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# **ASSESSING QATAR'S STANCE TOWARDS THE ISRAELI- PALESTINIAN CONFLICT THROUGH THE SPEECHES OF SHEIKH HAMAD BIN KHALIFA AL THANI (1995-2013)**

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## Abstract

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a major concern for Arabs and Muslims around the world and is considered one of the main reasons for instability in the Middle East. It affects state and non-state actors in the region. Qatar's involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has increased during the reign of Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, driven by its solidarity with the Arab and Muslim causes and in pursuit of a regional role. In this paper, Qatar's stance towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is examined through Sheikh Hamad 'speeches towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Sheikh Hamad delivered 210 official speeches during his 18 years of reign (1995–2013) and mentioned the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in 73 of them. This means that one third of Sheikh Hamad's speeches mentioned the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This signals the significance of this conflict for Qatar and the Gulf region. Through studying Sheikh Hamad's speeches, one can understand Qatar's official position towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and how Qatar exercised some autonomy in its foreign policy and deviated from the Gulf Corporation Council (GCC) and its member states which is not typical for a small state such as Qatar.

**Keywords:** Qatar foreign policy, Israeli -Palestinian conflict, Sheikh Hamad Al Thani.

## ملخص البحث

يعتبر الصراع الإسرائيلي الفلسطيني مصدر قلق كبير للعرب والمسلمين في جميع أنحاء العالم ويعتبر أحد الأسباب الرئيسية لعدم الاستقرار في الشرق الأوسط. إنه يؤثر على الجهات الحكومية وغير الحكومية في المنطقة. تزايد انخراط قطر في الصراع الإسرائيلي الفلسطيني في عهد الشيخ حمد بن خليفة آل ثاني ، مدفوعا بتضامنها مع القضايا العربية والإسلامية وسعيها لدور إقليمي. في هذه الورقة ، يتم فحص موقف قطر من الصراع الإسرائيلي الفلسطيني من خلال خطابات الشيخ حمد تجاه الصراع الإسرائيلي الفلسطيني. ألقى الشيخ حمد 210 خطابًا رسميًا خلال 18 عامًا من حكمه (1995-2013) وذكر الصراع الإسرائيلي الفلسطيني في 73 منها. وهذا يعني أن ثلث خطابات الشيخ حمد تحدثت عن الصراع الإسرائيلي الفلسطيني. وهذا يشير إلى أهمية هذا الصراع بالنسبة لقطر ومنطقة الخليج. من خلال دراسة خطابات الشيخ حمد ، يمكن للمرء أن يفهم الموقف الرسمي لدولة قطر تجاه الصراع الإسرائيلي الفلسطيني وكيف مارست قطر بعض الاستقلالية في سياستها الخارجية وانحرفت عن مجلس التعاون الخليجي والدول الأعضاء فيه وهو أمر غير نمذجي لدولة صغيرة. مثل قطر.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** سياسة قطر الخارجية ، الصراع الإسرائيلي الفلسطيني ، الشيخ حمد آل ثاني.



## Introduction

This paper addresses Qatar’s official stance towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through Sheikh Hamad’s bin Khalifa Al Thani’s speeches about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict during his 18 years of rule. The decision to use Sheikh Hamad’s speeches was based on the fact that the Amir of Qatar represents the official position of the state and sets policies and directions for the country. The Amir uses speeches to announce key positions and policies. Sheikh Hamad made 210 official speeches throughout his rule (1995–2013) and mentioned Palestine in 73 of them. This means that one third of Sheikh Hamad’s speeches referred to Palestine. Two out of 73 speeches were wholly dedicated to the topic of Palestine. One was given in Doha on February 26, 2012 at the International Conference on Jerusalem, and the other was made during Sheikh Hamad’s visit to Gaza on October 23, 2012. During Sheikh Hamad’s reign, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict reached major milestones, which are reflected in his speeches. Table 2 presents a summary of major events related to the conflict.

Table 2. Major Milestones in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (1995–2013)

Year	Event	Notes
September 24, 1995	Oslo II Accord	Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin sign an agreement to transfer further territory to the PNA.
September 28, 2000	Al-Aqsa Intifada	The intifada breaks out after Ariel Sharon’s visit to Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem.
March 29, 2002	Israeli invasion of the West Bank	This event represents the largest operation since the 1967 Six-Day War.
March 28, 2002	Adoption of the Arab Peace Initiative by the Beirut Summit	The Arab Peace Initiative calls for normalization between Arab countries and Israel based on the principle of land for peace.
June 2002	Erection of separation wall on the West Bank	The Israeli-built wall isolates Jerusalem and leads to the confiscation of many Palestinian lands.



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Year	Event	Notes
September 20, 2002	Israeli siege of Yasser Arafat's headquarters in Ramallah	Israel lifts its 34-day siege after the Palestinians transfer six men wanted by Israel to a prison in Jericho as part of a deal brokered by the United States.
March 22, 2004	Death of Ahmad Yassin	Yassin was the founder of Hamas.
November 11, 2004	Death of Yasser Arafat in Paris	Arafat was the chairman of PLO (1969–2004) and the president of the PNA (1994–2004).
January 9, 2005	Mahmood Abbas's rise to the presidency	Abbas is the moderate president of the PNA and the leader of the PLO and Fatah.
April 30, 2003	Roadmap for peace	The United States, the European Union, Russia, and the United Nations propose a roadmap to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by creating a Palestinian state that peacefully co-exists with Israel.
September 12, 2005	Israel's withdrawal from Gaza	This event marks an end to 38 years of Israeli occupation. Israel retains control over Gaza's airspace, water supply, and borders.
January 2006	Hamas's victory in Palestinian parliamentary elections	This event marks the second legislative elections after the elections that took place in 1996, which Fatah won.
June 14, 2007	Division between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip	Fatah refuses to acknowledge Hamas's rule over Gaza, and Hamas refuses to give up its right to rule.



Year	Event	Notes
December 27, 2008	Israel launched a war on Gaza	Israel claimed the war was to stop rocket attacks on Israel. Hamas said the rockets were a reaction to the blockade.
March 9, 2012	Beginning of Israel's second war on Gaza	The war is a result of conflict between Israel and Hamas.
October 23, 2012	Sheikh Hamad's visit to Gaza	The purpose of the visit is to provide political and financial support to Gaza.

## Methodology

To assess Qatar's official stance towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through the Amir's speeches, the content analysis approach was used for the current research. Qualitative content analysis is a research method designed to analyze and interpret data (Schreier, 2012). In their book, *Content Analysis: A Methodology for Structuring and Analyzing Written Material* (1996), Brian Crowley and Joseph Delfico specify that researchers categorize key ideas in a written communication as part of the approach. Researchers identify themes, issues, topics, and more. Then, researchers can count the frequency of topics, examine differences in their intensity, or analyze issues over time in different settings. Content analysis helps to summarize the content of written material and describe the attitudes of the material's author (Crowley & Delfico, 1996). Many researchers follow the content analysis approach, because it employs a systematic process that other investigators can easily replicate, yielding highly reliable results.

Previous studies that have used content analysis include Mohamed Selim's (1987) *Nasari Political Analysis – A Study in Foreign Doctrines and Policy*, in which the author analyzes Jamal Abdel Naser's speeches; Chang Pu's (2007) "Discourse Analysis of President Bush's Speech at Tsinghua University, China"; Hind Ismail's (2012) "Discourse Markers in Political Speeches: Forms and Functions," in which the researcher analyzes two of Barack Obama's 2012 speeches; and Mazen Al-Ougaili and Suzan Yaqoub's (2019) "Analysis of the Political Discourse of King Abdullah II Ibn Al-Hussein and Its Impact on Human Development in Jordan (1999–2015)."

After defining the text of interest, the content analysis approach entails the following steps:

1. Defining themes and keywords.
2. Setting rules for searching keywords.
3. Extracting relevant sections according to the keywords and rules.
4. Analyzing the extracted sections and drawing conclusions.



For the present study, the researcher collected official speeches given by the Amir (1995–2013) from the Amiri Diwan Archives. In total, 210 of Sheikh Hamad’s official speeches are publicly accessible at the Amiri Diwan Archives of the State of Qatar’s website ([https:// diwan.gov.qa](https://diwan.gov.qa)). They are available as videos and as Arabic and English texts. The researcher conducted an initial screening and a shortlist of relevant speeches by searching for the main keywords, “Palestine” and “Israel.” This resulted in a subset of 73 speeches. Next, the researcher defined the main themes and relevant keywords to cover the major events that shaped the Israeli-Palestinian conflict during Sheikh Hamad’s reign. These themes and relevant keywords are listed in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Relevant Themes and Keywords from the Speeches of Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani (1995–2013)

	Themes	Keywords
Peace process	Madrid Peace Conference (1991), Oslo Accord (1993), Arab Peace Initiative (2002), two-state solution, UN Resolutions	
Jerusalem	Jerusalem, Al-Aqsa Mosque, capital of the Palestinian state	
Settlements	Settlements, confiscation of land, extorting the land	
Gaza	Blockade, Hamas, aggression, reconciliation, division	
	Second Intifada	Uprising, intifada

Then, the researcher searched the 73 shortlisted speeches for the above keywords and categorized them into themes. The next step was to extract and analyze relevant statements from the 73 speeches. The analysis of the extracted statements focused on answering the following questions:

- What was Qatar’s position on the defined themes?
- How many times was a given theme mentioned?
- Did the position on a given theme change with the time, audience, or venue of the speech?

### 1.2 The peace process

Officially, the peace process began with the Madrid Conference in 1991 and culminated with the signing of the Oslo I Accord in 1993 between the Israelis and the Palestinians and Wadi Araba Treaty between the Israelis and the Jordanians in 1994. The 2002 Arab Peace Initiative was an extension of the peace process. After the Second Intifada of 2000, the peace process was put on hold due to the aggressive policies of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s right-wing government against the Palestinians.



Five main keywords were listed under the theme of “peace process”: “Madrid Peace Conference,” “Oslo Accord,” “Arab Peace Initiative,” “two-state solution,” and “UN Resolutions.” A search was performed for these keywords in Sheikh Hamad’s 73 shortlisted speeches about Palestine. The frequency of these themes is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Frequency of Keywords Related to the Theme of the Peace Process in the Speeches of Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani (1995–2013)

Keywords	Frequency
Madrid Peace Conference	6
Accord	1
UN Resolutions	5
Arab Peace Initiative	2
Two-state solution	5

The researcher extracted the statements before and after these keywords from the speeches and summarized Qatar’s stance on the peace process as outlined in the following section.

### 1.3 Qatar’s Stance on the peace process

As seen through Sheikh Hamad’s speeches, Qatar supported the peace process. In total, he discussed the importance of resuming the peace process 19 times in his speeches. Throughout his speeches, Sheikh Hamad emphasized that the peace process was the main concern with regard to stability in the Middle East and should be given priority. The failure of a peace process was a threat to security and stability in the region and also endangered international peace and security. Sheikh Hamad called for the achievement of fair and comprehensive peace for all people of the region on the basis of the Madrid Peace Conference (1991); UN Security Council Resolutions 242, 338, and 425; and the principle of land for peace. He confirmed that peace could not be achieved under Israel’s occupation, Judaization attempts, or provocative acts, threats, and violation of sacred Arab and Muslim sites. He blamed Israel for its refusal to commit to what was agreed upon in Oslo 1 Accord and for its hindrance of the peace process. For instance, at the opening of the 25th Advisory Council Session in Doha, Sheikh Hamad said, “There is no doubt that full responsibility before the international community for the lack of commitment to these principles and the hindering of peace efforts lies with the Israeli government” (*His Highness speech at the Opening of the 25th Advisory Council Session, 1996*).



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Sheikh Hamad explained that Qatar wants peace and takes responsibility for it. As a practical step towards peace, Qatar hosted the MENA Economic Summit in Doha in November 1997. This step was controversial for some Arab and Islamic countries, because the Israeli minister of commerce was in attendance. However, Qatar viewed the invitation of the Israeli delegate as a gesture of goodwill. In a speech at Georgetown University's campus in Doha, Sheikh Hamad said, "We, in Qatar, are willing to take our responsibility for peace. Therefore, we will proceed with our preparations to host the Middle East-North Africa Economic Summit that will be held in Doha next November." In the same speech, he added, "We are doing that in spite of the noncompliance of Netanyahu's government with the international legitimacy resolution, the Madrid terms of reference, the Land for Peace principle, and the agreements concluded with the Palestinians" (*His Highness speech at Georgetown University, 1997*).

For Sheikh Hamad, peace could only be achieved through a just, comprehensive, and permanent settlement; Israel's withdrawal from all Arab territories occupied in 1967; and the restoration of the Palestinians' rights, primarily the right to establish a state with Jerusalem as its capital. At the opening of the 25th Session of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) Foreign Ministers, Sheikh Hamad stated, "We in Qatar affirm our commitment to peace as an indispensable strategic choice: equitable, comprehensive and permanent peace, at all fronts, including the Syrian and Lebanese fronts. Such peace should be based on international legitimacy resolutions, the Madrid Conference and the principle of Land for Peace, including full withdrawal from the Golan Heights and Southern Lebanon, and enabling the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable national rights and establish their independent state with Jerusalem as its capital" (*His Highness speech at the opening of the 25th Session of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) Foreign Minister, 1998*).

However, the peace process deteriorated in 2000 with the beginning of the Al-Aqsa Intifada. Hostilities between the Palestinians and the Israelis continued. Israel continued to build settlements, persist with the Judaization of Jerusalem, and maintain aggressive policies towards Palestinians. Meanwhile, the latter reacted by bombing and attacking the Israelis. Sheikh Hamad heavily criticized Netanyahu and his government for the severe setbacks in the peace process. Recognizing that the Arabs alone were too weak to stop Israeli aggression or to force Israel to fulfill its commitments, Sheikh Hamad frequently called on the United States, Russia, the EU, and the UN to take responsibility. He asked them to provide Palestinians with protection and to reactivate the peace process. He also urged them to exert pressure on Israel to implement the signed agreements and respect the rights of Palestinians, as established through international resolutions.





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At the Second Doha Conference on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World, Sheikh Hamad said,

Our Islamic World wonders why the international community does not exert pressure on Israel to compel it to withdraw from the occupied Arab territories, while all pressures that are exerted apply solely to the Arab side. Therefore, we believe that it is necessary for the United States, which is the sponsor of the peace process, and for the international community to strengthen their efforts to end continuous violence so that negotiations and implementation of the road map can be resumed in order to achieve the positive vision of president George Bush, which is in line with the principles of freedom and justice in which the U.S. believes, namely, the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state living side-by-side with Israel. (*His Highness speech at the 2nd Doha Conference on Relations Between the US. and Islamic World, 2004*).

Sheikh Hamad reiterated that Israel's violence and provocative actions enflamed the sentiments of Arab and Islamic nations. In his opinion, Israel's actions against the Palestinians were intended to disrupt regional peace and to avoid fulfilling its commitments as part of the peace process. At the 67th session of the UN General Assembly, Sheikh Hamad said that "the peace process has stopped because of the Israeli policy of settlement in the Palestinian Territories and Jerusalem and refusing to cede them" (*His Highness speech at the 67th Session of UN General Assembly, 2012*).

To conclude, Sheikh Hamad was consistent in his stance towards the peace process throughout his 18 years of rule (1995–2013). He emphasized that peace was important for the security of the Middle East and of the world. For Qatar, peace meant the Israelis' withdrawal from all Arab territories occupied in 1967 and the establishment of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital, based on the legitimacy of international resolutions. Sheikh Hamad's stance towards the peace process did not change based on the time, audience, or venue of his speeches.

### *Jerusalem*

Three main keywords were established under the theme of "Jerusalem," namely "Jerusalem," "Al-Aqsa Mosque," and "Judaization." Their frequency in Sheikh Hamad's speeches is listed in Table 5.



Table 5. Frequency of Keywords Related to the Theme of Jerusalem in the Speeches of Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani (1995–2013)

Keywords	Frequency
Jerusalem	73
Al-Aqsa Mosque	11
Judaization	9

### *Qatar's Stance on Jerusalem*

Israel occupied West Jerusalem in the 1948 war, while East Jerusalem fell to Israeli occupation in the 1967 Six-Day War. East Jerusalem is home to Al-Aqsa Mosque, which is the first *qibla* (prayer direction) for Muslims and the third holiest shrine in Islam after Makah and Medina. As seen through Sheikh Hamad's speeches, the official Qatari position on Jerusalem is that it is the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict and should be given top priority because Arabs and Muslims will never abandon it. Sheikh Hamad believed that protection should be provided for Arabs in Jerusalem and that peace in the Middle East could only be achieved through a just, comprehensive, and permanent settlement involving the full withdrawal of Israel from all Arab territories occupied in 1967 and the restoration of Palestinians' legitimate national rights, particularly the right to establish an independent state with Jerusalem as its capital. Sheikh Hamad reiterated that there was no Palestinian state without Jerusalem and no Jerusalem without Al-Aqsa Mosque.

In his speeches about Jerusalem, Sheikh Hamad frequently emphasized the importance of maintaining the city's Arab and Islamic identity. To affirm his responsibility to and love for Jerusalem, Sheikh Hamad hosted the International Conference on Jerusalem in Doha in 2012. At the conference, Sheikh Hamad discussed the suffering of Palestinians, illegal Israeli settlements, the confiscation of Palestinian land, the separation wall, the blockade of Gaza, Jerusalem's Judaization, violations against Al-Aqsa Mosque, the ethnic cleansing of the people of Jerusalem, and the destruction of the city's Islamic and Christian heritage. He believed that Arab rulers were not doing enough to protect Jerusalem and urged them to act quickly in order to stop the Judaization of the city and help Muslim and Christian Palestinians to resist "the Zionist scheme of Greater Jerusalem" (*His Highness' Speech at the International Conference on Jerusalem, 2012*).



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Sheikh Hamad blamed the Israelis for the suffering of the Palestinians and the stalling of the peace process. He repeatedly highlighted that the Israelis were in violation of international law and UN Resolutions on the rights of the Palestinian people. He proposed that the UN Security Council pass a resolution to establish an international investigation committee to examine Israel's actions since its occupation of Arab Jerusalem in 1967 to eliminate the city's Islamic and Arab heritage. He also called on civil society organizations to fulfill their responsibilities to protect Jerusalem and its Arab and Islamic identity. His last call was to the Palestinian leadership to reconcile and prepare projects in Jerusalem, and he offered Qatar's help to implement these projects. He concluded the speech by calling on Arab leaders to support Palestinian unity and help Palestinians regain their rights (*His Highness' Speech at the International Conference on Jerusalem, 2012*).

Three months before stepping down from his position as the Amir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad reiterated the importance of finding a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict for the security and stability of the Middle East at the opening session of the 24th Arab Summit on March 26, 2013. Peace should guarantee the Palestinians' rights, particularly the establishment of a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital (*His Highness speech at the Opening Session of the 24th Arab Summit, 2013*). This was the first time Sheikh Hamad that explicitly referred to "East Jerusalem" in his speeches. He used the term twice in this speech. Mohammad Al Hajiri, a Qatar University professor and journalist, commented that Sheikh Hamad began using the term "East Jerusalem" after Abbas used it in one of his own speeches in 2012. Therefore, Qatar followed the Palestinian stance on East Jerusalem (M. Al Hajiri, personal communication, 2020). In this speech, Sheikh Hamad also blamed Israel for its violation of Al-Aqsa Mosque, the Judaization of East Jerusalem, the building of illegal Israeli settlements, and detention of Palestinians. He warned that all of these actions increased tension in the region and frustration among Palestinians and that they only served to delay the faltering peace process. He took a practical approach by proposing a smaller Arab Summit in Cairo for Palestinian reconciliation in accordance with the Cairo Agreement (2011) and the Doha Agreement (2012), which would include the establishment of a transitional government to oversee legislative and presidential elections. Finally, he called for the establishment of a \$1 billion fund to support Jerusalem and declared that Qatar would contribute \$250 million (*His Highness' Speech at the Opening Session of the 24<sup>th</sup> Arab Summit, 2013*).

To conclude, Sheikh Hamad was consistent throughout his speeches about what should be done for Jerusalem and its people. He was also consistent in referring to Jerusalem as the capital of the future Palestinian state, with the exception of the reference "East Jerusalem" at the opening session of the 24th Arab Summit during the last year of his rule (*His Highness' Speech at the Opening Session of the 24<sup>th</sup> Arab Summit, 2013*).



Settlements

Three keywords were established under the theme of “settlements”: “settlement,” “confiscation of land,” and “extorting of land.” Their frequency in Sheikh Hamad’s speeches is listed in Table 6 below.

Table 6. Frequency of Keywords Related to the Theme of Settlements in the Speeches of Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani (1995–2013)

Keywords	Frequency
Settlements	20
Confiscation of land	1
Extorting of land	1

In all of his speeches, Sheikh Hamad called for Israel to stop building settlements, because they are illegal, undermine the two-state solution, and obstruct the peace process. He added that the settlement policy creates tension in the region, increases frustration among Palestinians, and delays the peace process. This position was expressed in different platforms within and outside of Qatar. For example, at the opening of the 25th Advisory Council Session, Sheikh Hamad warned against Israel’s attempts to change the status quo in Jerusalem. He said, “Israel has to refrain from any measures to alter the geographic and demographic characteristics of Arab Jerusalem as defined by its boundaries prior to the 4th of June 1967; to freeze colonialist settlement activity in the occupied territories” (*His Highness speech at the Opening of the 25th Advisory Council Session, 1996*).

Sheikh Hamad explained that Israel has changed the face of Palestinian land through the construction of illegal settlements and Judaization in the occupied West Bank and Jerusalem. Israel was able to undertake these actions due to divisions in the Arab world, the international community’s failure to protect the rights of Palestinians, and the siding of the great powers (USA, EU) with Israel. These great powers embrace a double standard policy that is biased towards Israel and serves their own interests and denies Palestinians the right to return to their homeland and establish an independent state. Sheikh Hamad asserted that the peace process stopped due to Israel’s insistence on a settlement policy. He wondered why the UN Security Council would not adopt a resolution to force Israel to stop building settlements, arguing that Israel should refrain from practices that hinder the future achievement of peace. He asked for bold steps to be taken on the path to peace, which should be based on the cessation of settlements, a return to 1967 borders, and a two-state solution.



At the 67th session of the UN General Assembly, Sheikh Hamad said that “the peace process has stopped because of the Israeli policy of settlement in the Palestinian Territories and Jerusalem and refusing to cede them” (*His Highness speech at the 67th Session of UN General Assembly*, 2012).

Sheikh Hamad believed that Israel took advantage of the Arab Spring in 2010 to intensify its illegal settlement activities. He added that Netanyahu had even thought of amending the status of the West Bank to a non-occupied territory so that settlement activities would be subject to Israeli law, without taking into account the West Bank’s international status as an occupied territory. In his opinion, all of the Israeli settlements are illegal, regardless of labels used by the Israeli government. Overall, Sheikh Hamad was consistent when addressing the topic of settlements. His position remained firm throughout his 18 years of rule and did not change based on the time, audience, or venue of his speeches. *The Al-Aqsa Intifada (2000)*

Two keywords were searched under the theme of “Al-Aqsa Intifada,” namely “uprising” and “intifada.” *Intifada* is the Arabic word for “uprising.” The frequency of these keywords in Sheikh Hamad’s speeches is shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Frequency of Keywords Related to the Theme of the Al-Aqsa Intifada in the Speeches of Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani (1995–2013)

Keywords	Frequency
Uprising	2
Intifada	8

*Qatar’s Stance on the Al-Aqsa Intifada*

When Ariel Sharon (1928–2014), the 11th prime minister of Israel, visited Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem on September 28, 2000, the second Palestinian uprising began in protest to his visit. Although the Al-Aqsa Intifada ended in 2005, assaults on Al-Aqsa Mosque from the Israelis continued. Therefore, Sheikh Hamad frequently mentioned the issue in his speeches. He viewed the intifada as a legitimate way for Palestinians to defend themselves and achieve their right to live in peace in an independent Palestinian state. He added that hundreds of Palestinians were killed and injured in “the blessed Aqsa Uprising” for claiming their right to life, existence, and national sovereignty. He elaborated that the courageous Palestinian uprising stood against attempts to violate the sanctity of the first of the two *qiblas* and the third holiest shrines, which demonstrated that Jerusalem was the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict.



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At the opening session of the ninth Islamic Summit Conference, Sheikh Hamad stated, “The sanctity of the Islamic and Christian sacred sites in Palestine is being defiled; hundreds of Palestinians are being killed, in addition to thousands of injured victims in the blessed Aqsa Uprising for no reason other than claiming their right to life, existence and national sovereignty, all of which have been established by heavenly laws and international conventions” (*His Highness at the Opening Session of 9th Islamic Summit Conference*, 2000).

At the opening of the 38th Advisory Council Session, Sheikh Hamad said, “We denounce continued Israeli attacks on the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Islamic sacred places. We warn that these practices are not only inhuman but also involving dangerous political agendas to annex and Judaize Jerusalem;” He called for a firm Arab, Islamic, and international response to stop Israeli aggressions ([\*His Highness speech at the Opening of the 38th Advisory Council Session, 2009\*](#)). Sheikh Hamad justified the Al-Aqsa Intifada as the result of oppressive Israeli policies and practices. He recognized that the Arabs’ support was limited. He explicitly said that Palestinians were self-dependent in their fight and conscious that other Arabs only helped them through condemnations of Israeli aggressions and the provision of some financial assistance. Finally, Sheikh Hamad viewed the intifada as a way to enforce peace in the region. He noted that Arabs and Muslims sought peace. However, if the intifada was the way to enforce peace, then Arabs and Muslims had to support it. They had to support Palestinians by alleviating their suffering and enabling them to endure the aggressions that they faced due to the imbalance of power between Israelis and Palestinians. In doing so, Arabs and Muslims would not only help Palestinians but also defend their holy places and rights. Although the Al-Aqsa Intifada ended in 2005 and Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2005, assaults on Al-Aqsa continued. Therefore, Sheikh Hamad brought up the issue frequently. The intifada lasted five years (2000–2005). During this time, Sheikh Hamad’s position did not change according to the time, audience, or venue of his speeches. He fully supported the uprising and considered it a legal act of self-defense.



*The Gaza Strip*

Six keywords were included under the theme of “the Gaza Strip”: “Gaza,” “ Hamas,” “blockade,” “aggression,” “division,” and “reconciliation.” The frequency of these keywords in Sheikh Hamad’s speeches is given in Table 8.

Table 8. Frequency of Keywords Related to the Theme of the Gaza Strip in the Speeches of Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani (1995–2013)

Keywords	Frequency
Gaza	70
Blockade	10
Aggression	5
Division	9
Reconciliation	7
Hamas	3

*Qatar’s Stance on the Gaza Strip*

In 2006, Hamas won the second legislative elections in Gaza. Fatah, under the leadership of PNA President Mahmoud Abbas, and Hamas, led by Prime Minister Ismail Haniya, engaged in a bloody confrontation after Hamas’s victory. Fatah refused to recognize Hamas’s control over Gaza, and Hamas refused to give up its right to rule. Hence, a division occurred between the West Bank and Gaza. In addition to restrictions from the PNA, Israel and Egypt have imposed a blockade on Gaza since 2007.

Qatar supported the Hamas government in Gaza and argued that it had the right to rule because it had won the 2006 elections. Sheikh Hamad criticized the PNA and some Arab and non-Arab countries’ refusal to acknowledge Hamas’s victory; he considered it a form of hypocrisy to tout democracy, then refuse its outcomes. At the sixth Doha Forum, Sheikh Hamad said that “the parliamentary elections were held with transparency recognized by all observers, including those who have been unable to accept the will of the Palestinian people... This important Arab experience should be supported and encouraged rather than putting pressures on it, interfering with its people’s right to choose their leaders or threatening to cut off aid” (*His Highness speech at the 6th Doha Forum, 2006*).



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By showing solidarity with the Palestinians, Sheikh Hamad clearly signaled that their actions stemmed from a legitimate right to resist the Israeli occupation and did not constitute terrorism. In 2006, ISIS was terrorizing the Middle East and the world. At a speech at the European Parliament in the same year, Sheikh Hamad explained that Qatar was “keen on distinguishing between terrorizing safe civilians, which should be rejected no matter what, and the legitimate right to resist occupation, which is supported by international laws and norms.” He added, “The Palestinian government formed by Hamas a few months ago based on the Palestinian people’s free will should have been given an opportunity to work for the people who have chosen it.” Rejecting the way that the PNA and some Arab and non-Arab countries had reacted to Hamas’s victory, he said, “Instead of rewarding the Palestinians for practicing democracy standard which can hardly be matched in our region, they have been punished. I do not understand how a democratically elected government is besieged and an entire people is sanctioned just because it has practiced its democratic right to choose its government. Isn’t it double standards to demand democracy then object to its results?” (*His Highness speech at the European Parliament, 2006*).

Qatar stood with Gaza throughout the three wars that Israel launched on the Gaza Strip in December 2008, November 2012, and July 2014. The first and second offensives occurred during Sheikh Hamad’s rule. During the first Israeli war of 2009 which Israel called “Operation Cast Lead” while Hamas named the “Battle of al-Furqan”, Sheikh Hamad gave a speech in Doha. He called for a ceasefire, the lifting of the siege on Gaza, the organization of an extraordinary Arab Summit to take a position on the war. He condemned the Israelis’ assaults on Palestinians and called on Arabs, Muslims and all peace-loving countries in the world to help stop the aggressions, prevent repeated attacks, and lift the siege on the Gaza Strip. He also reminded all countries, including the ones that met after the 2009 war in Sharm El-Sheikh in Egypt,<sup>1</sup> that the siege was ongoing and that the reconstruction remained only “ink on paper” (*His Highness’ Address to the Arab Nation on the Occasion of the Israeli Aggression on Gaza, 2009*).

After the second war of 2012 which Israel called the “Operation Pillar of Defense”, Sheikh Hamad visited Gaza to offer his support. At the time of the visit, Gaza was under Palestinian rule, as it had been since the Oslo I Accord in 1993. Sheikh Hamad’s first visit took place after the establishment of the PNA in 1999, when he met Arafat in Gaza. His second visit occurred in October 2012 in an attempt to end Israel’s blockade on Gaza. According to Tamlali (2012), the visit brought \$400 million in investments and assistance to be spent on housing projects and infrastructure, which were greatly needed in the Gaza Strip after the siege and the Israeli war in 2008 (Operation Cast Lead).

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<sup>1</sup> An international conference to help reconstruct the Gaza Strip was held in Sharm Elsheikh in Egypt on 2nd March 2009 within a participation of more than 80 countries and organizations. The most famous participants were the united states, Gulf Arab states, the European Commission and Britain.





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Upon his arrival, Sheikh Hamad delivered a speech to the Palestinians in which he reiterated that the Palestinian cause was the Arab cause, asserted that Israel was changing the Palestinian landscape through settlement and Judaization, and recognized Gaza's suffering since the Israeli war in 2008 and as a result of the blockade. He emphasized that the Palestinians' sacrifices were an important contributing factor in the Arab Spring and the best motivation for Arab peoples to restore their lost dignity. He stressed the importance of unity and that the split between the West Bank and Gaza affected the joint Palestinian and Arab cause. Furthermore, he emphasized that standing with the Palestinians was a duty for all Arabs, including Qataris (*His Highness speech in Gaza*, 2012). According to Ezet Rishaq (2020), a member of Hamas's Political Bureau and the head of its Office of Arab and Islamic Relations, Hamas appreciated Qatar's embrace of leaders from the movement and considered this embracement to be a consolidation of relations and a strengthening of Qatar's role in supporting Palestinians' defense of their rights and land in spite of the pressures to which Qatar was subjected.

Sheikh Hamad believed in the importance of ending the division between the West Bank and Gaza. To support Palestinian national unity, he worked on creating the conditions necessary to achieve it through dialogue between different Palestinian factions. For example, at the opening of the 38th Advisory Council Session, he said,

We support the Palestinian national unity and are working on creating the appropriate conditions to achieve it through dialogue among different Palestinian forces and factions. However, we call for noninterference in this internal matter to avoid outweighing the interest of one party at the expense of the other and also avoid deepening differences among the Palestinians lest it should become impossible to find a solution. The failure of many countries to recognize the results of the democratic elections in Palestine and punishing its people by besieging them have undermined their credibility when they speak about democracy and elections under occupation and siege. (*His Highness speech at the Opening of the 38th Advisory Council Session*, 2009)

This call for unity was reaffirmed at the opening of the 39th Advisory Council Session. (*His Highness speech at the Opening of the 39th Advisory Council Session*, 2010) and the International Conference on Jerusalem. Sheikh Hamad called on Palestinian leadership to work towards reconciliation, as any dispute would be meaningless while Jerusalem remained under occupation. He advised Palestinian leaders to make Jerusalem a catalyst for ending the division as a natural way of restoring the Palestinians rights (*His Highness speech at The International Conference on Jerusalem*, 2012).



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In 2012, under the sponsorship of Sheikh Hamad, Fatah and Hamas met in Doha in an attempt to reconcile. As a result, the Doha Agreement was reached. Sheikh Hamad suggested holding elections, establishing a government of national consensus, reconstructing Gaza, and activating the Cairo Agreement of 2011. In his speech during his visit to Gaza on October 23, 2012, Sheikh Hamad urged the Palestinians to reconcile: “If the owners of a house do not fortify it, it will not be fortified by others” (*His Highness speech in Gaza*, 2012b). In other words, Palestinian factions needed to work together to reconcile and end their division. If they did not have the will to do so, nobody would. Finally, at the opening session of the 24th Arab Summit, Sheikh Hamad proposed holding a smaller Arab Summit in Cairo to achieve Palestinian reconciliation in accordance with the Cairo Agreement (2011) and the Doha Agreement (2012). He suggested establishing a transitional government to supervise legislative and presidential elections and agreeing on a date to hold them (*His Highness speech at the Opening Session of the 24th Arab Summit*, 2013). Sheikh Hamad was consistent in his financial, diplomatic, and political support of Gaza. This exposed Qatar to criticisms about its support of terrorism, since Hamas advocated for military confrontation with Israel while Fatah sought a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through negotiation.

To conclude, there are 210 official speeches on record made by Sheikh Hamad during his 18 years of rule from 1995 to 2013. In 73 of these speeches, he explicitly mentioned the situation in Palestine. This means that one third of Sheikh Hamad’s speeches referred to Palestine, demonstrating its importance in Qatari foreign policy. Two out of 73 speeches were wholly dedicated to the topic of Palestine; one was given in Doha in February 2012 at the International Conference on Jerusalem, and the other was made during Sheikh Hamad’s visit to Gaza in October 2012. After the content analysis method was used to examine Sheikh Hamad’s speeches, it was determined that Jerusalem was the most frequently occurring theme (73 mentions). This shows that Jerusalem was central to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict due to its importance to Muslims as a holy city, the first *qibla* (prayer direction), and home to the third holiest mosque in Islam after the ones in Makah and Medina. The Gaza Strip was the second most frequent theme in Sheikh Hamad’s speeches (70 mentions), which highlights the strong rapprochement between Qatar and the Hamas government in Gaza.

In all of his speeches, Sheikh Hamad called for a peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through negotiation rather than violence. He believed that a solution to the conflict could be achieved through Israel’s withdrawal from the territories occupied in the 1967 war and respecting the right of Palestinians to build a state next to Israel. To achieve security and stability in the Middle East, Sheikh Hamad called on Israel to accept the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative.



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Qatar's stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was very similar to that of the GCC and other Arab countries in most occasions. However, Sheikh Hamad interestingly diverged from the GCC when he allowed an Israeli trade office to be opened in Doha in 1996, hosted an urgent summit on Gaza in 2009 and a conference on Jerusalem in 2012 and visited Gaza in 2012. It is evident that Qatar's position on the ongoing conflict also aligned with that of the Arab League and UN Resolution 242. Sheikh Hamad also addressed the importance of Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian state, an idea that is in accordance with UN Resolution 194. Furthermore, Sheikh Hamad stressed the Palestinians' right to have their own state, which is a right that the UN emphasizes in Resolution 3236. Finally, Sheikh Hamad frequently reiterated the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative as a solution to the conflict and for the stability of the region.

Throughout his rule, Sheikh Hamad's position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remained consistent in his speeches. This stance did not change based on the time, audience, or venue of the speech. However, it is crucial to note that, during his last year of rule, he referred to East Jerusalem rather than Jerusalem as the designated capital of the future Palestinian state in his speech to the Doha Forum in 2013. This represented a change in his position on Jerusalem, which itself reflected a change in the Palestinian leadership's position in 2012 (M. Al Hajiri, personal communication, January 10, 2020).



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