

Interview

Qatari activist denounces Iranian influence in her country

Ahmed Gamal

Cairo

Qatari dissident Muna al-Sulaiti said, because of support Doha is receiving from some countries, it is unlikely to acquiesce to the demands of the four Arab countries that have cut ties with it. She said that backing is emboldening Doha to challenge demands by boycotting states.

Sulaiti, active in the Qatari political opposition, is the sister of Qatari Minister of Transport and Communications Jassim al-Sulaiti. She fled the country five years ago.

Her entanglement with the Qatari regime began when she said she discovered evidence of corruption inside the Supreme Education Council, she told The Arab Weekly. After criticising the government on social media, Sulaiti was stripped of her job as an Arabic teacher, which she had had for 15 years, and imprisoned. She left Qatar at the end of 2012 and settled in Alexandria, Egypt.

Sulaiti said that changing the regime in Qatar is not sufficient to resolve the crisis with the Gulf countries. She said the broader focus should be on Iran's influence in Qatar, which she referred to as "Iranian occupation."

Sulaiti said Iranian elements were behind many crises in the region and that their aim has been to prepare the ground for Iran's interests in the area and in the Middle East in general. She said Iran and Turkey are pursuing different agendas in Qatar, even though both countries are trying

to use Qatar to gain a foothold in the Arab world.

For Sulaiti, Turkey sees Qatar as a gate through which to pursue its interests in the Middle East. Iran, she said, sees it as a "colony" to be used as a base for its expansionist plans in the MENA region.

Sulaiti said that despite Ankara flexing its military muscle, "[Turkish President Recep Tayyip] Erdogan will not go as far as to sacrifice his relations with Saudi Arabia for the sake of Qatar." She warned against "Iran's interventionist attempts to unravel the Qatari social fabric."

"The Qatari regime is using certain elements to execute Iran's plans for Qatar first and the rest of the Gulf countries next," Sulaiti said.

She said she has witnessed the implantation of different factions and groups committed to political Islam in Qatar.

"Doha will continue to support these groups, especially the Muslim Brotherhood, as Qataris are involved in many terrorist operations carried out by these groups inside many Arab countries," she said. "What complicates things is that these groups consider the Qatari government as a partner and not just a source of support."

Sulaiti said that if the Qatari regime came to rely on using these groups in its crisis with the Gulf countries, it would be as a fast-moving militia against external targets.

"The Qatari regime had already resorted to using these groups as its armed militia in the zones of the 'Arab spring.' Letting go of them right now seems impossible," she noted.

Sulaiti was imprisoned from the beginning of 2011 until the second half of 2012, she said. During her



Explaining Doha. A screenshot from a video shows Qatari dissident Muna al-Sulaiti. (YouTube)

Sulaiti cited what she said were many examples of Qatar's involvement in terrorist operations in Arab countries.

imprisonment, she took pictures of the prison with her phone. Later, the US Embassy in Qatar established that that same place was used as a training base by al-Qaeda, she said.

Sulaiti cited what she said were many examples of Qatar's involvement in terrorist operations in Arab countries.

"Qatar had sent specially trained forces to Libya to lay hands on the pipelines with the complicity of local militia which Qatar continues to finance and arm to this day. Many Qatari officers confirmed that," she said.

Sulaiti was quick to point out that the operations in Libya were carried out for the benefit of other regional powers. The same units were involved in weapons smuggling to Sudan and Egypt. She described Qatar's role in the

conflict between Saudi Arabia and Yemen as "the ultimate betrayal." Qatar has tried to enroll tribal heads in Jizan in southern Saudi Arabia and used them to give logistical and intelligence support to the Houthis in Yemen.

Sulaiti insisted that the "Qataris cannot believe that their country can be involved in all these conspiracies against its neighbours. They are stunned and angry but can do nothing against the ruthlessness of the regime."

"There is no real political opposition inside Qatar," Sulaiti argued. "The anti-Qatar camp in the current crisis can use the situation to its advantage by agreeing on a new leader from the ruling family but not from the Hamad branch."

Ahmed Gamal is an Egyptian writer.

A message to the wise

Viewpoint



Abdullah al-Alami

While we do not wish to bring any harm to our Qatari brothers, Turkey has appointed itself a major player in the region and poured fuel on the fire. It is obvious that what Ankara has in mind is not peaceful mediation. It looks like nostalgia for the days of the Ottoman Empire has taken hold of the Turkish leadership.

The world had expected the Sublime Porte to calm the situation in the Gulf. Ankara, however, chose to stab Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt in the back. Turkish officials met in Turkey with the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood and agreed on three things: Back the emir of Qatar, continue Turkish support for the Brotherhood and censure the demands levied against Qatar as "illegal in international law."

It would have been best for Turkey to mind its own internal and external affairs instead of starting dubious relations. Perhaps a quick rundown of the problems facing Turkey would be useful.

Turkey is suspended from joining the European Union and it doesn't look like the suspension will be lifted soon. The Turkish sultan will just have to bear it and grin. That pesky Abdullah Ocalan and his Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) are giving the Turkish leadership terrible headaches.

Turkey has occupied some Iraqi land and failed to secure its borders with Syria.

These unfortunate situations are not going to end soon and will make heavy demands on Turkey's military budget. By sending weapons and money to Libya, Turkey is taking part in transforming that country into a heap of ruins. By cooperating with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Turkey has an implicit hand in killing Egyptian civilians. Turkey has given refuge to this terrorist organisation and provided it with television stations and intelligence offices in Istanbul.

The economic situation in Qatar is very uncertain. Consumer prices rocketed. Projects are halted. Foreign investments have left the country and foreign workers are fleeing by the hundreds. The stench of the World Cup 2022 scandal has filled the air and it is time to move the tournament from Qatar. Qatari travellers in Europe and the United States cannot sell their deteriorating riyals and international rating agencies downgraded Qatar's sovereign credit to "negative watch."

It is a mystery how Qatar still has faith in Turkey. The latter has jumped on every cause that has come along, blown them each out of proportion and, in the end, done nothing about them. Examples abound: The war in Syria; incidents at Rabaa in Egypt, Gaza, Hama and Tal Afar, illegal migration to Europe, the Kurdish question and many more.

On December 25, 2001, the Ottoman sultan signed a security cooperation agreement with Qatar. So

when Turkey sends more than 1,000 soldiers and supply planes to Qatar to celebrate the anniversary of that agreement, it becomes difficult to argue it is a neutral and unbiased intermediary in the current crisis. This tasteless comedy reminds us of the similarly ridiculous comedy of the Iranians sending supplies to the Houthis in Yemen.

When Qatar accepts to suffer further humiliation by inviting a foreign country to establish a military base on its soil, we can no longer speak of political grit but rather of a failed political manoeuvre.

Turkey has seduced Doha into playing with the cards of the Muslim Brothers, terrorism and dirty money; of supporting Azmi Bishara and his cells and of propagating crass mass media. The price tag was \$65 billion in addition to Qatar's foreign debts, which total \$172 billion. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan can hardly contain

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his hunger for Qatari gas, so he quickly condemns the conditions imposed by the Gulf states and Egypt. Qatar is a beautiful bride and we hope it will be spared the Ottoman sultan's greed.

Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir reiterated that the Gulf countries and Egypt were adamant about their list of demands. One of them concerns the immediate closing of the Turkish base in Qatar, which of course irked the Ottoman caliph out of his wits. Looking sternly into TV cameras, the sultan's chief adviser, Yigit Bulut, heralded the imminent coming of the "Arab spring" to Saudi Arabia. You can't be more insolent than that but I believe that the Ottoman caliph is smarter than to start a direct confrontation with Saudi Arabia.

Once again, we in Saudi Arabia do not wish to bring any harm to our Qatari brothers but, at the same time, we will not stand by idle as foreign powers – Turkey or any other country – try to sneak in to shake the security and economic conditions in the Arabian Gulf and by the same process harm the Qatari people. A message to the wise!

Abdullah al-Alami is a member of the Saudi Economic Association.

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Fuel on fire. Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (R) shakes hands with Qatar's Defence Minister Khalid bin Mohammed al-Attiyah prior to their meeting in Ankara, on July 1.

(AP)