

QATAR AND ISRAELI–SAUDI NORMALIZATION

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Qatar's primary national priority is to consolidate an independent and ostensibly neutral position that protects it from the influence and penetration of external powers—chiefly its larger neighbors, Saudi Arabia and Iran. Qatar addresses this challenge by hosting the largest U.S. military base in the region (the regional headquarters of CENTCOM – U.S. Central Command), which serves as a kind of insurance policy and allows it to hedge between regional powers. In particular, over the years Qatar has distinguished itself from the policies and dictates of the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) countries—led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE—partly by maintaining good relations with their rivals, Iran and Turkey. This approach has generated tensions that, between 2017 and 2021, escalated into a Gulf boycott of Qatar, which ended when Riyadh and Abu Dhabi renewed ties with it. Nevertheless, the neutrality that Qatar has carefully cultivated, along with its considerable wealth, has enabled it to play the role of mediator between rival parties and to build trust with adversaries—providing it with relative insulation from the effects of international conflicts. Although not all of Qatar's mediation efforts have been successful, it has gained substantial international prestige that bolsters its stability and security.

One of the central areas in which Qatar differentiates itself from Saudi Arabia and the UAE is its ongoing and active support for the Palestinian cause—primarily through funding Hamas and hosting the group's leadership—as well as through its opposition to normalization with Israel in the absence of progress toward a permanent resolution of the Palestinian issue. (It is

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worth noting that Qatar was also the only Arab country to oppose the Assad regime in Syria due to its crimes against humanity, despite the fact that most Arab states, including Gulf countries, normalized relations with his regime starting in 2018.)

Nonetheless, it should be noted that Qatar was the pioneer among Gulf states in establishing ties with Israel, with a permanent Israeli mission already operating there in 1996. After the [signing of the Abraham Accords](#) in 2020, Qatar appeared to be Israel’s next political target in the normalization wave, but Qatar sharply criticized the accords, calling them nothing less than a betrayal of the Palestinian cause. Since then, Qatar has emphasized its adherence to the Arab Peace Initiative and insists it will not join any agreements unless a resolution between Israel and the Palestinians is achieved. Qatari Foreign Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman even stated that Qatar would only join the Abraham Accords “if Israel [demonstrates seriousness](#) in resolving the two-state solution.” At the same time, Qatar operates below the threshold of public agreement and maintains “working relations” with Israel beyond the Gaza context (since it is a key channel for communicating with Hamas). For example, economic ties exist between Israel and Qatar, including in the [diamond](#) sector, and the emirate allowed Israeli tourists to attend the FIFA World Cup matches.

On the other hand, Qatar is also likely concerned about the formalization of relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia—a move that could isolate it, despite the thaw in its relations with Riyadh and Abu Dhabi. In particular, Doha would view negatively any U.S.–Saudi agreement that enhances Saudi Arabia’s military and political power—still a central threat to Qatar—and that displaces its own unique proximity to the United States. This closeness is reflected not only in hosting the largest U.S. military base in the region, but also in Qatar’s mediation role between Washington and various actors, including Iran, as well as in Doha’s involvement in efforts to promote a ceasefire in the Gaza war and a deal between Israel and Hamas to release the Israeli

hostages still held by Hamas. Qatar's relationship with the United States is close: as early as 2022, the U.S. designated Qatar a Major Non-NATO Ally—a status not yet granted to either the UAE or Saudi Arabia.

Qatar's central instrument of influence is its media and information empire, which includes media outlets and research centers that target both Arab and international audiences. This system currently serves as a platform for voices opposing normalization with Israel and is likely to intensify its activity should such an agreement come to fruition. Following the easing of tensions between Doha and Riyadh in 2021, direct criticism of the Saudi regime in Qatari media has diminished, and instead, criticism focuses on discrediting the idea of normalization with Israel itself, in both the Saudi and broader Arab context. Central narratives include that relations with Israel give Arab regimes more tools to violate rights; that normalization agreements [serve to improve](#) the image of Arab rulers rather than promote genuine peace; that the agreements are driven by the power of Israeli–Jewish influence in the U.S.; that U.S. involvement in the Middle East has been destructive; and that Israel is internally troubled and on the verge of collapse. At the same time, any potential U.S.–Saudi agreement discussed in Qatari media outlets includes normalization with Israel.

Qatar also promotes its image of support for the Palestinians throughout the region and globally via Al Jazeera and other media platforms it owns—setting itself apart from Arab regimes, which are often seen by the public as having abandoned the Palestinians in favor of Israel and the U.S. Therefore, as it did when the Abraham Accords were signed, Qatar is expected to maintain its stance that no Muslim state should normalize ties with Israel without a solution for the Palestinians. In fact, Israeli–Saudi normalization may improve Qatar's image as a country that remains committed to Palestinian rights and attuned to public sentiment.

However, it is clear that Qatar will find it difficult to openly oppose Israeli–Saudi normalization if it is U.S.-sponsored. Qatar will also find it difficult to

oppose Saudi Arabia if it decides to move forward with normalization with Israel—especially if the agreement between Jerusalem and Riyadh includes a commitment to advance a political process with the Palestinians.

From Israel’s perspective, Qatar’s identification with the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as its negative stance toward Israel, arouse suspicion regarding its willingness to help in matters that serve Israeli interests. Although Israel maintains normal working relations with Qatar, including among military and intelligence officials, “the Qatari dilemma” occupies the Israeli system—especially in light of Qatar’s negative role (even if coordinated with and encouraged by the Israeli government) in transferring funds that significantly contributed to Hamas’s military buildup. Another source of discomfort in Israel is Qatar’s funding of U.S. universities that promote anti-Israel agendas.

In conclusion, Qatar’s position outside the regional normalization wave with Israel will almost certainly make it an oppositional actor, likely to try to undermine the process—primarily through the cognitive warfare of its media empire. On the other hand, significant progress toward resolving the Palestinian issue, if it accompanies Israeli–Saudi normalization, would make it easier for Qatar to renew ties with Israel and, in doing so, to take steps with potential positive implications for Israel’s security.