

Danny Eisen: Qatar drops Canada from dubious rank of friends



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By Danny Eisen

Qatari Emir Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani once summed up Qatar's foreign policy strategy in a single sentence: "Qatar is everyone's friend". But in light of Qatar's hostile effort to have the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) moved from Montreal to Qatar, it appears Canada has been suspended for now from the circle of Qatari friendship.

Having been defriended by Qatar means that we no longer share the same status as other Qatari friends – such as al-Qaeda, Hamas, the Taliban and a host of other terrorist entities financially supported and indulged by that country.

It could also mean that should Canadian politicians seek political asylum in Qatar, they may not be given the same consideration for refuge as some of the world's most notorious terrorists – like 9/11 mastermind Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, who was reportedly hosted and protected from US authorities by members of Qatari royal family.

All this ostensibly because Qatar is unhappy with some of Canada's policies in the Middle East— including Canadian opposition to the recent PA bid for statehood.

Qatar's concern for the PA though, seems a bit disingenuous. Unlike Canada which has invested hundreds of millions of dollars in the PA, Qatar has done relatively little for President Abbas. Qatar has chosen instead to steer its hundreds of millions of dollars to the PA's nemesis Hamas – an organization only lukewarm to the PA sovereignty bid, with a penchant for throwing PA supporters off the roofs of Gazan apartment buildings.

Nevertheless Qatar's commercial aggression against Canada does indicate that something has indeed gone wrong with our policy in the Middle East. Changes should be made, and perhaps we should start with a more principled approach to dealing with regimes like Qatar.

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Up to now it would appear that Canadian policy has been following the US lead in tolerating Qatar's support of terrorism. The position was summed up neatly in a 2008 CRS report which found that "Concerns regarding alleged material support for terrorist groups by some Qataris, including members of the royal family, have been balanced over time by Qatar's ...broader, long-term commitment to host and support U.S. military forces being used in ongoing operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and the global war on terrorism."

So like the U.S., Canada has been most understanding of Qatar, despite Qatar's support and facilitation of al-Qaeda and the Taliban who have killed Canadians in Afghanistan over

the last decade. We have chosen to look past State Department cables stating that: “Qatar’s overall level of counterterrorism cooperation ... is considered the worst in the region. Al Qaida, the Taliban, LeT, and other terrorist groups exploit Qatar as a fundraising locale.” An accusation that has been common knowledge and reinforced by IMF reports and UN officials who have identified severe deficiencies, and an utter dearth of Qatari interest, in stemming the flow of terrorist-related funds through Doha.

But whatever the reasons for engagement with Qatar, it does not change the fact that Qatar is a state sponsor of terrorism. And there is something absurd then with its bid for ICAO, a UN agency dealing with aviation – an industry targeted by terrorist groups to great effect over the last 40 years. Groups like al-Qaeda have transformed the hijacking of civilian aircraft into an enduring symbol of our struggle with terrorism in the post 9/11 world, and the international community should summarily dismiss any bid of this sort by a country that has actively supported such groups. And Qatar is one of those countries.

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It has poured millions of dollars into al-Qaeda in exchange for the latter’s commitment to leave Qatar alone. In the candid words of a Qatari official: “We prefer to pay and to secure our national and economic interest.” It is part of what the London based Asharq Alawsat described as the “perfect formula” which allows Qatar to embrace the west while protecting itself against from retaliation by Arab leaders and extremists through closer relationships with the terrorist world. Or in words perhaps more familiar to Canadians, Qatar’s support of terrorism “is nothing personal — it’s just business.” Unfortunately though for the victims of Qatari sponsored terrorism be it in Gaza, India, Afghanistan Eritrea or Mali, it is very personal indeed.

In any case, Canadian “even-handedness” with Qatar has produced unsatisfying results for Canadian interests and principles, and new ideas are needed. So perhaps we might consider placing Qatar on Canada’s newly minted list of state sponsors of terror. It would

satisfy the practical and principled concerns of all sides. Qatar can continue sponsoring terrorism, Canada can continue doing business with Qatar, and the victims of Qatari financed terrorism can hold Qatar accountable in Canada's civil courts. It covers all the bases.

Or if Canadian leaders find this notion unpalatable, they might consider trying to see the silver lining in the terrorist cloud — and simply placate Qatar and allow it to take the ICAO. Qatar's superb relations with the terrorist world may enable it to convince those organizations to diminish the threat to the world's airlines. It would allow airlines and passengers to save billions of dollars in security related costs and vastly increase the efficiency of airports around the world. After all if Qatar can pay for the safety of its own citizens by sponsoring terrorism perhaps they can pay a little extra to keep our planes intact in exchange for moving ICAO to Doha.

Either way – it is high time we change the way we deal with countries like Qatar and others in that region who forfeit the lives of other nationals in exchange for the safety of their own citizens.

Danny Eisen is a cofounder of the [Canadian Coalition Against Terror \(C-CAT\)](https://nationalpost.com/opinion/danny-eisen-qatar-drops-canada-from-dubious-rank-of-friends).

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