

Israel's strike on Hamas failed tactically but sends strategic regional messages

written by Dr. Raphael BenLevi | 25.09.2025

Israel has a tendency to execute impressive military feats that often end in strategic failure. This time it's the opposite: a tactical failure – but a strategic gain. Indeed, the near-hit against the Hamas leadership assembled in Doha earlier this month led to a rare display of unity across the Arab world, the kind of unity that only condemnation of Israel can produce.

Even more significant is that this was a display of solidarity with Qatar, which in recent years has been largely shunned by the Gulf states that rightly see it as the primary promulgator of Islamist ideology that threatens their regimes.

Reactions to strike

At the emergency summit in Doha this week, attended by nearly all Arab states, participants condemned what they described as a “dangerous escalation” and demanded that the international community and the UN formulate a response and hold Israel accountable. Yet, the harsher that the Arab states’ public condemnation of Israel became, the more glaring was their unwillingness to translate those denunciations into any concrete steps.

In practice, this summit stemmed from the need of Arab states to salvage the honor of one of their own, who was humiliated by the Jewish state. Beyond this, however, it became clear that the strike could not undo the Gulf states’ interest in countering the Islamist threat represented by Hamas and supported by Qatar, nor their interest in avoiding a military confrontation with Israel.

The Trump administration also hurried to distance itself from the operation, with the president stating that it “does not advance Israel or America’s goals” and that he “felt very badly about the location of the attack.”

He said he had tried to warn the Qataris about the strike but that “unfortunately, it was too late to stop the attack.” Still, the fact that the administration took no

punitive measures against Israel speaks much louder than Trump's written message.

Even during his visit to Israel this week, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio admitted that the strike had stirred tensions, but emphasized the need to move forward, support Israel, and focus on the Hamas threat and the hostage issue. The practical American message was continued backing of Israel, even if accompanied by diplomatic discomfort.

In Israel, some fear the strike pushed normalization with Saudi Arabia further away. Yet this process is, in any case, in a state of arrest until after the war in Gaza ends. In the future, Israel's demonstration of operational capabilities may actually serve as a catalyst for deepening relations, since it strengthens Israel's image as a regional power with unparalleled capabilities.

Sending a strategic message

The strike's main achievements, however, lie in the messages it conveyed. Israel broadcast that its precision operational capabilities extend far beyond its borders, and that it is determined to pursue its enemies wherever they may be. It also signaled a willingness to act with deception and surprise - which may anger its adversaries but in practice strengthens its deterrence.

In addition, an Israeli shift in its approach to Qatar is long overdue. It must recognize Qatar as the hostile state that it is, despite the current security cooperation between Qatar and the United States. The strike demonstrated that Israel will no longer pretend that its enemies' most significant supporter can also serve as a trusted mediator, working to preserve peace and stability.

Furthermore, it taught us that although Washington does seek to maintain its security cooperation with Qatar, it will nonetheless not prevent Israel from acting against Hamas on Qatari soil, nor punish it for doing so.

Beyond this, the act also reverberated in Turkey - also a host of Hamas's leadership - which realized that its own territory is not immune from an Israeli strike. This possibility adds an important layer to the delicate balance of deterrence with Istanbul.

Finally, the most direct message was at Hamas itself: Israel will no longer allow

the terror organization to stall Israel's military progress in Gaza through endless negotiations that lead nowhere. The strike did not torpedo any potential hostage deal because Hamas has made clear that it will not agree to any deal that can meet Israel's minimum requirements.

Instead, the unambiguous message to Hamas is that your end is approaching, and it will come soon - either through surrender or through Israel's decisive action.

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