

Qatari Development and Humanitarian Aid at the United Nations as a Tool of Soft Power in Achieving National Interests

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how Qatar utilizes developmental and humanitarian aid through the UN as a means of exerting soft power to serve its national interests. Drawing on Joseph Nye's soft power theory, this analysis examines the relationship between Qatari aid, soft power, and national interests. Despite its small size, Qatar utilizes its financial and diplomatic resources to enhance its global standing in a volatile region. Using a qualitative analytical approach, the study explores three dimensions: economic (exports, investments, food and energy security), political (mediation, alliances, global influence), and security (addressing non-traditional threats). Findings confirm a strong relationship between Qatari aid and enhanced soft power in all three areas, as well as between soft power and the advancement of national interests. The research underscores Qatar's strategic use of aid, showing varying impacts across sectors, and highlights the importance of UN partnerships in legitimizing its efforts.

Keywords: Development Aid, Humanitarian Aid, Soft Power, National Interests, Qatari Foreign Policy

INTRODUCTION

Qatar has emerged as a distinctive model in using development and humanitarian aid as a core component of its foreign policy and soft power strategy. The state's strategic investment in humanitarian initiatives has significantly enhanced its international image and political influence. In recent decades, global power dynamics have shifted from reliance on hard power to soft power—defined by Joseph Nye as the ability to attract and persuade rather than coerce. Within this framework, development and humanitarian aid have become essential tools for states seeking to advance their national interests, enhance their global image, and build strategic partnerships (Muawad 2019, 173).

Qatar's foreign policy is grounded in the principles outlined in its 2003 Constitution, which emphasizes peaceful resolution of disputes and international cooperation (Government Communications Office, 2024). Article 7 further enshrines mediation as a central principle (Ministry of Foreign Affairs - Qatar, 2024; Barakat, 2019). This constitutional foundation aligns with Qatar's long-standing commitment to humanitarianism and diplomacy. Since 1995, when Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani assumed power, Qatar has pursued an "open-door policy" that maintains relations across political divides, enabling it to adopt an independent foreign policy distinct from Saudi Arabia's regional dominance (Kabalan, 2023).

Qatar's soft power strategy includes expanding its energy exports, hosting major global events, investing in international media and sports, and enhancing its international aid profile (Stiftung Wissenschaft, 2023). Its foreign aid efforts have evolved from traditional Gulf-based models to a more structured and institutionalized approach. Following the Arab Spring and the Gulf blockade crisis in 2017, Qatar initiated significant transformations in its foreign aid mechanisms, establishing key institutions such as the Regulatory Authority for Charitable Activities,

the Qatar Fund for Development, and the International Cooperation Department (Aras et al., 2024). These institutional developments linked humanitarian assistance more closely with the country's foreign policy objectives.

Against this background, the current study investigates a critical research problem: to what extent has the State of Qatar successfully utilized its development and humanitarian aid—particularly that provided through United Nations channels—as a tool of soft power to enhance its international standing and achieve its national interests? This question is particularly important in light of Qatar's geographic size and the volatility of the regional environment. The research explores the causal relationship between Qatari development and humanitarian aid (independent variable), soft power (intervening variable), and national interests (dependent variable), with an emphasis on how financial and diplomatic resources are leveraged to serve the state's economic, political, and security goals.

Qatar's aid is characterized by neutrality, impartiality, and responsiveness to crises—ranging from conflicts to natural disasters (Government Communications Office, 2024). A notable feature of its aid policy is its reliance on partnerships with international organizations, particularly UN agencies, which provide institutional legitimacy and operational reach. Studies such as Barakat (2019) and AlObaidan (2022, 5) highlight how these partnerships have enhanced Qatar's reputation as a credible international mediator and actor in global humanitarian efforts.

Qatar's current ranking—22nd globally and 3rd in the Arab world—in the 2025 Global Soft Power Index, with a score of 54.5 out of 100, reflects the effectiveness of its soft power instruments, including foreign aid, media, education, and diplomacy (Brand Finance, 2025). In this context, the study seeks to assess the effectiveness of Qatar's aid policy in strengthening its soft power and achieving national interests. Specifically, it aims to:

Examine the extent to which Qatar's aid policy contributes to achieving its economic interests internationally through soft power diplomacy.

Evaluate the role of Qatar's aid in supporting its political interests at the global level.

Analyze how Qatar's aid policy contributes to safeguarding the country's security interests via its soft power strategies.

RESEARCH THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

The appropriate theory to answer the problem is soft power theory. Soft power theory is one of the most prominent contemporary theories in international relations. It was introduced by Joseph Nye in his book "Bound to Lead" in 1990 and further developed in his book "Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics" in 2004. The theory is based on the fundamental idea that power in international politics is not limited to military and economic coercion, but extends to the ability to influence through attraction and persuasion.

Researchers distinguish between several levels of soft power. Nye sees two basic levels: the first relates to the resources and assets a state possesses (such as culture, values, and institutions), and the second relates to behavior and practices (such as public diplomacy and development aid). Barakat adds a third level related to the outcomes and effects a state achieves through its soft power. Many researchers have developed analytical models to measure and evaluate soft power. Watanabe & Soft (2024) presented a model based on three dimensions: political, economic, and cultural. Many researchers, such as Cooper & Momani (2011), have applied this theory to various cases, including studies of how small and medium-sized states use soft power to enhance their international standing.

The following conceptual map (fig1) illustrates the interactive relationship between the three main variables of the study. It shows how Qatari aid (as an independent variable) influences the strengthening of the state's soft power (as a mediating variable), which in turn contributes to achieving Qatari national interests (as a dependent variable) across all three dimensions. This map represents the analytical framework upon which the study relied to test its hypotheses and analyze its results.

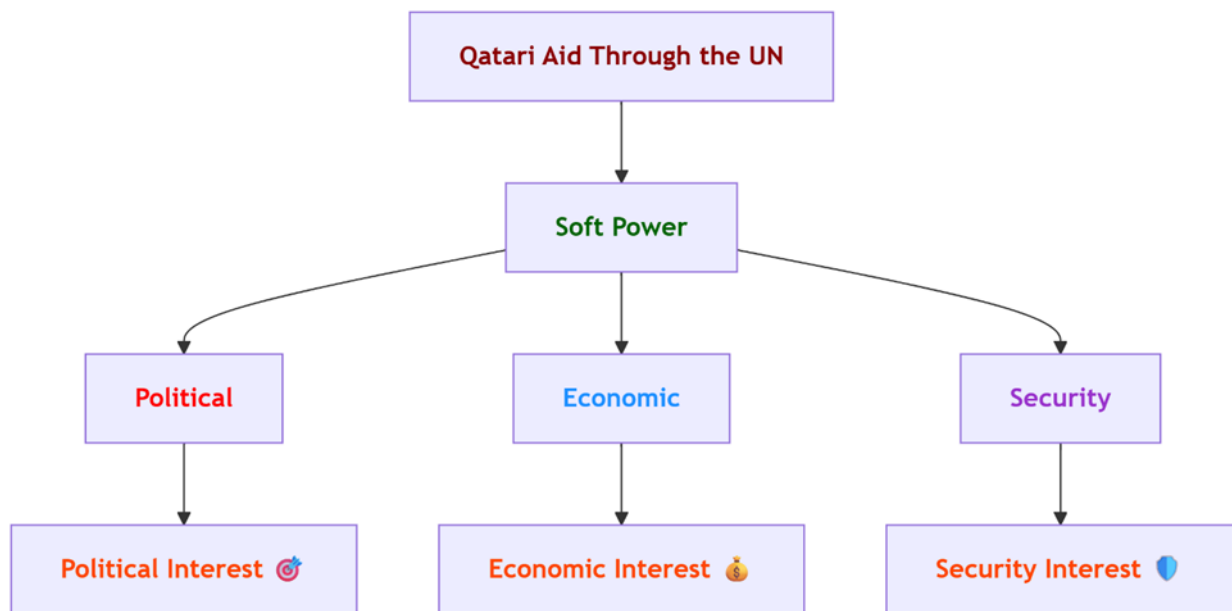


Figure 1: Concept map of research (by the author)

The above conceptual map represents the analytical framework upon which this study relied to understand the causal relationships between three primary variables: Qatari aid as the independent variable, soft power in its three dimensions as the mediating variable, and Qatari national interests as the dependent variable. This model demonstrates how aid, through the enhancement of soft power, is employed to serve national interests. Based on this framework, the research hypotheses were developed, which the study seeks to test and analyze in subsequent chapters.

The research problem is based on the main assumption that Qatari development and humanitarian aid provided through the United Nations system constitutes an effective tool of soft power, and that this soft power, in turn, contributes to achieving the country's national interests. Testing this assumption requires an in-depth analysis of the interrelationships between the three variables and a comprehensive assessment of Qatar's success in utilizing its development and humanitarian aid to achieve its strategic objectives. This problem gains additional importance in light of the growing regional and international challenges and the need for a deeper understanding of how soft power is used to achieve the national interests of small and medium-sized states in the contemporary international system. Based on soft power theory, three main hypotheses were formulated for the study:

Hypothesis 1: Qatari development and humanitarian aid provided through the United Nations enhances Qatari soft power in the economic sphere, contributing to the realization of the country's economic interests.

This hypothesis is based on the concept of "soft economic power" developed by Nye, whereby aid enhances the positive image of the donor country and increases its economic attractiveness. The theory assumes that development aid contributes to creating an economic environment conducive to investment and trade, opens new markets for exports, and strengthens economic relations with recipient countries. It also contributes to building Qatar's reputation as a reliable economic partner and rising economic power, enhancing its ability to attract investment and diversify its economy.

Hypothesis 2: Qatari development and humanitarian aid provided through the United Nations contributes to strengthening Qatar's political soft power, contributing to the realization of its political interests.

This hypothesis is based on the concept of "public diplomacy" in soft power theory, whereby aid constitutes an effective tool for influencing public opinion and political elites in recipient countries. The theory assumes that humanitarian and development aid contributes to enhancing the donor country's international standing and improving its global image. In the Qatari context, aid strengthens Qatar's role as a trusted regional and international mediator, grants it political influence in international organizations, and helps build strategic political alliances. It also contributes to strengthening the legitimacy of Qatari foreign policy and its ability to influence international decisions.

Hypothesis 3: Qatari development and humanitarian aid provided through the United Nations enhances Qatar's soft security power, helping to achieve its security interests.

This hypothesis is based on the concept of "soft security" in Nye's theory, whereby aid contributes to building relationships of trust and cooperation that enhances mutual security. The theory assumes that humanitarian and development aid play a pivotal role in achieving regional stability and combating non-traditional security threats. In the Qatari case, aid contributes to strengthening national security by building a network of security relationships with recipient countries, contributing to conflict prevention and resolution, and enhancing cooperation in

combating common threats such as terrorism and extremism. It also helps create a stable regional environment that supports Qatari security interests.

Based on soft power theory, the model assumes a positive, sequential relationship between these variables. Aid leads to the strengthening of soft power, which in turn contributes to the achievement of national interests. These relationships are based on the basic concepts in Nye's theory on the mechanisms of soft power and its impact on achieving foreign policy objectives.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, analytical, and critical methodology to understand the relationship between development and humanitarian aid provided by the State of Qatar and its use as a tool of soft power in the service of national interests. This approach was chosen due to the complexity and multidimensional nature of the subject, while utilizing both descriptive and comparative approaches to support the analysis. The analytical, critical approach provides an in-depth understanding of the relationship between the three main variables in the study. It also allows for an analysis of the historical, political, and social contexts surrounding this relationship and its transformations over time. The descriptive approach provides a comprehensive overview of the nature, mechanisms, and evolution of Qatari aid, while the comparative approach enables evaluation of its effectiveness by analyzing and comparing different experiences over multiple time periods. The study relies on interconnected hypotheses and sub-questions, which are tested based on the adopted theoretical framework.

The study relies on an in-depth analysis of official documents and records to collect its data, given the accurate and reliable information they provide about Qatari aid and its impact. These documents include annual reports issued by relevant Qatari entities, such as the Qatar Fund for Development, in addition to documents from the United Nations and its specialized agencies, as well as agreements and memoranda of understanding signed between Qatar and international organizations. The study also covers official Qatari discourse related to aid and its accompanying media coverage, in addition to relevant academic studies, through an analysis of government data, media reports, and documented content.

The study relies on primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include official documents issued by Qatari entities such as the Qatar Fund for Development and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in addition to aid statistics and documents from the United Nations and its various agencies, such as development reports and bilateral agreements. Secondary sources include previous academic studies, specialized books, reports issued by research centers, and peer-reviewed scientific articles that address the topic of Qatari aid and soft power, which provide analytical and interpretive dimensions that enrich the study's content.

The study follows a multi-stage analytical methodology, beginning with classifying and organizing data according to topics and time periods to facilitate systematic analysis. This is followed by an in-depth analysis of the relationships between variables within a clear theoretical framework. Content analysis is the primary tool for understanding texts and documents, used to extract recurring themes and patterns that address the relationship between aid, soft power, and national interests. Comparative analysis is also used to track the evolution of Qatari aid over time and measure its impact on achieving desired goals. The study relies on strict standards to ensure the quality of the analysis and the reliability of the results. Methodological triangulation techniques are applied by comparing data from multiple sources to ensure accuracy, while maintaining objectivity and avoiding bias in interpreting the results.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Qatari Aid and Economic Interests: A Soft Power Analysis

This part of the paper discusses how Qatari aid has transformed from mere humanitarian and development support into an effective tool for promoting national economic interests through its use as soft power. This approach is based on the concept of soft power, which refers to indirect influence through attractiveness and good reputation. It reviews the Qatari experience in this context as a model that combines humanitarian commitment with economic benefit.

Transforming Qatari Aid into Economic Attractiveness

Qatar has relied on well-thought-out strategies to transform its aid into economically attractive tools that enhance its international standing. Projects such as the \$200 million Siraj solar energy project in Somalia demonstrate Qatar's ability to combine humanitarian goals with economic interests. Projects in Sudan and Somalia have also contributed to enhancing Qatar's food security through agricultural investments that serve both parties

(Pericoli & Donelli, 2023). According to Kharas (2015), this approach is more balanced than the traditional aid model.

In promoting its image as a responsible economic power, Qatar has focused on financing innovative development projects that reflect its financial and technical capabilities (Cooper & Momani, 2011). This "aid diplomacy" has enabled it to establish a foothold in international financial institutions (Aghzadeh, 2023). This policy also aims to market a Qatari economic model based on innovation and sustainability, as confirmed by the Siraj project as an example that embodies the state's commitment to the green economy (Al Sharq newspaper, 2019; Yavuzaslan & Cetin, 2016).

The Impact of Aid on Qatar's Image as a Trusted Economic Partner

Qatari aid has enhanced its image as a reliable economic actor, especially during crises like the Gulf blockade (2017–2021) and the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite challenges, Qatar continued aid efforts in over 80 countries (Kinninmont, 2017; Al Jazeera, 2021), strengthening its credit rating and investment appeal. This approach also enabled economic diversification and expanded Qatar's reach into regions like Africa, forming partnerships in infrastructure, agriculture, and energy (Pericoli & Donelli, 2023).

Qatar's efficiency is reflected in projects such as Gaza's Hamad Hospital (Bashir & Abdelsalam, 2021), while the involvement of Qatari firms in international infrastructure has boosted their global competitiveness (Moawad, 2019). Qatar's financial interventions, like the \$3 billion deposit to Egypt in 2012, further underscore its strategic economic role (Barakat, 2019).

Strategic Economic Partnerships with UN Agencies

Qatar has deepened its global footprint through major partnerships with UN agencies. A 2023 UNDP agreement worth \$500 million supported initiatives such as the "Youth Economic Empowerment" program in North Africa, which opened new markets for Qatari firms (United Nations, 2023; Lestra, 2017). Cooperation with the FAO on strategic crops included the Somalia "Green Belt" project, which created agricultural investment opportunities (Qatar Charity, 2025; Milton et al., 2022).

Partnerships with UNOPS facilitated Qatari infrastructure involvement in complex zones like Gaza (Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021; Barakat, 2019), while collaboration with UNCTAD promoted Qatar as a regional trade hub, particularly through African infrastructure and trade facilitation programs (Pericoli, 2021; Zaid, 2021).

Effectiveness of Economic Partnerships with UN Agencies

Studies confirm that UN partnerships have strengthened Qatar's image as a credible economic partner and diversified its economy (ElKahlout & Milton, 2022). Post-blockade, these partnerships reinforced the legitimacy and transparency of aid flows (Elkahlout & Hedaya, 2024). Nonetheless, challenges remain, including weak institutional coordination, limited impact assessment mechanisms, and insufficient private sector engagement (Barakat, 2019).

Economic Impacts of Qatari Aid

Qatari Aid and Economic Diversification

Qatari aid has supported the goals of Qatar National Vision 2030 by promoting economic diversification. It has helped develop sectors such as agriculture, real estate, and services, creating opportunities beyond oil and gas (Lestra, 2017). Domestically, aid stimulated growth in transport, logistics, and food industries, while enhancing human capital in planning and international relations (Cooper & Momani, 2011; Barakat, 2019).

Aid's Impact on Qatari Investment Abroad

Aid has fostered favorable investment climates in recipient countries. In Somalia, aid preceded Qatari investment in ports and infrastructure (Pericoli & Donelli, 2023). It also improved the business environment and provided political cover for investments, as seen in Sudan and Turkey (Bashir & Abdelsalam, 2021; Antwi-Boateng, 2013). Qatar's investments in Turkey, totaling over \$22 billion, supported its economy during currency and natural disasters.

Benchmarking Qatar's Aid Model in the UN System

Qatar's aid model combines generosity with strategic ambition. From 2012 to 2019, it provided an average of \$6.75 billion annually (Government Communications Office, 2024). Like the UAE, Qatar channels aid through institutions such as Qatar Fund for Development and Qatar Charity (Aras et al., 2024). While Sweden emphasizes human rights and Turkey "humanitarian diplomacy," Qatar integrates humanitarian and political goals aligned with UN principles (Government Communications Office, 2024). Since joining the Development Assistance Committee in 2016, Qatar has boosted its global role by submitting official aid statements and hosting UN offices (United Nations, 2023).

Aid as a Tool for Export Growth

Qatar uses "tied aid" to support national exports. Between 2015 and 2020, non-oil exports to aid-receiving countries rose over 30% (Sheikh Mohammed bin Thamer Al Thani Report, 2024; Brannagan & Giulianotti, 2025, 1149). Aid to North Africa increased exports of Qatari chemicals and construction materials. Development projects also promoted Qatari products abroad. In Sudan, health aid improved perceptions of Qatari medical services, boosting demand. Aid also helped build distribution networks that facilitated product access (Yavuzaslan & Cetin, 2016; Kinninmont, 2017).

Aid's Role in Food and Energy Security

Aid supports Qatar's food security by funding agriculture in countries like Sudan, Somalia, and Ethiopia, targeting key crops such as wheat and rice. Around 30% of grain needs were met via Sudan and Ethiopia projects, including the \$300 million "Al-Qout" initiative (Pericoli & Donelli, 2023). Aid aligned with sovereign wealth investments, enhancing Qatar's control over food value chains (Al Sharq, 2023). In Ethiopia, the "Sustainable Food" project linked aid and investment to supply meat and grains.

In energy, aid expanded Qatar's global role beyond gas exports. Renewable energy projects in developing countries, such as Somalia's Siraj solar initiative, diversified expertise and opened new markets (Naier, 2021, 48). Infrastructure financing in Africa and Asia also supported LNG market expansion.

Testing the First Hypothesis on Economic Soft Power

Qatari aid—especially through the United Nations system—has become a strategic pillar in building the state's economic soft power. The findings support the study's first hypothesis: Qatar has effectively used aid to advance national interests and promote its image as a resilient, innovative, and sustainable economy. This transformation is reflected in its ability to tie aid to mutual economic interests, boost international confidence, and showcase technical and institutional capabilities. Aid has also supported economic diversification and expanded Qatar's global market presence. However, success varies, as the link between aid and diversification remains indirect and challenged by structural reliance on the energy sector. Qatar's partnerships with international institutions further highlight its flexible approach to beneficiary needs and global market trends, adding legitimacy to its development policy and strengthening economic ties within a strategic, humanitarian framework. Tabel 1 shows key joint projects between Qatar and un agencies regarding humanitarian aid.

Table 1: Key Joint Projects Between Qatar and UN Agencies Regarding Humanitarian Aid

Project Name	Partner Agency	Value/Scope	Objectives and Achievements
Gaza Emergency Project (2023–2024)	World Food Programme (WFP) + UNRWA + UNDP	\$150 million	- Shelter for 50,000 displaced individuals - Establishment of 3 field hospitals - Clean water for 500,000 people
Education Above All	UNICEF	Support for 1 million children	- Construction and equipping of schools - Teacher training - Provision of educational supplies

Sustainable Food Security	Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)	10 countries in Africa	- Development of sustainable agriculture - Support for small-scale farmers - Improvement of food supply chains
"Amal" Initiative	UNHCR	100,000 refugee children	- Support for education in refugee camps
Gaza Relief Operations Support 2023	World Food Programme (WFP)	\$100 million	- Provision of urgent food aid to over 1 million people
Support for UNRWA Operations in Gaza (prior to recent closure)	UNRWA	\$25 million	- Provision of shelter for displaced individuals - Healthcare services - Urgent humanitarian aid

(Sources: Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024; UNRWA, 2024; Education Above All, 2024; Al-Sharq Newspaper, 2023)

It is also noted that Qatar's strategy of utilizing aid to achieve economic interests faces multiple challenges and risks. Focusing on specific geographic regions, particularly Africa and the Middle East, makes this strategy vulnerable to political and security fluctuations in these regions. Furthermore, the increasing reliance on UN organizations to implement aid, despite its benefits in terms of legitimacy and transparency, may limit flexibility and speed in responding to available economic opportunities.

The following chart illustrates the dynamic relationship between Qatari aid and economic soft power and its impact on achieving national interests. Qatari aid, whether provided directly or through UN agencies, contributes to strengthening Qatar's economic soft power by increasing its attractiveness and influence internationally. This soft power translates into tangible economic gains, including diversifying the national economy, promoting foreign investment, opening new export markets, ensuring food and energy security, and expanding the network of international economic cooperation. The dashed path in the following chart (fig 2) represents the cumulative effect of this process, as the economic gains achieved contribute to strengthening Qatar's ability to provide more aid, creating a positive cycle of sustainable impact that strengthens Qatar's economic position globally.

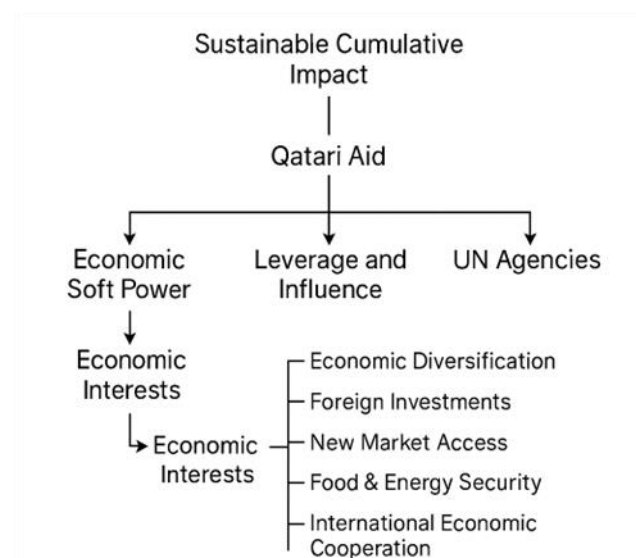


Figure 2: An Illustrative Model of the Impact of Qatari Aid on Economic Soft Power

Despite these challenges, Qatar's model of employing aid as a tool for economic soft power offers valuable lessons for small and medium-sized countries seeking to enhance their global economic influence. Despite its limited size and population, Qatar has been able to transform its financial resources into effective soft power, contributing to its economic interests and enhancing its international standing.

Looking ahead, it appears that achieving greater success in employing aid to enhance economic soft power requires developing more integrated mechanisms among the various Qatari institutions involved, adopting a more strategic approach to selecting projects and beneficiary countries, and enhancing the participation of the Qatari private sector in the design and implementation of aid programs. It also requires developing more accurate tools

to measure and evaluate the economic impact of aid, allowing it to be more effectively directed toward achieving national economic interests.

Qatari Aid and Political Interests: A Soft Power Approach

This chapter explores the political dimension of Qatari development and humanitarian aid by analyzing how it is employed as a tool of soft power to serve national interests. Despite the official discourse's emphasis on the humanitarian and developmental nature of aid, the analysis reveals its profound political role, particularly in enhancing Qatar's international image, expanding its influence within international organizations, and achieving diplomatic gains through its various partnerships, particularly with the United Nations system. This chapter draws on a soft power approach to understand how aid is transformed into diplomatic tools that contribute to maximizing Qatar's political influence, particularly in the context of regional crises and changing international balances.

Dimensions of the Political Influence of Qatari Aid

Mechanisms for Transforming Aid into Political Influence

Qatar has built an integrated system of "donor diplomacy" to convert aid into political influence. Barakat (2019) notes that Qatar strategically directed aid to areas like Syria, Gaza, and Afghanistan, allowing it to exceed its geographic and demographic limitations. Timing played a key role, as seen in Sudan post-2019, when Qatar leveraged political shifts to expand its influence. Through "targeted aid," Qatar combined bilateral support to elites with UN-channelled aid for international legitimacy. Cooper & Momani (2011) termed this "small-state ingenuity," exemplified by the \$200 million direct aid to Sudan and simultaneous UN humanitarian support (Al-Sharq Newspaper, 2019).

Qatar also employs "humanitarian diplomacy" by linking aid to political mediation. Elkahlout & Hedaya (2024) highlight this in Afghanistan, where Qatar aided the evacuation of over 70,000 people (Lusail News, 2021). Similar strategies were applied in Gaza. The study identifies four mechanisms as illustrated in fig 3: donor diplomacy, humanitarian diplomacy, UN partnership, and targeted aid—each reinforcing Qatar's political presence regionally and internationally.

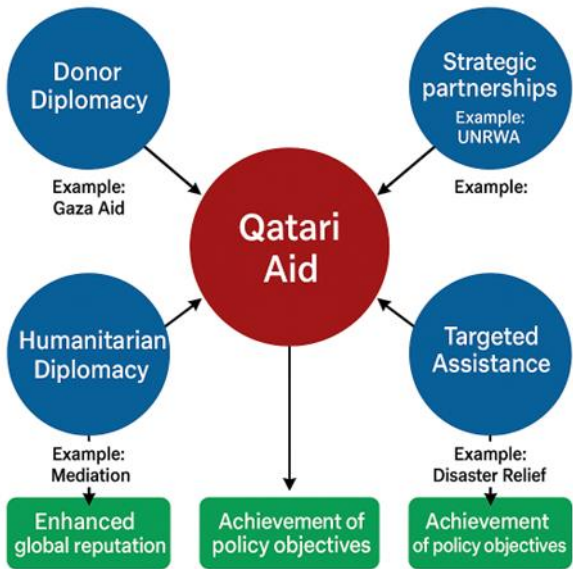


Figure 3: Mechanisms for transforming Qatari aid into political influence

The Impact of Aid on Qatar's Political Reputation in the International Community

Enhancing Qatar's International Image through Aid

Qatari aid has improved the country's global image, particularly after the 2017 blockade. Naier (2021) notes that aid countered terrorism allegations and positioned Qatar as a humanitarian state. During COVID-19, it sent aid to 80 countries, reinforcing its credibility (Al Jazeera, 2021).

Support for just causes—especially Palestine—has also elevated Qatar's status. Pericoli (2021) highlights over \$1.6 billion in Gaza aid, with a key mediation role during the 2023–2024 conflict. Qatar's rapid aid response to Syria and Turkey post-2023 earthquake further reinforced its humanitarian reputation (Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023).

UN partnerships have increased transparency. Milton et al. (2022) observed a transformation in Qatari aid delivery post-2017, acknowledged by the UN Secretary-General (United Nations, 2023), which boosted Qatar's international standing.

Aid and Qatar's Role in International Organizations

Qatar's generous contributions expanded its influence in global institutions. Barakat (2019) links this to its election to bodies like ECOSOC (2021–2023), the Human Rights Council (2018–2020), and the UNESCO Executive Board. Qatar has also strengthened its position within the IMF and World Bank.

Initiatives like Education Above All have educated over 10 million children (Education Above All, 2024), boosting ties with UNESCO and UNICEF. Collaboration with FAO supports food security (Al-Sharq Newspaper, 2023). Hosting UN offices like OCHA and OHCHR (Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021) has further enhanced Qatar's institutional presence.

UN Partnership and Political Gains

Post-2017, Qatar prioritized its UN partnership. Elkahlout & Hedaya (2024) emphasize that this boosted legitimacy, eased regional pressures, and enhanced international acceptance. In Gaza, UN frameworks allowed Qatar to provide aid under blockade conditions (United Nations, 2022).

Qatar leveraged UN cooperation to act in sensitive contexts, such as in Syria through UNHCR (Pericoli, 2021) and in Afghanistan as a mediator (Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023). The UN has also served as a multilateral platform for broader alliances. Milton et al. (2022) note Qatar's active role in initiatives like the Dialogue of Civilizations and climate change, enhancing its diplomatic independence amid regional polarization.

The Geopolitical Distribution of Aid

The geographic distribution of Qatari aid (fig 4) reflects a strategic pattern that combines a focus on the Arab region and the Middle East, as a geographic priority, with maintaining an active presence in other regions. This approach reflects Qatar's vision of employing development and humanitarian aid as a means of soft power to serve its national interests (RACA, 2022).

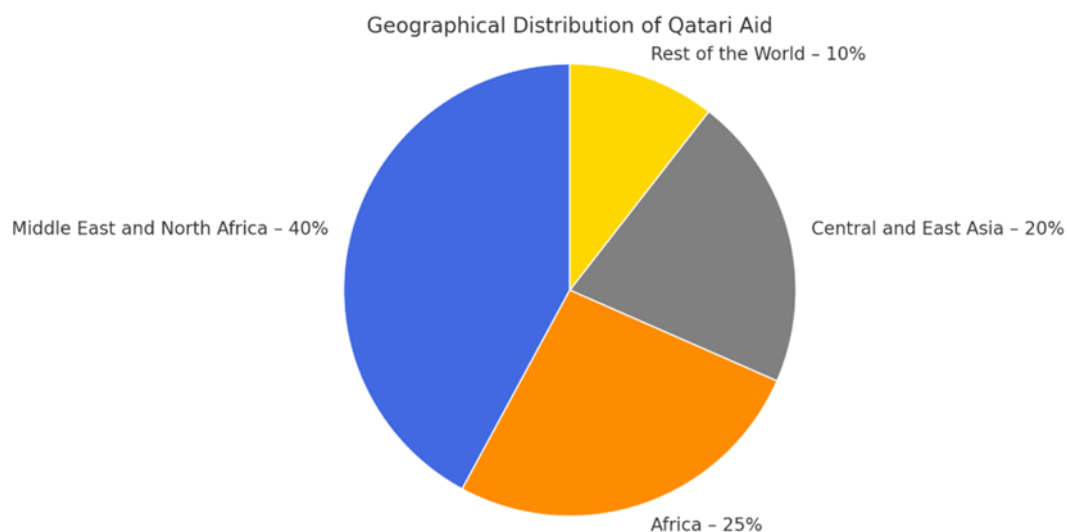


Figure 4: Estimated Calculation of the Geographical Distribution of Qatari Aid

The Middle East and North Africa receive about 45% of Qatari aid, reflecting strategic, cultural, and historical priorities. Qatar views the region as vital to its foreign policy. Notably, aid to Palestine has exceeded \$1.6 billion over the past decade, supporting reconstruction in Gaza, building hospitals and schools, salary support, and humanitarian relief. Following the October 2023 events, Qatar pledged \$500 million in emergency aid (RACA, 2024).

In Syria, Qatar has provided over \$2 billion since the crisis began, focusing on refugees, education, and healthcare. A key initiative was establishing the "City of Hope" in northern Syria after the opposition, led by new President Ahmad al-Sharaa, took control.

Aid Beyond MENA

While focused on MENA, Qatar also directs 55% of its aid to Africa and Asia. Africa receives 25%, including sustainable development and crisis response projects. These include the \$200 million Siraj renewable energy project in Somalia, and initiatives in Sudan involving dam construction, agriculture, and education. Asia receives 20%, with over \$50 million to Afghanistan post-2021 and aid to Pakistan in education, healthcare, and infrastructure (RACA, 2024; Qatar Charity, 2025; MOFA, 2023).

Criteria for Aid Allocation

Though no official criteria are published, analysis of RACA’s reports reveals several guiding principles. Priority is given to countries facing severe humanitarian or development crises. Strategic relevance, regional role, and institutional capacity also influence aid distribution. The potential for long-term impact and strength of bilateral ties are considered. These criteria are periodically reviewed with international partners to ensure aid effectiveness (RACA, 2024).

Qatari Aid and Strategic Political Objectives

Studying the Impact of Aid on Qatar's Capacity in Mediation and International Negotiations

Qatari aid has significantly enhanced the country’s role as a regional and international mediator, enabling effective engagement in complex negotiations. Milton et al. (2022) describe this as “diplomatic capital,” allowing Qatar to build balanced relationships with conflicting parties and serve as an acceptable mediator. A clear example is its role in the Afghan crisis, where aid helped facilitate the 2020 Doha Agreement and the evacuation of over 70,000 people (Lusail News, 2021; Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

Qatar has adopted "humanitarian diplomacy," integrating humanitarian and political dimensions to navigate sensitive conflicts. This is evident in Gaza, where Qatar maintained ties with both Hamas and Israel, allowing it to broker ceasefires and prisoner exchanges, including during the October 2013 War (Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014). A similar approach was used in Sudan, leading to the 2011 Doha Document for Peace.

Aid has also contributed to Qatar’s diplomatic strengths. According to Elkahoulout & Hedaya (2014), it has enabled disciplined neutrality, credibility, and access to hard-to-reach actors. These qualities were key in mediating complex cases like Lebanon’s 2008 Doha Agreement and peace efforts in Yemen.

The study’s model shows that Qatari aid builds trust and credibility essential for mediation. Case studies of six major conflicts (fig 5) illustrate how Qatar transformed humanitarian aid into political influence, achieving strategic goals: building alliances, enhancing its global standing, and addressing regional challenges. Despite its small size, Qatar has effectively used aid to establish powerful soft influence.



Figure 5: Mutual Influence Model between Qatari Aid and International Mediation Efforts

The Impact of Aid on Building Strategic Alliances

Qatar has used its aid as a key instrument to build strategic alliances beyond its immediate geography, reinforcing its political independence. As Cooper and Momani (2011) point out, Qatar pursued a pragmatic aid policy, balancing relations with key powers such as Lebanon and Turkey. During Turkey's economic crisis and the 2023 earthquake, Qatari aid deepened bilateral ties, reflected in Turkey's support during the Gulf blockade (Naier, 2021). In Africa, Qatar expanded its influence in the Horn of Africa through stronger ties with Ethiopia and Somalia.

Qatari aid also strengthened relations with major powers and international bodies. Kinninmont (2017) emphasized the role of aid delivered via international organizations in deepening ties with the U.S. and EU, culminating in Qatar's 2022 designation as a major non-NATO ally. Pericoli and Donelli (2023) note Qatar's flexible aid strategy, especially after the 2017 crisis, during which it intensified cooperation with international organizations to counter isolation and later restored Gulf ties without compromising autonomy. This flexibility reflects a strategic use of aid to enhance political influence despite limited resources.

Aid Effectiveness in Confronting Regional Political Challenges

Qatar effectively used aid to counter regional pressures, particularly during the 2017–2021 blockade. Barakat (2019) highlights how partnerships with Tunisia, Morocco, and Somalia helped break isolation. Humanitarian ties with Turkey and Iran ensured supply continuity during the crisis (Naier, 2021).

Qatar also reinforced its role as a neutral mediator. Milton et al. (2022) describe its "positive neutrality," offering aid to both sides of conflicts like in Yemen and Syria, especially after the 2023 earthquake (Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023). Qatar's independent policy also targeted regional hegemony. Elkahout and Hedaya (2024) show how aid to Sudan and Somalia bolstered its Horn of Africa influence, while Pericoli (2021) highlights its strengthened roles in the Arab League and OIC. Yet, regional polarization and complex crises such as Syria and Libya have limited aid effectiveness in some contexts.

Testing the Second Hypothesis on Political Soft Power

The analysis supports the second hypothesis: Qatari aid—particularly through UN cooperation—enhances political soft power and supports strategic goals. Tools like “donor diplomacy” and “humanitarian diplomacy” have helped Qatar build broad international ties and a responsible global image.

Aid flexibility, through both bilateral and multilateral channels, has enabled Qatar to navigate complex political landscapes. UN cooperation has provided international legitimacy and influence in global forums. This enabled mediation roles in conflicts such as Afghanistan, Gaza, Darfur, and Lebanon, and strengthened alliances with major powers like the U.S. and Turkey.

This strategy proved particularly effective during the blockade, allowing Qatar to preserve independence. Still, the model is subject to regional shifts and global polarization. It also raises concerns about the politicization of aid. Nonetheless, Qatar's approach represents a unique model of how a small state can leverage financial and diplomatic tools to amplify its international role. Its continued success depends on adaptability and the evolution of its soft power instruments.

Qatari Aid and Security Interests: The Soft Security Dimension

This chapter explores the security dimension of Qatari aid, highlighting its role in promoting “soft security”—a strategy that addresses the root causes of threats through development and stability rather than military means. Qatar uniquely integrates aid into its foreign policy to foster a stable environment that reduces risks and strengthens regional influence. This approach relies on international partnerships, especially with the UN, to enhance the legitimacy of aid and support national security (Fatic, 2002, 93).

Section 1: Aid as a Tool of Soft Security in Qatari Policy

Qatari aid, while humanitarian and developmental in nature, also serves as a preventive tool for promoting stability in fragile regions. Following the Arab Spring and the blockade crisis, Qatar increasingly used aid to expand regional influence and protect its domestic environment (Blyth, 2018; Stoddard & Harmer, 2010).

The Concept of Soft Security and Its Connection to Aid

Soft security involves using non-military tools—such as economic and social aid—to tackle non-traditional threats like extremism, migration, and conflict. It focuses on addressing root causes like poverty and marginalization to achieve lasting stability (Fatic, 2002, 93). Qatar applies soft security model (fig 6) in areas like Gaza, Syria, and Somalia to contain crisis spillover. However, critics warn that linking aid to security goals may compromise neutrality and international credibility.

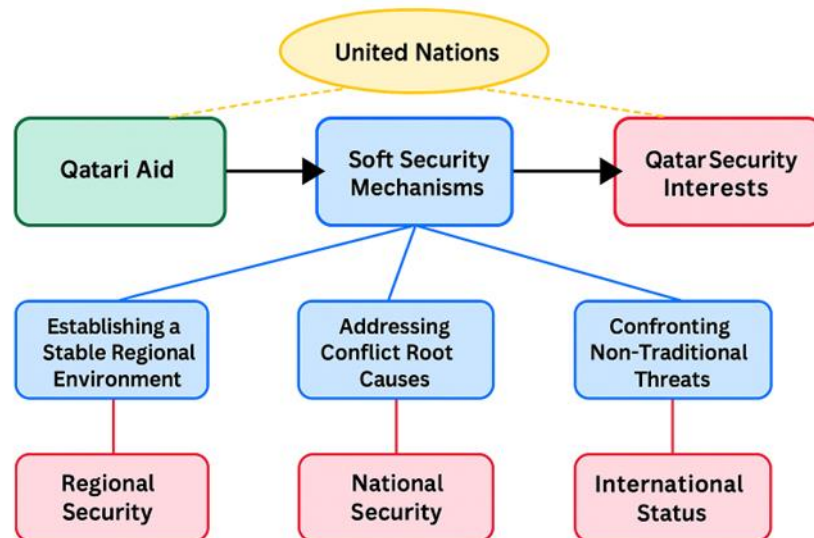


Figure 6: Conceptualization of Qatari soft security model

The study outlines how Qatar transforms its aid into tools of soft security through three mechanisms: promoting regional stability, addressing conflict roots, and tackling non-traditional threats. The United Nations plays a key role by lending legitimacy to Qatar's aid, reinforcing its position as a reliable security actor.

Aid and Regional Stability

Qatar has helped stabilize fragile states like Sudan, Somalia, and Yemen by funding development, infrastructure, education, and health services. These efforts have mitigated crises and reduced conflict risks, shielding Qatar from regional fallout (Pericoli & Donelli, 2023). Aid has also bolstered stability in Gaza and northern Syria (Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023). Yet, the fragility of recipient states threatens sustainability, highlighting the need for broader international cooperation, as seen during the Gulf blockade (Kinninmont, 2017).

Qatar's Role in Regional Security

Qatari aid has enhanced its influence in conflict zones. Its swift crisis responses and mediation roles, notably in Afghanistan, support its image as a key regional mediator (Elkahlout & Hedaya, 2024). Aid efforts in Palestine and Syria have extended Qatar's influence beyond its size (Milton et al., 2022). However, politicizing aid could erode trust and reduce Qatar's long-term effectiveness (Pericoli, 2021).

Confronting Non-Traditional Threats

Qatar uses aid to counter complex threats like extremism and displacement (AlHakmani, 2023, 10). A large share supports education and social services in conflict zones to tackle poverty and marginalization. Initiatives such as "Education Above All," in partnership with UNICEF, exemplify this strategy (Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024). Qatar also assists migration-affected states like Sudan and Yemen, aiming to reduce displacement and tensions. Collaborations with UNHCR and others help implement these efforts (AlHakmani, 2023, 9).

Still, addressing such threats requires integrated strategies as illustrated in fig 6, and ongoing program evaluations to ensure sustainable regional security outcomes (Barakat, 2019).

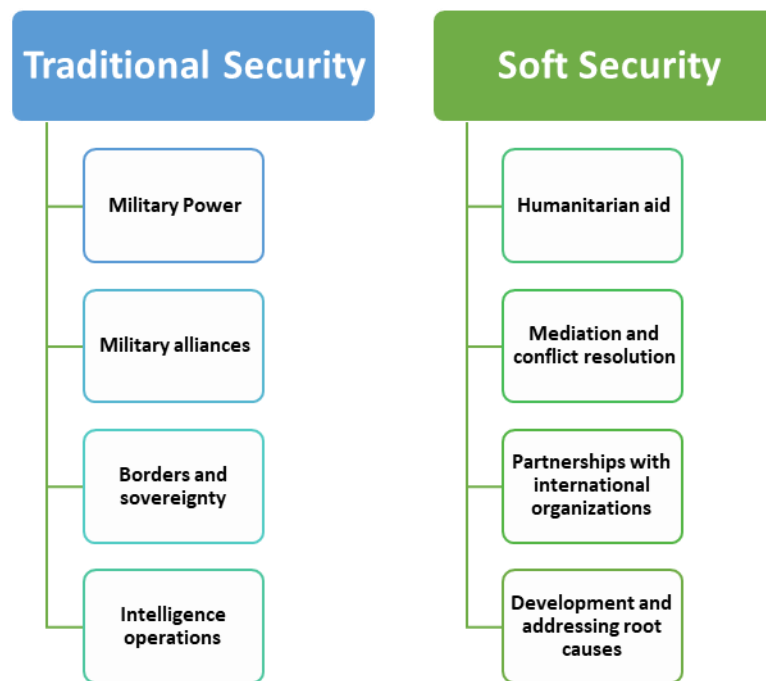


Figure 6: Conceptualization of Qatari soft security model

The model proposed in the study demonstrates how Qatar transforms its aid into tools for achieving soft security. It highlights three main mechanisms: first, building a stable regional environment; second, addressing the root causes of conflicts; and third, confronting non-traditional threats. The United Nations is a pivotal partner in this model, as it confers international legitimacy on Qatari aid, enhancing its role in regional and international security, and cementing Qatar's position as a responsible and trusted actor in security affairs.

Enhancing Qatari Security through International Aid Partnerships

This section explores how international partnerships enhance Qatar's national security through development and humanitarian aid. These collaborations help address non-traditional threats like terrorism and extremism and support Qatar's evolving security strategies.

Aid and National Security

Qatar leverages partnerships with international organizations as part of a broader national security strategy that extends beyond military tools to include economic, social, and political dimensions. Collaborations with UN agencies such as UNDP and FAO have enabled the implementation of development projects in conflict-prone areas, reducing security risks (Barakat, 2019). These efforts have supported Qatari interests, such as aiding Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan via UNHCR, which reduced tensions and reinforced Qatar's international reputation (Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024). Such partnerships were especially valuable during the Gulf blockade, bolstering Qatar's economic and political resilience (Al-Obaidan, 2022).

Aid in Counter-Terrorism Strategies

Qatar prioritizes countering terrorism and extremism through development and humanitarian work. By collaborating with international organizations, especially the UN, Qatar implements projects in vulnerable regions to tackle the root causes of extremism, including poverty and marginalization (Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024). These initiatives, notably in North Africa and the Sahel, have curtailed extremist recruitment by focusing on education and development (Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023). However, ongoing challenges include instability in target areas, sustainable funding, and coordination with stakeholders, necessitating regular evaluations to improve adaptability (Al-Obaidan, 2022, 102).

Testing the Third Hypothesis

This part of the paper supports the third hypothesis: Qatari aid through UN partnerships enhances soft security and serves Qatar's strategic interests. Aid has been used to address root causes of terrorism, extremism, and

migration, promoting regional stability. These partnerships have given Qatari aid international legitimacy and reinforced its image as a responsible global actor. Despite its success, challenges persist regarding sustainability and responsiveness to shifting conditions. Qatar's experience offers a unique soft security model that balances humanitarian goals with strategic interests, provided it undergoes continuous assessment and development.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The study results demonstrated Qatar's success in employing foreign aid as an effective tool of soft power, enabling it to achieve strategic gains on the economic, political, and security fronts. In the economic field, Qatar was able to integrate its aid with economic interests, contributing to enhancing its economic attractiveness and building its reputation as a global financial center based on innovation and sustainability. This was reflected in strengthening international confidence in its economy, expanding its network of trade relations, and highlighting its administrative and technical competencies internationally.

The study also demonstrated that Qatari aid contributed to diversifying sources of income, increasing foreign investment, and opening new markets for its exports, enhancing its global economic image. This aid also contributed to achieving food and energy security by expanding its investments in these two sectors, supporting the stability of the Qatari economy in the face of global market fluctuations.

On the other hand, partnerships with United Nations agencies played a fundamental role in the success of Qatar's soft power model, by providing an institutional framework that ensures transparency and grants international legitimacy to the aid. These partnerships have enabled Qatar to implement development projects with tangible impact in collaboration with organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization, strengthening Qatar's position as a reliable economic partner internationally.

The study also demonstrates that Qatar developed its strategy after the 2017 Gulf blockade crisis, intensifying its cooperation with international organizations, enhancing the credibility of its aid and reducing regional pressure and criticism. Qatar demonstrated flexibility in adapting to regional and international changes by diversifying its partners and expanding the scope of its aid, which strengthened its economic decision-making independence and enabled it to successfully overcome the effects of the blockade.

Discussion of the Main Research Problem and Hypothesis Testing

The study examined how Qatar uses development and humanitarian aid through the United Nations as a soft power tool to achieve its national interests. It raised a key question about how a small state can employ financial and diplomatic means to build soft power that protects its interests, along with three sub-questions related to the economic, political, and security dimensions of aid.

Economic Dimension

Qatar effectively aligned its aid with shared economic interests, enhancing its position as a reliable trade partner, boosting foreign investment, accessing new markets, and securing food and energy needs. Partnerships with international organizations added credibility and amplified the economic impact.

Political Dimension

Qatari aid bolstered its political influence, strengthened its role in international organizations, and enabled effective diplomatic engagement in crises like Afghanistan, Gaza, Darfur, and Lebanon. Through “donor diplomacy” and “humanitarian diplomacy,” Qatar expanded its political reach and fortified its position during the blockade while building new alliances.

Security Dimension

Qatar's aid policy enhanced national security through “soft security” strategies that address root causes of conflict such as extremism, terrorism, and illegal migration. Its contributions supported regional stability, counter-extremism efforts, and human security, reducing risks and strengthening national security via nontraditional approaches.

Hypothesis Testing

The study tested three hypotheses involving the relationship between Qatari aid (independent variable), soft power (mediator), and national interests (dependent variable), all of which received support.

First Hypothesis – Economic Soft Power: Aid strengthened economic soft power by building trust, attracting partners, and opening markets, though its impact on diversifying the national economy was less clear.

Second Hypothesis – Political Soft Power: Aid reinforced Qatar's international image and mediation capacity. UN cooperation added legitimacy, though regional and global tensions posed challenges.

Third Hypothesis – Soft Security: The strongest support was found here, as aid helped achieve stability, address extremism, and enhance human security. International partnerships increased aid effectiveness, though sustainability remains a challenge in a volatile region.

The data in table 2 confirmed the strong relationship between the three variables, supporting the hypotheses theoretically and practically, noting that the results of the application varied by field (economic, political, security).

Table 2: Relationship between the three variables

Independent Variable	Mediating Variable	Dependent Variable	Measurement Indicators	Test Results
Qatari Development and Humanitarian Aid	Economic Soft Power	Economic Interests	- Enhancing Qatar's image as an economic partner - Opening new export markets - Promoting foreign investments - Diversifying Qatar's economy - Strengthening food and energy security	The first hypothesis was confirmed, with varying levels of impact across different areas. The impact was strong in opening markets and enhancing economic image, and moderate in economic diversification.
Qatari Development and Humanitarian Aid	Political Soft Power	Political Interests	- Enhancing political reputation - Increasing status in international organizations - Strengthening mediation roles - Building strategic alliances - Addressing regional political challenges	The second hypothesis was confirmed. Aid had a strong impact on enhancing political soft power, particularly in the areas of mediation and strategic alliances.
Qatari Development and Humanitarian Aid	Security Soft Power	Security Interests	- Building a stable regional environment - Enhancing Qatar's role as a security actor - Addressing non-traditional threats - Strengthening national security	The third hypothesis was confirmed, showing a positive impact of aid on enhancing security soft power. The impact was strong in addressing non-traditional threats and moderate in building a stable regional environment.

Based on a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between Qatari aid, soft power, and national interests, it can be said that Qatar has succeeded in developing a distinct model that transforms foreign aid into effective soft power that contributes to achieving its multiple national interests. The table and graph above show the positive interrelationship between the three variables, confirmed by the results of testing the study's three hypotheses. Table 3 below illustrates the factors influencing the effectiveness of Qatari aid as a tool of soft power.

Table 3: Factors influencing the effectiveness of Qatari aid as a tool of soft power

Factor	Impact	Examples
Partnership with International Organizations	Strong Positive	- Enhancing the legitimacy and credibility of aid - Providing an institutional framework for aid - Leveraging technical and administrative expertise
Geographical Distribution of Aid	Moderate Positive	- Focus on the Middle East and North Africa region (45%) - Presence in Africa (25%) and Asia (20%) - Diversifying geographic partners
Type and Sectoral Distribution of Aid	Strong Positive	- Balance between humanitarian and development aid - Focus on strategic sectors (education, health, energy) - Aligning aid with strategic objectives
Regional and International Environment	Variable	- Impact of the Gulf crisis (2017–2021) - Regional and international polarization - Competition with other regional powers
Institutional Capacity for Aid Management	Moderate Positive	- Establishment of specialized institutions (e.g., Qatar Fund for Development) - Coordination among Qatari institutions - Development of evaluation and follow-up mechanisms

One of the essential elements that contributed to the success of the Qatari model of aid delivery is the strategic partnership with the United Nations and its specialized agencies. These partnerships provided an institutional framework and international legal cover that gave Qatari aid a significant degree of effectiveness in achieving economic, political, and security objectives. The importance of these partnerships was particularly evident during the Gulf blockade crisis, as they helped open alternative channels for delivering aid in a transparent and reliable manner, enhancing the credibility of Qatar's role on the international stage.

However, this model faces a number of challenges and limitations that affect its efficiency and sustainability. These challenges include the continuity of funding, the effectiveness of coordination between various Qatari institutions, and the difficulty of measuring the long-term impact of aid, especially given the multiplicity of stakeholders and their varying expectations. Furthermore, aid outcomes do not appear at the same level across all sectors, with the impact being more pronounced in some sectors than others, raising questions about the balance in the distribution of this effectiveness. Overall, the results of the hypothesis testing confirm the validity of the theoretical model adopted in the study, which assumes a positive, sequential relationship between Qatari aid as the independent variable, soft power as the mediating variable, and national interests as the dependent variable. These results indicate the growing importance of soft power as a strategic tool for small and medium-sized countries like Qatar, particularly in a complex and volatile international environment. This enhances these countries' ability to protect their interests and consolidate their global standing.

Practical and Theoretical Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, a set of practical and theoretical recommendations is presented to enhance the effectiveness of Qatari aid as a tool of soft power in foreign policy. On the practical level, the study calls for strengthening the institutional framework by establishing a higher body to coordinate between aid stakeholders, such as the Qatar Fund for Development, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Qatar Red Crescent, with the aim of achieving integration and avoiding duplication. It also recommends developing a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system based on clear performance indicators, as well as attracting qualified national cadres in the fields of development and humanitarian work. The recommendations also emphasize the need to direct aid according to a map of specific national interests and to diversify its delivery channels between bilateral and multilateral means, achieving integration between humanitarian and political policies within a comprehensive vision. They also call for deepening partnerships with United Nations agencies and expanding Qatari participation in international decision-making mechanisms, as well as hosting regional offices and headquarters for international organizations in Doha to strengthen Qatar's position as a regional hub for humanitarian action. In the same context, the recommendations emphasize the importance of developing an integrated media strategy that highlights Qatar's aid efforts, while strengthening the role of the private sector and civil society to ensure sustainability and community engagement.

On the theoretical level, the study focuses on the need to adapt the concept of soft power to suit the specificities of small and medium-sized countries by integrating it with hard power concepts to produce a comprehensive model of smart power appropriate to the Qatari and Gulf contexts. It also recommends developing quantitative and qualitative tools to measure the impact of soft power, taking into account the cultural and political specificities of the region. It calls for establishing the concept of "humanitarian diplomacy" as a theory that links aid and diplomatic mediation, while emphasizing the need to establish ethical standards that regulate the relationship between aid and national interests. The study proposes developing the concept of "soft security" as a theory linking humanitarian action and national security, particularly in the field of conflict prevention. It also emphasizes the

importance of developing a theory of small-state diplomacy that takes into account the limitations of their tools and the challenges they face in the international system, while deepening theoretical understanding of the role of international organizations as spheres of influence, and explaining how small states adapt to international changes through soft power tools.

FUTURE RESEARCH PROSPECTS

The study opens up broad avenues for future research, including conducting comparative studies between the Qatari model and other Gulf models such as the UAE, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia, as well as with successful small-state models such as Singapore, Switzerland, and Norway. It also proposes studying the evolution of the Qatari model over time, particularly in the period before and after the Gulf blockade.

The study calls for in-depth research on specific issues such as Qatar's role in Afghanistan and the Palestinian issue, or analyzing the impact of aid on its relations with major powers such as the United States and the European Union. It also proposes the development of quantitative indicators to measure the impact of aid, analyzing the perceptions of beneficiary communities, and studying Qatar's official discourse on aid as a tool of soft power.

In terms of future prospects, the study proposes scenarios for the development of Qatari aid in light of international economic transformations, such as changes in the energy market, and analyzes future challenges that may face Qatari soft power. It also recommends specialized studies on partnerships with international organizations, including an analysis of partnerships with United Nations agencies, a study of Qatar's role in reforming the global aid system, and an assessment of the impact of hosting regional offices on its international influence.

These recommendations and research perspectives confirm that Qatari aid, if developed within an integrated institutional and strategic framework, can remain an effective tool for achieving the state's interests and strengthening its position in a world of accelerating changes and increasing complexity of international relations.

Author Contributions

The author was solely responsible for the conception, design, data collection, analysis, interpretation, and writing of the manuscript.

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Competing Interests

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval

Not applicable. This study did not involve any human or animal subjects requiring ethical approval.

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