

Qatar, Sponsor of Islamist Political Movements, Major Ally of America

Qatar and U.S. : Collusion or Conflict of Interest?

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Global Research, January 23, 2013

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Religion](#)

In his inaugural address on January 21, U.S. President Barack Obama made the historic announcement that “a decade of war is ending” and declared his country’s determination to “show the courage to try and resolve our differences with other nations peacefully,” but his message will remain words that have yet to be translated into deeds and has yet to reach some of the U.S. closest allies in the Middle East who are still beating the drums of war, like Israel against Iran and Qatar against Syria.

In view of the level of “coordination” and “cooperation” since bilateral diplomatic relations were established in 1972 between the U.S. and Qatar , and the concentration of U.S. military power on this tiny peninsula, it seems impossible that Qatar could move independently apart, in parallel with, away or on a collision course with the U.S. strategic and regional plans.

According to the US State department’s online fact sheet, “bilateral relations are strong,” both countries are “coordinating” diplomatically and “cooperating” on regional security, have a “defense pact,” “ Qatar hosts CENTCOM Forward Headquarters,” and supports NATO and U.S. regional “military operations. Qatar is also an active participant in the U.S.-led efforts to set up an integrated missile defense network in the Gulf region. Moreover, it hosts the U.S. Combined Air Operations Center and three American military bases namely [Al Udeid Air Base](#), [Assaliyah Army Base](#) and [Doha International Air Base](#), which are manned by approximately 5,000 U.S. forces.

Qatar, which is bound by such a most intimate and closest alliance with the United States , has recently developed into the major sponsor of Islamist political movements. Qatar appears now to be the major sponsor of the international organization of the Muslim Brotherhood, which, reportedly, disbanded in Qatar in 1999 because it stopped to view the ruling family as an adversary.

The Qatar/Brotherhood marriage of convenience has created the natural incubator of Islamist armed fundamentalists against whom the U.S. , since September 11, 2001, has been leading what is labeled as the “global war on terrorism.”

The war in the African nation Mali offers the latest example on how the U.S. and Qatar , seemingly, go on two separate ways. Whereas US Secretary of Defense, Leon Panetta, was in London on January 18 “commending” the French “leadership of the international effort” in Mali to which his country was pledging logistical, transportation and intelligence support, Qatar appeared to risk its special ties with France, which peaked during the NATO-led war on Libya, and to distrust the U.S. and French judgment.

On January 15, Qatari Prime and Foreign Minister, Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem al-Thani, told reporters he did not believe “power will solve the problem,” advised instead that this problem be “discussed” among the “neighboring countries, the African Union and the (U.N.) Security Council,” and joined the Doha-based ideologue for the Muslim Brotherhood and their Qatari sponsors, Yusuf Abdullah al-Qaradawi – the head of the International Union of Muslim Scholars who was refused entry visa to U.K. in 2008 and to France last year – in calling for “dialogue,” “reconciliation” and “peaceful solution” instead of “military intervention.”

In a relatively older example, according to WikiLeaks, Somalia’s former president in 2009, Sharif Ahmed, told a U.S. diplomat that Qatar was channeling financial assistance to the al-Qaeda-linked Shabab al-Mujahideen, which the U.S. listed as “terrorist.”

In Syria, for another example, the Brotherhood is the leading “fighting” force against the ruling regime and in alliance with and a culprit in the atrocities of the terrorist bombings of the al-Qaeda-linked Al-Nusra Front, designated by the United States as a terrorist organization last December; while the Brotherhood-led and U.S. and Qatar-sponsored Syrian opposition publicly protested the U.S. designation, the silence of Qatar on the matter could only be interpreted as in support of the protest against the U.S. decision.

Recently, Qatar has, for another example, replaced Syria, which has been on the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism since 1979, as the sponsor of Hamas, whose leadership relocated from Damascus to Doha, which the U.S. lists as a “terrorist” group, and which publicly admits being the Palestinian branch of the Brotherhood.

Qatar, in all these examples, seems positioning itself to be qualified as a mediator, with the U.S. blessing, trying to achieve by the country’s financial leverage what the U.S. could not achieve militarily, or could achieve but with a much more expensive cost in money and souls.

In the Mali case, the Qatari PM Sheikh Hamad went on record to declare this ambition: “We will be a part of the solution, (but) not the sole mediator,” he said. The U.S. blessing could not be more explicit than President Obama’s approval of opening the Afghani Taliban office in Doha “to facilitate” a “negotiated peace in Afghanistan,” according to the Qatari Foreign Ministry on January 16.

However, a unilateral Qatari mediation failed in Yemen, a Qatar-led Arab mediation in Syria has similarly proved a failure two years on the Syrian crisis, the “Doha Declaration” to reconcile Palestinian rival factions is still a paper achievement, the Qatari mediation in Sudan’s Darfur crisis has yet to deliver, the Qatari “mediation” in Libya was condemned as intervention in the country’s internal affairs by the most prominent among the post-Gaddafi leaders, and in post-“Arab Spring” Egypt Qatar dropped its early mediation efforts to align itself publicly to the ruling Brotherhood. But in spite of these failures, Qatar’s “mediation” efforts were successful in serving the strategy of its U.S. “ally.”

Hence the U.S. blessing. The Soufan Group’s intelligence analysts on last December 10 concluded that “Qatar continues to prove itself to be a pivotal U.S. ally... Qatar is often able to implement shared U.S.-Qatari objectives that Washington is unable or unwilling to undertake itself.”

The first term Obama administration, under the pressure of “fiscal austerity,” blessed the

Qatari funding of arming anti-Gaddafi Islamists in Libya, closed its eyes to Qatar's shipment of Gaddafi's military arsenal to Syrian and non-Syrian Islamists fighting the regime in Syria, "understood" the visit of Qatar's Emir to Gaza last October as "a humanitarian mission," and recently approved to arm the Qatar-backed and Brotherhood-led Egypt with 20 F-16 fighter jets and 200 M1A1 Abrams tanks.

This contradiction raises the question about whether this is a U.S./Qatari mutual collusion or it is really a conflict of interests; the Obama administration during his second term has to draw the line which would give an explicit answer.

Seemingly nowadays, Doha and Washington do not see eye to eye on Islamic and Islamist movements, but on the battle grounds of the "war on terror" both capitals could hardly argue that in practice their active roles are not coordinated and do not complement each other.

Drawing on the historical experience of an Iranian similar "religious" approach, but on a rival "Shiite" sectarian basis, this Qatari "Sunni" Islamist connection will inevitably fuel sectarian polarization in the region, regional instability, violence and civil wars.

Given the U.S./Qatar alliance, the Qatari Islamist connection threatens to embroil the U.S. in more regional strife, or at least to hold the U.S. responsible for the resulting strife, and would sustain a deep-seated regional anti-Americanism, which in turn has become another incubator of extremism and terrorism and which is exacerbated by the past "decade of war," which President Obama in his inaugural address promised to "end."

Traditionally, Qatar, which stands in the eye of the storm in the very critical geopolitical volatile Gulf region, the theatre of three major wars during the last three decades, did its best to maintain a critical and fragile balance between the two major powers which determine its survival, namely the decades-old U.S. military presence in the Gulf and the rising regional power of Iran.

In 1992 it signed a comprehensive bilateral defense pact with the United States and in 2010 it signed a military defense agreement with Iran, which explains its warming up to closer ties with the Iran - supported Islamic anti - Israel resistance movements of the Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in the Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories and explains as well Qatar's "honey moon" with Iran's ally in Syria.

However, since the eruption of the bloody Syrian crisis two years ago, the Qatari opening up to regional pro-Iran state and non-state powers was exposed as merely a tactical maneuver to lure such powers away from Iran. In the Syrian and Hezbollah cases, the failure of this tactic has led Qatar to embark on a collision course with both Syria and Iran, which are backed by Russia and China, and is leading the country to a U-turn shift away from its long maintained regional balancing act, a shift that Doha seems unaware of its threat to its very survival under the pressure of the international and regional conflicting interests as bloodily exposed in the Syrian crisis.

During the rise of the massive Pan-Arab, nationalist, socialist and democratic movements in the Arab world early in the second half of the twentieth century, the conservative authoritarian Arab monarchies adopted the Brotherhood, other Islamists and Islamic political ideology and used them against those movements to survive as allies of the United States, which in turn used both, spearheaded by al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, against the former Soviet

Union and the communist ideology, to their detriment after the collapse of the bipolar world order.

However history seems to repeat itself as the U.S.-backed Arab monarchies, spearheaded by Qatar, are resorting to their old tactic of exploiting the Islamist ideology to undermine and preempt an Arab anti-authoritarian revolution for the rule of law, civil society, democratic institutions and social and economic justice in Arab countries on the periphery of their U.S. protected bastion in the Arabian peninsula, but they seem unaware they are opening a Pandora's box that would unleash a backlash in comparison to which al-Qaeda's fall back on the U.S. will prove a minor precedent.

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