

Qatar: Extremism & Counter-Extremism

Overview

Qatar maintains close military ties with the United States. At the same time, the United States has criticized Qatar for its purported ties to terrorist groups such as [al-Qaeda](#) [1] and [Hamas](#) [2]. According to the *New York Times*, Qatar provides global Islamist groups with “safe haven, diplomatic mediation, financial aid and, in certain instances, weapons.” The United States has accused Qatar of allowing terrorism-financing operations within its borders. The U.S. government has sanctioned several Qatari nationals for ties to ISIS and al-Qaeda financial networks. Qatar, however, denies that it supports terrorist movements. Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani told CNN in 2014 that there is a “difference between movements. I know that in America and some countries they look at some movements as terrorist movements. In our part of the region, we don’t.” (Sources: [New York Times](#) [3], [CNN](#) [4], [Congressional Research Service](#) [5], [U.S. Department of the Treasury](#) [6])

Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and other Middle Eastern governments have criticized alleged Qatari support of al-Qaeda, ISIS, and the [Muslim Brotherhood](#) [7]. The Brotherhood does not have an official branch in Qatar, but Brotherhood members such as the group’s spiritual leader, [Yusuf al-Qaradawi](#) [8], reside in the country. Qatar also reportedly provided financial assistance to Egypt’s Brotherhood-led government in 2013. Egypt has since labeled the Brotherhood a terrorist organization and condemned Qatar’s alleged support for the group. Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates, among others, broke diplomatic ties with Qatar in June 2017 as a result of the country’s support for global terrorism. (Sources: [CNN](#) [9], [Christian Science Monitor](#) [10], [U.S. Department of the Treasury](#) [6])

Nonetheless, the United States and Qatar maintain close military ties. Qatar’s Al Udeid Air Base hosts the largest U.S. military base in the region, which includes the U.S. Central Command from which U.S. anti-ISIS missions are primarily conducted. Qatar also maintains close ties with the United States in global counterterrorism operations. (Sources: [New York Times](#) [11], [Associated Press](#) [12])

State-run Qatari mosques have reportedly hosted extremist speakers and religious leaders. Nevertheless, relatively few Qataris have gone abroad to join jihadist groups in Syria and Iraq. Conversely, support for ISIS appears high among Qatari Facebook and Twitter users, according to a 2014 study. The study analyzed pro-ISIS and anti-ISIS posts of countries outside the so-called Islamic State and found that 47 percent of the posts in Qatar collected between July and October 2014 expressed pro-ISIS sentiments. (Sources: [BBC News](#) [13], [Economist](#) [14], [Daily Beast](#) [15], [Guardian](#) [16], [Guardian](#) [17], [International Business Times](#) [18], [MSNBC](#) [19])

Radicalization and Foreign Fighters

Radicalization

The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) labeled Qatar a “safe haven for religious extremists expelled by other countries.” CSIS cited Qatar’s history of providing refuge for Palestinian, Sudanese, and Algerian fugitives. Qatar reportedly gave refuge to Saudi militants following the 1979 takeover of the Grand Mosque in Mecca. The country has also reportedly hosted members of al-Qaeda and the Taliban. According to the military affairs periodical *Jane’s*, Qatar in the 1980s was a “waypoint for senior Salafist terrorists transiting to or from Afghanistan, utilising the homes of Qatari notables as safehouses.” David Andrew Weinberg of the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies has accused Qatar of showing “one face to the international community projecting a desire to help in the fight against terrorist organizations, while providing a platform for the preaching in their own backyard of the same kind of hate-filled extremism of ISIS.” Weinberg points to a stream of Islamist imams who have addressed Qatari mosques with government support. (Sources: [Center for Strategic and International Studies](#) [20], [New York Times](#) [11], [Daily Beast](#) [15])

The state-controlled Imam Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab Masjid Doha, a.k.a. the Grand Mosque, is Qatar’s largest mosque. It is named for the 18th century founder of Wahhabism. Analysts have accused the mosque’s religious leadership of fomenting radicalism by inviting extremist guest speakers. For example, in late January 2015, Saudi cleric Sa’ad Ateeq al Ateeq reportedly gave a sermon at the mosque calling for Allah to “destroy the Jews and whoever made them Jews, and destroy the Christians and Alawites and the Shiites.” It was reportedly al Ateeq’s sixth visit to the mosque since 2013. Qatari government officials reportedly promoted the imam’s sermon on Qatari media and Twitter. Other invited speakers to the mosque reportedly include the U.S.- and U.N.-designated Kuwaiti [Hamid Abdullah al Ali](#) [21], who has been accused

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of financing al-Qaeda, and U.S.-designated [Hamid Hamad al Ali](#) [22], accused of supporting the [Nusra Front](#) [23]. (Sources: [Daily Beast](#) [15], [Foundation for the Defense of Democracies](#) [24])

Qatari officials have condemned extremism while defending designated terrorist organizations. Extremist groups claim they are defending the rights of people who feel oppressed by their governments, according to Qatar's U.N. Permanent Representative Ambassador Alia bint Ahmed bin Saif Al-Thani. The ambassador called on the international community to focus on resolving social-justice problems in order to combat terrorism. Al-Thani also called for differentiating between terrorism and legitimate resistance to oppression. (Source: [Qatar News Agency](#) [25])

Terrorism Financing & Material Support

On June 5, 2017, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates severed diplomatic relations with Qatar over the country's support for terrorism. The nations also barred Qatari citizens and closed all of their borders to Qatar. According to the official Saudi Press Agency, the kingdom broke ties with Qatar to "protect its national security from the dangers of terrorism and extremism." Saudi Arabia cited Qatari support of Iranian-backed militias in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, as well as alleged Qatari support for the Muslim Brotherhood, al-Qaeda, and ISIS. Yemen, Libya's internationally recognized eastern-based government, and the Maldives also broke diplomatic ties with Qatar later in the day. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [26], [CNN](#) [9], [CNN](#) [27], [Saudi Press Agency](#) [28], [Agence France-Presse](#) [29])

At the same time, the Saudi-led Arab coalition fighting Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen expelled Qatar because of its alleged support for ISIS, al-Qaeda, and Yemeni rebel militias. In response to the diplomatic break, the Qatari government denied collusion with international terrorist groups and accused other nations of trying to undermine Qatari sovereignty. (Sources: [CNN](#) [9], [CNN](#) [27], [Agence France-Presse](#) [29], [New York Times](#) [30])

On June 8, 2017, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, and the UAE designated 59 people and 12 groups—all either based in or otherwise associated with Qatar—for links to terrorism. The list included Qatar-based Muslim Brotherhood ideologue Yusuf Qaradawi, as well as 18 Qatari businessmen and politicians. Qatar rejected the list. (Sources: [Al Jazeera](#) [31], [Reuters](#) [32])

On July 25, the countries issued a second sanctions list, designating an additional 18 groups and individuals with "direct and indirect ties" to the Qatari government. The new list included a Libyan television station affiliated with Al Jazeera, three Yemeni charities, three Qatari citizens, and six non-Qataris. Some of the individuals and entities on the list have previously been designated by the United States. Qatar called the new list a "disappointing surprise." (Sources: [Reuters](#) [33], [Al Arabiya English](#) [34], [Reuters](#) [35])

On June 22, 2017, the four countries issued 13 demands of Qatar in order to restore relations. The demands included closing Al Jazeera, closing a Turkish military base in Qatar, and severing ties with the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, al-Qaeda, and Hezbollah. The nations also called on Qatar to scale back relations with Iran. More generally, the nations also demanded Qatar end support for terrorism and terror-financing. Qatar rejected the demands and denied links to terrorist groups. During a meeting in Cairo on July 5, the foreign ministers of the four Arab states agreed on six core principles that Qatar must accept: commit to fighting extremism and terrorism, cease all forms of incitement to violence and hatred, and prevent terror groups from using Qatar as both safe havens and sources of financing. Qatar has rejected the demands but has modified its terrorism laws. (Sources: [Associated Press](#) [36], [Reuters](#) [37], [Al Jazeera](#) [38], [CNN](#) [39])

The United States has accused Qatar of providing financial and material support to extremist and terrorist groups. According to the U.S. Treasury Department, Qatar has "openly financed" Hamas, whose political leadership is also based in Qatar. The Treasury Department has also cited press reports accusing Qatar of "supporting extremist groups operating in Syria." Other groups, such as al-Qaeda and ISIS, have purportedly set up financial networks in the country. The U.S. government has designated several Qatari nationals for fundraising on behalf of the Nusra Front, al-Qaeda, and other groups. (Sources: [New York Times](#) [11], [U.S. Department of the Treasury](#) [6])

According to a March 2014 address by U.S. Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence David Cohen, terrorist-fundraisers in Qatar "aggressively solicit donations online from supporters in other countries, notably Saudi Arabia, which have banned unauthorized fundraising campaigns for Syria." Cohen also said that private fundraising networks in Qatar "increasingly rely upon social media to solicit donations for terrorists and to communicate with both donors and recipient radicals on the battlefield." Cohen said Qatar "has become such a permissive terrorist financing

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environment, that several major Qatar-based fundraisers act as local representatives for larger terrorist fundraising networks that are based in Kuwait.” U.S. Arab allies such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates have also accused Qatar of publicly supporting pro-U.S. policies while providing support for terrorist groups. Qatari Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani has denied accusations that Qatar supports terrorists. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [40], [U.S. Department of the Treasury](#) [6], [Wall Street Journal](#) [41], [CNN](#) [42])

The U.S. Department of the Treasury has sanctioned several Qatari nationals for financing terrorism. In December 2013, for example, the U.S. Treasury sanctioned Qatar-based terror-financier [Abd al-Rahman bin ‘Umair al-Nu’aymi](#) [43]. According to the Treasury, al-Nu’aymi ordered the transfer of almost \$600,000 to al-Qaeda in 2013 and intended to transfer almost \$50,000 more. The United Nations has also sanctioned al-Nu’aymi. Qatar-based Sheikh Hajaj al-Ajmi openly raised money in the country for the Nusra Front when the Treasury designated him in August 2014. In August 2015, the Treasury sanctioned Sa’d bin Sa’d Muhammad Shariyan al-Ka’bi, another Qatari financier of the Nusra Front. At the same time, the U.S. Treasury also designated Qatari al-Qaeda facilitator ‘Abd al-Latif Bin ‘Abdallah Salih Muhammad al-Kawari. The Qatari government employed al-Qaeda financier Salim Hasan Khalifa Rashid al-Kuwari in the Ministry of the Interior, despite al-Kuwari’s designation as a terrorist by the United States. Al-Kuwari has channeled hundreds of thousands of dollars to al-Qaeda. (Sources: [U.S. Department of the Treasury](#) [6], [United Nations](#) [44], [U.S. Department of the Treasury](#) [45], [New York Times](#) [11], [U.S. Department of the Treasury](#) [46], [U.S. Department of the Treasury](#) [47], [U.S. Department of the Treasury](#) [48], [Telegraph](#) [49])

The U.S. Treasury designated terrorist financier and facilitator Khalifa Muhammad Turki Al-Subaiy as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist in June 2008. Al-Subaiy “provided financial support to al Qaida senior leadership in Pakistan’s tribal region...[and] served as a diplomatic and communications conduit between al Qaida and third parties in the Middle East.” The United Nations designated al-Subaiy in October 2008 as a “Qatar-based terrorist financier and facilitator who has provided financial support to, and acted on behalf of, the senior leadership of Al-Qaida....” Al-Subaiy reportedly continues to freely finance and fundraise for terrorist extremist organizations while resident in Qatar. According to a [Telegraph](#) report from October 2014, al-Subaiy is “once again raising money for Islamist terrorists after being freed by the Qatari authorities.” (Sources: [U.S. Department of the Treasury](#) [50], [United Nations](#) [51], [Telegraph](#) [52])

The leaders of Iraq and Egypt have also accused Qatar of links to terrorism. In March 2014, then-Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki accused Qatar and Saudi Arabia of supporting ISIS insurgents fighting in western Iraq. Qatari Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani called the Iraqi claims “inappropriate” and chastised Iraq for failing “to preserve national unity” while accusing “other Arab countries of supporting terrorism.” (Sources: [Reuters](#) [53], [Reuters](#) [54])

In February 2015, Egypt launched military strikes against neighboring Libya in response to the kidnapping and beheading of 21 Egyptian citizens by Libyan militants. Qatar condemned the Egyptian action. Egypt’s representative in the Arab League, Tareq Adel, said Qatar’s condemnation showed that it “supports terrorism.” Qatar recalled its ambassador from Egypt in response. (Source: [Reuters](#) [55])

Muslim Brotherhood

The official Qatari chapter of the [Muslim Brotherhood](#) [7] disbanded in 1999, but Qatar has reportedly continued to support the Brotherhood through financial- and media-based pathways, as well as through public diplomacy. Other governments in the region, such as Egypt, have accused Qatari-owned satellite network Al Jazeera of biases toward the Brotherhood. Qatar is also home to prominent Brotherhood leaders such as the group’s spiritual leader, [Yusuf al-Qaradawi](#) [56]. (Sources: [Christian Science Monitor](#) [10], [Asharq al-Awsat](#) [57], [Gulf News](#) [58], [BBC News](#) [59])

Qatar has refused to join its regional neighbors that have labeled the Brotherhood a terrorist organization. Egypt designated the Brotherhood in 2013, while Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain labeled the Brotherhood a terrorist group in 2014. Qatar is a member of the six-member Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which signed an agreement in November 2013 to refuse support to “anyone threatening the security and stability” of the GCC. Fellow GCC members Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates withdrew their ambassadors from Qatar in March 2014 in protest of what they called the country’s violation of that agreement and “interference” in regional affairs, citing continued Qatari support for the Brotherhood. That November, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates announced intentions to return their ambassadors after Qatar purportedly agreed to finally expel several Brotherhood leaders from the country. Qatar had reportedly agreed to the expulsions in November 2013, and the country’s failure to follow through with the

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expulsions helped trigger the diplomatic row, according to the *Guardian*. (Sources: [Guardian](#) [60], [BBC News](#) [61], [Reuters](#) [62], [Reuters](#) [63], [Guardian](#) [64], [Wall Street Journal](#) [65])

In mid-September 2014, seven top Brotherhood members claimed that they had been “asked to leave Qatar” as the country came under pressure from neighbors to cut off support for the Brotherhood. The expulsions were reportedly meant to fulfill Qatar’s November 2013 pledge and repair the government’s regional relationships. An unnamed Qatari diplomat told the *New York Times* that Qatar had not forced the Brotherhood members out and that they were welcome to return. In a statement on the Brotherhood’s website, senior Brotherhood leader Amr Darrag says that members of the Brotherhood were asked to leave Qatar and would do so to “avoid causing any embarrassment for the state of Qatar.” (Sources: [Guardian](#) [66], [New York Times](#) [67])

In February 2015, Qatari Foreign Minister Khalid al-Attiyah denied Qatari support for the Muslim Brotherhood. He reportedly said that Qatar continues to host families of Brotherhood members who recently left the country after “feeling pressured by some Arab brothers.” Their families remain “our guests,” he said. (Source: [Al-Monitor](#) [68])

During the Brotherhood’s year in power in Egypt, Qatar loaned President [Mohammed Morsi](#) [69]’s government approximately \$7.5 billion. Qatar also reportedly aided Morsi’s regime with grants and “energy supplies,” according to Reuters. During Morsi’s presidency, funds as high as \$850,000 were reportedly secretly transferred to the Brotherhood from former Qatari Prime Minister Hamad bin Jassim bin Jaber Al Thani. A document dated March 28, 2013, details the allocation of funds to a “long list” of Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood leaders. Egyptian courts have also charged Morsi and his aides with leaking state secrets to Qatar. Qatar condemned Egypt’s decision to label the Brotherhood a terrorist organization in 2014. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [70], [Reuters](#) [71], [Fox News](#) [72], [Reuters](#) [73], [Reuters](#) [74], [Reuters](#) [75], [Reuters](#) [76])

Egypt has accused the Qatari government-supported Al Jazeera news outlet of being a mouthpiece for the Brotherhood. The Egyptian government has arrested several Al Jazeera reporters on charges of supporting the Brotherhood. Iraq banned the channel in April 2016. (Sources: [Deutsche Welle](#) [77], [Deutsche Welle](#) [78], [Guardian](#) [79], [Washington Post](#) [80])

Al-Qaeda

U.S. officials have tied members of Qatar’s royal family to [al-Qaeda](#) [81] core as well as to [al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula](#) [82] (AQAP). According to U.S. officials, Qatar’s former interior minister and royal family member Abdullah bin Khalid al-Thani tipped off the 9/11 attacks mastermind, Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, before he could be captured by the United States. An unnamed former CIA official told U.S. media that members of the Qatari royal family have provided safe haven for other al-Qaeda members as well. In 2010, a branch of the Qatari government made a donation to help build a \$1.2 million mosque in Yemen for Sheikh Abdel Wahab al-Humayqani. The U.S. government has since designated al-Humayqani as a fundraiser for AQAP. (Sources: [ABC News](#) [83], [New York Times](#) [11], [New Yorker](#) [84], [9/11 Commission Report](#) [85], p. 73)

A week before a March 2005 suicide bombing in a Doha suburb killed one and wounded a dozen, a top al-Qaeda operative in Saudi Arabia issued a call for attacks in Qatar and elsewhere in the Middle East. The timing of the bombing led investigators to believe al-Qaeda played a role in the terrorist act, though another group later claimed responsibility. (Source: [Telegraph](#) [86])

Hamas

In 2014, *Time* called Qatar one of [Hamas](#) [2]’s main allies. In 2012, then-Qatari Emir Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani became the first head of state to visit the Gaza Strip after Hamas violently took control of the coastal enclave from the Palestinian Authority (PA) in 2007. In a 2014 interview with CNN, Qatari Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani said Qatar supports “all Palestinian people. We believe Hamas is a very important part of the Palestinian people.” Al-Thani also said that Hamas leaders “believe in peace and they want peace. But it’s for the other party to believe in peace as well and to be more realistic.” (Sources: [Time](#) [87], [BBC News](#) [88], [Huffington Post](#) [89], [CNN](#) [42])

Qatar has also hosted Hamas political leader [Khaled Meshaal](#) [90] since the Hamas leadership abandoned its base in Syria in 2012. Since then, various media reports have surfaced that Qatar intended to expel Meshaal, but the Hamas leader

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continues to freely move around the country. For example, Meshaal called a press conference at Doha's Four Seasons Hotel in September 2015. In May 2017, the Sheraton hotel in Doha hosted a Hamas press conference during which the group revealed a new guiding political document. After [Ismail Haniyeh](#) [91] replaced Meshaal as head of Hamas's political bureau in May 2017, Hamas announced that Haniyeh would divide his time between Gaza and Qatar. In December 2019, Haniyeh left Gaza for the first time in three years to attend meetings in Turkey and Qatar. In early February 2020, rumors circulated that Egypt was preventing Haniyeh from returning to Gaza out of anger that he had visited Iran during his international tour. Hamas announced later that month that Haniyeh would reside in Qatar for the immediate future in order to continue traveling freely through the end of 2020 or early 2021. (Sources: [BBC News](#) [59], [Al-Monitor](#) [92], [Jerusalem Post](#) [93], [Haaretz](#) [94], [Washington Free Beacon](#) [95], [Guardian](#) [96], [Jerusalem Post](#) [97], [Times of Israel](#) [98], [Al-Monitor](#) [99])

Qatar has invested hundreds of millions of dollars in Gaza. For example, the government pledged \$400 million to reconstruction efforts in Gaza in 2012. Israeli leaders such as former President Shimon Peres have accused Qatar of funding Hamas terrorism. Qatar has continued to offer financial support despite condemnation by the U.S. government. After Hamas and rival faction Fatah signed a reconciliation agreement in April 2014, the PA refused to pay the salaries of Hamas civil servants in Gaza. In response, Qatar attempted to transfer hundreds of millions of dollars to Hamas to pay the salaries of 44,000 civil servants. The United States reportedly blocked the transfers. In July 2016, Israel and the PA approved a Qatari plan to pay \$31,000,000 for the July salaries of Hamas's public-sector employees in Gaza. At the end of the month, Hamas's then-deputy leader Ismail Haniyeh reportedly called for using the money to pay Hamas's "military personnel" as well as civil servants. (Sources: [Agence France-Presse](#) [100], [Times of Israel](#) [101], [Times of Israel](#) [102], [U.S. Department of the Treasury](#) [6], [Jerusalem Post](#) [103], [Times of Israel](#) [104])

In June 2017, Qatar reportedly expelled several Hamas officials, including Saleh al-Arouri, allegedly the founder of the West Bank branch of Hamas's military wing. The expulsions reportedly coincided with several Arab countries breaking diplomatic ties with Qatar. (Source: [Times of Israel](#) [105])

ISIS

Qatar is reportedly on alert for an [ISIS](#) [106] attack following attacks on Shiite mosques in Saudi Arabia in 2015. Policy analyst Andrew Hammond of the European Council on Foreign Relations dismissed the risk to the country, though "there is definitely reason for a country like Qatar to be on guard." Hammond told Qatar's state-sponsored Doha News in December 2015 that Qatar is rarely mentioned in ISIS's lists of targets. According to Hammond, the country is not a primary ISIS target because Qatar "has kept a low profile" in the U.S.-led campaign against ISIS. (Source: [Doha News](#) [107])

In July 2014, ISIS reportedly threatened to attack Qatar if international soccer organization FIFA did not relocate the 2022 World Cup, scheduled to take place in the country. In a message to then-FIFA president Joseph Sepp Blatter reportedly posted on an online ISIS forum, ISIS promised that by 2022 Qatar would be part of its caliphate headed by ISIS leader [Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi](#) [108], "who doesn't allow corruption and diversion from Islam in the land of the Muslims." That November, al-Baghdadi claimed the group's caliphate had spread to Qatar, among other Arab countries. (Sources: [International Business Times](#) [18], [MSNBC](#) [19])

Taliban

[Taliban](#) [109] officials have had an increasing presence in Qatar since approximately 2010. High-level Taliban officials and their families have reportedly moved to the country. Afghan diplomats in Doha have reported running into Taliban members on the street. For example, Mullah Abdul Salam Zaif, a former Guantanamo Bay prisoner and Taliban ambassador to Pakistan, reportedly moved from Afghanistan to Qatar in 2011. Sometime after 2010, the Taliban also reportedly maintained a diplomatic office in Doha until 2014. It was the only such office in the world. (Sources: [BBC News](#) [110], [Daily Mail](#) [111], [New York Times](#) [11])

Qatar has hosted on-and-off negotiations between the United States, the Taliban, and the Afghan government to reach an end to the war in Afghanistan that started in 2001. On February 29, 2020, U.S. and Taliban representatives meeting in Doha signed an agreement for a gradual U.S. troop withdrawal in exchange for the Taliban agreeing to renounce al-Qaeda and prevent al-Qaeda and other groups from using Afghanistan as a base for terrorism against the United States. The

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Taliban also agreed to negotiate a permanent ceasefire with other Afghan militants and the Afghan government. Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani praised Qatar's role in the negotiations for helping make the agreement possible. (Sources: [Associated Press](#) [112], [Al Jazeera](#) [113], [U.S. Department of State](#) [114], [Al Jazeera](#) [115])

Foreign Fighters

The Qatari government is "concerned" that foreign fighters could use Doha's international airport as a hub to and from Syria, according to the U.S. State Department. Qatar has not been a major source of foreign fighters abroad. As of December 2015, the Soufan Group estimated that fewer than a dozen Qataris had joined the fighting in Syria and Iraq. According to the Institute for Economics & Peace's 2015 Terrorism Index, only 15 Qatari nationals had joined the fighting in Syria and Iraq. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#) [116], [Soufan Group](#) [117], [Institute for Economics and Peace](#) [118], [Jamestown Foundation](#) [119])

Individual Qataris have been tied to terrorist plots abroad. For example, a Saudi court sentenced a Qatari man to 30 years in prison in 2014 for heading a group of 13 alleged terrorists, including 11 Saudis and one Afghan. According to the court, the group used Saudi territory "to form a terrorist cell seeking to carry out a terrorist operation in the state of Qatar against American forces...." The court ordered the Qatari to be deported back to Qatar after his prison sentence. (Source: [Reuters](#) [120])

Major Extremist and Terrorist Incidents

The Institute for Economics and Peace's 2017 Global Terrorism Index (GTI) ranked Qatar as the only Middle Eastern nation among the world's 50 most peaceful countries. Out of 163 countries, Qatar ranked No. 30 in terms of the most peaceful. In 2015, Qatar scored a 0 out of 10 on the GTI, indicating it was rarely or not at all affected by terrorism. The index measures countries' total of number of terrorist incidents, fatalities caused by terrorists, injuries produced, and the measure of property damaged caused from terrorism. (Sources: [Institute for Economics and Peace](#) [121], [Institute for Economics and Peace](#) [118])

According to the U.S. State Department, terrorism has "historically been low in Qatar." The State Department credited Qatar's "[r]estrictive immigration policies and security services capable of monitoring and disrupting violent extremist activities." Nevertheless, Qatar has experienced a small number of attacks. According to the State Department, the Qatari government "is concerned" that extremists could "commit terrorist acts in or from Qatar" using the country's Internet or financial systems. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [116])

Doha Theater Bombing

On March 19, 2005, the second anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, a suicide bomber attacked the Doha Players Theater in the suburb of Farek Kelab. The attack killed a British citizen and wounded 12 other people. The theater is frequented by Westerners and expatriates. Qatari authorities identified the bomber as Egyptian citizen Omar Ahmed Abdullah Ali. Ali had reportedly lived in Qatar for at least 15 years. (Sources: [Forbes](#) [122], [Associated Press](#) [123], [BBC News](#) [124])

An Islamist extremist group called Tanzim Jund al-Sham (Organization of the Army of Greater Syria) claimed responsibility for the attack in an online statement and warned "America, Britain and Italy and all those who have defiled the lands of Islam to be ready for the grand surprise." The bombing was the first of its kind in Qatar. Two days after the attack, more than 1,000 people gathered at the attack site, chanting "No to terrorism." (Sources: [BBC News](#) [125], [Jamestown Foundation](#) [126])

Attacks on Al Udeid Base

The Qatari base Al Udeid hosts the Qatari air force as well as the U.S. military base in the country. The base has come under attack several times. On November 7, 2001, security guards shot dead a Qatari man who opened fire at the base

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with an assault rifle. There were no other fatalities, but two U.S. contractors were wounded. An unidentified assailant drove into the base's gates in February 2002, but was killed by security. In October 2002, a Saudi man attempted and failed to hijack a plane bound for Saudi Arabia and crash it into the base. He was apprehended in Sudan before he could hijack a plane. In October 2014, a Saudi court sentenced 17 people to prison for plotting to attack U.S. forces in Qatar and Kuwait. The group was part of a group of 41 people arrested in 2011 for launching an al-Qaeda-linked cell. (Sources: [CNN](#) [127], [BBC News](#) [128], [Center for Strategic and International Studies](#) [20], [Doha News](#) [129], [Reuters](#) [120])

- **December 7, 2019:** Doha hosts a new round of peace talks between the United States and the Taliban. These negotiations between the U.S. peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad and Afghanistan's Taliban are the first talks since U.S. President Donald Trump withdrew from dialogues with the insurgents in September. Among the participants of the current talks is Anas Haqqani, one of three senior Taliban figures freed last month in exchange for kidnapped American University of Afghanistan professors—American Kevin King and Australian Timothy Weeks. The meetings held in Qatar, where the Taliban maintain a political office, follow several days of talks in Afghanistan's capital, Kabul, where Khalilzad met with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani. Source: [Washington Post](#) [130]
- **November 16, 2019:** Fox News publishes a report that claims Qatar had advance knowledge on an Iranian attack on four commercial vessels in the Gulf of Oman on May 12, 2019, and may have failed to warn its U.S., French, and British allies. "Credible intelligence reports indicate that the IRGC-Quds Forces Naval unit is responsible for the Fujairah Port attacks, and the elements of civilian government of Iran, as well as the State of Qatar, were aware of the IRGC's activities," the report said. The U.S. has classified Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a foreign terrorist organization. Qatar, however, has forged an alliance with the Islamic Republic of Iran, whose already tense relationship with the U.S. deteriorated further after Trump pulled out of the nuclear deal. Source: [Fox News](#) [131]
- **April 10, 2019:** Qatar and Turkey object to Washington's decision to designate Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a foreign terrorist organization. "We do not support Iran's Revolutionary Guards in Syria, but no country can declare another country's armed forces a terrorist organization. We also do not support unilateral decisions," Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu states during a joint press conference in Ankara with his Qatari counterpart Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani. Al-Thani, for his part, said disagreements over the Iranian army's behavior should not be solved by imposing sanctions. Source: [Ahval News](#) [132]
- **May 16, 2018:** Qatar imposes sanctions on Lebanon's Hezbollah leadership, targeting its top two officials, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah and Naim Qassem. The measures were imposed jointly by Qatar and its partners in the Terrorist Financing and Targeting Center (TFTC), which includes the United States, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, and United Arab Emirates. Sources: [Reuters](#) [133], [State of Qatar Ministry of Interior](#) [134]
- **March 22, 2018:** Qatar places 28 people and entities on a terrorism list, including several Qatari nationals already blacklisted by rival Arab states who accuse Doha of supporting militants. Named on the new Qatari list were two Qatari citizens who were described by the boycotting countries as financiers of the Islamist militant Nusra Front group fighting in Syria. Absent from the list was the Qatar-based International Union of Muslim Scholars, which was formed in 2004 mostly by clerics belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood and chaired by the Egyptian Sheikh Youssef al-Qaradawi. The group and Qaradawi are both blacklisted by Doha's rivals. Sources: [Reuters](#) [135], [State of Qatar Ministry of the Interior](#) [136]
- **March 19, 2005:** A suicide bomber attacks the Doha Players Theater in the suburb of Farek Kelab, killing a British citizen and wounding 12 people. Qatari authorities identify the bomber as Egyptian citizen Omar Ahmed Abdullah Ali, who had reportedly lived in Qatar for at least 15 years. Sources: [Forbes](#) [122], [Associated Press](#) [123], [BBC News](#) [124]
- **February 1, 2002:** An unidentified assailant rams a vehicle into the gates at Al Udeid Base and is killed by security. Source: [Center for Strategic and International Studies](#) [20]
- **November 7, 2001:** Security guards at Al Udeid base shoot dead a Qatari man who opened fire at the base. There are no other fatalities, but two U.S. contractors are wounded. Sources: [CNN](#) [127], [BBC News](#) [128], [Center for Strategic and International Studies](#) [20], [Doha News](#) [129], [Reuters](#) [120]

Domestic Counter-Extremism

The Qatari security forces are reportedly sparse and struggle to recruit nationals to fill law enforcement positions. The country relies on the "manpower from third countries to fill rank-and file law enforcement positions," according to the U.S. Department of State. The State Department also believes that Qatar's lack of extensive police training obstructs the efficiency of the emirate's security services. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [116])

The National Anti-Terrorism Committee (NATC) in the Ministry of Interior determines Qatar's counterterrorism policy and

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manages interagency cooperation within the government to ensure effective counterterrorism efforts. The government restructured the NATC in 2014 to include representatives from more than 10 government agencies as a measure “to secure [the nation’s] critical infrastructure, as well as to prevent the country from becoming a hub for [traveling] foreign fighters,” according to the Doha News Agency. The U.S. Department of State credits Qatar’s strict immigration laws and government monitoring of violent extremists for the country’s low rate of domestic terrorism. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#) [116], [Doha News Agency](#) [137])

Education

In 2015, Qatari Foreign Minister Khalid Al-Attiyah warned that lack of access to education puts children “increasingly at risk of radicalization and of being persuaded to act on behalf of extremists....” The Qatari government has focused on education as a primary counter-extremism tool. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#) [138], [Irish Times](#) [139])

The Qatari Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) partners with the U.S. embassy to Qatar on the Young Writers Program, an annual essay contest for students from 122 students from Qatari government schools on societal topics. The program launched in 2014. According to the U.S. Department of State, the program exposes students to counter-extremist programming “through essay writing on subjects affecting their society.” (Sources: [Young Writers Program](#) [140], [U.S. Department of State](#) [138])

Legislation

Qatar’s 2004 Law on Combatting Terrorism permits the state to prosecute individuals involved in terrorist-related activities, including providing terrorism-related information, training, weapons, financing, providing material support to terrorists or terrorist organizations, and associations with groups that commit terrorist activities inside or outside Qatar. In March 2004, the government established the Qatar Authority for Charitable Activities (QACA) to screen transactions made by Qatari domestic and international charitable organizations to prevent terrorism funding. According to the U.S. Department of State, the QACA failed to thwart donations made to charities associated with extremist and terrorist organizations. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#) [141], [Congressional Research Service](#) [142])

In July 2017, Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani issued a royal decree amending the 2004 terror law. The decree, which took immediate effect, created two lists of designated terror-affiliated nationals and entities and defined the terms “terrorist,” “crime,” “terrorist acts,” “terrorist entities,” “the freezing of funds,” and the “financing of terrorism.” The move reportedly came in response to pressure by Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain, which severed ties with Qatar the month before over accusations that the emirate supported regional terrorism. The UAE government reportedly called the Qatari move a “step in the right direction.” (Sources: [The National](#) [143], [Al Jazeera](#) [38], [Reuters](#) [144])

The 2010 Combating Money Laundering and Terrorist Finance Law permits Qatari authorities to freeze the funds and assets of terrorists or terror organizations designated by the U.N. Security Council. In addition, the Qatar Central Bank monitors suspicious accounts through its counterterrorism and anti-money laundering department, the Qatar Financial Information Unit. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#) [141], [Congressional Research Service](#) [142])

The Qatari government passed the Cybercrime Prevention Law in September 2014 to outlaw terrorism-related cybercrimes, including terrorism fundraising via the Internet. The law permits Qatari law enforcement to monitor Internet traffic and collect electronic data, according to the state-sponsored Doha News Agency. If a Qatari company is suspected of violating the Cybercrime Prevention Law, authorities are permitted to seize the company’s electronic information, bypassing any organizational confidentiality policies that may be in place. According to the Doha News Agency, domestic Internet service providers must comply with requests from authorities to shut down specific websites. This legislation also created a formal process for Qatari law enforcement to request information from foreign governments for investigative purposes. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#) [141], [Doha News Agency](#) [137], [Doha News Agency](#) [145])

On September 12, 2019, Qatar’s cabinet passed a new law to combat money laundering and terrorism financing that will bring it in line with recommendations from the Financial Action Task Force, an international organization that sets global standards for fighting illicit finance. Qatar has been intent on cracking down on terrorism financing, more than two years after coming under embargo by a Saudi-led bloc that has accused it of supporting militant groups, which Doha denies. “The

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new law sets out binding legal requirements for business and financial sectors related to combating money laundering and terrorist financing, including non-profit organizations and money transfer services,” a central bank statement said. (Source: [Reuters](#) [146])

State Security Bureau

Also known as Qatar State Security, the State Security Bureau is tasked with monitoring the extremist or terrorist-related activity within the country. The bureau is capable of deploying an elite quick-reaction security force that regularly participates in organized counterterrorism exercises, according to the U.S. Department of State. The State Security Bureau purportedly takes an aggressive, proactive stance toward monitoring Qatar’s internal threats. According to the U.S. State Department, Qatar strictly monitors the traffic of suspected terrorists through its airports with its own watch list and conducts in-depth background investigations on work visa applicants. Qatari authorities reportedly use a biometric scanning system for all airport arrivals. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [116])

Prosecution

In June 2017, Qatar announced that it had prosecuted five men sanctioned by the U.S. government for terror financing in 2015 and 2016. The government reportedly did not publicize the trials at the time in order to avoid embarrassing the men’s families. (Sources: [Bloomberg](#) [147], [U.S. Department of State](#) [116])

International Counter-Extremism

ISIS

Qatar is a member of the Global Coalition to Counter ISIS and reportedly provides surveillance and critical operational and logistical support to the coalition forces. According to the U.S. Department of State, the Qatari Al Udeid Air Base hosts two U.S. military installations and is reportedly the largest American base in the Middle East. The base hosts the U.S. Central Command from which the U.S.-led anti-ISIS “Operation Inherent Resolve” primarily operates. The United States also trains moderate Syrian opposition forces at the base. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#) [141], [Associated Press](#) [12])

Qatar has reportedly conducted numerous humanitarian flights for the coalition. When questioned by reporters on why Qatar joined the coalition, Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani responded, “We’ve been asked by our American friends if we can join, and we did.” Qatar has reportedly flown surveillance planes over ISIS-held territory and has participated in coalition airstrikes. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#) [141], [CNN](#) [148], [Wall Street Journal](#) [41], [U.S. Department of State](#) [116])

Taliban Negotiations

Doha has hosted on-and-off negotiations between the United States and the Taliban to reach an end to the war in Afghanistan that started in 2001. On February 29, 2020, U.S. and Taliban representatives meeting in Doha signed an agreement for a U.S. troop withdrawal. The United States agreed to draw its forces down from 13,000 to 8,600 in the next three to four months, with the remaining U.S. forces withdrawing in 14 months. In exchange, the Taliban agreed to renounce al-Qaeda and prevent al-Qaeda and other groups from using Afghanistan as a base for terrorism against the United States. The Taliban also agreed to negotiate a permanent ceasefire with other Afghan militants and the Afghan government. The U.S. troop drawdown is dependent on the Taliban maintaining its commitments. The agreement also called for permanent ceasefire and power-sharing talks that March between Afghan militant groups as well as between the Taliban and the Afghan government. The Qatari government praised its role in helping finalize the agreement. (Sources: [Associated Press](#) [112], [Al Jazeera](#) [113], [U.S. Department of State](#) [114], [Al Jazeera](#) [115])

The Global Counter Terrorism Forum

Qatar is one of 30 founding members of the Global Counter Terrorism Forum (GCTF). According to its mission statement, the GCTF “is an informal, multilateral counterterrorism platform that has strengthened the international architecture for

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addressing 21st century terrorism and promotes a strategic, long-term approach to countering terrorism and the violent extremist ideologies that underpin it.” The forum’s goals are to reduce terrorist recruitment and bolster “countries’ civilian capabilities for dealing with terrorist threats,” according to the GCTF. The forum reportedly works alongside the United Nations to assist in the operation of the [U.N. Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy](#) [149]. In March 2014, Qatar hosted the GCTF Workshop to Develop an Action Plan for Community-Oriented Policing as a Tool for Countering Violent Extremism. In May 2015, Qatar hosted the GCTF Seventh Coordinating Meeting, during which Qatar’s delegation called upon the organization to increase efforts to combat the causes of terrorism and declared Qatar’s commitment to combat terrorism, according to the Qatar News Agency. (Sources: [Global Counter Terrorism Forum](#) [150], [U.S. Department of State](#) [151], [U.S. Department of State](#) [152], [Qatar News Agency](#) [153])

The Doha Declaration

During the 13th U.N. Crime Congress held in Doha in May 2015, Qatar announced its Doha Declaration, which reportedly outlined a framework to counter violent extremism and criminal networks by focusing on the education of displaced youth in the Middle East. By November 2015, Qatar signed a four-year \$49 million contract with the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to initiate the Doha Declaration by establishing programs for prison rehabilitation, social integration, and youth education. According to the UNODC, “the Doha Declaration stresses the commitment and political will of Member States to implement comprehensive crime prevention and criminal justice strategies.” (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#) [141], [U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime](#) [154])

The Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund

In December 2015, Qatar’s ambassador to the U.N., Sheikha Alya Bint Ahmed Bin Saif Al Thani, called for support for the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF). The Geneva-based fund is reportedly used to “[enhance] skills, potential, and resources of both the public and private sectors to support local projects, such as education, vocational training, civic engagement, media, and defense of women’s rights” to counter violent extremism, according to the U.S. Department of State. The GCERF is reportedly the first global program of its kind that works alongside governments, civil society, and private organizations to create strategies to target the local origins of violent extremism. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [141])

Qatar-U.S. Cooperation

According to the U.S. State Department, U.S. and Qatari agencies have “an active and productive dialogue” when exchanging terrorism-related information. Despite the reported lack of manpower, the Qatari security services have been attentive to U.S. requests for information and able to establish cooperation between law enforcement and counterterrorism agencies. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#) [116], [Doha News Agency](#) [137])

In July 2017, the U.S. and Qatari governments signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on cooperation to prevent terrorism and terror financing in Qatar. The following month, the U.S. military announced a series of computer upgrades at the Al Udeid base. Military sources said that steps had already been taken to improve the review of intelligence data and refueling of U.S. fighter planes in Syria. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [155], [U.S. Department of State](#) [156], [Reuters](#) [157])

As a result of the counterterrorism MOU signed in 2017, the United States and Qatar continued to increase information sharing, including on terrorist screening information. Aviation security information sharing also increased. Ministry of Interior (MOI) authorities cooperated with the Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protection, and Transportation Security Agency officials to enhance screening capabilities of the estimated 30 million travelers who pass through Hamad International Airport each year. In November of 2018, Qatar funded a three-year anti-terrorism training program provided by the Department of State, which will include training pertinent to Qatar’s preparations to host the FIFA World Cup in 2022; the primary recipients are MOI and Internal Security Force officers. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [158])

Gulf Cooperation Council

Qatar is one of six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), a political and economic alliance, which also includes

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Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, and Bahrain.

In May 2017, Qatari Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani reportedly criticized Saudi Arabia's antagonistic relationship with Iran. The Qatari government denied the comments. Nonetheless, the incident damaged Qatar's relationship with other GCC countries. In June 2017, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, and others broke diplomatic ties with Qatar as a result of the country's continued support for extremism and terrorism, further bringing Qatar's role in the alliance into question. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [159], [CNN](#) [9])

Public Opinion

The Italian big-data company [VOICES](#) [160] analyzed more than two million pro-ISIS and anti-ISIS Arabic-language online posts from Facebook and Twitter collected between July 2014 and October 2014. The [study](#) [17] found that Arabic-speaking individuals outside of ISIS-held territory posted more favorable content on these social media sites in support of the terrorist group than those who lived in Syria. Of the online posts originating from Qatar, 47 percent of posts were in pro-ISIS sentiments, leading all other countries in the study. According to the VOICE analysis, 35 percent of online posts from Pakistan, 31 percent from Belgium, 24 percent from the United Kingdom, 21 percent from the United States, 20 percent from Jordan, 20 percent from Iraq, and 20 from Saudi Arabia expressed support for ISIS. (Sources: [Guardian](#) [16], [Guardian](#) [17])