

Pressure Qatar until all Hostages are Released and Qatar Ends its Support for Hamas

written by Asher Fredman | 14.10.2023

Key Messages

In recent years, Qatar's relations with the West have grown stronger and deeper. In 2022, the United States defined Qatar as a 'major non-NATO ally'. Qatar's economic ties with European powers such as Germany, the UK and Italy are expanding.

- At the same time, Qatar is a prime sponsor of the Hamas terrorist group. Qatar has been hosting Hamas' HQ, leaders and operatives since at least 2012, including those involved in transferring millions of dollars for terror activities.
- It is estimated that over the last decade, Qatar sent over a billion and a half dollars to the Gaza Strip, the significant majority of which went to Hamas, its operatives and employees.
- In recent years, Israel allowed and even encouraged the transfer of Qatari funds to Gaza, in the hope that this would buy quiet and delay the rounds of fighting. These transfers both strengthened Hamas and helped Qatar gain significant leverage over the terrorist organization.
- The United States and Europe, particularly Germany, Italy, the UK and France, must strongly pressure Qatar in order to ensure that Qatar employs all of its leverage to bring about the release of all of Hamas' hostages. Western governments, as well as private sector and civil society actors, must use all of the economic, political and public relations tools at their disposal to this end.
- In the mid-term, these countries must demand that Qatar choose between enhancing its relations with the democratic West, and its support for a radical terrorist organization more brutal than ISIS. Israel too must change its approach to Qatar, including with regards to post-war Gaza reconstruction.

Qatar and the West

Since the Gulf War, Qatar's relations with the West have greatly improved on both the economic and military fronts. The US is one of Qatar's most important trade partners,

responsible for 15% of all goods imported to Qatar.[1] The largest US military base in the Middle East is located at Al Udeid Air Base near Doha, which hosts US Central Command's Forward HQ as well as the US Combined Air Operations Center and US Special Operations Central Command.[2] In January, 2022, US President Biden announced that Qatar would be designated a 'Major Non-NATO Ally'.

Qatar's relationships with European nations are also gaining strength. Italy, Germany and the UK account for 14% of Qatari imports.[3] At the end of Q1 2023, the UK reported that trade with Qatar had grown 117% year-over-year.[4] While Qatari exports, which consist primarily of gas and oil, have traditionally gone to Asia, energy exports to Europe are growing as a result of Europe's desire to identify alternatives to Russian gas. For example, in 2022, French company TotalEnergies was selected by Qatar as its first partner in developing the world's largest liquefied natural gas (LNG) project,[5] and in 2023, Italy's Eni signed a long term agreement with Qatar for the purchase of natural gas.[6]

While Western countries are eager to reap the benefits of economic and military cooperation with Qatar, Qatar's human rights violations, and support for terrorism and radical Islamist movements, have drawn criticism. In November 2022, the European Parliament passed a resolution deploring the deaths of thousands of migrant workers in Qatar in the lead-up to the World Cup, due to unsafe working conditions. The resolution also criticizes, "the abuse perpetrated by the country's authorities on the LGBTQ+ community. This includes the use of domestic laws that allow for LGBTQ+ persons to be provisionally detained without charge or trial for up to six months." [7] Qatar is currently embroiled in a EU corruption and bribery scandal dubbed 'Qatargate'.

Following Hamas' massacre of 1,400 Israelis and kidnapping of over 220 children, women and men, the number of voices in Europe calling for a reexamination of economic deals with Qatar is growing. During the Qatari Emir's October 12, 2023 visit to Germany, the energy policy spokesperson of Germany's Free Democratic

Party declared ““Future energy partnerships should only take place with partners who recognize Israel’s right to exist and do not fight it.”[8]

Qatar and Hamas

Qatar is one of the primary sponsors of the Hamas terrorist organization, providing the group with extensive logistical and financial support. It is also a main sponsor of other Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated organizations and political parties, including those that have threatened moderate governments in the region.

Qatar has hosted Hamas’ headquarters and leaders in Doha since at least 2012. According to estimates, over the past decade, Qatar transferred over a billion and a half dollars to Gaza.[9] While some of that money went to humanitarian aid, the significant majority (by some estimates, close to 80%) ended up in the bank accounts of Hamas, its operatives and employees, enabling Hamas to maintain its control of the Gaza Strip.[10] On October 18, 2023, the US Department of the Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control imposed sanctions on a longtime Hamas operative based in Qatar with close ties to Iran, who “was involved in the transfer of tens of millions of dollars to Hamas, including Hamas’s military wing, the Izz al-Din al-Qassim Brigades.”[11]

Another way in which Qatar provides substantial support to Hamas is through its Al Jazeera television network. Al Jazeera provides a central platform for Hamas leaders, while spreading Hamas propaganda and inciting against Israel.

True to form, while Hamas’ October 7 rampage of murder, kidnapping and rape against Israeli civilians was still ongoing, the Qatari Foreign Ministry issued a statement saying that Israel alone was responsible for the violence.[12] The Qatari media likewise expressed its support for the attacks.[13]

Israel’s War Against Hamas

Until the current war, Qatar’s transfer of funds to Hamas-controlled Gaza was viewed by Israel as largely serving its interest of maintaining quiet in the Strip. The hope was that these funds would help preserve calm on the ground, and delay the next round of fighting for as long as possible.

Hamas’ attack has uprooted this paradigm. Israel has now committed itself to

destroying, “the military and governing capabilities of Hamas” and eliminating or capturing the Hamas’ top leadership.[14] Simultaneously, Israel is also focused on efforts to return the approximately 220 babies, children, women and men being held hostage by Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Qatar, together with Egypt, has played an active role on the issue of the hostages, winning praise from the US.[15]

Recommendations:

Following Hamas’ massacre, the West cannot continue with a ‘business as usual’ approach towards Qatar’s support for a terrorist organization more barbaric than ISIS. The US and Europe should put all necessary pressure on Qatar in order that Qatar uses all of its leverage over Hamas to bring about the immediate release of the hostages. As a first step, Qatar should demand that the Red Cross be allowed to visit and provide medical treatment to all of the hostages.

This pressure on Qatar should include reexamining and potentially downgrading or cancelling economic ties and agreements, and placing economic sanctions on all Qatari entities involved in the transfer of funds to Hamas. If Qatar fails to act decisively to free the hostages and end support for Hamas, the US should examine whether Qatar’s designation as a major ally is justified. European nations should identify alternatives to the purchase of Qatari natural gas.

- The US should explore the possibility of relocating military installations and assets from Qatar to other Middle East locations, including Saudi Arabia. Relocating assets to Saudi Arabia would help provide the security guarantees Saudi Arabia seeks in exchange for establishing relations with Israel, would help defend it from Iran, and would serve to counter inroads being made by China.
- Additional countries which support Israel’s right to defend itself, and which have extensive economic ties with Qatar, such as India, should participate in the efforts to apply pressure on Qatar as well.
- In the mid-term, all countries which recognize Hamas as a terrorist group should demand that Qatar end all forms of logistical and financial support for Hamas.
- Victims of Hamas terrorism should consider filing lawsuits in relevant jurisdictions against Qatari entities involved in providing material support to Hamas.

- Private sector actors, academics, athletes and civil society bodies should refuse to take part in events organized by Qatar, and should refuse Qatari sponsorships, until all the hostages have been freed and Qatar ends its support for Hamas.
- Israel should not allow Qatar to have a role in the post-war reconstruction of Gaza, unless Qatar demonstrably ends all support for Hamas.
- Similar steps should be explored with regards to other countries that both support Hamas and have extensive ties to the West, including Turkey, Algeria, Malaysia and Kuwait. Maximum pressure and sanctions should be applied to Iran for its ongoing support for Palestinian terror organizations.
- [1] https://www.calcalist.co.il/world_news/article/BkCN11MgFd

[2] <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/how-hamas-is-spending-qatari-money-61829>

[3] <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy1816>

[4] <https://www.reuters.com/article/israel-palestinians-qatar-idUKS8N37R027>

[5] <https://www.memri.org.il/cgi-webaxy/item?5918>

[6] <https://time.com/6322493/israel-hamas-ground-war-gaza-military/>

[7] https://www.state.gov/?post_type=state_briefing&%3Bp=92333

[8] <https://trendeconomy.com/data/h2/Qatar>

[9]

<https://www.americansecurityproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Ref-0213-US-Military-Bases-and-Facilities-Middle-East.pdf>

[10] <https://trendeconomy.com/data>

11]

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/652d52b66b6fbf0014b75759/qatar-trade-and-investment-factsheet-2023-10-19.pdf>

12]

<https://totalenergies.com/media/news/press-releases/qatar-totalenergies-selected-qatarenergys-first-partner-north-field-south>

[1 3]

<https://www.reuters.com/markets/commodities/qatar-signs-27-year-gas-supply-deal-with-italys-eni-2023-10-23/>

[1 4]

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20221121IPR56305/world-cup-in-qatar-fifa-should-help-compensate-families-of-dead-migrant-workers>

[1 5]

<https://www.politico.eu/article/german-gas-deal-qatar-renewed-scrutiny-emir-tamim-bin-hamad-al-thani-olaf-scholz/>