MIDDLE EAST FORUM
Policy Notes Agenda

Qatar and Turkey: Money, Sanctuary and U.S. Exposure

Qatar is the largest single country in the Education Department's Section 117 file: $8.98 billion across 1,338 disclosed transactions with 67 institutions, and 587 of those transactions carry no source name. Six universities with campuses in Doha's Education City hold most of the money, led by Cornell at $3.38 billion. Turkey hosts Hamas leaders and allows rallies praising Hamas while seeking a role in Gaza and new U.S. aircraft. Both notes close with questions on what U.S. agencies verify, request and report.

CONTENTS

MEF-PN-2026-01 Qatari Funding of U.S. Universities and Section 117 Disclosure page 2

MEF-PN-2026-06 Turkey and Hamas: Sanctuary, Money and U.S. Exposure page 4

2 notes, 5 pages. Notes current as of October 4, 2026. Each note carries its own sources, version and date. Online with findings, oversight questions and cited bills: notes.meforum.org/agendas/qatar-and-turkey/

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Qatari Funding of U.S. Universities and Section 117 Disclosure

DATE October 4, 2026 **VERSION** 1.0 **TOPICS** Foreign influence, Higher education, Qatar
RELATED BILLS H.R. 1048 (DETERRENT Act); H.R. 1049 (Transparency in Reporting of Adversarial Contributions to Education Act); H.R. 9602 (Less Bureaucracy, Better International Foreign Gift Transparency Act)
ONLINE https://notes.meforum.org/notes/qatar-section-117/

In brief

Core point: Qatar is the largest single country in the Education Department's Section 117 file: $8.98 billion across 1,338 disclosed transactions with 67 institutions.[1]

Where it lands: Six universities with campuses in Doha's Education City hold most of it, led by Cornell at $3.38 billion.[2]

Trend line: An MEF audit counted a record $980 million in Qatari contributions between January 2023 and October 2024.[3]

Contested: A registered foreign agent for Qatar argues that more than 90 percent of the funding is spent in Qatar on branch-campus operations.[4]

Reporting gap: 587 of Qatar's 1,338 disclosed transactions carry no source name in the federal file.[5]

What the disclosures show

Section 117 of the Higher Education Act requires universities to report foreign gifts and contracts of $250,000 or more, alone or combined, from one foreign source in a calendar year.[6] In the Education Department's cumulative file dated October 31, 2026, Qatar-origin entries total $8.98 billion, ahead of every other country. Contracts account for $8.82 billion of that sum. Six institutions hold most of it: Cornell ($3.38 billion), Carnegie Mellon ($1.98 billion), Georgetown ($1.11 billion), Texas A&M ($1.02 billion), Northwestern ($819 million), and Virginia Commonwealth ($446 million).[7] Institutions self-report these entries, and 64 Qatar-origin contracts worth $2.60 billion carry end dates after the file date.[8]

Totals vary with method. MEF's May 2025 audit counted $6.25 billion in Qatari grants to U.S. higher education, making Qatar the largest foreign donor.[9] A later MEF analysis put Qatar's reported 2025 gifts and contracts at over $1.1 billion and the cumulative total at no less than $6.6 billion since 1986.[10]

1. U.S. Department of Education, "Section 117 Foreign Gift and Contract Data," cumulative file dated October 31, 2026, Qatar-origin entries, MEF calculation, https://foreignfundinghighered.gov/.
2. Department of Education, "Section 117 Data"; Gregg Roman, "Qatar's Quiet Campaign: How Doha Is Buying America," *Middle East Forum Online*, April 23, 2025, https://www.meforum.org/mef-online/qatars-quiet-campaign-how-doha-is-buying-america.
3. Benjamin Baird, "America for Sale: Qatar's $40 Billion Spending Spree Buys Influence and Control of Elite Institutions," Middle East Forum report, May 13, 2025, https://www.meforum.org/mef-reports/america-for-sale-qatars-40-billion-spending-spree-buys-influence-and-control-of-elite-institutions.
4. Hollie McKay, "Qatar's Quiet Conquest of the American Classroom," *Middle East Forum Observer*, August 13, 2026, https://www.meforum.org/mef-observer/qatars-quiet-conquest-of-the-american-classroom.
5. Department of Education, "Section 117 Data."
6. Keren Karmiel, "How Qatar Has Co-opted the University of South Carolina," *Middle East Forum Observer*, July 6, 2025, https://www.meforum.org/mef-observer/how-qatar-has-co-opted-the-university-of-south-carolina; Baird, "America for Sale."
7. Department of Education, "Section 117 Data."
8. Department of Education, "Section 117 Data."
9. Baird, "America for Sale."
10. Victor Vahidi Motti, "Will U.S. Promotion of Regional Resilience Create an Opening for Rivals' Influence?" *Middle East Forum Observer*, August 20, 2026, https://www.meforum.org/mef-observer/will-u-s-promotion-of-regional-resilience-create-an-opening-for-rivals-influence.

Campus case files

Northwestern. The Qatar Foundation has put more than $700 million into Northwestern's Doha partnership since 2007, by MEF's count.[11] The Doha campus serves 473 students and offers two undergraduate majors.[12] Of 729 graduates from 2014 to 2025, about 21 percent bear surnames from the Al-Thani family or 11 other elite Qatari families. The university's contract requires personnel to "respect the cultural, religious and social customs" of Qatar.[13]

Georgetown and Texas A&M. Georgetown has received more than $971 million from Qatar, and Sheikh Abdulla bin Ali Al Thani sits on its Board of Directors.[14] Texas A&M announced it would close its Doha campus by 2028; a court-ordered release of its records showed almost half a billion dollars in Qatari grants and contracts.[15] Smaller programs show the same pattern: the University of South Carolina received nearly $4.5 million from Qatar between 2016 and early 2025.[16]

Where reporting is thin

Of the Qatar-origin transactions in the federal file, 44 percent name no source entity.[17] MEF's Georgetown study documented a separate route: Turkish government money that reached the university through the Diyanet Center, a U.S. 501(c)(3), and so did not appear as a foreign gift.[18] As of April 2025, Qatar was not designated a "country of concern" under the DETERRENT Act framework.[19]

Congress has examined the issue directly. Northwestern President Michael Schill testified before the House Committee on Education and the Workforce in 2024 about Qatar's role in campus operations,[20] and Charles Asher Small testified before the Senate HELP Committee in March 2026.[21] The House passed the DETERRENT Act in March 2025; it would lower the disclosure threshold from $250,000 to $50,000 and set a zero threshold for countries of concern.[22] The bill was received in the Senate and referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions on March 31, 2025.[23]

Questions for oversight

1. How much of Qatar's $8.98 billion in disclosed entries reflects funds already received, as opposed to contract values that run into future years?
2. How does the Department of Education verify the source field, given that 587 Qatar-origin transactions name no source?
3. Do branch-campus clauses on respecting Qatari customs bind faculty who also teach at U.S. home campuses?
4. How are foreign-government funds routed through U.S.-registered nonprofits treated under Section 117?
5. What rights do foreign funders hold over research performed at branch campuses, and does any of it fall in export-controlled fields?
6. What audit capacity does the Department have for institutions reporting more than $1 billion from a single country?

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11. Gregg Roman, "Qatar's Elite Pipeline at Northwestern," *Middle East Forum Online*, January 7, 2026, https://www.meforum.org/mef-online/qatars-elite-pipeline-at-northwestern.
12. "Qatar-Funded Northwestern Employs Hamas Money Launderer to Teach U.S. Students," Middle East Forum press release, September 8, 2025, https://www.meforum.org/press-releases/qatar-funded-northwestern-employs-hamas-money-launderer-to-teach-u-s-students.
13. Roman, "Qatar's Elite Pipeline at Northwestern."
14. Winfield Myers, "Qatar's Takeover of Georgetown University Should Be Investigated," *Campus Watch*, January 30, 2026, https://www.meforum.org/campus-watch/qatars-takeover-of-georgetown-university-should-be-investigated.
15. McKay, "Qatar's Quiet Conquest."
16. Karmiel, "How Qatar Has Co-opted."
17. Department of Education, "Section 117 Data."
18. Sam Westrop and Anna Stanley, "Beachhead: Georgetown U.," Middle East Forum report, July 8, 2025, https://www.meforum.org/mef-reports/georgetown.
19. Roman, "Qatar's Quiet Campaign."
20. Myers, "Qatar's Takeover of Georgetown."
21. McKay, "Qatar's Quiet Conquest."
22. Baird, "America for Sale."
23. DETERRENT Act, H.R. 1048, 119th Cong. (2025), https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/1048.

Turkey and Hamas: Sanctuary, Money and U.S. Exposure

DATE October 4, 2026 **VERSION** 1.0 **TOPICS** Turkey, Hamas, Terrorist finance
RELATED BILLS H.J.Res. 200 (Providing for congressional disapproval of the proposed foreign military sale to Turkey of certain defense articles and services.)
ONLINE https://notes.meforum.org/notes/turkey-hamas/

In brief

Core point: Turkey hosts Hamas leaders and allows rallies praising Hamas while seeking a role in Gaza and new U.S. aircraft.[1]

On the record: Treasury designated Musa Daud Muhammad Akari, a senior Hamas official based in Turkey, a Specially Designated Global Terrorist on November 19, 2024.[2]

Follow the money: An FBI affidavit filed in March 2025 traced Qassam Brigades crypto donations to accounts held by Palestinians with Turkish identity documents.[3]

Corporate footprint: Trend GYO, designated by Treasury as 75 percent owned by Hamas, trades on the Borsa Istanbul.[4]

Contested: Some Washington analysts see Turkey as a stabilizing partner; MEF's Michael Rubin argues that "it is not possible to be both pro-Turkey and anti-Hamas."[5]

The hosting record

Akari, a veteran of Hamas's Qassam Brigades, and nine other prisoners released in the 2011 Gilad Shalit exchange were flown to Ankara. He attended President Erdoğan's April 2024 meeting with Ismail Haniyeh and a Hamas meeting with the president in Ankara on January 29, 2025.[6] Senior Hamas figure Marwan Abu Ras urged a rally in Diyarbakır on April 20, 2025, to support the Qassam Brigades "with your weapons," and spoke again in Istanbul on April 27.[7] On September 5, 2026, Abdusselam Haniye, son of Ismail Haniyeh, addressed a congress of ÖNDER, the alumni association of Turkey's imam-hatip schools, which teach more than 1.2 million students.[8]

The money trail

The FBI affidavit, filed with the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, traced Qassam Brigades donations totaling over $1 million to exchanges including Istanbul-based BTCTurk. One Binance account held by a Palestinian with permanent residence in Turkey received 111,000 USDT in 14 transfers between January 23 and March 6, 2025. The agent wrote that he had not requested records from BTCTurk "due to concerns that the exchange may notify customers."[9]

1. Ohad Tal and Alon Schuster, "Why Turkey Is a Strategic Problem for the United States," *Middle East Forum Observer*, November 21, 2025, https://www.meforum.org/mef-observer/why-turkey-is-a-strategic-problem-for-the-united-states.
2. U.S. Department of the Treasury, "Treasury Targets Key Hamas Leaders and Financiers," press release, November 19, 2024, https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy2720.
3. Abdullah Bozkurt, "U.S. Crackdown on Hamas Virtual Currency Sheds Light on Turkey's Role in Terrorism Financing," *Middle East Forum Online*, April 3, 2025, https://www.meforum.org/mef-online/u-s-crackdown-on-hamas-virtual-currency-sheds-light-on-turkeys-role-in-terrorism-financing.
4. Amine Ayoub, "The 'Zombie' Caliphate," *Middle East Forum Online*, January 1, 2026, https://www.meforum.org/mef-online/the-zombie-caliphate.
5. Michael Rubin, "Is It Possible to Be Both Pro-Turkey and Anti-Hamas?" *Middle East Forum Online*, March 15, 2025, https://www.meforum.org/mef-online/is-it-possible-to-be-both-pro-turkey-and-anti-hamas.
6. Abdullah Bozkurt, "U.S.-Designated Hamas Operative Reveals Erdoğan Personally Promised Protection, Sees Militants as His Family," *Middle East Forum Online*, June 4, 2026, https://www.meforum.org/mef-online/u-s-designated-hamas-operative-reveals-erdogan-personally-promised-protection-sees-militants-as-his-family.
7. Abdullah Bozkurt, "Turkey Hosts Hamas Official Calling for Israel's Destruction, Arming of Qassam Brigades," *Middle East Forum Online*, April 30, 2025, https://www.meforum.org/mef-online/turkey-hosts-hamas-official-calling-for-israels-destruction-arming-of-qassam-brigades.
8. Abdullah Bozkurt, "Hamas Given Platform to Cultivate Jihadist Youth Among Millions of Turkish Students," *Middle East Forum Online*, September 15, 2026, https://www.meforum.org/mef-online/hamas-given-platform-to-cultivate-jihadist-youth-among-millions-of-turkish-students.
9. Bozkurt, "U.S. Crackdown on Hamas."

Akari's LinkedIn profile identifies him as a manager of Kubbe Medya, a media company incorporated in Istanbul in March 2014, although his name does not appear in its registration documents.[10] Turkey appears in other networks covered in this series: Hezbollah's commodity trade and Iran's oil sales.[11]

Strategic stakes

Turkey bought the Russian S-400 air-defense system, seeks new F-16s, and has discussed a path back to the F-35. Recent plans for postwar Gaza give Turkey no security or governance role.[12] MEF's Michael Rubin wrote after Israel's September 2025 strike on Hamas in Qatar that Turkey had become the group's last refuge (analysis).[13]

In Congress, H.J.Res. 200, providing for congressional disapproval of a proposed foreign military sale to Turkey, was introduced on July 2, 2026.[14]

Questions for oversight

1. What has Treasury asked of Turkey regarding designated Hamas officials resident there, including Musa Akari?
2. How do Turkish exchanges and banks respond to U.S. requests on accounts that received Qassam Brigades donations, given the FBI's stated concern about BTCTurk?
3. How are listed companies designated for Hamas ownership, such as Trend GYO, treated under U.S. secondary sanctions?
4. What technology-security reviews apply to pending arms transfers to Turkey while it operates the S-400?
5. What is the State Department's assessment of Hamas fundraising and recruitment at public events in Turkey?
6. How does Turkey's relationship with Hamas factor into U.S. planning for postwar Gaza?

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10. Bozkurt, "U.S.-Designated Hamas Operative Reveals."
11. Abdullah Bozkurt, "New U.S. Sanctions Expose Turkey's Role in Hezbollah's Cash Pipeline, Sanctions Evasion," *Middle East Forum Online*, February 19, 2026, https://www.meforum.org/mef-online/new-u-s-sanctions-expose-turkeys-role-in-hezbollahs-cash-pipeline-sanctions-evasion; Abdullah Bozkurt, "Turkish Company Linked to Covert Iranian Oil Smuggling Network Exposed in U.S. Court Filing," *Middle East Forum Online*, May 5, 2026, https://www.meforum.org/mef-online/turkish-company-linked-to-covert-iranian-oil-smuggling-network-exposed-in-u-s-court-filing.
12. Tal and Schuster, "Why Turkey."
13. Michael Rubin, "Israel Just Struck Hamas in Qatar: Turkey Could Be Next," *Middle East Forum Online*, September 9, 2025, https://www.meforum.org/mef-online/israel-just-struck-hamas-in-qatar-turkey-could-be-next.
14. Providing for congressional disapproval of the proposed foreign military sale to Turkey of certain defense articles and services, H.J.Res. 200, 119th Cong. (2026), https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-joint-resolution/200.