

Op-ed

Qatar's Practical Diplomacy Dilemma

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There are quite a few countries in the Middle East that have put forward practical diplomacy. Since disputes are so frequent and the conflict structure between countries is complicated, the calculation to find a balance point is in operation without being turned away from other countries as much as possible, standing on either side. These countries also mediate conflicts between Israel, Palestine, Israel, and Iran, and Qatar, Turkey, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Saudi Arabia are representative.

In particular, Qatar has grown its presence over the past five years by mediating various conflicts within and outside the region under the banner of pragmatism, adjusting the crisis phase. It successfully brokered peace negotiations between Trump's first-term government and the Taliban in 2020 and helped the remaining U.S. civilians there escape after the Taliban returned to power in 2021 and U.S. troops withdrew in extreme chaos. Immediately after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine in 2022, gas supplies were increased at the behest of Europe, allaying market instability caused by the Russian gas vacuum. In 2024, it provided an arbitration channel with Switzerland in the process of transferring about \$6 billion of Iranian funds, which had been frozen in South Korea, to humanitarian funds. Even after the Israel-Hamas War broke out in October 2023, he served as a key mediator in the ceasefire negotiations.

Qatar's diplomatic achievements are completely dependent on pragmatism to get along with anyone. Qatar is a representative pro-U.S. country that has the largest U.S. military base in the region, and at the same time has Hamas and Taliban political offices calling for anti-American and anti-Israel. It also maintains a close channel of dialogue with Iran and is providing great help to Iran's economy suffering from sanctions. Of course, energy, advanced technology, and security cooperation are actively continuing with China. Behind maintaining such conflicting relationships at the same time is a wealth of royal finances based on enormous natural gas imports. In particular, the Qatar Foundation is famous for

continuing cooperative relationships through long-term donations to major educational institutions and think tank communities in the United States. So, the Doha Forum, an annual international conference hosted by Qatar's foreign ministry, features a fun scene in which former U.S. and European officials and experts participate with Iranians or Taliban representatives.

Qatar was shocked by two missile attacks from neighboring countries this year. It was the first time since the founding of the country. In June, Iran directly attacked a U.S. military base in Qatar in retaliation for the U.S. strike on its nuclear facilities. Immediately after Iran's attack, a video of people running around in shopping malls in downtown Doha spread, clearly showing the fear of the time. Qatar was blocked by Arab Gulf brethren Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain in 2017 for maintaining good relations with Iran. Nevertheless, Iran violated Qatar's sovereignty by using only the justification for retaliation against the U.S., and Qatar strongly protested. In September, Israel struck the Hamas political office outside Doha in the name of removing the Hamas leadership. According to the announcement, Israel conducted an attack by bypassing U.S. air defenses, and Qatar fiercely protested. The United States expressed regret, but it seemed difficult to appease Qatar's shock and unrest.

The fact that Qatar was bombed twice shows how weak the conventional wisdom that practical diplomacy is safe is. The international order and security environment can be reversed in an instant, and diplomacy that wins everyone's trust in harsh international politics is difficult to exist. In particular, many countries are forced to make clear choices as strategic competition between the U.S. and China intensifies and the offensive moves of authoritarian solidarity, which is tied to China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea (CRINK). A firm alliance based on clear principles can serve as a shield for national interests as a nation sandwiched between belligerent countries. At this point, Qatar's pragmatic diplomacy faltered.

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