

The Qatari government denies that it is arming the Syrian revolutionaries

Written by Kim Sengupta - The Independant

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More than 70 people have been killed over the last two days in some of the most violent scenes seen so far in the Syrian uprising. The deaths come amid claims that Qatar is supplying money and arms to the opponents of Bashar al-Assad's regime.

According to activists, many of the latest to die were defectors from the military who had been targeted in an attack by government forces in the southern province of Daraa. The morgue in the city of Homs, one of the focal points of the resistance, received 20 corpses of people who have been shot.

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan responded to the continued violence yesterday, saying the crackdown threatened to place Assad on a list of leaders who "feed on blood." The strong words came as Turkey warned it could cut electricity supplies to the country after a spate of attacks by Assad supporters on its diplomatic missions.

Qatar, with its tiny population and huge natural resources wealth, was one of the most ardent supporters and the leading supplier of arms to the rebels in Libya. The Emirate now wields enormous influence in the country and has been accused of spending vast sums of money to back Islamist factions in the post-Gaddafi political scene. Qatar has also been a driving force in the Arab League's critical stance towards the Assad regime, which has led to Syria's suspension from the organisation. Now, however, officials in Damascus as well as Middle-Eastern diplomats say that it has taken the further step of secretly sending funds and weapons to the rebels.

The Qatari government denies that it is arming the Syrian revolutionaries as well as rejecting charges that it is interfering with Libyan politics.

The opponents of the Damascus regime say they are grateful for the support received from the Emirate in contrast to some other Arab countries.

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Bassma Koudrami, an exiled opposition leader, said: "Qatar played a very important role in the Arab League decision [to suspend Syria] and expose the atrocities being carried out. They are doing what other countries should be doing." Analyst Ramzi al-Ridwani said: "One gets the impression that Qatar wants to do it all – host Al-Jazeera, get the World Cup, be important in this changing scene in North Africa and West Asia."

Kim Sengupta

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<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/at-least-70-die-in-uprising-as-violence-escalates-6262678.htm>