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Qatar's Strategic Diplomacy: Mediating Crisis Resolutions in a Complex Geopolitical Arena

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In the aftermath of the October 7 Hamas attacks and hostage-taking, Qatar, a small but wealthy Persian Gulf state ruled by Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, has become a rising power by showing patient and adept mediation and negotiation skills in reaching a broad framework for a potential hostage release and ceasefire between Hamas and Israel. The West increasingly relies on Qatar to play a crucial role in such situations. Notably, Qatar's diplomatic influence was pivotal in the release of five Americans held by Iran, further solidifying its reputation as a go-to mediator. In addition,

Qatar's previous mediation successes, including its involvement with the Taliban and the release of hostages in Mali and Yemen, underscore its growing role as an essential interlocutor. As Qatar continues to navigate complex diplomatic landscapes, its successful mediations position it as a key player in facilitating resolutions to conflicts and securing the release of hostages on the international stage.

Qatar's Rising Diplomatic Star

Qatar took center stage in the efforts to secure

the safe return of Israeli hostages. Behind the scenes, Qatari diplomats engaged in elaborate negotiations between Israel and Hamas, meeting with the families of hostages globally. In the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict, where 240 people were reportedly abducted, Qatar's diplomatic efforts have gained international recognition. French President Emmanuel Macron acknowledged Qatar's crucial role, and World Jewish Congress president Ronald Lauder expressed gratitude for Qatar's significant contribution to facilitating hostage releases. However, the Qatari position is not without challenges. The country hosts Hamas's political office but also houses the largest US military base in the region. Analysts point out that Qatar's unique advantage lies in its decade-long hosting of Hamas's political leadership, making it the only entity authorized to negotiate on behalf of the group.

Relationship between Qatar, Hamas and Muslim Brotherhood is complex, shaped by geopolitical considerations.

Qatar's role should be seen within the framework of country's ambition to position itself as a mediator and key player in regional affairs. This has prompted interactions with entities like Hamas and the Muslim

Brotherhood. The relationship between Qatar, Hamas, and the Muslim Brotherhood is complex, shaped by geopolitical considerations, historical ties and regional dynamics. Qatar's engagement with these entities reflects its pursuit of a nuanced foreign policy that balances diverse interests. While Qatar defends its actions as contributions to regional stability and humanitarian relief, critics argue that such engagements may unconsciously support activities deemed harmful to regional peace. Understanding this complex web of relationships is crucial for comprehending the ever-evolving dynamics of the Middle East in the past and present times. Hamas, the Palestinian political and militant organization, has played a crucial role in the Palestinian territories, particularly in the Gaza Strip. Emerging in the late 1980s, Hamas was initially an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood. It should be emphasized that the relationship between Qatar and the Muslim Brotherhood has led to accusations of supporting subversive activities in other Arab states. This has strained Qatar's ties with some of its Gulf neighbors who view the Brotherhood as a destabilizing force. Qatar's financial support has played a role in sustaining Hamas, including paying civil servant salaries. The current emir's predecessor even visited Gaza in 2012.

In 2017 Qatar faced a diplomatic and economic blockade led by Saudi Arabia.

The US, at one point, cautioned against business as usual with Hamas, and in 2017, Qatar faced a diplomatic and economic blockade led by Saudi Arabia, demanding a severance of ties with Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood. Hamas' resistance against Israeli occupation and provision of social services to Palestinians have garnered support from segments of the population, while earning it the designation of a terrorist organization by some countries. In the last years, Qatar has provided financial aid to Gaza, controlled by Hamas, contributing to infrastructure projects and humanitarian assistance. This support has not only aimed at alleviating the dire conditions in Gaza but has also strengthened Qatar's influence in the Palestinian territories. Critics argue that Qatar's backing of Hamas has indirectly supported the group's militant activities, undermining international efforts to isolate it. However, Qatar contends that its engagement is a diplomatic tool aimed at fostering stability and addressing the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

Bridging Divides and Fostering Hope

In a recent diplomatic breakthrough, the

emirate of Qatar has once again asserted its influence as a key player in resolving delicate hostage situations. This recent development showcases Qatar's expertise in navigating complex geopolitical landscapes, maintaining warm relations with Western powers while simultaneously engaging with groups and states considered pariahs by some. In a first round of negotiation of November 2023, Qatar has succeeded in negotiating a four-day truce, which has been brokered between Israel and Hamas in return for the release of a specified number of Israeli civilians, totaling 50 within the four days, as well as the exchange for Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails. In addition to the truce and captive release, increased humanitarian aid would enter Gaza "as soon as possible". As part of the truce deal, Palestinians would be released from Israeli prisons, fostering a reciprocal release mechanism. The Red Cross was actively coordinating with all involved parties to ensure the safe release of captives in Gaza. It reiterated that the primary objective is the safety of the hostages, emphasizing the humanitarian aspect of the agreement. The truce and hostage release presented a glimmer of hope, but it did not continue as the fighting was resumed. Qatar continues its mediation in talks to secure a new deal for the release of approximately 130 captives still held by Hamas in return for a complete ceasefire, but with obstacles on the way. The situation remains complex, with

ongoing talks and efforts to secure additional releases.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu highlighted Qatar's substantial influence over Hamas.

On January 18, 2024, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu highlighted Qatar's substantial influence over Hamas, characterizing it as having "enormous leverage." He emphasized that Qatar's hosting and funding of Hamas leaders make them a crucial player in mediating talks for the release of remaining hostages in Gaza. Netanyahu expressed the need to demand Qatar's active involvement in achieving the release and suggested that the international community is closely observing Qatar's role. When asked about potential actions by the US or other world powers, Netanyahu indicated that direct discussions would be held, underlining Qatar's role as an influential intermediary rather than a passive one. The leaked audio, broadcasted on Israeli Channel 12, captures Netanyahu characterizing Qatar's involvement in the release of captives as "problematic" and blaming Qatar for financing Hamas. He also expressed displeasure at the US decision to extend the presence of a military base in Qatar.

Qatar has accused Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of being "irresponsible and destructive."

The families of Israeli captives denied the leak of audio where Netanyahu criticizes Qatar's role in negotiating the release of captives held by Hamas. The families have refuted any involvement in leaking the audio, emphasizing that all conversations in meetings with the Prime Minister are recorded by his office. Phones of participating family members were allegedly taken at the entrance, and they consider the leak a serious issue indicating a loss of control. The Prime Minister's office initially blamed one of the family members for the leak. Israeli media outlet Walla reported that the office reiterated its accusation, citing evidence in the form of a text message from a family member present at the meeting, expressing regret for not alerting someone about the presence of a phone. Qatar has accused Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of being "irresponsible and destructive" due to leaked remarks criticizing the Gulf state. The comments risk undermining efforts to secure the release of hostages held by Hamas. The spokesperson for Qatar's foreign ministry, was "appalled" by stating that the spat over Netanyahu's comments would not affect ongoing mediation efforts, emphasizing the

focus on saving lives. The mediation involves a proposal for a month-long truce in Gaza, during which a hostage-prisoner exchange would take place, but challenges persist regarding a permanent ceasefire. International pressure for a ceasefire in light of the Israeli offensive and Palestinian casualties continues to mount.

Navigating Complex Diplomacy and Criticism

As the Israeli Defense Forces undertake the second phase of military operations in Gaza, the situation has become much more complex, with potential escalations by various Iranian-backed proxies such as the Houthis in the Red Sea. The ongoing military ground operations involve special operations raids, block-by-block fighting, and subterranean tunnel clearing in search of both fighters and hostages. Executive director of the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington, expressed at a Washington gathering that the demonstrations aimed to show gratitude towards Qatar while simultaneously urging them to apply more pressure on Hamas. These dual objectives were perceived as complementary rather than conflicting. Israeli protesters, on the other hand, adopted a more confrontational stance outside Qatar's Washington embassy, accusing the Gulf state of direct involvement with

Hamas. The Israeli demonstrators attributed responsibility to Qatar for Hamas' October 7 attack on Israel, which resulted in significant civilian casualties and the abduction of over 240 individuals. Lawyer and organizer of the protest emphasized the demonstrators' intent to hold Qatar accountable for its alleged support of "terrorism," vowing relentless pursuit until the hostages were safely returned.

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Prime Minister Mohammed Abdulrahman al-Thani of Qatar, along with intelligence officials from the US, Israel, and Egypt, have recently devised a plan based on proposals from both Hamas and Israel. However, significant disagreements persist, especially regarding the terms of the ceasefire and the exchange of hostages. Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's recent uncompromising stance further complicates negotiations. Netanyahu's rejection of ending the war, coupled with his resistance to releasing a large number of Palestinian prisoners, presents challenges to potential diplomatic resolutions. Additionally, pressure from the US and the UK to recognize Palestine as a state adds another layer of complexity to the situation. Criticism towards

Qatar's role in mediating the conflict has escalated, with both Israeli and American officials calling for increased pressure on the Gulf state. However, Qatar maintains that its role is primarily that of a mediator, seeking to facilitate dialogue and bridge gaps between the conflicting parties. Despite the challenges and criticisms, Qatar continues to play a prominent role in hostage negotiations, with assurances from the US envoy that Qatar is actively cooperating in efforts to secure the release of hostages. However, some involved parties express reservations about Qatar's involvement, opting to work with them reluctantly as a means to achieve their ultimate goal of hostage release.

Criticism towards Qatar's role in mediating the conflict has escalated.

The efforts of US Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken to navigate the complex dynamics following the Gaza war reveal several key points in the whole conflict. Blinken's efforts to secure a ceasefire and negotiate the release of hostages and bodies of captives remain challenging. Both sides present obstacles to reaching an agreement, indicating the complexity of the situation on the ground. Saudi Arabia's interest in finalizing a comprehensive package deal that includes recognition of Israel suggests a potential

avenue for progress. However, significant hurdles remain in bridging differences and achieving a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Domestic pressures faced by both Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Hamas further complicate negotiations and decision-making. These internal factors add another layer of complexity to the peace process. International dynamics, including the role of actors such as Qatar, Egypt, the US and Saudi Arabia, play a crucial role in influencing the situation and potentially brokering a deal. The involvement of these external parties underscores the global significance of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Public opinion, both within the region and internationally, shapes the political landscape and influences the decisions of leaders. Understanding and addressing public sentiment is essential for any meaningful progress towards peace.

Hamas-Israel Negotiations and the Complex Humanitarian Crisis in Gaza

Recently, Hamas has responded to an Israel-backed ceasefire proposal with demands including a hostage-prisoner exchange and Gaza's reconstruction, a plan likely unacceptable to Israel's PM Netanyahu, who seeks "total victory." US President Biden and Secretary of State Blinken cautiously viewed the proposal,

emphasizing the need for a lasting peace. The proposal follows previous truces and escalating casualties. While Israel debates its response, some officials acknowledge “total victory” is distant. Amidst regional tensions, concerns mount over the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and the fate of hostages, as international pressure intensifies for a ceasefire and long-term peace efforts. Netanyahu asserts the possibility of “total victory” in Gaza and dismisses Hamas’s terms as “bizarre,” emphasizing negotiations’ stagnancy. Despite ongoing talks mediated by Egypt and Qatar, Netanyahu’s rejection contrasts with Qatar’s positive view of Hamas’s response.

Israel’s planned offensive in Rafah has drawn increasing international concern and warnings.

Hamas’s proposed terms include phased ceasefire actions and humanitarian aid delivery, aiming to end the war within 135 days. Netanyahu’s announcement of Israeli forces preparing to operate in Rafah raises concerns about exacerbating the humanitarian crisis. The rejection reflects a discrepancy between US-Israeli and Hamas visions for Gaza’s future, complicating efforts for a ceasefire and humanitarian pause. Israeli Prime Minister

Netanyahu ordered preparations for civilian evacuations from Rafah before launching an expanded offensive against Hamas. He also rejected Hamas’s latest ceasefire proposals. Israel’s planned offensive in Rafah, a city in southern Gaza densely populated with Palestinian refugees, has drawn increasing international concern and warnings. This makes the negotiations to release the hostages much more complex than before. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has affirmed the military’s intention to proceed with the ground offensive, assuring preparations for an evacuation plan. UK Foreign Secretary David Cameron highlighted the high number of Gaza’s population seeking shelter in Rafah, expressing apprehension over the potential consequences of an assault on the city. Saudi Arabia cautioned of severe repercussions should Rafah be attacked, while Dutch Foreign Minister Hanke Bruins Slot voiced concerns about the likelihood of significant civilian casualties.

International community urged an immediate pause in fighting to facilitate aid delivery.

The United Nations emphasized the lack of safe havens for the more than a million Palestinians already seeking refuge in Rafah. Hamas, the ruling faction in Gaza, warned of the

potential for tens of thousands of casualties and suggested that any operation would jeopardize ongoing negotiations regarding the release of Israeli hostages. The US cautioned Israel against invading Rafah, describing it as a potential disaster, while the EU and the UN expressed their own apprehensions. Aid groups highlighted the logistical challenges of evacuating civilians from Rafah, given its proximity to the border with Egypt. UN humanitarian coordinator Jamie McGoldrick emphasized the lack of alternative safe locations for people in Rafah, expressing deep concern about the potential humanitarian consequences of an Israeli offensive. The international community urged an immediate pause in the fighting to facilitate aid delivery and hostage evacuation, followed by efforts to establish a sustainable ceasefire.

Iran-Israel Conflict and Reassessment of Role in Negotiations

In recent weeks, the political situation surrounding the Gaza war has intensified due to Israeli bombing of the Iranian Consulate in Syria, followed by retaliatory Iranian rocket attacks. Israel responded by targeting sites near the airports of Tehran and Isfahan, escalating tensions and complicating negotiations. In mid-April, Qatar's Prime Minister, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim

Al Thani, expressed concerns about narrow political interests affecting the mediation process, prompting a reassessment of Qatar's role as a mediator in Israel-Gaza truce talks. This decision came after US lawmaker accused Qatar of siding with Hamas, leading to warnings of potential reassessment of American ties with Doha. Despite continued efforts, negotiations have reached a deadlock as both Israel and Hamas remain firm on their conditions.

Conclusion

While the situation remains dynamic, with ongoing discussions and diplomatic efforts, the proposed framework represents a potential turning point in the efforts to secure the release of hostages and establish a more extended period of peace in Gaza Strip. The situation is becoming much more complex by ongoing violence and tensions between Israel and Iran. As the negotiations facilitated by Qatar and Egypt persist, the Israeli military continues its lethal operations in Gaza, which remains under blockade. The role of various stakeholders, including Qatar, the United States and Egypt, underscores the complexity and sensitivity of the negotiations, emphasizing the need for continued diplomatic engagement and constructive responses from all involved parties. In conclusion, Qatar's strategic diplomacy in

mediating crisis resolutions, particularly in the Israel-Hamas conflict, signifies its increasing influence on the international stage. While facing challenges and criticism, Qatar's role as a mediator and key player remains pivotal, underscoring the complexity and sensitivity of negotiations in the Middle East.

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