

What Qatar can and can't do after Israeli strike on Hamas in Doha

written by Prof. Kobi Michael | 10.09.2025

The surprise Israeli Air Force strike in Doha, Qatar's capital, which precisely targeted the building where Hamas' external leadership was meeting, is the kind of event usually described as a game changer. Israel finally made the decision that should have been made back on October 8, when the war aims were first defined. In that sense, better late than never.

Without a major blow to Hamas' leadership, there is no way to dismantle the terrorist organization as a military and governing entity or to make recovery difficult. This is especially true following the elimination of Hamas' leadership in Gaza, which left Izz al-Din al-Haddad, commander of the Gaza Brigade who succeeded Mohammed Sinwar (himself replacing his brother, Yahya Sinwar), as the top military leader and effectively the most senior Hamas figure remaining in the Gaza Strip. The eliminations in Gaza shifted the terrorist organization's center of gravity to the external leadership outside Gaza, most of which enjoyed safety and comfort in Doha.

Beyond the impressive intelligence and operational capabilities displayed by Israel, far from the first time, and beyond the fact that this is Israel's fifth decapitation strike against hostile leaderships (Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah, Iran, and the Houthis), this action projects strength and determination. The Doha strike sends a message about Israel's seriousness in ending the war and achieving the objectives defined by the government. If the remnants of Hamas leadership in Gaza and its support circles dismissed threats about an invasion of Gaza City as empty bluster aimed at pressuring Hamas in negotiations, the Qatar strike may well change their assessment.

If the operation succeeded and Israel indeed managed to eliminate most of Hamas' external leadership, or at least its most senior figures, it would be a devastating blow to the organization, stripping it of critical organizational capabilities. Hamas' external leadership was responsible for fundraising and managing ties with states and groups that supported it. With their removal, even partially, the group faces paralysis and severe functional difficulties that could

threaten its survival as a meaningful entity and make any recovery far harder.

Even if most Hamas leaders managed to escape the strike, its importance remains enormous. It instantly changed the rules of the game and completely undermined Hamas leaders' sense of security. From now on, they will have to devote enormous effort to evasion, protection, and hiding, knowing they have lost their immunity and are vulnerable to immediate elimination anywhere.

The strike also creates an opportunity for new momentum in negotiations, if and when they resume. Israel seems unlikely to wait long, even if it slows down the pace of its operation to capture Gaza City in order to facilitate talks and conclude them within a short time frame, under the terms outlined in President Trump's proposal. If Israel has succeeded in removing much of Hamas' hardline external leadership, the result could leave al-Haddad in a stronger position with the potential for a more pragmatic approach.

Victor's generosity

With the confidence of victory and under the shadow of this dramatic success, Israel could declare triumph, secure the release of hostages, and reshape Gaza's security reality by dismantling Hamas as a military and governing force. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has called on Gaza's residents to expel the remnants of Hamas and declared that there would be no obstacle to a shared future and new relations between Gaza and Israel under an alternative civilian administration once Hamas is dismantled as the ruling authority.

If, however, most of Hamas' external leadership survived, the organization may harden its stance and push negotiations into deadlock, forcing Israel back to its plan for capturing Gaza City and the entire Gaza Strip.

Despite the troubling delay of nearly two years since the war began, the operation's execution helps cut Qatar back down to size, or at least sidelines it from negotiations and Gaza's reconstruction process. Qatar was never an honest mediator. Beyond being a state sponsor of terrorism and a clear supporter of Hamas, it manipulated Israel and other mediators, exploiting the horrors of the war to entrench itself as a regional diplomatic powerhouse. It turned mediation into a major tool of soft power, alongside corrupt use of its vast wealth to buy influence, cultural assets, and powerful lobbying networks that swayed decision-making in states and organizations. Qatar used negotiations to smear Israel,

undermine Egypt and its relations with Israel, and maneuver toward a war-ending arrangement that would keep Hamas in power and allow it to regroup for a future takeover of the Palestinian matter. Meanwhile, Doha tightened ties with the US, which amplified Qatar's importance by highlighting its role in negotiations and its broader utility to American interests.

It is hard to believe Israel carried out the strike without prior coordination with Washington, which maintains the largest American military base in the Middle East on Qatari soil. Even if the US government insists it was not informed or gave no green light, many in the region and beyond assume otherwise. In practice, it means that the US ultimately prioritized its commitments to Israel and its vital interests over Qatar's, a move of enormous symbolic weight, projecting Israeli strength across the region.

President Trump's social media posts can be read two ways: as expressing dissatisfaction over a unilateral Israeli strike against a close American ally, but also as acknowledging the legitimacy of the target. Claims of friction between Trump and Netanyahu may reflect an American attempt to soften what Qatar perceives as betrayal. Rumors of quiet Qatari consent to the strike, similar to its tacit approval for Iran's attack on a US base during Operation With the Lion, should not be taken too seriously. Even if partially true, they do not change the fact that Qatar suffered a humiliating blow that exposed its vulnerability and total reliance on American security guarantees.

Qatari officials have said they are investigating the incident and pledged action against Israel, which they labeled a terrorist state. A military response, however, is implausible, given Doha's lack of such capabilities. Any attempt would invite a devastating Israeli counterstrike, regardless of American reassurances. Qatar's retaliation is expected to focus on diplomatic and legal spheres, alongside intensified delegitimization campaigns against Israel. Its decision to suspend active mediation between Israel and Hamas is no threat, if anything, it is a blessing.

Let Turkey and Egypt frown

Israel's decision to target Hamas leadership on Qatari soil, officially not an enemy state, does have precedents, such as the 1985 Israeli strike on the Palestine Liberation Organization headquarters in Tunis. Still, this is a dramatic move,

reshaping regional dynamics and, to some extent, global ones. Israel has once again set world-class intelligence and military standards, reinforcing its position as the most powerful and influential force in the Middle East. It is a significant achievement, even if Turkey, Egypt, and other states wrinkle their noses at Israel's growing dominance and determination to wield it across the Middle East.

Make no mistake: Arab leaders will rush to condemn Israel and embrace Qatar with soothing words. But it is lip service. Behind closed doors, they are rubbing their hands in delight, smiling broadly at Qatar's humiliation. For many of them, Qatar is not just a rival but a dangerous adversary, thanks to its support for the Muslim Brotherhood, jihadist terrorist groups, and destabilization efforts through its *Al Jazeera* network. They will be pleased to see Qatar weakened, just as they would welcome Hamas' destruction.

Once Israel finishes the job, in time, these sentiments will likely be expressed openly, or at least become evident through regional realignments.

This is Israel's moment to combine statesmanship and military strategy to achieve decisive victory: ending the war, freeing the hostages, and reshaping Gaza's security reality as a key step in building a new regional order. When that happens, Israel will be able to speak of total victory.

Published in Israel Hayom, September 10, 2025.