

Qatar's Public Diplomacy

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12/12/08

PubD 599

In the realm of public diplomacy, there are two strategies that small states often pursue as a means of gaining greater recognition in the international arena: niche diplomacy and nation branding. In many ways, these two strategies dovetail insofar as they are both predicated on specialization. Nation branding builds on niche diplomacy as it takes the niche and cements that niche into a national image perception.

Niche diplomacy is often associated with the pursuit of small and medium states to raise their public diplomacy profile by wedding their image with a certain cause as a way to magnify their influence within global civil society. It was Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans who first outlined the concept of “niche diplomacy” as a form of policy specialization¹. Evans’ concept entailed, “concentrating resources in specific areas best able to generate returns worth having, rather than trying to cover the field.²” Specifically, in the field of niche diplomacy, focusing on issues considered to be in line with the greater good of global civil society is especially potent.

¹ Alan Henrikson, “Niche Diplomacy in the World Public Arena: The Global ‘Corners’ of Canada and Norway,” p.1, In J. Melissen (Ed.), *The New Public Diplomacy*, New York: Palgrave 2005

² Gareth Evans and Bruce Grant, *Australia's Foreign Relations in the World of the 1990s* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1991, p, 323 (CF Henrikson, op.cit)

On using “altruism” for advancing the national interest, Henrikson notes:

“It is sometimes possible for a country to do very well by doing good. To support ‘good works,’ to perform ‘good’ deeds, to use ‘good’ words, and to project ‘good’ images can pay off in terms of international prestige, and in even more practical expressions of others’ appreciation.³”

Focusing on niche diplomacy for public diplomacy allows for small and medium-sized powers with limited hard power resources to exert far more leverage on the diplomatic stage by getting involved in issues pertinent to global civil society. Batora argues, “for small and medium-sized states, public diplomacy represents an opportunity to gain influence and shape international agenda in ways that go beyond their limited hard power resources.⁴”

While the branding of cultural and consumer products is an age-old notion, the branding of political entities is a more recent postmodern phenomenon. Van Ham notes, “A brand is best described as a customer’s idea about a product; the ‘brand state’ comprises the outside world’s ideas about a particular country.⁵” Although the concept is relatively new, it has quickly become vital for statecraft. 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.⁶”

Yet in the curious case of Qatar, the tiny emirate employs both of these strategies for recognition in the international arena, but more importantly as a mechanism for its

³ Alan Henrikson, op cit., p.1

⁴ Jozef Batora, “Public Diplomacy Between Home and Abroad: Norway and Canada,” *Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 2006, p.55

⁵ Peter Van Ham, “The Rise of the Brand State: The Postmodern Political Image and Reputation,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 80, No. 5 (Sept.-Oct. 2001), p.2 (CF J.E. Peterson, “Qatar and the World: Branding for a Micro-State,” *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 60, No. 4 (Autumn 2006), p.745)

⁶ J.E. Peterson, “Qatar and the World: Branding for a Micro-State,” *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 60, No. 4 (Autumn 2006), p.745

very survival. Jutting out like a thumb into the Persian Gulf, Qatar has recently fashioned a public diplomacy niche for itself within global civil society as a conflict mediator *par excellence*. This barren, scorched desert kingdom, under whose sands hold the avarice of oil and natural gas, has become a mighty mite of public diplomacy prowess as it has deftly employed its conflict mediation skills for the world to see. By exercising a role as conflict mediator, the Emirate of Qatar has been successfully turning its diplomacy gains into public diplomacy triumphs as well as helping to ensure its survival in a troubled neighborhood.

Qatar has managed to balance its position along all the regional and international fault lines that dot the Middle East. In a region rife with factional disputes, this enigmatic little kingdom maintains close ties with all powers and parties concerned. Almost inextricably, Qatar possesses ties with Iran and Syria, while remaining an ally of the United States and host to the largest American military facility in the region; it has major links with Hamas and Hezbollah, while possessing ties with Israel.

More importantly, it has employed these diverse contacts as the medium for which it is able to carry out its mediation role. While delicately walking this diplomatic tightrope, the tiny Gulf state has emerged as the blessed peacemaker to multiple conflict zones spanning the Middle East and Africa. Through its role as conflict mediator, Doha has seen its star in ascendance in the international arena, as its diplomacy efforts have enabled it to hit far above its weight.

Successful conflict mediation, be it hard to come by, is very effective public diplomacy. Many try this approach; however, few succeed. There have been no shortage of peacemakers who have tried to mediate the dispute in Lebanon, including Saudi

Arabia, Egypt, France and the collective Arab League but only Qatar was successful in brokering peace negotiations in Lebanon. Qatar was hailed in the press across the Middle East for its accomplishments⁷. In addition, the *New York Times* proffered these anecdotes:

“Editorialists praised the Qatari emir as a modern-day Metternich. Huge billboards went up on the road to the airport, proclaiming, ‘We all say: Thank You Qatar.’ An ice cream shop in downtown Beirut put out a sign offering a Doha Agreement Cone.⁸”

The people of Lebanon cheered for the tiny Gulf nation, but Qatar’s dual-serving Prime and Foreign Minister, Hamad bin Jassim bin Jaber Al Thani, immediately turned his attention to resolving the numerous other maladies Qatar is trying to referee.

Qatar has played a significant role in a variety of long-simmering disputes. Beyond mediating the factional divide in Lebanon, which will be discussed in detail later, Qatar has also taken part in mediating between warring Palestinian factions, played a role among the various antagonists involved in the Darfur conflict in Sudan, and between the parties of the Western Sahara conflict, to name just a few. In a divided Middle East, Qatar has crafted the perception of being an independent mediator who will utilize its diverse contacts to further the mediation effort.

Meanwhile, its international broadcasting instrument Al-Jazeera remains the iconoclastic media flare of the Middle East and shines as a public diplomacy beacon radiating on the tiny emirate. Like Qatar’s niche diplomacy efforts, the satellite station has also been a tool used for the emirate’s survival and public diplomacy promotion.

Qatar has seen its own stature rise in popularity alongside the meteoric rise of the satellite

⁷ See: BBC Worldwide Monitoring “Lebanese, Arab officials react to Doha agreement, praise Qatari role,” May 22, 2008

⁸ Robert F. Worth, “Qatar, Playing All Sides, Is a Nonstop Mediator,” *New York Times*, July 9, 2008, available at <<http://www.spiegel.de/international/0,1518,471382,00.html>>

network Al-Jazeera. Much like Britain has reaped public diplomacy rewards from its connection to the BBC, Qatar has benefited from its loose ties to the iconoclastic satellite channel. Although backing the station as its principal benefactor, Qatar disavows any direct control of Al-Jazeera; yet due to its tacit sponsorship, Qatar gains both public diplomacy support and mediation leverage.

This paper seeks to address the case of Qatar and its public diplomacy strategies. It will examine Qatar's employment of public diplomacy through its use of niche diplomacy in the form of conflict mediation. It will also examine the brand strategy carried out by Qatar and the public diplomacy tools used under this framework. Furthermore, it will look at Qatar's utilization of its international broadcasting network Al-Jazeera for both survival and public diplomacy gain. Although it is possible to address Al-Jazeera's own public diplomacy strategy as a non-state actor with its own independent public diplomacy agenda, this paper will narrow its examination of the global news network as an instrument of the overall Qatari public diplomacy campaign[•].

In the overall examination, this paper will compare Qatar's regional conflict mediation efforts to that of Norway, another state that has successfully employed conflict mediation as niche public diplomacy on a global scale. This paper will address Qatar's public diplomacy challenges, strategies for addressing these challenges and instruments utilized in its public diplomacy endeavors.

[•] For a more in-depth look at Al-Jazeera's public diplomacy strategy as a non-state actor, see: Powers, Shawn & Gilboa, Eytan, "The Public Diplomacy of Al-Jazeera," In P. Seib (Ed.), New Media and the New Middle East, New York: Palgrave 2007, p. 53-80; Wildermuth, Norbert, "Defining the 'Al-Jazeera Effect': American Public Diplomacy at a Crossroad," *In Media Res*, vol. 1. no.2 (February 2005)

Qatar's Public Diplomacy Challenges

The small, peninsular emirate Qatar, ruled by the Al Thani, family, gained its independence from its status as a British protectorate amid the decolonization of the Gulf region. Originally conceived to be part of the Gulf federation including Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, amid political squabbling, Qatar decided to pursue its own path and received its independence on September 3, 1971.

In the wake of the first Gulf War in 1991, Qatar viewed its neighbors with precarious suspicion. Fandy notes,

“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.”⁹

It was in this unsettled environment that Qatar turned to the United States as a hard power guarantor. Yet tensions would escalate further following a coup that saw the present emir take power. On June 27, 1995, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani carried out a bloodless palace coup to replace his father, Khalifa, who had ruled Qatar for the previous 23 years. The coup was a source of consternation between the new regime and its neighbors like Saudi Arabia and Egypt, who were seen as still backing the former emir and giving shelter to his supporters¹⁰.

To help allay its vulnerability, the new regime pursued new avenues of soft and hard power means. Fandy writes,

⁹ Mamoun Fandy, *(Un)civil War of Words: Media and Politics in the Arab World*, Westport, CT: Praeger Security International 2007, p.45-46

¹⁰ *ibid*, p.46

“The new regime signed bilateral treaties with the United States to guarantee its security in terms of hard power. On the soft power front, it created the media equivalent of a super-gun under the name of Al-Jazeera to keep Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt on the defensive, or at the very least to respond to attacks appearing in the Egyptian and Saudi Arabian media.¹¹”

To deal with cultural and religious vulnerabilities in the face of competing Saudi and Iranian regional hegemony, Qatar utilized Al Jazeera as an instrument of protection and a way to promote its independence¹². Al Jazeera became a weapon to burnish Qatar’s Islamic credentials as well as a political tool to use against its larger neighbors¹³. Meanwhile, via its alliance with United States, and the considerable American military presence located within its borders, Qatar has been able to project shadow hard power. By virtue of the significant American military footprint in the form of the largest American pre-positioning base, the largest air base in the Middle East and the US Central Command headquarters, Qatar is not completely devoid of a hard power silhouette.

Qatar’s Public Diplomacy Strategies

Being cognizant of the challenges it faced as a small actor vying for attention in a contested area, Qatar also began to implement a concentrated public diplomacy branding strategy that highlights its strengths as a maverick in the region and its focus on the niche of conflict mediation. Furthermore, Qatar has used its immense oil and natural gas wealth in the form of “checkbook diplomacy” as a way to not only buy influence, but also raise its public diplomacy stature and enhance its conflict mediation efforts. As Nye stated, “Qatar has managed to find an important diplomatic niche between the West

¹¹ *ibid*, p.46

¹² Fandy, *op cit.*, p. 48

¹³ For more on Qatar’s deployment of Al Jazeera as a political, cultural and religious weapon, see: Mamoun Fandy, *(Un)civil War of Words: Media and Politics in the Arab World*, Westport, CT: Praeger Security International 2007

and the Arab nationalist mainstream, which it backs up with its considerable financial resources.¹⁴

One area where Qatar has helped brand itself as unorthodox is in its relations with the wider region. Qatar's wide variety of ties serves as a survival mechanism that allows it to navigate the turbulent currents of the Middle East. Due to Qatar's proximity to large and ambitious neighbors including Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia, the nation has sought to use its nonaligned status to counterbalance competing actors. As noted by Hady Amr, director of Brookings Doha Center: "Qatar is a tiny fish stuck between giants- Iran and Saudi Arabia...It simply tries to balance all those interests with those of the US. So it does have the US military base, but it actively balances this with deeper relations with Iran."¹⁵ Although Qatar does not have formal diplomatic ties with Israel, it maintains economic ties with Israel in the form of an Israeli trade mission in Doha. It has also played a leading role in expanding Israeli economic ties with the region, and has hosted Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Shimon Peres in February 2007 and Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni in April 2008, as well as lower-ranking foreign ministry officials and delegation for various conferences. Yet Qatar also remains a key supporter for Hamas, financially backing the group and hosting Hamas leaders for numerous talks and meetings since the 2006 Palestinian elections¹⁶. Perhaps the most telling anecdote of this strange dynamic is that Israel's trade mission is located not far from the villa owned by Hamas leader Khaled Meshal¹⁷.

¹⁴ CF George Abraham, "Qatar is a diplomatic heavy-hitter," *Al-Jazeera.net*, July 21, 2008, available at <<http://english.aljazeera.net/focus/2008/07/200872164735567644.html>>

¹⁵ CF Nicholas Blanford, "Why Qatar is emerging as Middle East peacemaker," *Christian Science Monitor*, May 23, 2008, available at <<http://www.csmonitor.com/2008/0523/p06s02-wome.html>>

¹⁶ Christopher Blanchard, "Qatar: Background and U.S. Relations," *CRS Report for Congress*, January 23, 2008, p. 18, available at: <<http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/33741.pdf>>

¹⁷ Worth, op cit.

Niche diplomacy has been another medium for Qatar to safeguard itself and its wealth—by trying to steady the volatile region. There are a number of reasons that Qatar has turned to niche diplomacy as a strategy for increasing its public diplomacy image and a means for its survival. Being at a disadvantage of size in a rough neighborhood, Qatar employs its relationship with all players in the region as a survival mechanism, and deftly plays on its ties and its small size to sell itself as an innocuous mediator. Essentially, Qatar is viewed as a small country that threatens no one, and can present itself as an honest mediator, with a perception for neutrality. Kamrava states, “Qatar is a small state, its national security needs dictate proactive diplomacy, particularly in light of chronic regional turmoil and instability.”¹⁸

Qatar’s recent diplomatic flurry must also be understood as a public diplomacy strategy to raise Qatar’s status. Through conflict mediation, Qatar raises its status in both the region and on the international stage. To this end, Janardhan writes,

“Several reasons are given for Qatar’s diplomatic overdrive. The 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.”¹⁹

Kamrava also illustrates Qatar’s proactive mediation roles in clear public diplomacy branding terms. He notes that the branding strategy, “is a deliberate attempt to carve out a distinct identity for Qatar as a significant regional and global actor compared to the other regional players like Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia.”²⁰

¹⁸ CF Robert F. Worth, “Qatar, Playing All Sides, Is a Nonstop Mediator,” *New York Times*, July 9, 2008, available at <<http://www.spiegel.de/international/0,1518,471382,00.html>>

¹⁹ Meena Janardhan, “Lebanon Deal Confirms Qatar’s Honest Broker Role,” *Inter Press News Agency*, May 26, 2008, available at <<http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=42504>>

²⁰ *ibid*

Qatar has long played its hand at mediating numerous conflict situations, in both well known and lesser-known disputes. With varying degrees of success, Qatar has mediated conflicts including: between Morocco and the Polisario over the Western Sahara; with the Sudanese government and rebel parties involved in the Darfur conflict; the parties involved in the conflict in Somalia; the conflict in Yemen between the government and Shi'a Al-Houthi rebel group; the Palestinian factions Hamas and Fatah. Qatar has also served as a conduit for negotiations between Israel and the Arab world, as it recently helped cajole Arab nations to attend President Bush's Middle East peace conference in Annapolis, Maryland in November 2007²¹. As well, it has played intermediary for Hamas with both Israel and the United States²². Sometimes these efforts have not succeeded, as Qatar brokered a cease-fire between Yemen's government and Shi'a rebels in June 2007 to end its three-year dispute, only to have to send its mediators back less than a year later to salvage the faltering deal²³; sometimes these efforts have even backfired, as Ethiopia broke diplomatic ties with the emirate over its role in negotiating the Somalia conflict and its relationship with Eritrea²⁴.

Qatar's biggest conflict mediation breakthrough came with its shepherding of a deal between the warring factions in Lebanon. For nearly 18 months, various mediators including the Arab League, Saudi Arabia and France had all tried to bring the rival parties

²¹ Janine Zacharia, "Qatar steers between U.S., Iran using gas to boost influence," *Bloomberg.com* March 3, 2008, available at

<<http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601109&sid=aPFYiIDYIFC0&refer=home>>

²² Arnon Regular, " Hamas sent messages to U.S. via Qatar proposing truce," *Ha'aretz* December 23, 2003, available at

<<http://www.haaretz.co.il/hasen/pages/ShArt.jhtml?itemNo=374808&contrassID=1&subContrassID=1&sbSubContrassID=0&listSrc=Y>>

²³ Ahmed Al-Hajj, "Yemen's government, Shiite rebels negotiate end to 3-year conflict," *The Seattle Times (The Associated Press)*, June 17, 2007, available at

<http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/nationworld/2003751155_yemen17.html>; Mohammed Gobari,

"Qatar tries to salvage faltering Yemen ceasefire," *Reuters*, May 4, 2008, available at <

http://www.reuters.com/article/homepageCrisis/idUSL04365487.CH_2400>

²⁴ "Ethiopia-Qatar Break in Relations," *Africa Research Bulletin: Political, Social and Cultural Series*, Vol. 45, Issue 4., May 22, 2008, p. 17514C - 17515C

in Lebanon together but all had failed, in part because of their perceived connections to different parties of the conflict. Worth notes, “Every major power with an interest in Lebanon had tried to resolve the country’s 18-month political crisis. All of them failed, in part because they were seen as favoring a particular group within Lebanon’s political mosaic.²⁵” Qatar’s ties to all parties, ability to talk with all parties and perceived neutrality and independence as a moderator, enabled Qatar to bridge the void between Lebanon’s warring factions and broker an agreement that ended the long-standing feud over the vacant Lebanese presidency and upcoming elections. Qatar’s mediation success also came from its ability to get the Sunni, Christian and Druze parties to accept Hizbullah’s conditions of negotiation- in part because it was a less bitter pill to swallow when broached by Qatar rather than Hizbullah.

In brokering the long-pursued but previously unattained agreement, Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim Al Thani, the Foreign minister and Prime Minister of Qatar, was dubbed, “a diplomatic rock star.²⁶” Meanwhile, for Qatar’s public diplomacy image felt an upsurge. Across the region, the status of Qatar increased:

“[Conflict mediation] had a fringe benefit for the Qataris themselves, whose reputation had grown just a bit brighter. ‘In the old days, nobody had really heard of Qatar,’ said Abdel Aziz al-Mahmoud, the editor of *Al Arab*, a newspaper in Doha. “Now, once you say ‘I’m from Qatar,’ it’s, ‘Step right this way.’²⁷”

In short, successful conflict mediation as niche diplomacy puts Qatar on the public diplomacy map and makes the small state stand out, while also helping its survival by steadying the region.

²⁵ Worth, op cit.

²⁶ Borzou Daragahi, “Qatar emerges as diplomatic powerhouse (*Babylon and Beyond* blog),” *Los Angeles Times* May 15, 2008, available at <<http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/babylonbeyond/2008/05/lebanon-qatar-e.html>>

²⁷ Worth, op cit

Case	Dates	Results
Morocco-Polisario	February 2004	Successful negotiation of release of 100 Moroccan POWs by Polisario.
Israel-Hamas	October 2006; February 2007	Unsuccessful in securing release of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. Unsuccessful in bringing Israel and Hamas to negotiate directly.
Hamas-Fatah	October 2006; August 2008	Contribution in 2006 towards reconciliation in Saudi-sponsored Mecca Accords- since broken down. Current Qatar mediation ongoing.
Yemen-Al Houthi rebels	June 2007; July 2008	Successful negotiation of cease-fire, ending 3-year civil war between Yemen's government and Al Houthi rebels. Subsequent re-implementation of cease-fire after breakdown.
Somalia	December 2006-April 2008	Unsuccessful in mediation, diplomatic ties between Ethiopia and Qatar severed.
Lebanon	May 2008	Doha Agreement, ending 18-month political deadlock.
Darfur (Sudan)	October 2008-ongoing	N/A

Qatar's Public Diplomacy Tools

There are multiple reasons that Qatar is able to pursue such an unorthodox line. Blessed with vast oil wealth, and home to the third-largest gas deposits in the world, Qatar stands as one of the richest locales in the world^{*}. The Economist notes:

“According to IMF figures, the country’s 950,000 residents this year surpassed those of Luxembourg to become the world’s richest. They enjoy an income per person of \$80,700. Yet that plump figure belies the far greater private wealth of native Qatari citizens, who number fewer than 200,000 but who own nearly all the emirate’s assets.”²⁸”

The tremendous oil wealth has been well spread throughout the kingdom and has bolstered the rule of the absolute monarchy that reigns over the peninsula. The wealth and ruling structure creates a situation where there is virtually no domestic dissent. Therefore, Qatar remains a global rarity in which it is free to pursue unorthodox policies abroad without anxieties of disquieting domestic pressures.

In addition to pacifying its own population, Qatar’s rulers have been able to use its vast oil wealth as part of its public diplomacy tool to raise its international profile. Furthermore, the Qatari aid has been used as a public diplomacy tool to facilitate Qatar’s niche diplomacy through which the emirate has gained both friends and access. There are numerous examples and anecdotal stories of Qatar using proposed financial aid as the means to further enhance their negotiating efforts. For example, as part of its public diplomacy strategy, following Hurricane Katrina, Qatar’s emir personally donated \$100 million for the hurricane’s victims. Sheikh Hamad has also doled out considerable aid to

* For more on a comparative ranking of Qatar, see the Global Edge Index, available at <<http://globaledge.msu.edu/countryinsights/country.asp?countryID=166®ionID=3>>; on Qatar’s economic freedom, see the Heritage Index of Economic Freedom:

<<http://www.heritage.org/Index/country.cfm?id=Qatar>>

²⁸ “Small Country, big ideas,” *The Economist* June 5, 2008, available at

<http://www.economist.com/world/mideast-africa/displaystory.cfm?story_id=11506776>

Gazans following the restrictions enacted by Israel on the Gaza Strip, as well as Qatari NGOs playing a role²⁹. In addition, Qatar provided millions for reconstruction efforts in the Shi'a sections of Lebanon that were destroyed during the 2006 war with Israel, most prominently in Bint Jbeil³⁰ and has invested \$350 million dollars for tourism projects in Lattakiah, Syria.

There are a number of other tools that Qatar has employed within the framework of its public diplomacy branding strategy for increased international prominence.

Peterson notes, "Few countries seem to have taken the lessons and importance of branding to heart more thoroughly than Qatar has in recent years."³¹ One such tool has been to partner in regional bodies and host important international conferences and events. In this realm, Qatar has played host to the World Trade Organization's Doha Round in 2001 and Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) summit in 2003. The emirate also served as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council from 2005 to 2007, and used this bully pulpit to carry its independent outlook³².

Qatar helped establish the Gulf Cooperation Council and has played an active role in that body. In typical Qatari fashion, when the Gulf Cooperation Council held its annual summit in Doha in December 2007, Sheikh Hamad broke with typical protocol and invited Iran's President Ahmadinejad to attend, marking the first time an Iranian head of state was on hand, thus reinforcing Qatar's maverick status in the region.

²⁹ "\$1 million aid boost for Gaza organization" *Gulf Times* November 12, 2008, available at <http://www.gulf-times.com/site/topics/article.asp?cu_no=2&item_no=253341&version=1&template_id=57&parent_id=56>; "Qatari charity plans aid mission to besieged Gaza," *Daily Star*, December 2, 2008, available at <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=10&categ_id=2&article_id=98173>

³⁰ Ulrike Putz, "Envy, Conspiracy and a Lebanese Motor City," *Der Spiegel* March 3, 2007, available at <<http://www.spiegel.de/international/0,1518,471382,00.html>>

³¹ Peterson, op cit., p.746

³² Blanchard, op cit, p.15

Also creating nontraditional cultural exposure has been the Qatar Foundation. Founded by the emir in 1995, the Qatar Foundation sponsors the Doha Debates, which were first initiated in 2004. The Doha Debates offer a forum for discussion of political and cultural issues affecting the Middle East. Participants in these wide ranging debates are drawn from Qatar's student body, as well as countries in the Middle East and Islamic world. The program is beamed out on BBC World News, which is seen by nearly 300 million viewers in 200 countries³³.

Qatar has pursued a more progressive course towards education, as the Qatar Foundation has invested heavily in educational opportunities in the emirate. The flagship of these efforts is manifested in "Education City," a state-of-the-art campus complex launched in 2003. Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser al Missned, one of Sheikh Hamad's wives, chairs the Qatar Foundation, which directs Education City. The university enclave in Doha offers degrees from many prestigious U.S. universities, including Weil Cornell Medical College, Georgetown University's Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, Texas A&M University, Carnegie Mellon University and Virginia Commonwealth University³⁴. In addition, Education City hosts the Rand-Qatar Policy Institute, the prestigious think tank's only location in the Middle East.

Education City is the largest enclave of American universities outside of the United States, and is attended by Qataris as well as students representing 50 different nationalities³⁵. Of the roughly 900 students currently attending the universities at

³³ www.thedohadebates.com

³⁴ Blanchard, op cit., p.6

³⁵ Tamar Lewin, "In Oil-Rich Mideast, Shades of the Ivy League," *New York Times*, February 11, 2008, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/11/education/11global.html?pagewanted=1&ei=5124&en=207f9a283ffda064&ex=1360558800&partner=permalink&exprod=permalink>

Education City, half of the students are from Qatar and half come from neighboring countries in the Middle East and South Asia, as well as students studying abroad from the partnering universities. Programs range from an academy for student from pre-school to high school through the aforementioned colleges to graduate research level studies. The experiment is also unique in that co-ed classes are available, something not previously offered in Qatar and not widely available in the Gulf region.

One additional example of Qatar's efforts to become a center of scholarship in the Gulf is the Brookings Doha Center. Established with the financial support of Qatar's Emir Al Thani, the think tank was inaugurated in February 2008 as part of the Brookings Institution's Saban Center for Middle East Policy. Qatar's center of scholarship and educational activities in the Middle East are another example of the way that the tiny emirate has broadened its public diplomacy outreach in a nontraditional fashion.

Qatar has also strived for branding with sports and culture. Peterson comments, "Sports are another important aspect of Qatar's branded image, particularly with regard to annual sporting events."³⁶ Qatar holds major tennis and golf tournaments that attract top international talent. In addition, Qatar played host to the 2006 Asian Games. With regard to culture, Peterson writes, "The very ambitious plans for the development of a number of world-class museums has put Qatar on the map of the art world."³⁷ The manifestation of these plans was the recent opening of Qatar's Museum of Islamic Art. Designed by I.M. Pei, the new museum's recent grand opening in November drew lavish praise and accolades.

³⁶ Peterson, op cit., p.748

³⁷ ibid

Beyond the prestige and public diplomacy awareness that these ventures bring Qatar, these tools help create the legitimacy for Qatar that buoys its survival. Peterson writes, “The fundamental advantage, however, is that it assures the legitimacy of the micro-state. This in turn leads to the single most important factor: increased awareness of and legitimacy accruing to Qatar— in domestic and external terms— enhances the prospects of Qatar’s survival.³⁸”

Al-Jazeera as Public Diplomacy Instrument

Perhaps the clearest move that has exhibited Qatar’s hetrodoxical course was Sheikh Hamad’s assistance in establishing the Al-Jazeera satellite television news network in 1996 with a \$147 million grant to “help put tiny Qatar on the map.³⁹” Qatar’s foray into international broadcasting was a success as the new satellite station shook up the Middle East media market. Since the network’s launch in 1996, Al-Jazeera has broached taboo topics and eviscerated the status quo of affairs in the Middle East. The network’s critical coverage has put it squarely on the receiving end of criticism of Arab regimes. Meanwhile, the network’s depiction of American-led war efforts in the region and perceived connections and sympathy towards fundamentalist Islamic movements has brought it reproach and claims of bias from the US⁴⁰. The probing news network has been a lightning rod of controversy to the ruling regimes of the Middle East, and a boon to Qatar’s public diplomacy standing on the “Arab street.”

³⁸ Peterson, op cit., p. 748

³⁹ Norbert Wildermuth, “Defining the ‘Al-Jazeera Effect’: American Public Diplomacy at a Crossroad,” *In Media Res*, vol. 1. no.2 (February 2005)

⁴⁰ Powers and Gilboa, op cit., p.53

Born into the staid and stagnant media environment in the Middle East, which featured state-run stations that served as mouthpieces for the ruling regimes or hemmed-in Saudi-owned satellite channel MBC, Al-Jazeera's freewheeling (by comparison) coverage of news, politics and religious issues quickly became a very popular across the region. Since then, the satellite station has become one of the "most important news organizations in the world today,"⁴¹ with an estimated of 45-50 million viewers in the Middle East. These figures do not include the added exposure from and viewership to other Al-Jazeera channels, such as Al-Jazeera English or Al-Jazeera Sport.

Al-Jazeera's public diplomacy value stems from its popularity and perceived credibility within the Arab world. Polls have shown that large swathes of the Middle East regularly tunes into the station, and overwhelming numbers consider the news to be credible⁴². Moreover, the intense criticism of Al-Jazeera from various corners, including Arab governments in the Middle East and also the United States, has enhanced the status of the television network. Powers and Gilboa note, "The sheer volume and tone of the criticism leveled at Al-Jazeera, especially from external sources, has only strengthened the popularity of the network among Arabs and Muslims."⁴³

In some ways, Al-Jazeera's public diplomacy star even has been seen to outshine its benefactor, Qatar. The notion exists that respective foreign emissaries to Qatar serve rather as "ambassadors to Al-Jazeera."⁴⁴ Yet, regardless of the impression that "Al-

⁴¹ Shawn Powers and Eytan Gilboa, "The Public Diplomacy of Al-Jazeera," "The Public Diplomacy of Al-Jazeera," In P. Seib (Ed.), New Media and the New Middle East, New York: Palgrave 2007, p. 53

⁴² *ibid*, p.56

⁴³ *ibid*, p.62

⁴⁴ Hugh Miles, Al-Jazeera: The Inside Story of the Arab New Channel That is Challenging the West, New York: Grove Press 2005, p.57 (CF Powers and Gilboa, *op cit.*, p.64)

Jazeera is more important as a regional power than Qatar,⁴⁵ a notion that Schiefler postulates than quashes, the fact that Al-Jazeera has such tremendous recognition value all over the globe has been a powerful wave to raise Qatar's public diplomacy boat. As Powers and Gilboa note on Al-Jazeera's brand recognition:

“Moreover, in 2005, the world's leading brand-monitoring survey found that Al-Jazeera was voted the world's fifth most influential ‘brand,’ beating out prestigious companies such as Finland's Nokia, United Kingdom's Virgin, and the American based- Coca-Cola.”

Important to note is the authors referencing of the respective country's relationship with the brand; if such brands are tied to their respective host country Al-Jazeera's influence also casts a shadow on Qatar as well. To this end Colonel Steven Carney notes, “‘Reporting from Qatar, this is Al-Jazeera.’ The station identification is continually heard each day in the smoky she-shas, hookah bars, coffee houses, cafés, of Arab living rooms throughout all 22 nations in the Middle East.⁴⁶” Given its ubiquitous nature, and constant reiteration of ties between the station and its benefactor, the relationship between public diplomacy actor and instrument is strengthened on a public diplomacy level.

Just as Al-Jazeera is perceived as being tied to Qatar by the populace of the Middle East, so too is it seen as such by different Arab regimes. Fandy notes, “For example, many Arab states still perceive Al-Jazeera to be an arm of the state of Qatar. That is why the responses to criticism by Al-Jazeera have been in keeping with state-to-state response rather than state-to-media response.⁴⁷” To that end, nearly all Arab

⁴⁵ S. Abdallah Schiefler, “Al-Jazeera Update: More Datelines from Doha and a code of ethics,” *Transnational Broadcasting Studies (TBS) Journal* no.10 (Spring 2003), available at http://www.tbsjournal.com/Archives/Fall04/aljazeera_schiefler.html

⁴⁶ Colonel Steven P. Carney, “Reporting from Qatar, This is Al-Jazeera,” *U.S. Army War College Strategy Research Project*, March 15, 2006, p.1, available at <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdf/files/ksil298.pdf>

⁴⁷ Mamoun Fandy, *(Un)civil War of Words: Media and Politics in the Arab World*, Westport, CT: Praeger Security International 2007, p.3

governments including Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, Algeria and Tunisia have recalled their ambassadors at various times in protest to Al-Jazeera's programming⁴⁸.

Beyond influence, Qatar's sponsorship of the popular Al-Jazeera allows it to draw upon the credibility that the network enjoys for its own reputation in mediation. The perception of independence for Al-Jazeera has created a secondary base for Qatar's mediation role, which the emirate has used to reinforce and strengthen its public diplomacy capabilities. According to Mustafa Alani, a security analyst at the Gulf Research Centre in Dubai, "The way the diverse groups are allowed to express their views on the satellite channel- from dissidents, rebels and Islamists to US officials and even Israelis- creates an impression that the state will also be even-handed when it come to mediation."⁴⁹ In that regard, Qatar is rather unique in that it is able to use one public diplomacy instrument to indirectly strengthen a public diplomacy strategy.

Meanwhile, Al-Jazeera benefits from the desire among parties in the West to conduct better public diplomacy with the Middle East populace and allows the satellite network, and indirectly its patron, to receive mirrored public diplomacy influence through Western outreach. Due to Al-Jazeera's significance in the Middle East, nations attempt to communicate through Al-Jazeera to implement public diplomacy, yet incidentally increase the public diplomacy value of the network and indirectly its benefactor. Qatar is able to increase its public diplomacy worth through its connections to Al-Jazeera, and the desire for the Western world to conduct public diplomacy via the influential station.

⁴⁸ Powers and Gilboa, op cit., p.60

⁴⁹ CF Alistair Lyon, "Qatar pulls off a mediation coup in Lebanon Crisis," *Reuters*, May 22, 2008, available at <<http://uk.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUKL2274043520080522>>

Qatar's ambitious motivation to become a global actor has been buoyed by the immense popularity of the unorthodox network. Through Al-Jazeera's credibility, Qatar has seen its public diplomacy stature increase and its niche diplomacy strategy reinforced and strengthened.

Norway and Niche Diplomacy

In many ways, Qatar's use of conflict mediation as niche diplomacy strategy mirrors that of another oil-rich, unconventional kingdom: Norway. Norway has crafted an international image through niche diplomacy related to its humanitarian work, its connection to the Nobel Peace Prize and its extensive conflict mediation work.

Henrikson writes:

“Norway, long known for the Nobel Prize for Peace, also is a generous aid donor to poor countries. Its giving level, as a percentage of its national income, is the highest in the world. Even more remarkable, in the realm of diplomacy, is its work in peace facilitation, its most famous effort being focused on the Middle East- the ‘Oslo process.’⁵⁰”

What began with the Oslo process, led to a full-scale conflict mediation blitz by Norway that has helped manifest Norway's international image as “the international capital of peace.”⁵¹ According to *New York Times* correspondent Frank Bruni:

“a frenzy of Norwegian peace-making, or at least peacetrying, that has put peace somewhere alongside oil and timber as one of this country's signature exports...Over the last decade, Norwegians have had a hand in peace talks between Communist rebels and the Philippine

* For more on the field of niche diplomacy, see: Jozef Batora, “Public Diplomacy Between Home and Abroad: Norway and Canada,” *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 1 (2006); Rhiannon Vicker, “The New Public Diplomacy: Britain and Canada Compared,” *British Journal of Policy and International Relations* Vol.6, 2004

⁵⁰ Henrikson, op cit, p.2

⁵¹ Frank Bruni, “A Nation That Exports Oil, Herring and Peace,” *New York Times*, December 21, 2002, available at

<<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9E07E2D61E3DF932A15751C1A9649C8B63>>

government; Croatia and Yugoslavia, and Colombia's government and the FARC rebel movement. Norwegians have ventured into Cyprus and Somalia and Sudan.”

Norway has been able to use its conflict mediation efforts as a way of gaining notice in the busy world of international public diplomacy, and through its practice of niche diplomacy has been able to stand out on the global stage.

There are many similarities between Norway and Qatar with regard to conflict mediation and niche diplomacy, including their respective affluence, domestic tranquility, independence from bigger regional and global players and benign image abroad. Similar to Qatar, Norway is among one of the most affluent countries in the world, with a per-capita GDP among the highest; also similar to Qatar, Norway has a placid domestic front. Like Qatar, given the abundant wealth and tranquil domestic base, Bruni writes, “[Norway] has money and time to lavish on faraway missions with uncertain deadlines.⁵²” Meanwhile, both the Norwegian government and Norwegian charities have used their considerable financial resources to carry out humanitarian work in many unstable regions, which in turn creates for access for their conflict mediation efforts; in the same vein, Qatar has been able to use its “checkbook” diplomacy efforts across the Middle East and Africa as an entrée into the mediation table.

Just as Qatar is able to use its independence in respect to its relations with all regional players as a way to boost its role as conflict mediator, Norway also uses its independence to its niche diplomacy advantage. Frank Bruni notes,

⁵² *ibid*

“Norway is not perceived to be doing the bidding of larger, more muscular and more meddlesome nations. While it belongs to NATO, it does not belong to the European Union. It has its alliances, but wears them lightly.⁵³”

Furthermore, Norway and Qatar are referred to in similar terms with respect to their size and non-threatening nature vis-à-vis other nations. Norwegian diplomats refer to the country’s small size, remote location as keys to the nation becoming a mediation interlocutor. As well, Bruni notes the sentiments of multiple Norwegian diplomats that since “Norway does not—and, really, could not—have grand designs on other countries, it does not engender suspicion.⁵⁴” In the same vein, analysts like Mustafa Alani at the Gulf Research Centre point to Qatar’s small size as a benefit to its intermediary role because it is viewed as being too small to threaten anyone.

What both Qatar and Norway have been able to do so successfully is to use niche diplomacy in the form of conflict mediation to distinguish themselves from their larger and more powerful neighbors. Their respective use of niche diplomacy has created an enhanced and increased international profile on the world’s stage. Yet a major difference is the scope of conflict mediation that the two parties pursue. While Norway has carried out conflict mediation on a global scale, Qatar has limited its conflict mediation to the Middle East and North Africa. This difference stems in-part from the survival aspect tied to Qatar’s mediation efforts and its attempts to calm its neighborhood, something that placid Norway needs not worry about.

Another major area where Qatar and Norway differ in the use of niche diplomacy relates to the internal cognizance of the value of public diplomacy efforts. While Norway has held conferences and seminars and produced papers to form and evaluate its public

⁵³ *ibid*

⁵⁴ *ibid*

diplomacy strategy and efforts⁵⁵, Qatar seems to lack the centralized focus by institutions of the state on putting forward conflict mediation as a clear public diplomacy strategy.

Stemming from a series of seminars conducted by the London-based Foreign Policy Centre (FPC) for the Norwegian Foreign Ministry that involved various public and private actors concerned in Norway's public diplomacy efforts, a strategic report was produced in 2003 that outlined Norway's status as a peacemaker as a key part of its public diplomacy outreach. Norway has strategically developed and cultivated its image as a peacemaker, while Qatar has thus far not carried out any comparable exercise to bring its Foreign Ministry, private sector and NGOs together. This may in-part stem from the higher levels at which Qatar carries out its conflict mediation, in essence the hierarchy of Qatar's conflict mediation versus the more egalitarian version of Norway's conflict mediation efforts that combines cooperation between different actors of the governmental and nongovernmental fashion. Qatar's own brand of conflict mediation diplomacy comes off as rather personality-driven, and is very connected with the apex of Qatari leadership. While Norway is set on maximizing its public diplomacy potential from its niche diplomacy work, Qatar is merely reaping "one-off" publicity for its work without the necessary structures to fully exploit its niche diplomacy efforts. Just as Oslo has become synonymous with peacemaking, with better public diplomacy coordination, Doha could conceivably be mentioned in the same sentence.

With the recent dramatic drop in the price of oil, it is unlikely that Qatar will be as flush with revenue to pursue its "petrodplomacy" tactics as a tool that has helped burnish its conflict mediation. However, a more developed public diplomacy campaign to

⁵⁵ Jozef Batora, *op cit*, p. 71

enhance Qatar's peacemaking reputation and brand Qatar as the hub of peacemaking could be a force-multiplier in Qatar's push to be an international player. Such efforts will require more concerted coordination between all the stakeholders in Qatari society as a way to get all actors on the same public diplomacy page. As Alan Henrikson notes, the Norwegian government's niche diplomacy success has been closely linked with close collaboration of government and nongovernmental sources (NGOs) and direct engagement with civil society⁵⁶; Qatar needs to look no further than the example of Norway to see how such collaborative efforts can be undertaken and implemented in a centralized approach.

Conclusion

Given Qatar's miniscule size amid powerful and discordant neighbors, the emirate has done an impressive job in fashioning a distinctive niche from which to gain recognition and shine. Qatar's use of both niche diplomacy and Al Jazeera are part of the same goal and motivation to broaden its security while also becoming a global actor. Through its maverick approach to diplomatic relations in its neighborhood, conflict mediation and international broadcasting, Qatar has been able to gain considerable public diplomacy leverage and hit far above its weight on the international stage.

Through its employment of the niche diplomacy strategy, branding efforts and the international broadcasting instrument as part of its the public diplomacy arsenal, Qatar has managed to gain major public diplomacy capital. The examples that the tiny emirate provides in public diplomacy theory are considerable.

⁵⁶ Henrikson, op cit., p.3

Qatar signifies how a small nation can use niche diplomacy as a means of increasing its prominence, while simultaneously exploiting that niche to improve its own security situation. Moreover, it signifies how a state can turn its niche diplomacy strategy, and public diplomacy tools into an overall nation branding stratagem. It is also a prime example of how an actor can employ a public diplomacy instrument such as international broadcasting to further its public diplomacy cause, strengthen its niche and protect its wellbeing. Most importantly, Qatar serves as a clear example how public diplomacy tools and instruments can serve to amplify public diplomacy strategies like niche diplomacy and nation branding.

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