

# Israel's policy on Qatar after the October 7 attack

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November 2023

## Executive summary

Israel **lacks a clear, consistent and established strategy for its relations with Qatar**, despite profound Qatari influence in the region. Since the 1990s, Israeli decision-makers have faced the dilemma of balancing between Qatar's regional and global importance and its close ties with enemies of Israel. Qatar's dominance has increased since the October 7 attack, as it has become an effective mediator on which Hamas and Israel have no choice but to depend. At the same time, its negative impact has also grown clearer, generated public debate in Israel. The question is: how do we proceed?

This policy paper examines the policy options available to Israel on Qatar, both during the war and in the long run. We provide a systemic review of Israel's constraints and opportunities regarding Qatar's role in the region, taking into account various approaches to its involvement in Israeli-Palestinian relations and the geopolitical reality.

Our basic assumption is that eliminating Qatari influence on the Palestinian issue altogether would be costly, complicated and likely to fail. Given its geopolitical and economic power, coupled with its foreign policy, Qatar will remain an active player on the Palestinian issue regardless of Israel's preferences. Adopting a confrontational approach could do more harm than good. **Israel is better off diverting Qatar's influence in directions that serve its interests – i.e., weakening Hamas, responding to war challenges and helping restoring Gaza. At the same time, Israel should work to ensure Qatar is not the only regional power holding sway over Gaza and the West Bank.**

We propose several strategies for managing Israel's relations with Qatar. One is to **maintain constant tension between incentives and pressure points.** Qatar's

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<sup>‡</sup> This paper is part of a series of policy papers published jointly by Mitvim and the Berl Katzenelson Foundation to discuss “the day after” the October 2023 war in Gaza.

major weak points are security threats (such as targeted assassinations in its territory or removing security cooperation) and damage to its diplomatic relations with global powers, especially the United States. Israel must therefore involve its international partners in shaping its policy toward Qatar. Another method is **appointing a broad state-security framework (preferably the National Security Council) to manage the relationship with Qatar**, bringing in external experts to add knowledge and fresh perspectives. Mossad, which currently handles the relationship, cannot formulate policy. Therefore, it should remain the operative arm and manage covert channels.

To serve Israel's immediate interests during the war, we recommend leveraging all of Qatar's influence on Hamas in Gaza, despite the urge to cut ties over its support of terrorism. Qatar can be crucial to achieving Israel's two war goals: freeing the captives and toppling the Hamas regime. Israel must **continue to use Qatar as a mediator** in captive release negotiations, given its unique position. As the war progresses, **Hamas' reliance on Qatar can be used as a lever**. Israel should push Qatar to cut practical ties with Hamas, in a gradual manner only while the negotiations are underway, in order to directly weaken Hamas. As motivation, Israel can propose an alternative that retains Qatar's influence over Palestinian politics, while ensuring conditions that are better for Israel. We believe that without such motivation, Qatar will cling to its hold over Hamas. Israel should also **use Qatar's abilities to assist in other war needs**, such as communication, administrative coordination and aid to civilians, using existing Qatari infrastructure in Gaza. At the same time, Israel should **draw clear red lines regarding Qatar's support for terrorism and publicly hold it responsible for strengthening Hamas**. This call for accountability may actually help diplomatic efforts vis-à-vis Qatar.

**In the long run, we submit that a policy of diversifying external influences in the Palestinian sphere** will reduce Israel's binding dependence on Qatar. When the postwar arrangements of governance in Gaza and the West Bank are clearer, Israel should actively work to bring moderate Arab states into the emerging order. Multi-state systems tend to be more moderate, enabling different channels of communication and maneuvering between the various actors. When the reconstruction of Gaza begins, economic projects should only be considered if they are based on broad partnerships. The UAE will play a particularly important role, having demonstrated its economic and diplomatic contribution to the Palestinians, as well as to the normalization with Israel. In the long run, we believe that cutting all ties with Qatar may hurt Israel. Qatar can play a constructive role in shaping the post-war political order in Gaza, as long as its influence is balanced by other regional partners.

Our analysis includes input from 11 in-depth interviews with Israeli position-holders currently or previously involved in ties with Qatar, including high-ranking officials in the security establishment and in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, academics and policy

researchers. The first section examines the public debate in Israel over Qatar, emphasizing the need to build up a knowledge base to assess Israel's policy options. The second section outlines Qatar's global assets, focusing on the Israeli-Palestinian context. This section analyzes Qatar's regional influence and whether it can be changed. The third section recommends a wartime policy on Qatar covering five issues: releasing captives, toppling Hamas, administrative coordination, Al Jazeera's influence, and holding Qatar accountable for supporting terrorism. The fourth section lays out three long-term policy options: conditional acceptance, diversification and cutting ties. The options represent different public opinions and offer creative solutions to avoid repeating past failures. For everyone, we detail steps for implementation, potential implications, opportunities and possible difficulties. Finally, we present the necessary strategy, including the incentives and pressure points available to Israel vis-à-vis Qatar.

## **A. Introduction**

Qatar is emerging as a key player in the geopolitical situation that has unfolded since the Hamas attack on southern Israel on October 7. Its global influence, particularly in the Israeli-Palestinian context, coupled with its growing political capital, make it ideally positioned to manage several aspects of the situation. This includes, so far, successfully mediating the release of captives;<sup>1</sup> administrative and civil coordination with Gaza (on evacuating foreign nationals, for example);<sup>2</sup> conveying messages between the parties; and broader collaboration, such as freezing funding for Iran in exchange for its release of American captives – a deal carried out mere weeks before October 7.<sup>3</sup> Qatar will remain influential as long as it has control over the decisions of Hamas leaders during the war, assuming the US, Israel and other important countries continue to cultivate ties with Doha. Its impact on both military and non-military aspects of this situation is the result of Qatar's investment in building up political, ideological, physical, material and financial infrastructure in Gaza, paying particular attention to Hamas – which is now paying off. Israel is not the only actor now dependent on Qatar regarding Gaza: the Hamas leadership, too, chose to bank on Qatar for foreign policy partnership and broad support. Doha's diplomatic power has grown into a formidable force with profound global reach.

This makes it very difficult for Israel to now cut ties with Qatar over its active support of Hamas. While Israeli decision-makers have been well-aware of this support over

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<sup>1</sup> Anchal Vohra, "[How Qatar Became the Middle East's Indispensable Mediator](#)". *Foreign Policy*, 28 October 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Yusri Mohamed, Ahmed Mohamed Hassan, Nafisa Elthahir, Aidan Lewis, Nadine Awadalla, Nidal al-Mughrabi and Maya Gebeily, "[At least 320 foreign nationals and some wounded leave Gaza for Egypt](#)". *Reuters*, 1 November 2023.

<sup>3</sup> Monica Alba, Elyse Perlmutter-Gumbiner and Katherine Doyle, "[U.S. and Qatar agree not to release Iran's \\$6B](#)". *NBC News*, 12 October 2023.

the years, **it is unlikely that Israel has a clear, consistent and established strategy for managing its ties with Qatar.** An analysis of Qatar's assets can help assess whether Israel will remain exclusively dependent on it, or whether some parts of the equation can change. This paper also addresses the essential question: what sort of relationship does Israel want with Qatar? Given the outcomes of Qatar's deep involvement in Palestinian politics, Israel must examine its best policy options, both during the current war and in the long run. Qatar's international and regional power, including a close alliance with Israel's most hostile adversaries, must be taken into account in formulating a strategy. Growing revelations of just how deeply Qatar is involved in Gaza are generating debate in Israel, as Qatar has the power to help manage the crisis while also bearing responsibility for it. As a result, opposition to a close relationship with Qatar seems on the rise in Israel. Every news show is discussing the topic and politicians are taking a stand. Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich said on Channel 12 News that "Qatar is a partner of the Nazis in Gaza and its involvement is a disaster."<sup>4</sup> Minister of Diaspora Affairs Amichai Chikli called Qatar "an evil enemy state and a problem for us on many fronts",<sup>5</sup> while former Prime Minister Naftali Bennett tweeted it is "the enemy itself".<sup>6</sup> The former head of Israel's National Security Council, Meir Ben-Shabbat, published an article on *The Hill* calling for the US to reconsider its policy on Qatar,<sup>7</sup> even as the current head, Tzachi Hanegbi, tweeted his pleasure that Qatar is becoming "essential".<sup>8</sup> Other top officials, from former Mossad chief Yossi Cohen to Minister of Foreign Affairs Eli Cohen and even Netanyahu himself, have been inconsistent on Qatar throughout their time in office. In 2021, Yossi Cohen said that Qatar's transfer of funds to Gaza was "out of control"<sup>9</sup> – yet since October 7, he has held talks with Doha and even visited personally. When Eli Cohen was minister of intelligence in 2021, he spoke in favor of normalization with Qatar<sup>10</sup> – yet in a recent address to the UN Security Council, he stressed Qatar's part in the massacre and called on the world to demand action from Doha.<sup>11</sup> Prime Minister Netanyahu, too, has been inconsistent and at times self-contradictory on Qatar,

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<sup>4</sup> Keren Marciano, "[Qatar is a partner of the Nazis in Gaza, its involvement is a disaster](#)", N12, 25 October 2023 (Hebrew).

<sup>5</sup> Avi Bar-Eli, "[New Hasbara Minister Amichai Chikli: Qatar is an evil enemy state](#)", *TheMarker*, 17 October 2023 (Hebrew).

<sup>6</sup> Naftali Bennett, "[The Israeli government is making a grave moral and practical mistake](#)", X, 25 October 2023 (Hebrew).

<sup>7</sup> Meir Ben Shabbat and Asher Fredman, "[America must change its policy on Qatar](#)". *The Hill*, 3 November 2023.

<sup>8</sup> @Tzachi\_Hanegbi, "[I'm pleased to say that Qatar is becoming an essential party...](#)". X, 25 October 2023.

<sup>9</sup> Barak Ravid, "[Outgoing Mossad chief: Transfer of Qatari funds to Gaza out of control](#)", *Walla*, 8 June 2021 (Hebrew).

<sup>10</sup> Alexandra Lukash, "[Minister Eli Cohen: Deals with Saudi Arabia and Oman forthcoming; Qatar – soon](#)", *Ynet*, 13 January 2021 (Hebrew).

<sup>11</sup> "[FM Cohen addresses UN Security Council](#)". Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 24 October 2023.

including since October 7.<sup>12</sup> In reality, Israel is in very close contact with Doha, with top officials including the chief of Mossad visiting there since the war began.<sup>13</sup>

Given this inconsistency, alongside growing debate in Israel, we offer a conceptual framework for examining Israel's policy options on Qatar, including possible complications and repercussions. The paper outlines several recommendations for defining Israel's relationship with Qatar, both during the war and in the long run, including guidelines for implementation. What is immediately important is to examine what policy can serve Israel's war goals – freeing the captives and destroying Hamas' military ability and political power. We propose the latter be paid greater attention, as the current discussion largely centers on the military aspect. We then examine three long-term goals and ways to achieve them, given Qatar's profound regional and global influence and possible repercussions. Finally, we outline the best available strategy, including incentives and pressure points at Israel's disposal. Our analysis includes input from 11 in-depth interviews with Israeli position-holders currently or previously involved in ties with Qatar, including top security and foreign ministry officials, academics and policy researchers.

## **B. Qatar's influence, especially in the Israeli-Palestinian context**

As Qatar is a small country without a strong military, its foreign policy is driven by two key principles: “connecting with the edges” – maintaining strategic ties with major global powers while also with the most hawkish actors, as a security measure; and “expanding influence” – building up broad impact and assets outside the country's borders. These principles converge in Qatar's support of terrorist organizations, and it is prepared to pay diplomatic prices as long as they do not compromise security.

### ***Global reach***

Since the early 1990s, Qatar has worked to establish itself as a key player around the world, and particularly in the Middle East, through “soft” power and civil-economic initiatives with a significant long-term effect. A notable example is the 1997 relaunching of Qatar Airways, with the emir declaring his goal to make it a leading international player.<sup>14</sup> Diplomatically, Doha believes in non-alignment and flexibility. For example, the foreign minister declared in the 1990s that his country would not take external orders. To implement that policy, Qatar has built up relationships with all international

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<sup>12</sup> Tal Shalev, “[Netanyahu on transfer of funds from Qatar: ‘The right thing to do at this time’](#)”. *Walla*, 11 November 2018 (Hebrew); Ariel Kahana, “[Netanyahu to ambassadors: Pressure Qatar to release captives](#)”. *Israel Hayom*, 6 November 2023 (Hebrew).

<sup>13</sup> Barak Ravid, “[Mossad chief visits Qatar over weekend to discuss captives in Gaza](#)”. *Walla*, 30 October 2023 (Hebrew); Jonathan Liss and Reuters, “[Mossad and CIA chiefs discuss captive release deal with Qatari prime minister in Doha](#)”, *Haaretz*, 9 November 2023 (Hebrew).

<sup>14</sup> Qatar Airways, “[The Qatar Airways Story: Charting the Rise of One of the Fastest Growing Airlines in the World](#)”. *Media release*, 1 July 2016.

actors, even when these appear to clash, such as close ties with both Iran and Israel or with both the United States and the Taliban.<sup>15</sup>

A major geopolitical advantage is Qatar's position as a key supplier of natural liquefied gas, at a critical time when the world is seeking alternatives to Russian gas. Since October 7, and despite international criticism of its support for Hamas, Qatar has signed at least four massive contracts, tying Germany, the Netherlands, Italy and China to its gas supply for decades.<sup>16</sup> The scope of these contracts, from east to west, illustrates the global demand for Qatar's resources and its lack of allegiance to any geopolitical camp. Qatar fully understands its political capital: during the current war, the Qatari Minister of Energy stated that by 2029, the country would provide for 40 percent of the world's liquefied natural gas consumption.<sup>17</sup> This influx of contracts arrived at an interesting juncture, even more significant than the Russia-Ukraine war and the global attempts at independence from Russian gas. After October 7, a gas pipeline between Estonia and Finland was blown up and gas workers in Australia went on a long strike, leading to a 20% spike in gas prices in Europe within less than a month.<sup>18</sup>

Qatar's global power is also based on control of real estate, investments and public opinion, in some cases creating conditions for leadership and dependence. Qatar shapes public opinion by investing in educational initiatives, sustainability programs, research institutes and universities.<sup>19</sup> A major asset in this area is Al Jazeera, a regime-owned TV channel that broadcasts in Arabic and in English and is considered central in both Arab and international media.<sup>20</sup> The channel faces heavy criticism, including from many Middle Eastern countries, for its biased coverage and promotion of Islamist elements in the Arab world. A common complaint is its coverage of the Arab Spring, which helped the protests spread and the Muslim Brotherhood rise to power in Egypt. Doha maintains it does not intervene in content and maintains the channel's press freedom.<sup>21</sup> It also invests directly in countries and offers them economic aid, such as Egypt. Qatar also helps regional countries acquire weapons, including aid to the

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<sup>15</sup> Caryle Murphy, "[A Small Nation, Qatar Stands Tall by Standing Apart](#)". *Washington Post*, 3 April 1994.

<sup>16</sup> Priscila Azevedo Rocha and Stephen Stapczynski, "[China's Sinopec, QatarEnergy Sign 27-Year LNG Supply Deal](#)". *Bloomberg*, 4 November 2023.

<sup>17</sup> Hazar Kilani, "[Qatar to supply 40% of world's LNG by 2029: energy minister](#)". *Doha News*, 6 November 2023.

<sup>18</sup> Dr. Elai Rettig, expert on energy geopolitics at Bar Ilan University, interviewed by Moran Zaga, 2 November 2023.

<sup>19</sup> Dr. Yossi Mann, expert on energy geopolitics at Bar Ilan University, interviewed by Ariel Admoni, 30 October 2023.

<sup>20</sup> Mohammed A. Al-Hamadi, *Al Jazeera's AJ+ and the Public Sphere*, Hamad Bin Khalifa University, 2020.

<sup>21</sup> Saif bin Ahmed Al Thani, "[Refusing To Close Al Jazeera in Qatar Is A Stand for Independent Journalism](#)", *Newsweek*, 18 July 2017.

Lebanese military<sup>22</sup> and deals to purchase drones from the Turkish defense industry.<sup>23</sup> Without covering all aspects of Qatar's global power, it is worth noting the mainstay of close security cooperation with the United States, including hosting the largest American military base in the Middle East.<sup>24</sup>

All this makes Qatar exceptionally resilient to diplomatic and economic pressure, or to threats to its image. A senior Israeli foreign ministry official who once worked in Qatar told us: "Looking at the bigger picture makes it clear we cannot wage war with Qatar. It's an incredible asset. It is essential to US interests and to Europe, which fears the Russians, as Qatar is the only alternative to Russian gas."<sup>25</sup>

### ***Influence on Israeli-Palestinian sphere***

Qatar's invests in various ways in Israel and the Palestinians. In the early 2000s it directly invested in Israeli sports, funding the Bnei Sakhnin football club. This paved the way for high-level Qatari visits to Israel when diplomatic ties were unstable.<sup>26</sup> It also invested in the Israeli commercial sector, particularly diamonds and gas initiatives.<sup>27</sup> However, its area focus is largely the Palestinian Authority and the Gaza Strip, providing humanitarian aid and improving infrastructure. The director-general of the Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD), Khalifa Jassim Al-Kuwari, said in an interview with Al Sharq on the third week of the war that Palestine is Qatar's main beneficiary.<sup>28</sup> Below, we detail specific investments in the Palestinian territories that have helped Qatar become a regional stakeholder beyond economic influence.

### **Civilian projects**

In the past decade, Qatar has become a key funder of development and construction in the Gaza Strip. In March 2009, Qatar committed to investing in reconstruction of Gaza as part of a committee that convened at Sharm El-Sheikh following Operation Cast Lead.<sup>29</sup> In October 2012, Sheikh Hamad visited Gaza and announced Qatar would provide multimillion-dollar support for its reconstruction. Notable projects include reconstructing the Salah a-Din highway, the Al Rashid, Al Bahar and Karamah

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<sup>22</sup> Qatar Fund for Development, "[The Second Batch of the Qatari Support Arrives to Supply the Lebanese Army with Diesel and Gasoline](#)". 29 October 2023.

<sup>23</sup> Pazit Ravina, "[Between Iran and Qatar: Saudi Arabia investing 1 billion dollars in purchasing drones](#)", *Makor Rishon*, 27 July 2023 (Hebrew).

<sup>24</sup> Joseph Kostiner, "GCC Perceptions of Collective Security in the Post-Saddam Era", in (ed.) Mehran Kamrava, *The International Politics of the Persian Gulf* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2011), p. 100.

<sup>25</sup> Senior foreign ministry official. Interviewed by Moran Zaga, 29 October 2023 (Hebrew).

<sup>26</sup> James M. Dorsey, *The Turbulent World of Middle East Soccer*. London: Hurst & Company, 2016, p.155.

<sup>27</sup> Sara Leibovich-Dar, "[The Rebecca Mark gas show](#)", *Haaretz*, 12 March 2002 (Hebrew).

<sup>28</sup> Jaber Al Harami, Hassan Hamoush & Amru Abdelrahman, "[Al Sharq Development CEO: There is no political agenda behind Qatari aid](#)". *Al Sharq*, 29 October 2023 (Arabic).

<sup>29</sup> Brenda Gazzar, "[Analysis: Sharm e-Sheikh summit gives needed boost to Egypt and its diplomatic efforts](#)". 18 January 2009.

streets, and the Sheikh Hamad Hospital – the same compound the IDF Spokesperson recently revealed was used to cover underground Hamas military infrastructure.<sup>30</sup> According to a 2014 report, Qatar also invested in improving Gaza's sewage system. To that end, as well as rehabilitating cities, Qatar sent in architects, civil engineers and other professionals via the Erez Crossing.<sup>31</sup> In 2017, Qatar funded the development of a city named after Sheikh Hamad near Khan Yunis, consisting of 2,500 apartments in 35 buildings as well as a mosque, government buildings and basketball courts.<sup>32</sup> This was reportedly Qatar's largest financial investment in Gaza, amounting to \$135 million. Qatar has since funded the reconstruction of other residential complexes in the areas of Deir al-Balah, Johar a-Dik and Beit Lahia.<sup>33</sup>

### **Energy projects**

Qatar also invests in Gaza's energy sector. In addition to funding the electricity supply, in May 2019 the Qatari government agreed to transfer another \$180 million via UN mechanisms to improve the power infrastructure.<sup>34</sup> In early 2021, Qatar's envoy to the Gaza Strip Mohammed Al-Emadi announced a \$60 million joint project between Qatar, the Palestinian Authority and the Gaza Electricity Distribution Company to supply natural gas through Israel.<sup>35</sup> This included contact with senior figures in the Gaza energy sector. In early 2022, the Qatari foreign ministry released a photo of Al-Emadi meeting with a representative of the Gaza Power Generation Company (GPGC), Waleed Salman, as well as with the chairman of the board of directors of the Qatari Electric Distribution Company, Kanaan Obaid. This meeting resulted in an agreement on further Qatari investment in the Gaza Strip.<sup>36</sup>

### **Mediation**

Another key aspect of Qatar's global and regional influence is mediation. Qatar has mediated between Israel and Hamas several times. Operation Protective Edge in 2014 marked a turning point in Israel-Qatar relations as from then on, Qatari aid to Gaza was coordinated with Israel, the United States and the UN.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> ["Israel publishes footage it claims proves Hamas is concealing terror tunnels under hospital"](#). *The Telegraph* (YouTube), 5 November 2023.

<sup>31</sup> Shlomi Eldar, ["The Qatar channel between Gaza and Israel"](#), *Al Monitor*, 3 March 2014.

<sup>32</sup> TRT World, ["Qatar Investment: \\$407M Spend on Reconstructing Gaza"](#), YouTube, 13 June 2017.

<sup>33</sup> Seth J. Frantzman, ["How Much Money is Qatar Spending on a Facelift for Gaza?"](#). *The Jerusalem Post*, 12 December 2017.

<sup>34</sup> Dov Liver, ["Qatar Sends Palestinians Aid After Deadly Gaza Clash with Israel"](#). *The Wall Street Journal*, 7 May 2019.

<sup>35</sup> Industrial Valve Summit, ["Qatar to Invest \\$60 Million in Gaza Pipeline"](#), 2021.

<sup>36</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Qatar, ["Chairman of Qatar Committee for Reconstruction of Gaza Signs Agreement to Ensure Gas Supply to Gaza Power Plant"](#). 21 January 2022.

<sup>37</sup> Doron Peskin, ["Cash flow: 16 years of Qatari money to Hamas has created a monster"](#). *Calcalist*, 26 October 2023.



Qatar has been dubbed a “reliable mediator” due to its extensive efforts to mediate between various players in the Middle East, while maintaining declared neutrality that supposedly ensures fair and reliable negotiations.<sup>38</sup> This has increased demand for Qatari mediation.<sup>39</sup> Its small decision-making team, which consists of the emir and the prime minister (who doubles as foreign minister), enables efficient negotiation, adding to Qatar’s regional advantage as mediator.<sup>40</sup> Doha also maintains close ties with regional organizations such as Hamas and Hezbollah, and some of their leaders are based there. Qatar’s ability to oversee these leaders, coupled with its consistent neutrality, enables effective communication between Israel and Hamas.<sup>41</sup>

Over the last two decades, Qatar mediated not only between Israel and Hamas but also between Palestinian Authority and Hamas. In April 2017, Yousef al-Ghariz, adviser to Qatar’s ambassador to the Palestinian territories and the head of the Qatari Committee for Reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, told Al-Monitor that Qatar works with both Hamas and the Palestinian Authority. He added that Qatar does not get involved in internal Palestinian political disputes, while working to mediate between the parties.<sup>42</sup>

### **Ideology**

Equally as important as tangible assets is Qatar’s support for Salafist ideology and promotion of Muslim Brotherhood agendas. This gives Qatar an advantage in Gaza over Egypt and other countries that do not promote religious fundamentalism, as explained by a former senior member of Mossad.<sup>43</sup> According to another former senior member, Qatar’s regional strategy is rooted in its understanding of Islam: “The Muslim Brotherhood is a religious movement that attracts doctors and businessmen who are not religious fanatics. Assisting them boosts Qatar’s popularity in Muslim public opinion.”<sup>44</sup>

A senior Israeli foreign ministry official who worked in Qatar told us its real connections is with the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood and not necessarily with the Palestinians themselves, who are looked down on and considered guests in Qatar.

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<sup>38</sup> Meshal Al Thani, “[Qatar Is the Mideast’s Honest Broker](#)”. *Wall Street Journal*, 29 October 2023.

<sup>39</sup> Mirdef Alqashouti. “Qatar mediation: From soft diplomacy to foreign policy.” In *Contemporary Qatar: Examining State and Society* (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2021), pp. 88-89.

<sup>40</sup> Federica D’Acunto, “[The brand of peace: The relations between Qatar, Palestine and Israel](#)”. 28 October 2016, p. 46; Assaf Uni, “[Qatar PM leads efforts to release Israeli hostages](#)”. 25 October 2023.

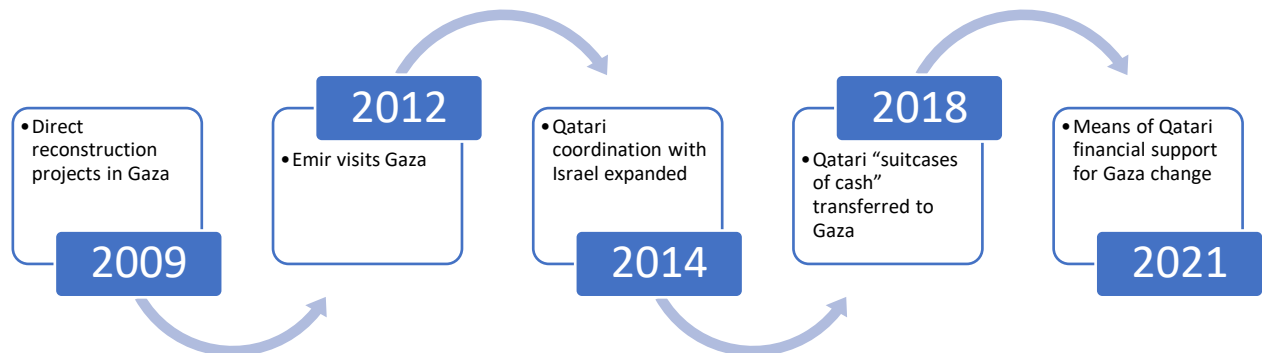
<sup>41</sup> Yoel Guzansky, “The Gulf States, Israel, and Hamas”. Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, 2017, p. 160.

<sup>42</sup> Khaled Abu Amer, “[Qatar’s Lifeline to Gaza](#)”. *Al Monitor*, 31 March 2017.

<sup>43</sup> Former senior Mossad member, interviewed by Moran Zaga, 6 November 2023.

<sup>44</sup> Former senior Mossad member, interviewed by Moran Zaga, 31 October 2023.

However, he noted, Qatar sees Hamas as a more “authentic” leadership than the Palestinian Authority – an approach that began with Emir Hamad bin Khalifa.<sup>45</sup>



It is also worth comparing Qatar’s influence over the Palestinians with other countries in the region. In recent years, Israel has increased its cooperation with Arab states such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain. Yet as they refrained from meaningful intervention in the conflict, Israel had little choice but to strategically partner with Qatar. The threat of Iranian influence over the Palestinians also plays a role: Israel would prefer its “natural” partners in the Arab world and Qatar to Iranian involvement along its southern border.<sup>46</sup> To that end, the Gulf States have to offer Hamas leaders more attractive offers than Iran, such as financial aid.

Egypt’s humanitarian aid to Gaza, especially during violent escalations, has focused on vital civilian needs such as food and medicine rather than on financial assistance. In Operation Protective Edge, the Egyptian government led by Abdel Fattah el-Sisi sided with Israel and displayed hostility towards Palestinians.<sup>47</sup> Egypt chose to encourage Hamas’ financial and political isolation<sup>48</sup> and advocated for its destruction.<sup>49</sup> According to Prof. Elie Podeh, “Egypt has almost no leverage with the Palestinians, except for geographical proximity and control over border crossings. Its relationship with Gaza is instrumental, in any case, and Egypt has no desire to be involved with Gaza.”<sup>50</sup> In contrast, Qatar has a clear economic advantage and, as mentioned, the diplomatic abilities that persuaded Israel to accept – and even take an active part in – its transfer of funds to Gaza. Before Qatar began massively aiding Gaza, Hamas turned to Iran for help and still maintains these ties to some extent, disappointing the Israeli hope that Qatari involvement would diminish Iran’s influence. Major funding

<sup>45</sup> Former senior Mossad member, interviewed by Moran Zaga, 29 October 2023.

<sup>46</sup> Yoel Guzansky, pp. 162-163.

<sup>47</sup> Khalil Al-Anani, "[Explaining Egypt’s Role during the Gaza War](#)". *Arab Center Washington DC*, 3 June 2021.

<sup>48</sup> Yoel Guzansky, p. 163.

<sup>49</sup> Steven A. Cook, "[Will Egypt Play a Role in Easing the Gaza War?](#)". *Council on Foreign Relations*, 16 October 2023.

<sup>50</sup> Prof. Elie Podeh, Hebrew University. Interviewed by Moran Zaga and Ariel Admoni, 30 October 2023.

from Qatar has not prevented Iran from providing financial and military support to Gaza in recent years that benefits both Hamas and Islamic Jihad.<sup>51</sup>

### **C. Israel's best immediate policy on Qatar**

Until the war, Israel's approach to Qatar followed its cardinal foreign policy rule, "knock on every door",<sup>52</sup> while recognizing its direct or indirect negative impact such as supporting the Muslim Brotherhood, strengthening Iran and Turkey, and shaping public opinion through heavily-funded media platforms and research institutes around the world. In 2018, Israel added an element to its policy on Qatar: economic leverage. As part of various measures to diffuse violent escalations, Qatar began sending cash to Gaza. On November 8, 2018, the first cash infusion entered the Strip. An important motivation for Israel to be directly involved was control financial aid channels after Egypt closed its gates to Qatar (2017-2021), and the Palestinian Authority temporarily cut the budget it transferred to Hamas in Gaza. Following criticism that these funds were directly financing Hamas terrorist activity, Qatar changed its means of aid and started transferring goods, equipment and fuel for the general population, which also reached Hamas.<sup>53</sup> The war revealed several implications of this policy:

- The Qatari funding helped strengthen Hamas and broaden the rift among Palestinians.
- Both Israel and the Hamas leadership came to depend on this channel as a conduit for communication and coordination beyond the financial issue.
- The Qatari funding reinforced Israel's assumption that financial security would lead to a peaceful border.
- The funding advanced Qatar's dominance as mediator over the Egyptian alternative.

This policy also restricted Israel in several ways. First and foremost, Qatar now has near-exclusive influence over Hamas, putting all stakeholders in a bind. For Hamas, turning to other players/mediators would greatly jeopardize the Qatari funding. For Qatar, a weaker Hamas would mean less influence in this sphere. For Israel, achieving its war goals requires going through Qatar. At present, it seems there is no alternative, and even Egypt's involvement includes a Qatari element. However, some parts of this equation can – and should – be altered, while others are likely to change as the war progresses.

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<sup>51</sup> Michal Yaari. "[Israel and Qatar: Relations Nurtured by the Palestinian Issue](#)". Mitvim, 2020, pp. 7-8.

<sup>52</sup> Avraham Ben-Zvi and Gad Varsha, "Knocking on every door: Israel's foreign policy, 1948-2018", *Lamda – The Open University*, 2023 (Hebrew).

<sup>53</sup> Yaniv Kubovich, "[With Israeli approval: Qatar transferred more than 1 billion dollars to Gaza since 2012](#)", *Haaretz*, 10 September 2023 (Hebrew).

Before detailing these possibilities for change, we propose Israel examine its policy options for two timeframes: the immediate present, focusing on achieving the war goals, and the long run, centering on changing the geopolitical landscape. **In the current crisis, we recommend Israel adopt a dual policy on Qatar.** On one level, Israel must exhaust Qatar's ability to advance four goals: freeing the captives, toppling Hamas, administratively coordinating with Gaza during the war, and shaping public opinion, as detailed below. On all four points, we suggest Israel use Qatar's relative advantages to promote its own interests. On the second level, Israel should act to ensure Qatar is held accountable for its contribution to the current crisis, whether directly or otherwise. This approach acknowledges the Qatari trap<sup>54</sup> or dilemma:<sup>55</sup> Israel needs Qatar's access to Hamas while seeking to limit them. Accountability is also important in the broader regional and international contexts.

### ***Freeing the captives***

Freeing the captives held in Gaza is one of Israel's two declared war goals, and Qatar is one of the only players that can influence Hamas on this issue. Qatar has proven again it can facilitate effective negotiations with Hamas while maintaining multi-channel communication with Israel, the United States, Germany and others. As many of the captives hold passports from other countries, there is broad interest from Thailand to Argentina in seeing Qatar use its mediating powers to the full to secure their release. As a result, world leaders and foreign ministers are thronging to Qatar.

The dominant political approach in Israel is led by the current head of the National Security Council, Tzachi Hanegbi, and former Mossad chief Yossi Cohen. Both believe in a "hugging" strategy and are managing Israel's communication with Qatar in practice.<sup>56</sup> This approach recognizes Qatar's exclusive position, as Cohen clarified on several opportunities: "Now is not the time to criticize the only effective mediator we have... If we want to get the captives back from Gaza, only Qatar can do that, so I am talking with them. I was there last week, and I assume the heads of other Israeli agencies will go there again and again."<sup>57</sup>

This invites two questions. First, is Qatar the only, or main, actor capable of delivering results in this area? Second, should criticism of Qatar be suspended until after the much-awaited release?

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<sup>54</sup> Dana Ben Shimon, "[The Qatari trap: Israel must cut its dependence on Doha](#)", *Israel Hayom*, 26 October 2023 (Hebrew).

<sup>55</sup> Yoel Guzansky, "[The Qatari dilemma](#)". *INSS*, 19 October 2023 (Hebrew).

<sup>56</sup> Gili Cohen, "[Captive release negotiations: Yossi Cohen in discussions with Qatar](#)", *Kan*, 1 November 2023 (Hebrew).

<sup>57</sup> Nathan Gutmann, "[Yossi Cohen defends Qatar: 'I don't accept criticism of the most effective mediator'](#)", *Kan*, 3 November 2023 (Hebrew).

Regarding Qatar's exclusivity, there are several reservations. As Egypt is crucial to deals that require physical passage through its territory, it has a mutually dependent relationship with Qatar, Israel and Hamas. While other international players are involved in the negotiations, they are not part of this quadrilateral core for any mediated deal. Also, other avenues were not explored for facilitating negotiations with Hamas, such as Turkey, or moderate Gulf States (or their representatives) that could try and establish ties. The answer to that claim is that few actors have ties with Hamas and there is not enough time to try and build up new ones. Turkey was one of the first countries to offer mediation, and whether it failed or was never given the opportunity to try is unknown. In any case, once that channel reached a deadlock, Turkey signaled a clear anti-Israeli policy.<sup>58</sup> The most important caveat relates to the assumption that Qatar has a unique relationship with Hamas. According to a study by Yitzhak Gal and Prof. Elie Podeh, regular Qatari funding for Gaza totals about \$400 million a year. While this number appears large, it is only about 20% of the funding poured into Gaza. The rest is made up of \$1 billion from the Palestinian Authority's budget, various taxes amounting to more than \$500 million, and Iranian aid worth several hundred million dollars a year.<sup>59</sup> This is compounded by numerous aid packages from international organizations, primarily UNRWA, whose distribution Hamas controls – as evidenced by its theft of fuel during the war.<sup>60</sup> In other words, Hamas does not rely solely on Qatari funding, making Qatar's leverage is limited. However, Qatar's overall influence over Hamas goes beyond funding, as it has the power to shape public opinion, promote religious ideas and political goals, and offer Hamas various kinds of diplomatic support.

The dilemma whether to criticize Qatar while “stroking” it is even more complicated. Qatar has proven highly resilient to diplomatic pressure and threats to its image. A prominent example is the boycott of Qatar by Saudi Arabia and its allies from 2017 to 2021, which ended without Qatar yielding to a single demand. In fact, Qatar used the boycott to strengthen its ties with Iran and Turkey. Another example is the massive criticism by many countries and organizations regarding allegations of Qatari corruption around hosting the World Cup. In this case, too, Qatar did not budge and hosted the World Cup without addressing a single concern. This means that Qatar is largely impervious to criticism, given its resilience and global assets. However, holding it accountable is very important for other reasons, primarily setting ethical-moral

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<sup>58</sup> Dr. Nimrod Goren, president of Mitvim and senior fellow at the Middle East Institute in Washington, interviewed by Moran Zaga, 29 October 2023 (Hebrew).

<sup>59</sup> Prof. Elie Podeh and Yitzhak Gal, “ [Hamas funding – with PA help and Israeli approval](#)”, *N12*, 29 October 2023 (Hebrew).

<sup>60</sup> Itamar Eichner, “[UNRWA: Hamas operatives stole fuel and medical equipment from Gaza headquarters](#)”, *Ynet*, 16 October 2023 (Hebrew).

boundaries, as elaborated further on. Our recommendation, therefore, is a policy of projecting both flattery and criticism, even by the same representatives.

This policy would mirror Qatar's approach, which welcomes contact with senior Israeli officials while extending harsh criticism, not only through Al Jazeera but also directly by its leaders: on November 5, 2023, Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdul Rahman bin Jassim al-Thani accused Israel of carrying out "war crimes" and "ethnic cleansing" in Gaza.<sup>61</sup>

We estimate that in the current conditions, Qatar will seek to prolong the negotiations, as freeing the captives will likely bring on harsher measures to destroy Hamas' military capabilities, thereby diminishing Qatar's regional influence. Therefore, Israel has to offer Qatar an attractive postwar alternative that will also serve its own interests, despite the desire to remove Qatar from the Israeli-Palestinian sphere of influence. Only an alternative form of influence can motivate Qatar to disengage from Hamas and facilitate the release of captives. One such alternative is discussed in the section on long-term policy options.

### ***Toppling Hamas***

The second declared goal of the war is to topple Hamas in Gaza and destroy its military abilities.<sup>62</sup> This is rarely discussed in the Qatari context, which we believe is a great waste of potential to impact the outcomes of the war. Qatar is well placed to help weaken Hamas, both through major – if not fatal – economic damage and by expelling or agreeing to turn over the Hamas leaders, some of whom are based in Qatar.

Why should Qatar cooperate? As with the release of captives, we cannot identify a Qatari interest in weakening Hamas under the current conditions, as this would eliminate its Palestinian assets. Also, harming Hamas at this time may damage efforts to release the captives, since Hamas is supposed to carry out this task. There appears, therefore, to be a structural contradiction. The way out of this is to change the current conditions. First, we assume that as the war progresses, Hamas' practical powers will weaken. It will likely remain with limited military capabilities, a political leadership in exile, Israeli captives as bargaining chips, and continued ideological support from parts of Palestinian society. Qatar will watch Hamas decline from the sidelines and understand that it must find another avenue of influence in the Palestinian sphere. Therefore, despite no visible interest at present, Qatar's need to maintain assets in the area will grow as Israel keeps up its military pressure on Gaza in the coming weeks. Second, Israel can expedite efforts to create alternative governance in Gaza,

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<sup>61</sup> Asmahan Qarjoui, "[Qatar's PM calls out Israel for 'genocide and ethnic cleansing' of Palestinians](#)". *Doha News*, 5 November 2023.

<sup>62</sup> Gili Cohen, "[Toppling Hamas and solving the issue of the captives: Document detailing war goals exposed](#)", *Kan*, 16 October 2023 (Hebrew).

if only as an interim arrangement at this stage. This may start Qatar's clock ticking. Third, Qatar has no wish to invite targeted assassinations into territory. Israel must be loud and clear about its intentions to pursue the leaders of Hamas wherever they may be.

Another important point is that Hamas and Qatar do not share common political goals. Qatar officially supports a two-state solution, while Hamas does not recognize Israel and calls for its destruction. We cannot rule out the possibility that Qatar would agree to switch to supporting Palestinian actors who align politically with this policy.

### ***Administrative coordination with Gaza during the war***

The prolonged military campaign in Gaza is raising dilemmas regarding ongoing administration of the population. The power vacuum, which will grow the more the military advances, will affect the provision of basic services and destabilize civil order. The major dilemma is that while Israel aims to topple the current regime, the vacuum created until a new one is established may give way to civil chaos that will interfere with the IDF's ability to conduct warfare, and may further undermine its already shaky international legitimacy.

UNRWA is not responsible for managing the population, and is incapable of doing so despite its presence on the ground. The local looting of UNRWA warehouses is a small example of what may happen as governance weakens and becomes decentralized.<sup>63</sup> To try and fill this vacuum, Israel can seek assistance among state actors who can initiate processes under a weakened Hamas government and have existing infrastructure and institutions in the Strip. For example, there are many EU-funded infrastructures that have so far refrained from managing them in Gaza, and may be able to assist given the current pressure. Relevant to the Qatari context is the coordination of evacuating foreign passport holders from Gaza during the war.<sup>64</sup> This means that Qatar can assist in mediation beyond the release of captives. Qatar also has institutions in Gaza, such as hospitals (one of which was proven to be covering Hamas tunnels and rocket launches),<sup>65</sup> educational institutes<sup>66</sup> and water infrastructure,<sup>67</sup> and is part of the mechanism for delivering fuel tankers to Gaza.<sup>68</sup> Israel may have to manage some of these aspects later in the war, and Qatar can

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<sup>63</sup> Einav Halabi, "[Flour, wheat and chaos: Gazans loot UNRWA warehouses | Footage](#)". *Ynet*, 29 October 2023 (Hebrew).

<sup>64</sup> Jack Houry, Jonathan Liss, *The New York Times*, *Reuters*, *The Guardian*, "[Rafah crossing opens for foreign nationals and injured persons to leave Gaza in first since war began](#)", *Haaretz*, 1 November 2023 (Hebrew).

<sup>65</sup> Emanuel Fabian, "[IDF releases new intel detailing Hamas use of Gaza hospitals for terror purposes](#)". *The Times of Israel*, 5 November 2023.

<sup>66</sup> Asmahan Qarjoui, "[Israel destroys Education Above All facility amid ongoing Gaza bombardment](#)". *Doha News*, 10 October 2023.

<sup>67</sup> Qatar Red Crescent, "[QRCS secures water supply for 40,000 people in Gaza](#)". Press release, 16 July 2023.

<sup>68</sup> Fares Akram, "[Hamas: Qatar paying public salaries by sending fuel to Gaza](#)". *AP News*, 1 December 2021.

provide an initial response to humanitarian and administrative needs as the Hamas rule grows weaker, in addition to Egypt's role in these areas. All this should be limited to the end of the war.

The Israeli interest is to expand the influence of other state actors in Gaza, even during the war, and especially regional ones such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the UAE. However, there are few countries apart from the EU and Qatar with existing infrastructure and major institutions already operating in Gaza.<sup>69</sup> In a realistic assessment of the available options, cooperation with Qatar may prove essential to achieving Israel's goals, at least in the short term.

### ***Shaping public opinion: the war over the media narrative***

One of Qatar's major assets is Al Jazeera, which should be seen as a weapon available to opponents of Israel. We ask, in this context, whether and how Israel can deal with the damage caused by this weapon. The biased narrative broadcast to 430 million viewers naturally sparks anger in Israel, exemplified by Minister of Communication Karhi's proposal to shut down the channel in Israel. In the explanation for the proposed bill, members of the Knesset backing it wrote: "The media channel is a mouthpiece for Hamas. It broadcasts from within Israeli territory, providing information to our enemies, inciting against the State of Israel and voicing support for Hamas. Every minute this continues is a danger to national security, to our citizens and our soldiers, and displays weakness in the face of the terrorism supported by Al Jazeera."<sup>70</sup>

While it is hard to quantify Al Jazeera's impact on Arab countries and around the world, there is no doubt it plays a significant role in shaping narratives and undermining Israel's legitimacy. Al Jazeera affects not only the near term righteous struggle, but also harms its long term ability to maintain regional processes with the Abraham Accord states, given popular pressure from their citizens. This pressure is already evident in all the signatory states and manifested, for example, in the Bahraini parliament's decision to suspend diplomatic and economic ties with Israel and recall its Israeli ambassador (who was already in Israel for security reasons).<sup>71</sup>

While acknowledging the negative impact of Al Jazeera, Israel cannot change its popularity and importance, and certainly cannot close it down. Other countries tried, exerting maximal pressure on Qatar, and failed.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Former senior Mossad member, interviewed by Moran Zaga, 30 November 2023.

<sup>70</sup> Hezki Baruch, "[Karhi on closing Al Jazeera: Everything is ready and waiting for Gallant's okay](#)". *Channel 7*, 1 November 2023 (Hebrew).

<sup>71</sup> Summer Said, "[Bahrain Suspends Economic Ties With Israel, Recalls Ambassador, Parliament Says](#)". *Wall Street Journal*, 4 November 2023.

<sup>72</sup> "[Qatar row: Al Jazeera hits back over closure demands](#)", *BBC News*, 23 June 2017.



With its existing tools, Israel can only shut down the channel in Israel – but this would have a negligible effect. Israel can also limit Al Jazeera’s ability to broadcast from Gaza using technological means, yet this could be interpreted as an attack on press freedom and an attempt at concealment. A more sophisticated policy would be to incorporate the Israeli narrative into Al Jazeera’s Arabic channel and try to air as many personal Israeli evidence as possible. These appear mostly on Al Jazeera’s English channel, and efforts should be made to integrate them into the Arabic channel, too.<sup>73</sup> Israelis have already spoken in Arabic on Al Jazeera, but one particularly aggressive interview had a counter effect. Meirav Leshem Gonen, whose daughter Romi was kidnapped, had to deal with manipulative questions, an unplanned confrontation with a member of Hamas and partial translation.<sup>74</sup> These conditions barely allowed empathy, and the interview probably did the Israeli cause more damage than good. It is important to enlist civilians and experts who are equipped to adapt the message to an Arabic-speaking environment, even if it is hostile to Israel. We believe that in a high-impact setting, it is better to be heard softly than not be heard at all. Al Jazeera wants an audience and media influence, and contrary to common belief, has often air voices that do not conform to the Islamist agenda. In Israel’s efforts to create media balance, as in other fields, we recommend involvement over detachment. This means using Qatari assets and adapting them to Israeli interests as much as possible: the benefit of integrating Israeli voices into Al Jazeera is greater than boycotting the channel.

### **Accountability**

Acting immediately to publicize Qatar’s part in the October 7 attack is important both within Israel and as a message to Qatar. Truthfully representing the position on Qatar will help Israelis build trust with their decision-makers, especially given the growing public debate. The explanation should be that Israel recognizes Qatar’s unequivocal support for Hamas, but is communicating via Qatar to achieve the war goals, as this is currently the most efficient channel. An official statement recognizing Qatar’s role in strengthening Hamas would also set important moral boundaries in international discourse. Moral and ethical considerations should not be left out of diplomacy in the name of pragmatism. We believe a combination is possible; Qatar itself does so. There is enough evidence to support this claim, and Israel should make use of it. First, hosting the leaders of Hamas makes Qatar automatically complicit. Even if the Qatari leadership was unaware of the planned attack, financing this terrorist organization and hosting its leaders make Qatar a partner in crime. Second, Qatar’s ideological backing

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<sup>73</sup> “[‘I want him back’: Families of Israeli hostages demand government save them](#)”. *Al Jazeera (English)*, 25 October 2023.

<sup>74</sup> Dana Yarkechy and Roi Kais, “[Before the ‘ambush’: Advisors to the families of the captives were warned against interviewing for Al Jazeera](#)”, *Kan*, 16 November 2023 (Hebrew).

is an even graver problem, as even if Hamas' institutions collapse, Qatar remains a source of ideological support for various arms of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Israel must carefully choose how and through whom to raise the issue of Qatar's accountability during the war, in order to keep existing channels of communication open, at least regarding captive release. This does not mean "sucking up" to Qatar, but rather sophisticated diplomacy that is sensitive to how Israeli leaders present Qatar and the world with the actors it defines as responsible for breeding terrorism, whether directly or indirectly. Current Minister of Finance Smotrich and former Prime Minister Bennett spoke clearly on this, but we recommend the figures such as the Israel Minister of Defense and Prime Minister also address this issue and find ways to point out Qatar's responsibility for supporting Hamas as soon as possible.

#### **D. Israel's long-term policy options on Qatar**

After outlining the possibilities and limitations of Israel's ties with Qatar, and discussing moral boundaries and Qatar's role in breeding regional terrorism, we now present three long-term policy options. We address the possible implications of each policy and steps to achieve it. The first option is "conditional acceptance": maintaining diplomatic ties only if Qatar stops supporting terrorism, while recognizing its international significance and assets. The second is "diversification": moving away from the bind of Qatar's exclusivity. The third is "cutting ties", with the goal of removing all Qatari influence in the area. These proposed policy frameworks are primarily based on understanding Israeli interests, taking into account Qatar's influence and interests and Israel's power to shape them, at least in the Israeli-Palestinian sphere.

##### ***Policy option 1: Conditional acceptance***

**Description:** A "red line" policy that allows for continued cooperation with Qatar based on the following conditions set by Israel:

- Stop support for Hamas through hosting, funding and media promotion.<sup>75</sup> As Qatar's support could shift to other terrorist entities after the war, this definition should be expanded. Also, while having the Hamas leadership in Doha facilitates communication channels between the United States and Israel and Hamas, in hindsight it also created a channel of communication between Hamas and Iran via Qatar, strengthening this relationship instead of mitigating Iranian influence. This point must be defined as a prerequisite.
- Agree to supervision of Palestinian aid funds. An oversight mechanism can ensure that funds and goods do not finance terrorism of any kind.

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<sup>75</sup> Dr. Yossi Mann, expert on energy geopolitics at Bar Ilan University, interviewed by Ariel Admoni, 30 October 2023.

- End incitement against Israel in Qatari media and various BDS affiliates. According to Dr. Harel Chorev, Qatar finances a broad network of organizations around the world affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, such as the BDS movement that leads Palestinian protests on US campuses.<sup>76</sup> From 2012 to 2020, Qatar alone gave \$1.3 billion to educational institutes in the United States. Qatari funding for educational and research institutes around the world influences research on Gulf-related issues and raises suspicions concerning elements tied to these institutions, including protest organizations such as BDS.<sup>77</sup>

This policy acknowledges that Qatar is too important for Israel to cut ties with it over time. Israel would gain more from cooperating with Qatar in a way that no longer harms its interests. The question is how Israel can hold Qatar to such terms, and what happens if Qatar gradually slides back on them. Past experience, and particularly the unsuccessful 2017-2021 boycott by leading Arab countries (detailed above), shows that Qatar does not yield easily to diplomatic pressure.<sup>78</sup>

**Implementation:** To implement this policy, Israel has to adopt firmer positions and change its strategy of “knocking on every door”. It can choose to use incentives or pressure tactics, as detailed in the next section, to make its demands on Qatar. We believe the first condition, in its broad version (stopping support for terrorism) should be Israel’s top priority. The other two conditions are more ambitious, but important in order to set clear moral boundaries. Qatar’s ties with Hamas may have already damaged it enough to create interest in a policy change, even without external pressure. Israel has to create timelines and measurement tools to assess Qatar’s responsiveness. Qatar has already hinted, since October 7, that it will rethink its relationship with Hamas after the war.<sup>79</sup> This may be the context for understanding a statement by the spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Majed Al-Ansari, on CNN that as long as the war continues, Qatar will maintain the Hamas offices in Doha.<sup>80</sup> The Palestinian news agency interpreted this as meaning that as long as the

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<sup>76</sup> Dr. Harel Chorev, the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies at Tel Aviv University. Interviewed by Maryann Bisharat, 2 November 2023.

<sup>77</sup> [“How Qatar is paying US institutions \\$1.3 billion to gain ‘dubious influence’”](#). *Al-Arabiya (English)*, 20 May 2020.

<sup>78</sup> Patrick Wintour, [“Arab States Agree to End Three-Year Boycott of Qatar”](#). *The Guardian*, 5 January 2021.

<sup>79</sup> John Hudson, [“U.S., Qatar to revisit Doha’s ties to Hamas after Gaza hostage crisis”](#). *The Washington Post*, 26 October 2023.

<sup>80</sup> Becky Anderson, [“Qatari mediation efforts for the release of hostages held by Hamas are still ongoing, says Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson @majedalansari”](#). X, 28 October 2023.

war continues, the Hamas offices in Doha will remain open.<sup>81</sup> For Israel and the US, this statement hinted at Qatar's intention to sever ties with Hamas after the war.

**Implications:** This policy will keep Qatar within Israel's sphere and still involved, although in the limited ways outlined in the policy. One challenge is the possibility that Qatar may opt for partial implementation. A goal such as stopping incitement against Israeli may be ambiguous and hard to measure, forcing Israel to compromise on certain aspects. If Qatar does not comply or refuses to cooperate, Israel can opt for the third policy of cutting ties.

### ***Policy option 2: Diversification***

**Description:** Reshaping ties with Qatar so it does not have exclusive influence over various aspects of managing the Palestinian territories. A prominent feature of Qatar's foreign policy is acting as a "lone wolf". Among Arab states, it is the least dependent on partnering with other countries in the Israeli-Palestinian context. It has to create ad-hoc collaborations for specific purposes, but is not associated with an alliance or a clear coalition of countries. It prefers to create conditions for leading, and avoids binding ties as much as possible. In contrast, many other Arab states operate in a more interconnected and complex regional political space. Examples include the Abraham Accords, which included UAE collaboration with Bahrain and Saudi Arabia; Egypt's mediation with Israel and Gaza, which included aid packages from moderate Gulf states; and the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, which is based on Saudi Arabia's ability to garner Arab League support, despite its ability to promote initiatives independently as a leading state. For Israel, it is easier to engage politically with states that tend to collaborate for two main reasons: such systems tend to be more moderate, and they allow for multiple channels of communication and maneuvering between the various players.

This policy would have Israel work to prevent Qatar from having exclusive control over diplomatic, economic and civil ties with the Palestinians. According to a former senior Mossad member, Israel had – and can still have – a high degree of control over external actors involved in the Palestinian sphere.<sup>82</sup> Just as Israel initially gave Qatar limited access and then welcomed it with open arms through the transfer of funds from Ben Gurion Airport to Gaza, it can also choose to close doors. However, as in the first policy option, this proposal assumes that Israel cannot ignore Qatar's regional and global assets over time. Its ideological and material impact will find a willing audience and outstretched hands in the Palestinian territories, but Israel certainly can and should work to mitigate it. Also, according to Prof. Elie Podeh, Qatar offers a crucial

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<sup>81</sup> "[Qatar: Hamas offices in Doha cannot be shut down now due to their importance to ending the conflict](#)", *Palestinian News Agency (Arabic)*, 29 October 2023.

<sup>82</sup> Former senior Mossad member, interviewed by Moran Zaga, 6 October 2023.

connection with all of Israel's enemies, primarily Iran, so maintaining a long-term relationship is important.<sup>83</sup>

**Implementation:** The most effective way to diversify external influence on the Palestinians, and accordingly on Israel, is to incorporate more players. These can be regional states, Western states, international entities such as the EU, companies and private entrepreneurs from various places. Israel should use all its diplomatic skills to create multilateral channels in order to diversify future policy options. Additionally, once the political order in Gaza and the West Bank becomes clear after the war, Israel should actively incorporate moderate states from the alliance that are considered friendly to Israel: Egypt, Jordan, the UAE, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. We believe the UAE has an especially important role, since it has demonstrated its political abilities in Yemen and Egypt, as well as its commitment to normalization with Israel.<sup>84</sup>

A former senior Mossad member who had dealings with these states suggested “creating joint motivation for Qatar and Egypt to bring a different form of governance into Gaza.”<sup>85</sup> He pointed out that Qatar's ties with Saudi Arabia, and the personal relationship between Mohammed bin Salman, the Saudi crown prince, and Sheikh Tamim, have improved significantly since the reconciliation in 2021. This renewed relationship is reflected in joint investments and projects, and therefore, the Saudis may support a solution proposed by Qatar.<sup>86</sup> This was evident during the war when the offices of the Qatari Committee for Reconstruction of the Gaza Strip were hit, a development condemned both by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and individually by each member state, including Saudi Arabia and the UAE.<sup>87</sup> The condemnation indicated Abu Dhabi's and Riyadh's implicit approval of Qatari presence in Gaza. This approach aligns with the policy of diversification we propose.

After the war, all parties will engage in reconstructing Gaza.<sup>88</sup> We recommend Israel take part in choosing the project owners, at least in the initial stages, and consider economic initiatives only within the framework of broad partnerships and not as individual states. Joint projects will prevent sole dependence on a particular resource or political actor.

**Implications:** Adopting this policy would mean Qatar retains its influence in the Israeli-Palestinian sphere, but in a limited, controlled and more moderate way. A possible plus

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<sup>83</sup> Prof. Elie Podeh, the Hebrew University, interviewed by Moran Zaga and Ariel Admoni, 30 October 2023.

<sup>84</sup> Senior foreign ministry official, interviewed by Moran Zaga, 29 October 2023.

<sup>85</sup> Former senior Mossad member, interviewed by Moran Zaga, 30 November 2023.

<sup>86</sup> Former senior Mossad member, interviewed by Moran Zaga, 30 November 2023.

<sup>87</sup> “[Arab, Islamic countries condemn Israeli bombing of Qatari headquarters in Gaza](#)”, *Anadolu Ajansı*, 14 November 2023.

<sup>88</sup> Dr. Nimrod Goren, president of Mitvim and senior fellow at the Middle East Institute in Washington, interviewed by Moran Zaga, 29 October 2023.

is that Qatar will grow more flexible and adapt its support to the interests of more moderate forces within the Palestinian leadership. We predict that Qatar's motivation to maintain influence over the Palestinians will help advance other Palestinian leaders as an alternative to Hamas. The policy of diversification and collaboration to which Israel will bind Qatar will create a system of checks and balances, fostering stability in the region. Removing dependence on Qatar can naturally rein in its ambitious regional policy. However, a possible negative outcome is that moderate players will have less freedom to act under Qatar's ongoing influence, even within the framework of broad partnerships. Although this outcome is not predetermined, as Qatar may want to continue its influence and work with existing actors, it is important to leave room for removing states that harm reconstruction and stabilization efforts, an issue the diversification policy is supposed to solve. It also possible that a policy that eliminates Qatar's exclusivity will also lower its motivation to invest in the Palestinian sphere. However, according to some interviewees, Qatar's ideological and moral identification with the Palestinian cause is too significant to abandon it under a different political structure.

### ***Policy option 3: Cutting ties***

**Description:** Severing Israel's de facto ties with Qatar. Various research experts and decision-makers support this option.<sup>89</sup> Ethically this is understandable, as Qatar is an unreliable entity supporting parties hostile to Israel while maintaining a stance of fair mediator. In this spirit, viewing Qatar as a hostile state also make sense as it has often acted to undermine Israeli interests and is a biased mediator. This policy has both pragmatic and ethical-moral justifications for drawing a clear line between stabilizing and destabilizing countries, and between supporters of peace or of terrorism.

There are several layers to this policy, including: completely severing covert ties and unofficial dialogue carried out directly between Israel and Qatar; blocking the movement of goods, funds and messengers from Qatar to the Palestinian territories via the Israeli crossings (while recognizing that Qatar may find alternative routes); and cutting ties with Qatar on broader, multilateral scale, including terminating partnerships in joint forums and ceasing to promote shared interests in Washington.

**Implementation:** The effectiveness of this policy would depend on Israel's ability to get other countries on board. European countries and especially the US have broad ties with Qatar that are very important to policy makers in Doha, both economically and geopolitically. Therefore, Israel detaching itself alone is unlikely to have a major impact, other than some limitation on its avenues for funding. However, if Israel

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<sup>89</sup> Former senior National Security Council member, interviewed by Moran Zaga, 30 November 2023; Dr. Michael Milshstein, Dayan Center, Tel Aviv University, interviewed by Ariel Admoni, 5 November 2023; Dr. Harel Chorev, Dayan Center, Tel Aviv University, interviewed by Maryann Bisharat, 2 November 2023.

manages to lead a campaign to cut ties involving other countries, and especially the US, this would be a substantial blow to Qatar.

Detaching from Qatar can take other forms, too. Ending trade relations and the activities of Israeli and international companies can damage Doha, which takes care to maintain various trade relations around the world. A more direct approach could employ the legal avenue of courts, building a case for the “vicarious liability” of senior Qatari officials for funding terrorism, not only from an Israeli perspective.

Also, ties cannot be cut without setting up a stable, more moderate alternative for external aid, especially as the demand to rehabilitate Gaza will likely increase. One alternative can be to empower other states, such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE, as a communication channel vis-à-vis the party that will take administrative responsibility for Gaza after the war.

**Implications:** Removing Qatar from its dealings with Gaza, and with the Palestinians in general, would have several implications. The immediate consequence of cutting Qatar off from Israel would be to disrupt the response to the power vacuum emerging in Gaza. This may hinder the immediate development of an alternative, as it will create a dearth of resources, of knowledge and of external experience in running significant aspects of life in Gaza. What is needed is an overall solution in the form of an alternative political order after the war, with other countries undertaking to meet the needs Qatar provided for, such as supplying fuel, constructing roads, building neighborhoods, establishing vital public institutions and responding to humanitarian needs unmet by UNRWA. This vacuum will increase the initial chaos, but may also be a golden opportunity to create a new aid infrastructure based on actors whose interests align more with those of Israel. This depends on whether other countries are interested in broadly investing in Gaza, as Qatar was until 2023.

From a politically realistic perspective, this option appears too costly and unbearable for Israel and has therefore been dismissed by other researchers.<sup>90</sup> It would be difficult to implement for two main reasons. First, Qatar may maintain some degree of direct contact with the Palestinian leadership and population, with Israel unable to prevent it. Qatar may attempt to reenter the Palestinian sphere and is unlikely to accept blocking attempts, especially vis-à-vis the Palestinians it holds ideologically dear.<sup>91</sup> This would be based on existing organizations in the area, once Doha loses the Hamas mechanism that was its regular contact.<sup>92</sup> Choosing this path, given Israel’s opposition, would not align with Israeli interests and may even involve a hostile policy towards Israel and support for extremist elements on the ground. The second difficulty lies in

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<sup>90</sup> Prof. Elie Podeh, the Hebrew University, interviewed by Moran Zaga and Ariel Admoni, 30 October 2023.

<sup>91</sup> Policy researcher located in Qatar and Iran, interviewed Ariel Admoni, 1 November 2023.

<sup>92</sup> Former senior Mossad member, interviewed by Moran Zaga, 30 November 2023.

Qatar remaining an important global player. Its numerous energy initiatives with many countries, economic investment in projects on different continents, and the defense outpost it provides the US, make Doha crucial to the West. This is particularly true given international developments making Qatar an alternative source to Russian gas.<sup>93</sup> This means that any attempt to cut ties with Qatar must be accompanied by constant monitoring of its regional influence in various forms.

Another potential outcome is that the vacuum created by Qatar's removal could attract growing Iranian influence and other Islamist entities that thus far have no ties with Arab countries.<sup>94</sup>

### **E. Coping strategies: How to achieve policy change**

Reshaping Israel's policy on Qatar requires rethinking broader strategies, as part of learning from past mistakes. We focus here on two issues: managing the relationship and Israel's range of incentives and pressure points to use against Qatar.

#### ***Who leads Israeli policy planning on Qatar?***

Recent events make it clear that we must reexamine who is managing Israel's ties with Qatar and shaping policy. This should come under the purview of a comprehensive state-security framework, preferably the National Security Council. Typically, countries without official ties to Israel prefer and even request to work through the Mossad.<sup>95</sup> Despite its advantages in building sensitive relationships and maintaining secrecy, the Mossad is an intelligence agency that cannot and should not be charged with addressing the broader political picture. Naturally, in its dealings with such countries, the Mossad focuses on solving specific problems and addressing immediate needs. The clearest example is the covert visit<sup>96</sup> to Qatar by Yossi Cohen, then chief of Mossad, and Herzl Halevi, then OC Southern Command and now Israel's chief of staff.<sup>97</sup> Responding to a Qatari threat to halt payments to the Gaza Strip, Cohen and Halevi reportedly asked Qatar to continue the funding. Those decisions have now come under heavy criticism for nurturing a dangerous misconception. Qatar's funding lulled Israel into complacency while helping Hamas build up military power.<sup>98</sup> In line with this criticism, we argue that the Mossad cannot

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<sup>93</sup> Dr. Yossi Mann, expert on energy geopolitics at Bar Ilan University, interviewed by Ariel Admoni, 30 October 2023.

<sup>94</sup> "[The Advent of Terrorism in Qatar](#)", *Forbes*, 25 March 2005.

<sup>95</sup> Former senior Mossad member, interviewed by Moran Zaga, 30 November 2023.

<sup>96</sup> Leaked by former Minister of Defense Avigdor Lieberman.

<sup>97</sup> "[Chief of Mossad and OC Southern Command visited Qatar and asked that transfer of funds to Gaza continue](#)", *Haaretz*, 22 February 2022 (Hebrew).

<sup>98</sup> Doron Peskin, "[16 years of Qatari money has created a monster](#)", *Calcalist*, 25 October 2023 (Hebrew).



integrate broad trends and lead long-term policy. Responsibility for this lies with the National Security Council, which can consult external experts to fill in knowledge gaps and challenge traditional perceptions. As part of the lessons learned, we recommend retaining the Mossad's role as an operational arm that assigns field personnel and manages the covert relationship with its specialized tools and experience. However, Israel's ties with these countries should be based on comprehensive political thinking, even if the challenge appears to be ad hoc problem-solving. This requires expanding the circle of people and bodies relevant to shaping such considerations.

To advance its interests in reshaping ties with Qatar, Israel will clearly have to use incentives, pressure points, or a combination of both.

### ***Positive incentives***

**Retaining influence:** Qatar's main incentive is to retain influence by finding an alternative to its partnership and reliance on Hamas (and vice versa). If implemented, this alternative will require various adjustments and conditions, as detailed in the first and second policy options. This incentive may also affect Qatar's motivation to assist in releasing captives and weakening Hamas.

**Creative rewards:** Another incentive Israel can offer Qatar to promote its short- and long-term interests is a reward elsewhere. Inasmuch as Israel manages to build up a regional order, or even an international one along with Western countries, Qatar's efforts regarding the Palestinians can be rewarded by another country, in light of interests regarding other players in various round-trip deals. This would address both immediate needs, such as releasing captives and weakening Hamas, and Israel's desire to reduce Qatari involvement in the long run.

**International legitimacy:** Since the war began, Qatar has used its role as intermediary to whitewash itself in the West. The UK changed its tone on Doha in a meeting between Sheikh Tamim and UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak (as detailed further on), where the central message emerged that the UK supported Qatar's efforts to secure a hostage release deal. This sentiment was echoed by many other heads of states.

### ***Pressure points and weaknesses***

Israel can also pressure Qatar to stick to its terms by exploit its vulnerabilities. Possible pressure points include:

**Military-security threat:** We believe that Qatar's weakest spot is military inferiority, being a small state without strategic depth, a large and well-trained military, or a security alliance ensuring military cooperation in case of an attack. Here, Israel has a significant advantage. Following Netanyahu's statement that "all of Hamas in Gaza

and beyond are marked for death”, Israel’s opposition leader added that “we must not rest until we kill all six Hamas leaders”, referring also to those in Doha. Many of Qatar’s actions derive from a marked sense of military insecurity. Threatening military action in its territory would raise security fears and enhance Israel’s image as a country with long reach.

However, Israel also has a clear limitation: the US presence in Qatar and the relationship between the two countries, which would not allow Israel to act without US approval and coordination. Israel can try to persuade the US to challenge Qatari security and stop its security partnership as a non-NATO country, and even threaten to relocate its military base from Al Udeid, a step that would be considered extreme. The US response to such a suggestion cannot be predicted at this point.

**Diplomatic pressure:** Qatar is diplomatically vulnerable as it operates as a “lone wolf” rather than joining stable regional alliances. Given its reliance on various global powers, pressure from individual countries such as the US and Germany to release the captives, and later to cease support for terrorism, can be effective. Notably, political leaders and organizations in the West have been hesitant regarding Qatar since October 7. In the 2010s, western pressure is what led Qatar to adopt more stringent enforcement on funding of terrorist entities by Qatari citizens, and to remove key figures from the ruling family for supporting Islamist elements. Its close ties with the US were made evident when Qatari ambassador Meshal bin Hamad Al Thani wrote that Hamas set up offices in Qatar in 2012 at Washington’s request, and that the aid to Palestinians involved western countries led by the US.<sup>99</sup> This means that a request from Washington to close these offices, and a strong demand to disassociate from Hamas, may also be heeded.

When Qatar improved its relations with Israel (2008-1996), one of its main goals was to improve ties with the US. Qatari officials believed that “the way to Washington is through Tel Aviv”.<sup>100</sup> As it considers relations with the US a strategic asset, Qatar responds swiftly to any criticism by the US. When members of Congress commented on its role in the Hamas attack, the Qatari foreign ministry posted on social media that Qatar was “surprised”. The post was deleted within hours, indicating Qatar’s caution towards Washington. The US was not alone in receiving such a response. When UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak called for sanctions on Qatar for hosting senior Hamas leaders,<sup>101</sup> the emir arrived for a visit within days, and his meeting with Sunak ended

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<sup>99</sup> Meshal Al Thani, “[Qatar Is the Mideast’s Honest Broker](#)”. *Wall Street Journal*, 29 October 2023.

<sup>100</sup> Ariel Admoni, “[Same Reasons, Different Outcomes: Qatar’s Policy on Israel up to 1996](#)”. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 2021, p. 9.

<sup>101</sup> Edward Malnick and Susie Coen, “[Rishi Sunak Urged to Sanction Qatar, where Hamas Leaders Live in Five-Star Luxury](#)”. *The Telegraph*, 15 October 2023.

in praise for Qatar for its efforts on behalf of the captives.<sup>102</sup> The emir also visited Berlin, again in response to criticism. German chancellor Olaf Scholz visited Israel during the war, after the emir received a chilly reception in Germany. The explanation given in Germany was that it must not rely for energy on parties that do not recognize Israel's right to exist. The emir understood that German's condition for meeting was to remain discreet and out of media sight.<sup>103</sup>

All this indicates that western opinion is another soft spot for Qatar. This became apparent during the preparations for hosting the World Cup. Qatar needed the "kafala" system, in which foreign workers depend entirely on their employers, to closely monitor the presence of foreign nationals in the country.<sup>104</sup> However, international pressure to abolish this system led to significant reform. Another example is funding Islamist elements around the world. Under growing international pressure, Qatar tightened its legal controls to prevent such funding. The country's elite has expressed genuine concern over the US response to Qatar after the October 7 attack.<sup>105</sup>

**Legal and economic pressure and attacking Qatar's image:** Qatar's branding strategy relies heavily on its considerable public influence in the West. We assume this creates some vulnerability to international sanctions. Various suggestions have been made since October 7 to impose an economic boycott and rebrand Qatar negatively, given its support for Hamas and for terrorism in general.<sup>106</sup> One option is an international campaign that would damage Qatar's reputation, exposing it as a state that sponsors terrorists, maintains close ties with Iran and promotes terrorism around the world, with Chechnya, Libya and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt among the examples.<sup>107</sup> Qatar justifies its support for Islamist causes with arguments tailored to western ears. In a September 2011 interview on Al Jazeera, Sheikh Hamad said: "I believe you will see this extremism transform into civilian life and civil society."<sup>108</sup> This made it clear that Qatar's leaders do not see Islamist causes as a problematic religious ideology, but as an expression of public wishes in Islamic societies in the Middle East. In a similar message, that Islamist views represent authentic voices in various countries, Prime Minister Hamad bin Jassim said that Islamists would be the next

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<sup>102</sup> Nick Gutteridge, "[Rishi Sunak Thanks Qatar for Efforts to free UK Hostages Taken by Hamas](#)". *The Telegraph*, 20 October 2023.

<sup>103</sup> Hans von der Burchard, "[German Gas Deal with Qatar under Renewed Scrutiny](#)", Politico, 12 October 2023.

<sup>104</sup> James M. Dorsey, 2016, p. 252.

<sup>105</sup> Policy researcher located in Qatar and Iran, interviewed Ariel Admoni, 1 November 2023.

<sup>106</sup> Former senior National Security Council member, interviewed by Moran Zaga, 30 November 2023; Dr. Harel Chorev, Dayan Center, Tel Aviv University, interviewed by Maryann Bisharat, 2 November 2023.

<sup>107</sup> Dr. Yossi Mann, expert on energy geopolitics at Bar Ilan University, interviewed by Ariel Admoni, 30 October 2023.

<sup>108</sup> Sam Dagher, Charles Levinson, and Margaret Coker, "[Tiny Kingdom's Huge Role in Libya Draws Concern](#)". *The Wall Street Journal*, 17 October 2011.

power in the Middle East.<sup>109</sup> This was also Sheikh Tamim's approach. In his first interview as emir, he addressed allegations that Qatar was funding terrorism by stating that not all Islamic movements in the region are terrorist organizations.<sup>110</sup> The " Hamas=ISIS" campaign may be causing some concern in Qatar, laying the ground for more reputational damage that would drive a change of agenda, both at home and externally.

Another option is real economic threats, which would increase Qatar's reputational damage, by canceling contracts, disengaging from Qatari funding for research and education institutes, closing Al Jazeera channels in key countries, and imposing sanctions on products and services of Qatari origin. Both the image-campaign and economic pressure options require international cooperation, relinquishing Qatari assets (sometimes replacing them with more extreme players), and real damage to the international boycott countries, which will naturally enjoy less economic diversity without Qatar. Yigal Carmon, president of Israel's Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI),<sup>111</sup> called on Israeli cyber companies to use their power against Qatar.<sup>112</sup> Israeli cyber professionals stated they were ready to attack Hamas during the war,<sup>113</sup> as well as Qatar.<sup>114</sup> An example of such pressure occurred early in the war. Paddy Cosgrave, CEO and co-founder of Web Summit, Europe's largest technology conference, made anti-Israeli statements from his location in Qatar. A campaign among tech giants led to big tech companies such as Amazon and Google withdrawing from the event, which was supposed to be held in Qatar and was subsequently cancelled.<sup>115</sup> This decision affected Qatar, which goes to great lengths to host as many conferences as possible, regardless of their content, in order to gain importance.<sup>116</sup> Discussion in the tech industry included fears that expanding war to countries like Qatar would lead to US sanctions on business activities there.<sup>117</sup>

Another pressure lever that has proven effective against Qatar's support for terrorism is legal action. Qatari businessmen have been tried in British courts on charges of

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<sup>109</sup> ["Qatari Premier Says the West should Embrace "Arab Spring" Islamists"](#), Al Arabiya (English), 11 December 2011.

<sup>110</sup> Mick Krever, ["Qatar's Emir: We Don't Fund Terrorists"](#). *CNN*, 25 September 2014.

<sup>111</sup> MEMRI tracks Arabic- and Persian-language media and translates excerpts on political, ideological, social, religious and economic affairs into various languages.

<sup>112</sup> Yigal Carmon in an interview with Rino Tzror, ["Massive economic pressure on Qatar will help release the captives"](#), MEMRI, 29 October 2023 (Hebrew).

<sup>113</sup> ["Israeli Cyber Community Unites to Bolster Cybersecurity Defenses amidst Gaza War"](#). *Calcalist*, 13 October 2023.

<sup>114</sup> ["Israel Gaza Conflict: The Cyber Perspective"](#), *Cyfirma*, 18 October 2023.

<sup>115</sup> Ruti Levy, "The boycott worked: Web Summit CEO who spoke out against Israel resigns", *TheMarker*, 29 October 2023 (Hebrew).

<sup>116</sup> Member of Israel's Trade Office in Doha in the early '00s, interviewed by Ariel Admoni, 13 August 2023.

<sup>117</sup> Makenzie Holland, ["Israel-Hamas war could Affect Tech Industry in Middle East"](#). *Tech Target*, 18 October 2023.

“vicarious complicity” in acts of terror they funded. In this context, it is important to note what is happening in India. During the war, a Qatari court sentenced eight Indians to death on charges of spying for Israel.<sup>118</sup> India’s Central Economic Intelligence Bureau announced an investigation into suspected tax evasion by several bodies, including Qatar Airways.<sup>119</sup> An Israeli-based legal forum has already applied to the International Criminal Court in The Hague to urgently launch an investigation of Hamas for war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity.<sup>120</sup> The families of individuals killed or captured on October 7 have announced they will consider filing a series of lawsuits against entities that assisted Hamas, hinting at Qatar.

While these historical examples indicate a certain sensitivity to reputational, legal or economic damage as a pressure point, even in these cases Qatar did damage control without changing its policy. It proved resilient yet again, in the face of allegations of corruption regarding the World Cup and of damage to its reputation by neighboring Gulf countries, which ultimately did not change its alliance with the US or its ability to continue promoting its interests around the world.<sup>121</sup>

## **F. Conclusions**

Israel is facing numerous questions about the aftermath of war, and how to design a geopolitical architecture that provide stability, security, and prosperity for both sides. Big changes sometimes come only after a major crisis. Therefore, even after October 7, we identify an opportunity for change – bought at a heavy price to lives. There is a broad consensus in Israel that a new policy is needed on Gaza, and on the Palestinian issue in general. Any new strategy cannot ignore regional players, including Qatar.

As Doha will continue its approach of engaging with all stakeholders, binary thinking on Qatar’s allegiance is neither correct nor effective. It is also important to remember that Israel has no power to diminish Qatar’s regional and global influence, certainly not its own. The assets and anchors Qatar has accumulated around the world make it highly resilient to economic pressure or reputational damage. Qatar’s only effective weak spot is a direct or indirect security threat, such as the removal of the American defense umbrella. Israel can exert limited security pressure on Qatar (for example, through targeted assassinations of terrorist leaders in its territory). However, more meaningful pressure would require coordination and cooperation between Israel and

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<sup>118</sup> Krishn Kaushik and Andrew Mills, “[Indians Given Death Penalty in Qatar Accused of Spying for Israel, Sources Say](#)”. Reuters, 27 October 2023.

<sup>119</sup> Basudha Das, “[DGGI conducts searches at India offices of Qatar Airways, Etihad, Emirates, other foreign airlines: Report](#)”. *Business Today*, 19 October 2023.

<sup>120</sup> Ariel Kahana, “[Fighting Hamas: First ICC complaint and campaign to stop EU funding](#)”, *Israel Hayom*, 26 October 2023 (Hebrew).

<sup>121</sup> Dr. Yossi Mann, expert on energy geopolitics at Bar Ilan University, interviewed by Ariel Admoni, 30 October 2023.

the US, with repercussions for all parties. Despite the limitations on its power and diplomatic options, Israel does have some ability to shape Qatar's involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian sphere.

A key takeaway from this paper is that Qatar will not be quick to abandon its areas of influence in the region. **We propose to undo this bind by offering Qatar an alternative form of influence, eliminating Israeli and Palestinian dependence on it.** Qatar can be motivated to act against Hamas, even during the war, by proposing an alternative that keeps it involved in the region, but only within a broad framework of regional partnership.

The major outline currently discussed by international and regional factors is rehabilitating the Palestinian Authority and implementation its administration in Gaza. If this direction gains traction, the PA will clearly need external assistance. Scenarios that exclude the PA also acknowledge that any civic mechanism running Gaza will need substantial external assistance. This is a critical juncture for ensuring that the countries and entities stepping into the power vacuum in Gaza will shape a stable political, economic and security reality. We must ensure that the motivation of moderate external players is higher than that of Qatar, and of other actors encouraging terror and extremism.

Realistically, Qatar is likely to retain influence over the Palestinians. However, it is up to Israel to curb this influence (as it did until about 2014) and ensure that Qatar does not have exclusive control over any aspect of administration in the Palestinian territories and among Palestinian governmental bodies. Israel must stop relying on Qatar as an exclusive partner who know how to talk to Hamas and solve economic or political problems. The former senior Mossad member we spoke with summed this up: "We must not let strong emotions [in Israel] against the Gulf states, and specifically Qatar, stand in the way of identifying opportunities, in a reality where such chances rarely arise."<sup>122</sup> Therefore, our main recommendation is that Israel adopt a policy of diversification, incorporating regional players into the Israeli-Palestinian sphere as a leading strategy for shaping its relations with Qatar.

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<sup>122</sup> Former senior Mossad member, interviewed by Moran Zaga, 30 November 2023.