

Why Qatar wants to invade Syria

By [Pepe Escobar](#)

Global Research, September 27, 2012

[Asia Times](#)

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Oil and Energy](#), [US NATO War](#)


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Make no mistake; the Emir of Qatar is on a roll.

What an entrance at the UN General Assembly in New York; Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani called for an Arab coalition of the willing-style invasion of Syria, no less. [1]

In the words of the Emir, "It is better for the Arab countries themselves to interfere out of their national, humanitarian, political and military duties, and to do what is necessary to stop the bloodshed in Syria." He stressed Arab countries had a "military duty" to invade.

What he means by "Arab countries" is the petromonarchies of the Gulf Counter-Revolution Club (GCC), previously known as Gulf Cooperation Council - with implicit help from Turkey, with which  the GCC has a wide-ranging strategic agreement. Every shisha house in the Middle East knows that Doha, Riyadh and Ankara have been weaponizing/financing/providing logistical help to the various strands of the armed Syrian opposition engaged in regime change.

The Emir even quoted a "similar precedent" for an invasion, when "Arab forces intervened in Lebanon" in the 1970s. By the way, during a great deal of the 1970s the Emir himself was engaged in more mundane interventions, such as letting his hair down alongside other Gulf royals in select Club Med destinations, as this photo attests (he's the guy on the left).

So is the Emir now preaching an Arab version of the R2P ("responsibility to protect") doctrine advanced by The Three Graces of Humanitarian Intervention (Hillary Clinton, Susan Rice and Samantha Power)?

This is certainly bound to go down well in Washington - not to mention Ankara and even Paris, considering French president Francois Hollande has just called for UN protection of "liberated zones" in Syria.

As for the Emir's Lebanon precedent, that's not exactly uplifting, to say the least. The so-called Arab Deterrent Force of 20,000 soldiers that entered Lebanon to try to contain the civil war overstayed its welcome by no less than seven years, turned into a Syrian military occupation of northern Lebanon, left officially in 1982 and still the civil war kept raging.

Imagine a similar scenario in Syria - on steroids.

A 'pretty influential guy'

As for the Emir's humanitarian - not to mention democratic - ardor, it's enlightening to check out what US President Barack Obama [thinks](#) about it. Obama - who defines the Emir

as a “pretty influential guy” – seems to imply that even though “he himself is not reforming significantly” and “there’s no big move towards democracy in Qatar”, just because the emirate’s per capita income is humongous, a move towards democracy is not so pressing.

So let’s assume the Emir is not exactly interested in turning Syria into Scandinavia. That opens the way to an inevitable motive – connected to, what else, Pipelineistan.

Vijay Prashad, author of the recent *Arab Spring, Libya Winter*, is currently writing a series on the Syria Contact Group for Asia Times Online. He got a phone call from an energy expert urging him to investigate “the Qatari ambition to run its pipelines into Europe.” According to this source, “the proposed route would have run through Iraq and Turkey. The former transit country is posing to be a problem. So much easier to go north (Qatar has already promised Jordan free gas).”

Even before Prashad concludes his investigation, it’s clear what Qatar is aiming at; to kill the US\$10 billion Iran-Iraq-Syria gas pipeline, a deal that was clinched even as the Syria uprising was already underway. [2]

Here we see Qatar in direct competition with both Iran (as a producer) and Syria (as a destination), and to a lesser extent, Iraq (as a transit country). It’s useful to remember that Tehran and Baghdad are adamantly against regime change in Damascus.

The gas will come from the same geographical/geological base – South Pars, the largest gas field in the world, shared by Iran and Qatar. The Iran-Iraq-Syria pipeline – if it’s ever built – would solidify a predominantly Shi’ite axis through an economic, steel umbilical cord.

Qatar, on the other hand, would rather build its pipeline in a non-“Shi’ite crescent” way, with Jordan as a destination; exports would leave from the Gulf of Aqaba to the Gulf of Suez and then to the Mediterranean. That would be the ideal plan B as negotiations with Baghdad become increasingly complicated (plus the fact the route across Iraq and Turkey is much longer).

Washington – and arguably European customers – would be more than pleased with a crucial Pipelineistan gambit bypassing the Islamic Gas Pipeline.

And of course, if there’s regime change in Syria – helped by the Qatari-proposed invasion – things get much easier in Pipelineistan terms. A more than probable Muslim Brotherhood (MB) post-Assad regime would more than welcome a Qatari pipeline. And that would make an extension to Turkey much easier.

Ankara and Washington would win. Ankara because Turkey’s strategic aim is to become the top energy crossroads from the Middle East/Central Asia to Europe (and the Islamic Gas Pipeline bypasses it). Washington because its whole energy strategy in Southwest Asia since the Clinton administration has been to bypass, isolate and hurt Iran by all means necessary. [3]

That wobbly Hashemite throne

All this points to Jordan as an essential pawn in Qatar’s audacious geopolitical/energy power play. Jordan has been invited to be part of the GCC – even though it’s not exactly in the Persian Gulf (who cares? It’s a monarchy).

One of the pillars of Qatar's foreign policy is unrestricted support for the MB – no matter the latitude. The MB has already conquered the presidency in Egypt. It is strong in Libya. It may become the dominant power if there's regime change in Syria. That brings us to Qatar's help to the MB in Jordan.

At the moment, Jordan's Hashemite monarchy is wobbly – and that's a transcendental understatement.

There's a steady influx of Syrian refugees. Compound it with the Palestinian refugees that came in waves during the crucial phases of the Arab-Israeli war, in 1948, 1967 and 1973. Then add a solid contingent of Salafi-jihadis fighting Damascus. Only a few days ago one Abu Usseid was arrested. His uncle was none other than Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the infamous former head of al-Qaeda in Iraq, killed in 2006. Usseid was about to cross the desert from Jordan to Syria.

Amman has been mired in protests since January 2011 – even before the spread of the Arab Spring. King Abdullah, also known as King Playstation, and photogenic Washington/Hollywood darling Queen Rania, have not been spared.

The MB in Jordan is not the only player in the protest wave; unions and social movements are also active. Most protesters are Jordanians – who historically have been in control of all levels of state bureaucracy. But then neo-liberalism reduced them to road kill; Jordan went through a savage privatization drive during the 1990s. The impoverished kingdom now depends on the IMF and extra handouts from the US, the GCC and even the EU.

Parliament is a joke – dominated by tribal affiliation and devotion to the monarchy. Reforms are not even cosmetic. A prime minister was changed in April and most people didn't even noticed it. In an Arab world classic, the regime fights demands for change by increasing repression.

Into this quagmire steps Qatar. Doha wants King Playstation to embrace Hamas. It was Qatar that promoted the meeting in January between the King and Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal – who had been expelled from Jordan in 1999. That left indigenous Jordanians wondering whether the kingdom would be swamped by yet another wave of Palestinian refugees.

Arab media – most of it controlled by the House of Saud – has been drowning in stories and editorials predicting that after the MB ascends to power in Damascus, Amman will be next. Qatar, though, is binding its time. The MB wants Jordan to become a constitutional monarchy; then they will take over politically after an electoral reform that King Abdullah has been fighting against for years.

Now the MB can even count on the support of Bedouin tribes, whose traditional allegiance to the Hashemite throne has never been wobblier. The regime has ignored protests at its own peril. The MB has called for a mass demonstration against the King on October 10. The Hashemite throne is going down, sooner rather than later.

It's unclear how Obama would react – apart from praying that nothing substantial happens before November 6. As for the Emir of Qatar, he has all the time in the world. So many regimes to fall – and become Muslim Brothers; so many pipelines to build.

Notes:

1. [Qatar's emir calls for Arab-led intervention in Syria](#), The National, Sep 26, 2012.
2. [Syria's Pipelineistan war](#), Al Jazeera, Aug 6, 2012.
3. [Qatar: Rich and Dangerous](#), Oilprice.com, Sep 17, 2012.

Pepe Escobar is the author of [Globalistan: How the Globalized World is Dissolving into Liquid War](#) (Nimble Books, 2007) and [Red Zone Blues: a snapshot of Baghdad during the surge](#). His most recent book is [Obama does Globalistan](#) (Nimble Books, 2009).

He may be reached at pepeasia@yahoo.com

The original source of this article is [Asia Times](#)
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