

Qatar is an Ally of Iran

written by Dr. Yossi Mansharof | 17.09.2025

Main Points:

- Alongside cultivating its strategic alliance with the United States, Qatar maintains a profound alliance with Iran and strengthens it economically, ideologically, and diplomatically.
- The Qatari network Al Jazeera refrained from covering the protests in Iran in 2009 and in 2022-2023; during the 2022 World Cup, Qatar acceded to Tehran's requests to block opposition elements and to monitor them.
- Various reports and media publications ascribe to Qatar the provision of indirect financial support and diplomatic cover for Hezbollah; moreover, the 2008 'Doha Agreement' conferred veto power upon Hezbollah and further entrenched Iran's influence in Lebanon.
- The "Swords of Iron" conflict revealed close Hamas-Al Jazeera collaboration, casting doubt on Qatar's ability to mediate fairly between Israel and Hamas due to its ties with Iran.
- It is recommended that Israel prefer Egypt as mediator; to launch a proactive campaign vis-à-vis Washington emphasizing the depth of the Qatar-Iran alliance; and to caution the Sunni partners in the region against reliance on Qatar.

Introduction

The discourse in Israel regarding Qatar, since Israel's unprecedented strike against the Hamas leadership in Doha, has focused on the double game managed by the emirate. Within this framework, emphasis was placed on Qatar's role as mediator between Israel and Hamas on the one hand, and on the other, on the role of the Qatari Al Jazeera network as the principal mouthpiece of Hamas propaganda during the "Swords of Iron" war.

Much has also been said regarding Qatar's duplicity vis-à-vis the United States. On the one hand, it is a principal ally of the United States, though not a NATO member, and hosts the largest American base in the Middle East, Al-Udeid. At the same time, it was Al Jazeera that exclusively published al-Qaeda's messages

following the September 11 attacks, and which was accused by the governments of Jordan, Egypt, and Bahrain—also important partners of the United States in the region—of promoting extremism and inciting unrest within their territories.

Alongside Qatar's mediation efforts in the current war, the close cooperation between Al Jazeera and Hamas was exposed by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). In this context, the IDF revealed that a number of Al Jazeera journalists in Gaza, some of whom were targeted by the IDF, were in fact operatives of Hamas and the Islamic Jihad; some were even local commanders. The IDF also presented captured documents indicating that Hamas prohibited Al Jazeera from criticizing it, instructed it to conceal failed rocket launches that resulted in Palestinian casualties, and even established a secure communication line between the parties.

This document seeks to shed light on Iran's alliance with Qatar from an economic, diplomatic, and propaganda perspective. In this framework, Qatar provided financial assistance to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and Hezbollah, in violation of U.S. sanctions; offered mediation services for Hezbollah in 2008 that guaranteed and even deepened Hezbollah's control in Lebanon, thereby granting Iran a significant diplomatic achievement; reported minimally on protests in Iran since 2009; and cooperated with Iran's demands in its coverage of the 2022 World Cup on its territory, in order to assist the Iranian regime in overcoming challenges to its stability.

Cultivating Strategic Relations with the United States

Qatar gradually cultivated relations with successive American administrations since the early 1990s. Since 2003 it has hosted American forces at the Al-Udeid base, into which it has invested more than 8 billion USD (as of January 2025) in order to develop it and transform it into the principal base of American forces in the Middle East.

In 2017, Qatar and the administration of Donald Trump signed a memorandum of understanding whereby Qatar would combat terrorism and cease financial support for terrorist organizations. The background to this was the unprecedented crisis between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt, which severed their relations with Doha and imposed upon it

(until 2021) a diplomatic and economic boycott, on the grounds that it funded and supported Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood, the Taliban, and even elements connected to al-Qaeda.

In January 2018, Qatar and the United States inaugurated a “strategic dialogue,” one of its central anchors being a joint struggle against terrorism, in order to institutionalize joint discussions on security and stability in the region. As emerges from official American governmental documents, foremost among the United States’ concerns was Qatar’s partnership in the global coalition against ISIS, which had been established in 2014. Relations with the United States culminated in the strategic alliance of 2022 under the Biden administration.

The Alliance with Iran

Simultaneously, Qatar maintains extensive ties with Iran. Their intelligence and security cooperation, including Qatar’s efforts to help safeguard Iran’s regime stability, became especially visible during the 2022 World Cup in Qatar. The period was sensitive, as the Iranian regime faced widespread protests following Mahsa Amini’s death at the hands of security forces in Tehran over her negligent wearing of a hijab.

It was a priority for the Iranian authorities to prevent the opposition from using the World Cup to amplify protests within Iran and garner Western support. At Tehran’s request, Qatar detained Iranian fans who attempted to bring flags of the Pahlavi monarchy and the “Woman, Life, Freedom” movement into the stadiums. Simultaneously, Qatar provided Iranian authorities with information on ticket purchasers and, upon Iran’s request, barred journalists from the leading opposition outlet, *Iran International*, from entering Qatar during the tournament.

Already earlier, Qatar had proven its cooperation with Iran during the crisis that erupted in Tehran following the extensive protests after allegations of election fraud in 2009. As was leaked in WikiLeaks documents, the American Embassy in Doha assessed in November 2009 (about half a year after the outbreak of the disturbances in Iran) that the Al Jazeera network was acting in service of the interests of the Qatari government, which maintained close relations with Iran, and therefore devoted scant coverage to the widespread protest that had broken out in Iran.

WikiLeaks documents indicate that in July 2009, U.S. Ambassador in Doha Joseph LeBaron sought clarification from Al Jazeera's director-general at the time, Wadah Khanfar, regarding the network's limited coverage of the protests about ten days after their outbreak. Khanfar replied that the format reflected "the difficult environment for journalists operating in Iran." Despite the restrained reporting on the Iranian election crisis, Al Jazeera's activities became a point of dispute between Iran and Qatar, as Iran viewed the network's coverage of Iraq as advancing the Sunni agenda, its regional opponents.

The WikiLeaks documents also revealed that in their December 2009 meeting, Qatar's then prime minister, Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al Thani, rejected the American ambassador's claims regarding Qatar's close relations with Iran, saying: "They lie to us, and we lie to them." Nonetheless, the clear political bias in favor of Iran in Al Jazeera's broadcasts was evident to all in the intensive, inciting, and sympathetic coverage that Al Jazeera devoted to the events of the "Arab Spring" against the regimes of Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt in 2011.

Iran and Qatar diverged significantly regarding the uprising in Syria. Iranian officials publicly criticized Al Jazeera's sympathetic coverage of the uprising and Qatar's support for the rebels. Nevertheless, the sparse coverage of the protests that broke out in Iran even after the 2009 crisis—contrasting with the intensive coverage of the "Arab Spring" protests—raises suspicion that the two states had at the very least understandings on the matter, if not an actual comprehensive agreement.

The clear political bias in favor of the Iranian regime in Al Jazeera during the Mahsa Amini protest (September 2022–March 2023) provoked criticism from intellectuals in the Arab world. They accused the network of ignoring the protest and of promoting the regime's narrative in Tehran. Coverage of events in Iran had changed since 2009, after a few years earlier, in 2005, Tehran revoked Al Jazeera's operating license in Iran. This move stemmed from Al Jazeera's coverage of the Ahvaz protests, which, according to Tehran, destabilized the Khuzestan province in southern Iran.

Further indications point to the alliance between Iran and Qatar: in 2019, Fox News reported that Qatar had prior knowledge of Iranian attacks on tankers and a fuel supply vessel near the port of Fujairah in the United Arab Emirates; in a podcast it broadcast in May 2020, Al Jazeera referred to Qasem Soleimani, who

was commander of the Quds Force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards until his elimination earlier that year, as “a hero who walked in the path of God.”

In 2021, Israeli President Reuven Rivlin shared intelligence with the White House indicating Qatar’s financial support for the Revolutionary Guards. Although the United States initiated an investigation, it did not proceed. This demonstrates that, despite pledges to the U.S. to end terrorism financing, Qatar still aided the world’s principal state sponsor of terrorism.

After the Iranian attack on the American Al-Udeid base in Qatar on June 23 of this year, Qatar dispatched a letter to the Security Council and to the UN Secretary-General, in which it expressed sharp condemnation of the Iranian missile attack. In the letter, Qatar stated that it regarded the attack as a blatant violation of its sovereignty and of its airspace, as well as of international law and the UN Charter, and even emphasized that it reserved for itself the right to respond directly. Yet in practice, in accordance with the alliance between the two states, Iran had notified Qatar (as well as the United States) in advance before it attacked the American base, in response to the earlier American strike against the Iranian nuclear program. Qatar’s letter to the UN was thus a mere pretense.

Support for Hezbollah

Qatar maintained close relations with Hezbollah until the outbreak of disagreements between them with the beginning of the Syrian civil war in 2011. The positive relationship with Hezbollah was evident in the “Doha Agreement” of May 2008, in which Qatar succeeded in mediating between the warring Lebanese sides. The agreement indeed led to the election of Michel Suleiman as president of Lebanon, but it granted Hezbollah veto power in the government, as the latter had demanded.

In July 2010, Qatar’s then-emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, received a warm popular reception in southern Lebanon during the first-ever visit by an Arab ruler to the region. During his tour, he lauded Hezbollah, noting that the 2006 Second Lebanon War had “raised the heads of Lebanon and of the Arabs,” and expressed his gratitude “to the fighters who sacrificed themselves for the defense of the homeland.”

There are also reports that link Qatar to the funding of Hezbollah and of the Quds

Force. In 2017, the *Jerusalem Post* revealed, citing a security adviser connected to Western intelligence services, that Qatar was involved in providing financial assistance to Hezbollah through diplomatic cover mechanisms and charitable associations operating from Doha. According to the report, Qatar's ambassador to Belgium attempted to conceal the affair and even offered a payment of 750,000 euros in order to prevent its exposure. This testimony of the adviser, which was at the time corroborated by senior officials in the German intelligence establishment, indicates that Qatar acted behind the scenes in order to support a terrorist organization subject to international sanctions.

Qatar's alignment with Hezbollah was also clearly demonstrated in late 2024, when it opposed the American initiative to exploit Hezbollah's defeat at the hands of Israel in order to bring about the election of a new president in Lebanon. Since the end of Michel Aoun's term in 2022, Lebanon remained without a president due to the political crisis into which it had fallen. The American initiative was intended to free Lebanon from Hezbollah's grip. However, in the talks that then-Secretary of State Antony Blinken conducted with Qatar in October 2024, the latter expressed opposition to the initiative, claiming that it was "a dangerous gamble."

Summary and Recommendations

The alliance between Iran and Qatar, and the strategic relations between Qatar and the United States, form part of the double game that Qatar conducts. In accordance with its adaptive character, it appears that the Israeli strike against it does not close the path to mediation efforts on the part of Qatar in the future. To the extent that it perceives that contacts with Israel will serve its interests, it will demonstrate willingness to return to mediating between Israel and Hamas, and to establish additional contacts with Israel in other spheres. However, the alliance with Iran deepens the significant doubt regarding Qatar's ability to mediate between Israel and Hamas, with which it maintains close cooperation. Therefore, it is preferable for Israel to suffice with Egypt as mediator.

In addition, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs should launch a comprehensive campaign against Qatar, focusing on its alliance with Iran. It is recommended to reveal relevant pieces of information that will deepen the understanding of the alliance's depth, and that will assist in bringing Washington to reconsider its relations with Qatar.

Such a campaign could also help counter Iran's effort to exploit the Israeli strike in Qatar to advance Ali Khamenei's initiative for a diplomatic and economic boycott of Israel. Israel must convey unequivocally to the Trump administration—and, through it, to the Sunni states in the region—that they should avoid falling into the trap set by Iran and Qatar, as the latter's support for terrorism could, in the future, directly affect them if the two states perceive it as the most effective means to pursue their strategic objectives.

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