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Role of Mediation in Qatar's Foreign Policy: A Case of the Afghan Conflict

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Abstract. The present study is of particular relevance as it seeks to demonstrate the new possibilities of crisis diplomacy for small countries, a topic that has gained additional significance in an increasingly unstable international situation. In recent decades, Qatar, being a small state, has acquired the status of an active actor in world politics, capable of influencing international and regional processes. This is largely due to its reliance on mediation in the settlement of international crises and disputes. The aim of the article is to identify the specifics of Qatar's mediation strategy in the context of evolving regional and global geopolitical conditions and the tools that have enabled the country to quickly establish itself as a credible mediator within the international community. The scientific novelty of the research lies in the separate study of the phenomenon of Doha's mediation as one of the key mechanisms for enhancing Qatar's international standing, focusing on Doha's mediation in resolving the Afghan issue. The study relies on a historical and comparative method, discourse analysis, case study. The authors conclude that Qatar was able to gain the trust of the international community as a mediator due to its pragmatic balancing strategy, active use of its own financial capabilities. As a new player on the international stage, the state was considered to have no hidden agenda when engaging in conflict resolution. However, the diplomatic crises of 2011–2013 and 2017–2021 undermined Qatar's reputation as a neutral actor, forcing it to adapt its mediation strategy, as mediation of the US — Taliban negotiations demonstrated. Qatar's effective mediation of the US — Taliban deal has restored Doha's credibility as an unbiased regional and global mediator and opened up new opportunities for the country to promote its influence in global politics, neutralizing the negative effects of the diplomatic crises.

Key words: negotiations, peace process, conflict resolution, crisis diplomacy, Middle East, Taliban, USA

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Роль посредничества во внешней политике Катара на примере конфликта в Афганистане

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Аннотация. Актуальность исследования обусловлена необходимостью осмысления новых возможностей антикризисной дипломатии малых стран, что стало особенно заметным явлением в условиях растущей нестабильности международной ситуации. Будучи небольшим по масштабам государством, Катар за последние десятилетия приобрел статус активного участника мировой политики, способного оказывать влияние на международные и региональные процессы. Во многом Катар добился этого благодаря ставке на оказание посреднических услуг в урегулировании международных кризисов и споров на Ближнем Востоке и в Афганистане. Цель исследования — выявление особенностей стратегии посредничества Катара на фоне меняющихся региональных и глобальных геополитических условий, а также инструментов, которые помогли стране столь быстро стать авторитетным медиатором для международного сообщества. Новизна исследования заключается в изучении феномена посредничества Государства Катар как одного из ключевых механизмов по повышению его международной значимости с фокусом на медиацию Дохи при урегулировании афганской проблемы. Применены такие методы, как историко-сравнительный метод, дискурс-анализ и кейс-стади. Авторы приходят к выводу, что Катар смог быстро завоевать доверие международного сообщества как посредник благодаря прагматичной стратегии балансирования, активному использованию собственных финансовых возможностей и тому обстоятельству, что он был новым игроком на мировой арене, который, как считалось, не имеет глубинной политической повестки при участии в урегулировании конфликтов. Вместе с тем дипломатические кризисы 2011–2013 гг. и 2017–2021 гг. негативно сказались на имидже Катара как нейтрального актора, что вынудило его пересмотреть свою посредническую стратегию. Результативное посредничество Катара при заключении сделки США с талибами вернуло Дохе авторитет беспристрастного регионального и глобального медиатора и открыло стране новые возможности для продвижения своего влияния в мировой политике, нейтрализовав негативные последствия дипломатических кризисов.

Ключевые слова: переговоры, мирный процесс, урегулирование конфликтов, антикризисная дипломатия, Ближний Восток, Талибан, США

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Introduction

In recent years, there has been an increase in political activity and autonomy among regional players in the Middle East, who are exerting greater influence on regional and extra-regional processes (Zvyagelskaya, 2022, p. 58). The participation of the Persian Gulf monarchies, such as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the Sultanate of Oman, and the State of Qatar, has become particularly noticeable in international affairs. The latter was one of the first among the small Gulf states to embark on a course of building an independent foreign policy and forming its own political identity, seeking, among other things, to break free from the influence of Riyadh, which had dominated the Arabian Peninsula for many years. In addition to defending its sovereignty against pressure from its larger neighbor, Qatar, in pursuing its own foreign policy strategy, also seeks to protect its energy routes and maintain stable demand for energy resources, and to this end, the country engages in efforts to maintain regional stability.

Doha uses various tools to achieve its goals, but its hallmark has become the mediation services in resolving international and regional crises. Over the past three decades, the monarchy has managed to gain a reputation as a reliable mediator, with at least a dozen successful cases of international mediation to its credit.

The aim of the article is to identify the specific features of Qatar's mediation strategy in the context of regional and global geopolitical transformations. It analyzes the case of Qatar, which became a credible mediator for the international community in a short period of time, and the process of adapting the Qatari approach to conflict mediation to new conditions after the Qatar diplomatic crisis of 2017–2021.

In Russian historiography, the role of Qatar as a mediator in resolving crises and

international conflicts has not been widely studied. A comprehensive analysis of Doha's foreign policy, which includes conflict mediation, can be found in the work of T. Tyukaeva (2023). Qatar's mediation efforts, primarily in the Afghan conflict, are also analyzed in an article by E. Melkumyan (2022). At the same time, English-language academic literature provides a very detailed analysis of Qatar's mediation role in different periods of time (Kamrava, 2011; Minich, 2015; Alqashouti, 2021; Milton, Elkahlout & Tariq, 2023).

The relevance of the research topic is due to the need to understand the new role of small states seeking to take on greater responsibility in international affairs against the backdrop of growing regional and global geopolitical tensions. In the current climate of permanent instability in the system of international relations, the emergence of new conflicts and the escalation of old ones are becoming commonplace. As the system itself and its institutions are often unable to resolve current crises, the importance of its individual participants is increasing. Small countries that are ready to offer mediation services to conflicting parties are taking on an increasingly active role. In these circumstances, studying the experience of such small yet influential players as Qatar appears to be a relevant subject for study.

The theoretical framework of the study uses concepts that explain the specifics of small states' foreign policy and their ability to overcome structural constraints through multilateralism, balancing, and the use of soft power instruments (Miller & Al-Mansouri, 2016; Miller & Verhoeven, 2020; Al-Tamimi, Amin & Zarrinabadi, 2023). In addition, considerable attention is paid to studies of international mediation, which allow to analyze the main functions of a mediator in resolving international conflicts (Schrodt & Gerner, 2004; Kamrava, 2011).

Methodologically, the paper is based on a combination of the historical-comparative method, discourse analysis, and the case study method. The historical-comparative method helps to trace the evolution of Qatar's foreign policy strategy and its approaches to mediation. Discourse analysis allows to analyze the official statements and rhetoric of the Qatari leadership that shape the image of the state as a mediator. A case study is employed to analyze the main instruments of Qatar's mediation efforts, using the US — Taliban settlement as an example.

Mediation in Qatar's Foreign Policy

Traditionally, the role of mediators in resolving military conflicts or political tensions between states has been assigned to major and medium powers that have had a significant influence on international processes and the parties directly involved in the conflict, and this has been relevant at both the global and regional levels. In the Middle East, the largest states in the region, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, have always sought to act as key mediators (Kamrava, 2011, p. 541). However, since the 21st century, Qatar, being one of the smallest states in the Middle East, has been the most successful mediator.

Qatar can be regarded as a relatively new player on the world stage, as the country did not embark on an independent foreign policy until the mid-1990s, thus staying in the shadow of Saudi Arabia, the key and largest member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). It was only with

Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani's rise to power in 1995 when Doha acquired its foreign policy identity and set a course to increase its regional and global influence (Tyukaeva, 2023, p. 96). Seeking to emphasize its uniqueness and independence from other Persian Gulf monarchies, primarily Saudi Arabia, which Qatar's leadership began to view as the main source of threats to its own national security (Roberts, 2016, p. 13), Doha began to pursue a pragmatic and multidimensional foreign policy (Miller & Verhoeven, 2020, p. 10). Thus, Qatar's leadership opted to use "soft power" tools, strengthening the country's influence by acquiring the status of a "gas superpower" and enhancing its security through an alliance with the United States,¹ as well as intensifying foreign policy contacts with major international players and influential actors in the Middle East, including non-state actors (Tyukaeva, 2023, p. 97). However, mediation has become a key feature of Qatari foreign policy.

Qatar's legislative commitment to performing a mediating role in the region was enshrined in Article 7 of the Constitution of the State of Qatar, adopted by referendum in 2003. It also contains a provision on the country's commitment to the peaceful resolution of international disputes and its readiness to act as a mediator between parties to a conflict if necessary.² Qatari officials have also declared the country's desire to promote conflict resolution through dialogue, emphasizing the importance of mediation in its foreign policy.³ The particular importance of the mediation mission for foreign policy is also noted

¹ Steinberg G. Qatar's Foreign Policy: Decision-Making Processes, Baselines, and Strategies // Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik. 2023. No. 4. URL: <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/271033/1/1841882623.pdf> (accessed: 21.06.2025).

² The Permanent Constitution of the State of Qatar // UNHCR. 2004. URL: <https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/2004/en/101710> (accessed: 08.04.2025).

³ See: Official Spokesperson for Ministry of Foreign Affairs Reviews Successes of Qatari Diplomacy During Middle East Global Summit in New York // Ministry of Foreign Affairs — State of Qatar. September 21, 2023. URL: <https://mofa.gov.qa/en/qatar/latest-articles/latest-news/details/1445/03/06/official-spokesperson-for-ministry-of-foreign-affairs-reviews-successes-of-qatari-diplomacy-during-middle-east-global-summit-in-new-york> (accessed: 21.06.2025); Atallah S. Mediation Remains Backbone of Qatar's Foreign Policy: Al-Khulaifi // The Peninsula. April 30, 2025. URL: <https://thepeninsulaqatar.com/article/30/04/2025/mediation-remains-backbone-of-qatars-foreign-policy-al-khulaifi>

on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar, which lists the country's participation in conflict resolution as a mediator since 2004.⁴ Overall, Doha's desire to play the role of peacemaker in a conflict-ridden region such as the Middle East seems logical and reasonable. However, it seems remarkable how quickly Qatar has achieved the status of a successful regional mediator, given its relatively late entry into the global political arena.

Shortly after Sheikh Hamad came to power in December 1995, Qatar acted as a mediator between Yemen and Eritrea during the conflict over the Hanish Islands (Minich, 2015, p. 129). Since then, Doha has repeatedly and successfully mediated in the settlement of various regional and international conflicts. Thus, in 2007, Qatar helped to reach a ceasefire agreement between the Houthis and the Yemeni government; in 2008, it facilitated the resolution of the internal political crisis in Lebanon; in 2011, the Sudanese government and the Liberation and Justice Movement signed a peace agreement in Doha. In 2012, Qatar helped to conclude an agreement on the path to reconciliation between the Palestinian factions Fatah and Hamas; and in 2020, the United States and the Taliban with Qatar's big and long-standing mediation efforts managed to reach an agreement in Qatari capital. Among similar, though less ambitious, examples of Doha's successful mediation efforts are the 2010 ceasefire agreement between Eritrea and Djibouti, the reconciliation between the Libyan Tuareg and Toubou tribes in 2015, the peace agreement between the Chadian government and opposition in 2022, and support for a peaceful resolution to the political crisis in Libya (Milton,

Elkahlout & Tariq, 2023, pp. 57–58). The most recent example of Qatar's effective mediation was its role in brokering a ceasefire agreement between the government of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the March 23 Movement (M23) in the spring of 2025.⁵

The interest of many conflicting parties in Doha's mediation services can be partly explained by their agreement to have their dispute mediated by an impartial party that does not seek to gain any practical benefit and does not act in the interests of one of the involved actors. While major regional powers such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia have traditionally been seen as active regional players using mediation as a tool to implement and promote their own political agenda, Qatar, as a state that has only recently embarked on an independent foreign policy course, was perceived as an honest broker until the 2010s and successfully cultivated this image (Kamrava, 2011, p. 543).

Another factor that allows Doha to act as an effective mediator in conflict resolution is its substantial financial capabilities. As one of the world's largest exporters of liquefied natural gas (LNG), Qatar has actively used the revenues from the sale of its resources to pursue its foreign policy goals (Al-Tamimi, Amin & Zarrinabadi, 2023, p. 51). According to studies, the financial incentives that a mediator is willing to offer to the conflicting parties in the case of a settlement may positively influence the outcome of negotiations (Schrodt & Gerner, 2004, p. 322). A mediator can offer direct payments to one of the parties to end the conflict, or more commonly, promise to invest in various infrastructure projects

(accessed: 21.06.2025).

⁴ Qatar Mediation Efforts // Ministry of Foreign Affairs — State of Qatar. URL: <https://mofa.gov.qa/en/foreign-policy/mediation/mediation> (accessed: 07.06.2025).

⁵ Mureithi C. DRC Government and M23 Agree to Halt Fighting and Work Towards Truce // The Guardian. April 24, 2025. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/apr/24/drc-government-and-m23-make-surprise-truce-to-end-fighting-in-east-of-country> (accessed: 20.05.2025).

of the conflicting parties. Thus, Qatar was ready to actively invest and offer material assistance to the states to which it provided mediation services.⁶ At the same time, according to a number of researchers, this approach, which Doha actively uses, often leads only to temporary deals concluded by the parties with the aim of obtaining short-term material benefits, but does not eliminate the root causes of the conflict, which leaves room for new contradictions to arise between its participants.⁷

It is important to note that Qatar has traditionally pursued a balancing strategy in its foreign policy: in addition to maintaining close relations with its key major ally, the US, the Qatari leadership has always sought to be an important partner for many Middle Eastern and extra-regional states (Tyukaeva, 2023, p. 98). Close military and political ties have developed between Qatar and Turkey (Vasil'ev, Khairullin & Korotayev, 2019), France, and other European states (Miller & Al-Mansouri, 2016). Despite competing with Saudi Arabia, Qatar has always remained committed to participating in the GCC, considering the organization an integral element in building its own security (Kabalan, 2019, p. 71). At the same time, Doha has repeatedly taken a special position among the GCC countries and has been, for example, open to maintaining contacts with Israel and developing mutually

beneficial relations with Iran, which other Gulf monarchies have repeatedly criticized (Tyukaeva, 2023, p. 99). This approach by the Qatari leadership demonstrates to the international community the country's neutral status and its willingness to build constructive cooperation with all international actors, thereby enhancing confidence in Doha as an impartial mediator.

Another notable feature of Qatar's foreign policy is its active engagement with Islamist movements in the Middle East that are seeking to gain real political power in various parts of the region. Doha has developed close ties with the Muslim Brotherhood,⁸ which, during the Arab Spring in 2011–2013, became the main conduit for Qatar's interests in the region. This led to the first crisis in the country's relations with other influential regional powers, who condemned the Qatari leadership's actions in support of the opposition in several Middle Eastern states (Tyukaeva, 2023, p. 100). Qatar has also established close connections with other regional movements that are recognized as terrorist organizations in a number of countries, including the Palestinian Hamas and the Lebanese Hezbollah. While some view the actions of the Qatari leadership as pragmatic, considering them as an attempt to ensure security by maintaining friendly relations with all influential forces in the region,⁹ Doha's support for Islamist movements, coupled with the development of cooperation with

⁶ See: Qatar to Complete Purchase of Sudan Government Bonds by End of April // Sudan Tribune. April 11, 2012. URL: <https://sudantribune.com/article/41613> (accessed: 08.04.2025); Qatar Paid \$1.1bn to Gaza since 2012 // Middle East Monitor. February 11, 2019. URL: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20190211-qatar-paid-1-1bn-to-gaza-since-2012/> (accessed: 08.04.2025).

⁷ Ulrichsen K.C. Qatar and the Arab Spring: Policy Drivers and Regional Implications // Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. 2014. P. 6. URL: https://carnegie-production-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/static/files/qatar_arab_spring.pdf (accessed: 08.04.2025).

* The activities of the international non-governmental organization *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* have been recognized as undesirable on the territory of the Russian Federation (*Editor's note*).

⁸ Hereinafter, an organization included in the Unified Federal List of Organizations, containing foreign and international organizations, recognized as terrorist in accordance with the legislation of the Russian Federation is mentioned.

⁹ Chandrasekaran R. Qatar's Friends-With-Everyone Approach Rankles Some of Its Persian Gulf Neighbors // The Washington Post. October 4, 2014. URL: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/>

Iran and the excessive influence of *Al Jazeera* in the region, has led to a serious crisis in Qatar's relations with other Middle Eastern states (Melkumyan, 2019, p. 128).

In 2017, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt severed diplomatic relations with Qatar and imposed an economic blockade on the country, which lasted until 2021. During the four years that Qatar spent trying to get out of the crisis, the country adapted fairly well to the new conditions (Umar & Ghurab, 2023). At the same time, Doha's regional authority was largely undermined, so the country had to intensify its foreign policy activities outside the region and focus on strengthening relations with the United States, which was greatly facilitated by Qatar's mediating role in conflict resolution.

Qatar's Role in the US — Taliban Settlement and the Afghan Peace Process

For many years, ending the long-running US military campaign in Afghanistan has been a top priority for the American political establishment. Having realized the futility of ending the Afghan mission by military means, the US leadership has been thinking about reaching a peace agreement with its adversary, the Taliban, since the early 2010s. However, direct negotiations with the group were not possible without the participation of a reliable mediator, and Doha played a key role in facilitating this.

Although the official process of reaching an agreement between the US and the Taliban, mediated by Qatar, was only launched in July 2018 (Machitidze, 2020, p. 66), the country

had been providing mediation services much earlier. In 2013, the Taliban opened its first political office in Doha, which signaled the group's willingness not only to conduct military operations but also to engage in political dialogue with various parties, primarily Washington. The Taliban chose Qatar as a location because they considered it to be truly neutral.¹⁰ The US also viewed Qatar positively as a potential mediator, which was undoubtedly facilitated by its accumulated mediation experience and balancing strategy. Consequently, the Taliban office in Doha has become a platform for confidential contacts between representatives of the group and the international community.

Another significant step on Qatar's part was its involvement in the exchange of five high-ranking commanders of the organization imprisoned at Guantanamo for an American soldier. The supreme leader of the Taliban, Mullah Omar, thanked the Emir of Qatar for his help, and the head of the Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that Doha's mediation efforts were guided solely by humanitarian principles.¹¹

Since the launch of official US — Taliban negotiations in Doha, Qatar has provided important political and technical support during each round of talks, also chairing the sessions. In addition, the Qatari leadership had to resort to shuttle diplomacy when the negotiations began to stall (Milton, Elkahlout & Tariq, 2023, p. 61). For example, following the Taliban's killing of American soldiers in September 2019 and Donald Trump's declaration that negotiations between the US and the group were 'dead',¹²

qatars-friends-with-everyone-approach-rankles-some-of-its-persian-gulf-neighbors/2014/10/04/b89977f8-4a7b-11e4-b72e-d60a9229cc10_story.html (accessed: 08.04.2025).

¹⁰ How Qatar Came to Host the Taliban // BBC. June 22, 2013. URL: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-23007401> (accessed: 09.04.2025).

¹¹ Taliban Five Arrive in Qatar After Swap Deal // Al Jazeera. June 1, 2014. URL: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2014/6/1/taliban-five-arrive-in-qatar-after-swap-deal> (accessed: 09.04.2025).

¹² Trump Says US — Taliban Peace Talks Are 'Dead' // Al Jazeera. September 9, 2019. URL: <https://www.aljazeera>.

Qatar facilitated another prisoner exchange to help resume the talks.¹³

After more than a year and a half of maintaining contact and diplomatic efforts the United States and the Taliban signed a peace agreement, on February 29, 2020, in Doha. Under this agreement, both sides made certain commitments: Washington was to gradually reduce its military presence in Afghanistan and completely withdraw its troops within a specified time frame. In return, the Taliban agreed committed to abstain from the use of Afghan territory against the US and its allies and initiate peace talks with the official government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.¹⁴

Although Qatar had been promoting contacts between the Americans and the Taliban in every possible way for several years, it repeatedly emphasized that it had not been directly involved in the discussions and agreements between them, nor had it undertaken any obligations to guarantee the implementation of the agreements. Qatari officials noted Doha's impartiality as a mediator, stating that mediation in the settlement of the Afghan issue is part of Qatar's preventive diplomacy in the context of escalating regional conflicts (Melkumyan, 2022, p. 185).

Moreover, Qatar has agreed to continue providing its mediation services in the next phase of the Afghan conflict settlement — the negotiations between the official government in Kabul and the Taliban opposition, which

began in Doha on September 12, 2020. The international community welcomed the start of the intra-Afghan dialogue and expressed its gratitude to Qatar for its efforts to reconcile the parties.¹⁵ At the same time, the negotiations were conducted directly by the Afghan parties themselves, without the presence of formal mediators in the room during the sessions. The exception was the assistance provided by Qatar's Special Representative for Afghanistan, Mutlaq Al-Kahtani, to the negotiating delegations in resolving a procedural issue in November 2020.¹⁶

Despite Qatar's efforts, the parties were unable to make any progress after several months of negotiations. The situation was complicated by the continuing fighting between pro-government forces and the armed opposition, as well as the growing pressure on the official Kabul from the Taliban. As soon as it became evident that the incoming US President, Joseph Biden, was committed to bringing the Afghan mission to a conclusion, the fate of the intra-Afghan dialogue was sealed. As the US contingent left Afghan territory, the Taliban's military operations against government forces became increasingly successful, ultimately leading to the fall of Kabul on August 15, 2021, and the establishment of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan under the Taliban rule.

Such an early military victory for the Taliban and the breakdown of inter-Afghan dialogue

com/news/2019/9/9/trump-says-us-taliban-peace-talks-are-dead (accessed: 09.04.2025).

¹³ Taliban Commanders 'Land in Qatar' as Part of Prisoner Swap Move // Al Jazeera. November 20, 2019. URL: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/11/20/taliban-commanders-land-in-qatar-as-part-of-prisoner-swap-move> (accessed: 09.04.2025).

¹⁴ The US and the Taliban Signed a Peace Agreement // TASS. February 29, 2020. (In Russian). URL: <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/7868699> (accessed: 09.04.2025).

¹⁵ Security Council Thanks Qatar for Facilitating Afghan Peace Negotiations // Ministry of Foreign Affairs — State of Qatar. URL: <https://mofa.gov.qa/en/qatar/latest-articles/latest-news/details/1442/02/01/security-council-thanks-qatar-for-facilitating-afghan-peace-negotiations> (accessed: 09.04.2025).

¹⁶ Adili A. Y. Intra-Afghan Talks (1): Rules of Procedure Agreed, but Still No Agenda as Talks Resume // Afghanistan Analysts Network. January 3, 2021. URL: <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/war-and-peace/intra-afghan-talks-1-rules-of-procedure-agreed-but-still-no-agenda-as-talks-resume/> (accessed: 09.04.2025).

came as a surprise to many. These events have also significantly affected attitudes toward the US — Taliban deal. For example, David Petraeus, the former head of the US Central Intelligence Agency and commander of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) mission in Afghanistan, called it ‘one of the worst diplomatic agreements in the history of the United States.’¹⁷ While the consequences of the agreement may cast doubt on its effectiveness and the wisdom of concluding it, they do not affect perceptions of the dialogue process between the US and the Taliban, nor Qatar’s central role. The Doha agreement is a major success for Qatari foreign policy, confirming Qatar’s reputation as a key regional and global mediator, ready to provide a platform for negotiations and assist in the settlement of disputes.

In addition, the events of the Afghan conflict had a positive impact on Doha’s international standing. Qatar successfully evacuated 60,000 Afghan citizens and thousands of foreigners from Afghanistan, which could only have been achieved with the Taliban’s cooperation (Milton, Elkahlout & Tariq, 2023, p. 62). Thanks to its good relations with the Taliban, Doha has become a center of diplomatic activity, acting as a conduit between the Taliban government and the international community. Many states have also relocated their diplomatic missions from Kabul to Doha. Doha has become a platform where countries without diplomatic relations with the new Afghan government can establish contact with the Taliban (Melkumyan, 2022, p. 187).

Thus, Qatar’s actions in Afghanistan, from building constructive relations with the Taliban and mediating the US — Taliban dialogue to providing humanitarian support to Afghanistan

after the events of 2021, have increased Doha’s regional and global influence.

Development of Qatar’s Mediation Strategy

An analysis of Qatar’s mediation efforts in the Afghan conflict reveals several new aspects of its approach to mediation.

Firstly, the success of the US — Taliban deal has enabled the country to restore its reputation as an effective and impartial mediator, ready to help resolve even the most difficult and long-lasting crises. Washington had long struggled to find a way to conclude its military operation in Afghanistan, and it was Doha’s effective mediation, which was able to help break the deadlock even in the most difficult situations, that allowed the US and its allies to end NATO’s mission in Afghanistan. In addition, during the intra-Afghan talks, it was Qatar’s involvement that enabled the parties to quickly reach an agreement on procedural issues, which was the only tangible progress made during months of dialogue.

Secondly, following accusations by regional powers that Qatar was interfering in the internal affairs of other countries, its leadership became more cautious in its foreign policy. Doha is only willing to actively promote the resolution of conflicts when both sides are interested in doing so, and the country tries to avoid unilateral intervention (Milton, Elkahlout & Tariq, 2023, p. 70). The US and the Taliban were both interested in concluding an agreement and were confident in Qatar’s positive role as a mediator, which explains its active role in promoting the peace initiative and its efforts to overcome difficult situations in the negotiation process.

¹⁷ Petraeus D. Afghanistan Did Not Have to Turn Out This Way // *The Atlantic*. August 8, 2022. URL: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2022/08/us-withdrawal-afghanistan-strategy-shortcomings/670980/> (accessed: 09.04.2025).

At the same time, Qatar is not willing to take risks and actively participate in negotiations that are highly likely to fail, as failure could damage its reputation. This explains Qatar's rather distant participation in the intra-Afghan negotiations, in which the Afghans themselves did not want to involve other countries' representatives. The failure of the peace process cannot be attributed to Doha's actions as a mediator, since the interests of the parties were too different from the start, and the position of one of them, i.e. the Taliban, began to strengthen over time to such an extent that it was able to achieve its goals without negotiations.

Thirdly, in the case of Afghanistan, Qatar did not resort to financial incentives to push the parties to the conflict towards a peaceful settlement, which was characteristic of Qatar's earlier mediation efforts. Qatar faced criticism for bribing the parties during the settlement of the crisis in Yemen in 2007¹⁸ and in its attempt to achieve a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas in 2009 (Rabi, 2009, p. 459) and in resolving the crisis around Darfur in 2010.¹⁹ In all these cases, Qatar was prepared to provide significant amounts of money to certain parties to the conflict for development and reconstruction. However, Qatar's recent mediation in resolving the Afghan problem shows that financial incentives are no longer a priority strategy for Doha, even though Afghanistan itself, both during the republican period and under the Taliban, is in dire need of foreign investment.

Thus, the example of the Afghan conflict shows that Qatar's mediation policy has

undergone certain changes. It is clear that for Doha, mediation is one of the key instruments of foreign policy, which it seeks to use competently and much more cautiously than before, in order to distance itself as much as possible from the accusations it faced during the diplomatic crises of 2011–2013 and 2017–2021.

Conclusion

In recent decades, Qatar has broken free from Saudi Arabia's influence, formed a sovereign foreign policy and emerged as a prominent actor in the Middle East. This notable shift has been accompanied by Doha's consistent commitment to facilitating the resolution of international crises, contributing to its growing prominence on the global stage. At the same time, Qatar's role as a mediator has expanded from helping to resolve minor local clashes and disputes in the region to mediating in major armed conflicts, such as the Afghan problem or the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas.²⁰

Its accumulated experience in resolving disputes of various scales, combined with its ability to effectively organize the negotiation process, has allowed Qatar to gain a reputation as an effective and impartial mediator both in the Middle East and beyond. This was clearly demonstrated, among other things, by the recent conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where it was Qatar, not the African Union or European countries, that managed to bring the leaders of the DRC and Rwanda, which

¹⁸ Yemen: Defusing the Saada Time Bomb // Crisis Group Middle East Report. 2009. URL: https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/wps/icg/0016493/f_0016493_14249.pdf (accessed: 09.04.2025).

¹⁹ Donors Conference Approves Qatar's Proposal of Establishing Darfur Development Bank // ReliefWeb. March 21, 2010. URL: <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/donors-conference-approves-qatars-proposal-establishing-darfur-development-bank> (accessed: 09.04.2025).

²⁰ Al-Malki F.H., Sadiqzade M. The Phenomenon of a Small Power: Qatar as a Part of the World Majority // Russian International Affairs Council. April 16, 2025. (In Russian). URL: <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/fenomen-maloy-derzhavy-gosudarstvo-katar-kak-chast-mirovogo-bolshinstva/> (accessed: 14.04.2025).

supports the M23 group, to the negotiating table.²¹ Although the parties have repeatedly resumed hostilities and a full settlement of the conflict is unlikely in the near future, they still see Doha as the main venue for negotiations.²²

In addition, Qatar's active involvement in mediating negotiations between the US and the Taliban has allowed the country to secure its status as one of the most important actors in Afghanistan, which has further strengthened Qatar's geopolitical position, considering

how relevant the Afghan issue remains on the international agenda.

The experience of Qatar confirms that small states can play a significant role in world politics if their leadership is able to develop a long-term and effective foreign policy that incorporates pragmatism, diplomatic flexibility, and the ability to balance and adapt to changing conditions. It is therefore extremely important to take their presence on the global stage into account and establish constructive relationships with them.

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²¹ Gamandiy-Egorov M. Qatar as a Mediator between Rwanda and the DR Congo // New Eastern Outlook. March 24, 2025. (In Russian). URL: <https://journal-neo.su/ru/2025/03/24/katar-v-rol-i-posrednika-mezhdu-ruandoy-i-dr-kongo/> (accessed: 20.05.2025).

²² Mills A., Rolley S. Congo and M23 Rebels Resume Peace Talks in Doha, Sources Say // Reuters. May 6, 2025. URL: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/congo-m23-rebels-resume-peace-talks-doha-sources-say-2025-05-06/> (accessed: 20.05.2025).

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