



## Feeding a Nation

### Building a Resilient Food Security System in Qatar

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Nadia Hassan

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## Doha's Diversification Drive Post-Blockade

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Since the public embrace between Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman and Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad at the Al-Ula Summit of January 2021 — which effectively ended the Arab blockade of Qatar — a key question that has come to mind is how fences will be mended between these Arab states beyond mere cosmetics. A related question revolves around the relevance and future of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

To circumvent the pressures of the blockade, Qatar hastened its strategic diversification efforts, from seeking new sources of food supply to increase its food security to deepening its bilateral ties with Turkey and Iran. Doha also has stepped up its efforts to carve out a bigger role in the rules-based international order. It has offered to mediate between different sets of parties: Tehran and Washington on the one hand and Washington and the Taliban on the other.

This series of *Insights* aims to uncover the various pathways to diversification that Qatar has undertaken since the blockade and following its rehabilitation by the blockading parties.

*Cover image: Cows are led to be fed in a dairy factory at the climate-controlled Baladna farm in the city of al-Khor, 60 km north Doha, 26 October 2019. Karim Jaafar/AFP.*

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Nadia Hassan\*

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Contrary to expectations, the impact of the Arab blockade of 2017 on Qatar's food supply has been negligible. Instead, the blockade provided impetus for the intensification and acceleration of Qatar's National Food Security Programme, established in 2008. By encouraging domestic food production and diversifying its sources of food supply, Qatar even managed to maintain top spot among Arab countries in a global food security index.

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**R**ecent global developments have pushed food security to the top of the national agenda for many countries today. Food supplies worldwide have been threatened by the disruption of global supply chains arising from the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war, as well as extreme weather events such as droughts, floods and bushfires. The resulting food price inflation has affected the affordability of food for many. The arid Middle East region has long been heavily reliant on food imports, with close to 50% of its food coming from other countries. This figure rises to 90% in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region, making it vulnerable to the supply and price risks associated with dependence on the world market.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> ESCWA (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia), Arab Horizon 2030: Prospects for Enhancing Food Security in the Arab Region (2017), [https://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/rne/docs/arab-horizon-2030-prospects-enhancing-food-security-summary-english.pdf](https://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/rne/docs/arab-horizon-2030-prospects-enhancing-food-security-summary-english.pdf). Also see Gyorgy Busztin, "Ukraine War

On the morning of 5 June 2017, when the Arab quartet severed diplomatic ties with Qatar and imposed a land, sea and air blockade, the tiny emirate found itself suddenly cut off from two of its primary suppliers of poultry, goat, milk, onions, potatoes and barley — Saudi Arabia and the UAE. More than 90% of Qatar's food supplies was said to be from foreign sources and a significant portion of it, though coming from the Levant region, had to be shipped across Qatar's lone land border — that with Saudi Arabia — to get into the country.<sup>2</sup> Before the blockade, Saudi Arabia and the UAE accounted for 27.4% of Qatar's total food imports by value. During this time, over 40% of Qatar's food imports came overland through Saudi Arabia.<sup>3</sup>

## More than 90% of Qatar's food supplies was said to be from foreign sources.

Amid fears of food shortages, Qatari residents rushed to supermarkets and filled their shopping carts with essential food items and water, adding to the frenzy arising from the preparations for Ramadan. The panic-buying compelled Qatar's Ministry of Economy and Commerce to fix prices of most consumer goods and food products<sup>4</sup> and

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Spotlights an Old Problem for the Middle East: Food (In)security", Middle East Institute, NUS, 28 June 2022, [https://mei.nus.edu.sg/think\\_in/ukraine-war-spotlights-an-old-problem-for-the-middle-east-food-insecurity/?fbclid=IwAR22bz6MSRgZjeiWiFEgLkySzZHrSQEA8W8wLI9-IamR1NsAcjo04BzmyCs](https://mei.nus.edu.sg/think_in/ukraine-war-spotlights-an-old-problem-for-the-middle-east-food-insecurity/?fbclid=IwAR22bz6MSRgZjeiWiFEgLkySzZHrSQEA8W8wLI9-IamR1NsAcjo04BzmyCs).

<sup>2</sup> Adam Taylor, "Qatar could face a food crisis in spat with Arab neighbours", *The Washington Post*, 5 June 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/06/05/qatar-could-face-a-food-crisis-in-spat-with-arab-neighbors/>.

<sup>3</sup> Hela Miniaoui, Patrick Irungu & Simeon Kaitibie, "Contemporary Issues in Qatar's Food Security", *Insights No. 185*, Middle East Institute, NUS, 31 May 2018, <https://mei.nus.edu.sg/publication/insight-185-contemporary-issues-in-qatars-food-security/>.

<sup>4</sup> Hussein A. Amery, "Food Security in Qatar: Threats and Opportunities", Gulf Insights Series 7, February 2019, Gulf Studies Center, Qatar University,

assure the public that the country's strategic reserve of essential food items like rice, sugar, milk, pulses and cooking oil was sufficient for the next 10 months.<sup>5</sup> Short-term solutions to ensure continuity in food supplies came in the form of emergency supplies flown in from Turkey and Iran. Two days after the blockade came into effect, Turkey arranged for an immediate shipping of dairy products and chicken, still bearing non-Arabic labels as they had been produced for local retail.<sup>6</sup> Iran followed suit on 11 June, sending four cargo plane-loads of fruit and vegetables and pledging to continue exporting 100 tonnes of these each day.<sup>7</sup>

Notwithstanding fears of food shortages though, Qatar ... shot up to 13th place globally in the 2019 [global food security] index while retaining its top spot among Arab countries, a position it has continued to maintain since.

Notwithstanding fears of food shortages though, Qatar leapfrogged over Kuwait and Oman to attain the top spot among Arab countries in a global food security index for 2018. This was despite a

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[https://www.qu.edu.qa/static\\_file/qu/research/Gulf%20Studies/documents/Gulf%20Insights%207%20Amery.pdf](https://www.qu.edu.qa/static_file/qu/research/Gulf%20Studies/documents/Gulf%20Insights%207%20Amery.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Qatar Tribune, "Strategic food reserve enough for 10 months", *Qatar Tribune*, 9 June 2017,

<https://www.qatar-tribune.com/article/69657/FIRSTPAGE/Strategic-food-reserve-enough-for-10-months>.

<sup>6</sup> Khatri, Shabina, Doha News 2017. "Turkish dairy products, chicken hit Qatar shelves" 9 June 2017

<https://dohanews.co/turkish-dairy-products-chicken-hit-qatar-shelves-2/>.

<sup>7</sup> Reuters, "Iran flies food to Qatar amid concerns of shortages", 11 June 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/gulf-qatar-iran-idUSL8N1J806M>.

drop in its score compared with the previous year.<sup>8</sup> More significantly, Qatar shot up to 13th place globally in the 2019 index while retaining its top spot among Arab countries, a position it has continued to maintain since.<sup>9</sup>

Qatar's ability to weather the storm was due largely to the government's efforts beginning in 2008 to establish a sustainable ecosystem of food security. The blockade served as a wake-up call to intensify and accelerate those efforts.

## Qatar's Constraints and Establishment of Food Security Programme

Like its Arab neighbours, Qatar's food security risks stem from its harsh geoclimatic conditions — the land is arid (only 1% of the landmass is considered arable land), temperatures are extremely high, and water has to be imported owing to low average precipitation. Consequently, Qatar has been unable to engage in traditional farming practices on a large scale.<sup>10</sup> Meanwhile, the country's food requirements have been growing, with the population having more than quadrupled since the turn of the century, reaching 2.93 million in 2021.<sup>11</sup>

As global commodity prices rose in 2008, the office of Qatar's then-heir apparent established the Qatar National Food Security Programme (QNFSP), mindful of the country's high import dependence and need to develop resilience to food supply or price shocks. The multi-

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<sup>8</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit, Global Food Security Index 2018, <https://foodsecurityindex.eiu.com/Home/DownloadResource?fileName=EIU%20Global%20Food%20Security%20Index%20-%202018%20Findings%20%26%20Methodology.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit, Global Food Security Index 2019, <https://foodsecurityindex.eiu.com/Home/DownloadResource?fileName=Global%20Food%20Security%20Index%202019%20report.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Hussein A. Amery, "Food Security in Qatar".

<sup>11</sup> World Bank data, "Population total, Qatar", based on UN Population Division, "World Population Prospects", <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=QA>.

billion dollar programme was aimed at expanding food storage capacity, diversifying food supply chains, and increasing domestic food production. The food security programme is meant to be an important enabler of the Qatar National Vision 2030 (QNV 2030), which is a master vision and roadmap towards Qatar becoming an advanced society with a diversified economy capable of sustainable development by 2030. Over the next five years, a cross-governmental task force of 17 ministries and agencies worked in consultation with global experts to formulate the QNFSP, which the Ministry of Municipality and Environment began implementing in April 2014, a month after the quartet withdrew their ambassadors from Qatar and severed diplomatic ties with Qatar in protest against the latter's independent stance on several issues. While the 2014 diplomatic crisis was mainly a political gesture and less severe in extent than the 2017 GCC blockade, which involved a closure of land, sea, and air borders, it became an opportune time for the QNFSP to implement its food security plan.

## Qatar's National Food Security Programme was aimed at expanding food storage capacity, diversifying food supply chains, and increasing domestic food production.

Food security must be distinguished from food self-sufficiency. The former refers to the access that people have to enough food for a healthy and active life<sup>12</sup> whereas the latter refers to a country's ability to meet its domestic consumption without relying on imports. Food security is relatively easier to achieve, especially when a country has the financial means to procure food supplies, as in the case of Qatar, one of the world's richest nations in per capita terms. Food self-sufficiency deals

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<sup>12</sup> FAO, "Food Security", Policy Brief, Issue No. 2, June 2006, [https://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/faoitally/documents/pdf/pdf\\_Food\\_Security\\_Concept\\_Note.pdf](https://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/faoitally/documents/pdf/pdf_Food_Security_Concept_Note.pdf).

with more complicated factors such as geographical constraints, lack of technological innovations and other limitations that a country faces in developing a domestic capacity for agricultural production and animal husbandry. The goal of every country today is ideally to fortify its defences on both fronts to counter any global uncertainty that will render it vulnerable.

Food self-sufficiency deals with more complicated factors [than food security] such as geographical constraints, lack of technological innovations and other limitations that a country faces in developing a domestic capacity for agricultural production and animal husbandry.

In Qatar's case, after initially planning to increase self-sufficiency from 10% to 70% by 2023, the QNFSP scaled back its ambitions to achieving 40-60% domestic production.<sup>13</sup> Efforts to increase domestic food production involved investing in hydroponics and other innovative farming technologies and irrigation systems to overcome Qatar's geoclimatic challenges. The government also began leasing or purchasing arable lands in countries like Kenya and Ghana.<sup>14</sup> Qatar's production of red meat and poultry was said to have skyrocketed from 10,792 tons in 2012 to 183,988 tons in 2016 although the production of grain, fruit and vegetables did not see much improvement.<sup>15</sup> The QNFSP seems to have slowed down in subsequent years.

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<sup>13</sup> Sara Fouad Almohamadi, "Qatar dispute exposes regional food-security failures", IISS Blog, 21 August 2021, <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2017/08/qatar-food-insecurity>.

<sup>14</sup> Hussein Amery, "Food Security in Qatar".

<sup>15</sup> Hussein Amery, "Food Security in Qatar".



## A Wake-up Call

The Arab blockade, however, served as a wake-up call, galvanising Qatar into seriously pushing through the QNFSP to break the curse of being an import-dependent country and move towards long-term self-sufficiency in food supplies. Qatar was also now determined to pursue diversification of its trade partners and supply chains, switching from the GCC to over 80 countries worldwide. Countries like Turkey and India soon emerged as leading sources of food imports.<sup>16</sup>

The Qatari government implemented various initiatives and schemes such as tax exemptions and subsidies to encourage more small and medium enterprises to undertake domestic manufacturing of food products.

As part of its efforts to ramp up local food production the Qatari government implemented various initiatives and schemes such as tax exemptions and subsidies to encourage more small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to undertake domestic manufacturing of food products. Qatar's Ministry of Economy and Commerce launched initiatives such as the “Own Your Factory in 72 Hours” scheme to attract both domestic and international investors to the manufacturing sector.<sup>17</sup> The scheme was designed to jumpstart the domestic manufacturing of strategic products by removing red tape and accelerating the approvals process.

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<sup>16</sup> Hela Miniaoui, Patrick Irungu & Simeon Kaitibie, “Contemporary Issues in Qatar’s Food Security”.

<sup>17</sup> The Business Year, “A Rebirth: Qatar’s Industrial Renaissance”, 30 March 2019, <https://www.thebusinessyear.com/qatar-2019/a-rebirth/focus>.

The government also provided support to the country's farmers to increase livestock and dairy production by providing facilities such as farm complexes complete with electricity and cooling systems to nurture animals in the desert climate. One of the companies that availed itself of government support to pursue expansion plans was Baladna. The company flew in 3400 Holstein cows within weeks of the blockade.<sup>18</sup> Today it has more than 14,000 cows, as well as 5,000 goats and 40,000 sheep.<sup>19</sup> Qatar's self-sufficiency in milk production has since increased from 28% before May 2017 to a peak 84% in August 2018.<sup>20</sup> Today Qatar is said to be fully self-sufficient in dairy production and Baladna is said to supply more than half of Qatar's fresh milk. In fact, Baladna reports being able even to export its products to Afghanistan, Yemen and Oman, and soon to Libya.<sup>21</sup> Reports of Baladna's ability to export its products may well be an effort to signal Qatar's resilience. Nevertheless, from a corporate perspective, being able to go beyond producing for the domestic market would allow the company to achieve economies of scale, overcome potential competition and remain viable in the long run.

## Today Qatar is said to be fully self-sufficient in dairy and poultry production.

Qatar is also said to have achieved full self-sufficiency in poultry production. The volume of fresh fish production was expected to reach a

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<sup>18</sup> Hussein Amery, "Food Security in Qatar".

<sup>19</sup> EIU, "Qatar seeks more self-sufficiency in food and manufacturing", [https://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=886843272&Country=Qatar&topic=Economy\\_1](https://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=886843272&Country=Qatar&topic=Economy_1).

<sup>20</sup> Sidi Mohamed, "Self-sufficiency in dairy products increases to 84%", *The Peninsula*, 7 August 2018, <https://thepeninsulaqatar.com/article/07/08/2018/Self-sufficiency-in-dairy-products-increases-to-84>.

<sup>21</sup> Erich Knecht, "With cows, chickens and greenhouses, Qatar takes on regional boycott", Reuters, 5 June 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-gulf-qatar/with-cows-chickens-and-greenhouses-qatar-takes-on-regional-boycott-idUSKCN1T6165>.

self-sufficiency rate of 90% by 2023. In 2021, red meat, production achieved a self-sufficiency rate of 24%, compared with about 16% in 2018. Egg production increased to a self-sufficiency rate of 35% in 2021 and is expected to reach 70% by 2023. In 2021, domestic production of vegetables more than doubled, achieving 41% self-sufficiency; the target self-sufficiency rate for 2023 is 70%.<sup>22</sup>

A major player in Qatar's food sector is Hassad Food Company (HFC),<sup>23</sup> a subsidiary of Qatar's sovereign wealth fund. Apart from playing a role in food-related research and development, the company has strategic investments in food production companies locally. HFC also engages in contract farming overseas by leasing or purchasing farmlands but seems to be increasingly switching to making strategic investments in large food producing companies overseas.

## Bypassing GCC Ports: Increasing Connectivity to Other Regions

The opening of Qatar's Hamad Port just months before the imposition of the blockade played a critical role in allowing Qatar to bypass the curb to its food shipments.<sup>24</sup> Entailing an investment of QR27.5 billion<sup>25</sup> and involving technologically advanced logistical systems and improved storage and warehousing facilities compared with Doha Port, the new port has been critical in allowing Qatar to accommodate large container ships, which previously had to discharge their cargo onto feeder ships at

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<sup>22</sup> Qatar Tribune, The march towards food security, self-sufficiency continues, *Qatar Tribune*, 30 December 2021, <https://www.qatar-tribune.com/article/226708/BUSINESS/The-march-towards-food-security-self-sufficiency-continuesqatar->

<sup>23</sup>Website of Hassad Food Company, <http://www.hassad.com/English/AboutUs/Pages/default.aspx>.

<sup>24</sup> The Peninsula, "3 years of dignity and prosperity: Qatar's ports played key role in defeating siege", *The Peninsula*, 2 October 2021, <https://thepeninsulaqatar.com/article/05/06/2020/3-years-of-dignity-and-prosperity-Qatar%E2%80%99s-ports-played-key-role-in-defeating-siege>.

<sup>25</sup> 1 Qatari Riyal is equivalent to approximately US\$0.27 as of September 2022.

ports such as Jebel Ali in Dubai.<sup>26</sup> Considering that Jebel Ali had serviced 85% of Qatar-bound sea-borne cargo before 2017, the newfound autonomy provided by Hamad Port was a significant contributor to Qatar's ability to overcome the effects of the blockade.<sup>27</sup>

## The newfound autonomy provided by Hamad Port was a significant contributor to Qatar's ability to overcome the effects of the blockade.

Qatari officials were quick to leverage the newly built port by launching new shipping routes, which made Qatar increasingly connected to more ports worldwide and provided alternative supply chains. Large volumes of trade were now possible, with Hamad Port being 14 times the size of Doha Port. The Liner Shipping Connectivity Index,<sup>28</sup> measuring how well countries are linked to global trade routes, went up sharply for Qatar from nine points in 2014 to 36 points in 2019.<sup>29</sup> Hamad Port has in fact made a paradigm shift in Qatar's economic diversification and transformed it into a vibrant and competitive trading hub within the region.

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<sup>26</sup> Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, "The Blockade of Qatar and Lessons for Small States", *Heard at the Souk*, Middle East Institute, NUS, 19 October 2020, [https://mei.nus.edu.sg/think\\_in/the-blockade-of-qatar-and-lessons-for-small-states/](https://mei.nus.edu.sg/think_in/the-blockade-of-qatar-and-lessons-for-small-states/).

<sup>27</sup> "The boycott of Qatar is hurting its enforcers", *The Economist*, 19 October 2017, cited in Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, "The Blockade of Qatar and Lessons for Small States".

<sup>28</sup> Liner Shipping Connectivity Index, <https://www.ceicdata.com/en/indicator/qatar/liner-shipping-connectivity-index>.

<sup>29</sup> Andreas Kreig "Coronavirus: How the Saudi-led blockade prepared Qatar for the pandemic", *Middle East Eye*, 2 April 2020, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/coronavirus-how-saudi-led-blockade-prepared-qatar-pandemic>.

In July 2017, Qatar announced the building of a 530,000 sq m food security facility at Hamad Port at a cost of QR1.6bn to process and stockpile rice, raw sugar and edible oils. The facility was scheduled to be operational in 2021. Once operational, it was projected to have the minimum daily capacity to produce 300 tonnes of sugar, 500 tonnes of rice and 200 tonnes of edible oils, ensuring a stockpile for 3 million people for two years.<sup>30</sup>

## Rising Sense of Nationalism: Better Prospects for Local Food Producers?

The boycott fuelled a spurt in Qatari nationalism, in part state encouraged.<sup>31</sup> Qataris mostly rallied around Emir Tamim: the slogans “Tamim Al Majd” and “Allah, Al Watn, Al Amir” were repeatedly featured not only on street murals and large posters in shopping malls but also on car decals. Social media messages by Qataris illustrated a growing sense of nationalism, as did the fact that hundreds of Qatari men signed up for military service.<sup>32</sup> In addition, the previously launched bi-annual #MadeinQatar campaign was reignited and intensified during the blockade. Supermarkets were filled with posters and stickers encouraging people to buy local Qatari produce and dairy shelves previously filled with Saudi produce were replaced with locally produced food such as Baladna's dairy products. Many shoppers were reported to

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<sup>30</sup> Satyendra Pathak, “Hamad Port food plant to be operational next year: Dorsch Qatar”, *Qatar Tribune*, 8 October 2019, <https://www.qatar-tribune.com/article/174072/BUSINESS/Hamad-Port-food-plant-to-be-operational-next-year-Dorsch-Qatar>.

<sup>31</sup> Ameena Almeer, “Loyal to the Royals: Nationalism in the Collective Imaginary of Post-‘Blockade’ Qatar”, Thesis submitted to Georgetown University, Spring 2020, <https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/bitstream/handle/10822/1059205/Loyal%20to%20the%20Royals%20-%20Ameena%20Almeer.pdf;sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

<sup>32</sup> Giorgio Cafiero, “A Rising Wave of Qatari Nationalism”, *TRT World*, 7 July 2021, <https://www.trtworld.com/opinion/a-rising-wave-of-qatari-nationalism-8594>.

be seeking out products that were made locally.<sup>33</sup> Qatari eggs were the first to be completely sold out before shoppers considered alternative supplies from Ukraine or Turkey.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, other food products such as locally produced honey were completely sold out during the first several months of 2018 owing to a surge of nationalist sentiment.<sup>35</sup> Support for and promotion of locally produced Qatari food products has been central to achieving self-sufficiency and reducing dependence on imported items.

## The boycott fuelled a spurt in Qatari nationalism, in part state encouraged.

In a survey conducted among 25 Qatari nationals in October 2021,<sup>36</sup> the author concluded that, if given a variety of choices, the majority — 64% respondents — would purchase foods locally produced in Qatar. Some element of nationalism in the wake of the blockade may have influenced the choices of the respondents. Eighty percent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had no fear of food supply disruptions in Qatar owing to efficient management by the government. This is an indicator of trust in and the success of the strategies employed by the government to safeguard the country's food security during the blockade.

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<sup>33</sup> Sebastian Castelier and Clement Poure, "Made in Qatar": How the Blockade Has Boosted Gulf State's Food Production, *The Middle East Eye*, 14 October 201, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/fr/node/73541>.

<sup>34</sup> Author's personal observations.

<sup>35</sup> Sebastian Castelier and Clement Poure, "Made in Qatar".

<sup>36</sup> Qatar Food System survey conducted by author among 25 Qatari nationals in October 2021. These survey findings are based on a small sample and are part of a preliminary research that the author hopes to explore further in the future.

## The Balance Sheet

Notwithstanding the progress made, Qatar may still be vulnerable to external food shocks. Firstly, while the diversification of trade relations helped to spread the risk of depending on limited food sources, some of its new sources of food supplies such as Iran and Turkey have low scores in terms of political stability, based on the UN's political stability index.<sup>37</sup>

### Progress in increasing domestic food production has come at a cost to the environment and to public coffers.

Secondly, Qatar's contract farming in places like Kenya — where it had leased 40,000 hectares of land to grow crops as part of a proposed package that would also see the Gulf state fund a new port on a Kenyan tourist island — can be controversial.<sup>38</sup> Contract-farming practices by rich foreign investors in developing countries is becoming increasingly politicised owing to the inequality in bargaining power between the smallholders whose land is acquired and the investors.<sup>39</sup> Hence, Qatar may need to reconsider contract farming overseas as a means of enhancing its food security and instead turn its efforts towards investing in agricultural research and development for new cost-effective and sustainable agricultural technologies and innovations domestically.

Thirdly, progress in increasing domestic food production has come at a cost to the environment and to public coffers, although, admittedly, the Qatari government is well endowed, thanks to massive

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<sup>37</sup> Hela Minoui, Patrick Irungu & Simeon Kaitibie, "Contemporary Issues in Qatar's Food Security".

<sup>38</sup> Xan Rice, "Qatar looks to grow food in Kenya", *The Guardian*, 3 December 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2008/dec/02/land-for-food-qatar-kenya>.

<sup>39</sup> Joachim von Braun and Ruth Meinzen Dick, "Land Grabbing by Foreign Investors in Developing Countries: Risks and Opportunities, IFPRI Policy Brief", April 2009, <https://www.ifpri.org/publication/land-grabbing-foreign-investors-developing-countries>.

gas reserves. The cooling systems provided for animal husbandry, for example, are a drain on energy and water resources. Moreover, the free provision of extracted groundwater to crop farmers reduces their incentives for economising on water usage.<sup>40</sup>

## Is Qatar prepared to resume food imports in a significant way from Saudi Arabia and the other countries that had imposed the blockade, given that relations have been improving since the Al-Ula summit of January 2021?

Fourthly, while the heightened sense of nationalism during the blockade was one of the key factors that led to Qatar's success in its food security efforts, it is arguably unsustainable in the long run, especially with the boycott having ended and the nationalistic duty to buy local produce possibly waning. If domestic consumption of local produce falls, Qatar's domestic food producers would need to find new markets overseas to attain economies of scale and remain viable in the long run. One question that arises in this context is whether Qatar is prepared to resume food imports in a significant way from Saudi Arabia and the other countries that had imposed the blockade, given that relations have been improving since the Al-Ula summit of January 2021. Will Qatar be willing to trade some of its political principles that had irked its neighbours earlier just so that it can resume large-scale food imports from these countries to feed the nation?

In conclusion, Qatar's efforts to diversify its food sources and step up domestic food production have certainly minimised the shock arising from the blockade. They have also had payoffs in terms of ensuring the

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<sup>40</sup> Laura Wellesley, "How Qatar's Food System has Adapted to the Blockade", Chatham House, 14 November 2019, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2019/11/how-qatars-food-system-has-adapted-blockade>.



availability of food amid the global supply shortages encountered in the three years since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>41</sup> ◆

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<sup>41</sup> Ministry of Municipality, "The Minister of Municipality and Environment presents Qatar's vision for sustainable food security", 19 May 2020, <https://www.mme.gov.qa/cui/view.do?id=702&contentID=7614&siteID=2>.



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