

Beyond Hard Power: Qatar's Non-Traditional Security Strategy in a High-Risk Neighborhood

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Abstract

Qatar is one of the most fragile geopolitical areas in today's Middle East, a region of great power where it is sandwiched between greater neighbors and subjected to blockade politics and regional conflicts involving the GCC states and Yemen, Syria and Iran. In spite of such exposure, Qatar has so far eschewed the use of traditional military deterrence as the major means of survival, instead developing a unique security architecture based on economic leverage, mediation diplomacy, media influence, and strategic hedging. It poses a fundamental question: How is Qatar able to build and maintain a sustainable security policy in a region experiencing high threat without relying on hard-power balancing? This research asks this question theoretically by applying securitization theory (the Copenhagen School) in explaining security as more of a political phenomenon, as a product of framing economic, environmental and identity issues as existential issues that require an extraordinary response from the political actors. In its application to Qatar, it is argued in the study that the presence of non-military tools in Qatar's foreign and security policy-such as LNG diplomacy, Al Jazeera's discursive power, conflict mediation from Afghanistan to Sudan and alliance diversification-can be understood as effective alternatives to the conventional deterrence strategy. The research methodology is qualitative, and the design is single-case, in-depth case study, with Qatar as an instrumental case to study how a small state responds to existential vulnerability in a risky neighborhood. In this design, the 2017-2021 Gulf blockade is the key empirical event, which is the process of Qatar's securitization of economic and diplomatic isolation, and its subsequent mobilization of non-traditional security tools in response. The study explores the NTS policy record of the state of Qatar, and by comparing the account presented in this episode to the state's foreign policy record in general, it offers a securitization-based approach to the literature on NTS in Gulf foreign policy and small-state security strategy, providing a framework of understanding for how states lacking material power can build security beyond conventional deterrence.

Keywords: Securitization Theory, Non-Traditional Security, Gulf Blockade, Deterrence, LNG Diplomacy; Media Diplomacy, GCC, Economic Statecraft, Strategic Hedging, Regional Security Architecture,

Introduction

Qatar's role in the regional order in the Gulf region is an anomaly: a country with very few armies of its own, surrounded by larger and sometimes assertive neighbors, has always been very hard to coerce. Since independence in 1971, Qatar has had a number of vulnerabilities, such as being a

narrow peninsula with only one land boundary compared to Saudi Arabia, relying on hydrocarbon exports, and being caught between the strategic rivalries of larger powers on either side of the Gulf. The standard theory of international relations would suggest that this vulnerability forces small states to turn to bandwagoning or external patronage or to expensive military balancing to survive. Qatar has taken a much different path instead, focusing on cultivating what Kamrava calls "subtle power" influence that is built through carefully calibrated diplomacy, reputational investment, and financial leverage, rather than on building up hard power assets. (Kamrava, 2013) Instead of buckling at the pressure or engaging in military posturing, Qatar was able to withstand the impact with a mix of measures beyond the military and diplomatic arsenal, such as emergency import substitution, LNG-based economic resilience, an assertive media approach leveraging the regional reach of Al Jazeera, ongoing mediation diplomacy in a spectrum of conflicts ranging from Afghanistan to Sudan, and a conscious diversification of security ties with Turkey and, gingerly, Iran (al-Horr, 2019). In January 2021, the blockade was lifted after Kuwaiti and American mediation brokered the Al-Ula Declaration, during which Qatar manages to preserve its core policies largely without changes, such as the continued operation of Al Jazeera and its ties with Iran (Al-Fraihat). The question raised in this episode is far more than a mere Qatari issue; it is a question of how a small state can build a sustainable security policy in a high-threat environment without having to rely on traditional deterrence measures. The existing scholarship has so far tended to question this in relation to soft power, that is, Qatar uses soft power in the form of mediation, foreign aid and media diplomacy, and then further research questions this aspect in the context of the tests and adjustments made by Qatar during the blockade (al-Horr, 2019). This literature, although useful for enumerating Qatar's instruments of influence, is often a reflection of prestige, rather than a coherent security logic, which are functional deterrence alternatives when reacting to existential threat perception. A smaller body of work has started to directly apply securitization theory to Qatari foreign policy, such as the work of Dogan-Akkas, who applied the Copenhagen School's framework to trace how Qatar had 'securitized' military and political threats in the early phase of the 2017 crisis (Dogan-Akkas, 2021). The economic, societal and media aspects of Qatar's securitizing strategy, however, have been relatively under-developed in studies of the entire duration of the crisis and in its broader non-traditional security (NTS) policy record, and have so far been largely limited to military and political domains and the first few months of the blockade.

Buzan's, Wæver's and de Wilde's securitization theory provides a particularly valuable counterpoint to capability or soft-power-based accounts of small states security. The Copenhagen School approach to the concept of security is not based on objective conditions, determined by the material threat, but rather on the result of a speech act, a securitizing actor is a person who frames an issue – military, political, economic, social or environmental – as posing an existential threat to a referent object, justifying extraordinary measures that are not justified under normal politics (Barry Buzan, 1998). This approach also enables security to be "widened" from the military sphere and that it can be studied as a phenomenon in its own right and not as a secondary aspect of statecraft, whether economic sanctions, discursive contestation, or identity-based framing. In the context of Qatar, this lens implies that LNG diplomacy, Al Jazeera's rhetorical interventions and diversification of alliances were not just soft power resources gathered up for prestige, but rather a conscious securitizing strategy – a political construction of economic and informational insecurity as an existential threat calling for urgent, extraordinary countermeasures. The question this study raises is how has Qatar built and maintained a viable security policy in a high-risk neighborhood environment by using non-military instruments as alternatives to conventional deterrence? It points out that the foreign and security policy of Qatar is a continuous securitization policy in which an economic leveraging policy, a mediation diplomacy, a media influence policy, and a strategic hedging policy can be seen as the *de facto* equivalents of a military balancing policy

within a Copenhagen School perspective. The study is of a qualitative single case type, with Qatar as the instrumental case and the 2017-2021 Gulf blockade as the primary empirical episode, looking back at Qatar's NTS policy since the early 2000s. By doing so, the research hopes to move the application of securitization theory beyond the military-political fields and the initial stages of the crisis in Qatar (Dogan-Akkas, 2021) and to offer a more systematic, securitization-related account of small-state security strategy to the broader literature on Gulf foreign policy and non-traditional security-one that can explain how states lacking significant material power build security beyond conventional deterrence. The research challenges are to analyse Qatar's securitization of the non-military fields during the time of the Gulf blockade in 2017-2021, to examine the role of Qatar's non-military instruments as alternatives to conventional deterrence, and to contextualize the blockade episode in Qatar's non-traditional security policy history.

Problem Statement

In the face of such threats, mainstream international relations theory suggests that small states face problems of survival by resorting to military balancing, external patronage, or hard-power deterrence (Kamrava, 2013). Qatar is an exception, however: It had very little military power, just one border with a much larger neighbor, and was being subjected to blockade by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt during the period 2017-2021 without surrendering its fundamental policies, including the operation of Al Jazeera and its relationship with Iran. The instruments Qatar employed, however, are those of soft power: LNG diplomacy, Al Jazeera's media presence, mediation, and diversification of alliances, which is mostly presented as a prestige projection, as explained largely by existing scholarship (al-Horr, 2019). In those areas where securitization theory has been used, it is strictly limited to military-political aspects and the early months of the blockade (Dogan-Akkas, 2021), such that the economic, social, and media aspects and the entire span of the crisis (2017-2021) have not been sufficiently investigated. So there is a lacuna that a machine of a material weak state to build a durable, multi-sectoral security strategy without conventional deterrence is not explained through a system of systematic, securitization based explanation. In the context of a blockade and the Qatar State that endured it from 2017 to 2021, the study explores the functions of economic leverage, mediation diplomacy, media influence and alliance diversification as securitizing moves – not just a soft power instrument – that give license to extraordinary state responses to economic and informational vulnerability as existential threats, for generalizable analysis of small states' security strategies beyond deterrence.

Literature Review

Small States and the Puzzle of Security in the Gulf

The structural and neorealist theories of international politics typically suggest that small, materially weak states located between bigger rivals will either "bandwagon" with a protector or build up whatever hard-power capability they can afford (Kamrava, 2013). This is not the case with Qatar's post-independence developments. Kamrava sees Qatar as a "tiny giant," whose disproportionate influence over other nations and in the region actually stems from more of a subtle power: "financial affluence, an assertive and self-confident leadership, effective self-promotion, and a cultivated sense of indispensability as a mediator when other states are caught up in conflict. This is important for the current study, as it does not place Qatar's security policy in the traditional dichotomies of deterrence and bandwagoning, but it does not yet consider security policy as a formal theory of security; Kamrava's account is descriptive and is an account of the mechanism that explains why certain issues are treated as existential.

While this activism in Qatar's foreign policy ultimately set the stage for a counter-reaction from its neighbors in the Gulf, it was also responsible for enabling Qatar to act decisively during the regional upheavals of 2010-2013, through its mediation, financial support and media attention via

Al Jazeera, which gave it a foreign-policy punch far beyond its material value (Coates Ulrichsen, 2014). In his next book on the Gulf blockade, Ulrichsen carries this analysis further, documenting the political, economic, energy and diplomatic efforts by which the Qatari government absorbed and outlasted the embargo of 2017-2021. Collectively, this work forms the empirical basis on which most of the scholarship by others on Qatar builds, primarily descriptive and policy analytical and without a systematic theory of security, leaving the analytical question open in what way and why certain instruments were chosen and used as solutions to what were seen as existential threats by Qatar's leaders. One parallel strand of dissertation length work has taken a different perspective of Qatar's small-state security posture, that of resource diversification, and not simply diplomacy, per se. While the UAE has adopted an inward-looking approach to security, Qatar is following the model of a broadcaster, projecting power and influence via the media and diplomacy from an inward, haven-like place, argues Callen (Callen, 2015). The soft-power literature discussed below approaches the question of Qatar's instruments used not as prestige projection for their own sake, but as answers to a structural security deficit, as the diversification framing in this study would suggest; it does not, however, seek to explain how the instruments had been discursively justified as extraordinary rather than routine.

Soft Power as the Dominant Explanatory Frame

This soft power argument, that Qatar brings charm not force, was widely used in subsequent work on Qatari mediation, humanitarian work and sports diplomacy and that Qatar's tools are media, diplomacy, finance (Antwi-Boateng, 2013). However, the conceptual problem in the soft-power literature that is directly applicable to this study is that the instruments are seen as expressions of prestige and attraction, rather than functioning as satisfactory alternatives to deterrence in reaction to an existential threat. It is not so much as a state would want to be emulated or liked as a state, but more than a small state with an unprecedented multi-year blockade would see "LNG diplomacy", "alliance diversification" or "media strategy" as "extraordinary measures" and not "routine investments of the state's reputation." This is where the theory of securitization might help fill the void and this is a void which the current Qatar literature has yet to close.

Significantly, this is a limitation which is self-scrutinizing from inside even the firmest of the soft-power variants of scholarship. Brannagan and Giulia Notti identify a "soft power–soft disempowerment nexus" (Brannagan, 2018), meaning that the same tools used by Qatar to elicit international admiration for their efforts with the 2022 FIFA World Cup can be used to draw international criticism and reduce Qatar's image. Their account, which was developed around a small non-Western state as opposed to the large powers that originally formed the basis of the soft-power theory, is important for this study because it reveals that the proponents of the soft-power theory at least concede that such instruments can go awry and that there can be an unwanted "securitizing" response from rival audiences—one which does not resort to the securitizing vocabulary required to describe this dynamic directly.

The 2017-2021 Gulf Blockade as Empirical Terrain

There is already a sizable and growing body of literature related to the blockade itself. Highlighting the five policy areas discussed in the book—politics and security, economy and trade, energy and infrastructure, regional and foreign affairs, and defense and security—the blockade ultimately had the effect of reinforcing Qatar's independence, argues Ulrichsen, who provides the most comprehensive single account of the country's response to the events in the summer of 2014 (Coates Ulrichsen, 2014). The work of Fraihat is helpful for the present study in highlighting the diplomatic aspect of Qatar's mediation during the crisis without considering the securitizing logic that made such mediation urgent in the first place, a consideration that is key in the present study since it is the mediation that is being analyzed. Koch's analysis of the food-security aspect of the

blockade provides an important angle on the economic sector, providing an example of “geopolitical pressure” that Qatar responded to by quickly replacing imports and adopting new trade relationships with Turkey and Iran, but one that does not use the Copenhagen School's language explicitly. But there has also been dedicated empirical research on the aspect of the blockade that has captured the media, which, at least, does not go so far as securitization reading. In the initial period of the 2017 crisis, Ajaoud and Elmasry analyses Al Jazeera's and Al Arabiya's flagship evening news programmers, discovering that Al Jazeera has consistently presented Qatar as a victim of an outside oppressor and Al Arabiya as a sponsor of terrorism for Qatar (Ajaoud, 2020). This is valuable evidence of the kind of competing existential framing victimhood versus threat that a Copenhagen School analysis would anticipate the media sector to exhibit in cases where the media is an actor that securitizes on behalf of competing state sponsors, although it itself is not produced within a securitization-theory vocabulary.

Securitization Theory and the Copenhagen School

The theoretical framework that this study draws on the case of Qatar from is provided by Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde's *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. The authors question the mainstream view that viewing security as a matter of military threat and use of force, and repudiate the concept of security as something that has to be measured objectively, instead seeing it as an intersubjective process; that is, an issue is a security issue not because it poses an objectively measurable threat to others, but because a securitizing actor successfully 'frames' it, in a 'speech act', as an existential threat to a valued referent object, thereby justifying 'extraordinary measures' which would not be allowed under 'normal politics'. For this study, critically, Buzan et al. expand the security sphere beyond the military to the political, economic, societal and environmental sector, which also have their own referent objects and characteristic threats. This broader agenda is what makes economic sanctions, media contestation and identity framing subjects of analysis as security phenomena, rather than as peripheral concerns of 'routine international conduct' as they are in the 'soft-power' literature mentioned above.

Applying Securitization to Qatar: Existing Work and Its Limits

A few pieces of scholarship have directly applied the Copenhagen School to the Qatari case. In this regard, the most advanced application of the securitization theory to date is the one by Dogan-Akkas, which aims to explain the process of the securitization of Qatar's military and political sectors in the initial weeks of the 2017 Gulf crisis. The study is also significant for the ongoing research as an example of a securitization analysis of foreign policy and its viability as a theoretical approach and empirical analysis. On the other hand, Dogan-Akkas' analysis is clearly limited in two ways that serve as a starting point for this study. First, it is only applied to the military and political sphere, while other securitizing strategies Qatar has implemented – economic securitizing strategies such as LNG diplomacy and import substitution – and other securitizing strategies in society and media-such as 'Al Jazeera's discursive interventions' – remain relatively unexamined in comparison from this perspective. Second, it remains limited to the first few months of the 2017 crisis and does not examine how the securitizing strategy has evolved over the longer term of the blockade, and Qatar's non-traditional security policy track since the early 2000s. It should be noted that Dogan-Akkas' previous master's thesis was conducted in the area of all five Copenhagen School sectors, and not just the military and political sectors, as is the case with the published article of 2021, which is a narrower, more tightly bounded extension of the broader project from which it was extracted; the present study's extension is to the published article of 2021, which is a peer-reviewed article, and not to the master's thesis itself. (Dogan-Akkas, 2021)

In fact, the societal sector is the one sector that the one securitization treatment that has been published most recently by Dogan-Akkas has not covered. In Heeg's doctoral dissertation, he

securitizes Qatari society in the context of the constructed threats of Western cultural influence and South Asian migrant labor, and introduces a new regime-type, "laissez-faire autocracy," to describe the way securitization works in a context lacking complete freedom of speech and where actions replace the speech act as the main securitizing action. This dissertation does not treat the societal sector as virgin territory, but rather offers a foundation on which to build and integrate with the military-political results of Dogan-Akkas presented in his thesis, as well as the economic and media material presented in other parts of this literature review.

In addition, the theoretical potential of securitization theory to the domain of governance in Qatar has also, in recent years, been pushed into a new field that transcends the blockade literature. In the study, Seloom applies securitization theory to the Gulf states' governance of AI, proving that the UAE and Saudi Arabia too, securitize AI through narratives of modernization and discourses of regime resilience, creating what it calls "routine exceptionality" in Qatar with the Aspire Command and Control Centre (QCCC) constructed for the 2022 FIFA World Cup. Although this application is not within the 2017-2021 blockade period which is the empirical focus of the present study, it is nonetheless useful corroborating evidence that the Copenhagen School's framework continues to travel well-both across sectors and in time-to Qatari governance practice, thus lending a sense of theoretical warrant to the present study's extension of securitization analysis into the Qatari case more generally. (Seloom, 2024)

Synthesis and the Research Gap

These four strands of literature together identify and leave a clear and tractable gap. While the small-state and soft-power literatures provide a detailed empirical description of the instruments Qatar has employed in order to build security without traditional military balancing, they tend to focus on prestige projection as well as diversification strategy, rather than securitizing measures that respond to existential threat perception. The literature underlying the blockades of Qatar (Fraihat, Koch, Ajaoud & Elmasry) offers detailed sectoral accounts of Qatar's crisis response – including in the media sector – but it fails to apply a security-theoretic framework systematically across sectors. Securitization theory provides the conceptual framework to help navigate this divide, but its significant applications to Qatar are still scattered across the sector and period: Dogan-Akkas is only used in the military-political sector and at the beginning of the 2017 crisis; Heeg is only applied to the societal sector, and before the blockade's outbreak; and Seloom extends into AI governance, well after the closure of the blockade. It links these pieces together and maps them out in the economic, social and media fields and the entire 2017-2021 period of the blockade, in order to create a more systematic, securitization based approach to how a small state with material weaknesses secures long-term security, in a high threat regional environment, without relying on traditional deterrence.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on the Copenhagen school's securitization theory (Barry Buzan, 1998), which defines security as a result of a "speech act," a process by which a securitizing actor portrays a situation as a threat to the existential security of a referent object, thereby generating an extraordinary response that lies outside the realm of normal politics. Most importantly, this framework extends the scope of security beyond the military to include political, economic, social, and environmental aspects, each with its own referent objects and threat logics, enabling a consideration of Qatar's LNG diplomacy, Al Jazeera's discursive interventions, mediation diplomacy, and alliance diversification as securitization strategies in their own right, not simply as soft-power attempts to project prestige. It has been applied to the Qatari case and expanded upon the partial applications by Dogan-Akkas that are limited to the military-political sectors and the first months of the blockade, and Heeg that are limited to the societal sector and precede the

blockade. It has been applied to the Qatari case and extended from the partial applications by Dogan-Akkas, which are limited to the military-political, and the first months of the blockade, and Heeg who are limited to the societal sector and predating the blockade.

Research Methodology

Given that Qatar is an instrumental case, and the Gulf blockade of 2017-2021 is a major empirical episode in the study, the study adopts a qualitative, single-case research design, with Qatar as the case study. The first "hard test" of the securitizing process is considered to be the single, sustained multi-year crisis itself, which is followed by the second "hard test" of the process, namely Qatar's broader non-traditional security policy trajectory since the early 2000s. Since the decision-making process of the Gulf states is private, and with the exception of the 'securitizing move' itself (actor, referent object, and extraordinary measure), this unit of analysis is limited to the publicly available documentary and secondary sources, including official government statements, the thirteen demands and Qatar's response, the Al-Ula Declaration, Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya coverage, and existing scholarly works. The moves are analyzed by employing the qualitative document/discourse analysis, which identified the pattern of framing in the official and media sources, and the process tracing approach over the period of 2017-2021, aiming at demonstrating the sequence and connection between particular securitizing moves and particular extraordinary measures, findings of the analysis are triangulated across the sources and the study is designed to be analytical and to seek generalizability in terms of findings, as opposed to statistical generalizability, due to the single case design.

Discussion and Analysis

The evidence examined along the three areas of Qatar's response to the 2017-2021 blockade (economic, media, and political) strongly supports the central proposition of the study: Qatar's non-military instruments were "securitizing" rather than "prestige" aims and were underpinned by an implicit or explicit security narrative of economic and informational isolation posing a threat to state sovereignty and continuity. This section positions the empirical material in the securitization framework and unearths its overall implications for the phenomenon of small-state security strategy.

The magnitude and rapidity of Qatar's response is hard to comprehend with respect to the economic sphere, which is not affected by usual policy changes. The reallocation of tens of billions of dollars in sovereign wealth fund holdings to the finance ministry and the fast restructuring of import channels toward Turkey, Iran and Oman were short-term efforts that went beyond normal fiscal management, and the speed with which the blockade affected the regional stock markets in the first months, but only for the short term, is due to the fact that the authorities in Qatar treated the blockade as an emergency matter, rather than as a normal one, as shown in the research of Almarri. A similar conclusion emerges when examining the trade data from Al-Mal and Saad, with both finding Qatar's aggregate imports and consumers' welfare declined significantly in the short run but improved as diversification of imports and food-security measures strengthened. Read through a Copenhagen School lens, these findings tell exactly the story which the securitization theory outlines: an out-of-the-ordinary step, taken beyond the realm of normal economic policy making, justified by a framing of a blockade as a threat to the material survival of the state instead of a tractable trade row.

A more mixed picture occurs in the media and diplomatic field. Khatib predicted that Qatar's diagonal "of opportunity" approach to foreign policy would overextend the country's partnerships, and could lead to the very sort of regional counterreaction that occurred in 2017 (Mohammad Khatib, 2013). Interesting for this earlier critique for the present analysis is the fact that Qatar's securitizing instruments were not 'created' with the aim of facing the blockade, but rather had

already been in the works for years, and that their very visibility as an instrument of influence made them a target rather than a protector. Krieg's edited book on the anatomy of the Gulf crisis expands this idea through various contributors by showing how the blockading states' securitizing narratives and depictions of Qatar's alliance choices as a regional political threat clashed with Doha's counter-securitizing of the embargo as an assault on its sovereignty (Krieg, 2019). But the crisis was more than a one-way operation of Qatari securitization: it was a struggle for securitizing moves, with Qatar's non-military instruments proving robust enough to survive and ultimately triumph over its rivals from the blockading quartet.

This is supported by Qatar's diversification of its alliances and its energy diplomacy. Miller says that Qatar's investments in LNG infrastructure and long term supply deals were a "strategic hedge" that protected Qatar's main revenue stream from the coercive pressure the blockading states tried to bring, and that energy policy is no longer a commercial matter, but also a security one. Here, too, Soubrier's comparative study of Qatar's and UAE's foreign and security policies is instructive, suggesting that while the UAE has stuck to a more military-focused approach, with a focus on security partnerships, Qatar has chosen a more networked one, with a focus on building regional reputational capital. This is another sign of the study's portrayal of Qatar as an instrumental rather than a representative case: its securitizing repertoire only makes sense within a regional security order where for some neighbors conventional deterrence is still an option, but not for Qatar in practice.

Finally, the placing of the blockade in Qatar's policy history further bolsters the argument that the blockade was not merely a response to a crisis but rather a manifestation of a longer securitizing logics. In his study of the narratives of Qatari foreign policy between 1995 and 2022, Al-Etaibi documents a recurring trend that saw the Qatari government portraying each successive outburst of external pressure, each time from an ambassador's withdrawal in 2014 to a blockade in 2017, as an existential crisis that required a deviation from normal diplomatic means. This is an indication of continuity between the two crises as the securitizing strategy that the study identifies during its empirical episode is not only present in that one situation but is also part of a wider institutional disposition, thus adding to the analytical generalizability of the study's conclusions beyond the case analyzed here. (Al-Etaibi)

Recommendations

There are several recommendations for future research and for practical understanding of small-state security strategy in the Gulf emanating from this analysis.

First, further work needs to be done in a more comparative sense, using a similar sectoral approach to both other materially constrained Gulf States (such as Bahrain or Kuwait) to see if the pattern that has been identified in the case of Qatar does exist in other states across the region, or is unique to the specific resource endowment and alliance structure of Qatar. As is the case with many other contributions in the volume, Krieg's treatment of the blockade already points toward the comparative field, and may provide a point of departure for further such developments. (Krieg, 2019)

Second, future research needs to further involve primary Arabic-language government statements and Al Jazeera editorial documents more systematically in the discourse analysis process, rather than relying on secondary scholarship literature to a large extent. This would enable the securitizing act to be explicitly traced to the words that it securitized, which would make the causal connection between particular statements and the extraordinary measures that ensued more direct.

Third, as has been established by research on energy diplomacy and the security function of Qatar's energy diplomacy, and by Al-Marri's research on the role of the sovereign wealth fund in the response to a crisis, future research should focus on sovereign financial instruments as a

separate securitizing sub-sector-one that has its own institutional logic and is deployed more quickly than other economic instruments. (Almarri, 2020)

Fourth, researchers who build upon the continuity argument should investigate the aftermath of the blockade in greater depth to see if the securitizing instruments that dominated during the blockade have continued, become formalized into enduring policy, or have been shelved since the immediate crisis has passed. Fourth, researchers following in the footsteps of Al-Etaibi should look in more detail at the post-2021 period to determine if the securitizing instruments prevalent during the blockade have persisted, been formalized into standing policy, or been relegated since the immediate crisis has ended, as Al-Etaibi's argument of continuity implies but does not test in detail. (Al-Etaibi)

Conclusion

This study aimed to account for Qatar's ability to develop and maintain an effective security strategy by choosing not to rely on conventional deterrence in the face of negligible independent military power and a single land border with a much larger neighbor in the midst of the 2017–2021 Gulf blockade. Applying securitization theory to these three aspects-economic, media, political, and alliance-of Qatar's response, the analysis concludes that the actions of Qatar's LNG diplomacy, restructuring of its sovereign wealth funds, and Al Jazeera's discursive interventions, and the Qatari government's strategic hedging with Turkey and Iran, were all securitizing moves in the Copenhagen School sense: extraordinary measures to counteract a supposed existential threat, namely blockade-induced isolation, rather than soft power projection for prestige's sake. This reading is supported by economic evidence of the pace and scope of Qatar's fiscal and trade response by Al-Marri & Selmi & Bouoiyour & Al-Mal & Saad, by diplomatic and media evidence that a contest for securitizing narratives is underway that far predates and extends beyond the blockade itself by Khatib & Krieg, and by longitudinal evidence that this securitizing disposition existed before and after the blockade by Al-Etaibi.

The study has two merits. Empirically, it extends existing application of the securitization theory beyond the military-political sector and the initial months of the crisis by focusing the economic, societal, and media aspects of Qatar's reactions in one sectoral approach. It is possible, in theory, to provide a generalizable approach to the question of how materially weak small states can build durable security without resorting to conventional deterrence, by avoiding the idea that non-military instruments are merely a category at the end of the security toolbox when hard power fails, but rather the functional core of an alternative security logic constructed in its own right. The generalizability of this account of the dynamics developed here could be further tested by future research which would apply it comparatively across other small Gulf states and trace its persistence beyond 2021.

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