



Qatar Soft Power: From Rising to the Crisis

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ABSTRACT

Qatar has recently become a regional power and an influential actor in international politics. Qatar has adopted a foreign policy of soft power, which played a prominent role in the rise of the international scene. On 5 June 2017, a diplomatic boycott crisis has erupted against Qatar. The Arab Quartet imposed a complete blockade on Qatar and stated 13 demands. The study explores Qatar's soft power tools such as lobbying, international mediation, scholarships, foreign aids, Al Jazeera network, which has created a national brand for Qatar. With the non-coercive foreign policy, Qatar's stance in regional politics has transformed from neutrality to influence. This study will investigate the underlying political, ideological, and strategic factors of the 2017 crisis that has manifested the power struggles in the Gulf, the role of Qatar's foreign policy of soft power in the context of the crisis. Finally, the study will analyze whether the current situation demonstrates transient appeasement or a permanent resolution.

Keywords: Qatar, Soft power, Blockade, The GCC, Boycott.

Introduction

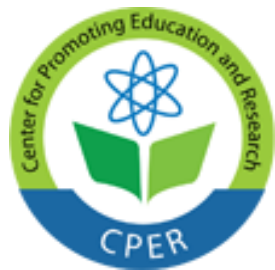
Qatar has emerged regionally in the nineties of the last century. For years before, it remained a shadow of Saudi Arabia's policies. The State is small with few populations, without a military force capable of preventing security risks. Therefore, the first ruler of the state Emir Khalifa Al-Thani remained in an alliance and dependent on Saudi Arabia. Two notable marks coincided with the rise of the state, namely the discoveries of liquefied natural gas and oil fields, and the launch of the Al-Jazeera channel. Emir Hamad has played a prominent role in shaping the state's foreign policy since his rise to power. He ascended to rule after a soft coup against his father in 1995. Emir Hamad set foreign policy priorities, which included ensuring the security and stability of society and establishing a unique brand for the state. Conflict mediation, neutrality, and participation in peacemaking became the most important features of foreign policy in the early years of Hamad Al Thani's reign. Qatar has suffered from geopolitical tensions, although the country has adopted a policy of neutrality and balance.

Disputes in the Persian Gulf are a feature of politics in this region. Contemporary politics has witnessed many conflicts, sometimes geographical and political, and sometimes over wealth and influence. For instance, the hegemony struggle between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The unprecedented role in mediating and resolving disputes has provided leverage for Qatar's foreign policy. In this sense, the small country on the geographical map has gained a noticeable influence on the map of international politics. The state has relied on an ambitious strategy to exceed vulnerabilities and challenges.

Crucially, the foreign policy of soft power has represented the strategic pillar for building a high political profile. Emir Hamad was keen to ensure security and autonomy through a political and military alliance with superpowers. Certainly, the main ally was the United States of America, which acted as a deterrent against foreign ambitions. Natural gas reserves and economic wealth have been major supporters of the country's foreign policy. Decision-makers have succeeded in developing state resources into effective tools.

The state has moved from the era of appearance and standing to the manufacture of the national brand and then to control and influence. Hence, sources and tools have changed between mediation diplomacy, launching media platforms such as the Al Jazeera network, and alliance with Islamists. The expansion of Qatar's influence and foreign policy has not been exceeded by countries such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Several diplomatic crises have arisen within the GCC in backlash to Qatari policies. The events of the Arab Spring and the Qatari interventions in the period of revolutions and their aftermath added a new trigger to Qatar's opponents.

On June 5, 2017, a diplomatic crisis has erupted, when Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt declared a total blockade against Qatar. The outbreak of the crisis was preceded by several defamation and incitement campaigns against Qatar and its Emir, Tamim bin Hamad. The Quartet states issued a statement that included thirteen demands, such as closing the Al-Jazeera channel, severing ties with Iran and other actors such as the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, and the cessation of foreign aid through relief organizations. Qatar has



translated these sanctions as an effort to subdue its foreign policy and control decision-making. Although the embargo and sanctions have severely affected economic, social, and humanitarian sectors, Qatar has shown no submission and has shown a clear resilience. Four years into a highly complex crisis, the boycott countries do not seem to have achieved anything of the thirteen demands.

Features of Qatari Foreign Policy

Qatar's foreign attitude in recent years has imposed many questions, raising many issues that require study and trying to understand. Surprisingly, the small country has ramped up its activity in a region marked by turmoil. The state has been involved in international politics and regional events, suggesting that it plays a role greater than its real weight. It has moved from the traditional role as a mediator in regional conflicts to making a national brand through various soft power tools. The features of Qatari foreign policy in contemporary politics were shaped by the moment Prince Hamad rose to power. Despite regional shifts and the tragic events in the Middle East over the past years, decision-makers have been able to design unique features of State policy.

1. Pragmatic and rational approach

Qatar has adopted a pragmatic approach in building a network of international relations. Qatar sought to secure society internally and strengthen security and sovereignty. Through a quiet and friendly policy, Qatar has adopted a rational approach to overcoming disputes through diplomacy and dialogue. This was the case in several crises with Saudi Arabia in 2004, 2011, and 2014 (Khatib, 2013, pp. 428-429).

Qatar has resorted to playing on all sides to neutralize opponents and win friends. The network of diplomatic relations brought together contradictory parties while the country established a political and military alliance with the USA. In return, it maintained political and commercial relations with Iran and opened channels of communication with the Taliban. The country hosted leaders from Hamas, and on the contrary, it established relations with Israel. The authority in Qatar has endeavored to maintain this balance and openness to all. Similarly, the state took a rational and calm approach to resolve disputes with opponents. Despite its frequent disputes with some Arab countries, especially Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, and Egypt, Qatar has maintained a respect for common customs, history, and roots and cooperated to resolve the crises (Kabalan, 2018, p. 34).

2. How Gas Wealth Promoted Foreign Policy Agenda

Many countries possess substantial natural wealth and economic resources. The real value stems from the ability of the state to invest these resources to enhance its role in international politics. Qatar seems to have succeeded in this effort. Qatar has a huge stockpile of LNG and oil fields, which is of great importance in the global economy. Therefore, Qatar has worked to convert this source into an effective political weapon. It sought to employ it in two main tracks. The first

track is to build international relations within the framework of winning national interests (Ennis, 2018, p. 579).

The second track seeks to transform wealth resources into effective tools within the soft power strategy. Economic power has played a fundamental role in designing soft power tools. Soft power has relied on huge economic resources and extensive funding to achieve foreign policy goals.

3. Soft power as a strategic state option

Remarkably, Qatar has designed an unprecedented foreign policy model that has made it the small country with the major role. An influential, highly dynamic foreign policy capable of adapting to unfavorable regional conditions. The state has benefited from a soft power strategy. Various soft power tools have enabled the state to overcome vulnerabilities and meet challenges. Certainly, Qatari soft power foreign policy has played a prominent role in achieving the goals of the national agenda. Diplomatic activity has been the main brand of Qatari foreign policy. The State has emerged in international politics through mediation diplomacy. Qatar has become a neutral mediator to intervene in the settlement of disputes through negotiation. Qatar has been able to rely on economic incentives and high reliability in resolving numerous disputes in the Middle East, such as Lebanon, Eritrea, Darfur, Yemen, and Palestine. In this context, the state has succeeded in benefiting from this diplomatic role. This role has enhanced the status of the state in the international and regional arena (Minich, 2015, pp. 124-126).

4. Repercussions of the Arab Spring

The Arab Spring has brought a wide change in the region. Its events imposed political volatility which affected the control of traditional hegemonies. The repercussions of the Arab Spring coincided with the growing and effective foreign policy of Qatar. As it represented an opportunity to expand in dominant powers in the region. The state has adapted to the new reality and has moved from a position of neutrality to imposing influence. It relied on an alliance with groups and parties with a wide impact in Arab societies. Similarly, a comprehensive change occurred in the features and tools of foreign policy during this era (Ulrichsen, 2014, p. 8).

The Qatari role changed completely, moving from a neutral phase, and keeping one distance from everyone to direct intervention in events. The state has indeed expanded politically and geographically. It played a direct role in the events of Libya and Syria, showing dynamism in the application of hard power. This has imposed unprecedented repercussions on foreign State policy. Tensions between Qatar and Saudi Arabia rose, and Qatar did not retreat from an alliance with Islamists. Undoubtedly, Qatar has risen to the forefront of the regional scene and has achieved expansion and clear control. Nonetheless, the country has been implicated in conflicts that extend to our present time. It has become a major rival to the dominant power in the region, such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt. State support for the Arab Spring has caused



disagreement with the GCC countries (Roberts D. B., 2012, pp. 2-4).

Theoretical Framework for Soft Power

Power is the ability to influence and control the behavior and policies of States, organizations, and actors in international politics. From another perspective, the efficiency of State power can be measured through optimal recruitment of material and non-material components to achieve interests and objectives. It turns out that power is an interaction between several elements, not limited to a single component or item. In this sense, military power, possession of weapons, the violent coercion of states has receded in favor of other sources of power based on the capability of influence and attract. This is what Nye has defined as soft power, which means achieving the state's interests in foreign policy through inducement and persuasion and the possession of attraction tools that influence the decisions and outcomes of other states and organizations (Nye, 1990, p. 166).

The concept of soft power emerged as one of the most important foreign policy instruments, especially after the Cold War, the reformulation of relations between states, and the emergence of non-state actors in the global landscape. Small states have given special priority to soft power, as it supports them in exceed over weakness and confronting challenges among the hegemonic power (Wagner, 2014, p. 1).

Soft power can be defined by achieving desired results through attraction factors, and the ability to guide others towards what the State wants. Soft power depends on moral resources and tools such as values and principles, culture and its institutions, diplomacy, media, sports. Soft power has taken on great importance in recent decades, giving states flexibility at the foreign policy level. Soft power tools have allowed some States to play a regional and international role. States can exceed the traditional concept of power. It has paved the way for countries to overcome unfavorable conditions and be able to compete with the great Powers (Lukes, 2005, p. 89).

Despite the unfavorable geopolitical conditions, Qatar has been an influential actor in the Middle East. It can be argued that the rise of Qatar's role in the region stems largely from the adoption of a dynamic soft power strategy. First, it is important to clarify why Qatar has moved towards this strategy. In recent years, especially in the last decade, the State's desire to build an independent foreign policy has increased, in addition to seeking to compete with traditional powers over regional leadership. Despite Qatar's success in overcoming security threats through a military alliance with a superpower such as the United States of America, the state was not satisfied with ensuring internal security and stability and embarked on an ambitious policy and role that transcends its geopolitical reality (Cherkaoui T., 2014, pp. 21-22).

Clearly, during the era of Emir Hamad, Qatar's soft power strategy was established. Hamad bin Khalifa has adopted balanced and realistic policies that consider the traditional powers in the region. He has succeeded in

benefiting from the state's economic resources and transforming them into effective tools that serve foreign policy. The soft power tools during the early years of his era included three main tracks; mediation diplomacy, an influential media network, and higher education institutions that attract foreign students (Moncunill, 2015, p. 18).

Arguably, Hamad bin Khalifa achieved his goals in the rise of the state as an influential player on the map of international politics. The soft power strategy witnessed remarkable development and change in the level of approaches and tools during the era of the Arab Spring. This coincided with the rise of Emir Tamim bin Hamad to power, who reformulated the goals and tools of the state's agenda. Thus, Qatar has moved to the stage of intervention and influence (Pierini, 2013, p. 1).

Qatar's soft power tools

The study explores Qatar's soft power tools through a combination of historical and objectives classification.

1. Mediation and conflict resolution

Since the early 2000s, Qatar has emerged as a neutral mediator between dispute parties in many regions and has gained over the years a wide reputation at the regional and international levels. Qatari mediation has gained a high profile and has become the subject of global attention. Doha has become the primary hub for conflict resolution in the region, as it has mediated critical regional and international issues. For instance, in Lebanon, Yemen, Darfur, and Libya, to Afghanistan, from Iraq to the crisis of Bulgarian nurses detained in Libya, also between Fatah and Hamas, relations between Sudan and Chad, and between France and Syria (Nuruzzaman M., 2015a, pp. 541-542).

This active role of Qatari diplomacy has created competition with traditional powers in the region such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia. It has led to tension in their relations, and Qatar has received many accusations, such as interference in states' internal affairs. Despite the humanitarian and moral dimension of dispute settlement, undoubtedly, Qatar's goals in the process go beyond that. Arguably, the Qatari ambitious leadership has sought to achieve several objectives from mediation diplomacy.

Qatar has adopted a proactive approach in dealing with tensions and disputes in the surrounding region. It aims to prevent threats to reach its state and to ensure internal security and political stability. The state has gained security and political immunity from balanced relations with contradictory parties. While it hosts leaders from Hamas, Qatar maintains diplomatic and economic relations with Israel. Despite its alliance with the USA, it communicates with the Taliban for media and political purposes. In other words, if Qatar is not a friend to all, at least it has been able to neutralize all parties, including the armed movements (Putri & Surwandono, 2019, p. 256).

2. Aljazeera network



The network, founded in 1996, represented a unique case in the Arab media system. The channel has fundamentally changed the objectives, framework, and structure of the Arab information space. From the first moment, Al-Jazeera raised slogans like independence and neutrality. In a few years, Al-Jazeera was able to expand in terms of construction and influence. Within a few years, Al Jazeera Network has assumed a position no less than CNN, Sky, or BBC worldwide. The influence of this brand and media network increased after the launch of Al Jazeera English, Al Jazeera Sports Channels, Al Jazeera Children, Al Jazeera Mubashir, and Al Jazeera Documentary. In addition, Al Jazeera has expanded its activities, no longer like any traditional television channel, but has created long and influential arms for itself, such as annual festivals, Al Jazeera Training Centre, Al Jazeera Human Rights Centre, Al Jazeera Studies Centre, Al Jazeera Net, and others. Al-Jazeera Network was not limited to the air and TV screens only but went beyond that when it moved from a mere media channel that breaks news and events to a maker or at least a participant in the event shaping (Da Lage, 2019, pp. 54-55).

Given the influence and wide impact, the Al-Jazeera television network, and its institutions' network have become an important tool in Qatar's soft power strategy, and one of the most important weapons to defend the state interests. In this sense, Al-Jazeera worked within three tracks, the first is the mass base it enjoys, which has enabled it to guide and influence Arab public opinion. Therefore, it has been able to benefit from Qatar's unlimited financial support to promote the state's policies and culture. Second, it has provided an attractive platform for politicians and the scientific and intellectual elites and thus gaining their support and defense of the state and its rulers. Third, in the last years of Prince Hamad's reign, the Al Jazeera network formed a deterrent weapon to counter political and media incitement campaigns. Moreover, it has become the main pillar of Qatari foreign policy, and the state has relied on it as part of its negotiation tools with its opponents (Samuel-Azran, 2013, pp. 1297-1298).

The channel has become an engine of revolutions and a major supporter of post-Arab Spring governments. The channel has meshed with audiences and built a reputation for reliability. This provided Qatar with an opportunity to expand and increase its influence in pivotal countries in the region. It is the same reason that sparked the conflict with the GCC countries. Despite the positive impact of Al Jazeera and its achievement of Qatari's foreign policy goals, the negative implications for Qatar's relations with its neighbors cannot be denied. Qatar has received numerous accusations, mostly about Al-Jazeera's interference in the internal affairs of neighboring countries and hosting opponents of Arab regimes to criticize its rulers (Cherkaoui T., 2018a, p. 135).

3. Foreign Aids

Although the foreign aid program was launched in the era of Hamad bin Khalifa, Qatar's foreign aid policy (QFAP)

occupied a prominent place with Sheikh Tamim's rise to power. Foreign aids strategy has evolved considerably in terms of patterns and funding. Indeed, the state's foreign policy and soft power strategy have undergone a radical shift. From a neutrality policy to a more ambitious strategy seeking influence and control. Thus, the QFAP also shifted, expanded, and became more organized and structured in institutions. Its evolution coincided with the remarkable rise in Qatar's regional and global role. Soft power with its diverse tools has been a bedrock for the new leadership strategy.

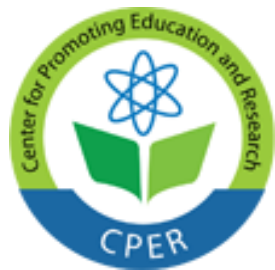
Similarly, foreign aid is one of the most important soft tools that has provided the dynamic for this strategy. Qatar relied on it as the main way to strengthen its relations with the governments and peoples of the countries of the region, such as Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, and Palestine. The reach extended to countries such as Nepal, the Philippines, European countries, and the United States (Kharas, 2015, p. 23).

Foreign aid has followed two basic paths, the official governmental path and that of non-governmental. Qatar has focused on mutual partnerships and cooperation in development and production projects. The state has carried out its activities through two channels, the Qatar Development Fund, and the International Cooperation Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Assistance through these channels is political in terms of the manner and place of guidance. It was notable that most of the activities were international and had a wide geographical reach. Regional activities have been concentrated in conflict areas such as reconstruction projects in Palestine and Lebanon. Such as building hospitals, schools, streets, and development projects (Zureik, 2018, pp. 788-796).

The second track, however, relied on a group of non-governmental associations and foundations. Despite the government's sponsorship of these institutions, Qatar has tended to highlight them in the form of civil or independent bodies. Humanitarian assistance, relief projects, and support for charitable institutions have been at the core of the non-governmental track. At the head of these organizations, Qatar Charity and Qatari Red Crescent, which were the unofficial arm of the state, operating within the country's soft power agenda. The foundations also included the Sheikh Eid Charity, the Raff Human Services Foundation, and the Sheikh Jassem bin Hamad Society (D'Acunto, 2016, pp. 35-36).

4. Political and Media Lobbies

The lobby is a political term that refers to groups that could pressing and influence, and often carry out their tasks in secret. It moves according to long-term goals and interests by influencing decision-makers in some countries and institutions, or even public opinion. The lobby may consist of officials, politicians and writers, journalists and media figures, non-state actors, and capitalists. Qatar has been active in establishing pressure groups in many Arab and western countries. Decision-makers have sought this path after the Arab Spring, as one of the soft power tools (Antwi-Boateng, 2013, p. 43).



With the Arab Spring, Qatar sought to benefit from the development of social media. The state-sponsored activists and social media pages. It sponsored media figures with influence on the masses and produced many TV programs. Significant financial incentives were provided. Qatar is investing in part of the Guardian newspaper and founding the Middle East Eye site were examples of Qatar seeking to expand its influence through a media lobby. Partnerships have also been established with media organizations, newspapers, and TV channels that have a wide influence in Western countries such as the USA, France, and Britain. In this sense, it can be argued that Qatar has established an extensive network with media personalities and organizations. It exerted considerable influence through this media array. It was able to direct and press all political events (Cherkaoui T., 2018a, pp. 135-141).

Qatar has realized the importance of political pressure groups in the soft power strategy. Achieving the state's foreign interests requires an influential arm in the countries that have political weight internationally and regionally. Building an indirect political alliance with Muslim Brotherhood is the most prominent model of these groups regionally (Felsch, 2016, p. 24).

Muslim Brotherhood is the largest political party in most Arab countries, and it dominated elections and authority after the Arab Spring. Consequently, Qatar sought to support them and ally with them, to pass its interests in the region and defend its policies and projects. In general, Islamist parties were the constant choice as a pressure card for Qatar in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Syria, and Palestine. Qatar adopted a policy of supporting opponents of other Arab regimes and using them as a pressure card in the political struggle (Roberts D., 2014, p. 90).

Qatar's foreign policy has entered a different phase, with profound changes. This was reflected in their direct intervention in support of political parties after the Arab Spring, and involvement in the influence struggle. It has made a great effort to build a wide network of relations and establish a political lobby in countries that influence international politics. The state's policies after the Arab Spring have caused disputes with Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt. Incitement campaigns have been launched against it in the West and the United States. Incitement has escalated to accusations of supporting terrorism and financing extremist groups (Mohammadzadeh, 2017, p. 12).

Therefore, Qatar turned to the United States, the main player in the region, and spent money in building a political lobby in support of it. Qatari lobby's relations in the US included members of Congress, members of US presidential candidates' campaigns. It also sought to connect with influential province heads and political senators. Qatari lobby activity increased after the siege crisis of 2017.

The Qatari leadership relied on the lobbies as a soft means possessing flexibility and strength in tactics and goals. Qatari lobby goals included three main points.

The first point, improving state image, is the basic role for which it was established, through promoting state policies and responding to suspicions and incitement campaigns. The second point, influence a political decision by contributing to forming public opinion, putting pressure on decision-making circles, and extract supportive opinions and positions for the state's interest. Third point, expanding areas of control and influence through media outlets and a network of opinion leaders, and support for political groups with a pro-state vision and its political project in the region.

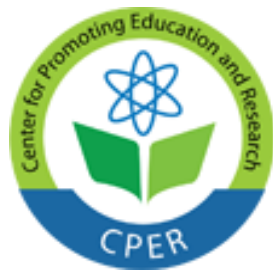
5. Establishing and sponsoring Human Rights Organizations

Qatar has accorded special priority to human rights in its post-Arab Spring foreign policy strategy. The new government sought to improve the image of the state and keep pace with the democratic development of the region. In addition to fulfilling its obligations on the international scene and to the official law institutions. The new ruler sought to improve the state image and keep pace with the democratic progress in the region, which was a major driver of the state's activity in this field. In addition to fulfilling its obligations on the international scene and towards official human rights institutions (Nuruzzaman M., 2015b, pp. 228-229).

During the reign of Emir Tamim, the human rights profile was reorganized, seeing a major evolution. The National Human Rights Commission was granted financial and administrative independence. Qatar emphasized its efforts to uphold the rule of law and promote human rights values within society. The State has established a Human Rights Commission within the Ministry of the Interior and Labor and has organized numerous law seminars. Qatar has been widely criticized for human rights, particularly about the living conditions of migrant workers and labor laws. It faced accusations of violation of workers' rights, especially in the 2022 FIFA World Cup projects. Political disputes between Qatar and countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt have played a role in escalating rights campaigns against the Qatari government. These countries have funded lawful and media institutions to launch accusations and discredit Qatar in the human rights issues (Cherkaoui T., 2018b, pp. 13-20).

Undoubtedly, the conflict between Qatar and the countries of the GCC, which ended with the siege crisis in 2017, represented an influential point on the path of the human rights file. It has become at the core of the soft power strategy of the state, and a pivotal tool in post-boycott foreign policy. The State has relied on the NHRC to deal with the repercussions of the embargo and to defend its national reputation. The role of Mr. Ali Al-Marri, head of the national committee, has emerged in his foreign activities (Al Marri, 2017).

The roots and reasons of the boycott crisis



Despite the shared culture, traditions, and geography among the Gulf countries, the political and diplomatic relations between them have been vulnerable and fragile at times. Over the past decades, the Gulf region has gone through many crises. Despite the Gulf countries' attempt to establish mutual workspaces through the Council, political crises have erupted in recent years between Qatar and Saudi Arabia on one side, and Qatar and the UAE on the other. In 2017, it became clear that the signs of a major crisis were looming, where the UAE proceeded to defamation and incitement campaigns against Qatar and its foreign policy (Macaron, 2018, pp. 106-107).

On June 5, 2017, the Persian Gulf was on a date with a watershed event in its political history. A massive crisis has erupted between Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt, on one side, and Qatar on the other. The Quartet suddenly issued a statement declaring diplomatic relations with Qatar to be severed. The blockade States have isolated it from the world and declared the blockade by air, sea, and land.

Certainly, the crisis was not the product of the moment. It had geopolitical roots that set the scene for the current confrontation. However, it caused a severe shock and confusion to the Qatari regime and the people of the region. Over the past three and a half years of the embargo against Qatar, the region has been affected by numerous consequences. The effects of this crisis have an extent not only to the States of the GCC and the Middle East but to the network of international relations. Undoubtedly, the Persian Gulf is a vital territory for many actors in international politics. As a result of the geographical location, oil, and natural gas reserves. Moreover, the Gulf States have international alliances with dominant States such as the United States. Hence, this crisis has been a major concern in the international arena, and many researchers have focused on following it (Katzman, 2016, pp. 13-15).

The Gulf crisis erupted when Saudi and Emirati media published news and statements attributed to Prince Tamim of Qatar. These statements were linked to issues involving Iran, Hamas, and Hezbollah, which were published on the Qatari News Agency. The crisis escalated until the fifth of June, when Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt announced that diplomatic relations with Qatar had been severed. The Qatari authorities denied these statements, emphasized the hacking of the official news agency and the broadcasting of fabricated statements (Jones, 2019, pp. 1389-1390).

There are certainly hidden causes that triggered the crisis and induced previous crises. Such as the 1996 crisis, when Qatar accused Saudi Arabia of supporting a coup against Emir Hamad bin Khalifa. Also, the diplomatic crisis in 2014, when Saudi Arabia and the UAE withdrew their ambassadors from Doha following accusations of Qatar interfering in the internal affairs of countries and threatening security and stability in the Gulf. Therefore, the dissertation will focus on exploring the most important reasons (Allagui & Akdenizli, 2019, pp. 1288-1291).

1. The Role of Soft Power Tools in Crisis

The state has gained a high profile and the power of attraction and influence, which enabled it to play a role different from the policy of neutrality and mediation. Qatar has emerged as a major actor in the region and has moved from neutrality to the pursuit of control and leadership. It has adopted more influential soft power tools that fit the new phase. In addition to developing traditional tools and altering their objectives (Anzawa, 2011, p. 38).

Certainly, some tools within the soft power strategy played a controversial role before the siege crisis erupted. First, Qatar has adopted political alliances and diplomatic relations with certain influential countries and actors in the Middle East. Such as the controversial relationship with Iran, Turkey, and Muhammad Morsi's regime during his reign in Egypt after the Arab Spring. Moreover, the relationship with non-state actors such as Hezbollah, Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya. These relations enhanced the position of the state and provided valuable cards in the context of the struggle for influence and control. The relationship between Islamist groups and Qatar emerges as a major state approach. This relationship has become strategic within the soft power strategy. Qatar has been providing financial and political support to organizations and parties affiliated with Ikhwan in Arab and Islamic countries (Roberts D., 2014, pp. 85-91).

This relationship witnessed a remarkable development with the events of the Arab Spring. The state interpreted the Arab Spring as an opportunity to benefit from its alliance with Ikhwan. Qatar has aimed to provide all kinds of support to Islamic groups. This approach has triggered a conflict with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which consider Ikhwan an inevitable threat to their internal security and regional influence. Saudi Arabia and the UAE sought to besiege Islamist governments after the Arab Spring. Saudi Arabia has taken this alliance as a pretext to discredit and attack Qatar (Khlebnikov, 2015, p. 20).

Secondly, the media weapon formed a cornerstone of the soft power agenda. The Qatari leadership has relied on it steadily during the last two decades. Al Jazeera network has emerged as the most important media tool and a crucial pillar in the soft power strategy. Al Jazeera has evolved for a few years, and its role has grown from a mere channel to a highly influential strategic tool. Al Jazeera succeeded in creating political events, bolstering Arab public opinion on many issues. Undoubtedly, the role it played in covering the events of the Arab Spring created geopolitical tensions. In addition to opening space for opponents of Saudi Arabia and the UAE and allowing criticism of the policies of these countries. Therefore, it has always been a reason for Saudi Arabia's criticism and struggles with Qatar and its foreign policy (Abdul-Nabi, 2017, pp. 8-9).

Saudi Arabia assesses this rise and change as a jump for Qatar above its size. It deals with the unprecedented rise of Qatar's soft power as an attempt to compete with it for the



region's leadership and a threat to its influence. The Qatari soft power strategy has witnessed a remarkable development, in terms of influencing political events in some countries and gaining extensive influence in the region. Hence, the expansion of the soft power strategy was a trigger for confrontation with Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Qatar has adopted policies different from Saudi Arabia and the UAE. This appeared in support of the Arab Spring revolutions and the values of freedom and democracy.

The rise of the young princes, with anti-Islamist, secular-leaning outlooks, Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), and Mohamed bin Zayed (MBZ) to power, played a role in the intensification of competition and conflict. It seems that the Qatari foreign policy of soft power has clashed with the trends and policies of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Consequently, Saudi Arabia has sought to obstruct Qatar's efforts to expand and increase its influence through soft power (Miller R., 2019, p. 8).

2. Hegemony struggle

Qatar has risen dramatically in recent years as an active force in regional politics. It has been a cornerstone of many important events in the Middle East. Qatar has adopted a strategy that enables it to transform its natural and economic resources into potent tools called soft power. Throughout the last decade of his reign, Emir Hamad succeeded in building a strategy of national branding, based on politically effective soft power tools. The most important tools were mediation and dispute resolution. Although neutrality was a fundamental feature of State policy at that time, nonetheless Saudi Arabia addressed the growing power of Qatar as a threat to its role in the region. Thus, the Gulf region has entered successive crises, where turmoil became the feature of the relationship between the two countries. For instance, the coup attempt by Saudi Arabia against Qatar in 1996, and then the crisis of severing diplomatic relations in 2002 (Bianco & Stansfield, 2018, p. 613).

Abruptly, the hegemony struggle entered a more complex phase with the rise of Emir Tamim to power. Where the Qatari policy has taken a new turn towards more influence and power. The opportunity arose to play a more active and expanded role with the changes in the political environment after the Arab Spring. An Arab hub was formed, led by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt after the army turned on President Mohamed Morsi. The rift between this axis and Qatar has widened, and political clashes and rivalry have turned into an open confrontation on all issues. In this sense, it can be argued that the siege crisis of 2017 is a stark allusion to a history of conflict. In other words, the embargo is the eventual sign of a flaming confrontation in the Persian Gulf. Although the Arab Quartet has been promoted for many reasons to justify the Boycott of Qatar. Indeed, this axis considers that Qatar's foreign policy has expanded to an extent that threatens its interests and control over the regional scene (Sadiki & Saleh, 2020, p. 4).

3. Ideological disagreement and political alliances

The boycott Quartet deals with the project of political Islam as an imminent threat to their rule and community. Furthermore, they adopt strict measures against groups that represent this thought. On the contrary, Qatar has adopted an open and positive policy towards the Islamist. Also, the state has established alliances with the parties and groups that belong to them.

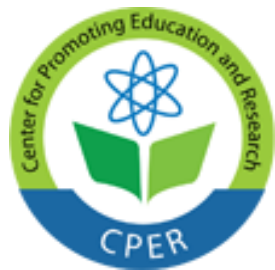
Qatar sought to build a broad alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood before the Arab Spring which has expanded after the Arab Spring. Qatar aimed to benefit from the regional expansion of the Ikhwan's ideology, and its wide influence in Arab societies. Their rise to power provided an opportunity for Qatar's ambitious policy to increase influence and expand in the region. Saudi Arabia and the UAE dealt with this scene as a real threat and feared that the revolutions and the Arab Spring would spill over into their societies (Roberts D. B., 2019, p. 4).

Within this conflict, the ideological aspect of the dispute between the head of power in Qatar, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia emerges. The crown prince MBZ, who controls power in the Emirates, strongly opposes the ideas of the Islamists and adopts ideas that contradict them. The ideological aspect constituted a motive for a struggle against the influence of the Brotherhood in the entire region. This was evident in the restrictions imposed on members and leaders of Ikhwan in the UAE in 2011 when the Arab Spring erupted. In addition to the socially liberal ideas that MBS seeks to implement in Saudi Arabia, which have secular learning.

Conclusion and Findings

Qatari foreign policy in recent years seems to be in an ongoing battle between ambition and obstacles. The small State faces geopolitical challenges in terms of its limited size and population density. Moreover, Qatar is in volatile security and political environment, plagued by a hegemonic struggle between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Qatari foreign policy in recent years seems to be in an ongoing battle between ambition and obstacles. Qatar is in volatile security and political environment, plagued by a hegemonic struggle between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Although the state suffered from unfavorable conditions, it has sought to build an ambitious foreign policy since the era of Emir Hamad. The foreign policy of soft power has emerged as the cornerstone for achieving the state's agenda in regional and international politics (Peterson, 2006, p. 739).

The State has relied on a sustainable plan to develop the State's natural and economic resources into a variety of soft power fronts. Qatari foreign policy has gone through two basic phases in the last two decades. The objectives of the initial era included security, autonomy, and standing in global politics. The second era has aimed to achieve branding and influence. The authority has achieved a remarkable integration between the objectives of each political era and soft power tools. Neutrality and dispute avoidance have marked the first stage, which included soft power tools such as mediation, diplomatic



activity, the Aljazeera network, and high education institutions. The second era included tools such as foreign aid, political and media lobbies, the alliance with Islamic groups, and the evolution of the Aljazeera network (Miller & Verhoeven, 2020, pp. 10-11).

Certainly, the soft power strategy played a decisive role in Qatar's emergence as an influential regional power. The growing Qatari influence in the region coincided with the events of the Arab Spring. The Arab Spring has provided a convenient opportunity for the expansion of the foreign policy of soft power. The state has created more influential soft power tools and sought to compete for leadership in the region. The Gulf states have not overlooked Qatar's expansionist policy. In this sense, Saudi Arabia has interpreted Qatari influence as an opponent of its regional role and a threat to its traditional influence. Undoubtedly, the foreign policy of its soft power was redesigned after Emir Tamim's rise to power. He has articulated a subtle and ambitious strategy, and he did not retreat from the expansionist agenda, despite the challenges that the state faced during his reign. Qatar has stepped up as an influential regional power and a key factor in international politics. Consequently, tension and conflict have emerged as a feature of the relationship between Qatar and the GCC States. Especially after supporting the Muslim Brotherhood government in Egypt and Qatar's general approach to Arab Spring (Hammond, 2014, pp. 7-8).

The dispute has reached a great deal that can be described as a hegemony struggle. Having a wide influence through the foreign policy of soft power has been a major reason for provoking the GCC countries. Thus, the boycott crisis erupted in 2017, when Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt announced a land, sea, and air blockade against Qatar. The statement of the Arab Quartet included thirteen demands that explain the causes of the crisis from their perspective. The study has concluded the link between the growing Qatari soft power and the outbreak of the Gulf crisis. This is confirmed by the demands of the Quartet states, which included closing the Aljazeera channel, severing ties with non-state actors such as Ikhwan, and the suspension of foreign aid through relief institutions. It seems clear that the battle is aimed at deterring Qatar and imposing sanctions related to its escalating regional role over the past two decades. Moreover, the measures are a Saudi Emirati attempt to impose certain foreign policies on the authority in Qatar.

Although the diplomatic boycott has posed risks and challenges to Qatar, the state has never capitulated. Qatar has demonstrated its ability to overcome the crisis and its economic sanctions, political and media campaigns. In this context, the country has successfully built a strategy of resilience and deterrence, which has relied on an impressive policy of soft power. The Qatari foreign policy of soft power has formed a cornerstone in the state enhancing its position in the regional and international scene. Similarly, the expansion

of soft power has served as a trigger for the boycott crisis in 2017. It seems clear after these years that the Quartet had failed to achieve the objectives of their campaign against Qatar. Similarly, Qatar has been negatively affected by the economic, social, and political repercussions of the blockade. In addition to the negative consequences for the state's reputation and its regional agenda. Although its ability to live with the blockade, and to establish a strategy of deterrence and resilience.

To sum up, Qatar may concede, and the blockade States retreat to resolve the current crisis. Even if that were to happen, it does not mean that the dispute issues have come to a permanent resolution. The real roots that provoke crises are still latent, and due to the intertwining of these reasons, solving them has become more difficult over the year. Qatar is aiming to strengthen its regional and international role and will not compromise the political gains and broad influence it has achieved in past years. It is hard to expect Emir Tamim bin Hamad to retreat from his ambitious strategy and expansionist foreign policy. The State recognizes the need to strengthen power strategies as a guarantor and deterrent in the face of foreign threats.

In this context, Qatar will certainly seek to further expand the foreign policy of soft power as the most important pillar of the state's influence. Qatar did not close Al Jazeera and did not change its editorial policy. And Qatari relations with Iran, Hamas, the Brotherhood are still active. Although the closure of the channel and severing relations with those parties were among the demands of the Quartet states in the boycott statement. Moreover, Qatar has created new soft power tools that have contributed to the resilience strategy that exceeded the crisis challenges. On the other hand, with MBZ in power in the UAE and MBS in Saudi Arabia, it seems that the hegemony and influence struggles will erupt from time to time. Given the attitudes of the two leaders against the politics and ideology of power in Qatar.

The historical roots and political and ideological backgrounds are important for understanding the causes of crises between Qatar and the GCC countries. Nevertheless, regional, and international reality seem to have a decisive impact on the destiny of the underlying conflict, in the context of the influence of alliances with the superpowers particularly the USA on decision-makers in most Gulf countries. As the crisis erupted in 2017 under the cover of President Donald Trump, the settlement of the crisis seems to have coincided with President Biden's coming to power. Clearly, shortly, it seems that the region is heading towards calming down and reducing the pace of conflict, especially in light of the orientations of the new US administration. Nevertheless, some reasons remain ready to trigger crises when favorable conditions are available. Certainly, it can be argued that disputes will continue even if the blockade ends.



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