

2016

Country Profile: Qatar



Religious Literacy Project

Harvard Divinity School

April 7, 2015

"Dancing with Swords," Omar Chatriwala (2013), from Flickr Creative Commons.



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"Doha, Qatar," by Kris Krug (2012) at Flickr Creative Commons.

Overview

Qatar is a small and wealthy monarchy with a population of over two million people, though foreigners outnumber local Qataris at about seven to one. Most of Qatar's resident population is made up of South Asian and Southeast Asian laborers and a wide variety of professionals from Europe, the United States, the Middle East, and Australia. The official state religion is Wahhabi Sunni Islam, though Qatari culture is, in many respects, strikingly more liberal than its Wahhabi neighbor, Saudi Arabia. The expatriate community is made up of Sunni and Shi'a Muslims, Christians, Hindus, and small groups of Buddhists and Baha'is. Qatar's only current border is shared with its much larger neighbor, Saudi Arabia, though Iran, Bahrain, Oman, and the Emirates are nearby and a bridge is planned to connect Qatar with Bahrain.

Its size and proximity to large, powerful nations has resulted in a highly flexible foreign policy allowing Qatar to strike a balance between competing interests. For example, Qatar is among the United States' strongest regional allies—U.S. Central Command is located on the Al-Udeid Air Base twenty miles outside of Doha, the capital city, and serves as a deterrent against those states who might seek Qatar's vast natural resources for themselves. However, Qatar is also home to the satellite news network *Al Jazeera*, whose coverage of American foreign policy (particularly the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq and the War on Terror) is distinctly critical of the United States, allowing Qatari leaders to maintain an alliance with their frequently unpopular ally without significant political consequences.

Other foreign connections are carefully maintained to ensure Qatar's autonomy and security—and this strategy is nothing new.¹ For generations Qatar's ruling family, the al-Thanis, have successfully negotiated for its continued existence between competing global powers including the British and Ottoman Empire in the 19th century to elements within Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Iran throughout Qatari history. What *is* new since 2000 has been Qatari leadership's assertive engagement in major world conflicts as a mediator, a *hakam*. There is significant prestige accorded to mediation in the Arab world, which is a legacy of Islam; the Prophet Muhammad was renowned for his skill as a mediator.² Notable examples of Qatari efforts include mediating between Lebanese politicians and Hezbollah representatives in 2008 and Darfuri rebels and the Sudanese government in 2009.³ Qatar's mediation strategy has raised its global profile considerably. Qatar is also heavily invested in promoting other key areas, from education and the arts to sports. At the same time, this new assertiveness has come with some risk.



The All Darfur Stakeholders Conference in Doha, Qatar, UNAMID (2011), Flickr Creative Commons.

Controversially, Qatar has supported Islamist militias and Islamist political parties in the post-Arab Spring era. Qatar was a major supporter of the al-Nahda Party in Tunisia, of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and of the Islamist opposition to Muammar Qaddafi in Libya. Qatar's support for the opposition in Libya was so significant that the Qatari flag was flown alongside the rebel flag. In part, this reflects Qatar's foreign policy aims of high-level engagement alongside major global powers such as the United States and Saudi Arabia. However, it also grows out of a longstanding affiliation

with and support for Islamist politics outside of the nation's borders, particularly for Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood—a sore spot for neighboring Gulf nations opposed to the Brotherhood.

At first glance, such support is counterintuitive; Qatari leaders lack ideological roots in Islamism and there are significant differences between the Brotherhood's activism and Qatar's Sunni Wahhabism, which is used to promote unquestioning allegiance to the al-Thani family.⁴ However, Qatar has leveraged the Brotherhood while co-opting its power through targeted support, allowing it to deflect

¹ Allen Fromherz, *Qatar: A Modern History* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2012).

² Ibid.

³ Mehran Kamrava, "Mediation and Qatari foreign policy," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 65, No. 4 (2011), pp. 539–556.

⁴ Bernard Haykel, "Qatar and Islamism," *Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre*, February 2013, http://www.peacebuilding.no/var/ezflow_site/storage/original/application/ac81941df1be874ccbda35e747218abf.pdf, accessed November 15, 2013.

Islamist criticism against the state and monarchy. The government accomplishes this by controlling the stage upon which Brotherhood ideas are explored, for example, in its provision of a television platform for Brotherhood ideologue, Yusuf al-Qaradawi.⁵

Qatar distinguishes itself within the region in other ways, as well. In addition to various new sports, educational, and cultural initiatives ongoing or underway, Qatar is set to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup, becoming the first Arab country to do so. It will require massive development to accommodate crowds, including new hotels, expanded transportation, and other changes in infrastructure. While the decision to host the World Cup has been celebrated, humanitarian and labor organizations highlight Qatar's poor labor conditions. Though Qatar is enjoying the spotlight, it has also increased global scrutiny of this small and increasingly influential state.

⁵ Mahmoud al-Sadi, "Al Jazeera Television: Rhetoric of Deflection," *Arab Media & Society*, No. 15 (2012).

Historical Legacies

In 2007, Qatar shifted its celebration of National Day from September 3rd, marking the date that the British departed in 1971, to December 18th, on which Jassim bin Muhammad al-Thani in 1893 repelled an Ottoman invasion and united a number of local tribes under his rule. The change from a passive event—in fact, many Qataris did not want the British to leave—to one which enshrines Sheikh Jassim as a national hero and “founding father,” is useful in the construction of a coherent national identity that grounds al-Thani claims to leadership.⁶



"Warmup," Christian Senger (2010), Flickr Creative Commons

Qatar was historically a stopping point along maritime Indian Ocean trade routes that linked overland trade ending at ports in Basra, Iraq to India, Southeast Asia, and China. Settled coastal Qataris relied on provisions from nomadic Bedouin and passing trade ships, and at times resorted to piracy to secure food.⁷ Pearl diving was the predominant local trade, in which nearly half of all Qataris were engaged prior to its devastating collapse in the 1940s.

Qatar’s population, both historically and today, has largely clung to its coastline. The region’s blazing heat makes the interior miserable for most of the year; only 3% of the land is cultivable and another 5% suitable for herding and grazing. Yet, the name “Qatar” means grazing ground, referring to the periodic incursions of the nomadic al-Naim and al-Murrah Bedouins to graze their animals, particularly after the winter rains.⁸ Remnants of nomadic life are barely visible today, and the government has settled Qatar’s Bedouin populations. Texts on Qatar typically emphasize its radical transformation from a “sleepy backwater” or a “fishing village” to a cosmopolitan, hypermodern cityscape. Older generations of Qataris recall life before wealth, remembering with particular bitterness the years of hunger that followed the ruin of the pearl industry that began with the cultivation of Japanese Mikimoto pearls and ended with the complete disruption of trade in WWII. The tensions between security/insecurity, indulgence/hunger, power/weakness, and excess/poverty subtly inform many of the changes that have taken place in Qatar.

⁶ Shannon Mattern, “Font of a nation: Creating a national graphic identity for Qatar,” *Public Culture*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (2013), pp. 479–496; Michael Stephens, “Qatar and national identity,” *Open Democracy*, December 27, 2012.

⁷ Fromherz, *Qatar: A Modern History*, p. 54.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

The Colonial Era

The rise of Qatar parallels the rise of the ruling al-Thani family, which emerged from among numerous competing elements in 19th century Qatari society to become the dominant, dynastic political entity. This was done with the solicited assistance of the British, who, though they did not colonize Qatar as such, had a hegemonic and stabilizing presence in the Gulf between the years of 1820 and 1971.⁹ Modern Qatar is therefore a product of the collaboration between shrewd al-Thani emirs and British naval officers who sought the pacification and cooperation of coastal tribes in order to clear naval routes to India. The flexibility of Qatari foreign policy is a consequence of al-Thani political strategy, which maintains power through diplomacy as leaders negotiate with and leverage others' competing territorial and strategic interests in the peninsula.



"Attentive After Prayer," Omar Chatriwala (2012), Flickr Creative Commons

The 1798 Napoleonic invasion of Egypt raised British concerns over French expansion in the Near East, which threatened to sever British routes to India. In response, the British made inroads among coastal Gulf leaders and secured the Persian Gulf under British naval control. The threat of piracy as well as naval disruptions caused by internal struggles among local sheikhs gave rise to the 1820 General Treaty of Peace and 1853 Perpetual Maritime Truce, which officially recognized certain leaders as representative of their particular area along the coast. That is, the British took steps to empower certain sheikhs as leaders as a way of organizing and making "sense" of these tribes in the best way they knew how—namely through the lens of monarchy.¹⁰

The al-Thani family, led by Muhammad bin Thani, was one of several tribes in Qatar, and one which had a longstanding presence in the area now known as Doha. In 1868, Muhammad bin Thani took advantage of British power by signing a treaty with Britain's Colonel Pelly to become the 'official' ruler of Qatar, thus creating the foundations for a family legacy of inherited leadership rights. However, contrary to popular national narratives, the al-Thani family is a relatively young dynasty and was never historically entitled to regional political power, unlike other nearby families such as the ruling al-Sabah of Kuwait, the Khalifa of Bahrain, or even the al-Saud in Saudi Arabia.¹¹ In signing its treaty with the al-Thani, Britain replaced the traditional style of leadership among equals through *baya*, the Islamic oath of allegiance, or *shura/majlis*, councils of respected elders, with a monarchical model that set the foundation for political power in modern Qatar.

⁹ James Onley, "Britain and the Gulf Shaikhdoms, 1820–1971: The Politics of Protection," *Center for International and Regional Studies at the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar*, Occasional Paper No. 4 (2009).

¹⁰ Fromherz, *Qatar: A Modern History*, p.67.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.53.

The Ottoman Empire also played a role in the rise of the al-Thani family. The Ottomans warily eyed growing British influence in the Gulf region and sought to reclaim territories that it had once held, particularly in the last days of the Empire when, with the loss of the Balkans, Sultan Abdulhamid II attempted to consolidate power among fellow Muslims and to secure the Empire's vulnerable boundaries.¹² While Muhammad bin Thani accepted British authority, his son Jassim agreed to a non-tributary Ottoman suzerainty. However, Jassim never permitted the growth of a permanent, politically dominant Ottoman authority, and in 1892 repelled an Ottoman invasion that might have established such a presence. This feat has taken on near-mythical proportions and Jassim is remembered as a hero on National Day.¹³ It was also under Jassim that most Qataris adopted the Wahhabi school of Islam as a means of repelling potential Saudi interference.¹⁴



"At an official welcome ceremony with the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani," Presidential Press and Information Office, from Wikimedia Commons.

In emphasizing Jassim as the "founder" and "unifier" of Qatar against the Ottomans, the ruling al-Thani have emphasized their family's heroic status as well as Jassim's particular lineage over that of competing al-Thani lineages and over other tribes. Against the backdrop of the First World War in 1916, Britain signed the Anglo-Qatari treaty with Jassim's son, Sheikh Abdullah bin Jassim al-Thani, formally recognizing Qatar as a British protectorate and Sheikh Abdullah as its unquestioned leader.

The Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC, later British Petroleum) was founded in 1908, marking the inception of an era of oil that would radically alter the destinies of Gulf nations. With the early 20th century decline of the pearl industry, Sheikh Abdullah capitalized on the creation of the Standard Oil Company of California and encouraged competition between the Americans and British. In 1935 he signed a contract with APOC granting them an oil concession that laid claim to all petroleum off of Qatar's coast, which kept the British involved in the Gulf even after Indian independence in 1947 made shipping channels to India less important. As British colonies declared independence in the mid- century, the British Empire seemed less and less relevant and British politicians were pressured by its former subjects to leave the entire Middle East.

¹² Frederick F. Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf: The Creation of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

¹³ Fromherz, *Qatar: A Modern History*, p.62.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 72.

Independence & Modern Political Rule

In 1968, Britain announced its plans for a withdrawal from the Gulf, citing the costs of maintaining a military presence that complicated efforts by the Labour Party to cut the civil budget at home. This delighted Arab nationalists in the Middle East who called for the complete removal of British power throughout the region, but was resisted by Qatari rulers so much so that they offered to bankroll Britain's continued military presence.¹⁵ The British officially left Qatar in 1971, and shortly thereafter the United States replaced Britain as Qatar's guardian.



Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser Al-Missned, UNAOC (2010). Flickr

In 1972, Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad, Sheikh Abdullah's grandson, took the throne in a bloodless coup and oversaw Qatar's transformation into a modern state. While Sheikh Khalifa successfully industrialized Qatar, he failed to bring about the significant reform that he had promised following the coup. Declining oil prices in the 1980s exacerbated frictions within the family and lent support and legitimacy to Khalifa's son Hamad, who secured the throne in another nonviolent takeover in 1995. It is Sheikh Hamad who is credited with the rapid development that characterizes contemporary Qatar, which includes the

massive Education City initiative and numerous Western university campuses hosted there, investment in enormous natural gas reserves, which outpace oil reserves and have secured Qatar's wealth far into the future, and the creation of several world-class art museums, among other changes.

The most significant development has undoubtedly been the creation of *Al Jazeera*, the Arab world's most-watched satellite network. *Al Jazeera* Satellite Channel was launched in 1996 and, characterizing itself as an independent alternative to state media as well as to hegemonic, Western news media, provides news coverage of regional and global events and talk shows in which guests and hosts alike have shocked viewers in their open critiques of political leaders. Nonetheless, it receives \$300 million in annual funding from the Qatari government and is rarely critical of the Qatari state. In recent years, it has expanded to include *Al Jazeera English* (2006), also headquartered in Doha, and *Al Jazeera America* (2013), based in New York, which suffered financial failure and is scheduled to cease operations in April, 2016.¹⁶

¹⁵ Onley, "Britain and the Gulf Shaikhdoms, 1820–1971: The Politics of Protection," p. 21.

¹⁶ Hussein Ibish, "Why America Turned Off Al-Jazeera," *The New York Times*, February 17, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/18/opinion/why-america-turned-off-al-jazeera.html>, accessed March 8, 2016.

Politically, Qatar has also distinguished itself in its emergence as an international mediator. Over the past decade, Qatar has played a leading role in mediation efforts between groups in Lebanon, Sudan, Yemen, and to lesser extents in Palestine, Djibouti, and Eritrea, though not all cases were resolved.¹⁷ In doing so, Qatar has assumed a mantle traditionally reserved for global powers, especially the United States, France, and other western nations, but also from regional powers such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia, or organizations like the Arab League, at times provoking their ire. The ultimate effect of this high-level engagement has been international recognition as a diplomatic powerhouse actively promoting regional stability and peace.

Mediation carries high prestige in the Arab region, and resonates with Islamic history. The Prophet Muhammad was a renowned mediator during his lifetime and successful mediation is seen to require thoughtfulness, tact, and a clear understanding of subtle and shifting interests.¹⁶

Qatar expanded its diplomatic reach in the post-Arab Spring era by directly supporting Sunni Islamist groups throughout the volatile region. This included billions in funding for the Libyan rebellion that led to the death of former leader Muammar Qaddafi, support for the al-Nahda Party in Tunisia, and financial support for anti-government opposition in Syria, including radical Islamist militias that Qatar's allies seek to disempower in favor of other opposition elements.¹⁷ In Egypt, Qatar became the largest aid donor during the presidency of Muhammad Morsi, the winning candidate from the Muslim Brotherhood's Justice and Development Party (Qatar also supports Hamas in neighboring Palestinian territories, though this pre-dates the Arab Spring). In essence, Qatar again emerged as a major regional player on par with Saudi Arabia and the United States, using its immense wealth to influence conflict outcomes, and, as many analysts note, gaining prestige and clout in a region of political aggressors.¹⁸



"Pearl Diver," Nick Leonard (2006), Flickr Creative Commons.

¹⁷ Kamrava, "Mediation and Qatari Foreign Policy," pp. 1–18.

¹⁶ Fromherz, *Qatar: A Modern History*, p.87.

¹⁷ David Roberts, "Behind Qatar's Intervention in Libya: Why Was Doha Such A Strong Supporter of The Rebels?" *Foreign Affairs*, September 28, 2011, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/68302/david-roberts/behind-qatars-intervention-in-libya>, accessed November 15, 2013.

¹⁸ "Tiny Qatar's growing global clout," *BBC*, April 30, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-13229852>, accessed November 15, 2013; Abigail Hauslohner, "Qatar loses clout amid fading Arab Spring," *The Washington Post*, November 13, 2013, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/qatar-loses-clout-amid-fading-arab-spring/2013/11/13/f3072b64-46ea-11e3-95a9-3f15b5618ba8_story.html, accessed November 15, 2013.

However, by 2013 global opinion of Islamist political parties had begun to shift and a critical eye was cast on Qatar for its abundant financial support of Islamist regimes. In July, a popular military coup unseated Morsi in Egypt and in September the military transition government returned \$2 billion as relations between the two nations soured.¹⁹ Qatari leadership was criticized by other nations attempting to negotiate an end to the Syrian conflict, where the empowerment of radical Islam opposition groups frustrated diplomatic efforts.²⁰ In Libya, where the Qatari flag flew alongside the rebel flag, the tide of public opinion turned as Qatar was accused of empowering a marginal faction among Libya's Islamists.²¹ Protestors in Libya and in Tunisia spoke out against Qatari "meddling," and in Egypt, the government took various actions against Qatar, including cracking down on *Al Jazeera* journalists. As a result, in 2014 Qatar rolled back its support for the Muslim Brotherhood, and took steps to mend relations with other nations in the region.²²

Economic Policies & Ideologies



A foreign worker in Qatar, Dan A'Vard, from Flickr Creative Commons.

Pearling dominated the Qatari economy until the modern period, as it did the economies of all the coastal Gulf polities. Of the pearling beds in the Gulf, the most concentrated encircled Qatar's northern coast and nearly all Qataris were in one way or another associated with the trade.²³ Pearling echoes in today's Qatar, incorporated into architectural motifs and monuments, remembered in heritage displays and in museum exhibits. Pearls are dependent on foreign demand; by the late 19th century, pearls had become hugely popular in Western nations and had nearly supplanted Bombay as a destination for Gulf pearls. When the Japanese released cultured Mikimoto pearls in the 1920s, the Gulf pearl trade began to collapse. The local economy was further impacted by the sudden drop in Western demand during the Great Depression in the 1930s, and was entirely devastated during World War II with the complete cessation of the pearl trade.²⁴

¹⁹ Heba Saleh, "[Egypt returns \\$2bn to Qatar in sign of worsening bilateral ties.](#)" *Financial Times*, September 19, 2013, accessed November 15, 2013.

²⁰ Jeremy Shapiro, "[The Qatar Problem.](#)" *Foreign Policy*, August 28, 2013, http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/08/28/the_qatar_problem, accessed November 15, 2013.

²¹ Steven Sotloff, "Why the Libyans Have Fallen Out of Love with Qatar," *TIME*, January 2, 2012, <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2103409,00.html>, accessed November 15, 2013.

²² "Islamism is no longer the answer," *The Economist*, December 20, 2014, <http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21636776-political-islam-under-pressure-generals-monarchs-jihadistsand>, accessed December 18, 2014; David Kirkpatrick, "[Qatar Suspends News Channel Critical of Egyptian Government.](#)" *The New York Times*, December 22, 2014, accessed January 6, 2015.

²³ Robert Carter, "The History and Prehistory of Pearling in the Persian Gulf," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (2005), pp.139-209.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

While oil exploration was fully underway during this period, it wasn't until 1949 that the first shipment of oil left Qatar, and significant benefits to society didn't take place until the 1960s.

The years leading up to the oil boom are thus remembered as the "Years of Hunger." The loss of the pearling industry devastated the merchant class and, as was typical of regional tribes, the poor subsistence base triggered migration. Both of these factors empowered the al-Thani family by weakening voices that might have made alternate claims to power or placed limits on their authority. Oil wealth facilitated the growth of patronage networks that have benefited the al-Thanis and other powerful tribal families, thereby encouraging the growth of politically dependent social groups who support al-Thani leadership and have little interest in democracy.²⁵

Like pearls, the oil and gas economy are at the mercy of global demand. As a result, Qatar's economy is managed carefully and conservatively, though this hasn't always protected them from dipping into deficit. The Qatar Ministry of Finance plans ahead to the year 2020, when oil reserves are projected to be depleted, and underscores the need for energy independence and a diversified economy. Qatar has invested heavily in international real estate and stock portfolios which are anticipated to soften the blow when oil and gas are no longer reliable sources of revenue.²⁶

This vulnerability is also a result of Qatar's workforce; foreign labor dominates private and public sector employment, and, combined with the highest levels of global per capita income and a lavish welfare system, analysts fear that there is little incentive for native Qataris to devote time and energy into developing the native workforce.²⁷ Increased investment in Qatar University, Education City and other education initiatives are a clear response to the need for a well- educated workforce capable of withstanding the loss of hydrocarbon production. However, most native Qatari students pursue humanities and Islamic studies, neither of which are highly employable fields.

One of the most striking features of Qatar's economy is its enormous foreign labor force, the majority of which are South Asian men, who are ubiquitous among the endless construction sites across the nation. Men far outnumber women in Qatar, making up roughly 70% of the population (77% of all non-Qataris), primarily because migrant laborers are unmarried and those who are married cannot afford to support a family in Doha on low wages.²⁸ Qatar has a poor track record of upholding its labor laws, abuse of migrant laborers is widespread, and many are victims of human trafficking.²⁹ Unskilled

²⁵ Jill Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf: Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Mehran Kamrava, "Royal Factionalism and Political Liberalization in Qatar," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 63, No. 3 (2009), pp. 401–420.

²⁶ Fromherz, *Qatar: A Modern History*, p. 122.

²⁷ Claude Berrebi et al. "Qatar's Labor Markets at a Crucial Crossroad," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 63, No. 3 (2009), pp. 421–442.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ "The Middle East's migrant workers: Forget about rights," *The Economist*, August 10, 2013, <http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21583291-attempts-improve-lot-migrants-working-middle-east-are-unlikely>, accessed November 27, 2013; "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2012: Qatar," Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (2012), <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2012&dlid=204380>, accessed November 27, 2013.

foreign workers arrive in Qatar under the oversight of a Qatari sponsor—this is known as the *kafala* system. Sponsors sometimes confiscate laborers' passports, and may demand high sums to "pay" for the cost of bringing them into the country. Workers have complained that they receive little to no time off, live in squalid conditions, are barred from unionizing, and some find that their wages are withheld for months on end. Change to the *kafala* system has been slow, in large part because cheap labor has undergirded Qatar's massive urban development. The most recent estimate puts the the population of Qatar at a new record high of more than 2.5 million people; 90% of people working in Qatar are not from the country originally.³⁰ These issues have become particularly salient in light of the 2022 FIFA World Cup, which has intensified scrutiny of Qatar's labor issues. Human rights organizations, including Amnesty International and the United Nations, have called on the Qatari government to make significant improvements to labor regulations, and to enshrine these in Qatari law.³² In October, 2015, Qatar's emir promised reforms but critics, including Amnesty International, say the changes were superficial and that fundamental change has not been implemented.³¹ In November, 2015, Qatar's Special Engineering Office opened Labor City—a \$825 million housing project outside Doha with capacity for 70,000 residents. It is one of seven complexes that the government is building designed to house 260,000 labor migrants.³²

³⁰ The New Arab "Migrant workers propel Qatar's population to 2.5 million," March 2, 2016, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2016/3/2/migrant-workers-propel-qatars-population-to-2-5-million>, accessed March 8, 2016.

³¹ "Promising Little, Delivering Less: Qatar and Migrant Labor Abuse Ahead of the 2022 Football World Cup," Amnesty International, May 20, 2015, <http://www.amnestyusa.org/research/reports/promising-little-delivering-less-qatar-and-migrant-labor-abuse-ahead-of-the-2022-football-world-cup> accessed March 8, 2016.

³² "Qatar opens 'Labor City' for 70,000 migrant workers," *The National*, November 2, 2015, <http://www.thenational.ae/world/middle-east/qatar-emir-approves-labour-law-reforms>, accessed March 8, 2016.

Religion, Political & Legal Structures

Historically, a customary legal system prevailed in the Gulf region, where the leader of a tribe served as the arbiter in disputes and judged according to custom and to his knowledge of Islam. This was replaced with an Islamic court system following the spread of Wahhabism in the late eighteenth century. These courts followed Hanbali jurisprudence, one of the four main schools of Sunni Islamic law.³³ By the late nineteenth century Hanbali *shari'a* fully dominated Qatari Islamic courts, which oversaw both civil and criminal matters until the arrival of the British.



"Waterfront," Shubert Ciencia (2012), from Flickr Creative Commons

The shift from customary law to specifically Islamic law transformed the role of tribal leaders; though they no longer passed judgments, individuals dissatisfied with a court ruling could appeal to the ruler. Following independence in 1971, the original Qatari constitution was created, the first article of which establishes Islam as the state religion and Islamic law the source of legislation. Numerous other provisions relate to the monarchy; Article 8 affirms hereditary rule as a legal right of the male descendants of Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa, granted to whichever son is named Heir Apparent by the ruler, and Article 9 further states that the Heir Apparent must be Muslim of a Qatari Muslim mother. The Emir's power is enshrined in the constitution, which places him at the head of state and of the armed forces, giving him the power to appoint or reappoint ministers at will and to establish and organize ministries and various other consultative bodies.³⁴ Notably, the constitution gives Qatari courts no power to restrict the actions of the Emir, and the Emir himself appoints all judges, and all justices in the recently established Supreme Court.³⁵ A new constitution was drafted in 1999, approved by referendum in 2004, and ratified by the Emir in 2004; the provisions on Islam and Islamic law remained unchanged.³⁶

³³ Peter Moscovitz, "Amnesty International: Qatar failing to enforce its labor laws," *Al Jazeera America*, November 17, 2013, <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2013/11/17/amnesty-internationalqatarfailingtoenforceitsownlawslaborlaws.html>, accessed November 27, 2013.

³⁴ Ahmed Khedr, "A Guide to Qatar's Legal System," *Hauser Global Law School Program at NYU Law* (July 2009), <http://www.nyulawglobal.org/globalex/qatar.htm>, accessed November 26, 2013.

³⁵ Nathan J. Brown, *The Rule of Law in the Arab World: Courts in Egypt and the Gulf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 183; Fromherz, *Qatar: A Modern History*, p. 137.

³⁶ "The Constitution," *Hukoomi* (2013), http://portal.www.gov.qa/wps/portal!/ut/p/c4/04_SB8K8xLLM9MSSzPy8xBz9CP3I8uRcq4LEkgxVQ-NEVQOP0uz8_NxMVUMjg_DUJBDlnj9XkppXgpAycEzKLy0BSQUmliQWqRqEZKRCFRaXZJaUgozWL8h2VAQAj2L5Dw!!/, accessed November 27, 2013.

Qatar has a dual legal system, providing multi-tiered Islamic courts which attend predominantly to personal status issues, as well as civil (*'adliyya*) courts.³⁷ The civil courts evolved out of the British legal system after the British protectorate period and which managed British and non-Muslim expatriate legal issues. Unlike civil courts in other Gulf states, the *'adliyya* courts are regarded as an independent and self-regulating legal body.³⁸ While the Minister of Justice oversees the civil courts, he does not issue laws, rather, these are determined by the courts themselves. The current constitution entitles the emir to grant pardons or commute penalties.³⁹ Notably, since 2005 a separate Islamic court system has been available for Shi'a Muslims and judges personal status cases according to Shi'a Ja'afari jurisprudence.⁴⁰

Islamic religious and cultural mores regulate the lives of non-Muslim expatriates in Qatar. For example, blasphemy is treated with great sensitivity; in the spring of 2013, a Nepali schoolteacher was accused by students of insulting Islam and faced up to seven years in prison before being released and returning to Kathmandu.⁴¹ In November of the same year, an Algerian principal at a French high school fled Qatar after being accused of anti-Islam sentiment for a policy barring girls from wearing headscarves in class, again facing a possible five-year sentence for "offending Islam."⁴² Qatari laws prohibiting adultery have also made it illegal for women to give birth to children outside of marriage.⁴³ Homosexuality is also illegal in Qatar and many have been prosecuted under sodomy laws. Even so, George Michael, an openly gay American singer, performed in Doha in 2008. The most recent case garnering worldwide attention is that of Qatari poet Muhammad al-Ajami, who was arrested in 2011 and sentenced to fifteen years in prison for criticizing the former Emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa, and for celebrating the effects of the Arab Spring in the region. International rights groups have strongly condemned al-Ajami's case, calling it highly politicized and criticizing secret court sessions.⁴⁴ As of this writing, he remains imprisoned.

Qatar hosts controversial speakers who preach hate-filled, anti-Semitic rhetoric, generating international criticism.

³⁷ A. Nizar Hamzeh, "Qatar: The Duality of the Legal System," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (1994), pp. 79–90.

³⁸ Brown, *The Rule of Law in the Arab World: Courts in Egypt and the Gulf*, p. 130.

³⁹ Khedr, "A Guide to Qatar's Legal System."

⁴⁰ "International Religious Freedom Report for 2012: Qatar," Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (2012).

⁴¹ Anup Kaphle, "Qatar jails a Nepali teacher on charges of insulting Islam," *The Washington Post*, May 9, 2013, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2013/05/09/qatar-jails-a-nepali-teacher-on-charges-of-insulting-islam/>, accessed November 26, 2013.

⁴² Colin Randall, "French principal flees Qatar after claims of anti-Muslim attitudes," *The National*, November 7, 2013, <http://www.thenational.ae/world/middle-east/french-principal-flees-qatar-after-claims-of-anti-muslim-attitudes>, accessed November 26, 2013.

⁴³ "Law No. 11 of 2004 Issuing the Penal Code," *Al Meezan* (2013), <http://www.almeezan.qa/LawArticles.aspx?LawTreeSectionID=255&lawId=26&language=en>, accessed November 26, 2013; "Facing jail, unmarried pregnant women in Qatar left with hard choices," *Doha News*, August 27, 2013, <http://dohanews.co/facing-jail-unmarried-pregnant-women-in-qatar-left/>, accessed November 26, 2013.

⁴⁴ "Qatar court upholds poet Mohammed al-Ajami's sentence," *BBC*, October 21, 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-24612650>, accessed November 26, 2013.

The events are shown on Qatari television and promoted by the Qatar Foundation with high praise on social media, including extremists who have called for ongoing violence against Jews, have publicly praised Hitler and Osama Bin Ladin. Michelle Obama visited Qatar in November, 2015 to speak about the importance of education for girls and women.⁴⁵

Relationship with Other Nation States

Qatar's activities in Syria have been attributed to its desire for greater recognition in regional and global diplomacy. However, Syria's location is also strategic for Qatar's economic future. Qatar began investing heavily in the country as early as 2008, setting up a \$5 billion joint holding company to finance infrastructure development projects, such as power plants and real estate purchases. Although the relationship between Qatari leaders and Assad chilled after 2009, they continued to discuss defense and economic collaboration less than a year before the Syrian uprising began. As violence worsened, Qatar made the strategic decision to denounce Assad and to finance Sunni armed groups.

Qatar offers payments for defectors from the Syrian regime, humanitarian aid, and direct payments to opposition fighters. Of all nations, Qatar has sent the greatest number of arms to Syria, though its partners have strongly criticized Qatar's lopsided support for multiple factions among the opposition's Islamist groups, which has ultimately factionalized Syria's opposition movement. In recognition of that factionalization, Qatar brokered the creation of an umbrella organization, the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, during a November 2012 meeting in Doha. Qatar has been among the largest funders of the opposition to Bashar al-Assad's government in **Syria**, with estimates of \$3 billion in aid spent in 2013.⁴⁶

As the violence worsened in Syria prompting Syrians to flee, Qatar has criticized by the West for its apparent unwillingness to accept Syrian refugees. Foreign Minister Khalid al-Attiyah refuted this in an interview with *Al Jazeera* in October, 2015 saying that Qatar does not consider Syrians "refugees" and has taken in 54,000 Syrians since 2011 who are treated fairly with access to job, health care, education and newly built schools. An additional 600,000 children, said al-Attiyah, are provided education in and out of Syria through the Education for All program.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ David Andrew Weinberg, "Michelle's Dangerous Journey to Qatar," *Politico*, November 3, 2015, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/11/michelle-obamas-dangerous-journey-to-qatar-213321>, accessed March 8, 2016.

⁴⁶ Roula Khalaf and Abigail Fielding Smith, "Qatar bankrolls Syrian revolt with cash and arms," *Financial Times*, May 16, 2013, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/86e3f28e-be3a-11e2-bb35-00144feab7de.html%23axzz2lrP7hGdO>, accessed November 27, 2013; Jeremy Shapiro, "The Qatar Problem," *Foreign Policy*, August 28, 2013, http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/08/28/the_qatar_problem, accessed November 27, 2013.

⁴⁷ "Who is Qatar backing in Syria?" *Aljazeera*, October 30, 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/upfront/2015/10/qatar-backing-syria-151030183458470.html>, accessed March 8, 2016.

The **United States** has been Qatar's most powerful ally since the departure of the British in 1971. Similar to the British before them, the United States provides security for the tiny and resource-rich nation. The massive Al-Udeid Airforce Base, which houses a 15,000-foot airstrip, sits twenty miles outside of Doha, Qatar's capital.

The United States has faced challenges establishing itself in the region, particularly in Saudi Arabia where numerous clerics criticized the government for allowing non-Muslim Americans to operate in the same nation as the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. Osama Bin Laden cited this as one of the motivating factors behind al-Qaeda's aggressive anti-United States stance. Thus, the alliance with Qatar is useful on many levels, solving the problem of Saudi Arabia and granting access to a region with immense security implications, especially with regards to neighboring Iran and Iraq.⁴⁸ Qatar also provides the United States with a neutral meeting ground where officials can engage in dialogue with "problematic" individuals and groups, while its relationships with a multiplicity of Middle Eastern actors assists UNITED STATES in better understanding geopolitical events in the region.⁴⁹

However, U.S. government leaders have strongly criticized *Al Jazeera's* coverage of American foreign policy. Qatar's willingness to maintain relations with Syria, Iran, and Hamas has also generated criticism in the UNITED STATES, including among members of Congress, causing some American critics to place it on an "axis of resistance" to the United States and Israel.⁵⁰ The War on Terror has also created tensions, especially allegations that some members of the al-Thani family supported al-Qaeda both before and after 9/11. However, a greater willingness by Qatar to cooperate on terrorist financing issues and a new administration in Washington, DC helped improve the relationship.

The accession to the throne by Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani in 2013 does not appear to have altered the close relationship. In December 2013 the two countries signed a new 10-year defense cooperation agreement. Qatar is a significant buyer of American weaponry, purchasing American air and missile defense systems. Exports to Qatar in 2013 were over \$3.8 billion; in the same period, the value of U.S. imports from Qatar, mainly oil was over \$1 billion.⁵¹

Qatar has played an active role reshaping the political landscape in **Libya** during and since the Arab Spring, and directly contributed to the 2011 overthrow of former dictator Muammar Qaddafi. It was the first Arab state to recognize the opposition Interim Transitional National Council (TNC) and one of two Arab countries contributing military aircraft to the international coalition enforcing the U.N. no-fly zone. It also provided humanitarian aid, marketed oil on behalf of the TNC, broadcast opposition TV channels under the auspices of *Al Jazeera*, hosted the first meeting of the Libya Contact Group, possibly supplied defensive weaponry to select opposition groups, and pledged \$400–500 million to a planned financial mechanism for post-revolution government operations.

⁴⁸ Fromherz, *Qatar: A Modern History*, p. 22–23.

⁴⁹ David Roberts, *The Arab World's Unlikely Leader: Embracing Qatar's Expanding Role in the Region* (Washington, DC: Project on Middle East Democracy, 2012), p. 5.

⁵⁰ Christopher M. Blanchard, *Qatar: Background and US Relations* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2011), p. 4.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

This decisive action provided Qatar special status amongst Libyans, reflected by the numerous squares and districts in Tripoli renamed after eminent Qataris.

Qatar's activities in Libya gave the appearance of a shift from its usual mediator role to a more interventionist role. However, the country already had ties to the Libyan rebels. Beginning in the 1990s, Qatar provided a home for a number of Libyan Islamists, primarily from the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group. These included Ali al-Sallabi, who emerged as a significant political leader in 2011, and Abdul Hakim Belhaj, who became commander of the Tripoli Military Council. Qatar's involvement—economic, political, and military—continued after Qaddafi's death. However, some members of the TNC complained about Qatari interference, in particular its promotion of specific political leaders and military commanders. Such cherry-picking, not unique to Qatar, undermined the Libyan government's attempts to form a unified military command and a democratic government. Continued arms shipments to Libyan Islamists amplified these concerns, although some observers suggested that Libya was merely a means through which to pass weapons on to Syrian rebels fighting in the Syrian civil war.⁵²

Qatar's relations with **Egypt** are complicated by Qatari support for the Muslim Brotherhood and former Brotherhood-affiliated president Muhammad Morsi. On the heels of a popular coup that deposed Morsi, the Brotherhood was once again outlawed in Egypt in 2013, leaving Qatar in an awkward position. Where Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE quickly extended \$12 billion in aid and credit lines to the Al Sisi government, Qatar offered asylum to Morsi supporters targeted by the new government's security forces. Additionally, numerous Brotherhood members have used *Al Jazeera* as a platform to condemn Egypt's government; as a result, Egypt cracked down on *Al Jazeera* journalists working in Egypt, for which it was condemned by international media and human rights organizations.

Soon after his accession to the throne in 1995, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani sought to normalize relations with **Iran**. While wary of Iran's expansionist intentions, Sheikh Hamad also recognized his country's geographic vulnerability. Trapped between Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shi'a Iran, Qatar is an obvious battleground should hostilities emerge. The normalization effort also recognized the ethnic and religious antecedents of Qatar's sizable *ajam* population. Descended from Persian merchants and craftsmen who migrated to Qatar in search of economic opportunity prior to the 1920s, the *ajam* are Farsi-speaking, mostly Shi'a Qatari citizens.⁵³

Iran and **Qatar** have overlapping economic interests as well; the North Field / South Pars, the world's largest natural gas deposit, is jointly owned by Qatar and Iran. In 2008 the countries signed a bilateral agreement for cooperation on energy, agriculture, health, tourism, IT, and other related issues, followed in 2010 by a defense and security cooperation agreement. The latter agreement included a statement that Qatar would not allow its land to be used as a U. S. base of operations for an invasion of Iran.⁵⁴

⁵² Lina Khatib, "Qatar's Foreign Policy: The Limits of Pragmatism," *International Affairs*, Vol. 89 (2013), p. 424.

⁵³ Sharon Nagy, "Making Room for Migrants, Making Sense of Difference: Spatial and Ideological Expressions of Social Diversity in Urban Qatar," *Urban Studies*, Vol. 43 (January 2006), p. 128–129.

⁵⁴ Jill Crystal, "U. S. Relations in Qatar," in *Handbook of US-Middle East Relations*, ed. Robert Looney (London: Routledge, 2014),

Qatar's activist foreign policy, during and after the Arab Spring, chilled this new relationship. Qatar supported the Saudi-led military intervention to quell Shi'a protestors in Bahrain. It also actively endorsed regime change in Syria, providing significant military and financial resources to Sunni opposition forces. Iran, which perceives itself as a defender of Shi'a rights around the Middle East publicly accused the Qatari government of sponsoring terrorism and questioned the legitimacy of the al-Thani family's rulership.⁵⁵

Saudi Arabia has historically laid claim to the Qatari peninsula. Muhammad bin Sa'ud early on asserted rights to Qatar, and numerous disputes, including military action, have taken place between the two nations over Qatar's borders, exacerbated by the discovery of oil in 1939 and, later, natural gas in Qatar. There are many cultural affinities between the two countries. Many Bedouin carry both a Saudi and a Qatari passport. Both countries are officially Sunni, Wahhabi nations, although Qatar has a more welcoming policy toward religious diversity than its neighbor, which some have attributed to Qatar's maritime culture versus Saudi desert culture.

Historically, Qatari imams were of Saudi origin. However, as tensions between the two countries increased in the 1990s, Qatar's Awqaf Ministry, the state office responsible for mosque assignments bestowed the more prominent assignments upon non-Saudi imams. As a result, the number of Saudi preachers and the influence of Wahhabi Islam declined.⁵⁷ Today, the majority of imams in Qatar come from Egypt, Yemen, Syria, and Iraq. While Saudi leadership is bound by restrictions set by Saudi clerics, Qatar's leaders are therefore relatively free to encourage a more pluralistic society—within limits.

The Saudi-Qatari border was finalized in 1999. Still, as recently as 2011, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Kuwait continued to promote claims to the coastal region of Khawr al-'Udayd.⁵⁶

Relations between the two countries soured under the former emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani. The Saudi monarch twice supported attempted coups against the Qatari emir in 1996 and 2005, and increasingly viewed Qatar as a power rival in regional and global politics. Qatar undertook what Saudi Arabia considered an unacceptably maverick diplomatic outreach to Israel and Iran and tolerated years of negative coverage about Saudi Arabia by *Al Jazeera*.⁵⁷ In 2003, Saudi Arabia recalled its ambassador from Doha over this reporting. The ambassador did not resume residency until 2008 after Saudi Arabia received a promise that the network would moderate its coverage. Still, Qatar has never directly challenged Saudi Arabia's leadership in the Gulf.

In March of 2014, Saudi Arabia, along with Bahrain and UAE, withdrew its ambassador from Doha, claiming Qatar failed to implement a November 2013 Gulf Co-Ordination Council (GCC) agreement not

p. 399.

⁵⁵ James M Dorsey, "The Struggle for Syria: Iran-Qatar Ties Come under Stress," *RSIS Commentaries*, No. 57 (2012); Sami Kleib, "Qatar Signals Strategic Shifts as Iranian Diplomacy Sways EU," *Alakhbar English*, March 10, 2014, <http://english.alkhbar.com/node/18965>. accessed July 18, 2014.

⁵⁶ J. E. Peterson, "Sovereignty and Boundaries in the Gulf States: Setting the Peripheries," in *International Politics of the Persian Gulf*, ed. Mehran Kamrava (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011), p. 22.

⁵⁷ Roberts, *The Arab World's Unlikely Leader: Embracing Qatar's Expanding Role in the Region*, p. 4.

to support groups that threaten the GCC.⁵⁸ According to news reports, Saudi Arabia presented the new emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani with an ultimatum to align Qatar's foreign policy with that of the other GCC states.⁵⁹ In particular, Saudi Arabia sought changes in Qatar's support for the Muslim Brotherhood, its close relations with Turkey, its opposition to the new regime in Egypt, and its support for Houthi rebels in Yemen.⁶⁰

Qatar has historically viewed neighboring **Bahrain** as a rival, dating to the al-Khalifah family's use of the Qatari peninsula as a staging ground during its conquest of Bahrain.⁶¹ Bahrain's al-Khalifah continued to lay claim to Qatari territory well into the 20th century, claims which Qatar's al-Thani spiritedly disputed. In 1868 the British mediated a peace treaty between Bahrain and Qatar, which formally recognized Qatar as an independent sheikhdom with the al-Thani family as its rulers. For over two centuries negotiations over the border continued, alternating between military skirmishes and sometimes interference in the other's internal politics. In 1995, as a means of improving its negotiating position, Bahrain assisted the ousted Qatari emir, Sheikh Khalifah bin Hamad al-Thani, in his efforts to regain the Qatari throne. Ultimately, under pressure from other GCC members, the two countries presented their case to the International Court of Justice, a rare appearance by Arab nations. The 2001 court decision, which basically halved the disputed territory between the two countries, opened the door for several joint economic development efforts, including the exploitation of oil and gas reserves in the territory and the construction of the Qatar-Bahrain Causeway, a 40 km roadway that will link Doha to Manama.

Faced with pro-democracy demonstrations in Bahrain during the Arab Spring, the Qatari government supported the Saudi effort to shore up the al-Khalifah monarchy.⁶² This action contrasted with Qatar's active support for protestors elsewhere in the region seeking regime change.

In March of 2014, Bahrain, UAE, and Saudi Arabia withdrew their ambassadors from Doha, claiming Qatar failed to implement a November 2013 GCC agreement not to support groups thought to threaten the GCC.⁶³ The other nations viewed Qatar's support for Muslim Brotherhood affiliated opposition movements in the Middle East as a direct violation of that agreement.

⁵⁸ "UAE, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain Recall Their Ambassadors from Qatar," *Gulf News*, March 5, 2014, <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/uae/government/uae-saudi-arabia-and-bahrain-recall-their-ambassadors-from-qatar-1.1299586>, accessed June 11, 2014.

⁵⁹ "Arab States Withdraw Ambassadors from Qatar in Protest at 'Interference,'" *The Manchester Guardian*, March 5, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/05/arab-states-qatar-withdraw-ambassadors-protest>, accessed June 11, 2014.

⁶⁰ Kamrava, "Royal Factionalism and Political Liberalization in Qatar," p. 410.

⁶¹ Peterson, "Sovereignty and Boundaries in the Gulf States: Setting the Peripheries," p. 30.

⁶² Blanchard, *Qatar: Background and US Relations*, p. 2; Roberts, *The Arab World's Unlikely Leader: Embracing Qatar's Expanding Role in the Region*, p. 4.

⁶³ "UAE, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain Recall Their Ambassadors from Qatar."

Qatar was the first Gulf state to recognize **Israel**.⁶⁴ While the two countries do not have official diplomatic relations, the former emir received occasional diplomatic visits by top-level Israeli officials, the only Gulf leader to meet with Israeli leaders. Qatar has also been at the forefront of efforts to institute Arab economic ties with Israel. It established official trade relations in 1996 and allowed the opening of an Israeli trade mission in Doha.⁶⁵ The trade mission operated until January 2009, when the Qatari government expelled its personnel and shuttered it in response to Israel's 2008 attack on Hamas in Gaza. As Qatar's relations with and financial support for Hamas deepened, Israel rebuffed outreach by Qatar in 2010 regarding the mission's reopening.

Qatar's outreach to Israel engendered significant criticism from other Arab states. In response, both the former and current emirs stressed their support for Palestinian independence and regularly criticize Israeli decisions on settlements and other actions that appear to undermine the future of a two-state solution.

Although Qatar's relations with the principalities contained in the **United Arab Emirates (UAE)** vary, the relationship with the combined federation is often rocky. When Qatari Sheikh Khalifah bin Hamad Al-Thani was overthrown in 1995, he sought refuge in Abu Dhabi and staged an unsuccessful counter-coup against his son from there. Alternatively, Dubai and Qatar have historically had good diplomatic relations because both countries have on-going feuds with Abu Dhabi.

However, Qatar's support for the Muslim Brotherhood and Brotherhood affiliates has created significant tensions. A UAE court sentenced a Qatari national to prison and deportation for helping two UAE citizens raise money for a banned Muslim Brotherhood affiliate. A Qatar human rights group then accused the UAE government of torture and failure to comply with international law. Egyptian-Qatari cleric Yusuf al-Qaradawi claimed on Qatari state television that the UAE is opposed to Islamic rule, relations deteriorated further.⁶⁶

Qatar's relations with **Lebanon** are relatively positive. In 2006 Qatar used its seat on the U.N. Security Council to criticize Israeli attacks and broke the air blockade of Lebanon by reinstating Qatar Airline's flights to Beirut. Its outspokenness was in stark contrast to other Arab states, which did not want to be seen supporting the Iran-backed Hezbollah. Qatar also provided troops for U.N. peace-keeping forces, humanitarian aid, and financial support for rebuilding. Villages in southern Lebanon, where it had pledged to rebuild mosques and infrastructure destroyed in the war, erected Qatari flags and banners proclaiming "Thank you, Qatar."⁶⁷ These efforts gained it the friendship of Hezbollah, the Shi'a militant group and Lebanese political party. The 2008 Doha Accords, named after the Qatari capital city and brokered by Qatar, helped end eighteen months of violence and laid the groundwork for a unified government. Qatar's vocal opposition to the continued leadership of Syrian leader, and Hezbollah ally, Bashar al-Assad frayed the once close ties between Qatar and Hezbollah.

⁶⁴ Roberts, *The Arab World's Unlikely Leader: Embracing Qatar's Expanding Role in the Region*, p. 2; Blanchard, *Qatar: Background and US Relations*, p. 9.

⁶⁵ Blanchard, *Qatar: Background and US Relations*, p. 10; Lina Khatib, "Qatar's Foreign Policy: The Limits of Pragmatism," *International Affairs*, Vol. 89 (2013), p. 419.

⁶⁶ "UAE, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain Recall Their Ambassadors from Qatar."

⁶⁷ Lina Khatib, "Qatar's Foreign Policy: The Limits of Pragmatism," *International Affairs*, Vol. 89 (2013), p. 425.

Qatar is a founding member of the **Gulf Co-Operation Council (GCC)** along with Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, UAE, and Saudi Arabia. Formed in 1981 in response to the Iranian revolution, the organization now rivals the Arab League as the pan-Arab voice.⁶⁸ Based in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, the organization provides a regular forum for joint interaction between the six heads of states and their foreign ministers. The Supreme Council, made up of the six heads of state, convenes once a year, while the Ministerial Council, made up of the six foreign ministers, meets four times per year. Saudi Arabia and Oman served as the organization's earliest leaders; power then shifted to Bahrain and Kuwait. More recently, Qatar and the UAE moved to the forefront, however, not without continued challenge from Saudi Arabia.⁶⁹

The GCC charter outlines three areas for coordination: Economic and Financial Affairs; Commerce, Customs and Communications; and Culture and Education. However, it has undertaken very little discussion in such areas as monetary policy, trade, and social policy. Although organized in response to a security threat, the GCC charter explicitly omits mutual security as a focus area. Still, most discussions focus on issues of mutual security in the face of threats from first Iran and then Iraq. The GCC and its member states have become some of the largest purchasers of arms in the world. With the U.S. defense industry, as well as that of other Western European arms producers, now focused on export rather than domestic security, the purchases further enhance the region's economic importance to the world.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Karen E. Young, *The Emerging Interventionists of the GCC*, *LSE Middle East Centre Paper Series*, No. 2 (2013), p. 7; Crystal, "U.S. Relations in Qatar," p. 393,

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Young, "The Emerging Interventionists of the GCC," *LSE Middle East Centre Paper Series*, No. 2 (2013), p. 7,

Case Study: Religion and the Media

While Qatar and Saudi Arabia are both Wahhabi states, the Saudi monarchy is deeply enmeshed with the Saudi *‘ulama* due to an agreement between Al-Saud and Muhammad ibn al-Wahhab that dates back to the 18th century. In contrast, Qatari emirs have successfully controlled religious institutions.



"Sheikh Yusuf Al Qaradawi," Omar Chatriwala, from Flickr Creative Commons.

This has allowed Qatari leaders to oversee religious discourse while cultivating a broad range of voices friendly to the state, even if they are critical of outside governments. And, it allows the government to deflect the potentially explosive force of political Islam away from the state.

Emblematic of this control is the weekly *Al Jazeera* program *al-shari'a w'al-hayat* (Shari'a and Life), which has been on air since the network's founding in 1996 and has a viewership of around 60 million.⁷¹ *Shari'a and Life* features a host and an Islamic scholar, typically Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who discuss topical issues.⁷² Qaradawi, who has lifelong ties with

the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, has used the program to showcase his reformist vision of Islam through commentary and juristic opinions, and to discuss contemporary political issues.

For example, the show was a platform for Qaradawi's condemnation of the Egyptian coup against former president Mohammed Morsi and for protest against the military government.⁷³ Qatar is thus responsible for the amplification of Qaradawi's message as well as for his meteoric rise to fame in the Muslim world. While Qaradawi is seen as independent of the state, he avoids criticism that would complicate his relationship with the al-Thani family and his views typically parallel that of official state policy.

In addition to Qaradawi, numerous other Brotherhood members have influenced *Al Jazeera's* programming and coverage of a wide range of events. Waddah Khanfar, the network's director from 2003–2011, is a Brotherhood member, as are numerous employees.⁷⁴ The connections were especially explicit since the Egyptian coup and subsequent outlawing of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.

⁷¹ Alexander Smoltczyk, "Islam's Spiritual 'Dear Abby': The Voice of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood," *Der Spiegel*, February 15, 2011, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/islam-s-spiritual-dear-abby-the-voice-of-egypt-s-muslim-brotherhood-a-745526.html>, accessed December 23, 2014.

⁷² Mohammed Ayish, "Religious Broadcasting on Mainstream Channels: Al Jazeera, MBC and Dubai," *Religious Broadcasting in the Middle East*, ed. Khaled Hroub (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), pp. 13–33.

⁷³ Juan Cole, "Egyptian Backlash against Yusuf Qaradawi's Call for foreign Intervention in Egypt," *Informed Comment*, July 29, 2013, <http://www.juancole.com/2013/07/backlash-qaradawis-intervention.html>, accessed November 18, 2013.

⁷⁴ Gilbert Achcar, *The People Want: A Radical Exploration of the Arab Uprising* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), p. 109.

Echoing previous eras of exile as early as the 1960s when the Brotherhood was outlawed under Gamel 'Abdel Nasser, Brotherhood members fled Egypt to Qatar where they stayed in *Al Jazeera*-owned suites, had their expenses covered by the network, and in some cases became commentators on the Egyptian Islamist opposition.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Abigail Hauslohner, "Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood finds havens abroad," *The Washington Post*, November 6, 2013, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/egypts-muslim-brotherhood-finds-havens-abroad/2013/11/05/438f2dfe-463a-11e3-95a9-3f15b5618ba8_story.html, accessed November 18, 2013.