unsuitable for agriculture.<sup>228</sup>

With Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt imposing land, sea, and airspace blockades on Qatar, Iran, and Turkey have been very keen on exploiting this rift for their strategic benefits. Iran has started exporting foodstuff to Qatar, with an Iranian diplomat stating that “dozens of Iranian businesses are ready to help Qatar with more goods if they are needed.”<sup>229</sup> This economic relationship can further strengthen the economic position of Iran in the region, given the fact, that many of the goods Qatar imports from its blockading neighbors are also produced commercially by Iran.<sup>230</sup> This economic relationship can further strengthen the financial backbone of Iran, giving more momentum to its destabilizing regional adventures, which the United States and its allies in the region are very keen on curbing. To further cement its alliance with Iran, Qatar has restored full diplomatic ties with Iran, as a hint to its new geopolitical trajectory.<sup>231</sup>

As Qatar seeks to ease the diplomatic, economic, and security pressures placed on it as a result of the GCC crisis, Qatar also has been increasingly moving closer to Turkey. On paper, Qatar's alliance with Turkey should not ring a geopolitical alarm for the United States, since it is a NATO ally. However, in light of Turkey's radical transformation, both internally and in its

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<sup>228</sup>Taylor, Adam. “Qatar could Face a Food Crisis in Spat with Arab Neighbors.” *The Washington Post*, 5 June 2017, [www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/06/05/Qatar-could-face-a-food-crisis-in-spat-with-arab-neighbors/?utm\\_term=.8bd85b85eeb8](http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/06/05/Qatar-could-face-a-food-crisis-in-spat-with-arab-neighbors/?utm_term=.8bd85b85eeb8)

<sup>229</sup>Sharafedin Bozorgmehr and Tom Finn. “Iran Flies Food to Qatar Amid Concerns of Shortages.” *Reuters*, 11 June 2017, [www.reuters.com/article/us-gulf-Qatar-iran/iran-flies-food-to-Qatar-amid-concerns-of-shortages-idUSKBN1920EG](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-gulf-Qatar-iran/iran-flies-food-to-Qatar-amid-concerns-of-shortages-idUSKBN1920EG)

<sup>230</sup>Abu-Sirriya, Jordan. “Qatar-Iran Economic Relations Will Improve, Contrary to Saudi Arabia’s Intent.” *Foreign Policy Journal*, 27 Oct. 2017, [www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2017/10/27/Qatar-iran-economic-relations-will-improve-contrary-to-saudi-arabias-intent/](http://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2017/10/27/Qatar-iran-economic-relations-will-improve-contrary-to-saudi-arabias-intent/)

<sup>231</sup>Associated Press. “Qatar Restores Full Diplomatic Ties With Iran in Stark Message to Saudi Arabia, Gulf States.” *Haaretz*, 24 Aug. 2017, [www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/qatar-restores-full-diplomatic-ties-with-iran-in-slap-to-saudis-1.5445366](http://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/qatar-restores-full-diplomatic-ties-with-iran-in-slap-to-saudis-1.5445366)



foreign policy, there are ample reasons why Washington should be alert to this strategic development.

Turkey's political direction runs adversely to that of the United States, with its increasing adventurist foreign policy that directly challenges American interests.<sup>232</sup> Turkey has made it a core foreign policy objective to support the Muslim Brotherhood across the region, which has drawn the ire of U.S. allies such as Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia.<sup>233</sup> Along with supporting the Brotherhood, Turkey is also a major political supporter of Hamas and seems to have an Islamist political agenda for the region.<sup>234</sup>

Turkey's recent purchase of advanced missile defense systems from Russia, despite U.S. concerns, is a pointer to the deteriorating state of U.S.-Turkish relations. As noted by Steve Cook, senior fellow for Middle East and Africa studies at the Council on Foreign Relations, "the United States and Turkey have gone from ambivalent allies to antagonists."<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> Cornell E. Svante. "The U.S. and Turkey: Past the Point of No Return?" *The American Interest*, 1 Feb. 2018, [www.the-american-interest.com/2018/02/01/u-s-turkey-past-point-no-return/](http://www.the-american-interest.com/2018/02/01/u-s-turkey-past-point-no-return/)

<sup>233</sup> Erdemir Aykan and Tahiroglu Merve. "Why Turkey Chose Qatar." *National Interest*, 25 June 2017, [nationalinterest.org/feature/pakistans-support-the-haqqani-network-undermining-us-21300](http://nationalinterest.org/feature/pakistans-support-the-haqqani-network-undermining-us-21300)

<sup>234</sup> Ibid

<sup>235</sup> Steven A. Cook. "Neither Friend nor Foe" *Council on Foreign Relations*, Nov. 2019, [www.cfr.org/report/future-U.S.-turkey](http://www.cfr.org/report/future-U.S.-turkey)

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR USA'S FOREIGN POLICY APPROACH TOWARDS QATAR

### **The United States Can Discourage Qatar from Being Complicit in its Counter Terrorism Efforts by Strategically Employing Different Instruments of States Power**

Qatar is a partner with the United States, and other relevant stakeholders in the fight against terrorism and extremism. For instance, Qatar is a full partner and active participant in the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, and has enacted legislation to address terrorism, terrorist financing, and related offenses, which complements other criminal laws.<sup>236</sup> Qatar has also funded efforts by the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Center (UNCCT) to help address key challenges to international peace and security.<sup>237</sup>

In this light, the United States can increase its pressure on Qatari officials diplomatically and politically to ensure Qatar complies with its obligations. Past actions by the Qatari government have proved the efficacy of U.S. pressure. For Example, Qatar has frozen funds and enacted travel bans against UN-designated financiers per its obligations as a member state, and prosecuted individuals involved in terror financing after significant U.S. pressure.<sup>238</sup>

The U.S. can exert further pressure on Qatar by bringing Qatar's violations of international laws to combat terrorism to the United Nations Security Council. For example, Qatar's failures to combat terrorism financing, or prosecute individuals for supporting terrorist activities within its territories constitute violations of numerous UN resolutions, such as UN

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<sup>236</sup> *Country Reports on Terrorism 2016*. U.S. Department of State, 19 July. 2017, [www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2016/](http://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2016/)

<sup>237</sup> "Qatar Supports the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre." United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, 6 Feb. 2017, *United Nations*, [www.un.org/counterterrorism/ctitf/en/Press\\_release\\_Qatar\\_supports\\_UNCCT](http://www.un.org/counterterrorism/ctitf/en/Press_release_Qatar_supports_UNCCT)

<sup>238</sup> Plotkin, Lori et al. "U.S. Options in the Qatar Crisis." *The Washington Institute*, 7 June 2019, [www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/U.S.-options-in-the-qatar-crisis](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/U.S.-options-in-the-qatar-crisis)

resolution 2462. The Resolution calls for all states to prevent and suppress the financing of terrorist acts, and to refrain from providing support to those involved in them.<sup>239</sup>

The United States can also apply pressure on Doha to arrest or expel wanted and internationally designated individuals inside its borders, including members of the Hamas and Taliban delegations currently domiciled inside Qatar.<sup>240</sup> The U.S. can do this, by enforcing the Export Administration Act of 1979, which calls for strict licensing requirements for trade in dual-use items to countries that knowingly grant safe haven to operatives of terrorist groups.<sup>241</sup>

### **The USA Can Increase Pressure on Qatar by Seeking an Alternative Location for its Military Bases**

As stated above, U.S. military bases in Qatar play a very important role in the fight against terrorism in the region, especially in places like Syria and Iraq, where the U.S. has been conducting regular airstrikes to decimate the Islamic State, and other terrorist groups. Qatar sees U.S. military bases located on its soil as an extension of U.S. security Umbrella and relies extensively on U.S. military bases in its territory for its security.

However, the United States can make it clear that its presence in Qatar does not give Qatar the moral right or legitimacy to carry out policies that are prejudicial to U.S. interest in the region or its allies. The United States could in this regard, explore the possibility of relocating its base to other countries in the region, which have shown more willingness to align with the

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<sup>239</sup> “United Nation Security Council. Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999) 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning ISIL (Da'esh) Al-Qaida and associated individuals groups undertakings and entities.” *United Nations*, 28 May 2019, [undocs.org/en/S/RES/2462\(2019\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2462(2019))

<sup>240</sup> David, Ibsen. “The US Must Pressure Qatar to Crack Down on Terrorism.” *The Hill, Capitol Hill Publishing Corp* 27 June 2017, [thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/foreign-policy/339536-the-us-must-pressure-qatar-to-crack-down-on-terrorism](https://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/foreign-policy/339536-the-us-must-pressure-qatar-to-crack-down-on-terrorism)

<sup>241</sup> Weinberg, David. *Terrorist Financing: Kidnapping, Antiquities Trafficking, and Private Donations*. Hearing before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade, 17 Nov. 2015, [docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA18/20151117/104202/HHRG-114-FA18-Wstate-WeinbergD-20151117.pdf](https://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA18/20151117/104202/HHRG-114-FA18-Wstate-WeinbergD-20151117.pdf)

interest of the United States.<sup>242</sup> As stated by President Donald Trump in an interview with the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN), many countries are willing to pay to host the U.S. airbases.<sup>243</sup>

In this light, The United States can leverage the presence of its airbase and service members in Qatar, to secure greater commitments and guarantees from Qatar's government, not to engage in activities that destabilize the region or its neighbor's.<sup>244</sup> This commitment can include an agreement from Qatar to tone down its inciting news broadcast on Al Jazeera on U.S. Gulf allies. This should not be seen as a way of ending Qatar's initiative at encouraging free speech or freedom of the press however, the U.S. should bring to the fore, the use of certain deliberate and harmful narratives by Al Jazeera, to embarrass the Gulf monarchies. The U.S. should also make it known, that Al Jazeera's Arabic damaging coverage of the U.S., which incite hatred against the U.S. will not be tolerated as an ally with similar objectives in the region.

### **The United States Could Diplomatically Engage the GCC to Strengthen Relations between Member States in Other to Settle Inter-State Rivalry**

The United States has been an influential actor in the Middle East, since the abdication of the British Empire in the 1970s, and has become unrivaled by the demise of the United Soviets Socialist Republics (USSR). These turn of events has left the United States in a very advantageous geopolitical position, as a strategic actor in the Middle East. In this light, the U.S. has the needed influence and geopolitical standing, particularly with the members of the GCC.

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<sup>242</sup> Bakker Elliot. "Why It's Time To Remove The United States' Air Base From Qatar." *The Federalist*, 18 July 2017, [thefederalist.com/2017/07/18/time-remove-united-states-air-base-qatar/](http://thefederalist.com/2017/07/18/time-remove-united-states-air-base-qatar/)

<sup>243</sup> Karam, Joyce. "Trump says US has Alternatives to Qatar's Al Udeid Airbase." *The National*, 14 July 2019, [www.thenational.ae/world/mena/trump-says-us-has-alternatives-to-qatar-s-al-udeid-airbase-1.608878](http://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/trump-says-us-has-alternatives-to-qatar-s-al-udeid-airbase-1.608878)

<sup>244</sup> Al Ansari, Salman. "The Case for Moving Al-Udeid Airbase from Qatar." *The Hill. Capitol Hill Publishing Corp* 9 Oct. 2017, [thehill.com/opinion/international/354555-the-case-for-moving-al-udeid-airbase-from-qatar](http://thehill.com/opinion/international/354555-the-case-for-moving-al-udeid-airbase-from-qatar)

Since the GCC remains one of the most important blocs of allies in the Gulf, both economically and in security, the United States should diplomatically engage the member states to align with the U.S. in areas of strategic and shared interests.<sup>245</sup> This will in turn, require Qatar to follow courses of actions and joint plans, backed by the U.S. For instance, the U.S. can bring Qatar onboard U.S. backed plans to slow down and prevent terrorists financing in the region.

For the U.S. to be successful in the use of diplomacy, as a tool in getting the GCC members on the same page on diverse issues, the United States should address terrorism as a wider problem facing the GCC. Choosing to single out Qatar as without criticism of other GCC countries is an error of omission that does little to advance a workable solution to the crisis.<sup>246</sup> The blockading states as noted above, have engaged in the same destabilizing vices as Qatar. In this light, the United States could be more sensitive and aware of the political dynamics at play in the GCC to make better diplomatic policies. By carrying out diplomacy in this manner, the efforts of the United States would be viewed as credible, which is a quality desired in a diplomatic process.

### **The United States Should Encourage Qatar to Return to its Prior Role as a Mediator of Conflicts in the Region**

Qatar has tested both waters of mediation and regional adventurism, and it is strikingly obvious that Qatar's best years as an international actor on the global stage, have been in times it sought to mediate between conflicting parties and not take sides in the conflict. Qatar's mediating activities have come with varied results; however, the efforts are always worthwhile.

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<sup>245</sup> Bowen, Andrew. "A Fractured Gulf: US Policy going Forward." *American Enterprise Institute*, Sept. 2017, [www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/A-fractured-Gulf.pdf](http://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/A-fractured-Gulf.pdf)

<sup>246</sup> Ibid

In this light, the United States can encourage Qatar to be more active as a mediator in times of crisis, which hitherto Qatar had been known for. Although Qatar may have lost some of its credibility as an impartial mediator, Qatar still maintains the numerous contacts of individual and group actors, which are parties to various conflicts. Such contacts have benefited the United States at various times. For example, Qatar helped broker a ceasefire between Hamas and Israel during periods of intense fighting, and also helped secure the release of Peter Theo Curtis, an American hostage held for nearly two years by the Al Qaeda linked Al-Nusra Front in Syria.<sup>247</sup>

In this regard, Qatar's relationship with Iran, which has been a source of tension between Qatar and U.S. allies in the Middle East is somewhat overstated, and has only gained momentum as Qatar seeks new allies. The United States should seek to prevent Saudi Arabia and its allies from pushing Qatar too far, due to its relationship with Iran, which is largely based on economic interest. However, Qatar's relationship with Iran can instead be viewed as a political card, which the U.S. can utilize in times of need for a diplomatic window needed to engage Iran on a range of geopolitical issues. In this light, forcing Qatar to take the same hardline stance as Saudi Arabia may be counterproductive, since Qatar's relationship with Iran can prove strategically valuable in the long run.

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<sup>247</sup> *Accessing the U.S.-Qatar relationship*. Hearing before the Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa. Committee on Foreign Affairs House of Representatives, One Hundred and Fifteenth Congress First Session, 26 July 2017 Serial No. 115-55. docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA13/20170726/106329/HHRG-115-FA13-Transcript-20170726.pdf

## CONCLUSION

The maverick and often confusing policies of Qatar continue to beg the question among U.S. policymakers, and that is, “is Qatar a reliable ally?” or is “Qatar a friend or foe of the United States?” In response to the confusing stance on Qatar, former U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, in his position as a senator in 2009, expressed his frustration, stating that “Qatar can’t continue to be an American ally on Monday that sends money to Hamas on Tuesday.”<sup>248</sup>

It is pertinent the United States take a tougher and more decisive stance on Qatar, in light of the important role the decisions and actions of the United States plays on the world stage. The United States as a democracy, and a frontline actor against terrorism, has a moral obligation to respond to acts that undermine international law and order. Qatar’s activities as a permissive jurisdiction for terrorism, and terrorism financing should not be condoned by the United States.

However, the path to a more predictable Qatar seems to be clearer in sight, in light of its current diplomatic and political travails as a result of the GCC crisis. The United States should channel the political momentum created by the GCC crisis, to push Qatar to a more harmonious stance on geopolitical issues that align with U.S. interests in the region. This should be done by taking active measures against Qatar to curb its excesses. These measures should be consistent and stringent enough to alter the calculus of Qatar, which should include sanctions, and policies that can further isolate Qatar. The United States should also be consistent in ensuring that it holds all its Middle Eastern allies to the same standard as Qatar. The United States can also make it clear that Qatar’s security begins at home with the peaceful coexistence with its allies, and not

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<sup>248</sup>Salisbury, Peter. “In Qatar v Saudi Arabia, the West Can't Afford to Pick a Side.” *Chatham House. Royal Institute for Foreign Affairs*, [www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/qatar-v-saudi-arabia-west-cant-afford-pick-side](http://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/qatar-v-saudi-arabia-west-cant-afford-pick-side)

abroad in trying to go against the interest of its neighbors, which are also allies of the United States.

However, it is important that the United State recognize the benefits of Qatar in the long run, as Qatar has made various contributions that have helped the United States in achieving some of its objectives, especially, in the areas of counter-terrorism. Nevertheless, a passive response from the United States is not in the interest of the U.S., since Qatar's actions undercut core values of the United States. In today's globalized world, the United States or its allies might be vulnerable to attacks that can result from Qatar's consistent failure to live up to its international and regional responsibilities. In this light, the United States should be firm in its dealings with Qatar, which means that the United States should not hesitate in applying various forms of pressure in response to Qatar's policies that pose threats to its interest.



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