



The Arab Gulf States  
Institute in Washington  
Building bridges of understanding



Securing the Qatari State

David B. Roberts



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## About the Author

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## Executive Summary

The small Gulf state of Qatar secures itself in two ways. First, its security is based on close relations with the United States stemming from the provision of the near-irreplaceable Al Udeid Air Base for U.S. military use. Second, diversifying this dependency, Qatar has buried itself into the energy supplies of a range of the world's more powerful states with its provision of liquefied natural gas (LNG). Add to this a small, stable, and well-provided for set of citizens, and the Qatari state is well-secured.

But, with few external security concerns and fewer domestic ones, Qatar's leaders overreached during the Arab Spring. In trying to support revolutions around the region, Qatar (and a range of other states) failed, sowed division, and angered regional states.

Challenges have now emerged from Qatar's three closest neighbors that are testing its two-pronged security modus operandi. Though Qatar's U.S. and international relations have proved to be resilient and are, thus far, supportive of Qatar, there have been deeply worrying moments. It remains to be seen how long Qatar can defy the geopolitical gravity of its region.

## Introduction

How do small states provide for their national security? U.S. political science perspectives or a Kissinger-like worldview suggests that small states need to be particularly careful. The stark realities of politics suggest that might is right – states with more territory, larger populations, and larger militaries are simply more powerful. Thus, it would be wise for a small state to find a larger suzerain protector, operate within a set of regionally proscribed rules, and not antagonize one or more neighbors, particularly if surrounding states are conspicuously larger. Or if the small state becomes mired in difficult regional politics, following Israel's model, an option is to develop cutting-edge and efficient peer-to-peer military capabilities.

Examining how Qatar has secured itself as a small state in a volatile region challenges this perspective. Sometimes, Qatar's approach mirrors what mainstream scholarship might expect. Though for some time, Qatar has been an individualistic and provocative foreign policy actor. The reason for this is not mysterious. The Qatari state has long sought out one core relationship with a hegemon to underpin its security. Today, the United States plays this role. The sheer size, scope, and importance of the Al Udeid Air Base the United States uses in Qatar has had an ironically inverse relationship on the U.S. ability to control Qatar. At times the states have acted as if they were in a loveless marriage, locked together for the foreseeable future. Knowing that divorce is not an option, and having forged the most generous welfare state on earth, Qatar's leadership took the opportunity to engage in a range of unusual and provocative foreign relations around the region.

But as crises with Qatar's three closest neighbors – Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain – have shown in 2014 and particularly in recent weeks, there are nevertheless ways to deeply affect Qatar's security. Qatar has been shaken by U.S. President Donald J. Trump's apparent decision to take sides against it, briefly calling into question some of the

fundamentals of Qatari security. A long-term plan to integrate Qatar into the energy matrices of some of the world's more powerful states, like China, Japan, and the United Kingdom, has provided limited comfort (and security) to Qatar.

But the impression remains that Qatar, emboldened by an implicit feeling it was immune from the consequences of its actions, flew too close to the sun, as if testing its limits. After decades of focusing assiduously on Qatar's worldwide relations, Doha's leadership cannot escape geography and the need to refocus on devising a *modus vivendi* with its three nearest neighbors.

## A Traditional Approach

In 1968, Britain announced it was going to abdicate its suzerain role "East of Suez" by 1971. This thrust independence on the proto-states of Bahrain, Qatar, and the federal entities of the Trucial States.<sup>1</sup> They were not pleased. Though Britain was a fast-fading power, having some overarching guarantees of protection from a U.N. Security Council member and nuclear power made sense. The Middle East experienced war in Israel only the year before, while in the Gulf itself civil war was ongoing in Yemen and the regional behemoths Saudi Arabia and Iran loomed menacingly at times over the smaller states with ongoing irredentist concerns.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, within months of Kuwait's independence from the United Kingdom in 1961, Iraqi forces massed on the border. Britain quickly launched Operation Vantage, returning an armored contingent to bolster Kuwait's deterrence, and the threat dissipated.<sup>3</sup>

Against this hostile backdrop, the small statelets themselves were intrinsically weak, lacking any meaningful military power, although they were rich in coveted oil resources. With families and tribes spread across Qatar, Bahrain, and the Trucial States, it would have made sense to combine for safety in numbers. And this was the initial plan.<sup>4</sup> Oman was always likely to be its own state with a quite different orientation on the southern coast of the Arabian Peninsula facing out to the Indian Ocean. But the other Trucial States, Bahrain, and Qatar sought to combine into one United Arab Emirates. After two years of discussion, bitter historical rivalries between Qatar and Bahrain precluded their joining together. They went their separate ways, as did the seven Trucial State entities. This would not be the last time that seemingly straightforward calculations related to national security were overridden by local politics.

Emir Ahmed bin Ali al-Thani oversaw Qatar's independence in 1971. That he did this from his hotel suite in Geneva – not even bothering to return to Doha – explains why, when Khalifa bin Hamad al-Thani launched a soft coup within six months, Khalifa was quickly accepted as the

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<sup>1</sup> Simon C. Smith, *Britain's Revival and Fall in the Gulf: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and the Trucial States, 1950-71* (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2004), 29-49.

<sup>2</sup> Saideh Lotfian, "A Regional Security System in the Persian Gulf," in *Security in the Persian Gulf*, ed. Lawrence G. Potter and Gary Sick (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Nigel Ashton, "Britain and the Kuwaiti Crisis, 1961," *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 9, no. 1 (1998).

<sup>4</sup> Simon C. Smith, *Britain's Revival and Fall in the Gulf: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and the Trucial States, 1950-71* (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2004), 49-78.

new emir.<sup>5</sup> With a financially secure but militarily weak state and with Iran taking possession of three contested Emirati islands by force, Khalifa took a conciliatory approach to regional politics. He reasoned that the best way to ensure Qatar's security was through anonymity and, as international relations literature puts it, bandwagoning.<sup>6</sup> This involved assiduously following Saudi Arabia's positions in all Qatar's foreign relations, engaging in no provocative foreign entanglements, and concentrating on domestic development.<sup>7</sup>

## An Innovative Approach

By 1985, Khalifa's son and crown prince, Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, was influential in Doha. By the end of the decade, diplomats in Qatar assumed that he was running the country and the days of Khalifa's role as de facto ruler were over.<sup>8</sup> Hamad's ascendancy coincided with a new era in Qatar's foreign relations. Qatar used the era of Iranian President Ayatollah Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani of lowering Arab-Persian tensions to improve Doha's relations with Tehran, but Hamad went further than most Gulf states in striving to build a pipeline from Iran's Karun mountains to import fresh water to Qatar.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Hamad used a moment of détente in the run up to the Israeli-Palestinian conference in Madrid in 1991 to augment Qatar's Israeli relations. Again, he went further than most Gulf states, and by 1996 he authorized the establishment of an Israeli trade office in Doha.<sup>10</sup>

This was jarring for Saudi Arabia. Qatar was making controversial, independent decisions and was increasingly not listening to advice from Riyadh. Tempers frayed at elite levels, Hamad refused to back down, and relations with Saudi Arabia troughed. By 1992, border skirmishes broke out.<sup>11</sup> In 1995, Hamad took over from his father in a bloodless coup. Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states supported Khalifa's return to the throne; no one wanted to set a precedent of a son unseating a father. Saudi Arabia allegedly supported at least one counter coup.<sup>12</sup> In 1996, Al

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Jazeera was founded in Qatar partly to boost the state's soft power and partly as an asymmetric means for Qatar to retaliate against Saudi Arabia. Hosting dissidents and discussing Saudi Arabia's leadership as never before irritated the leaders in Riyadh profoundly. Saudi Arabia removed its ambassador from Qatar in 2002 and kept him away for six years as a way to pressure Qatar to change its ways.

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<sup>5</sup> Jill Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf: Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 155-56.

<sup>6</sup> David B. Roberts, *Qatar: Securing the Global Ambitions of a City State* (London: Hurst & Co., 2016), 18-22.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-32.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-21.

<sup>9</sup> "Iran, Qatar Consider Huge Water Pipeline Project," *Reuters*, November 11, 1991.

<sup>10</sup> David B. Roberts, *Qatar: Securing the Global Ambitions of a City State* (London: Hurst & Co., 2016), 71-83.

<sup>11</sup> "Examining Qatar-Saudi Relations," *RUSI Newsbrief* 32, no. 2 (March 2012).

<sup>12</sup> "Qatar Frees Saudi Coup Plotter after 12 Years," *Al Arabiya*, July 10, 2008.

The foundation of these deeply provocative Qatari policies was a 1992 defense cooperation agreement with the United States that included use by the U.S. military of Al Udeid Air Base only a few miles from the emiri palace in Doha. Accommodating the United States at Al Udeid Air Base (named after a Qatari inlet about 30 miles further south that was contested among Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar) was a savvy move and provided Hamad's government with a deep sense of security. Defense agreements with France and the United Kingdom added a fig leaf of diversification.

But Hamad did not want to leave Qatar's security eggs in the Al Udeid basket. Rather, he embarked on a quarter of a century long ploy to boost Qatar's soft power and integrate its ongoing security and prosperity into the economies of the world's more powerful states. The Ottoman and British empires provided overarching protection for Qatar in the 19th and 20th centuries, but they left eventually. Hamad thus sought to diversify Qatar's dependence on the United States. Rather than focusing on building up Qatar's armed forces from their low base, Hamad instead sought to harness

the post-Cold War zeitgeist to forge the Qatari state as a mediator, a font of soft power in the sporting, media, and educational arenas, and as a state enmeshed in an ever-thickening web of

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international relations via its liquefied natural gas (LNG) shipments to states like the United Kingdom, China, Japan, and South Korea.<sup>13</sup> Qatar, under Hamad in the 2000s, was a state that strove to adopt a neutral persona, making itself important to as wide an array of countries as possible.

Qatar was successful in integrating itself into the energy nexus of some of the world's most powerful states, supplying the United Kingdom with one-third of its LNG imports and China with one-fifth.<sup>14</sup> Though other states are better diversified in percentage terms, the sheer volume of Qatar's exports to Japan and South Korea make replacing Qatar's products near impossible, at least in the short term.<sup>15</sup>

Despite the United States providing the central backstop enabling Qatar to undertake this array of unusual and controversial policies, U.S. administrations were seldom able to leverage this position to overtly influence Qatar's politics. Al Jazeera was a persistent bone of contention with successive U.S. administrations, which often saw the station as producing quasi-terrorist propaganda. But no amount of U.S. pressure could force Qatar to change its editorial stance. In the 2000s relations soured and visa issues with the U.S. military use of Al Udeid blighted U.S.-Qatari cooperation. But there was no alternative for Al Udeid. And when the U.S. Central Command forward headquarters and Air Operations Command needed to leave Saudi Arabia in 2003, they moved to Qatar, increasing the state's importance to the United States. Qatar had, in effect, successfully diversified its dependency on the United States.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> David B. Roberts, *Qatar: Securing the Global Ambitions of a City State* (London: Hurst & Co., 2016), 103-23.

<sup>14</sup> "Japanese Firms Watching Warily as Qatar Crisis Unfolds," *Japan Times*, June 11, 2017; Andrew Ward and David Shappard, "Qatar Diplomatic Spat Reignites UK Gas Supplies Fears," *Financial Times*, June 12, 2017.

<sup>15</sup> "BP Statistical Review of World Energy June 2016," in *BP Statistical Review of World Energy* (BP, 2016).

<sup>16</sup> David B. Roberts, *Qatar: Securing the Global Ambitions of a City State* (London: Hurst & Co., 2016), 35-47.



The ascendency of Crown Prince Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani from the mid-2000s did not change the overall Qatari stance. Tamim's rising influence mirrored an increase in Qatar's defense spending, from \$761 million in 2002 to \$2.218 billion in 2008.<sup>17</sup> But there is no evidence that Qatar's military dramatically increased its capabilities during that time. Qatar still secured itself on the back of the Al Udeid base and a diverse, thick set of economically rooted interdependencies.

## Arab Spring Pivot

The Arab Spring heralded a profound change in Qatar's foreign policy.<sup>18</sup> From a state that assiduously sought relations with all sides in regional politics, Qatar channeled material, financial, diplomatic, and media-related support to actors ranged against the Syrian, Libyan, and Egyptian governments. Often Qatar's support was via Islamist linkages. This reflected a certain practicality given existing connections the Qatari elite had across the region.<sup>19</sup> Equally, Hamad and his advisors were also content to support and empower a broad range of Islamists, not least because they believed the time for moderate Islam to play a role in regional politics had arrived. Consequently, they reasoned, supporting such a movement early on would be a savvy political gamble for Qatar.<sup>20</sup>

Hamad had nothing to fear from empowering such groups. A state with approximately 275,000 nationals, significant oil supplies, and huge gas supplies, Qatar's citizens enjoyed by far the world's strongest ruling bargain. As the Arab Spring rippled around the region, support for democracy in Qatar declined.<sup>21</sup> There is no institutionalized religious authority in Qatar to placate, kowtow to, or fear.<sup>22</sup> And in terms of regional security, Qatar remained secure in the cocoon of the U.S. military's embrace. Without any domestic concerns, Hamad threw the dice, hoping to support the emergence to power of new elites around the region by backing the emancipation of Arabs from autocracy, and to reap the subsequent kudos and benefits.

But this plan failed. With hindsight, it is possible to identify two critical problems.

First, Qatar's elite grossly underestimated how difficult it would be to control the intermediaries and groups it supported. As such, Qatar – along with other international actors – fueled a range of groups and individuals in a debilitating series of civil wars, notably in Syria and Libya. Peaceful transitions failed in all but Tunisia. Qatar wanted to engineer a situation in which it could earn plaudits for supporting a swift and peaceful transition from autocracy to a new people-powered system of governance. Instead, it quickly and enduringly developed a reputation as a meddler that fueled division and empowered Islamists of all varieties.

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<sup>17</sup> ["Sipri Extended Military Expenditure Database, Beta Version,"](#) Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), 2016.

<sup>18</sup> David B. Roberts, "The Four Eras of Qatar's Foreign Policy," *Comillas Journal of International Relations* 5 (2016), 1-17.

<sup>19</sup> David B. Roberts, ["Behind Qatar's Intervention in Libya,"](#) *Foreign Affairs*, September 28, 2011.

<sup>20</sup> David B. Roberts, *Qatar: Securing the Global Ambitions of a City State* (London: Hurst & Co., 2016), 123-45.

<sup>21</sup> Justin Gengler, ["Qatar's Ambivalent Democratization,"](#) *Foreign Policy*, November 1, 2011.

<sup>22</sup> David B. Roberts, "Qatar and the Muslim Brotherhood: Pragmatism or Preference?" *Middle East Policy* 21, no. 3 (2014).

Second, Qatar misread its own regional politics. While Qatar might have been secure domestically, its closest neighbors were deeply concerned about the encouragement and spread of political Islam. The perception in Manama, Bahrain's capital, is that a form of Shia political Islam deeply threatened the cohesiveness of the state, if not the rule of the al-Khalifa monarchy itself. Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province has been beset by low-level, ongoing insurgency that Riyadh puts down to external interference. Though the UAE is a secure and stable state overall, its leadership has long viscerally distrusted political Islam.<sup>23</sup> It has been worried not only about the rise of political Islam in the north of the country, but about the wider destabilization to its immediate neighborhood, particularly Bahrain and Saudi Arabia.

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There is little evidence of Qatar aiding and abetting groups directly targeting its neighbors. But Qatar was, as far as regional leaderships were concerned, stoking a more permissive atmosphere for the support of this kind of politics. Moreover, Qatar was directly seeking to support the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and elsewhere in the region. Even when Abdel Fattah al-Sisi took over from the Brotherhood-led government in July 2013, Qatar-based Al Jazeera sought to undermine his government daily with its coverage. This also angered Qatar's neighbors, who were investing heavily to prop-up the Sisi government out of a belief that his rule was critical to the stability of the whole Middle East.

Qatar's leadership long listened to these critiques, but seldom changed its politics, rejecting such sentiments as hyperbole if not simply duplicitous. Al Jazeera continued relatively unhindered, offering a critical look at regional politics, and giving a voice on a regular basis to those supporting Islamist positions. This included hosting several interviews with the leader of a Syrian group officially linked to al-Qaeda, Jabhat al-Nusra.

## The Tamim Era

Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani took over in 2013 when his father, Hamad, stepped down. Conspiracy theories that Hamad was forced to abdicate by Saudi Arabia (or other local powers) are unpersuasive as they not only lack any evidence, but ignore Hamad's tenacious history of successfully resisting Saudi pressure. But, after wrestling with regional politics for a quarter of a century, ever the regional outlier, Hamad likely abdicated to demonstrate that peaceful transitions were possible, to show that younger generations needed to be empowered, and, amid some health concerns, to enjoy retirement. There is no evidence that Hamad is still running Qatar from behind the scenes, despite persistent rumors to the contrary. If he wanted to be in charge, he would not have abdicated.

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<sup>23</sup> David B. Roberts, "[Mosque and State: The United Arab Emirates' Secular Foreign Policy](#)," *Foreign Affairs*, March 18, 2016.

Tamim did not change Qatar's position. It would have been hard to do so initially. Hamad was, after all, the man who had made the modern Qatari state. He had overseen the transition of Qatar to a state with a global reputation, powerful international allies, significant regional influence, and the strongest welfare state on earth. Hamad was Qatar's modern day founding father.

Within eight months of taking over, Tamim realized how irritated his neighbors were when, in February 2014, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the UAE withdrew their ambassadors from Doha in protest. The diplomatic snub was accompanied by stories in the Arab media of escalatory options that included blockading Qatar's only land border, which is with Saudi Arabia. This episode was deeply shocking and the Qatari military went to red alert preparing for further escalation.

Negotiations took nine months and agreement was reached in autumn 2014. Neither side was ultimately happy and the celebration of the success, a long planned GCC summit in Doha in December 2014, was cut short and was even more vacuous than usual. The practical signs of agreement were the expulsion of senior Muslim Brotherhood members long resident in Qatar. Rhetorically speaking, Qatar agreed not to interfere in the affairs of the other states and to tone down Al Jazeera's vociferous coverage of Egypt. There was little sense that Qatar changed the fundamental orientation of its foreign policy away from supporting Islamists, which seemed to be the core demand. Nevertheless, Qatar taking part in the 2015 UAE- and Saudi-led military operations in Yemen seemed to confirm that the country was trying to show that it was back in the fold.

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## The June Surprise

When on June 6, in the middle of Ramadan, an unprecedented diplomatic, air, and land blockade was announced of Qatar by Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the UAE, and Egypt, Qatar was again blindsided. Reports of Qatar's willingness to pay up to \$1 billion for the return of Qatari hostages from Shia militias in southern Iraq may have been the final straw.<sup>24</sup> And Trump's highly supportive visit to Saudi Arabia, as his first foreign trip, no less, also likely emboldened Saudi Arabia and the UAE to act. Nevertheless, the actions taken against Qatar remain curiously vigorous.

This vignette provides a reminder for Qatar that it faces real and present dangers from its immediate neighbors. To suffer from one surprising blockade by neighbors is a misfortune, but two is careless. Qatar's leadership will surely not be surprised again. The blockade has important implications for how Qatar ensures its security.

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<sup>24</sup> Erika Solomon, "The \$1bn Hostage Deal That Enraged Qatar's Gulf Rivals," *Financial Times*, June 5, 2017.

Though Tamim long spent more on Qatar's military, it is yet to bear tangible fruit. Reports indicate that Qatar's deployments in Yemen were static on the Saudi border and there is no sign that Qatar's contribution was more than symbolic. Tamim will redouble efforts to build an effective Qatari military, perhaps even using Israel – a small state that sees itself surrounded by larger, hostile states – as a template. But, given the disparities in size between Qatar and almost any conceivable adversary, the best a highly effective Qatari military can do is make controlling Qatar unduly costly. This means that Tamim will need to rely on the two consistent strands evidenced in Qatar's modern approach to its security: its U.S. relations centered around the Al Udeid base and a form of safety-in-numbers relying on Qatar's deep web of international relations and trade.

In terms of building and solidifying Qatar's mercantile reputation, the response from Doha to the crisis has been characterized by a decision not to react in kind. Qatar provides the UAE with approximately 30 percent of its daily gas requirement. Shutting this off is evidently an option for Qatar. But the rhetoric from Doha is that it is a state that stands by international agreements, even in the face of what it sees as gross provocation. Qatari ministers have also been taking meetings in key capitals around the world shoring up support. The saving grace for Qatar is that the troika cannot cut off Qatar's central

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money supply – its oil and gas revenue – without causing significant energy disruption in states like China, the United Kingdom, Japan, South Korea, and India. Going forward, Qatar will also strive to divest itself of its dependencies on Saudi Arabia and the UAE wherever possible. Its relations with Turkey will be critical as a source for imports. Iran too will benefit in this regard.

But Qatar needs to focus on its U.S. relationships. There are two problems as far as the U.S. government is concerned: Qatar's actions in countering terrorist financing and its material and media-related support for Islamist groups, some of whom are viewed as extremist.

Like other Gulf states, Qatar used to be a permissive arena for terrorist funding.<sup>25</sup> But it has improved significantly in recent years. As well as joining a range of international initiatives countering terrorist financing,<sup>26</sup> there has been a U.S. Treasury attaché based in Qatar and Kuwait since 2015 (in addition to ones in the UAE and Saudi Arabia) working directly with local agencies, banks, and ministries. Progress has certainly been made, though Qatar is its own worst enemy in not actually discussing what it has been doing. Regardless, Qatar could and should be doing more when it comes to stopping funding to terrorist groups.

Qatar's modus operandi of often channeling support via Islamist groups also rankles. Qatar is an unabashed supporter of Hamas, the Palestinian group that the U.S. regards as a terrorist organization. Similarly, having links to Jabhat al-Nusra (now called Jabhat Fateh al-Sham) further paints Qatar as a wanton supporter of Islamic extremism. One explanation as to why Qatar maintains these relations is not that its elites want to support or encourage radicalism. Rather, it is that developing relations with these kinds of groups is pragmatic. As demonstrated in recent years, Qatar has used these relationships to moderate each of these two groups:

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<sup>25</sup> "Qatar: Extremism and Counter-Extremism," *Counter Extremism Project*, accessed June 21, 2017.

<sup>26</sup> Kenneth Katzman, "Qatar: Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy," *Congressional Research Service*, June 9, 2017, 16-18.

Hamas moderated (slightly) its charter in April and Jabhat al-Nusra abrogated its al-Qaeda affiliation in July 2016. Both groups remain beyond the pale for many if not most observers, Jabhat al-Nusra (Jabhat Fateh al-Sham) especially. That Qatar never explains any of this logic is part of a problem of its own making.

Thus, while Qatar can and should be doing more, and it is perfectly legitimate to critique this *modus operandi*, the unique focus on Qatar as if it were the sole locus of terrorist financing in the Gulf and as if it were doing nothing about it, is curious. This is reflected in the bifurcated position of the U.S. administration. Those with experience in the Gulf understand better what Qatar is and is not doing. This includes Secretary of State Rex Tillerson from his days running Exxon Mobil and Secretary of Defense James Mattis from his days at CENTCOM. Both Tillerson and Mattis, like institutions that work with Qatar regularly such as the Pentagon, are relatively supportive of Qatar, cautioning restraint on all sides.

But Trump is a wild card. Aside from business dealings in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, he has little knowledge of the region. However, having imbibed the wider narrative about Qatar as an extremist supporter, he came down on the side of the countries singling-out Doha as the core regional problem. Worse still from the Qatari perspective, the UAE ambassador to the United States has suggested that the Trump administration consider relocating its military facilities from Qatar to the UAE.<sup>27</sup> While such a move would be egregiously difficult in any sensible timescale, Trump has demonstrated that his policy announcements are seldom constrained by such mundane concerns.

Signing a \$12 billion deal for F-15s in Washington, DC during the crisis came at a perfect time for Qatar, for it speaks a language that Trump can grasp. Qatar will surely be buying more U.S. kit soon, just as the Qataris are currently building a new runway at Al Udeid to make the base yet more important and harder to shift. Linked to this, Qatar needs to entirely reconfigure its approach to public relations in Washington. UAE and Saudi lobbyists have pummeled Qatar in this arena.

## Conclusion

Securing Qatar has never been easy. Qatar has always been relatively weak and dependent on others to provide its security. The most recent backstop for Qatar's security is the United States, the latest in a line of hegemony going back through Saudi Arabia and the British and Ottoman empires. The innovation from Hamad was in the diversification of this dependency and an assiduous LNG-based ploy to make Qatar's continuing security, stability, and prosperity of intimate importance to a range of the world's leading states. During the Arab Spring, Qatar overreached. In trying to develop its importance to another range of states, Qatar failed repeatedly to achieve its objectives and irritated its nearest regional allies in the process. This led to the regional issues of 2014 and those in play today.

This current blockade has shaken Qatar, but its twin-pronged methods of ensuring its security have thus far prevailed, though not without concern. Qatar has learned that reality is trumped by narrative. While Al Udeid may be near-indispensable to the United States and

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<sup>27</sup> Josh Lederman, "[U.A.E. Ambassador: U.S. Should Rethink Its Air Base in Qatar](#)," *Associated Press*, June 13, 2017.

Doha may have made strides with its legislation on countering terrorist financing, Qatar comprehensively lost the narrative war, which led to Trump tweeting against the state. Trump could yet intervene again to Qatar's severe detriment. Qatar's strategic communications need a profound overhaul.

The wide array of states around the world that rely on Qatar for energy supplies prevent a total blockade of the state, and stay the hand of the regional antagonists to some degree. And Qatar's relations with Turkey and Iran allow Doha to make up for many imports that previously came through Saudi Arabia and the UAE. But two problems remain.

First, Qatar can bypass its immediate neighbors. But there is a reason that Saudi Arabia's land border with Qatar was so busy, and Jebel Ali in Dubai is the region's premier re-exporting hub: They made the most sense because of their scale, costs, and location. Second, there are real logistical issues. Replacing a multilane highway into Saudi Arabia with Doha's small port will not be easy. It will create expensive bottlenecks in supply. It can all probably be done, but that is not to say that it should be done.

Ultimately, Qatar and its neighbors need to reconcile. This spat is good for no one. Chastened and punished, Qatar will certainly reconsider antagonizing its neighbors, mindful of just how far they may be willing to go, and aware that its international relations give it strength, but not immunity. Equally, no leader can be embarrassingly chided and forced into articulating new policies, so there must be compromise on all sides. Barring some near-impossible to envision, all cards on the table summit airing and resolving regional grievances, lofty ideas of a Gulf Union have been pushed back yet another decade. Qatar will assiduously deepen its U.S. and other international relations until the day that Gulf leaders grasp the reality that more unites them than divides them, and that they need to find a practical *modus vivendi* together.

