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# The Qatari Spring: Qatar's emerging role in peacemaking

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# **The Qatari Spring: Qatar's Emerging Role in Peacemaking**

## **Research Paper, Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance and Globalisation in the Gulf States**

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# The Qatari Spring: Qatar's Emerging Role in Peacemaking

SULTAN BARAKAT

## Abstract

Once a little-known Gulf peninsula, the tiny, gas-rich emirate of Qatar has in recent years undergone a remarkable transformation to emerge on the global scene as a heavyweight power in contemporary peacemaking. This paper charts the rise of Qatar from a modest pearl-based economy and British protectorate to a gas giant and powerhouse in international mediation. Through a detailed examination of a number of recent peacemaking interventions, this paper asserts that a winning combination of Qatari policy makers' wealth, will and vision, coupled with the pursuit of three key strategies – political and economic liberalization, independence in foreign policy, and state branding – have permitted the Lilliputian state to carve a unique role for itself as an impartial mediator and bridge between the modern Western and Arab worlds. However, as later sections of the paper explore, Qatar's recent move to 'take sides' during the Arab Spring revolutions may signify a break from this role, and could threaten the reputation of impartial broker which Qatari policy makers have so carefully crafted over recent years.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Over recent years, the tiny Gulf state of Qatar has undergone a significant transformation in terms of its domestic and foreign policy. Once a low-profile, conservative emirate with little impact on the global arena, the past two decades have seen the country skyrocket to become a progressive key player in the Arab world, and in the wider international community. Qatar's rise has been propelled by a winning combination of its policy makers' wealth, will and vision, and is underpinned by three key strategies: economic and political liberalization, the pursuit of an independent foreign policy, and a 'state branding' project. These strategies have seen the state attempt to redesign itself as a wealthy, neutral and forward-looking actor committed to educating the Arab world, attracting foreign investment and tourism, bridging the gap between the Middle East and the West, and peacemaking. Combined, these three strategies have jointly allowed the state to emerge as an increasingly powerful mediator, with a carefully constructed reputation for impartiality, and an ability to offer a number of generous financial incentives to encourage antagonistic parties – including most recently, rival

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Palestinian factions Fateh and Hamas, and the United States and the Taliban – to come to the negotiation table.

Recent events related to the ‘Arab Spring’, however, have had an immense impact upon Qatar’s reputation, perhaps irrevocably altering its established image as an impartial mediator in the region. Throughout the tumultuous period of 2011 and 2012, Qatari policy makers have taken an aggressive new stance against violent oppression of protestors in Libya and Syria. Features of this assertive new position have included a robust new leadership role within the Arab League, characterized by extensive mediation efforts and a strong hand in plans to end the violent crackdowns across the region. Most controversial, however, has been the small Gulf country’s breaking with its traditional role as impartial third party, making an unprecedented move to ‘take sides’ during successive crises in Libya and Syria. In Libya, Qatari activity included a variety of contributions to the campaign which eventually ousted Colonel Gaddafi, most significantly lobbying for military intervention, and the provision of weapons, Mirage jets and ground troops to rebel and ally forces. Similarly, in Syria, when regional and international diplomatic efforts failed to halt brutal oppression of protestors by the Assad regime, Qatar stepped up efforts to end the crisis, openly calling for the president to step down, and advocating for the international community to help the armed opposition ‘by all means’, including through the provision of cash and weapons (Chulov 2012). Such aggressive actions have broken with Qatar’s traditional determination to act as a neutral and impartial broker, potentially eradicating one of the key elements of the country’s success in emerging as a powerful international mediator: the confidence which diverse parties had in its ability to treat them without bias. As such, these actions not only risk compromising the state’s key positions as regional mediator and interlocutor between the Middle East and the West, but also expose the small nation to new security risks from antagonistic states such as Iran and Syria, which were previously placated by Qatar’s overt impartiality and extensive attempts to maintain friendly relations.

Qatar’s recent emergence in the international arena means that its peacemaking efforts remain relatively under-analysed in comparison to other leading players. This paper aims to address this gap by firstly offering an overview of Qatar’s recent rise to global prominence, charting its progress from a small conservative British protectorate with a pearl-based economy to a progressive Arab leader powered by immense wealth in liquid natural gas. Secondly, it will examine how such wealth, will and vision facilitated its transformation to a globally respected mediator, exploring Qatari mediation through its ambitious efforts to reconcile rival Palestinian factions, the Taliban and the United States, as well as conflicting

parties in Yemen, Lebanon and Darfur. Finally, the paper will offer insight into the motivations and potential impacts of Qatar's unprecedented response to events surrounding the Arab Spring revolutions, and suggests areas for further research relating to Qatari peacemaking.<sup>1</sup>

## **2. QATAR'S RISE TO GLOBAL PROMINENCE**

In the pre-Second World War era, Qatar – ruled by the Al Thani family since the early nineteenth century and a British protectorate from 1916 – relied heavily on its burgeoning pearl industry, being largely isolated from key trade routes in the region (Mallakh 1979; Crystal 1990). Following the economic crises resulting from the world wars, and the crash of the pearl industry following the development of pearl cultivation methods, the country's economy suffered a fatal collapse (Mallakh 1979: 31; Crystal 1990: 5). This was gradually reversed throughout the twentieth century as a result of the discovery of significant oil reserves in Qatari territory. Between 1949 and the late 1970s the petrol industry was nationalized, leading the Qatari state to become increasingly strong and centralized, as it provided social services and guaranteed state employment for the small Qatari population (Mallakh 1979: 34; Crystal 1990).

Following independence from Britain in 1971, Qatar attempted to carve a sovereign path in terms of its foreign policy – rejecting British plans for it to join the United Arab Emirates (UAE; Da Lage 2005; Smith 2004: 78). Meanwhile, its larger neighbour Saudi Arabia guaranteed the nation's security throughout its first twenty years of independence, until the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 awakened the smallest Gulf states to the necessity of finding additional and alternative means of security provision (Dargin 2007; Rabi 2009; Ulrichsen 2009).

Qatar's rise to prominence on the international stage was marked by the 1995 bloodless coup which brought Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani to replace his father, Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad Al Thani, as emir. Reasons for the coup – which may have been supported by the United States, which was quick to recognize the incoming regime – remain unclear (De Lage 2005). Many forward the argument that Sheikh Hamad saw his father as an economic hindrance, with others observing that the new regime acted to scupper plans that the former emir was harbouring to cede power to another family member (Rabi 2009). Yet others argue that Sheikh Hamad detested the growing influence Saudi Arabia had had on his father (Ibrahim 2012).

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<sup>1</sup> This paper presents a continuation to an ongoing work by the author on the role of Qatar in peacemaking.

Qatar has remained largely stable since the coup, including throughout the recent political turmoil of the Arab Spring, which has left the country remarkably unscathed. During the past decade, the emirate has embarked upon significant changes in the fields of domestic and foreign policy, with a modest internal political liberalization agenda, and ambitious economic and foreign policy agendas. The most significant evolution has been with regard to foreign policy, particularly in terms of playing an active and ever-growing role in regional peacemaking. A small, tight-knit group of Qatari representatives, led by its prime minister and minister of foreign affairs Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al Thani,<sup>2</sup> have worked incessantly to carve out an exceptionally high-profile niche for Qatar in the international arena. In 2006–7, Qatar spent a two-year term on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) – an episode that can be identified as pivotal in its rise to global prominence. Of particular note was the period in which Qatar assumed the presidency of the UNSC, during which time it pushed forward an agenda for an Arab–Israeli peace plan, calling members to a ministerial summit focusing on ‘Sustained Peace in the Middle East’ (Qatar News Agency n.d.). Further Qatari initiatives have included undertaking mediation roles in a number of conflicts in the region, including in Yemen, Lebanon and Darfur. Most recently, Qatar has demonstrated an unprecedented and high-profile involvement in negotiating crises related to the Arab Spring, leading critics to note that this small, previously low-profile state is ‘punching above its weight’ in global affairs (Roberts 2011a).

Qatar’s rise to global prominence has relied on the pursuit of a three-pronged strategy of political and economic liberalization, state branding and pursuing an independent foreign policy. The following sections of this paper examine the success of this three-pronged strategy – which has been buffered by vast reserves of Qatari wealth, will and vision, and the demise of Egypt and Saudi Arabia as regional mediators – and outline how these factors jointly explain the small Gulf state’s emergence as a key player in Middle Eastern peacemaking in recent years.

### **3. POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC LIBERALIZATION**

Since the bloodless coup brought the current emir to power in 1995, he has embarked on an accelerated liberalization programme on both political and economic fronts. Politically, this has seen the introduction of universal suffrage for municipal elections in 1999, the establishment of a Ruling Family Council in 2000, a new constitution in 2003, and the

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<sup>2</sup> Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al Thani was first appointed as minister of foreign affairs in 1992. He kept his position following the 1995 coup, and on 3 April 2007 he was appointed as prime minister while retaining his position as minister of foreign affairs.

promise of elections in 2013 (Bahry 1999; Ulrichsen 2009; Kamrava 2009; Lambert 2011; BBC News 2011a). However, many remain sceptical of how significant these reforms have proven to be in terms of transforming the Qatari political scene. Analysts have observed that continued royal control of finances means that truly democratic tendencies have not surfaced, despite the introduction of formal democratic institutions (Rathmell and Schulze 2000). Interestingly, it has further been argued that liberalization policies and increased women's participation actually constitute a facet of the Qatari state-branding strategy, since they are designed to legitimize the Qatari regime in the eyes of the international community (Lambert 2011). Despite limited reform, Qatar has not been affected by sweeping political unrest across the region during the Arab Spring revolutions. Many argue that the economic prowess, astonishingly high GDP, and international prestige projects such as the 2022 World Cup mean that the Qatari population see themselves as having too much at risk to stir up a popular uprising (Ulrichsen 2011).

Extensive economic liberalization measures have also accompanied recent political reforms. Bleak economic forecasts in the 1990s prompted an economic diversification scheme to ensure the sustained growth of the Qatari economy and a move away from an over-dependence on fossil fuel revenues. This has included expansions in the tourism, steel and petrochemical industries, privatization and the introduction of an investment-friendly regulatory environment, with the Doha stock market being established in 1995 (Gonzalez et al. 2008; Rathmell and Schulze 2000).

In recent years, Qatar has also exploited its vast natural gas resources, becoming the world's largest liquid natural gas producer in 2006, with the third largest proven supply of natural gas in the world. In fact, by 2010, Qatar was producing one third of the world supply of the precious fuel (Canty 2011), earning the country US\$28.8 billion, nearly double its revenue from oil export. The Qatari gas industry has been extremely fortunate with regard to timings, profiting from a quickly diminishing global oil supply and the resulting shift to find alternative fuels (Gonzalez et al. 2008). Consequently, Qatar's GDP has quadrupled in the past twenty years, emerging as the highest in the world (see Table 1). The economy was set to grow by 20 per cent in 2011 (Hankir 2011); early consensus estimates at the close of 2011 suggested that the real GDP had grown by 17 per cent throughout the year (General Secretariat for Development Planning, Qatar 2011).



**Table 1.** *GDP per capita: top five countries and selected West Asia and North Africa (WANA) states, 2011*

| Global rating | Country              | GDP per capita (US\$) |
|---------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1             | Qatar                | 102,943               |
| 2             | Luxembourg           | 80,119                |
| 3             | Singapore            | 59,711                |
| 4             | Norway               | 53,471                |
| 5             | Brunei               | 49,384                |
| 5             | Hong Kong            | 49,137                |
| 7             | United Arab Emirates | 48,158                |
| 11            | Kuwait               | 41,961                |
| 26            | Israel               | 30,975                |
| 33            | Bahrain              | 27,556                |
| 35            | Oman                 | 26,519                |
| 39            | Saudi Arabia         | 24,237                |
| 59            | Lebanon              | 15,523                |

*Source:* Compiled from International Monetary Fund data, 2011. Available online at: [www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2011/02/weodata/index.aspx](http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2011/02/weodata/index.aspx)

The oil and liquid natural gas exportation industry has permitted massive investment at home and abroad (including in prestigious companies such as Porsche, Harrods and the London Stock Exchange), and powered the country's economic boom, which has transformed Qatar from a position of relative obscurity to one of regional – and increasingly global – leadership (Barakat and Milton in press).

The legitimacy which Qatar has gained in the eyes of the international community as a result of its limited political liberalization, coupled with the immense wealth gained from natural gas sales, have jointly laid the foundation for all Qatari progress in recent years. Such international repute and wealth have permitted Qatari policy makers to pursue their domestic and foreign policy goals doggedly, financing prestige projects at home to keep the Qatari population satisfied, whilst allowing lavish spending to keep global partners happy and facilitate regional mediation processes.

#### **4. STATE BRANDING**

The global trend towards an appreciation of ‘soft power’ – the ability to appeal to and persuade others, using the attractiveness of a country’s culture, political ideals and policies (Nye 2004) – as opposed to more traditional demonstrations of ‘hard’, military and economic strength, has prompted many international actors to follow a course of state branding (Van Ham 2001, 2008a). Given their wealth and relatively small populations, as well as their desire to diversify revenue while providing security to their economic base, the concept of state branding resonated with a number of Gulf states, in particular the UAE and Qatar. In fact, analysts have noted that several categories of contemporary high-profile Qatari initiatives are evidence of a planned Qatari agenda of state branding (Anon. 2012). These initiatives can be roughly grouped into four categories, relating to education and culture, sport, international travel and tourism, and the development of the Arab media outlets, notably the Al Jazeera news brand.

One of the key Qatari state-branding categories relates to culture and education. Largely through the efforts of the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development, the state is attempting to portray itself as a cultural and intellectual hub through hosting world-renowned academic and cultural centres; Georgetown, Virginia, North-western and University College London are amongst the many universities which have set up campuses in ‘Education City’, the vast educational complex in Doha, along with leading research centres and think-tanks such as the RAND Corporation and the Brookings Institute.

Playing generous host to international conferences is a further aspect of the intellectual and cultural initiative, with Qatar hosting a number of international summits – such as the 2001 World Trade Organization negotiations, and the above-mentioned 2006 UN summit on ‘Sustained Peace in the Middle East’ – intended to garner support for Qatar as a leader in efforts to stabilize the Arab world. Similarly, Qatar has spent enormous sums building up cultural capital in Doha. Cultural highlights include the Museum of Islamic Art and the soon-to-open National Museum of Qatar, a lavish new structure whose design is inspired by the desert sand rose. The museum purportedly ‘reflects and belongs to a new era in Qatari prosperity, the country’s prominent role in the Arabian Gulf community and its world standing’ (Qatar Museums Authority n.d).

Further state-branding efforts relate to the sporting world, with Qatar striving to become a leading destination for international sporting events. An ambitious bid – whilst marred with allegations of bribery – has secured Qatar’s place as controversial host for the World Cup 2022 (Peterson 2006). Doha previously hosted the 2006 Asian Games and the

2011 Asian Cup, and is currently one of five cities competing to host the Olympic Games in 2020 following a previous failed bid for 2016 (Sportbusiness.com 2008; International Olympic Committee 2011).

Travel and tourism are further activities that demonstrate a state-branding agenda. The Qatar Airways brand has ushered the Qatari colours to over 100 destinations around the world, and ensured that Doha has become a global transport hub, with 18 million passengers travelling through the city in 2011 (Doha International Airport 2012). The Qatar Airways fleet is set to triple by 2018, with the Qatar Tourism Authority continuing its mission to promote the country as an ideal visitor destination based on the five pillars of meetings, culture, education, sports and leisure (Qatar Tourism Authority 2009).

Finally, perhaps offering most evidence of Qatar's state-branding strategy are its media and communication outlets, particularly the Doha-based and state-funded Al Jazeera news network, which offers a global voice to the Arab community. According to Bahry (2001), Al Jazeera reflects the emir's wish for a TV station which would broadcast his desired image of a progressive Qatar to the Middle East and the international community, contributing to his policy of 'bridging the gap' between the Western and Arab worlds.

Whilst Qatar has consistently insisted in public that Al Jazeera is editorially independent, it has long been speculated that the channel 'serves as an arm of its host nation's foreign policy' (Chatriwala 2011). These speculations have proven damaging to Qatari branding, particularly with regard to the projected image of impartiality, which has come under fire in recent controversies related to Al Jazeera. Especially troublesome was the recent scandal over the resignation of the channel's director-general Wadah Khanfar, who was subsequently replaced by a member of the Qatari royal family. Further damaging have been several WikiLeaks articles suggesting that Qatar has made use of the channel as a foreign policy tool for leverage with Egypt – allegedly offering to suspend broadcasting to Mubarak's Egypt if the country agreed to support a Palestinian statehood deal. Additional WikiLeaks suggested that the channel had toned down negative coverage of Saudi Arabia and the United States to improve relations, with *Foreign Policy* noting that one leaked US cable on the face of it appeared to be 'a smoking gun showing Al Jazeera at the U.S. government's beck and call' (Chatriwala 2011). However, despite such controversies, Al Jazeera remains a highly respected news outlet, to which Western media consistently turn for coverage on issues relating to the Middle East, and which remains a source of pride for Qatar.

Several suggestions have been forwarded to explain the motives behind Qatar's resolute pursuit of state branding. Bagaen (2007) and other analysts have suggested that the

process is aimed at attracting foreign business and investment and is similar to Dubai's efforts to secure its place as a cosmopolitan tourist and commercial hub. Others have suggested that the process is designed to project the image of Qatar as a Middle Eastern country that can offer political stability, liberalism and a progressive outlook – the ideal place to do business (Cooper and Momani 2009; Rabi 2009). Further, according to Peterson (2006), developing such an image is also vital to a long-term security strategy, as it fosters the trust amongst states that is necessary to ensure support for sovereignty and security in the global arena.

State branding has also been used in the pursuit of domestic goals. Observers note that state branding is part of a nation-building project, aimed at fostering a sense of national identity, loyalty and social cohesion. Some analysts assert that, unlike in many other countries, Qatari identity was not shaped by collective shared myths of a glorious past, and thus state branding contributes to creating such shared notions in the contemporary context (Crystal 1990; Amara 2006; Van Ham 2002).

On a regional level, analysts assert that the Qatari state-branding strategy is designed to ensure the country can compete with neighbouring states, particularly the UAE and Saudi Arabia. Similarly, as mentioned above, state branding facilitates Qatar's desire to promote itself as a neutral and progressive leader of the Arab and Islamic world, as evidenced through its hosting of Islamic conferences and events, and significant investment in Islamic charities, including the Qatar Red Crescent Society and the Qatar Foundation, which boasts Her Highness First Lady Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser as chairperson.

Analysts have additionally argued that Qatar is attempting to use state branding in the international political arena as a means to portray itself as the natural bridge between the contemporary Arab and Western worlds. Through actively depicting Qatar as a force for progress and modernity, whilst also an inherently Islamic and Arab country, Qatari authorities wish to appeal to both sides of the Middle East/West divide as an ideal interlocutor that can facilitate mutual understanding and foster a sense of common ground (Anon. 2012). Such a venture, however, has proven to be an extremely delicate balancing act, and has not been achieved without a measure of seemingly contradictory behaviour from the emirate (Rabi 2009). Illustrative of the 'schizophrenia' at times involved in this difficult endeavour is the fact that, of late, Qatar simultaneously banned the sale of alcohol throughout the country, won a World Cup bid including an agreement to permit the sale of alcohol to fans, and historically paid the highest ever price for a single piece of art in purchasing Cézanne's *The Card Players* – a piece featuring two gamblers clearly sharing a bottle of wine – for US\$250 million (Peers 2012). Nevertheless, Qatar's attempt to fill the recent and increasingly manifest gap between

the Western hemisphere and the Middle East has met with a great deal of success within the international arena, as we shall see in later sections of this paper.

State branding is thus a second key element that has facilitated Qatar's emergence as a key international broker and facilitator. Such a process can be viewed as a successful attempt to take up greater 'space' in the international arena than such a small state would normally occupy, as well as to project Qatar onto the international scene as a global player in terms of business, academia, culture, travel, sport and – most importantly – peacemaking and bridging the gap between the Arab and Western worlds.

## **5. QATAR'S INDEPENDENT FOREIGN POLICY**

Qatar has always sought to retain a flexible and independent foreign policy, largely based on the promotion of international peace. This key facet of Qatari strategy is laid out in the nation's constitution, which states in Article 7 that: 'The foreign policy of the State is based on the principle of strengthening international peace and security by means of encouraging peaceful resolution of international disputes; and shall support the right of peoples to self-determination; and shall not interfere in the domestic affairs of states; and shall cooperate with peace-loving nations.' (Government of the State of Qatar 2004)

The clear priority given to foreign policy within Qatari political strategy is illustrated by the fact that Qatar's prime minister, Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al Thani, is also its foreign minister. The prime minister has a distinctively strong hand in foreign affairs, acting as the leading Qatari mediator (Law 2011). Principal facets of the country's policy have included keeping relations open with a variety of actors – no mean feat in the context of the Middle East, where diplomatic rivalries and alliances form part of a perpetual power game – and creating an image of Qatar as a leading impartial actor in the Middle East.

A policy of open relations with often antagonistic groups has not, however, always garnered support from nations in the Arab world and elsewhere. Many see Qatar's actions as oftentimes controversial and conflicting (Rabi 2009). This is evident when one examines Qatar's term on the UNSC – to which it was elected by a near unanimous 'yes' vote (186 of 189) in the UN General Assembly. During this period, in addition to calling a summit on peacemaking in the Arab world, the state conversely simultaneously attempted to block UNSC statements supporting the arrest of Omar Al Bashir, Sudan's president, who has been indicted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) on charges of war crimes.

Nonetheless, some commentators argue that Qatar's 'playing all sides' (Worth 2008) is a carefully constructed strategy designed to help the country navigate the complex realities of

international relations and protect Qatari geostrategic interests. Indeed, the approach has brought many advantages to the country. An example of skilfully managed relations is the fact that Qatar, until recently, had managed to maintain diplomatic ties with Syria, Hezbollah and Tehran, whilst simultaneously hosting a US military base on their territory and maintaining good bilateral relations with the Western giant (Da Lage 2005; Worth 2008; Hamid 2011). Relationships with Tehran and Washington are both particularly important aspects of Qatar's foreign relations. The relationship with Iran is a vital aspect of Qatar's physical and economic security, since the two neighbours share the largest gas field in the world (Reuters 2010a). Similarly, the strategic presence of a US military base at Al Udeid ensures a mutual dependency for the two countries that offers Qatar protection from external threats (Ulrichsen 2011). Recent events in Syria, however, have soured the difficult triangle between the three countries, with Iran accusing the ruling Al Thani family of acting on behalf of the United States in an effort to install anti-Iran regimes throughout the Middle East (Vatanka 2012).

Furthermore, Qatar's relations with both the Israeli government and Palestinian actors have been equally turbulent and controversial, with Qatar's development of relatively good relations with Israel over the past decade raising concern amongst Arab and Islamic nations (Peterson 2006; Rabi 2009). Ever the juggler, Qatar has had a relationship with Israel that has been markedly turbulent, with Doha demonstrating the limits of Qatari patience in 2008/9 over the blockade of Gaza and closing the city's Israel interest office as a result. Meanwhile, Qatar has maintained relations with key Palestinian stakeholders, supplying Gaza with millions of dollars' worth of humanitarian aid, with First Lady Sheikha Mozah additionally funding a campaign to raise awareness of the humanitarian crisis on the strip (Fromherz 2012). The controversial relationship with Israel appears to be in conflict with relations with the likes of Hamas, Iran and Hezbollah, in addition to the Qatari desire to emerge as a leader among Arab nations. However, many observers note that attempting to maintain such challenging relations is a logical requirement for ensuring state security and positive relations with states outside of the Arab and Islamic world (Rabi 2009).

Particularly key to Qatari foreign policy is the tumultuous relationship with Saudi Arabia. The Middle Eastern giant until recently acted as Qatar's guardian, ensuring the security of the tiny peninsular nation. Saudi Arabia shares the state's only land border, and the neighbours share close cultural and religious ties through the strict Wahhabi form of Islam practised in both countries. In recent years, however, relations have deteriorated as a result of border disputes and Qatar's growing influence on the international scene, particularly with regard to rocketing Qatari mediation attempts. This has been a domain traditionally reserved

**Table 2.** *Peace index: Qatar and selected Middle East and North Africa (MENA) states*

|              | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 |
|--------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Qatar        | 30   | 33   | 16   | 15   | 12   |
| Oman         | 22   | 25   | 21   | 23   | 41   |
| UAE          | 38   | 42   | 40   | 44   | 33   |
| Kuwait       | 46   | 45   | 42   | 39   | 29   |
| Bahrain      | 62   | 74   | 69   | 70   | 123  |
| Saudi Arabia | 90   | 108  | 104  | 107  | 101  |
| Lebanon      | 114  | 132  | 132  | 134  | 137  |
| Israel       | 119  | 136  | 141  | 144  | 145  |

*Source:* Numbers refers to global peace rating for each year (e.g. Qatar was ranked as the twelfth most peaceful country in the world in 2011). The index is composed of twenty-three indicators, ranging from a nation's level of military expenditure to its relations with neighbouring countries and the level of respect for human rights. See [www.visionofhumanity.org/gpi-data/#/2010/scor/SA](http://www.visionofhumanity.org/gpi-data/#/2010/scor/SA).

for Saudi Arabia; however, the smaller Gulf state has recently profited from its giant neighbour's overt or covert involvement in regional conflicts, such as that in Yemen, to step in and fill this role. Despite this rivalry, strategic mutual interests, such as transportation routes, mean that the countries remain inherently interdependent (Bower 2008; Moran 2009).

On the whole, pursuing an independent foreign policy appears to have largely paid off in terms of Qatar's security – hence its top rating in the Middle East Peace Index (see Table 2).<sup>3</sup> Good diplomatic relations – including with a variety of antagonistic groups in the Middle East and further afield – and the protection offered by ties to the US military have largely ensured that Qatar steers clear of external threats. However, such a policy also means that Qatar has had continuously to navigate a minefield of challenging relations: a particularly risky business in this period of unrest in the Arab world.

Qatar's independent foreign policy thus represents the third and final key element that has propelled the country's rise from relative obscurity to global broker with a reputation for impartiality, generosity and a genuine desire to promote peace. In turn, the success of these strategies has been assured by three crucial driving factors: wealth, will and vision. The immense wealth at the state's disposal has allowed Qatar's government, led by the emir, to pursue determinedly his vision of the country emerging as a wealthy and progressive leader of Arab nations and a bridge between the Middle Eastern and Western worlds. Further, the

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<sup>3</sup> Qatar ranked twelfth in the global peace index for 2011, above countries such as Sweden, the Netherlands and the UK, and ranked first in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region (Vision of Humanity 2011).

execution of the emir's will is facilitated by the lack of bureaucratic political decision-making mechanisms in Qatar's political system, which allow him and a close circle of decision-makers to give swift and decisive verdicts regarding policy, unhindered by antagonistic groups.

While the above interpretative framework offered for understanding Qatar's rise to prominence and a role in peace and conflict is useful, a qualification should be added: these theories are of heuristic value and cannot capture all the inherent complexities involved in the case at hand. One insight from studying states and political life in the MENA region is that many of the most developed theories of political science consistently perform poorly when explaining or predicting events. Political systems and conflicts in the region are often highly personalized, and an intimate knowledge of the actors involved is required for a full understanding. The Arab Spring offers one compelling example in which expectations of stability held by most observers were dramatically proven incorrect. Nevertheless, the above combination of strategies has placed Qatar in a unique position that has allowed it to pursue its own interest in a pragmatic, if often controversial, way, without having to worry about what interpretations analysts attach to the state's motivations and politics.

This pragmatic approach to foreign policy is best illustrated by its often contradictory conflict-mediation roles. Two of Qatar's most controversial recent mediation attempts – notably those between Palestinian factions Fateh and Hamas, and between the United States, Afghanistan and the Taliban – highlight the unique international reputation which Qatar has succeeded in making for itself as an impartial broker between antagonistic groups. The following section will consider Qatar's involvement in these controversial cases, before going on to examine in more depth the history of Qatari mediation, which paved the way for their involvement in such high-profile and contentious efforts. Yemen, Lebanon and Darfur will be examined as cases that can offer an insight into Qatar's mediation efforts. The aim is not to give a comprehensive overview of Qatari mediation, but rather to highlight selected examples that may provide an insight into broader trends in Qatar's evolving foreign policy with regard to mediating conflict and peacemaking.

## **6. THE 'NON-STOP MEDIATOR'**

Since 2005, Qatar's extensive involvement in regional mediation, in countries such as Sudan, Lebanon, Yemen, Iraq, etc., has led analysts to dub the country 'the non-stop mediator' (Worth 2008). In late 2011 and early 2012, Qatar pushed ahead with two of its most ambitious mediation projects: facilitating unity negotiations between rival Palestinian factions Fateh and



Hamas – against the will of the United States– on the one hand, and hosting historic talks between the United States and the Taliban on the other. Such efforts made full use of the country’s strong traditions of both providing refuge to controversial Islamist figures and providing a neutral space for negotiations to take place.

The ‘Doha Declaration’ between rival Palestinian factions Fateh and Hamas – which have been bitter rivals since Hamas seized control of Gaza in 2007 and expelled the Fateh-led Palestinian Authority – paves the way for a unity government for the West Bank and Gaza (Sawafta 2012). Led by ‘independent technocrats’, a new government is set to be formed this year, with presidential and parliamentary elections touted as coming later in 2012. The deal, presided over by Qatari Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani and heavily supported by Crown Prince Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, has been welcomed by supporters of both Palestinian parties, but has met with consternation abroad.

Israel has denounced the agreement, asserting that Fateh must choose between Hamas – which is sworn to the destruction of Israel, but open to indefinite ceasefire – and peace with Israel. Similarly, the agreement is likely to complicate relations between the Palestinian authorities and the United States, with Barak Obama (quoted in White House Office of the Press Secretary 2011), having condemned a similar previous agreement in 2011, noting that ‘the recent agreement between Fateh and Hamas poses an enormous obstacle to peace’. For the United States, the inclusion of Hamas in Palestinian governance is hugely problematic, since Congress has passed amendments classifying the body as a terrorist organization. This has repercussions not only for political relations, but also financially, since the United States – the largest donor to the West Bank and Gaza – cannot provide financial support to Hamas (Bronner 2012). Both the United States and the European Union have stated that they will not negotiate with Hamas until it renounces violence, recognizes Israel as a state and adheres to previous agreements signed by the Palestinian Authority – conditions to which the group has, until now, refused to agree.

Harsher critics of the agreement from the Palestinian Territories and further afield have additionally noted that similar agreements between the two factions, including a deal signed in 2011, have later not been implemented. The lack of a timeframe for the implementation of a new agreement has left many dubious as to whether the Qatar-facilitated agreement will prove more fruitful than others, particularly since it does not appear to address the biggest areas of disagreement between the two parties – notably those relating to dealing with Israel and the intricacies of a coalition government. As Palestinian political analyst Hani al Masri noted: ‘They [Fateh and Hamas] are avoiding the main issue. They are waiting to see what the

international community's reaction will be. This leaves all the important issues unresolved' (quoted in Sawafta 2012).

The talks have additionally brought repercussions for Qatar's foreign relations. Already terse relations with Israel following the Gaza offensive in 2008/9, when the Qatari authorities forced the closure of the Israel trade office in Doha, have been further soured by Qatar's facilitation of the peace talks and its support for the Palestinian bid for UN membership in late 2011 (Middle East Monitor 2011; Ravid 2010; Roberts 2012).

Only time will tell whether Qatar's efforts to resolve the feud between the two parties have had sufficient substance to bring a lasting unity between long-standing rivals Hamas and Fateh. The crucial question at this point becomes whether such a controversial agreement can not only bring unity between rival Palestinian political factions, but also bring much-needed legitimacy to the coalition, and contribute to the process of creating the political accord necessary to achieve the ultimate goal: that of sustainable peace between Israel and Palestine.

Meanwhile, in January 2012, the emirate invited the Taliban to open an office in Doha from which to commence negotiations with the international community, allegedly after months of secret discussions between representatives of Qatar, the United States and the Taliban (Borger 2011). The venture is in its nascent stages, with the Taliban carefully avoiding calling the discussions 'peace talks' and insisting that they were intended to negotiate the release of prisoners from Guantánamo Bay. Taliban representatives have, however, expressed a desire to strengthen discussions to create 'an environment of trust' for further talks in the future (Maulavi Qalamuddin, former minister of vice and virtue for the Taliban, quoted in Rubin 2012). Despite such expressed good intent, there are signs that negotiations have stalled at the first hurdle. The name of the proposed office has proven controversial, as both the United States and Afghanistan rejected plans for it to be named an entity of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan – the name under which the Taliban governed the country prior to being toppled by US forces in 2001 (Associated Press 2012). The Taliban subsequently announced the suspension of talks, noting that unacceptable demands had been made upon them. Despite this first glitch, both the United States and Afghan administrations have expressed their continued willingness to enter into longer-term peace talks.

As with the Palestinian unity accord, it is too early to judge how successful this ambitious venture may prove. However, there is no doubt that securing the basis and, crucially, the location for talks to take place between the Taliban and the international community is a vital first step towards constructive dialogue. The fact that Qatar has had the reputation, flexibility, resources and political vision to make such a step only serves to

reaffirm the vital role in managing difficult Western–Arab/Islamic relations which the country has so carefully crafted for itself. The following section will critically explore some of the mediation cases that have helped Qatar to construct this role over recent years.

## **7. CONTEMPORARY QATARI MEDIATION EFFORTS**

### *7.1. Yemen*

Since 2003, civil war has broken out periodically between the government of Yemen and Zayidi Shiite rebels in the northern province of Saada. The conflict with these rebels, known as the Houthis, threatens to destabilize the entire region. Ceasefire agreements have been brokered multiple times, but all have failed. Emir Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani visited Yemen in May 2007; during his visit, he sent a Qatari Foreign Ministry delegation with hired Yemeni mediators to talk to Houthi leaders in northern Yemen with the aim of ending the conflict. On 16 June 2007, a joint ceasefire agreement was announced between the government of Yemen and the Houthi rebels. A peace agreement was signed in Doha on 1 February 2008, with Qatar pledging US\$300–500 million in reconstruction assistance for Saada province (International Crisis Group 2009). The June 2007 and February 2008 accords included provisions for the Yemeni government to release prisoners, grant amnesty, and provide reconstruction for war-torn areas; the Houthi rebels were, in turn, expected to come out of their mountain strongholds and disarm (Dorlian 2011).

Shortly after the accords were signed, however, fighting resumed. By March 2009, Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Saleh declared the Qatari mediation to be a failure (Salmoni et al. 2010). Qatar thus withdrew its pledges of assistance, to the disappointment of local populations in Saada that had greatly looked forward to much-needed development projects (Barakat et al. 2011). On 11 February 2010, a non-Qatari-mediated ceasefire was declared between the government and the Houthis (Reuters 2010b). Later that year, on 29 August, Qatar negotiated a renewal of the earlier ceasefire, but with a twenty-two-point political agreement (Barakat et al. 2011: 69). However, these efforts were fruitless, as fighting again broke out soon after (Dorlian 2011). The Yemeni government and the Houthi rebels both blamed each other for non-implementation and breaking with the terms of the agreement, and observers noted that the open corruption of President Saleh, and his failure to abide by the

terms of ceasefire agreements, were an immense obstacle to success<sup>4</sup> (Anon. 2012; Salmoni et al. 2010).

The lack of success of Qatari mediation in the Houthi/Saada conflict may be construed as due to a number of factors. The most important of these was the lack of effective follow-up mechanisms to regulate and monitor disputes during implementation and adjudication, according to the International Crisis Group. Lacking established channels for mediating disputes within the process, the peace agreement easily fell apart; the Group stated that ‘the initiative essentially amounted to throwing money at a problem, hoping it would disappear’ (International Crisis Group 2009). Not realizing the need to establish an effective monitoring and follow-up mechanism demonstrated a lack of understanding of the conflict on the part of the Qataris. Such lack of contextual knowledge and comprehension can be a fatal ‘sin’ in third-party mediation, to quote Lakhdar Brahimi and Salman Ahmed (2008). Clearly an independent analysis of the conflict and its main actors would have led the Qatari to conclude that given the wide range of interests involved (politicians, tribal leaders, military commanders, etc.) and the complexity of the conflict, regular contact with all parties was essential.

Furthermore, it has been contended that Qatari mediation did not align with traditional and customary practices of mediation, or *wassata*, and therefore the mediation process and its resulting agreements held ‘little moral compulsion over the participants’ (Salmoni et al. 2010). For example, the 2007 Doha Agreement made demands for the Houthis to disarm, while no comparable provisions were made for the Yemeni government, even symbolically. This was in direct contravention of the ‘restorative logic of tribal mediation among equals’ (Salmoni et al. 2010). However, President Saleh contradicted this criticism of Qatari mediation by stating exactly the opposite: Qatari mediation precisely buffered a false self-perception of the Houthis as equals around the negotiation table (Salmoni et al. 2010).

Despite such criticism of Qatari involvement in Yemen, Picard (2010) conversely suggests that Qatar’s errors are not wholly to blame for successive failed mediation efforts, asserting that a key factor in the failure to solve the conflict may have been that violence was actually a goal of the parties involved, in particular the Yemeni government. He notes that Saleh required the existence of an armed threat to justify authoritarian measures, and to occupy other armed groups such as Sunni and tribal militias, who might have become a threat to the regime under conditions of peace. Thus, the government’s taking part in mediation may

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<sup>4</sup> One interviewee in Doha, who wished to remain anonymous, went so far as to assert that Saleh was stealing cash intended to support the mediation process.

be construed as an effort to placate domestic and international observers, rather than a committed attempt to end the conflict.

## *7.2. Lebanon*

In the aftermath of the July 2006 Israel–Hezbollah war, Lebanon exploded in political conflict. Between 2006 and 2008, the government was in political gridlock, and hordes of protestors staged continuous sit-ins in downtown Beirut. The stakes were significantly raised on 6 May 2008, when the prime minister, Fouad Siniora, attempted to dismantle Hezbollah’s communications infrastructure and dismiss the head of Beirut Airport. In response, Hezbollah and Amal put up roadblocks and took control of much of West Beirut (Cutler 2011). Lebanon was nearly pushed into another civil war as running fire fights broke out all over the capital (Quilty 2008; Hajjar 2009).

The conflicting Lebanese parties were brought to crisis talks in Doha, hosted by a Qatari-led group of regional states. The eighteen-month conflict was finally brought to an end with the Doha Agreement signed on 21 May 2008. The agreement had two primary points: General Michel Suleiman, the head of the Lebanese National Army, would be appointed president as a compromise candidate, and a national unity government would be formed with a conditional balance between the parties that gave Hezbollah a *de facto* vote.

Analysis of the May 2008 Doha Agreement mostly contends that it was a success; some analysts noted that it had triumphed where all other efforts had failed (Rabi 2009). Qatar’s success in mediating the Lebanon agreement shattered perceptions that Qatar was merely a minor player, a slant garnered from failed efforts in mediating Israeli–Palestinian peace talks (Moran 2009). In particular, the success of the negotiations was enabled by the good faith that both parties had in Qatar, which permitted the mediators to assume a powerful role in reaching a compromise agreement (Haddad 2009). In addition, ‘personal and insistent intervention’ by Qatari mediators has been viewed as a critical factor, as Lebanese actors are generally considered unable to resolve domestic crises when left to themselves (Haddad 2009; Hajjar 2009).

Some, however, see the resolution of the 2006–8 Lebanese political stalemate as inadequate, as it was approached in a crisis management mode that failed to address the roots of the conflict (Haddad 2009). As with Yemen, Qatari mediation was criticized for its lack of contextual understanding and for not being consistent with customary and traditional Lebanese mediation practices. Although Qatari mediators were able to frame the negotiations in a general ‘Arab’ context, the ultimate product was incompatible with a lasting settlement in

Lebanon's specific context (Haddad 2009). In addition, the Doha Agreement focused on reapportioning votes, as opposed to structural transformation, a stark contrast to the October 1989 Taif Accords under Syrian and Saudi auspices. Thus, the agreement did not address the structure of Lebanese political institutions, although it was able to resolve the immediate political standoff (Makdisi et al. 2010; Anon. 2012).

A further vital facet of Qatari mediation strategy in Lebanon was the promise of additional investment in post-conflict reconstruction and relief efforts.<sup>5</sup> Qatar's recognition of the impact of reconstruction as a bargaining tool was clearly influential in allowing the negotiations to arrive at a swift outcome. The promises of further investment totalling around US\$300 million provided much-needed leverage on the parties to deliver an agreement, thus leading critics to describe the Qatari mediation in Lebanon as 'checkbook diplomacy' (Rabi 2009). In addition, it is posited that large Qatari economic investments in Syria were used as key leverage on Damascus, a potential spoiler in the process (Gulbrandsen 2010: 55).

Qatari mediation in Lebanon can therefore be viewed as a short-term success without long-term sustainability, in particular considering the deeper implications of Lebanon's political troubles. In January 2011, the Lebanese government collapsed after a Hezbollah walkout. Syria and Saudi Arabia led initial rounds of mediation, followed by Turkey and Qatar; however, all attempts were frustrated (Evans 2011). The cycle of crises is in part indicative of a constant state of conflict management, due to the failures of negotiations to achieve structural transformation.

### *7.3. Darfur*

In March 2003 conflict broke out in Darfur as rebel groups attacked Sudanese government positions in protest against the economic and political marginalization of the Darfur region. Government troops and Janjaweed militias took part in disproportionate counter-attacks, razing entire villages to the ground and leaving 35,000 dead and 2.7 million people internally displaced. The United Nations has declared that since 2004, the conflict has resulted in the death of between 200,000 and 300,000 people (UNICEF 2009), leading the US Congress to declare the conflict officially as genocide. In March 2009, Omar Al Bashir, president of Sudan, was indicted for war crimes by the ICC, becoming the first sitting head of state issued with an arrest warrant.

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<sup>5</sup> Qatar had already been involved in the rebuilding of villages in the south of Lebanon (Barakat and Zyck 2009).

The Darfur Peace Agreement was signed in 2006 by the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the Sudanese government, but was rendered non-inclusive and ineffectual by the refusal of many other rebel groups to sign, including the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), the rebel group with the most formidable military strength. Following the escalation of violence in Darfur, in 2008 further attempts were initiated to bring peace to the region. Qatar, which had a long-established relief effort in Darfur via its Red Crescent Society, was named as the Arab League representative to mediate talks between the government of Sudan and various rebel factions, with Doha playing generous host to the negotiations. Other international actors were also included in the process, notably African Union and UN mediators. An interesting facet of the talks is that they were designed to act as a two-track process, with JEM and non-JEM groups going through separate processes, with the possibility of merging at a later date (Enough Project 2010). After several failed attempts at peacemaking, in February 2010 the government of Sudan and JEM signed a ceasefire Framework Agreement, and Omar Al Bashir declared the conflict over (BBC 2012a). Later, an amalgamation of smaller rebel groups, which became known as the Liberation and Justice Movement (LJM), also signed a ceasefire agreement (Jones 2011).

Qatari mediation in the Darfur context was distinct from other mediation efforts in that additional mediators – notably the African Union and United Nations – were vital to the process. It is thus difficult to differentiate the impact of Qatar alone on the outcomes. There are, however, several crucial aspects of the process in which Qatari involvement is prominently evidenced. Firstly, Qatari use of money as a leveraging tool – as in Lebanon – was vital throughout the Darfur negotiations (Gulbrandsen 2010). In 2008, Qatar created a US\$2 billion joint investment fund with Libya in order to neutralize potential Libyan spoilers to the negotiations. Moreover, Qatar promised to invest a further US\$2 billion to address chronic underdevelopment in the Darfur region, and the creation of a Darfur development bank, if talks were successfully concluded (Sudan Tribune 2011). Elsewhere in Sudan, the Qatari Investment Authority has invested in a US\$1 billion deal to cultivate food crops for export to Qatar (Walid 2009). These moves were widely recognized as Qatari use of ‘carrots’ to provide incentives for an agreement to be reached.

Hosting the talks in Doha was a further crucial contribution from Qatar, with the capital playing generous host to large delegations over an extended period (Roberts 2010). Observers have praised such efforts on the part of Qatar, arguing that hosting the various parties to the talks – including Chad, Libya, Egypt, the Arab League, the African Union and the United Nations – is no mean feat (Doherty 2010). Observers have additionally noted that

the perception of Doha as a neutral venue may have had a positive effect on negotiations. Whilst some have argued that a city with closer ties to Sudan, such as Cairo, would have facilitated mediation through a deeper understanding of the Darfur problem, such arguments have been countered by those who perceive the impartiality of Qatar as a far greater asset. Analysts have noted that the neutral territory made participants more prepared to have a genuinely open dialogue on the difficult key issues surrounding the conflict (Abusharaf 2010). Doha's suitability as a venue for peace negotiations is further strengthened by Qatar's ostensible investment in humanitarian assistance. Abusharaf (2010) notes that Qatari civil society organizations' early and consistent response to the crisis in Darfur – such as that of the Qatari Red Crescent – reinforced Qatar's reputation as an actor that genuinely wishes to promote peace, thus providing greater legitimacy to mediation efforts.

Despite this praise which has been awarded to Qatar for its efforts towards peace in Darfur, many have also levelled criticisms at the country's contribution. Some parties to the talks accused Qatari mediators of being biased towards the Sudanese government (Jibril 2010), with others noting that certain Darfuri rebel groups are mistrustful of Arab states, viewing them as keen to push forward with talks in order to protect Al Bashir from his ICC indictment (Ibrahim 2010).<sup>6</sup> On the other side of the negotiating table, the Sudanese government has allegedly condemned the talks for not being sufficiently inclusive. It has been noted, for example, that the failure to include such groups as JEM and the SLA's splinter groups – in addition to civil society groups, internally displaced persons and women – is of particular concern for the sustainability of peace, since it was the multiplicity of groups and the failure to bring them all to an agreement which had been the principal reason for the failure of mediation talks in the past (Jones 2011; Brahimi and Ahmed 2008; US Department of State 2011). Conversely, sources in Doha have suggested the opposite, noting that the presence of a bloated civil society group in the city has in fact hindered negotiations, since Doha's lavish hosting has diminished the incentives for parties to come to agreement quickly (Abusharaf 2012).<sup>7</sup>

Further criticisms which have been levelled against the Darfur peace process are with regard to the talks' structure and timing. Critics have argued that the two-track structure of the talks favoured a lack of coordination, transparency and substance throughout the negotiations, and may have encouraged division as opposed to favouring cohesion amongst the implicated

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<sup>6</sup> In an interview in Doha, Hayder Ibrahim claimed that an important reason for Qatar's involvement was the close link between Al Bashir and Sheikh Qardawi, who enjoys a considerable influence over the emir of Qatar.

<sup>7</sup> Rogia Abusharaf (2012) suggested that the comfort of Doha has created a gap between the negotiating parties and their constituencies. Many civil society groups were created specifically for the talks.



parties (Enough Project 2010). Others have argued that the talks have either been rushed, or too slow. JEM representative Ahmed Hussein claimed that the Qatari mediators were rushing talks to avoid their being relocated to Egypt or Syria (Quinville 2010), whilst an association of advocacy groups published a ‘Roadmap for Peace’, observing that thus far talks had been too sluggish, and advocating for a more simply structured framework and tighter timetable for mediation in the future.

## **8. EVALUATING QATARI MEDIATION EFFORTS**

In evaluating Qatari peacemaking, authors have largely focused on mediation – Qatar’s primary peacemaking tool until recently. The present section will use a mediation evaluation framework proposed by Lanz et al. (2008) in order to assess Qatari mediation efforts, and highlight how such efforts have helped to consolidate Qatar’s new international standing and reputation for impartiality. The Lanz et al. framework suggests that there are several different types of mediation which can be identified, notably power-based mediation, which focuses on carrot-and-stick-type incentives to bring parties into agreement; interest-based mediation, which centres on problem-solving techniques to satisfy all parties; and finally transformative mediation, a long-term enterprise which involves multi-level interventions to alter relationships and understanding between parties fundamentally.

Moran (2009) suggests that Qatar has thus far practised power-based mediation, with its interventions heavily dependent on Qatari capacity to use its vast financial resources to offer incentives for conflict parties to come to agreement. This paper, however, goes further, to suggest that Qatari mediation is more advanced than pure power mediation, thanks to the rare legitimacy amongst both Arab and Western states which its three-pronged strategy of state branding, independence in foreign policy, and economic and political liberalization has brought the country.

Qatar’s use of money as a peacemaking tool has been the focus of various evaluation efforts. The use of financial incentives, or carrots, may be useful for bringing parties to initial agreement, as in Darfur, where both parties were offered significant post-agreement investment. However, this strategy may prove unsustainable in the long run. For example, it may encourage parties to focus on short-term gains rather than tackling the underlying roots of conflict, resulting in a constant state of conflict management, rather than a more profound conflict transformation. This was the case in Lebanon, where a lack of structural transformation has led to continued political crises. Such ‘checkbook diplomacy’ (Rabi 2009) on the part of Qatar may be related to its state-branding policy, in that policy makers see the

immediate benefits for Qatari prestige linked to a swift peace deal as outweighing the disadvantages of the breakdown of such an agreement in the long run (Barakat and Milton in press).

A crucial facet of Qatar's mediation has been others' perception of the state as neutral and impartial – a key component of successful mediation, as it facilitates trust between mediator and both conflict parties (Mitchell 2008). Qatar's strength over other Middle Eastern powers in mediation has been traditionally linked to its perceived impartiality, thanks to the strategy of pursuing an independent foreign policy and keeping relations open with a variety of actors, which it has carefully pursued over the years. For example, Qatar's good relations with the various factions in Lebanon, crucially including Hezbollah, meant that it was seen as a better choice to act as mediator during the political crisis than Saudi Arabia or Egypt – both of which had extremely poor relations with the group. Similarly, the emirate's good relations with the government of Sudan, and its extensive provision of humanitarian aid to the Darfuri population, meant that Qatari policy makers enjoyed a high level of legitimacy in the eyes of both parties during negotiations to end the conflict in Darfur. This reputation for impartiality, however, has not remained unchallenged, with critics noting even in the case of Darfur that Qatari mediators may have been partial to Khartoum. Similarly, in Yemen, where Qatari efforts have arguably been least successful, the country was drawn into dialogue on a somewhat ad hoc basis, and did not share sufficient ties with both parties to command the legitimacy necessary to facilitate a successful agreement. Mediation efforts were subsequently criticized by Saudi Arabia as being influenced by Iran.

Consistency with values is an additional criterion for evaluating peacemaking and mediation, and is most often linked with a state's adherence to 'universal' values promoted by Western donors, such as good governance, democracy and human rights. Whilst Qatar has remained largely independent from such norms, it exhibits a further aspect of value consistency which is under-researched: consistency with the conflict parties in question, particularly with regard to indigenous mechanisms for conflict resolution. In this vein, it can be argued that Qatar has an advantage over Western powers in terms of peacemaking in the Arab world, since it can use culturally appropriate frameworks to resolve disputes, rather than attempting to import 'one-size-fits-all' norms which may not be suitable – something for which Western powers have been criticized in recent years (Mac Ginty 2008). This aspect of Qatari mediation fits in with its state-branding strategy in promoting its identity as a progressive, yet inherently Arab and Islamic nation. As we saw with regard to Lebanon and Yemen, despite being Islamic, Qatari mediation has not always been culturally appropriate.

However, this is not an inherent flaw in Qatari mediation, and could be countered with more preparatory research on specific contexts. Such preparation could pave the way for Qatar to play a highly effective role in mediation within the Arab world (Barakat and Milton in press).

Lanz et al. (2008) suggest that relevance – the art of adapting mediation strategy to the conflict context – is key to successful mediation. Qatar has been criticized for a lack of knowledge of best-practice strategies in mediation, post-settlement implementation and ceasefire monitoring, and of instead relying too heavily on the personal attributes of its mediators, notably the emir and foreign minister (Roberts 2011a). Qatari mediation is recognized as being extremely character-driven, with the recent escalation of efforts in this area marked by the ascension of foreign minister Al Thani to the post of prime minister in 2007. However, both the foreign minister and the emir appear to have little formal training in mediation processes, instead relying on a combination of instinct, charisma and wealth to push through agreements. This, it has been argued, results in a lack of sustainability in Qatari mediation efforts, as can be seen in the cases of Yemen and Lebanon. Such challenges could be successfully mitigated through investing in a reflective process of lesson learning, whereby Qatari policy makers critically analyse internationally recognized best practices and Qatari mediation experience, to ensure that future policy is based upon a dedicated analysis of good practice and potential challenges relating to global and regional conflict resolution. Similarly, it is possible that the country's mediation efforts could benefit from Qatari mediators acting as part of a larger mediation coalition with other actors that can complement Qatar's strengths and help to balance its weaknesses.

Overall, Qatar has played an increasingly significant role in peacemaking and ending conflict over recent years, with mixed results. Whilst it is not yet possible to measure the effectiveness of recent peacemaking efforts, such as mediation between rival Palestinian factions and the United States and the Taliban, as we have seen above, analysts have reached a number of conclusions regarding the success of earlier peacemaking ventures. Firstly, whilst Qatar has put its considerable wealth to positive use in mediation, policy makers must be careful to avoid promoting short-term, high-prestige successes over long-term stability. Similarly, to enhance success, Qatar could benefit from greater contextual knowledge in certain cases, and a process of critical reflection to highlight best-practice mediation strategies, rather than relying on generous 'carrots' and the personal attributes of its mediators. Additionally, soft-power initiatives, investment in post-war relief and reconstruction, and support of Arab media outlets all show great potential to promote a positive image of 'Brand Qatar™', whilst contributing towards peacemaking. However, for these steps to have the best

chance of success and increased legitimacy, Qatar's government must ensure it follows through on promises of investment, and works to retain and reinforce its identity as an independent and neutral actor.

Despite the fact that Qatari mediation and broader peacemaking efforts remain imperfect, and – as we have seen above – have been criticized, such work has nonetheless been generally viewed in a positive light. In a region and a global community rife with power struggles, game play and vested interests, Qatar is one of the few actors that until recently appeared to have succeeded in rising above such matters, emerging as a genuinely impartial party, committed to working towards peace in difficult contexts. It had carefully constructed a niche for itself as an impartial, trustworthy and generous mediator in the Middle East, and its efforts, whilst not always successful, and rarely without controversy, had nonetheless laid firm foundations for the emergence of the country as a key global player in peacemaking and ending conflict. However, as we shall see in the following section, since early 2011, events related to what have been termed the 'Arab Spring uprisings' have challenged the neutral, impartial and non-violent position which the state had crafted for itself, possibly irrevocably changing the nature of Qatari foreign policy with regard to peacemaking. The following section is dedicated to an examination of Qatar's activities in this vein throughout this volatile period for the Middle East.

## **9. THE ARAB SPRING AND THE FAST-EVOLVING ROLE OF QATAR: FROM REGIONAL LEADERSHIP TO MILITARY INTERVENTION**

If Qatar was pursuing a fast-emerging role in global affairs prior to recent popular revolts across the Arab world, since then it could be said that it has gone into overdrive. Observers note that the country has taken advantage of the unique niche which it had spent years crafting to play an astoundingly high-profile and at times controversial role during the uprisings, undertaking unprecedented leadership and intervention in responding to crises across the region, particularly in Libya and Syria. As mentioned above, the past decade had seen Qatar carefully develop this niche position, utilizing its wealth, will and vision, together with three key strategies – economic and political liberalization, state branding and an independent foreign policy – to pursue an ambitious role in peacemaking. As a result, at the opening of the Arab Spring period, Qatar boasted a unique combination of characteristics rare in the Middle East region, including regionally and internationally recognized legitimacy and a reputation for impartiality; stability at home; a relatively progressive stance towards governance; the ability to make swift policy decisions; and extensive experience in mediation. All of the above

paved the way for the country to assume an extraordinarily high-profile role in peacemaking during the Arab Spring, particularly in Libya and Syria, as we shall see throughout the following section.

### *9.1. Military support and intervention in Libya*

Throughout the uprising and ensuing conflict in Libya, Qatar has made a new and groundbreaking role for itself: that of military intervention. Analysts have noted that the emirate's role in the Libyan campaign to oust long-term dictator Colonel Gaddafi appears to indicate a new direction for Qatari foreign policy, due to the country's unprecedented use of military support and intervention, in addition to the peacemaking instruments which it has traditionally used in efforts to end conflict.

Qatar was the first Arab state to recognize the rebel government, the National Transitional Council (NTC), officially and played a key role within the Arab League in dismissing Gaddafi's representatives to the League in February, and urging the United Nations to establish a no-fly zone in the country in March (Krauss 2011). This move alone was instrumental, as it led to UNSC Resolution 1973, paving the way for subsequent NATO intervention which turned the tide towards the side of the rebels and hastened the dictator's ultimately grisly departure and demise. However, apparently unsatisfied with mere diplomatic action, Qatar went on to provide significant military and economic assistance to the rebels' cause – something which may be considered uncharacteristic, given the country's traditionally projected image of neutrality and impartiality.

Seizing the role as interlocutor between the Middle East and the Western world which Qatar has carefully established for itself, the Qatari authorities provided vital legitimacy to NATO coalition forces in Libya by contributing six Mirage jets to oversee the no-fly zone, in an era and a region where Middle Eastern powers are wary of foreign intervention. Qatar further sold Libyan oil on behalf of the rebels to provide much-needed cash for the cause, and supplied them with gas, diesel, aid supplies and US\$400 million in funds (Roberts 2011a; Black 2011). Doha reportedly also furnished the rebels with weaponry, including anti-tank missiles and assault rifles, and Qatari Special Forces provided basic infantry training within Libya, and even special exercises training back on Qatari soil (Roberts 2011a).

Without a doubt, however, the most controversial aspect of Qatar's newly flexed military strategy was their deployment of Qatari troops to support rebel forces in the vital last weeks and months of their campaign against Gaddafi's regime. Qatari Special Forces were seen on the front lines of the final showdown on Gaddafi's compound, and in October, Qatari

chief of staff Major-General Hamad bin Ali Al Atiya revealed that there were ‘hundreds’ of Qatari forces in every region, and that training and communications were in Qatari hands, since the rebels had little military experience. He noted that, as mentioned above, ‘We acted as the link between the rebels and NATO forces’ (al-Atiya, quoted in Black 2011b).

Such overt and active intervention in Libya left commentators shocked at this apparent new direction for Qatari foreign policy. However, whilst some saw this as an uncharacteristic move on the part of the tiny Gulf emirate, events in Syria were about to point towards active intervention becoming an integral part of Qatari response to the new political realities resulting from the Arab Spring revolutions. The following section examines Qatar’s pivotal role in the Syria crisis, where the emirate has also advocated for interventionist action to take down the Assad regime.

## *9.2. Crisis in Syria*

With barely time to pause for breath following its controversial exploits in Libya, Qatar launched its most recent peacemaking venture in response to the crisis in Syria. A popular uprising against President Bashar al-Assad began with peaceful protests in March 2011, and evolved into an armed revolt as demonstrations were met with increasingly violent repression from the regime. The United Nations announced in March 2012 that 9,000 people had been killed by security forces during the year-long crisis (Robert Serry, UN special coordinator for the Middle East peace process, quoted in Charbonneau and Nichols 2012). As of June 2012, despite sustained and intensive mediation efforts from both the Arab League and the United Nations, and a UN-brokered ‘Plan for Peace’ being in place, the conflict appeared to remain unresolved. Violence – including against civilians – continued, with both parties accusing the other of violating the terms of the agreement.

Whilst it is difficult to isolate the precise role Qatar played behind closed doors during the Syrian crisis without interviews with key stakeholders, their involvement is evident in several ways. Firstly, in the early days of the crisis, Qatar’s most vital contribution was its provision of a leadership role to the Arab League. Previously considered an ineffectual ‘cosy club of autocrats’ (Law 2011), the regional body took on an unprecedented assertive role throughout the negotiation process, leading analysts to dub the phenomenon the ‘Arab Spring revolution at the Arab League’ (Leyne 2011). Foreign Minister Al Thani, nicknamed ‘the Peacemaker’ for his mediation efforts over recent years, was chairperson, and crucially chaired its Ministerial Committee on Syria throughout the crisis, allegedly providing the driving force behind increasing pressure on Syria: ‘without the personality of that man, the

message would not have been delivered. His was the strong hand behind the process' (Saudi analyst Mohsen Al Awaji, quoted in Law 2011). Law explains that Al Thani was quicker on the uptake than his colleagues in understanding that the League could not ignore the butchering of unarmed civilians in Syria, and pushed hard to expel the country from the body and impose sanctions. The foreign minister proved skilful at wielding the influence of the Arab League by taking the lead on Syria, whilst stalling from the international community, due to vetoes from Russia and China on UNSC resolutions, 'failed' the Syrian people (Doyle 2011). Al Thani adeptly took advantage of a strengthened Russian-proposed UNSC resolution in December 2011 to force Assad to agree to the Arab League peace plan. Playing the international intervention 'trump card', Al Thani warned that: 'If this matter is not solved in the weeks ahead [...] it will no longer be in Arab control' (quoted in Associated Press 2011). Two days later, the Assad regime signed the Arab League initiative, paving the way for observers to enter the country.

Critics were quick to note, however, that the Arab League was not being swift or strict enough in enforcing deadlines for action on Syria's part during the negotiations, and was allowing the Assad government repeatedly to stall efforts to halt the bloodshed. Further critics argued that the small teams of observers sent to Syria could not possibly hope to monitor the violations throughout the country (Muir 2011). Moreover, there was a great deal of criticism of the composition of the Arab League monitoring delegation. Particularly controversial was the appointment of Sudanese general Mustafa al-Dabi – a former military commander in Darfur, where he allegedly recruited the Janjaweed militia groups, infamous for their brutality against civilians – as leader of the mission (Kenner 2011). Despite some promising developments in the days following the delegation's arrival in Syria, the death toll continued to rise, with opposition groups reporting that 390 people were killed between the arrival of the monitors on 26 December and 2 January 2012 (BBC News 2012b). Eventually, escalating violence forced the Arab League to accept defeat and withdraw in late January 2012. The Qatari prime minister met Ban Ki-Moon in early January, admitting that since this was the first Arab League observer mission, 'there were some mistakes' (Telegraph 2012). Such ineffectiveness came as a huge blow to the Arab League, and perhaps particularly to Qatar, given its commitment to keeping the problem under 'Arab control'.

Following this failure to halt the bloodshed, fragile Arab League unity, previously held together by Qatar, faltered. An Arab League meeting in Iraq – the first to be held in Baghdad for more than twenty years – was characterized by tension, divisions and a resultant weak stance on the Syrian crisis, as the Iraqi prime minister pleaded for external actors not to

intervene (Davies 2012). Qatar made clear its distaste for the reluctance of countries such as Iraq and Lebanon to act decisively, and has taken an increasingly hard-line stance on the crisis, calling for Arab troops to be sent in to stop the killing (Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, quoted in Washington Post 2012), and publicly advocating for the international community to support the opposition, including through the provision of arms (Al Thani 2012). In March it emerged that the Qatari authorities may have provided a covert US\$100 million dollar 'donation' to the rebel cause, sent through Libyan coffers, following the establishment of a military council to coordinate arms donations from the international community by the Syrian National Council (Chulov 2012).

Analysts touted such overt calls for arming the opposition as a turning point, paving the way for international intervention. Yet many amongst the international community, including members of the 'Friends of Syria' group made up of around eighty Arab and Western states, openly rejected Qatari calls for providing arms or outright intervention, fearing fuelling civil strife (BBC News 2012b). In early April, it again appeared as though a diplomatic solution might be possible, as Assad agreed to a UN Six Point Peace Plan proposed by peace envoy and former secretary-general Kofi Annan. Analysts and policy makers, however, in the United States and Qatar among others, remained sceptical as to the good faith of the Syrian government (Al Jazeera 2012).

The long-awaited outcome of the Syria crisis remains to be seen. If Assad again fails to follow through on the latest peace plan, certain 'Friends of Syria' may take more decisive action to bring down the regime. Qatar's vocal, flexible and proactive role in the crisis until now, in addition to the seeming impossibility of achieving UN consensus on intervention, the widely held desire for legitimacy in intervention in the post-Iraq era, and the niche role of Arab leader and Arab-Western interlocutor that Qatar has carefully established for itself, mean that there is a great likelihood that the country will play a pivotal role in any 'Friends of Syria' coalition which may choose to take action against the regime's brutal oppression.

### *9.3. Examining Qatar's dynamic role in the Arab Spring*

As Roberts (2011b) has recognized with regard to Qatar's role in Libya: 'never before has Qatar so overtly supported one side or made such an active intervention'. In early 2012, having seen similar policies arise over Syria, the crucial questions now become: 'For what reasons, and how effective, will the changes in policy be?' Qatari foreign policy, long a mystery to many, has in the blink of an eye turned in what is ostensibly a new direction, leaving observers to play catch-up in striving to understand the motives behind their fast-



evolving international role in peacemaking. Some analysts, however, have begun to offer tentative explanations and critiques of the apparent Qatari shift towards military support and intervention.

Previous sections of this paper have argued that the most convincing explanation of Qatari peacemaking efforts is that of a three-pronged strategy of political and economic liberalization, state branding and pursuing an independent foreign policy. Such a strategy is seen to overcome Qatar's small-state 'security dilemma', through projecting itself as an impartial yet influential partner for contrasting regional and international powers, and offering the country more 'space' in the international arena than such a small state would normally command – attracting foreign investment, business and tourism. Whilst recent action may appear as a break from the above-mentioned strategy, one can view the recent change of course as prompted by a change in circumstances, rather than a more fundamental change in policy. In both Libya and Syria, Qatar began peacemaking efforts in a style similar to that which it has traditionally employed: pursuing agreement through diplomatic channels. However, given the fact that Qatar has in recent years so overtly supported the empowerment of Arab citizens in the face of human rights violations – particularly through the forum of Al Jazeera – one can argue that when mediation efforts failed, Qatari policy makers were unable to remain neutral in the face of regimes openly slaughtering their citizens. Correspondingly, they saw themselves as obliged to take an unprecedented stance against such regimes, using their diplomatic strength, and arguably also the influence of Al Jazeera, to mobilize first the Arab street, then the Arab League and finally the international community into intervention towards regime change.

Roberts (2011a) supports such a suggestion, asserting that new military involvement is not illustrative of a change of strategy amongst the tight group of policy makers in Qatar, but rather is representative of a reaction to a new state of affairs. He suggests that despite the tiny country's ambitious foreign policy goals, Qatar remains realistic about what it can, and cannot, achieve without international approval. Thus it was a specific situation – notably the unusual alignment of the Arab League and Western powers' stances on the crisis, and the resulting widespread approval of the international community – which motivated unprecedented Qatari military intervention in Libya. Assad's response to the UN Six Point Plan will decide whether we shall see a similar situation unfold in Syria, with Qatar in June 2012 poised to play a lead role in a regional or international intervention, yet ostensibly awaiting a 'nod of approval' from the international community. Indeed, it has been argued that Qatar is in fact most successful in its peacemaking efforts when it acts in cooperation with

partners, with analysts citing Libya and Darfur as examples where the country has been able to utilize its niche role effectively to complement the efforts of other powers as part of a broader coalition. The added value of Qatar's acting in cooperation with others is an element of the country's foreign policy which remains under-analysed, with further research needed to identify whether, and under what conditions, this offers greater potential for successful peacemaking ventures.

Roberts (2011a) further affirms that Qatar is driven by its desire to become 'leader in an era of stronger, more assertive, Arab diplomacy'. This can be seen as an element of both the Qatari state-branding agenda and its pursuit of an independent foreign policy. Qatar's independence, unique identity in the Arab world and stability at home have allowed it to act decisively and emerge as a dynamic, if controversial, Arab leader at this key moment when other players in the region have wavered. Qatari policy makers see more traditional leaders such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt as having respectively grown out of touch with the issues facing normal Arabs, and been weakened by recent instability. Neither of these being the case in the Gulf's tiny peninsular state, Qatari policy makers thus view themselves as able to offer the progressive leadership that is needed at such a volatile moment in the region's history.

Additionally noted is Qatar's desire to affirm its pride of place as independent interlocutor between the Western world and the Middle East – a key aspect of the country's three pronged modernization strategy. The chance of working with Western powers to bring down Gaddafi offered a key opportunity for the country to reinforce this vital role which it has carefully crafted for itself in recent years. Qatar played a crucial role in maintaining Western–Arab relations during the Syria crisis, leading the Arab League to action when the UNSC efforts stalled, whilst ensuring diplomatic channels and possibilities for multilateral action between the two bodies were kept firmly open. Success in establishing Qatar as a pivotal Western–Arab interlocutor is evident when one examines Western praise for the country. French defence minister Gérard Longuet (quoted in Krauss 2011) echoed the sentiments of many as he gushed, referring to Qatari involvement in the Libyan no-fly zone, that: 'this is the first time that there is such a level of understanding between Europe and the Arab world'.

Other analysts, including Krauss (2011) and Burke (2011), also affirm that Qatar's actions may be less uncharacteristic than they appear. They note that Qatar's intervention in Libya is consistent with two of its long-term policy goals: emerging as a world player despite its size, and geopolitical aims, notably the country's desire to 'play-off' regional neighbours Saudi Arabia and Iran, to protect Qatari sovereignty and natural gas reserves. Blake Hounshell, the Doha-based managing editor of *Foreign Policy* magazine (quoted in Burke

2011), affirms that such security concerns are a key driver of recent policy: ‘The emir is a military man and knows that Qatar is basically indefensible. He has thought laterally about ways of making Qatar more secure.’ Similarly, it has been noted that Qatari involvement in the Arab Spring is clearly consistent with Qatar’s economic liberalization policy, in its desire to secure economic benefits from the incoming Libyan (and possibly later, Syrian) regime. Policy makers in Doha will naturally expect to reap the results of what their financial and material support throughout the campaign to oust Gaddafi has sown, so to speak, in post-Gaddafi Libya, particularly with regard to Libyan gas and oil industries (Roberts 2011a).

Qatar’s actions can thus be viewed as consistent with its state branding, liberalization and independent foreign policy strategies, but representing a reaction to a new set of realities in the Middle East region. However, commentators have argued that Qatar’s newest decision to ‘take sides’ in Libya and Syria may be damaging for the peninsular state in the long run, for several reasons. Firstly, critics see recent activities as potentially detrimental to the emirate’s carefully crafted reputation for impartiality – a linchpin of Qatari policy. Whilst there has been great praise from the West for Qatar’s new interventions, as noted above, its actions have proved controversial in other arenas. Libya itself is an example, with the rebels initially flushed with gratitude to Qatar, flying its maroon and white flag at key events, and even renaming Algeria Square in Tripoli as Qatar Square following the fall of the dictator. However, recently some Libyan officials, including Abdel Rahman Shalgam, Libya’s envoy to the United Nations, have proved less than content with what they see as continued Qatari ‘meddling’ in Libyan affairs, suggesting that they see the peninsular state as having overstepped the mark in its enthusiasm for intervention: ‘they give money to some parties, the Islamist parties. They give money and weapons and they try to meddle in issues that do not concern them and we reject that’ (Shalgam, quoted in Maxwell 2012). Such commentary has been echoed by others, with some analysts fearing Qatar’s recent interventions in the Arab Spring are guided by a desire to install Islamist regimes in formerly secular dictatorships across the Middle East. Such suspicions – whether true or otherwise – are potentially detrimental to Qatar’s historic positive relations with Western nations.

Likewise, Qatar’s allegedly choosing to provide Syrian rebels covertly with financial support, despite calls for restraint from Western and Arab actors alike, is a hazardous move which may lead to negative consequences for Qatari international relations. Advocating for intervention in Syria is not only extremely risky for relations with the Syrian regime, should Assad succeed in clinging to power, but also jeopardizes Qatar’s key relationship with Iran – a stalwart ally of the Syrian regime. Military intervention and/or support for the Syrian

opposition may prove to have devastating consequences for the country's traditionally positive relations with Iran, whose proximity and shared oilfields mean that it poses a significant threat to Qatar's physical and economic security.

A further criticism levelled at Qatar has been its apparent 'picking and choosing' of which rebellions to support. The state has actively worked to oust Gaddafi and Assad, whilst simultaneously providing support to the Bahrain authorities to quash a similar domestic uprising through the regional Gulf Cooperation Council. The Qatari government additionally allegedly forced Al Jazeera to tailor coverage of the Arab Spring uprisings according to the Qatari 'version' of events. This allegedly included downplaying coverage of unrest in Bahrain compared to other countries, and failing to report on early arming of rebel groups in Syria. Such biased coverage of the Arab uprisings resulted in the resignation of at least one reporter in protest (Hashem 2012).

Whilst one could view taking action with such potentially negative consequences for Qatar's reputation and relations as characteristic of the emirate's penchant for launching peacemaking ventures without sufficient critical reflection, it may be hasty to conclude that decisive Qatari backing of Libyan and Syrian rebels occurred without policy makers' having considered the risks. Conversely, Qatar's enthusiasm for supporting the rebels in both Libya and Syria may indeed have been prompted by policy makers' recognition that the break with impartiality and the policy of 'taking sides' are an extremely risky venture. Thus, the government may be acting on the belief that now they have chosen to back one party in the conflict, they must see this venture through to its conclusion – notably the opposition emerging as victorious – in order to avoid potential retribution from hostile regimes in the aftermath of conflict. This, of course, is something which Qatar has previously avoided through its staunch policy of impartiality. On the other hand, Qatar's over-enthusiasm for intervention in Syria could be illustrative of the fact that policy makers had not fully grappled with the consequences of unprecedented action in Libya, and thus 'rushed in' to intervention in Syria, misjudging the global appetite for intervention, with potentially negative consequences for both the tiny emirate itself and the region as a whole. Whichever may be the case, Qatar's involvement in the Arab Spring, as with earlier mediation efforts, highlights the urgent need for Qatari policy makers to invest in processes of 'lesson learning', to ensure that future interventions are based upon a coherent strategy which relies on analysis, best practices and prior experience to inform policy.

It remains to be seen how detrimental such losses of impartiality may ultimately prove for the rising star of the Gulf. This may depend on the outcome of the extended crisis in Syria,

and Qatar's role in achieving an end to the violence. Interestingly, in a worst-case scenario, such a loss may have cost the wily diplomat its role as impartial third party permanently. This could prove devastating not only for its international reputation as a niche mediator, but also for the domestic security of the tiny country, so far ensured by a delicate balancing act which involved attempting to 'please everyone' – an act which may have now come crashing to the ground. Recent rapprochement with Saudi Arabia over the Syrian crisis could signify Qatar's recognition of the fact that it may now once again require the security umbrella which the larger neighbour provided for so many years, but from which the tiny state had recently emerged as an independent power in global affairs.

Regardless of praise or criticism of Qatar's role in the Arab Spring, a fascinating aspect of Qatari efforts during this volatile period has been the country's consolidation of a comprehensive strategy aimed at ending conflict. Taking the examples of Libya and Syria, this has included elements as diverse as participation in international and regional diplomatic channels through the United Nations and Arab League; military intervention; and the provision of financial support, weapons and training to rebel groups. Also key to their efforts have been a number of soft-power initiatives to influence events, including support for Al Jazeera, which has played a remarkable role in the Arab Spring uprisings as a whole, and whose 'relentless coverage speeded [Gaddafi's] messy slide to extinction', according to *The Economist* (2011). Qatar also built on its experience with Al Jazeera in establishing another news channel, Libya TV, to counteract the Gaddafi propaganda machine and garner the support of the wider Libyan population. Also key to the all-inclusive strategy in Libya was the provision of hundreds of thousands of dollars of humanitarian relief in the form of food and medical supplies within Libya, the construction of refugee camps in Tunisia, and significant investment in post-war reconstruction efforts following the fall of Gaddafi, with Doha hosting an international donor conference aimed at raising US\$2.5 billion for immediate post-conflict needs (BBC News 2011b).

This development of a comprehensive strategy employing both traditional hard-power and soft-power initiatives in peacemaking attempts is an interesting turn of events, and marks Qatar's emergence as a truly significant player in the international arena. As one analyst noted: 'Qatar isn't punching above its weight, but has become a heavyweight' (Allaf 2011). Future research into Qatari peacemaking efforts should pay special attention to Qatar's evolving role in the continuing Syrian crisis; the consequences for the emirate's regional and international relations of its recent 'taking sides'; the impacts of the country's acting – or not acting – as part of a wider coalition in peacemaking efforts; and how successful recent 'hard'

peacemaking measures prove in achieving its constitutional aims of promoting international peace and stability.

## **10. CONCLUSION**

As we have seen throughout this paper, in recent years Qatar has played a fast-evolving and increasingly significant role in the arenas of peacemaking and ending conflict, particularly with regard to the Middle East. A three-pronged strategy comprised of political and economic liberalization, state branding and pursuing an independent foreign policy – all driven by policy makers' wealth, will and vision – has been crucial to developing contemporary Qatari peacemaking initiatives. Such initiatives have included high-profile mediation, most recently between rival Palestinian factions and between the United States, Afghanistan and the Taliban, and earlier in Yemen, Lebanon, Darfur and elsewhere. Similarly vital have been soft-power initiatives, including investment in post-war reconstruction, the provision of humanitarian relief and support for Al Jazeera.

These activities have met with mixed results and approval, and evaluations have suggested that mediation efforts would have a greater chance of succeeding if Qatar retained its reputation for impartiality and independence; ensured that efforts do not favour short-term prestige successes over long-term stability for recipient states; and invested in a process of lesson learning and critically reflecting upon best practices and challenges related to peacemaking, rather than relying on personal traits and generous incentives to secure successful mediation attempts. In this vein, efforts to build on Qatar's human resource capacity, in terms of developing a strong base of domestic expertise in peacemaking strategy, are of vital importance. In addition, soft-power initiatives will need to follow through on promises of investment, whilst again striving to retain Qatar's identity as an independent and impartial actor.

Most recently, Qatar has undertaken an unprecedented role in global peacemaking efforts during the Arab Spring revolutions. This is most notably through taking a progressive leadership role within the Arab League and 'Friends of Syria' group during the Libyan and Syrian crises; advocating for military intervention and support for opposition groups in Libya and Syria; and the expansion of foreign policy tools to include a more comprehensive range of 'hard' and 'soft' initiatives.

This sequence of events has taken the country on a swift upwards path to global prominence. We first saw Qatar emerge on the international peacemaking scene as an impartial regional broker. Later, the country evolved into a powerful mediator with the

capacity and willingness to back up agreements with a variety of financial ‘carrots’. Finally, during the Arab Spring, Qatar has emerged as a ‘reformer’; that is, as a vocal and progressive leader of modern Arab nations, with the willingness and the capacity to utilize a broad range of both hard- and soft-power initiatives to achieve its foreign policy goals. Whilst such use of ‘hard’ initiatives and the decision to abandon the country’s impartial position in global affairs may appear a break with policy, it can be argued that this is not entirely the case. Instead, one can view Qatar’s recent activities as a response to the new realities produced in the Middle East during the Arab Spring. Specifically, the government realized that it was neither possible, nor fitting with Qatari foreign policy or state-branding agendas, to stand by whilst hostile regimes slaughtered their own unarmed citizens. Further, this transition has come with Qatar’s realization that ‘size does not matter’, that soft power and wealth are powerful tools in the arena of international relations, and that the Arab Spring is a pivotal moment in Arab–Western relations, with corresponding political, economic and security-related advantages for those nations that are progressive and dynamic enough to ‘come out on top’.

The full impact of recent Qatari initiatives related to the Arab Spring of 2011 is yet to be seen. New leadership and the employment of hard-power initiatives have proven popular with Western powers, which clearly view Qatar as their legitimate link to facilitating intervention in the Arab world, particularly with regard to peacemaking and democratization. Whilst such strong cooperation between the Arab and Western worlds is necessary and welcome for the future development of peacemaking in the region, Qatar’s actions have been seen by some in the Arab world and elsewhere as overstepping the mark. Libya in particular is demonstrating signs of wariness at the continued high levels of Qatari intervention in its domestic affairs, and should military intervention occur in Syria, not only Iran but also Russia and China are likely to be extremely unhappy.

Displeasing such a variety of actors is a dangerous game for Qatar, and the loss of impartiality – one of the linchpins of Qatari foreign policy strategy – associated with this shift may prove highly damaging in the long term. This is likely to jeopardize the state’s reputation as an impartial mediator and as the ideal Middle East–West interlocutor. Further, in a worst-case scenario, Qatar’s recent activities might potentially put the country’s domestic security at risk; something which has not been a concern of Qatari policy makers in recent years, thanks to the good relations the emirate has enjoyed with a diverse array of actors, including global powers, rogue states and rebel groups. Time will tell whether Qatar can carefully navigate the dangerous territory in which it now finds itself to maintain its emerging role as the Arab world’s chief peacemaker. This would be no mean feat, but is, after all, a speciality of the

ever-pragmatic new power. Whatever the case may be, as one observer noted in 2011, one thing is clear: ‘this year has been something of a coming of age for this small Gulf nation’ (Buchanan 2011).



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