Qatari Security: Geographic Constraints and Strategic Adaptation 2017–2025

Received: 11/04/2026 ***Accepted: 25/06/2026*** ***publication: 30/06/2026***

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Abstract:

This study examines the security challenges facing Qatar amid the rapid transformations occurring in the Arabian Gulf, and aims to analyze how it has responded to these threats despite its limited hard power and geographical constraints. It adopts an analytical approach that focuses on the main challenges, particularly non-state actors, the 2017 Gulf crisis, cyber threats, and regional conflicts.

The study concludes that Qatar has adopted a flexible strategy based on the use of soft power instruments—through alliance-building, diplomacy, and mediation—which has enabled it to effectively manage threats and transform structural constraints into strategic advantages.

Keywords: Security, Qatari Security, Small States, Security Challenges, International Alliances.

Introduction:

Over the past two decades, the regional order in the Middle East has undergone profound transformations that have significantly reshaped the security environment of the region. The intensity of regional conflicts has increased, competition among regional and international powers has deepened, and non-state actors have become more prominent alongside the growing relevance of non-traditional security threats. Together, these developments have produced a complex and volatile security landscape marked by a high degree of instability. Such dynamics have had direct implications for the security of the Gulf states, particularly smaller states whose strategic vulnerabilities stem from geographical constraints and limited military capabilities.[1]

Within this context, Qatar emerges as a notable case among the small states of the Gulf regional system. The country has found itself operating within a shifting strategic environment that requires it to confront a wide range of security challenges. These challenges extend from geopolitical transformations across the region and the rise of armed non-state actors, to intensified regional competition among major powers and recurrent regional crises that have affected the stability of the Gulf. This evolving security

[1] F. Gregory Gause III, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010, p. 23.

environment highlights the particular difficulties faced by small states in preserving their security and stability in a regional setting characterized by asymmetrical power relations.[1]

Yet the distinctiveness of the Qatari case lies not only in the nature of the threats it confronts, but also in the manner in which its policymakers have responded to them. Rather than relying solely on conventional military power, Qatar has adopted a multidimensional security approach that employs a variety of instruments, including active diplomacy, the cultivation of international alliances, and the strategic use of economic and soft power resources, alongside efforts to strengthen domestic capacities in areas such as food security and digital security. Through this approach, Qatar has managed to address surrounding security challenges with a degree of flexibility, transforming certain structural and geographical constraints into functional elements of its regional strategy[2].

The contours of this strategy became particularly visible during several regional crises, most notably the 2017 Gulf crisis, which represented a critical test of Qatar's ability to adapt to regional pressures and manage their political, economic, and security consequences. In response to the blockade imposed by several Gulf states, Doha succeeded in reorganizing its economic networks, strengthening its international partnerships, and expanding its regional relations. These measures contributed to mitigating the impact of the crisis and enhancing Qatar's capacity to withstand pressures within a turbulent regional environment.[3]

Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to examine the nature of the security challenges facing the State of Qatar amid ongoing regional transformations. Particular attention is given to the ways in which Qatar has managed these challenges through a security strategy that combines both hard and soft power instruments. To achieve this objective, the study first provides a theoretical grounding of the concept of security and its various dimensions. It then proceeds to analyze the principal security challenges confronting Qatar, before turning in the third section to the strategies adopted by Doha to address these challenges and manage their implications within a regional environment characterized by complexity and continuous change.

Research Problem:

This study seeks to examine how the patterns of security threats facing the State of Qatar during the period 2017–2025 can be interpreted, and how Qatari decision-makers have managed these threats effectively despite the geographical constraints that characterize the state.

Research Questions

To address this problem, the study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What is the concept of security and its theoretical dimensions, particularly in the context of small states?
2. What are the main regional and international sources of security threats facing Qatar?
3. How has Qatar managed these threats effectively through crisis management strategies?

Research Hypothesis:

[1] Baldur Thorhallsson, "Studying Small States: A Review," *Small States & Territories*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2018, p. 19.

[2] Mehran Kamrava, *Qatar: Small State, Big Politics*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2013, p. 41.

[3] Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, *Qatar and the Arab Spring*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2014, p. 112.

Qatar successfully managed its security challenges during the period 2017–2025 by adopting an integrated strategy that combined military and non-military tools, active diplomacy, and strategic alliances, enabling it to turn geographical and military constraints into strategic advantages.

1- The Concept of Security and Its Dimensions

Security is among the oldest human concerns, closely linked to human existence since its earliest stages. At its core, it reflects a sense of reassurance and peace and is commonly understood as the opposite of fear. Throughout history, security has constituted a fundamental condition for stability and development, as no society or state can achieve progress or pursue development in the absence of security.

Despite its central importance, security remains one of the most contested concepts in the field of international relations due to the multiplicity of its meanings and the diversity of its dimensions. There is no single comprehensive definition that fully captures its scope; rather, it is a dynamic concept whose meaning varies according to historical and political contexts. In the classical Arabic lexicon Lisan al-Arab, Ibn Manzur defined security as "safety and assurance",[1] meaning that one is secure and provides security to others. In this sense, it stands in opposition to fear and denotes a condition of tranquility.

Within the literature of international relations, Robert Jackson approached security as a normative concept that can be understood through a series of fundamental questions: security of what, against whom, for what purpose, and by what means. Similarly, Al-Haribi described security as one of the most difficult concepts to define and one over which no general agreement exists, noting that it lacks a precise definition that can be conclusively established.[2]

Among the most widely cited contemporary definitions in security studies is that proposed by Barry Buzan, who conceptualizes security as the pursuit of freedom from threats. Within the context of the international system, he defines it as the ability of states and societies to preserve their identity, future existence, and functional cohesion against forces of change perceived as hostile Arnold Wolfers, in turn, distinguished between two dimensions of security: an objective dimension, referring to the absence of threats to acquired values, and a subjective dimension, referring to the absence of fear that such values may be endangered.[3]

The diversity of these definitions highlights the complex and dynamic nature of the concept of security, making it difficult to confine it within a single analytical framework. This conceptual diversity underscores the need for methodological criteria that help clarify and structure the concept by identifying its principal dimensions. Accordingly, the following section seeks to outline a set of analytical criteria that contribute to a more systematic understanding of security.

[1] Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-Arab*, Dar Sader, Beirut, 1979, p. 140.
[2] Suleiman Abdullah Al-Haribi, "The Concept of Security: Its Levels and the Formulation of Its Threats – A Theoretical Study on Concepts and Frameworks," *Journal of Political Science*, No. 160, April 2005, p. 56
[3] Abdel Nour Ben Anter, "The Evolution of the Concept of Security in International Relations," *Journal of International Politics*, No. 160, April 2005, p. 96

1.1- The Nature of Threats as a Criterion:

Arnold Wolfers argued that security is fundamentally associated with the absence of threats, whether in its objective dimension or its subjective dimension. This perspective makes the study of the nature of threats a crucial entry point for understanding the transformations that have affected the concept of security. A historical examination of the concept reveals that the nature of threats has changed significantly across different periods. During the Cold War, threats were largely understood within the traditional framework of security, which was primarily military in nature. Military threats constituted the principal concern of states, and conventional power was centered on defensive and military capabilities.

However, the end of the Cold War and the structural transformations that followed within the international system led to the emergence of new interpretations of the concept of security. These interpretations reconsidered the earlier tendency to confine security exclusively to the military dimension. Contemporary studies began to incorporate non-military dimensions within the spectrum of security threats, giving rise to what has come to be known as soft security, which includes non-military threats that may generate economic, social, and health-related risks. In this regard, the Finnish Institute of International Affairs classified these soft threats into four principal categories :[1]

•Societal risks that threaten the cohesion of societies and their internal stability.
•Transnational threats such as terrorism and organized crime networks.
•Gradual or protracted crises, including regional conflicts and long-term disputes.
•Individual risks that affect personal security and fundamental rights.

Through this criterion, it becomes evident that the scope of threats is no longer limited solely to states. Instead, it has expanded to encompass multiple levels, including the individual, society, and the state. Consequently, the concept of security has broadened to include additional dimensions such as economic security, social security, health security related to the capacity to respond to epidemics, food security reflecting the stability of supply chains, and cyber security concerned with the protection of digital and information infrastructures.

In light of these developments, the transformation in the nature of threats has generated a broader analytical approach to the concept of security, which can be understood through two complementary dimensions: hard security, based on the use of military capabilities, and soft security, which addresses non-military challenges.

1.2- The Nature of Actors as a Criterion:

Historically, security was closely associated with the nation-state following the Peace of Westphalia (1648), which established the state as the central and primary actor in international relations. Within this framework, the state was considered responsible for protecting its territorial boundaries and safeguarding its interests through reliance on its own capabilities, a concept commonly referred to as national security. However, the evolution of the international system—particularly after the Second World War—produced a new reality in which the state could no longer exclusively monopolize the provision of security.

[1] Al-Haribi, Op.Cit, P.12

Other actors began to emerge as influential participants, including international and regional organizations, which were regarded by theorists such as Mitrany and Haas as critical elements in political performance and international cooperatio . This development became particularly evident in the role played by the United Nations since its establishment in 1945 in maintaining international peace and security, alongside the contributions of other actors in strengthening cooperation and creating spaces for cross-border stability.[1]

Based on this expansion in the range of actors involved in security affairs, three principal levels of security can be identified:

- **International Security**: This refers to the security of the international community as a whole and represents a more advanced stage than the traditional concept of world peace. It is linked to the integration of efforts among states and various international actors, including international organizations and multinational corporations. Robert Jackson emphasized that the security of individual states ultimately remains contingent upon the security of the international community as a whole, a notion often referred to as the doctrine of international security[2].
- **Regional Security**: This concept relates to a group of states within a defined geographical area that share historical ties and overlapping interests, such as the security of the Middle East, the Gulf region, or North Africa.
- **National Security**: This level is based on the internal capabilities of the state to protect its territory and preserve its core values from external threats.

Despite this widening circle of actors involved in security governance, the expansion has not necessarily contributed to greater stability; in many cases, it has added further complexity to the security environment. While international and regional organizations are theoretically expected to contribute to the maintenance of security, conflicts of interest among their member states have often generated additional challenges. Consequently, defining security through the criterion of multiple actors renders it a relative concept, dependent on the capacity of states and societies to adapt to this diversity and manage it effectively.

Within the framework of this study, Qatari security can therefore be understood as the set of strategies and mechanisms adopted by the State of Qatar to safeguard its security across its various dimensions. This approach takes place within the context of geographical and structural constraints that limit the country's ability to develop extensive hard power capabilities. As a result, Qatar has relied on the strategic use of soft power instruments—particularly diplomacy, alliances, and political mediation—in order to manage security threats rather than confront them primarily through military means .

2- Qatar's Security Challenges:

Any analysis of the concept of security cannot be undertaken in isolation from the security threats confronting states. The nature of these threats varies according to different theoretical perspectives. While the realist approach emphasizes military threats as the primary

[1] tawfiq Saad Haqi, *Principles of International Relations*, Baghdad: Dar Wael for Publishing, 2006, p. 50.
[2] Jackson, R., *The Global Covenant: Human Behavior in a World Full of States*, Riyadh: Obikan Library, 2003, p. 362.

determinant of national security, the liberal perspective expands the scope of threats to include various economic, social, political, and environmental dimensions.

From another methodological standpoint, it is necessary to distinguish between the concepts of threat and challenge. A threat refers to a specific danger with a clearly identifiable source that may cause direct harm to the security of states. A challenge, by contrast, refers to a set of transformations or developments that require states to adapt and respond, even if they do not necessarily rise to the level of an immediate or direct danger. Accordingly, the relationship between the two concepts is complementary, as certain challenges may evolve into security threats under particular circumstances[1].

Based on this conceptual distinction, the principal security challenges facing Qatar can be classified as follows:

2.1- The Rise of Non-State Actors:

The rise of non-state actors represents one of the most prominent sources of threat to Qatari security within the contemporary Gulf security environment particularly in light of the declining capacity of fragile or failing states to maintain a monopoly over the legitimate use of force. A non-state actor can be defined as an entity that challenges the state's monopoly over political action and typically possesses several defining characteristics: it is an organized entity with a hierarchical leadership structure, operates with a degree of independence from the state within whose territory it is located, represents or claims to represent a particular group—whether ethnic, sectarian, or ideological—pursues specific political objectives, and possesses various instruments of power that enable it to pursue these objectives.[2] In this sense, non-state actors have become increasingly influential participants in international politics.

Among the most prominent examples in the regional context is the Houthi movement in Yemen, which has emerged as a significant actor due to its control over strategically important territories and its capacity to influence critical maritime routes. Several reports indicate that the group has received technical and military support from regional actors, enabling it to develop capabilities in ballistic missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles[3]. Such developments represent a growing concern for regional security, particularly with regard to the protection of energy infrastructure and maritime stability in the Gulf region.

The rise of such actors constitutes a strategic turning point whose implications can be examined at two principal levels. First, at the level of regional balance of power, the consolidation of Houthi influence has contributed to a relative shift in power dynamics across the Gulf and the Red Sea region. Second, at the level of the nature of security threats, the activities of the Houthis have transcended the domestic Yemeni context to assume regional and even international dimensions, particularly following their targeting of the Bab al-Mandeb Strait—one of the most vital maritime routes for global energy trade. These developments have reportedly contributed to a significant decline in

[1] Kazem, K, *Contemporary Security Threats and the Transformation of the Concept of Security*, Baghdad: Center for Strategic Studies, 2022.
[2] Yassin Hadi Thajeel, "Non-State Actors and Their Impact on International Relations," *Journal of the Faculty of Law and Political Science*, No. 26, 2024, p. 271
[3] Baldur Thorhallsson, "Studying Small States: A Review," *Small States & Territories*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2018, pp. 17–34.

maritime traffic, estimated at approximately 55 percent during the first quarter of 2024[1]. Such disruptions pose a direct threat to the energy security of Gulf states, including Qatar, which remains one of the world's leading exporters of liquefied natural gas.

2.2- The 2017 Gulf Crisis:

The Gulf crisis of 2017 was not a sudden or isolated event; rather, it was the culmination of long-standing political and historical disagreements between Qatar and several Gulf states. The crisis unfolded shortly after the Arab-Islamic-American Summit held in Riyadh in May 2017, during which Qatar became the target of an intense media campaign accusing it of interfering in the internal affairs of neighboring states and supporting terrorism[2]. The escalation developed rapidly, culminating in June 2017 with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, and Bahrain announcing the severance of diplomatic relations with Qatar and imposing a comprehensive land, air, and sea blockade.

This crisis had immediate repercussions for Qatari security in its comprehensive sense. It revealed the strategic vulnerability associated with Qatar's geographical position as a peninsula connected by land only to Saudi Arabia through the Abu Samra border crossing. This crossing represented Qatar's sole land gateway and had previously supplied approximately 80 percent of the country's food requirements for a population exceeding 2.5 million people[3].

Consequently, the blockade targeted one of the most sensitive sectors of national security—food security—exposing structural weaknesses in the Qatari economy. Despite its financial strength, Qatar lacks extensive industrial and agricultural production capacities. As a result, the country was compelled to secure its food supplies through alternative routes, primarily via air transport from Iran and Turkey, which significantly increased transportation costs compared to land-based trade. At the same time, the government expanded its strategic storage capacities in order to ensure the availability of essential goods for extended periods in anticipation of a prolonged crisis.[4]

The repercussions of the crisis extended to other economic sectors as well. Qatar faced additional financial burdens related to pastoral activities after Saudi Arabia expelled thousands of livestock—particularly sheep and camels—that had previously grazed freely in Saudi territory .

In this context, the 2017 Gulf crisis revealed a structural security dilemma confronting small states such as Qatar, where limited geography can be transformed into a strategic instrument of pressure capable of threatening national security in its various dimensions—particularly political, economic, and food security—when regional relations are governed by dynamics of rivalry and power politics.

[1] Salah Janbeen, "Waterways and Their Strategic Importance: The Bab al-Mandeb as a Case Study," Al-Jaish Magazine, Issue 130, 2025, available online at: https://urli.info/1snZl .
[2] Abdel-Amir, A., *The Gulf Crisis: Causes and Implications*, Center for Arab Unity Studies, Beirut, 2017.
[3] Ezzeddine Abdel Mawla, Ali Hussein Bakir, et al., *Qatar's Resilience: A Model of Resistance to the Blockade and the Power of Small States*, Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, Doha, June 2018, p. 71.
[4] Al-Raji, Mohammed; Madawi Al-Rasheed et al., *The Blockade of Qatar: Contexts of the Gulf Crisis and Its Implications*, Doha: Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, October 2017, p. 27.

2.3- The Cybersecurity Challenge:

With the evolving transformation in the concept of power, security is no longer confined solely to hard power or even soft power. Instead, cyberspace has emerged as a new dimension of what is increasingly referred to as cyber power, largely as a consequence of rapid technological advancements. Cybersecurity has therefore become one of the central components of comprehensive national security, given both its strategic importance and the range of threats it presents to state sovereignty, stability, and critical infrastructure.

According to the United States National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), cybersecurity refers to the activity, process, capability, or condition through which information systems, communication networks, and the data transmitted through them are protected and defended against damage, unauthorized use, modification, or exploitation[1].

Within this context, Qatar is considered among the leading states in the region in terms of digital transformation. This orientation has been reflected in the development of digital services and the increasing reliance on technological infrastructure across strategic sectors. However, while this technological progress provides significant opportunities, it simultaneously exposes the country to emerging cybersecurity threats. These threats are often associated with what are described as fifth-generation warfare, which relies on the strategic use of cyberspace to achieve political, economic, and strategic objectives through indirect means, including weakening state institutions, undermining stability, and influencing the international image and standing of the targeted state.

2.4- The Challenge of Regional Conflicts:

The regional role of Iran represents one of the most significant structural determinants shaping the security environment of the Gulf region. This is largely due to Iran's considerable military and demographic capabilities in comparison with other Gulf states, in addition to its persistent efforts to expand its regional influence. In this context, the Iranian challenge to Qatari security cannot be assessed merely through the existence of direct confrontation between the two countries, but rather through the broader role played by Iran in reshaping the regional balance of power and the indirect implications this carries for smaller Gulf states.2

Relations between Qatar and Iran have generally been characterized by a degree of political pragmatism shaped by geopolitical and economic considerations. Both countries share the world's largest natural gas reservoir—the North Field in Qatar and South Pars in Iran—a factor that has contributed to avoiding direct escalation between them. Each side recognizes the importance of maintaining a certain level of stability in bilateral relations in order to ensure the continued economic exploitation of this vital resource3.

Nevertheless, the absence of direct conflict does not eliminate the security challenge. Rather, the challenge is primarily linked to the nature of Iran's broader regional strategy,

[1] Hashim, Abdul-Muttalib Mohsen, "International Cooperation in the Cyber Domain from a Value-Based Perspective: Russia as a Model," Hammurabi Journal, no. 51, 2024, p. 273.
[2] Gause, Op.cit, p. 45.
[3] Mohamed Dawood, "Why Attacks on Gas Fields Represent a Serious Escalation in the Course of War," March 19, 2026, online link: https://urli.info/1sol8 2026/3/8

which seeks to expand its sphere of influence across the Middle East through a combination of political and military instruments. Over recent decades, Iran has succeeded in establishing an extensive regional network of influence extending across Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen. This expansion has significantly affected the Gulf's security environment, making it increasingly complex and interconnected.1

One of the most prominent manifestations of this challenge lies in Iran's reliance on indirect warfare, commonly described as proxy warfare, whereby Tehran supports non-state actors in order to strengthen its regional influence. This strategy has contributed to the emergence of recurring zones of tension, particularly in Yemen and Iraq, exposing the Gulf region to the broader repercussions of these conflicts. Such tensions manifest themselves in threats to maritime navigation and potential attacks on critical infrastructure linked to the energy sector.

At the same time, escalating tensions between Iran and several regional and international actors—most notably the United States—place smaller Gulf states in a particularly sensitive position. Their territories and military installations may become arenas for regional confrontation. This dynamic is clearly illustrated by the presence of foreign military bases across the Gulf, including Al-Udeid Air Base in Qatar, which constitutes one of the largest U.S. military installations in the region. As such, Qatar becomes indirectly integrated into the strategic balance of power in the Gulf.

Within this framework, the Iranian challenge to Qatar can be understood primarily as an indirect security threat, shaped less by bilateral hostility and more by the broader dynamics of the regional security environment. The ongoing competition between Iran and several Gulf states, combined with persistent tensions in the Strait of Hormuz and the wider Gulf region, generates an unstable security environment capable of affecting global energy flows and international trade—two factors of critical importance to the Qatari economy, which relies heavily on exports of liquefied natural gas.2

Accordingly, the Iranian challenge to Qatari security can be described as structural in nature, arising from imbalances in the regional distribution of power and the expanding regional role of Iran. This situation compels Qatar to adopt a security approach centered on managing regional balances and avoiding direct confrontation, while maintaining diplomatic channels with Tehran and simultaneously strengthening its security partnerships with regional and international powers.

3- Qatar's Security Challenges:

Within the complex security environment surrounding the State of Qatar and the multidimensional challenges it faces, Qatari decision-makers have adopted a flexible security

[1] F. Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf: From the Iraq War to the Arab Uprisings*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2013, p. 73.
[2] Gause, Op.cit, p. 88

approach that goes beyond reliance on traditional hard military power.[1] As a small state in terms of both geographical size and military capabilities, Qatar has pursued a security strategy based on diversifying its instruments of power and employing a combination of diplomatic, economic, and military tools. This approach enables the country to manage security threats and mitigate their consequences without becoming directly involved in regional conflicts.2

3.1- Strengthening International Security Alliances:

International alliances represent one of the principal pillars of Qatar's security strategy. Doha has sought to compensate for its limited military capabilities by building defense partnerships with major global powers. In this context, Qatar hosts Al-Udeid Air Base, one of the largest United States military bases in the Middle East, which plays a central role in American military operations in the region. This reflects Qatar's strategic importance within the United States' security architecture in the Gulf[3].

This security cooperation is not limited to the United States alone. Qatar has also expanded its defense partnerships with several Western countries, including the United Kingdom and France, as well as with regional partners such as Turkey. These partnerships enhance Qatar's ability to maintain a form of strategic balance within a regional environment characterized by intense competition among regional powers.

3.2- The Use of Active Diplomacy and International Mediation:

Qatar has also relied heavily on active diplomacy as a central instrument for managing security threats and strengthening its regional position. This diplomatic role has been particularly visible through Qatar's involvement in mediation efforts in a number of regional and international conflicts, including mediation initiatives in Lebanon, Sudan, and Afghanistan, as well as its role in facilitating negotiations among various conflicting parties.

Through these diplomatic initiatives, Qatar has succeeded in cultivating an image as a credible and reliable mediator. This reputation has expanded the country's network of international relations and enhanced its standing within the regional system, while simultaneously reducing the likelihood of political or security pressures from regional actors.

Qatari diplomacy is characterized by:[4]

a) **Proactive and bold**: It takes positions ahead of others, as reflected in its stance on the Tunisian, Moroccan, and Libyan revolutions, and is not constrained by any ideological framework that limits its activities or scope.
b) **Non-dominating**: It does not seek hegemony or control.
c) **Reliant on soft power tools and methods**: It involves no threats, ambitions, or agendas to expand influence.

[1] Hashim, Abdul-Muttalib Mohsen, "International Cooperation in the Cyber Domain from a Value-Based Perspective: Russia as a Model," Hammurabi Journal, no. 51, 2024, p. 273.
[2] Kamrava. Op.Cit. p. 45.
[3] Ulrichsen. Op.Cit. p. 82.
[4] Nawaf Al-Tamimi, "Qatari Diplomacy and the Test of Crisis," *Arab Policies Journal*, No. 27, July 2027, p. 11

3.3- Strengthening Economic and Food Security:

The 2017 Gulf crisis exposed vulnerabilities in several critical sectors of the Qatari economy, particularly in relation to food security and supply chains. In response, Qatari policymakers adopted a new strategy focused on enhancing self-sufficiency and diversifying sources of imports. This was pursued through the development of domestic production capacities and the expansion of trade partnerships with a wider range of international partners1.

Qatar also invested significantly in logistical infrastructure and expanded its strategic food storage capacities. In addition, it strengthened economic cooperation with new partners such as Turkey and Iran, measures that contributed to mitigating the effects of the blockade and enhancing the country's resilience in the face of future crises.

3.4- Developing Cyber Capabilities and Digital Security:

With the rapid global shift toward digital economies, cybersecurity has become an essential component of national security strategies. Qatar has recognized the importance of this dimension, particularly given its growing reliance on digital technologies across critical sectors such as energy, telecommunications, and government services.

Accordingly, the state has worked to strengthen its digital infrastructure and enhance its cyber defense capabilities. This has included the establishment of specialized institutions tasked with protecting cyberspace, as well as expanding international cooperation in the exchange of expertise and information related to cyber threats. These efforts form part of a broader strategy aimed at safeguarding the country's digital infrastructure and ensuring resilience in an increasingly interconnected technological environment.

Conclusion:

We conclude this study by presenting our key findings and recommendations:

First: Findings:

Qatar's approach to managing security challenges is proactive rather than reactive, reflecting a strategic shift in how small states operate within complex regional contexts. Despite its limited territory and modest conventional military capabilities, Qatar has demonstrated that these constraints can be transformed into strengths through a flexible, multidimensional approach. The Qatari model emphasises the balanced use of hard and soft power.

Through investments in diplomacy, mediation, and international alliances, Qatar has strengthened its regional position and enhanced its credibility as a reliable mediator in conflicts spanning Lebanon, Sudan, and Afghanistan. These efforts have expanded the country's network of international relations and reduced the likelihood of political or security pressures from neighbouring states.

[1] Ulrichsen, Op.Cit, p. 115

African journal of legal and political studies, University Ahmed DRAIA of Adrar, Algéria
Volume : 10, Number: 01, year : Juin 2026
ISSN : 2572-0082, EISSN : 2710-810x

Economic and food security have also been central to Qatar's resilience. The 2017 Gulf crisis highlighted vulnerabilities in supply chains and critical sectors, prompting the implementation of policies to diversify imports, expand domestic production, and reinforce strategic reserves. Partnerships with countries such as Turkey and Iran have further mitigated the effects of regional disruptions. Recognising the growing importance of the digital domain, Qatar has invested in cybersecurity and digital infrastructure to protect critical sectors such as energy, telecommunications and government services.

These measures, combined with enhanced cyber cooperation with international partners, reinforce the state's ability to respond to non-traditional threats. Qatar's experience shows that small states can proactively influence their security environment. Rather than being a sign of weakness, structural limitations can be a source of influence when managed strategically. This proactive approach enables Qatar to adapt to rapid regional transformations and influence outcomes.

Secondly, the following recommendations are made:

- The need to continue investing in the diversification of power instruments, particularly in the fields of diplomacy and international mediation, in order to enhance regional standing.
- Strengthening endogenous capabilities, especially in the areas of economic and food security, to reduce external dependency during times of crisis.
- Advanced cybersecurity strategies must be developed in line with the growing scale and complexity of digital threats in the international environment.
- Expand regional and international partnerships in a balanced manner to ensure the diversification of alliances and reduce strategic risks.
- Investing in strategic foresight mechanisms to anticipate future changes rather than relying solely on reactive responses.
- Integrating hard and soft power instruments within a comprehensive, sustainable security framework.

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