



Playing with Terror: How to Stop Qatar's Support for Hamas

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Qatar has become the leading backer of Hamas terrorism, and the country's wings need to be clipped. Cancellation of the plan to hold the FIFA 2022 World Cup in Qatar would be a useful and important first step.

Qatar: From Gulf Backwater to World Cup Host Nation

Fifteen years ago very few people had ever heard of Qatar. A Persian Gulf backwater, it had little influence. Today it is the richest per capita country in the world, although that wealth is enjoyed only by 250,000 of its 1.8 million residents who actually hold Qatari citizenship.

But a combination of a new and ambitious emir, huge revenues from natural gas (it has the world's largest reserves, after Russia and Iran), and that emir's obsessive-compulsive need to put Qatar on the map – have caused it to embark on an erratic political path. This path has taken Doha from being one of the few Arab states to have diplomatic relations with Israel to being the main backer of Israel's implacable Palestinian foe, Hamas.

Qatar has landed a branch of the prestigious Georgetown University, and it hosts the Doha Forum, a “world class event” [Qatar's words] of international glitterati. In 1996 it founded Al-Jazeera Satellite Channel, which angered every Arab government -- except that in Doha. The government-owned Qatar Foundation is the main sponsor of the Barcelona Football Club – arguably the most famous soccer team in the world.

But from the perspective of the former Emir Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, and his wife, fashion icon Sheikha Moza bint Nasir al-Misnad, his crowning achievement, as well as a testimony to the influence of money, greed, and graft, was winning a coveted prize: the hosting the FIFA Soccer World Cup in 2022. (In 2013 Hamad abdicated the throne in favor of the son he shares with Moza, Tamim.)

Indeed, who in his right mind would agree to soccer matches in July in Qatar —where the average temperature is 105 degrees Fahrenheit (41 degrees Celsius) —without an impressive *douceur*? Indeed, Qatar's labor practices while building the World Cup infrastructure have led to several deaths of foreign workers, and have come under withering criticism from human rights groups. And why should Qatar be rewarded with the World Cup when it supports Hamas, an internationally recognized terrorist organization?

Supporting Hamas Terror

Qatar has contributed to Hamas' emergence as a major contender to the Palestinian Authority. Qatar hosted Hamas leader Khalid Mash'al, first in 1999 when he was expelled from Jordan, and then again from 2012, when he left Syria. Qatar invited him to attend the 2009 Arab Summit in Doha, where he was seated next to Arab leaders, to the chagrin of the PA. In February 2012 it mediated a Fatah-Hamas reconciliation agreement; in July it began delivering fuel to Gaza via Israel; and in October Emir Hamad visited Gaza, where he announced a \$400m. aid program to the Islamist organization. "Today you are big guest, great guest, declaring officially the breaking of the political economic siege that was imposed on Gaza," gushed Ismail Haniya, the Hamas prime minister. The PA felt jilted. "We call on the Qatari prince or his representative to visit the West Bank too!" screamed a headline in the leading West Bank newspaper, *al-Quds*. The delivery of fuel and building materials, including cement, came via Israel, as did Qatari officials and others involved in the reconstruction. The Qataris committed to purchasing much of the material in Israel. (For its part, Israel may have expected Qatar to renew diplomatic relations, broken in 2009.)

While Qatari officials say that Doha is helping the Palestinian people, not Hamas, Israeli officials are clear on this point: Doha is aiding and abetting Hamas, and Hamas is listed by the United States and others as a terrorist organization. The "terror tunnels were funded by Qatari money," noted Israel's UN ambassador, Ron Prosor. Cloud technology based in Qatar guides Hamas rocket launches at Israel, and Qatar trained Hamas terrorists to manage its terror tunnel system, according to an Israeli cyber-security expert. The construction of these tunnels "under civilian populated areas and protected sites like hospitals, across borders, and/or with the intention of maiming

civilians [must be regarded as a violation of international law” and a war crime.](#)

Blood Money: Qatar and the World Cup

Qatar’ s support for terrorism should be enough to deny it the World Cup show; but what many do not know is that the World Cup tournament landed in Qatar due to corruption and graft.

The evidence points to Qatar’s bribing of FIFA officials to receive the right to host the prestigious tournament. A *Sunday Times* investigation, based on a huge number of emails, reported that the decision to award the World Cup to Qatar had been influenced by payments made by former FIFA vice-president, Muhammad bin Hammam, a Qatari national. Hammam has already been removed from his position for buying votes in his campaign to become FIFA president. Hammam was allegedly in contact with the Qatar bid committee and hosted a number of lavish functions where he handed out cash gifts with the aim of securing the bid for Qatar. Qatar’s Shaykh Muhammad bin Hamad A Thani, a brother of the current emir and chair of the Qatari bid committee, described Hammam as the bid’s biggest asset. FIFA president Sepp Blatter has already said that it was a mistake to choose Qatar.

The Qatari World Cup committee is currently under investigation by FIFA ethics investigator Michael Garcia, but Doha has not cooperated, refusing to supply details of its budget and how it was spent. Results of the investigation are expected in September.

Many laborers have actually died during construction, as Qatar struggles with a compressed time schedule to build an infrastructure that can support soccer events in the blistering summer heat. According to Human Rights Watch, Qatar’s labor system facilitates trafficking and forced labor. Between June 4 and August 8, 2014, 44 Nepalese workers perished from cardiac arrest and workplace accidents.

The Qatari terrorist-soccer nexus came into play when Qatar’s Aspire Academy, a sports promoting organization that played a role in the Qatari bid, hosted Saudi sheikh Muhammad al-Arifi, who has been banned from the UK for urging young Britons to join the jihad in Syria. On the same July occasion, Aspire Academy also hosted Wajdi Ghunaym, an Egyptian-Qatari preacher who was a fundraiser for Hamas. In 2009 he was banned from Britain for “engaging in unacceptable behaviour by seeking to foment, justify or glory terrorist violence in furtherance of particular beliefs and to provoke others to commit terrorist acts.”

Taking the World Cup away from Qatar would send a strong signal to other countries that corruption and support of terrorism do not pay. It would be a setback to Qatar internationally. And it would weaken Qatar's ability to stand up to Saudi Arabia, a loyal American ally, which, along with Israel, has stood at the forefront of countering Iranian nuclear ambitions.

Through its money and mediating of conflicts, Qatar seeks a place on the world stage. Its wings need clipping. Recently US courts have agreed to hear a case against the Arab Bank for knowingly routing funds to Hamas operatives. Filed under the Antiterrorism Act of 1990, this is the first such case ever to go to trial in the US. Investigators may yet find that aspects of Qatari financing of terrorism come under the Antiterrorism Act.

But right now, a strong signal need to be sent to immediately. The world community should pressure FIFA to remove the 2022 Soccer World Cup from Qatar, or boycott the event. It's the right thing to do.

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