

Qatar today stands before a complex reckoning of its strategic relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood one shaped by the logic of geopolitical influence. While this alliance has enabled Doha to transcend its geographic limits and emerge as a "global player" and a pivotal regional mediator by leveraging the group's soft power, it has also imposed significant costs. These have been reflected in the strain on its ties with its Gulf and Arab hinterland, as well as in facing international accusations that have placed it under intense diplomatic and financial pressure to defend its global image.

Abstract

This study examines the nature of the organic and functional relationship between the Qatari state and the Muslim Brotherhood over a span of seven decades, tracing its dramatic evolution from a phase of humanitarian hosting to a full-fledged strategic partnership, and ultimately to the current phase of political realism. The central problem of the study lies in identifying the “structural contradiction” between the nature of the Qatari state as a hereditary monarchy with a conservative legacy, and the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood, which embraces a transformative project aimed at challenging traditional regimes. The study argues that this alliance was not merely a transient ideological convergence, but rather a “bargain of influence” that enabled both parties to achieve unprecedented regional and international breakthroughs: Qatar provided resources and platforms, while the Brotherhood supplied cadres and a transnational intellectual backing.

The study begins by tracing the historical roots of this entrenchment back to the 1950s, highlighting a process of “silent Brotherhoodization” that targeted key sectors of the emerging state, particularly education and the judiciary. This analysis reveals how the group succeeded in shaping the collective consciousness of Qatari identity and in establishing a financial and logistical infrastructure through charities and parallel institutions. This, in turn, created a supportive environment ready to transition toward more significant political roles with the rise of new leadership. This phase paved the way for transforming Doha into a global center of intellectual and religious production, capitalizing on the integration

between communication platforms and religious authorities—especially through Al Jazeera and prominent Brotherhood figures—to promote a model of “transnational ideology” as an alternative to traditional regimes in the region.

The study further analyzes the turning point of the “Arab Spring” as the peak of the Qatari–Brotherhood empowerment project, during which Doha moved from “hosting ideas” to directly influencing governance in major capitals such as Cairo, Tunis, and Tripoli. It highlights the strategy of “financial diplomacy” and Qatar’s substantial investment in consolidating the Brotherhood’s rule—an approach that ultimately led to open confrontation with a rising regional axis following the events of June 2013. The study also shows how the Brotherhood’s narrative of victimhood, combined with Qatar’s continued support for a “government in exile,” deepened Doha’s diplomatic isolation, culminating in the 2017 blockade crisis, which placed this alliance under an existential test amid intense regional and international pressures.

In conclusion, the study explores the trajectory of this alliance in light of the Al-Ula Agreement and the subsequent quiet political recalibrations between 2021 and 2026. It concludes that Qatari policy has shifted toward a “zero-problems” approach and adopted a new pragmatism based on the “quiet relocation” of controversial figures and the de-escalation of sensitive issues, while maintaining the core of the relationship as a “strategic reserve” kept out of the spotlight. The final findings indicate that Qatar has reconfigured its relationship with the Brotherhood to align with the requirements of regional stability, transforming the

group from a spearhead of expansion into a carefully managed file within the framework of evolving international power balances.

Introduction

The relationship between the State of Qatar and the Muslim Brotherhood represents one of the most complex and controversial political phenomena in the contemporary Arab landscape. It transcends the conventional frameworks of state-movement alliances, constituting a unique model of political interdependence and geostrategic betting, marked by an existential paradox: a structural contradiction whereby a political system grounded in the legitimacy of “hereditary monarchy” aligns strategically with a transnational ideological movement that seeks, in its intellectual foundations, to redefine the nation-state, move beyond traditional governance structures, and reshape national identity.

The mid-20th century marked a pivotal turning point in the history of the Muslim Brotherhood, as waves of political repression and successive trials in the Arab Mashreq, particularly in Egypt and Syria, forced thousands of cadres and youth into accelerated, forced migration. This migration was not merely an individual escape from repression but evolved into a strategic, organized relocation shaped by intersecting regional circumstances. While Gamal Abdel Nasser’s regime tightened the noose on the organization through arrests and exile, the emerging Gulf states were undergoing delicate structural transformations, seeking educated, conservative talent to build their educational and judicial institutions.

Guided by the principles of humanitarian and religious solidarity, the Gulf states—Qatar foremost among them—opened their doors to the Brotherhood’s leaders

and cadres, providing them with a supportive intellectual and spiritual environment and ample employment opportunities. They were entrusted with pivotal roles in shaping nascent institutions, with their presence clearly visible in curricula, religious guidance, and universities, as a “conservative force” capable of restraining the then-dominant nationalist and leftist currents. Thus, the early relationship was functional and alliance-based, serving the legitimacy of ruling families against shared ideological adversaries.

Over time, Qatar’s trajectory gradually diverged from that of its Gulf neighbors. While Saudi Arabia and the UAE later moved to reassess the Brotherhood as a potential political threat—particularly as the danger of Arab nationalism waned—Doha maintained continuous coordination with the movement. Observers attribute this divergence to the absence of a sharp internal confrontation between Qatar’s ruling elite and a local Brotherhood organization, as well as the movement’s engagement in education and religious work rather than direct partisan activity, which facilitated their integration into the state’s formal structures rather than being classified as an opposition force.

With the rise of Emir Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani in 1995, Qatari foreign policy began to utilize the Brotherhood as a tool of “soft power” for a small state seeking an international role disproportionate to its geographic and demographic size. Al Jazeera, close relationships with influential figures such as Yusuf al-Qaradawi, and political and financial patronage of Brotherhood branches—including offshoot movements such as Hamas—played a central role in positioning Qatar as a sponsor of “moderate Islam” discourse and a

conflict mediator, while simultaneously bringing it into tension with the strategies of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt.

The Arab Spring marked a strategic turning point in this relationship. Doha perceived the political rise of the Brotherhood in Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya as an opportunity to reshape the regional map, positioning itself as a strategic partner to these ascending forces. Through three-dimensional support—political, financial, and media—Qatar bet on the Brotherhood as a central actor, reinforcing this approach through a close alliance with Ankara. Conversely, this bet was interpreted by key regional powers as a departure from traditional balances and a threat to the prevailing stability, turning the relationship into a focal point of intense polarization within the Gulf, culminating in a deep diplomatic crisis in 2017, with the Brotherhood file remaining a cornerstone of the dispute.

Since those crises, Qatar has begun a process of repositioning its dealings with the Brotherhood, characterized by reducing overt public support, calibrating media discourse, while keeping open channels of communication and continuing to leverage Brotherhood networks in certain regional arenas, particularly Gaza and mediation efforts. Many observers contend that Qatar still views the Brotherhood as an instrument within a multi-level toolkit—religious, media, and network-based—used to achieve balance with larger regional powers, rather than as an absolute ideological ally.

Thus, the Qatar–Brotherhood relationship can be read as a trajectory that has evolved from a functional

alliance countering nationalist and leftist movements, to a political and media partnership, and finally to a utilitarian relationship governed by regional power balances and Gulf-system pressures, with Doha carefully seeking to maximize its role while avoiding the cost of a complete rupture with its Brotherhood allies.

Chapter One: Foundations and Early Formation

1. The Integration of the Muslim Brotherhood into the Emerging Qatari Identity

Since the era of its founder, Qatar has been associated with the title “*Qiblat al-Madyoum*” (the refuge of the oppressed)—a designation that reflects a political and humanitarian doctrine which has made the country a haven for all those facing injustice or persecution. The hosting of the first cadres of the Muslim Brotherhood in the mid-1950s was a practical embodiment of this deeply rooted approach, as they found under the patronage of Sheikh Ali bin Abdullah Al Thani a safe haven from the repression they had endured in their home countries.

From this humanitarian shelter, the contours of a long-term strategy gradually began to take shape, making the growing influence of the Brotherhood by the end of the twentieth century a natural outcome of roots planted decades earlier. What began as a refuge for exiles evolved into a platform for participation in building the institutions of the emerging modern state. Sheikh Ali bin Abdullah Al Thani was known for his inclination to support religious scholars and his appreciation for learning; he welcomed and hosted them out of religious and humanitarian conviction, viewing them as Muslims who had sought refuge in his land to escape injustice and persecution. In this regard, Abdul Ghaffar Hussein notes: “Individuals from the (Brotherhood), who had

been expelled from or left Egypt, sought refuge, and the former ruler of Qatar, Sheikh Ali bin Abdullah Al Thani, embraced them. He regarded the Brotherhood as Salafi Muslims who had been oppressed in their homelands and thus sought refuge in his country, and it was his duty to support them. Sheikh Ali, may God have mercy on him, was a deeply religious Muslim ruler who maintained close ties with scholars and was not deeply engaged in political affairs beyond the scope of his simple environment.”

This reception was not merely official; it resonated widely within Qatari society, which is inherently inclined toward religiosity and reverence for scholars. The conservative social fabric and innate piety of the Qatari people made Brotherhood members welcome guests. This popular acceptance granted the group a form of “social legitimacy” that facilitated their integration into the local fabric, transforming their presence from mere political asylum into a deeply rooted religious and educational role. They were perceived as “brothers in faith” before being refugees. As the confrontation between the Nasserist regime and the movement in Egypt intensified, the contours of an “elite accommodation” strategy became evident, welcoming waves of fleeing figures who were not merely refugees but represented the “intellectual elite” of organizational and administrative expertise.

In its early stages, the Muslim Brotherhood focused primarily on religious outreach (*da'wa*), guidance, and social work, deliberately avoiding direct political confrontation or involvement in conventional party politics. This approach stemmed from a conscious desire to evade security crackdowns and premature conflict

with authorities, thereby allowing space for gradual and quiet expansion.

This early phase was marked by the establishment of a solid organizational and educational infrastructure, grounded in societal penetration and a focus on building service institutions, mosques, and charitable organizations to strengthen ties with the grassroots. Their educational methodology prioritized the formation of the “individual,” nurturing both spiritual and intellectual development, while avoiding partisan polarization by presenting the Brotherhood as a comprehensive Islamic movement not confined to narrow party structures—thus affording it a form of “protective legitimacy” in the sphere of religious outreach. In this context, Dr. Jassim Sultan, a former Qatari member, notes that in its early years in Qatar, the group did not aim to establish a “political organization” as much as it focused on educational and missionary work. This is further supported by Dr. Abdullah Al-Nafisi, who observed that Brotherhood members were keen to operate in an individual and organic manner to avoid raising suspicions, especially since accusations of “partisanship” frequently followed members fleeing Egypt, with Nasser’s intelligence services actively attaching such labels to them wherever they went.

The year 1961 marked a significant turning point with the arrival of Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, whose role extended beyond traditional preaching to laying the foundations of an integrated educational and legislative framework. The relationship between Qatar and the Brotherhood during this period can thus be characterized as a form of “quiet alliance,” in which the state and society provided security and platforms, while

the Brotherhood was granted the opportunity to contribute to building the institutions of the emerging state, including education, the judiciary, and religious endowments (*awqaf*).

2. Pathways of Muslim Brotherhood Influence in the Education and Judiciary Sectors

This period in Qatari history marked a structural turning point in the establishment of the emerging modern state. Qatar adopted a strategy of attracting Arab expertise as a core driver of national development. With political foresight, the state transformed these incoming elites—including members of the Muslim Brotherhood—from mere expatriate communities into active “building blocks” shaping national institutions. This initiative was not merely an administrative measure to fill gaps; it reflected a Qatari vision of creating educational and judicial systems that blended tradition with modernity. Analysts, however, describe it as a form of “silent Brotherhoodization,” whereby members of the movement transitioned from “political refugees” into state architects who forged the country’s tools and identity from within.

The process began through supervision of curriculum development, which went beyond basic education to present a vision of national identity aligned with the Brotherhood’s intellectual references. Through the Ministry of Education, prominent figures such as Abdul Badi’ Saqr and later Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi strengthened the role of religious institutes, positioning them as a key source of senior state personnel. This fostered an administrative class that shared intellectual affinity with the movement’s doctrines.

In the judiciary and legislative sectors, the Brotherhood's presence emerged through advisory and legal positions. Rather than pursuing confrontational strategies to overhaul laws, the Brotherhood cadres focused on harmonizing regulations and statutes with a Sharia-compliant framework consistent with their methodology. They leveraged the state-building phase to develop a judicial system integrating heritage with modernity. This participation afforded them significant social and legal prestige, with advisors and judges becoming foundational references, gradually aligning their thought with the country's legal architecture even before Qatar's political role gained prominence on the international stage.

By the 1980s, the outcomes of this intellectual interaction became evident: the educational sector produced cadres imbued with Brotherhood concepts, while the judiciary provided a stable environment for these ideas to take root. By 1995, the educational, judicial, and media institutions had taken shape with a clear ideological imprint, awaiting the political moment to transition from foundational roles to partnership in decision-making. This stage represented the "first building block," creating a local environment prepared for the major transformations led by Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa, as the new leadership inherited a ready human and intellectual infrastructure capable of supporting Qatar's expanding regional roles.

Chapter Two: Strategic Alliance and Integration of Cadres

1. Reasons Behind the Strategic Alliance between Doha and the Muslim Brotherhood



Yusuf al-Qaradawi between the former and current Emir of Qatar

During the tenure of Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, Qatari foreign policy underwent a structural transformation, adopting a strategy academically described as “functional expansionism.” Since the 1995 coup, the new leadership sought to turn the country’s small geographic size from a security vulnerability into a platform for geopolitical maneuvering, based on the principle of “securing survival through amplified influence.” The primary challenge to this ambition was establishing a distinct political identity and an “ideological backing” that would grant Doha full independence from the traditional orientations of its regional neighbors. This objective prompted the transition of Qatar’s relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood from mere humanitarian hosting of

political refugees to the creation of a robust pragmatic alliance.

A study[4] by the Washington Institute notes that Qatar treats the Muslim Brotherhood as a “long-term political bet,” aiming to achieve a set of strategic goals, foremost among them the expansion of regional influence. Through its connections with Islamic currents, Qatar has been able to extend its presence in politically fluid environments, such as Sudan, Libya, and Tunisia. The Brotherhood has also been deployed as a tool for leverage and mediation, allowing Doha to play the role of intermediary between conflicting parties while maintaining the appearance of neutrality, despite the presence of implicit biases.

Analysis[5] from the Brookings Institution highlights that Qatar, through its alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood, seeks to diversify its instruments of influence across multiple domains, including media, education, conference organization, and support for Islamic-oriented civil society organizations. This approach provides Doha with strategic flexibility, enabling it to pursue two parallel tracks: strengthening security partnerships with the West while simultaneously supporting Islamic currents politically.

Within this framework, a functional integration emerged between Doha’s geopolitical ambitions and the cross-border organizational capabilities of the Muslim Brotherhood. While Qatar sought to acquire tools of regional influence, the Brotherhood provided an ideological and mobilization network with wide popular reach. Through this convergence, Brotherhood members transitioned from the stage of “refuge” to becoming

“strategic partners in shaping Qatari soft power,” employing the slogans of “tradition and modernity” as a framework for attracting intellectual elites and integrating them into cultural and educational institutions.

This integration created an overlap between the state’s sovereign discourse and the movement’s agendas, supported by a media arm that leveraged resource surges to break conventional information structures. While these platforms were presented as spaces for pluralism, analysts view them as instruments of “sharp power,” designed to disrupt competitors’ balances, positioning Doha as a regional pivot oscillating between a bridge for dialogue and a driver of political contention.

2. Dissolution of the Local Organization in 1999

The year 1999 represents an exceptional milestone in the history of the relationship between the Qatari state and the Muslim Brotherhood, marked by the historic decision to “dissolve the local organization.” Unlike the usual pattern driven by security crackdowns or political repression, this move emerged from a pragmatic vision, establishing a unique model that can be described as a “trade-off between presence and role.” While the state confidently advanced toward building its modern institutions, the Brotherhood locally agreed to merge into the state apparatus in exchange for transforming Doha into a global intellectual and media hub for its broader project.

This arrangement relied on a careful alignment between the ambitions of the state and the aspirations of the cadres. The Qatari leadership sought to shield the

domestic front from partisan and ideological tensions, ensuring rapid modernization and the creation of cohesive national institutions. Conversely, the Brotherhood found in Doha a “safe haven” and a solid logistical base. Under this implicit understanding, “Qatari Brotherhood” members transitioned from a narrow organizational framework into technocratic roles and influential advisors across education, media, and judiciary sectors, fully integrated into the national identity of the state.

In this context, Dr. Jassim Sultan, one of the founding cadres, interpreted this transformation in his testimony[6], arguing that the dissolution of the organization resulted from the absence of a functional need for it in a state that did not oppose the movement. He posed a fundamental question: “What value can a partisan entity add in a society characterized by cohesion and particularity, such as Qatari society?”

From an analytical perspective, this step granted Qatar a major strategic advantage by shifting the relationship from “competition for power” to “complementarity of roles.” While domestic stability remained insulated from partisan activism, Doha became a strategic ally capable of leveraging these networks in foreign policy arenas. This distinction—between domestic stability and external influence—rendered Qatar an exceptional case in international relations, maintaining a stable hereditary governance model while possessing a unique capacity to nurture movements of change and support intellectual elites in the region.

Chapter Three: Tools of the Strategic Alliance

1. Al Jazeera Channel and Supporting Platforms

The media platform has been the cornerstone of the concept of soft power employed by Qatar to enhance the presence of the Muslim Brotherhood current in the Arab scene. Al Jazeera emerged as a strategic tool, providing the group for decades with an unprecedented platform to export its ideas and reach millions of followers, breaking the isolation previously imposed on its leaders by local regimes. This support was manifested clearly through specialized talk shows, which became permanent platforms hosting Brotherhood leaders as “thinkers” or “political analysts,” allowing them to shape public awareness and justify the organization’s political positions under the guise of objective analysis. This contributed to creating a mental image linking popular aspirations with the group’s political agenda. International research centers, including the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), have published multiple reports[7] noting that Qatar used the network as a tool for political and financial support for Brotherhood leaders.

On the field coverage level, the platform played a pivotal role in adopting media narratives aligned with the group’s objectives, particularly in conflict zones and major transformations, such as during the Arab Spring. By focusing on specific angles in coverage and amplifying the roles of the group’s cadres in popular movements, this media machinery successfully portrayed the organization as a unified and organized force capable of leading change, making media a

political bridge that enabled the group to ascend to power in multiple Arab countries during that period.

Digital platforms and specialized channels marked a qualitative development in the use of media for political objectives. Qatar did not limit itself to general broadcasting but advanced to “targeted media” by launching specialized arms, the most prominent of which was Al Jazeera Mubasher Misr. This platform was not just a news channel but evolved into a media operations hub entirely dedicated to supporting the Brotherhood’s experience in governance and subsequently backing their movements after being ousted, making it a direct partner in shaping field events.

These platforms focused on live, continuous coverage that went beyond traditional professional frameworks, becoming a platform for mobilizing supporters and directing public opinion to adopt the group’s vision of the political scene. By emphasizing certain issues and ignoring others, these channels helped create a state of sharp polarization, providing supporters with space for expression and organization while exerting intense media pressure on political opponents, enhancing the organization’s ability to maneuver during domestic crises.

Moreover, this role extended to crafting a “virtual reality” that serves the political orientations of the group in specific countries, through leveraging social media platforms linked to live channel broadcasts. This technical integration allowed the rapid dissemination of the group’s messages while bypassing government censorship, making these digital platforms a “cross-

border” tool that not only conveys news but also participates in its creation and guidance, serving the strategic interests shared between Doha and the organization.

On the jurisprudential and organizational side, Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi played a central role in this alliance through his program *Sharia and Life*, becoming a “global mufti” who employed tools of *ijtihad* to serve the political project. Al-Qaradawi presented a specific concept of Brotherhood “moderation,” portraying it as a third path that combines modernity and religion, undermining the influence of long-established traditional religious institutions in the region. With Qatari support, Doha became a hub for activist thought, establishing entities such as the “International Union of Muslim Scholars” to serve as the jurisprudential arm that legitimized political activism and provided the group with the ethical and religious cover needed to confront traditional regimes.

This strategic partnership succeeded in instilling a mental image among Arab publics that the “Muslim Brotherhood model” is the ready and sole alternative to the political vacuum in the region. By 2010, Doha had completed building its soft power arsenal, transforming the group from a “security burden” into a “spearhead” of its public diplomacy. This investment in “alternative thought” and media platforms was not a transient alliance but a complete intellectual and logistical preparation for the subsequent phase, whose fruits became evident with the outbreak of the Arab Spring.

2. Charitable Organizations

Major charitable organizations, most notably *Qatar Charity* and *Eid Charity*, functioned as what can be described as parallel institutions, granting the Muslim Brotherhood exceptional cross-border operational capacity. These organizations leveraged the moral and legal immunity afforded by humanitarian work to evade the conventional oversight of international security agencies.

During this period, Brotherhood cadres—both citizens and expatriates—successfully infiltrated the leadership and executive structures of these charities, transforming them into “financial reservoirs” managed with exceptional organizational acumen. This strategic presence allowed the group to direct funding policies in ways that served its “organizational bases” abroad, employing government and public donations to build a wide network of loyalties in conflict zones and underdeveloped countries. This granted the organization influence far beyond its traditional structures, making it a formidable field partner.

Furthermore, the “charitable” character of these organizations provided an ideal diplomatic and legal cover for transferring funds and personnel across continents under humanitarian slogans such as “building mosques” or “orphan sponsorship.” Under this cover, the group was able to finance Islamic centers and intellectual hubs in Europe, Africa, and Asia, managed by loyal members, creating “soft enclaves” for the organization worldwide. These institutions also played a vital role in providing refuge and logistical support to leaders under security pursuit by appointing them to

advisory and administrative positions, ensuring freedom of movement and funding under a legitimate official framework.

On a deeper level, these parallel institutions became the “spearhead” of Qatar’s informal foreign policy. While the state publicly adhered to diplomatic norms, these charities funneled aid to support political forces aligned with the Brotherhood, effectively turning charitable funds into a powerful tool of political leverage. Through this sustainable financial flow, the group secured substantial financial independence, enabling it to establish media outlets, research centers, and advocacy organizations in the West. This completed the “infrastructure loop” that made the Doha–Brotherhood alliance a regional force capable of manipulating political balances at opportune moments.

3. Diplomacy as a Strategic Pass

“International mediation” emerged as the most important tool in Qatari foreign policy after 1995. Through it, Doha succeeded in transforming its close relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood from a mere ideological alliance into a “golden pass” for engaging with the region’s and the world’s most complex files. Rather than being a political burden, this connection became a strategic diplomatic asset. Qatar presented itself to major powers like the United States and the European Union as an exclusive channel capable of communicating with movements classified by the West as “radical Islamists” or groups difficult to engage directly, such as Hamas. This pivotal role has been confirmed by numerous studies, including those by the Brookings Institution [8], which highlighted Qatar’s rise

as a regional actor exploiting gaps in international communication to establish itself as an indispensable security and diplomatic partner in orchestrating prisoner exchanges and military truces.

In this context, Qatar's role extended beyond that of a "mailbox." Doha became a "safe haven," providing political asylum and legal protection to top Brotherhood leaders under security pursuit. Analyst David Roberts [9] argues that this sheltering was not merely humanitarian; it effectively transformed Doha into an integrated political "operations room," through which the organization's affairs and international positions were managed under full Qatari oversight. This centralized presence allowed Qatar to guide the trajectories of these groups or mediate on their behalf when international circumstances required, bolstering Doha's status as a regional hub capable of managing major crises through informal channels. Hillary Clinton noted this in her memoirs [10], describing Qatar's role as a vital means of accessing field actors with whom Washington could not legally engage.

Moreover, Qatar successfully employed a "trusted, biased mediator" model, earning the confidence of the Islamic party, which enabled it to extract concessions more effectively than any neutral intermediary. According to studies by the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP), this direct ideological and financial influence over the Brotherhood allowed Qatar to offer a rare "political commodity" in international relations: the ability to escalate or de-escalate sensitive issues in exchange for diplomatic gains. Consequently, the post-1995 alliance with the Brotherhood became a "policy insurance" and a tool for maximizing influence, aligning

the group's agenda with Doha's ambitions. This established Qatar as "the party that cannot be bypassed" in any political settlement concerning the region, institutionalizing a model of diplomacy based on leveraging crises rather than resolving them.

4. Research Centers as a Tool for Political Empowerment



The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies during one of the seminars

The "intellectual and research tool" represents one of the most important means Qatar has relied upon to reshape the image of the Muslim Brotherhood and market it internationally. While traditional powers usually focus on financial or military support, Doha invested in "meaning-making" through a systematic process of "rationalizing" the Brotherhood's discourse. According to analyses by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, this process aims to present the Brotherhood to the international community, and particularly to the West, as a mature and politically acceptable democratic alternative, capable of leading regional states beyond the zero-sum dichotomy that for decades confined the

Middle East between authoritarian regimes and “jihadist currents.”

In this context, research centers have played a fundamental role as platforms for legitimization, with the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies emerging as one of the key intellectual drivers in this process. The center produces literature and theoretical frameworks that seek to integrate Islamic movements into the political process under the banner of "democratic transition." Through international seminars and conferences, the Brotherhood is presented as a "civil" faction ready to abide by the rules of democratic engagement—a strategy aimed at reducing Western apprehension by framing an Islamic discourse in a modernist language aligned with concepts of human rights and citizenship, thus facilitating their acceptance as potential political partners.

Concurrently, hosting thinkers and theorists in Doha represented a strategic shift, turning the Qatari capital into a "laboratory of ideas" for the most prominent minds associated with the Brotherhood. In a safe environment, financially and logistically supported, these leaders were provided space for "calm theorizing" and for developing the organization's strategies, away from the pressures of security crackdowns in their home countries. Several reports confirm that this gathering not only helped preserve the intellectual structure of the organization from decay but also updated its ideological tools to align with contemporary discourse.

Thus, through this instrument, Doha became a center for long-term strategic planning for the Muslim Brotherhood, aiming to transform the organization from

a local ideological movement into a cross-border "political project" equipped with soft power tools capable of penetrating think tanks and decision-making centers in major capitals, using academic research as a bridge toward achieving strategic objectives.

Chapter Four: The Arab Spring and the Bet on Empowerment (2011–2013)

The period between 2011 and 2013 represents the peak of the strategic ascent of the Qatari alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood, during which Doha transitioned from a phase of "incubating thought" to a phase of "managing governance" and direct political empowerment. With Mohamed Morsi's rise to the presidency of Egypt as the first civilian president affiliated with the Brotherhood, Qatar shifted from being a "media platform" to becoming an "economic rescue partner," investing its full diplomatic and financial weight to consolidate the foundations of the Brotherhood's rule in the largest Arab country.

1. Qatari Diplomacy and the Fall of Traditional Regimes

During the Arab Spring, Qatar's role shifted from that of a "neutral mediator" to a partisan actor supporting the forces of change, particularly Islamic movements with Brotherhood roots, amid the reshaping of the regional balance of power and the collapse of traditional regimes in Tunisia, Libya, and then Egypt. Prior to 2011, Qatar had built its image as a "diplomatic intermediary" through initiatives to resolve crises in Lebanon, Sudan, and Yemen, leveraging soft power tools such as Al Jazeera, public diplomacy, and development and humanitarian aid. This approach allowed Doha to "gain friends" among opposing actors, including the United States and Iran, Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as maintain balanced relations within the Gulf.

With the outbreak of the revolutions, Doha restructured its foreign policy, transitioning from a mediator to an active intervening role, employing “hard power” tools through direct military and financial support for opposition forces in Libya and Syria. This marked a clear departure from its previous mediation approach. Al Jazeera played the role of a “media driver” for the uprisings, providing extensive supportive coverage of protests in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen, while hosting revolutionary intellectual voices. Its coverage of the Bahrain protests, however, was cautious, reflecting the limits of its independence from state policy.

Doha accompanied the revolutionary movements in Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt with swift actions, not only accelerating the fall of traditional regimes but also capitalizing on the “political vacuum” to initiate a new phase of support and empowerment for the Muslim Brotherhood. In this phase, Qatar moved from field support to “marketing diplomacy,” positioning itself as an international political backer of the Brotherhood and presenting it to Western circles as the sole democratic and civil partner capable of managing the transitional period and ensuring stability. Through this approach, Doha sought to convince the international community that the rise of Islamists to power through the ballot box was the surest guarantee against regional chaos, effectively acting as the “official channel” through which emerging powers could gain recognition and international legitimacy.

2. Qatar's Bet on "Consolidating Power"

Qatar adopted a multidimensional intervention strategy as a key tool to provide a safety net for Brotherhood-aligned governance models and their allies in the Arab Spring countries. This role was not limited to "financial engineering" in Egypt but extended to structural and systematic support in Tunisia and Libya, using a combination of cash flows and media momentum through the Al Jazeera network to reshape political legitimacy in these countries.

In Tunisia, Doha leveraged its economic weight to support the Ennahda Movement after its 2011 electoral victory, providing exceptional loans and aid to support the state budget and alleviate social pressures, aiming to demonstrate the Islamist movement's ability to govern and achieve developmental stability. In Libya, Qatar moved into the "field action" domain, where its support for Islamic forces went beyond political channels to include military and logistical coordination, strengthening their influence in the complex post-Gaddafi Libyan landscape and positioning them as key partners in building a "new Libya."

In Egypt, this strategy reached its peak through efforts to consolidate the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood following their rise to power. Doha transitioned from supporting the "revolution" to directly "empowering the Brotherhood," viewing the success of the Egyptian experiment as the cornerstone of its new regional project. Qatar acted as an exclusive political and economic backer of the regime, using active diplomacy to market the Brotherhood in Western capitals as a politically responsible force capable of safeguarding

international interests and regional agreements, including the peace treaty with Israel, in exchange for international recognition of their legitimacy as an alternative to traditional military regimes.

Alongside this material and political support, Al Jazeera played the role of “driver and theorist” for these transformations. The channel functioned as a tool to “manufacture consensus” around the inevitability of Brotherhood rule, providing intensive publicity platforms for Islamic leaders, portraying them as the sole democratic civil force capable of breaking with the authoritarian past. This coverage conferred “transnational revolutionary legitimacy” while marginalizing opposition voices or labeling them as “counter-revolutionary,” making Qatari media a key partner in managing political conflict and shaping Arab public opinion to accept the Brotherhood model.

This comprehensive strategy culminated with Qatar being positioned as the “lender of last resort” and the largest bet on the Egyptian model, injecting a package of aid worth approximately \$8 billion during President Mohamed Morsi’s tenure. These funds were not mere deposits to support foreign currency reserves or LNG shipments to cover energy shortages, but a “high-risk political investment” aimed at preventing state collapse under Brotherhood rule. While international institutions imposed stringent structural conditions for lending, Qatari funds flowed with complete flexibility to advance the “empowerment” project and give the Brotherhood regime a chance to consolidate its position away from pressures from traditional powers and sectional protests.

Chapter Five: The Decline of Doha's Allies After 2013

1. June 30 and the End of the “Empowerment Project”

The events of June 30, 2013, in Egypt represented a major geopolitical shock for Qatari diplomacy. The fall of President Mohamed Morsi's regime was not merely an internal power shift in a friendly state, but the collapse of Doha's largest “strategic investment” in the region. Following this turning point, Qatar transitioned from a state of “strategic momentum” and political empowerment to one of “regional isolation” and defensive positioning. After having managed the levers of influence in Cairo through financial engineering and political backing, it suddenly faced a hostile regional reality that led to the contraction of its project associated with the Muslim Brotherhood, alongside the emergence of a counter-regional axis that reshaped the balance of power, placing Doha in a suffocating diplomatic isolation within its Gulf neighborhood.

On the diplomatic front, Doha faced the “political recognition dilemma” regarding the new regime. Initially, it adopted a strategy of skepticism and resistance, refusing to acknowledge the post-July 3 legitimacy and describing it as a coup against the democratic path. Qatar deployed its media arsenal, led by Al Jazeera, to launch an international campaign aimed at delegitimizing the new authority and internationalizing the crisis by focusing on human rights issues. However, these attempts clashed with the financial and political resilience of the rival Gulf axis, particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE, neutralizing

Qatar's economic pressure tools and making it appear as an outlier in both regional and international arenas, forced to confront a political reality it neither recognized nor could change.

The issue of “political asylum” for Muslim Brotherhood leaders in Doha transformed from a leverage tool into a “strategic burden,” casting a shadow over Qatar's Gulf relations. Doha became an optional exile and a launchpad for Brotherhood figures to address domestic Egyptian audiences—an act perceived by Cairo and other Gulf states as blatant interference in internal affairs and incitement to destabilize the Egyptian regime. This file triggered the first public rift within the Gulf Cooperation Council, culminating in the 2014 withdrawal of ambassadors. The Qatari leadership faced difficult choices between fulfilling its commitments to Islamist allies and maintaining its position within the Gulf system—a gamble that ultimately demonstrated that betting on a single organization against the will of state institutions and major regional powers carries a heavy cost, potentially threatening the national security of Qatar itself.

2. Shifts of Power in Tunisia

For many years, Doha regarded the Tunisian experience as the “golden model” for the success of its political vision in the region. Unlike the Egyptian scenario, which ended in a zero-sum confrontation, Tunisia served as a laboratory for the possible integration of the Ennahda Movement within the civil state structure. However, this “model gamble” began to wane as domestic popular and political pressures against Qatar's allies intensified. Following the 2013 assassinations and the subsequent

protests, Qatari diplomacy recognized that insisting on the movement's exclusive control over power could lead to a scenario of "eradication," prompting it to act as a catalyst for its ally to accept a "national dialogue" and relinquish authority in 2014. This shift represented a tactical move from supporting "absolute empowerment" to engineering "forced consensus" as the only viable option to protect the movement from total collapse and to preserve a minimal level of Qatari influence within state institutions.

When the Tunisian scene reached a major breaking point on July 25, 2021, with President Kais Saied announcing exceptional measures that froze parliament and dismantled the previous governance system, Qatari policy shifted from "ideological support" to a sphere of "political realism." Unlike its harsh stance toward the eradication of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Qatar's reaction to Saied was characterized by "cautious calm" and clear pragmatism. Doha avoided direct confrontation with the presidency, preferring to maintain channels of communication with "the state of Tunisia" rather than sacrifice bilateral relations for the sake of the Ennahda Movement. This adaptation reflected Qatar's recognition that the regional and international climate no longer permitted the overt sponsorship of Islamist regimes, prompting Qatari diplomacy to reposition itself as an economic partner focused on overall stability rather than a political backer of a specific party.

3. Libya: From Revolution to “Axis War”

Libya represented the boldest case in the history of Qatari foreign policy, where Doha transitioned from providing political and media support to direct military intervention under the NATO umbrella in 2011. However, this role quickly evolved from leading “support for the rebels” against the Gaddafi regime to a gradual erosion of influence as the country slid into a fierce regional “proxy war.” Doha found itself compelled to shift from the role of “liberator” to that of a “key actor” in the axis struggle, with each regional player attempting to shape Libya’s future according to its ideological and geopolitical interests. Consequently, Qatari influence became intrinsically tied to the resilience of the Muslim Brotherhood forces and allied regional groups against the counter-revolution.

In this context, the Qatari strategy confronted rising traditional and military powers, most notably through its support for the “Libya Dawn” coalition in 2014 and later the “Government of National Accord.” These moves placed Doha in direct opposition to a regional axis backing the so-called “Libyan National Army” led by Khalifa Haftar. Through its backing, Qatar aimed to preserve a foothold for Brotherhood-aligned forces and western Libyan actors in the power equation, viewing the weakening of these groups as tantamount to losing its influence in Libya entirely. This confrontation evolved into a diplomatic war of attrition on the international stage, with Doha leveraging its relationships with major powers and the United Nations to secure political legitimacy for its allies in Tripoli, while opponents sought to label these forces as “terrorists.”

The prolonged Libyan crisis exposed the high costs of conflict amid chronic political and battlefield divisions. Despite continuous financial, military, and logistical support over several years, Doha realized that achieving a decisive military victory in Libya was impossible due to the multiplicity of international interventions and conflicting interests of major powers. Over time, Qatari involvement shifted from a “bet on a quick victory” to “crisis management,” aiming solely to prevent the collapse of its allies. This imposed a heavy toll on Qatar’s diplomatic reputation, as it was accused by opponents of “fueling the conflict.” With the stabilization of frontlines and the beginning of political tracks, Qatar began reassessing its tools, moving toward political realism that acknowledged that sustainable influence in Libya could not be achieved through money and arms alone, but through alignment with the regional and international environment exhausted by the prolonged conflict.

4. Implications of the Setback on “Soft Power” and Foreign Policy

Qatari “soft power” faced an existential test following the collapse of the Arab Spring wave. Al-Jazeera found itself at the center of a credibility and professionalism crisis. While the channel had initially been considered a “platform for the people” and a voice for the marginalized during the early stages of the uprisings, its clear and overt bias toward regimes shaped by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya eroded its image among wide segments of the Arab public. In the eyes of many, the network shifted from being a media outlet advocating change to a “propaganda tool” serving a specific political agenda,

losing much of its cross-ideological appeal and making its discourse appear increasingly disconnected from the new realities created by the “counter-revolutions” and traditional national institutions.

Simultaneously, this period revealed the high costs of Doha’s policy of “decision monopolization.” Unilateral and overt Qatari support for the fall of traditional regimes, without coordination with balanced regional powers in the Gulf, resulted in a state of “Qatari isolation” within its natural neighborhood. Qatar’s policies created the perception among Gulf capitals that its moves had exceeded the bounds of diplomatic competition, reaching the level of a collective national security threat through the adoption of the Muslim Brotherhood “empowerment” project. This strategic gap was not merely a temporary political disagreement but the practical groundwork for the 2014 diplomatic rift over the withdrawal of ambassadors, culminating in the comprehensive blockade of 2017. The “surplus ambition” of Qatar thus became a strategic burden, pushing the state into isolation unseen since its independence.

These successive setbacks forced decision-makers in Doha to initiate a “strategic repositioning” as an alternative to the Arab Spring ventures that had peaked and then waned. Early signs emerged of a shift toward “quiet diplomacy” as a preferred approach, aimed at rebuilding international and regional relations away from the clamor of ideological alignments. Doha began redefining its role as an economic power and international mediator in issues far removed from direct engagement with the security concerns of its neighbors, such as the Afghan file.

Chapter Six: Outcomes of the Alliance and Phase Transformations 2021–2026

The relationship between Qatar and the Muslim Brotherhood entered the third decade of the 21st century under a phase of “strict political realism,” as geopolitical shifts in the region necessitated a comprehensive reassessment of this strategic alliance. After years of intense polarization, Doha adopted a new strategy based on regional openness and moving beyond past crises, positioning the “Muslim Brotherhood file” within a cost-benefit framework aligned with Qatar’s national vision seeking stability and development.

1. Resetting Tensions and the Impact of the “Al-Ula Summit” on Public Support

The “Al-Ula Summit” in January 2021 marked a major turning point in Qatar’s foreign policy, as Doha adopted the principle of “resetting tensions” with its Gulf and Arab neighbors, foremost among them Egypt and Saudi Arabia. This approach required addressing the issues that had triggered the 2017 crisis, most notably the open support for the Muslim Brotherhood. Consequently, Qatar shifted from a phase of “aggressive media and political backing” for the Brotherhood to one of “quiet pragmatism,” balancing the preservation of its independent decision-making with the requirements of regional collective security.

This shift directly affected the form and level of public support for the Brotherhood. During this period, there was a noticeable reduction in the intensity of media rhetoric targeting Arab regimes opposed to the Brotherhood, and Qatari media platforms were

calibrated to align with the reconciliation climate. Doha also began exerting subtle pressure to dismantle the informal “government-in-exile” that had operated on its soil, encouraging some Brotherhood leaders to leave the country or to suspend political and media activities directed against Cairo and other Gulf capitals. This phase became known as the “political cooling” of the file.

In a dramatic reflection of pragmatic flexibility under crisis pressure, international reports—most notably from the *Wall Street Journal*[11]—revealed a secret visit by the Qatari Foreign Minister to Riyadh prior to the thaw. According to informed sources cited by the newspaper, Doha offered a “surprise proposal” that included a readiness to reassess its relations with the Muslim Brotherhood as a key step toward ending the boycott and restoring balance within the Gulf framework. While these details remained within diplomatic leak territory, they revealed Qatar’s willingness to make concessions on ideological ties in exchange for securing its geopolitical stability.

Analytically, these steps should not be interpreted as a complete abandonment of the Brotherhood but rather as a “strategic repositioning.” Doha recognized that the cost of public confrontation over a political faction that had lost much of its weight in the Arab street now outweighed the expected benefits. Instead, Qatar chose the role of a “trusted intermediary,” maintaining back-channel contacts with the Brotherhood without allowing this linkage to disrupt broader strategic cooperation with sister states. Accordingly, the Brotherhood shifted from being the “spearhead” of expansionist projects to a “managed file” within the broader context of regional

balances, reflecting a pragmatic approach aimed at protecting Qatar's highest national interests.

2. Recycling: “Silent Relocation” versus Strategic Disengagement

Qatar's conduct in the post-“Al-Ula Agreement” phase raises a fundamental question about the nature of the shift in its relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood. While some analyses suggest that Doha severed ties with the “Brotherhood project” in favor of regional integration, deeper readings indicate that what occurred was a form of “recycling,” whereby a “silent relocation” of controversial leaders and media platforms was carried out, while maintaining the core of the relationship within secretive and pragmatic frameworks.

Qatari measures were not intended as a full ideological break but rather as an effort to reduce the “political burden.” This was evident between 2021 and 2026, when several Brotherhood leaders and media figures quietly relocated to alternative capitals such as London and other European cities. This “silent relocation” was consensual rather than confrontational; it was not an act of hostile expulsion but took place through understandings that ensured the group's continuity in other spaces. These measures provided Doha with the necessary margin to demonstrate compliance with the outcomes of the Gulf reconciliation and to restore momentum in its relations with Cairo and Riyadh.

Analysts argue that Doha entered a phase of “strategic reserve,” shifting channels of communication from direct partisan engagement to unofficial pathways such as think tanks, research institutions, and academic or

humanitarian initiatives. This approach grants Qatar two strategic advantages: maintaining lines of contact with the Brotherhood as a latent leverage tool that can be activated if regional circumstances change, and mitigating sources of tension by sidelining contentious files that had previously strained its relations with neighboring states.

3. Assessing Qatar’s “Losses and Gains” from this Alliance

After decades of the strategic alliance between Doha and the Muslim Brotherhood, Qatar faces a complex legacy that has redefined its foreign policy. Evaluating the “losses and gains” in this context does not follow a logic of direct material profit, but rather the logic of geopolitical influence, the cost of building a regional role, and the sustainability of ideologically based alliances in a world governed by shifting interests.

On the gains side, Qatar succeeded through this alliance in transcending its small geographic size to become an indispensable “international player” in regional affairs. The Brotherhood provided Doha with the “key to the Arab street” at a time when traditional regimes were experiencing deep disconnects with their populations. By leveraging the soft power associated with the Brotherhood’s ideology, Qatar became a “mediator no one could bypass” in crises ranging from Gaza to Libya and Tunisia, granting the capital diplomatic weight and transforming it into a global political and media hub.

On the losses side, Qatar paid a steep price for this influence, manifested in severe “regional isolation” that peaked during the 2017 blockade. Its unwavering

support for the Brotherhood project strained Doha's historic relations with Gulf neighbors and Egypt, eroding trust with Arab elites who perceived Qatar's actions as an attempt to impose a particular ideology on the region's future. Furthermore, this relationship placed Qatar under international scrutiny and accusations of financing terrorism, forcing it to expend enormous diplomatic and financial resources to defend its reputation and refute such claims before international institutions.

The most important lesson derived from this experience is Qatar's recognition of the "limits of power." Betting on a single political faction as a substitute for established regimes proved to be a high-risk strategy prone to backlash. Qatar's shift toward "new pragmatism" after 2021 reflects an understanding that regional stability requires building balanced relations with states rather than with organizations alone. In this light, Qatar emerges from this experience having realized that true soft power lies in adaptability and mediation—not in ideological adoption that may provide temporary influence but generates enduring antagonisms.

Recommendations

Based on the historical monitoring and political analysis of the relationship between the State of Qatar and the Muslim Brotherhood, the study arrives at the following recommendations:

1. **Adopt a “Multipolar” Soft Power Strategy:** The study recommends diversifying Qatar’s regional allies and avoiding reliance on a single political faction. Shifting from “ideological adoption” to “pragmatic openness” grants the state greater flexibility in political maneuvering and reduces the risk of confrontation with major regional powers.
2. **Institutionalize Structural Neutrality:** It is essential to transform Qatar’s role from being a “supporter of one party against another” into a neutral, institutionalized mediator. The study advises strengthening the role of think tanks and official diplomacy in managing Arab crises, free from partisan bias, to ensure that Qatar remains a credible and trusted interlocutor for all political actors in the region.
3. **Enhance Oversight and Transparency in Charitable and Advocacy Work:** To avoid future diplomatic crises, the study recommends continuously developing legal and supervisory frameworks for charitable institutions and intellectual platforms. It is crucial to ensure that humanitarian support is not politicized or exploited by transnational organizations, thereby protecting the state’s financial and political reputation.
4. **Separate “Humanitarian Hosting” from “Political Activity”:** The study advises establishing a clear charter governing the presence

of political dissidents on Qatari soil. There should be a strict distinction between providing safe asylum as a humanitarian and legal commitment, and using state territory as a platform for incitement or managing political operations against other countries. This separation can prevent refugee-related issues from becoming flashpoints in bilateral relations.

5. **Periodic Review of Geopolitical Alliances:** In a rapidly changing world, the study recommends creating a mechanism for the regular review of strategic interests associated with informal alliances. The “viability” of continuing support for any political faction should be assessed based on shifts in international and regional power dynamics, ensuring that yesterday’s ally does not become today’s burden.

Conclusion

At the conclusion of this analytical study, which traced decades of the relationship between the State of Qatar and the Muslim Brotherhood, it becomes clear that this is not merely a transient alliance, but a unique model in international relations where ideological identity intertwined with geopolitical interests. Since the mid-1990s, Qatar has leveraged this relationship to craft a distinctive political entity, surpassing conventional frameworks, and by the third decade of the new millennium, the issue had evolved into a domain governed by “strict political realism.”

The study’s chapters illustrate how Doha transformed the Brotherhood from a “refugee mass” into a “strategic arm” within its soft power project. Through platforms like Al Jazeera and the charisma of Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, a transnational Islamist discourse was constructed, aimed at challenging political stagnation in the Arab region and promoting the Brotherhood as a ready alternative for governance. With the onset of the Arab Spring in 2011, this alliance moved into a phase of direct “empowerment,” as Qatar’s foreign policy aligned with the Brotherhood’s aspirations for political authority. The so-called “diplomacy of financial portfolios” emerged as a key tool to consolidate the foundations of the Morsi administration in Egypt.

However, this strategic gamble—despite initially granting Qatar broad regional influence—collided with popular and military upheavals in 2013, plunging the alliance into a “major confrontation.” The 2017 crisis and the blockade demonstrated that the costs of overt association with the Brotherhood exceeded anticipated

geopolitical returns, forcing Doha to navigate a difficult trade-off between sustaining its support for the organization and safeguarding its national security and Gulf stability.

The current phase, following the “Al-Ula reconciliation,” signals the emergence of a “new Qatari pragmatism” in foreign policy—not built on severing ties with the past, but on the quiet “recycling” of relationships. Conflictual issues were cooled down, controversial figures quietly relocated, while backchannels were maintained, enabling Qatar to retain potential “leverage” without jeopardizing its relations with Cairo or Riyadh.

Ultimately, the study concludes that Qatar has internalized the “lesson of limits”: alliances with transnational movements are double-edged. They offer wide-ranging influence during periods of political fluidity but become security and diplomatic burdens during moments of stability and power balance. The future of this relationship will continue to be guided by the principle of “strategic prudence,” with the Brotherhood remaining part of Qatar’s political memory and informal tools, but never again the “sole compass” of Doha’s foreign policy.

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