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COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

QATAR MEDIATION STRATEGY: AFGHANISTAN AS A CASE STUDY

BY

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ABSTRACT

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Title: Qatar Mediation Strategy: Afghanistan As A Case Study

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Qatar is a small Gulf state located in a critical geopolitical location. It gained its independence in the early 1970s, a time where the Gulf region was going through many incidents such as the Iranian Revolution, the Iran-Iraq War, and the Invasion of Kuwait. The Father Emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, seemed to be aware of Qatar's vulnerability to face such threats due to the size, location as well as the fact that Qatar is one of the least populated countries in the world, which makes it unable to build an effective military to face any possible threats. Thus, the Father Emir, came into power in 1995 and since then, Qatar adopted a proactive foreign policy where mediation is one of its core pillars. Qatar's profile as a mediator began, relying on different soft-power tools aiming to create a national brand for the country as a trustworthy ally. This thesis argues that, the main goal behind Qatar's interest in engaging as a mediator might not be solely to end a conflict but to achieve a specific foreign policy whereby it can face its security dilemma and strengthen its regional and international role.

Although Qatar mediated in various cases that has different conditions, this thesis argues that the case of Afghanistan is considered unique in terms of the Qatari role. In order to answer the main research question comprehensively of *what makes Afghanistan a different case study in terms of Qatar's mediation strategy*, the researcher has built three sub-questions to be discussed in this thesis. The thesis uses qualitative methods to answer the research question. A comparative case study

approach is adopted as well to expose the similarities, differences and patterns of the cases where Qatar engaged as a mediator. Furthermore, data were collected through first; the analysis of secondary resources such as previous studies, books, articles and second; semi-structured interviews with officials and experts of the field.

The thesis begins by discussing the connection between small states and mediation in general. It then describes Qatar's foreign policy by analyzing the related tools that have helped Qatar become a trusted ally and confident mediator in different complex cases. The thesis also explains five cases where Qatar engaged as a mediator: Yemen, Sudan, Lebanon, Palestine and Djibouti/Eritrea. The thesis then analyzes the main case study, Afghanistan, and sheds light on the Qatari mediation strategy in this case during the period 2013–2022.

DEDICATION

To my family, and specifically my beloved Mother.

Thank you for being beside me all the time.

This endeavor would not be possible without your continuous encouragement.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Qatar is a small state in the Gulf region, surrounded by the Arabian Peninsula on all sides except for its sole land border, which it shares with Saudi Arabia. After gaining independence from Britain in 1971, the country faced various threats at all levels, which encouraged the leadership to predominantly introduce noticeable changes in its foreign policy. The reasons behind such developments can be classified as two main events in the Gulf region: 1) the Iranian Islamic revolution of 1979 (followed by eight years of war between Iran and Iraq) and 2) the invasion of Kuwait in 1990. Hence, the country's vulnerability to such a high threat level was tested, considering its lack of capable military.

During the reign of Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad Al Thani, who came to power in 1972, many changes and developments took place in Qatar at the social, economic, and political levels. Regarding security and stability, however, Sheikh Khalifa decided to ally with Saudi Arabia due to its position as a hegemonic power in the region and the close relationship between the two countries' royal families. Many internal and external decisions were made under Saudi guardianship (Abdulla, 2014). At that time, specifically in 1977, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa (son of Sheikh Khalifa) began to rise to power since his appointment as the Crown Prince and the commander of the Qatari Armed Forces. As the region during that time was going through rapid changes and threats were increasing, Sheikh Hamad was aware of Qatar's vulnerability due to its size and location.

Moreover, Qatar is one of the least populated countries in the world, so it cannot build an effective military to defend itself from external threats. Sheikh Hamad

was unfortunate with his father's decision to be a Saudi Arabian follower to solve their country's security dilemma. In other words, it could be said that the rapid spread of threats and the continuous Saudi intervention in all affairs that was seen by Sheikh Hamad as nothing but a Saudi ambition to dominate the region, first by controlling small states, which clearly meant that the country needed a new strategic independent foreign policy (Gray, 2013). This thought was reinforced in Sheikh Hamad's mind after the invasion of Kuwait in 1990, which was a shock for the whole region and, more specifically, the small states. Like many other countries in the area, Qatar was anxious about being the next "Kuwait," betrayed and invaded by a more prominent neighbor. What made things even worse was the Al Khufus incident in 1992, a clash between Saudi and Qatari soldiers over a disputed area in the border region between the two states. Such events meant for Sheikh Hamad that Saudis would benefit from Qatar's being a weak follower of their country and might lead to an occupation of Qatar, for instance.

Consequently, after many attempts to convince his father to introduce changes to the country's policies, mainly foreign policy, Sheikh Hamad was forced to come into power in 1995 in a bloodless coup. As Kablan (2019) states, "beyond its inability to be neutral, Qatar has been attempting to rid itself of Saudi hegemony over its foreign policy since 1995" (p. 96). Therefore, a new Qatari foreign policy was drawn up by the Qatari government and has persisted to the present day.

Besides various soft-power tools implemented by Qatari's new leadership in 1995 to compensate for the country's smallness and face all surrounding threats, Qatar chose *mediation* as one of the country's foreign-policy pillars to address its security dilemma. Furthermore, the country benefited from its wealth as the world's largest producer of liquified natural gas (LNG) and emerged from "on one" to a

significant player in the international arena. Strengthening international peace and security is one of the five principles of Qatar's foreign policy, which also includes preserving Qatar's sovereignty and independence, defending the Islamic and Arab identities, respecting international covenants and conventions, and defending public and human rights (Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.). Qatar thus engaged in many cases in the region as a mediator, such as in Lebanon, Palestine, Yemen, and Eritrea. While some of these cases did not achieve the required goals, Qatar's reputation as a mediator and "go-to" partner for many countries around the world has been enhanced since then. This thesis argues that the main goal behind Qatar's interest in engaging as a mediator might not be solely to end a conflict but to achieve a specific foreign policy whereby it can strengthen its regional and international role. Afghanistan is another case where Qatar has entered as a mediator between the United States and the Taliban on one hand and between the Taliban and the Afghan government on the other since 2013. The literature, however, has mainly focused on Qatar's foreign-policy strategies with a precise concentration on many cases where Qatar has engaged as a mediator, except for the case Afghanistan. This thesis thus intends to fill this gap by analyzing and understanding the Qatari mediation role in the Afghan case. It aims to examine and answer what makes Afghanistan a different case study in terms of Qatar's mediation strategy by covering the period 2013–2022.

1.2 Research Problem

The critical geopolitical location of Qatar dictates a unique foreign policy to secure the country from different threats. Since the arrival of Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa in power in 1995, Qatar has begun to be an active player in the international arena. Sheikh Hamad was aware of the importance of developing his country's soft power to a level of strength equal to its hard power. Thus, Qatar has engaged in

several crises as a mediator. This thesis analyzes Qatar's mediation strategy by focusing on Afghanistan as a case study. First, it will explore Qatari foreign policy and the different soft-power tools it has applied, with a concentration on mediation as one of the critical pillars of its foreign policy. Second, it will examine the history of Qatar's mediation strategy in five prominent cases: Yemen, Sudan/Darfur, Lebanon, Palestine and Djibouti/Eritrea. It is critical to understand the Qatari role in each of these cases to compare it with the thesis's case study. Thirdly, since the thesis aims to answer what makes Afghanistan a different case study in terms of Qatar's foreign policy, a critical analysis of the Qatari role from 2013 to 2022, when the Taliban came to power, will be performed.

1.3 Significance of the Research

This thesis will provide vital insights into what makes Afghanistan a different case study in terms of Qatar's mediation strategy. As a small state, Qatar has adopted a unique foreign policy of which mediation is a core pillar. Since the early 2000s, Qatar has engaged as a mediator in several crises and successfully gained the trust and prestige it has always pursued. Except for the Afghani case, the rest of the cases where Doha has engaged as a mediator have been widely covered by researchers. Thus, diagnosing and analyzing the Qatari role in Afghanistan is significant, as it is considered a multilayer mediation case where Qatar engaged as a mediator between the Taliban and the United States on the one hand and between the Taliban and the Afghan government on the other, making it unique. Furthermore, this thesis aims to fill the gap related regarding the Qatari role in the Afghan case since there is minimal coverage to date on this topic.

1.4 Research Questions

To develop a comprehensive understanding of "Qatar Mediation Strategy:

Afghanistan as a Case Study,” this thesis aims to answer the following research questions.

Main Research Question

- What makes Afghanistan a different case in terms of Qatar’s role as a mediator?

Sub-research Questions

- How did Qatar become a trusted ally among international community?
- Why has Qatar chosen mediation as a core pillar of its foreign policy?
- How could the Qatari role be described in the Afghan case?

1.4 Research Hypothesis

Based on the above research questions, this thesis argues that Qatar as a small state located in a sensitive location between two superpowers, followed a proactive foreign policy where mediation is one of its core pillars since the arrival of the Father Emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani into power in 1995. Since then, Qatar began to mediate in several disputes with an aim to strengthen international peace and security and to create a national brand to face the surrounding threats. Henceforth, at the request of conflicting parties, Qatar mediated in several cases, including Yemen, Lebanon, Sudan, Palestine, Djibouti/Eritrea, and Afghanistan. In these cases, Qatar’s mediation efforts are considered either traditional one-track efforts between the government and oppositions (as in Lebanon, Yemen, and Palestine) or multi-track efforts targeting several civil societies and political groups mainly (as in Sudan). However, Afghanistan’s case illustrates the uniqueness of Qatar’s role for three main reasons. First, in contrast to other cases where the conflict emerged within a certain internal faction, the case of Afghanistan involved various international players such as but not limited to the US, Western countries as well as the NATO. Second, Qatar

mediated between the Taliban and the US on one hand and between the Taliban and the Afghan government on the other, making it a multilayer mediation case. Third, one of the conflicting parties (the Taliban) was a non-state actor when Qatar entered the process of mediation.

Literature Review

This section has been designed into three sections to give the readers an overall view of the thesis's topic and is organized thematically. The first section will explore mediation as a soft-power tool used by smaller states to survive and enhance their stability. The second section will determine how Qatar, through its activist foreign policy, has compensated for its "smallness" and become an important player in the region due to its mediation role in various cases. The third and last section will pinpoint the Qatari mediation strategy in the Afghan case during the period 2013–2022.

1.5.1 Mediation and Small states

The structure of the international system had shifted dramatically by the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s. Furthermore, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, many new small states with various degrees of power emerged. The Middle East in general and the Gulf region in particular are no exception to this shift. Power and hegemony have always been in the hands of bigger states, such as Egypt, Iraq, Syria, and Saudi Arabia, while smaller states, such as Qatar, Bahrain, the UAE, and Kuwait, have had a marginalized role and been weaker in terms of security (Almezaini & Rickli, 2017). The rapid changes in the Middle East, however, have strengthened the position of smaller Gulf states, especially after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in the 1990s and the fall of Iraq in 2003. Smaller states started to realize their security dilemma and tried to find tools to be applied to their policies to compensate for their

smallness. In Almezani and Rickli's (2017) book, they mention that "small states moved from being passive to active actors with the ability to play significant roles in different regions" (p. 3). Consequently, states began to use various methods to conduct their foreign relations and achieve their goals. Therefore, it could be argued according to the existing literature that a shift occurred from a material dimension to a non-material one and that "small states" were impacted by such a shift (Galal, 2019).

Still, by reviewing the literature on international relations, and although many scholars were attracted to the concept of the small state, there is still no single unified and precise definition of the term. This thesis, however, shares the opinion that a small state is defined not only by its area, population, or military capabilities but also by its ability to deal with internal and external threats (Alford, 1984). Hence, a state's being proactive in the international arena is what defines its size. Galal (2019) analyzes certain variables that could be used as indicators of a small state, which in my opinion are applied to the state of Qatar. These indicators include creating a brand for the state, using soft power, such as mediation, and following greater powers. On the other hand, Miller (2019) believes that small states are more sensitive than bigger states to external circumstances. Hence, these states, each in their own ways, have worked to find solutions to how to overcome the challenges of being small and thus appear as more productive members of the international community. Furthermore, small states following a strategy of survival started to create independent foreign policies. Miller analyzes the cases of Qatar and the UAE, which expanded their sovereignty and reshaped their policies to find a place for their countries in the international system. In another article, Miller (2018) agrees that Qatar has challenged the traditional view of small states' being vulnerable and inactive through its engagement on multiple fronts as a mediator. This is also related to Kamrava's (2011)

argument that Qatar, as a small state in a complex neighborhood, overcomes this smallness through the adoption of mediation in its foreign policy.

It is often believed that small states engage in the mediation process to develop their soft power in order to face their security dilemmas. Abu Sulaib (2017) mentions that, in terms of landmass and population, Qatar, for instance, is classified as a small state, yet the country has exercised considerable power and influence in politics and foreign policy. On the other hand, Zweri and AlQawasmi (2022) discuss that three Gulf countries considered small states—Kuwait, Oman, and Qatar—have chosen mediation as part of their foreign policy. Qatar uses mediation to secure its stability and recreate a state brand. It has succeeded in numerous mediation or negotiation efforts, such as the Palestinian cause, Sudan, and Lebanon. Although many of these cases are complex and have many implications, Qatar's engagement in such a process is due to its regional vision and aspirations.

Moreover, Zweri and AlQawasmi (2022) believe that Qatar has two essential features that other mediators might not: 1) a lack of internal conflicts and 2) the fact that it is one of the wealthiest countries and a significant producer of LNG and hence can provide the needed assistance to conflicting parties. Likewise, according to Minich (2015), Qatar is considered a small state with a security dilemma historically resolved by being attached to its major neighbor, Saudi Arabia. Things changed in the mid-1990s, however, as Qatar began to use its mediation skills, including maneuvering, which means having the ability to be friends with everyone and no enemies. For instance, it maintains good relations with Iran while also hosting an American military base. Hashim (2020) mentions that many small states use their economic and other means to enhance their security by using soft power to implement an activist foreign policy. This strategy is linked to many small states, such as the

UAE, Qatar, and Singapore, which used their wealth to enhance their foreign policies and emerged from “nobodies” to significant international players.

In a related context, the importance of mediation lies in its characteristics as an alternative tool used to prevent coercion and violence in resolving international disputes by peaceful means. According to Wall, Stark, and Standifer (2001), mediation is “an assistance to two or more interacting parties by a third party who usually have no authority to impose an outcome” (p. 370). Still, for the mediation process to begin, the disputing parties must request and accept the engagement of a third party. Likewise, the latter should accept the role of mediator. Kleiboer (1996) indicates three characteristics that improve the chance of a third party’s being accepted by the disputing parties: a) impartiality, b) leverage, and c) status. Henceforth, and as a broad definition, *mediation* is a tool of conflict management that requires the acceptance of disputing parties to have an outsider mediate their conflict by assisting, managing, and resolving the dispute if possible.

This section points out the gap in research on how a small state is defined. My research, however, addresses this gap by arguing that a state is not defined by its size of land and population but rather by how it conducts its foreign policy and is able to influence regionally and internationally. Qatar gives evidence of being able to overcome its smallness and adopt a foreign policy that enables it to be in the level to bigger hegemonic power in terms of its ability to guide and preserve peace and security.

1.6.2 Qatar’s Foreign Policy

According to Zahlan (1999), the independence of Qatar in 1971 is considered a turning point in the country’s history, as it was then that it became known on the map. Qatar since then has gained its full sovereignty and become a member of the

United Nations. A year after independence, in 1972, Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad Al Thani became the Emir. Gray (2013) details Qatar's politics and challenges. The book's second chapter covers Sheikh Khalifa's role during his leadership from 1972 to 1995. While Sheikh Khalifa has led to a huge transformation on the social and economic levels, he and his son Hamad disagreed on many issues, especially those relating to Qatar's strategic direction toward surrounding threats. Generally, Abdulla (2014) mentions that Qatar's presence was minimal in the international arena until the mid-1990s. He believes that Qatar was not very different from the rest of the Gulf countries, which were conducting their affairs under Saudi hegemony. Many of their internal and external decisions were made based on Saudi decisions.

Nevertheless, the size of the country and its location in a complex region demanded a big change that was not accepted by Sheikh Khalifa. Consequently, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa came into power in 1995 after a bloodless coup. This thesis agrees with Abdulla's (2014) argument that three important events are considered milestones in the history of Qatar's foreign policy evolution: first, the invasion of Kuwait in 1990 (the First Gulf War), an incident that proved the weakness of the Gulf states; second, the end of the First Gulf War in 1991 (known as the liberation of Kuwait); and third, the arrival of Sheikh Hamad in power in 1995. Another important incident also posed a serious challenge to Qatar and caused the aforementioned armed clash between Qatar and Saudi Arabia in 1992 over a disputed border region. This clash is known as the "Al Khufous" incident.

Furthermore, on a regional level, Sheikh Hamad has faced challenges since he came into power, as Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states (mainly the UAE and Bahrain) kept supporting his father Sheikh Khalifa and organized a countercoup attempt in 1996 that failed (Barkat, 2014). Consequently, Sheikh Hamad seemed

aware of the necessity of introducing many changes to his country's policies including the transformation of the direction of his country's foreign policy. Moreover, as Feiler and Zeev (2017) note, since Qatar is one of the world's least populated countries, the new government seemed aware of the fragility of the country to build coherent military forces to face any surrounding threat. Hence, an independent foreign policy was created that reflects five main principles: 1) preserving sovereignty and independence, 2) defending the country's Arab and Islamic identities, 3) respecting international treaties, 4) strengthening international peace and security and defending public and private freedom and human rights (MOFA, n.d.). Furthermore, the Qatari constitution states clearly the direction of the country's foreign policy in article 7, which states:

“The foreign policy of the state of Qatar is based on the principle of enhancing international conflicts by peaceful means, supporting the right of the people to self-determination, abstaining from interference in the internal affairs of other countries and cooperating with all nations that seek peace.”

In a similar context, Akpınar (2015) states that “the rise of Qatar as a giant energy exporter in the 1990s has also been influential in the craving of a more confident and active foreign policy” (p. 258). In other words, receiving huge amount of revenue from energy sectors helped the country adopt a foreign policy to ensure its national security and reduce the threats to its survival. In addition to that, this thesis shares Abu Sulaib's (2017) argument that Qatari foreign policy relies on three main factors: contradictory alliances, economic capabilities, and developing a media outlet by establishing one of the leading media networks in the region. Al Jazeera, the famous media network, played a crucial role in changing public opinion and raising awareness of different issues in the Middle East. As Feiler and Zeev (2017) argue,

“the popularity of Al Jazeera has helped create an image of Qatar as almost on par with Saudi Arabia in terms of influence and importance, an image upon which Qatari foreign policy has been capitalizing” (p. 28). According to Cavusoglu’s (2020) argument, the reason for Qatar’s success at building a reputation and brand for the country as a credible partner is its focus on “strategies” in foreign and domestic politics. Sheikh Hamad, as described by the literature, has adopted proactive diplomacy with new broader goals and strategies. The researcher agrees with Cavusoglu’s (2020) argument that two significant elements were behind the pursuit of Qatar’s proactive foreign diplomacy: diplomatic mastery and a balancing strategy.

Gray (2013) discusses in detail how Qatar was transformed under the leadership of Sheikh Hamad in terms of benefiting from the energy resources, developing a political economy, diversifying investments, and creating a brand of the states which allowed the country to find a position in the international arena and face future challenges. Furthermore, Peterson (2006) analyzed two factors that shaped Qatar’s integration and emergence in the international system since 1995. The first factor is the surrounding problems and threats around Qatar. The second factor is how Qatar responded to such problems by creating a brand of the state to ensure its survival. This includes Qatar’s attempts to enhance its legitimacy by engaging as a mediator in various conflicts and hosting major international meetings and conferences.

A clear practice of the adoption of proactive diplomacy is the international mediation role assumed by Qatar since the early 2000s. Mediation also officially entered the Qatari constitution in 2003 and thus has become a key pillar of the foreign policy, as stated earlier. By engaging as a mediator, Qatar aimed to help the parties reach a mutual agreement and find a solution to their problem. Mediation has become

part of Qatar's foreign policy not only to deter the surrounding threats but also out of the country's belief in the principles of the importance of maintaining a secure life for all humanity.

Subsequently, Qatar mediated nearly 10 regional and international crises at the request of concerned parties and without interfering in the internal affairs of states, which helped the country rapidly gain a prestigious position, become a prominent mediator in the Middle East, and survive the surrounding situation. According to Akpinar (2015), "Qatar's image as a peacemaker serves as a tool for ensuring its national security in a volatile region by reducing the number of regional or global opponents Qatar might face otherwise" (p. 258). Qatar hence has long experience in neutral mediation, including conflicts in Yemen, Sudan, Lebanon, Palestine and Djibouti/Eritrea. These cases of conflict, focusing on the Qatari mediation role, will be addressed separately to highlight the general feature and context of each in comparison to the case of this thesis, Afghanistan.

Yemen

An intermittent war called the "Six Wars" broke out in Saada governorate and neighboring areas in northern Yemen in 2004. The spark of the conflict was an incident where three Yemeni soldiers were killed by the Houthis, and the government announced a decision to arrest and kill the leader of the Houthi rebels, Hussein Al Houthi. Although the government succeeded in killing him and several of his supporters, the conflict broke out again, then intensified between pro-government tribal members against the Houthi tribal militants; this fighting reached the capital, Sanaa, in 2005. As Akkas (2021) mentions, the roots of the Yemeni conflict are embodied in the composition of the social system, which is based on tribal dimension, which in turn affect the political and security situation in Yemen. Since then, there

have been six rounds of violence punctuated by ceasefire agreements and failed attempts to mediate.

As the situation kept worsening, the former president of Yemen, Ali Abdulla Saleh, invited Qatar to visit Saada to mediate between the government and the Houthis. Consequently, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, accompanied by a delegation from the Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs, visited the Yemeni province and attended several meetings with the conflicting parties (Barkat, 2014). The efforts resulted in a declaration of a ceasefire between the two sides on June 16, 2007, and a peace agreement was signed in Doha on Feb 8, 2008. Moreover, Qatar has allocated money for investment in damaged areas in Saada, but a problem occurred. The government wanted to control the investment money fully, concerning Qatar that the money might be misused or not achieve its aim, as asserted by Alqashouti (2021). Hereafter, this problem led to friction between the Yemeni and Qatari governments. As analyzed by Al Qahtani and Al Thani (2021), however, some forces within the two parties to the conflict worked in favor of some neighboring countries to accumulate their gains. In other words, the Qatari efforts were thwarted due to personal goals, leading both parties to return to fighting until the end of 2009.

Despite the end of Doha's role in Yemen, it tried to build again on what had been achieved and resumed its mediation efforts in the summer of 2010. Indeed, these efforts were crowned once again with success with an agreement between both parties to renew their commitments to a truce and ceasefire in August 2010, known as the "Doha agreement". The same month, however, and in conjunction with the Qatari efforts, Saudi Arabia invested nearly a billion dollars in the areas damaged by the war. As Al Qahtani and Al Thani (2021) argue, according to some observers, the Saudi announcement had a negative effect on the Qatari mediation, resulting in a change in

the position of the conflicting parties. Still, the Doha agreement is considered a success of the Qatari mediation regardless of whether the conflicting parties retreat from what was agreed upon or whether there will be influence from neighboring countries.

Sudan

The conflict in Sudan, known as the “Darfur Conflict,” began in 2003 and reached its peak in 2008, forcing many international players to try to find a solution. Thus, in 2008, Qatar was named as a representative of the Arab League to mediate talks between conflicting parties. According to Barkat (2014), this helped Qatar gain a regional mandate for involvement. According to Al Qahtani and Al Thani (2021), however, the Qatari role in the Sudan case began in 2006 when Qatar became a non-permanent member of the Security Council. After two years of unsuccessful attempts, the government of Sudan and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) signed a ceasefire agreement in 2010, and Omar Al Bashir declared the conflict over. Later, many other agreements between smaller groups were signed, and all of these documents, including the main agreement, are known as the “Doha Documents” (MOFA, n.d.).

One of the important features of this case, as explained by the literature, is the involvement of high-level officials from the Qatari government. For instance, the former Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Ahmad bin Abdulla Al Mahmoud spent months traveling between different countries to consult regarding the conflict in Sudan. He also managed to visit Khartoum quite often and met with the conflicting parties. In addition, Qatar held many talks in its capital; as Alqashouti (2021) asserts, “Qatar hosted large delegations for months, including both track-one elite talks and track-two negotiations with civil society representative“ (p. 8). A follow-up

committee for the implementation of the “Doha Document” began holding meetings between Doha and Khartoum periodically under the chairmanship of Qatar and the United Nations.

The efforts of Qatar continued, with the cooperation of other actors, mainly Germany and the African Union, with the aim of urging the factions that had not yet signed the Doha Agreement to engage in negotiations with the Sudanese government. Such efforts succeeded through the signing of a framework agreement in 2018 between the government and two of the most vital movements within Sudan: Justice and Equality and the Sudan Liberation Movement, which all agreed to resume negotiations in Doha. Negotiations hence began in Doha on this basis officially in January 2019. A wave of protests broke out against former president Omar Al Bashir, however, leading to his removal in April the same year. Still, the Sudanese were unable to sit at the negotiation table in Doha. According to the literature, it became clear later that some regional powers did not welcome the Qatari role and wanted Sudan to be fodder for some conflicts in the region, including the wars in Yemen and Libya (Al Qahtani & Al Thani, 2021).

Although many other regional and international players are considered important to the achievement of the treaties signed between the Sudanese conflicting parties, the Qatari effort is the most vital (Barakat, 2014). Nevertheless, Qatar faced many challenges in the process that included criticism by internal Sudanese and other geopolitical confronts such as the blockade that was imposed in June 2017 against Qatar. The Quartet— Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt—tried to force Sudan to cut ties with Qatar. There were also many attempts by the UAE to shift talks between the Sudanese to Abu Dhabi. The international community, however, formed a committee under the leadership of the United States with the inclusion of certain

countries to support Sudan. There were only four Arab countries: Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, and Qatar. Hence, the Qatari role continued, and there were many visits to Khartoum, Juba, and Addis Ababa by Qatari officials until the signing of the Sudan Peace Agreement in August 2020, and Qatar was among the few countries that witnessed the signing of the agreement. The agreement was followed by visits of South Sudanese and Sudanese officials in charge of negotiations to Doha. Moreover, according to the QNA official website (2021), the first deputy of the Sudanese Sovereign Council, Mohamed Hamdan Daglo (“Hamedti”), conducted the first visit to Doha in January 2021, and several consultations were held with Qatari officials on the implementation of Juba agreement, recognizing the effective Qatari role that contributed to the promotion of peace and development in Sudan and the Darfur region.

Lebanon

In 2008, Lebanon was about to enter a civil war as a result of the power vacuum that lasted for a year and a half due to disagreements between political parties. Knowing that Saudi Arabia would be sensitive to any unilateral Qatari role in Lebanon, Qatari officials sought to support their role by obtaining a mandate from the Arab League. Qatar relied mainly on its positive image in the eyes of the Lebanese conflicting parties, which convinced the Arab League that Qatar was the right player for the mediation process (Aljazeera, 2008). Moreover, Qatar maintained a good relationship with all Lebanese parties, especially during the Lebanese civil war, as well as a good relationship with Tehran and Damascus, which had political weight in Lebanese affairs. Thus, Qatar’s role started to emerge in the crisis, as Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani invited all political parties in Lebanon to Doha with the aim of negotiating, mediating, and reaching an agreement. The Lebanese conflicting parties

accepted the invitation, and many meetings were held in Doha, resulting in the signing of an agreement by the Lebanese political parties known as the “Doha Agreement” in May 2008 (Cowell & Bakri, 2008).

Consequently, and after a long period of negotiations between the Lebanese parties under the leadership of Doha as a mediator, which according to the literature employed its political and economic capabilities and its international relationships to solve the crisis, they agreed to elect a new president and a government, a step welcomed by many regional and international powers, including Iran and the United States. Thus, months of political tension in Lebanon were ended, and an outbreak of another potential civil war was avoided.

According to Alqashouti (2021), “Qatar’s policy follows a model of true impartiality and having ‘no agenda’ as stated many times by Qatari officials. Moreover, the mandate to mediate deriving from international legitimacy is a central dynamic of the Qatari foreign policy” (p. 83). Hence, Qatar’s mediation in Lebanon is considered one of the biggest successes in Qatar’s two-decade profile of mediation. The main reason behind this success is Qatar’s policy of favoring nobody. In other words, all parties are equal to Qatar.

Palestine

Qatar mediated between Fattah and Hamas, two of the internal Palestinian factions who both aims to have their country liberated from the Israeli occupation, yet they disagree on many matters which resulted to a continues conflict. As represented by the literature, the Palestinian authority led by Abbas who is a member of Fattah movement supports reaching a negotiated peace agreement with Israel that gives the Palestinians an independent state in the West Bank and Gaza and to coexist with Israel. While on the other hand, Hamas charter calls for the elimination of Israel, but

at the same time it is prepared to reach an indefinite ceasefire. However, the two movements were unable to resolve the problem on their positions (Hassan, 2017).

Hence, many external players including Qatar mediated between both parties. In the Qatari role, and under the leadership of Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, he was able to bring both parties to Doha where they went through many negotiations that resulted in the signature of the Doha agreement in 2012 (Qarjouli, 2013). Although both parties promised their willing to follow the agreement and achieve what is best for their country, the tension between them continued due to disagreements. Furthermore, Qatar hosted several meetings between Fattah and Hamas in 2016 to discuss the implementation of previous treaties. However, and as described by Qarjouli (2013) “tension between the parties torpedoed all prospects of the deal”. On the other hand, Egypt mediated between both sides several times and the last one was in 2017 where both parties reached a long-term agreement on major issues. However, none of the agreements was implemented. As discussed by Alqashouti (2021), in all ways, the Qatari diplomacy made notable efforts to send humanitarian aids during the clashes especially when Gaza was under blockade as well as its several attempts to broke ceasefire between Palestinian factions and Israel.

Djibouti/Eritrea

A border dispute occurred and escalated in 2008 when Djibouti accused Eritrea of penetrating its territory. In June 2008, tensions escalated when Djibouti moved its troops to confront Eritrean troops and violence increased that caused the death of 35 soldiers. Many reports were submitted to the United Nations, and the Security Council adopted resolution 1907, which imposed an arms embargo on Eritrea and a travel ban on its officials (United Nations Official). Moreover, the Security Council called several times on both parties to engage into a dialogue and avoid any

further escalation.

Nevertheless, it seemed that international efforts did not help end the conflict. Thus, in 2010, Qatar made an offer to mediate between the countries that both countries accepted. A committee was headed by former Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim Al Thani, and the committee's membership comprised two Eritreans and two Djiboutians. Both sides agreed to allow Qatari forces to monitor the disputed borders. Since the agreement, the Eritrean troops have been pulled back. Qatar's forces, along with logistical and tactical support, remained on the border. Qatari negotiators also continued their consultations with the two sides to redraw the borders between the two countries and consider the possibility of agreeing to resort to arbitration or to the International Court of Justice. Qatar also made efforts to exchange prisoners of war between the two sides, and, in 2016, Eritrea as a result released four Djiboutian prisoners of war. Qatar, however, decided to withdraw its forces, as both Djibouti and Eritrea announced their stand with the Quartet, mainly Saudi Arabia, after the blockade that was imposed on Qatar in 2017 (Reuters, 2017). In addition, and as the role of Qatar as a mediator and monitor of the border between both countries illustrates its financial resources, Qatar chose to redirect its resources to face the threat of the blockade, as asserted by the literature.

This section indeed fills the gap in the research on Qatari's foreign policy, goals, and strategies. It also highlights five different Qatari mediation efforts, which have varied between traditional diplomatic one-track efforts (as in Yemen, Lebanon, Palestine and Eritrea/Djibouti) and multi-track efforts targeting political groups and civil society (as in Sudan). This thesis addresses the question of how Qatar became a trusted ally and why it has chosen mediation as a core pillar of its foreign policy. The only gap that has been observed, however, is that there has been no deep analysis of

the Qatari role in different conflicts, just a general description based on researchers' opinions.

1.6.3 Qatari Role in the Case of Afghanistan

The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979 with the aim of launching a pro-communist regime in Kabul, as the previous regime was overthrown after a revolution by the Afghan people. It is worth noting that both Afghanistan and the Soviet Union signed a treaty in 1978 in which they agreed to develop their economic and military cooperation (Aljazeera, 2021). Hence, the Soviet Union used the treaty as an excuse for its invasion. Moreover, the Soviet Union considered Afghanistan important to its national security and a gateway to Asia. On the other hand, some Afghans opposed this invasion, and the United States, Pakistan, and other regional powers played a central role in backing them against this invasion. These opponents become later known as "Mujahideen" an Arabic word that means "religious warriors." The Mujahideen were able to defeat Soviet occupying forces in 1989 due to the vast logistic, financial, and military support they received from external power. When the Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989, however, the mujahdyn began to fight each other for power. In 1994, a group of mujahdyn rose rapidly and surprisingly under the name of the "Taliban" and were able to gain control of most parts of Afghanistan (Tavana et al., 1998). By 1996, Kabul had been captured by the Taliban. They implemented highly restrictive laws in the name of Islam. Still, both Muslims and non-Muslims described such laws as inhumane.

Consequently, international concern was reinforced by what happened in Afghanistan, and the biggest obstacle for the Taliban at that time was gaining recognition from the rest of the international community (Öztürk, 2019). Moreover, many terrorist groups found a home in Afghanistan, specifically Al Qaeda, a group

whose origins go back to 1979 and the fight against the Soviet invasion. According to Albrecht et al. (2021), “Afghanistan is marked by a history of conflict, which are interstate, intrastate as well as non-state conflict” (p. 47). With the rapid changes in the region and the establishment of American military bases in the many Gulf states after the liberation of Kuwait, Al Qaeda focused its attention on fighting the U.S. presence. Nevertheless, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE were the only countries to recognize the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan. The United States, on the other hand, did not pay the attention it should have to the rise of Taliban and the situation in Afghanistan. Indeed, it found the rise of the Taliban beneficial, mainly due to the emergence of a new ally against Russia and, likewise, one that could help isolate Iran (Öztürk, 2019). In describing the situation, Taviana et al. (1998) state that “a vacuum was created by Soviet departure and U.S disengagement which resulted in a civil war with increasingly ethnic divisions, the influx of terrorist groups and rivalry between regional powers, most notably Iran and Pakistan” (p. 10). Thus, the internal situation kept getting worse in Afghanistan due to internal conflicts as well as the strict laws imposed by the Taliban.

Furthermore, the attacks of 9/11 on the United States shocked the world generally, and the United States particularly, and the Taliban was the main suspect, as it was the host country to several terrorist groups, mainly Al Qaeda, according to the United States. As a result, the United States invaded Afghanistan in 2001 and toppled the Taliban regime. Jones (2020), in his testimony, discusses the U.S. interests in Afghanistan, which have evolved over the years. He believes that the United States was trying to get rid of Al Qaeda, prevent the region from sliding into instability, and stop any future humanitarian crisis. Therefore, a new government under Hamid Karzai was established in July 2002. The Taliban remained, however, and got

stronger in Afghanistan; eventually they were able to control vast parts of the country. Öztürk (2019) mentions that it was impossible for both the United States and Karzai's government to control all of Afghanistan due to Pakistan's huge financial and logistical support of the Taliban.

The U.S. presence in Afghanistan lasted many years and claimed the strategic victory of getting rid of terrorist groups, specifically Al Qaeda. Nonetheless, in 2011 in Pakistan, during the Obama administration, the United States was able to kill Osama bin Laden, considered the head of the Al Qaeda movement. Consequently, President Obama announced his plan to withdraw American troops from Afghanistan. Furthermore, it is believed that the idea behind the announcements was the recognition that there might be no military victory since the Taliban kept growing and controlling many parts of Afghanistan (Hodali, 2021). Based on what has been analyzed by the literature, the reason for the rise of the Taliban regardless the presence of American troops and the establishment of a new "democratic" government, was *corruption*, which limited the capabilities of the government as well as the national forces.

At the request of the United States and with the acceptance of the Taliban, the Qatari role as a mediator in Afghanistan began to emerge. Qatar has hosted Taliban officials since 2011 to discuss peace efforts. In 2012, an official delegation of eight Taliban senior officials arrived in Doha to set up an office (Ulrichsen, 2014). It is worth noting, as Ayman (2016) mentions, that the office opened with the agreement of the Afghan government. Still, the Afghan government set a condition that the office should be held by the Afghan High Peace Council. On the American side, the Obama administration supported the office with the purpose of paving the way for Afghan–Afghan negotiations to achieve the smooth withdrawal of the U.S. forces

(Katzman, 2019). A dispute occurred only few weeks later, however, when the Taliban used the former Taliban government flag and the name of “Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan” on the building. The Obama administration, at the same time, was insisting that the office should not represent an embassy of Taliban. Consequently, the dispute led to the closure of the office and several postponements of the negotiations.

Nonetheless, Qatar remained on the scene as mediator between the Afghan government and the Taliban on one side and the Taliban and the United States on the other. Talks between the United States and the Taliban revived in 2014, and many meetings were held to discuss the exchange of prisoners between them. Blanchard (2014) states that Qatar remained “an interlocutor” with the Afghan Taliban movement, especially with respect to the exchange of prisoners. In 2017, the new U.S. president, Donald Trump, announced a new strategy to end any U.S. military intervention in foreign countries and insisted on the importance of ending the “crisis” in Afghanistan. Consequently, Trump appointed a special representative to start negotiations with Taliban. After long rounds of meetings, an agreement was signed between the United States and the Taliban in February 2020 in Doha. One of its main provisions was the full withdrawal of U.S. and foreign troops from Afghanistan, while the Taliban should stop being host to international terrorists (Jones, 2020). The agreement is undoubtedly considered a historic event because it provided a clear map for the disputing parties to end military operations within a specific period. Likewise, it helped end the longest military occupation in history.

Al Anssari (2020) illustrates that the reasons behind the success of Qatari efforts has been the belief of all disputing parties in the integrity of Qatar as a mediator. Many attempts were made by Saudi Arabia and the UAE to take on the Qatari role in Afghanistan, but they failed. Oglu (2021) stated that the Qatari role as a mediator has

been reinforced since 2011, and even before, as there were secret meetings, because Doha was accepted by both the Afghan government and the Taliban. Furthermore, due to its hosting of the American military base, Qatar has further gained a position acceptable to all parties.

In August 2021, as the American military troops departed Afghanistan, the Taliban was able to take control of the country, including the presidential palace (Zucchini, 2021). As Barkat (2021) describes it, “the president’s sudden departure was a complete shock” (p. 6). Hence, the country entered a situation of chaos, as thousands of people fled the country either through desert borders or the Kabul airport. Many foreign nationals were similarly trying to leave the country. At this stage of the Afghan cause, the Qatari role as a mediator entered reached a new level. Thus, and according to Lulwa Al Khater, Qatari Minister of State for International cooperation, the Qatari mediation efforts in Afghanistan could be divided into two main tracks: *before the U.S. withdrawal* and *after the U.S. withdrawal* (Al Araby, 2021). Qatar has helped since the takeover by the Taliban to evacuate a huge number of Afghans and foreigners from Afghanistan. It is often described as the hugest evacuation process in history. Moreover, after August 2021, many embassies moved from Kabul to Doha to be closer to the negotiations process (Al Araby, 2021). Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, Qatari Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs has also stated that Qatar enjoys a unique position in the Afghan cause due to its integrity and neutrality. The statement was further explained by the State Minister, Al Khater, that Qatar can talk with all disputing parties due to its good relations with everyone, and it enjoys flexibility in doing so that other mediators might not have (Al Araby, 2021). Although the cost is high for a country like Qatar to engage as a mediator in complicated crises like Afghanistan’s, the rewards are enormous. The

mediation role could create the needed geostrategic depth for small countries like Qatar (Alqashouti, 2021). Obviously, Qatar has become an international destination for arranging the situation in Afghanistan since the takeover by the Taliban, bringing it international appreciation.

This section points out the gap in research on the Qatari mediation role in Afghanistan. The main research question of this thesis, however, addresses the gap by analyzing the Qatari mediation strategy in Afghanistan in comparison to the other five cases with the aim of finding the answer to what makes the Afghan case a unique one. Most of the existing literature is descriptive in terms of the Qatari role, especially related to the pre- and post-periods of signing the 2020 agreement in Doha between the Taliban and the United States.

1.7 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this thesis was created in accordance with related concepts that include *small states, diplomacy, soft power and mediation, and non-state actors*.

Small States

The structure of the international system had shifted dramatically by the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s. States began to use various methods to conduct foreign relations and achieve their goals. Therefore, a shift occurred from a material to a non-material dimension, and “small states” were affected by such a shift (Galal, 2019). Still, by reviewing the literature on international relations, and although many scholars were attracted to the concept of the small state, there remains no single unified and exact definition of the term (Alford, 1984). This thesis, however, shares the idea that a small state is not only defined by its area, population, or military

capabilities, but also by its ability to deal both with internal and external threats (Alford, 1984). In addition, its ability to be proactive in the international arena is what defines the size of a state. Galal (2019) analyzes certain variables that could be used as indicators of a small state, which in my opinion apply to Qatar:

- *Following great powers:* small states choose to follow one or more great powers to maintain their security and stability. This attitude is often known as “*bandwagoning*” (Walt, 1987).
- *Creation of hallmark/state branding:* small states choose to provide certain services to attract other states and make a mark on the international community. This can include the mediation process, humanitarian assistance, and foreign investment, which help the world be aware of their capabilities.
- *Soft power:* small states choose to develop their soft power at a level equal to their hard power with the aim of serving their national interests and implementing the goals of their foreign policies.

Diplomacy

In a wider sense, *diplomacy* is classified as a fundamental political activity that gives states the power to achieve the objectives of their foreign policies. Berridge (2010) illustrates the definition of diplomacy as “an important means by which states pursue their foreign policies” (p. 3). Thus, through diplomacy, states can achieve their national interests by knowing their needs and being able to deal with other nations effectively. In this matter, decision-makers need to be aware and alarmed to inform their leaders about how specific foreign policies should be drawn and followed. This is related to Nuechterlein’s (1976) argument that “the degree to which policymakers become alarmed about events in another country results from a process of thinking

through values and potential costs” (p. 248). On the other hand, a state should ensure that preserving its national interests does not harm the international order.

This thesis believes that Qatar considers following proactive diplomacy a vital principle of its foreign policy and a tool in building the hallmark/state branding over the past two decades. Furthermore, thanks to its proactive diplomacy, Qatar has developed its soft power at a level equal to hard control.

Soft Power and Mediation

The concept of *soft power* began to attract political-science and international-relations scholars during the 1990s, specifically by the end of the Cold Power. Generally, *power* as a concept refers to the ability to achieve certain aims by influencing the behavior of others. Joseph Nye is the originator of the concept of soft power; he defines it as the ability to “getting other to want what you want—co-opts people other than coerces them” (Nye, 2004, p. 14). Hence, two fundamental strategies could be used to affect others’ behavior: to coerce or co-opt. A state can gain and develop its soft power through different sources, such as foreign politics, culture, media, humanitarian assistance, foreign investment, tourism, and mediation endeavors (Al Rasheedi, 2021). This thesis shares the idea that Qatar uses *mediation* as a kind of soft power to create the needed geostrategic depth it lacks and gain a prestigious status in the international arena as the trusted and neutral mediator of all conflicts.

According to the United Nations charter, mediation is an important tool of implementing peaceful solutions, since conflict between individuals in the narrow sense and states in the wider sense is inherent in the human conditions (Bercovitch, 1985). Thus, such conflict requires the involvement of an outsider party as a mediator. The United Nations (2012) defines *mediation* as a “process whereby a third party assists two or more parties with their consent to preserve, manage or resolve a conflict

by helping them to develop mutually accepted agreement” (p. 4). Additionally, the mediation process could not exist without the acceptance of conflicting parties of the presence of a mediator. The role of mediator is, accordingly, affected by the environment of the conflict and its relationship with the parties.

The process of mediation starts with the enrollment of the mediator but does not necessarily end by signing a peace agreement between the conflicting parties. One necessary characteristic of a mediator is its ability to be aware of and flexible toward the changing circumstances. The United Nations (2012) outlines certain fundamentals to an effective mediation process, which include *preparedness, consent, impartiality, inclusivity, an international law framework, and a quality peace agreement.*

Non-state Actors

Until the early 21st century, the world was dominated by states. Still, the nature of authority each state exercises has changed for four main reasons: the transfer of the world into a multipolar system, globalization, the wave of democratization, and the continuous development of information and communication technology (ICT). Moreover, power is no longer centralized within a specific part of the world or in the hands of a particular country. This is because many new actors have emerged in the international arena classified as non-state actors (Wijninga et al., 2014). There is a wide range of non-state actors, each acting differently, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), media outlets, academic groups, lobby groups, terrorist groups, and many others. Since each exercises their power differently, some contribute positively to the world’s stability and vice versa.

Nevertheless, there is no definition of exactly what a *non-state actor* means, but it could be compared to states in order to understand its features (Wijninga et al., 2014). First, non-state actors do not control a specific population, although some can

be more influential than the state itself. Second, non-state actors do not have authority over a territory. Yet, similar to the previous indicator, non-state actors can effectively control parts of a country. Third, traditionally, a state is the only actor in the international arena able to conduct international relations with other states. Non-state actors can now conclude agreements with states in various fields. Henceforth, this thesis argues that a non-state actor can be defined as a group that, although not directed by a government, can influence specific populations and territories. From the discussed indicators, the Taliban could be classified as a non-state actor. It was able to exercise authority over the Afghan people, control large parts of Afghanistan, and negotiate and sign an agreement with the United States in 2020.

The four mentioned concepts were chosen as a conceptual framework for this thesis due to first, Qatar is considered a *small state* in terms of its size and population. Second, since the arrival of Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani in 1995, followed a proactive *diplomacy* through the creation of a foreign policy where it adopted various *soft power* tools and specifically *mediation* as one of its core pillars. Third, because of Qatar's foreign policy that it has followed since mid-1990s, it was able to gain a reputation of a trustworthy partner which hence, helped the state to deal with different actors in the international arena, including *non-state actors*.

1.8 Research Methodology

This thesis adopted a qualitative method to answer the research question of this thesis. As a method, it helps the researcher to analyze events from history and relate it to the current time. Furthermore, since this thesis intends to examine and analyze what makes Afghanistan a different case study compared to other previous cases of Qatar's mediation strategy, a "comparative case study" approach was adopted. As a methodological approach, a comparative case study helps the researcher cover two or

more cases that share the same goal to produce the required knowledge by analyzing their similarities, differences, and patterns.

1.8.1 Data Collection

Data were collected through two main techniques:

1) Semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interview format has been adopted as a technique for collecting the needed information because it is flexible and can be adapted and changed based on the responder's answers and flow of conversation. This method also helps develop a real sense of a person's understanding of a situation. As discussed by Stacey (1969), using open-ended questions helps the researcher solve complex issues and can also lead to new opinions and conclusions that have not yet been explored. Hence, the researcher interviewed eleven experts in the field, ranging from high-ranked Qatari, Afghani and American officials to experts familiar with Qatar's foreign policy and mediation strategy in Afghanistan. Experts from different backgrounds were selected. It is worth noting that since this thesis concentrates on Qatar foreign policy, the researcher obtained to meet with people either work or familiar with the foreign policy of Qatar, in order to come out with the needed answers and discussions. Furthermore, it was highly essential to have a perspective from related parties in the conflict, thus, the researcher interviewed an Afghani and American formal officials to get their insights on Qatar's mediation strategy in Afghanistan.

Recruiting Participants

A summary of the purpose of the study, the consent form (Appendix A), and the approved list of questions (Appendix B) were e-mailed to all participants right after obtaining the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from Qatar University (Appendix C). This helped participants understand the scope of the research and

review the questions so that no unexpected questions would be raised, which also encouraged them to be comfortable in the interview. The researcher also, during the informal communications, gave the participants the option of conducting the interview via e-mail or even SMS to show more flexibility and make participants more comfortable.

Face-to-face/virtual interviews

Once the researcher received the confirmation and consent from the invited participants to be interviewed, a day, time, and place for the interview were chosen. One of the Qatari official was met in his office in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The other official’s interview conducted virtually due to his current job abroad in one of Qatar’s embassies. Furthermore, the Afghani and American formal officials were both interviewed virtually. Regarding the academic experts, five of them were interviewed in person at their offices, while one was interviewed virtually, as he was working abroad. One expert also provided written answers and tried his best to provide even more explanation about the topic, as he was unable to be interviewed either virtually nor face-to-face as he lives in another country and has a very busy schedule.

Table 1. Characteristics of the participants interviewed

No.	Gender	Academic/Official	Degree	Nationality	Affiliation
01	M	Official - Diplomat	PhD	Qatari	MOFA
02	M	Academic	PhD	Palestinian	Hamad bin Khalifa University (HBKU)
03	M	Academic	PhD	Omani	National University of Singapore + Center of Islamic Area Studies
04	M	Academic	PhD	Turkish	Qatar University + Washington-based Atlantic Council
No.	Gender	Academic/Official	Degree	Nationality	Affiliation
05	M	Academic	PhD	Irish	Georgetown University - Qatar
06	M	Academic	PhD	American	Georgetown University - Qatar
07	M	Academic	PhD	Canadian	Heritage Institute for Policy Studies - Mogadishu

08	M	Official - Diplomat	M.A	Qatari	MOFA
09	F	Academic	PhD	Turkish	Sabanci University-Istanbul
10	M	Former Official	PhD	Afghani	Founding Member of the Taliban Political Office in Doha
11	M	Former Official	M.A	American	Former US National Security Advisor

2) Secondary Data Analysis

The researcher observed all published literature between previous studies, books, newspaper articles, and academic journal articles (English and Arabic). This was through online databases such as Qatar University library, Qatar National Library, Project Muse, ProQuest, J store, E Marfa, and Al Manhal. Furthermore, the researcher examined published interviews about Qatari foreign policy and mediation strategies by different Qatari officials to better understand the research topic.

Observing all the existing material from different types helped the researcher reach the needed answers for some of the research sub-questions. Moreover, it also helped the researcher to find the gap that needs to be bridged by relying on the primary method visa-a-ve the semi-structured interviews of experts and diplomats.

1.8.2 Restrictions and Limitation

The fact that the majority of the people selected to be interviewed rejected to participate especially officials, was a source of challenge for the researcher. The researcher communicated with at least eight of the Qatari officials, most of whom politely declined an interview due to their busy schedules. The researcher, however, was lucky enough to interview two of the diplomats on the team of the Qatari-led mediation efforts, and their answers added needed value to the thesis since they were considered the main representative of Qatar's engagement in the Afghani case. With regards to the officials from the US and Afghanistan, the researcher likewise, contacted at least seven from each side, but only two of them accepted to be interviewed and have their insights in this study. Thus, the researcher was keen to

choose academic participants based on their rich knowledge about mediation generally and Qatar foreign policy specifically to be able to reach the needed answers for this research question.

There were several other limitations to consider while interpreting the results of the study. First, the researcher is Qatari; hence, there was a chance of some shift in opinion in favor of Qatar. Prior to the research, however, and specifically before conducting the interview, the researcher studied how important it is to be neutral to avoid any wrong results. Hence, all the results discussed are based on participants' actual opinions. Second, the fact that most of the officials whom the researchers tried to interview declined to engage in the interview process was a challenge for the researcher. Yet, since the researcher got the chance to meet two of the diplomats responsible in a direct way for the Qatari mediation efforts in the Afghan case, it was discovered that their answers during the interview filled the need to meet more officials. Third, there were only a few studies discussing the Qatari role in the Afghan deals, and most of what the researcher reviewed was very brief. Thus, most of the discussion is in chapter three, which focuses on the case of the study relied on the conducted interviews, published interviews, and news articles. Likewise, the researcher's eight years of working experience as a diplomat at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was used and is reflected in the interpretation of the results.

1.9 Structure of the Research

The thesis comprises four chapters. Chapter one consists of the introduction of the research, the research problem, the significance of the research, the research questions, the research hypothesis, the literature review, the theoretical framework, and the research methodology. The second chapter is divided into three sections. The first section is about small states and mediation. The second section is about Qatar's

Foreign Policy and examines Qatar's soft-power tools which are media, sports, and global events and (LNG). The third section analyzes the history of Qatar's mediation processes, mainly in Yemen, Sudan/Darfur, Lebanon, Palestine and Djibouti/Eritrea. Chapter three is about Qatar's mediation strategy in Afghanistan. It begins with a background of the Afghan case. It then discusses the involvement of Qatar as a mediator between the Taliban and the United States and between the Taliban and the Afghan government. The chapter also examines the reconciliation treaty signed between the Taliban and the United States in Doha in 2020, the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban in 2021, and Qatar's role. The future of the Qatari role in the Afghan case is also discussed. Finally, chapter four presents the findings and conclusion of the overall thesis.

CHAPTER 2: MEDIATION IN QATARI FOREIGN POLICY

During the decolonization period in the Middle East, where the states of the region gained their independence from Britain and France, several small states were produced whose security dilemmas unfolded during and after specific incidents. Moreover, the constant competition between hegemonic powers in the region constituted an additional continuous load on small states. Observation and analysis of the literature reveals that these states tried to introduce methods to strengthen their positions and preserve their security and stability. For instance, the Iranian leaders of the time of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 were threatening to spread the ideas of the revolution to the region, targeting the regimes of the Gulf. Thus, the six Gulf

countries (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman), in response formed the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to face the continuous Iranian threats as a regional united bloc. This incident, however, was followed by eight years (1980–1988) of war between Iran and Iraq. What made things even more complicated for small Gulf states was the surprise of Iraq invading Kuwait in 1990. The GCC could not face the threat of one of its members being invaded and occupied by one of the hegemonic powers in the region. Hence, Qatar, as one of the small states in both size and population, realized its vulnerability in terms of hard power and has attempted since the mid-1990s to create a unique, active foreign policy with mediation, as a soft power, and one of its core pillars.

This chapter aims to answer the sub-research questions: 1) Why has Qatar chosen mediation as a core pillar of its foreign policy? and 2) How has Qatar become a trusted ally among international society? To explore and provide a comprehensive discussion of these questions, the chapter is presented in three main sections, each with sub-sections. The discussion will begin by exploring small states and mediation as soft power. Then, there will be an analysis of three Qatari foreign policy tools: media, sports, and global events and (LNG), which the researcher believes are overlapping and related to the research main topic. The last part of this section will focus on mediation as a fourth tool and analyze four cases where Qatar engaged as a mediator: Yemen, Sudan, Lebanon, and Djibouti/Eritrea.

2.1 Small States and Mediation as a Soft Power

To provide a comprehensive understanding of the linkage between small states and mediation as a soft-power tool, it is essential to review, first, what a small state is and how power can be applied to such small states. Furthermore, it is also essential to understand mediation and how it is considered a type of soft power. Thus, this section analyzes the linkage among the three concepts: small states, mediation, and soft

power.

Generally, *power* means the ability to do things and control others to do what they might not otherwise do (Nye, 1990). Traditionally, in international relations, power is linked to large states that can achieve military victory in wars and defeat their enemies. Conversely, smaller states are seen as fragile entities that cannot use military tools to defend themselves. Nevertheless, the international structure has undergone many changes, however, specifically during the 1990s (Elman, 1995). The researcher believes that two significant events in the early 1990s were behind this change: first, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and second, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. It could be argued that these two incidents, due to their proximity to the Gulf region and significantly the region's small states, affected how both small states and power can be defined, yet the literature generally lacks a unified definition of a small state. Some scholars define a small state based on its area and population, while others describe it based on how militarily strong a state is in defeating its enemies.

One can observe, however, that major powers' use of military tools declined after the two mentioned incidents. In other words, the traditional understanding of a state being powerful using military means has shrunk. This is because states have started using new tools to enhance their power to preserve their national interests and achieve their goals. Such tools have been called "soft power" in the literature." Joseph Nye, originator of the concept, defines *soft power* as the ability to "[get] others to want what you want—co-opt people other than coerce them" (Nye, 2004, p. 14). One might ask how a state would be able to do this, especially if such a state is classified as small and not well known in the international system. The simple answer is that a state can develop its soft power through foreign policies, cultural exchange, media outlets, humanitarian assistance, negotiation and mediation endeavors, as well as

foreign investment. This is also related to Galal's (2018) argument that "small states have begun to formulate effective foreign policies and transformed from inefficient states to efficient regional ones by the perception element of leadership variable and launching mediation initiatives" (p. 8). Therefore, it could be argued that, according to the existing literature, a shift has occurred from a material dimension to a non-material one and that "small" states have been affected by such a shift (Galal, 2019).

In addition, this thesis believes that a small state is not only defined or classified based on its size, population, or military capabilities but also by its ability to use soft power means and tools to achieve the desired goals. Likewise, a state's being powerful means being able to deal with internal and external threats (Alford, 1984). That said, how active a state is in the international arena defines its strength and capabilities. For instance, in terms of size, Singapore is considered a small state but cannot be put in the same category as Burundi, which is regarded as a failed state due to its civil wars, high percentage of corruption, and lack of ability to protect and defend itself from surrounding threats by using either hard or soft power. On the other hand, Singapore has always concentrated on developing its diplomatic and economic roles by pursuing a cooperative relationship with other countries. In many respects, Singapore also tries to establish its strategic weight and build prestige for itself.

Similarly, some states have created national brands by implementing soft-power tools. One of the tools on which this thesis focuses is mediation. As discussed by Zweri and Al Qawasmi (2022), smaller Gulf states, such as Kuwait, Oman, and Qatar, have chosen mediation as part of their foreign policies. Specific indicators could be applied to minor conditions that include the desire and effort to create a "state brand" and follow a greater power. According to various discussions in the literature, a state can create a brand by engaging as a mediator between conflicting

parties. In the Middle East, power has always been in the hands of bigger states and those more active in the international arena, such as Egypt, Iraq, Syria, and Saudi Arabia, while smaller states used to have a marginalized role due to being weak regarding security. Still, smaller states have moved from passive to active actors after the two mentioned incidents, as they played significant roles in different regions by using various tools, such as mediation (Almezani & Ricki, 2017).

Nevertheless, the definition of *mediation* varies in the literature on international relations. The United Nations (UN), however, has defined mediation as “a process whereby a third party assists two or more parties, with their consent to prevent, manage or restore a conflict by helping them to develop mutually acceptable agreements.” Moreover, the importance of mediation lies in its characteristics as a tool used to prevent coercion and violence in resolving international disputes by peaceful means. As discussed, and analyzed by Akpinar (2015), for the mediator to be considered ideal, there should be a sense of neutrality about them, meaning that the mediator should not have any interest in the outcomes of the mediation process. Furthermore, as Wall et al. (2001) discuss, two conditions must be met: the disputing parties must request or permit a third party to be engaged as a mediator, and the third party must consent to be a mediator in the conflict and meet all required characteristics to improve the likelihood of success. Furthermore, Kleiboer identified three significant factors that allow the third party to be accepted as a mediator between conflicting parties: impartiality, leverage, and status (1996).

On the other hand, Kamrava (2011) believes that the state usually mediates to enhance its regional role, image, or reputation in the international arena. In other words, a state’s goal in the mediation process is not always to resolve the conflict but to achieve its foreign-policy goals. This is also linked to Akpinar’s analysis that

mediation becomes a foreign-policy tool when a state engages as a mediator in any conflict (2015). In our case, this thesis considers mediation a foreign-policy tool often used by small states to create the strategic depth they lack and need, enhance their roles regionally and internationally, and secure their sovereignty by preventing their countries from facing damaging threats or being vulnerable to surrounding dangers. Qatar is one of the smallest yet wealthiest countries in the world and is at the forefront of the new global order and the significant changes to the concept of power (Ulrichsen, 2020). The following sections will reveal how Qatar, the small state, challenged the traditional understanding of a small state and acquired the trust of international society.

2.2 Qatar Foreign-Policy Tools

The state of Qatar is a peninsula in the Arabian Gulf between two of the hegemonic powers in the region, Saudi Arabia and Iran. It emerged as an independent political entity under Sheikh Mohamed bin Thani, the ruler from 1878–1850 (Zahlan, 1999). He overcame the old ambitions of the Bahrain Al Khalifa dynasty previously controlling Qatar. Thus, his country gained international recognition as a sovereign sheikhdom thanks to the tacit protection provided by Britain (Kamrava, 2013). Qatar gained its independence, however, from Britain in 1971, an event considered a turning point in the country's history, as it then became known on the map (Zahlan, 1999). Since then, Qatar has gained full sovereignty and become a member of the United Nations. A year after independence, in 1972, Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad Al Thani became the Emir. While Sheikh Khalifa has led a massive transformation at the social and economic levels, he and his son Hamad, the Crown Prince and armed forces commander in chief, disagreed on many issues, primarily those related to Qatar's strategic decisions (Gray, 2013). Abdulla (2014) mentions that Qatar's presence was

minimal in the international arena until the mid-1990s. During Sheikh Khalifa's reign, Qatar remained to derive its security guarantees from Saudi Arabia to face its surrounding threats. In other words, Qatar's internal and external decisions were based on Saudi findings (Filer & Zeev, 2017). Nevertheless, the size of the country and its location in a burning region has prompted a significant change that Sheikh Khalifa did not accept, as has been discussed and proved by most of the literature.

Consequently, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa came into power in 1995 after a bloodless coup. Sheikh Hamad believed that, due to his country's strategic yet sensitive location, Qatar had to achieve a balance by adopting an active independent foreign policy and seeking external protection (Peterson, 2006). On a regional level, Sheikh Hamad faced challenges since he came into power, as Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states (mainly the UAE and Bahrain) kept supporting his father, Sheikh Khalifa, and organized a failed countercoup attempt in 1996 (Barkat, 2014). Sheikh Hamad seemed aware of the necessity of changing the direction of his country's foreign policy. Moreover, as Feiler and Zeev (2017) have noted, since Qatar is one of the least populated countries in the world, the new government seemed to be aware of the fragility of the country to build coherent military forces to face any surrounding threats. Therefore, the Emir sought to balance his country's relationships and alliances to meet this challenge (Ulrichsen, 2020). Hence, an independent foreign policy was created by adopting various tools that reflect five main principles: 1) preserving Qatar's sovereignty and independence, 2) defending the country's Arab and Islamic identities, 3) respecting international treaties, 4) strengthening international peace and security, and 5) defending public and private freedom and human rights (MOFA, n.d.). Furthermore, the Qatari constitution clearly states the direction of the country's foreign policy in Article 7, which says, "the foreign policy of the state of Qatar is

based on the principle of enhancing international conflicts by peaceful means, supporting the right of the people to self-determination, abstaining from interference in the internal affairs of other countries and cooperating with all nations that seek peace.”

On the other hand, the evolving relationship between Qatar and the United States also guarantees the country’s sovereignty. This was evident in Qatar’s move toward the security orbit of the United States, especially with the call for establishing an American air base in Doha. The 1992 agreement laid the foundation for U.S.–Qatari cooperation (Abdulla, 2014). During Sheikh Hamad’s reign, the Qatari government moved toward securing a defense alliance, investing \$1 billion in the Al Udaid air base in the late 1990s (Ulrichsen, 2020). Another factor that played a key role is the transfer of the U.S. airbase operations center in the Middle East from Prince Sultan Airbase in Saudi Arabia to Doha due to the sensitivity of the kingdom to the presence of U.S. military personnel on its soil and the strained U.S.–Saudi relationship after the 9/11 attacks.

That said, the country steadily moved out from under the Saudi umbrella. It began to chart an independent, pragmatic foreign policy through which it sought to maintain good relations with contradicting players such as Iran and the United States or Hamas and Israel. Peterson (2006) analyzed two factors that shaped Qatar’s integration and emergence in the international system since 1995: the surrounding problems and threats around Qatar and how Qatar responded to such issues by creating a brand of the state to ensure its survival. Thus, it could be argued that three critical events are considered milestones in the history of Qatar’s foreign-policy evolution. The first is the invasion of Kuwait in 1990 (the First Gulf War). This incident proved the weakness of the Gulf states. The second is the end of the First

Gulf War in 1991 (known as the liberation of Kuwait). The third is the arrival of Sheikh Hamad in power in 1995. Another critical incident also imposed a severe challenge to Qatar and caused the mentioned change: the armed clash between Qatar and Saudi Arabia in 1992 over a disputed border region. This clash is known as the “Al Khfws” incident (Abdulla, 2014).

Sheikh Hamad was covered in the literature and analyzed by most of the interviewees in the thesis as adopting proactive diplomacy with new broader goals and strategies. That said, Qatar was transformed under the leadership of Sheikh Hamad in terms of benefiting from its energy resources, developing its political economy, diversifying its investments, and creating a brand for the state, which allowed the country to find a position in the international arena and face future challenges. When discussing adopting a unique foreign policy, the government worked on creating a national brand through various tools. Besides mediation, three other significant tools of Qatar’s foreign policy will be discussed in the following sections: media, sports and major global events, and LNG.

2.2.1 Media: Al Jazeera Network

The Al Jazeera channel was established in 1996 to create a national brand for Qatar. Abu Sulaib (2017) said, “Sheikh Hamad provided the Al Jazeera founding team with \$137 million to establish the channel; today, Aljazeera is one of the most influential aspects of Qatar diplomacy” (p. 30). Sheikh Hamad noticed the necessity of taking a step toward establishing a unique and high-quality channel. Consequently, Al Jazeera steadily proved itself the foremost opinion source in the Middle East. The channel was bold in its programs and discussion, with its famous motto “the opinion and the other opinion.” It was able to attract many Arab and Western Audiences. Al Jazeera also quickly evolved from one channel into a global network containing

channels in several languages, hundreds of electronic platforms on the internet, and social networking sites. Weigand (2013) asserts that Al Jazeera reached millions of audiences by broadcasting in different languages through several channels. For instance, Al Jazeera's famous programs focus on debates between hosts like *al-Itijah al-Muackis* (The opposite direction/point of view). Many other programs allowed Al Jazeera to reach millions of people inside and outside the region within a short period.

Most of the literature agrees that the main reason behind the success of Al Jazeera is its ability and desire to discuss sensitive Arab and Islamic issues. Most other Arab networks are reluctant to cover and critique some issues due to the control by their governments, which have a specific agenda and are usually afraid of discussing sensitive issues. Al Jazeera also succeeded during the Arab Spring in covering the protests that broke out in many Arab capitals. By contrast, many other Arab channels were banned by their governments from protecting against the incidents. During a testimony in 2011, then-U.S. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton talked about Al Jazeera, stating that "you may not agree with it, but you feel like you are getting real news around the clock" (Antwi-Boateng, 2013, p. 5). Likewise, Al Jazeera was able to maintain its reputation even when more channels were created, such as Sky News and Al Arabiya.

Moreover, according to Participant 2 in this research, after the establishment of Al Jazeera, Qatar began to build a reputation of openness in presenting opposing views, which later helped Qatar be seen as a neutral mediator. It could be argued that the network symbolizes the government's ambitions to enhance the country's regional influence through an open press. It represents a platform for Arab audiences to present and discuss their opinions and ask for their demands. The network succeeded in supporting sensitive Arab and Islamic causes, whereas, at the same time, other Arab

channels or networks, most of them owned by the government, represent biased views. That said, Al Jazeera helped Qatar expand its soft power and create a new agenda based on free speech, where it could be influential regionally and internationally. Gray, in explaining the influence of Al Jazeera on Qatar, mentions that “it contains an element to contribute to the goal of national branding and the redevelopment of the state’s and Emir’s image domestically and abroad” (p. 168). Hence, Al Jazeera has become a tool of Qatar’s foreign policy to implement its soft power by creating a brand for the country. Likewise, it has contributed to Qatar’s international image and reputation since its creation in 1996.

2.2.2 Sport and Other Major Global Events

Since the twentieth century, sports have acquired geopolitical importance with the increase in globalization. As Bascal (2013) argues, sports and major globalized competitions have become universal events that affect minds regardless of geographical, religious, social, or political differences. Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani implemented his concept of soft power. He also bet on sports and other significant events to introduce Qatar to the world and enhance its sovereignty. Gray mentions that “Al Jazeera has probably been the single largest contributor to Qatar’s international image and reputation since 1996, but not far behind has been its role as host of major sporting, cultural and other global events” (2013, p. 170).

That said, Qatar has invested in all areas of sports diplomacy, including sponsoring several competitions, obtaining exclusive broadcasting rights for international competitions, and purchasing foreign sports entities (Al-Rasheedi, 2021). Gray (2013) asserts that the Asian Games in Doha in 2006 were seen as a turning point in Qatar to become known internationally for its ability to host global events. Similarly, it is worth noting that the most considerable success achieved by

Qatar sports diplomacy was hosting the 2022 FIFA World Cup, an event considered the most media-attracting sporting event in the world. Qatar is the first Arab country to host the World Cup and has successfully represented Arab nations. The government, however, faced an aggressive campaign since winning its bid in 2010. Many doubted the ability of Qatar, as a small state, to gather “all the world” on its soil. Moreover, there were accusations of bribery to win the right to host the significant event. For 12 years, until the beginning of the championship, the campaign moved from accusing Qatar of corruption to accusing it of human-rights violations, especially against foreign labor.

As the world watched, however, Qatar was confident and strong enough to ignore the allegations and successfully host one of the most enjoyable versions of the World Cup, as asserted by most of the country’s visitors. Antwi-Boateng confirms that hosting significant sports events helped the country show off the best of its culture and hospitality. It thus clearly helped enhance the image of Qatar. In addition, Qatar established world-class training and treatment facilities that attracted international clubs and international competitors throughout the year, such as Aspire Academy and Aspetar Sports Medical Hospital (Bridgewater, 2006). Through the BEIN Sports Network sports channel, Qatar could also obtain the rights to broadcast the most important international tournaments, such as the major European leagues and several other continental championships.

On the other hand, Qatar, since the early 2000s, has hosted diplomatic events, such as the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) summit in November 2000 and, most importantly, the host of the ministerial-level talks in 2001 (Gray, 2013). Many important multilateral meetings since then have taken place in Doha, proving that the country can increase and enhance its presence internationally. For instance,

according to the MOFA website, Qatar hosted the fifth edition of the U.N. Conference on Least Developed Countries (LCD) in March 2023, a meeting held once every ten years. It confirms the support of Qatar for multilateral international actions and proves the international recognition of Qatar's importance to the world. In addition, the Doha Forum is one of the conferences organized and hosted by Qatar and is considered an international platform for dialogue, bringing together a distinguished group of leaders, intellectuals, policymakers, and journalists to discuss common challenges and search for solutions and opportunities (Doha Forum, n.d.).

2.2.3 Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG)

In 1971, Shell Oil discovered the largest gas field in the world, known as the North Field, in Doha (Filer & Zeev, 2017). It has given Qatar a unique position in the regional and international markets. Although Iran and Russia also possess the first and second largest reserves of natural gas, the rapid development of Qatar's natural gas potential since the mid-1980s has allowed it to become the leading exporter of LNG. According to Wright (2013), "Qatar's energy policy appears to be dictated by the fundamentals of supply and demand, with energy contracts going to the market where the highest price or volumes can be achieved (p. 303). Thus, the ability of Qatar to play a significant role in this field is evident. Qatar is adopting a specific energy strategy by creating stakeholders in its ability to diversify its relationships by meeting the demands of other foreign countries. Hence, the strategy could, in return, indirectly provide Qatar with the security it needs because the need of its partners for LNG is attached to its stability. That said, the wealth Qatar gains from LNG is critical in enhancing its image in the international arena and is thus linked to its foreign-policy goals.

Likewise, Qatar plays an important role regionally and internationally. For

instance, on the regional level, the Dolphin project links Qatar with the UAE and Oman for its gas supply. On the international level, Qatar exports to different countries in Asia and Europe, such as South Korea, Japan, India, the United Kingdom, and many countries in Latin America as well as the United States (Kumar, 2021). Therefore, the revenues from the LNG helped Sheikh Hamad enhance his legitimacy in the country when he became the Emir in the mid-1990s. He consolidated his control over the ongoing rivalries within the ruling family by putting them directly in charge of inner development (Miller, 2018). Moreover, during his role, Qatar was able to build strong government institutions and an extensive welfare system that met the needs of the country's citizens, which helped maintain a high degree of social cohesion and central authority. It could be argued that the internal stability that Sheikh Hamad achieved due to LNG revenues allowed him to pursue an unprecedented creative and bold foreign policy. Accordingly, as Al-Obaidan has summarized, "If natural wealth constitutes a fundamental component of power, Qatar will serve as a model for a small state redistributing such wealth for tools that fulfill its foreign policy long-term objectives of appropriately positioning the country in the international system". (2022, p. 81). In other words, the fact that Qatar has become the world's largest source of LNG has played a crucial role in adopting a unique and more active policy and achieving the required balance in a burning region. On the matter, Participant 11 mentions that the fact that Qatar has a vast amount of natural gas made the country an important player in the international arena. According to him, an evidence we can see is the fact that after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. many meetings were held in Washington with Qatari officials. US was working very closely with Qatar to provide gas options to others in the region which in return led to a development in the Qatari-American relations over the last 18 months.

2.3 History of Qatar Mediation Strategy

Most study participants asserted that Qatar, as a small country squeezed between the two regional powers of Saudi Arabia and Iran, must adopt proactive diplomacy to introduce itself and build a reputation internationally. A straightforward practice of adopting proactive diplomacy is the global mediation role assumed by Qatar since the early 2000s. Mediation also officially entered the Qatari constitution in 2003, which clearly states the direction of the country's foreign policy in Article 7, as stated in the previous section. Thus, mediation has become part of Qatar's foreign policy to deter the surrounding threats and out of the country's belief in maintaining a secure life for all humanity. Participant 3 asserted that mediation is a valuable foreign-policy instrument through which Qatar can pursue some of its interests, like maintaining global peace, building bridges and relationships with other countries, and being helpful to its friends and allies. By engaging as a mediator, Qatar aimed to help the parties reach a mutual agreement and solve their problems.

In addition, mediation has contributed to achieving the country's strategy of creating a brand for the state. Cavusoglu (2020) states that, "as a result of numerous mediation initiatives, Qatar proved a diplomatic mastership and become a brand state in mediating which was not the case for other small Gulf states" (p. 87). The author connects the benevolence of Qatar to its traditional background, as Sheikh Jassem bin Mohamed Al Thani (known as the founder of Qatar) used to describe his country as "K'ba al-mdywm," an Arabic description that means "the home of all people who are suffering and in need of assistance." Henceforth, Qatar seems to have been playing the role of assisting and mediating since the early days. Moreover, conflict resolution is a religious norm in Islam, a standard moral duty described by Karatas (2022).

Correspondingly, Qatar mediated in nearly 10 regional and international crises

at the request of the concerned parties and without interfering in their internal affairs, which helped the country rapidly gain a prestigious position, become a prominent mediator in the Middle East, and survive the surrounding challenges. According to Akpinar (2015), “Qatar’s image as a peacemaker serves as a tool for ensuring its national security in a volatile region by reducing the number of regional or global opponents Qatar might face otherwise” (p. 258). Moreover, as said by Participant 4, mediation signals that Qatar is considered an essential player in the international arena. He offered Kuwait an example of a state that was unknown to many actors in the world when Iraq invaded it, which he considered a strategic mistake. This also related to Participant 1’s argument that a country like Qatar should work equally in mediation as much as in the military sector due to the importance of mediation in deterring surrounding threats. That said, Qatar has succeeded in building an international reputation, challenging the traditional understanding of a small state barely known on the map. Qatar has also created a brand for itself as a peacemaker in the region. Thus, it has long experience in neutral mediation, including issues such as Yemen, Sudan/Darfur, Lebanon, Palestine and Djibouti/Eritrea. These cases of conflict, focusing on the Qatari mediation role, will be addressed separately to highlight the general features and context of each in comparison to the case of this thesis: Afghanistan.

2.3.1 Yemen

An intermittent war broke out in the Saada governorate and neighboring areas in northern Yemen in 2004 that became later known as the “six wars.” The spark of the conflict was an incident in which three Yemeni soldiers were killed, and the government announced a decision to arrest and kill the leader of the Houthi rebels, Hussein Al Houthi. Although the government succeeded in killing him and several of

his supporters, the conflict broke out again. It intensified between pro-government tribe members against the Houthis tribal militants, and this fighting reached the capital, Sanaa, in 2005. As Akkas (2021) mentions, the roots of the Yemeni conflict are embodied in the composition of the social system based on tribal dimensions, affecting Yemen's political and security situation. Since then, six rounds of violence have been punctuated by cease-fire agreements and failed mediation attempts.

As the situation worsened, the former president of Yemen, Ali Abdulla Saleh, invited official representative of Qatar, mainly the Former Emir, to visit Saada to mediate between the government and the Houthis. Consequently, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, accompanied by a delegation from the Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs, visited the Yemeni province and held several meetings with conflicting parties (Barkat, 2014). The efforts resulted in a declaration of a cease-fire between the two sides on June 16, 2007, and a peace agreement was signed in Doha on Feb 8, 2008. Moreover, Qatar has allocated money for investment in damaged areas in Saada, but a problem occurred. The government wanted to fully control the investment money, which worried Qatar that the funds might be misused or would not help to achieve its aim (Alqashouti, 2021). Hereafter, this problem led to friction between the Yemeni and Qatari governments. As analyzed by Al Qahtani and Al Thani (2021), however, some forces within the two parties to the conflict worked in favor of some neighboring countries to accumulate their gains. In other words, the Qatari efforts were thwarted due to personal goals, which caused both parties to return to fighting until the end of 2009.

Despite the end of Doha's role in Yemen, it tried to build again on what had been achieved and resumed its mediation efforts in the summer of 2010. Indeed, these efforts were again successful when the parties signed an agreement to renew their

commitments to a truce and ceasefire in August 2010 (Qatar New Agency Official Website [QNA], n.d.). The same month, however, along with the Qatari efforts, Saudi Arabia invested nearly a billion dollars in the areas damaged by the war. Al Qahtani and Al Thani (2021) argued that, according to some observers, the Saudi announcement harmed the Qatari mediation, resulting in a change in the position of the conflicting parties. The Doha agreement, however, is considered a success of the Qatari mediation, whether or not the conflicting parties retreat from what was agreed upon or there is influence from neighboring countries.

2.3.2 Sudan

The conflict in Sudan, known as the “Darfur conflict,” began in 2003 and reached its peak in 2008, forcing many international players to try to find a solution. Nevertheless, in 2008, Qatar was named a representative of the Arab League to mediate talks between the conflicting parties. According to Barkat (2014), this helped Qatar gain a regional mandate for its involvement. On the other hand, Al Qahtani and Al Thani (2021) mention that the Qatari role in the Sudan case began in 2006, when Qatar became a non-permanent Security Council member. The Qatari role in Sudan was only officially declared in 2008, however. These efforts started by mobilizing international support in the capitals of the Security Council’s permanent members, African capitals, and global and regional organizations. They culminated in signing the “Doha Document for Peace in Darfur” in July 2011 (MOFA, n.d.). The Security Council and the Sudanese constitution adopted the agreement. This was followed by the launch of the Darfur Support Fund in 2012, and the committee to follow up on the implementation of the contract, where many meetings were held between Doha and Khartoum periodically under the chairmanship of Qatar and the United Nations; as Alqashouti (2021) asserted, “Qatar hosted large delegations for months, including

both track-one elite talks and track-two negotiations with civil society representatives (p. 8).

As explained by the literature, one of the essential features of this case is the involvement of high-level officials from the Qatari government. For instance, the former Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Ahmad bin Abdulla Al Mahmoud, spent months traveling among countries to consult regarding the conflict in Sudan. He also visited Khartoum quite often and met with the conflicting parties. The efforts of Qatar continued with the cooperation of other actors, mainly Germany and the African Union, to urge the factions that still needed to sign the Doha agreement to negotiate with the Sudanese government. Such efforts succeeded with the signing of a framework agreement in 2018 between the government and two of the most vital movements within Sudan, Justice and Equality and the Sudan Liberation Movement. They all agreed to resume negotiations in Doha. Negotiations hence began in Doha on this basis, officially in January 2019. A wave of protests, however, broke out against former president Omar Al Bashir, which caused his removal in April the same year. The Sudanese needed help, however, to sit at the negotiation table in Doha. That said, it became clear later that some regional powers did not welcome the Qatari role and wanted Sudan to feed some conflicts in the region, including the war in Yemen and Libya (Al Qahtani & Al Thani, 2021).

Although many other regional and international players were critical to achieving the treaties signed between the conflicting Sudanese parties, the Qatari effort was vital (Barakat, 2014). Nevertheless, Qatar faced many challenges in the process, including criticism by internal Sudanese and other geopolitical confronts, such as the blockade imposed in June 2017 against Qatar. The Quartet—Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt—tried to force Sudan to cut ties with Qatar. There were

also many attempts by the UAE to shift talks between the Sudanese to Abu Dhabi. The international community, however, formed a committee of multiple countries under the leadership of the United States to support Sudan. There were only four Arab countries on the committee: Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, and Qatar. Hence, the Qatari role continued, and there were many visits to Khartoum, Juba, and Addis Ababa by Qatari officials until the signing of the Sudan Peace Agreement in August 2020. Qatar was among the few countries that witnessed the signing of the agreement. The agreement was followed by visits of South Sudanese and Sudanese officials in charge of negotiations to Doha. Moreover, according to QNA, the first deputy of the Sudanese Sovereign Council, Mohamed Hamdan Daglo (“Hamedti”), conducted the first visit to Doha in January 2021, where several consultations were held with Qatari officials on the implementation of the Juba agreement, recognizing the influential Qatari role that contributed to the promotion of peace and development in Sudan and Darfur region (2021).

2.3.2 Lebanon

In 2008, due to disagreements between political parties in Lebanon that caused a power vacuum for over a year, the country was about to enter a civil war. Knowing Saudi Arabia would be sensitive to any unilateral Qatari role in Lebanon, Qatari officials sought to support their role by obtaining a mandate from the Arab League (Barkat, 2014). Qatar relied mainly on its positive image in the eyes of conflicting Lebanese parties, which convinced the Arab League that Qatar was the right player for the mediation process (Aljazeera, 2008). Moreover, Qatar maintained a good relationship with all Lebanese parties as well as Tehran and Damascus, which had political weight in Lebanese Affairs. Thus, Qatar’s role started to emerge in the crisis, as Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani invited all political parties in Lebanon to Doha

to negotiate, mediate, and reach an agreement. The conflicting Lebanese parties accepted the invitation, and many meetings were held in Doha, resulting in the signing of a deal by the Lebanese political parties known as the “Doha agreement” in May 2008 (Cowell & Bakri, 2008).

Consequently, after lengthy negotiations between the Lebanese parties under the leadership of Doha as a mediator, which, according to the literature, employed its political and economic capabilities and its international relationships to solve the crisis, they agreed to elect a new president and a government. This step was welcomed by many regional and global powers, including Iran and the United States. According to Alqashouti (2020), “Qatar’s policy follows a model of true impartiality and having ‘no agenda’ as stated many times by Qatari officials. Moreover, the mandate to mediate deriving from international legitimacy is a central dynamic of the Qatari foreign policy” (p. 83). Hence, Qatar mediation in Lebanon is considered one of the most successful efforts in Qatar’s last two decades of mediation because months of political tension in Lebanon were ended, and an outbreak of another civil war that could have occurred was avoided.

2.3.3 Palestine

Qatar mediated between Fattah and Hamas, two of the internal Palestinian factions who both aims to have their country liberated from the Israeli occupation, yet they disagree on many matters which resulted to a continues conflict.

Fattah was the only internal faction that stood against Israeli occupation before 1987. However, after a prolonged history of armed conflict with Israel, Fattah signed the Oslo agreement in 1993 and decided to engage into negotiations with the Israelis (Myre, 2006). Furthermore, Fattah introduced amendments to its charter that includes deleting all provisions related to the elimination of Israel, and instead announced its

commitment to solve the conflict with Israel in peaceful means (Hassan, 2017). On the other hand, Hamas was founded in 1987 where it declared in its charter the liberation of Palestine using both peaceful and armed resistance as its ultimate goal. In 2006, Hamas participated for the first time in the second Palestinian Legislative elections. It succeeded to win the majority of seats in the legislative council. Hamas formed its government headed by Ismail Haniyeh, who on his turn presented a list of his selected members to the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas (Alqashouti, 2021). However, the dispute occurred when other factions, mainly Fatah refused to be part of Hamas' government and since there was no consensus, causing a power vacuum as well as continuous clashes between Fatah and Hamas.

Consequently, since 2006, there were many attempts by external players such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Qatar to mediate between Fatah and Hamas. Yet, the situation kept getting worse as President Abbas decided to appoint Salam Fayyad, to form a new government, in an action that was interpreted by Hamas as a coup (Hassan, 2017). After two years, and specifically in 2009, Egypt suggested a plan named as "Cairo paper" that aims to solve the problem between both parties, but it was rejected. As mentioned by (Myre, 2006) Qatar tried to mediate in 2006 when both sides were locked in a bitter war. However, the war ended due to Saudi mediation which resulted in "Mecca agreement". It is worth noting that during the years after 2006, Israel launched several military attacks against Gaza and Qatar mediated between Israel and Palestine to broker ceasefire (Qarjouli, 2023). Besides, the Qatari role as a mediator in the conflict emerged when it was able to bring both Fatah and Hamas into negotiations table in Doha which resulted in the signature of both parties of the "Doha agreement" in 2012 (Sawafta, 2012). The "Doha Agreement" aims to form a united government headed by Abbas. The agreement also

paved the way for holding Palestinian Presidential and legislative elections as well as rebuilding Gaza strip after the Israeli attacks that targeted Hamas during the period of 2008-2009. Nevertheless, the tension between Fattah and Hamas continued with intermittent clashes due to mutual accusation of not being obligated with the agreement. In addition to that, Qatar hosted several meetings between Fattah and Hamas in 2016 to discuss the implementation of previous treaties. Yet, and as described by the literature, the continuous tension between both movements was an obstacle. On the other hand, Egypt mediated between both sides several times and the last one was in 2017 where both parties reached a long-term agreement on major issues. However, none of the agreements was implemented. As discussed by Alqashouti (2021), in all ways, the Qatari diplomacy made notable efforts to send humanitarian aids during the clashes especially when Gaza was under blockade as well as its several attempts to broke ceasefire between Palestinian factions and Israel.

Furthermore, due to the escalation of war between Hamas and Israel in October 2023, Qatar emerged in the scene with a clear motivation of pushing both sides to begin cease fire and exchange of prisoners (Gettleman et al., 2023). Qatar engagement according to observers adds new momentum to the ceasefire, since it has mediated several times between Israel and Hamas, the last of which was in 2014. On 20th of October 2023, therefore, Hamas released two American prisoners, a mother and her daughter due to humanitarian reasons and in response to the Qatari mediation efforts. The Qatari Foreign Ministry Spokesman, Dr. Majid Al-Anssari said that the negotiations are ongoing with both sides and may lead to the release of more prisoners and reduction of violence in Gaza (Gettleman et al., 2023).

2.3.4 Djibouti/ Eritrea

A border dispute escalated in 2008 when Djibouti reported Eritrea penetrating

its territory. By June 2008, tensions escalated when Djibouti moved its troops to confront Eritrean troops, and violence increased, causing the death of 35 soldiers. Many reports were submitted to the United Nations, and, consequently, the Security Council adopted Resolution 1907, which imposed an arms embargo on Eritrea and a travel ban on its officials (United Nations, n.d.). Moreover, the Security Council called several times for both parties to engage in dialogue and avoid further escalation of the conflict.

Nevertheless, international efforts did not help end the conflict. Thus, in 2010, Qatar offered to mediate between both countries, and both parties accepted the offer. A committee was headed by former Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim Al Thani, and the membership comprised two Eritreans and two Djiboutian. Both sides agreed to allow Qatari forces to monitor the disputed borders. Since the agreement, the Eritrean troops have been pulled back. Qatari forces with logistical and tactical support remained on the borders. Qatari negotiators also continued their consultations with the two sides to redraw the boundaries between the two countries and consider the possibility of agreeing to arbitration or the International Court of Justice (Aljazeera, 2010). Qatar also tried to exchange prisoners of war between the two sides, and in 2016, Eritrea released four Djiboutian prisoners of war. Qatar withdrew its forces, however, as both Djibouti and Eritrea announced their stand with the Quartet, mainly Saudi Arabia, after the blockade imposed on Qatar in 2017 (Reuters, 2017). In addition, and as the role of Qatar as a mediator and monitor of the border between both countries illustrates their financial resources, Qatar chose to redirect its recourses in facing the threat of the blockade, as asserted by the literature.

From the above discussed five cases, the following has been observed and exposed.

- First, the five cases are considered as conflicts between parties of a certain geographical area.
- Second, while four cases are considered as a *one-track* mediation effort, the case of Sudan is the only one among the five that is considered a multi-track as it included various *Sudanese* factions.
- Third, in the cases of Lebanon and Sudan, Qatar mediation efforts were mandated through the Arab League.
- Forth, in the case of Sudan, Qatar mediated while serving as a non-permanent member of the security council which consequently helped Qatar to mobilize international and regional support.
- Fifth, in the case of Djibouti/Eritrea, Qatar mediated between two sovereign states. Furthermore, Qatar employed its military forces to monitor the borders between both countries while the mediation was going on.
- Finally, in all of the five cases and regardless of the outcomes as each case has different conditions, Qatar was able to bring conflicting parties to the negotiation table where they signed one or more agreements between themselves. Additionally, the majority of these agreements were named as “Doha agreement” / “Doha Document” ensuring first, the Qatari role, and second were used as a framework either by the conflicting parties themselves or by other mediators who continued on the Qatari role.

CHAPTER 3: QATAR MEDIATION STRATEGY IN AFGHANISTAN

(2013-2022)

This section addresses the research's main question: what makes Afghanistan a different case study in terms of Qatar's mediation role. Since most of the existing literature is descriptive and general about the Qatari role, especially concerning the pre-and post-period of signing the 2020 agreement in Doha between the Taliban and the United States, the researcher relied heavily on the interviews conducted with Qatari, Afghani and American officials as well as experts of the field. The researcher also analyzed Qatari officials' published statements and interviews to determine what is unique about this case compared to the five cases discussed in the previous chapter.

3.1 Background of the Afghani Crisis

The Taliban movement is an Afghan Islamic group that began to form and rise after the withdrawal of the Soviet Union from Afghanistan in 1989. The movement declared itself in 1994, came to power in 1996, and remained in control until 2001, when the United States invaded Afghanistan. Thus, to understand the background of the movement, it is necessary to know the circumstances under which it arose and the reasons that urged the United States to invade Afghanistan, aiming to eliminate it.

3.1.1 Rise of the Taliban

Afghanistan is a landlocked country with a rugged, mountainous nature located in southwestern Asia, bordered to the north by Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, to the west by Iran, to the northeast by China, and to the south and east by Pakistan (Robin, 2022). It represents a meeting point of the Middle East, Central Asia, and the Indian subcontinent. It is also considered a Sunni country with Shiite and Hindu minorities and a small number of Jewish families. It is worth noting that Afghanistan has many ethnicities, the most famous of which are the Pashtuns, representing 42% of the population of Afghanistan (Jably, 2021). Pashtuns are geographically and demographically divided between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Thus, it could be argued that, although Afghanistan has a strategic location and diverse ethnic groups, this location has created complications that deprived Afghanistan and the region of stability. In other words, the geographical and ethnic overlap between Afghanistan and Pakistan specifically led to the creation of many armed groups.

On the other hand, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979 to launch a pro-communist regime in Kabul when previous government was overthrown due to a revolution by the Afghan people. It is worth noting that both Afghanistan and the Soviet Union signed treaty in 1978 in which they agreed to develop their economic and military cooperation (Aljazeera, 2021). Hence, the Soviet Union used the treaty to excuse its invasion. Additionally, the Soviet Union considered Afghanistan necessary for national security and as a gateway to Asia. Some Afghan people were against this invasion, and the United States, Pakistan, and other regional powers played a central role in backing them against it. These opponents became later known as “Mujahideen” an Arabic word that means “religious warriors.”

Consequently, due to Afghanistan’s influence in the Middle East and Central Asia, it has become a proxy war arena for superpowers. After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the United States supported the Afghan armed groups. The aim was to take revenge on the Soviets for what they did in Vietnam, as the Soviets supported the Vietnamese revolutions which in turn defeated the American forces (Robin, 2022). The United States also entrusted Pakistan with training Afghan armed groups to fight the Soviet Union. Hence, the Mujahideen defeated the Soviet occupying forces in 1989 due to their vast logistical, financial, and military support. The U.S. support for these groups continued even after the withdrawal of Soviet forces (Jably, 2021). One of the main reasons is the fact that the U.S. was interested in preserving the oil-

transportation projects from the Caspian Sea and Central Asia through Afghanistan.

It is worth noting that U.S. and Pakistani interests converged on this point. Thus, Pakistan continued to harbor and train Afghan fighters. It provided planes, built an airport in Kandahar, and established a telephone communication network. Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, played a crucial role through the financial and logistic support it provided to all Arabs wishing to participate in the Afghan war before and after the establishment of the Taliban due to many motives, including the elimination of any Iranian role in the region (Robin, 2022).

When the Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989, however, the Mujahideen began to fight each other for power. In this complex reality and rugged natural conditions, the Taliban movement was born by the Mujahideen in 1994 from several countries, mainly Pakistan and Afghanistan (Tavana et al., 1998). In addition, the Pashtuns, along with some other ethnicities, are the largest nationalities in presence and representation in the movement. As Öztürk (2019) mentions that “the rapid rise of the Taliban was observed silently by the U.S. The growth seemed beneficial for US interests; its joint pipeline projects with Saudi Arabia, the isolation of Iran, and a new ally against Russia on the Southern border of Central Asia” (p. 103). In other words, the U.S. was trying to find a loyal local government in Afghanistan. Therefore, the U.S. remained silent about the rapid growth of the Taliban, opening the way for it to emerge and expand. Therefore, with the emergence of the Taliban, Saudi Arabia became one of its main supporters. That said, the intersection of interests, mainly of the United States, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia, contributed to the convergence of views in the early founding periods (Jably, 2021). Later, those countries invested in guiding the groups to remove the threat of the Soviet Union through educating, training, and facilitating all the means, according to

Secretary Clinton's testimony (Robbin, 2022).

The Taliban were able to gain control of most parts of Afghanistan. On the other hand, Muhammed Najibullah, who came to power in the presidential elections in 1986, continued to lead the country (Jably, 2021). Most armed groups, however, refused to cooperate with Najibullah, as they accused him of being an agent of Moscow (Öztürk, 2019). At the same time, the competition among armed groups escalated. On the other hand, the international community found this competition an entry point to invest in the ethnic factor in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the armed groups succeeded in overthrowing the government of Najibullah in April 1992 (Oglu, 2021). The country entered a period of civil war for almost four years, as the armed groups failed to establish a transnational government and distribute power among them (Jably, 2021). The civil war had a direct effect on the security of Afghanistan and was reflected in its lack of internal stability. Despair began to creep into the people due to the situation, leading some of them to wish for the return of communist rule, and others began looking forward to a new position. These facts made it easy for the Taliban to invest in this situation by declaring itself and continuing its combat operations to expand beyond Kandahar (Zucchini, 2021). Furthermore, the Taliban gained its importance and effectiveness from the significance of religion itself because it declared itself as a religious movement of change (Tavana et al., 1998). International and regional factors likewise played a crucial role in the emergence of the Taliban.

In addition, the Taliban sought initially only to secure Kandahar, but the international support, in addition to the aforementioned citizens' despair, affected the movement's takeover of Kandahar, Kabul, and later the whole of Afghanistan. In less than two years, the Taliban controlled nearly 90% of Afghan territory. The movement

faced a *fait accompli* that required it to continue not to retreat. Hence, by 1996, Kabul was captured by the Taliban. They implemented highly restrictive laws in the name of Islam. Nevertheless, both Muslims and non-Muslims described such laws as inhumane. According to Albrecht et al.'s (2021) argument, "Afghanistan is marked by a history of conflict, which is interstate, intrastate as well as non-state conflict" (p. 47). In describing the situation, Taviana et al. (1998) state that "a vacuum was created by Soviet departure and U.S disengagement which resulted in a civil war with increasingly ethnic divisions, the influx of terrorist groups and rivalry between regional powers, most notably Iran and Pakistan". (p. 10). Thus, the internal situation worsened in Afghanistan due to internal conflicts and the strict laws imposed by the Taliban.

While the international concern was reinforced by what happened in Afghanistan both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia were among the few countries to recognize the Taliban's role in 1997, besides the UAE (Albrecht et al., 2021). The biggest obstacle for the Taliban at that point was gaining recognition from the rest of the international community (Öztürk, 2019). Moreover, many terrorist groups found their home in Afghanistan, specifically Al Qaeda, which traced its roots back to 1979 and the fight against the Soviet invasion. With the rapid changes in the region and the establishment of American military bases in many Gulf states after the liberation of Kuwait, Al Qaeda started to focus its goals on fighting the U.S. presence.

3.1.2 The US Invasion of Afghanistan

Despite Al Qaeda's regular pledges of allegiance to the leaders of the Taliban, there is an intellectual and ideological distinction between the two movements (Hodali, 2021). The Taliban differs from Al Qaeda mainly in that it is a local group whose activities are limited to one nation without extending to others. By contrast, Al

Qaeda is not limited to a specific location. Still, as the Taliban hosted some Arab fighters, mainly Al Qaeda affiliates, who conducted several international bombings from Afghanistan, the Taliban was under pressure because of the U.S. request to hand over those groups. On the other hand, in 1998 Saudi Arabia requested that the Taliban hand over Osama Bin Laden, head of Al Qaeda at that time, as he was a Saudi citizen, due to his repeated terrorist bombings in different countries, such as in Kenya in 1998. According to Öztürk (2019), “the Taliban’s elites’ sheltering of Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda caused problems, although, in the beginning, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan regarded the Taliban as an ally” (p. 106). The Taliban’s refusal caused a deterioration of its relationship with the only countries that have recognized it as the legitimate government of Afghanistan (Oglu, 2021).

Furthermore, the 9/11 attacks, which killed about 3,000 people, changed the world to the extent that historians and politicians describe the events in the modern era as being divided into the periods before and after September 11 (Zucchini, 2021). The U.S. also insisted on handing over Osama bin Laden specifically, as he declared his responsibility for the 9/11 attacks. The Americans exerted intense pressure on the United Nations to persuade the Taliban to hand over Bin Laden, even though there were no official agreements between the Taliban government and the United States that would allow it to hand over wanted persons (Zucchini, 2021). On the other hand, the United Nations supported the U.S. request without the legal capacity to oblige the Taliban. The Taliban suggested several other options related to the trial of Bin Laden internally, which were rejected. The insistence of the U.S. to extradite him was seen by the Taliban as a challenge to the sovereignty of their new state (Robbin, 2022).

Accordingly, despite the Taliban’s worsening relationship with the international community and repeated attempts to reassure the outside world, the

relationship became more tense due to the events of September 11, 2001. The former U.S. President Bush signed the “USA Patriot Act” to enhance security internally and expand the surveillance efforts to detect terrorism (Zucchini, 2021). Since then, airports have been subject to strict new inspection and security rules. Bush launched a large-scale war in October 2001 through which he intended to punish those accused of the attacks and their loyalists. This war became the main driver of U.S. policies and even one of the most prominent reasons for government spending in the country’s history, which had human and economic costs (Jably, 2021). Similarly, Participant 4 also highlighted that the U.S. linked Afghanistan to the attacks of 9/11, the event that caused a shift in U.S. foreign policy in the unipolar world. He believed that Afghanistan was a case that showed the superiority of the U.S. where it intended to bring down the Taliban. President Bush announced, “the carefully targeted actions are designed to disrupt the use of Afghanistan as a terrorist base of operations and to attack the military capability of the Taliban regime” (Zucchini, 2021). As a result, the Taliban whom they were the “state” became a “non-state” actor again after being toppled by U.S. troops. A new government under Hamid Karzai was established in July 2002.

Nevertheless, the Taliban began to launch counterattacks against U.S. forces. The Taliban penetrated the battlefield through its direct attacks; on the other hand, the U.S., in cooperation with its allies, was strengthening its forces in Afghanistan (Zucchini, 2021). What helped the Taliban achieve essential gains and persist was the widespread rejection of the U.S. invasions and the movement’s relationship with Pakistan, which played a crucial role. That said, the U.S. thought several times that it would win the war and defeat the Taliban using various violent methods and strategies, including chemical weapons and depleted uranium. The U.S., however,

failed to defeat the Taliban, which was resisting the U.S. presence, leading to the deterioration of the security situation inside Afghanistan (Hodali, 2021). On a similar note, Participant 3 mentioned that the conflict in Afghanistan has been going on for decades with significant consequences for national, global, and regional security and creating a human catastrophe due to the deaths, emergence of several armed radical groups, elevated rates of disease, lack of clean drinking water, malnutrition, and reduced access to healthcare. Hence, the Taliban remained and got stronger in Afghanistan and was able to control vast parts of the country. Öztürk (2019) mentioned that the U.S. and Karzai's government could not manage to control all of Afghanistan due to first, the vulnerability of the government and second, the Pashtuns' enormous financial and logistical support to the Taliban.

Jones (2020), in his testimony, discusses U.S. interests in Afghanistan, which have evolved over the years. He believes that the U.S. was trying to eliminate Al Qaeda, prevent the region from toppling into instability, and prevent any future humanitarian crisis. Hence, the U.S. presence in Afghanistan lasted for almost twenty years, claiming the importance of eliminating terrorist groups, specifically Al Qaeda. Nonetheless, during the Obama administration, in 2011 in Pakistan the United States was able to kill Osama bin Laden. Thus, President Obama in 2011, announced his plan to withdraw American troops from Afghanistan. Moreover, as analyzed by Hodali (2021), the idea behind the announcements was the recognition that there may be no military victory for the U.S. since the Taliban kept growing and controlling many parts of Afghanistan. In addition to that as Zucchini (2021) mentions, "despite the presence of American and NATO troops and air power, the Taliban rebuilt their fighting capabilities". Participant 11 summarized it solely that the US was in Afghanistan since 2001 looking for Osama bin Laden and even when he was killed,

the US was not able to leave straightaway and hence it needed a trusted partner to mediate and lead the process of finding an exit strategy which will further be discussed in the next section.

3.2 The Involvement of Qatar

3.2.1 The 2020 Reconciliation Treaty

As discussed in the previous section and reiterated by Participant 1, the conflict in Afghanistan began after the 9/11 attacks, when the U.S. declared its “Global War on Terror” to secure its land and allies. Hodali (2021) mentions that the United States was trying to find a neutral venue to negotiate with the Taliban since it realized there might be no military victory in Afghanistan. Likewise, Participant 7 believed that Afghanistan was a failed project for the U.S.; thus, it decided to withdraw its forces and negotiate with the Taliban, who were the state, and, due to the invasion, they returned to being a non-state actor. Participant 1, on this matter, stated that there was a request by the U.S. in 2001 that Qatar engage as a mediator in the Afghan conflict. This also related to what Participant 11 mention that there was always a need for a solution in the Afghani case, and hence, the U.S. needed a third party to be involved and mediate between them and the other party (Taliban). The reasons behind choosing Qatar specifically since that time are still unclear but being a small, neutral state and having access to a certain group could be the reasons, according to both Participant 1 and Participant 11. On the other hand, according to participant 10, Qatar was accepted by the Taliban because there were certain conditions set by the leader of the movement at that time for any country to be engaged as a mediator. The conditions include being a Muslim state, not a direct neighbor of Afghanistan, does not have any kind of forces in Afghanistan, not a

member of the NATO nor provide any logistic support to the NATO, and it has no precedent with the Taliban. Hence, all of these conditions are applied to Qatar.

That said, and as discussed by Participant 6, Afghans and Americans found Qatar as the right mediator. He believed that Qatar's role in the case worked because not everyone spoke to the Taliban at that time. Thus, because Qatar hold a balanced relations with the Taliban and the U.S., strategically, Qatar was positioned right to act as a mediator. Above all, Qatar hosts the Al Udeid base, the most extensive U.S. military base in the Middle East. Therefore, it can be said that Qatar has a prestigious position with the Taliban on the one hand and with the U.S. on the other. Correspondingly, at the request of the U.S. and with the acceptance of the Taliban, Qatar engaged as a mediator in the Afghan conflict. The Qatari role started to arise only in 2011 through secret meetings. According to (Ruttig, 2014), "in 2011, channels to the Taliban leadership that are real, and promising were opened for the first time, with the potential that they could lead to substantial negotiations about a political solution to the current insurgence in Afghanistan" (p. 44). Qatar, therefore, has hosted some Taliban officials since 2011, according to Participant 1. In 2012, an official delegation of eight senior Taliban officials arrived in Doha to set up an office for the Taliban (Ulrichsen, 2014). It is worth noting, as Ayman (2016) mentions, that the office opened with the agreement of the Afghan government. On the American side, the Obama administration supported the office to pave the way for a successful intra-Afghan negotiation and the withdrawal of the U.S. forces (Katzman, 2019). A dispute occurred only a few weeks later, however. The Taliban used the former Taliban government flag and the name of the "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan" on the building (Yousaf & Jabarkhail, 2021). At the same time, the Obama administration insisted that the office should not represent an embassy of the Taliban. Consequently,

the dispute led to the office's closure, and the negotiations were postponed several times from 2013 to 2018 (Ardemagni, 2021).

Nevertheless, Qatar remained on the scene as a mediator between the Afghan government and the Taliban on one side and the Taliban and the U.S. on the other. Talks between the U.S. and the Taliban revived in 2014 in Doha, and many meetings were held to discuss the exchange of prisoners between them according to Participant 10. Blanchard (2014) states that Qatar remained "an interlocutor" with the Taliban, especially regarding exchanging prisoners. However, in 2017, Donald Trump announced a new strategy that ended military intervention in foreign countries and insisted on ending the "crisis" in Afghanistan (Blanchard, 2014). Consequently, Trump appointed a special representative to start the negotiations with the Taliban representatives in Doha (Rutting, 2011). However, as Participant 1 revealed, one Taliban official called him in 2018 and declared their intention to transfer the meetings and negotiations to the UAE, which in return was welcomed by Qatar as long as those meetings would produce the required results, that mainly revolved around ending the conflict and achieving peace. According to him, however, the UAE failed to hold the meetings. He believed that the UAE set some conditions rejected by the Taliban. Thus, negotiations resumed again in 2019 between the United States and the Taliban on one side and between the Taliban and Afghans on the other in Doha. It is worth noting on this matter that Participant 10 stated without mentioning a country name, that there were attempts from certain countries from the GCC to take the role of Qatar as a mediator in this case, but he believes that no country was successful as Qatar to mediate.

Besides, Participant 4 mentioned that Qataris maintained good relations with everyone, hosted an office for the Taliban, and were already hosting the American

base, which helped bring together all conflicting parties. Thus, in July 2019, Qatar hosted the “Afghan Peace Conference” for two days under joint Qatari–German sponsorship, considering reaching a joint final statement as a “first step toward peace” (MOFA, 2019). The conference started in Doha, with the participation of a delegation that included dozens of officials from different Afghan factions, including the Taliban, to discuss ways to end the conflict in the country. The conference coincided with the seventh round of talks between the U.S. and the Taliban (MOFA, 2019). During a speech delivered at the end of the conference, Dr. Mutlaq Al Qahtani, Qatar’s Foreign Minister’s Special Envoy for Combating Terrorism and Mediation in Dispute Settlement, indicated that everyone agreed on the importance of this step and the need to build on it, saying “the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.” The final statement included many essential points, most notably the agreement of all participants in the conference that achieving sustainable peace in Afghanistan would only be achieved through comprehensive Afghanistan negotiations. It also emphasized that “Afghanistan is a unified Islamic state and a home for all different races, with Islamic sovereignty.” The closing statement also expressed the participants’ support for the ongoing peace talks in Doha. Doha, thus, announced the success of the first intra- Afghan conference (Reuters, 2019). As described by Yousaf and Jabarkhail (2021), “the group’s political office in Doha-Qatar, established in 2013, may have provided the group with the exposure, training and the opportunity to engage in the art of political negotiation and diplomacy” (p. 2). This is also related to Participant 10 description of the Qatari role, he believes if the Political Office of Taliban was not established in Qatar, the parties of the Afghani conflict will not be able to sit at one table.

Reaching a political solution in Afghanistan was impossible, since the talks

between the representative of the Taliban and the U.S. were cut off several times due to the mutual misunderstanding between the parties. Furthermore, there have been repeated attempts since the opening of the Taliban office in Doha to start an intra-Afghan dialogue with the U.S. presence, despite the efforts of many parties to monopolize this role, such as Saudi Arabia to host the Taliban's office and the attempts to remove the Qatari mediation role (Mazzucco & Cafiero, 2022). As Barakat (2020) describes, "we witnessed a race between several governments to host United States–Taliban negotiations. While it was in Qatar that the talks eventually reached a successful conclusion, the UAE and Saudi Arabia tried to stage and facilitate negotiations". It is assumed that this rivalry wasted time and resources, complicating the issue by harming the peace process. This is also linked to Participant 1's analysis, as he states that if there had been no attempts to stop the Qatari role, the 2020 agreement would have been reached earlier, and thousands of lives would have been saved. Nevertheless, after long rounds of meetings that lasted for eighteen months, an agreement was signed between the United States and the Taliban in February 2020 in Doha, which crowned the Qatari mediation efforts. Al Anssari (2020) illustrates that the belief of both parties in the integrity of the Qatari mediator and that Qatar's success in previous mediation attempts generally helped Qatar to prove its ability to achieve the historic agreement. One of the agreement's main provisions was the complete withdrawal of U.S. and foreign troops from Afghanistan, while the Taliban should stop being the host for international terrorists (Jones, 2020). The agreement was undoubtedly considered historic because it provided a clear map for the disputing parties to end military operations within a certain period. Likewise, it helped complete the most prolonged occupation in history. Participant 10 declares that Qatar with its flexible diplomacy was able to pass all challenges and success in this

file.

3.2.2 Taliban Takeover of Afghanistan

In August 2021, as the last American military troops departed from Afghanistan, the Taliban took control of the country, including the presidential palace (Zucchini, 2021). According to Barkat (2021) in describing the situation, “the president’s sudden departure was a complete shock” (p. 6). Hence, the country entered a situation of chaos, as thousands of people fled the country, either through the desert borders or Kabul airport. Many foreign nationals were similarly trying to flee the country. At this stage of the Afghan cause, the Qatari role as a mediator entered a new level. Therefore, according to Lulwa Al Khater, Qatar’s State of Minister of International Cooperation, the Qatari mediation efforts in Afghanistan could be divided into two primary tracks: *before the U.S. withdrawal* and *after the U.S. withdrawal* (Al Araby, 2021). Qatar has thus, in this phase of the Afghan crisis, continued its role as mediator but in a different way, which will be further discussed in the following section.

3.2.3 The Qatari Efforts in Afghanistan 2021-2022

The Qatari role as mediator entered a new phase with different responsibilities after the withdrawals of the last American troops and the takeover of power by the Taliban that can be summarized into two main points: 1) *Development and Humanitarian Aid* and 2) *Diplomatic Support*.

- **Development and Humanitarian Aid**

From its responsibility as a mediator, Qatar provided Afghanistan with different types of humanitarian aid with the aim to achieve development for the country in the post-US invasion period.

- a) **Donations**

In terms of donation, Qatar participated in the “Donor’s Conference” in Afghanistan in September 2021 and pledged \$50 million for Afghanistan. It also co-sponsored the Afghanistan Conference 2022, in which Qatar promised to provide an additional \$25 million for humanitarian aid in Afghanistan (MOFA, 2022). Moreover, the Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD) and the Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs have supported the “Digital Citizen Fund” since 2019. In 2021, Qatar evacuated a group of girls specialized in robotics from the Fund’s group, and they were granted scholarships at Qatar Foundation universities. On the other hand, Qatar Foundation and QFFD also signed an agreement with the American University of Afghanistan to provide education for Afghan students in the Education City in Qatar (MOFA, 2022). The deal will allow Afghan students to continue their education in Qatar. In addition to that, and part of Qatar’s continuous support to the Afghani people, Doha will host a conference on the future of education in Afghanistan in November 2023 (MOFA, 2023).

b) The Evacuation Process

Since mid-August 2021, Qatar has evacuated more than 75,000 refugees from Afghanistan, as it received thousands of requests for a safe evacuation, including Afghan students, teachers, lawyers, doctors, and others. It is often described as the largest evacuation process in history. Qatar also facilitated the evacuation of citizens of many countries, such as the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, Canada, and Norway, and workers of many international organizations (MOFA, 2022).

c) Repair and Reopen the airport

At the request of several countries and the interim Afghan government, and to facilitate the transfer of international aid and the movement of passengers, Qatar sent a technical team to Afghanistan to help reopen and operate Hamid Karzai Airport

(MOFA, 2022). This undoubtedly allowed and supported the arrival of much-needed aid in Afghanistan. The technical team repaired the damaged airport, restored the runway and equipment, and made it safe for travel in only nine days (MOFA, 2022). On September 9, 2021, thanks to Qatar, the airport became ready for operation, and the first international civil flight took off for Doha since the withdrawal of the United States. Qatar Airways operated the flight, and 112 passengers traveled safely on board.

- **Diplomatic support**

Qatar participated in the G7 and G10 meetings related to Afghanistan as part of its diplomatic contribution at the invitation of the concerned countries (MOFA, 2022). It has also participated in international efforts to combat terrorism and preserve human rights in Afghanistan through many meetings, consultations, and exchanges of reports with several international partners and the Afghan interim government.

In addition, a group of countries have relocated their embassies from Kabul temporarily to Doha, including the United States, United Kingdom, Netherlands, and Japan. Cafiero (2022) describes Qatar as having all Western embassies relocated to its territory by being a “base for regional diplomacy.” On the other hand, Qatar and the U.S. signed an agreement on November 12, 2021, that required Qatar to protect the diplomatic interests of the U.S. and its citizens in Afghanistan. Furthermore, during this phase of the Afghan crisis, Qatar’s logistic capabilities proved successful. The Al Udaid American base in Doha and Hamad International Airport were crucial during the evacuation process of civilians. Al Jazeera Network, on the other hand, played a prominent role in covering and transmitting globally the first pictures of the situation in Afghanistan, especially after the Taliban takeover of Kabul (Sofuoglu, 2020). On this matter, Participant 6 believed that the stage where Qatar’s mediation role entered

a new level due to the evacuation process in which it participated led to the improvement of Qatar's value, mainly when most of the embassies relocated from Kabul to Doha. On the other hand, Participant 4 mentioned that, because of their stand and confidence, Qatar was able to secure a peaceful transition, where there were chances that it could have been much worse. He believed that Qatar was still essential despite the Taliban's attempts to engage other parties. This is also related to Participant 10 statement that the role of Qatar after the signature of 2020 agreement is still essential due to the fact that the Taliban office and Afghanistan's Embassy are still active in Doha and hence some official and unofficial meetings are taking place as many European embassies relocated from Kabul to Doha, which enhances and ensure the role of the State of Qatar.

Similarly, Oglu (2021) mentions that Qatar is an open door through which the West can access the Taliban. Many countries other than the United States, such as the United Kingdom, believe that the Qatari presence in the Afghan equation is critical and vital in maintaining communication with the Taliban. On this matter, Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, Qatari Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, also stated that Qatar was uniquely positioned in the Afghan cause due to its integrity and neutrality. Al Khater further explained that Qatar could talk with all disputing parties due to its good relations with everyone. It enjoys the flexibility other mediators might not have (Al Araby, 2021). Consequently, Qatar was the only Arab country to attend the U.S.-organized virtual meeting that discussed the approach to the post-American withdrawal from Kabul (Ardemagni,2021) which in return proves Qatar's success in its engagement and mediation strategy in Afghanistan.

Apart from this, after the Taliban takeover of the country, there were many abuses of human rights. Qatar expressed several times its "great concern and

disappointment” with the current Taliban regulation, especially concerning women’s rights to work and attend school (MOFA, 2021). Qatari officials warned that “these practices will have negative implications on human rights, developments, and the economy of Afghanistan.” Mazzucco and Cafiero (2022) mention that “Doha faces enormous challenges in this war-torn country. The US sanctions on Kabul and the reality of the Taliban’s harsh governance and human rights abuses will create major difficulties for Qatar as it seeks to build on its progress in Afghanistan”. On this matter, Participant 7 also believed that what was challenging was not Qatar mediating between the conflicting parties in the Afghan case. Still, instead of how the parties will implement the agreement they agreed upon and signed in Doha in 2020, although it is not Qatar’s responsibility whether the parties execute the deal. On the other hand, Participant 3 believed that the 2020 agreement could still work as a helpful framework that could be built by considering the facts on the ground. Qatar, however, has succeeded as a mediator by bringing both parties to the table where they signed the agreement, according to Participant 7.

Similarly, in an interview, Afghanistan’s Former President Hamid Karzai was asked to assess the Taliban’s first year back in power, and he summarized it as “the Taliban have brought an end to widespread fighting and conflict; however, Afghan people cannot find themselves in the government, and the economic situation is disastrous” (Barkat, 2022). Participant 8 believed that the primary aim of the Qatari role was the withdrawal of the American troops from Afghanistan, whereas, in return, the Taliban promise to suspend all threats against the U.S. coming from Afghanistan, which has already been achieved. He believes that what happened after can be considered an internal rivalry between Afghans, so Qatar’s task has entered a different level. Qatar in this stage is trying to speak to Afghans to advise them about the current

human-rights situation, but it cannot force a country to follow a particular policy because it is a sovereign internal decision, according to Participant 8. During the discussion with Participant 10 on this matter, he states that not allowing girls and women to work and study is a major mistake. However, the international community need to put in mind that Afghanistan was going through continuous wars for four decades and returning back to normal situation would need long time. Afghanistan also in this stage need the assistance of the international community rather than the negative critics.

In comparison to the Qatari mediation role in the previous five cases discussed the following has been observed and exposed:

- First, the conflict in Afghanistan began as the US declared its “Global War on terrorism” following the 9/11 attacks and lasted for 20 years.
- Second, Qatar has a history of mediation efforts that helped it to have the experience as well as the reputation of a trustworthy partner to mediate in one of the most complicated cases, Afghanistan. Hence, Qatar was strategically the best choice and accepted by the parties of the conflicts.
- Third, the Qatari mediation in this case combined two mediation efforts: between an *internal faction* (Taliban as a non-state actor) and an *external global power* (the US) on one hand and between *two internal factions* on the other (the Taliban and the Afghan government).
- Forth, the Qatari mediation efforts is divided into two main phases: before and after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan.
- Finally, in contrast to the other cases, Qatar did not only mediate and

facilitate talks between the conflicting parties, but it has led to the largest evacuation process in history, and it became the venue for foreign embassies that relocated from Kabul to Doha.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

This thesis analyzed Qatar's mediation strategy based on the presumption that Qatar's goal behind the strategy is to enhance its role regionally and internationally. The research was set on analyzing Afghanistan as a case study of Qatar's role for the period 2013–2022. The research was framed with one main question and three sub-questions. The main question revolves around what makes Afghanistan a different case study in terms of Qatar's mediation role. Thus, it was essential for the researcher to build the three sub-questions to provide a comprehensive answer to the research main question.

The first and second sub-questions, which are about how Qatar has become a trusted ally among international society and why Qatar chose mediation as a core

pillar of its foreign policy, were discussed and answered in chapter two. Since Qatar is considered one of the small states in the world, it has relied on certain tools to overcome its smallness. *First*, Qatar invested in media by creating an image of openness in presenting opposing views, a fact that later helped Qatar become a trusted and neutral mediator. In other words, Qatar was able, through its well-known network Al Jazeera, to cover sensitive Arab issues, whereas other Arab networks were not brave enough to do so. Al Jazeera helped Qatar be seen as a country that stands behind the rights of people, democracy, and justice. *Second*, Qatar invested in sports and hosting major global events, which helped the small state to be introduced to the world. Henceforward, hosting big events contributed to developing Qatar's international image and reputation. *Third*, LNG has played a role, as it blessed Qatar with a unique position in international and regional markets. Aside from all the mentioned tools is the mediation strategy. This thesis believes that all the mentioned tools overlap and have helped the country begin a history of mediation 23 years ago. It has argued that, since Qatar is considered a small state, located between two regional powers—Iran and Saudi Arabia—it has adopted a proactive diplomacy with an aim to build a reputation for itself regionally and internationally and be able to deter the surrounding threats. Moreover, adopting a proactive diplomacy comes out of the country's belief in maintaining and securing the life of all humanity. Mediation, thus, was adopted by Qatar in the early 2000s, and it was officially declared in Qatar's constitution in 2003, which clearly declared the country's foreign policy. The thesis has found that mediation has contributed to achieving the country's strategy of creating a brand. In other words, through mediation efforts in different countries, Qatar has proven its diplomatic ability as a small state to lead big contributions. The thesis discussed five mediation efforts for Qatar: Yemen, Darfur, Lebanon, Palestine

and Djibouti/Eritrea. The thesis found that all the cases are traditional one-track efforts between internal factions apart from Djibouti/Eritrea, which was between two sovereign countries. The thesis also observed that although in the case of Sudan the Qatari mediation effort are considered as a multi-track, it was within the context of the Sudanese themselves as it involved different civil societies and political groups. The thesis also proved through discussion that, although some of the cases are complex and challenging, it has given Doha its needed reputation, and it has also given it the chance to engage as a mediator in Afghanistan, which is believed to be the most complicated conflict for any mediator.

Chapter three of this thesis revealed the facts of what makes Afghanistan a different case compared to other conflicts where Qatar engaged as a mediator. The conflict in Afghanistan began when the U.S. declared its global war on terror following the 9/11 attacks. The Qatari role, however, started to emerge in 2011 through secret meetings. Qatar was chosen to mediate in the case because not everyone at that time had diplomatic relations with the Taliban, specifically since they were the state and returned to be a non-state actor after the U.S. invasion. At the same time, as the host of the biggest American base, Qatar was strategically the best choice to be a mediator. For Qatar, and as discussed, the reason for engaging in such a complex conflict can be summarized in three main points: *first*, it is a high-profile case, *second*, Qatar has the needed logistical and diplomatic ability to facilitate talks between all parties, and *third*, Qatar has a history with the Taliban and the U.S. In other words, the facts Qatar holds a balanced relationship with the Taliban since their emergence in Afghanistan played a key role. That said, Qatar was one of the few countries that did not recognize the Taliban government when they came to power after the departure of the Soviet Union, nor they were forced to cut their relationship

with them later, after the 9/11 attacks. Instead, Qatar was in a line that there might be no other country in its position. As discussed, and shown, however, there were many obstacles facing Qatar as a mediator, such as the continuous disagreement between the Taliban and the government on one hand and the mutual misunderstanding with the U.S. on the other. Furthermore, Taliban members and supporters do not recognize the Afghan government as legitimate. Thus, the process of the intra-Afghan talks was not an easy one for Qatar. On the other hand, there were attempts by other countries to take the Qatari mediation role. Still, and regardless of the challenges, Qatar continued its engagement when it re-hosted the Taliban–United States talks in Doha since 2018. Thus, Qatar since then has become the venue for the Afghan and the U.S. negotiations, which resulted in the signature 2020 agreement in Doha, that officially crowned the Qatari mediation efforts. It is considered a historic moment because first it has given a clear map for the parties to end the longest and most prolonged occupation in history within a certain period and second, it is the first time that a non-state actor signs an agreement with a global power. One might ask of why the legitimate government was not the one who signed the agreement rather than Taliban. As has been exposed by this study the answer is due to the fact that the U.S. agreed to recognize Taliban in Doha peace talk which gave the movement the legitimacy it sought and a position of strength. This also resulted in weakening the position of the Afghani government. Qatar, hence, has been close to all parties from the beginning, a fact that helped the small state to facilitate communication.

Nonetheless, With the U.S. withdrawals and the takeover of the Afghanistan by the Taliban, the Qatari role entered a new phase with different responsibilities. Chapter 3 summarized these efforts in two main categories; 1) *humanitarian aid and development*, which includes the evacuation process and the repair and reopening of

the airport, and 2) *diplomatic support*, where Qatar was part of the diplomatic contribution to helping Afghanistan. Qatar also hosted all the embassies that relocated from Kabul to Doha temporarily. This thesis has exposed Qatar's ability to challenge the stereotype of a small state being vulnerable. It proved its ability to overcome the challenges that include being blockaded by its neighbors. For instance, Qatar's direct contact with the Taliban was not free from criticism, especially when the blockade was started against it by the Quartet. The four countries pointed out that Qatar's direct relationship with the Taliban was clear proof of its attempts to sponsor terrorism in the region. This narrative never persuaded the U.S., nor Qatar's western allies, because it was the U.S. that not only accepted but actually requested that Doha host and facilitate talks between Washington and the Taliban. Although the cost of engaging as a mediator in complex conflicts like Afghanistan is high, the rewards are enormous in return. Qatar was designated as a major non-NATO ally because of its prominent role in facilitating talks between the Taliban and the United States since 2018, which culminated in the 2020 Doha agreement and later because of its logistical support during and after the departure of U.S. forces in August 2021. Furthermore, Qatar has turned out to be an international destination for arranging the situation in Afghanistan after 2021 which is also believed to be considered as a kind of hidden mediation.

Qatar doubtlessly played a significant role in bringing the conflict to an end regardless of all the challenges it has faced. Although many have accused Qatar of responsibility for the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan after the takeover of the Taliban, this thesis believe that what is essential is the criteria for this mediation process and the main goal behind it. The U.S., as examined, was trying to find an exit strategy from its war in Afghanistan, and this would not be achieved without engaging

in a negotiation process with the Taliban. Thus, and as has been discovered through the interviews conducted with Qatari, American and Afghani officials as well as academics, the Qatari mediation role in Afghanistan succeeded and should not be linked to the internal laws imposed by the Taliban. That said, although Qatari engagement is not new, the case of Afghanistan is a unique one because it represented beneficial opportunities and severe risks at the same time for Doha. It has been proven through this study that it is the first time that Qatar mediated in a crisis between a regional internal actor and a global external actor.

Summary of Results

- Qatari diplomacy played an effective role in Afghanistan case by employing soft power and mediation policy, which greatly contributed to strengthening its external alliances and establishing an international position and reputation.
- Mediation played a major role in Qatar's external interactions and contributed to resolving many disputes between the parties through peaceful means, as in the case of Afghanistan, which is considered a complex crisis between internal and external parties.
- Qatar has been the most effective and only regional Arab and Gulf player in the Afghan conflict, considering its successful mediation strategy in addressing the crisis between the Taliban and the U.S. since 2011.
- The 2020 Doha agreement between the Taliban and the U.S. succeeded in ending the most prolonged invasion in the history, which constitutes at the same time an opportunity to reimagine regional security once again.

- *The uniqueness of the case of Afghanistan in comparison to other cases where Qatar engaged as a mediator can be summarized as following*
 - The case of Afghanistan is multilayer; Qatar mediated between regional player (the Taliban) and global player (the US) as well as between the Taliban and the Afghani government (two internal factions).
 - The Afghani government position was weaker than the Taliban (who signed the 2020 agreement) because the U.S. agreed to recognize the movement in Doha talks rather than the government. *A fact that was assured by most participants that all the governments since 2001 were not strong and effective as they should be.*
 - Qatar mediation in Afghanistan is divided into two sections: before the U.S. withdrawals from Afghanistan and After the withdrawals of Afghanistan.
 - Qatar proves its ability as a small state to not only facilitate talks and mediate between conflicting power, but to lead the hugest evacuation process after the U.S. withdrawals from Afghanistan.
 - The fact that foreign embassies relocated from Kabul to Doha proves the strength and success of Doha as mediator in this case.

Suggestions for Future Studies

The researcher would suggest that future studies concentrate more on the Qatari role since the departure of the U.S. forces in 2021 because it is believed that the Qatari mediation entered a new level and phase, and it constituted many different

aspects, which proved the ability of the small state not only to facilitate talks and negotiations but to logistically provide whatever was needed to ease the scene in Afghanistan.

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APPENDIX A: IRB CONSENT FORM

IRB No:
IRB Approval Date:

My name is Hissa Al Sulaiti, and I am a Graduate student conducting a study for my MA in Gulf Studies thesis under the supervision of Professor Mahjoob Zweiri.

This thesis aims to analyze Qatar's mediation strategy by focusing on Afghanistan as a case study. Qatar gained its independence by the early years of the 1970s, a time the region was going through many changes which includes but were not limited to: the British withdrawal, the emerging rivalry between regional powers (Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia), Iran-Iraq eight years of war in the 1980s (followed by the Iranian revolution), and the invasion of Kuwait in the early 1990s. Such events associated with the arrival of Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani into power in Qatar in 1995, who realized the existence of security threats to his country, led to the draw of a new activist foreign policy where mediation is one of its core pillars. Consequently, Qatar gained the trust of the international community and started to mediate on a number of disputes in order to enhance its soft power and reduce the severity of surrounding threats. By the request of conflicting parties, Qatar went through mediation in for instance: Yemen, Lebanon, Darfur, Djibouti/Ertria, and Afghanistan. Yet, the case of Afghanistan illustrates the uniqueness of Qatar's role for two main reasons. First, Qatar mediated between the Taliban and the United States, and between the Taliban and the Afghan government on the other, making it a multilayer mediation case. Second, one of the conflicting parties is a non-state actor (Taliban). At the same time, in previous mediation cases, Qatar's mediation efforts are considered traditional one-track efforts between the government and oppositions (as in Lebanon and Yemen) or as multi-track efforts targeting several civil societies and political groups mainly (as in Darfur). Thus, it is important and interesting to study how Qatar jeopardizes to mediate in a conflict where one of the parties is a non-state actor whom the international community has long criticized.

As a part of this study, you are being requested to participate in an interview as your input will be of added value to this study.

Participation should not take more than 40-50 minutes of your time. Participation is completely voluntary. If you wish to refrain from answering any particular question, you may skip it. You may withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. The sample size will be 10-15 participants and no risk, the interview will be conducted both online via zoom and in person, knowing that all participants are understanding the English language (speaking, reading & writing).

You will not be penalized in any way for deciding to skip a question or withdraw at any time. You also will not be affected professionally if you refuse to participate. There are also no direct benefits to you personally if you choose to participate. However, this research will contribute to a better understanding of Qatar's mediation strategy, specifically in Afghanistan.

I would like to audio record this interview to ensure that all the information you provide is approved by the Qatar University IRB. If the interview is conducted online, the camera will be turned off to avoid an accidental video recording. You may still participate in the interview if you do not want the interview to be recorded.

Approved by the Qatar University IRB

Qatar University Institutional Review Board (QU-IRB)

off to avoid an accidental video recording. You may still participate in the interview if you do not want the interview to be recorded.

Your responses will be kept strictly confidential and data will be coded. Each respondent will be referred to as A, B, C, etc., which will be used for all transcription of data from the interview forms. The electronic data will be stored on a secure password-protected computer to which only the research team will have access. QU-IRB and Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) can access the data as well (if needed). The audio transcription will be deleted after the completion of data analysis. As for the data analysis, it will be deleted after one year of the thesis publication.

Do you voluntarily consent to take part in the study?

Yes No
If Yes, signature _____

Do you also voluntarily consent to this interview being recorded (Audio recording)?

Yes No
If Yes, Signature: _____

If you chose to be interviewed, you will be given a copy of this consent form with your signatures.

The identity of the respondent will only be known to the members of the research team who will keep this information completely confidential.

The study is approved by the Qatar University Institutional Review Board with the approval number _____; if you have any questions related to the ethical compliance of the study you may contact them at QU-IRB@qu.edu.qa

The contact information of the research team is as follows:

Hissa Al Sulaiti	Prof Mahjoob Zweiri
Email: ha1000695@qu.edu.qa	Email: mzweiri@qu.edu.qa
Telephone: 30045454	Telephone: 4403 4703

If you have read, understood the above, and agree to participate in this study, please sign below:

Participant signature: _____

Researcher signature: _____

Date: _____

Approved Date: January 11, 2023
Qatar University Institutional Review Board (QU-IRB)

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Approved Date: January 11, 2023
Qatar University Institutional Review Board (QU-IRB)

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions

I will interview 5-10 Qatari officials and academics to collect and analyze the needed information for the thesis. I have chosen the unstructured interviews because they are more flexible and can be adapted and changed based on the responder's answers/ flow of conversation. This method also helps develop a real sense of a person's understanding of a situation. A preliminary list of 13 questions is listed below:

- Besides other soft power tools, why did Qatar choose mediation as a foreign policy's core pillar?
- Is mediation assisting Qatar in facing surrounding threats?
- How do you describe the Qatari role in Afghanistan?
- Why does Qatar engage in such challenging cases, while sometimes the chance to fail is higher than success?
- What makes Afghanistan a different case, although Qatar has engaged in previous mediation cases?
- What factors made Doha / allowed Doha to be a mediator in Afghanistan?
- In your opinion, why Qatar chose to be a mediator in the Afghanistan case?
- Although the international community has long criticized the Taliban (Non-state actor), how do you think Qatar managed to trust and work with them?
- Did the blockade imposed in 2017 impact the Qatari role in Afghanistan?
- Do you think blockading countries (mainly Saudi Arabia and UAE) tried in one way or another to take the mediation role in Afghanistan from Qatar?
- Qatar succeeded in gathering Afghans in Doha. However, things went differently than what was expected as the Taliban took over the government. Do you think, at this stage, the Qatari role is still essential?
- How do you reflect the Taliban being in power on the Qatari mediation efforts?
- In your opinion, has the Qatari agreement fallen after the Taliban takeover?

Approved Date: January 11, 2023
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Board (QU-IRB)

APPENDIX C: IRB APPROVAL



Qatar University Institutional Review Board QU-IRB

QU-IRB Registration: IRB-QU-2025-006, QU-IRB, Assurance: IRB-A-QU-2019-0009

DATE: January 11, 2023

TO: Hissa Al Sulali

FROM: Qatar University Institutional Review Board (QU-IRB)

PROJECT TITLE: 1971334-1 Qatar Mediation Strategy: Afghanistan as a Case Study

QU-IRB REFERENCE #: QU-IRB 1801-EA/23

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

DECISION DATE: January 11, 2023

REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category # 6&7

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Qatar University Institutional Review Board (QU-IRB) has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review according to Qatar Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) regulations. This project has been determined to be a MINIMAL RISK project.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Qatar MoPH regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that Expedited Review approvals are valid for a period of one year and renewal should be sought prior to December 12, 2023 to ensure timely processing and continuity. Moreover, any changes/modifications to the original submitted protocol should be reported to the committee to seek approval prior to continuation.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others (UPIRSOs) and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

Documents Reviewed:

- Application Form - Qatar University - IRB Application.pdf (UPLOADED: 11/18/2022)
- Consent Form - Consent Form for Interview.docx (UPLOADED: 12/2/2022)
- Other - Interview questions (English).docx (UPLOADED: 12/2/2022)
- Other - QU-IRB Check List.pdf (UPLOADED: 10/18/2022)
- TrainingCertification - citiCompletionCertificate_10775149_46465837 copy.pdf (UPLOADED: 11/8/2022)

- TrainingCertification - CITI certificate - Hissa.pdf (UPLOADED: 11/1/2022)

If you have any questions, please contact QU-IRB at 4403 5307 or qu-irb@qu.edu.qa. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with the committee.

Best wishes,

Dr. Mohamed Emara
Chairperson, QU-IRB



This letter has been issued in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Qatar University's records.
Qatar University-Institutional Review Board (QU-IRB), P.O. Box 2713 Doha, Qatar
Tel: +974 4403-5307 (GMT +3hrs) email: QU-IRB@qu.edu.qa