

QATAR: THE GREAT AMBITIONS OF A SMALL STATE

Friday 27 september, 4:30 p.m. – 6:00 p.m., Or room



Emmanuel Dupuy, Nidal Shoukeir and Kader Abderrahim

It is a very small state in terms of its surface area (11,500 km²) and its number of inhabitants (2 million), but large in terms of its gross domestic product (GDP) per capita of 88,000 dollars, placing it among the 10 richest countries in the world, and large also in terms of its considerable influence on the international scene. But Qatar's success is confusing. First its neighbours, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. With its \$1,000 billion in assets in Qatari banks and its 900 billion m³ of gas, which will ensure its energy security for the next 150 years, Qatar is also a country with a literacy rate of 95%, well above the 68% of the other member countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council. As such, many prestigious global universities have established campuses in Doha, the country's capital, including Georgetown, Cornell, King's College London and HEC. Qatar has also made a name for itself through a new form of religious proselytism known as political Islam. Then there

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is the country's media power, whose Al Jazeera television channel resonates throughout the Arab world, with its 25 million viewers per day, not to mention

MODERATION

Emmanuel Dupuy, President of the Institute for Prospective and Security in Europe

SPEAKERS

Kader Abderrahim, Research Director, Institute for Prospective and Security in Europe and senior Lecturer, Sciences Po

Lama Fakhri, Lecturer and researcher at Saint Joseph University of Beirut

Nidal Shoukeir, Journalist, Governmental strategic consultant



Belin Sports, the broadcasting flagship of sporting events, to which Qatar is also a major financial contributor via the Qatar Foundation.

‘Since their entry onto the international scene, we had the feeling that this little troublemaker had no place in the big leagues,’ explained Kader Abderrahim, Director of Research at the Institute for Prospective and Security in Europe and lecturer at Sciences Po. It must be said that everything happened in a coup d’état on 27th June 1995, during the forced takeover of power by Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani from his father, Emir Khalifa bin Hamad Al Thani, who was then visiting Geneva. Since then, Qatar has implemented a diplomatic strategy of unprecedented power which is bearing fruit, and which resulted in the organisation of the 2022 Football World Cup on its territory. At the same time as Qatar implements its diplomacy, this is accompanied by a very new process for a country of the South: strategic autonomy. ‘It is implementing new ideas in a region of the world where until

now people have been content to place themselves under the protective American and British umbrella,’ stated Kader Abderrahim. Qatar envisages a new way of thinking about international relations, as we have seen since the start of the war in Ukraine.’ According to him, Qatar had anticipated what we are experiencing today, namely a loss of influence of France and the West on the international scene, and the emergence of a political Islam in Arab societies. This farsightedness has made this country the mediator in many conflicts, including the war between Israel and Hamas, even while it has sheltered Islamist leaders, going so far as to provide substantial funding to terrorist organisations. ‘When Qatar mediated over the imprisonment of Bulgarian nurses in Libya, it was France that asked the Qataris if they could intervene, and they obtained the release of the nurses. In the French and European minds, this marked the entry of a mediating Qatar onto the international stage.’ These mediations subsequently proliferated, notably in Afghanistan, Libya and Chad. Its project gives it an influence that exceeds its capacities in terms of gas and oil resources. Even in June 2017, when Qatar was ousted from the Gulf Cooperation Council, despite being 95% dependent on its neighbours for food imports, it eventually won re-entry through mediation by Kuwait.

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Lama Fakhri

Lama Fakhri, a lecturer and researcher at Saint Joseph University in Beirut, identified three diplomatic strategies used by Qatar since the 1995 coup. First of all, alliances with the great powers, including the United States, bode well for



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Nidal Shoukeir

a country which suffers from structural weaknesses. which pose a risk to its sovereignty. Secondly, hedging, a term borrowed from the lexicon of finance but which, in international relations, refers to maintaining good relations with opposing players in order to minimise risks. 'The country hosts the largest US military base abroad in the world, but at the same time hosts the Islamists, the Taliban and Hamas,' said Lama Fakih. Thirdly, there is the deployment of niche diplomacy, which consists of focusing on well-defined fields of action in order to generate high returns and gain widespread international recognition. 'What

is pushing Qatar to take on this role of mediator is the obsession with building a brand image for itself, by appearing as a peacemaker in order to gain a certain prestige,' she added. Qatar also promotes religious virtues by referring to certain Koranic verses that



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call for peace and reconciliation, and this is also reflected in its Constitution: working for peace and the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

Nidal Shoukeir, a journalist and government communications consultant, has spent several years studying Qatar's image and the reasons why the country is so attached to it. 'It goes far beyond a simple communication tool, it is a fundamental element in its DNA. There are two reasons for this, the first being that Qatar is landlocked between two very powerful rivals, Saudi Arabia and Iran, which took a dim view of the 1995 coup, he explained. This need to find allies beyond the Middle East was also increased tenfold after Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. This had an impact on the powers that be, which felt threatened.' Its central position on the international stage is no longer in doubt,

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despite the many contradictions that the country is still unable to eradicate at home, fostered by an archaic model of society based on the ideology of origin. This system classifies ethnic groups and families according to 'genealogical qualities' in order to integrate them into the social hierarchy, thus removing any prospect of a social ladder. Despite this, Qatar has demonstrated that even small states can play a role in the world, and has secured a prominent place alongside the world's great powers.