MEDIATION IN THE FOREIGN POLICY ARSENAL OF A SMALL STATE : THE QATAR CASE STUDY, 1995 - 2023

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A thesis submitted for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Nottingham Trent University

2025

Abstract

This thesis addresses the State of Qatar's unique strategy of implementing mediation as a strategic tool in its foreign policy, by analyzing the emergence of this small state and its rise in status in the regional and international arena. Three concepts framed the research: Role Theory, Virtual Enlargement, and Status Seeking, in an effort to answer three pivotal questions: (1) How successful has Qatar been in using Role Theory as part of its foreign policy arsenal when mediating as a small state? (2) What is the importance of virtual enlargement for Qatar's involvement in international law and mediation? (3) Did status-seeking attribution help Qatar enhance its importance on an international level?

This research highlights Qatar's strategic role as a key and reliable player in prominent regional conflicts, including Darfur, Afghanistan, and Lebanon. Investment in financial resources, non-alignment with any party, and a distinguished geographical location led to Qatar's success in reaching agreements in disputes that seemed largely intractable and complex, and through them it gained recognition even from global powers such as the United States.

Through interviews with senior Qatari decision-makers and diplomats and detailed case studies, the thesis reveals how Qatar achieved these remarkable mediation efforts that received praise from the international community. While previous studies have addressed Qatari mediation from an empirical perspective, this study provides a unique vision of their mediation strategies, which shows important insights into the role of small states in mediation.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my beloved family for their endless love, unwavering support, and constant encouragement throughout my academic journey. Their patience, sacrifices, and faith in me have been the cornerstone of my success.

My sincere appreciation goes to **Dr. Imad El-Anis**, my supervisor, for his invaluable guidance, insightful feedback, and continuous mentorship. His expertise and dedication have played a pivotal role in shaping this research and enriching my academic experience.

I would also like to extend my heartfelt thanks to all the participants who generously agreed to take part in the interviews. Their time, openness, and contributions were essential to the success of this study.

Finally, I am deeply grateful to all the academic staff, colleagues, and scholars who supported, inspired, and assisted me during my Ph.D. journey. Their knowledge, encouragement, and collaboration have been instrumental in helping me overcome challenges and achieve this milestone.

This achievement would not have been possible without the collective efforts, kindness, and support of everyone mentioned above.

Introduction

Aims, Research Questions

In the past two decades, a new diplomatic powerhouse has established a formidable presence in the geopolitical arena: Qatar. This small, previously unheralded Gulf state has used its mastery of mediation to insert itself into some of the world's most complex and challenging conflicts. Leveraging its financial resources, non-aligned status, and geographical location at the heart of the Middle East, Qatar has repeatedly placed itself forward as a mediator in some of the region's most high-profile conflicts. In Darfur, Lebanon, Afghanistan, and elsewhere, Qatar has successfully brokered political agreements to bring an end to seemingly intractable violence. In doing so, it has established a reputation as a trusted and impartial mediator such that even the world's foremost power, the United States, has been moved to call upon its services (Milton *et al.,* 2023).

Although previous academic studies have examined Qatar's rise to mediation prominence on an empirical level (c.f. Kamrava, 2011; Roberts, 2012; Cooper and Momani, 2011; Barakat, 2012; Khatib, 2013; Ulrichsen, 2014; Mohammadzadeh, 2017; Milton *et al.,* 2023), none have adequately theorised and conceptualised Qatar's use of mediation as a diplomatic and political strategy. This thesis argues that three concepts – role theory, status-seeking, and virtual enlargement – help to explain how and why Qatar has turned to conflict mediation as a foreign policy strategy. Incorporating primary data from eight interviews conducted with senior Qatari diplomats and officials who have worked personally and intensively on Doha's mediation efforts over recent decades, and focusing specifically on three high-profile mediation cases (Darfur, Lebanon, and Afghanistan), the thesis argues that Qatar has deliberately and successfully balanced its humanitarian objectives against its strategic interests to achieve outcomes that are beneficial for both Qatar itself and for the wider international community. This model is not directly replicable by other small states, but there are potential lessons to be drawn that could benefit both other states and the field of conflict mediation more widely.

The thesis aims to answer the following research questions:

- How successful has Qatar been in using Role Theory as part of its foreign policy arsenal when mediating as a small state?
- What is the importance of virtual enlargement for Qatar's involvement in international law and mediation?
- Did status-seeking attribution help Qatar enhance its importance on an international level?

In answering these overarching research questions, the study also aims to uncover *why* Qatar has sought to mediate so many conflicts within its wider region of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA); *how* it has gone about mediating these conflicts, including the strategies, resources, and structures employed by the Qatari state in its approach to mediation; *whether* Qatar has succeeded in its mediation aims, both in each individual case and on a wider strategic level; and *what* Qatar's experiences reveal about the role of small states in the contemporary international environment.

The main finding, overwhelmingly supported by the officials interviewed for this study, is that role theory, virtual enlargement and status-seeking lie at the heart of Qatar's mediation activities and are the key to understanding its foreign policy behaviour. As one government official (Interviewee 2) observed to the author, these three concepts serve as an "integrated means" for understanding the nature and development of Qatari mediation policy and indeed its foreign policy more broadly. The explanatory power of these three concepts is demonstrated most of all in their combined effect. Although each of the three theories can individually explain some aspects of Qatar's foreign policy and mediation activities, it is the concepts *acting together in unison* that provide a comprehensive and compelling explanation of how and why Qatar deploys mediation as a foreign policy tool. Put in the simplest terms, we can state that mediation has become internalized as part of Qatar's national *role,* is pursued partly for reasons of *status,* and has worked to expand and *virtually enlarge* Qatar's influence and presence on the international stage.

A second key finding is that Qatar's mediation strategy has been largely successful. This finding contradicts the frequent assertion in the literature that Qatar has become overly visible

on the international stage in recent decades and that Doha's prolific mediation activities have contributed to this over-exposure (c.f. Ulrichsen, 2014; Milton *et al.,* 2023). In fact, as the case studies in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 underline, Qatar's mediation efforts have been notably successful. Instead, Qatar's problems have principally been created by other aspects of its foreign policy behaviour, notably an overactive phase during the Arab Spring when the role of mediator took a backseat to that of instigator of, and participant in, events (Ulrichsen, 2014). The recent resumption of Qatar's mediation activities, notably in brokering the US-Taliban agreement in 2020, appears to signal that this lesson has been understood at the highest levels of the Qatari leadership.

Success is not a fixed or uniform objective. Rather it is a distributed concept—its meanings and functions shifting across different cases, each reflecting a distinct phase in Qatar's diplomatic trajectory. In the first instance, in order to define the success of the Qatari mediation initiatives examined in this thesis, it is necessary to move beyond a narrow focus on conflict resolution outcomes. Instead, success should be understood in relation to how these efforts contributed to Qatar's evolving strategic objectives over time. One can argue that these include distinguishing its national identity from other regional actors and small states; protecting its economic and political independence from outside influence; building up its resilience so it can absorb and bounce back from shocks; and demonstrating its value to its regional and international partners

In the case of Darfur, Qatar's engagement marked an early attempt to play a meaningful regional role. At the time, the primary focus was on asserting its presence as a capable and impartial actor within the immediate Arab and African spheres. While elements of virtual enlargement were present, they remained secondary; Qatar was still in the early stages of shaping its identity as a mediator. Nonetheless, the eventual signing of the Doha Agreement signalled a significant breakthrough, validating Qatar's potential to contribute to regional stability and successfully contributing to the achievement of its strategic objectives as set out above.

This achievement laid the groundwork for more ambitious mediation efforts, particularly in the Lebanese context. Lebanon's internal fragmentation and external entanglements made the political landscape far more complex than the situation in Darfur. Here, success reflected a deeper integration of both regional role performance and an early form of virtual enlargement. The ability to bring rival factions to the table and broker the Doha Agreement demonstrated

that Qatar was not only a neutral player but also a country capable of navigating overlapping regional rivalries and engaging with international actors with credibility. This not only demonstrated its value but also contributed to regional stability and the indirect achievement of its independence and building up its resilience.

By the time that Qatar assumed a central role in the Afghan peace process, its mediation had matured into a vehicle for projecting influence far beyond its geographic boundaries. Having accumulated experience and diplomatic capital, Qatar was now focused more explicitly on virtual enlargement and status consolidation- both of which served to distinguish its identity and demonstrate its value. Its role in facilitating the agreement between the Taliban and the United States was only one aspect of its broader diplomatic operation. The ability to coordinate the largest evacuation in modern history—managing over 80% of airlifts during the withdrawal—underscored its operational capacity. Furthermore, its temporary management of Kabul International Airport and diplomatic representation of key countries, including the United States and the United Kingdom, highlighted a transition: from regional mediator to indispensable global facilitator.

In this light, Qatar's success in mediation cannot be reduced to a single objective or outcome. It reflects its wider and longer-term strategic goals—initially focused on role performance, later expanding into strategic reach, and ultimately seeking to affirm a distinctive international standing. Each mediation effort served a different function depending on the geopolitical moment, allowing Qatar to continuously reposition itself within a highly competitive regional and global environment. This layered understanding of success reveals a deliberate and adaptive path, one that blends ambition with pragmatism across time in the service of its strategic objectives.

However, the study also finds that Qatar's mediation model is not directly replicable by other small states that may have their own ambitions to increase their status and influence. Two (arguably three) structural factors make Qatar unusually well-placed to act as a mediator: first, its significant financial resources, which have been used extensively in mediation both for the purposes of hosting delegations (often at vast expense) and for investing in conflict-ravaged societies. This financial strength gives Qatar some of the attributes of a much larger state. Secondly, Qatar's geographic location at the heart of the Middle East, from where it has proximity to a number of the world's most significant conflicts, makes it an obvious interlocutor for countries within the region. Thirdly, Qatar's Islamic identity as a Muslim state

in a largely Muslim region makes it well-placed to mediate conflicts between or within Muslim-majority states. Qatar's success as a mediator thus appears to lie in its combination of structural advantages (money, location, and religion) and practical mediation expertise (neutrality, patience, adaptability). This mediation model is easy to admire but difficult to emulate.

These findings make an important contribution to the existing academic literature on small state mediation. No other academic analysis of this topic has sought to conceptualize small state mediation through the lens of role theory, status-seeking and virtual enlargement. Nor have there been many, if any, attempts to explore theories of small-state mediation in conversation with high-level officials with personal recent experience of mediating conflict. The theories developed in this thesis therefore make a novel contribution to existing academic knowledge on small mediation. In general, small state mediation is under-theorized in the existing literature, which relies overly on an empirical framework that more adequately explains the 'what' than the 'why' or 'how' of mediation.

Conceptual Framework

The study's conceptual framework is based on three overarching concepts: role theory, virtual enlargement, and status-seeking. *Role theory* is a sociological perspective focused on the importance of social roles in the functioning of society. It is one of the major theoretical approaches in sociology, and has been influential in the social psychology domain (Georgakakis *et al*., 2022). Role theory posits that social roles are the basic units of social structure, and provide a framework for the organised conduct of social life. The theory has its origins in the work of the sociologists George Herbert Mead, Max Weber and George Homans, who argued that social roles are the products of social interaction and are the key to understanding social behaviours (Shalin, 2020; Anglin *et al.,* 2022). The theory suggests that social behaviour is determined by the roles that individuals play in their social interactions. A role is a set of expectations about an individual's behaviour that are assigned by others in a particular social context. The theory suggests that individuals adopt different roles in different social contexts and that these roles guide their behaviour (Ahn *et al*., 2020). The theory has

been particularly useful in understanding how social institutions and cultural norms influence individual behaviour (Anglin et *al.,* 2022).

Understanding how small states perceive themselves—and how they are perceived by others—is central to any constructivist analysis of international relations. Within this perspective, identity is not fixed or given; it is formed through interaction, interpretation, and the broader norms of the international system. A number of studies have addressed this issue specifically in the context of small states. For example, Henrikson (2001) explores how these states craft their political and diplomatic identity in relation to their structural position within global hierarchies and the expectations projected onto them by larger powers. His work highlights the importance of perception in shaping both the behaviour and the legitimacy of small states on the world stage.

This line of inquiry is further enriched by contributions from Neumann and Gstöhl (2006), who analyse how small states actively negotiate their external identity through symbolic interaction and embedded narratives. Their analysis underscores that small states are not merely passive recipients of identity imposed from above but are often engaged in performative processes that help construct how they are recognised internationally. Similarly, Ingebritsen (2006) shows how Nordic small states have intentionally positioned themselves as norm-setting actors—what she refers to as "model powers"—by aligning with widely accepted ethical and institutional standards. Together, these perspectives reinforce the idea that small state agency is deeply embedded in ideational and representational practices, making the constructivist lens particularly well-suited to capture the nuance of their foreign policy behaviour.

In an international relations context, role theory highlights the importance of social roles in shaping state behaviour in the international system (Ahn *et al.,* 2020). Role theory is implicit in mainstream IR theory. Classic IR concepts such as revisionist versus status quo powers, for example, are essentially based on different perceptions of the roles a state should play in the international system (Harnisch *et al.,* 2011: 1). Role theory is principally concerned with the interaction between agent and structure, and thus can help to build an empirical bridge to traverse the longstanding gap between actor and system in international relations theory (Breuning, 2011: 16). Roles help states determine who they are (or believe themselves to be), what their interests are, and how they should interact with other states (Harnisch *et al.,* 2011:

1-2). Role theory is therefore useful to understand international relations because it helps to explain why states behave as they do.

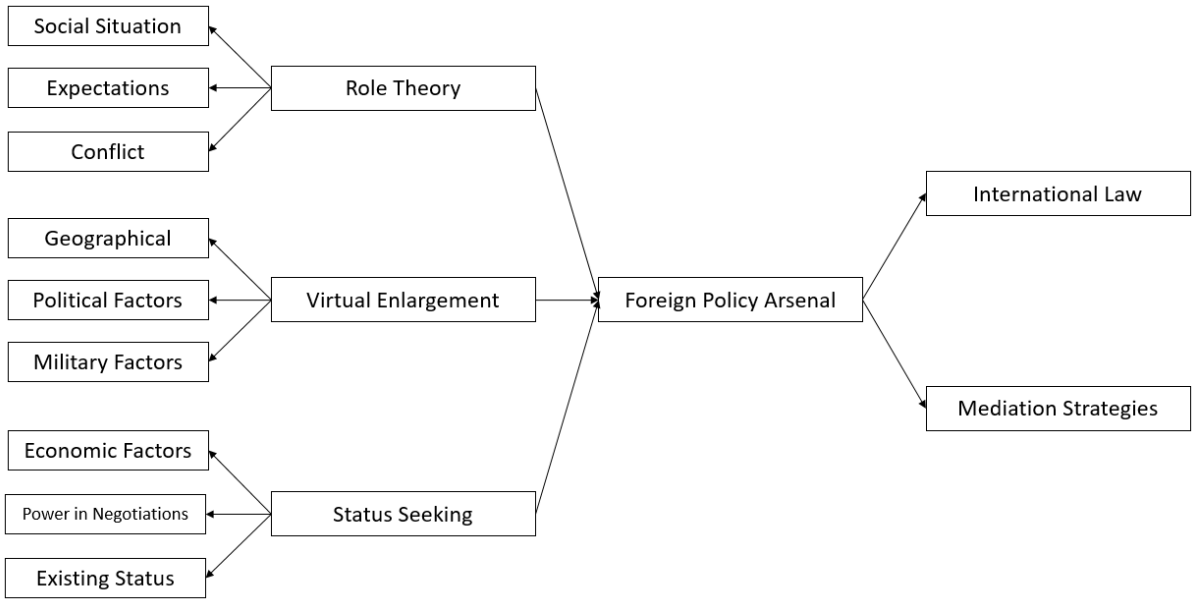
There are obvious parallels between role theory and constructivism. Indeed, role theory is essentially constructivist in nature given its emphasis on mutually constituted identities. A role is, at root, a social construct. As the constructivist Alexander Wendt (1997) theorised, the international system ultimately depends on what states make of it and what roles they choose (or feel compelled) to play. The resulting order sets the social parameters within which states pursue their individual goals and address their collective problems (Harnisch *et al.,* 2011: 2).

Status-Seeking refers to the act of trying to improve one's standing within a hierarchical community. In an international relations context, Larson *et al.* (2014: 7) define status as 'collective beliefs about a given state's ranking on valued attributes (wealth, coercive capabilities, culture, demographic position, sociopolitical organisation, and diplomatic clout). At root, status is about an actor's standing or rank within a hierarchical community (Renshon, 2017: 4; Ward, 2017: 4). Status-seeking by states is a recognised phenomenon in international relations. Indeed, status is regarded as an explanatory variable for state behaviour (McNamara, 2022: 1). The literature contains four major approaches to status: a social-psychological approach (Larson and Shevchenko, 2019), a rationalist approach (Renshon, 2017), a constructivist view (Murray, 2019), and a status immobility approach (Ward, 2017). These differing approaches are explored further in Chapter Two.

Finally, *virtual enlargement* refers to the process by which a state expands its presence and influence in international affairs without physically increasing its territory or, in certain contexts, material capabilities. Virtual enlargement is closely tied to the notion of soft power – a concept first theorised by Joseph Nye (2004), who defined it as the ability to co-opt others (rather than coerce them) through the attractiveness of one's culture, political values, and policies. Soft power makes it possible to get others to want what you want (Chong, 2010: 385). When states deploy soft power effectively, they virtually enlarge their reach and presence (Chong, 2010: 383). Governance models, political economy, and diplomatic mediation can all constitute bases of soft power that enable a state to defy its territorial limitations (Chong, 2010: 383). Small states may also possess intellectual human resources and public relations skills disproportionate to their physical size (Vukadinovic, 1971). Virtual enlargement is an important strategy for small states because one method of survival in the anarchical

international system is to enlarge their importance to the international community (Cooper and Shaw, 2009).

Broadly, the thesis posits that role theory is primarily a function of social expectations within a country, especially in terms of public expectations that a state seeks to attempt to alleviate conflict (De Carvalho and Neumann, 2015). Virtual enlargement policies were found to be dependent on geographical, political and military factors. Finally, status-seeking was found to be dependent on economic factors, together with the existing status of the country in terms of international standing (Ferrer, 2018). This can be demonstrated in diagrammatic form:



Key Terms and Scope of Enquiry

Scope of Enquiry

The study's main area of investigation is Qatar's use of conflict mediation as a foreign policy tool. This inevitably connects to adjacent issues such as Qatari foreign policy more generally, the role of small states in the international system, the field of conflict mediation and preventive diplomacy, the role of international law, inter-state relations within the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, and theoretical approaches to international relations and foreign policy behaviour. While these topics are frequently explored in some depth in order to advance the

research process and illuminate key concepts, the main underlying focus always remains concentrated upon Qatar's deployment of mediation as a foreign policy strategy.

Defining Mediation

Mediation is defined by the United Nations as a process whereby 'a third party assists two or more parties, with their consent, to prevent, manage, or resolve a conflict by helping them to develop mutually acceptable agreements' (Alqashouti, 2021). Mediation thus involves an impartial third party (or mediator) assisting the parties to a conflict to communicate with each other and reach an agreement to resolve the conflict. The mediator does not compel an agreement; rather, it facilitates communication between the parties to help them reach a mutually acceptable resolution. Historically, mediation in international relations was mainly practised by international institutions. Increasingly, however, individual states have sought to take on the role of mediator.

The United Nations Charter (Articles 2 and 33) emphasises the importance of resolving disputes through peaceful means. Utilising the services of third-party mediators is one way of achieving this, and international law provides for the mediation of conflicts (Ginsburg, 2020). Specifically, Article 8 of the Charter states that third parties should only become involved in conflict in order to mediate it and try to prevent war. Bull (2019) observes that the UN Charter should be observed by mediators, and that every effort should be undertaken to refrain from excessive reliance on compulsion or coercion in mediation.

The effectiveness of a mediator is determined by the attributes they possess as actors on the international stage (Szalai, 2018). Nathan (1999) has suggested six core principles of mediation: Mediators should not be partisan; the parties must consent to mediation and the identity of the mediator; conflict cannot be resolved quickly and easily; the parties must own the settlement; mediators should not apply punitive measures; mediation is a specialised activity. These principles can be distilled into several core attributes that it is important for a mediator to possess. First, mediators need to possess sufficient state capacity to manage the process of negotiations. This requires, at a minimum, a professional diplomatic corps with the

capacity to oversee a negotiation process; diplomats and policymakers well-versed in the issues at stake; and the financial resources to host delegations, potentially for months or years at a time. Understanding the issues at hand is crucial; it is necessary to understand, manage and transform the 'psycho-political dynamics' of the conflict (Nathan, 1999, p. 1).

Secondly, neutrality is an important characteristic of mediating states. Mediators need to be perceived as relatively neutral and impartial actors by the parties to a conflict. If the mediator is perceived as too close to one side or the other, it is unlikely to win the acceptance of all parties. States with an established tradition of neutrality or non-alignment are therefore particularly well suited to the role of international mediator (Goetschel, 2020, p. 527). A state is perceived as neutral when its interests in relation to a particular case or conflict do not align with either one side or the other (Goetschel, 2020, p. 528). Perceived neutrality helps to foster trust and encourage engagement (Goetschel, 2011).

Thirdly, and relatedly, states with minimal involvement in regional and/or global affairs are also perceived to be well-suited to a mediating role (Holsti, 1970). These states carry less political baggage and have fewer direct interests at stake, enabling them to avoid the zero-sum dilemmas experienced by states with more direct involvement in regional affairs.

Finally, mediators need to be willing to take on the role. Given the stakes involved, this is likely to require executive approval at the level of prime minister or president. Securing this approval may often be the greatest hurdle, especially where a conflict is regarded as intractable.

Defining Small States and Their Role in Mediation

The smallness of a state in a global political context has been depicted by the size of its population and its degree of involvement in international relations (Gelaidan *et al*., 2022). According to Roca and Martin-Diaz (2021), the size of a state is the primary determinant of its international position from a neo-rationalist point of view. Two-thirds of United Nations member states are categorised as small states (Zimmerman, 2019). The majority of inter-state conflicts also involve small states (Brannagan and Giulianotti, 2018). Small states are not

uniform, however, and vary considerably in terms of size, population, economy, natural resources, and state capacity (Chong, 2010, p. 284).

The growing influence of small states in the international system has attracted increasing scholarly attention in recent years (Melissen, 2005) but remains under-theorised at the conceptual level. Although often defined as states with a population of less than 1.5 million, the challenges faced by small states are often shared by those with slightly larger populations. The basic challenge confronting every state – how to ensure survival in an anarchic international system – is magnified many times over for small states. Small states have a reduced margin for error in international relations, and lack the physical capabilities to respond effectively to externally-imposed crises. This creates a heightened vulnerability to external predation. Despite this, however, there is growing consensus that small states are much more viable entities than once thought. Indeed, there is ample evidence of small states successfully developing a variety of strategies to overcome their smallness and become influential members of the international community.

Although small state mediation is not widely discussed in the literature (Solis, 2021), there is increasing acceptance that small states can often be superior mediators to their large state counterparts. Lazarev (2019) notes that large state mediation has often resulted in failure, more often prolonging conflicts than resolving them. Small states are generally perceived as more neutral and less partisan intermediaries, enhancing their acceptability as a mediator. Possessing less hard power and often with fewer direct interests at stake in a particular case, small states generate fewer security concerns for the parties to a conflict (Mason, 2011; Hey, 2002). This increases their acceptability as mediators (Slim, 1994, p. 207). Small states are also more likely to be disinterested as their involvement in global affairs is generally lower than that of larger states (Lanz and Mason, 2012).

Small states also arguably have a greater need to make their presence noted on the international stage, as well as a greater incentive to see the mediation process through to a successful conclusion, since their status is more dependent on it. In contrast, a larger state can opt out of the mediation process, or reject the role entirely, without necessarily significantly impacting its status. They may also enjoy greater agility and adaptability in their foreign policies, potentially enabling them to offer more creative solutions to resolve conflicts. Such a nimble approach can become a key characteristic of small states seeking to capitalise on their strengths in mediation (Brannagan and Giulianotti, 2018).

Current State of the Literature and Perceived Lacuna

There is extensive literature on small states, mediation, and Qatar itself, although relatively little that adequately conceptualises small state mediation and examines its underlying drivers. Providing a comprehensive and universally accepted definition of small states has so far eluded both theoretical and empirical literature (Maass, 2009). Small states have often been defined as small based on their geographical or population sizes. However, when categorizing through the lens of economic or diplomatic power, the relevance of the geographic dimension is much diminished. This poses the question of how the concept of smallness can be determined when traditional measures of smallness, on many occasions, do not explain how states traditionally seen as small outweigh states that are traditionally seen as larger (in the geographical sense, for example) both in terms of diplomatic power and economic power. Consequently, there is constant debate both in theoretical approaches and in empirical analyses of small states over what truly constitutes a small state and whether or not geographic size has any relevance to international relations.

Much of the confusion surrounding small states and attempts to understand their characteristics comes from applications of realist theory in explaining small states as entities that possess limited resources. As noted by Browning (2006), the realist paradigm defined power in terms of measurable units, such as natural resources, military power, population, or economy. However, this approach disregards the potential of small states to exercise diplomatic, or other forms of less tangible, power through strategic or other means. As exemplified by Galal (2020), a realist perspective of understanding how small states such as Qatar, Holland, or Finland have risen to power is futile. This is because states can possess other forms of power and influence that cannot be measured by quantitative means. Within the realist view, small states can only exercise power through various forms of alliances, which may also offer protection, deterrence and so on.

At the other end of the spectrum, Moravcsik (1997) argues for a liberal theory of understanding small state behaviour and development. Moravscik (1997: 516) contends that small states are shaped by the surrounding domestic and international environment in which they are embedded. In this sense, government policy is constrained by underlining interests, identities, and the power of social groups. However, Moravscik (1997) relies on a liberal democratic model that lacks application to a traditional, monarchical state such as Qatar. In

this case, cultural identities postulated by constructivism and state agency may have greater value in explaining small states' stability and development. Liberal theories might not be fully able to explain how small states gain power despite the absence of some or all of these Western democratic principles. However, the concept of liberal power based around persuasion rather than coercion, described by Joseph Nye (1990) as the power of attraction, can play an important role if the small state actor effectively uses its values, culture and achievements to gain influence.

Simpson (2006) and Long (2017) argue that the classification of small states is to be regarded as an entirely new analytical category in international relationships. Long (2017) in particular proposes a shift from the current terminology of "small" and "large" states, which the author describes as terms of absolute values, to a terminology of asymmetry. Thus, through this perspective, states are neither small nor large, but rather are in a power relationship with other states and/or the rest of the world. Further, it is the nature, strength, and benefits of these relationships that dictate resources, economic power, and development on the international stage. Asymmetries can then be identified more so in military power, but less so in diplomatic or economic power. Herein, the author proposes the use of hypo-power, to define the limited power in any domain that a state may have, while preponderant-power would define a state that holds power on all fronts, be it diplomatic, economic, or military.

An important aspect to point out is that from the perspective of international relations, using an asymmetry lens to characterise small states further enables an assessment of the strategic actions of these states. As noted by Long (2017), this method allows for a better understanding of how *weaker* states act and react in dynamic relationships based on their power asymmetries. One can further argue that actions and reactions would thus be used to select the theoretical lens for explaining small state strategy. If this approach is to remain valid, then observations of small states acting on the international scene through diplomatic and foreign policy should express different strategic actions when compared to other states that may be categorised as preponderantly powerful. This insight will be of some importance for the purposes of this study.

In explaining small state behaviour in foreign policy, East (1973) describes the traditionalist depiction as a series of seven potential strategic actions. In this sense, small states are seen as having a low level of participation in international affairs, and a high level of involvement in intergovernmental organisations. Further, small states support international legal norms, while

avoiding the use of force, and avoiding behaviours and policies that could undermine greater powers. Concomitantly, in the traditionalist view, small states focus on a narrow geopolitical area while utilising frequently moral and normative positions in international matters. However, as observed by East (1973), these actions also characterise the strategies of large states, or greater powers, thus they cannot only be specific to small states.

Thorhallson and Steinsson (2017) argue that small states have unique vulnerabilities which do not allow them to achieve favourable outcomes in foreign policy as often as larger states can. The remaining strategy is then focused on building multilateral relationships and organisations, which are able to reduce power asymmetries, impose constraints on a large scale and decrease the transactional cost of diplomacy. Kallas (2008) further notes that a crucial distinction between small state foreign policy behaviour and the behaviour of larger entities is the formation of multilateral, rather than bilateral relations. Thus, while large states tend to focus on building bilateral relations in foreign policy, small states are concerned with multilateral policies as these create more opportunities for resources. However, small states might focus on bilateral relations especially if these relations provide security or economy shatter or have a strategic nature.

Consequently, the exercise of foreign policy power for small states firstly stems from the exercise of the power of influence, herein defined as the ability to have other states aligned with the small state's objectives or to have other states take their interests into account before they act. This is likely to happen if the small states possess a resource upon which other states depend. At the same time, the leadership actions of a small state that can allow the state to gain prestige in the international arena, depends on opportunities, as well as the acceptance of other states to be led by the small state actor (Braveboy-Wagner, 2010).

Finally, as argued by Chong and Maass (2010), and as emerging from the above examples, small states are by no means powerless. Moreover, given the alignment of these states with moral and humanitarian international norms as initially postulated by East (1973), when small states exercise this power, global stability and progress can be achieved. Consequently, the global dynamics of small states and their foreign policy can lead to stability rather than conflict as postulated by the realist view. Nonetheless, despite diplomatic and trade efforts, small states still need to maintain their security, especially in the light of greater power seeking their influence and resources. This gives rise to different strategic approaches to security and power. However, the principles that are seen to govern small states' behaviour as theorised by (East,

1973), as well as their behaviour in the areas of international trade and economic development (Jazbec, 2010), fail to apply in the case of Qatar. Consequently, traditional approaches to state security, conflict management, and foreign policy seem to be of little use in explaining Qatar's behaviour in international policy and security.

Drawing from an analysis of 100 different states and their approach to international security negotiations, Panke (2017) argues that two categories of states can be distinguished. In this sense, some states voice their position often within security negotiations, while others remain silent. This led to the hypothesis that active participation in security negotiations is driven by two aspects. Firstly, state capacities, referring to political and financial capacities, can modulate state involvement in negotiations for security. Secondly, state incentives further drive involvement in security negotiations. Much of the discussion presented by Panke (2017) concerning state incentives is listed in conjunction with the state's capabilities. Thus, if a state has more capabilities, and high incentives, the state will tend to be more active in security negotiations. For example, it has been determined that states that possess financial, military, and political capabilities will most often share their positions and seek benefits in negotiations. This clearly has potential application to Qatar given its energy and financial resources.

Small states can either focus on defence and neutrality, or engage in cooperative schemes such as alliances and band-wagoning, seek shelter or develop hedging strategies. Hedging in particular, seems to be preferred by small states, by maintaining multilateral relations with greater powers and thus avoiding balancing and band-wagoning, which would ultimately lead to power compromises on behalf of greater states. Hedging is particularly preferred by small states in the Arabian Peninsula, as the threat of greater powers, such as Saudi Arabia or Iran may force smaller states into band-wagoning tactics. Hamdi and Salman (2020) argue that hedging, and thus maintaining multilateral relations with the greater powers in the Arabian Peninsula, provides an answer to the security dilemma of small states in the region, such as Kuwait, Bahrain, or Qatar. Nonetheless, the fact that smaller states in this region do not share strong ties and healthy relations between themselves especially lately and the regionally greater powers (Iran and Saudi Arabia) may be a significant impediment to this.

As observed by Hamdi and Salman (2020) and elaborated earlier by al-Hamad (1997), Qatar shares a tense relationship with Bahrain and a historically difficult one with Saudi Arabia. The fact that all six countries form a part of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) does not seem to ensure mutual security as the lack of border rules and constant religious tensions set significant

pressures on national securities of small states and greater powers alike. To pursue the proposal issued by Hamdi and Salman (2020) concerning hedging for security may thus seem difficult to achieve, as some of these states may have positive relations with each other, but negative relations with others.

The power dynamic of small states in the Arabian Peninsula seems to contradict the classification for security strategies issued by Panke (2017) and Vaicekauskaitė (2017), as the GCC, although with the formal status of an alliance, misses on the most important rules for state sovereignty, while loss of territory in an oil-rich region would signify important economic losses, and by default, a loss of power (al-Hamad, 1997). And with the existence of such disagreements and the serious impacts the result of not being settled between these countries, and between these small states then exists constant tension, in the absence of a universally accepted small stat leader. Multilateralism is nevertheless observed in cooperating with greater powers, which ensure states' security and avoid external interference. Thus, it can be argued that state interest and global power dynamics even within regions inhabited by small states play a significant part in security policies.

Long (2017) argues that small state power originates from three different categories derivative (relying on a greater power), collective (coalitions and international institutions), and particularly-intrinsic (material assets). The author further states, small states are in a position to exert power and influence with their means and are not deemed to be powerless when held against a larger country. The case of Qatar can be held as an example in this case, evident with its cordial relations with Iran. A demographically and militarily larger country, Iran however seeks to maintain a cohesive relationship with Qatar owing to its economic and political influence (its association with the GCC).

Small States and Mediation

Although the primary concern of this study lies with contemporary forms of small state diplomacy, it is important to position this within a broader intellectual lineage that traces back to the Cold War period. This era was defined by great power politics where two superpowers with large populations, territories, armies and economies dominated international affairs. Other actors, even those with significant levels of regional influence and standing were considered system ineffective in this bipolar reality. Small states, for their part, were typically characterised by limited military and economic resources, rendering them vulnerable and heavily reliant on the goodwill or protection of larger powers. The early small state scholarship was published in an environment where this worldview as paramount. They were considered primarily reactive or even passive actors in international politics, whose behaviour was shaped more by the structural constraints of the international system than by independent strategic calculations.

Two foundational works illustrate this early perspective. David Vital (1967), in his seminal study *The Inequality of States*, argued that the position of small powers was defined by systemic inequality and inherent dependence. Similarly, Keohane (1969) contended that small states lacked the capacity to act autonomously in shaping international outcomes, instead aligning themselves with major powers and engaging in largely adaptive foreign policy behaviour. These writings contributed to a dominant narrative in which small states were not considered true agents of international change, but rather objects of systemic pressures.

However, such interpretations have not gone unchallenged. Over the last two decades, a growing body of literature has begun to question the deterministic logic of earlier theories. More recent works emphasise the capacity of small states to innovate diplomatically, shape normative agendas, and carve out strategic roles despite their limited material power. One of the more comprehensive contributions to this debate is Long's (2022) study, which reconsiders the agency of small states in global affairs. He demonstrates how, under specific conditions, these states are not only active participants but also capable of influencing international norms and outcomes through strategic positioning and diplomatic agility.

Engaging with both classical and contemporary perspectives adds value to the current study, offering a historically grounded understanding of how perceptions of small state behaviour have evolved. This shift—from viewing small states as constrained followers to recognising

them as potential leaders in particular diplomatic domains—provides an essential backdrop for analysing the case of Qatar as a small but increasingly assertive actor in international mediation.

In general, small states seek to maintain neutrality in international conflicts and are often reluctant to take sides due to a fear of losing multilateral or bilateral relations, and by extension their soft power. When conflicts do arise, small states thus seek to avoid band-wagoning or alliances. Similarly, rising powers also show reluctance to adhere to one side or another during regional conflicts because of the principle of non-interference in international affairs (Dal and Emel, 2020). It is recognised here as previously discussed, that small states derive various advantages from pursuing a humanitarian agenda. This leads itself to a role in maintaining peace and resolving conflicts amicably (Tay, 2014). Preventative diplomacy can be used in order to avoid conflicts, prevent an escalation of existing conflicts, or limit the spread of conflicts. This form of diplomacy can be deployed either by a single small state actor or by an alliance of small state actors (Steiner, 2004). Small, stable states with transparent governance and norm advocacy generally maintain a high level of credibility and trust in the international community, making them particularly suitable potential mediators due to their perceived neutrality and impartiality (Tay, 2014).

However, Sverdrup (2003) notes that the best predictors of small state conflict management strategies are their domestic traditions, internal styles of decision-making, and preferred style of conflict resolution (i.e. domestic-level factors). The case of domestic tradition shaping peace policy becomes evident in an analysis of Switzerland's peace policy, carried out by Graf and Lanz (2013). The particular case of Switzerland, in which the country has been able to maintain neutrality in military interventions, dates back to its centuries-long tradition of neutrality, including during the Second World War. In terms of peace operations, the country is mostly reliant on civilian instruments rather than military actions. This contradicts the strategies of both EU and NATO members, and has been possible due to strong internal institutions, protecting Switzerland from adherence to international alliances and conformity with EU rules (Graf and Lanz, 2013).

There are several advantages for small states in conflict resolution. Firstly, a peace policy aligned with those in a larger group ensures that the resources needed in the case of conflict can be provided by partners. Secondly, small states can gain international visibility and through this, power of influence on the international scene (Schmidl, 2001). Small states tend to be

more flexible and adaptive in field situations, while their perceived lack of power elicits fewer polarised responses and allows them to assume an honest broker role in mediation. Also, because the credibility of small states may be more dependent on a successful outcome, they may be more patient, consistent and engaged than a large power during the mediation process.

A recent article by Milton *et al.* (2023) traces Qatar's evolution as a small state mediator over the past two decades. The authors observe that Qatar's role in mediation diminished during the 2017-21 Gulf crisis, when Saudi Arabia led an effective blockade of Qatar. During the process of the resolution of the crisis, however, Qatar successfully brokered an agreement between the U.S. and the Taliban in 2020. This paved the way for the subsequent U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. Nonetheless, Milton *et al.* (2023: 3) draw a contrast between Qatar's 'hyper-active meditation phase' from 2006-2010 and its more cautious approach in recent years. This shift in strategy appears to have been driven by the widespread backlash within the Arab world, emanating especially from Saudi Arabia and other GCC states, against Qatar's perceived meddling and pro-Islamist stance during the Arab Spring (Ulrichsen, 2014). Milton *et al.* (2023: 17) suggest that Qatar now has a lower tolerance for risk in its mediation efforts, and is willing to intervene in conflict resolution only when formally requested to do so.

A further potential discontinuity from Qatar's earlier mediation phase is that recent mediation efforts, especially in Afghanistan, arguably demonstrate Doha's increasing alignment with U.S. security interests. It is notable that the resolution of the Gulf crisis came about partly as a result of American pressure on Saudi Arabia and the other GCC states to bring their blockade of Qatar to an end. The U.S. also maintains a direct security guarantee to Qatar, partly connected to the presence of the American military airbase at Al-Udeid (Milton *et al.,* 2023: 6). The U.S.'s willingness to allow Qatar to act as a mediator with the Taliban also demonstrated the U.S.'s interest in Qatar returning to its former role as a trusted regional partner. This signals that Qatar has successfully repaired its reputation for neutrality as a third-party mediator. An alternative view, however, is that Doha's reliance on the U.S. to save its position during the blockade marked a subtle but important shift for Qatar from strict neutrality and impartiality to a position more closely aligned with American security interests. Qatar's designated status of 'major non-NATO ally', assigned to it by the U.S. in 2022, is arguably incompatible with full impartiality and neutrality (Milton *et al.,* 2023: 17).

A third shift in Qatar's mediation approach has occurred recently in relation to the use of financial incentives. In the three most recent mediation cases – Afghanistan, Libya, and Chad

– Qatar has refrained from offering major financial inducements to reach an agreement. This marks an apparent shift from the 'chequebook diplomacy' that characterised Qatari mediation strategy in the 2000s and 2010s (Milton *et al.,* 2023: 18). That said, Qatar has continued to host delegations in Doha at considerable expense to itself – including a 400-person Chadian delegation in 2022 and a sizeable Afghan cohort during intra-Afghan negotiations (Ibid).

Qatari mediation has also been practised by an increasingly diverse array of actors in recent years. During 2006-2010, Qatar's mediation efforts were overwhelmingly concentrated around the personage of then Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Hamad bin Jassim Al-Thani. More recently, other Qatari institutions and actors have entered the field of mediation. This has included the Special Envoy, National Security Advisor, Foreign Minister and Deputy Foreign Minister in the case of Afghanistan; the Emir in the case of Libya; and the Special Envoy and Secretary of the Emir for Security Affairs in the case of Chad (Milton *et al.,* 2023: 18). This suggests a broadening and potential deepening of Qatar's state capacity to mediate - previously a perceived weakness of its mediation efforts.

Although highly useful in providing the empirical context behind Qatar's mediation activism, none of the studies mentioned has sought to theorise Qatar's mediation strategies on a conceptual level. A related sub-strand of literature has sought to conceptualise Qatar's aid investment activities in the Horn of Africa (c.f. O'Bright, 2017), but none to the author's knowledge has directly applied small state foreign policy theories and security strategies to Qatari mediation practices. There has also been relatively little effort to connect Qatar's mediation campaigns to the wider theoretical literature on small state foreign policy behaviour. Nor did any of the aforementioned studies generate any significant new primary data. Although Kamrava (2011) interviewed a small number of diplomats for his 2011 study on Qatari mediation, there has been no attempt to build a thesis around the contributions of Qatari diplomats and their insights into the theoretical underpinnings of Qatar's mediation strategy.

Qatari Foreign Policy

The development of Qatar as a small independent state with a growing role in international relations has been discussed by Peterson (2006) from the perspective of state branding. As argued by this author, Qatar was quick to secure a position on the global scene and has been able to do so because of its immense gas reserves. In 2006, Qatar held the 3rd world's largest gas reserve, becoming an actor of interest for states in the region, as well as for western states. Starting from this point, Qatar sought to build an image of an independent state, with international prestige, firstly by housing various international conventions. Qatar further developed its own airline, thus having its name branded on airplanes and reaching airports all over the world, while strategically developing internal policies to enhance its participation in international organisations. Within the GCC, as previously discussed by Putri (2011) and Kamrava (2011), Qatar managed to build an image of neutrality and mediation, with significant interest in de-escalating conflicts in the region, albeit in the absence of support, still being unable to obtain peace.

This reputation was largely lost during the Arab Spring, at least in the eyes of many regional rivals, when Qatar's actions in support of protesters, especially in Libya, were perceived by other states within the region as destabilising and pro-Islamist (Ulrichsen, 2014). Roberts (2012) attempts to explain Qatar's behaviour and strategies as a small state, arguing that these effects can be understood through the lens of historical events and Qatar's supposed objectives for leadership. Roberts (2012) points out that Qatar's support for rebel groups in Libya or Syria may be regarded as a moral action, given that decisions are taken only by a small group of people, yet repercussions may be disastrous. Previous studies (East, 1973) underlined the fact that small states may seek to take a moral position to consolidate their relevance for normative behaviour in the international system. Yet these assessments may be negatively affected by the approach taken by Qatar (just like any other country) in the Arab Spring, where the Qatari role was viewed as biased and destabilising.

Roberts (2012) also argues that a lack of leadership characterises the Arab region, which thus leaves a political vacuum for acquiring a strong leadership in the Arabian Peninsula. This may therefore explain Qatar's efforts to assert its national brand locally and internationally, as well as to make swift decisions on regional matters. With a strong position in international affairs, and sufficient resources, the small state is thus free to experiment in attempts to secure

its position. Based on the analysis of Qatar's actions in the Arab Spring carried out by Miller and Verhoeven (2019), it becomes self-evident that Qatar did not seek to *depolarise* the region per-se, but rather to overthrow the *status-quo* and from the chaos created, to emerge as a leading power. After all, the small state had now been known internationally as a mediating state, and thus as the only state capable of re-establishing order in the Gulf through meditating efforts and opting for options such as negotiations with conflicting countries.

Although Barakat (2012) characterises these *side-taking* actions as a threat to Qatar's impartial role, the author also recognises that peace efforts and their success are dependent on regional alliances. Barakat (2012) does not look into this matter further but as shown by the aftermath of conflicts in Libya and Yemen, Qatar risked using resources to mediate conflicts in the region with no definitive end. A change in strategy can therefore be postulated, whereby Qatar seeks partnerships with actors with considerable international influence, by acting as a mediator and negotiator not within the region, but between the West and the Arab world. Two potential benefits arise from this despite potential tensions created with other Arab nations: Qatar's leadership role is reaffirmed, and bilateral relations are built mostly with western nations and alliances, rather than with the only GCC. Consequently, it can be argued that Qatar's mediating role is not carried out exclusively for the sake of mediation and stability, but rather striving to reach a clearer manifestation of the Qatari leadership's direction, headed by the Head of State, in pursuit of its interests.

Zweiri and Al Qawasmi (2021) argue that despite the fact that Qatar used mediation as a form of soft diplomacy, it did so only to ensure its own stability and pursue a narrower status interest. Indeed, there have been many occasions when Qatar's mediation role provided the small state with a significant advantage over other GCC countries. One such example is the US-Taliban talks in 2018 and respectively 2019, where Saudi Arabia and the UAE both attempted to have these discussions carried out within their own capitals, yet these talks still occurred in Qatar's capital, Doha. This example demonstrates how a mediation role for a small state can be used as a foreign policy instrument to achieve an international presence and enhanced soft power. Given that Qatar's previous strategy relied on hedging, by maintaining partnerships with larger actors in the region, as well as abroad, tensions for housing the discussions were controlled. Concomitantly, by expanding this strategy to unofficial groups such as the Taliban, which did not lack influence or military power, Qatar secured all three parts (the West, the Gulf, and the Taliban) within its mediating umbrella. Finally, as noted by

Mohammadzadeh (2017), Qatar's partnership with the US in terms of military force allows the smaller states to benefit from this bilateral relation by focusing its resources elsewhere.

Methodological Overview

The methodology is based on a multi-method research strategy in line with the arguments of scholars such as Wright (2013), who have argued that foreign policies are qualitative variables better explained by characteristics than magnitude. The study's method can be divided into two parts, which together comprise: (1) interviews conducted with eight Qatari diplomats and government officials closely involved in the country's mediation efforts in recent years, with the data generated by these interviewed analysed through thematic analysis; and (2) the analysis of secondary data through a systematic literature review. These analyses will enable this study to demonstrate the importance of external mediation of conflicts for small states.

This study incorporates triangulation through a two-part research plan and validates the theoretical arguments as applied to real world case studies with a focus on virtual enlargement, status seeking and role theory. Triangulation serves a dual purpose. First, it fosters an environment for holistic analysis by employing multiple perspectives, thereby facilitating cross-verification of findings and enhancing the overall validity and dependability of research outcomes. Second, it enables a deeper and more nuanced comprehension of Qatar's foreign policy strategies as a small state actor. The information generated by the data collection process has been subjected to a thorough thematic analysis, an approach designed to maximise the material's utility and interpretive potential.

Since this study aims to triangulate the results to demonstrate the links between theoretical arguments on virtual engagement, status seeking and role theory, it was important for the study to incorporate a methodology that justifies testing that addresses all these dimensions. A multi-method approach enabled the research to critically analyse the qualitative variables through a range of testing methodologies that are discussed in the following sections of this chapter. Hunter and Brewer (2015) have also argued that the incorporation of a multi-method approach enables a study to explore theoretical and real-world cases in a pointed manner whereby the validity of the arguments is judged through the triangulation technique. The validity of this

study's arguments is of optimal importance along with their alignment with the theoretical underpinnings addressed.

Phase or part one of this study draws on secondary data, while the second phase draws on primary data. Each phase consists of a distinct data collection method, sampling technique and data analysis that draws on triangulation. Furthermore, the incorporation of multi-method research also enables the study to verify its findings against the existing literature and formalised findings incorporated from the primary data. Jonsen and Jehn (2009) established that triangulation in qualitative data enables a study to cement characteristics of the variables, allowing both for a deeper understanding of the foreign policies of Qatar and the role of a small state as a conflict mediator.

Phase 1

The first phase of the research process gathered data from secondary sources such as peer-reviewed academic articles, academic books, think tank publications, government documents, and statistical data from government and official websites, in order to establish an understanding of the aims and objectives of this study while answering its research questions. This secondary data was used for two purposes: a systematic literature review and case studies. A systematic review, as the name suggests, is a systematic, reproducible methodology for collating, selecting, and critically appraising all relevant research on a particular topic. It is methodically intended to reduce bias and ensure replicability. The steps typically include identifying a clear research question, setting explicit selection criteria, conducting a comprehensive literature search, appraising the quality of the studies, and synthesizing the results in an impartial and explicit manner. According to Farquhar *et al.* (2020), the confluence of real-world case studies with conceptual frameworks serves to solidify the findings of the research, providing it with a superior degree of validity. Consequently, the systematic literature review is anticipated to confer a distinct advantage to the study, given its capacity to succinctly distil the primary debates in the literature concerning the key themes under scrutiny.

Another factor considered in this research was the chosen time-frame of 1995-2022. Major events that took place outside of this time frame - such as the 1990-91 Gulf conflict – were excluded. The sampling methodology for the case studies was largely the same as for the

aforementioned literature. However, case studies were also included that covered the beginning of the rule of the former Emir of the state of Qatar Sheik Hamad bin Khalifa and related it to the current foreign policy arsenal of Qatar. Moreover, virtual enlargement was adopted in order to explore the real time strategies of Qatar and the fulfilment of its respective aims and objectives. The research incorporated case studies through official government records of policies and approaches to the conflicts in Darfur, Lebanon and Afghanistan. As noted, these cases were selected as representative examples of Qatari mediation for the 1995-2022 period.

Phase 2

Phase 2 of the study focused on the collection of primary data by conducting interviews with Qatari mediation practitioners. Golan *et al.* (2019) observe that although foreign policy stakeholders are the entire population of a selected country, not all stakeholders are equally informed. Therefore, this research discarded the usage of a random sampling technique. Instead, it has chosen a selected sampling technique focused on government officials, key foreign policy decision-makers and experienced experts in regional and international relations. In line with this approach, a number of government officials in the State of Qatar were interviewed and in office, who have direct experience in mediation processes or who have experience in the field of foreign policy and have supervised or participated in one way or another in the State of Qatar's foreign policies, including mediation. For example, senior government officials who represented Qatar's foreign policy, senior officials who represented the country at the United Nations, and members of the diplomatic corps.

The eight individuals who agreed to participate in the study included the Special Envoy of the Minister of Foreign Affairs (both the previous and current), whose responsibility it is to act as a mediator and the State of Qatar's representative in all matters related to mediation efforts. It is his responsibility to perform this role at all steps of the mediation process, as well as to represent and convey the Minister of Foreign Affairs' and the State of Qatar's directions. The Special Envoy represents the most senior official representation of the State of Qatar in terms of mediation, and thus these interviews enrich the project by providing the perspective of the most senior policymaking levels of the State of Qatar.

In addition to the Special Envoy, six other officials (including senior officials and foreign ministry representatives) agreed to participate in the interview process. In terms of significance, the fact that such authorities have formally and practically participated in the process of mediation is crucial. This aligns their perspective with the difficulties they encountered and their capacity to express these difficulties, as well as the variables influencing the success or failure of such mediations. This data is valuable to academics attempting to comprehend mediation mechanisms and their effectiveness. Interviews with officials also helped to validate (or invalidate) the findings of earlier mediation study findings. These individuals have not only immersed themselves in a multitude of roles within the realm of Qatari mediation but also possess extensive practical experience, rendering their insights invaluable to comprehending the nuances and intricacies of this specialized field.

In selecting participants for this study, I adopted a purposive sampling approach, targeting a small group of individuals with deep institutional experience and varied but deep involvement in Qatar's foreign policy institutions, as well as a specific relevance to Qatar's evolving role in international mediation. All participants had no less than ten years of relevant professional experience, with many having served in high-ranking roles such as ambassadors, special envoys, senior advisors, or representatives of Qatar to the United Nations. One key participant—a former Special Envoy—was directly involved in nearly all aspects of the three case studies examined in this research, offering a rare and comprehensive perspective. Two of the interviewees had contributed to only one of the cases, while the rest had experience spanning one or two of the three. Across the sample, participants shared a high level of insight and extensive practical knowledge of the topics under investigation.

A deliberate decision was made to prioritize engaging deeply with a select but highly knowledgeable and experienced group of officials. While there were opportunities to expand the sample, doing so would have made it more difficult and time consuming to build the trust required for open and meaningful dialogue with officials who had been involved with very sensitive and confidential matters of states.

Building relationships based on trust is essential in elite interviews, and such trust is difficult to establish with a large number of participants. Moreover, it is neither efficient nor productive to invest that level of time and effort in individuals who may lack the necessary insight or direct involvement in the issues. So it would have also had a negative impact on the depth and relevance of the information provided by the interviewees. The sampling strategy, therefore,

prioritised quality over quantity, ensuring that the data collected was rich, credible, and grounded in direct experience with the three cases under examination.

The interviews focus on a number of issues that this thesis investigates. These questions probe interviewees' knowledge and experiences regarding mediation, their specific roles and experiences during related case studies and Qatar's broader role as a mediator. The timing and nature of their involvement, their perspectives on the significance of mediation to Qatar's foreign policy and strategic priorities, as well as their personal experiences of Qatar's mediation role, are also investigated. The analysis determines whether the interviewees regard Qatar's mediation efforts as fruitful, both in terms of conflict resolution and the achievement of Qatar's national goals and objectives. Alongside the broader discussion, the research also examines the experiences and perspectives of the interviewees regarding the three conceptual approaches at the core of this thesis - virtual enlargement, status seeking, and role theory - in the context of Qatari mediation. This dual focus on individual experiences and conceptual frameworks provides a nuanced understanding of Qatar's distinctive position and international mediation strategies.

Structure

Chapter Two comprises a literature review of the relevant academic studies published on these topics. Drawing on the insights of the three foundational international relations theories, the review starts with an exploration of small states and how best to define and characterise their role in the international system. The chapter then examines the foreign policy behaviour of small states as theorised by multiple scholars, and includes an assessment of the foreign policy models chosen by other small states such as Denmark and Trinidad and Tobago. The impact on small states of macro-trends such as globalisation (and now, possibly, *deglobalisation) is* also explored, as are the strategies chosen by small states as they seek to navigate these global power dynamics. The security strategies of small states are also considered, including those, such as Qatar, operating within a regional security complex as theorised by Buzan and Waever (2003).

The literature review also examines the role of small states in the fields of conflict management and preventive diplomacy. Here the contrasting models of Switzerland and Denmark are explored as small states with well-established models of preventive diplomacy. Following this, the chapter moves on to explore the literature on peace-building inside the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), of which Qatar is a member. The lack of alignment and cooperation between GCC states in conflict management is assessed and its implications considered (Hoetje, 2021), before the chapter explores the specific role of Qatar in preventive diplomacy and mediation (Kamrava, 2011; Cooper and Momani, 2011; Roberts, 2012; Barakat, 2012; Khatib, 2013; Ulrichsen, 2014; Mohammadzadeh, 2017; Milton *et al.,* 2023). This review of the literature on Qatari conflict diplomacy offers the reader a comprehensive overview of the current academic state of play in relation to Qatar's mediation efforts and, importantly, makes it possible to set out the theoretical lacuna in the existing academic literature that this study aims to fill.

Chapter Three sets out the methodology and conceptual framework underpinning the research process. Specifically, the chapter goes into much greater depth in explaining the conceptual framework based on role theory, virtual enlargement, and status-seeking. These concepts and their applicability to small state behaviour are considered from various angles, as is the relationship between these concepts and mainstream IR theories. The role of international law and its behaviour-shaping effects on small states is also considered at some length in this chapter.

The remainder of Chapter Three explicates the methodology along every stage of the research process from design, through the data sampling and data collection methods, to data analysis and a consideration of the potential limitations of the process. The chapter explains in depth the logic behind which individuals were chosen for interview with the author, the development process of the questions used in the interviews, and the manner in which the data was then processed and analysed before eventual incorporation in the case studies.

Chapter Four examines Qatar's historical development from relative obscurity as a small state located in a volatile region historically dominated by extra-regional powers. The chapter traces Qatar's rise to diplomatic prominence and its growing international influence, propelled by activist personalities such as Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani. The chapter explores how Qatar has overcome its smallness across multiple dimensions, including economic, defence and security, social, education, and climate, as well as mediation. Overall, Qatar has consistently

sought to project the image of a state that is not limited by its 'smallness', but rather empowered by it to provide a safe and trusted environment for dispute resolution. The virtual enlargement of Qatar's power through its status as a mediator and accumulated reputational capital have cemented Qatar's role as a regional and international mediator.

Chapters Five, Six and Seven present the main case studies of Qatar's mediation efforts in Darfur, Lebanon and Afghanistan respectively. These cases are not the only conflicts in which Qatar has mediated in recent decades, but they have been selected as representative examples on the basis of their importance and impact. Each of the three chapters follows the same format, focusing in turn on: the chronology of each case; Qatar's approach to mediation in each instance; reaction to the agreements and an analysis of Qatar's degree of success; a theoretical examination of each case through the lens of virtual enlargement, role theory, and status-seeking; and finally concluding with practitioner (i.e. Qatari officials who worked as mediators in the case in question) perspectives on the cases from interviews conducted with the author.

Chapter Eight concludes the dissertation by interrogating the findings of the case studies with a view to comprehensively answering the research questions set out above at the outset of the study. These findings are also linked back to the wider theoretical literature on small states and mediation explored in Chapters 1, 2 and 3. Further, the chapter assesses how far this thesis has contributed to academic knowledge in this field, weighs any potential limitations of the study, and considers whether there are any possible avenues for further academic enquiry in this and related fields.

CHAPTER 1:

Literature Review

Defining small state

Providing a comprehensive and universally accepted definition of small states has to-date, eluded both theoretical and empirical literature. Small states have often been defined as *small* based on their geographical or population sizes. However, when looking at categorization through the lens of economic or diplomatic power, the relevance of the geographic dimension is much diminished. This poses the question of how the concept of *smallness* can be determined when traditional measures of smallness, on many occasions, do not explain how states traditionally seen as small outweigh states that are traditionally seen as larger (in the geographical sense, for example) both in terms of diplomatic power of negotiation, as well as economic power. Consequently, there is constant debate both in theoretical approaches and in empirical analyses of small states over what truly constitutes a small state and whether or not the actual geographic size has any relevance to international relations. Besides the geographic size; other traditional empirical measures are also important to consider, such as the country's overall GPD, military capability and other traditional measures. In this case, Qatar is regarded to be well endowed in this regard through its vast amount of hydrocarbons and natural gas, which Qatar maintaining the third largest natural gas reserves globally (De Jong et al., 2019), with 13.1% of global reserves, which close remarkably to the ranked first Russa 19.9% (World Review of World Energy 2021), making Qatar one of the most hydrocarbon-rich areas in the world. It is important to note that Qatar maintains more reserves than the United States and, more importantly, the bilateral partnership between Qatar and Iran in gas production. While Qatar is using the field to expand its production globally, Iran, on the other hand, has been hampered by long delays, mainly because of international sanctions. This slow development in Iran is essential within the GCC context since Qatar can gain a decisive advantage over Iran, citing the former maintains the most fraternal relations with Iran. Therefore, when it comes to the diplomatic power of negotiation, Qatar is viewed as a cohesive force for initiating any

compromise between Iran and GCC countries and helps in maintaining the power balance between Iran and GCC or even beyond.

Conversely, the attempts to define small states open the doors significantly to discovering new dimensions that can help explain the nature of small states and their power in the modern era. It has been argued (see: Maass, 2009) that the constant debate over what small states are, actually created various frameworks for analysis, which thus greatly benefit researchers when investigating the unique contexts of small states' strategies in international relations.

The intangible power is important for all countries weather they are small or big to build up their repertoire of international behaviors that could be used later as a tool of power. However, as it will be discussed in this review, having a clear definition of small states holds relevance to the analysis of their behaviours in international foreign policy, most notably for their external movements and roles in conflict management and mediation. When following a realist perspective, various small states do not possess power in terms of military capabilities or other traditional empirical measures of size that would normally be expected in order to act internationally in (bold) manner.

The proposed structure to be followed in this chapter is to foremost present the theoretical approaches, which serve as a basis for deriving the variables for the study. The chapter then proceeds with Qatar’s foreign policy in particular and small states in general. The chapter then continues with a discussion on peace-building within GCC before applying it in Qatar’s case.

Foreign Policy and Small States

In explaining small state behaviour in foreign policy, East (1973) describes the traditionalist depiction as a series of seven potential strategic actions. In this sense, small states are seen as having a low level of participation in international affairs, and a high level of involvement in intergovernmental organisations. Further, small states support international legal norms, while avoiding the use of force, and avoiding behaviours and policies that could undermine greater

powers. Concomitantly, in the traditionalist view, small states focus on a narrow geopolitical area while utilising frequently moral and normative positions in international matters. However, as observed by East (1973), these actions also characterise strategies of large states, or greater powers, thus they cannot only be specific to small states.

Continuing from the realist perspective, East (1973) further notes that if the assumption is that small states act differently to large states, then this can be attributed to fewer resources being given to international affairs, more interest in the immediate geopolitical area, but also a higher likelihood for conflict in the absence of strategic information and fewer alternatives. In a new model of small state international action, these entities are seen not as conflict-avoidant, but rather conflict-generating actors, despite their small size. It is to be noted that these assumptions fuelled the reticence of larger states and colonial powers to recognise the independence of small states, as it was believed that a large number of small states would be automatically imply a higher likelihood for conflict and a diffusion of power in the system (Baehr, 1975).

In an analysis of US state formation and subsequent creation of democratic states in Eastern Europe, Elman (1995) argues that the use of resources for domestic affairs versus actions directed by constraints in the external environment are alternated because these actions are highly contextual. Thus, one state may choose to direct its resources to transform internal institutions in certain contexts, while the same state can choose to invest in foreign policy when subjected to external constraints. This does not exclude the concomitant division of resources for both internal and external affairs. It is to be observed that in this case, small state behaviour in international relations is more aligned with constructivist and literal approaches rather than with realism.

Doeser (2011) further underlines this argument by assessing the case of Denmark and how changes in domestic policy eventually led to a change in foreign policy. In this case political party opposition, and public opposition led to Denmark joining NATO alliance and expanding its US partnership, despite its traditionally neutral stance. A definitive factor, in this case, was represented by diminished sceptical opposition of NATO among the public, and the government's actions to support its existing power by exploiting the newly socially and politically accepted alliance.

However, despite these remarks, Doeser (2011) fails to acknowledge the fact that although NATO was the "lesser of two evils" once the Scandinavian alliance option was not viable, Denmark was equally under pressure from external powers to join the alliance. On one hand, Denmark could no longer maintain its neutrality as the foreign policy of other states would coerce the country to join in some form of alliance. On the other hand, while Denmark formally joined NATO, it did so by maintaining its nuclear weapon policy whereby NATO forces or nuclear arsenal could not access the country's territory, either during times of peace or war. This was unacceptable to the US-led NATO and thus Denmark was forced to change its position.

The Denmark case underscores that forms of association grant small states some form of power, either in security or in reaching other objectives, such as trade or economic development (Gartner,2001). This argument is supported by a remark made by Tuschhoff (in Reiter and Gartner, 2001) in regard to realism and explanations of why states form alliances. Herein, the realist view argues that alliances are made in response to threats, and thus when a threat disappears, so does the alliance. NATO's existence to date contradicts this approach. Further, if threat is the driver of alliance formation of an alliance, then this theoretical aspect is in contradiction with the historical dissolution of the Warsaw pact under the NATO threat as well as its internal collapse as a state. Consequently, it can be argued that small states can use alliances, and by extension relationships with other states as forms of power that do not necessarily involve security. At the same time, it must be noted that, as in the case of Denmark, small states may seek to pursue other interests and avoid alliances, but nonetheless can be pressured into joining these strategic cooperation unions in favour of greater powers.

Thorhallson and Steinsson (2017) argue that small states have unique vulnerabilities which do not allow them to achieve favourable outcomes in foreign policy as often as larger states can. The remaining strategy is then focused on building multilateral relationships and organisations, which are able to reduce power asymmetries, impose constraints on a large scale and decrease the transactional cost of diplomacy. Kallas (2008) further notes that a crucial distinction between small state foreign policy behaviour and the behaviour of larger entities is the formation of multilateral, rather than bilateral relations. Thus, while large states tend to focus on building bilateral relations in foreign policy, small states are concerned with multilateral policies as these create more opportunities for resources. However, small states

might focus on bilateral relations especially if these relations provide security or economy shatter or have a strategic nature.

Braveboy-Wagner (2010) also contradicts this claim through an analysis of Trinidad and Tobago, a micro-state using influence and its energy resources to shape politics in the Caribbean region. In this case, the microstate grew substantial economic power as a result of oil, but also trade liberalisation. This context led to the state having a leadership role in the region, while many other Caribbean states were dependent upon its resources and trade. Concomitantly, Trinidad and Tobago was also able to develop strong bilateral relations with Venezuela, Brazil, and Columbia by investing in their need for the natural resource.

Consequently, the exercise of foreign policy power for small states firstly stems from the exercise of the power of influence, herein defined as the ability to have other states aligned with the small state's objectives or to have other states take their interests into account before they act. This is likely to happen if the small states possess a resource upon which other states depend. At the same time, the leadership actions of a small state that can allow the state to gain prestige in the international arena, depends on opportunities, as well as the acceptance of other states to be led by the small state actor.

Globalisation and the liberalisation of trade have greatly supported the development of power for small states, precisely by increasing the number of existing opportunities for multilateral relations and economic growth. As pointed out by Armstrong and Read (2008), as well as by Christopher (2006) and Skilling (2013), small states are characterised by structural openness, which is reflected in their GDP/GNP. It is this openness, as further argued by Armstrong and Read (1998) that enables these entities to have a high degree of exposure to the resources of the international community. This access further allows small states to be sensitive to changes in the global trading environment, either negative or positive, and elicit swift responses.

Ahnlid (1992) further argues against the traditional view of small states and trade options, whereby small states would run a closed system within the country but focus on open trade policy abroad. As shown by various trade policies in small states, these entities are open systems, allowing imports from different countries with a strong diplomatic relation as well as facilitating external trade. This strategy may also be regarded as a form of building bilateral relations with larger states, but also for developing connection in the region with other small

states. As it can be observed, these notions contradict earlier realist claims according to which small states lack information to elicit strategic action. By looking at success of European and Asian small states, it can in fact be argued that trade liberalisation led to many of the small states being central economic poles of the world.

Diplomatic relations are equally important for small states as they construct and preserve both bilateral and multilateral relations. As argued by Mohamed (2002), in the case of Trinidad and Tobago, because small state had been *constructed* on a colonial basis, encompassing various migrant ethnicities, connections with larger countries of origin have been supported by the general population. This historical aspect of the small state therefore aided in the development of bilateral relationships with larger countries, while oil and gas reserves and the region's dependence upon them aided in the development of multilateral relations within the region.

Jazbec (2010) further argues that diplomatic actions in small states involve internal and external efforts. Within the state, organisations and institutions need to be aligned with diplomatic efforts, while this alignment generally occurs due to external pressures for change and strategy. As postulated by Jazbec (2010) in a comparative analysis of diplomacy in Slovenia and other Baltic states, for small countries, diplomatic organizations need to present a high degree of flexibility if they are to function as tools for serving national interest. Flexibility and swift response seem to derive naturally in these states from a simplistic organisational function, which not only enables a rapid process for change and adaptation but also maintains transparency in international relations, thus increasing trust and supporting multilateralism.

Finally, as argued by Chong and Maass (2010), and as emerging from the above examples, small states are by no means powerless. Moreover, given the alignment of these states with moral and humanitarian international norms as initially postulated by East (1973), when small states exercise this power, global stability and progress can be achieved. Consequently, the global dynamics of small states and their foreign policy can lead to stability rather than conflict as postulated by the realist view. Nonetheless, despite diplomatic and trade efforts, small states still need to maintain their security, especially in the light of greater power seeking their influence and resources. This gives rise to different strategic approaches to security and power which will be discussed in the following subthemes.

However, as will be discussed in the following sections, the principles that are viewed to govern small states behaviour as issued by (East, 1973), as well as their behaviour in the areas of international trade and economic development (Jazbec, 2010), fail to apply in the case of Qatar. Consequently, traditional approaches to state security, conflict management, and foreign policy seem to be of little use in explaining Qatar's behaviour in international policy and security.

Small state Security

Drawing from an analysis of 100 different states and their approach to international security negotiations, Panke (2017) argues that two categories of states can be distinguished. In this sense, some states voice their position often within security negotiations, while others remain silent. This led to the hypothesis that active participation in security negotiations is driven by two aspects. Firstly, state capacities, referring to political and financial capacities, can modulate state involvement in negotiations for security. Secondly, state incentives further drive involvement in security negotiations. Much of the discussion presented by Panke (2017) concerning state incentives is listed in conjunction with the state capabilities. Thus, if a state has more capabilities, and high incentives, the state will tend to be more active in security negotiations. For example, it has been determined that states that possess financial, military, and political capabilities will most often share their positions and seek benefits in negotiations. On the other hand, states-lacking capabilities but that are not necessarily small, will be engaged in security negotiations less often. An argument for this is that security negotiations for states with less capacity involve various resources, from diplomatic efforts to manpower and experts in the area. These resources may be wasted unless there is a greater incentive, thus the small state preference for remaining silent.

However, a crucial aspect to which Panke (2017) paid little attention is what happens when small states, or states with fewer capacities can seek out these incentives. Herein, regional group alliances have been presented as a potential explanation, whereby a group of small states can take a shared position in voicing their concerns and demands. As postulated by Panke (2017), a historical relationship, as in the case of the EU states, may favour this alignment. Yet the circumstances in which these positions may not be aligned have not been considered as a theoretical exercise. Such an exercise may hypothetically reveal much of the power that small states hold over their own security resides in the influence they have over aligning other states with their own position as postulated by Braveboy-Wagner (2010).

Vaicekauskaitė (2017) provides a more simplistic view of strategies used by small states arguing that small state behaviour in national security can be divided into two groups. Small states can either focus on defence and neutrality, or engage in cooperative schemes such as alliances and band-wagoning, seek shelter or develop hedging strategies. Hedging in particular, seems to be preferred by small states, by maintaining multilateral relations with greater powers and thus avoiding balancing and band-wagoning, which would ultimately lead to power compromises on behalf of greater states.

Hedging is particularly preferred by small states in the Arabian Peninsula, as the threat of greater powers, such as Saudi Arabia or Iran may force smaller states into band-wagoning tactics. Hamdi and Salman (2020) argue that hedging, and thus maintaining multilateral relations with the greater powers in the Arabian Peninsula, providing an answer to the security dilemma of small states in the region, such as Kuwait, Bahrain, or Qatar. Nonetheless, the fact that smaller states in this region do not share strong ties and healthy relations between themselves especially lately and the regionally greater powers (Iran and Saudi Arabia) may be a significant impediment to this.

As observed by Hamdi and Salman (2020) and elaborated earlier by al-Hamad (1997), Qatar shares a tense relationship with Bahrain and historically difficult one with Saudi Arabia. The fact that all six countries form a part of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) does not seem to ensure mutual security as the lack of border rules and constant religious tensions set significant pressures on national securities of small states and greater powers alike. To pursue the proposal issued by Hamdi and Salman (2020) concerning hedging for security may thus seem difficult to achieve, as some of these states may have positive relations with each other, but negative relations with others.

The power dynamic of small states in Arabian Peninsula seem to contradict the classification for security strategies issued by Panke (2017) and Vaicekauskaitė (2017), as the GCC, although with a formal status of an alliance, misses on the most important rules for state sovereignty, while loss of territory in an oil-rich region would signify important economic losses, and by default, a loss of power (al-Hamad, 1997). And with the existence of such disagreements and the serious impacts on the result of not being settled between these countries, and between these small states then exists constant tension, in the absence of a universally accepted small stat leader. Multilateralism is nevertheless observed in cooperating with greater powers, which ensure states security and avoids external interference. Thus, it can be argued that state interest and global power dynamics even within regions inhabited by small states play a significant part of security policies.

Small States in global power dynamics

Although the complex dynamics of power strategizing behaviours displayed by small states contradicts the realist approach to understanding small countries, a realist lens may, when applied differently, be useful to understand how greater powers behave in conjunction with what Bjøl (1968) and Wolfers (1962; cited in Bjøl, 1968) find about *weaker powers*. Herein the presumption is set that for the weaker powers and greater powers alike, power is a scarce commodity. In this case, power does not have a fixed definition but can signify anything from global influence on military and economic power. Because power is scarce, larger states would deploy their resources in more pressing matters and thus disregard its use for holding in line smaller states. As its occurrence, smaller states have an opportunity to grow their own *soft power* which ultimately may lead to these countries accumulating more resources of any kind and thus further expanding their own power and influence.

Another supposition postulated by Bjol (1968) is the advantage of small states in terms of geographic positioning, referring to this as strategic *geographic security*. Examples used by Bjol (1968) include the reticence of the Soviet Union to engage into military in action against

Albania and Finland at different points. Albania has a harsh climate, and is situated in mountainous region, thus making the country difficult to operate in. Military resources would thus have to be beyond what a greater power would expect when attempting to impose its will on a smaller state. While the Soviet Union also faced other more significant threats, Albania's transgressions were thus ignored. Finland on the other hand did not possess enough defence resources nor geographic security, yet the Soviets lacked the necessary power disposal for military actions as resources were engaged elsewhere as well as it also neutralised the threat from Finland by forcing it to sign a friendship treaty that forbit it from joining NATO.

In this context, it can be argued that a realist perspective may explain why and how great powers and weak powers alike choose to take action or respectively rebel. Nonetheless, a more liberal view may further explain how small transgressions against greater powers can lead to small states accumulating powers of their own. Over time, this resulted in the development of increased diplomatic and foreign policy powers, even in the absence of physical resources, replacing what Shaw and Barston (1975) described as "weak diplomatic representation" over five decades ago. Today, a very different landscape of power is visible in international relations. Over half of the nations within the UN are small states, maintain a constant humanitarian and moral normative alignment reshaped and restructured power dynamics.

Braveboy-Wagner (2015) argues that this power shift took place around the 1900s while being missed entirely by international relations theory due to its overreliance on realism and neo-realism. Following on, more critical views of the global dynamics of power reflected by liberalism and constructivism further enabled an incursion into how small states gain and exercise their power while maintaining agency. Concomitantly, the neo-Marxist view of the importance of domestic affairs for international relations, coupled with the realisation of the importance of values and cultural norms for social cohesion, and subsequently for development, further gave rise to more elaborate theories of small states actions.

However, as noted by Brady (2019) in an analysis of New Zealand, a major concern for small states is the return to an absolute view of *power* defined only in realist terms. An indication of this return to old habits is the increasing trend among greater powers to withdraw from international treaties. One of these examples is the withdrawal of the US from the Paris Agreement on climate change. For New Zealand and its Ross Dependency territory, this is a significant issue as the region maintains an interest in Antarctica citing political, historical, and social interests (NZ Government, 2013). Being in such proximity to a potential climate disaster,

New Zealand has a direct interest in the agreement over climate change as a matter of geographical security.

Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that despite these fears, small states have had influence in the formation of greater alliances and institutions as well as in setting their priorities. Jakobsen (2009) remarks that social cohesion and stability are of great importance to small states, as conflict and internal tensions can become an issue of state stability. Given that small states in northern Europe were quick to recognise this as a threat to their own security, these nations, notably Sweden, successfully used their influence to bring civilian issues in the EU's security and defence policy. Consequently, small state influence in international and regional organisations such as the EU, can shape institutional decisions and international policies.

Despite these effects, Grøn and Wivel (2011) argue that changes EU institutions can undermine the power of small states. As further noted by these authors, prior to these changes, small states engaged in a *binding* approach to influence decision-making in the EU and thus leverage interests. This binding approach was characterised by an over-reliance on creating strong institutions with common rules for all, regardless of realist power. This, as expressed by Grøn and Wivel (2011) levelled the field for small actors to be able to compete for decision-making and national interests with larger countries, which in this case geographically and militarily.

One of the main changes affecting small state influence is the diminishing power of the EU commission, as a representative, in light of democratisation and intergovernmentalism. The second change in the EU institutions refers to the powers of its council, and the subsequent power in voting brought by the Lisbon Treaty introducing the notion of qualified majority voting. The weakening of the powers of the commission and council has taken place to the benefit of the parliament, which as a decisional factor, is not seen as a representative of smaller states since these nations have fewer representatives in the parliament.

Although these changes may indeed diminish the influence of small states within the EU, this does not necessarily mean that small states are powerless, since as discussed before, power can come with various strategies. In this sense, Long (2017) argues that small state power originates from three different categories derivative (relaying on a greater power), collective (coalitions and international institutions), and particularly-intrinsic (material assets). The

author further state small states are in a position to exert power and influence with their means and are not deemed to be powerless when held against a larger country. The case of Qatar can be held as an example in this case, evident with its cordial relations with Iran. A demographically and militarily larger country, Iran however seeks to maintain a cohesive relationship with Qatar owing to its economic and political influence (its association with the GCC).

With these notions in mind, it can be argued that Grøn and Wivel (2011) detected a potential loss in collective power, to which other categories may be less sensitive, especially when considering that small states can act as their own lobbyists and have aligned interests with other greater powers. Grøn and Wivel (2011) further note that even in complex global circumstances, states have options for smart strategies. Herein, small states can act as *lobbyists* for their own interests, can act as a *self-interested mediator*, or can assume a leadership role as a state as norm entrepreneurs.

Relying on a greater power and subsequently focusing on country assets, such as a strong trading policy that brings in financial power, is not without its risks. Tunsjø (2011) argues that in a multipolar system, larger powers such as the EU, US, and China, can carry out hedging strategies to remain in a relatively neutral position while maintaining relationships with other powers. Yet the situation is different for small states, such as Norway, which in the context of a power shift to Asia, would need to deploy sophisticated foreign policies to maintain its trade with Europe while at the same time accepting and benefiting from the EU agreements with China.

This situation is somewhat similar to the dynamics established on a smaller scale between GCC countries. Tensions between the EU and other global powers could signify tensions between smaller states in the EU and the conflicting global power. In the GCC, conflicts between Qatar and Bahrain can cause instability for Saudi Arabia, despite it being the strongest state among the GCC countries. Any potential tensions between Qatar and Saudi Arabia may further pose diplomatic difficulties for Kuwait and so on.

Neutrality and non-alignment, often associated with defensive restraint in foreign policy, should be more accurately understood as deliberate and strategic choices that empower small states to play constructive roles in international mediation. Rather than being passive or risk-avoidant postures, such positions can serve as diplomatic assets, enhancing a state's credibility

and perceived impartiality—qualities that are especially valued in conflict resolution settings. The experience of Switzerland, with its longstanding neutral stance, illustrates how such positioning can open doors to high-level negotiations and behind-the-scenes diplomacy. Likewise, Oman's pragmatic and non-aligned approach has enabled it to act as a discreet intermediary in sensitive regional disputes, notably between Iran and Gulf states.

What these cases suggest is that neutrality, when consistently applied, can offer small states a form of soft power grounded in reputation, discretion, and trust. This is particularly significant for states with limited military capabilities, who instead cultivate influence through diplomatic reliability and niche expertise. As Karsh (1988) argues, neutrality can become a framework for international engagement rather than isolation. Barston (2014) further highlights how such states leverage their impartial standing to facilitate dialogue where larger powers might struggle. Additionally, Gstöhl (2015) notes that neutrality enhances access to diplomatic arenas, positioning small states as valuable brokers in a crowded and competitive international environment.

As observed from the literature analysing small states power, these entities can deploy various strategies to gain, maintain and defend their strength even in the face of greater states. While before the 20th century small states were seen as a threat to stability, developments on the global scene allowed small states to use soft forms of power and influence global decision-making. Today, small states may be confronted once more with the reality of being *weaker* in terms of realist power, and thus may need to deploy new strategic defence to maintain their autonomy and power while avoiding conflicts. To this end, the following theme will discuss the role of small states in conflicts, both in terms of avoidance strategies, stability maintenance, and pursuit of national interest.

Small States and Conflict Management

As previously discussed, small states seek to maintain neutrality in international conflicts and are often reluctant to take sides due to a fear of losing multilateral or bilateral relations, and by extension their soft power. When conflicts do arise, small states thus seek to avoid band-wagoning or alliances. Similarly, rising powers also show reluctance to adhere to one side or another during regional conflicts because of the principle of non-interference in international affairs (Dal and Emel, 2020).

The international system and international legal channels can be used to resolve disputes between states before the emergence of violent conflict, especially between small states as they do mainly believe on international laws and treaties and their understanding of the fact that they have a natural deficiency in their material resources due the smallness. This includes the permanent court of arbitration (PCA) the United Nation Commission on International Trade Law and the American Arbitration Association (Connerty, 2008).

It is recognised here as previously discussed, small states have various advantages from pursuing a humanitarian agenda. This in itself leads to a role in maintaining peace and resolving conflicts amiably. Tay (2014) recognises that small stable states also have a crucial role in ensuring the international responsibility to protect (R2P) principle, which protects civilians from crimes against humanity through generally their engagement in quiet diplomacy or preventive diplomacy as well as employing alternative dispute resolution method through mediation or the contribution of expertise. Tay's (2014) classifies Switzerland, Denmark, Austria, and Finland, Singapore, Qatar and the UAE as European, Asian and Middle Eastern small stable states. However, tensions within these wider regions, despite the countries' stability scores.

To act in their interest, and subsequently, in the interest of international community, small states have various strategic possibilities. Other Preventive diplomacy can be used in order to avoid conflicts, prevent an escalation of existing conflicts, or limit the spread of conflicts. This form of diplomacy can be deployed either by a single small state actor or by an alliance of small state actors (Steiner, 2004). Secondly, the power of influence held by a small state within the UN Security Council is also relevant for security maintenance and conflict management. As smaller states have the right to veto strategic intervention when they became members, small stable states can also bear the responsibility to *not veto* when action is needed. Finally,

small stable states with transparent governance and norm advocacy maintain a high level of credibility in the face of negotiators, thus limiting hostilities based on assumed hidden intentions (Tay, 2014). Nonetheless, it must be recognised that this credibility can also be lost regardless of state size. This was the case of Norway in peace-keeping operations in the ethnic conflicts in Sri Lanka, where Norway was regarded as biased towards the Tamil Tigers and selfish in pursuing a minimalist peace agenda that would increase its status as peacekeeper (Moolakkattu, 2005).

As noted from the previous example, geographical size has a discounted factor regarding power, but more so with influence. To apply these strategies, categorisation by population size and stability may pose issues. Finland, Switzerland both are well recognised powerful states in the EU, thus rendering population size irrelevant in the face of financial power, trade power, and influence. Similarly, in the Arabian Peninsula, Qatar has an estimated GDP of $66,000 per capita, while Saudi Arabia, one of the great powers next to Iran, has a GDP of $56,000 per capita (World Bank, 2021). While the population size differs substantially, Qatar has a population of approximately 2.7 million people while Saudi Arabia has a population of approximately 34 million, Qatar seems to hold more financial power based on its per capita income, however Saudi Arabia maintains more financial power.

Consequently, applying strategies for conflict mediation and management, as well as preventing or de-escalation may depend on state interest and its potential for action as dictated by various forms of power. Alternatively, as found by Sverdrup (2003) in an analysis of the EFTA non-implementation conflicts, the style of conflict resolution, domestic traditions, and styles of decision making are better predictors of conflict management strategies used by small states by contrast to enforcement capacity.

Peace policy and facilitating strategies

The case of domestic tradition shaping peace policy in Europe as exemplified by Sverdrup (2003) becomes evident in an analysis of Switzerland's peace policy, carried out by Graf and Lanz (2013). The particular case of Switzerland in which the country has been able to maintain neutrality in military interventions dates back to its neutrality history from the Second World War. In terms of peace operations, the country is mostly reliant on civilian instruments rather than military actions. This contradicts the strategies of both EU and NATO members, and it has been possible as noted by Graf and Lanz, (2013), due to strong internal institutions, protecting Switzerland from adherence to international alliances and conformity with EU rules.

As previously noted by Doeser (2011), a similar neutrality attempt has been implemented by Denmark, yet in the absence of strong institutions and faced with political and public pressures, the country subsided to the alliance. Yet unlike Denmark, Switzerland benefits from something that Bjol (1968) would refer to as geographic strategy, as the country holds around 20% of the Alps, with impenetrable 4000 meters peaks. This strategic advantage enabled the country to maintain neutrality during global wars, and further enabled it to transpose this into a tradition for crafting international peace policy. At the other end of the spectrum, Denmark and Norway have revised its internal policies in relation to military defence as a result of the Cold War and threats by greater powers. Laugen and Haaland (2007) further argue that changes in policies for international peace operations have been both qualitative and quantitative, as small European countries began to participate in peace operations not only with a higher number of military forces but also with better trained and equipped personnel. Laugen and Haaland (2007) underlines the fact that this has been done at economic and political cost, as small countries possess fewer resources, while populations may oppose participation in global conflicts.

As can be concluded, there are several advantages for small states to have an active peace policy. Firstly, a peace policy aligned with those in a larger group ensures that resources needed in the case of conflict can be provided by partners. Secondly, small states can gain international visibility and through this, power of influence on the international scene. Nonetheless, as argued by Schmidl (2001), the international community also benefits from having small states taking part in peace operations. Small states tend to be more flexible and adaptive in field situations, while their perceived lack of power elicits few polarised responses and allows them

to assume an *honest broker* role in mediations. Also, because small states may seek to outweigh larger powers in peace operations, they may use their full power and resources to establish a dominant role in peace operations.

This is not to say that small states do not face some disadvantages in peace operations. As further postulated by Schmidl (2001), in any small states still have a size disadvantage in terms of military force. This also makes smaller states more sensitive to casualties. Secondly, small states may not always be perceived as neutral, thus risking conflict escalation.

Peace Building inside the GCC

It is important to mention that the literature discussed thus far has a strong focus on European states and interventions in conflict areas, thus leaving much of the peace policies in the Arabian Peninsula free from scrutiny. In terms of this study, it is thus relevant to evaluate the literature in regard to peace operations undertaken by small states in the Gulf. In this sense, Hoetjes (2021) carried out an analysis of potential factors that led to failed efforts of the GCC cooperation in peace building in Yemen, by employing the *negative and positive peace framework*. As argued here, literature on the involvement of GCC in peace building is lacking, yet data on its involvement in mediation does exist. Hoetje (2021) concludes that the GCC has attempted to attain more so negative peace by obtaining a ceasefire in the area, and less so to build relations and re-establish cooperation efforts, thus further seeking to obtain positive peace. Hoetje (2021) further postulates that the lack of alignment and cooperation between GCC states led to failed peace efforts in the region, as heightened nationalism and disagreements between monarchies produced uncoordinated responses. However, it is questionable if the GCC's indecisiveness and alignment resulted were alone responsible for failed peace efforts.

An empirical analysis carried out by the Institute for Economics and Peace (2021) demonstrates that stability in a region can be modulated by initial scores in the global peace index and positive peace index. In this sense, regions that are historically characterised by low levels of negative and positive peace can create what is referred to as a *conflict trap*. While in time states tend to become stable as long as they are located in regions with high GPI and PPI scores, the opposite may apply to states characterised by conflict. This is indeed the case in Yemen; While intervention by the GCC may reduce negative peace, it can be argued that external influences, even within the GCC and Iran may lead to a new violent conflict in the

perception of impartiality. Based on IEP (2021) data the region can be virtually framed as a conflict trap, which is further amplified by the divergent interests of the GCC members. Intervention may therefore escalate current tensions between GCC members, as well as within the country.

Kamrava (2011) further underlines the limitations of Qatar as a small state to act as a resolver of conflict in the region, highlighting the limits of small states in peace building as expressed by Schmidl (2001). Kamrava (2011) characterises Qatar as one of the world's most pro-active mediators in the conflicts that emerged in Sudan, Lebanon, and Yemen. However, despite it being an efficient mediator, the small state was not able to eliminate conflicts. Its success in facilitating mediation seems to rely on its perceived neutrality, enough resources to support incentives for peace, as well as on the dedication of state leaders. Nevertheless, this is not always successful if small states like Qatar have limited power projection capacity and underestimate the complexities driving conflicts, which thus impede the achievement of long-term changes.

While mediation offers small states valuable diplomatic leverage, it is not without potential drawbacks. Firstly, it is a form of soft power and as such is still a form of power that can risk antagonising powerful regional or extra-regional actors who may view the mediator as encroaching on their sphere of influence. Moreover, as mediation is also intended to achieve strategic goals such as strengthening national identity and demonstrating value, its success has the potential to generate tension or even informal pushback, especially if the mediator is perceived as reshaping narratives or altering the balance of power. However, in the Qatari context, such reactions have not led to withdrawal from mediation. Officials appear to view the attendant friction as a manageable cost rather than disincentive, treating it as a natural consequence of stepping into high-stakes diplomatic spaces and a worthwhile endeavour given the contribution it makes to its strategic goals.

This perspective reflects a tendency to view criticism, opposition and hostility not only as evidence of relevance but as an indicator or measure of the successful attainment of its strategic objectives. In these terms, Qatari decision-makers appear to internalise the idea that meaningful mediation inevitably involves complex but, so far at least, palatable political downsides. As such, external resistance has not fundamentally altered Qatar's approach. Instead, it reinforces the state's commitment to strategic goals that allow for an independent foreign policy, where mediation is not only a tool for influence but also an assertion of

sovereignty. Thus, the perceived downsides have not outweighed the long-term diplomatic and reputational gains that come with sustained engagement.

A recent article by Milton *et al.* (2023) traces Qatar's evolution as a small state mediator over the past two decades. The authors observe that Qatar's role in mediation diminished during the 2017-21 Gulf crisis, when Saudi Arabia led an effective blockade of Qatar. Following the resolution of the crisis, however, Qatar returned to mediation and successfully brokered an agreement between the U.S. and the Taliban in 2020. This paved the way for the subsequent U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. Nonetheless, Milton *et al.* (2023: 3) draw a contrast between Qatar's 'hyper-active meditation phase' from 2006-2010 and its more cautious approach in recent years. This shift in strategy appears to have been driven by the widespread backlash within the Arab world, emanating especially from Saudi Arabia and other GCC states, against Qatar's perceived meddling and pro-Islamist stance during the Arab Spring. Milton *et al.* (2023: 17) suggest that Qatar now has a lower tolerance for risk in its mediation efforts, and is willing to intervene in conflict resolution only when formally requested to do so.

A further potential discontinuity from Qatar's earlier mediation phase is that recent mediation efforts, especially in Afghanistan, arguably demonstrate Doha's increasing alignment with U.S. security interests. It is notable that the resolution of the Gulf crisis came about partly as a result of American pressure on Saudi Arabia and the other GCC states to bring their blockade of Qatar to an end. The U.S. also maintains a direct security guarantee to Qatar, partly connected to the presence of the American military airbase at Al-Udeid (Milton *et al.,* 2023: 6). The U.S.'s willingness to allow Qatar to act as a mediator with the Taliban also demonstrated the U.S.'s interest in Qatar returning to its former role as a trusted regional partner. In the view of Milton *et al.* (2023), this signals that Qatar has successfully repaired its reputation for neutrality as a third-party mediator. An alternative view, however, is that Doha's reliance on the U.S. to save its position during the blockade marked a subtle but important shift for Qatar from strict neutrality and impartiality to a position more closely aligned with American security interests. Qatar's designated status of 'major non-NATO ally', assigned to it by the U.S. in 2022, is arguably incompatible with full impartiality and neutrality (Milton *et al.,* 2023: 17).

A third shift in Qatar's mediation approach has occurred recently in relation to the use of financial inducements. In the three most recent mediation cases – Afghanistan, Libya, and Chad – Qatar has refrained from offering major financial inducements to reach an agreement. This marks an apparent shift from the 'chequebook diplomacy' that characterised Qatari mediation strategy in the 2000s and 2010s (Milton *et al.,* 2023: 18). That said, Qatar has continued to host delegations in Doha at considerable expense to itself – including a 400-person Chadian delegation in 2022 and a sizeable Afghan cohort during intra-Afghan negotiations (Ibid).

Qatari mediation has also been practised by an increasingly diverse array of actors in recent years. During 2006-2010, Qatar's mediation efforts were overwhelmingly concentrated around the personage of then Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Hamad bin Jassim Al-Thani. More recently, other Qatari institutions and actors have entered the field of mediation. This has included the Special Envoy, National Security Advisor, Foreign Minister and Deputy Foreign Minister in the case of Afghanistan; the Emir in the case of Libya; and the Special Envoy and Secretary of the Emir for Security Affairs in the case of Chad (Milton *et al.,* 2023: 18). This suggests a broadening and potential deepening of Qatar's state capacity to mediate - previously a perceived weakness of its mediation efforts.

Considering these findings, it can be argued that the failure of peace-building efforts in the Gulf are attributed both to uncoordinated responses as argued by Hoetjes (2021), as well as to historical complex characteristics of the region as postulated by IEP (2021). Consequently, it can be argued that better resolutions may have been achieved if Qatar's interventions as a mediator would have been supported further for conflict resolution by other GCC members. This leads to the conclusion that for small states to be successful in peace-building efforts, these efforts need to be coordinated with other small states, while supported by larger powers.

Despite the initial mediating role exhibited by Qatar, (Putri, 2019; Kamrava, 2011), following the civil conflict that emerged within the region with the Arab Spring, Qatar renounced its foreign peace policy strategy as a mediator and neutral actor in support of transitional states, despite its considerable efforts to build this role. Nonetheless, in the lack of on-land resources for enforcing its policies, these efforts have been unsuccessful, it resulted in a collision in the agendas between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, thus creating significant tension and a possibility of dismantling of credibility in Qatar's role as an impartial mediator. With a change in leadership, Qatar's leadership then need to deploy conciliation strategies to maintain stability within the GCC (Ulrichsen, 2014).

The failure of some of these strategies deployed by Qatar for peace building, as well as for securing a stronger international position within the GCC context, further underlines the limitations of small states. Although Qatar possesses significant oil and gas reserves, acting as a strategic partner for other small states in the region, when compared to the Trinidad and Tobago case as described by Braveboy-Wagner (2010), Qatar may have lost the advantage of having strong bilateral relations with the closest greater power regionally. Constant clan divides, monarchy competition and within nationalism may have prevented Qatar from building an influence similar to that of Trinidad and Tobago. Considering these complex power contexts, the following theme will present a literature analysis of the case of Qatar.

The Case of Qatar

The development of Qatar as a small independent state with an essential role in international relations has been discussed by Peterson (2006) from the perspective of state branding. As argued by this author, Qatar was quick to secure a position on the global scene and has been able to do so because of its immense gas reserves. In 2006, Qatar held the 3rd world's largest gas reserve, becoming an actor of interest for states in the region, as well as for western states. Staring from this point, Qatar sought to build an image of an independent state, with international prestige, firstly by housing various international conventions. Qatar further developed its own airline, thus having its name branded on airplanes and reaching airports all over the world, while strategically developing internal policies to enhance its participation in international organisations. Within the GCC, as previously discussed by Putri (2011) and Kamrava (2011), Qatar managed to build an image of neutrality and mediation, with significant interest in de-escalating conflicts in the region, albeit in the absence of support, still being unable to obtain peace.

Despite Qatar's failed efforts in resolving complex conflicts as described by Hoetje (2021), as it will be discussed in the following subthemes, it remains a rather diplomatic mystery whether or not Qatar did in fact have all interests at hand to sole these disputes. carefully crafting its role as a mediator for the past decades, while supporting bilateral and multilateral relations, Qatar may have actually sought to emerge as a regional leader in light of ideological and civil conflict.

Qatar Mediation Policies

As argued by Grøn and Wivel (2011), small states can use their positions in international institutions to influence world politics and decision-making. Qatar used this strategy in the UN Security Council during its time as a temporary member between 2005-2007 seat holding position to expand its role in the Arabian Peninsula. However, as noted by Cooper and Momani (2011), Qatar challenged international relations theories as it concomitantly undertook a risky foreign policy approach in the region, while upholding a mediator and neutral role. Some examples included by Cooper and Momani (2011) are the maintenance of bilateral relations with the US, mediating the Palestine-Israeli conflict.

Much of the analysis carried out by Cooper and Momani (2011) is thus concentrated on examples of astute diplomacy and risky behaviour adopted by Qatar. But Cooper and Momani (2011) seem forego and discount a large part of Qatar's identity in determining the cause of these behaviours. Qatar thrives on an ideological identity that outline the Qatari approach to its foreign policy rather than a national identity solely, given its short period of independence. Such as the Qatari aid which reached more than 100 countries around the world, and these initiatives focused on building and maintaining a human being, thus, helping to remove the causes of extremism and violence. Concomitantly, while seeking to expand its own influence, it builds upon this ideology and seizes opportunities when these arise.

Roberts (2012) attempts to explain Qatar's behaviour and strategies as a small state, arguing that these effects can be understood through the lens of historical events and Qatar's supposed objectives for leadership. Roberts (2012) points out that Qatar's support for rebel groups in

Libya or Syria may be regarded as a moral action, given that decisions are taken only by a small group of people, while repercussions may be disastrous. Previous literature (East, 1973) did indeed underline the fact that small states seek to take a moral position to consolidate their relevance for normative behaviour in the international system. Yet these assessments may be negatively affected by the approach taken by Qatar (just like any other country) in Arab spring, where the Qatari role was viewed with a bias which may contribute to fuelling the conflict rather that mitigating it through mediation.

Secondly, Roberts (2012) argues that a lack of leadership characterises the Arab region, which thus leaves a political vacuum for acquiring a strong leadership in Arabian Peninsula. This may therefore explain Qatar's efforts for asserting its national brand locally and internationally, as well as for making swift decisions on regional matters. With a strong position in international affairs, and sufficient resources, the small state is thus free to experiment in attempts to secure its position.

The position of leadership supposedly pursued by Qatar (Roberts, 2012) was never more evident than in conflicts related to the Arab Spring in Libya, which may also give some indications to another motif: securing multilateral relations internationally through informal alliances. By supporting the uprising Qatar also aligned its own interests to that of NATO, further contributing with $400 million to the rebel cause (Eakin, 2011). Looking at Qatar's award of 2022 FIFA soccer World Cup, this event, it can be argued that this awarding was a form of recognition by the international community of the Gulf States. This context thus focused international attention on these states, creating a perfect opportunity for a display of power and leadership, which also took place on the part of Qatar and the UAE (Ulrichsen, 2012). It is important to mention that in supporting the civil movement, Qatar did not renounce its ideological beliefs, more so it upheld these notions to the despair of Saudi Arabia's totalitarian regime.

Although Barakat (2012) characterises these *side-taking* actions as a threat to Qatar's impartial role, the author also recognises that peace efforts and their success are dependent on regional alliances. Barakat (2012) does not look into this matter further but as shown by the aftermath of conflicts in Libya and Yemen, Qatar risked using resources to mediate conflicts in the region with no definitive end. A change in strategy can therefore be postulated, whereby Qatar seeks partnerships with actors with considerable international influence, by acting as a mediator and negotiator not within the region, but between the West and the Arab world. Two

potential benefits arise from this despite potential tensions created with other Arab nations: Qatar's leadership role is reaffirmed, and bilateral relations are built mostly with western nations and alliances, rather than with the only GCC. Consequently, it can be argued that Qatar's mediating role is not carried out exclusively for the sake of mediation and stability, but rather striving to reach a clearer manifestation of the Qatari leadership's direction, headed by the Head of State, in in pursuit of its interests.

Khatib (2013) takes a different stand and argues that the foreign policies and actions of Qatar that have led the state to lose its neutrality aspect can be a high risk to its internal stability. Moreover, in the international community, because Qatar posed as a neutral actor, yet supported a side of the conflict, its image as an impartial mediator could be damaged. Nonetheless, it is hard to see evidence of these affirmations, given that the West supported movements for democracy in Arab states. Khatib (2013) instead argues that Qatar prefers to have an influence on Islamists in the region, while not being seen as in direct relation with them.

Based on the findings, it can be inferred that it is agreed with Khatib (2013), since by adhering to humanitarian causes, Qatar's intervention in conflicts for mediation and the financial support it provides offers a way for the country to reach across political and international divides and gain a respected position in the eyes of all.

Mediation as a Foreign Policy

In spite of affirmations made by Khatib (2013) and Barakat (2012) concerning the erratic behaviour displayed by Qatar during the Arab Spring, in the aftermath of the conflict, a handful mediation policies. Zweiri and Al Qawasmi (2021) argue that despite the fact that Qatar used mediation as a form of soft diplomacy, it did so only to ensure its own stability and pursue a narrower status interest. Indeed, there have been many occasions when Qatar's mediation role provided the small state with a significant advantage over other GCC countries. One such example is the US-Taliban talks in 2018 and respectively 2019, where Saudi Arabia and the

UAE both attempted to have these discussions carried out within their own capitals, yet these talks still occurred in Qatar's capital, Doha.

Through this cleaver example presented by Zweiri and Al Qawasmi (2021), it becomes evident how a mediation role for a small state can be used as a foreign policy instrument to achieve both an international presence, as well as soft power. Given that Qatar's previous strategy relied on hedging, by maintaining partnerships with larger actors in the region, as well as abroad, tensions for housing the discussions were controlled. Concomitantly, by expanding this strategy to unofficial groups such as the Taliban, which were not lacking influence or military power, Qatar secured all three parts (the West, the Gulf, and the Taliban) within its mediating umbrella. Finally, as noted by Mohammadzadeh (2017), Qatar's partnership with the US in terms of military force allows the small state to benefit from this bilateral relation by focusing its resources elsewhere.

Unfortunately, although Zweiri and Al Qawasmi (2021) do present a comprehensive analysis of Qatar's actions for mediation, the authors wrongfully frame mediation as the foreign policy for Qatar as an attempt to depolarise the region while pursuing its own self-interest. Yet based on the analysis of Qatar's action in the Arab Spring carried out by Miller and Verhoeven (2019), it becomes self-evident that Qatar did not seek to *depolarise* the region per-se, but rather to overthrow the *status-quo* and from the chaos created, to emerge as a leading power. After all, the small state had now been known internationally as a mediating state, and thus as the only state capable of re-establishing order in the Gulf through meditating efforts and opting for options such as negotiations with conflicting countries.

Qatar's approach differs from two main regional players i.e. Iran and Turkey, where the latter has also attempted to approach to cultivate an image in the region for the country such as offering to mediate and broker the Syrian crisis. As postulated by Akpınar (2015) Turkey's regional policy was focused on promoting a high-level dialogue, developing strategic cooperation and agreements, and developing economic inter-dependence through trade agreements while supporting multiculturalism and comprehensive regional security. However, Iran has tried to wield its influence in Central Asia such as during Tajikistan's civil war along with its interest in the Kurdish region (Klimentov, 2022). However, it is considered to be an unlikely scenario since both Iran and Turkey maintain a sizeable Kurdish population, and thus both the countries are not in a position to take a strong position in this regard. Contrary to Iran

however, Turkey did achieve some success in resolving small-scale disputes such as hostage situations and tension escalations.

Akpınar (2015) therefore concludes that mediation used by these actors had only been effective in resolving small-scale conflicts rather than mediating conflicts between opposing regimes. While it is recognised that small-scale conflict management is important, as tensions can escalate to violent conflicts, small states are plagued by insufficient power and resources to resolve such disputes. Indeed, this was demonstrated both in the case of Turkey and in the case of Qatar, yet less so in the case of Iran. Nonetheless, Akpınar's (2015) analysis fails to recognise the differences between Qatar, as a small state, and Turkey and Iran given that a size framework, regardless of its theoretical perspective, has not been employed. One could argue that Iran and Turkey are by no means small states, with populations of tens of millions of citizens and large surface areas as well as major energy resources (in the case of Iran) and the second largest army in NATO (in the case of Turkey). Yet both these countries are surpassed by Qatar in terms of global reach albeit in political terms such as Iran maintaining its relations with Russia while Turkey maintains a dominant relationship with Pakistan. Iran on the other hand possesses the threat of nuclear arsenals, which may also explain why its attempts at its role as a mediator had been refused.

When factoring in the closeness developed between Iran Turkey and Qatar following the Arab Spring, it can be argued that these states appear to share a similar foreign policy tool, that of assuming a regional mediator position. Despite these aspects, the country's true intentions may be unveiled once chaos arises, while during relative calm periods, these states would seek to build on their impartiality and mediation characteristics by resolving conflicts that are within their power. These aspects further underline the need for a proper analysis of Qatar's mediation policies, which would enable an assessment of the small state's behaviour. In this sense, Mohammadzadeh (2017) argues that small states are just as vulnerable to status-seeking as larger states. However, given their size disadvantage, they seek to pursue status through unconventional means, giving rise to complex strategies that guide the development of foreign policy.

Mohammadzadeh (2017) further underlines an aspect of small states in his analysis of Qatar which has been missed by previous literature, namely internal conflict. To explain how Qatar deals with internal threats and as a result shapes its foreign policy, Mohammadzadeh (2017) uses the omnibalancing theory. David (1991) characterises this theory as a response to the

inadequacies of the balance of power theory to explain Third-World state behaviours in alliances. As noted by David (1991), omnibalancing theory agrees with the assumption of the balance of power theory noting that states will face threats with resistance, yet at the same time, it also recognises that alliances can be formed to address internal state threats.

As observed by Mohammadzadeh (2017), for Qatar and its royal family this is of extreme importance, as security threats can arise from within its borders, driven by ideological currents of Islamism in the area. With a population of fewer than 1 million Qatari citizen, most of Qatar's inhabitants are migrant workers from other regions, which can bring in the country resentment towards the rulers. Qatar thus imposes string rules for migrant workers, despite its democratic endeavours, listing migrant workers as a potential security threat, and actions against them as a matter of national security. Within this context, purity in religious ideology is important, and Qatar seeks to maintain it by forming alliances with regimes that have similar views.

It is in light of this that Khatib's (2013) and others' critiques of Qatar's erratic behaviour can be dismissed, as by supporting the Arab Spring, Qatar's bold ideological take replicated across all the GCC nations. In this scenario, the small state did not need to expand its young national identity, but rather to rely on its ideology to align other actors with its own interests. If it had been successful, Qatar may have eventually emerged as a regional leader among newly established state entities, not because of its resources or its mediation role, but because of its support for new political leaderships that were able to consolidate their success.

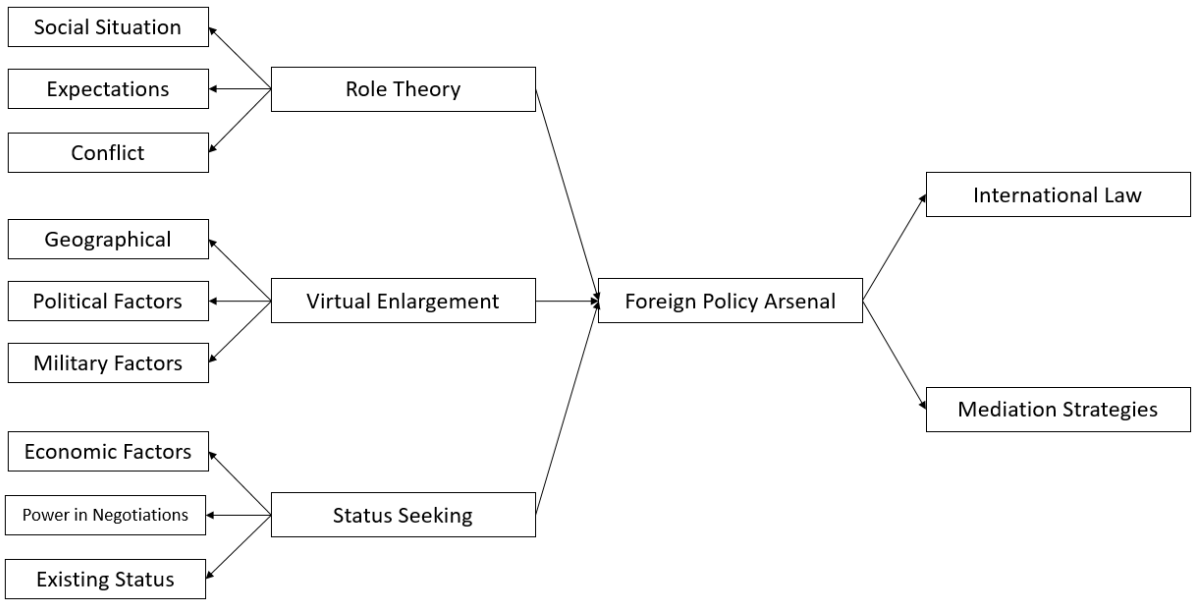
The accuracy of the assessment carried out by Mohammadzadeh (2017) in terms of ideological importance in small state alliances, is further emphasised by the events following the Arab Spring. When Qatar's ideological position became evident, other members of the GCC immediately used an embargo to constrain Qatar (Miller and Verhoeven, 2019). As pointed out by Hamdi and Salman (2020) and al-Hamad (1997), Qatar already shared a resentful relation with Saudi Arabia, not only because of Saudi Arabia's attempts at claiming territory, posing a major national threat, but also due to Qatar's open position for a less authoritative rule, which brought a direct challenge to the Arabian ruling class following traditionalist views of Islam.

Whether it was foreign policy incoherence, or the quest for a leadership role and alignment with Western partners, in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, Qatar's inter-regional relations were greatly affected. However, it is unlikely that Qatar would fail to continue to build its role as a mediator in the region or align itself with stronger actors in pursuit of its goal. These events may be an indication of the use of mediating policy for small states as a form of foreign policy in the quest for status.

CHAPTER 2:

FRAMEWORK

Conceptual Framework



The above diagram is designed to visually demonstrate the flow and structure of the research. Role theory, virtual enlargement and status-seeking are vitally important theories for analysing Qatar's mediation strategies. This chapter assesses each of these three theories in turn. Broadly, the chapter finds that role theory is primarily a function of social expectations within a country, especially in terms of public expectations that a state seeks to attempt to alleviate conflict (De Carvalho and Neumann, 2015). The virtual enlargement policies were found to be dependent on geographical, political and military factors. Finally, status-seeking was found to be dependent on economic factors, together with the existing status of the country in terms of international standing (Ferrer, 2018).

Status-seeking

Status-seeking is an approach used to describe the act of trying to improve one's social standing whether it be humans or states. In an international relations context, Larson *et al.* (2014: 7) define status as 'collective beliefs about a given state's ranking on valued attributes (wealth, coercive capabilities, culture, demographic position, sociopolitical organisation, and diplomatic clout). At root, status is about an actor's standing or rank within a hierarchical community (Renshon, 2017: 4; Ward, 2017: 4). The term can be used to describe an individual's behaviour when looking to improve his or her position in society, or it can be used to describe groups or organisations trying to increase their status (Zarras, 2021). There are many different ways that people can seek status, and the methods used will often depend on their culture and social environment. Status-seeking is often seen as a negative behaviour and can lead to people feeling envy, jealousy, and resentment towards others (Ferrer, 2018). However, it is also possible for status-seeking to have positive effects. For example, if someone is trying to improve their social standing to be able to provide for their family, then this can be seen as a positive thing. Additionally, if someone seeks to increase their status in order to help others, then this can also be seen as a positive thing.

There are many different factors that can contribute to an individual's desire to seek status. In some cases, it may be due to a need for validation or approval from others. In other cases, it may arise from a desire for power or influence. Additionally, status-seeking can also be a response to feelings of insecurity or inferiority (Baxter *et al*., 2018). Furthermore, status-seeking is of importance in international law as well. Considering the nature of status-seeking, it is probable that countries undermine each other to seek higher status (Esteves *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, it is important that lawful precedent is followed by international political frameworks to standardise the practice of status seeking.

Status-seeking by states is a recognised phenomenon in international relations. Indeed, status is regarded as an explanatory variable for state behaviour (McNamara, 2022: 1). The literature contains four major approaches to status: a social-psychological approach (Larson and Shevchenko, 2019), a rationalist approach (Renshon, 2017), a constructivist view (Murray, 2019), and a status immobility approach (Ward, 2017).

The social psychological approach is rooted in Social Identity Theory (SIT), which maintains that people have a basic need to feel good about themselves and their group (Larson and Shevchenko, 2019). States, like individuals and groups, compare themselves to a reference group that is equal or slightly higher in standing, and on the basis of such comparisons become either satisfied or dissatisfied with their status (Larson and Shevchenko, 2010: 71). States dissatisfied with their status will either seek to emulate higher-status states (if they perceive the ranks of these states to be permeable), compete against them (if the boundaries of the higher status group are perceived as impermeable or illegitimate), or engage in a 'strategy of creativity' designed to change socially accepted status markers (when the group boundaries are impermeable but legitimate) (McNamara, 2022: 7; Larson and Shevchenko, 2019: 9). This latter strategy entails either reevaluating the meaning of a negative characteristic or identifying a new dimension on which the lower-status group is superior (Larson and Shevchenko, 2019: 11).

In contrast, the rationalist approach is more instrumental and considers that states engage in status-seeking for pragmatic rather than emotional reasons (Renshon, 2016). Rationalists assume that states with higher status receive more deference from other states and are more able to advance their national interests (Dafoe *et al.,* 2014). Status-deficient states are more likely to resort to military action to demonstrate their power and acquire a higher status (Gotz, 2021: 231). Since it is difficult to change perceptions of status, status-altering events must be highly visible, clear and dramatic – hence the likelihood that states will resort to war (Renshon, 2016: 24).

For constructivists, on the other hand, status is best regarded as a recognised identity claim (Murray, 2019). Identity recognition provides states with ontological security, allowing states to maintain a consistent sense of self-identity over time (Murray, 2019: 39). When states feel that their identity is under-recognised or misrecognised, they are likely to reduce their social dependence on other states and 'attempt to take independent control over the meaning of their identities' (Murray, 2019: 48). This can result either in the state successfully constructing a new status community (conducive to the peaceful maintenance of the status quo) or, if recognition is not achieved, practices such as greater international assertiveness, the demonstration of military power, or the construction of spheres of influence. Such practices can create the illusion that the state in question has achieved an identity independent of recognition by the established powers (McNamara, 2022: 9). If the rising power is securitised

as revisionist by the established powers, this can result in a mutual spiral of suspicion and distrust (Murray, 2019: 78-9).

Finally, the status immobility approach employs Gilpin's Hegemonic Stability Theory to posit that when rising powers encounter resistance in their desire for incremental changes in the international system, they resort to demanding more systemic and significant changes. This can lead states towards a revisionist position in which they reject the status quo. When status recognition lags behind increases in material capabilities, revisionism becomes likely as states conclude they can no longer rise from within the existing system (Ward, 2017: 42). If the rules of the game are perceived to be unfair, then states may conclude that the game needs to be entirely reconstituted (Ward, 2017: 50).

These insights have been applied to a status-based conception of the foreign policy of small states (Carvalho and Neumann, 2015) and the actions of emerging and reemerging nations on the global stage (Freedman, 2016; Esteves *et al*., 2020). This includes explaining the international affairs of smaller states and their attempts at foreign policy mediation (Dal, 2019). This approach also helps to explain the way states seek status as small states (Götz, 2021). Various strategies can enable small states to participate more fully in global politics while actively optimising their relationship with other countries to enhance their influence.

To achieve security and advance their national interests, small states need to play a role in global politics and enhance their status and acceptance in international forums (Søyland and Moriconi, 2022). The inclusion of small states in international politics enables their voices to be heard. In recent years, small states have particularly thrived in enhancing their economic status. This is a function of globalisation, whereby smaller states have been able to secure access to the markets of much larger states. However, such increased accessibility (and the mutual interdependence it creates) also requires small states to be more involved in international policymaking. This, in turn, implies achieving a desired level of recognition. In the case of small states, representation in the United Nations and other international entities is relatively limited. Therefore, Esteves *et al.* (2020) have stated that small states should be more immersed in providing strategic alternatives in global politics. This includes mediation and other forms of conflict resolution as ways of enhancing their existing status.

Significance of Status for Small States

Two-thirds of members of the United Nations come under the category of small states (Zimmerman, 2019). Small states occupy an anomalous position in the international relations theoretical literature, since they vary significantly in terms of size, population, economic potential, resource possession, and administrative potential (Chong, 2010: 384). Consequently, there are significant variations in small state power capacities (Rapaport *et al.,* 1971). In recent decades, there has also been growing awareness that small states can leverage symbolic (or 'soft' – see below) power to expand their diplomatic footprint and power projection (Melissen, 2005).

Small states compete as well as cooperate with each other. Clayton *et al.* (2022) argue that such countries have extensively re-evaluated their foreign policies and international involvement to enhance their status. The authors determined that countries have sought to achieve this through mediation and providing strategic alternatives to resolve conflicts. Where successful, this readily improves their image in international politics. At the same time, however, it is suggested that the concerns of smaller countries often go unnoticed in the international system, increasing the chances of conflict. As Brannagan and Giulianotti (2018) note, the majority of conflicts involve small states. Potentially, successful status-seeking can enhance the value of a country in international politics and obviate the need for conflict.

Qatar serves as an example of a status-seeking small state aiming to empower itself politically and enhance its voice in international politics and forums like the United Nations. As part of this strategy, Qatar has become more active in presenting its concerns while also seeking to mediate in a number of conflicts. This has enabled Qatar to present itself as a champion of peace. Qatar has shown how public forums and international politics readily provide a collaborative platform for small states to demonstrate their status through conflict mediation and the maintenance of peace, thereby in turn enhancing the mediator's global standing. In doing so, they weaken the conventional view that status in the international system is simply a function of size and hard power capability.

Status-seeking: the state and external action/policies

The status-seeking approach can be used to examine the different ways in which states function, and their interaction with each other. There are several different ways to think about states as units (Sukaenah and Rusli, 2020). One approach is to think about states as units of geography. From this perspective, states are defined by their borders and their physical features. States are units of geography that divide a territory for administrative or other purposes. Another approach is to think about states as units of government (Dahir, 2022). This means that states are defined by their political structures and their laws. Each of these approaches has benefits and drawbacks. The advantage of thinking about states as units of geography is that it is easy to understand and visualise (Brinks and Ibert, 2020). The disadvantage is that it can be hard to compare states of different geographies. The advantage of thinking about states as units of government is that it can be easier to compare states on the basis of their political structures. The disadvantage is that it can be harder to understand and visualise.

International relations theory has been instrumental in understanding the emergence of Qatar as a soft power. The constructivist approach, in particular, has highlighted the importance of norms, identity and shared interests in shaping Qatar's foreign policy. Constructivism has enabled Qatar to create an image of itself as an impartial and trustworthy mediator, thereby allowing it to successfully intervene in regional and global conflicts (Al Handhali, 2019). International law has also provided a legal framework for Qatar's mediation efforts. On the grounds of being a signatory to the United Nations Charter, Qatar is entitled to act as a mediator between parties in conflict in accordance with international law (Berhe and Weldemichael, 2022).

However, international law is not a consistent guide for small states. Certain gaps in international law arise from the dynamic nature of rulings (Baxter et al., 2018). The precedence of international law has been readily challenged in the literature. However, the primary gap in international law lies in the variation in rulings applied to similar situations. Puntigliano (2015, 2022) determined that the control of international law by developed economies has marginalised it as a concept for developing economies. Therefore, it is important to standardise the laws for each participant in the legal framework of international law.

It was also noted that the developing economies readily challenged the rulings of international law as they cited lesser punishments for violations based on previous cases (Solis, 2021). Since international law readily accepts its own precedent, rulings of international courts were challenged which required re-addressing in the rulings. Furthermore, it was noticed that the standardisation on usage of international law was also not efficiently addressed as the motivation of international entities towards an event were found to be dynamic and their respective justifications are too diverse to be incorporated in a singular set of rules. Thus, international law was found to be of limited utility when applied to international entities.

Further, de Carvalho and Neumann (2015) point out that since the end of the cold war, the global political environment has fundamentally changed, and scholars' interest in small states has increased. A growing motivation for the foreign policies of small states has been the quest for status. In addition to breaking the monopoly of liberal and realist theories of international relations in explaining large, medium and small states' foreign policies, the status-based approach has also given rise to the development of innovative approaches for evaluating apparent behavioural discrepancies and irrational actions by governments.

Status Seeking and International Law

Status in international politics is defined by the difference in hierarchy between the associated countries (Barakat, 2019). Renshon's rationalist-instrumental approach mentions that the status of a country cannot improve without the weakening of another state (Götz, 2021). From this, it can be inferred that improving status can be achieved through enhancing one's own status or reducing that of others. International law has several gaps in regard to the reduction of status by other countries However, the United Nations has provided equality in voting to all its members. Waelde and Kolo (2001) identified that the modern approaches to conflict negotiation have led to significant changes in the status of small states, primarily due to their changed foreign policies. These foreign policies have also enabled these countries to better target their allies for relationship improvement and consequently enhance their status as small states. Tucker (2022) identified that countries are inclined towards status-seeking to enhance their role in global politics and negotiating power in international forums. Developing countries and small states have repeatedly been inclined towards status-seeking; thus, Blair

(2020) suggested a need for international law that incorporates a limited jurisdiction of status-seeking in the international community.

The Geneva Convention, the United Nations and the Commonwealth are some of the major international institutions that enable the collaboration of small states and developed economies. De Carvalho and Neumann (2015) emphasised that small states readily participate in these organisations to enhance their status in global politics. However, it was determined that their roles in mediating conflict offer further opportunities to enhance their status. The aforementioned conventions have carefully designed the rules of mediation, which state that the involvement of third parties in times of war should be to mediate conflict and resist war as per Article 8 of the United Nations Charter. Any actions that increase the likelihood, scope or scale of a conflict will result in disqualification of the contributing member (Wippman and Evangelista, 2022). In practice, however, many members of the UN have gone to war and remained part of the organisation.

It was noted that countries were inclined towards status-seeking due to power transitions, wars, military interventions, participation in international organisations and foreign policy preferences (Götz, 2021). The benefits of an improved status for small states are readily apparent. As such, there is a requirement for the law to incorporate a jurisdiction that limits any potential negative impact generated by smaller states engaging in status-seeking activities. Gray (2019) observes that status can be sought through leading international negotiations, but this can also result in an increased likelihood of conflict. Thus, there is an evident requirement to engage the law in issues relating to status-seeking. Tucker (2022) argues, for example, that the best status-seeking strategy for a small state like Qatar is to mould its foreign policies to assist other countries in conflict while enhancing relations with allies.

The rationalist-instrumental approach identified that status is not achieved solely through shows of power, but rather through the recognition of that power by other countries (Götz, 2021). Certain status-seeking behaviours are prohibited under international law – for example, it is not permissible to seek to acquire nuclear weapons. The UN Charter reserves the right for the UN Security Council to apply a wide range of measures, including sanctions and even potentially the use of force, to stop such behaviour. The limited number of nuclear powers in the world has enabled a balance to be maintained in global politics; however, there are a number of unreported cases of possible nuclear power projects in Asian countries. However, these projects appear to have had little effect on the status of these states, an outcome which further

justifies the rationalist instrumental approach. Ulrichsen (2019) also emphasises that countries are only now recognizing the power status of governments which have abided by international law; refuseniks are widely discredited in global politics.

Role Theory

Role theory is a sociological perspective focused on the importance of social roles in the functioning of society. It is one of the major theoretical approaches in sociology, and has been influential in the social psychology domain (Georgakakis *et al*., 2022). Role theory posits that social roles are the basic units of social structure, and provide a framework for the organised conduct of social life. The theory has its origins in the work of the sociologist George Herbert Mead, who argued that social roles are the products of social interaction and are the key to understanding social behaviours (Shalin, 2020). Role theory has been further developed and elaborated by other sociologists and social psychologists, and is applied to a wide range of social phenomena.

Role theory is a sociological theory focused on the expectations, behaviours, and perceptions of people about the roles they occupy in society. According to role theory, people learn what is expected of them by observing the actions of others. They further internalise these expectations and use them to guide their own behaviour (Ahn *et al.,* 2020). Role theory is a powerful tool for understanding the interaction of individuals with one another and the way social institutions are maintained. It can help us to understand the reasons people conform to social norms and why they sometimes deviate from them. Role theory has its roots in the work of the sociologist Max Weber. Weber argued that people's actions are determined by their roles in society (Anglin *et al*., 2022).

The theory also has its roots in the work of sociologist George Homans, who argued that human behaviour is best understood by observing the roles that people play in their social interactions. Role theory is used to explain a wide variety of social phenomena, including gender roles, family dynamics, organisational behaviour, and deviance (Anglin *et al*., 2022). The theory is also used to help understand how individuals respond to social change. The theory can help in understanding the behaviour of individuals and predict their response to changes in their social environment.

Role theory is perhaps the most prominent sociological theory, and has been influential in shaping research and understanding of social behaviour. The theory suggests that social behaviour is determined by the roles that individuals play in their social interactions. A role is a set of expectations about an individual's behaviour that are assigned by others in a particular social context. The theory suggests that individuals adopt different roles in different social contexts and that these roles guide their behaviour (Ahn *et al*., 2020). The theory has been particularly useful in understanding how social institutions and cultural norms influence individual behaviour (Anglin et *al.,* 2022). Role theory has, however, been critiqued for its emphasis on conformity and its lack of attention to individual agency. Nonetheless, the theory remains a valuable tool for understanding social behaviour.

The socially defined categories in role theories – including expectations, duties and norms – primarily impact upon international relations through their effect on human behaviour (Ahn *et al.*, 2020). Anglin *et al.* (2022) emphasise that these roles are acted out in international relations primarily through policy intervention and political frameworks. Small states have repeatedly adopted the role theory in developing improved sustainability for the local population and enhancing status as discussed in the preceding section (Georgakakis *et al.,* 2022). However, role theory also comes with challenges associated with increased awareness of the local population regarding their rights. Thus, semi-constitutional monarchies across the world have faced significant setbacks in policy-making, which has either resulted in the violation of basic human rights or the migration of local citizens to developed economies. Consequently, Aguilera and Grøgaard (2019) emphasise the need for the thorough implementation of role theory in order to reconsider approaches to foreign policy design.

Role theory and international relations

In international relations scholarship, role theory highlights the importance of social roles in shaping state behaviour in the international system (Ahn *et al.,* 2020). Role theory is implicit in mainstream IR theory. Classic IR concepts such as revisionist versus status quo powers, for example, are essentially based on different perceptions of the roles a state should play in the international system (Harnisch *et al.,* 2011: 1). Role theory is principally concerned with the interaction between agent and structure, and thus can help to build an empirical bridge to

traverse the longstanding gap between actor and system in international relations theory (Breuning, 2011: 16).

Roles help states determine who they are (or believe themselves to be), what their interests are, and how they should interact with other states (Harnisch *et al.,* 2011: 1-2). Role theory is therefore useful to understand international relations because it helps to explain why states behave as they do. For example, a state might pursue a certain foreign policy because it believes that it is its role to do so. In the case of Germany, for instance, it perceives Israel's security to be its guiding 'reason of state' for historical reasons associated with the Holocaust (Glucroft, 2023). This role as a defender of Israel is central to modern German foreign policy. Other states have their own unique conceptions of the roles they ought to play in the international system.

Additionally, role theory can help to explain the interaction of states with each other (Teles Fazendeiro, 2021). Furthermore, international laws are primarily designed to ensure that role theory is sufficiently met by countries. Aguilera and Grøgaard (2019) stated that there was a significant need for a body that monitors the social progress of a country while mediating their conflicts and foreign policies. Therefore, a need for international law to support role theory was also established through the interpretation of role theory incorporated in this research.

Role theory is an international relations perspective focused on the significance of norms, rules, and institutions to structure the behaviour of states. The theory suggests that states adopt different roles in the international system, which shape their behaviour in different ways. For example, a state that perceives itself as a "guardian" of the international order is likely to behave differently than a state that perceives itself as a "rebel" in the system (He *et al*., 2021). This theory provides a useful perspective for understanding the behaviour of states in the international system, as it highlights the importance of norms, rules, and institutions in shaping state behaviour (Holm and Sørensen, 2019). The role theory approach to international relations posits that states' behaviour is determined by the roles they play in the international system. This approach perceives states as actors who behave in accordance with the expectations of the other actors in the system. The role theory approach is also useful, in those terms, for understanding the behaviour of states in specific situations. However, it does not provide a comprehensive explanation for all state behaviour.

There are obvious parallels between role theory and constructivism. Indeed, role theory is essentially constructivist in nature given its emphasis on mutually constituted identities. A role

is, at root, a social construct. As the constructivist Alexander Wendt (1997) theorised, the international system ultimately depends on what states make of it and what roles they choose (or feel compelled) to play. The resulting order sets the social parameters within which states pursue their individual goals and address their collective problems (Harnisch *et al.,* 2011: 2).

A state's role must first be perceived by itself and then validated by other states, at which point it becomes an intrinsic driver of foreign policy. A 'rebel' state, for instance, will naturally take on this role if it is treated as such by other states. Generally, only dramatic events – such as a change of government – are capable of altering a state's chosen role once embarked upon. However, it remains unclear how a state will act if its self-perceived role clashes with the perception of other states. This situation is analogous to the status battles examined above. In such circumstances, it can be assumed that states either redouble their efforts to embody their chosen role or, alternatively, seek out a new role that will receive greater external validation.

Early role theory research focused primarily on the structural imperatives imposed on states by the international system (Walker, 1979, 1981). The role played by states was thought to be mainly a function of their structural position within the system. Indeed, Walker (1987: 256) explicitly characterised role theory as an extension of Kenneth Waltz's structural realism. Hence, small states could be expected to play a certain type of role in the system, larger states another type of role, and so on (East, 1973, 1978). As East (1973: 576) states, 'there are profound and significant differences in the behaviour patterns of large and small states'. Focused on size and structure, these early studies largely neglected the agent side of the agent-structure debate (Breuning, 2011: 17).

Over time, research into role theory broadened its awareness that national role conceptions are not necessarily determined simply by size or structural variables. Holsti (1970: 243) became an early forerunner of this shift, recognizing that foreign policy behaviour derives 'primarily from policymakers' role conceptions, domestic needs and demands, and critical events or trends in the external environment.' Holsti (1970: 243) also observed that during crises or international conflict, 'self-defined national role conceptions… take precedence over externally derived role prescriptions'. Holsti's emphasis on role conceptions was one of the first explorations of how role theory can contribute to our understanding of state behaviour and the international environment.

Surprisingly, the literature on identity and foreign policy often omits any explicit mention of role theory. However, Hopf (2002) seeks to distinguish between identities and roles – the latter being templates generated by externally predefined dimensions, the former being more psychological and amorphous in nature. Both Hopf (2002) and Wendt (1997) believe identity to be more intrinsic to an actor than role conception (Breuning, 2011: 21). Wendt (1997) perceives identity and structure as mutually constitutive, whereas Hopf (2002: 263) holds that identity – and by extension, role conception – can be entirely domestically driven.

Role theory and foreign policy

According to role theory, people define their expectations for themselves and others to meet the demands of their social roles. Foreign policy is the set of goals, principles, and actions that a government takes in its dealings with other countries. Foreign policy can be understood as a state's plan of action towards other states and actors in the international arena. It is usually shaped by a state's values, goals, and national interests. Role theory posits that states adopt different roles in the international arena to pursue their interests (Beasley *et al.,* 2020). For example, a state may pursue its interests by adopting a role as a leader. Alternatively, a state may adopt a role as a follower in order to pursue its interests. Role theory has made a significant contribution to the study of foreign policy (Oweke, 2019). Role theory posits that states adopt foreign policy positions to uphold their international image or role. This theory has helped to explain the reason states behave in certain ways in the international arena, and has been used to predict future state behaviour.

This theory is an important perspective in foreign policy because it enables a country to critically evaluate its stance on international issues and its place in external affairs. Holm and Sørensen (2019) determined that small states were readily involved in redesigning their respective international interaction to enhance their status while increasing the acceptability of their political positions in international law. The preceding study determined that the lack of authority among small states enabled them to embrace a theoretical approach to identify how their foreign policies could enhance their status in international politics and gain status as a mediator. Role theory posits that states adopt different roles to achieve their goals in the international system, and that these roles are shaped by the state's domestic politics, culture, and history (Anglin *et al.,* 2022). By understanding the different roles that states play in the

international system, the motivation and behaviour of states regarding foreign policy can be better understood.

National foreign policy roles tend to be fairly stable over time; the consolidating presence of international institutions contributes to this stability (Harnisch *et al.,* 2011: 2). For example, the status of Britain and France as permanent members of the UN Security Council potentially contributes to both countries pursuing a more activist foreign policy compared to many other European states.

Role theory has had a significant influence on the study of small states. Small states are often seen as being highly influential in international affairs, due to their ability to play a "bridging" or "balancing" role between larger states (Oweke, 2019). This is because small states typically have more flexible foreign policy options and are less constrained by domestic interests than larger states. As a result, small states are often able to act independently in international affairs, which can give them a significant amount of autonomy and influence.

Role theory and mediation/conflict management between states

Mediation is a process whereby an impartial third party helps disputing parties communicate and reach an agreement. The mediator does not make decisions or force an agreement; rather, the mediator facilitates communication between the parties to help them reach a mutually acceptable resolution. Mediation is often used as a way to resolve conflict between people who occupy different roles. For example, if a conflict arises between a student and a teacher, a mediator can help the two parties communicate with each other and reach a resolution. The mediator can help the parties to understand each other's perspective and find a way to resolve the conflict that is acceptable to both parties.

Mediators in global politics have gained relative recognition in relation to UN laws in order to mitigate the likelihood of wars between countries in conflict. Mediation was traditionally practised through international forums; increasingly, however, individual countries themselves have sought to mediate a conflict when the chances of wars arise. Moreover, Al-Eshaq and Rasheed (2022) noticed that such practices have enhanced the status of small states by increasing their number of allies. In accordance with role theory, an increased number of allies

helps the recipient country to achieve enhanced status due to receiving greater support in international politics. Furthermore, adherence to international laws further enables them to negotiate better due to extended support from the United Nations and other liberal international institutions which promote peace and economic prosperity in a regional setting.

According to role theory, the mediation of conflict is driven by rights, adherence to international law, and the expectations of regional prosperity and norms (Wehner and Thies, 2021). Regional prosperity was discussed by Al-Eshaq and Rasheed (2022), who argue that the Ukraine-Russia war was a result of failed mediation and resulted in a negative impact on the entire European economy as well. The Goffman approach in role theory suggests that an individual incorporates an action that he expects from the other parties (Thies and Wehner, 2019). In the case of global politics, the rigid stance in foreign policies is determined by countries' expectations of a response from the global community. Thus, small states have not been able to grow due to their pessimistic approach towards their roles (Kelly and Archibald, 2019). The preceding study emphasised that countries should readily enhance their foreign policies above and beyond the Goffman approach through an optimistic outlook that can increase their number of allies and their recognition in global political frameworks.

Virtual Enlargement

Virtual enlargement refers to the process by which a state expands its presence and influence in international affairs without physically increasing its territory or, in certain contexts, material capabilities. Virtual enlargement is closely tied to the notion of soft power – a concept first theorised by Joseph Nye (2004), who defined it as the ability to co-opt others (rather than coerce them) through the attractiveness of one's culture, political values, and policies. Soft power makes it possible to get others to want what you want (Chong, 2010: 385). When states deploy soft power effectively, they virtually enlarge their reach and presence (Chong, 2010: 383). Governance models, political economy, and diplomatic mediation can all constitute bases of soft power that enable a state to defy its territorial limitations (Chong, 2010: 383). Small states may also possess intellectual human resources and public relations skills disproportionate to their physical size (Vukadinovic, 1971).

Virtual enlargement can be achieved by various means, such as increasing economic investment in other countries, increasing military cooperation, or increasing cultural exchanges (Szalaim, 2018).. It can also be achieved by expanding soft power, for instance by promoting a country's reputation, values and culture internationally. Cultural diplomacy is another important method of virtual enlargement (Eggeling, 2017). The UK and Germany use the British Council and Goethe Institute, respectively, to increase global engagement with British and German culture. Many states pursue artistic, sporting and cultural interaction – museum exchanges, for instance, or tourism. Ireland, a smaller state, uses St Patrick's Day to showcase itself globally and gain access to the highest level of American politics through the public exchange of shamrock between the Irish Prime Minister and U.S. president on 17 March each year.

Many scholars argue that virtual enlargement has a positive impact on international relations (De Genova and Roy, 2020). While virtual enlargement does not involve the physical expansion of a state's territory, it can still have a significant impact (Magoń, 2020). For example, virtual enlargement can allow a state to increase its influence and prestige in the international community without having to resort to military force or economic coercion. This can make a state more attractive to other states and can help to foster cooperative relationships.

Additionally, virtual enlargement can also enable a state to project its power and influence into areas that it does not physically control. It can be used to counter the influence of other states or to further a state's own objectives. Therefore, virtual enlargement can be seen as a way for states to increase their influence and power in the international arena without resorting to traditional methods of action (Sheludiakova *et al.,* 2021). Technological changes have facilitated virtual enlargement. As technology advances, the world seems to be getting smaller. People can connect with anyone, anywhere in the world, in moments. The internet has brought people closer together and has made it easier to learn about other cultures (Heyes *et al.*, 2020). People can learn about other cultures and countries easily at home. One can also connect with people globally, which can help to build understanding and cooperation between different cultures.

Virtual enlargement is determined to be an effective tool for countries to break their territorial boundaries and enhance their productivity (Kelly and Archibald, 2019). Klabbers (2020) opined that the diplomatic relations of small states have readily enabled them to compete with developed economies. However, the case of Qatar discussed by Al-Eshaq and

Rasheed (2022), stated that Qatar is an oil-based economy with a significant degree of power in negotiations in international forums and in diplomatic relations with governments across the world. Thus, virtual enlargement for Qatar is a minor aspect of its foreign policy. Other economies which are identified as small states have readily restructured their foreign policies to enhance the trust level with neighbouring countries while maintaining a level of understanding to attain a desired level of recognition. The preceding study also mentioned that virtual enlargement is a tool that enables smaller states to achieve a competitive advantage and a better status in global politics.

Virtual Enlargement and international relations

The relationship between virtual enlargement and international relations can be seen in terms of the impact of virtual enlargement on the international sphere. Virtual enlargement allows for a greater number of people to be involved in international relations because it removes physical barriers to communication and collaboration. Furthermore, virtual enlargement can lead to a more open and inclusive international system (Myovella *et al*., 2020). It is because virtual enlargement allows for a greater diversity of voices to be heard in international relations that it has been so readily embraced by small states to enhance their political power around the world. Middle-Eastern countries after the 1991 Gulf War have readily embraced virtual enlargement in order to expand their influence while increasing their number of allies. Countries like Qatar have embraced virtual enlargement through economic investments and mediation to gain influence over the decisions of other small states, as well as to increase their profile and influence with bigger states.

The virtual enlargement of countries can have both positive and negative impacts on their international position. Recently, the impact of virtual enlargement on international relations has been widely debated. On the positive side, virtual enlargement can help countries to overcome physical barriers to trade and communicate, and to connect with each other more easily and efficiently, promoting international cooperation and understanding. On the negative side, virtual enlargement can also lead to the exploitation of weaker countries by powerful ones, exacerbating tensions and conflict (Malik and Choudhury, 2019). Critics argue that virtual enlargement has exacerbated tensions and conflict by creating a false sense of security and by promoting an "us vs. them" mentality. They also argue that virtual enlargement has led

to a decline in the quality of diplomacy, as diplomats are now more focused on promoting their country's interests online rather than engaging in face-to-face dialogue (Balog, 2021). Another major criticism is that virtual enlargement can create a sense of false intimacy between the participants. This can lead to unrealistic expectations and disappointment when the participants meet in person (Maziad and Khatib, 2018). Virtual enlargement can also create an artificial sense of equivalence between states, obscuring the very real differences in size, wealth and material power that still undergird the international system.

Virtual Enlargement and foreign policy

The European Union demonstrates how virtual enlargement can help to expand influence over neighbouring territories without actually formally incorporating them. East European countries with long-term aspirations to join the European Union have participated in EU-led schemes without actually becoming members. To become an EU member, a country must meet certain political, economic, and democratic criteria to become a member. This gives the EU long-term strategic influence over countries with aspirations to join the club or even those who merely want closer trading relations. Virtual Enlargement has thus been proposed as a way to expand the EU's influence into other countries, without necessarily admitting them as new members (Chong, 2020). For example, the EU has used Virtual Enlargement to provide assistance to Ukraine in its reform process, without making any commitments to eventual membership. This approach has been criticised by some, who argue that it does not provide the same benefits as full membership, but it allows the EU to extend its influence into new regions without having to make any major commitments (Chaban and Elgström, 2021). On a broader scale, one could argue that the EU’s extensive regulatory power in the modern, globalised economy has also been a form of virtual enlargement. It has enabled the EU to influence the trading policies of other states, without actually expanding territory or deploying hard power.

Virtual Enlargement and small states

Virtual enlargement is an important strategy for small states because one method of survival in the anarchical international system is to enlarge their importance to the international community (Cooper and Shaw, 2009). In this context, small states are able to join larger economic communities and participate in their decision-making processes without being formal members of the community. It allows them to have a say in policies that affect them, while still being able to take advantage of the benefits that larger economies can provide. For example, African countries are able to cooperate with the EU through multiple agreements, including the Samoa Agreement and the Joint Africa-EU Strategy. Small states are often at a disadvantage when it comes to enlargement, as they lack the necessary bargaining power and resources to compete with larger member states (Pedi and Wivel, 2020). Consequently, they are often forced to accept unfavourable terms and conditions to join organisations. This can lead to feelings of resentment and frustration among small state citizens, who may feel that their interests are not being represented adequately. There was great frustration among Canadians and Mexicans, for example, when the Trump administration unilaterally withdrew from the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and created a new agreement in its place (Esposito and Barrera, 2017).

There are several notable cases of small states successfully pursuing a virtual enlargement strategy. Chong (2010) cites Singapore and the Vatican City as particular examples of this phenomenon. The Vatican's virtual enlargement is self-evident: territorially and in terms of population, the Vatican City is tiny – yet as the home of one of the world's biggest and most influential religions, the Vatican exerts outsize power diplomatically and symbolically (Chong, 2010: 384). For example, the Pope's pronouncements on social issues or geopolitical issues are treated with the utmost seriousness by the international media, even though the Pope himself controls no army or meaningful hard power capability. In the Cold War, the Holy See intervened diplomatically in Poland to morally oppose Communism – a role some see as critical in the subsequent fall of Communism (Chong, 2010: 392).

Singapore is a more 'normal' example of a small state, not being the home of a global religion. Yet, like the Vatican, Singapore enjoys a disproportionately powerful and influential image in the international system despite its tiny physical size of only 704 square kilometres (Chong, 2010: 395). Singapore's soft power is based less on moral authority and more on its

impressive technocratic and political performance in the global economy. It is regarded as one of the world's most economically competitive states, and a clear example to others in terms of good governance and state effectiveness. Singaporean virtual enlargement thus operates primarily through exporting its governance model.

Virtual enlargement has enabled small states to combine with each other to compete with developed economies around the world. Other successful small state models include Iceland, Ireland, the Scandinavian countries, Switzerland, and Dubai (Chong 2010: 384). In Asia, China's economic supremacy has enabled it to lead the Asian Development Bank; however, the combined efforts of all regions combined has restored neutrality in the decision-making of the Bank (Wang, 2019). This demonstrates how the importance of virtual enlargement can be realised by small states in dynamic global politics.

Countries which are an active part of the UN have often complained of not being able to voice their concerns in international forums (Veebel *et al*., 2022). Galal (2020) stated that the small states have not been productive in presenting their concerns to developed economies, which has made development and economic progress a significant challenge for smaller countries. The study identified that the collaboration of countries through virtual enlargement enables them to effectively bring their concerns to developed economies without being vetoed. Virtual enlargement is a way for small states to increase their influence and bargaining power within organisations. This can be done through different methods, like establishing close economic ties, participating in organisation-sponsored programs, or working closely with larger member states. By doing so, small states can make their voices heard and ensure that their interests are taken into account during negotiations (Pedi and Wivel, 2020). While virtual enlargement is not a perfect solution, it can be an effective way for small states to get more involved in international organisations and make their presence felt.

The virtual enlargement techniques followed by small states include improving their relations with allies through strategic partnerships which not only involve financial partnerships but also negotiations, social and health collaborations as well. Bakhash (2019) states that the combined efforts of small states can readily improve their influence around the world as culturally similar states are considered to comprise a similar market from a business context. Thus, increasing the accessibility of each country is an important step for small states to catalyze their respective virtual enlargement. Furthermore, Giacalone and Salehi (2019) state that the inclusion of allies within decision-making also enhances competitiveness and leads to

a strengthened outcome regionally. It was noted that the collaborative effort of the Gulf states has standardised the practices of the oil market, for example, a major contributor to the world's economy (Niva, 2019). The world's oil reserves are largely governed by smaller states; therefore, it is important for small states to virtually enlarge themselves to ensure effective business outcomes.

The internal application of virtual enlargement enables a country to be more immersive and enhance and cement its stance on international and foreign policies. Raghuram *et al.* (2019) determined that countries have varied their stance on international politics due to unsustainable internal conditions. Therefore, the countries with standardised policies domestically can readily increase their influence in global politics to ensure that their virtual enlargement strategies are effectively met, and their status is also improved in international politics. On the other hand, the study also stated that the norms and requirements of virtual enlargement are governed by being a protagonist of peace, which small states must abide by at all times.

Virtual Enlargement and mediation/conflict management between states

According to the principles of international law, states are required to resolve their disputes through peaceful means, and are prohibited from threatening or using force against the territorial integrity or political independence of another state. Many states have turned to mediation and conflict management as a means of peacefully resolving disputes. One way in which mediation can be used to enlarge the virtual space between states is through video conferencing (Giacalone and Salehi, 2019). This technology is used to allow representatives of different states to communicate with each other without physically travelling to each other's territory. This can help to reduce the cost and time associated with traditional diplomacy, and can allow for a more informal and flexible approach to mediation. Another way in which mediation can help to enlarge the virtual space between states is by using online dispute resolution platforms. These platforms can be used to allow states to submit their disputes to a neutral third party, who can then help facilitate a resolution. This can again help to reduce the cost and time associated with traditional diplomacy, and can allow for a more efficient and effective resolution of disputes.

A conflict that could arise from virtual enlargement is if two countries have different ideas about the virtual world. For instance, one country may want all virtual worlds to be accessible to everyone, while another country may want to keep certain virtual worlds private. This conflict could be mediated by a third party, such as the United Nations.

Qatar has been an effective soft power practitioner in the United Nations, influencing states to uphold international law in resolving conflicts. Qatar has been able to use its wealth to leverage its influence and promote peaceful resolution of conflicts, both within the region and beyond. Qatar has used its financial resources to help fund mediation efforts, such as the UN-brokered peace process in Yemen, and has provided humanitarian assistance to those affected by conflicts (Antwi-Boateng and Alhashmi, 2022). Qatar has also provided political support to the international community, offering its diplomatic services to facilitate dialogue and negotiation between warring parties. Moreover, Qatar's neutral feedback between conflicting parties has made a strong case for the inclusion of smaller states in conflict resolution negotiations.

Qatar has also been an effective outside mediator in resolving conflicts using its diplomatic channels to encourage dialogue between adversaries and has sought to build bridges between countries. Further, Qatar has provided financial assistance to conflict-affected states, such as providing aid to the Syrian refugees (Aljassar and Rosenson, 2022 and has been a great proponent of international law, actively promoting its implementation and advocating for its enforcement. Qatar is a member of the International Law Commission, which has been instrumental in developing international law (Azaria, 2020). Qatar has also been a proponent of international humanitarian law, and has been involved in various initiatives to promote its implementation and enforcement. The inclusion of Qatar in the aforementioned organisations has enabled it to play a catalytic role in creating a communicational medium for Arab countries and international commissions. Traditionally, the Arab countries were distinguished by their lack of participation in international bodies.

International Law and Mediation

International law includes provisions for the mediation of conflicts (Ginsburg, 2020). However, Solis (2021) highlighted the need for a standardised practice of mediation embedded

in the law in cases of international conflict. Articles 2 and 33 of the UN charter emphasise the role of peaceful negotiations at all times between parties in conflict. Yet Tucker (2022) highlighted that deep-seated conflicts can generate a degree of enmity which may lead to the excessive use of power by the state parties to the conflict. In the preceding case, the role of an international mediator was found to be imperative. The United Nations' International Law Commission (ILC) aims to codify and progressively develop international law and also aims to resolve conflict in a peaceful manner. However, several countries have their own concerns regarding the use of the International Law Commission – for example, it is claimed that the ILC prioritises theory and doctrine over practice (Voulgaris, 2022). As such, ILC sceptics are found to be more open to mediation by third party states (Costello and Mann, 2020).

Small states, including Qatar, have widely gained the status of a mediator (Assefa, 2019). In accordance with the UN charter, countries are allowed to mediate conflict with their allies to resolve a problem in an efficient manner. However, Solis (2021) emphasised that the UN charter does not allow mediators to aid countries in a state of war. It has been observed during the Russia-Ukraine conflict that allies of Ukraine are supporting Ukraine with arms and other resources, which has lengthened the state of war in the region and has increased the likelihood of a 'no-outcome' zone over the past two years. At the same time, however, Ukraine has the right of self-defence under international law. Thus, Bull (2019) emphasised that the agreed laws in the UN charter should be followed by all mediators and effort should be made to avoid the excessive use of power or coercion in mediation. Lacking the option to use hard power in conflict management, small states are motivated to mediate conflicts via international law.

The role of small states in international conflict resolution is not widely discussed in the literature (Solis, 2021). Traditionally, the major developed economies have played a larger role in conflict resolution by influencing parties to the conflict. However, Lazarev (2019) notes that big state mediation has often failed and resulted instead in prolonging conflicts and adding to the turmoil in global politics. Small states are regarded as more neutral intermediaries and arbitrators in the eyes of the international community as well as the parties to the conflict. However, Blair (2020) observes that arguments over shared interests or cultural backgrounds are a major concern of international arbitration.

As a small state, Qatar has played the role of key negotiator in several conflicts involving Muslim countries, including Afghanistan and Palestine (Al-Eshaq and Rasheed, 2022). Qatar's foreign policy is linked to its own Islamic identity and its cultural similarities with the states in

conflict. Puntigliano (2022) argues that states in conflict should not have a biased mediator, since this can further increase the intensity of conflict. This study also determined that small states have a much higher likelihood of being accepted as mediators in a conflict. In the case of larger states, it is easier for the mediator to opt out in ways that do not impact their status. This is not the case for smaller states, who thus have a greater incentive to see the mediation process through to a positive outcome. Thus, it has been observed that the role of Qatar in redesigning its foreign policies to facilitate neutrality has been optimal in regard to managing conflict in Afghanistan and Palestine.

In accordance with international law, the parties to an extended conflict should be held accountable for their involvement while external parties should be given liberty to mediate conflict and, in effect, practise virtual enlargement. Western superpowers have already progressed towards the use of international law to resolve their respective conflicts. But in the case of smaller states, their foreign policies tend to be more focused on relationship-building; they are less inclined to monitor the internal politics of other countries or see it as their role to take an interventionist stance. Furthermore, small states are not empowered by organisations such as the United Nations and Commonwealth to intervene in the internal politics of foreign countries. Moreover, international law states that mediation between two countries can only be conducted by a third-party mediator for the optimal interest of both parties. In doing this, Qatar has played a pivotal role as a small state in playing a greater role to help mediate conflicts in global politics while adhering to international law.

In the case of Qatar's mediation in Afghanistan, Khan *et al* (2022) stated that the Qatari approach was found to be more liberal than realist in nature. Qatar appreciated Afghanistan's movement for independence from war and restoring peace while the country further mediated the efforts of the US in its war on terrorism. The mediation was depicted to be unsuccessful given how the crisis concluded in 2021 with the US abandonment of the country. Nonetheless, it was noted that the liberal approach adopted by Qatar had much significance in the mediation of the conflict, and led to comprehensive results that are still debated (Tuffuor, 2023). At the same time, it was argued that the results achieved were also not favourable for the prosperity of the people of the country under the new Taliban government.

Methodology

Introduction

This chapter explores the project's research methodology in order to best explore the topic of Qatar's small state mediation. The research will incorporate a multi-method research strategy in line with the arguments of scholars like Wright (2013) who have argued the foreign policies are qualitative variables as they are better explained by characteristics than magnitude. Moreover, the nature of this research suits triangulation for valid arguments and conclusions regarding the foreign policy arsenal of small states. The study's method can be divided into two parts, which together comprise the analysis of primary source materials through thematic analysis and the analysis of secondary data through a systematic literature review. These analyses will enable this study to demonstrate the importance of external mediation of conflicts for small states.

Qatar has developed into a regional mediator over the years for several reasons (Miller and Verhoeven, 2020). Qatar has actively participated as a mediator of conflicts in Palestine, Sudan, Lebanon and Afghanistan (Galal, 2019). This study will incorporate triangulation through two part research plan and will validate the theoretical arguments as applied to real world case studies with a focus on virtual enlargement, status seeking and role theory.

The information garnered from the data collection process has been subjected to a thorough thematic analysis, an approach designed to maximise the material's utility and interpretive potential. Given that this study includes three distinct categories of respondents, it is reasonable to assume that at least three distinct themes will emerge (Neuendorf, 2018).

To further explain, triangulation, a technique involving the application of other perspectives to interpret a given set of data, will be used to conduct a full analysis of these themes. This strategy aims to achieve a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of Qatar's function as a small state engaged in conflict mediation. This exhaustive analysis is necessary to comprehend the underlying nuances of Qatar's participation in such mediation efforts, as well as how these

efforts align with Qatar's overarching goals of virtual expansion, status seeking, and role theory.

In this context, triangulation serves a dual purpose. First, it fosters an environment for holistic analysis by employing multiple perspectives, thereby facilitating cross-verification of findings and enhancing the overall validity and dependability of research outcomes. Second, it enables a deeper and more nuanced comprehension of Qatar's foreign policy strategies as a small state actor.

Therefore, the application of triangulation in this research will be helpful in illuminating the complexities and multiple dimensions of the issues at hand. It will elucidate the interplay between the perceptions of all the participants, their motivations, and Qatar's actual strategies. In turn, this will provide a more nuanced understanding of Qatar's role and strategies in the international arena, which is essential for policy formulation and the advancement of academic knowledge in this field. This methodology reflects the rigour and exhaustive perspective typical of doctoral-level research and ensures the validity of the study's findings.

Mixed Method Design

The introductory section will be followed by a section setting out the research design, process of data collection, the sampling method, and the data analysis. This will assist the research to investigation into the role of mediation in the foreign policies of a small state, using the Qatar case study. Lamont (2021) has argued that a narrow research focus is an effective methodological approach especially when based on the collection and analysis of primary and secondary data. However, as noted above, foreign policies are determined as non-quantifiable variables that ignore magnitude while qualitatively determining its characteristics. Thus, in line with Lamont (2021), this research draws on a mixed research method in international relations that enables the effective testing of findings. In the process, the research will be divided into two phases.

The foreign policies of a country are dependent on a range of factors that include capacity for conflict management, the stability of relationships, the role of the small state in the global and regional political frameworks, cultural acceptance, administrative and institutional factors and state influence in the relevant region (Gimba and Ibrahim, 2018). These factors are qualitatively analysed variables and, as Lê and Schmid (2015) have identified, a singular research strategy embodied in a mixed method design enables the researcher to establish coherence in the results without providing separate qualitative and quantitative justifications. Furthermore, Prantner (2022) also adopted a similar approach while investigating foreign policies for the Arab Gulf states that yielded valid outcomes and provided effective recommendations in how improve understanding about foreign policies in the wider global context.

Natow (2020) analysed that multi-method design that embodies triangulation, which is effective when dealing with the role of small states using mediation as an instrument of foreign policy. Farquhar et al (2020) further argued that triangulation should be widely used by a researcher that explores a distinct timeline or research topic that cannot be supported through existing literature directly. Therefore, usage of multi-method design comprehensively empowered this research with the ability to counter-check its findings while formulating valid conclusions. Furthermore, Miller and Verhoeven (2020) also noted that the foreign policies are dynamic and cannot be justified through a single observation when extensive investigation is required.

Since this study aims to triangulate the results to demonstrate the links between theoretical arguments on virtual engagement, status seeking and role theory, it was important for the study to incorporate a methodology that justifies testing that addresses all these dimensions. A multi-method approach enabled the research to critically analyses the qualitative variables through a range of testing methodologies that are discussed in the following sections of this chapter. Hunter and Brewer (2015) have also argued mentioned that the incorporation of multi-method approach enables a study to explore theoretical and real-world cases in a pointed manner whereby the validity of the arguments are judged through triangulation technique. The validity of this study's arguments are of optimal importance along with their alignment with the theoretical underpinnings addressed.

Phase or part one of this study draws on secondary data, while the second phase draws on primary data. Each phase consists of a distinct data collection method, sampling technique and data analysis that draws on triangulation. Furthermore, the incorporation of multi-method research also enables the study to verify its findings against the existing literatures and formalised findings incorporated from the primary data. Jonsen and Jehn (2009) established that triangulation in qualitative data enables a study to cement characteristics of the variables, allowing both for a deeper understanding of the foreign policies of Qatar and the role of a small state as a conflict mediator.

Phase 1

Sampling method

The first phase of this research gathered data from the secondary sources such as documents, statistical data from government and its official websites as well as academic articles in order to establish an understanding of the aims and objectives of this study while answering its research questions. Sarstedt et al (2018) determined that the use of purposeful sampling that is non-random and incorporates inclusion and exclusion criteria allows for the research to embody secondary data that is relevant to the aims of research. Thus, this research, while investigating the role of small states as mediators, used purposeful sampling that scrutinised the existing literatures for its relevance and illumination in relation to aims and objectives of this study. Another factor considered in this research was the chosen time-frame of 1995-2022. Major events that took place outside of this time frame - such as the 1990-91 Gulf conflict – were excluded.

The sampling methodology for the case studies were primarily the same as literature for the aforementioned timeframe. However, case studies were also included that covered the beginning of the rule of the former Emir of the state of Qatar Sheik Hamad bin Khalifa and related it to the current foreign policy arsenal of Qatar. Moreover, virtual enlargement was adopted in order to explore the real time strategies of Qatar and the fulfilment of its respective aims and objectives. Ingebrigtsen et al (2012) explained that the small states increasingly rely

upon mediation as a way to achieve virtual enlargement; however, this is significantly dependent on specific foreign policies. Therefore, the research incorporated case studies through official government's records on its policies and changes that comprehensively determined their stance on certain conflicts like Palestine, Israel, Sudan and Lebanon. Brannagan and Giulianotti (2018) repeatedly emphasised that the focus of small states conflict mediation was dependent on the cultural and religious similarities of their respective regions. Thus, the cases were examined to explore on the preceding fact as well from 1995 to 2022.

Data collection

Groenland and Dana (2020) have identified that data collection is an integral part of the research process as it provides credible information to justify the findings that follow. Furthermore, the incorporation of secondary data provides context and evidence for the findings. In addition to the primary sources used, the secondary data will be incorporated from official government websites, studies and research departments in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Reporting on current events by credible news sites, including the BBC, Al Jazeera and CNN among others, will also be used. Furthermore, databases and other online sources and such as JSTOR, Scopus and ProQuest will be used to access peer-reviewed journal articles to establish an understanding on the key concepts and theoretical arguments especially as they relate to role theory, virtual enlargement theory and status seeking theory. Moreover, these databases provide a wealth of information and valuable tools in support of the project. They helped to identify relevant literature, gain a deeper understanding of the scholarly trends in the wider field of IR and Gulf Studies and to analyses arguments in more focused research. They also offer a range of perspectives, which can enrich the understanding of topics and strengthen one's own arguments.

Ryzhov et al (2019) have noted how Islamic countries around the world have mediated for peace between Muslim countries. Fahy (2018), Bilgin (2018) and Ryzhov et al (2019) have also observed that the inclination of Qatar towards external mediation was driven by their interest in the stability of Muslim countries and good well of Muslim stakeholders. At the same time, a country's foreign policies are governed by the national interest of its domestic

stakeholders as well as their involvement in the regional and global political systems. These are not constants but changing interests (Cioreiari and Haacke, 2019). Dogan AKKas and Camden (2020) have argued that such interests result in dynamic foreign policies that lead to a country's commitment to mediation whether it be a small state a Muslim state or both. The timeframe under study of 1995-2022, adopts a similar narrow approach in line with other studies (Cox and Stokes, 2018) and excludes, as noted above, events preceding that time such as the 1990-91 Gulf war that had a major impact on regional foreign relations (Sarmaan et al, 2019).

Data analysis

The analysis of data in this study takes the form of a systematic literature review, an approach that involves the rigorous and methodical collection and collation of pertinent theoretical and empirical materials. This review will form the bedrock upon which a comprehensive understanding of the central research issues can be constructed, thereby providing a panoramic view of the salient topics under study.

The incorporation of case studies further bolsters the research, enabling a nuanced understanding of the mediation role of a small state in the context of foreign conflict. This methodology is inspired by the approach employed by Lebow and Stein (2019), who explored the role of a considerably larger actor, namely the United States, during its withdrawal from Afghanistan, through the lens of extant studies.

A systematic review, as the name suggests, is a systematic, reproducible methodology for collating, selecting, and critically appraising all relevant research on a particular topic. It is methodically intended to reduce bias and ensure replicability. The steps typically include identifying a clear research question, setting explicit selection criteria, conducting a comprehensive literature search, appraising the quality of the studies, and synthesizing the results in an impartial and explicit manner.

According to Farquhar et al. (2020), the confluence of real-world case studies with conceptual frameworks serves to solidify the findings of research, providing it with a superior degree of validity. Consequently, the systematic literature review is anticipated to confer a

distinct advantage to the study, given its capacity to succinctly distil the primary debates in the literature concerning the key themes under scrutiny.

It is important to note that viewpoints aligning with our established findings will contribute to reinforcing the research's conclusions. Conversely, perspectives at odds with our findings will not be dismissed but rather subjected to further exploration, with the aim of understanding the multifaceted relationship between mediation and the foreign policies of small states. In this way, our systematic review will ensure a balanced and comprehensive understanding of the subject matter and ultimately enhance the overall credibility and integrity of the study.

Phase 2

Sampling method

Phase 2 of this study is focused on the sampling of primary data. Golan et al (2019) made the point that foreign policy stakeholders are the entire population of a selected country. However, it was suggested in the same research that not all stakeholders are equally informed. Therefore, this research discarded the usage of a random sampling technique. Instead, it has chosen a selected sampling technique focused on government officials, key foreign policy decision- makers and experienced experts of regional and international relations as well as the economic, social and cultural dimensions associated with external affairs.

In the line with this approach, a number of government officials in the State of Qatar were interviewed (whether in office or retired), who have direct experience in mediation processes or who have experience in the field of foreign policy and have supervised or participated in one way or another in the State of Qatar's foreign policies, including mediation. For example, senior government officials who represented Qatar's foreign policy, senior officials who represented the country at the United Nations, and members of the diplomatic corps. As the State of Qatar is in a slightly different situation than the countries that carry out mediation operations, it has a special envoy of the Minister of Foreign Affairs who acts as a mediator and the State of Qatar's representative in all matters related to mediation efforts. It is his responsibility to perform this role at all steps of the mediation process, as well as to represent

and convey the Minister of Foreign Affairs' and the State of Qatar's directions. interviews will take place with him because this envoy role represents the largest official representation of the State of Qatar in terms of mediation, and thus these interviews will enrich the project because it will be one of the best sources to discover the perspective of government officials of the State of Qatar.

A high-ranking official with the status of Minister of State is notable given the importance of his official function representing the State of Qatar. Furthermore, additional official numbers are regarded an important addition, yet this addition has never been addressed in study, particularly doctorate research. In terms of significance, the fact that such authorities have formally and practically participated in the process of mediation is crucial. This aligns their perspective with the difficulties they encountered and their capacity to express these difficulties, as well as the variables influencing the success or failure of such mediations. This data is valuable to academics attempting to comprehend mediation mechanisms and their effectiveness.

In total, eight individuals were interviewed for the study, all of whom had worked in some capacity for the Qatari state. All had worked in some form of mediation capacity within the Qatari government, most often under the umbrella of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As well as the Special Envoy, interviewees included ministers, former ministers, government officials within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ex-officials, and Qatari mediation experts. These individuals were able to provide in depth knowledge on Qatari mediation activities.

In addition, these authorities were able to provide the researcher with knowledge, particularly on their expertise as well as their perspectives on the different parties involved in the mediation process. This information is vital due to the fact it assists the researcher establish a more in-depth understanding of the mediation process and the impact that it has on the parties involved. It may also be used to discover areas that may contribute to improving the mediation process. Interviews with officials have the potential to validate the findings of earlier mediation study findings. This is of particular importance because other types of research methods, such as self-report surveys, might be more biassed.

Lu (2018) has explored the positive impact of the inclusion of foreign office officials in research. Sheludiakova et al (2021) stated that the government officials are exposed to the insights of decision making that enables them to effectively know key foreign policy issues. Therefore, inclusion of government officials was pivotal for this study as they enabled the research to gather a necessary and desired level of expertise and insights on the foreign policy arsenal of Qatar in general and its mediation role in particular. Furthermore, the inclusion of relevant stakeholders inside Qatar's foreign ministry also enabled this research to add to the evolving thinking on the role of mediation in the foreign policies of (small) states, as well as the wider relationship of Qatar with other states, in a framework of contemporary global politics (Acharya and Buzan, 2019).

Finally, the input of experienced international relations researchers allowed this study to incorporate their varied and informed understandings of the region in general as well as the value of existing literature, thus adding to phase one on secondary data as well as serving as primary data in itself. The views of these experts is especially helpful in addressing the outcomes of mediation efforts for small states and in providing a perspective on the key theoretical frameworks used here - virtual enlargement, status seeking and role theory. These experienced experts were also able to assist this study by providing a wider context for the framework that explored the role of small states and their attempts to incorporate status seeking and virtual enlargement on the global level.

The study effectively incorporated the theoretical arguments provided by these scholars as well as the real-world perspectives provided by government officials and foreign ministry stakeholders. Gomez and Bernet (2019) have argued that the diversification of contributors to the study sample offers a wider prospective and further dimension to research. This study will also use this mix of experts and practitioners to consider the effectiveness and to contrast the contribution of virtual enlargements, status seeking and role theory for small states when, like Qatar, they engage in mediation as a key foreign policy priority. Moreover, the inclusion of government officials and foreign ministry stakeholders allows for the provision of a concrete conclusion that contributes to our understanding of the roles of small state in global politics.

Data collection

The second phase of this research draws on interviews with selected respondents. As Arifin (2018) has noted respondents can be interviewed through structured and unstructured methods. The structured framework follows strict guidelines on the questions regardless of the response generated by the interviewee. Nevertheless, the structured approach could be used to obtain responses from academic writers as part of data collection. Semi-structured interviews, on the other hand, enable the researcher to elaborate on the specific strengths and knowledge of the respondent without any strict adherence to rigid formats. This is a more suitable method for this research as it will engage with more the one type of candidates with different areas of expertise and knowledge as part of the primary data collection. For example, while academic experts can apply address theoretical issues at the heart of this study, semi-structured interviews enable government officials to reflect on the national benefits and disadvantages of mediation from a practical perspective, while other government officials can locate mediation polices in Qatar's long-term strategic goals and objectives.

All contribute to our understanding of Qatar's use of mediation as a foreign policy instrument and also help us to understand the decision-making process of a small state. Specifically in the context of Qatar, it will help us understand the contribution of mediation to the fulfilling of its global political aims and objectives as well as its efforts to increase its soft power and reputation (Miller and Verhoevenm, 2020). As aforementioned, 5 to 7 high-ranking, senior Qatari government officials and senior representative in foreign ministry with sufficient knowledge and experience will be interviewed in order to answer research questions regarding the government perspective in ways that enrich the research. In furtherance of scholarly inquiry, it is of utmost importance to engage in in-depth interviews with individuals of significant expertise, notably the distinguished Special Envoy for Qatari mediation as noted above. such esteemed individuals have not only immersed themselves in a multitude of roles within the realm of Qatari mediation but also possesses extensive practical experience, rendering their insights invaluable to comprehending the nuances and intricacies of this specialized field.

The interview with the erudite Special Envoy serves as an unparalleled opportunity to glean firsthand knowledge and understanding from an authoritative figure who has been intricately involved in numerous facets of Qatari mediation. By engaging in a comprehensive dialogue with this esteemed expert, a myriad of crucial aspects related to the dynamics, strategies, and

challenges of Qatari mediation can be explored, providing a scholarly foundation for research and contributing to the advancement of knowledge in this field. Moreover, the extensive practical experience possessed by the Special Envoy further underscores the significance of this interview. While theoretical frameworks and academic literature serve as vital pillars in the academic exploration of Qatari mediation, the insights garnered from individuals who have engaged in practical application are paramount in bridging the gap between theory and real-world implementation. The Special Envoy's lived experiences, accumulated over a considerable span of time, provided information that cannot be found in literature or academic journals. It should also be noted that the researcher will conduct these interviews after arranging meetings and scheduling them.

The questions in part one will primarily investigate the dynamics of small states on the international stage, with a focus in particular on the State of Qatar. small states commonly lack hard power, inspiring them to pursue alternative means to exert influence and positively impact regional and international affairs. Recognising this dynamic, the thesis examines the centrality of mediation to Qatar's foreign policy by focusing on three major conceptual approaches: virtual enlargement, status seeking, and role theory. It is anticipated that these concepts will not only contribute to Qatar's mediation efforts, but also provide an in-depth explanation of them. As practitioners and experts, interviewees will be asked to reflect on their understanding and application of these concepts in their respective roles, as well as their perspectives on how these concepts relate to Qatar in context.

The questions in part two will raise a number of broader issues that this thesis investigates. These questions will probe interviewees' knowledge and experiences regarding mediation, their specific roles and experiences during related case studies and Qatar's border role as a mediator. The timing and nature of their involvement, their perspectives on the significance of mediation to Qatar's foreign policy and strategic priorities, as well as their personal experiences with Qatar's mediation role will be investigated. The analysis will also determine whether they view Qatar's mediation efforts as fruitful, both in terms of conflict resolution and the achievement of Qatar's national goals and objectives. Alongside the broader discussion, the research will delve into the experiences and perspectives of the interviewees regarding the three conceptual approaches at the core of this thesis - virtual enlargement, status seeking, and role theory - in the context of Qatari mediation. This dual focus on individual experiences and conceptual

frameworks will provide a nuanced understanding of Qatar's distinctive position and international mediation strategies.

In line with the research sub-questions, the interviews also sought to cast more light on why Qatar mediates, so many conflicts within its wider region of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA); how it has gone about mediating these conflicts, including the strategies, resources, and structures employed by the Qatari state in its approach to mediation; whether Qatar has succeeded in its mediation aims, both in each individual case and on a wider strategic level; and what Qatar's experiences reveal about the role of small states in the contemporary international environment.

The questions as to why Qatar mediates were largely contained within Part I, which also focused on the study's three overarching concepts of status theory, virtual enlargement, and role theory – all of which are intrinsically connected to 'why' Qatar mediates. The 'how' of Qatari mediation was specifically addressed by including a question asking: *"How was the decision made for Qatar to mediate in this case? Who was the driver of the intervention? (For example, His Highness the Emir, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, concerned individuals?) Or, in other words, was there a balance between the different concerned parties and was there always a single decision-maker leading the way, or was there a team dynamic?"* The responses to this question were extremely illuminating in detailing the nature of the policymaking process within the Qatari government and foreign ministry, especially as the Qatari government weighs whether or not to put itself forward as a potential mediator in a case.

The question of whether Qatar has succeeded in its mediation aims was put to interviewees directly through questions such as:

- "To what extent was Qatar's mediation successful in this case study (Darfur/Lebanon/Afghanistan) in terms of mediating these conflicts?"
- "Generally, do you believe Qatar's role as a mediator was appreciated by the concerned countries? What are the signs of this appreciation (if any)? "
- "What is your opinion on the role of mediation (Darfur/Lebanon/Afghanistan) in bilateral relations with the concerned countries?"
- "Regarding achieving Qatar's goals and objectives... in terms of the three conceptual approaches... has Qatar's mediation effectively contributed to: Virtual Enlargement / Status Seeking / Role Theory".

Here the answers were triangulated against the data generated by phase 1 of the methodology – see more below in the section on methodological limitations.

Finally, the research question about what Qatar's experiences reveal about the role of small states in the contemporary international environment was touched upon throughout the interviews, with participants often volunteering their view that the Qatari model could potentially be emulated by other small states.

Part 1 Context: Small states lack hard power and look to alternative ways to • Achieve influence • Contribution a positive role to regional/international affairs This thesis looks at 3 main approaches that both contribute to and explain the centrality of mediation to Qatar's foreign policy. They are… 1.Virtual enlargement 2.Status seeking 3.Role theory	Practitioner Qs	Experts Qs
	As a practitioner did you think in terms of any of these three concepts when you were in your role?	As an expert did you think in terms of any of these three concepts when you were in your role?
	How do you think any of these three concepts relate to Qatar in general?	How do you think any of these three concepts relate to Qatar in general?
Part 2 Generic questions	About mediation in general	About mediation in general
	About Qatar as a mediator	
	About the relevant case study to the interviewee	
	Specific questions about interviewee's role in the case study:	

	1.When were you involved (dates) and what was your specific role?	
	2.How long did you undertake this role?	
	3.What was your view of the role of mediation in bilateral relations with the countries involved?	
	4.How important was this mediation on this issue to Qatar's overall foreign policy and strategic priorities?	
	5.What was your experience of Qatar's mediation role in this case study?	
	6. What were the key lessons you took away from Qatar's mediation in this case study?	
	7.To what extend was Qatar's mediation a success in this case study in terms of mediating the conflict or tensions	
	and in terms of achieving Qatar's wider goals and objectives Specifically, In terms of the three conceptual approaches at the heart of this thesis? In your experience did Qatari mediation in this case study contribute effectively to • Virtual enlargement	

	• Status seeking • Role theory	
Question regarding International law:	In terms of the balance Qatar maintains between its adherence to the principles of mediation under the United Nations Charter and the pursuit of its own national interests and objectives. Which of these elements might have a greater influence on Qatar's mediation initiatives both specifically in relation to the case studies you were involved in and more generally.	

CHAPTER 3:

Background of Qatar as a small state

Introduction

The transfer of power to Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani in 1995 has been pivotal for Qatar's foreign policy (Eddin, 2021). Salem and Zeeuw (2012) determined that after gaining independence, the initial two decades of Qatar's foreign policies followed the footsteps of Saudi Arabia's foreign policies. However, the change in leadership enabled Sheikh Hamad to take control of a new independent foreign policy which advocated for human rights, equality and positive influence in the world. Qatar has thrived under monarchy and continues to present a moderate and progressive image to the world through its dynamic and innovative foreign policies (Al-Eshaq and Rasheed, 2022). Sheikh Hamad's experience on the Supreme Planning Council enabled him to expand economic and social policies using foreign policy as an instrument (Al-Eshaq and Rasheed, 2022). Thorhallsson and Stiensson (2017) determined that the alignment of economic development with foreign policy during the present era of globalization has significantly influenced economic output, particularly in the case of small states. Further, Qatar's foreign policies were also analyzed by Miller (2019), who found that the country's focus on mediation strategies has expanded beyond the boundaries of Middle Eastern countries and conflicts.

Qatar's military advancements after 1995 were pivotal in supporting its foreign policy ambitions. These developments enabled the country to connect with the United States (U.S.) for diplomatic ties and enhance international trade in acquiring weaponries and ammunition (Al-Zaidi, 2019). From 1995 to 2013, Sheikh Hamad focused on economic developments, trade agreements, and financial agreements with other countries to establish an enhanced regional presence along with greater global recognition. This strategy enabled Qatar to be an integral part of the United Nations (UN) after joining in 1971 (Galal, 2020). Prior to the Arab spring, Qatar embraced the role of a mediator under Sheikh Hamad with a focus on conflicts from Sudan to Eritrea, Lebanon to Palestine, and Somalia to Yemen (Eddin, 2021). These conflicts

involved significant Muslim populations, signaling Qatar's image as a small state actively seeking to mediate conflicts in the Muslim world.

Another pivotal point in Qatar's foreign policy development was the appointment of Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani in 2013 after the abdication of his father (Zweiri & Qawasmi, 2021). The new ruler significantly changed Qatar's foreign policies, focusing on soft power through diplomacy, education, festivities, sports, and tourism in maintaining existing strategic alliances while also making new ones (Coffey & Phillips, 2020). Ben Hassen (2021) observes that Qatar has played a significant role in enhancing the image of Arab monarchies. Furthermore, Albasoos et al. (2021) observe that the transition of Qatar's foreign policies after 1995 has enabled it to build more connections with the Western world and global institutions such as the UN. The recent opening of a UN House in Doha is a clear achievement for Qatar's foreign policies, serving as a platform for all UN agencies operating within Qatar (The Peninsula, 2023).

Recent Qatari activity in sports and tourism further demonstrates the country's increasing level of soft power. Qatar hosted the FIFA World Cup 2022 (Al-Thani, 2021). Despite challenges, Qatar succeeded in generating global attention, while the involvement of European countries in FIFA enabled Qatar to establish extensive relationships with them. Meza et al. (2022) observe that Qatar has been successful in maintaining good relations with Western countries. Sheikh Tamim's policies have also focused on the mediation of conflicts, continuing the path charted by his predecessor. Qatar has played a key role in mediating conflicts while providing significant financial aid to assist other countries' economic performance (Al-Eshaq and Rasheed, 2022).

Another strand in Qatar's growing assertiveness in international relations is its willingness to stand up for human rights (Alawi & Belfaqih, 2019). Qatar participated in the NATO-led international coalition against Libya after the Gadhafi regime threatened rebel populations with imminent slaughter (Ulrichsen, 2014: 121). Qatar was also the first Arab state to suspend diplomatic relations with Syria after the outbreak of civil war in 2011 (Ulrichsen, 2014: 131). Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim was instrumental in persuading the Arab League to suspend Syria's membership (Ulrichsen, 2014: 135). Involvement in Libya and Syria reflects Qatar's focus on events within its region and the wider Muslim world. Amidst the unrest of the Arab Spring, Qatari policymakers determined that mediating conflicts in neighboring countries is better than waiting for the outcome. Therefore, Qatar's foreign

policies closely monitor countries within the region to actively mediate conflicts before they directly affect Qatar itself.

However, this assertive posture has also drawn significant criticism. In Libya, Qatar struggled to translate its initial successes into long-term influence (Ulrichsen, 2014: 130). Qatar's assertiveness regarding Syria also drew criticism from the Arab world. By 2017, relations between Qatar and other key players in the Arab League had deteriorated, leading to a blockade by the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Egypt (Salem and Alam, 2021). The dispute lasted for four years until resolved in 2021, demonstrating that an independent foreign policy carries risks as well as opportunities for Qatar.

Qatar as a Small State and Its Transition

The growing international influence of Qatar has demonstrated that the country cannot simply be dismissed as a traditional small state (Lynch et al., 2022). Qatar's increasing economic and geopolitical influence has enabled the country's key stakeholders to be present for important economic decisions around the world along with treaties and alliances that ensure the sustainable prosperity of the region. Furthermore, Eid (2020) argued that, in economic terms, Qatar is a relatively significant player due to its growing GDP, which has increased to $179.7 billion. Qatar has also invested heavily in European countries – a reversal of the historic pattern between the Gulf and Europe. This economic and financial power has increased Qatar's status within the international system. Albasoos *et al.* (2021) argue that states have incorporated role theory, virtual enlargement and soft power to enhance their presence around the world. In the case of Qatar, soft power provides an important narrative for its foreign policies and ability to reach out to a global audience to enhance its value in the geo-political framework. At the same time, however, Qatar has faced significant criticism for its allegedly poor human rights record and treatment of non-citizens – an issue that recurred during the build-up to the 2022 FIFA World Cup, notably in relation to the deaths of construction labourers working on stadiums.

Qatar has enjoyed the status of a 'powerbroker' in the Middle East. Al-Eshaq and Rasheed (2022) observe that the maintenance of stable diplomatic ties within the Arab world is highly challenging due to conflicting historical experiences, attitudes, interests, and perspectives.

However, in the case of Qatar, it was noticed that the Al Thani family focused on the establishment of productive political relationships rather than historic differences. Traditionally, the size of a state affected its ability to exert geopolitical influence in the international system. However, in modern times, the growing budgetary independence of small states such as Qatar has made them less reliant on external support and more capable of acting autonomously in international relations. Indeed, Mansi *et al.* (2020) have argued that countries with lower population and higher per capita income are best placed to take advantage of globalization and achieve superior macroeconomic outcomes. Small states such as Ireland, Switzerland, and Singapore have all thrived in recent decades despite – or perhaps because of – their small state status. Thus, Zolberg (2019) concludes that the small state term is becoming increasingly redundant global politics. Certainly, Qatar's ability to transcend its historic small state status has allowed it to generate a greater voice in global politics and contribute to the dynamics of peace and prosperity in the Middle Eastern region.

High modernism and integration of society in the framework of its foreign policies has enabled the country to extensively enhance its status as a small state. Traditionally, Qatar's monarchical structure was regarded with scepticism externally; however, its highly modern approach towards monitoring society and providing health and education to citizens as well as providing electricity and water for free – in keeping with the Qatari government's view that these goods are fundamental human rights – has convinced more human rights advocates of the benefits of Qatar's approach to governance.

Furthermore, the usage of soft power further advocated for Qatar's inclusion in the big leagues. This approach has also been adopted by Qatar's neighbours. For example, Duan and Aldamer (2022) observe that Saudi Arabia's Prince Muhammad Bin Salman is also focused on soft power, with large scale financial agreements with the US and a growing sports and tourism industry with desired level of investments to enhance their status in global politics. Therefore, Zweiri and Qawasmi (2021) state that Qatar has influenced regional dynamics through its foreign policy and governance model, contributing to a significant change in global (or at least regional) politics. Thus, in accordance with preceding arguments, it can be stated that Qatar is not merely a small state but a growing force and influence within global politics.

The foreign policies of Qatar in respect of mediation have particularly changed the perspective of global politics in observing Qatar not as a small state but as a powerbroker for the region (Gelaidan *et al*., 2022). Currently, Qatar's mediation in the Palestine and Israeli

conflict serves an example. Furthermore, strategic alliances with other countries, including the U.S., have increased the visibility and influence of Qatar. The amount of business pledged by Qatar to diversified countries around the world has significantly enhanced its value in negotiations and capacity to maintain strategic relationships with other countries. Furthermore, its presence in global institutions like the United Nations has improved its connectivity with global norms and discourse. Internal polices play a critical role when it comes to small states. Miller (2019) argued that the small states are not effectively able to establish presence in the international medium and geo-politics due to their limited ability and increased focus on internal issues. However, in the case of Qatar, it was noticed that the optimal policies of governance internally enabled it to focus on foreign policies which readily targeted mediation and soft power to enhance its global image.

Boasting the world's highest per capita income, Qatar has established its global presence in transforming from an impoverished region to a global urban model (Al-Mutairi & Ali, 2022). The growth of Qatar has been fueled by hydrocarbons financial gains – discounting for inflation, Qatar's real GDP per capita grew from less than $30,000 in 1980 to over $300,000 by 2019 (St Louis Fed, 2024). However, Dogan Akkas (2022) observes that Qatar's smart deals in maintaining and retaining international contracts have also enabled it to enhance its global standing. Furthermore, it is observed that foreign states have also linked with Qatar to extensively evaluate the feasibilities of acquiring liquified natural gas (LNG). With its increased ability to negotiate, Qatar has disrupted the global dynamics of the international energy market, contrary to the traditional assumption that small states lack the power to change a global variable or cost. In the case of Qatar, it has sufficient control and voice over the LNG production and prices to exercise such influence.

Qatar overcoming its Smallness

The smallness of a state in a global political context has been depicted from the size of its population and degree of involvement in international relations (Gelaidan *et al*., 2022). The countries of the Middle East and Arab world were known for their smallness due to their limited influence over global politics despite holding much of the world's natural resources. Pourhamzavi and Pherguson (2015) determined that Qatar's changes in foreign policies enabled the country to overcome its smallness as it became increasingly participative in conflict

management of external affairs while contributing towards international politics as well as actively participating in UN programs. The preceding study determined that despite the limited size of Qatar, the country has demonstrated significant influence over regional and global politics, particularly in conveying the viewpoint of the Muslim world. Qatar does not speak for all Muslim states – as the blockade clearly demonstrates – but it does receive a respectful hearing in world capitals as the voice of a relatively rare phenomenon: a rich and successful Muslim state. Indeed, Kayaoglu (2014) observes that the sizeable presence of Muslim states in the UN has further contributed towards the growing voice of Qatar in global politics. Countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq appear to recognize the status of Qatar in international politics and respect its ability to contribute an independent Muslim viewpoint, even as a theoretically small state (Orhan, 2023).

Roca and Martin-Diaz (2021) determined that the size of a state is the primary determinant of its international position from a neo-rationalist and post-internationalist point of view. However, in case of Qatar, it was noticed that it is among the small states which struggled from gaining an international status in 1970s to being the host of UN conference and headquarters in 2022 (Spanos *et al.,* 2022). Furthermore, the country has hosted high-profile events, which has further amplified its status and contributed to overcoming its smallness. In the case of the FIFA World Cup, for example, the success of the tournament – played out to packed crowds in state-of-the-art stadia – helped to convey Qatar's modernity to foreign audiences. Furthermore, it was noticed that the growth in population through natural course as well as immigration, along with rapid urbanized development, aided Qatar's recognition in the world.

A sign of overcoming smallness is the increased resilience of a state to the impact of external events (Abrishami, 2020). The Gulf crisis in 2017 significantly impacted the decision- making of both the UAE and Qatar, whereby the entirety of the region was trying to enforce a change in power dynamics. The crisis underlined two truths about Qatar's standing in the region and wider world. First, it remains vulnerable to the actions of its neighbours, especially Saudi Arabia. For all its growing influence, Qatar remains a significantly weaker military power and regional influence than the Saudis. Secondly, however, Qatar also successfully leveraged its diplomatic relations with the US and Europe to dodge regional conflict with Riyadh as the blockade was ultimately mediated and resolved (Nawaz *et al.,* 2020). The willingness of powerful external actors to intercede on Qatar's behalf (at least indirectly) demonstrated Qatar's growing importance in the international system. The blockade thus underlines both

sides of Qatar's current status: persisting smallness, on the one hand, but also an increasing capacity to overcome this smallness through diplomatic means, on the other.

That said, Michael and Guzansky (2020) observe that for Qatar to be internationally recognized as an influential state, it should comprehensively address and settle its regional issues with adequate foreign policies to cement its role and stance in international politics. The preliminary objective of Qatari foreign policy is to be a protagonist of peace and mediate existing international conflicts that may disrupt regional peace and development, as demonstrated by the scale of mediation efforts initiated by Qatar since the change of leadership in 1995.

In discussing how Qatar may seek to overcome its 'smallness', it is useful to consider in what ways smallness is a weakness in international relations. Small states may have limited material, geographical, or human capabilities, which would directly influence their ability to achieve foreign policy objectives (Chong, 2010; Baxter *et al.,* 2018). Furthermore, smallness could make the state more vulnerable to outside political, military, and economic pressures compared to larger states (Barakat, 2012; Harnisch, 2012). However, relational power may reduce these pressures by allowing for more effective use of available resources, enhancing the state's 'soft power' (Brannagan & Giulianotti, 2018). Transcending beyond this 'smallness' is not about addressing the objective limitations of small states such as military power or geographical area, but rather about how states can convert their limited resources into 'smart' power (Darwich, 2019; Baxter *et al*., 2018). If in general the strength of states is related to natural resources, territory, and capabilities of administrate and political institutions, then it is only through enhancing those organisational capabilities that small states can overcome their smallness (Battaloglu, 2021).

Mitchell (2021) determined that the increasing prominence of Qatar in global politics took time due to the internal issues of monarchy as the Al-Thani family primarily owned the kingdom and internal family rivalries led to sudden changes in leadership. However, it has been observed that the country stabilized after 1995, marked by two peaceful leadership transitions. This contributed to the sustainability of the nation, as both the former and current princes engaged in various aspects of the economy. The existing policies of Qatar revolve around transcending its small state status in international politics. The country aims to be among the important stakeholders of global politics, which has led it to focus its foreign policies on gaining the support of other countries while establishing ties with the US and Europe for

effective representation in global politics. Furthermore, standardization of leadership enabled Qatar's policies to be more decisive and consistent, which streamlined the internal sustainability of the country and enabled it to focus on volatile movements within the Gulf region. Miller and Verhoeven (2020) also observe that there is a significant alignment between the UAE's and Qatar's foreign policies as both work towards a common objective to enhance their status in global politics.

Sheikh Tamim's speech at the Munich Security Conference clearly enabled other nations to understand that Qatar is working towards overcoming its smallness and urged all other small states to do the same and get the desired level of treatment in international politics (The Munich Security Conference, 2018). Amidst the high accessibility for countries around the world, it was noted that Qatar's involvement in businesses have often served the interest of foreigners as well. Through its increased per capita income along with major natural resources trading, Qatar was able to challenge the dynamics of small states and readily increase its status without seeking to deploy hard power for the completion of its objective. Furthermore, Rayburn *et al.* (2019) observe that status and influence is now better achieved through soft power means, such as investment, rather than through predation or invasion (although this message has clearly yet to reach every state). This shit suits the interests of small states, who – notably during heightened tensions like the Arab wars – experience precarious internal positions, underscoring the vulnerability they face in the complex dynamics of regional conflicts.

Qatar's Influence

Qatar's growing influence in international politics has been demonstrated above, showing how small states can transcend their smallness through deft diplomacy and domestic economic development. Eggeling (2017) stated that the virtual enlargement undertaken by Qatar through its foreign policies primarily covered economic grounds in which the country offered aid and investment to its allies to help them sustain themselves in the face of economic pressures – Egypt, Yemen, Palestine, Sudan and Lebanon feature prominently among the recipients of this aid (BBC News, 2013). As a consequence, Qatar won support for its political and regional agenda in return for its generosity. Apart from the general trading aspect, Brannagan and Giulianotti (2018) also state that the depth of Qatar's influence is determined by its virtual enlargement policies and status-seeking in addition to the economic importance of the country

in globalized world. Primarily, the Western countries are found to be aligned with Qatar due to its natural resources importance. However, the gradual change in Qatar's foreign policies and its global engagement through soft power means has enhanced the country's diplomatic status and added a secondary logic for foreign states to engage with Qatari interests.

Qatar's roles in the United Nations, Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Gulf Cooperation Council and the Council of Arab Economic Unity, among several others regionally, further demonstrate Qatar's importance in global and regional politics. The Western world has appreciated Qatar's ability to focus regional opinion towards developments of defense, economics and social norms of the Arab countries while also communicating a similar ideology to its allies. Furthermore, Qatar also has a strategic alliance with China (Ghafar & Jacobs, 2020). This positive relationship with China helps to further amplify Qatar's influence in international affairs, while also demonstrating Qatar's capacity to plot an independent course between rival poles (Naqvi & Rogers, 2021). The distance between the two countries and their varying importance in international relations derives from Qatar's role a country driven on natural resources while China is more dependent on its manufacturing sector for growth and international trade. Fetias *et al.* (2021) argue that a strategic alliance between the two nations can shift the balance of power in global politics towards them, despite Qatar only being a small state. This perhaps overestimates the degree to which Qatari and Chinese interests are aligned, but productive relations with China fit with Qatar's strategy of being friendly with all states and enemies to none.

Economic

The economic importance and influence of Qatar is greatest in relation to its extensive natural gas reserves, which are among the largest in the world (Zhao *et al.*, 2019). Tan *et al.* (2014) determine that the primary virtual enlargement of Qatar is due to its natural reserves, which are effectively used by the country to generate economic growth and development. Qatar used to be a member of OPEC, which gave it leverage in determining energy supplies and thus prices (Fattouh & Sen, 2021); however, the country left OPEC in 2019. This was Qatar's response to the diplomatic isolation and tensions with other countries in the Middle East (Dırıöz & Erbıl, 2021). Leaving OPEC did not substantially affect Qatar's economy as the state re-focused all its attention to LNG exports. In fact, as of 2024, Qatar is the world's second largest

LNG producer and exporter after the United States (Sharma, 2024). The latter only recently started overtaking Qatar in the LNG market following the war in Ukraine and the global increase in demand for LNG (Sharma, 2024). Prior to 2023, Qatar held the leading position in LNG exports. Thus, Qatar has successfully utilised its natural resources to develop a powerful position in global energy markets.

Despite the smallness of the state, Qatar has been able to economically incentivize its strategic allies due to its increased economic output (Buigut and Kapar, 2020). Miller and Verhoeven (2020) state that Qatar has also virtually enlarged itself by increasing its influence over South Asian countries as well due to its economic support and investments in these countries. This helps to win Qatar valuable international allies, and increases the likelihood that Qatar's voice will be heard and respected by larger states within the international system. Therefore, despite being a small state, Qatar has been able to effectively extend its influence in international politics. Similarly, Gengler and Al-Khelaifi (2019) observe that the work of Sheikh Hamad in promoting peace across the Middle East, along with the strategic expansion of relations with key allies, has enabled Qatar to enhance its autonomy while also increasing its international status. The preceding study stated that Qatar's status-seeking strategy empowered the country to make strategic alliances as other nations already hold an interest in accessing Qatar's natural resources. Thus, Qatar has enjoyed significant success in maintaining relationship or alliances with other countries despite its flexible foreign policies.

The historic rift between Saudi Arabia and Qatar during 2013, which led to an increased level of volatility in the oil market, served as a lesson to both countries that their geopolitical positions depended significantly on energy production (Lipp, 2019). Wezeman and Kuimova (2019) argue that the rift between Saudi Arabia and Qatar demonstrated to the entire Middle East the importance of their respective strategic alliances and their ability to work as a group in determining the supply of oil, the single most consumed and demanded natural resource in the world (Ajami, 2020). The recent intermediary efforts of Qatar in the Israeli-Palestine conflict have further demonstrated its willingness and capacity to work in the interests of regional peace.

Unlike other GCC countries including Bahrain and Oman, Qatar has not yet signed a free trade agreement (FTA) with the U.S. as it believes that the trade between the two countries has limited scope to expand beyond the current levels. The U.S. imports oil and gas related products from Qatar while Qatar imports aircraft, machineries and other technology-oriented products

from the U.S. (Al Breiki and Bicer, 2022). Anouz and Salah (2022) stated that an FTA would translate the internal elasticity of oil products pricing to the external parties as well and would consequently significantly disable governments' involvement in pricing decisions. In resisting an FTA, the Qatari government thus prioritizes its economic autonomy. Charfeddine and Al Refai (2019) observes that GCC countries are widely considered to be extravagant spenders on imports due to their oil and gas wealth. However, the modern economic policies of Qatar have sought to avoid the import of unnecessary products to induce its localized advantage. Furthermore, GCC countries rely heavily on military products acquisition from China, Russia and the U.S.

The economic issues within the country began with the rift with Saudi Arabia as 40% of the food imports of Qatar came from Saudi Arabia (Wellesley, 2019). Since Qatar is an extensively export-oriented country of natural gas with massive reserves of 11% of the entire world (EIA, 2023); the country was able to quickly shift its import preferences to Turkey, Iran and India. However, Cooper and Momani (2011) note that the Saudi rift highlighted the need for changes in the diplomatic policies, relationship management and foreign policies of Qatar. The next section examines how Qatar has used defense and security policies to complement its economic strength.

Defense and Security

Despite its small size, Qatar has invested significantly in its armed forces and defence system. Since the possibilities of war have always been likely in the Arab countries due to conflicts between states, Qatar has acquired high-grade military weapons from the U.S. and other parts of the world to equip its military (Wezeman & Kuimova, 2019). Furthermore, Qatar strengthened its relationship with the U.S. by signing a Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) that emphasizes the presence of U.S. troop within Qatar. Currently, therefore, the country has improved its defensive resilience through strategic partnerships with U.S. and NATO forces – for example, the largest U.S. military base in the Middle East is located in Qatar (Marquardt and Bertrand, 2024). By making itself important to major allies in this manner, Qatar partly overcomes its smallness and reduces its vulnerability vis a vis rivals such as Saudi Arabia.

Primarily, Qatar's requirement of defense and security was primarily present to defend its sovereignty. However, the gradual rise in Qatar's status and influence led to increased conflict due to its open foreign policies which operated independently of other Arab countries and also increased the level of conflicts to some countries banning the entry of Aljazeera's journalists who work for this Qatari channel and Qatar's journalists within their territories. Shockley *et al.* (2020) note that the Arab media has historically been tightly controlled by the region's governments. The greater openness and energy of Qatar's media organizations, epitomized by Aljazeera, effectively undermined the status of other Arab media. This is partly the cause of the ongoing tension between Qatar, the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

In each of the aforementioned conflicts, it was noticed that the security and defense strategies of Qatar were not just focused towards acquiring arms and ammunition from the U.S. It was determined by Aras (2019) that Qatar strategically evaluates the importance of other states and their possible contributions towards the defense and security of Qatar. After the conflict with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, Qatar sought to improve its relations with Iran and Turkey. Therefore, it was noticed in the preceding study that Qatar's status seeking, and virtual enlargements are not limited to neighbouring states but also go well beyond its borders to include significant players in the wider region. At the same time, Qatar is among the few Arab states eager to develop its relationship with NATO forces to enhance its defense policies. Buoyed by oil and gas wealth, and vulnerable due to its small size, Qatar appears relatively less concerned than other Arab states about ceding sovereignty to the West. Indeed, Joe Biden, the president of the United States, designated Qatar as a major ally outside NATO (Shear, 2022). Therefore, Rossi (2019) states that despite the small size of Qatar, it has been able to overcome regional obstacles through proactive foreign policy measures. In effect, Qatar has secured U.S. protection at relatively little cost to itself.

Al Udeid Airbase is among the chief assets of US-Qatar defense relations. The importance of the airbase was demonstrated in the American evacuation from Afghanistan as it was strategically closer to Afghanistan than any other present U.S. military base in Asia. Gengler and Al-Khleaifi (2019) argue that the U.S.'s deteriorating relations with other Middle Eastern states have presented an opportunity for Qatar to fill the gap for the U.S. in the region. In effect, employing role theory, Qatar is crafting a new role as important U.S. ally – critics might argue vassal – in the Middle East.

The U.S. alliance also adds to Qatar's potential as a mediator in conflicts between Arab countries and Western countries, as well as better facilitation of peace keeping exercises. In terms of peace-keeping, Ulrichsen (2019) observes that the maintenance of internal peace in other states is no less important than avoiding inter-state war given that domestic conflicts often transmit across borders under conditions of globalization. In seeking to promote peace, Qatar is among the countries with valuable allies and key resources. Thus, it was noticed that Qatar is fond of flexible foreign policies which not only mitigate conflicts but also mediate them for immediate and long-term solutions. In the process, this virtually enlarges the influence of Qatar in international relations.

The price of oil and gas exports have been a major concern for OPEC and GCC countries, creating significant tension with oil- and gas-consumers in the rest of the world (Selmi *et al.,* 2020). However, protective agreements and price elasticities have enabled countries like Qatar to empower their positive image in international politics. Mohammed *et al.* (2022) observe that the countries that are largely dependent on oil exports for the sustainability of their economy are willing to renegotiate the rates of petroleum exports. From an economic standpoint, Qatar has achieved an impressive level of GDP and highly effective per capita income threshold for a country with only 2.695 million residents (World Bank, 2023).

Ktaish (2022) determined that the internal policies of Qatar are also found to be volatile, which has increased its expenses on defense and security. Ktaish (2022) argues that strengthened ties with GCC countries would enable the entire Gulf geopolitical unit to form a defense union. Such a union would help to generate consensus among the region's states while offering mutual protection for all members. Qatar's significant desire for international allies has led the US and Qatar to maintain a positive relationship as each of the two require collaboration to survive economic pressures. To provide security to Qatar, the U.S. deployed 8000 troops to Qatar at regional headquarters for US central command (CENTCOM). The presence of active forces in itself enables a country to deter rivals by increasing the costs for potential aggressors (Khan *et al.,* 2022).

The financial contribution and/or donations by the US are negligible and can only be termed as strategic investments by the US in Qatar. Sorosh *et al.* (2022) stated that the US has reportedly invested relatively small sums for its own troops in the Al Udeid Airbase. It was noticed that the ties between the US and Qatar are primarily motivated by security concerns. In the case of Qatar, U.S. support helps to safeguard Qatari sovereignty and security in the

context of multiple regional conflicts, while for the U.S. the relationship helps to ensure the continued flow of valuable gas exports onto global energy markets. Since gas is a fungible good on the global market, higher gas production in Qatar means lower prices for U.S. consumers, other things being equal. As Farihat (2020) notes, U.S. foreign policy over decades has been centrally concerned with maintaining control over key oil- and gas-producing regions, notwithstanding the recent vast increases in U.S. energy production.

It was noted that the virtual enlargement and status-seeking attributes of a country are identified using its defense and security strategies (Mohammed *et al.,* 2022). In Qatar's case, the strengthened military enabled the country to deter aggression while effectively evaluating strategies and foreign policies to engage in international politics despite being a small state. It was noticed that the smallness of Qatar derives from its small population of 2.695 million individuals (World Bank, 2023), which is why Qatar's high GDP per capita does not necessarily translate to overall economic power. Roberts (2019) determined that the soft power of the country was the primary reason for popularity of Qatar; however, its ability to generate support from the nearby countries was more important for its acceptance of opinions in international politics. Through the developments of its own special forces and growing security relationship with the U.S., Qatar has also developed an adequate defense and security mechanism to defend against any possible intrusion on its territory.

The presence of the UN's anti-terrorism unit in Qatar is a self-explanatory proof of Qatar's successful policies pertinent to international relations. The country has successfully mediated several conflicts with a representation in international unions that has enabled the world to establish a considerable amount of trust in a small state. Despite its smallness, Qatar, after 2013, has never been limited in its foreign policies as it had already virtually enlarged itself through the support of neighboring countries. Contrarily, the regional terrorism in Asia instigated the interest of the UN to tackle terrorism from Qatar as a strategic geopolitical location (incentivized also by Qatari funding). Spanos *et al.* (2022) state that the collaboration between the UN and Qatar has enhanced the international status of Qatar, which has also been aided by developing relations with other allies. The preceding study determined that Qatar's foreign policies of Qatar were sufficiently flexible to mitigate conflict with its neighboring countries while also providing safety for UN headquarters as well.

The relationship with the U.S. is central to ensuring an optimal understanding of the defense and security policies of Qatar. During the 2000s, the US's involvement in Asia was primarily

focused on Iraq and Afghanistan (Buigit and Kapar, 2020). In relation to Afghanistan, the Qatari government took significant initiatives in resolving the conflict between the U.S. and the Taliban through the "Doha Agreement", signed as a peace agreement between the US and Taliban. Signing of the agreement meant that the Taliban already recognized Qatar as a diplomatic nation and an effective mediator while the US productively became aware that future conflicts can be efficiently mediated in neutral venues like Qatar for effective management of international relations. Mirza *et al.* (2020) state that the longevity of US inclusion in Afghanistan disrupted international politics significantly from the viewpoints of human rights and sovereign status of Afghanistan. However, Qatar's successful mediation restored the balance of power towards their respective governments, which enabled the country to demonstrate its influence over international politics. The preceding study also stated that Qatar is among the Muslim-majority countries which is most capable of being a diplomatic representative of Muslims worldwide. Many others are Muslim states are either too poor and unstable (e.g. Egypt), too aligned with rival poles (e.g. Iran), or too compromised by their domestic political systems and norms (e.g. Saudi Arabia). In ensuring its own defense and security, while at the same time projecting a moderate and independent image abroad, Qatar positions itself to mediate conflicts as an optimal methodology for the country to maintain its status.

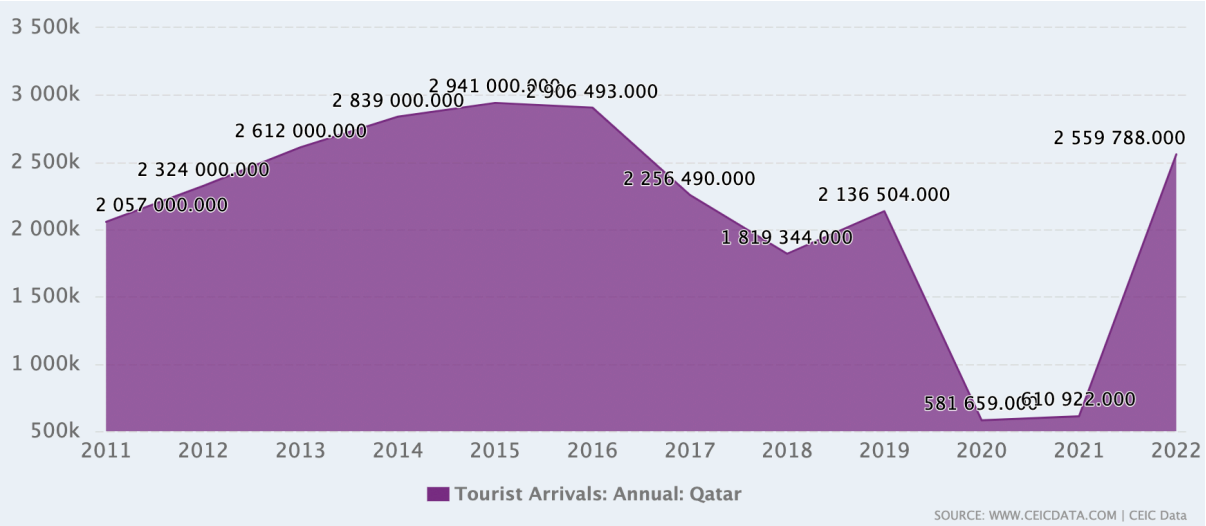
Social

Socially, Qatar has identified itself as an Islamic state with a primary prioritization towards the religion. The enhancement of its soft power was primarily focused towards gaining support from other Muslim majority countries. However, Roberts (2019) notes that Qatar was successful in projecting the traditions of Islam more widely for the entirety of the world to witness during the recent FIFA World Cup. Qatar faced significant criticisms in the run-up to the World Cup as it prohibited the drinking of alcohol and other acts which were already banned in the religion. Dorsey (2022) observes that outsiders were initially highly discouraged by this position. However, in the event, the tournament proceeded well, and most visitors appear to have enjoyed their experiences in Qatar. This has helped to enhance Qatar's reputation among foreigners and potential tourists, who have shown themselves ready to adapt to Qatar's cultural and societal norms. The increased tourism and social opportunities provided by the event

further enhanced Qatar's soft power, furthering its ability to increase virtual enlargement and provide distinct avenues for representation in international politics. This influence is evident in the recently introduced Olympic guidelines, which closely mirror the policies enforced by Qatar. Termed the "Qatar World Cup Effect," this trend signifies a broader shift in international sports regulations. France's Olympic Games Organising Committee has notably followed suit, reflecting a global alignment with the stringent standards set by Qatar and emphasizing the enduring influence of the initial decision on alcohol consumption within sporting venues.

On the other hand, Fahy (2019) argues that much of the international media believes that Qatar does not provide freedom to practice any religion apart from Islam. However, the truth is rather different, and an individual can practice their respective faith without harm. The facilitation of Qatar towards non-Muslim population may be limited, but the enhancement of its international relations was primarily dependent on their treatment of non-Muslims. Therefore, the country specifically cares for minorities and provides distinct spaces for prayers in tourist destinations. Apart from the religious aspect, Qatar has been focusing on sports initiatives and events that gather the world's attention. The FIFA World Cup 2022 along with other sporting events in cricket, tennis, car races and other sports have increased the number of tourists in Qatar (Table 1).

Figure 1 Qatar Visitor Arrivals (2011-2022)



Source: CEIC (2023)

Qatari foreign policy believes that the influence of policies towards tourists as individuals leaves a lasting impact as it spreads positive influence among the stakeholders, and thereby contributes to Qatar's virtual enlargement. Similarly, the demonstration of Qatar's infrastructure while showcasing classic Arab culture has enabled the country to convey its culture and religion to visitors while also demonstrating that Qatar is a willing and enthusiastic participant in global politics as well.

In addition to the FIFA world cup 2022, Qatar is also due to host the World Aquatics Championship 2024 and Asian Games 2030. These events will help to sustain the world's attention and consolidate Qatar's position in the global sporting landscape (Shakariji *et al.,* 2019). Sport is now one of the foremost means of attracting global attention, and it is notable that the Saudi government under Mohammed bin Salman has adopted a similar policy aimed at attracting the world's leading sporting events to its shores. Demonstrating the capacity to host global sporting events is a key method of increasing soft power and gaining acceptability among foreigners, notwithstanding the heightened scrutiny that comes with such events. This improved soft power can, in turn, be used to improve Qatar's leverage in foreign policy and enhance its international status.

Bafarasat and Oliviera (2021) observe that one of Qatar's main objectives is to translate its economic influence around the world into social influence. The new approach since 2013 enabled Qatar to reinvest revenues from trade to hosting sporting and social events designed to gain the world's attention. Their presence enabled Qatar to generate considerable positive attention; however, there was a significant hurdle in maintaining the positive feedback due to certain cultural limitations along with religious sentiment. It was observed that Qatar did not adapt its laws and rules for foreign visitors, instead expecting visitors to adapt to Qatari laws and customs. However, Hassan *et al* (2019) note that the country showed a progressive image of Islamic values in the recent events, which contributed to a change in perception of visitors about Islam as a religion as well as Qatar itself and Arab countries more widely. Indeed, Qatar can be seen as something of a trailblazer for the Muslim and Arab worlds more widely, demonstrating how modernity can be combined with traditional Islamic values and customs. Through this, it can be argued that Qatar has expanded its influence in the Arab world as an example to follow (Putra, 2023).

Ajayi *et al* (2021) also note that Qatar is among the nations which employs a carrot and stick strategy. The carrot and stick motivation theory posits that good behavior must be rewarded while bad behavior must be punished (Jabagi *et al*., 2019). The preceding study found that the carrot and stick strategy ensures balance within a society by enabling individuals to feel responsible for their actions. A similar approach has been used by Qatar in maintaining its international relations. Due to its abundant economic resources, Qatar is able to reward its allies with strategic agreements that can incur economic growth for both countries. For example, Qatar agreed to invest heavily in Sudan as an incentive for the Sudanese government to settle the conflict in Darfur. Ajayi *et al* (2022) argue that this carrot and stick strategy is among the reasons why Qatar, despite being a small state, can be an active mediator in international politics. This financial firepower has complemented Qatar's cultural diplomacy, a term driven from soft power, to help transform Qatar's role in international politics.

Al-Eshaq and Rasheed (2022) argue that Qatar's foreign policies have been driven by status seeking. Historically, Arab countries have invested relatively little in seeking to enhance their international status. However, Qatar has changed this dynamic as it seeks enhancement of its social status in international politics while pursuing long term sustainable development. Qatar's status-seeking was evident in its deployment of the 'Muslim Brotherhood' for peacekeeping in Syria and Egypt. Miller and Verhoeven (2020) observe that the country's ambitions for

regional peace and prosperity have been supported materially by a willingness to invest resources in pursuit of this objectives. The results, however, have not always been apparent, partly due to the presence of external factors. Nonetheless, Qatar's growing political influence of Qatar enabled it to sufficiently enhance its status in international politics, which further empowered the country to have more negotiation power in terms of conflict mediation in international politics. This marks a change from the early 1990s, when Qatar's small state status often left it unable to effectively manage its negotiations due to a lack of power and influence and misalignment with UN objectives.

Since then, Qatar has developed a much better working relationship with UN agencies. The UN's growing trust in Qatar is demonstrated by the recently inaugurated United Nations Office of Counter Terrorism (UNOCT) in Doha, Qatar (Lee *et al.*, 2020). The UNOCT is already approved by 193-member consensus of the UN, reflecting a broad international consensus that Doha is the right place for the institution. De Londras (2022) observes that Doha's growing prominence on the international diplomatic circuit, through hosting summits and negotiations, has increased Qatari influence both with foreign states and within global institutions such as the UN. Furthermore, the preceding study determined that the cultural diplomacy followed by Qatar signifies the importance of maintaining transparency in international relations and foreign policies to achieve the desired level of success. Contrarily, Kucukwar *et al* (2021) argue that the status seeking attribute of Qatar was revoked by the presence of UNOCT as the commission was focused on counter terrorism procedures while Qatar was found to be a country that was dependent on diplomacy to handle issues of external threats. However, since UNOCT was formed in collaboration with US and NATO forces, it enabled Qatar to strengthen its military as well, which assisted in maintaining its virtual enlargement. Also, it was determined that these advancements in military strength and security assisted Qatar in becoming a more effective mediator, as conflicting states observed the enhancement of power of their respective mediator.

Qatar has also influenced its local citizens to pursue international education and practise a general level of acceptance towards global norms while studying their own culture extensively. Graham *et al* (2020) observe that Qatar is not supportive of liberalism per se but is nonetheless inclined towards acceptance from foreigners. Domestically Qatar has readily invested in female empowerment, child education and basic human rights to ensure that the citizens are optimally satisfied with the leadership of the country while being increasingly responsive towards the

government's foreign policy objectives in terms of status seeking and virtual enlargement goals. For example, Qatar's female labour participation rates are among the highest in the region, as is the proportion of women enrolled in universities (MOFA, 2023). Miller and Verhoeven (2020) further observe that the monarchical nature of the Qatari system has advantages in terms of ensuring the long-term consistency of policymaking and alignment of means with objectives. Qatar has also invested significantly in issues pertinent to intolerance, discrimination, sectarianism and violence. The zero-tolerance approach adopted by Qatari law enforcement agencies on these issues has helped to change local norms and bring them into alignment with global expectations. This has increased the overall level of tolerance within Qatari society.

Education and Climate

In pursuit of its global objectives, Qatar has also focused extensively on educational initiatives both domestically and internationally. Zguir *et al.* (2021) observes that Qatar's leaders have promoted education domestically while launching significant educational opportunities for developing countries within their respective borders. Further, Qatar has provided funding programs for its citizens to study abroad. The "Reach Out to Asia" initiative has extensively expanded educational opportunities for Asian countries like Pakistan to offer more educational opportunities for their locals through Qatar's funding and research centers. These educational outreach programs further contribute to Qatar's growing soft power internationally. They also help to increase the number of skilled individuals willing to move to Qatar for future work and employment opportunities. Al-Thani *et al*. (2021) also observe that the increased educational opportunities provided by Qatar to neighboring and other Asian countries significantly increase its soft power while socially influencing these countries towards a distinct change in image of Qatar from an old-fashioned monarchy to a country that is a protagonist of peace and education in accordance with modern international standards.

As a protagonist of an orderly society, Qatar has also launched an educational program for children who lost their rights to education due to conflict. In Gaza, for example, the Qatar Fund for Development has worked in combination with UNICEF to provide educational opportunities to over 100,000 children (EAA, 2024). Sharifian and Kennedy (2019) note that conflict can often create a gap in children's education, with long-term consequences for human development and economic growth in the affected regions. Cognizant of this, Qatar has

relentlessly supported the provision of education in Palestine along with other conflict-affected regions. This has also helped to enhance the social image of Qatar and promote its identification of education as a pressing need for future peace and prosperity. The “Educate a Child” initiative of Qatar is a lasting program, which enhances Qatar’s influence in the world of philanthropy as well.

Over the past two decades, Qatar has undergone a remarkable transformation from a country with a limited number of local universities, not exceeding the count of one hand, to a nation housing 31 academic institutions offering more than 400 academic programs. This growth is notable not only in terms of quantity but also in quality, as Qatar has strategically targeted globally renowned universities in the academic field. Some of these prestigious institutions include Georgetown University (2005), Northwestern University (2008), the University of Virginia Commonwealth, (1998) Texas A&M University (2003), and Weill Cornell Medicine (2001) (Walsh, 2019: 274). This ambitious pursuit reflects Qatar's commitment to acquiring international academic recognition, positioning itself as a nation dedicated to providing world-class academic services across various disciplines. The scale of tertiary educational provision in Qatar now far exceeds that of comparable states in the region such as Kuwait and Oman.

Qatar has also been active in the environmental sphere. The government has pursued significant advancements in technology in order to control the environmental cost of its operations. Sherman *et al.* (2022) observe that the regular participation of Qatar in UN conferences has enabled the country to realize the importance of technology for saving the environment. This has led the Qatari government to invest extensively in acquiring and researching technologies which can improve the environment. The environment is a sensitive issue for Qatar given its reliance on natural resource extraction. However, as a primarily gas-based power, Qatar’s natural resources create fewer negative environmental externalities than the oil-based economies of neighbouring states. LNG, in particular, is relatively clean and efficient in comparison to oil as an energy source. Qatar has also reinvested its energy revenues in clean technology research, further demonstrating its willingness to participate in the global shift towards clean and renewable energy. That said, Qatar is yet to take a strong stand against unsustainable methods of business practiced within the country and the dependence of its trade on the extraction of scarce natural resources. Therefore, for Qatar to optimize its global presence in international politics, there is room for improvement in terms of environmental responsibility.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP18) was hosted by Qatar, which also gave the country a chance to introduce a Global Dryland Alliance. The global dryland alliance was focused on droughts, desertification and land degradation for countries with no other method of producing crops through agriculture. Since Qatar is among the desertified countries, its focus on the initiative enabled other countries including Saudi Arab, the UAE and Egypt to become a proactive part of the initiative to push back against environmentally unsustainable trading agreements concerning food and beverages. Zurayk (2020) notes that the rate of overcharge of food imports to the Middle East has always been reflected by the oil prices in that duration. Therefore, pricing strategies are determined by the demand for the product along with the willingness to pay by the Arab countries. In seeking fairer food import prices, Qatar is a protagonist for fairer trade for the Middle East, which could help to enhance sustainability in the region. These initiatives have also helped to improve relations between Qatar and its neighbours within the region.

Qatar's philanthropic initiatives are wide-ranging due to its involvement in different donation camps in forms of finance, education and resources. Chesnot and Malbrunot (2020) state that Qatar is among the largest donors to the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund. The response fund was specifically established to address the consequences of natural disasters worldwide such as earthquakes, tsunamis, floods and other forms of destructive natural phenomenon. Qatar has also established innovative partnerships with other countries to address these challenges – for example, in 2024 it has co-funded a $50 million initiative with the UK to help tackle humanitarian and development crises, with a particular focus on Gaza (FCDO, 2024). Qatar's willingness to offer financial resources in collaboration with other states underscores its role as a strategic ally which is not only available in times of economic advantage but also in times of need. Such initiatives are among the primary reasons for Qatar's success in enhancing its international status over recent decades.

Mediation

While smallness makes states more vulnerable to environmental threats, thus limiting their ability to act, a proper foreign policy may offset this by exploiting the states' position as consumers of security (Eggeling, 2020). Smallness may allow for greater flexibility and adaptability, and even become a crucial feature of states that seek to capitalise on their

negotiation capacity like Qatar (Brannagan & Giulianotti, 2018). According to the UN, mediation is understood as a process where 'a third party assists two or more parties, with their consent, to prevent, manage, or resolve a conflict by helping them to develop mutually acceptable agreements' (Alqashouti, 2021). In general, mediators may take the form of governments, international organisations, regional inter-governmental organisations, non-governmental organisations, and individuals (Ulrichsen, 2021). The effectiveness of mediators and their decision-making is shaped by their nature as agents on the international relations stage, and this is especially relevant for Qatar as a small state (Szalai, 2018). Qatar's foreign policy is reflected in Article 7 of the country's constitution, which affirms the 'principle of strengthening international peace and security by means of encouraging peaceful resolution of international disputes' (Álvarez-Ossorio & García, 2021).

One of the key events that changed Qatar's approach to diplomacy was Emir Sheikh Hamad assuming power in 1995 (Ennis, 2018). Qatar's policy was restructured with the goal of breaking the country's dependence on Saudi Arabia. Under Emir Hamad, Qatar assumed a role as a mediator and an integrator, providing initiatives for organising diplomatic processes and settling regional disputes. Key mediation efforts under Emir Hamad include Houthi ceasefires in Yemen, the Lebanese political crisis, the Darfur peace process, the Djibouti-Eritrea ceasefire, and the Hamas-Fatah reconciliation (Milton *et al*., 2023; Alqashouti, 2021). Current Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim has been following the same foreign policy course, focusing on expanding foreign affairs influence and status at both regional and international scale (Ennis, 2018). Notable mediation efforts under Emir Sheikh Tamim include the US-Taliban agreement, the Chad dispute, the presidential negotiations in Lebanon, US-Venezuela talks, and hostage exchange in the Israel-Palestine conflict (Barakat, 2012; Kusumawijaya & Machmudi, 2022;).

In general, Qatar has become a proactive mediator of disputes, focusing on conflicts in the Arab world, but also participating in crises and diplomacy processes related to Africa and Latin America (Kusumawijaya & Machmudi, 2022). Over the years, Qatar's mediation has been observed in a variety of conflicts and crises. Notable efforts over the past 15 years are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Qatar's major mediation efforts, 2008-2023

Mediation effort	Timeframe	Outcome
Houthi ceasefires in Yemen	2008-2010	Ceasefires were eventually violated
Lebanese political crises	2008	Successful election of president
Darfur peace process	2008-2011	Doha Agreement for Peace
Djibouti-Eritrea ceasefire	2010-2021	Qatar eventually withdrew its peacekeeping forces as Djibouti and Eritrea sided with Saudi Arabia in the Qatar-Gulf crisis
Hamas-Fatah reconciliation	2006-2017	2014 and 2017 agreements; reconciliation still in progress
Tebu-Tuareg reconciliation agreement in Libya	2015	Ceasefire was violated; a peace treaty was signed in 2017 in Rome
US-Taliban agreement	2001-2020	Withdrawal of US forces
Somalia-Kenya border conflict	2021	Agreement
Chad dispute	2022	Ceasefire pledge signed at Doha
Libyan political crisis	2022	Agreement signed at Doha
Presidential vacuum in Lebanon	2023	Qatar proposed three independent candidates: no agreement
US-Venezuela talks	2023	Agreement on prisoner exchange
Hostage exchange in the Israel-Palestine conflict	2023	Agreement on prisoner exchange

Over the past two decades, Qatar's mediation efforts have covered Yemen, Eritrea, Lebanon, Sudan, Palestine, Libya, Gambia, Somalia, Kenya, Chad, and Venezuela, among others (Barakat, 2012; Kusumawijaya & Machmudi, 2022; Milton *et al*., 2023). The nature and context of Qatar's participation have greatly varied from conflict to conflict, involving governments, regional and global partners, organisations, and sub-regional actors. In general, however, one can distinguish between a 'hyper-active mediation phase' during 2006-10, during

which period Qatar began to establish a reputation as a prolific mediator, and a more cautious (though still active) approach over the past decade (Milton *et al.,* 2023). This shift in approach reflects the backlash Qatar experienced from its Arab neighbours during 2017-21 as a consequence of its visibility and perceived pro-Islamist stance during the Arab Spring. The breakdown in relations between Qatar and its Gulf neighbours undermined Qatar's mediation ambitions for a period, and has arguably made Doha more reliant on US patronage in the years since then.

When approaching a mediation case, Qatar's general approach is to take a positive stance, encouraging different groups to come to reconciliation and political agreement, as well as offering humanitarian aid (Barakat, 2012). One of the earlier diplomatic achievements by Qatar were the Houthi ceasefires in Yemen. The Yemeni government claimed that the Houthi were a rebel militia supported by Iran, while the Houthis claimed that their issues were rooted in socioeconomic and political grievances with the current government (Alqashouti, 2021). The 2004-2010 period saw multiple rounds of war with largely failed attempts at third party mediation (Kusumawijaya & Machmudi, 2022). Qatar had good relations with both the Yemeni government and Iran, which allowed it to propose a mediation attempt led by the Emir Sheikh Hamad (Barakat, 2012). As a result, a ceasefire agreement was signed, eventually leading to the peace agreement signed in 2008 in Doha. The peace agreement was accompanied by financial aid to help reconstruct territories affected by the conflict. However, later the fighting resumed, in part due to Yemen's president insisting that Qatar's financial aid should be controlled by the Yemeni government (Alqashouti, 2021). Although ultimately the Yemen case was a mediation failure for Qatar, it nevertheless helped show the state's capability to organise peace talks and provide possible solutions to regional conflicts. This is consistent with the perspective of virtual enlargement theory, as Qatar's efforts still allowed the government to signal its mediation capabilities.

The Lebanon 2008 crisis was rooted in the country's political system. Naming a president required a consensus, with disputes over government formation leading to an 18-month power vacuum (Kusumawijaya & Machmudi, 2022). Qatar's invitation of all political parties to Doha allowed for the creation of a national unity government, eventually resulting in Michel Suleiman being elected as president. Before Qatar's involvement, the Lebanon crisis was tackled by every major power with an interest in the region, but ultimately all of those efforts failed (Alqashouti, 2021). Qatar achieved success through its policy of favouring no one and

everyone at the same time, further signalling to the outside world that it can succeed in its self-defined mediator role (Barakat, 2012).

The Darfur peace process was another major mediation effort by Qatar. The conflict in the Darfur region of Sudan began in 2003 and involved the government of Sudan as well as numerous rebel factions in the country. The conflict escalated in 2008, and Qatar was chosen to be the Arab League representative for mediating talks between rebel factions and the Sudanese government (Barakat, 2012). One significant difference between the Sudan and Yemen mediation cases for Qatar was that Doha had a significant Sudanese diaspora, and Qatar had long-standing ties with the Sudanese president (Kusumawijaya & Machmudi, 2022). As such, Qatar had greater strategic interests when receiving the regional mandate for involvement. This was reflected in a higher degree of personal engagement from Qatari officials such as the former Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Ahmed bin Abdallah Al-Mahmoud. However, this also led to criticism of Qatar's efforts in Darfur for being overly aligned with the Sudanese government. Qatar also made significant financial investments in Sudan and Darfur in an early example of its use of 'chequebook diplomacy' to induce the parties to the conflict to reach an agreement (Milton *et al.,* 2023). This included the establishment of a $2 billion development bank for Darfur. Following multiple unsuccessful mediation attempts, a ceasefire agreement was signed in 2010, known as the Doha Agreement for Peace in Darfur.

In 2006, Palestinian legislative elections resulted in Hamas winning the majority of seats on the Legislative Council (Alqashouti, 2021). The Fatah party refused to participate in a government led by Hamas, leading to clashes. Qatar mediated the talks between the parties, but did not succeed right away (Barakat, 2012). The conflict was exacerbated by Israel launching military operations in Gaza. Notably, Qatar also played the role of mediator in brokering ceasefire between Israel and Hamas. Eventually, a reconciliation agreement was signed in 2012 in Doha, although this did not stop the disputes between the parties (Alqashouti, 2021). In 2015 and 2016, Qatar brokered talks in Doha to further align Fatah and Hamas with the 2014 agreement. Qatar, along with the UAE and Egypt, further pressured the parties to sign another agreement in 2017 (Kusumawijaya & Machmudi, 2022). Overall, the Hamas-Fatah conflict involves complex tensions between political parties in Palestine, and Qatar's efforts have helped manage the conflict. Qatar's effectiveness in mediating the dispute might have been hampered by Egypt's strategic goals in the region (Alqashouti, 2021).

Another notable mediation effort by Qatar relates to the US involvement in Afghanistan. Qatar helped organise secret meetings between the US diplomats and Taliban contacts in 2011 (Alqashouti, 2021). Furthermore, Qatar, at the request of the US, allowed for the establishment of the Taliban Political Commission in Doha (Barakat, 2012). The impacts of this decision went beyond the US-Taliban conflict, as it enabled international parties to directly communicate with the Taliban in a trusted environment (Milton *et al.,* 2023). Qatar also organised the US-Taliban negotiations in 2018-2019, leading to the 2020 withdrawal agreement (Kusumawijaya & Machmudi, 2022). The Afghan case demonstrated Qatar's re-emergence as a respected mediator after the turmoil experienced during the 2017-21 blockade. It also signalled the increasingly close relations between Doha and Washington, with the Americans formally designating Qatar as a 'major non-NATO ally' in 2022 (Milton *et al.,* 2023).

Conclusion

Overall, Qatar has consistently sought to project the image of a state that is not limited by its 'smallness', but rather empowered by it to provide a safe and trusted environment for dispute resolution. The virtual enlargement of Qatar's power through its status as a mediator and accumulated reputational capital have cemented Qatar's role as a regional and international mediator. This chapter has explored how Qatar has leveraged its financial resources to develop and modernise across multiple spheres, including trade, defence and security, sport, education, and the environment. Particularly notable is how Qatar's international ambitions are complemented by its willingness to 'walk the walk' domestically in terms of investing in education, social development and defence and security. The consistency of strategy across policy spheres is noteworthy, and reflects the 'whole of government' commitment to economic and social development under clear direction from the monarch.

Of course, Qatar remains a small state. In terms of population, total economic size, and military heft, it is a minnow in a sea of sharks. This makes it all the more important for Qatar to overcome its smallness through strategies such as status-seeking, virtual enlargement and role theory. Qatar's ambitious approach to international relations is not mere vanity, therefore, but rather a survival strategy designed to ward off the predations of larger neighbours. By

making itself valuable to external powers such as the U.S., Qatar bolsters not only its reputation but also, more importantly, its security and autonomy.

Mediation is perhaps the most important method through which Qatar can demonstrate its utility to other states. The forthcoming chapters examine Qatar's mediation strategy in more detail. They trace how this small but increasingly assertive state has carved out a global niche as a major mediating powerhouse, one capable of navigating the complex dynamics of dispute resolution in the Muslim world. These chapters will analyse the strengths and weaknesses of Qatar's approach to mediation, and assess how mediation complements Qatar's wider foreign policy strategies. The chapters also demonstrate how Qatar's approach to mediation has evolved over the years, becoming progressively more cautious but also arguably more sophisticated and benefiting from a deepening of its state capacity to mediate.

CHAPTER 4:

Qatari Mediation in Darfur

(case study)

Introduction

This chapter examines Qatari mediation efforts in the case of Darfur, which is generally regarded as one of Qatar's most successful mediation interventions in recent years (Alarabeed, 2024, p. 11). The bulk of the chapter employs secondary literature – including peer-reviewed academic articles, books, respectable news sources, and reports from national and international organisations – to analyse Qatar's mediation efforts in Darfur through the lens of role theory, virtual enlargement, and status-seeking. The remainder of the chapter then uses primary data, gathered from interviews with Qatari officials and policymakers, to complete the case study. Throughout, the chapter argues that the case of Darfur demonstrates the importance of role theory, virtual enlargement and status-seeking in explaining Qatar's strategic motivations for mediating third party conflicts. This argument is strongly supported by the personal testimony of Qatari officials involved in mediating the Darfur case.

The chapter is structured as follows. The next section traces the chronology of Qatar's involvement in Darfur, including a brief examination of the conflict itself. The subsequent sub-chapters focus specifically on how status-seeking, role theory and virtual enlargement were each demonstrated through Qatar's mediation efforts in Darfur. The essay then draws on eight interviews with Qatari officials to demonstrate how these concepts applied in the case of Darfur. The chapter concludes with a summary of the main findings.

Background and Chronology

The Darfur crisis first erupted in March 2003 and led to the deaths of over 200,000 people by 2005 (Baxter *et al.,* 2018, p. 203). Broadly, the conflict involved the Sudanese government on one side against an assortment of rebel groups, based in the western Sudanese province of Darfur, on the other. The Darfuris alleged that the government in Khartoum had historically neglected Darfur's interests and mistreated its inhabitants because of their non-Arab status, most of whom are from the Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa ethnic groups. On the other hand, the Sudanese government argued that the Darfuri rebels were secessionists who posed a clear threat to the integrity of the Sudanese state. The Khartoum government armed the Janjaweed militia to suppress the rebellion – a group that soon became notorious for war crimes and the mass slaughter of civilians (Straus, 2015, p. 233). By 2008, a renewal of violence had led to renewed peacemaking attempts as outside actors sought to bring the conflict to an end (Barakat, 2014, p. 18).

In Darfur, Qatar's role was officially mandated by the Arab League in September 2008. The League agreed that Qatar would lead the mediation process between the government of Sudan and the various rebel groups in Darfur (Eliasson, 2016). The main obstacle to Qatari involvement was Egypt, which had long viewed itself as Sudan's main patron (Kamrava, 2011, p. 540). Ultimately, though, Qatar's greater financial resources and perception as a more neutral party enabled to win out over Egypt and secure the role of mediator (Green, 2009). This reflects how, as a relative diplomatic newcomer on the scene in recent decades, Qatar has a relative lack of diplomatic 'baggage' in comparison to states such as Egypt or Saudi Arabia (Kamrava, 2011, p. 542). Qatar's role was also welcomed by both the United Nations (UN) and the African Union, demonstrating Qatar's widely perceived legitimacy as a mediator (Mason and Sguaitamatti, 2011, p. 1).

Qatar's Mediation Approach in Darfur

Qatar's mediation efforts were led by the Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who supplied a mission to lead the negotiations between the conflicting parties (Alarabeed, 2024, p. 18). Senior Qatari diplomats demonstrated high levels of personal engagement in the mediation process. For example, the former Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Ahmed bin Abdallah Al Mahmoud spent months meeting international stakeholders, the conflict parties and affected populations as he sought to gain insight into the conflict (Barakat, 2014).

Qatari Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Al-Mahmud began the mediation process by travelling to global capitals to garner views and opinions from a diverse array of stakeholders, but the key Qatari contribution lay in its willingness to spend time on the ground in Darfur itself. Initially, the Darfuris were sceptical of further Arab involvement in the conflict given the failed attempts by Egypt and the Arab League to mediate. It was widely believed within Darfur that the majority of Arab governments were biased in favour of Khartoum (Kamrava, 2011, p. 545). However, the Darfuris were won over by Al-Mahmud's willingness to gain detailed, granular knowledge of the situation on the ground. The Minister even ate and slept in Darfuri refugee camps as he sought to understand the roots of the conflict (Ibid). This generated significant goodwill amongst both Darfuris and Sudanese, both of whom appreciated Qatar's willingness to go much further than previous mediators.

Qatari diplomats set to work with the Sudanese government and various rebel factions in Darfur. Initial negotiations took place in Doha, with large delegations hosted for months. Track I diplomacy took place at the elite level, while Track II sought to incorporate the views of civil society representatives (Barakat, 2014, p. 19). The most important discussions took place between the Sudanese government and one of the main Darfuri rebel groups, the Justice and Equity Movement (JEM) (Kamrava, 2011, p. 546). The two sides signed a memorandum of understanding in February 2009, which committed both parties to 'goodwill and confidence building for the settlement of the problem in Darfur' (Ibid). In February 2010, the mediation process took a further step forward when the Sudanese government and JEM agreed to sign a ceasefire agreement (Alarabeed, 2024, p. 19). At this point, Omar al-Bashir declared the conflict over (Barakat, 2014, p. 18). Soon after, another rebel group, the Liberation and Justice Movement (LJM), also signed a framework agreement and a ceasefire (Doherty, 2012). These ceasefires became known as the 'Doha agreements'.

The incentive of large-scale Qatari financial investment was significant in persuading the conflicting parties to come to the negotiating table. The literature on mediation notes that the prospect of development assistance can be a powerful weapon enabling third party mediators to win the hearts and minds of conflicting parties and incentivise them to reach a settlement (Greig, 2021; Ackermann, 2003; Bercovitch and Houston, 2000). The empirical data suggests that material incentives offered to the weaker party to a conflict do tend to decrease the level of conflict (Schrodt and Gerner, 2004, p. 322). Qatari mediators appear to have been cognisant of the incentives their financial firepower offered to the Sudanese, and leveraged this factor throughout the mediation process (Alarabeed, 2024, p. 19). Indeed, financial power is one of the unique advantages held by Qatar in its mediating role (Kamrava, 2011, pp. 543-4). In the run-up to the negotiations, Qatar promised to invest $2 billion and create a development bank to address Darfur's underdevelopment if the talks succeeded (Barakat, 2015, p. 19). At the same time, the Qatari Investment Authority floated the possibility of $1 billion investment in Sudanese farmland to promote food exports to Qatar (Barakat, 2011, p. 19).

More prosaically, the Qataris were also willing to house representatives from both sides, especially the Darfuris, in expensive hotels for many months, even as the negotiations sometimes came close to collapse (Kamrava, 2011, pp. 546-7). In total, Qatar hosted more than 200 tribal leaders and civil society representatives (Milton *et al.,* 2023, p. 12). Qatar also offered free health care, free car services, and a per diem allowance for all representatives during their stays in Doha (Dickinson, 2012). Such largesse may have acted as a further incentive for the two sides to reach a settlement. The ability to offer both a comfortable venue and financial carrots demonstrated Qatar's unique ability to leverage its financial power in mediation (Barakat, 2014, p. 19).

Reaction to the Agreement

Qatar's post-mediation efforts in Darfur were also supported by significant financial assistance extended by the Qatari government to local reconstruction projects. Between 2011 and 2018, Qatar provided $180 million to support the Darfur Development and Reconstruction Initiative within the framework of the 2011 Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD) (Alarabeed, 2024, p. 15). The most notable funding package, however, was $2 billion towards the creation of a development bank for Darfur. According to Milton *et al.* (2023, p. 18), this was a classic example of Qatar's 'chequebook diplomacy' in action during Doha's hyper-active mediation phase in the 2006-10 period. Qatari humanitarian organisations, such as Qatar Charity and the Qatar Red Crescent, focused most of their assistance towards social infrastructure and physical reconstruction, with smaller amounts going towards food, health and education (Alarabeed, 2024, p. 15). The construction funding included $31 million towards the building of a model services centre in each Darfuri state, and $33 million towards the reconstruction of 10 villages in five Darfuri states. Qatar also donated $88.5 million through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (Alarabeed, 2024, p. 16). These financial incentives appear to have been critical in persuading all parties to the conflict to sit at the negotiating table. However, analysts note the lack of adequate reporting, monitoring and coordination of Qatari assistance funds, implying potential concerns around corruption and local misuse of funds (Alarabeed, 2024, p. 20).

Qatar's role was largely embraced by local Sudanese actors. The evidence suggests that, following the Doha Peace Agreements in 2011, Sudanese parties preferred to work with Qatari organisations to implement humanitarian and development projects (Alarabeed, 2024, p. 16). This willingness to work with Qatari organisations also reflected the Sudanese government's suspicion of Western NGOs, whom they accused of plotting against the regime and supporting rebels (BBC News, 2012). Some critics argued that Qatari mediators became too close to the Sudanese government and ultimately became biased in their favour (Alarabeed, 2024, p. 17). However, good relations with the Sudanese government were probably a necessary condition for the peace agreements to succeed. Qatar's extensive financial assistance to the region also undoubtedly bolstered its legitimacy in the eyes of all sides. This suggests that Qatar succeeded in playing the role of honest broker between the parties in Darfur, with its impartiality respected by the government in Khartoum as well as on the ground in Darfur itself. As Barakat (2012)

has stated, the Qatari leadership enjoyed ‘a high level of legitimacy in the eyes of both parties during the negotiations to end the conflict in Darfur’ (Barakat, 2012).

However, critics noted the significant gap between pledged investment and actual distribution of funds (Barakat, 2014, p. 19). Two years after the signing of the Doha Agreements, the Sudanese government had only paid out approximately $135 million of a $2.65 billion commitment. The Khartoum government also complained that Sudan had failed to deliver $2 billion of promised investments (Barakat, 2014, p. 20).

Measuring Qatar’s Success in Darfur

In characterising Qatar’s mediating role in Darfur, it is evident that soft power predominated over hard power. While an element of hard power was evident in the form of reward power (financial incentives), there was no use of coercive power to compel the conflicting parties to accept a negotiated settlement (Alarabeed, 2024, p. 18). The soft power elements displayed by Qatar in the negotiations included legitimate power, expert power, referent power, and informational power (Schiff, 2021; Alarabeed, 2024, p. 18). Legitimacy was probably the most important component, reflecting Qatar’s recognised ability to talk to anyone in the region.

Notably, Qatar succeeded in Darfur where the UN itself had failed. Jan Eliasson, the UN Special Envoy to Darfur, has revealed that the UN submitted a request for mediation to the Sudanese government in 2007 – a request rejected by the Sudanese on the grounds that mediation would legitimise rebel groups (Eliasson, 2016). As well as enhancing its global image as a mediator, Qatar also secured more tangible benefits from intervening in Darfur. This included the opportunity to buy up Sudanese farmland for food security purposes (Kamrava, 2011, p. 542). More broadly, the Qataris perceived Sudan as a significant investment opportunity (Gulbrandsen, 2010). Qatar had invested in Sudanese hotels, property and financial institutions; a successful peace outcome could only enhance the value of such investments (Baxter *et al.,* 2018, p. 203).

However, the agreements did not completely end the fighting on the ground. Many elements within the Sudanese Liberation Army remained reluctant to support a ceasefire, while other rebel factions also opted to remain outside the negotiations process (Alarabeed, 2024, p. 19).

The Qataris also sought to negotiate with a large breakaway faction in October 2012, but these talks proved ultimately unsuccessful (Barakat, 2014, p. 19). Consequently, fighting continued on the ground for another two years and, even today, Darfur continues to simmer. Critics argue that the two-track structure of the talks led to a lack of coordination and may have encouraged divisions among the parties. It has also been suggested that the Doha Agreements were too vague and lacked specific measures for addressing issues such as demobilisation, disarmament and reconciliation (Williams and Simpson, 2011, p. 41).

Overall, however, Darfur is widely regarded as a success for Qatari mediation strategy. As Alarabeed (2024, p. 19) states, the mediation in Darfur 'remarkably built on [Qatar's] reputation and self-image as a reliable and neutral mediator'. Although not all parties to the conflict ultimately agreed to sign the peace agreements, the negotiations did help to reduce the scale and intensity of the conflict for a sustained period. This success is all the more notable given that it was achieved despite the absence of a mutually hurting stalemate compelling all sides to seek a resolution to the conflict (Barakat, 2014, p. 23). Ripeness theory maintains that conflicts are most amenable to a negotiated settlement when there is a mutually hurting stalemate, i.e. neither side have a realistic prospect of attaining a military victory, and both sides are suffering significant losses. This was not the case in Darfur: the Sudanese government held the upper hand militarily and consequently felt little pressure to make credible concessions to the rebels (Barakat, 2014, p. 23). To achieve any form of peace agreement, however imperfect, therefore represented a successful outcome. Qatar's good relations with the Khartoum government, together with the financial incentives it was able to extend, undoubtedly played a key part in making this success possible.

Applying A Theoretical Lens to the Darfur Mediation: Role Theory, Virtual Enlargement, and Status-Seeking

There was significant support from the interviewees for the three concepts that lie at the heart of this study: virtual enlargement, role theory, and status-seeking. Interviewee 3 [government official] commented that he regarded these three concepts *"as essential to supporting Qatar's strategy as a small state that seeks to enhance its international standing through mediation"* (I3). Similarly, Interviewee 2 [government official] saw mediation as an *"integrated means"* for realising these three overarching objectives. There was thus general consensus among the interviewees that role theory, status-seeking and virtual enlargement are an accurate and useful conceptualisation of Qatar's approach to foreign policy, and that mediation is the primary tool used by Qatar to integrate all three approaches.

Status-Seeking

Qatar's mediation efforts in Darfur are a clear example of status-seeking. As noted in a previous chapter, status-seeking involves the act of trying to improve one's social standing. For states, this entails improving one's status within the international system. As the issue of Darfur rose up the international political agenda, so the potential status benefits of helping to resolve the crisis became increasingly apparent. As a high-profile international conflict involving multiple international organisations (including the UN, the African Union, and the Arab League), Darfur offered obvious potential to burnish the reputation of whoever proved capable of helping to resolve the conflict. As Baxter *et al.* (2018, p. 203) observe, hosting talks alongside influential global actors was an important means by which Qatar could enhance its international 'brand' and legitimacy. Mediating the Darfur conflict thus served Qatar's status-seeking ambitions.

Successful mediation in Darfur also offered Qatar the opportunity to enhance its status by winning a valuable new regional ally in the form of Sudan. Mediation can enhance the status of small states by increasing their number of allies (Al-Eshaq and Rasheed, 2022). This generates greater support for these states within the international system. A successful mediation process in Darfur could therefore potentially enhance Qatar's regional status by aligning Sudan with Doha as a regional ally within forums such as the Arab League, of which

both states are members. As a relatively populous country (45 million inhabitants), Sudan represented a valuable prize for Qatar as it sought to enhance its regional influence vis a vis established regional power brokers such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

The importance of status was also key in enabling Qatar to be accepted as a legitimate mediator by other actors in the first place. The importance of Darfur to the African Union, Arab League, United States and France made it essential that a credible third party was selected to take on the role of mediator. In this respect, it is reported that French and American support was critical in enabling Qatar to overcome Egyptian opposition to its involvement as third-party mediator to the conflict (Gulbrandsen, 2010, pp. 83-4). The support of major powers such as France and the US illustrated Qatar's growing international status as a respected mediator perceived to possess the capabilities to bring about meaningful results.

Personal status was also at stake for Qatari policymakers. Analysts note how Qatari mediation efforts have often been intensely personal, reliant on the personalities of the Emir and other chief policymakers within the Qatari government (Kamrava, 2011, p. 555). In the case of Darfur, the willingness of Minister Al-Mahmud to invest such personal time and energy on the ground clearly played an important part in propelling the mediation process towards a successful outcome – and also did no harm to Al-Mahmud's own status both within the Qatari government and on the international diplomatic circuit more widely. The Special Envoy confirmed this in his interview with the author, noting how mediation has enabled Qatari officials to *"convey our messages and policies to a wider global audience, thereby amplifying our role far beyond the expected capabilities of a country the size of Qatar"* (I1). This demonstrates how collective status-seeking and personal status-seeking can be intertwined and mutually reinforcing.

Qatar's willingness to fund Sudanese development projects so lavishly reflects the degree to which Doha perceived its status to be dependent on a positive outcome in Darfur. Mediation is only really status-enhancing if it actually succeeds in bringing a conflict to an end. Qatar thus had a strong vested interest in ending the fighting, and was willing to finance local reconstruction in order to help achieve this objective.

One potential drawback of status-seeking is that it can lead to a focus on short-term victories at the expense of longer-term results. One of the main criticisms of Qatari mediation efforts, including in Darfur, is that there has been a failure to follow through on implementation

measures after peace agreements have been signed. Post-agreement implementation is perhaps the most important phase of conflict resolution, but is often overlooked as external actors lose interest and focus their attention elsewhere (Barakat, 2014, p. 24). Ideally, mediation should result not only in a peace agreement but also in implementation measures that foster reconciliation and the internal capacity to manage the post-conflict transition process. In the absence of such measures, peace agreements often break down and result in renewed violence (Barakat, 2014, p. 25).

Yet it is difficult for a small state like Qatar to offer the sustained engagement that the post-mediation phase requires. Even major powers such as the US and France have struggled to manage post-conflict environments in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and elsewhere. As a small state, Qatar has only a small number of officials with the skills, knowledge and experience required to engage in the post-mediation phase in third countries (Barakat, 2014, p. 25). Indeed, the limited capacity of the Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs is demonstrated by the fact that Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Al-Mahmud spent a reported 90% of his working hours on the Darfur negotiations – a level of engagement that is unsustainable in the long-term (Barakat, 2014, p. 25). Critics also suggest that Qatar lacks institutional knowledge of mediation and relies too heavily on the personal attributes of individual officials. In the Darfur negotiations, for example, there was no official note-taker, which led to confusion about precisely what had been said in discussions (Dickinson, 2012).

There is a risk, then, that in seeking to bolster its status by pursuing short-term diplomatic victories, Qatar may tarnish its status over the longer-term. The prestige of securing a quick peace deal can overshadow the vital importance of longer-term implementation of such agreements. Indeed, Barakat (2014, p. 26) argues that Qatar's interventions have been 'better suited to addressing short-term crises than paving the way for long-lasting solutions'. The failure to follow through on pledged investments – the gap between pledges and disbursals was notably wide in the case of Darfur – accentuates the perception that Qatar is more interested in public relations victories than achieving meaningful long-term peace settlements. If this pattern is repeated over time, it may tarnish international perceptions of Qatar's capability and reliability in the diplomatic sphere. This will ultimately reduce rather than enhance Qatar's status in international relations.

However, the interview participants rejected this scepticism towards Qatar's mediation efforts. Indeed, participants consistently emphasised Qatar's long-term involvement in each of

its mediation cases. For example, the Special Envoy stated in his interview that Qatar's mediation strategy was set apart by "*our dedication to achieving long-lasting and sustainable solutions, rather than simply providing a temporary ceasefire. We understand that successful mediation is not just about reaching a quick agreement but requires continuous efforts to ensure long-term stability"* [I1].

Similarly, the fourth of our eight interviewees, a mediation expert and Qatari government official, observed that Qatar's mediation strategy rests on a combination of short-term crisis management with *"long-term support for development"* [I4]. This interviewee continued: "*When you look at Qatar's mediation efforts, you see that it's not just about negotiations; it's about building long-term bridges, not merely temporary solutions."* The second interviewee [I2] agreed with these sentiments and noted: "*Qatar's mediation does not end with the signing of a peace agreement. After the conflict has been resolved, the relationships between Qatar and the involved countries are often stronger, built on mutual respect and trust."*

This long-term approach required the sustained personal engagement of Qatari officials. Indeed, the Special Envoy observed that "mediation is not a task that ends once an agreement is reached or the situation is calmed, but rather it is an ongoing process even after the mediator's formal role appears to have ended" (I1). Efforts usually continue indirectly after an agreement in order to ensure that such crises do not reoccur between the involved states. The mediator's role requires continuous follow-up and investment in diplomatic relations to ensure that the agreed-upon solutions remain effective and sustainable in the long term. Consequently, argued the Special Envoy, it was not even possible to think in terms of specific time-frames for each case; rather, mediation remains an ongoing process even after formal negotiations have ended. In the view of the interview participants, then, the questioning of Qatar's commitment to long-term peace and stability was unfair and unsupported by the facts.

The case of Darfur demonstrates how mediation for status-seeking purposes can be a double-edged sword. There are undeniable status advantages in being involved – and being *seen* to be involved – in resolving high-profile conflicts. This is doubly so when major powers, such as the US, choose to endorse Qatar's mediating role. Yet with a high profile comes the risk of damaged status if the mediator fails to achieve a peace settlement. Further, even short-term agreements are no guarantee of longer-term peace if the root causes of conflict are not addressed. In Qatar's case, there is also a clear risk that its mediation efforts come to be

perceived as more about branding than a genuine desire to achieve peace. Ensuring long-term engagement in post-conflict zones is perhaps the best defence against such criticisms.

Interviewees were clear that the pursuit of status has *"played a pivotal role"* in Qatar's approach to mediation, including in Darfur [I2]. According to Interviewee 2, success in mediating conflicts has earned Qatar a status as *"a responsible and credible nation capable of playing crucial roles in solving international crises"* [I2]. In this view, mediation has placed Qatar at the heart of regional and global political events, earning increased international respect and demonstrating that it wields considerable influence on the global stage.

Interviewees stated that the quest for status and enlarged influence must constantly be balanced against the risks involved in acting as mediator. As Interviewer 4 stated in his interview, the balance is *"delicate but generally favourable"* (I4). These risks were described as ranging from diplomatic friction to resource strains, while also including the reputational blowback if Qatar was seen to fail in its mediating role. However, the gains – characterised principally in terms of enhanced international recognition, deeper strategic partnerships, and improved soft power – were considered to, in the words of one senior government official, *"far outweigh"* these challenges (I4).

The interviewees further observed that mediation enhances Qatar's soft power, and through this bolsters the country's strategic position (I2). Establishing a reputation as a trusted mediator has also enabled Qatar to foster strategic relationships with both the conflicting parties and other influential international powers. These relationships *"serve Qatar's national interests by expanding its regional influence and enhancing its role as an effective diplomatic force"* (I3). Similarly, the Special Envoy (I1) noted the careful balance that Qatar strikes between its humanitarian/mediation objectives and its national interests. This demonstrates *"that even small states can play a significant role in global diplomacy through carefully calculated strategies that align with both their ethical commitments and strategic interests"* (I3). Further, "*Qatar has been able to amplify its role on the world stage while staying true to the principles of international law*" (I3). Interviewees believed that this careful balance of humanitarianism and strategic interest made Qatar a model for other small states as they seek to assert themselves on the international stage in ways that balance principles with interests.

Role Theory

The Darfur case also demonstrates many aspects of role theory. As noted previously, roles help states to determine who they are (or believe themselves to be), what their interests are, and how they should interact with other states (Harnisch *et al.,* 2011, pp. 1-2). The theory suggests that states adopt different roles in the international system, which shape their behaviour in different ways. For example, a state that perceives itself as a "guardian" of the international order is likely to behave differently than a state that perceives itself as a "rebel" in the system (He *et al*., 2021).

Interviewee 3 [government official] rationalised Qatar's international role primarily in terms of its need for security as a small state: *"Small states adopt defensive military strategies that contribute to stabilizing conflict zones without directly engaging in the conflict. Qatar, for example, participates in peacekeeping operations and provides logistical support in crisis regions, reinforcing its role as a state committed to regional security and stability. These limited military efforts enable Qatar to act as a neutral party that helps reduce tensions and foster stability"* (I3). By carefully calibrating its military presence to be supportive rather than combative, Qatar build trust with the conflicting parties, positioning itself as a constructive force in crisis resolution.

Qatar clearly perceives its role in the international system to be independent, impartial, and non-aligned. As a small state and a relatively late entrant to the international diplomatic scene, Qatar has carried – until recently, at least – relatively little baggage. Historically, its enemies and rivals have been few in number, while Doha has shown itself to be consistently willing to engage with all states. A mediating role suits a state with these characteristics. Further, Qatar's independent trajectory in international relations made it acceptable as a mediator to both the Sudanese government and the Darfuris. Acceptance of the mediator is a key criterion of success in any mediation process (Barakat, 2014, p. 20). The Darfuris were sceptical of Egyptian and Arab involvement given their close relations with the government in Khartoum, but Qatar's relative independence from other Arab states made it acceptable to the Darfuris. At the same time, Qatar's amicable relations with the Sudanese government made it an acceptable mediator for Khartoum as well. Qatar enjoyed established and amicable relations with the Sudanese government of Omar al-Bishr, further enhancing its legitimacy in the role. The presence of a large Sudanese community in Doha also contributed to the deepening relationship between

Qatar and Sudan (Schiff, 2021). The independent role chosen by Qatar over decades thus played a critical role in gaining acceptance as a mediator in Darfur.

Qatar's impartial role then also proved key to the conduct of the negotiations as they developed. It was noted above how Minister Al-Mahmud devoted considerable effort to gaining the views of all sides, and spent extensive time on the ground in Darfur itself. This engagement with all parties helped to ensure that Qatar's role was perceived as impartial by both sides. Impartiality is a critical component of successful mediation, and enabled Qatar to play the role of honest broker (Barakat, 2014, p. 21). Qatar also offered equal privileges to all participants, with hotels and air travel paid for by the Qatari government. Qatar's self-conceived role as an impartial actor was therefore key in enabling the negotiations to reach a successful conclusion.

A mediating role in Darfur, specifically, also appeared logical to Doha for strategic purposes. Geographically, Sudan and Qatar shared the same Middle Eastern and North Africa region. Darfur thus lay within Qatar's zone of interest. Both Qatar and Sudan were also Muslim states, and shared a common interest in exerting autonomy within the region vis a vis traditional big regional powers such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Cultural ties are an important factor in increasing the likelihood of a successful mediation process (Carnevale and Choi, 2000, p. 108).

Another core component of Qatar's perceived role within the international system is, of course, its vast financial resources. Indeed, Qatar's wealth is perhaps the first characteristic that comes to mind for outsiders when considering the country. As noted, Qatar's ability to offer financial incentives to both the Sudanese government and the Darfuris was critical in pushing both sides towards a negotiated settlement. This financial leverage has been criticised in some quarters for potentially bringing Qatar's neutrality into question. Barakat (2014, p. 24) notes that the use of leverage is traditionally associated with powerful mediators such as the United States, rather than small state mediators like Norway, who more commonly employ trust, dialogue and communication as their principal tools of mediation. Yet there is nothing illegitimate about a state using its financial power to incentivise conflicting parties to reach a peace settlement. The use of financial carrots in such circumstances can be a pragmatic option, especially when a mutually hurting stalemate does not yet obtain (as was the case in Darfur). The greater risk, perhaps, is that financial incentives can encourage parties to pay short-term lip service to peace agreements without securing meaningful buy-in to address the root causes of conflict.

Interviewees acknowledged that Qatar's financial capabilities give it a crucial advantage in its mediation efforts. Financial firepower enables Qatar to provide essential support during various stages of conflicts, whether through humanitarian aid or investments in reconstruction efforts. The Special Envoy noted how, in Darfur, Qatar played a pivotal role by providing developmental assistance that helped alleviate civilian suffering, further strengthening its ability to gain the trust of all the parties involved.

The interviewees recognised that the financial issue cuts both ways for Qatar. As a major energy exporter, Qatar relies on stable global markets. Consequently, argued one Qatari official (I4), "*promoting peace and stability, especially in regions critical to global energy supply chains, aligns with Qatar's economic interests."* At the same time, Qatar's financial resources are a useful tool to support its mediating role. The same interviewee acknowledged that financial resources "*enhance Qatar's credibility as a mediator".* This interviewee cited the establishment of a reconstruction and development fund in Darfur as an example of how Qatar's financial firepower won the support of local actors and helped to address the root causes of the conflict.

The financial cost of mediation is not trivial even for a state of Qatar's wealth. One interviewee (I4) acknowledged that hosting peace talks, providing humanitarian aid and supporting post-conflict resolution were all "*resource-intensive endeavours… [that] often require substantial financial and political investment*". This creates "*the risk of overextension, particularly for a small state with limited military and logistical capabilities"* (I4). Balancing the cost of involvement against potential outcomes is a constant challenge for Qatari policymakers.

Interviewee 3 also focused on the military component of Qatar's mediation and humanitarian role. Observing that limited military contributions play an important role in its mediation approach, Qatar uses its *"military presence in a balanced and strategic way to foster environments conducive to dialogue and trust-building in areas where it mediates"* (I3). Through the deployment of Qatari forces for logistical support or relief operations, Qatar demonstrates its practical commitment to stability and security. The interviewee also suggested that this carefully calibrated military presence helps to create an atmosphere in which the conflicting parties feel more open to engaging in dialogue.

Qatar's role as an Islamic state was also important in increasing its acceptance as a mediator in Darfur. All parties to the conflict, including both Darfuris and Sudanese, were predominantly Muslim. Qatar had also carved out a path as an independent Islamic actor over the preceding years, notably by hosting the Al Jazeera television station, which disseminated unusually candid news and opinion with a decidedly regional slant. This Islamic identity made Qatar an acceptable mediator to both sides. Indeed, it is notable that Qatar has often intervened in conflicts affecting majority Muslim states, including Yemen and Lebanon as well as Darfur. Qatar thus perceives its role not simply to be a mediator but, more specifically, to mediate conflicts within the Islamic world.

Interestingly, none of the interviewees particularly emphasised the role of religion or Islam as a driver behind Qatar's mediation efforts. More emphasis was placed on the importance of regional stability as a necessary condition for Qatar's own security and prosperity. Alongside this is a desire for Qatar to *"enhance its credibility and influence as a mediator in the Arab world"* (I4). Regional influence within the Arab world thus represents a key objective for Qatar in its mediation strategy. Speaking of Qatar's mediation involvement in Lebanon, for example, the Special Envoy (I1) emphasised how successful mediation *"boosted Qatar's standing in the Arab world"* and *"enhance[d] its role in Arab affairs", enabling Doha to increase its influence over regional affairs.* This desire for regional influence is clearly an important focus for Qatari officials.

The interviewees also observed that adherence to international law is an important part of Qatar's identity and international role. Interviewee 3 [government official] observed that Qatar maintains a careful balance between its commitment to the principles of mediation as outlined in the United Nations Charter and its pursuit of national interests and objectives. By adhering to the principles of international law, Qatar commits to respecting the sovereignty of states and resolving conflicts through peaceful means (I3).

Yet interviewees underlined that this commitment to international law "is not in conflict with [Qatar's] national interests; rather, it contributes to strengthening its position on the global stage" (I3). Similarly, Interviewee 2 [government official] observed that, as for any state, "national security and strategic interests are always Qatar's top priority" (I2). This is a natural consideration for any state that seeks to maintain its stability and safeguard its sovereignty from internal and external threats. When offering itself forward as a mediator, therefore, Qatar's national interests are neglected. As Interviewee 2 stated, "In the end, any mediation that Qatar

undertakes enhances its international standing and supports its national interests, including strengthening its role as a key player in the Middle East and as an influential voice on the global stage" (I2).

The commitment to international law is also expedient for Qatar as well as an ethical commitment. Interviewee 2 observes that Qatar's geographic size is a *"a sensitive factor"* and *"a country of Qatar's size may not be able to withstand the consequences of acting outside the framework of international law"* (I2). This is particularly the case given the presence of other parties with conflicting interests. Indeed, the interviewee suggested that *"international law serves as the primary protector of Qatar's role and shields it from political and strategic risks that may arise from the clashing interests of major powers"* (I2). The firm adherence to international law is therefore a matter of prudence as well as ethics for Qatar, helping to insulate the country from external pressures that could affect its interests or national security.

Virtual Enlargement

The case of Darfur also demonstrates the process of virtual enlargement in action. As noted, virtual enlargement refers to the process by which a state expands its presence and influence in international affairs without physically increasing its territory or, in certain contexts, material capabilities. Virtual enlargement is closely tied to the notion of soft power – a concept first theorised by Joseph Nye (2004), who defined it as the ability to co-opt others (rather than coerce them) through the attractiveness of one's culture, political values, and policies. Virtual enlargement can also enable a state to project its power and influence into areas that it does not physically control. It can be used to counter the influence of other states or to further a state's own objectives. Therefore, virtual enlargement can be seen as a way for states to increase their influence and power in the international arena without resorting to traditional methods of action (Sheludiakova *et al.,* 2021).

The Darfur case demonstrated many of these factors. It is notable how Qatari mediators began their mediation not in Darfur (or even Sudan) itself but rather by travelling to a series of world capitals to meet international actors already involved in mediating the conflict or with some form of stake in resolving it. Qatari Minister of State for Foreign Affairs al-Mahmud met officials from the US, France, Libya, China, the UN, African Union, and the Arab League

(Kamrava, 2011, p. 545). These meetings were intended to collect information about the conflict, discover the perspectives and preferences of each actor, and, crucially, secure approval for Qatar's role in leading the mediation process.

More subtly, this series of meetings also served to virtually enlarge Qatar's presence on the international diplomatic circuit. Securing the engagement and approval of leading states and key international organisations represented an undoubted victory for Qatari diplomacy. The support of the Arab League, African Union and UN for Qatar's mediation efforts also enlarged Qatar's presence within these institutions. Winning the UN's endorsement was particularly notable given that small states have often complained of being overlooked in leading international institutions (Veebel *et al.,* 2022). By inserting itself as a mediator in Darfur, the Qatari state thus succeeded in enlarging its international presence without expanding its geographic footprint or requiring any display of hard power.

Virtual enlargement also involves the ability of a state to project power and influence into regions or areas beyond its borders that it does not physically control. The mediation in Darfur achieved this by enabling Qatar to project power and influence into Sudan and North Africa, neither of which have any long-term physical Qatari presence. Virtual enlargement can also be used to counter the influence of other states – again clearly demonstrated by Qatar's success in resisting Egypt's attempts to take on the role of principal mediator of the conflict.

The interviewees confirmed that virtual enlargement forms a core part of Qatar's foreign policy strategy. Interviewee 2 [government official] noted that *"in terms of virtual expansion, Qatar's mediation has helped extend its influence beyond its geographical borders"* (I2). Similarly, Interviewee 4 observed that mediation has become a strategic tool that "*enables a small state like Qatar [to] achieve influence that far exceeds its geographic and demographic size."* Interviewees also highlighted how Qatar utilises media and technology to amplify its international influence and complement its mediation strategy. By leveraging platforms such as Al Jazeera and engaging in digital diplomacy, Qatar has been able to communicate its foreign policy and mediation successes to a global audience.

Further addressing the concept of virtual enlargement, Interviewee 3 described a *"virtual expansion"* of Qatar's influence through the use of media and digital platforms, including Al Jazeera, that broadcast Qatar's mediation efforts regionally and internationally. This enables Qatar to exert a much greater presence on the international stage than one would expect of a

small state with limited territory and population size. In the opinion of Interviewee 3, *"this innovative approach not only broadens our influence but also underscores Qatar's dedication to promoting peace and stability, helping to establish our reputation as a nation that favours constructive, peaceful solutions"* (I3). Interviewee 2 agreed that virtual enlargement has *"allowed Qatar to reach new fields of political and diplomatic influence, further strengthening its ability to manoeuvre on the international stage and increasing its diplomatic power"* (I2).

Officials acknowledged that Qatar's mediation efforts have generated undeniable benefits for its international reputation. As Interviewee 4 [a senior government official] stated, "*one of the most significant gains for Qatar lies in its enhanced international reputation. By positioning itself as a neutral and credible mediator, Qatar has successfully cultivated a unique identity as a small state with a disproportionate influence in global affairs"* (I4). Further, interviewees stated that they believed its mediation successes had earned Qatar recognition as a key diplomatic player, strengthened its soft power, expanded its diplomatic network, and improved its relations with major powers and international organizations.

Practitioner Perspectives on the Darfur Case

The interviewees were proud of Qatar's role in mediating the conflict in Darfur. As the second interviewee, a government official (I2), stated, "*Qatar played a major role in ending a long-standing humanitarian crisis", since "Darfur was suffering from a devastating civil war, and the intervention of a neutral party was essential to ending the conflict."* Similarly, the Special Envoy argued that Qatar "*played a pivotal role in ending years of prolonged conflict."* Further, the Darfuri case "*showcased Qatar's capacity to bring conflicting parties to the negotiating table and work closely with the international community to achieve a comprehensive and integrated solution"* (I1).

Interviewee 3 [a government official] also believed that Qatar played a major role in ending a long-standing humanitarian crisis. The interviewee observed that Darfur had been suffering from a devastating civil war, and the intervention of a neutral party was essential to ending the conflict. Qatar successfully positioned itself as an impartial mediator, which allowed it to

broker a peace agreement between the conflicting parties. This success *"earned Qatar significant international respect, as global actors saw Qatar as a reliable state capable of fostering stability"* (I2).

Interviewees revealed that in terms of how the decision to mediate in Darfur came about, the decision involved close coordination between the highest leadership (including the Emir himself) and various diplomatic bodies (I1). In most cases, His Highness the Emir is the key driving force behind mediation decisions, reflecting the Qatari state's commitment to its role in promoting global peace and stability. However, the Emir does not take such decisions in isolation from other relevant entities. Interviewees described a *"strong team dynamic"* that includes the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other responsible officials, who offer advice and present possible options (I1).

The Emir retains the most influential voice in the policymaking process, therefore, but decisions are made through consultation rather than decree. The aim is to ensure that mediation aligns with international law and serves national interests. Final decisions are taken by the highest leadership, but foreign policy and diplomatic experts feed into the consultative process throughout in order to ensure that mediation interventions are effective and that the best possible outcomes are achieved (I1).

As ever when approaching a specific case, Qatari officials and policymakers carefully calculated the perceived cost/benefit trade-off of intervening in Darfur before agreeing to step forward as a mediator. Invoking his long history in mediation work, the Special Envoy stated: "*I can confidently say that the role of a mediator carries significant risks, especially when dealing with complex, multi-party conflicts"* (I1). In general, however, interviewees expressed the view that the balance between risks and gains for Qatar is *"delicate but generally favourable"* (I4). The Special Envoy observed that in the case of Darfur, the risks lay mainly "*in the political complexities and intertwined regional interests".* Intervening in *"such a large-scale conflict could lead to tensions with certain regional powers that might perceive Qatar's role as a threat to their own interests"* (I1). This appears to be an allusion to Egypt, which had long considered itself Sudan's principal patron and regional ally. Interviewee 4 [mediation expert and Qatari government official] also observed that from the perspective of *"other regional actors, such as Egypt and Chad, Qatar's role might have introduced a level of indirect competition for influence over Sudanese affairs".* However, the risk of alienating regional powers had to be balanced against the rewards of a successful mediation intervention, which

in the Special Envoy's view lay principally in the reputational and soft power benefits for Qatar. Ultimately, argued Interviewee 4, Qatar's ability to coordinate with international stakeholders such as the African Union and United Nations, helped it to overcome this potential regional opposition to Qatar's mediation role in Darfur.

In terms of the approach adopted by Qatar as a mediator in Darfur, the interviewees argued that Doha developed a unique approach based not only on bringing the parties together to negotiate but also focuses on understanding the root causes of the problem. This *"required a precise understanding of the dynamics between the conflicting parties, as well as the influence of regional and international powers"* (I2). These root causes were characterised by Interviewee 4 [a senior government official] as *"poverty, lack of development and basic services"* (I4). The creation of the Darfur Development and Reconstruction Fund demonstrated Qatar's long-term commitment to invest in the region's future. Qatari officials believed this also earned the respect of both the Sudanese government and rebel groups.

The main challenges in Darfur *"revolved around the prolonged and ongoing conflict between the Sudanese government and the armed factions"* (I2). There was an obvious political component to the crisis but also an ongoing humanitarian crisis in Darfur that demanded immediate alleviation measures. Qatar also faced some initial scepticism from the parties to the conflict, who questioned whether Qatar was capable of effectively playing the role of mediator and maintaining an impartial approach. This required Qatari mediators to work hard to build bridges of trust not only between the conflicting parties but also between those parties and Qatar itself (I2).

The ultimately successful outcome in Darfur was *"not a matter of chance but the result of continuous work and a deep understanding of the needs and demands of each party"* (I2). This required patience and precision when dealing with complex issues, as Qatar progressively built up trust over time. Success depended on *"building trust and maintaining continuous dialogue, without retreating even in the most difficult circumstances"* (I2). Mediation in Darfur was thus more than just a process of negotiation but *"an art that required the ability to understand the needs of all conflicting parties and find a delicate balance between their interests"* (I2). Mediation in Darfur required more than simply hosting talks; Qatari officials were also required to broker potential solutions and strike potential compromises between different interests.

The reputational benefits of the success enjoyed by Qatar's mediators in Darfur extended widely. First and foremost, Qatar *"earned the trust of both the Sudanese government and the rebels"* (I1). However, this enhanced trust also extended beyond Sudan as *"the international community, including the United Nations and African Union, showed great appreciation for Qatar's efforts in bridging gaps"* (I1). The Special Envoy also observed that the level of trust engendered by Qatar was reflected in the willingness of the international community to entrust Qatar with overseeing the implementation of the agreement's terms on the ground. Similarly, Interviewee 4 [a senior government official] commented that Qatar's success in Darfur demonstrated its commitment to humanitarian diplomacy and earned recognition from the international community. In addition, Qatar's leadership in Darfur allowed it to strengthen its relationships with the Sudanese leadership and other African states, expanding its influence on the continent and opening new avenues for economic and diplomatic collaboration. Interviewee 2 [Qatari government official] noted that the successful mediation effort in Darfur helped Qatar to strengthen its relations with African nations, and also boosted its influence within regional organisations such as the African Union (I2).

Key to Qatar's success in Darfur was its ability to act as an impartial third party. As I2 stated, "Qatar successfully positioned itself as an impartial mediator, which allowed it to broker a peace agreement between the conflicting parties". The same official noted that, at times, Qatar had to remain vigilant about being sucked into the agendas of local parties: "[We] managed to avoid the mistakes that other mediators might fall into by maintaining neutrality and refraining from engaging in the political agendas of the various parties." (I2).

Participants also emphasised the importance of patience and long-term engagement with the parties to the conflict in Darfur. Acknowledging that conflict had become endemic, Interviewee 2 admitted that there was initial hesitation from local Sudanese/Darfuri actors as to Qatar's capacity to play the role of mediator. It required *"time…[alongside a] continued commitment to the negotiation process… continuous work and a deep understanding of the needs and demands of each party".* In Darfur, the official learned "*the importance of patience and precision when dealing with complex issues, and how a mediator can build trust over time, even in the most challenging conflicts.*" Further, "*another important lesson I learned is that success in mediation does not come from instant solutions, but through continuous effort and perseverance. The process of building peace requires time and patience"* (I2).

Mediating in Darfur also presented challenges, however, with the Special Envoy acknowledging that "*we faced numerous challenges during the mediation process"* (I1). These challenges derived from the complexity of the conflict, "*with intertwined internal interests and external forces"* creating the "*concern that any move could be perceived as bias toward one side, potentially straining our relationships with some regional or international powers"* (I1). The *"immense international and regional pressure"* was another factor, heightening the microscope under which the mediators operated and creating more pressure to not only succeed but also be *seen* to succeed.

A different type of challenge occurred in ensuring adherence to the peace agreement once it had been signed. As Interviewee 4 [a senior government official] observed, ensuring the adherence of the parties to the terms of the peace agreements presented an *"ongoing challenge"* (I4). The Special Envoy [Interviewee 1] agreed that the work of a mediator is never done; it requires long-term engagement in the country and a willingness on the part of the mediator to sustain relationships with a view to maintaining long-term peace and stability.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is evident that Qatar's mediation in Darfur demonstrated the importance of each of the three principal theoretical concepts explored by this study: status-seeking, role theory, and virtual enlargement. The quest for status lies at the heart of many of Qatar's mediation attempts, including in Darfur; Doha's role as a neutral, impartial, independent, Islamic actor was a central driver for Qatari policymakers to take on the mediation role in Darfur, and also contributed to its acceptance by all the main parties to the conflict; finally, Qatar's relative success as mediator illustrated how small states can practise virtual enlargement and increase the scope of their international presence.

Although, overall, Darfur stands as a relative success for Qatari mediation, several weaknesses were evident throughout the process. Not all the major rebel groups signed up to the peace agreements, and Qatar was slow to follow through on promises of financial investment. Furthermore, Qatar lacked the institutional capacity to engage consistently in the

post-agreement phase to ensure that implementation of the agreements actually took place. The reliance on high levels of personal engagement were both a strength and a weakness of Qatar's mediation efforts: a strength because of the productive personal relationships established by leading Qatari officials such as Minister Al-Mahmud, but also a weakness because such extensive engagement was not sustainable in the long-term. Going forward, Qatar might be advised to work more closely with regional institutions and, in particular, the United Nations in order to enhance its institutional capacity, especially in the post-agreement phase. The UN possesses the institutional resources that Qatar itself potentially lacks.

Nonetheless, Qatar's strengths as a mediator were equally on display in Darfur. Its independent, neutral posture was important in persuading the Darfuris to come to the table – no easy task, as the difficulties experienced by Egypt and the Arab League in achieving this clearly demonstrated. The high levels of personal engagement by Qatari officials were also valuable. Perhaps above all, however, Qatar's sheer financial power provided an irresistible incentive for the Sudanese government and Darfuris to reach a settlement. Few other mediators would have been able to offer the carrot of billions of dollars in investment for both sides. This financial strength ultimately proved critical in pushing the negotiations towards a settlement.

That said, interviewees observed that the success of mediation should not be measured solely by the final agreements. Perhaps equally important is *"to bring perspectives closer together, foster trust between the conflict parties, and provide a platform for peaceful dialogue"* (I2). The act of mediation in itself can therefore help to contribute to a more peaceful long-term outcome by changing the nature of political interaction within a country. There is no inevitability about this, but the act of dialogue is a necessary step on the road to peace. There are parallels here with the literature on democratic theory, which maintains that the act of democratic deliberation can itself contribute to better outcomes.

In drawing the lessons of Qatar's successful mediation in Darfur, therefore, interviewees concluded that trust and patience were the key factors in driving negotiations towards a successful conclusion. As Interviewee 2 [government official] stated, for example, *"Qatar was able to build strong trust between the conflicting parties…and this was the main reason behind the success of its mediation efforts"* (I3). Importantly, this trust was predicated on Qatar acting as *"a neutral and unbiased partner"* throughout the mediation process (I2). In addition, the same interviewee noted the importance of patience, continuous effort and perseverance. There

were no instant solutions in Darfur, but with time and a consistent approach Qatar was ultimately able to achieve a positive mediation outcome to a seemingly intractable conflict.

CHAPTER 5:

Qatari Mediation in Lebanon

(CASE STUDY)

Introduction

This chapter examines Qatar's mediation in Lebanon during 2007-8. This case marked one of Qatar's earliest forays into the realm of mediation, and stands as a noted success. Qatar's mediation in Lebanon came under the auspices of the Arab League following the Israel-Hezbollah war of summer 2006. In the aftermath, Lebanese politics had succumbed to factionalism and intermittent violence. This raised the prospect of a resumption of the bitter civil war that wracked Lebanon during 1975-90 – a conflict that stands as a salutary warning of 'how quickly modern civilisation can descend into barbarism' (Marshall, 2012, p. 1). Working under the umbrella of the League, the Qatari-led delegation succeeded in brokering an agreement to end 18 months of political deadlock and violence (Dakhlallah, 2012, p. 54). The Doha Agreement resulted in the election of a consensus presidential candidate, Michel Suleiman, the adoption of a new electoral law, and the creation of a new unity government in which the opposition received substantial veto powers. In the words of Dakhlallah (2012, p. 54), never before had the Arab League's [or indeed Qatar's] contribution to regional security 'been so effective or indeed so vital.'

The chapter proceeds, first, by presenting an overview of the historical roots of the crisis in Lebanon that demanded mediation in 2007-8. This is followed, secondly, by a chronology of Qatar's involvement in mediating between the various Lebanese factions. Thirdly, the chapter explores the Lebanese case from the perspectives of the study's three main theories: status-seeking, virtual enlargement, and role theory. The insights of Qatari officials interviewed for this study are referenced throughout the chapter. Finally, the chapter concludes by summarising the main findings.

Case Chronology and Background

The challenges of Lebanese politics were (and remain) particularly complex. Historically, Lebanon has been subjected to the interference of extra-territorial actors – first France during the colonial period, then more recently Syria and increasingly Iran (which exerts influence through the Shia militia group Hezbollah). At the same time, Lebanon has also been split domestically between rival sects, principally Christians, Sunnis and Shias. The neighbouring conflict between Israelis and Palestinians has also consistently destabilised Lebanese politics – just as it did in the run up to the 2007-8 crisis. Consequently, domestic power struggles have often taken on a regional and international dimension (Saouli, 2006).

Historically, Lebanon was a half-Muslim, half-Christian territory within the Ottoman Empire (Marshall, 2012, p. 6). The Muslims themselves were split between Shias and Sunnis, while the Christians comprised both Greek Orthodox and Catholic Maronites from Mount Lebanon. After World War One, the European colonial powers carved Lebanon out of Greater Syria, initially with a slight Christian majority (Rabin, 2011, p. 11). The Maronites were the favoured group during the French colonial period, dominating the army, judiciary, government and business (Firro, 2002, p. 152). In contrast, Sunnis and particularly Shias were largely excluded from positions of influence. The French reinforced sectarian identity in Lebanon since it suited their interests and enabled them to 'divide and rule' (Weiss, 2005, p. 243; Makdisi, 2000).

Following independence, granted in November 1943, the main sects agreed a National Pact whereby power was distributed between them. This established the longstanding tradition whereby Christians take on the presidency, Sunnis the prime ministership, and Shias the role of speaker of parliament (Marshall, 2012, p. 7). However, the National Pact effectively consolidated Christian privileges just as shifting demographics within Lebanese society were increasing the number of Muslims as a share of the population. The Pact was therefore an unstable equilibrium constantly at risk of being overthrown, as ultimately occurred when the civil war erupted in 1975. The war killed approximately 150,000 people and led to the flight of another 500,000 (Marshall, 2012, p. 1). Much of Lebanon's infrastructure was destroyed, and per capita income plummeted by two-thirds.

The civil war stemmed from longstanding inter-group enmity that ultimately spiralled into political violence (Marshall, 2012, p. 12). No one group holds a majority in Lebanon, hence

every group feels insecure and vulnerable (Marshall, 2012, p. 12). This has often led groups in Lebanon to employ pre-emptive aggression in self-defence (Ekhamri, 2004, p. 25). Dakhlallah (2012, p. 55) argues that Lebanon is a classic example of an Arab state 'in late formation' – less cohesive than European nation-states and often caught between competing power blocs. Authority in such states is constantly contested as different groups compete for a monopoly of power. This lack of unity has enabled foreign penetration, further exacerbating domestic instability and retarding development (Saouli, 2006, p. 705). Indeed, Najem (2012, p. 2) uses the term 'penetrated society' to describe the extent to which Lebanese politics has been infiltrated by foreign actors.

The core issue in Lebanon is that allegiance is primarily sectarian rather than national. Sectarianism and confessionalism have become central to Lebanese society (Di Donato, 2018, p. 73). Communal allegiances are codified in the Lebanese political system, which mandates a system of consociational power-sharing in which high offices are distributed among the main sects. Further, the vast majority of Lebanese political parties are based on sectarian identity; there are very few pan-Lebanese parties (Serhan, 2019). National Lebanese identity has also been forced to compete not only against these sectarian sub-national identities but also against influential and attractive pan-national identities in the form of pan-Islamism, pan-Arabism, and pan-Syrianism. Scholars have likened Lebanon to a market for the Arab world in which rival conceptions of identity are promoted and fought over (Tueni, 1985, pp. 131-2).

Post-civil war Lebanon has mostly managed to avoid a return to full-scale violence but, once again, the equilibrium established in the 1990s has been anything but stable. There has been a frequent turnover of governments, yet it is often the same leaders who return to power repeatedly (Haddad, 2020). The sectarian allocation of power has also enabled endemic corruption within society (Leenders, 2012, pp. 1-2). This is further fuelled by the presence of a significant local narcotics industry which draws in criminals from across Europe and the Middle East (Marshall, 2012, p. 164).

The assassination of Rafiq al-Hariri, the former Sunni Prime Minister, in a massive explosion in downtown Beirut in February 2005, resulted in a massive rupture between Lebanon and its erstwhile 'big brother', Syria. Under intense pressure from within Lebanon and the broader Arab world, all of Syria's 15,000 troops left Lebanon within days and the pro-Syrian government resigned (Najem, 2012, p. 123). The so-called 'Cedar Revolution' saw enormous street demonstrations as the people demanded democracy and sovereignty. However,

the removal of Syrian influence also removed the lid from the pressure cooker of Lebanese politics. As Dakhlallah (2012, p. 60) observes, the ending of Syrian tutelage after two decades saw a resumption of hitherto dormant domestic proxy power struggles. As foreign actors sought to increase their influence in Lebanon, the domestic political scene also became increasingly conflictual. This generated instability and increased violence. Sunnis, Christians and Druze on one side of the domestic political split became increasingly alienated from Shias – much closer to Syria and Iran – on the other (Najem, 2012, p. 147). As a power vacuum emerged, so all sides increasingly lapsed back into identity politics and sectarianism.

Qatar's Mediation Approach in Lebanon

Resolving the conflict in Lebanon was particularly important to the Arab League, since Lebanon is one of the League's seven founding states and the country sits squarely within the Arab world (Dakhlallah, 2012, p. 55). The Arab League Charter of 1945 also explicitly upholds the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Lebanese state – a condition of Lebanon's entry to the organisation back in the 1940s (Ibid). Throughout 2005, the League sought to diffuse tensions between the rival Lebanese groups, as well as between Lebanon and Syria. The League supported National Dialogue talks, an international investigation into Hariri's murder, and resistance to Israeli occupation of Lebanese villages in the south of the country. These efforts came to naught, and were soon overshadowed by the eruption of a month-long war between Hezbollah and Israel in southern Lebanon in the summer of 2006. This conflict resulted in the deaths of 1,200 people and the displacement of almost one million (Wilkins, 2013, p. 58). The war itself further divided Lebanon – some supported Hezbollah's actions, including President Emile Lahoud, Army Chief Michel Suleiman, and a number of Sunni and Shia clerics, but parliament was ambivalent, and the cabinet refused to accept responsibility for the operation (Ibid).

As the Arab League sought to address the developments in Lebanon (and also contemporaneous events in Gaza), Amr Moussa, the Secretary-General of the Arab League, made one of his first calls to Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jasem Al Thani. However, at this stage, internal divisions within the Arab League between a Syrian-led group

and Saudi-led group made negotiations difficult (Dakhlallah, 2012, p. 64). Eventually, a seven-point truce plan was adopted and presented to the Lebanese Prime Minister on 27 July 2006, which partially contributed to the halting of the conflict against Israel. A permanent ceasefire came into effect on 14 August (Wilkins, 2013, p. 112).

However, the end of the Hezbollah-Israel conflict did not resolve Lebanon's internal political issues, which remained plagued by instability and sectarian politics. The Sunni Prime Minister Fouad Siniora refused Shia demands for a blocking minority in a new cabinet (Dakhlallah, 2012, pp. 68-9). The opposition, led by Hezbollah, began protests in Beirut as the stalemate continued for months. Violence erupted as Sunnis and Shias clashed in the winter of 2006-7. By September 2007, the Lebanese army had clashed with al-Qaeda supporting Sunnis at the Nahr el-Bared Palestinian refugee camp. 420 people died in the violence. Assassinations of key political figures also continued, including anti-Syrian Industry Minister Pierre Gemayel in November 2006, MP Walid Eido in June 2007, MP Antoine Ghanem in September 2007, head of army operations Brigadier General Francois al-Hajj in December 2007, police intelligence Captain Wisam Eid in January 2008, and Hezbollah military commander Imad Mughniyah in February 2008 (Ibid). By this stage, Lebanon was closer to civil war than it had been at any time since 1990 (Kamrava, 2011, p. 547).

The League's Secretary General continued dialogue with all parties throughout this period, but by the summer of 2008, the various factions were refusing even to engage directly with each other. In May 2008, Druze leader Walid Joumblatt accused Hezbollah of running an illegal telecommunications network and a spying operation at Beirut International Airport. The Lebanese cabinet declared Hezbollah's actions to be illegal and stated that Head of Airport Security Brigadier Wafiq Shouqair would be removed due to his close ties to Hezbollah (Khatib, 2021, p. 24). In response, Hezbollah declared that the cabinet was now in 'open war on the Resistance' – Hezbollah fighters swept through Sunni strongholds in West Beirut and disarmed the Sunni militias. This represented a humiliation for the government. Dozens died as fighting spread and Lebanon appeared on the verge of another civil war (Dakhlallah, 2012, pp. 70-1).

At an Arab League emergency meeting on 11 May, the League Council issued Resolution 6915 mandating the formation of a Ministerial Committee headed by Qatari Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Al Thani and Secretary General Moussa to address the crisis. Three days later, the Committee arrived in Beirut to hold a series of meetings with key Lebanese figures.

A day later, on 15 May, the Committee announced that a formal dialogue between the different Lebanese factions would begin in Doha the next day. Talks would proceed on the basis of a League-sponsored agreement, whose elements comprised a commitment to return to the status quo ante, refrain from sectarian politics, end the protests in downtown Beirut, strengthen Lebanese state authority, and a commitment to a peaceful resolution (BBC News, 2008; Dakhlallah, 2012, p. 71).

The Doha Dialogue proceeded over five days of bilateral and multilateral discussions at the Doha Sheraton, involving 14 negotiators representing various Lebanese factions (Kamrava, 2011, p. 547). In reality, though, the main disputants were Hezbollah on one side and the March 14 Movement (including the government led by Sunni Prime Minister Fouad Siniora) on the other (Kamrava, 2011, p. 547). Minister Al Thani and Secretary General Moussa were involved as active mediators throughout, even contacting regional leaders when required (Dakhlallah, 2012, p. 71). The Qatari mediators also kept in constant contact with Saudi, Syrian and Iranian diplomats to ensure that the final agreement would have the buy-in of these influential states (Kamrava, 2011, p. 548).

Interviewees confirmed that Qatar made exceptional efforts to keep all stakeholders informed of developments during the negotiations. Interviewee 3 [a Qatari government official closely involved in the Lebanese case during 2008] observed that "*by maintaining transparency and open communication with all stakeholders, we mitigated potential tensions and kept the focus on the peace process*" (I3). This careful navigation of regional sensitivities was an important factor in enabling the negotiations to reach a successful outcome. The support of regional actors for the Agreement demonstrated their endorsement of Qatar's role, further solidifying its reputation as a trusted player in regional diplomacy.

Agreement took longer than expected but an acceptable compromise was eventually reached on 21 May 2008. The relative speed of the mediation reflected two factors: the background work undertaken by the Arab League over the preceding months, and the fact that the underlying conditions for an agreement were relatively well known. The Agreement stipulated: (1) the immediate election of Michel Suleiman to the presidency; (2) the formation of a national unity government with a blocking minority for the opposition; (3) redistricting based on the 1960 electoral law; (4) a commitment to refrain from political violence; (5) a national dialogue to strengthen the Lebanese state; and (6) a commitment to avoid sectarian incitement and accusations of treason (Dakhlallah, 2012, pp. 71-2). In effect, the Agreement gave the Shia

opposition their core demands: first, a blocking third of 11 ministers out of 30 in the new government of national unity; secondly, the 1960 electoral law (Kamrava, 2011, p. 547; Dakhlallah, 2012, p. 72). In return, Hezbollah ended their protests, accepted the reappointment of Sunni Prime Minister Siniora and the election of Suleiman as president, and conceded the distribution of ministerial portfolios. The March 14 movement received 16 cabinet seats, with the remaining three allocated to the president to choose (Blanford, 2008, p. 1).

According to Kamrava (2011, p. 548), Foreign Minister Al Thani had to step in on the fifth day of negotiations to break the impasse when pro-Syrian factions led by Hezbollah refused to compromise. The Qatari minister personally phoned Syrian president Bashar al-Assad to question Syria's stubbornness in refusing any compromise, contrasting this with Qatar's accommodating stance towards Syria regardless of the costs incurred for Doha. The next morning, the Hezbollah negotiators suddenly announced a reversal of their earlier refusal and finally accepted the compromise agreement. The personal mediation of Qatari mediators appeared key in brokering this eventual agreement, and contemporary observers hailed a 'Qatari mediation coup' (Kamrava, 2011, p. 548; Lyon, 2008).

Reaction to the Agreement and Measuring Qatar's Success in Lebanon

Reaction within Qatar to the agreement was adulatory, with general consensus that 'Qatar had saved Lebanon from the brink of catastrophe' (Kamrava, 2011, p. 548). In fact, Dakhlallah (2012, p. 72) observes that the talks in Doha were very much an Arab League initiative rather than a purely Qatari one. Furthermore, the Lebanese factions' mutual fear of a renewed civil war was probably the greatest imperative pushing them towards reaching a resolution. However, Qatar was the ideal host due to its ties to all the key regional players, including Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Syria. An adviser to Secretary General Moussa attributes the breakthrough to a cumulative process rather than the Doha conference itself. Nonetheless, Doha represented a notable mediating success for both the League and Qatar. It resulted in the election of Suleiman as president, the establishment of a unity government, and a return to relative calm on the streets.

Officials involved in the negotiations and interviewed for this study praised the outcome as a notable success for Lebanon, Qatar and the wider region. For Interviewee 3 [a Qatari government official closely involved in the negotiations], the Doha Agreement of 2008 represented a significant milestone on the path towards a restoration of political stability in Lebanon. The interviewee commented that despite their profound differences, the various Lebanese factions *"agreed on a political framework facilitated by Qatar, demonstrating their trust in Qatar's mediation capabilities"* (I3). The appreciation of international actors for the outcome also "*underscored Qatar's capacity to manage complex negotiations and highlighted its potential as a key partner in future diplomatic initiatives*" (I3).

Some criticised the Accord for being a mere band-aid temporary solution with little prospect of long-term success. This is an oft-made criticism of Qatar's mediation efforts, with Doha accused of prioritising short-term sticking plasters over longer-term solutions (Ulrichsen, 2014; Mesfin, 2016, p. 6; Milton *et al.,* 2023, p. 5). However, the Accord was sustained for the best part of a decade, before instability once again returned to Lebanon in the later part of the 2010s.

A key Lebanese participant in the negotiations, Prime Minister Siniora's Diplomatic Adviser Rola Noureddine, observed that the Doha Accord achieved as much as it could in the circumstances, given wider regional instability and the absence of agreement among external powers. As ever, Lebanese domestic politics does not occur in isolation, but rather is influenced and shaped by the policies of regional (and extra-regional) powers such as Syria, Iran, Egypt, Israel and the United States. As Noureddine states: 'I think the best that the Doha Agreement could be a local agreement on the sharing of power in the absence of a solution for the greater issues that we were fighting about. The Doha agreement could not reach a solution on the use of arms in Lebanon, about the persistence of an armed resistance that does not consult with the rest of the Lebanese. It could not solve issues that were much bigger than that because, as I said, there was no agreement yet between the bigger powers—like Iran or other players in the region—to deal with them. These are issues that are related to Israel, to America, et cetera. So, what could be achieved was a division of power in Lebanon, an interim agreement on the way to share power' (quoted in Dakhlallah, 2012, p. 73).

The interviewees, as one might expect, were much more positive about Qatar's achievements in Lebanon. All the participants argued that the Doha Agreement was a successful outcome that demonstrated Qatar's "*proactive engagement and a commitment to a peaceful resolution can yield substantial benefits*" (I3). The same interviewee also observed

that the signing of the Doha Agreement in 2008 was a significant milestone for Lebanon, representing a major step toward restoring political stability and establishing a foundation for *"sustainable peace"* (I3). The Lebanese factions overcame their deep-seated differences to agree on a political framework facilitated by Qatar, demonstrating their trust in Qatar's mediation capabilities. Further*, "this level of trust was a clear indicator of the appreciation for Qatar's role, as all parties recognized its genuine commitment to a peaceful and lasting resolution*" (I3).

The 'bigger issues' Noureddine alludes to have plagued Lebanon for centuries, as discussed above. It is unrealistic to expect any mediator, especially a relatively small state such as Qatar, to be able to resolve them. In these circumstances, the Doha Accord represented a notable achievement, staving off instability and violence for a sustained period of time and helping to avoid any return to the level and scale of violence witnessed during the civil war. In an intrinsically divided and penetrated society like Lebanon, success is measured by the absence of large-scale violence. Broader ambitions, aiming towards sustainable societal reconciliation and the creation of a pan-Lebanese identity, are long-term projects that rest ultimately on the actions of Lebanese themselves. For an outside mediator like Qatar to bring rival parties together and broker an agreement that was largely adhered to for over a decade, thus counts as a success. As such, the joint Arab League-Qatari mediation efforts in Lebanon during the mid-2000s deserve to be categorised as a successful case of mediation, albeit a precarious one (as subsequent events have demonstrated).

Applying a Theoretical Lens to the Lebanese Mediation: Role Theory, Status-seeking, and Virtual Enlargement

This section examines what the case of Qatari mediation in Lebanon tells us about the three main theories explored by this study: status-seeking, virtual enlargement, and role theory. All of these theories are demonstrated, at least to some extent, by Qatar's mediation in Lebanon. Indeed, from a theoretical perspective, the interviewees were intrigued by the three main concepts explored in this dissertation: role theory, virtual enlargement, and status-seeking. As Interviewee 4 [a senior government official stated]: "*As a government senior official, I find*

these three concepts—role theory, virtual expansion, and the pursuit of status—particularly intriguing. Although I had not previously framed them in theoretical terms, I can confidently say that they resonate deeply with my practical experience in mediation and accurately reflect the dynamics of Qatar's mediation strategy." (I4).

Interviewees cautioned, however, that the real challenge of all three concepts lies in their practical application. As Interviewee 4 [a senior government official] stated, "*from my experience, the true challenge lies in balancing the application of these ideas while responding to the rapid changes in regional and international conflicts"* (I4). It is all very well seeking to enhance status, enlarge influence and pursue mediation as a national role, therefore, but these objectives must be pursued astutely in the context of a rapidly changing international environment.

Status-Seeking

In asking why Qatar intervened in Lebanon, an obvious answer is to enhance its own status. As discussed in Chapter Two, status in an international relations context refers to 'collective beliefs about a given state's ranking on valued attributes (wealth, coercive capabilities, culture, demographic position, sociopolitical organization, and diplomatic clout' (Larson et al., 2014, p. 7). At root, status is about an actor's standing or rank within a hierarchical community (Renshon, 2017, p. 4; Ward, 2017, p. 4). The term 'status-seeking' can be used to describe an individual's behaviour when looking to improve his or her position in society, or it can also be used to describe groups or organizations trying to increase their status (Zarras, 2021). Status-seeking by states is a recognised phenomenon in international relations. Indeed, status is regarded as an explanatory variable for state behaviour (McNamara, 2022: 1).

Many analysts, such as Mehreen Kamrava of Georgetown University, have argued that Qatar's mediation efforts are aimed at survival: 'Qatar learned early that engaging with all sides — whether in conflict or diplomacy — was essential for its long-term survival and relevance' (quoted in Wirtschafter, 2024). Yet it is questionable whether Qatar's 'survival' was in any way at stake in the Lebanon crisis of 2007-8. Qatar's security and interests were not directly threatened by the crisis, and there was no prospect of violence spilling over into Qatar itself. A more plausible ambition than survival in this case, therefore, was relevance and status. Qatar

sought to use the crisis in Lebanon to demonstrate its aptitude as a mediator and thereby enhance its regional and global status.

Qatar's status-seeking was evidenced in three principal ways in the Lebanese case. First, by working so closely with the Arab League, in particular its Secretary-General Abr Moussa, Qatar enhanced its status within that organisation – an important and influential body within the Arab world. By helping the League to achieve a satisfactory mediation outcome, Qatar achieved the dual purpose of enhancing both the League's status and its own. This carried the possibility of generating potential future benefits for Qatar's diplomatic presence and status within the League.

Secondly, Lebanon's profound importance to the Arab world – discussed above – meant that this was a particularly high-status case for Qatar to mediate. States in the Arab world are acutely conscious of the regional hierarchy, with the biggest powers jostling for influence both across the region and within Lebanon itself. In inserting itself into such a high-status case, and achieving a satisfactory outcome, Qatar helped to improve its own status across the Arab world and within Lebanon itself. In so doing, Qatar enhanced its status among all the key players in the region, including Iran, Syria, Saudi Arabia and Egypt – all of whom believed they had vital interests at stake in Lebanon.

Thirdly, Qatar's relative success in Lebanon also enhanced its general status as a respected international mediator. Although focused on the Arab world in this instance, Qatar's success in Lebanon further solidified its global reputation as a reliable and impartial mediator on the world stage. The fruits of this burnished reputation would be demonstrated in later cases, such as the US-Taliban talks, when Qatar was specifically requested as a mediator by the United States. Success in individual cases such as Lebanon thus helped incrementally to build Qatar's reputation as a mediator, with corresponding benefits for its international status.

Given the positive outcome in Lebanon, the case also demonstrates how status-seeking need not always be construed as a negative dynamic in international relations. Status-seeking can be a motivating factor for both individuals and states, driving them to take potentially necessary and useful actions that they might not otherwise have taken. If Qatar had been less status-conscious, it might sensibly have opted to avoid becoming involved in complex and internecine Lebanese politics. That Doha opted for a more activist policy may well have been driven by status-seeking considerations, but this ultimately resulted in a better outcome than might have

been achieved otherwise. In this instance, the quest for status was a productive rather than destructive force.

Interviewees were honest in acknowledging that status-seeking has played an important role in Qatar's approach to mediation, including in the case of Lebanon. As Interviewee 4 observed, "*the pursuit of status, in my opinion, reflects a core objective that has long been integral to Qatar's mediation efforts"* (I4). Successfully mediating disputes helped to strengthen Qatar's reputation within the international community. However, the official also pointed out that *"this pursuit of status is not driven by narrow political ambitions but by a commitment to playing a constructive role in global peace and stability*" (I4). In other words, status is not pursued simply for its own sake but also because it helps Qatar to pursue its strategic objectives.

However, interviewees also acknowledged that a more proactive mediating role for Qatar potentially *"creates a level of concern among some regional actors, who view Qatar as an emerging competitor for regional influence"* (I4). Interviewee 4 commented that Qatar manages these challenges by avoiding direct confrontation with critics or appearing as a dominant force. Central to this is for Qatar to endeavour to act as a problem-solver during talks rather than attempt to impose its own agenda or desired outcome.

Nonetheless, there was general consensus among the interviewees that Qatar's approach to mediation has succeeded in formulating a new model. As Interviewee 3 observed, *"by integrating limited, humanitarian-focused military involvement into its mediation efforts, Qatar has been able to amplify its role on the world stage while staying true to the principles of international law"* (I3). This dual objective – the achievement of humanitarian girls in accordance with international law, but alongside the advancement of Qatari national interests – represents the guiding principle of Qatar's approach to mediation and foreign policy more widely.

Virtual Enlargement

The Lebanese case also demonstrates significant elements of virtual enlargement. As discussed in an earlier chapter, virtual enlargement refers to the process whereby a state expands its presence and influence in international affairs without physically increasing its territory or, in certain contexts, material capabilities. Virtual enlargement is closely tied to the notion of soft power – a concept first theorised by Joseph Nye (2004), who defined it as the ability to co-opt others (rather than coerce them) through the attractiveness of one's culture, political values, and policies. Virtual enlargement can also enable a state to project its power and influence into areas that it does not physically control. It can be used to counter the influence of other states or to further a state's own objectives. Therefore, virtual enlargement can be seen as a way for states to increase their influence and power in the international arena without resorting to traditional methods of action.

A notable aspect of the Lebanese case is how effectively Qatar worked under the auspices of a multilateral organisation – the Arab League. One reason why states hold membership in international institutions is to amplify their voice within the international arena and enlarge their influence. Although mainstream theory assumes that large states dominate international organisations (Corbett et al., 2021, p. 58), there is significant empirical evidence that multilateral organisations can, in fact, act as a diplomatic amplifier for those small states capable of navigating the internal politics of institutions adroitly. Indeed, the democratic nature of international institutions – membership is potentially open to all sovereign states, depending on the geographic scope of the institution – gives small states equal access to political influence (Bohman, 1999, p. 501). Consequently, international organisations are a key weapon in the virtual enlargement armoury for smaller states. Qatar appears to have succeeded in this regard in the Lebanon case, principally by leveraging its membership of the Arab League to extend its influence within the Arab world. This is a textbook case of virtual enlargement: a small state adeptly using a regional organisation to extend its influence within its region.

The personal diplomacy of Foreign Minister Al Thani also appears to have been an important component of Qatar's success in Lebanon. In particular, the close relations established between Al Thani and Amr Moussa enabled Qatar to play an outsize role in the resolution of the crisis. A comparison can be drawn here with how the effective personal styles of leaders of small states in the European Union can often enable those states to exert influence

far beyond their natural weight in Europe – the example of Luxembourg under its former Prime Minister Jean Claude Juncker, who went on to become president of the European Commission, is a case in point here. A personal reputation for energy, reliability and honesty can enable particular leaders – and through them, their states – to exert disproportionate influence within the international system.

The case of Lebanon also demonstrates how the concept of virtual enlargement puts more emphasis on the decision-makers, with a state's 'smallness' being tactically exploited to disarm the suspicions of major powers (Szalai, 2018). Qatar's influence, as well as its perceived status or image, was enhanced through the country's mediation efforts. This makes virtual enlargement theory (Chong, 2010) especially relevant, as both the actual influence and its virtual enlargement are crucial to Qatar transcending its smallness (Ennis, 2018). Regional powers acknowledged Qatar's ability to properly mediate a dispute, and this was achieved by Qatar accumulating political capital generated by domestic and international reputation (Eggeling, 2020).

The concept of virtual enlargement corresponded closely with the outlook of the interview participants. For Interviewee 4, mediation had become a strategic tool that "*enabled a small state like Qatar [to] achieve influence that far exceeds its geographic and demographic size."* Interviewees also highlighted how Qatar utilises media and technology to amplify its international influence and complement its mediation strategy. By leveraging platforms such as Al Jazeera and engaging in digital diplomacy, Qatar has been able to communicate its foreign policy and mediation successes to a global audience.

Similarly, Interviewee 3 observed that Qatar had achieved a *"virtual expansion"* of its influence (I3). Through media and digital platforms, Qatar highlights its humanitarian military initiatives, which allows it to broadcast its commitment to peace to the international community without the need for extensive military involvement. In the opinion of Interviewee 3, *"this innovative approach not only broadens our influence but also underscores Qatar's dedication to promoting peace and stability, helping to establish our reputation as a nation that favors constructive, peaceful solutions"* (I3).

Role Theory

In terms of role theory, the Lebanese example is interesting because it throws up two possible interpretations of Qatar's self-perceived role in this case. As noted in an earlier chapter, self-conceived roles help states to determine who they are (or believe themselves to be), what their interests are, and how they should interact with other states (Harnisch et al., 2011, pp. 1-2). Role theory posits that states adopt different roles in the international system, and that these roles then shape their behaviour in ways that cannot be explained by interests or material capabilities – the classic realist explanation of state behaviour - alone. A role is understood as a dynamic aspect of status, covering patterns of decisions and attitudes that may explain how the state's orientation is perceived by decision-makers (Holsti, 1970; Battaloglu, 2021)

Applying role theory to the case of Qatari mediation in Lebanon, the first possible interpretation of Qatar's actions is that it played out the role of a small state content to work helpfully in the background to resolve a crisis, primarily by assisting a larger organisation (in this case, the Arab League) to achieve its objective. In this interpretation, Qatar is not front and centre as a mediator but rather acts as a facilitator for more influential players to reach a resolution. Further, the mediating role in this instance can be interpreted as primarily altruistic and driven by a genuine desire to resolve the conflict. This role might be characterised as 'Qatar the background problem-solver'.

On the other hand, a second possible interpretation is that Qatar sought to leverage the Arab League's desire to resolve the crisis in order to position itself as an indispensable player within the Arab world. From this perspective, Qatar's actions were driven more by self-interest and status-seeking than by altruism. As noted above, playing a mediating role in Lebanon offered two significant benefits to Qatar: increased prestige and greater influence within the Arab League, and enhanced status within the Arab world. This interpretation of Qatar's role might be described as 'Qatar the status-seeker'. In reality, elements of both role concepts may have been in play. It is plausible that Qatar both genuinely desired to help solve the crisis in Lebanon and also wished to enhance its status within the Arab world.

Qatar's widely acknowledged role as a financial powerhouse was also in evidence in Lebanon, albeit more subtly than in later mediation cases in which Qatar became involved. Qatar's generous financial assistance towards reconstruction, following the damage inflicted

during the Hezbollah-Lebanon war in 2006, generated considerable goodwill in Lebanon. This goodwill helped to prepare the ground for Qatar to act as a mediator during the 2007-8 political crisis. However, there is no indication of Qatar offering investment incentives for the conflicting parties to reach an agreement in Lebanon, as it later did in the case of Darfur.

Also key to Qatar's successful mediation in Lebanon was its generally accepted role as an impartial broker in the region. Maintaining amicable relations with all states in the Arab world is particularly challenging given the conflicting historical experiences, attitudes, interests and perspectives across the region (Al-Eshaq and Rasheed, 2022). Indeed, Qatar has experienced this truth for itself recently during the Gulf Crisis 2017 (Salem and Alam, 2021). Back in the mid-2000s, however, Qatar was perceived in much more neutral and non-partisan terms by its counterparts in other Arab states. This was especially true in Lebanon, where Qatari financial assistance after the month-long war against Israel had been widely publicised and appreciated. As Kamrava (2011, p. 549) states, Qatar carried 'no historical or sectarian baggage in Lebanon'. In contrast, other potential mediators, such as the Egyptians and Saudis, were perceived to be overly close to the March 14 movement, while the Syrians and Iranians were closely tied to Hezbollah (Kamrava, 2011, p. 548). It also helped that Qatar had never been a major player in Lebanon. This, together with Doha's proven ability to maintain strategic ties with a wide range of different actors, made it a viable mediator. The 'friend to all and enemy to none' role was thus key in making Qatar an acceptable mediator to Lebanon's diverse factions, comprising Shias, Sunnis and Christians, and pro-Saudi, pro-Syrian and pro-Iranian elements. Satisfying all of these groups of Qatar's bona fides as an honest broker was a considerable achievement, and reflected well on Qatar's reputation for honesty and impartiality.

That said, it is worth considering whether Qatar would still be accepted as a mediator in a case like Lebanon today. As noted, the fate of Lebanon is a core strategic interest for many of the region's states, including Syria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Iran, all of whom seek to steer Lebanese politics in directions favourable to themselves. During the mid-2000s, Qatar's lack of diplomatic baggage made it non-threatening to all of these states, notwithstanding occasional grievances over the broadcasting of the Al Jazeera television channel. Two decades on, however, Qatar's relations with key players, such as Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, have become much less benign, largely in response to Qatar's policies during the Arab Spring (Ulrichsen, 2014, 2019, 2021; Miller, 2019). The blockade of Qatar

during 2017-21 was as close as Qatar has come to outright war, and it might be seen as a dramatic fall from grace for Doha as a diplomatic player in the Arab world. Despite this crisis lasted for nearly four years, Qatar has continued to play the role as a mediator in multiple cases, achieving significant results, most notably in Afghanistan.

These recent events demonstrate the downsides and challenges of status-seeking. In maximising status and influence, a state runs the risk of alienating other states that may not react well to activist new players in the international arena. In a regional security complex like the Gulf, where security is interdependent, diplomacy can all too often be interpreted as a zero-sum game; one state's diplomatic victory is assumed to equate to another's diplomatic defeat. Being overly activist and visible, even in a relatively benign sphere like mediation, thus carries risks as well as opportunities. These risks are arguably greater in the case of small states, which are naturally more vulnerable to the fire of their larger neighbours.

The interviewees were unanimous in their view that role theory is directly relevant to Qatar's mediation strategy. As Interviewee 3 [a government official closely involved in Qatar's diplomatic efforts] stated, "*I can affirm that mediation is not simply a policy choice but a core component of the nation's identity and strategic outlook"* (I3). In other words, mediation has become embedded as part of Qatar's national role. Interviewee 4 [a senior government official] expressed similar sentiments, arguing that role theory *"captures the essence of Qatar's approach to mediation"* (I4).

This interviewee also linked the mediation role to Qatari national identity and the desire to make a big impact even as a small state: "*Through my experience, I've come to realize that mediation is not just about resolving disputes or bridging differences; it's about building a national identity as a small state with a global impact"* (I4). Equally, Qatar's identity as a small state (albeit one with big ambitions) was also regarded as a central characteristic. This small size complemented Qatar's neutrality and enabled it to play the role of a non-threatening partner in the pursuit of peace. Qatar is clear to *"avoid any perception of aggressive involvement, reinforcing its status as a neutral mediator"* (I3).

In terms of how the interviewees characterised Qatar's role, therefore, there was general consensus that neutrality was a key characteristic. As Interviewee 4 stated, "*the role Qatar has embraced revolves around neutrality, active listening, and providing a fair platform for dialogue."* This interviewee articulated that Qatar has successfully adopted a diplomatic

identity centred on neutrality and trust-building, enabling it to bring conflicting parties to the negotiating table. Further, this role was not chosen arbitrarily but rather evolved naturally from Qatar's non-aligned foreign policy and its aspiration to be a trusted mediator. Qatar holds a historical commitment to peaceful solutions, and Interviewee 4 also observed that the Qatari constitution was amended to reflect this in 2024. Specifically, Article 7 was revised to explicitly affirm the Qatari state's commitment to its role as a neutral mediator working to promote peace and stability among nations. In the interviewee's opinion, this constitutional step underscored that *"mediation is not just a temporary foreign policy tool but an integral part of Qatar's national identity"* (I4).

Practitioner Perspectives on Mediating in Lebanon

Interviewee 3 [a Qatari government official] was particularly useful in explaining the background to Qatar's involvement in Lebanon. Heavily involved in Qatar's mediation efforts in Lebanon during 2008, the official praised *"the significant role our nation played in facilitating peace during a critical juncture in Lebanese history"* (I3). Interviewees also repeatedly emphasised the importance of Qatar operating under the umbrella of international law and the UN Charter. As a member of the United Nations, Qatar views its mediation initiatives as an extension of its obligations under international law. This perspective is also reflected in its domestic policies; in 2024, Qatar amended Article 7 of its constitution to explicitly emphasize its commitment to mediation as a fundamental principle of its foreign policy. This constitutional amendment not only reinforced Qatar's role as a mediator but also underscored its prioritization of diplomacy as a means to achieve global stability.

Interviewee 2 [government official] observed that Qatar's foreign policy is characterised by its adherence to *"an internationally disciplined model that aligns with United Nations (UN) resolutions and international law"* (I2). The interviewee noted that most, if not all, of Qatar's mediation efforts have been undertaken under the umbrella of UN resolutions, whether through the Security Council or the General Assembly. This reflects Qatar's commitment to these international mandates. Commensurate with this approach, Qatar is committed to respecting the sovereignty of states and resolving conflicts through peaceful means (I3).

One could add that operating under the umbrella of the UN also offers Qatar crucial diplomatic and political legitimacy for its mediation activities. Indeed, Interviewee 2 noted that stepping outside the framework of international law *"could subject the state to political or economic pressures"* (I2). The commitment to international law is thus partly born of prudence as well as ethical considerations. Interviewee 2 linked this prudence to Qatar's small size, noting that *"a country of Qatar's size may not be able to withstand the consequences of acting outside the framework of international law, especially given the presence of other parties with conflicting interests"* (I2). As such, international law serves as the *"primary protector of Qatar's role and shields it from political and strategic risks that may arise from the clashing interests of major powers"* (I2). This explanation of the importance of international law in Qatar's mediation efforts is noteworthy and brings to the fore an issue that has been under-explored in the existing literature.

In the case of Lebanon, Qatar once again acted under a multilateral umbrella. Interviewee 2 [government official] observed that Qatar's mediation in Lebanon was based on UN Security Council resolutions, which endowed Qatar's role with an institutional and legal standing on an international level. Similarly, Interviewee 3 [an official closely involved in Qatar's mediation in Lebanon during 2008] noted that partnering with international organisations such as the United Nations, NATO and the Arab League enabled Qatar to provide security assistance without direct combat involvement, thus "*reinforcing its image as a state that promotes peace through military alliances rather than aggression".* These partnerships also enable Qatar to leverage the greater military capacity of its allies, thus ensuring it can support its diplomatic initiatives with substantive military resources. This makes the Qatari role in mediation *"more substantial and well-supported by major international entities"* (I3).

As in the other cases in which Qatar has mediated in recent decades, a neutral and impartial stance was critical for establishing trust among the participants. Indeed, for the officials interviewed for this study, neutrality was perhaps Qatar's single most important attribute as a mediator. Interviewee 3 [government official] noted Qatar's *"steadfast commitment to neutrality"* throughout the talks, with no single faction favoured over any other. The same interviewee noted that this neutrality was *"a rare asset in a region often defined by competing influences"* (I3). This impartial approach was crucial in gaining the trust of Lebanese leaders and encouraging open dialogue between the various parties to the conflict. In the same

interviewee's opinion, this firm commitment to neutrality was a critical factor facilitating the ultimately successful outcome of the talks.

Interviewee 3 also emphasised the importance of the practical assistance extended by Qatar in Lebanon, especially in terms of logistical and security support: *"Our primary commitment was to provide a safe and impartial environment conducive to constructive dialogue. We invited all Lebanese parties to Doha, offering a secure venue where they could openly discuss their concerns and aspirations without external pressures influencing the negotiations"* (I3). Indeed, for those involved in the Lebanese case, the military component was much more important than many observers realised. As Interviewee 3 stated, "*One of the key strengths that made Qatar an effective mediator was our ability to offer logistical and security support throughout the mediation process.* While Qatar did not engage in direct military intervention, its indirect military contributions were vital. Qatar ensured the safety and smooth functioning of the talks by securing venues, coordinating safe passage for delegates, and providing necessary facilities for productive discussions. These efforts were instrumental in building trust among the Lebanese factions, enabling them to focus on finding common ground (I3). This level of practical assistance required not only the provision of Qatar's extensive financial resources but also a considerable degree of administrative efficiency, diplomatic networking, and logistical prowess.

Qatar's military assistance also extended to assisting the Lebanese Armed Forces. Qatar provided training and equipment to enhance the capabilities of Lebanon's security institutions. By strengthening the Lebanese military's ability to maintain internal security and protect the nation's sovereignty*, "we contributed to creating an environment where political solutions could take root. This support respected Lebanon's autonomy and aimed to bolster its capacity to address security challenges independently"* (I3). By enabling a stronger Lebanese military, Qatar also helped to enhance Lebanon's *"resilience against external pressures"* (I3). Although not renowned as a military power, therefore, Qatar's ability to provide military assistance – a capacity based primarily on the impressive Qatari special forces – was important in this instance.

The Lebanese case was also unusual in that Qatar despatched its own military forces to help maintain security on the ground in Lebanon. This active military involvement, albeit in a peacekeeping role, presented its own difficulties as the Qatari forces were relatively new to such international operations. Consequently, they *"encountered operational and logistical*

challenges in a foreign conflict environment" (I3), forcing them to show adaptability and resilience as they navigated unfamiliar terrain and worked within a highly complex political outcome. In the opinion of Interviewee 3, the Qatari forces succeeded in this endeavour, with their presence on the ground contributing to a peaceful resolution of the crisis.

Interviewee 3 [a government official closely involved in the Lebanese mediation] further expanded on the role of the Qatari military and special forces in a mediation capacity. He noted that Qatar has trained and equipped its special forces to be able to provide security for diplomatic missions and humanitarian initiatives, ensuring the safety of its mediation efforts in conflict areas. This capacity to deliver targeted military support adds another dimension to Qatar's role as a mediator and ensures its humanitarian ambitions can be supported by substantive capacity on the ground. The interviewees were clear that maintaining a dedicated security apparatus gives teeth to Qatar's diplomatic and humanitarian missions.

Of course, the practical help offered by Qatar to Lebanon also included the extension of direct financial assistance to the warring parties on the ground. Recognising the importance of addressing *"underlying social and economic challenges",* Qatar extended *"substantial resources to support Lebanon's reconstructions efforts following the conflict"* (I3). This included the funding of numerous infrastructure projects, including roads, schools and hospitals, with a particular focus on the areas that had suffered the greatest physical conflict damage. Qatari officials also sought grassroots involvement in these projects by inviting local Lebanese communities to participate in the reconstruction, thus *"creating job opportunities and fostering a sense of ownership among the population"* (I3). This served the dual purpose of alleviating immediate hardships while also contributing to longer-term stability and recovery.

In terms of the approach adopted by Qatar during the negotiations, interviewees emphasised that Qatar took a different approach from other parties who had previously attempted to find a resolution to the crisis. Interviewee 4 [a senior Qatari government official] stated that Qatar's approach was different insofar as Doha acted not merely as a technical mediator but also sought to create a dialogue and environment built on trust. In particular, the Lebanese factions came to trust the Qatari government because of its neutrality, consistency, and willingness to include everyone in the talks without bias or preconditions.

As in Darfur, Qatar had to overcome the scepticism of regional powers as it sought to put itself forward as a mediator in Lebanon. Interviewee 3 [a government official] noted the plethora of internal and external actors that were involved in Lebanon, all with their own perspectives and competing interests. Further, this official observed that *"some regional powers viewed Qatar's involvement with scepticism, concerned that our mediation might alter the balance of influence in the region."* (I3). These sceptics also worried that Qatar's mediating role would create *"a potential threat to their own interests in Lebanon"* (I3). Similarly, Interviewee 4 [a senior government official] noted that the negotiations *"were complicated by regional interference from countries with competing interests, which attempted to influence the course of the dialogue"* (I4). Interestingly, Interviewee 4 observed that the main sceptics were not Syria and Iran, two major regional external powers with longstanding strategic interests in Lebanon, but rather other Gulf states who viewed Qatar's success as unwelcome competition for influence over sensitive regional matters. Syria and Iran, on the other hand, *"viewed Qatar's efforts as a stabilising factor"* for the region (I3).

Qatari officials were required to navigate these sensitivities carefully by emphasising their overriding commitment to impartiality and a peaceful, stable outcome. In the opinion of Interviewee 3, even sceptical neighbouring countries *"eventually acknowledged the necessity and effectiveness of Qatar's mediation. For example, Saudi Arabia and Syria, two key players in the Lebanese political scene, viewed Qatar's efforts as a stabilising factor"* (I3). Interviewee 3 also stressed that maintaining transparency and open communication with all stakeholders was crucial in overcoming doubts and winning the trust of regional powers. This open, impartial approach was vital in enabling a successful ultimate outcome.

Qatari officials were also compelled to consider the risks of failure as they weighed the costs and benefits of mediating in Lebanon. In the opinion of Interviewee 3, a failed mediation *"could have led to a deterioration of the situation in Lebanon and negatively impacted Qatar's relationships within the region".* Furthermore, taking on such a high-profile case, with many interested external parties, placed Qatar under intense international scrutiny. Nonetheless, the official concluded that these were risks worth taking given the potential gains in terms of promoting peace, enhancing regional stability and strengthening bilateral relations. In the eyes of the officials involved in the negotiations, the successful outcome of the Doha Agreement validated this assessment and demonstrated that a proactive approach to mediation was the right approach.

The particularities of the Lebanese conflict were highly complex and challenging for Qatar as a mediator. Interviewee 3 noted that Lebanese politics was characterised by *"intense divisions and tensions among various factions, each with its own distinct interests and external affiliations"* (I3). These divisions reflected Lebanon's diverse sectarian make-up, which made it particularly challenging to secure consensus among the various parties.

Interviewees rejected the oft-asserted view that Qatar is too short-termist in its approach to mediation. In the case of Lebanon, one of the officials involved in the mediation process (I3) observed that Qatar committed substantial resources to support reconstruction projects in Lebanon even after the agreements. In the official's opinion, this demonstrated that Qatar's approach to mediation extended beyond short-term diplomacy and left *"a lasting impression on Lebanon's recovery process"* (I3).

Interviewees also reflected on how Qatar itself had benefited from mediating in both Lebanon and other cases. Interviewee 3 [a government official] concluded that Qatar's mediation efforts had brought *"multiple strategic benefits"* (I3). These benefits included the positive impact on Qatar's international reputation as a reliable partner capable not only of offering diplomatic and humanitarian assistance but also military help where required. In Interviewee 3's opinion, this enhanced strategic presence *"had opened doors for Qatar, allowing it to collaborate closely with international organizations like the United Nations and regional alliances, further elevating its profile"* (I3). In sum, Qatar's mediation efforts enabled it to solidify "*a unique niche in global diplomacy, combining soft and hard power to promote peace*" (I3). This balance has bolstered Qatar's standing, expanded its network of allies, and demonstrated its commitment to responsible, stability-focused military engagement.

Succeeding in a case as complex and intricate as Lebanon also enhanced Qatar's regional image and strengthened its reputation as a balanced actor capable of bridging divides and managing sensitive dynamics. This has generated increased trust not only from various Lebanese factions but also with *"other Middle Eastern stakeholders, enhancing Qatar's influence in regional security dialogues"* (I3). This represented a notable achievement for Qatar as a small and intrinsically vulnerable state situated in a complex and volatile region. It could be argued, indeed, that a greater voice in regional security dialogues was precisely what Qatar's rulers wished to achieve when they first entered the mediation arena some two decades ago.

The benefits generated in terms of an enhanced regional presence were also complemented by the positive impact Qatar's mediation efforts had on its various bilateral relationships with the countries directly involved. Interviewee 3 argued that by establishing itself as a trusted mediator in a particular country, Qatar positioned itself as a critical player in that country's future. This would enable future diplomatic and strategic benefits potentially unfolding over many decades. The personal relationships and connections created with individual leaders and politicians also offered obvious advantages for Qatar's diplomatic influence going forward.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined Qatar's mediation efforts in Lebanon during the 2007-8 political crisis. The Doha Accord of May 2008, which resulted in the establishment of a new unity government in Lebanon, helped to prevent another civil war and ranks as a significant achievement for the main mediators, Qatar and the Arab League. The case demonstrated that Qatar's status-seeking approach to mediation can be highly beneficial in certain circumstances. In seeking status and enlarged influence for itself, Qatar also helped to resolve a major crisis and avoid mass bloodshed. The Lebanese case also demonstrated how status-seeking, role theory and virtual enlargement can be intertwined and work in mutually reinforcing ways. In particular, Qatar's self-conceived role as a non-aligned state was shown to be of the utmost importance in Lebanon, since Doha's acceptability as a mediator derived principally from its relative lack of history in the country and its ties to all sides. In this sense, Qatar's role worked to further its status and virtual enlargement ambitions.

As Qatar's visibility on the international stage has risen in the years since then, however, this 'friends to all' national role conception has proven increasingly difficult to maintain. It is intriguing to consider that Qatar successfully performed a mediating role in a delicate case like Lebanon, one of the Middle East's most complex political environments, yet has since become embroiled in its own political difficulties with neighbouring states. The probable explanation for this apparent contradiction lies in the pre- and post-Arab Spring dichotomy. Pre-Arab Spring, Qatar was largely perceived as a benign force in the region; post-Spring, after allegedly becoming too close to Islamist forces in the region, Qatar's neighbours have regarded it much more suspiciously (Ulrichsen, 2014). One of the keys to understanding the success of Qatar's

mediation in the Lebanese case, then, is that it occurred in the pre-Arab Spring era, when Qatar's motives were largely regarded as altruistic and non-threatening. Pulling off the same feat today, in a more hostile regional environment, would likely prove much more challenging.

Nonetheless, the successful mediation in Lebanon demonstrates how Qatar balances its respect for international law and international norms against achieving its national interests and strategic goals. As Interviewee 3 concluded, through the adroit and patient use of mediation Qatar *"has been able to amplify its role on the world stage while staying true to the principles of international law"* (I3). This dual approach – combining both ethical commitments and strategic interests – undeniably represents an appealing model for other states to follow, although few can combine Qatar's enviable combination of financial resources, high level commitment to mediation, non-aligned status (while still retaining positive relations with powerful allies), and a location at the heart of one of the world's most important geopolitical arenas.

In summing up Qatar's mediating role in Lebanon, Interviewee 3 [a government official] concluded that the case demonstrated Qatar's commitment and ability to provide multifaceted support, including indirect military assistance, economic investment, and diplomatic engagement, all while maintaining a neutral stance and positive relationships with the parties involved. This "*comprehensive approach*" (I3), combining humanitarian, military and diplomatic elements, allowed Qatar to exert a positive influence over the course of events and contribute to a peaceful and stable outcome. The interviewee concluded: "*Overall, Qatar's strength as a mediator in Lebanon lay in its ability to provide multi-dimensional support, blending military-related aid, economic rebuilding, and diplomatic dialogue* [I3]*".* Through this balanced strategy, Qatar demonstrated that a small state can play a critical role in regional conflict resolution by leveraging both soft power and strategic military assistance.

CHAPTER 6:

Qatari Mediation in Afghanistan

(Case Study)

Introduction

This chapter examines Qatar's mediation efforts in the case of Afghanistan. Qatar was instrumental in facilitating the Doha Agreement signed between the U.S. and the Taliban on 29 February 2020 by Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar on behalf of the Taliban and Zalmay Khalilzad, the U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, on behalf of the U.S. (U.S.-Afghanistan Joint Declaration, 2020). The Afghan case differed from the one in Darfur insofar as it directly involved Western, especially American, interests as a result of the 20 year-long NATO presence in Afghanistan following the September 11 al Qaeda attacks on New York City and Washington, DC. The Afghan case is also notable for marking a resumption of Qatar's mediation activities following its hiatus during the 2017-21 Gulf Crisis (Milton *et al.,* 2023: 1). Examining this much more recent case makes it possible to draw conclusions about how, and why, Qatar's approach to mediation might have changed in response to the backlash it experienced in 2017-21. The chapter's findings also help to add further knowledge on the mediating role of small states from beyond the West. These findings are supported throughout by interview data from Qatari officials personally involved in mediating in Afghanistan.

In terms of structure, the chapter first recounts the main chronology of Qatar's involvement in mediating the Afghan conflict. It then analyses Qatar's involvement in the case through the lens of the three principal theories under discussion: role theory, status-seeking, and virtual enlargement. The chapter argues that each of these theories is clearly demonstrated by Qatar's broadly successful mediation between the U.S. and the Taliban. Indeed, the Afghan case offers strong evidence that Qatar's mediation strategy is becoming more mature, more subtle, and more institutionalised across different departments of government.

Background and Chronology

Qatar's renewed prominence in mediation reflects the growing influence of the Gulf states on the international stage in the early 2020s (Milton *et al.,* 2023: 4). The Russian invasion of Ukraine, and subsequent Western embargo on the purchase of Russian energy supplies, has significantly reduced the importation of Russian gas in Western markets. The Russian share of the EU's gas imports has declined from over 40 percent in 2021, for example, to less than 15 percent today (European Council, 2024). Increased importation of liquified natural gas (LNG) instead has been crucial in enabling this transition. Gas-rich Qatar and other Gulf states have helped to fill the gap, thereby stabilising global energy markets and allowing European states, in particular, to diversify away from their previous reliance on Russia as their main source of energy.

Qatar's involvement in the U.S.-Taliban talks began after Doha was approached by the U.S. to facilitate negotiations and host a political office for the Taliban outside Afghanistan (Poornima, 2022: 531). This initial approach occurred as early as 2007, during the height of the NATO counter-insurgency in Afghanistan, but took many years to come to fruition. Negotiations were delayed for years due to a dispute over the release of Taliban prisoners from Guantanamo Bay detention camp, reflecting the US's reluctance to permit the release of high-level Taliban operatives (Milton *et al.,* 2023: 8). In 2013, however, the Taliban established a political office in Doha under Qatari auspices, serving as a venue for secret dialogue between the Taliban and foreign interlocutors (Ibid: 9). As the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan became imminent, however, so the urgency of reaching an agreement increased.

Qatar's acceptability to both sides was a function of several factors. For the Taliban, Qatar was an acceptable mediator because of Doha's non-involvement in the NATO counterinsurgency and its willingness to accept the Taliban's pre-conditions (Milton *et al.,* 2023: 10). These factors made Qatar preferable to other regional third parties, whom the Taliban also considered as potential mediators. The United Arab Emirates (UAE), for instance, also sought to insert themselves both into the U.S.-Taliban negotiations and the later intra-Afghan discussions, but any role for the Emiratis was rejected by the Taliban on the grounds that the UAE had stationed troops in Afghanistan as a NATO partner from 2003 onwards (Ardemagni, 2021). The Taliban also killed five Emirati diplomats, including the Ambassador, in a car bombing in Kandahar in 2017 (Ardemagni, 2021; Karam, 2021). The Taliban therefore

saw Qatar as more impartial than the Emiratis. Qatar's relative warmth to political Islam may also have helped increase Doha's acceptability to the Taliban as a mediator. As Poornima (2022: 538) states, Qatar's 'subtle embracement and support of Islamist endeavours' earned it kudos among the Taliban (BBC, 2013). Finally, Qatar's financial firepower also made it attractive to the Taliban. Amicable relations with Doha created the potential for financial aid and investment that could help Afghanistan recover from the economic meltdown caused by the state's financial assets being frozen by the U.S. (Poornima, 2022: 538).

On the American side, Qatar's reputation as an honest broker and impartial mediator made it acceptable to Washington as a third-party mediator in this case. Qatar's security dependence on the U.S. made it unlikely that its mediators would go beyond their remit and show partiality in favour of the Taliban's interests. The U.S. Department of State expressed its gratitude to Qatar for the 'indispensable role' it played in facilitating and mediating the U.S.-Taliban negotiations, as well as its later undertaking of U.S. consular duties after the American withdrawal (MOFA, 2020; MEE, 2021; Milton *et al.,* 2023: 10).

Qatar was also an acceptable mediator to other international actors in Afghanistan, including the UN. Internationally, there was general approval for the Doha Agreement and relief that a negotiated settlement had finally been reached. Qatar's effectiveness as a mediator during the negotiations, was demonstrated by its ability to maintain secrecy and confidentiality, which further enhanced its reputation as a mediator (Milton *et al.,* 2023: 10). As ever, Qatar's financial firepower was also beneficial. This was particularly demonstrated during the intra-Afghan negotiations, when Qatar covered the significant hotel run by visiting Afghan delegations in Doha over the weeks and months of their stays (Ibid: 18).

Qatar hosted several rounds of talks between the Taliban and Americans, and offered technical and political support for Taliban leaders to travel to Doha for the negotiations. Qatar also chaired negotiation sessions and engaged in shuttle diplomacy between the two sides, especially during tense moments (EIU, 2019). During the latter days of the Trump presidency, for example, Qatar helped to broker the release of an American citizen in exchange for three high-value Taliban prisoners, following Trump's suspension of talks after the killing of an American soldier (France 24, 2019). Three members of the Taliban-linked Haqqani Network, Anas Haqqani, Haji Mali Khan and Hafiz Rashid, were released from Bagram Prison (located on a U.S. air base but under the custody of the Afghan government) in return for the release of American Kevin King and Australian Timothy Weekes (Faiez, 2019). Senior Qatari officials

were closely involved in this episode, including the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani, and the Special Envoy, Mutlaq Al-Qahtani (Milton *et al.,* 2023: 9). Qatar also became involved in resolving other disputes during the negotiations, including the Taliban's demand for a guarantor, which ran up against the Americans' reluctance to grant a monitoring role to any foreign government. An agreement was finally brokered when the U.S. arranged for 11 senior members of the Taliban to be temporarily excluded from the UN Security Council travel sanctions list (Ibid: 9).

Perhaps more significantly, Qatar proved instrumental in helping the two sides to overcome several main areas of dispute: the Taliban's counterterrorism obligations post-withdrawal, the sequencing and conditions of the ceasefire between the U.S. and Taliban, and the phasing of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghan territory (Ibid: 8). These issues were set out in the agreement signed in Doha on 29 February 2020, providing a roadmap for the safe withdrawal of U.S. troops, and stipulating commitments from the Taliban to renounce al Qaeda and other terrorist groups, and also to enter intra-Afghan negotiations (U.S.-Afghanistan Joint Declaration, 2020). The Declaration stipulated: (1) a guarantee by the Taliban not to permit Afghan soil to be used by international terrorist groups against the interests of the US and its allies; (2) a timeline for the withdrawal of all U.S. and Coalition forces from Afghanistan; (3) a political settlement from intra-Afghan dialogue; and (4) a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire (Ibid). The U.S. also committed to provide assistance in the fight against terrorism and to facilitate discussions with Pakistan to prevent its actions from threatening Afghan territory (Ibid: 2).

Following the agreement between the U.S. and the Taliban in 2021, Qatar also played a role in mediating intra-Afghan negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan government in Kabul. This again involved hosting discussions, as well as convening a friendly group of countries to observe and advise the participants, including Germany, Norway, Indonesia, and Uzbekistan. However, the talks themselves were Afghan-led, with no formal third-party mediator presence and no external party present in the room during the discussions. The sole exception to this state of affairs came in mid-November 2020, when the negotiating parties requested mediation assistance from Special Envoy Al-Qahtani to help resolve a dispute over the procedural rules for the negotiations. Al-Qahtani's intervention was successful, and the talks resumed in December 2020 (Milton *et al.,* 2020: 9).

Qatar's role also extended beyond negotiations to playing a direct part in the evacuation of tens of thousands of people from Afghanistan following the Taliban's military takeover on 15

August 2021. Qatar assumed responsibility for evacuating thousands of international citizens and 60,000 Afghans via Doha over a period of a month (Poornima, 2022: 534). This required extensive interaction and coordination with the Taliban on the ground – no easy task given the febrile and volatile nature of the situation in Kabul especially – and led to the U.S. designating Qatar as its 'protecting power' in Afghanistan (Pamuk and Landay, 2021).

Qatar's efforts were also bolstered by its geographic location and security ties to the U.S. Both the American base in Qatar, Al-Udeid, and Doha Airport were central cogs in the military and civilian withdrawal from Kabul. Indeed, half of the 120,000 people the U.S. flew out of Afghanistan passed through Al-Udeid (The Economist, 2021). The Qatari Ambassador in Kabul even personally escorted convoys to the airport to help the withdrawal process (The Economist, 2021). Doha also became the new base for the Afghan diplomatic missions of the US, UK, Japan and Netherlands (Ardemagni, 2021). Qatar also sent technical civilian assistance to help reopen Kabul international airport in collaboration with Turkey, and also entered discussions around hosting a military base to train Afghan special forces after NATO's departure (Ardemagni, 2021). The sudden Taliban takeover scotched this latter endeavour, but its consideration reflected Qatar's willingness to be bold in its mediation strategy.

Qatar's Mediation Approach in Afghanistan

One notable shift in policy since the 2017-21 crisis is that Qatar now only mediates in cases where the conflict parties formally request its intervention as a third-party mediator (Milton *et al.,* 2023: 17-18). Qatar desists from seeking to unilaterally enter the conflict mediation process, and is reluctant to mediate in cases with a low probability of success (in such cases, it confines itself simply to facilitating talks) (Ibid). In the case of the intra-Afghan discussions during 2020-1, for example, Qatar did not push for a formal mediation role, despite the obvious need for one (Ibid). Instead, Qatar facilitated only and was not even in the room for many of the discussions. This helped to mitigate any reputational damage to Qatar when the talks eventually failed, and the Taliban enforced control on the ground in Afghanistan.

In terms of the practice of mediation by Qatar in the Afghan case, it is notable that the main parties involved on the Qatari side were the Special Envoy, the National Security Advisor, the Deputy Foreign Minister, and the Foreign Minister (Milton *et al.,* 2023: 18). On the other hand,

recent mediation efforts in Chad were handled by the Special Envoy and the Secretary of the Emir for Security Affairs, while the similarly recent intervention in Libya was mediated by the Emir himself (Ibid). As such, there has been a diverse group of officials involved in recent mediation efforts. This marks a shift from the 2006-10 period, when nearly all mediation was conducted primarily through the then Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Hamad bin Jassim al-Thani. Critics suggested that Qatar lacked institutional knowledge of mediation and relied too heavily on the personal attributes of individual officials (Dickinson, 2012). Now, however, Qatar appears to have taken these lessons on board and is attempting to deepen its expertise and institutionalise its capacity for mediation beyond one or two particularly energetic (and admittedly impressive) individuals.

This shift in approach is also demonstrated by the fact that, in some cases, Qatar's lead mediators have rotated roles every six months, enabling a wider pool of officials to develop experience and expertise in mediation, as well as greater knowledge of specific cases and regions (Milton *et al.,* 2023: 19). The net effect of these changes has been to enable Qatar to develop a deeper and broader institutional capacity to mediate. This marks a clear improvement from the period 2006-10, when Qatar was forced to turn down mediation offers due to a lack of capacity – for example, Qatar declined to mediate in Mauritania in 2008 because its key officials were engaged in Darfur (LeBaron, 2008). Qatar's institutional capacity for mediation, criticised previously, thus shows signs of improvement.

Officials interviewed for this study offered useful insights on the nature of the decision-making process within the Qatari government when it weighs whether or not to mediate in a particular case. Interviewee 2 described *"a structured dynamic characterised by organisation and a hierarchical approach to decisions related to international mediation"* (I2). However, the dynamic can be either horizontal or vertical depending on the circumstances. In some cases, the impetus to mediate in a particular case *"might start from the highest leadership, such as His Highness the Emir"* (I2). In other cases, the initiative might start from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or even from individuals involved in dealings with external parties, such as ambassadors or international representatives. Interviewee 2 offered the example of a meeting with foreign leaders, which might spark the idea for mediation, or alternatively a meeting of senior Qatari officials might prompt the decision to intervene in a particular case.

The Special Envoy offered a slightly different perspective, arguing that *"in most cases, His Highness the Emir is the key driving force behind [mediation] decisions"* (I1). However, the

Special Envoy agreed that there was close coordination between the highest leadership and various diplomatic bodies. Decisions are not made in isolation but in liaison with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other responsible officials, who provide advice and present possible options.

Once a mediation proposal has been brought to the table, it is referred to the relevant state mechanisms to study all aspects of the decision. Here the risks, opportunities and possible consequences of intervention are analysed in a process requiring a comprehensive evaluation of the political, security, economic and humanitarian dimensions. Great care is taken to ensure that mediation aligns with international law and serves national interests (I1). The final decision, however, rests with the sovereign and *"remains the exclusive responsibility of Qatar's high political leadership"* (I2). Many government agencies and bodies feed into the decision-making process in a coordinated effort led by specialists and experts, but the final decision rests with the Emir himself.

Reaction to the Agreement and Measuring Qatar's Success in Afghanistan

The agreement was heavily criticised within the United States. The chaotic nature of the U.S. departure on 15 August, which many likened to the fall of Saigon during the Vietnam War, fed a perception that the U.S. had conceded too much to the Taliban. General David Petraeus, former commander of NATO forces in Afghanistan, labelled it 'among the worst diplomatic agreements to which the U.S. has ever been a party' (Petraeus, 2022). In effect, the precipitous nature of the U.S. withdrawal allowed the Taliban to short-circuit the intra-Afghan process and take control of the Kabul government (and almost all Afghan territory, aside from a few hold-out provinces) almost immediately (Milton *et al.,* 2023: 8). With virtually no troops left on the ground, the U.S. was powerless to stop the Taliban taking full control.

The nature of events on the ground also somewhat tarnished the reputational benefits of the mediation for Qatar, despite general acknowledgement that Qatar had performed its role effectively and fairly (Milton *et al.,* 2023: 10). Not only did the Taliban swiftly take control of

virtually the entire territory of Afghanistan, but it also failed to observe its promise to allow all females to enjoy access to education (Poornima, 2022: 533). Some critics even questioned Qatar's motivations in hosting the Taliban political office in Doha, seemingly hinting at some alignment of views between Qatar and the Taliban (Ibid). The fact that the U.S. apparently conceded so much to the Taliban adds potential credence to this view. In addition, Qatar is widely recognised to be the Gulf state most favourable towards political Islam, much more so than the neighbouring UAE (The Economist, 2021). Yet, there is little evidence that this swayed Qatar's mediation efforts or produced a worse outcome for the Americans. To make such an assumption is to misunderstand Qatar's impartial role in the talks and, moreover, the drivers of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. The chaos of August 2021 arose primarily from the anxious desire of President Biden, and before him President Trump, to remove U.S. troops from harm's way in Afghanistan as swiftly as possible (Kiely and Farley, 2021). As an impartial third party focused on facilitating the talks, Qatar had virtually no influence over American reasoning.

Notwithstanding these criticisms of Qatar, however, the public appreciation expressed by the U.S. government for Qatar's role has ensured that the mainstream reaction has been broadly positive and supportive of Qatar's efforts. Overall, Qatar's role in the U.S.-Taliban negotiations undoubtedly enhanced its reputation as a skilful and impartial third-party mediator capable of brokering agreements even in longstanding and complex disputes (Milton *et al.,* 2023: 17). The case also demonstrated Qatar's patience and longevity as a negotiator. Qatar's involvement spanned at least eight years, from the opening of the Taliban's political office in Doha in 2013 to the eventual agreement signed in 2019. Qatar also had to overcome several obstacles along the way, including President Trump's decision to cancel the talks in 2019 (Ibid). The swift and imaginative resolution of this dispute, involving a prisoner release and ceasefire to bring the parties back to the negotiating table, further underlined Qatar's skill as a mediator (Ibid). The willingness to stay the course over the best part of a decade, even at some reputational risk to itself should negotiations have failed, also proved Qatar's bona fides as a genuine and sincere third-party mediator.

Qatari officials involved in the Afghan negotiations and interviewed for this study confirmed that the mediation had generated considerable reputational benefits for Qatar. In the opinion of Interviewee 4 [a senior Qatari government official], for example, the Afghan case earned Qatar recognition as a *"key diplomatic player"*. The strengthening of Qatar's

relationship with the United States was a particularly beneficial result of the mediation, helping not only to increase Qatar's influence but also to diversify its strategic options in the face of regional challenges.

Qatari officials interviewed for this study confirmed that the Afghan negotiations, involving as they did the world's foremost geopolitical power (the United States), were the highest-profile and, in reputational terms at least, most important mediation case they had yet been involved in. The case involved *"multiple international interests",* not only regional ones, demonstrating the wider geopolitical importance of the case. Indeed, the Special Envoy acknowledged to the author that *"any failure in this mediation could have negatively impacted Qatar's reputation as an international mediator"* (I4).

The 'fall of Kabul' after the signing of the Doha Agreement, and the ensuing chaos that developed on the ground in Afghanistan, did little to enhance Qatar's reputation for post-mediation follow through. The failure to generate durable conflict resolution has been a longstanding criticism of Qatari mediation (Kamrava, 2011, 2013). One of the main criticisms is that there has been a failure to follow through on implementation measures after peace agreements have been signed. Post-agreement implementation is perhaps the most important phase of conflict resolution, but is often overlooked as external actors lose interest and focus their attention elsewhere (Barakat, 2014: 24). Ideally, mediation should result not only in a peace agreement but also in implementation measures that foster reconciliation and the internal capacity to manage the post-conflict transition process. In the absence of such measures, peace agreements often break down and result in renewed violence (Barakat, 2014: 25). In this case, however, it seems unreasonable to criticise Qatar for Afghanistan's post-2021 trajectory. Qatar clearly lacked the hard power to enforce the details of any agreement, nor did anyone expect this of Doha in its role as an impartial mediator. The Taliban's quick assumption of control reflected two factors, both of which lay outside Qatar's control: 1) The American unwillingness to maintain a significant military presence inside Afghanistan; 2) The Taliban's superior military power vis a vis its intra-Afghan rivals. Neither of these factors can be laid at the door of Qatar itself.

A perhaps more pertinent criticism of Qatar's mediation efforts in the case of Afghanistan was its willingness to exclude certain important local actors from the negotiation process. Notably, the U.S.-Taliban Agreement excluded the existing Kabul government led by President Ashraf Ghani (Sen, 2022). The exclusion of the entity that formed the sovereign government

of Afghanistan until August 2021 seems somewhat odd, and has raised concerns about the inclusivity of the Qatari facilitation and mediation process. Similarly, non-Pashtun groups in the north of Afghanistan were largely excluded from the negotiations and were thus unable to influence the nature of the agreement between the U.S. and the Taliban, despite the fact that they – and not the U.S. – would have to live alongside, or more likely under, the Taliban after the agreement.

One can perhaps make three responses to this criticism. First, it again overestimates how much control Qatar could realistically exert over the identity of the parties included in the process. For all practical purposes, the two main protagonists on the ground in Afghanistan were the United States and the Taliban. The exclusion of even major NATO allies such as the UK and France (both of whom had shed considerable blood and treasure in Afghanistan) from formal involvement in the talks reflected this reality. Secondly, the expansion of the talks to include more parties would almost certainly have made it even harder to reach an agreement, as more diverging interests and viewpoints would have been filtered into the negotiations and thereby made them even more complex. Thirdly, in theory, the intra-Afghan negotiations, which began after the Doha Agreement, could allow other Afghan parties outside the Taliban to put forward their interests and views. The fact that, in the event, the intra-Afghan negotiations largely failed serves only to underline the first point: that the Taliban were the main game in town in Afghanistan and held vastly more power than any other Afghan group. Confining the main negotiations to the two main parties, the U.S. and Taliban, thus made sense, even if it bruised the feelings of other parties.

The Economist speculated that Qatar's harmonious relations with the Taliban might, like its earlier Islamist allies in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia,[1] prove a reputational headache in the long run: 'Within a few years, though, Qatar's assets had mostly become liabilities. Its Islamist allies proved incompetent and divisive; its neighbours used them as a cudgel to damage Qatar's reputation. Its bet on the Taliban may go the same way' (The Economist, 2021). Yet, this is to overstate the nature of the relationship between Qatar and the Taliban. Even in the 1990s, Qatar

[1] For further information on the Islamist dimension of Qatar's foreign policy, and its resulting contradictions and implications, see Lina Khatib, 'Qatar's Foreign Policy: The Limits of Pragmatism', *International Affairs,* 89(2): 417-431; and Ben Hubbard, 'Arab nations demand Qatar shut Al Jazeera, cut Islamist ties, and detail funding', *New York Times.* 23 June 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/23/world/middleeast/qatar-saudi-arabia-al-jazeera.html

did not officially recognise Taliban rule, unlike the position adopted by the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. It seems unlikely that Doha will seek to invest too much capital in its relationship with the Taliban; more plausibly, it leveraged its relations for the duration of the talks but will now be content to wait and see how the Taliban governs in practice.

Arguably the lesson to be drawn from the Afghan mediation case, then, is that Qatar has become a warier but more skilful and prudent mediator over the past decade. In general, Qatar is now slower to intervene in conflicts, especially in those that appear to have little prospect of successful resolution. Perhaps wounded by the 2017-21 Gulf Crisis, Qatar has become more cautious about intervening, and does so only when explicitly requested by the conflict parties. Yet, if anything, Qatar has become an even more skilful mediator – clearly demonstrated when President Trump briefly abandoned the talks in 2019 – and its strategic patience remains impressive. These are notable strengths to draw upon, and explain why Qatar's reputation as a mediator has undergone something of a renaissance during the early 2020s.

Applying A Theoretical Lens to the Afghan Mediation: Role Theory, Status-Seeking, and Virtual Enlargement

Interviewees clearly recognised the relevance of role theory, virtual enlargement and status-seeking as drivers of Qatar's mediation efforts. Interviewee 4 [a senior government official closely involved in the Afghan case] observed that from his practical experience he saw the three concepts as "*interconnected elements"* enabling Qatar to achieve influence far exceeding its geographic and demographic size. Similarly, the Special Envoy (Interviewee 1) observed that Qatar's mediation role *"cannot be separated from these three concepts".* Virtual enlargement, the pursuit of status, and role theory have all contributed to shaping Qatar's mediation strategy and *"have significantly enhanced our influence and impact on both the regional and international levels"* (I1). The Special Envoy emphasised that mediation is not just a tool for resolving conflicts but a core part of Qatar's identity as a state.

The Special Envoy also commented that *"Qatar is in urgent need of adopting these combined concepts* [role theory, virtual enlargement, and status-seeking]*",* which he argued applied to small states in general through more than one tool of foreign policy (I1). Further, applying the concepts collectively could be a promising model for small states that could, in future, enable them to enhance their international standing in a similar fashion to what Qatar has achieved. The Special Envoy also argued that the concepts could have internal applications within the state, whether in the fields of security, economy or society. Applied with sufficient awareness of their implications and dimensions, he argued, the outcomes would undoubtedly be positive.

Interestingly, Qatar has already taken steps to promote its model of mediation more widely. As the Special Envoy observed, Qatar has invested in education and training in the field of preventive diplomacy, aiming to develop a new generation of mediators capable of addressing future crises. This strategic vision makes mediation an integral part of Qatar's foreign policy, as the country seeks not only to resolve current crises but also to offer proactive solutions that ensure long-term peace.

Role Theory

One of the most interesting aspects of the Afghan case is that the mediation role came to Qatar in this instance rather than Qatar having to put itself forward. This demonstrates the degree to which Qatar's role as a mediator within the international system has now become internalised by third parties, even parties as different from one another as the U.S. and the Taliban. Qatar thus no longer has to chase cases to mediate; instead, rather like the lawyer who amasses an impressive case record, the clients now come to Doha rather than the other way around. This demonstrates that role theory influences not only how a state perceives itself but also, critically, how other states perceive it as well.

As noted previously, roles help states to determine who they are (or believe themselves to be), what their interests are, and how they should interact with other states (Harnisch *et al.,* 2011, pp. 1-2; Holsti, 1970). The theory suggests that states adopt different roles in the international system, which shape their behaviour in different ways. For example, a state that perceives itself as a "guardian" of the international order is likely to behave differently than a

state that perceives itself as a "rebel" in the system (He *et al*., 2021). What is also increasingly apparent, however, is that the role adopted by a state will, over time, influence how others see that state. The course Qatar has charted for itself as an independent, impartial, non-aligned state with particular strengths suited to mediation has, over time, become accepted by other states in the international system (Barakat, 2024).

This insight would come as no surprise to constructivists, who have long argued that state identity and interests are constituted by social interaction in the international system (Wendt, 1992). As Alexander Wendt (1992: 395) observed, 'self-help and power politics are institutions, not essential features of anarchy. Anarchy is what states make of it.' Consequently, the *perceptions* that states hold both about themselves and about other states are critical in determining how states behave within the international system. Behaviour towards other states is thus determined not only by interests and material capacity but also by *perception,* with the friend/enemy dichotomy particularly important in shaping attitudes (Wendt, 1992: 396-7; Hopf, 2010: 540). In Qatar's case, the government has successfully embodied its chosen niche – non-aligned, impartial and independent – so consistently that these characteristics now appear to have been broadly internalised, if not always welcomed, by other states.

The Afghan case is also notable for demonstrating how Qatar is embedding its mediatory role within its own institutions and political structures. As noted, Qatar's mediation previously relied heavily on specific individuals and personalities. Increasingly, this is changing as more departments and offices gain mediation experience. No longer does any one individual or department dominate the process of mediation within Qatar. This suggests that the role of mediator is now becoming institutionalised across Qatari government. In turn, this may create some element of path dependency as expertise develops and leads, in future, to further cases of conflict resolution as outsiders increasingly come to recognise Qatar's particular capabilities in this field. The role of mediator is thus becoming increasingly embedded within Qatari politics and society.

In 2024, Qatar took this process a stage further by including mediation as a principle within the Qatari constitution. Specifically, Qatar amended Article 7 of its constitution to explicitly emphasize its commitment to mediation as a fundamental principle of its foreign policy. This constitutional amendment not only reinforced Qatar's role as a mediator but also underscored its prioritization of diplomacy as a means to achieve global stability. According to the Special

Envoy, this constitutional amendment has further solidified the role of mediation as a strategic priority in Qatar's foreign policy (I4).

In terms of role theory, Interviewee 4 observed that Qatar's commitment to mediation has profoundly shaped its diplomatic identity and *"transformed Qatar from a small Gulf state into a global actor recognised for its ability to navigate complex conflict and foster dialogue"* (I4). In this way, Qatar has demonstrated that even small states can play a significant role in shaping the global order through diplomacy, innovation, and a steadfast commitment to resolving conflicts. Similarly, Interviewee 2 [government official] conceptualised role theory in terms of the ability of a small state to adopt a role beyond its traditional size: *"Despite its small size in terms of geography and population, Qatar has managed to assume a much larger role"* (I2).

In exploring why mediation has become such an integral part of Qatar's national role, the Special Envoy argued that the focus on mediation stemmed from the country's cultural values, as enshrined in its constitution, as well as the desire of its leadership to play a significant role in peacebuilding, particularly within the region. The inclusion of mediation as a constitutional principle in Qatar has further solidified its role as a strategic priority in the country's foreign policy (I1).

While acknowledging that role theory, virtual enlargement and status-seeking all help to explain Qatar's approach to mediation, the interviewees also emphasised the moral dimension driving Qatar's willingness to step forward as a mediator. Indeed, Interviewee 4, a senior Qatari government official, observed that Qatar *"doesn't see mediation as a means to gain influence alone. Instead, it approaches it as a moral and political commitment"* (I4). The same interviewee emphasised Qatar's belief that dialogue is a means to resolve conflicts, even those that might appear intractable to outsiders.

Upholding international law is also an issue uppermost in the minds of Qatari policymakers. On an ideological level, Qatar's mediation efforts are often framed as part of its commitment to global peace and justice. As a member of the United Nations, Qatar views its mediation initiatives as an extension of its obligations under international law. This perspective is also reflected in its domestic policies; in 2024, Qatar amended Article 7 of its constitution to explicitly emphasize its commitment to mediation as a fundamental principle of its foreign

policy. This constitutional amendment not only reinforced Qatar's role as a mediator but also underscored its prioritization of diplomacy as a means to achieve global stability.

Interviewee 2 [government official] observed that Qatar's foreign policy is characterised by its adherence to *"an internationally disciplined model that aligns with United Nations (UN) resolutions and international law"* (I2). The interviewee noted that most, if not all, of Qatar's mediation efforts have been undertaken under the umbrella of UN resolutions, whether through the Security Council or the General Assembly. This reflects Qatar's commitment to these international mandates. Commensurate with this approach, Qatar is committed to respecting the sovereignty of states and resolving conflicts through peaceful means (I3).

One could add that operating under the umbrella of the UN also offers Qatar crucial diplomatic and political legitimacy for its mediation activities. Indeed, Interviewee 2 noted that stepping outside the framework of international law *"could subject the state to political or economic pressures"* (I2). The commitment to international law is thus partly born of prudence as well as ethical considerations. Interviewee 2 linked this prudence to Qatar's small size, noting that *"a country of Qatar's size may not be able to withstand the consequences of acting outside the framework of international law, especially given the presence of other parties with conflicting interests"* (I2). As such, international law serves as the *"primary protector of Qatar's role and shields it from political and strategic risks that may arise from the clashing interests of major powers"* (I2). This explanation of the importance of international law in Qatar's mediation efforts is noteworthy and brings to the fore an issue that has been under-explored in the existing literature.

Interviewees pointed out that the adherence to international law is complemented by a fierce commitment to upholding Qatar's humanitarian responsibilities. The Special Envoy commented that one of the most important lessons from Qatar's experiences as a mediator *"is that effective mediation does not only address the political aspects but also requires a deep understanding of the humanitarian dimension".* This necessitates a comprehensive approach that encompasses social and economic development alongside political solutions. In its approach to mediation, therefore, Qatar focuses not solely on the political or negotiations side of the equation but also, no less importantly, the humanitarian plight of the people on the ground most directly affected by conflict. According to the Special Envoy, this commitment to humanitarianism serves to contribute to alleviating the suffering of the affected populations, further demonstrating Qatar's role as a trusted humanitarian partner. As the Special Envoy

states, *"mediation experiences have taught us that political solutions alone are not enough; they must be accompanied by comprehensive humanitarian and social efforts"* (I1). This is reflected in Qatar's commitment to investing across fields such as education, health, sustainable development, and preventive diplomacy.

Interviewee 4 also explained the regional dynamics underpinning Qatar's desire to act as a mediator. Acknowledging that the Gulf had long been characterized by *"rivalries and shifting alliances",* the official argued that adopting the role of mediator enabled Qatar to navigate these dynamics more effectively (I4). The mediating role allows Qatar to build relationships with a wide range of actors, even those with competing interests, and gives Qatar a potential channel of influence that might otherwise be denied to it as a relatively small state.

Economic considerations also play a role in driving Qatar's mediation efforts. Interviewee 4 stated that as one of the world's leading exporters of natural gas, Qatar's economy is heavily dependent on stable global markets. Promoting peace and stability, especially in regions critical to global energy supply chains, aligns with Qatar's economic interests. Furthermore, Qatar's financial resources enable it to support post-conflict reconstruction and development, further enhancing its credibility as a mediator.

Virtual Enlargement

Applying virtual enlargement theory, it can be stated confidently that the Afghan case is another notable demonstration of virtual enlargement in action. As noted, virtual enlargement refers to the process by which a state expands its presence and influence in international affairs without physically increasing its territory or, in certain contexts, material capabilities. Virtual enlargement can enable a state to project its power and influence into areas that it does not physically control. It can be used to counter the influence of other states or to further a state's own objectives. Therefore, virtual enlargement can be seen as a way for states to increase their influence and power in the international arena without resorting to traditional methods of action (Sheludiakova *et al.,* 2021).

Even Qatar's critics would surely accept that these mechanisms have been clearly demonstrated with respect to the Afghan case. Poornima (2022: 539) notes that Qatar's

'enlarging political influence and closeness to the U.S.' will give rival states in the Gulf pause for thought before they consider implementing any further negative measures against it. In this regard, it was noteworthy that even President Trump opposed the Saudi-UAE blockade of Qatar during 2017-21 once Qatar's usefulness as an American ally became apparent to the administration (Fraihat, 2020). This relationship with the U.S. gives Qatar a degree of protection, although it would be wise not to abuse this position.

In establishing a relationship with, and possibly some small degree of influence over, the Taliban, Qatar has also succeeded in virtually enlarging its presence to encompass more of the Middle East. Although Qatar itself remains small, its influence now extends into Afghanistan (a vast territory standing at the crossroads of Asia) and even, to some degree, Turkey as well given the close relations established between Doha and Istanbul in relation to the Afghanistan brief in recent years (Jacobs, 2022).[2] It would be an exaggeration to label Qatar as an ally of the Taliban. However, given the Taliban's paucity of friends, its relationship with Qatar is one of its most important. This creates some degree of Taliban dependence on Qatar, which is likely to enable the Qataris to continue to exert influence and leverage over Afghan affairs going forward. Indeed, Qatar's influence over the Taliban is now probably at least as strong as that of Turkey and Iran – regional powers of much greater size and hard power than Qatar. This amply demonstrates how virtual enlargement can work in practice: a small state, once a minnow, now rivals much greater powers in terms of influence, at least in certain important aspects. This situation is mirrored across regions where Qatar has mediated in recent years, including in its relations with Hamas, Lebanese factions, Libya, Sudan, and Somalia.

Regarding the concept of virtual enlargement, the Special Envoy draw a direct link between mediation and virtual enlargement in commenting that as a small state Qatar recognised *"early on the importance of expanding its influence through roles that extend beyond its traditional boundaries. Mediation became the gateway for achieving this virtual expansion"* (I1). As a small country in terms of size and population, Qatar has *"excelled in this area [of virtual enlargement] by investing in innovative diplomatic tools and using global platforms to achieve an impact that exceeds its actual size"* (I1). This expansion of influence has been achieved

[2] For more on the growing closeness of Qatari-Turkish relations, particularly during the Arab Spring, see Birol Baskan, 'Turkey between Qatar and Saudi Arabia: Changing regional and bilateral relations', *Uluslararasi Iliskiler*, 16(62): 85-99.

through the use of digital and media tools, allowing Qatar to convey its messages and policies to a wider global audience and "*thereby amplifying our role far beyond the expected capabilities of a country the size of Qatar".* This virtual enlargement complements Qatar's mediation efforts by offering an effective platform to communicate worldwide.

Considering how mediation has facilitated Qatar's virtual enlargement, Interviewee 2 [a government official] commented that through its involvement in Afghanistan, as well as Lebanon and Darfur, Qatar managed to establish a presence in regions that are geographically distant while also becoming a more important player in addressing complex international issues. This expansion of influence enabled Qatar to extend its political and diplomatic reach, further strengthening its ability to manoeuvre on the international stage and increase its diplomatic power. The interviewee further commented that *"mediation also serves as a tool of virtual expansion, allowing Qatar to exert influence that extends beyond its geographic boundaries"* (I2). He also emphasises the role of media in facilitating this virtual expansion, especially the role played by Al Jazeera in highlighting Qatar's mediation efforts and enhancing its international image.

Status-Seeking

On the face of it, Qatar's facilitation and mediation of the U.S.-Taliban negotiations is perhaps a less obvious case of status-seeking than earlier conflicts in which Qatar stepped forward to mediate. As noted, status-seeking involves the act of trying to improve one's social standing. For states, this entails improving one's status within the international system. In the case of Afghanistan, Qatar appears to have been approached by others rather than seeking the brief for itself – a change in policy from the 2000s and 2010s, when it often put itself forward out of a desire to raise its diplomatic profile. However, Qatar cannot have been oblivious to the high stakes and profound international interest in a resolution to the conflict in Afghanistan. As a natural consequence of this importance, status would be generated for any state who successfully mediated discussions that brokered a resolution.

Indeed, the stakes (and thus the degrees of status to be enhanced or diminished) were arguably higher for Qatar in the Afghan case than in previous cases mediated by Doha. As Ardemagni (2021) observed, the situation in Afghanistan stood at the crossroads of a broader

geopolitical contest involving a plethora of regional and international players, including not only the U.S. and Afghan parties but also Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, China, and Germany. For differing reasons, all of these countries held some form of stake or interest in Afghanistan. This raised the sensitivity of the Afghan brief and heightened the reputational risk for Qatar if negotiations went poorly. In the event, the opposite occurred, and Qatar's reputation was largely enhanced.

The immediate benefits for Qatar's status were demonstrated in several aspects. For example, on 30 August 2021, Qatar was the only Arab country invited to a US-led meeting discussing a coordinated approach to withdrawal from Kabul. This reflected Qatar's status as the main facilitator and mediator among the variety of actors with an interest in Afghanistan (Ardemagni, 2021). Similarly, following the conclusion of the negotiations with the Taliban, Qatar's status was upgraded to that of a 'major non-NATO ally' by the U.S. in 2022 (Al Jazeera, 2022). This clearly signified that American policymakers were satisfied with Qatar's approach to mediation in this case. Further, being held in such esteem by the United States, the world's greatest power and the key extra-regional actor in the Middle East, had obvious positive consequences for Qatar's status within the region, especially vis a vis the UAE and Saudis.

Longer-term, the relatively successful mediation of the Afghan case is likely to further enhance Qatar's status not only as a mediator but also, more broadly, as a non-aligned independent actor worthy of respect within the international system. Increasingly, indeed, Qatar is now one of the first stops for visiting dignitaries travelling to the Middle East. The British Foreign Secretary Lord Cameron visited Qatar in January 2024, for instance, as he sought to liaise with the Qataris on their attempted brokerage of a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas (Wintour, 2024). This high profile comes with risks for Qatar, and is not always guaranteed to bring about results, but Qatar's heightened status in international relations increasingly speaks for itself. This allows Qatar to exert greater influence over the Middle East and shape the course of events in ways favourable to its own interests.

Officials also emphasised Qatar's willingness to use its military capabilities in pursuit of humanitarian and peaceful objectives. Although not blessed with a large military, Qatar has capable special forces and modern equipment. As Interviewee 3 [a government official] commented, Qatar applies a limited military component in conflict areas to support its mediation operations, especially by providing logistical support and humanitarian aid. Most

often, the Qatari military is used to deliver aid to conflict-affected communities and improve living conditions for those impacted by violence (I3). This limited military presence bolsters Qatar's efficacy on the ground and enhances its influence over the parties involved. At the same time, the focus on humanitarian missions and logistical support enables Qatar to avoid any perception of aggressive intent or partiality.

Interestingly, the Special Envoy [I1] acknowledged that there was a delicate balance to strike between fulfilling Qatar's commitment to the principles outlined in the UN Charter and achieving its national interests and objectives. Qatar aims to strike this balance by adhering to international law *"while also leveraging its mediation role to advance strategic goals that serve its national interests"* (I1). The Special Envoy was candid in stating that *"Qatar does not overlook its national interests"* and recognises that success in mediation can contribute to advancing those interests. Success in mediation can serve twin objectives: both upholding international law and serving as a means of enhancing Qatar's regional and global standing. In the Special Envoy's view, Qatar's ability to balance respect for international law and the pursuit of national interests is *"remarkable"* and a testament to its diplomatic ability (I1). Indeed, the Special Envoy concluded that the Qatari approach to mediation has become a model for how to reconcile international principles with national interests.

Further, *pace* the claims of critics, interviewees were adamant in their view that Qatar takes a long-term approach to mediation – it views peace "*not as a signature on a document but as a foundation for new relationships, development, and hope*" (I4). Qatar views itself not only as a mediator but as a long-term partner in building a better future. In the Special Envoy's view, it is this long-term commitment to achieving long-lasting and sustainable solutions, rather than merely a temporary ceasefire or band-aid solution, that sets Qatar's mediation efforts apart from those of other mediating nations. As the Envoy stated, *"We understand that successful mediation is not just about reaching a quick agreement but requires continuous efforts to ensure long-term stability"* (I1).

Practitioner Perspectives on the Afghan Mediation

Interviewees observed that Qatar did not have to work particularly hard to put itself forward as a potential mediator in Afghanistan; rather, its existing ties with both the US and the Taliban made it an obvious interlocutor and facilitator for negotiations between the two sides. This demonstrated how Qatar had become *"the preferred mediator"* for many conflicts in the wider Middle East, even one that ranked as *"one of the most challenging on the international stage"* (I2).

In line with standard Qatari mediation policy, officials ensured that mediation in Afghanistan only occurred under the umbrella of the UN Charter and international law. As Interviewee 2 observed, Qatar's mediation in Afghanistan was in line with UN resolutions, meaning that Qatar could demonstrate its commitment to the international community and the search for a solution to the conflict in accordance with international law (I2).

The interviewees candidly acknowledged the reputational risks for Qatar of failure in Afghanistan. Interviewee 4 [a senior Qatari government official] acknowledged the intrinsic risk encountered in engaging in complex conflicts, where political, social and economic divisions are often entrenched and difficult to resolve. This interviewee observed that, in Afghanistan, the intricacy of the conflict and the involvement of multiple actors, all with their own strategic interests and objectives at stake, meant that even a single misstep could have jeopardised the peace process and Qatar's standing as a mediator (I4). The same interviewee noted that the Afghan talks were not merely simple discussions but rather *"complex negotiations involving security, political, and even humanitarian issues"* (I4).

According to Interviewee 4, one of the greatest challenges in Afghanistan was maintaining a neutral stance in the face of such a complex and polarised conflict. The conflict in Afghanistan was characterised by *"the intricate interests of both local and international parties",* making it harder to reach a final and lasting solution (I4). Additionally, some parties were unready or unwilling to negotiate, adding another layer of difficulty to Qatar's efforts. The United States and the Taliban had spent over a decade inflicting violence upon one another, and both sides were instinctively suspicious of any interlocutor perceived as too close to the other side. Yet Qatar *"maintained an impressive balance"* in hosting the Taliban's political office for years while also maintaining strong relations with the US (I4). This ability to *"stay above the polarizing dynamics of global geopolitics"* required diplomatic dexterity (I4). In

Interviewee 4's opinion, Qatar's approach succeeded because both the Taliban and the US valued Doha as a place where they could raise issues freely outside the normal scrutiny of their home countries and without pressure, judgment or bias. This *"neutral, comfortable setting"* was the ideal place in which to reach an agreement (I4).

As in Darfur and Lebanon, Qatar also had to overcome the scepticism of other regional powers towards its involvement in Afghanistan. In particular, neighbouring countries, such as India and Iran, viewed Qatar's growing involvement in Afghanistan cautiously for fear it would clash or overlap with their own interests. The Special Envoy commented to the author that *"regional tensions have posed and continue to pose challenges"* in Afghanistan and elsewhere (I4). Qatar's role in Afghanistan *"was not welcome by all sides, adding an additional layer of difficulty in achieving broader international consensus on its efforts"* (I4). These tensions demonstrate the complex regional environment in which Qatar operates, where it sometimes faces opposition or reservations from other states that see its mediating role as a threat to their own interests.

The logistic and practical complexities of mediating such a complex case as Afghanistan were often commented on by the interviewees. In particular, Interviewee 4 argued that insufficient attention had been paid to Qatar's success in ensuring all parties adhered to the negotiation schedule. Qatar's role in providing security guarantees to all the participants was also important in enabling the dialogue to be sustained. By providing a secure, neutral environment for the two sides to engage candidly and openly, Qatar created *"an unprecedented opportunity for progress towards a peace agreement"* (I2).

Further, Qatar endeavoured not only to sit at the negotiating table but also to build direct communication bridges with the parties to the conflict, principally including both the US and the Taliban. According to the Special Envoy, these efforts enabled Qatar to play a more effective role in facilitating an eventual agreement. They also helped to bolster trust in Qatar's credibility and its position as a reliable partner in the eyes of the international community.

Interviewees observed that the signing of a peace agreement between the Taliban and the United States was a major diplomatic achievement for Qatar and proved that its capacity for mediating international conflicts extends to even the most complex issues (I2). Interviewee 2 noted how the agreement saved many lives, as *"each day an agreement was reached meant saving hundreds of lives"* I2). The Afghan conflict was *"one of the most challenging on the*

global stage, yet Qatar demonstrated its ability to bring the warring parties to the negotiating table" (I2). Further, Interviewee 2 claimed that the Afghan success *"was not just a paper agreement but a significant step toward achieving long-term stability in the region"* (I2). There is potential validity in this claim, given that the US-Taliban Agreement includes provisions for counter-terrorism operations (and hence a relatively benign US-Afghanistan relationship) going forward. Given its violent history, political complexity and internal divisions, Afghanistan is unlikely to be an entirely peaceful place any time soon – but the agreement has helped to move the country closer to achieving this long-term goal.

The ultimate success of the Afghanistan negotiations improved Qatar's international status, especially with respect to the United States. According to Interviewee 4, "*there was clear appreciation from the United States in facilitating negotiations with the Taliban"* (I4). Similarly, Interviewee 2 [a government official] commented that Qatar's success as a mediator in Afghanistan has cemented its role as *"a strategic partner for the United States in efforts to stabilise the region"* (I2). The major powers involved in the Afghanistan case were also said to be impressed by Qatar's ability to keep the talks on schedule. In terms of Qatar's bilateral ties with Afghanistan going forward, interviewee 3 also argued that the intervention in Afghanistan had enabled Qatar to position itself as *"a critical player in the country's future"* by improving its diplomatic and security ties with Afghanistan and its allies (I3). This perhaps overstates Qatar's influence over the new Afghan government, but it is undeniable that Qatar has established valuable channels of communication with, and influence over, the highest levels of the Taliban leadership.

Drawing on the lessons learned from the Afghan case, Interviewee 2 [a Qatari government official] concluded that *"mediation is not just a process of negotiation, but an art that requires the ability to understand the needs of all conflicting parties and find a delicate balance between their interests"* (I2). This possibly overstates Qatar's role in brokering an agreement between the US and Taliban; undeniably, the US was anxious to get out of Afghanistan and the time was ripe for some form of agreement. Nonetheless, the other lessons cited by the interviewee – the importance of trust, neutrality, dialogue and patience – are core requirements of any mediation process.

More broadly, the participants argued that Qatar's mediation efforts in Afghanistan, like the other mediation cases before it in which Qatar has intervened, demonstrates that mediation is not merely a short-term diplomatic tool with narrow applicability but rather also serves *"as a*

means to build lasting relationships and contribute to a more stable and peaceful world" (I3). On a personal level, too, the Special Envoy commented that mediation is *"mediation is not a task that ends once an agreement is reached or the situation is calmed, but rather an ongoing process even after the mediator's formal role appears to have ended"* (I1). Mediation requires continuous follow-up and investment in diplomatic relations to ensure that the agreed-upon solutions remain effective and sustainable in the long-term. This level of long-term commitment comes much more naturally to a state such as Qatar, where mediation has become part of its national identity and institutionalised within the state.

Conclusion

In summing up Qatar's involvement in mediating the conflict in Afghanistan, it can be stated that the case demonstrates how Qatar is becoming an increasingly effective and respected mediator within the international system. Qatar's involvement in mediating between the U.S. and the Taliban came about not of its own volition but at the request of both parties – a demonstration of the respect in which Doha is now held. Qatar is valued for its discretion, patience, independent stance, willingness to finance its endeavours, and imaginative approach when discussions go wrong and require fixing. All of these attributes make Qatar a valued mediator in Middle Eastern politics.

That said, it can be argued that the Afghan case was one of Qatar's more straightforward mediation briefs, certainly in comparison to Darfur or Lebanon. The case was ripe for resolving, largely because of the U.S.'s already made decision to depart Afghanistan. Sequencing issues and disputes over prisoners aside, there was little substantive disagreement between the two sides. The Taliban's main demand – that the U.S. leave Afghanistan – had already been decided in Washington. Consequently, Qatar's role was more facilitative than transformational.

Perhaps the most significant lesson from Afghanistan is that Qatar's involvement in mediating the case seemed so natural to all sides. This reflected the success of the decades-long process of status-seeking pursued by Doha. Qatar's self-designed role as a hub for a

diverse array of states and interests – whose offices are often located within close proximity to each other in Doha (Barakat, 2024) – has made Qatar a natural mediator for conflicts involving the Middle East. In a sense, Doha has become the Vienna of the Middle East - a relatively neutral ground in which all sides feel relatively secure and comfortable, just as the Austrian capital fulfilled a similar role during the Cold War. This neutral hosting role facilitates consistent communication between rival states, and does not always necessarily occur as part of a formal mediation process. This contributes significantly to Qatar's international status, and yet also advances the cause of regional peace: an undeniable win/win from the Qatari government's perspective. In summing up Qatar's mediation efforts in Afghanistan, the Special Envoy concluded that the success of Qatar's approach both in this and other conflicts lay in *"its ability to combine diplomatic flexibility with a commitment to sustainable solutions"* (I1).

Conclusion

Summary of Findings

This thesis has explored how, in the past two decades, a new diplomatic powerhouse has risen to prominence to establish a formidable presence in the geopolitical arena: Qatar. This small, previously unheralded Gulf state has used its mastery of mediation to insert itself into some of the world's most complex and challenging conflicts. Leveraging its financial resources, non-aligned status, and geographical location at the heart of the Middle East, Qatar has repeatedly placed itself forward as a mediator in some of the region's most high-profile conflicts. In Darfur, Lebanon, Afghanistan, and elsewhere, Qatar has successfully brokered political agreements to bring an end to seemingly intractable violence. In doing so, it has established a reputation as a trusted and impartial mediator such that even the world's foremost power, the United States, has been moved to call upon its services (Milton *et al.,* 2023).

Although previous academic studies have examined Qatar's rise to mediation prominence on an empirical level (c.f. Kamrava, 2011; Roberts, 2012; Cooper and Momani, 2011; Barakat, 2012; Khatib, 2013; Ulrichsen, 2014; Mohammadzadeh, 2017; Milton *et al.,* 2023), none have adequately theorised and conceptualised Qatar's use of mediation as a diplomatic and political strategy. This thesis argued that three concepts – role theory, status-seeking, and virtual enlargement – help to explain how and why Qatar has turned to conflict mediation as a foreign policy strategy. Incorporating primary data from eight interviews conducted with senior Qatari diplomats and officials who have worked personally and intensively on Doha's mediation efforts over recent decades, and focusing specifically on three high-profile mediation cases (Darfur, Lebanon, and Afghanistan), the thesis argued that Qatar has deliberately and successfully balanced its humanitarian objectives against its strategic interests to achieve outcomes that are beneficial for both Qatar itself and for the wider international community. This model is not directly replicable by other small states, but there are potential lessons to be drawn that could benefit both other states and the field of conflict mediation more widely.

How the Study Answered the Research Questions

Based on the conceptual framework set out above, the thesis aims to answer the following research questions:

- How successful has Qatar been in using Role Theory as part of its foreign policy arsenal when mediating as a small state?
- What is the importance of virtual enlargement for Qatar's involvement in international law and mediation?
- Did status-seeking attribution help Qatar enhance its importance on an international level?

In answering these overarching research questions, the study also aimed to uncover *why* Qatar has sought to mediate so many conflicts within its wider region of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA); *how* it has gone about mediating these conflicts, including the strategies, resources, and structures employed by the Qatari state in its approach to mediation; *whether* Qatar has succeeded in its mediation aims, both in each individual case and on a wider strategic level; and *what* Qatar's experiences reveal about the role of small states in the contemporary international environment.

The main finding, overwhelmingly supported by the officials interviewed for this study, is that role theory, virtual enlargement and status-seeking lie at the heart of Qatar's mediation activities and are the key to understanding its foreign policy behaviour. As one government official (Interviewee 2) observed to the author, these three concepts serve as an "integrated means" for understanding the nature and development of Qatari mediation policy and indeed its foreign policy more broadly. The explanatory power of these three concepts is demonstrated most of all in their combined effect. Although each of the three theories can individually explain some aspects of Qatar's foreign policy and mediation activities, it is the concepts *acting together in unison* that provide a comprehensive and compelling explanation of how and why Qatar deploys mediation as a foreign policy tool. Put in the simplest terms, we can state that mediation has become internalized as part of Qatar's national *role,* is pursued partly for reasons of *status,* and has worked to expand and *virtually enlarge* Qatar's influence and presence on the international stage.

A second key finding is that Qatar's mediation strategy has been largely successful. This finding contradicts the frequent assertion in the literature that Qatar has become overly visible on the international stage in recent decades and that Doha's prolific mediation activities have contributed to this over-exposure (c.f. Ulrichsen, 2014; Milton *et al.,* 2023). In fact, as the case studies in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 underline, Qatar's mediation efforts have been notably successful. Instead, Qatar's problems have principally been created by other aspects of its foreign policy behaviour, notably an overactive phase during the Arab Spring when the role of mediator took a backseat to that of instigator of, and participant in, events (Ulrichsen, 2014). The recent resumption of Qatar's mediation activities, notably in brokering the US-Taliban agreement in 2020, appears to signal that this lesson has been understood at the highest levels of the Qatari leadership.

However, the study also found that Qatar's mediation model is not directly replicable by other small states that may have their own ambitions to increase their status and influence. Two (arguably three) structural factors make Qatar unusually well-placed to act as a mediator: first, its significant financial resources, which have been used extensively in mediation both for the purposes of hosting delegations (often at vast expense) and for investing in conflict-ravaged societies. This financial strength gives Qatar some of the attributes of a much larger state. Secondly, Qatar's geographic location at the heart of the Middle East, from where it has proximity to a number of the world's most significant conflicts, make it an obvious interlocutor for countries within the region. Thirdly, Qatar's Islamic identity as a Muslim state in a largely Muslim region make it well-placed to mediate conflicts between or within Muslim-majority states. Qatar's success as a mediator thus appears to lie in its combination of structural advantages (money, location, and religion) and practical mediation expertise (neutrality, patience, adaptability). This mediation model is easy to admire but difficult to emulate.

These findings make an important contribution to the existing academic literature on small state mediation. No other academic analysis of this topic has sought to conceptualize small state mediation through the lens of role theory, status-seeking and virtual enlargement. Nor have there been many, if any, attempts to explore theories of small-state mediation in conversation with high-level officials with personal recent experience of mediating conflict. The theories developed in this thesis therefore make a novel contribution to existing academic knowledge on small mediation. In general, small state mediation is under-theorized in the

existing literature, which relies overly on an empirical framework that more adequately explains the 'what' than the 'why' or 'how' of mediation.

In terms of role theory, interviewees underlined that Qatar has internalized mediation as part of its national role conception. The Qatari leadership believes that this role has reflections on Qatar's standing and reputation as a neutral mediator. It also allows Qatar to gain positive influence and leverage, making it one of the countries that may have a decisive opinion in some regional crises. From the perspective of role theory, Qatar has successfully embraced a leading role on the international stage as a peaceful nation that relies on soft power and diplomacy to resolve conflicts. Through its role as a mediator, Qatar has demonstrated that it can actively contribute to shaping the global political landscape, making mediation an integral part of its national and diplomatic identity. This leadership role has not only served Qatar's interests but has also contributed to stability in troubled regions, earning Qatar widespread respect and recognition globally. It has become evident that Qatar, through its flexibility and diplomatic acumen, can play a crucial role on the world stage, surpassing its traditional boundaries.

In regard to the second research question – the importance of virtual enlargement – interviewees emphasised that Qatar, as a small country in terms of geographic size and population, has excelled in this area by investing in innovative diplomatic tools and using global platforms to achieve an impact that exceeds its actual size. Qatar has been able to expand its influence through digital and media tools, allowing it to convey its messages and policies to a wider global audience, thereby amplifying its role far beyond the expected capabilities of a country the size of Qatar. This virtual expansion has contributed to enhancing its role as an international mediator, as it now has an effective platform to communicate with the relevant parties worldwide.

Finally, the third research question – whether status-seeking helped Qatar to improve its international standing – was also answered in an overwhelmingly positive fashion by the interviewees. The Special Envoy, for instance, argued that in terms of the pursuit of status, Qatar's mediation efforts have significantly elevated its image as a small state with a prominent standing in the international community. Qatari mediation was not merely about ending conflicts; it was a reflection of a genuine commitment to peace and stability. Qatar's success in presenting itself as a neutral and trustworthy mediator, accepted by all conflicting parties, has given Doha a distinguished position among major nations. In this way, mediation has

become a hallmark of Qatar's foreign policy, earning the state a prestigious international reputation.

However, the explanatory power of these three concepts is demonstrated most of all in their combined effect. Although each of the three theories can individually explain some aspects of Qatar's foreign policy and mediation activities, it is the concepts *acting together in unison* that provide a comprehensive and compelling explanation of how and why Qatar deploys mediation as a foreign policy tool. This reflects how role theory, status-seeking and virtual enlargement are interdependent and mutually supportive both at the conceptual level and in practice. Put in the simplest terms, we can state with confidence that mediation has become internalized as part of Qatar's national *role,* is pursued partly for reasons of *status,* and has worked to expand and *virtually enlarge* Qatar's influence and presence on the international stage.

A second, related finding is that Qatari policymakers are honest and self-aware in their acknowledgement that the pursuit of status and influence drives much, though not all, of Qatar's activities in the mediation and conflict management sphere. Interviewees were always candid in acknowledging that yes, the search for status does motivate Qatar in its mediation activities – but they equally emphasized that this status consciousness is a rational strategy for a small state located in a dangerous region. Qatari officials are also acutely aware of the need to strike a sensitive balance between Qatar's national interests on the one hand and its humanitarian objectives and commitment to upholding international law on the other. They see occasional tension between these two objectives but no inherent contradiction, and for the most part, interviewees believed that Qatar overwhelmingly achieves both its strategic and ethical goals through its mediation activities.

A third key finding is that Qatar's mediation strategy has been largely successful. This finding contradicts the frequent assertion in the literature that Qatar has become overly visible on the international stage in recent decades and that Doha's prolific mediation activities have contributed to this over-exposure (c.f. Ulrichsen, 2014; Milton *et al.,* 2023). In fact, as the case studies in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 underline, Qatar's mediation efforts have been notably successful. Instead, Qatar's problems have principally been created by other aspects of its foreign policy behaviour, notably an overactive phase during the Arab Spring when the role of mediator took a backseat to that of instigator of, and participant in, events (Ulrichsen, 2014). The recent resumption of Qatar's mediation activities, notably in brokering the US-Taliban

agreement in 2020, appears to signal that this lesson has been understood at the highest levels of the Qatari leadership.

A fourth finding is that Qatar's mediation model is not directly replicable by other small states that may have ambitions to increase their own status and influence. Two (arguably three) structural factors make Qatar unusually well-placed to act as a mediator: first, its significant financial resources, which have been used extensively in mediation both for the purposes of hosting delegations (often at vast expense) and for investing in conflict-ravaged societies. This financial strength gives Qatar some of the attributes of a much larger state. Secondly, Qatar's geographic location at the heart of the Middle East, from where it has proximity to a number of the world's most significant conflicts, make it an obvious interlocutor for countries within the region. Thirdly, Qatar's Islamic identity as a Muslim state in a largely Muslim region make it well-placed to mediate conflicts between or within Muslim-majority states.

Interestingly, interviewees focused relatively little on the role of religion in Qatar's mediation activities. Although Qatar's mediation cases have been overwhelmingly concentrated in the Muslim world, its Islamic identity was not perceived as a particular strength or core attribute by interviewees (although, to some degree, the advantages of a Muslim mediator mediating conflicts within Muslim states may have been taken as a given). Qatari officials were much more exercised by the importance of neutrality and strategic patience – two qualities that are, in theory at least, more easily replicable by other potential mediators. Qatar's success as a mediator thus appears to lie in its combination of structural advantages (money, location, and religion) and practical mediation expertise (neutrality, patience, adaptability). This mediation model is easy to admire but difficult to emulate.

How the Study Answered the Research Sub-Questions

As noted above, in seeking to answer these overarching research questions, the study also aimed to uncover *why* Qatar has sought to mediate so many conflicts within its wider region of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA); *how* it has gone about mediating these conflicts, including the strategies, resources, and structures employed by the Qatari state in its approach to mediation; *whether* Qatar has succeeded in its mediation aims, both in each individual case and on a wider strategic level; and *what* Qatar's experiences reveal about the role of small

states in the contemporary international environment. These sub-questions can now be answered as follows.

Why Qatar Mediates

The *why* of Qatari mediation is relatively straightforward. The overriding reason why Qatar consistently places itself forward as a mediator is in order to improve its own security. As Interviewee 2 stated, "*national security and strategic interests are always Qatar's top priority, and this is a natural consideration for any state that seeks to maintain its stability and protect itself from internal and external threats."* This is doubly true of a state, like Qatar, which is located in a relatively dangerous and volatile region. Qatar chooses to mediate, therefore, because it believes that it enhances its own security by doing so.

However, the mechanism through which mediation enhances security demands more explanation. After all, the relationship between mediation and security is by no means self-evident; some even argue that Qatar has over-exposed itself through its mediation activities, leaving it more vulnerable to external hostility than it would otherwise have been (Ulrichsen, 2014; Milton *et al.,* 2023). Qatari policymakers take a different view, believing that the enhanced status generated through mediation enables Qatar to act with greater influence in its region, and greater autonomy and thus hold a greater capacity to safeguard its sovereignty. This is a proactive rather than passive approach to security; far from keeping its head down and hoping for the best, Qatar takes active steps to expand its influence and safeguard its autonomy within the region.

Enhanced *status* and *virtual enlargement* are thus the key mechanisms through which mediation enhances Qatar's security, thereby achieving the overriding security objectives of Qatari policymakers. By improving Qatar's status and enlarging its influence within the region, Qatar increases its importance to allies and raises the costs of hostile action for potential enemies. This was clearly demonstrated during the 2017-21 Gulf Crisis when the blockade of Qatar by Saudi Arabia and other GCC states was ultimately brought to an end by the intervention of the United States, which was unhappy at seeing one of its key Middle Eastern allies undermined. In making itself useful to a variety of different powers as a mediator,

therefore, Qatar has increased its number of powerful friends and thereby made itself less vulnerable to external predation.

This discussion underlines that in pursuing status and enlarged influence, Qatari policymakers are motivated primarily not by vanity but rather by the quest for state security in an anarchical international environment (just as realist IR theory would predict). Improving Qatar's status within the hierarchical community that makes up the Gulf region, and indeed improving its status within the wider hierarchy of states in the international system, serves defensive security-seeking objectives. Status is therefore pursued not for its own sake but for its instrumental role in advancing Qatar's security within the Gulf region.

Yet this does not exhaust the 'why' of Qatari mediation. Although security is the primary goal of Qatari foreign policy behaviour (and its mediation activity), every interviewee also emphasised the state's humanitarian objectives and its commitment to upholding international law. It is here where role theory becomes most evident, since Qatar policymakers have clearly identified humanitarianism and the peaceful resolution of conflict as core attributes of Qatar's role within the international system. This ethical commitment to peaceful international relations and international law is the other crucial part of 'why' Qatar chooses to mediate.

Of course, as noted in earlier chapters, a commitment to international law is not necessarily entirely altruistic on Qatar's part. For small states, in particular, it is rational to support a system of law in which the sovereignty of all states, both large and small, is safeguarded and external predation is forbidden. Qatar thus has a natural strategic self-interest in supporting the current system of international law and helping to avoid the emergence of a system in which 'might is right'. Anything that tempers and mitigates the inherent anarchy of the international system is desirable from the point of view of a small state like Qatar. Nonetheless, the commitment to humanitarianism in Qatari policy is real, even if partly self-interested.

How Qatar Mediates

If security and humanitarianism are the reasons why Qatar mediates, it still remains to be determined precisely *how* Qatar seeks to mediate. As observed by Milton *et al.* (2023), the nature of Qatari mediation has changed somewhat in recent years as Qatar has shifted from a highly activist approach, in which it frequently puts itself forward as a mediator, to a more cautious approach in which it generally only mediates when formally requested to do so by one or more parties to the conflict. In this sense, Qatar has become more selective in picking the cases where it chooses to act as a mediator. This shift in strategy appears to have been driven by the widespread backlash within the Arab world, emanating especially from Saudi Arabia and other GCC states, against Qatar's perceived meddling and pro-Islamist stance during the Arab Spring (Ulrichsen, 2014). Milton *et al.* (2023: 17) suggest that Qatar now has a lower tolerance for risk in its mediation efforts, and is willing to intervene in conflict resolution only when formally requested to do so.

A further potential discontinuity from Qatar's earlier mediation phase is that recent mediation efforts, especially in Afghanistan, arguably demonstrate Doha's increasing alignment with U.S. security interests. It is notable that the resolution of the Gulf crisis came about partly as a result of American pressure on Saudi Arabia and the other GCC states to bring their blockade of Qatar to an end. The U.S. also maintains a direct security guarantee to Qatar, partly connected to the presence of the American military airbase at Al-Udeid (Milton *et al.,* 2023: 6). The U.S.'s willingness to allow Qatar to act as a mediator with the Taliban also demonstrated the U.S.'s interest in Qatar returning to its former role as a trusted regional partner. In the view of Milton *et al.* (2023), this signals that Qatar has successfully repaired its reputation for neutrality as a third-party mediator. An alternative view, however, is that Doha's reliance on the U.S. to save its position during the blockade marked a subtle but important shift for Qatar from strict neutrality and impartiality to a position more closely aligned with American security interests. Qatar's designated status of 'major non-NATO ally', assigned to it by the U.S. in 2022, is arguably incompatible with full impartiality and neutrality (Milton *et al.,* 2023: 17).

A third shift in Qatar's mediation approach has occurred recently in relation to the use of financial inducements. In the three most recent mediation cases – Afghanistan, Libya, and Chad – Qatar has refrained from offering major financial inducements to reach an agreement. This

marks an apparent shift from the 'chequebook diplomacy' that characterised Qatari mediation strategy in the 2000s and 2010s (Milton *et al.,* 2023: 18). That said, Qatar has continued to host delegations in Doha at considerable expense to itself – including a 400-person Chadian delegation in 2022 and a sizeable Afghan cohort during intra-Afghan negotiations (Ibid).

Yet these slight shifts in approach apart, the core principles of how Qatar mediates have remained remarkably consistent over two decades. As repeatedly emphasised by the interviewees, these core principles are *neutrality, patience* and a willingness to *commit resources* where appropriate. The importance of neutrality was frequently alluded to by the interview participants. Although not always easy to achieve, especially when the parties to a conflict attempt to draw Qatar over to their side, neutrality and impartiality are essential if mediation is to reach a successful outcome. As noted, neutrality comes relatively easily to Qatar as a historically non-aligned state with a policy of talking to anyone, even states who may be mutual enemies.

Strategic patience also comes more easily to Qatar than to other states. As Qatar is a monarchical system of government, there is less pressure from the citizenry and less scrutiny from the media than would be the case in most democracies. This allows Qatar's leadership to pursue a consistent policy course and to stick to these policies even when they do not enjoy immediate success. Officials and ministers also tend to remain in office for longer durations than would be the case in Western countries, allowing them to better master their briefs, establish and maintain long-term relationships with partners in other states, and stay the course when seeking to mediate a conflict. It is by no means impossible for democracies to display similar traits, as Norway has demonstrated in its own mediation activities, but Qatar's system of government is particularly well-suited to demonstrating the patience required of a mediator.

By the same logic, it is easier for Qatar to commit resources in support of its mediation activities than it is for most other states. This is partly a reflection of Qatar's wealth, with an exceptionally high GDP per capita by international standards. However, it also reflects the long-term orientation and greater autonomy of officials and ministers as described above. A Western state seeking to invest significant taxpayer resources in, say, Darfur is much more likely to have to overcome various bureaucratic, regulatory and accountability hurdles. As a monarchy, on the other hand, Qatar can quickly place its money wherever it wishes. This gives Qatari officials the ability to apply much greater flexibility and resourcefulness in their mediation activities.

In summary, it is this combination of neutrality, patience and a willingness to commit resources that therefore distinguishes Qatar's method of mediation and goes a long way towards explaining its relative success in the sphere of conflict management.

In terms of process and personalities, the study found that Qatari mediation has been practised by an increasingly diverse array of actors in recent years. During 2006-2010, Qatar's mediation efforts were overwhelmingly concentrated around the personage of then Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Hamad bin Jassim Al-Thani. More recently, other Qatari institutions and actors have entered the field of mediation. This has included the Special Envoy, National Security Advisor, Foreign Minister and Deputy Foreign Minister in the case of Afghanistan; the Emir in the case of Libya; and the Special Envoy and Secretary of the Emir for Security Affairs in the case of Chad (Milton *et al.,* 2023: 18). This suggests a broadening and potential deepening of Qatar's state capacity to mediate - previously a perceived weakness of its mediation efforts.

Interviewees emphasised the collaborative nature of Qatari mediation strategy, albeit within a clear hierarchy headed up ultimately by the Emir himself. As the Special Envoy made clear, the decision to engage in mediation in the State of Qatar is based on a comprehensive vision and involves close coordination between the highest leadership and various diplomatic bodies. In most cases, His Highness the Emir is the key driving force behind such decisions, reflecting the state's commitment to its role in promoting global peace and stability. However, it is essential to understand that this decision is not made in isolation from other relevant entities; there is a strong team dynamic that includes the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other responsible officials, who provide advice and present possible options.

This dynamic reflects a balance between all involved parties, where decisions are made through consultation to ensure that mediation aligns with international law and serves national interests. The decision is not dependent on one individual but is the result of a consultative process led by the highest leadership in coordination with foreign policy and diplomatic experts, ensuring that interventions are effective and that the best possible outcomes are achieved.

The decision-making process in Qatar therefore relies on a structured dynamic characterized by organization and a hierarchical approach to decisions related to international mediation. This dynamic can be either horizontal or vertical, meaning that the initiative might start from

the highest leadership, such as His Highness the Emir, or from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, or even from individuals involved in dealings with external parties, such as ambassadors or international representatives. For example, a meeting with senior officials in the state or with foreign leadership might spark the idea for mediation, whether it is related to a humanitarian, political, or economic crisis.

Once a proposal or request is brought to the table, it is referred to the relevant state mechanisms to study all aspects of the decision. The risks, consequences, and opportunities that may arise from the intervention are analysed. This process requires a comprehensive evaluation of all political, security, economic, and even humanitarian dimensions. The final decision, of course, is sovereign and remains the exclusive responsibility of Qatar's high political leadership, which considers all these factors. However, during the analysis and study phase, many government agencies and bodies participate in the decision-making process. This reflects that the decision is not random or rushed; instead, it is the result of a coordinated effort by a full team of specialists and experts who present all possibilities and scenarios to the leadership to make the best decision for Qatar.

This type of dynamic decision-making contributes to making Qatar a successful mediator on the international stage. According to reports and media outlets, Qatar relies on a fully integrated team of experts and specialists to study the complex files related to mediation. This makes the decision-making process well thought out and coordinated, allowing Qatar to continue playing an effective role as an international mediator.

Ultimately, then, the combination of a solid, collaborative policymaking process, founded on the core principles of neutrality, patience, and a willingness to commit resources, cohere to constitute the successful Qatari model of conflict mediation.

Whether Qatar Has Succeeded as A Mediator

There is an evident lack of consensus in the literature on the key question of whether Qatar has succeeded as a mediator. As noted in the literature review, Qatar has often been criticised for its supposed short-termism and alleged fixation with optics over substance (Kamrava, 2011; Mesfin, 2016). The overwhelming finding of this study, however, is that Qatar has been a

significant success story as a mediator. Significant degrees of success were achieved by Qatar in each of the three mediation cases explored by this thesis – Darfur, Lebanon, and Afghanistan – with peace agreements achieved in all three cases and, most importantly, significant reductions in the scale and intensity of violence.

Critics might argue that the resumption of violence in Darfur and, more recently, in Lebanon demonstrates that Qatar's mediation efforts failed to achieve a sustainable long-term outcome for either country. Yet this is to apply a very harsh measure of success. Outside mediators hold very little influence over the domestic politics of another country. Nor can a mediator necessarily control or prevent the occurrence of destabilising external events, such as the eruption of violence between Israel and Hamas in 2023, which had significant consequences for the internal stability of Lebanon.

A fairer test of mediation success, perhaps, is whether it results in a reduction in the scale and intensity of violence for a sustained period of time (i.e., for years rather than months). By this definition, Qatar succeeded in all three mediation cases examined in this case study. The peace agreement in Lebanon proved to be relatively sustainable, even if there have been periodic outbreaks of violence. The agreement in Darfur clearly failed to resolve the long-term causes of conflict, but it did at least succeed in dampening the level of violence for some years. Finally, the mediation in Afghanistan also succeeded insofar as it paved the way for a relatively smooth withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan (albeit the optics of the US departure from Kabul did not necessarily play particularly well in Washington). US-Taliban relations also remain relatively benign, certainly in comparison to their earlier state. By all these measures, then, Qatar achieved relative success in each case.

On a wider level, measured in terms of enhanced status and enlarged influence, Qatar's mediation can be judged to have been even more successful. As argued above, Qatar's conflict management efforts have been generally successful. Doha's aim of establishing itself as a trusted and impartial mediator has largely borne fruit, clearly demonstrated by the willingness of two parties as divergent in their outlooks and interests as the United States and the Taliban both to be willing to accept Qatar as a mediator in 2020. Further, the sheer interest engendered by Qatar in its diplomatic activities – clearly evident in the growing number of published academic articles in mainstream journals on Qatari foreign policy and mediation strategy – demonstrates how the country's influence has grown over the past two decades. The ultimate proof of this lies in the decision of US policymakers to approach Qatar to request its services

to mediate the Afghan withdrawal agreement. There can be no clearer demonstration of Qatar's enhanced status in the international arena than the fact that the world's leading power specifically requested Qatar's diplomatic assistance.

This fact was also commented upon by interviewees, who noted that Qatar was specifically requested to act as a mediator in each of the three cases examined by this study. For Interviewee 2, one of the most prominent signs of Qatar's success as a mediator is the repeated requests for mediation that the Qatari government receives from various international and regional parties. If Qatar's mediation efforts were not effective and influential, these different parties would not repeatedly turn to Qatar to play the role of mediator. For instance, Qatar's mediation in Lebanon, then in Palestine, and later in Afghanistan, are clear examples of the trust that different parties place in Qatar. Whenever a neutral mediator capable of communicating with all sides is needed, Qatar is often seen as the first choice.

What Qatar's Mediation Experiences Demonstrate About the Role of Small States in the International System

The final sub-question related to what Qatar's mediation experiences demonstrate about the role of small states in the international system. The literature review explored how traditional conceptions of the role of small states in the international arena assumed them to have a low level of participation in international affairs, and a high level of involvement in intergovernmental organisations (East, 1973). Further, small states were expected to support international legal norms, while avoiding the use of force, and avoiding behaviours and policies that could undermine greater powers. Concomitantly, in the traditionalist view, small states focus on a narrow geopolitical area while utilising frequently moral and normative positions in international matters.

Similarly, Thorhallson and Steinsson (2017) argued that small states have unique vulnerabilities which do not allow them to achieve favourable outcomes in foreign policy as often as larger states can. The remaining strategy is then focused on building multilateral relationships and organisations, which are able to reduce power asymmetries, impose constraints on a large scale and decrease the transactional cost of diplomacy. Kallas (2008) further noted that a crucial distinction between small state foreign policy behaviour and the

behaviour of larger entities is the formation of multilateral, rather than bilateral relations. Thus, while large states tend to focus on building bilateral relations in foreign policy, small states are concerned with multilateral policies as these create more opportunities for resources.

Yet only some of these assumptions are borne out by this study. Although Qatar's diplomatic role is more activist than one might expect of a small state, it clearly eschews the use of force and strongly promotes international legal norms in line with East's model. Further, although Qatar has been, at times, willing to go against the policies of its neighbouring states, it has generally avoided alienating the biggest regional (and extra-regional) powers such as the United States, Iran and Turkey.

However, contrary to the assumptions of Thorhallson and Steinsson (2017), Qatar has often preferred to focus on building up bilateral ties rather than working mainly through multilateral organisations. Although Doha has been willing to work through multilateral organisations where necessary, notably operating under the auspices of the African Union and Arab League in the cases of Darfur and Lebanon, in general, Qatari policymakers have more often shown considerable confidence in being willing to establish and maintain productive bilateral relationships with a whole host of states in the region and beyond. Qatar's mediation activities have also been used to strengthen these bilateral ties with a view to forming productive long-term relations with the countries in question.

As Kallas (2008) has noted, however, small states are assumed to carry greater influence when they have a resource upon which other states depend. Qatar, with its vast gas reserves, clearly holds such a resource. It is largely, though not solely, this immense resource wealth that allows Qatar to transcend its smallness and exert a level of influence beyond what one would expect for a country of its size and population.

At the same time, though, Qatar also demonstrates the arguments of Braveboy-Wagner (2010), who argued that the leadership actions of a small state can allow that state to gain prestige in the international arena and win the acceptance of other states to be led by, or at least influenced by, the small state actor. In its mediation activities and non-aligned foreign policy strategy, Qatar has demonstrated such leadership actions. The effectiveness of its diplomatic activity has played a crucial role in enhancing Qatar's status and enlarging its influence beyond the expected levels for a small state.

Further, as argued by Chong and Maass (2010), and as emerging from the above examples, small states are by no means powerless. Moreover, given the alignment of these states with moral and humanitarian international norms as initially postulated by East (1973), when small states exercise this power, global stability and progress can be achieved. Consequently, the global dynamics of small states and their foreign policy can lead to stability rather than conflict as postulated by the realist view.

This line of thought has also been borne out by this study. Through its mediation activities, Qatar has indeed helped to advance the cause of regional – and, by extension, global – stability and progress. Doha's commitment to upholding moral and humanitarian international norms has represented an important stabilising factor in a region where such norms are sometimes conspicuous by their absence. This beneficial and productive role has belied the oft made assumption that small states are relatively powerless and inconsequential actors within the international system.

The literature review also explored the security-seeking strategies of small states. As discussed in earlier chapters, it is assumed that small states can either focus on defence and neutrality, or engage in cooperative schemes such as alliances and band-wagoning, seek shelter or develop hedging strategies. Hedging, in particular, seems to be preferred by small states, by maintaining multilateral relations with greater powers and thus avoiding balancing and band-wagoning, which would ultimately lead to power compromises on behalf of greater states. Hedging is particularly preferred by small states in the Arabian Peninsula, as the threat of greater powers, such as Saudi Arabia or Iran may force smaller states into band-wagoning tactics. Hamdi and Salman (2020) argue that hedging, and thus maintaining multilateral relations with the greater powers in the Arabian Peninsula, provides an answer to the security dilemma of small states in the region, such as Kuwait, Bahrain, or Qatar. Nonetheless, the fact that smaller states in this region do not share strong ties and healthy relations between themselves especially lately and the regionally greater powers (Iran and Saudi Arabia) may be a significant impediment to this.

Further, Panke (2017) drew from an analysis of 100 different states and their approach to international security negotiations to argue that two categories of states can be distinguished. In this sense, some states voice their position often within security negotiations, while others remain silent. This led to the hypothesis that active participation in security negotiations is driven by two aspects. Firstly, state capacities, referring to political and financial capacities,

can modulate state involvement in negotiations for security. Secondly, state incentives further drive involvement in security negotiations. Much of the discussion presented by Panke (2017) concerning state incentives is listed in conjunction with the state's capabilities. Thus, if a state has more capabilities, and high incentives, the state will tend to be more active in security negotiations. For example, it has been determined that states that possess financial, military, and political capabilities will most often share their positions and seek benefits in negotiations (Panke, 2017). This latter point clearly has potential application to Qatar given its energy and financial resources. Indeed, Qatar's willingness to be proactive in striking a military agreement with the United States suggests that Panke (2017) is correct to posit that states with higher capabilities are more active in security negotiations.

Yet the Arabian Peninsula is, to some extent, *sui generis* in its inter-state relations. As observed by Hamdi and Salman (2020) and elaborated earlier by al-Hamad (1997), Qatar shares a tense relationship with Bahrain and a historically difficult one with Saudi Arabia. The fact that all six countries form a part of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) does not seem to ensure mutual security as the lack of border rules and constant religious tensions set significant pressures on national securities of small states and greater powers alike. To pursue the proposal issued by Hamdi and Salman (2020) in respect of pursuing a hedging for security strategy may thus be difficult to achieve, as some of these states may have positive relations with each other, but negative relations with others.

The power dynamic of small states in Arabian Peninsula thus seems to contradict the classification for security strategies issued by Panke (2017) and Vaicekauskaitė (2017), as the GCC, although with the formal status of an alliance, does not satisfy the most important conditions for state sovereignty, while loss of territory in an oil-rich region would signify important economic losses, and by default, a loss of power (al-Hamad, 1997). And with the existence of such disagreements, there exists a situation of constant tension in the region, especially in the absence of a universally accepted small state leader. Multilateralism is nevertheless observed in the region in terms of cooperating with greater powers, which ensure states security and avoids external interference. Even in the argumentative and conflict-prone Gulf, therefore, a form of collective security-seeking strategy is evident.

Long (2017) argued that small state power originates from three different categories: derivative (relying on a greater power), collective (coalitions and international institutions), and intrinsic (material assets). The author further states that small states are in a position to

exert power and influence with their means and are not deemed to be powerless when held against a larger country. The case of Qatar can be held as an example in this case, evident in its cordial relations with Iran. Although a demographically and militarily larger country, Iran nonetheless seeks to maintain an amicable relationship with Qatar owing to its economic and political influence (including its association with the GCC).

Qatar's strength arguably lies in its ability to combine all three forms of power – derivative, collective, and intrinsic – while avoiding over-relying on just one. The intrinsic power speaks for itself in Qatar's case and clearly derives from its natural resources, which endow it with considerable wealth and, by extension, enhanced status and a higher degree of influence. The collective power dimension is less significant for Qatar given its desire to retain an autonomous foreign policy and its difficult relations with Gulf neighbours. As noted above, however, the collective power dimension is not entirely absent in Qatar's case given its membership of the GCC and the defensive collective security strategy adopted by the smaller Gulf states vis a vis larger powers. Finally, the derivative power dimension is most evident in Qatar's relations with the United States. As noted above, this relationship with the US was critical in allowing Qatar to escape the blockade imposed by its neighbours during 2017-21. In this case, Qatar relied on its amicable relations with a greater power to haul it out of a difficult situation.

As stated, however, although Qatar at times displays all three forms of small state power (derivative, collective, and intrinsic), it has avoided over-relying on just one form. A purely intrinsic strategy, for example, would become vulnerable if Qatar's resources diminished or became less valuable on the world market. A purely collective strategy might become counter-productive if relations with allies turned sour. And a wholly derivative strategy dependent on amicable relations with a greater power is also inherently vulnerable if that great power loses interest or develops new attachments. No state wishes to be wholly reliant on the beneficence of foreigners. Qatar's success as a small state, then, lies in its ability to combine all three forms of power, and to develop positive interdependencies between them (e.g. Qatar's amicable relations with the US clearly rely to some extent on its intrinsic strength in terms of natural resources, which make it a more attractive partner in the eyes of Washington).

Implications for Small State Mediation

It was observed throughout the study that, in general, small states seek to maintain neutrality in international conflicts and are often reluctant to take sides due to a fear of losing multilateral or bilateral relations, and by extension their soft power. When conflicts do arise, small states thus seek to avoid band-wagoning or alliances. Similarly, rising powers also show reluctance to adhere to one side or another during regional conflicts because of the principle of non-interference in international affairs (Dal and Emel, 2020). It is recognised here as previously discussed, that small states derive various advantages from pursuing a humanitarian agenda. This leads itself to a role in maintaining peace and resolving conflicts amicably (Tay, 2014). Preventative diplomacy can be used in order to avoid conflicts, prevent an escalation of existing conflicts, or limit the spread of conflicts. This form of diplomacy can be deployed either by a single small state actor or by an alliance of small state actors (Steiner, 2004). Small, stable states with transparent governance and norm advocacy generally maintain a high level of credibility and trust in the international community, making them particularly suitable potential mediators due to their perceived neutrality and impartiality (Tay, 2014).

However, Sverdrup (2003) notes that the best predictors of small state conflict management strategies are their domestic traditions, internal styles of decision-making, and preferred style of conflict resolution (i.e. domestic-level factors). The case of domestic tradition shaping peace policy becomes evident in an analysis of Switzerland's peace policy, carried out by Graf and Lanz (2013). The particular case of Switzerland, in which the country has been able to maintain neutrality in military interventions, dates back to its centuries-long tradition of neutrality, including during the Second World War. In terms of peace operations, the country is mostly reliant on civilian instruments rather than military actions. This contradicts the strategies of both EU and NATO members, and has been possible due to strong internal institutions, protecting Switzerland from adherence to international alliances and conformity with EU rules (Graf and Lanz, 2013).

There are several advantages enjoyed by small states operating as mediators in conflict resolution. Firstly, a peace policy aligned with those in a larger group ensures that the resources needed in the case of conflict can be provided by partners. Secondly, small states can gain international visibility and through this, power of influence on the international scene (Schmidl, 2001). Small states tend to be more flexible and adaptive in field situations, while their

perceived lack of power elicits fewer polarised responses and allows them to assume an honest broker role in mediation. Also, because the credibility of small states may be more dependent on a successful outcome, they may be more patient, consistent and engaged than a larger power during the mediation process.

These assumptions are largely supported by this study's findings. Undeniably, one of Qatar's most prominent strengths is its neutrality and the trust that different parties place in it. Qatar was not a direct party in the conflicts it mediated, whether in Darfur, Lebanon, or Afghanistan. This relative neutrality allowed Qatar to act as a bridge that was acceptable to all sides. Additionally, Qatar has the ability to communicate with all conflicting parties without exception, which stems from its positive diplomatic relationships with various countries and groups. There is also the element of trust that has been built over the years. Qatar has repeatedly demonstrated in every mediation it has participated in that it acts with sincere intentions and good faith, primarily aiming to stop human suffering or to halt wars or political crises. This has earned Qatar significant credibility among different countries and groups.

Yet mediation is not without its risks. One of the interviewees commented on the potential for blowback that could jeopardise Qatar's own security. For there are always security risks the Qatari state could face due to its involvement in sensitive conflicts. There is often the potential for Qatar to face threats or attacks from groups or parties that benefit from the conflict. These threats could be direct or indirect, such as threats to Qatar's internal stability or its relations with neighbouring countries. On a personal level, too, individuals participating in mediation efforts, whether diplomats or envoys, also face serious risks. These people are often under scrutiny, and their personal safety may be endangered due to the sensitive roles they play. There could be direct threats against them from parties seeking to disrupt or derail the mediation efforts.

Qatar's commitment to international law and the United Nations shields it from many of these risks. So too does its commitment to neutrality, which helps to insulate it from any perception of bias or partiality. Qatari officials accept that there will always be countries and regimes that benefit from the continuation of conflict or war, and these entities may attempt to obstruct Qatari mediation efforts, whether through political, economic, or even media means. On balance, though, officials believe these risks are worth taking, and that Qatar's neutral model of mediation can mitigate the potential dangers.

Contribution to Academic Knowledge

These findings make an important contribution to the existing academic literature on small state mediation. No other academic analysis of this topic has sought to conceptualize small state mediation through the lens of role theory, status-seeking and virtual enlargement. Nor have there been many, if any, attempts to explore theories of small-state mediation in conversation with high-level officials with personal recent experience of mediating conflict. The theories developed in this thesis therefore make a novel contribution to existing academic knowledge on small mediation. In general, small state mediation is under-theorized in the existing literature, which relies overly on an empirical framework that more adequately explains the 'what' than the 'why' or 'how' of mediation.

There are both practical and theoretical implications to these findings. On a practical level, Qatari officials interviewed for this study were struck by the relevance of virtual enlargement, role theory, and status-seeking. As Interviewee 4 observed to the author: "*Although I had not previously framed [mediation] in theoretical terms, I can confidently say that they [the three concepts] resonate deeply with my practical experience in mediation and accurately reflect the dynamics of Qatar's mediation strategy"*. Further, Interviewee 4 commented that on the basis of his practical experience, the three concepts were *"interconnected elements"* that together accurately and comprehensively explained Qatar's approach to mediation.

Similarly, Interviewee 2 [government official] commented: "*In my experience as an international mediator, I can say without a doubt that I often considered those three concepts you mentioned, which include Role Theory, Status Enhancement, and Virtual Expansion. These theories form a crucial foundation for decision-makers, and even if they are not explicitly adopted, they are often implicitly present when making decisions related to mediation."* In the same interviewee's opinion, these three concepts are *"crucial to grasp [Qatar's] foreign policy strategy"*.

Although all the interviewees held the view that the three concepts together provided a comprehensive and accurate explanation of Qatar's mediation strategy, they differed somewhat in the emphasis they laid on each individual concept. In the opinion of Interviewee 2, for example, virtual enlargement was the most relevant and pertinent of the three theories, whereas for the Special Envoy (Interviewee 1) it was role theory that most accurately captured Qatar's approach to mediation. Despite these differences of emphasis, however, the interviewees all

believed that in their collective application, these three concepts were critical for gaining an understanding of Qatar's mediation and foreign policy strategy. As the Special Envoy stated, *"in my view, Qatar's mediation role cannot be separated from these three concepts".*

So struck was the Special Envoy by the three concepts explored in this study that he advocated that Qatar explicitly adopt the combined concepts as a foreign policy guide and tool. Further, the Special Envoy believed that the conceptual approach set out in this study could also be usefully employed by other small states. As he stated, "*Qatar is in urgent need of adopting these combined concepts. Each of these theories serves small states in general through more than one tool of foreign policy, and it specifically serves Qatar concerning its mediation as one of the tools of foreign policy for the State of Qatar. I believe that applying them collectively and adopting their fundamentals is a promising plan for small states that may enable them, in the future, not only to maintain an international standing but also to attain it*".

It is perhaps natural to treat these words with some caution. After all, few small states possess Qatar's natural advantages in terms of resource wealth, geopolitical location, and Islamic identity (the latter two features an advantage for mediating conflicts in the Muslim world at least). As noted in the introduction, however, Qatari officials themselves placed relatively little emphasis on the importance of Qatar's financial firepower and religious identity as sources of mediation strength. They focused much more on Qatar's reputation for neutrality and strategic patience – two qualities that, in theory at least, are easier for other small states to emulate.

Assuming that Qatar's mediation model can be emulated to some degree by other small states, where would it be best employed? There is obvious scope for an expansion of conflict resolution efforts in Asia, where multiple territorial disputes (both on land and at sea) are currently in play involving a plethora of countries, including China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Japan, Russia, Taiwan, Pakistan/India (Kashmir and Baltistan), Thailand/Malaysia (Bukit Jeli), Myanmar/Thailand (Doi Lang), Indonesia/Malaysia (Ambalat), India/Nepal (Kalapani), North Korea/South Korea, Russia/Japan (South Kuril Islands), and South Korea/North Korea/Japan (Dokdo/Takeshima).

Applying the Qatari model whereby a small, non-aligned, relatively rich state seeks to mediate conflicts within its wider region, there is the potential for states such as Singapore and Brunei to step forward and take on a more active role in conflict management within Asia. This

may not necessarily correspond with either state's foreign policy priorities, but the potential benefits to be generated in terms of enhanced status and virtual enlargement are evident, as amply demonstrated by Qatar, should either country decide to incorporate mediation within its national role and foreign policy strategy in a similar manner to Qatar. The parallels between Brunei and Qatar are particularly striking, given that both are tiny but rich states ruled by monarchical governments. Equally, there is scope for Qatar itself to expand its mediation efforts further east into the Asia-Pacific region should its highest leadership determine that this might be in the national interest.

The study's findings are equally significant on a conceptual level. As argued in Chapters 1 and 2, the topic of small state mediation has been under-theorized in the literature and remains relatively undeveloped conceptually. The recently published study by Milton *et al.* (2023) in the *Mediterranean Politics* journal, for example, engaged in an interesting examination of Qatar's evolving role in conflict mediation and traced a perceived evolution in Qatar's mediation style post-2020. Yet the study made little or no attempt to conceptualise Qatar's mediation strategy, nor to offer any theoretical insight into the underlying drivers of Qatar's mediation and foreign policy activity. As with the vast majority of studies on Qatari mediation, the study was overwhelmingly empirical in nature – valuable in itself but lacking any solid theoretical foundation.

In establishing a theoretical foundation for the study of small state mediation, based on the three concepts of role theory, virtual enlargement and status-seeking explored in the preceding chapters, this study has paved new ground for future academic enquiry in this area. Future scholars may or may not concur with this study's arguments about the importance of the three concepts identified here, but they will likely feel compelled to consider these concepts even if to argue against them. In future, therefore, the concepts of role theory, virtual enlargement and status-seeking ought to be considered by scholars when assessing small state mediation.

Limitations of the Study

As with most studies of this length and depth, certain methodological and analytical limitations may have impacted upon the reliability and validity of the findings. In the first instance, confining the interview sampling process only to officials from the State of Qatar introduced the potential for partiality and bias in the responses. As individuals personally associated with cases of Qatari mediation, the interviewees could have been expected to hold an obvious vested interest in portraying Qatar's mediation efforts favourably. Expanding the sampling to include officials from other relevant nations in each case study (e.g. Lebanese, Afghans or Darfuris) could have helped to introduce more balance and thereby mitigate the potential for bias, but at the expense of introducing greater complexity and vastly increasing the difficulty of conducting the primary research phase in a sensible time-frame.

It was preferred instead to adopt the use of a mixed research strategy, involving a systematic review of the secondary literature, which helped to triangulate the data generated by the interviewees and enabled the author to exercise his own judgment as to whether this data was reliable. For the most part, interviewees were extremely candid and reflective, and spoke honestly about the nature of Qatar's mediation efforts. It can therefore be hoped that this limitation has been mitigated as far as possible.

A second limitation concerns the potential for the cultural biases of the author to have an impact upon the research process. The author's background and origins in the region in question (the Gulf) may have subconsciously predisposed him to look more favourably at Qatar's mediation efforts than someone with no connections to the region. This may have introduced an element of analytical bias into the research process, potentially resulting in a realistically favourable portrayal of Qatar's mediation activities.

Again, however, the systematic literature review helped to mitigate this danger by introducing a variety of academic studies written from a quite different perspective. Berouk Mesfin (2016), for example, has been highly critical of Qatar's involvement in the Horn of Africa; his arguments were explored at length in the chapter on Darfur. Further, the danger of cultural bias must be weighed against the research advantages bestowed by the author's fluency in the Arabic language, which made it possible to converse with participants in their own language. This enabled a better rapport to be developed and allowed for a more flowing conversation and, subsequently, the generation of better quality data.

Suggestions for Future Research

There are multiple potential avenues for future research in this and adjacent fields of academic enquiry. First, it would be interesting and useful to explore whether the three concepts of virtual enlargement, role theory and status-seeking are also applicable to large state mediators. Implicit in much of the preceding analysis offered by this study is the assumption that small states are more motivated than larger states by the quest for status and an enlarged presence on the international scene. However, this assumption is questionable when one considers the quasi-mediatory role, much of it apparently status-driven, played by France across post-colonial Africa as well as, more recently, in Lebanon. Is the mediatory role of a state like France driven by similar motivations to those experienced by Qatar, or is it more interest-driven and influenced by geopolitical strategy? And, if the latter, does this have a material impact on the mediation process and the chances of success? Future academic research in this area could held to shed light on these questions.

A second and related line of potential future academic enquiry concerns the crossover between mediation activities and post-colonial influence. As well as French activities in Africa, another interesting case in this context is Britain's role in mediating the Lancaster House Agreement in 1979, which facilitated the transition to democracy in Zimbabwe. The activities of post-colonial mediators clearly differ markedly from the model established by Qatar insofar as the mediator in such cases cannot genuinely be regarded as entirely neutral or disinterested given the level of historical baggage inevitably involved. The post-colonial model of mediation is therefore noteworthy and deserving of further academic exploration.

A final potential avenue for future academic research in this area involves studying the efficacy of mediation as a method of conflict resolution. A pertinent question raised by this study is whether mediation actually helps to bring conflicts to an earlier resolution than would otherwise occur if no mediator became involved? Ripeness theory holds that the resolution of conflicts is in large part structurally determined by the existence of a mutually hurting stalemate, i.e. the situation that occurs when neither side foresees any realistic prospect of victory but both sides are being hurt by the conflict (Zartman, 2000; Zartman, 2001, p. 8). This theory holds that when a mutually hurting stalemate is obtained, the parties become more willing to seek a resolution, assuming they are rational actors who weigh up the costs and benefits of continuing the conflict versus pursuing a peace deal. Given this, ripeness theory

implies that the role of a mediator is largely incidental, becoming relevant only late in a conflict when one or more of the parties have already decided to seek a resolution (the US-Taliban Agreement arguably being a case in point here). Further academic investigation into the impact of mediation on conflict duration would therefore be valuable.

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