



## QATAR IN BIG POLITICS: HOW SHOULD RUSSIA WORK WITH IT?

To the Editor-in-Chief:

Dear Sir,

Qatar was one of the key initiators of the Arab Spring; this has been quite obvious in Libya and especially Syria. The country is one of the main backers of the spread of radical Islam around the world, including to Russia. The emirate's leadership openly supports terrorist groups working abroad; Qatar's territory has become a safe haven and a convenient base for terrorists. Several years ago that situation resulted in an incident with the liquidation of Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev in Qatar. The country is also the permanent place of residence of the spiritual leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, the famous TV preacher Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, who has long been a staunch enemy of Russia. Apart from issuing several *fatwa* edicts against the Russian leadership and Russia as a whole, he is one of the main organizers of an anti-Russian campaign in the Arabic media.

Qatar is energetically promoting radical Islam on a global scale, and organizing Islamist cells in countries around the world, including Russia and other former Soviet Republics. It has also mounted an energetic and very effective attack against Russia's energy interests, especially in the gas industry. Qatari liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports constitute the greatest threat currently facing Gazprom's efforts to retain its share of the European gas market in the medium term. We are talking about Qatari gas supplies not only to Western Europe, but to the East European markets as well, including the Baltic states (via Poland), Ukraine, and Belarus.

Such policies, which have the backing of Qatar's European and American partners, are a replica of the U.S.–Saudi alliance in the 1980s, when plummeting oil prices essentially bankrupted the Soviet Union. But unlike the 1980s, when the conflict was part of a global confrontation between the superpowers, Qatar is pursuing a covert strategy, and hiding its anti-Russian policies behind the veneer of talks about establishing a "gas OPEC." The Russian leadership is obviously interested in promoting a coordinated policy by gas exporters on the world market. The Qataris have used that interest to implement their own strategy of elbowing Gazprom out of Europe, as well as strengthening their own grip on the LNG markets in South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific. Russia had regarded many of those markets as possible alternatives to European exports, but Qatar's rapid expansion has made those plans a lot more difficult to pull off, to say the least.

The emirate's political and military alliance with Europe (especially France) and the United States, as well as its cooperation with NATO during the military-terrorist campaigns against Gaddafi in Libya and Assad in Syria, have given the leadership of that small but extremely rich country a feeling of invulnerability. For many years now Qatar has been at or near the top of the world ranking in terms of per-capita GDP. The country also hosts Al Udeid, the largest U.S. military base in the Middle East, which means that any conflict with Qatar automatically turns into a war with the United States. The Al-Jazeera TV channel, based in Qatar, is one of the most effective information resources in the world, and probably the most effective in the Arab and Muslim world. Qatar Airways has turned Doha into a global transit hub. The Qatari sovereign fund and its other investment funds give the country's leadership access to hundreds of billions of dollars in disposable financial resources.



L E T T E R T O T H E E D I T O R

Qatar's wealth is predicated on its vast reserves of natural gas, the third largest in the world after Russia and Iran. That wealth also underpins the emirate's ambitious and aggressive foreign-policy strategies, which are deliberately targeted against Russian interests. Doha's open confrontation with Moscow has been amply demonstrated by the unprecedented beating of Russian ambassador V.E. Titarenko by Qatari police at Doha airport.

All of these considerations only serve to reinforce the importance of the recent article by Eldar Kasayev ("Qatar: Russia's Ambitious Competitor on the Gas Market," *Security Index*, No. 2 (103), Spring 2013, pp. 51–66), which analyzes in great detail the state of Russian–Qatari relations, and makes some pessimistic but important conclusions. The Russian audience will be even more interested in a detailed review of the state of the Qatari gas industry and strategy, as well as the emirate's relations with its foreign partners. In this day and age, economic rivalry is a much more common and dangerous type of confrontation than direct military conflict. That rivalry can be equally dangerous for both parties, even if one of them has massive superiority in all other respects. In the case of Russian–Qatari rivalry, we cannot rule out the David–Goliath scenario.

Even though Russia remains a great power on the gas market, there is a risk of it being defeated by Qatar, which has the support of the West. Russia has already suffered such a defeat in the Arab world. Its strategy of maintaining the existing balance of power and cooperating with its traditional partners in the region has crumbled before the onslaught of Doha and Riyadh, which aim to establish a "new Caliphate" based on Islamist regimes. That expansion will inevitably spread to some former Soviet republics and even to Russian territory. As a result, in the near future the confrontation with Qatar will become just as momentous for Russia as the old balance of power used to be during the Cold War.

Viewed in that light, the article by Eldar Kasayev published in the latest issue of *Security Index* is extremely topical. It is also very important for a proper understanding of the foundations that underpin the influence and strategies of Qatar, a tiny country that has become one of Russia's most dangerous adversaries.

Best regards,

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