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**Regional Actor Transformed into an International Key-Player:  
The Qatar Entrance in the Ukraine Crisis  
Leticia Rodríguez**

**Gulf Insights Series  
Nº 56 – March 2022**

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## **Regional actor transformed into an international key-player: The Qatar entrance in the Ukraine crisis. Leticia Rodríguez**

### *Introduction*

In the last decade, Qatar has earned its position as a regional and international actor, thanks to the development of its foreign policy and the mechanisms of diplomacy and mediation. After its independence in 1971, Qatar gradually approached the U.S. to shield its security and guarantee its survival in a complex and conflictive regional environment. To try to shield itself from possible threats to its territorial integrity, Qatar launched an intense policy of regional and international alliances. Qatar guarantees its security in two ways: on the one hand, through its close relations with the U.S. through the transfer of the Al Udeid base; on the other hand, Qatar has managed to diversify this dependency by supplying liquefied gas to some of the most powerful countries in the world such as Japan, India, South Korea, the United Kingdom, Taiwan, and China (Roberts 2017: 41). All of them depend on Qatar for energy, and, as is known, stability is an essential condition to guarantee the flow of gas.

Qatar's entry into the Ukraine crisis has brought back to the table the importance of Qatar as an international player and the trust that the West places have in the small emirate. Europe's energy dependence on Russian gas is one of the most critical points of this crisis. Despite the agreement reached between Qatar and the U.S. governments, the reality

appears to be more complex on the ground. Commitments to third countries, current peak production, and the gas characteristics that Qatar exports could not be a short-term solution. In response to Qatar's effort and involvement in numerous international crises, the U.S. government has designated Qatar as a "Major Non-NATO Ally." A special status within the alliance of 15 States with which the United States maintains strategic relations. Among these countries are Kuwait, Argentina, Bahrain, or Israel.

The following lines will review the current situation in which Europe finds itself immersed, the role of Qatar in this crisis, and recognition as a regional and international actor at a time when the Qatari government once again demonstrates its worth and weight in a regional environment and polarized international.

### *The Ukraine crisis: Europe dependence gas from Russia:*

The growing tension on the border has put the entire continent on alert. However, responses to the conflict differ when considering the consequences of an armed conflict within the European territory. European countries are energy-dependent on third countries. While southern Europe depends on North Africa and the Middle East for its energy supplies, northern [European countries are almost entirely dependent on Russia.](#)

Russian-German interdependence in energy matters is more than evident, and the escalation of the current military conflict in Ukraine would lead to a double scenario. On the one hand, the [non-authorization of the Nord Stream 2](#) gas pipeline connects Russia with Germany without passing through Ukraine. This would impact the Russian economy, which [has used energy and supply agreements as a source of power in its foreign policy for decades](#). It has aimed to maintain its influence in certain countries considered satellites for the Kremlin. On the other hand, a cut in Moscow's gas supply would mean a region's social, political, and economic crisis.

For this reason, the United States (the only valid interlocutor for the Russian government) has negotiated with Qatar the supply of [liquefied gas to Europe](#). With the possibility of a cut in gas supply in the middle of winter and with electricity prices on the rise, the U.S. administration and European executives are looking for strategic partners to alleviate the consequences of an armed conflict on the border of the European Union.

*Qatar gas: is it a real short-term solution?*

In recent years, Qatar has gained regional and international influence primarily, though not exclusively, from its gas revenues. The wealth provided by the sale of gas and international investments through Qatar's sovereign wealth fund has promoted economic and diplomatic relations with different countries.

Qatar has proven to be a valuable ally for the West; for this reason, it is not surprising that it enters,

in some way, to solve one of the crises derived from the conflict. However, this solution doesn't seem feasible in the short term for three reasons: Qatar is already producing at its peak, and a shipment of these characteristics would mean increasing (even more) its production. This issue linking to the second, Qatar's contracts with strategic partners absorb part of its production. Lastly, the nature of liquefied gas itself is a problem for some European countries. [As a study carried out by the European Parliament](#) has shown, investment in liquefied gas infrastructures would open the door to contracts from exporting countries such as Qatar or Australia. However, only eleven European countries have the necessary infrastructure to transform liquid gas into a gaseous state. The 11 countries that make up the GECF (Gas Exporting Countries Forum) agree that they [will not be able to provide](#) substantial quantities to Europe and insist on the need to invest in gas infrastructure to ensure supply and help maintain energy security. European energy dependence is a problem in the Ukrainian crisis and the European Union cannot try to [replace Russian](#) gas (in the short term) with gas from other suppliers.

The global reopening of the economy and the Ukrainian crisis have put on the table the need for the European Union to diversify gas suppliers on its territory. The European solution has to go through at least three significant reforms: investment in Liquefied Gas processing infrastructures, revision of the European Green Pact, and granting long-term contracts. It seems that Qatari gas is not a viable solution in the short term if the aim is to replace

Russian gas to alleviate the effects of the conflict.

*Recognizing Qatar's influence: Major Non-NATO ally.*

The decision by the Qatari authorities to put Qatar on the map has made it a reliable actor to turn to in situations of mediation, humanitarian aid, or as a gas supplier in the event of a conflict in times of crisis. Examples are plenty. [Qatar has mediated](#) in the conflicts in Lebanon (2008), Yemen (2008-2010), and Darfur (2009-2010) are just a few examples. It has sent humanitarian aid to developing countries (Somalia, Sudan, Burkina Faso), under armed conflict (Syria, Gaza Strip), in the face of a natural disaster (Japan, United States, Philippines) or in situations of a health crisis such as the current one against the Covid 19 (Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine). In emergencies, it has been a gas supplier the most recent case: supplying gas to the [Gaza Strip to put the Nuseirat](#) power plant into operation.

Over the last 25 years, Qatar has become a regional actor worthy of the trust of international powers such as the United States. The Al Udeid military base is proof of the reiterated confidence of the different American governments in Qatar as a strategic partner. The new alliance between Qatar and NATO comes to formalize the pre-existing relationship between the organization and the emirate. In 2004, NATO promoted the [Istanbul Cooperation Initiative](#), an association forum that aims to contribute to global and regional security. This initiative, in force today, offers non-NATO countries in the broader Middle East region to collaborate and cooperate with the

alliance. Its objective is to improve security and region stability through a new transatlantic commitment renewed in 2021. Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, and the UAE joined the initiative, while Oman and Saudi Arabia participated in specific activities.

From this moment on, Qatar began additional bilateral agreements with the organization, which has allowed NATO to access the Al Udeid military base as a military transit base, cooperation in security and military intelligence. For its part, Qatar opened a military representation office at [NATO headquarters in Brussels](#) in 2021. In recognition of the alliance and good relations, President Joe Biden has decided to name Qatar a "Major non-NATO ally," a status that grants access to military, financial, and security cooperation benefits. Qatar becomes the third Persian Gulf country to enter the select list of non-NATO allies. This new alliance reinforces the cooperation that both entities (NATO-Qatar) have maintained over the last decade. It is a recognition of Qatari diplomatic and political work at crucial moments.

*Conclusions*

The energy dependence of northern Europe is a problem that affects the economic, political, and security stability of the European Union. The conflict between Ukraine and Russia has revealed the lack of community leadership and the poor energy diversification of the continent. Germany is one of the countries with the most negligible energy diversification and the most significant dependence on Russian gas. 40% of the gas in its industry comes from Moscow. It is the leading economy on

the continent and the most stable within the Eurozone.

Faced with this scenario and its sights set on a conflict, the United States is aware of Europe's energy weakness and has chosen to expand the portfolio of gas suppliers given the lack of energy diversity. Good diplomatic, political, and strategic relations with Qatar have led the U.S. administration to supply LNG to the European continent. A commitment that cannot be addressed unilaterally by Qatar, as the head of the Qatari Ministry of Energy said, requires a commitment between allied forces. Qatar cannot be the only European energy guarantor in this crisis and at the same time maintain commercial commitments with the Asian market without suffering. However, while Qatar cannot be the only strategic partner in this crisis, it does have the opportunity to offer itself as a stable LNG supply partner.

Qatar has pledged to help Europe as long as it does not harm its contracts with other countries in the Asian market with which it has long-term contracts. Gas is becoming a diplomatic tool for Qatar, which sees this crisis as an opportunity to expand its share of the European market and its influence in the regional arena in the long term. However, one of Qatar's problems is the European Union's contracts with its suppliers. The European Union [rejects long-term contracts](#) because they run counter to the guidelines set out in the European Green Pact, which aims to achieve a carbon-free society by 2050. The European Commission believes that long-term contracts (10, 15, or 20 years) are not in line with the political goal and that many of them violate EU competition rules. The European

Commission opened an investigation in [2018 to Qatar Petroleum](#), alleging that, in its contracts, there could be territorial restriction clauses that would violate the principle of competition and harm the integration of European free trade. The investigation by the Commission's antitrust office has decided [to close the proceedings](#) at the beginning of February 2022. Qatar sees this move as a concession to the request it made earlier this year to drop the investigation in order to be able to supply gas in case of an emergency. Doha is thus ensuring that Qatar Energy will not face further action under the antitrust framework.

Unlike Russia, which has used gas supplies to influence strategic countries, Qatar has known how to take advantage of the energy resource to establish long-term contracts with strategic countries. The conflict comes at a crucial time for Europe. The high prices of electricity and fuels have led the European Commission to reconsider nuclear energy and [natural gas as green energies](#), necessary for the European transition to zero carbon emissions in 2050. This would be a good opportunity for Qatar to establish an energy trade relationship with Europe based on long-term contracts and stable prices.

Qatar's international projection has been increasing, and its figure as an international and regional key player is indisputable. Qatar's recognition as a "Major non-NATO ally" formalizes a relationship that began with the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative and has grown over the years. The bilateral agreements that have been signed over the years have allowed NATO access to the Al Udeid military base as a military transit base and allowed Qatar

to collaborate with strategic partners in security, military intelligence, and terrorism, among others.

Qatar's entry into the Ukrainian crisis reiterates the leading role of a country with global aspirations that, through the perseverance of its leaders, has become a valuable resource for the West amid a crisis with an uncertain future.

### **About the author**

Leticia Rodríguez García is a Ph.D. student in the Social Sciences Program at Granada University. She holds a Master's degree in European Union Studies at the University of Salamanca, and she graduated in Political Science and Public Management at the University of the Basque Country. Her research areas focus on the social and political dynamics of the Persian Gulf, socio-political movements in the Gulf region, Foreign Policy Analysis, and Interregional Relations between Europe and the Persian Gulf.

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