

From Resources to Usable Access: Network Position and Role-Specific Credibility in Qatar and Türkiye's Gaza Mediation, 2023–2026

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Why did Qatar sustain an early and continuous mediation role in the Gaza crisis while Türkiye, despite a broader diplomatic and soft-power portfolio, obtained comparable mediation acceptance only later? This article addresses a conversion problem that soft-power research often leaves underspecified: the conditions under which relational and reputational resources become operationally usable diplomatic access and an accepted crisis-mediation role. It combines a qualitative comparative case-study design with Structured, Focused Comparison across Qatar and Türkiye from 7 October 2023 to September 2026. The evidence triangulates official and multilateral documents, high-quality independent reporting, relevant academic literature, and twelve semi-structured expert interviews used for interpretation rather than stand-alone verification. The article argues that resource abundance is insufficient. Early mediation utility depends on the conjunction of functional specialization, role compatibility, a network position that connects otherwise difficult-to-link actors, usable access to actors whose participation is necessary, and sufficient role-specific credibility among the relevant negotiating parties and sponsors. Qatar entered the crisis with this configuration already institutionalized, which helps explain the continuity of its role from the November 2023 pause through subsequent negotiation rounds. Türkiye initially possessed broad reach but weaker mediation-role compatibility in Gaza; its principal function was advocacy and public diplomacy. In late 2025, however, changing negotiating demand revalued Türkiye's channels to Hamas and transformed previously underused or costly ties into usable mediation assets. The comparison refines soft-power conversion by locating a relational mechanism between resources and crisis-specific diplomatic utility and by showing that shocks can revalue resources over time.

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1. Introduction

International crises routinely reveal a gap between the resources a state possesses and the diplomatic roles it can actually perform. The Gaza war after 7 October 2023 provides a particularly sharp instance. Türkiye entered the crisis with a large diplomatic network, NATO membership, established channels across the Middle East, extensive public-diplomacy institutions, humanitarian capabilities, and political links to Palestinian actors. Qatar possessed a narrower institutional and material profile, yet it was embedded from the opening weeks in the core mediation architecture with Egypt and the United States. Qatar's role persisted through the November 2023 hostage-release pause, the negotiations that culminated in the January 2025 ceasefire agreement, subsequent rounds after that agreement faltered, and the later reconfiguration of the mediation framework. Türkiye, by contrast, offered mediation early and maintained wide contacts, but for most of 2023–2025 it remained more visible as an advocate, public diplomat, humanitarian actor, and political critic than as a central ceasefire broker. Only in October 2025 did international and multilateral evidence begin to identify Türkiye as part of the recognized brokering and guarantee structure, a role that continued into 2026.

This temporal asymmetry creates a puzzle that neither a resource-counting view of soft power nor a simple account of mediator impartiality explains well. If a wider portfolio of non-coercive resources automatically produced diplomatic influence, Türkiye should have converted its reach into mediation centrality earlier. If proximity to one belligerent necessarily undermined mediation, Qatar's ties to Hamas should have excluded it from a central role rather than making its channel indispensable. Conversely, if access alone were sufficient, Türkiye's early contacts with Hamas, Israel, Arab governments, Western partners, and international institutions should have generated the same type of negotiating role that Qatar enjoyed. The observed sequence therefore

points to a narrower question: under what conditions do relational resources become usable diplomatic access and accepted mediation roles during a highly polarized crisis?

The article argues that mediation utility is produced not by resource volume but by a conjunctural conversion mechanism. Functional specialization and role compatibility shape whether a state's existing resources can be activated for a specific diplomatic task. Network position matters when it connects actors who cannot, or prefer not to, communicate directly. Yet network position becomes operational only when it yields usable access: a channel that can actually carry proposals, information, assurances, or pressure in a negotiation. Usable access, in turn, is reinforced by role-specific credibility—the belief, among the relevant negotiating actors and sponsors, that the intermediary can perform that particular function with sufficient reliability. These components support role acceptance and diplomatic utility, but they do not imply enforcement capacity or ownership of the final outcome.

The Qatar–Türkiye comparison is analytically useful because the two states confronted the same crisis during the same period while entering it with different role histories and network configurations. This controls imperfectly but meaningfully for broad conflict context while preserving variation in institutional scale, relationships, foreign-policy style, and functional specialization. The comparison is also dynamic rather than static. Qatar's early advantage was not permanent, and Türkiye's initial absence from the core mediation architecture did not imply general diplomatic weakness. In late 2025, the demand structure of the negotiations changed. Türkiye's relationship with Hamas—previously useful for communication but costly for mediation acceptance among some actors—became more valuable when the emerging agreement required additional channels capable of encouraging Hamas to accept and implement a U.S.-backed

plan. The crisis therefore did not merely test pre-existing resources; it revalued them.

The contribution is twofold. First, the article specifies an intervening relational mechanism between soft-power resources and crisis-specific diplomatic utility. It distinguishes relational resources from usable access, general reputation from role-specific credibility, and mediation aspiration from accepted mediation role. Second, it links soft-power conversion to mediation scholarship on acceptance, credibility, information, and bias, while adding a temporal insight: the value of a relationship is endogenous to the function demanded by a particular phase of a crisis. The argument is deliberately bounded. It does not claim that mediation is itself soft power, that soft power caused ceasefires, or that Qatar “succeeded” while Türkiye “failed.” Rather, it explains why similar or broader resource portfolios produced different kinds of diplomatic utility at different times.

The article proceeds in five steps. The next section connects debates on soft-power conversion with research on mediation, acceptance, credibility, and diplomatic brokerage. Section 3 develops the analytical framework and three propositions. Section 4 explains the comparative design and evidence. Section 5 reconstructs the mechanism across Qatar’s early and sustained mediation role, Türkiye’s initially broad but non-central access, and the late convergence after 2025. Section 6 tests alternative explanations and draws out the comparative implications. The conclusion specifies the theoretical scope and limits of the argument.

2. Soft-Power Conversion, Mediation, and the Missing Relational Mechanism

Soft power is often discussed as if resources such as culture, values, foreign-policy legitimacy, communication capacity, and reputation can be aggregated into a national stock. Nye’s formulation is more conditional than many applications suggest: resources matter because they may generate attraction, legitimacy, or persuasion in a specific relationship and context,

not because their possession guarantees preferred outcomes (Nye, 2004, 2008, 2021). This distinction has been reinforced by critics and revisionists who warn against treating visibility, reputation, or instruments as equivalent to influence. Fan (2008) identifies conceptual slippage between image and power; Feklyunina (2016) emphasizes audience reception and identity; Gallarotti (2011) focuses on conditions of effective use; and Bakalov (2020) explicitly recasts soft power as a dynamic process whose mechanisms must be specified. The common implication is that the analytical problem is conversion: how resources become effects, for which audience, through which mechanism, and under what conditions.

That conversion problem is especially acute in diplomacy. Public diplomacy, humanitarian action, media, and mediation can all be associated with non-coercive statecraft, but they are not soft power by definition. An international broadcaster may generate reach without persuasion. Humanitarian assistance may create trust, resentment, or no identifiable reputational effect. Mediation may draw on trust and legitimacy but may also depend on material leverage, intelligence relationships, security guarantees, coercive pressure, or privileged access. Treating the diplomatic instrument as the outcome therefore collapses precisely the causal sequence that soft-power analysis needs to explain.

Mediation scholarship offers concepts that help specify this sequence. Research has long distinguished the willingness of a third party to offer mediation from the willingness of disputants to accept it. Greig and Regan (2008) show that the conditions that encourage third-party offers differ from those that foster acceptance. Kydd (2003) and Savun (2008) further complicate the conventional expectation that effective mediators must be impartial. A mediator’s relationship with one party can improve information and credibility under some conditions, while creating distrust under others. Maoz and Terris (2006) similarly identify mediator credibility as a central element of

strategic mediation, while more recent formal work shows that biased mediators may still be selected when their information and strategic usefulness outweigh the costs of bias (Kim & Lee, 2025). The implication is important for Gaza: proximity to Hamas is neither automatically an asset nor automatically a disqualification. Its value depends on who needs the channel, for what function, and whether the intermediary can remain sufficiently credible to the other relevant actors.

A second bridge comes from network and brokerage research. Diplomatic ties do not matter only as a count of bilateral relationships. Structural position can create informational and relational advantages when a state bridges actors or clusters that otherwise have limited direct contact. Choi (2023), although focused on conflict propensity rather than mediation outcomes, shows why broker positions in diplomatic networks should be understood as strategic assets rather than inherently pacific properties. For mediation, the relevant insight is narrower: a network position becomes diplomatically valuable when it allows an intermediary to move information, proposals, commitments, or assurances across a relational gap. The key variable is therefore not “network size” but the usability of the position for the function at hand.

Existing research on Qatar after 7 October illuminates parts of this logic but does not eliminate the comparative puzzle. Schiff and Admoni (2025) frame Qatar as a biased mediator whose ties to Hamas facilitated the November 2023 hostage negotiations, and their 2026 study emphasizes Qatar’s multiple roles as patron, broker, and ally. Elkahlout (2026) highlights a different limitation: negotiation success does not ensure implementation success when enforcement is weak and conflict asymmetry is high. Akpınar and Öztürk (2026) compare Qatar’s mediation in Gaza with Türkiye’s mediation in Ukraine as forms of strategic agency, showing how mediation can serve hedging or balancing strategies. These studies substantially advance understanding of

mediation as statecraft, but they do not directly explain why Qatar and Türkiye—inside the same Gaza crisis—converted their relations into accepted mediation roles at different times.

The gap is therefore not the absence of research on Qatar, Türkiye, or mediation. It is the under-specification of the relational steps linking a state’s resources and relationships to accepted crisis-specific diplomatic utility. Soft-power scholarship tells us not to equate resources with outcomes; mediation scholarship tells us that acceptance and credibility matter; brokerage research tells us that structural position can create relational leverage. Bringing these insights together suggests that the decisive analytical question lies between possession and outcome: when does a relationship become usable, for whom, and with what role-specific credibility?

3. Analytical Framework: From Relational Resources to Mediation Utility

The framework treats relational resources as antecedent conditions rather than as soft power in themselves. A relationship with a belligerent, a strategic partnership with a major power, prior mediation experience, or an institutional reputation can enable non-coercive diplomacy, but none proves attraction or influence. Their significance depends on the function they can perform in a specific episode. The proposed mechanism therefore begins with functional specialization and role compatibility, moves through network position and usable access, and culminates in role-specific credibility and accepted diplomatic utility.

Functional specialization refers to accumulated experience, organizational routines, personal and institutional networks, and external expectations surrounding a recurring diplomatic function. Specialization lowers the cost of activating a role because officials already possess procedures, trusted contacts, and reputational cues relevant to that function. It is not a generic national advantage. A state can be highly experienced in mediation in one conflict yet poorly positioned in another. Role compatibility is narrower still: the extent to which the role sought by a state fits its current relationships, behavior, public

positioning, and the needs of the negotiating actors. A state may be credible as an advocate or humanitarian donor but not as a mediator; these are distinct role-specific reputations.

Network position captures the state's placement between actors whose communication is costly, politically constrained, indirect, or incomplete. The concept is not used here as a formal network metric. Rather, it identifies a relational structure in which the intermediary links actors that need one another but lack an easy bilateral channel. This position matters only if it can be activated. Usable access therefore denotes more than diplomatic reach or the existence of contacts. It is an operational channel through which messages, proposals, lists, assurances, or pressure can move in a live negotiation and receive a response. Access can be asymmetric and still useful; what matters is whether the asymmetry can be embedded in a wider mediation architecture that compensates for it.

Role-specific credibility is the degree of confidence relevant actors place in the intermediary's ability to perform the particular function demanded of it. It is not equivalent to national popularity or general attraction. A mediator may be distrusted on broader political questions yet relied upon to transmit messages accurately, preserve confidentiality, interpret the other side, or help implement a limited arrangement. Conversely, a state may enjoy strong popular approval while lacking credibility as a broker among governments. Role-specific credibility is therefore relational, audience-specific, and potentially reversible.

The intermediate outcome is role acceptance or diplomatic utility: repeated inclusion in a negotiating architecture because relevant actors consider the intermediary useful for a defined function. This is analytically lower than "influence." It can be observed through

repeated requests for mediation, formal inclusion in joint statements, reliance on the channel during implementation crises, or third-party recognition of the mediator's role. Even then, the causal claim must remain limited. Accepted utility does not establish that the mediator caused a ceasefire, can enforce compliance, or altered the strategic preferences of the belligerents.

The final temporal component is resource revaluation after shock. Crisis shocks can change the scarcity and usefulness of particular relationships. A tie that previously carried reputational costs may become operationally valuable if it provides rare access to an actor whose consent is suddenly necessary. The opposite can also occur: a previously valuable relationship can become a liability if it destroys trust with a key audience. Resource revaluation is presented here as an emergent analytical insight rather than a general law. It helps explain why Türkiye's relations did not have a constant mediation value across 2023–2026 and why Qatar's ties could simultaneously be a source of criticism and of diplomatic indispensability.

The argument yields three bounded propositions:

P1. Relational resources are more likely to generate mediation utility when they provide usable access to actors whose participation is necessary for an agreement.

P2. Usable access is more likely to produce an accepted mediation role when it is accompanied by sufficient role-specific credibility among the negotiating actors and key sponsors of the process.

P3. Functional specialization facilitates early role acceptance, but changes in negotiating demand can revalue underused or costly relationships and enable later convergence in mediation roles.

Figure 1. Relational conversion mechanism

Relational resources / prior roles	Functional specialization & role compatibility	Network position	Usable access ↔ role-specific credibility	Role acceptance / diplomatic utility
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Context, conflict dynamics, third parties, material power, and party calculations

Possible function-specific contribution (not attribution)

Note. The arrows indicate an analytical sequence, not a deterministic causal chain. Acceptance and contribution remain conditioned by conflict dynamics, coercive capabilities, external sponsorship, and the decisions of the negotiating parties.

4. Research Design and Evidence

The article uses a qualitative comparative case-study design and Structured, Focused Comparison (George & Bennett, 2005). Qatar and Türkiye are examined through the same questions: What relational resources and prior roles existed before 7 October 2023? Which of those resources were activated for mediation? Did network position generate operationally usable access? What evidence indicates role-specific credibility and acceptance? When did the configuration change, and what competing explanations could account for the observed sequence? Negotiating episodes are treated as embedded analytical episodes within the two cases. Evidence is followed sequentially where this helps evaluate the proposed mechanism, but the article does not claim to conduct a formal process-tracing design with probabilistic causal tests.

The empirical period runs from 7 October 2023 to September 2026; earlier material is used only to establish baseline relationships and accumulated role specialization. The evidence base triangulates official documents from Qatar and Türkiye, U.S. and Egyptian statements where relevant, United Nations documents,

independent reporting, academic studies, and twelve semi-structured expert interviews conducted between 15 August and 3 September 2026. The interviews are anonymized as E01–E12 and were selected purposively for expertise spanning Qatar, Türkiye, mediation, public diplomacy, regional politics, humanitarian diplomacy, and comparative foreign policy. They are used interpretively and for triangulation, not as representative public-opinion data and not as stand-alone proof of disputed facts.

The comparative logic deliberately separates four evidentiary thresholds. First, mediation aspiration is an offer or stated willingness to mediate. Second, access is the existence of a functioning channel. Third, role acceptance is demonstrated when relevant parties or sponsors include the state in an operational mediation structure. Fourth, a negotiated outcome is a distinct empirical event, whose attribution remains multicausal. This separation is central because a state can have broad access without mediation acceptance, and it can be an accepted mediator without possessing enforcement power.

The cases are not selected to rank national soft power. They are useful because both states possessed substantial relational, diplomatic, and non-coercive resources, yet the timing and function of those resources differed inside the same crisis. The design therefore supports a mechanism-centered comparison rather than a

most-similar-systems claim in the strict sense. It also has limits. The two-case design cannot establish population-level generality; direct perception data among all negotiating actors are incomplete; and mediation outcomes are produced by multiple actors under conditions of intense military and political pressure. Claims are consequently framed as contributions to explanation rather than exclusive causal attribution.

5. From Network Position to Mediation Utility

5.1 Qatar: accumulated specialization and early usable access

Qatar entered the Gaza crisis with a relational configuration that was unusual precisely because it combined ties that appeared politically contradictory. It was a major U.S. security partner, hosted the Al Udeid air base, had accumulated experience in sensitive mediation and hostage-related diplomacy, maintained a channel to Hamas's political leadership, and worked with Egypt on Palestinian and Gaza-related files. None of these relationships was "soft power" in itself. The U.S. security partnership is materially grounded; the Hamas relationship carried serious reputational costs; and Egypt's role derived partly from geography, borders, and longstanding involvement. Their significance lay in the fact that together they formed a network position capable of being used in a negotiation where direct communication among principal actors was constrained.

The November 2023 hostage-release negotiations show the mechanism in its clearest early form. Qatar's channel to Hamas was activated inside a wider architecture involving Egypt, the United States, and Israel. The outcome—a temporary pause, hostage releases, Palestinian prisoner releases, and expanded humanitarian access—cannot be attributed to Qatar alone. U.S. diplomatic pressure, Egyptian mediation, Israeli and Hamas decisions, military conditions, and implementation by other actors were indispensable. Yet the episode demonstrates more than diplomatic visibility.

Qatar was used to move proposals and clarify positions with an actor to whom the United States and Israel did not maintain the same direct political channel. The relationship therefore generated usable access rather than mere relational reach.

The distinction between bias and uselessness is important here. Qatar's relationship with Hamas generated criticism and raised questions about neutrality, yet mediation scholarship predicts that a mediator's closeness to one side may improve information and the credibility of messages directed to that side (Kydd, 2003; Savun, 2008). Recent studies of the November negotiations similarly argue that Qatar's partiality did not automatically preclude mediation and may have enhanced its capacity to communicate with Hamas (Schiff & Admoni, 2025, 2026). The article's claim is narrower: Qatar's tie was valuable because it was embedded in a complementary multi-mediator structure. U.S. sponsorship and Egypt's role reduced some of the disadvantages of asymmetric access, while Qatar provided a channel the other actors needed.

Role-specific credibility developed through repeated use. Expert interviews most directly related to Qatar's mediation—particularly E02, E04, E07, E09, and E12, with comparative reinforcement from E01 and E06—converged on the view that the decisive resource was not wealth in isolation but an operational network and procedural trust. The relevant credibility was not broad admiration for Qatar. It was confidence that the Qatari channel could transmit proposals, manage sensitive contacts, and remain available across repeated rounds. This is consistent with the documentary pattern: continued inclusion in negotiation processes offers a stronger indicator of mediation-specific credibility than general claims about national image.

The January 2025 ceasefire agreement strengthens this inference. Qatar, Egypt, and the United States were publicly identified as the mediators, and the agreement entered into force on 19 January. Qatar's foreign ministry explicitly

described the agreement as a product of joint mediation, while the UN Secretary-General commended the three mediators. The event demonstrates role acceptance and a negotiated outcome, but it also establishes the boundary of the argument. The agreement's subsequent implementation problems show that accepted mediation utility was not equivalent to enforcement capability. Humanitarian access deteriorated, the transition between phases faltered, and large-scale fighting resumed in March 2025. Elkahoul's (2026) distinction between negotiation success and implementation success is therefore essential: mediators can facilitate agreement without controlling compliance.

The persistence of the Qatari channel despite failure is analytically revealing. In mid-2025, Qatar and Egypt continued to transmit and discuss proposals with U.S. involvement. Continued demand for the channel after a failed implementation phase suggests a durable functional role, not proof of strategic influence. The strongest stress test came on 9 September 2025, when Israel struck Hamas figures in Doha. Two days later, the UN Security Council condemned the strikes on the territory of what it called a key mediator and reiterated support for Qatar's vital mediation role alongside Egypt and the United States. The attack exposed the vulnerability of the network and the limits of trust, but international actors still treated Qatar as part of the mediation architecture rather than as a discarded intermediary.

This pattern supports P1 and P2. Qatar's pre-existing relationships mattered because they were operationally usable in the specific Gaza negotiation, and that access was reinforced by a role-specific credibility accumulated through repeated performance and continuing third-party reliance. Functional specialization helps explain why this configuration was available early. Qatar did not need to construct a new mediation identity after 7 October; it activated routines, contacts, and external expectations already associated with crisis brokerage. The

result was early role acceptance, not unrestricted influence.

5.2 Türkiye: broad reach without early mediation centrality

Türkiye entered the same crisis with a broader overall foreign-policy portfolio. It had extensive diplomatic representation, NATO membership, relations with the United States and Europe, political and economic ties across the Arab and Muslim worlds, channels to the Palestinian Authority and Hamas, and a recently repaired relationship with Israel before October 2023. It also possessed a large public-diplomacy ecosystem and substantial humanitarian and communication capacity. If network size or institutional breadth were sufficient, this profile should have yielded early mediation centrality. It did not.

The key distinction is between reach and usable negotiating access. In the opening weeks Türkiye offered to mediate and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan advanced a guarantor concept. Ankara conducted intensive contacts and retained access to Hamas while initially attempting to preserve space for communication with Israel. These actions demonstrate aspiration and broad diplomatic reach. They do not, however, demonstrate acceptance as a central mediator. The publicly documented mediation structures behind the November 2023 pause and the January 2025 ceasefire centered on Qatar, Egypt, and the United States. Even a Turkish-supported joint statement in August 2025 referred to the ceasefire efforts of those three states, indicating that Ankara itself was not yet publicly positioned in an equivalent role.

Role compatibility helps explain the difference. During the first phase of the war, Türkiye's foreign policy rapidly became more closely associated with political advocacy for Palestinians, increasingly confrontational rhetoric toward Israel, humanitarian action, legal initiatives, and efforts to shape international narratives. These activities could enhance legitimacy or attraction among some audiences, but they did not necessarily improve mediation credibility among the actors whose acceptance

was required for a ceasefire process. Expert interviews E03, E08, and E11, with comparative observations from E01 and E06, repeatedly distinguished Türkiye's broad ability to communicate from its more limited early negotiating centrality. They also emphasized that credibility as an advocate is not identical to credibility as a mediator.

The evolution of Türkiye-Israel relations intensified this trade-off. Before the war, normalization had created a potential bridging asset. As the conflict continued, however, Ankara's rhetoric hardened, the ambassador was recalled, and Türkiye later imposed trade restrictions and pursued legal and multilateral pressure. These moves reduced the gap between rhetoric and practice and could strengthen advocacy-specific credibility, but they also narrowed the political space in which Israel might treat Türkiye as an acceptable neutral or quasi-neutral broker. This illustrates why role-specific credibility cannot be collapsed into a general national reputation. A policy that improves credibility with one audience can reduce role compatibility with another.

Türkiye's relationship with Hamas created the opposite pattern. The tie provided information and political access, but in the early period it did not translate automatically into an accepted mediation role because access to one side was not enough. The surrounding mediation architecture already contained Qatar, which combined a Hamas channel with a long-standing U.S. strategic relationship and established Gaza-focused mediation routines, while Egypt contributed geographic and institutional centrality. Türkiye's channel was therefore potentially useful but not yet scarce enough, complementary enough, or sufficiently accepted to displace or join the established core.

This early period supports the negative side of P1 and P2. Türkiye possessed relational resources and broad reach, but the relevant conversion stalled between network position and usable access for the central ceasefire negotiation. Its connections generated other forms of diplomatic utility—advocacy, public

diplomacy, coalition building, humanitarian activity, and political pressure—without producing the same mediation role. Resource abundance was real; functional fit was different.

5.3 Late convergence: resource revaluation after 2025

The comparison becomes theoretically more valuable once Türkiye's later trajectory is included. A static account ending in early 2025 would freeze the cases into "Qatar as mediator" and "Türkiye as advocate." The evidence from October 2025 onward shows that this would be wrong. On 8 October 2025, the UN Secretary-General publicly commended the diplomatic efforts of the United States, Qatar, Egypt, and Türkiye in brokering a Gaza ceasefire and hostage-release breakthrough. On 13 October, Egypt, Qatar, and Türkiye signed, with the U.S. president, a document connected to the ceasefire framework in Sharm el-Sheikh. By January 2026, Qatar, Egypt, and Türkiye issued a joint statement explicitly describing themselves as the mediators, and joint mediator statements continued in August 2026.

What changed was not simply Türkiye's resource stock. Its institutions, NATO membership, regional ties, and Hamas contacts had existed earlier. The change lay in negotiating demand and the usability of particular relationships. Independent reporting in October 2025 indicated that Ankara's relationship with Hamas became operationally important as U.S.-backed diplomacy sought additional leverage and assurances to secure Hamas's acceptance. Hamas officials publicly referred to guarantees from the United States, Arab mediators, and Türkiye. The same relationship that had previously imposed costs on Türkiye's mediation credibility with Israel and Western partners could now perform a needed function within a larger, sponsored mediation structure.

This is resource revaluation after shock in a precise sense. The relationship did not become inherently more attractive; its functional value changed because the negotiation required a channel capable of communicating guarantees and encouraging acceptance by Hamas. At the

same time, U.S. sponsorship and the participation of Qatar and Egypt created an architecture in which Türkiye did not have to be trusted equally by every party on every dimension. Complementarity mattered. A mediator can contribute a function-specific capability while other actors supply different forms of access, leverage, reassurance, or legitimacy.

The late Turkish role therefore does not falsify the earlier explanation; it sharpens it. Role compatibility is not a fixed national trait. It is a relation between a state's resources and the requirements of a specific diplomatic phase. Türkiye's broad network was insufficient when the established mediation core already met the principal access needs and when Ankara's political positioning created acceptance costs. It became more valuable when the conflict and

U.S.-backed negotiating architecture generated demand for Türkiye's specific access and capacity to communicate with Hamas. That change moved the Turkish channel from broad reach to usable negotiating access.

Nor did convergence erase asymmetry. Israeli resistance to some prospective Turkish security or post-conflict roles demonstrated that acceptance remained function-specific. Türkiye could be useful in securing agreement or transmitting guarantees without being accepted for every implementation or security function. Qatar's position likewise remained contested and vulnerable, as the Doha strike had shown. The late phase therefore supports P3 while reinforcing the article's broader claim: accepted diplomatic roles are negotiated, audience-specific, and temporally contingent.

Table 1. Comparative mechanism and temporal change

Mechanism	Qatar	Türkiye	Explanatory implication
Functional specialization	Accumulated Gaza/hostage mediation routines and expectations before 7 Oct.	General mediation experience, but early Gaza role more aligned with advocacy and public diplomacy.	Specialization accelerates entry only when it matches conflict-specific demand.
Network position	Cross-cutting channel to Hamas, strategic U.S. relationship, coordination with Egypt.	Broader network spanning NATO/West, Israel, Palestinian actors, and regional partners.	Network breadth is less important than bridging a relevant relational gap.
Usable access	Operational early and repeatedly inside core mediation architecture.	Broad political access early; central negotiating access became documented later.	Access is functional and temporal, not a fixed stock.
Role-specific credibility	Procedural/mediation credibility demonstrated by repeated reliance despite reputational contestation.	Advocacy credibility stronger early; mediation credibility narrower, then improved in late 2025.	Credibility is role- and audience-specific, not general attraction.
Role acceptance	Continuous from 2023 in successive mediation rounds.	Aspiration without comparable centrality early; recognized co-broker/mediator from Oct. 2025 onward.	Acceptance must be distinguished from willingness to mediate.

Resource revaluation	Hamas channel simultaneously reputational liability and functional asset; U.S. tie enabled coordination.	Hamas relationship shifted from costly/underused mediation resource to a needed negotiating channel in late 2025.	Crisis phases can reprice the functional value of relationships.
Outcome limits	Contributed to negotiated pauses/agreements but lacked enforcement control.	Contributed later within a multi-actor structure; no basis for sole attribution.	Diplomatic utility and contribution do not equal control over strategic outcomes.

Note. The comparison concerns mediation-specific utility, not overall national soft power.

6. Comparative Discussion: What the Relational Mechanism Adds

The strongest rival explanation is U.S. sponsorship. The United States exerted diplomatic pressure, supplied security guarantees and political cover, and was central to the agreements examined here. This explanation is indispensable but incomplete. U.S. power helps explain why particular proposals became consequential; it does not by itself explain why Washington repeatedly required Qatar's channel to Hamas or why Türkiye's Hamas relationship became more useful only at a later stage. Sponsorship affects the value of intermediary channels, but intermediaries differ in whether they possess a channel that sponsors can use. The relational mechanism therefore complements rather than replaces U.S.-centered explanations.

Egypt's role is equally central. Geography, the Rafah border, longstanding involvement in Palestinian affairs, intelligence links, and established mediation routines make Egypt structurally difficult to substitute. The article does not attempt to explain Egyptian mediation or rank the mediators. Instead, Egypt functions as a crucial control against over-attribution: Qatar's early role was embedded in a multi-mediator arrangement, and Türkiye's later entry occurred in an even broader one. The relational argument is therefore about functional complementarity within mediation architectures, not diplomatic exclusivity.

Material leverage is another alternative. Qatar's wealth, U.S. security partnership, and financial capacity mattered; Türkiye's market size, military power, trade measures, and NATO position also mattered. Yet the timing pattern again resists a purely material explanation. Türkiye had greater aggregate material capabilities but did not enjoy equivalent Gaza mediation centrality early. Qatar's financial resources did not allow it to enforce the January 2025 agreement or prevent renewed fighting. Material power can support access, incentives, or credibility, but the translation from capability to mediation utility still depended on which relationships the parties and sponsors could use.

Ripeness and conflict dynamics provide a fourth explanation. Mediation roles often become possible when battlefield conditions, political costs, hostage dynamics, or external pressure change the parties' willingness to negotiate. This is also necessary but does not fully explain role selection. A ripe moment creates demand for mediation; it does not determine which intermediary will be accepted. The late 2025 Turkish shift is precisely where ripeness and relational revaluation intersect: changing conditions increased demand for a channel that Türkiye could supply. Timing thus moderates the utility of relational resources rather than replacing them as an explanation.

Domestic politics and identity also matter. Türkiye's leadership derived domestic and regional benefits from assertive advocacy for Palestinians, while Qatar faced its own

reputational and regime-security incentives. These motives help explain role preferences, rhetoric, and strategic agency (Akpınar & Öztürk, 2026; Schiff & Admoni, 2026). But aspiration and motivation remain distinct from acceptance. A government may strongly desire a mediation role without being selected by the relevant actors. The article's framework therefore places domestic and strategic motives upstream of the conversion mechanism: they shape what a state tries to do, while network usability and role-specific credibility help explain what it is actually allowed to do.

The comparison also qualifies attraction-centered readings of soft power. Qatar's mediation utility did not require uniformly positive public attitudes toward Qatar, and Türkiye's broad popular resonance did not automatically produce elite negotiating acceptance. General attraction and role-specific utility can diverge. This matters theoretically because many soft-power measures aggregate national image, cultural appeal, or visibility while overlooking whether the state is trusted for a specific political function. In crisis diplomacy, a state may be useful without being admired, and admired without being useful.

The relational mechanism thus adds explanatory precision at the point where soft-power analysis is often weakest. It does not redefine all diplomacy as soft power. Instead, it identifies a sequence through which certain non-coercive and relational resources may contribute to political effects: resources and prior roles become meaningful when they fit a function; network position matters when it produces usable access; access matters when relevant actors attach enough credibility to the intermediary to accept its role; and that role can contribute to outcomes only under conditions set by military power, sponsorship, bargaining positions, and enforcement capacity.

The late convergence further suggests that soft-power resources should be treated as dynamically valued rather than fixed. A relationship has no stable "soft-power score." Its value can rise when it bridges a newly

important gap and fall when it damages credibility with the audience whose acceptance is required. This is why the same Hamas ties could operate simultaneously as reputational liabilities and diplomatic assets for both Qatar and Türkiye, but with different net effects at different moments. The mechanism is relational twice over: it depends both on who the state is connected to and on how other actors value that connection in a particular phase.

The bounded generalization is to cases of crisis mediation in which direct communication is limited and multiple third parties possess overlapping but non-identical channels. In such settings, small or middle powers may obtain disproportionate diplomatic utility if they occupy a bridge that larger actors cannot easily substitute. Yet brokerage does not guarantee successful settlement. The more enforcement, security guarantees, territorial control, or coercive leverage dominate the problem, the less explanatory work a purely relational mechanism can perform. This boundary is visible throughout Gaza, where mediation repeatedly generated agreements or temporary arrangements without giving intermediaries control over implementation.

7. Conclusion

Why did Qatar sustain an early and continuous mediation role in the Gaza crisis while Türkiye obtained comparable mediation acceptance only later despite possessing a broader diplomatic and soft-power portfolio? The answer lies less in the amount of resources than in their functional conversion. Qatar entered the crisis with a pre-existing mediation specialization, a cross-cutting network that linked Hamas to the United States and other actors through a complementary structure with Egypt, operationally usable access, and sufficient role-specific credibility for repeated inclusion in negotiations. Türkiye had broader reach but initially converted that reach into advocacy, public diplomacy, humanitarian action, and multilateral pressure more readily than into central ceasefire mediation.

The Turkish trajectory changed because the value of its relationships changed. By late 2025,

the emerging negotiation architecture placed greater value on Ankara's access to Hamas and its ability to transmit assurances and political pressure within a U.S.-backed, multi-mediator framework. Türkiye's role consequently moved from mediation aspiration and broad access to documented role acceptance. This was not a simple increase in national soft power; it was a revaluation of a specific relational asset under changed crisis conditions.

The theoretical implication is modest but useful. Soft-power scholarship can be refined by distinguishing possession from usability and general reputation from role-specific credibility. In crisis mediation, network position matters only when it yields access that actors can actually use, and usable access produces diplomatic utility only when the relevant parties and sponsors accept the intermediary for the task at hand. Mediation scholarship, in turn, benefits from treating the value of bias, proximity, and brokerage as temporally contingent rather than fixed.

The article does not establish that relational resources caused ceasefires, nor does it attribute multilateral outcomes to Qatar or Türkiye alone. The Gaza negotiations remained shaped by U.S. sponsorship, Egyptian mediation, military developments, conflict asymmetry, domestic politics, and the strategic choices of Israel and Hamas. Its contribution is narrower: it specifies why some relationships become operationally consequential at particular moments and why a state with fewer aggregate resources may obtain an accepted diplomatic role earlier than a state with a broader portfolio.

Future research can test this mechanism across other multi-mediator crises and, where data permit, formalize the network component using measures of brokerage or betweenness. Such work should preserve the distinction emphasized here: a network tie is not influence, an accepted role is not enforcement capacity, and contribution to an agreement is not attribution of the agreement.

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