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Guido Steinberg

Qatar's Foreign Policy

Decision-making processes, baselines, and strategies

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- Qatar's domestic and foreign policy since the 1990s has developed along three main lines: The emirate has expanded its gas production and supplies liquefied gas to as many countries as possible; it assures itself of US military protection by providing bases; and it conducts a "soft power" campaign in the form of investments in media and sports.
- During the Arab Spring, Qatar went on the offensive, marking a change in its regional policy. At the time, it aimed at nothing less than revising the regional order in the Arab world. Since Emir Tamim took office in 2013, however, Doha has scaled back its ambitions, yet it still wants to be recognised as a regional power.
- Qatar tries to defuse regional conflicts by positioning itself as a mediator. It maintains good relations with Iran, its allies in the region and with militant groups such as Hamas and the Taliban. This, as well as its support for the Muslim Brotherhood, repeatedly provokes conflicts with Saudi Arabia and other neighbours. As a result, Qatar has identified Turkey as its new protecting power.
- Qatar is an attractive partner for Germany and Europe and can become an important gas supplier that has shown a long-standing interest in the European market; it is also more flexible in its deliveries than many of its competitors. It was a serious mistake for German policy not to focus on Qatari gas much earlier. Placing more long-term orders could rectify this mistake.
- If there really is going to be a "Zeitenwende" security policy, Germany must also prepare itself for security risks emanating from the Middle East (keywords: migration, terrorism, nuclear proliferation). This means that Germany and Europe need pro-Western allies — like Qatar.

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Qatar's Foreign Policy. Decision-making processes, baselines, and strategies

As recently as the mid-1990s, Qatar was an insignificant and largely unknown small state on the Persian Gulf that barely made an international appearance. The country was little more than a Saudi Arabian protectorate, since in foreign policy it mostly followed the lead of its big neighbour. Its limited oil reserves were slowly running out after production had already peaked in the late 1970s.

Only two and a half decades later, Qatar has become a regional heavyweight despite its small size. Between 2017 and 2021, its neighbours (led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, UAE) imposed a land, sea and air blockade that lasted a good three and a half years. The reason for this was Qatar's independent and controversial foreign policy. The fact that the blockade was ended without Qatar having to make public concessions confirmed its now strong position. This rapid development was made possible by the production of natural gas: Qatar has the third largest gas reserves in the world after Russia and Iran and has massively expanded production and exports since the mid-1990s. The country has acquired great wealth and can even afford to host major events that bring it worldwide attention, such as the 2022 World Cup.

The small gas superpower has not only become much more visible, prominent and influential, but is also the subject of heated debates about its foreign policy. Qatar's opponents in the region and beyond accuse it of pursuing a revisionist policy. This includes establishing close relations with the (state) enemies of the Arab Gulf states, namely Iran, which accommodates the latter's desire to revise the regional order in the Middle East. Moreover, according to the governments of Saudi Arabia and the UAE in particular, Qatar supports Islamists and Islamist terrorists. The two governments criticise the Emirate's actual or alleged support for Shiite militias (Hezbollah in Lebanon, various groups in Iraq) as well as for Sunni groups such as al-Qaeda, the Islamic State (IS), Hamas and the Taliban. They also accuse Doha of supporting the Muslim Brotherhood, which is classified as a terrorist organisation by Riyadh and Abu Dhabi.

Qatar itself along with its supporters, on the other hand, argue that Doha wants to use its close relations with Iran, with Syria (until 2011) and with militant groups such as Hezbollah, Hamas and the Taliban mainly to mediate between them and their opponents, with the final aim of reducing regional tensions and finding diplomatic solutions. According to this perspective, the Muslim Brotherhood is not a terrorist organisation. Qatar, they say, merely sided with the populations of states like Egypt, Libya and Tunisia that overthrew their authoritarian governments in the wake of the Arab Spring in 2011 — while the other Gulf states sided with the dictatorships. Where the Muslim Brotherhood has won elections, this must be accepted. In Syria, moreover, the aim was to remove a particularly violent and illegitimate regime. Furthermore, so goes the argument, Qatar did not support terrorists such as al-Qaeda or IS for this very reason.

These and similar debates have created the impression that the country's policies display glaring and irreconcilable contradictions. This study elaborates the baselines and strategies of Qatari foreign policy beyond polemical debates. A closer examination reveals that Qatar's policy is free of major contradictions in three areas, and that the leadership in Doha is following clearly recognisable baselines:

- Firstly, since the early 1990s, Qatar has been expanding its gas production, relying primarily on liquefied natural gas (LNG). The emirate has become a gas superpower, earning a reputation as a reliable supplier and energy partner, and therefore has almost inexhaustible sources of money for its foreign policy.
- Secondly, Qatar assures itself of US protection by providing the US military with bases, buying American weapons systems and standing by as a regional partner. The US al-Udaid airbase is the most important in the region and protects Qatar from its aggressive neighbours Iran and Saudi Arabia.
- Thirdly, Qatar follows a "soft power" strategy by investing in media, culture, education, tourism and sports. In particular it makes a name for itself with sporting events. The 2022 World Cup is the biggest success of this strategy so far — even if the widespread criticism of the World Cup, especially in the European media, diminishes it in some countries.

There was a striking rupture in Qatari regional policy between 2011 and 2013, when the emirate went on the offensive during the Arab Spring and, in alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood, aimed at nothing less than a revision of the regional order in the Arab world. Doha has since scaled back its ambitions, but the desire to exert influence in the Middle East and be recognised as a regional power persists. With the exception of the years between 2011 and 2013, Qatar's regional policy shows a remarkable continuity based on three strategies:

- First, Qatar tries to act as a mediator to defuse regional conflicts. To this end, while maintaining close ties with the USA and pro-Western states in the Middle East, it relies on good relations with Iran and its state- and non-state allies in the region, but also with more independent-minded militant groups such as the Taliban.
- Second, Qatar supports the Muslim Brotherhood and related Islamist groups. After an interventionist phase from 2011 to 2013, during which it provided massive support to Islamist militants in Egypt, Libya, Syria and elsewhere, Qatari policy has become more cautious — without ceasing its support for the Islamists.
- Thirdly, Qatar's regional policy is shaped by its competition with Saudi Arabia (and with the UAE). Relations fluctuate between phases of détente and times of crisis, as Qatar does not want to break the alliance with its neighbours and jeopardise stability in the Persian Gulf. In recent years, however, its rapprochement with Turkey shows that Doha is looking for alternatives.

In the following, there will first be an analysis of decision-making processes in the Qatari leadership and its threat perceptions. the second part addresses Qatar's international role, including the major constants of its policy, i.e. its development into one of the most important gas exporters, its security relations with the USA as well as its use of "soft power" strategies. The third part deals with the regional dimension of Qatari policy, focusing on the relationships with Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Rulers and the Ruling Family in Qatar

Qatar is an authoritarian state where all major political decisions are made by only a few individuals. The dominant figure is Emir Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani, who has been in office since 2013 and consolidated his position during two severe crises, when neighbouring states, led by Saudi Arabia, tried to force Qatar to abandon its independent regional policy in 2014 and 2017—2021. The greatest threat to Emir Tamim's rule (as it was to his father's rule before that) comes from repeated attempts by neighbouring states to enlist rival members of the Thani family in coup attempts. This threat perception also shapes the Emir's foreign policy, which focuses on distancing himself from Saudi Arabia.

Emir Tamim and the "Emir Father"

Emir Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani succeeded his father, Hamad Bin Khalifa, in June 2013. Born in 1980, Tamim is the fourth eldest son of his father. His mother, Mauza Bint Nasir Al Misnid, is the second of a total of three wives of the former Emir; she is said to have a particularly great influence on Qatari politics. Tamim went to school in England and, like his father, attended Sandhurst Military Academy before being appointed Crown Prince in 2003. At the time of his accession, Tamim had already gained some political experience: From 2010 onwards, the heir to the throne became increasingly visible and by 2013 had made a name for himself primarily as a domestic politician.[1] But he also took on his first foreign policy functions, for example when he paid a visit to the Supreme Military Council in Egypt in 2011.[2]

His father's resignation nevertheless came as a surprise, because rulers in the Arab Gulf states do not usually resign, but rather die in office or are overthrown. Emir Hamad, however, was only 61 years old when he resigned from office and acted of his own free will. Health problems are usually cited as the reason for the Qatari emir's resignation.[3] Perhaps Hamad wanted to prevent opposition to his son's succession in the event of his sudden death or serious illness. In any case, his father's renunciation offered Tamim the opportunity to consolidate his rule.

Emir Hamad himself had ousted his father in a bloodless coup in 1995.[4] During his rule, he made almost all strategic decisions alone and was known for his micromanagement. Only the Foreign Minister (1992—2013) and Prime Minister (2007—2013) Hamad Bin Jassim Bin Jabr Al Thani had scope for decision-making in foreign policy matters and is widely considered the architect of Qatar's foreign policy until 2013. Many sources describe Hamad's wife Shaikha Mauza as an influential personality, but her sphere of influence is likely to have been limited mainly to education, social affairs and culture.[5] Thus, the emir and his foreign minister became the dominant figures during Hamad's tenure — until 2010, when Tamim was also admitted to this innermost circle. Although this small circle of decision-makers made it possible to implement decisions quickly and effectively, far-

1 Rod Nordland, "In Surprise, Emir of Qatar Plans to Abdicate, Handing Power to Son," *The New York Times*, 24 June 2013, https://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/25/world/middleeast/qatar-transfer-of-power.html; Christopher Dickey, "Qatar's Succession Drama," *The Daily Beast*, 25 June 2013 (updated 11 July 2017), https://www.thedailybeast.com/qatars-succession-drama.

2 Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, "Foreign Policy: Discourse, Tools, and Implications," in *Contemporary Qatar. Examining State and Society*, ed. Mahjoob Zweiri and Farah Al Qawasmi, Gulf Studies, vol. 4 (Singapore: Springer, 2021), 59—71 (65f.).

3 Nordland, "In Surprise, Emir of Qatar Plans to Abdicate" (see note 1).

4 Joseph A. Kéchichian, *Power and Succession in Arab Monarchies. A Reference Guide* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2008), 210.

5 See, e.g., Dickey, "Qatar's Succession Drama" (see note 1).

reaching political decisions were often not sufficiently thought through or prepared for, and it was nearly impossible to deal continuously with the many issues involved in Qatari regional policy.[6]

After taking power in 2013, Emir Tamim quickly developed his own profile – and his father withdrew.

In recent years, there have been repeated reports that Hamad, now called "Emir Father" *(al-Amir al-Ab)*, continues to influence his son's policies in the background as an *éminence grise*.[7] Although the power of the former emir is difficult to assess from the outside, there are numerous indications that Tamim dominates the decision-making process in Doha not only in theory, but also in fact. To demonstrate his claim of complete control, the new emir reshuffled his cabinet shortly after taking office. The powerful Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Hamad Bin Jassim resigned and was replaced by two much less influential successors, who in turn were replaced after only a few years.[8] This was an important indication that Tamim was keen to consolidate his position in the government.

Tamim thus quickly gained stature from 2013 onwards, whereas the former emir withdrew from the public eye. During the 2014 and 2017—2021 crises, when neighbouring states tried to force Qatar to change its regional policy, Emir Tamim gave the impression of being in full control of his government's actions. In addition, the Qataris united behind their leadership in the face of external pressure. The government developed a veritable cult of personality by having a stylised profile picture of Tamim produced, which was hung on many public and private buildings in Qatar from spring 2017 onwards, often with the signature "Tamim the Glorious" *(Tamim al-Majd)*.[9] Qatari residents also spoke out on social media, where numerous popular hashtags emerged praising Tamim's and Qatar's stance.[10] Even if the public narrative is only partially indicative of the emir's position in the ruling family, this public support is likely to have strengthened his position.

Furthermore, the young Emir has pushed through changes in Qatari foreign policy, cautiously moving away from the activist regional policy pursued by his father and his father's foreign minister. Emir Hamad had sided with the opposition in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Syria during the Arab Spring and turned against the regimes there. In many cases, Qatar supported Islamist groups, including the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and related organisations, but also militant Salafists and jihadists. Emir Tamim now tried to return to the mediating role Qatar had taken before 2011. He accepted the Egyptian military's coup against President Muhammad Mursi and his Muslim Brotherhood, which took place in July 2013, only a few days after Tamim took office. Support for militant groups in Syria and Libya was significantly reduced by 2015. Above all, Tamim tried to repair Qatar's badly damaged relations with Saudi Arabia — without success, as the blockade from 2017 to 2021 demonstrated.

Tamim and his followers also sought to professionalise and institutionalise the country's foreign policy, which until then had been largely personalised. During Qatar's interventions in Libya and Syria from 2011 to 2013, the foreign ministry in Doha lacked personnel for a multitude of diplomatic activities, such that the department often had to rely on foreign intermediaries, some of them of Islamist orientation, who lived in Qatar as exiles — that is, if the initiatives did not founder to begin with.[11] From 2013 onwards, efforts to improve organisation became apparent, especially in Qatar's mediation activities in the Pales-

6 Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, "The Return of Qatari Mediation," *Baker Institute Blog*, 1 August 2014, https://blog.bakerinstitute.org/2014/08/01/the-return-of-qatari-mediation/.

7 This hypothesis was propagated, for example, by the Emirati ambassador to the USA, Yousef al-Otaiba, who is one of Qatar's harshest critics. See Kathy Gilsinan and Jeffrey Goldberg, "Emirati Ambassador: Qatar Is a Destructive Force in the Region," *The Atlantic*, 28 August 2017, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/08/yousef-al-otaiba-qatar-gcc/538206/.

8 Rob Nordland, "Qatar's Emir Names New Cabinet and Premier," *The New York Times,* 27 June 2013, https://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/28/world/middleeast/qatar-names-new-cabinet.html?searchResultPosition=1.

9 For examples of the posters see "Qatar: Beyond the Blockade. Featured Documentary," *Al Jazeera English*, 15 February 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dc6n31wIuHI, until minute 4:00 and minute 19:00.

10 Betul Dogan-Akkas and Gilla Camden, *The Political Culture in Qatar: Beyond the Rentier State* (Alsharq Forum, 13 April 2020), https://research.sharqforum.org/download/14862/.

11 Ulrichsen, "Foreign Policy: Discourse, Tools, and Implications" (see note 2), 67. For a particularly critical account, see Elizabeth Dickinson, "The Case against Qatar," *Foreign Policy*, 30 September 2014, https://foreignpolicy.com/2014/09/30/the-case-against-qatar/.

tinian territories and in Afghanistan. This was particularly evident after the appointment of the new Foreign Minister Muhammad Bin Abd al-Rahman Al Thani in February 2016, when a commissioner's post for conflict mediation officer and another for Gaza reconstruction were established in the Foreign Ministry, a clear indication of the wish to develop more professional structures in foreign policymaking.[12]

The threat from Saudi Arabia and within the ruling family

The Qatari leadership sees Saudi Arabia as the greatest immediate threat to its own rule and independence. This fear stems from its neighbour's historical claims on Qatar, and at least one attempted restorative coup in February 1996 that failed. Back then, the neighbours relied on members of Qatar's ruling family that wanted to reinstate the old Emir Khalifa, who had been overthrown by his son Hamad the previous year, and/or who harboured ambitions of their own. Like in other Gulf states, the Qatari leadership faces a domestic threat primarily from within the ruling family itself; there is no organised opposition in the country. It is the threat from Saudi Arabia, combined with the opposition of individual relatives, that shapes the policies of the Qatari leadership overall.

Hamad Bin Khalifa and his son Tamim's view of their own country and neighbouring states was significantly influenced by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990. It became apparent then that, contrary to all lip service paid to pan-Arab solidarity, not only Iran but also Arab states pose threats to the smaller countries in the Gulf. Even in the past, it was above all the British presence that had protected small Qatar from a takeover by Saudi Arabia — where voices repeatedly laid claim to the peninsula.[13] A conflict over border demarcation as well as minor violent incidents on the Qatari-Saudi border in 1992 and 1994 convinced the then Crown Prince Hamad Bin Khalifa that the threat posed by this neighbour was more than theoretical.[14]

Just how great the threat really was became apparent after Emir Khalifa was overthrown by his son Hamad in June 1995. Until October 1996, there were reports on a total of three coup attempts involving Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain — and, according to Qatari sources, also Egypt.[15] The immediate neighbours wanted to overthrow Emir Hamad because he had announced a far-reaching modernisation programme and (initially) political liberalisation.[16] The most dangerous coup attempt was the one in February 1996, when French mercenaries on behalf of Saudi Arabia and the UAE, together with members of the Al Murra tribe (who traditionally live in south-eastern Saudi Arabia and Qatar), were supposed to arrest Emir Hamad and take control of important military, political and media landmarks in Doha.[17] Qatari sources say the former police chief, economy minister and cousin of Emir Hamad, Hamad Bin Jassim (Bin Hamad) Al Thani, was leader of the coup plotters in the country itself.[18] Meanwhile, the plan was discovered in advance and abandoned.

The measures taken by the Qatari leadership in 1999 and 2000 show how seriously it took these

12 Ulrichsen, "Foreign Policy: Discourse, Tools, and Implications" (see note 2). On the commissioners in detail, see also Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, *Qatar and the Gulf Crisis* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2020), 192–96.

13 See, e.g., Allen J. Fromherz, *Qatar. A Modern History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 33, 67f. and 73f.

14 Ulrichsen, *Qatar and the Gulf Crisis* (see note 12), 29f.

15 On Egyptian involvement, see "Qatar 1996 Coup Plot: New Details Reveal Saudi-UAE Backing," *Al Jazeera English*, 19 December 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ig2wsUhIgVc.

16 "Royal jigsaw in Qatar," *The Economist*, 29 July 1999, https://www.economist.com/international/1999/07/29/royal-jigsaw-in-qatar.

17 See, e.g., Simon Henderson, *Qatar without Tamim,* Policy Note 83 (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, June 2020), 11, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/qatar-without-tamim-sudden-succession-essay-series. On the plot from the Qatari perspective see the short version in: "Qatar 1996 Coup Plot" (see note 15). Particularly detailed (and rich in images) is the account in this video, in which the French mercenary leader Paul Barril also has his say at length: "The Hidden is more immense: 'French Rambo' reveals the hidden ... How did Gulf states support the 1996 coup?" (Arabic), *Al Jazeera*, n.d. [2018], https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OvF9zgDa2Tg. The Emirati Foreign Ministry denied this information and accused Barril of lying: "Gargash accuses French 'mercenary' of lying, linking Emirates to 1996 coup attempt in Qatar" (Arabic), *CNN Arabic,* 17 December 2018, https://arabic.cnn.com/middle-east/article/2018/12/17/gargash-opaul-barrel-qatar-uae.

18 "Qatar 1996 Coup Plot" (see note 15).

threats. First, it brought the former police chief Hamad Bin Jassim from Beirut back to Doha, where a court found him guilty in February 2000 of being the ringleader of the coup attempt and sentenced him to life in prison.[19] The Qatari leadership punished the Al Murra tribesmen that were involved by denaturalising 5,000 to 6,000 people, although this was later reversed.[20] The events of 1996 left Emir Hamad with a strong distrust of neighbours Saudi Arabia, UAE and Bahrain and thus affected his policies aimed at freeing Qatar from Saudi influence.

The extent to which the events of 1996 still determine the attitude of the Qatari ruling family is underlined by a statement Emir Tamim made in October 2017, a few months after the Qatar blockade began: In an interview with *CBS News*, he said he believed Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt wanted regime change in Doha, and equated the situation in 2017 with that of 1996.[21] In fact, there are strong indications that the blockading states were planning a military intervention in June 2017, and only direct exhortations from Washington kept them from attacking their neighbour.[22]

Opponents of Qatar can always count on members of the Thani family to claim the throne in their plans to overthrow the government.

The prominent role of the police chief Hamad Al Thani among the 1996 coup plotters highlights a serious weakness in the Qatari political system: Qatar's opponents can always count on finding fairly prominent members of the Thani family who believe they have a claim to the throne or to some other important position in Qatari politics. The reason lies in the history and structure of the ruling family, which consists of at least 20,000 members.[23] This makes the Thani family one of the largest dynasties in the Arab world in absolute numbers and by far the largest in relation to Qatar's population (around 300,000 citizens and 2.5 to 3 million inhabitants in total). Against this background, it is not surprising that there have been repeated factional disputes and conflicts over succession to the throne in the past. None of the five successions in the 20th century (1913, 1949, 1960, 1972 and 1995) went smoothly.

The problem of intra-family competition was obviously a major concern for Emir Hamad after the fall of his father, since he took precautions to ensure the succession of his children. First, the constitution of 2003 stipulated that only *his* male descendants could become rulers — changing the previous rule that the ruler had to come from the Thani family.[24] Also in 2003, Tamim replaced his elder brother Jassim as Crown Prince. Subsequently, the heir to the throne was given the opportunity to prepare for his future functions by taking on political duties. Particularly relevant, however, was Emir Hamad's voluntary resignation in June 2013, which gave Tamim the opportunity to consolidate his own rule during his powerful father's lifetime and under his protection.

Emir Hamad also tried to curb opposition within the family by granting ministerial posts, civil service positions and management positions in state-owned companies to members of other branches of the family. This policy has contributed to the fact that there is hardly any visible or audible opposition to Tamim from within the family.

The importance of these precautions became clear during the blockade by neighbouring states from June 2017: Saudi Arabia and the UAE presented individual members of the Thani family as alternatives to Tamim. The most prominent of these was Abdallah Bin Ali, whose father Ali (1949—1960) and brother Ahmad Bin Ali (1960—1972) had served as rulers of Qatar. Abdallah had not played a role in Qatari politics until then, but was shown by Saudi media meeting King

19 "Life Sentences for Qatari Coup Plotters," *BBC News*, 29 February 2000, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/660887.stm. Later, those involved in this coup attempt and a subsequent one in October 1996 were pardoned. Hamad Bin Jassim was released in 2008.

20 Mehran Kamrava, "Royal Factionalism and Political Liberalization in Qatar," *Middle East Journal* 83, no. 3 (2009): 401—20 (403). On the reversal of the order, see Fromherz, *Qatar. A Modern History* (see note 13), 74.

21 Tamim said: "It's... so obvious. History as well tells us, teaches us they tried to do that before, in 1996 after my father became the emir. So, and they made it also so obvious in the last couple of weeks." Charlie Rose, "Qatar's Emir Stands Defiant in Face of Blockade," *CBS News*, 29 October 2017, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/qatars-emir-stands-defiant-in-face-of-blockade/.

22 On this aspect see chapter "An Ally of the USA" page 18f.

23 Henderson, *Qatar without Tamim* (see note 17), 6. The numbers could be higher. Fromherz speaks of 20,000 family members in the 1980s and a subsequent increase. See Fromherz, *Qatar. A Modern History* (see note 13), 138.

24 Kamrava, "Royal Factionalism and Political Liberalization in Qatar" (see note 20), 414.

Salman in Tangier after the blockade began.[25] He was even portrayed in the kingdom's press as the legitimate ruler of Qatar who now supported the blockade.[26] In January 2018, however, he let it be known from exile in Abu Dhabi that he was being treated like a prisoner there.[27] Abdallah Bin Ali then returned to Qatar, whereupon his short political career ended.

Saudi Arabian media presented other allegedly oppositional Al Thanis, but it often remained unclear to what extent they truly opposed the ruler. None of them seems to have really gained influence.[28] The fact that Qatar's enemies failed to find followers within the ruling family is an indication that Emir Hamad's family policy was successful.

25 Henderson, *Qatar without Tamim* (see note 17), 10.

26 Khaled M. Batarfi, "Sept. 15 — The Failed Plot," *Saudi Gazette*, 18 September 2017, https://saudigazette.com.sa/article/517497/Opinion/OP-ED/Saudi-Arabia.

27 Callum Paton, "Who Is Sheikh Abdullah bin Ali al-Thani, the Qatari Royal Held 'Prisoner' in the UAE?" *Newsweek*, 15 January 2018, https://www.newsweek.com/who-sheikh-abdullah-bin-ali-al-thani-qatari-royal-held-prisoner-uae-781399.

28 For example, Sultan Bin Suhaim, a cousin of Emir Hamad who served as Qatar's first foreign minister after 1972, and even Abd al-Aziz Bin Khalifa, a brother of Emir Hamad, were mentioned. See Henderson, *Qatar without Tamim* (see note 17), 10.

Qatar international

Qatar has been pursuing three strategies to lessen its dependence on Saudi Arabia since the mid-1990s: First, it has expanded its gas production, focusing on LNG, which has made the emirate a globally sought-after gas supplier whose importance for the respective markets continues to grow. Second, Qatar relies on military protection from the USA, which has developed the al-Udaid airbase near Doha as its most important in the Middle East. Thirdly, Doha has launched a "soft power" campaign by investing in media, culture, education, tourism and sports to raise its own profile and become as indispensable in these areas as it is a major gas power and Middle Eastern ally of the USA.

The gas superpower

Since the 1990s, the Qatari leadership has purposefully turned the country into a central gas exporter on the world market, mainly exporting LNG.[29] Qatar's ambition was to become an indispensable part of the global gas markets and the world economy as a whole — for economic reasons and so that as many states as possible develop an interest in its (continued) existence. The emirate has the third-largest gas reserves in the world after Russia and Iran, but unlike these two, it also has access to modern technology that facilitates the production of natural gas, as well as its transport and further processing. Furthermore, due to the sanctions against Russia and Iran, Qatar also has access to markets that will remain closed to these two states for the time being. Qatar has become so important in the gas market that the country is often referred to as "the Saudi Arabia of natural gas" or "the Saudi Arabia for LNG".[30]

Qatar has the world's largest known gas field, the North Field, located off the Qatari coast in the Persian Gulf. About a third of the field is under Iranian territorial waters and is called South Pars in Iran. It was discovered in 1971 by Royal Dutch Shell, yet was at first considered worthless because it contained no oil, and gas was difficult to transport at the time. Only when oil prices fell at the beginning of the 1980s did a rethink begin in Doha. Qatar's oil production had already peaked in the late 1970s and was only about 300,000 barrels per day in the 1980s (it later augmented).[31] As Qatar had significantly increased its spending during the previous high-price period, the government accumulated budget deficits, so it decided to produce gas in the early 1980s.

With the start of production from the North Field in 1991, the emirate sought customers outside the Gulf region and relied on liquefied gas, which was exported for the first time in 1996. The Qatari leadership took an immense risk at the time, since energy prices were very low in the 1990s and the export of LNG was expensive because of the infrastructure required, which is why the emirate had to borrow billions. But the risk paid off for Doha: From 2002 onwards, the demand for gas in Asia increased and with it the prices, so that the emirate's revenues virtually exploded. By 2006, Qatar was already the largest LNG exporter and the second largest gas producer worldwide.

For years, Qatar supplied about a third of the LNG consumed worldwide. The Qatari leadership expanded its infrastructure and benefited from technological innovations that made liquefaction cheaper and en-

29 LNG is natural gas that is cooled in large plants until it liquefies in an energy-intensive process that has been used since the end of the 1960s. It is then pumped into special ships and at the port of destination it is again converted to its original gaseous state in a regasification plant and transported to its destination via pipelines.

30 See, e.g., Justin Dargin, "Qatar's Natural Gas: The Foreign-Policy Driver," *Middle East Policy* 14, no. 3 (2007): 136—42 (142), https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/j.1475-4967.2007.00318.x.

31 Rory Miller, "Qatar, Energy Security, and Strategic Vision in a Small State," *Journal of Arabian Studies* 10, no. 1 (2020): 122—38 (125).

abled the construction of more modern and larger tankers.[32] Qatar invested heavily in its own tanker fleet, which in 2015 was larger than any competitor's, with more than 60 state-of-the-art vessels, offering Qatar the greatest possible flexibility.[33]

Although Qatar soon managed to gain access to markets around the world, the emirate struggled in the USA from 2011 onwards. As the USA rapidly expanded shale gas production — a development often referred to as the *shale revolution* — it became a gas producer and exporter in its own right, so Qatar turned towards Europe.[34] However, it also encountered difficulties on this continent because competition from Russia, Norway and Algeria was particularly strong there and LNG was considered too expensive. Qatar therefore concentrated on Asia, so that Japan, China, South Korea, India and Taiwan became the most important buyers of Qatari gas.[35] In parallel, Qatar sought to diversify its customer countries, which are now located on almost all continents (the exception being Australia).[36]

Qatar's seemingly unstoppable rise was only halted by a "moratorium" on further expansion of production from the North Field, which remained in force between 2005 and 2017. The reason given by Qatari politicians and experts for halting all new projects was the need to carry out technical studies to prepare for the gentlest and most effective subsequent exploitation of the field. Another argument was that Qatar did not want to release too much gas on the market too quickly in order to avoid "overheating".[37] Both reasons may have played a role, but many observers were of the opinion that it was also, or even primarily, a matter of not offending Iran because Qatar was extracting the gas from the joint gas field much faster and more effectively than its powerful neighbour — which was already suffering from sanctions at the time and could only produce a little gas.[38]

The long restriction on production in the North Field resulted in Qatar losing market share to its competitors, a situation that continues to the present. Australia expanded its LNG exports to such an extent that it disputed Qatar's position (held since 2006) as the world's largest LNG exporter in 2018 — after which the two countries alternated at the top position. In the USA, shale gas production picked up in the 2010s; the country even briefly became the largest LNG exporter in the first half of 2022.[39] Australia and the US export to Asia, which is also Qatar's main market, so the emirate lost market share and prices came under pressure.[40] The situation was complicated by the fact that the high price phase for oil and gas, which lasted for more than a decade, ended in 2014.

However, Qatar did not react by reducing production to drive up prices. Rather, the then CEO of the state energy company Qatar Petroleum (now QatarEnergy) Saad al-Kaabi announced the end of the moratorium in April 2017. Qatar would increase production from 77 to 100 million tonnes per year within five to seven years through intensified exploitation of the North Field.[41] The Qatari leadership thus accepted even lower prices in the short and medium term. However, these are less problematic for the emirate than for all its competitors because the production costs there are far below those in Australia, the USA or Russia. Kaabi made no secret of the fact

32 Dargin, "Qatar's Natural Gas: The Foreign-Policy Driver" (see note 30), 141.

33 Nikolay Kozhanov, "Navigating Troubled Waters: Geopolitics of Qatar Natural Gas in the Age of Shale Revolution and COVID Pandemic," in *Contemporary Qatar*, ed. Zweiri and Al Qawasmi (see note 2), 171—93 (179).

34 Ibid., 177.

35 In 2014, Asian countries bought two-thirds of Qatar's gas. See Stanley Reed, "Liquefied Natural Gas Makes Qatar an Energy Giant," *The New York Times*, 5 August 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/06/business/energy-environment/liquefied-natural-gas-makes-qatar-an-energy-giant.html.

36 For a list of consumer countries in 2020, see Miller, "Qatar, Energy Security, and Strategic Vision in a Small State" (see note 31), 133.

37 Kozhanov, "Navigating Troubled Waters" (see note 33), 180.

38 See, e.g., David B. Roberts, *Qatar Coming to Grips with New Realities of Global Energy Markets*, Issue Paper 8 (Washington, D.C.: The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, 2015), 11, https://agsiw.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Roberts_Qatar-LNG_2.pdf; Kozhanov, "Navigating Troubled Waters" (see note 33), 180.

39 The high exports were mainly triggered by the rapidly growing demand in Europe. See U.S. Energy Information Administration, "The United States Became the World's Largest LNG Exporter in the First Half of 2022" (Washington, D.C., 25 July 2022), https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=53159.

40 Kozhanov, "Navigating Troubled Waters" (see note 33), 182f.

41 "Qatar Lifts Development Moratorium on World's Biggest Gas Field," *The National* (Abu Dhabi), 3 April 2017, https://www.thenationalnews.com/business/qatar-lifts-development-moratorium-on-world-s-biggest-gas-field-1.77097.

hat his government wanted to take market share from its competitors, even if this goal could only be achieved in the longer term.[42]

The Qatari government confirmed this strategy in July 2017, shortly after the blockade began.[43] The following year, Kaabi even mentioned the figure of 110 million tonnes per year as a new target, and in 2019 he was already talking about 126 million tonnes per year, to be realised in 2027.[44] Despite the blockade, companies from the USA, China, Europe, Russia and India showed great interest in Qatari projects — while Qatar increasingly invested in the gas infrastructure in consumer countries.[45] The gas policy thus contributed significantly to the fact that the intended isolation of the emirate by Qatar's opponents in the Gulf did not succeed. Qatar was already too important for the global gas markets for Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt to dissuade major energy companies from doing business with Qatar.

Qatar's energy policymakers also sought to minimise the impact of the political conflict on the gas business. They repeatedly offered assurances that they would honour all agreements with their gas customers despite the logistical difficulties. This included continuing to supply gas to the blockading state of UAE, which is connected since 2007 to Qatar by the Dolphin pipeline.[46] The priority for the leadership in Doha was to present itself as a reliable energy supplier to its international partners rather than to take revenge on Abu Dhabi.

Moreover, Qatar used the blockade period to distance itself from its neighbours. This was done by leaving the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in December 2018. Qatari officials justified the move by the emirate's desire to focus entirely on the future of its gas industry.[47] Indeed, Qatar's oil export revenues had been declining in importance relative to gas revenues for years. Nevertheless, at the time, Qatar continued to have a keen interest in oil price trends, since gas prices are linked to oil prices, and the emirate still produces around 700,000 barrels of oil per day.[48] It is therefore likely that Doha's main concern was to demonstrate its own strength in the context of the blockade, as well as its independence from the organisation, which is strongly influenced by Saudi Arabia.[49]

Risk-taking and investments have paid off – Qatar is in demand as a gas supplier like never before.

The strength of Qatar's position became even more evident in 2022. The Russian invasion of Ukraine and subsequent sanctions against the Russian energy industry not only led to massively rising prices, from which Qatar benefitted.[50] Its importance as a potential gas supplier also grew, partly because its focus on LNG allowed it to react extremely flexibly. In particular, the emirate opened up the potential for developing new markets in Europe. It had already been able to expand its exports to the UK and Poland in previous years; the reduction in Russian gas supplies in spring 2022 now offered the opportunity to expand

42 Kozhanov, "Navigating Troubled Waters" (see note 33), 187.

43 Stanley Reed, "Qatar to Ramp Up Gas Production amid Feud with Arab Neighbors," *The New York Times*, 4 July 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/04/business/energy-environment/qatar-gas-lng-saudi-blockade.html.

44 Justin Dargin, "Crossing the Rubicon: Qatar's Journey to Natural Gas Dominance" (Doha: Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, 14 November 2021), https://studies.aljazeera.net/en/analyses/crossing-rubicon-qatar%E2%80%99s-journey-natural-gas-dominance.

45 Miller, "Qatar, Energy Security, and Strategic Vision in a Small State" (see note 31), 134.

46 For example, Qatari Energy Minister Muhammad as-Sada said in September 2017: "During this blockade we have never missed a single shipment of oil or gas to any of our consumer partners." Quoted in: Anthony Di Paola, "Qatar Says It's Fulfilling Oil and Gas Deals Despite Gulf Crisis," *Bloomberg*, 13 September 2017.

47 Miller, "Qatar, Energy Security, and Strategic Vision in a Small State" (see note 31), 134.

48 Kenneth Katzman, *Qatar: Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy*, R44533 (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service [CRS], 11 April 2022), 2, https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R44533. In the last decade, production has mostly fluctuated between 600,000 and 700,000 barrels per day. See Di Paola, "Qatar Says It's Fulfilling Oil and Gas Deals Despite Gulf Crisis" (see note 46).

49 Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, "Why Is Qatar Leaving OPEC?" *The New York Times*, 10 December 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/10/opinion/qatar-leaving-opec-saudi-arabia-blockade-failure.html?searchResultPosition=4.

50 Prices rose sevenfold in Europe and threefold in Asia in the year to July. See Gerson Freitas, Jr, Stephen Stapczynski and Anna Shiryaevskaya, "Natural Gas Soars 700%, Becoming Driving Force in the New Cold War," *Bloomberg*, 5 July 2022, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-07-05/the-global-energy-crisis-just-got-even-worse-here-s-why?sref=N7ngA6uG.

further, including to Germany, at the expense of Russia, which had dominated the German market until then. Qatar is very interested in expanding its exports to Europe.[51] After the moratorium was lifted in 2017, commentators often wondered who was going to take all the new gas from Qatar.[52] In 2022 and 2023, this question was answered — Qatar is in demand as an energy partner as never before.

An Ally of the USA

Qatar's growing gas wealth has made it vulnerable. Since the 1990s, it has feared above all its neighbours Saudi Arabia and Iran, which have repeatedly behaved aggressively towards the small Gulf states. The emirate's leadership tried to compensate for its weakness primarily by establishing close ties with the USA. Qatar achieved this goal when the US military established a presence at the al-Udaid airbase in 2003. Thereafter maintaining and expanding relations with the USA remained by far the most important goal of Qatari foreign and security policy — until now.

With the start of gas production in the North Field in 1991, Qatar became increasingly in need of protection, as conflicts with Iran became more likely. As exploitation of the field progressed, the production facilities would necessarily move closer and closer together, so that border disputes could easily arise. In the early 1990s Iran was still hoping to quickly start and expand its gas production in South Pars.[53] However, Tehran's chronic financial problems prevented it from making the high initial investment required for offshore gas production and from acquiring the necessary technology. The Iranian leadership therefore became critical of Qatar's rapid increase in production. As tensions between Tehran and its regional and international adversaries mounted, Doha began to fear Iranian threats to its gas infrastructure, and wanted to counter them with the help of the USA.

As early as 1992, Qatar tied itself more closely to the USA with a bilateral security agreement (renewed for a third ten-year period in 2013). Although the exact text remains a secret, the agreement regulated for the first time the modalities for US military access to Qatari facilities and for the storage of military equipment in the country, and also provided training for Qatari troops.[54] Between 1992 and 2021, the US used the Qatari base al-Sailiya to store military equipment. At times, it was the largest *pre-positioning base* outside the USA in the world. There were always weapons, ammunition and equipment for a brigade there, so that only the personnel had to be transported to Qatar in the event of a conflict.[55]

In the years that followed, Emir Hamad tried to persuade the US government to station even more troops in Qatar. Central to these efforts was the state-of-the-art al-Udaid airbase southwest of Doha, which the emirate built in 1996 at a cost of more than US$1 billion. Since Qatar did not have a significant air force at the time, this move was seen as an offer to the USA to station troops in the country.[56]

When Saudi Arabia asked the Americans to withdraw forces from their kingdom before the Iraq war in 2003, the alternative infrastructure in Qatar was ready. Not only about 100 fighter planes, but also the regional command centre of the U.S. Air Force (U.S. Central Command's Combined Air Operations Center) moved to al-Udaid, which became the most important U.S. air base in the Middle East. In addition, the U.S. military's Central Command responsible for the region between Yemen and Afghanistan (based in Tampa, Florida) established its regional headquarters (called U.S. Central Command Forward) in Qatar in late 2002. For the emirate, the massive presence of between 8,000 and 11,000 US military personnel meant being better protected than ever from its powerful neighbours. Over the next few years, the US Air Force flew strikes from Qatar in Afghanistan, Iraq and, from 2014, against the Islamic State (IS) in Syria. The US

51 Indrajit Sen, "Qatar Looks to Extend a Helping Hand to Europe," *MEED Business Review* 7, no. 3 (2022): 18f.

52 See, e.g., Kozhanov, "Navigating Troubled Waters" (see note 33), 188.

53 In November 1990, Qatar and Iran announced that they would launch a joint project to exploit the gas field by 1994. See "Iran-Qatar Gas Field," *The New York Times*, 14 November 1990, 11, https://www.nytimes.com/1990/11/14/business/iran-qatar-gas-field.html.

54 Katzman, *Qatar: Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy* (see note 48).

55 Ibid., 14. The base was closed in June 2021, but reopened in August to temporarily house evacuees from Afghanistan.

56 Christopher M. Blanchard, *Qatar: Background and U.S. Relations*, RL31718 (Washington, D.C.: CRS, 4 November 2014), 10, https://sgp.fas.org/crs/mideast/RL31718.pdf. In 1996, Qatar had six Alpha jets and five Mirages; it was not until 1997 that 12 new French Mirage fighters were delivered, and they have since formed the backbone of the Qatari air force. See "Middle East and North Africa," *The Military Balance* 97, no. 1 (1997): 115—44 (120 and 139).

presence in al-Udaid remained the core of the alliance between the two states.[57]

Qatar's relations with the USA, which have been very close since the 1990s, hit a crisis in 2017.

Despite these close ties, a crisis erupted between Qatar and the USA in 2017 because then US President Donald Trump initially supported the Qatar blockade by neighbouring states. The leaders of the UAE and Saudi Arabia had already developed their relations with the new US administration before Trump took office and exerted early influence on Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, who was inexperienced in foreign and security policy and rose to become his father-in-law's Middle East advisor.[58] The first visible result of this lobbying was President Trump's visit to Saudi Arabia in May 2017. The fact that the blockade began on 5 June, shortly after the Riyadh summit, was seen as a possible indication that Trump might have encouraged his hosts to do so. A tweet by the US president on 6 June 2017 also pointed in this direction: he described the blockade as a success and implied that he had known about the move.[59]

Trump's hostile attitude jeopardised the close relations between Qatar and the USA that had existed since the 1990s. From the Qatari perspective, the situation was threatening because the emirate feared it would not be protected from its regional enemies by its ally as expected. But some members of the Trump administration understood Qatar's importance, and not only because it provided the USA with the al-Udaid airbase and was central to the global economy as a reliable gas supplier. From the beginning, the Trump administration had committed itself to a policy of "maximum pressure" on Iran, for which a common front of the Arab Gulf states was essential. The Qatar blockade thus threatened to complicate the administration's key foreign policy agenda. According to several reports, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Secretary of Defence James Mattis even had to exhort the leaderships in Riyadh and Abu Dhabi to refrain from military intervention in Qatar. Afterwards, especially Tillerson — who as former CEO of ExxonMobil had maintained close contacts with Qatar — tried to change the president's mind and persuade the conflicting parties to engage in dialogue.[60]

In September 2017, Donald Trump switched to following the line of his department heads and supported mediation efforts by the Emir of Kuwait.[61] This did not end the blockade, but it did avert the greatest threat to Doha. President Trump reaffirmed his change of course in January 2018 in a telephone conversation with Emir Tamim and during a visit by the latter to the White House in April.[62] In the months beforehand, the Qatari leadership had worked hard to improve relations with the USA. Central to this were arms deals worth billions; in the Gulf states (principal sales markets) such deals are always a way of keeping the US government interested — and was valued by President Trump as a means of cultivating relations.

Between June and December 2017, Qatar concluded several contracts with the USA for the purchase of a total of 72 state-of-the-art F15 fighter jets at an estimated price of US$21 billion.[63] While Qatar had already sought the aircraft in 2013, it used the opportunity four years later to score points with Washing-

57 The costs for the expansion and maintenance of the base were largely borne by Qataris. See Katzman, *Qatar: Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy* (see note 48), 13f.

58 On these relations see Guido Steinberg, *Regional Power United Arab Emirates. Abu Dhabi Is No Longer Saudi Arabia's Junior Partner*, SWP Research Paper 10/2020 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, July 2020), 15f., https://www.swp-berlin.org/publikation/regional-power-united-arab-emirates.

59 Trump wrote: "During my recent trip to the Middle East I stated that there can no longer be funding of Radical Ideology. Leaders pointed to Qatar — look!". Quoted in: Declan Walsh, "Tiny, Wealthy Qatar Goes Its Own Way, and Pays for It," *The New York Times*, 22 January 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/22/world/middleeast/qatar-saudi-emir-boycott.html?action=click&module=RelatedLinks&pgtype=Article.

60 Alex Emmons, "Saudi Arabia Planned to Invade Qatar Last Summer. Rex Tillerson's Efforts to Stop It May Have Cost Him His Job," *The Intercept*, 1 August 2018, https://theintercept.com/2018/08/01/rex-tillerson-qatar-saudi-uae/.

61 Declan Walsh, "Trump's Bid to End Saudi-Qatar Stalemate Ends in Recriminations," *The New York Times*, 9 September 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/09/world/middleeast/trump-qatar-saudi-arabia.html. On Tillerson's efforts, see Jason Zengerle, "Rex Tillerson and the Unravelling of the State Department," *The New York Times Magazine*, 17 October 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/17/magazine/rex-tillerson-and-the-unraveling-of-the-state-department.html.

62 Peter Baker, "Trump Now Sees Qatar as an Ally against Terrorism," *The New York Times*, 10 April 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/10/world/middleeast/trump-qatar-terrorism.html.

63 Katzman, *Qatar: Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy* (see note 48), 14f.

ton. The emirate also ordered 24 Rafale fighter jets from France (2015) and 24 Typhoon Eurofighters from the UK (September 2017).[64] The deals were sensational, considering that Qatar's air force had until then essentially consisted of twelve older Mirage jets. Militarily, it makes little sense to order three different kinds of fighters to replace a single old one, so it can be assumed that Doha primarily wanted to strengthen its alliance with the USA and its European allies.

Furthermore, there were other measures that were primarily aimed at convincing the USA of Doha's willingness to cooperate. These included an agreement reached during Tillerson's visit to Doha in July 2017, in which Qatar and the USA approved joint initiatives to combat terrorism and its financing.[65] They also launched a new strategic dialogue on security issues, which began with a meeting in January 2018.[66] But even more important was the further expansion of the US al-Udaid base and the modernisation of the air force command centre there, paid for in large part by Qatar.[67] This was also significant because UAE politicians repeatedly called for a closure of the base and suggested that the American military move to the al-Dhafra base in Abu Dhabi.[68] Qatar went a step further by proposing that the new Hamad Port, which officially opened in September 2017 and was designed for this purpose, be used by US Fifth Fleet warships.[69] This was a direct challenge to Bahrain, where the US Navy maintains its headquarters for the Gulf region.

64 Zachary Keck, "Why Is Qatar Building a Massive Air Force?" *The National Interest*, 29 September 2017, https://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/why-qatar-building-massive-air-force-22541.

65 Gardiner Harris, "Tillerson Tries Shuttle Diplomacy in Qatar Dispute," *The New York Times*, 11 July 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/11/world/middleeast/tillerson-qatar-mideast.html?action=click&module=RelatedCoverage&pgtype=Article&region=Footer.

66 Katzman, *Qatar: Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy* (see note 48), 12.

67 Ulrichsen, *Qatar and the Gulf Crisis* (see note 12), 215f.

68 See, e.g., the following article by the UAE Ambassador to the US: Yousef Al Otaiba, "Qatar Cannot Have It Both Ways," *Wall Street Journal*, 12 June 2017, https://www.wsj.com/articles/qatar-cannot-have-it-both-ways-1497307260. See also Simon Henderson, "White House Meeting with Emir of Qatar Holds Potential for Deal, or Two," *The Hill*, 8 April 2018, https://thehill.com/opinion/international/382025-white-house-meeting-with-emir-of-qatar-holds-potential-for-deal.

69 Katzman, *Qatar: Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy* (see note 48), 14.

In this way, Qatar softened the criticism that was fuelled by Saudi Arabia and the UAE and was widespread in parts of US politics. From 2021, it also benefited from the change of government in Washington. While the Trump administration maintained decidedly close relations with Riyadh and Abu Dhabi, the new president Joe Biden has kept his distance. Instead, relations have improved with Qatar, which became an increasingly important partner for Washington during the US withdrawal from Afghanistan.

In the winter of 2021/2022, the threat of Russia's war against Ukraine and its consequences for the energy supply strengthened Qatar's position in the gas markets. In January 2022, President Biden invited Emir Tamim to the White House and announced that the US government would categorise Qatar as a "*major non-NATO ally*".[70] This categorisation is reserved for the USA's most important allies outside NATO. Although it does not constitute an obligation to defend Qatar, it is considered a sign of particularly close relations with the USA. Until 2022, only Kuwait and Bahrain belonged to this group of states in the Persian Gulf, and Israel, Jordan, Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco in other parts of the Middle East.[71] Admission to this exclusive club of loyal friends of the USA comes with access to military and security technology, selected weapons systems and training by the US military.[72] The decisive factor for Qatar, however, was probably the gain in prestige, since Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which are also allied with the USA, have so far been denied the status of *major non-NATO ally.*

Qatar's "soft power"

Since the mid-1990s, Qatar has also relied on "soft power," the form of power based on the persuasiveness and attractiveness of a political actor, which it

70 The White House, "Remarks by President Biden and His Highness Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani, Amir of the State of Qatar before Bilateral Meeting," 31 January 2022, https://bit.ly/3SlKcXx_RemarksBiden.

71 In addition, there are Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Japan, New Zealand, Pakistan (!), the Philippines, South Korea and Thailand. Taiwan has this status de facto. Afghanistan is on the list, but is no longer part of it since the Taliban took power. Colombia was included in 2022.

72 Michael D. Shear, "Biden Designates Qatar as a Major Non-NATO Ally," *The New York Times*, 31 January 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/31/us/politics/biden-qatar-nato.html.

uses to gain political influence.[73] By investing in media, culture, and education, by promoting tourism and hosting sporting events, the emirate seeks to raise its profile and become as indispensable in these areas as it is a global gas supplier and an ally of the USA in the Gulf. Here, too, Qatar's ambition is to garner vested interest in its continued existence in as many states as possible. The Qatari leadership is working purposefully to make Doha a media, cultural and sporting capital of the Arab world and beyond.

Al Jazeera

The first building block of this policy was the founding of the Arabic-language TV station *Al Jazeera* in November 1996, whose 24-hour news programme can be received via satellite throughout the Arab world.[74] This move proved a revolution in the Arab media landscape, as most TV viewers in the region in the mid-1990s were still dependent on the domestic channels strictly controlled by the respective regimes. *Al Jazeera* became the most popular news channel in the Arab world within a few months; it claimed to have around 35 to 40 million viewers worldwide in the 2000s.[75] Emir Hamad provided start-up funding of US$137 million for the first five years, and the Qatari state most likely remained the channel's main financial backer in subsequent years.[76]

Al Jazeera caused a furore because it provided detailed news on all Arab states — except Qatar — and allowed opposition figures and critical intellectuals from these countries to have their say, as well as Israeli politicians, government and army spokespersons. The station's motto "the opinion and the other opinion" *(al-Ra'i wa-l-ra'i al-akhar)* became a catchphrase throughout the region.

Emir Hamad was primarily interested in establishing Doha as the centre of the Arab media landscape and thus demonstrating Qatar's new independence. Many Arab governments had a hostile reaction to the new broadcaster; the Saudi Arabian government vehemently resisted it. *Al Jazeera* not only reported on the domestic political situation in the kingdom, but also offered Saudi Arabian dissidents a much-used forum — which even led to Saudi Arabia withdrawing its ambassador from Doha in 2002.[77] The USA, too, often reacted angrily because since 1998 the channel exclusively received the video and audio messages of the al-Qaeda leadership and sometimes played them without comment and at full length. From 2001 onwards, this aroused the ire of the Bush administration, which was often publicly outraged by the reporting, and which exerted pressure on the Qatari government and the broadcaster not to broadcast messages from al-Qaeda.[78] While these episodes attracted attention in the Western world, the main topics in the channel's coverage in the 2000s were the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Iraq. In the Arab world, *Al Jazeera* news coverage was very well received.[79]

In the wake of the Arab Spring, *Al Jazeera* took sides with the Muslim Brotherhood and lost many viewers as a result.

It was only due to the Arab Spring of 2011 that *Al Jazeera* lost popularity because of its support for the opposition Muslim Brotherhood. Even before that, it had provided various kinds of Islamists a platform where they could present themselves to their home countries and the entire region. The programme *"Shari'a and Life" (al-Shari'a wa-l-hayat)*, in which a Muslim religious scholar presented his interpretation of Islam in an interview once a week, was particularly popular. Until 2013, this was mostly the prominent

73 For a brief overview of the concept, see Joseph S. Nye, "Soft Power," *Foreign Policy*, no. 80 (1990): 153—71.

74 *Al Jazeera* translates as "the island"; it refers to the Arabian Peninsula *(Shibh al-Jazira al-Arabiya)*, which is often abbreviated to the Arabian Island *(al-Jazira al-Arabiya)* in everyday language.

75 Christopher Marquis, "U.S. Protests Broadcasts by Arab Channels," *The New York Times*, 29 April 2004, https://www.nytimes.com/2004/04/29/world/the-struggle-for-iraq-the-media-us-protests-broadcasts-by-arab-channels.html.

76 On the start-up funding, see Hugh Miles, *Al-Jazeera. The Inside Story of the Arab News Channel That Is Challenging the West* (New York: Grove Press, 2005), 28. In 2001, the channel received a further US$130 million for five years. See ibid., 172. According to press reports, the annual budget in 2013 was several hundred million dollars. See, e.g., Nordland, "In Surprise, Emir of Qatar Plans to Abdicate" (see note 1).

77 On this crisis see in chapter "A Competitor of Saudi Arabia," page 39.

78 Initially, Secretary of State Colin Powell tried to convince Emir Hamad to restrict *Al Jazeera*'s coverage. See Miles, *Al-Jazeera* (see note 76), 122f. In November 2001, the *Al Jazeera office* in Kabul was bombed by the US Air Force. See ibid., 164—66.

79 In 2006, *al-Jazeera* launched an English-language channel (https://www.aljazeera.com) that is broadcast worldwide.

Egyptian Islamist Yusuf al-Qaradawi (1926—2022).[80] During his appearances, he called for a holy war *(jihad)* against Israel and repeatedly argued that suicide bombings by Hamas and other organisations were permissible.[81] In August 2004, he also said that "resistance" (*muqawama*, a word with positive connotations in both Arabic and English) against the Americans in Iraq was not only legitimate, but was even a duty.[82]

From spring 2011, *Al Jazeera* reported live from the protests, but after a few months no longer openly took sides with the protest and opposition movements, but with the Muslim Brotherhood and similar currents.[83] Many viewers had shared the channel's very critical view of Israel's policy towards the Palestinians and that of the USA in Iraq — now they rejected its closeness to the Islamists.[84] Observers criticised *Al Jazeera* for towing the Qatari government's line and thus deteriorating into an instrument of the powerful; the channel also celebrated the protests in Tunisia, Egypt and elsewhere, but hardly reported on similar events in neighbouring and allied Bahrain, where Shiite demonstrators in particular were protesting against the government.[85] Many viewers, however, had overlooked the fact that *Al Jazeera's* editorial policy was already in line with Qatari interests before 2011 — it was simply less noticeable then, because Doha's policy had tried to take a mediating role in the region and was perceived by many as balanced. However, when support for the Islamist opposition in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Syria became the focus of Qatari policy and the channel's coverage, many viewers turned their backs on it. *Al Jazeera* became, in their eyes, an instrument to promote the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamists in the region; the channel itself was now dominated by Islamist supporters.

Moreover, from 2011 onwards, many states took measures against *Al Jazeera* amidst the counter-revolution led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The channel's offices were closed, broadcasting licences revoked, journalists arrested and convicted, and even put on international wanted lists. Qatar's opponents repeatedly called for its closure. During the 2014 crisis between Qatar and its neighbours, Emir Tamim finally pledged in November to prevent *Al Jazeera* from providing a forum for groups or individuals opposed to the Egyptian government. Qatar also shut down *al-Jazeera Mubashir Misr* ("al-Jazeera Egypt live"), a special-interest *Al Jazeera* channel that was primarily dedicated to live political coverage from Egypt and was seen by its opponents as a mouthpiece for the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood.[86]

That *Al Jazeera* remained a thorn in the side of Qatar's opponents was evident in 2017, when the four blockading states of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain demanded its closure,[87] which Qatar refused to do. In 2022, *Al Jazeera* is still the most popular news channel in the Arab world, but its reach is much more limited than in 2011.

Culture, tourism and sport

With the growing revenues from oil and gas exports, Qatar began to expand its soft power strategy to education, science and culture. The main driver of this development is the Qatar Foundation, established in 1995 and headed by Shaikha Mauza, the emir's influential mother, which has established branches of US, British and French universities and think tanks in a compound called Education City in Doha.[88] Cultural

80 On his person see the beginning of the chapter "A Supporter of the Islamists," page 26.

81 Miles, *Al-Jazeera* (see note 76), 43 and 192.

82 Neil MacFarquhar, "Muslim Scholars Increasingly Debate Unholy War," *The New York Times*, 10 December 2004, https://www.nytimes.com/2004/12/10/world/middleeast/muslim-scholars-increasingly-debate-unholy-war.html.

83 Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, "Qatar's Maverick Streak Leaves It Friendless in the Gulf," *Current History* 116, no. 794 (2017): 342—47 (345).

84 Jared Malsin, "In the Eye of the Storm: Can Al Jazeera Survive the Gulf Crisis?" *Time*, 21 August 2017, https://time.com/4896791/al-jazeera-qatar-middle-east-saudi-arabia-crisis/.

85 Lina Khatib, "Qatar's Foreign Policy: The Limits of Pragmatism," *International Affairs* 89, no. 2 (2013): 417—31 (428), https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12025.

86 Jim Sciutto and Jeremy Herb, "Exclusive: The Secret Documents That Help Explain the Qatar Crisis," *CNN*, 11 July 2017, https://edition.cnn.com/2017/07/10/politics/secret-documents-qatar-crisis-gulf-saudi/index.html. The original text and an English translation can be found here: https://i2.cdn.turner.com/cnn/2017/images/07/10/translation.of.agreementsupdated.pdf.

87 See, e.g., Ben Hubbard, "Arab Nations Demand Qatar Shut Al Jazeera, Cut Islamist Ties and Detail Funding," *The New York Times*, 23 June 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/23/world/middleeast/qatar-saudi-arabia-al-jazeera.html.

88 On the role of the Foundation in the Qatari political system see Kamrava, "Royal Factionalism and Political Liberalization in Qatar" (see note 20), 407.

institutions have also been established, including the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, which opened in 2008, the Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra in 2008, the Qatar Opera House in 2010 and the new Qatar National Museum building in 2019.[89] These measures are aimed at making Qatar a tourist destination and — partly in tandem with this — a hub for international aviation. The latter is evidenced by the opening of the new Hamad International Airport in 2014 and the expansion of the state-owned airline Qatar Airways.

In addition, Qatar has invested in sports and major sporting events in Doha, which have attracted immense attention. In the 2000s, the onset of gas wealth allowed for the rapid expansion of sports funding. In 2006, Qatar hosted the Asian Games — a kind of Asian Olympics and thus the largest event ever held in the country up to that time. Prominent handball and athletics events were added. At the same time, Qatar massively expanded its sports infrastructure. The centerpiece was the Aspire Zone, which opened in 2005 and was first used for the Asian Games. It is a large, state-of-the-art sports facility with the Aspire Dome multifunctional sports hall, several football pitches, sports facilities of all kinds, an indoor swimming pool, two hotels and a shopping center.[90]

The awarding of the 2022 FIFA World Cup to Qatar in 2010 was the result of years of hard work. The award was an epoch-making event for Qatar, since the world's largest single sporting event would be hosted in the Middle East for the first time. Overnight, the small country became a household name around the world.[91]

Since 2010, Qatar demonstrated its full potential in its efforts to become globally known through sport. The emirate not only invested in the infrastructure needed for the major event (stadiums, hotels, transport), triggering an unprecedented construction boom,[92] but also stepped up its efforts to make Doha an international sports capital. The Club World Handball Championship was held in the emirate every year between 2010 and 2018, as was the Handball World Cup in 2015, and Doha has regularly hosted parts of the Diamond League of Athletics since 2010. This was followed by the Asian Football Championship in 2011, the West Asian Football Championship in 2013, the World Short Course Swimming Championships in 2014 and the World Road Cycling Championships in 2016. In 2021, Qatar completed the last major World Cup test run with the Arab Cup, a football tournament for the national teams of the Arab world.[93]

During the 2017–2021 blockade, Saudi Arabia and the UAE also took action against Qatar in terms of sport.

The World Cup in Qatar, and with it the emirate's entire sports strategy, briefly came under severe threat during the blockade as of 2017, since the blockading states also acted against the emirate in terms of sports policy. The extent of the Saudi-Emirati plans became apparent in November 2017 when messages were leaked from the hotmail account of the UAE Ambassador to the USA, Yousef Al Otaiba. Otaiba's statements were significant because he was a particularly prominent anti-Qatari propagandist.[94] The messages exposed the UAE's strategy against Qatar, in which football and the upcoming World Cup played a central role. Among other things, Otaiba said that the consequences of the blockade were also aimed at making it more difficult for Qatar to build and maintain the infrastructure (especially air transport) necessary for the World Cup. FIFA would be asked to hold the World Cup in several countries, with the argument that this would stabilize the region. The aim of such an approach was to bring the 2022 World Cup to the UAE.[95]

89 Robin Pogrebin, "Qatari Riches Are Buying Art World Influence," *The New York Times*, 22 July 2013, https://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/23/arts/design/qatar-uses-its-riches-to-buy-art-treasures.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

90 Christian Spiller and Andrea Böhm, "Höher, schneller, Katar," *Die Zeit*, 11 June 2015.

91 See on this and the following: Marlon Saadi and Guido Steinberg, "Konkurrenten auf dem Rasen und abseits des Platzes: Der Konflikt zwischen den Vereinigten Arabischen Emiraten und Katar," in *Das rebellische Spiel: die Macht des Fußballs im Nahen Osten und die Katar-WM*, ed. Jan Busse and René Wildangel (Bielefeld: Die Werkstatt, 2022), 58—71.

92 On the construction boom between 2010 and 2022 see, e.g., "Qatar Set for New Phase of Development," *MEED Business Review*, 28 April 2022, https://www.meed.com/qatar-set-for-new-phase-of-development.

93 Olaf Jansen, "Arab Cup 2021: No Football Fervor in Qatar," *Deutsche Welle*, 1 December 2021.

94 On Otaiba's position in UAE politics see Steinberg, *Regional Power United Arab Emirates* (see note 58), 14f.

95 Ryan Grim and Ben Walsh, "Leaked Documents Expose Stunning Plan to Wage Financial War on Qatar — and Steal the World Cup," *The Intercept*, 9 November 2017, https://

It was probably an initial success of this lobbying by the UAE and the Saudis that FIFA President Gianni Infantino announced in 2018 that the association wanted to increase the tournament in Qatar from 32 to 48 teams. At the same time, he mentioned Saudi Arabia as a possible co-host, as Qatar did not have the infrastructure for such an enlarged sporting event.[96] There might have been a connection between this FIFA plan and the offer of a Middle Eastern-Asian investor group, in which Saudi Arabia is said to have been particularly strongly represented. In April 2018, this group offered FIFA US$25 billion for the rights to a new Club World Cup and a new global league for national teams. Many observers thought this was an attempt by Riyadh to buy into a significantly expanded 2022 World Cup at short notice. However, the increase in the number of participating teams for 2022 was dropped a few months later, possibly because Qatar strongly resisted and threatened to sue FIFA. Infantino then postponed his plans to the 2026 World Cup, as originally planned.

Furthermore, the blockade started a conflict over the broadcasting of sporting events on television. After it was founded in 2003, *Al Jazeera Sports* became the most important sports broadcaster in the Arab world, investing billions in broadcasting rights. In early 2014, this sports division of *Al Jazeera* was merged into the beIN [= Be in!] Media Group, which became the target of concerted attacks by the Saudis and Emiratis after the blockade began in June 2017. The channel's transmissions were stopped in the blockade states and hijacked by a pirate channel called beOutQ (= Be out, Q(atar)!). The latter now broadcast numerous international football matches and other sporting events from BeIN's programming in the Arab world without having paid for the rights.[97] For the Qatari broadcaster, the theft meant billion-dollar losses.

In an investigative report published in September 2019, several football federations and leagues (including FIFA) found that the transmissions were handled by the Saudi Arabian communications company Arabsat and that Saudi Arabian government authorities condoned the piracy.[98] But despite the clear facts, the associations failed to find lawyers who would dare to take the case to court in Saudi Arabia. Qatar had to wait until the final year of the blockade for the conflict to be resolved. BeOutQ ceased operations in 2020 and since January 2021 BeIN can be received again in Saudi Arabia.[99]

Perhaps an even more serious setback for the Qatari sports and soft power strategy is that the World Cup bid has focused the attention of Western public opinion on the poor situation of migrant workers in Qatar. Saudi Arabia and the UAE fuelled criticism of their neighbouring country by accusing it of systematic and large-scale support for terrorism in veritable propaganda campaigns — an accusation that was also picked up by Western media. Overall, Qatar has become better known, but its image has been damaged in many Western countries.

theintercept.com/2017/11/09/uae-qatar-oitaba-rowland-banque-havilland-world-cup/.

96 "Mega-WM am Golf; 48 Teams 2022 denkbar: Will die Fifa Saudi-Arabien mit ins Boot holen?" *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 27 October 2018.

97 Tariq Panja, "The Brazen Bootlegging of a Multibillion-Dollar Sports Network," *The New York Times*, 9 May 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/09/sports/bein-sports-qatar-beoutq.html.

98 Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), "Joint Statement by FIFA, the AFC, UEFA, the Bundesliga, LaLiga, Lega Serie A, LFP and the Premier League on the Publication of an Investigative Report into the Operations of BeOutQ," 16 September 2019, https://www.fifa.com/about-fifa/commercial/fifa-tv/news/joint-statement-by-fifa-the-afc-uefa-the-bundesliga-laliga-lega-serie-a-ligue-1-.

99 Jonathan Easton, "Saudi Arabia Reportedly Ends beIN Blackout," *Digital TV Europe*, 20 January 2021, https://www.digitaltveurope.com/2021/01/20/saudi-arabia-reportedly-ends-bein-blackout/.

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There are also clearly recognisable strategies in Qatar's regional policy: First, Qatar tries to defuse regional conflicts by proposing itself as a mediator. Second, it supports the Muslim Brotherhood and related Islamist groups, albeit more cautiously today than in 2011—2013, when it sought to revise the regional order and catapult itself into a leadership position with the help of the Muslim Brotherhood. Third, Qatar's regional policy is shaped by its competition with Saudi Arabia (and also with the UAE), which during the Qatar blockade from 2017 led Doha to seek a new regional protector in Turkey, thus shifting the balance of power on the southern shore of the Persian Gulf in its favour.

A Mediator in regional conflicts

With the accession of Emir Hamad to power in 1995, Qatar demonstrated its independence from Saudi Arabia and used the rising revenues from gas exports as well as protection by the US military to assume a regional mediating position. To this end, in the early 2000s, Qatar drew closer to Iran, Saudi Arabia's major regional counterpart. Initially, this policy was strongly influenced by Qatar's geographical location, as the shared North Field/South Pars gas field forced Doha to cooperate with its powerful neighbour. When the relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia and their respective allies deteriorated noticeably from 2005 onwards, Qatar increasingly acted as a mediator between the camps.

With this repositioning, Qatar tried to prevent tensions between the two powerful neighbours from escalating, since its security would be compromised. In addition, Qatar wanted to establish itself as an independent power of a new kind — one that, due to its own lack of strength, relied on a mediating role. The emirate thereby intended to show the USA and the West that it could contribute to solving problems in the Middle East and beyond.[100] From 2005 onwards, Doha mediated primarily in conflicts involving allies of the two regional powers Iran and Saudi Arabia, such as between the Palestinians (Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and Hamas), in Sudan (Darfur rebels and the government), in Yemen (Huthi rebels and the government) and in Lebanon. Qatar's mediation in Lebanon in 2008 was long considered the greatest success. The Iranian proxy Hezbollah and allies of Saudi Arabia faced each other in a political crisis that even led to fighting in West Beirut and other areas in May of that year. Thanks to an agreement reached shortly afterwards in Doha, a government of national unity was formed in Beirut, which prevented further escalation of the conflict.[101]

During years of mediation efforts in Lebanon, the Qatari leadership around Emir Hamad established close relations with the Assad regime in Syria, the Lebanese Hezbollah and the Palestinian Hamas, which ensured Doha a significant role in Middle East politics. However, Qatari policy often had an unplanned effect, since Emir Hamad and his foreign minister made several simultaneous attempts at mediation without having a sufficiently large and experienced diplomatic and/or intelligence apparatus to do so. Apart from the personal persuasiveness of the two leaders, Doha was able to come up with a lot of money, with the help of which the respective parties were persuaded to compromise. However, even in those cases where concrete results were achieved, as in Lebanon, no longer-term solutions to conflicts could be found; in Lebanon, the mediation ended

100 For a detailed account of the reasons for the new Qatari policy see Khatib, "Qatar's Foreign Policy" (see note 85), 418f.

101 For the text of the Doha Agreement see *Doha Agreement "On the Results of the Lebanese National Dialogue Conference,"* 21 May 2008, https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/Lebanon_DohaAgreement2008_Engl.pdf.

with the agreement — and after a while disputes broke out again.[102]

Under Emir Tamim, Qatar has expanded its foreign policy apparatus to be able to deal intensively with individual conflicts.

When the Arab Spring began, Qatar gave up its mediating position in several conflicts and supported the protest movements and Islamist forces in Libya, Syria, Tunisia, Egypt and other countries. With Emir Tamim taking office in June 2013, the Qatari leadership gradually returned to the policies of the years before 2011. Perhaps the most important difference from the years 2011 to 2013 was that the new Emir and his government expanded the foreign policy apparatus to enable more intensive handling of individual conflicts, and limited mediation efforts on a few particularly relevant projects.

By far the most significant were those between Hamas and its opponents in Israel/Palestine and between the Taliban and the USA. In its relations with Israel, Qatar made headlines early on when Emir Hamad received Prime Minister Shimon Peres in 1996 and an Israeli trade office was opened in Doha. In the years that followed, Hamad repeatedly met with Israeli politicians, a move sometimes heavily criticised in the Arab world.[103] At the same time, Qatar expanded its relations with the PLO/Fatah-led Palestinian Authority, which it has financially supported since the 1990s.

Even more important were contacts with Hamas, which has offices in Doha and whose former political leader, Khalid Mishal (in office 1996—2017), lived in Qatar between 1999 and 2001, and lives once again since February 2012.[104] These ties put Qatar in a position to mediate between Palestinian factions when the conflict between the PLO and Hamas brought the Palestinian territories to the brink of civil war in 2006. Although Saudi Arabia outranked Qatar at the time, and the Mecca Agreement of February 2007 agreed on the formation of a government of national unity, Qatar remained a key player — if only because it provided large sums of money to the Hamas government in Gaza.[105]

Qatar's relations with Hamas became more significant when Hamas seized control of the Gaza Strip in June 2007. Shortly afterwards, Qatar's rapprochement with Israel ended with the three-week Gaza war in December 2008 and January 2009; Israel responded to continuous rocket fire by Hamas and other militant groups from the Gaza Strip with a military offensive. Emir Hamad sharply criticised Israel, closed the Israeli trade office and even called for a suspension of the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002, in which the Arab states had offered Israel peace if it withdrew to its 1967 borders.[106]

During the next few years, Doha primarily tried to overcome the division between Palestinian rivals through talks, but was unable to achieve any lasting success. After the beginning of the Arab Spring, Qatar began to take a clearer stance in favour of the Islamists in the inner-Palestinian conflict. Since Hamas is the Palestinian offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, this rapprochement matched Qatar's increased support for the Islamists from 2011 onwards. This closeness to Hamas was demonstrated during a visit by Emir Hamad to the Gaza Strip in October 2012: he promised US$400 million in reconstruction aid for housing, health care and infrastructure in the area, which had been badly affected by the armed clashes. The Qatari emir was heavily criticised by the Israeli government, which believed the visit boosted Hamas and reaffirmed its rule in the Gaza Strip. Israel feared

102 Courtney Freer, *Qatar and the UAE in Peacemaking and Peacebuilding*, LSE Middle East Centre Paper Series 60 (London: LSE Middle East Centre, March 2022), 12, http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/114561/3/Qatar_and_UAE_in_Peacemaking_and_Peacebuilding_1_.pdf. In Lebanon, the National Unity Government was able to govern until January 2011, before it fell apart and Lebanese politics were once again paralysed by the conflict between enemy camps.

103 This also applies to the interviews that Israeli politicians were allowed to give on *al-Jazeera*, such as one given by Prime Minister Ehud Barak in January 2001. See Miles, *Al-Jazeera* (see note 76), 97.

104 Mishal stayed in Jordan until 1999 and in Damascus from 2001 to 2012.

105 On this process see Guido Steinberg, *Saudi-Arabien als Partner deutscher Nahostpolitik*, SWP-Studie 35/2008 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, December 2008), 21f., https://www.swp-berlin.org/publikation/saudi-arabien-partner-deutscher-nahostpolitik. On Qatar's payments to Hamas at the time, see Robert F. Worth, "Qatar, Playing All Sides, Is a Nonstop Mediator," *The New York Times*, 9 July 2008, https://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/09/world/middleeast/09qatar.html.

106 Andrew England and Tobias Buck, "Two Arab States Suspend Links with Israel," *Financial Times*, 17 January 2009.

that the organisation was benefiting directly or indirectly from Qatar's financial aid.[107]

Shortly after Emir Tamim took office, Israeli criticism of Qatari policy lessened, as Doha now relied on continued cooperation with Tel Aviv/Jerusalem to facilitate humanitarian aid to Gaza. To this end, Qatar is working closely with a unit in the Israeli Ministry of Defence responsible for authorising the transport of construction materials and relief supplies to Gaza. Qatari Gaza envoy Mohammed al-Emadi has repeatedly defended this pragmatic approach as necessary if the people of Gaza are to be helped.[108] To this day, Qatari officials claim that assistance to the Gaza Strip is of a purely humanitarian nature and is not directed at Hamas as an organisation. But it can be assumed that the organisation — which is still present in Doha — is also receiving aid.

Due to its close relations with Hamas, Qatar remained in demand as a mediator even after 2012, forexample during the ceasefire in July and August 2014.[109] In August 2020, Qatar and a Qatari cash payment to Hamas even played an important role in brokering a ceasefire between Hamas and Israel.[110] The Israeli side has accepted Qatar during these years as an actor that exerts influence on Hamas, alleviates economic hardship in Gaza with its financial aid, and at the same time does not have an anti-Israeli agenda. This is not altered by the fact that Qatar has remained critical of Israel and rejected peace with the Jewish state even when its neighbours UAE and Bahrain concluded the so-called Abraham Accords with Israel in 2020. In April 2022, Qatar once again showed its importance as a mediator in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict when riots broke out on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. While similar events the year before had led to a military confrontation between Israel and Hamas, this time both sides announced through Qatari officials that they had no interest in an escalation.[111]

Qatar's role as a mediator between the USA and the Taliban developed similarly. Qatar's first contacts with the Afghan Islamists date back to the late 1990s and early 2000s, when they seized several opportunities to present their views on the Qatari channel *Al Jazeera*. *Al Jazeera* was the only international TV station that could broadcast from Taliban territory before and during the American invasion.[112] Qatari relations with the Taliban became important as of 2010 at the latest, when the US administration of then President Barack Obama decided to hold initial talks with them.[113] In the years that followed, individual meetings took place repeatedly, but never continuously. Qatar was of central importance because as early as 2011, both the USA and Afghanistan were considering opening a Taliban liaison office abroad where authorised representatives of the organisation could act as contacts. The US government favoured Doha early on, so that the Taliban office was officially established there in June 2013.[114] Qatar thus finally became the focus of Afghanistan diplomacy for the next few years.

In 2014, talks between US representatives and the Taliban in Doha resulted in a prisoner exchange, in which the latter proved for the first time that they spoke for the Taliban leadership and could deliver results. Doha again became the focal point when the Trump administration decided in 2017 to hold talks with the Taliban to facilitate a rapid withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan. The result was the Doha Agreement of February 2020, in which the US agreed to withdraw its troops by 1 May 2021, while the

107 Jodi Rudoren, "Qatar's Emir Visits Gaza, Pledging $400 Million to Hamas," *The New York Times*, 23 October 2012, https://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/24/world/middleeast/pledging-400-million-qatari-emir-makes-historic-visit-to-gaza-strip.html.

108 Ulrichsen, "Foreign Policy: Discourse, Tools, and Implications" (see note 2), 67f.

109 Ulrichsen, "The Return of Qatari Mediation" (see note 6).

110 David M. Halbfinger and Adam Rasgon, "Israel and Hamas Agree to Cool Hostilities, for Now," *The New York Times*, 31 August 2020 (updated 24 September 2020), https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/31/world/middleeast/hamas-gaza-israel-corona virus.html.

111 Patrick Kingsley and Raja Abdulrahim, "Israeli Government Crisis Deepens after Closing of Major Mosque," *The New York Times,* 17 April 2022 (updated 6 May 2022), https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/17/world/middleeast/jerusalem-al-aqsa-mosque.html.

112 Miles, *Al-Jazeera* (see note 76), 112 and 115.

113 Barnett Rubin, "A Tale of Two Scepticisms: Fighting and Talking with the Taliban during the Obama Years," *War on the Rocks*, 26 February 2020, https://warontherocks.com/2020/02/a-tale-of-two-skepticisms-fighting-and-talking-with-the-taliban-during-the-obama-years/.

114 The difficulty of the process is evident from the fact that the opening was announced in January 2012. See Matthew Rosenberg, "Taliban Opening Qatar Office, and Maybe Door to Talks," *The New York Times*, 3 January 2012, https://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/04/world/asia/taliban-to-open-qatar-office-in-step-toward-peace-talks.html.

Taliban pledged to cut its ties to al-Qaeda.[115] Trump's successor Joe Biden put his predecessor's withdrawal announcement into action in the summer of 2021, whereupon the Afghan government collapsed, and the Taliban were able to take power.

Once again, there was an opportunity for Qatar to present itself as a useful ally to the US, because the superpower had failed to fly out its own nationals and Afghans who had worked for the US military in time. Qatar provided numerous Qatar Airways planes to evacuate thousands from Kabul. The emirate then took in a total of 60,000 evacuees until their applications for onward travel to the USA or other countries were reviewed.[116] It was only logical that the American Embassy in Kabul was also moved to Doha after its closure in August 2021, and that Qatar has represented the USA diplomatically in the Afghan capital since 2022.[117] In Afghanistan, Qatar provides humanitarian aid and, together with Turkey, supported the Taliban's efforts to make Kabul airport functional again. The limits of Qatar's influence on the Taliban, however, are evident in their uncompromisingly Islamist domestic policy, even though Doha has called on them to be moderate and to form a government that is as inclusive as possible.[118]

A Supporter of the Islamists

Since the 1950s, Qatar has been a refuge for supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood who fled to the Gulf to escape repression in Egypt and other Arab countries. Once there, they mainly took up positions in the newly emerging education system. Their most important representative was the Egyptian religious scholar Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who, after years of persecution in his home country, fled to Doha in 1961, where he taught at the local Sharia faculty of Qatar University. In the decades that followed, he developed into the most important religious thinker of the Muslim Brotherhood. With the help of *Al Jazeera* and the website *islamonline.net*, he became prominent in the second half of the 1990s — and the world's best-known and most influential Sunni religious scholar.[119] A growing community of exiled Muslim Brothers from various countries formed around the Egyptian, used *Al Jazeera* as a forum, and otherwise waited for a political turnaround in their home countries. Qatar allowed the Islamists to build an intellectual and political centre with global appeal — which was perceived as increasingly threatening by the countries where the Muslim Brotherhood formed strong opposition.

During the Arab Spring, the Qatari leadership saw the Muslim Brotherhood as the political force of the future.

With the beginning of the Arab Spring, the Qatari leadership changed its strategy and rarely acted as a mediator. It now openly took sides with the protest movements in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria, as well as with Islamist forces associated with the Muslim Brotherhood, which seemed to emerge as winners of the upheavals in the course of 2011. Qatar apparently wanted to create a new regional order in alliance with the Islamists, in which the emirate would assume a dominant role. In so doing, the leadership in Doha saw the emancipation of the Muslim Brotherhood and more militant groups as an opportunity rather than a threat. Emir Hamad explained this in an interview with *Al Jazeera* in September 2011. He explained that Islamists become extremists primarily because dictatorial regimes (among which he obviously did not include Qatar) oppress them. Referring to the situation in Libya, where armed insurgents had just overthrown the regime of Muammar al-Gaddafi, he said: "What then is the reason that makes extremists such? Extremism is the result of tyrannical, dictatorial governments or leaders who do not give them [extremists] justice, who do not give them security. That is what leads to extremism. But if the people are allowed to participate politically, then I believe that

115 Mujib Mashal, "Taliban and U.S. Strike Deal to Withdraw American Troops from Afghanistan," *The New York Times*, 29 February 2020 (updated 23 August 2021), https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/29/world/asia/us-taliban-deal.html.

116 Ben Hubbard, "From Afghanistan to the World Cup, Tiny, Wealthy Qatar Steps Up," *The New York Times*, 7 September 2021 (updated 12 November 2021), https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/07/world/middleeast/afghanistan-qatar-airlift.html.

117 "Qatar to Represent US Interests in Afghanistan," *VOA News*, 12 November 2021 (updated 13 November 2021), https://www.voanews.com/a/qatar-to-represent-us-interests-in-afghanistan-/6311070.html.

118 On these calls from Qatar see, e.g., Hubbard, "From Afghanistan to the World Cup" (see note 116).

119 For his biography see Peter Mandaville, "Qaradāwī, Yūsuf al-," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World* (2007—2008), http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t236/e1230.

you will see that this extremism will transform into a civil/civilised life *[hayat madaniya]* and a civilised society."[120]

Apart from the emir's obvious sympathy for Islamists, what was striking about this interview was that Hamad was not only talking about the Muslim Brotherhood, which many Western observers also consider moderate and potential partners; rather, he also explicitly included Salafists and al-Qaeda — a very controversial view of Islamists that pervaded Qatari politics at least until 2013.

In debates about their country's role in the Arab Spring, representatives of Qatar repeatedly stress that it supported the protest movements as a whole and not just the Islamists. While this is correct in principle, the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist organisations soon became Doha's preferred partners. However, this was probably due less to ideological than to pragmatic considerations. The Muslim Brotherhood and related groups were the only organised opposition to the ruling regimes in 2011. Only the Islamists had structures and a large and disciplined following, so that only they could realistically hope to quickly provide an alternative to the ruling regimes in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Syria.

Apparently, Emir Hamad and his foreign minister believed that the Muslim Brotherhood were the political forces of the future in the Arab world and decided to assist their grip on power by any means.[121] Contributing to their negligence was the fact that the many Muslim Brothers who had settled in Qatar restricted their political activities to abroad and never gave the Qatari authorities cause for suspicion. In fact, the ineffective Qatari offshoot of the Muslim Brothers had disbanded in anticipatory obedience in 1999.[122] Moreover, the Qataris almost all adhere to (a moderate version of) Wahhabism and are religiously, socially and culturally very conservative, which is why parts of the Muslim Brotherhood's programme are not completely unfamiliar to them. For the leading figures around Emir Hamad, the Islamist combination of conservative religiosity and political pragmatism may also have been attractive, such that they viewed alliances with the movement as unproblematic.

Between 2011 and 2013, the Qatari leadership seized the initiative in Libya and Syria, and the emirate briefly became a leading power in the Arab world. Qatar urged members of the Arab League to call for the establishment of a no-fly zone over Libya and therefore a military intervention, which then became feasible with UN Security Council Resolution 1973 of 17 March 2011.[123] Qatar was also the first Arab country (and the first ever after France) to recognise the National Transitional Council in Benghazi as the legitimate government of Libya at the end of March 2011. It subsequently participated in the intervention itself with six fighter jets and (in coordination with the USA, UK and France) sent special forces to finance, arm and train insurgents fighting the Gaddafi regime. In addition, the emirate supported the rebels by transporting and selling oil for them from areas that they controlled.

Al Jazeera reported daily for hours on the clashes, and Yusuf al-Qaradawi called several times for the overthrow of the Gaddafi regime and for support to be given to the rebels. Qatar sought to channel its aid primarily to Islamist rebels, with only a small portion of arms and money going to the National Transitional Council. Thereafter, the emirate continued to support Islamist groups that opposed the UAE- and Egyptian-sponsored warlord Khalifa Haftar.[124] Qatari-backed militias, for example, were instrumental in the Dawn of Libya (Fajr Libiya) fighting alliance that captured the capital Tripoli in summer 2014.[125]

The Qatari leadership took a similarly determined approach in Syria in 2011, where peaceful protests in the spring and summer of that year escalated into an

120 "Liqa' Khass: Shaikh Hamad Ibn Khalifa Al Thani: The Situation in the Arab Region" (Arabic), *Al Jazeera*, 10 September 2011, http://bit.ly/2OWin9w.

121 For example, an advisor to Emir Tamim argued in an interview with researcher Courtney Freer: "[Emir Hamad] is the only Arab leader who looked at Arab public opinion. He saw that Islamists were most popular, so he supported them. He supported many liberals and secularists too. Many secular opposition leaders were taken in by Qatar." Quoted in: Freer, *Qatar and the UAE in Peacemaking and Peacebuilding* (see note 102), 18.

122 David B. Roberts, "Qatar and the Brotherhood," *Survival* 56, no. 4 (2014): 23—31 (26).

123 See on this and the following: Guido Steinberg, *Qatar and the Arab Spring. Support for Islamists and New Anti-Syrian Policy*, SWP Comment 7/2012 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, February 2012), 4, https://www.swp-berlin.org/publikation/qatar-and-the-arab-spring.

124 David B. Roberts, *Reflecting on Qatar's 'Islamist' Soft Power*, Policy Brief (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, April 2019), 3, https://www.brookings.edu/research/reflecting-on-qatars-islamist-soft-power/.

125 On these events see Steinberg, *Regional Power United Arab Emirates* (see note 58), 21f.

armed uprising against the regime of President Bashar al-Assad. Initially, however, the emir and his foreign minister were hesitant, because both had established close relations with the Assad regime from 2005 to 2010; they had invested billions in Syria and thus made successes like the Doha Agreement about Lebanon in 2008 possible. Moreover, the Qatari leadership had long hoped to convince the Syrian dictator to adopt a less confrontational approach.

When the decision against Assad was made, the Qatari leadership initially became active in the Arab League. In a sensational move, the League suspended Syria's membership in November 2011 and announced economic sanctions shortly afterwards.[126] But it was not until the uprising escalated into civil war in spring 2012 and all hopes for a peaceful settlement of the conflict faded that Doha decided to support armed groups.[127] Together with Turkey — which pursued a similar strategy from 2011 onwards — the Qatari leadership focused on groups close to the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and on Salafists.[128] The most important affiliate of Doha and Ankara became Ahrar al-Sham (The Free Men of Syria), an Islamist-Salafist group that until 2017 had a strong jihadist wing and much support among Muslim Brothers, and was for a long time the largest rebel group in the country.[129]

It is disputed whether Qatar also supported the jihadist al-Nusra Front (Jabhat al-Nusra), which operated as a Syrian al-Qaeda offshoot until 2016. The emirate's government denies such a relationship, but their disclaimers are not very credible. During several hostage crises in 2013 and 2014 Qatari officials negotiated with the al-Nusra Front and the abductees were released. This raised suspicions that Doha had such good access because it was one of the organisation's supporters.[130] Many sources assume that Qatar has paid millions to the jihadists.[131]

In the meantime, it has also been established that Qatar and Saudi Arabia supported a rebel coalition with money and weapons in spring 2015, which called itself the Army of Conquest (Jaish al-Fath) and which indeed conquered almost the entire province of Idlib within three months.[132] Since this alliance was led by Ahrar al-Sham and the al-Nusra Front (and both groups routinely worked together anyway, according to a division of labour), it can be assumed that there was close cooperation between Qatar and al-Nusra at least until 2015. Former Foreign Minister and Prime Minister Hamad Bin Jassim seemed to indirectly confirm this in 2017 when he said that there "may have been" contacts between his government and the al-Nusra Front, but that these had been broken off.[133]

In 2015 at the latest, Qatar is said to have stopped its aid to most of the militant Islamist groups in Syria and Libya due to pressure from the Obama administration.[134] In Libya, Qatar lost influence (although it continued to support Khalifa Haftar's opponents) because Turkey became the main supporter of the government in Tripoli. In Syria, the al-Nusra Front broke away from al-Qaeda in July 2016 and sought alliances with other rebel groups. The Qatari leadership is said to have played a role in this.[135] In the following years, the al-Nusra Front — from July 2016 under the name Conquest Front of Syria (Jabhat Fath al-Sham, JFS) and from January 2017 as the Liberation Committee of Syria (Hai'at Tahrir al-Sham, HTS) — tried to present itself as a moderate Islamist force that resembled the Taliban and had no business appearing

126 See on this and the following: Steinberg, *Qatar and the Arab Spring* (see note 123), 5f.

127 Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, "Qatar and Its Rivals in Syria's Conflict," in *The War for Syria. Regional and International Dimensions of the Syrian Uprising*, ed. Raymond Hinnebusch and Adham Saouli, Routledge/St. Andrews Syrian Studies Series (London: Routledge, 2020), 101—19 (110).

128 Tom Perry and Suleiman Al-Khalidi, "Gulf Crisis Seen Widening Split in Syria Rebellion," *Reuters*, 14 June 2017, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-gulf-qatar-syria/gulf-crisis-seen-widening-split-in-syria-rebellion-idUSKBN19517O.

129 Ahrar al-Sham is considered a terrorist organisation in Germany and Austria, but is absent from the relevant terrorism lists of the UN, the EU and the USA.

130 David Roberts, "Is Qatar Bringing the Nusra Front in from the Cold?" *BBC News*, 6 March 2015, https://bbc.in/1G6MzBs.

131 Andrew Norfolk, "Qatar 'Funnelled Millions of Dollars to Nusra Front Terrorists in Syria'," *The Times*, 4 June 2021, https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/qatar-funnelled-millions-of-dollars-to-nusra-front-terrorists-in-syria-x5rnbsr3l.

132 Ulrichsen, "Qatar and Its Rivals in Syria's Conflict" (see note 127), 116.

133 "Qatar 'Maybe' Supported al-Qaeda in Syria, Says Former PM," *Middle East Eye*, 31 October 2017, https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/qatar-maybe-supported-al-qaeda-syria-says-former-pm.

134 Walsh, "Tiny, Wealthy Qatar Goes Its Own Way" (see note 59).

135 Katzman, *Qatar: Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy* (see note 48), 10.

on terrorism lists.[136] Such moderation had been a declared goal of Qatari policy for years, so there is a strong suspicion that Qatar had a hand in these developments.[137] But post-2015, Doha's influence in Syria also diminished considerably in favour of Turkey. After 2017, Turkey created a veritable protectorate in the Syrian province of Idlib, where the al-Nusra Front dominated the rebel scene.

The limitations of Qatar's new policy, however, became most apparent in Egypt. In the protests there that led to the overthrow of ruler Hosni Mubarak in February 2011, the Islamists of the Muslim Brotherhood played only a supporting role, although they were by far the largest opposition movement in the country. In the months that followed, the Egyptian military leadership, in the form of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, tried to control the transition until new structures were formed. To this end, the military received support from Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Meanwhile, the well-organised Muslim Brotherhood won the parliamentary elections of November 2011 to January 2012 and its candidate Muhammad Mursi prevailed in the presidential elections of June 2012. The fact that relations between Riyadh and Abu Dhabi on the one hand and Cairo on the other were now rapidly deteriorating was used by Qatar as a reason to step in and come to the aid of the new government itself. In 2012 and 2013, Doha became Egypt's most important foreign donor.[138]

But already on 3 July 2013, the military led by General Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi overthrew the government, supported by Riyadh and Abu Dhabi, and took power. Islamist protests were brutally put down; more than a thousand demonstrators died in the now infamous Rabi'a al-Adawiya Square in Cairo alone. Tens of thousands were arrested, including Mursi and all the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood whom the new rulers could ensnare. The Muslim Brotherhood itself was banned and declared a terrorist organisation in December 2013.[139]

Qatar's regional policy offensive thus failed; but support for the Muslim Brotherhood remained a guiding principle of its policy nevertheless. That the Qatari leadership's position has not fundamentally changed since 2011 was made clear by Foreign Minister Muhammad Bin Abd al-Rahman Al Thani in a 2018 interview when he said: "I am not here to defend the Muslim Brotherhood. But our position is that anyone who is willing to participate in a political process, a democratic process openly and transparently — give them a chance in the process and don't drive them underground and let them commit crimes."[140]

A Competitor of Saudi Arabia

A third pillar of Qatari regional policy is competition with Saudi Arabia, which is a direct consequence of the attempt to make itself independent of its neighbour and to assume a mediating position in regional policy. Saudi Arabia (and for several years also the UAE) have so far been unwilling to tolerate such an independent Qatari policy. Since 1995, phases of détente have alternated with phases of open conflict. The crisis point was the blockade of Qatar by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain from mid-2017 to early 2021. Although the conflict was superficially settled, Riyadh and its allies have not been able to achieve their goal — Doha reversing its previous regional policy. Instead, Qatar has strengthened its relations with Turkey, a trend which could become a new constant in Doha's policy.

Emir Hamad's policy from the mid-1990s onwards was clearly designed to break free of Saudi Arabian hegemony over the small Gulf states. The founding of *Al Jazeera* was an attempt to take on a regional (opinion) leadership role distinct from Saudi Arabia and it was perceived as a provocation by Riyadh. In 2002, *Al Jazeera* broadcast "The Opposite Direction" *(al-Ittijah al-mu'akis)*, which led to an open rupture. In the programme a Saudi dissident strongly criticised the

136 Guido Steinberg, *Gutachten zum Befreiungskomitee Syriens (Hai'at Tahrir ash-Sham, HTS) als terroristische Organisation* (unpublished court testimony), Berlin, 17 October 2021, 24 and 26. It is telling that al-Nusra saw the Taliban as a moderate force.

137 On this objective, see Roberts, "Is Qatar Bringing the Nusra Front in from the Cold?" (see note 130).

138 Imad K. Harb, "An Economic Explanation for Egypt's Alignment in the GCC Crisis" (Washington, D.C.: Arab Center, 9 August 2017), http://arabcenterdc.org/policy_analyses/an-economic-explanation-for-egypts-alignment-in-the-gcc-crisis/.

139 "Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood Declared 'Terrorist Group'," *BBC News*, 25 December 2013, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-25515932.

140 Quoted in: Roger Cohen, "The Prince Who Would Remake the World," *The New York Times*, 21 June 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/21/opinion/sunday/saudi-arabia-women-drivers.html.

kingdom's peace initiative for Israel and Palestine and accused the then King Fahd of treason.[141] As a result, Saudi Arabia withdrew its ambassador from Qatar; a five-year diplomatic ice age followed. It was not until late summer 2007 that relations between Saudi Arabia and Qatar thawed, and in 2008 the Saudi ambassador returned to Doha. The escalating conflict over Iran's nuclear programme was probably the reason for the rapprochement: the Qatari leadership feared retaliatory measures by Tehran against Qatar in the event of an American or Israeli military strike; therefore, it sought proximity to Riyadh.[142]

Qatar's interventionist regional policy of 2011 to 2013 triggered a renewed crisis in the Saudi-Qatari relationship. Qatar's policy towards Egypt and its promotion of the Muslim Brotherhood in Libya, Syria and Tunisia may have been the main reasons for the backlash. The military coup in Cairo was an important turning point, when Saudi Arabia and the UAE made it clear to their rival that it was unable to protect the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt from its powerful opponents in the military, in Riyadh and in Abu Dhabi. Qatar seems to have understood this message, because the new Emir Tamim reacted in a conciliatory way and showed himself much more cooperative than his father. Among other things, Qatar ratified an agreement on internal security between the states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in August 2013, which aimed at closer collaboration in monitoring internal opposition. Furthermore, Qaradawi's programme "*Shari'a* and Life" on *Al Jazeera* was discontinued, as were his Friday sermons criticising the coup d'état in Egypt.[143]

Tamim sought reconciliation with Saudi Arabia, but resentment over Qatari policy remained high in Riyadh. One reason for this was probably the fact that Doha offered refuge to Muslim Brotherhood leaders who had fled Cairo, and *Al Jazeera* continued to comment very critically on events in Egypt.[144] Moreover, Qatar's continued support for the Muslim Brotherhood made it clear that Tamim, although moving away from his father's activist and interventionist policies, adhered to their basic tenets. Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, demanded that Tamim break with his father's policies and seemed to hope that the young and inexperienced emir would bow to pressure. In fact, King Abdallah was able to push through important demands at a meeting with Emir Tamim in Riyadh in November 2013. In an agreement — leaked to *CNN* after the Qatar blockade began in 2017 and published by the broadcaster — the Qatari leadership pledged to renounce political and financial support for Islamist groups in general and the Muslim Brotherhood in particular.[145]

However, from the point of view of the leadership in Riyadh and its allies, Qatar did not comply with the agreement, so that in March 2014 Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and shortly afterwards also Egypt withdrew their ambassadors from Doha. The Qatari leadership called President al-Sisi an "old-style Arab dictator" who kills his own people, and the Egyptians accused Qatar of supporting "terrorists".[146] The Gulf states published lists of terrorist organisations, each of which included the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and many groups associated with it that received or had received aid from Qatar. Under this pressure, Qatar relented and asked the most important leaders of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in Qatar to leave the country.[147] The conflict then subsided, and in November 2014 the ambassadors returned to Doha after another agreement was reached in which Qatar consented, among other things, to ensure that *Al Jazeera* did not provide a forum for the Egyptian opposition.[148]

Again, Tamim sent signals of détente to Riyadh in the aftermath of the crisis, for example by cooperating closely with the Saudi leadership in the Syrian conflict and, together with Saudi Arabia, making the Jaish al-Fath offensive in Idlib possible in spring 2015.

141 Miles, *Al-Jazeera* (see note 76), 196—99.

142 Robert F. Worth, "Al Jazeera No Longer Nips at Saudis," *The New York Times*, 4 January 2008, https://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/04/world/middleeast/04jazeera.html.

143 Ulrichsen, *Qatar and the Gulf Crisis* (see note 12), 56.

144 Abigail Hauslohner, "For Some Brotherhood Leaders, Havens Abroad," *The Washington Post*, 7 November 2013.

145 Sciutto and Herb, "Exclusive: The Secret Documents That Help Explain the Qatar Crisis" (see note 86).

146 David D. Kirkpatrick, "Egypt Pulls Ambassador from Qatar," *The New York Times*, 6 March 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/07/world/middleeast/egypt-withdraws-ambassador-from-qatar.html.

147 For these people, see "The Brotherhood Diaspora," *Mada Masr* (Egypt), 30 September 2014, https://www.madamasr.com/en/2014/09/30/feature/politics/the-brotherhood-diaspora/.

148 "Saudi Arabia, UAE and Bahrain End Rift with Qatar, Return Ambassadors," *Reuters*, 16 November 2014, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-gulf-summit-ambassadors/saudi-arabia-uae-and-bahrain-end-rift-with-qatar-return-ambassadors-idUSKCN0J00Y420141116. For the text of the agreement see http://i2.cdn.turner.com/cnn/2017/images/07/10/translation.of.agreementsupdated.pdf.

In September 2015, Qatar also sent 1,000 soldiers to the kingdom to protect the Saudi Arabian border from attacks by Huthi rebels. In addition, the Qatari air force made some raids on the Huthis.[149] But the situation changed due to the ascension of a new leadership in Saudi Arabia: In January 2015, King Salman succeeded his late brother Abdallah, and his son Mohammed Bin Salman was appointed defence minister and deputy crown prince. The latter ruthlessly expanded his power until he was appointed Crown Prince in June 2017. At the same time, together with the UAE's strongman, the then Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahayan, he pursued an aggressive anti-Iranian and anti-Islamist strategy, including targeting neighbour Qatar. Both were no longer willing to tolerate Doha's independent foreign policy and began planning for the blockade.

The reason for the escalation in tensions was a hostage crisis in Iraq that spilled over into Syria. In April 2017, Qatari hostages, including members of the ruling family, who had been kidnapped on a hunting trip in southern Iraq in late 2015, were released. The hostage-takers were the Iraqi Shia militia Hezbollah Battalions (Kata'ib Hezbollah), a group loyal to Iran. The release was part of a larger triangular deal orchestrated by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards that scored a major success. It involved the Four Cities Agreement in Syria, in which the Sunni residents of two towns between Damascus and the Lebanese border were evacuated so that Lebanese Hezbollah could take control there after a long siege. This was significant for Iran because weapons for Hezbollah have been brought into Lebanon via this area since the 1980s. Additionally, the Shiite inhabitants of two villages in the south of Idlib province, which were trapped by the rebel groups Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham, were evacuated.

But the deal also included payments in the double and triple-digit millions to Hezbollah Battalions in Iraq, Lebanese Hezbollah, the Syrian al-Nusra Front and Ahrar al-Sham.[150] The fact that Iran, Shiite militias loyal to Iran and Sunni terrorists emerged as winners from the affair led to anger that had been pent up for years in Abu Dhabi and Riyadh being unleashed on Doha.

On 5 June 2017, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain cut all relations with Qatar and imposed a blockade by closing land, air and sea borders with the neighbouring state. Except for Egypt, the states also asked their citizens to leave the emirate and in turn forced Qataris to leave. On 22 June, the blockading states issued an ultimatum giving Qatar just ten days to meet a list of 13 demands: Doha was to close the *Al Jazeera* television station, cut all ties with Islamist organisations and provide detailed information on its payments to Arab opposition figures. It should also close the (small) Turkish military base on its territory and downgrade its diplomatic relations with Iran. The blockading states demanded that Qatar align itself politically and economically with the policies of its GCC neighbours and accept regular assessments of whether these demands were being implemented.[151] These demands were so far-reaching that Doha could not agree. Emir Tamim said in an interview in October that the demands were tantamount to an end to Qatar's independence and would not be met.[152]

The consequences were serious because Qatar's economic and social ties to its neighbouring states were close. In 2017, it still imported around 40 per cent of its food via its land border with Saudi Arabia.[153] But within a few weeks, the Qatari leadership had reorganised large parts of the emirate's foreign trade and had overcome the initial supply crisis. It benefited from the fact that the new US$7 billion Hamad Port for containers, although not yet officially opened, was already in use as of December 2016. Now large cargo ships could also call directly at Doha instead of unloading in Jebel Ali in the UAE or other large ports and then transporting the goods to Doha on smaller ships, as had been the case until then.[154] Qatar Airways increased the number of its cargo

149 Katzman, *Qatar: Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy* (see note 48), 10.

150 For details of the deal, see Robert F. Worth, "Widening Gyre," *The New York Times*, 18 March 2018. One press report mentions payments of US$1 billion. See Erika Solomon, "The $1bn Hostage Deal That Enraged Qatar's Gulf Rivals," *Financial Times*, 5 June 2017.

151 For a list of demands see "List of Demands on Qatar by Saudi Arabia, Other Arab Nations," *Associated Press News*, 23 June 2017, https://apnews.com/article/bahrain-qatar-iran-saudi-arabia-united-arab-emirates-3a58461737c44ad58047562e48f46e06.

152 Tamim said: "Actually, what they're saying in a very simple way, [is] 'Give up your independence'." Rose, "Qatar's Emir Stands Defiant in Face of Blockade" (see note 21).

153 Katzman, *Qatar: Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy* (see note 48), 18.

154 By spring 2017, 85 per cent of Qatar's maritime imports came from Jebel Ali. See Ulrichsen, *Qatar and the Gulf Crisis* (see note 12), 10.

flights and ordered new aircraft; the air cargo terminal in Doha was brand new and large enough. Food now came mainly from Iran and Turkey, and other goods from all over the world.

While expensive air freight dominated in the early days, in late June most imports were transported by ship again. It is estimated that the government subsidised this commercial reorientation with US$38 billion in the first three months alone.[155] With Qatar's sovereign wealth fund then estimated at around US$340 billion, Doha was confident it could sustain the blockade for a long time.[156]

Qatar has found a new regional protector in Turkey – a provocation for Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

During the crisis, it became clear that Qatar's relations with Iran and Turkey were vital. Doha further extended them from 2017 onwards. Iran not only supplied food immediately after the blockade began, but also provided access to ports and opened its airspace to numerous flights to and from Doha — the last free air corridor for Qatar. In recognition of Iran's assistance, Qatari leaders restored full diplomatic relations; they had been downgraded in solidarity with Riyadh since attacks on the Saudi Arabian embassy in Tehran in January 2016.[157]

Even more consequential was Qatar's rapprochement with Turkey due to the blockade. Doha and Ankara had been working together for some time in support of their allies in Libya and Syria, and both maintained a close relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood. Now, relations between Qatar and Turkey intensified and were no longer limited to the rapid expansion of trade. The increase in the Turkish military presence was particularly important — Turkey had already maintained a small military base in the emirate since 2014. On 7 June 2017, the Turkish parliament ratified two agreements that had already been concluded before the start of the blockade and provided for the expansion of military cooperation and the stationing of more Turkish troops in Qatar.[158] The number of Turkish soldiers there grew to more than 1,500 by 2019, spread over two bases.[159] The mere fact of their presence on Qatari soil illustrates how close relations between Doha and Ankara already were in 2017 — and still are today. Turkey has become Qatar's new protecting power, and Qatar reciprocates with generous financial support. For Saudi Arabia and the UAE, this alliance was and is a provocation, because Riyadh and Abu Dhabi see Turkey as well as Qatar as significant regional competitors.

Downgrading diplomatic relations with Iran and closing the (initially only one) Turkish base had been among the demands of the blockading states: Qatar's reinforced relations with Iran and Turkey made it clear that the blockade was a failure. In fact, the emirate used the blockade to become more independent from Saudi Arabia and the UAE. As early as 2019, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi were looking for a way out of the crisis and Riyadh began talks with its neighbour. The reasons for these negotiations were probably their own failed strategy, the ongoing conflict over Iran's nuclear programme and — as of November 2020 — the anti-Saudi position of the new US president, Joe Biden. At the GCC summit in Saudi Arabia's al-Ula in January 2021, the conflict was settled on Riyadh's initiative and the blockade ended.[160] During that same year, Riyadh and Doha exchanged ambassadors and established a bilateral cooperation council.[161] It was a substantial victory for Qatar, as there

155 Miller, "Qatar, Energy Security, and Strategic Vision in a Small State" (see note 31), 132.

156 Ben Hubbard, "Qatar Adapts to Blockade with a Retooled Economy," *The New York Times*, 20 December 2018.

157 Faisal Mukhyat Abu Sulaib, "Understanding Qatar's Foreign Policy, 1995—2017," *Middle East Policy* 24, no. 4 (2017): 29—44 (33), https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/MEPO.12306.

158 "Turkish Parliament Approves Bill to Deploy Troops in Qatar," *Reuters*, 7 June 2017, https://www.reuters.com/article/gulf-qatar-turkey-idUSL8N1J45G5. For more detailed information on Qatari-Turkish relations, see Ulrichsen, *Qatar and the Gulf Crisis* (see note 12), 220—23.

159 Katzman, *Qatar: Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy* (see note 48), 16.

160 Nader Kabbani, "The Blockade on Qatar Helped Strengthen Its Economy, Paving the Way to Stronger Regional Integration," *Order From Chaos* (blog), 19 January 2021, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2021/01/19/the-blockade-on-qatar-helped-strengthen-its-economy-paving-the-way-to-stronger-regional-integration/. For the text of the summit declaration, see Tuqa Khalid, "Full Transcript of AlUla GCC Summit Declaration: Bolstering Gulf Unity," *Al Arabia News*, 6 January 2021, https://english.alarabiya.net/News/gulf/2021/01/06/Full-transcript-of-AlUla-GCC-Summit-Declaration-Bolstering-Gulf-unity.

161 Mariam Nihal, "Saudi Arabia and Qatar to Establish Co-ordination Council," *The National* (Abu Dhabi), 26 August 2021, https://www.thenationalnews.com/gulf-news/2021/

was no indication that Doha had to meet any of the 2017 demands. But the differences were not and are still not resolved. Consequently, it can be assumed that the neighbours still do not see Qatar as a reliable political partner, and that the conflict may erupt again if the political situation changes.

08/26/saudi-arabia-and-qatar-to-establish-co-ordination-council/.

Recommendations for German policy

Qatar's increasing importance in the Persian Gulf, in the Middle East and occasionally in world politics makes the emirate an attractive partner for Germany and Europe:

- Qatar is first and foremost an important energy partner, because its enormous gas reserves and flexibility in terms of deliveries (thanks to its focus on LNG) make it one of the few countries that can fill gaps in Europe's gas supply, at least in the medium term. Moreover, Qatar is a reliable supplier that has a great interest in closer energy relations with Germany and Europe. It was a serious mistake on the part of German policy not to import more Qatari gas much earlier; had it done so, it could have avoided great dependence on Russia. This omission should be corrected by long-term orders of Qatari gas.
- Qatar is also a potential security partner because it is indirectly allied with Germany through its close ties with the USA and its upgrading to a *major non-NATO ally*. In recent years, Germany's security role in Qatar has been largely limited to supplying weapons systems such as the Leopard 2 A7+ and the PzH 2000 howitzer (whose export was approved in 2012). Germany, like its allies, has an interest in Qatar's continued existence as an independent state and should continue to export weapons there in the future.
- Qatar's "soft power" policy affects the Federal Republic in that its new prominence is often met with particularly fierce and fundamental criticism in Germany, up to and including the demand to boycott the World Cup 2022. Leaving aside the justified anger of football purists about such a tournament being hosted by a country without a football tradition, the reasons for this criticism are often incomprehensible: While Qatar is an authoritarian state, it is friendlier internally and much more cooperative and peaceful externally than almost all its neighbours. German politics should point this out more offensively and should self-confidently commit to strong relations with the emirate.

In regional policy, Qatar could also be an important partner, but Germany and the European Union have lost much of their influence there since 2011. In Qatar itself, Great Britain and France are considered important allies, while Germany is perceived almost exclusively as an economic partner. In fact, the Federal Republic has passively accepted the loss of its influence in the Middle East (which was also limited in the past) over the last decade — there is not even a debate in German politics about future policy towards the region. This is a mistake, because conflicts there have a direct impact on Europe (keywords: refugees, terrorism, nuclear proliferation). If there really is to be a security policy "Zeitenwende," Germany must also prepare itself for the dangers emanating from the Middle East. This means that Germany and Europe need pro-Western allies, of which Qatar is one:

- Qatar is now difficult to replace as a mediator in regional politics. The Federal Republic has already acknowledged this several times in recent years — for example when it took part in talks with the Taliban. The German government should continue to make use of Qatar's good relations with the more problematic actors in regional politics. For the foreseeable future, however, it should be aware that Germany's as well as Europe's regional policy weight is very small — so that it should act in tandem with the USA whenever possible.
- Qatar's good relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood is no longer as relevant today as it was a few years ago, because the organisation has largely lost its political influence in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Syria. However, Qatar seems to be assuming that it will once again play a role in regional politics in the future — and this would make its contacts important for German and European politics as well.

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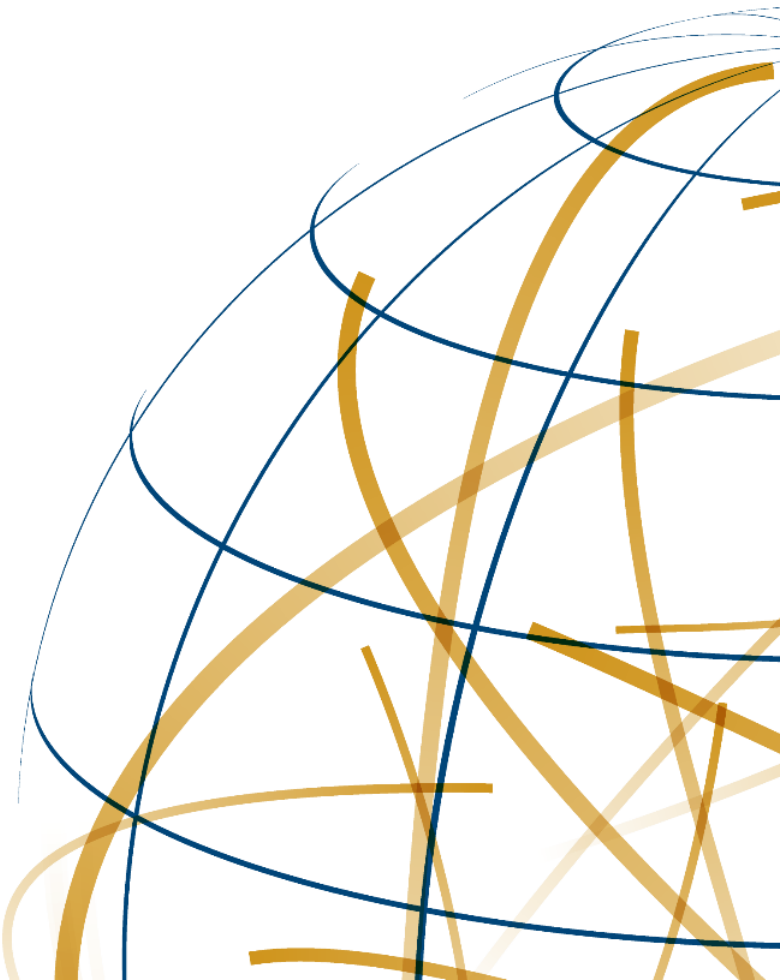
Only the coming years and decades will reveal whether this will indeed be the case.

- Above all, it is problematic that Qatar also financially supports the Muslim Brotherhood in Europe, despite the fact that it is considered an extremist — if not terrorist — organisation in Germany and other states. Qatar should be asked to stop this funding (and Germany should take a harder line against Islamists at home).
- Finally, German policy should emphasise to Doha the dangers of working too closely with militant Islamists such as the HTS in Syria or the Taliban in Afghanistan. Awareness of the dangers posed by these groups seems to be underdeveloped in Qatar; sympathy for them is still widespread among the political elite in Doha.

Abbreviations

CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CRS	Congressional Research Service
EU	European Union
FIFA	Fédération Internationale de Football Association
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
HTS	Hai'at Tahrir al-Sham (Liberation Committee of Syria)
IS	Islamic State
JFS	Jabhat Fath al-Sham (Syria Conquest Front)
LNG	Liquefied Natural Gas
LSE	London School of Economics
MEED	Middle East Economic Digest
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OPEC	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
PM	Prime Minister
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UN	United Nations