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# **The Qatari Conundrum**

## **The Changing Face of West Asia's Political Landscape**

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## **The Changing Face of West Asia's Political Landscape**

### **Abstract**

**Q**atar is creating a large footprint for itself in the West Asian political landscape. The Gulf state was previously known primarily for its oil and gas reserves, and compliance with US interests in the region. However, Qatar has in the recent past made significant efforts to assert regional pre-eminence through an aggressive foreign policy. Emir Shaikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, who recently handed over the reins of power to his son, Tamim bin Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, demonstrated exceptional vision in developing Qatar as a progressive Arab nation that is now the academic and cultural hub of the region. In the new dispensation, expectations are high and speculation rife over whether Qatar will continue to exert a pro-active foreign policy.

Exploring how the Gulf state's relations with its adversarial neighbours—Saudi Arabia and Iran—have evolved, this paper contextualises Qatar's active participation in the Arab Spring events. It examines the viability of the emerging axis between Qatar, Turkey, Egypt and Tunisia. The alliance is examined through the twin lens of western interests and the changing security dynamics of the West Asian region.

### **Introduction**

Qatar, a tiny country on the Gulf peninsula, has found increasing significance on the world map in the recent past. This new-found

prominence comes not only from its huge oil and gas reserves, but also from its recent policy initiatives. Qatar has historically been seen as acting on behalf of the US. Qatar's mediation efforts, subsequent assertive interventionism and foreign policy in its entirety have been viewed through the prism of US interests in the West Asian region. However, despite their broad-based cooperation, differences between Qatar and the US have begun to be speculated upon—particularly since the onset of the Arab Spring. The unprecedented influence that Qatar's 'geostrategic media' tool, Al Jazeera, has exerted over the revolutionary process has only intensified this speculation.

This paper will review the relationship between Qatar and the US, in the process exploring its primary drivers. An attempt will be made to more deeply understand the conundrum that is Qatar. Why has a ruling monarchy thrown its weight behind the Arab Spring revolutions against autocratic regimes? Why has Qatar consistently and explicitly supported 'Islamist' movements in West Asia, despite having made concerted efforts to restrict the spread of Islamism within its own borders?

### **Historical Background—Ruling Monarchy and Islamism**

Qatar's tribes originated from the Arabian Peninsula and settlements along different areas of the Gulf coast. The Qatari tribesmen were dependent upon rainfall, water supply and suitable ports for fishing and pearling. Oil was discovered in Qatar in the 1940s and within twenty years, the country's main oil field, Dukhan, was producing over eight million tons of oil per year.<sup>1</sup> Qatar's population began to expand rapidly, largely due to the influx of non-Qataris. At the same time, the pearling, fishing and herding industries faced serious set-backs and began to

crumble. This induced migration to Doha, the seat of government, and other oil towns, many of which were owned by members of the Al-Thani family.<sup>2</sup> The petroleum industry was nationalised between 1949 and 1970s, allowing the Qatari state to become 'strong and centralised'.<sup>3</sup> After gaining independence from Britain in 1971, Qatar rejected a British proposal for it to join the United Arab Emirates (UAE), asserting sovereignty instead.<sup>4</sup> This sovereignty was somewhat limited since Qatar did not have a clearly defined, autonomous foreign policy; most of its policies were aligned with those of Saudi Arabia. However, as the political dynamics in West Asia changed with Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, Qatar witnessed a marked shift in its foreign policy. The ruling Shaikh Khalifa bin Hamad Al Thani was deposed on June 27, 1995 in a bloodless coup led by his son, Shaikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani. While the exact reasons for the coup have not clearly been stated, many believe Shaikh Hamad was unhappy with his father's laid back attitude on matters of investment and foreign policy. Another perspective is that Shaikh Hamad was wary of his father's proximity to Saudi Arabia.<sup>5</sup>

Qatar is the only country apart from Saudi Arabia to subscribe to the austere Wahhabi sect of Islam. Wahhabism became prominent in Qatar due to an alliance between the Al Thani tribe and the Wahhabis in the late 18th century. The alliance was forged to offset Bahrain's attempts at imposing its influence on Doha. Following Bahrain's attack on Qatar in 1867, Britain was compelled to negotiate a settlement treaty in 1868 in order to preserve its position as a protector of maritime peace in the Gulf waters.<sup>6</sup> This treaty was symbolic because it officially acknowledged the Al-Thani family as representative of the people of Qatar. The family was further institutionalised under the Ottoman rule when Shaikh Jasim Al-Thani was appointed the governor of Doha in 1879.<sup>7</sup>

The Wahhabi movement was therefore, used by the Al-Thani family to 'legitimise their power' in Qatar.<sup>8</sup> Qatar was, however, threatened by the 'renaissance' of the Wahhabi movement in early twentieth century.<sup>9</sup> Ibn Saud captured Riyadh in 1902 and made further territorial advances in the Arabian Peninsula in the next two decades, including on Mecca and Medina. Threatened by his consolidation of control, the Qatari ruling family prevented the spread of a distinctive class of Wahhabi clerics within its borders. Wahhabism was also restricted by the fact that the Qatari state was not dependent upon religion for its identity as opposed to Saudi Arabia. Thirdly, as territorial disputes with Saudi Arabia arose in the 1990s, Qatar expelled Saudi clerics, thus reducing the influence of Wahhabism. The majority of Qatar's preachers now come from Egypt, Yemen, Syria and Iraq; constantly under the threat of deportation, they generally shun 'political activism and radicalisation'.<sup>10</sup>

Under the Ottoman Empire, Qatar institutionalised a legal system that adhered closely to the Sharia as interpreted by Wahhabism. However, British influence increased in the Gulf state after 1916, particularly following the discovery of oil. Qatar was, hence, exposed to British legal institutions to deal with British and non-Muslim residents employed in the oil businesses. As a result, the Emir created a parallel judicial system, the Adlia court, after independence in 1971. The Adlia court was based on western legal practices and together with the Sharia formed part of the country's dual judicial system.<sup>11</sup> This duality has not only introduced certain flexibility in the legal system, but has also 'eclipsed' the role of Sharia law.<sup>12</sup> As a result, religious duty has been separated from civilian order, which has prevented a uniform pervasion of Islamic influences and regulations.

### **A Changing Context—Iraq's Invasion of Kuwait**

Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 shattered the illusion of a secure Gulf neighbourhood, bringing issues of regional security and stability to the fore. Qatar, which had looked upon Saudi Arabia as a guarantor of its security during the twenty years since independence, suddenly awakened to the need for obtaining a wider means of security. The Emirate's policies underwent a drastic change as the new Shaikh took over from his father in 1995. Qatar's foreign policy and relations with neighbouring countries also began to evolve in light of these developments.

### **Saudi Arabia and Iran—Friends or Foes?**

Qatar's relations with Saudi Arabia have oscillated between viewing the larger neighbour as a protector of sorts, to Doha alienating itself from its Wahhabi counterpart on account of territorial disputes that erupted in the 1990s. The ruling monarchy's fear of the Saudis could have largely emanated from the latter's alleged support for the reinstatement of the forcefully abdicated Shaikh Khalifa. The relationship further soured due to Qatar's on and off rapprochement with Iran, its relations with Israel (including an Israeli trade representation office in Doha), and an overall independence in foreign policy initiatives. All these factors have eventually culminated into a fight for regional pre-eminence.

Qatar and Saudi Arabia's opposing responses to the Arab Spring also demonstrate their quest for regional pre-eminence. Both countries were, however, compelled to find common ground on issues of sectarianism. A case in point is Bahrain. Saudi Arabia has long faced resistance from the Shia minority in its oil-rich eastern provinces. When protests broke



out against the Sunni minority regime in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia expressed support for the Al Khalifa dynasty by sending military forces to the country. This conflict also gave the Saudis an opportunity to strengthen Sunni opposition against a common Shia enemy within its own borders.<sup>13</sup> Al Jazeera, on behalf of Qatar, largely ignored the protests by Shi'ite activists in Bahrain. This was in sharp contrast to the network's coverage of protests against oppression in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya. Thus, both Saudi Arabia and Qatar converged on their common interest of preventing Shi'ite radicalisation in the region, as well as according another Shia ally to Iran.<sup>14</sup>

Another dimension of the Saudi–Qatari relationship is presented by the Syrian experience. While both countries would like to see the Shia Alawite regime of President Bashar Al-Assad deposed, they are supporting rival Syrian factions. This has not only exposed the differences in threat perceptions of the two countries, but has also weakened the main rebel umbrella, the Free Syrian Army, worsening the situation in Syria.

The thrust of Qatar's support has been for factions aligned to the Muslim Brotherhood, the *Tawheed* brigade for example.<sup>15</sup> The Syrian National Coalition, the main opposition alliance, was established with the Brotherhood's support and Qatar wields significant influence over its policies.<sup>16</sup>

The House of Al-Saud, on the other hand, is allegedly funding rebels associated with various Islamist factions rather than the more secular and moderate rebel groups. It has historically viewed the Brotherhood as a threat to its own autocratic monarchical system. Their animosity dates

back to the time the Kingdom provided refuge to members of the Brotherhood after they were brutally repressed in Nasser's Egypt. The Brotherhood, however, incurred Saudi wrath by mobilising the 'Sahwis' within the Kingdom in an effort to end monarchical rule. As a result, Saudi Arabia is wary of the possibility of the Brotherhood's ascent to power in Damascus, in light of Qatar's support for the movement.<sup>17</sup> The Kingdom is therefore exerting its influence in Syria by allegedly supporting Salafi rebel factions from Lebanon and Jordan.<sup>18</sup> The Salafis themselves are ideologically opposed to the Muslim Brotherhood and accord legitimacy to Saudi rule.

Thus, the Qatar–Saudi Arabia relationship is defined through notions of regional security, including sectarian threats and assertions of regional power.

Qatar and Iran share the world's largest natural gas field, the Northern Field or the 'South Pars'. Given the sanctions on Iran and consequent limited extraction, there are fears of Qatar extracting more gas than allocated. At the same time, there have been allegations of Iran attacking and stealing equipment from Qatari gas rigs.<sup>19</sup> However, like with Saudi Arabia, the critical dimension of Qatar's relations with Iran is more implicit and finds expression in the Shia-Sunni faultlines. Qatar's patronage of Hamas and consistent efforts to draw it away from the troika of Iran, Syria and Hezbollah are examples of this stand.

Qatar is strategically poised to fragment the 'Shia Crescent'. The Iran-Syria-Hezbollah triumvirate is threatened by Qatari opposition to Al-Assad's regime, coupled with support of the Sunni minority regime in Manama. Hamas has often relied on Iran for weapons, as part of Iran's

strategic 'Axis of Resistance' with the anti-Israel Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon.<sup>20</sup> Iran alienated Hamas through its support of Al-Assad's brutal crackdown on a Sunni Muslim uprising. Qatar, on the other hand, courted Hamas by hosting exiled leader Khaled Mashaal and pledging US\$500 million in aid to Gaza during the Emir's visit in October 2012.<sup>21</sup> Qatar's new allies, Egypt and Turkey, also played a significant role in mediating a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, thus laying the foundations for a broader understanding. Iran attempted to improve ties by providing military assistance to Hamas during the recent crisis.<sup>22</sup> An alliance with Qatar can accord Hamas wider political legitimacy within the Gulf region.

### **Qatar and the United States—Who Needs Whom?**

Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the Gulf War in 1991 provided the foundation for cooperation between Qatar and the US. Qatar allowed coalition forces (Operation Desert Storm) to operate out of Qatari territory and also helped the forces repel an attack on the Saudi Arabian town of Khafji in the oil-rich eastern provinces south of Kuwait. Ever since, Qatar's reliance on foreign support to ensure its security has been unprecedented. Qatar's small population, second smallest military force in the West Asian region, and an increasingly volatile neighbourhood have added to its security dilemma. In 1992, Qatar signed a defence cooperation agreement with the US, which has long since expanded to include base access agreements, defence cooperation exercises and equipment pre-positioning.<sup>23</sup> At the time of the construction of the Al Udeid air base south of Doha, Qatar did not have an air force of its own. The Al Udeid airbase and other facilities in Qatar now serve as a logistics,

command and basing hub for US Central Command (CENTCOM) area of operations, including Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>24</sup>

Qatar's labyrinthine ties with the US are further cemented in the economic and energy requirements of both countries. Qatar's oil reserves are far less than those of other Gulf countries like Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. According to Qatari officials, it is estimated that oil reserves are likely to be exhausted by 2026 given the current production rates. In light of this, Qatar, with the world's third largest gas reserves, has made significant efforts to finance the expansion of gas extraction and Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) production facilities. High operational costs of the LNG industry and competition from exporting countries like Nigeria and Indonesia have prompted Qatar to secure agreements with US energy companies like ExxonMobil (US\$12 billion deal) to export natural gas to the US and Europe. Moreover, in 2004, the Export-Import Bank of the United States provided a loan guarantee of almost US\$1 billion to support the export of US equipment and services for the construction of gas production facilities.<sup>25</sup> In turn, Qatar donated \$100 million to victims of Hurricane Katrina in the US.<sup>26</sup>

### **Iran, Israel and Qatar**

Qatar's relationship with the United States has come to be described as a 'balancing act'.<sup>27</sup> The Doha Declaration, a Qatari mediated peace deal between rival Palestinian factions Hamas and Fatah, was denounced by Israel and is one of the foreign policy initiatives considered divergent from US interests.<sup>28</sup> Other policies like overt support for the establishment of Islamist regimes like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Ennahda in Tunisia, as well as the fragile peace with Iran, have

compounded this divergence. However, it is likely that the 'balancing act' incorporates a dual policy. Qatar can establish regional influence and simultaneously bridge the gap between newly created friendly Islamist regimes and the western world.

Qatar initiated a policy of balancing relationships with and between Israel and Hamas in the early 1990s. Qatar's desire for US patronage and security led it to become the first Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) state to normalise relations with Israel through de facto recognition and trade relations.<sup>29</sup> Qatar was severely criticised for allowing Israel to open a trade representative's office in Doha in 1996. Even though the Emirate offered an olive branch to other Gulf States by condemning Israel's policies every time the Arab-Israeli peace broke down, it continued to maintain economic relations with Israel.

Qatar's simultaneous patronage of Hamas posed a problem for the United States as the Palestinian faction had been declared a terrorist organisation. Qatar's ability to balance these relationships was put to test when Israel directed its military operations against Hamas in December 2008. The gas-rich Gulf state used its financial prowess to assert influence by pledging US\$250 million for a Gaza reconstruction fund; it also closed down the Israeli trade office in Doha.<sup>30</sup> In October 2012, the Emir of Qatar became the first head of state to visit Gaza after the formation of the Hamas government. He not only called for reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas, but also pledged an additional US\$400 million aid for Gaza.<sup>31</sup> Gaza, after its fallout with the Syrian regime, has been crippled by Israel's economic blockade—making Qatar an important source of revenue.<sup>32</sup>

Given that these actions were condemned by Israel and the US, Qatar has demonstrated independence in foreign policy that is seemingly unafraid of inviting US and Israeli annoyance. Different perspectives emerge when these developments are scrutinised, for instance, in light of Qatar's efforts to alienate Hamas from Iranian benefaction. Iran has alleged that Qatar's actions, including its call for an end to the Al-Assad regime in Syria, are indicative of installing anti-Iran regimes in the Arab region on behalf of the United States.<sup>33</sup>

By facilitating the prominence of the historically aligned Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas and Ennahda, Qatar has solidified a regional power base among factions that are striving for international legitimacy.

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

The unrest that swept the Arab world in 2011 cannot be thought of without considering Qatar's exertion of soft power through its 'geostrategic'<sup>34</sup> media tool, Al Jazeera. By encouraging extensive coverage of protests, media propaganda, support for regime change, and financial and military aid, the Qatari state fuelled the revolutions. These actions have also demonstrated a shift in Qatar's policy stance from one of mediation to that of intervention.

The establishment of television channel Al-Jazeera is perhaps the most significant expression of Qatar's role in regional politics. The pan-Arab television station, set up in 1996, was mostly funded by the ruling family and comprised of Egyptian writers and journalists associated with the Muslim Brotherhood. While the channel was daring in its coverage of social and political issues plaguing the Arab world, it evaded the coverage

of controversial issues within Qatar itself. In terms of the Arab Spring specifically, Al Jazeera maintained 'around-the-clock', live coverage of events unfolding on ground, even allowing rebel leaders to use the channel as a platform for communicating with the people. Al Jazeera, therefore, established itself as the key source for news of the revolutions, and was unequivocal in its support for regime change.<sup>35</sup>

Mediation, too, became an important tool for Qatar in expressing an autonomous foreign policy, as was established in the April 2003 Permanent Constitution of the State of Qatar. According to Article 7, Qatari foreign policy “is based on the principle of strengthening international peace and security by means of encouraging peaceful resolution of international disputes”.<sup>36</sup> Qatar's mediation efforts in Yemen, Lebanon and Sudan were considered moderate successes although a Qatari-mediated ceasefire agreement between the Yemeni government and the Houthi rebels fell apart shortly after its implementation in August 2010.<sup>37</sup> The onset of this mediating role coincided with a two-year rotating seat on the UN Security Council in 2006-2007. During this period, Qatar took controversial foreign policy decisions: mediation between the Hamas and Fatah factions in 2006; vote against a Security Council Resolution that demanded the halt of uranium enrichment by Tehran;<sup>38</sup> and attempt to block Security Council resolutions that supported the arrest of Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, indicted by the International Criminal Court on charges of war crimes.<sup>39</sup>

While these policy decisions could be viewed as efforts towards 'state branding',<sup>40</sup> a closer scrutiny reveals Qatari financial stakes in these conflict zones. In Sudan, for instance, Qatar's US\$2 billion worth

investment pledge in 2012 makes the Gulf state the sixth largest investor in the country. It has made investments in agriculture, animal resources and mining.<sup>41</sup> In addition the, Qatari National Bank has invested in Sudan's National Islamic Bank, aiding it with a start-up capital of US\$100 million.<sup>42</sup>

Coming back to the events of the Arab Spring, Qatar was steadfast in its opposition to the government of Muammar Gaddafi. Qatar took a lead in pressurising the Arab League into supporting a no-fly zone over Libya and even participated in the surveillance operations with its own fighter jets.<sup>43</sup> In addition to providing weapons and training to rebel fighters, Qatar was the second country to formally recognise the National Transitional Council (NTC) after France.<sup>44</sup> State-owned Al Jazeera reported that the recognition came a day after the rebel group announced an oil contract with Qatar. According to the report, Qatar Petroleum would market crude oil produced in the east Libyan oil fields. The sale of oil had previously been crippled by US-imposed sanctions that were aimed at obstructing funding to the Gaddafi regime.<sup>45</sup>

Qatar's role in Syria, as mentioned earlier, has been to weaken the alliance between Iran and President Bashar Al-Assad's regime, as well as to assert regional pre-eminence over Saudi Arabia. Qatar's business interests in Syria include the Syrian International Islamic Bank (SIIB) that was jointly formed by Qatari and Syrian investors in 2006. Qatar International Islamic Bank (QIIB) and other Qatari investors together own a 49 per cent stake in SIIB. The Syrian bank, against which sanctions were recently placed by the US treasury, witnessed the resignation of Qatari investors from the Board; they will now remain passive investors.<sup>46</sup>



Qatar, often called the 'mouthpiece for the Brotherhood',<sup>47</sup> is known to have been most active in facilitating the demise of the Mubarak regime and propping up the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. The Brotherhood has been traditionally opposed to monarchical systems of rule and is on a different ideological plane from the Wahhabi Qatari state. Despite this, the Emirate has cultivated ties with the Brothers and hosted them since they were ousted from Gamal Abdul-Nasser's Egypt. Until the recent political upheaval in Egypt, the relationship between the Brotherhood and Qatar was beneficial to both. The ouster of President Morsi has created a new dilemma for Doha and its relationship with Egypt has suffered a setback. UAE and Saudi Arabia have been directly involved in the Egyptian political transformation and have pledged substantial financial support to the new regime in Cairo, along with Kuwait. In light of these developments, the status of earlier financial commitments made by Qatar to President Morsi's government now remain uncertain.

Qatar has reportedly already transferred US\$5 billion and pledged an additional US\$18 billion to support Egypt's fledging economy. Qatar's Egyptian investments prior to the Arab Spring were estimated at a much smaller figure of US\$260 million.<sup>48</sup> Morsi's government had responded by assuring 'technical support' for Syrian opposition as well as facilitating Qatari investments by exempting them from laws on foreign ownership.<sup>49</sup> On one hand, this solidarity with the Brothers had created long-lasting animosity with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, because both states are threatened by the Brotherhood's capacity to instigate regime change. On the other hand, Qatar's policies towards the Brotherhood have possibly won the Gulf state allies in the Palestinian Hamas and the Tunisian Ennahda.

### **Liberalisation and Islam—A Qatari Contradiction?**

Qatar's policies in their entirety have been summed up as the culmination of Shaikh Hamad's 'wealth, vision and will'.<sup>50</sup> In terms of wealth, Qatar is increasingly focused on private and foreign investment in non-energy sectors. Nonetheless, Qatar's oil and gas revenues have made it the world's highest per capita income country and one with the lowest unemployment rate. Gas reserves constitute 13 per cent of the world's total, making Qatar's reserves the third largest in the world at 25 trillion cubic meters.<sup>51</sup>

Qatar's sovereign wealth fund, the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) has undertaken acquisitions worth billions of dollars all over the world. Qatari investments through the QIA, private investments and government agencies include stakes in, among other companies, Barclays Bank, Credit Suisse, the London Stock Exchange, Volkswagen, Porsche and Harrods.<sup>52</sup> The QIA is a means of ensuring the country's security as a small state surrounded by adversarial neighbours like Iran and Saudi Arabia. It is equally instrumental in diversifying the state's resources and enabling it to develop a reputation as a global player.<sup>53</sup>

In a similar vein, the ruling monarchy's vision is demonstrative of its efforts to develop Qatar as an academic and cultural hub. The presence of academic institutions like Georgetown, Virginia and University College London, leading research centres like RAND and Brookings Institute, as well as the hosting by Doha of a variety of international conferences and summits are examples of this vision. Qatar's successful bid to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup is likely to complement this effort. Investments in initiatives like the Qatar Foundation, Qatar Red Crescent

Society and other Islamic charities have also allowed Qatar to project itself as a progressive and impartial Arab nation.<sup>54</sup>

Even though these developments have taken place against the backdrop of limited political reforms, the Gulf state has managed to evade domestic criticism and social dissent. Qatar, a small nation with an easily governable and homogenous population, has co-opted its citizens through a comprehensive social welfare system. It is important to mention that out of a population of 1.8 million, only about 270,000 are Qatari nationals, and foreigners have been largely excluded from social welfare initiatives.<sup>55</sup>

In light of this, it is surprising that Shaikh Hamad abdicated in favour of his son, Shaikh Tamim. The move was initiated despite having alleviated succession threats from within the Al Thani tribe by instituting a law that ensures succession only to Shaikh Hamad's direct descendents. The transition can perhaps be looked upon as a model for succession crises plaguing many of the neighbouring countries, including Saudi Arabia. It has been speculated that the decision was instigated by the United States keeping in mind the events of 1995.

The forceful abdication by Shaikh Hamad in 1995 could have also been prompted by the US following the Gulf War and the need for security cooperation, given the opposition to US military bases in Saudi Arabia and the discovery of oil in Qatar. Secondly, a peaceful transition at the height of Qatar's proactive policies sets a precedent for the monarchical Gulf, where political short-sightedness is often a by-product of succession threats and factionalism from within the ruling families.<sup>56</sup>

Qatar has also projected power and acquired regional significance through a number of mediation and interventionist initiatives. Qatar's actions are driven by the motive of ensuring security and establishing allies. Its strategies have largely revolved around offering monetary incentives for settlement through investments in the countries involved. This approach could, however, have certain repercussions for Qatar's security and stability.

Firstly, it can be argued that the coalitions created are of questionable loyalty. For instance, Hamas' allegiance to Qatar largely rests on aid pledges and can be precarious. Hamas has a long-standing alliance with Iran and has often relied on the Shia state for military provisions. Moreover, Qatar's relationship with Hamas is also dependent on the Emirate's relationship with Israel, thereby making both unpredictable.

Secondly, Qatar's support of the Islamist regimes goes against its own social fabric, and movements like Muslim Brotherhood could pose a threat to its regime. Hosting radical, anti-monarchy clerics like the Brotherhood's Yusuf Al-Qaradawi<sup>57</sup> can be perilous, even though he has refrained from making statements against the state.

On the other hand, Qatar's deftness has created a certain degree of regional security amongst the newly created regimes. They have thus far been supportive of each other and owed allegiance to their benefactor, Qatar. A new alliance appears to have emerged between Qatar, Turkey and the newly Islamist regimes of Egypt and Tunisia.<sup>58</sup> Qatar's absolute support for the Muslim Brotherhood, coupled with traditional ties between the Brotherhood and Hamas have established a basis for this emerging 'axis'.<sup>59</sup> The support of Turkey's Justice and Development

Party (AKP), which is also sympathetic to the Muslim Brotherhood, has given further weight to this alliance.<sup>60</sup>

Qatar's support of these regimes has been considered divergent from US interests. When viewed through a different perspective, Qatar has possibly served as a bridge between the Islamist regimes looking for western legitimacy, and the western world, particularly the US, which is looking for regional allies. For instance, by protecting the Sunni regime in Bahrain from Shia protesters, Qatar has not only served its own interests of preventing Shi'ite radicalisation, but also safeguarded a vital US ally that is host to one of its largest naval bases.

Therefore, while Qatar's policies may appear contradictory, they have 'balanced' the dual purpose of safeguarding its security within the volatile West Asian region, as well as fulfilling its role as a US ally.

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