

Qatari Mediation Between Image-Building and the Pursuit of Influence: Political, Security, and Economic Costs



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Abstract

This study examines Qatar's role in regional and international mediation, analyzing its strategies in conflict management within multiple political and security contexts. The study posits that Qatari mediation was not merely a neutral diplomatic practice but a functional tool in Qatar's foreign policy, primarily utilized within specific margins that serve the strategic interests of the United States. In a later phase, it evolved into a means of expanding Qatar's regional influence and strengthening its international presence.

Through the analysis of prominent mediation cases, particularly the Palestinian issue, as well as conflicts in Lebanon, Yemen, Afghanistan, and Sudan, the study demonstrates that Qatar's mediation role is intertwined with a broader regional and international structure, where security concerns and strategic alliances play a central role. Chief among these is the increasing security reliance on the United States, leading to Qatar's mediation being integrated into an international power framework led by Washington, especially in highly sensitive geopolitical files.

The study also discusses the political and strategic implications of this role on Qatar's foreign policy orientation. Continued involvement in regional crises is identified as a dual-factor influence: on one hand, it provides opportunities to enhance the country's diplomatic standing, while on the other, it may lead to tensions with influential regional powers, complicating efforts to build stable and balanced relations with various conflict parties.

The study further highlights that in certain contexts, Qatar's mediation role has contributed to weakening its international image, deepening divisions within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and opening the door for external interventions, particularly by the United States and Israel, within the framework of managing regional power balances.

From a national security perspective, the study warns that indirect involvement in complex regional conflicts may pose potential risks to internal stability, whether through direct security repercussions or increasing political pressure on the state.

In light of these considerations, the study concludes that Qatari mediation is a double-edged sword: while it helps enhance Qatar's international standing and yields short-term diplomatic gains, it simultaneously presents long-term strategic challenges, including complicating regional relations and increasing security and political risks associated with mediating in prolonged and open conflicts.

Introduction

Diplomacy is one of the oldest human phenomena, emerging with the formation of societies and the establishment of relations between states. Since the dawn of history, peoples have resorted to various diplomatic practices, and as international interactions evolved, diplomacy became a key tool for implementing the foreign policies of states. Armed conflicts throughout the ages, characterized by their recurrence and global spread, have posed one of the greatest challenges to international stability and human life. Despite the changing causes and names of these conflicts over time, their impacts remain profound on human rights and the future of nations. With the rising human and financial losses resulting from military solutions, there emerged a pressing need to enhance effective diplomatic mechanisms to resolve conflicts and maintain peace and security. Diplomatic mediation leads these mechanisms as the most widely used and influential.

Currently, the international scene witnesses a noticeable increase in the use of mediation as a diplomatic tool for conflict resolution, with mediation becoming the primary mechanism for settling international and regional disputes away from the use of armed force. Despite the great importance of mediation in this context, the questions now raised about it go beyond its effectiveness in resolving conflicts to include its role as a tool used within the political and economic interests driven by major powers.

In this context, Qatari diplomatic mediation in global conflicts raises many questions regarding its independence, neutrality, and the true objectives behind

it, especially with the increasing criticism directed at it. Qatar is accused of having become a tool in the hands of great powers, particularly the United States, which controls many regional and international mediations, giving it the ability to control, manipulate, and prolong these conflicts in alignment with its strategic interests. Hence, the question arises regarding the true purpose of these mediations and their effectiveness in achieving real peaceful solutions.

Qatari mediation is often characterized as a mechanism for concluding short-term agreements rather than a path for building lasting peaceful settlements. Despite some relative successes Qatar has achieved in reducing temporary tensions in cases such as Lebanon and Yemen, its role has been limited to crisis management and containment in the short term, without extending to the restructuring of political frameworks or addressing the root causes of conflicts. This strategy relies on a recurring model, offering financial and political incentives, and organizing intensive short negotiations that lead to partial agreements such as ceasefires or limited security arrangements. However, the absence of strong follow-up and implementation mechanisms weakens the ability of these agreements to persist over the long term.

This "transactional" logic reflects the strategic objectives of Qatar's foreign policy, where mediation is used as a tool to enhance the country's international standing and build a network of relations with influential states and non-state actors, in order to secure a regional environment that poses fewer threats to a small state surrounded by larger powers. In this context, de-escalation itself is considered a sufficient goal to achieve

gains related to reputation and legitimacy, even if the roots of the conflict remain unresolved. Furthermore, the limited ability to impose long-term arrangements and the absence of strong institutional follow-up mechanisms by Qatari authorities contribute to strengthening the "transactional" nature of these mediations, making their outcomes susceptible to erosion or collapse with any shift in the balance of power or the regional environment, thus requiring crisis management rather than permanent settlements.

On the other hand, the political cost of these mediations has become increasingly high, as Qatar has positioned itself in situations that have harmed its relations with certain countries or exposed it to political pressure, blackmail, and high security costs. This was reflected in the Israeli bombing of Doha, which served as a serious warning of the repercussions of Qatar's involvement in regional conflicts. The attack mirrored the escalating security tensions in the region and highlighted the security risks associated with Qatar's role in mediations, which have become a burden on the state's security and stability.

Chapter One: Historical and Strategic Background of Qatari Mediation

1. The Beginning of Qatari Mediation

Before the 1990s, Qatar's foreign policy was notably aligned with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) framework, with Doha heavily relying on security and political coordination within the GCC, particularly with Saudi Arabia, as a fundamental pillar to ensure its security and stability. However, 1995 marked a pivotal turning point in Qatar's foreign policy trajectory, as the country entered a new phase characterized by a redefinition of its regional and international priorities.

In light of the reservations, and even opposition, expressed by some GCC countries towards this shift, Qatar's leadership embarked on implementing radical changes in its foreign policy. It adopted a more independent course, gradually distancing itself from the traditional approach within the Gulf system. This shift contributed to the creation of a charged regional environment, prompting Qatar to redefine its foreign identity on new foundations, largely based on utilizing unconventional tools, with active diplomacy and mediation being key components of its soft power strategy.

In this context, Qatar moved from a foreign policy based on adaptation within the Gulf framework to an approach that sought to reposition the country within both the regional and international systems. This repositioning provided Qatar with broader maneuvering space and reduced its exclusive reliance on the GCC. Strengthening

ties with the United States emerged as one of the key features of this early shift. In 1996, Qatar signed an agreement to host the Al-Udeid Air Base, which later became one of the most important centers of U.S. military presence in the Gulf region.

The base played a central role in U.S. military operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, providing Qatar with a strong security umbrella and solidifying its position as a "strategic partner" to Washington. In turn, this partnership granted Qatar greater flexibility in its political and diplomatic maneuvering on both the regional and international levels.

In addition to the military dimension, Doha worked on expanding its international relations through unconventional means, such as opening communication channels with Israel, either directly or informally. This strategy aimed to enhance Qatar's influence within U.S. decision-making circles. This was evidenced by the opening of an Israeli trade office in Doha and the establishment of undeclared communication channels that included economic and security dimensions, contributing to building flexible relationships that served Qatar's strategic interests, particularly through leveraging the role of the Israeli lobby in supporting Qatar-U.S. relations.

Media played a fundamental role in this foundational phase through the launch of Al Jazeera, which served as a transnational political and diplomatic tool of influence. This channel allowed Qatar to enhance its regional and international presence and influence both Arab and global public opinion, thereby reinforcing its image as a

political actor that transcends its geographic and demographic weight.

These structural shifts in Qatar's foreign policy were not an end in themselves but laid the groundwork for advancing the use of soft power tools, particularly diplomatic mediation. After securing a U.S. security umbrella, expanding its international relations, and consolidating its media tools, Qatar was able to present itself as a relatively acceptable party among conflicting parties. This enabled it to increasingly play mediation roles in regional and international conflicts, making mediation one of the central components of its foreign strategy in the following two decades.

2. Geopolitical and Economic Considerations Behind Qatar's Mediation Policy

Qatar's foreign policy is based on a combination of political, security, economic, and diplomatic considerations aimed at enhancing its regional and international standing, as well as maintaining internal stability. Its strategic geographic position between major regional powers such as Saudi Arabia and Iran, combined with its limited demographic and geographic size, makes it vulnerable to external threats, necessitating the adoption of unconventional tools to bolster its security and independence.

Through mediation, Qatar sought to build an image of a neutral and reliable state on the international stage, thereby enhancing its international legitimacy and

political influence that exceeds its actual size. Qatar succeeded in presenting itself as a "neutral" mediator in various regional and international crises, such as those in Lebanon, Sudan, Yemen, and Afghanistan. The country leveraged its vast financial resources and ability to provide financial incentives to disputing parties. Moreover, the country's leadership personally commits to these efforts, enhancing the credibility of its mediation and making it respected internationally.

Diplomatically, promoting Qatar's "neutrality policy" enables the state to maintain balanced relations with opposing parties, contributing to its ability to maneuver diplomatically and expand its international relations network. In this context, mediation is considered a primary tool for Qatar to maintain a balance in its regional relations with major powers like Saudi Arabia and Iran. This strengthens Qatar's role as a key player in regional and global politics. An increasing number of experts argue that using mediation as an unconventional tool to compensate for the limited elements of hard power does not equate to a strategic choice emanating from a comprehensive national security vision. Instead, it remains a circumstantial precautionary measure aimed at expanding Qatar's international network and neutralizing potential risks.

Recent developments have revealed the limits of this approach, highlighting its fragility in the face of direct threats. Notably, the Israeli bombing of Doha underscored the limited effectiveness of this strategy in guaranteeing national security.

Economically, mediation is promoted as a factor supporting regional stability, which is presumed to serve

Qatar's interests as a rentier state reliant on natural gas exports. However, this linkage remains largely theoretical, as most of Qatar's mediations have not translated into sustainable economic gains or long-term strategic partnerships. Rather, they have often been limited to politically driven, rather than economically motivated, investment opportunities. Moreover, integrating mediation into Qatar's soft power strategy, alongside media, humanitarian aid, and education, has symbolically amplified Qatar's "national brand" without necessarily leading to a tangible accumulation of power or influence.

While there are acknowledged short-term benefits to this policy, Qatar's limited ability to deeply influence complex conflicts, combined with competition from other regional powers or their overt efforts to undermine Qatar's efforts, exposes the fragile and unsustainable nature of mediation as a political choice. Instead of forming a clear, strategic pillar, mediation has remained a flexible tool used according to context, without rising to the level of a comprehensive strategy capable of ensuring long-term national security.

Thus, it can be said that despite the intensity and variety of Qatar's mediation efforts, they have not succeeded in evolving into a cohesive strategic policy. Rather, they have remained a means to amplify Qatar's international presence and minimize immediate risks without addressing the root causes of security challenges or establishing stable regional influence. This renders Qatar's mediation policy more of a short-term risk management approach than a strategic option capable of delivering sustainable gains in a highly volatile regional environment.

Chapter Two: Qatari Mediation Tools

1. Building Parallel Political Relationships

Qatar's foreign policy relies on an approach that involves cultivating broad and parallel relationships with conflicting parties, whether they are states, movements, or organizations. This is evident in Qatar maintaining relations simultaneously with both Hamas and Israel, as well as fostering ties with both Iran and the United States. Qatar has also supported various factions and movements, such as the Muslim Brotherhood and some Iran-linked groups in the region, as part of its efforts to leverage this network of relationships to mediate in regional and international conflicts.

However, this model of excessive pragmatism and the absence of a long-term vision, despite the influence it affords, is associated with a range of negative aspects and risks. It leads to the expansion of a network of alliances with volatile or controversial actors, causing a lack of coherence in Qatar's diplomatic message. It also fuels international skepticism regarding Doha's intentions, particularly with the repeated accusations of supporting extremist groups or forces opposed to its neighbors. Accusations of duplicity and opportunism have emerged, particularly from some GCC states, which view this policy as deviating from the framework of joint Gulf coordination and contradicting their own security and political priorities.

This tension manifested itself in the Gulf Crisis and the blockade imposed on Qatar in 2017, when Qatar was accused of attempting to destabilize the region and supporting parties deemed to be extremist or hostile to

certain regimes. As a result, Qatar's policy became subject to doubts about its credibility and faced increasing political and media pressures, especially in light of allegations that Doha sought to gain political and strategic advantages through its mediation efforts at the expense of its regional partners' interests.

Academic researcher Lina Khatib, head of the Reform and Democracy Program at Stanford University, describes Qatar's foreign policy as lacking a clear strategy, heavily relying on pragmatism and opportunism. She argues that Qatar engages with opposing actors and overexpands its network of relationships, which ultimately threatens its credibility .

2. Financial Resources

The State of Qatar utilizes its vast financial resources to provide economic incentives and financial aid to conflicting parties, positioning these as key tools in its foreign policy to enhance its role as a mediator in regional and international disputes. However, despite the apparent success of this strategy in drawing parties to the negotiation table, it faces several criticisms related to its potential negative effects on the credibility of mediation and the complex entanglements of the conflict.

In this context, it is argued that the strategy of "buying loyalties" or relying heavily on financial incentives could transform the peace process into a short-term financial deal. This approach may encourage the conflicting parties to engage in political blackmail and prolong the conflict rather than pushing for a swift and sustainable settlement. Several scholars in the field of mediation and

conflict resolution note that financial support might prompt the warring parties to procrastinate or escalate their demands in hopes of obtaining additional resources. This turns the negotiation process into a “financial bargaining” exercise, from which the parties benefit, but it undermines the efforts to achieve a genuine and lasting peace.

Moreover, the limited long-term impact of financial support is one of the core weaknesses of the Qatari approach. Although financial incentives can create initial conditions for dialogue and bring conflicting parties together, the absence of effective follow-up mechanisms and the failure to address the structural roots of the conflict often results in outcomes that are temporary and fragile. As such, Qatar may find itself with limited ability to ensure the continuity of peace or to establish it in the long run.

Additionally, the use of financial aid to serve Qatar’s objectives faces increasing criticism, particularly concerning suspicions of overlap between humanitarian efforts and strategic considerations. In several cases, the allocation of financial assistance is not seen purely as a humanitarian commitment but as a tool to expand Qatar’s political and economic influence in areas of tension and conflict. This raises serious questions about Qatar’s neutrality and opens the door for doubts about its true motives.

This approach undermines the image of Qatari mediation as a neutral endeavor focused solely on conflict containment and peacebuilding. Financial aid, in this context, is viewed as part of a broader system of tools used to exert influence rather than as a separate

humanitarian mechanism. As a result, Qatar's moral and political credibility is eroded, limiting the effectiveness of its mediation and hindering its ability to gain the trust of both the conflicting parties and the regional and international community.

On the other hand, the excessive reliance on financial support, especially when directed toward controversial parties or groups, is seen as a factor that could damage Qatar's international image. While this support contributes to cementing Qatar's position as an active mediator, its association with disputed parties may be interpreted as bias, making its policies subject to sharp criticism from powers and entities that perceive this support as aligning with one side against another. This, in turn, diminishes Qatar's ability to promote its "image as an impartial and unbiased mediator."

3. Soft Power (Media, Education, Sports)

Qatar employs a variety of tools in its soft power strategy, primarily including the Al Jazeera network, investments in education through the attraction of branches of global universities, and sports diplomacy through hosting major events like the 2022 World Cup. These efforts aim to enhance its symbolic presence and open non-traditional communication channels with regional and international actors. However, this intensive use of soft power tools has become a subject of academic and media criticism that links the progressive image Qatar seeks to market with its internal records and external alliances.

In the media realm, Al Jazeera is considered a central tool in building external influence and crafting a

narrative that presents Qatar as a modern and active player on both regional and global levels. However, this position has been associated with accusations of politicizing the media discourse, aligning with Qatar's foreign policy priorities, and adopting a stance more favorable to the official narrative in issues related to the country's image. This was clearly reflected in the analysis of the coverage of the 2022 World Cup, where studies indicated that content from "Al Jazeera English" was closer to Qatar's official perspective on human rights and migrant labor compared to competing international media outlets.

In the sports sector, Qatar's strategy of hosting major tournaments and acquiring global sports assets is part of a broader project to build the "national brand" of Qatar and enhance the country's appeal as a tourist and investment hub. However, this policy has attracted widespread accusations of "sportswashing," or using sports to polish the image of a state facing criticism regarding labor conditions, human rights, and individual freedoms. Studies on the Western media coverage and European audience of the World Cup suggest that linking the event to the discourse of human rights violations tarnishes Qatar's image, while focusing on organizational efficiency and infrastructure improves it. This exposes the fragility of soft power gains when confronted with human rights and media criticism.

Legal and human rights research consistently agrees that Qatar's hosting of the World Cup was accompanied by widespread violations of migrant workers' rights, including harsh working conditions, wage violations, and numerous deaths. Human Rights Watch reported that Qatar's hosting of the "2022 FIFA World Cup" left

behind a legacy of extensive violations against migrant workers, including thousands of unexplained deaths, rampant wage theft, and exorbitant recruitment fees [2] . A 2021 Guardian report cited the deaths of 6,500 workers [3] .

Some research analyses argue that the contradiction between Qatar's discourse of modernity and openness promoted through media, education, and sports, and its ongoing conservative social policies and controversial regional alliances, undermines the credibility of its soft power project. This turns some of its tools into a form of reverse soft power, intensifying scrutiny and accountability rather than improving its reputation. Consequently, Qatar's experience is often presented in analyses as a double-edged project that grants Doha international presence and considerable symbolic capital but also opens the door for sharp questioning of its human rights record and political choices. This requires Qatari decision-makers to carefully manage the balance between building a positive image and responding to demands for reform and transparency.

4. Personal Engagement of the Leadership



The Emir of Qatar mediates between the Rwandan president and his Congolese counterpart

The personal involvement of the Qatari leadership, particularly the Emir and senior decision-makers, plays a pivotal role in shaping the mediation approach adopted by Doha since the mid-1990s. Qatari foreign policy relies on the direct presence of the highest levels of leadership in the negotiation processes, accompanied by the establishment of trust-building channels with the conflict parties. This is often characterized by a proactive spirit and a willingness to bear political risks in order to open new negotiation tracks. Leadership involvement in mediation is marked by a high degree of direct and repeated interaction with conflict parties through reciprocal visits, phone calls, and informal communication channels.

This approach transforms mediation from a mere institutional process into a network of personal

relationships, aimed at enhancing trust and the ability to overcome negotiation deadlocks. The proximity of leadership to the parties and their intertwined interests with them is a decisive factor in the effectiveness of the mediation. This factor has been critical in specific cases, such as the temporary settlement of the Lebanese crisis in 2008 and the Doha peace agreement for Darfur in 2011. This personal engagement has been accompanied by extensive use of financial and diplomatic tools, including hosting extended rounds of negotiations in Doha, offering economic incentives, and providing reconstruction programs. These efforts allowed the Qatari leadership to soften the positions of the conflicting parties and produce agreements that contributed to the cessation of armed escalation, even if temporarily.

In several cases, Qatari mediation shifts from being an institutional long-term process to a platform for showcasing leadership's role. Trust with the conflict parties is built on the image of the Emir and the Qatari leadership as a patron capable of pushing deals forward through personal promises and financial and political guarantees directly tied to the ruler's prestige, rather than to the capacity and continuity of state institutions.

Chapter Three: Determinants of the Failure of Qatari Mediation

1. The Limitations of Transitioning from "De-escalation" to "Conflict Resolution"

The literature on conflict resolution shows a clear analytical distinction between two fundamental stages: de-escalation and cessation of escalation on the one hand, and the actual resolution of the conflict on the other. Mediation efforts, especially in complex and multi-party conflicts, tend to succeed more in achieving the first stage than in reaching sustainable final settlements. This is characteristic of Qatari mediation, which has achieved temporary de-escalation in cases such as Lebanon, Sudan, and Yemen, without addressing the root causes of the conflict or restructuring the political structures that generate it.

This conceptual framework helps explain one of the prominent features of Qatari mediation, which is the limitation of its transition from managing tension to producing comprehensive, long-term settlements. These mediations tend to produce temporary ceasefires, media de-escalation processes, or short-term transitional arrangements that focus more on managing the daily crisis than on reshaping the political and institutional structures that produce and fuel the conflict. Dr. Mehran Kamrava, Professor of Government at Georgetown University, in his study titled "Mediation and Qatari Foreign Policy," indicates that Qatar has succeeded in reducing tensions in cases like Lebanon, Sudan, and

Yemen, without addressing the conflicts at their roots. The study clearly affirms that relying on material incentives often leads to temporary understandings that only ease the conflict, while the lack of follow-up and enforcement mechanisms prevents Qatari mediations from evolving into lasting, final settlements.

This limitation becomes even more apparent in regionally and internationally intertwined conflicts, such as Sudan, Yemen, and Lebanon, where the entanglements of regional alliances, multiple actors, and conflicting agendas of external powers impose strict limits on the ability of any single mediator, including Qatar, to shift the process from de-escalation to comprehensive settlement. In such contexts, the main obstacles lie not only in the positions of local parties but also in the structure of regional and international balances, which make reaching an agreement to restructure the political system something that exceeds the capacity of the Qatari mediator. It requires multi-party arrangements and a strategic cost that the involved powers in the conflict are not easily willing to bear.

In addition to structural constraints, Qatari mediation faces limits stemming from the nature of the tools of power available to it. Its primary reliance on financial and symbolic influence is evident in various studies that indicate Qatar's success in temporarily de-escalating tensions in Lebanon, Sudan, and Yemen is tied to the use of substantial financial resources to host rounds of negotiations and offer support packages or investment promises to the parties. This has made Doha an attractive mediator, capable of "buying" moments of de-escalation. However, in the absence of "hard power"

tools, Qatar's ability to impose or ensure the implementation of long-term settlements is extremely limited. Multiple analyses also suggest that Doha's motivation for initiating mediation is partly driven by a desire to enhance its international stature and build an image of a "neutral mediator," rather than a full resolution of every conflict in which it engages. As a result of these combined factors, the outcomes of Qatari mediations are closer to what can be called "managing chaos" or "managing conflict" rather than reaching radical and final solutions. The success of these mediations is practically measured by their ability to make disruption more manageable and contained, rather than definitively and comprehensively ending it.

2. The Reflection of the Gap Between the Internal and Public Image on Qatari Mediation



An image of a workers' residential camp in Qatar.

The credibility of a mediator in conflicts is largely determined by their internal conduct and record in the area of human rights at the state level and within its institutions. When it is observed that the mediator violates human rights or tolerates discriminatory practices against citizens or foreigners, a sharp contradiction emerges between their publicly declared image as a fair actor committed to humanitarian standards and the reality of their internal policies. This discrepancy undermines the trust of the parties involved in the conflict in the mediator's neutrality and seriousness, raising fundamental questions about whether the mediator genuinely seeks a fair resolution of the conflict or whether their role in mediation serves a broader strategy to enhance their political and economic influence.

Studies indicate that internal human rights violations by the mediator—whether related to the judicial authority's treatment of citizens and foreigners or the conditions and rights of workers and migrants—undermine their ability to perform the mediation role seriously and impartially. When parties discover that the mediating state practices policies inconsistent with international human rights standards, their willingness to commit to proposed agreements diminishes, and the chances of achieving a lasting settlement decrease. Furthermore, these violations are exploited by opposing parties to undermine the mediator's image, accusing them of using mediation as a tool to serve political agendas, complicating their mission and reducing the effectiveness of the negotiation process.

Qatar markets itself on the international stage as a sponsor of dialogue, mediation, and human rights,

relying on active diplomacy and soft power tools. While Doha has built significant cultural, sports, and humanitarian momentum over the past two decades, United Nations reports have revealed serious human rights violations. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights report during the 33rd session in Geneva highlighted certain practices of the Qatari regime in the field of human rights. The report pointed out that the treatment of citizens and foreigners in Qatari courts varies according to the person's nationality, economic, or professional status, and that the Qatari Nationality Law No. 38 of 2005 states that naturalized persons enjoy "less protection." The report also indicated that the prevailing perception among foreigners in Qatar is that Qatari courts do not treat Qatari citizens equally, nor do they treat foreigners equally. Treatment may vary depending on the person's nationality or economic and professional status in the country. A daily reality inspection reveals a stark contrast between this declared image and the structure of the political and legal system within, creating a legitimacy gap in the role of mediation in conflicts.

Evidence from Qatar's foreign policy shows that the success of mediation and building an image as a "progressive actor" has been accompanied by continued centralization of decision-making, weak political participation, and the absence of effective oversight institutions. Qatar is classified in international indices of political rights and civil liberties among countries with severe restrictions on political rights and civil freedoms. In the broader field of human rights, the data related to the World Cup highlights gaps in the sponsorship system, violations of the rights of workers and migrants, and some restrictions related to individual freedoms.

Despite some measures that the Qatari regime considers important labor reforms and improvements in the conditions of workers, the gap between the declared discourse and practice remains. Studies show that the credibility of public diplomatic mediation is affected when parties perceive a contradiction between the promoted image and the mediator's actual policies. The inconsistency between image and actions weakens public diplomacy messages and fuels doubts about the true motivations behind Qatar's foreign policy, intersecting with accusations from its opponents of using mediation as a cover for a broader political agenda.

3. The Absence of Institutional Frameworks in Qatari Mediation Management

In the model of Qatari mediation, there is a clear reliance on personal diplomacy rather than formal institutional frameworks. This is evident in the frequent direct involvement of political leadership and the use of a wide network of personal relationships with both official and unofficial leaders and actors. This approach gives Doha the ability to act swiftly, open flexible back channels, and engage with parties that traditional diplomacy might find difficult to communicate with. However, this method also creates a degree of personalization in the mediator's role, so that the success of the negotiation processes is more linked to specific individuals than to stable, sustainable institutions.

This style leads to several risks related to sustainability and transparency in managing mediation files. The lack of established institutions and clear procedural mechanisms for documenting negotiation phases and exchanging information among different bodies limits the possibility for evaluation and accountability. It also makes it difficult to transfer accumulated experience between diplomatic generations and teams, while opening the door for accusations of undisclosed arrangements or side deals, which negatively affect the mediator's image and the parties' trust in its neutrality.

Analysis of this model reveals a clear paradox between immediate effectiveness and the ability to generate sustainable peace. On one hand, several researchers link the commitment of leadership at the highest level to Qatar's ability to reduce tensions and open channels with a broad spectrum of actors, including rebel movements that have no formal or direct relations with any international party. On the other hand, case studies in Lebanon, Darfur, and Yemen show that these successes often remained confined to conflict management and containment, rather than addressing the root causes of the conflicts. Qatari mediations lack strong institutional mechanisms for field follow-up and rely heavily on financial incentives and the dynamics of the negotiation moment, limiting their ability to change the parties' preferences in the long term or enforce the implementation of agreements.

Additionally, the heavy personal involvement of leadership contributes to the personalization of Qatar's foreign policy and marginalizes the institutional dimension. Qatar's foreign structure is characterized by a high concentration of decision-making in the hands of

the leadership and a tendency to pursue rapid, opportunistic moves that lack a long-term strategic vision. This style, while granting Doha flexibility and the ability to seize diplomatic opportunities, has exposed it to criticisms of fluctuating choices, managing sometimes contradictory networks of relationships, and exaggerating the use of mediation as a tool for building influence and reputation rather than as a commitment to a gradual approach to peacebuilding.

This personalization also raises questions about the sustainability of this approach in light of changes in leadership generations or shifting domestic priorities, as well as the potential for Qatar's mediation model to evolve into an institutional policy that can be replicated outside the personal commitment of the emir and the narrow elite surrounding him.

The British academic specialist in Gulf affairs, Christian Coates Ulrichsen, one of the foremost researchers in the political economy and security of the Gulf Cooperation Council states, emphasizes that relying on the personal commitment of Qatar's top leadership limits the ability to effect long-term change.

In this sense, it can be said that the personal involvement of Qatari leadership represents both a source of strength and fragility. It provides Qatari mediation with speed, boldness, and high negotiating capacity, but limits its structural depth and sustainability, leaving it vulnerable to the limits of "soft power" that are not supported by hard influence tools or by an institutional structure rooted in post-agreement management.

4. Showcase Mediation and the Production of Superficial Settlements

The Qatari mediation model tends to focus on the symbolic and visual dimensions of the negotiation process, where the form and symbolism of the process are considered more important than the depth of the commitments involved. This is evident in Qatar's emphasis on hosting historical agreements and reinforcing its image as a central actor in resolving regional conflicts, which enhances its international standing and solidifies its image as a "peace broker." However, this drive for quick diplomatic and symbolic gains leads to prioritizing the achievement of rapid, publicly-announced, and media-celebrated agreements, even if the root causes of the conflict remain inadequately or weakly addressed. In this context, there is a risk that some settlements will turn into superficial agreements that merely respond to the parties' immediate needs to temporarily halt violence or achieve a short-term political gain, without seriously addressing deep-rooted issues such as power-sharing, institutional reconstruction, resource-sharing guarantees, transitional justice, disarmament arrangements, or the reintegration of fighters—issues that are often raised in conflicts.

The previous experiences of Qatari mediation pathways reveal a clear limitation in follow-up and implementation mechanisms after the agreements are signed. The absence of common institutional frameworks for oversight, permanent committees with defined powers, binding timelines, and mechanisms for resolving disputes arising from the interpretation of agreement clauses—along with the lack of an effective

system of sanctions and incentives in coordination with international and regional partners—makes many agreements susceptible to disruption or collapse shortly after they are signed. As a result, the mediation platform becomes a stage for producing "historic" agreements in form, but lacking the institutional depth and procedural guarantees necessary for their sustainability in the medium and long term. This fuels the cycle of superficial settlements and the re-emergence of conflict in new forms.

Chapter Four: Qatar's Experiences in Diplomatic Mediation

1. Mediation Between the Taliban and the United States



The moment of signing the peace agreement under Qatari sponsorship.

The outbreak of the war in Afghanistan in 2001 marked a central turning point in the international system following the September 11 attacks, when the United States directly accused the Taliban of harboring al-Qaeda and allowing Afghan territory to be used to plan attacks against the United States and its allies. The military intervention was based on the "War on Terror" logic, specifically aiming to dismantle the al-Qaeda infrastructure and overthrow the Taliban regime, which provided shelter and support to the group.

Over two decades, the military intervention became the longest war the United States has ever fought in its modern history, with extensive military presence supported by NATO forces and regional partners.

However, the fluctuating objectives and shifting strategic approaches, from focusing on counterterrorism to adopting a "nation-building" project, and later prioritizing "responsible withdrawal," deepened the American strategic predicament.

Estimates, both material and human, indicate that the war drained vast resources. The United States spent hundreds of billions of dollars on military operations, building Afghanistan's security and political structures, funding aid and development programs, and the ongoing costs of deploying troops and contractors over many years. Additionally, the U.S. military and its allies suffered thousands of casualties in an asymmetric conflict marked by long-term guerrilla warfare, which weakened combat and morale capabilities without delivering a decisive defeat to the Taliban, who maintained a significant presence in both the security and political arenas.

As the war neared the end of its second decade, finding a less costly exit—politically, financially, and humanely—became an urgent priority within U.S. decision-making circles, amid the strategic exhaustion imposed by the prolonged conflict. In this context, Qatar was called upon by the United States to assume a functional mediation role, primarily aimed at providing a diplomatic exit to alleviate the American predicament in Afghanistan. This role manifested in Doha hosting the Taliban's political office and facilitating an organized negotiation process that became a crucial framework for reconfiguring the relationship between the United States and the Taliban. It marked a shift from relying exclusively on hard power tools to employing diplomatic

tools as a more cost-effective and manageable option in the post-military exhaustion phase.

Qatari mediation became a strategic and political tool serving the broader objectives of the United States in maintaining its interests in the region, rather than representing a true peace agreement. The Qatari Deputy Foreign Minister for Counterterrorism Affairs stated that Qatar hosted the Taliban at the request of the U.S. government. After nearly two decades of fighting, Washington considered the Doha Agreement as "the quickest way out of the conflict," through a framework that allowed for a full withdrawal of U.S. forces within 14 months in exchange for limited commitments from the Taliban. The mediation helped the U.S. reduce human and military losses by providing a channel for dialogue with the Taliban at a time when domestic pressure on Washington to end the long conflict was increasing. Thus, Qatar's role became a means of implementing the U.S. withdrawal strategy, which would not have been possible without some form of consensus or arrangements ensuring the minimum stability in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of U.S. forces.

The Doha Agreement addressed the urgent American need to:

- End the longest war in modern U.S. history while reducing human and financial losses after immense spending and mounting internal criticisms of the war.
- Provide a "responsible withdrawal" that preserves the minimum gains since 2001 on paper, such as preventing Afghanistan from being used as a base

for attacks on the West, even if the actual project of building a stable liberal state was abandoned.

- Secure the Taliban's pledge not to use Afghan territory against the United States and its allies, which was considered fulfilling the core security demand that underpinned the war.
- Legitimize the withdrawal rather than view it as a clear military defeat.
- The public signing in Doha, under the banner of a "Peace Agreement," provided a political cover for the troop withdrawal, marketing it internally as a well-thought-out diplomatic step, rather than as a defeat on the battlefield.

2. Qatari Mediation in the Lebanese Crisis

The roots of the Lebanese crisis, which exploded in 2008, lie in a complex interplay between the structure of the sectarian political system, the nature of the financial-economic model, external interventions, and the weakness of the state and the erosion of its institutions. The political system is based on sectarian quotas that were institutionalized following the Taif Agreement, and power-sharing became a clientelist system using state institutions and the public sector to distribute benefits to networks of sectarian leaders in exchange for loyalty. This system made the public sector larger, less efficient, more corrupt, and less independent from political elites, undermining the state's ability to function as a unified body with a national vision. It entrenched the logic of mutual "vetoes" and periodic paralysis in the institutions, opening the door to further external interventions in every internal matter.

Economically, post-war "Lebanese capitalism" was built on a financial model reliant on capital inflows from the Gulf, the banking sector, and real estate, rather than on actual production or a balanced industrial and social policy. This resulted in a fragile middle class and left vast segments of the population in poverty, with income and wealth highly concentrated in the hands of a few. For instance, 1% of the population earns about a quarter of the national income, and 10% earns more than half of it, making Lebanon one of the most unequal countries in the world.

These structural imbalances were exacerbated by external interventions and axis-based conflicts. Lebanon became a battleground for regional and international influence, with involvement from Syria, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Western powers, which turned the internal political divide into part of a broader struggle over "who will rule Lebanon after Syrian tutelage." After the assassination of Rafik Hariri in 2005 and the withdrawal of Syrian troops, the country split into the March 8 and March 14 alliances, supported regionally by Syria and Iran, versus Saudi Arabia and the West. The internal conflict became part of a wider geopolitical struggle, with UN Security Council Resolutions 1559 and 1701 calling for the disarmament of militias, and the political consequences of the 2006 war with Israel, deepening the dispute over Hezbollah's weapons and the monopoly of force in the Lebanese state.

This was compounded by a presidential vacuum, a severe governmental crisis, and the failure of political forces to agree on a new president and form a consensual government, leading to institutional paralysis, protests in downtown Beirut, and heightened

sectarian rhetoric. The direct trigger came in May 2008, when the government made decisions affecting Hezbollah's "communications network" and Beirut Airport, which Hezbollah considered a direct attack on the "Resistance." The group responded with military intervention in Beirut and the mountains, bringing the country closer to an open civil confrontation.

Qatar intervened to host negotiations that culminated in the Doha Agreement, a temporary solution that restored the functioning of state institutions without addressing the root causes of the crisis. This intervention provided a short-term lifeline that halted the violence but failed to build actual stability or bring about deep reforms to the Lebanese system. Over time, it contributed to reinforcing dangerous imbalances in the balance of power and state weakness.

The agreement reproduced the model of "consociational democracy" in Lebanon, based on sectarian power-sharing. While the Doha Agreement did not alter the essence of this political model, it entrenched the logic of settlements between sectarian elites without instituting institutional or constitutional reforms. Comparative studies between Lebanon and Iraq have shown that this model has failed to achieve sustainable civil peace or establish true popular legitimacy, in addition to the limited efficiency of the state in providing services and ensuring institutional cohesion. The electoral law, which was passed to implement the Doha Agreement, contained some technical improvements but remained shackled by the clientelist and sectarian nature of the existing system, failing to produce political representation that transcended sectarian identities or

establish effective mechanisms for holding traditional leaders accountable.

Thus, the logic of armed power outside the framework of the state continued after the Doha Agreement, with an organized military force maintaining a de facto veto power over sovereign decisions, strengthening this force's influence over state institutions. The settlement was also linked to the regional axis struggle between Iran and Syria on one hand, and the Arab-Western axis on the other, which made the agreement fragile in the face of shifting regional power dynamics. The solution remained limited to an understanding between political elites without addressing the deep causes of popular discontent or building a new social contract, leading to a continued gap between the state and society.

In conclusion, the Doha Agreement succeeded in extinguishing the 2008 fire but fueled subsequent fires, contributing to the entrenchment and reproduction of other crises in a more imbalanced form.

3. Mediation in the Yemeni Conflict

Since the outbreak of the Saada wars in northern Yemen in 2004 between the Yemeni government and the Houthis, the need for an external mediator emerged after local and regional attempts at de-escalation failed, particularly with the repeated failures of Saudi intervention and ongoing rounds of fighting in Saada and its surroundings. In this context, Qatar emerged as a new actor seeking to bring the parties together, leveraging its reputation as a mediator, its financial resources, and its soft power tools in foreign policy.

Doha entered the crisis in 2007 when the Emir opened a direct channel with both Sana'a and the Houthis, offering a proposal for a ceasefire, financing the reconstruction of Saada, and hosting the negotiations. This led to the Doha Agreement in 2008, which called for the cessation of hostilities, the release of prisoners, the disarmament or reintegration of fighters, and a Qatari commitment to reconstruction. The agreement marked the height of Qatar's role and succeeded in reducing the level of violence and imposing a relative calm. However, it did not address the root causes of the rebellion or establish institutions capable of securing long-term peace. This pattern of mediating through temporary solutions, which initially achieve some success in de-escalation but fail to resolve the underlying conflict, is consistent across Qatar's other mediation experiences.

The agreement quickly eroded, as the Saleh regime viewed Qatar's growing influence with suspicion, while Saudi Arabia saw the Qatari mediation as a threat to its traditional role in Yemen. This led to increased Gulf tensions, which affected the Saada file. The war reignited in 2009, and a new attempt at mediation took place in 2010. Qatar found itself caught between regional interests, internal commitment issues, and the absence of real follow-up mechanisms, which ultimately led to the collapse of the Doha process and Qatar's exit from the Saada issue in favor of arrangements led by Riyadh through the Gulf Initiative.

4. Mediation Between Hamas and Israel

Qatar presents its mediation role between Hamas and Israel in political and media discourse as a humanitarian initiative or a diplomatic endeavor stemming from the independent role of the state. However, academic analyses offer a more complex understanding of this role, highlighting its structural integration with the U.S. strategy, while also shedding light on the security, economic, and political costs borne by Doha.

From a strategic perspective, Qatar's mediation efforts have reinforced an approach focused on containing tensions rather than addressing them comprehensively. The Palestinian issue has been treated more as a procedural matter to be managed rather than a struggle for liberation and political and legal rights. This approach leads to a recurring pattern where each mediation attempt ends in short-term ceasefire arrangements, followed by a new escalation, perpetuating a reality that allows Israel to maintain its field dominance, reduce the international pressure it faces, and create a time window for continuing its settlement policies.

Quantitative data indicates that Qatar is one of the largest financial supporters of the Palestinians, contributing hundreds of millions of dollars annually compared to other Arab countries. Officially, this aid is presented as humanitarian support aimed at reconstruction and preventing a humanitarian collapse in the Gaza Strip. However, in practice, it plays a role beyond relief by contributing to managing the conflict rather than striving for its resolution. These transfers are made within the framework of understandings with

Israel and the United States, aiming to prevent a large-scale humanitarian explosion in Gaza—an outcome feared by Israel due to the potential security and political repercussions that contradict its strategic interests. In this sense, Qatar bears significant financial burdens in managing a crisis over which it does not hold control over war or peace decisions, while using its resources to alleviate pressure on Israel and its Western supporters.

5. Mediation in the Darfur Crisis

The Darfur crisis in western Sudan erupted in 2003 due to a complex mix of ethnic-tribal discrimination, political marginalization, competition over resources (land and water), and the spread of arms, leading to a war between local rebel movements and the Sudanese government along with its allied militias (Janjaweed). The crisis had devastating humanitarian consequences, including mass killings, widespread displacement, rape, and destruction of property, making it one of the worst humanitarian disasters of the early 21st century. The region is home to over 80 Arab and non-Arab tribes, dependent on herding and agriculture, whose past conflicts typically revolved around land, water, and livestock. However, these disputes gradually evolved into a political and ethnic conflict due to colonial policies and subsequent governments that deepened marginalization, creating an identity crisis and division between “indigenous” and “immigrant” tribes. In this context, armed movements from the region took up arms against the central government, protesting decades of political and economic marginalization, weak development, and unequal distribution of resources and power, which triggered the bloody Darfur crisis.

In 2008, Qatar announced its readiness to contribute to finding a lasting solution to the Darfur crisis, leading to the establishment of the Doha Peace Process, which served as a starting point for negotiations between the Sudanese government and Darfur's rebel movements. The Qatari initiative involved inviting the various parties to negotiate under Qatar's supervision, with Qatar playing the central role as mediator. Qatar invested in promoting its neutrality through Al Jazeera and worked hard to present itself as balanced, seeking to represent all parties, not just the Sudanese government or the rebel movements, which helped enhance its credibility among the various factions. This effort culminated in the signing of the *Doha Agreement for Darfur Peace* in 2011 between the Sudanese government and some of the rebel movements. The Qatari mediation focused on bringing the parties together at the negotiation table, offering political and economic incentives, and funding reconstruction and development projects in the region, with the hope of addressing the root causes of the conflict related to marginalization, lack of development, and power and wealth-sharing.

Although the Doha Agreement represented a significant diplomatic breakthrough at the time and reduced the intensity of confrontations in some areas, it suffered from several structural flaws. Not all major armed movements, especially those with military and political clout, participated in the agreement, and large sectors of displaced people and local communities felt unrepresented in the negotiation process. This weakened the legitimacy of the agreement at the social level. Furthermore, the implementation of the agreement lacked full political will from the central government and the signatory parties, with delays in

implementing security arrangements, reconstruction programs, and the return of refugees, which reinforced a sense of distrust.

While the Doha Document responded to some of the demands of the Darfur population, such as guaranteeing their representation at all levels of governance, including the presidency, defining the region's borders according to 1956 standards, providing compensation for displaced persons and refugees, and ensuring their voluntary return to their villages, the seriousness of implementing these provisions was lacking. The agreement also included allocating five billion dollars for regional development, granting the region a say in central government affairs according to population proportions, and revising state institutions to achieve national unity and justice. Other provisions included the reintegration of those dismissed due to the conflict, the release of prisoners, organizing the return of displaced persons through a dedicated committee, and establishing a compensation fund and a justice and reconciliation commission. The agreement also detailed arrangements for ceasefire and disarmament, with a focus on incentivizing rebel soldiers to participate in peace processes and holding an inclusive Darfur forum to present and involve all parties in the agreement's content, along with a monitoring mechanism to ensure compliance.

Qatar faced accusations that it used its mediation as a tool to serve its regional alliances rather than as a neutral mediator aiming for a balanced settlement that would satisfy all parties. The armed movements accused Qatar of bias in favor of the Sudanese government. This perception arose from what these groups saw as political

and ideological alignment between Doha and some of the conflict's key actors, Qatar's support for the Khartoum government on various occasions, and the involvement of some Qatari leaders in backing the government's policies in Darfur. Additionally, Qatar's unbalanced media and economic support during the mediation process reinforced the feeling of bias. This sense of impartiality had a significant impact on the effectiveness of the mediation, as the opposition movements felt they could not negotiate freely with a mediator they considered to be biased.

6. Mediation Between Djibouti and Eritrea

The relations between Djibouti and Eritrea saw escalating tension, culminating in an armed border conflict in 2008 over the Ras Damera area and the Damera Islands at the entrance to the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. This region holds strategic importance for global trade and navigation routes in the Red Sea. The roots of the dispute can be traced to the borders drawn during the colonial era, based on French-Italian agreements at the beginning of the 20th century. These agreements left the demarcation lines vague and open to conflicting interpretations regarding sovereignty over the land and islands, which turned the colonial legacy into a territorial dispute in a volatile regional environment. The conflict was further complicated by other issues in the Horn of Africa, notably the chronic tension between Eritrea and Ethiopia, as well as regional and international powers competing for influence in the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa. This added a geopolitical dimension to the crisis, turning it into a conflict that went beyond a simple bilateral border dispute.

Faced with the failure of regional and international efforts to produce a stable settlement, Qatari diplomacy emerged as an active mediation player. Qatar's intervention led to the signing of an agreement in 2010 between Djibouti and Eritrea, where both parties accepted Qatar's mediation as a third party. This initiative was characterized by the deployment of Qatari peacekeeping forces in the disputed area to separate the forces and reduce the likelihood of renewed clashes, with both parties committing to enter into negotiations over border demarcation and resolving claims based on international law and prior treaties. Qatar's selection as a mediator reflected its image as a relatively small state with extensive financial and media resources, pursuing an active mediation policy and building a reputation as a "neutral mediator" while seeking to expand its influence in the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea within a broader Gulf competition for regional power.

However, the Qatari mediation faced structural challenges that prevented it from evolving into a final resolution of the dispute. The agreement primarily focused on halting confrontations and establishing field arrangements, without providing a comprehensive legal resolution to the issue of sovereignty and border demarcation, given the complexities of the border issue and its interconnection with regional security concerns.

The trajectory of the mediation took a sharp turn in 2017 with the outbreak of the Gulf crisis, where Qatar found itself politically and media-wise opposed by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt. Djibouti and Eritrea aligned themselves with the blockading countries, and in this tense context, Doha withdrew its peacekeeping forces from Ras Damera and the disputed

islands in June 2017. This effectively ended Qatar's role as a mediator without providing detailed legal or political justifications to the local parties or the international community. This sudden withdrawal represented a fundamental shift in Qatar's commitment, transforming the dispute from a state of "military freeze under the supervision of a third party" into a new security and territorial vacuum. This opened the door for renewed tensions and attempts at military and political repositioning in the region by the competing powers.

Chapter Five: The Political and Security Costs of Qatari Mediation

1. The Impact of Mediation on the Arab Environment

Qatar, through its policy of mediation, seeks to employ this tool as one of the sources of "soft power" to build regional and international influence and strengthen its position on the global stage. However, this path has been accompanied by growing sensitivities among its neighboring countries, particularly after the wave of the "Arab Spring," when it appeared that Qatar's role, in the eyes of these states, shifted from that of a "mediator" to an interventionist actor aligned with transformative forces. Studies addressing the 2017 Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) crisis indicate that a significant part of the tension between Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, and Doha was linked to accusations leveled against Qatar for using its mediation roles and its network of relationships with non-state actors beyond regional consensus frameworks, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, and competing regional powers like Iran and Turkey. These actions were seen by these countries as a threat to the balance of the Arab and Gulf systems, instead of merely facilitating dialogue. This expansion was viewed as a challenge to the Gulf-Egyptian axis, which sought to contain its political rivals and maintain the regional status quo.

These differences led to a comprehensive blockade on Qatar in June 2017, including the closure of land, sea, and air routes, and the presentation of a list of 13 demands targeting the core elements of Qatari influence, including the closure of Al Jazeera network, reducing

relations with Iran, ending the Turkish military presence, and halting support for what these countries termed "political Islam networks." This resulted in a deep rift within the GCC, splitting it into a camp supporting the blockade, one supporting Qatar, and another remaining neutral. This undermined the GCC's image as a unifying framework for Gulf security and revealed its limited ability to manage internal conflicts among its members.

The crisis also highlighted the limitations of over-relying on mediation as a security tool. Qatar's symbolic gains from mediation turned into a strategic burden, marked by a loss of trust with its surroundings and damage to its image as a neutral mediator. Although Doha gradually regained its mediating role following the Al-Ula Agreement in 2021, this occurred within a more cautious framework, given the ongoing sensitivities of neighboring countries regarding any roles perceived as interfering with the balance of the existing regimes.

2. The Security Cost of Qatari Mediation



An Image of the Israeli Bombing of Doha

International mediation studies show that state involvement in managing armed conflicts is neither a neutral activity nor a "pure gain," but rather involves significant political and security costs, especially in tense regional environments like the conflicts where Qatar has mediated, facing strategic and security repercussions as a result. Mediation typically occurs in security-intertwined contexts, where local conflict intersects with regional and international rivalries, making any mediator prone to becoming part of the conflict equation rather than remaining outside it. Recent studies in the field of external intervention show that the impact of mediation on ending wars or reducing violence is complex, as fighting may continue or escalate alongside the negotiation effort, particularly in the absence of security guarantees or effective peacekeeping forces. Moreover, mediators may pay a political and security price when their intervention is perceived as biased towards one side or an attempt to reshape balances that some conflict parties oppose.

The security cost of Qatari mediation is not just a theoretical possibility but a structural element of a strategic choice that transformed the state into an active mediator in security-intertwined conflicts. This policy has provided gains in status and role, but it has also attracted regional pressures, skepticism in alliances, and tied the state's security to complex violence contexts that it alone cannot control. The bombing of Doha was a manifestation of these security risks that have always accompanied entering mediation in conflicts, reminding the ruling elite of the limits of "small mediator diplomacy" when intersecting with the calculations of major powers and immediate neighbors. Qatar was no longer treated merely as a neutral diplomatic actor but as a party held responsible for the political and security outcomes and paths that were beyond its control.

In this context, Qatari mediation reveals a structural paradox: while enhancing the state's symbolic and diplomatic capital through external mediation, it simultaneously expands the scope of potential threats, turning the mediator itself into a target within the deterrence and pressure equations. Thus, the security cost becomes an integral part of foreign policy calculations, not as an exceptional occurrence, but as an inherent effect of a strategic choice that utilized mediation as a central tool to redefine the state's position and role in a highly turbulent regional environment.

Recommendations

1. Comprehensive Review of Mediation Policy

It is essential to adopt clear criteria before accepting any mediation, considering factors such as the importance of the issue to Qatar's security, the actual available influence, Qatar's ability to monitor and implement the mediation, and the map of allies and adversaries. There should be a careful avoidance of broad engagement driven solely by the desire for prestige or symbolic value. The approach should shift from "opportunistic" short-term strategies and unplanned pragmatism to a long-term strategy that regulates engagement in specific issues and minimizes uncalculated involvement. The study also highlights the lack of cohesive strategic planning in Qatar's foreign policy, which results in tangled partnerships and diminished external credibility.

2. Avoiding Uncalculated or Unmanageable Mediation Engagements

For mediation to be successful, there must be a real opportunity for resolution, the inclusion of key parties, and the acceptance of the mediator. The absence of these conditions transforms mediation into symbolic crisis management rather than a solution to the conflict. The study also recommends that Doha should not bear the consequences of settlements where it lacks the tools to influence their on-the-ground outcomes. This has been evident in past experiences where agreements were criticized for lacking inclusivity, and violence persisted despite ceasefire declarations, as seen in the peace agreements in Darfur and Yemen.

3. Building Accountability Mechanisms and Addressing Ethical and Legal Responsibility

A key issue highlighted is the lack of follow-up mechanisms after agreements, which allows for the resurgence of violence and creates a gap between managing the conflict and resolving it. The study recommends establishing a permanent institutional unit for follow-up, responsible for evaluating implementation and providing regular reports. This would help prevent the mere appearance of neutrality without bearing the consequences of failed settlements, as seen in the withdrawal from the Djibouti-Eritrea mediation, which raised questions about legal and ethical responsibilities when exiting a mediation process. The study also advocates for developing a clear protocol for withdrawal that considers the mediator's obligations to the parties involved in the conflict.

4. Requiring Clear Guarantees and Protection for Civilians

It is essential to link any agreements brokered by Doha to international or regional enforcement guarantees related to the cessation of targeting civilians, field monitoring arrangements, and specific sanctions for violations of the agreement. This recommendation arises in light of past peace agreements where fighting continued despite official peace declarations. These guarantees would ensure that the mediation process results in tangible outcomes and that the protection of civilians is prioritized throughout the resolution process.

5. Integrating Soft Power into a Broader National Power Strategy

The study emphasizes that any serious review of Qatar's mediation policy must first acknowledge the inevitability of combining both soft and hard power within the concept of a realistic "smart power." It should not overestimate the ability of mediation to compensate for the fragility of the security environment. Soft power, including mediation and humanitarian diplomacy, should not be practiced as a substitute for hard power but as a complementary tool. The study recommends that Doha focus on strengthening political and security deterrence elements, enhancing defensive alliances, and building institutional capacity to transition from a "mediator of acceptance" to an "influential mediator."

6. Strengthening the Institutional Nature of Mediation and Reducing Personal Involvement

The study reveals that relying on the personal involvement of top elites, combined with a lack of specialized staff and follow-up mechanisms, hinders the transition from conflict management to conflict resolution. Therefore, the study recommends:

- Establishing a permanent professional mediation body that includes experts in international law, conflict analysis, and risk management.
- Developing systematic programs for "lessons learned" from each mediation case to ensure continuous improvement and effectiveness in future efforts.

Conclusion

Qatar's mediation policy in conflicts reveals an increasing security and strategic cost when presented as the central, almost sole, tool for managing the surrounding threats of a small state in a highly volatile regional environment. Despite the international presence and reputation Qatar has gained as a mediator, and its ability to reduce tensions in many instances, these successes have largely remained at the level of conflict management rather than resolution. Violence has reemerged, and crises have persisted in countries like Lebanon, Yemen, and Darfur, reflecting the limitations of Qatar's ability to enforce agreements or ensure their sustainability in the absence of strong institutional follow-up mechanisms and the ability to transform negotiated arrangements into on-the-ground power structures.

Studies indicate that Qatar's financial wealth and its regional and international relationship networks have allowed it to gain considerable acceptance as a mediator in several conflicts. However, it lacks the "hard power" necessary to change the preferences of the parties involved or to impose long-term commitments, whether through military coercion tools or through the administrative structure and capacity for precise field monitoring. As a result, its role has been more aligned with reducing temporary tensions than reshaping power balances or addressing the structural roots of conflicts.

Other studies show that excessive investment in soft power tools, particularly mediation, without a solid

strategic foundation or long-term vision, has made Qatar's foreign policy vulnerable to dangerous repercussions. These included the Gulf blockade in 2017, growing doubts about Doha's intentions, and the rise of "soft dismantling" of its international image through human rights and political criticisms.

From a national security perspective, these findings suggest that mediation cannot replace hard power or reliable deterrence arrangements and security alliances; rather, it serves as a complementary tool within a comprehensive strategy. This strategy should combine the building of self-defense military capabilities with a more cohesive foreign policy that avoids rash involvement in complex conflicts beyond a small state's capacity to manage or bear the consequences. An exclusive focus on mediation as a "survival strategy" risks turning into a strategic failure when mediation is used as a substitute for addressing power imbalances or building a more robust national and regional security system. When mediation becomes more of a "role marketing tool" rather than a means of "securing national safety," it runs the risk of undermining the very security it seeks to promote.

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“**Qatari mediation** has emerged as one of the most visible diplomatic tools in the Middle East—projected as humanitarian, neutral, and internationally constructive. Yet behind this cultivated image lies a complex strategic calculus.”



This book examines Qatar's intensive use of mediation as both an instrument of soft power and a means of navigating regional vulnerabilities, geopolitical pressures, and the constraints of small-state survival.

Through detailed case studies—including Lebanon, Yemen, Afghanistan, Darfur, and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict—the study argues that Qatari diplomacy has often produced temporary conflict management rather than durable peace. It reveals how Qatar's pursuit of international prestige, alliance maintenance, and security guarantees has at times generated **political friction**, economic burdens, and direct security risks, challenging the narrative of mediation as a cost-free path to influence.