

Qatar:

Inside the Middle East's Newly Ostracized State



Aerial view of The Pearl-Qatar, an artificial island with over 12,000 residents living in modern highrises next to harbors, shops and entertainment facilities.

Qatar's skyscrapers rise above the desert coastline like futuristic monuments, a testament to the small nation's economic and political prowess in a region known for its turmoil. But today, despite its successes, Qatar suddenly has been labeled a pariah state by its wealthier, more powerful neighbors—and this may dramatically reverse the nation's fortunes.

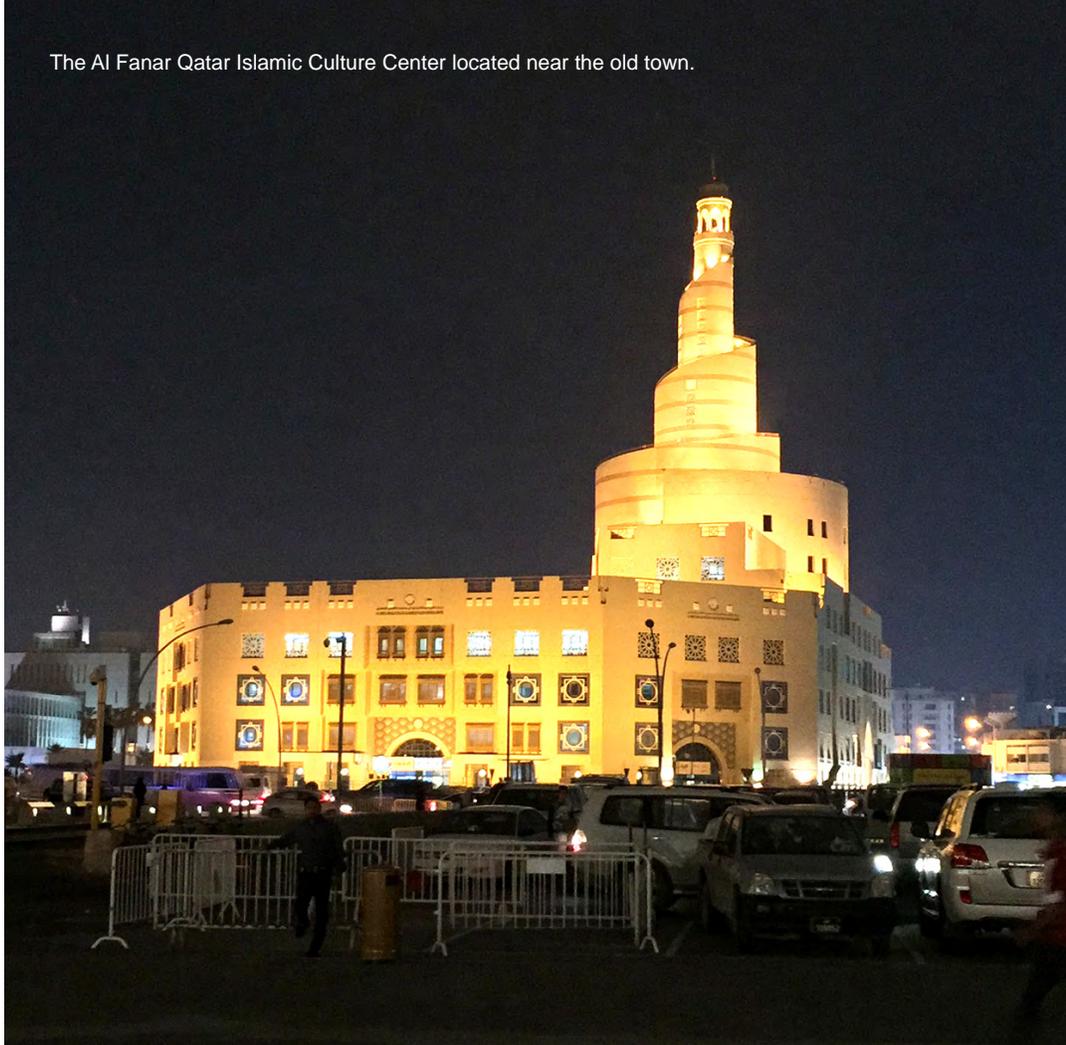
Thriller author A.C. Frieden recently spent a weekend in Qatar's capital, Doha, visiting key sites that he intends to use as settings for two upcoming novels: the still unnamed fifth installment in his Jonathan Brooks series and the launch book in his recently announced Kaden Black spy thriller series. Frieden's research included visits of some of the city's most fascinating locations, such as the skyscraper-filled downtown financial district and the artificial island known as The Pearl-Qatar (which is actually a series of developments, including The Pearl, Porto Arabia, Bahriya, Qanat Quartier, West Bay, and Isola Dana). Frieden also visited Lusail City, a 15-square-mile area that includes four newly developed islands that will eventually include many residential and commercial buildings and a port.

During his stay, Frieden also toured the Museum of Islamic Art, a modern structure influenced by ancient Islamic architecture located on an man-made peninsula on the southern end of Doha Bay. The museum's collections include Islamic artifacts from the Persian Gulf region, North Africa, Turkey, India and Central Asia spanning a period of 14 centuries. It opened to the public in 2008.

Frieden also spent time at the Imam Abd al-Wahhab Mosque (also known as the Qatar State Mosque), a huge, modern mosque opened in 2011 that can accommodate up to 30,000 worshippers. Since it opened, it has hosted several highly controversial sermons by well-known regional religious leaders. Moreover, some of the mosque's worshippers and visiting clerics have become targets of the CIA's clandestine surveillance.

More recently, Saudi and UAE officials have accused Qatar of aiding terrorist organizations and supporting Iran's intelligence operations. As a consequence, Qatar's banks, religious institutions, air transportation and port facilities, and government offices have come under increased scrutiny by U.S., Israeli, Russian and British intelligence services.

The Al Fanar Qatar Islamic Culture Center located near the old town.



Patrons enjoying a quiet afternoon in one of The Pearl's coffee shops.

From his hotel room novelist A.C. Frieden overlooks modern skyscrapers along Doha's 4-mile long bayfront Corniche.



Today, Qatar is attempting to survive an aggressive commercial, political and diplomatic chokehold imposed by its Arab neighbors. Among the most difficult measures is Saudi Arabia's move to severely restrict access to its airspace by Qatar-based airlines, disrupting its civil air transport links with the outside world. This is in addition to Saudi border closures and sea lane restrictions.

By the end of September, over ten countries had severed or downgraded diplomatic ties with Qatar, leaving only the U.S., Europeans, and Russians to broker a settlement. "Qatar's recent troubles are indicative of the rivalries that exist amongst the ruling elites in the region," said Frieden, "and it also shows that America's considerable diplomatic power isn't enough to resolve this dispute."

So how will this turn out? Western companies and the U.S. military all

have substantial investments in Qatar and in general seek greater stability in a region already rocked by conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Yemen. While this move to ostracize Qatar may have been a knee-jerk reaction to unproven allegations by its Arab neighbors, most Western governments haven't jumped on the bandwagon for fear that prolonging the crisis may lead to broader problems in the region. ⊕

“

Qatar's recent troubles are indicative of the rivalries that exist amongst the ruling elites in the region, and it also shows that America's considerable diplomatic power isn't enough to resolve this dispute.”

The Museum of Islamic Art, built at the southern end the bayfront Corniche, opened in 2008.

