

# THE RISE OF QATAR AS A SOFT POWER AND THE CHALLENGES

*Osman Antwi-Boateng, PhD*

Assistant Professor of Political Science, U.A.E University, U.A.E

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## Abstract

This paper argues that Qatar exercises soft power influence in a troubled region via attraction and “carrots”. The sources of attraction includes: Qatar’s political stability derived from its military alliance with the U.S and effective income redistribution policies and a progressive higher education system which have greatly enhanced the stature of Qatar in the Middle East. Qatar offers the following “carrots” for influence: the potency of its Aljazeera Network, “carrot diplomacy”, sports investments and a generous foreign aid policy. However, the efficacy of these tools could be undermined, by the lack of a democratic culture in Qatar, questionable associations and causes, the unsustainable trajectory of “carrot” diplomacy and a creeping shift towards hard power in resolving conflicts and its attendant backlash.

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**Keywords:** Qatar, hard power, soft power, diplomacy, Arab Spring, Middle East

## Introduction

This paper seeks to explore how Qatar exerts soft power influence in its foreign policy and its attendant challenges. Since Joseph Nye pioneered the concept of soft power, there have been numerous articles on how countries are exerting soft power influence. However, most of these articles have disproportionately focused on the same traditional great powers that dominate international politics in the exercise of hard power such as the U.S, China, Russia and other European powers. Thus the focus on Qatar offers a departure from a great power exercising any form of power and demonstrates how a small country can punch above its weight by exerting soft power influence and shaping the course of history in the Middle East.

Joseph Nye defines soft power as “the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or

payment.”<sup>101</sup> Nye notes that “one can affect other’s behavior in three main ways: threats of coercion (sticks), inducements and payments (‘carrots’), and attraction that makes others want what you want.”<sup>102</sup> Also, soft-power relies on three main resources: cultural - places where it is attractive; political values -when the promoter adheres to them at home and abroad; and foreign policies- regarded as legitimate and having moral authority<sup>103</sup>. In this regard, this paper argues that Qatar relies on attraction and “carrots” in its exercise of soft power. Qatar’s relative political stability in a turbulent region derived from a strong military alliance with the U.S and the effective redistribution of wealth among its citizens constitute a major source of attraction within its sphere of influence in the Middle East. In addition, the image of the Aljazeera media network as the voice of the powerless coupled with a progressive higher educational system is shaping the hearts and minds of thousands of people within the region. In terms of “carrots”, the volume and scope of Qatar’s foreign aid, sports investments and “carrot” diplomatic efforts is a major boost for its attempt at soft power. However, these could be derailed by the following: creeping utilization of “sticks” in the form of military intervention in Libya and Syria, questionable associations and causes, the unsustainable trajectory of “carrot” diplomacy and the risk of negative backlash.

### **Soft Power by Attraction Dividends of U.S./Qatar Military Alliance**

Although Qatar is not a democratic country in the liberal sense and thus hardly a symbol for liberal democratic ideals in practice that is worthy of universal admiration and attraction, it still has some indirect hard-power that that makes it attractive within its sphere of influence in the Middle East. This is because, “Military power can also be an attraction to those who wish to be on the winning side - or at least wish to avoid being on the losing side. Military units can be used for disaster relief”,<sup>104</sup>. In this regard, Qatar’s military alliance with the U.S and its hosting of the U.S. military base, CENTCOM has bolstered its image in the region to the point of mute attraction and awe which constitute soft power. For example, the U.S/Qatar military alliance enabled Qatar to engage in military humanitarian intervention in Libya, addition to the hard power participation in the overthrow of the Gaddafi regime.

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<sup>101</sup> Joseph Nye, “Public Diplomacy and Soft Power.” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616 (2008), 94

<sup>102</sup> Ibid

<sup>103</sup>J. Nye, *Soft power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, p.11.

<sup>104</sup> Dan Blatt, review of *The Paradox of American Power* by Joseph Nye, *Futurecasts* 4 (2002):3.

Furthermore, it inoculates Qatar against any immediate regional threat and preserves the power and authority of the Al-Thani dynasty as would be provocateurs would have to contend with the full might of the sole Super-power in the world which has vested military and economic interest in Qatar. Second, the U.S military alliance also enhances the image of Qatar regionally and worldwide as a stable country that has the approval and ear of the sole Super-power thereby enabling Qatar to leverage this benefit into soft power influence in places where Qatar can serve as an interlocutor between the U.S and its Middle Eastern and Muslim friends, who are wary and suspicious of U.S motives.

### **Effective Distribution of National Wealth**

Qatar stands out in a region where there is massive disenchantment against the ruling elites for their failure to effectively manage their respective economies and distribute immense wealth from oil sales. It is therefore not surprising that Qatar remains unscathed by the Arab Spring phenomenon. Through this default mode, Qatar has become the proverbial one-eyed man in the kingdom of the blind, worthy of everyone's leadership.

Qatar is blessed with the double fortune of immense natural resources and a small population which has enabled the leadership to formulate an uncontested domestic and foreign policy at home. According to the 2008 Economist intelligence report, Qatar had a GDP per capita per person of a whopping \$448, 246. This level of wealth has insulated Qatar from the socio-economic discontent that has led to the political turmoil of the Arab Spring. The Qatari state has proven itself to be an effective distributor of wealth to its citizens through public sector employment, grants of land to citizens and the provision of subsidized goods and services. This is in contrast to other countries in the region such as Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Oman where a complex demographic mix and increasing population continue to pose a strain on wealth distribution<sup>105</sup>.

Indeed there is evidence to show that Qataris are content with the wealth distribution. According to the results of the third annual Arab Youth Survey published in March 2011 by the Dubai based Public relations firm, Asda'a Burson-Marsteller, the percentage of respondents who ranked democracy as important had fallen from 68% in 2008 to just 33% in 2010. Instead, two-thirds of the respondents placed a higher premium on stability and living in safe neighborhoods. These results show that Qataris are content with what they are currently receiving and have made a rational calculation

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<sup>105</sup> Kristain Ulrichsen. "Qatar: Emergence of a Regional Power with International Reach." *E-International Relations*, 2102, <http://www.e-ir.info/2012/01/23/qatar-emergence-of-a-regional-power-with-international-reach/> (25 June, 2013)

that the cost of rocking the status quo was not worth the hassle. It is therefore not surprising that the Arab Spring has passed Qatar by.<sup>106</sup> Indeed, this contentment quiets the home front and gives the government the breathing space to be more active in foreign affairs.

However, Nye warns that military and economic superiority is frequently not enough to achieve a desired outcome as history does not always favor the side with the biggest battalions or the deepest pockets. Furthermore, the player with the strongest power hand is not always destined to carry the day. Therefore, "Converting resources into realized power in the sense of obtaining desired outcomes requires well-designed strategies and skillful leadership. Yet strategies are often inadequate and leaders frequently misjudge -- witness Japan and Germany in 1941 or Saddam Hussein in 1990."<sup>107</sup>

### **Progressive Higher Education System**

One of the major sources of attraction that has traditionally enabled the U.S and its western allies to exercise soft power is a strong and reputable higher education system that attracts thousands of people to study in U.S and other western educational institutions. Over the years, the U.S has been offering several scholarships to other nationalities via institutional programs such as the Fulbright and Marshall Programs. These are aided by other non-governmental programs such as the Ford foundation and the George Soros financed Open Society program. It is instructive to know that former UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan was a beneficiary of a Ford foundation scholarship just as President Obama's father was in the sixties. It is no coincidence that the U.S strongly backed the candidacy of Kofi Annan, an MIT Alumnus, for the post of the U.N Secretary General. Having been educated in the U.S, Washington considered him a known entity in contrast to his unknown fellow African competitor, the former foreign minister of Tanzania, Ahmed Salim Salim.

The foreign policy benefits of such educational opportunities for host governments are immeasurable. First, higher educational institutions offer a non controversial avenue to shape the hearts and minds of future elites from other countries who will assume leadership positions in their respective countries. Such elites are more likely to have forged strong ties with their counterparts in wherever they received their education and are more amendable to deal making rather than confrontation. Second, educational opportunities help demystify the fear of the other as both U.S and international students are able to overcome entrenched stereotypes and

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid

<sup>107</sup> Dan Blatt, review of *Soft Power* by Joseph Nye, *Futurecasts* 6 (2004):5

misperceptions about each other through their interaction on various campuses. This is helpful for future cooperation between the host country and the countries of origin of the students. Nye points out that personal contact serves a vital channel for soft power. For example, "Most of China's leaders have a son or daughter educated in the States who can portray a realistic view of the United States that is often at odds with the caricatures in official propaganda",<sup>108</sup>.

Thanks to its huge oil and gas revenue, Qatar continues to invest heavily in the improvement of education, making the country the world leader in terms of the percentage of GDP spent on education. In addition, the literacy rate stands at 93 percent and 88.6 percent of girls are able to read and write, which is the highest percentage in the Arab world.<sup>109</sup> In the last few years, Qatar has aggressively courted and has been successful in getting prestigious U.S universities to open branches in Qatar where they offer the same degrees as the parent universities in the U.S. In pursuance of this strategy of attracting foreign universities, Qatar has built an education city in order to concentrate all the Universities in the same area. Notable among these Universities are Carnegie Mellon University, Georgetown University, Virginia Commonwealth University, Weill Cornell Medical College and Texas A & M University.<sup>110</sup>

These institutions have become very popular in the Middle East as it is obvious that for these universities to be viable in the long run, they would have to go beyond the small pool of prospective Qatari applicants and instead tap into the greater Middle East for prospects. Herein lays the soft power impact of Qatar on Middle Easterners and other foreigners who are attracted by the aforementioned universities in Qatar. Many of the Middle Eastern students are going to be the elites in their respective countries and as such the relationships that they forge with Qataris and other international students' coupled with their live experiences living in Qatar are going to make them much more tolerant of Qatari foreign policies in the future if not susceptible. Furthermore, schools in Qatar's education city serve as a credible alternative for higher education for Arabs who are hesitant to pursue higher education in the West either as a result of visa restrictions or cultural considerations. This adds to the growing prestige of Qatar in the Middle East and their ability to shape the minds of current and future generations of

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<sup>108</sup> Dan Blatt, review of *Soft Power* by Joseph Nye, *Futurecasts* 6 (2004):9

<sup>109</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index, "BTI 2012 Qatar Country Report," *BTI*, 2012, <http://www.btiproject.de/fileadmin/Inhalte/reports/2012/pdf/BTI%202012%20Qatar.pdf> (20 June, 2013)

<sup>110</sup> Helen Ziegler, "International Universities in Qatar". *Helen Ziegler & Associates*, n.d, <http://www.hziegler.com/articles/international-universities-in-qatar.html> (25 June, 2013).

Middle Eastern and Muslim elites. It is instructive to also note that most of the faculty members at these universities are Westerners who are primed to shape the hearts and minds of future Arab leaders towards moderation, a foreign policy goal of Qatar.

It is noteworthy that during the Cold War, U.S Soft power influences in the form of cultural exchanges and the thousands of international students who came to study in the U.S created a significant advantage for the U.S over its Cold War adversaries. Nye has observed that some of the pioneer international students from the Soviet Union played a pivotal role in the peaceful demise of the Soviet Union as they eventually rose to positions of influence upon their return home and began challenging the status quo from within.<sup>111</sup>

Apart from helping in the molding of the future elites of the Middle East, Qatar is also shaping the foreign policy agenda of the region by inviting scholars and academics to attend conferences that focus on priority issues of the Qatari government. For example, in his capacity as Chair of the Qatar Foundation, H.E. Sheikh Abdullah Bin Ali-Al Thani, holds annual summits in Doha to discuss new ideas about innovations, inventions and technologies. The theme of the 2009 inaugural summit was global education and how people around the world should cooperate to achieve something great.<sup>112</sup> Participants of these summits represent leading and emerging voices from their countries and they are not impervious to presentations from like-minded people and their Qatari hosts.

### **Aljazeera Media Influence**

Unlike the U.S and other major European powers that have are widely associated with certain desirable ideals and values which enable them to exert soft power influence around the world, Qatar until recently was a relatively unknown country. However, the establishment of the Aljazeera media empire by the Qatari government in 1996 has given the country unprecedented exposure in the world as Qatar is now synonymous with the famous Aljazeera brand which is now universally recognizable. The ability of any country to exert soft power influence by promoting its ideals or values depends largely on its ability to tout the utility of the proposed ideals via a medium that the targeted audience trusts or derives its information from. Over the years, the U.S and Great Britain have had major successes promoting their ideals around the world via their dominance of the major media sources such as CNN, BBC and Voice of America just to mention a

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<sup>111</sup>Dan Blatt, review of *Soft Power* by Joseph Nye, *Futurecasts* 6 (2004): 34

<sup>112</sup> World Innovation Summit for Education, "WISE Initiative". *WISE, N.D.*, <http://www.wise-qatar.org/> (20 June 2013)

few. However, the duopoly of American and British Media dominance has been broken by Aljazeera since its inception in 1996 and it remains a force in influencing the attitudes and minds of people in the Middle East.

In fact Hillary Clinton in a March 2, 2011, Congressional testimony cited the increasing influence of Al Jazeera in her argument for more Congressional funding to execute what she termed the “information war” which she declared the U.S was losing. Acknowledging the soft power influence of Aljazeera, she testified as follows:

Al Jazeera has been the leader in that are literally changing people’s minds and attitudes. And like it or hate it, it is really effective...In fact viewership of Al Jazeera is going up in the United States because it’s real news. You may not agree with it, but you feel like you’re getting real news around the clock instead of a million commercials and, you know, arguments between talking heads and the kind of stuff that we do on our news which, you know, is not particularly informative to us, let alone foreigners.”<sup>113</sup>

Aljazeera has been providing its audience with different perspectives on the ‘hot button’ global issues which counters the western news media’s narrative thereby carving a niche for itself as captured by its motto “The View and the Other Point of View”. In addition, Aljazeera has built a reputation for breaking the media norms of the Arab world which shies away from critiquing or questioning officialdom. Instead, the network is widely praised for giving opposition groups the forum to condemn their repressive governments.”<sup>114</sup>

The international profile of Qatar in the midst of the Arab Spring has been greatly enhanced, particularly in the Middle East as a result of the coverage of Aljazeera. The average man on the streets of Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Syria is more likely to view Qatar as siding with the powerless because its news organization is telling and showing the world their struggles for freedom and democracy. Buttressing this point, Kinninmont, notes that “Al-Jazeera now wins global accolades for its cutting-edge coverage of the Arab Spring. It has been the only Arab broadcaster to make serious inroads

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<sup>113</sup> Kirit.Radia, “Sec. of State Hillary Clinton: Aljazeera is ‘Real News’, U.S. Losing ‘Information War’” *ABCNEWS*, 2011, <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2011/03/sec-of-state-hillary-clinton-al-jazeera-is-real-news-us-losing-information-war/> (20 June, 2013)

<sup>114</sup> Jeremy M. Sharp, “*The Al Jazeera News Net work. Opportunity or Challenges for U.S.*” *Library Of Congress Washington Dc Congressional Research Service*, 2003, <http://oai.dtic.mil/oai/oai?verb=getRecord&metadataPrefix=html&identifier=ADA476202> (25 June 2013)

with western audiences, challenging the stereotype that globalization must mean westernization.”<sup>115</sup>

Aljazeera has diversified its coverage to include sports, documentaries, local news and children’s programs in addition to its highly acclaimed English-language current-events channel that features an ensemble of top notch Western journalists. Although the network may be popular in the State Department’s cafeteria in Washington, the network is unfairly tagged as a promoter of jihad in certain quarters of American society thereby limiting its expansion in the American media landscape.<sup>116</sup> However, the recent acquisition of Current TV by Aljazeera offers the possibility of Aljazeera gaining about 40 million American customers for its proposed Aljazeera America Network.<sup>117</sup> The ability of Aljazeera to broadcast into the homes of millions of Americans may go a long way to change the attitudes of Americans towards Muslims and the Middle East in general. If this happens, it will be a novelty in the sense that it will be the first time that a smaller country via the power of its media empire is exerting soft power influence on the super-power of the world.

### **“Carrots” for Soft Power**

#### **“Carrot” Diplomacy**

Qatar uses its enormous wealth from natural resources as a tool for its foreign policy in order to build its regional and international profile. However, Qatar lacks the organic influence that other countries have over others such as Saudi's religious influence, America democratic influence and China's economic influence. As a result of this, Qatar is increasingly relying on its financial muscle when mediating conflicts by promising huge sums of money after a peaceful settlement to build up infrastructure and so on. I term this “Carrot Diplomacy.” For war torn and cash strapped countries, Qatar’s offer of “carrots” for peace is a noble cause.

In order to achieve its diplomatic objectives, Qatar relies on two types of diplomacy. The first is diplomatic mediation, which seeks to project an image of Qatar’s as a neutral intermediary that can be relied upon and interested in peace and stability in the region. Qatar uses diplomacy to maximize its interests and influence on countries such as Lebanon, Egypt,

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<sup>115</sup>Jane Kinninmont, “From Football to Military Might, How Qatar Wields Global Power”, *Guardian*, 2013, [www.guardian.co.uk/.../2013/feb/.../qatar-tiny-gulf-state-global-force](http://www.guardian.co.uk/.../2013/feb/.../qatar-tiny-gulf-state-global-force) (20 June 2013)

<sup>116</sup> The Economist, “Al Jazeera Must do Better: The Arabs’ Premier Television Network Bids for American Viewers,” *The Economist*, 2013, <http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21569429-arabs-premier-television-network-bids-american-viewers-must-do-better>

<sup>117</sup> Ibid



Yemen and Sudan that have traditionally fallen under Saudi Arabian influence thereby upending the mantle of domination and influence of a strong regional hegemon.

The second mode of diplomacy employed by Qatar is public diplomacy through the media, where it presents Aljazeera as the voice of the people and an open platform for the voiceless. Diplomatic and public diplomacy is often integrated whereby Al Jazeera highlights conflicts that Qatar mediates. Most of Qatar's diplomatic interventions are aimed at defusing crisis, or relieving tension, and not necessarily resolving the the conflict. However, Qatar's modus operandi is being tested by the Arab Spring whereby Qatar is now compelled to shirk its impartiality cloak and instead take sides. Thus, Qatar has attained a respectable regional and international reputation that does not commensurate with its small size and limited military capability all through a deliberate policy where it uses its tremendous resources as carrots and sticks.

As part of its public diplomacy strategy, Qatar pursue a deliberate type of diplomacy which has been described as "Niche Diplomacy, "defined as the targeting of "resources in specific areas able to generate returns worth having."<sup>118</sup> In line with this strategy, Qatar has devoted resources in six areas with the hope of exerting soft power influence to solve some of the most vexing conflicts in the Middle East. The first strategy is serving as an unbiased interlocutor between two conflicting parties that Qatar has good relations with. In pursuance of this Qatar offered to open an office for the Taliban in Doha in order to facilitate peace talks between the Taliban and the Karzai government and also between the Taliban and the Americans.

The second strategy involves Qatar using its good offices to mediate intra faction conflicts by hosting reconciliation meetings among feuding factions in the region. For example, Qatar has hosted several reconciliation meetings between Hamas and Fatah in a bid to unite them for the much bigger challenge of speaking with one voice against Israel and ending the destruction intra faction political turf wars that undermines Palestinian unity. Also in November 2012, Qatar hosted a conference in its capital Doha which brought all the opposition forces against the Assad regime. At the conference an agreement was signed among the Syrian opposition to form a Syrian National Coalition of the Opposition and Revolutionary Forces in a bid to better coordinate their resistance against the Assad regime.

The third strategy is that Qatar hosts big multilateral conferences as it did in hosting the largest conference on United Nations Convention on Climate change from November 26- December 6, 2012 with about 17,000

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<sup>118</sup> Carl Ungerer, "The 'Middle Power' Concept in Australian Foreign Policy." *The Journal of Politics and History* 53 (2007):548

participants. Prior to this, Qatar hosted the now famous WTO Ministerial Conference known as the Doha round of talks in 2001 which sought to commit all countries to negotiate for open agricultural and manufacturing markets and enhanced intellectual property rights protections.

The fifth strategy which is perhaps the most controversial is Qatar increasingly becoming the preferred destination for many political dissidents in the region sometimes to the discomfort and displeasure of some of its international and regional allies. For example Qatar hosts Khaled Meshaal the political head of Hamas after the latter abandoned his patron Assad in the wake of the Syrian uprising. Although the Qatari move has been interpreted as an attempt to wean Hamas off its Iranian/Syria influence and thereby moderate its outlook, Tel Aviv and Washington D.C are quite wary. Similarly, Qatar host a number of prominent Islamic Brotherhood dissidents that have been expelled from Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E creating a sour spot in an otherwise excellent relationship among the three nations. On the other hand, Qatar has dangled the prospect of a comfortable asylum to key actors in some of the conflicts in the Middle East in order to entice them to defect and assist in ending a conflict. For example, in August 2012 the former Prime Minister of Syria Riad Hijab defected from the regime and headed quickly to Qatar. In addition, Qatar granted Asylum to the former foreign minister of Libya in the Gaddafi Regime Mousa Kousa in the heat of NATO's attack on Gaddafi's forces.

The last strategy involves Qatar projecting its diplomatic efforts through its Aljazeera network and highlighting its mediation initiatives to the region and the world at large. This goes a long way to enhance the reputation of Qatar in the world and the public opinion in places where Qatar is mediating peace. According to Nye "Shaping public opinion becomes even more important where authoritarian governments have been replaced by new democracies."<sup>119</sup>

## **Sports**

Sports are non-controversial tools that bring nations together and enhance the reputation and image of countries that excel in them or host successful events. That is why many countries have traditionally invested heavily in the preparation of their athletes for major worldwide sporting events. For example, in the height of the Cold War, the Olympics became a proxy battle field between the East and West to the point where some of the Eastern bloc members such as Eastern Germany deemed it necessary to dope their athletes in order to demonstrate athletic superiority and in extension,

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<sup>119</sup> Joseph Nye, "Public Diplomacy and Soft Power." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political Science and Social Science* 616 (2008), p. 105

ideological superiority over their Western German counterparts. The bidding to host major sporting events such as the Olympic Games and the Football World Cup is a fiercely contested process even though many host countries are unable to recoup all their financial investments after hosting these events. An intangible and an unquantifiable factor behind the fierce competition to host such major sporting events is the international prestige and stature gained in successfully hosting major sporting events. This goes a long way to make the host country or the athletically successful country very attractive to other countries, a major coup for soft power.

Although Qatar is far from being a major world power in any sport, it has been aggressively seeking and successfully hosting major sporting events. It successfully hosted the XV Asian Games in 2006 and recently won the bid to host the 2022 World Cup amid allegations of vote buying which threatens to undermine this tremendous accomplishment. Winning the right to host the World Cup has greatly enhanced the image and reputation of Qatar in the Middle East and among Muslims around the world, just as South Africa's hosting of the 2010 World Cup was a major source of pride for the entire African continent.

A successful hosting will further cement the reputation and level of Qatari attractiveness in the Middle Eastern region thereby boosting its influence in the Middle East and the Muslim world in general. When countries host major sports events, the best of their culture and hospitality is also on display and depending on how attractive it is, it can greatly enhance the image of the host nation. One cannot under-estimate the impact of the captivating acrobatics and fire displays during the Beijing Olympics and the James Bond themed cameo of the Queen of England during the London Olympics. Joseph Nye has identified culture as one of the main resources of soft-power, particularly in places where it is attractive.<sup>120</sup>

Qatar is also using sports to build its soft power beyond its shores through sponsorship deals with famous European sporting giants and outright purchase of major European football clubs. For example, in 2010, FC Barcelona accepted the Qatar Foundation logo in place of the UNICEF logo ending more than a century of tradition by signing a commercial shirt sponsorship package worth \$190 million dollars. In 2011, Qatar also purchased the iconic but cash strapped Parisian football club, Paris Saint-Germain. Thus using its immense financial resources to invest in an

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<sup>120</sup> Joseph Nye, "Public Diplomacy and Soft Power." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political Science and Social Science* 616, no. 1 (2008), 94.

immensely popular global sport, Qatar is tactfully increasingly its global profile via football diplomacy.<sup>121</sup>

Drawing a parallel, with the long held soft power advantage of American culture in the world, Coruzzi posits that Qatari investment in football will serve “a similar purpose to that of Hollywood. Sports, like movies, are extremely popular in all ranks of society. Just like the world learned to love America through Marlon Brando and Marilyn Monroe, so too will the world learn about Qatar through Paris-Saint Germain.”<sup>122</sup>

### Foreign Aid

The world giving index 2011, ranked Qatar in 20th place based on the percentage of population giving and the first in terms of the Middle Eastern region and Arab countries.<sup>123</sup> Countries that integrate substantial foreign aid in their foreign policy generally generate positive goodwill as it enhances their reputation among the beneficiaries. In international relations, today’s aid beneficiary is a potential future ally via soft power influence and as Nye puts it “When countries make their power legitimate in the eyes of others, they encounter less resistance to their wishes.”<sup>124</sup> According to Qatar’s Ministry of Foreign Ministry, the total developmental and humanitarian aid given by the Qatari government between 2010-2011 amounted to over 1 billion U.S dollars.<sup>125</sup>

Notable among Qatar’s giving is a one billion dollar loan to Tunisia with a 2.5% interest rate and a promise to employ 20,000 Tunisians to work in Qatar.<sup>126</sup> Similarly, Qatar has decided to invest 29 million Euros in subsidized housing in Tunisia which will provide 810 housing units in Sejoumi in the Tunis governorate.<sup>127</sup> This aid comes at an opportune time for Tunisia which went through a tumultuous democratic transition sparked primarily by agitations for more employment opportunities and democratic

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<sup>121</sup>Damien Corrucci, “Qatar: Football as Soft Power,” *Columbia Political Review*, 2013, <http://cpreview.org/2013/02/qatar-football-as-soft-power/> (25 June, 2013)

<sup>122</sup> Ibid

<sup>123</sup> Charities Aid Foundation, “World Giving Index 2011,” *Charities Aid Foundation*, 2011, [https://www.cafonline.org/pdf/worldgiving\\_index\\_2011\\_191211.pdf](https://www.cafonline.org/pdf/worldgiving_index_2011_191211.pdf) ( 20 June, 2013)

<sup>124</sup> J. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. (2004), p. 10

<sup>125</sup> Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs. “Humanitarian Aid in Two Years Exceeds QR 5 BN,” *Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Foreign Affairs*, N.d, <http://english.mofa.gov.qa/newsPage.cfm?newsid=22196> (25 June, 2013)

<sup>126</sup>Jihen Laghmari, “Qatar Giving Tunisia \$1 Billion Loan, May Provide Jobs,” *Bloomberg*, 2012, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-04-26/qatar-giving-tunisia-1-billion-loan-may-provide-jobs.html> (25 June, 2013).

<sup>127</sup>ANSAmEd. “Qatar Gives Tunisia EUR 29 mln for Subsidized Housing,” *ANSAmEd*, 2013, <http://www.ansamed.info/ansamed/en/news/sections/economics/2013/03/13/Qatar-gives-Tunisia-EUR-29-mln-subsidised-housing8392367.html> (25 June, 2013)

reforms. Qatar's financial assistance and offer of employment for Tunisians will go a long way, to ingratiate the Qatari government to Tunisians. This will make the Tunisian government and public opinion more susceptible to Qatari influence because the latter will be viewed as having demonstrated commitment to the welfare of Tunisians in times of need.

In addition, Qatar has given cash strapped Egypt a loan facility of 3 billion dollars<sup>128</sup> and pledged five free cargoes of liquefied petroleum gas to assist Egypt this summer.<sup>129</sup> This aid from Qatar was aimed at shoring up the Islamic Brotherhood government of Morsi, a major ally of Qatar at a time that the West was hesitant to grant the Morsi government financial assistance pending some political reforms. By providing financial assistance to Egypt at a critical time of need, Qatar was positioned to influence Egyptian politics and at the same time ingratiate itself to Egyptian public opinion in the post-Mubarak era. According to Nye "Shaping public opinion becomes even more important where authoritarian governments have been replaced by new democracies."<sup>130</sup> However, the toppling of Morsi could seriously undermine Qatar's image in Egypt as the former would be viewed negatively for investing in a failed cause.

Qatar's indiscriminate humanitarian assistance could yield strong foreign relations dividends from the recipient governments and countries in the foreseeable future as Qatar will become an attractive country to deal with. The provision of \$100 million dollars assistance to the U.S in the wake of a devastating natural disaster such as Katrina will help soften the image of Qatar among the U.S public which is very hostile towards Arabs and suspicious of Muslims as a result of 9/11. For risk averse and opinion poll conscious American politicians, this will reduce the political transaction cost of engaging Qatar in foreign policy issues since the former can now show to the American public a tangible deed of the Qatari government to make the case that Qatar is an American ally worthy of engagement. Nye posits that "in democracies where public opinion and parliaments matter, political leaders have less leeway to adopt tactics and strike deals than in autocracies".<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>128</sup>Bourzou Daraghi, "Qatar Gives Egypt \$3bn Aid Package," *Financial Times*, 2013, from <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/790a7d52-a1f4-11e2897100144feabdc0.html#axzz2Y4LfKNqT> (25 June, 2013).

<sup>129</sup> Summer Said, "Qatar to Give Egypt 5 Free LNG Cargoes This Summer –Egyptian," *Wall Street Journal*, 2013, <http://online.wsj.com/article/BT-CO-20130610-706242.html> (25 June, 2013)

<sup>130</sup> J. Nye, *Soft power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. (2004), p. 105

<sup>131</sup> J. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. (2004) p. 16

## **Challenges to Qatari Soft Power Promoting Values without Practicing**

On a global scale, Qatar is not faring well in terms of practicing democracy internally and serving as a good democratic role model in the Middle East. According to the 2010 Democracy Index released by the Economic Intelligence Unit, Qatar ranked 137 out of 167. A contributory factor to Qatar's low democratic ranking is its 0 rating in electoral process and pluralism.<sup>132</sup> This ranking shows that indeed Qatar is an authoritarian regime and lacks the moral authority to be the torch bearer of democracy in the Middle East.

During an official visit to the White House, President Obama praised then Emir of Qatar for his diplomatic and military support in toppling the Gaddafi regime. However, has acknowledged Qatar's awkward position as a flawed messenger of democracy, by observing that "He, Al-Thani, is a very influential guy but he himself is not reforming significantly."<sup>133</sup>

According to Nye promoting a set of political values could be a major booster to soft power influence "when the promoter adheres to them at home and abroad" and pursues "foreign policies regarded as legitimate and having moral authority".<sup>134</sup> In order for Qatar's democratic advocacy to be effective and persuasive for its recipients, Qatar would have to lead by example by practicing what it preaches. It is far difficult and unattractive to promote a policy based on do as I say, not as I do. As the cliché goes, action speaks louder than words.

## **Over Reliance on "Carrots" and Backlash**

Qatar risks a global backlash even in recipient countries of Qatari investments and foreign aid if it is perceived as buying influence. While the elites in countries where Qatar is investing or donating money may court or welcome Qatari money, a segment of the population may resent this and view this as an attempt by Qatar to prop up a political faction within the country. At worse, the sheer volume of Qatar's investment could unnerve the sensibilities of domestic actors already blaming global forces for their economic plight in a difficult global economic environment. Under such

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<sup>132</sup> Economic Intelligence Unit, "Democracy Index. Democracy in Retreat: A Report from the Economics Intelligence Unit," *The Economist*, 2010, [http://graphics.eiu.com/PDF/Democracy\\_Index\\_2010\\_web.pdf](http://graphics.eiu.com/PDF/Democracy_Index_2010_web.pdf). (25 July, 2013)

<sup>133</sup> David Jackson, "No Big Move Towards Democracy in Qatar," *USA Today*, 2011, <http://content.usatoday.com/communities/theoval/post/2011/04/obama-no-big-move-toward-democracy-in-qatar/1> (25 June 2013)

<sup>134</sup> Joseph Nye, "Public Diplomacy and Soft Power." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political Science and Social Science* 616 (2008): 94.

circumstances, Qatar risks losing the hearts and minds of the people that they hope to court for future engagements.

There is growing resentment throughout Europe and the Middle East as a result of recent Qatari investments. In the Middle East, there are grumblings against Qatar for purchasing the downfall of Gadhafi among others. After initially hailing Qatar for its role in toppling Arab Dictators, protestors in Libya burnt the Qatari flag for funding the Muslim Brotherhood there. After giving Egypt \$3 billion dollars, some Egyptians burned Qatari flag and accused their government of selling the country to Qatar. Meanwhile rumors continue to swirl among Egyptians that Qatar might purchase the Suez Canal in spite of numerous denials from both governments. Furthermore, anti-Qatar demonstrations flared up after Qatar promised a \$1 billion dollar loan prompting an embarrassed Tunisian government to rebuke its citizens for insulting a country that is helping them.<sup>135</sup>

In France, the backlash against Qatari investments is being spearheaded at the elite level among far right politicians who are particularly incensed about Qatar's plans to invest in low-income "banlieues". Marine Le Pen, the leader of the far right party, Front National who scored about 20% of the votes in the last Presidential elections has labeled Qatari investment plans as an "Islamic Trojan Horse." This has resonated with a segment of French citizens in the midst of economic and political anxieties.<sup>136</sup>

### **Limitations of "Carrot" Diplomacy**

Qatar is not universally identified with a particular set of values or ideals that others will voluntarily embrace without inducements and this can make their soft power influence fleeting. Buttressing this point Nye posits that "When you can get others to admire your ideals and to do want what you want, you do not have to spend as much on sticks and carrots to move them in your direction. Seduction is always more effective than coercion, and many values like democracy and human rights, and individual opportunities are deeply seductive."<sup>137</sup>

Many people imitate Americans not because they are coaxed to do so but they are motivated to do so and they are willing to learn and adopt American ways of thinking or doing things because they think it's a better option. However, what will happen if Qatar is no longer able to deliver the "carrots" when it faces economic crises as it is cyclical with resource

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<sup>135</sup> Omar Chatriwala, "Qatar Spending Spree Ignites Backlash, Warnings," *Nuqudy*, 2013, [http://english.nuqudy.com/Gulf/Qatar\\_Spending\\_Spre-5568](http://english.nuqudy.com/Gulf/Qatar_Spending_Spre-5568) (25 June, 2013)

<sup>136</sup> Damien Coruzzi, "Qatar: Football as Soft Power," *Columbia Political Review*, 2013, <http://cpreview.org/2013/02/qatar-football-as-soft-power/> (25 June, 2013)

<sup>137</sup> J. Nye, *Soft power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. (2004), p. X

dependent economies? Will countries welcome Qatar to mediate their problems and will the influence of Qatar remain the same or fade away when it can no longer deliver the “carrots”? Nye argues that a powerful country should set the values and others would follow without any external influence and notes that motivation plays a major role in soft power.<sup>138</sup> Citing the United States as a case study, Nye points out that the U.S set the standards for democracy and a set of ideals romanticized around the world as the “American dream” for people to follow.<sup>139</sup>

### **Qatar’s Questionable Friends**

Qatar has cultivated and built strong relationships with diverse Islamist groups across the Middle East and exert considerable influence on them primarily through the provision of “carrots”. These groups include Muslim brotherhood branches in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and to some extent Turkey and Hamas in Gaza. In addition, Qatar host a number of brotherhood/Islamist dissidents from neighboring Gulf countries such Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E much to the consternation of these countries. With Qatar overtly providing financial and moral support to Islamists in the region, any deviation from democratic norms by the latter regimes will severely dent the international image of Qatar thereby undermining their soft power credentials.

If Qatar’s Islamist allies are able to consolidate democratic ideals and meet the aspirations of their people, then Qatar’s image will be enhanced in the region and become a major source of attraction, a sine-qua non for soft power influence. However, recent events in Egypt where millions of Egyptians marched on the streets and forced the ouster of Brotherhood President Morsi for betraying their democratic aspirations, does not bode well for the image of Qatar in Egypt and beyond. In this regard, Nye warns that “The reputation and credibility of a state or group seeking to exert soft-power influence also matters particularly because of the “paradox of plenty”<sup>140</sup>. Thus any information perceived as propaganda may not just be treated with contempt but may also be counterproductive if it undermines the reputation of the provider of the information.<sup>141</sup>

### **The Perils of Creeping Hard Power**

As Nye points out, one of the resources of soft power is foreign policy if it is viewed as having moral authority. He adds that “When our

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid, 5

<sup>139</sup> Ibid

<sup>140</sup> . Nye, *Soft power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 107

<sup>141</sup> Ibid



policies are seen as legitimate in the eyes of others, our soft power is enhanced".<sup>142</sup> In this regard, Qatar has earned tremendous amount of goodwill in the Middle East for its role in defeating the Ghadhafi regime and humanitarian and military support for the Syrian rebels against the Assad regime. However, such unbridled use of hard power could backfire and could damage Qatar's reputation in the long run as there have been credible reports of atrocities committed by some of the Qatari backed rebels in Syria. There are also serious fears that Qatar may be supporting the most radical elements of the rebels with illiberal motives with ties with Al Qaeda. This fear was conveyed by U.S President Barack Obama to the Emir of Qatar during an April 23, 2013 meeting in which the former is "said to have spoken in blunt terms about Qatar's support for jihadists and to have warned that Qatari backing of Al-Qaeda-like groups would pose a direct challenge to the national-security interests of the U.S. The emir was said to have agreed with the president wholeheartedly on the matter."<sup>143</sup>

## Conclusion

Qatar will be better served by preserving its main sources of attraction in order to continue exercising soft power influence in its sphere of influence. In this regard, it should re-align its regional foreign policy goals with that of its major security benefactor the U.S. by re-evaluating its support for Islamist groups that the U.S is suspicious of or disapproves. In order to be taken seriously as a champion of the movement for democratic change that is currently sweeping across the region, Qatar should accelerate the pace of its own long over-due democratic reforms by at least releasing all political dissidents and permitting elective municipal and parliamentary elections with real legislative powers. This should be supplemented with labor reforms for the millions of migrant laborers that are fueling Qatar's economic and construction boom. Failure to do this could put Qatar under unnecessary international scrutiny that could undermine its image and thus soft power capability as it prepares to host the FIFA World Cup in 2022.

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 12

<sup>143</sup> Jeffrey Goldberg, "Qatar: Attention-Starved Teen of the Middle East," *Bloomberg*, 2013, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-05-02/qatar-attention-starved-teen-of-the-middle-east.html> (25 June, 2013)

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