



Research Article

Small States, Big Influence: Assessing the Strategic Role of Qatar and the UAE in Middle Eastern Conflict Mediation and Regional Stability

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ABSTRACT

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This paper is an analysis of the disproportional influence of small yet strategically ambitious nations such as Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in the mediation of conflicts in the Middle East and the stability in this region. It seeks to evaluate the instruments, motivations as well as the results of their foreign policies using qualitative case studies that concentrate on the mediation efforts of Qatar in Afghanistan and Sudan as well as the UAE in Yemen and Libya. Through the process tracing and discourse analysis, the research establishes that the two states use wealth, media and strategic alliances to reflect soft and smart power. Whereas Qatar tends to be a more diplomatic and dialogue-based country, UAE tends to be more military demanding. The research makes a contribution to the literature that traditional views confine small states to passive participants and emphasizes the various ways in which niche diplomacy and strategic adaptation can produce a huge regional effect and provide an overview of how Gulf foreign policy may be changing in a multipolar order.

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Introduction

The concept of small states in international relations was traditionally considered as marginal players who could hardly influence the development of the region or the whole world. But this can be disputed by the emergence of such states such as Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which have proven to have a significant influence due to their form of diplomacy, strategic investments, and media power despite having small territorial boundaries and population (Neumann and Gstohl, 2006). This is a paradox of small states having excessive influence in the region and it is especially apparent in the Middle East, which is also characterized by constant instability and rival hegemonies.

The key research question addressed in this paper is as follows: How do Qatar and the UAE apply strategic influence in conflict mediation and regional stability endeavours? To answer this question, the research aims to: (1) examine the processes that these states use to mediate regional conflicts, and (2) evaluate the overall effect that these states do on the Middle Eastern peace processes and power structures.

Two important questions, which guide the research include; what drives small states with the likes of Qatar and UAE to engage in active regional politics? Secondly, are their interventions effective in certain conflict situations in the Middle East?

The significance of the study is that it has added to the international relations theory by widening the knowledge on how small state agency may be enacted especially in the contexts of soft power, niche diplomacy and regional order (Cooper & Shaw, 2009; Panke, 2010). It also provides a subtle insight into Gulf foreign policy plans under the changing global orientations (Ulrichsen, 2020).

Theoretical Perspectives

The research of small states in international relations has developed a lot during the last decades. The theory of small states assumes that even those states that have little military or economic strength can be able to have influence as part of diplomacy, multilateralism, and strategic niche behavior (Baldacchino, 2012; Thorhallsson, 2006). Such states tend to rely on agility, global norms and moral authority to exercise influence that is out of proportion to its material capabilities (Ingebritsen, 2006).

A constructivist and soft power can be useful in understanding how small states such as Qatar and the UAE are using ideational images and instruments such as national branding, humanitarian diplomacy, and media outreach to become regional-level actors and producers of narrative (Nye, 2004; Grix and Brannagan, 2016). The constructivist scholars are of the view that identity, perception and norms are central to the foreign policy behavior, which allows the small states to create a

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role of a mediator or norm entrepreneur (Hopf, 1998; Wendt, 1999).

On the same note, the literature on regionalism and middle power diplomacy complements this by viewing small states as competent participants in the security complexes of the regions. This view emphasizes that middle and small powers manipulate the regional institutions, coalition building and selective participation to exercise some influence on the larger security and political framework (Cooper and Shaw, 2009; Panke, 2010). These paradigms aid in the explanation of how the Gulf states have infiltrated themselves into major mediation positions in the Middle East and Africa.

Conceptual Framework

Small states are usually not just determined by their physical size or size but also their insufficient material capacity and inability to act unilaterally in the international system (Thorhallsson, 2006; Neumann and Gstohl, 2006). Yet, they tend to overcome these drawbacks with the help of diplomatic skillfulness, normative correspondence, and coalition-making (Panke, 2010). The example of Gulf nations such as Qatar and the UAE also proves that the small state can rise in regional and global politics due to its wealth and location (Kamrava, 2013; Almezaini and Rickli, 2017).

Regional stability is a situation where political, economic and security relations amongst states in a geographical region are predictable, cooperative and relatively devoid of large-scale conflict (Lake and Morgan, 1997). This stability may be either externally imposed or internally secured, and usually interfered with by asymmetries of power, ideological incompatibility, or state failure. Stability in the Middle East is a particularly controversial issue because of the rivalries amongst the countries, a conflict between sects, and both local and external actors (Gause, 2010).

Conflict mediation refers to the act whereby a third-party actor intervenes to help parties in a conflict to discuss and even negotiate a resolution in a manner that the disputing parties can accept (Bercovitch and Houston, 2000). Neutrality, credibility, and access to conflicting parties are usually part of the resources of the effective mediators. The intervention of Qatar in Lebanon and Sudan and the intervention of the UAE in some conflicts in the region are the examples of how small states can place themselves as important diplomatic mediators (Barakat and Milton, 2020; Kamrava, 2011).

The idea of soft power that was formulated by Nye (2004) is the capacity to influence the preferences of other people in a non-coercive way by appealing and convincing them without using force and bribes. Smart power is an intermediate tool that involves the utilization of soft and hard power tools in a strategy that is contextually dynamic (Nye, 2011). The small states tend to be good at using soft power, including a media (e.g., Al Jazeera), cultural diplomacy, and humanitarian aid (Grix and Brannagan, 2016). Nevertheless, Qatar and the UAE have also been practicing smart power, combining their diplomatic policies with strategic investments, military collaboration, and choosy military involvement (Roberts, 2021; Ulrichsen, 2020).

Literature Review

Diplomatic Efforts and Diplomatic Influence of Qatar and the UAE in Stabilizing the Middle East Region

It is still one of the most geopolitically unstable parts of the globe, with both the regional powers and small states having various approaches to enhancing stability, many of which are determined by sectarianism, proxy wars, and alliances depending on the time. Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are the two states that have become notable small states by being involved in diplomatic activism, which goes beyond their geographical and demographic constraints, in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). This literature review will analyze the character, approaches, and efficiency of their diplomatic activities and

influence in facilitating the stabilization of the region in 2010 to 2025.

A larger change in the international relations literature which can be seen in Qatar and the UAE is the increased role of small state actors especially those with high resource endowments on regional security structures. As noted by Panke (2010), small states are able to have influence that is disproportionate to their size by specializing in issues, setting the agenda, and coalition-building in international and regional arenas. This has been enhanced by hydrocarbon wealth, geopolitical position, and institutional investments in media and soft power instruments in the context of the Gulf.

Neutrality has enabled Qatar to broker over complicated conflicts, where it is displayed as a constructive mediator having access to the Islamist and the western players. UAE, in its turn, has developed as a reputation of a practical and aggressive state that aligns itself with Western forces and intervenes in conflict areas directly in the name of counterterrorism and stability propagation (Roberts, 2021).

1. Timeline of Major Diplomatic Initiatives by Qatar and the UAE (2008–2024)

Year	Qatar	UAE
2008	Brokered the Doha Agreement ending Lebanon’s political crisis	
2010–11	Active in Darfur peace process in Sudan	
2011	Supported Arab Spring movements and hosted exiled political Islamists	Backed counter-revolutionary forces in Egypt; supported military ouster of Morsi
2014	Gulf diplomatic rift over Qatar’s ties to Islamists	Recalled ambassador from Qatar with Saudi and Bahrain
2015	Hosted Taliban office ; began quiet role in Afghanistan mediation	Military intervention in Yemen under Saudi-led coalition
2017	Blockade imposed on Qatar by UAE, Saudi, Bahrain, Egypt	Central architect of Qatar’s isolation campaign
2020	Facilitated U.S.–Taliban peace deal in Doha	Signed Abraham Accords normalizing ties with Israel
2021	Al-Ula Declaration ends GCC crisis; Qatar re-integrated	Began drawdown in Yemen , shifting to proxy stabilization and aid
2022	Mediated Iran–U.S. backchannel talks via EU frameworks	Deepened strategic ties with Israel, Egypt, and India
2023	Humanitarian diplomacy in Afghanistan and Gaza	Increased peacebuilding aid in Horn of Africa and East Mediterranean
2024	Mediated in Sudan conflict ceasefire talks with African Union support	Engaged in Red Sea security diplomacy with Egypt and Saudi Arabia support

The Qatari diplomacy is based on a strategic hedging strategy, the application of which is made through dialogue, humanitarian diplomacy, and global media in order to influence the narratives of the region and conflict results. The Doha Agreement (2008) that solved the long-cycle political crisis in Lebanon, the Darfur Peace Process (2011) in Sudan, and negotiations between the U.S and

Taliban (2020) held in Doha are notable examples of mediation (Ulrichsen, 2020). Such attempts highlight the fact that Qatar can serve as a plausible intermediary in polarizing situations, especially when traditional actors are in no position or place.

At the core of the Qatar diplomatic power lies the soft power machinery, the Al Jazeera network that has been most effective in influencing the mind of the people in the Arab uprisings and beyond. According to Barakat and Milton (2020), humanitarian aid and investment in war-torn countries contribute to the reputation of Qatar as a peace agent, despite the allegations of dualism in the region since the country supports Islamist movements. Though successful in terms of broadening the coverage of Qatar, this diplomatic profile has elicited suspicion and opposition, which eventually led to the Gulf diplomatic crisis of 2017.

Unlike the ideational approach of Qatar, the UAE adopted the more realpolitik-oriented foreign policy based on regime security, anti-Islamism, and geopolitical assets. After the Arab Spring, Abu Dhabi became a regional powerbroker, which promotes authoritarian stability in Egypt, Libya, and Yemen. According to Juneau (2020), the direct intervention of the UAE into Yemen, which the Saudi-led coalition participated in, signaled the change in its policy identity as it shifted toward soft balancing to active power projection.

Economic statecraft has also been used by UAE to increase its influence through investment in port infrastructure along Red Sea and Horn of Africa, and foreign aid as a mechanism of diplomatic alignment. Its 2020 normalization of relations with Israel under the Abraham Accords marked a new period of realignment in the region, presented as a donation to the peace and stability in the Middle East (Roberts, 2021). Nevertheless, critics also argue that the engagements of the UAE tend to focus on regime interest instead of actual peacebuilding, and destabilizing effects in conflict theaters like Libya (Krieg, 2022).

Whereas both Qatar and UAE are seeking to influence the structure of the region, their tactics differ radically with Qatar adopting dialogue and soft power whereas the UAE incorporates intervention and strategic alliances. Such strategies are ambivalent. On the one hand, the mediation efforts of Qatar have served the purpose of defusing tensions and establishing negotiation lines in situations with no resolution. Concerning this, the UAE proactive participation in crushing Islamist agendas and encouraging security alliances has brought temporary stability to certain situations, at the cost of a long-term reconciliation in many instances.

The competition between Qatar and the UAE, which was shown during the 2017-2021 GCC crisis, underestimates their overall potential as stabilizing actors as well. Krieg (2019) notes that the process of the polarization of the Gulf states tends to reflect the overall geopolitical rivalries and sabotage mediation and regionalization. However, the two states have managed to make the world recognize their diplomatic functions and rebrand small Gulf states as the creators of Middle East diplomatic policies, rather than as followers of the bigger nations.

The foreign policies of Qatar and the UAE contradict the common knowledge of the inactivity of small states in unstable regions. Small states that have economic strength and are strategically oriented can serve as norm entrepreneurs and stabilizers in the region, as Ulrichsen (2020), Barakat and Milton (2020) believe. However, the success of such roles depends on the cohesiveness of its objectives, the righteousness of its process, and the capacity to strike a balance between soft and hard power instruments.

What is needed is further research to determine the long-lasting effect of their diplomatic policies, particularly in terms of the sustainability of peace, the post-conflict rule, and the unforeseen effects of the proxy alliances. Although available literature gives ideas about their foreign policy orientations,

comparative and outcome-based researches would help to gain more insight into how small states can be able to contribute to the stability of the region in a sustainable manner.

Case Study Analysis

Case 1: Qatar

Qatar is a country that has developed a unique diplomatic identity based on the principles of neutrality, mediation, and strategic niche diplomacy. Being a small state and having huge ambitions, Qatar takes advantage of its wealth and media presence to establish itself as a global mediator and dialogue facilitator (Kamrava, 2011; Barakat and Milton, 2020). Its foreign policy is a mix of soft power and selective participation in high-profile conflicts, which allows it to become an intermediary between the conflicting parties (Ulrichsen, 2020). The foreign policy of Doha is marked by the strategy of hedging, balancing between the relations with the allies in the West, Islamist forces, and regional competitors (Roberts, 2012).

Conflict Mediation Roles

- Doha Agreement (Lebanon, 2008): Qatar was able to mediate the 18-month political crisis in Lebanon by negotiating a power-sharing deal between the opposing groups. This raised the Doha level of diplomatic credibility in the region to a great extent (El-Hokayem, 2008).
- Darfur Peace Process: Qatar mediated between the government and the rebels in the Darfur region, leading to the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur of 2011. Its task was perceived as a small-state peacemaking model (Barakat and Milton, 2020).
- U.S.-Taliban Negotiations: The historic negotiations between the U.S. and the Taliban were hosted and facilitated by Qatar and led to the Doha Agreement in 2020. The negotiations emphasized the fact that Qatar is capable of offering a neutral venue to the hostilities (Ulrichsen, 2020; Dorsey, 2021).

Strategic Leverage

Qatar also exerts strategic power due to the sheer amount of the natural gas that finances its aggressive foreign policy, humanitarian aid, and development assistance (Kamrava, 2013). One of the primary soft power instruments is the Al Jazeera state-owned media network that influences the discourse in the region and provides the opposition movements with the voice (Grix & Brannagan, 2016). The relationships with Islamist forces, specifically, the Muslim Brotherhood and the groups in Hamas, have helped Qatar to be an intermediary in situations that others might not have access (Roberts, 2017).

Challenges and Criticisms

Diplomatic activism by Qatar has attracted criticism and isolation especially by its neighbors in the Gulf. This blockade 2017-2021 by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt was based on the claim that Qatar was a sponsor of terrorists and meddled with the internal affairs of other nations (Krieg, 2019). Also, its interactions with Islamist groups have caused some unease in Western capitals over the issue of dual loyalty and commentatorism (Dorsey, 2021). Critics claim that the Qatar branding as a neutral arbitrator conceals ambitions of strategy linked to the need to survive and gain international recognition (Barakat and Milton, 2020).

Empirical Studies

An increasing literature on Qatar studies its diplomatic interventions especially in Lebanon, Sudan, and Afghanistan. Kamrava (2011) refers to Qatar as a post-modern mediator, whereby the country redid, capital and strategic ambiguity is employed in an effort to bring a dialogue to the conflicting parties. The 2008 Doha Agreement that resolved the Lebanese political crisis and its involvement in Darfur are examples of Qatar with its niche diplomatic style (Barakat and Milton, 2020). Also, the fact that Qatar hosted the U.S. and Taliban negotiations serves as

another example of why it is a trustworthy mediator in the negotiation involving high stakes (Ulrichsen, 2020).

Conversely, the literature on the aggressive foreign policy has focused on the UAE as it experienced a post-Arab Spring shift of a passive actor into an active regional power. Researchers mention the military presence of the UAE in Yemen, its engagement in anti-Islamist groups in Libya, and the participation in counter-terrorism alliances (Roberts, 2021; Krieg, 2022). The UAE is a state with military strength, economic power, and the reality principle in the form of statecraft, as compared to Qatar (Almezaini and Rickli, 2017). Its entry into normalization deals with Israel on the Abraham Accords is also a strategic change in Gulf diplomacy (Guzansky and Marshall, 2020).

Debates and Gaps

Although there is a lot of empirical and theoretical information, there are still debates on the motivation of small states such as Qatar and the UAE. Other scholars view their foreign policy practices as selfless based on international standards, humanitarianism, or moral power (Barakat and Milton, 2020). There are those who believe that their tactics are influenced by self-interest, regime security and regional power rivalry (Roberts, 2021; Kamrava, 2013). Another element lacking in comparative analysis that exists in small Gulf states is the aspect that they are small and how they strike a balance between ideological commitments and realpolitik strategies in volatile environments. Moreover, there is not much research on how these states negotiate inconsistency between mediation and militarization, which is a subject that should be examined further.

Case 2: the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

The Post Arab Spring Foreign Policy Transformation.

Since the Arab spring, the UAE has experienced a drastic foreign policy change as it no longer represents a relatively quiet actor in the region, but a muscular force that seeks to assert itself across the world. The city of Abu Dhabi led by a Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed developed an aggressive policy of opposition to political Islam, demonstration of military strength, and redrawing the regional balance according to the principles of secular authoritarian rule (Roberts, 2021; Almezaini and Rickli, 2017).

Regional Involvement

- Yemen and Libya: The UAE was at the forefront of the Saudi-led coalition of forces fighting against the Houthi insurgency in Yemen, sending its own troops and training militias. It also provided arms and air support to anti-Islamist forces of General Haftar in Libya despite international embargoes (Juneau, 2020).
- The UAE established a de facto anti-Islamist alliance with Egypt and Saudi Arabia, which enhanced stability by authoritarian fortitude. It tolerated crackdowns against the affiliates of Muslim Brotherhood and allied with Israel against the influence of Iran (Guzansky and Marshall, 2020).
- Normalization with Israel: The UAE was the first Gulf state to normalize with Israel under the Abraham Accords of 2020. This was a shift towards strategy that highlighted the position of the UAE as a security and pragmatic actor within the region (Bahat, 2021).

Application of Financial Leverage, Ports and Military Proxies.

Economic instruments, such as the ones in foreign aid, development of infrastructure, and the Red Sea ports, are the means of influence in the UAE (Gray, 2019). The UAE has established a geopolitical and commercial advantage by building a network of ports in Yemen, the Horn of Africa, and the Arabian Sea (Bueger and Stockbruegger, 2020). At the same time, it has built and used armed proxies to pursue its strategic goals, particularly in Yemen and Libya (Krieg, 2022).

The UAE, even though it can participate in diplomatic efforts, like reconstruction efforts and interfaith dialogue, is becoming more militarized, which undermines its reputation as a neutral party. Its soft power campaigns and hard power approaches seem to be in stark contrast, making it difficult to understand its image internationally (Roberts, 2021). Critics maintain that the interventions by Abu Dhabi, however, reasonable in terms of counterterrorism discourses, tend to contribute to the further development of conflicts and make it difficult to build peace in the long term (Juneau, 2020).

Comparison of Strategic Approaches: Qatar Neutral vs. UAE Proactive Alignment.

Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have assumed considerably different strategies when it comes to the desire to gain influence in the region. Qatar has been a neutral facilitator using soft power instruments like diplomatic brokerage, humanitarian interventions and media diplomacy as instruments to reach the conflicting sides (Kamrava, 2011; Barakat and Milton, 2020). The fact that it focuses on neutrality allows it to negotiate with various players such as Western powers and Islamist groups thus maintaining an image of a reliable middleman.

2. Table: Comparison of Qatar and UAE Foreign Policy Tools

Category	Qatar	United Arab Emirates (UAE)
Diplomatic Strategy	Mediation, soft balancing, niche diplomacy	Assertive diplomacy, strategic alignment, coercive balancing
Ideological Alignment	Supportive of political Islam (e.g., Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas)	Anti-Islamist, secular-authoritarian agenda
Soft Power Tools	Al Jazeera, sports diplomacy (World Cup 2022), humanitarian aid	Cultural diplomacy (Louvre Abu Dhabi), Expo 2020, foreign aid institutions
Hard Power Tools	Minimal military intervention; relies on diplomatic channels	Active military involvement in Yemen, Libya; use of military bases and air power
Economic Diplomacy	Sovereign wealth investments via Qatar Investment Authority (QIA)	Aid diplomacy, port infrastructure (DP World), real estate, logistics in Africa & Asia
Mediation Portfolio	Lebanon (2008), Sudan (2011), U.S.–Taliban (2020), Iran–U.S. talks	Yemen peace talks (post-2021), Red Sea and Horn of Africa stabilization efforts
Strategic Partners	Turkey, Iran (selective engagement), Western states	Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Israel, Western powers (U.S., France)
Reputation Risks	Accused of supporting extremists, polarizing media narrative	Criticized for war conduct (Yemen), authoritarian alignment, proxy warfare

In contrast, the strategy of the UAE can be described as proactive alignment, which involves the use of military force, ideology placement, and control of the region through coalition-building to establish control (Roberts, 2021; Krieg, 2022). Abu Dhabi has taken a more activist approach, which is allied with secular authoritarian governments and which is directly involved

in the conflicts like Yemen and Libya. This compatibility enhances its vision of opposition to political Islam and seizing the regional arrangement to reflect its model of governance.

Motives and Consequences: Ideological vs. Strategic/Realist Motives.

The Qatar diplomacy is, to some extent, ideologically sympathetic, especially towards Islamist movements like the Muslim Brotherhood, which are the determinants of its alliances and mediation efforts (Ulrichsen, 2020; Roberts, 2017). Simultaneously, its actions are also strategic, such as the survival of the regime, its international visibility, and the insurance against its isolation in the region (Kamrava, 2013).

In its turn, the UAE is driven by a realist agenda known as regime security, regional domination, and repression of ideologies it considers destabilizing, especially political Islam (Almezaini and Rickli, 2017). The foreign policy indicates that it has a calculated plan of putting down roots of authoritarian stability, protecting economic corridors and countering the opponents such as Iran and Qatar.

These differences are observed in outcomes: Qatar has enhanced negotiations and ceasefire deals, but it has suffered backlash due to ideological alignments. Military aggression has brought short-term strategic rewards to the UAE, but in many cases, it has come at the price of breaking down the region and reputational damage (Juneau, 2020).

Effects on Regional Stability: Positive Interventions vs. Destabilization by accident.

Mediation initiatives of Qatar have been on the positive side of de-escalation in relation to the U.S. Taliban discussions and the Doha Contract in Lebanon (Kamrava, 2011). The fact that it can act as a neutral has made it to undertake the things that other actors could not. Nevertheless, its backing of controversial parties has also added to the tensions with its neighbors, which resulted in the 2017-2021 Gulf blockade (Krieg, 2019).

The interventions made by the UAE have sometimes played at the expense of the situation in the region though they are presented as the ones aimed at boosting the security. In Yemen, its military intervention caused humanitarian disasters and active development of armed militias (Juneau, 2020). In Libya, its support of General Haftar increased the civil war and weakened the peace attempts under the UN. The UAE has employed coercive policies giving it long-term instability in certain spheres of engagement despite its soft power initiatives, including aid and cultural diplomacy (Roberts, 2021).

Conclusions to Theories of Small State Behavior: Rethinking the Limits of Soft/Hard Power.

These two contrasting courses that Qatar and the UAE have taken pose a challenge to those classical theories of small state behavior that focus on vulnerability, passivity, or unilateral dependence on soft power (Neumann and Gstohl, 2006; Panke, 2010). The two states show that small states can pursue ambitious risk-taker approaches and have disproportionately large roles in regional politics, particularly resource endowed states.

The model by Qatar restates the usefulness of soft power and niche diplomacy, especially under the support of strategic neutrality and access to negotiation arenas with high stakes (Barakat and Milton, 2020). The model of the UAE, in turn, shows that small states can also project the hard power, develop hybrid diplomacy, and practice military adventurism, at times even surpassing the small state restraint expectations (Krieg, 2022; Bueger and Stockbruegger, 2020).

The findings indicate that there is a need to re-calibrate the small state theory to include differences in resource endowment, the type of regimes, the ambition of pursuing foreign policy, and the opportunity structures in the region. The examples of Qatar and the UAE present that the small states are not just the reactive agents of the international system but the creators of the regional

order, which can combine both the functions of a peacemaker and a projector of power.

Major Research Findings Discussions.

One of the key discoveries is that diplomatic identity of Qatar and the UAE is contrasting. Qatar has developed a position of neutrality, frequently taking the form of providing a forum where conflicting sides can engage in an inclusive discussion. Its presence in the Doha Agreement (Lebanon, 2008), Darfur peace talks and the U.S.-Taliban negotiations (2020) highlight its preference of back-door negotiations, which it presents as humanitarian and peace-based.

The UAE, in contrast, is pursuing an aggressive stabilizer identity, which is based on military intervention, ideology, and alliances. Its intervention in Yemen and Libya, aid to secular authoritarian governments and the Abraham Accords demonstrate an aggressive style based on geopolitical calculations and security interests. These identities do not only influence their diplomatic instrumentations but also their perceived legitimacy and regional alliances.

The study establishes one of the major differences in the tools of influence. Qatar uses soft power whereas UAE uses hard and smart power. Qatar soft power comprises Al Jazeera, humanitarianism and the hosting of diplomatic forums. These will help to improve its international image and credibility as a peace broker.

In the meantime, the UAE has combined financial aid with military activism through using financial aid, port control, and military proxies. Its interventions are supported by public diplomacy programs that lay stress on modernization and counterterrorism. Nevertheless, although the soft power allows Qatar to enter delicate diplomatic spheres, the militarization of the UAE can be questioned in terms of the long-term sustainability and the ethics of the matter.

The results indicate that ideological orientation has a big effect on the diplomatic agenda of the two states. The issue of the Qatari involvement with the Islamist trends, including the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas, has its background in the fact that Qatar adheres to the policy of political Islam, which explains its dynamics in favor of the inclusive principles of governance and resistance movements.

UAE on the contrary follows a counter Islamist, secular authoritarian agenda. The Arab Spring has influenced its foreign policy as it fears the emergence of political Islam, which has led it to support the activities of such actors as General Haftar in Libya and President Sisi in Egypt. This ideological confrontation was one of the key factors of the 2017 GCC crisis and still affects the overall Gulf diplomatic arena.

Even though the two states argue that they are encouraging regional stability, their interventions have mixed results. Qatar has been effective in brokering ceasefires and deals, yet its relationship with dubious organizations has caused backlash and division within the region most visibly with the Gulf blockade. Its foreign policy is at other times too opportunistic than altruistic.

UAE interventions have had only short-term security benefits in the conflict regions but sometimes at a cost of increased violence and humanitarian disasters particularly in Yemen. Its encouragement of armed proxies and opponent governments jeopardizes establishment of conflict instead of its settlement. Consequently, the contribution towards the stabilization and destabilization of both actors is concurrent, and it is determined by context and aims.

The threat that both Qatar and the UAE pose to the traditional theory of the small states is one of the most important discoveries. Historical literature on international relations also tends to consider small states as passive or limited by their size and ability. Both states, however, show how small states with resource-rich

and strategically positioned states may make use of outsized diplomatic agency.

They have established significant roles in both regional and global diplomacy through agenda-setting, mediation, formation of alliances, as well as, branding internationally. This supports more subtle idea of small states as resourceful, tactical actors, especially where small states are functioning in discontinuous geopolitical space such as the Middle East.

Finally, we also get to know that intra-Gulf rivalries, particularly between Qatar and the UAE, hamper the regional coordination and stability initiatives. Instead of cooperating with one another via the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) or Arab League, the two states tend to perform unilateral or antagonistic actions against each other. Their foreign policy, especially regarding political Islam, ties with Iran, and their peace strategies, create gaps in geopolitics, allowing foreign powers (e.g., Turkey, Iran, Russia) to occupy the diplomatic gaps.

This competition also restricts the effectiveness of regional mediation and forms alternative legitimacy stories. The Gulf crisis of 2017-2021 is a classic example of how competition within the circle of small states may inherently move to the stage of greater regional polarization, complicating the process of peace and deteriorating stability in the long term.

Conclusion, Summary Recommendations

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the strategic diplomatic positions of Qatar and United Arab Emirates (UAE) in stabilizing Middle East region, their divergent strategies, their expansion intentions and consequences of their foreign policy actions. Although small in size, the two states have become powerful actors due to a mix of the economic possessions, ideological orientation and international initiative. Whereas the Qatar diplomatic policy is heavily based on soft power, dialogue, and norm entrepreneurship, the UAE power is based on military aggressiveness, pragmatic alliances, and strategic statecraft economy. It is in the comparative analysis that the two states have provided way to redefine the expectations of the small state conduct in international relations, but their intervention is of a twofold nature and can create stability as well as destabilization.

Summary of Research

- i. Comparison and contrast of Diplomatic Strategies Qatar is a neutral mediator, whereas the UAE is a proactive stabilizer with the aid of military instruments and alliances.
- ii. Soft vs. Hard Power: The dependency of Qatar on the humanitarian diplomacy and media is opposed to the combination of economic influence and military action by the UAE.
- iii. Ideological Rift: Qatar is a patron of Islamist regimes as the UAE aims to have a secular-authoritarian agenda, which causes frictions in the region.
- iv. Mixed Effect on Stability: Both the actors have been successful in mediation and conflict intervention although they have contributed to stability inadvertently.
- v. Small State Theory recast: The cases conclude that small states may have significant agency, particularly in the form of financial resources and vision.
- vi. Gulf Rivalry: The UAE-Qatar rivalry has undermined unity of the region, and caused the disjointed stabilization attempts.

Recommendations

- I. Encourage Gulf Diplomatic Reconciliation and Cooperation: Regional entities such as the GCC ought to institutionalize shared framework of diplomatic cooperation amongst member states in order to curb the unilateralism and competition.
- II. Create a Multilateral Mediation Platform: Qatar and the UAE can jointly sponsor or sponsor a neutral multilateral

mediation platform of the Middle East in the Arab League or the UN so that a comprehensive discussion of the conflict resolution can be held.

- III. Striking a Balance between Ideological Determinants and Pragmatism: Both parties must reevaluate their own ideological commitments, especially the relationship that Qatar has with the Islamist groups and the practice of securitization adopted by UAE to ensure more long-term peace at the cost of regime rewards.
- IV. Invest in Peacebuilding Beyond Ceasefire Mediation: Beyond brief diplomatic breakthroughs, the two parties should invest more in the post-conflict rebuilding, institution-building, and reconciliation initiatives to guarantee peaceful results in the long run.
- V. Improve Transparency and Accountability in Overseas Activities: As a way of establishing confidence in the world stage, Qatar and the UAE should consider the use of transparent foreign policy reporting, especially in conflict mediation, military engagements, and humanitarian interventions.
- VI. Stimulate Future Academic and Policy Scholarship on Small State Diplomacy: University and think tanks in the region ought to invest in more comparative study of the role of small states in geopolitics, so as to produce models of the complexities of small power strategic action.

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