

BOOK REVIEW

Tusiani, Michael D., and Anne-Marie Johnson. *From Black Gold to Frozen Gas: How Qatar Became an Energy Superpower*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2023.
454 pages. Hardcover \$32.00

Reviewed by Hamdullah Baycar

Michael D. Tusiani and Anne-Marie Johnson investigate the story of Qatari wealth, which was primarily derived from oil and gas. With the rise of the importance of gas, from just 2 million metric tons of global demand in 1970 to 357 million metric tons in 2020, Qatar, as a supplier of 25 percent of all demand, increased its footprint in international affairs. In fifteen chapters, an introduction, and epilogue, the authors survey Qatari political history from independence to many coups, all revolving around the story of natural resources – mainly oil and later gas. Both Michael D. Tusiani and Anne-Marie Johnson worked in the oil and gas industry. While Tusiani worked for a consulting firm and has authored five books on energy, Johnson is a journalist who has been extensively writing on gas and oil and was later invited to join the consulting firm that Tusiani works for.

The book begins with Qatar's recent crisis with its neighbors. The authors draw upon the history of crises in Qatari political history dating back to 1893. By doing so, they show how the state has always overcome crises despite initial difficulty, even becoming more powerful than before their initiation. In addition to Qatar's rise as the superpower of gas exports, the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 might have empowered Qatar with increased European reliance on gas. The book is timely as gas has become one of the most critical resources for Europe, among other countries.

The authors focus more on oil than gas between chapters two to seven. The first chapter takes the reader on a time travel when Qatar did not have much oil and gas by focusing on domestic, regional, and international actors, namely the Al Thani family; Saudi Arabia; Bahrain; different emirates of today's United Arab Emirates; and the British. The second chapter is reserved for the first oil concession in 1935 to the Anglo-Persian oil company, which lasted 75 years. Of course, the concession was not without security guarantees from the British. For example,

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when Ibn Saud threatened Shiekh Abdullah and asked him not to engage in concessions until their boundaries were agreed upon, British authorities protected Qatar with different mediums, such as the Royal Air Force and Royal Navy, which are detailed in Chapter 3. Even though oil well tests were in progress, the war in Europe significantly harmed the operations by the end of 1941. The role of the British in the game of thrones is seen again in Qatar. After Sheikh Abdullah abdicated in favor of his son Ali, the British Government established an independent political office in Qatar, as the Bahrain office had been previously responsible for Qatar. One of the first arrangements made by A. J. Wilton, the first political officer in Qatar, was establishing a police force to protect the new ruler. Qatar's interrupted search for oil finally ended with the shipment of 96,000 metric tons of crude oil from Umm Said.

Chapter four is retained for Qatar's first marine oil concession, finalized in 1952, which generated the Qatari ruling family more importance and wealth. Chapter five explains the ruler's push for more significant profit and better arrangements with the companies. Moreover, the chapter also shows that oil and gas exacerbated the borders disputes, as was the case with Halul Island, the area between Abu Dhabi and Qatar. Also, the role of British companies in determining the borders of the emirates is demonstrated here. In chapter six, the authors study the internal dissatisfaction with Sheikh Ali and his abdication in favor of his son Ahmad. Additionally, with the accumulation of oil money, Qatar's initiatives in development are explored. This was followed by the participation in the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in 1961. In 1964, the ruler passed a law that distributed part of the revenues to Qataris for land or loans to overcome the populace discontent. During this newly acquired wealth accumulation, the newly elected Labour Government of Britain decided to withdraw from the Gulf in 1968. Consequently, Qatar and other Gulf sheikhdoms (Bahrain, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ras al Khaimah, Omm al Quwain, Fujairah, and Ajman) began federation negotiations. Qatar's existing emir, Sheikh Ahmad, was a supporter of the federation, while Sheikh Khalifa, his cousin and deputy emir, was leaning toward an independent state. Chapter seven analyzes this disagreement and the first years of independence, in which Sheikh Khalifa initiated a bloodless coup against his cousin and took over the role of ruling Qatar in 1972. This chapter is where gas enters Qatar's agenda. However, due to the generous profit from oil, gas was still underappreciated.

The following two chapters deal with oil and gas equally, as gas was still not the dominant source of income but was gaining significance over time. Chapter eight delves into the first years of Sheikh Khalifa and the nationalization of resources. Similar to the nationalization of oil companies elsewhere in the region, such as Saudi Arabia's Aramco and Kuwait's agreement with Gulf Oil and British

Petroleum (BP), Qatar initiated a nationalization project. Of course, Qatar's modest and slow entrance to gas was not without challenges, which are discussed in Chapter nine. We learn that several explosions occurred in the natural gas plant in Umm Said, which resulted in budget cuts and, thus, slower development of the country. Chapter nine, moreover, discusses the challenges Qatar faced in the post-revolution in Iran. While Qatar had a cautious stand and a balanced relationship regarding OPEC decisions, U.S. requests, and Iranian anger, it was also involved in regional cooperation, which ended with the establishment of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

From chapter ten onwards, Tusiani and Johnson concentrate more on gas. Due to the relatively low gas prices compared to oil, gas has not been a priority for a long time. Chapter ten is about the gas projects in the North West Dome, in which gas target use was for domestic purposes and possibly for exports. The next chapter discusses the negotiations among different companies for the North Field, which eventually went to BP and the Certified Financial Planner (CFP). Chapter twelve focuses on the first stage of the North Field Project. The challenges and the first contracts are explained along the finance issues in Qatar, such as increased foreign loans and a significant government reshuffle. Chapter thirteen elaborates on the challenges of Qatar's first Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) project. Among these challenges were the 1991 Gulf War, BP withdrawal, a cabinet reshuffle, border disputes between Qatar and Saudi Arabia on one side and Bahrain on the other, and limited government funds to finish the development plans. Chapter fourteen is about the second LNG project, Ras Laffan LNG. During the initial phase of the second project, a palace coup took place against Sheikh Khalifa and his son, Sheikh Hamad. The subsequent chapter details the financial difficulties that the 1995 coup brought. Domestic, regional, and international legitimacy and recognition were not the only issues that Sheikh Hamad dealt with, but also the low oil prices. but also the low oil prices and other financial problems were awaiting the new emir. Starting in 1999, with the rise in oil and gas prices and the new emir economic program, Qatar's financial situation was enhanced.

To conclude, Qatar's long journey with oil and gas faced many challenges, from internal coups to border disputes. More challenges had to be overcome due to Qatar's independent foreign policy. One problem was the utilization of Al Jazeera as a significant soft power influencing the Arab public, which made the neighboring states unhappy, especially during the Arab Spring uprisings. Another was Qatar's ties with Iran and Turkey which accelerated the discomfort of the neighboring state even more, eventually resulting in blockades by the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Bahrain from 2017 to 2021. The book clarifies the complex journey of Qatar's domestic and international status concerning gas and oil.

In this sense, the book fills the gap by giving first-hand accounts and details of many significant actors, individuals, or institutions. In terms of sources, the study has benefited from different types of primary and secondary sources. In addition to archival documents, which are primarily British correspondence during the protectorate era, the book offers rich documentation regarding the debates using media reports. Even though many of the archival documents are from the Qatar Digital Library, many are British sources. This is evidenced even in the language, as they used “Pirate Coast” in some documents, a term that locals disavow. The maps and images of the significant actors enhance the text.

One of the most detailed accounts of Qatar’s gas history, *From Black Gold to Frozen Gas* is a must-read for students, researchers, and the general public who wish to learn more about Qatar’s political history and the role of its wealth in politics and international relations. Also, because the book has rich information about the role of political actors, it would be recommended for researchers to examine the inter-relations between Qatar and the Gulf region as they interface with global actors.