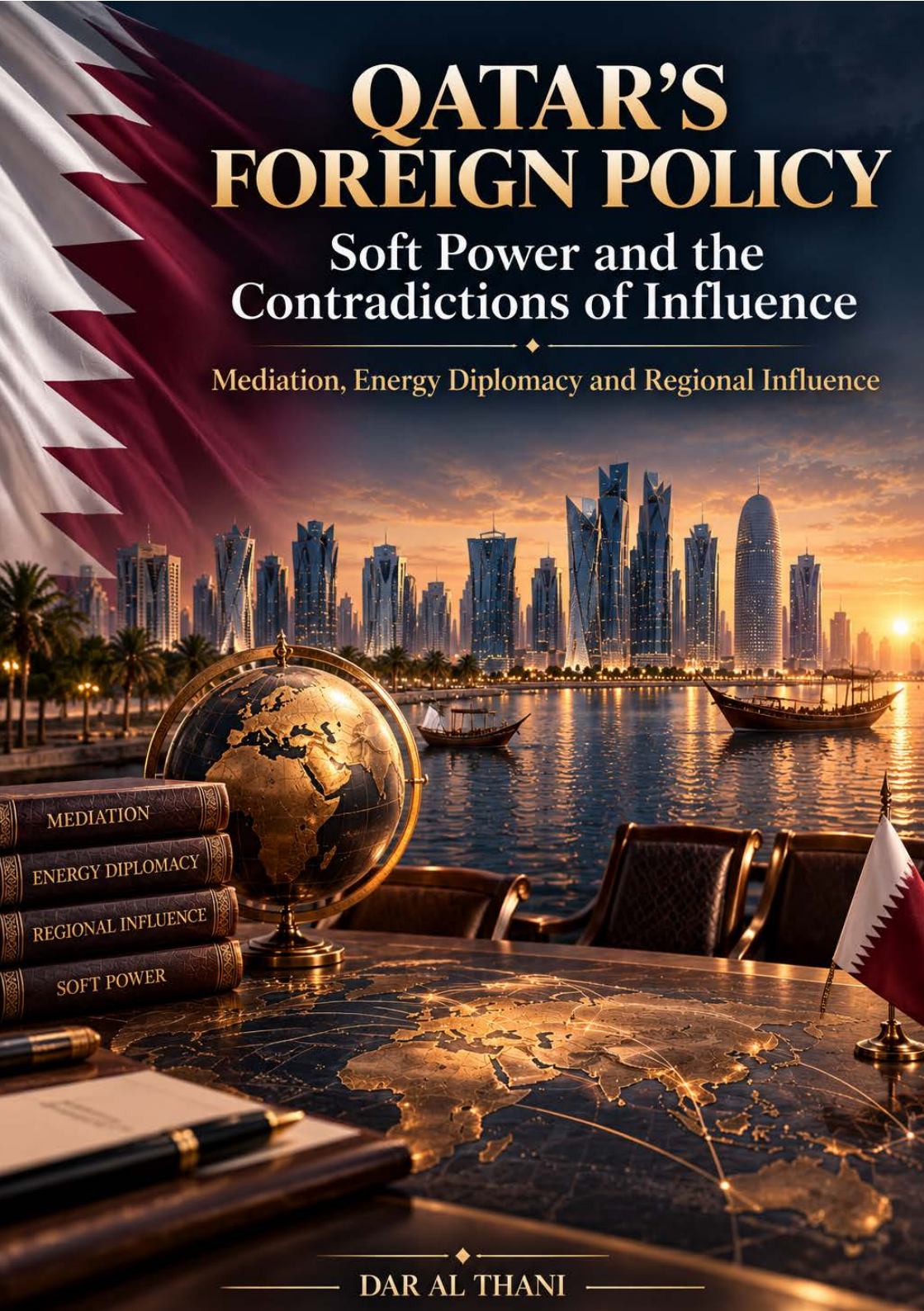
QATAR'S FOREIGN POLICY

Soft Power and the Contradictions of Influence

Mediation, Energy Diplomacy and Regional Influence



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Abstract

This study critically examines Qatar's foreign policy, focusing on its use of soft power, mediation, energy diplomacy, and regional influence, and the shortcomings, contradictions, and mismanagement associated with these instruments. It explores the discrepancy between the image the Qatari authorities promote of their international role and the actual outcomes of their policies by assessing the alignment between objectives and means, the sustainability of gains, and the financial, political, and security burdens borne by the state and society.

Chapter One examines the construction of Qatar's international image and its use of media, investment, and aid to strengthen its presence. It focuses on the tensions between claims of neutrality and partisan choices, and between the pursuit of international standing and the protection of the public interest. It also addresses the concentration of foreign policy decision-making, the limits of transparency and accountability, and their implications for policy review and correction.

Chapter Two analyzes Qatari mediation, examining the motives behind its involvement in conflicts, the limits of its influence over the parties, and shortcomings in securing and monitoring the implementation of agreements. Through selected cases, it explores the gap between hosting negotiations and achieving lasting settlements, distinguishing the contribution of Qatari policy choices to setbacks from factors beyond the mediator's control.

Chapter Three examines energy diplomacy and the use of gas, contracts, and investment to build international relationships. It analyzes the limits of translating economic importance into political and security protection, while addressing dependence on partners and markets, the overestimation of gas-based influence, and the contradiction between environmental rhetoric and hydrocarbon expansion.

Chapter Four addresses regional influence and the costs of foreign policy choices, focusing on conflicting alliances, the miscalculation of risks, and the gap between diplomatic ambition and the capacity to contain its consequences. It also examines how commitments and antagonisms are passed on to society and future generations. Citizens' security, national resources, and the country's future thus serve as benchmarks for holding foreign policy accountable, rather than judging it solely by the scale of its media and diplomatic presence.

Introduction

Foreign policy is closely tied to the security of states and the future of their peoples. It shapes partnerships, manages disputes, and creates commitments whose consequences may endure for decades. Its success therefore depends on sound assessments of interests and risks, a realistic balance between ambition and capabilities, and the review of policy choices before mistakes become lasting burdens. The broader a country's involvement in regional and global affairs, the greater the responsibility of its decision-makers to justify their choices, disclose their costs, and ensure that society does not bear the consequences of gambles it had no part in shaping.

In this context, Qatar's foreign policy raises fundamental questions about the relationship between the pursuit of international standing and the protection of the national interest. The authorities have used mediation, energy diplomacy, and an expanding network of relationships to strengthen Qatar's international presence. Yet assessing that presence requires looking beyond the image constructed by official rhetoric to examine actual outcomes and their sustainability. Frequent meetings, extensive partnerships, and major contracts are insufficient measures of sound policy, particularly when the costs of commitments and the limits of their benefits remain outside public debate and independent scrutiny.

Contradictions emerge between claims of neutrality and partisan choices, and between Qatar's portrayal of itself as a facilitator of conflict resolution and its pursuit of greater influence within those conflicts. Mediation loses credibility when it becomes entangled with political

interests that are not clearly disclosed, while settlements remain fragile without implementation guarantees and monitoring mechanisms. Hosting negotiations or announcing agreements must therefore be assessed against what is achieved on the ground, including whether these efforts address the causes of conflict or merely produce temporary arrangements vulnerable to collapse.

Energy diplomacy raises further questions about the limits of translating gas wealth into political influence and security guarantees. Commercial relationships create mutual interests, but they neither ensure consistent support from partners nor guarantee that their priorities will align with Qatar's interests during crises. Reliance on gas becomes a source of miscalculation when it generates exaggerated expectations of protection and influence, or when long-term commitments are undertaken without testing their resilience to changes in markets, demand, and competition. Hydrocarbon expansion also requires scrutiny of the consistency between economic choices and the environmental rhetoric used to enhance Qatar's international image.

At the regional level, overlapping relationships and conflicting alliances require an assessment of Qatar's ability to balance competing interests and contain their consequences. Expanding channels of communication may create room for maneuver, but it also generates expectations and pressures that are difficult to reconcile. These problems deepen when diplomatic ambition exceeds the country's actual capacity to withstand escalation, or when external partnerships are treated as guarantees that make preparation for shifting positions unnecessary. The pursuit of influence then becomes a

source of vulnerability, exposing the state to conflicts whose course it cannot control.

These gambles become more dangerous when transparency and accountability are restricted. Concentrated decision-making limits the examination of alternatives, weakens the early identification of mistakes, and leaves policy correction in the hands of those who adopted the original course. The problem is compounded when citizens are denied information about commitments undertaken in their country's name, the resources spent to expand its international presence, and the adequacy of safeguards against the consequences of failure. Excluding foreign policy from public debate does not diminish its effects on society; it entrenches the divide between those who hold the power to decide and those who bear the costs.

Chapter One: Building International Standing and Personalizing Foreign Policy Decision-Making

1. Building International Standing



The Trophy Presentation Ceremony at the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar

The Qatari authorities have used media, overseas investment, aid, and major events to expand the country's international presence and present it as an actor whose significance exceeds its geographic and demographic size. This approach relies on building a network of platforms and relationships that places Doha at the forefront of international attention. Greater visibility, however, does not necessarily translate into lasting influence. Being present on the international stage differs from being able to shape events, while access to centers of power does not guarantee influence

over their decisions when their interests conflict with Qatar's.

Media is one of the principal instruments of this presence. According to Al Jazeera's official profile **[1]**, the network operates more than 70 bureaus worldwide, broadcasts to over 150 countries, and has a potential reach of more than 450 million households. These figures demonstrate the scale of its potential audience, but they do not measure Qatar's ability to achieve political objectives through it. A media platform can highlight issues and direct attention toward them, yet translating that attention into international positions or stable settlements remains dependent on competing interests and the balance of power. Extensive coverage alone cannot secure such outcomes.

The Qatari authorities also use overseas investment to strengthen their economic presence and build relationships with influential countries. In the United Kingdom alone, the British government estimated existing Qatari investments at more than £40 billion in May 2022, excluding the additional investment targeted under the partnership announced at the time, which envisaged up to £10 billion over five years **[2]**. These ties create opportunities for cooperation and access to economic and political circles, but they do not guarantee support for Qatar's positions during crises. Investment-receiving countries remain guided by their own priorities and alliances and may maintain economic partnerships with Doha without accommodating its political aspirations.

Major events have likewise given Qatar extensive global exposure. Hosting the 2022 FIFA World Cup illustrates

the scale of resources associated with this approach. The International Monetary Fund [3] estimated the investment program undertaken over roughly a decade before the tournament at US$200–300 billion**,** while reporting stadium construction costs of approximately US$6.5 billion**.** The broader program included transport networks, ports, airports, and other infrastructure. Its total value therefore should not be treated as the direct cost of the tournament or expenditure on promoting it. The benefits of these projects depend on their use after the event and their capacity to support economic activity and tourism relative to their construction, operating, and maintenance costs.

The central weakness in the Qatari approach lies in conflating the instruments of visibility with the foundations of influence. Extensive media reach, substantial investments, and the hosting of global events may make Qatar more visible, but they do not establish that its interests are better protected or its influence more secure. Economic and social gains must also be measured by the productive opportunities, income, and services that remain after international attention subsides. When standing is reduced to visibility, maintaining it requires repeated initiatives and renewed spending, without any assurance that the resulting momentum will produce lasting outcomes. This exposes the fragility of a position built more on attracting attention than on an established capacity to shape decisions: an image may give Qatar prominence at a particular moment, but it cannot guarantee political weight when that influence is put to the test.

2. Personalized Decision-Making and Weak Accountability

The personalization of decision-making in Qatar's foreign policy stems from the concentration of policy formulation, priority-setting, and relationship management within a narrow leadership circle. National choices become tied more closely to the judgments and preferences of decision-makers than to independent institutional deliberation. This approach weakens institutions' ability to examine alternatives and identify risks before they become commitments, reducing their role to implementing and justifying policies rather than reviewing them and holding those responsible to account. As the space for dissent narrows, the distinction between the national interest and the leadership's vision becomes blurred. Decisions acquire political protection, and criticism is treated as a challenge to those in power rather than a responsibility essential to protecting society's interests and the country's future.

This concentration also weakens debate over the true costs of foreign policy choices. Announcing broad objectives, such as enhancing international standing or promoting stability, is insufficient without explaining which alternatives were rejected, which risks were accepted, and what thresholds would require a change of course. Policies that face no serious institutional challenge before adoption are more vulnerable to overestimating influence and underestimating the consequences of commitments. The problem deepens when those who chose a policy also assess its success and control the information disclosed about it. This enables the selective presentation of results and the withholding

of evidence that might reveal flawed judgment or mismanagement.

The transparency problem lies in the gap between announcing agreements and initiatives and opening their financial and political provisions to scrutiny. Official coverage of meetings and signing ceremonies cannot substitute for disclosing the resulting obligations, their duration, implementation conditions, beneficiaries, and the costs of withdrawal or renegotiation. Similarly, announcing the value of an investment or aid package does not, by itself, explain its funding sources, safeguards, expected returns, or the risks the state may bear. When these matters remain beyond public scrutiny, citizens are reduced to observing the outward display of diplomatic activity while being denied the information needed to judge its value.

Accountability requires more than presenting the outcomes the authorities choose to highlight. It demands mechanisms capable of comparing stated objectives with actual achievements, identifying the causes of setbacks, and distinguishing external constraints from errors in decision-making. Reviews conducted within the same circle responsible for a policy, without independence or published findings, cannot provide adequate assurance of accountability. Failure can then be relabeled: a stalled initiative becomes evidence of a complex situation, rising costs are justified as necessary to sustain international standing, and continuing commitments are portrayed as steadfastness. Responsibility for miscalculation remains unaddressed.

The problem with personalized foreign policy in Qatar therefore extends beyond how decisions are made to how

their consequences are distributed. The leadership retains the power to choose and the authority to interpret the results, while the state and society bear the financial, political, and security costs.

Chapter Two: Limits of Influence and Failures to Secure Lasting Outcomes in Qatari Mediation

1. Motives for Mediation and Criteria for Selecting Conflicts

The central problem with Qatari mediation lies in the overlap between resolving conflicts and enhancing political standing. Using the hosting of negotiations to reinforce Qatar's importance to international powers risks turning mediation into an investment in influence at the expense of addressing the causes of conflict. The problem becomes more acute when mere engagement with the parties is presented as an achievement without being assessed against its results. Conflicts are not platforms for elevating a mediator's standing, and people's suffering must not become diplomatic capital that generates political gains while a settlement remains elusive.

Relationships with conflicting parties give Qatar channels of communication, but they do not necessarily enable it to change those parties' calculations or secure concessions. This is where access is confused with influence: receiving representatives and relaying proposals cannot compensate for limited means of narrowing differences. The stalled Gaza negotiations in May 2024 exposed the limits of Qatari mediation's ability to overcome fundamental disagreements at that stage. Qatar's responsibility lies not in its inability to control the belligerents' decisions, but in realistically assessing the limits of its influence and avoiding inflated claims about a role whose outcomes it cannot guarantee.

Shortcomings also emerge when agreements are celebrated despite lacking the support of influential parties. In the Chadian peace process, the Front for Change and Concord in Chad (FACT) refused to sign the Doha Agreement in August 2022 despite the efforts of Qatari mediators, amid objections concerning guarantees and the conditions for participating in the dialogue. This represented a specific failure to secure an inclusive settlement. Numerous signatures cannot fill the gap left by the absence of a significant armed actor, nor can an announcement ceremony give an agreement the capacity to accommodate those who remain outside it. Assessing mediation must therefore begin with the influence of the participants and their acceptance of the process, rather than simply counting the groups that signed.

The selection of mediation files requires criteria that go beyond a conflict's potential to raise Qatar's political profile. Responsible selection entails assessing the prospects for a settlement, access to influential parties, the expertise and resources available for follow-up, and potential conflicts of interest. Yet Qatar's general official presentation of its mediation activities does not set out detailed criteria for prioritizing conflicts or explain the weight these considerations carry in decisions to intervene. This limits the ability to determine whether priority is given to humanitarian needs and the prospects for resolution, or to the diplomatic value a particular conflict offers.

Arguing that every mediator selects conflicts in which it can operate is insufficient. Selectivity requires justification, particularly when mediation is presented as a principled commitment to peace. The consistency of that commitment must be tested against clear criteria,

inclusive participation, and a willingness to sustain engagement after media attention fades. Leaving the reasons for selection and the limits of Qatar's capabilities inadequately explained gives the authorities considerable scope to promote interventions as achievements without enabling the public to assess their value or hold those responsible for misjudgments to account.

2. Shortcomings in Settlement Design and Implementation Guarantees



Reuters: Photograph dated 12 August 2009 showing renewed fighting in Saada following the breakdown of the Qatar-brokered settlement

A mediator's responsibility extends beyond collecting signatures to crafting a clear, enforceable settlement capable of withstanding disagreements and setbacks. Mediation must therefore be judged by the strength of the agreements it facilitates and the safeguards they provide for peace. Celebrating their conclusion neither conceals their weaknesses nor absolves the authorities of

responsibility for shortcomings in their drafting and implementation mechanisms. When fundamental issues remain ambiguous or their resolution is deferred without a binding process, an agreement merely postpones confrontation while leaving its causes unaddressed. The ambiguity that facilitates a signature today may give the parties a pretext tomorrow to abandon their commitments and return to conflict.

These shortcomings begin when commitments lack specific guarantees, realistic timelines, and a clear allocation of responsibilities. Ceasefires, disarmament, power-sharing, and the return of displaced people require arrangements that specify who will implement them, who will verify compliance, and how violations will be addressed. Any settlement lacking these elements allows parties to benefit from the agreement without fully honoring their obligations. The fact that implementation rests with the conflicting parties does not absolve Qatar of responsibility for designing the process. A mediator must identify gaps before an agreement is signed and avoid presenting commitments without adequate safeguards as a sufficient foundation for peace.

Agreements become more fragile when monitoring is weak or controlled by the parties themselves. Committees that lack independence, access to conflict areas, or the authority to publish verification findings may become procedural façades incapable of establishing responsibility for violations. The absence of a clear dispute-resolution process also allows violations to accumulate until the parties lose confidence in the entire undertaking. Sponsoring an agreement without securing credible monitoring therefore leaves affected communities with promises that are difficult to enforce,

while allowing the mediator to retain the benefits of the announcement without meeting the demands of sustained engagement.

The limitations of financial incentives become apparent when they are used as a substitute for addressing the roots of conflict. Funding may support reconstruction or the reintegration of combatants, but it cannot, on its own, resolve struggles over power, address marginalization, or deliver justice to victims of abuses. The use of money becomes problematic when it seeks to appease leaders without changing the conditions that sustain conflict. This may encourage bargaining over benefits and make continued compliance dependent on continued funding. The underlying weakness is the assumption that political stability can be purchased without establishing fair rules for distributing rights, power, and resources.

Qatar's responsibility must therefore be assessed by the quality of the settlements it helps formulate and the guarantees, monitoring, and inclusiveness it supports. A signature unsupported by implementation mechanisms gives the mediator a moment of celebration while leaving society exposed to renewed conflict. The gravest shortcoming is presenting a fragile agreement as a completed achievement while leaving the people affected to bear the cost of its unresolved weaknesses in their security, rights, and lives.

3. The Costs of Mediation



The Israeli Strike on Doha

Mediation entails commitments that extend beyond managing negotiations to bearing financial, diplomatic, and security burdens. Expanding Qatar's role without rigorously assessing these burdens has turned the pursuit of influence into a gamble whose costs are borne by society. The international standing sought by the authorities does not justify exposing national security to risk, nor does it absolve them of explaining the limits of their commitments and their capacity to protect citizens and residents. The problem becomes particularly serious when the leadership receives credit for diplomatic prominence while the state and its people bear the costs of security exposure.

Qatar has already paid a price in security terms for hosting negotiations over Gaza. On 9 September 2025, an Israeli strike targeted premises in Doha associated with Hamas's negotiating delegation. UN experts documented the deaths of five members of the

negotiating team and a member of Qatar's security forces. The Security Council also condemned the strikes and reaffirmed respect for Qatar's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The costs thus moved beyond diplomatic pressure to an attack inside the capital that claimed lives, including that of a Qatari security officer.

Israel bears responsibility for the attack. Condemning the aggressor, however, does not preclude holding the Qatari authorities accountable for their assessment of the risks and their preparedness. The incident alone does not establish security negligence, but it exposed the fact that neither mediator status nor an extensive network of international relationships prevented an attack on Qatari territory. Relying on diplomatic standing as sufficient protection can therefore be described as a political gamble: the attack demonstrated that Qatar's importance to its partners does not confer automatic immunity. Any serious assessment must explain whether this threat was anticipated, whether protective measures were adequate, and what guarantees the authorities relied upon, rather than merely reaffirming the continuation of the same role.

Financial burdens cannot be reduced to the costs of hosting meetings. They may include protecting delegations, logistical support, aid, and commitments associated with implementing settlements. These expenditures require transparent accounting that distinguishes humanitarian spending from spending intended to strengthen Qatar's political role and explains what has been achieved in return for the commitments undertaken. Without such detail, society cannot adequately assess the true costs, while diplomatic gains can be celebrated without equivalent scrutiny of the resources used and the accompanying risks.

Stalled settlements also affect credibility and foreign relations. Repeated commitments that fail to produce stable outcomes widen the gap between the image projected and actual capabilities. They also expose the mediator to pressure from parties seeking concessions it cannot compel, or attempting to assign it responsibility for failures driven by their own calculations. Mismanagement does not lie in every unsuccessful negotiation, but in inflating expectations, expanding commitments without adequate means, and maintaining the same approach without demonstrating what has changed in response to setbacks.

The attack on Doha showed that involvement in conflicts can carry costs reaching into the security of the capital and the lives of those responsible for protecting it. Continuing mediation must therefore be accompanied by more rigorous review that places public safety ahead of gains in international standing. The real gamble begins when a threat that has materialized is treated as an incident that requires no change in policy calculations, while the state and its people are expected to bear the consequences of choices whose costs remain undisclosed and beyond independent scrutiny.

Chapter Three: Energy Diplomacy and the Limits of Independence

1. Using Gas to Build Political Relationships

The central problem with Qatar's gas diplomacy lies in conflating the consolidation of commercial interests with assurances of political support. Long-term contracts and joint investments bind companies through revenues and supplies, but they do not commit purchasing countries to defending Qatar's policy choices or protecting it during crises. Miscalculation begins when economic relationships are assigned a strategic significance beyond their actual substance, and partners' demand for gas is treated as a guarantee of continued support. Buyers seek energy on terms that serve their own interests, while their political and security decisions remain subject to considerations broader than their relationship with a supplier.

The announced contracts illustrate the scale of Qatar's reliance on partnerships lasting decades. In November 2022, QatarEnergy signed an agreement with China's Sinopec to supply four million tonnes of liquefied natural gas annually for 27 years. In October 2023, it announced two agreements with Shell affiliates to supply up to 3.5 million tonnes annually to the Netherlands for 27 years, beginning in 2026. These contracts establish enduring commercial ties, but interpreting their duration and scale as evidence of lasting political loyalty is a leap unsupported by the publicly announced supply terms.

Interests become further intertwined when buyers acquire equity in production projects. In November 2023, QatarEnergy announced that Sinopec would

receive a 5% stake in a joint venture company within the North Field South expansion, alongside an agreement to supply three million tonnes annually for 27 years. An investment stake, however, gives a partner an interest in a project's profitability and continued operation; it does not oblige that partner to endorse Qatar's foreign policy positions. Overstating the significance of these partnerships therefore obscures a fundamental distinction: protecting an investment is not equivalent to defending every policy choice made by the host state. A partner may seek to preserve business operations while disagreeing politically with that state.

Interdependence also works in both directions. Importers' need for supplies is matched by Qatar's need for markets, revenues, and contractual continuity. Portraying the relationship as a one-way source of Qatari influence overlooks the constraints borne by the exporting state itself. The more production and investment plans are tied to long-term commitments, the more important contractual compliance and commercial credibility become. This limits the assumption that gas can readily be turned into an instrument of pressure, since its political use could endanger Qatar's own economic interests.

The limits of translating commercial importance into security protection are evident in the fact that extensive economic partnerships prevented neither the Iranian missile attack on Al Udeid Air Base in June 2025 nor the Israeli attack on Doha on 9 September of the same year, which the Security Council condemned. Both incidents demonstrate that Qatar's weight in the gas market and its network of international interests do not confer immunity from attack. Treating them as guarantees of national security therefore reflects a dangerous

overestimation of the protection commercial relationships can provide.

The failing that demands accountability is the exaggeration of gas wealth's political returns and the use of contract volumes to suggest that national security and partners' support have been secured. The Qatari authorities must distinguish between the concrete commitments these partnerships provide and what remains a matter of expectation. Any policy that bases its security calculations on the assumption that others will protect Qatar because they purchase its gas gambles with society's future on interests it does not control. Revenues may finance protective capabilities, and contracts may strengthen relationships, but national security requires clear guarantees and realistic risk assessments, rather than an inflated view of the political power of commercial deals.

2. Expansion Strategies and the Risks of Overestimating Influence

The weakness in Qatar's expansion strategy lies in the potential confusion between increasing market share and gaining greater power to shape the positions of others. Export volumes alone do not determine diplomatic weight; their significance also depends on the scarcity of supplies and how difficult they are to replace. As competing producers expand supply, Qatar's sales rise while the political value of each unit exported declines. Measuring influence solely through production volumes therefore presents a misleading picture of power and

encourages foreign policy ambitions beyond what market conditions can sustain.

Competition creates a more troubling paradox. The state may have to offer more attractive commercial terms to preserve its market share, selling larger volumes without a corresponding improvement in returns. Demand growth is also inseparable from price: high prices may encourage consumers to conserve energy and accelerate the search for alternatives, while lower prices may increase consumption without generating the expected revenues. Building influence on the assumption that high prices and continuously rising demand will coexist therefore reflects a selective optimism that overlooks the tension between these expectations.

Another weakness lies in the difficulty of changing course once substantial resources have been committed to expansion. As implementation advances, pressure grows to complete projects and keep them operating, even when the circumstances that originally justified them have changed. Past expenditure then becomes a justification for further spending rather than a reason to reassess viability on the basis of future returns. Policy becomes captive to the scale of the original commitment, and changing course is treated as a retreat from ambition, even when it may be the least costly option.

Expansion also carries an opportunity cost. Resources and administrative capacity devoted to deepening specialization in gas cannot simultaneously be used to develop other sources of income. If the sector dominates investment and political priorities, export capacity may grow while efforts to reduce economic dependence on it fall behind. This exposes a fundamental contradiction:

expansion is used to project national strength while leaving the country's future more closely tied to the performance of the same sector.

The foreign policy risk emerges when an anticipated boom becomes the permanent basis for the scale of international engagement and spending. Some commitments generate recurring needs that extend beyond the initial payment, and sustaining them becomes part of defending the standing built around them. Without spending ceilings, clearly identified funding, and conditions for review, a gap develops between resources that fluctuate with the economic cycle and obligations that cannot be reduced at the same pace. Miscalculation therefore begins when projected expansion is treated as realized income and its political dividends are spent before its financial returns materialize.

3. Contradictions in Qatar's Environmental Diplomacy

Qatari policy faces a contradiction between presenting climate commitments as an international responsibility and pursuing production and investment choices that prolong dependence on fossil fuels. The seriousness of environmental rhetoric must be judged by its ability to guide economic decisions and limit their harmful effects, rather than merely by its inclusion in official statements. When hydrocarbon expansion is presented as compatible with climate protection without explaining the conditions and limits of that compatibility, such rhetoric

becomes a means of polishing policy choices rather than subjecting them to scrutiny.

A fundamental issue concerns how commitments are presented. Qatar's Nationally Determined Contribution, submitted in November 2025, targets mitigation measures equivalent to 42 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent by 2040 **[4]**. This figure does not, in itself, mean that national emissions will fall by the same amount relative to their current level. Assessing the commitment therefore requires clarity about the projected trajectory of total emissions, the assumptions used to calculate reductions, and the effects of industrial expansion. Without this explanation, mitigation figures may suggest greater climate progress than changes in actual emissions demonstrate.

Efficiency improvements do not resolve the contradiction. Emissions per unit of production may decline while total emissions rise as activity expands. Moreover, the climate footprint of gas extends across extraction, processing, liquefaction, transport, regasification, and final combustion. The International Energy Agency's report published in September 2026 **[6]** documents multiple sources of emissions throughout the supply chain, including energy consumption, methane leakage, and flaring. Focusing solely on the efficiency of facilities within Qatar therefore provides only a partial picture: national accounting boundaries do not capture the full climate impact of the exported product.

This contradiction also affects Qatar's international reputation. The gap between environmental language and investment choices undermines confidence in Qatari

messaging and leaves its climate initiatives vulnerable to accusations of image management. Communications campaigns alone cannot overcome this risk. Credibility requires verifiable data, independent emissions measurement, and disclosure that identifies both achievements and failures, rather than selectively highlighting the indicators most favorable to the official narrative.

The weakness in foreign policy assessment emerges when climate costs and potential reputational damage are treated as peripheral concerns, while economic gains alone are counted as strategic returns. The Qatari authorities must demonstrate how climate commitments actually influence their decisions and identify which choices they modify or reject in order to honor those commitments.

Chapter Four: Miscalculating Risks and the Costs of Policy Choices

1. Regional Competition and Conflicting Alliances

Sound management of regional relations is measured by the ability to build sufficient trust to contain disagreements, rather than merely keeping channels of communication open with competing parties. From this perspective, Qatar's policy becomes problematic when the pursuit of an independent role is coupled with a desire to distinguish itself from its Gulf and Arab neighbors, without adequately considering the consequences for collective action. Independent decision-making is a state's right, but it does not absolve it of responsibility for honoring its commitments or clarifying the limits of actions that may affect its partners' interests and security.

The contradiction emerges when bilateral relationships are managed as separate opportunities for gain, without integrating their consequences into a coherent regional strategy. What Doha views as an opportunity to expand its presence may be seen by another partner as support for an adversary or an attempt to undermine its position. Qatar is not required to adopt its neighbors' positions on every issue. Yet ignoring these conflicts, or simply describing them as diplomatic flexibility, leaves the underlying tensions unresolved. Flexibility loses its value when partners can no longer determine what to expect from Qatari policy when interests diverge.

Partnerships with competing actors reach their limits when they cease to be instruments for managing

disagreement and become commitments that are difficult to reconcile. Engagement with rival parties requires clear boundaries. Otherwise, Qatar may find itself offering assurances it cannot collectively fulfill, or avoiding firm positions to preserve conflicting relationships. Ambiguity then erodes trust, while diplomatic efforts are consumed by explaining actions and reassuring partners rather than building stable understandings.

Across the Arab region, competition to take the lead on key issues damages coordination when each initiative prioritizes asserting Doha's presence. More initiatives do not necessarily create more opportunities for resolution. Without a shared framework, they fragment efforts and allow conflicting parties to choose between negotiating tracks and evade their commitments. The value of a Qatari initiative therefore depends on what it contributes to collective efforts and on Qatar's willingness to integrate its role into them, even when it cannot claim exclusive visibility or credit for the results.

2. The Gap Between Diplomatic Ambition and Protective Capacity

Diplomatic ambition becomes a dangerous gamble when involvement in conflicts exceeds a state's capacity to contain the consequences. The Qatari authorities must therefore be held accountable for expanding their external roles and for whether those roles rest on realistic risk assessments and measures that protect citizens and residents from conflicts spilling onto their territory. Securing an influential position in negotiations

does not justify exposing the country to danger or absolve the leadership of balancing diplomatic gains against national security requirements. Such a position also entails responsibilities beyond political prominence, including preparedness for pressure, threats, and escalation. Treating these possibilities as unlikely simply because of the importance of Qatar's role reflects a miscalculation whose costs outweigh its diplomatic gains.

Responsible assessment begins before involvement, by identifying sources of danger, anticipating changes in the parties' behavior, and determining whether to continue or withdraw if risks exceed acceptable limits. Without this preparation, the state becomes trapped in a role that is difficult to relinquish without sacrificing its standing, yet difficult to sustain without placing its security under further strain. Ambition then becomes a constraint: the authorities defend the continuation of their role because withdrawal would be politically embarrassing, while citizens bear the consequences of preserving it.

Security partnerships do not relieve Qatar of the need to assess risks independently. An ally's presence does not mean its calculations align with Qatar's, and guarantees must be judged not only by the strength of their wording but also by the speed and scope of the response and their ability to prevent threats from materializing. Excessive reliance on external protection therefore encourages wider political involvement without sufficient means to manage its worst consequences.

This gamble becomes more precarious when economic relationships or mediator status are treated as barriers against escalation. Conflicting parties may place military

objectives and domestic political calculations above their interests with the mediating state, or view pressure on it as a way to alter the course of negotiations. Qatar's economic and diplomatic importance therefore neither removes the need to prepare for hostile action nor justifies assuming that others will prioritize its safety as much as they value the benefits of its role.

A foreign policy that expands its roles faster than it develops the capacity to protect the country exposes the state to risks whose conditions it has partly helped create, without controlling their consequences. What most urgently demands accountability is treating public security as an acceptable price for maintaining international standing. Qatar's safety is not a resource to be consumed in demonstrating its importance, and the lives of its citizens and residents must not remain hostage to assumptions that allies will intervene or adversaries will exercise restraint out of respect for its role.

3. Shortcomings in Crisis Management and Course Correction

Crisis management begins before a crisis occurs, when decisions are assessed against their potential consequences and their underlying assumptions are tested against adverse scenarios. In Qatar's case, accountability should focus on the quality of this assessment: whether decision-makers receive analysis that challenges their expectations, or whether calculations are built around the scenario most favorable to political ambition. An assessment that exaggerates the prospects of success and downplays the likelihood of adverse

reactions gives a decision the appearance of careful consideration while leaving the state inadequately prepared for what may follow.

These shortcomings deepen when there are no clear criteria for determining when a policy should be modified or discontinued. Responsible policy requires measurable objectives, limits on costs, and indicators that trigger reassessment from the outset. Leaving continuation to the discretion of those who adopted the decision, without review safeguards, creates room to redefine success whenever results fall short. The objective may shift from securing benefits for the state to defending the original choice, allowing a policy to continue in order to protect its authors' reputations at the expense of the interests it was meant to serve.

This highlights the importance of a carefully considered change of course. Persistence does not make a faltering policy sound over time, whereas adjusting it can spare the state greater losses. Depleting resources to avoid acknowledging that the original gamble failed turns an error into an increasingly costly pattern. When foreign policy choices become tied to the leadership's standing, shielding it from admitting failure takes precedence over protecting national interests. Review is then treated as an affront to prestige, and society bears the cost of maintaining a position that should have been corrected.

Institutional review loses its meaning if it is confined to reports in which implementing bodies assess their own performance. Independent review requires access to information, the authority to question assumptions and identify errors, and the ability to submit recommendations that are not suppressed because they contradict the official narrative. Its seriousness must be measured by its capacity to change

decisions and hold officials accountable for mistakes, rather than by the number of meetings held or reports produced.

4. Making Society and Future Generations Bear the Costs of Influence

Foreign policy becomes most unjust when the leadership claims the gains of international prominence while leaving society with obligations that outlast both the decisions and those who made them. The standing acquired today may require sustained spending tomorrow, positions that are difficult to reverse, and arrangements that constrain future choices. The Qatari authorities must therefore be held accountable for what their policies leave behind once the announcements and celebrations have passed. Long-term external commitments lay claim to future resources and affect subsequent governments' ability to set their priorities. Financing earlier obligations may take precedence over emerging needs, not because those obligations remain the most beneficial, but because withdrawal carries political costs. The authority of present decisions thus extends beyond their time, narrowing the choices available to future generations. This injustice deepens when the limits of commitments are not disclosed and the conditions for reviewing or terminating them remain undefined.

External antagonisms also endure after the circumstances that created them have disappeared. Positions adopted by the leadership may develop into tensions affecting the state and its citizens, including their relationships, opportunities, and interests abroad. Citizens cannot separate their names and nationality from how others perceive their country, even when they

may know little about the decisions that generated the hostility, let alone have consented to them. Provoking or escalating a confrontation without a clear necessity therefore imposes consequences on society that it cannot control and exposes everyday life to political calculations made without its involvement.

The ethical dilemma lies in separating the power to choose from the burden of bearing the consequences. Decision-makers can present their actions as a defense of Qatar's standing, while citizens bear their effects on their security, resources, and families' futures. The leadership's interests must not automatically be equated with those of the state, nor should the country's name be invoked to shut down debate over decisions that may harm it. Society's right to information, participation, and accountability stems from its direct stake in these choices and its inability to escape their consequences when policies fail. Future generations are particularly exposed to this imbalance: they have no voice in today's decisions, yet inherit commitments and antagonisms that drain their resources and impose priorities they did not choose.

Recommendations

1. **Subject foreign policy to effective institutional oversight:** Require the Qatari authorities to disclose the objectives, commitments, and costs of external initiatives to an oversight body empowered to access information and hold officials accountable. Publish periodic reports enabling society to assess outcomes and demand accountability for failures.
2. **Establish clear mediation criteria and implementation guarantees:** Adopt publicly disclosed criteria for selecting conflicts, including the capacity to influence the parties, inclusive participation, and the avoidance of conflicts of interest. Provide independent monitoring and verification mechanisms, and assess mediation by its outcomes for affected communities rather than merely by the announcement of agreements.
3. **Require prior risk assessments for foreign policy decisions:** Examine security, financial, and diplomatic consequences before expanding involvement in conflicts. Establish cost limits and conditions for modifying or ending policies, verify the substance of external guarantees, and avoid assuming that economic relationships or mediator status will prevent escalation.
4. **Subject energy diplomacy to economic and environmental accountability:** Test expansion strategies against changes in prices, demand, and competition. Publish verifiable emissions data, align investment decisions with climate commitments, and develop alternatives that reduce dependence on external partners, technology, and protection.

5. **Protect society and future generations from open-ended commitments:** Establish ceilings and safeguards for long-term external commitments and subject them to periodic reviews assessing their necessity, benefits, and exit conditions. Ensure citizens can participate in debating choices that affect their security, resources, and children's future.

Conclusion

The predicament of Qatar's foreign policy extends beyond a stalled mediation effort or a strained relationship. It concerns how influence is assessed, the limits of its use, and responsibility for its costs. When success is measured by visibility, questions about the value of that presence and what it delivers for the state and society recede. When relationships, contracts, and initiatives are presented as evidence of strength without examining the constraints they create, political rhetoric outstrips actual capabilities, making it harder to acknowledge setbacks and correct course. The complexity of conflicts does not absolve the Qatari authorities of responsibility for choosing their roles and assessing the risks. Mediation requires settlements backed by guarantees; energy diplomacy requires a realistic understanding of markets; and partnerships require clarity about what they actually provide and what falls outside their commitments. Treating these instruments as permanent proof of sound policy conceals shortcomings and leaves the state vulnerable to repeating mistakes under different names.

The most serious issue remains the breadth of decision-making power compared with the narrow scope for accountability. Citizens who bear the effects of tensions on their security and the costs of commitments on their country's resources have the right to know what is decided in their name and to challenge choices that may affect their lives and their families' futures. Their role must not be reduced to endorsing decisions whose reasons and alternatives have not been disclosed, only to be asked to accept the consequences as an unquestionable national destiny.

Reviewing Qatar's foreign policy therefore requires redefining success itself: protecting society's security, safeguarding its resources, reducing its vulnerabilities, and preserving the ability to change course when the costs of a policy become clear. It also requires separating the leadership's standing from the national interest, so that admitting error is not treated as a threat to prestige and persisting in it does not become a burden imposed on everyone. Responsibility is measured by the willingness to correct a decision, even when doing so contradicts the narrative built around it.

Ultimately, a country's meaning lies in the people who call it home: a father seeking reassurance about his children, a mother hoping for a secure tomorrow, and a young person waiting for an opportunity to build a life. They are not peripheral to calculations of influence, and their security is not a price that political ambition is entitled to exact. They have the right to expect their country's strength to support them and its decisions to protect their future rather than give them new reasons to fear for it.

Future generations have no less a claim to Qatar than those who hold decision-making power today. They deserve to inherit a country free to choose its path, not one weighed down by commitments they were never consulted on and antagonisms they did not create. Justice is not served by leaving them a story of international prominence and then abandoning them to pay its bills. The most meaningful legacy for tomorrow's children is a state whose security protects their lives, whose resources preserve their dignity, and whose choices leave room for their dreams. Qatar's future is a trust, and no one has the right to squander it in pursuit of fleeting glory in the present.

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QATAR'S FOREIGN POLICY

Soft Power and the Contradictions of Influence

Mediation, Energy Diplomacy and Regional Influence

This book critically examines Qatar's foreign policy, focusing on its use of soft power, mediation, energy diplomacy, and regional influence, and the shortcomings, contradictions, and mismanagement associated with these instruments. It explores the discrepancy between the image the Qatari authorities promote of their international role and the actual outcomes of their policies, by assessing the alignment between objectives and means, the sustainability of gains, and the financial, political, and security burdens borne by the state and society.

The study analyzes how Qatar has built its international standing through media, investment, and aid, while highlighting the tensions between claims of neutrality and partisan choices, the concentration of foreign policy decision-making, and the limits of transparency and accountability.

It evaluates Qatar's mediation efforts, the limits of its influence over conflict parties, and the gap between hosting negotiations and achieving lasting settlements. It also examines the role of energy diplomacy and the extent to which gas wealth can translate into political influence and security protection, while addressing the risks of overestimating Qatar's leverage and the contradiction between environmental rhetoric and hydrocarbon expansion.

The book further explores regional influence and the costs of foreign policy choices, including conflicting alliances, the miscalculation of risks, and the consequences for citizens, national resources, and future generations. It argues that Qatar's foreign policy must be judged not by the scale of its diplomatic presence, but by its ability to safeguard the national interest, ensure accountability, and avoid passing the burden of political gambles onto society and future generations.

KEY THEMES EXPLORED

INTERNATIONAL IMAGE AND SOFT POWER
Media, investment, aid and the pursuit of global standing.

MEDIATION
Motives, limits of influence, and the challenge of lasting settlements.

ENERGY DIPLOMACY
Gas, contracts, influence and the reality of security guarantees.

REGIONAL INFLUENCE
Alliances, risks and the costs of foreign policy choices.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND THE NATIONAL INTEREST
The impact on citizens, national resources and future generations.

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