

Israel-Hamas war

Qatar asks Hamas leaders to leave after US pressure

Washington says militant group's rejection of deal to release Israeli hostages meant its presence was no longer 'viable'



Qatari prime minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani © Pool/AFP via Getty Images

Steff Chávez in Washington, **Neri Zilber** in Tel Aviv, **James Shotter** in Jerusalem and **Chloe Cornish** in Dubai YESTERDAY

Qatar has told the leaders of Hamas to leave the country following pressure from Washington, in a significant shift in policy by the Gulf state.

The request was made around 10 days ago after intense discussions with US officials, according to one person familiar with the matter.

The gas-rich state has hosted Hamas's political office in its capital, Doha, since 2012, when Syria's civil war forced it to leave its base in Damascus, and the US asked Qatar to open a channel of communication with the Palestinian group.

Doha became a crucial interlocutor in hostage negotiations between Israel and Hamas following the militant group's deadly attack on southern Israel in October 2023, in which it killed 1,200 Israelis and took more than 250 hostage, according to Israeli officials.

Israel's ensuing offensive in Gaza has killed more than 43,000 Palestinians, according to Palestinian officials.

More than 100 Israeli hostages were freed in a deal last year that Qatar helped broker. But the talks have since been deadlocked, and Doha was told that after the failure of "repeated proposals to release hostages, [Hamas's] leaders should no longer be

welcome in the capitals of any American partner”, said a senior Biden administration official.

“We made that clear to Qatar following Hamas’s rejection weeks ago of another hostage release proposal,” the official said.

The official added that while Qatar had played a key role in trying to negotiate a ceasefire and the release of the remaining Israeli hostages held by the militant group over the past year, “following Hamas’s repeated refusal to release even a small number of hostages, including most recently during meetings in Cairo, their continued presence in Doha is no longer viable or acceptable”.

A person familiar with the matter said Hamas figures in Qatar would relocate to Turkey. The country has long harboured Hamas political operatives and since the start of the war in Gaza, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has been vocal in his support for the group.

Turkey’s foreign ministry did not respond to a request for comment.

In recent years, Qatar has poured millions of dollars into Gaza — which Hamas has governed since it seized control of the enclave in 2007 — to pay the salaries of civil servants and support struggling Palestinian families.

The country’s image was tarnished by its relationship with Hamas after the October 7 attack. But its role as a mediator in ceasefire talks attracted international praise, and it successfully brokered the release last year of the more than 100 Israeli hostages in exchange for 240 Palestinian women and children held in Israeli jails.

But, frustrated by both sides’ intransigence in the talks to end the conflict in Gaza and criticism of Qatar by politicians in the US and elsewhere, Qatari prime minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani said in April that Doha was [re-evaluating its role](#) as mediator.

An Arab diplomat said Hamas officials had recently visited countries including Turkey, Iran, Algeria and Mauritania, and discussed the possibility of relocating.

“Qatar hosted Hamas leaders in the first place after they got a green light from the Americans. It’s logical to try to get rid of them when the US position changes,” the diplomat said.

Additional reporting by Adam Samson in Ankara

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