

**T.C.**  
**ISTANBUL SABAHATTIN ZAIM UNIVERSITY**  
**INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**  
**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL**  
**RELATIONS**



**QATAR'S SOFT POWER: FROM STATE SURVIVAL TO**  
**REGIONAL POWER**

**MASTER THESIS**

**Taha NAIER**

**Istanbul**

**Dec-2021**

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**Dr. Ravza ALTUNTAŞ ÇAKIR**

**Istanbul**

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POWER**

**Dec, 2021**

## THESIS APPROVAL

This study is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for MA Degree in Political Science and International Relations.

Chairperson of jury.....(Signature)

Member of jury.....( Signature)

Member of jury.....(Signature)

Approval by

**Prof. Dr. Metin TOPRAK**

Director, Graduate Institute

## **DECLARATION OF SCIENTIFIC ETHICS AND ORIGINALITY**

From the proposal stage to the conclusion of the study titled “**QATAR SOFT POWER: FROM STATE SURVIVAL TO REGIONAL POWER**” prepared as a master's thesis, the process meticulously complied with scientific ethics and academic rules. I obtained all the information in the thesis within the framework of scientific ethics and tradition. I hereby declare that I have prepared this thesis in accordance with the spelling rules. I referenced every direct or indirect quotation in this work. The references I used are those shown in the bibliography.

**Taha NAIER**

Istanbul, Dec, 2021

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**Taha NAIER**

Istanbul, Dec, 2021

**ABSTRACT**  
**QATAR'S SOFT POWER: FROM STATE SURVIVAL TO**  
**REGIONAL POWER**

Taha NAIER  
Master, Political Science and International Relations  
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Qatar has recently become a regional power and an influential actor in international politics. Although it faces unfavorable geopolitical conditions, the Qatari state has overcome political and security obstacles. Obviously, Qatar has adopted a foreign policy of soft power, which played a prominent role in its consolidation of national power and rise in the international scene. GCC countries did not overlook Qatar's unprecedentedly growing role. On 5 June 2017, a diplomatic boycott crisis erupted against Qatar. The Arab Quartet imposed a complete blockade on Qatar and issued a statement of 13 demands.

The dissertation explores Qatar's soft power tools such as lobbying, international mediation, scholarships, foreign aids, and Al Jazeera network that have created a national brand for Qatar. With a non-coercive foreign policy strategy, Qatar's stance in regional politics developed from neutrality to influence. This thesis will investigate the underlying political, ideological, and strategic factors of the 2017 crisis that manifested the power struggles in the Gulf, in which Qatar under the rule of Tamim bin Hamad has pursued a different foreign policy path from that of Saudi Arabia and the UAE. It will explore the role Qatar's foreign policy of soft power played within the context of the Qatar diplomatic crisis; and the extent to which Qatar succeeded in building a resilience strategy. Finally, the dissertation will analyze whether the current situation demonstrates a transient appeasement or a permanent resolution.

**Keywords:** Qatar, Soft power, Blockade, GCC, Survival, Regional Power, Resilience.

**ÖZET**  
**KATAR'IN YUMUŞAK GÜCÜ: DEVLETİN BEKA ENDİŞESİNDEN**  
**BÖLGESEL GÜCE YÜKSELİŞİ**

Taha NAIER

Yüksek lisans, Siyaset Bilimi ve Uluslararası İlişkiler

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Katar son zamanlarda hem bölgesel bir güç hem de uluslararası politikada önemli bir aktör haline geldi. Elverişsiz jeopolitik koşullarla karşı karşıya kalmasına rağmen Katar devleti, siyasi ve güvenlik engellerin üstesinden gelmiştir. Açıkçası Katar, uluslararası arenanın yükselişinde önemli bir rol oynayan yumuşak bir güç dış politikası benimsemiştir. Katar'ın benzeri görülmemiş ve büyüyen rolü, KİK (Körfez Arap Ülkeleri İş birliği Konseyi) ülkeleri tarafından göz ardı edilmemekle birlikte sürekli çatışma ve krizlerin ana nedeni olmuştur. 5 Haziran 2017'de Katar'a karşı diplomatik boykot krizi patlak verdi. Arap Dörtlüsü Katar'a tam bir abluka uyguladı ve 13 maddelik talep bildirisini yayınladı.

Bu tez, Katar'ın lobicilik, uluslararası arabuluculuk, burslar, dış yardımlar, El Cezire ağı gibi Katar için ulusal bir marka yaratan yumuşak güç araçlarını araştırıyor. Zorlayıcı olmayan dış politika stratejisi ile Katar'ın bölgesel siyasetteki duruşu tarafsızlıktan nüfuz etmeye dönüşmüştür. Bu tez, Temim bin Hamad yönetimindeki Katar'ın Suudi Arabistan ve BAE'den farklı bir dış politika izlediği Körfez'deki güç mücadelelerini gözler önüne seren 2017 krizinin altında yatan siyasi, ideolojik ve stratejik faktörleri araştırmaktadır. Katar'ın yumuşak güç dış politikasının diplomatik kriz bağlamında oynadığı rolü ve Katar'ın bir direnç stratejisi oluşturmayı ne ölçüde başardığını inceleyecektir. Sonuç olarak bu çalışma, mevcut durumun geçici bir yatıştırma veya kalıcı bir çözüm gösterip göstermediğini analiz edecektir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Katar, Yumuşak güç, KİK, Devletin Bekası, Dayanıklılık.

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Table 1 Number of international students studying in Qatar at university level per year.



## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
UAE	United Arab Emirates
USA	United State of America
LNG	Liquefied Natural Gas
FIFA	International Federation of Association Football
EU	European Union
UN	United Nations
QNRF	Qatar National Research Fund
KİK	Körfez Arap Ülkeleri İş birliği Konseyi
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CNN	Cable News Network
QFAP	Qatar Fund Aid Policy
WHO	World Health Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organization
NHRC	National Human Rights Commission
MBZ	Mohammed bin Zayed
MBS	Mohammed bin Salman

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background and Overview

Qatar has emerged as an independent regional power in the nineties of the last century. Prior to that, it was under the shadow of Saudi Arabia's policies. The Qatari state is small with a small population, without a military force capable of dealing with military threats. Therefore, the first ruler of the state Emir Khalifa Al-Thani remained in an alliance with Saudi Arabia, and was dependent on the kingdom. 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. The country did not make a big fuss at the level of foreign policy (Cooper & Momani, 2011, p. 114). Although Qatar has sought independence and built an influential foreign policy, the country has avoided regional conflicts. Emir Hamad 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. Clearly, 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 (Barakat, 2012, pp. 12-13).

Qatar is located between two big neighbors. First is Saudi Arabia, with which Qatar shares language, history, religion, and society. The other is Iran, which shares a border with Qatar in the Persian Gulf, where natural gas fields are located. These two neighbors of Qatar are engaged in a struggle for control and identity in the region. Consequently, Qatar's foreign policy is subject to pressure and obstacles. This situation has posed many challenges to Qatar's sovereignty. The remarkable rise of the state created tension in the relationship with Saudi Arabia.

Indeed, disputes in the Persian Gulf are a feature of regional politics. Contemporary politics bear witness to many conflicts, some geographical and political, and others over wealth and influence. In this context, the Gulf States have sought to meet the challenges

through an organization that serves their common interests. Saudi Arabia, UEA, Bahrain, Oman, and Qatar established the Gulf Cooperation Council. Despite the common culture and customs among the GCC countries, tensions erupted between them on numerous occasions.

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 international political map. Qatar emerged as a major player in international and regional politics. The Qatari state relied on an ambitious strategy to overcome vulnerabilities and challenges. Obviously, the objectives and components of Qatar's foreign policy evolved through different eras; and, the tools adapted to the goals of each era.

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 (El-Labbad, 2012, pp. 19-20).

The Qatari 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. This policy pushed the state to the fore of regional and international politics. This constituted a competition with the traditional powers in the region, particularly Saudi Arabia. Countries such as Saudi Arabia and UAE did not exceed Qatar's influence and foreign policy. Several diplomatic crises occurred 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 (Sloan III, 2019, pp. 20-21).

On June 5, 2017, a diplomatic crisis 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 translated these sanctions as an effort to subdue its foreign policy and control its decision-making. Although the embargo and sanctions severely affected economic, social, and humanitarian sectors, Qatar did not submit and exhibited a clear resilience. Four years into a highly complex crisis, the boycott countries do not seem to have achieved any of the thirteen demands (Bianco, 2017, pp. 1-2).

Therefore, what this thesis aspires is to explore the role of Qatari foreign policy for soft power in consolidating its position as a major actor in international politics. It aims to look at how it affected the relations with the GCC countries, which led to the outbreak of the Qatari diplomatic crisis. The study seeks to examine Qatar's strategy of resilience, facing the challenges of the blockade, and overcoming the sanctions.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

This study aims to clarify the utilization of Qatar's foreign policy of soft power in international as well as national politics in recent years, with a specific focus on the GCC crisis. The study provides arguments about the most important soft power tools that played an influential role in Qatar's strategy in dealing with the crisis, both reinforcing state survival and regional power. It examines the ambitious model that Qatar exemplified in the region through soft power strategy. The research investigates the reasons why Saudi Arabia and some Arab countries interpreted the expansion of soft power policy as an imminent threat. In that regard, it is essential to explore how Qatar's foreign policy of soft power was a major reason for the boycott crisis. The siege crisis of 2017 brought challenges and threats, creating unfavorable conditions for Qatar. The study provides arguments on how the Qatari state employs soft power tools as part of a resilience strategy to withstand the challenges of the crisis, and the future implications of such a foreign policy.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

In light of from the conclusions of the literature review, several questions emerged that require study. Thus, the questions guiding this research are: main question, how can we understand the role Qatar's foreign policy of soft power played within the context of the Qatar diplomatic crisis? Sub-questions: What is soft power capability and how does it affect foreign policy? What is the literature on soft power and Qatar, identifying main themes, approaches, and problems? How has Qatar increasingly articulated its soft power strategy with the rule of Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani? Did Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries interpret the expansion of Qatar's soft power policy as an imminent threat? What are the most important soft power resources that have played a prominent role in the country's strategy during the crisis? Did Qatar succeed in building a resilience strategy and overcoming the challenges of the crisis? Is the future of the dispute between Qatar and the GCC countries temporary appeasement or a permanent solution? Answering these questions will add significant value for exploring the theme of Qatari foreign policy of soft power.

### **1.4 Research Significance**

Generally, the dissertation aims to contribute to the literature on soft power, as it represents an important and emerging topic in international relations. Moreover, the research studies the case of Qatar in a coherent and integrated manner, especially the period between the state rising as a regional power until the outbreak of the boycott crisis.

The main significance of this study is to provide a comprehensive and innovative analysis of the Qatari foreign policy of soft power. The study will contribute to illustrating Emir Hamad's role in establishing a unique strategy for Qatari soft power, which contributed to the state's emergence internationally through rational and balanced policies. In addition, the study aims to reveal the most important soft power tools that accompanied the various political eras, particularly those that contributed to the rise of the state and provided Qatar an unprecedented regional role.

Similarly, the study discusses Emir Tamim bin Hamad's role in reframing and evolving the soft power strategy. Moreover, the dissertation reveals how Qatar's expansion of the soft power strategy triggered the confrontation with Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Furthermore, the thesis describes the backlash of Saudi Arabia and its allies that led to the outbreak of the siege crisis in 2017. The significance be more clear as it highlights the resilience strategy that Qatar formulated to face the challenges of the crisis; thus guaranteeing state survival. Finally, the dissertation analyzes the development of the current crisis, ranging from transient appeasement to a permanent resolution.

### **1.5 The Outline of the Study**

The dissertation structure adopted an approach aimed to achieve integration, interpretation, and coherence. After the introduction, Chapter Two reviews the literature divided into three themes, Qatar's foreign policy, Qatar's soft power, and the GCC crisis. That aims to explore the Qatari foreign policy of soft power and to understand its connection with the Gulf crisis in 2017.

In the third chapter, the study elaborates on the most important features of Qatar's foreign policy. It examines the turning points that affected the formulation of state policy. In addition, it points the challenges and obstacles that faced Qatar's foreign policy.

In the fourth chapter, the thesis delves into a thorough examination of the Qatari soft power strategy. It seeks to clarify the role of Emir Hamad bin Khalifa as the founder of soft power policy and strategy, and the role of Emir Tamim in redesigning the national agenda to be more influential and assertive. It explains how the country transformed its economic and natural resources into effective soft power tools. Moreover, the study illustrates the most important soft power tools that played a role in the rise of Qatar as an influential power, and how the country moved to the stage of influence and rivalry for regional leadership. It also explains how the expansion of Qatar's soft power strategy acts as a trigger for the confrontation with Saudi Arabia.

The fifth chapter explores the roots of the crisis between Qatar and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, and the reasons for the outbreak of the blockade crisis in 2017. In addition, it examines the role of the expansion of Qatari foreign policy in creating tension and a turbulent environment between Qatar and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries. Moreover, the study seeks to clarify the challenges posed by the crisis, and the strategy adopted by Qatar to face the consequences of the crisis.

The last chapter summarizes the conclusions of the previous chapters and the thesis' contributions. In addition to it touches upon the debate about the future of the crisis after four years, and the impact of the crisis on Qatar's foreign policy and regional politics.



## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

Although the Persian Gulf has witnessed several political crises in recent years, the blockade crisis against Qatar in 2017 was very unique in Middle Eastern politics. Consequently, the Gulf crisis has become an important research area in foreign policy studies, which attracted researchers and authors to engage in many discussions. Thus, this literature review seeks to explore academic works that dealt with the GCC crisis, Qatar's foreign policy, and its most important pillar: soft power.

#### **2.2 Qatar's Foreign Policy**

The first theme that this literature review will examine is Qatar's foreign policy. The small country faces challenges on two levels. Firstly, the external ones of constant pressure and ambitions of control from superpowers. Secondly, the internal challenge to maintain the cohesion of the society, guarantee internal security, ensure ruling power stability, and achieve an equitable distribution of wealth. Consequently, Qatar options are limited with regards to foreign policy and entanglement with superpowers and international institutions. The author emphasizes the close relationship between the internal environment of the state and foreign policy. Domestic stability on the political and economic fronts enable the small country to build a more independent foreign policy.

Kamrava (2017) shares the perspective of Kassimeris (2009) about the constraints imposed on Qatar's foreign policy. Kamrava illustrates the model that Qatar formulated for overcoming the weaknesses of small states in international politics. Qatar was able to face challenges at the level of sovereignty and independence. The author affirms that the state possesses a flexibility that enabled it to deal with wide contradictions at the level of foreign policy. The most prominent issue is the alliance with superpowers that have different interests without compromising the national agenda and interests. The author argues about the power that gave Qatar capability and influence in international politics includes a combination of soft power that represents influence and hard power that

represents capability. Through this model, Qatar has emerged as a major actor in the international scene.

Qatar provided a different model of expectations about the role and influence of a small country in international politics, according to (Babak, 2017). The author believes that the state faced risks due to controversial regional alignments. The state has adopted foreign policy and alliances that are contrary to the GCC, especially during the Arab Spring. However, Qatar imposed its foreign policy agenda, and emerged as an influential player in international politics.

Khlebnikov (2015) argues that a key feature of Qatar's foreign policy in recent years has been its constant rivalry with Riyadh. This prompted the state to adopt a strategic alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood and its affiliated organizations, as it is considered a regional power, an influential actor, and has widespread support in most countries of the region. Khlebnikov argues that this alliance was the cause of the ideological confrontation between a pragmatic regime in Qatar and a closed conservative regime in Saudi Arabia according to. Khlebnikov sought to explore the roots of the relationship with the Brotherhood, stressing that it began decades ago when Qatar relied on teachers and scholars from the Brotherhood to cut its dependence on Saudi Arabia.

Khatib (2014) argues that Qatar considered the relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood as a foreign policy cornerstone. In this context, the state provided political and financial support to the Brotherhood's institutions and parties. The Brotherhood's access to power in several Arab countries represents a success for Qatar's agenda, which secures the state interests in the region. On the other hand, Khatib argues the miscalculation of the state's foreign policy, as it adopts an expansionary policy and excessive spending aimed at competing with Saudi Arabia, which threatens its relations with its neighbors and exposes the region to many challenges and threats. The author refers to the weakness of the state's governing institutions and their dependence on the Emir's personal capabilities.

Ulrichsen (2014) illustrates the transformation that occurred in Qatar's foreign policy during and after the Arab Spring, and affirms that the country exposed its foreign policy to its uncalculated risks during that period. Qatar's strategy before the Arab Spring adopted diplomatic mediation and emerged as a neutral actor in resolving disputes, which ensured balanced and stable relations in the region. After the Arab Spring, Qatar sought

to be a leader in the region, and its foreign policy was correlated with supporting political groups in unstable regions such as Libya and Syria. This caused damage to the country's reputation and exposed its interests to threats, according to Ulrichsen.

The role of energy resources, especially liquefied natural gas (LNG), in supporting Qatar's foreign policy was a point of agreement between (Ulrichsen, 2014) and (Bahgat, 2016). The latter claims that the huge stock of liquefied gas propelled the country to an important place on the global political map. In addition, it created economic investments and broad diplomatic relations. According to the author, the energy reserve was the reason for the increase in trade and the opening of markets between Qatar and many regions in Asia, South America, and Europe, which led to the acquisition of great influence and strategic relations.

Qatar suffered from the weaknesses of small states, which poses challenges at the level of foreign policy. According to Wright (2016), Qatar successfully emerged as an influential player in international politics. Wright argues that Qatar gained significant influence as one of the largest exporters of LNG. In this sense, what distinguishes Qatar is its ability to transform natural resources into real power tools. Wright shares Bhagat's perspective about the influential role of natural gas wealth in supporting Qatar's foreign policy strategy.

Wright believes that Qatar designed a distinctive and unique national image by establishing a soft power with effective tools, including Al Jazeera TV and the development of education and sports. In the field of higher education, the state provided the conditions for opening branches for international universities such as Georgetown and Texas A&M. In the field of sport, Qatar sponsored many world clubs in football and tennis, which played a role in promoting the country and its presence on the world stage. Therefore, Wright emphasizes the transformation of Qatar from a small state into a leading and influential country.

Cooper & Momani (2011) consider Qatar to be a model of flexibility and the ability to deviate from the ordinary foreign policy of small countries. Instead of pursuing a quiet policy and staying in the shadow of great power, Qatar expanded its foreign policy and played a different and influential role. Qatar's foreign policy represents an unprecedented case, demonstrating the ability to combine contradictions in diplomatic relations,

according to the authors. Despite its alliance with the United States and Western countries, it has a strong political relationship with Iran. Despite Qatar's relationship with Hamas and Hezbollah, it maintains diplomatic relations with Israel.

Roberts (2016) traces the changes in Qatar's foreign policy. He divides it into 4 historical eras from the establishment to rise as one of the most prominent actors in the region. The first era during the reign of Prince Khalifa focused on the state's internal security and resorted to an alliance with superpowers at that time. Therefore it was a period of stagnation at the level of foreign policy. The second and third eras were during the reign of Hamad bin Khalifa, who adopted a deeper and more dynamic foreign policy. The main goal was independence from Saudi Arabia, adopting an open policy with all contradictory actors, and playing the role of mediator in crises.

In the last years of the Emir Hamad regime, the author demonstrates the changes in the country's foreign policy strategy from playing the role of a neutral mediator to building soft power sources and tools to influence regional issues. Finally, in the post-Arab Spring era, the author argues that Tamim bin Hamad drew up an ambitious foreign policy that relied on various sources of soft power, in addition to political support from regional powers such as the Muslim Brotherhood. The author agrees with Khatib that building policies through an individual decision from the Emir leads to the weakness of state institutions and the formulation of a risky foreign policy.

Lawson (2016) argues that the alliance between Qatar and the United States was on the basis of providing security and protection from the superpower to the small state. Consequently, Qatar's foreign policy suffered from many constraints in compliance with the US strategy in the region. Although Qatar's decision-makers conceive the importance of the relationship with the United States, the state sought to gradually shift from US dominance to build an independent and balanced foreign policy, according to the author. He also affirms that Qatar became more effective and influential after 2011 and had a prominent role in Libya, Syria, and then Egypt, and a more bold and tumultuous foreign policy.

According to Roberts (2008), Qatar succeeded in redrawing the concept and tools of security. Roberts explained Qatar's strategy in building a dynamic foreign policy that enables the state to support and protect its internal security. In this sense, the state replaced

the idea of security from merely an alliance with superpowers and concluding military agreements to deter others, to establishing soft power pillars effective in the mission of deterrence and attraction. Roberts claims that the most important tool of soft power is branding the state as a mediator capable of resolving conflicts in turbulent regions. In addition, soft power tools included broad investments in many fields worldwide, establishing media networks capable of influencing global public opinion.

Kaussler (2015) highlights Qatar's adoption of an ambitious foreign policy, as the state sought to overcome the challenges facing small countries in the international arena. Kaussler argues that Qatar's foreign policy strategy relied on its emergence as a trusted mediator for conflict resolution, and support for non-state actors in many countries such as Libya, Syria, and Egypt. This strategy enabled the state to establish a security and political balance in a region full of risks. This is considered a success for decision-makers in Qatar. The Arab Spring was a turning point for the country's foreign policy, as it became more active and soft power became its policy bedrock, as the author argues.

Qatar and the UAE sought to benefit from their economic power and natural resources to reshape their role in international politics (Ulrichsen, 2012). The author affirms that the two small countries share the desire to lead and influence Middle Eastern politics; and emerged to play a major role in the international and regional scene, especially after the Arab spring. He claims that it became clear during the Arab Spring that Qatar attempted to move on from its conventional foreign policy towards a policy of controlling and engineering changes in the region.

Ulrichsen believes that despite the different responses to the Arab Spring from Qatar and the UAE, both confronted many foreign policy challenges. In this sense, Qatar faced criticism for its support for political Islamists and suffered crises with neighboring countries. Similarly, the UAE got involved in military conflicts in countries like Yemen and Libya; and is seen as opposing revolutions.

Al-Jazeera is not just a tool for Qatari foreign policy, but rather a central driving force, key determinant, and headline for the state's ambitious project (Zhang, 2018). In this sense, the author asserts that Al-Jazeera has enhanced Qatar's position in international politics. It enabled the state to influence all political events. Despite the rise of Qatar's role in diplomacy and mediation, it relied on Al Jazeera in improving the country's image and

promoting its foreign policy to Arab and global public opinion, according to Zhang. The author argues that although Al-Jazeera Channel was one of the reasons for the outbreak of the recent Gulf crisis and the sanctions, it played a critical role in the success of Qatar and its foreign policy in confronting the crisis.

Mandaville (2020) argues that Qatar adopted a model that combines Islamic background with civic norms and values such as free media and democracy. Mandaville underlines the importance of Al-Jazeera in engendering Qatar's soft power. The Qatari-based Pan-Arab channel Al-Jazeera, which emerged in the late 1990s as the first of several satellite-based news channels, broke the mold of standard state-controlled media in the Arab world. Mandaville claims that globalization and the ideas of political Islamists have influenced the leadership in Qatar. On the one hand, the Qatari state provides a prominent role to Sheikh Al-Qaradawi as a religious figure. Al-Qaradawi offered opinions on a wide range of contemporary and 'modern' issues, and gained a considerable following not only among the Arab world but among Muslim communities in the West. The channel won massive following not only in the Arab world but also among Muslim communities in the West. Qatar shows a considerable degree of media, cultural and political openness through Al-Jazeera network. It has won followers through hard-hitting current affairs programming and ruffling some feathers among governments targeted by its programming.

El-Labbad (2012) affirms the same idea about the central role of Al-Jazeera in the strategy of Qatar's foreign policy. El-Labbad clarifies Qatar's attempt to transform foreign policy, and to play an active role in the region's events. The author emphasizes the perspective of Lawson (2016) on the importance of the alliance with the United States for the state's foreign policy. From the author's perspective, this expansionary policy collided with many constraints, including territory and population limitations, location between two major competitors: Saudi Arabia and Iran, and the risks of interference in the internal conflicts of region countries.

Khatib (2013) emphasizes that in less than 20 years Qatar was able to become one of the main actors in the Middle East region. Khatib indicates that the main feature of Qatar's foreign policy is mediation in many countries and conflicts, to expand its influence in the region and secure the country from the impact of such conflicts. The author emphasizes

that Qatar attempted to create a pragmatic brand for its foreign policy. Despite its alliance with Western countries and the USA, Qatar strengthened its relationship with Islamist organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, and Hezbollah in addition to relations with Iran and Turkey. Khatib argues that despite this strategy's benefits, pragmatism faced many challenges and restrictions, which exposed Qatar to various political and economic threats.

### **2.3 Qatar's soft power**

The study seeks to explore Qatar's soft power as one of the foreign policy pillars and an important concept in contemporary politics. Arguably, hard power has been the main choice of states in the era of military confrontation and hegemonic conflict. In this context, superpowers tended to accumulate military capabilities to achieve their interests through coercion. In this sense, hard power played the key role in achieving foreign policy objectives and national interests. Undoubtedly, small countries did not have the superpowers' ability nor the influence in international politics due to military and demographic limitations. International politics witnessed a shift in the concept and tools of power after the end of the Cold War, through the emergence of cultural openness and economic interdependence among states (Nye, 1990, p:154).

International relations have undergone major changes that provided room to discuss the reformulation of the concept of power. Concepts such as the power of attraction, incentives, and the influence of ideas have emerged as an alternative to coercion, threats, and sanctions. The concept of soft power emerged in international politics as an effective tool to achieve foreign policy goals as an alternative to hard power. According to Nye (1990), who formulated the concept, soft power is the state's possession of various resources other than military power, which provide the ability to influence and control the outcome of other states' decisions and policies. Nye argues that soft power is the power of attraction and influence through incentives rather than threats. It is the achievement of desired results through the factors of attraction, and the ability to direct others towards what the state wants. Soft power depends on basic resources that provide the state with the capacity to achieve its interests. Cultural resources such as the history and cultural heritage, events and conferences, and intellectual and artistic production. Museums,

libraries, and influential national figures are among the most important cultural tools. Political values are a vital source in promoting the state and creating the image necessary to influence others. Establishing an effective foreign policy that relies on soft power tools is an effective source of power. Therefore, achieving interests and policies and pushing others to embrace the goals of the state is what Nye argued as the development of public diplomacy (Nye, 2008, p:96).

Soft power gained great importance in recent decades, giving countries flexibility at the level of foreign policy. Generally, Nye sought a new understanding of capability, influence, and power in the context of cooperation and interdependence among states. He clarified the advantages soft power has given to states. Through soft power sources, small countries have been able to play a new and active role in international politics, regardless of their size or military power. Moreover, dominant powers gained new paths to achieving foreign policy objectives away from military power (Nye, 2004, p:7-8).

Based on a theoretical understanding of soft power, the literature review seeks to analyze the tools and objectives of Qatar's soft power. Maximilian (2016) argues that Qatar is one of the rising powers in the Middle East and beyond, relying on an ambitious soft power strategy. Felsch examines the efficacy and capacity of the state's strategy by analyzing the resources of this power: culture, economy, and diplomacy. An example of cultural resources is the granting of educational scholarships that attract many foreign students. As to economic resources, Qatar provides many job opportunities for foreigners.

Antwi-Boateng (2013) emphasizes the role of economic strength as a basic factor for supporting Qatar's capacity to fund all activities in the cultural field, and for supporting its role as a diplomatic mediator in conflict resolution. Felsch (2016) and Antwi-Boateng (2013) assert that the power structure as a monarch rule and the centrality of decision-making in the Emir's hands created internal stability. Therefore, the state can make bold foreign policy decisions and influence the course of international politics.

Al-Jazeera, higher education institutions, and sponsoring international sporting events are the most crucial resources of Qatar's soft power, according to Antwi-Boateng. Consequently, these resources played a leading role in branding the state's foreign policy and promoting the country's image in the international arena. The author argues that

Qatar's foreign policy will face limitations and challenges due to its reliance on its economic strength as a fundamental resource of soft power.

Al-Thani (2017) argues that Qatar moved to the forefront of the regional and international landscape, relying on a soft power strategy. This enabled the state to overcome many constraints in international relations. The author demonstrates the soft power tools that played a role in the rise of Qatar as an influential power. Al-Thani agrees with Boateng's argument about Qatar's efforts to develop higher education institutions and strategies as one of its soft power tools. For instance, university scholarship programs enhanced the country's role as a major attraction for many international students. Al-Thani asserts that mediation diplomacy is a fundamental pillar of Qatar's foreign policy. The state sought to expand its regional influence by mediating and resolving disputes. Qatar became a trusted mediator with international institutions in resolving conflicts in the Middle East, as is the case in Palestine, Lebanon, Yemen, and Darfur. Al Jazeera media network emerged as one of the most important tools of soft power. It enabled the state to influence and guide Arab societies, especially during important political events. Al-Thani believes that the expansion of soft power politics resulted many tensions. Qatar's foreign policy came under pressure from the traditional powers in the region, especially Saudi Arabia.

Baabood (2017) argues that although several challenges and threats surrounded Qatar, it was able to build a resilience strategy that preserves its national security. The measures of this strategy include mediation, branding and image building, and sport diplomacy. Baabood affirms Qatar's success in overcoming the recent blockade crisis by relying on soft power tools.

Undoubtedly, Qatar had a high profile in the international arena during recent decades, relying on a soft power strategy (Barakat, 2012). Peacemaking or mediation in conflicts was the cornerstone of this strategy. Barakat argues the same idea as Ulrichsen (2012) that the Arab Spring represented a turning point for Qatar's foreign policy. The state sought to enhance its role in the region by building diverse resources of soft power. After the Arab Spring, the state redesigned its foreign agenda by further allying with many non-state actors in the region and employing foreign investments to support its regional and international interests.

Barakat believes that the state is exposed to significant risks due to an expansionist soft power agenda and enhancing political alliances. (Andrew & Bessma, 2011) argues that there are fears among the GCC countries about Qatar's expansionist role, which Saudi Arabia views as a potential threat. This situation led to the outbreak of struggles of influence in the region.

Brannagan & Giulianotti (2018) analyzed the implications of Qatar's soft power tools on foreign policy and its role in international politics. Brannagan & Giulianotti demonstrate the concept of soft disempowerment, which is the negative outcome of soft power tools. The authors examine the stage of converting soft power resources into effective tools. The result can be either positive, soft power, or negative, soft disempowerment. They determined the most essential tools and resources of this power such as culture and sports resources. Therefore, Qatar pursued hosting international sporting events such as tennis tournaments and the FIFA World Cup, and built museums and libraries.

According to Rookwood (2019), sports has been of keen interest within the soft power strategy of Qatar, as it organized international sporting events and sponsored clubs in football leagues. From the author's view, this stems from an ambitious policy and a desire to establish the national brand. Rookwood believes that Qatar's success in organizing the 2022 FIFA World Cup is a quantum leap and an important gain for Qatar's soft power. Nevertheless, it also represents a great challenge for the state and its foreign policy.

Obviously, Qatar adopted a soft power strategy with the rise of Emir Hamad. The state sought to rely on a foreign policy of soft power to support its independence from Saudi Arabia. The main objective of soft power policy is to secure state survival. Through multiple soft power tools that include media, culture, and mediation diplomacy, the state has been able to reformulate the concept of national security by playing a pivotal role in the regional and international arena. Within a few years, Qatar became a unique brand in international politics through two main paths. Qatar played the role of a trusted mediator by resolving regional and international disputes through diplomatic and negotiation methods. Through the role played in areas such as Darfur, Palestine, and Lebanon, Qatar achieved a crucial status among superpowers and international institutions. Moreover, Al Jazeera media network is a mainstay among Qatar's soft power tools. The media organization provided a link between Qatar and Arab communities, and a voice for Qatar's

policies. In this sense, Qatar has been able to change the concept of security from a mere alliance with a superpower or a regional power to building an influential strategy based on various sources of soft power, which have ensured the security and stability of the state (Roberts, D. B, 2013).

#### **2.4 The GCC Crisis**

The third theme this literature review addressed is the GCC Crisis. (Khlebnikov, 2015) argues that the rise of ideological challenges and difference between countries in handling them is the main threat facing the GCC in the current time. There were differences over the confrontation between Sunni and Shia sects before the Arab Spring; and disagreement over the rise of Islamists in the Arab region after the Arab Spring. According to Khlebnikov, this played a role in the emergence of rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Qatar on imposing policies in the Gulf region. Khlebnikov affirms that the alliance between Qatar with two parties in the region, the Muslim Brotherhood and Iran, was a focus of the dispute and a cause of conflict with the Gulf States, as Saudi Arabia sees this alliance as a threat to its national security.

Qatar's efforts to overcome its limited size and population, and the pursuit of an independent foreign policy disturbed Saudi Arabia, which influenced Qatar's rulers in previous decades (Pulsone, 2020). The blockade crisis imposed on Qatar in 2017 was a consequence of competition between the two countries in recent years. Pulsone believes that despite the alliance between the United States and Qatar economically and militarily, the US policy toward the siege crisis was negative and confusing. Also, the European Union did not have a significant role in supporting Qatar or in solving the crisis.

Bianco & Stansfield (2018) highlights propaganda campaigns in the Saudi and Emirati media against Qatar, which paved the way for the declaration of a boycott by Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt. These countries issued a list of thirteen demands on Qatar, including stopping the broadcasts of Al-Jazeera network, closing the Turkish military base in Qatar, and cutting political ties with Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood. The authors assert that the 2017 Gulf crisis had negative repercussions on the cohesion of Gulf societies; and will lead to fragmentation within the GCC. Bianco & Stansfield argue

that despite the historical roots of disputes between Qatar and the Gulf states, the events of 2011 in the region were a milestone in the escalation of the crisis.

The roots of the Gulf crisis in 2017 can be illustrated through three overlapping levels, from the perspective of (Bianco, 2017). The first is the domestic level with the rise of new princes to power: Mohammed bin Salman in Saudi Arabia, Mohammed bin Zayed in the Emirates, and Tamim bin Hamad in Qatar. Competition between them was obvious. In addition, there was remarkable change in the foreign policy of each country. The second is the regional level where Qatar's policies towards Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood are completely different from the approaches of Saudi Arabia and the UAE. In addition, they had conflicting approaches to the Arab Spring. A prominent alignment of Saudi Arabia and the UAE with the Trump administration emerged, which has viewed as an alliance against Qatar.

Wahyuni (2018) argues that the diplomatic crisis among Arab countries, particularly Qatar and its neighbors, goes back to border disputes in the 1970's. However, the competing neighboring countries considered Qatar's foreign policy, particularly during the Arab Spring, a risk and a security threat. This increased the tension between the neighboring countries, and led to a complete cut of diplomatic relations between Qatar and UAE and its allies on 5th June 2017. Wahyuni argues about two issues in this study. Firstly, the causes that led to developing tension between Saudi Arabia and Qatar. These include the influence of Qatar's political relations with Iran, the influence of Al-Jazeera TV policy, and Qatar's support for some Islamic organizations in many countries, which Saudi Arabia criticized and considered a threat to its regional policy. The second issue is the negative impact of the blockade crisis on Qatar's foreign policy and regional stability. Wahyuni explains that Qatar adopted a strategy that combines hard power such as military agreements with Turkey, Iran, and the US with strengthening soft power. The author also acknowledges that the blockade caused great harm to Qatar's economy and other aspects of life.

Miller (2019) shares Bianco's perspective on the impact of rising new princes to power in Saudi Arabia and the UAE on the Gulf crisis. Their common goal in the context of the leadership rivalry in the region is to limit Qatar's influence and role. Miller explains that Qatar's first reaction toward the blockade depended on the resources of diplomatic,

commercial, and cultural soft power. Although the crisis was not militarized, Qatar sought to counter security threats from the besieging countries through a military alliance with Turkey as well as the US military base.

Asisian (2018) argues that despite the common customs, geography, religion, and history of the GCC, its member countries lack unity of interest and vision on many issues. The repercussions of these disputes emerged in the blockade crisis imposed on Qatar in 2017. Asisian explains the nature of the conflict, considering it a model for the confrontation between Qatar, the small country trying to overcome security threats, and Saudi Arabia, the big country that seeks to impose its policy in the Arab region. He asserts that Qatar's soft power tools accumulated over the years, foremost through media networks such as Al Jazeera, which have a wide influence on public opinion and political events. This contributed to igniting the crisis in the Gulf region. Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the UAE considered the growing rise of Qatar's soft power and its influence as a regional threat.

From the perspective of (Köse & Ulutaş, 2017), The Gulf region entered a Cold War-like state after the Arab Spring because of Qatar and Saudi Arabia's rivalry to lead the region. The authors assert that the wide influence of Qatar's soft power tools played a significant role in the Quartet's decision to break diplomatic relations with Qatar. They claim that the Gulf crisis has serious implications on the entire region, and prevents a resolution of many issues, such as Yemen and Syria, which weakens the Arab status internationally. The issue has deeper ideological roots. Qatar's relationship with Islamist actors in the region runs counter to Saudi and Emirati trends.

Negri (2018) argues that the crisis in the GCC is an extension of the Saudi - Iranian confrontation, as Saudi Arabia seeks to punish Qatar for its alliance with Iran. Negri claims that expanding economic, diplomatic, and military relations with new countries, such as Turkey, India, and other countries, are among the most important factors that supported Qatar in overcoming the risks of the blockade crisis. The Gulf crisis caused considerable damage to the political and economic situation of Qatar (Wahyuni, 2018). Wahyuni argues that Qatar adopted a smart strategy that included a combination of hard and soft power, which was a deterrent against security threats.

Abdullah (2019) discussed the reasons that led to cutting diplomatic relations with Qatar. Abdullah emphasizes that the crisis between Qatar and Saudi Arabia comes in the context

of the power struggle in the region. The author claims that Qatar adopted an ambitious foreign policy, and built diplomatic relations with many countries such as Iran, which Saudi Arabia considered to be a competition for its role and influence in the region. This played a role in igniting the crisis between the two neighboring countries. Abdullah confirms that the most important reason for the outbreak of the crisis with Saudi Arabia was Qatar's support for the Muslim Brotherhood, especially during the Arab Spring, in addition to the prominent role of Al Jazeera TV in increasing disputes between the Gulf states and Qatar.

Gause III (2017) emphasizes the same idea as Khlebnikov about the effects of ideological differences between Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Gause III believes that Qatar's support for political Islamist groups, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood, is a central cause of the dispute between Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt.

Kinninmont (2019) agrees with both Abdullah and Gause III in their argument that Qatar's alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood is the main cause of the rift in relations between Qatar and the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. Kinninmont emphasizes the idea of Köse & Ulutaş about the impact of the 2017 Gulf crisis on the Arab world and North Africa, resulting in new relationships and alliances based on political polarization. Kinninmont shares Pulsone's vision of the Saudi-Qatar rivalry, which became a power struggle, and shares the view about the limited role of the United States in resolving the dispute.

Qatar's relationship with Hamas and Iran, as well as Al Jazeera's role, are the main causes of the crisis between the GCC countries, according to (Richard, 2019). Moreover, Kabalan (2018) discusses the role of the United States in the Gulf crisis and asserts that the blockading countries benefited from the support of the Trump administration as a cover for their action against Qatar.

According to Barakat (2021), the Qatari leadership adopted a rational approach to dealing with Saudi Arabia after the 2017 crisis. Barakat argues that a reasonable diplomatic response to the blockade's consequences was a major reason for finding a solution to the crisis after three years. Despite the Trump administration's support for the blockade from the outset, Qatar continued its diplomatic and commercial relations with the United States. Furthermore, the Qatari Government avoided criticism of King Salman and dealt positively with resolution initiatives.

(Ramani, 2021) argues that although Qatar and the rest of the Gulf States signed Al-Ula agreement, it does not mean that the conflict is over. The blockade of Qatar ended, but certainly, the underlying reasons of disagreement persist. Ramani claims that Qatar's support for the Muslim Brotherhood, the relationship with Iran and Turkey, its Islamist friendly policies, and the expansion of Qatar's role in the region are the reasons that led the Quartet to impose a blockade. Both Islamist expansion and Iranian aggression are considered existential threats to the tribal monarchs of the Gulf region. The resolution of the tension between Qatar and other GCC countries remains challenging. The recent reconciliation, according to Ramani, is rather a pragmatic gesture. The timing of reconciliation with Qatar timed to Biden's rise of power, which pushed Mohammed bin Salman to minimize problems and tension in the region.

## **2.5 Summary**

The literature review is divided into three main topics: Qatar's soft power, the GCC crisis, and Qatar's foreign policy. These topics provide an integrated and holistic approach towards the research theme. Generally, the dissertation aims to contribute to the literature on soft power, as it represents an important and emerging topic in international relations. Moreover, the research concerns studying the case of Qatar in a coherent and integrated manner, especially framing how Qatar used soft power as a strategy for regime survival leading to its rise as a regional power until the outbreak of the boycott crisis. It is necessary to be familiar with Qatar's foreign policy and one of its pillars, soft power, and to realize its role in the crisis that erupted in the Gulf region. After a thorough analysis of secondary resources related to the research, some gaps require further exploration and study.

This dissertation contributes to filling the gaps in the theme of Qatar's foreign policy of soft power. The main significance of this study is to provide a comprehensive and innovative analysis of the Qatari soft power foreign policy. The study will contribute to illustrating Emir Hamad's role in establishing a unique strategy of Qatari soft power. The study seeks to show how Qatar managed to overcome geopolitical challenges in a region rife with turmoil. The research contributes to the debate over Qatar's success in formulating a new meaning of security, which transcends dependence on a superpower or

a regional power; but rather based on an ambitious strategy consisting of effective soft power tools, through which Qatar was able to survive and compete for regional leadership.

This study attempts to reveal the most important soft power tools of the various political eras; particularly the ones that provided Qatar an unprecedented regional role. For instance, Qatar created a network of influential political and media lobbies in Arab and western countries. These lobbies helped in improving its public image, promoting its foreign policy, and defending the state's reputation against the opponent's smear campaigns and media attacks. Furthermore, the study discusses Emir Tamim bin Hamad's role in reframing and developing Qatar's soft power strategy.

The dissertation reveals how Qatar's expansion of soft power triggered a power struggle with Saudi Arabia and the UAE. In addition, it describes the backlash of Saudi Arabia and its allies that led to the outbreak of the siege crisis in 2017.

The thesis gains further significance through highlighting the state survival strategy Qatar formulated to face the challenges of the crisis. Finally, the dissertation provides arguments about the question: is the future of the dispute between Qatar and the GCC countries temporary appeasement or a permanent solution? It provides insight on how proposed solutions to the crisis affect Qatari foreign policy.

## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The scope of this research is to explore Qatari foreign policy of soft power in the context of the GCC crisis. Moreover, it aims to clarify the essential resources that played role in the country's strategy. The issue of soft power requires studying a relationship in which several factors interact, including sources, power, impact environment, outputs, and consequences. The research does not deal with the issue of tangible capabilities, but rather variable dimensions. Soft power is challenging due to its multidimensional and volatile nature. In this context, the research adopts an approach that provides the capacity to analyze, explore, and engage with the story of Qatar's soft power model. Hence, the study adopts a qualitative methodology to attain the research objectives. In this context, the study tends to investigate and analyze collected data from a variety of sources. The interpretative nature of the qualitative methodology serves the thesis theme and gives the ability to make many arguments. Undoubtedly, various perspectives provide a possible study of soft power and geopolitical implications.

Qualitative methods call for the interrogation of ideas and engagement in historical and political contexts. This dissertation aims to fill the gap in the literature on the role Qatar's foreign policy of soft power played within the context of the Qatar diplomatic crisis. This project will examine a wide range of primary and secondary data from different sources, including books, journal and newspaper articles, electronic newspapers, reports, and official documents. These sources were selected according to their connection to the main thesis topics.

The criteria of data selection is highlighting aspects of Qatari foreign policy of soft power that is relevant to the GCC crisis. To achieve an effective and coherent analysis, the methodology adopts a tracing process through integration between the themes of the dissertation chapters. The dissertation devoted a chapter on Qatar's foreign policy, its components, features, and how it relied on soft power to achieve national interests. The second chapter on soft power included how it was built, the role of the two leaders Hamad bin Khalifa and Tamim bin Hamad bin Khalifa in formulating it, and the most important

tools. The final chapter is on the role of the foreign policy of soft power in the boycott crisis in 2017.

This research suffered from some limitations. It was prepared in unusual circumstances because of the COVID- 19 pandemic, which posed communications difficulties with researchers and experts, as well as difficulties in interviewing government officials in Qatar. Thus, the initial plan of conducting semi-structured interviews and a more empirical side of my research gave way to a qualitative approach.



## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### **4.1 Introduction to Qatari foreign policy**

Qatar's foreign attitude in recent years raised many questions and issues that require study and understanding. Surprisingly, the small country ramped up its activity in a region marked by turmoil. The state is highly involved in international politics and regional events, suggesting that it plays a role greater than its real weight. The country's foreign policy generated wide-ranging debate since the early 1990s, with multiple roles and different features. It moved from the traditional role as a mediator in regional conflicts to making a national brand through various soft power tools. Finally, it sought a more influential role that aspires to regional dominance through the opportunity of the Arab Spring (Echague, 2014, pp. 10-11).

Although the state faced many geopolitical challenges, Qatar has been able to develop an assertive foreign policy. The state overcame many obstacles and built an ambitious strategy. In this context, Qatar recently positioned itself as a regional power in international politics. The new leaders were able to put the country on the map of the international scene. Clearly, the country adopted an unconventional political and diplomatic agenda. In this sense, the state created tools, expanded in the region, and created extensive relations. Undoubtedly, this agenda enabled Qatar to construct a unique foreign policy. At the same time, it created many problems and challenges, most notably the 2017 crisis (Ulrichsen, 2012b, pp. 10-11).

Despite the differences raised by the Qatari foreign policy in the Middle East region, it created a new reality in the region in recent years. The model established by the state based on the soft power system has become controversial. Hence, this chapter seeks to explore the components of foreign policy, the contradictions and controversies it posed, and to identify the challenges it faced (Roberts, 2016, p. 2).

#### **4.2 Features of Qatari foreign policy**

The features of Qatari foreign policy in contemporary politics started taking shape when Prince Hamad rose to power. Despite regional shifts and tragic events in the Middle East

over the past years, decision-makers designed unique features of State policy. In modern times, power in Qatar underwent two fundamental transitions. First, rule passed to Emir Hamad bin Khalifa through a soft coup against his father. Secondly, power passed peacefully from Prince Hamad to his son Tamim. Clearly, the country experienced many regional shifts and dramatic events in the Middle East. Nonetheless, the Qatari establishment successfully and flexibly adopted policies and agendas, even if the tools and tactics differed. The dissertation now will turn its focus on the practice of Qatari foreign policy in recent decades and its main features.

#### **4.2.1 Pragmatic and rational approach:**

Qatar emerged in international relations through a unique diplomatic model. Although highly criticized, it was a vibrant alternative for a state to stand in a troubled region. Such a non-conventional foreign policy strategy faced geopolitical challenges. First geographically, Qatar's location is in the center of a confrontation between Saudi Arabia and Iran as the main dominant forces in the Persian Gulf. Secondly, the turbulent regional environment and security and political threats pose other challenges.

Qatar 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 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 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, it maintained political and commercial relations with Iran, and opened channels of communication with the Taliban. The country hosted leaders from Hamas, and established relations with Israel. The authority in Qatar 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 maintained respect for common customs, history, and roots, and cooperated to resolve the crises (Kabalan M. , 2018a, p. 34).

#### **4.2.2 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. It has a huge stockpile of LNG and oil fields, which are of great importance to the global economy. Therefore, Qatar worked to convert these sources into effective political tools. It sought to employ them in two main tracks. The first track is to build international relations within the framework of winning national interests (Ennis, 2018, p. 579).

Obviously, it aimed to build a national strategy to make the most of its gas wealth. It succeeded in linking gas export agreements with important political and military alliances. This is evident in the choice of countries and the quantities of gas exported. The country made major agreements with the USA, France, Japan, India, South Korea, and Italy. This reflects the ambition to expand into pivotal countries, both geographically and politically. Gas wealth achieved multidimensional alliances, a breakthrough for the state interests. The alliance with the USA was a guarantee of internal security and a military deterrent to external threats (Bahgat, 2016, pp. 28-29).

The second track seeks to transform wealth resources into effective tools within the soft power strategy. Upon his rise to power, Emir Hamad adopted a policy of building sustainable power. Hence, the foreign policy of soft power became the strategic choice. This turned into a national feature even with the transfer of power to his son, Emir Tamim bin Hamad. Economic power played a fundamental role in designing soft power tools. It has been a powerful driver in the practice of mediation and dispute resolution. Moreover, the state established and developed of Al-Jazeera network as a tool for influencing Arab public opinion. Its effect is clear in doubling the funding for foreign aid programs. Clearly, soft power relied on huge economic resources and extensive funding to achieve foreign policy goals. Although soft power tools changed according to historical and political circumstances, the state financial support has not changed. From mediation and media to the FIFA World Cup and sponsoring political lobbies, gas wealth formed a solid basis for soft power foreign policy (Kamrava, 2017, pp. 117-120).

### **4.2.3 Soft power as a strategic state option**

Remarkably, Qatar designed an unprecedented foreign policy model that made it a small country with a major role. It is an influential, highly dynamic foreign policy capable of adapting to unfavorable regional conditions. The state benefited from a soft power strategy; and various soft power tools enabled the state to overcome vulnerabilities and meet challenges. Certainly, Qatari soft power foreign policy played a prominent role in achieving the goals of the national agenda. Qatar relied on it as a cornerstone both in the era of construction and in the era of rise and influence (Kinninmont, 2019, p. 10).

The State employed all available resources under the soft power strategy. Thus, foreign policy has various tools that enabled the state to influence different issues and countries. The soft power strategy involved several key interfaces, such as culture, media, diplomacy, and sports (Rubin, 2010, p. 15).

Diplomatic activity is the main brand of Qatari foreign policy. The State emerged in international politics through mediation diplomacy. Qatar became a neutral mediator intervening in the settlement of disputes through negotiation. Qatar was 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 succeeded in benefiting from this diplomatic role, which enhanced the status of the state regionally and internationally. The state established alliances with powerful countries and international organizations. Success in this role gave the state great influence in many countries. It secured alliances with superpowers and international organizations (Minich, 2015, pp. 124-126).

Undoubtedly, Al-Jazeera network was a critical tool within Qatar's soft power. It played a prominent role in its ambitious foreign policy strategy. Remarkably, it evolved into creating events and directing public opinion. The Arab Spring demonstrated the ability of Al-Jazeera and its tools to influence significant political events in the Middle East and around the world (Cherkaoui T. , 2014, pp. 26-28).

The cultural aspect included many soft power tools. The state sought to invest in the historical legacy through the establishment of national museums. Qatar succeeded in organizing cultural festivals and holding conferences with UNESCO participation.

Moreover, the country was keen to develop the higher education system, hosting branches of international universities, and providing scholarships for international students.

In this context, the study confirms Qatar's ability to formulate a smart foreign policy strategy. It is what enabled Qatar to ensure internal stability and efficiency regionally and internationally. This is the thesis contribution to understanding the pivotal role played by soft power tools.

#### **4.2.4 Political alliances at the center of Qatari foreign policy**

Since Qatar embarked on building a foreign policy independent of Saudi Arabia, it faced security concerns and geopolitical threats. Therefore, the state sought to build strategic alliances that guarantee the protection of internal security and enhance its ability to rise as a competitor to lead the regional scene. The USA is the strategic ally of Qatar's foreign policy. The country relied on this coalition in the face of security and political threats, and paved the way for an ambitious strategy. The alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood is the second central alliance. Despite changing political circumstances in recent years, the relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood remained equally important. This alliance served Qatar in strengthening its position in Arab societies and expanding the sphere of influence for its foreign policy (Ghaddar, 2013, p. 1).

### **4.3 Turning Points**

Clearly, Qatar today is not the country of the past. Over the past decades, the small state moved through many stages to emerge as a major power. In contemporary history, Qatar underwent changes in ruling authority. However, there are key pillars that defined the features of Qatari foreign policy across different eras. It is therefore important to highlight the political turning points and explore its pillars.

#### **4.3.1 The era of Hamad bin Khalifa**

The most prominent event in Qatar's modern history is the rise of Emir Hamad to power. Since 1995, the features of the country changed at all levels. It witnessed great development on the economic level. Moreover, he is the founder of the country's foreign policy strategy. During his reign, Qatar moved from a mere Saudi follower to a major

actor in the international scene. Furthermore, the country passed through several stages. He succeeded in reframing foreign policy from seeking standing to possessing influence, and from mediation to intervention (Roberts, 2016, p. 5).

In his early years in power, Emir Hamad sought to promote autonomy and ensure internal security. He focused on community cohesion and economic growth, and worked to achieve a foreign policy independent of Saudi Arabia. Then, he adopted a national soft power agenda that ensured an influential position in international politics. It can be claimed that Emir Hamad implemented his policies in a turbulent political environment. Nevertheless, he managed to place the country as a key player on the map of international politics. The dissertation seeks to explain Prince Hamad's success in establishing an independent role for the state and its survival. In addition, the study contributes to the arguments about his role in employing state resources to build an effective foreign policy after Qatar was merely an appendage of Saudi policies.

The main features of his reign included creating soft power resources, ensuring internal security, and building modern state institutions. He intended to employ its economic strength as sustainable tools of soft power. Clearly, the main brand of his era was neutrality, playing a mediating role and resolving disputes. The second pillar of soft power is Al Jazeera as a media and cultural interface. He relied on an alliance with the USA to protect the state from external risks (Moncunill, 2015, pp. 32-33).

#### **4.3.2 Repercussions of the Arab Spring**

The Arab Spring brought significant change to the region. Its events imposed political volatility that affected the control of traditional rulers. The repercussions of the Arab Spring coincided with Qatar's growing and effective foreign policy, and presented an opportunity to expand influence in the region. Clearly, the state adapted to the new reality, and 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 the same distance from everyone to direct intervention in events. The state 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 resulted in 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 moved to the forefront of the regional scene and achieved expansion and clear control. Nonetheless, the country got involved in conflicts that extend to our present time. It became a major rival to dominant powers in the region, such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt. State support for the Arab Spring caused disagreement with the GCC countries (Roberts D. B., 2012b, pp. 2-4).

#### **4.4 Qatar foreign policy challenges after 2017 crisis**

The boycott crisis in 2017 raised questions about new restrictions and challenges facing Qatar. It seems that the repercussions of the crisis widened the rift between Qatar and the Quartet countries. Despite what Qatar has shown of resilience in the face of the effects of this crisis, it is clear that the conflict and disagreements brought risks and constraints to Qatar's foreign policy. Economic challenges burdened the country. Nevertheless, Qatar was able to manage the crisis through flexible policies. While geopolitical challenges are the most threatening to the state's foreign policy, their effects continue despite the attempts to settle the crisis (Collins, 2018, p. 2).

##### **4.4.1 Swing in alliances and negative international role**

Over the years, Qatar gained support and strength in the international arena through a political and military alliance with superpowers. The most important ally during the past decades is the USA, as it played the protector role for Qatar security. With the change of authority and President Trump's coming to power, the mood of the U.S. administration changed. Relations between Saudi Arabia and the UAE on the one hand and the Trump administration on the other were clearly evolving. There was greater coordination between them in the war on terrorism; and the U.S government has benefited from major economic deals. There seemed to be a mutual interest in attacking Qatar, especially in its relations with Iran and support for the Muslim Brotherhood (Roberts D. B., 2017, pp. 8-9).

The blockade decision against Qatar needed a green light from the White House. This means that Qatar lost the bet on its most important ally in a decisive crisis. This situation imposed a reality that threatened Qatar's foreign policy. The Qatari leadership faced a strategic shock and limited options. The negative position of the USA in the crisis presented significant security and military risks. Moreover, the Western role was not supportive of Qatar's position, despite the huge investments in many countries such as France, Italy, and Spain. Western countries' economic interests with Saudi Arabia and the Emirates played a role in limiting their role during the crisis. In addition to the activity of the Saudi and Emirati lobby worked to influence decision-making institutions to earn points against Qatar (Alkuwari, 2020, p. 38).

That induced the state to reshape its map of alliances. Hence, Qatar resorted to a political and military alliance with Turkey. The two parties concluded political and military agreements, in addition to relying on the Turkish market to meet the needs of goods and products. The Turkish intervention played a prominent role in military deterrence and strengthening Qatar's political stance. As time passed, relations between the sides turned into a strategic alliance. Qatari diplomacy was active further east and west. It sought to win friends and neutralize parties in this crisis. The country developed political and economic relations with Iran, India, China, and other countries (Albasoos, Hassan, & Al Zadjali, 2021, pp. 161-162).

#### **4.4.2 Limitations on traditional power tools**

Qatar's foreign policy relied on tools of power that formed traditional pillars. However, some of these tools were the reason behind the flare-up of the Gulf crisis. Over the years, the alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood was a power card for Qatari politics. Qatar benefited greatly from their deployment in Arab societies. This alliance suffered incitement and accusations after the Arab Spring and until the siege crisis. The severing of relations between Qatar and the Muslim Brotherhood was at the top of the Arab Quartet demands (Ryan, 2015, pp. 37-38).

Despite the huge investments and economic and military deals with European countries such as France and others, Qatar did not achieve the expected return from this huge spending at the time of the blockade crisis. Rather, the negative stance of those countries

was an opportunity for the Arab Quartet to tighten sanctions. Some institutions in European countries were involved in campaigns of incitement and defamation against Qatar (Pierini, 2013, p. 1).

Generally, the GCC crisis imposed constraints on the tools of Qatari diplomacy. It brought significant challenges to the country's leadership. Qatar's foreign policy went through a state of instability and fluctuations in of international relations. Furthermore, the repercussions of the boycott crisis created a rift in Qatar's relations with the GCC countries. Despite the state's ability to withstand several challenges, the Qatari foreign policy faces geopolitical threats; and the state's ability to overcome them is unpredictable.

## CHAPTER V

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 5.1 Theoretical Framework for Soft Power

Power, its sources and how it serves the state's interests, are one of the main features of international relations. The global arena witnessed profound changes at the level of international relations and between states and other actors. With the increase of international cooperation and interdependence, it became necessary to reformulate the concept of power in the state's foreign policy strategy (Barnett & Duvall, 2005, p. 58).

In theory, power is the ability to influence and control the behavior and policies of States, organizations, and actors in international politics. From another perspective, optimal recruitment of material and non-material components to achieve interests and objectives is a measurement of State power efficiency. Hence, power is an interaction between several elements, and is not limited to a single component or item. In this sense, military power, possession of weapons, and the violent coercion of states receded in favor of other sources of power based on the capability of influence and attraction. This is what Nye defined as soft power, which means achieving the state's interests in foreign policy through inducement, 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 enables them to overcome weaknesses and confront challenges of 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, and sports. Soft power has taken on great importance in recent decades, giving states flexibility at the foreign policy level. Soft power tools allowed some States to play regional and international roles. Thus, States can exceed the traditional concept of power.

It paved the way for countries to overcome unfavorable conditions and to compete with great powers (Lukes, 2005, p. 89).

The international arena witnessed dramatic fluctuations in power, providing roles for new actors and instruments. The concept of soft power created a shift in the how countries conduct their foreign policy. Policymakers are capable of benefiting from the resources and components of the state, and employ them in foreign policy strategy. This generated results and effects that led countries to expand their reliance on it as one of the pillars of foreign policy (Trunkos, 2013, p. 4).

In about the debate about soft power, there are two interrelated terms: resources and tools. Resources are basic components, general pillars, and raw wealth. There are fundamental resources that Nye declared when exploring soft power, such as culture, economics, sports, art, energy, education, and media. On the other hand, tools are the ways, means, and methods that soft power sources employ to achieve specific targets. In this regard, a state's success is its ability to transform resources into effective tools that work positively to achieve its interests (Nye Jr, 2008, pp. 95-96).

Small states in contemporary politics usually do not have many options in power approaches. They are mostly concerned with protecting society internally and preserving their security against external threats. Consequently, the state needs to engage in a political and military alliance with a superpower; and foreign policy is limited to essential diplomatic relations. On the contrary, a few small countries adopt an ambitious foreign policy, and seek to play a major role in international politics. Hence, soft power emerges as a favorable and effective option for overcoming the vulnerabilities of small countries. Economic and cultural resources and political will enhance the state's capability to articulate a foreign policy of soft power (Wagner, 2014, p. 1).

The Qatari model is an attractive to study and research in recent years. Despite the limited size and population, and weak military capabilities, the state sought to create a path for its presence in the international scene. This study aims to clarify Qatar's plan to employ resources to achieve state interests. The country succeeded in building a soft power foreign policy, which gave it power and influence in international politics. In this context, the study seeks to explore the role of this policy in the recent diplomatic crises.

Despite the unfavorable geopolitical conditions, Qatar is an influential actor in the Middle East. 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 moved towards this strategy. In recent years, especially in the last decade, the State's desire to build an independent foreign policy 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).

This chapter aims to explore the Qatari soft power strategy. How the State articulated a soft power system that serves the national agenda according to political and historical circumstances. The chapter aims to clarify the role of soft power policies in enhancing Qatar's role in international politics. It looks at the various resources and tools through which Qatar, as a small country, was able to gain influence and achieve foreign policy objectives. This chapter explains the impact of Qatar's soft power on the relationship with the Gulf States, and Saudi Arabia's interpretation of its expansion.

### **5.1.1 How soft power secures survival and ensures influence**

Many debates arise about the different goals and motives of the state's pursuit of diverse tools of power. Undoubtedly, the goal of survival and securing the state is the goal that imposes itself on the ruling authority. The neorealist theory confirms this. The theory sought to address the security dilemma in international relations through the accumulation of power to create a balance with the other states. Therefore, one cannot overlook the overlapping issue of power and security when discussing the components of a state's foreign policy. In this sense, even if the foreign policy goals and tools are numerous, the state still means showing the ability to survive and face security challenges. Therefore, despite the cooperation between states in political and economic issues, the state seeks to achieve maximum benefit and serve national interests (Kadercan, 2013, p. 1017).

If the small country manages to overcome external and internal obstacles, it can formulate an independent and credible foreign policy. Political and economic pressures on the state and its authority, and the exercise of hegemony by superpowers, pose external obstacles

to the small state. Moreover, the authority faces internal threats of economic, security and political dimensions, which constitute an obstacle to achieving an effective and independent foreign policy (Kassimeris, 2009, pp. 93-96).

There are wide options for superpower for dealing with security issues and competition in international politics. They possess traditional military and economic power to impose its interests on the foreign policy level. Therefore, superpowers do not face a dilemma of survival or control to a similar extent to less prominent states. On the other hand, small states face dilemmas pertaining to internal security and survival in the international system. Therefore, it is not easy to build an effective foreign policy within the framework of limited military capabilities and geopolitical obstacles.

Although small states do not have the tools and opportunities equivalent to the challenges they encounter in the system, some models capable of building an effective foreign policy emerged. These states depend on two tracks. The first is to employ all kinds of power resources within a foreign policy strategy that ensures survival and maximizes security on the international level. The second is the formation of a stable governance system and institutions that act as a guardian of national security. This power includes tools and a concept that goes beyond a hard or military interpretation of force (Elman, 1995, pp. 172-173).

Qatar is a small country in size, population, and military capabilities. Examining the Qatari model seems interesting to any researcher, particularly in a region full of political volatility as well as regional and international conflict. Clearly, the state faced internal and external challenges that threatened security and its ability to influence and survive in the international system. The dissertation aims to contribute to understanding how Qatar succeeded in overcoming internal and external obstacles, and was able to formulate a strategy of power that acted as a guarantor of survival and security. The study discusses the rise of Qatar as a regional and international actor; and how it promoted its internal security and influential foreign policy. The Qatari leadership was able to secure its country through a strategy that relies on employing its economic, cultural, and political resources. The authority adopted a strategy to promote Qatar as a unique brand of soft power, which achieved a radical transformation in Qatar's position on the international relations map. Moreover, the soft power strategy reshaped the concept of state security. It advanced from

being an appendage to a regional ally or a superpower, to building an ambitious policy outlook imposing itself as an independent power that can survive, compete, and control by its own resources (Roberts D. B., 2013, pp. 2-8)

The dissertation asserts that Qatar formulated a soft power foreign policy that attracted many friends, neutralized many opponents, and acted as a deterrent to enemies. This policy gave Qatar pivotal importance in international politics; and enhanced its stability and internal security. Through various soft power tools, Qatar rose as a regional actor and competitor for dominance in the Arab region. Despite the challenges that the state faced because of its expansion of soft power policy, it managed to develop soft power tools that enabled it to withstand and survive on the international scene.

## **5.2 Historical approach**

Historically, two events crucially influenced Qatar's foreign policy and its soft power strategy in recent years. Although there are many important turning points in Qatar's recent history, the rise of Emir Hamad bin Khalifa to power and the Arab Spring are two remarkable and distinct events that impacted the state's soft power strategy and its available resources and tools options. Qatar did not possess much potential when Emir Hamad came to power; neither at the level of infrastructure, services, policies, and institutions internally, nor at the level of foreign policy (Zeineddine & Nicolescu, 2018, p. 176).

Therefore, Emir Hamad sought to secure Qatari economic, political, and security stability. The era of Emir Hamad established Qatar's soft power strategy. Hamad bin Khalifa adopted balanced and realistic policies that took into consideration the traditional powers in the region. He succeeded in benefiting from the state's economic resources and transforming them into effective foreign policy tools. Soft power tools during the early years of Hamad's era included three main tracks; mediation diplomacy, an influential media network, and higher education institutions that attract foreign students (Moncunill, 2015, p. 18).

Hamad bin Khalifa achieved his goals in the rise of the state as an influential player in international politics. In addition, the soft power strategy witnessed remarkable development and change in approaches and tools during 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 moved to the stage of intervention and influence (Pierini, 2013, p. 1).

According to this historical approach, Qatar's soft power tools are classified into common tools between the two eras and other tools unique to each era. Apart from history, every political phase had its own circumstances and challenges, which required different agendas and objectives. When Emir Hamad bin Khalifa took power in Qatar, there was obvious change in the state ambition and its foreign policy objectives. Hamad bin Khalifa played a central role in building the state's soft power strategy and adopting it as a major weapon in his quest to break the dependency on Saudi Arabia's policy. He sought a stable foreign policy and balanced relations with neighboring countries (Kabalan M. , 2019, pp. 77-78).

Although it was clear he intended to create a variety of sustainable soft power tools, he has succeeded in securing his country from regional conflicts, and avoided struggles with traditional powers, especially in the early period of his reign. Qatar's objectives in this era were to enhance the state's position in international politics, play a regional role, and create an independent foreign policy while maintaining neutrality (Rubin, 2010, p. 15).

Secondly, this chapter discusses the significant impact of the Arab Spring on redesigning Qatar's soft power strategy. The Arab Spring represented a favorable opportunity for decision-makers to compete for leading the political scene in the region and expand their role in international politics. This coincided with the rise of young Prince Tamim bin Hamad to power. He developed a more ambitious and expansionary agenda utilizing effective and diverse soft power tools. In those years, Qatari leadership faced many challenges, which required a change in the power agenda and tools. The main objectives of this phase were to compete for domination and influence (Dacrema, 2013, pp. 2-3).

While the first era was the first step towards rising on the international scene and the transformation of state resources as economy, culture, and politics into active tools, the second era was a breakthrough towards regional leadership, broad influence on most political issues, and playing crucial roles in the Middle East.

### **5.3 Qatar's soft power tools**

This chapter will examine Qatar's soft power tools through a combination of historical classification and its objectives. In this sense, they are divided into two main titles: national standing and branding, and the transition from neutrality to competition and influence.

#### **5.3.1 National standing and branding**

Hamad bin Khalifa played an important role in articulating Qatari foreign policy. The Emir sought to build a policy independent of Saudi Arabia; and soft power was a central strategy in this policy. This gave Qatar's foreign policy influence and capacity to enhance its position in the regional and international arenas. The state adopted realistic and balanced practices that took into consideration traditional powers. At this stage, the state avoided the struggle for dominance in the region. Qatar pursued a neutral diplomacy; and kept an equal distance from all regional parties. Hence, the soft power tools at this stage included what serves the basic objectives, foremost of which was the diplomacy of mediation and conflict resolution (Peterson, 2006, pp. 741-742).

##### **5.3.1.1 Mediation and conflict resolution**

Mediation is a process of resolving disputes through comprehension, negotiation, and perspectives convergence between the parties to find common ground for compromise and resolution. The mediator needs capabilities and influence to convince the conflicting parties. Countries like Norway and Sweden are famous, acceptable mediators around the world. These countries have wide and stable diplomatic relations, characterized by neutrality, integrity, and reliability. The Qatari leadership under Emir Hamad avoided direct conflicts with neighboring countries. Simultaneously, Doha actively sought to build strong relations with the major players in the region, such as the USA and some EU countries. It relied on its important economic status because of the vast stock of LNG, which enabled it to enter attractive contracts and investments with those states (Putri & Surwandono, 2019, pp. 255-256).

Under Emir Hamad, Qatar's foreign policy took another course that enhanced its international standing, and enabled it to contribute to policymaking rather merely

following it. Qatar established itself as a neutral and credible international mediator. In this sense, Doha conducted, over the years, rounds of negotiations between conflicting parties in various conflicts. Qatari mediation succeeded in reaching the Doha peace agreement in Darfur, releasing Eritrean prisoners and hostages in Syria, and resolving the political crisis in Lebanon. (Gulbrandsen, 2010, pp. 27-38).

Since the early 2000's, Qatar emerged as a neutral mediator between disputing parties in many regions; and gained a solid reputation at the regional and international levels. Qatari mediation achieved a high profile and garnered global attention. Doha is the primary hub for conflict resolution in the region; as it mediated critical regional and international conflicts. Qatari mediation ranged included Lebanon, Yemen, Darfur, Libya, Afghanistan, Iraq, Bulgarian nurses detained in Libya, between Fatah and Hamas, between Sudan and Chad, and between France and Syria (Nuruzzaman M. , 2015a, pp. 541-542).

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

Qatar adopted a proactive approach in dealing with tensions and disputes in the surrounding region. It aimed to prevent threats from affecting it; and to ensure internal security and political stability. It also gained security and political immunity through balanced relations with contradictory parties. While it hosted leaders from Hamas, Qatar maintained diplomatic and economic relations with Israel. Despite its alliance with the USA, it communicated with the Taliban for media and political purposes. In other words, if Qatar is not a friend to all, at least it was able to neutralize all parties, including the armed movements (Putri & Surwandono, 2019, p. 256).

Qatar's model as a mediator capable of settling deep disputes in highly troubled areas ensured an influential presence in international politics. It emerged as a key participant in the peacemaking process through establishing broad influence and diplomatic relations with many non-state actors. Undoubtedly, the state employed its economic capabilities to advance its conflict resolution strategy. Qatar provided financial aid to urge conflicting countries towards negotiation and resolving disputes. Observers argue that Qatar

established its influence in the Middle East through this strategy. Therefore, the UN, USA, EU, and key players relied on Qatar to mediate on many challenging issues (Ahmed, 2020, pp. 87-92).

### **5.3.1.2 Higher education and scholarships**

The development of education and the promotion of institutions is one of the most prominent pillars of Emir Hamad's soft power strategy. He implemented comprehensive reforms to all levels of the educational system. He restructured institutions; and adopted new policies aimed at improving the content and quality of education, as well as expanding the establishment of educational institutions. The Qatari leadership is convinced of the value of education, and its internal implications for the advancement of society and the State (Zeineddine C. , 2017, p. 215).

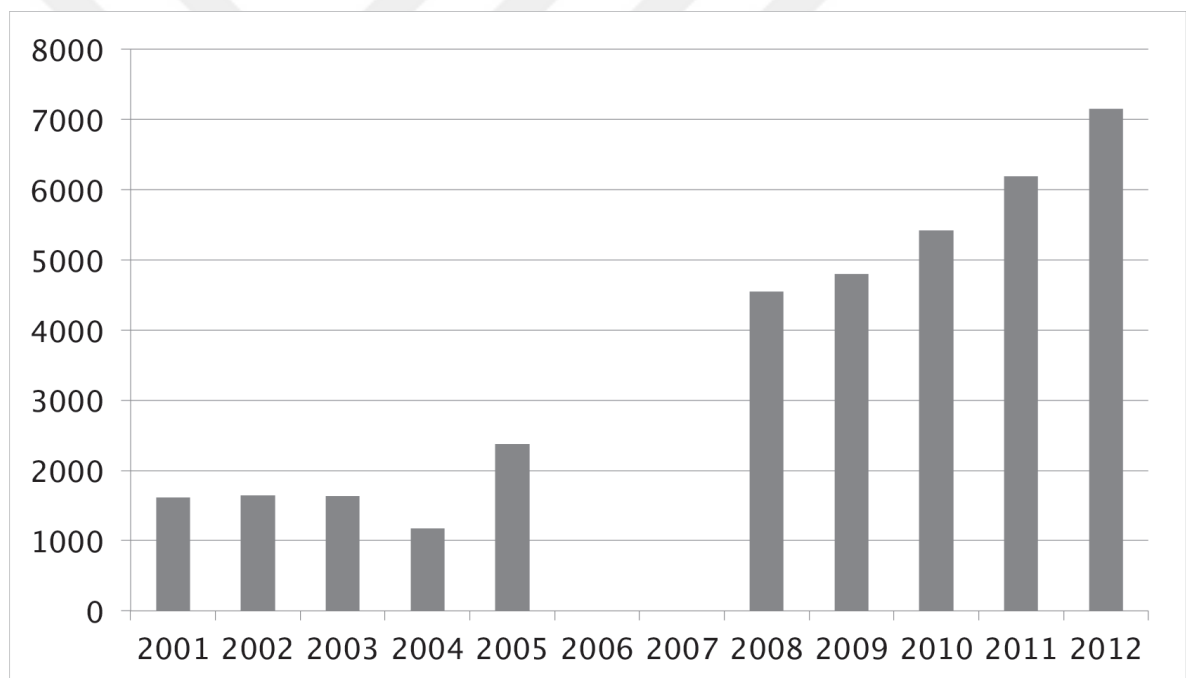
Hence, the state allocated a huge budget for education, and international academic expertise and institutions oversaw the state's plan, which sought to provide a modern educational environment. Qatar Foundation for Education and Science was the first step towards elevating the standards of higher education. Sheikh Hamad's decision to establish the foundation aimed at accelerating human development, developing education and research, and competing at global levels.

The Foundation brought branches of international universities to Doha, such as Georgetown University, Carnegie Mellon University, Texas A & M, and others. In addition, national universities, such as Qatar University and Hamad Bin Khalifa University, were central to the drive towards leading in education and scientific research. Qatar Foundation included many specialized research centers besides universities, covering the fields of energy, environment, medicine, and computer science (Miller & Verhoeven, 2020, p. 9).

Qatar strengthened its international standing through the development and expansion of the higher education system. It sought to highlight its contribution to scientific research and human development. Qatar was able to create a high profile by attracting experts and academics, and engaging in educational projects aimed at sustainable development. In this sense, the development of higher education was the most important cultural tool of the state's soft power. The state established scholarship programs that aimed to benefit from higher education institutions as one of the soft power tools. Scholarship programs

provided an opportunity for students and researchers from many countries. Consequently, it served as a bridge to convey the culture, ideas, and values of Qatari society (Antwi-Boateng, 2013, pp. 41-42).

Qatar successfully invested its resources in higher education institutions; thus, becoming an active tool of soft power. Apart from education, Qatar adopted a long-term investment policy in the scientific research field. Emir Hamad founded the QNRF organization. It supported and sponsored scientific research on sustainable development and innovation in areas such as energy, IT, social sciences, medicine, and the environment (Putri & Surwandono, 2019, p. 257).



**Table 1:** Number of mobile international students studying in Qatar at university level per year.

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

The graph reveals the clear growth in the number of international students enrolled in Qatari universities. The successive increase between 2008 and 2012 indicates the development of higher education institutions within an ambitious national strategy.

### **5.3.2 From Neutrality to Influence**

The years between 2011 and 2014 varied in circumstances, objectives, and tools. Important factors motivated decision-makers to expand and adopt an ambitious strategy. First, the radical changes in the regional political map after the Arab Spring had a profound impact on the transformation of Qatar's foreign policy and its components. Secondly, the state's resources and wealth evolved significantly, as well as its active presence on the international scene, and the development of diplomatic instruments and institutions (Roberts D. B., 2012b, p. 2).

The political and social repercussions of the Arab Spring constituted an opportunity for Qatari expansion. The revolutions created a change in the regional power balance. The influence of traditional powers such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt declined; and new actors emerged. Moreover, Arab societies suffered from major economic problems and political instability. Taking advantage of these fragile conditions, Qatar achieved many gains and imposed its foreign agenda. This phase corresponded with the rise of a new Emir, with new aspirations. Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad sought to move Qatar to a more expansive and influential position (Hüdaverdi, 2020, p. 114).

Emir Tamim has achieved evolution on soft power strategy. He sought to develop the basic interfaces of this strategy. For example, he sought to highlight cultural capabilities by establishing historical museums and national libraries. Which aims to promote the civilized and cultural face of Qatar and keep pace with Western countries in this field. Moreover, he developed the media system into a wide network that dealt with many countries and files. This gave Qatar considerable influence in directing public opinion and engineering political events (Hammond, 2014, pp. 4-5).

The study sought to explain how Qatar increasingly articulated its soft power strategy under the rule of Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani. The thesis emphasizes the role of Emir Tamim in promoting and evolving the role of the state into a regional and international actor. As Tamim Al Thani sought to expand effective tools, the state competed for control and leadership.

The expansion of the foreign policy of soft power created competition with the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, who viewed Qatar's rise as a threat to its regional influence. This competitive situation was a trigger for conflict and crisis, which occurred

in 2014 and 2017. It can be said that at this point Qatar went from neutrality to competition for influence; and developed soft power tools, which the chapter seeks to explore.

### **5.3.2.1 Aljazeera network**

The network, founded in 1996, represented a unique case in the Arab media system. The channel fundamentally changed the objectives, framework, and structure of the Arab information space. From the first moment, Al-Jazeera raised slogans like independence and neutrality. Nonetheless, it is not a secret that Emir Hamad bin Khalifa founded and sponsored the network. Al-Jazeera provided a model of free media with limited political constraints; and elite broadcasters and media professionals joined its staff. The emerging channel gained a wide presence because of exclusive coverage of important events such as the war on Afghanistan, and exclusive reports with controversial political figures (Da Lage, 2019, pp. 54-55).

In a few years, Al-Jazeera was able to expand in terms of construction and influence. Within a few years, Al Jazeera Network 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 expanded its activities, unlike traditional television channels. It 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. Given the influence and wide impact, Al-Jazeera network and its institutions became 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 enabled it to guide and influence Arab public opinion. Therefore, it was able to benefit from Qatar's unlimited financial support to promote the state's policies and culture. Second, it provided an attractive platform for politicians and intellectual elites, gaining their support and defense of the state and its rulers. Third, Al Jazeera network formed a deterrent to counter political and media incitement campaigns

in the last years of Prince Hamad's reign. Moreover, it became the main pillar of Qatari foreign policy, and the state relied on it as part of its negotiation tools with its opponents (Samuel-Azran, 2013, pp. 1297-1298).

Undoubtedly, Al Jazeera played a crucial role in promoting Qatar's policies towards the Arab Spring. The channel created events in Arab capitals that expressed anger towards Arab regimes. The channel became an engine of revolutions and a major supporter of post-Arab Spring governments. The channel 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 are undeniable. Qatar was the subject of repeated accusations, mostly about Al-Jazeera's interference in the internal affairs of neighboring countries, and hosting opponents of Arab regimes to criticize its rulers. In this context, Al Jazeera was a direct motive for many countries to break their diplomatic ties with Qatar, such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt (Cherkaoui T. , 2018a, p. 135).

### **5.3.2.2 Foreign Aids**

Considering the ongoing conflicts around the world and competition for a role in the changing world order, we have to wonder why a country is providing foreign aid, to whom, and to what benefit. Hence, we find the realistic interpretation of international relations imposes itself despite the humanitarian aspect of this aid. Tracing Qatar's foreign policy, the state paid significant attention to the foreign aid system. Undoubtedly, its contribution was not a transitory pursuit; but a realistic and targeted strategy.

Sheikh Tamim Al Thani assumed power in Qatar in 2013, leading to a change in the management of foreign policy. That is in line with several changes in regional events, particularly in Egypt, Iraq, and Syria. Furthermore, Qatar's foreign policy tools evolved significantly within the framework of soft power concepts. Soft power with its diverse tools was a bedrock for the new leadership strategy. Similarly, foreign aid is one of the most important soft tools that provided the dynamic for this strategy. It is one of the tools that transferred soft power to the concept of smart power (Pierini, 2013, p. 2).

Although the foreign aid program 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. The foreign aid strategy evolved considerably in terms of patterns and funding. Indeed, the state's foreign policy and soft power strategy underwent 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 (Bashir & Abdelsalam, 2021, pp. 8-9).

The Arab Spring played an additional role in the growing position of foreign aid within the state's soft power. The opportunity rose to employ it as a tool of attraction and influence. 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).

#### **I. Qatar Foreign Aid Paths:**

Foreign aid followed two basic paths, the official governmental path and that of non-governmental organizations. The two different paths, with a variety of aid patterns, provide space for political tactics and achieve national agenda goals. The first track dealt with cooperation with governments or official institutions of other countries. Qatar focused on mutual partnerships and cooperation in development and production projects. The state 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 in nature and had a wide geographical reach. Regional activities concentrated in conflict areas, such as reconstruction projects in Palestine and Lebanon for hospitals, schools, infrastructure, and development projects (Zureik, 2018, pp. 788-796).

Spending and financial support doubled after Prince Tamim rose to power. The State enhanced soft power through the Qatar Development Fund and its initiatives. Qatar became a major donor to many countries, and participated in regional and international

development projects. Consequently, it gained considerable influence through distinct ties with neighboring and big countries (MOFA, 2019). This track focused on achieving common international objectives in the areas of health, education, infrastructure, and the promotion of security and stability. Furthermore, Qatar granted loans and economic deposits to close countries to help them overcome economic crises. In addition to engaging in investments with allies, Qatar aimed to maintain good relations and winning over the people's hearts and minds (Barakat & Zyck, 2010, pp. 50-51).

The second track, however, relied on a group of non-governmental associations and foundations. Despite the government's sponsorship of these institutions, Qatar tended to highlight them in the form of civil or independent bodies. Humanitarian assistance, relief projects, and support for charitable institutions are at the core of the non-governmental track. At the head of these organizations, Qatar Charity and Qatari Red Crescent, which are unofficial arm of the state, operated 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. Contrary to the government track, non-governmental aid and private associations focused on the Arab world (D'Acunto, 2016, pp. 35-36).

## **II. Qatar Foreign Aid Motives**

It is clear that the QFAP received criticism, with arguments about the hidden motives of foreign aid. In this sense, Qatar's behavior in foreign aid took a realistic and constructive approach. The pursuit of the state's national and strategic interests is the pillar of this realistic approach; whereas the constructivist perspective focuses on human values and standards such as the common relations between Qatar and other countries (Abdullah J. , 2014, p. 5).

Qatar emphasized its humanitarian and moral motives in the foreign aid field. However, the state's pursuit in this area enhances the capabilities and impact of the soft power agenda. The connection of foreign aid to specific political events and interactions emerged. The close connection between Emir Tamim's rise to power and the emergence of Qatar as a major donor in the region and the world is noted, as is the close relationship

between the Arab Spring and targeted support for specific countries and actors. (Salisbury, 2018, p. 2).

- **Promoting Qatar's humanitarian image**

Qatar emphasizes its recognition of the importance of the humanitarian role and intervention in support of other peoples. According to official statements, this is a firm conviction of the leadership and of Qatari society. The state claims that its growing performance in foreign aid stems from the values and norms that characterize Qatari society. The conservative community and socio-cultural background have an important influence in directing QFAP. This refers to the deep-rooted Arab values and Islamic history that value assisting others and human solidarity in general (De Lauri, 2018, p. 3). Apart from the direct political gain, the country achieved numerous gains from humanitarian aid and relief efforts; most notably promoting its value system and community culture, and improve its regional and international image. The gains included making good impressions among the Arab public by supporting the most needy regions. Implementing health, developmental projects, and supporting poor families were ways to win hearts and minds.

Thus, foreign aid played a vital role as a counter tool to political and media campaigns against Qatar, especially after the Arab Spring. Despite the focus of aid on Arab countries such as Syria, Palestine, and Yemen, the distribution included Asian and European countries. This contributed to the soft power strategy, aiming to achieve influence expansion and acceptability in the international arena (Turner, 2019, p. 284).

- **Achieve distinctive brand and political interests**

Donors in contemporary politics seek to achieve maximum benefit from foreign aid programs. Qatar adopted an obvious foreign aid policy as part of its soft power strategy, especially after Sheikh Tamim came to power. Data tracking official spending on aid indicates a significant increase in the years after 2013 over the period before (Apodaca, 2017, pp. 7-8).

Events in the Arab region after the Arab Spring created an environment conducive to the implementation of Qatar's soft power strategy. The opportunity was favorable to the expansion of relief and humanitarian work, and to aiding peoples and Governments.

Political conflicts and the ensuing widespread upheavals in societies had repercussions on the human and economic situation. Thus, it provided a conducive environment for implementing the foreign aid strategy, and achieving the strategic gains it aspired to (Momani & Ennis , 2012, pp. 615-616).

The objectives included making allies at the international and regional levels, and strengthening relations with them. Qatar intervened to support many countries around the world, including the USA and major countries, especially during natural disasters. It built partnerships in development projects, infrastructure, and financing plans for essential facilities. Accordingly, Qatar ensured the friendship and confidence of the peoples and rulers of countries that are influential in international politics. The state intensified its efforts after the Arab Spring in the countries of revolutions, through financial support for the new governments, in a manner like creating loyalties (Villanger, 2007, pp. 240-241). Secondly, it sought to increment regional and international prominence to influence many events and countries. The Arab Spring and its consequences shaped new features of the political environment in the Middle East. In this sense, political influence and hegemony began to move and provide the opportunity to compete for traditional seats.

Consequently, it became favorable for Qatar to seek a prominent role at the regional and international levels. Qatar realized the imperative of possessing different tools to emerge as a major player in place of the traditional powers. The deteriorating economic and humanitarian situation and the rise of new regimes provided an opportunity for QFAP. This policy paved a solid relationship and alliance with new Arabic governments, creating a tool of attraction and a path of influence (Roberts D. B., 2012b, p. 4).

Qatar achieved success and gained allies and influence in many countries in the region. How foreign aid was distributed and those implementing its projects showed the close link between aid and Qatar's political interests. Moreover, it enhanced its presence on the international scene through partnerships with countries and international organizations such as the UN. Qatar has achieved its foreign policy objectives through the approach of aid diplomacy and humanitarian diplomacy (Kharas, 2015, pp. 13-14).

Qatar's political goals included ensuring national security as well as maintaining society coherence and the state's internal stability. According to Qatar's vision, foreign aid and financial support to other countries create automated immunity from external risks.

Apparently, the distribution and increase of aid targeted conflict areas; as it represented a tool for influencing the parties to settle disputes. This policy aimed to keep regional crises away from Qatar's borders, and to sustain internal security. In addition, Qatar engaged in projects with organizations such as the WHO, UNHCR, and UNICEF to contribute towards international peace and security (De Lauri, 2018, p. 3).

#### **5.4 Saudi Arabia backlash to the evolution of Qatari soft power**

Turmoil and instability characterize the relationship between Qatar and Saudi Arabia. The conflict between them took on a geographical character with Saudi Arabia's desire to control Qatar's natural wealth. The struggle began to take another turn with the rise of Emir Hamad to power, as he designed an independent foreign policy based on a soft power strategy. Emir Hamad sought to avoid confrontation with traditional powers and close neighbors. He pursued quiet diplomacy and a policy of neutrality to build the state profile. Certainly, the rise of Emir Tamim after the Arab Spring played a remarkable role in the development of soft power strategies and tools. He adopted an ambitious policy aimed at moving from building the brand to influence and control (Cherkaoui T. , 2014, pp. 25-26). In recent years, Qatar emerged as an active power in international politics, relying on a soft power strategy. That enhanced its influence in many countries and many issues. Saudi Arabia translated this rise in state power and policies as a rival to its traditional influence in the region. Saudi Arabia viewed the expansion of diplomatic relations and the alliance with Islamists as a challenge and hostile action from Qatar (Ulrichsen, 2012b, p. 2). In this context, the thesis contributes to providing a perspective on how Saudi Arabia dealt with the emergence of Qatar as an influential actor dependent on soft power. Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries interpreted the expansion of Qatar's soft power policy as an imminent threat.

According to Saudi Arabia's perspective, soft power tools such as media, foreign aid, and sports mega-events have become a potential threat. Saudi Arabia and some of its allies have worked to limit Qatar's role and impede its regional and international expansion. Saudi Arabia adopted a policy of confrontation and sanctions against Qatar to impede further expansion. The strain of relationships between Qatar and the GCC is because of

its expansion and influence. This is evident in many diplomatic crises such as 2014 and 2017 (Miller, 2019, p. 39).



## CHAPTER VI

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### **6.1 Introduction to The GCC Crisis**

The GCC was established in the 1980s and included six Gulf state members. These states faced common regional and international interventions and threats due to their vast petroleum wealth and weak military capabilities. Therefore, the main motivation for the Council's formation was to protect the national security of those States and to confront common threats and challenges. The Council served other common objectives, such as the consolidation of community relations, economic cohesion, and maximizing the use of resources (Ulrichsen, 2018, p. 50).

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 experienced many crises. Despite the Gulf countries' attempt to establish mutual workspace through the Council, political crises erupted in recent years between Qatar and on one side and Saudi Arabia and the UAE on the other. In 2017, it became clear that the signs of a major crisis loomed, when the UAE launched defamation and incitement campaigns against Qatar and its foreign policy (Macaron, 2018, pp. 106-107).

On June 5, 2017, the Gulf was on a date with a watershed event in its political history. A massive crisis erupted between Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt, on one side and Qatar on the other. The Quartet issued a statement declaring the severance of diplomatic relations with Qatar. They also imposed a full blockade and Qatar to isolate it from the world (Harb, 2018, p. 13).

The crisis was not the product of the moment. It had geopolitical roots that set the scene for the confrontation. However, it caused a severe shock and confusion to the Qatari regime and to the people of the region. Over the past three and a half years of the embargo against Qatar, the region suffered numerous consequences. The effects of this crisis were not limited to the GCC States and the Middle East. They extended to affect the network of international relations. Undoubtedly, the Gulf is a vital territory for many actors in

international politics due to its geographical location and energy reserves. Moreover, the Gulf States have international alliances with dominant countries such as the United States. Hence, this crisis was a major concern for the international community; and many researchers focused on it (Katzman, 2016, pp. 13-15).

There are many arguments about the real causes of this rift; and some studies sought to explore mutual accusations. Furthermore, researchers sought to clarify the effects of the crisis and the gains and losses of each party. This chapter aims to clarify the real roots behind the outbreak of the siege crisis in 2017. Considering Qatar's soft power as the most important pillar of foreign policy, this chapter explores and provides a discussion on the role it played in the crisis. The dissertation turns its focus to the data of the recent reconciliation agreement, and to answer the question of whether it is a sustainable solution or temporary appeasement.

## **6.2 The roots and reasons of the crisis**

The Gulf crisis erupted when Saudi and Emirati media published news and statements attributed to Prince Tamim of Qatar. These statements pertained to issues involving Iran, Hamas, and Hezbollah, allegedly published on the Qatari News Agency. The crisis escalated until 5 June, when Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt announced the severance of diplomatic relations with Qatar. The Qatari authorities denied these statements, emphasized the hacking of the official news agency, and the broadcasting of fabricated statements. Nonetheless, the Quartet took unilateral action against Qatar. This coincided with a political and media campaign sponsored by some Gulf countries. Many articles funded by the UAE and Saudi Arabia were published in American media that aimed to discredit Qatar and attack its Emir (Jones, 2019, pp. 1389-1390).

Regardless of whether the statements were fabricated or real, it is clear that there was a decision regarding the blockade of Qatar. Media campaigns launched before the publication and continued steadily thereafter. In fact, these statements and media campaigns were just apparent causes of the crisis. 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 of the crisis (Allagui & Akdenizli, 2019, pp. 1288-1291).

### **6.2.1 The Role of Soft Power Tools in the Crisis:**

Emir Hamad bin Khalifa contributed to articulate the foreign policy of soft power. He succeeded in building the features of the state's strategy, and transforming the state's economic resources into effective soft power tools. He aimed to strengthen sovereignty and independence at the level of foreign policy, and to get out of the historical dependence on Saudi Arabia. However, he pursued quiet and balanced policies, adapting to the power balances in the region. Emir Hamad focused on protecting the state from external threats and ensuring internal security and stability through two paths. The first is a military and political alliance with a superpower such as the USA, which represents the country's protector against security threats. The second path is building neutral diplomacy that avoids conflicts and seeks to win friends. In addition, Qatar was active in mediating and settling regional disputes (Dorsey, 2013, pp. 14-21).

However, the last years of Hamad's reign and the reign of Emir Tamim, witnessed a break from conventional foreign policy. The foreign policy of soft power underwent undeniable change with the reformulation of objectives and expansion of strategy and tools, which gave the state a new position in international politics. The state gained a high profile and enhanced its influence, which enabled it to play a role different from the policy of neutrality and mediation. Clearly, Qatar emerged as a major actor in the region and moved from neutrality to the pursuit of control and leadership. It 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).

Some tools within the soft power strategy played a controversial role before the crisis erupted. First, Qatar 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, and the relationship with non-state actors such as Hezbollah, Hamas, and 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. Clearly, the relationship between Islamist groups and Qatar is a major state approach. This relationship became strategic within the soft power strategy. Qatar provided 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 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 took 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 relied on it steadily during the last two decades. Al Jazeera network emerged as the most important media tool, and a crucial pillar in the soft power strategy. Al Jazeera evolved over the course of 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 and influencing Arab public opinion on many issues. Undoubtedly, the role it played in covering the events of the Arab Spring created geopolitical tensions. In addition, Al Jazeera provided space for opponents of Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and allowed criticism of their policies. Therefore, it was always a cause for Saudi Arabia's criticism and conflict with Qatar and its foreign policy (Abdul-Nabi, 2017, pp. 8-9).

Obviously, 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 a threat to its influence and an attempt to compete with it for the region's leadership. The Qatari soft power strategy 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 adopted policies different from Saudi Arabia and the UAE, such as Qatar's support of the Arab Spring revolutions and the values of freedom and democracy.

The rise of the young princes, with anti-Islamist, secular-leaning views, Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), and Mohamed bin Zayed (MBZ) to power, played a role in intensifying the competition and conflict. Under the view that Qatari foreign policy of soft power clashed with the policies of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia sought to obstruct Qatar's efforts to expand and increase its soft power influence. It became clear from the Quartet's demands in the 2017 crisis that the main objective is to besiege the Qatari agenda and subjugate its tools. The Quartet states used Qatari soft power tools as pretexts to impose blockades and sanctions (Miller, 2019, p. 8).

### **6.2.2 Hegemony struggle**

Qatar rose dramatically in recent years as an active force in regional politics. It became a key player in many important events in the Middle East. Qatar managed to overcome two fundamental obstacles in its contemporary politics. The first was to eliminate the long dependence on Saudi Arabia and design its own foreign policy. The second was to overcome the limitations of area, population, and military strength.

Qatar adopted a strategy that enabled it to transform its natural and economic resources into potent soft power tools. This success in developing the capabilities of the state motivated a more expansive foreign policy. In the late 1990's and early 2000's, Qatar competed with traditional powers in the Arab region, such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia. This rivalry was low-key for a while in the era of Hamad bin Khalif. Afterwards, it erupted into a feature of Gulf politics. Indeed, Qatar's emergence in international politics provoked and motivated these countries to take measures to limit Qatar's rise. Clearly, the prominence of the Qatari presence in the region had negative repercussions on the relationship with Egypt and Saudi Arabia, which always sought to control Qatar and its wealth (Moncunill, 2015, p. 9).

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 conflict resolution. Although neutrality was a fundamental feature of state policy at that time, Saudi Arabia viewed Qatar's growing power as a threat to its regional role. Thus, the Gulf region entered successive crises, where turmoil became the feature of the relationship between the two countries. The crises included Saudi Arabia's

1996 coup attempt in Qatar, and the severing diplomatic relations in 2002 (Bianco & Stansfield, 2018, pp. 613-621).

Abruptly, the struggle for dominance entered a more complex phase with the rise of Emir Tamim to rule, as Qatari policy took 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 coalition formed, led by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt after its army turned on President Mohamed Morsi. The rift between this axis and Qatar widened; and political clashes and rivalry turned into an open confrontation on all issues. In this sense, the siege crisis of 2017 is a stark allusion to a history of conflict. In other words, the embargo was the sign of a flaming confrontation in the Gulf despite the fact that the Arab Quartet promoted for many justifications. Indeed, this axis consider that Qatar's foreign policy expanded to an extent that threatens their interests and regional dominance (Sadiki & Saleh, 2020, p. 4).

It seems that the 2017 crisis was an explosion of ongoing tension between these countries and Qatar. The Arab quartet believed that Qatar exceeded its size and role. The confrontation initiated with Saudi Arabia's ambitions to control Qatar's natural wealth and subdue its foreign policy. After that, Saudi Arabia and its allies moved from a struggle of history and geography to a struggle of politics and hegemony to impede Qatari expansion and influence. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt adopted a hostile approach towards Qatar after the Arab Spring and the rise of Qatari influence in the region. The distortion and sanction approaches were the most available options in dealing with Qatar (Macaron, 2018, pp. 102-103).

### **6.2.3 Ideological disagreement and political alliances**

Despite the shared religion, culture, and value system among the GCC countries, the 2017 diplomatic crisis revealed deep ideological differences. The boycott Quartet dealt with the project of political Islam as an imminent threat to their rule and community. Furthermore, they adopted strict measures against groups that represent this ideology. On the other hand, Qatar adopted an open and positive policy towards Islamists. Furthermore, it established alliances with the parties and groups that belong to that ideology (Dacrema, 2013, p. 3).

The Muslim Brotherhood spread over the past 30 years in Saudi Arabia and the UAE and has many institutions therein. It maintained good relations with the governments of Gulf States. This presence was compatible with conservative society, despite the Gulf's adoption of the Salafi ideology. After the Arab Spring, the Muslim Brotherhood and its affiliated parties rose to power in many countries. This was a watershed in the history of Ikhwan's relationship with Saudi and UAE. Obviously, the abrupt rise brought dismay and concern for these monarchy authoritarian states. This coincided with a change in the value system and openness in the societies of the Gulf (Khatib, 2014, pp. 12-13).

Qatar sought to build a broad alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood before the Arab Spring, which expanded afterwards. 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 leaders in Qatar, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia emerged. The crown prince MBZ, who controls power in the Emirates, strongly opposes the ideas of the Islamists; and adopts views that contradict them. The ideological aspect constituted a motive for a struggle against the influence of the Muslim 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.

These countries sought to limit the Muslim Brotherhood's power, and considered Qatar's alliance with them a threat to their national security. Saudi Arabia and the UAE took extensive measures and sanctions against Ikhwan's institutions. They launched media campaigns to discredit Qatar and incite against its alliance with Muslim Brotherhood. Among the most prominent of these measures was support for the military coup against President Mohamed Morsi in Egypt, support for counter-revolution in Libya and Tunisia, and the diplomatic crisis against Qatar in 2014 (Ghaddar, 2013, pp. 2-3).

Collectively, the divergent attitudes of the GCC countries towards Ikhwan were one of the most important reasons for the boycott crisis in 2017. In this sense, this disparity has an

ideological nature, in which Qatar followed a pragmatic approach to dealing with them. In contrast, Saudi Arabia and the UAE chose the path of confrontation.

#### **6.2.4 Qatar's relationship with Saudi Arabia's traditional opponent, Iran**

Qatar faces a major challenge in regional politics that combines politics with geography. Certainly, this renewing challenge is one of the main sources of tension between Qatar and the rest of the Gulf States. The location of Qatar between the two dominant forces in the region causes continuous political turmoil, and significantly impacted the 2017 GCC crisis. Qatar shares land borders as well as social and cultural relations with Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, it shares a huge natural gas stock with Iran across the Gulf. However, Saudi Arabia and the UAE deal with Iran as a strategic enemy and a threat to national security in the Gulf region. In addition, they built military and political alliances to counter Iran's influence in the region. In contrast, Qatar established political and commercial relations with Iran; and adopted neutrality in the conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran. In this context, the background of the conflict is linked is the historical sovereignty dispute between the UAE and Iran over three islands in the Gulf. On the other hand, the issue of the ideological conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran plays a role in provoking conflicts in the region. It is a dispute that extends across important countries in the region such as Yemen, Bahrain, and Lebanon. On the contrary, Qatar and Iran share political alliances with non-state actors in the region such as Hezbollah and Hamas (Dudley, 2017).

The Qatari-Iranian relations have been a reason for constant criticism from Saudi Arabia and other countries. Saudi Arabia and the UAE accuse Qatar of tampering with Gulf security. They launched international incitement campaigns against its relationship with Iran. Similarly, the contradiction in building political alliances was a major source of the ongoing tension between Saudi Arabia and Qatar that led to the 2017 crisis. Noticeably, the 2017 Gulf crisis began with the hacking of the Qatari news agency and the publication of news concerning Qatar's relationship with Iran. In addition, one of Quartet's 13 demands was to break ties with Iran and its allies. Undoubtedly, the Iran issue was a major concern for Saudi Arabia; so it dealt decisively with Qatar in this regard. It sought to employ the conflict between the USA and Iran in its battle with Qatar. Saudi Arabia aimed

to link the war on terrorism with Qatar's relationship with Iran to gain support from President Trump (Zaccara, 2019, p. 4).

### **6.3 The challenges facing Qatar and how it handled the 2017 blockade crisis**

Small states face profound challenges in contemporary politics. Despite Qatar's economic power, which depends on natural gas and oil reserves, the state faces the same challenges of small area, small population, and weak military force. Moreover, Qatar is located in a turbulent territory amidst a political reality full of conflict. The state arose between Saudi Arabia and Iran, two powers competing for dominance in the region.

The state suffered from the greed for its land and wealth, from its neighbors and Western countries. Qatar managed to overcome these obstacles with minimal losses. Subsequently, Qatar faced challenges to achieve autonomy in foreign policy under Emir Hamad's rule. The state faced major differences, especially with Saudi Arabia, and experienced numerous diplomatic and security crises. Nonetheless, Qatar succeeded in overcoming this stage, relying on a balanced foreign policy as well as military and political alliances with superpowers (Miller & Verhoeven, 2020, pp. 12-18).

The Arab spring phase and beyond brought on new challenges. It witnessed a prominent rise of Qatar, and a shift in motives and goals. In this era, the state formulated a new foreign policy strategy. The state adopted a national agenda aimed at increasing its role and influencing the international landscape. Undoubtedly, those policies brought enormous challenges, plunging the State into thorny conflicts.

Apparently, the 2017 crisis is the most prominent challenge facing Qatar's foreign policy in recent decades. The crisis involved a complex set of economic, social, and political problems. The Arab Quartet siege placed unusual pressure on the Qatari authority. It is undeniable that the state and society in Qatar suffered harm from the measures and sanctions. Land and sea closures caused serious damage to the economy, putting food security at risk. Threats from the Quartet reached the extent of a military confrontation (Wahyuni, 2018, pp. 86-87).

The initial phase of the crisis shook the Qatari leadership. Despite this shock and pressure, the state quickly restored its balance and adopted a viable strategy to face the consequences of the crisis. Indeed, the 2017 crisis represented a major challenge for Qatar.

Although it illustrated the vulnerabilities that face small states, the crisis demonstrated Qatar's capability to cope with the aftermath of the boycott. The Qatari leadership established a resilience strategy that improved its position in the face of a years-long crisis (Baabood, 2017, pp. 13-19).

The development of soft power tools was one of the crucial paths in this strategy. Qatar recognized the importance of soft power in achieving an ambitious national agenda. Although the Quartet states viewed Qatar's soft power policy as a threat and competition for their influence in the region, it considered this strategy to be the main pillar of the power struggle in the region. This enabled the country to overcome obstacles, neutralize several adversaries, and gain political support from important countries in the international arena. The resilience strategy included multi-hubs aimed at deterring the Arab quartet and protecting national interests (Fuller, 2017).

#### **6.4 Resilience Strategy**

The foreign policy of soft power was the cornerstone of Qatar's resilience strategy. The state relied on soft power tools to address the challenges of the crisis. This strategy enabled the state to overcome the embargo and its effects. Although Qatar possessed soft power tools built over previous years, some innovative tools emerged after the crisis. These tools played a prominent role in supporting state resilience (Felsch, 2016, p. 4).

##### **6.4.1 The Evolving Soft Power Strategy**

Qatar pursued a diplomatic approach within a smart strategy based on active soft power tools. Thus, the state was able to meet the challenges of the crisis without slipping into losing battles. The state used its resources to create soft power tools to face the threats posed by the blockade countries. In addition, Qatar developed new tools in the cultural, sports, and economic fields. These tools included directing investments in specific countries and sectors to gain friends and support from countries, and sponsorship contracts for world sports championships and football teams (EIEtreby, 2015, p. 37).

The state created political and media lobbies to promote state interests in Western countries. In addition, it provided financial support to scientific research institutions and human rights organizations to improve its image in the international arena. It expanded its

media network at the regional and international levels. Qatar was able to transform Al Jazeera network into a weapon to counter incitement campaigns. The media organization attracted global figures, writers, and journalists to promote the state's perspective and defend its position in this crisis (Roberts D. B., 2017, p. 8).

#### **6.4.1.1 Political and Media Lobbies**

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

Qatar supported, sponsored, and implemented partnerships with Washington research centers such as the Washington Institute, Center for American Progress, and Atlantic Council. Qatar enhanced its relationship with public relations companies in the United States, such as the Portland Company in 2014, which promoted Qatar's policies and organized meetings between Qatari officials and members of Congress and the US administration.

##### **I. Patterns of lobbies**

Within a few years, Qatar built a vast network of high-impact lobbies. The patterns of these groups varied mainly between the political and media spheres

- **Media lobbies**

In addition to Al Jazeera network, Qatar supported many local and global media outlets. With the Arab Spring, Qatar sought to benefit from the development of social media through state-sponsored activists and social media pages. It sponsored popular media figures, produced many TV programs, and provided significant financial incentives. One of the targets was the Brookings Centre, a research institution consisting of writers and journalists from several Western countries. Furthermore, Qatar is a stakeholder in the Guardian newspaper, and established the Middle East Eye site to expand its influence through a media lobby. In addition, Qatar developed partnerships with media

organizations, newspapers, and TV channels that have a wide influence in Western countries, including the USA, France, and Britain. In this sense, Qatar established an extensive network of 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).

The network formed a defensive wall against Qatar's opponents and a deterrent in the campaigns against it after the Arab Spring. In Western countries like France, Britain, and the USA, Qatar hosted several journalists and media professionals. Qatar established media corporations in London to form a strong media network, such as the New Arabi newspaper and Al-Arabi TV, and granted these institutions incentives and financial sponsorships. In addition, Qatar signed agreements with companies and public relations and promotion offices. In Arab countries, the state provided jobs for many media figures from Arab Spring countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, and Syria (ElEtreby, 2015, pp. 44-46).

- **Political Lobbies**

Political fluctuations ravaged the Middle East after the Arab Spring. Qatar moved from neutrality, exhibition policy, and a safety zone to competition and broad influence. It expanded soft power tools to achieve an ambitious foreign policy strategy. Qatar realized the importance of political lobbies in the soft power strategy. Achieving the state's foreign interests required an influential arm in the countries that have political weight internationally and regionally. Building an indirect political alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood is the most prominent regional lobby model (Felsch, 2016, p. 24).

The Muslim Brotherhood is the largest political party in most Arab countries. It dominated elections and power after the Arab Spring. Consequently, Qatar sought to support them and ally with them to achieve 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 used them as a pressure card in the political struggle (Roberts D. , 2014, p. 90).

Qatar's foreign policy entered a different phase, with profound changes. This was clear in their direct intervention in support of political parties after the Arab Spring, and involvement in the influence struggle. Without a doubt, this pushed policymakers towards securing support from superpowers. They expended great effort to build a wide network of relations, and establish political lobbies in countries that influence international politics. The state's policies after the Arab Spring caused disputes with Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt. They launched incitement campaigns against Qatar in the West and the United States. Incitement 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 there. Qatari relations in the US included members of Congress as well as members of US presidential candidate campaigns. It also sought to connect with influential state governors and senators. Qatari lobby activity increased after the 2017 crisis. In this context, Qatar sought to strengthen its relationship with politicians and members of Congress in the United States, such as the relationship with Senator Lindsey Graham, one of the most prominent Republican faces in Congress, who visited Qatar to participate in the Doha Forum in 2019.

The Qatari Lobby relied on a smart strategy of reaching out to U.S. states and strengthening business relations with them. Through this strategy, it was able to win members of Congress. Strengthening trade relations meant increasing the satisfaction of the population of these states, and thus the rate of the re-election of their representative members. After the siege crisis with the Arab Quartet, the Qatari lobby intensified its activity and sought to avoid a negative attitude from President Trump's administration (Roark, 2018, p. 19).

## **II. Objectives:**

The Qatari leadership relied on lobbies as a soft means possessing flexibility and strength in tactics and goals. The Qatari lobby goals included three main components. The first is improving state image. It is the basic role of lobbies, through promoting state policies and

responding to accusations and incitement campaigns. Secondly, they worked to influence political decisions by contributing to forming public opinion, putting pressure on decision-making circles, and securing supportive opinions and positions for the state's interest. Thirdly, they aimed to expand 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.

While the lobbies added influence capabilities at the level of defending the state interests within the influential countries in the international arena, work in the human rights agenda was a weapon to defend the state's reputation against smear campaigns, and promoted state policies in this area of growing importance.

#### **6.4.1.2 Establishing and sponsoring Human Rights Organizations**

In recent years, attention to human rights issues increased owing to changes in international policy, numerous inter-state conflicts, and unrest within societies. The events of the Arab Spring have been a central point in the democratic transition in the Arab region. The performance of Arab regimes on human rights issues became the focus of attention of dominant countries and NGOs. Human rights became one of the elements of assessing countries and classifying regimes as democratic or authoritarian. Moreover, this field became an extortion tool among countries.

Qatar accorded special priority to human rights in its post-Arab Spring foreign policy strategy. It sought to improve the image of the state, and keep pace with the democratic developments of the region. In addition, it worked to fulfill its obligations in the international scene and to official law institutions. The new ruler sought to improve 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 experienced a major evolution. The National Human Rights Commission received financial and administrative independence. Qatar emphasized its efforts to uphold the rule of law and promote human rights values within society. It established a Human Rights Commission within the

Ministry of the Interior and Labor, and organized numerous law seminars. Qatar received criticism for the human rights situation, particularly about labor laws and the living conditions of migrant workers. It faced accusations of violation 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 played a role in escalating rights campaigns against the Qatari government. These countries funded law and media institutions to launch accusations and discredit Qatar in the human rights issues (Cherkaoui T. , 2018b, pp. 13-20).

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

Al-Marri sought to build partnerships with international and European institutions working in the field of human rights, which formed an extensive network to deter counter-campaigns. Several media meetings responded to doubts about Qatar's human rights performance, the issue of workers, and their living conditions and salaries, especially pertinent to the World Cup and the circumstances surrounding construction. Similarly, Al-Marri sponsored several Arab human rights institutions, which worked on human rights issues against the Quartet countries; and provided technical and financial support. The Qatari leadership relied on him to promote its human rights policy, and respond to the accusations of the boycotting countries.

#### **6.4.2 Political and military alliance with Turkey**

Qatar resorted to Turkey to conclude a political alliance with a regional power of wide influence and anti-quartet policies. This alliance included a mutual defense agreement and the establishment of a military base in Doha. The military and the political alliance was a prominent factor in deterring security and military aggression against the country. Thus, it ensured the protection of its internal security and provided it with an environment conducive to diplomatic actions (Aras & Akpınar, 2017, p. 4).

Indeed, the Turkish attitude towards the crisis is the most decisive. The country made a political decision to support Qatar. Conversely, European and American backlash was hesitant and ineffective. Despite conservative policy and careful intervention in the region's conflicts, Turkey intervened early, both politically and militarily. The Turkish president initially sought to play a mediating role between Saudi Arabia and Qatar. The Arab Quartet sanctions against Qatar increased risks in the region, leading to a change in the Turkish role from neutrality to direct intervention.

Turkey's behavior towards the Gulf crisis arose from two main perspectives. The first concerns tense relations between Turkey on the one hand and Saudi Arabia and the UAE on the other, because the two countries allegedly supported the failed coup in Turkey in 2016, according to Turkish official statements (Hearst, 2016). Conversely, Emir Tamim bin Hamad supported the government of President Erdogan at the time. The second is related to the common orientations and visions of Turkey and Qatar towards Middle East issues, such as the Arab Spring, support for Islamists, and support for Hamas.

Qatar made tangible gains from the strategic alliance with Turkey. On the economic front, Turkey provided essential goods and products to Qatar to overcome the initial shock of the blockade. Moreover, the military and security support from Turkey formed a bulwark against the military and security threats of the Quartet. On the other hand, Qatar strengthened its investments in Turkey and supported the Turkish economy and currency by participating in the stock exchange and mega projects (الرننيسي, محمود، 2020، صفحة 288)

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

#### 7.1 Conclusion

Qatari foreign policy in recent years seems to be in an ongoing battle between ambition and obstacles. Qatar faces geopolitical challenges in terms of its limited size and population density. Moreover, Qatar is in a volatile security and political environment, plagued by a struggle for domination between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Although the state suffered from unfavorable conditions, it sought to build an ambitious foreign policy since the era of Emir Hamad. The foreign policy of soft power emerged as the cornerstone for achieving the state's agenda in regional and international politics (Peterson, 2006, p. 739). The dissertation concluded that the Qatari state passed two basic challenges in contemporary politics. Emir Hamad successfully confronted the difficulties that faced the state in the founding era, which focused on the survival struggle amid a geopolitical environment rife with conflicts and threats. Qatar realized that achieving independence and stability at that stage required building effective power resources and tools. Qatar successfully employed its economic potential to create soft power tools. In this context, it ensured the state's stability in the face of security and political obstacles externally and internally; and it managed to survive.

After this era, Qatar moved from state survival to challenging for dominance and influence. Emir Hamad and then his son Tamim Al Thani formulated an ambitious soft power foreign policy. They relied on developing more decisive and effective soft power sources and tools. Clearly, the foreign policy of soft power decisively contributed to Qatar's transition from state survival to regional power.

To achieve foreign policy objectives, it formulated a strategy convenient to the circumstances of each era. Soft power tools played the most prominent role in this strategy. Qatar relied on a sustainable plan to develop its natural and economic resources into a variety of soft power fronts. Qatari foreign policy went through two basic phases in the last two decades. The objectives of the initial era included security, autonomy, and survival in global politics. The second aimed to achieve the national brand and influence. Qatar achieved remarkable integration between the objectives of each political era and

soft power tools. Neutrality and dispute avoidance marked the first stage, which included soft power tools such as mediation, diplomacy, media, and high education institutions. The second era included tools such as foreign aid, lobbying, alliance with Islamic groups, and the evolution of the Al Jazeera 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, which provided a convenient opportunity for the expansion of the soft power foreign policy. The Qatari state created more influential soft power tools and sought to compete for regional leadership. The Gulf States did not overlook Qatar's expansionist policy. In this sense, Saudi Arabia interpreted Qatari influence as competition of its regional role and a threat to its traditional influence. Emir Tamim redesigned the foreign policy of its soft power after his rise to power. He articulated a subtle and ambitious strategy, and did not back off the expansionist agenda, despite the challenges that the state faced during his reign. Qatar stepped up as an influential regional power and a key factor in international politics. Consequently, tension and conflict emerged as a feature of the relationship between Qatar and the GCC States; especially after supporting the Muslim Brotherhood governments in Egypt, and Qatar's general approach to Arab Spring (Hammond, 2014, pp. 7-8).

The dispute escalated into a regional struggle for domination. Qatar's wide influence through the foreign policy of soft power was 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 concluded the link between growing Qatari soft power and the outbreak of the Gulf crisis. 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 confirm this. It is clear that the battle is to deter Qatar and impose sanctions against its growing 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 (Negri, 2018, pp. 245-246).

Although the diplomatic boycott posed risks and challenges to Qatar, the state never capitulated. Qatar demonstrated its ability to overcome the crisis and its economic, political, and media impact. In this context, the country successfully built a strategy of resilience and deterrence, which relied on an impressive policy of soft power. The Qatari foreign policy of soft power formed a cornerstone in the state, enhancing its position in the regional and international scene. Similarly, the expansion of soft power served as a trigger for the 2017 crisis. The Qatari state faced the challenges of the crisis with a resilience strategy. Crucially, soft power tools formed the pillars of this strategy. Indeed, this strategy enabled Qatar to win the siege battle (Baabood, 2017, pp. 5-7).

### **7.2 Gulf disputes; Permanent solution, or temporary appeasement?**

It has been more than three years since the blockade crisis struck GCC unity. Although this region went through many upheavals, the 2017 crisis created obstacles that are difficult to overcome. Given its threats, this crisis was not only regional; but spread to the international scene. Many efforts aimed at mediating and seeking to bridge the rift between neighboring states. Saudi Arabia and its allies did not respond to the settlement efforts, insisting on the 13 demands. The Quartet submitted a list of demands that include the severing of Qatar's relationship with Iran, the closure of Al Jazeera, the closure of relief institutions, and the cessation of interference in the internal affairs of the Gulf States (Cherkaoui M. , 2020, p. 14).

On the other hand, Qatar faced the repercussions of the crisis, resisting any attempts to blackmail it. Nevertheless, Qatar stressed the acceptance of mediation and any attempts to end the crisis. Actually, Kuwait played the most prominent role in the quest to resolve the conflict. Since the early days of the Gulf crisis, the role of Kuwait and its late prince, Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah, emerged to mediate and end the crisis, visiting Doha on June 8, 2017, after visiting Saudi Arabia and the Emirates.

Kuwait formulated several initiatives for reconciliation between the parties, and remained neutral throughout the crisis period. These efforts continued throughout the crisis years, but did not have an adequate environment. The escalation between the parties continued; and the conflict spread to regional and international issues. In addition, the USA and the

Trump administration's role in the crisis was generally negative. Despite the considerable Kuwaiti efforts over the past three years, there was no real progress in terms of resolution. Qatar appeared to uphold its sovereignty and the independence of its decision. The embargo countries bet on regional and international variables to weaken Qatar's position and lead its acceptance of their demands. However, the contrary seems to have happened. (Kabalan M. , 2018b, pp. 25-26).

It is clear after these years that the Quartet failed to achieve the objectives of their campaign against Qatar. Despite its deterrence and resilience strategy to survive the blockade, Qatar suffered the economic, social, and political repercussions of the blockade, as well as the negative consequences for the state's reputation and its regional agenda.

It seems that the Saudi leadership faced many challenges during the last three years. Many policies changed with the rise of Prince Mohammed bin Salman, and his quest to rule. The kingdom entered a new era of social and economic openness, while political repression increased. The young prince was the subject of accusations from many countries. Furthermore, Western criticism of the human rights file in Saudi Arabia intensified. The country also failed in the war of Yemen. The international scene is undergoing a realignment, especially with President Biden's rise to rule in the USA. Saudi Arabia lost a key ally and supporter of its approach against Qatar as Donald Trump lost the US election. In addition, the regional circumstance that coincided with the conflict changed. In this context, the country sought to settle some of the challenges facing its foreign policy (Pradhan, 2018, pp. 439-440).

I claim that political shifts in the region and the changes in the international scene paved the way for the efforts to end the embargo crisis. Meanwhile, Kuwait's endeavors over the past few years succeeded in concluding a reconciliation agreement that ended the quartet boycott of Doha. Kuwait announced that a meeting of GCC countries in the city of Al-Ula. In January 2021, Qatar met with other Gulf countries and agreed to end the diplomatic boycott and lift the blockade. Official statements paint the scene as a reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Qatar approved by the rest of GCC countries (MacDonald, 2021).

Despite the importance of resolving the current crisis for all parties and the positive implications for political stability in the region, the question that arises here is to what

extent is this agreement sufficient in ensuring balanced and calm relations. Does it carry deep procedures and solutions to resolve the causes of the conflict? Alternatively, is it just a temporary retreat due to the fluctuations of global politics?

The Quartet did not achieve its objectives. Despite the harsh sanctions and the campaign against it, Doha did not comply. Rather, it seems to have emerged stronger, with success in preserving independence and the ability to meet challenges. It seems that the Al-Ula Agreement is a political truce that does not have clear components to resolve the roots of the dispute (Wintour, 2021).

A fundamental solution to the disagreement between Qatar and its neighbors seems far off. The roots of the conflict are difficult to remedy, as they relate to the structure and convictions of governing institutions in the Gulf countries. Moreover, Qatar's ambitious foreign policy is likely to continue to clash with Saudi Arabia's quest to remain the sole dominant power in the region. In addition, the ideological and political disagreement between the UAE and Qatar persist. Furthermore, the political alliances of Qatar and the current regime in Egypt are conflicting (Kinninmont, 2019, pp. 5-6).

To sum up, Qatar may concede, and the blockade States retreat to resolve the current crisis. However, that 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 years. Qatar aims 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 is likely to seek further expansion of its 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. Qatari relations with Iran, Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood still stand, despite the fact that 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 created new soft power tools that contributed to the resilience strategy that overcame the crisis. On the other hand, with MBZ in power in the UAE and MBS in Saudi Arabia,

both strong men with regional and international ambitions, it seems that the domination and influence struggles will erupt from time to time.

The historical roots as well as 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 superpowers, particularly the USA, on decision-makers in most Gulf countries. As the crisis erupted in 2017 under cover from President Donald Trump, the settlement of the crisis seems to have coincided with President Biden's coming to power. Clearly, in the near future, it seems that the region is heading towards calm and reduction of the 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, disputes will continue even if the blockade ends.

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