

QATAR'S RETURN TO MEDIATION DIPLOMACY: WHAT CHANGED?

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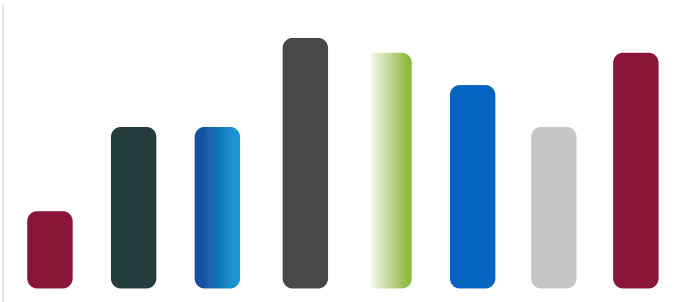
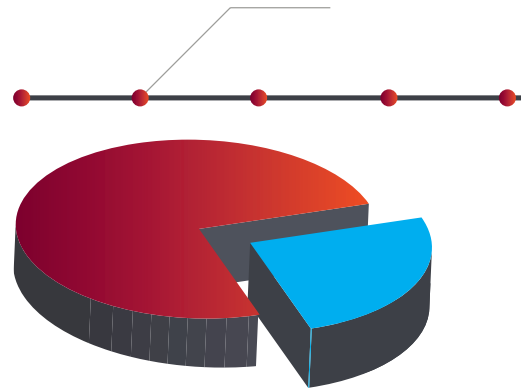
ANALYSIS

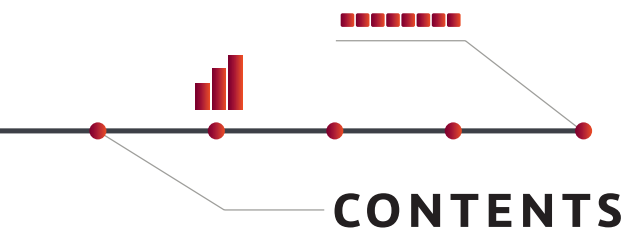
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Abstract: This research elucidates characteristics of Qatar's mediation diplomacy, one of the basic pillars by which the small state gains greater influence in regional and world politics. Qatar's brokerage before the Arab Spring was largely successful and helped it obtain new friends and become known as a reliable partner by conflicting parties. However, switching to an interventionist foreign policy during the Arab Spring caused strife with other Arab states that wanted authoritarian regimes to remain in power. Though being on the right side morally, namely with the people against dictatorial regimes, the sheikhdom suffered from the hostilities of its rivals, particularly during the blockade. With the Al-Ula Declaration that ended the three and a half year blockade, Doha resumed mediation diplomacy to re-gain its pre-Arab Spring reputation. While Qatari officials act more assertive and professional in the new era, whether they will be successful in actualizing the goal of making Doha a hub of diplomacy depends not only on the Qatari government, but also external factors and rival countries. This study tries to shed light on Qatar's mediation diplomacy by analyzing positive and negative aspects of the venture.

INTRODUCTION

One of the basic goals of small states is to ensure their security and sovereignty and make up for their small size by other means, whether armament, climbing on the bandwagon of a great power or improving good relations with other countries. Qatar, a small state in the Persian Gulf sandwiched between hostile countries, faces the same challenges to maintain its existence as any other small state. Yet, unlike similar countries, it follows a maverick foreign policy that sometimes annoys and provokes regional countries such Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Egypt. However, despite its proactive foreign policy, the Sheikhdom guards against external threats thanks to its subtle use of soft power in its foreign policy. One method it adopted was mediation diplomacy. Indeed, acting as a mediator between conflicting parties helped it gain new friends, enabled new investments abroad and improved the country's reputation. Yet, rivalry with other Arab states sometimes halted Qatar's progress and exposed it to sanctions. Despite the impediments, Qatar did not deviate from this path and even supported popular revolutions during the Arab Spring. Yet, this study argues that its interventionist policy failed as it was blockaded by the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Egypt for several years. Moreover, all of the Arab spring revolutions failed. On the other hand, with the lift of the blockade in January 2021, Qatar seems to have returned to its pre-Arab Spring days.

In light of this context, this research paper sheds light on Qatar's mediation diplomacy by analyzing it through different periods. It investigates why and how mediation diplomacy was implemented, why Qatar switched to an interventionist foreign policy, and why it has now returned back to mediation diplomacy. The hypothesis of the research is that mediation diplomacy and generally active foreign policy is a tool for Qatar both to ensure its sovereignty and to have political and economic gains, not mentioning gaining the hearts of foreigners. Yet, given the fierce rivalry with other states, active diplomacy may continue to hurt Qatar. Methodologically, both qualitative and quantitative research methods were used to prepare this study. To this end, a literature review was made and a few interviews were conducted.

QATAR'S MEDIATION DIPLOMACY BEFORE THE ARAB SPRING

The expectation of Qatar as a small state is that it would try to ensure its sovereignty by not getting involved in international politics. Yet, the Sheikhdом followed a maverick foreign policy in the Middle East. Particularly, its mediation diplomacy launched by former Emir Hamad Bin Khalifa lured attention as it was effective enough to change the course of conflicts. Doha's mediation diplomacy indeed brought benefits to the small country until the eruption of the Arab Spring. It then lost influence as Qatar followed a more interventionist foreign policy. While mediation continued even during and after the Arab Spring, Doha's reputation of being a reliable broker was damaged by uprisings. Yet, the small nation revived and revised its mediation diplomacy after the blockade imposed by Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the UAE and Egypt was lifted.

Characteristics of Qatar's Mediation Diplomacy

Many scholars and analysts have studied why a small country like Qatar, which has existential problems, would want to solve conflicts by mediating between parties. Several views are conspicuous about Qatar's attitude. First, Qatar expected recognition and credibility in international politics. The Sheikhdом is small enough to be difficult to find on the map, leading observers to believe its foreign policy ambitions would be similar in scope. However, through mediation, it aimed to become a reliable partner that solves other countries' problems so it could gain more prestige, voice and friends in world politics. To this end, the Doha government relied on mediation diplomacy so much that the term also officially entered the Qatari constitution in 2003. In addition, desiring to be the "Geneva of the

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Middle East,” Qataris introduced the term “preventive diplomacy”, aiming for it replace the term “preventive war” coined by Americans¹. Second, according to Kamrava, Qatar’s aim in mediation diplomacy was not only international prestige, nation-branding, and enhancing Qatar’s soft power, but also to maintain its survival as a small state². Located in a region with continuous religious and military conflicts, Qatar takes advantage of mediation to prevent it from reaching its borders and neutralizing its enemies regionally and internationally³. Third, Qataris also see mediation as a moral duty. According to Barakat, Qatari officials stress mediation as a moral, cultural, and religious duty, emphasizing that the Qur’an orders parties to use *wasata* (intermediation), *sulh* (traditional reconciliation), and *musalaha* (conflict mediation) to resolve disputes⁴. Underlining the importance of conflict resolution, former Qatari Foreign Minister said in a conference that:

This dedication to resolve conflict stems from the longstanding Qatar tradition of mediation. Our cultural norms also emphasize tolerance and openness, especially towards those in difficulty. In the words of our founder, Sheikh Jassim: [in Arabic], “Qatar is the destination of the oppressed”⁵.

We should note that conflict resolution as a religious norm is rarely mentioned in international theories. Rather, they look at the subject from a materialistic perspective that does not include moral beliefs. While moral duty is common in Muslim and Eastern countries, it is rarely a matter of discussion in the Western literature.

Fourth, Qatar’s socio-political and economic conditions were also suitable for mediation. Barakat ascribes five factors that led the Emirate to become a mediator in regional conflicts: (1) financial and domestic stability; (2) pragmatic foreign policy; (3) Al Jazeera’s broadcasts that cast Qatar as a relatively free and open country in the Arab world; (4) No historical baggage (conflicts, wars, enmities, etc.); (5) the former Emir’s personal interest in conflict mediation⁶. Fifth, there are also some significant motivations that force Qatar to mediate. First, it wants to maintain its security and survival through containing conflicts and lowering threats of terrorism. Second, Qatar wants to manage Iran’s rising influence. Given that it shares the North Field natural gas field with Iran, it cannot afford to jeopardize its relations with Iran. Third, Qatar desires to expand its influence in the region vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia. Fourth, Qatar wants to improve its international profile by creating an image of itself as an honest broker and a diplomatic powerhouse⁷. Besides political goals, Qatar mediates because mediation has financial and commercial benefits and serves state branding⁸.

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On the other hand, Qatar's mediation diplomacy had/has some disadvantages that impede the success of efforts. For instance, some scholars claim that Qatar has some structural weaknesses that limit its diplomatic capacity. For one thing, Qatar's diplomatic team is too small to follow up on post-agreement processes and monitor the implementation of terms, according to Ulrichsen, "The country lacks a large professional diplomatic corps to translate initial engagement into the sustainable implementation of agreements."⁹ For example, during the Darfur and Lebanon cases, Qatari diplomats built bridges between parties and solved superficial problems, but deeper problems remained untouched because of the inadequate capacity of Qatari diplomacy. Moreover, Qatar's decision-making is centralized as only high-level individuals are involved in mediation. Thus, Qatari diplomats and NGOs have a minimal role in decision-making and do not have much effect on the result¹⁰.

Therefore, analysts argue that the Emirate's mediation produces short-term solutions alone while basic problems continue to remain unsolved. For example, Felsch argues that besides the lack of diplomatic corps, Qatar's small military power is not capable of enforcing agreements, asserting that soft power is hardly effective without military power¹¹. In the case of Qatar, the lack of military power deprives Qataris of playing a security role as guarantors of agreements they help broker, which in some cases potentially reduces its capacity to enforce the negotiated deals. As such, what Qatar actually does is alleviate tensions and enable the conflicting parties to negotiate, with a permanent solution to the conflict beyond the capacity of Qatar's foreign policy¹². Another idiosyncrasy of Qatar's mediation diplomacy is its lack of secrecy. All of its efforts can be learned through news reports by regional and international media outlets, which are filled with Qatari diplomats' interviews and breaking reports about the case¹³. Particularly, Al Jazeera features all the efforts made by Qatari diplomats. Kamrava once said:

Qatari foreign policy parallels that of Oman. But Omanis do it silently, without attention, etc. which is more effective. But Qataris do mediation as a show. They do it in Sheraton, call Al Jazeera, and turn it into a show. While Omanis are interested in the result, Qataris are interested in the process itself or let's say reputation¹⁴.

Pre-Arab Spring Mediations: Yemen, Lebanon, Darfur, and Inter-Palestinian Dialogue

Based on above reasons and characteristics, Qatar tried to mediate between conflicting parties in the first decade of the second millennium, literally until the beginning of the Arab Spring. While viewing the major conflicts it intervened in, Qatar's brokerages in Yemen, Lebanon, Darfur, Palestine, and Afghanistan are salient in the context of its influence.

In Yemen, a civil war broke out between the Yemeni government headed by Ali Abdullah Saleh and Zayidi Shiites called Houthis in Saada province in 2003. Having credibility with both sides, Qatar began the mediation process with Emir Hamad's visit to Yemen in 2007. When the Emir arrived in Yemen, the fourth war between the parties was already ongoing¹⁵. The Qatari Foreign Ministry, with a team of Yemeni experts began talks between the two sides, eventually reaching a ceasefire agreement that was signed in Doha in February 2008. The agreement stipulated that the Yemeni government would release prisoners, grant amnesty, and re-construct war-torn areas. In return, the Houthis were to disarm. As part of its carrot diplomacy, Qatar pledged to invest more than \$300 million in Saada province¹⁶. However, soon after the agreement both sides resumed fighting and blamed the other for breaking the agreement. Qatar then declared that it would not fulfill its pledge of financial assistance.

Qatar appeared on the scene for negotiations in 2010 again but failed once again. Yet, the Saudis, who were backing Ali Abdullah Saleh, were disturbed by Qatar's involvement and its payment to some Houthi leaders. Eventually, Qatar's efforts to resolve the conflict in Yemen failed for several reasons. First, there was a lack of effective follow-up mechanisms and established channels to regulate and monitor disputes during implementation. Second, Qatar's mediation diplomacy did not follow traditional means of diplomacy. For example, while the Doha Treaty asked Houthis to disarm, it did not include comparable provisions for the Yemeni government¹⁷. Third, the process was left to low-level diplomats in the embassy in the course of time. Fourth, Saudi Arabia's support of the Yemeni government and at times direct involvement were reasons for the process' to fail. Saudi Arabia had a geopolitical interest in Yemen and saw Qatar's efforts as a challenge to its power¹⁸.

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A second notable mediation case in Qatar's foreign policy was its endeavor to end the strife among leading Lebanese parties in 2008. After the 2006 Hezbollah-Israel war, Lebanon was plunged into a political conflict in 2008, when then Prime Minister Fouad Siniora dismantled Hezbollah's communication structure. The Shiite group and its ally, the Amal Party, responded by seizing Western Beirut and blocking roads, bringing Lebanon once again to the brink of a new civil war. Qatar stepped in again before any other mediator in 2008 and brought the conflicting parties to Doha for negotiations. The Qatari Foreign Minister, Sheikh Mohammad bin Abdulrahman, called Qatar's mediation in Lebanon "preventive diplomacy"¹⁹. The Doha Agreement, which enabled actors to reconcile and put forth a power sharing mechanism, was signed on May 21, 2008. Besides achieving conflict resolution, Qatar provided financial aid to Lebanon for post-war reconstruction, including predominantly-Shiite towns. An interesting point about Qatar's involvement as a mediator in the Lebanese case was that Saudi Arabia supported the step rather than opposing it. The Saudi support was due to the rapprochement between the two countries at the time and since they saw a credible effort from Qatar to preserve their camp's presence and power in Lebanon. Thus, since the Saudis did not intervene in Lebanon as they did in Yemen, Qatar succeeded in its mediation efforts.

Qatar's mediation in Lebanon is generally regarded as a success. Both parties had trust in Qatar and gave the emirate the space to act freely in solving the problem. Moreover, Qatari mediators' engagement and insistence were influential as Lebanese actors were unable to solve their problems when left to themselves²⁰. A further factor was Qatar's promise of additional investment, which was necessary for a war-torn country. Qatar promised an additional \$300 million investment that encouraged the parties to deliver an agreement.

Another salient mediation led by Qatar was in Darfur in 2008. In 2003, rebel groups attacked Sudanese troops, claiming that the Darfur region was economically and politically discriminated against by the government. According to UNICEF, 200,000-300,000 people were killed during the clashes, leading the United States Congress to call it a genocide. Qatar, already in Sudan for relief activities through its Red Crescent, was named as the representative of the Arab League to mediate between Sudan and various rebel groups.

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There were also envoys from the African Union and the United Nations. After several failed attempts, the Sudanese government agreed to a ceasefire agreement with the biggest rebel group, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), and other rebel groups separately, in 2010. The final agreement between the government and the rebel groups was signed in 2011²¹. Qatar, again, as a pivotal tool, utilized its financial resources and pledged to establish a development bank to invest \$500 million in Darfur, and buy Sudanese state bonds²². In addition, it signed an agreement with Sudan to invest \$4 billion in the Red Sea Port at Sudan's Suakin coast²³.

Qatar's mediation in Darfur is assumed to be an achievement, but the credit should be shared with other involved actors, such as the African Union, United Nations, and the Arab League²⁴. Meanwhile, Egypt, viewing itself as the primary patron in Sudan, was infuriated by Qatar's mediation in what it considered its own backyard²⁵.

The fourth and final major mediation effort that should be discussed is the one between Palestinian groups and, in association with it, between Israel and Palestine. Qatar does not deny that it supports the Palestine cause. Former Qatari Foreign Minister, Khalid Mohammed Al-Attiyah, said in a conference: "We emphasize that the Palestinian cause is our cause and the first cause of the Arab people²⁶. We reject all forms of Israeli settlement." Thus, Qatar decided to get more involved in the Palestinian cause. From 2006 onwards, Qataris have been trying to broker peace between Hamas and Fatah factions.

In fact, Egypt had acted earlier than Qatar, but since Hamas had seen Egyptians as pro-Fatah, negotiations failed. There were also some attempts made by Saudi Arabia and Yemen that ended with no solution. Yet Qatar, considered to be a more reliable partner, was allowed to mediate. Qatar, as always, used its most effective tool, financial aid, to facilitate the mediation process. However, no agreements were signed between Hamas and Fatah until 2012. The Palestinian Authority leader, Mahmud Abbas, and Hamas's exiled leader, Khalid Mishal, both of whom had entertained good relations with the emirate and were hosted in Doha for extensive periods during their political active years, signed the Doha Agreement in February 2012. Nevertheless, Hamas leaders based in Gaza deemed the agreement illegitimate as they were not invited to the negotiation process²⁷. Therefore, the implementation of the agreement

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failed. In connection with mediation between Palestinian factions, Qatar also joined efforts for a permanent solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In 2011, Qatar played an important role in the release of the Israeli soldier Gilat Shalit. Moreover, in line with the Arab League, it supported Obama's two-state solution²⁸.

Regarding Qatar's success in the Palestinian cause, it failed to bring Hamas and Fatah together because of deep differences in the two factions' ideologies. Besides, Hamas was well aware that it would always have Qatari support regardless of the outcome of the negotiations. Also, its pro-Palestine policies made it subject to US and Israeli criticism, thus, leading it to be accused of financing terrorism, particularly due to Qatar's good relations with Hamas. Therefore, Qatar's diplomatic activities in Palestine caused trouble for the Doha government.

There were also some other instances of mediation worth pointing out. For example, Qatar allowed the Taliban to open an office in Doha. It also brokered between the Taliban and the Afghan government but negotiations failed as Afghan President Hamid Karzai accused Qatar of allowing the Taliban to use their Doha office like the embassy of an exiled government²⁹. However, the Taliban and the US agreed to the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan in Doha in February 2020. In 2008, Qatar successfully mediated between Eritrea and Djibouti, preventing new military confrontations. Furthermore, Qatar was involved in disputes among countries in the Horn of Africa, namely Eritrea, Somalia, Ethiopia, and Sudan. However, since Ethiopia blamed Qatar as the source of instability due to allegedly supporting Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan, and armed groups, it cut off diplomatic relations with the emirate. Relations were eventually normalized in 2012. Besides Ethiopia, Egypt was also disturbed by Qatar's pro-Sudan policies. Another angry state in the Horn of Africa was Kenya, which was uncomfortable with Qatar's activities in Somalia. According to Mesfin, Qatar lost its credibility because it did not remain impartial in Horn of Africa disputes³⁰. Finally, Qatar was also involved in the release of numerous hostages abducted by armed groups in various countries.

The Success Level of Mediation Diplomacy

Regarding the success of Qatar's pre-Arab Spring mediation diplomacy, the Sheikhdом's efforts to find a permanent solution to ongoing conflicts were appreciated by the conflicting parties. But some third parties were disturbed by Qatari foreign policy, arguing that the Doha government was harming their interests. On the other hand, some scholars underline deficiencies mentioned above such as lack of a big diplomatic team, lack of supporting hard power, and turning negotiations into a media spectacle. Yet, despite the shortcomings, this

QATAR BENEFITED FROM MEDIATION DIPLOMACY BOTH POLITICALLY AND ECONOMICALLY

study argues that Qatar's brokerage efforts were generally successful. First of all, the roots of problems should not be a parameter for a mediator. Some cases cannot be solved through mediation even by superpowers. For example, no great powers or international organizations have been able to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as both sides' stakes in the conflict are its very *raison d'être*. Second, Qatar was successful due to gaining the confidence of the conflicting parties, which is a crucial factor in mediation diplomacy. For instance, no party would see Egypt in Sudan, the Saudis in Yemen, or Iranians in Afghanistan as impartial enough to be a mediator. Yet, Qatar mediated in all these countries. Third, Qatar's brokerage was not just to gather parties in Doha. It also made donations and helped parties cover the costs of reconstruction, a strategy which was well welcomed by parties. Fourth, Qatar's diplomacy could be more fruitful had other regional powers not distorted it. It is difficult for negotiations to succeed if there is intervention from an outside party. As explained above, in some cases, the failure was not due to Qatar but external intervention, e.g. Saudis in the Yemeni peace process. Fifth, Qatar turned its soft power into commercial gains through diplomacy. Since it was the mediator, parties opened their markets to Qatari companies, most of them affiliated to the Qatari state, as a gesture. Finally, Al Jazeera's continuous coverage of Qatar's efforts contributed to improving Qatar's image. Hence, it cultivated an image of a peaceful mediator through its media. Overall, it can be said that Qatar benefited from mediation diplomacy both politically and economically.

QATAR'S INTERVENTIONIST FOREIGN POLICY

Qatar, up until the time the Arab Spring broke out in December 2010 with the Tunisian uprising, had a foreign policy based on soft power. The most important feature of its foreign policy to that time was diplomatic mediation. With the uprisings known as the Arab Spring, it abandoned mediation and adopted a more interventionist foreign policy. Therefore, the conciliating mediator turned into an active supporter of the uprisings.

Switching to Interventionism

Many reasons can be forwarded for why Qatar changed its foreign policy. According to Habraken, Qatar's interventionist policies would not have been possible without extreme wealth as was the case for its mediation and state-branding, the two other pillars of Qatar's foreign policy³¹. When unrest began in Tunisia, Egypt, and Syria, Qatar saw the developments as an opportunity rather than a challenge³². This was because the uprisings toppled strong

dictators of the Arab world and allowed Qatar to be more influential and reinforce its regional position³³. Previously, Qatar had not been able to intervene since there was no challenge from people to authoritarian regimes. This is one of the reasons it had preferred mediation over intervention before the Arab Spring. When conditions turned in Qatar's favor, it decided to fill the power vacuum in the region. Therefore, analysts argue that Qatar was opportunistic during the Arab Spring. Qatar also wanted to show Western states that it could be a good partner if it wanted³⁴. Besides, it would enable Qatar to play on the world stage. In his article in *The Times*, Hugh Tomlinson wrote:

*The Obama administration has recognized the value in Qatar's relationship with rogue states and terrorist groups. As the United States tries to ensure regional stability while extricating itself from two foreign wars, Doha's willingness to engage America's enemies on its behalf is invaluable*³⁵.

Another reason for the change in Qatar's foreign policy was its domestic stability. The emirate has the highest GDP per capita in the world. As Elashmawy points out, Qataris are too rich to protest.³⁶ While people are demanding freedom, jobs, non-corruption and so on in many other Arab states, Qatari people are living on welfare. Unemployment in Qatar is below 1% and Qatari citizens occupy top posts in the government and business. Even the Shiite minority (approximately 10% of the population) is well integrated into society with no discrimination against them. Additionally, Qatar's leader, Emir Hamad, had already launched a democratization process in his country, thus making the reforms before his people could request them.

Moreover, like other GCC members, Qatar has been hosting Muslim Brotherhood (MB) members and their leaders since the 1950s. The Sheikhdome saw the MB as a partner they can work with and with whom they shared a vision for the region. As Qatar cannot realize its regional goals via hard power, it subtly outsourced this to use for its ends. On the other hand, the MB had huge human power and a network but lacked financial resources. Therefore, co-operation between Qatar and the MB would be mutual beneficial. While Qatar would be

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one of the most influential Arab states in the region despite its small size, the MB would take power in countries it was operating. This was a well-planned strategy of Qatar, which would multiply its strength through “outsourced power”, a concept which could contribute further to the international relations literature on power types. Hence, to reach Islamist groups during the Arab Spring (and even before), Qatar utilized the MB network in the region³⁷. For example, it was in contact with the Ennahda Party in Tunisia, Islah in Yemen, the PJD Party in Morocco, Hamas in Palestine, and the Muslim Brothers in Egypt³⁸.

Cases of Interventionism

To understand Qatar’s interventionist foreign policy and its collaboration with the MB, it is worth examining the emirate’s activities in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and Bahrain alongside Al Jazeera’s coverage during the Arab Spring. The first upheaval of the Arab Spring happened in Tunisia in December 2010. When people took to the streets, Qatar indicated its stance via Al Jazeera TV. Although Al Jazeera correspondents were banned from entering Tunisia, they were still able to cover the conflict secretly. The Islamic scholar, Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, said in a sermon broadcasted by Al Jazeera that the Tunisian revolt was a reaction to injustice and there were more Arab countries whose leaders had stolen public wealth³⁹. Al Jazeera live broadcasted the success of the Tunisian revolution as Tunisian president Zine El Abidine bin Ali, tricked by the Tunisian army into leaving the country, fled to Saudi Arabia. Qatar also became involved in the post-uprising process by supporting the Ennahda Party. Nevertheless, while Ennahda garnered 37% of votes in the first post-revolution elections held on October 23, 2011, and came to power, it lost to the secular Nidaa Tounes Party in the October 2014 elections⁴⁰.

On the other hand, when Tunisians managed to oust Bin Ali, Egyptians began their revolt against President Mubarak, hoping that they could get rid of their dictator as well. As soon as protestors gathered at Tahrir Square, Al Jazeera began covering the events live, which eventually culminated in the closure of its offices. Nonetheless, “Aljazeera evaded the blockage by providing viewers with alternative frequencies to watch its coverage of the unfolding news”⁴¹ (El Etreby, 2014: 90). Al Jazeera also founded a new channel called Al Jazeera Al Mubashir Misr that was devoted to covering the protests in Egypt. The protests

TO UNDERSTAND QATAR’S INTERVENTIONIST FOREIGN POLICY AND ITS COLLABORATION WITH THE MB, IT IS WORTH EXAMINING THE EMIRATE’S ACTIVITIES IN TUNISIA, EGYPT, LIBYA, YEMEN, AND BAHRAIN ALONGSIDE AL JAZEERA’S COVERAGE DURING THE ARAB SPRING

eventually resulted in a democratic transition, bringing the MB candidate Mohamed Mursi to power. However, the Defense Minister, Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi, finally toppled Morsi on July 3, 2013, and became president, remaining in power to this day⁴². What if there had remained an MB-controlled government in Egypt? Qatar would certainly have the biggest Arab country's support and would have a larger say in regional politics.

Qatar's intervention in the Libyan civil war, however, stands out as Qatari boots were on the ground. While the Qatari administration had good relations with Muammar Gaddafi, when the civil war erupted in Libya, Qatar sided with Islamic groups, probably because it understood the inevitability of its ally being overthrown. Hence, it became the most active Gulf state during the conflict. When fighting among Libyan parties broke out, Qatar called for an Arab League meeting and suspended Libya's membership, then backed NATO's military operation, and asked the UN Security Council to impose a no-fly zone over Libya. In addition to these political moves, Qatar sent six Mirage jets to join NATO forces, deployed special forces to Libya, and supplied weapons to rebels. Al Jazeera further supported the rebel groups with its coverage. Moreover, Al-Qaradawi appeared on Al Jazeera and gave supportive speeches. Nevertheless, the post-Gaddafi era was not fruitful for Qatar as it could not turn short-term gains into long-term ones due to its lack of diplomatic capabilities and failure to institutionalize the outcomes.

In addition, when public protests erupted in Syria, Emir Hamad tried to persuade Bashar al-Assad to find a peaceful solution to the conflict. However, when mediation failed, Qatar was again first to step forward. Qatar's first action was to ask the Arab League to send Arab troops to stop the bloodshed⁴³. In the case of Syria, Qatar worked alongside Saudi Arabia and the UAE to arm rebel groups, a move that angered Iran. Yet, rivalry prevailed ultimately due to Qataris and Saudis' support of different factions in the Syrian National Council (SNC). Qatar also armed rebel groups and became the biggest Arab donor to Syrian dissidents. Regarding media support, Al Jazeera remained silent until Qatar stopped supporting Assad, once a good friend of Emir Hamad. In the aftermath, it featured pro-SNC reports and allowed Al-Qaradawi to comment on the Syrian revolution. However, looking back from the year 2022, it can be argued that Qatar failed in the Syrian civil war as indeed almost all the actors lost there. Qatar took part in the Yemeni unrest as well. However, the information concerning its

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***THE QATARI GOVERNMENT REMAINED
SILENT DURING EARLY DAYS OF
BAHRAIN'S UNREST BUT LATER
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involvement are mostly allegations. Qatar certainly kept good ties with the Islah Movement, a Muslim Brotherhood branch in Yemen. According to Baabood, the Sheikhdome reportedly donated \$80 million to the Islah Movement during the unrest that led to the end of Ali Abdullah Saleh's reign⁴⁴. It also established the Yemeni TV channel called Yemen Youth Channel. However, Qatar was also accused of supporting Iran-linked Houthi rebels against the Saudi-backed Abdrabuh Mansur Hadi regime. Thus, it was expelled from the Saudi-led coalition fight against the Houthis when the Qatar diplomatic crisis began in 2017 and culminated in the ongoing blockade. It seems that Qatar's hyperactive policies greatly disturbed the Saudi-led coalition.

Among all the countries that witnessed revolts during the Arab Spring, the only country which did not see Qatari support for its protests was Bahrain. The Qatari government remained silent during early days of Bahrain's unrest but later joined the GCC intervention. Whether Qatar sent troops to Bahrain to demonstrate its support is not clear. While Pulliam and Blanchard claim it did, Windecker and Sendrowicz hold the opposite⁴⁵. Also, Al Jazeera was blind to the Bahraini uprising as well, which was widely considered as double standard⁴⁶. There are some reasons why Qatar stood next to the Bahraini government. One reason may be that it might have decided not to cross the line⁴⁷. In other words, it did not want to worsen its relations with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain. Furthermore, since those that revolted were Bahrain's Shiite majority, it probably allied with other neighbors to form a Sunni counter-pole against Iran's infiltration attempts. This reason looks more acceptable since Qatar would not want to see Iran next to its borders.

The Results of Interventionism

It can be argued that Qatar was quite ambitious and exceeded its capacity during the Arab Spring. While allying with the MB was a good idea, Saudi Arabia and the UAE were hostile to the MB as they saw it as a threat to their regimes. In addition, the Arab Spring proved the MB's power and strength, causing fear in Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Therefore, Qatar's Arab neighbors were frustrated by the Qatar-MB alliance and accused Qatar of attempting to destroy their regimes. Thus, their enmity turned into hostility and led to the infamous Qatari blockade that lasted 3.5 years. It can be concluded that Qatar should have remained as a mediator instead of being an interventionist country since mediation diplomacy culminates in a good

image, trust, respect, new friends, and even new business opportunities. Meanwhile, Qatar lost some of its credibility since the beginning of the Arab Spring due to interventionist policies. On the other hand, the unrests showed that Qatar's diplomatic and military capacity fell short of managing intervention. It is now apparent that the Arab Spring did not bring new opportunities but rather new threats. However, it is difficult to label Qatar's support for democratic transitions in other countries as being the wrong policy. The moral policy for any country is to support such political changes as they will result in more freedom, political participation, and the diversification of power. Qatar's policy was "inclusive", meaning that it wanted people to participate in the political system. If people are excluded, they are more likely to turn to radical solutions and create a state of anarchy. Moreover, those countries condemning Qatar were not innocent in their policies themselves as they worked to maintain dictatorships.

QATAR'S POST-BLOCKADE MEDIATION DIPLOMACY

It is generally accepted that Qatar's interventionist foreign policy starting with the Arab Spring backfired. As of 2022, all revolutionary attempts in the Arab World have failed, Tunisia being the last one after Kais Saied took full control of power. As Doha relinquished its neutral position, other Arab states, which have an authoritarian character, fiercely opposed Qatar's new foreign policy and became hostile to the Sheikdom. In June 2017, Qatar faced the worst diplomatic crisis as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt implemented an air, sea, and land blockade to force Qatar to stop supporting "terrorism" and cut its relations with Iran. Turkey and Iran tried to lessen the impact of the blockade by providing food aid. Turkey also sent troops to Qatar to prevent a likely invasion. Despite its small size, Qatar stood strong against the difficulties imposed by the blockade, which continued until the Al-Ula Declaration of January 2021. The declaration was interpreted as a victory by Qatari officials in terms of regional politics⁴⁸.

Since 'Al-Ula', an enhancement of mediation diplomacy has been apparent in Qatar's foreign policy. It should be noted that Qatar's brokerage attempts never ended even during the Arab Spring and the blockade. However, it was not as conspicuous as in the pre-Arab Spring era. It can be said that it either avoided mediating in conflicts to which the blockading quartet already got involved in, or acted a bit more passively. Yet, as soon as the blockade was lifted and the rift with the blockaders ended, Qatari government resumed mediation talks to restore its image of a reliable and credible partner. Before analyzing characteristics of Qatar's 'Mediation Diplomacy 2.0', it is worth taking a look at some of the latest cases of Qatari diplomacy.

***SINCE 'AL-ULA', AN ENHANCEMENT
OF MEDIATION DIPLOMACY HAS BEEN
APPARENT IN QATAR'S FOREIGN POLICY***

Examples of Post Al-Ula Mediation Efforts

The biggest success for Qatari diplomats not long after the Al-Ula Declaration was the hosting of American and Taliban officials, who eventually agreed on the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan. Qatar was also the key country for evacuating foreign troops and civilians from Kabul. The Afghan case has more of a long-term aspect as senior Taliban leaders had already been stationed in Doha since 2010. Qataris also allowed Taliban to open an office in 2013. Therefore, when the US decided to withdraw from Afghanistan, its interlocutors, namely Taliban delegates, were already based in Doha. Thus, it is not a surprise that the final agreement was signed in Qatar and named 'Doha Agreement' in 2020. During the chaotic final days of US presence in Kabul, 40% of evacuees, including troops and even journalists, were moved via Doha⁴⁹. The American administration stated many times that evacuation would not have been successful without Qatar's help. Qatar's relentless efforts for Afghanistan bore political fruit and were worth millions of dollars in terms of public relations. During the evacuation, Qatar was seen a trustable partner both by the Taliban regime and other countries. Many embassies of other countries that were previously in Kabul are now based in Doha. Besides, the US uses the Qatari embassy for diplomatic relations in Kabul. It should be noted that Qatar was fortunate during the Afghanistan case as regional and international players such as the US, China, Iran, Turkey, the UK, Germany, France and Russia were involved in it. The process would probably be more difficult had Doha not had so much international support.

While the Afghanistan talks have become the first success of Doha's mediation venture since the Al-Ula Agreement, the Qatari foreign ministry would spare no effort to score new achievements. Currently, Qatari officials are trying to be the go-to mediator between the US and Iran as both sides hint to return to talks to revive the JCPOA. Yet, at the moment, Europeans are mediating between the two parties. What is more, Tehran seems to prefer meeting directly with the US negotiators in order to deepen relations⁵⁰. In addition, Iran is concerned by Qatar being a key ally to the US. However, despite the obstacles, it will not be surprising if Qatari diplomats mediate between Washington and Tehran.

The Sheikhdom also wanted to resume mediation in Yemen as well. Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani said in a conference long before the Al-Ula Declaration that they want to bring the Yemeni people together and stop the crisis. Houthis also want Qatar's involvement but the Saudi Arabia factor looks to be a great obstacle

WHILE THE AFGHANISTAN TALKS HAVE BECOME THE FIRST SUCCESS OF DOHA'S MEDIATION VENTURE SINCE THE AL-ULA AGREEMENT, THE QATARI FOREIGN MINISTRY WOULD SPARE NO EFFORT TO SCORE NEW ACHIEVEMENTS

before Doha. Given that Saudi Arabia is a warring party in Yemen and has concerns about Qatar's maverick foreign policy, it may not give the green light to Qatar's brokerage. Thus, the Yemeni case might not be a productive avenue for mediation diplomacy for Qatar.

Qatari officials also brokered a resumption of relations between Kenya and Somalia in May 2021⁵¹. However, negotiations failed as Kenya suspended flights to Mogadishu. Previously, Qatar was again the mediator between the two countries in the Horn of Africa but failed as Kenya claimed that Qatar was acting in favor of Somalia. On the other hand, since the UAE, Saudi Arabia and some western countries are directly involved in Somalia's internal affairs, the success of a likely brokerage is not clear. Despite being the most vocally anti-Russian GCC country, Qatar also wants to mediate between Russia and Ukraine. This remains unlikely though as countries like Turkey are already filling this role. Besides, Russia does not seem to want to come to the negotiating table before winning the war. Moreover, there are already direct talks between Russia and Ukraine. Finally, Qatar's brokerage between Palestinian groups, namely Al Fatah and Hamas, as well as between the Palestinian Authority and Israel never ceased. Perhaps, among non-Palestinian Arabs, Qatar is the basic Arab interlocutor for Israel regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

While above cases are well known, it is likely that there might be some other attempts not yet known to the public. Nonetheless, the above cases are sufficient to show that Qatar has returned back to mediation diplomacy. In fact, it never gave it up, but now free of rifts with its neighbors it looks eager to abandon its interventionist foreign policy in favor of its well-tested mediation diplomacy.

Characteristics of Mediation Diplomacy 2.0

It can be argued that international and regional dynamics following the Al-Ula agreement enabled Qatar to anchor back to its traditional policies of diplomacy and mediation. Given its legacy in this field and the need for Qatar's role in several regional issues, Doha boosted its diplomatic capacity and mediation efforts and we have seen effective role on the Afghan issue and in the nuclear negotiations issue, etc.⁵². All in all, if a comparison is made, it can be seen that there are both differences as well as similarities in the new mediation diplomacy compared to the pre-Arab Spring era. First, Qatar's diplomacy is better positioned

IT CAN BE ARGUED THAT INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL DYNAMICS FOLLOWING THE AL-ULA AGREEMENT ENABLED QATAR TO ANCHOR BACK TO ITS TRADITIONAL POLICIES OF DIPLOMACY AND MEDIATION

and more influential than before⁵³. The general view is that Doha looks more careful when connecting with other countries for bilateral relations as well as mediation. In other words, it considers potential repercussions before taking one step forward. However, maintaining negotiations in a secret manner like Oman still does not exist. Qatari diplomacy is open to a global audience thanks to the broadcasts of its well-known media outlet Al Jazeera. Second, statements of Qatari officials indicate that the small state will be more assertive in diplomacy to solve international conflicts. Foreign Affairs Minister Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani stated that “2022 is the year to solve the crises and Qatar is functioning through its resources while urging for international cooperation. Recent incidents have highlighted the importance of international cooperation and the crises can be addressed only through international efforts, not unilateral ones⁵⁴. He also added that mediation will be at the core of Qatar’s diplomacy.

Third, in another speech, Al-Thani underlined that the nature of conflicts has changed, becoming more complex and diverse. He said that new areas of mediation have emerged due to new developments in technology⁵⁵. Al-Thani particularly references conflict in cyberspace and emphasizes that a new mediation framework should be developed for it. It is interesting that the top Qatari diplomat has studied transformation of conflicts and is aware that new paradigms should be applied to solve inter-state problems. Fourth, and perhaps the most important aspect of post-blockade Qatari diplomacy is that the Doha government continues to follow an independent foreign policy. According to Fathollah-Nejad and Bianco, Qatar does not seek prior coordination with fellow GCC states, which may entrench mistrust among Gulf countries⁵⁶.

Qatar decided to undertake an independent foreign policy when Emir Hamad Bin Khalifa took power in 1995. This policy has not changed since then and will not probably change in the future. Moreover, since other Gulf states, particularly the UAE and Saudi Arabia, are in a state of rivalry with Qatar, discord between them may emerge again. The best scenario might be to avoid direct conflict while maintaining rivalry in less impactful areas. For instance, if unrest erupts in any Arab country, Qatar will probably avoid intervening for the sake of good relations with its neighbors. However, it will probably not consult neighbors

IT IS INTERESTING THAT THE TOP QATARI DIPLOMAT HAS STUDIED TRANSFORMATION OF CONFLICTS AND IS AWARE THAT NEW PARADIGMS SHOULD BE APPLIED TO SOLVE INTER-STATE PROBLEMS

over other conflicts that do not have the potential to culminate in regime change. Moreover, it can be expected that Qatar will further invest in mediation diplomacy particularly outside the Middle East. The goal to make Doha as “the Geneva of the Middle East” will continue, but this time Doha may host non-regional conflicting parties as well. Overall, Qatar has returned back to mediation diplomacy and still acts independent but with greater caution and more diversified customers, while avoiding direct interventions in conflicts.

CONCLUSION

This study has analyzed Qatar’s foreign policy in the post-blockade period and compared it with the pre-Arab Spring decade in terms of mediation diplomacy. Before the Arab Spring, Qatar was known for its maverick foreign policy since a bloodless coup brought Hamad Bin Khalifa to power in 1995. Given its existential threats as a small state, Emir Hamad and his successor Emir Tamim followed an independent foreign policy from Saudi Arabia to ensure the country’s sovereignty. The Sheikdom adopted mediation diplomacy to gain new friends and expand in international politics. Indeed, mediation diplomacy worked well as it increased the country’s credibility and made it seen as a reliable mediator. However, since brokerage was being done in the influence area of regional powers, the Doha government was criticized harshly and relations were severed on some occasions. In addition, seeing the Arab Spring as an opportunity to increase its influence in the region, Qatar began to intervene in popular revolutions. However, this new foreign policy hurt the country and culminated in a three and a half-year blockade.

As soon as the blockade was lifted with the Al-Ula Declaration, Qatar resumed mediation diplomacy. While the strategy and the method are not different than pre-Arab Spring era, Qatar seems to act more carefully and professionally. The Sheikdom has already undertaken some mediatory roles, among which the American withdrawal from Afghanistan is the most conspicuous. Qatar hints that it will try to realize its goal to make Doha the hub of diplomacy in the Middle East. However, this study argues that its current foreign policy implies that mistrust may continue among GCC states. Nonetheless, relations are not expected to deteriorate as much as they did during the blockade.

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