

## QUICK POLICY INSIGHT

# Handover of power to a new generation in Qatar

Author: Pekka HAKALA

On 25 June 2103, the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, abdicated in favour of his son Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani. The succession should be uneventful, with only minor readjustments in Qatar's domestic and foreign policies. The handover of power to a new group of leaders has been cemented by the departure of Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim, the powerful and long-serving Prime Minister and Foreign Minister and co-author (with Qatar's Emir) of the country's bold international policy alongside. Sheikh Tamim's appointments to his new cabinet hints that the new ruler may pay more attention to domestic matters than did his father.

### The reign of 'His Highness the Father'

Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa transformed his country into a bold and assertive presence on the world stage.

Sheikh Hamad ruled his small, hydrocarbon-rich country as an absolute monarch since assuming power in a bloodless palace coup in 1995. The Emir's legacy is impressive and intriguing.

Like Saudi Arabia, Qatar follows the ultra-conservative Wahhabi school of Islam, and Sheikh Hamad vowed to 'spare no effort' in spreading Wahhabism across 'the whole world'. Qatar is, in fact, the only country in the Arab world whose constitution does not provide for an elected *Majlis* (council), as all members are appointed by the Emir. The legislative elections the Emir promised to introduce have been postponed *sine die*.

Yet Hamad is also considered to have been a progressive Muslim leader. He has placed his capital, Doha, on the world map as a major venue for international conferences, sport events and conflict mediation. He personally helped to fund the pan-Arab al-Jazeera satellite television network, which has gained a prominent position not only in the Arab world, but also — following the 2006 launch of its English channel — in the global media landscape.

He supported new Islamist forces in countries affected by the Arab Spring, but

Under Sheikh Hamad's bold leadership, Qatar allowed Israel to open a trade office in Doha in 1996. (The office was closed in 2008 after Israel's attack on Gaza.) Since 2011, as the winds of change have swept across the Arab world, Qatar has used its position to lend financial, military and/or political support to revolutions. The Islamist Nahda party in Tunisia, rebel

ensured continuity in the Gulf.

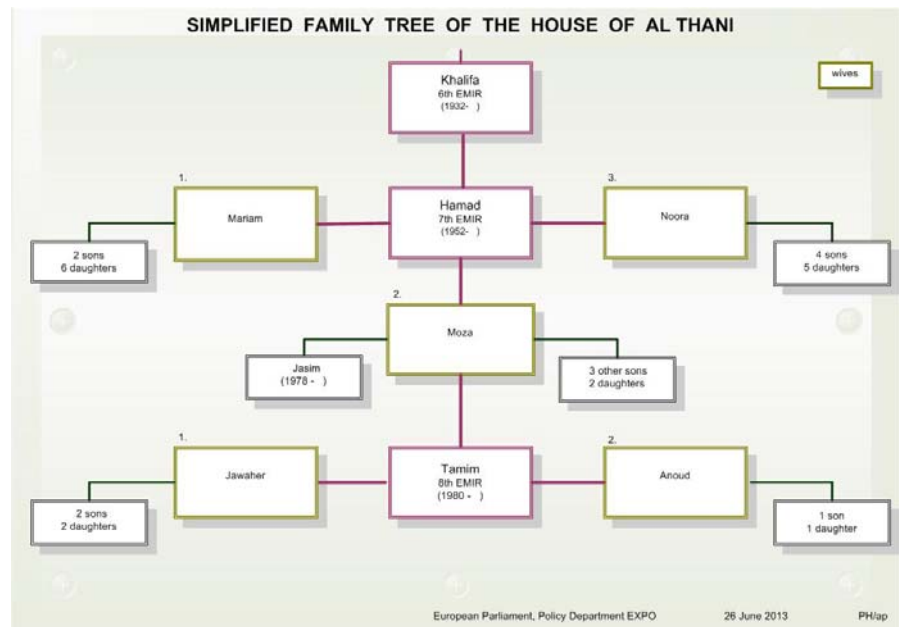
forces fighting Libyan Colonel Muammar Qadhafi, the Justice and Freedom Party of Egyptian President Mohammed Mursi in Egypt and Free Syrian Army rebels have all benefitted from Qatar’s assistance. Since 2012 Sheikh Hamad has also been the most outspoken advocate of deploying Arab troops to fight the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Sheikh Hamad’s own country, which has the highest GDP per capita in the world, has proved largely immune to the contagion of the Arab uprisings. His solidarity with fellow monarchs in the Gulf Cooperation Council and his efforts to maintain the status quo in his immediate neighbourhood have prevailed over his support of revolutionaries further afield: Qatar wholeheartedly supported the Saudi-led military operation to quench the popular, pro-democracy uprising in Bahrain in 2011. For Qatar, stability and security in the Gulf — and particularly the guarantee of vessels’ secured passage through the Strait of Hormuz — is of vital strategic interest. Sheikh Hamad has therefore anchored his country firmly to US-led security structures, signing a defence pact and permitting US troops to be stationed in Qatar at the al-Udeid Air Base and al-Saliyah Army Base.

### A meticulously prepared succession process

The 33-year-old Sheikh Tamim has assumed power through a carefully managed process that has lasted several years. Sheikh Hamad was keen to ensure that the handover to his chosen heir proceeded without problems. This will be the country's first uneventful succession since 1913.

**Figure 1:**  
Simplified family tree of the house of Al Thani



© European Parliament, DG Expo Policy Department, 2013, PH/ap

Sheikh Tamim is the fourth son of Sheikh Hamad and the second son of Sheikh Hamad’s second wife, Sheikha Moza. Tamim has been heir apparent since 2003, when his elder brother Jasim stepped down from this position.

Sheikh Tamim has been carefully positioned and trained in Qatar’s

domestic and foreign policy and the interests of the other branches of the family have been carefully accommodated to prevent any discord. Tamim gained international experience by leading major sport event initiatives, such as the 2006 Asian Games, the successful campaign to hold the 2022 football world cup in Qatar and the unsuccessful campaign to bring the 2020 summer Olympics to the country.

### Short biography



- Born in Doha on 3 June 1980.
- Graduated from the Military Academy of Sandhurst (UK).
- Married (two wives) with six children.
- Previous positions:
  - Head of Qatar Olympic Committee and the Supreme Committee for Qatar 2022 FIFA world cup, member of the International Olympic Committee.
  - Chairman of Supreme Education Council, Supreme Council for the Environment and Natural Reserves, Supreme Council of Information and Communication Technology, Board of Directors of Qatar Investment Authority.
  - Deputy Commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces and the Ruling Family Council.
  - Mediator between Jordan and Hamas in 2012.

### New Emir and musical chairs in the cabinet

The new Emir addressed the nation on 26 June and announced his new cabinet. The major question centred on what role Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim would play in the new administration. Although he stepped down as Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, he will continue to lead the powerful Qatar Investment Authority, whose resources are estimated at between USD 100 and 200 billion, invested in businesses across the globe.

As heir apparent, Sheikh Tamim focused primarily on domestic policies: he led the country's long-term development plan and masterminded several innovations, such as the establishment of the Qatar National Food Security Programme. The formation of his cabinet, and particularly the appointment of the former Deputy Minister for Internal Affairs, Abdallah bin Nasser Al Thani, as Prime Minister and Interior Minister has suggested that Qatari politics may be slightly reoriented towards domestic issues. There has been no suggestion of any internal security threat, and dissent in wealthy Qatar, which has only 250 000 citizens, is nearly unknown.

There are numerous other major changes within the senior posts in the cabinet of ministers. The former Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Khalid al-Attiyah, has taken over the reins of the ministry. He is known to be close to the previous Emir and has been instrumental in many of Qatar's international mediation efforts. Ali Sharif al-Emadi, the CEO of Qatar

The appointment of the new cabinet suggests a slightly more domestic orientation.

National Bank, was promoted to Finance Minister, and the Director-General of al-Jazeera, Jassim bin Jassim Al Thani, has become the new Minister of Economy and Trade. Five new ministries were created: Administrative Development, Planning and Statistics, Youth and Sports, Transport and Communication; and Information Technology. The last, Information Technology, will be led by the only female member of the cabinet, Hessa al-Jaber. The influential Ministry of Energy will remain under the guidance of the experienced Mohammad Saleh al-Sada.

### **Qatar remains an assertive international player.**

Qatar's strong support of Islamist political forces in the Arab world has provoked the ire of the country's closest neighbours, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Warm congratulations for Sheikh Tamim's succession are likely underpinned by Riyadh's hope he will prove more moderate than his father. Sheikh Tamim has already replaced his father in the most recent summits of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and he is expected to coordinate more closely with Qatar's regional allies.

The generational change in Qatar highlights the relatively geriatric nature of the regimes in the five other GCC countries. Sheikh Tamim is 55 years younger than the Doyen of the club, King Abdallah of Saudi Arabia, and 30 years younger than the second youngest, King Hamad of Bahrain. What Tamim lacks in seniority, however, he makes up in the appeal of a youthful and dynamic Emir — particularly important among the markedly young populations of the Arab world. If the winds of the Arab Awakening ever reach the Gulf, Qatar appears the country best prepared to weather the change.

One urgent international challenge will be mediating a peace agreement between the Taliban and the Afghan government. The Afghan Taliban are in contact with the United States through senior Qatari officials, and some progress has been made towards initiating a dialogue process.

The new Emir has excellent relations with the United States. Over the past 10 years, the US-Islamic World Forum, hosted annually by Qatar, has become a major forum for 'building bridges between the United States and Muslim-majority communities across the world'. The new Emir is likely to devote significant attention to relations with the US, particularly to coordinate diplomatic initiatives and security issues in the Gulf.

The new Emir is also reported to have good relations with the United Kingdom and France. The country's relations with the EU are principally handled by the Gulf Cooperation Council. Qatar would have a keen interest in a region-to-region investment agreement (Investment is part of the EU's common commercial policy, an exclusive competence of the Union (Article 207 TFEU), although this will not be on the agenda before the long-stalled negotiations for a free trade agreement have been concluded. Stronger EU-Qatari relations would be mutually beneficial.

The youthful ruler may coordinate more with regional partners, but will maintain an independent approach to international questions.