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Assad regime enraged over 'deformed' opposition in Arab League



Syria vented its wrath at Qatar and the Arab League on Wednesday for handing its seat at an Arab summit in Doha to a "deformed" opposition coalition trying to topple President Bashar al-Assad. "The emir of Qatar, the biggest bank for supporting terrorism in the region, began his presidency of the Arab League by hijacking it with tainted oil and money," said state news agency SANA, which carries the views of Assad's government. It said the League had compromised its values for the sake of Gulf Arab and Western interests when it gave Syria's seat to the opposition Syrian National Coalition on Tuesday. Qatar's Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani "committed a flagrant violation of the league's pact by inviting the deformed body, the 'Doha Coalition', to usurp Syria's seat in the League," SANA said, in a scathing reference to the opposition. Qatar has funded political opposition groups and is believed to be funneling money and weapons to rebels in Syria. Assad has long accused his opponents of being "terrorists" funded by Gulf and other foreign powers. A two-year-old revolt against him began with peaceful protests, but evolved into a civil war in which more than 70,000 people have been killed. Arab countries, like world powers, are divided over the conflict in Syria, with Algeria, Iraq and Lebanon the most reluctant to take any action against Assad's rule. Saudi Arabia, Qatar and some others have thrown their support behind the mostly Sunni Muslim rebels in Syria, partly to weaken Shi'ite Iran, the main regional ally of Assad, whose minority Alawite sect is distantly derived from Shi'ite Islam. Iran, which has sent advisers, money and weapons to help Assad stay in power, also lambasted the Arab League for allowing a foe of Assad to take Syria's seat at the summit, calling this "a pattern of dangerous behavior." Iran views Assad as a pillar of an "axis of resistance" against Israel and a bulwark against Sunni militants in Syria, a country which for three decades has been the main conduit for Iranian arms supplies to Lebanon's Shi'ite Hezbollah movement.