

PAPER DETAILS

TITLE: QATAR AND ARAB SPRING

AUTHORS: Samet YÜCE

PAGES: 146-150

ORIGINAL PDF URL: <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/236987>



Kitap Tanıtımı/ Book Review

Qatar and Arab Spring

Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, Oxford University Press, New York, 2014.

Reviewed by Samet Yüce*

The book aims to examine Qatar's position in the so-called Arab Spring and its role in the emerging regional alliances between December 2010 and June 2013. The core argument of Ulrichsen is that Qatar has benefited from the upheavals of the Arab Spring and rose in regional and international politics (p.1).

It can be concluded from the book that Qatar's rise can be classified into three periods. The first period starts with Emir Hamad from 2007 until the Arab Spring's strong upheavals in the Arab countries in 2011. During the Emir Hamad era, significant steps were taken for Qatar's rise regionally and internationally and Qatar became a state of mediation and peace-building in the region. In the second period, Qatari leaders, Emir Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani and his powerful Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim Al-Thani (HBJ), were able to use Arab Spring as a strategic opportunity to rise the country. During this period Qatar changed its policy and became an activist and interventionist state. In the third period

* Lecturer, School of Foreign Languages, Kastamonu University, syuce@kastamonu.edu.tr

when the new Emir came to throne in 2013, Qatar's foreign policy evolved and the political elites concentrated more on domestic affairs than regional and international ones. Nevertheless, they also tried to restore the damaged relations with its neighboring countries.

In chapter one (Historical and Political Context), the author claims that Qatar became 'a rising star' both in regional and international politics by strengthening its own position. He points out that there are two main factors leading to Qatar's rise in the international arena: Firstly, it owns the world's third-largest reserves of liquefied natural gas (LNG). Secondly, it has been ruled effectively by the political leaders. In this context, Emir Hamad and his Prime Minister HBJ can be considered to be the architects of Qatar as an active novel player in the regional and international arena (p.13).

In chapter two (State-Branding and the Leveraging of Power and Influence), the author puts the emphasis on the significant and visible challenges of Qatar in the region. He discusses how the extremely small circle of decision-makers became so successful in both regional and international politics. He underlines how Qatar successfully used state-branding and soft power to leverage the state. In this context, the Qatari leaders leveraged the state's political, economic and strategic assets to increase their importance in the region.

Ulrichsen states that Qatar as a small state used its national resources wisely when Arab Spring broke out in the Middle East. Qatar's successful attempts during the Arab Spring imply that a small state can emerge as a global player with its own national resources while its neighboring countries were struggling with the upheavals. The author thinks that Qatari political elites were really skillful to see regional interactions as a prospect rather than an obstacle (p.66). Qatar never stopped during the upheavals and developed its potential. It increased the number of hotel rooms from 10000 in 2010 to 30000 in 2013 (p.63). Thus, it hosted major international meetings in the country (p. 63).

In Qatar's global rise, Al Jazeera had an important place (p.48). The channel became very popular in the world (p. 49). Most significantly, Al Jazeera English channel's popularity peaked during the uprisings in Egypt (p. 49). On the other hand, there were some sceptics that Al Jazeera Arabic was used as a political tool by Qatar (p.50).

In chapter three (Drivers and Motivations of Qatari Foreign Policy), the author tries to reveal the main drivers and motivations of Qatar's foreign policy. He urges that Qatar had a distinctive and strong foreign policy and a small circle of elite decision makers were in charge of managing the foreign policy up to 2013 with a goal of a regional autonomy and international protection while prioritizing diplomatic mediation (p.67). In Qatar, Emir Hamad and his Prime Minister HJB's personal engagements became prominent in Qatar's mediation policy (p. 90). HJB actively played roles in many diplomatic mediation initiatives in the Arab and Islamic world, especially in three major Qatari diplomacy in Yemen, Lebanon and Darfur (p. 82). The success in diplomacy related with these states made a great reputation for Qatar as a 'non-stop mediator' (p.82).

In chapter four (Qatar and the Arab Spring), the author gives more information about the relationship between Qatar and the Muslim Brotherhood (p.102, 103). He believes that Qatar benefited Arab Spring unrest in two forms of leverage. First, Qatar managed to establish a good relationship with the Doha-based exiles. Doha carried on its personal relations with these people even when they returned to their homes. Second, they benefited from the Muslim Brotherhood as a powerful player in the political transitions (p.103). In fact, Qatar established a good relationship with the leaders of the upheavals in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria and Yemen. The author claims that Qatar backed the Muslim Brotherhood in the region. It hosted the Muslim Brotherhood exiles in the country (p. 103). On the other hand, Qatar's concern with the Muslim Brotherhood widened the rift between Qatar and the regional states (p. 119).

The author emphasizes that Qatar was caught unprepared for the Arab Spring as it was trying to make its stance for diplomatic mediation (p.109). However, some factors helped the political elites to launch or change the state policy quickly. The author considers three factors for the ability of launching Doha's policy quickly. Firstly, Qatar had a very concentrated core of decision making. Related with this factor he states that there was small circle of policy makers which had the advantages to make a rapid decision. Additionally, there was no bureaucracy and no opposition-competing factions in the country. Secondly, The Qatari policy makers had no real domestic constraints. Thirdly, the uprisings aligned with Qatar's

international branding as an active novel player in the Middle East (p.110).¹

Chapter five (Arab Solutions to Arab Problems: Libya and Syria), examines the nature and extent of the Qatari interventions both in Libya and Syria in terms of Qatar's foreign policy (p.121). The author states that the intervention in Libya in March 2011 means that Qatari policy evolved from the diplomatic mediation to an activist and interventionist approach to the Arab Spring (p.121). Therefore, Qatar challenged to use political, economic, and military support when needed (p.121).

Ulrichsen believes that Qatar also used Doha based Al Jazeera to oust Gaddafi so it gained a global attention and strengthened its state-branding strategy during the Arab Spring (p.122). Qatar's intervention in Libya increased its credibility in the international politics. However, in Libya in 2012, Qatar lost ground. In other words, Qatar could not maintain its influence in Libya after the international intervention due to its lack of professional diplomatic capabilities (p.130).

Qatar also intervened in the Syrian uprisings during the Arab Spring. It became one of the first Arab countries which froze its diplomatic relations with this country (p.131). Syrian opposition leaders came together at a meeting in Doha in 2012 to remove their differences (p.139). However, Qatar couldn't maintain its regional influence. During the spring and the summer of 2013 Qatar's regional influence waned and the Saudi Arabia came forward as a regional pioneer instead (p.141).

In Chapter six (Post-Arab Spring Challenges and Implications), the author emphasizes that in the post-Arab Spring Era, Qatar had three major policy consequences: Firstly, Qatar moved from diplomatic mediation towards a more activist and interventionist regional policy. Secondly, Qatar's Arab Spring policy of taking up for the winners risked Qatar's regional relationships with the other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. In the chapter, the author analyzes the Qatar's current position in domestic, regional and international arena by stating that there were two questions to be answered but probably they wouldn't be answered at the moment. The first one was the sustainability of Qatar's highly personalized decision-

¹ For complimentary respectives see: Philipp O. Amour, "Israel, the Arab Spring, and the Unfolding Regional Order in the Middle East: A Strategic Assessment," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 2016, doi:10.1080/13530194.2016.1185696.

making structure and the second one was the durability of its relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood. Additionally, the author states Qatar's position in international politics so that Qatar has been "punching above its weight" or it has "bitten off more than it can chew" (p.171). Thirdly, the Qatari political elites inevitably focused on the lack of political freedoms at home (p.145-146). In this regard, the author points out some signs of unease among the Qatari nationals in 2012.

Ulrichsen expresses drastic political changes in the country. Firstly, he points out the criticism of Qataris on selling pork products to expatriates and license to purchase alcohol. The Qatari authority at last had to prohibit the alcohol license all around the country due to an increasing concern in public to this issue. Secondly, he underlines that the Supreme Education Council run by Emir Tamim issued a decree stipulating that Arabic would be the official language of undergraduate education at Qatar University (p.167).

Epilogue both highlights the developments in Qatar and the region, and gives the author's perspective for the future of Qatar. He claims that the new Emir has changed the Qatari foreign policy and replaced with a new one. He sees that Emir Tamim is likely to be more introspective than before (p.174). Hence, he urges that he will concentrate on domestic issues more than international ones. In this regard, the author claims that Emir Tamim will be engaging in consolidation of domestic power and damaged regional relations (p.184).