

March 4, 2024

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
United States Department of State
2201 C St.
Washington, D.C. 20520
By email: secretary@state.gov
Cc: secretary@treasury.gov; secretary@defense.gov

Re: The IRGC and Iranian Military in Qatar

Dear Mr. Secretary:

On behalf of the Counter Extremism Project (“CEP”),¹ I am writing to protest in the strongest terms the official participation—once again—of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (“IRGC”) and sanctions-designated Iranian military officials, and a booth hosted by Iran’s Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics (“MODAFL”) at the Doha International Maritime Defense Exhibition and Conference (“DIMDEX”) starting today, March 4-6, 2024.² Qatar continues to provide MODAFL and the IRGC with the opportunity to exhibit their weapons and war-fighting prowess at a booth within the conference hall.³ These Iranian drones, missiles, and other arms currently on display are and will be used—whether by Iran, its Russian ally, or Iranian terror proxies and partners—directly against the United States and its allies.

Two years ago, on March 24, 2022—responding to this exact same issue at DIMDEX 2022—the U.S. State Department stated that it was “deeply disappointed and troubled by the presence of Iran and reported IRGC officers [at DIMDEX].”⁴ State Department Spokesperson Ned Price correctly asserted, “**We reject the presence of Iran at a maritime defense exhibit, considering that it’s Iran that single-handedly is threatening maritime stability throughout the Gulf region...**” The decision to once again permit the attendance of, and thereby legitimize, the IRGC is entirely contrary to the actions of—in the words of President Biden—a “good friend,”⁵ granted U.S. Major Non-NATO Ally (“MNNA”) status in 2022. Moreover, it is a serious sanctions violation on top of promoting the most grave risk to American national security and that of our allies in the region.

¹ CEP is a bi-partisan, non-profit international policy organization formed in 2014 to confront the growing threat from extremist groups and extremist ideology. <https://www.counterextremism.com/>

² DIMDEX, “[DIMDEX 2024](#)”

³ Reuters, “[Iran’s Revolutionary Guards tout missile prowess at Doha exhibition](#),” March 24, 2022.

⁴ U.S. Department of State, “[Iran Military Presence at the Doha Defense Show](#),” March 24, 2022.

⁵ On March 10, 2022, President Biden officially designated Qatar as a “major non-NATO ally” of the U.S. The President stated, “Qatar is a good friend and reliable and capable partner. And I’m notifying Congress that I will designate Qatar as a major non-NATO ally to reflect the importance of our relationship. I think it’s long overdue...” Reuters, “[Biden tells emir he will make Qatar major non-NATO ally](#),” January 31, 2022.

As you are well-aware, MODAFL is subject to multiple U.S. sanctions, and as the U.S. Treasury Department has noted, “entities affiliated with MODAFL help produce Iranian weapons systems, including UAVs, many of which are transferred to Russia or are provided to Iran’s web of proxy and partner groups to use against U.S., allied, and partner interests throughout the Middle East.”⁶ The Gaza drone, or the Shahed 149, that is being displayed at DIMDEX this week is manufactured by HESA, which has helped to arm Russia in its brutal invasion of Ukraine.

Likewise, the IRGC is a pathologically anti-American Foreign Terrorist Organization (“FTO”), additionally designated as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (“SDGT”) under Executive Order (“E.O.”) 13224 and as a proliferator of Weapons of Mass Destruction under E.O. 13382. Among its litany of crimes, the IRGC has murdered more than 600 U.S. personnel. In conjunction with the IRGC-Quds-Force (“IRGC-QF”), it is the Iranian regime’s primary vehicle for advancing Iran’s missiles, nuclear, and drones programs, while simultaneously supplying these weapons of war to Iranian regional terrorist proxies, including Hezbollah, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and the Houthis.

It is completely unacceptable that the IRGC and MODAFL are permitted to showcase their terror capabilities at DIMDEX on Qatari soil—especially alongside U.S. defense corporations with multibillion-dollar federal Department of Defense contracts. In 2022, the IRGC exhibited adjacent leading American defense companies including Boeing, Lockheed Martin, and Raytheon. According to Reuters, the IRGC booth was “adjacent” to “U.S. firm General Atomics [which] showcased its MQ-9B predator drone, which is engineered to conduct anti-surface warfare, including maritime surveillance and precision-guided munitions.”⁷ In 2024, U.S. firms including Anduril Industries, Blacksky, Boeing, General Atomics, General Dynamics, Inveris Training Solutions, Kallman Worldwide, Leonardo DRS, Lockheed, Northrop Grumman, Raytheon, Resecurity, S&K Technologies, S3 Aerodefense, ShieldAI, and Spinlaunch, will all be in attendance at DIMDEX 2024, appearing along with MODAFL and the IRGC.

Given the IRGC and MODAFL’s well-established propensity to surveil and steal from foreign companies, Qatar’s decision to host leading American military firms as well as the IRGC—and *adjacent* to each other in 2022—merely emphasizes the incredible risks to U.S. persons and national security that arise from Qatar’s outrageous inclusion of the IRGC at the DIMDEX conference.

DIMDEX 2022 also featured the Doha-based U.S. Navy Fifth Fleet. According to Naval News, Vice-Admiral Charles Bradford Cooper, Commander of the Fifth Fleet, discussed “regional threats” at the conference, in an obvious reference to IRGC-Navy provocations and IRGC-backed operations carried out by Iranian terrorist proxies against U.S. naval ships and foreign commercial vessels throughout the Gulf. The juxtaposition of this guarantor of peace and maritime security—for

⁶ U.S. Treasury Department, “[Treasury Targets Vessel Shipping Iranian Commodities Valued at Over \\$100 Million for Iran’s Ministry of Defense](#),” February 27, 2024.

⁷ Reuters, “[Iran’s Revolutionary Guards tout missile prowess at Doha exhibition](#),” March 24, 2022.

all the allied littoral nations of the Gulf including Qatar—versus the principal destabilizing threat to that same peace—a few meters away—was jarringly stark. Clearly, Qatar’s ability to maintain its own defense requirements while safely exporting liquefied natural gas and petroleum in lucratively vast quantities benefits enormously from the security that is provided by the same U.S. naval presence.

Of course, the IRGC is not the only U.S.-designated FTO that Qatar accommodates. Following the horrific atrocities of October 7, 2023, the entire world is now aware of Qatar’s status as the primary patron to Hamas, the terrorist group responsible for that massacre. Qatar has long provided essential support to the group in maintaining its grip over Gaza, thus ensuring Hamas’s ability to plan and perpetrate future acts of barbarism against Israel, as they have openly and repeatedly threatened, while concomitantly prolonging the suffering of the Palestinians who live there.

The State of Qatar is also the long-time host to the top leaders of Hamas. Supposedly a U.S. ally, Qatar is home to Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, who celebrated the October 7 massacre from his Doha office along with his predecessor, Khaled Meshaal. Haniyeh, the chairman of Hamas’s Political Bureau and a U.S. Specially Designated Global Terrorist (“SDGT”), his predecessor Khaled Meshaal, also an SDGT, and other Hamas leadership all lead luxuriantly appointed lifestyles in five-star accommodation in Doha, Qatar. Ali al-Qaradaghi, residing in Qatar, is the highest religious authority of Hamas, providing the organization with an alleged pretext (in the form of Fatwa) for their terror acts. He replaced the late Yusuf al-Qaradawi, a long-time resident of Qatar—and former longtime television personality on Qatar-owned *Al Jazeera*—who encouraged and advocated for all their atrocities and provided religious sanction to suicide attacks. Haniyeh is regularly hailed by Qatari leaders, including the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani. In return, Haniyeh offers his constant gratitude to Qatar for its “official and popular support.”

During the morning and early afternoon of October 7, more than 1,000 Hamas terrorists perpetrated an atrocity of remarkable savagery, butchering, burning, and shooting to death approximately 1,200 people in villages and Kibbutzim across southern Israel. Whole families, including elderly grandparents and infants, were locked inside houses and immolated. Hundreds of teenagers and young people in attendance at Nova open-air music festival were slaughtered en masse, many at point-blank range, others simply mown down in hails of machine-gun fire. As dead friends lay strewn around them, Hamas terrorists proceeded to rape teenage girls repeatedly. President Biden has attested to instances of decapitated babies still wearing blood-stained diapers. Witness testimony and video evidence has since revealed a brutal campaign of sexual violence, torture, and mutilation against Israeli women.⁸ Israeli first responders have provided horrifying accounts of the dismemberment and eye-gouging of live infants in front of their parents. A full accounting of the slaughter will take months if not years to finalize.

Qatar played a major role in the October 7 brutality by hosting and funding the very same Hamas leaders responsible for its formulation. But even in the months following the horror, Qatar has neither accepted any responsibility, provided even the most minor censure of Hamas, nor suspended

⁸ *New York Times*, “[Accounts of Sexual Violence by Hamas are Aired Amid Criticism of U.N.](#),” December 4, 2023.

its platforming of Hamas propagandizing and incitement from Qatar. Even as the blood of the 1,200 victims was still flowing, the Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that it held Israel “solely responsible for the ongoing escalation due to its ongoing violations.” Since the attacks, Qatar has hosted at least five meetings between Hamas leadership and its main terror sponsor, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and continued its full-court propaganda press against Israel.

Qatar’s patronage for Hamas extends beyond the provision of opulent accommodations and unswerving public support. Even before this heinous event, Qatar had stained its reputation through a long history of vast financial and material support for terrorism and internationally designated terrorists.⁹ Qatar’s financial support of Hamas dates back to at least 2008, when Doha pledged \$250 million to Hamas one year after the terror group seized control of the Gaza Strip.¹⁰ In 2012, Qatar’s then-emir Sheik Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani pledged more than \$400 million to Hamas for infrastructure projects.¹¹ In July 2016, the Qatari government announced that it would give \$30 million to Hamas in order to help pay the salaries of Gazan public sector workers.¹² The following month, Hamas’s then-deputy leader Haniyeh said that Qatar’s donations would also go toward paying Hamas’s “military personnel.” Today, and since at least 2018, Qatar funds Hamas to the tune of between \$360 million to \$480 million each year.¹³ Qatar’s repeated claims that it does not have influence over Hamas are ludicrous and offensive to reason.

Secretary Blinken: Neither CEP, nor increasing segments of the American public and the U.S. Congress, are fooled by Qatar’s unabashed efforts to co-opt Western interests and exonerate its own malfeasance. In 2022, the Department of State publicly reprimanded Qatar for allowing Iranian military elements to be present at this same maritime defense exhibition, just two weeks after awarding the MNNA status to Doha. Two years later, Qatar has once again demonstrated it is happy to completely dismiss this call—an entirely predictable behavior in keeping with Qatar’s prioritization of its terrorist friends over its U.S. “ally.”

We call on the United States government to use tomorrow’s meeting with the Qatari Prime Minister in Washington, D.C., as an opportunity to impress upon Qatar the foregoing concerns and—in the absence of substantive actions on its behalf—suspend Qatar’s official status as a major non-

⁹ The Qatari government has long provided critical support to a wide array of terrorist and extremist groups including not only Hamas but also al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (“AQAP”), the Muslim Brotherhood, and the Taliban – including direct money loans, ransom payments, and supplies transfers. Former Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence David Cohen described Qatar as a “permissive terrorist financing environment” that enables “private fundraising networks” to operate within its borders. According to Cohen, Qatar “has for many years openly financed Hamas, a group that continues to undermine regional stability. Press reports indicate that the Qatari government is also supporting extremist groups operating in Syria.”

¹⁰ Al Monitor, “[Hamas Ties to Qatar Have Cost](#),” April 22, 2013.

¹¹ *New York Times*, “[Qatar’s Emir Visits Gaza, Pledging \\$400 million to Hamas](#),” October 23, 2012.

¹² Reuters, “[Qatar says gives \\$30 million to pay Gaza public sector workers](#),” July 22, 2016; Times of Israel, “[Haniyeh seeks to pay Hamas ‘military personnel’ with Qatar’s money](#),” August 2, 2016.

¹³ Associated Press, “[Qatar pledges \\$360 million in aid to Hamas-ruled Gaza](#),” January 31, 2021; Haaretz, “[Qatar is Hamas’ Patron. Its Moderate Rebranding is a Dangerous Delusion](#),” May 9, 2022.

NATO ally and instead to sanction the State of Qatar, the DIMDEX conference and its organizers including the Al Thani royal family, until Qatar: arrests Hamas leaders, including Haniyeh, resident in Qatar for remand into U.S. or Israeli custody; uses the leverage created by the billions of dollars disbursed by Qatar to ensure the immediate release of every single hostage unharmed, and; durably proves its commitment to sanctions enforcement, counterterrorism, and that it is not effectively an Iranian IRGC partner.¹⁴

Thank you for your kind attention to this matter. We look forward to hearing from you.

Truly yours,



Ambassador Mark D. Wallace

¹⁴ As the State Department also noted in its March 24, 2022 press release, “Transactions related to Iranian weapons are generally sanctionable under multiple U.S. authorities, including sanctions related to terrorism and weapons of mass destruction.” We therefore also call on the U.S. Department of the Treasury to investigate and apply punitive sanctions against Qatari entities which may have engaged in business with the IRGC or U.S.-sanctioned persons.

APPENDIX – PHOTOGRAPHS FROM DIMDEX 2024



Mohammad Ashtiani (in uniform), Iran’s U.S.-sanctioned defense minister, at DIMDEX 2024 (IRIB News)



(IRIB News)



(IRIB News)



(IRIB News)



Mohammad Ashtiani (in uniform), Iran's U.S.-sanctioned defense minister, at DIMDEX 2024. (IRIB News)
Visible in the photo are IRGC officers accompanying him.



Mohammad Ashtiani (in olive uniform), Iran's U.S.-sanctioned defense minister, at DIMDEX 2024. Visible in the photo are IRGC officers accompanying him. (IRNA)



Mohammad Ashtiani (in olive uniform), Iran's U.S.-sanctioned defense minister, at DIMDEX 2024. Visible in the photo are IRGC officers accompanying him. (IRNA)