

Qatar and the ICC Prosecutor

A witness statement raises new questions about the Gulf monarchy and Karim Khan.

By The Editorial Board

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The trouble isn't over for Karim Khan. He's the International Criminal Court prosecutor who requested arrest warrants for Israel's leaders in 2024, shortly after learning he had been accused of sexual assault. He took leave in May 2025, and this month the court's governors voted to advance disciplinary proceedings. Now a witness statement says the Qatari government promised to "look after" Mr. Khan if he moved against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

This builds on [the Guardian newspaper's November report](#) on a Qatar-linked private intelligence operation by at least two firms, Highgate and Elicius Intelligence, hoping to discredit Mr. Khan's alleged assault victim. Elicius didn't reply to requests for comment. Highgate said in a statement that it had worked on a file in defense of the ICC, but denied it was commissioned by a government entity or aimed at discrediting any individual.

The new witness statement is by a person familiar with that operation who requests anonymity. We've reviewed it along with supporting audio recordings. The statement was submitted to the FBI to request an inquiry and is known to several Members of Congress. It suggests the private intelligence operation also sought to target two Americans: Tom Lynch, the senior ICC official who first reported the assault allegation, and Sen. Lindsey Graham. Several ICC officials who became targets have been interviewed by the NCTV, the Dutch counterterrorism agency, two sources confirm.

In recordings, private investigators discuss their intelligence operation's connection to what seems to be Qatar, which they call the "client country." In writing, one investigator instructs others to say "client" to describe "Q country." Two sources familiar with the intelligence operation tell us Qatar was ultimately the client.

The witness statement says that a source of Elicius's had claimed—albeit without providing evidence—that Israel's Mossad believed Mr. Khan to be a Qatari agent. This led the private intelligence team to discuss the ICC prosecutor.

"I spoke to the client about it," the intelligence operation's manager is heard saying in an Aug. 5 recording, "and they weren't surprised that it had leaked that they were wrapping their arms around him."

Around "KK"—Karim Khan—a researcher clarified.

“It’s not that long that they wrapped their arms around him,” the manager continued, per the recording and the witness statement. “It’s all in the context of issuing the warrant. That was basically the deal. He was like, ‘I want to issue the warrant, but I’m terrified to do it.’ And they said, ‘if you do it, then we’ll look after you.’”

The intelligence operation’s manager was asked whether the support came from an individual sheikh or from the Qatari state. He said, “No, it’s the state.”

A lawyer for Mr. Khan says that neither the prosecutor nor his team had any involvement in such an intelligence operation. He adds, “Our client was not offered or given (and would not have sought or accepted) any ‘promise’ by *any* state (whether Qatar or any other) to ‘look after’ him if he applied for the arrest warrants.” Mr. Khan “never had any discussions with any Qatari official prior to the warrants being issued.”

The Qatari embassy reiterated a November statement calling the allegations “unfounded.” The ICC Office of the Prosecutor said it is “deeply concerned by the unverified allegations against its personnel.”

The recordings show the private intelligence team speculating about connections that Mr. Khan’s alleged abuse victim, a subordinate ICC lawyer and Malaysian Muslim, might have to Israel or Jews. A June 3 recording has the investigators discussing their research. The alleged victim “didn’t have a Jewish grandmother,” one says, as if such a thing would matter.

They are also heard discussing whether she could have a secret Israeli passport. This passport theory was then raised in a June 6 tasking document by Highgate to Elicius Intelligence that we have reviewed. The Guardian reported that the private investigators attempted to access the alleged victim’s private travel history and her son’s birth certificate, and uncovered some of her online passwords. Highgate has denied seeking this information.

In a July 15 recording, a researcher claimed that the alleged victim’s husband once worked for a company that had a kosher-food subsidiary. “There’ll be a rabbi associated with it,” the operation’s manager said on the recording. “It could be good cover employment” for an agent.

Nothing came of these theories, but the intelligence firms also entertained an alternate hypothesis: What if the alleged victim didn’t have a nefarious agenda but was being manipulated by someone who did?

“Establish any ties between Thomas Lynch and Israel / Jewish heritage,” the June 6 tasking document said. A 10-page dossier on Mr. Lynch—the American ICC official who was Mr. Khan’s right-hand man until he reported the assault allegation—was shared among researchers. It included a photo of him and his family. “Anything else that you’re getting on Lynch?” the intelligence operation’s manager asks in the July 15 recording.

Briefing notes were shared among the intelligence team in a document titled “Further context on TL,” which we have reviewed. “Thin gruel,” one investigator commented. The document alleged that Mr. Lynch had built “close ties with Lindsey Graham.” From this dubious premise it jumped

to a conclusion: “TL clearly has some sort of liaison role – perhaps it is not with the State Dept but with e.g. Israel political lobby on the Hill.” The researchers proposed to make this the focus of the “second stage” of their investigation.

In a statement, Mr. Lynch dismissed the speculations of the intelligence firms and said their alleged actions are “disturbing” and “cross all lines of acceptable conduct.”

All the grasping at straws by the intel firms led nowhere, according to persons familiar with the operation. The firms found no evidence the alleged victim was part of any Israeli plot. And if anyone tried to manipulate her, the alleged victim says it was the ICC’s Mr. Khan.

“Think about the Palestinian arrest warrants,” Mr. Khan told her, urging her to withdraw the allegations, according to her U.N. testimony [reported by the Journal](#). She testified that Mr. Khan called her to his hotel suite in New York and forced sexual intercourse—the first of several alleged instances. Mr. Khan denies any misconduct.

The U.N.’s yearlong inquiry, whose summary we have reviewed, found a “factual basis” for the alleged victim’s allegations and for allegations that Mr. Khan retaliated against ICC staff. Witness accounts of contemporaneous conversations with the alleged victim were found to “lend support to her claims.” The summary also noted that Mr. Khan “would not confirm, in an interview, whether he had had a sexual relationship” with his accuser.

An ICC-commissioned panel of judges later found that the U.N.’s evidence wouldn’t pass a “beyond reasonable doubt” standard used in criminal cases. In its summary, the panel also said the disputed facts “do not disprove the allegations of misconduct definitively.”

It isn’t clear why the panel used that criminal standard for an employment decision, and this month the court’s governors made an “initial determination,” two sources confirm, that Mr. Khan may have committed misconduct and disciplinary proceedings should advance. A source familiar with the ICC says most states on its governing body find it absurd that Mr. Khan could continue leading the court after a U.N. finding against him based on the preponderance of the evidence.

The claims in the witness statement and recordings warrant investigation. If true, we don’t know what it would mean for Qatar to “look after” Mr. Khan. But we’d like to know.

It was always egregious to indict Israel’s Prime Minister and Defense Minister for the country’s defensive war, which Hamas began. What the Nuremberg tribunal rejected after World War II—the argument that the democratic defender’s bomber pilots were equivalent to the totalitarian aggressor’s death squads—Mr. Khan endorsed by seeking to prosecute both Hamas and Israeli leaders.

[In October 2024](#) these columns urged the ICC to halt its anti-Israel proceedings and to investigate Mr. Khan’s personal conduct and its role in his sudden decision to seek arrest warrants on CNN. That decision junked Mr. Khan’s own investigatory timeline, shocking his ICC staff.

Instead of stopping, the court issued the warrants. In 2024 we wrote that Mr. Khan’s conduct had placed the ICC’s targeting of Israel “under a cloud.” Now it’s raining.

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