



المركز العربي للأبحاث ودراسة السياسات
Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies

situation Assessment | 11 September 2025

The Drivers and Consequences of Israel's Attack on Qatar

Unit for Political Studies

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Series: **situation Assessment**

11 September 2025

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Table of Contents

- Background 1
- Israel’s Motives 2
 - 1. Assassinating Hamas Leaders as a War Goal 2
 - 2. Sabotaging Qatar’s Mediation Efforts 3
 - 3. Completing the Process of Reshaping Gaza 4
 - 4. A Message of Deterrence to the Region, Confirming Israel’s Superiority 5
- Repercussions of the Attack 5
- Conclusion 6

On Tuesday, 9 September, Israel launched an attack on Qatar, targeting homes and residential buildings housing members of the political bureau of Hamas. The attack left several people dead, including the son of the Palestinian movement's leader in the Gaza Strip, Khalil al-Hayya, the director of his office, several members of his entourage, and a Qatari security officer. It also wounded several civilians who were in the vicinity.¹ The attack was an attempt to assassinate members of the Hamas delegation to ceasefire negotiations over Gaza, who had been discussing a truce proposal² tabled by US President Donald Trump. He had indicated that the Israelis had accepted his terms, and that it was time for Hamas to do the same, saying: "This is my last warning, there will not be another one!"³

With its latest cross-border attack, Israel broke with even its own precedents, attempting to assassinate members of a delegation with which it was negotiating, on the territory of the mediator – a state that Israeli officials had been visiting for the talks. The incident, the act of a rogue state, was widely condemned. It prompted widespread international solidarity with Qatar, which has spent nearly two years hosting negotiations to halt Israel's genocidal war of extermination against the Gaza Strip.

Background

The assassination of top Hamas figures has been a primary goal of Israel since the first days of Israel's nearly two-year war on the Gaza Strip. In late November 2023, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced at a press conference that he had instructed Israel's national intelligence agency Mossad to target Hamas leaders "wherever they are."⁴ Then-defence minister Yoav Galant indicated at the same conference that all of the movement's leaders were "doomed to die."⁵ On 3 December 2023, former Shin Bet chief Ronen Bar said that Israel was determined to kill Hamas leaders "in every location, in Gaza, in the West Bank, in Lebanon, in Turkey, in Qatar, everyone. It will take a few years, but we will be there in order to do it."⁶

When Israel assassinated then-Hamas political bureau chief Ismail Haniyeh on July 31, 2024, in Tehran, it was slow in officially announcing the killing. The same had been the case with that of his deputy, Saleh al-Arouri, earlier that year in an airstrike on Beirut's southern suburbs. In contrast, it quickly claimed responsibility for the attack on Doha. This time, Israel said it had targeted prominent Hamas leaders in an operation codenamed "Summit of Fire." The Israeli military said in a joint statement with the Shin Bet domestic intelligence agency that "a short time ago, the air force attacked, in a

¹ "Condemnations pour in after Israeli assault on Qatari capital", *The New Arab*, 9/9/2025, accessed on 11/9/2025 at: <https://tinyurl.com/mpde7sw5>

² "World reacts to Israel's attack against Hamas leaders in Qatar's Doha", *Al Jazeera*, accessed on 11/9/2025 at: <https://tinyurl.com/5atnk6nt>

³ "Trump issues 'last warning' to Hamas to accept Gaza ceasefire deal: *The Guardian*, 8/9/2025, accessed on 11/9/2025 at: <https://tinyurl.com/2h42nfsj>

⁴ "Before hostage deal, Netanyahu said Mossad had orders to target Hamas leaders everywhere," *The Times of Israel*, 27/11/2023, accessed 10/9/2025 (in Arabic), at: <https://tinyurl.com/ytatnmx2>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ "In Recording, Shin Bet Chief Vows to Kill Hamas Chiefs 'in Lebanon, Turkey, Qatar,'" *The Times of Israel*, 4/12/2023, accessed 10/9/2025, at: <https://tinyurl.com/4epkc5tt>.

targeted and precise manner, the leadership of the Hamas movement in Doha.”⁷ Netanyahu’s office indicated in a statement that Israel had “initiated and carried out the attack, and Israel bears full responsibility.” Israeli Army Radio also indicated that the attack on Qatar had been planned several months previously, and that 15 fighter jets had taken part, launching around 10 aerial munitions which hit the target within seconds of each other. The fighter jets were then refuelled in the air, before returning to Israel.⁸

Israel’s Motives

Netanyahu launched this attack in order to achieve several key political, security, and strategic aims:

1. Assassinating Hamas Leaders as a War Goal

As it launched Operation Protective Edge on 7 October 2023, Israel outlined its objectives for the war on the Gaza Strip: wiping out Hamas, ending the group’s rule in Gaza, and destroying its military capabilities.⁹ In this framework, it has adopted a policy of systematic assassinations of the movement’s leaders, both inside and outside Gaza. This started with the assassination of Saleh al-Arouri in Beirut in early 2024, followed by those of Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran in July and Yahya Sinwar, the head of the movement’s political bureau, in Gaza that October. Those assassinated also included a number of prominent military commanders, including Mohammed Deif, the head of the group’s armed wing, the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades; his deputy, Marwan Issa; the commander of the Weapons and Combat Services Section, Ghazi Abu Tama’a; the commander of the Human Resources Department, Raed Thabet; and the commander of the Khan Yunis Brigade, Rafi Salameh.¹⁰

From the first day of the war, Israel enjoyed the full support of the US, which saw eliminating Hamas as a central goal in its own strategy towards the war. This provided political cover for Israel to continue its systematic assassinations of the movement’s leaders both inside and outside the Gaza Strip, without restrictions¹¹ or any need to distinguish between military personnel and political figures. Netanyahu and his government viewed President Donald Trump’s return to the White House as an opportunity to continue assassinating prominent Hamas political, government, military, and security figures. These included members of the political bureau,

⁷ Nayef Zaidani, “Israeli Army Radio: The aggression against Qatar was planned several months ago,” *Al-Araby Al-Jadeed*, 9/9/2025, accessed 10/9/2025 (in Arabic), at: <https://tinyurl.com/3csvtjen>.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ “Israel’s War on Gaza City: Goals and Projections,” Situation Assessment, *Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies*, 2/11/2023, accessed 10/9/2025, at: <https://www.dohainstitute.org/en/PoliticalStudies/Pages/israels-war-on-gaza-city-goals-and-projections.aspx>.

¹⁰ “Qassam announces the martyrdom of its chief of staff, Muhammad al-Deif,” *Al Jazeera*, 30/1/2025, accessed 10/9/2025 (in Arabic), at: <https://tinyurl.com/45mmbu9>.

¹¹ “The Biden Administration’s Response to the War on Gaza: How Can Its “Calculated Bias” be Explained?” Situation Assessment, *Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies*, 24/10/2023, accessed 9/10/2025, at: <https://www.dohainstitute.org/en/PoliticalStudies/Pages/the-biden-administration-response-to-the-war-on-gaza-calculated-bias.aspx>.

Salah al-Bardawil, Yasser Harb, and Ismail Barhoum; one of the movement's spokesmen, Abdul Latif al-Qanou;¹² a number of prominent military leaders such as Mohammed Sinwar; other government officials such as the head of the government oversight committee, Issam al-Daalis; the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Justice in the Gaza Strip, Ahmed al-Hatta; the Undersecretary of the Interior Ministry, Major General Mahmoud Abu Watfa; and the Director-General of the Domestic Security Service, Major General Bahjat Abu Sultan.¹³

2. Sabotaging Qatar's Mediation Efforts

Since October 2023, Qatar has been attempting to stop the war on Gaza through tenacious mediation and diplomatic efforts. It has hosted regular rounds of negotiations involving Israeli and American officials in a relentless effort secure the release of detainees and bring an end to the conflict. Qatari mediation played a pivotal role in reaching two temporary truces and prisoner exchanges between Israel and Hamas, the first on 22 November 2023, and the second on 15 January 2025. Qatar's role has become central – indeed, indispensable – in efforts to halt Israel's genocidal war.¹⁴ However, Qatar and its mediation efforts have faced a systematic Israeli smear campaign, aimed at blackmailing it into pressuring Hamas to release the detainees in Gaza in line with Netanyahu's demands. The Israeli premier has shown no intention of ending the war, but has rather sought to prolong it for as long as possible, totally disregarding the fate of detainees on both sides.¹⁵ By contrast, Hamas has shown great flexibility in dealing with mediators' proposals regarding prisoner and hostage exchanges and ending the war – most recently the August 2025 proposal by Qatar and Egypt, to which Hamas agreed after consulting with Palestinian factions.¹⁶ Netanyahu ignored the proposal.

In this context, Israel's aggression against Qatar – even targeting the mediator in ceasefire negotiations – is an unprecedented step in the history of international relations. It represents a new attempt to derail negotiations and kill any chance of reaching an agreement to end the war on Gaza. Targeting the Hamas delegation as it was discussing Trump's latest suggestions for ending the war clearly reveals that Netanyahu and his government do not seek solutions or agreements; rather, they are deliberately thwarting every initiative and prolonging their aggression until Hamas submits to their demands to end the war. Moreover, it reveals that Israel's arrogance and conceit of power have led it to disregard every recognised humanitarian

¹² Nancy Moussa, "Infographic: The most prominent Hamas leaders assassinated by Israel after the resumption of the war on Gaza," *Al Jazeera*, 27/3/2025, accessed 10/9/2025 (in Arabic), at: <https://tinyurl.com/4vc2mrew>.

¹³ "Government leaders assassinated by Israel after resuming aggression on Gaza," *Al Jazeera*, 18/3/2025, accessed 10/9/2025, at: <https://tinyurl.com/mw94u49d>.

¹⁴ For more on the Israeli campaign against Qatar and its mediation role, see: "Israel's Campaign against Qatar over Its Support for Gaza and a Ceasefire," Situation Assessment, *Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies*, 23/2/2025, accessed 9/10/2025, at: <https://www.dohainstitute.org/en/PoliticalStudies/Pages/the-israeli-campaign-against-qatar-because-of-its-role-in-supporting-gaza-and-the-ceasefire.aspx>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ "Hamas agrees to a proposed agreement in Gaza... and Trump incites Israel," *Al-Araby Al-Jadeed*, 18/8/2025, accessed 10/9/2025, at: <https://tinyurl.com/3hy95vxp>.

norm and international law. In August, Netanyahu's office announced that Israel's Security Cabinet had adopted five principles for ending the war in Gaza: "disarming Hamas; the return of all prisoners, living and dead; the demilitarization of Gaza; Israeli security control over Gaza; and the establishment of a civil administration that is subordinate neither to Hamas nor the Palestinian Authority."¹⁷ Yet in practice, Israel has ignored these "principles," and is systematically striving to destroy the Gaza Strip, render it uninhabitable, and thus create the conditions necessary for the expulsion of its population.

3. Completing the Process of Reshaping Gaza

The decision by Hamas and other Palestinian factions to agree to a proposal by mediators regarding a prisoner exchange and a ceasefire in Gaza came just 10 days after the Israeli cabinet, on 8 August, approved Netanyahu's proposal to prepare to reoccupy Gaza City.¹⁸ In late August, the Israeli army declared Gaza's biggest urban area a "dangerous combat zone," saying it had begun preliminary operations and the first stages of an assault on the city, and that it was "currently operating with great force on its outskirts."¹⁹

This came several days after Defence Minister Yisrael Katz approved the army's plan for an offensive to reoccupy Gaza City, codenamed "Operation Gideon's Chariots II" – a continuation of the original operation of the same name, which the army had launched in May.²⁰ For the previous month, Netanyahu had been feigning his eagerness to reach a comprehensive deal to end the war, particularly since he could no longer ignore the fact that Hamas had accepted the mediators' proposal – a move that Israel's security and military establishment saw as a substantial concession by the movement compared to its previous positions. However, this did not change the core aim that has guided Netanyahu in this genocidal war since day one: carrying out his plan to destroy Gaza, displace its population, and reoccupy it. In this context, the Israeli attack on Qatar served as an additional tool to exert maximum pressure on Hamas, with the aim of eliminating its leadership and forcing it to surrender to Netanyahu's terms, including the disarmament of Hamas, the displacement of the Palestinian population, and the reoccupation of parts or the whole of the Gaza Strip. At the very least, it was intended to impose a new logic on negotiations with the movement's leaders, forcing them to discuss terms from overseas while under fire, in accordance with Israel's wishes.

Israel has openly declared its intention to reshape the political geography of the Gaza Strip, as part of what it calls its plan for the "day after" in the territory. At the time of writing, the

¹⁷ "Netanyahu announces 5 principles for stopping the war in Gaza.. Here they are," *CNN Arabic*, 8/8/2025, accessed 10/9/2025, at: <https://tinyurl.com/4fcm887p>.

¹⁸ "Israel: Cabinet gives Netanyahu 'green light' to take control of Gaza City despite opposition at home and abroad," *CNN Arabic*, 8/8/2025, accessed 10/9/2025 (in Arabic), at: <https://tinyurl.com/4emfy2w5>.

¹⁹ Nayef Zidani, "The occupation army declares Gaza City a dangerous combat zone," *Al-Araby Al-Jadeed*, 8/29/2025, accessed 9/10/2025 (in Arabic), at: <https://tinyurl.com/sfsern92>.

²⁰ Nayef Zidani, "Katz approves plan to occupy Gaza City under the name Gideon 2," *Al-Araby Al-Jadeed*, 20/8/2025, accessed 10/9/2025 (in Arabic), at: <https://tinyurl.com/5fdvpfk3>.

army had already begun intensifying its military operations in the eastern and northern parts of Gaza City. It was also stepping up its systematic destruction of buildings, including tower blocks, and displacing their residents to the west of the city using “explosive robots” carrying tons of explosives,²¹ in preparation to push them toward the centre and south of the Strip. On 7 July 2025, Katz announced a plan to establish what he called a “humanitarian city” on the ruins of Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip. In reality, the complex would be far from humanitarian: it would be something closer to a vast concentration camp, set up to house Palestinians in a limited area. The complex would include tents for shelter, food distribution centres, and basic medical facilities.²²

4. A Message of Deterrence to the Region, Confirming Israel's Superiority

With its attack on Qatar, Israel sought to highlight its regional dominance and superiority, which it has been trying to reassert since the severe blow the 7 October attacks delivered to its reputation. It also aimed to send a warning to every country in the region, stating that it is able to strike any target in the region at will.²³ During the war on Iran in June 2025, Netanyahu declared that Israel was “changing the face of the Middle East,”²⁴ a reference to his policy of establishing absolute Israeli hegemony, thus enabling him to resolve the conflict within historic Palestine as well as with other regional states. In this regard, he has exploited the Trump administration's absolute bias toward Israel and the inability of Arab and regional states to confront it, with zero regard for state sovereignty or international law.

Repercussions of the Attack

The Israeli airstrike on Qatar will have significant repercussions for the future of its mediation efforts and any move to bring an end to the Israeli genocide in Gaza, especially since Netanyahu and his government are exploiting any delay in negotiations to press forward with their plan to reoccupy the territory. Israeli Chief of Staff Eyal Zamir recently approved new plans for further stages of the war in Gaza City, along with the head of the Southern Command and several other commanders.²⁵ The army also issued new orders to Gaza residents to evacuate and head to the southern part of the Gaza Strip, particularly targeting residents of the Old City and the Tuffah neighbourhood in the east, and

21 Muhammad Majid and Ramzi Mahmoud, “Explosive Robots: An Israeli Weapon to Wipe Out Gaza and Displace Its People (Report),” *Anadolu Agency*, 5/9/2025, accessed 10/9/2025 (in Arabic), at: <https://tinyurl.com/3h7yr7pp>.

22 Yasser Manna, “Mass Detention Camps Under the Name of the ‘Humanitarian City,’” *The Palestinian Center for Israeli Studies - Madar*, 21/7/2025, accessed 12/8/2025, at: <https://tinyurl.com/47rj9ycz>.

23 “Al-Aqsa Flood Offensive: Israeli Strategic Failures in Gaza,” Situation Assessment, *Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies*, 12/12/2025, viewed on 9/10/2025, at: <https://www.dohainstitute.org/en/PoliticalStudies/Pages/al-aqsa-flood-offensive-israeli-strategic-failures-in-gaza.aspx>.

24 “Netanyahu: Killing Khamenei ‘will end the conflict’ and Israel ‘will change the face of the Middle East’ through its strikes on Iran,” *France 24*, 16/6/2025, accessed 10/9/2025 (in Arabic), at: <https://tinyurl.com/yzjsdfku>.

25 “Israeli Army: We are closely monitoring the changing balance of power in the Middle East,” *Asharq Al-Awsat*, 10/9/2025, accessed 10/10/2025 (in Arabic), at: <https://tinyurl.com/n63fp5ay>.

the western seaside districts, via the seaside Rashid highway, towards a so-called “humanitarian zone” in the Al-Mawasi area of the southern city of Khan Yunis.²⁶

Given that Israel’s attack failed to kill the top political leadership of Hamas in Qatar, it is entirely possible that Israel will strike the country again. Following the attack, Israeli officials issued further threats that they would pursue the movement’s leaders wherever they were found. Katz said on 10 September that “Israel’s security doctrine is clear – its long arm will act against its enemies everywhere. There’s nowhere they can hide.”²⁷ His threat came after the Israeli ambassador to the United States, Yechiel Leiter, said that even if Israel had missed its targets during the attack in Qatar, “we will get them the next time.” He said members of Hamas were on Israel’s target list “anywhere, anytime.”²⁸

The incident also demonstrates that Israel’s military reach and the aggressive policies of Netanyahu and his far-right government are not limited to neighbouring Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria, but rather extend throughout the region. This helps explain the widespread international condemnation and solidarity that came immediately in the wake of Israel’s attack on Qatar: such an attack represents a flagrant violation of state sovereignty and increases the chances of the conflict escalating and spreading across the region.²⁹

Conclusion

Since October 2023, Israel has placed the assassination of senior Hamas leaders and negotiators, both inside and outside Gaza, as a central objective in its genocidal war, claiming that they were involved in planning or executing the 7 October attacks. The Israeli attack on the movement’s leaders in Doha was part of an effort to eliminate the movement’s presence, leaders, governance, and military capabilities. It was also intended to sabotage any efforts to end the war through mediation, until Israel’s goals are achieved and a new balance of power is established, based on negotiations with a movement whose leaders live in exile under threat of assassination. Furthermore, the attack was calculated to send a message that Israel is capable of reaching anywhere in the region and striking any target as it sees fit. This calls for serious efforts by Arab and Islamic countries to put an end to Israel’s rampant aggression, which has spiralled out of control and now threatens the security and stability of the entire region.

²⁶ “The occupation orders all residents of Gaza to evacuate and bombs the city’s homes,” *Al Jazeera*, 9/9/2025, accessed 10/9/2025 (in Arabic), at: <https://tinyurl.com/4cw77mpu>.

²⁷ “Israel threaten to pursue Hamas leaders wherever they are,” *Asharq Al-Awsat*, 10/9/2025, accessed 11/9/2025 (in Arabic), at: <https://tinyurl.com/mr2b435k>.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ “UN and international condemnations of Israel’s attack on Qatar,” *Al Jazeera*, 9/9/2025, accessed 11/9/2025, at: <https://tinyurl.com/bdevczfd>.