

# Rubio vows ‘strong support’ for Qatar after Israel strike

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- Trump told reporters in Washington that Netanyahu “won’t be hitting” Qatar again
- In 2012, Qatar agreed to host the Hamas political bureau with US blessing

AFP | Doha, Qatar



Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani and Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani meet with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and US Charge d'Affaires in Doha Stefanie Altman-Winan at the Amiri Diwan in Doha

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio pledged strong support for Qatar's security on a lightning visit yesterday, as anger boils in the Gulf over last week's Israeli attack on Hamas negotiators.

On a hastily arranged stop in Doha after a visit to Israel, Rubio shook hands with Qatar's emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, in his office before entering closed door talks that lasted just under an hour.

He flew out straight after the meeting.

In Israel, he had pledged “unwavering support” even after it angered US allies in the Gulf by

targeting Hamas negotiators in Doha.

“Secretary Rubio reaffirmed the strong bilateral relationship between the United States and Qatar, and thanked Qatar for its efforts to end the war in Gaza and bring all hostages home,” said State Department spokesman Tommy Pigott.

Rubio “reiterated America's strong support for Qatar's security and sovereignty,” he added.

Rubio had earlier said the United States would work with Qatar to finalise a defence agree-

ment soon despite the Israeli military action.

Speaking to reporters on Tuesday, Qatar's foreign ministry spokesman, Majed al-Ansari said his country appreciated US support for its mediation efforts, adding that “this attack, of course, expedited the need for renewed strategic defence agreements between us and the US”.

Rubio had earlier said he would “ask Qatar to continue to do what they've done” adding that “if there's any country in

the world that could help end this through a negotiation, it's Qatar”.

But Israel's launch of its long anticipated ground assault on Gaza City early Tuesday left little scope for any new mediation bid. Rubio's visit also sought to reassure Qatar after the Israeli strikes undermined security pledges to the Gulf emirate from its key ally.

Rubio landed in Qatar a day after an Arab-Islamic summit in Doha condemned Israel for the strikes, with the head of the

six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council urging Washington to “use its leverage and influence” to rein in Israel.

President Donald Trump told reporters in Washington that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu “won't be hitting” Qatar again.

Rubio made no such comments in Israel.

Netanyahu said his government assumes “full responsibility” for the attack on Doha “because we believe that terrorists should not be given a haven”.

## Duelling US relationships

The tiny gas-rich emirate is classified by Washington as a major non-NATO ally, and has assiduously courted Trump, gifting him a luxury plane.

Before the October 2023 attack, Israel and the United States had reportedly quietly encouraged Doha's role, including its transfer of millions of dollars to Hamas in hopes of maintaining stability in Gaza.

In 2012, Qatar agreed to host the Hamas political bureau with US blessing.

Both the United States and Israel viewed Qatar, with its close relationship with Washington, as a better place to keep an eye on Hamas.



**Qatar is home to the largest US air base in the Middle East and is the forward base of Central Command, the US military command responsible for the region.**

## 'We pulled the children out in pieces': Israel pummels Gaza City

AFP | Gaza City, Palestinian Territories

As drones buzzed overhead in the morning sun, Palestinians gently lifted from the rubble a blanket holding a body, the latest casualty of Israel's relentless bombardment of Gaza City.

The devastating scene is a familiar one in the Gaza Strip's main urban hub, where Israel has carried out intensifying strikes in the runup to the ground assault it launched on Tuesday.

Overnight bombing reduced a residential block in the north of the city to mounds of rubble. One man squeezed his head and hand beneath a concrete slab in a desperate search for survivors.

“There were about 50 people inside, including women and children. I don't know why they bombed it,” said Abu Abd Zaout, adding it had housed his uncle's family.

“Why kill children sleeping safely like that, turning them into body parts?” he added.

“We pulled the children out in pieces.”

In a statement, the Zaout family said 23 of its members were killed in the strike on their home.

A sea of destruction sur-



Palestinian men carry the shrouded bodies of children killed in Israeli strikes on Gaza City at dawn,

rounded the site of the strike, with those aiding the rescue effort dwarfed by mounds of crushed concrete and metal.

One family attempted to load belongings into a car parked on a barely usable debris-strewn road nearby.

“At night they bombed an entire quarter, three houses and the neighbouring houses,” said Gaza City resident Mohammed al-Bardawil.

“All of (the dead) are children, elderly people and women. They are all under the rubble.”

Gaza's civil defence agency -- a rescue force operating under Hamas authority -- said at least 12 bodies had been recovered

after more than eight hours of search operations at the site.

When contacted by AFP, the Israeli military said it would try to look into the report.

Media restrictions in the territory and difficulties in accessing many areas mean AFP is unable to independently verify the details and tolls provided by the civil defence agency or the Israeli military.

### 'No humanity left'

Israel on Tuesday said it had launched its long-anticipated ground assault on Gaza City, where it said its troops were moving deeper into the centre.

The United Nations recently

estimated nearly one million people lived in Gaza City and its surroundings, from where Israel has repeatedly warned people to evacuate southwards.

An Israeli military official estimated more than 350,000 people had fled the city ahead of the ground offensive.

Ibrahim Al-Besheiti, a 35-year-old resident of Gaza City's Al-Sabra neighbourhood told AFP the situation was “already catastrophic”.

“The sound of aircraft never stops -- quadcopters and warplanes constantly fill the sky. We're extremely afraid, and many people around us have already fled. We don't know what will happen to us,” he said.

Besheiti said the overnight bombing near his house was so intense that the pressure shattered its windows and blew doors off their frames.

“We heard screaming from under the rubble,” he said.

“This repeated scene terrifies us and proves to us that there's no humanity left in this world.”

In the northern Sheikh Radwan neighbourhood, 38-year-old

Maysa Abu Jamaa said gunfire from military vehicles, drone fire and artillery shelling were constant.

A huge overnight explosion jolted her family awake, she said, adding her children were “terrified, screaming and crying in fear”.

“We live in constant darkness”

and see no way out.”

