THE SAZAN GATE

HOW SOVEREIGN WEALTH, POLITICAL INFLUENCE AND LUXURY DEVELOPMENT COLLIDED IN ALBANIA

AN INVESTIGATION INTO POWER, MONEY AND INFLUENCE

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Qatar's Sovereign Wealth Funds: Between Tactics of Buying Influence and Strategies of Creating Instability

Abstract

This study seeks to examine the dimensions of the joint political and financial investment between the Kushner–Doha alliance on the Albanian island of Sazan, highlighting the geopolitical background and the legislative and financial corruption mechanisms associated with the project. The study bases its arguments on official records, leaked documents, and local regulatory decisions issued in Albania between 2025 and 2026, demonstrating how this real estate scheme was designed to appropriate a sovereign military asset and transform it into an isolated enclave serving the interests of financiers and political elites, beyond the reach of domestic oversight and the framework of international judicial accountability. In this context, the marketing narrative of "luxury tourism" is presented as a façade for laundering political influence and facilitating backroom deals.

Chapter One analyzes the strategic importance of Sazan Island and its significant geographical location at the entrance to the Strait of Otranto, which connects the Adriatic Sea with the Ionian Sea. It examines the island's military legacy as a fortified military stronghold equipped with thousands of bunkers and underground tunnels built to withstand invasion during the communist era. The chapter also explains how the island's prolonged environmental and natural isolation has been exploited to transform it into a closed resort offering complete privacy for the ultra-luxury tourism elite, beyond the jurisdiction of the domestic judiciary. It further discusses the systematic strategy of acquiring assets in economically fragile states and reshaping their

national environmental legislation under the pressure of financial need.

Chapter Two examines the instruments of "hidden influence engineering and the politicization of capital" through Jared Kushner's company, Affinity Partners. It reveals the extent of Qatari financial involvement by documenting the establishment of Sazan Real Estate Development LLC in Doha in October 2025, owned by Sazan Operations Holding, and traces the suspicious increase in the valuation of the coastal land transaction from €5.5 million to €122 million in April 2026. The chapter also documents the ownership of Albania Land Development by brothers Moataz and Ramez Al Khayyat, the company responsible for acquiring the resort property, whose accounts were frozen by Albania's Special Anti-Corruption Structure (SPAK). It further explains how the injection of US$1.5 billion into Kushner's investment fund became an instrument for securing preemptive political protection in Washington.

Chapter Three highlights the "structural contradiction between Qatar's moral discourse and its foreign policy," revealing the sharp discrepancy between Doha's public presentation of itself as a supporter of the Palestinian cause and its simultaneous investment of hundreds of millions of dollars, behind closed doors, in Jared Kushner's investment fund—the financial vehicle of the architect of the "Deal of the Century." The study further notes that this fund is the largest investor in Israel's Phoenix Financial Group, which has been linked to financing settlement projects in the occupied Palestinian territories. The chapter discusses the implications of this contradiction for the standing of Qatar's foreign policy and the erosion of its symbolic credibility as a "trusted mediator."

Chapter Four addresses "legislative corruption and the misuse of sovereign wealth funds," exposing the manipulation of Albania's legal framework through the Strategic Investment Committee and the extension of negotiation deadlines to coincide precisely with the legal timetable for the registration of the Qatari companies in April 2026.

Chapter Five examines the strategic implications and consequences of the project. The first part analyzes its significant negative impact on the reputation of the sovereign wealth fund, its international financial credibility, and its exposure to international legislation such as the U.S. Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA). The second part documents the civil uprising and popular mobilization in Albania, including the outbreak of large-scale demonstrations opposing the sale of a national military symbol and the relinquishment of strategic defense assets, as well as strong environmental resistance against coastal excavation and the destruction of the island's surrounding pristine protected natural reserves.

Introduction

Over the past decades, the nature of geopolitical conflicts has undergone a profound transformation. Control over strategic locations and the acquisition of sovereign state assets are no longer pursued primarily through conventional military confrontation; rather, they are increasingly engineered through investment firms and transnational capital flows. Within this context, a new model of modern economic colonialism has emerged, exemplified by the proposed acquisition of Albania's Sazan Island. This project is driven by an alliance combining the influence of Jared Kushner, the son-in-law of the U.S. President, with substantial Qatari financing operating through multiple investment vehicles. Available evidence suggests that this real estate project extends far beyond the official narrative of a luxury tourism development. Instead, it represents a systematic effort to appropriate a sovereign military asset and transform it into an isolated enclave serving the interests of financiers and political elites, beyond the reach of domestic oversight and the framework of international judicial accountability.

An examination of leaked documents, official records, and Albanian regulatory decisions issued between 2025 and 2026 reveals a substantial gap between the publicly announced development objectives of the Kushner–Doha investment alliance and the arrangements negotiated behind closed doors to secure future political influence in Washington. In this regard, the transfer of hundreds of millions of Qatari dollars through Jared Kushner's investment firm, Affinity Partners, constitutes a form of preemptive political investment that reflects Doha's intention to establish a privileged position within the decision-making circles of the White House. The analysis further demonstrates how the American partnership was utilized as both a legal and media shield to facilitate a project carrying significant political and security sensitivities within Europe.

The concealment strategy extended well beyond the American political façade to include a complex hierarchical financial arrangement commonly referred to as a cascading structure. This structure becomes evident through the creation of six interconnected foreign companies established specifically to obscure the origin of financial resources and circumvent beneficial ownership disclosure requirements. The financial architecture also involved opaque partnerships, including Blue Industries in the Netherlands, while allocating minority ownership stakes of less than one quarter (24 percent) to Albanian shareholders, thereby avoiding mandatory disclosure requirements before anti-money laundering authorities. Such arrangements have given rise to allegations of concealed bribery and the purchase of political influence to facilitate the transaction and reshape national legislation.

Furthermore, the erosion of governance standards and national sovereignty under the influence of political finance is illustrated by the legislative practices of Albania's Strategic Investment Committee and the government decision issued in late December 2025, which transferred the costs of securing the island and clearing landmines and remnants of the former communist military infrastructure to the budget of the Albanian Ministry of Defense. Consequently, the financial risks associated with the project were effectively shifted onto an economically vulnerable population. The implications of this alliance extend beyond financial and legislative concerns to encompass highly sensitive geopolitical issues. In particular, the study explores the proposition that these substantial investments may function as financial incentives or diplomatic leverage intended to influence the positions of economically fragile European states and facilitate controversial media narratives concerning the relocation of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians outside their homeland in accordance with Kushner's broader vision.

As opposition to the project intensified, waves of protests and demonstrations spread throughout Albania, reflecting widespread public discontent and evolving into a broad civil and environmental movement. These developments suggest that Qatari political financing has not produced the promised economic development but has instead contributed to social polarization, environmental degradation, and growing instability. Increasing demands have consequently been directed toward international institutions and European anti-corruption bodies to investigate the realities surrounding Sazan Island and to determine whether it represents not merely a luxury tourist destination, but rather a platform for laundering political influence, undermining domestic legislation, and exchanging national sovereignty for transnational financial interests.

Chapter One: The Strategic Significance and the Rationale Behind the Selection of Sazan Island

1. Geographical Location and the Gateway to the Adriatic Sea

Sazan Island

Sazan Island occupies an exceptionally sensitive geopolitical position within the security architecture of the Eastern Mediterranean. The island's rocky landmass lies at the northern entrance to the Strait of Otranto, the most strategically important maritime passage linking the Adriatic Sea to the north with the Ionian Sea to the south. The strait extends across a narrow waterway of approximately 72 kilometers, separating the Balkan Peninsula from the Italian coast, making Sazan Island the principal geographical vantage point overlooking this maritime chokepoint. Historically, it has served as the gateway controlling access to, or isolation of, the entire Adriatic Sea from the rest of the Mediterranean. This strategic significance was not accidental; over successive decades, the island evolved into a heavily fortified military stronghold contested by regional powers. Whoever controls Sazan possesses the strategic capacity to monitor and influence both commercial and military maritime traffic to and from Central Europe.

From an environmental perspective, the island is distinguished by a unique ecosystem whose pristine condition is largely the result of decades of political and military isolation during Albania's communist period. Designated as a restricted military zone and closed to civilians, the island was equipped with thousands of bunkers and underground tunnels designed to withstand any potential invasion. This prolonged period of enforced isolation protected the island from urban expansion and industrial pollution, allowing it to develop into an intact natural reserve characterized by rare terrestrial and marine biodiversity, pristine rocky beaches, and limestone cliffs that remained untouched by mass tourism. These exceptional environmental characteristics have made the island a natural geographical extension of the protected marine areas surrounding the Bay of Vlorë and the Karaburun Peninsula. According to an environmental research paper published by the UFZ Institute on ecosystem conservation strategies in Albania, the Albanian government's recent initiative to amend the Protected Areas Law has attracted substantial criticism from environmental organizations, particularly following the removal of Article 33, which had prohibited activities within protected areas unless they directly contributed to environmental conservation. Critics argue that opening these pristine ecosystems to large-scale construction projects poses a significant threat to the region's ecological balance.

Ironically, this prolonged environmental isolation represents precisely the type of setting sought by investors in ultra-luxury tourism. The island's isolated rocky landscape provides an ideal environment for establishing exclusive gated resorts capable of guaranteeing the highest levels of privacy and confidentiality for influential political and financial figures from around the world, away from media scrutiny and public oversight. This unique combination of geographical isolation and environmental exclusivity significantly enhances the island's economic and geopolitical value as a platform for laundering political influence under the cover of luxury tourism.

2. Background to the Selection

Large-scale international investment projects that operate within politically sensitive contexts often seek exceptional legal and geographical environments, a consideration that helps explain the selection of Albania's Sazan Island as the site of an exclusive ultra-luxury tourism development. The choice was driven not merely by the island's unspoiled natural beauty, but by a broader geoeconomic strategy in which Jared Kushner's influence intersected with financial flows originating from investment funds and real estate companies associated with Qatar. Owing to its strategic location and historical isolation, the island represents an ideal model of what may be described as political real estate engineering, where the global elite's demand for absolute privacy converges with the interests of financial actors seeking to expand international influence beyond conventional oversight mechanisms. Consequently, Qatar's involvement in this project has attracted criticism alleging the exploitation of sovereign national assets to establish centers of influence operating outside traditional frameworks of state sovereignty.

One of the principal criticisms concerns the alleged effort to transform the island into what resembles a "state within a state," taking advantage of its legal and security isolation and its historical function as a restricted naval base. According to this interpretation, the project's objective extends beyond the construction of a conventional luxury resort to the creation of a semi-autonomous enclave protected by private security systems capable of ensuring the complete isolation of the site from its surrounding environment. Many analysts argue that such a security framework is intended to provide a secure and secluded destination for influential political and financial figures, shielded not only from media scrutiny and public oversight but also from the jurisdiction of the Albanian judicial system. Within such a highly controlled environment, opportunities emerge for facilitating networks of influence, negotiating reciprocal political arrangements, and conducting sensitive informal engagements under the guise of luxury tourism. Consequently, Sazan would cease to function merely as a protected natural reserve and instead become an international platform for managing unofficial political and financial relationships with minimal public accountability.

Another dimension of the criticism relates to the strategy of systematically acquiring strategic assets in economically vulnerable states, an approach that Qatar has been accused of employing in support of Jared Kushner's political and personal objectives. This strategy involves identifying developing countries experiencing severe financial constraints or weak governance structures, such as Albania, and approaching them through large-scale real estate investment initiatives accompanied by promises of substantial financial inflows. Under conditions of economic hardship, host governments may become more willing to make significant sovereign concessions, including the transfer of strategically important land and the amendment of national legislation to remove stringent environmental protections. Within this context, Qatar's involvement has been widely criticized for allegedly exploiting the economic vulnerabilities of such countries in pursuit of future political influence in Washington through its relationship with the Trump family, while placing the environmental sustainability and sovereign interests of economically fragile states at considerable risk.

Chapter Two: Proxy Structures and the Politicization of Capital

1. Engineering Hidden Influence

Foreign investments and the development of transnational networks of interests have become a central instrument of Qatar's diplomatic strategy. However, contemporary patterns of capital allocation have grown increasingly sophisticated, relying on private-sector entities closely connected to governing circles in order to minimize direct political exposure. This pattern is clearly reflected in the real estate and tourism project managed by Affinity Partners, the investment firm owned by Jared Kushner, the son-in-law of former U.S. President Donald Trump. Although the project has been publicly presented as an American investment supported by regional financial partners, international investigative reporting has revealed extensive Qatari financial involvement led by billionaire brothers Ramez and Moataz Al Khayyat through their business empire, which maintains close ties to the Amiri Diwan in Doha and has increasingly been portrayed as an alternative financial vehicle for facilitating politically sensitive transactions.

The documentary evidence of this geopolitical overlap begins with the official corporate records and special-purpose companies established to manage and implement the project. According to a detailed report published by Agence France-Presse (AFP) and subsequently carried by international media platforms, including Al-Monitor, the financial and administrative structure of the investment project associated with Jared Kushner and Ivanka Trump in Albania traces back to a corporate entity established in Qatar. In October 2025, a company named Sazan Real Estate Development LLC was registered in Doha as a wholly owned subsidiary of Sazan Operations Holding. AFP further reported that inquiries submitted to Affinity Partners were officially redirected to the Qatari company, whose representatives confirmed that it was the entity responsible for managing and supervising the project in partnership with individual investors. The company is chaired by the American businessman Asher Abehsera. According to the documents reviewed by AFP, the coastal property located in the Zvërnec area was initially acquired for approximately €5.5 million. However, following the transfer of ownership and control to the Qatar-based entity in April 2026, the declared transaction value increased abruptly to €122 million. This twenty-two-fold increase raised significant legal concerns regarding the nature of the valuation and prompted allegations of money laundering and artificially inflated financial assessments designed to facilitate large-scale capital transfers under the guise of real estate development.

In a related investigation, the U.S. National Public Radio (NPR), through its affiliated platform CapRadio, published an extensive report identifying the legal ownership of the investors behind the local land acquisition company. According to the investigation, on 2 June 2026 prosecutors from Albania's Special Anti-Corruption Structure (SPAK) ordered the freezing of the bank accounts of Albania Land Development, the company responsible for acquiring and developing the resort site. The investigation concluded that the company is owned by businessmen and brothers Moataz and Ramez Al Khayyat, who are directly involved in financing and constructing the luxury resort.

Similarly, the Financial Times examined the political dimensions of the project, reporting Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama's defense of the investment while noting that the project's management confirmed that the development is being conducted through the Qatar-based company Sazan Real Estate Development.

Understanding the structural relationship between the Al Khayyat brothers and decision-makers in Doha requires placing this investment within the broader historical context of the family's rise as a financial and strategic partner of the Qatari Amiri Diwan. An extensive Reuters investigation examined the circumstances surrounding the rapid expansion of the Al Khayyat brothers, describing how they evolved from local contractors into influential business figures whose growth was facilitated by direct support from the highest levels of the Qatari state and the Amiri Diwan. According to the investigation, this political backing enabled them to expand their influence across key sectors of Qatar's economy and transformed their business empire into a trusted partner closely aligned with the state's broader strategic objectives. This relationship reinforces the proposition that their business network may serve as a flexible financial intermediary in politically sensitive international transactions while reducing direct public scrutiny.

2. Purchasing Political Protection and Influence

The allocation of Qatari capital to Affinity Partners, the investment firm founded by Jared Kushner, reflects what the study characterizes as a structural deficiency in the management of Qatar's sovereign wealth, whereby investment shifts from a developmental instrument to a mechanism for securing political protection. The decision by Qatar, alongside the United Arab Emirates, to invest approximately US$1.5 billion in a firm established in July 2021 and managed by an individual with no previous experience in hedge fund or venture capital management has generated considerable debate. According to WAYA Media, these investments increased the firm's assets under management to approximately US$6.2 billion by 2026. From this perspective, the allocation of sovereign capital appears to have been driven less by commercial considerations than by broader political calculations, particularly given the limited publicly reported investment returns, while the firm's management continued to receive substantial management fees funded through sovereign investments.

The transaction also illustrates what the study describes as a broader strategic challenge. Rather than relying on transparent and institutional diplomatic relations with the United States, Doha is presented as continuing to respond to the political uncertainty that followed the 2017 Gulf crisis by seeking alternative channels to secure access to influential figures within Donald Trump's political circle. Investigative reporting published by Mother Jones has described this approach as a form of "preemptive investment," portraying it as an example of a foreign policy strategy that relies on financial diplomacy directed toward individuals rather than on institutional partnerships based upon enduring state interests.

This pattern of financial engagement is not presented as an isolated case but rather as part of a broader approach involving the use of sovereign financial resources in transactions intended to cultivate political relationships. Previous examples cited by the study include extensive expenditures associated with reservations at the Trump International Hotel in Washington, indirect involvement in the refinancing of the Kushner family's 666 Fifth Avenue property, and investment decisions linked to transactions involving Donald Trump's private aircraft and other assets associated with members of his family. According to the study, directing hundreds of millions of dollars from Qatar's sovereign wealth toward such initiatives raises important questions regarding their long-term economic value. It argues that these practices divert sovereign wealth funds from their developmental objectives and from serving the interests of future generations, while transforming them into instruments for pursuing political assurances from foreign political actors whose commitments may ultimately remain uncertain and subject to changing political circumstances.

Chapter Three: The Structural Contradiction Between Ethical Discourse and Foreign Policy

1. The Duality of Ethical Discourse in Political Transactions

The direction of Qatari capital flows toward Affinity Partners, the investment firm founded by Jared Kushner, represents a striking paradox that reveals the depth of political duality and ethical inconsistency within Doha's foreign policy. While Qatar presents itself regionally and internationally as a leading supporter of the Palestinian cause and a principal patron of resistance movements, these multibillion-dollar transactions expose a profound contradiction through the injection of hundreds of millions of dollars into a fund managed by the principal architect of the "Deal of the Century" and one of the key figures behind the relocation of the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem. In this context, Qatar's humanitarian discourse appears subordinated to narrow political interests. This duality becomes even more apparent when investigations reveal that Qatari funds contributed to making Kushner's investment fund the largest shareholder in the Israeli financial services company Phoenix, which itself maintains direct investments in entities linked to Israeli settlements, including some regarded by Western governments as illegal. Consequently, Doha's rhetoric regarding Palestinian rights appears, according to this interpretation, as a discursive cover for policies that financially support their opposite.

The Sazan Island project in Albania stands as one of the clearest manifestations of this controversial financial and political alignment. International investigative reports published by major financial media outlets, including *The New York Times* and *Bloomberg*, disclosed plans by Affinity Partners to transform the former military island into an ultra-luxury tourist resort. The project involves substantial financial commitments that rely heavily on Qatari sovereign capital injected into the fund to secure future influence. Through its contribution to financing the Sazan project, Doha becomes situated within a complex network of mutual interests involving American political figures widely known for their opposition to Palestinian rights. The picture becomes even more concerning when examining specialized financial reports linking Kushner's projects in the Balkans to his investments within Israel.

The anticipated profits and returns generated by the Affinity Partners fund from the development of Sazan Island and real estate projects in Belgrade are managed within a unified financial structure through which capital is redirected and diversified into other investments, most notably the fund's acquisition of controlling stakes in the Israeli Phoenix Group. Investigative journalists have reported that Phoenix is not merely an ordinary insurance company but a major financial institution deeply embedded in the Israeli economy, providing insurance, financing, and financial services to infrastructure projects and companies operating within Israeli settlements established in the occupied Palestinian territories. This documented financial linkage suggests that Qatari capital flows and returns have become integrated into the economic system that supports settlement activity. The contradiction is evident in Doha’s simultaneous provision of humanitarian assistance and public statements opposing settlement expansion at the United Nations while facilitating investment pathways for Jared Kushner through projects such as the development of Sazan Island.

Such a dual approach strips Qatar’s political positions of any meaningful ethical or normative content. It is a striking contradiction for a state to present itself internationally as a defender of Palestinian rights while its sovereign funds simultaneously direct hundreds of millions of dollars toward supporting the individual who proposed the dismantling of UNRWA, sought to marginalize the refugee issue, and endorsed the recognition of Jerusalem and Palestinian territories as falling under “Israeli sovereignty.”

Ultimately, tracing the movement of these sovereign funds from Doha through investment structures based in Miami, onward to settlement-linked investments through Phoenix, and extending to the Albanian coast through the Sazan Island project reveals a clear pattern of political disjunction. Investigative reports and financial disclosures document how regional wealth has been utilized to support figures associated with policies viewed as among the most hostile to the very cause that the Qatari leadership publicly claims to champion.

2. The Implications of the Structural Contradiction for the Standing of Qatari Foreign Policy

Doha has built much of its soft power on promoting a moral narrative that places it among the foremost defenders of Palestinian rights, utilizing its media and diplomatic networks to reinforce this image regionally and internationally. However, the exposure of sovereign funding channels directed toward investment entities indirectly associated with supporting settlement-related infrastructure delivers a significant challenge to this narrative. It highlights the apparent contradiction between the rhetoric advanced in international forums and the realities of financial transactions conducted behind closed doors.

Such practices deprive Qatari foreign policy of its principled character and contribute to the gradual erosion of the symbolic capital that the state has accumulated over decades. As a result, its image risks shifting from that of a "supporter of resistance" to that of a pragmatic actor that employs solidarity with Palestine as a means of facilitating large-scale investments and cultivating relationships with American political figures whose positions are openly unfavorable toward Palestinian rights.

At the diplomatic level, the influence of Qatari foreign policy depends largely on its ability to act as a "trusted mediator" in complex regional and international crises. As investigative reports increasingly document the involvement of Qatari capital in financial structures that indirectly contribute to the settlement economy through intermediary funds, Doha's credibility as a neutral actor faces a structural challenge. The divergence between publicly declared positions and concealed financial practices encourages international and regional actors to approach Qatari initiatives with greater caution and skepticism, viewing them as tactical instruments serving broader political bargains.

Consequently, Doha's capacity to mobilize meaningful support for its diplomatic initiatives may be weakened, while its condemnations of Israeli policies risk losing substantive impact and becoming little more than procedural diplomatic statements lacking effective political commitment. This, in turn, diminishes Qatar's influence and its ability to shape regional political dynamics.

Perhaps the most significant consequence of this duality lies in the erosion of trust among popular constituencies and allied political actors. Public awareness of the actual pathways of financial flows deepens perceptions of inconsistency and undermines confidence in Qatar's stated commitments. The use of sovereign investment as a vehicle for supporting projects associated with the architects of the "Deal of the Century," or with entities such as Phoenix that are alleged to be linked to settlement-related activities, inevitably weakens the ethical foundations upon which Qatar's foreign policy has sought to rest.

As these contradictions become more widely visible, Doha risks losing some of its most valuable sources of political leverage and seeing its role as a reliable political partner diminish. The result is a substantial cost to its strategic standing, as perceptions may shift from viewing Qatar as a supporter of just causes to regarding it as an indirect participant in policies that contribute to the continuation of occupation. In such circumstances, its regional role becomes increasingly dependent on the scale of its financial expenditures rather than on the credibility and legitimacy of its political positions.

Chapter Four: Legislative Corruption and the Mismanagement of Qatar's Sovereign Wealth Funds

1. Facilitating Cross-Border Corruption

The use of Qatari political capital in the international arena represents a striking example of cross-border corruption, characterized by the penetration of political systems and the manipulation of national legislative environments to serve narrow networks of influence. Investigative reports and geopolitical analyses indicate that this pattern of intervention relies on financial flows as a means of exerting influence, securing political loyalties, and shaping decision-making behind the scenes, particularly in developing countries and across the Balkans. This approach extends beyond the provision of conventional economic incentives to the direct restructuring of the legal and regulatory frameworks of host countries, exploiting institutional weaknesses and the financial needs of governments to secure exceptional legislative privileges that fall short of basic standards of integrity and good governance. As a result, it undermines the rule of law in vulnerable states and contributes to a new pattern of institutionalized transnational corruption.

In the Albanian case, this pattern is particularly evident in the strategic Sazan Island project. The course of negotiations revealed complex mechanisms of financial and political pressure aimed at reshaping the domestic regulatory environment in order to secure exceptional privileges. In this context, Albania's Committee of Strategic Investments (CSI) faced extensive criticism from both domestic and international legal and human rights circles after its broad powers, operating under significant financial influence, were perceived as facilitating special privileges and providing legal cover for transactions that circumvented national legislation and weakened the protection of public assets, thereby directly affecting the rights and interests of Albanian citizens. This legislative manipulation became particularly apparent through the extension of legal deadlines for foreign investors, an issue examined in a series of in-depth investigations published by the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN). These investigations documented how Albania's Strategic Investments Law was amended to accommodate the interests of specific financial groups. Perhaps the most significant finding, illustrating the coordinated nature of this legislative engineering, was the striking synchronization between the legislative amendments and the establishment of the relevant Qatari corporate entities. Legal monitoring and investigative reporting showed that the Committee of Strategic Investments unexpectedly extended negotiation deadlines and modified regulatory conditions in a manner that closely coincided with the legal registration of the Qatari companies in April 2026. This precise timing suggests that key

Albanian sovereign decisions were aligned with an external timetable designed to provide a complete legal framework for these investment entities at the moment of their formal establishment.

2. The Systematic Misallocation of Sovereign Wealth Funds

In principle, sovereign wealth funds are intended to serve as strategic instruments for preserving national wealth for future generations and promoting long-term economic diversification. Recent investment policies pursued by the State of Qatar, however, indicate a significant shift in the management of these assets. Rather than functioning primarily as financial instruments designed to generate sustainable developmental returns, they have increasingly been directed toward advancing limited political objectives and cultivating influence within major international decision-making centers, particularly in the United States.

This departure from their developmental purpose is reflected in the substantial financial commitments directed toward the investment funds established by Jared Kushner, the son-in-law of the former U.S. presidential adviser. These investments appear to have been driven less by comprehensive economic feasibility assessments or expectations of strong financial performance than by broader political considerations and long-term efforts to strengthen personal relationships with influential political networks in Washington. Within this perspective, such investments have been viewed as a means of securing political access and protecting the interests of the ruling elite, rather than maximizing the long-term value of Qatar's public assets.

These transactions have also been criticized for falling short of widely accepted standards of investment efficiency and economic performance. Billions of dollars were reportedly committed to a newly established investment fund with limited experience and no established track record in managing sovereign-scale assets. Economic observers have argued that these resources were allocated to projects lacking sufficient transparency and producing few measurable benefits for Qatar's domestic economy. According to this interpretation, the disappointing financial outcomes were not simply the result of ordinary market fluctuations but reflected the prioritization of political relationships and narrow security considerations over sound investment principles.

More broadly, this investment approach has been interpreted as reflecting an effort by the Qatari leadership to cultivate networks of political influence in Western capitals capable of providing sustained political support and strategic protection. Instead of directing these substantial financial resources toward infrastructure development, strengthening productive domestic sectors, or promoting innovation, significant portions were allocated in ways that, according to critics, reduced the long-term financial resilience of the sovereign wealth funds and increased their exposure to external political developments. From this perspective, the use of sovereign wealth as an instrument for reinforcing political authority represents a model of policymaking that prioritizes short-term political objectives over the country's long-term economic sustainability, leaving the national economy increasingly dependent on external political dynamics.

Chapter Five: Legislative Corruption and the Mismanagement of Qatar's Sovereign Wealth Funds

1. Facilitating Cross-Border Corruption

Mass Demonstrations in Albania Against the Qatar–Kushner Deal

The use of Qatari political capital in the international arena represents a striking example of cross-border corruption, characterized by the penetration of political systems and the manipulation of national legislative environments to serve narrow networks of influence. Investigative reports and geopolitical analyses indicate that this pattern of intervention relies on financial flows as a means of exerting influence, securing political loyalties, and shaping decision-making behind the scenes, particularly in developing countries and across the Balkans. This approach extends beyond the provision of conventional economic incentives to the direct restructuring of the legal and regulatory frameworks of host countries, exploiting institutional weaknesses and the financial needs of governments to secure exceptional legislative privileges that fall short of basic standards of integrity and good governance. As a result, it undermines the rule of law in vulnerable states and contributes to a new pattern of institutionalized transnational corruption.

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Conclusion

Based on the evidence and financial indicators examined throughout this study, it becomes evident that the project to develop Albania's Sazan Island represents more than a luxury tourism investment or a resort intended to stimulate the local economy. Rather, it constitutes a strategic point of convergence where three interconnected dynamics intersect: the transnational circulation of political influence, the flow of Qatari financial capital, and government privileges associated with allegations of corruption and legislative adaptation. An examination of the complex network of relationships surrounding the project—from the financial actors based in Doha, through influential political networks in Washington, to the executive political leadership in Tirana—suggests that the real estate development served not only as an investment project but also as a framework through which broader political understandings and geopolitical interests were pursued. The evidence presented in this study indicates that the exceptional concessions granted to the project, together with the rapid amendments to environmental and protective legislation governing the island, reflected not merely an effort to encourage investment but also the exercise of extraordinary governmental discretion involving an asset of considerable historical and strategic importance.

Within this broader context, Qatari financial resources emerge as a central component of the investment structure examined in this study. Rather than functioning exclusively as instruments for long-term economic development, these sovereign funds are presented as having been directed toward cultivating political influence through investments in newly established financial vehicles managed by individuals closely connected to influential political circles in the United States. From the perspective developed in this study, such investment decisions appear to have been motivated less by expectations of measurable economic returns than by broader political considerations and the pursuit of strategic relationships. Consequently, Sazan Island has become an illustrative case through which to examine how strategically significant assets in developing countries may be incorporated into wider geopolitical and financial networks. According to the evidence discussed, concerns regarding transparency and governance have been accompanied by growing environmental controversy, as the island, once regarded as a protected natural area and a strategic national asset, became the focus of public opposition and environmental activism following allegations of large-scale environmental alteration associated with luxury development projects. These developments contributed to widespread demonstrations in Albania, where protesters characterized the project as a form of "modern economic colonialism" and opposed what they viewed as the transformation of national territory into an arena for transnational political and financial bargaining.

The overall conclusion emerging from this analysis is that the **Sazan** project illustrates the broader risks associated with development strategies that prioritize short-term political objectives over long-term economic, environmental, and sovereign interests. Such approaches may leave nationally significant assets increasingly dependent on confidential political arrangements and informal networks of influence.

Political protection secured through financial relationships remains inherently temporary, changing with shifts in governments and international alliances, whereas the longer-term consequences—including the depletion of national wealth, potential effects on financial credibility, and exposure to cross-border legal scrutiny under anti-corruption and anti-money laundering frameworks—may persist well beyond the immediate political context. The evidence examined in this study further suggests that when capital allocation lacks transparency, accountability, and effective governance, it may generate social tensions and sustained public resistance rather than broad-based development. These findings underscore the importance of subjecting sovereign wealth funds and major cross-border investment transactions to rigorous legal oversight, transparent governance standards, and effective international accountability mechanisms in order to ensure that national resources are protected from being used in ways that may compromise the long-term interests, sovereignty, and future generations of the states concerned.

Recommendations

I. Legislative Recommendations and the Rule of Law (Albanian National Level)

- **Revoke the environmental legislative amendments:** Call for the immediate reinstatement of Article 33 of Albania's Protected Areas Law and prohibit any construction or investment activities within protected natural reserves that are not directly aimed at preserving and enhancing the natural environment.
- **Strengthen parliamentary oversight of sovereign agreements:** Require the Albanian government to submit the complete **Sazan Island** project agreement, including all annexes and confidential provisions, to Parliament for approval. Any decision involving the transfer, allocation, or development of historically significant military assets should require the approval of a two-thirds parliamentary majority.
- **Investigate alleged legislative misconduct:** Refer officials of Albania's **Committee of Strategic Investments (CSI)** for judicial investigation regarding allegations of abuse of authority and the adoption of legislative amendments that coincided with the establishment of the relevant Qatari companies in April 2026.
- **Reconsider the transfer of financial obligations to the Ministry of Defence:** Review the government decision issued in December 2025 and require the investment consortium to bear the full costs of clearing landmines and remnants of former military stockpiles on the island, rather than

allocating these expenses to Albania's national defence budget.

II. Financial Governance and Cross-Border Accountability

- **Enhance oversight of cascading corporate structures:** Encourage Albania's Special Anti-Corruption Structure (SPAK), in cooperation with the European financial intelligence authorities, to investigate complex foreign corporate structures and require full disclosure of beneficial ownership and local shareholding arrangements.
- **Request review under the U.S. Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA):** Recommend submitting a comprehensive documentary file to the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Congress requesting an examination of the financial activities of Affinity Partners, founded by Jared Kushner, concerning whether the project involved financial benefits or sovereign concessions with potential implications under applicable anti-corruption legislation.
- **Strengthen the governance of sovereign wealth funds:** Recommend the establishment of stronger institutional and public oversight mechanisms within Gulf states that finance sovereign wealth funds in order to improve transparency, strengthen accountability, and ensure that sovereign assets are managed according to sound economic principles and the long-term interests of future generations.

III. Political and Geopolitical Recommendations

- **Promote greater transparency regarding integrated financial networks:** Encourage research institutions and media organizations to undertake comprehensive analysis of financial flows associated with the project in order to examine the relationships between investments in the Balkans, including the **Sazan** project, and subsequent investments in other financial entities, including **Phoenix Financial Ltd.**, thereby facilitating informed public discussion of broader investment patterns.

IV. Civil Society Mobilization and Environmental Protection

- **Internationalize environmental advocacy:** Encourage cooperation between Albanian environmental organizations, the European Parliament, and relevant international organizations to promote enhanced environmental protection measures for Sazan Island**,** Vlora Bay, and the Karaburun Peninsula, recognizing their ecological significance and the need for sustainable conservation.
- **Institutionalize civic engagement:** Support the development of structured civil society initiatives that promote environmental protection and national heritage through lawful advocacy, public participation, and, where appropriate, legal action before domestic and international courts aimed at protecting coastal ecosystems and preserving the island's biodiversity.

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Why Sazan Island is a key maritime chokepoint in the Adriatic and a prize of geopolitical significance.

THE QATAR–KUSHNER CONNECTION
Inside the financial partnership, company networks and billion-dollar flows behind the deal.

LEGISLATIVE CORRUPTION
How laws were bent, oversight was bypassed and a sovereign asset was handed over beyond the reach of justice.

PEOPLE'S RESISTANCE
Mass protests, environmental alarm and a nation's fight to protect its land and future.

GLOBAL IMPLICATIONS
The risks to sovereign wealth funds, international credibility and anti-corruption regimes worldwide.

> “*This is more than the story of an island.*
> *It is a warning about the world*
> *we are allowing to be bought.*”