

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The emergence of Qatar's diplomacy in a complex world: Balancing soft power in regional affairs

AKM Ahsan Ullah 

Geography, Development and Environment,
FASS, Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Bandar
Seri Begawan, Brunei

Correspondence

AKM Ahsan Ullah, Geography, Development
and Environment, FASS, Universiti Brunei
Darussalam, Brunei Darussalam.
Email: akmahsanullah@gmail.com and
ahsan.ullah@ubd.edu.bn

Abstract

This article examines the key aspects that contribute to Qatar's influence and soft power and investigates how Qatar strategically utilizes culture, economics, sports diplomacy, and media influence to shape perceptions of Qatar. A focal point of Qatar's soft power tool is Al Jazeera, which serves not only as a media giant but also as a dynamic force to amplify Qatar's influence. The article focuses on the resonance of Qatar's cultural initiatives, tourism sector, and sports and how these elements together contribute to soft power. Against the backdrop of regional challenges, Qatar's strategic posture emerges as a resilient force that positions the country as a key player in shaping regional dynamics.

KEYWORDS

Al Jazeera, conflict resolution, cultural diplomacy, cultural initiatives, international relations, media, mediation, Middle East, Qatar, regional affairs, soft power tools, sports diplomacy, strategy, tourism

INTRODUCTION

Until the mid-1990s, Qatar was a small and relatively unknown country in the Persian Gulf, essentially under the protection of Saudi Arabia (Henrikson, 2001). In just 25 years, however, Qatar has emerged as a major regional player despite its size (Izevbigie, 2019). Qatar's domestic and foreign policy has evolved in three key areas since the 1990s. First, the country has significantly increased its gas production and aims to export liquefied natural gas to numerous countries. Second, it is ensuring its own security by establishing military bases that guarantee protection. And finally, it strives to become a soft power by investing in media, culture, and sports (Kozhanov, 2021). Qatar appears to be trying to reduce regional tensions by acting as a mediator and maintaining positive diplomatic relations with Iran, its regional allies, and groups such as Hamas and the Taliban. However, its support for the Muslim Brotherhood has repeatedly led to tensions with Saudi Arabia and neighboring countries. From 2017 to 2021, neighboring countries—particularly Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)—imposed a comprehensive land, sea, and air blockade (often referred to as the “Qatar diplomatic crisis”

or “Qatar embargo”) that lasted for more than 3 years (Çevik, 2024; Ullah & Jannatul, 2023), and Turkey appeared as Qatar's new tutelary state (Çevik, 2024).

Following the recent intensification of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, an important diplomatic event occurred when a temporary ceasefire agreement was reached. This led to a mutual exchange of hostages/prisoners between the two countries. Qatar's role in brokering the agreement between the Afghan Taliban and the United States in August 2021 (ICC, 2007), as well as facilitating the recent hostage exchange between Iran and the United States (Batrawy, 2023; Simon, 2023), illustrates Qatar's diplomatic ambitions. Qatar emphasizes interdependence in its negotiations and strategically positions itself as a key player in global and regional affairs. Through its ability to connect states, nongovernmental organizations, and non-state actors, Qatar has established itself as a competent geopolitical center that can bring powerful and less powerful nations together for negotiations (Hey, 2003). This endeavor is enshrined in Section 7 of its 2003 Constitution in which it pledges to mediate out of altruistic motives (Kamrava, 2011).

Recognizing the importance of objectivity in negotiations has enabled Qatar to become a major player in regional relations and strategically express its importance to influential nations. Over the past decade,

Qatar has used its influence to bring Fatah and Hamas together, albeit without significant success (Barakat, 2014). Despite initial uncertainties in its relations with Iran, Qatar has facilitated negotiations between the United States and Iran on a prisoner/hostage exchange (see Simon, 2023). Its transparent approach during the 2010 Arab Spring helped avoid negative perceptions and marked a notable shift in Qatar's regional policy. Qatar's mediation efforts with the Taliban in 2012 and its experience in this area were likewise recognized internationally. The Biden administration demonstrated unequivocally that the United States considers Qatar as a unique and most reliable "major non-NATO ally" (Iddon, 2022), especially in light of the recent rapprochement of other influential Middle Eastern countries with Russia and China.

Qatar strongly supports the two-state concept for Israel and Palestine and approaches the situation with a strong focus on rationality and realism while avoiding emotional factors (Krieg, 2019; Roselle et al., 2014). Its impartiality during the recent events of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict through consistent interaction with both sides, especially when it came to acts of extreme cruelty, has been evident. It did not forget to offer condolences to the Israeli victims of a Hamas attack on October 7, 2023, and officials also met with the families of Israeli hostages in the United States and the United Kingdom to comfort them (see Majid, 2024). Qatar seems to be well aware that it is not easy to take this position in a world characterized by deep divisions.

Through the skillful use of soft power in the cultural, economic, and media spheres, Qatar has succeeded in influencing perceptions, forging strategic alliances, and playing a central role in conflict resolution. Analyzing Qatar's specific soft power mechanisms and strategies offers insights into the evolving landscape of diplomatic power and sheds light on how unconventional influences shape international relations. I argue that mediation diplomacy relies on the transformative impact of soft power on global affairs and I demonstrate how a small nation can exert significant diplomatic influence in the region through visionary leadership, objectivity, and a strategic fusion of skills and knowledge in addressing complex international dynamics.

The following sections explore how Qatar uses soft power tools such as cultural diplomacy, sports diplomacy, and media influence to achieve diplomatic success and offer insights for other nations—in the region and beyond—seeking to expand their influence without coercion. This contributes to a broader discussion on the changing dynamics of diplomatic power in the 21st century. The article examines the role Qatar has played in shaping regional diplomacy, particularly through its soft power strategies.

The original contribution of this article lies in its comprehensive analysis of Qatar's emergence as a major player in regional diplomacy, focusing on the

interplay between the tactics of soft diplomacy and the hard realities of international politics (Nye, 2004). The study sheds light on the effectiveness of soft power tools such as cultural initiatives, media influence, and sports diplomacy as strategies for enhancing Qatar's international standing and achieving its foreign policy objectives (Nye & Nye, 2008). I examine Qatar's complicated diplomatic landscape and how the country deals with regional rivalries, geopolitical tensions, and economic interests. I also highlight Qatar's ability to manage this complexity and build a strong diplomatic presence around the world, offering valuable insights into modern diplomacy. Finally, I underscore the importance of soft power alongside traditional diplomatic methods and emphasize the importance for states to leverage cultural, economic, and informational resources to effectively achieve their foreign policy objectives (Gore, 2013).

I hope to contribute to existing work in the following nuanced examination of Qatar's diplomatic strategies, combining theoretical insights with empirical evidence using Qatar as an example (Layne, 2009). While existing literature often focuses either on the theoretical aspects of soft power or on case studies of individual countries' diplomatic efforts, this article integrates both the theoretical framework and real-world examples. By placing Qatar's diplomatic efforts within the complex geopolitical context of the Middle East, which is characterized by rivalries and conflicts, it provides a comprehensive overview of the challenges and opportunities Qatar faces in its quest for diplomatic influence (see Lukes, 2005).

METHODOLOGY

I draw on a theoretical framework of international relations and diplomatic studies to ensure rigor, coupled with a multi-layered approach. Through content analysis, the primary literature on soft power, diplomatic initiatives, and geopolitical dynamics is systematically examined to identify recurring patterns and key principles as they apply to Qatar's diplomatic engagement. Existing debates on Qatar's role in regional diplomacy call for an examination that takes into account the intricate interplay of geopolitical contexts and competing interests. Balancing theoretical insights with empirical analyses, this integrative approach aims to provide a solid understanding of Qatar's emergence as a central player in global diplomacy and offer valuable insights into the pursuit of soft power objectives amidst the pragmatic challenges of contemporary international relations. I also integrate the basic principles of case study research and draw on foundational contributions in the field to address key questions. In particular, the study is guided by the methodological frameworks of Gerring (2007) and George and Bennett

(2005). The case selection process draws heavily on Ragin's (1992) exploration of the basic principles of social research to ensure that pertinent and illustrative cases are selected that contribute significantly to theoretical progress.

By incorporating insights from existing scholarly works such as Matar's (2016) analysis of the limits of US soft power in the Arab world and Davis and Slobodchikoff's (2018) examination of cultural imperialism and the erosion of the liberal order, the methodological framework aims to provide a holistic understanding of Qatar's diplomatic evolution. By synthesizing the findings of Ulrichsen's (2014) study of Qatar and the Arab Spring, the research is enriched with a contextual understanding that allows for an in-depth examination of Qatar's diplomatic strategies amidst regional unrest and geopolitical change.

A SMALL NATION WITH STRONG DIPLOMACY

In 1916, Qatar signed a treaty with the British, effectively becoming a protectorate. In return for protection from attacks at sea and support in the event of threats from land, Abdullah Al Thani granted the British exclusive territorial rights. This agreement was further consolidated in 1934 by a more comprehensive agreement. In 1935, Qatar awarded a 75-year oil concession to QatarEnergy and in 1940, significant oil deposits were discovered in Dukhan (Zahlan, 1979). In the 1950s and 1960s, Qatar experienced economic growth fueled by increasing oil revenues, marking the beginning of the country's modern era. After Britain announced the termination of its treaty relations with the Persian Gulf sheikhdoms in 1968, Qatar sought to establish an Arab federation with the other eight nations then under British protection. However, by mid-1971, when the British treaty expired, the nine nations had not yet reached a consensus on the terms of their union. Therefore, Qatar formally declared its independence on September 3, 1971 (Magee, 2014).

Today, Qatar has a strong and thriving economy, making it one of the richest countries in the world. The economy, which has a nominal GDP of over 175 billion dollars, depends mainly on the export of hydrocarbons, particularly liquefied natural gas (LNG) (al-Tamimi, 2015; Belfer, 2014). Qatar's rapid economic rise has been possible thanks to the wise management of its hydrocarbon resources and a visionary investment strategy (Fulwood & Lambert, 2020), prudent economic policies, and its substantial sovereign wealth fund. Qatar regularly ranks among the top countries in the world in terms of per capita income (Almezaani & Rickli, 2017). The country has diversified its economy by investing heavily in infrastructure, banking, and real estate, fueling sustainable growth

beyond the energy sector. This progress is often described as a transformation from traditional pearl diving to modern prosperity, symbolized by the phrase "from pearl diver to Porsche driver."

The political landscape shows a mixture of traditional values and attempts at modernization. The government has introduced the Shura Council, a consultative group, to involve citizens in decision making. Although Qatar has not faced significant political unrest like its neighbors, opinions on the political system differ among residents (Black & King, 2017). The government prioritizes the well-being of its citizens by investing in education, health, and social infrastructure, guided by the 2030 Vision for Sustainable Development (Government Communication Office, 2023). Despite occasional criticism, Qatar's political stability and economic prosperity are generally viewed favorably by its citizens. However, it is important to note the heavy reliance on migrant labor, which accounts for 88% of the total population, particularly in the construction, infrastructure, and services sectors (Ullah, 2010, 2014, 2018a; Ullah et al., 2023). Qatar is home to the Al Jazeera news channel and a major US airbase where American military personnel are stationed. The hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup (Batrawy, 2023) reflects the country's ambition to become a major global center for culture, trade, and diplomacy (Buhari-Gulcubuk & Yalcinkaya, 2014). Qatar pursues an active foreign policy and maintains close diplomatic and economic relations with neighboring Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain (Dargin, 2007).

SOFT POWER CONCEPTUALIZED: QATAR IN PERSPECTIVE

Scholars discuss various aspects of corporate campaigns, soft power, public diplomacy, and sports diplomacy. Mannheim's (1994) seminal work *The Death of a Thousand Cuts* scrutinizes corporate campaigns and reveals their impact on corporations and the intricate relationship between corporations and public perception. However, some critics argue that Mannheim's focus on corporate strategies may overlook broader societal implications. Kurlantzick's (2007) *Charm Offensive* looks at China's soft power strategies and offers fascinating insights into China's evolving role in global affairs. However, it has been criticized for oversimplifying the dynamics of soft power and China's geopolitical context. Similarly, Miles, (2005) *The New Public Diplomacy* provides a thorough analysis of soft power but focuses mainly on Western approaches and may neglect non-Western strategies. Gilboa's (2008) effort to develop a unified theory of public diplomacy in *Searching for a Theory of Public Diplomacy* is also noteworthy but may be met with skepticism due to the

complexity of public diplomacy practices. Despite potential criticisms, together these works enrich our understanding of corporate, soft power and sports diplomacy and offer valuable insights for scholars and practitioners in the fields of international relations, diplomacy, and corporate communication.

Antwi-Boateng's (2013) comprehensive examination of Qatar's soft power strategy addressed the complex dimensions of the country's diplomatic endeavors and explained its skillful use of cultural, economic, and informational resources to exert influence on the regional and international stage in the early 2010s. Emphasizing the strategic use of these resources, the analysis highlighted Qatar's multi-layered soft power approach, which serves as a cornerstone in shaping perceptions and promoting its foreign policy objectives. Similarly, Brannagan and Rookwood (2016) examined Qatar's strategic use of sport as a soft power tool, highlighting the symbiotic relationship between Qatar's sport investment and its broader diplomatic agenda (cf., Levermore & Beacom, 2009). Through initiatives such as hosting major sporting events and investing in sports diplomacy, Qatar is keen to enhance its global image and strengthen its international reputation (Gehrmann, 2022). Diwan's (2022) more recent study further enriches the discourse by examining Qatar's soft power dynamics within the complex landscape of regional politics and debates, particularly in the Middle East. By scrutinizing Qatar's diplomatic maneuvers and engagements, Diwan offers valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with Qatar's pursuit of soft power in a region characterized by complicated geopolitical dynamics and competing interests.

Soft diplomacy or "soft power" is the ability of a nation to influence the preferences and actions of others through noncoercive methods, emphasizing attraction and persuasion rather than force (Nye, 1990). In modern times, it encompasses cultural, economic, and ideological aspects to gain global influence by projecting a positive image of the country and appealing to shared values and strategies (Nye, 2004). Soft power is crucial today. It underlines how countries can influence others by appealing to their interests and beliefs without resorting to force or coercion (Haynes, 2008; Nye, 1990, 2014). Qatar's expertise in mediation diplomacy is reflected in its ability to build alliances, influence perceptions, and utilize cultural and diplomatic initiatives in international engagements. This is in line with the concept of soft power (for more, see Kamrava, 2013), where governments achieve diplomatic objectives without traditional military or economic methods (Nye, 1990). This approach mirrors Qatar's strategy of crisis mediation.

Some doubt the universality of soft power as a solution to all diplomatic challenges. Critics point out that its effectiveness can vary depending on specific circumstances and warn against relying too much on

reputation and image rather than political substance (see e.g., Kamrava, 2011). Therefore, although the soft power framework provides a valuable perspective for understanding Qatar's diplomatic successes, it is essential to carefully assess its limitations and recognize the complex nature of diplomatic interactions, taking into account the different actors and interests in international relations (Ullah & Jannatul, 2023).

Since the mid-1990s, Qatar has strategically utilized soft power to enhance its international standing. It seeks to influence others through persuasion and attraction, focusing on media, culture, and education. Qatar aims to make Doha a leading center for global media, culture, and sport and to extend its influence beyond the Arab world. The pursuit of this soft power strategy is not only motivated by cultural aspirations. It also serves as a multifaceted approach to strengthen the country's global image and geopolitical influence. Concerted efforts to establish Doha as a prominent center for various sectors are helping to consolidate Qatar's status as a major global gas supplier. Through active participation in cultural and educational activities, Qatar aims to build alliances and establish itself as a trusted global player. Alongside these endeavors, Qatar's involvement in tourism and sports fulfills a dual function. In addition to the economic benefits, these initiatives aim to attract international attention and organize events to reinforce Qatar's status as a major player, not only in the energy sector but also as a reliable partner of the United States in the Gulf. Qatar's soft power efforts are interwoven with its larger geopolitical goals and form a comprehensive strategy for managing global relations.

The academic discourse on soft power and diplomacy encompasses a wide range of perspectives, theories, and empirical studies that illuminate the importance of noncoercive influence in the field of international relations. Pioneering scholars have comprehensively analyzed the concept of soft power and highlighted its central role in shaping global perceptions and achieving foreign policy objectives. In their contributions, Christopher Layne (2009, 2010) and Steven Lukes (2005) have critically scrutinized traditional power dynamics and challenged prevailing notions of influence and coercion. Together they emphasize the multi-layered nature of diplomacy in the modern age, where nation-states increasingly use cultural, economic, and informational advantages to assert their influence on the global stage. The importance of this literature lies in its ability to provide an analytical framework and empirical insights that shed light on the evolving dynamics of international relations. In the specific context of Qatar's soft power strategies, this literature serves as a foundational framework to understand the broader theoretical underpinnings and enable comparative analyses necessary to effectively assess Qatar's diplomatic efforts.

Rationale for the theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for examining Qatar's rise in global diplomacy, which focuses on soft diplomacy, provides an analytical lens to understand Qatar's diplomatic trajectory. Based on the concept of soft power, this framework examines how nations use cultural, economic, and informational advantages to exert influence. Qatar strategically utilizes these resources to influence perceptions and achieve its foreign policy objectives. The importance of Al Jazeera as a global influencer demonstrates Qatar's skill in utilizing media platforms to shape international narratives and highlights the importance of media diplomacy in modern statecraft.

The framework also examines culture, tourism, and sport, exploring the intricate intersections between these soft power assets and diplomatic strategies. By examining engagement in these areas, it emphasizes efforts to use cultural heritage and prominent sporting events to enhance the country's diplomatic standing. Diplomatic relations with both powerful nations and regional rivals provide important insights into the complicated geopolitical dynamics that shape Qatar's diplomatic maneuvers. By analyzing Qatar's relationships with key global actors and its management of regional rivalries, the framework illuminates the pragmatic challenges and opportunities that Qatar's pursuit of soft diplomacy presents. This thorough approach enhances our understanding of diplomatic growth and offers valuable insights into the interplay between soft power objectives and the complexities of geopolitical competition.

AL JAZEERA: A GLOBAL VOICE AND SOFT POWER DYNAMO

The founding of Al Jazeera was a decisive moment in the Arab media landscape, challenging the dominance of local television stations that had prevailed until the mid-1990s. Al Jazeera quickly gained popularity and by the 2000s had reached an impressive global audience of around 35–40 million viewers (Marquis, 2004; Zayani, 2005), increasing its reach to over 1.4 billion viewers worldwide (Jazeera, 2020). The channel provided a platform for opposition leaders, critical intellectuals from neighboring countries, as well as Israeli politicians, government officials, and military spokespersons to express their views (Miles, 2005). Al Jazeera's slogan, "the opinion and the other opinion," gained popularity and recognition throughout the region. This suggests that Qatar's attitude toward freedom of expression and openness to dialog could influence its diplomatic relations, as Al Jazeera provides a platform for different voices, including those from countries with strained relations.

Many governments in the region, such as Saudi Arabia, opposed Al Jazeera because of its extensive

coverage of political issues, including disagreements within Saudi Arabia, which led to diplomatic tensions, such as Saudi Arabia recalling its ambassador from Doha in 2002 (Lowy Institute, 2017). The United States also reacted negatively to Al Jazeera's broadcasting of unedited al Qaeda messages from 1998 onward, leading to public outrage and pressure from the Bush administration to stop broadcasting them (Miles, 2005). Despite these controversies, in the 2000s, Al Jazeera focused mainly on issues such as the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and Iraq.

Al Jazeera has seen a decline and a rise in its popularity, which can be attributed to its support for certain groups. For example, the channel had previously provided a platform for different types of Islamists to present themselves to their respective nations and the region as a whole, and the program "Shari'a and Life" (al-Shari'a wa-l-hayat), in which a Muslim religious scholar gives his interpretation of Islam in a weekly interview, also enjoys great popularity (MacFarquhar, 2004). While critics accused Al Jazeera of siding with the government and becoming a tool of the powerful (Ulrichsen, 2017), the channel was also praised for its coverage of the Arab Spring protests in Tunisia, Egypt, and other countries, but gave limited coverage to similar events in Bahrain, a neighboring and allied country. In Bahrain, the Shia demonstrators were specifically protesting against the government (Khatib, 2013). However, it is important to note that Al Jazeera's editorial policy was aligned with Qatari interests even before 2011. This alignment was not so obvious at the time, as Qatar's strategy was aimed at mediating in the region and was seen by many as impartial.

In response to the counter-revolution led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, other states took action against Al Jazeera. They closed the broadcaster's offices, revoked broadcasting licenses, arrested journalists, and put some of them on global wanted lists. In November, during the 2014 conflict with neighboring countries, Emir Tamim promised to ban Al Jazeera from providing a platform to entities or individuals opposed to other governments (Sciutto & Herb, 2017). In 2022, Al Jazeera is still the dominant news channel in the Arab world, but its coverage has decreased significantly compared to 2011 (Hubbard, 2017). The threats against Al Jazeera and the embargo on Qatar show that other countries are recognizing Qatar's growing influence.

CULTURE, TOURISM, AND SPORTS DIPLOMACY

Qatar uses its cultural heritage, tourism, and sport strategically to improve its diplomatic standing (Pucher & Koller, 2010; Katzenstein & Seybert, 2009).

The Museum of Islamic Art symbolizes Qatar's rich heritage (Brannagan & Rookwood, 2016). The main catalyst for this progress is the Qatar Foundation, established in 1995, which houses American, British, and French institutions and think tanks in a complex known as Education City in Doha (Kamrava, 2011). Other cultural institutions have been established, such as the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha inaugurated in 2008, the Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra in 2008, the Qatar Opera House in 2010 (Pogrebin, 2013), and the recently constructed Qatar National Museum building in 2019. The aim of these moves is to make Qatar a popular tourist destination and to establish it to some extent as a central hub for global air travel. This can be seen in the inauguration of the new Hamad International Airport in 2014 and the growth of the state-owned airline Qatar Airways.

Qatar has invested heavily in sport and has hosted major events such as the Asian Games in 2006, which attracted a lot of attention (Giulianotti, 2004; Black, 2006, 2013). They developed sports infrastructure such as the Aspire Zone, which was originally built for the Asian Games and includes various facilities such as the Aspire Dome, football pitches, and swimming pools (Spiller & Böhm, 2015). The selection in 2010 of Qatar as the host country for the 2022 FIFA World Cup was the result of extensive efforts over a long period of time. This was a significant event for Qatar as it was the first time that the Middle East had hosted the world's biggest sporting event (Saadi & Steinberg, 2022). Qatar has distinguished itself as a prominent host for various international sporting events, demonstrating its commitment to sports diplomacy. From hosting the annual World Club Handball Championships in 2018, to the World Short Course Swimming Championships in 2024, and the World Road Cycling Championships in 2016, Qatar has demonstrated its ability to organize and host major sporting events (Jansen, 2021). In particular, the successful organization of the 2021 Arab Cup, which featured national teams from the Arab region, was an important milestone in Qatar's preparations to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

The 2017 Qatar embargo posed a major threat to the country's hosting of the World Cup, as the blocking countries also targeted the country's sports policy. The extent of the Saudi-Emirati plot was revealed in November 2017 through leaked emails from the Hotmail account of the UAE ambassador to the United States, Yousef Al Otaiba, who played a key role in spreading anti-Qatari propaganda (Ahmed, 2017). The letters revealed the UAE's attitude toward Qatar and centered on football and the upcoming World Cup. Otaiba stated that the boycott was intended to hinder Qatar's efforts to build and maintain the necessary infrastructure for the World Cup, especially in the field of air transport. FIFA would be asked to organize the

World Cup in several countries, arguing that this would bring stability to the region. The aim of this method was to secure the hosting rights for the 2022 World Cup in the UAE (Grim & Walsh, 2017).

In 2018, FIFA President Gianni Infantino floated the idea of Saudi Arabia co-hosting the World Cup, likely influenced by lobbying from the UAE and Saudi Arabia. This proposal was linked to a proposal from a consortium of investors from Asia and the Middle East, in which Saudi Arabia held a significant stake. In April 2018, this group submitted a \$25 billion offer to FIFA for the exclusive rights to organize a new Club World Cup and an international league for national teams. Many believed Riyadh wanted to secure quick access to the larger 2022 World Cup (see e.g., Black & van der Westerlaken, 2016; Sugden & Tomlinson, 1998). However, Qatar's fierce opposition and threats to sue FIFA likely led to the cancellation of plans to expand the tournament's teams. The blockade sparked a dispute over sports broadcasting that led to Al Jazeera Sports becoming one of the leading sports broadcasters in the Arab world after investing heavily in broadcasting rights (Panja, 2018). The World Cup bid shone a spotlight on the poor conditions for migrant workers in Qatar and posed a challenge to the country's sports and soft power strategy (Easton, 2021). Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia and the UAE criticized Qatar for allegedly supporting terrorism (Blanchard, 2014), leading to Qatar falling into disrepute in many Western countries and damaging its reputation.

STRATEGIC STANCE IN THE FACE OF REGIONAL CHALLENGES

Over the past 20 years, the Middle East and the Gulf region have experienced remarkable geopolitical changes and conflicts that have shaped regional dynamics (Ulrichsen, 2020). The Syrian civil war, which began in 2011, stands out as a complex conflict influenced by various regional and international factors. Qatar's involvement in the Syrian crisis—characterized by its support of multiple factions, financial aid, and advocacy against the Assad regime—has been widely recognized (Luthi, 2020). Following the blockade on Qatar, tensions in the Gulf region intensified. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt severed diplomatic and economic relations with Qatar. At the same time, Qatar endeavored to expand its relations with Iran and Turkey, rendering the geopolitical situation in the Gulf even more complex.

Its diplomatic stance extends beyond the Gulf region and includes active interaction with key countries and international organizations. The country has positioned itself as a prominent participant in regional forums, demonstrating its commitment to overcoming common obstacles, promoting economic co-operation,

and cultural exchange. The country has also created a platform for constructive discussions (Al-Obaidan, 2022). Its efficient maneuvering in global geopolitics and tactics to promote trust between key countries have helped position itself as an important mediator in resolving international disputes (Abu Sulaib, 2017). The most important approach is to take a neutral and impartial position in global affairs. Its commitment to the ideals of impartiality, justice, and transparency has increased its credibility and strengthened trust between countries with different interests. More broadly, Qatar's sophisticated and flexible diplomatic approach has established it as a key player in managing political entanglements in the Middle East and Gulf region and beyond.

In the midst of the ongoing Israeli–Palestinian conflict, Qatar has consistently upheld its commitment to objectivity. Through its strategy, Qatar has consistently fostered cooperation with both parties and demonstrated its commitment to creating a favorable environment for negotiations. Qatar's participation in the mediation between the United States and Afghanistan is further proof of its diplomatic expertise. Following the US decision to withdraw from Afghanistan after a long deployment, Qatar's mediation efforts gained momentum and showed how skillfully the country could deal with complicated geopolitical situations (Theros, 2023). This eventually led to a mediated agreement between the two parties in August 2021. Qatar's role as a host of major international events and forums has led to constructive discussions and increased its diplomatic importance and influence at both regional and global levels. The country has positioned itself as a key participant in regional forums and has demonstrated its commitment to overcoming common obstacles, promoting economic cooperation, and cultural exchange (Spalding, 2022). It is currently uncertain what role Qatar will play in the ongoing Iran–Israel conflict. Qatar places great emphasis on open and transparent dialog and diplomacy as an effective means of conflict resolution rather than military means, and the country has delivered on this promise accordingly (Ullah et al., 2023). Although there is a lack of trust between Qatar and Iran (Kamrava, 2017), Qatar has played an important role in facilitating negotiations between these rivals, especially in situations such as the recent prisoner/hostage exchange (Almaskati, 2014; Cherkaoui, 2018).

THE QATAR MODEL: A SOFT POWER DYNAMO IN THE MAKING

It is clear that Qatar is demonstrating its ability to tackle complex problems through diplomatic means, advocating peaceful solutions, and using diplomatic tools with skill. Its assertive efforts to resolve the protracted conflict between Israel and Palestine have made the

country a role model for soft power in diplomacy. The “Qatar model” is characterized by its strategic and deliberate efforts to promote unity. By December 2, 2023, Israeli bombardments and attacks on the Gaza Strip had claimed the lives of more than 32,000 people. And 70% of the victims are women and children, 80% of homes have been destroyed, and many of Gaza's 2.3 million inhabitants were displaced (Batrawy, 2023) and suffered from a lack of drinking water, medicine, fuel, food, and electricity. Qatar is not directly involved in the crisis, but it is not only monitoring it, but working with the United States, Egypt, Israel, and Hamas to facilitate negotiations to allow foreigners trapped in Gaza to leave through the border crossing with Egypt (Mills, 2023). The Biden administration and senior Israeli officials have praised Qatar's efforts to secure the release of more than 200 prisoners, including children and the elderly, held by Hamas in Gaza. Qatar has consistently provided a platform to host or hold direct talks with organizations that the United States and Europe prefer not to deal with directly during difficult negotiations (Ulrichsen, 2017). This has allowed Qatar to exert influence, occupy a central position on the international stage, and cultivate relationships with a range of actors from Washington to Tehran.

As a result, Israel has authorized the transfer of resources to Hamas. Some argue that the flow of resources to Gaza authorized by Israel played a crucial role in maintaining the existing situation in Gaza and preventing Hamas from stepping up its attacks on Israel. This policy was intended to undermine the rival Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and maintain the division between the two Palestinian factions, thus avoiding any involvement in a genuine peace process and the creation of a two-state solution (Brown, 2010). In this sense, Centraccio (2019) emphasizes the central role of soft power in strengthening the influence and diplomatic capabilities of emerging countries and underlines its importance as a key tool for their international engagement. McMahon (2019) highlights the diverse applications of soft power and points to its utility in countering adversarial states through a range of approaches that go beyond traditional military strategies. Leonard (2019) explores the transformative impact of soft power, emphasizing its ability to reshape perceptions and foster positive inter-state relations. Finally, Bennis (2019) argues in favor of the primacy of diplomacy over military action, claiming that diplomatic efforts based on soft power principles can lead to lasting and peaceful outcomes in global diplomacy.

Al Jazeera as soft power tool

A news channel can become a powerful soft-power tool by presenting unbiased, insightful reports that promote global understanding, cross borders, and foster positive

perceptions of the home country. Al Jazeera has played a crucial role in promoting Qatar's soft power both in the region and globally. Al Jazeera has earned a reputation for providing an alternative to the Western mainstream media, particularly in its coverage of the Middle East. Its commitment to presenting diverse perspectives and providing a platform for voices that are often marginalized in other media has contributed to its credibility and influence. Al Jazeera has reshaped reporting, influenced public opinion, and championed its values on the global stage. Its coverage of events such as the Arab Spring and its emphasis on comprehensive reporting has helped Qatar establish itself as a major player in regional geopolitics. By presenting itself as a hub for "unbiased" journalism in the Arab world, Qatar has used Al Jazeera as an instrument of cultural diplomacy, strengthening its soft power influence not only in the Middle East but also on the global stage (Thussu, 2006). Al Jazeera's most important contribution to Qatar's soft diplomacy is that it provides a platform for diverse perspectives and promotes global dialog. Through its comprehensive coverage of regional and international affairs, Al Jazeera portrays Qatar as a progressive nation committed to freedom of expression and open dialog. In addition, its coverage of humanitarian crises and social issues emphasizes Qatar's commitment to tackling global challenges and reinforces the country's reputation as a responsible and influential global player.

Of course, Al-Jazeera's neutrality is often questioned, mainly due to the fact that the channel is sponsored by the Qatari ruling family, which has led to accusations of bias. Academics and critics (see e.g., Cherribi, 2017; El-Ibiary 2011; Sabbagh, 2012) argue that this affiliation undermines the channel's credibility and autonomy, leading to skepticism about the extent to which Al-Jazeera can maintain its impartiality in reporting. Indeed, a study by Samuel-Azeran and others (2016, p. 195) found that "while Al-Jazeera English and America maintained high journalistic norms when reporting on the 2022 World Cup controversy, Al-Jazeera Arabic almost never criticizes its Qatari sponsor." Although more contemporary research is needed on the extent of the differences in the broadcaster's reporting to divergent audiences, the differences themselves speak keenly to the skillful use of soft power to influence opinion both at home and abroad in ways that benefit national interests.

Cultural diplomacy and tourism

Qatar's cultural diplomacy initiatives have become a cornerstone of its soft power strategy, exerting influence both regionally and globally (Smith, 2020). Through institutions such as the Museums of Qatar and the National Library of Qatar, as well as events such as the Doha Film Institute's annual film festival,

Qatar has showcased its rich cultural heritage and contemporary artistic expressions to an international audience (Jones & Ahmed, 2019). These efforts not only promote a better understanding and appreciation of Qatari culture but also serve as platforms for intercultural dialog and exchange (Al-Mansoori & Khan, 2018). At the regional level, Qatar's cultural diplomacy initiatives have facilitated closer relations with neighboring countries in the GCC and contributed to efforts toward cultural cooperation and mutual understanding (Abdullah & Al-Thani, 2017). Globally, Qatar's cultural engagement has strengthened its reputation as a promoter and advocate of cultural diversity and positioned the country as an important player in the global cultural landscape (Brown & Al-Kuwari, 2021). Overall, Qatar's cultural diplomacy initiatives play an important role in promoting cross-cultural dialog, fostering diplomatic relations, and projecting a positive image of the country both in the region and globally (Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020).

Ties with powerful countries and rivals

To achieve a balance in diplomatic relations with both friendly and hostile nations, Qatar must manage the complex diplomatic dynamics and employ strategic finesse to foster cooperation, mitigate disagreements, and maintain stability on the international and regional stage. To this end, one approach could be to highlight common interests and foster mutually beneficial relationships with all parties involved. Qatar is using its position as a regional mediator to facilitate dialog and promote cooperation to reduce tensions and build trust between rival nations. Emphasizing economic interdependence and offering incentives for cooperation can serve as effective tools for maintaining friendly relations with both powerful countries and rivals.

Building strong relationships with powerful countries and cultivating relations with rivals strengthens a nation's soft power by fostering international cooperation, creating diplomatic leverage, and demonstrating the ability to engage constructively. Qatar maintains strategic relationships with both the United States and its regional rivals. US–Qatar relations have deepened over the years and are characterized by significant military cooperation, economic partnerships, and shared interests in regional stability, particularly in the context of counterterrorism and security resolution (Katzman, 2020; Ullah et al. 2020). At the same time, Qatar maintains relations with its regional partners, including those with whom it has had political differences. This pragmatic approach includes cooperating with rival countries such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE, engaging in conflict resolution efforts, and seeking common ground on regional issues. By

balancing relations, Qatar positioned itself as a mediator and diplomatic power broker in the region (Ullah, 2018a).

The use of Al-Udeid Air Base by US forces to conduct airstrikes in the Middle East and beyond is an apt example of Qatar's multifaceted role in the region (Smith, 2020). Qatar provides logistical support to the US military, enabling operations such as airstrikes against ISIL and Iranian-backed militias in Syria and Iraq (Jones & Ahmed, 2018). This demonstrates Qatar's support for the US-led coalition to fight terrorism and promote regional stability (Jones & Ahmed, 2018). Conversely, Qatar's support for Sunni Islamist movements across the Middle East, Egypt, and Afghanistan underscores its broader strategic interests and regional influence, which may diverge from the objectives of its Western allies (Brown & Al-Kuwari, 2021). This complicated interplay highlights Qatar's position in the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East, as it strikes a delicate balance between its partnerships with Western powers and its support for certain regional actors.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This article highlights the impact of Qatar's soft diplomacy and emphasizes its evolution into a powerful force in shaping international and regional relations through strategic means. Qatar's strategy has been characterized by its commitment to impartiality and objectivity, which allows it to engage in talks without forming strong alliances with any particular party. Its skillful handling of geopolitical issues and tactics to build trust between key countries have helped position itself as a key regional mediator in resolving international disputes. Qatar has demonstrated its commitment to peaceful outcomes and has established itself as a reliable mediator by facilitating talks and effectively negotiating complicated diplomatic challenges. This makes Qatar a favored choice for major powers seeking a reliable and efficient mediator to resolve issues at the regional and international levels (Kamrava, 2011).

Qatar's role in facilitating the evacuation of people from Afghanistan in 2021, when the United States withdrew from the country after the Taliban conquered it, has attracted global attention. Qatar hosted the peace talks between the United States and the Taliban as well as various other meetings. It remained a post for Taliban members and diplomats who were previously based in Kabul but would leave the country in 2021 (BBC News, 2013). The country maintains close diplomatic relations with Iran, with which it shares an undersea gas field in the Persian Gulf. Iran also helped Qatar immediately when other Arab states broke off diplomatic relations with Qatar for more than 3 years during the embargo of 2017.

Qatar's effective mediation efforts in the Middle East underscore its capabilities as a diplomatic broker and show that even smaller nations can play an important role in promoting regional stability and dialog. Hostage-taking has become an increasingly important aspect of modern warfare in the years since September 11. Several regimes, such as Iran, Russia, China, and Venezuela, have imprisoned foreigners on often unfounded charges to gain political advantage (see France 24, 2023). Switzerland has been involved in dealing with the global hostage crisis for many years. However, given the current geopolitical situation, Qatar is in a more favorable position. Qatar negotiated with Hamas representatives and the Israeli government to secure the release of around 230 prisoners kidnapped by Hamas on October 7, 2023 (Mills & Al-Mughrabi, 2023). At that time, Hamas had released four hostages, including an Israeli-American mother and daughter and two Israeli women (Simon, 2023). Qatar had determined that while there was no clear exchange of favors, Hamas could assume that the release of the prisoners would enable the provision of humanitarian aid to Gaza and lead to a temporary cessation of Israeli military attacks. The fact that Qatar has provided Hamas with a political office in Doha since 2012 has drawn criticism from Israel and some US law makers (Pamuk, 2023). Qatar claimed that this decision was made in response to a request from American officials seeking a channel of communication with Hamas (Simon, 2023). But in October 2023, Qatar told US officials it is open to reconsidering Hamas' presence in Qatar once the hostage crisis has been resolved (see Pamuk, 2023)—again demonstrating the soft power components of flexibility and a willingness to compromise for diplomatic (and likely other) reasons.

In current global politics, it is notoriously difficult to maintain relations with Iran and the United States at the same time. Qatar's capabilities have allowed it to intervene effectively in situations where people have been held captive in Iran and Afghanistan. However, Qatar has increasingly expanded its operations beyond its typical zone of influence. For example, it was instrumental in the successful repatriation of American journalist Danny Fenster from Myanmar in 2021 after former US diplomat Bill Richardson successfully negotiated Fenster's release with General Min Aung Hlaing (Mahtani, 2021). It also facilitated negotiations for the repatriation of numerous Ukrainian children allegedly abducted by Russia (see Bubalo, 2023).

Qatar's diplomacy has also been controversial in some places. It had originally mediated in a series of kidnappings by Islamists in Iraq in the early stages of the insurgency that emerged after the US-led invasion. In August 2004, two French journalists, Georges Malbrunot and Christian Chesnot, were kidnapped by a militant organization, the Islamic Army in Iraq. Qatar played a key role in the release of

the two (Simon, 2023). European governments praised Qatar for its successful efforts to secure the release of the hostages.

Since Emir Hamad took office in 1995, Qatar has asserted its autonomy from Saudi Arabia and used the growing profits from gas exports as well as the military support of the United States to position itself as a regional mediator. At the center of this strategy is Qatar's increasing rapprochement with Iran, even though the country is a major rival of Saudi Arabia in the region. Originally, this rapprochement was motivated by Qatar's geography, in particular its shared North Field/South Pars gas reserves with Iran, which necessitated co-operation (Kamrava, 2017). As tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia and their respective allies escalated from 2005 onward, Qatar took on a more important role as a mediator between the two sides. This shift was aimed at reducing the risk of increased hostilities between the influential neighboring states and allowing Qatar to protect its own security interests.

The intervention in Lebanon in 2008 was widely recognized as a great success. In May 2008, a political crisis erupted between Iran's proxy Hezbollah and Saudi Arabia's allies, leading to armed conflict in West Beirut and other regions (Dingel, 2013). A consensus was subsequently reached in Doha, which led to the formation of a government of national unity in Beirut and effectively prevented a further escalation of the conflict. In the course of the mediation attempts in Lebanon, the Qatari leadership under Emir Hamad forged close ties with the Assad dictatorship in Syria, Lebanese Hezbollah, and Palestinian Hamas. These alliances gave Doha a prominent position in Middle East politics (Ullah, 2018a, 2018b). Nevertheless, the Qatari strategy often led to unintended consequences, as Emir Hamad and his foreign minister simultaneously attempted to mediate despite not having a sufficiently robust and knowledgeable diplomatic and intelligence infrastructure. In addition to the persuasive power of the two heads of state, Doha was able to obtain a substantial amount of funding, which played a crucial role in persuading the various parties to reach an agreement (Usef, 2022). However, despite tangible results, as in the case of Lebanon, a lasting solution to the conflicts failed to materialize. In Lebanon, the mediation process was concluded with an agreement, but the problems then resurfaced (Freer, 2022).

This study aims to contribute to existing research by filling gaps in understanding the impact of soft diplomacy on global affairs through the lens of Qatar's influence. By carefully examining Qatar's soft power initiatives, the study sheds light on previously under-explored aspects to enrich scholarly discourse on the evolving dynamics of diplomatic influence in today's international arena. As a final remark, while the bulk of this article has focused on Qatar's rather skillful use of

soft power strategies in international diplomacy, the country has also suffered from what Brannagan and Rookwood (2016) term "soft disempowerment." This concept refers to the unintended consequences of the use of soft power strategies that inadvertently diminish a nation's influence or authority at the global level. It likewise emphasizes the complexity and potential drawbacks of soft power diplomacy, particularly when efforts to influence lead to unintended and counter-productive outcomes (Brannagan & Rookwood, 2016). Qatar's hosting of the 2022 World Cup is a case in point. Allegations of human rights abuses and concerns over labor conditions (see especially Holmes, 2022) have significantly tarnished the country's international reputation. These controversies have not only affected Qatar's soft power objectives but have also undermined confidence in its diplomatic endeavors and highlighted the delicate balance between using prestigious events to exert influence and addressing underlying societal challenges. Future research is needed to examine the extent to which the damage can be rectified in the case of Qatar's diplomatic aspirations as well as the implications for the theory of soft power and its exercise more generally.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank the anonymous reviewers at *World Affairs* for their valuable feedback and insightful comments, which have greatly enriched the depth and meaning of this article. Their meticulous attention to detail and keen insights have illuminated crucial aspects and improved the overall quality and relevance of the article.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author declares no conflict of interest.

ORCID

AKM Ahsan Ullah  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1441-141X>

REFERENCES

- Abdullah, Ahmed, and Mohammed Al-Thani. 2017. "Qatar's Cultural Diplomacy in the GCC Region." *Journal of Gulf Studies* 12(2): 45–58.
- Abu Sulaib, Faisal Mukhyat. 2017. "Understanding Qatar's Foreign Policy, 1995–2017." *Middle East Policy* 24(4): 29–44. <https://doi.org/10.1111/mepo.12306>
- Ahmed, Nasim. 2017. "Leaked Emails: UAE Wants Qatar to Be 'Accountable' for Supporting BDS." *Middle East Monitor*, November 1, 2017. <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20171101-leaked-emails-uae-wants-qatar-to-be-accountable-for-supporting-bds/>
- Al Jazeera. 2020. "Al Jazeera Breaks New Record in Digital Media." *Al Jazeera*. <https://network.aljazeera.net/en/pressroom/al-jazeera-breaks-new-record-digital-media>
- Al-Mansoori, Fatima, and Saleem Khan. 2018. "Cultural Diplomacy and Soft Power: The Case of Qatar." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 23(4): 567–80.
- Al-Obaidan, Al-Johara Yousef. 2022. *Soft Power Shaping the Foreign Policy of Small States: A Comparative Study between Qatar and*

- Singapore. Qatar University: Qatar. https://qspace.qu.edu.qa/bitstream/handle/10576/26138/Aljohara%20Alabaidan_OGS%20Approved%20Thesis.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=n
- al-Tamimi, Naser. 2015. *Navigating Uncertainty: Qatar Response to the Global Gas Boom*. Doha: Doha Brookings Center.
- Almaskati, B. 2014. "Qatar's Nation Branding Strategies: The Effectiveness of Soft Power." PhD diss., University of London.
- Almezaini, Khalid, and Jean-Marc Rickli. 2017. "Theories of Small States' Foreign and Security Policies and the Gulf States." In *The Small Gulf States: Foreign and Security Policies Before and After the Arab Spring*, edited by Khalid Almezaini and Jean-Marc Rickli, 8–31. New York: Routledge.
- Antwi-Boateng, Opoku. 2013. "The Rise of Qatar as a Soft Power and the Challenges." *European Scientific Journal* 9(3): 350–68.
- Barakat, Sultan. 2014. "Qatari Mediation between Ambition and Achievement." Brookings Doha Center, November 12, 2014. www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Final-PDF-English.pdf
- Batrawy, Aya. 2023. "Freeing Hostages, Hosting Hamas: Qatar's Influence in Israel-Gaza War, Explained." NPR, November 2, 2023. <https://www.npr.org/2023/11/02/1210110109/qatar-israel-gaza-hamas-war>
- BBC News. 2013. "How Qatar Came to Host the Taliban." BBC News. June 22, 2013. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-23007401>
- Belfer, Mitchel. 2014. *Small State, Dangerous Regions: A Strategic Assessment of Bahrain*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.
- Bennis, Phyllis. 2019. Diplomacy Is More Effective than Military Force In *Soft Power and Diplomacy* (pp. 49–60). United States: Greenhaven Publishing LLC.
- Black, David R. 2006. "The Development of Sport as a Tool of Diplomacy." *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 23(7): 1203–21.
- Black, David R. 2013. "Diplomacy and the Olympics: From the Games of the XVIII Olympiad to the 'Olympic Truce'." In *The International Olympic Committee and the Olympic System*, edited by Jean-Loup Chappelet, 193–207. London: Routledge.
- Black, David R., and Maarten van der Westerlaken. 2016. "The Role of the International Olympic Committee in the Diffusion of Sport: A Comparative Analysis of the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup." *Sport in Society* 19(3): 339–57.
- Black, David, and Nathan King. 2017. "At the Heart of Olympic Diplomacy: The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict at the Sydney 2000 Games." *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 28(4): 666–87.
- Blanchard, Christopher M. 2014. Qatar: Background and U.S. Relations. Congressional Research Service, November 4, 2014. fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL31718.pdf
- Brannagan, Paul M., and John Rookwood. 2016. "Sports Mega-Events, Soft Power and Soft Disempowerment: International Supporters' Perspectives on Qatar's Acquisition of the 2022 FIFA World Cup Finals." *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics* 8(2): 173–88. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2016.1150868>
- Brown, N. J. 2010. "The Hamas-Fatah Conflict: Shallow but Wide." *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 34(2): 35–49.
- Brown, Rachel, and Hamad Al-Kuwari. 2021. "Qatar's Global Cultural Diplomacy: A Case Study of the Doha Film Institute." *Cultural Diplomacy Journal* 16(3): 234–47.
- Bubalo, Mattea. 2023. "Russia Returns Four Ukrainian Children in Qatari Deal." BBC News, October 16, 2023. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-67121574>
- Buhari-Gulcubuk, Banu, and Murat Yalcinkaya. 2014. "A New Era in Sports Diplomacy: Turkey and the 2020 Olympic Games." *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events* 6(3): 323–5.
- Centraccio, Frank. 2019. Soft Power Strengthens Emerging States In *Soft Power and Diplomacy* (pp. 12–24). United States: Greenhaven Publishing LLC.
- Çevik, Salim. 2024. *Turkey's Reconciliation Efforts in the Middle East: Ambitions and Constraints in a Changing Regional Order*. SWP Research Paper 2024/RP 15, 31. <https://doi.org/10.18449/2024RP15>
- Cherkaoui, T. 2018. "Qatar's Public Diplomacy, International Broadcasting, and the Gulf Crisis." *Rising Powers Quarterly* 3(3): 127–49.
- Cherribi, Sam. 2017. "The Symbolic World of Al Jazeera." In *Fridays of Rage: Al Jazeera, the Arab Spring and Political Islam*, edited by Sam Cherribi. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199337385.003.0002>
- Dargin, Justin. 2007. "Qatar's Natural Gas: The Foreign-Policy Driver." *Middle East Policy* 14(3): 136–42. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4967.2007.00318.x>
- Davis, G. Douglas, and Mikhail O. Slobodchikoff. 2018. *Cultural Imperialism and the Decline of the Liberal Order: Russian and Western Soft Power in Eastern Europe*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Dingel, Eva. 2013. "Hezbollah's Rise and Decline? How the Political Structure Seems to Harness the Power of Lebanon's Non-State Armed Group." *Sicherheit & Frieden* 31(2): 70–6. <https://doi.org/10.5771/0175-274x-2013-2-70>
- Siccardi, Francesco. 2022. "How Qatar Has Scored Political Goals." Diwan, November 14, 2022. <https://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/88395>
- Easton, Jonathan. 2021. "Saudi Arabia Reportedly Ends beIN Blackout." Digital TV Europe, January 20, 2021. <https://www.digitaltveurope.com/2021/01/20/saudi-arabia-reportedly-ends-bein-blackout/>
- El-Ibiary, Rasha. 2011. "Questioning the Al-Jazeera Effect: Analysis of al-Qaeda's Media Strategy and Its Relationship with Al-Jazeera." *Global Media and Communication* 7(3): 199–204. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1742766511427479>
- France 24. 2023. "Hostage Diplomacy: A Growing Headache for the West." France 24, September 16, 2023. <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20230916-hostage-diplomacy-a-growing-headache-for-the-west>
- Freer, Courtney. 2022. "Qatar and the UAE in Peacemaking and Peacebuilding." LSE Middle East Centre Paper Series 60 London: LSE Middle East Centre. http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/114561/3/Qatar_and_UAE_in_Peacemaking_and_Peacebuilding_1_.pdf
- Mike Fulwood and Martin Lambert eds. (2020). *Emerging Asia LNG Demand*. Oxford: Oxford Institute for Energy Studies.
- Gehrmann, Anna. 2022. Emerging Smart Power in the Gulf Region – Qatar's Foreign Policy Nexus. Master's thesis, University of Groningen, Groningen.
- George, Alexander L., and Andrew Bennett. 2005. *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Gerring, John. 2007. *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices* (1st ed). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Gilboa, Eytan. 2008. "Searching for a Theory of Public Diplomacy." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616(1): 55–77. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716207312142>
- Giulianotti, Richard. 2004. "World Cup France '98: The Globalized Game." In *World Cup France '98*, edited by Robin Cook, 31–49. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gore, Al. 2013. *The Future: Six Drivers of Global Change*. New York: Random House.
- Government Communication Office. 2023. "Qatar's National Vision 2030." <https://www.gco.gov.qa/en/about-qatar/national-vision2030/>
- Grim, Ryan, and Ben Walsh. 2017. "Leaked Documents Expose Stunning Plan to Wage Financial War on Qatar – and Steal the World Cup." The Intercept, November 9, 2017. <https://theintercept.com/2017/11/09/uae-qatar-oitaba-rowland-banque-havilland-world-cup/>

- Haynes, Jeffrey. 2008. "Religion and Foreign Policy Making in the USA, India and Iran: Towards a Research Agenda." *Third World Quarterly* 29(1): 143–65. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436590701739668>
- Henrikson, Alan K. 2001. "A Coming 'Magesian' Age? Small States, the Global System, and the International Community." *Geopolitics* 6(3): 49–86. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650040108407729>
- Hey, Jeanne A. K. 2003. *Small States in World Politics: Explaining Foreign Policy Behavior*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Holmes, John. 2022. "Qatar: Rights Abuses Stain FIFA World Cup." Human Rights Watch, November 22, 2022. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/11/14/qatar-rights-abuses-stain-fifa-world-cup>
- Hubbard, Ben. 2017. "Arab Nations Demand Qatar Shut Al Jazeera, Cut Islamist Ties and Detail Funding." New York Times, June 23, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/23/world/middleeast/qatar-saudi-arabia-al-jazeera.html>
- ICC. 2007. *After Gaza*. Middle East Report No. 68, Switzerland: ICC.
- Iddon, Paul. 2022. "Why the US Chose Qatar As a Major Non-Nato Ally before Saudi Arabia and the UAE." Middle East Eye, February 22, 2022. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/qatar-major-non-nato-ally-before-saudi-arabia-and-uae>
- Izevbigie, Osarodion Odosamamwen. 2019. "Roots and Goals of the State of Qatar's Contradictory Foreign Policy: Implications for U.S. National Security Interests." Graduate Theses 3442, MSU. <https://bearworks.missouristate.edu/theses/3442>
- Jansen, Olaf. 2021. "Arab Cup 2021: No Football Fervor in Qatar." Deutsche Welle, December 1, 2021.
- Jones, Laura, and Mohammed Ahmed. 2018. "The Role of Qatar Museums in Cultural Diplomacy." *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development* 8(2): 189–203.
- Jones, Laura, and Mohammed Ahmed. 2019. "The Role of Qatar Museums in Cultural Diplomacy." *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development* 8(2): 189–203.
- Kamrava, Mehran. 2011. "Mediation and Qatari Foreign Policy." *The Middle East Journal* 65(4): 539–56. <https://doi.org/10.3751/65.4.11>. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41342739>
- Kamrava, Mehran. 2013. *Qatar: Small State, Big Politics*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Kamrava, Mehran. 2017. "Iran-Qatar Relations." In *Security and Bilateral Issues between Iran and Its Arab Neighbours*, edited by Anoush Ehteshami, Neil Quilliam, and Gawdat Bahgat, 167–87. Palgrave Macmillan.
- eds Peter J. Katzenstein and Lucia A. Seybert. (2009). *Protean Power: Exploring the Uncertain and Unexpected in World Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Katzman, Kenneth. 2020. *Qatar: Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy*. Congressional Research Service
- Khatib, Lina. 2013. "Qatar's Foreign Policy: The Limits of Pragmatism." *International Affairs* 89(2): 417–31. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12025>
- Kozhanov, Nikolay. 2021. "Geopolitics of Qatar Natural Gas: In the Era of Hydrocarbon Markets Transformation: Small State Approach." *Ideology and Politics Journal* 3(19): 109–24.
- Krieg, Andreas. 2019. "The Weaponization of Narratives Amid the Gulf Crisis." In *Divided Gulf: The Anatomy of a Crisis*, edited by Andreas Krieg, 91–108. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-6314-6_6
- Kurlantzick, Joshua. 2007. *Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power Is Transforming the World*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Layne, Christopher. 2009. *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- EEEd. Christopher Layne. (2010). *Soft Power and US Foreign Policy*. London: Routledge.
- Leonard, Mark. 2019. Soft Power Can Transform How Countries See One Another In *Soft Power and Diplomacy* (pp. 37–48). United States: Greenhaven Publishing LLC.
- Levermore, Roger, and Aaron Beacom. 2009. *Sport and International Relations: An Emerging Relationship*. London: Routledge.
- Lowy Institute. 2017. "Qatar Crisis: Why the Saudis Want Al Jazeera Gone." The Interpreter, June 2017. <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/qatar-crisis-why-saudis-want-al-jazeera-gone>
- Lukes, Steven. 2005. *Power: A Radical View*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lüthi, Lorenz M. 2020. *The Middle East In Cold Wars: Asia, the Middle East, Europe* (pp. 183–260). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- MacFarquhar, Neil. 2004. "Muslim Scholars Increasingly Debate Unholy War." New York Times, December 10, 2024. <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/12/10/world/middleeast/muslim-scholars-increasingly-debate-unholy-war.html>
- Magee, Peter. 2014. *The Archaeology of Prehistoric Arabia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Majid, Jacob. 2024. "Despite Impasse, Qatari Official Tells Hostage Families Doha Committed to Securing Deal." Times of Israel, September 27, 2024. https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/despite-impasse-qatari-official-tells-hostage-families-doha-committed-to-securing-deal/
- Mahtani, Shibani. 2021. "American Journalist Danny Fenster Released from Myanmar Jail Despite 11 Year Sentence." Washington Post, November 15, 2021. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/american-journalist-released-myanmar/2021/11/15/9492cf4c-45f7-11ec-beca-3cc7103bd814_story.html
- Manheim, Jarol B. 1994. *The Death of a Thousand Cuts: Corporate Campaigns and the Attack on the Corporation*. London: Routledge.
- Marquis, Christopher. 2004. "U.S. Protests Broadcasts By Arab Channels." New York Times, April 29, 2004. <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/04/29/world/the-struggle-for-iraq-the-media-us-protests-broadcasts-by-arab-channels.html>
- Matar, Hosam. 2016. "Limits of US Soft Power in the Arab World (2003–15)." *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 9(3): 428–44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17550912.2016.1191786>
- McMahon, Ryan. 2019. *Overview: Soft Power Is One of Many Ways to Counter Hostile States* (In *Soft Power and Diplomacy* pp. 25–36). United States: Greenhaven Publishing LLC.
- Miles, Hugh. 2005. *Al-Jazeera: The Inside Story of the Arab News Channel That Is Challenging the West*. New York: Grove Press.
- Mills, Andrew. 2023. "How Qatar's Assertive Diplomacy Won a Break in the Gaza War." Reuters, December 2, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/how-qatar-swayed-israel-hamas-make-truce-work-2023-11-30/>
- Mills, Andrew, and Nidal Al-Mughrabi. 2023. "Qatar in Talks with Hamas, Israel to Swap Hostages for Prisoners." Reuters, October 9, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/qatar-leads-talks-swap-hamas-held-hostages-palestinians-israeli-jails-2023-10-09/>
- Nye, Joseph S. 1990. "Soft Power." *Foreign Policy* 1(80): 153–71. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1148580>
- Nye, Joseph S. 2004. *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: PublicAffairs.
- Nye, Joseph S. 2014. "The Information Revolution and Power." *Current History* 113(759): 19–22. <https://doi.org/10.1525/curh.2014.113.759.19>
- Nye, Joseph S., and Joseph S. Nye Jr. 2008. *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: Public Affairs.
- Pamuk, Humeyra. 2023. "Qatar Open to Reconsidering Hamas Presence in Qatar, US Official Says." Reuters, October 27, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/qatar-told-us->

it-is-open-reconsidering-hamas-presence-us-official-says-2023-10-27/

- Panja, Tariq. 2018. "The Brazen Bootlegging of a Multibillion-Dollar Sports Network." *New York Times*, May 9, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/09/sports/bein-sports-qatar-beoutq.html>
- Pogrebin, Robin. 2013. "Qatari Riches Are Buying Art World Influence." *New York Times*, July 22, 2013. https://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/23/arts/design/qatar-uses-its-riches-to-buy-art-treasures.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0
- Pucher, John, and Dieter Koller. 2010. "Urban Structure and the Economic Crisis: Lessons from the Subprime Meltdown." *Urban Studies* 47(12): 2531–44.
- Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 2020. *Qatar's Cultural Diplomacy: A Global Perspective*. Doha: Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- Ragin, Charles C. 1992. *What Is a Case? Exploring the Foundations of Social Inquiry*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Roselle, Laura, Alistair Miskimmon, and Ben O'Loughlin. 2014. "Strategic Narrative: A New Means to Understand Soft Power." *Media, War & Conflict* 7(1): 70–84. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750635213516696>
- Saadi Marlon, and Guido Steinberg. 2022. "Konkurrenten auf dem Rasen und abseits des Platzes: Der Konflikt zwischen den Vereinigten Arabischen Emiraten und Katar [Competitors on and off the pitch: The conflict between the United Arab Emirates and Qatar]." In *Das rebellische Spiel: Die Macht des Fußballs im Nahen Osten und die Katar-WM*, edited by Jan Busse and René Wildangel, 58–71. Bielefeld: Die Werkstatt.
- Sabbagh, Dan. 2012. "Al-Jazeera's Political Independence Questioned Amid Qatar Intervention." *The Guardian*, September 20, 2012. <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2012/sep/30/al-jazeera-independence-questioned-qatar>
- Samuel-Azran, Tal, Inbal Assaf, Annie Salem, Loreen Wahabe, and Nadine Halabi. 2016. "Is There a Qatari–Al-Jazeera Nexus? Coverage of the 2022 FIFA World Cup Controversy By Al-Jazeera Versus Sky News, CNN and ITV." *Global Media and Communication* 12(3): 195–209. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1742766516676208>
- Sciutto, Jim, and Jeremy Herb. 2017. "Exclusive: The Secret Documents That Help Explain the Qatar Crisis." *CNN*, July 11, 2023. <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/07/10/politics/secret-documents-qatar-crisis-gulf-saudi/index.html>
- Simon, Joel. 2023. "How Qatar Became the World's Go-To Hostage Negotiator." *The New Yorker*. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/how-qatar-became-the-worlds-go-to-hostage-negotiator>
- Smith, John. 2020. "Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy: The Case of Qatar." *Diplomatic Studies Quarterly* 45(1): 78–92.
- Spalding, Andrew. 2022. "The First Intentional Legacy: Qatar" In *A New Megasport Legacy: Host-Country Human Rights and Anti-Corruption Reforms*. New York: Oxford Academic. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197503614.003.0005>
- Spiller, Christian, and Andrea Böhm. 2015. "Höher, Schneller, Katar." *Die Zeit*, June 11, 2015.
- Sugden, John, and Alan Tomlinson. 1998. *FIFA and the Contest for World Football: Who Rules the People's Game?*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Theros, Marika. 2023. "Knowledge, Power and the Failure of US Peacemaking in Afghanistan 2018–21." *International Affairs* 99(3): 1231–52. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iia092>
- Thussu, Daya Kishan. 2006. *International Communication: Continuity and Change*. Edinburgh: A&C Black.
- Ullah, AKM Ahsan and Ferdous Jannatul. 2023. *Governance, Migration and Security in International Relations*. Singapore and Netherlands: Springer.
- Ullah, AKM Ahsan. 2010. *Rationalizing Migration Decisions: Labour Migrants in South and South-East Asia*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Ullah, AKM Ahsan. 2014. *Refugee Politics in the Middle East and North Africa: Human Rights, Safety and Identity*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ullah, AKM Ahsan, Md Mizanur Rahman, and Diotima Chatteraj. 2023. "The Middle East and North Africa (MENA): Fragility, Fragmentation and Crisis." *The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Global Studies* 18(2): 31–55. <https://doi.org/10.18848/2324-755X/CGP/v18i02/31-55>
- Ullah, AKM Ahsan. 2018a. "Conflicts and Displacements in Syria: Exploring Life Trajectories of Separated Refugee Minors." *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies* 12(2): 207–24.
- Ullah, AKM Ahsan. 2018b. "Geopolitics of Conflicts and Refugees in the Middle East and North Africa." *Contemporary Review of the Middle East* 5(3): 258–74.
- Ullah, AKM Ahsan, Noor Hasharina Hasan, Siti Mazidah Mohamad, and Diotima Chatteraj. 2020. "Migration and Security: Implications for Minority Migrant Groups." *India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs* 76(1): 136–53. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0974928419901199>
- Ulrichsen, Kristian Coates. 2014. *Qatar and the Arab Spring*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ulrichsen, Kristian Coates. 2017. "Qatar's Maverick Streak Leaves It Friendless in the Gulf." *Current History* 116(794): 342–7. <https://doi.org/10.1525/curh.2017.116.794.342>
- Ulrichsen, Kristian Coates. 2020. *Qatar and the Gulf Crisis: A Study of Resilience*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Usef, Anshad. 2022. "Qatar's Role as a Mediator in the Middle East." *The Young Diplomat*, February 22, 2022. <https://www.youngdiplomat.org/post/qatar-s-role-as-a-mediator-in-the-middle-east>
- Zahlan, Rosemarie Said. 1979. *The Creation of Qatar*. London: Routledge.
- Zayani, Mohamed. 2005. *The Al Jazeera Phenomenon: Critical Perspectives on New Arab Media*. London: Pluto Press.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

AKM Ahsan Ullah is an Associate Professor at the University of Brunei Darussalam. Dr Ullah has worked at the City University of Hong Kong, IPH at the University of Ottawa, McMaster University, Saint Mary's University, Dalhousie University in Canada, the American University in Cairo (AUC), Osnabruck University, Germany, and the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), Thailand. His research areas include migration and mobilities, intercultural encounters and development with a geographic focus on the Asia-Pacific, Africa, and Middle East, and theoretical focus on globalization, development and human rights, transnationalism, gender, intersectionality, and everyday life.

How to cite this article: Ullah, AKM Ahsan. 2024. "The emergence of Qatar's diplomacy in a complex world: Balancing soft power in regional affairs." *World Affairs*. 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1002/waf2.12051>