The case of Qatar: understanding the Emirate’s exceptional foreign policy

1. Introduction
In the literature regarding the foreign policy behaviour of small states, these states are generally portrayed as weak and incapable of having any real influence in international affairs. However, the small Gulf state of Qatar has been an exception to this expected behaviour; in recent years it has pursued a foreign policy that contrasts with (neo)realist and (neo)liberal predictions. Exemplary is Qatar’s deep involvement in the Syrian Civil War, where it has supported a wide range of rebel groups, politically, monetarily and logistically. In this manner, it has tried to influence the regional balance of power by trying to undermine the Iranian-backed Assad regime, which is an atypical form of behaviour for a small state. This thesis aims to analyse the conditions - both internal as external to the state - that have influenced and shaped Qatar’s exceptional foreign policy from a constructivist and (neo-)institutionalist perspective, as these two approaches focus on different factors that influence a small state’s foreign policy than the (neo)realist and (neo)liberal approaches and might therefore provide key insights. Furthermore, this research aims to provide preliminary insights into the reasons why other small states with large issue-specific power have not been following an equally ambitious foreign policy. Additionally, this research also aims to contribute to the discussion of the conceptualization of small states by arguing that Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is an indispensable part of the conceptualization of a small state. On a societal level, this research might be illuminating for foreign policy analysts trying to understand the remarkable foreign policy behaviour of a state with only slightly more than 300,000 nationals, especially after the diplomatic crisis that started in early June 2017, in which multiple states, most notably Saudi-Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, severed all diplomatic ties with Qatar and imposed far-reaching sanctions.

2. (Neo)realist and (Neo)liberal views on small states
While there are many ways to classify a state by its size, for realists the only measure of state size is hard power, defined by the state’s ability to influence international outcomes (Browning, 2006, p. 670). The sources of power are material capabilities, visible amongst others in a state’s demographics, territorial size, GDP, and the size and quality of its armed forces. Since small states tend to have fewer material capabilities, smallness is commonly equated with weakness (Vogel, 1983, p. 55). As a result, the possible foreign policy actions of states usually depend on the benevolence of larger powers, the actions between them, or the nature of the balance of power (Keohane, 1969, p. 299; Vital, 1971, pp. 8-9). In the anarchic self-help system that realists envisage, it is the distribution of power across the system which defines the rational actions of a small state. Furthermore, as a result of their lack of hard
power, small states also tend to be more preoccupied with their survival than larger states (Browning, 2006, p. 670). Consequently, realists assume that domestic variables, such as domestic politics, will have no influence on the foreign policies of small states, because small states have to be more preoccupied with the effects and dangers of anarchy in the international system. All in all, the realist view of small states is that they are objects in world politics, to be moved around as pawns at the will of the great powers (Baker Fox, 2006, pp. 39-40).

Like realists, liberals also tend to have a rather dismissive view of small states and their chances to have any significant influence in the international system, although to a lesser extent than realists do. For example, Keohane and Nye have argued that the power of small states is often issue-specific and that small states can have significant influence in specific issue areas, mostly in the economic domain (Keohane & Nye, 1977; Browning, 2006, p. 672). Liberals therefore take into account the role of economic issues in the international and domestic political system. By contrast, realists do not focus on these issues of ‘low politics’, they only focus on issues which, in their eyes, are vital to the survival of the state, referred to as ‘high politics’ (Heywood, 2014, p. 66). Additionally, in contrast to (neo)realists, (neo)liberals argue that international organizations and institutions have a constraining impact on larger states through rules and norms, leading them to assume that small states will be active participants and strong supporters of such structures (Wivel, 2005, p. 395).

Based on the aforementioned description of the traditional approaches’ vision on the position of small states in the international system, small states are generally expected to exhibit certain types of foreign policy behaviour, that are deviant from the characteristics of large states’ foreign policy behaviour. According to (neo)realist and (neo)liberal literature, small states are, amongst others, expected to: 1) exhibit a low level of participation in world affairs; 2) limit foreign policy behavior to their immediate geographic arena; 3) employ diplomatic and economic foreign policy instruments, as opposed to military instruments, and lastly, 4) aim to cooperate and to avoid conflict with others (East, 1973, p. 557; Hey, 2003, p. 5). As stated in the introduction, Qatar has been following an atypical foreign policy for a small state over the last decades. While these aforementioned four expected types of small states’ behaviour are not the only types of ascribed behaviour, it is in these four expected types of behaviour that Qatar has been acting the most deviant (for example see Hey, 2003 and East, 1973). Consequently, these types of behaviour are described in more detail below, as they help understand Qatar’s foreign policy deviancy as a small state.

2.1 Exhibit a low level of participation in world affairs

As mentioned above, the realist assertion that smallness can be equated with weakness significantly constrains the available policy options for small states. Furthermore, in the liberal and especially
realist view, their weakness implies that small states will pay more attention to ensuring their survival than larger states. In his classical work, Aron writes that this disproportionate focus on survival means that small states do not - and cannot - have offensive ambitions, but only defensive ambitions to ensure their survival, whereby defensive ambition is defined as the intent to avoid being influenced from the international environment (Aron, 1968, p. 83; Mouritzen, 1991, p. 219). Only larger states have the capacity to act offensively, that is, the capacity to act on other states by convincing or constraining them. Small states can, as a result of their weakness, only strive to resist these offensive ambitions of larger powers (Aron, 1968, p. 83). This means that small states are expected to exhibit a low level of participation in world affairs, in the sense that they will only react to - and not initiate - key international events.

2.2 Limit foreign policy behavior to their immediate geographic arena
The small state’s general lack of material capabilities also explains its relatively larger focus on regional issues, instead of on global issues. According to East, because fewer resources are available for foreign policy compared to larger states, the capacity of the small state’s foreign policy sector is likely to be small (1973, p. 559). Consequently, a small state is unable to cope with all the international issues facing it. Therefore, certain geographical areas and issues must be prioritized while others will have to be ignored. For the same reasons, the small state’s diplomatic representation is usually restricted to the geographic region and majors powers (Sutton, 1987, p. 20). Furthermore, from a security perspective, Zahariadis has argued that because small states lack the resources for extensive international interaction as a result of their limited capabilities, they tend to concentrate more on regional issues of immediate security as these might be more threatening to their survival (1994, p. 653).

2.3 Employ diplomatic and economic foreign policy instruments, as opposed to military instruments
East (1973) has argued that small states have different perceptions of the importance of various issues in world affairs than larger states. He argues that because of the primacy of domestic internal demands on political decision-making in small states, certain ‘traditional’ issues in world politics are of lesser concern to these states, like global prestige and influence, acquiring or maintaining alliances and spheres of influence, and territorial expansion (East, 1973, p. 560). However, issues directly relating to economic growth and development are deemed to be more salient to small states instead. It is generally asserted that small states give higher priority to economic issues in their foreign policies, mainly because small states usually have a small domestic market and therefore tend to focus more on international trade, and as a result, have a higher level of dependency on other states in their economic performance (Payne, 1987, p. 51; McGraw, 1994, p. 14). The traditional issues mentioned by East
(1973) lend themselves more to the use of military instruments, than issues relating to economic growth and development, and therefore small states are likely to employ diplomatic and economic instruments more often.

2.4 Aim to cooperate and to avoid conflict with others

As mentioned above, the limited capabilities of small states make them more vulnerable to the perils of the anarchic self-help system that realists envisage. Therefore, small states will generally avoid international conflict to minimize threats to their survival. As a result, small states are also expected to exhibit more cooperative behaviour in international relations (IR) than large states. Furthermore, a key indicator of cooperation is that small states are active supporters of international institutions and organizations, because these constrain larger powers, allow small states to voice their concerns more effectively, and provide political influence and economic prosperity for small states (Hey, 2003, p. 187; Wivel, 2005, p. 395). Likewise, Keohane has argued that small states can cooperate in an international organization to shape an ‘international political culture’, thereby attempting to promote attitudes favourable to their survival (2006, p. 60).

3. Qatar: a deviant case?

One state, which is commonly regarded as a small state and which has consistently acted in contrast with the four expected behavioural patterns described above is the State of Qatar. Despite the fact that it is commonly regarded as a small state, its power in specific issue areas, mainly the hydrocarbon sector, is larger than often expected by the traditional approaches, in particular realism. As the second largest natural gas exporter and the eleventh largest crude oil exporter in the world, it undoubtedly plays a large role in international energy markets (CIA, 2017a). Consequently, in line with liberalism’s attention for ‘low politics’, Qatar might be seen as enjoying great issue-specific power in this domain. The prosperity that Qatar enjoys as a result of its endowment with natural resources has enabled it to pursue a remarkably ambitious foreign policy considering its small size. For example, Qatar has financially and logistically supported multiple rebel groups in Syria, to the detriment of its diplomatic relations with its larger neighbours Saudi-Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (Dickinson, 2014; Kirkpatrick, 2014). This sparked a diplomatic crisis in the Gulf Cooperation Council in March 2014 (Hassan, 2015). Additionally, Qatari support of controversial Islamist groups, in addition to Qatar’s pragmatic stance towards Iran, also lay at the basis of the mentioned diplomatic crisis that started in June 2017 (Wintour, 2017). Furthermore, Qatar has militarily supported NATO operations in Libya during the Libyan Civil War by sending multiple fighter jets and deploying special forces, in addition to its political, financial and logistical support of local rebel groups (Black, 2011; Cooper & Momami, 2011, p. 123). Mediation of conflicts is also a central pillar of Qatari...
foreign policy; for example, Qatar has mediated in conflicts in Lebanon, Sudan and Yemen (Kamrava, 2011). While mediation is not atypical for a small state, the scale of Qatar’s efforts in this domain is, especially when considering the fact that mediation in the Middle East has traditionally been dominated by great powers and regional powers, such as the United States and Saudi-Arabia respectively (Barakat, 2014, p. 4). Furthermore, the Emirate has tried to enhance its soft power and status in grand ways by creating a large worldwide broadcaster - the Al Jazeera Media Network - and by hosting the FIFA World Cup in 2022 (Brannagan & Giulianotti, 2015).

Qatar’s foreign policy is therefore marked by a relatively high participation in world affairs; a willingness to not only use economic or diplomatic instruments, but also military instruments; activity outside its immediate geographic area - the Persian Gulf region - and lastly, an apparent willingness to also antagonize larger powers and neighbours in the process of reaching its goals. Keohane has argued that middle powers are marked by the belief that they can have a systemic impact on the international system, in contrast to small powers which never see themselves as having the ability to have a systemic impact (2006, p. 60). The aforementioned behaviour suggests that Qatar acts, or at least sees itself more like a middle power than as a small power. This is remarkable, because many conceptualizations of a small state, including the one based on population size used in this thesis (see section 8), would identify Qatar as a small state, because of its small population and territorial size. Overall, Qatar’s ambitious foreign policy therefore runs counter to the foreign policy behaviour often ascribed to small states from the realist and liberal perspectives, and as a result it clearly acts as a deviant case in the study of small states in IR.

4. Scientific relevance and problem statement
A key contribution of this thesis might be a contribution to the discussion on the conceptualization of small states, in the sense that the fact that Qatar acts as a deviant case might not be an empirical failure of the realist and liberal approaches, but could be the result of inappropriate dominant conceptualizations of a small state. Conceptualization on the basis of population size has been the most widely used conceptualization of small states, however this thesis might show that GDP and (self-)perception of small states might play a key role in their foreign policy behaviour, thereby showing the importance of taking these indicators into account (Crowards, 2002, p. 143). Secondly, this thesis could show the accuracy of the constructivist and institutionalist approaches, which will be discussed below, vis-à-vis the traditional theories in explaining small state foreign policy behaviour. Thirdly, this research might especially be relevant for the study of other small states that, like Qatar, possess significant power in certain economic issue areas; examples of such states are: Bahrain, Brunei (hydrocarbon sector) and Luxembourg (financial sector). It can be suspected that these states at least have the potential to act differently from other small states in the international realm as a result
of their large issue-specific power and resources, which would imply that smallness does not always equate weakness. This thesis might therefore provide preliminary insights into the reasons why these states have not been pursuing an atypical foreign policy for small states, as Qatar has. Finally, on a more societal level, this research might be illuminating for foreign policy analysts trying to understand the remarkable foreign policy behaviour of a state with only slightly more than 300,000 nationals, especially in light of the severe diplomatic crisis between Qatar and its neighbours in June 2017.

In order to understand Qatar’s deviancy in foreign policy as a small state, this thesis aims to clarify the conditions, both internal as external to the state, that have influenced Qatari foreign policy in the last decades. The main research question is therefore as follows: Which conditions - internal and external - have influenced its remarkable foreign policy? However, in order to more clearly establish Qatar’s deviancy and most importantly, the influence of certain conditions herein, there is a need to focus on Qatar’s foreign policy goals and whether the Emirate has been successful in reaching them; this is necessary as successfulness is critical for its deviancy; if Qatar is unsuccessful in reaching its foreign policy goals, its current deviant foreign policy is unlikely to be sustainable in the long term, meaning that its current behaviour might only form a temporary, and not a structural deviation. Consequently, this research also contains the following two sub-questions: What are the goals behind Qatar’s ambitious foreign policy, and has it been successful in reaching these goals?

5. Constructivist views on small states
As has been argued above, the traditional approaches in IR - (neo)realism and (neo)liberalism - prove largely incapable to explain Qatari foreign policy behaviour. One theory that could fill up the analytical void and serve as a guide in answering the research question is the post-positivist theory of constructivism. Constructivists reject the realist and liberal notion that there is an objective social and political reality independent of our interpretation of it; they point to the effects that norms, values, ideas, identities and (self-)perception have on the behaviour of states (Browning, 2006, p. 673). Exemplary here is their rejection of the realist notion that state behaviour is only determined by the structure of the international system and Wendt’s (1992) famous assertion that “anarchy is what states make of it.” According to constructivists, small state behaviour is not only determined by the structures of the international system, and the small state’s hard power, but also by small states’ respective identities, and the norms, ideas and values these states adhere to. In their case study of Georgian and Azerbaijani foreign policy behavior, Gvalia and coauthors have shown that elite ideas, identities, and preferences for social orders can have a significant influence on the foreign policy behaviour of small states (2013). Likewise, Browning has shown the importance of identity and self-perception on small state foreign policy behaviour in his case study of Finland. According to
Browning, the implication of state size on foreign policy is as much a function of how size is viewed and perceived, as it is a result of objective criteria (2002, p. 681). Therefore a small population and territorial size does not necessarily imply weakness, as realists posit. Browning argues that small size can be narrated in different ways at different times, influencing available policy options and constraints (2002, pp. 681-682). Following from this section, Qatar’s (self-)perception and its identity, norms and values might therefore have influenced the political elite’s choices in foreign policy, thereby potentially offering an explanation for Qatar’s deviant foreign policy, showing the relevance of the constructivist approach in explaining Qatar’s deviancy.

6. (Neo-)institutionalist views on small states

A second theory that could help fill up the theoretical void and help answering the research question is not a theory from IR, but from mainstream political science: (neo-)institutionalism. From a (neo-)institutionalist perspective, the foreign policy of small states must not be viewed as resulting from the constraints and opportunities of the international system, as realists and liberals posit, but as a function of the (informal) domestic institutional make-up of the specific state in question and the interaction of this make-up with the international system. For example, arguing from a historical institutionalist perspective, Elman has shown that not only structural or systemic factors influence the foreign policy of small states, but also their domestic institutions. More specifically, she argues that opting for a certain institutional design at one point can significantly influence the small state’s foreign policy in later periods (Elman, 1995, pp. 210-212). This can be captured by the concept of path dependency: the phenomenon that the outcome of political processes depend on decision-making at critical junctions earlier in time (Hague & Harrop, 2013, p. 371). While structural or systemic factors might be more influential in determining a small state’s foreign policy and domestic institutions in a state’s early history, the choices made for domestic institutions in these early years explains the small state’s foreign policy in later periods better than systemic and structural factors, according to Elman. This stands in contrast with the realist assumption that, unlike in larger states, domestic factors cannot account for the foreign policy behaviour of small states, because they have to be occupied with the perils of the anarchic international system to ensure their survival; so domestic institutions matter least in small states according to the traditional approaches, especially realism. Following from this section, Qatar’s deviant foreign policy might therefore also result from its domestic institutional make-up. This make-up might constrain certain policy options while promoting others that might have lead to Qatar’s exceptional foreign policy. Apart from constructivism, (neo-)institutionalism might therefore also help explain the Emirate’s deviant foreign policy.
7. Expectations

One straightforward explanation for Qatar’s ambitious foreign policy might be that it has been able to increase its military, diplomatic and economic capabilities as a result of the massive wealth it has acquired over the last couple of decades, mainly from the export of oil and natural gas. However, Qatar’s ability to act the way it does is, on its own, not a sufficient explanation for its unexpected behaviour. If a state has the ability to act a certain way, due to increased capabilities or a less constraining international system, it is by no means certain that it will actually behave this way. As has been clarified from the previous discussion of constructivism and (neo-)institutionalism, the self-perception of a state, its ideas, norms and values all have an influence on its foreign policy, as does its domestic institutional make-up. Based on the previous discussion of constructivism and (neo-)institutionalism, two expectations can be formulated that might help answering the question why Qatar has been pursuing a remarkably ambitious foreign policy. First, from a constructivist perspective, it can be expected that Qatari foreign policy is influenced by Qatar’s presumed perception of its identity as a middle power and the subsequent perception of a relatively big role in world politics, and by the ideas, norms and values that the Qatari political elites adhere to. Secondly, from a (neo-)institutionalist perspective, it can be expected that Qatar’s foreign policy is influenced by its highly personalized and centralized decision-making structure, and more specifically that the most important foreign policy decisions are based on the personal preferences of the Emir and his closest advisors, which likely strengthens the influence of the constructivist factors mentioned above.

8. Conceptualization and operationalization of the ‘small state’

Most conceptualizations of small states are based on quantifiable criteria, of which the most frequently used criteria are: population size, territorial size and GDP (East, 1973, p. 557; Crowards, 2002, p. 143). Sometimes a psychological dimension is added, for example, Rothstein and Keohane already argued in the 1960s that (self-)perception is also an important criterion, which is currently associated with the constructivist approach in IR (Rothstein, 1968, p. 29; Keohane, 2006, p. 60). However, in this thesis the criterion of (self-)perception is excluded in the conceptualization of small states, because in this way it might contribute to the conceptualization discussion, as it is expected that (self-)perception does have a significant influence on the foreign policy of Qatar. In other words, if Qatar’s deviant foreign policy as a small state is for a large part explained by its (self-)perception, this thesis might argue that (self-)perception is, like Rothstein and Keohane have argued, indispensable in the conceptualization of small states. This thesis will conceptualize small states by using the criterion of population size, based on the grounds that it provides an key insight in the amount of human capital in a state and a rough estimate of the size of the domestic market, besides the fact that it is also the most commonly used criterion (Crowards, 2002, p. 143). Furthermore, by therefore excluding the
other quantifiable criterion of GDP, this could also show the importance of this criterion in the conceptualization of small states, if Qatar’s wealth is found to be the most important factor explaining its remarkable foreign policy.

This thesis will make use of the most widely used operationalization established by the Commonwealth of Nations and the World Bank, which have set the population threshold of small states at 1.5 million inhabitants, based on the observation that almost all states under this threshold tend to experience problems associated with small size (Commonwealth Secretariat/World Bank, 2000, p. 3; Commonwealth Secretariat, 1997, pp. 8-9; 1985, p. 9). With an estimated population of 2,660,000 (March 2017 est.), Qatar crosses this threshold (Ministry of Development Planning & Statistics, 2017). However, only an estimated number of 313,000 of these are Qatari nationals (Snoj, 2017). The other part of the population consists of migrant workers and expats without political rights. While these groups are making valuable contributions to Qatar’s economy, they are unlikely to be a human capital resource base for Qatar’s government branches that are relevant to Qatar’s foreign policy, since these are dominated by Qatari nationals. The effect of these groups on Qatari governance is therefore likely to be very limited. For this reason Qatar will be categorized as a small state in this research. However, this is troubled by the fact that Qatar’s migrant workers and expats do likely have an (indirect) influence on the foreign policy behaviour of Qatar, mainly from the fact that they have increased the country’s GDP. However, as stated in section 7, it is expected that other factors besides its GDP have influenced the Emirate’s foreign policy.

9. Methodology

This research will make use of an in-depth, qualitative, single case study of Qatar’s foreign policy behaviour. Since Qatar is by far the most empirically deviant case, this research will take the form of a single case study. In sections 3 and 4 it was established that Qatar’s foreign policy behaviour forms an empirical anomaly in the (neo)realist and (neo)liberal theoretical approaches, and that this research seeks to explain why this is the case; the corresponding case study design that is adopted is therefore the deviant case study design (Levy, 2008, p. 13). Consequently, the aims of this case study are theoretical refinement and hypothesis generation (Levy, 2008, p. 13). As stated in section 4, this research aims to generate insights that might lead to additional hypotheses on the questions why other small states with large issue-specific power have not been following an equally ambitious foreign policy. Additionally, theoretical refinement is part of the aims in the sense that this research aims to contribute to the discussion on the conceptualization of small states and show the the accuracy of the constructivist and institutionalist approaches vis-à-vis the traditional approaches. This research will make use of qualitative content analysis in order to answer the research question. The content analysis will mainly focus on pre-existing scientific research on Qatar, on newspaper articles, on official
statements and documents and on four interviews held with Qatari officials. The interviews that are analysed are interviews of anonymous Qatari officials held by Sultan Barakat and interviews of Qatar’s former prime minister and minister of foreign affairs Hamad bin Jassim al-Thani held by Charlie Rose (see al-Thani 2012, 2014; Barakat, 2014).

10. Three pillars of Qatari foreign policy
An overall lack of transparency throughout the Qatari government and more specifically the unavailability of policy documents, white papers and official statements on Qatar’s foreign policy goals significantly troubles the effort to identify Qatar’s foreign policy goals and its motivations. However, the fundamental goals of Qatari foreign policy can be derived from a wide range of scientific literature, of which the authors have managed to gain preferential access to primary sources. Based on this literature, the foreign policy actions of Qatar can be categorized into three central pillars, that mark the fundamental foreign policy goals of the Emirate. Most of Qatar’s foreign policy behaviour falls in either one these three pillars: 1) mediation in intra- and interstate conflicts; 2) interventionism; 3) and state-branding. Each of these will be briefly discussed below.

10.1 Mediation in intra- and interstate conflicts
Since the previous Emir of Qatar - Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani - came to power in a bloodless coup in 1995 by displacing his father, Qatar has been following an ever-expanding foreign policy (Khatib, 2013, p. 418). One key element of this foreign policy has been Qatar’s effort to become a regional peace broker and mediator. Qatar’s mediating efforts have, for example, conflicts in, amongst others, Yemen, Lebanon and Sudan (Kamrava, 2011, pp. 545-552). Quite remarkable for such a small state, Qatar has managed to become one of the most active mediators in the Middle East, eclipsing the more powerful traditional mediators Saudi-Arabia and Egypt. The Emirate’s rise as the leading state in the Middle East in mediating conflicts is often ascribed to five factors: 1) its financial and domestic stability; 2) the pragmatic nature of its foreign policy; 3) Al Jazeera’s casting of an image of Qatar as a country of relatively free and open debate in the Arab world; 4) Qatar’s lack of historical baggage; 5) and lastly, the previous Emir’s personal interest and involvement with conflict mediation (Barakat, 2014, pp. 12-13).

Qatar’s mediation efforts have been motivated by a number of factors. First of all, according to most authors, the Emirate seems to be motivated by the maintenance of its own security and survival, through containing conflicts, and lowering threats of terrorism and more immediate effects of large-scale population displacement (Kamrava, 2011, p. 542; Khatib, 2013, p. 418; Barakat, 2014, p. 11). Secondly, Khatib argues that through mediation Qatar tries to counter rising Iranian influence,

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1 This factor is only valid up until Qatar started to intervene in other states following the Arab Spring in 2011.
while also trying to maintain friendly relations with Iran. Historically and culturally, the Gulf states have poor relations with Iran; however, since Qatar shares the huge North Dome/South Pars natural gas field with Iran, it cannot afford to alienate Iran too much; any violent conflict with Iran could lead to Qatar being cut off from its economic lifeline: natural gas (Khatib, 2013, pp. 418-419). Together with Barakat she also argues that the third motivation is Qatar’s desire to expand its regional influence, especially vis-à-vis Saudi-Arabia; this ambition will be explained in more detail down below in section 11.3 (Khatib, 2013, p. 418; Barakat, 2014, p. 11). Finally, according to most authors, the last motivation for Qatar is raising its international profile, and appealing to and exercising leverage on the international community through a strategy of state-branding, in this case creating an image of Qatar as a diplomatic powerhouse and honest broker (Kamrava, 2011, p. 542; Khatib, 2013, p. 418; Barakat, 2014, pp. 10-11). State-branding policies form a central pillar of their own, and will be explained down below in section 10.3.

Qatar has achieved some significant successes in its mediation efforts. Standing out are Qatar’s efforts in Lebanon, culminated in the 2008 Doha Agreement, which managed to avert a new civil war in the unstable and sectarian divided country (Lyon, 2008). Despite this success it did not manage to solve the root causes of the conflict, which led to a collapse of the Lebanese government in 2011 (Barakat, 2014, p. 18). It is this inability to solve the root causes of the dispute that leads to the main criticism on Qatar’s mediation efforts: its inability to also orchestrate true conflict resolution (Kamrava, 2011, pp. 545-553). The best way to assess Qatar’s successfulness of its mediation policy (and of the other pillars) is to compare it with its motivations. To start off, the record to limit Iranian influence has been mixed. The above mentioned Doha Agreement can be seen as an instrumental case in this regard, as Iranian influence through its proxy Hezbollah in this state is perceived to be significant. The Doha Agreement is seen to have strengthened Hezbollah’s position, although the context should be kept in mind; a potential civil war could have strengthened the Shi’a group’s position even further (Worth & Bakri, 2008). Secondly, while it may be difficult to assess to what degree Qatar’s total regional influence has increased, there is evidence that it’s influence has increased in certain countries as a result of its efforts; for example, in Sudan, the Emirate has replaced historically-linked Egypt as in terms of influence (Kamrava, 2011, p. 542). Lastly, since it is extremely difficult to find out whether there is a causal relationship between Qatar’s mediation and the maintenance of its own security and survival, no statements can be made on that matter, although Qatar is in general regarded as relatively safe country.

10.2 Interventionism
The events of the Arab Spring starting in 2011 marked a critical reorientation in Qatari foreign policy; Qatar’s main foreign policy focus on mediation was partly shifted towards more proactive political
and military interventionism, especially in the conflicts in Libya and Syria (Barakat, 2014, p. 2). In both Libya and Syria, Qatar turned one of the most ardent supporters and donors of rebel groups, in Libya it even became directly involved militarily (Cooper & Momami, 2011, p. 123; Kaessler, 2015, p. 31). It also played a key role in Libya as an interlocutor for the Arab League and the Arab states that were pushing for intervention in Libya (Khatib, 2013, p. 420). This active stance was matched in Syria, where its efforts were crucial in brokering a coalition of rebel groups (Khatib, 2013, p. 422).

One key aspect of Qatar’s interventionist policies, and one which it is often criticized for in the international community and by other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states, is its support for Islamist groups throughout the Middle East, such as the Muslim Brotherhood and more controversially Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, previously known as Jabhat al Nusra. Especially the former has been given vast support through Qatar’s offering of offering shelter to its most prominent members, besides financial and public support through Al-Jazeera (Al Qassemi, 2012a; Al Qassemi 2012b).

On the surface, Qatar’s interventionism strategy would seem a dramatic break with the mediation policies it was mainly focussing on until the Arab Spring, as the Emirate shifted its policies from trying to resolve conflicts to actively participating in them. However, according to Khatib, this shift is not as dramatic as it seems. First of all, Qatar’s interventions were partly motivated by its goal of appealing to and exercising leverage on the international community (2013, p. 421). Qatar’s actions in the early stages of the Libyan revolt earned praise from its key allies - the United States, the United Kingdom and France - and consolidated its reputation as a “heavyweight” ally (Roberts, 2011; Khatib, 2013, p. 421). Secondly, the interventionism policy was part of a process of adaption Qatar had to go through in order to sustain the regional leadership position it had established with its mediation policies, as the regional context changed dramatically during and after the Arab Spring (Khatib, 2013, p. 421). Apart from these two motivations, she argues that Qatar’s interventionism policy also served the abovementioned motivations of countering Iranian influence, as Assad is a key Iranian ally, and staving off instability at home thereby ensuring regime survival (Khatib, 2013, pp. 421-422).

As mentioned above, with its intervention in Libya Qatar successfully appealed to the international community. In Syria, this has been more troublesome, as a result of its controversial decisions to support radical Islamist groups, such as Jabhat Fateh al-Sham. In terms of limiting Iranian influence, Qatar has not been really successful, marked by the fact the Assad is still in power and Iranian influence in Syria is arguably higher than ever (Naylor, 2016). Lastly, Qatar has managed to stave off domestic instability, reflected by the fact it repeatedly scores relatively high on political stability and absence of violence in calculations of the World Bank (2017). Qatar’s interventionist policies can therefore be declared as partially successful, although they did create severe diplomatic
blowbacks in its relations with other GCC member states, marked by the diplomatic crises of March 2014 and June 2017.

10.3 State-branding

The third pillar of Qatari foreign policy is comprised of its initiatives towards branding the state of Qatar. According to Van Ham, a brand can best be described as the consumer’s ideas about a product; the ‘brand state’ therefore comprises the outside world's ideas and perceptions of a particular state (2001, p. 2). In line with constructivist views, Qatar’s ruling elite has tried to create an image of Qatar in the outside world of a business-oriented, modern and savvy state, as a result of the more broad and modern perception the Qatari elite adopted of the concept of security after 1995 (Roberts, 2012, p. 236). Diversification of Qatar’s oil and gas-driven industry began to be perceived as a core part of the state’s security, as the elite had realised that the current economic model was unsustainable in the long term (Roberts, 2012, pp. 235-236).

Qatar’s branding initiatives encompass a number of fronts, on both the international as well as the domestic level. The Emirate’s state-branding initiatives are numerous, a few of which are highlighted below to illustrate Qatar’s significant efforts. Politically, Qatar has adopted a high-profile stance within the GCC and other regional and international organizations (Peterson, 2006, p. 746). Qatar’s hosting of the FIFA World Cup in 2022 and other sport events is, amongst other reasons, also aimed at raising its international profile (Brannagan & Giulianotti, 2014, pp. 708-710). Lastly, the Al Jazeera network also played an important role in raising Qatar’s international profile, especially in the Arab world, where it became widely popular as a result of its critical broadcasting; a novelty in the Arab world (Roberts, 2012, p. 236). Qatar’s state-branding policies not only create a beneficial business climate, but, from a constructivist perspective, also increase the country’s international prestige, and assure the legitimacy - internal and external - of the state, which enhances Qatar’s prospects of survival as a state and of the ruling regime (Peterson, 2006, p. 748).

Measuring the success of state-branding is very difficult and Qatar is no exception herein (Van Ham, 2008, p. 1). Although hard to measure, it can be safely stated that Qatar’s prestige has significantly increased over the last decades. For example, its mediation efforts, which as stated above were also used to brand Qatar, and its successful bid to host the FIFA World Cup in 2022 have boosted its prestige, especially in the Arab World (Kamrava, 2011, p. 555). Furthermore, Qatar has successfully raised its international profile, exemplified by the former prime minister of Qatar stating that while fifteen years ago hardly anybody knew where Qatar was situated, it has now been put on the map (Al-Thani, 2012, 33:50). In terms of assuring legitimacy, Qatar’s state-branding policies have been warmly welcomed by its native population, increasing support for the government (Roberts, 2012, p. 239).
11. Conditions influencing Qatar’s disproportional foreign policy as a small state
The previous section answered the two sub-questions by arguing that conflict mediation, interventionism and state-branding are the core foreign policy goals of Qatar, and that in general it has been quite successful in reaching these goals. However, in order to explain why Qatar’s foreign policy contrasts with the four (neo)realist and (neo)liberal expectations regarding small state behaviour elaborated on in the theoretical framework, there is a need to focus on the factors that have influenced its disproportional foreign policy: its material capabilities, its domestic institutions, and the ambitions, principles and values of leading agents of foreign policy.

11.1 Capabilities disproportionate to population size
One crucial explanation for Qatar’s ambitious foreign policy lies in the Gulf state’s extreme wealth as a result of its endowment with huge oil and natural gas fields. As a result of this endowment, its GDP per capita (PPP) is the highest in the world, numbering a staggering US $129,700 (CIA, 2017b). Consequently, for a small state, its capabilities are disproportionate to its population size. One key indicator in this regard is Qatar’s military power. In 2010 Qatar’s military expenditure was US $2.1 billion (1.5% of Nominal GDP) according to SIPRI, remarkably high for a small state (2017).2 Despite the fact the Qatar’s armed forces are modest in size, this has not withheld the Emirate from making use of them. As mentioned, Qatar has deployed parts of its armed forces to Libya. This shows that Qatar has the capability and willingness to project military power abroad, counter to (neo)realist and (neo)liberal expectations of small states. This ability is in large part owing to Qatar’s extreme wealth and its consequent ability to have a relatively high military expenditure for a small state.

Furthermore, the Emirate’s three pillars of foreign policy would likely not have been possible without Qatar’s extreme wealth. While successful mediation depends for a large part on diplomatic skill and status, Qatar’s mediation efforts have in part also been successful as a result of its willingness and ability to provide significant financial incentives to disputants in the form of investments (Kamrava, 2011, pp. 552-553; Barakat, 2014, pp. 23-24). Its interventionist policies would also not have been possible without its extreme wealth. The abovementioned ability to project military power abroad is part of this and so is Qatar’s support of the wide range of rebel groups and Islamists; all have been given significant support in the form of money transfers, but also more indirectly through arms deliveries. Lastly, Qatar’s state-branding strategies also depend for a large part on the Emirate’s huge financial resources. To use the same abovementioned examples of state-branding, Qatar will be investing huge amounts of money for its hosting of the FIFA World Cup; it is estimated that a total amount of US $200 billion will invested in Qatar’s infrastructure (Booth, 2015). Secondly, while the high-profile stance Qatar has adopted in the GCC and other international

2 SIPRI only has statistics on Qatar up until 2010.
personalized and notable influence and becomes the decision-making of especially centralized structure in the 13). (Barakat, Hamad appointment after Qatar 2014, p. bin Jassim's efforts Jassim's exemplified of the one subsequently it priorities, string by made mediation Emirate's of highest policy This (Barakat, foreign placed 13). p. Qatari at 2014, essentially center of bin Jassim April Hamad who position thereupon 2007, al-Thani a was policy of the his Minister Foreign to previous appointment foreign Affairs gave his Emir his during Qatar's general. Revealing ambitious partly of explaining in foreign policy the which gave a Emir Hamad Khalifa The bin al-Thani Qatar's decision-making structure on national policies. on of the focus Qatar, the showing influence last Emirs of difference foreign under. The personal can his structure, of Emir ideas the be decision-making. As centralized p. Qatar's foreign result (Khatib, issues 418).

The disproportional material capabilities that Qatar enjoys, explain to a large degree why Qatar has not acted according to four described (neo)realist and (neo)liberal predictions for the behaviour of small states. As explained in the theoretical framework, these two approaches tend to view power in terms of material capabilities and tend to equate a small state size with low capabilities. Furthermore, these low capabilities define for a large part the behaviour of a small state according to these approaches. Qatar's extreme wealth has allowed it to increase its material capabilities to a level that is atypical for small states. Consequently, if Qatar is categorized as a small state, its behaviour cannot be explained by the (neo)realist and (neo)liberal schools of thought. However, as mentioned in the expectations section, Qatar's wealth is likely not the only explanation for Qatar's deviant behaviour; there is a need to focus on Qatar's domestic institutions and its ambitions, principles and values as well, which will be addressed in the following two subsections.

11.2 Highly personalized and centralized decision-making structure

Qatar's remarkable foreign policy can be partly accounted for by the fact that it is an absolute monarchy; the Emirate's decision-making structure is highly personalized and centralized. Especially in relation to foreign policy, most crucial decisions are made top-down by the Emir, his heir, the prime minister and the foreign affairs minister, with the Emir often being personally involved in foreign policy issues (Khatib, 2013, p. 418). As a result of Qatar's highly centralized and personalized decision-making structure, the personal ideas and preferences of the Emir and his advisors can be deemed to have an extensive influence on the Emirate's foreign policy. The influence of perceptions, ideas, principles and values on Qatar's foreign policy will be explained down below; this section will focus on the difference in foreign policy under the last two Emirs of Qatar, showing the influence of Qatar's decision-making structure on national policies.

The previous Emir - Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani - gave a high priority to foreign affairs during his reign, which partly explains Qatar's ambitious foreign policy in general. Revealing of the priority the previous Emir gave to foreign policy was his appointment of his Foreign Affairs Minister Hamad bin Jassim al-Thani as the Prime Minister in April 2007, who thereby occupied a dual position (Barakat, 2014, p. 13). This essentially placed Qatar's foreign policy at the center of Qatari power and subsequently made it one of the Emirate's highest priorities, exemplified by the string of mediation efforts Qatar began a month after Hamad bin Jassim's appointment (Barakat, 2014, p. 13). The influence of the personalized and centralized decision-making structure becomes especially notable
when comparing Qatari foreign policy under the reign of the previous Emir Hamad and the current Emir Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, who succeeded his father in 2013. In his inaugural speech, Emir Tamim announced that his country would focus on domestic development in the coming years (Kerr, 2013). Furthermore, the inaugural speech suggested that the new Emir would break with the foreign policy of his father, although it was uncertain to what extent this would be the case. In practice, a break has been visible in the few years following Emir Tamim’s coronation; so far during his reign, Qatar has been keeping a lower profile internationally, by lowering its support of Islamist groups and trying to avoid new diplomatic clashes with other GCC member states through more careful alignment of Qatar’s foreign policy with GCC member states’ foreign policies, although unsuccessfully, reflected by the multiple diplomatic crises within the GCC (Bianco & Cañiero, 2016). In addition, Tamim’s choice to select his Minister of the Interior to also serve as his Prime Minister and reduce the amount ministers involved with foreign policy from three to one, is a sign of Tamim’s more domestically focussed policy, according local experts (Al-Khuwaylidi, 2013; Tuttle, 2013).

The abovementioned arguments support the expectation flowing from (neo)-institutionalism that Qatar’s remarkable foreign policy results at least partly from its domestic institutions, as there have been differences between the policies of the last two Emirs, following from their differences in priorities. This shows that small states’ domestic institution do have an influence their foreign policy, contrary to (neo)realist assertions.

11.3 Influence of ambitions, principles and values

Another key factor that explains Qatar’s expansive foreign policy is Qatar’s desire to define itself as a leading power in the Middle East, despite of its small size. In an interview with Charlie Rose, Hamad bin Jassim al-Thani, Qatar’s Prime Minister and Foreign Minister under Emir Hamad and generally regarded as the architect of Qatar’s foreign policy, stated: “We have ambitions to have the name of Qatar in a level that everybody can see.” (Pulliam, 2013, p. 3; Al-Thani, 2014, 21:53). This is supported by an interview held by Sultan Barakat, in which a senior official of Qatar’s ministry of foreign affairs stated that Qatar’s interventionist policies were driven by Emir Hamad’s view that the time was right for Qatar to assume a greater role (Barakat, 2014, p. 29). Considering that Qatar already had a great role in regional affairs as a result of its mediation policies at the time, it points to the fact that the Emir must have had an ambitious view of Qatar’s role in regional politics.

Apart from ambitions for Qatar’s role, principles and values also play a role in Qatar’s ambitious foreign policy. As stated by Hamad bin Jassim al-Thani in Moscow in 2010: “(...) We defined the priorities of our foreign policy based on beliefs, discretion, values and national heritage represented in the teachings of our Islamic religion and Arab civilization” (International Business Publications, 2015) In addition, Qatar’s officials often state that its mediation efforts are partly driven
by a sense of duty (Barakat, 2014, p. 11). For example, in an interview with Sultan Barakat, a senior official of Qatar’s ministry of foreign affairs stated that Qatar has a “moral, cultural and religious duty” owed to Qatari citizens and others to mediate in conflicts (Barakat, 2014, p. 11). The duties this official referred to, are to a large degree derived from the Quran (Barakat, 2014, p. 11). The value Qatar attaches to the these duties is also illustrated by its constitution. As stated by Article 7 of the The Permanent Constitution of the State of Qatar: “The foreign policy of the State is based on the principles of strengthening international peace and security by means of encouraging peaceful resolution of international disputes (...)”(Al Meezan, 2017).

The arguments above support the expectation that ideas, norms and values have an influence on Qatar’s foreign policy. However it is almost impossible to investigate the degree to which these factors influence Qatar’s foreign policy. In fact, their influence might be limited, as it might be possible that values and principles are mostly used to legitimize Qatar’s sometimes controversial policies. It is therefore concluded that there is not enough evidence to support the claim that Qatar’s exceptional behaviour as a small state is (partly) the result of its ideas, norms and values; further research on this topic is required. Furthermore, no evidence has been found that Qatar’s foreign policy is the result of its self-perception and the perception of its role in world politics. However, comparable to these two factors are Qatar’s ambitions, which do partly explain Qatar exceptional foreign policy, as these ambitions have been the driving force behind at least one of Qatar’s foreign policy pillars: interventionism.

12. Conclusion
Overall, Qatar has achieved some significant successes in its foreign policy goals of mediation, interventionism and state-branding comprising its remarkable foreign policy. Especially its mediation and state-branding policies can be seen as at least successful. The record of its interventionist policies is more mixed, as Libya and Syria have turned into proverbial quagmires and created severe diplomatic blowbacks for the Emirate. In this case study three factors have been identified that have influenced Qatar’s remarkable foreign policy and its consequent deviancy as a case: its disproportionate capabilities, its highly personalized and centralized decision-making structure, and its ambitions. The most important factor seems to be Qatar’s disproportionate capabilities as small state, resulting from its extreme wealth; while Qatar’s decision-making structure and ambitions, as expected, partly explain its ambitious foreign policy, the scale and the form of its foreign policy would not have been possible without its extreme wealth. The (neo)realist and (neo)liberal approaches tend to view power in terms of material capabilities and tend to equate a small state size with low capabilities. Furthermore, these low capabilities define for a large part the behaviour of a small state according to these approaches. Therefore Qatar’s disproportionately high capabilities explain for the
largest part why Qatar’s behaviour deviates from (neo)realist and (neo)liberal expectations of the behaviour of small states.

One of the aims of this thesis was to contribute to the discussion of conceptualization of small states. Since Qatar’s relatively large material capabilities, as a result of its high GDP, is the most important factor explaining its deviant foreign policy, it can be stated that GDP is an indispensable criterion in the conceptualization of a small state. Consequently, it can be argued that Qatar is not a small state on the basis of its GDP, however, this would be preliminary to argue solely on the basis of this thesis, because conceptualizations of small states are always arbitrary and Qatar is still a small state in terms of population (although this depends on the operationalization used) and territorial size, making such as classification risky (Crowards, 2002; Neumann & Gstöhl, 2006, pp. 5-6). Furthermore, it cannot be stated that (self-)perception is an indispensable criterion in the conceptualization of a small state, as no conclusive evidence has been found that Qatar’s remarkable foreign policy is the result of its perception of itself and its role in world politics, contrary to expectations. Because of this reason and because material capabilities - which play and extensive role in (neo)realist and (neo)liberalist analyses - are the defining factor of Qatar’s foreign policy, the accuracy of constructivism vis-à-vis the (neo)realist and (neo)liberal approaches in the case of Qatar cannot be asserted, despite the fact that ambition does play a role in Qatar’s exceptional foreign policy. The same holds true for (neo-)institutionalism, however, in line with expectations, Qatar’s highly personalized and centralized decision-making structure did have an influence on its foreign policy, which shows that small states’ domestic institution do have an influence their foreign policy, contrary to (neo)realist assertions. Lastly, this thesis has provided some preliminary insights into the reasons why other small states, that enjoy relatively much power in certain economic issue areas, have not been following an ambitious foreign policy as Qatar has, despite their relatively large capabilities. Especially in regard to other oil-rich autocratic states, such as Bahrain and Brunei, ambition might be a key factor. The following hypothesis can therefore be formed: a lack of ambition explains the low-profile foreign policies of Bahrain and Brunei. Further research, possibly in the form of a comparative case study, is required to investigate this hypothesis.

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13. Bibliography

13.1 Theoretical outline and research design


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