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Crossing Red Lines:
Israel's Military Strike in Qatar
By
Gulf State Analytics



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Executive Summary

- ✦ Israel's 9 September 2025 military strike in Doha targeting Hamas figures marked the first direct Israeli attack on a Gulf Cooperation Council state.
- ✦ The U.S. permitted the strike, prompting Gulf states to question the reliability of Washington's security guarantees amid escalating Israeli military operations across the region.
- ✦ The attack has deepened regional instability, threatening the fragile balance Gulf states maintain stability required for their ambitious economic transformation agendas.
- ✦ Israel's leadership prioritises a decisive military victory in Gaza, rejecting diplomatic engagement and aiming to eliminate Palestinian resistance through force, including targeting negotiators abroad.
- ✦ The Doha strike may serve as a strategic distraction from international condemnation of Israel's rogue actions in Gaza.
- ✦ An analysis of the attack must consider political divisions within Israel, with security agencies viewing Qatar as a pragmatic interlocutor, while right-wing extremists, supported by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, see it as hostile.
- ✦ While Israel's leadership warns Qatar against harboring Hamas, U.S. President Donald J. Trump has assured Qatar it will face no further strikes, highlighting a potential rift between Washington and Tel Aviv.
- ✦ The attack on Doha has galvanised GCC states, with rapid diplomatic solidarity from the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia.
- ✦ Israel's message warns any country hosting Hamas figures could be targeted, raising concerns about Turkey, a NATO member which hosts Hamas figures in Istanbul, becoming a possible future target.
- ✦ The strike marks a critical turning point, exposing the Gulf monarchies' vulnerabilities and accelerating a shift toward multipolar security frameworks, demanding flexible, multifaceted approaches beyond alliances and partnerships with Washington and London.

Key Picture: Israel's Strike on Qatar



Source: [Al Jazeera, 9 September 2025](#)

1. Background

Israel launched a military strike against Qatar on 9 September 2025, targeting Hamas figures in one of Doha's residential neighborhoods.¹ The attack, which killed five low-level Hamas negotiators and one Qatari security force, has added new layers of instability to the already tumultuous Middle East.² The event marked a major turning point in Israel-Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) relations and will have a lasting impact on the Gulf's security architecture.

Israel striking Hamas targets in foreign countries is not new. Since 7 October 2023, Israel carried out the assassination of Ismail Haniyeh, the third chairman of the Hamas Political Bureau, in Tehran on 31 July 2024.³ In Lebanon and Syria, the Israelis have killed Hamas figures throughout the past two years as well.^{4, 5} Additionally, Israel famously assassinated the senior Hamas member Mahmoud al-Mabhouh in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) back in 2010.⁶ But what made this recent strike on Doha unique was that it was the first time that Israel carried out a military attack on a GCC member that exists under Washington's security umbrella. The United States' acquiescence to an ally striking a Gulf Arab monarchy compels not only Qatar but all GCC members to reevaluate the reliability of Washington's security guarantees. This reassessment comes amid a period of escalating Israeli military actions across the region, seemingly unchecked by the United States.

Gulf leaders are left questioning the reliability of their defence arrangements with Washington given that this attack on Doha occurred with the U.S. permitting it. Policymakers in other Gulf capitals can't help but ask, if Qatar—a Major non-NATO Ally (MNNA) since 2022—can be targeted with impunity, who might be next? This anxiety is compounded by Israel's past two years of aggression in other Arab countries and Iran, which have all raised the stakes for GCC states which seek, above all else, stability throughout the region as required by their economic transformation agendas.

2. Decoding Israel's Calculated Military Approach

At least three factors need to be addressed when explaining Israel's motivations for waging this strike on Doha.

First, Israel's leadership is firmly focused on achieving a decisive military victory in Gaza, prioritising force over diplomacy or negotiation. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has charted a course that favors the decisive elimination of Palestinian resistance in Gaza over any meaningful political dialogue. This approach was starkly illustrated by Israel's decision to target Hamas negotiators during talks hosted in a neutral third-party country—a move that not only escalated the conflict but also sent a clear signal about Tel Aviv's intent to derail the negotiations process entirely. Such actions underscore a strategic preference for military domination over diplomatic engagement, with profound implications for regional stability and the prospects for de-escalation.

Secondly, the strike on Qatar may also serve as a calculated diversion from the ongoing war in Gaza—a conflict that has drawn mounting international condemnation. Leading human rights organisations, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, have described Israel's actions in Gaza as constituting a genocide, further intensifying global scrutiny.^{7,8} In this context, shifting attention away from the humanitarian catastrophe unfolding in Gaza and toward broader regional tensions could be seen as a strategic attempt by Israeli leadership to deflect criticism and reshape the international narrative.

The third dynamic must be considered within the context of Israel's complex domestic political landscape. Far from being a monolith, the Israeli state encompasses a range of perspectives on Qatar, shaped by institutional roles and political affiliations. Within Israel's security and intelligence establishment, particularly the Mossad, Qatar has long been regarded as a pragmatic and useful intermediary in the Gaza conflict. Since the outbreak of hostilities on 7 October 2023, Mossad Director Yossi Cohen has publicly urged Israeli politicians to refrain from criticizing Doha, stating unequivocally that "any criticism of Qatar at this point in time needs to be stopped."⁹

In contrast, right-wing civilian elements within the government, along with key segments of Netanyahu's political base, perceive Qatar as a hostile and nefarious actor. This sentiment has been especially pronounced in the rhetoric of figures such as Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, who has consistently portrayed Qatar as a malign force threatening Israel's national interests.¹⁰ Against this backdrop, the decision to strike Doha can be interpreted, at least in part, as a politically calculated move by Netanyahu aimed at consolidating support among his right-wing constituency amid growing domestic pressure.

The strike itself failed to eliminate Hamas's top political leadership based in Qatar. In light of this, Netanyahu has issued a stark warning to Doha, threatening that any continued Hamas presence on Qatari soil will invite further Israeli military action.¹¹ In contrast, U.S. President Donald J. Trump has provided Qatar with assurances that it will not face additional Israeli strikes, signaling a possible divergence between Washington and Tel Aviv on how to manage the situation.¹² According to an *Axios* report published on 11 September, Trump demanded that Netanyahu commit to never striking Qatar again.¹³

Whether the White House will actively employ its considerable leverage over Israel to restrain further aggression—and clearly communicate that targeting a GCC member constitutes a "red line" with tangible consequences—remains uncertain. However, several factors suggest Trump may be more inclined to enforce limits in this instance. Qatar is not only a MNNA, but also a major investor in the American economy. Furthermore, Trump himself maintains significant commercial interests in the country.¹⁴

These dynamics may prompt Washington to take a firmer stance toward Tel Aviv in defence of Qatar. This would contrast with earlier cases, where Israeli strikes on less U.S.-aligned, influential, and resource-rich Arab states occurred with little consequence.

The recent Israeli strike has served as a catalyst for deeper unity among the six Gulf monarchies, significantly sharpening their shared threat perceptions of Israel. This renewed cohesion was immediately visible in the swift diplomatic responses from key regional leaders. UAE President Mohammed bin Zayed traveled to Doha just one day after the attack, underscoring Abu Dhabi's solidarity with Qatar.¹⁵ Meanwhile, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman issued a forceful condemnation of Israel's "brutal aggression" and pledged Riyadh's unwavering support for Doha.¹⁶ On 15 September, leaders and representatives from dozens of countries convened in Doha for a joint emergency summit held under the auspices of the Arab League and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. The outpouring of solidarity with Qatar from across the broader Arab-Islamic world sent a powerful signal: Doha remains a respected and integral member of the international community, and there is broad, unequivocal condemnation of Israel's act of aggression and violation of Qatar's sovereignty.¹⁷

3. GCC's Strategic Dilemma: Navigating Security Amid Rising Threats

Given their limited military capabilities in relation to Israel, Gulf states are likely to focus on non-military avenues of response—chief among them leveraging their strategic relationships with Trump and key figures within his administration. Gulf leaders may seek to press Washington to exert meaningful diplomatic and economic pressure on Israel, urging restraint and a clearer articulation of red lines to prevent further escalation.

Within the region, particular attention is being placed on the United Arab Emirates, the GCC member with the closest diplomatic and economic ties to Israel. Qatar is quietly encouraging Abu Dhabi to reassess the trajectory of its relationship with Tel Aviv in light of recent events.¹⁸ While a full withdrawal from the Abraham Accords remains improbable at this stage, a recalibration of Emirati-Israeli ties—such as diplomatic downgrades or delays in bilateral initiatives—could serve as a signal that acts of aggression against any GCC member carry tangible consequences.

However, should Israel conduct additional strikes on Qatari territory, the political calculus in Abu Dhabi could shift significantly. In such a scenario, the likelihood of the UAE reconsidering or even fully withdrawing from the 2020 normalisation deal would increase, particularly if Washington fails to intervene decisively in defence of Doha.

As confidence in the reliability of U.S. security guarantees continues to erode, the GCC members are likely to intensify efforts to strengthen intra-Gulf defence coordination and resilience. This could include renewed focus on joint military planning, intelligence sharing, and the development of more integrated defence systems. In parallel, Gulf states could be expected to further diversify their defence partnerships by deepening security and economic ties with external powers such as Turkey, China, and Russia—actors increasingly seen as complementary, if not alternative, sources of geopolitical and security support.

The region stands at a pivotal juncture, with Gulf monarchies reassessing long-standing assumptions about the durability of their security architecture. In this evolving landscape, the pursuit of greater strategic autonomy is becoming not only a priority but a necessity. Amid rising regional volatility and shifting global power dynamics, the path forward for the GCC will likely involve a more balanced, multipolar approach to securing its interests and safeguarding regional stability.

4. Turkey on the Horizon: Potential Next Flashpoint?

Israel's targeted operation against Hamas figures in Doha appears to form part of a broader strategic message from Netanyahu's government—namely, that any country hosting members of the Palestinian resistance movement could potentially face similar military action.

This signals a deliberate effort by Tel Aviv to deter international actors from providing political or logistical space to Hamas by raising the perceived costs of doing so.

Against this backdrop, analysts speculate that Israel may extend similar operations to other countries harboring Hamas figures, including Turkey. The presence of Hamas officials in Istanbul has prompted questions about whether it could become a future target. However, any Israeli strike on Turkish territory would carry profoundly higher stakes, not least because of Turkey's status as a NATO member. Such an escalation would not only trigger severe repercussions mindful of Article V but could also test the boundaries of existing alliance structures and regional security norms in unprecedented ways.

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Whether Netanyahu would be willing to assume the considerable risk of targeting Hamas figures on Turkish soil remains uncertain. Should Israel choose to act, it may opt for more covert methods rather than overt military action, drawing on precedents such as the 2010 assassination in Dubai. This scenario raises the possibility of clandestine operations designed to avoid direct confrontation with a NATO member.

Nevertheless, in the aftermath of Israel's unprecedented strike on Qatar, which is Turkey's closest strategic partner in the Gulf, concerns in Ankara over the potential for Israeli action on its territory have grown markedly. These developments are likely to reinforce Turkish perceptions of Israel as an unrestrained rogue actor in the region.

Turkish policymakers increasingly recognise that Israel has breached multiple geopolitical "red lines" since the onset of the Gaza war on 7 October 2024—most notably through its strike on Iran and its unprecedented attack on Qatar, an MNNA of the United States and host of U.S. Central Command's forward headquarters at al-Udeid Air Base. These actions have underscored Israel's growing willingness to operate beyond traditional constraints and challenge long-standing regional and international norms.

In this evolving strategic environment, Ankara is expected to take concrete steps to enhance its deterrence posture and elevate its overall state of alert. Turkish officials are increasingly aware that assumptions of immunity, based solely on NATO membership, may no longer be sufficient to shield the country from the risk of future Israeli operations, particularly given the presence of Hamas figures in Istanbul. As a result, Turkey is likely to adopt a more proactive security stance, focused on preparedness, resilience, and the signaling of credible consequences in the event of any perceived violation of its sovereignty.

5. A Regional Turning Point: Redefining Gulf Security and Alliances

Ultimately, Israel's unprecedented strike on Qatar has fundamentally altered the security calculus of the Gulf region, exposing the vulnerabilities of the GCC members' reliance on U.S. protection and signaling a new era of geopolitical uncertainty. This breach of a GCC state under Washington's security umbrella has intensified regional anxieties, compelling Gulf monarchies to urgently reconsider their strategic dependencies and accelerate efforts toward collective defence and greater autonomy. As the Gulf pivots toward a more multipolar security framework, balancing ties with external powers while deepening intra-GCC coordination, this moment marks a critical juncture that will shape the future trajectory of Middle Eastern stability and the resilience of longstanding alliances. The traumatic event underscores that in an evolving and fractious regional order, the preservation of Gulf security demands innovative, flexible, and multifaceted responses beyond traditional paradigms.

NOTES

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