

QATARI MEDIATION

A Study of the Causes of Failure
and the Mechanisms of Reproducing Crises



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Abstract

This study examines the mediation initiatives undertaken by Qatar in a number of Arab and regional conflicts, with the aim of assessing the nature of its role and measuring its capacity to produce stable and sustainable political settlements. The cases examined reveal that failure was the common denominator of Qatari mediation efforts, whether through the collapse of agreements, the resumption of hostilities, or the persistence of the underlying causes of conflict without meaningful resolution. Against this background, the study investigates the factors that have made failure a recurring pattern in Qatar's mediation experience. It also examines Qatar's reliance on financial incentives, grants, and economic pledges to win over the parties and secure their temporary consent—an approach that, in several cases, made its interventions resemble a diplomacy of buying consensus rather than comprehensive political mediation equipped with effective mechanisms for leverage, implementation, and enforcement.

Chapter One presents the general framework of Qatari mediation by defining international mediation and outlining the conditions necessary for its success, foremost among them neutrality, independence, expertise, the capacity to exert influence, and the ability to ensure that the parties fulfil their commitments. It also traces the emergence of Qatar's mediation role and examines its political and diplomatic objectives. Furthermore, the chapter discusses the limitations of the instruments available to Qatar for managing complex conflicts, as well as its reliance on financial resources, personal relationships, and the hosting of negotiations instead of developing institutional mechanisms capable

of addressing the root causes of conflict and guaranteeing the implementation of agreements.

Chapter Two examines Qatari mediation efforts in Lebanon and Yemen, as well as in the border dispute between Djibouti and Eritrea. It considers the 2008 Doha Agreement on Lebanon as a temporary settlement that ended the immediate crisis without eliminating the causes of political division. It also analyses Qatar's mediation between the Yemeni government and the Houthis, including the financial commitments and arrangements that failed to prevent renewed fighting. The chapter further discusses Qatar's role between Djibouti and Eritrea, highlighting the limitations of the settlement and the collapse of its arrangements following the withdrawal of Qatari forces. It identifies the elements common to these cases, particularly the fragility of the agreements, their dependence on Qatar's continued presence and financing, and their lack of durable guarantees.

Chapter Three addresses Qatari mediation efforts in Sudan, Chad, Afghanistan, and Gaza. It analyses the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur, including the exclusion of influential parties, its reliance on financial incentives, and its inability to achieve comprehensive peace. The chapter also examines the Chadian dialogue held in Doha and the limitations of the resulting agreement in establishing an inclusive process of national reconciliation. It considers Qatar's hosting of negotiations between the United States and the Taliban, culminating in the 2020 Doha Agreement, which was followed by the collapse of the Afghan government and the Taliban's return to power. In doing so, the chapter distinguishes between merely providing a platform for negotiations and possessing the actual capacity to build

peace and ensure its durability. It also discusses Qatari mediation in Gaza, focusing on indirect contacts between Israel and Hamas, prisoner and hostage exchange arrangements, ceasefire agreements, and temporary truces. The chapter demonstrates that success in arranging a limited truce or securing the release of detainees does not amount to achieving a sustainable political settlement, particularly when ceasefires repeatedly collapse and military operations resume.

Chapter Four is devoted to a comparative analysis of the outcomes of Qatari mediation initiatives and to explaining failure as their common denominator. It identifies the principal manifestations of this failure, including the collapse of agreements, renewed fighting, the exclusion of key actors, weak implementation, and the persistence of the underlying causes of conflict. It also examines the use of financial incentives as a substitute for political solutions and assesses how selective relationships and conflicting interests have affected the mediator's neutrality. The chapter concludes that Qatari mediation has become an instrument for managing conflicts, postponing their escalation, and reproducing them, rather than a process capable of resolving them and building sustainable peace.

The study concludes that Qatar's diplomatic ambitions exceeded its available political and institutional capabilities, and that reliance on financial power and high-profile media exposure could not compensate for the absence of effective mechanisms of leverage, enforcement, and implementation. Consequently, while some Qatari mediation initiatives produced limited and temporary results, they failed to transform those outcomes into stable settlements capable of addressing the root causes of conflict and preventing its recurrence.

Introduction

International mediation has become one of the principal instruments used to address armed conflicts and political crises, as it offers a means of bringing the positions of opposing parties closer together and creating the conditions necessary to halt violence and reach peaceful settlements. The success of mediation, however, does not depend merely on bringing adversaries to the negotiating table or persuading them to sign an agreement. Rather, it rests on the mediator's ability to understand the root causes of the conflict, maintain an adequate degree of neutrality, build trust among the parties, and establish clear guarantees and implementation mechanisms. It also requires political and diplomatic leverage sufficient to address breaches of the agreement.

As part of its efforts to expand its regional influence and strengthen its international presence, the State of Qatar has made mediation a central pillar of its foreign policy. Over recent decades, it has hosted negotiations and agreements related to conflicts in Lebanon, Yemen, Sudan, Chad, Afghanistan, and Gaza. It has also intervened in the border dispute between Djibouti and Eritrea, presenting itself as a small state capable of maintaining contact with opposing parties and assuming diplomatic roles that exceed its geographical and demographic weight.

At the time of their launch or the signing of the agreements they produced, some of these mediation initiatives received considerable political and media attention and were presented as successes of Qatari diplomacy. Yet mediation should not be judged by signing ceremonies or the scale of the accompanying

media coverage. It must instead be assessed according to the tangible results it produces, its ability to end the conflict and address its underlying causes, its capacity to ensure that the parties honour their commitments, and its effectiveness in preventing a return to violence. From this perspective, an examination of the cases in which Qatar intervened reveals that the announced results were frequently short-lived. Many agreements and truces collapsed or encountered serious obstacles in their implementation, while the crises either persisted or re-emerged in more complex forms.

Failure was the common denominator of most of these mediation initiatives, although its forms and severity varied from one case to another. In some instances, hostilities resumed shortly after an agreement was signed. In others, key parties were excluded from the settlement, agreed provisions remained unimplemented, or the settlement became a temporary truce that left the political, economic, and social causes of the conflict untouched. Consequently, Qatari mediation efforts did not build sustainable peace so much as temporarily contain crises and postpone their renewed eruption, without providing the conditions necessary for their definitive resolution.

This recurring failure raises fundamental questions about the nature of Qatar's role and the instruments on which it relies. Qatar has depended heavily on its financial resources, offering grants, aid, compensation, investment pledges, and reconstruction funding. Although economic assistance can be important in improving the prospects for peace, using money to win over the parties or encourage them to sign agreements does not necessarily resolve disputes over power, justice, representation, resource-sharing, and security

guarantees. When financing becomes the mediator's principal instrument, the process shifts from politically resolving the conflict to temporarily purchasing consent or calm, making it closer to a diplomacy of buying consensus than to comprehensive mediation.

Qatar's role also raises the issue of the distinction between hosting negotiations and building peace. Providing a venue for meetings, facilitating communications, funding the accommodation of delegations, and giving agreements extensive media exposure can all help initiate dialogue, but they are insufficient to resolve a complex conflict. Effective mediation requires accumulated institutional expertise, a precise understanding of the structure of the conflict, the ability to apply balanced pressure, the inclusion of all influential actors, and the establishment of mechanisms for monitoring and accountability. The cases examined demonstrate that Qatar lacked sufficient means to compel the parties to comply or to guarantee the implementation of the agreements they had signed. Their continuity therefore remained dependent on Qatari financing or presence, and their fragility became apparent whenever political circumstances changed or Qatar's involvement diminished.

Chapter One: Qatari Mediation Between Diplomatic Ambition and Limited Capacity

1. The Concept of International Mediation and the Conditions for Its Success

International mediation is a peaceful means of resolving disputes through the intervention of a state, organization, or other accepted third party to help the parties resume dialogue, narrow their differences, and reach an agreement. Unlike a court or arbitral tribunal, a mediator has no authority to impose a binding solution. Its influence derives instead from the parties' trust, its ability to present realistic proposals and provide guarantees, and its use of political and economic leverage to ensure the success of the negotiations.

Mediation is not limited to hosting meetings or conveying messages. It requires an understanding of the conflict's history, root causes, balance of power, and surrounding interests, as well as the design of a negotiating process capable of reconciling competing demands. Success in bringing the parties together and securing an agreement is therefore different from success in building peace: an agreement may be signed and subsequently collapse because the conditions necessary for its implementation are absent.

Neutrality is one of the most important conditions for successful mediation. It requires the mediator not to become a concealed party to the conflict or favour the interests of one side over another. This does not mean equating the aggressor with the injured party; rather, it

means applying consistent standards to all parties and managing the negotiations in a balanced manner, independently of the mediator's own interests and alliances. Independence is equally essential and requires the mediation process to be conducted without submission to external dictates or its exploitation to enhance the mediator's image, expand its influence, or compete with rivals. The mediator's interests must therefore remain separate from the requirements of the settlement.

Mediation also requires expertise, institutional competence, and specialized teams in politics, law, security, economics, human rights, and peacebuilding. It further demands detailed knowledge of the parties to the conflict, the sources of their power, the demands of affected communities, and the relevant regional and international factors. Such expertise helps prevent vague agreements that merely postpone disputes instead of resolving them.

The mediator must also possess the capacity to influence and exert pressure, since goodwill alone is insufficient to persuade the parties to make concessions and honour their commitments. Pressure, however, does not mean providing unconditional funds or purchasing consent. Financial incentives may secure a temporary signature without creating genuine acceptance of the settlement, and may even encourage other groups to take up arms in pursuit of compensation and material gains.

Successful mediation requires the inclusion of all influential parties and the representation of affected communities, because an agreement that excludes major actors remains incomplete. Restricting negotiations to

governments and leaders of armed groups may also reduce peace to an arrangement for sharing power and benefits among elites. Local communities, displaced persons, and other affected groups should therefore be included in the process.

Ensuring the implementation of an agreement is another essential condition, because signature does not mark the end of mediation but the beginning of the implementation phase. This requires defined timetables and responsibilities, independent mechanisms for monitoring, verification, and dispute resolution, and procedures for addressing non-compliance. It may also require international or regional guarantees, monitoring missions, and security and judicial arrangements.

Addressing the root causes of the conflict remains the most important criterion. Conflicts arising from exclusion, injustice, unequal distribution of wealth, discrimination, competition over resources, or foreign intervention cannot be resolved merely through a ceasefire or the distribution of positions and funds. A sustainable settlement must combine political, security, economic, and social reform with justice, reconciliation, institutional reform, reconstruction, and the return of displaced persons.

Success also depends on the existence of genuine political will among the parties and on the mediator's ability to distinguish between serious participation and the use of negotiations to gain time or legitimacy, or to reorganize military forces. Incentives must be tied to measurable steps. The success of mediation should therefore be judged by the durability of the cessation of violence, the implementation of commitments, the

establishment of a stable political process, and the redress of grievances—not by the number of conferences held or agreements signed. An agreement that depends on continued funding or the mediator’s presence and collapses when circumstances change does not constitute sustainable peace; it is merely a truce that postpones confrontation and may pave the way for renewed conflict.

2. The Emergence of Qatar’s Mediation Role, Its Political Objectives, and Its Costs

Qatar’s role in international mediation began to take shape in the mid-1990s, as its foreign policy shifted towards greater activism and independence. Doha sought to overcome the limitations arising from its small territory, limited population, and modest military capabilities by engaging with opposing parties, hosting negotiations, and intervening in conflicts that were not always directly connected to its own interests.

This approach acquired a constitutional basis, as Article 7 of the Qatari Constitution calls for the peaceful settlement of international disputes. Qatar’s expanding involvement in mediation, however, went beyond this declared objective and became part of a broader policy aimed at building influence and enhancing its regional and international standing. This was evident in Doha’s involvement in the crises in Lebanon, Yemen, Darfur, Djibouti, Eritrea, Afghanistan, Chad, and Gaza. By hosting delegations, financing negotiations, and offering grants, investment pledges, and reconstruction assistance, Qatar succeeded in associating its name with numerous agreements and diplomatic initiatives.

These activities gave Qatar a degree of visibility disproportionate to its geographical and political weight, but they also exposed a gap between the breadth of its ambitions and the limitations of its capabilities. Peacebuilding requires institutional expertise, the capacity to exert pressure, effective monitoring mechanisms, and credible guarantees of implementation—tools that Qatar did not possess on a scale commensurate with the scope of its interventions.

Building influence was a central objective of this policy. Mediation enabled Doha to establish direct relations with opposing parties and made it an actor in regional affairs. As a result, mediation evolved from a means of resolving conflicts into an instrument for ensuring Qatar's continued presence within them.

Mediation was also used to enhance Qatar's image and present it as a state committed to dialogue and peace. Al Jazeera contributed to amplifying this role and associating Doha's name with negotiations and agreements, until mediation became part of an integrated system combining financial power, media influence, and diplomatic activism.

The financial cost is among the most controversial aspects of this policy. The state bore the expenses of hosting delegations, financing negotiations, providing aid and compensation, and pledging investment projects. In the absence of publicly available, detailed financial data, however, it is difficult to determine the overall cost of these mediation efforts or to compare that cost with the results achieved. The costs are not solely financial but also political and diplomatic. Qatar's selective relationships exposed it to accusations of bias and

interference in the internal affairs of other states. Its competition with regional mediators also contributed to the proliferation of negotiating tracks and, in certain cases, complicated efforts to reach a settlement.

There is also a reputational cost. When an agreement bearing Doha's name collapses, the mediator's credibility is inevitably affected. As hostilities repeatedly resumed, the gap widened between the media portrayal of Qatar as a peacemaker and the practical outcomes revealing its limited capacity to guarantee implementation. This policy also raises the issue of opportunity cost. A portion of the resources devoted to building influence abroad could have been directed towards domestic priorities or more transparent and sustainable forms of development assistance. The criticism is not directed at the financing of peace efforts in itself, but at expenditure undertaken without disclosing its cost, defining objective criteria for success, or subjecting its outcomes to independent evaluation.

3. The Limitations of Qatar's Conflict-Management Instruments

Qatar's mediation experience reveals a clear gap between the breadth of its diplomatic ambitions and the limited instruments available to manage complex conflicts. Doha succeeded in bringing different parties to the negotiating table and providing platforms for dialogue, but it lacked the institutional capacity and accumulated expertise required to transform preliminary understandings into stable and enforceable settlements.

Qatari mediation efforts relied heavily on the involvement of the country's leadership and senior officials, as well as on personal relationships with leaders of governments and armed groups, rather than on a specialized and independent institutional apparatus comprising experts in conflict resolution, law, security, transitional justice, and reconstruction. This made certain initiatives dependent on particular individuals and political circumstances, weakening their continuity whenever leaderships or balances of power changed.

Qatar also lacks the coercive instruments necessary to compel the parties to fulfil their commitments or impose meaningful costs on those obstructing an agreement. Although it can host negotiations and offer incentives, it does not possess, on its own, sufficient military or political weight to guarantee an end to hostilities, monitor disarmament, or protect transitional arrangements. The implementation of many agreements therefore remained dependent on the willingness of the parties or on the support of more powerful regional and international actors.

In place of such instruments, Doha relied on financing, grants, and promises of investment and reconstruction to win over the parties and bring their positions closer together. Although financial support can help create an environment conducive to settlement, using it as a substitute for a political solution produced temporary consent and encouraged armed elites to treat negotiations as an opportunity to secure benefits, without making a genuine commitment to ending the conflict.

Chapter Two: Qatari Mediation in Lebanon, Yemen, Djibouti, and Eritrea

1. Mediation in Lebanon and the 2008 Doha Agreement



Qatar's mediation followed a political crisis that had lasted approximately eighteen months and culminated in the events of 7 May 2008, when Hezbollah and its allies used armed force in Beirut and other areas in response to decisions taken by the government. The Doha negotiations did not, therefore, begin between parties of equal standing; they took place under the pressure created by Hezbollah's military superiority and fears that Lebanon might descend into another civil war.

Qatar hosted Lebanese political leaders from 16 to 21 May 2008, drawing on its relations with Hezbollah, Syria, and Iran, as well as its acceptance among other Arab and international actors. The negotiations culminated in the signing of the Doha Agreement, which

led to the election of Michel Suleiman as President of the Republic and the formation of a government comprising 16 ministers from the parliamentary majority, 11 from the opposition, and three appointed by the President. The agreement also established electoral arrangements and included a commitment not to use weapons in political disputes.

The agreement succeeded in halting the confrontations and ending the presidential vacancy, but it failed to address the core of the crisis. It granted the opposition a “blocking third” after Hezbollah had resorted to force, thereby converting the outcome of armed dominance into political gains. Instead of restoring the authority of the state, the mediation entrenched a reality in which an armed party could impose its demands on state institutions.

The most serious flaw was the deferral of the issue of Hezbollah’s weapons to a subsequent dialogue, without a timetable, an implementation mechanism, or penalties for non-compliance. Qatar obtained only general commitments that weapons would not be used, but it established no practical guarantees for placing military force exclusively under state authority. The agreement thus temporarily addressed the consequences of the confrontation while leaving the principal cause of the crisis unresolved.

Qatar’s role also relied more heavily on political relationships, financing, aid, and reconstruction projects than on institutional mechanisms capable of enforcing implementation. Financial resources gave Qatar considerable influence and visibility, but they did not resolve sectarian divisions, foreign interference, or the

existence of competing sources of military authority. Mediation consequently became a means of purchasing calm and producing temporary consensus rather than a process for building a viable state and sustainable peace.

The agreement failed its first major political test. Despite the parties' commitments neither to resign nor to obstruct the government, eleven ministers affiliated with Hezbollah and its allies resigned in January 2011, bringing down Saad Hariri's government. The parliamentary strength granted to the opposition under the Doha settlement was thus used to overthrow the very government created by that agreement. This exposed the weakness of Qatar's guarantees and Doha's inability to compel the parties to honour their commitments.

Following the collapse of the settlement, Lebanon's crisis intensified. Institutional paralysis, presidential vacancies, and disputes over government formation persisted, while Hezbollah's weapons remained beyond state control and its regional role expanded, particularly after its intervention in the Syrian war. Lebanon subsequently entered a succession of political, economic, and security crises.

2. Mediation Between the Yemeni Government and the Houthis



Qatar's mediation between the government of President Ali Abdullah Saleh and the Houthi movement began in 2007, following successive rounds of fighting in Saada Governorate that caused numerous casualties, widespread destruction, and growing displacement. Qatar presented its intervention as an effort to halt the hostilities. However, the initiative was also linked to its ambition to use the crisis to establish a diplomatic role and expand its regional influence, drawing on its relations with the Yemeni government and its channels of communication with Houthi leaders.

The mediation produced a peace agreement and a declaration of a cessation of hostilities in June 2007, followed by an implementation agreement signed in Doha on 1 February 2008. The arrangements provided for the cessation of military operations, the evacuation of military positions, the surrender of medium-grade

weapons, the release of detainees, the return of displaced persons, the reconstruction of affected areas, and the regularization of the status of the movement's leaders. A committee was also established to monitor implementation.

Financial incentives played a central role in the initiative. The agreement was linked to a Qatari commitment to finance the reconstruction of Saada, with studies estimating the proposed funding at between \$300 million and \$500 million. The funds were intended to compensate those affected and rebuild devastated areas. However, the financing itself became a point of contention between the parties, revealing that the mediation relied more heavily on financial resources than on a coherent political and security plan.

The fundamental flaw was that Qatar treated the war as a crisis that could be ended through incentives and compensation, even though its roots lay in the structure of power, local marginalization, tribal and sectarian relations, the distribution of resources, and the struggle between the government and the Houthis over influence and control. The mediation offered no clear framework for addressing these issues or integrating the Houthis into a national political process that would define their rights, obligations, and relationship with the state.

The agreement also lacked robust implementation mechanisms. The monitoring committee was unable to independently verify withdrawals, the surrender of weapons, or the release of detainees. No clear penalties were established for either party if it obstructed implementation, while numerous provisions allowed considerable scope for conflicting interpretations. The

parties consequently exchanged accusations of delay and non-compliance, while Qatar lacked any effective means of compelling either side to honour its commitments.

This inability exposed the limits of Qatar's influence. Doha could bring delegations together and provide financing, but it could neither monitor the conflict zones nor control the military and tribal forces involved, nor could it neutralize regional interference. It also relied on personal relationships with President Saleh and Houthi leaders, leaving the agreement dependent on the calculations of both parties and on shifts in the balance of power between them.

In April 2008, Abdul-Malik al-Houthi announced that the mediation had reached a "dead end" and accused the government of obstructing it. In June of the same year, Saada Governor Hassan Mohammed Manna declared that Qatar's efforts had failed. The agreement collapsed only months after it was signed, and a fifth, more extensive round of fighting erupted. Its consequences extended to the Saudi border and drew the conflict into a broader regional dimension.

3. Mediation Between Djibouti and Eritrea

The border dispute between Djibouti and Eritrea erupted in June 2008 over the Ras Doumeira area. The confrontations resulted in deaths and prisoners on both sides, while raising fears that the dispute could escalate into a broader war in the Horn of Africa. Qatar intervened in the crisis by drawing on its relations with both countries and presented its involvement as an

attempt to halt the confrontation. At the same time, the conflict offered Doha a new opportunity to expand its political and military presence beyond the Gulf region.

On 6 June 2010, Djibouti and Eritrea signed an agreement granting the then Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, broad authority to propose the legal and technical measures necessary to reach a final and binding settlement. Entrusting the mediation to an individual, rather than establishing it within a permanent institution governed by clear mechanisms, made the process more dependent on Qatar's leadership and political relationships than on an independent legal framework.

Qatar deployed hundreds of soldiers to the buffer zone to monitor the ceasefire and prevent friction between the two countries' armed forces. This military presence succeeded in freezing direct confrontation for several years, but it neither resulted in the demarcation of the border nor resolved the sovereignty dispute. The calm remained dependent on the continued presence of Qatari forces rather than on a final agreement capable of enduring without them.

The issue of prisoners also remained unresolved for years, with only limited progress achieved in March 2016, when Eritrea released four Djiboutian prisoners who had been held since the 2008 clashes following Qatari mediation. The fact that this step took nearly eight years revealed the mediator's limited ability to compel the parties and accelerate the resolution of essential humanitarian and political issues.

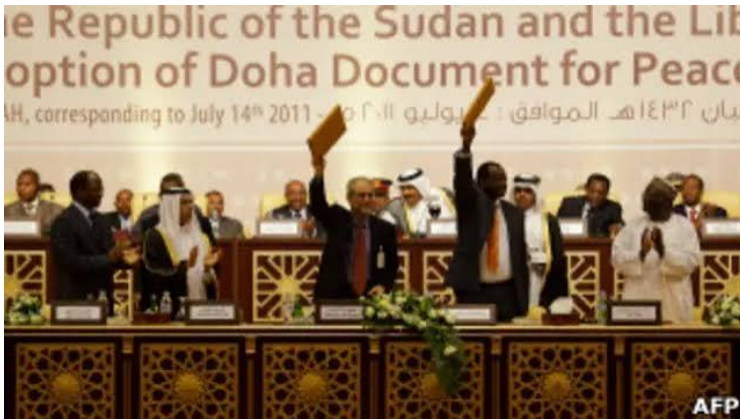
The most serious flaw became apparent in June 2017, when Qatar abruptly withdrew its forces after Djibouti downgraded its diplomatic relations with Doha amid the Gulf crisis that began that month. Qatar announced the withdrawal without presenting a public transition plan or ensuring the deployment of a replacement force, despite knowing that the prevention of renewed confrontation depended primarily on the military separation maintained by its troops.

Through this action, Qatar demonstrated that its mediation was not independent of its political disputes. It made the continuation of a mission concerning peace and security between two states contingent on their positions regarding its own regional crisis. A responsible mediator should not abandon a disputed area without alternative arrangements merely because its relations with one of the parties have deteriorated. Protecting a truce is not a political reward that can be withdrawn, but a commitment requiring an orderly transition capable of preventing the conflict from resuming.

This case demonstrates that Qatar's role was essentially confined to the temporary military separation of the two parties, without addressing the underlying dispute or establishing a sustainable institutional settlement. The withdrawal also revealed that Doha treated its military presence as a political instrument and an extension of its relationships and interests, rather than as a consistent commitment to regional security.

Chapter Three: Qatari Mediation in Sudan, Chad, and Afghanistan

1. The Darfur Mediation and the Doha Document for Peace



Qatar's mediation in Darfur began in 2008 under a mandate from the League of Arab States and in cooperation with the African Union–United Nations Joint Mediation. Doha hosted negotiations that lasted approximately two and a half years, at a time when the war had already caused large numbers of deaths and displaced persons and refugees, while armed movements had multiplied and local, regional, and international interests had become increasingly intertwined.

On 14 July 2011, the Sudanese government and the Liberation and Justice Movement signed an agreement adopting the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur. The document addressed power-sharing and wealth-sharing, human rights, justice and reconciliation, compensation,

the return of displaced persons, security arrangements, and the reconstruction of the region.

The fundamental flaw, however, was that the principal signatories were limited to the government and the Liberation and Justice Movement—a coalition formed from smaller factions that did not represent all the influential military and political forces in Darfur. The Justice and Equality Movement and the principal factions of the Sudan Liberation Army, most notably those led by Abdul Wahid Mohamed al-Nur and Minni Arko Minnawi, were absent. Arab militias were also not meaningfully represented. The term “peace” was therefore applied to a document that excluded some of the most important actors capable of continuing the war or obstructing the settlement.

The protracted duration of the negotiations demonstrates that Doha was unable to overcome divisions among the armed movements or persuade the principal forces to participate and sign. Instead of reconsidering a negotiating process that lacked inclusiveness and adequate representation, Qatar continued with the initiative until it produced a document with a party of limited influence, which it then presented as a comprehensive framework for ending the conflict.

During the Doha negotiations, numerous experts on Sudanese affairs warned that the process was not being treated with sufficient seriousness by the parties to the conflict and did not enjoy the confidence of significant sections of Darfur’s population. Tribal violence was also escalating, confirming that the negotiations were largely

disconnected from the balance of power and the security realities within the region.

Qatar also emphasized financial incentives, development projects, and reconstruction as means of attracting the parties and supporting the agreement. At the 2013 donors' conference in Doha, pledges of approximately \$3.6 billion were announced. Of that amount, \$2.65 billion had already been committed by the Sudanese government, while Qatar pledged \$500 million. This financial emphasis, however, made peace appear to be primarily a matter of funding and reconstruction, even though the conflict's roots lay in political marginalization, land ownership, the absence of justice, weak state institutions, the arming of militias, and impunity.

The security arrangements failed to address the most dangerous elements of the conflict. The militias were not comprehensively disarmed, and no robust and independent mechanism was established to protect civilians, monitor the ceasefire, and hold violators accountable. The issue of justice also remained entrusted to the government of Omar al-Bashir—the very government accused of committing grave violations in the region—which undermined confidence in its ability to fulfil commitments relating to accountability and redress.

Fighting continued after the document was signed. Clashes between the government and non-signatory movements intensified alongside tribal conflicts, attacks against civilians, and further waves of displacement. A 2013 report by the United Nations Secretary-General acknowledged that efforts to broaden participation in the

agreement had produced only limited and temporary results. The clearest indication of the document's shortcomings was that Sudan subsequently required a new peace process, culminating in the 2020 Juba Peace Agreement.

2. The Chadian Dialogue in Doha



The Chadian dialogue followed the death of President Idriss Déby in April 2021 and the assumption of power by his son, General Mahamat Idriss Déby, as head of a Transitional Military Council outside the established constitutional process. The Council pledged to transfer power to an elected civilian government following an eighteen-month transitional period. It subsequently invited political and armed movements to preliminary talks hosted by Qatar in preparation for what was described as an “Inclusive and Sovereign National Dialogue.”

The Doha negotiations began in March 2022, with the participation of more than fifty political and armed movements and hundreds of delegates. They continued for approximately five months—a duration reflecting the large number of delegations, the conflicting nature of their demands, and the disparities in their actual influence. The dialogue included small groups with limited military and political presence, while the large number of participants did not necessarily indicate adequate representation of the forces capable of threatening the authorities or genuinely influencing the country's future.

In August 2022, the transitional authorities and more than forty movements signed the Doha Peace Agreement, which provided for a cessation of hostilities, amnesty for members of armed movements, guarantees of their safety upon returning to Chad, the release of detainees, and arrangements for their participation in the national dialogue scheduled to take place in N'Djamena.

From the moment of its signing, however, the agreement lacked inclusiveness. The Front for Change and Concord in Chad refused to join it, despite being one of the country's most powerful armed movements and having fought in the confrontation during which President Idriss Déby was killed. Other movements, including the Military Command Council for the Salvation of the Republic, also declined to sign because the agreement lacked adequate guarantees for implementing their demands and defusing the conflict.

Qatari mediation therefore repeated a flaw evident in its other experiences: placing greater emphasis on the

number of signatures than on the actual influence of the signatories. Furthermore, the Doha Agreement merely paved the way for another dialogue within Chad, without resolving the fundamental questions surrounding the nature of the transitional period, the timetable for transferring power, the eligibility of the Military Council's leaders to stand for election, military reform, and guarantees of electoral independence. The mediation also failed to establish mechanisms for monitoring the cessation of hostilities, integrating and disarming combatants, or compelling the authorities to fulfil their commitments.

Only months after the agreement was signed, protests erupted in October 2022 and security forces suppressed the demonstrations with live ammunition. The government announced that fifty people had been killed and approximately three hundred injured, while human rights organizations estimated a higher death toll.

These events rapidly undermined the image of the Doha Agreement as the beginning of a process of national reconciliation. The agreement neither prevented violence nor incorporated the principal opposition forces, nor did it establish a civilian transition. Instead, it was followed by the extension of military rule and the violent suppression of its opponents. Rather than resolving the crisis of legitimacy, the dialogue helped provide the authorities with additional time and political cover to consolidate their position.

3. Negotiations Between the United States and the Taliban



Qatar's involvement in the Afghan file began with its hosting of the Taliban's political office in Doha in 2013, at the direction of the United States, with the aim of establishing a channel of communication with the movement. From that point onward, Qatar provided a secure base for Taliban leaders, along with the logistical and diplomatic facilities necessary to hold meetings and convey messages between the movement and US officials.

Hosting the movement's office, however, does not mean that Qatar formulated a plan for resolving the Afghan conflict. Doha put forward no independent political initiative defining the future of the state, the conditions for a ceasefire, or guarantees for protecting the constitution and state institutions. Qatar's role was essentially closer to that of a courier: it provided the venue, conveyed messages, and arranged meetings, while

the United States and the Taliban determined the subjects, priorities, and outcomes of the negotiations.

Direct negotiations between Washington and the Taliban intensified in 2018 under the leadership of US Special Representative Zalmay Khalilzad and the movement's representatives. The principal US objective was to end its military presence and withdraw from Afghanistan, while the Taliban sought a binding timetable for the departure of foreign forces and recognition as a principal political and military actor. Qatar did not emerge as a mediator offering its own proposals, but rather as the host of a process shaped by the interests of the two negotiating parties.

In February 2020, the United States and the Taliban signed the "Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan." The agreement provided for the withdrawal of US and allied forces within fourteen months, Taliban guarantees that Afghan territory would not be used to threaten the security of the United States and its allies, the commencement of intra-Afghan negotiations, and the exchange of thousands of prisoners.

The text of the document clearly demonstrates the limited nature of Qatar's role. The agreement was bilateral, concluded between the United States and the Taliban; Qatar was neither a signatory nor a guarantor of its implementation. Nor did the agreement assign Qatar any specific monitoring or accountability obligations. Doha's name thus became associated with an agreement whose terms it had not formulated, whose parties it lacked the means to compel, and for which it assumed no

legal responsibility commensurate with the media image it projected of itself as a peacemaker.

4. Qatari Mediation Between Israel and Hamas



During the war in the Gaza Strip, Qatar emerged as an indirect channel of communication between Israel and Hamas, drawing on its hosting of the movement's political leadership and its relations with the United States. Describing this role as "Qatari mediation," however, obscures the fact that it was not an independent Qatari undertaking. Egypt and the United States played central roles in managing the negotiations: Cairo handled the operational and security matters connected to Gaza, while Washington possessed the greatest influence over the Israeli government. Doha's role was largely confined to conveying proposals and responses and communicating with the Hamas

leadership, without possessing sufficient leverage to impose a settlement or guarantee the parties' compliance with it.

This limitation became clearly apparent during the November 2023 truce, whose continuation was tied to the daily release of groups of Israeli hostages in exchange for Palestinian prisoners. Despite its limited humanitarian achievements, the truce included neither provisions addressing the causes of the war nor a binding mechanism for transitioning towards a permanent ceasefire. It collapsed after only seven days, on 1 December, and intensive bombardment and fighting resumed. During the truce, 105 hostages were released in exchange for 240 Palestinian prisoners. The parties traded accusations over responsibility for its collapse, revealing Qatar's inability to effectively manage the arrangement.

The same flaw reappeared in the ceasefire agreement that entered into force in January 2025. Attention focused on the first phase and the exchange of hostages and prisoners, without providing credible guarantees for a transition to a permanent end to the war. As negotiations over the subsequent phases stalled, Israel resumed large-scale military operations in March 2025, killing hundreds of Palestinians during the first days of the renewed bombardment.

The truces thus became temporary intervals for completing exchange arrangements rather than coherent steps towards a sustainable political settlement. This experience demonstrates that Doha acted more as an "intermediary messenger," or diplomatic courier, than as a mediator capable of formulating solutions and

enforcing commitments. It possessed no effective means of pressuring Israel and remained dependent on US influence. Nor could it compel Hamas to accept proposals or provide independent guarantees of their implementation.

Qatar also failed to put forward a comprehensive political framework addressing Gaza's future, the Palestinian political divide, the blockade, Israeli withdrawal, security arrangements, and reconstruction. Its efforts remained confined to managing negotiations over truces and hostages.

The weakness of this role reached its height when Israel launched an air strike inside Doha on 9 September 2025, targeting Hamas leaders and a negotiating delegation that was discussing a ceasefire proposal. The attack killed several members of the movement and a member of Qatar's security forces, while the senior negotiators who had been targeted survived. The strike not only violated Qatar's sovereignty but also dealt a severe blow to its image as a secure venue for negotiations. It demonstrated that Qatar's hosting of parties to the conflict was not supported by security or political guarantees capable of preventing them from being targeted on its territory.

The attack also placed Qatar's own security at risk and exposed the limited protection afforded by its close relationship with the United States and the presence of a major US military base on its territory. It demonstrated that a state acting as a mediator was unable to protect the venue of negotiations or the delegations it hosted, casting doubt on its capacity to provide political and security guarantees for agreements. Although legal and

political responsibility for the attack rests with Israel, the incident revealed Qatar's miscalculation of the risks involved in hosting the leadership of a party engaged in an open war without possessing either a credible deterrent or guarantees capable of preventing the conflict from reaching Qatari territory.

Chapter Four: The Pattern of Failure in Qatar's Mediation Experiences

1. Manifestations of Failure in the Cases Examined

The cases examined demonstrate that failure was not an incidental outcome of Qatari mediation but a recurring pattern that took multiple forms. Several agreements were followed by the resumption of hostilities, indicating that mediation succeeded temporarily in freezing confrontation but failed to end the conflict or address its political, security, and social roots. Some agreements also collapsed when subjected to their first serious test because of weak guarantees and the absence of clear mechanisms for monitoring implementation and holding non-compliant parties accountable. Qatar remained unable to compel the parties to fulfil their commitments because it relied on financing, personal relationships, and external pressure rather than possessing independent and effective institutional instruments.

Another manifestation of failure was the exclusion of key parties from negotiations or their refusal to join the resulting agreements, as occurred in Darfur and during the Chadian dialogue. This produced partial settlements that did not represent all influential forces, leaving groups capable of obstructing the agreement and resuming violence outside the political process. In other cases, financial incentives became a substitute for political settlement: funds were used to win over the parties or encourage them to sign agreements. The effectiveness of those agreements consequently

diminished as soon as financing encountered difficulties or interests and alliances changed.

Ceasefire agreements and prisoner and hostage exchanges remained tied to time-limited arrangements and did not develop into lasting peace. Once the exchanges ended or negotiations stalled, hostilities resumed with greater intensity, as seen in Yemen and Gaza. Similarly, the border arrangements between Djibouti and Eritrea collapsed following the withdrawal of Qatari forces.

Qatari mediation efforts in the cases examined therefore failed to establish stable settlements. Instead, they produced fragile truces that postponed the eruption of conflict without preventing it. Their overall outcome consisted of incomplete agreements, unfulfilled commitments, excluded parties, weak guarantees, and renewed conflicts—after temporary calm had been presented as a diplomatic success.

2. Qatari Mediation as a Mechanism for Managing and Reproducing Conflict

The cases examined demonstrate that Qatari mediation was directed less towards dismantling the structures that generated conflict than towards containing its consequences and keeping it within manageable limits. Attention focused on convening meetings, reconciling immediate positions, and containing escalation, while questions concerning the distribution of power and wealth, justice, accountability, and institution-building remained beyond the scope of serious consideration.

This mediation adopted a short-term negotiating approach based on offering incentives, hosting political leaders, and opening channels of communication, without developing a comprehensive political framework for the post-agreement period. Its practical objective consequently became the management of the crisis and the enhancement of Qatar's international image, rather than a genuine transformation of the power relations that had produced the conflict.

Selective engagement with certain actors also granted them political recognition and negotiating status without requiring them to alter their conduct or commit to the rules of a peaceful process. This encouraged some parties to use escalation as a means of extracting concessions, once the resort to force had become a pathway to the negotiating table in Doha and to securing recognition or financial support.

Linking mediation to aid and grants transformed peace from an institutional process into a transaction conditioned on material benefits. Instead of using financial resources to build trust and institutions, they were sometimes employed to purchase temporary acceptance or contain objections. This led the parties to expect new incentives whenever the crisis resurfaced.

This approach reveals a fundamental paradox: the continuation of conflicts provided Qatar with renewed opportunities for diplomatic involvement, the hosting of negotiations, and the strengthening of its image as an influential state, whereas a definitive settlement would diminish the need for such a role. Mediation thus became part of the conflict cycle: Qatar intervened when the conflict intensified, alleviated its outward

manifestations, and then left its underlying structure intact, allowing it to re-emerge.

The problem, therefore, was not limited to the failure of individual initiatives but lay in a model of mediation that prioritized managing conflict over resolving it and treated de-escalation as an instrument for containing the crisis rather than as a pathway towards ending it. Qatari mediation thus contributed to the reproduction of conflicts by granting them periods of political calm before they returned in new forms.

Recommendations

1. **Redefine the objective of mediation:** Mediation should be directed towards ending conflicts and building sustainable peace rather than merely achieving temporary de-escalation or using negotiations to enhance Qatar's political and media presence.
2. **Establish a specialized national mediation institution:** Such an institution should train and qualify mediators, accumulate expertise, analyse conflicts, and develop clear methodologies for negotiation and implementation, instead of relying on personal relationships and individual initiatives.
3. **End the use of financial incentives to purchase consent:** Mediation should be separated from financing, while aid and grants should be subject to transparency and oversight to prevent settlements from becoming temporary transactions that collapse once the financial benefits end.
4. **Ensure the participation of all influential parties:** Partial agreements that exclude major actors should be avoided. Representatives of civil society and affected communities should also be included to give settlements broader political and social legitimacy.
5. **Establish binding mechanisms for implementing agreements:** Every settlement should include a defined timetable, an independent monitoring body, regular public reports, and clear procedures for addressing breaches of commitments, rather than leaving implementation to the discretion of the parties to the conflict.
6. **Address the structural causes of conflict:** Mediation should not be limited to halting hostilities

or arranging prisoner and hostage exchanges. It must also address questions of power, wealth, justice, accountability, rights, institutional reform, and reconstruction.

7. **Subject mediation initiatives to independent evaluation and transparency:** The objectives, sources of funding, and outcomes of mediation initiatives should be publicly disclosed, and each experience should undergo an independent review. A temporary truce or the signing of documents should not be presented as a success before implementation has been completed and conditions have stabilized.
8. **Review the political and security risks to Qatar:** Qatar should assess the costs of hosting the leaders of conflicting parties and ensure the security of negotiating venues. It should avoid becoming involved in conflicts that exceed its capacity to provide protection, exert pressure, or offer guarantees, while prioritizing its own security and sovereignty over the pursuit of diplomatic influence beyond the limits of its actual capabilities.

Conclusion

This study sought to evaluate Qatar's role in international mediation by analysing a number of cases in Lebanon, Yemen, Darfur, Chad, Djibouti, Eritrea, Afghanistan, and the Gaza Strip. A comparison of these experiences demonstrates that Qatar's intensive diplomatic engagement was not matched by a comparable capacity to produce durable settlements. The common features of the mediation initiatives examined were the fragility of the agreements, difficulties in their implementation, the persistence of the underlying causes of conflict, and the eventual return of tensions or armed confrontation.

The study reveals that Qatar treated mediation more as an instrument for building influence and enhancing its international standing than as a comprehensive peacebuilding process. It devoted considerable attention to hosting conferences, announcing agreements, and highlighting Doha's role, while failing to give equal attention to establishing implementation and monitoring institutions, ensuring the participation of all relevant parties, or addressing the political, economic, and social roots of the conflicts.

Qatari policy also relied heavily on financial resources, personal relationships, and the hosting of political leaders rather than on accumulated institutional expertise and binding legal and political mechanisms. Some initiatives consequently came closer to purchasing temporary consent or offering incentives for the signing of agreements than to impartial mediation capable of changing the parties' conduct and building trust between them. This approach made the continuation of

understandings dependent on immediate benefits rather than on the parties' conviction that a settlement was necessary.

The cases examined further demonstrate that Qatar lacked independent instruments for exerting pressure on the parties to the conflicts. In major cases, it remained dependent on US influence, Egypt's role, or broader regional and international support, while its own contribution was sometimes confined to conveying messages and providing a venue for negotiations. This exposes a clear gap between Qatar's media image as an influential international mediator and its actual ability to enforce commitments or protect agreements from collapse.

The cessation of hostilities in certain cases was not, in itself, sufficient evidence of successful mediation. Peace was reduced to a temporary truce, while periods of calm were used to exchange prisoners and hostages, reposition forces, or alleviate pressure. Hostilities then resumed once the reasons for the temporary pause had disappeared. Crisis management and the postponement of renewed conflict were thus presented as settlements, even though the structures generating the conflict remained intact.

The shortcomings of this policy reached a more dangerous level when Doha itself was targeted. This demonstrated that expanding relations with conflicting parties and hosting their leaders does not necessarily provide Qatar with protection or influence; instead, it may bring the dangers of those conflicts onto its own territory. A role used to enhance the state's image consequently became a source of risk to its security and

sovereignty, amid its limited capacity to deter the parties between which it seeks to mediate.

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MEDIATION WITHOUT SOLUTIONS?

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF QATAR'S ROLE IN REGIONAL CONFLICTS

This book examines Qatar's mediation initiatives in a number of Arab and regional conflicts, assessing their objectives, methods and outcomes, and why failure has been the recurring pattern. Through detailed analysis and documented cases, it explores how Qatar's mediation efforts—despite significant financial resources, diplomatic engagement and high-profile negotiations—have often led to temporary arrangements that collapse, renewed hostilities, or unresolved underlying causes of conflict.

The study investigates the factors behind these failures, including reliance on financial incentives, selective relationships, limited leverage, exclusion of key parties, and the absence of effective mechanisms for implementation and enforcement. It offers a comparative analysis of Qatar's mediation efforts in Lebanon, Yemen, Djibouti and Eritrea, Sudan, Chad, Afghanistan and Gaza, drawing valuable lessons on the limitations of its approach and the broader implications for regional stability.



KEY THEMES EXPLORED



THE NATURE OF QATARI MEDIATION

Objectives, methods and the limits of its diplomatic approach.



LEBANON, YEMEN, DJIBOUTI AND ERITREA

Analysis of key cases and the fragility of agreements.



SUDAN, CHAD, AFGHANISTAN AND GAZA

From negotiations to renewed conflict: a recurring pattern.



FINANCIAL INCENTIVES

The use of grants and economic pledges as a tool for temporary consensus.



WHY MEDIATION EFFORTS FAIL

Common factors, structural limitations and the absence of sustainable solutions.



LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Towards a more effective and credible mediation role in the region.

“ Mediation requires more than money,
meeting rooms and publicity.

It requires impartiality, leverage and the will
to address the root causes of conflict.

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