



Qatar and Terrorism: a Dangerous Game

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After a month of ban, Qatar and the Gulf Cooperation Council are still in the midst of a diplomatic crisis. The sudden sidelining of Qatar surprised the whole world. But this country has been playing an ambiguous, and dangerous game, flirting with terrorism for years.

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Qatar's Questionable Ties:

Many analysts claim that the government of Qatar's role in fighting terrorism has improved in recent years, but it is clear that much work remains to be done. For example, the government's recent controversial decision to continue its policy of paying ransom fees for hostages indirectly continues support to terrorist organizations, and is viewed by --- as counterproductive. Doha's recent decision to pay ransom fees to Al-Qaeda-linked forces in Iraq was allegedly one of the primary factors that led to the GCC decision to cut diplomatic ties. Middle East specialist and journalist, Georges Malbrunot declared " If we put together every ransom Doha has paid so far, it amounts to more than \$100 million (...)"

While some of the numerous allegations against Qatar are undoubtedly politically motivated, there is no question that Qatar has maintained close ties with Hamas and certain Al-Qaeda and Taliban affiliates in the past, in addition to an extremely close relationship with Iran. One author writes in Foreign Policy magazine that Qatar is the "poster-child for two-faced friends" seeking to have

it both ways by acting as a reliable military partner and host for the United States and Western Allies, but at the same time politically and ideologically backing some of the region's most destabilizing forces.

Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Bahrain, which make up the most influential allied block of the GCC, have long accused Qatar as sponsoring and harboring terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda and ISIS. The group has officially published a list of 59 individuals and 12 institutions linked to terrorist organizations that receive support from Qatar. The Saudi government, which also considers the Muslim Brotherhood to be a terrorist organization, also cites Qatar's harboring of the Brotherhood's leader, Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, as evidence of its support to extremist groups.

Understanding Terrorist Financing:

Further analysis of these allegations have shown that terrorist financing is rarely black and white, and usually occurs indirectly through several organizations and individuals with varying degrees of extremist ties. In fact, the most damning evidence of any state's involvement in terrorist financing is persistent negligence, or simply not acting to stop or convict well-known suspects. Mounting evidence suggests that while Qatar's direct links to terrorist organizations remain blurry, the government has created a culture of impunity by which donations can be easily solicited to extremist groups and networks.

According to the Center on Sanctions and Illicit Finance, Doha's pattern of negligence against terror finance goes back two decades. In every important case of suspected terror finance involving a Qatari in recent years, the Qatar government has simply refused to crack down. Their report also cites the US Treasury Under Secretary for --- lamented that despite having several U.S. and U.N.-designated terrorist financiers present in Qatar, the government has failed to act. These allegations have also been corroborated by an investigation led by the UK-based Telegraph, which identified several terrorist financiers who were either released from prison or escaped scrutiny due to their positions in Qatari society.

For example, Khalifa Muhammad Turki al-Subaiy, was previously jailed for financing crimes of terrorism but was later released,. He has once again been accused of financially supporting terrorists in Iraq and Syria. Another known terrorist financier and former advisor to Qatar's government, Abdul Al-Rahman ben Umayr Al-Nuaymi, was accused facilitating an important transfer of money in 2014 to Abu Khaled al-Souri, an key figure of Al Qaeda in Syria. Nuaymi remains free in Qatar largely due to his ties with the ruling elite. These actors manage to blur lines by being multi positioned, navigating between private and public sector as well as civil society.

It is clear that Qatar's refusal to capture and convict suspected terrorist financiers is not due to lack of institutional capacity, but instead due to lack of political will. Furthermore, as Malburnot explains in his newest book, *Nos Tres Cher Emirs*, these problems reflect a much larger systemic problem of Western complicity to turn a blind eye towards Qatar's negligence.

Conclusion:

Reiterating the importance of respecting the Qatari people and Qatari sovereignty, the Brussels International Center urges Qatar to investigate and strengthen its commitment to counterterrorism. If there is no change in this behavior, the Qatar national vision 2030 a program made to shape Qatar's role in the world over the next ten years – will not be one of peace, but one of destabilization. For the benefit and well-being of all citizens concerned, we recommend that Qatar and the Gulf States quickly and respectfully work to resolve this diplomatic dispute, and prevent any further escalation.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Mrs Mogherini, with the help of the Council, the European Parliament and the Commission, should create a new task force which will target financial backers and fundraisers in the Middle-East region focusing especially on preventing terrorist groups from collecting ransoms payments.
- The AML/CFT Global initiative's budget to monitor, disrupt and prevent the financing of terrorism should be raised to over 16 Million. This will enhance capacity building for tracking, seizure and confiscation.
- A solution to cope with the use of Islamic charities with more control of their money transfers should be implemented to answer the challenges linked to hawalas or informal money-transfer schemes.
- The EU and the EEAS should continue their mediation efforts within the Gulf Cooperation Council while insisting on the importance of transparency for Qatar.
- The results of this investigation should be presented by the European Union and the international organizations so that sanctions can be applied in irregular cases.

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