

# THE AGGRESSION AGAINST DOHA

THE COST OF SECURITY DEPENDENCE  
ON FOREIGN POWERS AND  
THE DILEMMA OF FUNCTIONAL MEDIATION



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This study, "The Aggression Against Doha: The Cost of Security Dependence on Foreign Powers and the Dilemma of Functional Mediation," presents a structured analytical examination of the Israeli attack on Doha on 9 September 2025 and its wider political, strategic, and security implications. It draws exclusively on publicly available information, documented events, official statements, and established research to offer a comprehensive account of the crisis and its impact on Qatar's regional position, sovereignty, mediation policies, and defence strategies.

The work does not introduce new claims beyond the documented record, nor does it seek to advocate for any political program. Instead, it compiles, contextualizes, and analyzes existing material—including regional and international commentary, governmental statements, and academic assessments—to provide readers, researchers, and policymakers with a coherent understanding of the episode and its significance.

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# **The aggression against Doha... The cost of security dependence on foreign powers and the dilemma of functional mediation**



# Summary

This study addresses the Israeli bombing incident targeting the Qatari capital, Doha, as a pivotal event that revealed the fragility of Qatar's security structure and highlighted the limits of its excessive dependence on foreign security umbrellas. Despite Qatar's substantial military investments and defense agreements with the United States and other countries, the attack served as a practical test of these arrangements' ability to provide real deterrence and protection. In contrast, there was a clear deficiency in Qatar's self-defense and warning systems.

The study also explores the political and security costs of Qatar's diplomatic mediation policy in global conflicts, which has been a central tool in its foreign policy. The findings suggest that Qatar's deep involvement in highly complex regional issues has left it politically and security-wise vulnerable, especially when its interests collided with the influence of Israel and the United States in the region. The attack was not merely a fleeting security incident but a point of exposure for strategic choices that relied on the "legitimacy of the role" rather than on the "efficacy of power."

The study highlights how the Israeli bombing was a blatant violation of Qatari sovereignty, with Doha failing to respond with a clear political or diplomatic counteraction. This reflected the imbalance of power in the relationship between Qatar and Israel and exposed Qatar's limited capacity to impose red lines or protect its territory from external aggression. The study also discusses Qatar's hesitant stance, characterized by silence and confusion, suggesting the existence of implicit understandings or narrow political calculations that prioritized mediation for diplomatic gains over sovereign and security considerations.

Additionally, the study reviews Qatar's responsibility for the security of Palestinian negotiators from Hamas residing on its territory. The event reveals a clear security failure in protecting them, showing that the country, which claimed to sponsor dialogue, was unable to protect its guests or its land from direct targeting.

The study concludes that the Israeli bombing of Doha was a result of the fragility of Qatar's security infrastructure and its excessive reliance on foreign security arrangements that were not based on its national priorities but on the calculations of the powers hosting their military bases on Qatari soil. This "imported security" model stripped the country of the ability to develop its own deterrence system and weakened its independence in security decision-making during moments of threat. The study underscores that relying on foreign power is no longer a safe option for Qatar and has become a factor contributing to the country's vulnerabilities, as the security of the state cannot be a priority for allies who logically place their own interests above all else.

# Introduction



A picture of the Israeli aggression on Doha

On the 8th of September 2025, under pressure from U.S. President Trump, Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar stated that his country had accepted the ceasefire proposal put forward by the United States to end the devastating war in Gaza. The following day, Israel launched a treacherous attack targeting a residential complex in the Qatari capital, Doha, where several members of the political bureau were staying to discuss the same proposal. The attack resulted in the martyrdom of a Qatari security officer and several movement cadres, including the son of Hamas leader in Gaza, Khalil al-Hayya, his office director, along with a number of companions and civilians.

The Israeli aggression went beyond the traditional military operation to a more dangerous level, as the bombing of Doha represented an unprecedented incident in the history of the conflict, targeting the territory of a mediator country that has long been a central hub for diplomatic mediation in regional issues. This attack carried a clear message that Israel no longer recognizes any red lines and is willing to pursue its opponents even within capitals hosting negotiations, including Qatar, a country that Israeli officials have frequently visited and with which Israel has extensive security coordination.

The Israeli attack on Doha revealed the real cost of Qatar's bet on a mediation policy, which had long been promoted as a tool for regional influence. However, it proved, at the moment of crisis, to be a political and security burden beyond its ability to bear. Qatar paid a high price in terms of its security and the lives of its citizens and residents due to its parallel openness to both Israel and resistance movements. This openness failed to provide Qatar with any real guarantees, and instead left it exposed to dangers it lacked the means to deter.

With the breach of its sovereignty and the targeting of its capital, the assumption of "diplomatic immunity" that Doha had used to justify its role as a mediator collapsed in practice. Qatar found itself unable to protect its territory or secure the parties it hosted as part of its mediation efforts, which had been presented as a model of effective diplomacy. As a result, Qatar's role as a mediator shifted from being a source of alleged political gains to a direct cause of its exposure and the unprecedented strategic embarrassment it faced.

The Israeli attack on Doha also revealed a truth that the Qatari regime had long tried to ignore or conceal: its national security is almost entirely dependent on foreign powers. This is especially true in regard to the U.S. and Turkish military bases Qatar has hosted for decades, with the attack exposing that these were never a real guarantee against any external threat. Both countries, whose forces were supposed to provide Qatar with "strategic immunity" through their presence, stood by as mere spectators while Doha was directly bombed, without any military response from them. This shattered the official Qatari narrative that portrayed the U.S. Al-Udeid Airbase as a "protective umbrella" and part of Washington's commitment to Qatar's security. The attack revealed that this base is merely a facility managed according to narrow U.S. interests, not Qatar's needs. The Turkish presence in Al-Rayyan fared no better; the attack showed that this presence was no more than a political extension of Ankara, serving its regional interests without adding any real value to Qatar's defense capabilities or sovereignty.

# CHAPTER ONE:

## The Israeli Bombing of Doha... Context and Implications

### 1. Background of the Field and Political Aggression

Since after October 7, 2023, Israeli policy shifted towards the direct targeting of Hamas leaders beyond the scope of traditional confrontations. In late November 2023, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced that he had directed the foreign intelligence service to begin operations targeting Hamas officials wherever they may be. This marked a clear transition from general threat rhetoric to adopting a cross-border assassination strategy. This shift in political and security discourse was further reinforced by statements from the Minister of Defense at the time, who indicated that the top Hamas leaders were "threatened with elimination at any moment," signaling the security establishment's readiness to pursue leadership figures outside of their traditional operational areas. The former head of the Shin Bet security service also solidified this direction in later public statements, confirming that the security agencies would continue hunting Hamas leaders "in any location that can be reached," whether in Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, Turkey, or even Qatar. It was noted that this approach might continue for years but would be pursued as a long-term strategic option.

On the ground, this rhetoric was translated into a series of assassinations targeting prominent figures within the movement. These events reinforced that the elimination of leaders had become a practical policy executed across international borders. This dynamic also manifested in the expansion of operations beyond the traditional conflict arena, including Qatar, whose government had previously believed that its territory was protected due to its diplomatic role as a mediator appointed by the United States.

These developments point to a clear integration of both political and operational dimensions in an Israeli strategy that began to adopt the targeting of Hamas' senior leadership as a central tool in achieving its security and political goals, with consequences that extend beyond the traditional boundaries of the conflict, raising issues related to national sovereignty, the responsibility for escalation, and the protection of civilians and diplomatic facilities.

## **2. Declared and Hidden Motives of Aggression**

The Israeli government, led by Benjamin Netanyahu, relied on an integrated strategic approach to justify its recent aggression, encompassing political, security, and military dimensions. This strategy was based on the principle of targeted assassination as a central tool to achieve the military goals set after the "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation on October 7, 2023. These goals included dismantling Hamas' infrastructure and ending its rule in Gaza by systematically destroying its organizational and military capabilities.

In this context, Israel adopted a policy of cross-border assassinations targeting leaders of the movement both inside and outside of Palestine. This began with the assassination of the deputy head of Hamas' political bureau in Beirut in early 2024, followed by the assassination of Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran in July of the same year, among others. These actions were part of a methodical attempt to dismantle the military leadership of Hamas.

Since the start of these operations, they have received unlimited political and military support from the United States, which adopted the Israeli view of "eliminating Hamas" as part of its strategic approach to the war. This allowed Tel Aviv to move freely without legal or political constraints, including carrying out assassinations in sovereign countries. Under this climate of impunity, and with the return of the Trump administration to power, Israel expanded its operations to target political and civilian figures in other Arab countries, in clear violation of international law and the principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of states.

This direction was clearly manifested in the aggression against Doha, which marked a qualitative escalation, reflecting Israel's shift from targeting individuals to directly violating the sovereignty of an Arab country that was not militarily involved in the conflict. As such, Israel's assassination policy took on a new dimension that went beyond the confrontation with Hamas, creating a dangerous precedent in regional relations. This shift imposed a logic of force at the expense of international legitimacy, and among the main reasons for the aggression against Qatar:

- **Failure of Qatari Mediation:** The Israeli aggression against Qatari territory represented a dangerous shift in international conduct rules. It targeted the mediating country itself in an overt violation of its sovereignty, clearly aiming to sabotage the negotiations.

Since the outbreak of the war on Gaza in October 2023, Qatar announced a diplomatic initiative under the guidance and sponsorship of the United States "aimed at stopping the war and containing its humanitarian consequences." This initiative took the form of continuous mediation, with Doha hosting several rounds of multi-party negotiations involving representatives from the United States and Israel in an attempt to reach agreements on detainee releases and ceasefires. These efforts led to limited breakthroughs, including two temporary ceasefires and a prisoner exchange between Israel and Hamas, one on November 22, 2023, and the other on January 15, 2025. Despite Hamas's flexible stance towards the mediators' proposals, including the Qatari-Egyptian initiative, which was agreed upon by Palestinians in August 2025, Netanyahu's government refused to take it seriously, preferring military escalation over any political settlement.

- **Reshaping Gaza's Political Geography:** Despite Netanyahu's recent political rhetoric, which portrayed him as seeking a comprehensive settlement to end the war, this position was merely a propaganda cover to mislead international public opinion, especially after Hamas' agreement to the proposal put forward by mediators became a reality that could no longer be ignored. The Israeli military and security institutions saw this acceptance as a qualitative shift in Hamas's position, revealing a degree of flexibility not seen in previous rounds of negotiations. However, this development did not lead to any change in Netanyahu's core policy, which, since the outbreak of the war, has been an eradication approach aimed at destroying Gaza physically and humanely, imposing a new settler and security reality that leads to the displacement of its population and the reoccupation of the area.

In this context, the Israeli aggression against Qatar represented an additional link in the chain of maximum pressure strategies employed by Tel Aviv to subdue Hamas, by targeting its political leadership outside Palestinian territory and creating a coercive negotiating environment, rather than a dialogue-based one. The declared goal was to force the movement to accept Israeli terms, which included disarming the resistance, displacing the population, and re-subjugating the sector to complete Israeli military control. At the very least, the objective was to impose a new negotiation framework under the threat of military force, in line with Israel's vision of what it calls "the next phase in Gaza."

This approach was accompanied by an intense military escalation in the eastern and northern regions of Gaza, which preceded the bombing of Doha by a few days. The Israeli army carried out comprehensive destruction operations targeting urban infrastructure, including towers and residential buildings, using advanced combat techniques such as "explosive robots" loaded with large amounts of explosives. The aim was to clear the targeted areas of their residents and force them to move southward and toward the center of the Gaza Strip.

In parallel, Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz announced on July 7, 2025, a plan to create what he called a "humanitarian city" in Rafah. This plan essentially involved gathering Palestinians in a confined space under harsh living conditions, resembling a large detention camp with temporary tents and limited relief centers, effectively embodying a project of mass displacement and demographic restructuring in the region.

Thus, from the overall situation, it is clear that the Israeli strike against Qatar was not an isolated or circumstantial incident but aligned with Israel's power-driven approach, which is no longer limited to the conventional battlefields in Gaza. The attack reflects a strategic direction targeting any actor attempting to shift the Israeli-American dominance over negotiation processes. It marks a shift in the nature of the conflict, from direct military operations to tools aimed at disrupting regional mediations and weakening state sovereignty, under repeated justifications related to Israeli security.

- **Regional Deterrence Message Affirming Israeli Superiority:** The Israeli bombing of Doha is part of a show-of-force approach, through which Israel seeks to restore its regional stature, which was dealt a significant blow after the "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation. The attack was not a military action detached from its context but a deliberate signal to other countries in the region, indicating that Israel could penetrate the borders of any state and achieve its objectives whenever it decided to do so. This move clearly reveals a disregard for national sovereignty principles and the boundaries of states.

Benjamin Netanyahu clearly outlined this trajectory during the wide-ranging confrontation Israel engaged in with Iran in June 2025, when he confirmed that his country was "redrawing the regional landscape." This statement reflects an implicit expansionist agenda aimed at rearranging the geopolitical environment of the Middle East according to a unilateral Israeli vision. It also reveals Tel Aviv's desire to solidify a structure of sustained influence that would enable it to manage the course of the conflict in Palestine and control the regional power equations in the long term.

This approach is supported by unlimited political backing from the U.S. administration during Donald Trump's presidency, which largely adopted the Israeli perspective in dealing with the region's crises and balance. This alignment provided Tel Aviv with a broad margin to expand its military operations beyond its traditional scope, without serious regard for state sovereignty or international law. In this nearly complete absence of international deterrence and Arab retreat, Israel is working to solidify its position as the dominant actor in the region, leveraging hard power tools and military superiority to reshape the regional structure in line with its security agenda and expansionist goals.

# CHAPTER TWO: THE POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE ISRAELI BOMBING

## 1. THE IMPACT OF THE BOMBING ON QATAR'S REGIONAL STATUS



A picture of the residential complex after the Israeli bombing

The Israeli airstrike targeting Doha marked a pivotal turning point in redefining Qatar's position within the regional framework. It revealed the limits of the role Qatar had been playing and the structural pressures that define its position in regional security equations. The attack severely harmed its diplomatic standing and raised profound questions about the limits of its political independence and the effectiveness of its role as a mediator in recent years. Studies from

Western research centers, such as the Washington Institute, published an analysis titled "Strategic Shift After the Israeli Attack on Qatar," which indicated that the Israeli bombing of Doha represented a turning point in Qatar's status as a regional mediator. It would, in the long term, significantly harm Doha's influence in mediations. An intelligence analysis from the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) pointed out that the attack set a dangerous precedent, breaking one of the "security taboos" in the Gulf, as it was carried out against a sovereign state that hosts parties engaged in sensitive mediations. The strike threatens Qatar's role in ceasefire negotiations, undermines confidence in its role as a neutral guarantor, and could weaken its internal stability.

Symbolically and politically, the bombing contributed to undermining the image that Doha had sought to establish as a "safe negotiation haven" capable of hosting both resistance leaders and international representatives simultaneously. This led to a diminished ability for Qatar to balance its roles as a mediator, host, and financier within a single equation. It placed Qatar in a structural paradox between maintaining its traditional functional role on one hand, and facing the risk of threats to its sovereignty and internal security on the other.

On the other hand, many analysts argue that the Israeli attack was a test of Qatar's political independence. It showed that despite Qatar's extensive relations with Washington and Tel Aviv, and the United States' investment in Qatar's strategic position and its functional diplomacy to serve its regional interests, Qatar was not immune to direct targeting. This reaffirmed that Qatar remains vulnerable to being utilized within the agendas of major powers, which employ its location and negotiating role to serve broader regional balances. Therefore, the bombing was not just a limited military action but a strategic message that reshaped the balance of influence in the region, pushing Doha to reassess its soft power tools and the limits of its involvement in highly sensitive issues, especially the Palestinian cause.

Most analyses agree that the impact of the attack went beyond the immediate security dimension, reaching the symbolic and political structure of Qatar's regional standing. The strike represented a sharp moment of exposure for the functional role Doha plays in international relations, highlighting the contradiction between its ambition to be a neutral mediator and its connections to a network of alliances that constantly put its decision-making independence into question. In this regard, the Israeli bombing can be considered a turning point in Qatar's political trajectory. It led to a rise in internal criticisms of the regime's mediation policies, causing Qatar to lose its position as a neutral mediator and become a politically and security-exposed party in a situation it cannot control.

Simultaneously, the level of risk in international investors' assessments rose, particularly since Qatar's economic transformation programs and development plans rely on the assumption of a stable environment. The transformation of Qatari cities themselves into potential targets adds a new layer of geopolitical uncertainty, threatening Qatar's investment attractiveness and undermining its narrative as a safe haven in the region.

## 2 . THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE BOMBING ON ARAB-ISRAELI RELATIONS



An Arab-Islamic Summit in Qatar a few days after the aggression

The Israeli bombing that targeted the Qatari capital, Doha, marked a pivotal moment in the trajectory of Arab-Israeli relations. It clearly demonstrated that Arab countries, including those with established political ties and advanced security coordination with Israel, such as Qatar, are not immune to Israeli aggression. This situation forced the Arab countries that have normalized relations with Israel to reconsider the balance of trust and regional alignments. Most observers agree that this event represented a true test of the outcomes of the Arab-Israeli normalization project, exposing the hard limits of the relationship between security cooperation on one hand and respect for national sovereignty on the other.

From a strategic perspective, the aggression revealed the fragility of the entire Gulf security structure, presenting the countries in the region with a double dilemma. On one hand, these countries are connected by political and security cooperation networks with both Israel and the United States as part of normalization agreements and

strategic partnership arrangements. On the other hand, the targeting of a sovereign Arab state like Qatar raises fundamental questions about Israel's commitment to the boundaries of such partnerships and its respect for their requirements. Thus, it became clear that the "peace for security" equation, promoted after the Abraham Accords, is not sufficient to protect the Gulf states from the consequences of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or from unexpected Israeli military actions.

Politically, several analysts pointed out that the bombing politicized the issue of normalization, as there was a prevailing belief that relations with Israel were heading toward institutional stability. The attack widened the gap between Israel and several Arab capitals, prompting some governments to adopt more cautious positions in their public dealings with Tel Aviv. Additionally, public and media criticism within the Arab countries that have normalized relations with Israel grew, which was seen as an indicator of the beginning of a "normalized coldness" phase, where relations regress to symbolic or limited security levels, without the previous political momentum.

From another perspective, the attack deepened the psychological and political gap between the peoples of the Arab countries that have normalized relations with Israel and Israel itself. It revived the image of an aggressor state that disregards diplomatic norms and international rules. This was reflected in the difficulty these countries faced in marketing economic and cultural normalization projects, especially as new narratives emerged calling for a comprehensive review of the course of relations with Israel.

In conclusion, it can be said that the Israeli aggression against Qatar was not an isolated incident in its military context, but rather represented a turning point in the structure of Arab-Israeli relations. It produced new equations based on suspicion and mistrust, reasserting the importance of national sovereignty and dignity as

central determinants for any future rapprochement. The impact of the attack did not stop at the borders of Doha but extended to the entire Arab political system, creating a rift in the official pro-normalization discourse and solidifying a new phase of caution in regional interactions with Israel.

### **3. INTERNATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE AGGRESSION**

The Israeli attack on Doha marked a pivotal moment in the course of international security and political dynamics, while its full ramifications remain unclear. The description of the operation by U.S. President Donald Trump as a mere "regrettable incident" revealed a notable shift in the nature of U.S. security commitments, deepening the sense among U.S. allies that American guarantees are no longer binding or enforceable when tested. With the absence of any red lines imposed by Washington on Israeli military behavior, it seems that Tel Aviv will continue to use its military superiority to impose its policies by force rather than diplomacy.

The strike expanded the conflict regionally in an unprecedented manner. After decades of Israeli operations being confined to Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen, the targeting of Doha sent a clear message that Israel is prepared to pursue any Hamas leadership in the broader region. Netanyahu's statement that other countries may face "similar consequences" heightened fears of an escalation involving the Gulf, Turkey, and Southeast Asia, threatening further internationalization of the conflict.

The attack also represented a direct challenge to the norms governing sovereignty and the immunity of mediators, signaling a potential redefinition of the role of intermediary states in international conflicts. Targeting a host country of negotiators increases the risks surrounding diplomatic work and places regional and international organizations—from the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to the Arab League and the United Nations—under mounting pressure to reaffirm principles of non-intervention, despite their limited ability to enforce these principles.

From the perspective of international alliances, the attack damaged the credibility of the United States and raised doubts among its allies about the reliability of its security commitments. This could drive allied countries to expand their security and political options by strengthening ties with China and Russia. The statement by Qatar's Foreign Minister about the inability of the "Patriot" system to detect Israeli missiles marked a significant revelation about the operational limitations of the U.S. air defense systems deployed in Qatar. Such an admission not only raises technical concerns but also opens a broader discussion about the nature of the strategic reliability linking U.S. allies to U.S. defense manufacturers, and whether these systems truly provide full sovereign capability to make decisions and control in moments of critical threats.

The hypotheses arising from this shortcoming vary, ranging from the possibility of structural technical gaps in the system that limit its ability to detect certain types of projectiles, to the possibility of deliberate software limitations affecting how the system responds to targets linked to Washington's network of alliances. The hypothesis of external control, though still unproven, reflects growing doubts about the effectiveness of these systems in various scenarios.

If any of these possibilities prove true, their repercussions will not be limited to Qatar alone but will extend to other Gulf air defense systems and countries that rely on U.S. arms supplies. This may prompt some of these countries, out of strategic necessity, to reconsider diversifying their sources of arms and explore alternative options, including partial openness to Russian or Chinese defense systems, in order to reduce dependency and expand autonomy in building their defense capabilities.

# CHAPTER THREE: SOVEREIGNTY IN SUSPENSION BETWEEN AMERICAN AND TURKISH PROTECTION

## 1. BETWEEN THE PAST OF "A HAVEN FOR THE OPPRESSED" AND THE PRESENT OF DEPENDENCY ON FOREIGN POWERS.

In its early historical stages, Qatar occupied a distinguished position among the Gulf coastal emirates. Its rulers, since the time of Sheikh Mohammed bin Thani in the mid-19th century, were known for their firmness in stance and their ability to reconcile between the tribes. This made Doha, Al Wakrah, and Al Khor important places for those seeking security and aid, whether from Gulf tribes or those suffering oppression in neighboring regions. At that time, Qatar drew its strength from the courage of its leadership elite, its tribal cohesion, and its ability to assert its presence in a region contested by regional powers.

In the second half of the 19th century, Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed Al Thani managed to establish a cohesive central government and confront both Ottoman and British influence. He succeeded in preserving Qatar's political independence during this difficult period, rejecting external dictates, which assured refugees that Qatar would not betray anyone nor compromise the dignity of its refugees.

The roots of Qatar's reliance on foreign security umbrellas trace back to the agreements of the 1990s, which cemented a new reality where Qatar became a wealthy country with vast resources, but heavily dependent on foreign security protection, especially the American security umbrella. Additionally, in 2022, Doha was granted the status of "Major Non-NATO Ally." Qatar promoted this "partnership" as a strategic guarantee against external threats and a firm pillar of national security. However, recent developments have revealed that this reliance did not provide real protection, but rather resulted in a sovereignty dependency that deepened the state's fragility and reduced its ability to control its defense sector.

The defense relationship between Qatar and the United States is based on broad Qatari commitments in exchange for vague American guarantees. The agreements give Washington extensive powers to manage and use military facilities beyond Qatar's ability to impose effective controls or conditions. As a result, the American forces stationed in Qatar have turned into an operational command center for the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), overseeing extensive intelligence and combat operations networks. Meanwhile, Qatar has failed to secure mechanisms ensuring American commitment to repelling threats or preventing security breaches on its territory, which has led to a clear imbalance between the cost and benefit, with the balance shifting clearly in favor of the U.S., while Doha continues to bear the financial and political responsibility without tangible, effective returns.

## 2. AL-UDEID AIRBASE: TRADING NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY FOR ILLUSORY STABILITY.



A picture of fighter jets on the runway at Al-Udeid Airbase.

Al-Udeid Airbase was established in the context of deep regional security transformations during the 1990s and the early 2000s, when the United States sought a more stable military foothold in the Gulf after its stay in Saudi bases faltered following the 1996 bombings and the subsequent political tensions. In this context, Qatar did not hesitate to invest its financial resources to attract the U.S. presence, initiating the construction of an advanced air infrastructure at Al-Udeid. This move early on demonstrated Doha's willingness to compromise part of its defense decision-making independence in exchange for external security guarantees. This process culminated in defense agreements in 2003 and 2013, which granted U.S. forces broad powers in using and managing the base, in exchange for an unwritten American commitment to protect Qatar— a commitment that later proved to be more of a symbolic promise than a real guarantee.

Over time, Al-Udeid Airbase became the largest American military facility in the Middle East and an advanced command center for U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), playing a key operational role in the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria. Qatar thus became a launch point for the occupation of Islamic countries, with its role expanding to include intelligence and logistical operations, as well as coordinating air alliances. This made Qatar a host for a massive U.S. military infrastructure without possessing the actual ability to influence how or for what purposes it is used or directed. This situation created an increasing dependency on the American security umbrella, leading to discussions about the "price of sovereignty" that Doha pays, and the structural erosion of its ability to produce an independent defense decision within a relationship that is inherently unequal.

As for financing this vast base, official documents and construction records show that Qatar covered the bulk of the financial costs for the base, from runways and concrete shelters to command centers and housing, with investments estimated in the billions of dollars over the past two decades. The United States only bears the costs of operating its forces and equipment, while Qatar remains hostage to a long-term commitment to finance the expansion and development of the base, considering it a "guarantee of external deterrence." This model has created both a financial and political dependency, meaning a massive Qatari investment in a project not governed by Qatari decisions, with an American promise of protection that lacks any binding mechanism or defined guarantees.

This pattern has entrenched a high level of reliance on the United States and placed the Qatari state in a highly complex security environment. Hosting an American military center made Qatar a potential target should conflicts escalate or Washington's strategic priorities change. The Israeli strike targeting Hamas figures in Doha revealed the fragility of this equation. It became clear that having a

U.S. base the size of Al-Udeid does not necessarily prevent violations of the host state's sovereignty nor ensure deterrence against any of the U.S.'s own allies.

The strike shattered the fundamental assumption upon which the defense partnership was built—that hosting a large American military infrastructure automatically translates to protection and control over the security domain. It practically proved that American deterrence is not all-encompassing and that Washington's strategic considerations toward its direct allies take precedence over the concept of "host state protection." The American silence or reluctance to comment on the attack deepened these concerns, exposing the limits of the guarantees that had long been promoted in the Gulf. The rhetoric of "a partner who withdraws in times of test" became more prominent than the discourse of "a stable alliance."

This reality raises urgent questions in the Qatari arena about the effectiveness of hosting American military bases and whether the state can bear the risks associated with this option. These questions became particularly evident during the Iranian bombing incident, where there is increasing belief that Qatar would not have been a direct target of the Iranian attack were it not for its close ties to the U.S. military infrastructure in the region. This is especially true given that Tehran confirmed its operations were a response to U.S. strikes on its nuclear facilities and were not specifically aimed at Doha.

From this perspective, a broader discussion arises about whether the foreign military presence in the Gulf actually enhances security or brings additional threats, as well as the issues related to the limits of national sovereignty and how it aligns with hosting foreign forces, even within the framework of formal defense agreements that govern this presence.

The Qatari case is not an exception in this context; international experiences show that hosting American bases often places host countries at the heart of tensions in which they are not direct parties. Many research studies suggest that the stationing of U.S. forces in a country can contribute to rising geopolitical tensions, motivating Washington's adversaries to target that country as an extension of American influence, in addition to providing material for anti-U.S. groups who use this presence in their propaganda.

Instead of solidifying stability, this military presence reveals that it could undermine the security of host countries and turn them into direct targets in times of regional escalation or major confrontations between global powers.

### **3. Turkish Military Presence and the Reproduction of External Security Dependency**



Erdogan during his visit to the Turkish military base in Qatar.

The defense agreement that Qatar signed with Turkey represents a new level of security dependency, one that is no less restrictive on its national decision-making than other foreign protection arrangements. The Turkish base in Al Rayyan came as an extension of political rapprochement between the two sides, but it quickly turned into a direct military foothold for Ankara on Qatari soil, without any Qatari regulatory framework defining the nature of the tasks or the scope of its deployment. Thus, Doha found itself trapped between two foreign powers with intersecting influences but differing goals, at a time when its ability to manage its own defense space was diminishing in favor of arrangements that it could neither review nor modify.

The accelerated pace of Turkish expansion within Qatar in recent years reveals a deep structural shift in Doha's approach to its national security. This shift has been marked by a clear compromise on sovereignty, replacing self-deterrence mechanisms with unbalanced security arrangements. Military agreements with Ankara led to the establishment of a new base structure promoted as a pillar for enhancing protection. However, a strategic evaluation shows that it is more of a symbolic façade than an effective defense system.

In contrast to the extensive American presence in Qatar, the Turkish military presence lacks operational support capabilities. Ankara does not possess effective naval capabilities in the Gulf waters, and its air supply lines depend on international approvals that do not guarantee stability, especially since there is no land route connecting it to Qatar. Given these factors, the Turkish base lacks any real mission, and it is impossible for Turkey to engage in any potential confrontation in the Gulf, particularly with the presence of U.S. military facilities on Qatari soil.

Several observers believe that Turkish leadership capitalized on exaggerated security concerns held by Qatari leadership, which were based on an inflated perception of military threats from the neighboring Gulf region. This perception provided fertile ground for Turkey to cement its military presence—not as a necessity to protect Qatar, but as a means to achieve broader strategic gains related to its expansion in the Gulf and securing a geopolitical outlet to trade routes toward Southeast Asia. In this context, Qatar became a platform for Turkish expansion that was not tied to its national security needs but rather served Ankara's regional influence projects.

With the increasing expansion of the Turkish base and the rising numbers of troops and equipment stationed there, what was once referred to as "military cooperation" gradually turned into a situation that resembled an undeclared, semi-occupational military presence. Turkish forces began operating outside any defense framework that serves Qatari security priorities or aligns with its needs. This positioned Doha in a way that contradicted its natural strategic environment in the Gulf, affecting its strategic extension. Through this reckless choice, Qatar exposed itself to growing Gulf sensitivities, leading many to view it more as a Turkish protectorate than a Gulf state with independent defense decision-making.

In this context, the Turkish military presence in Qatar cannot be viewed merely as an unfortunate political choice; rather, it reflects a deeper structural flaw in Qatar's conception of national security. Qatar effectively abandoned the project of building independent defense capabilities in favor of fragile arrangements that grant a foreign power with limited capacities a foothold on its territory and a share of military decision-making. This not only weakened Qatar's regional position but also compromised the foundations of its sovereignty, as Doha's national security became dependent on the will of an external state that lacks the ability and perhaps the will to provide protection in a critical moment of testing.

# **CHAPTER FOUR:**

## **A Double Failure of the Qatari Regime**

### **in Deterrence and Post-Aggression**

### **Management**

The Israeli bombing that targeted Doha marked a pivotal moment in revealing the limits of the political and security power of the Qatari regime. It shattered the official narrative long promoted by the regime, which depicted Qatar as a "safe zone" fortified by military alliances and extensive diplomatic relations. The event unequivocally demonstrated that Qatar's security infrastructure was excessively reliant on untested external guarantees and that the country lacked the minimum capacity to manage one of the most serious crises it has faced in its modern history.

#### **1. Failure of the Qatari Monitoring System**



A picture of American-made Patriot missile batteries

The Israeli attack on Qatar revealed a high level of vulnerability in its defense system, despite Doha possessing advanced systems including Rafale and Typhoon fighter jets, as well as 4.5th generation "F-15 QA" aircraft, in addition to American-backed "Patriot" and "THAAD" air defense systems. The Israeli aircraft, accompanied by drones and reconnaissance planes, successfully penetrated Qatari airspace without being detected by radar. This raised serious questions about the effectiveness of the massive arms deals Doha had signed with the United States. According to statements from the Qatari Prime Minister, the weapons used did not appear on radar screens, sparking questions about the nature of the failure and whether it was due to a technical malfunction or a deliberate shutdown at the critical moment.

Several observers and experts suggest there was clear American and British support in monitoring the airspace, and possibly in disabling Qatar's radars, so that Israeli planes did not appear on the radar screens. The U.S. and Britain played a prominent role in the strikes, either by providing accurate intelligence or through military equipment. They point out that Israel is not capable of executing such long-range operations on its own and requires American refueling aircraft, indicating a direct U.S. role in these strikes.

In this context, the Turkish website "Haber 7" published a report titled "The Attack That Justified Turkey's Acquisition of the S-400 System... Israel Strikes, and the Patriot Systems Are Asleep," highlighting a key issue that Qatar and other Gulf countries ignore: Western air defense systems, especially the Patriot, are either ineffective against Israeli threats or can have their effectiveness controlled and disabled remotely by political decisions from Washington when it comes to a strategic ally. The report notes that one of the reasons Turkey previously refused the Patriot system and turned to the S-400 was this flaw, which involves the United States controlling the air defense systems of its allies.

On the other hand, this failure cannot be seen as an isolated incident but rather a strategic setback for the Qatari regime, which has entrusted Qatar's security to the American umbrella and invested billions of dollars in systems that could be shut down with the push of a button at a critical moment, leaving the skies exposed to any threat, especially if it comes from Israel.

## **2. The Fragility of Qatar's Position After the Israeli Aggression**

The Israeli attack on Qatar revealed unprecedented fragility in the Qatari regime's ability to manage the fallout from the crisis, not only on a military level but also diplomatically and politically. The limited official Qatari response after the attack was evident, both in terms of sending firm messages to the international community and in protecting its national interests through effective diplomatic channels. These gaps in crisis management revealed an excessive reliance on the American umbrella, as Qatar's response was limited to repetitive, protocol-driven statements that did not rise to the level of the aggression or the direct threat to its territory and the interests of its people. This exposed an excessively lenient approach to Qatar's security, undermining its sovereignty and exposing its citizens to direct risks. The priority appeared to be maintaining the image of a "regional mediator" rather than protecting its national space.

This flaw became particularly clear after the bombing in the confused official narrative, which sought to downplay the event and present it as a "limited" incident, instead of taking a firm stance or providing a clear account to the public. The authorities adopted an evasive rhetoric, misjudging the nature of the attack, despite the harm it caused to the state's prestige and image.

Days after the attack, the Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that the Qatari Prime Minister received a phone call from Netanyahu apologizing for the killing of a Qatari citizen. However, this apology was not officially documented, nor did Israel issue any statement confirming or adopting it, which undermined its credibility and contained another form of insult. In essence, it was a subtle disdain for Qatari sovereignty, as the apology was only for the killing of the Qatari officer and not the Hamas delegation, despite the violation of Qatari sovereignty in the first place. This was a strange diplomatic precedent, considering that the delegation was summoned by Qatari authorities for official negotiations, for which the security and safety of the delegation should have been a top priority and an integral part of the country's sovereignty. Any attack on it in any form would be a flagrant violation of the sovereignty of the host state. Despite this, the Qatari regime accepted the inadequate apology without any guarantees that the attack would not be repeated and without consideration for the state's sovereignty or the safety of its citizens and residents.

This flaw was further entrenched when Doha treated U.S. President Donald Trump's statements about "protecting Qatar" as if they were a security commitment, despite the fact that these statements had no legal force under the U.S. Constitution or international law. The president does not have the authority to approve defense agreements or use military force beyond the borders without congressional approval. In the absence of a ratified mutual defense treaty or a decision from the UN Security Council, such a statement remains mere political rhetoric with no binding obligation. Moreover, international law does not recognize any form of protection between states unless it is based on a binding agreement or UN resolution, which does not apply to the Qatari case. These practices collectively reveal a deep shortcoming in the Qatari authorities' understanding of the legal and political limits of security guarantees and a structural flaw in managing external threats, leaving the state extremely vulnerable to any future aggression.

Symbolically, the Emir of Qatar responded to the event with an unusual symbolic coldness. Removing the headband (agal) is a gesture with deep cultural significance in Gulf traditions, not seen as a casual act but as a sign of intense anger or protest, signaling that the situation can no longer tolerate politeness or patience. This meaning was clearly manifested in Emir Tamim's behavior during Ismail Haniyeh's funeral, where he expressed strong personal feelings. However, comparing this act to the lack of a similar stance after the Israeli bombing of Qatar on September 9, 2025— which directly targeted the country's territory and the interests of its citizens—reveals a stark contradiction in the state's priorities and leadership. It appears that symbolic expressions of personal feelings and solidarity take precedence over protecting the national space and asserting state sovereignty in the face of a real threat. This contradiction highlights the lack of strategic sensibility in Qatari leadership and raises serious questions about their understanding of the symbolism of public stances and their role in either enhancing or undermining the image of the state regionally and internationally.



Prince Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani during Ismail Haniyeh's funeral.



Prince Tamim during the funeral of the victims of the Israeli bombing

In conclusion, the official Qatari response was weak, limited, and contradictory. This impression was further amplified by the behavior of Qatari officials in the days following the attack, particularly the appearance of the Qatari Foreign Minister in an emotional meeting and embracing an Israeli official in Sharm El-Sheikh, which starkly contradicted the gravity of the aggression that had occurred on Qatari soil. This contradiction between the direct threat Qatar faced and its official friendly stance towards the aggressor sparked widespread debate among political analysts. Some observers even speculated that the Israeli bombing may have been coordinated implicitly between Israel and Qatar, with the aim of pressuring Hamas into accepting specific Israeli conditions.

This scene also carried a humiliating tone for Doha in the eyes of many observers, as it was not perceived as just a passing protocol behavior but rather as a manifestation of a deeper shift in Qatari foreign policy. It showed an increasing readiness to move from an unspoken coordination with Israel to open communication, at a

highly sensitive moment when criticism of Qatar's role in sovereignty issues and security mediation efforts was escalating. This accumulation of events deepened waves of criticism and raised questions about the true nature of the relationship between Qatar and Israel, and whether Doha had crossed symbolic lines it had long claimed to uphold in its regional policy.



An embrace between the Qatari Foreign Minister and an Israeli official.

# **Testimonies about the Israeli Aggression and Its Repercussions**

- The Washington Post**

In an analytical article, it was noted that the aggression severely damaged the "value of American protection" [7] .

- The Guardian**

The strike weakened the confidence in the American security umbrella among the Gulf countries, as it became clear that even the country hosting a major U.S. military base is not immune to an Israeli attack [8] .

- Analyses by Researchers from the Carnegie Institute**

The attack is described as a "media call" to the Gulf countries, showing that Israel is willing to use force even against a Gulf state, which may put the American guarantor to a major test. The event also weakens Qatar's trust in its role as a mediator between Israel and Hamas, especially after this type of operation was carried out on its own territory [9] .

- The European Council on Foreign Relations:**

The aggression was described as a "seismic event in the Gulf security system," because the strike raises questions about the West's, especially the U.S.'s, ability to ensure the security of its partners in the region [10] .

- **Analysis by The Soufan Center**

The Israeli bombing of Qatar is a blow to mediation and regional diplomacy, discussing the impact of the strike on Qatar's role as a mediator and on regional stability [11] .

- **Sarah Harmoush, Expert in Defense Policies and Counter-Terrorism, and CEO of H9 Defense**

U.S. influence in the Gulf has historically been built on a clear equation based on hosting American bases and forces in exchange for providing a level of deterrence and protection. However, the Israeli strike clearly revealed how wrong this perception was [12] .

- **Abdullah Hayek, Political Analyst and Specialist in Levant and Gulf Affairs, who previously worked at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy**

The matter was not limited to the breach itself, but also to the international and regional reactions, including the American silence or reservation. This was interpreted by Arab capitals as a signal of the limits of previous guarantees, making the phrase "trust being eroded" more effective than talking about "power asserting itself."

- **Dr. Rami Ashour, Professor of International Relations**

The delayed comment from the White House on the Israeli aggression does not indicate endorsement nor rejection of targeting Qatar, but suggests that the operation occurred with U.S. approval and direct coordination [13] .

- **Analysis by The Guardian**

The strike was described as a pivotal moment shaking Gulf countries' confidence in traditional American protection, considering that "the strike showed that the United States might allow the breach of an Arab ally's sovereignty in order to meet Israeli goals" [15] .

## Recommendations

- Strengthen national defence capabilities by investing in early-warning systems and independent radars and by raising the readiness of the air force, in a way that reduces excessive dependence on foreign systems.
- Review foreign military cooperation agreements to ensure they are aligned with national interests, especially regarding control of airspace and sensitive data.
- Strengthen bilateral partnership instead of dependency: it is necessary to redefine the defence relationship with the United States on the basis of an equal strategic partnership rather than full security dependence, in a way that grants Qatar full sovereignty in formulating its defence and public policies.
- Rebuild indigenous capabilities in parallel with, and through diversification of, partnerships: invest in air and missile defence capabilities and diversify sources of armaments so that the partnership with Washington becomes a lever for strengthening local capabilities, not a substitute for them.
- Reduce reliance on mediation diplomacy as a central pillar: by lessening the centrality of mediation policy in Qatar's external identity, especially as the political and security costs of such mediations increase and they become a source of pressure that exceeds the state's capacity to control their paths or outcomes.
- Link Qatar's engagement in mediation efforts to its ability to influence and control their trajectory: mediation should remain within a sphere of influence in which Qatar controls the key parameters, so that it does not bear the consequences of complex political processes that it is unable to manage or impose outcomes upon.

- Strengthen strategic alignment with the Gulf as the first line of defence: affirm that the geographic, social, and political depth of the GCC states is the foundation of Qatari security, and that any effective security strategy must start from this framework, as Gulf security is, from a strategic perspective, an indivisible whole.
- Rebuild political and security trust within the GCC: work to reinforce defence and security relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council states and activate mechanisms of early warning and joint air defence as part of an integrated Gulf security architecture.
- Turn Gulf affiliation into a balancing lever vis-à- vis regional powers: enhance Gulf cohesion, which provides Qatar with greater room for manoeuvre in the face of international and regional pressures and constitutes a more stable alternative umbrella than dependence on foreign security frameworks.
- Conduct an assessment study of the burdens Qatar bears as a result of its excessive regional role: the study should include a clear recommendation to review the economic, diplomatic, and security costs of engaging in files that exceed the state's size, and to redirect resources toward national security.
- Submit a comprehensive legal file documenting the attack as a violation of the sovereignty of an independent state and a dangerous precedent in Israeli deterrence practices.

# Conclusion

The Israeli strike targeting Doha on September 9, 2025, revealed a picture that had remained unclear for decades, revolving around the effectiveness of American protection. It demonstrated with unprecedented clarity the illusion of foreign protection upon which Qatar's defense strategy had been built for decades. The lack of any response from the United States and Turkey, despite their heavy military presence within Qatari territory, proved that "imported security" was nothing more than a fragile gamble that constrained Qatar's national decision-making and failed to provide real protection at a critical moment of testing. It became evident that relying on foreign forces, rather than developing independent defense capabilities, left the country exposed and powerless in the face of a direct threat targeting its sovereignty, without any deterrent action from its supposed allies.

On another front, the attack highlighted the limits of Qatar's role as a regional mediator, along with the political and security ramifications of this role. Qatar faced intense Israeli pressure, including smear campaigns and diplomatic blackmail, aimed at steering its mediation to serve Israel's approach to the war. However, this role offered no protection from direct targeting. It became clear that the role of the "mediator" is not insulated from the circles of conflict, and the reliance on mediation as a political shield may lose its effectiveness in conflicts, even if this functional role was endorsed by the United States. It is also important to note that Qatar's insistence on its image as a mediator contributed to delaying the development of an effective national deterrence system, despite increasing security vulnerabilities.

The incident represents a historic opportunity to reconsider Qatar's foreign policy, particularly concerning mediation as a core element of the country's diplomatic identity. It is crucial to shift from a policy that prioritizes the regional role at the expense of internal security, to an approach that places the protection of sovereignty and the security of the citizens at the highest priorities. This begins with a strategic step of freeing Qatar from the American umbrella and reducing excessive dependence on foreign protection, alongside initiating the construction of a self-sufficient defense force capable of protecting the homeland and deterring any external threats. Qatar is capable of doing this, given its abundant resources.

In light of the findings highlighted by this study, it can be said that the Israeli aggression against Doha exposed the limits of the traditional approaches Qatar has adopted in managing its national security and regional position. The event, as a moment of difficult testing, revealed that reliance on international legal frameworks or the capital of diplomatic relations does not provide an effective deterrence umbrella in a competitive international environment, where small states are vulnerable to sudden transformations. It also showed that while financial abundance and economic capabilities are important, they do not automatically translate into strategic solidity unless invested in building a defense system and self-sustaining capabilities that enhance the state's ability to withstand and confront threats.

Qatar's natural alignment with its immediate regional environment remains an irreplaceable strategic option. This underscores the importance of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) framework, which goes beyond economic coordination to become a necessary space for building collective power based on shared identities, similar threats, and complementary resources. Alliances built on long-term organic ties are fundamentally different from arrangements driven by circumstances, as they provide states with the capacity to confront a

turbulent international environment governed by power balances rather than fixed rules.

Although Qatar has relied in the past two decades on leveraging soft power tools such as diplomatic mediation, media influence, sovereign investment, and hosting major international events, the attack on Doha demonstrated that, no matter how broad their scope, these tools remain incapable of compensating for the lack of solid power foundations in the form of building indigenous Qatari strength. In moments of security testing, the effectiveness of diplomatic tools diminishes in the face of the realities of conflict, and military capabilities and organic defense alliances become the most crucial guarantee for the state's security and stability.

Thus, the study concludes that enhancing Qatar's security will not be achieved by continuing excessive reliance on soft power tools, nor by depending on the international system to protect sovereignty. Instead, it will be achieved through rebuilding a security approach based on developing self-sufficiency, solidifying Gulf integration, and reconnecting to the strategic regional depth that has been lost.

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DAR AL THANI

When Israeli warplanes struck Doha on 9 September 2025, the attack did more than violate the sovereignty of a small Gulf state—it shattered an entire strategic narrative.

This book examines, with rare clarity, how a single incident exposed the fragility of Qatar's national security model, its dependence on foreign protection, and the limits of its widely publicized role as a regional mediator.