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MAPPING GCC FOREIGN POLICY RESOURCES, RECIPIENTS AND REGIONAL EFFECTS



Collected Papers | Volume 3 | October 2015

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Mapping GCC Foreign Policy: Resources, Recipients and Regional Effects

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Forward

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Karen Young is Senior Resident Fellow at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington. She is also Visiting Fellow at the LSE Middle East Centre, where she acts as Project Consultant on a collaborative research project between LSE, Qatar University and the American University of Sharjah, analysing the foreign policies of GCC states.

As part of our Emirates Academic Collaboration with Arab Universities grant, we met in January 2015 in Doha for our second workshop on 'Mapping GCC Foreign Policy: Resources, Recipients and Regional Effects', to analyse the increasingly interventionist Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states' foreign policy. Our debate was lively and sustained by leading political scientists of the Arab Gulf states. The following are three papers presented at the workshop; the first addresses the impact of the Syrian war on Turkey's Kurdish conflict, while the other two tackle Qatar's foreign policy.

Some of the workshop participants were skeptical of a paper focusing on the domestic politics, particularly Kurdish politics, of Turkey. For many analysts of the Arab Gulf states, politics of the Gulf stop at the water's edge. However, what others have tried to stress is the increasing widening sphere of influence of GCC states' policies and interests in the Middle East and North Africa. What we are also witnessing is the spread of violence and conflict, certainly not always originating in the GCC, but with implications for GCC states and the larger citizen and resident populations they host. Turkey's long-standing conflict with its Kurdish population hence represents a Gulf state's primary fear, a well-organised (and armed) minority group with a political agenda and organising force outside of state borders. The future of the Kurdish movement, as a political and military force, will impact the ability of the Arab Gulf states to intervene in their widening sphere of influence. Evren Balta's work represents the best of comparative case analysis focused on understanding the domestic context of the politics of minority populations and separatist movements that spread over existing state boundaries. In a MENA region with competing centers of power and influence, these domestic spillovers will allow us to anticipate regional changes and alliances.

The foreign policy of Qatar has been a moving target over the last decade, though few analysts have been able to attribute exactly how domestic and international factors have had a causal effect. In his paper, Jamal Abdullah focuses on the domestic politics within Qatar and its leadership transition, giving specific attention to Qatar's role as regional mediator. The paper by Evren Tok, Jason McSparren and Fatima Ramadan Sanz puts Qatari foreign investment in comparative perspective and asks what strategic goals Qatar seeks to achieve with its widening foreign economic policy. Both of these papers are seeking to unlock the so-called 'black boxes' of Arab Gulf states' foreign policies. The lead authors are based in Qatar and are well-positioned to examine the evolving foreign policy of this small, yet powerful, member of the Gulf Cooperation Council. Our ability to analyse patterns of Gulf state policy formulation and execution will help advance a framework of foreign policy analysis in the region.

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The Syrian War and Turkey's Kurdish Conflict

Evren Balta

Abstract

Turkey has played a key role in Syria's multi-sided conflict. In a conflict not of its own making, Turkey soon became a hub and transit point for refugees, insurgent fighters and foreign aid. As refugees, fighters, money and munitions moved from one side of the border to the other, the Syrian conflict became not only internationalised but also an intrinsic part of Turkey's domestic politics. In the context of the Syrian conflict, the alliance structures of Turkey have shifted, and contradictory foreign and domestic policies have emerged, puzzling many observers on the country's position. This paper argues that Turkey's policy in Syria cannot be understood without thoroughly analysing the linkages between domestic conflicts, transnational ties and regional ambitions. Although Turkey has shown many elements of sectarian interventionism in the context of Syria, it was not 'sectarianism' *per se* but mainly these linkages that shaped its policy towards Syria. By focusing on Turkey's Kurds in the context of the Syrian conflict, this paper analyses how domestic politics were shaped and reshaped by larger regional and international opportunity structures.

About the Author

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Introduction

Since the Syrian crisis began in 2011, it has been estimated that Turkey has hosted over one and a half million Syrian refugees, most of whom have fled conflict in the Syrian provinces bordering the country.¹ As the plight of the refugees continues to worsen, Turkey's refugee policy has become a major source of domestic tension.² In several border provinces, Syrians have begun to outnumber the local population, escalating the local conflicts between Turkish citizens and Syrian refugees over jobs, rents and security.³ The lack of transparency and the sectarian refugee admission policy have become issues of domestic tension and criticism.⁴

If the influx of Syrian refugees is one area in which the Syrian conflict has influenced Turkish domestic politics, another is the issue of foreign fighters and Syrian jihadists using Turkey as a transit country.⁵ The government has been accused of turning a blind eye to the entry of thousands of foreigners who cross the border, and of harbouring Syrian jihadist fighters, thus promoting a sectarian agenda and potentially increasing the possibility of sectarian conflict in Turkey.⁶

Criticism of the government is also related to the influx of 'foreign aid' and its distribution.⁷ Since the start of the Syrian conflict, Turkey has been the main transit route for humanitarian aid to civilians and for military and financial aid to the Syrian opposition. It has been claimed that this 'undocumented' aid was being provided by Gulf actors, with Turkey playing the role of intermediary for the financial and military

¹ UNHCR, '2015 Country Operations Profile: Turkey'. Available at <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e48e0fa7f.html> (accessed 10 March 2015).

² Turkey passed its first asylum legislation as a response to the escalating Syrian crisis in April 2013. The law came into effect on 11 April 2014. However, non-European foreigners can still not receive 'refugee' status, because the law did not lift the geographical limitation that Turkey maintains on the 1951 Geneva refugee convention and 1967 protocol. Thus, Syrian refugees are still 'guests' who are under 'temporary protection'. Crisis Group Europe Report, 'The Rising Costs of Turkey's Syrian Quagmire N. 230', 30 April 2014. Available at [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/europe/turkey-cyprus/turkey/230-the-rising-costs-of-turkey-s-syrian-quagmire.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/europe/turkey-cyprus/turkey/230-the-rising-costs-of-turkey-s-syrian-quagmire.pdf) (accessed 15 February 2015).

³ 'The Vortex', *New Yorker*, 8 December 2014. Available at <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/12/08/vortex> (accessed 15 March 2015).

⁴ 'Syrian Conflict Brings Sectarian Tensions to Turkey's Tolerant Hatay Province', *The Guardian*, 3 September 2013. Available at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/sep/03/syria-crisis-threatens-turkish-tolerance> (accessed 5 March 2015).

⁵ 'A Path to ISIS, through a Porous Turkish Border', *New York Times*, 9 March 2015. Available at http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/10/world/europe/despite-crackdown-path-to-join-isis-often-winds-through-porous-turkish-border.html?_r=0 (accessed 15 March 2015).

⁶ 'Pressure Mounts on Turkey over Radical Groups in Syria', *Al-Monitor*, 15 October 2013. Available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/10/turkey-must-control-jihadists-entering-syria.html> (accessed 10 March 2015).

⁷ 'Turkey and Saudi Arabia Alarm the West by Backing Islamist Extremists the Americans Had Bombed in Syria', *Independent*, 12 May 2015. Available at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/syria-crisis-turkey-and-saudi-arabia-shock-western-countries-by-supporting-antiassad-jihadists-10242747.html> (accessed 15 June 2015).

interventionism of the Arab Gulf States.⁸ The government was accused of establishing sectarian links with the ‘Sunni bloc’ represented mainly by the Gulf countries.

In fact, in the context of the Syrian conflict, the concept of ‘sectarian war’ has become a very popular analytical tool. Studies utilising the concept of sectarianism, however, generally lack a solid theoretical base and are unclear about how ‘sectarianism’ relates to broader models of foreign policy making. It has been almost automatically assumed that the foreign policies of regional actors involved are shaped by ideological or political commitments which correspond to identity blocs, rather than to changing political opportunity structures and interests. The conflict in Syria is then represented as a conflict that adopts a sectarian frame – that is, Sunni Salafis on one side and Iranian-backed, ideologically influenced Shi’a Islamists on the other⁹ – with sectarianism understood as an immutable feature of the region.

In more nuanced views of the Syrian conflict as a ‘sectarian war’, sectarianism is understood as a strategic tool utilised by the elites to promote their own interests. For example, Matthiesen explains the rise of sectarianism in the Middle East ‘as a result of an amalgam of political, religious, social, and economic elites who use sectarianism to further their personal aims’.¹⁰ According to him, this constitutes a new type of sectarianism, and it works through sectarian entrepreneurs who strengthen divisions between Sunni and Shi’a strategically in order to prevent a cross-sectarian opposition front.¹¹ Wehrey has similarly discussed sectarianism as a tool utilised by governments and oppositions in order to enhance their credentials vis-à-vis their respective domestic constituencies as well as among regional and global powers.¹² According to Wehrey, sectarianism ‘arises from a combination of exclusionary policies at home and regional shocks abroad’.¹³ For Gause, sectarianism is instrumental in building alliances between regional and local actors.¹⁴ Providing clients with material support is important, but without ideological or identity links it does not suffice to sustain influence.

In the context of Turkish foreign policy in Syria, as outlined briefly above, the concept of sectarianism has been widely used, and Turkish foreign policy has simply been understood as the outcome of an ideological commitment to the ‘Sunni bloc’.¹⁵ Although Turkey has shown many elements of sectarian interventionism in the context of Syria, its policy cannot be understood simply as such a commitment. Right

⁸ ‘Tır’daki sir aydınlandı’, *Cumhuriyet*, 13 February 2015. Available at http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/213863/_TIR_daki_sir_aydinlandi.html (accessed 15 March 2015).

⁹ Aaron Zelin and Phillip Smyth, ‘The Vocabulary of Sectarianism’, *Washington Institute for Near Eastern Policy*, 29 January 2014.

¹⁰ Toby Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the Arab Spring That Wasn’t* (Palo Alto, 2013), p. ix.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Frederic Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf: From the Iraq War to the Arab Uprisings* (New York, 2014).

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

¹⁴ F. Gregory Gause III, *Beyond Sectarianism: The New Middle East Cold War*, Analysis Paper 11, Brookings Doha Center (Doha, 2014).

¹⁵ For such a perspective, see Halil Karaveli, ‘Turkey is No Partner for Peace: How Ankara’s Sectarianism Hobbles US Syria Policy’, *Foreign Affairs*, 11 September 2012.

from the beginning, Turkish foreign policy in Syria was dominated by how Turkish policy-makers perceived their strategic interests given domestic, regional and international opportunity structures. It was used to foster the strategic interests of the elites, to build alliances with powerful Gulf actors, and to sustain influence over the Syrian opposition. Domestically, the language of 'sectarianism' is a 'bellwether for the deeply entrenched problems of governance'.¹⁶

Among these strategic interests and problems of governance, the Kurdish conflict stands out. Especially since the Syrian conflict began, it has become almost impossible to differentiate Turkey's (already regional) Kurdish conflict from regional power struggles. What was previously a mainly domestic problem turned regional, and the Turkish government began to look for allies to consolidate its own political position, frequently employing sectarian language and using sectarian links to level the Kurdish opposition in both Syria and Turkey.

The Syrian Crisis, Turkey and the Kurds

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the Syrian government provided strategic support to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanî, PKK), the guerrilla organisation waging war against the Turkish military in Turkey's Kurdish regions. Syria allowed PKK training camps on its territory, let PKK forces enter Turkey, and granted refuge to PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan in Damascus.¹⁷ The support that the Syrian government provided to the PKK was related to the perception that Turkey was sheltering the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, the major opposition force to the Syrian government. Syria's support was also used as leverage in the ongoing water disputes between the two governments.¹⁸ Supporting the PKK was perceived too by the Syrian government as a way to quell the possible aspirations of its own Kurdish population.¹⁹ As a result, the Turkish government viewed its foreign relations with Syria mainly through the lens of this active support for the PKK, especially in the 1990s when the conflict in southeast Turkey was very intense.

In 1998, the tension between Syria and Turkey over the Kurdish issue transformed into a major crisis, described by Olson as almost an 'undeclared war'.²⁰ Unwilling to go to war, the government of Syrian president Hafez al-Assad complied with Ankara's demands, ending the crisis with the signing of the Adana Agreement on 20 October.

¹⁶ Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics*, p. 219.

¹⁷ Robert Olson, 'Turkish and Syrian Relations Since the Gulf War: The Kurdish Question and the Water Problem', in Ferhad Ibrahim and Gülistan Gürbey (eds), *The Kurdish Conflict in Turkey: Obstacles and Chances for Peace and Democracy* (New York, 2000). Robert Olson, *Turkey's Relations with Iran, Syria, Israel, and Russia, 1991–2000: The Kurdish and Islamist Questions* (Costa Mesa, 2001).

¹⁸ Ali Carkoğlu and Mine Eder, 'Domestic Concerns and the Water Conflict over the Euphrates–Tigris River Basin', *Middle Eastern Studies* 37/1 (2001), pp. 41–71.

¹⁹ Meliha Benli Altunışık and Özlem Tür, 'From Distant Neighbors to Partners? Changing Syrian–Turkish Relations', *Security Dialogue* 37/2 (2006), pp. 229–48 at pp. 232–3.

²⁰ Olson, *Turkey's Relations*.

This agreement explicitly ended Syrian support for the PKK,²¹ as the Syrian government acknowledged that the PKK was a terrorist organisation.²² Abdullah Öcalan was then immediately expelled from Syria, and was captured the following year by the Turkish government. Right after his capture, the PKK declared a unilateral ceasefire, and some of its remaining 3,000–5,000 militants moved into Iraqi Kurdistan.²³

It was then that the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) won the general election in Turkey on 3 November 2002, with 34 per cent of the votes thus gaining 65 per cent of the parliamentary seats. With this victory, the AKP became the first party since 1991 to govern without coalition partners. The improvement in Turkey's relations with the West during this period and the rapprochement with the EU created a positive environment for solving the Kurdish problem.²⁴ The normalisation of the Kurdish issue further advanced when the AKP pushed through reforms that significantly reduced the role of the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) in domestic politics and approved (albeit very limited) cultural, educational and linguistic rights for the Kurds.²⁵ Throughout the 2000s, the AKP never entirely forwent the political option for the resolution of its domestic Kurdish problem, and initiated several peace/solution processes.²⁶

The relations between Syria and Turkey greatly benefited from the normalisation of the Kurdish issue. The AKP government thought that a constructive Syrian policy would help not only consolidate its Kurdish problem domestically, but also increase Turkey's regional influence through trade. This was also in line with the government's 'zero-problem' approach to its neighbours and its wish to tone down its conflicts with them, while negotiating proactively and looking pragmatically for opportunities to solve conflicts and create cooperation.²⁷ At that point, analysts perceived Turkey's active foreign policy in the Middle East very positively.

In 2004, a bilateral free-trade agreement was signed between Syria and Turkey, opening Syria's economy to Turkish businesses. A mutual agreement on water resources was reached in 2008; water had previously constituted a major source of conflict between the two countries. Syria's exports to Turkey more than tripled from \$187 million in 2006 to \$662 million in 2010, while Turkish exports to Syria grew from \$609 million to

²¹ Caroline James and Özgür Özdamar, 'Modeling Foreign Policy and Ethnic Conflict: Turkey's Policies Towards Syria', *Foreign Policy Analysis* 5/1 (2009), pp. 17–36.

²² M. B. Aykan, 'The Turkish–Syrian Crisis of October 1998: A Turkish View', *Middle East Policy* 6/4 (1999), pp. 174–91.

²³ Evren Balta Paker, 'The Ceasefire This Time', *MERIP Online*, 31 August 2005. Available at <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero083105.html> (accessed 5 February 2015).

²⁴ Kemal Kirişçi, 'The Kurdish Question and Turkish Foreign Policy', in Dimitris Keridis and Lenore Martin (eds), *The Future of Turkish Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, MA, 2004), pp. 277–314.

²⁵ Balta Paker, 'The Ceasefire This Time'.

²⁶ Marlies Casier, Joost Jongerden and Nic Walker, 'Turkey's Kurdish Movement and the AKP's Kurdish Opening: Kurdish Spring or Fall?', in Mohammed Ahmed and Michael Gunter (eds), *The Kurdish Spring: Geopolitical Changes and the Kurds*, vol. 12 (Costa Mesa, 2013), pp. 135–62.

²⁷ Bulent Aras, 'Turkey and the GCC: An Emerging Relationship', *Middle East Policy* 12/4 (2005), pp. 89–97 at p. 90.

\$1.85 billion in the same period.²⁸ An enhanced diplomatic and cultural relationship followed. In July 2009, the two countries signed the Strategic Cooperation Agreement, which was intended as a collaboration against terrorism. In the same year, Turkey lifted visa restrictions for Syrian citizens: by the end of 2010, some 60,000 Syrians were visiting Turkey every month.²⁹

As Altuğ has observed, this was also a time of rising anti-Kurdish sentiment within Syria.³⁰ In 2003, the Democratic Union Party (Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat, PYD) was established in the Kurdish-dominated regions of Syria by Kurdish activists with close affiliations to Turkey's PKK. In fact, Syrian support for the PKK in the 1990s enabled the party to gain a foothold among Syrian Kurds that proved difficult to reverse even after the Syrian government withdrew its support. This would eventually create the unintended consequence of the Syrian Kurdish opposition creating strong links with that of Turkey. Thus, the Turkish and Syrian governments had a joint interest in collaborating against the Kurdish opposition.

In fact, coupled with the US invasion of Iraq and the establishment of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq,³¹ the Kurdish question was increasingly perceived by the Turkish government as a regional issue that should be dealt with through regional strategies and alliances. Thus, the Turkish government benefited enormously from the increasingly repressive stance of the Assad regime against the Kurdish opposition. Given the economic collaboration and joint security interests, when the rebellion began in Syria in March 2011, the Turkish government believed that the destabilisation of Syria was not in Turkey's national interest, especially if that would eventually mean territorial breakdown. The possibility of an independent Kurdistan in Syria was perceived as a major national security threat, given that Syrian Kurds have strong links with Turkey's Kurds.³²

²⁸ Christopher Phillips, *Into the Quagmire: Turkey's Frustrated Syria Policy*, Chatham House Briefing Paper (London, 2012), p. 3.

²⁹ André Bank and Roy Karadağ, 'The "Ankara Moment": The Politics of Turkey's Regional Power in the Middle East, 2007–11', *Third World Quarterly* 34/2 (2013), pp. 287–304 at p. 296.

³⁰ Seda Altuğ, 'The Syrian Uprising and Turkey's Ordeal with the Kurds', *Dialectical Anthropology* 37/1 (2013), pp. 123–30.

³¹ Although the Turkish government also initially resisted the establishment of the KRG, through the massive influx of Turkish investment northern Iraq soon became Turkey's second-largest market for exports (Henri J. Barkey, 'Turkey's Syria Predicament', *Adelphi Papers* 54/447–8 (2014), pp. 99–122 at p. 106). Flourishing trade between the two helped overcome decades of tension, making the KRG a major ally of the Turkish government in the region. This was also related to the fact that the Turkish government realised that it could use the KRG's influence in the region to counter that of the PKK.

³² On 27 July 2015 Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stated that the number one priority of Turkish national security was to prevent the establishment of an independent Kurdish state in the south of Turkey. 'Bir Devlet Kurulmasına Asla Müsade Etmeyeceğiz', *Sabah*, 27 June 2015. Available at <http://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2015/06/27/guneyimizde-yeni-bir-devlete-izin-vermeyiz> (accessed 30 June 2015).

The Syrian Conflict Goes Regional: Turkey Among its Allies

When the Syrian uprising began, the Turkish government quickly called for social, economic and political reforms even offering help to achieve the required changes.³³ Nevertheless, the Turkish government's pro-Assad stance angered not only protestors in Syria, but also Turkey's Arab allies, especially the Gulf bloc. Besides, Syrian president Bashar al-Assad was not eager to negotiate with the protestors, or to initiate any kind of reform. More importantly, however, as the protests intensified and as the other regional powers, especially Saudi Arabia and Qatar, began to pour aid towards the Syrian opposition, the Turkish government started to believe that the Assad regime would not last long.³⁴ The Turkish government assumed that, in order to be an active agent in the construction of a post-Assad political order in line with its own domestic and regional priorities, especially with regard to the management of the Kurdish issue, it should change, and it thus began supporting the Syrian opposition.³⁵ In the last months of 2011 the AKP government started criticising the Assad regime as inhumane, and by the beginning of 2012 was insistently calling for regime change.

However, the policy in Syria was thus rife with conflict and indeterminate alliance patterns for Turkey right from the beginning. For one, Iran and Russia were backing Assad's forces and Turkey had been in the process of developing closer connections with both states diplomatically and economically. Furthermore, both states strongly supported a unified Syria, which coincided with the 'territorial integrity' policy objective of Turkey. Turkey has also been in close security cooperation with Iran against the PKK and the Party of Free Life in Kurdistan (Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê, PJAK),³⁶ being involved in joint military operations against the rebel group since 2003. Although the Syrian issue created major tensions between Turkey and Iran, the AKP government declared several times that their differences over the Assad regime would

³³ Ömer Taşpınar, 'Turkey's Strategic Vision and Syria', *Washington Quarterly* 35/3 (2012), pp. 127–40 at p. 137.

³⁴ 'Davutoğlu, Esad'a Ömür Biçti', *Hürriyet*, 25 August 2012. Available at <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/planet/21300142.asp> (accessed 5 March 2015).

³⁵ Altuğ, 'Syrian Uprising'.

³⁶ The PJAK is a Kurdish political/militant organisation in Iran, which has waged an armed struggle against the Iranian government since 2003 for the cultural and political rights of Kurds. Kurdish movements both in Syria (PYD) and in Iran (PJAK) have close connections with Turkey's PKK. As van Bruinessen has argued, all Kurdish political movements of the twentieth century have concentrated their efforts on only one part of Kurdistan (Martin van Bruinessen, 'Transnational Aspects of the Kurdish Question'. Working Paper, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute (Florence, 2000)). The partial exception to this was the PKK. Starting in the 1980s, the PKK has been the sole Kurdish political actor in Turkish politics. It is the inspirer, organiser and protector of the PYD in Syria and the PJAK in Iran. Although both the PYD and the PJAK are directly linked to the internal dynamics of Syrian and Iranian Kurdish society, respectively, they are often regarded as the PKK's local branches.

not jeopardize their relations;³⁷ in fact, the AKP government was even open to the possibility of an Iranian role in a post-Assad Syria. On the other hand, Turkey openly sided with the Gulf States, which were aligned against the Iran–Russia–Syria alliance.

These multiple alliance structures, and especially Turkey's good relations with Iran, suggest that its foreign policy was not following a strict sectarian line. Indeed, then foreign minister (soon to be prime minister) Ahmet Davutoğlu's long-standing foreign policy perspective in the Middle East was based not on a sectarian stance, but on a balance-of-power analysis. According to Davutoğlu, the most disastrous development for Turkey's foreign policy would come from pan-Arab nationalism. A Middle East, he has argued, with such an increasing nationalism would prevent Turkey from becoming a regional player and make the country dependent on major global powers.³⁸ Therefore, as Davutoğlu has stated, 'Turkey's priority foreign policy objective in the Middle East is to prevent Arab states from uniting around a national identity against Turkey.'³⁹ 'The most important tool to achieve this objective is to have individual relations with each Arab nation, leveling them against each another',⁴⁰ and to establish good relations with Iran. Davutoğlu also openly acknowledged that the failure to develop a flexible balancing policy which rests on these two pillars – that is, good relations with Iran and preventing the emergence of pan-Arabism – would allow the PKK to gain a stronghold within the region, thus colliding with Turkey's regional as well as domestic ambitions.⁴¹

Therefore the fact that the Gulf states themselves were in different camps, supporting different factions of the opposition, was very advantageous for Turkey. Saudi Arabia was backing Salafi groups to counter the influence of Iran and Hezbollah, supporting the formation of the Islamic Front in 2013, but refusing to back Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), all of which had ties to al-Qaeda.⁴² Qatar, on the other hand, was supporting the Muslim Brotherhood, to which the AKP had close historical and ideological ties.⁴³

Eager to become an influential player in the region, the AKP government began to back groups affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood over the Salafists among the Syrian opposition, thus aligning with Qatar. In fact, both Turkey and Qatar supported the Muslim Brotherhood, not only in Syria, but also in Egypt and Tunisia as a way to influence and (re)shape the Middle East. This alliance paid off in the beginning. For example, when the Syrian National Council (SNC) was established in August 2011,

³⁷ Turkish foreign minister Davutoğlu, during a visit to Iran with prime minister Erdoğan in March 2012, said: 'There is common ground between Turkey and Iran. We will not allow a regional balance based on Turkish–Iranian rivalry to emerge. There could be those who want a new cold war, but both Turkey and Iran know history well enough not to let this happen' (cited in Mohammed Ayoob, 'The Arab Spring: Its Geostrategic Significance', *Middle East Policy* 19/3 (2012), pp. 84–97).

³⁸ Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik* (İstanbul, 2011), p. 415.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 416.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 141.

⁴² Gause, *Beyond Sectarianism*, p. 7.

⁴³ Crystal Ennis and Bessma Momani, 'Shaping the Middle East in the Midst of the Arab Uprisings: Turkish and Saudi Foreign Policy Strategies', *Third World Quarterly* 34/6 (2013), pp. 1127–44 at p. 1140.

the Qatar–Turkey axis exerted a disproportionate influence via the Muslim Brotherhood, which controlled the largest number of council seats and the influential relief committee that distributed aid to the fighters.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the conflict between the Turkey/Qatar-backed Brotherhood and the Saudi-backed Salafists prevented not only the creation of a unified rebel force, but also the toppling of the Assad regime.⁴⁵ Thus, although there seemed to be a unified regional bloc against Assad, every actor had its own agenda for a post-Assad Syria. This had a major impact on fracturing the Syrian opposition along different lines of interest.⁴⁶ Regional (state and non-state) powers provided their clients on the ground with immense financial, military and diplomatic support, which consequently turned the conflict into one about access to resources and power, making the parties less likely to negotiate with each other, and prolonging the stalemate and hence the civil war.⁴⁷ Mostly as a result of the fragmentation of the opposition forces and also due to military and economic aid from Iran and Russia, the Assad regime around 2013 was able to reclaim authority over most of the country's urban 'spine', from Homs in the north to Damascus in the south.⁴⁸

This was a major blow to Turkey's anti-Assad stance, since it made clear to Turkey that a postwar Syria would be partitioned along ethnic-religious lines, once again aggravating Turkey's domestic fears regarding the Kurds. A second blow came from elsewhere. As mentioned above, Turkey's stance in the anti-Assad camp was aligned with that of Qatar. Qatar and Turkey put a lot of emphasis on the role of the Muslim Brotherhood, both in the Syrian opposition and in a possible post-Assad Syria. However, the coup against the Muslim Brotherhood government in Egypt on 3 July 2013 radically altered its influence there as well as in Syria, possibly allowing Saudi Arabia to regain its footing.⁴⁹ In an interview with Richard Falk, prime minister Davutoğlu clearly acknowledged this change of policy in Syria due to the coup in Egypt:

There are three forces in the international community. First there are those that favor a democratic transition and support democratic groups: Turkey and several moderate democratic forces. Second are those political actors that are scared of democracy. These states prefer autocrats to govern their country:

⁴⁴ Steven Heydemann, 'Syria and the Future of Authoritarianism', *Journal of Democracy* 24/4 (2013), pp. 59–73 at p. 69.

⁴⁵ Phillips, *Into the Quagmire*, p. 7.

⁴⁶ It was not only states, but also wealthy oil-rich individuals from the Gulf region whom the Gulf States were either unwilling or unable to control, who poured aid into the hands of the Syrian opposition.

⁴⁷ Phillips, *Into the Quagmire*, p. 7. All the groups involved also created a needs-based relationship with the local communities that were tremendously affected by the civil war. All of these groups competed with each other, and local communities took advantage of funding by Gulf States. 'Jabhat al-Nusra, Ghassan Hitto Divide Syrian Opposition', *Al-Monitor*, 20 March 2013. Available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/ar/politics/2013/04/syria-jabhat-nusra-opposition-hitto.html> (accessed 5 January 2015).

⁴⁸ Heydemann, 'Syria and the Future', p. 64.

⁴⁹ In March 2014, Saudi Arabia officially designated the Muslim Brotherhood, al-Qaeda and its affiliates, and ISIS as terrorist organisations. In the same month, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain increased pressure on Qatar to reduce its support for the Brotherhood by staging a coordinated withdrawal of their ambassadors from Doha (Gause, *Beyond Sectarianism*, p. 17).

Saudi Arabia, UAE, and the Gulf Countries, *except for Qatar*. The third group is countries that are sectarian, like Iran. Before, the first two were united against Iranian influence, so they worked together against Assad. However, after Sisi, that coalition has collapsed.⁵⁰

But the real blow to Turkey's Syrian policy, which involved controlling the Kurds while regaining its regional influence, would be the rise of ISIS. This put regional powers, such as Qatar and Turkey, which (allegedly) provided foreign aid to radical Islamic groups under the international spotlight, and under great pressure to cut ties with such groups.⁵¹ The rise of ISIS was also a major problem for the opposition, since it allowed Assad to legitimise himself by claiming that a post-Assad Syria would be a safe haven for radical Islamist groups. These (alleged) links also provoked much domestic criticism of the Turkish government. It was argued that this government (secretly) supported ISIS forces,⁵² in order to level the Kurdish opposition and to counter the emergence of an autonomous Kurdish region under the influence of the PYD. These criticisms reached their climax when major ISIS attacks were directed against Kurdish towns in Iraq and Syria.

The Syrian Conflict Goes Domestic: Turkey Facing Kurds

Right after the uprising began, the Assad regime tried to re-establish its ties with minority groups, specifically the Kurds, in an attempt to leverage the strength of the uprising and to obstruct a total mobilisation of all sectors of Syrian society. As Altuğ has observed, the Assad regime immediately adopted more inclusive minority policies and rarely attacked minority-inhabited regions.⁵³ This practice helped the regime in propagating the official discourse that the uprising was an armed Islamist one created and supported by the US, Israel and Saudi against the Alawites. Reflecting this policy, one month after the first anti-Assad demonstrations in Syria, the regime issued a decree restoring the citizenship rights of Kurds who had been deprived of citizenship by the Ba'ath Party in 1963.⁵⁴ Furthermore, the Assad forces withdrew from the Kurdish enclaves in 2012, leaving control to local militias. The 'opportunities' presented by the civil war thus helped the PYD transform itself into a major regional actor.

⁵⁰ Turkish prime minister Ahmet Davutoğlu in conversation with Richard Falk [emphasis mine]. Available at <https://www.opendemocracy.net/ahmet-davuto%C4%9Flu-richard-falk/turkish-prime-minister-ahmet-davuto%C4%9Flu-in-conversation-part-1> (accessed 10 March 2015).

⁵¹ This sometimes leads to groups renaming themselves without changing anything else. See 'Can al-Qaida's Syrian Branch Rebrand?', *Slate*, 5 March 2015. Available at http://www.slate.com/blogs/the_slatest/2015/03/05/can_al_qaida_s_syrian_branch_rebrand.html?wpsrc=fol_tw (accessed 15 March 2015).

⁵² David Phillips, *Research Paper: ISIS-Turkey List*, 1 July 2015. Available at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-l-phillips/research-paper-isis-turke_b_6128950.html (accessed 15 March 2015).

⁵³ Altuğ, 'Syrian Uprising'.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

As the PYD was becoming a major actor in Syria, the Turkish government continued to use every possible governance technique to level its influence. Turkey's first tactic was to bolster the Sunni-dominated anti-Assad opposition, both for regional influence and against the Kurds. The second major tactic was to manipulate power struggles by exploiting political divisions among Kurds to level the influence of the PYD. Many Kurdish political organisations exist in the region. These organisations have complex and dynamic relations that includes antagonism, cooperation and in some cases direct links. These relations manifest themselves most acutely in Syria.

A case in point, illustrating the Turkish government's efforts to level the influence of the PYD, is the formation of the SNC. Initially the SNC did not incorporate significant Kurdish groups into the Syrian opposition, mostly due to pressure from Turkey.⁵⁵ This not only bolstered the Arab nationalist attitude of the opposition, but also meant that the Kurdish struggle in Syria had become, in effect, separate from the anti-Assad opposition. Later on, the SNC was renamed as the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Oppositional Forces, with the aim of making it demographically more inclusive (especially of Kurds).⁵⁶ This time, however, the Turkish government insisted on incorporating non-PYD parties into the SNC, such as the Kurdish National Council (KNC),⁵⁷ so as to undermine the PYD's power and influence.⁵⁸

In spite of these efforts, Turkish fears about an autonomous Kurdish region were heightened when in November 2013 the PYD officially announced an interim government over three autonomous areas: Afrin, Jazira and Kobani. This move once again brought to the fore Turkish sensitivities about the possibility of another Kurdistan Region emerging.⁵⁹ Turkey reacted to this development by erecting a wall along the border with Syria. The Turkish government even closed down the customs office of Nusaybin, cutting off contact with and unofficially imposing an embargo on the Kurds.⁶⁰ These policies were interpreted by Turkey's Kurdish political activists as the government's declaration of war.

While Turkey was trying to cut links of its own Kurds with those of the rest of the region, it was also trying to contain its Kurdish question by negotiation. Fearful of a potential Kurdish state on its borders, the Turkish government was trying to control its

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ 'Deal with Kurds Gives Syrian Opposition a Boost', *National World*, 18 September 2013. Available at <http://www.thenational.ae/world/deal-with-kurds-gives-syrian-opposition-a-boost> (accessed 5 January 2015).

⁵⁷ KNC (in Arabic ENKS) was founded on 26 October 2011, under the sponsorship of KRG president Massoud Barzani. It is an umbrella organisation of Barzani-inspired political parties in Syria, and initially it was openly in conflict with the PYD.

⁵⁸ Altuğ, 'Syrian Uprising'.

⁵⁹ Gareth Stansfield, 'The Unraveling of the Post-First World War State System? The Kurdistan Region of Iraq and the Transformation of the Middle East', *International Affairs* 89/2 (2013), pp. 259–82 at p. 279.

⁶⁰ 'Turkey's New Border Wall Angers Kurds on Both Sides of Syrian Divide', *The Guardian*, 8 November 2013. Available at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/08/turkey-new-border-wall-kurds-syria> (accessed 10 January 2015).

Kurdish populations and the PKK. The PKK, on the other hand, was more concerned with stabilising its own force in Syria and backing Syrian Kurds than waging another costly war against the TAF. Thus, the AKP government launched negotiations with the PKK on the terms of 'peace' at the beginning of 2013. On 25 April 2013, the PKK announced that it would withdraw all its forces from within Turkey.

However, this policy of balance and negotiation would come under direct attack, with the ISIS threat increasingly directed against Kurds in Iraq and Syria. In early October 2014, ISIS fighters surrounded the eastern part of the Kurdish city of Kobani and began firing into it from higher ground. Turkish troops and tanks lined up on the Turkey–Syria border, as the Turkish government maintained its reluctance to give direct or indirect support to this small city. The Turkish government also refused to allow the Iraqi Peshmerga forces to cross through its territory to help the Syrian Kurds and denied Washington permission to conduct offensives out of the US Air Force base at Incirlik in Southern Turkey.⁶¹

On 6 and 7 October 2014, tens of thousands of Kurdish people in Turkey's southeast took to the streets, protesting against the AKP's Syrian policy, and asking the government to open its borders to refugees, and to allow Iraqi Peshmerga forces to cross into Syria to help the Syrian Kurds. Protests then spread across the country, including Ankara and Istanbul, leaving 42 people dead.⁶² The government imposed a curfew in six Kurdish-populated cities of Turkey in order to control the growing intensity of the protests.⁶³ Turkey's president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan warned that Kobani was 'about to fall'.⁶⁴ This statement was understood by the protesters not as a reality, but as the government's preference.

The protests continued despite the emergency measures taken by the government. At the same time, as a result of growing internal pressures to take greater action against ISIS militants, Turkey allowed the Peshmerga forces to cross through its territory on 22 October 2014. A small group of Syrian rebels also entered Kobani from Turkey to help Kurdish fighters battle against ISIS.⁶⁵ Both developments were followed by the intensification of US-led coalition airstrikes against ISIS forces in Kobani. The city became the target of an average of half a dozen airstrikes every day, and more than 80 per cent of all coalition airstrikes in Syria were in or around it. US air forces even dropped weapons and medical supplies for Kurdish fighters, an event which was

⁶¹ Barkey, 'Turkey's Syria Predicament', p. 99.

⁶² '6-7 Ekim'in Acı Bilangosu', *Radikal*, 12 November 2014. Available at http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/6_7_ekimin_aci_bilangosu_42_olu-1229423 (accessed 15 January 2015).

⁶³ 'Curfew in 6 Southeastern Cities', *Bianet English*, 7 October 2014. Available at <http://bianet.org/english/world/158990-curfew-in-6-southeastern-cities> (accessed 20 January 2015).

⁶⁴ 'Clashes Spread South and West of Kobani', *Al-Arabiya News*, 7 October 2014. Available at <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2014/10/07/Clashes-spread-south-and-west-of-Kobani.html> (accessed 12 January 2015).

⁶⁵ 'Turkey to Allow Kurdish Peshmerga across its Territory to Fight in Kobani', *The Guardian*, 20 October 2014. Available at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/20/turkey-allows-peshmerga-forces-to-travel-to-kobani> (accessed 15 January 2015).

acknowledged as a first in the Syrian conflict.⁶⁶ On 26 January 2015, with the help of coalition forces, the Kurdish forces pushed ISIS out of Kobani. Thus Kobani, a city which was initially of little strategic value to the US-led coalition, became a model for defeating ISIS. This victory was crucial, because it was one of the first defeats of ISIS, which portrayed itself as invincible in order to attract not only local support, but also foreign jihadists.⁶⁷

The outcome of the Kobani battle, involving the PYD and the PKK in tandem with regular Peshmerga units, has dramatically altered the strategic image for the Kurds. Syrian and Turkish Kurds who came to fight were also joined by units from the Iranian–Kurdish forces based in the area of the KRG, which had been inactive for most of the last decade.⁶⁸ The large-scale atrocities that ISIS perpetrated against the local populations in Iraq and Syria forced a compromise solution between rival Kurdish parties, pushing them to establish more cooperative links with each other hence creating a feeling of solidarity among ordinary Kurds.⁶⁹ The Kobani victory was interpreted as a major defeat for Turkish policy in Syria.⁷⁰

Conclusion

Turkish political elites pursued two critical foreign policy objectives in Syria which were initially believed to be complementary, and instrumentalised sectarian identities in order to achieve both of them. The first objective was to regain or retain regional influence in the emerging power struggle, by employing a flexible alliance strategy. The alliance strategy was also based on preventing a unified Arab bloc from forming in the Middle East. The second objective was to prevent the establishment of an autonomous Kurdish region in Syria, by supporting the anti-Assad opposition and various factions of Kurdish groups against the PYD. The Turkish government believed that the best political project to achieve both objectives was to keep the territorial integrity of the Syrian state intact, together with regime change that would favour Turkey's interests.

However, what were initially thought to be complementary objectives soon became contradictory, and Turkey failed to achieve its objective in Syria: the installing of a friendly regime while keeping Syria's territorial integrity intact. Inciting rivalries among the regional powers and bolstering sectarian identities helped fracture the Syrian

⁶⁶ 'Islamic State Group Pushed Out of Syria's Kobani', *Fox News*, 26 January 2015. Available at <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2015/01/26/kurdish-officials-syrian-activists-islamic-state-group-militants-nearly-pushed/> (accessed 4 February 2015).

⁶⁷ 'In Liberated Kobani, Kurds Take Pride Despite the Devastation', *New York Times*, 1 February 2015. Available at http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/02/world/asia/in-liberated-kobani-pride-despite-the-devastation.html?_r=1 (accessed 5 February 2015).

⁶⁸ Barkey, 'Turkey's Syria Predicament', p. 113.

⁶⁹ Stansfield, 'Unraveling', p. 280.

⁷⁰ Amberin Zaman, 'Kurdish Victory in Kobani Defeat for Turkish Policy', *Al-Monitor*, 28 January 2015. Available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/01/turkey-kurds-kobani-defeat-turkish-policy.html#> (accessed 5 February 2015).

opposition, pushing it towards radicalisation. By 2015, it was clear that a postwar Syria would not keep its territory intact and that there would not be a regime change soon. Moreover, as the opposition has become more factionalised and sectarian, the political distance between the Kurdish and Arab oppositions has widened, making it impossible to build a unified alliance against the Assad regime.

The Syrian conflict and the related regional processes also helped Kurdish political actors overcome some of their differences and further fuelled the emergence of pan-Kurdish ideas and imaginings. It paved the way for an autonomous Kurdish region in Syria, which was in direct contrast to Turkey's foreign policy objectives. Most importantly, the instrumentalisation of sectarian identities to achieve these two objectives helped to bolster sectarian politics in the region, which will have major consequences not only for Syria, but also for Turkish politics for years to come.

Qatari Foreign Policy: Reorientation or Adjustment to the Rhythm?

Jamal Abdullah

Abstract

Qatar's foreign policy has undergone shifts in response to regional geopolitical developments. Though it was characterised by neutrality and mediation during the first decade of this millennium, it changed direction after the Arab Spring began, becoming more interventionist by supporting Arab populations who were rebelling against authoritarian regimes and demanding greater freedom, dignity and the right to self-determination. With the ousting of President Mohamed Morsi in Egypt, escalating tensions and conflicts in Libya, the expansion of the Islamic State (IS) in the region, Houthi control of major state departments in Yemen and the recent Israeli offensive on the Gaza Strip, the geopolitical landscape and regional power balances have again shifted. These events have impacted Qatari foreign policy as it responds to ongoing developments at the regional and international levels. By reactivating its mediation role, utilising soft power tools and maintaining its commitments within international alliances to counter threats to its national and regional security, Qatar's foreign policy has entered a new phase of wielding 'smart power'. This paper analyses in detail the most prominent changes in Qatar's foreign policy since Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani came to power on 25 June 2013.

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Introduction

Since Qatar's independence in 1971, Qatari foreign policy has passed through various phases. There were two key turning points, the first being the transfer of power to Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani in June 1995, and the second his abdication of power in favour of Crown Prince Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani in June 2013.

Like that of most other Gulf states, Qatar's foreign policy was generally in agreement with the Saudi government's foreign policy until the mid-1990s, when Doha carved an independent path after Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani came to power.¹ Adopting an 'open' foreign policy, which relied on soft power tools such as media, diplomacy, education, culture, sports, tourism, economics and humanitarian aid, Doha's strategy was based on being a friendly neighbour and on the formation of strategic alliances with major and middle powers.²

Since the current ruler came to power, the Arab region has undergone several substantial changes that have reshaped the geopolitical landscape and regional power balances. The most significant of these are the ousting of former Egyptian president Mohamed Morsi, escalating tensions and conflicts in Libya, the geographical and ideological expansion of the Islamic State (IS) in the region and the Houthi group's control of major state departments in Yemen. Each of these events, among others, has undoubtedly impacted Doha's foreign policy and how it responds to developments in the regional and international arenas.

Fixed Principles of Qatar's Foreign Policy

Qatar's international relations doctrine focuses on the consolidation of peace and stability. Article 7 of the Qatari constitution states that the country's foreign policy is 'based on the principle of consolidating international peace and security'³ and that its aims are: encouraging settlement of international disputes by peaceful means; supporting peoples' rights to self-determination; non-interference in the internal affairs of other states and cooperation with peaceful nations.

Before the outbreak of the Arab Spring, the former emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, adopted diplomacy that focused on conflict resolution, which meant that Doha assumed the mediator role in almost every regional conflict, including those in Sudan, Eritrea, Lebanon, Palestine, Somalia and Yemen.

¹ Jamal Abdullah, *Qatar's Foreign Policy 1995–2013: Leverages and Strategies* (Doha: Al Jazeera Center for Studies, 2014).

² Jamal Abdullah, 'Qatari Position on the Arab Spring: Qatar's Foreign Policy – From Neutrality to Influence', in Mohammed Badri Eid and Jamal Abdullah (eds), *The Gulf in a Changing Strategic Context* (Doha: Al Jazeera Center for Studies, 2014).

³ State of Qatar, 'Permanent Constitution of the State of Qatar', Article 7. Available at http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---ilo_aids/documents/legaldocument/wcms_125870.pdf (accessed 1 July 2015).

The positive results of this mediatory role secured recognition and credibility for Qatar at both the regional and international levels. Two examples are the May 2008 Lebanon agreement and the 2007 release of the Bulgarian nurses and Palestinian doctor detained in Libya. This determination to resolve disputes by peaceful means and to play the role of mediator is accompanied by Qatar's willingness to accede to international arbitration over disagreements about its borders with its neighbours, as happened with Bahrain in the early 2000s.

While these are the general principles guiding Qatar's foreign policy, since late 2010, developments in both the regional and international arenas have shaped new principles that impacted the country's foreign affairs.

From Neutrality to Influence

For fifteen years, Qatar's foreign policy was distinguished by its neutrality and impartiality, until December 2010, when the outbreak of Arab Spring protests catalysed a historic shift in the political landscape of the region. The Arab peoples who had been subjected to repression since their countries gained independence suddenly took to the streets to reclaim their freedom, dignity and right to self-determination.

The revolution that started in Tunisia was perceived as a threat by several dictatorships in the Arab world, while Qatar's national leadership responded by supporting Arab nations' choices, again based on Article 7 of its constitution. Consequently, the country's international image changed, with Qatar regarded as an active player rather than a conciliating mediator.⁴ Qatar participated in military action in April 2011 under the NATO-led international coalition against Colonel Muammar Gaddafi's forces in Libya, and as part of the Arab League, Qatar also called for Arab troops to be sent to Syria to stop the bloodshed there.

A regional power vacuum during 2011–13 prompted a shift in Qatar's foreign policy and pushed the country to assume a leadership position, especially within the Arab League. Traditional powers in the Arab world were suffering a decline in power for various reasons. Riyadh was focused on its internal affairs because nascent rebellious movements had emerged within its borders, particularly in its eastern regions. Cairo was struggling in the transitional period that followed the January 2011 Egyptian revolution. Iraq was still reeling from the 2003 American invasion, while Syria was grappling with the popular revolt that broke out in March 2011 and has continued since.

The Arab Spring revolutions and Qatar's consistent position, as well as the positions of international and regional powers, such as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), provided an opportunity to begin a new phase in Qatari foreign policy,

⁴ Jamal Abdullah, 'The Foreign Policy of the State of Qatar (1995–2014): Transformations and Horizons', *Al Diplomat*, 10 (2014), pp. 24–8.

one aligned with the vision of Doha's political leadership at the time.⁵ There was a clear difference between Qatar's position towards the Arab Spring revolutions and that of various GCC countries at both the political and diplomatic levels. This is embodied in official statements, as well as in actions including humanitarian, logistical and financial support and economic investment.

Qatar's regional strategic framework sought a balance between regional powers, and Doha was therefore placed in a very sensitive position vis-à-vis its support for the rising powers in countries undergoing socio-political change, some of which were proponents of political Islam. Doha had to be cautious not to provoke Iran, on the one hand, or other Gulf states which classified the Muslim Brotherhood as a banned terrorist organisation. Qatar's policy of 'impact and influence' seems to have been successful for the country, thanks to the changing political climate and divided geopolitical structures across the region due to the Arab Spring revolutions. This substantial shift in Qatar's foreign policy appears to reflect its confidence both in independent decision-making and in its ability to perform on a par with other countries in the region.

The Transition to Smart Power

Just days after Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani assumed power, the Egyptian military overthrew the first elected civilian president in Egypt's history, on 3 July 2013. Some countries in the Arab region explicitly welcomed the coup, while most Western powers overlooked it. At the regional level, Turkey expressed its rejection of the sudden breakdown of Egypt's democratic process. Qatar called for reconciliation between the various disputing groups in Egypt, but the new Egyptian leadership was betting on suppressing protesting voices and on the exclusion of the Muslim Brotherhood movement from the political scene. These developments forced the Qatari leadership to adapt and reshape its policies.

Qatar's diplomatic moves were somewhat quiet when compared with its previous stance, which can be attributed to the new leader's desire to shape his country's foreign policy strategically in line with Joseph Nye's determinants of 'smart power',⁶ combining both soft and hard power approaches, while maintaining the constitutional principles underpinning Qatar's foreign policy. The relatively quiet diplomacy of Qatar may be regarded not as a retreat, but rather as a foreign policy shift to bolster soft diplomacy tools such as the media and to bolster the

⁵ Jamal Abdullah and Nabil al-Nasiri, *Qatari Foreign Policy: Carryover or Redirection?* (Doha: Al Jazeera Center for Studies, 2014). Available at <http://studies.aljazeera.net/ResourceGallery/media/Documents/2014/7/10/2014710114831205734Qatari%20Foreign%20Policy%20Carryover%20or%20Redirection.pdf> (accessed 5 July 2015).

⁶ As characterised by Joseph Nye, 'Smart power is the combination of hard and soft power to create optimal strategies in particular contexts' (Quentin Cantu, 'Interview: Dr. Joseph Nye, Jr.', *Diplomatic Courier: A Global Affairs Magazine*, 1 21 January 2012). See also Yahya Yahyaoui, 'Obama and the Thesis of Smart Power' (Arabic), 18 November 2013. Available from <http://www.aljazeera.net/knowledgegate/opinions/أوباما-وأطروحة-القوة-الذكية> (accessed 5 July 2015).

economy through increased investment at home and abroad. Furthermore, it aims to enhance education through promoting intellectual advancement and international events in various fields of culture, arts and sports.

Qatar's decision-makers have adopted an open-door policy for dialogue with all parties wherever feasible. Because this stance contradicts that of some neighbouring countries that chose to confront some political Islam movements, it has fuelled disagreements within the GCC, and led Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to withdraw their ambassadors from Doha on 5 March 2014.⁷ Qatar is seen as a major diplomatic supporter of the banned Muslim Brotherhood in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and is unwilling to end its alleged support for Islamist and extremist groups in the region. Qatar and the GCC also remain divided over Egypt's aborted democracy, and Qatar stands alienated, having been accused of breaching a GCC concord that was first signed in November 2014. The agreement guaranteed that member states would not interfere in each other's internal affairs.

Undoubtedly, this constituted the biggest challenge that Sheikh Tamim faced during the first year of his reign. It was an unprecedented crisis in the history of relations between members of the GCC and highlighted deep disagreements between Gulf capitals regarding regional issues.

Redirecting Foreign Policy

Countries in the region have adopted different approaches towards the tide of political Islam that has gained popularity in a number of countries affected by the Arab Spring.⁸ While the Muslim Brotherhood is a banned terrorist organisation in countries such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia, Qatar considers this group as one of the formative forces on the political map of the Arab world and argues for communication with the group and its inclusion in the political arena, particularly since the Brotherhood is also a significant factor in the polity of a number of other Gulf Arab states, including Kuwait and Bahrain.

Developments in the region following the expansion of IS to the north in both Syria and Iraq, as well as the Yemeni government falling to the Houthis, have led the Gulf countries to review their interrelationships. The countries sought to put an end to their disagreements in order to unite against security threats at both the national and regional levels. Hence, Riyadh's mediation to resolve the Gulf crisis between Qatar and the UAE, Bahrain and itself reflects Saudi decision-makers' awareness of the seriousness of the regional crisis and their responsibility as one of the central countries of the region. Qatar was among the first countries to

⁷ Jamal Abdullah, 'Motives and Consequences of Ambassador Withdrawals from Doha', Al Jazeera Center for Studies, 24 March 2014. Available at <http://studies.aljazeera.net/en/reports/2014/04/201441061248251708.htm> (accessed 1 July 2015).

⁸ Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, *Qatar and the Arab Spring: Policy Drivers and Regional Implications*, 24 September 2014. Available at <http://carnegieendowment.org/2014/09/24/qatar-and-arab-spring-policy-drivers-and-regional-implications> (accessed 1 July 2015).

announce its participation in the Saudi-led military coalition to stop the expansion of the Houthis. Oman, however, did not participate in 'Operation Decisive Storm' (see later section on this operation).

Qatar has expressed flexibility and willingness to overcome the crisis with its neighbours in the GCC. The emir's speeches in Germany⁹ and at the United Nations during September 2014,¹⁰ as well as in his television interview on American news channel CNN,¹¹ are public indications of this stance and present a combination of the old and the new features of Qatar's foreign policy. In other words, this suggests that the country's foreign policy has been adjusted without compromising the essence of the fundamental principles laid out in Qatar's permanent constitution, with an emphasis on independent decision-making. For instance, in his first interview as the emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim highlighted that Qatar is also a vocal supporter of Hamas, the Palestinian organisation which controls Gaza, and which the United States consider a terrorist organisation. When asked whether Qatar would continue its support of Hamas, Sheikh Tamim responded that 'We support all Palestinian people. We believe Hamas is a very important part of the Palestinian people.'¹²

The principle of mediation, which was incorporated into Qatar's foreign policy during the first decade of the millennium, remains one of its most important features. Sheikh Tamim has made a call in recent international forums for the promotion of a culture of dialogue and 'preventative diplomacy' through pre-emptive peaceful methods rather than pre-emptive war, as well as for support for governments to implement gradual reforms. All the signs suggest that Doha wishes to explore more flexible foreign policy approaches than those adopted after the outbreak of the Arab Spring revolutions in late 2010 without changing the fundamentals of its foreign policy.

Qatar's Vision for the Region

In all his public speaking engagements in the US, Emir Tamim laid the foundation for a solid partnership with the US and demonstrated the extent to which the state of Qatar can play a critical and a positive role in calming the region and in contributing to peace and stability in the Arab world at large. Qatar shares with the US a vision of stability and peace; however, Qatar is advocating a different tactic for dealing with these challenges.¹³

⁹ Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani, public speech, Germany, 17 September 2014. Available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k6eYQJQYsxM> (accessed 1 July 2015).

¹⁰ Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani, public speech, UN General Assembly, 24 September 2014. Available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3bZRLLLwMsc> (accessed 8 July 2015).

¹¹ Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani, CNN interview with Christiane Amanpour, 25 September 2014. Available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vR9ezioJ4kQ> (accessed 8 July 2015).

¹² Mick Krever, 'Qatar's Emir: We Don't Fund Terrorists', CNN, 25 September 2014. Available at <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/09/25/world/meast/qatar-emir> (accessed 12 July 2015).

¹³ Tamim H. Al-Thani, 'Qatar's Message to Obama', *New York Times*, 23 February 2015. Available at http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/24/opinion/qatars-message-to-obama.html?_r=0 (accessed 5 July 2015).

The tenets of Article 7 of its constitution allow Qatar a wide margin for manoeuvre and give it the credibility needed to act as an independent but concerned member of the international community. Qatar's transformative foreign policy is similar to that of Norway. For instance, Norway maintains open relations with Hamas and keeps funding many humanitarian projects in the Gaza Strip unabated despite the criticism it receives from the US or Israel. In addition, Norway was the first country to send its envoys to the Gaza Strip in support of the newly formed unity government in 2007. Norway did so against the will of the US and without fully coordinating its steps with the EU.¹⁴ Both Norway and Qatar garner their credibility to initiate such moves from their interest in separating the humanitarian from the political; thus the two countries maintain open relations with many of the parties concerned and allow both sides to present their cases equally. The open channels that Norway and Qatar keep with many actors around the world serve as crucial media for communication and assist in bridging the gaps between and among all the parties concerned in any conflict zone.

The Qatari vision for a more stable Middle East was made public in an opinion piece in the *New York Times*,¹⁵ in which the Qatari leadership emphasised the following principles: justice, security, equality and restoring hope for all. The Emir's vision promised a better option than the one-solution-fits-all approach that the US has been championing for the last few decades in a region so diverse and longing for dialogue and understanding. The Qatari message of justice and peace for all offers the US a different path and proposes an alternative to all the old and unsuccessful policies of the US in the region. Qatar's emphasis on solving the Palestinian–Israeli conflict is sound advice and should be given serious consideration by the Obama Administration. According to many observers in the region, this conflict serves as the biggest recruiter for IS.¹⁶ The Qatari leadership shares that view, and argues that the conflict is conducive to many of the acts of violence that take place in the region and beyond.

¹⁴ Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Norway Normalizes Relations with the Palestinian Unity Government', *Electronic Intifada*, 17 March 2007.

¹⁵ Al-Thani, 'Qatar's Message to Obama'.

¹⁶ 'King of Jordan: ISIS Used Gaza Conflict as Recruiting Tool', *CBS News*, 25 September 2014. Available at <http://www.cbsnews.com/videos/king-of-jordan-isis-used-gaza-conflict-as-recruiting-tool> (accessed 5 July 2015).

Qatar's Attitudes to Operation Decisive Storm

Qatar was among the first countries to announce its participation in the Saudi-led military coalition in Yemen to stop the expansion of the Houthis, who seemed to be a stone's throw away from Aden and the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, one of the most important waterways in the world.

Doha's stance stems from the principle that Arabs should take the lead in solving problems and dilemmas they face, and that those with capacity should unite to cooperate with each other.¹⁷

The approach adopted by Qatar has translated on the ground in Yemen as the adoption of all possible options in order to establish peace and security in the region. This includes dialogue, diplomatic solutions and finally military action, as required by the situation on the ground.

In his address to Arab leaders during the 26th Arab Summit in Sharm El-Sheikh on 28 March 2015, the emir of Qatar said:

The recent events which were perpetrated by Ansar Allah group in collaboration with the former president are an assault on the peaceful transition process in Yemen. They vacated the results of the national dialogue of its content, confiscated the political legitimacy and broke down the State institutions, and the most dangerous of all, they sow the seeds of a newly introduced hateful phenomenon in Yemen – political sectarianism. Therefore, the Ansar Allah militia movement and former President Ali Abdullah Saleh are responsible for the recent escalation, which led to the launch of the Operation Decisive Storm.¹⁸

Based on this, Sheikh Tamim called on all parties and political forces to prioritise Yemen's interests and its people, and respect the legitimacy of President Hadi and his globally recognised government by withdrawing militias from the state institutions and public places, and working to complete the implementation of the political process. He also called all involved to stand by the legitimate government in Yemen and reject the situation created by Houthi-led militias, in order to maintain the unity, security and stability of Yemen.

¹⁷ Al-Thani, 'Qatar's Message to Obama'.

¹⁸ 'Text of the Speech of the Emir of Qatar during the Arab Summit in Sharm el-Sheikh', Shabakat Al-ialam Al-Arabiya, *Moheet*. Available at <http://moheet.com/ننشر-نص-كلمة-أمير-قطر-أمام-القمة-العربي/html#.VSZK5r7fqUk> (accessed 9 April 2015).

Conclusion

In recent years, the Arab Spring and its repercussions have catalysed the transition of Qatar's diplomacy from that of mediation to that of influence. There is no doubt that the independence of the country's foreign policy is underlined by its autonomous income sources (derived from the production and export of oil and gas as well as external investments), which confer competitive advantages as a regional power.

Qatar's emergence as a rising regional power since the early 2000s has occurred because of its significant economic base and the leadership vacuum left by major regional powers such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Iraq. An added factor was the United States' reluctance to interfere in regional conflicts after disastrous experiences in both Afghanistan and Iraq.

Qatar's transformation into an influential regional and international power after the Arab Spring revolutions was a turning point in Doha's foreign policy approach, taking advantage of the multi-dimensional soft power tools that had been developed and strengthened during the previous decade and beyond. This change demonstrated that Doha's foreign policy is flexible and uses multiple strategic options based on the independence of its decision-making.

Accordingly, the recent readjustment of the country's foreign policy is consistent with developments affecting the region: in the interests of the state, it is necessary to redirect its external policies to serve its national interests without compromising its principles. This is evident from Qatar's return to the mediator role and the use of soft power tools, with a continued commitment to international alliances aimed at stopping any threat to its national security or the security of the region.

Contours of Qatar–Sub-Saharan Africa Relations: Shedding Light on Trends and Prospects¹

Jason J. McSparren, Mohamed Evren Tok & Fatima Mahmoud Ramadan Sanz

Abstract

Within the context of expanding South–South cooperation on trade and aid, this paper explores Qatar’s economic engagements with Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), both through state-sponsored charity and business enterprises, over the last half decade. We gather insight for understanding the Qatari strategy towards SSA by reviewing the state’s objectives as they are laid out in the *Qatar National Vision 2030* as well as by drawing on Qatar’s use of ‘subtle power’ in its foreign policy. More specifically, we problematise Qatar’s engagement with SSA by comparing Qatari charitable programmes in the region with the state’s economic interests; we then compare the SSA economic interests with recent economic engagements with Asian nations, and evaluate the difference. We conclude that Qatar is utilising different strategic approaches in different regions. Its foreign policy practices of insisting on its neutrality in its relations with conflicting states and sub-state actors have demonstrated a unique and broad agency that may be on display as the state diversifies its economy into SSA and East Asia. Moreover, the state is promoting its national brand in both regions: in one through economic interdependencies, and in the other through charitable aid that can assist in developing and promoting economic entrepreneurship that could eventually benefit Qatari service enterprises in the region.

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Introduction

Africa being the target for foreign direct investment (FDI) by the ‘BRIC [Brazil, Russia, India and China] plus group’, which constitutes the ‘New Global Middle’,² the continent received a total of US\$57 billion in investment inflows in 2013, primarily in commodities and infrastructure.³ South–South trade has been robust, although there is some concern that Africa’s exports to the South mirror the continent’s exports to developed countries. Africa’s exports to non-African developing states are calculated to be 90 per cent in primary products; 67 per cent of these consisting of fuels – oil, gas and coal; comparably, 92 per cent of exports to the United States and 75 per cent to the European Union are also primary products.⁴ Most of the South–South investment originates from the BRIC states; however, the emerging Gulf Cooperation Council states (GCC) have also increased their investment and trade relations with the continent.⁵ Most of this capital flow has been targeted within the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, reaching North African states, while only a handful of states in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) have been targeted.⁶

The GCC states have a history of trade and cultural exchange with Africa, facilitated by their geographic proximity, although trade relations waned in recent decades. However, since 2002, trade between Africa and the wider Middle East, much of it with the GCC states, has risen by 400 per cent to almost US\$50 billion.⁷ Other figures analysing the period between 2000 and 2009 suggest that annual trade between the GCC states and African countries has risen by 270 per cent to more than US\$18 billion.⁸ Africa, especially SSA, has experienced a decade of growth consistently surpassing 5 per cent as FDI has put financing into roads, railways, information and communications technology, water and power. Despite the growth, there remains a significant deficit of US\$93 billion annually to meet the continent’s infrastructure needs up to the end of 2020.⁹ This continent-wide growth is an attractive opportunity for states that want to capitalise on new market opportunities. A mapping of Qatar’s engagements with SSA reveals a noteworthy pattern that may offer insight into Qatari foreign policy and strategies for economic diversification.

² Timothy Shaw, Andrew Cooper and Gregory Chin, ‘Emerging Powers and Africa: Implications for/ from Global Governance?’, *Politikon* 36/1 (2009), pp. 27–44. Available at <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02589340903155385> (accessed 16 September 2015).

³ UNCTAD, *Investing in the SDGs: An Action Plan*, World Investment Report 2014 (New York and Geneva, 2014).

⁴ Maxi Schoeman, ‘Of BRICs and Mortar: The Growing Relations between Africa and the Global South’, *International Spectator: Italian Journal of International Affairs* 46/1 (2011), pp. 33–51 at pp. 38–9.

⁵ Gulf Cooperation Council states are Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

⁶ Economist Intelligence Unit, *Risk and Reward: The Gulf’s Push into African Infrastructure* (London, 2014).

⁷ Mirna Sleiman, ‘Wealthy Gulf Investors Warm to Africa’, *Reuters*, 2 January 2013. Available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/01/02/us-gulf-africa-investment-idUSBRE9010B520130102> (accessed 16 September 2015).

⁸ Michael Peel, ‘Africa and the Gulf’, *Survival* 55/ 4 (2013), pp. 143–54 at p. 146. Available at <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00396338.2013.823037> (accessed 14 November 2014).

⁹ Economist Intelligence Unit, *Risk and Reward*, p. 3.

This paper explores Qatari economic engagements with SSA, both through its state-sponsored charity and its business enterprises, over the past half decade. Within a context of increased South–South cooperation, specifically between emerging economies and African states, Qatar is not as heavily invested in SSA as other emerging economies, as exemplified by the small number of business ventures launched by Qatari state-owned enterprises (SOEs). This analysis presents a cursory comparison of Qatar’s South–South engagements with SSA and East Asia for the purpose of demonstrating the lopsided expansion of trade relations and interdependencies within the hydrocarbon sector, where Qatar has a comparative advantage. On the other hand, there has been an expansion of Qatari-sponsored aid programmes focused on education and social development in SSA. This approach to SSA may indicate that Qatar is promoting development that may provide benefits in the future.

It is difficult to argue that a nation-state would utilise foreign aid donations purely from charitable motives. Foreign aid is considered a political tool with which states can promote their own interests abroad or bolster their international image. Foreign aid from GCC states was generally thought to increase during periods of high oil prices and decrease when prices dropped. Young recently contradicted this notion, showing that the current trends of interventionist GCC states, namely Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, is for continued foreign aid in the MENA region despite historically low oil prices that put pressure on state budgets. These Gulf states are supporting strategic partners abroad during a period of constricting markets and high domestic demand. Young writes that ‘[T]he politics of Gulf Arab state aid is, above all, strategic. Political goals can override economic prudence.’¹⁰ Agreeing with this premise leads to questions as to Qatar’s intentions towards SSA.

We gather insight for understanding the Qatari strategy towards SSA by reviewing the state’s objectives as they are laid out in the *Qatar National Vision 2030*, as well as by drawing on Qatar’s use of ‘subtle power’ in its foreign policy. More specifically, we problematise Qatar’s engagement with SSA by comparing Qatari charitable programmes in the region with the state’s economic interests; we then compare the SSA economic interests with recent engagements with Asian nations to demonstrate the variance. Considering the proximity of the Arab Gulf to SSA, by way of the Horn of Africa, we assume that Qatar could capitalise on the recent oil and gas discoveries in East Africa as an opportunity for expanding its hydrocarbon extraction industry into the nascent African market. The question that arises is: despite its comparative advantage in hydrocarbon extraction and the opportunities presented by these recent discoveries, why is Qatar seemingly more engaged in charitable enterprises than extractive industries in SSA? Qatar, in relation to its capacity for investment and trade, has engaged SSA much less than other enterprising GCC states, according to an Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) report.¹¹

¹⁰ Karen E. Young, ‘The Limits of Gulf Arab Aid: Energy Markets and Foreign Policy’, *EUCERS ‘Reflections’ Working Paper Series 1* (Summer 2015), pp. 43–53 at p. 43. Available at <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/departments/warstudies/research/groups/eucers/reflections-1-2015.pdf> (accessed 16 September 2015).

¹¹ Economist Intelligence Unit, *Risk and Reward*.

Qatar's National Vision 2030: A Policy Statement

The *Qatar National Vision 2030* presents the state's goals for economic, human, social and environmental development as it progresses towards developed state status by 2030.¹² Three elements of this plan have an impact on the current analysis: first, the pursuit of a diversified economy away from dependence on hydrocarbon exports; second, a commitment to improving access to higher education so that Qatari citizens are prepared to compete in the global knowledge economy; third, the state's commitment to being a leader in regional and global development. It is of note that all GCC states have developed their own versions of a national vision looking beyond 2020, and that similarities exist between these; one instance is the common objective of economic diversification away from hydrocarbon dependency. In this respect, Qatar is an outlier because its national vision situates economic diversification as a supplement to its existing natural gas sector, while the other GCC states' national visions plan for diversification in terms of a post-hydrocarbon economy.¹³ Qatar Petroleum (QP), a state-owned corporation, is the world leader in liquid natural gas (LNG) exports. An intangible added value of these assets is the global demand for LNG, which allows Qatar to create interdependencies through trade with other emerging states.

Qatar's known oil reserves are sufficient to continue current output levels for another 23 years, and its natural gas reserves constitute 5 per cent of the global total and are the third largest in the world.¹⁴ QP and its subsidiaries undertake all aspects of upstream and downstream energy development, including transport and trade. In pursuit of economic development and a 'competitive and diversified economy',¹⁵ opportunities present themselves in the natural resource extractive industries located in SSA, specifically the recent discoveries of oil and gas deposits in East Africa. Here Qatar could exploit its comparative advantage in the hydrocarbon extraction industry, including refining and exporting. Investment and development of industry in SSA also support Qatar's vision to 'play a significant role in the global partnership for development'.¹⁶ These are two reasons for Qatar to venture into the African extractives industry.

A brief overview of Qatar's GDP illustrates the state's comparative advantage in hydrocarbon extraction, given the dominance of the oil and gas sector at 58 per cent of national output.¹⁷ A combination of services makes up the second largest output:

¹² General Secretariat for Development Planning, *Qatar National Vision 2030* (Doha, 2008). Available at http://www.gsdp.gov.qa/portal/page/portal/gsdp_en/qatar_national_vision/qnv_2030_document/QNV2030_English_v2.pdf (accessed 10 July 2014).

¹³ Martin Hvidt, *Economic Diversification in the GCC Countries: Past Record and Future Trends*, Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance and Globalisation in the Gulf States, Research Paper No. 27. Available at <http://www.lse.ac.uk/middleEastCentre/kuwait/research/papers/economicdiversification.aspx> (accessed 16 September 2015).

¹⁴ Claude Berrebi, Francisco Martorell and Jeffery C. Tanner, 'Qatar's Labor Markets at a Crucial Crossroad', *Middle East Journal*, 63/3 (2009), pp. 421–42 at p. 423.

¹⁵ General Secretariat for Development Planning, *Qatar National Vision 2030*, p. 11.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ World Trade Organization, *Trade Policy Review: Report by the Secretariat: Qatar*, 18 March 2014, p. 48. Available at http://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/tpr_e/s296_e.pdf (accessed 16 September 2015).

finance, insurance and real estate (10.2 per cent), followed by manufacturing (9.8 per cent) to round out the top three.¹⁸ The World Trade Organization identifies the most effective element of diversification as the downstream energy industries, due to their synergies with the primary exports of oil and gas. Growth within the non-hydrocarbon GDP¹⁹ is supported by expansion in the banking industries, such as Qatar National Bank's buy-in of Togo's Ecobank Transnational, Egypt's Qatar National Bank Alahly and South Africa's Public Investment Corp.²⁰

Qatar thus far has more service assets than extractive industries located in SSA, even though there is the opportunity for expanding the extractive sector into East Africa. This begins to look like a deliberate strategy as we go on to compare Qatar's trade relations with Asian countries and with Africa.

Qatari–South Trade Patterns

An EIU report from 2011 that surveyed emerging market trade and investment stated that Asia is expected to be the most important emerging-market region for the GCC states due to the demand for oil.²¹ Certainly, Qatar is investing for the purpose of increasing the nation's wealth, but economics is only part of the strategy. Qatar's foreign policy has been to manoeuvre between competitors and make itself useful to powerful states as well as sub-state political actors. The same EIU report claims that the GCC states' trade with Africa has been increasing,²² except for Qatar.

Trade between Qatar and Africa has been minuscule in recent years. Tables 1 and 2 show that Qatari exports to Africa and imports from the continent between 2010 and 2012 have made up less than 2 per cent of national trade in both directions. In 2010 Qatar passed legislation to adopt the Protocol on the Preferential Tariff Scheme for the Trade Preferential System among members of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation,²³ which includes more than 20 countries from SSA as members.²⁴ This arrangement offers reciprocal preferential tariff access among trade partners. Qatar has 22 bilateral investment agreements (some of which have not been ratified); four of these partner with African states, two of them from SSA. They include Egypt, Morocco, Senegal and Sudan.²⁵ Even with arrangements meant to facilitate trade between Qatar

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Non-hydrocarbon GDP is defined as all economic activity other than upstream oil and gas production.

²⁰ R. Tuttle, 'Qatar National Bank Expands in Africa with Ecobank Deal', *Bloomberg Business*, 4 September 2014. Available at <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-09-04/qatar-national-bank-expands-in-africa-with-ecobank-deal> (accessed 16 September 2015).

²¹ Economist Intelligence Unit, *GCC Trade and Investment Flows: The Emerging-Market Surge* (London, 2011). Available at <http://www.economistinsights.com/sites/default/files/GCC%20Trade%20and%20investment%20flows.pdf> (accessed 16 September 2015).

²² Ibid., pp. 17–25.

²³ World Trade Organization, *Trade Policy Review*, p. 24.

²⁴ OIC, *Organisation of Islamic Cooperation: Member States* (n.d.). Available at <http://www.oic-oci.org/oicv2/states> (accessed 2 December 2014).

²⁵ World Trade Organization, *Trade Policy Review*, p. 26.

and these selected African states, little has been done in actuality. As Tables 1 and 2 illustrate, there is a vast difference between Qatar’s trade with the African and the Asian regions.²⁶

Table 1. Qatar’s Merchandise Exports by Destination, including re-exports (for selected regions and states)

Region/State	% of total in 2010	% of total in 2011	% of total in 2012
Africa	1.1	1.3	1.3
South Africa	0.3	0.7	0.8
Asia	73.5	73.6	78.1
China	3.0	3.9	5.1
Japan	28.7	26.1	27.7

Source: World Trade Organization, *Trade Policy Review*, pp. 80 and 82.

Table 2. Qatar’s Merchandise Imports by Origin, 2010–12 (for selected regions and states)

Region/State	% of total in 2010	% of total in 2011	% of total in 2012
Africa	1.8	1.7	1.6
Egypt	1.2	1.2	1.2
Asia	30.5	30.0	33.9
China	9.1	9.6	9.8
Japan	7.5	5.6	8.2

Source: World Trade Organization, *Trade Policy Review*, pp. 80 and 82.

²⁶ The list of Asian countries that trade with Qatar is incomplete in Tables 1 and 2. China and Japan make up the largest percentages and therefore are contrasted with Africa’s only and largest contributors.

Trade and Investment in Asia

In contrast to the limited economic relations shown in Tables 1 and 2 between Qatar and SSA, trade relationships with partner states in Asia and the Pacific are expanding. Bilateral trade between Qatar and Thailand increased by 43 per cent to US\$4 billion in 2013, from US\$2.8 billion in 2012.²⁷ Qatar trades oil and LNG, fertiliser and pesticide, and finished oils and chemicals with Thailand in exchange for motor cars, parts and accessories, precious stones and jewellery, iron and steel machinery and jasmine rice, to name a few products. The connection with the Philippines is another that is growing stronger. In the ten months ending in October 2013, bilateral trade between Qatar and the Philippines reached US\$862 million.²⁸ Through this deal, Qatar receives meat products, bananas, cereals and condiments, and exports petroleum oils and oils obtained from bituminous minerals, polymers of ethylene, polyethylene, liquefied butane and propane and other liquefied petroleum gases, among others, as well as unwrought aluminium alloys, tower cranes, scaffolding and other construction equipment. In 2008–2009 QP and the China National Offshore Oil Company signed multiple agreements; one, a 25-year Exploration and Production Sharing Agreement, makes Qatar the leading supplier of LNG to China.²⁹ QP also has a stake in a US\$4 billion petrochemical complex in Vietnam.³⁰ More recently, the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) has earmarked US\$15–20 billion for investments in Asian healthcare, infrastructure and real estate.³¹ This investment and trade strategy with Asia is much broader than the current arrangements in SSA.

Investment in Africa

Recently discovered oil and gas deposits in the East African states of Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania, Ethiopia and Mozambique may revitalise the region as production is expected to begin between 2017 and 2019.³² This opportunity did not receive much attention from Qatar. Qatar Petroleum International (QPI) is a partner in only two

²⁷ Joey Aguilar, 'Diplomat: Thailand in Talks to Invite Qatari Investment', *Gulf Times*, 28 January 2014. Available at <http://www.gulf-times.com/qatar/178/details/379338/diplomat-thailand-in-talks-to-invite-qatari-investment> (accessed 16 September 2015).

²⁸ Peter Alagos, 'Qatar–Philippines 10-Month Trade Volume Reaches USD862m in 2013', *ZAWYA*, 19 February 2014. Available at http://www.zawya.com/story/QatarPhilippines_10month_trade_volume_reaches_USD862m_in_2013-ZAWYA20140219034434 (accessed 28 May 2014).

²⁹ Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, *The GCC States and the Shifting Balance of Global Power*, Occasional Paper No. 6, Center for International and Regional Studies, Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar.

³⁰ Mohd Fauzi Bin Abu-Hussin, 'Gulf Arab Foreign Direct Investment (FDI): ASEAN Targets of Opportunity', *Middle East Institute*, 20 March 2013. Available at <http://www.mei.edu/content/gulf-arab-foreign-direct-investment-fdi-asean-targets-opportunity> (accessed 9 January 2014).

³¹ Brian Spegele, 'Qatar's Sovereign-Wealth Fund to Invest at Least \$15 Billion in Asia', *Wall Street Journal*, 4 November 2014. Available at <http://www.wsj.com/articles/qatars-sovereign-wealth-fund-to-invest-at-least-15-billion-in-asia-1415080679> (accessed 16 September 2015).

³² D. A. Barber, 'Geopolitics: Challenges of East Africa's Oil and Gas Boom, Part I', *AFK Insider*, 27 August 2014. Available at <http://afkinsider.com/70140/challenges-east-africas-oil-gas-boom-part-1> (accessed 15 September 2014).

East African sites. In Mauritania, QPI is partnered with Total E&P Mauritania and Sonatrach. QPI has a 20 per cent working interest as an active non-operating partner in the two exploration blocks; Total E&P Mauritania has 60 per cent as operator and Sonatrach 20 per cent. Seismic and other necessary studies have been completed and two exploration wells have been drilled. QPI also has a share subscription to 15 per cent of Total E&P Congo relating to nine producing assets and three exploration licences in the country.³³

In mid-2014, Qatar Mining (QM) was awarded four mining permits in the state of Mali in West Africa, creating QM Mali Greenfield,³⁴ the SOE's first project in Africa. It was thought to be an initial step towards securing a supply of raw materials for Qatari-based industries and to focus investment on commodities where local and global demand are high. QM was established in 2010 to undertake targeted, value-accretive investments in the mining and metals sector and to become an international multi-commodity mining company by 2024. However, in June 2015, The website *oilprice.com* reported that the QIA was abandoning the mining sector due to poorly performing markets in precious and non-precious metals, compounded by poor earnings from oil and natural gas.³⁵

In light of the comparison of investment and trade in the hydrocarbon sector between Qatar and SSA on the one hand and Asia on the other, it is obvious that the focus for hydrocarbons is in Asia. In Africa, Qatar is investing primarily in banking and insurance, with a few large-scale real estate projects, all located in North Africa except for one, which is located in Sudan. This regional comparison begins to look like a deliberate strategy as the state concentrates the expansion of different sectors into separate regions. This design in turn begins to resemble established characteristics of Qatar's foreign policy, in which the state has demonstrated significant agency manoeuvring between rival political actors, both state and non-state, while maintaining relations with both sides even when criticised for doing so. In the same way, we argue, Qatar is executing separate economic strategies in different regions. This idea is further illustrated by the depth of foreign aid directed towards SSA. Before presenting that evidence, however, it is necessary to explore further Qatar's variety of power.

³³ 'Qatar Petroleum International: Nasser Khalil Al-Jaidah, CEO', *Energy Boardroom*, 2 September 2014. Available at <http://www.energyboardroom.com/interviews/qatar-petroleum-international-qpi-nasser-khalil-al-jaidah-ceo> (accessed 16 September 2015).

³⁴ 3SMedia, 'Qatar's Foray into West African Mineral Resources', *miningnews*, 21 July 2014. Available at <http://www.miningnews.com/2014/07/21/qatars-foray-into-west-african-mineral-resources> (accessed 16 September 2015).

³⁵ Michael McDonald, 'Key Points for Investing in Global Mining Sector', *Oilprice.com*, 21 June 2015. Available at <http://oilprice.com/Metals/Commodities/Key-Points-For-Investing-In-Global-Mining-Sector.html> (accessed 16 September 2015).

Qatar's 'Subtle Power'

It is possible to identify at least five motivations that guide Qatar's foreign policy. First is the maintenance of the country's own security and stability.³⁶ Qatar is located in an area rife with political and military rivalries; by raising its international profile, it aims to prevent the perils of small-state anonymity and *vulnerability*.³⁷ Second, in building its reputation as an effective mediator of conflict, Qatar not only contributes to its first aim of preventing the spill-over of regional violence, but seeks to expand its influence as an international player, vis-à-vis competing hegemon within the region.³⁸ Third, Qatar, seeks to appeal to and leverage the international community, branding itself as a key international ally and a potential host state for global economics and business.³⁹ Fourth, the state's foreign policy has been largely influenced by Qatari perspectives on sovereign wealth management,⁴⁰ as well as the maximisation of its natural resources to achieve domestic development.⁴¹ Fifth, and most recently, observers have suggested that Qatar has begun to turn away from self-described 'arrogant policies' of absolute support for regional Islamist groups and revolutions, signalling a softening in foreign policy goals and a return to the brand of neutral mediator.⁴² Achieving these aims is made possible by the strategic utilisation of the state's most effective capabilities: LNG exports and a vast amount of capital reserves. Qatar's execution of its foreign policy is not one based on coercion, but rather a strategic utilisation of soft power attributes.

Kamrava identifies four key components that Qatar utilises that he terms 'subtle power'.⁴³ Safety and security 'guaranteed through physical and military protection' is the first component. This does not necessarily involve 'force projection and coercion or bribery'. Qatar has national security coverage because the United States' command centre for air operations for the MENA region is located at Al Udaid Air base, just outside Doha.⁴⁴

³⁶ Line Khatib, 'Qatar's Foreign Policy: The Limits of Pragmatism', *International Affairs* 89/2 (2013), pp. 417–31 at p. 418. Available at <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.ezproxy.lib.umb.edu/doi/10.1111/1468-2346.12025/abstract> (accessed 10 January 2014).

³⁷ Ibid. Andrew Cooper and Timothy Shaw, 'The Diplomacies of Small States at the Start of the Twenty-First Century: How Vulnerable? How Resilient?', in Andrew Cooper and Timothy Shaw (eds), *The Diplomacies of Small States: Between Vulnerability and Resilience* (New York, 2013), pp. 1–18.

³⁸ Khatib, 'Qatar's Foreign Policy', p. 419.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 419–20.

⁴⁰ Asa Fitch, 'Qatar SWF Drops Flashy Deals as Foreign Policy Shift, Report Says', *Wall Street Journal*, 16 June 2014. Available at <http://blogs.wsj.com/middleeast/2014/06/16/qatar-swf-drops-flashy-deals-as-foreign-policy-shifts-report-says/> (accessed 16 September 2015).

⁴¹ 'Envoy to US Spells Out Qatar's Foreign Policy', *Gulf Times*, 12 July 2014. Available at <http://www.gulf-times.com/qatar/178/details/400164/envoy-to-us-spells-out-qatar%E2%80%99s-foreign-policy> (accessed 16 September 2015).

⁴² Sigurd Neubauer, 'Qatar's Changing Foreign Policy', *Sada*, 8 April 2014. Available at <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/2014/04/08/qatar-s-changing-foreign-policy/h7gf> (accessed 16 September 2015). 'Qatar's Foreign Policy: Change of Tack', *Economist*, 15 July 2013. Available at <http://www.economist.com/blogs/pomegranate/2013/07/qatar-s-foreign-policy> (accessed 16 September 2015).

⁴³ Mehran Kamrava, *Qatar: Small State, Big Politics* (Ithaca, 2013), p. 61.

⁴⁴ Thom Shanker, 'Hagel Lifts Veil on Major Military Center in Qatar', *New York Times*, 11 December 2013. Available at http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/12/world/middleeast/hagel-lifts-veil-on-major-military-center-in-qatar.html?_r=0 (accessed 16 September 2015).

Prestige derived from brand recognition and the development of a positive international reputation is the second component of subtle power. Kamrava identifies a number of ways in which countries acquire such an image: as ‘a result of the behaviors of their leaders domestically and on the world stage, the reliability of the products they manufacture, their foreign policies, their responses to natural disasters or political crises, the scientific and cultural products they export, and the deliberate marketing and branding efforts they undertake’. Prestige of this sort ‘can enhance overall effectiveness in agenda-setting and in influencing frameworks and preferences’.⁴⁵ Qatar has been constructing its brand through the promotion of its high-profile Al Jazeera News Network, its ‘five-star’ Qatar Airlines, and major sports events including tennis, golf and auto racing tournaments and matches, as well as hosting such global events as the 2022 World Cup tournament.

A positive global image is reinforced by a ‘proactive presence on the global stage’. A global presence is maintained by private enterprises or SOEs combined with a diplomatic posture that promotes the state and its entities as ‘a global good citizen’. Qatar has presented itself as an impartial mediator in active disputes in the MENA region and East Africa.⁴⁶

The fourth component of subtle power is wealth. Considered a classic hard power asset, wealth produces influence by control and ownership over valuable economic assets – persistent and sizeable international investments.⁴⁷ It has already been mentioned that Qatar has amassed large capital surpluses derived from hydrocarbon rents over the 2000–08 period. The state has pledged development aid in mediation situations as a means of encouraging a settlement. Additionally, a major mechanism for Qatari economic diversification and long-term wealth management of oil and gas surpluses is the QIA, which manages its sovereign wealth fund (SWF), which holds an estimated US\$120 billion in assets and is comprised of five subsidiaries.⁴⁸ Qatar intends to distinguish itself within the Gulf Cooperation Council as a ‘modern business-orientated state that is able to compete in the international economy’.⁴⁹

As Qatar pursues its diversification away from dependence on hydrocarbon exports, it is investing in financial services sectors across the globe and in Africa particularly. Moreover, a strategy of expanding the hydrocarbon sector appears to be targeted towards Asian states in need of energy to fuel development. Returning to SSA, we see a broad expenditure of foreign aid directed where Qatar does not have much economic investment beyond the services mentioned. It is at this point that the observation presented by Young in the introduction becomes problematic.

⁴⁵ Kamrava, *Qatar*, pp. 61–2.

⁴⁶ Mustafa el-Labbad, ‘Qatar: Big Ambitions, Limited Capabilities’, *Perspectives: Analysis and Commentary from the Middle East & North Africa* 4, pp. 18–23. Khatib, ‘Qatar’s Foreign Policy’. Ulrichsen, *The GCC States and the Shifting Balance of Global Power*.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁴⁸ SWFI, *Fund Rankings* (n.d.). Available at <http://www.swfinstitute.org/fund-rankings> (accessed 10 October 2014).

⁴⁹ Khatib, ‘Qatar’s Foreign Policy’, p. 420.

Why would Qatar provide foreign aid where its economic and security interests are minimal? Before presenting an answer to this question it is prudent to present the evidence.

Impact Investing

Impact investing can be broadly defined as an investment made with an intent to create social or environmental benefit in addition to financial return or private sector development.⁵⁰ Research by the World Economic Forum suggests that impact investing can offer a number of benefits: the opportunity to create tremendous social change in targeted communities or states; the creative funding of projects which might otherwise go unfunded and the scaling of organisations with viable business models that meet pressing social or environmental challenges.⁵¹ The practice is also cited as emphasising *long-term* value creation, driving higher investor commitment as a result of their knowledge about a state or organisation's sustainable and socially responsible investment approach, and it offers the opportunity to carve out a distinct, competitive advantage for practitioners amongst their peers.⁵² Foundations are particularly noted as a natural fit for impact investing given their concerted focus on addressing key social sector challenges.⁵³ Qatari foundations are duly engaged in this enterprise.

Qatar's *National Vision 2030* aligns itself quite closely with the principles of impact investing, in recognising that future sustainability involves more than economic prosperity, and must also address issues of social and human development. There is a strong, researched correlation between philanthropic action and a state's or organisation's recognised 'brand'. By doubling its presence in selected African countries, in which it is already present via the Education Above All (EAA) initiative,⁵⁴ Qatar has increased its presence and consequently enhanced its soft power in Africa. Helping support peace in Africa through education is a way to 'brand' itself not only as a leader in education but also as a strong contributor to peace and development across the continent. Moreover, the UNESCO Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report 2011 recognises conflict as a major impediment to achievement of EFA goals, especially in SSA.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Dalberg Global Development Advisors, *Impact Investing in West Africa* (Washington, DC, 2011), p. 10.

⁵¹ Michael Drexler and Abigail Noble, *From the Margins to the Mainstream: Assessment of the Impact Investment Sector and Opportunities to Engage Mainstream Investors* (Cologne, 2013), pp. 9–10.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 13.

⁵⁴ The EAA foundation is a relatively new NGO, established in 2012 by Her Excellency Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, an active advocate of access to quality education in the international arena. Before launching the EAA she had set up several initiatives which now fall under its umbrella. In 2010, supported by His Highness the Father Emir and Sheikha Moza, Qatar introduced a resolution on 'The Right to Education in Emergency Situations' at the UN General Assembly. The resolution, which was unanimously adopted, affirms the human right to education and access to it during crisis and conflict, and urges states to support this right as an integral element of humanitarian assistance and response. Her Excellency Sheikha Moza holds a number of notable roles in the field of education internationally, as the current Chair, Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development; Special Envoy for Basic and Higher Education, UNESCO; and a member of the Steering Committee of the UN Secretary-General's Global Education First Initiative, amongst others.

⁵⁵ UNESCO, *The Hidden Crisis: Armed Conflict and Education*, EFA Global Monitoring Report 2011 (Paris, 2011).

A premier Qatari strategy in its mediation efforts has been the use of ‘carrot diplomacy’, or the facilitation of peace through the promise of financial aid for post-conflict reconstruction efforts. Indeed, many of Qatar’s more prominent mediation processes exemplify this approach, which fundamentally links the state’s quest for soft power influence in the Middle East and Africa. In Sudan, for example, Qatar used its economic model of state capitalism for political dividends throughout the peace process, both by emphasising its already sizeable investments and by pledging new infusions of financial resources, including US\$500 million for reconstruction assistance.⁵⁶ For Somalia, Qatar Charity (QC) has been one of the most active not-for-profit organisations operating in the country, paralleling high-level mediation efforts with the launch of dedicated relief programmes during the country’s recent famine.⁵⁷ During the recent conflict in Mali, the Qatari Red Crescent was at one point the only humanitarian organisation to be granted access to the vast Northern Mali region, a privileged position acquired since the 1980s, through the establishment and funding of a wide network of institutions, madrassas, schools and charities in Mali.⁵⁸

Qatar has strengthened its presence in Africa over the past few years through aid and charity work. Most recently, QC implemented a relief and rehabilitation project for the people affected by the floods that have swept through the Somali province of Middle Shabelle. The project will benefit around 93,000 people.⁵⁹ In December 2014, the RAF in partnership with Qatar Airways inaugurated Al-Amal School for primary education in Djibouti, in accordance with a quality partnership which aims at launching several community initiatives. The school was inaugurated in conjunction with the arrival of Qatar Airways’ first flight to Djibouti International Airport. Al-Amal School is being implemented by the RAF in cooperation with the Sanabil Al-Khair Association and provides the opportunity for Arabic-language education to thousands of students from Bekados province, on the outskirts of Djibouti’s capital.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, ‘Qatar’s Mediation Initiatives’, *Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre Policy Brief*, February 2013, p. 2.

⁵⁷ QC is a well-established NGO which acts not only as a donor but also as an implementing agent through its field offices across seven sub-Saharan countries, namely Burkina Faso, the Comoros, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Somalia and Sudan. Besides its field offices, QC also works through strategic partnerships in other African countries, namely Kenya, Tunisia, Benin, Chad, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Libya, Morocco, Senegal and Togo. QC’s partners include private foundations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Fundación Kanouté. See: <https://www.qcharity.org/en/qa> & <http://www.gulf-times.com/qatar/178/details/433643/qc-sponsors-10,000-people-in-somalia> (accessed 16 September 2015).

⁵⁸ Ségolène Allemandou, ‘Is Qatar Fuelling the Crisis in North Mali?’, *France 24*, 23 January 2013. Available at <http://www.france24.com/en/20130121-qatar-mali-france-ansar-dine-mnla-al-qaeda-sunni-islam-doha> (accessed 16 September 2015).

⁵⁹ ‘93,000 to Benefit from QRC Somalia Project’, *Peninsula*, 11 March 2015. Available at <http://thepeninsulaqatar.com/news/qatar/326307/93-000-to-benefit-from-qrc-somalia-project> (accessed 16 September 2015).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

Conclusion

Qatar is engaging SSA more substantially through aid programmes that promote education and social development, despite the burgeoning hydrocarbon extraction industry, which is the state's comparative advantage. Qatari leadership is advancing a programme for economic diversification in two ways. It is expanding its trade into East Asia by utilising natural gas exports to strengthen interdependencies with Asian states that crave energy sources. In SSA, diversification is under way as service industries, banking and insurance are expanding. Neoliberal thinking would probably drive Qatar to take advantage of East Africa's proximity and sizeable markets, leading the state to move in that direction. However, that is not what is happening. In an attempt to politicise Qatar's foreign aid to SSA, we assume that the underlying strategy is to promote education and social development in the region while simultaneously expanding the service sectors. Over time, the hope is for this aid to assist in development and to promote economic entrepreneurship that could eventually benefit Qatari service enterprises in the region.

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