

## Small States in Conflict Management: A Case Study of Qatar

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### Abstract

### Review Article

Since the Second World War and the emergence of great powers, little consideration has been given to the role of smaller countries in conflict management. As opposed to what academics and IR scholars refer to as major or great powers, which receive a lot of attention from researchers. The majority of IR scholars focus on the great powers, their position in the international system, and their methods for resolving disputes. Because it is difficult to define small states and because different scholars have different definitions of what small states are, it is possible that they did not pay attention to them. Smaller countries, however, might also make a significant contribution to resolving disputes. Small countries have successfully resolved many conflicts despite their small size and limited resources, and they have developed to the point where they can now compete with those that are larger and more capable than they are. The aim of this article is to investigate how small countries handle disputes and their role in conflict management. In doing so, this paper focuses on how Qatar contributes to conflict management and explores the mechanism it takes to resolve disputes. And yields three key outcomes: First, despite having a small population and limited territory, small states can successfully settle many conflicts. Second, in many international arenas, small states can compete with large countries and superpowers. Finally, despite Qatar's active role in conflict resolution, there is a limitation to it: it focuses solely on mediation and doesn't employ any other conflict management techniques.

**Keywords:** Small States, Qatar, Conflict Management, Diplomatic Tools, Cases.

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## INTRODUCTION

During the 20th century, there were an increasing number of small countries on the international scene. As a result of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the decolonization of numerous nations worldwide (Fazle Rabby, Md. 2015). Small states have been ignored for a long time, but interest in them has grown recently since they have emerged as very effective players and have a place in international affairs. They also significantly shape several developments in world politics (Fazle Rabby, Md. 2015). There is no actual definition of small states in the international relations realm, and that makes it hard for many scholars to study and focus on small countries, as they do when it comes to a major or superpower. The ignorance of scholars and academia led to the omission of the importance of smaller nations in global politics and the reality that they have a significant impact on intervening in and resolving a number of international crises that even the largest countries have been unable to do so.

Countries take part in managing conflicts that arise between other nations and attempt to find a resolution to put an end to those conflicts. These countries' interventions in managing conflicts can take the form of mediation, negotiation, arbitration, or conciliation. Qatar is a small country in the Middle East Region that plays a significant role in the international arena. Despite its small size, Qatar is considered the third largest natural gas reserve in the world. Since Sheikh Hamad took over as ruler of Qatar in 1995 and pushed for Qatar to play an independent role in world politics, the country has assumed a prominent position. Qatar has intervened in several disputes in both intra-Gulf disputes and inter-Arab disputes and succeeded in resolving some disagreements due to its wise conflict resolution strategy. Furthermore, Qatar's small size encourages the disputing parties to trust it as a mediator to settle the conflict.

### Small States

There is currently no agreed-upon definition of what constitutes a small state, despite the fact that there are numerous small states around the world, including

those that are crucial players in international affairs. This poses a problem when discussing small states in the context of international relations (Maass, M. 2008). However, there are times when small countries are defined in terms of specific characteristics, such as the population, which is small compared to large countries, the territory, which is smaller, the strengths and weaknesses of the economy, as well as the absence of the country from the international scene (Mushelenga, P., & Wyk, J.-A. V. 2019; Prasad, N. 2009). The size of small countries and their natural resources were significant determinants of economic growth in such countries; therefore, it was vital to pay attention to them and study them. Until the 1960s and 1970s, however, small countries did not receive much attention (Prasad, N. 2009). Based on the concept of strength, some definitions of small states include all those countries like Australia, and South Africa, that weren't major powers and didn't always insist on being called intermediate powers (Fazle Rabby, Md. 2015). Another way to define small countries is as states with little to no government engagement in things like community, the country's economy, and so forth (Fazle Rabby, Md. 2015). The scholar Keohane defines a "small state" as one whose leaders believe their country would never have a significant global effect, whether working alone or in a small group (Fazle Rabby, Md. 2015). There are several additional definitions of small countries, some of which are based on quantitative and others on qualitative standards (Maass, M. 2008). According to the quantitative criteria small states are classified according to their physical dimensions and sizes (Maass, M. 2008). It is worth noting that such a measurement was actually used to measure the size of the state's economy or the size of its army (Maass, M. 2008; Hänggi, H. 1998). Although a small country can be defined by its physical dimensions, the most prevalent definition in quantitative terms is now one that considers its population (Maass, M. 2008). Along with the fact that population size is highly linked with the size of the state's army and economy, the availability and ease of access to information about population size, as well as the ease of defining borders between large and small countries, are what have increased awareness of and interest in population size in defining the small states (Maass, M. 2008). In terms of the qualitative standard, small countries are those that are not very large and that, in comparison to major countries, have not received much attention (Maass, M. 2008). Moreover, small countries are those that the larger nations do not consider or care about (Maass, M. 2008; Vital, David. 1972). Small states can also be classified using qualitative standards based on their conduct, which characterizes them as having distinct behavior in the field of international relations (Maass, M.,2008). Diverse meanings and interpretations further show that the term "small state" still hasn't been given a universally accepted definition. States with a small population or territory are small, or small states can be characterized by their behaviors. Despite the absence of

a precise definition, small countries continue to play a vital role in international affairs and have the power to alter policies worldwide. Additionally, in contrast to other powerful countries, they play a substantial and effective role in resolving conflicts. For instance, Qatar in the Middle East plays a significant role in resolving various crises despite its small size and relatively small population.

### **Qatar**

Qatar is considered one of the most important countries in the Gulf region; it is also one of the nations that attained independence in 1971 as a result of Britain's withdrawal from the Gulf region and cancellation of its protection over those of the Gulf States (Blanchard, C. 2014). The government system in Qatar is a monarchy-style political system ruled by one royal family, the Al Thani family (Ministry of Foreign Affairs). In addition, the 2003 amendment to the Qatari constitution stated that the reign in Qatar is a hereditary one within the Al-Thani royal family. It is worth noting that Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani succeeded his—father Khalifa—as ruler of Qatar in 1995 following a coup that took place in the Qatari palace (Blanchard, C. 2014). After the coup, the Khalifa then transferred authority to his son Sheikh Hamad. Shortly after the first coup, the Khalifa's followers and loyalists attempted another coup to overthrow Hamad. However, it failed (Blanchard, C. 2014). Sheikh Hamad made many economic improvements to improve the lives of Qataris and established Al-Jazeera, which was considered the first news network at the time to deal with the concerns of the Arab world. So, the crown prince of Qatar, Shaikh Hamad, has been considered to be a leader of the new era of Gulf rulers. Qatar has the third-largest natural gas reserves in the globe despite its small size. Furthermore, oil is viewed as Qatar's key economic driver because the country is mostly dependent on oil and gas, much like the other Gulf nations. It is regarded as one of the wealthiest countries in the Gulf and the Arab world because of its resources. During the rule of Shaikh Hamad, Qatar began to take an active role in world politics and settle conflicts.

### **Conflict Management Mechanism**

States in the international relations realm attempt to use some conflict management methods to resolve disputes and settle conflicts. Although it is difficult to describe conflict management in any way, as it is a fluid idea with hazy limits (Sumita, B. 2011). Some academic as Dennis Sandole explains conflict management as the strategies used by the participants to resolve disputes (Sumita, B. 2011). And according to common understanding, conflict management refers to an effort made by parties involved in a disagreement to lessen aggression and create some order in their interactions (Bercovitch, J., & Regan, P. M.). Conflict management sometimes it could be dealing with and managing disputes in aggressive or competitive as well as peaceful or collaborative ways (Sumita, B. 2011).

However, the majority of countries that want to deal with and settle disputes choose to do so through peaceful means. Effective conflict management may result in a full resolution of the issues at hand, and a change in attitudes and conduct (Sikander, T. 2011). The means and techniques that states can use to manage disagreements can be peaceful methods (diplomatic means) such as negotiation, mediation, and conciliation.

Mediation is a common tool in conflict management. Through the process of mediation, a third party not only offers their good offices but also participates actively in the process of mediation (Sikander, T. 2011). Mediation is defined by the United Nations (UN) as "a process whereby a third party assists two or more parties, with their consent, to prevent, manage, or resolve a conflict by helping them to develop mutually acceptable agreements." (UN Official Website, 2012) The mediator or the third party is either indirectly or directly aiming to advocate a short-term or long-term resolution based on the results they believe will be broadly or unanimously accepted by disputant's parties. Therefore, a mediator is interested in tactics (Barston, R. P. 2014). Thus, the tactics to influence both the process and substance of potential solutions are of interest to mediators. By way of explanation, the goal of mediation is to alter four aspects: conduct, perspective, and method (Barston, R. P. 2014). Additionally, the third party tries to calm down the disputing parties, bring them together, and help them come to a mutually agreeable settlement. It is important to note that the mediator's function only depends on mediation and that the opposing parties are not subject to his judgment or suggested solutions (Sikander, T. 2011). The first protocol of the first Hague Peace Conference, which took place in 1899 and 1907 stated the role and functions of the mediator or third party, "the function of a mediator was declared to be that of reconciling the opposing claims and appeasing the feelings of resentment which may have arisen between the states at variance." (Sikander, T. 2011). In order to attain their own foreign policy objectives and expand their regional influence, some governments get engaged in the resolution of disputes and utilize mediation as a tool to do so (Akpınar, P. 2015).

Another method the state may employ to resolve the conflict is negotiation. And it is an effort to examine and compromise opposing viewpoints in order to achieve a mutually agreeable conclusion. Moreover, the goal of negotiation is to identify areas of shared interest and dispute, regardless of the nature of the resolution, which may really favor one side over the other (Barston, R. P. 2014). Negotiation is also a procedure in which specific offers are made with the intention of resolving them through an exchange or the realization of a shared interest, and that occurs when there are competing interests. During the negotiation, the shared area of interest between the disputant parties may be improved and defined. And based on the

intentions of the parties to the conflict, the negotiator can determine the content and form of the negotiation process (Barston, R. P. 2014). Despite this, the disputant's parties' differences may frequently continue and make it difficult for the negotiators to come to a compromise. The setting in which the negotiation takes place, the resources at the negotiator's disposal, as well as potential negotiating variables, are some of the factors that might influence the negotiation process (Barston, R. P. 2014). For the negotiation setting, it could have an impact on the bargaining process in a certain situation. While domestic issues connected to the development and realization of negotiation positions are among the most important negotiating variables. The capability and resources of the negotiators, such as the scope and depth of the specialists, the proximity of the negotiators to the central authority, and the ability to control the flow of information during a disagreement, can also have an impact on the negotiation process (Barston, R. P. 2014).

There are other conflict mechanisms, such as Conciliation, in addition to mediation and negotiation, which is the most frequently used methods for resolving disputes. Inquiry and mediation are both parts of conciliation. It denotes the referring of a disagreement to a committee to produce a report with suggestions for a resolution to the disputant's parties (Sikander, T. 2011). Moreover, in conciliation, this committee chosen by the parties to the dispute settles the disputes. This committee maintains objectivity throughout the resolution of the dispute, finds a resolution that is acceptable to all parties, and also establishes the terms under which the dispute will be resolved. The function of the mediator or third-party during conciliation is different from the role they play during the mediation process itself because, during conciliation, the third party intervenes within the legal bounds. In contrast to conciliation, which operates within a legal framework, mediation involves the mediator or third party intervening voluntarily out of a desire to settle the conflict (Merrills, J. G. 2011). There are some judicial methods such as arbitration. The arbitration process is one of the earliest methods Western countries have used to settle international disputes. It denotes the referral of a disagreement or dispute between countries to a neutral third party who renders a decision after being freely selected by the protagonists. Arbitration is the process used when both parties formally agree to follow the terms of a mediator's proposed resolution (Sikander, T. 2011). As was previously mentioned, there are several ways to settle disputes. While some governments can make use of the majority of these tools on a global scale, others can only use one to handle conflicts. Qatar is one nation that frequently uses mediation to resolve disputes.

### **The Role of Qatar in Conflict Management**

Although Qatar is a small country, it is one of the Gulf States that play an effective role in settling and

managing disputes. Qatar has intervened in many inter-Arab and intra-Gulf disputes, making it more active than other Gulf countries, in particular its neighboring country, Saudi Arabia. And that caused a confrontation between them (Nuruzzaman, M. 2015). Although there are many conflict management methods to settle disputes as discussed previously, however, Qatar succeeded in using one means, mediation. As some scholars call Qatar as "a non-stop mediator" (Nuruzzaman, M. 2015).

As a mediator in Gulf and Middle Eastern issues, Qatar was not as active or influential as it is now under the leadership of Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad al-Thani, the father of Hamad Al-Thani (Nuruzzaman, M. 2015). The policy of Qatar in resolving disputes could be traced back to the Emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani. The country's strategy for resolving disputes altered after Emir Sheikh Hamad assumed power in 1995 following the coup that took place in the Qatari palace. Since then, Qatar has pursued ever-expanding foreign affairs, which has elevated the country's status on a regional and international scale. And it has emerged as one of the most proactive mediators of regional disputes in the Arab World and portions of Africa since the middle of the 2000s (Kamrava, M. 2011). In order to resolve a number of situations, Qatar has successfully acted as a mediator, and taken involved in conflicts in some countries such as Syria, Yemen, Lebanon, Afghanistan, and others places (Khatib, L. 2013). It is worth mentioning that in each of these circumstances and in each dispute that Qatar is involved in settling and managing, Qatar has taken a positive stance to engage with opposing groups to encourage them to come to a political agreement or reconciliation and to offer humanitarian aid (Khatib, L. 2013). As the Qatari government places significant emphasis on mediation and intervention to resolve issues, Prince Hamad and the Qatari Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs make the decision to involve Qatar in specific cases (Khatib, L. 2013). Preserving its security and stability in an unstable region plagued by political disputes, the Arabian Peninsula is one of several significant motivations and causes that motivate Qatar to participate in mediation and conflict resolution. Due to its modest size and desire to avoid coming off as a weak nation, Qatar also sought to re-enter the regional political scene through mediation, and compete with its neighboring nation, Saudi Arabia (Khatib, L. 2013). Saudi Arabia was one of the countries that mediates and settles conflicts, but because of its lack of neutrality in doing so, it became a participant in resolving the disputes rather than an efficient mediator (Nuruzzaman, M. 2015; Khatib, L. 2013). Qatar's small size, which many consider unthreatening, as well as the neutrality policy it implemented, which made Qatar's function as a mediator acceptable to the disputing parties, is what helped it become a successful and well-liked mediator (Kamrava, M. 2011).

There are some important cases that Qatar was involved as a mediator and succeeded to settle the dispute such as Yemen, Lebanon, and Darfur in Sudan (Coates Ulrichsen, K. 2013). At the start of 2007, Qatar mediated in Yemen following the Houthi group uprising and the ensuing disarray in 2004. The Houthis rebelled against the Yemeni government under the direction of Husayn al-Huthi because they desired to revive Zaydi Islam. In order to mediate a resolution to the conflict, the Emir of Qatar went to Yemen's capital city of Sanaa. At the same time, he sent representatives from the Qatari government to the city of Saada, the scene of the Houthi uprising to start the mediation process with the Houthis group (Kamrava, M. 2011). The Emir of Qatar stated that Qatar wanted to mediate between the two sides to put an end to the conflict and that if the disagreement is resolved, Qatar would contribute financially to the restoration of Saada, which was damaged during the uprising, and as a consequence, a cease-fire was formed between the Houthis and the government, and on February 1, 2008, in Doha, Qatar, the two sides signed a peace deal (Kamrava, M. 2011; Coates Ulrichsen, K. 2013). Due to criticism of the agreement from the Yemeni government under President Ali Abdullah Saleh, the dispute between the Houthis and the government flared up once more in 2009 (Akpınar, P. 2015). Unfortunately, the Qatari mediation did not continue to stop the war between the Houthis and the Yemeni government for a long time. And the Yemeni president announced that the Qatari mediation did not bear fruit. So, Qatar mediated again for a cease-fire between the two parties in 2010 (Coates Ulrichsen, K. 2013).

Another dispute that Qatar intervened in and mediated to settle was the Darfur issue in Sudan (Prior to being split into southern and northern Sudan). In 2008, as the violence in Darfur, Sudan, increased, Qatar stepped in to mediate a peace settlement. The League of Arab States assigned Qatar as a mediator between the rebel groups in Sudan and the government of that country in the same year (Coates Ulrichsen, K. 2013). Due to divisions and disagreements among the rebel groups in Darfur, Sudan, negotiations to end the conflict were challenging and complicated, and they frequently ran into roadblocks (Kamrava, M. 2011). The conflicting parties had more respect for Qatar's position and confidence in it as a mediator because of the patience of the Qatari mediators, their resolve to settle the disagreement between the disputing parties, and their desire to carry out the negotiations until a final settlement was reached (Kamrava, M. 2011). Qatar made several trips to the conflict's location to gather information and data, but these trips also helped the disputants' confidence in the Qatari mediators by giving them more information about the conflict (Kamrava, M. 2011). And in 2009, after extensive negotiations, the two sides agreed to "goodwill and confidence-building for the settlement of the problem in Darfur" and signed



a memorandum of understanding. This was mediated by Qatar (Kamrava, M. 2011).

Qatar actively participated in the Arab Spring uprisings and served as a mediator in some disputes. When the Fijian government's 45 peacekeepers were kidnapped by the Al-Nusra Front in 2012, Qatar brokered a deal that led to their release (Akpınar, P. 2015). And in 2014, Qatar intervened between the militias in Lebanon to secure the release of 13 Lebanese nuns. The Qatari mediation effort was successful, and the nuns were freed. Additionally, Qatar intervened to secure the release of 9 Lebanese pilgrims in Aleppo, Lebanon (Akpınar, P. 2015). Evidently, due to the unexpected regional developments, Qatar's policy during the Arab Spring switched from encouraging stability to encouraging change (Akpınar, P. 2015). Moreover, the Arab Spring provided new possibilities for Qatar as a mediator in the Arab World. Due to the decline in the influence of traditional actors like Syria, Iraq, and Egypt, the center of power in the Arab world has changed toward the Gulf region (Akpınar, P. 2015).

## CONCLUSION

Small states can play an effective role in the international arena and be more proactive than other major or superpowers, despite their small size, limited resources, and capacity. Academics have long disregarded small states despite their significance and usefulness. The absence of a clear definition of what small states are in international relations may be the cause of this. Due to its active involvement in conflict resolution, Qatar, a small nation, was also one of the nations that did not receive academic attention until recently. Although there are numerous ways to resolve a conflict, Qatar only employed mediation because, on occasion, using the mediation mechanism to settle some disputes also serves as a means for the mediating state to advance its political objectives. Along with attempting to project the image of regional power, Qatar wanted to use the mediation process to advance its foreign policy objectives.

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