

**COMPETITION VS. COOPERATION IN MULTILATERAL MEDIATION-
EXPLORING THE TRANSITION IN EGYPT AND QATAR'S MEDIATION
TACTICS IN THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT**

By

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Abstract

In recent decades, multilateral mediation has emerged as a key strategy in resolving ethnonational conflicts. However, competition among mediators within the same mediation process can undermine these efforts, leading to the need for a deeper understanding of the dynamics of multilateral mediation. This thesis aims to address a gap in multilateral mediation literature by arguing that mediators' status and role rejection and acceptance affect mediators' coordination. Applying role theory, I explore Egypt and Qatar's mediation strategies in the Gaza Wars of 2008-2009 and 2023-2024. Methodologically, this research uses a longitudinal analysis within the Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD) framework. To trace changes in the mediators' roles and statuses over time, my sources consist of qualitative data including government statements, media reports, and indices such as the Composite Index of National Capability (CINC) as well as soft power indices. I find that Egypt and Qatar's transition from competitive to cooperative multilateral mediation is linked to shifts in their statuses and role socialization. In 2008-2009, significant disparities in their perceived status and Egypt's rejection of Qatar's mediator role led to competition. By 2023-2024, however, both nations recognized each other's status as equal, leading to a cooperative multilateral mediation. This shift highlights the importance of role perceptions and status in achieving cooperative multilateral mediation.

Keywords: *Multilateral mediation, Role theory, Mediation strategies, Israeli-Palestinian conflict*

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Introduction

The methods of peaceful settlement of ethnonational conflict are numerous. Multilateral mediation has emerged as a prominent strategy for addressing complex disputes involving multiple parties. (e.g., Camp David Accords, Belfast Agreement, Oslo accords, Dayton agreement, the Comprehensive Cambodian Peace Agreements) In this approach, mediators coordinate their efforts, pooling resources and expertise to facilitate dialogue and negotiation between conflicting parties. However, despite the widespread use of multilateral mediation, a critical issue remains largely unexplored: the potential for conflict between mediators within a single mediation process. While the assumption is that multiple mediators coordinate their actions effectively, the reality often deviates from this ideal. Competing interests, divergent strategies, and power dynamics among mediators can lead to discord and dysfunction within a single mediation, undermining the prospects for conflict resolution and exacerbating tensions between the parties involved.

This thesis aims to examine the intriguing phenomenon of the transition from competitive to cooperative mediation in conflict resolution. Specifically, it seeks to shed light on the mechanism that alters mediators' competitive behavior in a single conflict. First, I examine why Egypt and Qatar competed in mediating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict during the Gaza war in 2008-2009 but cooperated in the latest iteration of the conflict beginning in 2023. These cases provide a consistent framework for analyzing the shifts in their mediation strategies and the resulting different outcomes despite the involvement of the same mediators. This study primarily focuses on regional power mediators to explain how regional actors interact with other allies, represent themselves, and affect each other's mediation behavior. The reason for this focus is that the role of regional mediators is an understudied topic in the field of conflict management studies. Thus, I do not examine great power mediators such as the United States and the United Kingdom.

To explain now we get from competitive to cooperative multilateral mediation, this study employs role theory as a central analytical framework. Role theory is a social psychological framework that holds that actors differentiate into various roles during group tasks, influencing their behavior and interactions (Holsti 1970, 237). Role theory provides a robust framework for understanding how states and their leaders conceptualize and perform their roles in international relations. In foreign policy analysis, role theory examines the expectations, behaviors, and interactions associated with various roles that states adopt. These roles are influenced by internal perceptions, external expectations, and the social structure of the international system. By developing a role theory of multilateral mediation, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of a transition of mediators' status that underpins mediators' conflict management behavior and show how these roles affect the level of coordination between mediators of the same conflict.

Applying the theoretical framework to the mediators' behavioral transition in the cases of Egypt and Qatar in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, I advance three hypotheses: 1) Mediators' status hierarchy has changed over time, influencing their behavior. 2) Mediators are more likely to adopt cooperative mediation strategies when they perceive themselves as having equal status. 3) When mediators' chosen roles are deemed appropriate by socializers, they are more likely to accept and align with these roles.

The methodological approach used in the thesis is a longitudinal analysis using a Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD). I compare the Gaza War in 2008-2009 with the Gaza War in 2023-2024 to understand the drivers of competitive versus cooperative mediation dynamics. To test the hypotheses in the case study, I apply longitudinal analysis by quantizing qualitative data, and coding government statements and analyzing academic articles and media reports to track the shifts in Egypt and Qatar's statuses of mediation behaviors. Through empirical analysis and

theoretical exploration, this research fills a gap in multilateral mediation literature by providing insights into the drivers of coordination in multilateral mediations.

Literature review

Mediation stands as one of the fundamental methods for managing ethnonational conflicts (United Nations 2022, 5). It is often characterized as a form of assisted negotiation, in which an external actor enters the peacemaking process to influence and alter the character of relations between the conflicting sides (Vuković 2016, 10; Bercovitch and Jackson 2009). This process is voluntary, non-coercive, and legally non-binding, making it especially practical in the complex dynamics of international relations, where preserving actors' independence and autonomy is crucial (Vuković 2016, 11; Bercovitch 2005). In terms of mediators in traditional multilateral mediation, Moore (1986, 8–9) states that mediation ought to be viewed as an extension of the negotiation phase, where a third party that is deemed “acceptable, impartial, and neutral,” and lacks authoritative power, aids the conflicting parties in achieving a mutually agreeable resolution.

The traditional views on mediation face challenges in the contemporary international landscape. Following the Cold War, new relations and institutions emerged, and issues such as terrorism, weapons proliferation, and ideological fanaticism have threatened the international relations system (Bercovitch 2003, 163). Hence, states take on the role of mediators for various reasons, such as building a reputation as peacemakers and increasing their influence in the resolution of a dispute. This can involve altering an unfavorable situation or preserving a favorable status quo (Melin 2013, 80).

In recent decades, the proliferation of ethnonational conflicts with increased complexity has necessitated mediation by multiple actors, including international organizations, regional entities, and NGOs. Multilateral mediation, a term coined by Saadia Touval in 1989, has emerged as a crucial tool in the realm of international conflict resolution, particularly in addressing contemporary complex and protracted conflicts. The increasing use of mediation for conflict

management, along with the recent increase in potential mediators, has sparked a growing academic interest in studying the processes and dynamics of multiparty mediation (Vuković 2014, 74). Touval (1989) asserted that although contemporary international problems have come to affect the interests of several states, and governments have resorted to multilateral processes, few studies have focused on multiparty negotiation. Multilateral negotiation typically involves three or more parties negotiating simultaneously over multiple issues to reach a consensus acceptable to all (Touval 1989, 159). In bilateral negotiations, mediators are usually external and need to use leverage to be accepted, altering the negotiation structure, while in multilateral settings, mediators are often participants in the negotiation, which means they do not change the structure or face issues of acceptance (Touval 1989, 167). Multiple mediators usually operate from various perspectives, with negotiation chairs, representatives, and rapporteurs blending mediation with their official roles, making their involvement generally acceptable (Touval 1989, 167).

Touval (1989) claims that one of the challenges to establishing a theory of multilateral mediation lies in the inadequacy of key concepts typically used in bilateral negotiation—such as negotiation-bargaining, information processing, and decision-making—to describe multilateral negotiation. This is because multilateral negotiation takes place among different kinds of actors, in different contexts, and within a complex system (Touval 1989, 159). To identify the conditions for its success, it is crucial to recognize the variety of structures, sub-structures, and processes that exist in multiparty negotiation (Touval 1989, 159). The author underscores three additional crucial concepts for analyzing multilateral mediation: coalition formation, differentiation of interests, and differentiation of roles. These concepts are fundamental to contemporary multilateral mediation, as they go beyond bilateral bargaining and encompass mediation within triangular structures, coalition formation, and the adoption of different roles by various actors (Touval 1989, 171). Touval (1989) provides insights into the elements necessary for understanding multilateral

mediation as compared to bilateral mediation. While he acknowledges that mediators often form coalitions to advance their interests in negotiation, his perspective is perhaps overly optimistic, as it assumes mediators primarily cooperate in resolving conflicts. He thus overlooks mediators' competitive interests in negotiation settings and the impact that divergent interests have on mediation outcomes.

Vuković (2016) however, does examine the significance of the interests of mediators and the necessity of aligning them. In his argument, multilateral mediation involves multiple external actors, various institutions, and ad hoc coalitions working together in the mediation process. In contrast to Touval's (1989) argument, Vuković (2016) focuses on the advantage of involving multiple actors with complementary roles. The author explores the idea of myopic rationality, where actors overlook the long-term benefits of mediator cooperation, instead prioritizing their short-term gains and trying to sway the outcome to their advantage. Some actors are unwilling to cooperate with others because their short-sightedness prevents them from seeing that they cannot go back to a point where not cooperating would have been more beneficial (Vuković 2016, 52). Such actors may utilize their biased position to influence one side in the conflict and disrupt other mediation efforts (Vuković 2016, 52).

Zartman and Touval (2010, 1) define mediator cooperation as “a situation where parties agree to work together to produce new gains for each of the participants that would be unavailable to them by unilateral action, at some cost.” Actors who choose to cooperate can influence the mediation process and bargain in favor of the party with whom they share unique ties. Despite the costs involved, cooperation leads to greater benefits through coordinated activities. Although there are significant advantages to mediator cooperation, the authors do not shed light on the factors that prevent mediators from embracing collaboration. They do not explain why some mediators choose to work independently rather than recognize the advantages of collaboration. In the realm of

multilateral mediation, several scholars, such as Touval (1989), Crocker et al. (2001), and Vuković (2016), argue that forming mediation coalitions and fostering cooperative relationships among mediators is mutually beneficial, as it improves the effectiveness of the mediation process. Touval (1989) asserts that coalitions form in the pre-negotiation phase as states realize that a coalition is more effective in influencing the interests of the conflicting parties compared to an individual state acting alone. This implies a dynamic where parties with competing interests combine their resources and capabilities to achieve shared benefits (Vuković 2016, 45). Cooperation becomes feasible when individuals believe that it would be less expensive to achieve their objectives through collaboration rather than pursuing them independently (Zartman and Touval 2010, 5).

Vuković (2016) observes that there are, however, unsuccessful cases of multiparty non-cooperation such as in 1990s Kosovo. Despite the involvement of the European Union, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, and Russia in the mediation process, they were unable to facilitate an agreement between Kosovo and Serbia (Vuković 2016, 122). This lack of success can be attributed to the absence of clearly formulated preferences on Russia's part, which prevented adequate coordination undermining their effectiveness (Vuković 2016, 125). The author posits that, even with changing ground realities and increasing external pressure, the involved parties might still be unable to cooperate effectively (Vuković 2016, 122). It is also important to consider that the nature of coordination may be influenced by the broader context of diplomatic relations as well as the strategic choices made by external actors (Vuković 2016, 8). Crocker, Hampson, and Aall (2001) also examine the complexities of multiparty mediation in conflict resolution efforts, emphasizing both the drawbacks and advantages of involving multiple actors in the mediation process. Multiparty mediation can rapidly enter a danger zone due to collective action problems, such as fragmentation and competition among mediators (Crocker, Hampson, and Aall 2001, 59). Even with a well-organized distribution of tasks and negotiation powers within a

multiparty mediation endeavor, alliances can only succeed if the management of less significant partners does not undermine the diplomatic effort (Crocker, Hampson, and Aall 2001, 59). However, Vuković (2016) and Crocker et al. (2001) do not discuss how mediators' interests might shift due to situational factors.

Despite the fact that multilateral mediation is widespread in the contemporary world, scholars have largely overlooked shifts in the potential for conflict among mediators themselves. For instance, during the Lebanese Civil War from 1975 to 1990, the conflict went through multiple stages and saw numerous unsuccessful mediation attempts by third party organizations, including the United Nations, the Arab League, the United States, and the European Union (Ghosn and Khoury 2011, 383). Eventually, the involvement of Saudi Arabia, Syria, and the U.S. demonstrated an alignment of interests, resulting in the successful negotiation of the Taif Agreement (Irani 2016). Another pertinent example is the Bosnian War (1992-1995), where multiple mediators, including the United Nations, NATO, the European Union, and individual states like the United States and Russia, were involved (Cousens and Cater 2001, 44–49). These efforts often led to conflicting strategies and objectives, which sometimes impeded the peace process rather than advancing it (Cousens and Cater 2001, 45). The Dayton Agreement, ultimately bringing an end to the war, was chiefly brokered by the United States, sidelining other international efforts and highlighting the difficulties of multilateral mediation. These examples illustrate that, despite the efforts of international mediators to facilitate a resolution, they were unable or reluctant to coordinate to reach an agreement. This underscores the necessity to re-examine the assumption that multiple mediators will tend to coordinate their actions in the interest of conflict resolution.

Puzzles in Multilateral Mediation in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

In the contemporary era, conflict mediation has expanded beyond the exclusive purview of major powers. Regional and neighboring countries have become increasingly involved in mediation efforts. Small states may utilize mediation opportunities to enhance their international reputation, status, and influence within the region. This is due to their broader strategic objectives, which revolve around “state branding” tactics aimed at bolstering their soft power or cultural sway (Barakat 2014, 10).

In the turbulent landscape of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, peace has remained an elusive dream despite three decades of international endeavors since the Oslo Accords of 1993. This enduring struggle, characterized by its complexity and protracted nature, has witnessed numerous attempts at mediation and diplomacy by various third party actors. These mediators, ranging from international organizations to individual states, play a pivotal role in shaping the negotiation dynamics and influencing the prospects for peace.

The empirical puzzle of inter-mediator conflict is exemplified by two periods of multilateral mediation during the Gaza war in 2008-2009 and 2023-2024. Egypt, as a regional mediator, has historically played a central role in Arab-Israeli relations such as the Camp David Accords in 1978. During the Gaza War (2008-2009), Egypt emerged as the primary mediator and was engaged in behind-the-scenes negotiations on the Hamas¹-Israel and Hamas-Fatah² issues since Hamas won the Palestinian elections in 2006 (Kostiner and Mueller 2010, 1). In contrast,

¹ Hamas was established in 1987 by the Muslim Brotherhood during the initial Palestinian Intifada. Hamas is designated a terrorist organization by Israel, the United States, the European Union, Britain, Canada, and Japan. Hamas characterizes its armed activities as resistance against Israeli occupation (Reuters 2024).

² Palestinian National Liberation Movement is a political and military organization of Arab Palestinians (Britannica 2024a).

Qatar, a small but wealthy Gulf state, has played a unique diplomatic role in the Middle East as a peace broker and regional moderator. Qatar has endeavored to reconcile its disparate interests by engaging in diplomatic mediation in several international conflicts, including those in Yemen, Lebanon, Sudan, Libya, Djibouti, and Eritrea (Zweiri and Al Qawasmi 2021, 4:76). Additionally, it has utilized its unique position as a mediator between Israel and Hamas. Although it does not share a border with Israel or Palestine, it has been actively involved in the dispute between Israel and Palestine since the early 2000s (Cooper and Momani 2011, 119). Its foreign policy has been characterized by an ambitious pursuit of a role as an influenced broker in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. (e.g. Lebanon, Yemen, Iraq, Libya) Both Egypt and Qatar have thus been interested in this conflict for decades, which has influenced their mediation strategies.

The puzzle I investigate is why there was conflict between the two during the Gaza War of 2008-2009, whereas there was cooperation between Egypt and Qatar in recent negotiations following the Hamas attack in 2023. During the Gaza War in 2008, Egypt assumed the leading role of mediating between Israel and Hamas, as documented by Kostiner and Mueller (2010, 211). Meanwhile, Qatar attempted to facilitate reconciliation between Israel and Hamas amidst regional tension (Cooper and Momani 2011, 121). In a statement released in 2011, Shaikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, the emir of Qatar from 1995 until 2013, asserted that “Qatar is open to assisting Israel in any attempt to engage in dialogue with any Arab state or organization.” (Cooper and Momani 2011, 121; Rabid 2008). This was because negotiations over a ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas had reached an impasse in Cairo in January 2009 (Rabi 2009, 458). Qatar sought to challenge Egypt's position by advocating for an Arab summit to coordinate efforts aimed at halting the conflict (Hroub 2012, 36). In response, Egypt and Saudi Arabia withheld their support for the Qatari summit, asserting that the Gaza matter should be addressed within the framework of an economic summit that had already been scheduled to convene in Kuwait on

January 17, 2009 (Rabi 2009, 458). Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak was disinclined to demonstrate Arab unity because of Qatar's ambition to establish a significant regional position at the expense of Egypt (Kostiner and Mueller 2014, 221). Consequently, Egypt rejected Qatari participation in the mediation of the Gaza War in 2009. The Qatari mediation attempt ultimately failed, yet it left its presence in international society. On October 7, 2023, a new Gaza war was initiated by Hamas attacks on Israel. Since the Hamas attack in 2023, two of the key mediators, Egypt and Qatar, have actively coordinated to secure the release of Israeli hostages and Palestinians imprisoned in Israel and to establish a ceasefire agreement between the parties. On October 22, 2023, Egypt and Qatar reached a deal to implement a humanitarian truce in Gaza (Egypt State Information Service 2023c). On the following day, they resulted in the release of two hostages to the Red Cross (Knell and Gritten 2023).

In short, in the mediation processes in the Gaza War in 2008-2009, the regional brokers, Egypt and Qatar, did not cooperate in the process but rather confronted each other. Each mediator sought to be the major power broker in the region, which I refer to as “competitive mediation”. Despite the contributions of scholars such as Cooper and Momani (2011), Kostiner and Mueller (2010), Barakat (2012), and Rabi (2009) to the literature on the roles, strategies, and foreign policies of the mediators, none of them helps us understand the shifting mediation behavior of Egypt and Qatar. This begs the question: how can we understand this phenomenon? Why do we see competitive versus cooperative mediation, in the same conflict with the same mediators at different points in time? To comprehend the shifts between competition and cooperation between Egypt and Qatar, it is necessary to examine various factors that affect the mediators’ behavior. According to Bercovitch and Houston (2000, 174), a mediator's actions are influenced by their perceived role or purpose, along with the resources and methods at their disposal within the particular context of the dispute. The occurrence of regime changes within Egypt and Qatar, shifts

in mediation approaches, changes in regional roles and context, and fluctuations in state status between 2008 and 2023 are all factors that could influence mediators' behavior. Such transformations could potentially impact the mediation strategies of these actors and their relationships with other regional and international mediators. By analyzing how these factors might shape the behavior of mediators, insights into the complex interplay between mediators' interests and global influences in conflict resolution processes can be revealed. This case study presents a unique opportunity to investigate why mediators alternate between cooperation and competition in the same ethnonationalist conflict at different points in time.

Chapter I: Theoretical Framework

This chapter presents a theoretical framework to address the puzzle of competitive versus cooperative multilateral mediations in a conflict resolution process. First, it explores the application of role theory and national role conception (Holsti 1970, Wish 1980, Thies 2009, 2012) in International Relations, focusing on status and behavior. Second, by developing a role theoretic argument, I predict that status and role socialization explain shifts in inter-mediation conflict.

1.1 Role Theory in International Relations

Role differentiation is critical to the success of multilateral mediation. Mediators expend resources not only to resolve disputes but also to pursue their interests (Vuković 2016, 64; Greig 2005). Depending on their capacities and readiness to cooperate in such an endeavor, mediators may join the process at different stages and assume various roles, each of which can significantly influence the outcome (Vuković 2016). For many actors, international mediation serves as a strategic foreign policy instrument, allowing them to advance their interests with minimal opposition (Touval 1992). Thus, to fully understand the mediators' roles, it is essential to examine their foreign policy behaviors in the context of conflict mediation.

Role theory, introduced by K. J. Holsti in 1970, explores national role conceptions, which refer to the duties or special responsibilities that governments perceive for themselves in their interactions with other states within specific regions or cross-cutting subsystems, such as international communist movements (Holsti 1970, 261). The concept of roles is well-established in sociology and social psychology, with numerous empirical studies demonstrating how role expectations influence behavior (Holsti 1970, 237). Holsti (1970, 238; Wahlke 1962, 8-9) defines role theory as a set of consistent behavioral expectations believed to apply to all

individuals occupying the same position within a given context. Individuals recognize these norms and adjust their behavior to align with them to some extent (Holsti 1970, 238; Wahlke 1962, 8-9).

Thies (2009) highlights the potential of role theory in contributing to foreign policy analysis. He argues that role theory provides a comprehensive vocabulary for categorizing the beliefs, images, and identities that individuals and groups develop for themselves and others, as well as the processes and structures governing their deployment in specific situations (Thies 2009, 2). Organizationally, role theory provides analysts with a framework to examine different levels of analysis—individual, state, and system—which are commonly employed in foreign policy studies (Thies 2009, 3). It accomplishes this by employing a process-oriented approach that links agents and structures, thereby bridging these levels (Thies 2009, 3). Thus, role theory can be applied to states.

1.2 Role and Status

Holsti (1970) distinguishes between statuses, roles, and behavior. Roles encompass both an individual's social position within a group and the meaning of that social category as conferred by others (Elgström and Smith 2006, 5; Thies 2010, 2-3). Citing Ralph Linton, Holsti (1970, 239) argues that a role embodies the dynamic component of status. “Role theorists define status as a location in the social structure defined by expectations for performance by an incumbent... The status dimension is correlated with legitimate power and social esteem.” (Wish 1980, 536; Sarbin and Allen 1968, 551-552). When an individual occupies a socially assigned status and enacts the associated rights and duties, they are performing a role (Holsti 1970; Linton 1936, 114). Status offers a broad evaluation of a nation's standing in the global arena, potentially shaping policymakers' perceptions of appropriate international priorities or responsibilities, which is why status is variable and sporadic (Holsti 1970, 244). Thus, status

and role are strongly interconnected, but status comes before, of helps to determine, the roles a state may enact.

Wish (1980, 536) identifies several variables for classifying national role conceptions, arguing that the perception of status, related to power and influence, is a critical aspect. This suggests that an actor's status within a social structure shapes their role conception and subsequent behavior. Conversely, Thies (2009, 12) posits that status is a dimension of social identity within role theory. Status encompasses a position in a social structure with associated duties, rights, and legitimate power or authority, implicating several normative expectations regarding the proper enactment of the role by the occupant (Thies 2009, 12). Therefore, role theory suggests that both the position and the norms and expectations projected onto the position influence human behavior.

1.3 Role and Behavior

Beyond the interconnection between status and role, role theory also emphasizes the relationship between role and behavior. Holsti (1970) claims that roles are associated with certain rights, obligations, and expected behaviors. When an actor occupies a specific role, they are expected to behave in accordance with the norms and expectations associated with that role (Holsti 1970, 239). Thies (2010, 23) further elaborates that “roles are defined by shared understandings about appropriate behavior” within a certain social context. This perspective underscores that roles not only define an individual or entity's place within a given structure but also prescribe the manner in which they are expected to function within that role. It's not merely a matter of occupying a position; it entails a set of responsibilities and behavioral patterns that are culturally and socially constructed (Holsti 1970, 242). Therefore, individuals or entities are not passive recipients of roles but actively engage in role enactment, adhering to or deviating from established norms based on various factors such as context, culture, and personal beliefs

(Holsti 1970, 243).

1.4 Role and Foreign Policy Behaviors

Holsti (1970, 243) expands role theory to the state level, suggesting that foreign policy decisions and actions (role performances) are influenced by policymakers' role conceptions, domestic requirements and pressures, and notable external events or trends. The external environment plays a crucial role in foreign policy, as policymakers' conceptions of their nation's orientations and tasks in the international system or subordinate regional systems drive role performance (Holsti 1970, 244). These role-based expectations significantly influence a state's foreign policy decisions and actions. Similarly, Aggestam (2006, 23) finds that role conceptions, influenced by both domestic and international factors, direct state behavior and influence foreign policy. Thus, role theory proposes that the behavior of an actor is determined by the roles they undertake, and the normative expectations linked to them.

Scholarly interest in role theory has resurged in recent decades. This resurgence began with Stephen G. Walker's 1987 publication "Role Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis," which laid the groundwork for further advances in the use of role theory in foreign policy and international relations (Thies 2009, 2). Walker (1987, 2) contends that role analysis concepts possess both multilevel descriptive power and multidimensional scope in their application to foreign policy behavior. The foreign policy roles identified by Holsti (1970) and Wish (1980) transcend the simplistic view of foreign policy as merely cooperative or conflictual (Walker 1987, 2).

Thies (2009), Walker (1979) and Wish (1980) discuss how role theory has been used in foreign policy analysis at the individual, state, and system-level. He argues that most foreign policy studies implicitly examine some aspect of the role location process, especially the initial stages when a leader selects a national role conception and attempts to enact it through foreign

policy behavior (Thies 2009, 12). Wish (1980) contributes to a deeper understanding of the relationship between nations' roles and behaviors by analyzing individual perceptions of the national role conception which are coded based on status, motivation, and issue area. These three dimensions of national role conceptions are believed to affect the state's international participation, hostility, independence of action, and resource commitment. This means that perceptions of a nation's role, based on status, motivation, and issue area, significantly impact its choice of foreign policy.

1.5 Role Rejection and Acceptance

Role theory can help understand not just how states are socialized to adopt certain roles, but also how they may reject or resist socialization efforts by other actors (socializers) and the reactions of the broader audience. The concept of socialization is introduced as relationships between states in the system (Thies 2012, 28). During this “socialization” process, the state engages in interactions with socializers, such as a hegemon or institutions associated with the EU or NATO, as well as interested audiences (external observers, stakeholders, and other interested parties) who provide cues and demands about the role to be performed. Socialization itself is essentially an inter-state bargaining process (Thies 2012, 28).

Role rejection occurs when a state resists or refuses to adopt a particular role suggested or expected by socializers or when the state's role conception is rejected or contested by the socializing actors or the broader audience (Thies 2012). This resistance can stem from various reasons, such as conflicts with the state's national identity or interests, or a desire to assert its autonomy and independence (Thies 2012, 36). Smaller states, aware of their capabilities and identity, often strive to achieve roles beyond those ascribed to them, while regional powers, with greater capabilities, have a diverse array of roles they may enact and help to socialize emerging and small states within their geographic subsystem (Thies 2012, 33). Socialization

affects both “novice” states and older states as they navigate their roles through the interaction in the international system over time (Thies 2012, 29). As Holsti (1970, 254) argues, national role conceptions are not fixed attributes leading to the same actions in all situations. The role location process captures this dynamic, showing how states engage with socializers to determine their roles. Role rejection becomes relevant within this framework as a state exercises agency in accepting or rejecting roles it is socialized into. Understanding the socialization process in regional and international systems is crucial for analyzing states' foreign policy behavior.

Thies (2012) introduces the concept of the “socialization game” to depict how states, their socializers, and the interested audience interact during state socialization. In this game, three types of players exist: the state being socialized (emerging state), the socializer(s) (often established members of the international community), and the interested audience (other states and international actors who observe and react to these interactions) (Thies 2012, 30). Initially, an emerging state defines its own identity and intended role in the international arena influenced by domestic factors, historical experiences, and leadership vision (Thies 2012, 31). This selection occurs after a state has emerged but before it officially announces its role (Thies 2012, 31). Essentially, the international system allows a state to enact certain roles based on its state's capabilities and status (Thies 2012, 31). Socializers must then decide to either accept or reject the role pursued by the emerging state (Thies 2012, 31). When the socializer accepts the role that the emerging state is pursuing, it signals that the socializer views this role as suitable for the emerging state based on its structural position and capabilities within the international system (Thies 2012, 31).

On the other hand, the socializer might reject the role that the emerging state is attempting to enact, it suggests that the socializer believes the role is inappropriate for the emerging state given its current capabilities and status within the international hierarchy (Thies

2012, 31). This highlights the strategic nature of socialization dynamics and the potential for power struggles among states and socializing actors.

Thies (2012, 33; 2001, 708-709) introduces the numbers and kinds of roles that different types of states are likely to adopt in the international system including the roles of small member states, major member states, and great powers. Small states aim to achieve roles beyond those ascribed to them, while major member states or regional powers possess greater capabilities and therefore have a wider range of well-developed roles they may enact. They can innovate their internal organization to maximize their strengths, playing a role in socializing emerging and small states within their geographical sphere but are also subject to socialization by great powers at both the international and regional levels.

This socialization game illustrates the interaction between small states, regional power, and great power, and how role rejection and acceptance occur in the international system. The concept of role rejection emphasizes the interactive and negotiated nature of role adoption and the agency of states in shaping their roles within the social system. Role theory provides a theoretical foundation for analyzing the socialization process and understanding how states navigate the adoption or rejection of specific roles in their foreign policy.

1.6 Hypotheses: Status and Role Socialization

By synthesizing insights from role theory, I develop hypotheses about the competitive and cooperative mediation strategies employed in multilateral mediation. The socialization role theory introduced by Thies (2012) can be utilized to explain the phenomenon of why Egypt (a regional power) rejected Qatar's (small state) performance as a fellow regional mediator in the Gaza War in 2008-2009. I now offer a theoretical framework for understanding how states navigate role rejection, influencing their conflict resolution engagement. First, I explore the competitive mediation strategies of multiple mediators within the framework, followed by my

presentation of the first hypothesis. Second, I delve into the cooperative mediation approaches of multiple mediators within the same framework, leading to the formulation of the second hypothesis.

1.6.1 Competitive Mediation

Role theory posits that competition between mediators can arise due to these socialization processes. Status, defined by perceptions of power and influence, plays a crucial role in shaping role perceptions. When one perceives itself as having a higher status than others, it may adopt competitive mediation strategies to assert its dominance and advance its agenda. Furthermore, states may engage in competitive behaviors such as dominating discussions, dictating terms, and marginalizing the contributions of others to pursue their interests in the mediation outcome.

Role rejection is an important concept in multilateral mediation. Role rejection occurs when one mediator refuses to accept another state's mediator role. This resistance stems from discrepancies between one mediator's self-perceived role and its status and capability. Consequently, the “socializer” mediator engages in competitive behaviors to reject the other's mediator role. This behavior may stem from a belief in its elevated status compared to the other mediators and its attempt to impose its dominance in the regional hierarchy. Moreover, it might have a desire to control the mediation process to serve its interests. This leads to the first hypothesis:

H1: Mediators holding higher status than others are more likely to adopt competitive mediation strategies to assert dominance and undermine the efforts of rival mediators.

1.6.2 Cooperative Mediation

Conversely, when mediators perceive themselves to be of equal status relative to other would-be mediators, they are more likely to cooperate with these other actors to bolster their

influence and achieve their objectives. Moreover, regional powers, great powers, and other relevant actors are more likely to accept and support the roles and approaches of emerging or small states when these roles align with their status and capabilities. They are more likely to understand that cooperation and coordination with other mediators are essential for achieving successful outcomes, leading to a willingness to work together and compromise. This recognition is more likely to lead to a cooperative approach. With this in mind, I hypothesize that:

H2: Mediators are more likely to adopt cooperative mediation strategies when they perceive themselves as having equal status with that of other mediators or when these other state's mediator roles are deemed appropriate by the socializers and the interested audience.

Figure 1 depicts the hypothesized relationships between mediator status, role socialization, and competitive and cooperative mediation. It illustrates how differences in perceived status lead to either competitive or cooperative mediation behaviors. The figure underscores the central argument that role rejection by higher-status mediators leads to competitive strategies, whereas perceived status equality or appropriate role acceptance leads to cooperative mediation.

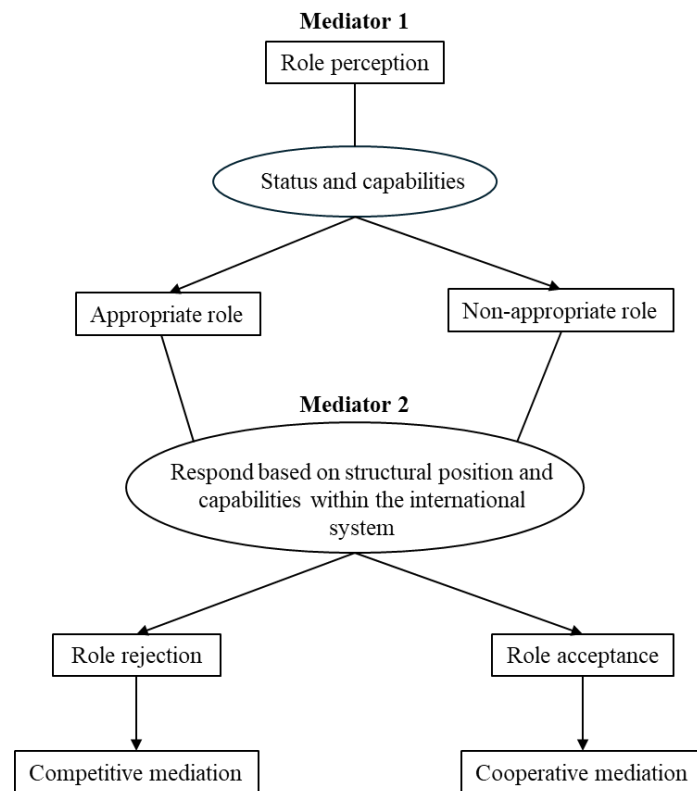


Figure 1: Mediators' socialization and competition vs. cooperation in multilateral mediation

Chapter II: Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology employed to investigate the shifting dynamics between competitive and cooperative mediation by Egypt and Qatar in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The chosen approach is central to qualitative research. I utilize a case study methodology, specifically longitudinal analysis within the framework of Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD). According to Creswell (2013, 30), case studies involve an in-depth investigation of a program, event, activity, process, or individual(s) within specific boundaries of time and activity. Researchers collect comprehensive information using various data collection methods over an extended duration (Cresswell 2013, 30). The case study approach was chosen because it can help us identify causal drivers for behavioral shifts by examining the historical record (Eddin 2021, 18). The case is divided into two case periods, the Gaza War in 2008-2009 and the Gaza War in 2023-2024. These cases are examined comparatively for several reasons. First, both wars involved Egypt and Qatar as mediators, providing a consistent framework for analyzing the shifts in their mediation strategies. Second, despite having the same mediators, the two wars led to different outcomes in terms of competitive and cooperative behavior, making them ideal for comparative analysis.

The MSSD approach facilitates the comparison of cases that share similarities in various dimensions while allowing for variation in the key independent variable of variation in the outcome. In this study, the key independent variables are the status of associated roles. If variance in status is matched by variance in the dependent variable—competitive and cooperative mediation—this would confirm my hypotheses. By analyzing these cases, the aim is to discern patterns and causal mechanisms underlying the transition from competitive to cooperative mediation strategies of assess whether this difference is due to a shift in status of enacted role by Qatar.

Measurement of variables, particularly the status of Egypt and Qatar as mediators, poses

a methodological challenge. To address this, I will employ a multi-faceted approach, drawing on quantitative indicators such as the Composite Index of National Capability (CINC) index³⁴ and the soft power index⁵, as well as qualitative data including government statements, media coverage, and expert analyses which are used to gauge the perceived influence and status of each mediator over time.

According to Wish (1980, 537), status may be measured by the degree of influence. The soft power index, which measures a country's ability to attract and co-opt rather than coerce, is particularly valuable in this context (Nye 2004, 5; Riding 2003, 30). It encompasses various dimensions such as culture, political values, and foreign policy, providing a nuanced assessment of a country's influence that goes beyond traditional military and economic metrics (Nye 2004, 5-12). This index is crucial for understanding the mediatory status of Egypt and Qatar, as it reflects their ability to shape preferences and gain cooperation through non-coercive means.

Additionally, content analysis of speeches at the United Nations Security Council and General Assembly, and public statements by leaders from Egypt and Qatar, will provide insights into their strategic positioning and interactions with other mediators, shedding light on the causal mechanism. This is due to the fact that most research in this area either codes speeches by individual leaders to represent the state's national role conception or extracts the national role conception from various historical sources to explain foreign policy decisions (Thies 2009, 16). Such analyses typically encompass both individual and state levels, offering a comprehensive

³ The CINC is a statistical measure of national power created by J. David Singer that assesses demographic, economic, and military strength. The more points a state has, the more national power it possesses.

⁴ I chose the CINC index for the earlier period because the soft power index does not have data available before 2020. Hence, for consistency and to utilize available data, the CINC index was used for measuring role status before 2020.

⁵ The concept of soft power, first introduced by Harvard University political science professor and international security expert Joseph Nye (1990), is defined as a country's ability to influence others through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion or force (Yavuzaslan and Cetin 2016; Nye, 2003).

understanding of how national role conceptions impact foreign policy behavior (Thies 2009, 16).

Additionally, the study acknowledges the potential limitations associated with relying on historical data and the inherent biases in media coverage and diplomatic discourse. To mitigate these limitations, I rely on third country media coverage from sources such as BBC News, CNN, Washington Post, Reuters, and The Guardian. To measure socialization, I rely on comments from leaders and diplomats, utilizing media reports in the Middle East including Al Jazeera, The Jerusalem Post, and Haaretz.

The combination of these methods allows for a robust and comprehensive analysis of mediator status, capturing both the tangible and intangible aspects of power and influence that shape mediation dynamics. By employing both quantitative and qualitative approaches, this study aims to offer a detailed and accurate portrayal of the evolving roles of Egypt and Qatar in regional mediation efforts. Furthermore, hypotheses based on the theoretical framework and Egypt and Qatar's relative status will be introduced for each case. Finally, my hypotheses will be tested in each case based on the observed data and analysis.

Chapter III: Competitive Mediation: Gaza War in 2008-2009

3.1 Overview of the conflict

The Gaza War (2008-2009), also known as Operation Cast Lead, was a significant conflict between Israel and Hamas (Zanotti et al. 2009, 2). The conflict unfolded against a backdrop of longstanding tensions and hostilities between the two parties. The context behind the conflict can be traced back to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories, including the Gaza Strip, which began in 1967 (Council on Foreign Relations 2024). The occupation has been marked by periodic skirmishes, territorial disputes, and resistance from various Palestinian factions.

In 2007, Hamas, an Islamist political and military organization, took control of the Gaza Strip following its electoral victory and subsequent armed clashes with the rival Palestinian faction Fatah, which controlled the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank (Kostiner and Mueller 2010, 7). The takeover resulted in a political division between the West Bank, governed by Fatah, and the Gaza Strip, governed by Hamas (Davis 2016, 66–69).

A six-month ceasefire mediated by Egypt between Israel and Hamas ended on November 4, 2008, when the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) made a raid into Deir al-Balah, central Gaza to destroy a tunnel, killing several Hamas militants (McCarthy 2008). Israel asserted that the raid was a preemptive strike and that Hamas intended to abduct further Israeli soldiers (Zanotti et al. 2009, 9). In contrast, Hamas characterized the raid as a ceasefire violation and responded with rocket fire into Israel (Kroll 2009).

On December 28, 2008, the border between Gaza and Egypt was breached, allowing Gaza inhabitants to move into Egypt (Toameh 2008). This breach resulted in the death of an Egyptian border policeman by Palestinian gunmen, leading to tensions (Toameh 2008). At the time, Egypt,

which borders Gaza, was experiencing dual pressure. On one hand, Egypt was concerned about the conflict potentially spreading to its territory, while as a significant regional power, Egypt was expected to promptly facilitate a ceasefire (Kostiner and Mueller 2010, 13).

International efforts were made to broker a ceasefire and end the hostilities. Diplomatic initiatives involved various actors, including Egypt, the United Nations, and regional and international stakeholders, such as Saudi Arabia and the United States. On 3 January 2009, both Israel and Hamas rejected international pleas for a truce and also declined to implement a French-Egyptian plan to end the war (Whitlock and Raghavan 2009). On January 8, 2009, the United Nations Security Council convened and passed a resolution urging an immediate ceasefire and the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza. The resolution also welcomed the Egyptian initiative (United Nations Security Council 2009).

On January 13, 2009, in response to the apparent stalemate in the Cairo negotiations, Qatar called its call for an Arab summit to end the conflict (Rabi 2009, 458). “The flagrant and savage aggression against the Palestinian people necessitates the convening of an extraordinary summit as soon as possible,” declared Qatari Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Hamad bin Jasim Al Thani (Rabi 2009, 458; Mahjoub 2009). However, Egypt and Saudi Arabia stated that they supported discussing the Gaza crisis at a Kuwait summit scheduled for January 19, rejecting Qatar's proposal for an extraordinary summit later this week (The Nation 2009). Egypt's Foreign Ministry spokesman Hossam Zaki indicated that Cairo preferred Arab leaders to hold talks in Kuwait City on Sunday, on the eve of an economic summit (Kostiner and Mueller 2010, 220). On three separate occasions, the Qatari Emir, Shaikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani invited Arab leaders to Doha to address the Gaza War, but each time, President Mubarak and Saudi King Abdullah declined the invitation (Kostiner and Mueller 2010, 220). Egypt's rejection of Qatari participation in mediating between Israel and Hamas can be attributed to its desire to maintain its prominence and renewed

regional importance (Kostiner and Mueller 2010, 220).

The war took a toll on both sides. The Gaza Strip, which is densely populated and already facing an economic and humanitarian crisis at the time suffered significant damage to infrastructure, including homes, schools, hospitals, and vital services (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2009). The Israeli side also experienced casualties and damage from Hamas rocket attacks (Belfast telegraph 2009). On January 11, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert announced a unilateral ceasefire in Gaza, but not a military withdrawal (CBC News 2009). A unilateral pullout was declared on January 17, one day after a U.S.-Israel Memorandum of Understanding on stopping weapons smuggling into Gaza was signed in Washington, DC, and it took effect on January 18 (Zanotti et al. 2009, 4). Following one more round of rocket attacks, Hamas announced the ceasefire on January 18 as well. The Israeli withdrawal was completed on January 21 (Zanotti et al. 2009, 4).

3.2 Predictions for multilateral mediation

My theoretical framework developed by role theory predicts why Egypt and Qatar confronted the latest Gaza War in 2008-2009. By applying the role theory, discussing diplomatic accomplishments elsewhere, and comparing the CINC score of Egypt and Qatar, I argue that Egypt's role rejection occurred because Qatar's role as a “fellow mediator” was inappropriate in the international system due to its low status.

First, during the reign of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's (1981-2011) foreign policy was driven by two primary objectives: the consolidation of the Camp David regional system and the maintenance of a strategic alliance with the Arab Gulf countries, particularly Saudi Arabia (Selim 2022, 7). Since the Camp David Accords, Egypt has maintained peaceful relations with Israel and the United States, positioning itself as a critical mediator in the Israeli-Palestinian

conflict under the US-sponsored Middle East peace process (Selim 2022, 7). Egypt's robust alliance with Saudi Arabia, bolstered by economic and financial support, has further reinforced its regional influence.

Moreover, sharing a physical border with the Gaza Strip made Egypt an active mediator in the conflict. Throughout the conflict, Egypt was the main regional mediator between Israel and Hamas (Kostiner and Mueller 2010, 203). Its efforts to broker a ceasefire and facilitate negotiations repositioned it as a key intermediary in the region. This aligns with the concept of role, where a state assumes the role of mediating between conflicting parties to resolve disputes and maintain stability. It actively mediated in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict however, it also finds itself drawn into the mediation process whenever the involved parties demand Egyptian action regarding its border (Kostiner and Mueller 2010, 203). Egypt must have been feeling pressure both domestically and internationally. Thus, Egypt should have perceived its status as a regional mediator and among stakeholders.

Second, Qatar's involvement in diplomatic efforts surrounding the Gaza War suggested its growing role as an international mediator. The Qatari leader, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani (1995-2013), sought to establish an innovative diplomatic role for his country since the peaceful coup in 1995 (Cooper and Momani 2011, 117). This was due to the geostrategic location of Qatar, which renders it susceptible to external influence. Qatar served as a buffer state between two regional hegemonies, Saudi Arabia and Iran (Bary 2022, 58). In an effort to shift Qatar's foreign policy agenda away from Saudi hegemony in the region, Sheikh Hamad sought to establish a distinct foreign policy approach, one that would allow Qatar to act as a mediator in regional disputes (Cooper and Momani 2011, 117). This approach was formalized in the constitution of Qatar, which explicitly mandates the use of mediation as a tool of small state diplomacy. In April 2003, Article 7 was adopted, which specifically mandates that Qatari foreign policy be "based on

the principle of strengthening international peace and security by means of encouraging peaceful resolution of international disputes” (Ulrichsen 2014, 6). Qatar believed that being an international mediator would increase its international status and influence in the international community (Khatib 2013, 429).

Furthermore, Qatar has repeatedly offered to broker peace between Israel and its neighbors since 2003. For instance, in 2006, Qatar offered a peace negotiation after a battle between Israel and Hezbollah⁶ in Lebanon while most Arab states were quietly showing support for Iranian-backed Hezbollah (Cooper and Momani 2011, 120). Notably, Qatar successfully mediated the formation of a Lebanese national unity government in 2008 after many months of tense internal political wrangling that had contributed to the Second Lebanon War. Qatar managed to bring the conflicting parties into government unification (Doha Agreement) (Cooper and Momani 2011, 120). Soon after this big success in Lebanon in 2008, Qatar tried to gain more reputation as an “international mediator”. Qatar demonstrated its willingness to engage in mediation efforts, reflecting its aspirations to gain recognition and influence in the region (Cooper and Momani 2011, 121). This aligns with the role theory's emphasis on states seeking to enhance their reputation and power through mediation and diplomacy.

Third, I use quantitative evidence to examine Egypt and Qatar's status before the first Gaza war. I measure the status of Egypt and Qatar as the degree of influence using the Composite Index of National Capability (CINC) index. The CINC from 2000-2007 reveals a considerable difference in the national power of Egypt and Qatar, with Egypt being nearly ten times more influential than Qatar at that time. Egypt's CINC average score was 0.009398 throughout the years, while Qatar's was 0.000875 throughout the years (Singer 1987; Singer, Bremer, and Stuckey 1972).

⁶ A political party and militant organization that originated as a militia during Lebanon's civil war following Israel's invasion in 1982 (Britannica 2024b).

This substantial disparity underscores the clear discrepancy in the degree of influence, or status, between Egypt and Qatar during the Gaza War. Egypt's larger economy and more substantial military capabilities gave it greater leverage in regional politics. The CINC index quantifies this power disparity, highlighting Egypt's significant advantage over Qatar. This economic and military strength enabled Egypt to assert its influence more effectively in mediation processes. Despite its wealth from natural gas reserves, Qatar did not come close to matching Egypt's military capabilities (Rabi 2009, 445). This limitation affects Qatar's ability to project power and influence on the same scale as Egypt, reinforcing the latter's higher regional status.

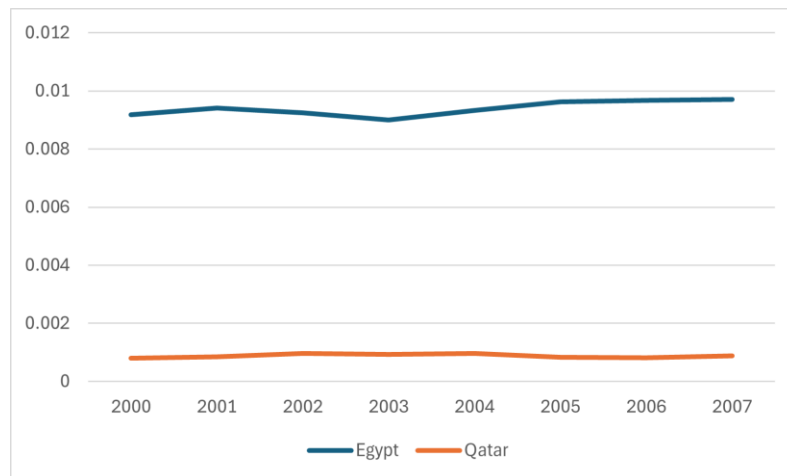


Figure 2: CINC scores of Egypt and Qatar 2000-2007

The lack of Qatar's status in the international system led Egypt to reject Qatar's role as a regional mediator, as both countries sought to enhance their reputation and power through their involvement in the conflict resolution process. Egypt perceived itself as holding a higher status compared to Qatar in the regional and international arenas. As a historically significant regional power with substantial political influence and resources, Egypt viewed itself as the dominant player. This perception influenced Egypt's mediation strategies, leading it to adopt competitive behaviors to assert dominance and advance its interests despite external pressures to cooperate for an early

resolution of the conflict, Egypt asserted its dominance and rejected Qatar's role. Hence, Egypt's role rejection could stem from discrepancies between Qatar's self-perceived role and its actual capability and status. This hypothesis will be further tested in the following sections.

3.3 A Case of Role Rejection

I now shift focus to a detailed analysis of the status and role divergence between Egypt and Qatar during the Gaza War in 2008-2009, aiming to validate my hypotheses. I present a study applying role theory and socialization role theory alongside empirical evidence, elucidating the dynamics of inter-mediator competition in this scenario.

The violent takeover of the Gaza Strip by Hamas in June 2007 led Egypt to work on reconciling the two Palestinian factions while mediating a ceasefire between Fatah and Hamas (Kostiner and Mueller 2012, 214). Hamas's ties to Egypt's own Islamic opposition posed a threat to domestic stability. Consequently, Egypt assumed the primary role of regional mediator during the Gaza War, working tirelessly to broker a ceasefire and facilitate negotiations. Egypt's geographical proximity to the Gaza Strip expected its active mediation role, crucial for maintaining national security given the shared border and potential spillover of terrorism from Gaza to the Sinai Peninsula (Hamzawy and Brown 2023, 9).

However, Egypt's established role as a regional leader and mediator, rooted in its historical significance and strategic location, faced challenges from Qatar's ambitions. During this period, Egypt and Qatar had disparate geopolitical interests in the region. From 2006 to 2009, Saudi Arabia and Egypt viewed Iran's potential regional hegemony as the main threat. Iran sought to expand its influence in Iraq, supported Hezbollah in the 2006 proxy war against Israel, and engaged in confrontations with the West over its nuclear program, including threats against Israel (Kostiner and Mueller 2010, 204). Conversely, Qatar maintained stable relations with Iran. During 2006-

2007, Qatar held a seat two-year term on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) (Barakat 2012, 7) and Doha used its status as a member of the UN Security Council in order to support Iran (Rabi 2009, 447). Emphasizing the need for a political resolution, Qatar was the only member of the Security Council to vote against a resolution in June 2006 that set a deadline for Tehran to cease its uranium enrichment (Rabi 2009, 447).

Qatar actively engaged in international conflict resolution efforts by utilizing its unique position. Joseph Nye, the architect of the ‘soft power’ concept, noted that “Qatar has managed to find an important diplomatic niche between the West and the Arab nationalist mainstream, backed by its considerable financial resources” (Cooper and Momani 2009, 118; Abraham 2008). From Qatar's perspective, maintaining positive communication with Iran also served to antagonize Saudi Arabia, which sought to influence the foreign policies of smaller GCC nations, especially regarding Iran (Rabi 2009, 447). Egypt was concerned about Qatari diplomacy strengthening ties with Iran due to security reasons and increasing Qatar's influence in the region.

Moreover, the public discourse of Egypt and Qatar during the Gaza War illuminates their respective perceptions of their role as mediators. Both countries had the opportunity to make speeches at the United Nations Security Council on January 6, 2009. They each emphasized their status to argue before international audiences that they should enact a mediator role.

For example, Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit highlighted Egypt’s pivotal role in regional mediation and efforts to maintain calm in the Gaza Strip:

As members know very well, Egypt is in a unique situation as far as the current events are concerned, as the immediately adjacent neighbor of the Gaza Strip, where the Israeli aggression is taking place, and *because of its central role* in having helped the Israelis and Palestinians attain a period of calm that lasted six months until just one week before the aggression and despite violations by both sides. Furthermore, *Egypt is in a well-known position given its role* in sponsoring the Palestinian national reconciliation. (Aboul Gheit 2009)

Conversely, Qatari Foreign Minister Ahmad bin Abdulla Al-Mahmoud emphasized

Qatar's support for the Palestinian people and its active involvement in providing aid:

The State of Qatar has been among *the leading supporters* of the Palestinian people at the bilateral level, through the decisions of the Council of the League of Arab States and through the United Nations. We have recently *sent aid to the Palestinians* by sea and air. (Al-Mahmoud 2009)

These speeches reflect how Egypt and Qatar perceived their roles in the region. Egypt emphasized its historical and geographical significance while Qatar focused on its humanitarian contributions to show an alternative mediation approach. Although both countries did not mention one another, the speeches describe their aspiration to be exclusive regional mediators.

This competitive mediation indicates Qatar's ambition to elevate its standing in regional and international diplomacy, especially through its mediation role during conflicts like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Lebanon negotiations. As Qatar continues to enhance its diplomatic reach and influence due to the lack of military and economic power, it sought to carve out a more significant role as a “regional mediator”, positioning itself as a pivotal player in resolving conflicts and fostering stability in the region. However, Qatar did not have a sufficiently high status to be accepted by Egypt as the key socializer. As mentioned earlier, there was a huge status difference between Egypt and Qatar at that time. Despite facing pressure both domestically and internationally, Egypt upheld its high status among the stakeholders involved in the conflict, reflecting its prominence as a key player in regional diplomacy and mediation. Although Egypt was seeking to broker a ceasefire in the war to securitize the border between Egypt and Gaza and could have cooperated with Qatar to do so, it did not accept the Qatari offer for mediation. This is because Egypt perceived the Qatari role, “regional mediator” as inappropriate in the international system. Even Saudi Arabia, the regional hegemon close to Egypt refused to attend the Qatari summit in January 2009. A senior Saudi diplomat stated that Saudi Arabia found the Qatar proposal to be

“inappropriate” (The Nation 2009). Ahmad al-Qattan, Saudi Arabia's permanent representative to the Cairo-based Arab League, told the pan-Arab channel al-Arabiya, “We do not see it as *appropriate* to hold another summit” (The Nation 2009). Eventually, 14 members out of 22 Arab League attended the emergency summit (Black 2009), however, it failed due to the lack of member countries attending (Rabi 2009, 459).⁷ Qatar's attempts to surpass Egypt as the primary power broker in regional conflicts ultimately proved unsuccessful (Kostiner and Mueller 2010, 220). In the aftermath of the war, Egypt remained the primary mediator, with international players relying on Cairo's expertise and crucial assistance to achieve a lasting ceasefire (Kostiner and Mueller 2010, 220).

The case of Egypt and Qatar during the Gaza War of 2008-2009 supports the hypothesis that Egypt and Qatar's status, role rejection dynamics, and competitive mediation were at play. Egypt's established high status and geopolitical interests led it to reject Qatar's mediation efforts to prevent Qatar's emergence, while Qatar's ambition to enhance its international standing drove its attempt to pursue its role as a “regional mediator.”

This competitive mediation further illustrates the broader implications for regional politics and mediation strategies in the Middle East. This underscores the complexity of conflict mediation in a region characterized by deep-seated rivalries, geopolitical interests, and external influences. The competitive mediation between Egypt and Qatar reflects the struggle for influence among Middle Eastern states and highlights the challenges faced by emerging powers in gaining acceptance and legitimacy.

⁷ A minimum of fifteen countries is required to convene an official Arab League summit.

Chapter IV: Cooperative Mediation: Gaza War in 2023-2024

4.1 Overview of the conflict

The Gaza War of 2023-2024 erupted on October 7, 2023, beginning with a surprise attack by Hamas and other Palestinian militant groups from the Gaza Strip into southern Israel (Shaath and Owda 2023). The conflict began with a rapid onslaught on October 7 when over 3,000 rockets were launched into Israel, as well as incursions by vehicles and motorized paragliders. This incursion into Israeli territory was the first since the 1948 Arab-Israeli War (Council on Foreign Relations 2024). Rockets also targeted Jerusalem and other cities, prompting Israel to declare a state of war and launch a major military counteroffensive (Council on Foreign Relations 2024). This initial barrage was quickly met with Israeli retaliation, including airstrikes and ground operations in the Gaza Strip, resulting in widespread hostilities and significant casualties among both combatants and civilians (Fderman and Adwan 2023). The Hamas fighters killed approximately 1,200 people and took more than 250 hostages, while the death toll from Israeli military operations in the Gaza Strip exceeded 31,600 by mid-March 2024 (Selján 2024, 81).

The conflict prompted negotiation efforts by Egypt and Qatar to secure the release of hostages and Palestinian prisoners held in Israel. On October 22, 2023, Egypt initiated “The Cairo Peace Summit”, which brought together 31 nations including Qatar, and three international organizations to address the escalating situation in Gaza and the Palestinian territories (Egypt State Information Service 2023a). Following the summit, two women held captive by Hamas in Gaza were released led by Egypt and Qatari mediation, according to the Palestinian group and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) (Al-Mughrabi and Cox 2023). On November 10, 2023, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi invited Qatari Emir Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad Al

Thani to Cairo after the meeting of the Hamas delegation and Egyptian General Intelligence Service (Egypt State Information Service 2023b). The Israeli government voted to approve a deal mediated by Qatar, Egypt, and the U.S. with Hamas to exchange 150 Palestinian prisoners for 50 hostages (Said, Lieber, and Malsin 2023). It also approved an agreement for a four-day ceasefire in Gaza (Burke, Michaelson, and Borger 2023). The two countries cooperated in mediating a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, and as of November, 24, they led negotiation producing the first temporary cessation of hostilities (Reuters 2023).

On November 22, 2023, President Abdel Fattah El Sisi welcomed the successful mediation efforts brokered by Egypt, Qatar, and the US, to reach a deal on implementing a humanitarian truce in Gaza (Egypt State Information Service 2023c). Subsequent extensions of the truce were agreed upon, with Qatar announcing an additional two-day extension on November 27 (Salem and Shortell 2023). Despite initial progress in the release of hostages following the ceasefire, as of May 24, 2024, 121 individuals remain unaccounted for after being kidnapped by Hamas (Ryan and Pengelly 2024). Efforts to negotiate a permanent ceasefire mediated by Egypt, Qatar, and the United States are ongoing. However, significant challenges persist, and mediators have yet to bridge the divide between Israel and Hamas to achieve a lasting resolution.

4.2 Predictions for multilateral mediation

My theoretical framework predicts why Egypt and Qatar's cooperative mediation occurred in the 2023-2024 Gaza War. By applying the role theory, discussing diplomatic accomplishments elsewhere, and comparing the soft power score of Egypt and Qatar, I argue that Qatar's status increased after the first Gaza War and gained an “appropriate” role in the international system.

First, since the Arab Spring in 2011, Egypt has faced significant internal challenges, including economic crises and political instability. These issues have promoted a more

collaborative approach in recent mediations. This shift significantly diminished Egypt's regional influence and its ability to shape Arab and Middle Eastern politics. Consequently, a regional vacuum emerged, which was filled by competitors such as Turkey and Qatar (Selim 2022, 8; Kheir 2013, 185). Therefore, it can be inferred that Egypt's status in the region may have declined since the first Gaza War.

Second, since its mediation failure in 2009, Qatar has maintained collaborative relations with Israel as well as all Palestinian actors, including the Palestinian Authority and Hamas (Brown and Hamzawy 2023, 5). Qatar has successfully mediated several conflicts internationally following the Gaza War of 2008-2009. These include the cases of Sudan, Afghanistan, and Palestine (Fatah and Hamas). The turning point in its foreign policy came with the Arab Spring in 2011. During this period, Qatar shifted its foreign policy to support various revolutionary forces across the region (Roberts 2019, 3). Beginning in 2011, Doha organized a series of political conferences focused on uniting opposition forces, many of which were Islamist groups that received financial support from Qatar (Roberts 2019, 3).

Qatari all-round diplomacy further emerged in June 2013, when Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani succeeded his father as emir of Qatar. In his inaugural address, he asserted that "Qatar was not aligned with any particular trend against another. We reject the division of Arab societies along sectarian or doctrinal lines." (Ulrichsen 2014, 20). Following Tamim's accession, Qatar began reducing tensions with its neighbors. It served as a mediator in conflicts in Egypt and Syria and, in early August 2013, negotiated a settlement to the escalating confrontation between the Egyptian military and members of the Muslim Brotherhood with the United States (Ulrichsen 2014, 20). In October 2013, Qatar was involved in a multilateral effort alongside Lebanese, Turkish, Syrian, and Palestinian interlocutors to negotiate a complex three-way prisoner exchange

agreement in Syria (Ulrichsen 2014, 20).⁸

Qatar's status elevation contributed to its identity as a key player in regional diplomacy. Qatar's engagement with both Israel and Hamas must have yielded significant diplomatic dividends. By developing open channels of communication with both parties, Qatar effectively bridged the divide between conflicting factions and facilitated meaningful dialogue. This diplomatic engagement contributed to Qatar's role perception as a "regional mediator," promoting peace and stability in the region while enhancing its standing as a trusted mediator among all stakeholders.

Third, the analysis of the soft power index for Egypt and Qatar from 2020-2024 provides valuable insights into their respective status during the Gaza War. In 2020, Egypt scored 34.8, while Qatar scored 38.5 in 2024, their ranks were 38 and 31 respectively (Brand Finance 2024). Qatar held a slightly higher soft power score and rank compared to Egypt. This suggests that Qatar may have exerted a somewhat more pronounced soft power influence on the international stage prior to the Gaza War in 2023, although both countries were situated within a relatively narrow range of soft power indices. In 2024, Egypt scored 44.9, while Qatar scored 54.5, with respective ranks of 39 and 21 (Brand Finance 2024). The increase in Qatar's score and rank was more pronounced than that of Egypt, indicating a notable enhancement of its status. With Qatar's higher soft power score and improved ranking, it can be inferred that Qatar exerted a greater degree of influence than Egypt when the Gaza War commenced in 2023.

⁸ In 2014, due to Qatar's continuous support of the Muslim Brotherhood-backed Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain severed diplomatic relations with Qatar. These Arab countries were not amenable to Qatar's comprehensive diplomatic approach, which resulted in a significant rift in diplomatic relations. In 2021, these four countries agreed to restore full diplomatic relations with Qatar and end their blockade.

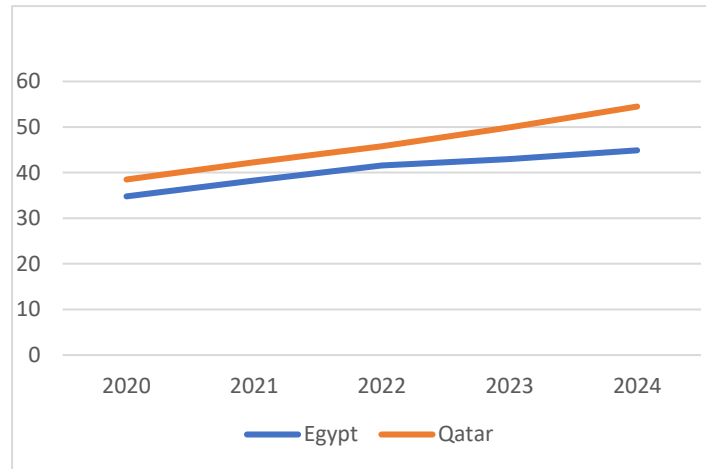


Figure 3: Soft power scores of Egypt and Qatar 2020-2024

Hence, since the previous competitive mediation, Qatar gained a higher status with the potential to be perceived as a “fellow mediator” by Egypt. Conversely, Egypt weakened its regional influence due to its economic crises and political instability. Despite both countries claiming the role of “regional mediator,” there was no evidence of role rejection, suggesting mutual acceptance of respective roles. This is consistent with the socialization role theory introduced by Thies (2012), this means that Egypt may have recognized Qatar's status and role as “appropriate” in the international system, leading to a cooperative mediation. Should either Egypt or Qatar have rejected externally prescribed roles, this could have led to a breakdown in cooperation or altered the dynamics of the mediation process.

4.3 A Case of Role Acceptance

I will now delve deeper into the examination of the status and roles adopted by Egypt and Qatar during the Gaza War of 2023-2024 to validate my hypotheses. This involves presenting a case study that applies role theory and socialization role theory to elucidate the dynamics of inter-mediator cooperation in this context.

Historically, Egypt has been the regional mediator between Israel and Hamas, as seen in

2008-2009 and in the current Israel-Hamas war. Its efforts to broker a ceasefire and facilitate negotiations have positioned it as a key intermediary both regionally and internationally. What is new in this war is that Egypt has actively cooperated with Qatar in a multilateral mediation. That is said, hosting a summit and negotiation talks within its own country (Lewis and Eltahir 2023), Egypt sought to reaffirm its status as a pivotal mediator and a stabilizing force in the region, while cooperating with Qatar.

From 2009 to 2017, there have been laudable efforts made by Qatari diplomacy to contain tension and stop fighting between Hamas and Israel (Alqashouti 2021). During this period, Israel initiated several military operations on Gaza (Alqashouti 2021). In many times, Qatar played the mediation role to broker ceasefire agreements between Hamas and Israel (Alqashouti 2021). These efforts have strengthened ties with both Israel and Hamas but have consistently angered Egypt's government (Issacharoff 2018). Egypt considers Gaza to be within its political sphere of influence, often leading to the manipulation of humanitarian aid for political purposes (Issacharoff 2018). With regard to its policies in Palestine, Qatar has a long and well-documented relationship with Hamas, the Gaza-based Islamist organization designated as a terrorist group by the United States, European Union, and Canada (Roberts 2019, 4). According to Israeli reports, Qatar has provided Hamas with up to \$1 billion since 2012, typically used for aid, fuel, and government salaries, with regular meetings between Qatari and Hamas elites (Roberts 2019, 4). The support Qatar offers to Hamas has strategic dimensions. By engaging directly with Hamas, Qatar positions itself as a key mediator capable of influencing both the militant organization and the broader political dynamics of the region. This relationship has allowed Qatar to facilitate dialogue and negotiations that others might not be able to, given the complexities and hostilities involved. This shift in Qatari foreign policy and increased involvement in international mediation suggests that Qatar's enhanced status, as indicated by its superior soft power index, has influenced its role dynamics in the Gaza conflict

mediation efforts. The case of Qatar illustrates that its elevated status over time, evidenced by an increase in mediation activities and diplomatic initiatives, correlates with its emergence as a significant international mediator since 2009. However, this stance must have put Qatar at odds with Egypt, which sees such mediation efforts as encroaching on its historical role and influence in Gaza and the broader Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Nevertheless, Egypt needed to leverage Qatar's unique diplomatic ties between Israel and Hamas in this conflict mediation due to the complexity of its relationships with them. Between 2016 and 2017, Egypt and Israel cooperated on counterinsurgency operations against the Islamic State in Sinai, and Egypt mediated ceasefire negotiations between Hamas and Israel (Kayali 2024). Despite these efforts, recent negotiations have stalled, prompting Egypt to issue strong warnings about any Israeli moves on the border (Kayali 2024). Egypt, which has had a peace treaty with Israel since 1979, has strengthened its relationship with Israel under Sisi but has threatened to suspend the treaty if Rafah is invaded (Kayali 2024). This is because maintaining peace in the Gaza Strip and protecting the border between Egypt and Gaza is crucial for Egyptian national security as mentioned in Chapter 3. If Palestinians were resettled in Sinai, it could turn Egyptian territory into a new base for resistance operations, potentially dragging Egypt into military conflict with Israel (Kayali 2024). Therefore, the Egyptian leadership has consistently rejected the mass displacement of Gazans to Sinai and has also rejected proposals by the United States for Egypt to manage security in Gaza in a post-conflict scenario (Al-Khalidi and Gebeily 2023).

Egypt has consistently played a pivotal role in facilitating negotiations between Israel and Hamas. In the previous iteration of conflict in Gaza, Egypt served as the primary intermediary and facilitated successful negotiations to restore calm (Brown and Hamzawy 2023, 8). Conversely, Qatar increased its use of international mediation as a diplomatic tool since the first Gaza War. Although there is no diplomatic relation between Qatar and Israel, Qatar has played a crucial role

in this conflict mediation (Deble 2023). The first public visit by Qatari officials to Israel on November 26, 2023, marked an extraordinary moment for the two countries (Deble 2023). Given its close ties to the United States, its communication with Israel since 1995, and its support of the blockaded Gaza Strip to the tune of \$1 billion since 2014, Qatar was uniquely positioned to break deadlocks in the cease-fire talks, which also involved the United States and Egypt (Deble 2023). Qatar's robust relationships with key stakeholders have reinforced its capacity to act as an impartial mediator.

Egypt's acceptance of Qatar as a “fellow mediator” reflects a strategic adaptation to this shift in roles. Based on the socialization role theory (Thies 2012), Qatar's role as a regional mediator was not only accepted but also supported by Egypt. Egypt's recognition of Qatar's status and role led to a cooperative approach, where both countries worked together effectively. The evolving relationship between Egypt and Qatar is evident in their public statements and actions. Both nations underscored the significance of collaborative efforts and presented a unified front in their government statements:

President El-Sisi and Sheikh Tamim's discussions highlighted the continued development of relations and *the activation of various frameworks of cooperation*. (Egypt State Information Service 2023b)

Regarding progress in the talks for the release of detainees, Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani explained that there has been some progress in the past few days through the release of two American prisoners, as well as the release of two other hostages *in cooperation with the Arab Republic of Egypt*. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs State of Qatar 2023)

It is nevertheless worth noting that not only has Qatar's status increased, but also that Egypt's economic difficulties, characterized by high inflation, a depreciating currency, and dependence on foreign aid, have influenced its approach to regional mediation in the latest Gaza War in any way. The economic crisis has made Egypt more dependent on regional allies and has

reduced its ability to act unilaterally. Historically, Egypt developed a close relationship with Saudi Arabia, receiving financial and economic assistance amid its domestic economic crises and increasing dependence on foreign resources during the Mubarak regime (Selim 2022, 7). In the last decade of Mubarak's rule, Egyptian foreign policy became increasingly regressive, subordinating its national interests to the agendas of its global and regional patrons (Selim 2022, 8).

Currently, Egypt is facing severe economic challenges. Over the past 18 months, there has been a notable increase in prices, with the consumer price index rising by 38% in October 2023, according to Dr. Ofir Winter from Tel Aviv University's Department of Arabic and Middle Eastern Affairs Institute for National Security Studies (Uni 2023). Furthermore, he explains that the Egyptian pound has depreciated by 50% against the US dollar, and the debt-to-GDP ratio has reached 100%, with no immediate economic relief in sight (Uni 2023). To maintain regional stability, Egypt relies heavily on financial grants from Saudi Arabia and other wealthy Gulf states including Qatar (Uni 2023). This dependency underscores Egypt's reduced power and increasing reliance on global and regional actors for financial support. Uni (2023) further reported that Egyptian involvement in this mediation has been notably limited, in contrast to previous instances. Egypt's role in the Israel-Hamas talks and its stance on accepting Gazan refugees are illustrative of this shift.

The mediation efforts during the 2023-2024 Gaza War demonstrated a shift towards cooperative multilateral mediation, characterized by role acceptance between Egypt and Qatar. Although the Qatari diplomatic stance was a challenge to Egypt's traditional role and influence in Gaza and the wider Israeli-Palestinian conflict arena, Egypt accepted Qatar's role as a "fellow mediator." Egypt's acceptance of Qatar was not merely a passive acceptance but an active engagement, recognizing Qatar's capabilities and resources as complementary to its own. The acceptance of Qatar's enhanced role by Egypt, in light of its economic challenges and strategic

dependencies, represents a significant shift from competition to cooperation in multilateral mediation. This shift underscores the evolving nature of regional politics in the Middle East, where strategic cooperation can sometimes outweigh traditional rivalries.

Conclusion

Many studies in multilateral mediation literature posit that mediators tend to cooperate with each other to lead conflicting parties to agreement. However, these studies overlook the possibility that there is potential for conflict among mediators themselves in multilateral mediations. Although previous studies have focused on mediators' roles, strategies, and foreign policies, none adequately explain the puzzling shifts in mediators' behavior over time. By analyzing the dynamics of competitive and cooperative mediation by Egypt and Qatar in the Gaza Wars of 2008-2009 and 2023-2024, this thesis reveals how regional mediators interact and perceive themselves within system, and how these interactions affect their mediation behavior to cooperate rather than compete. In my case study, I employ a multi-faceted approach within the role theory framework to argue that shifts from competitive to cooperative mediation result from the evolving statuses and role socialization of the mediators involved.

In 2008-2009, Egypt's rejection of Qatar's mediation attempts can be attributed to the significant disparity in their statuses and Egypt's reluctance to accept Qatar's rising influence. In contrast, the 2023-2024 Gaza War demonstrated a marked shift towards cooperative mediation. Despite both countries holding the role of "regional mediator," role rejection did not manifest in the second war, due to the equal status of Egypt and Qatar and mutual acceptance of respective roles. Egypt recognized Qatar's status parity, diplomatic capabilities, and resources as appropriate in the international system, leading to a cooperative approach to conflict mediation. Moreover, by leveraging Qatar's unique diplomatic ties and resources, Egypt was able to facilitate more effective dialogue and negotiation between conflicting parties though facing its economic challenges and strategic dependencies. The evolving status of mediators and the shifting geopolitical landscape, including shifts in alliances and regional power structures, influenced mediators' coordination.

This research breaks new ground by examining mediators' status and role socialization in multilateral mediation, an area that has been largely neglected. By focusing on the specific cases of Egypt and Qatar during the Gaza Wars, the thesis offers a nuanced understanding of how status and role socialization shape mediation strategies, offering a new perspective on why mediators may shift from competitive to cooperative behaviors over time. This contributes significantly to the literature on international conflict mediation, developing effective multilateral mediation strategies. Future research should explore how regional and international actors can enhance the effectiveness of mediation efforts, reduce conflicts among mediators, and contribute to more sustainable conflict resolutions in the Middle East and other conflict-prone regions.

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