

## Qatar's Foreign Policy: An Analysis of Mediation as a Tool

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**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.70670/sra.v3i4.1462>

### Abstract

As a small state situated between Saudi Arabia and Iran, Qatar utilizes mediation diplomacy to develop itself and its reputation overseas. Qatar's involvement as a global mediator since the early 2000s exemplifies proactive diplomacy. Mediation was also legally incorporated in the constitution of Qatar in 2003, which specifies the country's foreign policy in Article 7. As a result, mediation has been included in the foreign policy of Qatar to prevent potential coercions and to achieve global reputation. Mediation is an effective foreign policy tool that Qatar may use to achieve some of its goals, such as sustaining global peace, developing relationships and alliances with other nations. Qatar has successfully attempted to support the parties to reach an agreement and settle their disputes by serving as a mediator. This paper attempts to analyze Mediation as a tool of foreign policy implementation in Qatar's Foreign Policy.

**Key Words:** Qatar, Foreign Policy, Mediation, Interlocutor, MENA Region

### Introduction

Mediation has aided the nation's objective of developing a state brand. Unlike other small Gulf nations, Cavusoglu (2020) says that as a result of several mediation plans, Doha showed a political mastery and became a branded country in arbitrating. Qatar's compassion may be drawn back to its founder, Sheikh Jassem bin Mohammed Al Thani, who referred to his country as "bait ul muhtajin," which means "the house of all people who are grieving and in need of help". Since 2004, Qatar has appeared to have been aiding and mediating the critical issues (MOFA, n.d.). Karatas (2022) states that settling disagreements is a basic moral task and a religious necessity in Islam. As a result, Qatar intervened in approximately 10 local and global issues, at the request of the related parties and without intervening in their domestic politics. This supported the kingdom of Qatar in speedily establishing a well-known reputation, emerging as a significant Middle Eastern mediator, and weathering the challenges that surrounded it. According to Akpinar (2015), the reputation of Qatar as a negotiator contributes to national security by reducing the number of regional or worldwide enemies it may face. As indicated by respondent 4, conciliation suggests that Doha is viewed as an important actor in the global ground. He used the example of Kuwait as a country that various global players were unfamiliar with at the time of Iraq's invasion, which he viewed as a tactical fault. This also linked to respondent 1's claim that, given the importance of mediation in countering foreign threats, a state like Qatar invested as much in negotiation as in the

military. Qatar has developed a status for supporting regional unity. As a result, it has substantial experience mediating impartial disputes in Palestine, Sudan, Lebanon, Djibouti/Eritrea, and Yemen. Sheikh Khalifa brought about major social, political and economic changes but both son and father were distressed on a number of matters, especially on the country's strategic approach to foreign threats. Before the mid-1990s, Qatar had relatively little global influence (Abdullah, 2014). According to him, Qatar was not that different from the other Gulf States under Saudi rule. Saudi actions influenced a wide range of Qatar's domestic and international policies. Sheikh Khalifa refused to accept the enormous modification that was necessary owing to the country's size and position in a difficult area. Thus, King Hamad assumed control in 1995 by nonviolent takeover. Abdullah's (2014) claims that three significant occasions marked a turning point in the development of Qatar's foreign strategy: the attack of Iraq on Kuwait, which demonstrated the Arab states' vulnerability; the Liberation of Kuwait from Iraq's aggression and takeover of Sheikh Hamad in 1995. Another key incident faced Qatar with a considerable challenge, resulting in the 1992 military war between Saudi Arabia and Qatar over a contested boundary territory. The confrontation is known as the "Al Khufus" event.

Since taking power, Sheikh Hamad has had challenges in the region from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, continued to support his father and founder, the King Khalifa, and conducted an unsuccessful coup effort in 1996 (Barkat, 2014). As a result, King Hamad looked to hold the obligation to make various policy changes in the course of his country's foreign policy. The new leadership appears to recognise Qatar's weakness in forming unified military forces to face any foreign threat, as stated by Feiler and Zeev (2017), given that the country is one of the least populated in the world. As a result, a distinct foreign policy was planned, based on five essential concepts: 1) maintaining independence and sovereignty, 2) defending the Arabic nationality and Islamic Status, 3) imposing global treaties 4) promoting global peace, harmony and security, and 5) safeguarding human rights and freedoms in both the public and private spheres (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019). Moreover, Article 7 of the constitution of Qatar specifically describes the passage of the state's foreign policy, stating:

*"Qatar's foreign policy is based on the principles of promoting international disputes peacefully, defending the right of the people to self-determination, refraining from interfering in other countries' domestic affairs, and working with all states that pursue peace (Al-Sayed, 2016)."*

Akpinar (2015) asserts that the desire for a more firm and active foreign policy has also been influenced by Qatar's rise as a massive energy exporter in the 1990s. In other words, a huge money assimilated by the petroleum business enabled the country to develop a distinct foreign policy to safeguard its own integrity and to minimize the upcoming threats and hardships. Abu Sulaib's (2017) argues that the Qatar's foreign dealings is based on three essential elements: i) economic powers, ii) establishment of one of the region's most significant media network (Al Jazeera channel), and iii) incompatible alliances. The well-known television network Al Jazeera was essential in shaping public opinion and raising awareness of various Middle Eastern issues. According to Feiler and Zeev (2017), "the foreign policy of Qatar has been capitalizing on the perception that the country is nearly as important and influential as Saudi Arabia due to the popularity of Al Jazeera" (p. 28). Cavusoglu (2020) argues that Qatar's concentration on strategies in both domestic and international affairs is the reason for the country's success in developing a status and making as a trustworthy partner. Sheikh Hamad has implemented practical international relations, with wider objectives and advanced policies. The researcher also harmonizes with Cavusoglu's (2020) assessment that diplomatic capability and a balanced approach were the two main elements of Qatar's active foreign policy. Gray (2013) goes into great detail about how Sheikh Hamad's leadership transformed Qatar in order to capitalize on its energy sources, build the state economy, expand its savings, and establish a national identity, all of which helped the country by establishing a reputation internationally and address future difficulties. During King

Hamad's rule (1995-2013) the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increased from US\$7.4 billion to US\$184 billion as well as the per capita income increased from US\$16000 to \$1million. King Hamad enhanced exports from US\$3.6 billion to US\$144 billion of LNG, steel, crude oil, fertilizers and aluminium to China, India, South Korea and Europe (World Bank, 2013). Peterson (2006) identified two reasons that have affected Qatar's rise and integration into the global structure from the 1990s. The first consideration is the risks and difficulties that surround Qatar. The second reason is how Qatar solved these difficulties by establishing a state brand to ensure its existence. This comprises Qatar's efforts to boost its influence by hosting major international meetings and conferences and serving as a mediator on a number of issues.

Qatar's involvement as an international mediator since the early 2000s demonstrates proactive diplomacy in the global sphere. Mediation was legally incorporated into Qatar's constitution in 2003, and as previously said, it has evolved to be an important pillar of foreign policy. Qatar tried to support the participants reach an accord and settle their dispute by serving as a mediator. In addition, Qatar tries to enhance its reputation in the global politics by using mediation as a soft power tool by resolving various conflicts and by providing their own land for international meetings and dialogues. Qatar involved as a mediator in several disputes at the appeal of the parties concerned without any intervention in state domestic issues that are Afghan peace process, Russia-Ukraine war, Darfur dispute, Lebanon civil war, Palestine issue, Yemen crises, Djibouti/Eritrea war, Chad-Sudan conflict, US-Iran issue and between Chad government and rebel groups. This enabled the country to quickly acquire a well-known character by emerging as a significant Middle Eastern mediator. As Akpınar (2015) argues that Qatar's reputation as an arbitrator contributes to national security by reducing the number of regional or worldwide rivals it may face. As a result, Qatar has considerable experience in mediating disputes in Djibouti/Eritrea, Yemen, Sudan, Lebanon, and Palestine through neutral intervention. These conflict situations, with an emphasis on Qatar's role as a mediator is focused on highlighting their basic characteristics and framework in connection to the case of Afghan peace process is the main focus of this research.

### **Tools of Qatar's Foreign Policy**

Qatar came into being under the leadership of Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad al Thani in 1971. During Khalifa's rule, Qatar was totally under the influence of Saudi Arabia especially in foreign affairs. Sheikh Khalifa and his son Hamad were disagreed on various issues most particularly on diplomatic affairs (Filer & Zeev, 2017). Thus, resulting in a bloodless coup, Crown Prince Hamad bin Khalifa assumed control in 1995. Sheikh Hamad believed that Qatar needed a balance between aggressive and dominant powers and to formulate an independent foreign policy to control foreign threats (Peterson, 2006). Since assuming power, Sheikh Hamad has had regional challenges since Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, especially the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, continued to support his father, Sheikh Khalifa, and conducted an unsuccessful counter-coup effort in 1996 (Barkat, 2014). Sheikh Hamad seemed to recognise that his country's foreign policy needed to change direction. Furthermore, the new leadership appears to be aware of Qatar's weakness in collecting unified military forces to fight any foreign threats, as noted by Feiler and Zeev (2017), given the country's low population. To solve this challenge, the Emir sought to achieve a balance between his country's relations and alliances" (Ulrichsen, 2020). To establish an independent foreign policy, five key ideas were implemented using diverse tools. Qatar aims to preserve its sovereignty and independence, defend its Arab and Islamic identities, obey international laws, support international peace treaties, and protect public and private freedoms and human rights (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.).

Qatar's foreign policy is also based on the principle of resolving international disputes by peaceful means, supporting the right of the masses by self-determination, refraining from interfering in the internal issues of other nations, and cooperating with all nations that seek peace, as stated in Article 7 of the constitution, which also obviously outlines the country's foreign policy direction.

However, the country's sovereignty is also protected by the growing relationship between Qatar and the United States. This was confirmed by Qatar's move toward US security, specifically, the plan to establish a US air base in Qatar. The accord of 1992 set the ground for the US-Qatar partnership (Abdulla, 2014). Qatar's government invested US\$1B in the Al Udaed air base at the end of the 1990s as part of its efforts to form a defence alliance under Sheikh Hamad (Ulrichsen, 2020). Because of the kingdom's sensitivity to having American military troops on its land, as well as the nervous US-Saudi relationship following the 9/11 attacks, the US airbase control centre in the Gulf region was shifted from Saudi Arabia to Qatar. Doha gradually motivated to moved out from Saudi protection. It started to build a self-governing, realistic foreign policy in which it attempted to maintain friendly relations with conflicting parties such as Israel and Hamas or Iran and the United States. Peterson (2006) looked into two factors that have impacted Qatar's interest and growth in the global order since 1995; the obstacles and difficulties that the nation faces, and how Qatar has responded to them by developing a separate identity to ensure its survival. As a result, three key events might be considered watershed moments in the evolution of Doha's foreign policy. The first was the invasion of Iraq on Kuwait in 1990. This event highlighted the weak and small states. The second was the liberation of Kuwait in 1991, which ended the first Gulf War. The third is Sheikh Hamad's rise to power in 1995. The 1992 military war between Saudi Arabia and Qatar over a contested border region was another key event that posed a severe threat to Qatar and resulted in the above-mentioned transition. According to Abdullah (2014), this conflict is famous in the name of "Al Khufus" event.

The majority of thesis participants saw King Hamad as adopting active diplomacy with recent, comprehensive goals and strategies. During Sheikh Hamad's leadership, Qatar saw significant changes in terms of energy resource utilization, political economy expansion, investment buildup, and state brand development. These improvements helped the country to gain a status in global politics and handle upcoming difficulties. The government employed a range of measures to establish a national brand while debating the implementation of a separate foreign policy. In addition to mediation, the following sections explain three other key components of Qatar's foreign policy: Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG), sports and major international events and the media.

### **Qatar as a Mediator**

Qatar has evolved a prominent mediator in local and global politics in various conflicts in the past twenty years for achieving a world reputation. Mediation is the main tool of its foreign policy to provide their land for communication between conflicting groups. Qatar has been involved in several cases as a mediator to resolve the issues but the Afghanistan case is more complex as compared to other cases because the eighteen years of war came to an end by their neutral efforts. Qatar also faced various challenges during mediation process such as imposition of blockade by Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain and Egypt in 2016.

### **Yemen**

In 2004, the Saada governorate and adjoining areas of northern Yemen saw occasional violence known as the Six Wars. An event in which the Houthis killed three Yemeni militias started the war, in this situation, the administrative authority stated its intention to imprison and execute rebel commander Hussein Al-Houthi. Even after his assassination and some of his supporters, the struggle between pro-government members and Houthi tribal militants persisted and became violent, finally reaching Sanaa, the capital of Yemen in 2005. According to Akkas (2021), the social structure's tribal dimension, which determines Yemen's political and security situations, lies at the heart of the country's conflict.

As the condition deteriorated, Yemen's ex-President Ali Abdullah Salih requested Qatar's officials to come to Yemen to make a settlement between the government and Houthis rebels. Thus, King Hamad visited Yemen's disputed region many times and engaged with the parties involved in the

conflict, accompanied by a Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs delegation (Barkat, 2014). As a result of their efforts, the two parties proclaimed a ceasefire on 16 June, 2007, and a peace treaty that came into existence in Doha on Feb 8, 2008. Qatar issued US \$6 million to invest in Saada's destroyed regions including houses and farms. According to Alqashouti (2021), the government wanted full control over the investment money because it was concerned they would be exploited or fail to achieve their objectives in Qatar. This issue sparked tensions between the Yemen's and Qatar's governments. According to Al Qahtani and Al Thani (2021), certain groups within the two opposing parties such as Houthis funded by Iran and Yemeni government and Sunni militias supported by Saudi Arabia in order to gain interest. In other words, personal goals hindered Qatar's efforts, and as a result, both parties resumed clashes through the end of 2009.

Even though Qatar's engagement in Yemen ended, it sought to make on earlier successes and restarted mediation attempts in the summer of 2010. In reality, these efforts were once again effective when the two parties agreed to the "Doha agreement" in August 2010 to endorse their commitment to a ceasefire and peace. However, in the same month, Saudi Arabia invested over US \$1 billion in war-torn areas to assist Qatar's projects. Some analysts believe that the Saudi announcement weakened Qatar's mediation by fluctuating the parties' positions in the dispute (Qahtani and Al Thani, 2021). Regardless of whether the opposing parties withdraw from the agreement or whether influence from neighboring countries is present, the Doha Agreement is seen as a triumph of Qatar's mediation policy.

## **Sudan**

In 2003, a dispute arose in Sudan in the Darfur region, which is known as a "Darfur War" and this war motivated various foreign parties to seek a settlement. As a result, Qatar was chosen as an Arab League ambassador in 2008 to mediate the process between disputing parties. Barkat (2014) argues that this helped Qatar secure a regional command to participate. However, the involvement of Qatar commenced when it became the nonpermanent member of the UN Security Council in 2006 (Qahtani & Al Thani, 2021). Subsequently, two years later, Omar Al Bashir declared the battle concluded in 2010 when Sudan's leadership and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) declared a cease-fire treaty and signed agreement known as Doha Document.

According to the literature, one of the case's distinguishing features is the involvement of Qatar government officials. For example, Ahmad bin Abdullah, the previous Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, spent months travelling to different countries to discuss the Sudanese problem. He was also able to meet with opposition organizations during his several journeys to Khartoum. According to Alqashouti (2021); Qatar accommodated huge deputations for many days and discussed the issue with both officials and with civilian agents. Qatar also organized many workshops in its capital. In the leadership of United Nations and Qatar, a regular commission for the execution of the "Doha Document" initiated possessing consistent dialogues between Doha and Sudan authorities. Qatar continued efforts with the help of Germany and African countries to complete the mediation with Sudan's government and sign the Doha Documents. These measures were effective in 2018, when the government, the Sudan Liberation Movement, and Justice and Equality, two of the country's major movements, inked a framework agreement in Doha to continue discussions. So, in January 2019, official discussions on this basis began in Doha. However, a flood of rallies in opposition to ex-President Umar Al Basheer led to his removal in April of that year. On the other hand, Sudanese representatives stumbled from taking part in the Doha discussions. Several regional powers opposed Qatar's engagement and wanted Sudan to serve as fuel for Yemen and Libya's civil war (Qahtani & Al Thani, 2021).

Qatar's effort is the most important, even if several local and global players are observed as notable to the success of the agreements reached between Sudan's opposing groups (Barakat, 2014). Qatar confronted various hardships during the situation, having domestic Sudanese resistance and

international obstructions such as the embargo implemented on Qatar on June 13, 2017. Sudan was compelled to break contracts with Qatar by the Quartet, which includes Egypt, Bahrain, UAE and Saudi Arabia. The UAE also made several attempts to transfer the Sudanese discussions to Abu Dhabi. Thus, Qatar's participation continued until the Sudan Peace Treaty was signed in August 2020 (Al Jazeera, 2021). Qatar's representatives made several official visits to Sudan, Addis Ababa and Juba. South Sudan's representatives and Sudan's officials in trust of dialogues compensated a visit to Doha succeeding the agreement (Alqashouti, 2021). The Qatar News Agency (QNA) official website (2021) states that Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, the Sudanese Sovereign Council's first deputy, made his first trip to Qatar in January 2021 and arranged multiple meetings with Qatar's representatives about the Juba agreement's execution, recognizing Qatar's fruitful role in advancing harmony and success in Sudan and the Darfur area.

### **Lebanon**

Lebanon faced a one-and-a-half-year power vacuum in 2008 as a result of political conflicts, bringing the country close to civil war. Qatar's authorities sought to gain an Arab League mandate to clarify their involvement in Lebanon, knowing that any unilateral Qatar intervention would insult Saudi Arabia. The regional organization of the Middle East, the Arab League was persuaded that Doha is the perfect choice for the peace settlement due to its good reputation among the Lebanese conflicting parties. Qatar maintained good relations with Iran and Syria, which had diplomatic influence in Lebanon's affairs, as well as with all Lebanon factions, specifically at the time of the civil crisis. Sheikh Hamad called all of Lebanon's conflicting groups to Doha to facilitate and sign an agreement and design the start of Qatar's participation in the situation. The invitation was accepted by the Lebanese rival parties, and after numerous negotiations in Doha, they signed the "Doha Document" in May 2008 (Bakri & Cowell, 2008). Various regional and global authorities including Iran and the US government, welcomed the decision to decide a new head for the state and government resulting in a prolonged period of negotiations between the Lebanese parties led by Qatar as an arbitrator. Qatar used its political and economic potentials as well as its global ties to end the crisis. As a result, months of political disorder in Lebanon were put to rest, and a possible civilian clash was impeded. According to the statement of Alqashouti, Doha's policy obeys a pattern of actual neutrality and taking no schedule as commonly declared by Qatar's administrators. A major component of Qatar's foreign policy is the exercise to mediate, which is derived from the international community. In light of this, Doha's involvement in Lebanon is viewed as one of the most significant events in its twenty years of negotiation history. This result is largely due to Qatar's approach of exhibiting no partiality. In other words, all parties stand on the same footing with Qatar.

### **Palestine**

Qatar acted as a bridge between Hamas and Fattah, two internal Palestinian organizations with the same objective of liberating their country from Israel's aggression. However, they disagree on various matters, which has resulted in a continuous stalemate. The Palestine leadership, directed by Abbas, the supporter of the Fattah movement, favors negotiating a ceasefire deal with Israel that would allow Palestinians to settle with Israel while establishing an autonomous state in Gaza and the West Bank. In contrast, Hamas' contract calls for Israel's eradication while still allowing for an unspecified treaty. Despite their differing positions, the two movements were unable to reach an agreement (Hassan & Buheji, 2024). As a result, both sides were mediated by a variety of other parties, including Qatar. Sheikh Hamad, Qatar's leader, was able to take both groups to Qatar, where they engaged in a series of meetings that terminated in the signing of the Doha Accord in 2012 (Qarjouli, 2013).

Despite their promises to obide by contract and do what was suitable for their state. In addition, Fattah and Hamas conducted many talks in Qatar in 2016 to examine the execution of previous accords. On the other hand, as Qarjouli (2013) describes, antagonism between the groups destroyed all predictions of the pact. Egypt has served as a mediator between the parties several times, the most recent of which occurred in 2017, when they reached a long-term agreement on a number of crucial issues. None of the agreements were carried out. According to Alqashouti (2021), Qatar's diplomacy made notable efforts to pause the cease-fire between Israel's and Palestinian organizations and provide humanitarian aid throughout the fighting, particularly when Gaza was under embargo. Recently, Qatar, Egypt and the USA played a vital role in Palestine by signing the peace agreement between Hamas and Israel on 19 January 2025 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

### **Djibouti and Eritrea**

When Djibouti suspected Eritrea of invading its territory in 2008, a border battle broke out between the two countries. When Djibouti's military moved to meet Eritrean forces in June 2008, tensions arose and 35 soldiers were killed as a result of the growing conflict. Subsequently repeated grievances, the UN Security Council issued Resolution 1907, which prevented Eritrea's officials from traveling and implemented a weapons embargo on Eritrea (Secretary-General of United Nations, 2012). The Security Council advised all parties to engage in dialogue in order to avoid matters from deteriorating. However, international efforts seemed insufficient in resolving the conflict. Consequently, both countries accepted Qatar's offer to mediate between them in 2010. The group was made up of two Eritreans and two Djiboutians, commanded by ex-PM Sheikh Hamad bin Jasim. All sides agreed that Qatar's soldiers might patrol the disputed boundaries and the Eritrean soldiers were removed succeeding in the agreement.

Qatar's forces remained on the border, providing logistical aid. Qatar's diplomats carried on their conversations with the parties and again drew the border lines between the two states and investigates the prospect of striking an agreement to use mediation or the International Court of Justice. In 2016, as a result of Qatar's efforts, the exchange of prisoners of war between Eritrea and Djibouti took place. Following the embargo imposed on Qatar in 2017, Eritrea and Djibouti expressed their support for Saudi Arabia, and Qatar chose to remove its soldiers.

### **Afghan Peace Process**

Qatar played a significant role in the Afghan peace talks between Taliban and USA by ending the longest war of the history. After the withdrawal of USSR from Afghanistan 1989 the country faced the experienced of civil war that led to the sudden rise of Taliban in 1994 and in short span of time the Taliban controlled vast area of Afghanistan and established government in Kabul in 1996. The 9/11 event and protection to Osama bin laden paved way for USA and invaded Afghanistan as well as toppled the Taliban regime and installed their own government in Kabul. In this situation a new era of war started between the Taliban and USA which made the Afghan land from bad to worse condition. In 2010, Qatar emerged as a neutral and third partner for mediation between the opposing groups. In 2013 a political office opened in Doha for Taliban and a series of talks begins that led the situation to peace treaty in 2020. The USA withdrawal its troops from Afghanistan and Taliban once again controlled the Afghan land. In the whole process of dialogues Qatar provided its land for mediation as well as humanitarian and diplomatic support for the peace agreement. (Al Jazeera, 2021).

### **Conclusion**

Qatar has employed unique techniques to overcome its small size since it is recognized as one of the world's smallest states. First, Qatar made media investments by depicting an image of being

open to expressing opposing viewpoints, which aided Qatar in becoming a respected and neutral mediator. In other words, whereas other Arab networks had the confidence to do so, Qatar was able to address sensitive Arab issues via its well-known network, Al Jazeera. Al Jazeera helped Qatar's reputation as a state that values democracy, justice, and human rights. Second, Doha has been investing in sports and hosting of foremost international session, which assisted the minor nation's globalization. Hosting big events has helped to strengthen Qatar's brand and image out of the country. Third, LNG has helped Qatar gain a good advantage in both regional and worldwide markets. The mediation method is one of the strategies discussed. According to this perspective, the state began a history of mediation 23 years ago, using all of the aforementioned tools, which overlap.

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