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## Operation "Summit of Fire" Another Feather in Airpower's Cap

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## Introduction

On the afternoon of September 09, 2025, Israel conducted a bold aerial attack targeting senior Hamas leadership in Doha, Qatar. This operation was named Operation "*Summit of Fire*." It marked the first time that Israeli forces executed an offensive action within the sovereign territory of a country considered a United States (US) ally. Recently, Israel has consistently demonstrated a growing willingness to undertake operations on foreign soil in pursuit of its national goals, even at the cost of diplomacy. This operation also highlighted the Israeli Air Force's (IAF) ability to adapt to evolving doctrines, incorporate advanced technologies, and act upon real-time intelligence. Importantly, it validates Israeli leadership's decisiveness in a complex diplomatic environment.<sup>1</sup>

## Operation "Summit of Fire"

The operation had been planned for some time, with operational details worked out over several months. Apparently, a meeting was scheduled among senior Hamas leaders to discuss a new US-proposed ceasefire deal for Gaza in Doha. Israeli intelligence agencies tracked the gathering, identified it as an opportunity, and provided the necessary operational intelligence for the operators to undertake the mission. The Israel Defence Forces (IDF), Shin Bet,<sup>2</sup> and Mossad collaborated closely with real-time intelligence support. Operational control was exercised by senior political and military leadership, including Mossad and Shin Bet.<sup>3</sup> The operation has been in the planning stage for several months, involving regular meetings and classified simulation exercises that picked up pace in the past weeks. The green light for the strike was given on September 09, just hours before the scheduled attack was to take place. The use of the Shin Bet's special operations command centre for mission direction highlights the role of integrated, multi-domain coordination.<sup>4</sup>

Over 15 IAF fighter jets (primarily F-35I "Adir" stealth fighters), supplemented by drones for real-time surveillance and targeting, were involved. These advanced platforms ensured penetration of Qatari airspace while evading detection by modern air defence systems, including US-supplied Patriot Advanced Capability (PAC)-3 and NASAMS (National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile System) batteries.<sup>5</sup> At least ten to twelve precision-guided munitions (heavy bombs, air-to-ground missiles, and *Delilah* loitering munitions) were delivered onto a single compound with near-simultaneous impact.<sup>6</sup> The fighter jets flew a whopping distance of about 1,800 to 2,200 km either way, conducting multiple air-to-air refuellings during the transit on each leg. The flight path allegedly avoided Jordanian airspace, crossing Syrian and Iraqi sectors.<sup>7</sup> Advanced Electronic Warfare (EW) assets jammed radar and radio communications, suppressing both Qatari and US-operated surveillance and early-warning systems at Al-Udeid Air Base, located only 30 km from the target.<sup>8</sup>

The entire operation, from take-off to landing, took roughly five hours, suggesting intense operator training and rapid tasking enabled by robust C4ISR integration (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance).<sup>9</sup> The West Bay Lagoon district, the heart of the strike zone, is home to embassies, luxury residences, foreign diplomats, and the US ambassador's residence, underscoring the operation's complexity and high-risk threshold.<sup>10</sup> Subsequent developments have indicated that prior information was provided to the US by Israel, and in turn, to Qatar agencies by US agencies. However, such claims have been refuted by Qatari government sources.<sup>11</sup>

Operational accounts indicate a direct hit on the targeted complex and surrounding compound, with physical damage and fatalities. Reportedly, the airstrike resulted in six **deaths** (five Hamas operators and one Qatari security officer).<sup>12</sup> Despite the successful attack in terms of precision and effect, it appears that senior Hamas leadership managed to survive due to last-minute movement or successful deception regarding their real location within the district.<sup>13</sup> Prominent among the fatalities were **Humam al-Hayya** (son of Hamas chief Khalil al-Hayya) and **Jihad Labad** (director of Al-Hayya's office).<sup>14</sup> Notwithstanding the tactical impact, Israel did manage to communicate strategic reach and ability to disrupt Hamas leadership during sensitive negotiations. Intimidation has been reestablished by the conduct of such an audacious airstrike. Despite Qatar's extensive investment in air defence (Patriot PAC-3, NASAMS, Rafale, and F-15QA jets), the Israeli strike went undetected and unchallenged. Al-Udeid is one of the foremost military bases outside of the US mainland holding critical US military assets. The proximity of the target to this base is another unique aspect of this strike. It appears that the Qatari air defence command centres failed to respond, a direct testament to Israel's potent electronic warfare and stealth capabilities.<sup>15</sup> Defence analysts cite this as a demonstration of modern EW and cyber capabilities, aimed at paralysing well-trenched defences.<sup>16</sup>

## Lessons for Contemporary and Future Air Operations

(a) **Extended Reach and Rapid Power Projection:** The IAF demonstrated its ability to plan and execute an ambitious strike over trans-regional distances. This was achieved by effectively utilising air-to-air refuelling, precise coordination, and complementary logistics. Such operations encourage modern air forces to invest in combat enablers such as refuelers and EW systems. Although India does not have any expeditionary intentions, such actions reignite discussions about the relevance of stealth bombers. Diplomatically, cross-border operational agreements are crucial, as they must be carefully negotiated to remain effective across different geographies.<sup>17</sup>

- (b) **Stealth, Precision, and EW:** The successful evasion of advanced air defences while carrying out simultaneous successful air attacks demonstrates the pivotal role of stealth platforms and EW in modern warfare.<sup>18</sup>
- (c) **Intelligence, Integration, and Time-Sensitivity:** Months of preparatory intelligence, fused with Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR), and cyber support, permitted time-sensitive targeting. Future airpower applications must couple layered intelligence with rapid decision cycles.<sup>19</sup>
- (d) **Strategic Communication and Risk Management:** Achieving tactical success does not necessarily guarantee the fulfilment of political goals.<sup>20</sup> This is especially true for countries like India, which value strategic autonomy. Additionally, considerations such as narrative building, diplomatic fallout, and alliance management will influence decision-makers' calculations going forward.<sup>21</sup>
- (e) **Redefining Deterrence and Security Architecture:** The strike catalysed re-evaluation of regional security, exposed vulnerabilities, and prompted debate on defence, intelligence sharing, and escalation management in the Middle East.<sup>22</sup>

## Conclusion

The conduct of Operation "Summit of Fire" has reaffirmed the growing prowess of dynamic air operations in pursuit of strategic effects. Israel's innovative and audacious use of Air power has transformed the calculus of alliance coordination on the diplomatic front while showcasing tremendous reach and striking capability based on accurate intelligence. Air power has again proven its capability to achieve desired effects and shape strategic manoeuvres.<sup>23</sup> Another important outcome has been the efficacy of enablers such as integrated ISR, AAR, EW, and stealth. This event will provide enduring principles for future procurement, force structuring, employment,<sup>24</sup> and doctrines for the use of Air power.<sup>25</sup>

## Notes:

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- <sup>1</sup> "Israel attacks Hamas leadership in Qatar: All to know," *Al Jazeera*, September 09, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/9/9/israel-attacks-hamas-leadership-in-qatar-all-to-know>. Accessed on September 10, 2025.
- <sup>2</sup> Shin Bet (also known as Shabak or the Israel Security Agency) is Israel's primary internal security and counterintelligence organisation.
- <sup>3</sup> Fiona Nimoni, "What do we know about Israeli strike on Hamas in Qatar?" *BBC*, September 09, 2025. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cq5jl77ygv4o>. Accessed on September 10, 2025.
- <sup>4</sup> Elisha Ben Kimon, Yoav Zitun "Months of preparation' for attack on Hamas leaders in Qatar: The secret battle plan, the green light and the heavy bombing," *Ynet News*, September 8, 2025, <https://www.ynetnews.com/article/h13nhr69el>. Accessed on September 10, 2025.
- <sup>5</sup> Howard Altman, Joseph Trevithick, "Israel Executes Unprecedented Strike on Hamas Leadership in Qatar," *The War Zone*, September 8, 2025, <https://www.twz.com/news-features/israel-executes-unprecedented-strike-on-hamas-leadership-in-qatar>. Accessed on September 10, 2025.
- <sup>6</sup> Joe Truzman, "Israel targets Hamas leaders in Qatar," *Long War Journal*, September 08, 2025, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2025/09/israel-targets-hamas-leaders-in-qatar.php>. Accessed on September 10, 2025.
- <sup>7</sup> "Doha explosions: Israel says dropped 10 bombs on Hamas headquarters in Qatar," *Times of India*, September 9, 2025, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/middle-east/doha-explosions-israel-says-dropped-10-bombs-on-hamas-headquarters-in-qatar-top-developments/articleshow/123789388.cms>. Accessed on September 10, 2025.
- <sup>8</sup> "Israel's Airstrike in Doha Exposes Qatar's Air Defence Failure," *Defence Security Asia*, September 9, 2025, <https://defencesecurityasia.com/en/israel-airstrike-doha-qatar-air-defence-failure/>. Accessed on September 10, 2025.
- <sup>9</sup> Kimon, Zitun, n. 4.
- <sup>10</sup> Nimoni, n. 3.
- <sup>11</sup> Joseph Stepansky, "Qatar denies White House claim Trump sent warning before Israel's attack," *Al Jazeera*, September 09, 2025. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/9/9/white-house-says-trump-notified-qatar-ahead-of-israeli-strike-on-hamas>. Accessed on September 09, 2025.
- <sup>12</sup> Andrew Mills, Jana Choukeir, Ahmed Elimam and Jeff Mason "Israel attacks Hamas leaders in Qatar, Trump says he's 'very unhappy' about strike," *Reuters*, September 9, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israel-attacks-hamas-leaders-qatar-trump-says-hes-very-unhappy-about-strike-2025-09-09/>, Accessed on September 10, 2025.
- <sup>13</sup> David Grittenin, Paul Adams, "Hamas claims leaders survived Israeli attack in Doha, but confirms six deaths," *BBC*, September 09, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ced58zywdwno>, Accessed on September 10, 2025.
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- <sup>15</sup> Grittenin, Adam, n. 13.
- <sup>16</sup> Bilal Y. Saab and Darren D. White, "Lessons Observed from the War Between Israel and Iran," *War on the Rocks*, July 08, 2025, <https://warontherocks.com/2025/07/lessons-observed-from-the-war-between-israel-and-iran/>. Accessed on September 10, 2025.

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<sup>18</sup> Altman, Trevithick, n. 5.

<sup>19</sup> Truzman, n. 6.

<sup>20</sup> Mills, Choukir, n. 12.

<sup>21</sup> Adam Rasgon, Vivian Nereieim, Ronen Bergman, "Israel Attempts to Kill Hamas Leadership in Airstrike on Qatar," *New York Times*, September 09, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/09/09/world/middleeast/israel-hamas-doha-qatar-strike.html>. Accessed on September 10, 2025.

<sup>22</sup> [Sean Mathews](#), "Israel's attack on Qatar eviscerates promise of US security umbrella," *Middle East Eye*, September 08, 2025, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/israels-attack-qatar-eviscerates-promise-us-security-umbrella-gulf>. Accessed on September 10, 2025.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Grittenin, Adam, n. 13.

<sup>25</sup> Kimon, Zitun, n. 4.

