

Lawsuits by U.S. victims accuse top Qatar banks and charity of financing terrorism in Israel

By Spencer S. Hsu

U.S. victims of extremist violence in Israel allege that three of Qatar's leading financial institutions have secretly funneled millions of dollars to Palestinian groups responsible for killing Americans, accusing a key U.S. ally in the Middle East of duplicity.

In U.S. lawsuits, victims and their families claim that the government and royal family members of the wealthy Persian Gulf nation have spearheaded "a terrorism financing conspiracy" that has channeled tens of millions of dollars to support Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), both U.S.-designated terrorist groups.

The initial two complaints, filed in federal court in June and on Tuesday in Brooklyn, assert that payments made under the guise of Qatari charitable donations have moved through the U.S. banking system since 2014 and landed in dozens of accounts that are maintained by Qatar National Bank and used by Hamas leaders and militants and their relatives. The funds allegedly assisted seven strikes, including [stabblings](#), car-rammings and [rocket attacks](#), that killed several U.S. citizens.

The suits identified accounts purportedly used by [Ahlam Aref Ahmad Al-Tamimi](#), a Jordanian woman who is on the FBI's list of most-wanted terrorists for assisting a 2001 [suicide bombing at a Jerusalem pizzeria that killed 15 people and wounded 130 others](#); a spokesperson and former leader of Hamas's military wing in the West Bank; a member of its ruling political bureau who was convicted in Israel of operating a terrorist cell; and a 94-year-old spiritual leader of the Muslim Brotherhood close to Qatar's emir who [chairs](#) the Union of Good, a U.S.-designated terrorist organization sanctioned for funding Hamas's terrorist activities.

Families of American victims have won court judgments totaling billions of dollars against countries that the U.S. government has specially designated as state sponsors of terrorism, such as Iran, Yemen and, until it was [delisted](#) Monday, Sudan. Congress also passed [a law](#) allowing American victims to sue Saudi Arabia for the 9/11 attacks.

However, other foreign countries such as Qatar and their officials are normally immune from civil lawsuits in the United States.

The new lawsuits take a different tack, targeting financial institutions close to the Qatari state, whose leaders are drawn from the royal family but that are legally distinct.

[Read the latest complaint here](#)

Suing under the U.S. Anti-Terrorism Act, which allows victims to seek triple damages from private entities. the cases name three defendants: Qatar Charity, whose chairman is a member of the royal family, Hamad bin Nasser al-Thani; Masraf Al Rayan Bank, which the suit asserts is controlled by the government and family members on its board; and Qatar National Bank, in which Qatar's sovereign wealth fund purportedly holds a 50 percent interest.

The suits claim that the charity solicited donations worldwide and used both banks to access the U.S. financial system and dollars. Funds were distributed by Qatar Charity to its affiliates in Palestinian-controlled territories, including at least \$28 million between March and September 2015, according to the lawsuit. It says money went to support Hamas and PIJ, including "martyr payments" to the families of convicted or killed militants.

The complaints do not disclose the sources of information but include details such as account numbers, account opening dates, holders' birth dates and addresses, and other identifying information.

"By allowing Qatar Charity to use accounts at the banks to funnel money to Hamas and PIJ, the banks were joining a conspiracy intended to commit acts of international terrorism, including the kidnapping and murder of Americans in Israel," states the lawsuit filed Tuesday by the family of Pinches Przewozman, an American who was among those killed in rocket attacks on Israel from the Gaza Strip on May 5, 2019.

"No family should have to endure the loss we have experienced," said Stuart and Robbi Force, the lead plaintiffs of the initial suit and parents of Taylor Force, a U.S. military veteran who was fatally stabbed near Tel Aviv in 2016. Force's death prompted Congress [to enact a law in his name](#) in 2018 to cut some U.S. aid to the Palestinian Authority until it ends its financial support to convicted terrorists and their families.

"In addition to holding the banks and illegitimate 'charities' who enable terrorism accountable, our fervent hope is that this lawsuit serves as a deterrent to those who might engage in similar actions," the Forces said in a statement released by a spokesman for 57 plaintiffs and 11 victims of attacks since 2014. "We believe that the best way to honor our son's memory is to help prevent future attacks."

A spokesman for the Qatari government did not immediately respond to a request for comment, nor did information offices of the banks and Qatar Charity. The defendants have not yet formally responded to the June case.

President Trump in 2017 criticized what he said was Qatar's support for terrorist organizations, including the millions of dollars annually it provides to the Hamas

government of the Gaza Strip. In recent years, however, Trump has praised Qatari Emir Tamim Bin Hamad al-Thani as “a highly respected man, a real leader.” At a bilateral security meeting in September, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo thanked Qatar for its “invaluable role in helping stabilize Gaza” and efforts to lower tensions in Syria and Lebanon.

The legal actions come at a delicate time in U.S.-Middle East diplomacy. President-elect Joe Biden has vowed to rejoin a nuclear deal with Iran if the latter meets conditions, while the departing Trump administration has won diplomatic recognition of Israel from four nations since August: the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco.

Qatar has keen interests in both developments. Host of the largest [U.S. military base in the Middle East](#), U.S. Central Command’s forward headquarters and just 300,000 citizens, the tiny peninsular state is the world’s richest country per capita and a major U.S. ally. It maintains cordial relations with Iran, and the two nations share the world’s largest natural gas field, from which Qatar derives most of its wealth.

Still, Qatar has faced accusations from Saudi Arabia and its Persian Gulf allies of [supporting](#) Islamic extremism, a criticism often also levied against its accusers.

Qatar rejects allegations of double dealing. It says it has played a positive role in the region, cooperating with Israel in providing crucial aid to the Gaza Strip, backing the Arab Spring movement and running Al Jazeera, the most popular media outlet in the Middle East, which has aired critics of other Arab governments.

Some analysts say the timing of the allegations is tied to the U.S. election and the defeat of Trump, who boosted the Saudi side in a three-year-old diplomatic and political cold war with Qatar.

“This is Qatar’s Arab enemies — led by the U.A.E., including Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, with the support of Egypt — trying to smear Qatar as a terrorist patron,” said Bruce Riedel, a former CIA officer and senior fellow and director of the Brookings Intelligence Project. “They want to make it as difficult as possible for the Qataris in advance of a Biden administration.”

All three major players — the Saudis, Qataris and Emiratis — have heavily bankrolled lobbying and influence campaigns against one another in recent years, with lawsuits against each other’s top officials emerging as the newest battlefield, legal observers note.

No foreign government has provided any assistance to the lawsuit, said lawyers Josh and Steven Perles of the Perles Law Firm of Washington, which represents plaintiffs along with Fleischman Bonner & Rocco of White Plains, N.Y., and Allen L. Rothenberg of Yardley, Pa. Robert J. Tolchin of the Berkman Law Office of Brooklyn represents plaintiffs in the June lawsuit.

Instead, they point out Qatar’s plans to host the World Cup in 2022 and the Trump administration’s formal notice to Congress last month that it plans to sell up to 50 F-35 fighter jets, the most advanced combat aircraft in the U.S. arsenal, to the United Arab Emirates as part of [a \\$23 billion arms sale](#) in exchange for its historic recognition of Israel.

The arms deal prompted Qatar to make its own F-35 request, adding to concerns in Washington and in Israel over how to maintain the latter’s regional military edge.

“How can the U.S. government sell F-35s to a putative ally where you have the most senior officials . . . cooperating with U.S.-designated terror financing entities?” Steven Perles asked.

“If Qatar is going to earn its way back into the good graces of its Gulf [neighbors] and, more broadly, Western countries and the United States, it needs to make some type of public accounting and apology, frankly, for this pattern of actions rather than try to deny or obstruct it.”