



Arab Negotiators: Qatar and Saudi Arabia Seek to Resolve Palestinian-Israeli Conflict

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In Israel's war with Hamas, Qatar has become the main mediator in negotiating a ceasefire agreement between the parties in conflict. Saudi Arabia, at the same time, has focused on a long-term solution, promoting its Renewed Arab Peace Initiative. Poland, whose approach to the conflict is consistent with this plan, could use its potential support for the initiative to influence the Saudi position towards Russian aggression against Ukraine.

Almost from the beginning of [Israel's invasion of the Gaza Strip in response to the 7 October Hamas attack](#), Qatari authorities have been a key mediator in negotiations on a ceasefire. So far, they have only managed to implement one that lasted less than a week at the end of November. At that time, the Israeli authorities released 240 Palestinian prisoners and Hamas turned over 105 Israeli hostages. The most important truce proposal since then has been the three-phase plan announced by U.S. President Joe Biden on 31 May, backed by UN Security Council Resolution 2735, which included not only a pause in fighting but also the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the most populated areas of the Strip, while Hamas would release the remaining hostages. This would be followed by improved delivery of humanitarian aid and, in the final stage, the complete withdrawal of the Israeli army from Gaza. However, Hamas proposed changes, such as the timeframe for the withdrawal of the Israeli troops, which contributed to Israel's eventual rejection of the plan. In addition to the ceasefire negotiations, there are also talks on the future of the Gaza Strip, its reconstruction and governance, where Saudi Arabia and the future of Saudi-Israeli relations play an important role.

Qatari Mediation. Qatar's important role in the negotiations with Hamas is linked to the country's assertive policy, which

allows it to maintain credibility and trust with both Western countries and their allies, as well as with Iran and even terrorist organisations. This has made Qatar the key actor in difficult negotiation processes, such as those [between the U.S. and the Taliban](#) or during earlier escalations between Israel and Hamas, as well as in the release of some [Ukrainian children kidnapped by the Russians](#) after the invasion of Ukraine in 2022. At the same time, the credibility of Arab mediation has been enhanced by Qatari cooperation with Egypt, with the latter's approach to Hamas more closely aligned with that of Israel. Qatar's leading role is crucial to maintaining the legitimacy of mediation in the eyes of the Palestinians—most Palestinians rated it as positive in surveys conducted nearly two months after the Gaza war began. Among residents of the Gaza Strip alone, 79% expressed such an opinion. Qatar has also been home to Hamas' political office since 2012, and its leader, Ismail Haniyeh, lives there. These factors make it possible to maintain smooth contact between the mediators and Hamas, despite unsuccessful negotiations so far.

From Qatar's perspective, its participation in the difficult mediation allows it to strengthen its image as an independent regional actor, and at the same time, an important partner—also to the West—in the security field, despite its limited military capabilities. This helps it prevent

renewed pressure from states critical of Qatar's relations with the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, or Iran, such as the [blockade imposed on it by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, and Bahrain in 2017](#). The effectiveness of such an approach was indicated by Western countries' positions emphasising Qatar's essential role in mediating between Hamas and Israel when it signalled in April that it might abandon the process due to accusations of bias by members of the Israeli government and the U.S. administration on the one hand, and by Hamas' uncompromising stance on the other. During previous efforts to deescalate conflicts between Hamas and Israel, Qatar combined elements of mediation with promises of investment in reconstruction as incentives for both sides to cease hostilities. This time, however, despite pressure from Israel and the U.S., it has adamantly refused to take responsibility for reconstructing Gaza. Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states also rejected such a possibility, as well as suggestions that they could govern the Strip, stressing that reconstruction is Israel's responsibility and control must be conducted by the Palestinian Authority.

Saudi Initiative. Saudi Arabia's involvement is of a more long-term nature and focuses on the future of the Gaza Strip after the hostilities end. This is related to the [normalisation of the monarchy's relations with Israel](#), planned even before the outbreak of the war, [with U.S. participation](#), which was to consolidate the monarchy's position as a regional leader. The Hamas attack was the reason for halting talks on the issue, and their potential resumption has become part of the negotiations to end the Gaza war. Saudi diplomacy is therefore working both regionally with Arab partners to create a post-war plan for Gaza and bilaterally, using potential normalisation with Israel as an incentive to accept ceasefire terms.

Both forms of engagement draw on Saudi Arabia's proposed Arab Peace Initiative of 2002, which proposed normalisation of Arab relations with Israel in exchange for the establishment of Palestine within the 1967 borders (the so-called peace-for-land principle). Now, Saudi authorities conditioned recognition of Israel on the latter's "irreversible steps" toward guaranteeing the creation of Palestine, but moved away from demanding its immediate creation. This condition became more important after the start of the Gaza war, not least because of the Palestinians' deteriorating assessment of the Saudi actions (the percentage of those expressing a favourable stance toward them fell from 38% before 7 October to 5% during the war), as well as Israel's growing isolation in the international arena and growing support for the Palestinian side. This is indicated by statements by the Saudi foreign minister, who stressed that security guarantees for Israel must be accompanied by security guarantees for the Palestinians (at the Manama

conference last November), and that only the creation of Palestine can guarantee peace for Israel (at the World Economic Forum in January this year). The potential effectiveness of Saudi efforts could be undermined by the signing of a bilateral Saudi-U.S. security agreement that does not address the Palestinian issue, which U.S. representatives have been working on for several months.

This approach is also reflected in the joint proposal by Arab states to end the conflict. In January, five countries (Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Egypt, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates) led by the Saudis began working with the Palestinian Authority on a peace plan. Its conditions included UN recognition of Palestinian statehood, the complete withdrawal of the Israeli army from the Gaza Strip, the [Palestinian Authority taking control of the Strip](#), international support for building security structures and establishing UN peacekeeping missions in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, as well as the start of direct negotiations between Palestine and Israel. The plan was rejected by the U.S. in May as unrealistic, while the Israeli authorities are currently rejecting all proposals involving the creation of Palestine despite pressure from the EU and its Member States.

Conclusions and Recommendations. Qatar and Saudi Arabia are the most important actors from the Arab world capable of influencing the future of the situation in Gaza and the broader Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Although these countries' goals and attitudes toward Hamas diverge, the nature of their involvement in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is complementary. Qatar's actions are focused on achieving immediate results like a truce and improving the delivery of humanitarian aid, and its long-standing regional policy reinforces the legitimacy of the negotiations. In contrast, the new Arab initiative promoted by Saudi Arabia presents assumptions that provide a good starting point for further work on a peace agreement, especially with the possibility of linking it to the normalisation of monarchy-Israel relations. From the Palestinian perspective, the risk factor in this regard remains the signing of a bilateral Saudi-American agreement, which could divide Arab states due to the deteriorating perception of U.S. policy in the region.

In view of the growing importance of Saudi Arabia and Qatar to Polish foreign and energy policy, Polish diplomacy could consider signalling their support for a commitment to peace in the region, for example during visits to Doha and Riyadh. Given that Saudi Arabia is considered as a venue for peace talks between Russia and Ukraine, Poland could consider linking its official support for the Arab peace plan regarding Palestine—for example during next year's EU Council presidency—with a suggestion of a more favourable Saudi stance towards the Ukrainian proposal to end the war.