

Genealogy of Qatar's Developmentalist Foreign Policy: Presenting a Model of Governance in Contemporary Islamic Political Thought (1995–2025)

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to examine the transformation of Qatar's foreign policy from a conservative, security-oriented approach to active and development-driven agency. This transformation does not appear to be merely a change in diplomatic tactics or a response to regional structural developments, but rather a reflection of a broader project at the level of identity and thought—a project aimed at redefining the concept of the "modern Muslim state" and presenting a model of governance consistent with the logic of development and globalization. The starting point of this transition must be sought in 1995, with the transfer of power from Sheikh Khalifa to his son, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani. This transfer was not just a political change, but a rupture in the intellectual orientation of Qatar's leadership. The new Emir, with a pragmatic and modernist vision, sought to bring the small, wealthy country of Qatar out from under the heavy shadow of Saudi Arabia and redefine it within a new framework of regional politics. From this point onward, Qatar's foreign policy was based on three main components: economic developmentalism relying on gas resources, media diplomacy through the Al Jazeera network, and selective support for moderate Islamist movements, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood. This combination allowed Qatar both to project an image of a modern, successful state and to establish itself as a supporter of a type of moderate Islamism. Using James Rosenau's "linkage" model, this research shows that the evolution of Qatar's foreign policy is the result of the simultaneous interaction of five levels of analysis: the individual characteristics of leaders, their role and position within the power structure, the characteristics of the governance system, the country's social and ideological context, and finally, the pressures and opportunities of the international environment. At the individual

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level, the personalities of Sheikh Hamad and, after him, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad play a decisive role. Unlike traditional leaders of the Persian Gulf, they adopted a rational, pragmatic, yet simultaneously ideological approach. Their goal was not merely security and survival, but building a global image of Qatar as a pioneering, development-oriented Muslim country. At the governmental level, the concentration of power within the Al Thani family and the absence of powerful opposing institutions enabled rapid and unified decision-making. Such a structure became the link between the Emir's individual will and the state's macro-objectives, transforming foreign policy into an efficient tool for realizing the national developmentalist project. At the social and ideological level, Qatar has drawn from two main sources: enormous wealth from oil and natural gas exports, and a particular tendency towards the discourse of the Muslim Brotherhood. A moderate, pragmatic interpretation of the Brotherhood's discourse, emphasizing the connection between religion and progress, offers a model of "effective Islam" that aligns with the mindset of Qatar's rulers. On the other hand, oil and gas wealth provided the material means to implement ambitious, costly, and development-oriented policies—from establishing the Al Jazeera network to global investment and hosting international events. In this way, Qatar was able to institutionalize a specific type of moderate Islam within the framework of its developmentalist foreign policy and present an image of modern, global Islam. At the international level, this transformation has emerged from complex geopolitical equations. By maintaining a US military base on its soil and participating in Western security arrangements, Qatar relatively secured its own safety while simultaneously using this position to increase its regional influence. At the same time, the ideological rivalry with Saudi Arabia over the interpretation of political Islam became a primary driver of Qatar's foreign policy. In contrast to the conservative, authoritarian reading, Qatar sought to present a face of moderate, dialogue-oriented, media-savvy, and development-oriented Islam. This rivalry not only intellectually distinguished Qatar from Saudi Arabia but also transformed it regionally into an actor with a cultural and ideological mission. The findings of the paper indicate that Qatar's developmentalist foreign policy should be understood as a form of "soft power of a Muslim country"—power exercised not through force and coercion, but through symbolic capital, media, education, investment, and cultural diplomacy. Through global branding by hosting events like the 2022 FIFA World Cup, investing in scientific and cultural centers, and supporting reformist discourse in the Arab world, Qatar has sought to simultaneously increase its international and Islamic legitimacy. Thus, Qatar's foreign policy has become a tool for constructing a new identity in which Islam is seen not as an obstacle to development but as an important factor enabling it.

Keywords

Qatar's Foreign Policy, Developmentalism, Rosenau's Linkage Model, Islamic Political Thought.

1. Introduction

Qatar, a small emirate on the margins of the Persian Gulf, is situated at a point which, in addition to its geopolitical importance, also constitutes a center of ideological rivalries within the Muslim world. Its proximity to regional powers such as the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia has exposed it to opportunities and challenges that extend beyond purely security and economic equations into the realm of political thought and models of Islamic governance. Therefore, understanding the foreign policy transformations of this micro-state requires moving beyond traditional analyses and paying attention to its attempt to redefine its identity and role within the regional and Islamic order. Prior to 1995 and the rise to power of Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa, Qatar's foreign policy was predominantly defined as conservative and operating within the ideological and political orbit of Saudi Arabia. During this period, Qatar acted as a follower state, seeking its survival through alignment with the traditional order governing the Gulf Cooperation Council and reliance on great powers. High military expenditures, such as allocating 27.9% of total government spending in 1991 (The Global Economy, 2024), and signing defense agreements with the United States and France, all indicated a survival-oriented foreign policy lacking independent initiative. This approach reflected the prevailing model of governance in the region's sheikhdoms, which was based on maintaining the status quo and avoiding any challenging activism. But with the quiet coup of 1995, Qatar embarked on a distinct path that cannot be described merely as a diplomatic turn. This transformation marked the beginning of a new project to move from the margins to the center and to present an alternative model of the "modern Muslim state." The establishment of Al Jazeera network (1996) as a platform for critical Islamic and Arab discourses, the founding of the sovereign wealth fund (2005) to advance economic influence, and hosting global events such as the FIFA World Cup (2022) as a tool for Islamic soft power—all these were pieces of a puzzle that constructed an image of a developmentalist, active Qatar with an ideological message. This new foreign policy, which deepened further with the rise to power of Sheikh Tamim in 2013, transformed Qatar from a passive rentier state into an active actor.

Therefore, the main research question goes beyond the simple query of why Qatar's foreign policy changed. This study seeks to answer the fundamental question: How and why did Qatar's foreign policy become a tool for the genealogy and promotion of a specific developmental model of Islamic political thought? This research argues that this transformation is the product

of a complex interaction and linkage among various variables. To explain this phenomenon, the theoretical framework of James Rosenau's "linkage model" is employed, which, through the simultaneous analysis of five levels—individual, role, governmental, societal (including ideological resources), and the international system—enables a causal and multi-dimensional analysis. The existing literature in this field, although it has addressed various dimensions of Qatar's foreign policy (Kamrava, 2013; Kabiri & Adami, 2024; Sarkheil, 2016), has mainly focused on describing the tools and patterns of developmentalism. Some, such as Mahmoudi Kia (2023), have correctly pointed to the role of the Muslim Brotherhood orientation. However, this research seeks to demonstrate, by applying a coherent theoretical framework, how support for the Muslim Brotherhood was not a single variable but rather part of a larger project and the product of the systematic interaction of Rosenau's five variables. The main gap that this research aims to fill is the lack of a causal and genealogical analysis that formulates Qatar's transition as a political-ideological project. Accordingly, the present study attempts to show how the interaction among the reformist personality of the leaders, the centralized governmental structure, financial and ideological resources, and environmental pressures has steered Qatar's foreign policy path toward presenting and consolidating a distinct "brand" of Islamic governance on the international stage.

2. Theoretical Framework: Explaining Foreign Policy in Relation with Political Thought

The analysis of foreign policy, as one of the most complex fields of study in international relations, seeks to explain the goals and instruments of state action on the global stage (Porcel, 2001, p. 17). To understand why states behave as they do, researchers have employed various approaches, which can be categorized into three broad groups: macro-level, micro-level, and mid-range. Each of these approaches opens a different lens through which to view the phenomenon of foreign policy. Macro-level approaches, such as Kenneth Waltz's neorealism, consider state behavior to be the product of the structural pressures of the international system. Waltz, focusing on the third image (the anarchic structure), argues that states, regardless of their internal differences (political and ideological), exhibit similar behaviors due to the imperatives of survival and balance of power (Moshirzadeh, 2005, pp. 108-113). This relatively deterministic perspective, although capable of explaining some similarities in state behavior, is not very effective in accounting for the

differences and unique initiatives in foreign policy, such as Qatar's transition from conservatism to active developmentalism. If structure determines everything, why did Qatar take a relatively different path from other small sheikhdoms of the Persian Gulf? In contrast, micro-level approaches shift the focus of analysis inside the borders of the state and emphasize factors such as the individual characteristics of decision-makers (Jervis, 2006), the dynamics of decision-making groups (Janis, 1972), or the influence of bureaucratic structures (Allison & Halperin, 1972). These approaches are effective in explaining differences, but they often neglect the influences and pressures of the international environment and cannot explain how a small state advances a project of such magnitude in a turbulent regional environment.

3. The Integrative Approach and Rosenau's Linkage Model: A Tool for Foreign Policy Analysis

To overcome this analytical gap, this research employs a mid-range approach, specifically James Rosenau's "linkage model." Due to its integrative nature, this model is an ideal tool for analyzing a multi-faceted phenomenon such as Qatar's developmentalist foreign policy, in which politics, economics, and ideology are inextricably intertwined. Rosenau argues that foreign policy is the product of the interaction and linkage among five categories of variables:

Idiosyncratic Variable: Includes the personality traits, value system, beliefs, and intellectual backgrounds of decision-makers. In the present study, this variable allows us to analyze the role of the worldviews and specific perceptions of Qatar's emirs regarding modern political Islam as a key driving force.

Role Variable: The expectations and constraints that a specific position imposes on the decision-maker's behavior, independent of individual characteristics. In the case of Qatar, this variable helps in understanding how the position of "Emir," with its extensive powers, has provided the necessary means to advance a large-scale project.

Governmental Variable: The structure of the political system (e.g., authoritarian or democratic) that influences the decision-making process. In this research, Qatar's authoritarian structure is analyzed as a facilitating factor for directly linking the ruler's individual vision with the country's foreign policy.

Societal Variable: Non-governmental sources influencing foreign policy, including geopolitical position, economic capacity, and, most importantly, the value-based and ideological orientations prevailing in society or among elites.

This variable allows us to explain the influence of enormous gas wealth as the "material enabler" and the Muslim Brotherhood discourse as the "ideological content" of Qatar's foreign policy.

International System (Systemic) Variable: The constraints and opportunities arising from the structure and dynamics of the external environment. This variable is crucial for understanding how Qatar, on the one hand, ensures its security through alliance with the global hegemon (the United States) and, on the other hand, defines its independent identity and role in competition with regional powers (Saudi Arabia and Iran).

Rosenau believes that the weight and importance of each of these variables vary depending on the characteristics of the country (large/small, developed/developing, open/closed) and the subject area (Rosenau, 1971, p. 100). In the case of Qatar as a "small" but "wealthy" state, it can be expected that the idiosyncratic variables (the ruler's vision) and the international system variables (security and competitive imperatives) carry more weight. Thus, Rosenau's model provides a framework to move beyond one-dimensional analyses (purely economic, security, or ideological). This model helps us understand the transition in Qatar's foreign policy not as an event, but as a multi-faceted process in which the ideological vision of the leaders (idiosyncratic variable), reinforced by material resources (societal variable), is implemented through a centralized political structure (governmental variable), and shaped within the context of regional and global opportunities and threats (international system variable). This integrative approach provides the necessary tools to answer the main research question, namely, explaining the linkage between developmentalist foreign policy and the project of presenting an alternative model in Islamic political thought.

4. Genealogy of Developmentalist Foreign Policy: Analysis Based on the Linkage Model

After 1995, Qatar's foreign policy witnessed a fundamental metamorphosis from a survival-oriented approach to an active developmentalist strategy. This transformation, beyond being a set of diplomatic tactics or economic investments, is a political-ideological project to redefine Qatar's position in the region and the Muslim world. This approach, through the purposeful utilization of soft power tools such as media diplomacy, cultural-sports branding, and mediation, seeks to achieve dual objectives: securing national interests and simultaneously presenting and consolidating a distinct model of modern Islamic governance. In this section, by applying the five variables of

Rosenau's linkage model, we engage in a genealogy of the causes of this strategic transition.

4.1. Idiosyncratic Variable: Leaders as the Architects of a Pragmatic "Islamic Modernism"

Within Rosenau's theoretical framework, the idiosyncratic variable emphasizes the unique characteristics, beliefs, and particularly the value system and worldview of the main decision-makers. In the case of Qatar, the transformation of foreign policy is inseparably linked to the personalities and vision of two key leaders, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa and Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad. These two have acted not merely as political rulers, but as the architects of an intellectual project.

4.1.1. Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa: The Transition from Tradition to Modernism with Historical Insight

Sheikh Hamad, who came to power in 1995 at the age of 43, represented a different generation from the aging, conservative rulers of the region. His education in the West and his experience heading the Supreme Planning Council gave him a dual insight: on the one hand, an awareness of the requirements of development and modernization, and on the other hand, a deep understanding of the fragility of rentier states. Drawing lessons from historical experiences, such as the bankruptcy of 16th-century Spain after its sudden wealth boom, he concluded that enormous energy revenues were both an opportunity and a threat for Qatar. Consequently, unlike his father, who sought to strengthen a traditional, static welfare state, Sheikh Hamad sought to transform wealth into influence and sustainable power. But his "modernism" was not merely a copy of the Western model. He sought to link the principles of economic liberalism and media openness with Qatar's Arab-Islamic identity. This approach was not a pure secularism, but rather an attempt to create a "pragmatic Islamic modernism"—a model in which a Muslim country could, while preserving its identity, be an active and influential actor on the global stage. This worldview was the main driving force behind the major reforms and the adoption of a developmentalist foreign policy (Khatib, 2013, p. 425).

4.1.2. Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad: Deepening the Project with Tools of Islamic Soft Power

Sheikh Tamim, who came to power in 2013 at the age of 33, was the inheritor of his father's project but deepened it with the tools and priorities of a new

generation. His pragmatic and youthful character (Fanack.com, 2018) was accompanied by a special focus on institution-building and identity branding. The establishment of a sports investment company (Oryx Qatar Sports Investment) and the successful management of the 2006 Asian Games were not merely economic or sporting actions; they were part of a grand strategy to use sports as a tool of "Islamic soft power"—an attempt to present a modern, efficient, and welcoming image of a Muslim country to the world. Similarly, his focus on education and the founding of "Education City" went beyond domestic development. This project was an attempt to gain scientific and intellectual authority in the region and to build a new hub for knowledge in the Muslim world, one that could compete with traditional centers such as Al-Azhar or Saudi universities (Brewer & et al., 2007, p. 42). Thus, unlike previous rulers who viewed foreign policy within the framework of "conservative coexistence" (Sarkheil, 2016), Sheikh Hamad and Sheikh Tamim transformed it into a tool for realizing a political-ideological vision. This transition from an "individual" to a "project"—pursued by two generations of leaders—is the most crucial factor in the genealogy of Qatar's developmentalist foreign policy. The presence of aligned and capable figures such as Hamad bin Jassim and Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani as foreign ministers has also reinforced and ensured this project at the executive level.

4.2. Role Variable: Concentration of Power in the Position of Emir as an Enabler of the Developmentalist Project

The role variable in Rosenau's model examines the constraints and possibilities that positions and organizational procedures impose on decision-makers, independent of their individual characteristics. In political systems with numerous and powerful institutions and bureaucracies, "role" can severely constrain individual behavior. However, in Qatar's political structure, this variable has an inverse function and, instead of limiting, helps empower and facilitate the Emir's developmentalist project. As noted, there is an inverse relationship between the influence of the individual variable and the role variable (Dehghani Firouzabadi, 2012, p. 76). In Qatar, due to the charismatic personality and transformative vision of the new emirs, the weight of the individual variable is far greater than the constraints of the role variable. The foreign policy decision-making structure in this country is highly personalized and centralized. Although institutions such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defense, and national institutions like Al Jazeera act as advisory and executive arms, the center of gravity for final decision-making

lies not in the cabinet but in the "Emiri Diwan" (the royal court). This institution, which operates directly under the Emir's supervision, possesses power beyond that of the cabinet and can veto or amend its decisions (Abdullah, 2014, p. 37). This structure has important implications for the analysis of Qatar's foreign policy:

Elimination of Bureaucratic Vetoes: In many countries, new and bold policies face resistance from conservative bureaucracies. But in Qatar, the concentration of power in the role of the "Emir" removes these obstacles and allows him to translate his individual vision into practical policies with minimal friction. In other words, organizational procedures are designed not to control power, but for the swift execution of the Emir's will.

Enabling the Grand Project: Qatar's developmentalist foreign policy is a long-term, multi-faceted project that requires complete coordination among the economic, media, cultural, and diplomatic sectors. If decision-making power were distributed among numerous institutions, advancing such a coherent project would be nearly impossible. However, the pivotal role of the Emir as the ultimate coordinator makes it possible for the investments of the sovereign wealth fund, the programs of the Al Jazeera network, and the active diplomacy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to all serve a single objective.

Reducing the Impact of Other Roles: In this structure, the role of other officials, including the Minister of Foreign Affairs, is not so much an independent role as one aligned with the role of the Emir. Although these officials may be influential in their areas of expertise, ultimately, the overall framework of their actions is determined by the Emir, and in the event of disagreement, it is the constraints of their roles that are imposed on them, not on the Emir.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the "role" variable in Qatar, due to the absence of numerous and powerful institutions and the concentration of legal and practical authority in the position of the Emir, has a negligible constraining effect on the ruler himself. Instead, this variable acts as a channel for the transfer of power, allowing the individual vision and ideological project of the Emir to flow effectively and swiftly throughout the governmental structure, giving objective reality to the country's active, developmentalist foreign policy.

4.3. Governmental Variable: Modernizing Authoritarianism as the Driving Engine of the Identity Project

The governmental variable in Rosenau's model examines the structure of the

political system and its influence on foreign policy options. While democratic systems, due to the multiplicity of actors (parties, parliaments, media), often have complex and slow decision-making processes, authoritarian systems, because of the concentration of power, possess a high capacity for making swift decisions and implementing grand projects. Qatar's governmental structure is a prominent example of a "modernizing authoritarianism" in which centralized power is used not to preserve tradition, but to advance a transformative project. Qatar's political system is a hereditary emirate in which the Emir stands at the apex of the power pyramid and possesses nearly unlimited authority in legislative, executive, and judicial domains. The cancellation of the Shura Council elections in 2024 and the return to the full appointment of members by the Emir reaffirmed this non-democratic and centralized nature. This structure has provided three key characteristics for Qatar's developmentalist foreign policy:

Speed and Decisiveness in Decision-Making: The authoritarian nature of the government allows the Emir to directly translate his individual vision and ideological project into executive policies without the need for lengthy consensus-building and political bargaining. Major decisions such as founding Al Jazeera or hosting the World Cup might have been bogged down for years in parliamentary debates and public opposition in democratic systems, but in Qatar they were quickly adopted and implemented.

Immunity from Domestic Pressures: In authoritarian systems, leaders do not consider themselves directly accountable to public opinion or civil institutions. This characteristic allowed Qatar's rulers to pursue bold and sometimes risky policies (such as supporting the Arab Spring or confronting Saudi Arabia) that might have faced serious opposition in a pluralistic political system. This "immunity" from domestic pressures provided the necessary maneuvering space for active agency on the international stage.

Blending Traditional Legitimacy and Modern Efficiency: Qatar's political system can be described as a type of "neo-patrimonialism" or "rentier sultanism," in which the ruler's legitimacy derives not from popular vote but from a combination of tradition (tribal inheritance) and efficiency (distribution of rent and provision of modern services). Within this framework, developmentalist foreign policy has a dual function: on the one hand, by gaining international prestige and influence, it helps strengthen the symbolic legitimacy of the ruling system; on the other hand, by attracting capital and technology, it helps ensure domestic welfare and its functional legitimacy.

Thus, the developmentalist approach in Qatar's foreign policy is deeply

indebted to the country's governmental structure. This authoritarian system has not only provided a platform for the direct linkage of the Emir's individual preferences with foreign policy, but also acts as the driving engine of his identity project. Although institutions such as the Shura Council or academic elites may play an advisory role (Abdullah, 2014, p. 39), ultimately, it is this centralized governmental structure that has given decisiveness, speed, and coherence to the project of "branding a modern Islamic model" and transformed it from an idea into a political reality.

4.4. The Societal Resources Variable: The Nexus of Wealth, Vulnerability, and Ideology

The societal resources variable in Rosenau's model refers to the non-governmental yet fundamental factors that shape the context of a country's foreign policy. In the case of Qatar, the convergence of three key components at this level—geopolitical vulnerability, economic capacity, and ideological orientation—is the main explanation for the transition to a developmentalist foreign policy.

a) Geopolitical Vulnerability: The Survival Dilemma of a Micro-State

Qatar's geography (with an area of 11,437 square kilometers and only one land border with Saudi Arabia) places it in the category of "micro-states" (Rabiei & Heidari, 2014). The greatest concern for such states has always been survival and security in the neighborhood of larger powers. This inherent "sense of vulnerability" is a constant driving force in Doha's foreign policy. But while before 1995 the survival strategy was seen in "isolation and alignment" with Saudi Arabia, afterward, the new leaders concluded that lasting security is achieved only through "visibility and influence." Developmentalist foreign policy is, in fact, Qatar's strategy to become an actor whose "ignoring or eliminating" would be costly for others (Saei & Emadi, 2014).

b) Economic Capacity: Gas Wealth as Fuel for the Developmentalist Project

If geopolitical vulnerability was the "motive" for transformation, the immense wealth from gas resources provided the "possibility." Qatar, possessing the world's third-largest gas reserves and planning to increase LNG production capacity to 142 million tons by 2030 (Oxford Business Group, 2024), has an unparalleled economic lever. These financial resources were not merely used for domestic modernization but were purposefully transformed into the main "fuel" for the developmentalist foreign policy project. Media diplomacy (financing Al Jazeera), sports diplomacy (investing billions of

dollars in the World Cup), scientific branding (establishing Education City), and strategic investments through the sovereign wealth fund would all be unimaginable without this enormous financial backing. In effect, Qatar turned its wealth into a tool for buying security, gaining influence, and building an international brand.

c) Ideological Orientation: The Muslim Brotherhood as Identity Content

While geography provided the necessity and economics the possibility, ideology determined the direction and content of this foreign policy. Islam is the official religion, and Sharia the primary source of legislation in Qatar, but unlike its neighbor Saudi Arabia, Qatar moved closer to the dynamic Islamist discourse of the Muslim Brotherhood rather than promoting conservative Wahhabism. This alignment, beyond being a tactical alliance, was a strategic-identity choice that served Qatar's developmentalist project at three levels:

Creating Ideological Distinction: Support for the Muslim Brotherhood allowed Qatar to distance itself from Saudi Arabia's ideological orbit and stand as the standard-bearer of a different interpretation of political Islam (moderate, populist, and reformist) against Riyadh's royal-Wahhabi model. This distinction forms the core of the competition over the intellectual leadership of the Sunni world.

Providing Soft Power Tools: The Muslim Brotherhood's discourse, which emphasizes civil society, elections, and media, had complete synergy with Qatar's soft power tools (Al Jazeera, mediation diplomacy, support for democratic transitions during the Arab Spring). By promoting this discourse, Qatar created a network of intellectual and political allies across the Arab and Muslim world, organically extending its influence.

Building the "Modern Islam" Brand: By supporting an Islamist current that sought to reconcile Islam with democracy and modernity, Qatar was able to present itself as a representative of a "forward-looking Islam" in contrast to traditional or radical readings. This branding was particularly attractive to Western audiences and helped Qatar position itself as a bridge between the Muslim world and the West.

Thus, although this orientation may be exercised in a "personalized" and non-institutionalized manner at the level of the ruling elite (Mahmoudi Kia, 2023), its function is entirely strategic. Muslim Brotherhood-oriented thinking (Ikhwanism) provided the necessary "ideological content" for Qatar's developmentalist project and allowed the country, through it, both to secure its security against regional ambitions and to establish itself as a significant identity actor on the global stage.

4.5. The International Environment Variable: Managing Regional Threats with Global Opportunities

The environmental variable in Rosenau's model examines the opportunities and constraints originating from outside a state's borders that influence its foreign policy. For Qatar, the international environment has two distinct but related layers: the post-Cold War global structure and the regional security-ideological order. Qatar's developmentalist foreign policy can be understood as an intelligent strategy to exploit opportunities in the global layer in order to manage threats and competitions in the regional layer.

a) The Global Level: Opportunities of the Unipolar Order and Globalization

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War created a new space for the agency of small states. Three key developments at this level provided a suitable foundation for Qatar's developmentalist foreign policy:

The Increasing Importance of Soft Power: In the post-Cold War era, the indicators of power shifted from sheer military capability toward components such as economic influence, cultural attractiveness, and information control (Sazmand, 2011, pp. 136-137). Qatar's leaders, understanding this transformation, realized that they could compensate for their military weakness by investing in soft power (media, sports, diplomacy) and become influential actors.

US Hegemony and the Need for Regional Allies: The US-led unipolar order created a strategic imperative for a small state like Qatar: alliance with the hegemon to purchase security. Following the withdrawal of US forces from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, by hosting the massive Al Udeid base, made itself an irreplaceable ally for the United States in the region. This American "security umbrella" reduced the risk of Qatar's bold and independent foreign policy and allowed it to resist regional pressures.

Economic Globalization: Economic interdependence in the age of globalization allowed Qatar to tie itself to the fabric of the global economy through extensive investments in major Western companies and supplying a significant portion of the world's energy. This interdependence raised the cost of any military action or severe sanctions against Qatar for the great powers, creating a kind of "economic life insurance" for the country.

b) The Regional Level: Ideological Competition and Balance of Power

While the global environment created opportunities, the regional environment was fraught with threats and competition. Qatar's developmentalist foreign policy was a direct response to these challenges:

Ideological Competition with Saudi Arabia: The most important external driver of Qatar's foreign policy was competition with its larger neighbor, Saudi Arabia. This competition was not merely geopolitical but a deep battle over the desirable "model" of governance in the Sunni world. By supporting the Muslim Brotherhood and promoting a discourse of change, Qatar directly challenged Saudi Arabia's conservative, royalist Wahhabism. The 2017 crisis and blockade were the culmination of this ideological confrontation and demonstrated that Qatar's developmentalism was not a choice but a necessity for preserving its identity and political independence against Riyadh's hegemonic tendencies.

Pragmatic Interaction with the Islamic Republic of Iran: The relationship with Iran serves as a key balancing tool for Qatar against Saudi Arabia. Despite ideological differences, the shared South Pars/North Dome gas field and the presence of a common rival have driven the two countries toward pragmatic cooperation. By maintaining friendly relations with Iran, Qatar both demonstrates that it is not captive to the Sunni-Shia binary (which is itself part of its mediation brand) and possesses a strategic lever of pressure against Saudi Arabia. This relationship clearly illustrates the complexity and flexibility of Qatar's foreign policy.

In conclusion, the environmental variable demonstrates that Qatar's developmentalist foreign policy is a multi-layered strategy. Doha has intelligently utilized the alliance with the global hegemon (the United States) to secure its hard security needs, thereby allowing it to confidently engage in ideological competition with Saudi Arabia at the regional level and balance power through its relationship with Iran. This linkage between the global and regional levels has been the cornerstone of Qatar's active agency and its branding project as a soft power and a distinct political-Islamic model.

5. Qatar's Developmentalist Foreign Policy in Practice

Based on the foregoing, the multi-faceted analysis of Qatar's foreign policy using Rosenau's linkage model demonstrates that Qatar's foreign policy has witnessed a shift from a security-oriented approach to a developmentalist one, and this change in approach has laid the groundwork for changes in Qatar's relations at the macro and regional levels. These changes are discussed below.

5.1. Relations with the United States: An Alliance to Secure Security and Enable Development

The strategic alliance with the United States is the cornerstone of Qatar's

developmentalist foreign policy and a key factor that has allowed this micro-state to play a role far larger than its geopolitical weight. This relationship has two complementary and intertwined functions: providing hard security and creating international legitimacy for Qatar's developmentalist project.

1. Securing Security and Survival: For a country with a very limited conventional military capability (an army of fewer than 12,000 personnel), an alliance with the global hegemonic power is a survival imperative. After the September 11 attacks and the ensuing tensions in US-Saudi relations, Qatar intelligently filled the resulting void. Hosting the headquarters of the United States Central Command (CENTCOM) at the massive Al Udeid Air Base transformed Qatar into the main non-NATO strategic ally of the United States in the region (Soroush & et al., 2021). This military presence opened a "security umbrella" over Doha and acted as a powerful deterrent against potential threats from larger neighbors, especially during the 2017 crisis and blockade. Without this security guarantee, pursuing an independent and bold foreign policy that challenged Saudi Arabia would have been practically impossible.

2. Enabling Development and Branding: The relationship with the United States for Qatar extends beyond a mere military alliance. Qatar's leaders correctly understood that realizing their ambitious developmental goals and becoming a financial, media, and cultural hub would not be possible without alignment with the US-led liberal international order. This understanding was likely reinforced by observing the experience of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the development challenges it faced due to its hostile relations with the West.

Thus, the alliance with the United States for Qatar meant accepting the rules of the game in the global system. This alignment allowed Qatar to: confidently invest its vast capital in Western financial markets; gain international support and legitimacy for its major projects such as the World Cup; and ultimately, present itself as a reliable partner and a "bridge" between the Muslim world and the West.

In effect, an unwritten deal took shape: Qatar received security and access to the global system from the United States, and in return, became a logistical hub and a reliable diplomatic partner for Washington's regional policies. This paradoxical relationship, in which Qatar simultaneously hosts the largest US military base and supports Islamist currents critical of America, represents the height of pragmatism in the country's foreign policy. Ultimately, the alliance with the United States provided the necessary security space and

international legitimacy for Qatar to confidently advance its ideological and developmentalist project on the regional level.

5.2. Qatar Among the Giants: Balancing in the Region's Ideological Order

The Middle Eastern regional order is not merely a multi-polar security structure, but also an ideological battlefield in which various models of governance and political Islam compete for influence and leadership. In this context, Qatar's two traditional neighboring powers—Saudi Arabia as the representative of the royal-Wahhabi model and the Islamic Republic of Iran as the representative of the republican-Shia model—constitute the two main poles of this competition. In such a tense and unstable environment, Qatar's developmentalist foreign policy cannot be seen merely as a choice, but must be understood as a strategic necessity for survival and identity distinction. This approach allowed Doha to transform from a follower and vulnerable actor into an active agent that, using diplomacy, soft power, and diverse alliances, balances against regional pressures. Indeed, it was the complexity and ideological rivalries in Qatar's neighborhood that drove the country toward constructing a "third way" or an "alternative model"—a model that is neither fully aligned with the Saudi model nor fits within the Iranian framework. The following examines the impact of interaction with these two regional powers on the genealogy and formation of Qatar's developmentalist foreign policy.

5.3. Relations with Saudi Arabia: Competition over Leadership and the Model of Islamic Governance

The relationship with Saudi Arabia has been, more than any other factor, the main driving engine and directional force of Qatar's developmentalist foreign policy. This relationship cannot be understood as merely a geopolitical rivalry between two neighbors; rather, it is a profound ideological confrontation over the definition of "Sunni political Islam" and the desirable model of governance in the 21st century.

Despite sharing the Wahhabi creed, after 1995 Qatar refused to accept its traditional role as a "follower" of Saudi Arabia and launched a project of "differentiation." This differentiation was implemented at three levels:

Security Challenge and Escape from Guardianship: Qatar's new leaders viewed Saudi Arabia's regional hegemony as a direct threat to their independence and survival. The 2017 crisis and blockade turned this perception of threat into an undeniable reality (Zafirov, 2017). Therefore,

developmentalist foreign policy was, first and foremost, a security-building strategy. By creating a network of international relations (with the US, Europe, and Iran) and gaining economic and media influence, Qatar sought to become an actor for whom a blockade or attack would be costly.

Ideological Challenge and Presentation of an Alternative Model: The most important dimension of this rivalry was in the realm of thought and identity. By supporting the Muslim Brotherhood movement and promoting a discourse emphasizing "political, media-oriented, and reformist Islam," Qatar directly challenged Saudi Arabia's model of "royal, conservative, and static Islam." The establishment of Al Jazeera as a platform for critical voices in the Arab world, support for Arab Spring movements, and playing a mediating role were all actions that stood in complete opposition to Saudi Arabia's foreign policy based on maintaining the status quo. In effect, Qatar sought to present itself as the intellectual leader of the modernist current in the Sunni world.

Competition over Prestige and Soft Power: Through massive investment in sports (the World Cup), culture (museums), and education (Education City), Qatar sought to acquire a level of prestige and standing traditionally monopolized by Saudi Arabia (as the host of the Two Holy Mosques). These actions were an attempt to build a modern and attractive brand of a Muslim country that could compete with the traditional and closed image of Saudi Arabia held in the world.

In conclusion, almost all components of Qatar's developmentalist foreign policy can be interpreted as either a reaction or action vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia. This rivalry compelled Qatar, for the sake of survival and distinction, to become an active, innovative, and ideological actor. Interestingly, the recent reforms by Mohammed bin Salman in Saudi Arabia and his efforts to pursue policies similar to Qatar's (in the areas of entertainment, sports, and foreign investment) themselves testify to the success of the Qatari model and herald a new round of this identity-ideological rivalry.

5.4. Relations with Iran: Strategic Pragmatism for Balance and Independence

Qatar's relationship with the Islamic Republic of Iran is a prominent example of pragmatism in the country's developmentalist foreign policy. This relationship, despite its ups and downs and inherent contradictions, serves a vital function as a balancing tool against the hegemony of Saudi Arabia and as a guarantor of Doha's independent action. This complex interaction is built on three pillars:

The Necessity of Balancing Against a Common Rival: The most important driving factor behind the friendly relations between Doha and Tehran has been the existence of a powerful common rival, namely Saudi Arabia. For Qatar, maintaining an open and friendly channel of communication with Iran is a strategic lever to counter pressure from Riyadh. This became especially evident during the 2017 blockade, when Iran, by keeping its airspace and maritime routes open, played a vital role in breaking the blockade and ensuring Qatar's survival. This relationship allows Qatar to demonstrate that it is not regionally isolated and has options beyond the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Economic Interdependence in Energy Resources: Sharing the world's largest gas field (South Pars/North Dome) has created a mutual economic interdependence between the two countries that drives both toward cautious management of their relations. This shared economic interest acts as an anchor of stability in the relationship and prevents political disagreements (such as differences over the Syrian crisis) from leading to a complete rupture.

Threat Management and Complex Interaction: Despite cooperation, Doha's relationship with Tehran is not free from mistrust and threat perception. As an Arab Sunni state and a close ally of the United States, Qatar has concerns regarding Iran's regional influence and its nuclear program (Naanaa, 2017). Qatari support for certain opposition groups in the Syrian conflict or hosting US forces are examples of this contradiction in the relationship. However, unlike Saudi Arabia and the UAE, Qatar has based its strategy not on direct confrontation but on management and engagement with Iran. This approach allows Qatar, while maintaining its security concerns, to benefit from the advantages of a stable relationship with its northern neighbor.

Ultimately, Qatar's developmentalist foreign policy benefits intelligently from its relationship with Iran. On the one hand, by balancing against Saudi Arabia, it creates the necessary strategic breathing room to advance its identity and ideological project. On the other hand, by avoiding falling into the trap of Sunni-Shia sectarian confrontation, it strengthens its brand as a rational actor and mediator in the region. This complex engagement demonstrates the high capacity of Qatar's foreign policy to simultaneously manage both cooperation and rivalry in a turbulent regional environment.

6. Conclusion

This research, aiming to trace the genealogy of Qatar's foreign policy transformation from a conservative model to a developmentalist approach,

addressed the question of how and why this transition became a tool for presenting an alternative model of governance in contemporary Islamic political thought. By applying James Rosenau's linkage model, it has been demonstrated that this metamorphosis was not the product of a single factor, but rather the result of a complex interaction and synergy among idiosyncratic, structural, societal, and international variables. At the idiosyncratic level, the findings indicated that the reformist and worldly vision of the new emirs, Sheikh Hamad and Sheikh Tamim, was the point of departure for this project. These leaders, understanding the imperatives of the post-Cold War era, sought to create a "pragmatic Islamic modernism" capable of linking Islamic identity with success on the global stage. This worldview elevated foreign policy from a tool for survival to a means of realizing an identity project. This individual vision found the necessary foundation for realization at the role and governmental levels. The governmental structure of "modernizing authoritarianism" and the concentration of power in the role of the "Emir" removed bureaucratic obstacles and gave this grand project speed, decisiveness, and coherence. In effect, instead of constraining, Qatar's political structure became the driving engine of this bold foreign policy. At the societal resources level, the convergence of "geopolitical vulnerability," "economic capacity," and "ideological orientation" formed the power triangle of Qatar. Enormous gas wealth provided the material fuel for this project, while alignment with the dynamic discourse of the Muslim Brotherhood supplied the necessary ideological content for differentiation from regional rivals. This linkage between wealth and ideology allowed Qatar to showcase a unique brand of "Islamic soft power." Finally, at the international environment level, Qatar intelligently exploited the opportunities of the global order to manage regional threats. The strategic alliance with the United States as the global hegemon provided the necessary security umbrella, while at the regional level, ideological competition with Saudi Arabia acted as the main driver, and pragmatic engagement with Iran served as a balancing tool. This multi-layered strategy allowed Doha to advance its branding and influence project with minimal risk while ensuring its security. In final conclusion, this research argues that Qatar's developmentalist foreign policy, beyond being a diplomatic strategy, represents a comprehensive political-ideological project to redefine the identity and position of a Muslim state in the 21st century. By intelligently linking the vision of its leaders, structural power, economic wealth, ideological content, and international opportunities, this country has successfully transformed from a follower "micro-state" into an influential "identity

actor"—one that not only plays a role in regional equations but is also seriously engaged in presenting and promoting an alternative model of governance and agency within the Muslim world.

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