

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-2201

November 29, 2021

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
Secretary
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St. NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Austin and Secretary Blinken,

We write to oppose the sale of more than \$500 million worth of armed MQ-9 Reaper drones to Qatar.¹ We have serious concerns about Qatar's need for such drones in light of their abysmal human rights record, foreign policy and national security considerations. Their desire to purchase drones from the United States military should be a cause for alarm.

This is not a partisan issue. There are many reasons to be concerned about the potential sale of such weapons. On the human rights front, there is no question that Qatar is a serial human rights abuser and it is vital we stand together against such oppression.

According to the U.S. State Department 2020 Country Report on Human Rights Practices, Qatar's "[s]ignificant human rights issues included: restrictions on free expression, including criminalization of libel; restrictions on peaceful assembly and freedom of association, including prohibitions on political parties and labor unions; restrictions on migrant workers' freedom of movement; limits on the ability of citizens to choose their government in free and fair elections; lack of investigation of and accountability for violence against women; criminalization of consensual same-sex sexual conduct; and reports of forced labor."²

In response to soccer star David Beckham signing a deal to be Qatar's ambassador for the upcoming FIFA World Cup, Amnesty International's UK CEO, Sacha Deshmukh, emphasized: "Qatar's human rights record is troubling - from the country's longstanding mistreatment of migrant workers, to its curbs on free speech and the criminalisation of same-sex relations... Qatar's mistreatment of migrant workers - the people whose hard work is making the World Cup possible - is especially disturbing... FIFA has an important role to play in helping to drive change in Qatar - especially in raising labour abuses associated with World Cup preparations. David Beckham should use his unique worldwide profile to keep the world's focus on the human rights issues surrounding the matches, and not just the play on the pitch."³

¹ <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/pentagon-favors-u-s-sale-more-500-million-worth-armed-n1282413>

² <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/qatar/>

³ <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/qatar-david-beckham-must-use-world-cup-ambassador-role-focus-world-human-rights>



While Human Rights Watch reported on significant reforms last September into migrant workers' rights,⁴ subsequent research shows serious abuses and systemic violations of basic human rights of migrant workers in Qatar. In "conjunction with the prohibition on worker strikes and the ineffective implementation and enforcement of laws designed to protect migrant workers' rights" Qatari inaction has "contributed to abuse, exploitation, and even forced labor".⁵

According to The Guardian in February 2021, more than 6500 migrant workers from India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka had died in Qatar since being awarded the World Cup.⁶ One of those migrant workers, Rupchandra Rumba from Nepal, "died in 2019, gasping for breath in a squalid camp for labourers on the outskirts of Doha."⁷

Second, there is no clear need for such weapons. Qatari leadership is hyper focused on the sale of armed drones and request for F-35 fighter jets, considering the plethora of other U.S. defense-related equipment to Qatar. For example, on 27 October, the first F-15QA (Qatar Advanced) fighter jets departed the U.S. for delivery to the Qatari Air Force. The F-15QA reportedly includes a "new feature" which equips the aircraft "with the Missile Approach Warning System (MAWS) sensors at the end of the tail booms and below the cockpit."⁸ *Janes Defense* reported that the Qatar Emiri Air Force "is officially contracted to receive 36 F-15QAs in a deal signed in December 2017"⁹ but that the Defense Department has been referring to "a buy of 48 aircraft" since May 2020 and that "the State Department initially cleared Qatar to buy 72 aircraft, so any expanded procurement would be in line with current Congressional approvals."⁹

It is not a coincidence that Qatar is seeking the same defense equipment the UAE requested from the Trump administration, leveraging the Abraham Accords and its normalization of relations with Israel to secure approval. However, Qatar is not prepared to recognize and normalize relations with Israel and dismisses the view that the Abraham Accords are the path to peace in the region.

Approval of the sale would likely be received or interpreted by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates as a threat to their security given Qatar's close relationship with terrorist organizations, including Hamas and the Taliban.¹⁰

Qatar has long supported Hamas, along with its parent organization, the Muslim Brotherhood. The Qatari government has served as a safe haven for Hamas, providing financing, advocacy and even hosting its leadership.¹¹ They have provided a media platform for terrorist leaders on Al

⁴ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/09/24/qatar-significant-labor-and-kafala-reforms>

⁵ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/08/02/migrant-workers-and-qatar-world-cup#>

⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/feb/23/revealed-migrant-worker-deaths-qatar-fifa-world-cup-2022>

⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/oct/28/men-who-built-qatars-world-cup-dream-deserve-some-of-david-beckhams-pay-packet>

⁸ <https://theaviationist.com/2021/10/29/qeaf-f-15qa-delivery/>

⁹ <https://www.janes.com/defence-news/news-detail/first-f-15qas-head-for-qatar>

¹⁰ <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/pentagon-favors-u-s-sale-more-500-million-worth-armed-n1282413>

¹¹ <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/why-qatar-turkey-cant-solve-the-crisis-gaza-10930> and <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/20/world/middleeast/israel-gaza-ceasefire.html>

Jazeera, its state-controlled media operation.¹² Israel has disrupted several plots by Hamas operatives in the West Bank run out of Qatar. And, while there are some indications that Qatar has changed its approach to dealing with Hamas, they have not had a change of heart, rather they are responding to pressure from the United States.

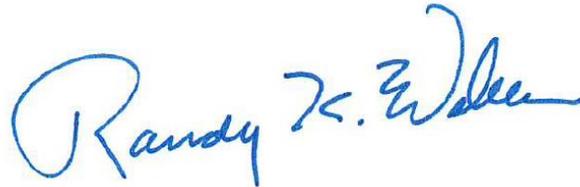
Qatar has also allowed former Taliban prisoners in Guantanamo to operate freely in their country and has been notoriously lax in combating financing of terrorist groups.¹³

When the Emir of Qatar visits the United States, we urge you to raise these concerns on behalf of the American people. This potential sale does little to help U.S. national security interests in the region and quite frankly would do a lot of harm to our reputation as a defender of human rights and leader of the free world. We look forward to hearing from you about this potential purchase in the context of Qatar's human rights records.

Sincerely,



Jack Bergman
Member of Congress



Randy K. Weber
Member of Congress

¹² <https://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/87985/Egypt/Politics-/Egypys-prosecution-calls-on-Interpol-to-arrest-isl.aspx>

¹³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/26/world/asia/taliban-guantanamo-afghanistan-peace-talks.html>