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Introduction

On September 9, Israel crossed a line that no state can excuse: it launched a strike on Hamas negotiators in Doha, hitting a residential area in the heart of Qatar's capital. Six people were killed, including one Qatari national. This was not only a provocative escalation—it was a direct violation of Qatar's sovereignty, a breach of international law, and an assault on the security architecture of the Gulf.

The choice of Qatar as the site of this strike makes the violation even more serious. Doha is not just another regional capital. It is a U.S.-designated major non-NATO ally and the host of Al Udeid Air Base, the largest American military air force installation in the Middle East.² By carrying out an attack in Doha, Israel not only endangered Qatari citizens but also undermined regional security and U.S. strategic interests. This was not a marginal escalation but rather a deliberate breach of one of Washington's most critical security partnerships. Qatar, moreover, has long served as a pivotal mediator in Middle Eastern conflicts, including the ongoing negotiations between Hamas and Israel. By striking in the Qatari capital, Israel jeopardized this essential channel of communication and projected a preference for escalation over diplomacy in the Gaza war. Unsurprisingly, the attack provoked one of the most extensive and unified waves of international condemnation since October 7, 2023, drawing sharp responses from global and regional actors alike.

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 U.S. Department of State, "The U.S.-Qatar Strategic Partnership," U.S. Department of State, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://2021-2025.state.gov/the-u-s-qatar-strategic-partnership/>

The UN: A Violation of Sovereignty and International Law

Under the UN Charter, the prohibition on the use of force against the territorial integrity of another state is among the clearest and most binding principles of international law.³ By unilaterally targeting individuals on Qatari soil, Tel Aviv disregarded the fundamental rule that no state has the right to conduct military operations within another sovereign nation without its consent. UN Secretary-General António Guterres condemned the attack as a “flagrant violation” of Qatar’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, reaffirming the international community’s stance on the inviolability of state borders.⁴ UN experts echoed this condemnation, stressing that “killing members of the other party’s negotiating team also violates the most basic ground rules of peace-making, which requires good faith dialogue between adversaries, not deceptive assassination attempts.”⁵ On September 11, the UN Security Council (UNSC), the most binding UN body for maintaining international peace and security, called an emergency meeting. The Council issued a statement condemning the Israeli strike in Qatar, with all 15 members—including the United States—endorsing the text, thereby marking an unusually unified position on a matter concerning Israel.⁶

International Shockwaves

The international response has also reflected the gravity of the breach. Across the Arab world, governments and institutions have denounced the strike as reckless and unlawful.⁷ Other regional actors also joined their Arab peers in condemning the attack. Turkish President Erdogan said in a statement that “This attack, which constitutes a clear violation of international law and

³ U.N. Codification Division, *Repertory of Practice of United Nations Organs: Charter of the United Nations, Chapter I — Article 2(1)–(5)*, “The Organization and its Members ... shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state,” accessed September 21, 2025, <https://legal.un.org/repertory/art2.shtml>

⁴ “Guterres Condemns Israeli Strike on Hamas Leaders in Qatar as ‘Flagrant Violation’,” *UN News*, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/09/1165811>

⁵ “UN Experts Condemn Israel’s Strikes in Qatar and Attacks on Peace-Making,” Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/09/un-experts-condemn-israels-strikes-qatar-and-attacks-peace-making>.

⁶ “Security Council Press Statement on Doha Strikes,” United Nations, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://press.un.org/en/2025/sc16163.doc.htm>.

⁷ “Arab and International Condemnation of Israeli Strike on Qatar,” *Asharq Al-Awsat*, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://english.aawsat.com/gulf/5184466-arab-and-international-condemnation-israeli-strike-qatar>.

Qatar's sovereignty, has also targeted the security and peace of our brotherly nation, Qatar,”⁸. Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian denounced the strike as an “illegal, inhumane, and anti-peace act,” asserting that it demonstrates Israel’s disregard for any limits to violence and its willingness to undermine every effort at diplomacy.⁹ In June, Iran itself launched missile attacks on the US military base in Qatar.¹⁰ Mahdi al-Mashat, head of Yemen’s Houthi Supreme Political Council, cautioned that “what happened in Doha will happen again and more in the rest of the countries if we do not all unite in confronting the Zionist threat,” urging Arab and Muslim states to take Israel’s actions seriously.¹¹

Within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman condemned Israel’s strike on Qatar, characterizing it as a “criminal act” in his conversation with Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani.¹² UAE President Sheikh Mohamed met with Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani in Doha, where the two leaders addressed the strength of bilateral relations and discussed regional security challenges, particularly in light of Israel’s strike on Qatari territory targeting Hamas leaders.¹³ Similar statements came from the GCC Secretary General and other GCC member states.¹⁴

Even among Israel’s Western partners, there is growing unease about the precedent it sets. French President Emmanuel Macron condemned the attacks as unacceptable under any

⁸ “Turkey Condemns Israeli Attack on Hamas in Doha, Says It Adopted Terrorism as State Policy,” *Reuters*, September 9, 2025, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/turkey-condemns-israeli-attack-hamas-doha-says-it-adopted-terrorism-state-policy-2025-09-09/>.

⁹ Iran Condemns ‘Extremely Dangerous’ Israeli Strike on Hamas in Qatar,” *Iran International*, September 9, 2025, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://www.iranintl.com/en/2025090909029>.

¹⁰ “Iran attacks U.S. military base in Qatar with missiles,” *CNBC*, June 23, 2025, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://www.cnbc.com/2025/06/23/iran-qatar-missiles-us-doha.html?msockid=34997eef72fd65af305b688873516401>

¹¹ “Israeli attack in Doha sparks regional and international condemnation,” *Al Jazeera*, September 9, 2025, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/9/9/israeli-attack-in-doha-sparks-regional-and-international-condemnation>.

¹² “Saudi Crown Prince Speaks to Qatari Emir After Israeli Attack on Doha,” *Al Arabiya English*, September 9, 2025, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2025/09/09/saudi-crown-prince-speaks-to-qatari-emir-after-israeli-attack-on-doha>

¹³ “UAE President Sheikh Mohamed Arrives in Qatar After Israel Strike on Doha,” *The National*, September 10, 2025, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://www.thenationalnews.com/news/2025/09/10/uae-president-sheikh-mohamed-arrives-in-qatar-after-israel-strike-on-doha/>

¹⁴ “Israeli attack in Doha sparks regional and international condemnation,” *Al Jazeera*, September 9, 2025, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/9/9/israeli-attack-in-doha-sparks-regional-and-international-condemnation>

circumstances, while German Foreign Minister Johann Wadehul emphasized that the strike constituted a violation of Qatar's sovereignty and undermined international efforts to secure the release of hostages.¹⁵ In its statement, the European Union's External Action Service declared that Israel's airstrike on Hamas leaders in Doha constituted a breach of international law and Qatar's territorial integrity, warned of the risk of further regional escalation, and expressed full solidarity with Qatar as a strategic partner of the EU.¹⁶ Canadian Foreign Minister Anita Anand condemned Israel's attack in Qatar as "unacceptable," noting that Ottawa is reassessing its relationship with Israel and considering possible next steps, a stance that follows Prime Minister Mark Carney's earlier decision to recognize Palestinian statehood at the UN General Assembly.¹⁷ At the UN Security Council, UK Ambassador Barbara Woodward expressed solidarity with Qatar, condemning Israel's strikes on Doha as a flagrant violation of sovereignty and territorial integrity that threatens to escalate regional tensions and undermine ceasefire negotiations.¹⁸

From the non-Western states, the Russian Foreign Ministry condemned the strike as a gross violation of international law and the UN Charter, an infringement on Qatar's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and a destabilizing act warranting the strongest denunciation.¹⁹ China condemned Israel's attacks on Doha, denouncing them as a violation of Qatar's sovereignty and a deliberate obstruction of ceasefire negotiations in Gaza, warning of escalating regional tensions and urging Israel in particular to pursue dialogue and negotiations rather than the use of force.²⁰

¹⁵ "EU Leaders Condemn Israeli Attack on Hamas in Doha, White House Calls Strike 'Unfortunate'," *France24*, September 9, 2025, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20250909-israel-strikes-hamas-officials-in-qatar>

¹⁶ "Israel/Qatar: Statement by the Spokesman," European External Action Service, September 9, 2025, accessed September 21, 2025, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/israelqatar-statement-spokesman_en.

¹⁷ "EU Suspends Israel Payments Over Gaza," *DW*, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://www.dw.com/en/eu-suspends-israel-payments-over-gaza/live-73944579>.

¹⁸ "Israel's Strikes on Doha Are a Flagrant Violation of the Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity of Qatar: UK Statement at the UN Security Council," United Kingdom Government, September 11, 2025, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/israels-strikes-on-doha-are-a-flagrant-violation-of-the-sovereignty-and-territorial-integrity-of-qatar-uk-statement-at-the-un-security-council>

¹⁹ "Russia Condemns Israeli Strike on Qatar as 'Gross Violation' of UN Charter," *Al-Monitor*, September 10, 2025, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2025/09/russia-condemns-israeli-strike-qatar-gross-violation-un-charter>

²⁰ "China warns of possible escalation after Israel strikes Doha," *Anadolu Agency*, September 10, 2025, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/china-warns-of-possible-escalation-after-israel-strikes-doha/3683463>

Washington's Dilemma

For the United States, the incident presents an unavoidable dilemma. Washington cannot credibly champion the rules-based order while turning a blind eye to violations of its own allies' sovereignty. The U.S. response to Israel's strike in Doha highlights both the fragility and the contradictions within Washington's regional diplomacy. On the one hand, the White House emphasized that the Trump administration was notified by the U.S. military only as the attack was unfolding, portraying Washington as caught off guard by a unilateral Israeli decision. Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt framed the operation as contrary to American interests, insisting that "unilaterally bombing inside Qatar, a sovereign nation and close ally of the United States ... does not advance Israel or America's goals."²¹ President Trump similarly distanced his administration from the strike, declaring, "This was a decision made by [Israel's] Prime Minister Netanyahu, it was not a decision made by me," while assuring Qatari leadership that "such a thing will not happen again on their soil."²²

Yet Qatar's outright denial of receiving any advance warning from Washington exposes a troubling credibility gap. While U.S. officials claimed that Special Envoy Steve Witcoff had been dispatched to inform Doha of the impending strike, Qatari Foreign Ministry spokesman Majed al-Ansari dismissed such claims as "false," clarifying that "the call received from an American official came as explosions sounded from the Israeli attack in Doha."²³ This discrepancy underscores more profound questions about the reliability of U.S. communication with its allies and the extent of Washington's influence over Israeli decision-making. For Doha, the episode reinforced the vulnerability of its sovereignty despite being a designated major non-NATO ally and host of the region's largest U.S. military base.

Conclusion

²¹ "Trump 'assured' Qatar that Israel won't attack again, says White House," *TRT World*, September 9, 2025, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://www.trtworld.com/article/3a09ff8a2dd7>

²² Nadine Yousif, "Trump Says Strike on Doha 'Does Not Advance Israel or America's Goals'," *BBC News*, September 9, 2025, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cx25711r8jxo>

²³ "Trump 'assured' Qatar that Israel won't attack again, says White House," *TRT World*, September 9, 2025, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://www.trtworld.com/article/3a09ff8a2dd7>

The attacks elicited the most extensive and unified international response against Israel since October 7, 2023, and in light of this broad condemnation, Israel has further marginalized itself within the international community. For the Gulf monarchies, Israel now appears as a security threat for the first time, exposing the dilemma of relying unilaterally on the U.S. security umbrella—an umbrella that has proven incapable of shielding them from Israeli actions. Although the initial response from the Arab and Muslim world has been primarily verbal and rhetorical, as reflected in the recent Arab and Islamic Summit in Doha, this episode of rare unity may still provide momentum for advancing multilateral regional security mechanisms, particularly within the GCC framework.²⁴ The strike in Doha was not business as usual; it constituted a flagrant breach of sovereignty, a violation of international law, and a reckless provocation with far-reaching consequences. More broadly, it forces Gulf states and the wider region to reconsider the balance between reliance on external powers and the pursuit of collective security arrangements that can safeguard their sovereignty against both traditional and emerging threats.

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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.

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²⁴ “Final Communiqué Issued by Arab-Islamic Emergency Summit in Doha,” Qatar News Agency, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://qna.org.qa/en/news/news-details?id=final-communicue-issued-by-arab-islamic-emergency-summit-in-doha&date=15/09/2025>