

Repressive Saudi-Emirati axis to blame for Gulf Crisis

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Saudi Arabia remains a critical financial support base for Al Qaeda, Taliban, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and other terrorist groups, says US State Department

Oil-rich Saudi Arabia wants to rule the Arabian Gulf and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) wants to rule Riyadh, indirectly, at least. Both states desire to impose their will on neighbouring Qatar, whose independent foreign policy irritates entitled elites not used to criticism let alone opposition. But so far the two nations' efforts have done little more than strengthen Qatar's independence and expose their own hypocrisy. Washington should continue to mediate, while making clear that the fault mostly lies with the aggressive and repressive Saudi-Emirati axis. In June Abu Dhabi and Riyadh imposed a quasi-blockade on Qatar and demanded that it accept the status of vassal. They were joined by two countries which previously sold their sovereignty: Egypt, whose unpopular al-Sisi dictatorship was on both the Saudi and Emirati payrolls, and Bahrain, whose monarch crushed democracy protests with the help of Saudi troops. (The Maldives and one of Libya's contending "governments" also joined in, while Kuwait and Oman remained neutral.) UAE and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia presented 13 "non-negotiable" demands, which included accepting foreign oversight of Doha's policies.

The KSA and UAE royals long have been frustrated with Qatar. Not over supporting terrorism, however. After all, 15 of the 19 9/11 hijackers were Saudis and two were Emiratis. Moreover, both countries earned a dubious reputation in Washington as sources of money for Al Qaeda and other groups targeting the US.

Indeed, State Department officials complained in a long cable dated December 30, 2009: "It has been an ongoing challenge to persuade Saudi officials to treat terrorist financing emanating from Saudi Arabia as a strategic priority." This matters because "donors in Saudi Arabia constitute the most significant source of funding to Sunni terrorist groups worldwide." The Kingdom "remains a critical financial support base for Al Qaeda, the Taliban, LeT (Lashkar-e-Tayyiba), and other terrorist groups, including Hamas."

The State Department went on to observe that Emirati citizens "have provided financial support to a variety of terrorist groups". Moreover, "UAE's role as a growing global financial centre, coupled with weak regulatory oversight, makes it vulnerable to abuse by terrorist financiers and facilitation networks."

The recent hacking of UAE ambassador to America Yousef al-Otaiba's e-mails led to circulation of an online report compiling evidence of his government's support for the Haqqani Network in Afghanistan, Islamist radicals in Libya, and similar violent groups elsewhere.

Last year Donald Trump complained that the Saudis were "the world's biggest funders of terrorism".

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