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**MAVERICK OF THE GULF:
QATAR'S STRATEGIC MOVES TO ENHANCE ITS NATION BRAND**

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INTRODUCTION

Two decades ago, few people had heard of Qatar or could place it on a map. A small Gulf state with a population today of 1.4 million—only 20% of whom are ethnically Qatari Arab¹—Qatar was a virtual unknown, grouped among other tiny Gulf sheikhdoms which established their independence in 1971. As a former U.S. Ambassador to Qatar comments, Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad Al-Thani (Emir of Qatar 1972-1995) was “self-interested” and had been content to keep Qatar “quiet” and “in the shadow of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states.”² But Sheikh Khalifa’s son, Hamad had a different vision for Qatar and in 1995, he deposed his father in a bloodless coup and “sought to change Qatar’s relative anonymity within the international sphere.”³

It is worth noting that “in 1952, the year that Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al Thani was born, Qatar had fewer than 40,000 people, most of them barefoot nomads and fishermen, and not a single school.”⁴ Today, the emirate he rules is home to some of the world’s most prestigious colleges in Doha’s premiere Education City, and Qatar’s population enjoys an income per capita of \$76,000⁵—the highest in the world. A senior administrator in the Office of the President at Qatar University describes the Emir as a “visionary, courageous leader.”⁶ A Qatari diplomat told the authors, “His Highness [the Emir] has a progressive vision for Qatar, and we’ve seen faster results in our country

¹ U.S. Department of State. “Background Note: Qatar.” 7 Mar. 2011. Web. 1 Apr. 2011. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5437.htm>

² Confidential Interview, March 2011

³ Lambert, Jennifer. “Domestic Reform and External Legitimacy: The Case of Qatar.” Ph.D. dissertation, University College Dublin, 2010, p123

⁴ “Small country, big ideas: oil and clever diplomacy win friends and influence.” *The Economist*, 5 June 2008. Web. 2 Jan. 2011. http://www.economist.com/node/11506776?Story_ID=E1_TTVDGSSG

⁵ International Monetary Fund. “Qatar: Statistical Appendix. IMF Country Report No. 10/62, Mar 2010. Web. 1 Apr. 2011. <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2010/cr1062.pdf>

⁶ Confidential Interview, March 2011

because ideas came from the top. The last fifteen years in Qatar have felt like one hundred.”⁷ Indeed, as Jennifer Lambert notes, “this traditionally sleepy state has emerged as one of the wealthiest states in the world and its regime is pursuing an interesting set of economic and political reforms.”⁸

Qatar has adopted various attention-grabbing initiatives in the economic, social, and political spheres during the rule of Emir Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani (1995-Present). Qatar has aggressively sought to punch above its weight across the board—through political liberalization and educational reforms, investment in a broad range of diplomatic relationships and an active role as a mediator in regional conflicts, the hosting of international conferences and sporting events, prudent development of its vast liquefied natural gas and oil resources, and the establishment of an array of institutions including Al-Jazeera, Qatar Foundation, Education City, Qatar Exchange (formerly the Doha Securities Market), and Qatar Financial Center. Unlike two decades ago, many are now able to easily recognize Qatar on a number of different levels—through Al-Jazeera, as host of the 2022 World Cup, and its diplomatic leadership and military action in Libya, to name a few.

Why has Qatar embarked on such a series of wide-ranging initiatives? We argue that theories of nation branding and niche diplomacy best explain why Qatar took these steps, and that the regime’s strategic calculus is rooted in its desire to bolster Qatar’s security, legitimacy, and influence on regional and international stages.

⁷ Confidential Interview, March 2011

⁸ Ibid., p98

RESEARCH DESIGN AND OUTLINE

Research for this topic was conducted during the course of one academic year. During this time, the authors reviewed the limited scholarship available on Qatar. We observed common themes that Qatar is experiencing striking changes in several fields in a short amount of time, is seen to be punching above its weight, and that the current Emir—in marked contrast to his father—is gaining significant international attention for “far-sighted leadership.”⁹ But we did not find much work seeking to analyze recent Qatari initiatives in a comprehensive way that both explored the strategic interconnectedness of these efforts and analyzed them within the framework of academic theory. Accordingly, we decided to focus our project on seeking to explain, using academic theories of nation branding and niche diplomacy, how and why Qatar has pursued an aggressive agenda of economic, social, and political initiatives.

Scholars have suggested a number of theories to explain liberalization measures and international relations of Arab states, but we argue that these theories fail to adequately explain recent developments in Qatar. The theory most commonly referenced to analyze the authoritarian nature of regimes in the Gulf and their lack of democratization, for example, is the rentier hypothesis. According to Beblawi and Luciani, this theory asserts that oil-based economies allow states to provide extensive social services to their citizenry, dampening impetus for vocal discontent with the states’ authoritarian politics.¹⁰ In this way, oil-rich states take advantage of their vast wealth to buy the tacit support of their citizens, support which would presumably be lost in place of

⁹ Confidential Interview, March 2011

¹⁰ Luciani, Giacomo, ed. *The Arab State*. Berkeley: University of California, 1990. Print. p85-98

calls for democratization and reform were the states to face economic crises preventing them from sustaining large subsidies. An instructive example of this occurred in the 1990s, when the price of oil fell and populations were growing at a faster than expected pace. Rentier theory suggests that the liberalization campaigns that occurred in the Gulf during this period were a direct result of these two trends. The region-wide fiscal crisis appeared to have an effect, albeit modest, on Qatar as well. In 1999, it was expected that state revenue would decrease 15% and state expenditures would be cut by 10%.¹¹ However, the effects of this fiscal crisis on liberalization efforts were minimal. Qatar's budget cuts only applied to infrastructure projects, and spending on social security actually increased.¹² Indeed, liberalization has occurred in tandem, rather than in lieu of economic prosperity in Qatar. Fiscal pressure appears to have had a minimal effect in inducing reforms, thus deflating the rentier theory as a sufficient explanation for recent initiatives in Qatar.

Another theory often used to explain liberalization is the domestic pressure and development thesis proposed by Sager. According to Sager, population growth and advancements in education lead to increased domestic pressure on regimes for reform and democratization.¹³ However, this theory also does not adequately explain recent initiatives in Qatar. The rate of population growth in Qatar is smaller than the rest of the Gulf, and there is evidence suggesting that the populace has actually been resistant to

¹¹ Lambert, Jennifer. "Political Reform in Qatar: Participation, Legitimacy, and Security." *Middle East Policy* XVIII.1 (Spring 2011): 89-101. Print. p95

¹² Ibid, p95

¹³ Ibid, p95

many of the changes enacted by the Emir.¹⁴ Thus, it appears that neither theories concerning fiscal conditions nor domestic pressure can fully account for Qatar's approach to recent reforms and initiatives.

This paper will explore how nation-branding theory best explains Qatar's behavior. According to Sevin, "Nation branding is the process of reaching the foreign publics and managing their perceptions of a nation".¹⁵ States seek to present their sovereignty as a brand in order to build an international reputation and attract international attention. In addition, branding serves as a useful tool in "attracting foreign direct investment... and wielding political influence."¹⁶ J.E. Peterson argues that an essential component of nation branding is fostering a sense of distinctiveness in order to distinguish a state from its neighbors and competitors, akin to distinguishing a product when marketing it to customers.¹⁷ Peterson illustrates this notion by presenting examples of successful nation brands, including France and its association with culture, good food, cheese, and wine, and Switzerland's reputation as a neutral banking haven.¹⁸ Peterson also briefly discusses some of Qatar's branding efforts, including its initiative to become a hub for international conferences, a major producer of natural gas, an international sporting events haven, and a cultural center.¹⁹ We argue that nation brand theory can be expanded to provide a holistic explanation for strategic moves made in Qatar's economic development, social initiatives and foreign policy agenda during the past two decades.

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Sevin, Efe. *Controlling the Message: A Strategic Approach to Nation Branding*. Saarbrücken: LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, 2010. Print. 1.

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Peterson, J. E. "Qatar and the World: Branding for a Micro-State." *Middle East Journal* 60.4 (Autumn 2006): 733-48. Print. 743.

¹⁸ Ibid, p745

¹⁹ Peterson, p746-747

Our research culminated in a trip to Doha in March 2011, by the end of which we were able to secure over 20 confidential interviews from various current and former officials, scholars, and journalists from whom we gained a great deal of insight that helped us draw many of the conclusions of this paper. Before travelling to Doha, we met with a diplomat at the Embassy of Qatar and members of the U.S.-Qatar Business Council in Washington, D.C. The individuals we interviewed at these organizations facilitated a few of the high-level meetings we had later in Doha. The vast majority of our Doha meetings were arranged, however, by way of the personal efforts of the authors.

While in Doha, we attended the 6th Annual Al-Jazeera Forum, whose 2011 theme was “The Arab World in Transition: Has the Future Arrived?” The conference convened a wide array of political figures, scholars, activists, and journalists from Qatar, the Middle East, and around the world. During the course of the forum, we interacted with several of the participants and held informal interviews on the sidelines of the event. During our week-long stay in Doha, we also visited the following organizations to interview various individuals at the working and senior levels: Qatar University (Offices of the President, Academic Research, and the Department of International Affairs), Texas A&M University (Office of Academic Affairs), Georgetown University School of Foreign Service (Office of the Dean), *The Peninsula* daily newspaper, Qatar Foundation, Brookings Doha Center, Qatar Gas, Qatar Financial Center, U.S. Embassy Doha, and the Al-Jazeera Network. All of our interviews were conducted in confidence to allow for open, candid discussions, and as such, on-background attributions will be utilized throughout our paper.

We argue that nation branding best explains the Qatari leadership's strategic approach to boost its influence in economic, social, and political spheres. The following sections explore various Qatari initiatives in this regard, from exporting liquefied natural gas to building Education City to Al-Jazeera and mediating regional conflicts. We conclude by arguing that Qatar's bold initiatives are interrelated and supported by the leadership's strategic calculus to distinguish Qatar from its neighbors, bolster Qatar's security and influence, and attract international legitimacy and attention for its efforts.

ECONOMIC INITIATIVES FUELING QATAR'S STRATEGIC MOVES

A crucial component of a successful branding apparatus is an abundance of sustainable resources devoted to both short-term initiatives and a long-term strategy. One of the four pillars of the 'Qatar National Vision 2030' (QNV 2030) to cultivate a "knowledge-based economy" in Qatar is economic development through improved domestic economic management, investment in hydrocarbons and infrastructure, and continued economic diversification. Qatar's attempts to solidify its brand name across the ranks of the international community are a combination of its current robust economic position and future growth prospects. Since 1995, the country's leadership has taken a phased dual approach to enhancing and securing the long-term financial position of the state and its people. First, sustaining domestic growth through targeted and strategic investment has constituted a top priority and has thus far resulted in significant progress and development. The rapid success and capability of considerable internal revenue generation and continued government budget surplus has led directly into the second

phase of the program, namely the formulation of the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA), the country's sovereign wealth fund (SWF) in 2005.

A primary focus of the government's long-term branding approach since the late 1990's has been to build the Qatar's economy from the "ground up", investing heavily in augmenting domestic infrastructure and capacity. Qatar's young leadership looked to initiate and implement an aggressive expansion program to optimize capacity of its natural resource output, emphasizing the natural gas sector as the country's immediate and ultimate growth driver. The country's current dependence on the hydrocarbon sector, however, is widely acknowledged domestically as a future obstacle to fostering durable prosperity as noted in the QNV 2030. Conversely, the rising global demand for energy is also embraced as an opportunity within the current context of the QNV 2030. QatarGas, Qatar's state majority-owned gas company's slogan is fitting to the important role and contribution the small country envisages for itself as part of the evolving global order, "Change Your Future, Change the World". From the outset, the intent was not just to become a player within the international financial system but to become indispensable through seeking a leading and active role, and securing sustainable relevance. On this note, and in line with Qatar's nation branding strategy, Chairman of QatarGas Khalid al-Khalifa asserts that "when people think of energy, they think of Qatar."²⁰

In 2010, oil and gas revenues accounted for over half of the state's GDP of \$126.5 billion²¹. Qatar has the largest non-associated natural gas field (The North Field) in the

²⁰ This quote is from a promotional video we viewed during a confidential interview with employees at QatarGas.

²¹ "Qatar Country Report." *Www.gfmag.com*. Global Finance Magazine. Web. 15 Apr. 2011. <<http://www.gfmag.com/gdp-data-country-reports/195-qatar-gdp-country-report.html#axzz1JhRLBTDU>>.

world and is the world's largest liquefied natural gas (LNG) net exporter holding approximately 21% global market share²² (See Chart 1). Qatar holds the world's third largest natural gas reserves trailing only behind Russia and Iran, and substantially ahead of Saudi Arabia and the United States (See Chart 2). The recent completion of the country's expansion program has reached full fruition, with production reaching the target capacity of 77 million tons/year, making Qatar the largest global producer of LNG. Qatar has secured long-term gas contracts ranging from 15-25 years with Asia, Europe and the U.S. further diversifying its revenue streams.

Long-term gas contracts with Asian countries such as China, India, Japan, South Korea, and Singapore have further augmented a rapid diversified export model with increased international market presence of the Qatari gas industry and secured revenues for decades due to the growing Asian market where rising demand in these developing countries has accordingly resulted in rising prices. In addition, Qatar's ability to divert gas shipments through procurement of flexible contracts and on the global Spot Market from the U.S and Europe to Asia via the Qatar Gas Shipping Company, known as Nakilat, has decreased dependence on external parties, ensured supply chain productivity, and increased Qatar's brand image abroad. Nakilat has a fleet of eight of the most advanced class of transport ships with a range of capacity between 210,000-250,000 m³

²² "Country Analysis Briefs: Qatar." *www.eia.doe.gov*. Energy Information Administration, 12 Jan. 2011. Web. 15 Apr. 2011. <<http://www.eia.doe.gov/EMEUCabs/Qatar/pdf.pdf>>.

enabling Qatar to compete for exports globally with lower prices by reaching economies of scale.²³

In addition, crude oil production is projected to increase by 25% over the next five years from the current 926,550 bp/d (See Chart 3) as expansion at the offshore Shaheen oilfield is expected to continue.²⁴ The increase in capacity will further grow the country's reserves as it continues to abide by its designated OPEC market production quota²⁵. Production will secure the long-term ability of Qatar to accrue reserves and be able to tap into its excess when future regional instability arises and rapid deployment of oil reserves is needed to calm the financial markets. With its fifteen billion barrels of reserves as of 2010, Qatar is the sixteenth largest exporter of crude oil in the world.

Qatari ambition to reduce its reliance on revenues from oil and gas receipts to around 25% of GDP by 2015 is well underway.²⁶ Various measures and initiatives have been adopted by which future economic diversification will continue gradually. The majority of early diversification efforts, however, will consist of high government spending on civil infrastructure and fail to encompass the stated long-term development strategy of substantial diversification, due to the 'artificial' nature of growth.

In 2005, the Qatar Financial Centre (QFC) was created to help attract international banks to the country in support of the heavy domestic financing efforts necessary. Despite its success in attracting many of the largest U.S. and European banks

²³ England, Andrew. "Oil and Gas: An Important Operator in Global Markets." *Ft.com*. The Financial Times, 18 Nov. 2009. Web. 15 Apr. 2011. <<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/f5295948-d30e-11de-af63-00144feabdc0.html#axzz1JcuMFD8v>>.

²⁴ "Country Report: Qatar." *EIU.com*. Economist Intelligence Unit, Mar. 2011. Web. 15 Apr. 2011. <www.eiu.com>.

²⁵ Qatar's current OPEC quota is 731,000 bbl/d

²⁶ "Country Report: Qatar." *EIU.com*. Economist Intelligence Unit, Mar. 2011. Web. 15 Apr. 2011. <www.eiu.com>.

such as HSBC, Barclays, and Morgan Stanley, the QFC has suffered significant setbacks, being forced to lay off more than one third of its workforce in 2010. With technical support from the World Bank and United Nations Development Program, the Qatar Authority for the Development of Small and Medium Scale Projects was formed in February 2011 to finance small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs) and enhance the role of the private sector. In addition, the creation of international brands such as Qatar Airways, al-Jazeera, Qatar Petroleum, QatarTelecom, serve to enhance the global visibility of Qatari companies.

As host of the 2006 Asian Games, frequent ATP Tennis tournaments, Formula 1 racing series and the winning bid for World Cup 2022, Qatar has recently increased its commitment to its tourism industry, turning it into a source of national pride. The upcoming 'Project Qatar 2011', an International Trade Exhibition for Construction Equipment and Environmental Technology to be hosted at the Doha Exhibition Center, will act as a strategic entry point for Qatar to further promote its nation brand and attract foreign investment from among the more than 1,700 regional and international exhibitors who have already confirmed their participation in the event.²⁷ Qatar has earmarked over \$100 billion of investment over the next decade for improving the country's transportation and tourist infrastructure, which includes the creation of Lusail, the new 'jewel of Qatar' located just north of Doha. A waterfront city, Lusail is intended to be the biggest domestic real estate development in Qatar; it will cover an area of 377 million square feet and is expected to provide accommodation for over 200,000 people. The \$5.5 billion development project will contain two marinas, residential areas, commercial

²⁷ <http://www.bilateralchamber.org/newsletter/2011/may/economy.html>

districts, two golf courses, an entertainment district, shopping malls, schools and medical centers. The city will also be the home to Qatar's new Lusail Iconic Stadium, which will host the opening and final matches of the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

At \$76,000, Qatar has the highest per capita GDP in the world according to the IMF.²⁸ Real GDP growth has averaged double digits since 2004 and is one of fastest growing in the world, reaching 15.8% in 2011 due to the continuing investment in hydrocarbon infrastructure. While growth is expected to slow to an average of 6-8% between 2012-2015, rapid growth is expected to continue in years leading up to the World Cup in 2022 as several infrastructure projects are in planning and development. The fiscal surplus currently at 13.6% of GDP (excluding all LNG revenue) and will reach around 19% between 2012-2015 as a result of increasing oil prices and continued capacity of hydrocarbon production and export.²⁹ In addition, government ability to raise capital on international capital markets has materialized as its sovereign bond issue managed to raise \$7bn in 2009 and over \$10bn in 2010, signifying global appetite for Qatari government credit despite the tumultuous times for fiscal budgets. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Qatar, furthermore, grew from \$3.7bn in 2008 to \$8.7bn in 2009 to over \$10bn in 2010.³⁰

Qatar's global economic presence beyond its hydrocarbon exports has been primarily through the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA), formed in 2005. The QIA, with

²⁸ International Monetary Fund. "Qatar: Statistical Appendix. IMF Country Report No. 10/62, Mar 2010. Web. 1 Apr. 2011. <<http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2010/cr1062.pdf>>

²⁹ "Country Report: Qatar." *EIU.com*. Economist Intelligence Unit, Mar. 2011. Web. 15 Apr. 2011. <www.eiu.com>.

³⁰ Harthy, Nasser Al. "Qatar among Top FDI Destinations, Says Report." *The Peninsula Qatar*. 23 July 2010. Web. 15 Apr. 2011. <<http://www.thepeninsulaqatar.com/qatar/121193-qatar-among-top-fdi-destinations-says-report.html>>.

an estimated \$85-100 billion under fund management³¹ is responsible for constructing a global investment portfolio by pursuing investments across various asset classes (securities, property, alternative assets and private equity), industries and geographies. The QIA benefits from being a central part of Qatar's economic vision, which allows it to invest in a manner which transcends the tumultuous nature of economic cycles and fluctuations of the financial markets, and offer the benefits of stability to all stakeholders.³² The sovereign wealth fund is set up as a vehicle through which the State of Qatar can help secure the future prosperity of its people by building up a diversified asset base to complement its wealth of natural resources; the QIA's investment strategy is based on its responsibility to generate a strong and sustainable return for the shareholder. In addition, the government relies on the QIA to take equity stakes and make various investments in foreign firms and institutions considered the leaders in their field, in order to further facilitate knowledge transfer that will eventually benefit the Qatari people and its economy.

The QIA has managed to reconcile its long-term investment strategy with the acquisition of several global name brands while seeking to emerge as a high profile global investor. Its search for opportunities and increasing notoriety has seen the firm make notable investments in Sainsbury (UK), Barclays Bank (UK), Credit Suisse (Switzerland), the London Stock Exchange, Banco Santander Brazil, Agricultural Bank

³¹ Kerr, Simeon. "Emerging Fund Set to Vault into Higher Tier." *Ft.com*. The Financial Times, 22 Nov. 2010. Web. 15 Apr. 2011. <<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/b6cc5eb4-f5e7-11df-99d600144feab49a.html#axzz1JcuMFD8v>>.

³² "The Qatar Investment Authority: About Us." *The Qatar Investment Authority*. Web. 15 Apr. 2011 <<http://www.qia.qa/QIA/about.html>>.

of China, Harrods (UK), VW and Porsche (Germany), Songbird Estates (UK), Iberdola (Spain), etc. While the QIA lost an estimated \$15 billion during the recent global financial downturn, the fund has remained aggressive and was one of the busiest deal-makers of world's SWFs during the years 2009-2010. Despite its temporary setbacks, the QIA has demonstrated a continuous successful investment strategy and could put Qatar on pace to become a post-rentier state as annual returns from the QIA will suffice to cover 100% of the state budget within the next few years, setting Qatar apart from its Gulf neighbors.³³ Indeed, economic prosperity in Qatar during Emir Hamad's rule has occurred in parallel to and helped facilitate a wide range of recent initiatives in Qatar at the economic, social, and political levels—a reality which is best explained, therefore, by nation branding, not reinter theory.

SOCIAL INITIATIVES BOOSTING QATAR'S INTERNATIONAL LEGITIMACY

Qatar's robust economic position has allowed the Emir to undertake a number of social reforms and cultural initiatives designed, not only to help the Qatari people, but also to raise its international profile and compete with its neighbors for international attention and acclaim. This section will explore the reforms of the education system, including the establishment of Qatar Foundation, reforms at the K-12 levels, reforms of Qatar University, and the establishment of Education City. It will also look at improvements in women's rights, focusing on women's role in education, the workforce, politics, and the public realm. We will then assess how these modernization initiatives fit

³³ Confidential Interview. March 2011

into Qatar's ambition to brand itself as a distinct entity worthy of international attention and acclaim.

The first step in reforming the education system was the establishment of Qatar Foundation in 1995. Qatar Foundation is a non-profit organization that "aims to unlock the human through its three pillars of Education, Science & Research and Community Development".³⁴ It is spearheaded and chaired by Sheikha Mozah and was instrumental in many of the education reforms that will be discussed below. And in addition to helping institute education reform by working closely with RAND and building Education City, Qatar Foundation seeks to foster community development through cultural pursuits including building the Heritage Library, launching Al-Jazeera's Children's Channel, and supporting Qatar's Philharmonic Orchestra, Qatar Music Academy, and Al Shaqab Equestrian Facilities.³⁵

One of the first education pursuits of the Emir was instituting reform at the K-12 levels. Although Qatar offered free education and monthly stipends to all Qatari citizens enrolled in the education system as early as 1950, Emir Hamad considered Qatar's current education system antiquated and inefficient in preparing students for higher education and for building the knowledge-based economy enshrined in the 2030 National Vision.³⁶ While the Emir had supported modest efforts to reform the system in the late 1990s, he took a more aggressive approach in 2001, hiring RAND Corporation to survey and provide recommendations for the modernization of the education system. RAND

³⁴ Qatar Foundation. "Qatar Foundation - Unlocking Human Potential" Qatar Foundation, Official Website. Web. 19 Apr. 2011. <<http://www.qf.org.qa/home>>.

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Bahry, Louay, and Phebe Marr. "Qatari Women: A New Generation of Leaders?." Middle East Policy 12.2 (2005): 104-119. Academic Search Premier. EBSCO. Web. 14 Apr. 2011. 105.

offered three strategies to overhaul the system but the Emir decided to choose the charter school option, which included decentralizing the education system and hiring private entities to run the schools. Other recommendations included increasing student, teacher, and school assessments and increasing incentive pay for teachers and administrators based on performance on these assessments.³⁷ In 2006, RAND conducted an evaluation of the new reforms and gave Qatar high reviews, praising the new education system as “comparable to the highest in the world”.³⁸ And other states in the Gulf, including the UAE, have reportedly followed Qatar’s example in modernizing their education systems.

In addition to the reforms at the K-12 level, the Emir also sought to reform the higher learning institutions. The first vocational school was opened in 1996 and efforts to provide more vocational opportunities have since increased.³⁹ In 2003, RAND was once again hired, this time to provide suggestions for reforming Qatar University, the country’s first and only public university. The reforms included greater autonomy through the creation of a Board of Regents, decentralization of the administration, unifying the colleges and integrating research, instituting a core curriculum, implementing academic planning programs, improving management of the faculty and staff through increased compensation based on performance, and increasing student incentives by enforcing admission standards and expanding the services available to students.⁴⁰ Qatar’s higher education reforms are designed to better prepare students to join the work force and fill high-level positions, as part of the government’s

³⁷ Lambert, p209

³⁸ Ibid, p210

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Moini, Joy S., Tora K. Bikson, C. Richard Neu, and Laura DeSisto. *The Reform of Qatar University*. Santa Monica: RAND-Qatar Policy Institute, 2009. Print. xxii.

“Qatarization” campaign; but, as was mentioned during a number of our interviews with academics and scholars, it is still too early to assess the efficacy of these reforms.⁴¹

The Emir also undertook another step to modernize Qatar’s education system and shape its brand as a regional knowledge hub: building Education City. The process began in 1997 with the Emir inviting U.S. universities to open campuses in a large complex on the outskirts of Doha. The first university branch, Virginia Commonwealth University, opened in 1998 and offered women the opportunity to earn a degree in Fine Arts and Design. This was followed by the opening of Cornell’s Weill Medical College and Texas A&M University’s School of Engineering in 2001, Carnegie Mellon University focusing on computer science and business in 2003, the Georgetown School of Foreign Service in 2005, and Northwestern School of Communications and Medill School of Journalism in 2007.⁴² Each university provides a different degree and all fall under the supervision of Qatar Foundation.

Additionally, Education City hosts University College London; Qatar Faculty of Islamic Studies; Qatar Academy, a private K-12 school; the Academic Bridge Program, a preparatory program designed to help students get into university. In the coming years, Qatar Foundation plans to expand Education City and invite more U.S. universities to open campuses in Doha. While Education City was built primarily to provide Qataris with access to world-class higher education, Lambert argues that it has also provided “the highly visible symbol of educational reform the Qatari leadership wanted.”⁴³ According to one of the administration officials we interviewed in Education City, moreover, the

⁴¹ Confidential interviews, March 2011

⁴² Lambert, p215-216

⁴³ Ibid, p213

building of Education City has fit squarely into the “sexy and splashy” image of grand, modern projects that Qatar aims to advertise to the international community.⁴⁴

Women have been especially eager to take advantage of educational reforms in Qatar, exceeding men in terms of enrollment numbers and degrees obtained. As previously stated, women were given universal and free access to education in 1950 and as early as 1978, the number of women graduating from high school surpassed the number of men.⁴⁵ Since the inauguration of the first university in Qatar in 1973, women have been allowed to pursue higher education, though in separate classrooms from men.⁴⁶ They have taken advantage of the opportunity to pursue higher education and in Qatar University alone, women account for 73% of the student body.⁴⁷ Additionally, in 2003, Sheikha al-Misnad became the first woman appointed President of Qatar University.⁴⁸ According to many of the scholars and academics we interviewed in Doha, women have benefitted more from the educational reforms than men, perhaps due to their increased motivation to succeed academically.⁴⁹

While the number of women enrolled in universities has increased, the monumental gains in the educational experience have not necessarily carried over into the workforce. The number of women working rose from 27% in 2001 to 36% in 2008,⁵⁰ but this number is still relatively low considering that women account for over 70% of the

⁴⁴ Confidential Interview, March 2011

⁴⁵ Bahry, p105

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ Moini, p10

⁴⁸ Bahry, p107

⁴⁹ Confidential Interviews, March 2011

⁵⁰ Toumi, Habib. "Qatar to Increase Women's Participation in Its Workforce." *Gulfnews.com*. 14 Apr. 2011. Web. 15 Apr. 2011. <<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/qatar/qatar-to-increase-women-s-participation-in-its-workforce-1.792456>>.

student body at the university level. Women are also underrepresented in the private sector and overrepresented in other fields, including education, nursing, public health, and administration. Between 1996 and 2001, for example, women accounted for about 90% of all teachers in the school system and some 96% of all women with PhDs or MDs were employed at Qatar University.⁵¹ There are signs of improvements, however, with the National Development Strategy estimating that women will make up 46% of the workforce by 2016.⁵² This is expected to be the result of new labor laws, improvements in childcare services, and more gender-sensitive work environments over time that will allow women to maintain a balance between work and family life.⁵³ Women have made gains in labor force participation, but these increases do not appear to match up to the increases in educational opportunities.

Perhaps the most visible improvement in women's rights came in 1999 on International Women's Day, when women went to the polls not only to vote in Central Municipal Council elections, but to participate as candidates as well. Qatari women were the first in the Gulf to be granted the right to vote and run for office in 1998, just a year before Qatar's first elections since 1968. And the elections were purposefully held on March 8, 1999, International Women's Day, sending a clear message that women were welcome in politics. However, while women flocked to the polls, accounting for 45% of voters, only six women ran for office, none receiving enough votes to be elected.⁵⁴ In the second municipal elections, women again accounted for around 45% of the voters, but

⁵¹ Bahry, p110

⁵² Toumi, op cit.

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ Bahry, p112

this time the only female candidate running proved successful in winning a seat, though it is noteworthy that she ran unopposed in her district.⁵⁵ Again in 2007 only one woman, this time out of three, won enough votes to be elected. And so far in the elections to be held later this year, it is expected that only three women will run for office.⁵⁶ While women have taken advantage of the opportunity to vote in elections, they have had little success running for office.

Despite the low number of women participating in elections, there are a number of women in high-level, public roles in politics. The most important woman in Qatar is undeniably Sheikha Mozah, “first lady of Qatar” and, according to a scholar we interviewed at the Brookings Doha Center, the third most powerful person in Qatar after the Emir and the dual-serving Foreign/Prime Minister.⁵⁷ She spearheaded the educational reform and serves as the Chair of Qatar Foundation, as well as serving on the Supreme Education Council, the Supreme Council for Family Affairs, the Supreme Health Council, and the UNESCO Special Envoy for Basic and Higher Education.⁵⁸ She also frequently accompanies her husband the Emir overseas and has given speeches at two U.S. universities, in addition to appearing in a televised interview on *60 Minutes*. She is the first wife of a GCC leader to speak in public abroad and conduct a televised interview⁵⁹ making her the most publicly visible and outspoken of all the women in the Gulf. When asked about Sheikha Mozah and the role of women in Qatar, a Qatari

⁵⁵ Lambert, p136

⁵⁶ Toumi, Habib. “Three Qatari women sign up to contest municipal elections.” *Gulfnews.com*. 7 Mar. 2011. Web. 15 Apr. 2011 <<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/qatar/three-qatari-women-sign-up-to-contest-municipal-elections-1.772745>>.

⁵⁷ Confidential interview, March 2011

⁵⁸ “Her Highness Sheikha Moza.” 2010. Web. 10 Apr. 2011.

<<http://www.mozabintnasser.qa/Her%20Highness/Offices%20Held/Pages/default.aspx>>

⁵⁹ Lambert, p134

diplomat told us, “His Highness [the Emir] leads by example. He encourages the women in his family to receive the top education, to take on active roles in society. In this way, he shows that he is really sincere about empowering women in Qatar.”⁶⁰ But not only does the Emir seek to lead by example in expanding the public role of women, he also uses this as a way to distinguish Qatar from its religiously conservative neighbors who restrict the role of women in the public and try to keep them confined in the private sphere.

The official justification of these reforms and initiatives is that they are all part of the QNV 2030 and Qatar’s efforts to foster societal and human development. The Emir envisions a future economy based, not on oil and gas, but on human knowledge and development, and education is an important component of this process. Education reform is also a necessary element of the Emir’s Qatarization campaign, which seeks to fill top-level positions traditionally held by foreigners with Qatari nationals. Supporting women’s rights, on the other hand, is part of the effort to cultivate social development, creating a more just society whose laws are in line with international human rights norms.

Why did Qatar pursue these reforms? Much of the existing literature on the Gulf justifies the lack of development and democratization by citing the rentier hypothesis and domestic pressures theory. However, neither of these theories appears to fully explain the changes occurring in Qatar. There is no economic decline sparking change and no domestic pressure. In fact, Qatar’s wealth is growing with the increase in production of natural gas, and the reforms were initiated top-down by the Emir and a handful of government elites. A number of the academics we interviewed, moreover, suggested

⁶⁰ Confidential Interview, February 2011

there was actually some resistance to the reforms,⁶¹ and that, as one government official intimated, the people have yet to catch up to the “progressive” and “modern” views espoused by the Emir.⁶²

Noting the incongruous application of rentier and domestic pressure theories, we argue that nation-branding theory presents the best alternative to understand Qatar’s motives. Nation brand theory rests upon marketing the state as a unique and distinctive product to the international community. Educationally, Qatar has reformed its public systems and built Education City in an effort to brand itself as an educational hub in the region. As Lambert points out, Education City is “designed to enhance the image of Qatar as much as it is designed to provide enhanced educational opportunities”⁶³. Even Qatar Foundation’s website mentions that education improvements “will benefit not only Qatar, but the region and the world.”⁶⁴ And several people we interviewed, including a senior administration official at Qatar University, mentioned that it is also part of a strategy to compete with Qatar’s neighbors, especially the UAE, to see who can attract the best universities and students, and build the most luxurious and over-the-top campuses.

Qatar Foundation’s “Think” campaign, launched in 2009, has been central in helping to brand Qatar as a premier hub for education and research through international marketing. The campaign features words like “think”, “discover”, “grow”, and “create” in Arabic and English on billboards, banners, TV, radio, in magazines, and in the form of

⁶¹ Confidential Interview, March 2011

⁶² Confidential Interview, February 2011

⁶³ Lambert, p200

⁶⁴ *Qatar Foundation*

flashy sculptures in Qatar, across the Middle East, and in key markets in Europe and the U.S.⁶⁵ Qatar Foundation describes the aim of the campaign as follows: “Like the Qatar Foundation’s mission and vision, the scope and scale of the Think campaign is big. Part of our goal is to establish a distinct visual identity for Qatar Foundation and to unify all its various branches and entities under a single voice. But more importantly, this campaign seeks to engage, inspire curiosity and raise awareness about Qatar Foundation in Qatar, the GCC and around the world.”⁶⁶ During the launch ceremony of the “Think” campaign, Qatar Foundation President Fathy Saoud hinted at the nation branding strategy underlying the campaign, declaring that “Over the last several years QF has created a well-integrated centre of excellence in various fields. We have moved into new frontiers that put Education City, and Qatar, on the global map.”⁶⁷

Women’s rights initiatives have provided another platform for international marketing and have helped brand Qatar as a modern, progressive state. As Lambert points out, “Qatar uses international norms regarding elections and women’s political rights to bolster the state’s external reputation.”⁶⁸ It not only became the first state in the Gulf to grant women the right to vote and participate in popular elections, but the highly publicized and purposeful holding of the first elections on International Women’s Day proved to be another way to attract attention and praise for its efforts. Additionally, Qatari leaders were reportedly disappointed about the failure to elect a woman in the first

⁶⁵ Qatar Foundation. “The Think Campaign.” Qatarfoundation.org. Web. 1 Mar. 2011.
http://www.qf.org.qa/think/campaign_english.htm

⁶⁶ Ibid

⁶⁷ “QF goes global with its new “THINK” campaign.” IloveQatr.net, 9 Sep. 2009. Web. 1 Mar. 2011.
<http://www.iloveqatar.net/forum/read.php?28,9889>

⁶⁸ Lambert, p96

elections and Qatari press was allegedly ordered to depict women's participation in a positive way.⁶⁹ And by the time the first woman won a seat on the Central Municipal Council in 2003, Qatar sought to market this achievement internationally by publishing the event in the first issue of the Qatar Embassy to the United States' newsletter, *The Pearl*.⁷⁰

Given this evidence, it appears that Qatar has used education reforms and women's rights initiatives, not just to provide new opportunities to the people, but to distinguish itself from its neighbors, gain international acclaim, and brand itself as a uniquely modern and progressive state in the region.

POLITICAL MOVES ENHANCING QATAR'S INDISPENSIBILITY

A tiny Gulf state with neither a track record of mediation nor the international political influence of its larger neighbors, Qatar has sought to punch above its diplomatic weight under Emir Hamad's leadership. Qatari leadership even enshrined the state's role as a mediator in Article 7 of the 2002 Constitution, which reads: "The foreign policy of the State shall be based on consolidating international peace and security by encouraging the settlement of international disputes peacefully."⁷¹ In an effort to challenge the power of other regional players on the diplomatic field—Saudi Arabia and Egypt, in particular—Qatar has aggressively pursued the role of mediator in conflicts in Lebanon, Sudan, Palestine, Western Sahara, Somalia, Djibouti, Yemen, and most recently, Libya. These mediation efforts have served as a mechanism for Qatar to "ensure its survival in a

⁶⁹ Lambert, p135

⁷⁰ Lambert, p135

⁷¹ "Constitution of Qatar." *Embassy of Qatar in Washington D.C.* Web. 16 Mar. 2011.
<http://www.qatarembassy.net/constitution.asp>

troubled neighborhood”⁷² and gain international recognition. As Paul Rockower notes, “Qatar has recently fashioned a public diplomacy niche for itself within global civil society as a conflict mediator *par excellence*...[becoming] a mighty mite of public diplomacy prowess as it has deftly employed its conflict mediation skills for the world to see.”⁷³

In addition to the chief sponsorship of Emir Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, who has been praised as the “Prince of Peace”⁷⁴, Qatar’s dual-serving Prime and Foreign Minister Hamad bin Jassim bin Jaber Al-Thani has been central to these efforts, working with the Emir to maintain diverse diplomatic contacts and referee regional disputes. He has been described as the “smiling sheikh” who has emerged as a “diplomatic rock star”, especially after putting on “a heck of a performance” in 2008 to end an 18-month political deadlock between Lebanese factions, a feat which “wowed the Lebanese” and the world and had previously baffled Arab League Secretary General Amr Moussa, French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner, Saudi Arabia and others for months.⁷⁵ Qatar has received a lot of attention and acclaim for its mediation efforts, described as a “diplomatic powerhouse”⁷⁶ and an “honest broker”⁷⁷ with the leverage to wage “clever diplomacy”⁷⁸ and pull off mediation coups.⁷⁹

⁷² Rockower, Paul. “Qatar’s Public Diplomacy.” 12 Dec. 2008. Web. 26 Oct. 2010.

<http://tinyurl.com/44b4naq>

⁷³ Ibid., p3

⁷⁴ “In Praise of the ‘Prince of Peace’”. The Peninsula, 27 Apr. 2010. Web. 1 Apr. 2011.

<http://www.thepeninsulaqatar.com/qatar-perspective.html?start=15>

⁷⁵ Daragahi, Borzou. “Lebanon: Qatar emerges as diplomatic powerhouse.” *Babylon and Beyond* blog, *Los Angeles Times*, 15 May 2008. Web. 26 Oct. 2010.

<http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/babylonbeyond/2008/05/lebanon-qatar-e.html>

⁷⁶ Ibid.

Qatar's latest venture in proactive, strategic diplomacy is illustrated by its response to the crisis in Libya. In a bold move, Qatar became the first Arab and Muslim state to join the NATO effort to maintain a no-fly zone over Libya by deploying six Mirage jets, the majority of its operational Air Force fighter wing⁸⁰. The Qatari Emir is the only Arab leader to officially recognize the Transitional National Council in Benghazi. Furthermore, Qatar is assisting the Libyan rebels by supplying anti-tank missiles, marketing crude oil produced from eastern Libyan fields and delivering shipments of oil products to Benghazi, and providing support for a Libyan opposition satellite TV station broadcasting from Doha.⁸¹

Qatar also took the initiative to host the first meeting of the Libya Contact Group in Doha on April 13. The following day in Washington, President Obama stood with the visiting Emir after a bilateral meeting and told the press: "We would not have been able, I think, to shape the kind of broad-based international coalition that includes not only our NATO members but also includes Arab states without the Emir's leadership....we are very appreciative of the outstanding work that the Qataris have done..."⁸² President Obama is also reported to have that the Emir is a "pretty influential guy. He is a big

⁷⁷ Janardhan, Meena. "Lebanon Deal Confirms Qatar's Honest broker Role." Inter Press News Agency, 26 May 2008. Web. 1 Nov 2010. <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2008/05/22/uk-lebanon-qatar-analysis-idUKL2274043520080522>

⁷⁸ "Small country, big ideas: oil and clever diplomacy win friends and influence", op cit.

⁷⁹ Lyon, Alistair. "Qatar pulls off a mediation coup in Lebanon Crisis." Reuters, 22 May, 2008. Web. 1 Nov. 2010. <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2008/05/22/uk-lebanon-qatar-analysis-idUKL2274043520080522>

⁸⁰ Roberts, David B. "Punching Above Its Weight: Could Tiny Qatar Send Ground Forces to Libya?" Foreign Policy Magazine, 12 Apr. 2011. Web. 14 Apr. 2011. http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/04/12/punching_above_its_weight

⁸¹ Black, Ian. "Libyan rebels receiving anti-tank weapons from Qatar." The Guardian, 14 Apr. 2011. Web. 15 Apr. 2011. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/apr/14/libya-rebels-weapons-qatar>

⁸² "Remarks by President Obama and Emir Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani of Qatar After a Bilateral Meeting". *Office of the Press Secretary, The White House*, 14 Apr. 2011. Web. 15 Apr. 2011. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/04/14/remarks-president-obama-and-emir-hamad-bin-khalifa-al-thani-qatar-after->

booster, big promoter of democracy all throughout the Middle East. Reform, reform, reform. You're seeing it on Al-Jazeera."⁸³

Why and how has Qatar taken on this role on regional and international stages?

Nation branding and public diplomacy theories offer insight into Qatar's approach.

Roberts explains:

Qatar loves the limelight. Many of its policies over the past decade have been specifically designed to thrust the little-known country onto the international stage to publicize not only Qatar in and of itself, but a particular modern, business-savvy, and erudite brand thereof. The 1990 invasion of Kuwait (another small, rich country surrounded by far larger states) likely convinced Qatar that anonymity is not a desirable quality in the event of such a catastrophe. Any number of subsequent policies -- from funding Al Jazeera, the pan-Arab satellite channel, to mediating in Lebanon to winning the 2022 World Cup hosting rights - - can be seen through this lens as promoting brand QatarTM.⁸⁴

In a manner akin to branding a product for consumers, Qatari strategy seeks to brand the state by building prestige and shaping international perceptions of Qatar while assertively distinguishing itself from its neighbors. Qatar's niche diplomacy by way of its mediation efforts and broad range of bilateral relationships, coupled with its sponsorship of Al-Jazeera, illustrate the dynamics of nation branding, public diplomacy, and the balancing of soft and hard power resources. As J.E. Peterson notes, "Branding has emerged as a state asset to rival geopolitics and traditional considerations of power. Assertive branding is necessary for states as well as companies to stand out in the crowd, since they often offer similar products."⁸⁵ This is especially true for a small state like Qatar, whose pragmatic leadership has adopted policies to enhance Qatar's profile, boots its security,

⁸³ Hagey, Keach and Byron Tau. "Al-Jazeera has fans in Obama W.H." POLITICO.com, 17 Apr. 2011. Web. 18 Apr. 2011. <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0411/53339.html>

⁸⁴ Roberts, op cit.

⁸⁵ Peterson, J.E. "Qatar and the World: Branding for a Micro-State." *Middle East Journal* 60.4 (Autumn 2006): 732- 748. Print.

and facilitate its ascendance as a “star”⁸⁶ in the international arena. Meena Janardhan adds that Qatar’s “diplomatic overdrive” is driven by its “attempts to draw international mileage goes beyond oil and gas and serves as an advertisement to expand its diversifying economy; the desire to be a regional hegemon and win a seat on the U.N. security council.”⁸⁷

As a “tiny fish stuck between giants”⁸⁸ like Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Iraq, Qatar maintains a “nonaligned status to counterbalance competing actors”⁸⁹ and safeguard its own survival. Mamoun Fandy writes:

“Smaller Gulf states felt vulnerable to both Saudi Arabia and Iran and always had the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait on their minds. Qatar, in particular, felt it might face a similar invasion like that of Kuwait, but the aggressor this time would be either Iran or Saudi Arabia. The conflict between Iran and Qatar over gas is almost a replica of the conflict between Kuwait and Iraq over oil before the invasion.”⁹⁰

In this context, and given Qatar’s limited military capabilities, the Emir has employed—as described by a senior administrator in the Dean’s Office at the Georgetown School of Foreign Service in Doha—“aggressive hyper-diplomacy”⁹¹ with a wide range of actors as a strategic function of Qatar’s national security. In this regard, former U.S. Ambassador to Qatar (1995-1998) and current President of the U.S.-Qatar Business Council Patrick Theros notes that “Qatar definitely practices the maxim of holding your friends close, and your enemies even closer.”⁹²

⁸⁶ Rockower, op cit., p3

⁸⁷ Janardhan, op cit.

⁸⁸ Abraham, George. “Qatar is a diplomatic heavy-hitter.” *Al-Jazeera.net*, 21 July 2008. Web. 1 Mar. 2011. <http://english.aljazeera.net/focus/2008/07/200872164735567644.html>

⁸⁹ Rockower, op cit., p8

⁹⁰ Fandy, Mamoun. *(Un)civil war of Words: Media and Politics in the Arab World*. Westport, CT: Pareger Security International, 2007, p45-46.

⁹¹ Confidential Interview, March 2011

⁹² Abraham, op. cit

Qatar has ties with Iran, for example, cooperating in joint defense exercises, exchanging high-level visits, etc. as part of a strategy to ally itself with a regional heavyweight that it fears. At the same time, Qatar enjoys a close alliance with the United States, hosting the largest air base in the Middle East and headquarters of U.S. Central Command—realities which allow Qatar to project “shadow hard power.”⁹³ A scholar at the Brookings Center Doha shared an illuminating anecdote regarding this eccentric dynamic: “During one of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s recent trips to Doha, an Iranian naval ship docked in Doha’s port. And beyond that, during her stay in Qatar, Qatari officials did not hold back from speaking out in favor of Iran’s right to develop nuclear technology, even though Hillary was in the Gulf trying to find support for sanctions on Iran. Only Qatar could pull a balancing act like that off!”⁹⁴

Another example of Qatar’s strategic balancing act is its commercial ties with Israel and hosting of various Israeli delegations in Doha while remaining a key supporter and financial backer of Hamas, and new home to headquarters of Hamas’ political leadership.⁹⁵ In a symbolic way, moreover, Israel’s trade mission in Doha (which was closed in protest of the 2009 war on Gaza) is located near a villa owned by Hamas leader Khaled Meshal.⁹⁶ Robert Worth provides a further example of how Qatar often walks a diplomatic tightrope, arguing:

⁹³ Rockower, op cit., p7

⁹⁴ Confidential Interview, March 2011. To watch a rare Al-Jazeera English report focusing on Qatar, with a particular focus relationships with Tehran and Washington, see “Qatar’s diplomatic balancing act”, available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=THvebWRV4nM>

⁹⁵ Al-Husseini, Jehan and Fathi Sabbah. “Hamas Takes Decision to Leave Damascus and Doha has Agreed to Host its Political Leadership.” *Al-Hayat*, Dar Al-Hayat. 30 Apr. 2011. Web. 30 Apr. 2011. <http://www.daralhayat.com/portalarticlendah/261292>

⁹⁶ Worth, Robert. “Qatar, Playing All Sides, Is a Nonstop Mediator.” *New York Times*. 9 July 2008. Web. 1 Mar. 2011. <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9801EED71638F93AA35754C0A96E9C8B63>

“At times, Qatar's multifaceted approach to the world has bordered on comedy. In March 2003, Qatar hosted a meeting of the Organization of the Islamic Conference aimed at forestalling the American invasion of Iraq, even as preparations for that invasion were taking place nearby at the American military base. As the final communiqués were being read, military cargo planes could be heard soaring overhead.”⁹⁷

Being friends with everyone, and even standing out by sparking some controversy at times, fits into Qatar’s nation branding strategy. As a small state vying for international capital, a branding strategy rooted in broad-based niche diplomacy as a conflict mediator highlights Qatar as a valuable, indispensable “maverick in the region.”⁹⁸ Unlike traditional diplomatic players like Egypt and Saudi Arabia, Qatar is perceived to be an honest broker, not one that is a “puppet” of the U.S. or too close to any one country or group. This approach to conflict mediation has benefited Qatar, whose reputation has “grown just a bit brighter” as a result.⁹⁹ Abdel Aziz al-Mahmoud, editor of Doha’s *Al Arab* newspaper says: “In the old days, nobody had really heard of Qatar...now, once you say 'I'm from Qatar,' it's, 'Step right this way.' ”¹⁰⁰

In addition to niche diplomacy, Qatar employs public diplomacy through Al-Jazeera to help brand Qatar and wield tremendous soft power over its mass viewership. Many commentators point to Al-Jazeera as a tool to project influence regionally and internationally, and to support Qatari foreign policy. Mamoun Fandy argues that “on the soft power front, it [Qatar] created the media equivalent of a super-gun under the name of Al-Jazeera to keep Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt on the defensive.”¹⁰¹ Paul Rockower

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Rockower, op cit., p7

⁹⁹ Worth, op cit.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Fandy, op cit., p46

adds that to counter the religious and cultural influence of hegemons like Saudi Arabia and Iran, Qatar launched Al-Jazeera as an “instrument of protection and a way to promote its independence. Al-Jazeera became a weapon to burnish Qatar’s Islamic credentials as well as a political tool to use against its larger neighbors.”¹⁰²

Leaked U.S. diplomatic cables indicate, furthermore, that Emir Hamad has used Al-Jazeera as a bargaining chip to threaten Arab leaders with negative media coverage if they did not support a particular foreign policy agenda. Robert Booth writes, “in a clear example of the regional news channel [Al-Jazeera] being exploited for political ends, the Doha embassy claimed Sheikh Hamad (HBJ) told the U.S. senator John Kerry that he had proposed a bargain with the Egyptian president, Hosni Mubarak, which involved stopping broadcasts in Egypt in exchange for a change in Cairo's position on Israel-Palestinian negotiations.”¹⁰³ Leaked cables allege that the Emir had told Mubarak “‘we would stop al-Jazeera for a year’ if he agreed in that span of time to deliver a lasting settlement for the Palestinians...Mubarak said nothing in response [to the Emir].”¹⁰⁴

Various other Arab governments have also at times lost patience with Qatar over Al-Jazeera coverage. Saudi Arabia went so far as to break diplomatic relations with Qatar over this issue in 2002, and “they [relations] were not restored until 2007, after Qatar promised to rein in coverage of the kingdom.”¹⁰⁵ The U.S. has also been vexed by Al-Jazeera coverage, particularly during the 2003 invasion and the channel’s negative

¹⁰² Rockower, op cit., p7

¹⁰³ Booth, Robert. “Wikileaks cables claim al-Jazeera changed coverage to suit Qatari foreign policy.” *The Guardian*. 6 Dec. 2010. Web. 7 Dec. 2010. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/dec/05/wikileaks-cables-al-jazeera-qatari-foreign-policy>

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Worth, op cit.

coverage of the U.S. in Iraq, an editorial line which mirrored mainstream Arab public opinion and that of Qatari officials, despite their hosing of a large U.S. military base at Al-Udeid. At the time, Defense Secretary Rumsfeld frequently complained about Al-Jazeera's "vicious, inaccurate and inexcusable" coverage, and President Bush is reported to have joked about bombing its headquarters.¹⁰⁶

Al-Jazeera's recent coverage of uprisings in the region also illustrates how Qatar uses the pan-Arab broadcaster as an instrument of Qatari foreign policy. As Andrew Hammond notes, Al-Jazeera was "pivotal in keeping up momentum during protests that toppled Zine al-Abdine Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak, both entrenched rulers who were no friends of Qatar's ruling Al Thani dynasty. When Al Jazeera's cameras turned to Yemen, it was as though its guns were trained on the next target in an uprising longtime Arab leaders were convinced was of the channel's making."¹⁰⁷ Indeed, almost every Arab regime has, at some point in the past decade, closed Al-Jazeera's local offices, and harassed or revoked the licenses of the station's correspondents in order to curb negative coverage. Al-Jazeera Director General Wadah Khanfar addressed this issue at the 6th Annual Al-Jazeera Forum, during which Al-Jazeera cameraman Ali Hassan al-Jaber, a Qatari national, was killed in an ambush on the crew by Qaddafi forces in Benghazi.¹⁰⁸ During his tribute to al-Jaber, Khanfar stated that Al-Jazeera and its staff are understood by Arab regimes as a "combatant in a war zone."

¹⁰⁶ Hagey and Byron, op cit

¹⁰⁷ Hammond, Andrew. "Gulf media find their red lines on Bahrain. Reuters, 14 Apr. 2011. Web. 15 Apr. 2011. <http://af.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idAFTRE73D1HB20110414?sp=true>

¹⁰⁸ "Al-Jazeera condemns killing of cameraman in Libya." *Al-Jazeera Forum*, 12 Mar. 2011. Web. 13 Mar. 2011. <http://forum.aljazeera.net/node/311>

In contrast to extensive coverage of uprisings in Arab republics, Al-Jazeera gave scant attention to protests occurring in the Gulf monarchies of Bahrain, Oman, and Saudi Arabia. As'ad Abu Khalil argues that "Bahrain does not exist as far as Al-Jazeera is concerned, and they have avoided inviting Bahraini or Omani or Saudi critics of those regimes."¹⁰⁹ The threat posed by uprisings in Bahrain was closer to home, with implications that were the protests successful, they would bolster Shi'ism and by extension, Iranian influence, in addition to setting a precedent for wider public participation and reform in the Gulf.

Our assessment, however, is that this threat applies more to Saudi Arabia than it does to Qatar, whose Emir is well-liked, has friendly ties with Iran, initiated reforms in the absence of domestic pressures, and whose population is relatively apolitical. We happened to be in Qatar on March 16th, when a "day of rage" was scheduled to take place in Doha. No one showed up to protest, and a number of scholars and journalists we spoke with in Doha agreed that it did not make much sense for Qataris to protest against the popular Emir. One journalist suggested that social media pages calling for protests in Doha were created by people outside of Qatar, probably non-Qataris aiming to stir up trouble in the country.¹¹⁰

The important point here, though, is that regardless of whether any sort of protest had occurred in Qatar, Al-Jazeera would not have covered it. Aside from a 2007 Al-Jazeera English investigative report, "Blood, Sweat, and Tears,"¹¹¹ on foreign workers in

¹⁰⁹ Ibid

¹¹⁰ Confidential interviews, March 2011, Doha

¹¹¹ "Blood, Sweat, and Tears." *Al-Jazeera English*, 18 Aug. 2007. Web. 1 Apr. 2011.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMxbpsw_UTE

Gulf countries, including Qatar—Al-Jazeera typically refrains from covering domestic issues. The fact that the report was produced and broadcasted by Al-Jazeera English, whose audience is largely outside the Middle East, rather than Al-Jazeera Arabic, is also illustrative of the network’s reluctance to offer programming on Qatari issues to local audiences. Indeed, Qatar’s strategic utilization of Al-Jazeera is as an instrument of foreign, not domestic policy.

Like Qatar’s niche diplomacy initiatives, Al-Jazeera serves as a branding tool to promote Qatar and project its influence both regionally and internationally. At the top of each news hours, anchors make sure to say “reporting live from Doha” in order to leave a branding mark on reports throughout the day. As Rockower observes, “Al-Jazeera remains the iconoclastic media flare of the Middle East and shines as a public diplomacy beacon radiating on the tiny emirate...Qatar has seen its own stature rise in popularity alongside the meteoric rise of the satellite network Al-Jazeera.”¹¹² Though Qatari officials assert that Al-Jazeera’s line is editorially independent despite financial backing from the government, we argue that this issue is insignificant in terms of Qatar’s overall public diplomacy strategy. As a scholar at Brookings Doha Center explained, “Regardless of whether Al-Jazeera strays from the regime’s line, it is still good to have Al-Jazeera in Doha. It puts the Qatar on the map, and increases the state’s profile.”¹¹³ A senior administrator in the Office of Academic Research at Qatar University adds: “Al-Jazeera is a success story. At first, people here hesitated and didn’t understand why it

¹¹² Rockower, op cit, p4-5

¹¹³ Confidential Interview, March 2011

was important and why lots of money was being spent on it. Now they see it as an open media and a way for everyone around the world to recognize Qatar.”¹¹⁴

CONCLUSION

Through significant economic, social, and political moves, Qatar has deliberately sought to carve a distinct identity for itself as a key regional and global actor. Qatar has pragmatically utilized its colossal oil and gas wealth in the form of “checkbook diplomacy”¹¹⁵ as a means to carry out large-scale projects and initiatives, buy influence, and support its nation branding and public diplomacy strategies. In addition to possessing seemingly infinite financial resources, “Qatar is institutionally set up to allow personal directives from the elite to come to fruition.”¹¹⁶ Free from economic, political, and other restraints, the Qatari leadership is able to uniquely fashion personal conviction into policies that are swiftly implemented. As a scholar at the Brookings Doha Center summarized, “Qatar is run by personality politics, and by money plus vision—what the top wants is what gets done. Three people run the country—the Emir, the Foreign Minister and Prime Minister, and Sheikh Mozah—and they do so with no veto mechanism in their way, and with unlimited funds at their disposal.”¹¹⁷

Qatar’s active efforts to brand itself through a wide range of initiatives in economic, social, and political spheres raises several questions and provides ample opportunities for future research. Are further changes and nation-branding tactics sustainable in a country driven by personality politics? The Emir, Foreign and Prime

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Rockower, op cit, p7

¹¹⁶ Roberts, op cit

¹¹⁷ Confidential interview, March 2011, Doha

Minister, and Sheikha Mozah have managed to adopt a range of “spectacular schemes”¹¹⁸ largely because they have faced no real financial or bureaucratic restraints. In fact, they have even sidelined Qatar’s institutions to move forward with profile-raising schemes when they felt the process would be slowed down otherwise—prime examples of this are the leadership’s creation and diversion of a significant amount of funds to both the Supreme Education Council and the wholly private Qatar Foundation, to maneuver around Qatar’s Ministry of Education to launch Education City and a series of educational reforms. The Emir and Sheikh Mozah have invested a great deal into fashioning Qatar as a hub of modern education in the region, but it remains to be seen what the returns of that investment will be and whether the next generation of Qatar’s leaders will continue efforts made in this field and others. Indeed, much research remains to be done in the coming years concerning the effectiveness of reforms in Qatar’s education system, the entry of recent graduates and their performance in the job market, and the expansion of Education City.

Another specter to look out for in Qatar’s future is the issue of democracy. Through liberalizing measures including constitutional reforms granting women the right to vote and run for office, creating a Central Municipal Council, and promising to allow direct elections for two-thirds of the Advisory Council, the Emir has sought to project an image of Qatar as a progressive state in the Gulf. These moves have led to Qatar being

¹¹⁸ “Qatar and its Emir: He’ll do it his way.” *The Economist*. 27 May 2010. Web. 28 Apr 2011. <http://www.economist.com/node/16219226>

“frequently described as being at the vanguard of democratization in the Arab world.”¹¹⁹

But there are few indications that the Emir is truly committed to democratization in Qatar and would be willing to relinquish some of his authority; indeed, “the emir does not pretend he is anything but a benevolent modernizing autocrat.”¹²⁰ A prime example of this faltering commitment is the frequent postponement of elections for even the “toothless advisory council”¹²¹ since 2005, when they were originally scheduled to be held.

The Emir’s efforts to brand Qatar as a progressive state and bid for international legitimacy require that he not delay these elections much longer, and that he enact reforms that actually decentralize executive powers in Qatar—a move that the Emir may be unwilling to make. If the Emir decides to hold Advisory Council elections, for example, will those elections be free and fair, or will the Emir pressure people behind the scenes to not run for office, as he did during the Central Municipal Council elections in 2003? Will the advancements in education and human development that the Emir has worked to promote eventually foster the rise of domestic demands for democracy, as scholars like Sager have suggested? How will the Emir balance the desire for control with these new demands—or will Qatar’s wealth, which is projected to grow even further and faster in the coming years, prevent these demands from appearing?

Our research offers a significant contribution to the literature studying authoritarian regimes in region, as we demonstrate that Qatar has enhanced its image by

¹¹⁹ Hawthorne, Amy. “Qatar’s New Constitution: Limited Reform From the Top.” *Arab Reform Bulletin*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 26 Jun. 2003. Web. 39 Apr. 2011.
<http://www.carnegieendowment.org/arb/?fa=show&article=21605>

¹²⁰ “Qatar and its emir: He’ll do it his way”, op cit.

¹²¹ Ibid.

engaging in reform and adopting new initiatives while remaining steadfastly authoritarian. Indeed, we have argued that the case of Qatar provides an example of how a resource-wealthy state may bolster its authoritarian nature through external legitimacy, beyond the internal legitimacy-seeking moves discussed in theories like the rentier hypothesis, which we maintain does not adequately explain the current situation and the strategic calculus underlying recent initiatives in Qatar. The 2022 World Cup will be a critical signpost and spotlight for Qatar. As we approach 2022, more eyes will turn toward Qatar and put the Emir's lip service and nation-branding strategies to the test.

At the economic level, Qatar is expected to complete a number of high-profile infrastructure projects in the country in the coming decade, in addition to both attracting foreign investment and making investments via the country's sovereign wealth fund, the QIA. We anticipate an influx of even more foreign migrant workers to Qatar during this period, a phenomenon that will impact Qatari society and exacerbate the "glum sense among many indigenous Qataris...that they are being swamped by incomers...[and] the dizzy pace of modernization [that] has led some Qataris to worry that their identity is being eroded."¹²² Despite the shiny new projects across Qatar and the Emir's efforts to promote the placement of Qataris in executive positions in the business sector in a process known as "Qatarization", many Qataris worry about issues of identity and whether Qatar will remain "Qatari", given the dramatic influx of foreigners to the country during the Emir's rule. As the spotlight of 2022 begins to shine on Qatar, the Emir—who will be keen to protect Qatar's image abroad—will be challenged to institute better human rights protections for the country's laborers and address issues of national

¹²² Ibid.

identity, perhaps through expanded Qatarization policies and public diplomacy campaigns.

On the multilateral and public diplomacy fronts, moreover, it remains unclear where Qatar will offer its conflict mediation services next and whether its niche diplomacy strategy as a mediator is sustainable, given the tough balancing act and taut diplomatic tightrope Qatar walks. It will become increasingly difficult for Qatar to maintain the appearance that it is neutral and balanced in all of its relationships, and it will inevitably be forced to take positions that favor one side over the other. An example of an issue where there is precedent in this regard is when Qatar, as a non-permanent member on the United Nations Security Council in 2006-2007—a seat Qatar lobbied hard to obtain—was pressured to vote on a resolution toughening sanctions against Iran. In an uncomfortable position having to choose between its Western allies and Iran, coupled with Qatar’s desire to show that it stands among leaders of the international community, Qatar decided to support the unanimous adoption of the resolution.¹²³ But how will things play out when Qatar is faced with this issue again, and others? A tiny state with limited military capabilities and wedged in between giants like Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq, Qatar has pursued hyper-diplomacy to protect its natural security interests. As a result, when Qatar is forced in the future to make critical choices among its allies, we argue that it will likely opt for the ally who will best serve Qatar’s security interests. A kinetic confrontation between Iran and Arab or Western states, for example, would present such a challenge for Qatar and serve as a key case for analysis in this regard.

¹²³ United Nations. “Security Council Toughens Sanctions Against Iran, Adds Arms Embargo, with Unanimous Adoption of Resolution 1747 (2007).” 24 Mar 2007. Web. 21 Apr. 2011. <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2007/sc8980.doc.htm>

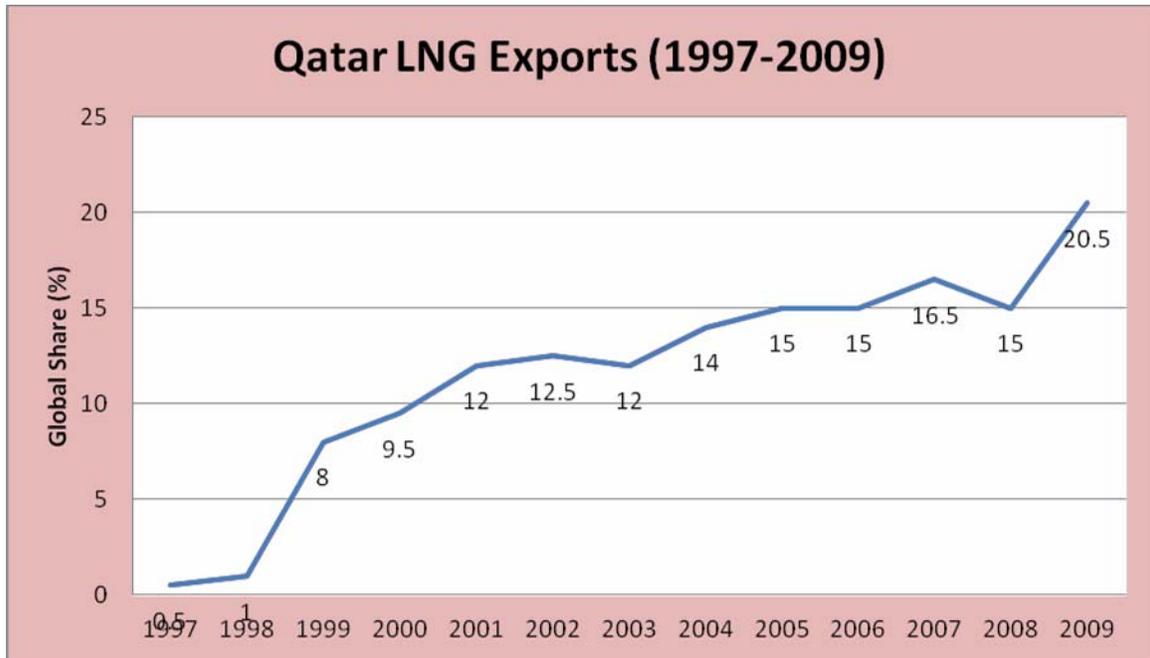
In the near term, Qatar's military and diplomatic roles in Libya merit continued observation. The Emir has taken a considerable risk in committing Qatari forces to NATO's mission, and it remains to be seen whether that mission will be successful, and whether and what kind of backlash Qatar may experience from Qaddafi and other Arab leaders as a result. In addition, it will also be important to research what editorial lines and trends Al-Jazeera, as an instrument of Qatar's foreign policy, will follow in its continued coverage of the broader "Arab Spring" and beyond.

It will be interesting to monitor, furthermore, whether Qatar's nominee for the position Secretary General of the Arab League, Abdulrahman al-Attiyah, will succeed Amr Moussa or even become close to doing so. If Qatar were to win this bid, it would be historic, as the position of Secretary General has always gone to an Egyptian diplomat (with the exception, of course, of the period when Egypt was suspended from the Arab League for signing a peace treaty with Israel, and Tunisia took on the role). A Qatari Secretary General would be a truly symbolic win for Qatar—an acknowledgement that this tiny state has become a heavyweight and transformed the traditional balance of power in the Middle East.

We have demonstrated that Qatar has strategically pursued an aggressive agenda of initiatives in the economic, social, and political spheres as part of a nation branding and differentiation strategy to create a unique niche for itself on regional and international stages. Indeed, given Qatar's ambition to secure its relevance and indispensability amongst the international community, and the absence of fiscal and domestic pressures on the country's leadership, we argue that that nation branding theory is the most appropriate paradigm to explain recent developments in Qatar.

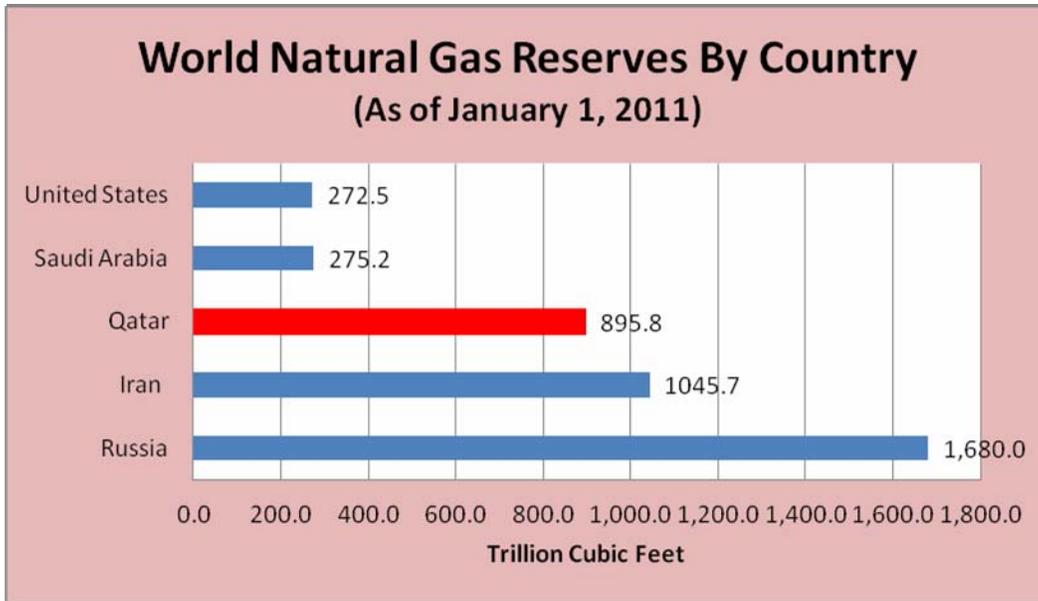
TABLES & FIGURES

Chart 1: Qatar Liquefied Natural Gas Exports (1997-2009)



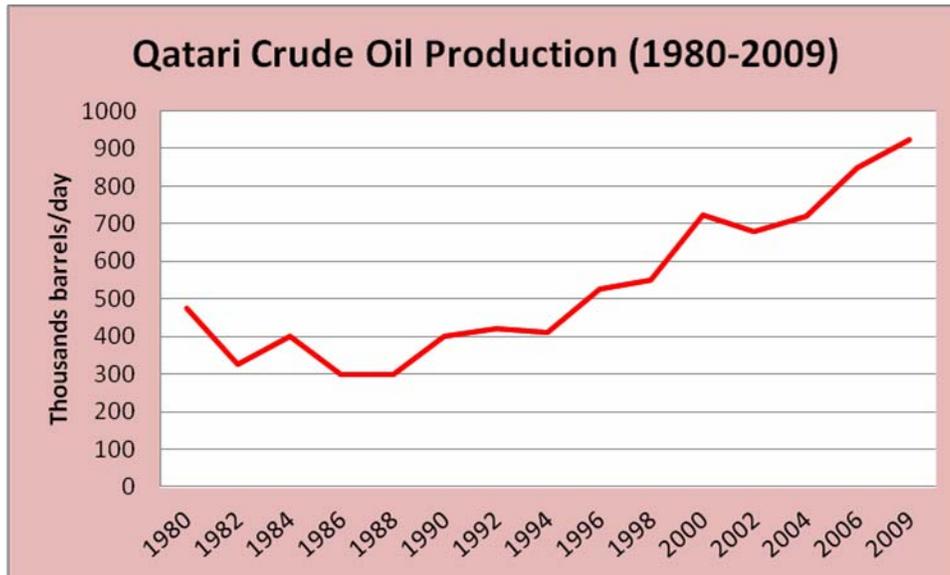
Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration

Chart 2: World Natural Gas Reserves by Country (As of January 1, 2011)



Source: *Oil & Gas Journal*, January 1, 2011

Chart 3: Qatari Crude Oil Production (1980-2009)



Source: *U.S. Energy Information Administration*

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