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# Tracing Qatar's Foreign Policy and its Impact on Regional Security

Bernd Kaussler | Sep 2015

## Tracing Qatar's Foreign Policy Trajectory and its Impact on Regional Security

Series: Research Paper

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### **Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies**

PO Box 10277

Street No. 826, Zone 66

Doha, Qatar

Tel: +974 44199777 | Fax: +974 44831651

[www.dohainstitute.org](http://www.dohainstitute.org)



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## Introduction

Qatar presents a fascinating case through which to examine theories and practices of International Relations (IR). This paper surveys research on small states, and in particular their quest for status and security in IR, through the example of Qatar's diplomatic position vis-a-vis Iran, the United States, and its fellow GCC members during the period after the Arab Spring. In IR literature, small states (or microstates) rarely feature prominently in diplomatic relations due to their alleged lack of power and global significance. To date, IR research on microstates has largely focused on the realist premise that small states, in order to gain power, 'bandwagon' behind a greater power or 'balance' against it by means of alliances with other countries. However, the case of Qatar challenges these assumptions. A look at the country's foreign policy shows that small states are far from inconsequential in international relations. On the contrary, this paper argues that the Qatari leadership has refused to remain in the shadows of either its allies or regional antagonists. Rather, Qatar has followed a distinctly individual and influential foreign policy position both within and outside of the Middle East. Embedded within recent IR literature on the foreign affairs of small states, this paper forwards several arguments on the realities and trajectory of Qatar's foreign policy:

(1) Qatar has an 'activist foreign policy.' This sees both economic and political gain for the country, as well as ensuring its security. Reflecting on lessons of past security challenges, Qatar participated in the military intervention in Libya and continues to honor its alliance with the US. This intervention (i.e. the 'ad-hoc coalition in Libya') and other commitments were meant to provide political support and legitimacy to Europe and the US in return for guarantees around security, as well as political and economic benefit.

(2) Domestic political legitimacy has been a primary concern for the Qatari leadership in the wake of the Arab Spring. On account of this, Qatar has not only supported non-state actors and democratic movements across the region but also managed to dominate the 'political opposition discourse' of the Arab Spring. Qatar's government also provided its good offices and humanitarian support in international crises. However, support of opposition groups (the championing of 'the responsibility to protect' and its work toward democracy in Libya and Syria, its support for the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the rebels in Syria, and the Palestinians during the 2014 Gaza conflict, for example) directly countered the soft power advanced by Iran and Hezbollah in the region.

(3) Qatari foreign policy is as much influenced by systemic regional factors as it is the product of its political elite. Based on recent research on elite ideas, identities, and preferences on their impact on foreign policies in small states, Qatar's elite can be understood to desire a leading role in the Middle East and beyond. This desire has substantially determined the substance and direction of Qatari foreign policy.

(4) Qatar's 'activist' and independent foreign policy can positively impact Middle East security and help move the region toward a concert based on power equilibrium. Regional order in the Middle East has been a mixture of hegemonic stability (extended deterrence by the US) and a balance of power between regional states that oscillates between different coalitions and outside powers. Outside interference, and in particular the fallout from the last Israel-Arab/Palestine conflict, has left the region with no mutual defense pact and no balance of power concert based on equilibrium. Instead of seeking an integrative mutual defense regime, alliances were formed to balance against one another. In order for a Middle Eastern security architecture to emerge, a critical mass of regional states must develop stable and mutually reinforcing ties; only this will permit long-term interests to coalesce. Given the fluid regional relations created by the tumult of the Arab Spring, Qatar might act as a conduit for a regional détente between

external patrons and regional antagonists. This is particularly the case given Qatar's work in accommodating itself with an emerging US-Iranian rapprochement whilst maintaining strong ties to its fellow GCC members.

Rather than balancing or bandwagoning, analysis reveals that for the first time, Middle Eastern states are beginning to define their relations' vis-à-vis one another on the basis of their individual interests and ambitions rather than those foreign policy orientations being delivered unto them from afar. To facilitate a self-regulated and stable Middle East, Qatar's 'activist' foreign policy seems a vital first step in managing external powers and bringing together in common interest what have thus far been antagonistic regional actors.

## Small States and International Relations

There are three main areas of IR theory that are challenged by the case of Qatar. From the question of 'bandwagoning,' and the idea that small states must align with larger powers or build coalitions, to the assumption that wealth and resources make for foreign policy clout, and the idea that leadership does not play a large role in small state IR. Finally, taking all these into consideration, a look at how Qatar has mobilized its situation in the wake of the Arab Spring provides strong evidence for an alternative model of small state foreign policy positioning.

### Resources

Given the lack of resources in small states, IR theory sets two top foreign policy priorities: alliance formation, and securing and defense commitments from more powerful states. In a post-Cold War era, this has usually meant bandwagoning with a regional (e.g. China or Russia) or global (US) hegemon. Recent research on small and

'micro-state' security, however, suggests that an 'activist foreign policy' and 'ad-hoc coalition building' can alternatively provide small states with "opportunities to 'sell' political support and legitimacy in return for security and economic benefits." Wivel and Oest, for example, looked at the participation of Pacific island states in 'Operation Iraqi Freedom,' and argue that:

Participation in a 'coalition of the willing', such as the coalition in Iraq in 2003, cost the microstates relatively little, as they only contributed with diplomatic support (with the exception of Tonga), and the increased threat related to coalition participation was minor. The US aimed for quantity more than quality when forming the coalition. The main issue for the US was to increase the legitimacy of the invasion by making the coalition as inclusive as possible; not by adding more specific capabilities to the practical conducting of the invasion.<sup>1</sup>

The situation of Qatar is similar. Though the Qatari government needs US security assurances and pledges its support for US military operations, Qatar's leadership is also navigating between Iranian and Saudi influence as well as is offering its good offices as intermediary in regional conflicts. So even though Qatar has enjoyed a formal defense pact with the United States since 1991 (renewed in 2013) and hosts the CENTCOM Forward Headquarters on its soil, the country can be seen to pursue a largely activist and independent foreign policy. In fact, Qatar's activist foreign policy provides economic and political gains as well as security, as this paper shall outline.

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<sup>1</sup> Anders Wivel and Kajsa Ji Noe Oest, "Security, profit or shadow of the past? Explaining the security Strategies of Microstates," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Volume 23, Number 3, September 2010, 450.



## Soft Power

When examining the means at a state's disposal for exercising influence in international relations, the spectrum traditionally looks at the classic pyramidal power inventory consisting of resources, capabilities and instruments.<sup>2</sup> By this definition, small states inevitably have little military or diplomatic strength. However, the body of literature on 'soft power' or 'implicit influence' looks beyond traditional forms of command power, and shifts its gaze toward culture, ideology, ideas and their work in setting a political agenda and determining the framework of debate in a way that shapes preferences of other states. In this vein, Nye argues that the ability to affect what other countries want tends to be associated with intangible power resources such as culture, ideology and institutions.<sup>3</sup> So, for example, small states like the Vatican and Singapore utilize their political economy potential, good governance structures, religious authority, and diplomatic mediation as forms of soft power.<sup>4</sup> Both Singapore and Vatican City display foreign policy clout disproportionate to their physical size or resources. Both, however, make use of different types of soft power to gain influence. Singapore's competence in managing economic activities and its attractiveness for investment, on the one hand, and the Vatican's religious and ethical appeal in its activist foreign policy on the other, both provide the small states with compensatory symbolic power – soft power. Both cases illustrate how good governance and idealist diplomacy (particular during the

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<sup>2</sup> See Christopher Hill, *The Changing Politics of Foreign Policy*, (Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan), 2003, p.136 ; Bruce Russett, Harvey Starr, David Kinsella, *World Politics – The Menu for Choice*, (San Francisco : Freeman), 1981, 94.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph S. Nye, "Soft Power," *Foreign Policy*, Number 80, (Fall 1990), 166 .

<sup>4</sup> Alan Chong, "Small State Soft Power Strategies: Virtual Enlargement in the Cases of the Vatican City State and Singapore" in *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 23, 3 (2010), 383.

papacies of John Paul II and Pope Francis) helped enlarge the international presence and political weight of these states in the international community.<sup>5</sup>

Qatar has made similar use of its available ideological and cultural resources to gain status. This came through the support of democratic actors and democratic movements across the Middle East, but also its dominance of the 'political opposition discourse' amid the Arab Spring. The "discourse war"<sup>6</sup> that accompanied the Arab Spring in the media and public diplomacy was dominated by Doha-based al-Jazeera. Broadcasts from the Qatari channel and news articles from its website drove the discourse of the era, and overshadowed the discourse of Iran and Hezbollah, and their own news outlets.

### Leadership

Equally important in considering Qatar's position internationally is the question of whether "leaders matter in international relations?" This has been a fundamental part of the agent-structure debate in international relations theory. The accepted premise of Foreign Policy Analysis literature has been that "the degree to which there is freedom of choice and room for individual preferences depends in significant measure on how compelling the external environment is."<sup>7</sup> Robert Jervis, however, in his look at the role of American presidents in foreign policy, argues that "skillful presidents differ from less skillful ones not in the content of their policies, but in their ability to get what they want through their gift for reading the domestic political currents, appealing to public opinion, and maintaining coalitions."<sup>8</sup> Differences in political skill, popularity and in the particular

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 403.

<sup>6</sup> See Raymond Hinnebusch, MEI Conference: Raymond Hinnebusch, "The Arab Uprising and Regional Alignments," Middle East Institute in Singapore (<http://vimeo.com/44913180>)

<sup>7</sup> Robert Jervis, "Do Leaders Matter And How Would We Know?" in *Security Studies*, Vol.22, Issue 2 (2013), 156.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 162.

domestic or international audience of a given age allow some leaders to use the political machinery better than others. According to Jervis, those who are able to navigate the arena "will suffer less from the slings and arrows of outrageous bureaucracy, thwarting the tendency for departments to implement the president's policies in ways that they want, but the president does not want, curbing the unruly and disruptive ambitions of cabinet officers, and drawing the best from the government in terms of information and options."<sup>9</sup>

It is without question that a leader who is successfully able to navigate multiple fields can make a difference to the standing of a nation; it was the leadership of Prime Minister Winston Churchill that led Britain to victory during the Second World War, and half a century later, Tony Blair too dominated British foreign policy as he allied his Labor government with the US rather than his EU partners France and Germany, a move which has shaped the international relations sphere since. In the United States, it was George W. Bush's ideology coupled with the trauma of 9/11 that created a shift in US foreign policy towards unilateralism and a military intervention in the Middle East despite his lack of foreign policy credentials.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, German foreign policy under Chancellor Angela Merkel's pragmatic but decisive leadership mastered the European financial crisis as well as trans-Atlantic issues ranging from NSA spying to troop commitments in Afghanistan, security in the Ukraine, and issues in the Middle East. Political psychology and critical literature on the subject both stress how leaders' beliefs and decision-making styles directly impact foreign policy behavior.<sup>11</sup> When linking the

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 167.

<sup>11</sup> In an analysis on foreign policy decision-making in the run up of the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, Keller and Shannon argued that the "need for power, belief in ability to control events, in-group bias, and especially distrust may be important predictors of one's willingness to violate international norms." Vaughn P. Shannon, Johnathan W. Keller, "Leadership Style and International Norm Violation: The Case of the Iraq War," *Foreign Policy Analysis*, Vol. 3, Issue 1, (January 2007), 79-104.

question of leadership significance to the role of 'small states' in international relations, the concepts of power and influence seem to tell us that leaders do not matter very much. The standing theory holds that the foreign policies of 'small states' are primarily concerned with "withstanding pressure from the great powers, at safeguarding their territorial integrity and independence [...] A small power is a state on the defensive, a state that thirsts for security,"<sup>12</sup> and not focused on having an influence more broadly.

While security concerns may feature prominently among most states' foreign policy making (including the great powers), the heft of a nation's influence and power does not necessarily correlate with its territory size, wealth, or the strength of its military. However, research on 'small states' and the concept of influence in international relations moves beyond classic realist notions of power and the capacity to influence. Robert Rothstein's research on alliance formation among 'small states,' for example, analyses their "capacity to achieve intended effects" in foreign policy, and argues that one must look beyond "basic power factors" in order to assess this capacity. He suggests that a "wider criteria" be taken into account: "Small states may achieve their objectives despite an 'objective' lack of material power to do so."<sup>13</sup> Research on the foreign policy behavior of small states in the former USSR confirms that "elite ideas,

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<sup>12</sup> Matthias Maass, "The Elusive Definition of the Small State," *International Politics* Vol. 46, 1,(2009), 73; see also A Baker-Fox, *The Power of Small States: Diplomacy in World War Two*, (Chicago, Chicago University Press), 1959, 114, 180; for hierarchy amongst states see:

Jorge I. Domínguez, "Mice That Do Not Roar: Some Aspects of International Politics in the World Peripheries," *International Organization*, Vol.25 No.2, (1971) 175-208.

<sup>13</sup> Matthias Maass, "The Elusive Definition of the Small State," *International Politics* Vol. 46, 1,(2009), 74; for a in-depth analysis of honorary consuls for small states' diplomacy see Kevin D. Stringer, "Honorary Consuls in Small State Diplomacy: Through Liechtenstein's Lens," in *Discussion Papers in Diplomacy* No.120 (2011) (Netherlands Institute of International Relations "Clingendael") [http://www.clingendael.nl/sites/default/files/20110200\\_cdsp\\_paper\\_kstringer.pdf](http://www.clingendael.nl/sites/default/files/20110200_cdsp_paper_kstringer.pdf) (website accessed June 12, 2014)

identities and preferences" help us understand the pro-Western or pro-Russian leanings of each state much more than systemic or structural approaches do.<sup>14</sup>

Just as in the case of the states in the former USSR, a look at Qatar supports the idea that leadership plays a large role in the foreign policy capabilities of small states. In fact, as the following sections will outline, Qatari leadership has been instrumental in setting and implementing the country's foreign policy, both with reference to long-term goals as well as during crisis decision-making.

Given the tectonic shifts in Middle Eastern politics since 2011, both the nature of governance and regional relations are subject to the statesmanship of both citizens and leaders in and outside the region. The conflicts and changes associated with the Arab Spring represent a major systemic shock to the regional balance. Like previous post-war junctures (1648, 1713, 1815, 1919 and 1945) these changes provide opportunities for renegotiating the Middle Eastern order. However, unlike the 1814-5 Congress of Vienna, when 'small states' were invited to attend but perceived status as 'weak powers' and therefore were not treated as equals, in today's Middle East and indeed internationally, small states like Qatar can have a major impact on an emerging regional architecture.<sup>15</sup>

## Qatar: The Foreign Policy Maverick

In its negotiation of the events of 2011 and after, Qatar has proven itself to be a small state with foreign policy clout. It has used soft power and an activist foreign policy to secure its place in the international community, and is shaping the region in the midst of a period of great instability.

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<sup>14</sup> Giorgi Gvalia, David Siroky, Bidzina Lebanidze & Zurab Iashvili, "Thinking Outside the Bloc: Explaining the Foreign Policies of Small States," in *Security Studies*, Vol. 22, Issue 1, (2013), 13.

<sup>15</sup> See Maass, "The Elusive Definition," 74.

Even before the upheavals of the Arab Spring, Qatar acted as peace broker and intermediary, balancing between Arab populist causes and extending a hand to Israel.<sup>16</sup> Upon taking office in 2013, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani described his country's activist foreign policy thus:

We are people who are committed to our principles and values. We do not live on the sidelines of life and we do not go adrift without a destination. We are not subservient waiting for guidance from anyone. This independent pattern of behavior has become factual in Qatar and people who deal with us. We are people with visions [...]

We respect all sincere and active political trends in the region but we are not supportive of a trend against another. We are Muslims and Arab; we respect the diversity of religious schools of thought and respect all religions in our country and abroad. As Arabs, we reject dividing the Arab communities based on sectarianism or doctrine because this affects social and economic immunity and prevents its modernization and development on the basis of citizenship regardless of religious sects or thoughts.<sup>17</sup>

The popular democratic upheavals presented Middle Eastern governments with a choice to either embrace the momentous changes that were taking place across the region or circle their wagons. The Islamic Republic of Iran was quick to label the popular movements as 'Arabs following the line of Imam Khomeini.' The protests' collective calls for dignity, good governance, and democracy, however, were more closely reminiscent

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<sup>16</sup> Andrew F. Cooper and Bessma Momani, "Qatar and Expanded Contours of Small State Diplomacy," in *The International Spectator*, Vol. 46, No. 3, September 2011, 113.

<sup>17</sup> Christopher M. Blanchard. "Qatar: Background and US Relations" in *Congressional Research Service* (January 30, 2014) <http://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL31718.pdf> (website accessed June 19, 2014)

of Iran's Green Revolution of 2009 rather than its Islamic Revolution of 1979. When Syria fell to the forces of popular protest, Iran felt compelled to side with its old Arab ally Bashar al-Assad and effectively joined the ranks of Saudi Arabia and the GCC states in their resistance against the popular forces of the Arab Spring. Qatar, on the other hand, offered its support for resistance movements across the region, including those working to topple Assad. Egypt, Libya and Syria became focal points of Qatari diplomacy and the region's ensuing 'discourse war.' Change was not something that Qatar only supported regionally, however, for the country embraced political reform at home as well.

The result of these resistance movements was an upheaval throughout the region. With the departure of Egypt's Mubarak in 2011, the Saudis lost an ally against the Muslim Brotherhood and its Islamist ideals of governance. As the Qatari government supported first the protesters and then the newly elected Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi, the UAE and Saudi Arabia remained loyal to Egypt's ancien régime; they supported the military coup against Morsi in July 2013 and the crackdown against Brotherhood supporters in Egypt that followed. Cairo's troubles meant it was focused internally, so while in the 1950s and 60s Radio Cairo controlled the pan-Arab anti-imperialist agenda of the region, in 2011 the discourse was largely dominated by Qatar's al-Jazeera and social-networks.<sup>18</sup> This meant that Qatari policy was driving the discourse, and framed the uprisings as popular demands to end corrupt and parochial regimes. The coverage glorified the protesters in Tahrir Square and their idealism, and demonized Mubarak and the Egyptian security forces. This stance was a major departure from the pan-Arab ideology that had hitherto dominated discussion: both the movement and al-Jazeera embraced the West's argument that the source of the region's problems was not

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<sup>18</sup> Hinnebusch, "The Arab Uprising and Regional Alignments."

Western imperialism but rather the lack of democracy.<sup>19</sup> In recognition of its coverage, the English version of al-Jazeera won a Peabody Award in 2012 for its work during the Arab Spring. Contrary to al-Jazeera's coverage stood the Saudi media empire. With the uprisings in Bahrain, Saudi controlled media adopted a staunch sectarian tone and framed its narrative of events there as an Iranian-backed 'Shia plot' intent on destabilizing the region. Protests there were eventually crushed with the Saudi-led GCC intervention into Bahrain.<sup>20</sup>

Overall, al-Jazeera's coverage of the Egyptian uprisings was biased, and aimed to delegitimize "Mubarak's regime and legitimizing the demonstrators among the Arab audiences in general, and especially among Egyptian audiences, which no doubt helped to resolve the 'battle in Egypt' with Mubarak's resignation."<sup>21</sup> While bias became clear during 2011, the 'discourse war' had begun back when al-Jazeera was launched in 1996, catering to Arab audiences with its "'criticism campaigns' against Arab regimes under the slogans 'Democratizing the Arab world' or 'The opinion and the other opinion.'"<sup>22</sup> The recalling of ambassadors by Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain and Egypt from Qatar on March 5, 2014 has to be seen within this context of both 'discourse war' as well as strategic maneuvering. As can the simultaneous support for Hamas and Islamist

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Toby Matthiesen, "The Sectarian Gulf vs. The Arab Spring" (October 8, 2013) in *Foreign Policy* [http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/10/08/the\\_sectarian\\_gulf\\_vs\\_the\\_arab\\_spring](http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/10/08/the_sectarian_gulf_vs_the_arab_spring) (website accessed June 12, 2014)

<sup>21</sup> Khalil Rinnaw, "Cyber uprising: Al-Jazeera TV channel and the Egyptian Uprising," *Language and Intercultural Communication*, Vol. 12, Issue 2 (2012), 128.

<sup>22</sup> Rinnaw, "Cyber uprising," 128; Programs critical of Saudi Arabia broadcast by al-Jazeera were thought to have been a major reason for Riyadh's decision to withdraw its ambassador to Qatar from 2002 until 2008. See [BBC](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26447914) (March 5, 2014) <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26447914> (website accessed June 8, 2014).



groups in Syria,<sup>23</sup> and the March 2014 decision of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the UAE to classify the Muslim Brotherhood a "terrorist organization." With Morsi ousted and the Brotherhood under crackdown, the Saudis hope that the balance of power will return to what it was before 2011: a military dominated Egyptian regime underwritten by Saudi petro dollars that is furthering a Saudi-led counter-revolution against Islamists and pro-democracy movements, which is all meant to create for the United States a veneer of regional stability.

The way that Qatar and Saudi Arabia are negotiating the current shift has created new positions for the countries internationally. This has caused tensions. In November 2013, Saudi King Abdullah presented the new Qatari Emir with a document, which essentially demanded the complete reorientation of Qatari foreign policy. The Emir's refusal to sign the agreement resulted in the GCC statement that Qatar failed to "implement a November 2013 agreement not to back anyone threatening the security and stability of the GCC whether as groups or individuals — via direct security work or through political influence, and not to support hostile media."<sup>24</sup> The statement was an attempt by GCC states to force a reorientation of Qatari foreign policy and reign in its rising soft power in the region.<sup>25</sup> The Kuwaiti-brokered compromise, which was signed by Qatar's Foreign

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<sup>23</sup> During the July Gaza conflict, Saudi Grand Mufti Abdul Aziz Al Ash-Sheikh issued a fatwa against "pro-Gaza marches" calling them "useless demagogic actions" Aziz Alliou, "Saudi Grand Mufti Issues Fatwa Against Solidarity Marches" in *Morocco World News* (August 2, 2014). <http://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2014/08/135880/saudi-grand-mufti-issues-fatwa-against-solidarity-marches-with-gaza/> (website accessed August 5, 2014)

<sup>24</sup> Madawi Al-Rasheed, "Saudi – Qatar Tensions Divide GCC," in *al-Monitor* (March 6, 2014) <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/03/saudi-qatar-gcc-tensions-islamist.html###ixzz39XBYI7RC> (website accessed May 29, 2014)

<sup>25</sup> Abbas Al Lawati, "What is Qatar's Tamim thinking, after all? Doha may be looking to Oman for Empathy, Not an Alliance" (March 12, 2014) Gulf News

<http://gulfnews.com/opinions/columnists/what-is-qatar-s-tamim-thinking-after-all-1.1303239> (website accessed May 16, 2014).

Minister in April the following year, purportedly outlined the same conditions as the first document. The compromise stated:

- Qatar's curtailment of funding to media organizations in the Middle East that are critical of the policies of the GCC
- Expulsion of Muslim Brotherhood Members living in Doha and a halt to the country's support for the Brotherhood
- Curtailment of support for the Houthis in Yemen
- Halt of current policy to naturalize Gulf immigrants who had fled other GCC states for political reasons.<sup>26</sup>

Doha was given three-months to comply before ambassadors would be sent back to their GCC home countries. The GCC countries' willingness to escalate this 'discourse war' and reign in Qatari's foreign policy ambitions exemplifies Qatar's rising implicit cultural and political influence in the region. If there was any question as to whether Qatar would comply with the demands of the compromise paper, however, the Gaza conflict of July 2014 (three months after it was signed) showed that a reorientation of Qatari foreign policy was unlikely. Doha, along with Ankara, participated in brokering a ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas. As the only two nations to have official contact with one of the belligerents: Hamas, they were asked by US Secretary of State John Kerry to assist in negotiations. In asking Doha to participate in negotiations instead of Egypt (the traditional broker of Hamas-Israel ceasefires) a new coalition of Arab States officially emerged. On the one hand, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and the UAE

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<sup>26</sup> Steven A. Cook, "How Personal Politics Drive Conflict in the Gulf," in *Council on Foreign Relations* (May 6, 2014) <http://blogs.cfr.org/cook/2014/05/06/how-personal-politics-drive-conflict-in-the-gulf/> (website accessed July 20, 2014)

effectively lined up with Israel in its fight against Hamas,<sup>27</sup> while Qatar was able to use soft power as both vehicle and goal for Doha's foreign policy. This was done by virtue of adhering to the principle of freedom of expression, and is therefore unlikely to be struck down by conventional GCC hard power.

### Activist Foreign Policy

Qatar's 'activist foreign policy' is ambivalent about political returns. On the one hand, Doha honors its allegiance to the United States and maintains numerous US military-to-military ventures as well as political and cultural initiatives (i.e. 'security and counter terrorism'; 'US President's Initiative on Muslim Community Engagement'; 'Interagency Engagement on Joint Political Military Issues'; Interagency Initiatives on Critical Energy Infrastructure Protection; ILiAD Support to Diplomatic Operations).<sup>28</sup> However, on the other, it pursues a highly independent IR scheme. This has not gone unnoticed. The US Embassy described Qatari foreign policy as "highly personalized" and with "an orientation towards the middle," noting that:

Qatar will also continue to pursue its classic vulnerable small-state policies aimed either at pleasing as many players as possible or - where competing demands make this impossible - at containing and counter-

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<sup>27</sup> During the conflict, Egyptian media outlets repeatedly blamed Hamas for the violence and "continued to rail against [the group, suggesting a] regional Islamist plot to destabilize Egypt and the region" David D. Kirkpatrick, "Arab Leaders, Viewing Hamas as Worse Than Israel, Stay Silent," in *New York Times* (July 31, 2014) [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/31/world/middleeast/fighting-political-islam-arab-states-find-themselves-allied-with-israel.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/31/world/middleeast/fighting-political-islam-arab-states-find-themselves-allied-with-israel.html?_r=0)

<sup>28</sup> Disclosed US Diplomatic Cable (November 19, 2009) US embassy cables: "Qatar using al-Jazeera as bargaining tool, claims US" in *The Guardian*

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/235574> (website accessed May 1, 2014)

balancing irritation caused by these policies. We expect Qatar therefore to persist in supporting problematic players such as Hamas, Hezbollah and Syria, even as it attempts to strengthen its relationship with the United States and its GCC neighbors. *We expect the trend in favor of using Al Jazeera as an informal tool of GOQ foreign policy to continue undiminished.*<sup>29</sup>

Another cable from the US Embassy in Cairo in 2010 describes Egyptian frustration at Qatar's third party mediation efforts. Since the fall of 2010, Doha helped set up a series of meetings between the Taliban and the US and additionally offered its good offices in Darfur. Then President Hosni Mubarak was determined to spoil Doha's efforts:

Egypt is determined to thwart every single initiative Qatar proposes during its current term as president of the Arab League, to include proposals that are in Egypt's national interest ... The Egyptian DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission] said Qatar's involvement in Sudan, Palestine, and Al Jazeera's vitriolic broadcasts against Egypt were the main causes of Egyptian leaders' ire, to include that of President Mubarak. Challenged to list actions Qatar had taken in Sudan against Egypt's interest, Naguib readily conceded there were none. Qatar's offense, he said, stemmed from the mere act of its mediation in Egypt's back yard.<sup>30</sup>

What all of this data suggests, is that Qatari foreign policy fits squarely within the category of 'small state activist foreign policy.' This idea is supported by a number of

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid

<sup>30</sup> Cable cited in Hugh Ekin, "The Strange Power of Qatar" in *The New York Review of Books* (October 27, 2011) <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2011/oct/27/strange-power-qatar/?pagination=false&printpage=true> (website accessed July 19, 2014)

other instances of Qatar's exercising and development of its foreign policy through similar measures at the start of and even before the Arab Spring. For example, when Libya was engulfed in a bloody civil war and the country needed outside assistance in 2011, the Qatari government as well as the Arab League committed to the principle of 'responsibility to protect' and took the unprecedented step and supported NATO's military campaign. Moreover, Doha was instrumental in securing the support of the Arab League, which demanded for the UN Security Council to impose a no-fly zone over Libya, paving the way for the military campaign.

Following Qatar's successful mediated resolution of the 18-month-long stalemate in Lebanon in 2008, Doha's dispatch of six Mirage fighter jets to support the rebels in Libya marked its first active military intervention.<sup>31</sup> Doha's military support for the rebels was substantive and included arms shipments including French-made Milan antitank missiles and Belgian-made FN assault rifles and the provision of basic infantry training to rebels by Qatari Special Forces. Purportedly, the Qatari military trained Libyan fighters in Doha for special exercises. During the final assault on Qaddafi's Bab al-Aziziya base on August 24, Qatari Special Forces were seen on the front lines of the fight. Qatari efforts and supplies were instrumental in shifting the military balance to the favor of the rebels.<sup>32</sup> During the transition phase towards a new government, the Transitional National Council (TNC) lacked resources to neither pay public sector employees nor fund state subsidies on basic consumer goods. State owned International Petroleum Marketing Company marketed 1m barrels of crude oil on behalf of the TNC and delivered four shipments of petroleum products, including diesel, petrol

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<sup>31</sup> David Roberts, Behind Qatar's Intervention in Libya (September 28, 2012) *Foreign Affairs*, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/68302/david-roberts/behind-qatars-intervention-in-libya> (website accessed July 9, 2014)

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

and gas to the then rebel controlled port of Benghazi.<sup>33</sup> According to a senior member of the TNC this 'barter deal' between Qatar and the rebel group was aimed at circumventing UN sanctions against the Libyan government.<sup>34</sup> Qatar's initiative at marketing the crude carried more political than economic weight as it recognized the legitimacy of the TNC. One month later on March 28, Qatar was the first country in the Middle East and the second country after France in the international community to give full diplomatic recognition to the TNC as the new Libyan government. Notwithstanding subsequent political violence and fighting between rival militias and Islamist groups in Tripoli and Benghazi, Libya's transition to democratic governance has made progress since the fall of Qaddafi's authoritarian regime.<sup>35</sup> When Qatar took on the role as the regional standard-bearer of the doctrine of "responsibility to protect," Doha's leadership had essentially become the region's most vocal anti-status quo power.

Qatar's provision of good offices and active mediation in conflicts in the Muslim World has made the country an influential intermediary between regional and sub-state rivals. Qatari mediation efforts have become an integral part of its foreign policy toolkit and

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<sup>33</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit, "Qatar Undertakes to Sell Libyan Oil," (May 11, 2011) <http://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=1398092324&Country=Qatar&topic=Politics&subtopic=Recent+developments&subsubtopic=The+political+scene:+Qatar+undertakes+to+sell+Libyan+oil> (website accessed July 28, 2014); Steven Sotloff, "Why the Libyans Have Fallen Out Of Love With Qatar" *Time Magazine* (January 2, 2012) <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2103409,00.html> (website accessed July 28, 2014)

<sup>34</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit, "Qatar Undertakes to Sell Libyan Oil."

<sup>35</sup> In August, 158 out of 188 delegates convened for the first convention of the parliament and vowed to "prove to the world that Libya is not a failed country." There are 200 seats in total but 12 still represent a representative due to violence in respective districts. David Kirkpatrick In Libya, "Parliament Convenes Amid Battles," *in The New York Times*

(August 4, 2014) [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/05/world/africa/libyas-new-parliament-meets-amid-militia-rivalries.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/05/world/africa/libyas-new-parliament-meets-amid-militia-rivalries.html?_r=0) (website accessed August 4, 2014)

started to largely define its role in the Middle East. Contrary to the usual premium put on secrecy during mediation, Kamrava remarks that "Qatari mediation efforts have taken place in the limelight and often before local and regional media outlets, with high ranking Qatari diplomats frequently granting media interviews as the process is still underway and reflecting on the country's role in positive, often glowing terms."<sup>36</sup> The role of Qatari intermediaries in Lebanon stands out as watershed moments in the development of the country's diplomatic largesse. This was a position that was cemented by its involvement in Sudan.

Qatar's mediating role in Sudan started with efforts by Foreign Minister Ahmad bin Abdullah al-Mahumd, who initiated a course of shuttle diplomacy between Sudan and international actors with a stake in the conflict.<sup>37</sup> In January 2010, the French Special Envoy to Sudan privately credited the Doha talks with achieving significant progress in a resolution. The official told officials at the US Embassy in Qatar that it was the shuttle diplomacy that was able to bring all of the various factions, including the Justice and Equality Movement and the Tripoli and Addis groups, to the same talks for the first time since the 2004 signing of the Abuja Protocol.<sup>38</sup> Its commitment to fact-finding and evenhandedness earned Qatari intermediaries respect and trust from belligerents, which ultimately allowed various Qatari diplomats as well as UN and AU envoys to initiate a process of confidence building among the various Darfur groups.<sup>39</sup> The parties

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<sup>36</sup> Mehran Kamrava, "Mediation and Qatari Foreign Policy," *Middle East Journal*, Vol.65, No.4 (Autumn 2011), 542.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 554.

<sup>38</sup> Disclosed US Diplomatic Cable, *Reference ID 10DOHA40* (January 28, 2010) *French Envoy Expresses Optimism, Frustration With Darfur Talks*

<sup>39</sup> Mehran Kamrava, "Mediation and Qatari Foreign Policy," 545.

eventually signed a cease-fire agreement in Doha on February 23, 2010; the agreement addressed issues such as a prisoner exchange, power-sharing, the integration of the JEM armed groups into the Sudanese military, amnesty for militia members, the allocation of natural resources, and compensation to victims.<sup>40</sup> The platform provided by Qatar coupled with substantial financial commitment eventually paved the way for the July 2011 Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD), which continues to serve as the internationally accepted roadmap to implement a durable peace in Sudan.<sup>41</sup>

The Emir and Prime Minister's efforts to end Lebanon's 2008 standoff between Hezbollah and the March 14 Movement (effectively lead by the government under Prime Minister Fouad Siniora) effectively solved one of the greatest crises of instability since Lebanon's civil war ended in 1990.<sup>42</sup> The crisis began in November 2007 over the parliament's inability to agree on a consensus candidate for the presidency. Sectarian tensions gradually increased and by May 2008 tensions were so high that there was fear of a new outbreak of civil war. The Lebanese government's attempt to curtail Hezbollah power by shutting down its telecommunications network and sacking officials it suspected of being close to Hezbollah lead to the group occupying parts of Beirut

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<sup>40</sup> Disclosed US Diplomatic Cable, *Reference ID10DOHA74 (February 24, 2010) Leaders Sign Darfur Deal in Doha.*

<sup>41</sup> In its 2014 January report on Sudan, the International Crisis Group concludes, "horrific violence and displacement continue, largely due to protracted tribal conflicts, exacerbated by uncontrolled government militias. Insecurity and national economic crisis cripple the DDPD and much needed reconstruction and development." Sudan's Spreading Conflict (III): The Limits of Darfur's Peace Process

*Africa Report N°211* | January 27, 2014, 38.

<sup>42</sup> Mehran Kamrave, "Mediation and Qatari Foreign Policy," 547.



including the airport in protest.<sup>43</sup> Under the auspices of the Arab League, 14 negotiators representing various Lebanese factions gathered in Doha on May 17, 2008.

Shuttle diplomacy under the leadership of Qatar's Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, the country's Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabor al-Thani, and the Secretary-General of the Arab League Amr Moussa succeeded in reaching a compromise on the distribution of the 19 parliamentarian seats as well as the consensus president Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) commander General Michel Suleiman.<sup>44</sup> All parties also agreed on the formation of a national unity government with 16 seats for the majority, three seats for the president, and 11 (a blocking third) for the opposition. It was also agreed to use a new electoral law based on small districts that was used in the 1960s, but with a modification for Beirut.<sup>45</sup> The highly contentious issue of Hezbollah's weapons was addressed indirectly by the agreement, which called for all parties to abstain from political violence as well as for a dialogue between parties to reinforce the state's monopoly on violence throughout Lebanon's territory.<sup>46</sup> Given the parties involved and the sensitivities that had to be addressed through talks, the Qatari Prime Minister was uniquely placed to diffuse the situation.

The Qatari Prime Minister, given the nation's foreign policy positions, was able to reach out to both Syrian and Iranian parties in order to put pressure on Hezbollah. Walid

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid

<sup>44</sup> Disclosed US Diplomatic Cable, *Ref ID 08BEIRUT733, Lebanon: Agreement Reached in Doha* (May 21, 2008).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

Jumblatt, leader of the Druze in Lebanon, put stock in the efforts of Qatar's diplomacy, telling the US Embassy in Beirut that "March 14 is still waiting to see the Hezbollah weapons paper developed by the Qatari PM."<sup>47</sup> Amid shuttle diplomacy, Druze Telecommunication Minister Hamadeh is also reported to have told US Embassy officials that the "opposition holds too many 'hidden cards', adding 'we can't reward violence with a political victory."<sup>48</sup> Following a phone call by the Qatari Prime Minister, the US Embassy in Damascus reported that the Syrian president—eager to convert Hezbollah's gains on the ground into political gains—immediately phoned Nabih Berri (leader of the Shi'ite Amal movement) and issued a strong appeal in support of the deal, urging it to go forward. Berri conveyed Assad's message and Hezbollah's envoys eventually backed down, leaving Michel Naim Aoun, the head of the Free Patriotic Movement, politically exposed and without support.<sup>49</sup> The Doha Agreement on Lebanon was thus made, and reflected Shaykh Hamd bin Jassim's delicate balancing act between Lebanon's highly antagonistic internal and external parties.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Disclosed US Diplomatic Cable, *Ref ID 08STATE52907 Lebanon Monitoring Group: Situation Report No. 19* (May 19, 2008).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Disclosed US Diplomatic Cable, *Ref ID 08DAMASCUS357 Initial Intake From Damascus on Doha Agreement on Lebanon* (May 21, 2008).

<sup>50</sup> The Qatari Prime Minister's most difficult mediation efforts related to finding a formula on the cabinet composition and electoral law with the Lebanese Prime Minister's office rejecting the initial 10-10-10 formula. Whilst Bin Jassim attempt to amend the agenda to include a discussion on Hezbollah's weapons proved unsuccessful, the Qatari envoy's shuttle diplomacy was instrumental in securing deal which proved an effective at balancing moderates and hardliners in Lebanon as well as Syria. For more information see US Diplomatic Cable, *Ref ID08STATE52757, MGLBO1: Lebanon Monitoring Group Situation Report No. 17* (May 18, 2008).

Reflecting Qatar's success in Lebanon and other initiatives, a leaked 2009 US Embassy assessment of the country's diplomacy concluded that, "giving the Qataris a defined role to play is the best way to bring them on board. Qatar is a small state with global ambitions, and it wants to be seen as a player in regional politics and diplomacy. When we asked Qatar to help us—for example in interceding with the Libyans to put Lockerbie behind us at the end of the previous Administration—the Qataris worked our requests very quietly and effectively."<sup>51</sup> The same cable commended Qatari diplomacy and its role in resolving the Lebanese standoff as "having a policy of doors across the ideological spectrum in the region" as "important to promoting stability in the region." To the US diplomats in Doha, shuttle diplomacy in Lebanon lead Qatar's leader to three important decisions:

- 1) A small state getting along with everyone can accomplish what larger states (Jordan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia in the Lebanese example) cannot
- 2) Good relations with bad actors (in this case Syria and Iran) can lead to tangible and beneficial results for the region and the world
- 3) Resolving the Lebanese conflict increased regional stability and paid dividends for Qatar's own security and global standing. <sup>52</sup>

These observations also proved true in the case of Yemen, however, the failure to broker a deal in this case reveals just how much Qatar's soft power is perceived as challenging the regional status quo. Concern over Qatar's role in Yemen, even though it

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<sup>51</sup> Disclosed US Diplomatic *Cable, Ref ID 09DOHA376, Screenshot for Special Representative Holbrooke's June 6-7 Visit to Qatar* (June 3, 2009).

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

was well placed to act as broker, did not emerge until later in the negotiations process. Qatar's involvement dates back to 2004, when conflict between Houthi rebels, an Islamist militia, and the government witnessed serious violent rounds of fighting or 'wars' as the Yemeni press has called them. It was not until the 'fourth war' that Qatar's Shaykh Hamad travelled to Sana'a and indicated his government's willingness to mediate.<sup>53</sup> Unlike his later highly publicized shuttle diplomacy, the Emir and Prime Minister's early brokering efforts between warring parties in Yemen was kept secret. The first brokered ceasefire agreement on 16 June 2007 brought the Houthi leadership exile to Doha, and in exchange the rebels accepted the republican regime in Yemen and to hand over its heavy weaponry. In the agreement, the Yemeni government also conceded to the release of a number of Houthi supporters from prison, pledged amnesty for certain rebel leaders, and to rebuild war-damaged areas.<sup>54</sup> Subsequent efforts by Qatari intermediaries were stalled amidst renewed fighting between warring parties in the northern province of Saada and mutual denunciation over not having lived up to the ceasefire conditions.<sup>55</sup>

Notwithstanding several more attempts by the Qataris to reinvigorate the stalled mediation efforts throughout 2008 and 2009, the peace process became victim to the conflict's increasing intransigence, members of the ROYG's refusal to accept the Qataris' mediation, as well as outside interference by Saudi Arabia and Iran.<sup>56</sup> By mid-2009, the

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<sup>53</sup> Mehran Kamrave, "Mediation and Qatari Foreign Policy," 549.

<sup>54</sup> Disclosed US Diplomatic Cable, *Ref ID07SANAA1133 Saada: War is Over But Can ROYG Now Win the Peace?* (June 18, 2007).

<sup>55</sup> Disclosed US Diplomatic Cable, *Ref ID072124 Efforts Underway to Revive Qatari Mediation* (November 18, 2008).

<sup>56</sup> An agreement in February 2008 failed to have any positive impact on the ground as intense fighting continued. Disclosed US Diplomatic Cable, *Ref ID08SANAA240, Two Sides Agree to Revive Qatari*

Qatari leadership became subject to increasing attacks by Saudi Arabia for allegedly supporting the Houthi rebels, causing the Qatari Prime Minister to publicly state on several occasions that his country acted as a "fair broker in the conflict" and the previously brokered agreements between warring parties were not honored for no fault of its own. Faced with public criticism over Qatar's role, the Prime Minister advised the Emir not to continue Qatar's involvement in Yemen.<sup>57</sup> The subsequent conflict between Riyadh and Tehran over respective activities in Yemen left the conflict-ridden country without an effective neutral third party. Instead, Saudi Arabia increased its political and financial support for Yemen's President Saleh, ultimately acting as a driver of continued violence.<sup>58</sup> The so-called proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia in Yemen and Riyadh's accusations of Qatar's meddling in Yemen only intensified after the Arab Spring

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*Mediation in Sanaa* (February 6, 2008); see Disclosed US Diplomatic Cable, *Ref ID09SANAA2155, Sa'ada Ceasefire Talks Blow But Not Stalled*, (December 2, 2009); In a private meeting between the US Ambassador to Qatar and Prime Minister Shaykh Hamd bin Jassim al-Thani about how he more "might be a force for reconciliation in the Yemeni conflict, Shaykh Hamad stated that his influence with Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh is limited, since the President believes the Qataris are financing the Houthi rebels leading the Saada rebellion against his government. Still, the Prime Minister said that the GOQ is reaching out to Saleh and would like to host him in Doha for talks." Disclosed US Diplomatic Cable, *Ref ID 09DOHA606, Prime Minister: Qatar Deeply Concerned About Yemen*, (October 8, 2009).

<sup>57</sup> Disclosed US Diplomatic Cable, *Ref ID09DOHA432, Embassy Doha's Analysis of Qatari Prime Minister's al-Jazeera Interview* (July 1, 2009); Disclosed US Diplomatic Cable, *Ref ID09SANAA2155, Sa'ada Ceasefire Talks Blow But Not Stalled*, (December 2, 2009).

<sup>58</sup> For an assessment of Saleh's military campaign and Saudi influence see US Diplomatic Cable, *Ref ID09SANAA2176, Sa'ada Ceasefire Talks Shattered* (8 December 2009); Following Houthi incursions into Saudi territory, the Saudi military launched its largest deployment of forces since the Gulf War along the border and into Yemeni territory. Though GCC states expressed support for the Saudi military offensive, the US Embassy in Riyadh described Qatar's response as the "noticeable outlier" as on the same day the Emir conducted a five-hour visit to Tehran and met with both Supreme Leader Khameni and President Ahmedinajad, to discuss the situation in Yemen and escalating Saudi-Iranian tensions. Following the meeting, the Qatari PM told al-Jazeera that Iran and Saudi Arabia were "major countries in the region" who Qatar hopes "will communicate and have understanding." With respect to Yemen he notes, the cable indicated that "we first support the unity of Yemen, and we hope, in the meantime, that this issue will be resolved through political dialogue." Cited in US Diplomatic Cable, *Ref ID 09Riyadh1490 Saudis Will Do What it takes to secure Border*, (November 8, 2009).

in 2011. Since then, Saudi and Qatari policy towards Yemen has been seen by both states largely through the prism of extending both hard and soft power over the country as well as the region as a whole. To Riyadh, Qatar's activist foreign policy in Yemen and beyond was seen as competing for control of the Gulf and patronage of Islamist groups.<sup>59</sup> With the departure of President Saleh after thirty years of authoritarian rule in 2011 and the 2014 National Dialogue Conference, likeminded stakeholders of peace are building a fragile democratic infrastructure. However, this process continues to be challenged by armed non-state actors as well as the regional battle for influence.

The Yemeni case illustrates to what extent Qatar's activist and open door policy towards all countries in the Middle East as well as non-state actors is perceived as challenging the regional status quo. The country's Prime Minister put it succinctly in a 2009 interview with al-Jazeera's Arabic channel, saying, "Qatar has the right to speak out and the right to pursue an independent policy line. The subtext of this is that Qatar, despite its stated strategic alliance with the United States, despite its membership in the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Arab League, will not abandon its independence of thought and action."<sup>60</sup> Underscoring this is Qatar's involvement with Syria, where it has been working alongside the Saudi government to arm the rebels fighting Assad loyalists. On the one hand, this is a same sort of intervention as was practiced in the Libyan case, but on the other, Qatar is allied (unlike in Yemen) with Saudi Arabia.

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<sup>59</sup> See Monte Palmer, "Egypt Becomes Battle Ground for Arab States", *Asia Times* (March 24, 2014), [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle\\_East/MID-01-240314.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/MID-01-240314.html) (website accessed August 1, 2014)

<sup>60</sup> To the US Embassy in Doha, the interview was meant to signal the Qatari government's firm intention to maintain its engagement with, and active support for, non-state actors such as Hamas and Hezbollah regardless of international pressure Disclosed US Diplomatic Cable, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/214776> (website accessed August 12, 2014).

In February 2014, US Senator John McCain, commenting on the international response to the Syria crisis, said at the Munich Security Conference "Thank God for the Saudis and Prince Bandar, and for our Qatari friends."<sup>61</sup> Indeed, the Syrian theatre has been far from a straightforward intervention, with outside assistance limited to covert military support rather than the provision of humanitarian spaces or multilaterally enforced no-fly zones. The Qatari government continued to embrace the principle of the Arab Spring, and provided both substantial humanitarian support as well as military aid. By the beginning of 2012, the violence in Syria had caused widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure and loss of life on both sides. The International Crisis Group reported that regime forces subjected entire neighborhoods to intense bombardments and the targeted killings of civilians including children. This phase of radicalization empowered radical elements on both sides. Despite the destruction, there was no meaningful response from the international community. Rather, the governments of Russia and Iran continued to supply the Syrian military with aid whilst Western powers seemed to have exhausted all economic and diplomatic leverage.<sup>62</sup> Both Saudi Arabia and Qatar vowed to tilt this internal military balance in favor of rebel forces. US threats of military reprisals after the regime's chemical attacks against civilians in August 2013

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<sup>61</sup> Steve Clemons "Thank God for the Saudis: ISIS, Iraq, and the Lessons of Blowback," *The Atlantic* (June 23, 2014), <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/06/isis-saudi-arabia-iraq-syria-bandar/373181/> (website accessed June 25, 2014).

<sup>62</sup> International Crisis Group, Syria's Phase of Radicalization (April 10, 2012) <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/publication-type/media-releases/2012/mena/syrias-phase-of-radicalisation.aspx>; In 2012, according to the IISS Military Balance, the financial and material support provided by Iran was considerable and allegedly contributed to improving the Assad's territorial advances. Also according to the IISS, Iran had provided communications and Internet-monitoring equipment. Starting in 2012, Iran dispatched members of its Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) to advise Syrian troops in urban and counter-insurgency warfare and, in some cases, to take part in the fighting. Iran also trained hundreds of Shia militiamen at the Amir Al-Momenin camp outside Tehran. IISS, *Military Balance 2014*, Vol. 114 Issue 1, (2014) Chapter Seven Middle East and North Africa, 297.

were eventually defused when the UN Security Council charged the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to destroy Syria's entire stockpile. By August 2014, the OPCW, which was awarded the 2013 Nobel Peace Prize for its work in Syria, stated that over 70% of Syria's chemical stockpile had been destroyed.<sup>63</sup> Western states were eager to defer to the OPCW and other multilateral organizations and allow them to enforce a change in Syria. During a debate on Syria in the British House of Commons after which parliament voted against military intervention in Syria, British Secretary of Defense Philip Hammond explained the reasons why Britain would stay out of Syria: "there is a deep well of suspicion about military involvement in the Middle East stemming largely from the experiences of Iraq."<sup>64</sup> In the same debate, Prime Minister, David Cameron cautioned against comparing Syria with the Iraq 2003 invasion, but ultimately championed the expediency of a UN sanctioned military campaign:

I am deeply mindful of the lessons of previous conflicts and, in particular, of the deep concerns in the country that were caused by what went wrong with the Iraq conflict in 2003. However, this situation is not like Iraq. What we are seeing in Syria is fundamentally different. We are not invading a country. We are not searching for chemical or biological weapons. The case for ultimately supporting action—I say "ultimately" because there would have to be another vote in this House—is not based on a specific piece or pieces of intelligence. [...] The evidence that the

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63 *OPCW Press Release*, Ellesmere Port Facility Completes Destruction of Its Consignment of Syrian Chemicals; Almost Three Quarters of Syria's Entire Stockpile Now Destroyed, (August 7, 2014)

<http://www.opcw.org/news/article/ellesmere-port-facility-completes-destruction-of-its-consignment-of-syrian-chemicals-almost-three-q/> (website accessed August 13, 2014).

<sup>64</sup> IISS, *Military Balance 2014*, Chapter One, Conflict Analysis and Conflict Trends, 11.



Syrian regime has used these weapons, in the early hours of 21 August, is right in front of our eyes. [...] The differences with 2003 and the situation with Iraq go wider. Then, Europe was divided over what should be done; now, Europe is united in the view that we should not let this chemical weapons use stand. Then, NATO was divided; today, NATO has made a very clear statement that those who are responsible should be held accountable. Back in 2003, the Arab League was opposed to action; now, it is calling for it. It has issued a statement holding the Syrian regime fully responsible and asking the international community to overcome internal disagreements and to take action against those who committed this crime.<sup>65</sup>

Just like Britain, President Obama sought from Congress and was denied authorization to enter Syria. It was after this that he had issued the threat that the use of chemical weapons would constitute a red line, which would warrant US military retaliation. The White House proposal would have empowered the President to order military action to “prevent or deter the use or proliferation” of chemical or biological weapons “within, to or from Syria” and to “protect the United States and its allies and partners against the threat posed by such weapons.”<sup>66</sup> A deeply divided Congress coupled with the Russian initiative for the Syrian government to have the chemical weapon stockpile destroyed eventually thwarted President Obama’s call for arms against Syria. Conscious and wary

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<sup>65</sup> House of Commons (Debate August 29, 2013) Column 1425

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmhansrd/cm130829/debtext/130829-0001.htm#1308298000001>.

<sup>66</sup> Peter Baker and Johnathan Weisman, “Obama seeks Approval By Congress For Strike in Syria,” *New York Times*, (August 31, 2013) [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/01/world/middleeast/syria.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/01/world/middleeast/syria.html?_r=0)

of committing extensive military and intelligence resources towards another military conflict in the Middle East, the Obama administration's policy towards Syria was more informed by reluctance to inadvertently backing violent extremists than a proactive strategy to effectively intervene.<sup>67</sup>

Lacking a clear EU and US leadership on effectively settling the violence in Syria, Qatari policy—which remained committed to intervention—substantially influenced the internal military balance in Syria. During 2012, “Friends of the Syrian People,” a group of 70 countries supporting the Syrian opposition, could not agree on a common policy of supplying weapons to the anti-government militias. While the US and other European governments supplied non-lethal equipment in 2012, the Qataris purportedly used a covert arms network to move man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS) to the Syrian rebels.<sup>68</sup> It was reported that Qatar would eventually move on to become the biggest foreign donor to Syria's opposition by providing generous refugee packages to defectors (one estimate puts it at USD 50,000 a year for a defector and his family).

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<sup>67</sup> See Adam Entous and Siobhan Gorman, “Behind Assad's Comeback, a Mismatch in Commitments Regime's Survival Seen as Example of America's Inability to Steer Events From a Distance,” *The Wall Street Journal* (December 31, 2013) <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702303453004579292543464208138> (website accessed July 3, 2014).

<sup>68</sup> Pieter D. Wezeman, *SIPRI Yearbook 2013, Arms Transfers to Syria*, (Oxford University Press, 2013), 272; According to US officials, one of the shipments of shoulder-fired missiles was a batch of Chinese-made FN-6s. Mark Mazzetti, C.J. Chivers and Eric Schmitt, “Taking Outsize Role in Syria, Qatar Funnels Arms to Rebels,” *Washington Post* (June 29, 2013) <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/30/world/middleeast/sending-missiles-to-syrian-rebels-qatar-muscles-in.html?pagewanted=all> (website accessed July 7, 2014).

Sources close to the Qatari government say total spending reached as much as USD 3 billion in 2014, while rebel and diplomatic sources put the figure at USD 1 billion.<sup>69</sup>

By 2013, the two most successful militia groups were the Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS, later changed to IS). Though a senior Qatari official claimed that, "ISIS has been a Saudi project," the same official said that he could "identify al-Nusra commanders by the blocks they control in various Syrian cities."<sup>70</sup> During a visit to Washington, Iraq's National Security Adviser Faleh al-Fayyad accused Qatar and other Arab governments of financing al-Nusra and causing the uprisings that heralded the armed conflict.<sup>71</sup> According to Britain's former ambassador to Qatar Sir Graham Boyce, the Libyan and then Syrian theaters turned Qatar from "facilitator to manipulator" and like other Western and regional statesman, he wondered whether Qatar had "got out of its depth" with the direct involvement. He explained:

As a very small country, with policy in the hands of a handful of people, it has a tendency to oversimplify problems, and to make deals with the people it knows, often-unreliable exiles from their own countries. Of course, it is not just the Qataris who can be taken in by exile groups trying to manipulate their hosts for their own ends. But some of Qatar's

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<sup>69</sup> Roula Khalaf and Abigail Fielding Smith, "Qatar Bankrolls Syrian Revolt With Cash and Arms," *Financial Times* (May 16, 2013) <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/86e3f28e-be3a-11e2-bb35-00144feab7de.html#axzz39nxI4z7o> (website accessed August 7, 2014).

<sup>70</sup> Clemons "Thank God for the Saudis."

<sup>71</sup> Blake Hounshell, "Iraq Accuses Qatar of Financing Jihadi Groups in Syria," in *The Cable*, (March 4, 2013) [http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/03/04/iraq\\_accuses\\_qatar\\_of\\_financing\\_jihadi\\_groups\\_in\\_syria](http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/03/04/iraq_accuses_qatar_of_financing_jihadi_groups_in_syria) (website accessed June 1, 2014).

impulsiveness and perhaps naivety has led to Qatar coming in for bitter criticism even in countries like Libya where their initial help was indispensable. They are accused of political meddling, commercial greed, or of pushing a pan-Arab Islamist agenda.<sup>72</sup>

As many American and European officials feared, no amount of intelligence gathering by Qatar and particularly Saudi Arabia could control the end use of the weapons that the two parties provided. The main political opposition umbrella organization, the National Coalition of Syria and Opposition Forces lacked any real control and authority over military operations on the ground. As Qatar and Saudi Arabia supported competing blocs within this coalition, as well as separate armed groups outside it, rifts over the nature and direction of political change in Syria and beyond as well as military strategy widened, and were exploited by Jihadi groups.<sup>73</sup> Despite American, Saudi, and Qatari efforts to cut off funding to ISIS and al-Nusra, and shift all support to the Free Syrian Army after a meeting of intelligence ministers in February 2014, private military and financial support from the Gulf is said to have continued to both Islamist groups.<sup>74</sup> In April 2014, Qatar's Prince Bandar bin Sultan lost control over the Syrian file, and it was handed over to his political rival Minister of the Interior Prince Mohammad bin Nayef. The official was eventually sacked as intelligence chief over the apparent imminent blowback of aiding groups with allegiance to al-Qaeda and hostile to both Saudi Arabia

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<sup>72</sup> Sir Graham Boyce, (2013) "Qatar's Foreign Policy," *Asian Affairs*, 44:3, 375.

<sup>73</sup> Louise Arbor, "Next Year's Wars From Sochi to Sudan, 10 conflicts that will threaten global stability in 2014" in *Foreign Policy* (December 30, 2013) [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/12/30/next\\_year\\_s\\_wars](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/12/30/next_year_s_wars) (website accessed 12 August 2014)

<sup>74</sup> Clemons "Thank God for the Saudis."

and the United States.<sup>75</sup> The violence in Syria and the rise of ISIS spilled over into Iraqi territory in 2014, contributing to large-scale atrocities and acts of genocide against civilians across Iraq, which constituted a serious humanitarian catastrophe. While it would be wrong to attribute outside assistance as the main factor contributing to the field successes of ISIS and other Islamist militias, Qatar's switch from "facilitator to manipulator" has come with serious political costs to the country. Much like great power meddling, Qatar's pursuit to global recognition by means of an activist foreign policy produces ambivalent political returns for the country.

## Towards a Middle East Power Equilibrium

Since the end of the Second World War, the "Pax Americana" extended over the Middle East and in particular the Persian Gulf. Regional security arrangements have been underwritten by external and internal power balancing, and have largely reflected US foreign policy interests and "regime survival" for the monarchies in the Gulf and North Africa, as well as the military regimes aligned with the US government.

During the Cold War, the United States perceived threats from the region in the Pan-Arab movement and the wide support for socialism. This would turn out to be an unwarranted American fear, as only one country in the region, South Yemen, embraced socialism as a form of government. Egypt's Nasser as well as leaders in Iraq and Syria viewed socialism merely as means of state-led industrialization, and were never serious

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<sup>75</sup> Following field successes and of al-Nusra and the Ahrar al-Sham brigades, Saudi authorities banned their own Salafists from going to fight in Syria. The Saudi Interior Ministry threatened Saudi nationals fighting alongside jihadist with criminal prosecution. Head Mufti Sheikh Abdul-Aziz instructed pro-jihad imams to say to their congregations: "We are against Saudi youth going to Syria for jihad. It is not clear under whom they are fighting. Instead they should support Syrians with money and prayers." IS, al-Nusra as well as the Muslim Brotherhood were put on Saudi Arabia's official terrorism list. Fehmin Tasteskin, "Saudi Arabia and Qatar Vie for Influence in Syria," in *al-Monitor* (April 17, 2014) <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/ar/politics/2013/04/saudi-arabia-qatar-vie-influence-syria.html#ixzz3A8MuGxBa> (website accessed July 3, 2014).

about its full implementation. The Yom Kippur War of 1973 was a turning point for US foreign policy towards the Middle East, galvanizing support for Israel and putting the Arab-Israel conflict at the top of the US foreign policy agenda.<sup>76</sup> With the loss of America's closest regional ally, Iran, in 1979, the US built up other surrogates and created, piecemeal, bilateral security agreements in the region. As the US tried to re-create a balance of power in the region, the 1980 invasion of Iraq by Saddam Hussein represented a major shock to regional relations. Despite Anwar Sadat's advice not to wage war on a revolution, Saddam's attack on Iran would herald the 20<sup>th</sup> century's longest conventional war with over 500,000 fatalities on both sides. During the conflict, the main determinants for Reagan's foreign policy were energy security in the Persian Gulf, fears that the Soviets may be able to exert influence in the region, and the spread of revolutionary Islam.<sup>77</sup> The Reagan administration's policy of "No Winners, No Losers" as well as Europe's evenhandedness during the ten-year-long Iran-Iraq war essentially prolonged the conflict and laid the foundations for US extended deterrence. Following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait the 1990 liberation of Kuwait through "Desert Storm," US energy security needs and realist security perceptions targeted both countries. However, the 'dual-containment doctrine' neither prevented Iran's burgeoning (then covert) nuclear program, nor did it effectively assist UN weapons inspections in Iraq. The 2003 US-led invasion, coupled with the continuous conflict between Israel and Palestine between 2008-2014, Israel and Hezbollah in 2006, and the ongoing conflict in Syria, have brought the region even further from an indigenous and sustainable security regime.

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<sup>76</sup> See William Burr, "The October War and US Policy," (October 7, 2003) The National Security Archive – The George Washington University <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB98/#IX> (website accessed May 1, 2014).

<sup>77</sup> Bernd Kaussler, "No Winners, No Losers: Regan, the Iran-Iraq War and the Gulf's Perpetual Security Dilemma," in Anthony J. Eksterowitz and Glenn P. Hastedt (eds) *Presidents and War* (Nova Science Publishers, 2010), 235.

Today, the regional security regime in the Gulf is formed around the shared economic interests of the US and GCC states, and is based on power balancing rather than collective security. After US forces withdrew from Iraq in 2011, the government in Baghdad purchased a sizable stockpile of Hellfire Missiles from the US (December 2013 and July 2014), thus joining its Arab neighbors in procuring large quantities of weapons mainly from the United States. Over the decades, billions of dollars have been invested into weapons systems, which seem to serve more to underwrite the US arms industry than to support regional security.

Notwithstanding the Saudi-led GCC "Peninsula Shield" intervention into Bahrain to crush the popular protests in 2011, there has been no regional collective security alliance created with treaty obligations. Rather, the United States "has operated in a reactive and tactical mode in the region in response to serious security threats. As a result, it has fostered a dysfunctional and ultimately unsustainable dependency on its own security footprint among many countries, particularly those in the Arab Gulf."<sup>78</sup> In the absence of an indigenous regional security alliance, the primary priorities of the US and Arab Gulf states are to contain Iran and respond to threats posed by terrorist networks from the Syrian theatre. Atrocities committed by Islamic State terrorists against Yazidis and other minorities in Syria and Iraq in 2014 necessitated external assistance from EU and US military forces. In the Middle East, however, neither human nor conventional security can be guaranteed by regional powers alone.

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<sup>78</sup> S Brian Katuli, "Sustainability is Elusive for Persian Gulf Regional Security System" in *World Politics Review* (June 29, 2010).

The irony of the Pax Americana, is the fact that America's other close ally, Israel, is de facto still at war with most of the very regional states which pledged allegiance to the American vision of a stable Middle East. Failed attempts at brokering a peace settlement between Israel and the Palestinians and the failure to censure Israel for its continuous reliance on military coercion, its expansion of settlements in the West Bank, and its continuous siege of Gaza culminating with 'Operation Protective Edge' in July 2014, cast a shadow over the US government's role as an honest broker in the region.

In this environment, external shocks administered by the US or violent intervention by Israel accentuated tensions and have sparked conflict across the region. Since the Arab Spring, regional relations have become even less stable and predictable. Moreover, as the US (informed by setbacks in Iraq and Afghanistan) is unwilling to enter another military commitment in the Middle East, and eager to close the nuclear file with Iran based on the 2013 "Interim Geneva Agreement," its allegiance to the security of regional states is being questioned. The Obama administration's commitment to finding a negotiated political solution to both the Syrian and Iranian theatres is being questioned by Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the UAE, who essentially fear that a US-Iranian détente would do little to quell Iran's nuclear ambitions, and rather enable its alleged hegemonic aspirations. Likewise, support for the rebels in Syria and calls for an international intervention seem less informed by humanitarian concerns but rather the objective of Gulf States to remove the Assad regime, Iran's closest ally.<sup>79</sup> Given the tectonic shifts, occurring in the Middle East since 2010, both the nature of governance and regional relations are subject to the statesmanship of both citizens and leaders in and outside the region. As Rami G. Khouri put it:

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<sup>79</sup> Colin H. Kahl and Jacob Stokes, "Overcoming the Gulf in the Gulf" in *Defense One* October 31, 2013 <http://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2013/10/overcoming-gulf-gulf/72983/>(website accessed July 6, 2014)



Therefore we witness across the Arab world a most complicated convergence of historical dynamics of stunted statehood and post-colonial (Western) and neo-imperial (Iranian-Saudi) interventions with the aspirations of millions of citizens to live freely and securely in societies that respect their rights and offer them basic opportunities to live a decent life. All the accumulated ills, distortions, crimes and incompetencies of the past century of Arab history are now being flushed out into the open, in order to be replaced by something better in the business of governance, development, citizenship and statehood. For the first time ever, this process may occur according to the wishes of the citizens themselves.<sup>80</sup>

For the first time since the end of World War I, regional states have started to formulate foreign policies according to their own interests. As demonstrated, Qatar, but also Kuwait and Oman, are increasingly pursuing independent foreign policies. Disclosed diplomatic cables show that as early as 2009, Oman offered to act as intermediary between the US and Iran, and helped secure the release of the detained American hikers in Iran. Hosting a round of at least five secret meetings between Iranian and US diplomats during 2013, the Omani backchannel actively helped craft the 2013 Geneva Interim Agreement between Iran and the P5+1 in November 2013, and the subsequent Joint Plan of Action. These small states have begun to define their relations' vis-à-vis one another on the basis of their individual interests and ambitions rather than those foreign-policy orientations being delivered unto them from afar or by regional powers.

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<sup>80</sup> Rami G. Khouri, "The Risings Three Years On" (December 19, 2013)

[http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/publication/23763/risings\\_three\\_years\\_on.html](http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/publication/23763/risings_three_years_on.html) (website accessed August 4, 2014)

Qatar's most significant intermediary role is between state and non-state actors, where it serves as an important conduit of rapprochement and détente between antagonistic states. It has honed its mediatory role between the Taliban and the US government before, and in 2014 mediated the release of five Taliban leaders from Guantanamo in exchange for the release of American soldier Bow Bergdahl from captivity in Afghanistan in 2014.<sup>81</sup> Qatar may also be able to serve in the future as an intermediary between Iran and the United States. As multilateral negotiations on Iran's nuclear program have the potential for an Iranian-US rapprochement, Qatar can act as a mutually trusted intermediary. In the past, Qatar's open door policy towards Tehran has allowed it to maintain a working relationship with the Iranian government and allowed the nation to help balance competing Iranian and US interests.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> The Taliban opened an office in Doha in 2013 with the stated aim to use it as platform for talks not as political platform. Dan Roberts and Emma Graham-Harrison "US-Taliban Afghanistan peace talks in Qatar cancelled" in *The Guardian* (June 20, 2013). The five Taliban members have restricted movement in Doha. Anne Gearan, "Sources outline conditions on Taliban leaders' release in exchange for Bergdahl" in *The Washington Post* (June 5, 2014)

[http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/sources-outline-conditions-on-taliban-leaders-release-in-exchange-for-bergdahl/2014/06/05/4ed9d8a0-eceb-11e3-93d2-edd4be1f5d9e\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/sources-outline-conditions-on-taliban-leaders-release-in-exchange-for-bergdahl/2014/06/05/4ed9d8a0-eceb-11e3-93d2-edd4be1f5d9e_story.html).

<sup>82</sup> See the US State Department assessment on Qatar's non compliance with financial restrictions against Iranian banks: "As an example of the balancing act Qatar plays with Iran – and elsewhere – Qatar will not close the one Iranian bank serving Qatar, as we have asked. Nor, however, will Qatar allow Iran to open additional banks, as we expect the Iranians would like. Instead, in classic Qatari fashion, the government announced it had granted permission to the sole operating Iranian bank to open a second branch – on the same day former Treasury Secretary Paulson visited Doha in June. Such behavior does not satisfy either the U.S. or Iran, but it exemplifies how the al-Thani leadership tries to maintain balance between competing interests. Disclosed US Diplomatic Cable, *Ref ID09DOHA271, Screensetter for the SE Gration's April 27-29 Visit to Qatar* (April 23, 2009).

The Iranian government's verified compliance with the conditions set out in the Joint Plan of Action throughout 2014 coupled with a mutually acceptable long-term nuclear agreement between the P5+1 and Iran would eliminate a number of coercive and hostile actions in Tehran's and Washington's respective foreign-policy tool kits. Rapprochement between the United States and Iran relaxes a dominant source of regional imbalance, as Middle Eastern countries with close ties to the United States no longer need to mirror the United States' hostility towards Iran. Moreover, this regional reconciliation may alleviate fears that Iran will once again strive for regional hegemony, leading to a possibility for a loose regional-security framework.

Qatar might also work to mediate between Palestine and Israel. Its historic evenhanded position towards the groups is unique in the region. Its dual pursuit of contacts with Israeli officials (the Israeli Trade Representation Office opened in Qatar in 1996) as well as all Palestinian factions, including Hamas, has allowed Qatar to act as the sole legitimate intermediary between Israelis and Palestinians and between Hamas and Fatah.<sup>83</sup> This was particularly evident during the 2014 Israeli assault on Gaza when the Egyptian government announced a ceasefire, the conditions of which reflected solely Israeli demands without even consulting Hamas. Rather than acting as the traditional intermediary between warring factions, Egyptian officials directly and indirectly blamed Hamas for the violence.<sup>84</sup> Instead, US Secretary of State John Kerry had to turn to the Turkish and Qatari governments to secure the mediated ceasefire. Given Qatar's commitment to fund the Palestinian Authority and its previous role in reconciling rival Palestinian factions, future peace efforts between Israel and Palestine are unlikely to be successful without Qatari political and financial support.

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<sup>83</sup> For Qatar's balancing act between Arab League Boycott policy and trade and political engagement with Israel see assessment Disclosed US Diplomatic Cable, Ref ID07DOHA1047, Qatar-Israel Commerce Continues Quietly (November 6, 2007).

<sup>84</sup> Kirkpatrick, "Arab Leaders, Viewing Hamas as Worse Than Israel, Stay Silent"

The negotiations over Iran's nuclear program, the impact of the Arab Spring in particular in Syria and Israel/Palestine, all provide pivotal focal points for a new inclusive regional order to emerge. In order to facilitate a self-regulated and stable Middle East, the United States as the most intrusive of the external powers needs to allow an indigenous security architecture to emerge from within the region. Qatar's role is pivotal in this respect. The existing security order in the Middle East is based on extended deterrence as well as power balancing, not on power equilibrium. In order for a Middle Eastern security architecture to emerge, a critical mass of Middle Eastern states must develop stable and mutually reinforcing ties to permit long-term interests to coalesce. The current situation represents an opportunity. While there have been systemic shocks before the Arab Spring—the Arab-Israeli Wars of 1948, 1967 and 1973, the Iran-Iraq war between 1980-1988, Desert Storm in 1991 following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, the 2003 Iraq war, the 2006 Lebanon war, and the Gaza-Israel conflicts between 2006 and 2012—each of these critical junctures also saw significant post-conflict intrusion from external powers (most frequently, the United States) in which extra-regional relations have fueled regional discord enough to preclude the emergence of regional security architectures.<sup>85</sup>

The Middle East finds itself at a critical crossroads for a regional order. Like previous conflicts in international relations history, post-war settlements allowed for the re-negotiation of the previous order. The "settlements" of 1648, 1713, 1815, 1919 and 1945 offered critical junctures in which major-power conflict had sufficiently destroyed the existing order, permitting the reorganization and rebuilding of international order. As Ikenberry argues, during post war junctures, victorious powers may either use

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<sup>85</sup> Bernd Kaussler and Keith Grant, "Could the Arab Spring Create A New Balance of Power in the Middle East?" in *The National Interest* (May 26, 2014) <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/could-the-arab-spring-create-new-balance-power-the-middle-10529?page=3>

coercion to dominate the system, withdraw, leaving the intermediate powers to fend for themselves, or pursue a systemic transformation in an attempt to lock its post-conflict advantage for the foreseeable future.<sup>86</sup>

## Conclusion

A look at the development of Qatari foreign policy shows clearly that the nation fits within existing literature on small state diplomacy. The data supports the forwarded assumptions on the pursuit of security and status in international relations, the role of leadership in foreign policy making, and the significance of soft power in the foreign policy toolkit of small states. In particular, analysis reveals to what extent Qatari soft power has influenced international relations in the Middle East as well as impacted the narrative of the Arab Spring.

Beneath the conventional public recognition of al-Jazeera and Qatar's hosting of the World Cup is profound cultural and political implicit influence that has been used strategically to further Qatari interests. Coupled with its activist foreign policy, commitment to development, and humanitarian aid across international crises and conflicts, Qatar has emerged as the most important and trusted regional mediator. While this self-assigned and aptly executed role has caused regional powers like Saudi Arabia and Egypt as well as its traditional ally the United States to question both the nature and direction of Qatari foreign policy, and in some cases resulted in open challenges by the GCC, the leadership in Doha has earned the respect and trust of governments and non-state actors in and outside the Middle East.

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<sup>86</sup> John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order After Major Wars*, (Princeton University Press) 2000, 21-50.

Evenhandedness and financial clout have allowed Qatar to become an important variable in regional stability. The violent conflicts associated with the Arab Spring at the intra-state and sub-state level in the region provide an opportunity to re-negotiate the existing regional order. Qatar's current status as 'go to mediator' means the country can serve as an effective conduit between antagonistic states, essentially assisting in the removal or weakening of external and internal power imbalances and intrusions. The Qatari Emir's commitment to engage with all actors across the ideological spectrum may well be the missing Metternich in the Middle East and help usher a new regional security concert based on inclusiveness and power equilibrium.

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