



## Qatari PM calls Doha strike 'state terror,' vows a regional response

**Ben Samuels, Jonathan Lis, Jack Khoury and Reuters**

Qatar's Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, the most senior mediator between Israel and Hamas in the hostage and cease-fire talks said Wednesday that there will be a regional response to Israel's strike on Doha Tuesday targeting Hamas officials.

In an interview with CNN, Qatar's prime minister and prime minister said the response "is currently under consultation and discussion with other partners in the region," adding that an Arab-Islamic summit will be held in Doha in the coming days to decide on a course of action.

Sheikh Mohammed noted that several Qatari officers were critically wounded in the attack.

He accused Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of "wasting" Qatar's time in negotiations and of "leading the Middle East to chaos." Sheikh Mohammed warned that "the entire [Persian] Gulf region is at risk," adding that Qatar is reassessing "everything" about its mediating role and about Hamas' presence in the country.

Israeli defense officials are still assessing the outcome of Tuesday strike in Doha, as no evidence of the assassinations of Hamas' top brass in Qatar has surfaced. Hamas officials told Saudi newspaper Asharq Al-Awsat on Wednesday that two members of the organization's political bureau were wounded with one of



A building in Gaza City collapsing after an Israeli strike on Wednesday.

Majdi Fathi via Reuters Connect

them in serious condition. According to the officials, the two are hospitalized in a private hospital under heavy security, but their names have not been provided.

Canada has stated that it is evaluating its relationship with Israel after the attack in Qatar, Foreign

Minister Anita Anand said on Wednesday, in the latest sign of unhappiness with the Israeli government. Anand reiterated that Canada considered the attack to be unacceptable, especially given Qatari attempts to facilitate peace in the Middle East.

Anand made her com-

ments when asked whether Canada might follow the lead of the European Commission, which said it would propose the suspension of trade-related measures in a European Union agreement with Israel.

"We are evaluating our relationship with Israel,"

Anand told reporters on the sidelines of a meeting of the ruling Liberal Party in Edmonton. Asked specifically whether Canada was considering any kinds of sanctions against Israel, she replied: "We will continue to evaluate our next steps."

In a statement issued by

the Prime Minister's Office on Wednesday, Netanyahu threatened further action against senior Hamas officials living abroad. "I say to Qatar and all nations who harbor terrorists, you either expel them or you bring

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## Premature applause for risky gamble

The celebrations proved premature. Nearly two days after the Israel Air Force strike in Qatar, suspicions are mounting that the operation failed to achieve its stated objectives. Hamas and the Qatari government have maintained strict silence about the results, but at this stage it appears that fewer senior Hamas officials were harmed in the bombing than initially believed.

More significantly, it has emerged that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu approved the attack despite opposition from most of Israel's senior defense officials and in defiance of stern warnings about the move's potential negative impact on a hostage deal.

As the regional war grinds on and grows more complex, Israel is taking ever greater risks with its targeted killings. About two weeks ago, the air force struck in Yemen's capital, Sanaa, in an attempt to eliminate much of the Houthi government leadership. Then, on Tuesday, Hamas' negotiating team in Qatar was hit during a meeting meant to shape strategy for a potential hostage deal.

The strikes aren't only reaching farther afield, but the targets themselves are becoming increasingly ambitious. Until recently, Israel had portrayed its series of assassinations as a string of growing successes. Yet the strike in Yemen yielded only partial results: the prime minister and several ministers were killed, but the Houthi security chiefs escaped unscathed, and the operation in Qatar may yet prove a failure.

The gravest danger lies with the hostages' lives and safety. International con-

demnations of Israel's strike in Qatar may be easy to dismiss, but does Israel not fear that Hamas will exploit the incident to further worsen the hostages' already dire conditions in Gaza's tunnels or even threaten to harm them?

It must be said bluntly: Safeguarding the hostages is no longer a top priority for Netanyahu. His overriding concern is holding on to power at any cost. And in his view, the surest path to that goal is through a war that drags on for as long as possible.

## Sinking along with Netanyahu

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For now, U.S. President Donald Trump is allowing him additional time in Gaza, while cautioning against dragging the war out for too long. Some expect Trump will demand an end to the fighting by year's end. This, in turn, explains Netanyahu's push to expand the ground incursion into Gaza City. It was at his insistence that the strike in Qatar was carried out before the launch of a more intensive ground offensive there.

Trump's level of support for Israel's operation depends on him maintaining good personal ties with Netanyahu. What remains unclear is what transpired between Jerusalem and Washington in the hours, and even weeks, leading to the strike. In a statement at the end of August, IDF Chief of

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IDF Chief of Staff Eyal Zamir, earlier this week.

IDF

## Zamir ordered Gaza City cleared despite legal counsel

**Yaniv Kubovich**

IDF Chief of Staff Eyal Zamir on Monday ordered the evacuation of the entire population of Gaza City, contrary to the position of the army's top lawyer, the IDF's Military Advocate General, Yifat Tomer-Yerushalmi.

Last week, Tomer-Yerushalmi warned Zamir that it could not be determined

that the planned evacuation operations to southern Gaza would be legal and demanded that evacuation notices be postponed until the necessary conditions for receiving the population were in place, but he ignored her position.

A few days later, he convened a meeting with IDF Southern Command Chief Yaniv Asor and Coordinator

of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) Ghassan Alian, excluding the Military Advocate General, and the three decided to order all residents of Gaza City to move south without informing Tomer-Yerushalmi of the decision.

The Military Advocate General is the IDF authority responsible for interpreting international law, and senior

military officials said they could not recall a case in which a Chief of Staff ignored the top lawyer's position on such a significant issue.

Zamir frequently emphasizes that he is committed to acting in accordance with international law, both publicly and in conversations with reservists concerned about violations of the laws of war. "The IDF always acts in ac-

cordance with domestic and international law," the army chief said in May. "Any claim questioning the integrity of our actions or the morality of our soldiers is baseless."

Last week, Zamir held several meetings with senior legal officials and top military leaders regarding the evacuation of Gaza City residents and their transfer to southern Gaza. During

these discussions, the army chief, the Southern Command chief, and the COGAT commander were asked to provide the Military Advocate General with a comprehensive report detailing the humanitarian situation in southern Gaza and the status of infrastructure required under international

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## Elizabeth Tsurkov, Israeli grad student abducted in Iraq, freed

**Liza Rozovsky, Ben Samuels, Jonathan Lis and Reuters**

An Israeli-Russian graduate student who was abducted in Iraq more than two years ago has been released by the militant group Kata'ib Hezbollah and landed in Israel Wednesday night.

Elizabeth Tsurkov, a Princeton University doctoral student, was kidnapped in March 2023 by the Shiite militia while on a research trip, according to officials.

Her release was confirmed in a Tuesday statement from U.S. President

Donald Trump, who wrote on his social media platform that Tsurkov "is now safely in the American Embassy in Iraq after being tortured for many months."

Trump added that her sister is an American citizen and concluded his statement with a call for Hamas to release its hostages.

The student's release came less than a week after Trump signed an executive order to strengthen efforts against hostage diplomacy. Her family struggled to secure support from the previous administration because Tsurkov is not an American

citizen. However, a Trump administration hostage negotiator traveled to Iraq in February to push for her release.

Emma Tsurkov, one of Elizabeth's sisters, said the "entire family is incredibly happy. We cannot wait to see Elizabeth and give her all the love we have been waiting to share for 903 days." She thanked Trump and his Special Envoy Adam Boehler, who she said made her sister's return his "personal mission." She also thanked the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad.

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David Bachar

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## Israel's religious left finds new sense of purpose with Gaza war

**Judy Maltz**

The invitation to the event did not include a dress code. But among the large crowd of proudly left-wing religious Israelis packing Jerusalem's best-known synagogue, a t-shirt featuring the following quote from Maimonides – the influential medieval Torah scholar – seems to be especially popular: "There is no greater mitzvah than redeeming captives."

It is a clear response, perhaps even a rebuke, to the great number of religious Israelis who continue to support the country's devastating war in Gaza at the expense of a hostage deal.

Symbolically, as this Smol Emuni ("Faithful Left") conference is kicking off late Tuesday afternoon, news breaks that Israel had just carried out an assassination attempt on the entire Hamas leadership in Qatar. But rather than serve as cause for celebration, it seems to confirm the worst fears of the religious peaceniks attending this conference: that the Israeli government is intent on sabotaging the latest round of talks on a cease-fire and hostage deal.

Smol Emuni was launched in early 2023, soon after the formation of the most reli-



More than 1,000 Israelis joined Smol Emuni's conference in Jerusalem.

Naama Grynbbaum

gious, right-wing government in Israeli history. It sought to give voice to the minority of religious Jews in Israel who oppose the occupation, support Palestinian rights and see peace and coexistence as intrinsically Jewish values.

Addressing the standing-room-only crowd gathered for the event, founder Mikhael Manekin notes that their struggle has gained far more urgency since the

events of October 7.

It is incumbent on those here, he says, to present a "contra" to religious right-wingers who invoke Torah "to justify atrocities, like mass killings and starvation in Gaza," to secular Israelis who are "suspicious of Torah," and to "our Palestinian partners in this sacred land."

Nearly 1,000 people, representing a wide spectrum of "faithful" Jews, have registered for Tuesday's con-

ference: They range from ultra-Orthodox men dressed in traditional Hasidic garb to female rabbis ordained by the Reform movement.

Underscoring the religious diversity of the crowd is the wide assortment of head coverings on display, including black velvet hats, Druze-style kippot, wigs and headbands. A not-insignificant number of participants

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## EU leader urges sanctions on Israel and restricting trade ties

**Liza Rozovsky and Reuters**

The European Commission will propose sanctioning extremist Israeli ministers and the suspension of trade-related measures in a European Union agreement with Israel, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said on Wednesday.

The proposals, announced by von der Leyen in a speech

to the European Parliament in Strasbourg, reflect growing EU criticism of Israel's conduct of the war in Gaza and increased pressure on the bloc's executive body to take action.

The proposals would need broad or unanimous support among the EU's member states, which is likely to be hard to achieve as the bloc is deeply divided on the Middle East. But von der Leyen made clear the proposal was also

meant to be a political signal. "What is happening in Gaza has shaken the conscience of the world," von der Leyen said in her State of the Union speech, an annual address setting out her priorities for the year ahead.

Von der Leyen acknowledged the divisions within Europe on Gaza but pledged the Commission would do what it can on its own.

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