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**Qatar and Latin America:
Narrowing the Distance**
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Abstract

Qatar's foreign policy is analyzed according to its autonomous regional policy, its role as a mediator in international conflicts, and its branding strategy directed mainly towards the West. This paper aims to explore the relations between Qatar and some selected countries in Latin America. Although the relations are still under construction, this paper tries to identify some of their patterns, first through the context and aims of the first contacts among countries during the period of Emir Hamad and then the expansion of ties under Emir Tamim. The assessment takes into consideration the political, economic and cultural aspects of the exchange.

Alejandra Galindo short bio

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Introduction

Qatar is a relatively small state with vast resources of oil and natural gas. It has been in the limelight since the first decade of the new millennium. Yet, Qatar's foreign policy does not comply with the behavior of small countries' foreign policies that tend to conform to bigger countries from a realist perspective (Klausser, 2015; Kemrava, 2015). Rather, it has an active and autonomous role at regional and international level, gaining not only power, but recognition of its status as an independent country. This policy is aimed to assure its own survival and to deter threats that jeopardize its goals, as well as to project an image of a country able to contribute to the international realm through a strong branding strategy.

The display of an active foreign policy is supported by three interlinked strategies: economic and political liberalization, the pursuit of an independent foreign policy, and a state branding strategy (Barakat, 2015: 1). This results in the construction of smart power that enables Qatar to pursue and fulfil a role as an acknowledged international mediator, supporter of popular movements, host of the most relevant international events, and an important financier of global and local projects.

The political liberalization, initiated under the period of Emir Hamad, includes the elections for the consultative council of 1999, (women were given the right to vote and run for office since 1997), the establishment of the royal family council in 2002 and the amendment and approval of a new constitution in 2003. Political reforms were accompanied by an economic boom linked not only to the exploitation of oil, but also to the investment in gas infrastructure that made Qatar hold the second largest natural gas reserves, and the first exporter of liquefied gas in the world (EIA, 2017).

The state-sponsored projects developed the country in a short period of time to become a hub for international businesses, giving not only influence and projection abroad, but also contributions to promote identity, loyalty and social cohesion (Coates, 2014: 39). Nowadays, Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) managed to contribute to Qatar's international projection, through acquisitions and investments

carried out abroad, including the ownership of well-known international brands such as Harrods, shares in main European Banks, the purchase of Paris Saint-Germaine football team and the sponsorship of Barcelona football team...etc. The foundation of *Al Jazeera* news channel in 1996 also contributed in enhancing Qatar's presence internationally. It was the only Arabic news outlet to broadcast regional and international affairs for Arabic audiences and, through *Al Jazeera English* in 2006, to non-Arabic audiences. Although it is a private enterprise, it remains under the sponsorship of the royal family. According to Emir Hamad, this channel would project an image of a new State of Qatar (Cooper and Moona, 2009: 114).

Qatar has a wide scope of maneuvering since its security is supported by the United States. From the early nineties, Qatar has been the host of the United States Central Command forces, providing security *vis a vis* any threat. Therefore, since Emir Hamad, Qatari foreign policy adopted independent role from any regional or international power. From a regional perspective, Qatar enjoys close relations with Iran and Syria (before the civil war erupted), and maintains ties to Hamas, Hizbollah and other Islamist forces to counter the weight of dependence on the US and to sustain their independence from Iran and Saudi Arabia. At the international level, Qatar embraced multilateralism through: being a non-permanent member at the UN Security Council in 2006-2007, hosting the UN Climate Change Summit in 2012, and promoting the initiative of the dialogue of civilization besides other international issues. In addition to the fact that the country has donated large amounts of money to fund development and relief programs in more than 100 countries, Qatar has increased threefold the amount of money set aside for these purposes since 2011 (Al Thani, 2016).

In general terms, Qatar's foreign policy is analyzed according to its autonomous regional policy, its role as a mediator in international conflicts, and its branding strategy directed mainly towards the West. This paper aims to explore the relations between Qatar and some selected countries in Latin America, since these relations

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are under-researched. Up to 2013, there were very few works that analyzed the relations between the Gulf and Latin American countries¹, mainly because relations were not substantial. As relations with the countries strengthened during the new millennium, more academic work especially from Latin America, started to appear but none focused on the Gulf or on Qatar in particular. Since 2013, two books focusing on the Gulf and Latin America were published². In 2017, two books tackling the relations between Latin America and the Middle East were published³, but the Gulf region was dealt with in general terms. I hope this paper can contribute to the research on Qatar's foreign relations and engage more researchers with this topic.



As mentioned earlier, the cultivation of these relations is relatively new and is still under construction. We take into consideration two phases of Qatar's foreign policy, namely the period of Father Emir Hamad (1995-2013) as a period of openness and construction of an independent role in international affairs, and the period of the current Emir Tamim (2013-), constrained by regional events, but nonetheless active in its relations with Latin America with more focus on trade and investments. These two periods show the nature of the approaches to and links with Latin America. The opening of embassies and the closer relations with some Latin American countries is in tandem with the implementation of an active

1 Hardy, José (1994). *Oil: Venezuela and the Persian Gulf*. Caracas: editorial Panapo. In contrast, the academic work on the foreign policy of some Latin American countries towards the Middle East continued, for instance studies on Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela, among others focused on particular contexts according to the patterns in the countries' foreign relations and the global importance. In this regard, there is more scholarly work produced in Latin America than in the Gulf or Middle East countries.

2 Galindo, Alejandra ed. (2013). *The Relationship between the Gulf and Latin America: an assessment of expectations and challenges*. Cambridge, UK: The Gulf Research Centre; Galindo, Alejandra ed. (2016). *The Gulf and Latin America: exploring new avenues of exchange*. Cambridge, UK: The Gulf Research Centre.

3 Fehmy, Saddy ed. (2016). *The Arab World and Latin America: economic and political relations in the twenty first century*. Cambridge: IB Tauris; Tawil, Marta (2016). *Latin American Foreign Policies towards the Middle East: actors, contexts and trends*. New York: Palgrave.

foreign policy conceived by former Emir Hamad and the minister of Interior and Foreign Relations. The independence of Qatar's foreign policy coincided by the encounters with maverick Latin American countries such as Cuba, Venezuela and Brazil that allowed Qatar to explore Latin America further and gain support to its international role. In contrast, the foreign policy towards Latin America under Emir Tamim took advantage of the links already established to expand its relations towards more countries in the region and increase the opportunities and the channels to expand the commerce, but focused more on issues of trade and investment. The two countries chosen - Mexico and Argentina - represent new diplomatic overtures during the rule of Emir Tamim. In addition, they together with Brazil represent major commercial partners.

r approach to assessing Qatar's foreign policy towards Latin America covers three aspects. The political aspect which shows the importance of the South-South focus and the way relations are displayed; secondly, I will examine the trade and investment policy followed by Qatar and some Latin American countries to identify patterns and Qatar's attempt to diversify its economy; and thirdly,  will focus on the aspects of education and cultural exchange as a part of Qatar's branding strategy and its role in international cooperation.

This research is based on interviews with some Qatari officials and Latin American ambassadors in Qatar during a sabbatical semester spent at Qatar University in 2016. Electronic interviews with some people involved in educational projects were also conducted. The paper also uses primary sources from the Ministers of Foreign Relations of the countries covered in this paper, as well as material from press.

Forging the Links

In the context of building up an independent foreign policy, during the period of Father Emir and once the vast sources of natural gas was discovered and extracted, the Qatari government pursued active diplomacy by embracing multilateralism and by the expansion of investments and trade abroad. For instance, Qatar's government was very active in international issues following a South orientation such as the millennium objectives, the conditions of trade between the North and the South, and the importance of aid and humanitarian assistance⁴. This was reflected in the celebration of the Doha Round of Trade in 2000 and Qatar's role in the Group of 77 plus China, which presided in 2005 through the South Summit in Doha and the presentation of its initiative to start a South Fund. It was also reflected in its participation in the Non-Aligned Movement. Qatar was carving its status as an independent country but was also building relations with other countries to strengthen its status and gain acknowledgment as a committed member of the international community. In this context, Qatar became a permanent observer at the Organization of American States in 2002, giving donations for the peace fund, scholarships, and the Art Museum of the Americas (OAS, 2015).

Although Cuba was the first Latin American country to open an embassy in Qatar in 1994, followed by Venezuela in 2003, Qatar opened its embassy in Cuba in 2001. The first high ranking exchange of visits occurred in 2000 when the Father Emir Hamad visited Cuba and Fidel Castro visited Qatar the following year. In 2006, Father Emir visited the Caribbean island once more for the Non-Aligned movement summit in 2008. According to the press, the relations between father Emir and Fidel Castro were strong, reflected in the exchange of visits by high-ranking Qatari and Cuban officials, and most importantly, by the presence of father Emir in the Funeral of Fidel Castro in 2016.

During the nineties, the only Cuban embassy in the Gulf was in Qatar. Its main objective was to be present in a region that was changing rapidly and at the same

⁴ See the speeches delivered by Qatar's government at the United Nations General Assembly (2000-2010).

time, it was an opportunity to find economic and strategic partners to support Cuba against the US blockage (Ernesto Plascencia, 2016). The cooperation between the two countries has focused mainly on the health sector, from the beginning some medical staff started to work in Qatar, culminating in the establishment of the *Cuban Hospital* in Dukhan in 2012, which has more than 450 Cuban staff.

Its big impulse towards the region started from 2005 onwards when Qatar started to open embassies in other regions, and participated as a non-permanent member of UN Security Council. However, the Summit of South American and Arab Countries (ASPA) in Brasilia provided the opportunity to explore other market opportunities among the regions and to promote South-South cooperation. Brazil was behind this initiative under the leadership of President Ignacio Lula da Silva. According to the former Brazilian Minister of Foreign Affairs, the summit facilitated regional dialogue between two regions which were distant from each other until then. Besides other positive effects of this interregional dialogue, there was a significant growth of trade and investments among the countries, especially with Brazil. Indeed, the trade with this region “was largely responsible for Brazil largest trade surplus in the world”, before the turmoil of the Arab Spring (Amorim, 2011: 52-53).

Although rapprochement between Brazil and Qatar was initiated during the nineties through multilateralism, especially after the two countries were major protagonists in the Doha round of trade negotiations in 2001, the real encounter was during this phase of strengthening South links between both governments. Both countries exchanged embassies in 2005⁵. For Qatar, Brazil represented a gateway to South America, as well as being one of the largest economies in Latin America. For Brazil, Qatar was a central partner in the Middle East, which was an important scenario for Lula’s government to construct the image of a leading country fulfilling a global role; after all, Brazil was pursuing its goal to become a

⁵ Qatar had opened an embassy in Brazil in 1997, but it closed down due to the lack of reciprocity. It is important to mention that Dominican Republic also opened an Embassy in Qatar in 2005 and Qatar opened its embassy in this country i in 2007.

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permanent member of United Nations Security Council. It is worth emphasizing that Brazil, in contrast to other Latin American countries, has been present in the region, and its involvement in the Gulf region is marked by trade. Its office of investment promotion (APEX) was established in Dubai as of 2002. Also, Brazil is the chief exporter of beef and chicken to the Gulf countries. In Qatar, there is a number of Brazilians working in the field of medicine, sports, Qatar Airways personnel, as well as the cooperation and contacts through the Qatari representative to UN, according to the former Qatari ambassador to Brazil and representative to this international organization (Al Bader, March 26, 2016). In other words, the economic exchange that existed between the two countries and Brazil's trade contributed to consolidate the relations with Qatar.

Qatar hosted the second ASPA Summit in 2009 and, as in the first summit, it increased the interest of both parties - Qatar and Latin American countries – in activating the relations. For instance, the opening of Qatar's embassies in Latin America is noteworthy, reflecting Latin American countries' growing interest in this region. These embassies included Uruguay (2010), Costa Rica (2011), Ecuador and Panama (2012), Argentina (2013), and Mexico and Paraguay (2014), with a total of 13 diplomatic representations in the region.

The relationship with Brazil strengthened with the visit of Father Emir in 2010 to Brazil and with lunching flights by Qatar Airways to Sao Paulo. Also Her Highness Sheikha Moza, visited Brazil on two more occasions. First, in 2010 she attended the Third Forum of the Alliance of Civilizations, and later in 2013 she visited Brazil to see the education projects supported by Qatar Foundation (Brazil Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017). Brazil also contributed to becoming closer to Qatar and the region, a process which was marked by two important issues. First it was its support for the Palestinian state recognition in 2010, in which was followed by other Latin American countries. The vote in favor of allowing Palestine to be a full member of UNESCO in 2011 and the following year also the vote in favor of Palestine as a non-member observer at the United

Nations. Even in 2009, Lula offered Brazil to become a member of the Quartet in the negotiations of the Arab Israeli conflict, “the problems of the Arabs are inside the hearts of the south Americans (BBC, April 1, 2009)”, a proposal that was well-received by the president of the League of Arab Nations and the Foreign Affairs Minister of Palestine. Brazil’s attempts to play a bigger role in the Arab Israeli conflict can be regarded as part of a strategy to gain more credibility internationally (Brun, 2013: 164). Secondly, together with Turkey, Brazil attempted to overpass the deadlock on sanctions imposed on Iran. Together they tried to convince Iran to send its uranium abroad for enrichment in return for international recognition of its right to civil nuclear energy. But, despite obtaining a public agreement with Iran through Tehran Declaration, a resolution on the reinforcement of sanctions on Iran was passed by the UNSC.

Most of the agreements between the countries were achieved by Lula and Father Emir in the fields of culture, sports, tourism and news services, as well as several MoUs between the Olympic committees of countries, national libraries, air transport, and a mechanism of political consultations. During Dilma Rousseff’s presidential period, the relations between the countries continued to grow by the formation of the Brazilian -Qatari Business council in 2013, an initiative that was consolidated during the visit of the President to Qatar in 2014, in which they agreed to form a joint committee to explore opportunities in the fields of natural gas, defense, education, and infrastructure (Portal Brasil: November 12, 2014). On the other hand, President Rousseff’s interest was towards fostering opportunities in educational areas, as well as the programs sponsored by the Qatar foundation in Brazil, the objective was to include Qatar in the National program of “Ciencia Sin Fronteras”, as we are going to see in the section on education and culture this topic. The year 2014 marked forty years of relations between the two countries, and Qatar celebrated the year with activities to promote Brazilian culture in Qatar. If with Father Emir, the relations were focused on advancing South-South cooperation, it is relevant to highlight that despite the limits imposed on the context of the Arab revolts in the Middle East, Emir Tamim has, over four years,

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carried out two tours to Latin America between 2013-2016, in contrast to his father who traveled to Latin America only twice in 18 years. Also, thanks to experience earned in dealings with Latin American countries, the formalization of relations and the exchange with other countries has taken another rhythm.

In the case of recent exchanges of embassies, Argentina and Mexico offered a good example of how quick the links and a type of policy more focused on trade and investments have become established. Argentina exchanged the opening of embassies in 2013, after an exchange of visits by the two heads of state. As we previously stated, Qatari foreign policy of diversifying links also intersected with the objectives of Argentinean foreign policy which tried to enhance its relations with South countries. For Argentina this approach corresponded to the country's self-perception and as a part of a strategy aimed to strengthen its international presence and increase commercial exchange (Fabani, 2016: 127).

The two countries increased their links through ASPA and the G77 when Argentina occupied its presidency (2010-2011). Furthermore, the start of commercial flights between Doha and Buenos Aires through Qatar Airways in 2010 contributed to shorten the distance and promoted the exchange between the countries. Father Emir visited Argentina for the first time in 2010 in a tour that took him also to Brazil, Venezuela and Costa Rica. President Cristina Kirchner also paid a visit to Qatar in 2011, after being in Doha in 2009 for the ASPA gathering. During these first encounters, the Argentinean and Qatari governments subscribed several agreements. The first was on convening a mixed commission develops interest for cooperation and exchange between the two countries, while the other focused on the fields of culture, science and technology, tourism and international cooperation (Clarín, 18 de enero 2010). All these encounters and exchanges paved the way for the opening of both embassies in 2013.

The interest of Argentina is shown with the number of visits that officials and businesspeople made to Qatar, and vice versa such as the visit of the Minister of

Tourism and the Minister of Production of the province of Buenos Aires in 2014. On the other hand, the realization of several commercial tours by Argentines to Qatar, among which the one headed by the former governor of Mendoza in 2013, followed by a commercial mission under the Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2014 that also visited Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates.

Later in November 2015, the Argentinean Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs visited Qatar to continue to identify and consolidate the exchange in areas of interest for the two countries, especially those related to technical cooperation, education, and research. In this visit the Argentinean official acknowledged Qatar's support on the issue of the Malvinas, and on the approval of a multilateral framework for the restructuring of debt at United Nations (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto, Press Note 274/15, November 9, 2015). Cooperation in the last years of President Kirchner's administration has been in terms of the possibilities to cooperate with Qatar Foundation and the agreement to provide Argentina with liquified gas.

Argentinean foreign policy with the new president, Mauricio Macri, continued with the diversification of relations and trade. A meaningful act that pointed to the importance of the relations between the two countries was the attendance of the Qatari Minister of Development at the investiture of the new president in Argentina. On the other hand, the new Emir followed the activation of bilateral exchange. Emir Tamim visited Argentina in 2016 and other agreements were signed: an MoU on cooperation in the legal field between the Qatari and Argentinean Ministers of Justice; an MoU on cooperation regarding diplomatic training between both countries' Diplomatic Institutes; and an MoU on holding political consultations between Qatar's Foreign Ministry and Argentina's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship (Qatar Tribune, July 30, 2016). Nevertheless, they promised to accelerate the review of other draft agreements such as an agreement on the stimulation and protection of mutual investments, a draft MoU on cooperation in the agricultural field, a draft MoU on cooperation in the field of education, higher education and

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scientific research, and a draft MoU on cooperation in the sports field, among others (Qatar Tribune, July 30, 2016).

Macri reciprocated the visit of Emir Tamim in August 2016 with a meeting that followed up the areas of cooperation identified and a discussion of the mechanism to enhance the bilateral relations. Later in November, Gabriela Michetti visited Qatar and signed an agreement of promotion and protection of investments, as well as an important deal whereby Qatar will invest in projects of infrastructure and energy (El Clarín, November 7, 2016)⁶.

As we have seen, in three years, Argentina and Qatar have established good bases to promote the exchange between the two countries although the formal relation and the steps to formalize the cooperation are still in construction. There are two main areas of cooperation according to the Argentinean ambassador: the area of sports, where Argentina has a worldwide known long tradition of governmental sport programs and highly qualified personnel, there are at Qatar Argentinian technicians, physical trainers, sports instructors.etc. Another area of cooperation is agribusiness, where also has a strong exports base and experience in halal markets as well as the development in technology for agriculture and the cattle industry (Surballe, March 16, 2016).

In the case of Mexico, several inroads have been made since the administration of Felipe Calderón. For the first time, the Gulf Cooperation countries were targeted as an objective in terms of the diversification of foreign relations and cooperation. The agency of promotion of trade and investment, ProMéxico, opened its office in Dubai in 2007 and lasted for five years due to the opening of the Mexican Embassy in Abu Dhabi. Since 2007, several visits were made by Mexican officials to the Gulf countries including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates and Qatar (Galindo, 2012: 104-106). After those trips, the idea of the exchange of opening

⁶ GulfThis agreement caused controversy in Argentina, due to some of the clauses that imply an offshore management of the money, among others. There is a judicial case under way. See: <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/6059-memorandum-sospechoso>

embassies between Qatar and Mexico was expressed by both sides. Also, it is worth emphasizing that through these first steps, cooperation between Mexico and Qatar developed. For instance, Qatar and Mexico cooperated in the preparation of the United Nations Summit on Development in 2008, which was a continuation of the Monterrey Consensus. Qatar also supported the candidacy of Mexico as non-permanent member of the Security Council. In return, Mexico supported Qatar's membership to the United Nations Economic and Social Council (Segundo Informe de Labores de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 2008:78).

Under the new president, Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-2018), Mexico's interest in the Gulf meant that it continued to enhance relations with the Gulf Cooperation Countries and to have more presence in the Middle East in general in order to attract investments and diversify exports. The major reforms in Mexico – in the fields of education, telecommunication and the upcoming approval of the reform of energy - were conditions that allowed the Mexican government to promote Mexico abroad in order to attract investments especially in areas of energy and infrastructure as well as cooperation in technology.

It was notorious that one of the first tours to the Middle East by the then new Minister of Foreign Affairs was to Gulf countries (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates and Qatar) accompanied by the heads of Mexican agencies such as the Council of Science and Technology (CONACYT), the Mexican Bank of Exports (Bancomext), the Promotion of Trade and Investments ProMéxico and the Fund for Infrastructure in 2014 (Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores-SRE: February 28, 2014). In his visit to Saudi Arabia, the general agreement of commerce between Mexico and the GCC was signed. Also in Qatar, with the Emir Tamim, they announced the exchange of embassies, a project that had been planned for Mexico since the previous administration. Finally Qatar opened its Mexican embassy in 2014 and Mexico in 2015. Also, an office of Proméxico attached to the embassy was opened in 2015. Later in the same year, another delegation headed by the vice-minister toured the same Gulf countries to continue with the projects and

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commitments delivered by the Minister. This time, the delegation counted on the participation of some businesspeople, besides the presence of representatives of the governmental agencies (SRE: September 7, 2014).

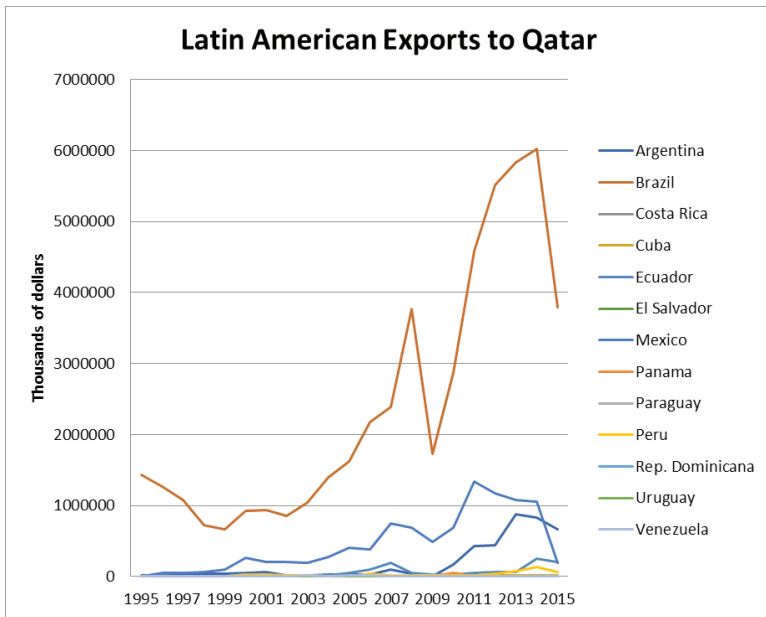
Emir Tamim visited Mexico in 2015, marking the anniversary of forty years of diplomatic ties between the two countries. It was the first visit by a Qatari Emir to this country. Five agreements were signed, among which was an air service agreement, agreement on technical cooperation, an MoU between the Central Bank of Qatar and the Mexican Bank, an MoU between the Mexican Business Council of Trade, and Technology and the Qatari Chamber of Commerce, among others (SRE: November, 24, 2015). This visit was also reciprocated by the Mexican President during his official tour to the Gulf countries that included Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, and Qatar at the beginning of 2016. This visit signaled the importance of the Gulf countries to the Mexican government; since President Echeverria in the seventies no other Mexican president has visited the region. During his visit to Qatar, ten agreements were signed which included cooperation in terms of energy between the Ministries of Energy of both countries, a letter of intention between the Mexican Foreign Ministry and Qatar Foundation, an agreement on cooperation in education, and an MoU between Promexico and the Supreme Committee of Provision and Welfare to promote Mexican companies for the provision of products and services for the Qatar World Cup, besides others.

As the ambassador remarked, for Mexico, Qatar is an important interlocutor for a variety of international actors as well as for its role in international cooperation and the importance that Mexico is giving to this issue, as well as the clear potential in terms of trade and commerce (Niembro, April 26, 2016).

In these two cases, we can observe that the establishment of the formal frame for the encouragement of relations was very rapid, so the road to increase exchange between the countries has already started.

Trade and Investment

The rapprochement between Qatar and Latin America reflects the growing commercial exchange taking place, although factors such as distance and lack of knowledge about each other limit the increase of trade and investment. It is nonetheless evaluating the scope of trade exchange and the level and nature of investment between Qatar and its commercial partners in this region.



Source: Unctad Statistics

The leadership of Brazil in terms of exports to Qatar, reflects the general trend of exports to the Gulf countries, since it is the main Latin American exporter to the region, representing 3.5 percent of its total exports in 2015. Its success is partially explained by the presence of Brazil since the eighties in the commercial meat sector. Later on, greater impetus was achieved by the opening of a Brazilian trade promotion office in Dubai in 2002, the role of the government in promoting the ties especially with ASPA, and the active role of the Arab Brazilian chamber of commerce. Apart from its exports on chicken, Brazil also has other important

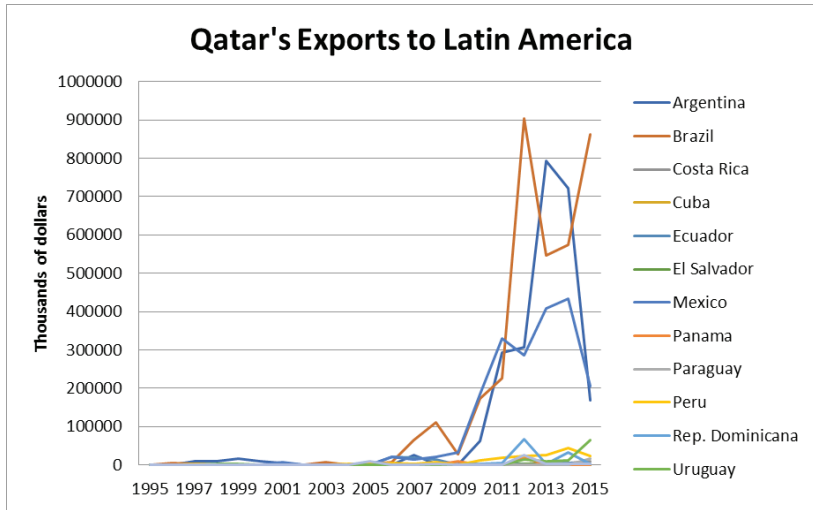
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exports to the country. For instance, Brazil is the second supplier of artificial corundum and first in the provision of iron ores. In 2005, Qatar steel company signed with Vale mining company a contract to provide 2.66 million of iron pellets up to 2010 (Daniel, Agência de Notícias Brasil-Árabe- ANBA: 2005). Again, in 2014, they signed an agreement that was renewable for three years (Qatar Steel News, March 5, 2014). Brazil's exports present a variety of products, including arms, where it is the fifth supplier, machinery for construction, cars, and dairy products, among many others.

Mexico's exports to Qatar are characterized by manufactured products, although its percentage of exports to the Gulf Cooperation countries is very little (just 0.23 as of 2015). Mexican exports started to become significant as of 2006 and reached their peak in 2012, corresponding to the growing interest of Mexico's government in increasing relations with the Gulf area. The peak of exports is especially due to the large number of trucks and light vehicles exported to this country. Subsequently, Mexico seems to be recovering its previous levels as of 2015. Its main exported goods are transport vehicles, phones, refrigerators, automobiles, and laminating machines. Mexico is the 5th largest supplier of telephones and tubes and pipes in Qatar, the 6th supplier of trucks, and the 7th light vehicle supplier in 2015 (TradeMap, 2016). In 2016, the agriculture Minister together with a mission of 40 businessman toured the Gulf countries, including Qatar, to promote agricultural products and Mexico started to import meat to some Middle East countries in 2017.

The variety of products exported by the following countries is more reduced. The exports of Argentina are mainly focused on chicken as it is the 6th supplier of red meat, and 9th in terms of citrus fruit. It also exports medicaments, tubes, pipes, and wine, among other products. In the case of Ecuador, in addition to exporting roses, it also exports bananas, of which it is the 5th supplier. Peru's exports are based mainly on three products: grapes, medicines (in 2015) and cereals (as of 2016). The other Latin American countries' exports are not substantial, although

all of them show an increase since 2000, except for Cuba and Venezuela.



Qatar's main product of exportation is liquified gas and its exports to Latin America and the Caribbean represent almost 4 percent of its total exports, which are mainly to Argentina and Brazil, their second supplier. Meanwhile for Mexico, as of 2015 it represents the sixth supplier. Qatar Gas Company signed an agreement with Argentina's government in 2011 for the provision of this product for the next 20 years, starting from 2014. The provision of gas is five million tons per annum (MTA) of LNG to Energia Argentina Sociedad Anonima (ENARSA). It is expected to supply Argentina with the 16 percent of Argentina total consumption (Qatar Gas Press Release, June 29, 2011).

Although the investments are difficult to track - since sometimes they are done in a triangular way, or they are arranged with private firms - we will rely on data from official sites and newspapers. According to the Vice-president of business development of Hassad Food, the strategy of Qatar is to diversify its portfolio of investments, products, and locations. Regarding the region of Latin America specifically, there is a good opportunity whereby Qatar can invest via joint ventures

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either associated with Canada and the US or through local business firms. In the case of agribusiness, the emphasis is not on buying land, but on participating as share-holders and to invest in a product that is not only necessary to Qatar, but is important in terms of worldwide demand (Youssef Hegazy, May 18, 2016). Qatar is participating in Brazil's production through an investment by Qatari Holding in Adecoagro. The Gulf fund agreed to buy stock equal to about 25 percent of the proceeds from the international public offering in 2011, which raised \$314m (Bladd, 2011: Arabian Business). The money invested allowed Adecoagro to buy an important sugar and ethanol processing plant, as well as farmland in Brazil.

As in the case of exports, Brazil once more leads Latin America in terms of investment; Asif Iqbal Doha Qatar Holding, the country's sovereign wealth fund, acquired 5 percent stake in Banco Santander (Brazil). The representatives of Qatar underlined the importance of diversifying investment in emerging markets (Qatar Tribune, January 4, 2011). However, in early 2017, it sold half of its share, taking into consideration the gains made by the Bank in recent years (Arend and Parra-Bernal, Reuters: April 4, 2017).

In its first-ever investment in South America, Qatar Petroleum International (QPI) has signed an agreement with Shell to buy the latter's 23% stake in the Parque das Conchas (BC-10) project, an offshore Brazilian oil field, for \$1bn. (Gulf Times, January 30, 2014).

Another investment, although not directly, was through the Iberdrola company specializes in the energy sector, in 2011. According to the Washington Post, Qatar invested (\$2.82 billion) in shares in Iberdrola SA to help Spain's leading power company fund two large deals, including the acquisition, for \$2.9 billion, of Elektro Electricidade e Servicos SA in Brazil. The representative of Qatar Holding said "the purchase gives the investment company a greater interest in the stable European market as well as more exposure to Brazil, Mexico and the U.S" (Washington Post, March 14, 2011).

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Brazil is the only Latin American country with investments in Qatar. Brazilian food company BRF S.A.⁷ (a private firm) acquired part of the frozen food distribution business from Qatar National Import and Export Co. for a value of \$140 million (BRF News, October 5, 2015). Also, at the beginning of 2017, BRF and Qatar Investment Authority formed a joint venture to acquire the most important Turkish plant of poultry production (Qatar Tribune, January 11, 2017).

Regarding the sectors of infrastructure and tourism, Qatar has also investments in some other countries. One of them was through a joint venture with US Company Occidental Petroleum to develop the second phase of a Panama oil refinery in 2007. The deal covered a sum of \$8 billion (Associated Press, May 14, 2007). Another project was through Qatar Diar Company, which invested \$2 billion for the development of the Panama Pacific special economic area close to the Panama Canal. Also in the same sector, another joint venture in Cuba was proposed in 2009 for the construction of a luxury Hotel in Cayo Largo, between Qatar Diar and the Cuban State Hotelier Gran Caribe. According to the agreement, Qatar would invest \$75 million (Reuters, May 6, 2009). According to the current Qatari ambassador in Cuba, Rashid Mairza, the deal is about to be finished, but there is now another deal between Qatar Airways and Cuban airways to invest in another hotel. Furthermore, during the visit of Emir Tamim to Cuba in 2015, an MoU was signed whereby Qatar committed to invest two billion dollars over the next five years in different sectors of the Cuban economy besides the opening of an office of Qatar National Bank in Cuba (Rivero, September 19, 2016).

Similarly, Qatar Investment authority also signed an agreement with Argentina's state pension agency ANSES to establish a fund for infrastructure projects, although it can cover other areas. The Argentinean agency will provide \$300 million (Latinfinance, November 7, 2016)⁸.

⁷ BRF has been in the Middle East region from the 70's. Through Sadia Halal, a BRF core brand focus on exporting chicken and its parts, as well as chicken food products, it dominates the market in the Gulf.

⁸ This agreement caused controversy in Argentina, due to some of the clauses that imply an offshore management of the money, among others. There is a judicial case under way. See: <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/6059-memorandum-sospechoso>.

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The most recent investment made by Qatar in Latin America was by Qatar Airways which bought 10 percent of shares from Latam airlines in 2016, a business owned by two private air business firms from Argentina and Brazil. This provides Qatar with a big entranceway into the air sector in Latin America, since this airline is the biggest one in the region. Both Qatar Airways and Latam belong to the one world alliance, so it enhanced its connectivity and expanded its network. The investment was of \$608 million (Qatar Tribune, December 29, 2016).

As we can see, investments in Latin America are not as big as those in other continents such as Europe, Asia, or the US. However, nonetheless, they are significant in terms of recent relations with Latin America. The oil crisis has paused the rhythm of Qatar investments abroad, meanwhile Qatar and Latin America's rapprochement provides an opportunity to continue to explore the different opportunities for the two sides.

Education and Culture

As part of Qatar's smart power policy, the area of culture and education also becomes relevant to track Qatar inroads into Latin American countries, attempting to reduce the geographical distance through knowledge and cooperation. Qatar Foundation is one of the main institutions in charge of education and research. It has several programs that promote international cooperation, some focusing on learning Arabic, others on promoting educational initiatives, and funding research or educational programs.

Three initiatives from Qatar Foundation are directed towards Latin America. The first one is the program from the World Innovation Summit for Education initiative *Wise Haiti* Task force in partnership with the Haitian partner FOKAL (Foundation for Knowledge and Liberty)⁹. This initiative's main objective is to rebuild educational infrastructure and provide access to education for Haiti people through financial support. It started as of 2010, after the big earthquake that hit

⁹ Qatar pledged 20 million to reconstruct Haiti.

Haiti. From 2012 it selected seven projects in coordination with Haiti Minister of Education to finance. Through these projects, they covered all levels of education, aiming not only to restore the educational system but also to innovate in education (Qatar Foundation, March 5, 2013).

The other two initiatives are in Brazil. Qatar Foundation International (QFI) helped to train and follow up the instructional methodologies for Arabic learning courses in Rio de Janeiro. Six middle schools and two high schools were supported by Qatar Foundation in coordination with the Brazilian Educational authorities. According to one of the promoters of the new education programs, the initiative was from Brazilian educational facilitators who were making a new program (Gimnasio Carioca) to keep students from poor and violent areas in school. As a part of the activities, and before the FIFA World Cup started, the students were eager to learn languages, so they contacted QFI. The Foundation chose 7 university lecturers from Brazil and trained them in the U.S, where they have the main center and programs for public schools. From 2010 to 2015, the teachers received support through teleconferences and once a year received the visit of two professors to review their classes. In 2015, QFI, due to its shrinking budget, ended the contract with the Brazilian teachers, but nonetheless they were invited to attend the summer camp in the U.S for teachers of Arabic. Currently, they are expecting that with the new CEO, there will be a renovation of the Arabic program (Mesquita, July 1, 2016). This program benefited around 300 hundred students (QFI, Arabic schools programs, May 23, 2016).

Another important initiative is Educate a Child (EAC), a program from Global Foundation Education Above All, founded in 2012 by Mother Sheikha Moza. Its main aim is “to build a global movement that contributes to human, social and economic development through the provision of quality education”, especially for those in conditions of poverty, conflict or violence (Education Above All, 2016)). EAC participated in education projects around 40 countries, mainly in Africa and

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Asia. In partnership with Aprendiz City School¹⁰, EAC created a project called Schools of Tomorrow in Rio de Janeiro hoping to enroll and retain 21,000 school children over three years. It started in 2013 and finished in 2016, reaching the target and promoting new public policies to address the problem of children out of the education system.¹¹

WISE and its international Summits have fostered South-South perspective, for example the Latin American participants since 2013 have built an electronic exchange on issues of education, poverty and violence (Mesquita, July 1, 2016). Besides, the Wise Award has given international recognition to innovative educational projects around the world, but especially those in South countries. Since 2009, some projects from Latin America have received the prize with a grant of \$20,000, including Colombia, Brazil, Chile, Peru and Argentina.

In terms of research, the Qatar Foundation has given grants through the National Research Fund since 2006. Its aim is to contribute to develop Qatar as a knowledge-based economy, by encouraging partnership and dialogue. Although the presentation of proposals is based on leading researchers, the Qatari institution is open to collaborating with other institutions worldwide. It is as of 2012 that collaborations with researchers in Latin American countries began to appear, but it is very limited with just four projects. The researchers are from Argentina, Brazil, Colombia and Chile. The nature of the projects revolves around issues of technology and medicine (Qatar National Fund for Research, Awards).

Another way Qatar promotes the culture of Latin American countries, is with the support given to embassies through Katara Cultural Village. According to the liaison officer, Fatima Ali, Katara provides the space, the design of invitations,

10 It was created in 1997 and through its model Aprendiz School Neighborhood Model it has been recognized by UNESCO, the World Bank among other organizations and has worked with the Ministry of Education to promote its methodologies.

11 See: the presentation of the Project and its results at <http://www.alunopresente.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/relatorio-alunopresente-2.pdf>

promotion of the events, and the technical support to host events proposed by any embassy (March, 10, 2016). In the case of Latin America, the countries collaborated in organizing two big Latin American festivals, one in 2011 and other in 2017, where they presented exhibitions, films and music performances. Also, in 2016, they presented a photographic exhibition of the symbols of Latin America and the Caribbean. Since 2011, each year a Latin American's exhibition takes place. Of course, these countries face the obstacles of the distance and the money to support live performances or to exhibit museum historical pieces, but nonetheless there is an interest on both sides in narrowing the cultural distance between the countries.

Conclusions

In the approach to Latin America, we observed two periods that corresponded to the phases of creation of an independent foreign policy carried out by father Emir and Emir Tamim. During the first phase, the opening of the first Latin American countries' embassies in Qatar, such as Cuba, Venezuela, El Salvador and Brazil, which represented countries characterized by an independent foreign policy matched with the emergence of an independent Qatari foreign policy focused on South approach to participate in the international order. During this phase, we identified the active foreign policy of Qatar in hosting international events and participating in South countries international gatherings. In general terms, after establishing an strategy of development through Qatar National Vision 2030 and through hosting the second ASPA summit, it is visible the coincidence of interest between South American countries and Qatar to diversify their relations in political and economic terms through opening embassies with the following countries - Uruguay (2010), Costa Rica (2011), Ecuador and Panama (2012), Argentina (2013), and Mexico and Paraguay (2014)-. The opening of flights to South America in 2010 was an important achievement for both parties, since it facilitated the exchange of trade and, more recently, the participation of Qatar Airways with LATAM airlines, which has strengthened the connections between Qatar and Latin America.

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Trade has been growing especially as of 2005, but still represents a very low percentage of their own exports for both sides. In terms of investments, there is also a low flow. There are a lot of opportunities, but it seems that due to the oil crisis, the initial impetus of investment has changed rhythm. Maybe another factor could be the type of opportunities offered by the countries being unable to attract the interest of Qatari authorities. In the branding strategy, there is no reach towards Latin America, although it has already started in research; however, in funding education programs throughout this region the scope is short, only Haiti and Brazil.

Brazil, as stated, is the country with the closest relations with Qatar, since in the aspects covered here, the exchange is broad and since Brazil was the “the first Latin American country with the main investments. Also, in terms of trade, and its history of commercial presence in this area, it has facilitated the political relations and enhanced the commercial exchange. However, as any other country, both Qatar and its Latin American counterparts cannot escape from regional contexts which have determined the focus of foreign policy and trade. The stability of the officials in government positions related to foreign policy and trade determined the continuance of the policies directed to enhance the links between the countries, as well as their disruption, as we have seen in the case of Mexico and Argentina. The road for development is under construction. It is a matter of time and favorable contexts that we can see more rapport among Qatar and Latin American countries. The current situation among the Gulf countries and the embargo imposed on Qatar, make it harder for the Latin American countries to reach the Qatari market despite the stronger competition they have in the region with countries and companies closer to this country. On an optimistic note, there are opportunities to be seized by the countries involved. We hope that this paper will offer a better insight for academic researchers from both sides to further analyze this area.

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