

Sport : football (club du Paris Saint-Germain), chaîne TV sportive (BeIN), etc.
Luxe : LVMH (1 %), Le Tanneur (53 %), Le Printemps (rachat en cours), etc.
Hôtellerie : Le Concorde La Fayette, Hôtel du Louvre, Carlton, etc.
Immobilier : Groupama, HSBC France, etc.
Energie : Total (3 %)
Divers : Vivendi (3 %), Lagardère (12 %), Vinci (7 %), Veolia Environnement (5 %), Suez Environnement (3 %)

ROYAUME-UNI
Immobilier
Luxe
Finance
Grands magasins

SUÈDE
Immobilier

PAYS-BAS
Energie

ALLEMAGNE
Automobile

LUXEMBOURG
Energie

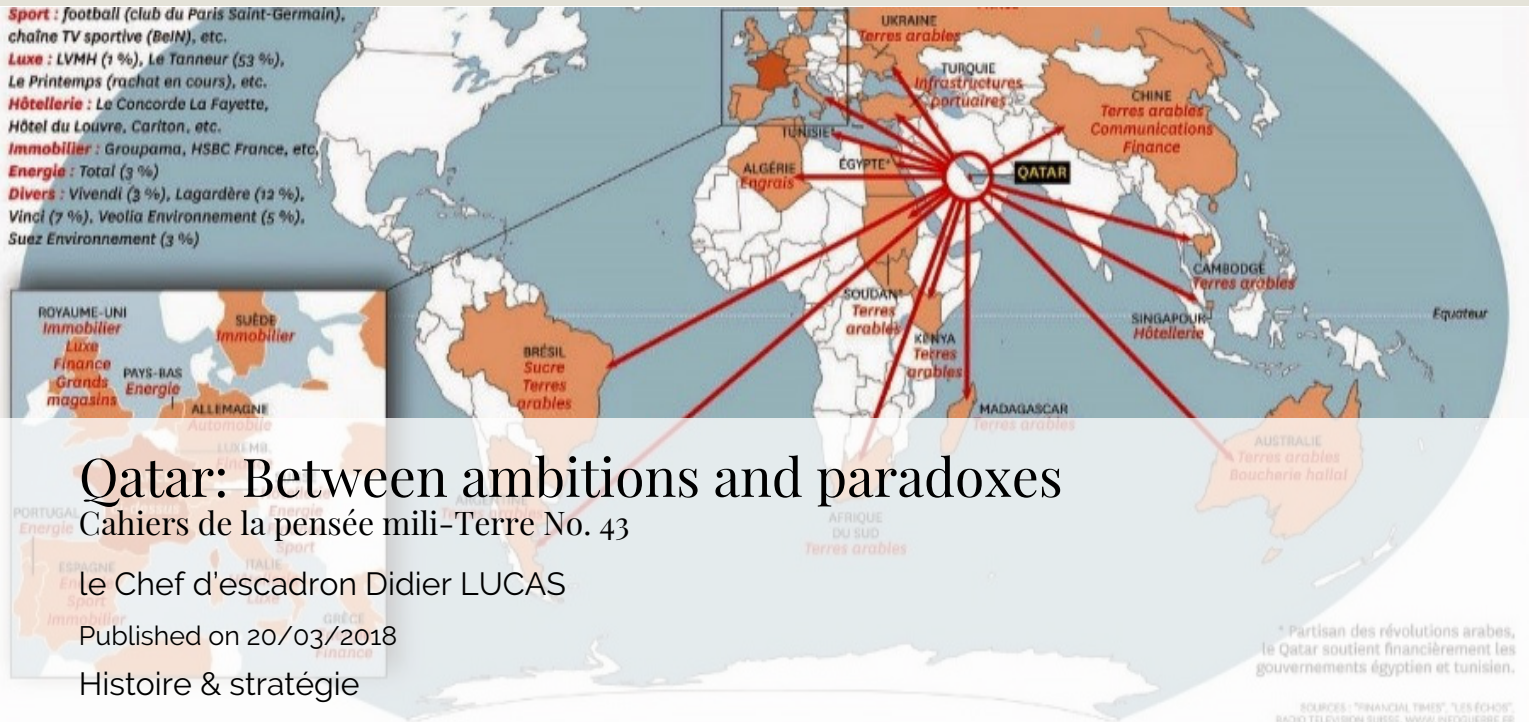
PORTUGAL
Energie

ESPAGNE
Sport

ITALIE
Luxe

GRÈCE
Immobilier

QATAR
Finance



Qatar: Between ambitions and paradoxes

Cahiers de la pensée mili-Terre No. 43

Le Chef d'escadron Didier LUCAS

Published on 20/03/2018

Histoire & stratégie

Qatar and its foreign policy are a source of questioning for the Western world. This article paints a portrait of a ÉThis State, with its considerable economic resources, has managed to establish itself over the last 15 years as one of the main players in the Near and Middle East and on the international scene, but is still struggling to achieve and maintain a lasting balance.

Eur ambitions and paradoxes

In twenty years, Qatar has gone from being an obscure Gulf gas monarchy to a fully-fledged player in international relations. This new positioning is the subject of constant debate and questions a West caught between financial stakes and contrary diplomatic lines. Whether it is the conscious double game of Qatar or the cultural logic of an Arab country caught between tradition, modernity and hegemony, the omnipresence of this micro-State on the five continents through a broad spectrum investment policy is worrying and raises many questions.

Benefiting from an economic situation marked by the global economic crisis and the phenomenon of the "Arab Spring", Qatar has been able to seize these opportunities to assert itself as a true power and no longer just a tiny, immensely rich State. It is now at the forefront of the international scene, but raises many questions about the positions it has taken. While its ambitions to assert itself vis-à-vis its Iranian and Saudi neighbours, as well as its desire to diversify its investments in order to limit its dependence on its gas resources are clear, on the other hand it is sowing confusion because of the support it gives to the movements of political Islam.

How, then, can Qatar be an ally of the United States, whose largest air base it hosts at Al-Udeid, if it is also practising a check-book policy with the movements fought by the world's leading power, particularly since 11 September 2001 and the introduction of the American Patriot Act?

At the dawn of the 21st century, Qatar owes this dynamic to Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani. When he came to power in 1995 following a coup d'état that deposed his father, he began a foreign policy that demonstrates his perfect understanding of the situation in Qatar. In the context of the new post-Cold War world order, the challenges of globalization, and the possibilities offered by non-coercive instruments of power such as the economy or the media. At the same time, Qatar, like Saudi Arabia, has also chosen to stand up for Wahhabism, rigid Islam and the fundamentalist currents that have been making headlines in recent months, from Australia to France.

On what levers has Qatar relied to succeed in joining the ranks of the world's leading powers, not just because of its wealth, but because of its political stance? How have its policies been translated into action and how can they be sustained at a time when the blacksmith of Qatari ambition has given way to his son and the regional powers are calling to order the enfant terrible of the Gulf? Above all, what are the real goals pursued by this State, which is building its diplomacy on an ambivalence that is not conducive to trust? These are the questions raised by the evolution of this country over the past two decades.

In order to understand its diplomatic orientations, it is necessary to go back to the origin of the meteoric rise of this tiny State in permanent search of recognition: a visceral need that bears a name, "the Qatari complex". A complex that has resulted in the writing of a "white paper" with the "Vision 2030" project, which defines, through a vast investment programme, the objectives of the future Qatar: "a prosperous country, offering economic and social justice for all in harmony with nature". Awareness of its strengths but also its weaknesses, the clarity of the internal situation of the State but also of the global challenges suggest that nothing is left to chance in the policy it conducts, contrary to what its first years of autonomy might have suggested.

The advent of Qatar on the international scene and the tools of Qatari soft-power

With only 1.7 million inhabitants and only 220,000 nationals, the 11,000-square-metre emirate has demonstrated that size or armed force are no longer operative criteria for asserting itself on the international stage.

When Qatar gained independence in 1971 and freed itself from British rule, Emir Khalifa, a member of the Wahhabi tribe of Al-Thani, who had been in power since 1968, chose to remain in the shadow of the great regional powers. A stance that the emir will not leave until the coup led by his son, who will dismiss him in 1995. Even when the Iran-Iraq conflict was rumbling on its doorstep, Qatar was non-existent on the international scene.

As soon as he came to power, the young Emir made it very clear what his ambitions were for his country. To achieve his goals, he will implement a bold policy with regard to that of the players in the region and develop modern tools of power. Thanks to a favourable economic climate linked to the development, in the 1990s, of the North Field gas field discovered in the 1970s, which is adjacent to Iran's South Pars gas field, Qatar is now the world's third largest gas producer after Russia and Iran. At the same time, Qatar has chosen to place itself under the protection of the United States by hosting the Al-Udeid base. Since the 1980s, the United States has made the Gulf an area of vital interest, and when Qatar agreed to host the US armed forces, it placed itself out of reach of the Saudis and Iranians.

With considerable financial resources, an annual GDP per capita of \$100,000, and freedom of action, Qatar now has the means to fulfil its ambitions.

- The QIA: Qatar Investment Authority

While Saudi Arabia massively uses the profits from its oil revenues to buy social peace in its country, Qatar decided in 1995 to diversify its investments in order to free itself from its dependence on gas resources alone.

Although these resources are still considered a priority, they are in fact under triple threat. A threat linked to the internal increase in the country's natural gas consumption, which is expected to double to 44 billion cubic metres by 2020, to competition linked to the exploitation of shale gas and to the renegotiation of LNG (liquefied natural gas) exploitation contracts. In order to remain at the forefront, Qatar is counting on research to maintain its leadership in this sector thanks to a new process: GTL (gas to liquid), a gas derivative that can be used to produce less polluting kerosene or gasoil.

In this context, the QIA was given the task of reinjecting a significant part of its revenues into foreign markets and acquired, in particular, numerous shares in major Western companies. The Qatari sovereign wealth fund, which manages nearly 90 billion dollars, then embarks on an investment policy that seems at first glance not very rational and marked by a sort of compulsive frenzy. An investment policy boosted by the financial crisis of 2008 and the recession that hit Europe from 2010 onwards, but which very quickly underwent a reorganisation that put in place objectives completed within the framework of an intermediate development plan between 2011 and 2016: the "Qatar National Strategy" plan.

This plan has been successful, as the share of hydrocarbon income in GDP has been steadily declining. Growth of 6% in 2013^[1] is now driven by non-hydrocarbon activities.

These investments seem to follow two development lines.

The first is in markets where Qatar is increasing its visibility and notoriety. The luxury industry and the sports sector are two targets that allow Qatar to reap benefits and to shine. After the Arc de Triomphe prize, the handball world cup in 2015 and the football world cup in 2022, Qatar is also in the running for the 2022 Olympic Games.

These investments conceal other positions whose aims are less clear-cut. If we can question Qatar's investments in the Maghreb, in the petrochemical sector in Algeria or in tourism in Morocco, they at least have the advantage of resembling real financial projects. On the other hand, Qatar's investments in the Gaza Strip are more questionable and are a matter of political support vis-à-vis Israel. Similarly, how can we perceive Qatar's desire to allocate 50 million euros to France for the development of its suburbs? Faced with the reluctance of the French government and public opinion, these millions have found another, more traditional destination.

If France had any doubts, Al-Jazeera's editorial line could have quickly lifted them as soon as it was founded.

- Al-Jazeera **and control of "Arab Street"**

In the midst of Arab satellite channel packages controlled in each state by authoritarian governments, Al-Jazeera quickly established itself as a dissident channel. Launched in 1996, it immediately stood out for its modernity and, in less than 15 years, established itself as the leading news channel in the Arab world, with an audience of more than 50

million viewers on some days. Taking up a platform for Saudi and Syrian opponents, the channel and Qatar clearly oppose the regimes that emerged from the independence of the 1950s by supporting the Islamist currents that embodied the only viable opposition forces in these states. Whether the Muslim brothers in Egypt or the Ennahdha party in Tunisia, all have found in this channel a propaganda tool serving their own purposes and those of Rigidist Sunni Islam. The messages of these parties are relayed by the telecoranists and, at the time of the Arab spring, Qatar is radiating throughout the Arab world by relaying images of the fall of secular and corrupt regimes to the benefit of religious parties in line with the aims of Rigidist Islam.

Despite the competition played by the Al-Arabyia channel, created by the Saudis in March 2003 to thwart Qatar's echo in the Arab world, Al-Jazeera remains in control of the information market. Qatar, with a partisan editorial line, covers the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the second intifada, as well as the 2006 Israeli operations in Lebanon in order to unite the Arab world in a common cause.

Qatar and its diplomatic line

As of 2000, Qatar left its role as the sole player on the world financial markets to also position itself as a mediator in major regional and international crises. Sheikh Ahmad Bin Khalifa, assisted by Sheikh Jasim, his Minister of Foreign Affairs and then Deputy Prime Minister, then sought to find solutions where other world or regional powers had failed. Lebanon, Yemen, Sudan and Palestine become the emirate's centres of diplomatic interest.

- Qatar, a mediator who achieves diplomatic results

Although it remains one of the main economic players, as can be seen from its involvement in the organisation in 2001 of the first conference of the "Doha Round" launched by theThe emirate left this area alone in 2006 and moved to the forefront of international diplomacy by becoming a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. Nurturing privileged relations with all the players in its region, it has become a key player for the international community. An ally of the United States, whose military base is close to Iran, whose gas resources it shares, it is also the brother of belief of the Saudis, whose Wahhabi doctrine it defends. In 2008, Qatar was the instigator of the Doha agreements on the settlement of the dispute between factions in Lebanon, including Hezbollah. [Egypt and Saudi](#) Arabia had not really intervened in the crisis; they had almost given up in favour of Qatar, which, being [closer to](#) Syria and Iran [was](#) more likely to be in a position to help resolve [the](#) situation.

Qatar then intervenes not only in large-scale conflicts, but also as a mediator on different issues such as the release of hostages. Thus, in 2006 it obtained the release of a Franco-Israeli soldier held by Hamas and, in 2007, jointly with France, the release of the Bulgarian nurses held in Libya [2].

However, what is behind these diplomatic successes? A policy known as the checkbook policy that allows Hamas to rearm itself against Israel and Qatar to enjoy renewed recognition in the Arab world. Certainly, but these successes are welcomed by the international community.

- The turning point of the "Arab Spring": a player in international relations

While Saudi Arabia fears that it will be destabilized by the death of its Crown Prince and the deteriorating health of King Abdullah, which is a matter of concern to the country, that the Iran is in the grip of international sanctions and threatened by the Syrian crisis, Qatar enjoys economic and political stability which enables it to position itself not as a mediator but as a real player in international relations.

It was with the "Arab Spring" that Qatar changed its position by becoming the fervent defender of Islamic unity. Once again, as in the field of the economy, Qatar is seizing this opportunity to assert itself as the new leader of the Arab world. With a television channel that is particularly well followed and focused on the same ambitions as those of the parties that emerged from these movements, Qatar broadcasts the information that feeds the revolutions in each country on a loop and, as a true agitator of consciences, it relays the demands of the people against the autocratic rulers of the Arab world.

However, Qatar's role is not going to be limited to this one event. Taking advantage of this opportunity to broaden its sphere of influence, it will, in this context, seek to control Islamist movements. In 2011, Qatar will inaugurate the emirate's most important mosque and give it the name "Ibn Abdel Wahhab". A symbol for the Muslim world which sees in this figure of rigorist Islam the emblem of traditionalism, of the return to original Islam and the strict interpretation of the Koran. A support for fundamentalist Islamic movements which will go as far as the creation, in 2013, of a Taliban representative office aimed at finding a modus vivendi after 2014 and the end of the American presence in Afghanistan.

The positions taken by Qatar from 2010 onwards will surprise its Western allies as much as irritate its neighbours in the Arab world. At the time of the succession and accession to the throne of Crown Prince Sheikh Tamim, Sheikh Hamad ben Khalifa al Thani announced that 'the time has come for a new generation to take power. The young monarch inherited a difficult situation which forced him to clarify the position of his country vis-à-vis its Western allies, but also to maintain his role as mediator in the Near and Middle East.

The succession of Sheik Hamad and Prince Tamim

Sheikh Tamin Bin Hamad al Thani thus inherited his father's foreign policy in 2013, a failure rather than a success. For years, the latter has pursued a foreign policy aimed at imposing his country as a decisive and active power in the Persian Gulf. The Egyptian revolution was one of the country's mistakes. Thinking he was supporting Egypt's future influential leaders, he paid seven billion dollars to his Muslim brothers [3].

Qatar has largely financed the Egyptian party of the Muslim brothers, but also the Syrian rebellion to which it also supplies arms. Despite his attraction to religious parties that might place him on a more conservative side, however, the Emir has repeatedly proved his disapproval of the Syrian rebellion. He refused to associate himself with the United States, notably by extraditing American citizens on several occasions despite the absence of an agreement between the two countries on this matter.

On the Israeli-Palestinian issue, it would appear that he wants a resolution of the conflict towards two separate states. In his view, whether or not the Arab countries "agree with Israel, the whole region must negotiate with Israel" for the sake of the peace process. He has acted as a negotiator in Sudan to discuss the situation in Darfur and even led a

diplomatic delegation to Saudi Arabia in 2010. Thus, while Qatar's positions are readable, their underlying motivations are less understandable as they may seem to run counter to a single diplomatic line.

However, although marked by a certain continuity, Qatar's policy is taking new directions due to internal concerns, but also under pressure from its neighbours. Expressions such as "rebalancing", "discipline" and even "need for centralisation" have crept into the political vocabulary, marking a shift in priorities both in Qatar and abroad.

- Calling the regional powers to order

On 5 March 2014, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain recall their ambassadors to Qatar on the pretext that Qatar supports organizations and individuals who "are threaten the security and stability of the Gulf States" and for hosting a "hostile media" (Al-Jazeera). More specifically, Riyadh criticizes Qatar for failing to respect an agreement concluded in November 2013 that calls on all states in the region to "refrain from any interference in the national affairs of other signatories". In fact, it is Riyadh that has dragged its two neighbours into the open struggle with Qatar since the outbreak of the Arab revolutions. This phenomenon, relatively little followed by the Western media, is of fundamental importance for the political-religious balance in the Near and Middle East.

Called to order by its powerful Saudi neighbour, Qatar understands that it can no longer hold its position and has chosen to withdraw from the international scene without abandoning its ambitions.

Qatar are taking a step backwards in the Syrian dossier. Thus, even if Doha has been providing support to the Syrian opposition since May 2011, which has enabled it to structure itself and whose first diplomatic representation it will welcome in March 2013, it is accused of having been a "failure to act".s government for the control of the gas field discovered in the Mediterranean on the Levant coast, a field which promises to be the most important in the world. A position contrary to the one he has taken since the beginning of the conflict, defending firm action by the international community and the exclusion of Bashar Al Assad from any political solution.

On September 25, 2014, while he has until then supported fundamentalist movements, and especially in Egypt, where he has taken a less clear-cut position in favor of the "Egyptian people more than in favor of the "Egyptian people", he will be able to take a stand on the issue. a party", he intervened with the international coalition against the EI alongside the United States and France with four Arab allies, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.

Qatar gives the impression that it has fallen in line, and the conflictual relations between the emirate and the other Gulf states seem to have been temporarily set aside to form a united front against the threat of the "Islamic state".

However, this alliance is only circumstantial and driven primarily by financial interests. Substantive differences persist and Qatar does not seem to have given up its ambitions.

- The persistence of Qatari ambition

In his first major address to the nation, Emir Tamim insisted on the need to refocus on domestic policy, but he completely ignored foreign policy.

On the face of it, the country's main concern is the World Cup to be held in Qatar in 2022. It is vital for the pride of the country that the cup is held in Qatar. However, to mark the emirate's new modesty, it is presented as an "Arab event" and not a purely Qatari one.

Continuing its investment policy to get out of its dependence on oil and gas revenues, Qatar has refocused it on Asia, and China has become one of its priority objectives. This shift responds to economic imperatives and places it in a position where its investments are less questionable.

At the same time, in order to combat the loss of speed of the Al-Jazeera channel, whose credibility was damaged by the "Arab Spring" movement and by its support for Islamic movements, Qatar is planning to acquire a new communication tool. A new television channel with Qatari capital called Al-Arabi Al-Jadeed will be launched in March 2014. According to the Saudi newspaper Elaph, "this new channel embodies the desire of the new Emir to gradually free himself from the weight of his father and to soften the vehemence of the media discourse held by Al-Jazeera, which had put Qatar in a situation of permanent hostility with its Gulf neighbours.

While Qatar appears to have changed its foreign policy on the surface, it has in fact been able to be more discreet, but without giving any indication that it is abandoning its support for Islamist movements.

Moreover, faced with important domestic policy issues, it must also succeed in integrating Qatari youth into its dynamism. The future of the emirate can no longer rely solely on the abilities of expatriates from Lebanon, Egypt, Palestine, Turkey or Western Europe. In a country where nationals live comfortably on the fruits of an effective investment policy, it is difficult to motivate a population that prefers to leave its interests in the hands of foreigners under the control of a Qatari elite.

The emirate having bet on an educational policy, it is nevertheless likely to awaken the democratic aspirations of a people who, for the time being, are living in a certain apathy. Educated and open-minded young people could, in the long run, pose a threat to a regime for whom the concept of democracy is, as in Kuwait, a source of destabilization and danger.

1] Source: Website of the Ministry of Finance and Public Accounts - Ministry of Economy, Industry and Digitalization <http://www.tresor.economie.gouv.fr/pays/qatar>

2] Source: http://www.liberation.fr/monde/2007/08/01/le-fils-khadafi-revele-les-dessous-de-la-liberation-des-infirmieres-bulgares_10184

3] Source: http://www.lepoint.fr/monde/comment-le-qatar-et-arabie-saoudite-s-affrontent-en-egypte-21-08-2013-1716008_24.php

A graduate of the Joint Military School, promotion "Captain Biancamaria", Squadron Leader Didier LUCAS servedⁱⁿ the 93rd Mountain Artillery Regiment and the 511th Train Regiment. Following his technical diploma in 2013, he is currently studying Arabic at the National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilizations (INALCO).

Title : le Chef d'escadron Didier LUCAS

Author (s) : le Chef d'escadron Didier LUCAS

Release date 17/02/2018
