



Gulf Insights

Foundations of the Qatari Stance on the Israeli
Occupation of Palestine: Reading of the British
Archives

No. 102

September
2025

Amna Sadiq



Foundations of the Qatari Stance on the Israeli Occupation of Palestine: Reading of the British Archives¹

Dr. Amna Sadiq

On September 1, 1971, in a televised speech to the Qatari people, the Deputy Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad Al-Thani, announced the termination of the country's protection agreement with Britain. In his speech, he outlined the future direction of Qatar's foreign policy:

The state holds faith in the brotherhood of all Arabs and sincerely strives to strengthen ties of solidarity and mutual support with sister Arab States...it shall exert utmost effort to assist joint endeavors to realize Arab unity and shall promote Arab struggle for their causes, on top of which are the cause of the usurped land of Palestine and that of the occupied Arab territories which are every Arab's causes. The State extends absolute support for the right of the Arab Palestinian people to restore their usurped homeland. It also fully supports the Frontline Arab States in their strife to restore their occupied territories.²

In this speech, the Deputy Emir, disregarding the challenges attendant upon the sudden British withdrawal from the region, laid down a clear path for the country's commitment to supporting Palestinian sovereignty and his pledge to support all efforts to restore the occupied territories.³ However, official and public support for Palestine started much earlier, well before Qatari independence.

This article briefly surveys the early events that shaped Qatar's foreign policy toward Palestine. Utilizing archival records, it shows how Qatar's commitment, rather than being newfound and opportunistic, was deeply rooted in the public and official memory.⁴

¹ All articles published under "Gulf Insights" series have been discussed internally but they reflect the opinion and views of the authors, and do not reflect the views of the Center, the College of Arts and Sciences or Qatar University, including the terms and terminology used in this publication.

² 'Letter from the Political Agent in Doha to the Political Resident in Bahrain, 2 September 1971, Independence for Qatar, FCO 8/1724, Foreign and Commonwealth Office Records in Arabian Gulf Digital Archives (hereafter cited as AGDA).

³ In 1968, Britain asserted its intention to withdraw from the Gulf region by the end of 1971. The announcement came as a shock to the region, as they were not prepared for the British departure. For more discussion on the British withdrawal from the Gulf see Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, "History of the Gulf Security Structure, 1903-2003," in *Insecure Gulf: The End of Certainty and the Transition to the Post-Oil Era* (London: Hurst, 2011), 15-36.

⁴ This paper is merely a reading of the British archival documents on Qatar's early engagement in the liberation of Palestine. Further studies with broad data collection methods are required to cover all aspects of this engagement, including Qatari sources and Arab newspapers materials, as well as the oral history archives.

Britain, Palestine, and Qatar before Independence

The roots of Qatar's foreign policy involvement in the Palestinian cause can be traced back to 1948. In that year, David Ben-Gurion, the head of the Jewish Agency, announced the formation of a Jewish state in the occupied lands of Palestine, following United Nations Resolution 181, which approved the partition of Palestine into independent Arab and Jewish states. The enforcement of the Israeli occupation of Palestine was a major event in the history of the Arab resistance to the Israeli occupation. Immediately after Ben-Gurion's announcement, five Arab states (Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria) invaded the newly formed State of Israel.

Initially, the Gulf states were not directly involved in the conflict. However, financial assistance was the first foreign policy channel of support for Palestine. Early reports from British records suggest that Sheikh Abdulla bin Jassim Al Thani, the Emir of Qatar, contributed Rs. 1,000,000 in 1948 to help Palestinian refugees, and his son Sheikh Hamad contributed Rs. 30,000.⁵ At this time, Qatari state institutions remained underdeveloped. Accordingly, financial assistance offered a way to indicate solidarity, through a straightforward foreign policy expression, with the Palestinian cause.

Within a few years, and especially after the Second Arab–Israeli War, Qatari support for Palestine went beyond governmental financial support. In the early days of the war of 1956, reports emerged about a general frustration with the involvement of the British government in Egypt, which soon escalated into acts of protests, most notably the closing of the *suq* in Doha alongside prominent schoolboys' demonstrations. The general demonstrations soon erupted into violent riots, resulting in the cutting of an oil pipeline that linked the Dukhan oil field to the port of Mesaieed.⁶ In the upcoming weeks, reports indicated that 200 Qatari volunteers had signed up to fight with Egypt, and demands were made to the ruler to boycott British goods. However, while the popular

⁵ 'Administration Report of the Bahrain Agency including the Trucial Coast and Qatar for the year 1948', 1 June 1949, Coll 30/9(2) - Persian Gulf Annual Administration Reports, IOR/L/PS/12/3720B, India Office Records and Private Papers in Qatar Digital Library (hereafter cited as QDL). Other records suggest that Media reports from the B.B.C. suggests that, the Emir of Qatar attended a regional meeting with the rulers of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain to boycott "Zionist goods and to prohibit the transit of such goods through Saudi Arabia". However, the political agent on the region dismissed this information later claiming, the ruler of Kuwait only met Ibn Saud. 'Letter from the Political Agency in Bahrain', 10 August 1947, Coll 30/45(3) - Persian Gulf Diaries: Koweit Intelligence Summaries 1946, IOR/L/PS/12/3759A, QDL.

⁶ 'Letter from the Political Residency in Bahrain to Selwyn Lloyd the Foreign Secretary', 23 November 1956, Repercussions of Israeli attack on Egypt, FO 1016/480, Foreign Office Records in AGDA.

and official dissent eventually declined, a British report indicated that it would be *wrong* to entertain the notion that “the people are ready to forgive or forget our (*British*) invasion of Egypt,”⁷ indicating Qatari people’s underlying resentment that persisted even after the protests have declined.

This public response came as a shock to British officials. A British report described the surprisingly firm stance by Qatar to the 1956 war producing an immediate “puzzled shock”;⁸ this stance was also praised by *Sut Al Arab* as “remarkable.”⁹ In a letter to the Foreign Office, Bernard Burrows, Britain’s Political Resident in Bahrain, noted that these developments were a direct threat to British prestige in the Gulf, as it was feared that Kuwait and Qatar could change their relationship with the UK. He even suggested that “immediate action by us against Israel or to oblige Israeli forces to withdraw would do us more good than anything else, both in the immediate very tricky situation and in the long-term future.”¹⁰ In fact, reports suggested that, in Qatar and Kuwait, the demonstrations were anti-British and not anti-rulers, a direct indictment of the British role in the Israeli occupation of Palestine.

Since 1957, Qatar’s stance on Israeli aggression has only intensified. By 1966, the Palestinian Liberation Organization and the Bureau of the Arab Boycott of Israel opened offices in Qatar.¹¹ During the 1967 Arab–Israeli war, regardless of Qatar’s protectorate agreement with Britain, the Qatar Petroleum Company and Shell Company Qatar were asked to cease exports to the UK and the US as well as to cease loading US and UK flag vessels as part of the first Arab oil embargo.¹² In fact, this incident marked one of Qatar’s first acts of participation in the international community.

⁷ ‘Letter from the Political Agency in Qatar to the British Resident in Bahrain’, 24 November 1956, Repercussions of Israeli attack on Egypt, FO 1016/480, Foreign Office Records in AGDA.

⁸ ‘Letter from the Political Residency in Bahrain to Selwyn Lloyd the Foreign Secretary’, 23 November 1956, Repercussions of Israeli attack on Egypt, FO 1016/480, Foreign Office Records in AGDA.

⁹ ‘Precis of a Voice of the Arabs broadcast on Qatar’s significance for the revival in Arab nationalism purported to be taking place in the Gulf’, 22 February 1960, Internal Political Situation: Qatar, FO 371/148913, Foreign Office Records in AGDA.

¹⁰ ‘Telegram from the Political Agency in Bahrain to Foreign Office’, 3 November 1956, Repercussions of Israeli attack on Egypt, FO 1016/479, Foreign Office Records in AGDA.

¹¹ ‘Foreign and Commonwealth Office’s Middle East Research Department memoranda on Arabia and Arab-Middle East issues’, 3 August 1960, Arabia: Arab / Middle East issues; Research Department memoranda, FO 464/60, Foreign and Commonwealth Office Records in AGDA.

¹² ‘Foreign and Commonwealth Office’s Middle East Research Department memoranda: Chronology of the Arab-Israel War, May-June 1967’, 4 August 1967, Arab-Israeli ‘Six Day’ War: Middle East crisis, FO 1016/781, Foreign Office Records in AGDA.

At that time, financial assistance was already one of Qatar's top foreign policy tools in Palestine. This financial assistance has intensified; in one incident, Qatar aided Jordan, a frontline state of the Arab-Israeli conflict, with around ten 10-ton lorries of aid, followed by additional financial support against Israeli aggression.¹³ This time, larger and much more serious demonstrations than those in 1957 broke out in Doha, accompanied by some violence.¹⁴ The escalating scale of governmental support and the intensity of public demonstrations reflected much more mature responses to the Israeli occupation, indicative of an emerging independent foreign policy occurring outside of British protection.

Conclusion

It is difficult to identify a precise beginning for direct Qatari involvement in the Palestinian cause, but British papers suggest that the seeds had already been planted as early as 1948. Both public support and official engagement were responses to the 1948, 1956, and 1967 wars, in which Britain was also a major player. A vital element of these events is Qatari alignment with pan-Arab solidarity, extended to Egypt and Jordan as well. Meanwhile, British engagement in the wars also created tensions with the Qatari population and its officials. It is safe to say that, by the time of Qatar's independence in 1971, the small country had already developed a vision of its role in the Arab efforts for Palestinian liberation.

¹³ 'Letter from the Political Agency in Qatar to the British Residency in Bahrain', 21 June 1967, Jordan, FCO 8/731, Foreign and Commonwealth Office Records in Arabian in AGDA.

¹⁴ 'Letter from the British Residency in Bahrain to the Foreign Office', 23 June 1967, Arab-Israeli 'Six Day' War: Middle East crisis, FO 1016/781, Foreign Office Records in AGDA.

About the author

Dr. Amna Sadiq is an Assistant Professor at the Gulf Studies Program at Qatar University.

About the Gulf Insights series

The "Gulf Insights" series is published by the Gulf Studies Center on a weekly base with the aim to promote informed debate with academic depth. The Gulf Insights are commentaries on pressing regional issues written by the GSC/GSP faculty, staff PhD and MA students, as well as guest scholars, and they can be between 1,200 to 1,500 words.

All articles published under “Gulf Insight” series have been discussed internally but they reflect the opinion and views of the authors, and do not reflect the views of the Center, the College of Arts and Sciences or Qatar University.