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*CC*: Hassan al-Thawadi (Secretary General, Supreme Committee of the Qatar World Cup)

*SUBJECT*: ‘What We Should Do’ Strategy Memo: Dealing with Controversy One Month Out from The Tournament.

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**Introduction:**

After the Olympic games there is no bigger global sporting event than the FIFA Men’s Soccer World Cup. It is estimated that more than five billion people will tune in to the tournament from around the world and see Qatar in the spotlight for the next few months. Qatar is the first Middle East nation to host either the World Cup or the Olympics. This is the opportunity of a generation for Qatar to establish itself as a cultural beacon on the global stage despite any of the raised eyebrows and criticism, but it is the potential reputation-damaging crises that will be vital to manage.  
  
**Situational Analysis:**

Issues in the media coverage and societal atmosphere of the buildup to this tournament include:

* **Human Rights Abuses of Migrant Workers**
  + [The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/feb/23/revealed-migrant-worker-deaths-qatar-fifa-world-cup-2022) Investigation
* **Societal Attitudes Toward visiting LGBTQ+ Fans**
  + “Qatar regards homosexuality as illicit behavior which could result in up to three years in jail, although the host nation says, ‘all visitors will be welcome.’ Qatar though warned against any public displays of affection” –[Forbes](https://www.forbes.com/sites/bradadgate/2022/10/17/qatar-hosting-the-fifa-mens-world-cup-comes-with-controversy-for-sponsors-players-and-fans/?sh=a61185856d87).
* **Urban Landscape and Infrastructure Layout**
  + “Qatar is approximately the size of Connecticut, with little infrastructure to host the 32 soccer teams and over one million visitors expected over the four weeks” –[Forbes](https://www.forbes.com/sites/bradadgate/2022/10/17/qatar-hosting-the-fifa-mens-world-cup-comes-with-controversy-for-sponsors-players-and-fans/?sh=a61185856d87).
* **Fan Conditions (Alcohol and Accommodation)**
  + ‘What Fans Need To Know’ – [The Telegraph](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/middle-east/qatar/guide-visiting-qatar-world-cup-accommodation-alcohol-dress-code/); ‘Can England Fans Drink in Qatar?’ – [Talk Sport](https://talksport.com/football/983856/world-cup-2022-fans-qatar-alcohol-stadiums-cost/)
* **Protests and Boycotts (Foreign Governments, Teams, Charities and Advocacy Groups)**
  + [Amnesty International](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2016/03/qatar-world-cup-of-shame/); ‘[Pressure Mounts on Teams](https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/pressure-mounts-for-teams-to-boycott-2022-world-cup-in-qatar/)**’**
* **Accusations of Fraud, Money Laundering and Corruption**
  + [New York Times](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/06/sports/soccer/qatar-and-russia-bribery-world-cup-fifa.html); [Al Jazeera](https://www.aljazeera.com/sports/2020/4/7/qatar-denies-allegations-of-corruption-in-world-cup-2022-bid); [Sky Sports](https://www.skysports.com/football/news/12098/11969691/world-cup-2022-in-qatar-new-bribe-and-corruption-claims-from-us-prosecutors).
* **Multimedia Negative Press Coverage from Thought Leaders (Traditional News Outlets, YouTube and Podcasts)**
  + Gary Neville on [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uvyA-iCNSaU); ‘[World Corrupt](https://open.spotify.com/episode/4WBCntvbBPM8CdLfMKZeGc?si=XwI0oew3Qoq1avHwd29Iew)’ Podcast by Crooked Media.

**Key Stakeholders:**

Any crisis management response in this case must be targeted at, focused on and satisfactory too the following stakeholder groups:

* **The Qatari Royal Family:** Responsible for the reputation and governance of the country, the Royal Family have a vested interest in this tournament and want to be recognized as associated with its bright lights and successes.
* **FIFA and Other Global Soccer Authorities:** Responsiblefor the governance of soccer and the state and direction of the game, World Cup tournaments are a marker in the sand of this role, regardless of the associated governance and economic impacts.
* **Visiting Teams and Players:** One of, if not the, most crucial aspect of the tournament. The importance of this group feeling good and excelling on the entertainment value and historic nature of this tournament must be recognized.
* **Visiting Fans:** The second most important part in a successful tournament. The game belongs to the fans and their experience reveling in the vibe of the tournament will be a defining factor in its success.
* **Foreign Governments:** The World Cup is an important vehicle for expanding and publicizing Qatar as an actor on the world stage. Emphasizing and selling the country’s potential to investors of all kinds and foreign governments, many of whom will be sending delegations, is crucial.
* **Corporate Sponsors:** Corporate finance and advertising is an integral aspect of soccer, and the World Cup is the beacon event of this dynamic. Reputation is key to maximizing the economic advantages of hosting a tournament of this magnitude by taking advantage of the propensity and desire for large corporations to be associated and partnered under your banner.
* **The Qatari Population:** Managing the impact of the tournament on the citizenry and their day-to-day existence on the ground will be vital to the cogs whirring without interruption or difficulty. Embrace the local population and unique cultures and histories and incorporate them into the tournament.
* **Supreme Committee of the Qatar World Cup Employees and Associates:** Encouraging and inspiring the employees and associates involved in the organizing and delivery of the tournament will enhance their performance and craft and improve the tournament as a result. People take pride in their work and will care more to work better and harder if treated and celebrated in the correct way.
* **Migrant and Low Wage Workers:** Much of the reputational damage Qatar has suffered in the run up to this tournament has been regarding the treatment of migrant workers. Elevating their voices and recognizing their achievements in developing the infrastructure and allowing this World Cup to take place will be an unprecedented way of dealing with this issue.
* **Thought Leaders such as Ex-Player Commentators:** Soccer is a game steeped in history and legend, and a crucial part of the watching and enjoyment in the game is specialists and ex-players having their voices recognized and debated. Encourage these thought leaders and former players to get involved, to contribute and the community around the tournament will be richer and its reputation and legitimacy will be enhanced.
* **Broadcasters and the Media:** The resounding memory of this tournament in years to come will be defined by its portrayal in the media. It is vital that the narrative is controlled, that our key messages are disseminated, and every effort is made to ensure that the tournament is portrayed with effusive and superlative praise and recognition around the world.

**Basic Communications Management Principles to Inform Tactical Planning:**

We need to recognize that the public interest in this tournament is immense and there is no space for manipulation or spin. Fans will reject and be angered by communication that is superficial or patronizing. Honesty and transparency are critical during any crisis management scenario response. Communications should be as open, timely and factual as possible, avoiding falsities and speculation.

**Topline Strategy Recommendations:**

* Emphasize Transparency
* Publicize Innovation, Uniqueness and Success of the Tournament in Qatar
* Reassure Key Stakeholders with Readiness Status and Potential of this World Cup
* Elevate Minority Voices Involved in Areas of Reputation Challenges and Criticism
* Focus on Fans, Football and Fun
* Soften Qatar’s Global Image with Concessions while Promoting Cultural Respect and Understanding

**Key Messages and Supporting Materials:**

1. *Qatar is open, safe, and secure for fans who respect local customs and traditions.*
2. *Qatar has listened and understands concerns over rights for migrant workers and has made accelerated and reconciliatory improvements towards Western standards.*
3. *Qatar is a country with immense potential to showcase and looks forward to welcoming its global neighbors.*

**Tactical Recommendations to Enhance Reputation Prior to the Tournament:**

* Invite key bodies, for example notable LBGTQ+ advocacy groups and ex-player legends of the game, to view the facilities and take part in events such as ‘day in the life’ of a fan in the run up to the tournament. Expectant fans and engaged stakeholders will trust their feedback and notable experiences and be reassured by processes there remain questions over, for example travel to the games and fan park events.
* Create social media campaigns using influencers that attract large audiences on different formats and in different media markets, such as TikTok videos for young Americans, Facebook posts in Arabic language networks, etc. Promote content on history and cultural understanding, ‘Top 10 things to do in Doha,’ and raise Qatar’s profile in the general public's thoughts and consciousness.
* Invite globally recognized specialists and experts to review working conditions, contracts, and accommodations of migrant workers. Ensure transparency and testimony from those workers involved. Generate increased confidence in practices and elevate positive voices, for example a migrant worker from the Philippines who is proud of their work on a stadium, a soccer fan and happy to have provided for his family back home.
* Focus on fan experience. It is important to consider travel logistics, food and drink, activities for families, accommodation, arrival and departure by air travel and many other related areas when organizing a tournament for everyone. Keep fan areas and activities adequately stocked, well resourced, clean, and safe throughout the entirety of the tournament with staff available to help.

**Previous Examples of Global Tournaments with Successful PR Responses to Crises for Learning:**

* The 2018 Russia Soccer World Cup: [BBC News](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-44812175); [The Independent](https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/football/world-cup/england-tunisia-world-cup-latest-volgograd-russia-praise-welcome-fans-trouble-a8405341.html); [The Telegraph](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-cup/2018/06/18/england-fans-welcomed-open-arms-volgograd-ahead-opening-2018/).
* The 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympics in Brazil: [The Washington Post](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/early-lead/wp/2014/07/08/ioc-says-brazils-successful-world-cup-will-lead-to-successful-2016-olympics/); [The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2014/jul/15/rio-2016-olympics-brazil-world-cup#:~:text=Rio%202016%20Olympics%20organisers%20confident%20after%20Brazil's%20World%20Cup%20success,-Having%20played%20its&text=High%20on%20the%20eventual%20success,the%20Olympics%20of%20the%20Olympics%E2%80%9D.).

**Prevention and Preparation for Potential Crises:**

* Effectively Stress Test Infrastructure Prior to Visitor Arrivals: Ensure the Metro will work in busy periods such as fans departing a stadium after a game; Train security personnel to deal with situations such as fans who are too drunk or a child separated from their parents; Make sure fan accommodations are good quality and affordable.
* Regularly Communicate to Stakeholders and Interested Parties Through a Website and an App: Generate varied and detailed Q&A content and social media updates and deliver accurate and consistent news media interactions.
* Focus on empathy and flexibility by stewards, officials, assistants and police and other security officials involved in the day-to-day running of the tournament with understanding of recent and historical fan related contexts such as the [Hillsborough Disaster](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-merseyside-47697569), [the Champions League Final Incident](https://www.cnn.com/2022/06/09/football/champions-league-liverpool-madrid-chaos-police-intl-spt) in [Paris](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-61633840) last year and [the recent Indonesia Soccer Tragedy](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/04/world/asia/indonesia-soccer-football-stadium.html), for example.
* Liaise and engage with foreign teams, players, officials, and government authorities to promote collaboration, international diplomacy, and soft power.
* Enhance and promote fan experience as well as that of the corporate sponsors and advertisers. Remember that soccer belongs to the fans.

**Conclusion:**

Much has been written about the shortcomings of our promotion, preparation, and organization of the Qatar World Cup. Many of these talking heads will be quieted, however, by a successful delivery of the event. The ultimate test is how the tournament plays out. If successful, the reputation damage suffered thus far will pale into insignificance given the long-term image enhancement we will experience. Effectively utilizing a variety of crisis management and preparation tactics and consistent communications on traditional and social media will be vital to achieving this goal.

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