



Gulf Insights

Reflections on Qatar's Global Commitment
towards Ensuring Education

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Reflections on Qatar's Global Commitment towards Ensuring Education¹

Edited by: Thouria Mahmoud
Senior Editor, Gulf Studies Center

Introduction

Qatar plays an important role in global development and humanitarian aid. Since Qatar advocates education as a fundamental right for all, regardless of any geopolitical aspects, it is one of the pioneering countries that are actively involved in humanitarian initiatives allocated for the global right of education and the rehabilitation of the educational infrastructure in crisis-hit countries. This report highlights Qatar's initiatives towards education in Afghanistan and Gaza.

Deciphering Qatar's Niche Role and Influence in Afghanistan

Dr. Sinem Cengiz
Research Assistant at the Gulf Studies Center

Over the past decade, Qatar has emerged as a critical actor that has been playing multifaceted role in Afghanistan. Especially in the wake of the Taliban's return to power in August 2021, Qatar has been among the very few states that has adopted a visible and holistic role characterized by a blend of diplomacy, cultural/educational engagement, and humanitarian assistance amid the highly complex and shifting environment in Afghanistan.

In the post-2021 era, Qatar's role and influence in Afghanistan did not come as a surprise. As a country hosting both Taliban's first political office and the Middle East's biggest U.S. military base, Qatar was instrumental in hosting negotiations between the

¹ All articles published under "Gulf Insights" series have been discussed internally but they reflect the opinion and views of the authors, and do not reflect the views of the Center, the College of Arts and Sciences or Qatar University, including the terms and terminology used in this publication.

Taliban and the U.S., which led to the signing of [the Doha Agreement](#) in 2020. It also hosted the intra-Afghan talks and played a significant role in Afghanistan's regional and international diplomacy. Having high stakes in post-occupation Afghanistan, Qatar has positioned itself as a key mediator to have a particular influence over the political landscape in the country. Moreover, Qatar became a member of the Kabul Process for Peace and Security Cooperation in Afghanistan, which provides a useful platform and framework for security, peace and counter-terrorism cooperation.

In the realm of humanitarian assistance, Qatar was instrumental in evacuating thousands of foreign troops and civilians, both foreigners and Afghans, out of Afghanistan in mid-2021. It supported operations at the Kabul airport, with Qatar Airways aircraft making [several trips](#) to the capital in order to fly in aid and ferry out passport holders. In the end, nearly 40 percent of all evacuees were moved out via Qatar. International media outlets also asked Qatar for help with their staff evacuations. In this highly chaotic moment, Qatar was uniquely positioned because of its ability to speak to various parties on the ground. The evacuation policy was followed with addressing immediate humanitarian funds for food security, health care, and education to foster long-term stability and development in the country. Qatar has also facilitated the relocation of Afghan refugees, providing them with necessary resources and assistance during their transition.

In the realm of educational support, Qatar has funded educational projects in Afghanistan, including vocational training programs and support for schools, particularly in areas affected by conflict. Moreover, it [offered](#) scholarships to Afghan students through the Qatar Afghan Scholarship Project (QASP), enabling them to pursue higher education in various fields. The Education Above All Foundation and the Qatar Fund For Development (QFFD) have announced the [initiative](#) that aims to reach out to Afghan students located in various countries where they sought shelter. This initiative is important as it aims to build human capital in Afghanistan. Qatar also collaborates with various international organizations to enhance educational access and quality in Afghanistan, focusing on sectors like health and technical education.

As a relatively new actor in Afghanistan, Qatar's role and influence is an important and interesting case study. Scholars describe Qatar's approach in Afghanistan as a

[`whole-of-society`](#) approach which encompasses emergency relief, evacuations, educational support, development support, and humanitarian diplomacy, effectively bridging the Taliban with international actors after the takeover. By adopting a multifaceted approach, through soft power elements such as mediation and humanitarian policy, Qatar tried to carve out a niche role to itself in shaping Afghanistan's future amidst ongoing challenges. It scored political gains out of this policy, which is likely to show its impact in the coming years.

Qatar's Ongoing Humanitarian Support for Education in Gaza

Thouria Mahmoud
Senior Editor at the Gulf Studies Center

Since the beginning of Israel's genocidal war on Gaza, nearly [90 percent](#) of school buildings were destroyed leaving more than 600 thousand students with no school or access to education. Schools in the Gaza Strip have been beyond mere educational institutions. In times of war, they are [repurposed as refugee shelters](#) equipped with additional power, sanitation and generator facilities. These "safe" sites, run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), are being systematically destroyed by Israeli forces since the beginning of the aggression. Given its role as a mediator in this deepening war, an advocate for an immediate ceasefire and a humanitarian aid provider, Qatar plays an important role in the education crisis of this densely populated Palestinian territory.

To aid Palestinian children who were left without schools or hope for a better future, Shaikha Moza bint Nasser Al Misned launched the [Al Fakhoora campaign](#) in 2009, one of many projects of the Education Above All Foundation([EAA](#)). The [aim](#) of this humanitarian campaign is "to promote the right to education in conflict and post-conflict regions". The name came from a school in the Jabaliya refugee camp, where many families took refuge during the 2008 Gaza Massacre and 200 displaced Palestinians were killed in a single attack. The Al Fakhoora campaign encompasses many initiatives falling under humanitarian aid which include rebuilding destroyed schools, granting

scholarships, providing disabled students with vocational training, and working on the physiological and social aftermath of the war.

The Al Fakhoora Campaign launched a number of projects since 2009 in aid of education in Gaza. One of these projects, in collaboration with United Nations Development Programme, was "[The Qatar Scholarship Project](#)" (QSP) which, in the duration of 13 years (2009- 2022), provided access to higher quality education, student services and extensive civic engagements programs. Earlier this year, EEA and Qatar's General Directorate of Endowments (Awqaf) [honored](#) a number of scholarship recipients of QSP as high-achievers who exhibited academic excellence during the 2023-2024 academic year.

Following yet another Israeli war on Gaza in 2014, Al Fakhoora launched another project, the "Right to Education Program", in February 2015 to support the recovery of the educational sector in Gaza by reconstructing and rehabilitating what was destroyed during the war. Amongst other achievements, this project was able to rebuild and refurbish completely damaged schools, rehabilitate private and public schools, add additional classrooms, build multi-purpose halls to be used for emergency shelters, rehabilitate training centers, and recover higher education institutions.

Since the beginning of the ongoing war on Gaza, more than 500 schools were either [directly or indirectly hit](#) leaving more than 600 thousand students out of school. Gaza's education system had been already struggling after several wars since 2008. Talal al-Hathal, director of the Al Fakhoora Campaign, [stated](#) to Al Jazeera that Israeli attacks on educational institutions in Gaza have not only "disrupted immediate educational activities but also eroded the foundation for sustained societal growth and development."

The current war on Gaza is unprecedented in many respects. Gaza has never witnessed a war that reached this magnitude of destruction and duration. In addition to the destruction of the buildings, students and teachers have also been killed during the war which resulted in a vanishing educational infrastructure and mental trauma to thousands of students who were left alive. In the current unlivable situation of Gaza, education is now considered a luxury rather than a need. With a population struggling to seek shelter, find food and simply stay alive, providing educational resources for the time

being is not a priority for ordinary Gazans. Even if it were, without proper electricity, stable internet connection and technology, providing online classes too is close to impossible. Although many teachers run “classes” in tents, this too is neither practical nor safe.

With negotiation efforts being refused by Israel and with the risk of further spread of conflict, the collateral damage of this war, including failed educational systems, are bound to increase. The future of the students remains unclear as of now, and estimating the time and effort needed to rehabilitate the education system and the psychologically wounded students in Gaza is impossible.