

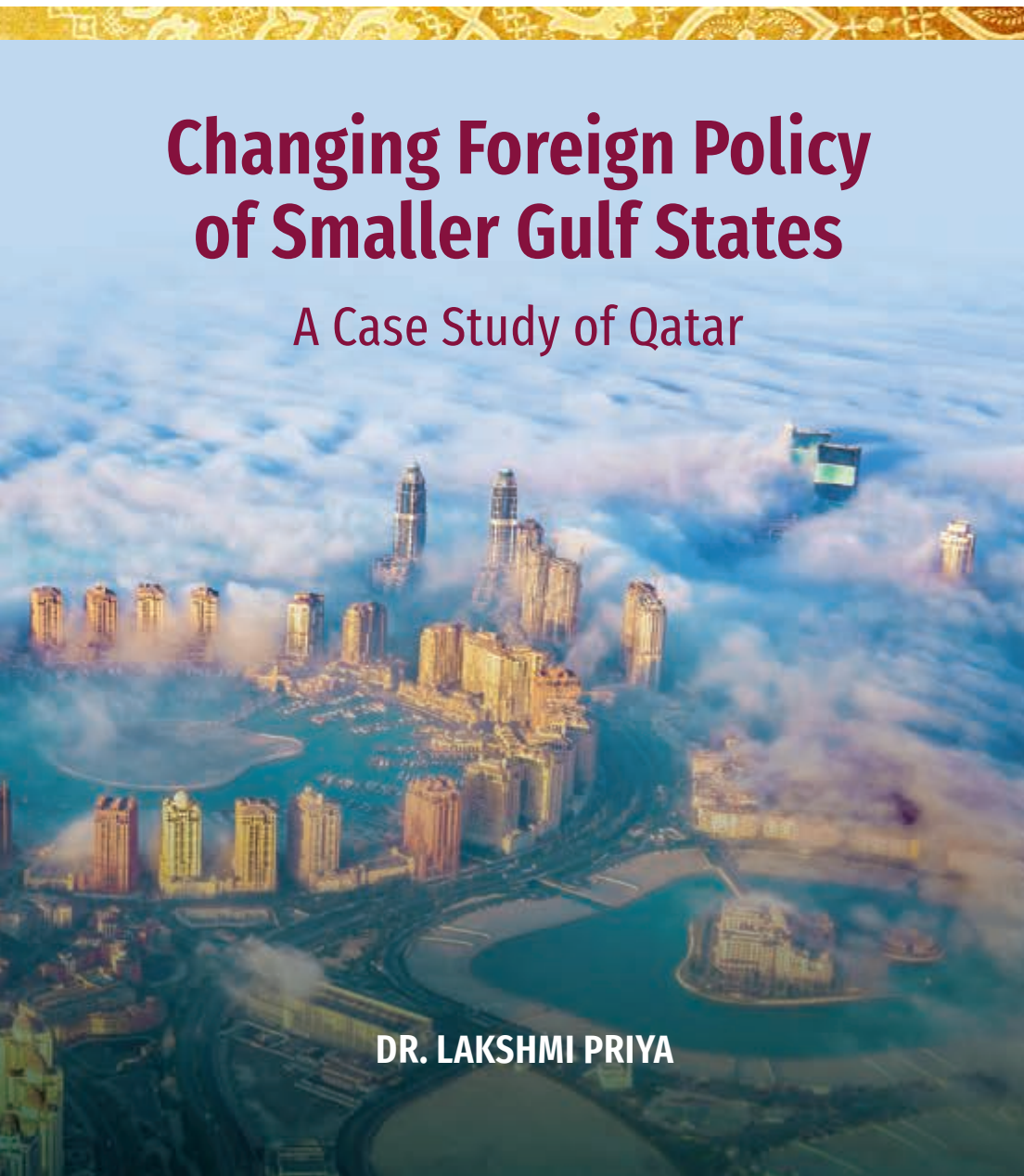


Indian Council
of World Affairs



Changing Foreign Policy of Smaller Gulf States

A Case Study of Qatar



DR. LAKSHMI PRIYA





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of World Affairs



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of World Affairs**

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ABSTRACT



Gulf is changing at a rapid pace and the smaller GCC countries are molding external behaviour accordingly. This paper is second in a series of four papers analysing the changing foreign policy of smaller Gulf states and focuses on Qatar. Qatar is an interesting Gulf country to study in order to understand the foreign policy decision making in a smaller state. It has modified its external behaviour according to the regional and extra-regional circumstances and has been studied by a number of scholars. The paper is divided into three sections and the first section discusses the determinants of Qatar's foreign policy including geography, demography, society, politics, economy, security and aid, regional environment and international environment. The second section describes the evolution of foreign policy and the third section discusses the changing dynamics of the foreign policy of Qatar. Lastly, the paper gives policy recommendations for enhancing India-Qatar ties.



INTRODUCTION



Small states are defined by Neumann and Gustohl as a residual category that are more capable than the micro powers but are devoid of the qualities of great or middle powers.¹ Defining small states has been complicated; from the treaty of Westphalia to the treaty of Versailles, states were defined on the basis of hierarchy and small state was defined as ‘not large’. It was only after the end of the World War II that the focus shifted to the ranking of countries in the international hierarchy based on the elements of their hard power, and the small states began to be described as satellite states. Later, the small states began to be classified on the basis of capabilities, impact on behaviour of other countries, perception of the decision makers and other international units, and membership in international institutions.

International relations theory focused on the dominance of the big states; Kenneth Waltz propounds that the world politics is characterised by the capacity of the most powerful states to impose a world order concordant with their interests and a general theory of international politics is necessarily based on the great powers.² As a corollary, scholars like Anthony Payne perceived small states as vulnerable powers that needed protection and support of big powers.³ However, scholars like Andrew Cooper⁴ focused on the resilience of small states and going a step forward Mehran Kamrava⁵

Defining small states has been complicated; from the treaty of Westphalia to the treaty of Versailles, states were defined on the basis of hierarchy and small state was defined as ‘not large’.

Scholars have been insisting on the significance of power instead of space with regard to the categorisation of small states.

said that given the right circumstances, they can become highly influential at the regional as well as the global level by forging alliances, norm entrepreneurship (resorting to international norms to enhance influence) and hedging.

Babak Mohammadzadeh believes that small states are as vulnerable to status and glory as other states and strategic ideas based on state size stimulate foreign policy change in small states.⁶ Similarly, Kristian Coates Ulrichsen has explored the new possibilities for the exercise of power and influence by small states in the global era and emphasizes that there are ample opportunities for small states to make their voices heard in the globalised environment.⁷ Ulrichsen also underlines that states have multiple channels of influence and territorial size has lost its significance.

Mostafa Galal⁸ has documented the external behaviour of small states in light of theories of international relations and mentioned that earlier there was lack of studies on behaviour of small states as realism limited their role as satellite states to the great powers. However, liberals believe that smaller states behave as a result of the internal structure of international units and their interactions; and as per the constructivists, small states make their choices based on the internal construction of units and its perceptive impact on the decision maker. He goes on to categorise the existing literature into those dealing with the theoretical dimensions of small state's foreign behaviour and those focusing on the impact of international



environment on the foreign policy of small states. Giorgi Gavalia argued that ideas affect the process of foreign policy making of small states⁹ while Mirriam Fendius concluded that the foreign policy of small states has its sources in domestic policies.¹⁰ Scholars have been insisting on the significance of power instead of space with regard to the categorisation of small states; Peter Baehr has pointed out that the intended size of the state is the size of power not space.¹¹

Looking at Qatar's foreign policy through the lens of international relations, it is apparent that Doha's external behaviour has traits of neo-realism, liberalism and constructivism in terms of its economic heft and ability to influence the behaviour of states; role of the ruling elite or Al-Thani family in the foreign policy formation of Qatar; and the propagation of soft power to pursue its interests within the region and beyond, respectively. Also, as per Steven Walt, neoclassical realism is the most capable theoretical framework in order to explain the effects of both domestic and international elements and combining them to explain states' foreign policies. He believes that domestic policies play the role of the variable mediating the distribution of strength in the international system and in foreign policy.¹²

Fig 1: Foreign Policy Determinants



- Geography
- Society and Demography
- Politics
- Economy
- Security and Aid
- Regional Environment
- International Environment



Section I

Determinants of the Qatar's Foreign Policy

GEOGRAPHY



Geographical location has played an important role in the foreign policy formation of Qatar. The drop shaped country shares 87 km land boundary with Saudi Arabia and is connected with Bahrain, UAE, Oman, Kuwait, Iran and Iraq through water bodies. The narrow limestone peninsula is largely a desert and unfit for agriculture and has not had any permanent inland settlements. Qatar has towns and villages settled on the coast and pearling, fishing and sailing were the only occupation practiced by the people. Lack of inland oases implies that Qatar has had to depend commercially and politically on its neighbours for food and other commodities. It imported essential items while exporting pearl to Bahrain and Bandar Lingej situated on the Persian coast. In her eminent book on the creation of Qatar, Rose Marie Zahlan states that since Qatar shares its southern border with the Arabian mainland, it was affected by the political ramification of the Bedouin tribes who repeatedly took refuge on the centrally located Qatar. Due to the geographical proximity, Qatar has had the longest historic links with Bahrain. During the second half of the eighteenth century, the Al-Khalifah (emigrants from the Utub tribe of Najd) settled in the western coast of Qatar and went on to conquer Bahrain. For the next hundred years, Qatar's fate got tied

Due to the geographical proximity, Qatar has had the longest historic links with Bahrain.





Fig 2: Map of Qatar

Source: US Library of Congress, <https://countrystudies.us/persian-gulf-states/69.htm>

Gulf countries share an interlinked past and the geographical location is of utmost importance in determining their external behaviour.

with Bahrain. Zahlan, the sister of Edward Said mentions in her book that Jalahimah branch of the Utub tribe refused to accept the dominance of Al-Khalifah and struck new alliances. A member of this tribe, Rahmah bin Jaber made alliances with the Wahhabis of Saudi Arabia and Qawasim of the Trucial coast against Bahrain. However, the Wahhabi-Rahma alliance did not last long as declining Wahhabism was challenged by Oman and the Ottomans and Rahma sided with Sayyid Said bin Sultan of Oman.¹³

With this background, it is more than evident that the Gulf countries share an interlinked past and the geographical location is of utmost importance in determining their external behaviour.

For Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain are the most important neighbours; Saudi Arabia has a history of boundary disputes with Doha while Bahrain has a legacy of domination over the country. In the 1920s, Ibn Saud considered all of Qatar as part of its Hasa province and in 1935, Saudi Arabia pressed claims over Jabal Nakhsh and Khawr al-Udayd territory of Qatar. However, the question of border came to the fore briefly when the two countries got involved with different oil exploration companies. Post-World War II, the question of boundary became a secondary issue as the two countries began focusing on socio-economic development. Later, the issue was resolved amicably in 1965,¹⁴ only to re-erupt when a border clash led to three deaths in 1992 with Qatar claiming that Saudi



Arabia had attacked its border post at Khafus, while Saudi Arabia stating that the clash was on Saudi territory and had occurred between Bedouins from the two sides. Four years later, Qatar and Saudi Arabia signed a border demarcation agreement,¹⁵ but the two neighbours were able to settle the issue only in November 2021 when Saudi Arabia returned full sovereignty of the southern shore of the Khor al Udeid to Qatar as part of the Al-Ula agreement.¹⁶

Qatar's boundary dispute with Bahrain took a different course and remains unresolved. Doha had resentment against Al-Khalifa of Bahrain who never considered Zubarah as part of Qatar. The ownership of Zubarah, became a contentious issue for the two countries when a petroleum company began preliminary survey on the western coast of Qatar in 1935. Next year, Bahrain claimed its authority on the Hawar islands whose significance had increased manifold after the discovery of oil. Manama was adamant on establishing its authority on parts of the Qatari territory and imposed an embargo on trade and travel with Qatar in 1937.¹⁷

Nevertheless, Qatar did not accept Bahrain's authority over the islands and in 1986 an armed confrontation between the two countries was narrowly avoided with the timely intervention by Saudi Arabia. Five years later, Qatar referred the dispute to the United Nations International Court of Justice (ICJ). In 2001, the ICJ decided that Bahrain had claims over Hawar Islands, while Qatar had the authority over Zubara and the Janan Islands.¹⁸ Despite the resolution of the dispute by the ICJ, Qatar-Bahrain border dispute is still a sensitive issue; the latter claimed its authority over the former's territory through a press release in 2017 when the Gulf

Developing a sense of oneness and nationhood among the moving Bedouin population is a difficult task in itself but Qatar faced an additional problem of being inhabited by tribes owing allegiance to neighbouring powers.

countries isolated Qatar. Despite the signing of Al-Ula declaration, Bahrain and Qatar remain sceptical of each other while Saudi Arabia pushes for reconciliation.¹⁹

The above-mentioned disputes and claims by Saudi Arabia and Bahrain instilled a sense of insecurity in Qatar. It realised that it has to protect itself from not only the giant neighbours like Saudi Arabia and Iran but also from smaller countries like Bahrain. The historical experience of territorial claims by Bahrain which was territorially small but economically strong, sowed the seeds of being independent and strong through forging of alliances with super powers like USA. Iraqi invasion of Kuwait also instilled the need for protecting its territory while the 1937 sanctions by Bahrain pushed it to emphasise on gaining self-sufficiency. Geographical location plays a major role in shaping the history and consequent external behaviour for the countries.

SOCIETY AND DEMOGRAPHY



Society and demography have had an important impact on the foreign policy formation of Qatar. Developing a sense of oneness and nationhood among the moving Bedouin population is a difficult task in itself but Qatar faced an additional problem of being inhabited by tribes owing allegiance to neighbouring



powers. The Bedouins belonging to different tribes migrated to the Qatari mainland only for a brief winter period and owed allegiance to the dominant forces in the neighbourhood including Wahabis. As the stability of coastal cities depended on the Bedouins, Qatari rulers had limited manoeuvrability and kept them content. Qatar realised that in order to maintain a domestic stability, it had to have a peaceful neighbourhood.

Qatar has been inhabited by foreign populations since long and the population as well as the rulers are accustomed to the social heterogeneity. Almost half of the population immediately prior to the oil era consisted of foreigners constituting Baharinah, Iranians and Africans. In 1939, Qatari population composition constituted of Arab tribes, Sunni Muslims, Black Africans and Persians.²⁰ Currently, Qatari population constitutes of natives (11 per cent), Arabs (40 per cent), Indians (18 per cent), Pakistanis (18 per cent), Iranians (10 per cent) and others (mainly Europeans 14 per cent).²¹ However, in recent decades the numerical dominance by migrants over the native population has led to calls for workforce nationalisation policies. On the other hand, these policies are seen with contempt by the migrant sending countries. Being aware, Qatar has made foreign policy decisions based on these considerations.

After discovery of oil, wage labour came to Qatar, however due to lack of labour laws, in the 1940s and 1950s the hours, conditions and wages varied to a great extent. Petroleum development of Qatar employed British engineers and foremen, South Asian clerks, drivers and labourers while local merchants provided work certificates acting as representatives of the oil company. There

are instances where Qatar has made decisions affecting its ties with other countries based on societal compulsions especially over disagreements among the labour force. Many a times Qatari labourers had disagreements with the management of the oil companies comprising of non-Qataris. In 1951, Qatari labourers declared strike over opposition to those from Dhofar region and the latter were deported to Oman. Eight years later, a labour department was established and in 1962 a labour law was enacted in Qatar.²²

The labour law of 1962, gives preference to Qataris over non-Qataris. Labour Act No. 3 of 1962, Chapter 2, Section 10 mentions that the employers shall give the priority in hiring to nationals first and then to other Arab nationals as far as possible. Similarly, in case of attrition, the non-Arab employees must be released before the nationals and the Arab workers. Section 12 emphasises on the point further stating that employers are not permitted to employ non-citizens or non-Arabs without ensuring complete absence of unemployed nationals or Arabs that are qualified for the work. It also states that the non-citizens shall not be hired unless they have a work permit from the Labour Ministry in consultation with the Immigration Ministry.²³

However, condition of migrant workers especially in the wake of Qatar World Cup, has been a source of negative attention by external actors. In 2015, Germany's Vice Chancellor conveyed displeasure over situation of foreign workers to the Qatari Emir.²⁴ A year later, the delegates to the 103rd Session (2014) of the ILO conference filed a complaint concerning non-observance of the Forced Labour



Currently, the Gulf country hosts 1.5 million migrant workers from Nepal, India, Bangladesh, the Philippines and Bangladesh constituting 90 per cent of the total population

Convention, 1930 (No. 29), and the Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 (No. 81) by Qatar. In response to these criticisms, Qatar has introduced a number of reforms pertaining to labour laws. In 2019, Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani said that Qatar is keen to defend individual and collective rights and has made significant achievements in terms of workers' rights and working conditions in coordination with the International Labour Organisation.²⁵

Currently, the Gulf country hosts 1.5 million migrant workers from Nepal, India, Bangladesh, the Philippines and Bangladesh constituting 90 per cent of the total population and understands that labour policy is a complex issue and cannot be solved overnight. However, over the past several years, Qatar has implemented extensive reforms to strengthen labour laws, and increased protections for migrant workers. Qatar government communications office states that the majority of workers no longer need exit permits to leave the country. Doha has announced procedures allowing workers to change employment freely, without requiring a No-Objection Certificate (NOC) from their previous employer. It has also introduced a non-discriminatory minimum wage and has announced the establishment of 20 Qatar Visa Centres (QVCs) in India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, the Philippines and Tunisia in order to expedite the

recruitment process and ensure that workers do not get exploited in their home countries. Qatar has also established a Workers' Support and Insurance Fund which will ensure and provide care for workers, guarantee their rights and provide a healthy and safe working environment.²⁶

In 2021, the Minister of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs announced the formation of a Minimum Wage Committee tasked with the continued review and examination of the minimum wage of employees and domestic workers. The non-discriminatory minimum wage is the first law of its kind in the region. With the Interior Minister Decision No. 95 of 2019, Qatar has cancelled the need for exit permission for migrant workers in Qatar and has allowed domestic workers to leave the country without first obtaining permission from their employer.

The Minister of Administrative Development Labour and Social Affairs decree of 2019 allows workers in companies with 30 or more employees to elect their own representatives. In March 2018, Qatar established Labour Dispute Resolution Committees with the aim of improving access to justice by settling labour disputes within three weeks of a migrant worker filing a complaint. Qatar's Law No. 21 of 2015 provides the freedom to change jobs, measures to prevent contract substitution, greater transparency, enhanced representation and measures to prevent passport confiscation. Qatar has made legislation to protect workers from wage exploitation through the introduction of a Wage Protection System and has provisions for health insurance of all expatriates and visitors.



POLITICS



Qatar's foreign policy is formed by the individual actors like the head of the state, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister while the decision-making bodies with this regard are the Council of Ministers and the Advisory Council. The 1970 provisional constitution declares Qatar as a sovereign Arab and Islamic state with Emir as the head assisted by an Advisory Council with right to debate legislation drafted by the Council of Ministers before it is ratified and promulgated. Al-Thani family belonging to the Tamim tribe is the ruling family of Qatar and members of this family have played an important role in the foreign policy formation. Second Sheikh of this family Qasim ibn Muhammad al Thani is the founder of Qatar who defeated the Ottomans in 1893 and expanded the family's authority in the peninsula even when it was reeling with complex Anglo-Ottoman relations.

The seventh Sheikh Khalifa ibn Hamad was instrumental in gaining independence from Britain becoming the first Emir in 1971 and his son Hamad ibn Khalifa founded Al Jazeera, the cable television news network and led the Qatar's shift from being an oil producer to the robust gas industry.²⁷ His wife Sheikha Moza bint Nasser is an influential figure who has done commendable work in education and is the co-founder and chair of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development. Current Emir

Al-Thani family belonging to the Tamim tribe is the ruling family of Qatar and members of this family have played an important role in the foreign policy formation.

HBJ is the architect of Qatari foreign policy; he gave a direction to the way Qatar looked at the outside world for nearly two decades.

Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, rightly benefitted from the shift led by his father and focused on building a strong Qatar with well-defined foreign policy whose base was formed by Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jaber bin Mohammed bin Thani Al Thani (HBJ). His sister Sheikha Mayassa is the Chairperson of Qatar Museums and the Doha Film festival and has been featured as Forbes' World's 100 Most Powerful Women. Another sister Sheikha Hind bint Hamad al Thani, is the vice chairperson and CEO of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development. It is to be noted that pursuing soft diplomacy, Qatar has emerged as an education hub being home to a number of foreign universities and institutions²⁸ while aspiring to be the art Mecca of the Middle East.²⁹

HBJ is the architect of Qatari foreign policy; he gave a direction to the way Qatar looked at the outside world for nearly two decades. Since 1995 to 2013, he led the foreign policy decision making in Qatar as the Foreign Minister and emphasised on the expansive approach. During his leadership, Qatar began investing in countries within and outside the region. Being a sport enthusiast himself, he envisioned Qatar's active engagement in global sports and it would not be an exaggeration to say that he was the force behind Qatar's acquisition of Paris Saint Germain, a professional football club as well as Qatar's successful bid to host the 2022 World Cup.³⁰



Secondly, Islam has an important role to play in foreign policy decision making in Qatar. Islamic precepts of fairness, honesty, generosity, and mutual respect form the basis of policy formation in Qatar mandating Emir to retain the support of the religious community which asserts itself in areas of media censorship, education regulations, and the status of women.³¹ There are three ways in which Islam impacts the foreign policy formation in Qatar; as a belief of the political actors; as an identity and source of legitimacy among the domestic population as well as in the region; and lastly as a way of life. For instance, Qatar Red Crescent offers a provision to use the zakat for providing aid to the poor and needy in over 22 countries.³² Currently, Qatar's image is that of a supporter of Islamist groups in the region and has served well in expanding its influence in the region, however it has also proved to be an irritant for the neighbouring countries as reflected during the isolation of Qatar by the quartet of Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain and Egypt.

Thirdly, domestic needs and developments can also be decisive in the formation of foreign policy. For instance, when Qatar was isolated by Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain and Egypt in 2017 and the country faced hardships owing to halt in import of items of basic necessities, it accepted the help offered by Iran and Turkey. Forty per cent of the food came to Qatar through its land boundary with Saudi Arabia. Companies working on infrastructure projects for the 2022 football World Cup had to secure new sources for building materials and Qatar had to ship cargo through Oman. Shipping costs went up tenfold but this was the only way to import in view of restrictions on access to ports in the UAE.³³

ECONOMY



Economy is the invisible but mighty force with wide impact; David Cameron said that economy is the start and end of everything. It is an important determinant of foreign policy decision making and Qatar is no exception. It was impacted by the discovery of oil in the Arabian Peninsula, even before it became independent. When pearl trade in Qatar was declining, Bahrain became prosperous overnight as a consequence of the discovery of oil in 1932. Relying on the port and markets of Dubai, Qatar experienced large-scale outward migration to other Gulf countries.³⁴ Likewise, the prospects of considerable profits from offshore oil exploration led Qatar to share the offshore production in Al Bunduq field with Abu Dhabi in 1964 as both neighbours claimed authority over the same.³⁵

Qatar joined OPEC as soon as a year after its formation in order to gain leverage over the oil company in terms of revenues, pricing and production. OPEC was established in 1960 by Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela in response to the oil price cuts imposed by the multinational companies and in order to hold greater control over their own resources through nationalisation. Soon after gaining independence in 1971, Qatar established the Qatar General Petroleum Corporation with 60 per cent ownership of the oil companies and six years later it achieved complete nationalisation of its oil companies. Qatar adhered to the production quota of the OPEC majorly, but it did not hesitate to raise its production above quota in order to gain from the soft markets. For instance, to benefit from the rising oil prices during



the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, Qatar exceeded the OPEC quotas in the first eight months of 1990. Being a small player in the big group dominated by Saudi Arabia, and possessing discovery of huge gas resources in the North field Qatar became wary of the organisation. In 2018, the Gulf country left the grouping with its Energy Minister Saad Sherida al-Kaabi announcing that Qatar wanted to focus on its gas industry rather than oil.³⁶

Qatar was ambitious enough to begin one of the region's largest trans-border energy projects called the Qatar Dolphin Gas Pipeline or the Ras Laffan Qatar-UAE Pipeline. The pipeline is the first cross-border refined gas transmission project and was conceived in 1999 to produce, process, and transport natural gas from Qatar's North Field to the UAE and Oman. The project involves development of gas wells and installation of two platforms in Qatar's North Field; two multiphase sea lines from the wellheads to the processing plant; gas processing and compression plant at Ras Laffan in Qatar; offshore pipeline from Ras Laffan to Taweelah in the UAE; and gas receiving facilities at Taweelah. The field currently accounts for approximately 9 per cent of Qatar's daily output.³⁷ The project faced various challenges including hosting a diverse staff of 30 different nationalities and languages and the implementation of emergency response programs, however one major issue was the consent of Saudi Arabia.³⁸ Formerly an ardent supporter of the proposed project, Saudi Arabia not only withdrew from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) pipeline negotiations in 1992, but denied transit rights for the pipeline to pass overland to Kuwait and began its own gas initiative in 1998.

Nevertheless, in 2021, Qatar had a high GDP of USD 179 billion and ranked among the world's 60 richest countries.³⁹ Qatar's National Vision 2030 mentions that economic diversification will play an important role in the policy formation in the near future and consequently, the Gulf country's long-term plan is to generate a favourable business environment to support higher investment and employment.⁴⁰ Realising the significance of attracting external investments, Qatar is keen on developing a promising investment environment in the priority sectors along with providing a conducive administrative and legislative system. It is also keen on ratifying laws allowing foreign investors to implement fully-owned investment projects in various sectors and is introducing amendments to its Free Zones Law. Qatar has approved a draft law on regulating the investment of non-Qatari capital in economic activity and has issued several laws aimed at stimulating and attracting domestic and foreign investments. It has also developed an investor-friendly business environment, through measures like creation of a single window for investor services and providing advanced electronic services for business incorporation. Qatar offers incentives to foreign investors and has been able to attract investments from the US, Japan, South Korea and Singapore in sectors like oil and gas, construction, public works and financial services.

More importantly, Qatar is aware of the significance of investments in forging strong relations with other countries. In a quest to pursue economic diplomacy, it has invested over USD 400 billion in more than 40 countries and has signed investment agreements with over 60 countries. Qatar Investment Authority (QIA), Sovereign Wealth



Fund of the Gulf country is engaged in a number of long-term strategic investments in sectors including infrastructure, retail, health care, banking, automotive, sports, investment banking, real estate and construction, tourism, agriculture, raw materials and trade. Qatar is also mindful of the need to balance its economic diplomacy and has invested in Europe and US on the one hand and Russia, Iran, Syria and Turkey on the other hand. It has also invested in Asian and African economies.

Qatar has invested more than USD 23.8 billion in German companies Volkswagen, Deutsche Bank, Siemens, Hochtief and Solar World. QIA has acquired Italian luxury brand Valentino Fashion Group SpA for about USD 834.3 million. Also in UK, Doha has made investments worth more than USD 53.3 billion in projects including HSBC tower, the Shard skyscraper, the Olympic Village and the Harrods store. QIA owns 22 per cent of Sainsbury super market chains and 20 per cent of London Heathrow airport. QIA opened an office in New York in 2015 to diversify its investments in the US and has acquired about 10 per cent of the Empire State Realty Trust Inc, which is the owner of the Empire State Building. QIA has bought more than 18 per cent of the shares of Russia's largest oil producer Rosneft for USD 11 billion and is a partner with a quarter stake in the St. Petersburg Airport. Qatar has an investment target of USD 55 billion in the US and Asian markets.⁴¹ Qatar announced direct investment of USD 15 billion in Turkey in 2018⁴² and has signed an MoU for the transfer of 10 per cent of the shares of Borsa Istanbul.⁴³ In October 2022, the Vice President of Iran Dr Mohsen Rezaei urged the Qatari investors to invest in projects in Iran⁴⁴ and in

March 2023 Qatari trade delegation visited Iran in order to explore further avenues of cooperation and collaborations.⁴⁵

Like other countries, Qatar has been engaged in economic diplomacy, however, this phenomenon came to the fore recently when Doha was isolated by the quartet countries. The isolation of Qatar was devastating for Qatar during the initial days; however, the Gulf country endured the crisis with elan. When its economy was suffering due to the sanctions, it received economic support from Turkey. By the end of 2018, trade volume between Turkey and Qatar increased by 57 per cent as compared to 2017, and reached a level of USD 1.4 billion. Presently, more than 180 Turkish companies are operating in Qatar and the total value of projects undertaken by Turkish companies in Qatar has reached a level of USD 17.4 billion. Also, Qatar ranks first among the Gulf countries in terms of the number of projects undertaken by Turkish contractors. On the other hand, the volume of Qatari capital investments in Turkey has also been increasing steadily and Turkey has become an important destination for the tourists coming from the Gulf country.⁴⁶

Qatar has also been engaged in energy diplomacy in the region. In 2020, it had proven gas reserves of 24.7 trillion cubic meters (tcm) constituting 13.1 per cent of the global reserves and Qatar's planned USD 29 billion LNG production expansion capacity is one of the largest energy projects in the world.⁴⁷ Currently, Qatar has the third largest gas reserve in the world constituting 12.40 per cent

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of the global total and has the 609 years of gas left at the ongoing consumption levels. It is the sixth largest producer of natural gas and constitutes around 1.1 per cent of the total global consumption. The Gulf country exports 73 per cent of its natural gas production to the emerging Asian economies.⁴⁸ Qatar is making a strategic shift from the West towards the East and it is very well reflected in the energy cooperation.⁴⁹ QatarEnergy- a state owned petroleum company of Qatar, has agreed to acquire 25 per cent stakes in a massive gas project founded by French oil giant Total in Southern Iraq.⁵⁰ Qatar is moving away from the western technology providers and investors in the LNG sector and is close to finalising a deal with China National Petroleum Corp (CNPC) which will buy LNG from Qatar Energy for over nearly 30 years from Qatar's North Field expansion project. Also, in November 2022 QatarEnergy agreed to supply 4 million tonnes of LNG annually for 27 years to China's Sinopec. It is to be noted that it is the longest duration LNG supply contract ever signed by Qatar.⁵¹

During the Ukraine crisis of 2022, when Saudi Arabia and UAE sided with OPEC, US and Europe looked up to Qatar for fulfilling their energy needs. In this context, Saad Sherida Al-Kaab, Qatar's

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Minister of Energy, met with many Western leaders while Doha said that it was ready to increase gas deliveries in the short term. Even before the crisis, in the post-pandemic world, as US and European countries witnessed a surge in energy demand, gas rich Qatar was seen as a suitable partner. Pursuing gas diplomacy, the Emir of Qatar visited USA and was received by the President Joe Biden at the end of January 2022 and the energy ministers of the two countries discussed strengthening their energy relationship as soon as in early March.⁵²

SECURITY AND AID



Security is an important determinant for Qatari foreign policy.

In 1980s and 1990s, Qatar depended on France for defence acquisitions, however, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait reminded Qatar to seek a dominant external actor for its security. Post-Operation Desert Storm of 1991, it signed a defence cooperation agreement with US concerning arms sales, troop presence and the importance of interoperability and has subsequently renewed it in 2002 and 2013. Qatar hosts the al-Udeid Base with 10,000 US troops in the southwest of Doha. It is the largest US base in the region and serves as the headquarters for the US Central Command, US Air Force Central Command and the Forward Command Center for US Special Operations. Currently Qatar is the sixth largest arms importer constituting 4.6 per cent of the global share.⁵³ Its defence market budget is worth USD 13.4 billion in 2023 and is expected to increase at a compounded annual growth rate of more than 5 per cent during 2024-2028.⁵⁴



US is Qatar's primary partner for major defence acquisitions. It has approved FMS sale of 24 AH-64E Apache Attack helicopters and related equipment for an estimated USD 3 billion in 2019. It has also approved sale of advanced anti drone systems in a deal worth USD 1 billion.⁵⁵ Also, Qatar relies heavily on the US defence contractors for maintenance, upkeep, and training for all the military equipment it has purchased. Other than US, Qatar currently has security relations with France and Britain. In 2018 the French-Qatar military relationship was worth USD 2.7 billion. Similarly, UK and Qatar have signed a multi-billion-pound contract for Eurofighter Typhoon Fighter Jets and Hawk T2 Aircrafts. Qatar has also been in talks with Russia to buy the Russian missile defence system (\$400) even though no agreement has been formalised yet.⁵⁶

Secondly, security has emerged as an important factor in the decision making for Qatar. While hosting the world cup in 2022, in order to ensure security Qatar signed a number of security cooperation deals with several countries. In order to test the readiness and responsiveness of the emergency services, Qatar security forces and counterparts from 13 countries carried out a five-day security exercise. Turkey National Police Force stated that 2,242 personnel consisting of twenty commissioners in advisor roles, 2,000 riot police, 70 bomb specialists, and medical staff with expertise in sports safety ensured security in the stadiums and the festival areas.⁵⁷ Turkish interior minister Suleyman Soylu said that Turkey has also trained 677 Qatari security personnel in 38 different professional areas. Despite not participating in the world cup, Pakistan sent 4500 soldiers to Qatar. Similarly, France deployed 220 security personnel to the Gulf state for the tournament and

The Gulf country is engaged in aid diplomacy for a long time and has been major support for countries in the region and beyond.

Morocco sent a team of cybersecurity to help ensure security at the Lusail stadium. UK Ministry of Defence assisted Qatar with military capabilities to counter terrorism and other related threats. Lastly Jordanian soldiers also played an important role in the success of World Cup hosted by Qatar.⁵⁸

Nature of diplomacy is evolving in various dimensions. While being recipient of security assistance strengthens Qatar's approach to these countries, likewise emerging as major aid provider generates a soft power image for Qatar. The Gulf country is engaged in aid diplomacy for a long time and has been major support for countries in the region and beyond. During the COVID-19 crisis, like many other countries Qatar provided aid worth USD 89 million to more than 78 countries, World health Organisation, Global Alliance for Vaccine and Immunisation (GAVI), United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). International Cooperation Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Qatar's report of August 2020⁵⁹ states that Qatar provided government aid worth more than USD 50 million to 32 countries with aim to combat ill effects of pandemic. It also provided USD 150 million financial support to the Gaza Strip in health sector. Similarly, the non-government sector of Qatar including charitable associations, organisations and the private sector provided medical relief and financial assistance worth USD 39 million to 66 countries around the world.



Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Qatar's aid recipients were mainly Arab countries. Qatar provided aid to the children affected by the crisis in Syria and was appreciated by the UNICEF.⁶⁰ It also provided USD 0.55 million aid to Syria along with installing and equipping 1,150 shelter tents.⁶¹ Similarly Qatar donated USD 5 million to re-build Gaza in 2014.⁶² Going back, Qatar contributed USD 3 million in funding to the restoration of Lebanon after the 2006 Lebanon war. After the overthrow of Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak in 2011, Qatar provided loans worth USD 4 billion and aid worth USD 1 billion to help Egypt manage its political instability.⁶³ Qatar has donated USD 500 million in humanitarian aid to Yemeni provinces in order to help people displaced by the Houthi rebellion.⁶⁴ Even outside the region, Qatar has generously provided aid and assistance. It provided USD 100 million aid to US after the Hurricane Katrina in 2007,⁶⁵ donated to Japan after the 2011 earthquake,⁶⁶ provided logistical support to Nepal after the 2015 earthquake,⁶⁷ and sent relief to Philippines after 2013 Typhoon Haiyan.⁶⁸

REGIONAL ENVIRONMENT



Regional environment impacts a country's external behaviour and over a period of time it becomes part of the foreign policy. According to Matthew Gray,⁶⁹ Qatar is an activist microstate and pursues strong foreign policy goals because of the complex international relations of its neighbourhood. Qatar relies on few states for its survival while it needs strong links with many other states in order to sustain its economic bases and continue its long-time robustness. GCC is important for Qatar, however Gray underlines that it is important only to an extent that this

Qatar has shaped a foreign policy that is
balanced, bold and outward looking.

contributes to a basic level of security and offers trade investment and other opportunities. Second factor that defines its level of interaction with the region is its quest to shift away from Saudi Arabia's influence and instead assert its own foreign policy. Thirdly, Qatar looks at wider engagement with the region as it has and wants to pursue trade and investment relationships beyond GCC. Keeping this in mind, Qatar has shaped a foreign policy that is balanced, bold and outward looking.

Qatar has had fluctuating ties with the Arab countries in contrast to its steady relations with Iran. Until the Islamic revolution, it had tepid relations with other Gulf Arab countries including Bahrain, UAE and Saudi Arabia with whom it had territorial disputes. Since the GCC was formed in an attempt to bolster intra-regional security and Saudi desire to offset the power of Iran and Iraq, Qatar did not have an organic connect with the GCC. It was part of the GCC for the sake of security but was also keen on maintaining a certain level of engagement with Iran. Doha improved ties with the GCC for wider economic interests and strategy and it is very much evident from the closer economic integration efforts of the Council when Qatar was the Secretary General during 2002-2010.

Iran-Iraq war had a significant impact on Qatar; the Gulf country realised that the GCC could not ensure security without strong US support. Accordingly, Doha signed a military alliance with US in 1991 and twelve years later it permitted US to transfer base at



Arab spring reflected an important aspect of Qatari foreign policy; it brought out Qatar's willingness to engage militarily despite being a small country.

Al Udeid. The Saudi-Iran rivalry in the region led Qatar to adopt a balanced approach; in 2006 Qatar was the only UN Security Council member that did not vote in favour of calling on Iran to halt its uranium enrichment program. Instead, in February 2010, Doha and Tehran signed a defence and security cooperation agreement including the exchange of technical experts and a widening of cooperation in training and campaigns against terrorism.⁷⁰

Also, Arab spring reflected an important aspect of Qatari foreign policy; it brought out Qatar's willingness to engage militarily despite being a small country. It took a direct military role in Libya in 2011 and was a vocal supporter of the opposition in Syria. Arab spring emphasised on the proactive role of Qatar in the region and its capability to influence the events in its neighbourhood. Scholars have analysed Qatar's position from various vantage points; some say it was an opportunity for Qatar to reiterate to the regional and international audience about its willingness to contribute to regional initiatives. Secondly, Qatar looked at it as a pre-emptive measure so as not to be criticised for its limited political liberalisation and lastly it was an act of branding itself as a model of soft authoritarianism with an openness to globalisation and economic reforms.

Most importantly, Qatar came closer to Iran and Turkey during its isolation by Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain and Egypt. Its resolve

West Asia is a dynamic region with a history of attracting a number of international actors. The complex interplay of actors and related events has played a vital role in shaping the foreign policy of the regional countries.

of having a balanced relations with the regional actors was strengthened when the quartet of Arab countries isolated it while non-Arab countries provided it the much-needed support. The activist and balanced foreign policy of Qatar is an outcome of the events taking place in the region.

INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT



West Asia is a dynamic region with a history of attracting a number of international actors. The complex interplay of actors and related events has played a vital role in shaping the foreign policy of the regional countries. As mentioned in the previous section, Qatar realised the significance of the role of external actors in the region and developed proximity with the US. The closeness to US provides a security guarantee while addressing the defence limitation derived from small size and secures a greater independence within Gulf. Qatar supported Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war and was much appreciated by the US. Qatar was the only Gulf country visited by the US President George W. Bush in June 2003. With economic success and democratising profile, Qatar was emerging as the type of reformist state that Bush was seeking to encourage in the region.⁷¹



During the oil boom of 2004-2008, Qatar developed and expanded its sovereign wealth investments abroad and a major part went to the US. Qatar-US relations have continued at the same pace; however, Doha was conscious of being branded as a US puppet. Al-Jazeera America was shut down for hefty dose of Arab nationalism and a strong bias for the Muslim Brotherhood; it was even called as media affiliate of Al Qaeda.⁷² US was also wary of Qatar's support to other Islamist groups like Palestinian Hamas and Iraqi Shia leader Muqtada Al-Sadr. However, the bilateral ties continue to grow stronger despite the lows witnessed during the Qatar crisis. US President Donald Trump took the credit for engineering the Qatar crisis in a series of tweets and stated that there can no longer be funding of radical ideology.⁷³ The Pentagon, the US Department of State and the US Ambassador to Qatar took a neutral stand. Since then, the US has made efforts for damage control; the US designated Qatar as a major non-NATO ally in 2022. The move upgrades the partnership between Doha and Washington and gives the Gulf country special economic and military privileges in its relationship with the US. Qatar is now the third country in the Gulf region after Kuwait and Bahrain to become a major non-NATO ally.⁷⁴

Changing dynamics of global actors in the region has led Qatar to look at Russia in a different light. Qatar is neither drifting away from the US nor is moving closer to Russia, however, it is trying to

Qatar is neither drifting away from the US nor is moving closer to Russia, however, it is trying to take a balanced approach in the foreign policy.

take a balanced approach in the foreign policy. From 2004 to 2007, relations between Russia and Qatar went from extremely poor to remarkably cooperative. Moscow recognised that Russia could benefit from cooperating with Qatar in the oil and gas spheres.⁷⁵ Moscow also hoped to sell arms to Qatar as well as to boost trade and investment ties with the country. There was even talk of Russia and Qatar working together to create a 'gas OPEC'.⁷⁶

During the Arab Spring, Qatar was supporting the opposition while Russia was backing the Assad government in Syria, however Doha made a shift in its policy in 2015 and adopted a neutral approach towards the Assad government. Qatar decided to support Russia in a quest to bring Russia closer to the GCC and also because it did not want to deal with Tehran in the neighbourhood. Qatar decided to use finances as a leverage in an attempt to impact Russian foreign policy in the region.⁷⁷ In 2017, Qatar took the risk of investing in Russia and the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) became a shareholder in Rosneft following the Russian state-controlled oil giant's privatisation in late 2016, and now holds a 19 per cent stake.⁷⁸

During the Ukraine crisis, Qatar was upfront in condemning Russia's activities in Ukraine. It co-sponsored the UNGA resolution demanding Russia to withdraw its military from Ukraine.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, when Biden administration approached Qatar to supply gas to Europe, Qatar mentioned that it cannot cover the deficit. Qatar is the EU's second-largest supplier, after the US and ahead of Russia.⁸⁰ Although there is no hostility between Russia and Qatar, they have been opposing stakeholders in various conflicts plaguing the region. Despite tensions between Doha and Moscow,



Currently, the major focus of Qatar is on developing economic ties with China. Qatar has signed a landmark gas deal with Qatar in January 2023 for 27 years despite Europe seeking to reduce dependence on Russian gas by buying LNG from Qatar in the wake of Ukraine crisis

they have found ways to pragmatically cooperate, particularly in the spheres of sports, tourism, infrastructure, and investment.⁸¹ The Emir of Qatar thanked Vladimir Putin for his great support with the 2022 FIFA World Cup.⁸² For Russia, ties with Qatar have strategic significance in the region.⁸³

Similarly, when China is making its inroads in the region, Doha is looking at advancing its ties with Beijing. Qatar-China relations are now at a high as the two countries cooperate strategically in the domain of energy and political coordination in the Darfur issue in western Sudan and the issue of Palestine. Qatar-China relations have gone through three main stages; during the first stage (1988-99) the two countries tried to figure out cooperation potential and opportunities in different sectors, especially energy and petrochemicals and specialised delegations in energy and trade visited each country. During the second stage, the two countries emphasised on focus on Asia and signed many agreements covering economic, political, cultural and other kinds of cooperation. The third stage, began in November, 2014, when His Highness Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani visited China and the bilateral relations entered a new era embarking on strategic partnership.

Currently, the major focus of Qatar is on developing economic ties with China. Qatar has signed a landmark gas deal with Qatar in January 2023 for 27 years despite Europe seeking to reduce dependence on Russian gas by buying LNG from Qatar in the wake of Ukraine crisis.⁸⁴ China constructed the Lusail stadium for the Qatar world Cup 2022.⁸⁵ Zhu Rui, Assistant Minister of the International Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China pointed out that Qatar had faced some unfair attack by the Western media but China has always maintained its steadfast support for Qatar.⁸⁶ China is willing to strengthen strategic cooperation with Qatar, jointly safeguard multilateralism, oppose unilateralism, and promote the building of a new type of international relations and a community with a shared future for the humankind .⁸⁷ Qatar is an eager participant in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) . Rich in vast hydrocarbon resources, Qatar is China's number one foreign source of natural gas, enjoying a 20 per cent share in that particular Chinese market.⁸⁸ In December 2022, the Qatari Emir met Chinese President Xi Jinping in Riyadh and the latter expressed his support to Qatar in advancing its National Vision 2030, and expand cooperation with Qatar in natural gas and other traditional energy sectors as well as photovoltaic, wind and other renewable energy sectors, and upgrade bilateral cooperation in the fields of finance and investment.⁸⁹





SECTION II

Evolution of the Qatar's Foreign Policy

POST-INDEPENDENCE QATAR



The foreign policy of Qatar evolved in various phases. Cut-off from the Arabian Peninsula, Qatar did not have a significant foreign policy during the first two decades after becoming independent in 1971. Firstly, sandwiched between rising Bahrain and Kuwait, it was still pre-occupied with the domestic concerns and securing its territories. Major concerns of the leader Sheikh Khalifa Bin Hamad Al Thani was the reorganisation of the government, amendment of the Interim Basic Law, sign agreements for extraction of oil and setting up educational institutions.⁹⁰ David B. Roberts opines that remaining unknown and under the radar characterises the initial phase of Qatar's foreign policy.

Secondly, the focus of the state was on subsistence, basic development, and securing regime and state security through alliance-forming. Prior to achieving independence, Qatar had swapped alliances with local powers like the al-Khalifah, the Wahhabis and the Sultan of Muscat. In terms of alliances with global actors, Qatar shifted alliances with the Ottomans and the British. Therefore, an important aspect of Qatar's foreign policy during the decades after independence was to form alliances for ensuring security. After independence, Qatar maintained its sovereign policy through signing treaty of friendship with Britain, joining the League of Arab States, and accession to the United Nations in 1971. Qatar established diplomatic relations with a number of foreign countries and sent ambassadors to partner countries.



Qatar's foreign policy was generally in agreement with the Saudi government's foreign policy until the mid-1990's.

Also, Qatar focused on the pan-Arabism during the first decade after independence; the Amended Interim Basic Law identified Qatar as part of the Arab nation.⁹¹ Qatar's foreign policy was generally in agreement with the Saudi government's foreign policy until the mid-1990's. Under the leadership of Sheikh Khalifa, Qatar became one of the most influential countries economically, joined OPEC, began exporting oil and gas to countries within the region and outside and formed GCC with the five Gulf countries. In terms of external behaviour, Qatar adopted an inoffensive and muted posture.

DEFINING QATAR'S FOREIGN POLICY IN THE 1980s



The next decade of the 1980s witnessed Qatar defining its foreign policy under the leadership of Khalifah bin Hamad's son and Crown Prince, Hamad bin Khalifah al-Thani. He focused on diversifying Qatar's international relations, creating an image of Qatar as an impartial and neutral mediator, and branding Qatar as the most dynamic and forward-thinking country in the GCC. Hamad bin Khalifa realised the significance of diversifying the Qatar's dependence on external actors by reducing its proximity with Saudi Arabia. The Iraqi occupation of Kuwait nailed the fact that support of outside regional actors is important to ensure security and Qatar found US as a dependable ally. David B. Roberts stresses that Qatar's reluctance in following Saudi Arabia as a dominant partner is evident from the fact that unlike Riyadh, Doha

Showcasing Qatar as an impartial and neutral mediator, Hamad bin Khalifa adopted a mature approach to engage diverse actors, including Sunni (Hamas), Shia (Hezbollah), Zaydi (Houthis), or Jewish (the Israeli government)

expanded education on American model, and gave prominence to a female leader and second wife of the Crown Prince Sheikha Moza bint Nasser al-Misnad. Showcasing Qatar as an impartial and neutral mediator, Hamad bin Khalifa adopted a mature approach to engage diverse actors, including Sunni (Hamas), Shia (Hezbollah), Zaydi (Houthis), or Jewish (the Israeli government).⁹²

TWO DECADES OF AN EMERGING QATAR



Continuing to sharpen the external behaviour of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa who became the Emir in 1995, introduced changes in the domestic as well as foreign policy of the Gulf state. Qatar focused on the expansion of production and export of the natural gas, ensuring security by providing air base to the US military and propagating its soft power through investments in media and sports. The venturing out in the extraction of Liquefied Natural Gas provided Qatar with immense wealth and status within as well as outside the region. It became an important

Qatar focused on the expansion of production and export of the natural gas, ensuring security by providing air base to the US military and propagating its soft power through investments in media and sports.



country for its import partners. Similarly, the emergence of Qatar as a gas giant brought forth the issues of security and territorial integrity, and Qatar found US as a reliable partner. Qatar was inclined to forge stronger ties with US keeping Iran's intentions of exploiting South Pars fields in mind. When Saudi Arabia asked US to remove its base from the Saudi territory, 100 US fighter planes, and the regional command centre of the US Air Force (US Central Command's Combined Air Operations Center) moved to Al-Udeid in Qatar.⁹³

Secondly, Qatar focused on the propagation of soft power through carrot diplomacy, public diplomacy and hybrid diplomacy pursued with the help of media, culture, tourism and sports while engaging in a number of mediation efforts. In this regard, foundation of Arabic-language TV station Al Jazeera in 1996 is an important development. Its 24-hour news program that could be received via satellite throughout the Arab world brought a revolution in the Arab media landscape. In the international arena it raised Qatar's image for being independent and progressive whereas it faced backlash within the region for providing platform to opposition figures and critical intellectuals. Its motto of "the opinion and the other opinion" (al-Ra'i wa-l-ra'i al-akhar) became popular throughout the region. Saudi Arabia withdrew its ambassador from Doha in 2002, while the US and UK criticised Qatar for airing the views of Al-Qaeda leaders. During the Arab spring, Al Jazeera was much criticised for extending support to the opposition groups and Islamists.

FIFA World Cup 2022 symbolised the success of Qatar as a small state and it nailed down the fact that an Arab country with no history of football can host an event of this scale.

Qatar promoted the culture, tourism and sports in a quest for expanding soft power. It opened a number of art institutions and museums like Qatar Foundation, Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, the Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra, the Qatar Opera House and the new Qatar National Museum building. These institutions not only attracted tourists from within and outside the region but also gave a boost to the Qatari aviation industry. Along with this, Qatar invested in sports infrastructure and hosted major sporting events like Asian Games in Doha in 2006. Qatar also hosted the Club World Handball Championships, Handball World Cup, Diamond League of Athletics, Asian Football Championship, West Asian Football Championship, World Short Course Swimming Championships, and the World Road Cycling Championships. Hosting the FIFA World Cup in 2022, Qatar emerged as an international sports capital.

FIFA World Cup 2022 symbolised the success of Qatar as a small state and it nailed down the fact that an Arab country with no history of football can host an event of this scale. The World Cup became a regional affair with whole hearted participation from the neighbouring countries. Qatari Emir's wrapping of the Saudi flag expressing solidarity with Saudi Arabia's victory over Argentina on day three of the FIFA cup, showed that the World Cup managed to dilute the tensions that exist despite Al-Ula declaration. Qatar emerged triumphant over the accusations of human rights



violations of infrastructure labour and the rights of the LGBTQ. The sport event had presence of fans from all over the world including Morocco, Argentina, Mexico, India and Japan. It brought many firsts for the FIFA World Cup including being held in winters and being alcohol free.⁹⁴ The World Cup witnessed the participation of Israelis and Palestinians who flew together on chartered flights to attend the event. The event also became a platform for Iranian football players to register their displeasure against the government's repressive measures against the protests that erupted over the custodial death of a 22-year-old woman named Mahsa Amini detained for not wearing her hijab properly. The footballers did not sing the national anthem of Iran and were mute when the anthem was played by the FIFA while the fans booed in the auditorium.

During these two decades, Qatar focused on emerging as a mediator in the regional conflicts. From 2005 onwards, Doha mediated in the conflicts involving allies of the two regional powers Iran and Saudi Arabia, such as in Palestine (Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Hamas), Sudan (Darfur rebels and the government), in Yemen (Houthi rebels and the government) and Lebanon.⁹⁵ Qatar mediated the Lebanese reconciliation in 2008 with the Doha Agreement as well as sponsored talks between the Taliban and the US in order to find a solution to the conflict in Afghanistan. Qatar also sponsored the agreement signed between the Republic of Djibouti and the State of Eritrea in 2010. In addition, Qatar sponsored several conferences and established forums to promote the principle of dialogue and understanding between nations; some of the forums are US-Islamic World Forum; the Doha Forum on Democracy, Development and Free Trade; and the Doha Interfaith Conference.

During this period, Qatar received the non-permanent membership of the UN Security Council for two years and chaired the UNSC in October 2006. It also presided over the 66th session of the United Nations General Assembly in 2011-2012. Qatar's regional stature was rising evidently as it hosted the 24th ordinary session of the Arab League Council at the Summit Level. Also, Qatar announced the donation of 10 million US dollars as a contribution to establish a pension fund for the staff of the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States.⁹⁶





SECTION III

Changing Dynamics of the Qatar's Foreign Policy

QATAR'S FOREIGN POLICY GOALS



Article 6 and Article 7 of the Constitution of the State of Qatar mentions the main principles of the foreign policy. The focus of Qatar's foreign policy is to preserve the sovereignty and independence and defend the identity of the Arab and Islamic countries. Qatar emphasises on respecting international covenants and conventions along with the consolidation of international peace and security. It also stresses on defending public and private freedom and human rights. Article 6 states that "The state respects international treaties and conventions, and works to honour all international treaties and conventions to which it is a party" and Article 7 states that "the foreign policy of the state of Qatar is based on the principle of enhancing international peace and security through encouraging the resolution of international conflicts by peaceful means, supporting the right of the peoples to self-determination, abstaining from interference in the internal affairs of other countries, and cooperating with all nations that seek peace".⁹⁷ Qatar Government Communications Office states that the priorities of Qatari foreign policy as mediating disputes between conflicting parties to achieve peaceful resolutions; promotion of

Qatar emphasises on respecting international covenants and conventions; along with the consolidation of international peace and security. It also stresses on defending public and private freedoms and human rights.



sustainable development; alleviation of discrimination against women and religious minorities; bolstering humanitarian assistance in regions of conflict and war; and strengthening efforts to reduce anticipated humanitarian needs in complex emergencies.⁹⁸

Qatar's foreign policy is dynamic and a number of scholars have analysed the external behaviour of the Gulf country as a small state and have pointed out various trends of Qatar's projections and conduct. One trend that is worth mentioning is the ability to change positions as and when it suits Qatar and it brings out the realist strains of the Qatari foreign policy. For instance, during the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-88, Qatar provided economic support to Iraq however it quickly joined the anti-Iraq coalition after the Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, that was alarming for the smaller states of the region. Also, before the invasion, Qatar provided political and economic support to the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), however it bitterly condemned the alliance between the PLO and many Palestinians on the one hand and Saddam Hussein on the other. More importantly, Qatar that had opposed the naval presence of superpowers in the Gulf, openly permitted the air forces of the US, Canada, and France to operate from its territory.⁹⁹

Qatar's foreign policy goals also reflect its concerns pertaining to regime security. Bernd Kaussler says that Qatar's activism vis-a-vis its military intervention in Libya were meant to provide political support and legitimacy to Europe and the US in return for guarantees around security, as well as political and economic benefit.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, Qatar's closeness to US and hosting its

Doha's overtures to come out of the passive Saudi dominance and maintaining warm ties with Iran is also rooted in the quest to keep its territory secure from regional actors.

military base is to ensure security for Qatar keeping in mind the Iraq's occupation of Kuwait under Saddam Hussein. In addition, Doha's overtures to come out of the passive Saudi dominance and maintaining warm ties with Iran is also rooted in the quest to keep its territory secure from the regional actors. Similarly, resolving the Lebanese conflict in 2008 increased regional stability and paid dividends for Qatar's own security and global standing.

FROM MEDIATION TO ACTIVISM



The two decades of Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani rule, put Qatar on the global map forcing a number of scholars to take notice and evaluate the external behaviour of Qatar. Emir Hamad forged a perception of neutral mediator for Qatar, however Doha's response to the Arab Spring changed this image. Qatar favoured the opposition groups in the affected countries saying it was adhering to Article 7 supporting the right of the people to self-determination. Qatar's image transformed from that of a mediator to an active player as it supported the protests in Tunisia.¹⁰¹ It participated in 2011 military action under the NATO-led international coalition against Colonel Muammar Gaddafi's forces in Libya, and, also called for Arab troops to be sent to Syria to stop the bloodshed caused by the Assad government. However, as much as it projected Qatar as an active state, Doha's inconsistency



Qatar's foreign policy underwent significant transformation and there was a visible shift from being a soft, subtle or smart power to assertion of presence as well as preferences.

in response to the protest in the Gulf countries vis-a-vis those situated outside came to the fore.¹⁰²

As Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani became the Emir in 2013, Qatar's foreign policy underwent significant transformation and there was a visible shift from being a soft, subtle or smart power to assertion of presence as well as preferences. Mehran Kamrava,¹⁰³ said that till 2013, Qatar was a subtle power that aimed to redraw the geostrategic map of the region owing to lack of a dominant regional power with Iraq being isolated and marginalised, Iran being engaged with non-state actors, and Egypt, Saudi Arabia, UAE burdened by old leaderships. It focused on achieving physical and military protection to gain safety and security; and proactively engaged in marketing and branding efforts to get prestige, recognition and reputation. It engaged in diplomacy as a proactive and good global citizen and invested heavily to show influence, control and ownership. However, the Arab Spring changed it all; the regional context was changing and Qatar needed to act accordingly.

QATAR'S SUPPORT TO THE ISLAMIST GROUPS



Saudi Arabia became active in countering the revolution and ensuring stability in the region especially Gulf. Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL) emerged as an extremist group unequivocally opposed by all and younger generations came

to power in Saudi Arabia and UAE with new ideas for reform. Changed regional situation demanded distinct external behaviour and Qatar made its priorities clear; one of which was the explicit support to the Islamist groups. Qatar has been providing refuge to the supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood since 1950s in a quest to gain religious legitimacy. However, Qatar perceived Arab Spring as an opportunity to change the geostrategic landscape and emerge as a dominant actor by supporting Muslim Brotherhood and other more militant groups against the existing regimes. During an interview in Al Jazeera, Emir Hamad said that extremism was a result of the tyrannical regimes. Therefore, Qatar now took sides with the Islamist forces in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria, which seemed to emerge as winners of the upheavals in the course of 2011. According to David B. Roberts,¹⁰⁴ Qatar's support to Islamists was a rational decision on its part and it is another point that the perception about such groups changed after the Arab Spring. Doha's support to such groups neither signifies state's ideological inclination, nor reflects the stronghold of the Qatari elite; most of the Arab states have supported these groups at one time or the other.

QATAR STANDS STRONG



Qatar's extensive support to the Islamist groups acted as an irritant for countries like Egypt where Muslim Brotherhood opposed the existing rulers. Disagreements with the sensitive Gulf countries led to a diplomatic crisis in 2014 with Saudi Arabia, UAE and Bahrain withdrawing their ambassadors over interference in internal affairs, providing support against the Sisi government and



Qatar has been providing refuge to the supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood since 1950s in a quest to gain religious legitimacy.

violation of First Riyadh Agreement (2013). The disagreements eased for some time after the death of Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah in 2015 to reappear following the Saudi sentencing of Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr Baqir al-Nimr to death in 2016. The Gulf countries withdrew Gulf ambassadors from Tehran while Qatar maintained ties with Iran. Qatar's continued support to the Islamist groups and ties with Iran gave a clear signal that the Gulf country had taken an independent position and was standing by it.

In 2017, the quartet of Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain and Egypt isolated Qatar and imposed sanctions over interference in domestic politics and overt support to terrorist groups. Qatar stood its ground, survived the crisis and became instrumental in triggering new shifts in the region; Doha received support from Turkey and Iran while wading through the boycott and proving its capability of surviving even without support of the Arab countries. It also withdrew from OPEC stressing on its gas-based economy. One example where Qatar has stuck to its position is its opposition to the Bashar Al Assad's government in Syria. Now that Syria is being accepted in the region, and has re-joined the Arab League, Qatar did not join the consensus.¹⁰⁵ Similarly, when the Arab world is being more accepting towards Israel, as evident from the signing of Abraham Accords in 2020, Qatar's Foreign Minister ruled out accords as key to the peace in the region.¹⁰⁶

The Al-Ula conference of 2021, ended the blockade of Qatar enabling it to emerge as an independent actor that is capable of balancing Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey at the same time.

The Al-Ula conference of 2021, ended the blockade of Qatar enabling it to emerge as an independent actor that is capable of balancing Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey at the same time. Qatar that is used to having ties with Saudi Arabia on the one hand and Iran on the other has also got Turkey on its side. Ankara is engaging with the region in hope to revive its ailing economy. Qatar is acting as an influential actor, and a neutral mediator while expanding sports and tourism diplomacy in the region. It has emerged as an education hub hosting a number of educational institute and universities and is spending big on image building. Qatar offered the USD 500 million for the reconstruction of facilities in the Gaza Strip, administered by the Hamas group.¹⁰⁷ It also acted as an effective mediator when Taliban came to power in August 2021 and enabled the largest evacuation of civilian personnel. Qatar is also looking forward to be part of the multilateral forums; it is to gain the status of dialogue partner at Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.

QATAR'S GEO-POLITICAL MANEUVERINGS



Qatar is the most peaceful country in the Middle East as per the Global Peace Index 2023.¹⁰⁸ Its diplomatic engagements in the neighbourhood and beyond is growing and the Gulf country has become adept in balancing various actors while propagating its soft power.



The Al-Ula declaration ended the isolation of Qatar as the quartet of Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain and Egypt agreed to restore full ties with the Gulf country in 2021. Along with nudging Qatar to be self-sufficient and resilient, the crisis led Qatar to enhance its proximity to Iran and Turkey that supported the gas rich nation thrive under the sanctions. Currently, Qatar is engaged in enhancing ties with these countries specially Turkey; Qatar has sent around four thousand world cup huts to the quake hit Syria and Turkey.¹⁰⁹ It has also purchased shares in the Eurasia tunnel¹¹⁰ and is to provide USD 10 billion funding to Ankara.¹¹¹ As part of the military accord, Qatar is sending 36 Qatari fighters and 250 military professionals to Turkey for training¹¹² while the latter sent riot police, bomb specialists and medical staff to Doha for the FIFA World Cup 2022.¹¹³ The investment projects in northern Syria have brought Qatar and Turkey closer.

Similarly, Qatar is improving ties with Iran that provided food shipments to Doha while allowing its airspace for Qatar airways during the crisis. The Saudi-Iran deal mediated by China has also changed the existing dynamics and gave a boost to its ties with Iran. During the Iranian Foreign Minister's recent visit to Doha, the Qatari Emir accorded special place to Iran and said that Doha has no limits in expanding ties with Tehran.¹¹⁴ Within the GCC, Qatar is engaged in improving its ties with UAE and Bahrain. Qatar and UAE have re-opened embassies while Qatar and Bahrain have resumed direct flights after six years. Despite the Al Ula declaration, Qatar-

Qatar is improving ties with Iran that provided food shipments to Doha while allowing its airspace for Qatar airways during the crisis.

Saudi ties have not blossomed, even though the warmth between the two countries was evident when Qatari Emir wrapped the Saudi flag expressing solidarity with Saudi Arabia's victory over Argentina on day three of the FIFA cup.

Qatar is also actively engaged in Iraq, Yemen and Syria through aid and mediation. Qatar is interested in the investment opportunities in these countries. Three Qatari companies and Iraq's National Investment Commission are developing USD 9.5 billion projects in Iraq, including the construction of two power plants.¹¹⁵ Qatar has also announced the creation of 45,000 job opportunities for Yemenis by financing small projects. Doha has also contributed to repairing and maintenance of the Aden power station, with USD 14 million funded by the Qatar Fund for Development.¹¹⁶ Interestingly, in Syria, Qatar is willing to invest in reconstruction activities and humanitarian aid despite not supporting Syria's return to the Arab League. As per the Qatar Chambers of Commerce and Industry, fifty Syrian companies had expressed interests in cooperating with Qatari partners in 2017.¹¹⁷

Going beyond the Arab World, Qatar is expanding its ties with the Central and South Asian economies. Qatari Emir's June 2023 visit to Uzbekistan, Kyrgyz Republic, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan symbolises the significance of these countries for Qatar.¹¹⁸ Qatar intends to increase investments in the region and has signed a number of agreements with these Central Asian countries. Qatar's mediation

Going beyond the Arab World, Qatar is expanding its ties with the Central and South Asian economies.



role in Afghanistan has created a goodwill for the Gulf country and in May 2023, the Taliban supreme leader urged the Qatari Prime Minister to invest in Afghanistan as it is under heavy sanctions imposed by the US post-Taliban takeover of Kabul.¹¹⁹ Likewise, Qatar is looking towards South Asian economic giants like India and China. In June 2022, India and Qatar launched a Start Up Bridge between Invest India and Invest Qatar to push start up sectors while India has assured to support the food security of Qatar.

Qatar intends to harness the energy market in China and to that end it has signed two long term energy agreements with China recently. China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) and QatarEnergy signed a 27-year agreement, under which China will purchase 4 million metric tons of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) a year from Qatar.¹²⁰ Also, in November 2022, Sinopec signed a deal with QatarEnergy that agreed to supply 4 million tonnes of LNG annually for 27 years.¹²¹ Qatar-China ties are at a peak and the two countries have strategic cooperation on energy and political coordination in regional conflicts including the Darfur problem in western Sudan and the Palestine Issue.¹²² However growing Qatar-China ties are not a reflection of waning Qatar-US ties.¹²³ In 2019, Qatar had refused to certify China's human rights record on Uyghurs and other Muslims in the Xinjiang province. Qatar's engagement with China is on economic aspects whereas ties with US go beyond; Qatar depends on US for security needs and hosts the largest US military airbase. Nevertheless, Qatar is trying to engage positively with Russia; Qatar Prime Minister called upon the Russian President Putin during the Wagner mutiny and urged to resolve differences through dialogue and diplomacy.¹²⁴

Qatar is also engaging actively with the African countries in terms of mediation in the conflicts and providing humanitarian aid.

Lastly, Qatar is also engaging actively with the African countries in terms of mediation in the conflicts and providing humanitarian aid. It provided relief to the conflict-ridden Sudan by supplying 40 tons of food items. It also airlifted evacuees as fighting continued between the military led by Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, and a rival paramilitary group called the Rapid Support Forces, command led by Gen. Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo.¹²⁵ Qatar is also interested in cooperation and collaborations on hydrocarbon explorations in Africa. Earlier this year, QatarEnergy announced a light oil discovery in the Jonker-1X deep-water exploration well drilled in the PEL-39 exploration license, offshore Namibia. Last year it had announced two similar discoveries in the Graff-1 well and in the Venus-1X prospect, both located in the Orange Basin offshore Namibia.¹²⁶ In a nutshell, Qatar's geopolitical manoeuvres and economic heft have raised its status to that of a small state with a giant impact. Also, Qatar follows pragmatic realism and is a great balancer in the current times. It is surviving in a polarised world that is moving from being unipolar and bipolar to embracing multipolarity. It is also successfully balancing the Global West and the Global South at the same time.

In a nutshell, Qatar's geopolitical manoeuvres and economic heft have raised its status to that of a small state with a giant impact.





CONCLUSION

Policy Recommendations for India



With India and Qatar celebrating 50 years of diplomatic partnership, it becomes important to explore the potential domains of cooperation. India and Qatar have ties rooted in energy security, trade and investment and expatriate population. Qatar is an important supplier of LNG for India; New Delhi imported about 10 million tonnes of LNG in 2020 from Doha accounting for a share of 15 per cent of Qatar's total LNG exports. Qatar's share in India's total LNG has shown a downward trend since 2014-15 from 82 per cent to 36 per cent in 2020-21. However, India was the second largest Asian buyer of Qatar's LNG after South Korea in early 2023.¹²⁷ Despite the energy transition and the focus shifting to renewables, being a transition fuel, LNG will remain important for India's energy security. Consequently, India should focus on skill training for the human resource to be employed in energy sector, and form joint collaborations on research and developments. India can also promote joint ventures in petrochemical complexes and cooperation in joint exploration in India under the new 'Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing' Policy and 'Discovered Small Fields' Policy. India can also encourage Qatar to invest in the downstream sector of post-production and sale. India's Petronet is

Despite the energy transition and the focus shifting to renewables, being a transition fuel, LNG will remain important for India's energy security.



in talks for extending the LNG procurement under the long-term Qatar deal. Opportunities can also be explored in collaboration on green hydrogen.

Secondly, in course of pursuing tourism and sports diplomacy, Qatar is focusing on building infrastructures and it is the right time for Indian companies to invest in this sector. Indian companies are participating in mega projects like Doha metro, Al Wakra highway and sports stadiums. Similarly, Qatar is investing in Indian start-ups; Qatar Investment Authority has invested in a Bangalore-based unicorn company VerSe Innovation. It has also invested USD 800 million in food delivery company Swiggy and USD 175 million in Rebel Foods Pvt Ltd. While India is promoting the ease of business for companies, education sector is another area of interest. Qatar is emerging as an education hub and it is an opportune time for Indian universities to open branches in the Gulf country. For example, Milestone Indian Education affiliated with Savitribai Phule Pune University is the first Indian university to open in Qatar.

Defence and security are other potential areas of cooperation between India and Qatar. India and Qatar signed an agreement on defence cooperation in 2008, which provided the necessary framework to strengthen bilateral defence ties. In 2016, Prime Minister Modi and the Qatari Emir agreed to provide further impetus to these relations through joint exercises and enhanced training of naval, air and land forces. Qatar expressed interest in the opportunities offered under the “Make in India” initiative for the joint production of defence equipment in India while emphasising

This is an opportune time for India and Qatar to strengthen the existing bilateral defence partnership and enhance the engagement of private-sector investors.

cooperation in coastal defence. Approximately 1.5 per cent of Qatar's GDP expenditure is spent on the military, the 2021 figures being an estimated USD 11.6 billion - making it the 5th largest spender in the Middle East.¹²⁸ Equally, India's defence sector has taken major strides in the last eight years and aims to be among the largest defence manufacturing countries and achieve defence export worth USD 5 billion by 2024-25. This is an opportune time for India and Qatar to strengthen the existing bilateral defence partnership and enhance the engagement of private-sector investors. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, the Indian government announced private sector-friendly provisions, including funding of up to 70 per cent of defence equipment development costs, relaxation of eligibility criteria and minimal documentation in 2016. India and Qatar can enhance defence ties through inter-governmental agreements to boost Qatari investment in India's defence sector.¹²⁹

Counter-terrorism is another area in which the two countries can foster partnership. In 2015, India and Qatar agreed to strengthen their cooperation in combating terrorism at both the bilateral level and within the multilateral system of the UN. They stressed the need for closer cooperation in the area of security and counter-terrorism through regular dialogue, sharing of information, intelligence and assessments and training of personnel.¹³⁰ A year later, a bilateral Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed to



facilitate the exchange of intelligence related to money laundering, terrorism financing and related crimes.¹³¹ Prime Minister Modi and the Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani reiterated their firm resolve to cooperate to mitigate the global menace of terrorism, highlighting the need to isolate sponsors and supporters of terrorism. Most importantly, the two sides noted that global terrorism should be addressed with a comprehensive approach of countering violent extremism, combating radicalisation and recruitment, disrupting terrorist movements, stopping all sources of terrorism finance, stopping the flow of foreign terrorist fighters, dismantling terrorist infrastructure, and countering terrorist propaganda through the internet.¹³²

Lastly, India should promote cultural exchanges and people-to-people ties with Qatar. Such ties inculcate positive perceptions and lead to strengthening of bilateral ties. India has close to 700,000 expatriates living in Qatar and their well-being is of utmost importance. There were cases of human rights violations of Indians in Qatar and Indian embassy in Doha received 2,068 complaints by Indian workers from July 2019 till April 2020.¹³³ Qatar reaffirmed its commitment to the protection and promotion of rights of the Indian workforce in the country at the 7th Joint Working Group meeting between India and Qatar on labour and manpower

Qatar Vision 2030 mentions that the size and the quality of the expatriate labour force and the selected path of development is one of the defining characteristics of Qatar's future.

development in May 2022. India also appreciates the labour law reforms brought by Qatar in recent years. Qatar Vision 2030 mentions that the size and the quality of the expatriate labour force and the selected path of development is one of the defining characteristics of Qatar's future. It also emphasises on the recruitment of the right mix of expatriate labour, protecting their rights, securing their safety, and retaining those who are outstanding among them. Qatar's foreign policy is changing with Doha being more assertive, firm and independent and India needs to keep this in mind while engaging with this gas giant in the extended neighbourhood. To conclude, India and Qatar can have collaborations at the level of think tanks and the Indian Council of World Affairs can have collaborations with think tanks in Qatar including Qatar Policy Institute, Al Jazeera Center for Studies and Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies and Qatar Foundation.



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