

KEEPING JERUSALEM QUESTION ALIVE: ABOUT QATAR'S EFFORTS TO STAND WITH JERUSALEMITES

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ABSTRACT: *Jerusalemmites (Maqdisis) constitute one of the most vulnerable Palestinian communities, subjected to systematic Israeli policies aimed at uprooting them from their holy city, which has endured a century of organised Judaisation. With limited resources, Palestinians alone cannot withstand the dual pressures of Zionist colonial expansion and the Judaising of holy sites. At a time when multiple Arab and Muslim states –most notably two Gulf countries– have moved towards normalisation with the Zionist state through formal agreements such as the Abraham Accords, this study acquires particular significance by examining initiatives that diverge from this trajectory. Specifically, it investigates Qatar's diplomatic and on-ground efforts to support Jerusalemmites and to sustain solidarity with their cause amid widespread political abandonment. The paper focuses on Qatar's policies and initiatives during the pre-Tufan al-Aqsa period, highlighting its strategies to mobilise international attention to the Palestinian question and to reinforce Palestinian resilience through tangible measures on the ground. While the primary analytical framework predates October 2023, the study also acknowledges Qatar's continued engagement during the Israeli genocide in Gaza, underscoring its pivotal role in mediation, humanitarian diplomacy, and the preservation of the Jerusalem question within global consciousness.*

KEYWORDS: al-Quds, Qatar, Diplomacy, Normalisation, Solidarity, Zionist Settlers.

INTRODUCTION

The occupation of Palestine has long stood as one of the most enduring and unresolved conflicts in modern international relations. Despite successive diplomatic initiatives, the issue of al-Quds/ Jerusalem and the plight of its indigenous population remain central to debates on justice, legitimacy, and global governance. In recent years, the acceleration of Arab normalisation with the Zionist state –most notably through the Abraham Accords– has deepened Palestinian feelings of abandonment, even as Zionist policies of Judaisation and displacement intensify in al-Quds. Against this backdrop, voices calling for consistency in international responses to human suffering have gained renewed urgency.

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It was within this context that HH the Amir of the State of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, addressed the opening session of the World Economic Forum 2022 in Davos, held under the theme *"History at a Turning Point."* He declared:

As we rightly-apply laser-focus to find a diplomatic solution to the Ukrainian crisis, I hope we can equally give as much attention and effort to resolving, all those forgotten or ignored conflicts. They all deserve peace, security, and dignity. The most glaring example, is in Palestine, which has been an open wound, since the establishment of the United Nations. (Amiri Diwan, May 2022).

In his speech, the Amir not only advocated for a diplomatic resolution to the Ukrainian crisis but also urged the international community to apply the same standards of justice and compassion to Palestine and other neglected conflicts. Citing the occupation in Palestine, the Amir urged all countries to adopt same standards when dealing with the injustices, *"which has been an open wound since the establishment of the United Nations"* (Government Communication Office, 2022). In this context, he also criticised the double standards of some governments in responding to human suffering, which often vary depending on ethnic, national, or religious biases. These double standards and biases were starkly revealed during the 2022 Russia–Ukraine conflict.

This speech coincided with a period of increase pace of Arabs' normalisation with the Zionist entity. Following the Trump administration's unveiling of its "peace plan" in a ceremony at the White House in January 2020. Two Gulf states, United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, openly agreed to normalise relations with Israel in what is called "Abraham Accords". Back then, it is believed that other countries in the Gulf would follow in their steps. The subsequent "Negev Summit" in March 2022, held on stolen land of the Palestinian desert –with the attendance of the American, Bahraini, Egyptian, Emirati, and Moroccan counterparts–symbolised the consolidation of this trajectory.

For many Palestinians, these developments represented a profound betrayal, being stabbed in the back by their Arab and Muslim brothers, at a time when Zionist activism in Jerusalem intensified and policies of Judaisation sought to erase the city's Palestinian identity and ethnically cleanse Bayt al-Maqdis from Jerusalemites. But few diplomatic and on-ground actions to address this were made by Muslim and Arab states of whom Palestinians took for granted their support and solidarity. Thus, a rising disappointment, left-alone emotions and isolation felt by Palestinians in the last years, in particular after the "Abraham Accords" and the changing foreign policies of the Arab states to politically, economically and culturally normalise with "Israel".

Having set the background and context, this paper explores the Arab and Muslim efforts in supporting Jerusalemites and standing against the Judaisation of al-Quds. Thus, this paper situates Qatar's position within this shifting landscape. The study highlights how Qatari officials have utilised national,

regional, and international platforms to keep the Jerusalem question alive, translating solidarity into tangible actions through projects and programs to support Palestine, Jerusalem in particular, and the broader support of the Palestinian cause through soft initiatives, aid, diaspora engagement, and media advocacy.

The paper is structured as follows: the first section examines the historical trajectory of the Judaisation of Bayt al-Maqdis and its intensification over the past three decades, to what Jerusalem is facing nowadays. The second section traces and analyses Muslim and Arab responses to Judaisation, its challenges and success, focusing in particular on Qatari interventions. Whilst the third section discusses and showcases the assassination of the Maqdisi journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, whose murder drew renewed attention to the plight of Jerusalemites and further illuminated Qatar's role in sustaining the Palestinian question.

Research Question and Methodological Approach

Jerusalemites are amongst the most vulnerable group of Palestinians due to different Israeli policies to uproot them from Jerusalem. The city of al-Quds faces mass and systematic Judaisation in the past century, although being studied extensively, few studies highlighted specific efforts done by an Arab country. As Arabs head to build more visible ties with the Zionist government after the signature of four Arab countries including two gulf states on the "Abraham Accords", the significance of this study comes from the fact that it explores and gives account to efforts that are being undertaken in the other direction i.e., supporting Palestinians and sending messages of solidarity with their cause after feeling they are abandoned.

This paper examines three core dimensions of the Palestinian sovereignty struggle over Jerusalem; the collective advocacy efforts of Muslim and Arab actors in advancing Palestinian human rights, with particular attention to al-Quds's vulnerable Palestinian population, and with Qatar serving as a principal case study; Qatar's distinctive governmental and diplomatic interventions in support of Palestinian self-determination and Bay al-Maqdis's contested status. Through this analysis, the paper evaluates how regional soft power, diplomatic channels, and humanitarian aid frameworks intersect in addressing al-Quds's protracted geopolitical conflict. To do so, the paper consulted related literature with extensive review on the past publications about the subject; analysing news articles and speeches of Qatari officials in response to the Israeli assaults against Jerusalemites, al-Quds, and Palestine in general; reviewing any activities and public events that occurred in Qatar or organised by Qataris to address the issue of murdering a Palestinian reporter who worked for Al-Jazeera News Agency broadcasting from Qatar's Capital, Doha.

TRACING THE JUDAISATION OF JERUSALEM AND CURRENT SITUATION

In the early twentieth century, Palestine experienced large-scale Zionist immigration from Europe and neighbouring regions. After the creation of the

“State of Israel” in 1948, this influx continued leading to significant demographic imbalance. Following the 1967 War between “Israel” and neighbouring Arab states, the Zionist state further expanded its settlements across the territory and unilaterally declared Jerusalem as its eternal capital.

Bayt al-Maqdis, as the locus of numerous religious and historical sites, has long stood at the very heart of Zionist activism and policies of ethnic cleansing, pursued in the quest to dominate the city and assert an exclusive claim to its “Jewishness”. Throughout its tumultuous history, it has been repeatedly destroyed and rebuilt, serving as a contested space and a magnet for diverse faith communities. In recent decades, however, it has become the principal arena of Israeli Zionist expansionism, where strategies of Judaisation and displacement converge to reshape both the city’s demography and its symbolic identity.

Immediately after the American administration announced the so-called “Deal of the Century”, the United States relocated its embassy to Jerusalem, a move subsequently emulated by several other countries. As Epatko (2018) observes, the transfer of the US embassy was both political and symbolic: politically, it fulfilled one of the president’s campaign pledges; symbolically, it signified the United States’ formal recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of “Israel”. The relocation of additional embassies to Jerusalem has further complicated the city’s already contested legal and urban status, exacerbating uncertainty and insecurity for its Palestinian residents.

Since the establishment of the Zionist state, repeated attempts have been made to assimilate the Palestinian cultural and natural landscapes into biblically conceived imaginaries, with Jerusalem as the principal target. Policies of land confiscation, re-engineering of land use, inequitable distribution of water and natural resources, and systematic assaults on historic and religious sites have become embedded within the dominant political and religious discourses of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict. As a result, thousands of Palestinians have been displaced and continue to face the threat of losing their ancestral lands, heritage, and traditions under the weight of ongoing Israeli confiscation policies pursued for a variety of strategic, ideological, and demographic purposes.

One of the most active strategies employed by the Israeli government in its project of Judaising Jerusalem has been the proliferation of Jewish settlements within and around the city. As Dhaher (2017) observes, the primary Israeli settlements in Eastern Jerusalem are organised into two concentric rings: an inner ring located within the pre-1967 municipal boundaries, and an outer ring extending into the newly defined “Greater Jerusalem”. These settlement patterns have exerted a profound impact, effectively ghettoising Eastern Jerusalem, severing it from its West Bank hinterland, and simultaneously bisecting the West Bank itself. The consequences have been far-reaching: Eastern Jerusalem’s historic role as the socio-economic hub of Palestine has been choked,

disrupting its central position in regional trade, mobility, and transportation networks, and thereby undermining its function as a connective urban core.

Moreover, a sophisticated regime of checkpoints and surveillance has come to regulate and restrict the movement of Palestinians into and within al-Quds. These checkpoints function as gates within the broader apartheid wall, isolating Eastern Jerusalem's neighbourhoods from its historic centre and fragmenting the city's social fabric. In addition, a range of Israeli policies systematically discriminate against Palestinian Jerusalemites, marginalising them politically, economically, and socially. To further complicate daily life, the Israeli authorities enforce differentiated policies across communities, producing a patchwork of challenges. Thus, residents of the Old City, Silwan, and Kafr Aqab encounter markedly distinct struggles, each shaped by their geographic location and the specific mechanisms of control imposed upon them (Dhafer, 2017).

A more concrete example of the detrimental impact of Jewish settlement expansion on Jerusalemites is the Israeli government's plan to extend its settlements into the E-1 area (Institute of Palestine Studies, 2005). This 12-square-kilometre zone, situated between Jerusalem and Ma'ale Adumim –an Israeli settlement in the West Bank– has placed Palestinian Bedouin communities on Jerusalem's periphery under imminent threat of forcible displacement. Entire villages have been demolished, including the community of Abu Nuwar (Wafa, 2018), while Khan al-Ahmar, a village composed of members of the Jahalin Bedouin tribe and located east of al-Quds, remains at the centre of international concern. Home to more than 180 residents, 95% of whom are refugees, Khan al-Ahmar epitomises the precarious existence of Palestinian communities under Israeli settlement policies. The Jahalin tribe itself bears a significant history of displacement: originally residing in the Tel Arad area of the desert of al-Naqab, they were expelled from their ancestral lands by the Zionist occupation forces following the 1948 war, eventually resettling in what is today Khan al-Ahmar (B'Tselem, 2018).

Moreover, the Israeli government has enacted a series of repressive measures and instituted policies that contravene fundamental principles of international human rights law. A concrete illustration of these measures is the military raid and administrative closure of six internationally recognised Palestinian civil society organisations operating in the occupied West Bank. The targeted institutions included Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, Al-Haq (a leading human rights documentation centre), the Union of Palestinian Women Committees, the Union of Agricultural Work Committees, the Bisan Center for Research and Development, and Defense for Children International–Palestine. Such actions constitute a deliberate erosion of the institutional capacity of critical civil society organisations in the occupied territory, exacerbating existing asymmetries in legal protection and political representation under prolonged military occupation (The Carter Center, 2022).

Israel's attacks on human rights defenders extend beyond Palestinian activists and workers, targeting international personnel as well. In recent years, numerous international professionals have been denied entry to Palestine. In the wake of Israel's refusal to grant visas to UN staff members, Michelle Bachelet, then UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, reminded the Israeli authorities of their obligations as a UN Member State. In a statement released in August 2022, she emphasised that countries must cooperate in good faith with the United Nations and grant its officials the privileges and immunities necessary for them to independently exercise their functions (UN News, August 2022).

MUSLIM & ARAB BOND WITH AL-QUDS: CONTEXTUALISING QATAR'S STANCE

On 29 May 2022, Zionist settlers organised the so-called "Flags March" in the Old City of Jerusalem, commemorating the anniversary of the city's "unification" according to the Hebrew calendar. Jerusalem's occupation and colonisation unfolded in two phases: first in 1948, when the western part of the city fell under Zionist occupation, and subsequently in 1967, when the eastern part –including the Al-Aqsa Mosque and other major Muslim and Christian holy sites– was occupied following the Arab–Israeli war, during which Israel extended its control over the West Bank and Gaza.

As in previous decades, settlers used the march as a platform to hurl insults at the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), denigrate Arabs and Muslims, and boast of normalisation with Arab states (Smour, 2022). In parallel, groups of Zionist fanatics have repeatedly stormed the courtyards of al-Aqsa Mosque under the protection of Israeli occupation forces and police. These incursions are frequently accompanied by extreme violence against Muslim worshippers, including the deployment of sound grenades and tear gas, further underscoring the systematic assault on religious freedom and the sanctity of one of Islam's holiest sites (El-Awaisi & Yavuz, 2020).

Several Palestinian demonstrations have taken place across the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in protest against the recurrent assaults and Israeli attacks on al-Aqsa Mosque, though these remain limited in scale and impact. Notably, in recent years official Arab regimes have gradually abdicated their responsibilities and duties towards the Palestinian cause. Although al-Aqsa Mosque belongs to all Muslims, since it is their first Qiblah, the second mosque on earth and one of the holiest sites in Islam, the discourse surrounding Bayt al-Maqdis and its central sacred status has begun to shift. Increasingly, voices advocating normalisation with "Israel" and relegating the liberation of Palestine to the Palestinians themselves have gained prominence in mainstream Arab media and across social media networks. In stark contrast to this regional disengagement, the only substantive response to the assaults on al-Aqsa Mosque came from Gaza's resistance movement through the *Sword of al-Quds* operation. This campaign sought to defend the sanctity of Al-Aqsa and reassert the centrality of Bayt al-Maqdis within the Palestinian struggle. It underscored the widening gap between

the rhetoric of Arab regimes and the lived reality of Palestinians, highlighting how the burden of resistance has been borne almost exclusively by Palestinian actors themselves.

For decades, since the onset of settler colonial project in Palestine, Arab and Muslim states expressed official support for the Palestinian cause, as evidenced by their participation in multiple wars waged against the Zionist state. Yet, following their perceived independence, many of these states became entangled with former imperial powers, leaving them weakened and ill-equipped to address their own domestic challenges. Within the Arab region, some countries have been torn apart by civil or proxy wars, while others continue to grapple with the political and socio-economic repercussions of the Arab Spring. These internal crises have rendered it increasingly difficult for ordinary citizens, and indeed for governments themselves, to sustain meaningful engagement with the Palestinian question.

Nevertheless, notable efforts have been undertaken by various entities in the Arab and Muslim world to keep the Palestinian question visible despite multi-layered global challenges. A prominent example is the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (later the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, OIC), the principal multilateral platform of the Muslim world and the second-largest intergovernmental organisation after the United Nations, with fifty-seven member states across four continents. The OIC was formally established in response to the burning of al-Aqsa Mosque on 21 August 1969, an event that galvanised collective Muslim action among Muslim-majority nations. Its founding vision was to institutionalise the Muslim world's role in defending Palestine and al-Aqsa. Yet, in practice, the organisation has struggled to take concrete measures towards liberation, with the al-Quds Committee inactive for decades and the institution itself facing operational stagnation. This shift was further reflected in June 2011, when the organisation officially rebranded from the "Organisation of the Islamic Conference" to the "Organisation of Islamic Cooperation," signalling a transition from a politically reactive forum to one primarily focused on economic cooperation.

Yet the OIC continues to operate a range of programmes, most notably the OIC-2025 Plan of Action, which includes a dedicated component on Palestine and Al-Quds al-Sharif. Its stated objectives are to actively support Palestinians in attaining their right to self-determination, including principled backing for the establishment of a sovereign and independent Palestinian state with Eastern Jerusalem (Al-Quds al-Sharif) as its capital. According to its official documents, the OIC also seeks to preserve a united Islamic position in favour of a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian issue, consistent with OIC resolutions, United Nations decisions, and international legitimacy. It further emphasises the centrality of Al-Quds for the Islamic Ummah, upholding Palestinian rights, protecting the city's heritage and sanctities, and defending its Arabo-Islamic identity. Another example of Muslim organisational support is the Islamic

Solidarity Fund for Development, which in 2021 collaborated with two Jerusalem-based organisations –the Jerusalem Endowment Fund and Taawun– to establish the Jerusalem Empowerment Fund. Within the framework of the Empowerment for Development Programme, this initiative aims to promote the economic and social empowerment of Jerusalemites through vital projects in sectors such as education, higher education, housing, community development, and economic advancement.

Since the early twentieth century, Jordan has exercised guardianship over al-Quds, particularly in safeguarding its Christian and Islamic holy sites even after the occupation in 1967. Another role has been of the King Mohammed VI of Morocco, the chair of Al-Quds Committee, tasked with addressing the cultural, political, social, religious, and human rights challenges arising from the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

On 16 July 2022, the Jeddah Security and Development Summit was convened at the King Abdulaziz International Conference Center in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, with the participation of leaders from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, and the United States, at the invitation of King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud. The summit underscored the historic ties among these states and sought to strengthen cooperation across multiple domains (D&B Bureau, 2022). Prior to his arrival in Saudi Arabia, President Biden began his “Middle East” tour in “Israel”, reaffirming Washington’s long-standing alliance. While the visit produced few dramatic breakthroughs –such as new normalisation accords or commitments from Saudi Arabia to increase oil production– it highlighted the United States’ continued prioritisation of regional security cooperation, particularly in countering Iran. The trip did, however, yield several substantive outcomes, including a bilateral U.S.–Saudi agreement to develop next-generation 5G/6G telecommunications infrastructure and Saudi Arabia’s decision to open its airspace to Israeli civilian aircraft. Regarding the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, the President reiterated America’s enduring support for “Israel” while explicitly stating that reviving peace negotiations with Palestinian authorities was not a current policy priority (Barron et al., 2022). During his visit, the Jerusalem U.S.–Israel Strategic Partnership Joint Declaration was released in which:

Israel thanks the United States for its ongoing and extensive support for deepening and broadening the historic Abraham Accords. The countries affirm that Israel’s peace and normalisation agreements with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Morocco constitute a critical addition to Israel’s strategic peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan, all of which are important to the future of the Middle East region and to the cause of regional security, prosperity, and peace”, ... , the United States is committed to “building a robust regional architecture; to deepen the ties between Israel and all of its regional partners; to advance Israel’s regional integration over time; and to expand the circle of peace to include ever more Arab and Muslim States (The White House, July 2022).

The Amir of the state of Qatar, during his participation in Jeddah Security and Development Forum, emphasised that development, sustainable security, and stability remain unattainable in conflict-ridden environments. He stressed that adherence by conflict parties to international legal frameworks, in particular the United Nations Charter, would prevent significant human casualties and humanitarian catastrophes for both affected populations and the global community (Amiri Diwan, July 2022).

He added, the Middle East faces significant dangers due to the tense global situation, and a just, lasting solution to the Palestinian cause is essential, as it holds great symbolic and moral importance for the Arab and Muslim worlds and global peace advocates. The ongoing tensions and instability stem from Israel's violations of international law, including settlement expansion, altering Jerusalem's status, and blockading Gaza. The prolonged occupation persists due to selective enforcement of international resolutions and the use of force rather than justice and fairness. Ending these practices is crucial for regional stability.

The Amir reiterated the Arab Peace Initiative's centrality, noting its unanimous Arab approval as the basis for normalisation –conditional on Israel's compliance with internationally backed terms, including 1967 border withdrawal within a final peace deal. It is unacceptable now to abandon Arab initiatives just because the Israeli government rejects them. He calls on Arabs to express their opinions about issues related and affected Arab countries as Israel has widely expressed itself and its public opinion in matters related to the region.

Historically, Qatar opposed the Egypt-Israel peace treaty and subsequently opposed "Abraham Accords". However, in the 1990s, the Al Thani regime supported normalisation with "Israel" for two main reasons: aligning with Palestinian public opinion after Oslo Accords and advancing Qatar's foreign policy goals. In 1979, Qatar had to conform to the broader Arab stance, particularly Saudi Arabia's position from "Israel". By the 1990s, its focus shifted to asserting Qatar's role in global affairs. But by 2020, Qatar realigned itself with other anti-Israel Muslim states and organisations, such as Türkiye (Admoni, 2021).

According to Tarek Ali Faraj Al-Ansari, Qatar's Ambassador to Egypt and its permanent representative to the Arab League, in 2012, Qatar took a bold step by becoming the first Arab country to establish a permanent body dedicated to Gaza's recovery –the Gaza Reconstruction Committee. Its mission was clear: to rebuild lives and infrastructure shattered by the blockade. For over a decade, the committee worked to deliver aid, restore homes, and provide hope amid relentless hardship. Yet even this lifeline was not spared. During the Gaza genocide, Israeli forces bombed its headquarters, underscoring the challenges faced by institutions involved in reconstruction and humanitarian assistance (Middle East Monitor, 2025).

Qatar's strategic mobilisation of multilateral platforms to advance Palestinian rights is further exemplified by her highness Sheikha Moza bint

Nasser's diplomatic leadership. As both a UN Sustainable Development Goals Advocate and Chairperson of the Education Above All Foundation, her interventions during the high-level panel discussion titled “Act Now to Protect Education from Attack” at UNESCO headquarters in Paris in September 2022, on the occasion of the International Day to Protect Education from Attack, demonstrated Doha's commitment to institutionalising the Palestine question within global governance frameworks. She implored the international community not to ignore the “millions whose school buildings were destroyed or damaged or occupied by soldiers. Millions who simply do not have access to education because of conflict” (The Peninsula Qatar, 2022).

On the governmental officials' side, the Qatari ministry of foreign affairs exploited many occasions to express their support and solidarity with Palestinians. In the side-line of the 14th Doha Conference for Interfaith Dialogue, the minister Sultan bin Saad Al Muraikhi met with the Mufti of Al-Quds and Palestine, Sheikh Mohammad Hussein, where he discussed the latest developments in Palestine (Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, May 2022). During discussions with the EU Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process, the Assistant Foreign Minister for Regional Affairs outlined Qatar's ongoing initiatives in the Gaza Strip, analysed developments in the Palestinian context, and explored potential pathways to reinvigorate the “Middle East” peace process.

It should be noted that the State of Qatar is the one of the first states to reiterate strong condemnation, denunciation of Israeli Occupation Forces and Zionist settlers who stormed al-Aqsa Mosque in Ramadan 2022 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs News, April 2022). This came in an official statement of the Ministry of Foreign affairs account on twitter (MofaQatar, 2022) and in the statement made by Ambassador Sheikhha Alya Ahmed bin Saif Al-Thani, the Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar to the United Nations, at the meeting of the UN Security Council on the Situation in the Middle East, Including the Palestinian Question. She stated that Qatar's condemned Israel's repeated attacks on Palestinian civilians and Muslim holy sites, calling them a deliberate provocation to Muslims worldwide – especially during the sacred month of Ramadan. The government criticised the international community's failure to hold Israel accountable, noting that this ongoing impunity only encourages further violations of Palestinian rights and disregard for international law and UN resolutions (Ministry of Foreign Affairs News, April 2022). Moreover, the statement reaffirmed that any attempts to alter the established historical and legal status quo of Jerusalem's Islamic and Christian holy sites under occupation –including measures aimed at their Judaisation– constitute violations of international law and relevant UN resolutions. It specifically condemned: spatial and temporal divisions of Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, and restrictions on Muslim worship rights, declaring such actions legally invalid and without effect (Ministry of Foreign Affairs News, April 2022). These speeches emphasise the role of the state of Qatar as a representative of the Palestinian issue at the United Nations.

According to the analysis of Aras and Al-Ansari (2024); for the past five decades, the Palestinian question has maintained a central position in Qatar's annual addresses to the UN General Assembly General Debate. The Qatari delegation has persistently advocated for a resolution to the conflict through diplomatic channels, consistently upholding the principles of equitable peace and the two-state framework as essential parameters for a just solution.

Representing Qatar at the Amman Arab Ministerial Committee meeting, a committee in Charge of International Action to Confront Illegal Israeli Policies and Measures in the Occupied City of Jerusalem, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani condemned the frequent incursions by Israeli occupation forces into Al-Aqsa Mosque and the detention of worshippers as representing: a continuation of systematic and ongoing violations against the sanctity of the holy site; a deliberate provocation targeting Muslim religious sentiments during Ramadan; and a grave breach of fundamental human rights and international humanitarian law (Ministry of Foreign Affairs News, April, 2022).

In the past years, the state of Qatar has emerged as a vital mediator in regional and global conflicts, leveraging its diplomatic neutrality and strategic relationships. In 2008, it brokered a Lebanon peace deal that ended an 18-month political crisis. Qatar further demonstrated its mediation capabilities by playing a pivotal role in facilitating the 2020 U.S.-Taliban peace talks and the subsequent withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan. Even though the State of Qatar is claimed to support Hamas, whose political bureau it had hosted since 2012, the Islamic Resistance Movement of Palestine (see Layman, 2024; Michael & Guzansky, 2014; Schiff & Admoni, 2025), Qatar negotiated ceasefires between Israel and Hamas while channelling humanitarian aid in 2014. Qatar's extensive diplomatic networks, built through decades of strategic relationship-building, positioned it as a pivotal mediator following the October 2023 escalation of the Gaza conflict –affirming the enduring value of its long-term investment in conflict resolution. In coordination with the United States and Egypt, Qatar facilitated negotiations that yielded a temporary humanitarian truce, the release of hostages, prisoner exchanges, and the delivery of urgently needed humanitarian aid to Gaza (Schiff & Admoni, 2025).

Qatar's unique approach –combining humanitarian outreach, backchannel diplomacy, and sustained engagement– has made it an indispensable conflict mediator, even amid complex geopolitical tensions. Kabalan (2021) observes that Qatar's unique geopolitical position –sandwiched between rival regional powers Saudi Arabia (defending the status quo) and Iran (pursuing transformational change) – forces it to navigate carefully. Both neighbours view Qatar's ambition to carve out an independent regional role as a threat, compelling Doha to adopt strategies that avoid direct confrontation while asserting influence. This precarious balance has shaped Qatar's approach to mediation: leveraging its neutrality, soft power, and energy resources to position itself as an indispensable

broker. By capitalising on technological advancements and regional contradictions (such as the Saudi-Iran divide), Qatar turns its vulnerability –being a small state amid larger rivals– into an asset. To this end, by maintaining Palestine as a cornerstone of its foreign policy –evidenced by its mediating role between Israel and Hamas– Qatar skilfully navigates great-power tensions to both protect its autonomy while amplifying its global relevance.

The state of Qatar has devoted many development and humanitarian efforts to sisterly Palestine for handling the problems in a sustainable manner that serves the Palestinian individual and future generations. One of the active public development institutions which work on behalf of the State of Qatar is Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD) which is committed to improving the livelihood of communities around the world including Palestine. According to QFFD reports, their assistance has reached more than 550,000 direct and indirect beneficiaries in the Gaza Strip as well as tens of thousands of beneficiaries from al-Quds and West Bank projects. In Gaza, they implemented several projects mainly with Palestine Children's Relief Fund in which beneficiary children received cochlear implants and hearing aids and batteries. And with a collaboration with Education Above All (EAA) foundation led to Al-Fakhoora - and 'Reach Out Asia' program which both provides a comprehensive and vital support system for education in Palestine. Al-Fakhoora program invested more than thirty million dollars in the reconstruction, renovation and maintenance of educational infrastructure since the humanitarian emergency was declared in Gaza Strip after the 51-day conflict in 2014. Contributing to human development and right of education to the Palestinians, EAA provided hundreds of higher education scholarships and exchange programmes for Palestinians including Jerusalemite through its various projects with UNDP, Al-Quds Bard College and Al-Quds University.

Moreover, QFFD has established Al-Quds Committee, chaired by the Amir of Qatar, which has contributed significantly to infrastructure, healthcare, and education in al-Quds in particular. The Palestinians are acknowledging the significant role that the state of Qatar plays in contributing to development of different education sectors in Palestine which at the end enforce their *sumud* and resilience. For example, President of Birzeit University Dr. Abdul Latif Abu Hijla said during the grant agreement's signature between QFFD and Birzeit University in 2018:

This agreement represents an additional milestone in the supportive role of the State of Qatar towards Birzeit University. Since 1996, the State of Qatar has contributed significantly to the development of education capacity and facilities in the Birzeit University. Previously, the State of Qatar has contributed to the construction of the Institute of Law's building (QFFD website, 2018).

Acknowledging its importance for Palestinian refugees, the State of Qatar agreed in 2022 to support UNRWA's basic resources for 2021-2022 with a total of \$18 million (Ministry of Foreign Affairs News, April 2022).

Other major organisation supports Palestinians is Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) which is according to the Capital Cluster (2021), QRCS in cooperation with Palestine Red Crescent Society has implemented a project for Al-Makassed Islamic Charitable Hospital in Jerusalem which aimed to purchase and upgrade medical equipment of the hospital as well as rehabilitation of outpatient clinics. This came in a time when the whole world was affected negatively, especially in the health sector due to COVID-19 pandemic. This initiative builds upon Qatar's longstanding support for Palestinian healthcare institutions. In 2015, QRCS partnered with WHO's Jerusalem Office through a \$500,000 bilateral agreement to deliver critical medicines and medical equipment to Al-Makassed Hospital. The aid specifically targeted the hospital's chronic pharmaceutical shortages –a consequence of both persistent financial constraints and Israeli restrictions that systematically undermine Palestinian health institutions. Such measures have severely compromised these organisations' capacity to deliver essential medical and social services to Palestinian communities in occupied Jerusalem (Al-Sharq, 2015).

In 2020, Qatar Charity, an international NGO comprises of a group of Qatari philanthropists with a vision to aid people living in a war and conflict settings, ranked as the second NGO in humanitarian aid contribution to Palestine. According to Qatar Charity's Annual Impact Report 2020, given the living conditions Palestinians have had to endure under Israeli occupation, they launched their very first initiatives in 1992 in the West Bank. Their field of specialty and work covers education and culture, economic empowerment, health, water and sanitation, food security, and social care and housing spending some twenty million dollars in 2020.

According to Zureik (2017), the state of Qatar emerged as a critical humanitarian patron for Palestine, particularly under Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani and his successor, Sheikh Tamim. Between 2009 and 2017, Doha provided over \$1.7 billion in aid, focusing on Gaza's reconstruction post-Israeli offensives (2008–2009, 2014). Key initiatives included the 2012 Gaza Reconstruction Committee, which oversaw infrastructure projects like the Hamad City housing complex (1,200 homes) and fuel subsidies for Gaza's power plant. Qatar also funded hospitals (e.g., Al-Wafa) and education programs. This aid –coupled with mediation efforts– served dual purposes: alleviating Palestinian suffering and positioning Qatar as a regional power broker, countering rivals like Saudi Arabia. Zureik (2017) notes that such humanitarian diplomacy bolstered Doha's soft power, despite political controversies. Looking into aid from Israeli perspective, Michal Yaari (2020) who noted; according to data presented to Israeli's security cabinet, Qatar donated over 1.1 billion USD to Gaza with Israeli government permission between 2012-2018. For him, the Palestinian cause remains central to Qatar's foreign policy, yet Doha has strategically leveraged its mediator role to foster limited regional cooperation with Israel. While significant diplomatic, economic, and civilian potential exists for deeper Israel-Qatar relations, the

unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to impose fundamental constraints on this bilateral relationship.

KILL A PALESTINIAN, NOBODY CARES: ABOUT THE MURDER OF THE MAQDISI JOURNALIST SHIREN ABU AKLEH

On 11 May 2022, while the world was watching, Shireen Abu Akleh –a veteran Jerusalemite correspondent for Al-Jazeera Arabic who had reported on Israel’s occupation of Palestine for over twenty-five years– was killed in Jenin Camp, shot in cold blood by an Israeli soldier. Then she was robbed of a dignified burial when the Israeli police raid her funeral, denying her a peaceful burial. The circumstances of her death provoked global outrage, triggering international condemnation and widespread demands for an impartial investigation. Israel, however, rejected these calls, opting instead for an internal inquiry (Al-Jazeera News, 2022).

The Israeli government and military narrative shifted repeatedly. Initially, authorities denied responsibility, claiming armed Palestinian fighters were the “likely” perpetrators. While Israeli Authorities initially denied responsibility, extensive investigations by international media, human rights monitors, and UN officials consistently identified Israeli forces as the perpetrators for the Jenin shooting. Under sustained international pressure, Israeli authorities eventually conceded that it was “highly possible” one of their soldiers had killed Abu Akleh (Al-Jazeera News, 2022).

Shireen Abu Akleh, who was murdered in full view of the international community, was clearly identifiable as a journalist –wearing a clearly marked press vest and helmet, and standing alongside journalists similarly equipped. Her killing epitomised the vulnerability of journalists in Palestine, where she became one among eighteen reporters killed since 2000. This pattern underscores the systematic targeting of media professionals, silencing voices that document the realities of occupation and further eroding the protections guaranteed under international humanitarian law. The Qatari Amiri Diwan asserts in their condolence:

In the 21st Century, we should not tolerate these aggressions. And we should not accept a world where governments have double standards about the value of people, based on their region, race, or religion. We consider the value, of each European life, to be just as precious, as someone from our region (Amiri Diwan, May 2022).

Her face and the Palestinian flag lit up the tower buildings of Lusail, Qatar for a number of days (The New Arab Staff, May, 2022).

Practicing violence against Palestinians such as the multiple accidents in 2021 in Sheikh Jarrah where hundreds of Palestinians protested Israeli settlers' attempts to seize properties from Palestinians. During the coverage of Shiekh Jarah, journalists were targeted by Israeli soldiers with their government encouraging them to uphold violence against Palestinians. Among the cases illustrating this trend is the detention of Palestinian journalist and mother Lama

Ghosheh who was arrested and facing charges of "incitement" through social media (MEE staff, 2022). Broadcasting from Qatar, Al-Jazeera has covered Palestine extensively since its founding in 1996, making it one of the network's longest running and most prominent focuses. Al-Jazeera's coverage on Jerusalem is a polemical counter-narrative to Western media, combining on-the-ground reporting with advocacy journalism that centres Palestinian resistance and frames Israel as an oppressive occupier. In its coverage, Al-Jazeera focuses on settlement expansions, Israeli soldiers' assault on al-Aqsa Mosque and its worshippers, and Eastern Jerusalem evictions with special reports on Jerusalemite identity and Israel's "Judaisation" policies. The media outlet often accused of anti-Israel bias. However, it aligns with Qatar's pro-Palestinian diplomacy and foreign policy on Palestine cause. According to Eddin and Rahma (2021), Qatar has wisely employed its soft power tools to play a role in the Palestinian issue including tools like Al-Jazeera's coverage of the conflict.

CONCLUSION

In recent decades, West Asia and the Arab World has endured profound political and economic turmoil. The Arab Spring of 2011 and subsequent shifts in regional and international alignments accelerated the pace of normalisation with the Zionist state among certain Arab countries, leaving Palestinians at times feeling abandoned by their Arab and Muslim brethren. Against this backdrop, this paper has sought to examine Qatar's role in empowering and standing in solidarity with Palestinians, particularly Jerusalemites. Despite its small size, the foreign policy strategies adopted by the Qatari leadership since 1995 have enabled the country to overcome structural constraints that might otherwise have limited its influence (Kabalan, 2017). As Federica D'Acunto (2016) observes, the Palestinian question remains a foremost priority for Qatar, reflected in its steadfast defence of Palestinian human rights and consistent condemnation of Israeli policies. Qatar's engagement manifests across multiple domains –ranging from principled diplomatic advocacy and conflict mediation to substantial financial and humanitarian assistance– underscoring its enduring commitment to keeping the Palestinian question alive.

The Arab Opinion Index 2025 situates Qatar within a broader regional pattern of opposition to recognising "Israel" and normalising diplomatic relations. Survey findings reveal that 89% of respondents in Qatar opposed normalisation, placing the country among those exhibiting the highest levels of resistance in the Arab world. This position closely mirrors wider regional attitudes, with 87% of respondents across the Arab world rejecting official recognition of "Israel" by their governments and only 6% expressing support. The persistence of such views, despite the "Abraham Accords" of 2020 and subsequent normalisation agreements between "Israel" and several Arab states, underscores the enduring gap between state-level diplomatic initiatives and public opinion. Qatar's high level of opposition is comparable to that recorded in Libya (96%), Jordan (95%),

Kuwait (94%), and the occupied Palestinian territories (91%), highlighting the continued prevalence of anti-normalisation sentiment across the whole of the region (Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2026).

During the Arab Spring (2011–2013), Qatar pursued an ambitious regional policy aimed at shaping political transitions in West Asia, directly contesting the spheres of influence maintained by Saudi Arabia particularly in Egypt and Iran notably in Syria. This paper has highlighted Qatar's capacity to sustain a key role in the region and demonstrated how Qatari officials consistently seized opportunities to consolidate Palestinian resistance and defend Palestinians' fundamental and legitimate rights –political, social, civil, economic, and cultural.

Under the leadership of Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, Qatar placed Palestine at the centre of its foreign policy and deepened its engagement with the question of Israeli occupation. This orientation was driven both by ideological solidarity with Arab and Muslim causes and by a strategic ambition to expand Qatar's regional influence. Content analysis of 210 of Sheikh Hamad's speeches between 1995 and 2013 reveals al-Quds as the most frequently addressed theme (73 mentions), surpassing even Gaza (70 references). This emphasis reflects Jerusalem's dual role as a political flashpoint in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and as a sacred symbol for Muslims worldwide. Sheikh Hamad consistently underscored its status as one of Islam's holiest cities –home to Al-Aqsa Mosque, Muslims first Qiblah– while condemning Israeli policies threatening its Arab and Islamic character. His address at the Doha International Conference on al-Quds in February 2012 epitomised this focus, framing the city's protection as a collective Muslim duty rather than merely a Palestinian concern (Eddin, Zweiri & Rahma, 2021). This diplomatic commitment was further intensified under the leadership of HH Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, the Amir of Qatar, who has consistently called for unified Arab–Islamic action to halt Israeli crimes amid global inaction, thereby reinforcing Qatar's enduring role as a defender of Palestinian rights.

The State of Qatar has employed niche diplomacy to keep the Jerusalem question alive both regionally and internationally. Driven by ideological alignment with Arab–Muslim solidarity as well as pragmatic state interests –including security preservation and ambitions for regional leadership– Qatar has strategically leveraged soft power instruments to influence the Palestinian issue (Eddin & Rahma, 2021). This multifaceted approach is evident across four principal channels: substantial humanitarian assistance, Al-Jazeera's influential framing of the conflict, representation of the Palestinian cause at the United Nations, and diplomatic mediation between “Israel” and Hamas.

While this article has focused on Qatar's engagement with the Palestinian cause in the period preceding Tufan al-Aqsa, it is important to recognise the continued relevance of the diplomatic, political, and humanitarian strategies examined here. Qatar's role has remained pivotal during the Israeli genocide in Gaza since 2023, particularly through mediation and humanitarian diplomacy.

Positioned at the centre of negotiations, Qatar has leveraged its diplomatic influence, political access, and economic resources to facilitate negotiations among the parties involved. Its longstanding relationship with Hamas has enabled Doha to serve as a trusted interlocutor and an indispensable channel of communication between otherwise irreconcilable actors. This unique position raises critical questions regarding the role of mediator partiality in conflict resolution and whether close ties to one of the parties may, under certain circumstances, constitute a strategic asset rather than a liability in crisis diplomacy (Schiff & Admoni, 2025). Working alongside the United States and Egypt, Qatar played a central role in brokering the November 2023 prisoner-release agreement, which secured a seven-day humanitarian truce, facilitated the release of more than ninety war prisoners, and enabled the delivery of urgently needed aid to Gaza. Despite significant political and security challenges –including the Israeli airstrike in September 2025 that targeted Hamas leaders in Doha and killed a Qatari security officer (Gritten, 2025)– Qatar has remained committed in its mediating role. These efforts underscore Qatar's readiness to continue pursuing dialogue and diplomacy, reaffirming its commitment to ending the genocide and alleviating humanitarian suffering in Gaza.

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