

Diplomatic Politics and Conflict Mediation: Evidence from Strategic Roles of Qatar and Egypt in the Israel-Hamas War and Ceasefire Negotiation (2023-2025)

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Abstract

Mediation in contemporary inter- and intra-state conflicts is rarely neutral. It is often shaped and re-shaped by the strategic interests, regional ambitions, and diplomatic calculations of the mediating states. This article examines the diplomatic politics underlying conflict mediation through the strategic roles played by Qatar and Egypt in the Israel–Hamas war and the ceasefire negotiations between 2023 and 2025. The article relied mainly on secondary data including scholarly and grey literature which were analyzed thematically. The study interrogates how Qatar and Egypt leveraged their unique political ties with Hamas, Israel, and Western actors to position themselves as indispensable intermediaries. While both states presented themselves as facilitators of peace, their mediation efforts have been deeply embedded in broader geopolitical objectives, including regional influence, security concerns, international legitimacy, and relations with major powers. It argues that their effectiveness as mediators derived not from neutrality but from strategic partiality, access, and credibility with conflicting parties. The paper further unravels how competition and cooperation between the two mediators shaped the trajectory of negotiations, humanitarian access, hostage exchanges, and ceasefire arrangements. By situating mediation within the framework of diplomatic politics, the study contributes to debates in conflict resolution and international diplomacy by demonstrating how middle powers employ mediation as an instrument of foreign policy and regional influence.

Keywords: Conflict mediation, Diplomatic politics, Israel-Hamas war, Qatar and Egypt geopolitics, Strategic interests

Introduction

The Israel– Hamas war of 2023–2025 represents one of the most intense phases of the long-standing Israeli–Palestinian conflict, marked by large-scale violence, humanitarian crises, and repeated attempts at ceasefire negotiations. In this complex environment, Qatar and Egypt emerged as key mediators, leveraging their regional influence, political networks, and diplomatic credibility to facilitate communication between Israel, Hamas, and international actors. Their involvement reflects a broader shift in global diplomacy where regional powers increasingly play central roles in conflict mediation, especially in protracted and politically-sensitive conflicts.

The October 2023 outbreak of large-scale hostilities between Israel and Hamas rapidly evolved into a wider diplomatic and humanitarian crisis whose resolution depended as much on external mediation as on battlefield calculations. From the outset, Qatar and Egypt emerged as principal third-party actors: Qatar leveraged on long-standing informal channels to Hamas and ties to Western states to facilitate hostage negotiations and humanitarian flows, while Egypt used its geographic proximity, border controls at Rafah, and security relationships to manage ceasefire logistics and cross-border aid (Al Jazeera, 2025).

Mediation scholars emphasize that third-party intervention is rarely neutral or purely humanitarian; rather, mediation is a political practice shaped by mediators' strategic aims, capacities, and the domestic and regional constraints they face (Bercovitch & Houston, 2000). Mediators pursue settlement not only to end violence but also to secure influence, demonstrate diplomatic competence, and protect national security interests. The case of Qatar and Egypt illustrates these dynamics: their mediation activities combined operational tasks (shuttle diplomacy and aid corridors) with broader strategic objectives (regional standing and border stability).

Despite numerous international efforts to manage the Israel–Palestinian conflict, sustainable peace remains elusive, and mediation attempts often produce only temporary ceasefires. While much attention has been given to Western-led diplomatic initiatives, less scholarly focus has been placed on the strategic roles of regional actors such as Qatar and Egypt. There is a need to critically examine how their diplomatic politics, national interests, and mediation strategies influence ceasefire negotiations and humanitarian outcomes in the Gaza conflict. This article, therefore, examines how diplomatic politics, strategic interests, and mediation efforts intersect in the roles played by Qatar and Egypt during the conflict. It is guided by the following research questions: How did Qatar and Egypt engage diplomatically in mediating the 2023–2025 Israel– Hamas war? What strategic interests shaped their mediation roles? How effective were their efforts in achieving ceasefires and humanitarian access? What challenges arose in mediating between state and non-state actors? And what do their roles reveal about the growing importance of regional powers in conflict mediation?

Theoretical and Analytical Framework

Understanding the strategic roles of Qatar and Egypt in mediating the Israel– Hamas war between 2023 and 2025 requires a robust theoretical foundation capable of explaining how states behave, why mediators intervene, and how different forms of diplomacy shape conflict outcomes. This section discusses the three complementary perspectives (Realism, Liberalism, and Middle-Power

Mediation) deployed in the paper. Together, these frameworks illuminate how power, interests, norms, and networks intersect in the mediation strategies deployed by Qatar and Egypt.

Realism positions international politics as a competitive arena dominated by power, security imperatives, and strategic interests. Classic realists such as Hans Morgenthau (1948) and later structural realists like Kenneth Waltz (1979) argue that states act primarily to preserve national survival, maximize security, and maintain regional balance. From a realist standpoint, mediation is never neutral; rather, it is a strategic tool employed by states to shape conflict outcomes in ways that enhance their geopolitical advantage.

Realist interpretations shed light on why Egypt and Qatar assumed active mediation roles in the 2023–2025 Israel–Hamas war. Egypt’s geopolitical calculations revolve around preventing instability in the Sinai, avoiding mass displacement into Egyptian territory, and preserving its role as the central Arab interlocutor in Palestinian affairs (Kamel, 2016). Qatar’s mediation, similarly, aligns with its pursuit of political influence and regime security through what Kamrava (2013) describes as “subtle power projection” by small states seeking strategic relevance in regional politics. Within realism, mediation thus functions as part of a state’s foreign policy toolkit, enabling actors to control outcomes, mitigate threats, and expand influence. Qatar’s diplomatic ties with Hamas and Western governments, and Egypt’s control over the Rafah crossing, become forms of leverage.

This perspective explains the multilateral dimension of the 2023–2025 mediation processes. Qatar and Egypt worked closely with the United States, the United Nations, and regional organizations to facilitate ceasefire frameworks, humanitarian corridors, and hostage exchanges. All activities are consistent with liberal assumptions about the value of institutional coordination. Liberalism also highlights how both states rely on reputation, international legitimacy, and diplomatic partnerships. Qatar’s strategy of cultivating global visibility through conflict resolution aligns closely with liberal institutionalism ideas of soft power, international engagement, and norm entrepreneurship (Ulrichsen, 2020). Egypt’s participation similarly reflects its long-standing commitment to regional diplomacy and its desire to maintain constructive ties with Western actors and multilateral bodies.

Middle-power theory conceptualizes states that are neither great powers nor minor actors but exercise influence through diplomacy, coalition-building, and niche roles such as conflict mediation (Cooper, Higgott & Nossal, 1993). Middle powers rely on soft power, strategic positioning, and credibility as honest brokers. Both Qatar and Egypt fit the conceptualization of middle powers, though in different ways. Qatar represents the “niche diplomacy” model of a small state using wealth, media influence, and strategic relationships to act as a facilitator in regional crises (Cooper & Momani, 2011). Egypt, meanwhile, fits the “traditional regional middle power” category: a state with geographic centrality, demographic weight, and diplomatic history that give it legitimacy in Arab-Israeli negotiations (Brownlee, 2012).

Middle-power mediation theory explains why both states are able to act as credible intermediaries:

- Qatar leverages financial resources, global networks, and relationships with diverse actors (including Islamist movements and Western states).

- Egypt leverages border control, security institutions, and historical leadership in the Arab world.

Together, their complementary strengths illustrate how middle-power states can shape conflict dynamics despite lacking great-power military capabilities. Middle-power theory thus helps explain how states without overwhelming material capabilities can nonetheless shape negotiations, influence outcomes, and acquire prestige through mediation leadership, legitimacy, and diplomatic specialization.

Literature Review

The recent escalation in the Israel–Palestine conflict culminating in the 2023–2025 war between Hamas and Israel has underlined the entrenched nature of the conflict, its deep historical roots, and the severe humanitarian consequences for civilians in Gaza and beyond. The Israel–Palestine conflict remains one of the most enduring and complex geopolitical struggles of the modern era, rooted in competing national identities, territorial claims, colonial legacies, demographic transformations, and deeply embedded historical narratives. Scholars trace its origins to the late Ottoman and early British Mandate periods, during which rising Jewish and Arab nationalisms crystallized into competing claims over the same territory (Khalidi, 2020). British imperial policies from the Balfour Declaration of 1917 to the inconsistent governance of the Mandate contributed to growing mistrust and institutionalized inequality, laying the foundation for later conflict (Seikaly & Penslar, 2013). The 1947 UN Partition Plan and the subsequent 1948 Arab–Israeli War led to major demographic and territorial shifts, including the displacement of approximately 700,000 Palestinians. This created a protracted refugee crisis that remains central to political claims and collective memory, shaping subsequent diplomatic initiatives and resistance movements (Pappé, 2006).

By the mid-twentieth century, the conflict had transformed from inter-communal tensions into multi-state wars, most notably in 1948, 1956, 1967, and 1973. The 1967 Six-Day War was a turning point: Israel’s occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, and other territories altered the conflict’s structure and created conditions for decades of military rule, settlement expansion, and contested sovereignty (Morris, 2001). Scholars argue that the post-1967 era marked a shift from classical warfare to an asymmetric, fragmented struggle involving state and non-state actors, recurring uprisings, and increasingly complex mediation dynamics (Bickerton & Klausner, 2018).

The emergence of Hamas in 1987 during the First Intifada added a new dimension to the conflict. Hamas’ dual identity as both a political organization and an armed resistance movement has significantly shaped subsequent developments (Milton-Edwards & Farrell, 2010). Unlike the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which pursued negotiations culminating in the Oslo Accords (1993–95), Hamas rejected recognition of Israel and advocated armed resistance, though participating in electoral politics after 2005. Its electoral victory in 2006 and subsequent control of Gaza resulted in a divided Palestinian political landscape that many scholars view as a structural obstacle to unified bargaining and credible peace negotiations (Shikaki, 2010). This fragmentation deepened asymmetry not only between Israelis and Palestinians but also within Palestinian political institutions.

Cycles of violence, ceasefires, and failed negotiations remain a recurring theme. Episodic analysis (Abrahams, 2018) reveal that escalation phases often follow predictable sequences driven by mutual deterrence failures, humanitarian crises, or political shifts. These analyses support the argument that the Israel–Palestine conflict is not continuous but episodic characterized by discrete outbreaks of violence punctuated by temporary calms. Ceasefires, while periodically effective in reducing immediate casualties, typically fail to produce durable peace because they do not address underlying structural grievances such as territorial rights, refugee status, political representation, and sovereignty (Gordon & Akram, 2020).

Findings and Discussion

The Role of Qatar in the Mediation Process

Qatar has cultivated a distinctive foreign policy role as a mediator, combining a stated commitment to peaceful dispute resolution with pragmatic tools, wealth, global diplomatic networks, and a willingness to engage actors often shunned by other states to position Qatar as a key interlocutor in Middle East crises (Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025). In the Gaza context, Qatar’s motivations reflect both humanitarian aims (facilitating relief, protecting civilians) and strategic goals (preventing regional spill-over and projecting soft power), a dual logic that helps explain her active role in ceasefire negotiations, hostage-release arrangements, and humanitarian delivery (Reuters, 2023). Qatar’s ability to host Hamas’s political office and to run discreet back-channel diplomacy gives it unusual access to non-state actors and thus creates opportunities for mediation that other states lack; however, scholars caution that such crisis management often yields temporary relief rather than structural settlement, since underlying drivers remain unresolved (Ramsbotham et al, 2016).

Over the past two decades Qatar has deliberately constructed a diplomatic profile centered on mediation, presenting itself as a “neutral” broker capable of engaging both state and non-state actors to resolve or at least manage violent conflicts (Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025). Doha’s approach draws on several complementary assets: sizeable financial resources that can be used to fund humanitarian relief and reconstruction; an outsized diplomatic footprint that includes high level contacts across the region and beyond; and a willingness to host political offices and discussers that many other governments will not (for example, Hamas leadership in Doha). These attributes underpin Qatar’s self-presentation as a constructive third party and have allowed Palestinian context (Doha Institute, 2025).

Analysts typically frame Qatar’s motivations as dual: normative and instrumental. Normatively, Qatar frames mediation as consistent with a constitutional and diplomatic commitment to peaceful dispute resolution and humanitarianism; the Qatari foreign ministry emphasizes mediation as a core foreign-policy pillar. Instrumentally, successful mediation advances Qatar’s strategic goals: it builds international prestige, extends soft power, and positions Doha as a necessary interlocutor for states and international organizations seeking access to difficult parties (e.g., Hamas) or barren negotiation spaces (Qatar MFA, 2025). In short, mediation serves humanitarian ends while also accruing diplomatic capital to Qatar, allowing a small Gulf state to punch above its weight in regional politics.

In the Gaza wars, this mixture of motives became evident. Qatar's immediate aims typically emphasize humanitarian relief (opening crossings, delivering fuel and medicine), preventing regional spill-over (limiting refugee flows and cross-border escalation), and securing pragmatic deals such as hostage releases and temporary ceasefires (Reuters, 2023; Al Jazeera, 2024). At the same time, Qatar's involvement assists its strategic image as a reliable go-between: by demonstrating that it can open doors to armed non-state actors, Doha signals utility to major powers and regional states seeking leverage over difficult interlocutors (Times of Israel, 2025). Therefore, Qatar's mediation in the Gaza context exemplifies a powerful, pragmatic small-state diplomacy.

Qatar's diplomatic role in the Israel– Hamas conflict has been built upon its longstanding decision to host Hamas's political leadership in Doha, a move widely recognized as giving Qatar unique access to key Palestinian decision-makers during periods when other channels of communication are closed. As Doha News reports, Qatari officials have repeatedly confirmed that Hamas's political office remains in the country and continues to function as a hub for communication, even when mediation efforts were temporarily paused (Doha News, 2024). This institutional arrangement distinguishes Qatar from other regional actors and positions it as one of the few states able to maintain direct dialogue with Hamas during high-intensity conflict. Analysts stress that Qatar's hosting of Hamas is not ideological alignment but a pragmatic diplomatic choice, enabling channels of negotiation that contribute to regional crisis management (Al Jazeera, 2024).

Building on this access, Qatar conducted a combination of back-channel diplomacy, shuttle diplomacy, and high-level negotiations during the 2023–2025 Gaza war. According to *The Times of Israel*, the eventual 2025 ceasefire and hostage-release framework were the result of intensive mediation involving Qatar, Egypt, and the United States, who coordinated to negotiate phased releases, humanitarian corridors, and partial Israeli withdrawals (The Times of Israel, 2025a). These negotiations were largely confidential, consistent with the logic of shuttle diplomacy, where mediators move rapidly between parties to refine proposals and sustain momentum. Qatar's diplomatic posture quiet negotiation rather than public declarations reflected the sensitivities of domestic politics in Israel, Gaza, and neighboring states, as well as the need to prevent political backlash that could jeopardize fragile talks.

Qatar also emphasized its neutrality and independence throughout the mediation process. As reported by Al Jazeera, Qatari diplomatic sources insisted that “Doha would not allow interference from any party that would affect the integrity of its role,” even amid pressures from regional powers and Western governments (Al Jazeera, 2024). This claim was further demonstrated when Qatar temporarily suspended mediation in late 2024, citing the lack of “commitment and seriousness” from the warring parties (Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024).

The Role of Egypt in the Mediation

The recurring cycles of conflict between Israel and Palestinian actors particularly in the Gaza Strip have repeatedly drawn in regional mediators, among whom Egypt has played one of the most consequential roles. As a neighbouring state with shared borders, historical involvement with Palestinian politics, and formal diplomatic ties with Israel, Egypt occupies a strategic position that

enables both direct and indirect engagement. This explores Egypt's mediation role across four interlinked dimensions discussed below.

Egypt has long held a central place on conflict mediation in the Middle East, particularly regarding the Israeli–Palestinian arena. Its role as mediator is deeply rooted in its geopolitical position, diplomatic history, and security interests. As noted by Shlaim (2014), Egypt's peace treaty with Israel in 1979 not only reconfigured regional alignments but also positioned Cairo as a unique intermediary with simultaneous credibility among Arab states and access to Israeli decision-makers. Subsequent literature has emphasized how these structural advantages shaped Egypt's repeated engagement in Gaza-related conflicts, particularly in 2008–09, 2012, 2014, 2021, and most recently the 2023–2025 conflict. According to Dunne (2020), Egypt's mediation efforts operate at the intersection of regional diplomacy, intelligence coordination, and humanitarian logistics, making it indispensable to ceasefire engineering in Gaza.

A substantial body of research links Egypt's mediation role to its geographic proximity and border governance. Gaza shares its only non-Israeli border with Egypt, giving Cairo control over the Rafah crossing; an essential site for the flow of humanitarian aid, medical evacuations, and limited civilian movement. As Gerges (2013) argues, territorial contiguity provides Egypt with leverage unavailable to other mediators: by regulating Rafah, Cairo can influence Hamas's incentives, Israel's military calculus, and international humanitarian access. Studies of the 2014 Gaza war note that Egypt's management of Rafah significantly shaped civilian outcomes and humanitarian corridors during escalations (Berti & Guzansky, 2015).

Egypt's security-state capacity also features prominently in academic analyses. Numerous scholars highlight the centrality of Egypt's General Intelligence Service (GIS) in facilitating indirect negotiations between Israel and Hamas. Khatib (2016) explains that Egypt possesses longstanding intelligence channels with Palestinian factions dating back to the 1990s, enabling it to act as a credible broker in ceasefire talks and hostage-exchange negotiations. During the 2012 and 2014 conflicts, intelligence-led mediation allowed Cairo to conduct shuttle diplomacy when direct communication between the conflict parties was impossible (Brown, 2017). This mechanism has continued into the 2023–2025 war, where Egypt's intelligence networks remained critical for coordinating temporary truces and humanitarian pauses (Sayigh, 2024).

Scholarly work also underscores Egypt's regional legitimacy within the Arab world as a factor underpinning its mediation capacity. As Yahya (2011) notes, Egypt historically viewed itself as a guardian of Palestinian national aspirations, a narrative that reinforces its diplomatic legitimacy among Arab publics and elites. Although its regional status has fluctuated particularly after the political upheavals of 2011, Egypt retains symbolic authority that countries such as Jordan, Turkey, or the UAE cannot fully replicate in Gaza-related diplomacy. This legitimacy is especially relevant because Hamas often rejects Western-led mediation; therefore, mediators with Arab identities and political capital become more acceptable interlocutors (Hilal, 2015).

Despite these recognized strengths, literature is equally clear about the limitations and contradictions of Egypt's role. Many scholars refer to Egypt as an “embedded mediator,” meaning its proximity and vested interests simultaneously enhance and constrain its ability to mediate (Yefet, 2022). Embedded mediators, according to Zartman (2008), Arowona and Abdulkadir

(2024), are never fully neutral: they seek outcomes that protect their own national interests. In the Egyptian case, these interests include preventing spillover into Sinai, avoiding mass refugee inflows, containing Hamas's influence within Egypt, limiting the operational reach of jihadist networks, and maintaining its strategic relationship with Israel and the United States. These priorities can compromise Cairo's perceived impartiality and lead Palestinian actors, especially in Gaza, to question Egypt's motivations (Khalil, 2019).

A related body of literature critiques Egypt's border and security policies as undermining its humanitarian responsibilities. Fadel (2018) notes that while Egypt sometimes opens Rafah to facilitate humanitarian assistance; it also enforces strict border closures and periodically destroys the underground tunnels used for smuggling goods into Gaza. While justified by Egypt as counterterrorism measures in Sinai, these policies can worsen humanitarian conditions in Gaza and reduce Cairo's local legitimacy. Palestinian public opinion surveys often demonstrate ambivalence toward Egypt's role, acknowledging its diplomatic importance but criticizing its cooperation with Israel on border restrictions (Shikaki, 2020).

Scholars debate Egypt's diplomatic autonomy. Some argue that Egypt's mediation is constrained by its alignment with U.S. and Israeli security priorities, limiting its ability to pressure Israel meaningfully (Barnett, 2021). Others contend that Egypt skillfully balances great-power diplomacy with regional politics, positioning itself as indispensable to Washington while maintaining dialogue with Hamas and other non-state actors (Ahram, 2019). This duality reinforces its value as a mediator but also constrains the scope of the political solutions it can pursue

In the course of the 2023–2025 Gaza war, Egypt has emerged as a central mediator working in close coordination with Qatar and external powers (notably the United States). According to a 2025 statement by Egypt's foreign ministry, Egypt and Qatar continue their “intensive efforts” with the aim of reviving a 60-day ceasefire, facilitating humanitarian aid entry and prisoner/hostage exchanges, as well as stabilizing the situation in Gaza. This ongoing, coordinated mediation underscores both Egypt's commitment to crisis de-escalation and its recognition of the war's humanitarian urgency.

An immediate tactical element of Egypt's strategy has been the establishment of an operations room to oversee implementation of ceasefire agreements. Shortly after the January 2025 ceasefire accord was announced. Egypt formally set up this joint operations centre to monitor hostage and prisoner exchanges, humanitarian aid deliveries, and the movement of people including supervising the reopening of the Rafah border crossing between Gaza and Egypt. The operations room reflects a recognition that securing an agreement is only one part; ensuring compliance and delivery is equally critical. It also demonstrates Egypt's dual role as mediator and logistical facilitator not just negotiating ceasefires but helping to make them operative in practice.

However, Egypt's 2023–2025 mediation strategy also reveals underlying tensions and constraints, while border control and humanitarian access give Cairo real influence, they also expose it to high operational and political risk. Managing the Rafah crossing especially in a war-torn context requires balancing humanitarian imperatives with national security concerns. Critics argue that strict border-security regimes and control over aid and movement may undermine humanitarian

impact or fuel local resentment if civilians perceive restrictions or delays as politicized. This tension between mediation and securitization has long been identified by scholars of conflict governance and refugee-flows (Fadel, 2018). In the contemporary Gaza context, such balancing acts are politically delicate and operationally challenging.

Egypt's capacity to mediate in the Israel–Palestine conflict derives from multiple structural, political, and diplomatic pillars. Geographically, Egypt shares the Rafah border crossing with the Gaza Strip, giving it *de facto* control over one of the few points of entry and exit for people, goods, and humanitarian aid (Berti & Guzansky, 2015). This role renders Cairo a critical gatekeeper: its policies can influence the movement of refugees, facilitate humanitarian access, and manage the inflow of essential supplies during escalations, as observed during the 2023–2025 Gaza war (Anadolu, 2025). By controlling the border, Egypt can impose temporary restrictions or openings in coordination with ceasefire agreements, effectively using infrastructure as both a security and diplomatic tool.

A second pillar of Egypt's leverage is its long-standing diplomatic relationship with Israel. Since the 1979 Egypt–Israel peace treaty, Cairo has maintained formal diplomatic relations and cooperative security arrangements with Tel Aviv, providing channels for back-channel communications, coordination, and negotiation (Khatib, 2016). During Gaza conflicts, Egyptian authorities have frequently acted as intermediaries to relay proposals, warnings, or ceasefire terms between Israel and Palestinian factions, thereby enhancing both parties' confidence in mediation outcomes. Scholars note that Egypt's credibility with Israel as a recognized and treaty-compliant state enables it to influence Israel's decision-making more effectively than other regional actors without formal diplomatic ties (Berti, 2016).

Third, Egypt possesses deep contacts with Palestinian factions, including Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and representatives of the Palestinian Authority. Historically, Cairo has cultivated relationships with Hamas leaders, partly stemming from its proximity and intelligence networks (Khalil, 2019). These ties allow Egypt to negotiate with multiple stakeholders in Gaza, increasing the likelihood of reaching at least temporary agreements. Egypt's dual access to Israel and Palestinian groups makes it one of the few credible mediators capable of bridging both sides in an asymmetrical conflict environment characterized by mistrust, security concerns, and political fragmentation (Sayigh, 2024).

This unique positioning, however, is not without constraints. Scholars of conflict mediation emphasize that Egypt's leverage is contingent and context-specific, requiring careful balancing of competing interests. On the Palestinian side, some actors are wary of Egyptian motives, fearing that Cairo's security priorities or cooperation with Israel may compromise Palestinian autonomy or exacerbate political divisions (Hilal, 2015). On the regional level, Arab states may monitor Egypt closely, particularly regarding refugee flows, border security, and the broader political balance in the Middle East (Yahya, 2011). The literature further suggests that Egypt's leverage is inherently fragile and situational. While it can facilitate communication, negotiate ceasefires, and coordinate humanitarian interventions, structural constraints including political divisions within Palestinian factions, external pressures from other regional powers, and the asymmetric power balance between Israel and Gaza limit the sustainability of any mediation effort (Yefet, 2022).

Qatar and Egypt's Mediation Roles

The 2023–2025 Gaza conflict underscored the centrality of regional actors in mediating high intensity, asymmetrical conflicts. Among these actors, Qatar and Egypt have played particularly prominent roles, leveraging distinctive diplomatic strategies, historical relationships, and regional influence to broker ceasefires, facilitate humanitarian access, and engage in hostage and prisoner negotiations. While both states share overlapping goals namely, the de-escalation of hostilities, civilian protection, and maintaining regional stability; their approaches, capacities, and geopolitical calculations reveal both convergence and divergence. Examining the interplay between these two mediators provides critical insights into the complexities of regional diplomacy, the politics of mediation, and the broader implications of their engagement for the Middle East and international actors involved.

Qatar and Egypt, as primary mediators in the 2023–2025 Gaza conflict, demonstrate both convergence and divergence in their approaches, reflecting overlapping goals as well as distinctive strategic, historical, and political contexts. In terms of convergence, both states share a common interest in mitigating humanitarian suffering, maintaining regional stability, and preventing conflict escalation. They have coordinated efforts to establish temporary ceasefires, humanitarian corridors, and emergency relief delivery for civilians trapped in Gaza (Anadolu, 2025). This coordination is manifested through joint operations rooms, shuttle diplomacy, and liaison with external powers, including the United States and the Arab League, which allows them to present a unified front in negotiations (Doha News, 2025). Scholars argue that such coordination not only maximizes credibility with conflict parties but also reduces the risk of miscommunication and strategic misunderstandings that could derail agreements (Barnett, 2021). In practice, convergence in objectives has enabled both states to achieve tangible outcomes such as multi-week ceasefires, humanitarian relief distribution, and preliminary discussions on post-conflict governance structures.

Despite these convergences, divergences in mediation approaches are pronounced due to differences in historical relationships, strategic priorities, and available leverage. Qatar's longstanding relationship with Hamas through the hosting of its political bureau in Doha provides it with direct and privileged access to Palestinian decision-makers, a channel unavailable to Egypt (Al Jazeera, 2025). This relationship allows Qatar to engage in back-channel diplomacy, negotiate sensitive agreements discreetly, and maintain a perception of neutrality while exercising significant influence over Hamas' political calculations (Roberts, 2017). The Qatari approach, therefore, emphasizes soft power projection: humanitarian support, financial aid, and diplomatic recognition are leveraged alongside mediation to reinforce its image as a neutral yet influential actor in regional conflicts (Ulrichsen, 2015).

In contrast, Egypt's mediation strategy relies heavily on institutional and geographical leverage. Cairo leverages its control of the Rafah border crossing, its intelligence networks, and formal diplomatic relations with Israel to influence both security outcomes and political negotiations (Berti, 2016). By combining security capacity with diplomatic outreach, Egypt can facilitate coordination between Israel, Palestinian authorities, and the broader Arab League framework, positioning itself as a central actor capable of bridging gaps between state and non-state parties (Sayigh, 2024). This dual role as both a practical security gatekeeper and a political mediator

underscores the structural differences between Egypt and Qatar: whereas Qatar's leverage is relational and network-based, Egypt's is spatially and institutionally anchored.

The relationship between Qatar and Egypt in mediating the Israel–Palestine conflict is deeply influenced by broader regional power dynamics in the Middle East. Scholars of Gulf politics and regional security argue that mediation efforts by these states cannot be understood in isolation from historical competition for influence, ideological orientation, and alignment with political actors (Ulrichsen, 2015). Qatar's foreign policy has been characterized by strategic independence, extensive engagement with non-state actors, and support for Islamist political movements across the region, including Hamas. Such a posture has occasionally conflicted with Egypt's more state-centric, security-focused approach, which prioritizes territorial integrity, control over borders, and formal diplomatic relations with Israel and other Arab states (Berti, 2016). During the 2010s, tensions between Cairo and Doha emerged clearly over Qatar's support for political Islamist groups, including the Muslim Brotherhood, which Egypt viewed as a direct threat to its domestic and regional interests (Ulrichsen, 2015). This historical context of mistrust shapes contemporary coordination, creating a delicate balance between cooperation and competition in mediation initiatives.

Despite these underlying tensions, the exigencies of the 2023–2025 Gaza war have fostered pragmatic collaboration between the two states. The humanitarian and political urgency of the conflict necessitated unified action, compelling both Qatar and Egypt to coordinate ceasefire negotiations, humanitarian relief operations, and hostage/prisoner exchange efforts (AA News, 2025). Public statements by both governments emphasized a shared commitment to mediation objectives, including the reduction of civilian suffering, temporary de-escalation, and facilitation of regional stability.

Nevertheless, Qatar–Egypt cooperation is not devoid of strategic rivalry. Divergent priorities often shape negotiation strategies and operational choices. Qatar, leveraging its unique relationship with Hamas, frequently prioritizes approaches that preserve the political autonomy and legitimacy of the Palestinian factions it engages with, particularly Hamas' political bureau (Roberts, 2017). In contrast, Egypt's strategic calculus emphasizes Israel's security requirements, border control, and the maintenance of regional stability, which can at times lead to differing perspectives on the sequencing, timing, or conditionality of ceasefire agreements and humanitarian interventions (Sayigh, 2024).

The mediation roles of Qatar and Egypt during the 2023–2025 Gaza conflict provide an illustrative case of regional conflict management in asymmetrical warfare, characterized by entrenched distrust, power imbalances, and humanitarian crises. Empirical assessments suggest that their efforts have yielded measurable but constrained outcomes. Coordination between the two states enabled the negotiation of multi-week ceasefires, hostage and prisoner exchanges, and the establishment of humanitarian corridors that allowed aid to reach civilian populations in Gaza (Anadolu, 2025). These accomplishments, while temporary, represent significant successes in a conflict marked by high intensity violence, fragmented leadership, and a breakdown of formal communication channels between Israel and Palestinian factions (Barnett, 2021).

The effectiveness of Qatar and Egypt's mediation, however, remains circumscribed by structural and political limitations inherent to the conflict. Despite successfully negotiating temporary ceasefires, renewed hostilities frequently followed these agreements, illustrating the fragility of mediated outcomes in the absence of long-term political settlements (Sayigh, 2024). Analysts attribute this fragility to several factors. First, the political fragmentation of Palestinian factions, including the divide between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority, complicates the implementation of ceasefires and generates conflicting commitments on the ground (Khalil, 2019).

Qatar and Egypt's diplomatic efforts in the 2023–2025 Gaza conflict have had important regional effects by helping to reduce the risks of spillover into neighboring countries such as Israel, Egypt, and Jordan. Through temporary ceasefires, coordination of humanitarian aid, and management of refugee movements, both countries have helped prevent further instability in an already fragile region. Egypt's control of the Rafah crossing has allowed it to regulate border movement and humanitarian access, while Qatar's engagement with Palestinian authorities has helped ensure that aid reaches those in need. Together, these actions have reduced pressure on neighboring states' security systems and infrastructure and limited the chances of wider regional disruption. (Sayigh, 2024).

Globally, the mediation roles of Qatar and Egypt highlight the growing importance of regional powers in conflict resolution. International actors such as the United States, the European Union, and the United Nations increasingly rely on these countries because of their proximity, political connections, and local knowledge. Qatar uses its financial strength and neutral position to maintain communication with key actors, while Egypt provides stability through its institutional capacity and diplomatic experience. Their involvement has strengthened the role of regional voices in global peace discussions and set an example of how neighboring states can play a central role in managing complex conflicts through a combination of diplomacy, humanitarian coordination, and strategic influence (Barnett, 2021).

Conclusion

The Qatar–Egypt experience demonstrates the strategic value and limitations of regional mediation in protracted, asymmetrical conflicts. Their interventions mitigate immediate humanitarian crises and offer models for regional-global collaboration but must be complemented by structural political solutions and robust coordination to achieve sustainable peace. The case underscores that effective conflict mediation in the Middle East depends on integrating local expertise, regional leverage, and international support, providing a framework for future diplomatic initiatives in Gaza and other high-intensity conflict zones.

Recommendations

Based on the analysis of Qatar and Egypt's mediation, several policy recommendations emerge:

1. Regional mediators should work closely with the UN and humanitarian agencies to ensure that ceasefires are supported with enough resources and lead to lasting peace.

2. Mediation should go beyond stopping violence and address deeper issues such as governance, refugee rights, and territorial disputes, while involving local communities.
3. Mediators must build trust, remain neutral, and protect their reputation when dealing with unequal and sensitive conflicts.
4. The Middle East should establish formal, multi-country mediation frameworks to handle crises more effectively instead of relying on ad hoc efforts by individual states.
5. There should be consistent evaluation of ceasefires, humanitarian actions, and reconstruction plans to learn what works and improve future peace efforts.

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