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**Qatar**: The success story of a small gulf state

**Abstract**

In 1971, the small state of Qatar gained its independence from its British protectorate and started a journey that would bring the small Gulf country to work amongst the elite powers across the globe. In just two decades, Qatar put its name in bold on maps across the globe as it became one of the most promising developing countries in the Middle East. Currently one of the few remaining true monarchies in the world and avid supporters of Western culture in a region known for the opposite, Qatar itself is unique. For this reason, I decided to research why such a small country, located in a region of western hostility and instability, has been so successful. This paper focuses on four areas that contribute to Qatar: its branding policy, international relations and foreign policy, public diplomacy, and lastly its economy.

**Introduction**

Today, large powers such as the United States and Germany dominate global politics and economics. Over the last decade, developing nations have found their way to the table of global politics, providing large reserves of economic resources, new waves of ideas, and fresh minds. Qatar, a small Arab State in the Middle-East dwarfed in size by Saudi Arabia, is one of these developing nations. To the general public, Qatar is merely lettering found on the Barcelona football team jersey. However, Qatar is much more than that. Currently ranked third globally for the largest natural gas reserves and the highest human development in the Arab world, Qatar is an influential power house ruled by one of the few remaining absolute monarchies in this modern world. Its ruling royal family, the Al Thani, have created an atmosphere for their citizens and visitors that is enjoyable and welcoming. Since its independence, Qatar has made itself an active player in foreign policy mediation, establishing relationships with the Western powers and supporting various rebel groups during the series of revolutions in the Arab Spring. Economically, Qatar sits on vast oil and natural gas reserves that provide plenty of revenue to give its citizens comfortable lifestyles and fund its leader’s, the Emir, unique branding policy. Al-Jazeera, a ground breaking free speaking Arab new station supported by the Emir, also has brought attention to the small Arab state through its coverage of many. Amongst all of its success and growth, Qatar recently reached a population just over 1.5 million. But how can such a small Arab country play such a predominant role in the region? What is allowing them to be so successful? What is so unique about this Middle-Eastern power? How has it become, arguably, the most important country within this unstable region? In this paper, I plan to show the reader that by combining a prosperous economy, unique branding policy, state of the art public diplomacy, and developing important international alliances and mediation driven foreign policy Qatar has broken from the struggles of a small state, allowing the country to rise as a key developing power in both the globe and the region. First, we must understand why it so unique that Qatar has overcome the difficulties small states face in this globalized society.

**Qatar a Small State?**

Out of the current population of over a million and a half, 250,000 are native Qataris, all whom remain Important to the country’s government and culture (Baker 1). These 250,000 live comfortable off the revenues brought in through their massive reserves of oil and liquid natural gas. The rest of the population living in Qatar are “workers from all over the world” that “toil at its mammoth construction projects, copious megamalls, while a smaller cadre of Arab and Western expats files the paperwork and keeps the trains running on time” (Hounshell 2). The small state’s population seems small now, but its population grow is projected to rapidly increase in the near future. Kristian Ulrichsen found in her book *Insecure Gulf,* that the population of Qatar was 800,000 in 2006 and rose to 1.5 million in 2007, and now is estimated to grow at a rate of 64 percent between the years of 2009 and 2050 (87). With a rapidly growing population, it is clear why we cannot classify Qatar as a micro state. Soon enough its population will reach the numbers of larger countries within the region.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Since small states cannot provide security for their own borders, it would only make sense that they would too have problems projecting both hard and soft power. All these advantages and disadvantages are key when looking at Qatar, and help illustrate why this small country in the Middle-East is unique and one of a kind.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The possession of power resources can be measured through things such as the state’s population, territory, or their GDP. Projection, on the other hand, is measured through size of military, strength of government, or regional influence. Yet again, we have a road bump; it is rather difficult to correctly measure power or what constitutes as power. A state’s population or GDP cannot tell us how much power is has on the region or globally. There lacks a measurement of soft or hard power, providing no clear definitive way to compare the two classifications.

The discussion of small or micro states in international politics helps one to understand why Qatar is such a unique state because of its ability to benefit and overcome these obstacles. Within these state, the natives tend to enjoy a “great sense of community with less alienation” and are less likely to have radical ideologies fester that would break apart the social bindings of its society (Peterson 738). This provides the governing body, in Qatar’s case the royal family the Al Thani, with more control over its smaller population and the ability use this power to pass legislation without opposition. But, with such a tightly knit community and such a small population, this leaves micro and small states with the problem of defending their borders. Which, in response to this, these countries develop “friendly” relationships with the surrounding countries and other regional powers to ensure security.

Despite its strong ruling family and generally happy population, Qatar does face the obstacles that are common amongst other small states. Kuwait is much like Qatar with regards to its small state struggles. Their security in the region “rest in part on the particular regional configuration of power” and their oil plays a large role in these struggles (Crystal 167). Since both their armies are small, the two countries have had to rely on regional powers, putting the fate of their security in the hands of more powerful countries. The size of Qatar’s military is only estimated to be about 12,000, plus an additional 8,000 that are employed in the public security forces (Kamrava 88). The major reason behind such a small army is the lack of young men who are not only of age, but are of decent health and discipline. There is a lack of incentive for the younger generation in Qatar to choose career paths in the Military, so in turn they are drawn towards the private sector or white collar positions that are “fattened by the state’s labor Qaterization policies” (Kamrava 88). Thus, Qatar has been limited to recruiting those who are already born into a military family or the population of immigrants from surrounding countries who are in search of a stable career. The United States Library of Congress mentioned in a study of the Gulf States that only 30 percent of the army is filled by Qatari native with the rest coming from twenty nationalities, and the “lack of sufficient indigenous manpower” to employ its armed forces (1). With such a small army to protect itself, Qatar has to rely on international alliances, especially the US to provide security in not just the region, but within Qatar itself.

In response to their small army, Qatar turned to creating relationship with neighboring countries and the United States to help provide them with the security they need. Since there is limited information on what Qatar spends on its military and military enhancements, it is clear that the small state wants to rely more on these key relationships to provide its security (Solmirano and Wezeman 1). The first Gulf War provides an example of Qatar’s willingness to change alliances in the face of changing strategic environment. When Qatar’s ally at the time, Iraq, invaded Kuwait the Emir did not support this invasion and saw this as a perfect opportunity to establish ties with the United States. During the war, Qatar allowed the US military passage, providing air space to stage attacks and deployment of military forces (Cordesmann 22). The Emir also built two military airport bases to provide the United States with forward operating positions to deploy its troops and stage air attack. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait presented Qatar the need to increase and improve its regional security, thus leading to a significant change in both their foreign and military priorities (“A Country Study”). The years following the Gulf War were crucial for Qatar to establish a better international profile to establish these security alliances that it desperately needed to protect itself from conflict in the region.

By increasing its international profile, Qatar now “aims to protect itself from the perils of small-state anonymity and vulnerability” (Khatib 418). The first factor to its emergence as a regional and global player is through its revolutionary foreign policy and international relations. This has opened new doors to allow the country to gain and maintain strong ties with important powers, such as the United States, to help Qatar to continue its rise in regional and global politics.

**Qatari Foreign Policy and International Relations**

The most important factor for Qatar’s rise as a regional power is its ability to craft a flexible foreign policy and development of important international relationships. Being a small state, Qatar has had to make up for its lack of physical size and military strength by molding together a unique foreign policy by affectively avoiding the use of hard power. Instead, Qatar pushes for the use of soft power and mediation to gain regional power and influence (Kamrava 69). Combined with its public diplomacy and economic stability, Qatar’s foreign policy is putting the small Gulf state on the rise to becoming the next regional power. But, to better understand the country’s foreign policy we need to look at the goals Qatar is attempting to reach through its relationships and mediation attempts.

By moving towards Western allies, more importantly the United States, Qatar has gained key allies that can provide the regional stability through military force that it lacks. This strategic relationship did not form until the late 1980s, only a few shorts years after Qatar’s independence. Originally, the first signs of a relationship started through security arrangements with the US during the tanker war of 1987-1988 and then stronger ties were developed further as the first Gulf War arose (Cordesman 225). The Gulf War posed a difficult decision for Qatar to make: whether to support Iraq, an ally at the time, and risk losing a key relationship with the United States, or to support the United States in its efforts to kick Iraq out of Kuwait. Strategically, Qatar chose to side with the United States and opened its doors for its military to station itself within its borders. The United States then implemented a dual containment policy that would focus on both Iran and Iraq, which in turn made the relationship with Qatar key (Ulrichsen 28). Because Qatar allowed the US forces to operate within its borders, its involvement in Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm greatly improved its image amongst the United States as a “desirable security partner,” solidifying a relationship that would be strategically useful for both parties (“A Country Study”)

By obtaining this key security relationship, Qatar can focus its efforts on other parts of its plan to become a strong regional power in the Middle-East. For the United States, Qatar is their gateway in promoting democratic values and change in the region as well as acting as a forward operating base for its military within the Middle-East (Lynch 37). This allows Qatar to operate comfortably in and out of its borders. But The Emir also realizes the need to play it safe with many of his neighbors who share borders that hold important economic and strategic assets. For example, Qatar and Iran both have heavy investments in the largest natural gas reservoir, the North Field, an area both share a mutual agreement that Iran claims one-third of Qatar’s North Field (“A Country Study”). The two countries have heavily invested in this offshore drilling site and acquire a great deal of their natural gas supply from this location. If relations were to deteriorate, the North Fields would become a battle ground between the two countries, endangering important economic assets.

Another example of playing it safe with border countries is the relationship between Saudi Arabia. This relationship, in the past, has been plagued with border disputes and rivalry in the oil and natural gas markets but is also one of the “most important and longstanding international relationships” (Fromherz 91). Although they are very similar in their foreign, domestic, and oil policies, border disputes have largely kept the two countries engaging in conflict. From example, in a 1992 border disputes made its way to the surface that ultimately led to violent attacks in the a town called al-Khafus. When the Saudis attempted to build a high way in this disputed territory, tensions continued to increase because it restricted Qatar passage to the United Arab Emirates (Rabi 445). Disputes continued to surface in the following years, straining the relationship even further. These relations were further strained by Qatar allegations of Saudi involvement in two coup attempts against the Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani in 1996 and 2005 (Ulrichsen 26). The Emir addressed the relationship with Saudi Arabia and made the effort to settle disputes submitted to the International Court in “the Hague” in 2001 in hopes to create less tension on its borders (Samuel-Azran). By improving the relationship with Saudi Arabia, Qatar can use its resources to assist with its mediation tactics in the region; a tactic that makes this small state unique amongst others like it.

Qatar’s involvement in the Gulf Cooperation Council, similar to the Arab League, also adds to the country’s focus on mediation and soft power to deal with conflicts rather than military might. Established on May 25, 1981, the GCC was initially created in response to the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1978-1979 and the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war in September 1980 (Ulrichsen 25). Together Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates work together to solve regional issues and conflicts, reshaping the idea of regional security in the Gulf. At the start, the GCC lacked political, military alliances, and an integrative collective decision making structure to react if a conflict were to arise in the region. Common fears of Saudi dominance in the GCC thus arose amongst the smaller states, including Qatar. However, these fears have dissipated over time. The GCC members have focused their energies on improving cooperation and coordination on mutual defense issues, while continuing to work together in “social, cultural, political, and economic spheres” (“A Country Study”). Though not as developed as other regional coalitions, such as the EU, the GCC is continuing to grow into an organized body to promote stability in the region. Qatar’s participation in the GCC builds onto the country’s mediation tactics, allowing the Emir to promote mediation and soft power as effective forms of foreign policy.

What is so unique about Qatar’s foreign policy is that puts itself inside conflicts that, in general, all small states tend to avoid due to the risk of failure and backlash the conflict could inflict. But, Qatar acts differently with each conflict and addresses each situation as unique, allocating the necessary moves for the best results. Mediation policies give Qatar an image of a small state overcoming the restrictions and challenges that follow most other small states. Using diplomacy and monetary donations, the Emir effectively uses this soft power to asset its mediation efforts. What makes this point even more important is which conflicts Qatar has chosen to act as the mediation leader: Egypt, Syria, and surprisingly Israel. With this all in mind, problems have developed to the country’s unique foreign policy and development of international allies that have gathered significant flak against the Emir and important government officials.

Geographically, Qatar is surrounded by larger regional powers who, unlike Qatar, have armies relative to their country’s size. By angering any of its neighbors, for example by taking an aggressive stance on the Arab and Israeli conflict, Qatar could very well put itself into a high risk security situation. On top of all this, we also have age old border disputes with countries such as Bahrain and Saudi Arabia that could be further hinder regional security because of the Emir’s foreign policy. For Bahrain, relations have been riddle with conflicts. One of these conflicts occurred in 1986 when a small Qatari force attacked a Bahraini outpost on the Fashet-e-Dibal, which was supposedly constructed on an artificial island formed on the reef and was acting as a coast guard station (Cordesman 219). The Qatar forces took hostages and demanded that the structure be destroyed immediately, and only then would the hostages be released. Bahrain claimed that his was a structure sanctioned by the GCC, but came to terms with Qatar and destroyed the facility. As for Saudi Arabia, keeping cordial ties is key to maintain safe boaders. But, if Qatar continues to take a radical approach with its foreign policy, especially in the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Emir could very well find himself in a situation where cordial ties with Saudi Arabia become hostile.

This brings up another major problem with Qatar’s foreign policy; could the Emir be biting off more than he can chew? What Qatar is doing is enacting a foreign policy normally pursued by larger and much more physically powerful countries, such as the United States who are well known for mediation tactics. In Egypt, Qatar chose to take a risk in supporting the Muslim Brotherhood in the wake of the Arab uprisings in Egypt, a very controversial move that caused tension with its Western allies (Ghitis 1). The West has generally not supported the Muslim Brotherhood, especially the United States. Qatar essentially pumped billions of dollars to support the brotherhood’s rise to power, as well as acting as it’s political and “diplomatic background” (Ghitis 2). In doing so, Qatar risked its relationship with the West by supporting the Muslim Brotherhood. Luckily for the Emir, the Muslim Brotherhood was taken out of power in Egypt, possibly escaping a situation in which he might have bitten off more than he could chew.

But yet again, Qatar surprises the West and the region with another one of its mediation attempts. Probably one of Qatar’s most controversial moves yet, the Israeli-Qatari relations are considered to be radical by regional standards. Qatar, unlike most of its Arab neighbors, has established “warmer” relations with Israel and was the first GCC state to grant recognition of Israel by opening trade relations during the Arab boycott in the early 1990s (Rabi 448). This was monumental for Qatar and raised eyebrows all over the world. By recognizing Israel, Qatar gained major points amongst its key Western ally, the United States, who was the major actor in the creation of Israel itself. This mediation attempt gained Qatar a nomination to hold a seat on the UN Security Council. The Foreign Ministry of Israel states that “Qatar was one of the only countries that kept ties with us throughout the al-Aqsa intifada. Israel has representation in the Qatari capital and it continued to operate even during the intifada…we hope that as a member of the UNSC, Qatar will not operate against Israel” (Rabi 423). And Qatar did just that by remaining the only Arab State to hold trade missions until the Israel attacks on Gaza in 2008-2009 (Khatib 419). Now, this mediation attempt was beneficial for Qatar in respect to the West, but not for its neighbors in the region. This is an Arab nation supporting the recognition of the Jewish state of Israel, which is obviously not a favored position for the Arab world. This could put Qatar into a very dangerous situation and risk its relations with other regional players. Again, Qatar has then responded by sending a $400 million development package to Gaza “in the most public way possible,” acting in favor of its Arab ties (Baker, Newton-Small, and Schuman 2).

The current Syria crisis has been a tough situation for many countries to read. The United States has been reluctant to support any specific rebel groups and other major powers have stayed out of the conflict overall to avoid taking any risks. For Qatar, this is not the case. In fact, Qatar is one of the few major actors in spearheading efforts to gain support for rebel factions in the Syrian civil war, giving the country its full support in the coup to overthrow the Emir’s “former friend” President Bashar Assad (Baker, Newton-Small, and Schuman 2). This has proven to be rather controversial due to the fact that Iran is one of Syria’s largest ally, whom share important claims to Qatar’s North Fields. By getting too heavily involved in the conflict, Qatar could anger Iran and endanger both its economic assets in the North fields and its own security. More importantly, if Assad survives, Qatar could lose one of its key relationships within the region (Hounshell 4). It will be interesting to see how the conflict pans out for Qatar, and hopefully, the results fall in its favor rather than adding more evidence to the fact that Qatar could be biting off more than it can chew.

Lastly, Qatar has entered into the Iran nuclear enrichment debate as a mediator between the West and Iran. In doing so, Qatar is risking the tactical and strategically alliance with the United States as well as its alliance with Iran and their oil supplies. Qatar was one of the rotating members of the UN that voted against a resolution on the floor that created a deadline for Iran to stop its uranium enrichment in June 2006 (Rabi 447). As already stated, Qatar choses the path of diplomacy and mediation rather than implemented economic sanctions and hard power to make countries comply. Thus, Qatar voted against the resolution because it would rather see a more diplomatic solution than using military and economic force to stop Iran from continuing its uranium enrichment program. This is a risky move; it puts the relationship between Qatar and the United States at risk because the United States has been an avid supporter for sanctions. By supporting Iran, this may lead the United States into believing that they are no longer on the same level when it comes to regional security. But if Qatar was to support the sanctions, it would risk the security of its economic assets in the North Fields. However, Qatar’s vote was not a decisive one in the sanctions and thus gave it the chance to appease Iran while not getting the United States too upset. Overall, a lucky, but a good example of its mediation efforts at works.

Altogether, Qatar has been able to accommodate its mediation efforts while at the same time standing its ground on issues. It has taken great risks in regards to its foreign policy and its effects on its international relations. Fortunately, its efforts have been a success. In the future, it may be essential to use the GCC as a safer way to promote its mediation and soft power policies without hurting its international relationships. It could give Qatar its own mediator in promoting its foreign policy without creating more problems in the process. Although a key factor in its rise as a regional power, Qatar’s public diplomacy has put its name out even further by focusing on promoting the country as a whole.

**The Powers of Public Diplomacy**

Being a small state, Qatar had to find efficient ways to project its influence and power onto the region that did not involve military might. Thus, the Emir and his family have put together an ingenious public diplomacy to both promote Qatar’s values as well as projecting its influence globally. Qatar uses a unique combination of high-profile cultural and educational undertakings, participating in humanitarian aid, and most importantly promoting one of Qatar’s key pillars of projection of influence, Al Jazeera, that has won the “hearts and minds” of the international population (Khatib 425). Being one of the more active pillars of Qatar’s public diplomacy, Al Jazeera has been rather successful in promoting the values and interests of the country. Ever since it was founded in 1996, it has been an important factor in Qatar’s rise in foreign influence. Al Jazeera could be considered the most radical form of foreign policy to be implemented within the region because of its value of free speech in a region of oppression. This form of non-traditional diplomacy reflects the Emir’s ability to affectively use and invest in soft-power diplomacy by using Al Jazeera not just for news, but for its push for a “new and bold internet age of Islamic jurisprudence” (Fromherz 108). In turn, Qatar’s inability to project physical military power on the region is then substituted for its ability to effectively use soft power. By continuing to be the main investor for the network, the Emir has ultimately gained control over the messages being sent out by the station to global audiences, promoting positive images of the emerging small state (Azran 1294). Most importantly, the news channel has gathered extraordinary influence across the Arab world and prospering more than any other s stations in the region that have not been as successful (Kamrava 70).

Al Jazeera has “established the tradition of investigative reporting in the Arab world” by pulling apart the taboos about what can and cannot be disccued on televisions these days according to Hugh Miles, the author of “Al Jazeera” article published in the *Foreign Policy* journal (22). The thought of a free, uncensored Arabic new station still remains radical for a region whom is generally opposed to western influences and values. Due to its success, the Emir has continued to help the network develop and expand by opening up a free English branch of Al Jazeera that geared towards English speaking countries in the West (Morris 32). With the new Al Jazeera English station, Qatar is able to project more influence to its key Western powers and provide its viewers with an outside view of global events.

However, there are criticisms about Al Jazeera. One of the stations earliest opponents, the United States, criticized the station for supporting terrorist organizations and filling its airways with “crude appeals to Arab nationalism, anti-Americanism, anti-Semitism, and religious fundamentalism” all during the Bush administration (Lynch 36). The station took most of this flak post 9/11 attacks on the Twin Towers in 2001 during a period of intense fear of future attacks by the group responsible for the terrorist attacks; Al Qaeda. Al Jazeera supporting terrorist groups is not a new critique for the free speaking Arab new station. In its defense, author Marc Lynch makes appoint that the station was simply promoting the values it was created on, freedom of speech, by allowing all parties in a the discussion to have their voices heard (36). That is why Al Jazeera allows radical groups and terrorist organizations to come on to their shows to state their opinions in a discussion or debate. By hearing both sides of the story, Al Jazeera is standing by its claim of freedom of speech. Over time, the United States has moved away from their criticisms and has remained supportive of the station’s liberal values. Former U.S Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, a known critic of Al Jazeera, stated that it offered the international audience with “real news” (Baker, Newton-Small, and Schuman 2).

Another common criticism for Al Jazeera is that it is not running on its own agenda, but rather it is being influenced by Qatar and is censored to project the country’s own agenda and values. Although the country has no “official censorship,” the news station does still recognize the need for “self-censorship” in preventing publishing material critical of the Emir and his family, the government, and religious issues (“A Country Study”). The station does need to watch what it puts out in its airwaves, especially since the Emir currently remains the sole financial supporter of the station. Fortunately for Qatar and Al Jazeera, these criticisms have died down, mainly because the reverse is actually happening; Qatar’s foreign policy is following Al Jazeera’s reporting rather than vice versa (Baker 4). With no clear connections between the two, Al Jazeera and Qatar’s Foreign Policy remain to separate entities. Al Jazeera’s audience continues to grow globally, and will remain a large part of Qatar’s attempt to use public diplomacy to protect its interests and values.

Besides Al Jazeera, Qatar also uses its contributions to humanitarian aid and financial support to surrounding countries as a way to help promote its public diplomacy. Currently, the Qatari Red Crescent, the equivalent of the West’s International Red Cross, supports refugees and coordinates humanitarian interventions commonly rejected by Islamists in the North who are against invention made by the International Red Cross (Khatib 426). This move separate’s Qatar from the majority of the Gulf States. Because of this, Qatar has been able to acquire relationships with major Western powers, including the United States and its former protectorate Great Britain. Promoting a helping hand to those in need sheds positive light on the small state in a region riddled with corruption and exploitation of its people. The Emir has also effectively projected its public diplomacy by visiting the Gaza Strip to deliver a $400 million development package, making the Emir the first Arab head of state to publically break the Israeli blockade placed by Hamas when it took control of Gaza in 2007 (Baker 1). These are genuinely effective ways to publically promote Qatar in the most positive light possible and continue to help with its rise to a major player in the Gulf region. However, there is one more key factor in Qatar’s public diplomacy that has had a substantial impact on its rise as a regional power.

Branding, or creating a unique image of a country to separates itself as a unique area of investment globally, has provided Qatar a perfect opportunity to gain ground as an important regional player. The small Gulf State of Qatar has established itself as an influential power by creating a successful brand of foreign policy that takes some bold risks such a playing a mediation role in key regional conflicts, becoming a close ally of the United States, projecting an image of a modern society that is still in touch with its traditional values and getting involved in humanitarian projects. The Al Thani family has done an excellent job by both using their international relationships and their strong economy to fund their branding policy that is putting the word Qatar in the minds of people across the globe. According to Lina Khatib, Qatar’s ruling family has devoted its power and resources to “establish itself as a recognized ‘brand,’ defining itself as an international ally of the West” (419). This small Arab state is one of the few in the region to open itself up to modernizing its way of life and letting western influence help guide their creation of a new modern Arab country. The Qatari state has “emerged” as a major promoter of “spreading Western and especially American cultural norms and practices” (Kamrava 83). Yet, there are still remnants of a century old rule of government found in Qatar. To the naked eye, Qatar is ruled by a monarchy, a rather rare find in this modern age. Yet, its style of rule is more personal, “less restrained by social political institutions” than the neighboring countries (Crystal 167). Once the Emir leaves the country, the government essentially stops until he is back in Doha. Then, when looking into the government and the ruling family itself, it is made up of conservative Sunni’s that have been ruling under one family ever since the 19th century. Then again, it is moving away from its traditional conservative values by spending money on improving its society and creating a “forward-thinking image” to the west (Baker 2). By creating a modern image for itself, Qatar opens its doors economically and culturally to the West. This is not only beneficial to its people, but it is also a great strategic move to invite larger powers to establish themselves within the country to help provide security and economic stability.

When looking more closely at Qatar’s unique branding policy, it is important to look the role of women because, unlike the neighboring state of Saudi Arabia, Qatar stands out as the most liberal state in the region. Kristian Ulrichsen states that Qatar has led the way in promoting women’s rights by “placing women in visible positions of political and economic leadership” (169). Currently, the Emir’s wife plays a substantial role in Qatari politics by standing by him at high level political appearances and acting as the head of the Qatar Foundation that dispenses “billions in charity and development projects dedicated to education” (Baker 3). Promoting women’s right is just one piece of Qatar’s branding policy that makes the small Gulf country stand out in the region.

It is no riddle that Qatar’s vast liquid natural gas and oil revenues allows the state to enhance its branding policy through investments in areas to promote its uniqueness. More commonly known than other investments, Al-Jazeera was created through the Emir’s contributions to establish a free speaking Arab news station that covered both regional and global news. This is the first independent Arab news station that has served the Emir’s attempt to create a unique brand for Qatar. Already a sudo part of Qatar’s public diplomacy, Al-Jazeera is more concretely connected with the Emir and his visions through his branding policy rather than the direct influence the new station has on other aspects of the Qatari government, i.e foreign policy and international relations.

What Qatar has done through the creation of Al-Jazeera is “reinvented and specifically adapted the state sponsored broadcasting model to the contemporary media environment” allowing the small state to maintain control over the narratives broadcasted to the world “with high impact” (Samuel-Azran 1294). This essentially has created Qatar’s modern form of public diplomacy and its influence both within the country and the region. It is through its politics of “pluralism” and free-speech values that Al-Jazeera has created a new modern “Arab identity” according to author Marc Lynch (43). To some this may just be the identity of the Qatari people rather than a new Arab identity, but Al-Jazeera has become an important provider of news and information that could very well be the correct movement to create this new identity for the region.

The final part of Qatar’s branding policy revolves around the small Emirate state’s investment in culture, sports and education. The Emir has sponsored the FC Barcelona soccer team since 2010, and in addition it has “elbowed aside” major sporting heavyweights, such as the United States and Great Britain, for the right to host the next World Cup in 2022 (Baker, Newton-Small, and Schuman 2). The country continues to invest in soccer and has made other major steps in making other country brands its own. For example, Qatar has not only bought the Paris Saint-Germaine soccer but made large investments in well-known global brands that include Volkswagen, Tiffany, Louis Vuitton, and Credit Suisse with more hopes to eventually pick up the AC Malan soccer team from former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi for $600 million (Baker, Newton-Small, and Schuman). As for education, Qatar has welcomed many universities to establish branches in the Education City, including top think tanks such as the Brooking Institution and the Royal United Service Institute (Baker 3). The universities that can be found inside Education City include Texas A&M, Georgetown University, and Northwestern Illinois University (Peterson 747). This has allowed for increased relations between Western powers and has provided the people of Qatar quality higher education. Lastly, two of Qatar’s own creations are its Five-Star airliner Qatar Airways that has been labeled the World’s only five-star airline and the Qatar Foundation headed by the Emir’s wife that “helps the world think” (Kamrava 91). All of these investments mentioned are the structure of Qatar’s branding policy. As long as Qatar continues to bring in these revenues, its branding policy will continue to grow and promote Qatari influence regionally and globally.

With such an extensive public diplomacy for such a small country, how does Qatar support these ambitions? Luckily for the Emir and his people, there is one thing Qatar has an abundance of; oil and natural gas. Because of its massive supply of these highly demanded materials, Qatar has developed a strong and stable economy through its sales.

**The Qatari Economy**

For such a small country, Qatar’s economy remains strongly invested in the sale of its massive reserves of oil and liquid natural gas. Today, Qatar has the third largest natural-gas reserves in the world at 910.5 trillion cubic feet, making the country the next “Saudi Arabia” of liquefied natural gas and natural-gas sales (Dargin 136). The discovery of oil remains one of the most important historical events in Qatar’s history, for it created a new age of economic prosperity.

Fortunately, Qatar faced another great economic discovery. Already, Qatar was greatly benefiting from its oil, but the revenues further increased with the discovery of immense natural gas reserves called the North Field. The discovery of the field led to implementation of the world’s largest hydrocarbon projects, boosting Qatar’s climb to “real wealth”, and becoming one of the richest nations in the world (Morris 28). There is a catch, however, with the North Fields. The territory is shared with one of the region’s powerful countries; Iran. Both countries are under an agreement to share the North Fields, which remains a vital part of Qatar’s carefully constructed foreign policy and selective international relationships (Fromherz 96). The Emir understands that he must ensure peaceful ties between Qatar and Iran, while still maintaining relations with key Western powers. Iran is not the only competitive neighbor. Both Bahrain and the UAE compete with Qatar in the natural gas and oil markets, but the Emir has been able to guide the country to “carve out an impressive niche for itself in global fiancé and trade” setting them aside from its competitors (Kamrava 69). The Emir has also begun negotiating with Russia with regards to its oil and gas reserves. Recently, the two countries have cooperated together in the Gas Exporting Countries’ Forum and have established bilateral agreements in April 2010 to begin development of Russia’s Artic gas reserves in the Yamal peninsula (Ulrichsen 73).

Obviously, it has been important for the Emir to recognize that the natural resources his country has can provide to be useful in strengthening its economy. Thus, the country has been ‘keen to attract foreign investment” which have, in turn, enable the country to “exploit its natural resources and diversify its economy” in a way that has sheltered it from market fluctuations (Coleman 1). This is key to Qatar’s survival as well as its projection of foreign power. By having the third largest reserves of oil and natural gas in the world, Qatar has been able to use its resources to establish relationships with global leaders, mainly the oil and gas hungry United States of America. The revenues have increased the countries diplomatic powers, creating a new “sense of confidence” that has allowed Qatar to engage in a form of “checkbook diplomacy” by investing in education, global markets, countries in need, and supporting recent uprising in the region during the Arab Springs including a $300 million donation for the reconstruction of Lebanon (Rabi 457).

Currently, Qatar’s economic future looks bright. With a GDP per capita roughly around $57,558 in US dollars, the people of Qatar rank amongst the wealthiest populations, even over the United States itself (“Qatar GDP”). Although there is no imminent danger, oil and natural gas are not guaranteed to last forever in Qatar. Natural Gas is by no means a “secure” source of GDP, for large global supplies have shot prices down and Qatar’s production of liquid natural gas continues to slow down (Hounshell 4). In the nearby future, Qatar could be surpassed by other natural gas distributors, such as Australia, and could be shadowed by the increasingly popular discovery of shale-gas in the United States and Eastern Europe. Lina Khatib expresses these economic concerns of economic dependence by stating “Qatar’s economic aims are underpinned by the need to guarantee gas exports and the simultaneous realization that long-term economic viability means moving beyond an oil-based economy” and searching for other alternative resources (420). But for now, Qatar will continue to take advantage of its supplies of its highly demanded recourses and use the revenue brought in to fuel its initiative to become the world’s up and coming power.

**Conclusion**

Apart from its challenges as a small state in a region generally dominated by extremists and crumbling governments, Qatar has emerged as a strong regional leader in the Middle East. With its vast oil and natural gas revenues, strategic international alliances and critical foreign policy, and revolutionary public diplomacy, Qatar has proven to be an essential player in the region. Qatar’s royal family has guided the country into a golden age of economic stability, comfortable living conditions, and development of key international relationships that will help provide security and stability for the small Arab State. Al-Jazeera will continue to shape the new free speaking Arab airwaves, exposing its viewers to all sides of the political spectrum, and help formulate both an effective public and foreign policy for Qatar. By expanding its name into various markets, Qatar will continue to gain publicity through its focus on improving education, endorsing various athletic organizations, and promoting humanitarian activism amongst its allies. In the near future, Qatar could very well find itself respected as more than just a regional leader in the Middle East, but as an unorthodox influential leader of Western Civilization.

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1. For the sake of this paper, my classification of Qatar is simple. Qatar can no longer be considered a micro State because of its growing population and other improvements on the weakness of micro and small states, which include but are not limited to a lack of border security and international influence. Therefore, to be consistent throughout the paper and to provide the reader with as little confusion as possible, I classify Qatar as a small state. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The technical terms, micro and small state, are used to classify small countries that act independently. Micro states are defined as an independent country with a population of less than 100,000, see Peterson 773. For small states, the difference is almost miniscule and defined as an independent country with a population no less than one million with a governing body. Population remains the major factor in deciphering between the two classifications, however, the paper also mentions GDP as another determining factor. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)