

When War Reached Doha: Students Reflect on a Day That Changed Everything

By Aruzhan Muratbek

The sound hit Farah Jueitem before the words did. The 19-year-old Qatari sophomore at Northwestern University in Qatar was waiting for her car outside her family's flat in Doha when the blasts echoed through the diplomatic neighborhood.

"I was hysterically crying," she said.

Until that moment, Jueitem had believed her country was untouchable. "Having lived here my entire life, I always thought Qatar is safe. It's very far from being bombed," she said. That certainty collapsed on September 9, 2025, when Israeli forces launched airstrikes on Doha, marking the first acknowledged direct attack of its kind on Qatari soil.

According to [Reuters](#), the strikes targeted sites in the Qatari capital allegedly linked to Hamas operatives. The Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemned the assault as "a dangerous escalation" and "a violation of Qatar's sovereignty," [Al Jazeera](#) reported.

"When Israel targeted Qatar, I was afraid for my life," she said. "I feel sad because this is my home, and you are targeting a piece of me. You are hurting me."

The September 9 airstrikes on Doha marked an unprecedented breach of security in Qatar, shattering the sense of safety that students at Northwestern University in Qatar had long taken for granted. Panic, fear, and resilience spread across campus as students confronted the reality of conflict at their doorstep. The NU-Q community processed the attacks in a mosaic of perspectives that reveals not only individual responses but the broader human stakes of living through a historic moment of insecurity.

In the days that followed, Jueitem found herself living on edge. A slammed door or the roar of a passing jet was enough to send her scrambling for cover. "I developed this phobia of being scared of sounds," she said. "Now every time I hear something, I check my phone to see if there's something happening."

Her anxiety deepened when Israel justified the attack as an effort to "target Hamas leaders." That explanation only sharpened the outrage. "If you target a diplomatic area, then you want war. You want more than war," she stated.

"They killed a civilian Qatari man," Jueitem said. "The next civilian could be me."

For others on campus, the same moment drew out a different kind of resilience.

Danya Alfranji, 19, responded with unsettling calm. "Honestly, I coped really differently from how normal people would cope," she stated. "I was even laughing most of the time. I became numb to it."

When airstrikes hit, Alfranji was in her car near campus. Her first reaction was disbelief. "My cousin told me they hit Qatar," she said. "It was shocking."

Months before the September airstrikes on Doha, regional tensions escalated significantly. On June 23, Iran launched a missile attack on the U.S. Al Udeid Air Base near Doha, in retaliation for U.S. airstrikes on Iranian nuclear facilities. Although Qatari air defenses intercepted most missiles, one struck the base, causing minimal damage but raising alarms about the country's vulnerability in the face of regional conflicts, according to [Reuters](#).

That moment stayed with students like Alfraji, who recalled how the first explosions redefined what safety meant in Qatar. “The Iranian strike was scary because it was the first time something like that happened here,” she admitted, “but the latest airstrikes made me realize that I quickly get adjusted to bombs.”

As a Palestinian, she had grown up watching images of Gaza under fire. Her way of processing fear was through comparison. “When it happened, I thought, okay—it’s just one bomb. People in Gaza have over fifty bombs every single day,” she said. “We are nothing compared to them.” Thus, calmness became a learned response for Alfrangi. “I just thank God that this is what we have in comparison to them.”

Fatima Hammoud, a 19-year-old freshman from Lebanon, felt a sense of triggered déjà vu rather than fear. “I wasn’t really that affected in a sad way,” she said. “I was used to all the violence that was going on.”

Having grown up in Beirut, where the sound of bombs once interrupted her school exams, Hammoud viewed the attack on Doha with both surprise and familiarity. “I was surprised they attacked Qatar,” she shared, “especially because Qatar has been such a big mediator in these talks with the U.S. and Israel and Hamas.”

“Enough,” she said. “They’ve bombed Yemen, Lebanon, Iran, Syria, Jordan. How many countries are they going to bomb until someone says ‘enough’?”

What struck Hammoud most, however, was the contrast in how her classmates responded. Some called for classes to be canceled, arguing that the campus should close for safety. She understood their fear, but could not help seeing it through a different lens. “I was doing my IB exams in Lebanon while hearing bombs in the background,” she recalled. “So yes, the reaction is valid — but we also have to recognize how privileged we are.”

Hammoud spent the following days checking on her peers, especially international freshmen facing their first crisis abroad. “I was more in fear for others,” she said. “They came from faraway countries for a better life, and then this happened.”

Even Hammoud’s family has learned to cope through humor. Her father, who happened to be in Qatar during the attacks, missed his flight. “I texted him to make sure he was okay,” she said. “He sent me a photo of himself eating ice cream with my sister. It’s some weird, messed-up form of resistance—but it works.”

Students closer to the blasts experienced a heightened sense of immediacy. Al Dana Mohsin, a 20-year-old sophomore, learned the strikes had occurred just a kilometer from her home. “I was at university when my friend told me it happened near my house,” she said. “Nobody was home except my aunt. The windows were shaking. It felt like a horror.”

Mohsin emphasizes that the coordinated response and political statements following the attack reaffirmed her confidence in her city’s safety. “I do think Qatar is safe. Because it wasn’t a mistake Qatar made,” she said.

Amina Zaidi, a junior at Northwestern University in Qatar, experienced the airstrikes with a mix of confusion and fear while walking with a friend to the Student Center. “We heard loud blasts and didn’t know what was happening,” she recalled. “We thought a transformer blew up.”

The shared concern among friends and the broader NU-Q community became a source of calm for Zaidi. “It helped to know that everyone was in it together,” she said. Zaidi recalled that even

as news from home and reports of nearby damage heightened tension, the sense of unity made the chaos easier to bear.

For 19-year-old freshman Zhazel Urankaeva, the attacks sparked immediate concern over her safety and her ability to leave the country, as her passport was held in a campus office for visa processing.

“I didn’t know where my passport was,” she said. “I had given it to a man I don’t even know, in a place I’d never seen.” Urankaeva quickly gathered her admission letter, scholarship papers, and a copy of her student visa, preparing for the possibility of evacuation.

The situation left her unable to focus on classes or assignments. “I couldn’t do my homework or prepare for the next day,” she said. The university responded with flexibility, extending deadlines and providing guidance, which Urankaeva described as a crucial support during the crisis.

In the aftermath of the Israeli airstrikes, what remains is a collective reckoning with fragility. For many at NU-Q, that day carved a mark in Doha’s history, a moment when the unthinkable became real. Each student’s story, from fear to defiance, reflects how a generation that grew up in safety now carries a new awareness of vulnerability. The attack may have shaken the ground beneath them, but it also revealed how this community is bound by reflection, resilience, and the will to remember.