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Only 27% of Americans see Qatar as 'US friend or ally': Poll

Arab News/YouGov survey finds that most Americans who are aware of Doha diplomatic rift identify terror accusations as main reason

69% either unsure if US military base should remain in Qatar, or think it should be moved

BEN FLANAGAN
ARAB NEWS STAFF

LONDON: Just 27 percent of Americans consider Qatar a friend or ally to the US, while many associate Doha with accusations of terror financing, an Arab News/YouGov poll has found.

The survey of 2,263 US citizens, conducted in July, also found that 31 percent of Americans consider Qatar to be unfriendly toward or an enemy of their country, while 43 percent either do not know or are unsure about how to classify the relationship with Doha.

The Arab News/YouGov poll on how the US views the Qatar crisis was carried out to mark the 60 days since the start of the diplomatic rift between Doha and its Arab neighbors Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain.

It found that 71 percent of Americans are aware, to various extents, of the diplomatic row. It also found that those who are aware have a good understanding of the reasons behind the crisis, with 67 percent correctly identifying that Qatar had been accused of supporting terror groups and meddling with the internal affairs of regional countries.

"Two months into the crisis, and given the US government's keenness to mediate, it was important to gauge the sentiment of the American people with regard to this issue," said Faisal J. Abbas, editor in chief of Arab News.

Stephan Shakespeare, CEO of YouGov — the globally renowned online polling company — noted that the American public "is not usually characterized by its high interest in foreign affairs, rather the opposite. However,

this latest poll shows the current tensions between Qatar and its neighbors is gaining some significant attention."

The poll also sought to measure public opinion regarding the US military base in Qatar. The Al-Udeid air base currently hosts more than 11,000 American soldiers. However, 49 percent of Americans say they are unsure if it is best for the base to remain there, while 20 percent thought that it should be moved somewhere else. Only 31 percent said the base should remain in Qatar.

The study also revealed several findings regarding the Qatar-owned Al Jazeera news network. At one point during the crisis the Anti-Terror Quartet (ATQ) — Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt — called for a shutdown of the network over its editorial guidelines, which allegedly permitted terror-related content.

According to the Arab News/YouGov poll, more than six in 10 Americans are aware of Al Jazeera — but many of those have negative perceptions of it. Half believe that Al Jazeera has a negative influence on the US image abroad. A majority of those with an opinion on the matter also believe the network gives a platform to terror groups linked to Osama bin Laden — with 44 percent agreeing with that statement, and only 18 percent saying the opposite. The rest of the US respondents — 38 percent — were unsure.

When asked about their general perceptions of Qatar, the poll found that 50 percent did not have enough information.

Of those who did, the greatest proportion of US citizens — 34 percent — associate Qatar with accusations of terror financing, compared to just 16 percent who cited the Gulf state's controversial hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

Detailed reports — Pages 2, 3 & 9

HOW US SEES QATAR'S TERROR TIES

67% of Americans who are aware of diplomatic rift with Doha recognize it is over terror accusations

69% not sure if US military base should remain in Qatar, or think it should move

44% of those aware of Al Jazeera associate it with giving a platform to terror groups linked to Osama bin Laden

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Bad news for 'Brand Qatar'



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EDITOR IN CHIEF

Lebanese army targets Daesh in Ras Baalbek

NAJIA HOUSSARI
SPECIAL TO ARAB NEWS

BEIRUT: The Lebanese army on Saturday said it targeted Daesh positions in Ras Baalbek, resulting in "the destruction of many fortifications and vehicles," and "many confirmed casualties among the terrorists."

The army started using advanced weaponry, including airstrikes, against Daesh in the past few days, Lebanon's official National News Agency (NNA) reported.

A Lebanese military source told Arab News: "Army rocket launchers and cannons have been intensifying their bombardment of Daesh posts, and fear is evident among its members."



Lebanese soldiers take part in a recent parade at a military academy in Fayadyeh, near Beirut. (Reuters)

Lebanese Defense Minister Yaqoub Sarraf on Friday said the fighting "will only end when the last inch of (Lebanese) territory is liberated and all kidnapped soldiers are freed. The army is our sole protector and we do not seek advice from anyone."

He added that the army "is equipped with vehicles and methods that can be relied upon to make the decisions it deems necessary."

The army "is the only party capa-

ble of choosing when and how to fight any battle, and no political party has any right to pressure (it)... There are no national, regional or international forces that can pressure the army."

Meanwhile, the Lebanese Red Cross (LRC) explained in a statement the role it played in Aarsal after the cease-fire deal between Hezbollah and Jabhat Fateh Al-Sham (JFS).

"The process of exchanging bod-

ies and prisoners, and moving the displaced (families), was financed by the Norwegian Red Cross with a contribution from the Dutch Red Cross," the LRC said.

"Upon the request of the Lebanese General Security (LGS)," the LRC said it "performed the process of the prisoner and dead-body exchange between the two adversaries, and transported some detainees held by Lebanese authorities."

The LRC said the LGS also assigned it "the task of managing logistics, escorting and convoys, and transporting the sick and wounded."

Accordingly, the LRC said it contacted the Syrian Red Crescent, which provided 161 vehicles with different capacities that entered Lebanon.

Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah said JFS was no longer holding prisoners from his party.

He added that Hezbollah fought in Aarsal "with capabilities, weapons and expertise we received with full support from Iran."

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Americans urge censorship of terror content amid Qatar media row

ARAB NEWS

LONDON: Most American citizens believe that the Qatar-funded Al Jazeera TV network promotes a negative image of the US abroad, with many saying it also acts as a platform for terror groups linked to Osama bin Laden, according to an Arab News/YouGov poll.

The survey of 2,263 people found a high awareness of Al Jazeera among Americans — but also a generally negative public opinion about the network.

Slightly more than half said that Al Jazeera has a negative influence on the US image abroad, the survey revealed. And a majority of those with an opinion on the matter also believe that the network gives a platform to terror groups linked to Osama bin Laden — with 44 percent agreeing with that statement, and only 18 percent saying the opposite. The rest of the US respondents — 38 percent — were unsure.

The Arab News/YouGov poll, conducted in July, was carried out to mark the 60 days since the start of the diplomatic rift between Doha and its Arab neighbors Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain.

At one point during the crisis, the Anti-Terror Quartet (ATQ) called for a shutdown of Al Jazeera over its editorial guidelines, which allegedly permitted terror-related content.

Al Jazeera executives have denied such claims. Arab News contacted Al Jazeera requesting comment but did not receive a response.

AL JAZEERA: 44% SEE IT AS A 'TERROR PLATFORM'

Most US residents polled are aware of the Qatar-funded TV network – but 44% of those associate it with being a platform for groups linked to Osama bin Laden

63% Aware of Al Jazeera

37% Not Aware

Quality of news reporting



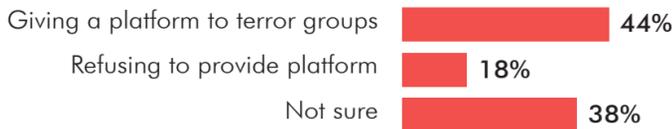
Promoting US image abroad



Influence on US public opinion about the Arab world



Platform to terror groups linked to Osama bin Laden



More than half of US citizens support censorship of terror content

Should TV channels censor content which promotes terrorist causes or incites hatred?

Yes

55%

No

19%

Not sure

26%

YouGov arab news
What the world thinks

Americans tuned into the Qatar crisis

THE crisis over Qatar has created deep diplomatic tensions in the Arab world, and they are now playing out onto an international stage. The US is, of course, a hugely significant influence on the region so it is valuable to understand how the disputes have been understood by the American public. As part of our partnership with Arab News to research and analyse an international perspective on the Arab world, YouGov surveyed a representative sample of over 2,000 Americans between July 19-21, 2017.

We tested American perceptions of six Arab states in terms of whether they were seen as allies or “enemies.”

Egypt was considered an ally or friend of the US by 47 percent of respondents, compared with 39 percent for the UAE and 37 percent for Saudi Arabia, ahead of Qatar at 27 percent, Iraq at 19 percent, and Syria at 8 percent.

Qatar was the least known of the six, with 43 percent unable to express a judgment on the country. Of those that do claim knowledge of Qatar, the picture they paint is somewhat negative. We asked them what attributes

they most closely associate with the country and the most common association was “being accused of financing terror groups,” chosen by a third. Even with the high publicity surrounding the FIFA World Cup 2022 soccer tournament, only 16 percent associated Qatar with being the host of the championship.

The poll found that 71 percent of Americans claim some degree of awareness of the dispute between Qatar and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations. Among those, 67 percent identify the root cause being accusations of Qatar supporting terror groups and meddling with the internal affairs of other GCC countries. Americans are divided over the issue of how their country should react to the situation: 49 percent of aware respondents are unsure if their military air base should remain in Qatar, while 31 percent agree it should remain, and 20 percent think it should be moved.

In contrast to the low familiarity with Qatar, the country’s Al Jazeera media network has achieved high awareness. The broadcaster is known by 63 percent of Americans, but their impressions are negative: by around



STEPHAN SHAKESPEARE

two-to-one they associate it with giving a platform to terrorist groups and having a negative influence on the image of the Arab world. In spite of America’s liberal laws on publication, by 55 percent to 19 percent Americans favour censorship of TV content that promotes terrorist causes or incites hatred.

The American public is not usually characterized by its strong interest in foreign affairs, rather the opposite. However, this latest poll shows the current tensions between Qatar and its neighbors are gaining some significant attention.

— Stephan Shakespeare is the CEO and founder of YouGov.

The hard truth about Qatar’s ‘soft power’ failure

Qatar has spent hundreds of billions of dollars propping up the Al Jazeera network and in preparing for the 2022 FIFA World Cup. Yet both have been dismal failures in making the right impression among Americans, as the Arab News /YouGov poll shows.

THE cost runs into hundreds of billions of dollars — but has it been money down the drain for Doha?

Qatar has over the past years spent big on so-called “soft power” moves, from the launch of Al Jazeera English in 2006, to the controversial bid to host the FIFA World Cup in 2022, to its investment in the Paris St-Germain football club, which just sealed the record-breaking \$263 million transfer deal for Brazil forward Neymar.

Yet the recent survey carried out by Arab News and YouGov, published today, suggests such bids for international favor are proving deeply unsuccessful.

It is telling that Qatar and Al Jazeera — despite the latter having a presence in America for more

than two decades — continue to be dogged by serious image problems in the US.

According to the YouGov/Arab News survey, nearly half of Americans polled are unsure about whether Qatar is a friend or foe, while 31 percent consider it “unfriendly” or an “enemy.”

A further barometer of Qatar’s image problem comes in the findings about what US citizens associate with Qatar.

Half of respondents said they do not know enough about the Gulf state to pass judgement. Yet the next highest response rate — at some 34 percent — reflects those whom associate Qatar with the accusations of terror financing made against it. Only 16 percent of Americans associate Qatar with the

2022 FIFA World Cup, one of the biggest sporting events in the world.

The poll highlights a very important point that the battle for American hearts and minds is still an open playing field.

And this is significant given that America maintains a major military presence at the Al-Udeid Air Force Base in Qatar. Half of Americans polled say they do not know enough to decide whether the US should keep the base open in the face of growing concerns, with a fifth saying it should be relocated elsewhere.

The poll also shows that most Americans, at 63 percent, recognize Al-Jazeera as a news source, but they do not believe that the network reflects professional journalism standards, which means many Americans do not



RAY HANANIA

trust Al Jazeera’s reporting.

Half believe Al Jazeera promotes a negative images of the US, while 44 percent remember that it served as a platform in promoting terrorist groups linked to Osama bin Laden.

There is no doubt over the reliability of the findings of the poll, which was conducted from July 19-21 by YouGov, one of the world’s leading market research companies.

Nor is there any doubt over one of the key takeaway points: That Qatar’s soft-power plays have been nothing but own goals.

— Ray Hanania is an award-winning Palestinian-American former journalist and political columnist. Email him at rghanania@gmail.com.

HOW THE POLL WAS CONDUCTED

YOUGOV

IT has been a little over two months since the start of the Arab diplomatic crisis. Whilst there has been significant coverage and interest surrounding the dispute with Qatar in the region, its

wider impact on public opinion remains unclear.

As part of the continued partnership between the YouGov and Arab News to reveal American views of the Arab world, YouGov conducted an opinion poll among US citizens about their awareness and under-

standing of the crisis in Qatar.

The aim of the research was to explore America’s familiarity with and perception of Arab states, in particular which countries they consider to be an enemy or ally. It asked citizens about their degree of knowledge and understanding of the con-

flict between the four Arab countries — Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain — and Qatar, and importantly their perception of Qatar following the accusations of its support for terrorism.

The poll was conducted online between July 19-21, 2017 among

2,263 Americans on YouGov’s online panel covering all US states. The total sample achieved is representative of the US population by gender, age, ethnicity (white, Hispanic, black, and others) and education. The survey also captured information such as political affiliation

(Democrat, Republican, independent and others), and voter registration status.

There was a near-even gender split among respondents with 49 percent males and 51 percent females taking part in the survey. The majority of the sample, 72 percent, were registered

voters, and 48 percent fell between the ages of 31 and 60. Respondents to the survey answered 19 closed-ended questions.

The overall margin of error is considered to be low (2.2 percent), compared to the 3 percent industry average.

Doha 'losing fight for US public opinion'

- More than a third of Americans associate Qatar with accusations of terror financing, Arab News/YouGov poll finds
- Qatar 'failing miserably in attempting to convince Americans that it is in the right,' says Syrian-American analyst

BEN FLANAGAN
ARAB NEWS STAFF

LONDON: Qatar is losing its battle to win favorable public opinion in the US, with more than a third of Americans linking Doha with accusations of terror financing, an Arab News/YouGov poll has found.

The poll of 2,263 US citizens, conducted in July, suggests that Qatar is "failing miserably" in its effort to convince Americans it is in the right over the row with its Arab neighbors, according to one analyst.

Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain cut diplomatic ties with Qatar two months ago, accusing Doha of supporting terror groups and meddling with their internal affairs.

The Arab News/YouGov poll found that 71 percent of Americans are aware, to various extents, of the diplomatic row.

It also found that those who are aware of it have a good understanding of the reasons behind the crisis, with 67 percent correctly identifying the factors behind it.

In the wake of the diplomatic row, the poll found that the US public view Qatar in a negative light.

Just 27 percent of Americans consider Qatar as a friend or ally to the US, while 31 percent consider Qatar to be an enemy of their country. Almost half either don't know or are unsure about how to classify the relationship with Doha.

Oubai Shahbandar, a Syrian-American analyst and fellow at the New America Foundation's International Security Program, said that the data show that Qatar is losing the fight for American public opinion.

"The numbers make a fairly strong case that despite its best efforts, Qatar is failing miserably in attempting to convince Americans that it is in the right," Shahbandar told Arab News.

"Perhaps Doha would be best served in saving the millions that it will spend in its public relations campaign in the US and instead just do the right thing and agree to meaningful steps that end financial support to terror and extremist incitement."

Shahbandar added that the poll has helped clarify where Americans stand on the diplomatic rift between Doha and the Anti-Terror Quartet — namely Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain. "Deciding who was the villain and which side stood by principles that coincided with US strategic interests was no easy matter for thought leaders and your average American voter. That said, the recent data from YouGov has helped crystalize just where the American public stands — and the data is damning for the Qatari side," he said.

Shahbandar pointed to the millions of dollars that Doha spends on lobbying and public relations campaigns in the US — much of which is centered around the US military presence in Qatar.

The Al-Udeid Air Base currently hosts more than 11,000 American soldiers. However, 49 percent of Americans say they are unsure if it is best for the base to remain there, while 20 percent thought that it should be moved somewhere else, according to the Arab News/YouGov poll. Only 31 percent said the base should remain in Qatar.

"The center of the Qatari media strategy is to highlight to the American public the defense cooperation between the two countries — anchored by the presence in Qatar of Al-Udeid Air Base," Shahbandar said.

"Despite that, 43 percent of Americans are unsure if Qatar is an ally or an enemy of the US. This is a startling find ... that a country which has hosted thousands of American military men and women for over a decade is still unable to garner the goodwill of the American public."

The poll found that very few US citizens associate Qatar with the 2022 World Cup, with more making the link to the terror financing allegations against Doha.

"What should concern Doha is that of those Americans who were aware of the crisis, a significant amount (two-thirds) of those polled blamed Qatar for initiating the dispute due to support of terror groups," Shahbandar said.

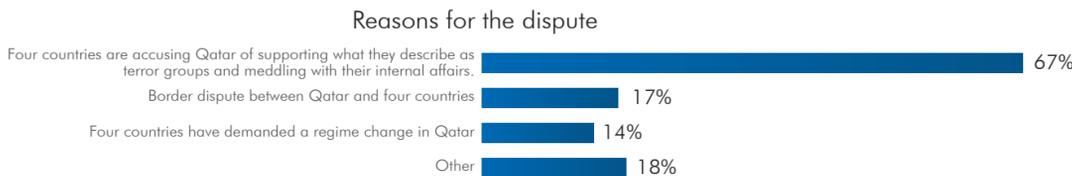
"The Qatari public relations narrative has attempted to paint the dispute as a result of an effort by the Anti-Terror Quartet Arab states to impose control over Doha's sovereignty. Nonetheless, that line seems to have fallen on deaf ears amongst a wide swath of Americans."

THE QATAR RIFT IN AMERICAN EYES

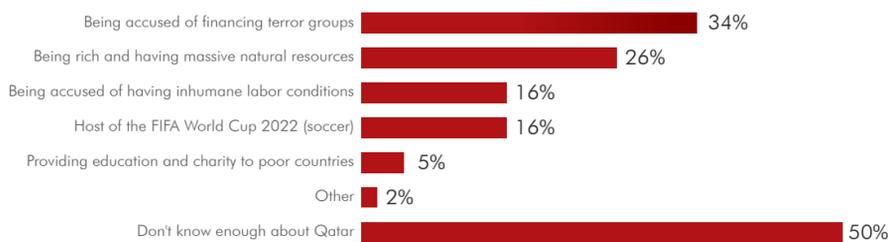


SIGNIFICANT AWARENESS OVER CAUSE OF CRISIS

Two-thirds of Americans who are aware of the dispute correctly identified the reason for the rift — that Qatar had been accused of supporting terror groups.



WHAT AMERICANS ASSOCIATE WITH QATAR



ALLY OR ENEMY: US PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF QATAR



Perceived relationship between selected Arab countries and the US:



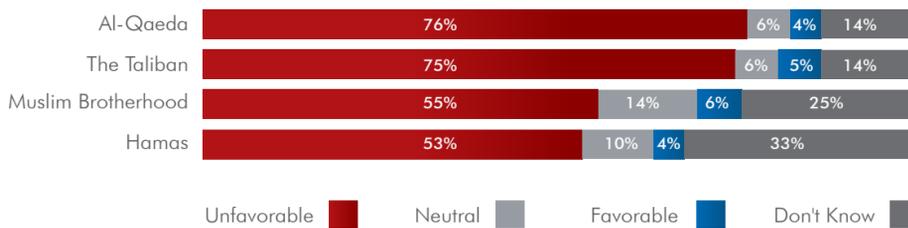
*Percentages reflect proportion of American respondents who think country is an ally or friendly toward the US

69% of Americans not sure if US military base should remain in Qatar, or think it should be moved



VIEW OF TERROR GROUPS QATAR ALLEGEDLY SUPPORTS

Three quarters of US respondents perceive Al-Qaeda and the Taliban unfavorably



Unfavorable Neutral Favorable Don't Know



In the Middle East, money can't buy you love

THE new Arab News/YouGov poll on US perceptions of the current dispute between Qatar and some of its Arab neighbors is both interesting and complex.

Interpreted properly, credible opinion polling is a highly valuable tool for understanding the reality of popular positions and their underlying causes.

For example, the repeat polling in Egypt that revealed how rapidly support for the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) and the Muslim Brotherhood fell off a cliff between early 2012 and 2013 — and why it did so — told those who were prepared to listen something very important about the fragility of their position. The fact that the Brotherhood members themselves failed to understand this — and their external sympathizers refused

to believe it — also told us something important about the power of wishful thinking.

So what does this poll tell us about US attitudes to the various actors in this current dispute? To give a properly considered answer to this question, of course, I would need to study the data and methodology in more detail. But my initial reactions are as follows. First, there is a surprising level of awareness of the core problem — security, stability and counter-terrorism. This has been widely covered in the serious US press — the New York Times, the Washington Post and so forth. But their readerships tend to be elite and liberal. The poll suggests that anyone who follows the news has a relatively high level of awareness not just of the dispute but of wider factors including Syria and Iraq. And that in turn suggests that the

Middle East is becoming a more pressing concern for a significant number of Americans.

That is perhaps hardly surprising given the viciousness and persistence of armed conflict in the region. But it shows a relatively high level of sophistication to link these conflicts to wider political disputes between individual states over the future of the region. And it is here that we see perhaps the most interesting point. There is a high level of support for the view that Egypt and the UAE are friends of the US. Saudi Arabia has ground to make up here, which is an important policy point for decision-makers in Riyadh: Reputation matters in the modern world and you do not improve that without a smart, targeted and sustained communications strategy. But Qatar comes off

worst, with strongly negative views associated with the country over issues such as terror financing and Al Jazeera's news reporting. Qatar's humanitarian, educational and development efforts are unrecognized. That is almost certainly not the case in parts of the wider Middle East: Qatar has long been a generous donor to Gaza, for example.

But even here simply spending money doesn't guarantee popularity. In Libya, as I witnessed at first hand in 2011, if people think you are spending money to buy their affections while seeking to manipulate the political situation to advance your own interests and those of selected clients, it will not end well. And in spite of efforts over the last decade or so to persuade people that Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood are both distinct from and more

acceptable than Al-Qaeda and Daesh — often on the grounds that they are committed to an Islamist version of the democratic process and the nation state — a high plurality of the respondents to the poll remain rightly suspicious of them.

That represents a failure of the project to frame them as essential participants in any future political-security dispensation in a reconstructed Arab Middle East and North Africa. The same applies to the Taliban in Afghanistan. That should give pause to those who think that various forms of political Islamism — all of them with at least a contextual willingness to deploy tactical violence to achieve their aims — need to be reintegrated into national political processes without any fundamental change in their approach.

And it points to something that

Karl Popper, the distinguished defender of open societies against their totalitarian enemies, made clear over half a century ago: Wisdom is not the preserve of elites. It emerges in the collective attitudes and decisions of ordinary people, their instincts and their common sense. We have seen that in various forms in Egypt, in Libya, in Tunisia, in Iraq and in the Gulf over the last seven years. You can't buy that. And you shouldn't want to.

— Sir John Jenkins is Corresponding Director (Middle East) at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), based in Manama, Bahrain. He is also a Senior Fellow at Yale University's Jackson Institute for Global Affairs. Until January 2015, he was the British ambassador to



SIR JOHN JENKINS

Saudi Arabia. He was also the Benghazi-based British Special Representative to the National Transitional Council and later ambassador to Libya during the 2011 revolution, ambassador to Iraq, Syria and Burma and consul-general in Jerusalem. In a 35-year career in the British diplomatic service, he also lived and worked in Kuwait, the UAE and Malaysia. He was director for the Middle East and North Africa in the Foreign Office in London from 2007-2009.