

SUDDEN SUCCESSION



Examining the Impact of Abrupt Change in the Middle East



Photo credit: Reuters

SIMON HENDERSON

Qatar Without Tamim

When Emir Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani abdicated voluntarily in 2013 in favor of his then thirty-three-year-old son Tamim, it was the smoothest transition in recent Qatari history. But Tamim's reign has been blighted by efforts by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to replace him with historically marginalized rivals. This study looks at what leadership may emerge in Qatar if Tamim, for any reason, is no longer the ruler.



Modern Qatar’s founding father, Jassim bin Mohammed al-Thani (r. 1876–1913), referred to the country as *Kaaba al-Madiyoom*, translated as “Kaaba of the Dispossessed.” The Kaaba itself is the cube-shaped Mecca building toward which Muslims turn while praying. By “dispossessed,” Jassim meant “an array of regional banished leaders, fleeing criminals, exiled religious figures, and other waifs and strays.”¹ Qatar still upholds this tradition, offering sanctuary to firebrand Egyptian preacher Yusuf al-Qaradawi, hosting an official diplomatic office of the Afghan Taliban, and sponsoring the influential satellite television station Al Jazeera.

A key historical event helps explain today’s Qatar: the 1995 overthrow of Emir Khalifa bin Hamad al-Thani (1927–2016) by his son Hamad (b. 1950), the father of the present emir, Tamim (b. 1980).² Hamad’s move against his own father, who had taken up residence in a Swiss clinic, was controversial both in Qatar and throughout the region. Other Persian Gulf states, principally Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates,

opposed the move, perhaps concerned that it created an unfortunate precedent that might affect their own countries. Khalifa, who retained control over several billion dollars of government funds, exiled himself to Abu Dhabi, the UAE capital, while Riyadh in 1996 organized a counter-coup attempt against Hamad. Additionally, factions of the al-Thani, a clan estimated to be around 20,000 strong, did not approve of the changeover.³

A more recent event defining Qatar is the rift that started in 2017, when Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt cut off diplomatic relations and transport links, including airspace, with their neighbor. For these countries, Doha’s alleged support of terrorism, closeness to Iran, and interference in the internal affairs of other nations justified the move. Credible but unconfirmed reports suggest that the UAE, with Saudi cooperation, was then plotting a land invasion of Qatar aimed at forcing Emir Tamim into exile and replacing him with an al-Thani more amenable to Riyadh and Abu Dhabi.⁴



THE BURDEN OF HISTORY

The grievances underlying the 2017 rupture are contemporary, but the various antagonisms of the main regional players—Qatar, Bahrain, the UAE, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia—date back more than 150 years.

In the 1800s, the Qatar Peninsula was controlled by the al-Khalifa family, which ruled Bahrain then and still does today. In 1867, the al-Khalifa governor in Doha, fearing for his life, fled to the western coast of the peninsula. In retaliation, Bahrain's ruler, Muhammad bin Khalifa, formed an alliance with the ruler of Abu Dhabi, known as Zayed the Great, and together they attacked Doha, looting the town and seizing Qatari ships. The British Political Resident in the Gulf, Col. Lewis Pelly—who represented the British government's interests in the region—regarded the attack on Doha as a breach of the agreement by the regions' rulers to not wage war by sea. Colonel Pelly went to Bahrain, where he replaced Muhammad bin Khalifa and ordered the new ruler—Muhammad's brother—to pay a large fine, which included compensation to Qatar.

Around the same time, Saudi control of the Arabian Peninsula was supplanted by the Ottoman Turks. A Turkish unit went to Doha, and the Qataris, still fearing the al-Khalifas of Bahrain, accepted Turkish protection. Tension also persisted with Abu Dhabi, particularly over the Khor al-Udeid, the inlet at the southeastern corner of the Qatar Peninsula. But Jassim al-Thani, the Qatari ruler, was over time disappointed by the lack of Turkish support against Abu Dhabi, and the two allies fell out. Thus, the Turks were reduced to a small garrison in Doha, had little authority, and officially renounced sovereignty in 1913. To bolster his relationship with the emerging al-Saud family in Arabia, Jassim joined their Wahhabi Muslim sect and paid them *zakat* (religious taxes).

The Ottoman Turks were on the losing side in the First World War, so Britain replaced them in Qatar. With Jassim's son Abdullah bin Jassim al-Thani in charge, a treaty was signed in 1916, by which Britain gave Qatar protectorate status and handled its foreign relations.

Abdullah nevertheless felt vulnerable to obstreperous tribes and rival al-Thani, as well as to Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. The standoffish British approach to Abdullah changed in the 1930s, when competition began between British and U.S. companies for oil concessions.

Oil and gas revenues changed the dynamics of al-Thani rule and succession. Oil was not discovered in Qatar until 1939, and its exploitation was delayed by the Second World War. Exports began in 1949, and a proper government structure emerged soon afterward. But the revenues were siphoned off by the al-Thani rather than shared widely. Emir Ahmad bin Ali al-Thani, the Qatari ruler from 1960 to 1972, personally took a quarter of the oil revenues. Described as being both idle and extravagant, he is also noteworthy for signing Qatar's independence document in 1971 while in Switzerland on vacation. Ahmad's successor, his cousin Khalifa, held much of the country's financial reserves in his own name. It took nine years after Khalifa's 1995 overthrow by his son Hamad to unravel the mess.

Although Qatar joined the OPEC cartel in 1961, the country was a minor oil producer compared with other members. It left the Saudi-dominated organization in January 2019, apparently as a consequence of the Gulf rift. Given its small population, however, Qatar's revenues were significant. But it is Qatar's huge reserves of natural gas that have made it a world-class player, at least in energy terms. Between 1980 and 2018, its proved reserves increased almost tenfold. Russia has nearly 20 percent of the world's natural gas, and Iran has just over 16.2 percent. But Qatar has 12.5 percent and is the world's largest exporter of liquefied natural gas, the form in which natural gas is increasingly delivered worldwide. For comparison, Saudi Arabia's natural gas reserves increased only modestly between 1980 and 2018. The kingdom currently has only 3 percent of world gas reserves. The United States has 6 percent.⁵

This hydrocarbon wealth has changed the geopolitical dynamics of the broader Gulf; in particular, it has affected Doha's standing with the other Gulf Arab states, which appear to be irritated that, instead of being still impoverished, Qatar is now empowered.

Meanwhile, relations with Iran are sensitive because most of Qatar’s gas reserves are offshore in its North Field. Beyond the bilateral maritime boundary, this field is contiguous with Iran’s South Pars gas field. Hampered by sanctions, Iran has been unable to

exploit gas in its sector as quickly as Qatar, meaning Doha’s share of the proverbial milkshake has been greater than Tehran’s. The details and terms of any understandings or agreements on the exploitation of this shared resource are not known.

THE RIFT*



June

Tamim becomes emir and Hamad becomes Father-Emir.

November

The first secret agreement to smooth relations is signed in Riyadh between Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Qatar.

March

The first Gulf rift begins as Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the UAE announce withdrawal of their ambassadors from Doha.

November

An agreement to settle differences and a supplement to the 2013 agreement are signed.

May 20–21

The Riyadh summit is attended by President Trump, as well as leaders of Egypt, the UAE, Bahrain, and Qatar.

May 23

The Qatar News Agency website carries pro-Iran stories, prompting condemnation by Riyadh and Abu Dhabi. But U.S. officials subsequently conclude that the UAE had orchestrated the hacking of the website.

June 5

The blockade starts and diplomatic relations are broken.

June 6

In a tweet, President Trump accuses Qatar of supporting terrorism.

June 7

The Turkish parliament ratifies two agreements to permit joint military operations and deployment of Turkish troops in Qatar.



June 23

Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the UAE, and Egypt issue thirteen demands of Qatar.

July 5

Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the UAE, and Egypt issue a statement laying out six principles for talks with Qatar.

January

President Trump thanks Emir Tamim for efforts “to counter terrorism in all its forms.”

April

Trump meets Emir Tamim in the Oval Office.



Although led by Saudi Arabia, the blockading group’s stance is apparently driven by personal enmity toward Qatar held by Crown Prince Muhammad bin Zayed al-Nahyan of Abu Dhabi, the effective leader of the UAE. Despite initial approval by President Donald Trump, the U.S. position has shifted toward neutrality in support of diplomacy. But efforts to broker a resolution of the rift have so far failed.

*For a detailed account, read Kristian C. Ulrichsen, *Qatar and the Gulf Crisis: A Study of Resilience* (London: Oxford University Press, 2020).

The following are demands of Qatar made by the blockading countries, as clarified for the U.S. State Department:⁶

1. Curb diplomatic ties with Iran and close its diplomatic missions there. Expel members of Iran's Revolutionary Guard from Qatar and cut off any joint military cooperation with Iran. Only trade and commerce with Iran that complies with U.S. and international sanctions will be permitted.
2. Sever all ties to "terrorist organizations," specifically the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamic State group, al-Qaida, and Lebanon's Hezbollah. Formally declare those entities as terrorist groups.
3. Shut down Al Jazeera and its affiliate stations.
4. Shut down news outlets that Qatar funds, directly and indirectly, including Arabi21, Rassd, Al-Araby Al-Jadeed and Middle East Eye.
5. Immediately terminate the Turkish military presence currently in Qatar and end any joint military cooperation with Turkey inside Qatar.
6. Stop all means of funding for individuals, groups, or organizations that have been designated as terrorists by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, Bahrain, the United States and other countries.
7. Hand over "terrorist figures" and wanted individuals from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain to their countries of origin. Freeze their assets, and provide any desired information about their residency, movements and finances.
8. End interference in sovereign countries' internal affairs. Stop granting citizenship to wanted nationals from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain. Revoke Qatari citizenship for existing nationals where such citizenship violates those countries' laws.
9. Stop all contacts with the political opposition in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain. Hand over all files detailing Qatar's prior contacts with and support for those opposition groups.
10. Pay reparations and compensation for loss of life and other financial losses caused by Qatar's policies in recent years. The sum will be determined in coordination with Qatar.
11. Align itself with the other Gulf and Arab countries militarily, politically, socially and economically, as well as on economic matters, in line with an agreement reached with Saudi Arabia in 2014.
12. Agree to all the demands within 10 days of it [sic] being submitted to Qatar, or the list becomes invalid. The document doesn't specify what the countries will do if Qatar refuses to comply.
13. Consent to monthly audits for the first year after agreeing to the demands, then once per quarter during the second year. For the following 10 years, Qatar would be monitored annually for compliance.

On July 5, 2017, the four countries gave a joint statement in Cairo, stating that the six principles for negotiations are as follows:*

Commitment to combat extremism and terrorism in all its forms and to prevent their financing or the provision of safe havens.

Prohibiting all acts of incitement and all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify hatred and violence.

Full commitment to Riyadh Agreement 2013 and the supplementary agreement and its executive mechanism for 2014 within the framework of the Gulf Cooperation Council for Arab States.

Commitment to all the outcomes of the Arab-Islamic-U.S. Summit held in Riyadh in May 2017.

Refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of states and from supporting illegal entities.

The responsibility of all states of international community to confront all forms of extremism and terrorism as a threat to international peace and security.

*See, e.g., "Quartet Demand Action from Qatar in Briefing of UN Correspondents," Permanent Mission of the United Arab Emirates to the United Nations, July 20, 2017, <https://www.un.int/uae/news/quartet-demand-action-qatar-briefing-un-correspondents>.

DOMINANCE OF THE AL-THANI

Historically, the al-Thani owe their prominence in the Qatar Peninsula to the role played by Muhammad bin Thani bin Muhammad, who, in the 1860s, represented the inhabitants in their dealings with the local governor appointed by the al-Khalifa of Bahrain. Muhammad also dealt with the British Political Resident, the imperial presence who effectively imposed a measure of stability in the Gulf. Muhammad’s position thus enabled the al-Thani, in return for their good behavior, to become the dominant family and for Qatar to emerge as a state. Hence, the status of Muhammad’s son Jassim as the father of the nation was made possible.

There are now an estimated five thousand adult members of the al-Thani. (Including children, the al-Thani are thought to number around twenty thousand.) The al-Thani can be divided into various branches and sub-branches. For nearly 150 years, Qatar has been ruled by the Jassim branch, principally the al-Abdullah branch. Within that branch, competition has centered on the Ali sub-branch and the Hamad sub-branch, but the latter now dominates (see box “Rival Lines of Succession”). The other al-Thani branches include descendants of the brothers of Jassim al-Thani, principally Ahmad and Jaber. All were sons of Muhammad bin Thani bin Muhammad, who lived from 1788 to 1878.

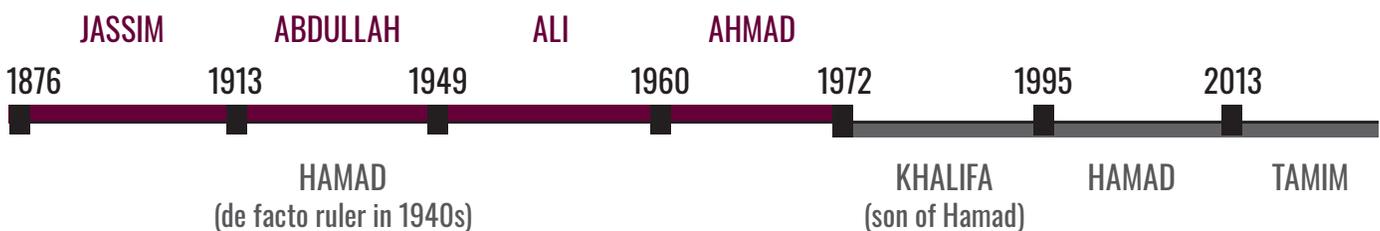
Another significant Qatari family comprises the descendants of Abdullah bin Ali al-Attiyah, who fought alongside Jassim al-Thani against the sheikh of Abu Dhabi and the Turks. The mother of Emir Hamad (r. 1995–2013) was an al-Attiyah and died soon after Hamad’s birth, resulting in his being raised by an al-Attiyah uncle.

All members of the al-Thani are thought to receive a government stipend. Further, they are thought to be represented in the family council that confirms new Qatari rulers. At present, however, only descendants of Hamad bin Abdullah are apparently eligible to be emir.

SUCCESSION IN THE AL-THANI

The most significant members of the al-Thani belong to the Hamad branch, named after Hamad bin Abdullah (1896–1948), who was never actually emir. The second son of Abdullah bin Jassim, who ruled Qatar from 1913 to 1949, Hamad had been groomed as his father’s successor. But Hamad, who for most of the 1940s was the effective ruler, predeceased his father, and the hoped-for transition from Abdullah to Hamad, and then to Hamad’s own son Khalifa, never happened. Instead, when Abdullah abdicated in 1949, his eldest son, Ali, became ruler. But Ali ignored his father’s specification that his nephew Khalifa, whose leadership potential was widely recognized in the family, should succeed him. Instead, Ali was succeeded by his own second son, Ahmad, who then appointed Khalifa heir apparent. Khalifa ran the government in the 1960s because Ahmad was disinterested, and eventually deposed Ahmad in 1972. Khalifa’s eldest son, Hamad, was appointed crown prince in 1976, after receiving more family backing than Khalifa’s preferred choice, his second son, Abdulaziz bin Khalifa al-Thani. With the passage of time, Khalifa’s own energy for administration faded, and in 1995 Hamad seized power. At least in succession terms, the result of these transitions has been the emergence of al-Thani family members who feel (1) that they have been unfairly sidelined, and (2) that historically power has been transferred, if not forcibly, then certainly without agreement or consensus.

RIVAL LINES OF SUCCESSION: TWO SUB-BRANCHES OF THE AL-THANI



ABDICATION OR USURPATION

Abdullah bin Jassim	1913–1949	Forced to abdicate by the British
Ali bin Abdullah	1949–1960	Forced to abdicate by the British and the al-Thani family
Ahmad bin Ali	1960–1972	Usurped by cousin Khalifa
Khalifa bin Hamad	1972–1995	Usurped by son Hamad
Hamad bin Khalifa	1995–2013	Abdicated in favor of son Tamim
Tamim bin Hamad	2013–	

HAMAD BIN KHALIFA: CROWN PRINCE, EMIR, FATHER-EMIR

Credit for Qatar's gas-fueled transformation goes to Hamad bin Khalifa, who appears to have relished the accompanying political challenges. He was made crown prince in 1976 despite opposition within the ruling family. Appointed prime minister in 1980, Hamad had to accept his father's choices of ministers. He was not able to form his own cabinet until 1989. When finally he deposed his father in 1995, the move was opposed not only by parts of the al-Thani clan but also by other Gulf states. A strong personality, Hamad is regarded as forceful and single-minded by his advocates, and as an inveterate troublemaker by his detractors. Despite his history of ill health, which includes at least one kidney transplant, Hamad's reign continued until June 2013, when he abdicated in favor of his fourth son, Tamim. It was yet another move met with disapproval from Arab Gulf neighbors, who persisted in thinking that Hamad, now titled "Father-Emir," remained in charge.

This view of Hamad's preeminence gained currency during a March 2014 diplomatic row, when Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain announced the withdrawal of their ambassadors from Doha over Qatar's apparent failure to live up to a secret agreement—then three months old—to not "support any party aiming to threaten the security of any GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council] member."⁷ The crisis

continued until November 2014, when Emir Tamim met Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah in Riyadh. The reconciliation was a consequence of Kuwaiti mediation, but the details of the agreement were not revealed. Two months earlier, Qatar had expelled some leading officials of the Muslim Brotherhood, and the day before the Riyadh meeting, the UAE had released a long list of Brotherhood-affiliated groups that it had declared to be terrorist organizations.⁸ Gulf concerns about the rise of the Islamic State appeared to be prevailing over other issues. The reconciliation meant that year's GCC summit, hosted by Qatar, could go ahead as planned in December 2014.

To the surprise of many observers, Tamim quickly emerged as a national leader in his own right. His position was apparently further consolidated by the 2017 diplomatic rift with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt, which had intended to weaken Tamim's rule to the point of collapse but seemed to bring about the opposite outcome. Tamim's administration has the same ideological underpinnings as his father's: in his first speech, Tamim declared that Qatar remained a place of refuge for the dispossessed, *Kaaba al-Madiyoom*. Without being conciliatory, Tamim's style is also less abrasive than his father's.

Since the 2013 transition, Father-Emir Hamad has largely disappeared from sight, both politically and socially. He spends much of his time traveling, and speculation in the Gulf remains considerable over

who is in fact running Qatar. While UAE officials assert that the Father-Emir is still a key player, diplomats in Doha do not share this view. Rather, the Hamad-Tamim transition represents a break from the past, when Qatar's leadership was so often marked by poor quality and abrupt change.

WHY TAMIM?

While neighboring Bahrain has tried to establish a system of primogeniture—succession by eldest son—Qatar's method has been anything but. Tamim is, as noted, Hamad's fourth son. According to Western diplomats, the eldest son, Mishal, was never interested in a government career, and the second eldest, Fahd, was considered by his father to be too interested in radical Islamist politics. (Hamad once told a Western ambassador that of his two eldest sons, "one [plays] too much; the other prays too much.") The first to be appointed crown prince was the third son, Jassim, who acted as emir for several months in 1996 and 1997 while his father was having a kidney procedure. But in 2003, Jassim, who did not enjoy administration and the accompanying requirement to solve al-Thani family disputes, voluntarily stepped aside in favor of Tamim.

Hamad is said to have made it clear, albeit not publicly, that he would eventually abdicate. Although a sportsman in his youth, playing team soccer, he became overweight in his adult life; in 2011, he lost much of this weight rather suddenly. Apart from the reported kidney transplant, Hamad has had other procedures and may even currently require dialysis. He also has diabetes. Tamim appears to have been the first of Hamad's sons whom he regarded as capable of ruling.

AFTER TAMIM

Tamim's own children are still too young to have any public role. Could Hamad return to being emir if

Tamim, for whatever reason, could no longer be the ruler himself? The short consensus answer is yes, at least as an interim ruler. But Tamim's siblings would be the prime candidates to replace him if he were to die or become incapacitated. Of Tamim's siblings, Abdullah is already the deputy ruler, but this does not mean heir apparent. Indeed, because Abdullah's mother is Noura bint Khaled, it is assumed that Sheikha Moza bint Nasser al-Misnad, the Father-Emir's favorite wife and mother of most of his children, would attempt to veto Abdullah's rise. Tamim has ten brothers and four sisters in total, but the following siblings, including one sister, are the ones to watch:

JASSIM. Born in 1978 to Moza bint Nasser al-Misnad, he trained at Sandhurst military academy and was crown prince from 1996 to 2003. Jassim is well-liked but not forceful. He has experience and standing despite not having wanted a leadership role.

MAYASSA. Born in 1983 to Moza bint Nasser al-Misnad, Mayassa is academically gifted and was educated at U.S. and French universities. She has supposedly said, "If I were a man, I could be the emir."

JOAAN. Born in 1984 to Moza bint Nasser al-Misnad, he was educated at the Saint-Cyr military academy in France and owns racehorses.

ABDULLAH. Born in 1988 to Noura bint Khaled, he headed the Amiri Diwan (ruler's court) from 2011 to 2014 and has served as deputy ruler since 2014.

MUHAMMAD. Born in 1988 to Moza bint Nasser al-Misnad, he serves as managing director of the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy, a role that includes leading preparations for the 2022 World Cup soccer tournament.

KHALIFA. Born in 1991 to Moza bint Nasser al-Misnad, he has experience in the security sector.

THANI. Born (year unknown) to Noura bint Khaled, he is often seen with his father.

AL QAQA. Born in 2000 to Noura bint Khaled, he

trained at the Qatar Leadership Academy, a local military institution modeled on France's Saint-Cyr military academy.

The following individuals are likely to be influential in a succession decision:

FATHER-EMIR HAMAD. If healthy, he remains the most crucial personality.

SHEIKHA MOZA. She is the most important wife of Father-Emir Hamad and the mother of Emir Tamim. A dominant personality, she exerts significant influence over the Father-Emir and would likely favor her own children for succession.

HAMAD BIN JASSIM BIN JABER AL-THANI (HBJ). The former prime minister and foreign minister, HBJ is very close to the Father-Emir, though he comes from a peripheral branch of the al-Thani. He is judged to still be a formidable political player, especially in foreign affairs.

MOHAMMED BIN AHMED AL-MISNAD. He is the Qatari national security advisor and a cousin of Sheikha Moza.

KHALID BIN KHALIFA AL-THANI. The Qatari prime minister and interior minister since January 2020, and the former head of the Amiri Diwan, he is very close to Emir Tamim. Khalid is also from a peripheral branch of the al-Thani family.

SCENARIOS

Any of the following three scenarios could drive Emir Tamim from power.

TAMIM IS FORCIBLY REMOVED OR KILLED IN A COUP. The 1996 Saudi-sponsored attempted coup, with UAE and Bahraini support, was a serious threat. Diplomats including the British military attaché, taken to see an arms cache discovered in the desert, reported that it was enough to equip five hundred men. One diplomat recalled that the plan was for Emir

Hamad and his immediate family to be slaughtered. The attempt failed, however, when one of the coup plotters revealed the details to Hamad days before it was to take place. There is little doubt that the possibility of such a scenario dominates security concerns for Emir Tamim and his top advisors. Indeed, reports that Emirati or Saudi mercenaries were planning a land invasion of Qatar in 2017, at the start of the current diplomatic rift, suggest that this type of scenario remains possible.⁹

In such circumstances, Tamim would likely be replaced by a rival al-Thani, although that person would have little initial legitimacy. None of the al-Thani who have been publicly backed by Saudi Arabia and the UAE as alternative leaders (see box "Rivals of the Emir," p. 10) appear to have much credibility.

TAMIM IS USURPED WHILE ABROAD. For the past century, the forced transfer of power among the al-Thani family has practically been the norm. But the displaced emirs were noted for their idleness and extravagance, which are not faults attributed to Emir Tamim. Tamim can ensure the stability of his reign while outside the country by fostering harmony within both his immediate family and the alliances he has developed to promote talent in other al-Thani branches. At present, all seems well within the inner circles of the al-Thani close to Tamim, but these arrangements will have to be managed carefully as time passes.

TAMIM BECOMES INCAPACITATED. The possible onset of ill health, which constrained the activities of his father, Emir Hamad, and may have even influenced his abdication, must be a concern for Emir Tamim despite his comparative youth. As yet, there are no reports of ill health. His father's example likely makes him consider possible time constraints of hoped-for achievements in terms of decades rather than his lifetime. It will also likely encourage him to make succession arrangements before his children become adults and can participate in government. In fact, Tamim's own father, Hamad, could be an interim candidate to replace him.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR U.S. POLICY

Even before the rift, U.S. policy toward its allies in the Gulf region operated in less-than-harmonious circumstances. Washington has important diplomatic and military relationships with all the Gulf Arab states, but maintaining these links while navigating the tensions among the countries can be challenging.

Doha has generally played its options well. In 2003, its newly built air base at al-Udeid was ready for American forces when Riyadh asked the United States to vacate its Prince Sultan Air Base. Since then, Doha has funded most of the expansion of the Qatari base and of the Camp As Sayliyah logistics facility. And it has been more lenient in allowing U.S. forces to operate from these sites—in terms of the missions allowed—than have other Gulf Arab states from their own territories. In addition, the new commercial

Hamad port, south of the capital, has been suggested as an alternative base for the U.S. Fifth Fleet, currently headquartered in Bahrain.

Yet Doha has also infuriated Washington, at least in the past, by failing to curb the sometimes inflammatory broadcasting of the Al Jazeera television network, particularly its Arabic-language channel. Along with its Gulf neighbors, Doha's handling of U.S. terrorism finance concerns, a consequence of historically loose banking rules, has also been problematic.¹⁰ These concurrent positive and negative aspects of the U.S.-Qatar relationship will likely remain in play to one extent or another in the future.

At the time of this writing and despite U.S. efforts, the Gulf rift looks like it will remain unresolved. Given Qatar's history, the rift could be the context for any sudden leadership transition. The 2020 coronavirus epidemic, likely to have a large impact on the economies of Gulf states already affected by low oil

RIVALS OF THE EMIR

The al-Thani rivals of Emir Tamim, backed by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, are as follows:



ABDULLAH BIN ALI AL-THANI is the son of Emir Ali (r. 1949–60) and the brother of Emir Ahmad (r. 1960–72). The most high-profile opponent of Emir Tamim, he was shown in the media meeting King Salman of Saudi Arabia after the rift began. Later, in a video statement circulated on social media, he said: “I am currently in Abu Dhabi. I was a guest of Sheikh Muhammad [bin Zayed]. I am no longer a guest. I am a prisoner.” The UAE denied holding Abdullah, and he returned to Qatar via Kuwait.¹¹



SULTAN BIN SUHAIM AL-THANI is the nephew of Emir Khalifa and a cousin of the current Father-Emir, Hamad. Sultan's father was Qatar's first foreign minister after the country gained independence in 1972.¹²

Two other members of the al-Thani named in media reports as opponents of Emir Tamim are:

ABDULAZIZ BIN KHALIFA AL-THANI, a brother of the Father-Emir, and

SAUD BIN NASSER AL-THANI, who is described as “little known.”¹³

In May 2020, the *Saudi Gazette* reported a third figure, **MUBARAK BIN KHALIFA AL-THANI**, had called for Emir Tamim to leave power immediately. Although he is described as a member of the al-Thani ruling family, analysts could find no record of him, even speculating that, despite the name, he may not be a family member.

prices, is a new ingredient in the rift. But initial signs do not suggest it will contribute to any early conclusion. Washington, meanwhile, despite an initial few months of seemingly siding against Qatar, now takes a neutral view; this stance suggests that the concerns of the blockading states either are not recognized or are perceived as exaggerated. But encouraging the resolution of the rift should remain a U.S. priority, particularly as it only complicates American policy toward Iran—which is Washington’s main regional concern and which arguably should be the principal concern of its Arab Gulf allies.

In April 2020, the Saudi English-language *Arab News* published a front-page report that Sheikh Talal al-Thani, a grandson of Emir Ahmad, was detained and being tortured in Qatar. Sheikh Talal is the son of the late Sheikh Abdulaziz, who served as health minister during the reign of his father, Ahmad, and had wanted to succeed him as emir.¹⁴ The tempo of anti-Qatar media reports, particularly out of Saudi Arabia, appears to have increased in 2020, including a fabricated report on Twitter, amplified by bots, of a coup in Doha. Whether this is preparing the ground for another diplomatic or even military intervention is not clear.

NOTES

1. David B. Roberts, *Qatar: Securing the Global Ambitions of a City-State* (London: Hurst, 2017).
2. Biographical data in this study is taken from *Tree of the al-Thani*, by Michael Field, whose charts of Gulf ruling families are widely considered to be authoritative.
3. Simon Henderson, *The New Pillar: Conservative Arab Gulf States and U.S. Strategy*, Policy Paper 58 (Washington DC: Washington Institute, 2003), 42, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-new-pillar-conservative-arab-gulf-states-and-u.s.-strategy>.
4. Simon Henderson, “White House Meeting with Emir of Qatar Holds Potential for a Deal, or Two,” *The Hill*, April 8, 2018, <https://thehill.com/opinion/international/382025-white-house-meeting-with-emir-of-qatar-holds-potential-for-deal>; Alex Emmons, “Saudi Arabia Planned to Invade Qatar Last Summer. Rex Tillerson’s Efforts to Stop It May Have Cost Him His Job,” *The Intercept*, August 1, 2018, <https://theintercept.com/2018/08/01/rex-tillerson-qatar-saudi-uae/>.
5. See “Statistical Review of World Energy—All Data, 1965–2018,” BP Statistical Review of World Energy 2019, <http://www.bp.com/statisticalreview>.
6. See Associated Press, “List of Demands on Qatar by Saudi Arabia, Other Arab Nations,” June 23, 2017, <https://apnews.com/3a58461737c44ad58047562e48f46e06/List-of-demands-on-Qatar-by-Saudi-Arabia,-other-Arab-nations>.
7. Simon Henderson, “Gulf Arabs in Crisis,” Policy Alert, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, March 5, 2014, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/gulf-arabs-in-crisis>.
8. Simon Henderson, “Qatar Makes Peace with Its Gulf Neighbors,” Policy Alert, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, November 17, 2014, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/qatar-makes-peace-with-its-gulf-neighbors>.
9. In his *Tree of the al-Thani*, Michael Field writes that the plot, as betrayed by an al-Murra tribesman, involved French mercenaries, a ship chartered in Dubai to carry an invasion force from the tribe to Doha, and Saudi intervention to “restore order.”
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