



# Turkey & Qatar's Support For Extremist Groups

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President Trump made clear in Sunday's Riyadh speech that America stands by countries willing to fight Islamist extremism. A welcome opportunity to revisit our relationship with two ostensible allies, Turkey and Qatar. Both host significant American military bases and Turkey is a NATO member, yet for too long they have been American partners in name while providing material support to extremist groups, including the Muslim Brotherhood and Al-Nusra front. President Trump's serious intent to confront Islamic terrorism means he must redefine the terms of our alliances with Turkey and Qatar. The United States can no longer allow them to have it both ways.

Last week, President Trump met at the White House with Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan. Though the two disagree on Syria's Kurds - America arms them against ISIS, Turkey considers them terrorists - and though Turkey turned against ISIS only very belatedly, it is still viewed as a key coalition partner. Indeed, since 2015 Turkey has allowed Washington to use its base at Incirlik near the Syrian border as part of this fight. Simultaneously, Qatar hosts U.S. forces and the strategically important Combined Air and Space Operations Center at Al Udeid airbase, from which the United States directs coalition air operations against ISIS.

Model allies, it would seem? Not quite. Scratching the surface, it becomes clear that Ankara and Doha are merely helping put out fires they had started. The Turkish-Qatari relationship accelerated after Erdogan came to power in 2002 when Qatari investments became a crucial source of capital for Erdogan - not least as he used it to acquire media holdings critical of his government through hostile takeovers.

Simultaneously, Turkey helped Qatar diversify its foreign military relations. In recent years, Turkey has even begun building a military base in Qatar that could eventually host up to 3,000 troops. Given the existing American basing there, it remains unclear what purpose this deployment will have - aside from helping reduce Qatar's dependence on the U.S. for its security.

Their relationship burgeoned following the 2011 Arab uprisings since the two countries were aligned ideologically. To seasoned observers, that was no surprise: Erdogan's ruling AKP party stems from an Islamist movement that remains deeply influenced by Muslim Brotherhood ideology, and Qatar began serving as a base for the Brotherhood as early as the 1960s. For some time, both countries had agitated for Islamist causes across the region, such as endorsing the militant group Hamas's control of the Gaza Strip.

Thus, even though most Arab states viewed the uprisings with alarm, Turkey and Qatar enthusiastically supported them. In particular, while Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates strongly opposed the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood and its affiliated organizations across the region, Turkey and Qatar threw their lot, as well as plenty of money in Qatar's case, behind the Brotherhood's bid for power in Egypt, Syria and elsewhere.

Once their support for the Syrian Brotherhood failed to yield results, both countries extended their backing to even more extremist groups. Including Al Nusra Front, al Qaeda's franchise in Syria, which both Ankara and Doha have tried to convince Washington is rather moderate - all while both countries appeared unconcerned by the rise of ISIS until it was far too late.

The Obama Administration realized characterizing Al Nusra as "moderate" was a bridge too far, but it had no problem with Turkish and Qatari support for the Brotherhood. Indeed, the Obama Administration endorsed the notion of the Brotherhood as a force for moderation to counter growing extremism in the region.

The problem is that the Brotherhood is far from moderate. It forms the ideological foundation upon which modern extremist Islamism is built. Brotherhood ideologues from the late Sayyid Qutb to the Qatar-based Yusuf al-Qaradawi have provided a coherent narrative depicting the West and particularly the United States as the lethal enemy of all Muslims. They have spewed out virulent anti-Semitism, and Qaradawi endorsed suicide bombings, including through the megaphone of Qatar's Al Jazeera satellite TV channel. The Brotherhood and its key backers are part of the problem, not the solution.

For now, Turkey's and Qatar's policies are backfiring, and both are increasingly isolated from the region's other key players. However, there is no indication they see this as anything more than a tactical setback. With America's permissive attitude toward their policies thus far, why should they?

The Trump Administration must correct this mistake. To combat Islamist extremism effectively, America needs to clearly and forcefully redefine what it means to be our ally. We can no longer afford to turn a blind eye when our putative allies are actively supporting the very forces we are trying to defeat.

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