

MEDIATING THE QATAR CRISIS – CRITERIA FOR A SUCCESSFUL OUTCOME

The crisis that erupted in June 2017 between Qatar and the alliance of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain and Egypt, is currently forecast to last until 2022 (EIU 2018). Assuming that the crisis will indeed end in 2022, the question arises how this end is to be construed.

Current analyses of the crisis yield two main baseline scenarios. The first scenario assumes that the blockade of Qatar “will not undermine the emir's domestic political standing” (ibid., 2) and that the Saudi-alliance will obtain only modest concessions on stricter counter-terrorism laws from Qatar. The second scenario assumes that the Saudi-alliance effectively controls the crisis. Therefore, an end to the blockade will become conceivable only if Qatar makes full concession on the broad set of Saudi demands (Abdullah 2017 and Ibish 2017).

The spread between these baseline scenarios is echoed by the parties on the ground in the Gulf region. Referring primarily to terrorist-sponsoring, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt have announced that “Qatar should truly change its behavior; and then this dispute will end” (Bin Nawaf et al. 2018). In response, Qatar has announced that the “illegal blockade has hindered Qatar and its allies in the fight against terrorism.” (Al-Thani 2018). Both sides accuse the other of deviating from international laws and low commitment to cooperation.

This ongoing hostile rhetoric offers valuable insight into how an end of the crisis can be construed. The insight is offered less by the content of the rhetoric than by its context – the Qatar crisis is, in essence, a crisis of communication. The communicational dimension of the crisis is expansive, ranging from an early misinformation campaign targeting the Qatar News Agency (Jones 2017) and Saudi Arabia's demands to shut down Al-Jazeera, to continued deployment of vague language – such as the mutual accusation of supporting terrorism – to Saudi Arabia's assertion that it will turn Qatar into an island by digging a canal around its borders (Toumi 2018).

As the governments of Qatar and the Saudi-alliance eschew engaging in dialogue, the deterioration of communications between them has led to mediators entering the conflict, most notably the United States in from of a number of officials associated with the current Administration.

The US engagement puts pressure on the two baseline scenarios for the end of the Qatar crisis as the US has the resources needed to expand or narrow down this set of scenarios. This gives rise to the question to what extent the US mediation effort is leading the crisis towards a certain outcome and how the terms of this outcome should be defined. To answer this question, two parameters, P1 and P2, need to be considered. As the following analysis centers on the US coordinated mediation effort, the US is treated as the first-mover (P1); Qatar and the Saudi-alliance are treated as second-movers (P2).

P1. Given the conflict in the Gulf region, what outcome does the US consider successful?

P2. Given the engagement of the US, what outcome do Qatar and the Saudi-alliance consider successful?

Building on the parameters, three assumptions need to be clarified.

First, each party pushes for an outcome that yields the highest relative payoffs. Second, each party's payoffs are directly responsive to the outcomes that the other parties push for. Third, the definition of a successful outcome is an outcome that satisfies both each party on its own and all parties taken together.

1. Contextualizing success

Following the third assumption, a successful outcome is defined as an outcome that satisfies both each party on its own and all parties taken together. Following assumption one and two, it is evident that this definition is deeply context dependent. There is no generalizable mechanism that yields each party's response function to the actions of the other parties across conflicts. Hence, such a mechanism has to be developed on a case by case basis. To ensure sufficient generalizability, a range of heuristics is available to deal with the context dependence of success.

The heuristics can be classified into two groups, normative and descriptive definitions of success. Normative definitions concern how an outcome is achieved. Descriptive definitions concern what type of outcome is achieved. On the normative side, Bercovitch (2006) identifies the variables *justice*, *fairness*, *effectiveness*, and *efficiency*. On the descriptive side, Vukovic (2014) identifies the variables *getting the parties to the table*, *reaching an agreement*, and *making the agreement stick*. On the normative level, an outcome could be considered successful if it results from a fair or cost-efficient process. On the descriptive level, an outcome could be considered successful if it results in the parties starting negotiations or concluding negotiations in form of a formal agreement.

In determining what constitutes success in the mediation of the Qatar crisis, both groups provide variables to design a payoff-based model of the mediator's operational engagement. The goal of the model is simple – yield P1. Subsequently, P1 can be reconciled with P2 to consolidate a definition of success in the context of the Qatar crisis.

2. Setting up the model

To assess the notion of success, an operational engagement model (OEM) is proposed. The goal of the OEM is to map the best options available for the mediator's operational engagement in a conflict by establishing a two-way relationship between the mediator's current position in the mediation process and a set of preconfigured strategies.

The OEM takes three inputs and yields one output.

Input 1. A structure of the mediation process that allows the mediator to combine different start and end points of her engagement.

Input 2. A set of variables that define the mediator's cost-benefit calculus, which changes in response to different combinations of start and end points.

Input 3. A set of strategies that specify how the cost-benefit calculus changes based on assigning different weights to the variables.

Output 1. A set of engagement profiles (EPs) that determine the agent's optimal payoff points with respect to the conflict environment and the agent's targeted strategy.

3. Defining the first input of the OEM

The first input – the structure of the mediation process – is adapted from the descriptive variables identified in Vukovic (2014).

The variables *getting the parties to the table*, *reaching an agreement*, and *making the agreement stick* are translated into three distinct domains of the process, D1, D2, and D3. Each domain is associated with an endpoint, E1, E2, and E3 (Figure 1). Each domain represents a potential point of entry of the mediator into the process. If the mediator enters in D1, she enters into the pre-negotiation phase. If the mediator enters in D2, she enters into the negotiation/agreement phase. If the mediator enters in D3, she enters into the post-agreement phase. Crucially, the mediator does not have to exit the process in the same domain that she entered the process. If the mediator enters in D2, she can choose to exit at E2 or E3. If the mediator enters in D3, she has to exist at E3 as the structure is unidirectional.

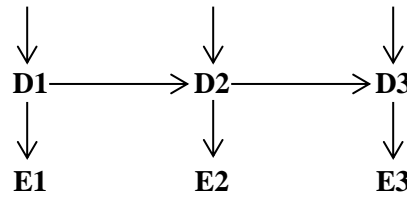


Figure 1 – Three-domain structure, unidirectional

The three-domain structure allows for a total of six distinct combinations of operational engagement in the mediation process, differing in highest domain accessed and duration of engagement. The notation for each combination is a set consisting of the initial domain, optional further domains across which the mediator remains operationally engaged, and the end endpoint of the engagement. The six combinations are [D1, E1], [D1, D2, E2], [D1, D2, D3, E3], [D2, E2], [D2, D3, E3], and [D3, E3].

4. Defining the second input of the OEM

The second input – the set of variables defining the cost-benefit calculus of the agent – is largely adapted from Bercovitch (2006), although with changes in terminology.

The variable *effectiveness* is translated into the variables *Control* and *ChangeTR*, both of which yield the mediator's benefits. *Control* represents the amount of control the mediator can exercise over the process to guide the parties towards her desired outcome. *ChangeTR*, which stands for change towards resolution, represents the amount of impact the mediator's solution have in guiding the parties towards an agreement.

The variable *efficiency* is translated into the variable *Leverage*, which yields the mediator's costs. *Leverage* represents the amount of resources the mediator needs to commit in a directive manner to ensure that the parties accept her solutions. *Leverage* is considered a cost as high resource commitment increases the risk that the parties will default on the mediation process in the long run (Beardsley et al. 2006). An additional cost factor is that a high directive resource commitment may destabilize ongoing conflict dynamics – this holds in the case of the Qatar crisis (Byman and McCants 2017).

For preliminary analysis, each of these variables is assigned the expressions of *low*, *moderate*, *substantial* or *complete*. These expressions change depending on the combination chosen for the first input, e.g. *Control* will take on a different expression for $[D1, E1]$ than for $[D1, D2, D3, E3]$.

Before going into the preliminary analysis, three main assumptions about the distribution of the expressions need to be clarified. The following trends are assumed in the distribution of the expressions:

First, *Control* starts low in D1 and increases over-proportionately for duration of engagement and highest domain accessed. However, duration of engagement impacts *Control* more than highest domain accessed. The rationale for *Control* to increase over-proportionately is that (i) the longer the mediator remains operationally engaged, the more control she can establish over the mediation process. In addition, it is assumed that (ii) higher domains allow for establishing control in a more direct manner.

Second, *ChangeTR* starts high in D1 and remains constant or increases for duration of engagement. For single-domain engagement, *ChangeTR* decreases continuously for the highest domain accessed. The rationale for *ChangeTR* to start high in D1 is that (iii) the communicational dimension of the Qatar crisis is a core driver of the conflict and would have to be largely resolved before negotiations could start in D2. In addition, it is assumed that (iv) the higher the domain, the more the communicational dimension of the crisis will have been resolved by the parties themselves. Lastly, it is assumed that (v) increasing duration of operational engagement allows the mediator to achieve change across domains, hence *ChangeTR* remains constant or increases for duration of engagement, depending on the discount arising from (iv).

Third, *Leverage* starts low in D1 and increases continuously for duration of engagement and highest domain accessed. The rationale for *Leverage* to start low in D1 is (vi) benchmarked to the current environment in the Gulf region. As the US mediators engage in D1, no leverage is applied (Byman and McCants 2017). However, it is assumed that (vii) the longer the mediator wants to remain part of the mediation process, the more resources she needs to commit. Hence, *Leverage* increases for duration of engagement. In addition, it is assumed that (viii) the later the mediator engages in the process, the more resources she has to commit to the parties. Hence, *Leverage* increases for highest domain accessed.

5. Preliminary analysis based on the first and second input of the OEM

The first and second input of the OEM can be aggregated into a preliminary analysis of the options for US operational engagement in the mediation of the Qatar crisis (Table 1).

The different sets of combinations of start and end points are now assigned to distinct cost-benefit profiles based on the assumptions specified above.

Based on the trend-based distribution of the expressions associated with each combination, the following preliminary results can be obtained.

For domain 1 based operational engagement, $[D1, E1]$ yields low *Control*, substantial *ChangeTR*, and low *Leverage*. $[D1, D2, E2]$ yields moderate *Control*, substantial *ChangeTR*, and moderate *Leverage*. $[D1, D2, D3, E3]$ yields complete *Control*, complete *ChangeTR*, and substantial *Leverage*. For domain 2 based operational engagement, $[D2, E2]$ yields moderate *Control*, moderate *ChangeTR*, and moderate *Leverage*. $[D2, D3, E3]$ yields substantial *Control*, substantial *ChangeTR*, and substantial *Leverage*. For domain 3 based operational engagement, $[D3, E3]$ yields moderate *Control*, low *ChangeTR* and moderate *Leverage*.

Combinations	Benefits	ChangeTR	Costs
	Control		Leverage
D1→E1 [D1, E1]	<i>Low</i> – US facilitates the communication between the disputants	<i>Substantial</i> – communication facilitation addresses core of the conflict	<i>Low</i> – current US strategy is facilitative in design
D1→E2 [D1, D2, E2]	<i>Moderate</i> – US oversees agreement process	<i>Substantial</i> – communication facilitation consolidated, US direct influence on agreement assumed low	<i>Moderate</i> – US needs to ensure presence at the table
D1→E3 [D1, D2, D3, E3]	<i>Complete</i> – US is operationally engaged across all domains of the process	<i>Complete</i> – communication facilitation consolidated, US direct influence on agreement assumed moderate	<i>Substantial</i> – US needs to ensure an agreement it can commit to guaranteeing in the long run
D2→E2 [D2, E2]	<i>Moderate</i> – US oversees agreement process	<i>Moderate</i> – communication facilitation limited, US direct influence on agreement assumed low	<i>Moderate</i> – US needs to ensure presence at the table, no facilitative background assumed
D2→E3 [D2, D3, E3]	<i>Substantial</i> – US oversees agreement and post-agreement processes	<i>Substantial</i> – US direct influence on agreement assumed moderate	<i>Substantial</i> – US needs to ensure an agreement it can commit to guaranteeing in the long run
D3→E3 [D3, E3]	<i>Moderate</i> – US oversees post-agreement process	<i>Low</i> – no communication facilitation, US cannot influence agreement	<i>Moderate</i> – US needs to engage parties on guaranteeing the agreement without background in the process

Table 1 – Cost-benefit calculus for all combinations of the unidirectional three-domain structure

To move from the preliminary analysis to the OEM model, the expressions of low, moderate, substantial and complete need to be translated into numerical scores.

The numerical scores for input 2 range from 0 to 10, where 0 is the baseline option of non-engagement. On the proposed scale, low = 2, moderate = 5, substantial = 8, and complete = 10. It is thus assumed that moving from the baseline to low yields a steeper increase in payoffs than moving from low to moderate or from moderate to substantial. The increase in moving from substantial to complete is equal to moving from baseline to low.

Based on the numerical scores, input 1 and input 2 can be entered into OEM.

6. Stating the OEM

Before input 3 is discussed, the OEM can be stated. The OEM is a linear model and yields EPs based on different payoffs. The payoffs are given as profile scores.

The OEM is defined as:

$$Profile_score = \alpha * (Control) + \beta * (ChangeTR) - \gamma * (Leverage) \quad (01)$$

The model takes the inputs Control (+), ChangeTR (+), and Leverage (-) and assigns each of the inputs a weight, α , β , and γ . The profile score is thus determined as a function of weighted inputs.

The weights are located on a scale of 0 to 1. They are specified through input 3 – that is, the different strategies chosen by the mediator.

The OEM assumes that the mediator can choose combinations independent of strategies. The profile scores change depending on the respective strategy of the mediator and the combination of start and end points chosen. Therefore, the profile scores identify which combination is the best choice based on the mediator's strategy, or conversely, which strategy is the best choice based on the current combination. This allows for using the OEM for two directionally different estimation processes. The first estimation process connects a given connection to the corresponding best strategy (bottom-up). The second estimation process connects a given strategy to the corresponding best combination (top-down).

7. Defining the third input of the OEM

To analyze the operational engagement of the US in the mediation of the Qatar crisis, six different strategies are proposed (see Table A1 in the Appendix). Each strategy corresponds to a different EP.

The strategies are separated into four strategies with static weights (EP1, EP2, EP3, EP4) and two strategies with dynamic weights (EP5, EP6). The different strategies allow for a holistic perspective on US engagement in the Qatar crisis – as circumstances on the ground may change, the US may update its cost-benefit calculus and adapt a new mediation strategy. These potential shifts in strategy and their impact on the mediation process are mapped through the OEM.

The following six strategies and corresponding EPs are specified. The respective weight of the variables is given in parentheses next to the variables.

The first strategy (EP1), CONTROL-CHANGETR-DRIVEN-LOW-LEVERAGE describes a mediation effort with equal emphasis on procedural control and change achieved, and low tolerance for leverage. For EP1 equal weights are assigned to Control (0.5) and ChangeTR (0.5), and the combined weight of Control and ChangeTR is assigned to Leverage (1).

The second strategy (EP2), CONTROL-CHANGETR-DRIVEN-HIGH-LEVERAGE, describes a mediation effort identical to EP1, but with high tolerance for leverage. For EP2 equal weights are assigned to Control (0.5) and ChangeTR (0.5), and half the weight of either Control or ChangeTR is assigned to Leverage (0.25).

The third strategy (EP3), CHANGETR-DRIVEN-LOW-LEVERAGE, describes a mediation effort with equal emphasis on change achieved and low tolerance for leverage, but reduced emphasis on procedural control. For EP3 equal weights are assigned to ChangeTR (1) and Leverage (1), and half the weight of either ChangeTR or Leverage is assigned to Control (0.5).

The forth strategy (EP4), CONTROL-DRIVEN-HIGH-LEVERAGE, describes a mediation effort with emphasis on procedural control, high tolerance for leverage, but reduced emphasis on change achieved. For EP4 the following weights are assigned, Control (1), Leverage (0.25), and ChangeTR (0.25).

EP1-EP4 are classified as strategies with static weights. Recognizing that the weights may change throughout the mediation process, EP5 and EP6 are designed to account for such a change. EP5 and EP6 are associated with DOMAIN-RESPONSIVE strategies. For DOMAIN-RESPONSIVE strategies, the profile score is determined as the average of a combination and its preceding combinations. Preceding combinations

are combinations that have the same initial domain (i.e. $[D1, D2, D3, E3]$ is preceded by $[D1, D2, E2]$ and $[D1, E1]$ but not by $[D2, E2]$ or $[D2, D3, E3]$). To ensure responsiveness, the weights for each combination change according to the highest domain accessed (i.e. $[D1, D2, E2]$ is weighted for $D2$).

The fifth strategy (EP5), DOMAIN-RESPONSIVE -MIXED-INCREASE-LEVERAGE, describes a mediation effort with initially low but gradually increasing emphasis on procedural control, initially high but gradually decreasing emphasis on change achieved, and initially high but continuously decreasing tolerance for leverage (hence, the weights for leverage are increasing). For EP5 the following weights are assigned, Control ($\{0.25, 0.5, 0.75\}$), ChangeTR ($\{0.75, 0.5, 0.25\}$), and Leverage ($\{0.25, 0.75, 1\}$).

The sixth strategy (EP6), DOMAIN-RESPONSIVE -MIXED-DECREASE-LEVERAGE, describes a mediation effort identical to EP5 but with initially low but continuously increasing tolerance for leverage (hence, the weights for leverage are increasing). For EP5 the following weights are assigned, Control ($\{0.25, 0.5, 0.75\}$), ChangeTR ($\{0.75, 0.5, 0.25\}$), and Leverage ($\{1, 0.75, 0.25\}$).

Following the specification of the above strategies, the inputs for the OEM are complete and the different EPs for the US mediation in the Qatar crisis can be evaluated.

8. Analysis of US engagement profiles in the mediation of the Qatar crisis

Based on different combinations of start and end points, cost-benefit variables and the strategies underlying the six EPs, the OEM yields different profile scores for each EP (Table 2).

Combinations	Cost-benefit points			EP1 score	EP2 score	EP3 score	EP4 score	EP5 score	EP6 score
	Control	ChangeTR	Leverage						
D1→E1 [D1, E1]	2	8	2	3.000	4.500	7.000	5.500	6.000	4.500
D1→E2 [D1, D2, E2]	5	8	5	1.500	5.250	5.500	7.750	4.375	3.625
D1→E3 [D1, D2, D3, E3]	10	10	8	2.000	8.000	7.000	13.000	4.125	5.375
D2→E2 [D2, E2]	5	5	5	0.000	3.750	2.500	6.250	1.250	1.250
D2→E3 [D2, D3, E3]	8	8	8	0.000	6.000	4.000	10.000	-0.125	4.250
D3→E3 [D3, E3]	5	2	5	-1.500	2.250	-0.500	4.750	-0.750	3.000
Aggregate EP score (AES)	-	-	-	5.000	29.750	25.500	47.250	14.875	22.000

Table 2 – OEM for the US mediation of the Qatar crisis

Analysis of the EP scores shows that there is no strictly dominant strategy across all combinations available to the mediator (Figure 2). The expectation that low tolerance for leverage leads to relatively low aggregate payoffs remains true for both EP1 (AES 5.000) and EP3 (AES 25.500) compared to EP2 (AES 29.750) and EP4 (AES 47.250). However, EP3 and the associated strategy CHANGETR-DRIVEN-LOW-LEVERAGE, yield higher payoffs than EP2 and EP4 for one-domain engagement in D1. Therefore, based on the profile of the Qatar crisis, mediators that have low tolerance for leverage nonetheless hold an

advantage over leveraged strategies at the structural onset of the mediation process. This advantage cedes once the mediation enters higher domains.

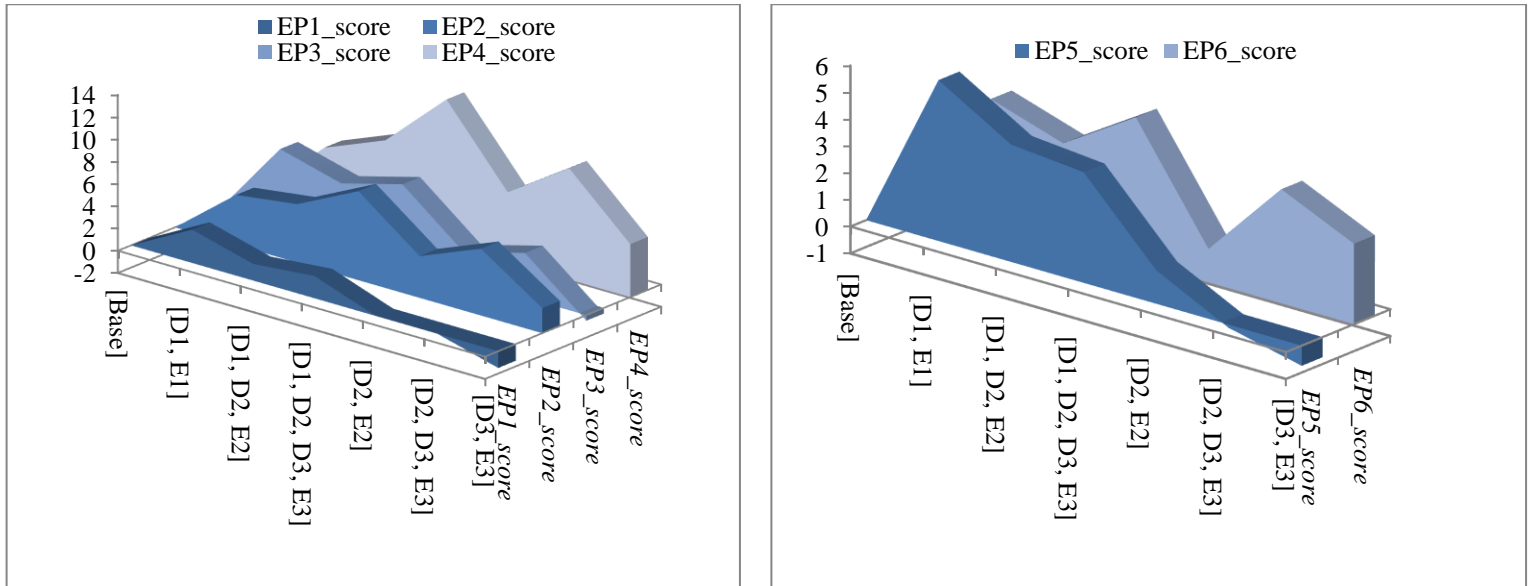


Figure 2 – Scores for engagement profiles sorted by lowest domain accessed.

For EP1 and the associated strategy CONTROL-CHANGETR-DRIVEN-LOW-LEVERAGE, the OEM yields that mediators should prioritize their expected benefits unless they have sufficient resources to enforce all of these benefits. This becomes evident in the difference between EP1 and EP2, and the associated strategy CONTROL-CHANGETR-DRIVEN-HIGH-LEVERAGE. If the mediator lacks the necessary resources, failure to prioritize leads to significant trade-offs between the benefit variables, resulting in a lower AES, as in EP1, than for prioritized strategies such as EP2 or EP4.

Comparing the EPs for static weights (EP1-EP4) and dynamic weights (EP5 and EP6) yields that dynamic weights lead to lower individual payoffs (max. EP score is 6.000 for EP5 compared to 13.000 for EP4) and lower AES (max. AES for EP6 is 22.000, max. AES for EP4 is 47.250). This relationship can be interpreted as decreasing stability of the mediator's cost-benefit profile (dynamic weights) leading to overall lower payoffs compared to stable payoff profiles (static weights). Under this interpretation, EP1-EP4 represent a case of perfect information, and EP5 and EP6 represent a case of imperfect information. The differences arising from the weight distributions serve as a reminder of the important role that informational flows play in mediation processes (Beardsley et al. 2006). Perfect information will lead to different strategies and thus different outcomes than imperfect information.

Comparing EP5 and EP6 yields that EP5 and its associated strategy DOMAIN-RESPONSIVE -MIXED-INCREASE-LEVERAGE, which are jointly based on a decreasing tolerance for leverage, secure high payoffs at the structural onset of the mediation process but see a steep drop in payoffs as the lowest domain accessed increases. EP6 and its associated strategy DOMAIN-RESPONSIVE -MIXED-DECREASE-LEVERAGE, which are jointly based on increasing tolerance for leverage, secure slightly lower payoffs at the structural onset of the mediation process compared to EP5 but surpass EP5 as the lowest domain accessed increases.

The distributions of payoffs for EP5 and EP6 show that the decreasing tolerance for leverage results in a continuously decreasing pay-off profile, whereas increasing tolerance for leverage results in a more volatile payoff profile. This consolidates that the impacts of leverage on the mediation process are non-linear – applying leverage does not have the reverse effect of removing it.

In addition, there are common themes between the two groups of EPs. When sorted by lowest domain accessed, a relative trend towards increasing payoffs from *[Base]* to *[D1, D2, D3, E3]* and decreasing payoffs from *[D1, D2, D3, E3]* to *[D3, E3]* becomes discernible. This shows, again based on the profile of the Qatar crisis, that early engagement by the mediator pays off across different strategies.

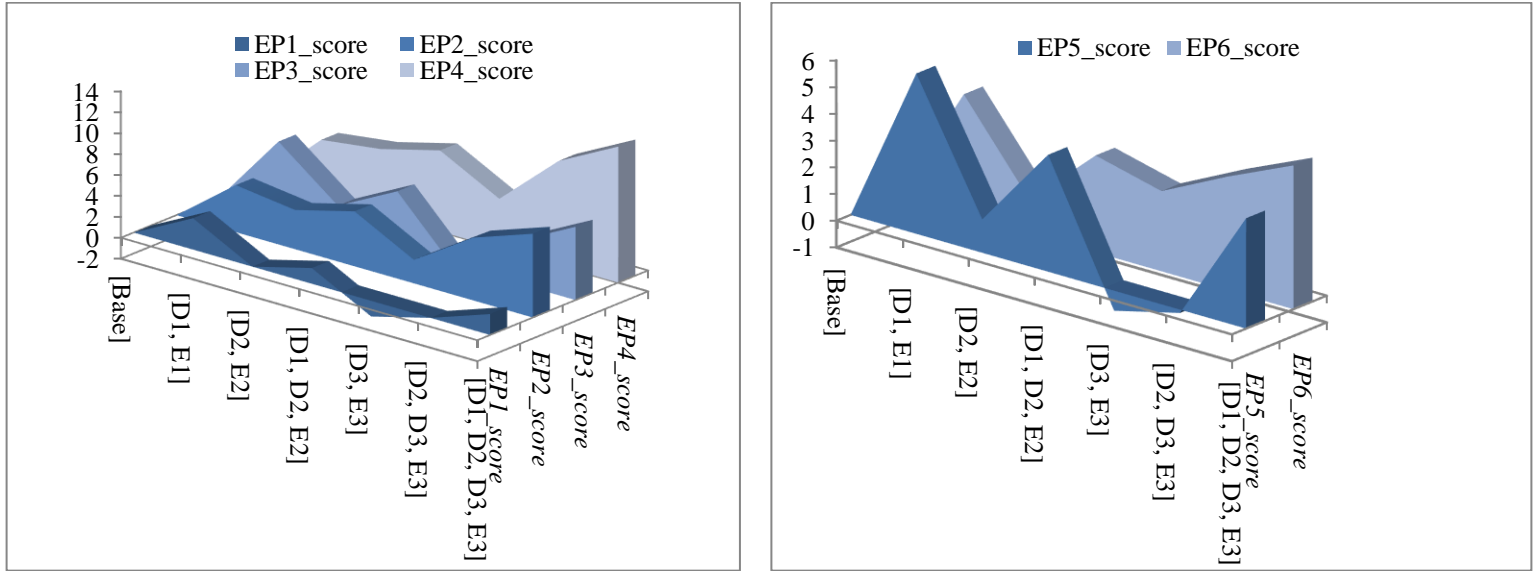


Figure 3 – Scores for engagement profiles sorted by highest domain accessed.

The last observation is reinforced when sorting the EPs by highest domain accessed (Figure 3). Based on the profile of the Qatar crisis, analysis of the EPs by highest domain accessed yields two main scenarios for obtaining optimal payoffs. The first scenario is “engage early, exit early”, which is associated with the combination *[D1, E1]*. The second scenario is “engage early, exit late”, which is associated with the combination *[D1, D2, D3, E3]*.

With the exception of EP5, all other EPs yield strictly higher payoffs for “engage early, exit early” and “engage early, exit late” than for the remainder of combinations.

9. Discussion

Based on the outputs of the OEM, sufficient criteria have been established in terms of the US perspective for determining what constitutes a successful outcome of the mediation process. Given that the true US engagement profile is not known, the OEM can be used for bottom-up estimation to determine the strategy the US would rationally follow based on the domains of the Qatar crisis across which the US has shown activity.

Some limitations arise for this bottom-up estimation as the Qatar crisis is still in the pre-negotiation phase. As a result, the US cannot show activity across D2 and D3. Hence, even if the true US EP obtains optimal

payoffs for multi-domain engagement, the one-domain nature of the Qatar crisis cannot reveal this EP and constrains observations of US activity to D1. To narrow down the successful outcome of the US, a more hybrid approach is needed – one that combines the bottom-up estimation with elements of the top-down estimation.

The argument proceeds in three stages. First, the successful outcomes yielded by the bottom-up estimation are considered. Second, further assumptions about the US cost-benefit profile are introduced that allow for top-down estimation. The top-down estimation reduces the set of outcomes obtained in the first step. Third, the resulting successful outcome is augmented through the perspectives of Qatar and the Saudi-alliance. While the positions given for Qatar and the Saudi-alliance are not grounded in deep analysis, it is nonetheless argued that the successful outcome yielded by analysis of the US perspective has sufficiently broad overlap with the position of Qatar and the Saudi-alliance to remain stable. Therefore, the OEM output is channeled into the successful outcome of the Qatar crisis mediation process.

First, based on the US operational engagement in D1 and the uncertainty about the US planned length of engagement, two EPs should be considered for determining the successful outcome of the mediation process from the US perspective. First, EP3 and the associated strategy CHANGETR-DRIVEN-LOW-LEVERAGE as EP3 yields the highest payoffs for $[D1, E1]$ (7.000). Second, EP4 and the associated strategy CONTROL-DRIVEN-HIGH-LEVERAGE as EP3 yields both the highest AES (47.500) and the highest payoffs for $[D1, D2, D3, E3]$ (13.000), which constitutes the longest possible duration of engagement of the US in the Qatar crisis. Comparing EP3 and EP4 in terms of E2 yields a $[D1, D2, E2]$ payoff of (5.500) for EP3 and a $[D1, D2, E2]$ payoff of (7.750) for EP4. Therefore, EP4 strictly dominates EP3 for multi-domain engagement and EP3 strictly dominates EP4 for one-domain engagement.

Second, additional assumptions about the Qatar crisis allow for direct estimates of the true US EP. As both Qatar and Saudi Arabia are allies of the US and provide gateways for counter-terrorism operations in the Middle East, Byman and McCants (2017) argue that the US is cautious not to offset the regional balance in the Gulf region and jeopardize its relationship with Qatar or Saudi Arabia. Consequently, based on the constraints that apply to the use of leverage, namely increased risk of short-term volatility and increased risk of long-term default on agreement, the US can be assumed to prioritize low-leverage strategies in the Qatar crisis.

The top-down estimation yields that the true US EP is best represented by EPs such as EP1, E3, and EP5. While all of these EPs have low tolerance for leverage, they also obtain optimal payoffs for one-domain engagement in D1. EP1 and the associated strategy, CONTROL-CHANGETR-DRIVEN-LOW-LEVERAGE, yields $[D1, E1]$ payoffs of (3.000). As stated above, EP3 and the associated strategy, CHANGETR-DRIVEN-LOW-LEVERAGE, yields $[D1, E1]$ payoffs of (7.000). EP5 and the associated strategy, DOMAIN-RESPONSIVE -MIXED-INCREASE-LEVERAGE, yields $[D1, E1]$ payoffs of (6.000). While EP3 dominates both EP1 and EP5 in terms of $[D1, E1]$ payoffs and AES, EP3 and EP5 cannot be fully compared given their different underlying assumptions about the informational state of the mediation process.

To summarize the two estimation processes, the bottom-up estimation yields that the true US EP is represented either by an attempt to maximize $[D1, E1]$ payoffs through EP3, or payoffs for multi-domain engagement through EP4. The top-down estimation yields that the true US EP is characterized by low tolerance to leverage and hence its true EP is best represented by low-leverage strategies such as EP1, EP3 or EP5, all of which obtain their optimal payoffs in $[D1, E1]$. Therefore, it can be argued that the

successful outcome from the perspective of the US is defined through the EP3 CHANGETR-DRIVEN-LOW-LEVERAGE strategy that starts and ends operational engagement in D1. This is true under the assumption of static weights and perfect information. Under the assumption of dynamic weights and imperfect information, the successful outcome is defined through the EP5 DOMAIN-RESPONSIVE -MIXED-INCREASE-LEVERAGE strategy, which nonetheless still starts and ends operational engagement in D1.

Therefore, the US can be expected to focus its efforts on achieving change, not establishing procedural control. The US will most likely detach from the mediation process at the end of the pre-negotiation phase.

To consolidate these results and generalize the criteria for a successful outcome for the entire mediation process, the positions of Qatar and Saudi Arabia have to be considered.

While both of these positions warrant careful estimation, there is reason to assume that Qatar and Saudi Arabia would consider the above outcome of the mediation process successful. The main line of reasoning is that both Qatar and Saudi Arabia would achieve political cover to start negotiations, while maintaining autonomy over of the negotiation process and the terms of the negotiated agreement. Two points can be advanced to support this reasoning. First, both Qatar and Saudi Arabia have voiced support for negotiations but tied this support to preconditions that border on reverse causality and thus are unlikely to be satisfied. Qatar has announced that negotiations can start only if the blockade imposed by the Saudi-alliance is removed (Sergje 2017). Saudi Arabia has announced that negotiations can start only if Qatar meets all of the demands that the Saudi-alliance has posed (Khan 2017). Therefore, while both Qatar and Saudi Arabia appear interested in the prospect of negotiations, the environment of the crisis has prevented them from showing credible commitment to potential negotiations.

This leads to the second point, the deterioration of communications between the disputants as a core driver of the crisis. As has been argued, the Qatar crisis is defined by an expansive communicational dimension. US engagement constrained to the pre-negotiation phase would be focused on improving these communications and thus would allow Qatar and Saudi Arabia to move beyond games of words towards matters of substance. Given the political cover provided by the US in D1, this could be achieved with minimal trade-offs on domestic environments that have become accustomed to the hostile rhetoric and would likely deem a unilateral attempt to improve communications a sign of their government's weakness, thus resulting in domestic instability that no side of the crisis wants to risk.

These lines of reasoning on the positions of Qatar and Saudi Arabia, while brief, nonetheless show that there exists sufficiently broad overlap between these positions and US operational engagement for *[D1, E1]* under EP3 CHANGETR-DRIVEN-LOW-LEVERAGE. In addition, it is hard to reconcile the perspective of Qatar and Saudi Arabia with different US EPs and durations of engagement, given that changes away from EP3 *[D1, E1]* are tied to increased deployment of leverage and stronger procedural control of the US.

10. Conclusion

Based on the variables defined in Bercovitch (2006) and Vukovic (2014), the OEM provides a best estimate of what constitutes a successful outcome of the US mediation of the Qatar crisis. On the normative level, this outcome is characterized by a strong emphasis on cost-efficient change and general disregard for procedural control by the mediator. On the descriptive level, the successful outcome is characterized as getting the parties to the table. While this outcome is the best estimate based on current

information about the Qatar crisis, the OEM allows for updating this estimate once new information becomes available that would indicate a change in strategy or a change in duration of US engagement.

Appendix

Profile	Strategy	Weights		
		α	β	γ
EP1	CONTROL-CHANGETR-DRIVEN-LOW-LEVERAGE	0.5	0.5	1
EP2	CONTROL-CHANGETR-DRIVEN-HIGH-LEVERAGE	0.5	0.5	0.25
EP3	CHANGETR-DRIVEN-LOW-LEVERAGE	0.5	1	1
EP4	CONTROL-DRIVEN-HIGH-LEVERAGE	1,	0.5	0.25
EP5	DOMAIN-RESPONSIVE-MIXED-INCREASE-LEVERAGE	$f(x)$, for $x = \{0.25, 0.5, 0.75\}$	$f(y)$, for $y = \{0.75, 0.5, 0.25\}$	$f(z)$, for $z = \{0.25, 0.75, 1\}$
EP6	DOMAIN-RESPONSIVE-MIXED-DECREASE-LEVERAGE	$f(x)$, for $x = \{0.25, 0.5, 0.75\}$	$f(y)$, for $y = \{0.75, 0.5, 0.25\}$	$f(z)$, for $z = \{1, 0.75, 0.25\}$

Table A1 – Weight specification for all EPs and corresponding strategies

References

- Abdullah, Jamal (2017 September 21). The Qatar crisis might permanently shift dynamics in the region. TRT World. <https://www.trtworld.com/opinion/the-qatar-crisis-might-permanently-shift-dynamics-in-the-region-10685>
- Al-Thani, Thamer (2017, April 30). Qatar has been hindered in its fight against terrorism. Financial Times. <https://www.ft.com/content/561ab082-4c71-11e8-8a8e-22951a2d8493>
- Bin Nawaf, Mohammad Al-Saud, Kamel, Nasser, al-Khlaifa, Mohammed, and Almazroi, Sulaiman (2018, April 24). Qatar must act to improve relations with neighbours. Financial Times. <https://www.ft.com/content/17606898-46fc-11e8-8ee8-cae73aab7ccb>
- Bercovitch, Jacob (2006). Mediation Success or Failure: A Search for the Elusive Criteria. *Cardozo Journal of Conflict Resolution* 7, 289–302
- Beardsley, Kyle, Quinn, David, Biswas, Bidisha, Wilkenfield, Jonatahn (2006). Mediation Styles and Crisis Outcome. *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50(1), 58–86
- Byman, Daniel L. and McCants, William (2017, June 17). The danger of picking sides in the Qatar crisis. Brookings Institution. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2017/06/17/the-danger-of-picking-sides-in-the-qatar-crisis/>
- EIU, Economist Intelligence Unit (2018). Country Report Qatar. <http://country.eiu.com/qatar>
- Ibish, Hussein (2017, June 06). Unfulfilled 2014 Riyadh Agreement Defines Current GCC Rift. The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington. <http://www.agsiw.org/unfulfilled-2014-riyadh-agreement-defines-current-gcc-rift/>
- Jones, Marc (2017). Hacking, bots and information wars in the Qatar spat. In *The Qatar Crisis*, Project on Middle East Political Science, 8–10. https://pomeps.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/POMEPS_GCC_Qatar-Crisis.pdf
- Khan, Taimur (2017, July 2019). Arab countries' six principles for Qatar 'a measure to restart the negotiation process'. The National. <https://www.thenational.ae/world/gcc/arab-countries-six-principles-for-qatar-a-measure-to-restart-the-negotiation-process-1.610314>

- Vukovic, Sinisa (2014). Three Degrees of Success in International Mediation. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 42(3), 966–976
- Sergje, Mohammed (2017, June 19). Qatar Won't Negotiate Under Saudi-Led Sanctions, Minister Says. Bloomberg. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-06-19/qatar-won-t-negotiate-under-saudi-led-sanctions-minister-says>
- Toumi, Habib (2018, April 9). Saudi waterway to turn Qatar into island. Gulfnews. <https://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/qatar/saudi-waterway-to-turn-qatar-into-island-1.2202215>