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The American University in Cairo

School of Global Affairs and Public Policy

**Al Jazeera as a Political Tool within the Contradictions of Qatar**

A Thesis Submitted to

the Department of Middle East Studies

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the degree of Master of Arts

by Munehiro Anzawa

May 2011

The American University in Cairo  
School of Global Affairs and Public Policy

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## DEDICATION

Dedicated to the memory of my late mother

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the guidance of several individuals who extended their valuable assistance in the preparation and completion of my research. I would like to express here my gratitude to all those who gave me the possibility to complete this thesis. I am especially indebted to my supervisor Dr. Naila Hamdy from the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication. I am deeply obliged to the readers, Dr. Holger Albrecht from the Department of Political Science, and Dr. Helen Rizzo from the Department of Sociology. I am also grateful to Dr. Hanan Kholoussy for the preparation of my thesis proposal. Last but not least, I would like to give my special thanks to my family in Japan who always supports and encourages me.

The American University in Cairo

**ABSTRACT**

**AL JAZEERA AS A POLITICAL TOOL  
WITHIN THE CONTRADICTIONS OF QATAR**

Munehiro Anzawa

This thesis explores three issues regarding Al Jazeera satellite network and its host country, the state of Qatar. The first theme discusses the political power of Al Jazeera vis-à-vis its relationship with Qatar since Al Jazeera's foundation of 1996 to the present day. In light of the fact that Al Jazeera's impact on the Middle East and international affairs is disproportionate to Qatar's global influence, this thesis argues that the state-owned Al Jazeera is not merely a media giant but also a powerful player in Arab politics. Specifically, as a case study, the Qatari-Saudi rivalry in the respective reporting of Al Jazeera and the Saudi-operated Al Arabiya is discussed. The second theme examines five sociopolitical contradictions of Qatar caused by the Emir's diverse reforms, namely "democratization" by the absolute leader, rapid modernization in a Wahhabi country, an exploding young population and increasing foreign labor, its controversial relationship with Israel, and its reliance on U.S. forces for national security. An analysis of these contradictions is crucial to comprehending Qatar's contemporary politics, which wield a significant influence on Al Jazeera's news coverage. The last theme analyzes Qatar's "omnidirectional diplomacy" in order to understand how the Qatari government and the Emir of Qatar have manipulated Al Jazeera as an effective political instrument. This thesis focuses on Qatar's niche strategy to draw the supports of the West in general and the United States in particular. Finally, by highlighting Qatar's ambitions to be a regional power, it becomes obvious that pan-Arab Al Jazeera functions as a critical media outlet for Qatar's survival in this turbulent region. This thesis also tries to examine briefly Al Jazeera's role in the recent popular uprisings across the Arab world, taking into consideration the future prospects of Al Jazeera and Qatar.

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# I. INTRODUCTION

Al Jazeera satellite network, which is based in Doha, was founded in 1996 by the Emir of Qatar, Emir Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani, for the greater democratization of Qatar. Emir Hamad established Al Jazeera as an independent satellite channel that would be free from governmental censorship. The channel effectively ended the Western monopoly of global media, placing Qatar at the center of the international media stream and providing Arabs with the opportunity to view their region in relation to the global context. Since then, the Arab media scene has changed dramatically and variedly with Al Jazeera. Al Jazeera's success, which is based on its strong pan-Arab character, brought about changes in the political culture of the region as well. These changes are widely known as the "Al Jazeera Phenomenon" or the "Al Jazeera Effect."

This thesis aims to explore three main issues regarding Al Jazeera satellite network and its host country, the state of Qatar. First, the central discussion is about the political power of Al Jazeera vis-à-vis its relationship with Qatar, from Al Jazeera's founding in 1996 to the present day, including the recent popular uprisings in the Arab world. This thesis argues that Al Jazeera is not merely an international media giant but also a powerful player in contemporary Arab politics. Specifically, as a case study, this thesis focuses on the Qatari-Saudi rivalry in the past and present reporting of Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya, the satellite news agency launched by Saudi Arabia in 2003. Al Jazeera's past programming and agenda setting had been criticized for being hostile to the Saudi royal family, in keeping with the contentious political relationship between the two countries. For that reason, this thesis also sheds light on Qatar's efforts to break the traditional Arab hierarchy during the new rule of Emir Hamad.



The second theme of this thesis is an examination of the contemporary politics of Qatar in order to understand how the Qatari government and the Emir of Qatar have manipulated the so-called “independent” Al Jazeera satellite network as an effective political instrument. This tiny *rentier* state,<sup>1</sup> which has no more than 1,700,000 people<sup>2</sup> – including foreign labor – and a national area of only 11,437 square kilometers,<sup>3</sup> has dramatically gained prominence in the Middle East as well as globally over the last decade or so. It was a big surprise to many around the world that Qatar won the bid to host FIFA World Cup 2022. Hosting the World Cup is the first time for the Middle East and Islamic nations where the football is the most popular sport. This achievement unquestionably spotlights Qatar at the center of global attention. Qatar punches above its weight, enjoying unprecedented prosperity along with high economic growth. At the same time, the state of Qatar has embraced a number of sociopolitical contradictions, namely “democratization” by the absolute leader, rapid modernization in a Wahhabi country, potential ramifications of a youth population time bomb, a controversial relationship with Israel, and heavy reliance on U.S. forces for national security. Taking into consideration these contradictions, especially the U.S. protection of the country, this thesis explores how Al Jazeera has functioned in favor of Qatar’s policy in the Middle Eastern and international affairs.

The last theme analyses the role of Al Jazeera in Qatar’s “omnidirectional diplomacy,” which is a foreign policy of maintaining good relations with every country. With consideration for unique niche strategies that the Qatari government has

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<sup>1</sup> Hossein Mahdavy defines *rentier* state as those countries that depend on substantial external rent for their economy.

Mahdavy, Hossein, “The Pattern and Problems of Economic Development in Rentier States: The Case of Iran,” *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970),428

According to CIA the World Fact Book (2010), natural resources such as oil and natural gas account for more than 50% of Qatar’s GDP, approximately 85% of export income, and 70% of government revenue.

<sup>2</sup> The Qatar Statistics Authority, “The 2010 Census of Population, Housing and Establishment,” retrieved on 23 January 2011 at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/nea/136078.htm> /

<sup>3</sup> The U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Qatar,” retrieved on 26 January 2011 at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5437.htm>

developed, this thesis mainly focuses on Qatar's sophisticated opportunism to attain the recognition from the West in general and the United States in particular. The Qatari government has been striving for the support of the West for its survival in the rapidly changing Middle East. Finally, by closely examining the relationship between Al Jazeera and Qatar, the function of Al Jazeera in the balancing act of Qatar can be observed in this thesis.

With regard to a review of the literature, unfortunately, most existing scholarship approaches Al Jazeera and its function through media studies. Mohammed El-Nawawy and Adel Iskandar, both of whom are prominent Al Jazeera researchers, see Al Jazeera as a form of non-state-controlled Arab media, although they point out the necessity of Al Jazeera's financial independence from Qatar.<sup>4</sup> Naomi Sakr, previously a journalist and now media scholar at the University of Westminster, elaborates on the present situation surrounding Arab television, analyzing program content, television ownership, and development of Arab viewers.<sup>5</sup> Whereas Philip Seib, a professor of journalism and public diplomacy at the University of Southern California, defines the "Al Jazeera Effect" from a political approach,<sup>6</sup> the role of Qatar in Al Jazeera's operations is less understood in his analysis. In general, these scholars tend to argue over Al Jazeera in the narrow framework of comparison between conventional and new Arab media. Although there are some attempts to address the political involvement of Qatar in Al Jazeera, these studies show a tendency to focus more on the growing impact of Al Jazeera rather than on the political clout of Qatar. Only a few scholars delve into the relationship between Al Jazeera and the Qatari regime from the standpoint of political science. For instance, Mamoun Fandy, a political scientist concerned with media and politics in the Arab

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<sup>4</sup> See El-Nawawy, Mohammed, and Iskander, Adel, *Al Jazeera: the Story of the Network that is Rattling Governments and Redefining Modern Journalism* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 2003)

<sup>5</sup> See Sakr, Naomi, *Arab Television Today* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007)

<sup>6</sup> See Seib, Philip, *The Al Jazeera Effect: How the New Global Media Are Reshaping World Politics* (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books, 2008)

world, conducts an in-depth investigation of the political power of Al Jazeera.<sup>7</sup> However, there is an insufficient review of the rapidly changing politics in the modern state of Qatar. In sum, it is safe to say that a comprehensive analysis of Qatar's politics is lacking in studies of Al Jazeera. Moreover, a detailed investigation of contemporary politics in Qatar is limited in comparison to such studies of other Middle Eastern countries. Because of its significant economic development based on petroleum and natural gas revenues, there has been much socioeconomic research on Qatar, such as the study of the *rentier* economy and migrant labor market. Nonetheless, it seems that a political approach to the modern state of Qatar has been overlooked despite its fast-growing political presence in the region.

Last of all, this thesis projects the future prospects of Qatar and Al Jazeera, taking into consideration Qatar's unique strategy and Al Jazeera's potential as a political tool. The last chapter also briefly discusses Al Jazeera's role in the current anti-government movements in the region that toppled the Tunisian and Egyptian regimes. As a whole, this thesis utilizes Al Jazeera as a vehicle for understanding the rapid changes in Qatar itself. With respect to research methodology, this thesis examines a large number of secondary sources as the basis of analysis and conclusions in addition to my own observation of Al Jazeera from 2006 to 2011. It is my strong belief that this thesis will contribute to scholarship on Al Jazeera as well as the limited scholarship on Qatar by underlining Qatar's growing political presence and rapid emergence as a center of economy, culture, education, and sport in the Middle East.

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<sup>7</sup> See Fandy, Mamoun, *(Un) Civil War of Words: Media and Politics in the Arab World* (Westport, London: Praeger Security International, 2007)

## II. ADVENT OF AL JAZEERA

This chapter begins by briefly presenting the background and development of Arab media, especially focusing on mushrooming satellite news channels in the Middle East over the 1990s. The establishment of Al Jazeera in 1996 and its vast impact are then discussed in reference to the effect of the “Al Jazeera Phenomenon” on the conventional Arab media scene and about how it provides impetus for facilitating the creation of a new Arab media stream in the region.

Actually, Al Jazeera satellite network offers several channels such as Al Jazeera Arabic (launched in November 1996), Al Jazeera Sports (November 2003),<sup>8</sup> Al Jazeera Mobile (November 2003), Al Jazeera *Mubashar* (Live broadcast channel, April 2005), Al Jazeera Children (September 2005), Al Jazeera Documentary (November 2006), and Al Jazeera English (November 2006). The network also includes both Al Jazeera.net Arabic (January 2001) and English (September 2003), the online news service of Al Jazeera. In addition to these channels, the Al Jazeera Media Training and Development Center was established in 2004 to advance Arab journalism in the region, and the Al Jazeera Center for Studies was founded in 2006 as a multi-lingual scholarly research center for the channel.<sup>9</sup> More recently, Al Jazeera Shop, which sells Al Jazeera’s own DVDs and books over the internet, opened in 2010. By promoting its original brand in various forms, Al Jazeera satellite network has become a giant world-wide corporate entity. Because of this, Al Jazeera

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<sup>8</sup> Al Jazeera Sports currently has 15 channels including 12 subscription channels. Al Jazeera Sports owns the exclusive broadcasting right for worldwide popular football leagues, such as the Spanish La Liga, the English Premier League, and the Italian Serie A.

<sup>9</sup> Al Jazeera Satellite Network, *The Al Jazeera Decade, 1996-2006* (Doha: Al Jazeera Satellite Network, 2006), 189-193

was recognized by the Brandchannel's Readers Choice Awards in 2004 as the fifth most influential global brand behind Apple, Google, IKEA, and Starbucks Coffee.<sup>10</sup>

Of the various services offered by Al Jazeera satellite network, this thesis mainly focuses on Al Jazeera Arabic, which targets an estimated audience of more than 300-500 million in 22 countries. Hence, in this thesis, Al Jazeera refers to Al Jazeera Arabic unless otherwise stated. One of the main reasons for narrowing the focus to Al Jazeera Arabic is that this Arabic channel is basically a regional Arabic news channel by Arabs for Arabs within the Arabic-speaking world, in contrast to Al Jazeera English, which is aimed at the broader audience of English-speaking countries and which thus differs in its function and target. Given that this thesis is designed to discuss the political influence of Al Jazeera on other Arab countries, especially Saudi Arabia, it is appropriate to single out Al Jazeera Arabic as the main focus.

## **A. Arab Media and Its Development**

In general, Arab media has traditionally worked as a public relations outlet for regimes in the Arab world. Traditional Arab media, notably state-owned Arab news television stations, overwhelmingly produces tame reports, such as the president's formal speeches, interviews with government officials, ministers' inaugurations of new projects, ministers' daily routines, and noncontroversial coverage of domestic affairs with the aim of maintaining public respect for their regimes. Marc Lynch, the director of the institute for Middle East Studies at George Washington University, stated that "the Arab news media resembled the desert: barren, boring, oppressive, repetitive, and (if not controlled by a national government) owned by the Saudis."<sup>11</sup> Likewise, Mohammad Ayish, a professor of communication at the

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<sup>10</sup> Rusch, Robin D., "Readers Pick Apple: 2004 Readers' Choice Awards," *Brandchannel.com* (31 January 2005), retrieved on 7 March 2011 at [http://www.brandchannel.com/features\\_effect.asp?pf\\_id=248](http://www.brandchannel.com/features_effect.asp?pf_id=248)

<sup>11</sup> Lynch, Marc, "Watching al-Jazeera," *The Wilson Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (Summer 2005), 40

University of Sharjah, argued that conventional television journalism was “dull and monolithic in their format, content, and delivery method.”<sup>12</sup> More specifically, Mamoun Fandy identified four characteristics of traditional Arab media. Firstly, all Arab media outlets are government-controlled to a greater or lesser extent, while most Western media is regarded as independent. Second, those Arab media outlets that are apparently not state-owned are controlled by the regimes they operate under. Thirdly, the “anywhere but here” phenomenon is widespread; while Arab news media are quick to denounce other states, they intentionally ignore problems in their host governments. Finally, Arab news media tend to indulge in “news-receiving” activity rather than “news-gathering” activity. They seldom act as an original news source and usually only receive useful information from other news sources.<sup>13</sup> Arab media, either directly or indirectly, have been working as a public relations mouthpiece for the rulers. Simply put, each Arab media outlet has only served as a competent spokesperson for its government in order to maintain social order and to justify its legitimacy. In that sense, the function of Arab media could be inherently political and manipulated.

The diminishing of the Arab people’s trust in state-owned news media dates back to the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, when Sawt Al Arab, once Egypt’s most influential radio station in the Middle East founded by Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1953, reported that Egypt had won over Israel, despite having lost.<sup>14</sup> This fatal information manipulation bred distrust among Arabs. After this incident, Arab audiences were skeptical about state-run news media, but had no choice apart from the one-sided reporting in each regime. Saudi news media, which is represented by the publication of the leading newspaper Al Sharq Al Awsat since 1978, had also wielded its

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<sup>12</sup> Ayish, Muhammad I., “Political Communication on Arab World Television: Evolving Patterns,” *Political Communication*, Vol. 19 (2002), 138

<sup>13</sup> Fandy, Mamoun (2007), 8-10

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 42

influence over the Middle East. Historically speaking, prior to the 1990s, Saudi Arabia, as a regional power, was a dominant media player alongside Egypt.

However, the dimensions of Arab media changed dramatically during the 1990s, when the satellite broadcasting system began in the region. The satellite broadcasting significantly altered the Arab media world. With the appearance of satellite news channels, the 1990s is seen as a formative decade in the development of Arab media. The satellite transmission technology made it easy to transcend time and geographical restrictions. Since the beginning of the 1990s, in order to meet many domestic and regional challenges, such as the 1991 Gulf war, Saudi Arabia had been driven by the necessity to acquire more influence over pan-Arab media using satellite broadcasting. To meet this demand, in 1991, the Middle East Broadcasting Center (MBC) was launched in London as the first free-to-air satellite news channel announced in the Arab world as the Arab CNN, by a Saudi businessman, Sheikh Waleed Al Ibrahim, brother-in-law of late King Fahd.<sup>15</sup> Technically speaking, MBC was more oriented to saturate Arab viewers with entertainment, such as American films, dramas, and quiz shows rather than a serious news station. The soft power of MBC fulfilled Saudi Arabia's wish to spread and secure a solid basis for its media influence to the region. Accordingly, the Jeddah-based Arab Radio and Television Network (ART) was launched in 1993 by Sheikh Saleh Abdullah Kamel, a Saudi businessman who also had a close relationship with the Saudi royal family. ART is mainly characterized by entertainment-oriented programs such as family movies, Arab music and sporting events. Orbit, another Saudi satellite channel, started a pay television service broadcasting entertainment, documentaries, and news programs. Through satellite broadcasting, Saudi Arabia attempted to exercise its leadership and expand its influence in the region. In addition to Saudi-owned satellite channels, the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation (LBC), which was initially founded in 1985 in

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<sup>15</sup> Hammond, Andrew, "Maintaining Saudi Arabia's Cordon Sanitaire in the Arab World," Al-Rasheed, Madawi (ed.), *Kingdom without Borders: Saudi Political, Religious and Media Frontiers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 335

Beirut, launched its satellite channel, LBC International, in 1997 to cover a number of political discussions and news programs. Another popular satellite channel in the region is the Lebanese-owned Future Television, which was founded in 1993 by former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Al Hariri. The primary stage of the satellite era, dominated by Saudi Arabia and Lebanon, stimulated other satellite channels to pursue more attractive programs and to depart from routine programming.

In brief, the spread of the satellite broadcasting system ushered in a new era of Arab media. Arab television media succeeded in gaining a wider audience crossover in Arab countries. As a consequence, Arab viewers could find alternatives to state-monopolized terrestrial television and broaden their perspectives. The satellite era may be also best identified with the transformation of the new public sphere, uniting Arabs through the Arabic language. Although the basic function of satellite television served the interests of the owners, or the host countries, the development of the Arab news media has strengthened the pan-Arab identity as never before, spawning new forms of regional news sources. During this transitional period of Arab media culture, Al Jazeera suddenly came on stage in 1996.

## **B. Emergence of Al Jazeera in 1996**

Al Jazeera Arabic was founded in November 1996 by the Emir of Qatar, Emir Hamad, as part of his democratization of Qatar. In fact, Al Jazeera declared its mission and vision to “be a bridge between cultures, to support people’s right to knowledge, and strengthen the values of democracy and the respect of liberties and human rights.”<sup>16</sup> In the year preceding its foundation (June 1995), Deputy Emir Hamad at that time deposed his father, Emir Khalifa Bin Hamad Al Thani, in a bloodless coup. Soon after the coup, Emir Hamad undertook wide-ranging reforms,

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<sup>16</sup> Al Jazeera Satellite Network (2006), 183



especially making economic policies a high priority. In the process of various reforms in Qatar, Emir Hamad first established Al Jazeera as an independent and nonpartisan satellite television free from governmental censorship.<sup>17</sup> Emir Hamad explicitly declared Al Jazeera to be autonomous and to have no room for interference in editorial decisions, even from him.<sup>18</sup> In contrast to other conventional Arab news media, Al Jazeera was officially assured independence.

To begin with, Al Jazeera gained popularity and international recognition through the coverage of the bombing of Iraq by the United States and United Kingdom in December 1998 as the only news channel with correspondents on Iraqi soil. At the same time, this exclusive coverage made Al Jazeera the first counterbalance to the hegemony of Western news media. In addition, during the Palestinian Al Aqsa Intifada in 2000, Al Jazeera further raised its reputation for its exclusive reporting. The outbreak of Al Aqsa Intifada took the center of attention of Arabs, and the channel responded to their expectations with exclusive live broadcasts on the ground. When the Afghanistan war began in October 2001, Al Jazeera once again became the only foreign news station covering the war on the ground in Kabul; other international news channels including CNN and BBC totally depended on Al Jazeera's exclusive footage.<sup>19</sup> Al Jazeera placed its role as the first reliable alternative media that covered the Arab and Muslim world, and Western media was no longer the only influential news source in the region. Al Jazeera's well-known motto, "the opinion and the other opinion," highlights its different point of view from Western media.

It is true that Al Jazeera has been widely watched by Arab citizens. A survey in 2005 found that 88% of Cairo households with satellite television preferred to watch Al Jazeera on a regular basis.<sup>20</sup> According to an audience survey conducted by

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<sup>17</sup> El-Nawawy, Mohammed, and Iskander, Adel (2003), 33

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 119

<sup>19</sup> Al Jazeera Satellite Network (2006), 187

<sup>20</sup> Arab Advisors Group, "48 Percent of Households in Cairo Use the Internet and 46 Percent Have Satellite TV," news release (24 January 2005)

the University of Maryland and Zogby International in Arab countries (Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates) in May 2009, Al Jazeera is the most watched news source accounting for 55% of Arab viewers.<sup>21</sup> One reason for its popularity is that, for the first time, Al Jazeera successfully set its coverage of events in individual Arab countries into a broader Arab context. This regional approach provided Arab audience with the ability to view their region in relation to the larger world,<sup>22</sup> and consequently it offered Arabs an opportunity to look at the Arab and Muslim world from a different angle. This is part of the “Al Jazeera Phenomenon” or the “Al Jazeera Effect.” Philip Seib claimed that “[the Al Jazeera Effect] changes the way states and citizens interact with each other and it gives the individual a chance at a new kind of autonomy, at least on an intellectual level, because of the greater availability of information.”<sup>23</sup> In other words, the “Al Jazeera Phenomenon” is now beyond a media phenomenon; rather, its effect bears the aspect of a momentous political phenomenon in the Arab world.

In terms of Al Jazeera’s content of its programs, Al Jazeera’s experiment is characterized by some of its own broadcasting methods. The sensational on-the-spot reporting around the clock, especially in attention-getting regional and international conflicts, such as the Palestine Intifada against Israel, the Afghanistan war, the Iraq war, more recently the collapse of the Mubarak regime and the war in Libya, made Al Jazeera stand out among other Arab news media. According to Mohammed El Oifi, a specialist on Arab media, Al Jazeera’s programs tend to embrace three conflicting ideologies, namely Arab nationalism, Islamism, and liberalism. First, Arab nationalism is prominent in the weekly debate program, *The Opposite Direction*, which is hosted by the Syrian journalist Faisal Al Kasim. This program frequently invites advocates of Arab nationalism and invokes Arab solidarity, referring to Arab

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<sup>21</sup> Linzer, Dafna, “Alhurra Bleeding Viewers, Poll Finds, But Spending is Up,” *ProPublica* (29 May 2009), retrieved on 3 March 2011 at

<http://www.propublica.org/article/alhurra-bleeding-viewers-poll-finds-but-spending-is-up-529>

<sup>22</sup> Seib, Philip (2008), 145

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 175

nationalists' efforts against colonialism or Zionism. Second, the trend of Islamism on the channel is seen in the weekly religious program, *Islamic Law and Life*, which hosts Sheikh Yusuf Al Qaradawi, an Egyptian intellectual and spiritual leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, as a main guest each time. The Islamic trend is an important component of Al Jazeera's characters. Third, the liberal line of the channel is represented by the program, *More Than One Opinion*, which consists of a free discussion among various personalities with different political positions and ideological beliefs.<sup>24</sup> These three ideologies, that is, Arab nationalism, Islamism, and liberalism, are vital elements of Al Jazeera's programs. Moreover, Al Jazeera was the first Arab news channel to interview Israeli leaders, such as Shimon Peres and Ehud Barak, on the air. In response, the Israeli authority frequently sends its officials to appear on Al Jazeera in Hebrew, English, and even Arabic. The appearance of Israelis on Arab television stunned most Arab audience who never saw Israelis and heard Hebrew. Thus, Al Jazeera's boldness can be seen as a significant departure from the conventional practices of Arab media, which long avoided putting Israelis on the screen.<sup>25</sup>

It is an undoubted fact that Al Jazeera has devoted an immense amount of time and effort to the coverage of Arab and Islamic issues from many different perspectives. Al Jazeera has also provided a speaking and listening stage that is critical of Arab authoritarian regimes, even though there have been certain criticisms from many Arab governments to Al Jazeera's coverage. Marc Lynch noted that Al Jazeera has "been consistently and forcefully insistent on discussing reform in the Arab world, putting almost every issue – social, economic, cultural, political – and every regime under fierce public scrutiny."<sup>26</sup> By the same token, Al Jazeera has

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<sup>24</sup> El Oifi, Mohammed, "Influence without Power: Al Jazeera and the Arab Public Sphere," Zayani, Mohamed (ed.), *The Al Jazeera Phenomenon: Critical Perspectives on New Arab Media* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2005), 72-73

<sup>25</sup> Miles, Hugh, "Al Jazeera," *Foreign Policy*, No. 155 (July/August 2006), 21

<sup>26</sup> Lynch, Marc, *Voices of the New Arab Public: Iraq, Al-Jazeera, and Middle East Politics Today* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 241

brought about a sense of unity among the Arab diaspora. The Arabs living outside the Arab world have regained their Arab identity through the channel.<sup>27</sup> Al Jazeera brings all Arabs to self-consciousness as Arab, building strong confidence in being Arab. Indeed, its popular talk shows, in which various controversial issues in the Arab world are debated, mainly consist of timely pan-Arab subjects. On the basis of monitoring Al Jazeera's 976 talk shows from 1999 to 2003, Marc Lynch concluded that a considerable proportion of its talk shows were devoted to Palestinian and Iraqi issues. In truth, in 2003, when the Iraq war broke out, nearly 44% of talk shows were related to the Iraqi issue.<sup>28</sup> By providing pan-Arab news, Al Jazeera lives up to expectations of Arabs who crave for knowing what is really happening in the Arab world.

Furthermore, in terms of imaging techniques and editing skills, Al Jazeera is now neck-and-neck with international standards of the leading Western media giants, such as CNN and BBC. This is partly because Al Jazeera has successfully attracted a particular Arab audience, namely the growing young generation, by sophisticated editing, vivid graphic images, and eye-catching promotion clips. In a sense, Al Jazeera's footage with exciting music and strong commentary invokes some sort of Hollywood-style visual interpretation. Al Jazeera's advanced technique is part of the reason for its popularity and accentuates its difference with other Arab media. Accordingly, while Arab televisions have been mushrooming and the number of satellite television channels in the Middle East had actually exceeded 150 by 2005,<sup>29</sup> many of those have changed their broadcasting style to be more like Al Jazeera. Al Jazeera's style sets media trends in the Arab world.

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<sup>27</sup> El-Nawawy, Mohammed, and Iskander, Adel (2003), 1-20

<sup>28</sup> Lynch, Marc (2006), 79-80

<sup>29</sup> Booz Allen Hamilton, *Strategic Review of the Television Broadcasting Sector in the Middle East* (Dubai: November 2005, revised March 2006), 6

### III. POLITICAL POWER OF AL JAZEERA

This chapter demonstrates the political power of Al Jazeera, focusing on its structure and relationship with its host country, the state of Qatar. The first section argues how it is unreasonable to call Al Jazeera an “independent” satellite news network and poses some questions in regard to its editorial independency from and possible political involvement with its main financial sponsor, the government of Qatar. Who is the generous sponsor for its operating funds? What is the implication of munificence by the Emir of Qatar? In the second part, to illustrate the Arab media war, the Qatari-Saudi conflict between Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya is discussed. With the establishment of Al Arabiya by Saudi Arabia in March 2003, the Qatari government felt a growing need for Al Jazeera to compete with this new media rival. Al Jazeera cannot be understood without exploring the media tug of war between Qatar and Saudi Arabia. By the same token, it is imperative to shed light on Qatar’s geopolitical pressure from Saudi Arabia and the continuous disagreements between the two countries. Put simply, an analysis of the interstate conflict between Qatar and Saudi Arabia is an effective way to indicate how the government of Qatar has manipulated Al Jazeera satellite network as a political tool.

Interestingly enough, Mohammed El-Nawawy and Adel Iskandar described the tendency of each news media to reflect its own discourses to the target audience as “contextual objectivity.”<sup>30</sup> They elaborated on this “contextual objectivity” by explaining that “all media deviate from the standard of objectivity by framing the facts of a given situation in ways that are socially accepted and expected amongst their particular audiences.”<sup>31</sup> To be sure, there is no completely neutral perspective,

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<sup>30</sup> El-Nawawy, Mohammed, and Iskander, Adel (2003), 203-204

<sup>31</sup> El-Nawawy, Mohammed, and Powers, Shawn, “Al-Jazeera English: A conciliatory medium in a conflict-driven environment?,” *Global Media and Communication*, Vol. 6 (2010), 65

and any journalist cannot be totally free of bias in reporting. Hence, it is not surprising that Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya are effective implements used for their owners' political motivations. Taking into account this "contextual objectivity," this chapter argues for the political power of Al Jazeera.

## **A. "Independent" Channel, Al Jazeera**

Since its inception, Al Jazeera satellite network has raised doubts of whether it actually is a private or a state-run satellite television. Even though Al Jazeera's initial financial plan was that the channel had been instructed to become financially self-sufficient within 5 years from its establishment, the government of Qatar has covered the bulk of Al Jazeera's annual operating cost.<sup>32</sup> Al Jazeera's financial management has depended heavily on the Qatari government, and the state of Qatar has been the main stakeholder in the network. It is important to reveal how Al Jazeera's financing by one of the most repressive governments regarding freedom of expression affects the channel's coverage, bias, and editorial independence. It is also interesting to note that Al Jazeera's news reporting virtually ignores the internal affairs of its financial sponsor, Qatar, or the ruling Al Thani family. Why does the Emir of Qatar continue to fund the supposedly "independent" Al Jazeera? Why does Al Jazeera intentionally avoid dealing with the domestic issues of Qatar?

### **1. Sole Head of Al Jazeera's Shareholder**

The large financial support of Al Jazeera by the government of Qatar can be attributed to long-running pressure from Saudi Arabia, which accounts for nearly 60% of the Gulf region's advertising market, to have potential advertisers boycott Al Jazeera. Kuwait and Bahrain are similar to Saudi Arabia's boycott.<sup>33</sup> Although Al

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<sup>32</sup> Sakr, Naomi (2007), 144

<sup>33</sup> The Economist (21 June 2003), "All that Jazeera"

Jazeera's advertising revenue doubled between 2003 and 2004, it could not meet its rising expenses. Additionally, Al Jazeera's advertising slot on its program is relatively small considering its size and audience. The average advertising time on Al Jazeera is about 40 to 45 minutes each day, compared to about 300 minutes of daily commercial advertising on CNN.<sup>34</sup> Besides, Al Jazeera "refuses to disclose the exact figures for its revenue or spending, but it has an operating budget of about \$40 million a year and in 2002 it took only about a fifth of this in advertising."<sup>35</sup> Emir Hamad and his cousin, Sheikh Hamad Bin Thamer Al Thani, who is the chairman of Al Jazeera, stated why the state funding continues. They officially regard Al Jazeera to be a public service, likening the public funding of Al Jazeera to that of the BBC.<sup>36</sup> Whatever the case, it is no doubt that Al Jazeera's financial administration has no choice but to depend on the Qatari government itself. This continued financial assistance from the host country inevitably questions the editorial impartiality of Al Jazeera.

More significantly, Al Jazeera does not seem eager to report on the internal issues of Qatar and the dirty laundry of the ruling family. Rather, severe criticism of the Emir and Qatari government is utterly absent in Al Jazeera's reports. To cite a case of Qatar's domestic politics, the Emir's decision in 2001 to postpone elections for the Advisory Council (or the *Majlis Al Shura*)<sup>37</sup> was neglected by Al Jazeera.<sup>38</sup> Al

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<sup>34</sup> Miles, Hugh, *Al-Jazeera: How Arab TV News Challenged the World* (London: Abacus, 2005), 2

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 355

<sup>36</sup> Transnational Broadcasting Studies (No.7, Fall/Winter 2001), "Cover Story: Sheikh Hamad bin Thamer Al-Thani, chairman of the board of Al-Jazeera, talks with TBS about the channel's coverage, pressure from Washington, and the direction of the media in Qatar," retrieved on 9 March 2011 at [http://www.tbsjournal.com/Archives/Fall01/Jazeera\\_chairman.html](http://www.tbsjournal.com/Archives/Fall01/Jazeera_chairman.html)

<sup>37</sup> Until the creation of the Permanent Constitution promulgated in 2004, the role of the Advisory Council was vague. The article 61 of the Permanent Constitution of Qatar stipulates that the legislative authority shall be vested in the Advisory Council, and the article 77 specifies that the Advisory Council "shall consist of forty-five members thirty of whom shall be elected by direct, general secret ballot; and the Emir shall appoint the remaining fifteen members from amongst the Ministers or any other persons."

Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "The Constitution," retrieved on 3 March 2011 at <http://english.mofa.gov.qa/details.cfm?id=80t>

However, parliamentary elections which will grant a right to the legislative authority have not been conducted so far (as of March 2011), and the members of the Advisory Council are currently named by the Emir.

<sup>38</sup> El-Nawawy, Mohammed, and Iskander, Adel (2003), 83

Jazeera has avoided coverage that is disadvantageous to the interests of Qatar. In response to this criticism, the Qatari government attributes Al Jazeera's disregard for Qatari issues to the tiny population of Qatar and domestic issues in Qatar being inconsequential in comparison to international news.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, neglecting the coverage of Qatar, especially unfavorable internal affairs, does not allow Al Jazeera to become a truly "independent" news channel at all. It would be better to say that, unfortunately, the financial reliance on the host country limits the independence of Al Jazeera.

On the other hand, those involved in Al Jazeera satellite network frequently declare the guarantee of independent editorial policy on its programs. According to Edmund Ghareeb's interview with a board member of Al Jazeera, "the Qatari government has not up to now used Al Jazeera in its battles, although it could have done so, and the authorities have nothing to do with the content."<sup>40</sup> In turn, Sue Phillips, the chief of Al Jazeera English in the London Bureau, clearly stated that they have an independent editorial board in which anyone from the Qatari government, or even the Emir, has never interfered.<sup>41</sup> More recently, Wadah Khanfar, the director general of Al Jazeera, responded to an interview in relation to outside editorial interference. He also said, "We are completely independent. The only one who runs this network is the editorial board that has the upper hand in defining editorial policies and the agendas of reporting and we do not have any relationship politically with the politicians and we don't take guidance from any politician at all."<sup>42</sup> However, these statements prompt the simple question, "Is it safe to say that all Al Jazeera's framing practices and editorial decisions are in its own hands?" It should come as no surprise

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<sup>39</sup> Sakr, Naomi (2007), 146

<sup>40</sup> Ghareeb, Edmund, "New Media and the Information Revolution in the Arab World: An Assessment," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (Summer 2000), 409

<sup>41</sup> Weyman, George, "Interview: Sue Phillips on Al Jazeera International's First Year," *Arab Media & Society* (Fall 2007), retrieved on 5 March 2011 at <http://www.arabmediasociety.com/?article=423>

<sup>42</sup> ABC Local Radio (19 March 2010), "Sunday Profile, Wadah Khanfar, Al Jazeera Director-General," retrieved on 9 March 2011 at <http://www.abc.net.au/sundayprofile/stories/2850789.htm>



that Al Jazeera's staff can never escape the shadow of the Qatari government or the Emir, even though they are supposed to be free of any governmental censorship. Under the total financial control of Qatar, they might have a tacit understanding on their assignments. Al Jazeera's journalists are likely to act out of self-censorship. In this sense, it is unlikely that Al Jazeera is totally "independent."

## **2. Not a Commercial Entity, but a Political Instrument**

The pursuit of commercial profitability is not important for either Al Jazeera or Qatar. A rumor once spread that the Qatari government would sell Al Jazeera in 2005 due to accumulated pressure from the United States and an advertising boycott by Arab countries.<sup>43</sup> Although there are no accurate figures of operating cost, it is estimated that Al Jazeera's budget of \$120 million of 2004 was subsidized by the Qatari government with \$40 or \$50 million.<sup>44</sup> To be sure, hosting Al Jazeera satellite network is a huge economic burden and is unprofitable for the host country. However, the government of Qatar placing Al Jazeera on the market appears to be an unrealistic plan. Such speculation should not be taken at face value. This is simply because, in essence, Al Jazeera is not a commercial entity that brings economic benefits to advertising clients and the operating country.

More interestingly, there is an account that advertisers seem reluctant to buy space on Al Jazeera possibly because of implicit pressure from Saudi Arabia.<sup>45</sup> Given the fact that Al Jazeera has gained a viewing audience of 300-500 million, this analysis may be far off the mark. No other media giant can gain such a huge number of viewers in the region. In contrast, seen from the perspective of the advertising

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<sup>43</sup> Kinninmont, Jane, "Qatar draws up plan to sell off al-Jazeera," *Guardian.co.uk* (27 April 2005), retrieved on 23 February 2011 at

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2005/apr/27/Iraqandthedia.broadcasting>

<sup>44</sup> Weisman, Steven R., "Under Pressure, Qatar May Sell Jazeera Station," *The New York Times* (30 January 2005), retrieved on 23 January 2011 at

<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/01/30/international/middleeast/30jazeera.html>

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

industry, Al Jazeera must be the most attractive and profit-earning medium for advertisement. By watching Al Jazeera on a daily basis, it is easy to observe that advertising time is relatively low in all programs on the channel. In addition, most of the advertisements on Al Jazeera are almost entirely occupied by major Qatari enterprises, such as Qatar Telecom (Qtel), Qatar National Bank (QNB), RasGas, Qatar Gas, Qatar Petroleum, Qatalum, Qatar Airways, Qatar Fertilizer Company (Qafco) and Qatar Petrochemical Company (Qapco). These enterprises' names are based on the author's monitoring of commercial advertisement on Al Jazeera Arabic in the period of 2006 to 2011. During this monitoring period, some multinational enterprises (e.g. Toyota, Gillette, STX Pan Ocean, Turkish Airlines, Land Rover, and Western Union) and government tourism agencies (e.g. India, Thailand, Cyprus, and Turkey) also advertised in Al Jazeera Arabic for a certain period. As a result, it became obvious that most of these advertising enterprises are Qatari state-owned companies. What is more interesting is that their names are always titled by "Qatar." Recently, Qatar Tourism Authority frequently advertises both on Al Jazeera Arabic and English. Al Jazeera's viewing audience is inevitably the subject of the promotional strategy of Qatari enterprises. Put simply, Al Jazeera plays a positive role in promoting Qatar all over the Arab world. In this sense, Al Jazeera is nothing less than an effective public relations agency for the Qatari government and businesses. Why does the gas-rich Qatar have to sell this useful billboard for the promotion of the country? Within the wealthy *rentier* economic system in most Gulf countries, market forces are not the main motivation for operating costly media outlets. It is, therefore, possible that Qatar has enough money to operate Al Jazeera and does not need advertisers outside its country; rather, Qatar would like to keep Al Jazeera under its influence by its monopolistic financial support.

## **B. Qatari-Saudi Rivalry through Media Proxy War**

In the first place, Al Jazeera's impact on the Middle East and international affairs is disproportionate to Qatar's national influence and leverage in the region. More to the point, Al Jazeera is a good example of "asymmetrical interdependence," a term coined by media scholar Joseph Straubhaar.<sup>46</sup> In fact, the political power of Al Jazeera is asymmetrical to Qatar's actual national power. The geopolitical environment surrounding Qatar, which is located between the two regional big powers of Saudi Arabia and Iran, is an important factor in understanding Qatar's "asymmetrical independence." Geographically speaking, Qatar is a peninsular state that shares a common border with Saudi Arabia, and it also directly faces Iran on the other side of the Gulf. Therefore, in light of this geopolitical risk, much of Qatar's policy strives to eliminate the overbearing Saudi influence.<sup>47</sup> This effort is applicable in the Arab media scene as well. Saudi Arabia launched Al Arabiya in 2003 possibly in response to its perception that its dominance in regional news media had been eroded by the growing popularity of Al Jazeera. Within the framework of the Qatari-Saudi rivalry, to what extent has Al Jazeera functioned as a political tool against the Saudi regime?

### **1. Qatar's Independence from the "Gulf Big Boss"**

On the historical side, Qatar had been politically and economically influenced by the larger neighboring country, Saudi Arabia. Since the ruling Al Saud family openly tried to bring the Qatari peninsula under its influence, the tiny Gulf state of Qatar had felt its sovereignty threatened.<sup>48</sup> In this political situation, bilateral

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<sup>46</sup> See Straubhaar, Joseph, "Beyond Media Imperialism: Asymmetrical Interdependence and Cultural Proximity," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 8 (1991), 39–59

<sup>47</sup> Saif, Ahmed A., "Deconstructing Before Building: Perspectives on Democracy in Qatar," Ehteshami, Anoushiravan, and Wright, Steven (ed.), *Reform in the Middle East Oil Monarchies* (Berkshire: Ithaca Press, 2008), 104

<sup>48</sup> Blanchard, Christopher M., "Qatar: Background and U.S. Relations," *CRS Report for Congress* (18 November 2009), 17-18

relationships had long been strained and conflicts rose over some issues. Since the assumption of power by Emir Hamad, the government of Qatar has claimed its autonomy from the dominance of the “Gulf Big Boss.” Qatar had made its best efforts to break away from the shadow of its larger neighbor, while Saudi Arabia had been offended by the small neighboring country’s moves. For instance, the prolonged territorial dispute between Qatar and Saudi Arabia over fifteen miles of desert was more than just a territorial issue. It gave Qatar the political chance to raise an objection to Saudi hegemony.<sup>49</sup> Through this border dispute, the tiny state challenged the “Gulf Big Boss” despite being weaker. This was only the beginning of Qatar’s challenge to Saudi Arabia. Actually, Qatar has put various efforts into breaking away from Saudi dominance.

Above all, the Qatari government has developed a unique economic strategy in order to be more independent from Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Qatar has the third-largest natural gas reserves country in the world, behind Russia and Iran, and it accounts for nearly 14% of the world’s natural gas.<sup>50</sup> Qatar was supposed to become a leading producer of liquefied natural gas (LNG) with the world’s largest production capacity (77 million tonnes per annum) by the end of 2010.<sup>51</sup> This gas-rich state appears to want to become the Saudi Arabia of LNG. By extension, this means a departure from Saudi Arabia’s dominance of oil resources represented by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). By the same token, the Dolphin Project, which provides the United Arab Emirates and Oman with Qatari natural gas through the first cross-border gas pipeline in the Gulf States, is another striking example. The Dolphin Project was launched not only for commercial purposes; on the contrary, Qatar utilizes the Dolphin Project as means to

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<sup>49</sup> Okruhlik, Gwenn, and Conge, Patrick J., “The Politics of Border Disputes: On the Arabian Peninsula,” *International Journal*, Vol. 54, No. 2 (Spring 1999), 235

<sup>50</sup> *Oil & Gas Journal* (1 January 2011)

<sup>51</sup> Qatargas, “Qatar Celebrates Achieving 77 Mta LNG Production Capacity,” retrieved on 23 January 2011 at <http://www.qatargas.com.qa/news.aspx?id=236032>

secure political ties with the United Arab Emirates and Oman.<sup>52</sup> Through the exclusion of Saudi Arabia in this energy security strategy, these countries can be independent from the existing Saudi-led economy system in the Gulf region. Furthermore, Qatar is a leading member of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF), which is known as the “Gas OPEC.” GECF accounts for more than 70% of the natural gas reserves in the world, 38% of the pipeline trade, and 85% of the LNG production. The three dominant member countries (Russia, Iran, and Qatar) of GECF account for approximately 57% of world gas reserves.<sup>53</sup> In other words, Qatar has become the Saudi Arabia of LNG both in name and reality. This unique strategy backed by abundant natural resources seems effective in eliminating the economic influence of the “Gulf Big Boss.”

## 2. Al Jazeera versus Al Arabiya

Of Qatar’s challenges to Saudi hegemony, struggling for supremacy of Arab media is particularly distinguished. Saudi Arabia had sensed that its dominance of regional news media was weakened by the growing popularity of Al Jazeera. Under these pressures, Al Arabiya was launched in March 2003, just in time for the Iraq war. The \$200 million start-up capital for Al Arabiya came from a conglomerate of Saudi Arabian, Lebanese, and Kuwaiti businesses.<sup>54</sup> Thereafter, Al Arabiya was brought into the MBC fold in 2006. With the establishment of Al Arabiya, Al Jazeera has actually faced increasing competition in the Arab media world. Sheikh Waleed Al Ibrahim, the owner of Al Arabiya, stated that Al Arabiya had become a moderate

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<sup>52</sup> Dargin, Justin, “Qatar’s Natural Gas: The Foreign-Policy Driver,” *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Fall 2007), 140

<sup>53</sup> Dietsch, Marcel, “The Next Global Energy Cartel,” *Forbes.com* (10 December 2009), retrieved on 20 January 2011 at <http://www.forbes.com/2009/12/10/natural-gas-exporting-trade-opinions-contributors-marcel-dietsch.html?sp=true>

<sup>54</sup> Miles, Hugh (2005), 221

CNN version compared with Al Jazeera's more extreme Fox News style.<sup>55</sup> Al Arabiya and Saudi Arabia knew well the importance of making a difference with the precedent of Al Jazeera. Meanwhile, the recovery of lost media territory is not only the reason for launching Al Arabiya. The Saudi-owned Al Arabiya is politically motivated against Qatar's growing influence in the region.

The Saudi government had frequently criticized Al Jazeera's reporting on its country and the Saudi royal family. During a regular meeting in October 2002 among information ministers from Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia, the Saudi government accused Al Jazeera of "insulting and slandering" the GCC countries.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz once accused Al Jazeera of "being a disgrace to the GCC countries, of defaming the members of the Saudi royal family, of threatening the stability of the Arab world and of encouraging terrorism."<sup>57</sup> Prior to this accusation, there was a friction between the two countries that Al Jazeera's coverage of King Fahd's illness had offended the Saudi royal family. Since then, Saudi Arabia took countermeasures against Al Jazeera in many ways. To take some examples, the Saudi Imams issued a "political *fatwa*," which prohibits Saudis from appearing on Al Jazeera's shows. Saudi journalists were forbidden from interviewing with Al Jazeera, and screening Al Jazeera in coffee shops was also prohibited by the Saudi authority. Moreover, Al Jazeera correspondents were not allowed to cover the Hajj pilgrimage from 2003 to 2007.<sup>58</sup> One of the reasons Al Jazeera was threatening was the concern in Saudi society that the Saudi youth – of which those under fifteen years of age account for half of the population – had become conscious of Arab politics by watching the Palestinian

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<sup>55</sup> Shapiro, Samantha M., "The war inside the Arab newsroom," *The New York Times* (2 January 2005), retrieved on 8 March 2011 at

<http://faculty.washington.edu/pnhoward/teaching/mms/arabnewsroom.pdf>

<sup>56</sup> Assya Y., Ahmed, "Al Jazeera Under Fire Once Again: This Time The GCC Threatens Sanctions," *Transnational Broadcasting Studies* (No. 9, Fall/Winter 2002), retrieved on 8 March 2011 at <http://www.tbsjournal.com/Archives/Fall02/Jazeera.html>

<sup>57</sup> Trabelsi, Habib, "Crise larvée entre Ryad et Doha," *AFP* dispatch (24 July 2002)

<sup>58</sup> Miles, Hugh (2005), 54

Intifada on Al Jazeera.<sup>59</sup> The strong sympathy among young Saudis for the oppressed Palestinians could lead to criticism against Saudi Arabia's foreign policy on the Palestinian issue. Therefore, for the Saudi authority, Al Jazeera's coverage posed a major threat to domestic affairs.

One of the striking examples of Qatari-Saudi rivalry is the argument over the coverage of the Al Murrah tribe incident in 2005, in which more than 5,000 members of the Al Murrah tribe had their Qatari nationality taken away. The Qatari government deprived the Al Murrah tribe of their citizenship because of its support for the deposed former Emir Khalifa.<sup>60</sup> For Emir Hamad, a possible countercoup by the deposed Emir, his father, was a political concern at the time. Moreover, the Saudi royal family supported the deposed Emir and the Saudi government viewed Emir Hamad unfavorably. Actually, in the 1995 GCC meeting, Saudi Arabia made a public statement welcoming the deposed Qatari Emir, Sheikh Khalifa.<sup>61</sup> With this political background, Al Arabiya extensively reported on the Al Murrah tribe incidence, while Al Jazeera completely ignored the issue. Although their nationality was finally restored, it is assumed to be due to the exclusive report of Al Arabiya. In addition to this, the respective reporting of Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya on the assassination of Rafiq Al Hariri in Beirut in February 2005 also demonstrated the Saudi-Qatari rivalry. While Al Jazeera's coverage was more favorable to the Syrian regime, Al Arabiya was more critical of Syria and showed empathy for the Lebanese.<sup>62</sup> Both reporting approaches seemed to correspond to the diplomatic positions of their host countries.

Regarding Al Jazeera's programs and media approach, one program in particular demonstrates an animosity toward Saudi Arabia. Mohammed Hassanein Heikal, a prominent Egyptian journalist and editor-in-chief of the Egyptian leading

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 92

<sup>60</sup> Fandy, Mamoun (2007), 57

<sup>61</sup> Hashimoto, Kohei, Ellass, Jareer, and Eller, Stacy, "Liquefied Natural Gas From Qatar: The Qatargas Project," *The Geopolitics of Natural Gas Study* (December 2004), 33, retrieved on 7 March 2011 at

<http://www.bakerinstitute.org/publications/liquefied-natural-gas-from-qatar-the-qatargas-project>

<sup>62</sup> Fandy, Mamoun (2007), 58

Newspaper, Al Ahram, for 17 years, hosts the weekly lecture program *With Heikal* on Al Jazeera. In this popular program, Heikal has examined the historical interaction among the Arab, the West, and Israel during the decolonization period. More than anything else, Heikal has been overtly critical of Saudi diplomacy on his program.<sup>63</sup> Also Mamoun Fandy argues that the airing of a sequence of Osama Bin Laden's messages on Al Jazeera is directed more at the government of Saudi Arabia than at the United States.<sup>64</sup> The frequent appearance of Osama Bin Laden drew a lot of finger pointing from the United States, who accused the channel of being the "Terrorist Television" or the "Jihad Broadcasting Station." However, according to that logic, Osama Bin Laden and Qatar shared a common political target – the Saudi royal family – and they were mutually dependent. Fandy Mamoun pointed out Al Jazeera's controversial relationship with Osama Bin Laden by explaining that "there is no mention of any crime committed by the Taliban regime. Bin Laden's and Al Zawahiri's history of terror, both in the Arab world and globally, are forgotten. Instead, Bin Laden, Zawahiri, and the Taliban are portrayed as the victims."<sup>65</sup> This is a compelling reason why Osama Bin Laden chose Al Jazeera as the contact news station for his propaganda.

Technically speaking, Lawrence Pintak, the ex-director of the Kamal Adham Center for Journalism Training and Research at the American University in Cairo, pointed out a difference between the two channels: while Al Jazeera has been inclined to use unedited bloody footage with moral outrage, Al Arabiya has adopted a more measured reporting style that avoids sanguinary images.<sup>66</sup> Al Arabiya is very aware of its difference as the moderate alternative to Al Jazeera. Al Arabiya refrains from using terms like "martyrdom" and "resistance," which Al Jazeera often uses to

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<sup>63</sup> Hammond, Andrew (2008), 339

<sup>64</sup> Fandy, Mamoun (2007), 51

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 47

<sup>66</sup> Pintak, Lawrence, "Gaza: Of media wars and borderless journalism," *Arab Media & Society* (January 2009), 2, retrieved on 7 March 2011 at [http://www.arabmediasociety.com/articles/downloads/20090629091755\\_AMS7\\_Lawrence\\_Pintak.pdf](http://www.arabmediasociety.com/articles/downloads/20090629091755_AMS7_Lawrence_Pintak.pdf)



describe the struggle of Palestinians against Israel. In early 2004, during the Iraq war, Al Arabiya replaced its management with a more pro-American editing newsroom.<sup>67</sup> This indicates Al Arabiya's intention to differentiate itself from Al Jazeera.<sup>68</sup>

Once again, the contrast in reporting manner between the two news stations is indicative of the political motives of each owner. Specifically, the multilayered conflict between the two countries "involves the Saudi brand of Islam vs. the Islam of Qatar and the Muslim Brotherhood. It is a conflict between oil represented by Saudi Arabia and gas represented by Qatar. It is a conflict between Egyptian journalists and Lebanese journalists. It is a conflict between Bin Laden and the Saudi royal family on Al Jazeera and between the Al Murrah tribe and the Qatari royal family on Al Arabiya."<sup>69</sup> This is nothing short of a proxy war in the Arab media world.

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<sup>67</sup> Lynch, Marc (2006), 65

<sup>68</sup> President Barack Obama gave his first interview to Arab viewers since his taking office through Al Arabiya in January 2009. It is telling that Al Arabiya was the first choice for the United States to deliver a message to the Arab world rather than Al Jazeera.

<sup>69</sup> Fandy, Mamoun (2007), 65

## **IV. REFORMS AND CONTRADICTIONS IN QATAR**

The global image of Qatar has certainly received a massive boost over the last decade. Rapid political, economic, and social developments by the initiative of Emir Hamad have significantly changed the appearance of Qatar. At the same time, Qatar has embraced many sociopolitical contradictions in its society and politics. Since a deep analysis of the modern state of Qatar is indispensable in order to comprehend the function of Al Jazeera, this chapter explores the various reforms initiated by Emir Hamad since he came to power in 1995 and the consequent contradictions in Qatari politics and society. This examination would provide a clue to the political importance of Al Jazeera for the Qatari regime and the ruling Al Thani family. The first part looks into the wide range of political, economic, cultural, and education projects introduced by the Emir, and how these achievements strengthened Qatar's presence in the Middle East. The second part separately analyses the five sociopolitical contradictions of Qatar, which mainly stem from drastic reforms and changes. Once again, in order to better understand the function of Al Jazeera, it is crucial to examine the sociopolitical contradictions of Qatar.

### **A. Sweeping Reforms and Rise of Qatar**

The young leader of Qatar, Emir Hamad, has pushed ahead with a wide range of reforms over the last 15 years or so. With a large income from vast natural resources, Emir Hamad has embarked on overhauling many fields, including politics, society, economy, finance, education, culture, and sports. His drastic and rapid reforms are nothing short of eye-opening for both domestic and international society.

Among them, various economic and financial projects were implemented on high priority by the Emir. As a result, it is striking that the GDP of Qatar doubled between 1999 and 2004.<sup>70</sup> Although Qatar has grown thanks to its oil exports and rapidly growing natural gas production, there is another rationale behind its striking presence in the region. This part delves deeper into the reasons for the significant rise of Qatar on the global stage.

## 1. Political Reforms and Economic Projects by Emir Hamad

The first point to be discussed here is with regards to the political reforms by Emir Hamad. The direct election of the members of the Central Municipal Council created in 1998 is regarded as the first step for popular participation in Qatar's politics. The Central Municipal Council has the responsibility of advising and monitoring local administrations and its agenda is not confined to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Agriculture.<sup>71</sup> The elections of its members were carried out in 1999, 2003, and 2007. The formulation of the Permanent Constitution is the second important step in Qatar's political reform. Qatar's constitution was promulgated in 1970 and revised in 1972 after national independence. Then, in June 2004, Emir Hamad ratified the Permanent Constitution, which had been approved by referendum in 2003. It is notable that the Qatari constitution guarantees the freedom of expression of opinion (article 47). Although the Islamic law, or the *Sharia*, is the main source of legislation in Qatar (article 1), the Qatari government basically allows all religions to practice their faiths within the country (article 50).<sup>72</sup> Interestingly enough, the first Christian church in 1,400 years is now under construction at the capital, Doha.<sup>73</sup> Unlike

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<sup>70</sup> Cordesman, Anthony H., and Al-Rodhan, Khalid R., "The Gulf Military Forces in an Era of Asymmetric War Qatar," *Center for Strategic and International Studies* (28 June 2006), 14

<sup>71</sup> Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "The Central Municipal Council," retrieved on 3 March 2011 at <http://english.mofa.gov.qa/details.cfm?id=41>

<sup>72</sup> Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "The Constitution," retrieved on 3 March 2011 at <http://english.mofa.gov.qa/details.cfm?id=80>

<sup>73</sup> Theodoulou, Michael, "Muslim state to build first Christian church for 1,400 years," *The Times* (2 November 2005)

neighboring Saudi Arabia, where public expressions of religious faith outside of Islam is totally banned, Qatar shows openness to other religions. Moreover, women's participation in Qatari society has been ahead of the other Gulf nations owing to the Permanent Constitution. The Qatari constitution grants women not only the right to vote but also to run for national office.<sup>74</sup> Besides, the abolishment of the Ministry of Information in 1997, which used to undertake the active role of governmental censorship of Qatari media, reflected a shift in policy concerning freedom of expression.

When discussing the modern state of Qatar through an interdisciplinary approach, its remarkable economic development must be noted here. Actually, even in the face of the global economic crisis that followed Lehman's fall, Qatar's economy has shown steady growth in the last several years. Another surprising thing is that Qatar's GDP per capita is outstanding among Arab nations. According to the 2010 World Economic Outlook Database by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), GDP per capita of Qatar (\$74,422) is the third highest, following Luxembourg (\$104,390) and Norway (\$84,543).<sup>75</sup> Regarding financial policies, the Doha Stock Market was opened in 1997 with the aim of privatizing state assets and boosting the involvement of private investors. In April 1998, 3,700 Qatari business leaders, for the first time, voted for the 17-member board of the Chamber of Commerce from a slate of 41 candidates.<sup>76</sup> These members had been appointed by the former Emir Khalifa. The structural change to a more competitive economy system actually enhanced economic developments in Qatar.

However, just like other oil-producing Gulf countries, the diversification of

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<sup>74</sup> Saif, Ahmed A. (2008), 111-112

<sup>75</sup> The International Monetary Fund, "The 2010 World Economic Outlook Database," retrieved on 3 March 2011 at <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2010/02/weodata/index.aspx> However, the figure of the IMF is based on "GDP per capita including foreign labors." "GDP per Qatari citizen" can be much higher than the reported data by the IMF. In fact, CIA the World Fact Book 2010 estimates that Qatar is the World's highest nation of "GDP per citizen."

<sup>76</sup> Blanchard, Christopher M. (2009), 7

the economy is also an urgent issue for this tiny *rentier* state. The economic policy of the Qatari government aims to stimulate the development of non-associated natural gas reserves. For example, the Energy City Qatar (ECQ), launched in March 2006, is the first integrated hydrocarbon business center in the Middle East and North Africa. ECQ is expected to be a key player in the high-potential energy market in the region.<sup>77</sup> ECQ aims to shift Qatar from only an energy exporting country to a multi-functional energy center in the region. The Qatari government also focuses on increasing private and foreign investment in non-energy industries. Nonetheless, the oil and natural gas industry still constitutes more than 50% of Qatar's GDP. It also accounts for around 85% of its export income and 70% of its government revenues.<sup>78</sup> For this reason, Qatar's industrial structure remains a *rentier* economy system by its nature but tries to implement a variety of economic and finance policies. Actually, Qatar is a good example of successful Islamic finance and banking in the Middle Eastern countries. Qatar Islamic Bank (QIB), which holds 53% of the domestic market and is one of the top five Islamic banks in the world, is now the center of the development of Islamic finance and banking in Qatar. QIB has operations not only across the Middle Eastern region but also in south-east Asia and Europe. QIB is a vital player in the rapid economic development of Qatar, as the main financier of infrastructure and real estate projects.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, the Qatari government launched the Qatar Financial Center (QFC) in 2007, which aims to support Islamic finance and banking all over the Middle East.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, since Qatar has now been elected as the host country of the FIFA World Cup 2022, as the first country among the Middle East and Islamic nations, capital investment from Islamic financial institutions from all over the world is expected to flow into Qatar to take advantage of this

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<sup>77</sup> Energy City Qatar, "Welcome to Energy City Qatar," retrieved on 3 March 2011 at <http://www.energycity.com/qatar/home.html>

<sup>78</sup> CIA The World Factbook, "Qatar," retrieved on 3 March 2011 at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/qa.html>

<sup>79</sup> Asiamoney (23 April 2010), "Islamic bank awards: Qatar"

<sup>80</sup> Qatar Financial Center Authority, "Islamic Finance," retrieved on 2 December 2010 at [http://www.qfc.com.qa/en-US/About-qfc/Business\\_case/Islamic\\_finance.aspx](http://www.qfc.com.qa/en-US/About-qfc/Business_case/Islamic_finance.aspx)

extraordinary financial opportunity.<sup>81</sup>

## 2. The Brand Name is “Qatar”

Aside from political reforms and economic projects, Qatar expands its sociocultural business in a broad range of fields. First of all, Qatar has become a hub for major international sporting events. Qatar’s remarkable accomplishment of winning the bid to host FIFA World Cup 2022 is still fresh in our minds.<sup>82</sup> More recently, Qatar succeeded in hosting the AFC Asian Cup 2011 and demonstrated its management ability in international football tournaments all over the world. In 2006, the capital of Qatar, Doha, hosted the 15th Asian Games for the first time in the Middle East. To cite other cases, the Qatar Exxon Mobil Open, which is a professional tennis tournament with top-ranked players, has been held annually in Doha since 1993. The Qatar Masters, one of three European golf tournaments, has taken place since 1998. The Qtel Qatar International Rally is also a well-known annual rally race. Other international sporting events, such as the International Grand Prix of Doha Qatar Cycling Tour, the Qatar International Athletics Championship, and the Commercial Bank Grand Prix of Qatar, are too numerous to list here. In addition to international major sporting events, Qatar is committed to its sports institutes within the country. The ASPIRE Academy for Sports Excellence was established in 2004 with the aim to develop Qatari athletes as world-class players. It is equipped with top-class sports and educational facilities within 290 square meters.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Siddiqui, Rushdi, “Qatar, the World Cup and Islamic Finance,” *Business Times* (12 December 2010), retrieved on 14 December 2010 at

[http://www.btimes.com.my/Current\\_News/BTIMES/articles/katta/Article/index\\_html](http://www.btimes.com.my/Current_News/BTIMES/articles/katta/Article/index_html)

<sup>82</sup> It might be safe to say that Al Jazeera bought the broadcast right of FIFA World Cup 2010 for the sake of facilitating lobbying activity for FIFA World Cup 2022. Actually, during the broadcast of FIFA World Cup 2010, Al Jazeera Sports repeatedly advertised for Qatar. Additionally, Al Jazeera already bought exclusive rights to broadcast FIFA World Cup 2014, 2018, and 2022 across the Middle East and North Africa. More interestingly, before Al Jazeera Sports, the Saudi-owned ART was an official network for the World Cup. That is, Qatar replaced Saudi Arabia as a vanguard sports broadcasting of the region.

<sup>83</sup> The ASPIRE Academy for Sports Excellence, retrieved on 3 March 2011 at <http://www.aspire.qa/>

Furthermore, through commercial shirt sponsorship, Qatar extends its presence to one of the most famous football teams in the world. Surprisingly, Spanish FC Barcelona agreed to a record £125 million shirt sponsorship from Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development<sup>84</sup> (known as Qatar Foundation) from 2011 to 2016.<sup>85</sup> Qatar seeks the top position of the world's biggest football organization. Just recently, Qatari Mohamed Bin Hammam, the president of the Asian Football Confederation, announced his candidature for the position of FIFA president. Elections for the FIFA resident will be held on June 1, 2011.<sup>86</sup> Qatar's ambitions in the sporting world are endless.

Secondly, many cultural events and establishment of cultural facilities are another significant aspect of the country. Every year, Qatar holds the Doha Tribeca Film Festival, which is known as one of the biggest international film festivals in the Middle East. The Doha Cultural Festival hosts cultural programs such as Arab music, poetry, and dance that promote the traditions of Qatar. The Arab Museum of Modern Art, which was opened in Doha in December 2010 as part of activities for the 2010 Arab Capital of Culture, presents collections, exhibitions, and programs that celebrate art by Arab artists. The Museum of Islamic Art, which was opened to the public in December 2008, showcases a collection of ancient Islamic artifacts, many of which are historically significant. The Qatar Cultural Village, which was partly opened in November 2010, displays the historical heritage of Qatar through its traditional

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<sup>84</sup> Qatar Foundation is "an independent, private, non-profit, chartered organization" founded in 1995 by Emir Hamad in order to "develop people's abilities through investments in human capital, innovative technology, state of the art facilities and partnerships with elite organizations." Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser Al Missned, the second wife of Emir Hamad, is the chair of Qatar Foundation.

Qatar Foundation, "Vision," retrieved on 5 May 2011 at <http://www.qf.org.qa/discover-qf/qatar-foundation-vision>

Moreover, Qatar Foundation proactively publicizes its activity through advertisement on Al Jazeera English since March 2011.

<sup>85</sup> BBC Sports (10 December 2010), "Barcelona & Qatar Foundation agree £125m shirt deal," retrieved on 25 February 2011 at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport2/hi/football/europe/9276343.stm>

<sup>86</sup> The Asian Football Confederation (18 March 2011), "Bin Hammam to contest FIFA top job," retrieved on 18 March 2011 at <http://www.the-afc.com/en/football-development/vision-asia/33901-bin-hammam-to-contest-fifa-top-job>

architecture and its hosting of many cultural facilities. It is especially notable that these cultural institutions have been established over the last few years. The National Museum of Qatar, which is currently under refurbishment, is scheduled to reopen in December 2014 as one of the most modern museums in the region.<sup>87</sup> Qatar has become the center of Arab Islamic culture.

Thirdly, bold education reform has been on the agenda for the government of Qatar. Since the 2000s, Qatar's compulsory education system has changed into more modern and effective institutions with the aim of enhancing of Qatari students' competitiveness in the world.<sup>88</sup> With this radical education reform, learning English has become mandatory from the first grade of elementary school onwards. As a consequence of this English instruction, hours for Islamic and Arabic studies have been relatively reduced.<sup>89</sup> In 2001, Qatar Foundation set up Education City in 2,500 acres on the outskirts of Doha. Education City aims to be the center of higher education in the Middle East. Six American universities (Carnegie Mellon University, Cornell University, Georgetown University, Northwestern University, Texas A&M University, and Virginia Commonwealth University) have branch campuses in Education City. These American universities receive huge financial assistance, such as cost for facilities and faculty salaries from Qatar Foundation. Of particular note is that Education City provides Qatari women with broad opportunities to receive higher education.<sup>90</sup> Education City also contains the RAND Corporation, which is an American policy think tank, and the Qatar Science and Technology Park (QSTP), which provides laboratories designed for advanced science and technology companies over the world. Al Jazeera Children's headquarters is located in Education City as

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<sup>87</sup> Qatar Museums Authority, "National Museum of Qatar," retrieved on 3 March 2011 at <http://www.qma.com.qa/eng/index.php/qma/collections/3>

<sup>88</sup> Nasser, Cilina, "Rigid Qatar schools undergo radical transformation into modern institutions," *The Daily Star* (8 March 2004)

<sup>89</sup> Glasser, Susan B., "Qatar Reshapes Its Schools, Putting English Over Islam," *The Washington Post* (2 February 2003)

<sup>90</sup> Lewin, Tamar, "In Oil-Rich Mideast, Shades of the Ivy League," *The New York Times* (11 February 2008), retrieved on 27 February 2010 at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/11/education/11global.html>



well. Changes and advancements in the education system are the outstanding accomplishments of Emir Hamad.

Fourth, Qatar has convened a great number of major international conferences, selling itself as a world-class venue in the region. By hosting the Doha Development Round, the multilateral trade negotiation of the World Trade Organization (WTO) that commenced in November 2001, Qatar was introduced to the global economic stage. Moreover, the Qatari government willingly welcomes conferences on unfettered discussions, such as the World Peaceful Mobilization against Foreign Invasion, the workshop on human rights in Asia and the Indian Ocean, and the annual Doha Forum on Democracy and Free Trade, which are sometimes difficult to host in other Arab countries due to their controversial themes. Among them, the Doha Debates sponsored by Qatar Foundation are a public forum of free speech in Qatar, providing an argument space for the major contemporary political topics of the Arab and Islamic world, such as the recent political turmoil in the Middle East and North Africa. These debates are hosted by Tim Sebastian, the award-winning former BBC correspondent, who founded them in 2004 and ensured their editorial independence. The Doha Debates are televised eight times a year by BBC World News.<sup>91</sup> More recently, Qatar convened the 2010 World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE), which focused on improving existing education systems over the world. Having grown into a venue for international events and conferences, Qatar significantly enhances its visibility in the world.

As one of the largest exporters of LNG, the Qatar economy will maintain its unprecedented prosperity. Thanks to its huge oil and natural gas revenues, Qatar is one of the best welfare states in the world. Its native population enjoys comprehensive benefits of free health care, free education, and desired employment provided by the regime. It becomes obvious through these sweeping reforms and various events that

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<sup>91</sup> The Doha Debates, "About the Debate," retrieved on 22 February 2011 at <http://www.thedohadebates.com/page.asp?p=3259>

Qatar seeks to be more than just a *rentier* state rich in natural resources. The Qatari government seems to be pursuing the diversification of its economic and industrial structure through these efforts. Ultimately, all of Qatar's efforts paid off when it was awarded the FIFA World Cup 2022. This brought about a sense of achievement and pride in being Qatari. The Emir of Qatar unified a nation through a bid on the most exciting world sporting event. Hosting the World Cup will accelerate nationwide infrastructure projects such as the Doha metro network and the Qatar-Bahrain causeway project. By one estimate, the initial cost of the world's most popular sporting event is as much as \$65 billion. As a matter of course, not only Qatar but the entire region will experience the positive economic effects of investment for the World Cup.<sup>92</sup> Winning the bid for the World Cup will lead to additional success in the diversification of Qatar's industries. By maintaining growth with diversified forms of projects, above all, this tiny Gulf state has attained success in building a prominent brand-name "Qatar" all over the world.<sup>93</sup>

## B. Sociopolitical Contradictions of Qatar

Since the wresting of power by Emir Hamad, the state of Qatar has enjoyed numerous benefits from diverse reforms and projects. At first glance, Qatar's prosperity appears to be at the best in its history. But on the one hand, in step with the drastic and enormous changes, the country has begun to show some contradictions in its policies and social structure. In general, sudden growth and change have a negative

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<sup>92</sup> Salama, Vivian, "Dubai says 2022 Soccer World Cup in Qatar will lure investment to region," *Bloomberg* (22 December 2010), retrieved on 5 March 2011 at <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2010-12-22/dubai-says-2022-soccer-world-cup-in-qatar-will-lure-investment-to-region.html>

<sup>93</sup> An acquisition of the Harrods, a London high-end department store, by Qatar Holding for £1.5 billion, which is an investment arm of Qatar Investment Authority, raised eyebrows in Europe. This means that "Qatar" brand penetrates in diverse ways. BBC News (8 May 2010), "Mohammed Al Fayed sells Harrods store to Qatar Holdings," retrieved on 4 March 2011 at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/8669657.stm>

effect on society and politics in some cases. It is becoming evident that Qatar is no exception, and actually contains a complicated inconsistency. This inconsistency can be summarized by the five following sociopolitical contradictions of Qatar and its leader, Emir Hamad: (1) Emir Hamad promotes democratization, while keeping his exclusive sovereignty; (2) Although most of the indigenous Qatari population is comprised of Wahhabi conservatives, Emir Hamad is an outstanding modernizer in the Arab Islamic world; (3) While depending heavily on foreign labor for its economic development, the exploding young Qatari population is likely to turn into the unemployed sometime soon; (4) The foreign and economic policies of Qatar are much closer to Israel, while providing a safe haven for expelled Islamic activists like Sheikh Yusuf Al Qaradawi; (5) Under the total protection of U.S. military power for national security, Qatar's domestic security has been threatened by anti-American groups. By discussing each contradiction point by point, the instability of Qatar's politics and society caused by its own inconsistency is revealed in this chapter.

### **1. "Democratization" by the Absolute Leader**

The Emir of Qatar, Emir Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani, was educated in the United Kingdom. He graduated from Sandhurst, the British Royal Military Academy, in 1971 – the year Qatar gained independence from the United Kingdom. When Emir Hamad assumed power by a peaceful coup in June 1996, he was only 45 years old and was the youngest leader in the GCC countries. Emir Hamad was seen as a new generation of Arab leader, surrounded by young Western-educated advisers. In July 2005, in Italy, Emir Hamad stated that the absence of democracy is a backwardness of development and a cause of prolonged violence in the Arab world.<sup>94</sup> In line with his statement, Emir Hamad has embarked on a number of programs towards "democratization." The sequence of political reforms and economic policies mentioned above are the main parts of his "democratization." As a result of his efforts,

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<sup>94</sup> Cordesman, Anthony H., and Al-Rodhan, Khalid R. (2006), 13

the New York Times praised the state of Qatar by saying that “Qatar is now one of the most liberal, democratic countries in the traditionally tribal-ruled neighborhood.”<sup>95</sup>

Despite its significant achievements, however, this so-called “democratization” is open to question in many aspects. The Central Municipal Council, which is assumed as a way of political participation for the people, is actually not granted real decision-making power by Emir Hamad. The Emir does not intend to part with his absolute authority.<sup>96</sup> In reality, chapter two of the Permanent Constitution, which is composed of article 64-75, specifies the Emir’s authority and the retention of his absolute power.<sup>97</sup> Emir Hamad firmly establishes his power as the monarch of Qatar, while calling for the promotion of “democratization.” Furthermore, the Qatari government does not permit the formation of political parties. Freedom of political activity, which is a critical element of democracy, has not been granted to the people of Qatar. The ruling Al Thani family is the one and only political party per se. This degree of “democratization” is obviously lacking in political liberalization, even though the Emir declares the importance of democracy here and there. Under these political circumstances, Emir Hamad and the ruling Al Thani family are likely to never loosen their hold on absolute authority. In essence, centralization of all power by the Emir himself seems to be incompatible with “democratization,” and a limited course of “democratization” would not jeopardize his absolute power. The reality is that the Emir’s fourth-oldest son, Crown Prince Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani (born in 1980), is expected to be the heir apparent in the same manner of succession in other authoritarian Arab regimes. It is certain that the transfer of power will be conducted without democratic elections. In any event, the Al Thani

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<sup>95</sup> Smith, Craig S., “A Tiny Gulf Kingdom Bets Its Stability on Support for U.S.,” *The New York Times* (24 October 2002), retrieved on 23 February 2011 at

<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/10/24/international/middleeast/24QATA.html?pagewanted>

<sup>96</sup> Rosman-Stollman, Elisheva, “Qatar: Liberalization as Foreign Policy,” Teitelbaum, Joshua (ed.), *Political Liberalization in the Persian Gulf* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 192

<sup>97</sup> Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “The Constitution,” retrieved on 5 December 2010 at <http://english.mofa.gov.qa/details.cfm?id=80>

dynasty will have absolute control over the emirate. More importantly, the repeated delay of parliamentary elections is a striking example of Qatar's dubious attitude toward "democratization." Taking into consideration both the domestic atmosphere and the relationship with neighboring countries, the Emir of Qatar conveniently delays or ignores the promise of parliamentary elections.<sup>98</sup> There is no doubt that Emir Hamad is not very willing to seek Qataris' endorsement of his legitimacy through democratic elections. In view of all that, as a whole, the state of Qatar is in the category of "liberalized autocracy,"<sup>99</sup> which is a far cry from democratized countries.

In addition to the Emir's subtle approach to political participation, it should be noted here that the people of Qatar are basically considered apathetic about national politics. Their political apathy stems from *rentierism* within the state economy and society.<sup>100</sup> The Qatari authority has provided Qataris with a generous social welfare system. Just as free healthcare is granted to all Qataris, free education from kindergarten to university is offered by the state. Not only Qataris do not pay for utilities, but also "all Qatari citizens are eligible to receive plots of land ranging 700 to 1,500 square meters and an interest-free loan of up to QR850,000 (approximately \$233,000 in 2008) toward its development."<sup>101</sup> In other words, the people of Qatar grow up with a silver spoon in their mouths, and they seem to entrust the regime with the steering of political affairs in return for enough social services and generous welfare benefits. The *rentierism* works on keeping the Qatari mind off of politics.

It is also possible to suppose that Qatar's eye-catching sporting and cultural events serve not only as a self-esteem boost but also as an effective distraction from domestic politics. More precisely, the successful World Cup 2022 bid won the support

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<sup>98</sup> Kamrava, Mehran, "Royal Factionalism and Political Liberalization in Qatar," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 63, No. 3 (2009), 417

<sup>99</sup> See Brumberg, Daniel, "The Trap of Liberalized Autocracy," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (October 2002), 56-68

<sup>100</sup> Kamrava, Mehran (2009), 419

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 406

from all the Qatari people and enhanced Qatar's nationalism. Without granting real political participation, the government could not have met popular demand any better. In a similar fashion, there is an interesting conjecture that the Doha Stock Market is an effective tool in keeping Qataris away from domestic politics. Money games in the financial markets have diverted people's attention from politics.<sup>102</sup> That is to say, a combination of abundant welfare benefits, promotion of nationalism, the blessing of economic development, and a number of controlled "democratization" programs have successfully resulted in the de-politicization of Qataris.

## 2. Rapid Modernization in a Wahhabi Country

In light of history, Qatar is a Wahhabi country by nature. Qatar and the ruling Al Thani family have their origin in the Wahhabi school of Sunni Islam.<sup>103</sup> Since Wahhabism, which is a puritanical movement of Sunni Islam, is basically incompatible with innovations and practices that diverge from the original Islam of the seventh century,<sup>104</sup> it hesitates in and even opposes the implementation of the politico-religious changes in Islamic society. The rapid modernization initiated by Emir Hamad has transformed traditional Qatar society into a modern state over a short period of time. It stands to reason that, for conservative Qataris and even orthodox royal family members, the state appears to be gradually moving away from its Islamic traditions and teachings. In particular, some of the pious senior citizens, who cherish the good old Qatari days based on Islam rather than material wealth, might feel repulsion toward the rapidly modernized Qatari society. In a country where Wahhabi jurisprudence is embraced from generation to generation, departure from the concept of Islam surely provokes various conflicts between modernizers and traditional conservatives. It should be also noted that the social structure of Qatar remains

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<sup>102</sup> Saif, Ahmed A. (2008), 115

<sup>103</sup> Rathmell, Andrew, and Schulze, Kirsten, "Political Reform in the Gulf: The Case of Qatar," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (October 2000), 52

<sup>104</sup> Blanchard, Christopher M., "The Islamic Traditions of Wahhabism and Salafiyya," *CRS Report for Congress* (24 January 2008), 1

patrimonial and consists of the strong bond of kinship. Qatar is essentially a land of tribal society rooted in tribalism and nepotism as well as the traditional Wahhabi realm. It is possible that the nature of a tribal-based society cannot adapt to rapid modernization smoothly, and Qatar's traditional patriarchal system may be negatively eroded by the Westernization of life style.

For this unique, religious background, the nature and roots of Qatari soil could easily cultivate Islamism, which is considered as a political discourse that centers Islam within the political order. The notion of Islamism extends to the assertion of a Muslim subjectivity and the reconstruction of society based on Islamic principles. Similarly, an Islamist is someone who puts their Muslim identity at the center of their political practice.<sup>105</sup> The strong roots of the Wahhabi school leave room for the emergence of Islamism in Qatar. Moreover, the argument that Islamism reacts to the ramifications of rapid economic development is valid.<sup>106</sup> Assuming that the fragmentation of traditional life by economic growth could lead people to support the rise of Islamism, to what extent have the rapid changes influenced the traditional Islamic community in Qatar? Some Qataris might be displeased with the drastic changes in Qatar's society and culture. Possibly, sociopolitical changes could have provoked a backlash from Islamic conservatives, especially senior Qatari citizens. More specifically, Islamism might attract those Qataris who are satisfied with the material wealth but essentially dissatisfied with the poverty of the Islamic spirit. Spiritually dissatisfied Qataris might devote themselves to Islamism at some stage. Islamism also responds to the integration of Muslim society into the Western-led capitalist system, which erodes Islamic identities.<sup>107</sup> Once again, the effect of cultural erosion by rapid modernization, such as the destruction of tribal society, could boost the possibility of Islamism in Qatar. It cannot be denied that Islamism would be

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<sup>105</sup> Sayyid, Bobby S., *A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentrism and the Emergence of Islamism* (London, New York: Zed Books, 1997), 17

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 20

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 22

deliberately planted by other conservative Arabs with an aim to disturb domestic affairs in Qatar. For these reasons, considering that Qatar can trace its roots to Wahhabism, the government of Qatar needs to carefully handle the potential of Islamism in order to maintain its stability and prosperity.

### 3. Exploding Young Population and Increasing Foreign Labors

It was surprising that, in 2009, Qatari males topped the list of highest life expectancy in the world.<sup>108</sup> Even though the total population of Qatar is no more than 1,700,000 people, including foreigners, this is the first time that an Arab country reached the top of world longevity ratings. In fact, between 1950 and 1990, average life expectancy in the Gulf countries increased from 42 to 67 years for males and from 44 to 70 years for females. The rapid improvement in socioeconomic conditions financed by petroleum revenue supported relative declines in birth and death rates.<sup>109</sup> At the same time, Qatar has been experiencing an unprecedented youth explosion. It is estimated that nearly half of Qatar's population is below 30 years of age.<sup>110</sup> The demographic trends of Qatar can be summarized by two patterns: a large youth population and exponential population growth fueled by foreigners, including migrant labor. To be more precise, the total population of Qatar in 1970 was only 111,133 people (male 71,714 and female 39,419), and the number of Qatari nationals was 45,039 people. In contrast, the 2010 Qatari census shows that its population had reached 1,699,435 people (male 1,284,739 and female 414,696).<sup>111</sup> Over four decades, surprisingly enough, the population of this tiny state has grown 15 times.

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<sup>108</sup> McCurry, Justin, "Japan's women toast their own health as life expectancy rises again," *Guardian.co.uk* (1 August 2010), retrieved on 3 October 2010 at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/aug/01/japan-women-life-expectancy-rises>

<sup>109</sup> Omran, Abdel R., and Roudi, Farzaneh, "The Middle East Population Puzzle," *Population Bulletin*, Vol.48, No.1 (July 1993), 8

<sup>110</sup> Cordesman, Anthony H., and Al-Rodhan, Khalid R. (2006), 16

<sup>111</sup> The population of Qatari citizens only is not specified in the 2010 population census. The imbalanced sex ratio for the total population is due to the majority of guest workers being male.

The Qatar Statistics Authority, "The 2010 Census of Population, Housing and Establishment," retrieved on 23 January 2011 at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/nea/136078.htm>



This astounding population growth mostly results from the huge influx of foreigners not only from developing countries as migrant physical labor but also from industrial countries as resident officers or professionals in corporations. Indeed, the number of Japanese living in Qatar as of 2009 (1,123 people) has increased six times from 2004 (185 people).<sup>112</sup>

With the rapid demographic change, there is a large concern of whether every single young Qatari will be able to secure employment in the years to come. The job market for native Qataris is likely to run short of employment offers. The rapid expansion of the youth population can be a potential risk for Qatar's employment market. Since the youth bulge is more likely to exert a harmful influence on the domestic job market, the Qatari government will face a challenge in maintaining balance between supply and demand for employment. The unbalanced demographic growth is an undeniable internal factor of instability.

In response to this job environment, the government of Qatar has taken the step of a "Qatarization" strategy, which is intended to increase the proportion of native Qataris in both the public and private employment on the condition that every private business operating in Qatar needs to allocate 20% of its positions to Qataris.<sup>113</sup> This quota policy shows that the Qatari government is trying to increase the employment of Qatari nationals in diversified industries. Likewise, the Minister of Labor and Social Affairs mentioned that "non-specialist" jobs in ministries and public departments were required to be replaced by native Qataris by the end of March 2009.<sup>114</sup> Just recently, as part of the "Qatarization," 784 Qatari nationals were employed in the public and private sectors from January to February 2011. Of the total figure, 557 people were recruited by private companies and 227 people were

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<sup>112</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Statistics of Japanese living overseas," retrieved on 23 January 2011 at <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/toko/tokei/hojin/index.html>

<sup>113</sup> Kamrava, Mehran (2009), 406-407

<sup>114</sup> Elshamy, Anwar, "'Non-specialist' jobs at ministries only for Qataris," *Gulf Times* (23 March 2008), retrieved on 23 February 2011 at [http://www.gulf-times.com/site/topics/article.asp?cu\\_no=2&item\\_no=208835&version=1&template\\_id=57&parent\\_id=56](http://www.gulf-times.com/site/topics/article.asp?cu_no=2&item_no=208835&version=1&template_id=57&parent_id=56)

appointed by public institutions, such as the Ministry of Interior and the Qatari National Bank.<sup>115</sup> The “Qatarization” strategy has so far brought employment to young Qataris; however, it is still unclear whether the “Qatarization” strategy can continue to steadily provide sufficient jobs in the coming decades.

Furthermore, there is a particular tendency among native Qataris to hope for work in the public sector. Only a few native Qataris prefer to work in the private sector, even though they were unemployed.<sup>116</sup> Non-wage benefits, such as job security and retirement allowances provided by the public sector, are big incentives for Qataris. Partly due to the lack of professional skills required to work in private industry, the public sector is the only job opportunity for many Qataris, especially first-time job seekers.<sup>117</sup> Indeed, many Qataris do not acquire enough skills to work in the competitive private sector, and they tend to look for high income positions without professional skills and knowledge. The public sector offers such relatively high-paying and low-skilled occupations for native Qataris.<sup>118</sup>

On the other hand, Qatar’s economy and social services have been heavily dependent on foreign labor. Qatar has welcomed foreign migrant labor in a variety of industries along with the development of its economy. It is particularly worth noting that more than four-fifths of the total population consists of non-Qataris such as Indians, Pakistanis, and Iranians, in addition to other Middle Eastern nationalities.<sup>119</sup> This means that the Qatari labor market has embraced a structural contradiction regarding the balance of supply and demand similar to other GCC countries. In particular, most manual labor is done by non-Qataris. Not to mention that native

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<sup>115</sup> The Peninsula (8 March 2011), “784 nationals get job in two months,” retrieved on 10 March 2011 at

<http://www.thepeninsulaqatar.com/qatar/145030-784-nationals-get-job-in-two-months-.html>

<sup>116</sup> Richards, Alan, and Waterbury, John, *A Political Economy of the Middle East: Third Edition* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 2007), 404

<sup>117</sup> Berrebi, Claude, Martorell, Francisco, and Tanner, Jeffery C., “Qatar’s Labor Markets at a Crucial Crossroad,” *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 63, No. 3 (2009), 428-429

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 435-436

<sup>119</sup> The Qatar Statistics Authority, “The 2010 Census of Population, Housing and Establishment,” retrieved on 23 January 2011 at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/nea/136078.htm>

Qataris seldom prefer to work in hard and dangerous jobs that require physical labor such as construction sites and garbage collection, Qataris are not likely to take on such jobs, even though that they may be unemployed. This is a significant contradiction in Qatari society.

With the huge influx of foreigners, Qatari society has rapidly become multinational. As is the case with migrant workers' issue in Western and other GCC countries, the diverse ethnic and religious structure might influence the internal security of Qatar. Similarly, the existence of foreign migrant labor could become an external factor of instability in Qatar. While foreign workers, both professionals and unskilled labor, serve as the basis for Qatar's economic growth and basic social services, they have been excluded from political life and welfare state benefits. Although the Qatari government has carefully dealt with the demographic transition and gotten along with migrant workers so far, the uncertainty caused by growing non-nationals could create a new challenge for Qatar. The 2009 State Department human rights report on Qatar reported that the Qatari labor law "prohibits all forms of forced or compulsory labor. However, there were reports that such practices occurred. Foreign workers in many cases worked under circumstances that constituted forced labor. These conditions were found primarily in the construction and domestic labor sectors."<sup>120</sup> This report is highly suggestive of accumulated frustration among foreign workers in Qatar.

#### **4. Controversial Relationship with Israel**

Building up close relations with Israel has been a notable diplomatic strategy of Qatar. While there is no official agreement, the Qatari government has proactively established a diplomatic and commercial relationship with Israel, despite Israel having antagonized neighboring Middle Eastern countries. Emir Hamad has

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<sup>120</sup> The U.S. Department of State, "2009 Human Rights Report: Qatar," retrieved on 19 February 2011 at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/nea/136078.htm>

acknowledged that Qatar would like to play a role in supporting peace negotiations between Israel and Palestine.<sup>121</sup> It should be noted that Doha hosted an Israeli trade representative office, which was closed down in 2009 because of the Israeli offensive on Gaza. Although the office has not resumed so far, Qatar is the only Gulf Arab country to be actively building a relationship with Israel.

Historically speaking, for the state of Qatar, the signing of the Oslo Declaration of Principles between Israel and Palestine opened a path to improve relations with Israel. In this process, many trade ventures were introduced and Israeli officials officially visited Qatar. Eventually, by allowing Israel to open the trade representative office at Doha in May 1996, Qatar became the first GCC country to admit *de facto* recognition of Israel.<sup>122</sup> In addition to this, Qatar invited Israel to the 1997 Middle East North Africa Economic Conference in Doha. This triggered a boycott of the conference by a number of Arab countries including Saudi Arabia. Actually, only five countries (Yemen, Jordan, Oman, Kuwait, and Tunisia) sent low-level delegations to the conference.<sup>123</sup> Qatar's bold attempts to normalize its relations with Israel provoked a sense of aversion among many Arab countries. The onset of the Al Aqsa Intifada in 2000 constricted Qatar's activities with Israel. Eventually, the Israeli trade office in Doha was temporarily closed in November 2000. However, this did not indicate Qatar's willingness to break relations with Israel. Not long after the Al Aqsa Intifada, in May 2003, Qatari and Israeli foreign ministers held a high-level meeting in Paris to restore better relations between the two countries. The Qatari foreign minister, Sheikh Hamad Bin Jassim, said that "Qatar

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<sup>121</sup> Blanchard, Christopher M. (2009), 21

<sup>122</sup> Rabi, Uzi, "Qatar's Relations with Israel: Challenging Arab and Gulf Norms," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 63, No. 3 (Summer 2009), 448-449

<sup>123</sup> MacKinnon, Colin, and Curtiss, Richard H., "The MENA Summit Conference in Doha: Two Views," *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* (January/February 1997), retrieved on 22 February 2011 at <http://www.washington-report.org/component/content/article/2798-the-mena-summit-conference-in-doha-two-views-.html>

could consider a peace treaty with Israel if it served the Gulf state's interests."<sup>124</sup> Moreover, in 2005, Qatar asked Israel to support its candidacy for a two-year term position on the United Nations Security Council.<sup>125</sup> As a result, Qatar obtained a rotating seat on the United Nations Security Council from 2006 to 2008. In April 2008, Tzipi Livni, the Foreign Minister of Israel, was invited to the Doha Forum on Democracy, Development, and Free Trade. Syria and Iran cancelled their participation due to Livni's presence at the conference. The Gaza War during the winter of 2008-2009, which began with Israel's military operation against Hamas, challenged Qatar's relations with Israel and its efforts to be a political mediator in the region. The Qatari Premier announced that it froze its ties with Israel and shut down the Israeli trade office in Doha.<sup>126</sup> Nevertheless, the government of Qatar does not seem to want to part ways with Israel. On the contrary, Qatari officials call on Israeli officials to discuss the possibility of resuming the Israeli mission in Qatar.<sup>127</sup> Although the Israeli government rejected rapprochements to restore ties with Qatar and reopen its office in Doha,<sup>128</sup> the Qatari-Israeli relations could be restored in the near future.

In contrast to its commitment to Israel, Qatar has served as a safe haven for Islamic radicals expelled from their countries and traditionally sheltered religious exiles from Saudi Arabia. A striking example is that Qatar hosts Sheikh Yusuf Al Qaradawi, who justified suicide bombing attacks on Israeli civilians as *Jihad* to regain

<sup>124</sup> BBC News (14 May 2003), "Israel Holds Talks With Qatar," retrieved on 22 February 2011 at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/3027909.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3027909.stm)

<sup>125</sup> 7days.ae (19 May 2005), "Israel backs Qatar," retrieved on 18 February 2011 at <http://www.7days.ae/storydetails.php?id=7721&page=localnews&title=Israel%20backs%20Qatar>

<sup>126</sup> BBC Monitoring International Reports (16 January 2009), "Qatar to Ask Staff of Israeli Trade Office to Leave"

<sup>127</sup> Ravid, Barak, "WikiLeaks blows cover off Israel's covert Gulf states ties," *Haaretz.com* (29 November 2010), retrieved on 25 February 2011 at <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/wikileaks-blows-cover-off-israel-s-covert-gulf-states-ties-1.327758>

<sup>128</sup> Ravid, Barak, "Israel rejects Qatar bid to restore diplomatic ties," *Haaretz.com* (18 May 2010), retrieved on 22 February 2011 at <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/israel-rejects-qatar-bid-to-restore-diplomatic-ties-1.290866?localLinksEnabled=false>

occupied Muslim territory.<sup>129</sup> In the past years, Qatar has been accused of hosting Salafist militants, who have strong connections with Al Qaeda.<sup>130</sup> In fact, Qatar was a halfway point to Afghanistan for Salafist militants receiving support from Qatari notables. Conservative Qataris also provided safe shelter to the Taliban consul to Abu Dhabi during the Afghan War after September 11th.<sup>131</sup> In short, Qatar's contradictory policy, which is a balance between cooperation with Israel and support for Islamic extremists, looks insecure and even risky.

## 5. Reliance on U.S. Forces

In terms of national security, Qatar is under the umbrella of U.S. military forces. As the Qatari military forces, excluding reserves, are only 12,400 men in 2006,<sup>132</sup> the state of Qatar has no self-defense capability without the American military. There are two important American bases in Qatar – the Al Udeid airbase and Camp As Sayliyah. The Al Udeid airbase located west of Doha has served as a crucial U.S. base for its operations and logistics. This airbase also serves as a strategically important forward headquarters of the United States Central Command (USCENTCOM).<sup>133</sup> In 2003, the U.S. Combat Air Operations Center for the Middle East was relocated from the Prince Sultan airbase in Saudi Arabia to the Al Udeid airbase. This relocation symbolically means that the United States has shifted the importance of military allies in the region from Saudi Arabia to Qatar. Furthermore, Camp As Sayliyah, which is the largest U.S. prepositioning military facility outside the United States, is situated on the outskirts of Doha.<sup>134</sup> Needless to say, these

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<sup>129</sup> Kepel, Gilles, *The War for Muslim Minds* (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 19

<sup>130</sup> Cordesman, Anthony H., and Al-Rodhan, Khalid R. (2006), 14

<sup>131</sup> Knights, Michael, "Southern Gulf Co-operation Council countries brace for terrorist attacks," *Jane's Intelligence Review* (1 November 2005)

<sup>132</sup> Cordesman, Anthony H., and Al-Rodhan, Khalid R. (2006), 3

<sup>133</sup> GlobalSecurity.org, "Al Udeid Air Base," retrieved on 27 February 2011 at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/udeid.htm>

<sup>134</sup> GlobalSecurity.org, "Camp As Sayliyah," retrieved on 27 February 2011 at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/camp-as-sayliyah.htm>

military bases have functioned as front-line bases for military campaigns against Afghanistan and Iraq. Therefore, hosting the other country's military bases inevitably entails the danger of strong objection from its own citizens, especially in the Middle East, where anti-American sentiment is often quite high. Meanwhile, the U.S. government frequently praised Qatar for its military contribution. In truth, Emir Hamad was the first Arab leader to visit Washington after the Iraq war ended. President George Bush expressed great appreciation for his staunch cooperation by saying that "you made some promises to America and you kept your promises. We are honored to call you a friend."<sup>135</sup> Likewise, President George Bush was the first serving U.S. president to visit Qatar after the war. In 2005, the Emir of Qatar instantly announced a relief fund of \$100 million for the devastation of Hurricane Katrina through the Qatar Katrina Fund.<sup>136</sup> It is even more interesting that, in line with strengthening the military bilateral relationship, U.S. investments in Qatar have risen from \$300 million to \$30 billion over the past decade.<sup>137</sup> In addition to this, "the Obama Administration requested \$60 million in FY2010 military construction funds for further upgrades to U.S. facilities in Qatar as part of an ongoing expansion and modernization program that has been underway since 2003 at a cost of over \$200 million."<sup>138</sup> This could be a good indication that the United States is attaching more importance to Qatar as a military strategic point in the region. These political and financial ties might indicate a honeymoon period between Qatar and the United States.

On the other hand, there has been the fact that the Al Udeid airbase has come under attack by Arabs. In November 2001, Abdullah Mubarak Tashal Al Hajiri, who was working for the Qatari air force, opened fire at the Al Udeid airbase, and was

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<sup>135</sup> Koppel, Andrea, "War in Iraq has affected U.S. alliances," *CNN Washington Bureau* (9 May 2003), retrieved on 23 February 2011 at

<http://edition.cnn.com/2003/ALLPOLITICS/05/09/us.allies/>

<sup>136</sup> The Qatar Katrina Fund, "About the Qatar Katrina Fund," retrieved on 10 March 2011 at

<http://www.qatarkatrinafund.org/aboutfund.php>

<sup>137</sup> Miles, Hugh (2005), 349

<sup>138</sup> Blanchard, Christopher M. (2009), 3

eventually shot and killed.<sup>139</sup> In October 2002, a Saudi citizen who attempted to hijack a plane with the purpose of crashing it on the Al Udeid airbase was arrested in Khartoum.<sup>140</sup> It is, therefore, hard to deny that the existence of U.S. forces on Qatari soil is an unstable element for Qatari society. The national security of Qatar is basically vulnerable to external factors, although radical activities and possible terrorism have so far been relatively limited in Qatar. Indeed, subsequent to September 11th, Emir Hamad strived to diminish the influence of Islamic extremists in his government.<sup>141</sup> Nonetheless, Qatar had long harbored exiled Islamic radicals such as a top commander of Al Qaeda, Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, the suspected mastermind of September 11th, and many Arab extremists, including veterans of the fighting in Afghanistan during the mid-1990s.<sup>142</sup> Moreover, Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, the former president of Chechen who found safe haven in Qatar, was assassinated in Doha in February 2004.<sup>143</sup> Concerning terrorism on Qatari soil, in March 2006, Qatar was actually targeted by a suicide bomber, Omar Ahmed Abdullah Ali, an Egyptian computer programmer who sought shelter in Qatar for 15 years.<sup>144</sup> Although the only casualty was a Briton and some were injured, it is easy to see that this suicide attack came as a deep shock to Qatari society. This incident proves the potential danger to the country by non-Qataris. Although Qatar has been a relatively safe state in the Middle East, the negative effect on the Qatari people of the American military presence remains uncertain in the years to come. In April 2003, in the midst of the

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<sup>139</sup> Ellis, Mark, "War on Terror: Arab is killed in attack on US base," *The Mirror* (8 November 2001)

<sup>140</sup> Knights, Michael (2005)

<sup>141</sup> Cordesman, Anthony H., and Al-Rodhan, Khalid R. (2006), 14

<sup>142</sup> Risen, James, and Johnston, David, "Threats and Responses: Counterterrorism; Qaeda Aide Slipped Away Long Before Sept. 11 Attack," *The New York Times* (8 March 2003), retrieved on 25 February 2011 at <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/08/world/threats-responses-counterterrorism-qaeda-aide-slipped-away-long-before-sept-11.html>

<sup>143</sup> The New York Times (14 February 2004), "Ex-President of Chechnya Killed in Blast in Qatar," retrieved on 25 February 2011 at <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/02/14/world/ex-president-of-chechnya-killed-in-blast-in-qatar.html>

<sup>144</sup> Krane, Jim, "Qatar bomb's impact felt throughout Gulf," *The Gazette* (22 March 2005), and Oxford Analytica (25 March 2005), "The Advent of Terrorism in Qatar"



Iraq war, a 10,000-people-strong demonstration, organized by members of the Municipality of Doha and the Advisory Council, took place in Doha in protest against the United States and Israel.<sup>145</sup>

Once again, Qatar is a crucial ally of the United States, playing the critical logistics role of the American military in the Middle East, providing both the Al Udeid airbase and Camp As Sayliyah at the capital, Doha. However, the heavy reliance on U.S. military power will continue to be an element of instability. Moreover, according to the U.S. diplomatic cables unveiled by WikiLeaks, Qatar was the worst in counterterrorism measures in the region. Qatar's security was "hesitant to act against known terrorists out of concern for appearing to be aligned with the U.S. and provoking reprisals."<sup>146</sup> To put it simply, heavily reliance on the American military while providing a safe haven for anti-American groups are contradictory politics in Qatar.

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<sup>145</sup> Da Lage, Olivier, "The Politics of Al Jazeera or the Diplomacy of Doha," Zayani, Mohamed (ed.), *The Al Jazeera Phenomenon: Critical Perspectives on New Arab Media* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2005), 60

<sup>146</sup> Shane, Scotto, and Lehen, Andrew W., "Leaked Cables Offer Raw Look at U.S. Diplomacy," *The New York Times* (28 November 2010), retrieved on 25 February 2011 at [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/29/world/29cables.html?\\_r=1&pagewanted=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/29/world/29cables.html?_r=1&pagewanted=1)

## V. AL JAZEERA AND QATAR

Al Jazeera is a successful investment for reform-minded Emir Hamad, which generates long-term political returns for the host country. By the same token, Al Jazeera is an icon of the Emir's achievement in modernizing the state of Qatar. In light of Al Jazeera's political power and Qatar's contradictions discussed above, this final chapter examines the relationship between Al Jazeera and Qatar. An in-depth discussion on the active role of Al Jazeera in Qatar's sociopolitical contradictions, especially the reliance on U.S. forces, is important. Likewise, the key point in this chapter is to explore the possible implications of Al Jazeera in maintaining Qatar's contradictions. This chapter tries to answer the following questions. What are Qatar's goals given its desperate efforts towards its own branding effort? What makes Qatar attempt to garner global attention? Why does Qatar jump to make its presence distinctive? How can we characterize Qatar's unique strategy? Is Al Jazeera more powerful or weaker than ever before? What can we anticipate the future prospects of both Al Jazeera and Qatar? It should be kept in mind that Qatar now stands out in world affairs despite its small area and limited population.

### A. Al Jazeera's Function in "Omnidirectional Diplomacy"

Since Qatar's foreign policy stems from mainly two important factors, tense relations with Saudi Arabia and shared natural resources with Iran, the soft power of Al Jazeera needs to be assessed through the lens of this geopolitical constraint of Qatar. Due to its small population and tiny territory, wedged between Saudi Arabia and Iran, the government of Qatar has been compelled to depend on its unique foreign diplomacy. That is to say, Qatar's diplomatic ties with foreign countries can be

described as “omnidirectional diplomacy,” which pursues diplomatic efforts to get along well with every country. A good example of Qatar’s “omnidirectional diplomacy” is that “by balancing Iran against Iraq in the pre-2003 era, Israel against the Arab world, and the U.S. against all other regional actors, the Emir kept Qatar safe from aggression and also ensured that it attracted regional attention.”<sup>147</sup> Meanwhile, the “omnidirectional diplomacy” could be construed as risky behavior for both Qatar and partner countries. Therefore, this section mainly delves into the function of Al Jazeera within “omnidirectional diplomacy,” looking into the goals of Qatar’s diplomacy.

### **1. Striving for the West with Its Niche Strategy**

Small states have always been vulnerable to external factors in international affairs. There is no doubt that the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 taught a valuable lesson to the small Gulf countries, including Qatar. Surely, Qatar faced no small threat through the border dispute with Saudi Arabia and Bahrain at the time. For Emir Hamad, the vulnerability to external threat is the biggest challenge that needs to be overcome. For that reason, Qatar must rely on complementary strategies, such as reliance on a powerful guardian, against larger neighbors and the exploitation of its unique niche that benefits the region or the broader world.<sup>148</sup> As Qatar was able, until the 1970s, thanks to the protection of the United Kingdom, to prevent annexation by Saudi Arabia, the Emir of Qatar has not forgotten the need for an absolute protector. Consequently, Qatar found the United States to be a perfect substitute for the United Kingdom. In the meantime, the new Emir of Qatar, Emir Hamad, strived to prepare a niche strategy to make the small country more visible in the region. More importantly, Qatar’s niche strategy is obviously oriented to the West in general and the United States in particular. Projecting the positive image that the state of Qatar is the most

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<sup>147</sup> Rosman-Stollman, Elisheva (2009), 205

<sup>148</sup> Peterson, J. E., “Qatar and the World: Branding for a Micro-State,” *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 60, No. 4 (Autumn 2006), 741

open and modernized nation among the Middle Eastern countries is actually attracting much more attention from the West.

Notably, Qatar leverages its own niche strategy in the regional political sphere. It is a fine example of a mediator of regional conflicts in the Middle East. The Qatari government does not hesitate to raise its high profile as a peace negotiator in the region, a role that Saudi Arabia and Egypt had historically assumed until recently. The Israel-Hizbullah war of 2006 gave Qatar an opportunity to stand out as a peacemaker. Qatar strengthened its presence as a nonpermanent United Nations Security Council state by sending 300 troops to bolster the United Nations' peacekeeping operations in Lebanon.<sup>149</sup> While other Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt were reluctant to openly support the Iranian-backed Hizbullah, Qatar had an active involvement in Lebanon after the ceasefire. Another example of diplomatic success as a regional mediator is, in May 2008, when the Qatari government hosted over 15 Lebanese factions and helped strike the Doha agreement, which marked the end of an 18-month long political deadlock in Lebanon. Additionally, Qatar had mediated a political dialogue between the government of Yemen and Yemen's northern rebels to end a civil war that had dragged on since 2004. In August 2010, the Qatar-mediated deal was signed by the two sides at Doha.<sup>150</sup> Qatar has also been actively involved in the Darfur crisis, taking leadership of the Darfur peace initiatives.<sup>151</sup> Although there is no official diplomatic relationship between Qatar and Israel, Qatar has been a leading player in Arab-Israeli peace talks, in harmony with expanding economic ties with Israel. Uzi Rabi, a professor of the Tel Aviv University, mentioned, "Qatar emerged as a triumphant regional hero that

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<sup>149</sup> The Economist (9 September 2011), "A bouncy bantam; Qatar"

<sup>150</sup> Ghobari, Mohammed, "Yemen officials, rebels reach peace deal in Qatar," *Reuters* (27 August 2010), retrieved on 10 March 2011 at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2010/08/27/us-yemen-idUSTRE67Q39T20100827>

<sup>151</sup> Al Hakeem, Mariam, "Qatar's Darfur peace initiative gets wide support in Sudan," *Gulf News* (19 October 2008), retrieved on 10 March 2011 at <http://gulfnews.com/news/region/sudan/qatar-s-darfur-peace-initiative-gets-wide-support-in-sudan-1.137750>

succeeded where others had failed... Qatar's ability to convince Hizbullah-led opposition forces and pro-Western factions to compromise on thorny issues and to allay the threat of heightened violence has drawn much attention to Qatar's rising influence in the region."<sup>152</sup> While the aggressive political leadership of Qatar stands out to both Arabs and non-Arabs, accusations have been made that "Qatar's willingness to embrace Iran, Syria, Hizbullah, and Hamas as part of its mediation and outreach initiatives has at times appeared to anger officials in other regional countries. Egypt and Saudi Arabia refused to participate in a January 2009 summit on Gaza called by Qatar attended by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Hamas political leader Khaled Meshaal."<sup>153</sup>

In addition to the role of a regional peace negotiator, the Qatari government has successfully earned praise for its efforts toward "democratization," one of the Qatar's contradictions, from the West in general and the United States in particular. For Western countries, Qatar might be a favorable model nation of the democratization process in the Arab world. Its own "democratization" seems to follow the standard and precedent of the West. It would be, therefore, reasonable that its "democratization" is prepared to satisfy the West rather than the Qatari people. In fact, the limited "democratization" by projecting a more democratic image has had enough appeal to successfully attract the favor of Western countries.<sup>154</sup> In sum, Qatar's quasi-democracy, which is designed to secure endorsement from non-Arab countries, has been effectively utilized for the global reputation of Qatar.

The implication of seeking close ties with Israel, other contradiction of Qatar, is also crucial in comprehending Qatar's niche strategy. While maintaining engagement with the Israeli government is a significant contradiction of the Qatari government, it may be aimed at gaining the favor of the United States, reflecting the motive to pander to the guardian of Qatar. Needless to say, relationship-building with

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<sup>152</sup> Rabi, Uzi (2009), 457

<sup>153</sup> Blanchard, Christopher M. (2009), Summary

<sup>154</sup> Rosman-Stollman, Elisheva (2009), 206

Israel involves political and social risk in the region, where anti-Israel sentiment deeply prevails. However, maintaining a close relationship with Israel has enabled Qatar to emerge as a distinctive Arab nation and has attracted national interest as the most pro-American country in the region. Stated differently, through the engagement with Israel, Qatar has gained favorable legitimacy from the United States.

Seen from the perspective of its niche strategy, Al Jazeera English shows its West-oriented dimension works well for Qatar's interests. Launched on November 2006, Al Jazeera English, headquartered in Doha, is the world's first 24-hour English news channel in the Middle East and North Africa. The channel aims to gain viewers from both the non-Islamic world and Muslim countries where Arabic is not spoken. With nearly 70 news bureaus worldwide, including Africa, Latin America, Asia, and as well as the Middle East, the channel reports "the voice of the South," where impartial news coverage has been marginalized by the Western media.<sup>155</sup> Compared to Al Jazeera Arabic, the English network covers much more Western politics. In terms of its programs, Al Jazeera English hosts high-profile personalities, such as David Frost, the veteran BBC interviewer who presents the interview program "Frost over the World," Riz Khan, the prominent anchorman, who presents the live interactive talk show "Riz Khan," and Richard Gizbert, the former London correspondent for ABC News, who operates now weekly media critique program "the Listening Post." In view of this, Al Jazeera English is well positioned to gain recognition of Qatar in the West.

As already noted in chapter four, on the surface, Qatar appears to implement basic elements for democracy such as an election system, advancement of national education, respect for basic human rights, empowerment of women, and freedom of the media. It is often said that democracy cannot be realized without strong support and need from the public. Similarly, "real" democratization should be driven by the

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<sup>155</sup> Al Jazeera.net English, "About Us," retrieved on 5 March 2011 at <http://english.aljazeera.net/aboutus/>

public. However, concerning the Qatar's domestic demand for democracy, since Qatari nationals seem satisfied with current well-being circumstances, the people of Qatar are unlikely to rise up in a pro-democracy movement any time soon. As mentioned, compared to the other Arab countries, native Qataris seem to be almost completely apolitical. Although the prospects for "authentic" democracy seem to be difficult in Qatar, ironically enough, the political stability of Qatar looks attractive to the West. In other words, Qatar does not necessarily pursue "real" democratization as long as the West is satisfied with present domestic affairs in Qatar, which ensure political stability in the region. In a sense, Qatar's own "democratization" is also a niche strategy for winning over the West.

## 2. Limits of Qatar's Paradox

Joseph Nye, an international relations expert, observed, "Qatar has managed to find an important diplomatic niche between the West and the Arab nationalist mainstream, which it backs up with its considerable financial resources."<sup>156</sup> Qatar has been politically and domestically successful in attracting favorable attention from the West by means of its diplomatic niche strategy, which makes a substantive contribution to the national security of this tiny state. On the other hand, Qatar exposes some paradoxes in the rapidly changing Middle Eastern politics. In particular, Qatar's foreign politics indicates its paradox in a striking manner. No less important is the fact that potential geopolitical tensions regarding the offshore North Field of natural gas<sup>157</sup> exist between Qatar and Iran. The Qatari government is acutely aware that building and maintaining a close relationship with neighboring Iran is imperative

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<sup>156</sup> Abraham, George, "Qatar is a Diplomatic Heavy-Hitter," *Al Jazeera.net English* (21 July 2008), retrieved on 22 February 2011 at <http://english.aljazeera.net/focus/2008/07/200872164735567644.html>

<sup>157</sup> Qatar's North Field of natural gas that is one of the largest gas deposit bounds the maritime border with Iran. The North Field, which covers 6,000 square kilometers, is expected to supply natural gas for many decades to come. RasGas, "The North Field," retrieved on 5 May 2011 at [http://www.rasgas.com/1\\_3.cfm?L3\\_id=1&L2\\_id=1](http://www.rasgas.com/1_3.cfm?L3_id=1&L2_id=1)

for its energy security. The Qatari government often supports controversial positions of Iran in international affairs. In June 2006, Qatar as a nonpermanent state member of the United Nations Security Council cast a sole ballot against a resolution specifying a deadline to roll back Iran's nuclear program.<sup>158</sup> In January 2007, on the occasion of his official visit to Tehran, Sheikh Hamad Bin Jassem, the Qatari Minister of Foreign Affairs, stated, "Iran's nuclear case should be solved through talks instead of using force. Qatar knows that Iran plays a pivotal role in the region." Sheikh Hamad Bin Jassem added, "Qatar will not be part of any Israeli or any other country's attack against Iran."<sup>159</sup> Qatar also welcomed Ahmadinejad's re-election in 2009, and Emir Hamad stated, "Iran has had four presidents since its revolution, while some Arab countries have not changed their leaders at all."<sup>160</sup> What is important to remember is that, while the Qatari government strives to establish good relations with Iran, Israel has been a good partner to Qatar as well. This "omnidirectional diplomacy" might be the antimony of Qatar. More surprisingly, it was revealed by WikiLeaks that the Qatari government agreed to allow the United States to use the Al Udeid airbase to attack Iran.<sup>161</sup>

Moreover, the fact that Qatar, protected by the U.S. military, has hosted Al Jazeera is a remarkable paradox in a way. Al Jazeera frequently hosts anti-American guests and has aired propaganda against the United States both before and after September 11th.<sup>162</sup> In the middle of the Iraq war, Al Jazeera's coverage was slanted

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<sup>158</sup> Edwards, Steven, "Qatar ties UN deadline on Iran to 'flames' in the Middle East," *The Ottawa Citizen* (1 August 2006)

<sup>159</sup> Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "The joint press conference of HE Sheikh Hamad Bin Jassem Bin Jabr Al Thani, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and H.E. Manoucherr Mottaki, the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, held in Tehran on Sunday 21st January 2007," retrieved on 5 December 2010 at [http://english.mofa.gov.qa/minister.cfm?m\\_cat=2&id=24](http://english.mofa.gov.qa/minister.cfm?m_cat=2&id=24).

<sup>160</sup> The Economist (18 July 2009), "Mixed feelings; The Arabs' view of Iran"

<sup>161</sup> Khoury, Jack, "WikiLeaks cables: Qatar okays use of airbase for U.S. attack on Iran," *Haaretz.com* (30 November 2010), retrieved on 25 February 2011 at <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/wikileaks-cables-qatar-okays-use-of-airbase-for-u-s-attack-on-iran-1.328081>

<sup>162</sup> Schanzer, Jonathan, "A Tale of Two Qatars," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, Policy Watch #685 (6 December 2002)



toward the hardships faced by the Iraqi citizens due to the U.S. invasion, rather than the celebrations of the end of Saddam Hussein's era. In Al Jazeera's choice of terminology, for instance, the U.S.-led coalition in Iraq is named "invading forces" and suicide attacks are called "martyrdom operations;" these indicate Al Jazeera's obvious stance against the United States.<sup>163</sup> In fact, Al Jazeera has been often criticized by U.S. officials. In the midst of the Iraq war, Paul Wolfowitz, the Deputy Defense Secretary of the United States, sharply accused Al Jazeera's coverage of slanting the news in favor of Saddam Hussein and endangering the lives of American troops.<sup>164</sup> An American newspaper once stated, "Al Jazeera has become the most powerful ally of terror in the world – even more important than Saudi financiers."<sup>165</sup> More recently, WikiLeaks exposed a diplomatic cable from the U.S. embassy in Doha. This cable reported, "the regional Al Jazeera Arabic news channel will continue to be an instrument of Qatari influence, and continue to be an expression, however uncoordinated, of the nation's foreign policy. Qatar will continue to use Al Jazeera as a bargaining tool to repair relationships with other countries, particularly those soured by Al Jazeera's broadcasts, including the United States."<sup>166</sup> It is now obvious that at least the United States regards Al Jazeera as an informal tool of Qatari foreign policy. Stated another way, it is a paradox or even ironic that Qatar, protected by the United States, operates controversial Al Jazeera, which is seen as an opponent of the United States.

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<sup>163</sup> Sharp, Jeremy M., "The Al-Jazeera News Network: Opportunity or Challenge for U.S. Foreign Policy in the Middle East?," *CRS Report for Congress* (23 July 2003), 7

<sup>164</sup> Timms, Dominic, "Wolfowitz sparks fury from al-Jazeera," *Guardian.co.uk* (29 July 2003), retrieved on 6 March 2010 at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2003/jul/29/iraqandthemedialiraq>

<sup>165</sup> Peters, Ralph, "Killers With Cameras - Al-Jazeera - Enemy Combatant," *New York Post* (21 June 2004), retrieved on 8 March 2011 at [http://www.nypost.com/p/news/opinion/opedcolumnists/killers\\_with\\_cameras\\_al\\_jazeera\\_4cXakAID6Va9TMq2Oq67YP](http://www.nypost.com/p/news/opinion/opedcolumnists/killers_with_cameras_al_jazeera_4cXakAID6Va9TMq2Oq67YP)

<sup>166</sup> *Guardian.co.uk* (5 December 2010), "US embassy cables: Qatar using al-Jazeera as bargaining tool, claims US," retrieved on 21 December 2010 at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/235574>

In terms of gender and women, unlike other conservative Islamic nations, the government of Qatar has taken action for the advancement of women's status in society. In fact, Qatari women have been given the right to vote, which is the first women's suffrage in the Gulf region. The empowerment of Qatari women has been promoted by Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser Al Missned, the second wife of Emir Hamad and chairperson of Qatar Foundation. In contrast with other Gulf monarchies except Kuwait, Sheikha Mozah takes the initiative in social and welfare activities, coming to the fore. Qatar's steps toward the improvement of women's rights may have gotten a favorable reception from the international community, but the Emir and his wife have faced domestic opposition as well.<sup>167</sup> This means that the frequent public appearance of Sheikha Mozah draws criticisms among conservatives by reason of it not being Islamic in their interpretations.<sup>168</sup> For some of the Qatari conservatives, the empowerment of Arab women and the activities of the Emir's wife are unpalatable.

While Qatar has been successful in implementing "eye-catching" events and "photogenic" reforms, the country does not still permit total freedom of expression and association like the West. The important point to note here is that many elections have not changed the fundamental tradition of governance in Qatar. By the same token, the Qatari constitution never grants citizens the right to change the ruler and government through popular elections. Even Education City at Doha seems to be contradictory in that the American liberal education system is operated in a non-secular Islamic state. Some may consider how young Qatari graduates, who received American education that is based on "genuine" democracy, would review their own country, which is ruled by the absolute power of the Al Thani family. While

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<sup>167</sup> Rosman-Stollman, Elisheva (2009), 201

<sup>168</sup> It is a quite impressive that, on behalf of Qatar, Sheikha Mozah gave a final presentation to the World Cup bid committee in December 2010 in Switzerland. The moment after winning the bid that Sheikha Mozah was presented with the World Cup Trophy by the FIFA President is broadcasted all over the world.

Education City is expected to raise the education level to compete with developing countries, it somehow indicates an aspect of Qatar's paradox.

### **3. Role of Al Jazeera in Qatar's Survival**

Who had heard of Qatar before Al Jazeera made an appearance? How much of an impact has Al Jazeera's broadcasters had on Arab audiences by starting its daily news with the comment, "We are broadcasting from Doha?" What else could have distinguished Qatar other than Al Jazeera? Without any doubt, Al Jazeera satellite network helps project a significant image of Qatar not only in the Middle East but also all over the world. Just as none has been more visible than Al Jazeera satellite network, the network has been inextricably connected to Qatar. There is fairly general agreement that one of the most successful achievements of the Emir's "democratization" is the initiation of Al Jazeera. It is, therefore, crucial to consider the role of Al Jazeera vis-à-vis Qatar's prosperity.

As discussed earlier, Qatari foreign diplomacy has been based on a sophisticated opportunism between pro-American policy and political ties with anti-American nations or organizations in the region. With the aim of counterbalancing heavy dependence on the United States for its national security, the Emir of Qatar necessarily rests on the popularity of Al Jazeera for its domestic security. Briefly, Al Jazeera serves as a basis of supporting the Arab public and popular Islamic discourses. By providing Islamic feature programs<sup>169</sup> and hosting influential religious figures such as Sheikh Yusuf Al Qaradawi, the Qatari government has succeeded in pandering to Wahhabi conservatives in its society and pro-Islamists outside the country with a view to resolve its contradiction. As a result, Al Jazeera seems to be curtailing the potential emergence of religiously-minded dissidents against the Qatari regime. Whereas Al Jazeera generally gains broader

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<sup>169</sup> Al Jazeera featured Hassan Al Bannah, the founder of Muslim Brotherhood, in a two-part documentary series regarding his life and thought in 2006.

support from the Arab street, the channel earns the admiration of so-called “rejectionists” as well, by hosting the leaders of Iran, Syria, Hamas, and Hizbullah on its programs. Hard-line opposition to compromise with Israel is generally favorable among the Arab publics, and reporting of one-way accusation against Israel is basically harmless to the host country in the Arab world. Likewise, providing a safe haven to radical Islamists, as well as Qatar’s Wahhabi features, has restrained the emergence of terrorism in Qatar.<sup>170</sup>

Plenty of signs suggest that Al Jazeera Arabic will continue to gain support from conservative and pious Muslims. This is because, more recently, Al Jazeera Arabic itself seems to be more “Islamized.” To cite a specific case, it is reported that some former Al Jazeera employees left the Arabic channel “because, they said, Al Jazeera’s management these days is too Islamist for them. Women were discouraged from wearing tight pants, they said, and some men refused to shake your hand if they knew you did not follow Islamic law.”<sup>171</sup> Another similar case is that, in May 2010, five anchorwomen, one of them Jumana Namur, a well-known Lebanese news presenter, resigned from Al Jazeera Arabic for the reason of not being conservative in dress code.<sup>172</sup> This is evidence of the conservativeness of Al Jazeera Arabic, and the channel is strongly aware of target viewers who strongly support Islamism on the basis of its programs. Owing to that, for the operating country, the heavy Islamic aspect of Al Jazeera results in a bulwark against the critiques of anti-American Muslims. That is, Qatar is able to skillfully disguise its pro-American image through Al Jazeera.

Moreover, Al Jazeera Sports has served as a safety valve for exploding young Qataris, who would turn into unstable factor in Qatari society by deteriorating

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<sup>170</sup> Knights, Michael, and Solomon-Schwartz, Anna, “The Broader Threat from Sunni Islamists in the Gulf,” *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy* (19 July 2004)

<sup>171</sup> Shapiro, Samantha M. (2005)

<sup>172</sup> Spencer, Richard, “Al-Jazeera presenters quit over ‘modesty’ dress comments,” *The Telegraph* (31 May 2010), retrieved on 23 February 2011 at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/7790478/Al-Jazeera-presenters-quit-over-modesty-dress-comments.html>

employment situation. Al Jazeera Sports, which provides 15 channels, pleases Qatari youth by offering numerous sporting programs. It is a fine example that Al Jazeera Sports frequently featured Qatar's bidding activity of the World Cup 2022 and exclusively broadcasted live coverage of the bid. On the day after Qatar won the bid, this sporting channel covered the scene that millions of Qatari national flags were flying, celebrating its success across the country. Al Jazeera Sports promotes Qatar's nationalism and captures the hearts of all Qataris, especially the young people. It leads to lessen dissatisfaction or anxiety of Qatari youth to some extent.

In terms of the present Qatari-Saudi relationship, the strained bilateral relationship has actually improved over the past few years. In March 2009, Qatar and Saudi Arabia officially signed the land and maritime border delimitation agreement at the United Nations headquarters. The demarcation of borders between the two countries was definitively completed by this agreement.<sup>173</sup> Qatar and Saudi Arabia finally ended a longstanding territorial dispute and re-established diplomatic relations that had deteriorated when Saudi Arabia recalled its ambassador from Doha in 2002 in protest against Al Jazeera's coverage. Interestingly enough, Al Jazeera had moderated its criticism toward Saudi Arabia ahead of this rapprochement.<sup>174</sup> After diplomatic relations between Qatar and Saudi Arabia improved, Al Jazeera has gradually begun to tone down the criticism of Saudi Arabia and the Saudi royal family over the last few years. Indeed, it is a symbolic event that the Saudi authority allowed Al Jazeera's correspondents to cover the Hajj pilgrimage in December 2007, which had been prohibited since 2003. In an interview in June 2009 on Al Jazeera, Qatari Prime Minister, Hamad Bin Jassim Al Thani, described Saudi Arabia as "an important country for Qatar" and "the backbone of the GCC."<sup>175</sup> More recently, at the

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<sup>173</sup> Arab News (21 March 2009), "Kingdom, Qatar sign maritime border pact," retrieved on 20 January 2011 at

<http://archive.arabnews.com/?page=4&section=0&article=120543&d=21&m=3&y=2009>

<sup>174</sup> BBC News (17 December 2008), "Saudis in border deal with Qatar," retrieved on 20 January 2011 at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/7788530.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7788530.stm)

<sup>175</sup> Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Interview with H.E. Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al Thani, Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs on Aljazeera Satellite Channel on

beginning of March 2011, the representatives of the two countries, Qatari Crown Prince Sheikh Tamim and Saudi Crown Prince Sultan, signed a joint agreement to deepen bilateral ties for politics, security, finance, and media.<sup>176</sup> According to the U.S. diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks, the U.S. embassy in Doha reported that the strained Qatari-Saudi relations are improving after Al Jazeera moderated the criticism of the Saudi royal family. Additionally, the U.S. ambassador to Qatar, Joseph LeBaron, mentioned that Al Jazeera has encouraged reconciliation between the two countries by its favorable reporting on the Saudi royal family. Joseph LeBaron also pointed out that Al Jazeera “remains one of Qatar’s most valuable political and diplomatic tools.”<sup>177</sup> Behind the fact that the Qatari-Saudi relationship has improved, Al Jazeera fulfills an important role as a political arm of Qatar’s foreign policy.

It should be also added that Qatar is keen to gain favor with the United States. Allowing for this “inconvenient truth” within the Qatar’s contradiction, Al Jazeera might function as an appeasement policy of Qatar toward Arabs and Muslims. One can safely state that its close alliance with the United States has been offset by the function of Al Jazeera that pleases conservative Muslims and anti-American audiences. In fact, in Al Jazeera’s news approach, there have been few attempts to examine the U.S. military presence in Qatar.<sup>178</sup> The presence of U.S. bases in the country is a sensitive issue for the Qatari government, and Al Jazeera does appreciate its position. It is quite ironic that, under the total protection of the U.S. military power, Qatar operates Al Jazeera with the slogan of representing Arab voices against Western (or American) media hegemony.

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Wednesday 24 June 2009,” retrieved on 5 April 2011 at  
[http://english.mofa.gov.qa/minister.cfm?m\\_cat=4&id=97](http://english.mofa.gov.qa/minister.cfm?m_cat=4&id=97)

<sup>176</sup> Saudi Gazette (2 March 2011), “Kingdom, Qatar to ‘deepen’ economic and security ties,” retrieved on 8 March 2011 at

<http://www.saudigazette.com.sa/index.cfm?method=home.regcon&contentID=2011030395024>

<sup>177</sup> Booth, Robert, “WikiLeaks cables claim al-Jazeera changed coverage to suit Qatari foreign policy,” *Guardian.co.uk* (6 December 2010), retrieved on 25 February 2011 at  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/dec/05/wikileaks-cables-al-jazeera-qatari-foreign-policy>

<sup>178</sup> Sharp, Jeremy M. (2003), 5

Taken all together, the target audiences by the reform-minded Emir's initiatives toward "democratization," if not cosmetic or window dressing reforms, become clear. The Emir's initiative is distinctly more directed at the Western-led international society, which prefers a democratic system, rather than at the domestic and Arab societies. To that end, Qatar has launched all kinds of policies and projects the West is fond of one after another. That is simply because, for Qatar as a tiny state with a population of only 1,700,000, the endorsement from the West in general and the United States in particular is essential to survive in the turbulent Middle Eastern region. As it were, the recognition of the state by powerful non-Arab countries is the only way to remain viable in the region, and Al Jazeera becomes indispensable for the survival of Qatar.

## **B. Future Prospects of the Two Players**

The state of Qatar demonstrates how a small wealthy state can pursue strategic foreign policy that keeps the country independent and differentiates itself from powerful neighboring countries. It seems reasonable to conclude that a security guarantee from the United States is vital to Qatar's national security. At the same time, its foreign policy has been flexible, skillfully taking advantage of building relations with other Arab and Western countries. Nevertheless, these circumstances of tightrope diplomacy or sophisticated opportunism are becoming a thing of the past partly due to the recent popular uprisings in the Arab world. This leads further into a consideration of how anti-government movements in the region impact Qatar itself. Meanwhile, looking back on Al Jazeera's journalistic history, it turns out that the channel brings out its best reporting ability during political events, regional conflicts, change of power, and warfare. Ironically, the political instability and chronic conflicts in the region makes Al Jazeera the most-watched news channel in the region. In the wake of recent political turmoil (as of the end of April 2011) in the Middle East and North

Africa, the political situation surrounding Qatar and Al Jazeera is rapidly changing and unpredictable. In fact, Al Jazeera satellite network is becoming a more and more influential news media giant not only in the region but also all over the world.

## 1. Concerning Recent Uprisings in the Arab World

Unlike Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, where Sunni and Shia exist together in one country, native Qataris (excluding foreigners) are religiously as well as ethnically homogeneous. This feature could be one of the contributions to the lack of the eruption of an anti-government movement in Qatar so far, despite many Arab countries having experienced unprecedented popular uprisings since the end of 2010. However, there was a report that some 30 senior army officers were detained on suspicion of a military coup attempt against the Qatari regime at the end of February 2011.<sup>179</sup> In addition to this, Amnesty International says that Sultan Al Khalaifi, a Qatari human rights activist, was detained by the security forces at the beginning of March 2011.<sup>180</sup> Al Jazeera's English website reported that detained Al Khalaifi criticizes book censorship by the Qatari authority on his blog.<sup>181</sup> On the other hand, in February 2011 amid the rising political tension all over the Middle East, Prime Minister Sheikh Hamada Bin Jassem suddenly announced that Qatar will hold parliamentary elections "in the near future,"<sup>182</sup> which have been suspended many times for no clear reason. Although the Qatari Prime Minister does not clarify the date

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<sup>179</sup> Al Bawaba (28 February 2011), "Report: Qatar emir foils coup attempt amid growing tensions," retrieved on 9 March 2011 at <http://www1.albawaba.com/main-headlines/report-qatar-emir-foils-coup-attempt-amid-growin-g-tensions>

<sup>180</sup> Amnesty International (3 March 2011), "Document-Qatar: Blogger Detained Incommunicado In Qatar," retrieved on 9 March 2011 at <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE22/001/2011/en/a90ca459-7bf5-479d-ba4d-903c7f476e26/mde220012011en.html>

<sup>181</sup> Al Jazeera.net English (5 March 2011), "Amnesty: Qatari blogger detained," retrieved on 9 March 2011 at <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2011/03/20113511455929372.html>

<sup>182</sup> The Daily Star (1 March 2011), "Qatar to hold consultative council elections, says county's PM," retrieved on 5 March 2011 at [http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition\\_id=10&categ\\_id=2&article\\_id=125448#axzz1FZNUXeW6](http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=10&categ_id=2&article_id=125448#axzz1FZNUXeW6)



for the elections, this could be a noteworthy decision that indicates the administration's great concern about nationals being susceptible to the recent anti-government movements.<sup>183</sup> As a whole, the Emir of Qatar, who dramatically raised the quality of life for his people, enjoys high popularity among most Qatari citizens. A popular uprising against the regime by the people of Qatar is unlikely to occur as long as the Emir can keep providing comprehensive welfare services. If that was the case, what is a conceivable unstable element for Qatar's domestic policy? Although Qatari notables and the religious class are still tactfully connected to the regime through economic incentives or nominal institutions such as the Advisory Council, the Emir of Qatar is aware that local notables and religious establishment can be potential dissidents to his authority.<sup>184</sup> This means that the government of Qatar can never rule out the target of its next uprising, although there have been no serious challenges to the rule of Al Thani family so far.

There is one another aspect that is important concerning the future outlook of Al Jazeera. Because of its reporting on the uprisings in the region, Al Jazeera satellite network has begun to acquire a new reputation from past anti-Al Jazeera countries, namely the United States. Over the last decade, Al Jazeera has been criticized by Washington for anti-American or pro-terrorist coverage in its news reports. However, soon after the Mubarak regime's collapse, the U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, remarked, with reference to a series of Al Jazeera's coverage on the anti-government movements in the region, that "viewership of Al Jazeera is going up in the United States because it is real news."<sup>185</sup> Hillary Clinton now regards Al Jazeera's reports as a "real news" source. This striking comment is an explicit appreciation of Al Jazeera by the United States. In fact, visitors to Al Jazeera's English website increased

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<sup>183</sup> Based on the author's monitoring Al Jazeera Arabic on that day, Al Jazeera Arabic did not report the decision of holding parliamentary elections in its news programs.

<sup>184</sup> Kamrava, Mehran (2009), 418

<sup>185</sup> Bauder, David, "Clinton media criticism buoys Al-Jazeera," *Herald Tribune* (4 March 2011), retrieved on 8 March 2011 at <http://www.heraldtribune.com/article/20110304/APE/1103041415>

2,500% at the peak of the uprising in Egypt, and some 50% of the viewers had been traced to the United States and Canada.<sup>186</sup> Moreover, Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism awarded the 2011 Columbia Journalism Award, which is given to an individual or organization for "singular journalism in the public interest," to Al Jazeera English.<sup>187</sup> Furthermore, Wadah Khanfar, the director general of Al Jazeera, was invited to the TED conference, a popular American talk show, shortly after the Mubarak regime collapsed. On the occasion of the TED conference, Wadah Khanfar said enthusiastically, "this may be the biggest story that we have ever covered. We have covered many wars... But this is a story. It is a great history. It is beautiful... You are witnessing change in history. You are witnessing the birth of a new era."<sup>188</sup> The director general of Al Jazeera can now talk about Al Jazeera's journalism and its code of ethics in front of American audiences. Thus, Al Jazeera has a new accomplishment as the leading Arab news media in the world.

## 2. Where Qatar is Headed with Al Jazeera

The Gulf *rentier* states have skillfully enticed political acquiescence out of its citizens through huge welfare benefits. In the course of the demise of long-plagued Arab authoritarian regimes and the consequent political liberalization, beginning with Tunisia at the end of 2010, the conventional system of government is not acceptable in many Arab countries any more. Therefore, given the fast and furious political changes in the region, what direction will Qatar head in? Can the government of Qatar keep the "omnidirectional diplomacy" that it has been conducting? Does the Al Thani

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<sup>186</sup> Edgecliffe-Johnson, Andrew, "Al-Jazeera in battle for US coverage," *The Financial Times* (24 February 2011), retrieved on 9 March 2011 at

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/58ee83ca-4048-11e0-9140-00144feabdc0.html#axzz1G6SbiQGt>

<sup>187</sup> Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism (4 May 2011), "Al Jazeera English to be honored with Columbia Journalism Award," retrieved on 9 May 2011 at

<http://www.journalism.columbia.edu/news/406>

<sup>188</sup> TED (March 2011), "Wadah Khanfar: A historic moment in the Arab world," retrieved on 9 March 2011 at [http://www.ted.com/speakers/wadah\\_khanfar.html](http://www.ted.com/speakers/wadah_khanfar.html)

rule continue to extend its clout, which outweighs its tiny territory with a small population?

Today, the authority centralization of Emir Hamad is solid, and the potential of opposition to his reign either from within the ruling Al Thani family members or from other outsiders has been curtailed.<sup>189</sup> Heir Apparent Crown Prince Sheikh Tamim has been out in public and has played a more active role in national scale events. It is an impressive scene that, at the award ceremony of the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2011, Crown Prince Sheikh Tamim awarded the Asian Cup as a representative of the host country. Both Al Jazeera Arabic and Al Jazeera Sports covered this big moment. The Al Thani family ensures the hereditary transfer of power. Qatar is likely to remain the fiefdom of the Al Thani dynasty under the absolute authority of Emir Hamad. In a similar fashion, Al Jazeera satellite network surely rests in the hands of the Emir. It might be, however, uncertain whether its control over Al Jazeera will last forever. In light of the unstable political climate in the region, the ultimate question is how Al Jazeera will/can report the situation in Qatar in the event of a people's democratization movement that demands a change in the Qatari regime. In 2011, 15 years after its launching, this scenario could become more likely. Once again, if Al Jazeera acts up to its editorial policy of anti-authoritarian regimes and pro-“real” democratization in the Arab world, it cannot get by without including its host country. This is a permanent dilemma that Al Jazeera faces.

Prosperous Qatar involves another risk in the region. Although the unprecedented cultural and economic prosperity lifted Qatar out of obscurity, that could make other Middle Eastern countries envious. To be specific, the year of 2022, when the FIFA World Cup will take place, will be a big turning point for this tiny country. In the course of the coming decade, Qatar will accelerate its developments in the short term. This means that neighboring Arab countries, especially Saudi Arabia, will be nervous about Qatar's further prosperity and rise in the region. The Qatari

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<sup>189</sup> Kamrava, Mehran (2009), 419

government needs to be prepared to respond to their malicious “envy,” which could turn out to be hostile to Qatar in many ways. In a way, the attack on Al Jazeera Sports by the jamming of the FIFA World Cup 2010 was a symbolic case. Al Jazeera Sports was the only official broadcast station in the Middle East and North Africa of the FIFA World Cup 2010. However, its broadcast of several matches, including the opening match between South Africa and Mexico, was interrupted by deliberate jamming. Al Jazeera has confirmed that its broadcast was jammed by a party in Jordan.<sup>190</sup> Since then, there has been a heated dispute between Al Jazeera Sports and the Jordanian authority over the transmission jamming. This disruption enraged millions of subscribers who love football across the region and, as a result, the network lost its well-established credibility. It is probable that there is a discontented person or party against Al Jazeera satellite network or Qatar’s success. The reason why Al Jazeera Sports was targeted for the jamming was to presumably damage the reputation of the channel. This attack on Al Jazeera satellite network may reflect how other Arab countries view Qatar’s emerging prestige.

Added to the future prospects of Qatar, it is also worth considering the post “Al Jazeera Phenomenon.” As of 2011, 15 years have passed since Al Jazeera’s founding, and the network is now at a crossroads. While Al Jazeera remains a prominent satellite news station in the Arab world, it has been challenged by the growing number of other Arabic news channels. This challenge is not restricted to Arab media. Western media has also tried to gain Arab viewers in the Middle East and North Africa, launching Arabic news channels. To cite a case, the U.S. government founded Alhurra satellite news network in February 2004. Subsequently, German Deutsche Welle has offered Arabic programs since February 2005. France 24 started its Arabic service in April 2007. BBC Arabic was launched in March 2008 as well. Even in Asia, China Central Television (CCTV) launched CCTV International Arabic

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<sup>190</sup> Al Jazeera.net English (30 September 2010), “Al Jazeera Jamming traced to Jordan,” retrieved on 18 October 2010 at <http://english.aljazeera.net/video/middleeast/2010/09/201093016559770307.html>

in July 2009. Nowadays, Arabic broadcasting is a key component of international satellite televisions. For Arab citizens, increased exposure to Arabic news provided by various satellite channels brings more perceptions of Arab world affairs. Although the expansion of news channels might be basically beneficial to Arabs, the huge influx of news sources should be carefully treated. In fact, not only is “media literacy” needed by Arab news consumers, but also Arabic news outlets need to provide independent perspectives in their reports as well.

It is also important to note here how the recent uprisings in the Arab world affect the development of Arab media and enhance the post “Al Jazeera Phenomenon.” If governmental censorship in Arab authoritarian regimes was lifted at some stage, a margin of freedom in the Arab world would prevail. When the time comes, Al Jazeera will face a real challenge in sustaining itself as the leading news channel in the Arab media world. Both Egypt and Tunisia, which are on the road to democratic change, would be key players in the post “Al Jazeera Phenomenon.” In other words, through the expected process of democratization, Egypt and/or Tunisia hold the promise of launching more “independent” news channels that can criticize their own regimes in competition with Al Jazeera. More interestingly, there has been a change inside Al Jazeera Arabic. Based on many interviews with those who are/were working for the channel, both media scholars Mohamed Zayani and Sofiane Sahraoui pointed out, “there is less enthusiasm inside the network than before; people do not feel as much empowered as they used to; the level of commitment to the mission of Al Jazeera is not as strong as it was in the first few years of the network’s history.”<sup>191</sup> They even concluded that “already, Al Jazeera is more tame than it used to be.”<sup>192</sup> With the rapidly changing political circumstances in the region, in order to survive in the more competitive and fragmented Arab media market, the giant satellite network may need

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<sup>191</sup> Zayani, Mohamed, and Sahraoui, Sofiane, *The Culture of Al Jazeera: Inside An Arab Media Giant* (North Carolina: McFarland & Co., 2007), 175

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 172

to reform the organization. Regardless, the post “Al Jazeera Phenomenon” has just started, and the new era of Arab media is coming.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Over the past 15 years, the Gulf Arab state of Qatar has achieved immense economic, political, social, and cultural advances. In spite of its limited national territory and minimal population, the Qatari monarchy is becoming a regional power with the significant initiatives of the reform-minded Emir and outflanking the conventional Saudi hegemony in the Middle East. In line with this wide sphere of Qatar's prosperity, Al Jazeera became the first viable news channel to compete with Western news hegemony, captivating millions of Arab viewers. In light of this context, this thesis has focused on the intricate web of ties among the function of the state-funded Al Jazeera, the sociopolitical contradictions in Qatar, and Qatar's "omnidirectional diplomacy."

It should be concluded, from what has been discussed in this thesis, that Qatar has no other choice but to differentiate itself from other Arab countries, especially from Saudi Arabia, for the sake of survival in the region. The era of Emir Hamad is a beginning of "democratization" and modernization. Qatar has strived to show its presence as a modernizing, open-minded, socially flexible, and pro-Western state in the turbulent Middle East. Consequently, its efforts led to establish itself as competition to the "Gulf Big Boss." Shifting its foreign policy away from conventional Saudi hegemony, the young ruler, Emir Hamad, has succeeded in re-branding his country as a good example of how a tiny state with an abundance of natural resources can survive in this difficult region. To put it simply, to keep strengthening its visibility is Qatar's utmost priority. Likewise, alliances with the West in general and the United States in particular are a national credo for its survival in the volatile political climate of the Middle East. On this account, Qatar successfully replaced Saudi Arabia as the new and notable ally for U.S. military operations in the

region. The U.S. military strength guarantees both Qatar's fragile security and implementation of the bold policies.

It is evident that Qatar will find it difficult to stay alive without the recognition from the West as represented by the United States. The ruling Al Thani family has turned its gaze towards the West beyond Arab countries. In some ways, Qatar's every action can be concluded to "leave the Arab world and enter the West." This tiny Arab state seems to already detach itself from the Arab world, preferring to nurture a closer relationship with the West. Just recently, the commitment of Qatar to the multinational allied forces striking Gaddafi's Libya demonstrates this behavior. Qatar was the first Arab country to declare participation in the military actions over Libya. Although the Prime Minister, Sheikh Hamad Bin Jassim, explained the reason for military participation is to "protect civilians,"<sup>193</sup> Qatar's willingness to contribute the Western-led operation cannot be denied. Qatar "shows the flag" to the West, in return, the West comes to owe the legitimacy of the attack against an Arab nation to Qatar's involvement. The government of Qatar has also recognized the rebel national council in Benghazi as the legitimate representatives of Libya. Qatar has become the second country, after France, to officially recognize the council.<sup>194</sup> In accordance with this Qatar's political action, the West-oriented Al Jazeera English has reported the Libyan issue in favor of anti-Gaddafi parties, frequently naming them as "pro-democracy fighters" in its news coverage. In April 14, 2011, President Barack Obama welcomed Emir Hamad to the White House for discussion about the Libyan issue and recent developments in the Middle East, praising Qatar's contributions.<sup>195</sup> By playing a maximum role of the pro-Western nation in the Libyan issue, Qatar

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<sup>193</sup> Reuters (20 March 2011), "Qatar to take part in military action over Libya," retrieved on 24 march 2011 at <http://af.reuters.com/article/topNews/idAFJJOE72J00S20110320>

<sup>194</sup> Coker, Margaret, "Qatar Recognizes Libyan Rebel Council," *The Wall Street Journal* (28 March 2011), retrieved on 3 April 2011 at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704559904576228341860730126.html>

<sup>195</sup> Black, Ian, McGreal, Chris, and Sherwood, Harriet, "Barack Obama: Qatar crucial to coalition's success in Libya," *Guardian.co.uk* (15 April 2011), retrieved on 16 April 2011 at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/apr/15/barack-obama-qatar-libya-gaddafi>



clearly demonstrates its great ambition to become a new regional power with the strong favor of Western countries. Meanwhile, the Qatari government never forgets to secure a strong foothold in the Arab politics. Qatari Abdulrahman Al Attiyah, a former GCC secretary general, has decided to run for the position of Arab League Secretary General, which has been occupied by Egyptians since its establishment in 1945 except for a short period resulting from Egypt's peace agreement with Israel in 1979.<sup>196</sup> Qatar is trying to compete with the political stronghold of Egypt, another traditional regional power.

In terms of the sociopolitical contradictions in Qatar, there are signs that the government of Qatar has recognized the necessity to redress its contradictions. The General Secretariat for Development Planning (GSDP) has mapped out a national plan for human, social, economic, and environmental development for the next 20 years. The Qatar National Vision 2030, which was declared in July 2008 by Sheikh Hamad Bin Jassim, the director of the GSDP, defines five major challenges; “(1) Modernization and preservation of traditions; (2) Needs of the current generation and future generations; (3) Managed growth and uncontrolled expansion; (4) Size and the quality of the expatriate labor force and the selected path of development; (5) Economic growth, social development and environmental management.”<sup>197</sup>

Interestingly enough, the Qatar National Vision 2030 manifests both the aim of balancing challenges facing the country and the contradictory environment in which Qatar operates. Now that the government of Qatar has identified tasks to work on, steady implementation of this national strategy is strongly required to determine a better future for Qatar and to maintain its prosperity.

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<sup>196</sup> Al Masry Al Youm English (5 April 2011), “Qatar nominates former Gulf council official for Arab League chief,” retrieved on 10 April 2011 at <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/en/node/387784>

<sup>197</sup> The General Secretariat for Development Planning, “Qatar National Vision 2030,” retrieved on 25 March 2011 at [http://www.gsdp.gov.qa/portal/page/portal/GSDP\\_Vision\\_Root/GSDP\\_EN/What%20We%20Do/QNV\\_2030](http://www.gsdp.gov.qa/portal/page/portal/GSDP_Vision_Root/GSDP_EN/What%20We%20Do/QNV_2030)

While military relations with the United States give the country security and legitimacy in the region, Qatar's internal stability is inextricably linked to its management of its sociopolitical contradictions. Therefore, the Qatari government has tried to find a fine equilibrium between its pro-American political stance and social tolerance to the Islamic radicals living in its society. In a similar way, Qatari diplomacy has been skillfully balanced among Israel, Iran, Hizbullah, Hamas, and Arab countries. This is quite similar to trying to strike its delicate balance between the implementation of modernization and the preservation of traditional ways of life in Qatar. Under such a balancing act, the government-financed Al Jazeera explicitly functions as a pacification of potential dissent, such as extreme Islamists against the status quo. Whereas the government is building close relationship with the United States, Al Jazeera is actually supporting a traditional Islamic culture.

The modern state of Qatar has successfully found its niche strategy to garner the support of Western countries. Al Jazeera satellite network, which now has become the regional and international media giant, is nothing less than a vital player of this strategy. In accordance with Qatar's political attitude, such as the role of intermediary for regional political events, Al Jazeera has been one of the conduits to facilitate Qatar's diplomatic efforts. It is now no wonder that Al Jazeera is an arm of Qatar's foreign policy. More realistically, the fact remains that the channel would not keep operating without Qatar's financial assistance. The Emir of Qatar will stay at the helm of Al Jazeera. It is, however, uncertain whether the Qatari government can maintain its "omnidirectional diplomacy" in the current changing political climate. Breaking the traditional Arab hierarchy also might create further friction in the volatile region. Furthermore, in the aftermath of anti-government movements rattling many Arab countries, the political influence of Al Jazeera has become more significant than ever. Meanwhile, along with the prospects of "true" democratization in the Middle East and North Africa, the post "Al Jazeera Phenomenon" gradually moves ahead.

The gas-rich emirate in the stormy region has oceans of money, and the Emir does know how to use this windfall wisely and effectively for the country's survival. In this sense, Al Jazeera satellite network is the most successful and functional enterprise for the wealthy Qatari monarchy so far. By the same token, Al Jazeera fulfills its duties not only as the pan-Arab news media but also as the Qatar's media outlet. It is clear, in conclusion, that the political relationship between the two players definitely deserves more study. Qatar will continue to chart its own path with Al Jazeera, demonstrating that nation size is not necessarily a drawback. Indeed, Qatar is still a small state, but no longer a weak state.

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