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Qatar: Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy

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SUMMARY

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Qatar: Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy

The State of Qatar, a small Arab Gulf monarchy which has about 300,000 citizens in a total population of about 2.4 million, has employed its ample financial resources to exert regional influence, often independent of the other members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, and Oman) alliance. Qatar has fostered a close defense and security alliance with the United States and has maintained ties to a wide range of actors who are often at odds with each other, including Sunni Islamists, Iran and Iran-backed groups, and Israeli officials.

Qatar's support for regional Muslim Brotherhood organizations and its Al Jazeera media network have contributed to a backlash against Qatar led by fellow GCC states Saudi Arabia and the UAE. In June 2017, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain, joined by Egypt and a few other governments, severed relations with Qatar and imposed limits on the entry and transit of Qatari nationals and vessels in their territories, waters, and airspace. The Trump Administration has sought a resolution of the dispute, in part because the rift is hindering U.S. efforts to formalize a "Middle East Strategic Alliance" of the United States, the GCC, and other Sunni-led countries in the region to counter Iran. Qatar has countered the Saudi-led pressure with new arms purchases and deepening relations with Turkey and Iran. Some signs that the rift might be resolved emerged in late 2019, but progress apparently stalled in January 2020.

Qatar's leaders work with the United States to secure the Persian Gulf, as do the other GCC leaders. The United States and Qatar have had a formal Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) that reportedly addresses a U.S. troop presence in Qatar, consideration of U.S. arms sales to Qatar, U.S. training, and other defense cooperation. Under the DCA, Qatar hosts more than 8,000 U.S. forces and the regional headquarters for U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) at various military facilities, including the large Al Udeid Air Base. U.S. forces deployed at these facilities participate in operations throughout the region. Qatar is a significant buyer of U.S.-made weaponry, including combat aircraft. In January 2018, Qatar and the United States inaugurated a "Strategic Dialogue" that has included discussion of efforts to improve accommodations for U.S. personnel deployed to Al Udeid Air Base. In 2017, the United States and Qatar signed a broad memorandum of understanding to cooperate against international terrorism.

The voluntary relinquishing of power in 2013 by Qatar's former Amir (ruler) departed from GCC patterns of governance in which leaders generally remain in power for life. At the same time, Qatar is the only one of the smaller GCC states that has not yet held elections for a legislative body. U.S. and international reports, which are scrutinizing Qatar as its hosting of the World Cup soccer tournament approaches in 2022, criticize Qatar for not adhering to international standards of labor rights practices, but credit it for taking steps to improve the conditions for expatriate workers.

Like other GCC states, Qatar is wrestling with the fluctuations in global hydrocarbons prices that started in 2014 and were compounded by the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). As of mid-August, Qatar has reported about 115,000 infections and 190 deaths from the disease, which has affected Qatar's expatriate population disproportionately. Qatar has been able to weather economic headwinds because of its small population, substantial financial reserves, and its favorable business conditions for entrepreneurs. But, Qatar shares with virtually all the other GCC states a lack of economic diversification and reliance on revenues from sales of hydrocarbon products. On December 3, 2018, Qatar withdrew from the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in order to focus on its natural gas export sector; Qatar has the third largest proven reserves of natural gas in the world.

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Brief History

Prior to 1867, Qatar was ruled by the family of the leaders of neighboring Bahrain, the Al Khalifa. That year, an uprising in the territory led the United Kingdom, then the main Western power in the Persian Gulf region, to install a leading Qatari family, the Al Thani, to rule over what is now Qatar. The Al Thani family claims descent from the central Arabian tribe of Banu Tamim, the tribe to which Shaykh Muhammad ibn Abd Al Wahhab, the founder of Wahhabism, belonged.[1] Thus, Qatar officially subscribes to Wahhabism, a conservative Islamic tradition that it shares with Saudi Arabia.

In 1916, in the midst of World War I and after the Ottoman Empire relinquished its territorial claims over Qatar, the Al Thani family signed an agreement under which Qatar formally became a British protectorate. In 1971, after Britain announced it would no longer exercise responsibility for Persian Gulf security, Qatar and Bahrain considered joining with the seven emirates (principalities) that were then called the "Trucial States" to form the United Arab Emirates (UAE). However, Qatar and Bahrain decided to become independent rather than join that union. The UAE was separately formed in late 1971. Qatar adopted its first written constitution in April 1970 and became fully independent on September 1, 1971. The United States opened an embassy in Doha in 1973. The United States is currently represented by Charge D'Affaires Philip Nelson, appointed to that post on March 2, 2020.

Table 1. Senior Leaders of Qatar

Position	Leader
Amir (ruler) and Minister of Defense	Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani
Deputy Amir and Crown Prince (heir apparent)	Abdullah bin Hamad Al Thani
Prime Minister and Minister of Interior	Khalid bin Khalifa bin Abdulaziz Al Thani
Deputy Prime Minister	Ahmad bin Abdallah al-Mahmud
Minister of State for Defense Affairs	Khalid bin Muhammad Al-Attiyah
Minister of Foreign Affairs	Muhammad bin Abd al-Rahman Al Thani
Minister of Finance	Ali Sharif al-Imadi
Ambassador to the United States	Mishal bin Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani

Source: Central Intelligence Agency, "Chiefs of State and Cabinet Members of Foreign Governments."

[1] Information in this section is taken from Bernard Haykel, "Qatar and Islamism," Policy Brief: Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre, February 2013.

Figure 1. Qatar at-a-Glance

Area	11,586 sq km (slightly smaller than Connecticut)
People	*Population:* 2.3 million, of which about 90% are expatriates *Religions:* Muslim 68%, of which about 90% are Sunni; Christian 14%; Hindu 14%; 3% Buddhist; and 1% other. Figures include expatriates. *Ethnic Groups:* Arab 40%; Pakistani 18%; Indian 18%; Iranian 10%; other 14%. Figures include expatriates. Virtually all citizens are Arab.
Economy	*Gross Domestic Product (GDP):* $350 billion on purchasing power parity (ppp) basis *GDP per capita:* $125,000 on ppp basis *Inflation:* 1% *GDP Growth Rate*: 1.5% in 2019 but projected at no growth for 2020 *Export Partners:* (In descending order) Japan, South Korea, India, China, Singapore, UAE *Import Partners:* (In descending order) United States, China, Germany, Japan, Britain, Italy
Oil and Gas	*Oil Exports:* Slightly more than 700,000 barrels per day. Negligible amounts to the United States. Producer of condensates (light oil) vital to S. Korean petrochemical industry. Gas (LNG) Exports: 126 billion cubic meters per year

Sources: Graphic created by CRS. Map borders and cities generated by Hannah Fischer using data from Department of State; World Bank Group, Esri; and Google Maps. At-a-glance information from CIA, *The World Factbook, Economist Intelligence Unit* country report on *Qatar; World Bank.*

Governance

Qatar's governing structure approximates that of the other states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman) in that it led by a hereditary Amir (literally "prince," but interpreted as "ruler"), Shaykh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani.[2] He became ruler in June 2013 when his father, Amir Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, relinquished power voluntarily—an unprecedented move in the modern Gulf. The Amir governs through a prime minister, who is a member of the Al Thani family, and a cabinet, several of whom are members of the Al Thani or other prominent families. On January 28, 2020, the Amir appointed a new Prime Minister, U.S.-educated Khalid bin Khalifa bin Abdulaziz Al Thani. The Amir's younger brother, Shaykh Abdullah bin Hamad, is deputy Amir and the heir apparent.

Political parties are banned and there are no "political societies" that act as the equivalent of parties. Political disagreements in Qatar are aired mainly in private as part of a process of consensus building in which the leadership tries to balance the interests of the country's families. There have been no significant protests by Qatari citizens in many years, but some in the large expatriate community have sometimes protested for improved working conditions.

Qatari citizens approved a constitution in a 2003 referendum, by a 98% vote in favor. The document affirms that Qatar is a hereditary emirate, specifies Islamic law as a key source of legislation,[3] and provides for elections for 30 of the 45 seats of the country's Advisory Council (*Majlis Ash-Shura*), a national legislative body. After it is elected, the power of the *Majlis* are to increase to include the ability to remove ministers (two-thirds majority vote), to approve a national budget, and to draft and vote on proposed legislation (subject to concurrence by the Amir). Naturalized Qataris who have been citizens for at least 10 years are to be eligible to vote, and those whose fathers were born in Qatar can become candidates. In October 2019, the Amir ordered the establishment of a committee, chaired by the Prime Minister, to organize the first Council elections.[4] No election date has been announced.

The country holds elections for a 29-seat Central Municipal Council, which advises the government on local public services. Elections for the fifth Council (each serving a four-year term) were held in April 2019. Voter registration and turnout were lower than expected.[5]

Human Rights Issues[6]

The State Department human rights report for 2019 identifies the most significant human rights problems in Qatar as: "criminalization of libel; restrictions on peaceful assembly and freedom of association, including prohibitions on political parties and labor unions; restrictions on the freedom of movement for migrant workers' travel abroad; refusal to grant asylum despite risk of arrest and torture; limits on the ability of citizens to choose their government in free and fair elections; criminalization of consensual same-sex sexual activity; and reports of forced labor."

A National Human Rights Committee (NHRC), which investigates allegations of human rights abuses, operates independently, but it is funded largely by the Qatar Foundation that is run by the

[2] Shaykh is an honorific term.

[3] Amy Hawthorne, "Qatar's New Constitution: Limited Reform from the Top," August 26, 2008.

[4] "Qatar takes step toward first *Shura* Council election: QNA agency," Reuters, October 31, 2019.

[5] Department of State, Human Rights Report for 2015: Qatar, p. 13.

[6] Much of the information in this section is based on: Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights for 2019.

Amir's mother, Shaykha Moza. Among the NHRC's functions is to monitor the situation of about 1,000-2,000 stateless residents ("*bidoons*"),[7] mostly members of families whose citizenship was revoked decades ago for opposing Qatar's leaders. Although the constitution provides for an independent judiciary, the Amir appoints all judges.[8]

Freedom of Expression

Despite the absence of open opposition among the citizenry, since the 2011 "Arab Spring" uprisings, Qatar has adopted some laws that increase penalties for criticizing the leadership. In 2014, the government approved a cybercrimes law that provides for up to three years in prison for spreading "false news." One law, enacted in January 2020, authorizes the imprisonment of "anyone who broadcasts, publishes, or republishes false or biased rumors, statements, or news, or inflammatory propaganda, domestically or abroad, with the intent to harm national interests, stir up public opinion, or infringe on the social system or the public system of the state."[9] Qatari officials assert that the law targets those who organize violent opposition activities.

Al Jazeera Media Network

According to the State Department human rights report, the government subsidizes the Al Jazeera Media Network, which has evolved since its establishment in the mid-1990s into a global media organization. The State Department report asserts that the government owns the network. A U.S.-based representative for Al Jazeera says that, in 2011, its legal standing was changed to an independent legal entity with characteristics similar to a U.S. non-profit.[10] The network features a wide range of guests from all over the region debating issues; Arab leaders have sometimes reacted to the network's critical coverage by closing Al Jazeera's bureaus or imprisoning its journalists. The network has run stories that criticize Qatar, including on the situation of expatriate laborers.[11] The State Department quotes "some observers and former Al Jazeera employees" as alleging that Qatar's government "influences" Al Jazeera content. Officials in the United Arab Emirates and other neighboring countries have sometimes criticized Al Jazeera for providing a platform for Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, and other Islamists to promote their ideology. Some Members of Congress have asserted that Al Jazeera is an arm of the Qatar government and that its U.S. bureau should be required to register under the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA).[12]

[7] *Bidoon* is the Arabic word for "without," and refers to persons without documentation for their residency in country.

[8] State Department human rights report on Qatar: 2017, op. cit.

[9] Qatar: Repressive new law further curbs freedom of expression, Amnesty International, January 20, 2020.

[10] Information provided to CRS in August 2020 by CLS Strategies, a firm that represents Al Jazeera in the United States.

[11] "Renewed Calls for Qatar to Address Treatment of Migrant Workers," Al Jazeera, September 19, 2019.

[12] Lawmakers Seek FARA Evaluation of Qatari-owned Al Jazeera, Office of Senator Tom Cotton press release, June 19, 2019.

Qatari Leadership

Shaykh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani

Shaykh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani was born on June 3, 1980. He is the fourth son of the former Amir, Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, and the ninth Al Thani ruler in Qatar. He was appointed heir apparent in August 2003 when his elder brother, Shaykh Jasim, renounced his claim, reportedly based on his father's lack of confidence in Shaykh Jasim's ability to lead. Shaykh Tamim became Amir on June 25, 2013, when Amir Hamad stepped down in voluntary transfer of power that was unprecedented for Qatar and the Gulf region. Amir Tamim was educated at Great Britain's Sherbourne School and graduated from its Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst in 1998, from which his father graduated in 1971. Concurrently, Amir Tamim heads the Qatari Investment Authority, which has billions of dollars of investments in Europe, the United States, and elsewhere. He is reportedly highly popular for resisting Saudi-led pressure in the intra-GCC crisis.

Shaykh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani

Amir Tamim's father, *Shaykh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani,* seized power from his father, Amir Khalifa bin Hamad Al Thani, in June 1995, during his father's absence in Europe. In 1972, after finishing his education in Britain and assuming command of some Qatari military units, Hamad had helped his father depose his grandfather in a bloodless seizure of power while then-Amir Ahmad bin Ali Al Thani was on a hunting trip in Iran.

While Shaykh Hamad is no longer Qatar's ruler, he, his wife, and several of their other children remain key figures in the ruling establishment. Qatari media refer to Shaykh Hamad as "The Father Amir" and acknowledge that he has some continuing role in many aspects of policy. His favored wife (of three), Shaykha Moza al-Misnad Al Thani, continues to chair the powerful Qatar Foundation for Education, Science, and Community Development (QF). The QF runs Doha's Education City, where several Western universities have established branches and which is a large investor in the United States and Europe. One daughter (and full sister of the current Amir), Shaykha Mayassa, chairs the Qatar Museums, a major buyer of global artwork. Another daughter, Shaykha Hind, is vice chairman of the QF. Both daughters graduated from Duke University. Another relative, Hamad bin Jasim Al Thani, remains active in Qatar's investment activities and international circles. During Amir Hamad's rule, Shaykh Hamad bin Jasim was Foreign Minister, Prime Minister, and architect of Qatar's relatively independent foreign policy. Shaykh Hamad's father, former Amir Khalifa bin Hamad, died in October 2016.

Sources: various press, and http://www.mofa.gov,

Women's Rights[13]

According to the State Department, social and legal discrimination against women continues, despite the constitutional assertion of equality. The laws criminalizes rape. No law criminalizes domestic violence. A national housing law discriminates against women married to noncitizen men and divorced women. Court testimony by women carries half the weight of that of a man. Women in Qatar drive and own property, and constitute about 15% of business owners and more than a third of the overall workforce, including as professionals.

Women serve in public office, such as minister of public health, chair of the Qatar Foundation, head of the General Authority for Museums, and ambassadors to the United Nations and several countries. Most of the other small GCC states have more than one female minister. In November 2017, the Amir appointed four women to the *Majlis As-Shura* for the first time in the body's history. In December 2019, the spokeswoman for the Foreign Ministry, Lolwah Al Khater, was appointed "assistant minister" of Foreign Affairs (number two at the Foreign Ministry).[14]

Trafficking in Persons and Labor Issues[15]

The State Department's Trafficking in Persons report for 2020 maintained Qatar at a Tier 2 ranking on the basis that the government makes significant efforts to comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. Qatar has enacted a Domestic Worker Law to better protect domestic workers and it has established a coordinating body to oversee and facilitate anti-trafficking initiatives. But, Qatar remains a destination country for men and women subjected to forced labor and, to a much lesser extent, forced prostitution. Female domestic workers remain particularly vulnerable to trafficking due to their isolation in private residences. Alongside the January 2018 U.S.-Qatar "Strategic Dialogue," the two countries signed a memorandum of understanding to create a framework to combat trafficking in persons.

The State Department assesses Qatar's labor laws as not adequately protecting the rights of workers to form and join independent unions, conduct legal strikes, or bargain collectively. Qatari law does not prohibit antiunion discrimination or provide for reinstatement of workers fired for union activity. Yet, the State Department credits the country with taking steps to protect labor rights, including for expatriate workers. In 2016, a labor reform law went into effect that provided for changes to the "*kafala*" system (sponsorship requirement for foreign workers) to enable employees to switch employers at the end of their labor contracts rather than having to leave Qatar. The law abolished the *kafala* system entirely at the end of 2019, and further reforms that took effect on August 30, 2020 established a monthly minimum wage and provide for stricter penalties that fail to provide their mostly expatriate labor force with adequate housing. The government also has increased its cooperation with the International Labor Organization (ILO) to take in worker complaints and inform expatriate workers of their rights.

Scrutiny of Qatar's labor practices has centered on the plight of the many additional, mostly expatriate, engineers, construction workers, and other laborers hired to prepare for the 2022 FIFA World Cup soccer tournament. An Amnesty International report of September 2019 alleged that workers sometimes are not paid for work and the lack of adequate dispute resolution

[13] Information taken from the State Department Country Reports on Human Rights for 2019. See also: CRS Report R46423, *Women in the Middle East and North Africa: Issues for Congress*, by Zoe Danon and Sarah R. Collins.

[14] "Amir appoints Lolwah AlKhater as Assistant to FM." *Gulf Times*, December 2, 2019.

[15] This section is based on the State Department "Trafficking in Persons" report for 2020..

mechanisms.[16] The Qatar government responded to the report by stating: "Many of the cases included in the report precede recent legislative amendments—including the establishment of the Committees for the Settlement of Labour Disputes. These have significantly improved the processes and increased the speed for resolving labour disputes." Hundreds of expatriate workers demonstrated in August 2019 against poor working conditions and unpaid and delayed wages. Some studies suggest that crowded conditions for expatriate laborers in Qatar have fueled a relatively high per capita infection rate from COVID-19.[17]

Religious Freedom[18]

Qatar's constitution stipulates that Islam is the state religion and Islamic law is "a main source of legislation," but Qatari laws also incorporate secular legal traditions. The law recognizes only Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. The overwhelming majority (about 95%) of Qatari citizens are Sunni Muslims, possibly explaining an absence of observable sectarian tensions. The government permits eight registered Christian denominations to worship publicly at the Mesaymir Religious Complex, and it has allowed the Evangelical Churches Alliance of Qatar to build a church. Hindu, Jewish, Buddhists, or other non-Muslim religious groups are registered with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and they have established villas and private homes as houses of worship. According to the International Religious Freedom report for 2019, in January 2019, a delegation led by the Secretary of State met with senior counterparts in Doha and signed a statement of intent to "support the shared ideals of tolerance and appreciation for diversity."

Foreign Policy

Qatar uses its ample financial resources to support a foreign policy that attempts to influence a wide range of regional actors. Its policies have enabled Qatar to mediate some regional conflicts, as well as to back regional actors at odds with those supported by some of the other GCC states. Qatar has at times also used its military forces to intervene in regional conflicts. Regional and bilateral issues have reportedly constituted the focus of high-level U.S.-Qatar meetings.[19]

Qatar and the Intra-GCC Dispute

A consistent source of friction within the GCC has been Qatar's embrace of Muslim Brotherhood movements. Qatari officials argue that the Brotherhood is a moderate political Islamist movement that can foster regional stability through participation in the legitimate political process, but UAE leaders, in particular, assert that the Brotherhood seeks to destabilize established governments in the region. In 2014, differences over this and other issues erupted and Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Bahrain withdrew their ambassadors from Doha, returning them several months later after Qatar pledged to implement a November 2013 commitment to end support for Muslim Brotherhood-linked organizations.[20] The differences erupted again in June 2017 when Saudi Arabia, the UAE,

[16] "All Work No Pay: The Struggle of Qatar's Migrant Workers for Justice." Amnesty International, September 19, 2019.

[17] "These two countries are tiny, rich and have the world's highest coronavirus infection rates." *Associated Press*, July 23, 2020.

[18] This section is based on the State Department report on International Religious Freedom for 2019.

[19] White House, Joint Statement from the President of the United States Donald J. Trump and His Highness Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani, Amir of the State of Qatar, July 9, 2019.

[20] Cable News Network released the text of the November 2013 agreement, which was signed between Saudi Arabia,

and Bahrain, joined by Egypt and Jordan, cut diplomatic relations with Qatar, expelled Qatar's diplomats, recalled their ambassadors, and imposed limits on the entry and transit of Qatari nationals and vessels in their territories, waters, and airspace. These countries presented Qatar with 13 demands as conditions for lifting the blockade, including closing Al Jazeera, severing relations with the Muslim Brotherhood, scaling back relations with Iran, and closing a Turkish military base in Qatar. [21] Amir Tamim expressed openness to negotiations but said Qatar would not "surrender" its sovereignty and argued that Qatar has historically given refuge to Islamists from the region, including Brotherhood adherents. Qatar's ample wealth has enabled it to limit the economic effects of the rift, which has also separated families and caused other social disruptions. Qatar, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia fund a wide array of U.S.-based representatives and lobbyists to support their respective positions on the intra-GCC rift.[22]

President Trump initially echoed criticism of Qatar's policies, and mediation of the rift was spearheaded by then-Secretary of State Rex Tillerson who, working with Kuwaiti leaders, conducted "shuttle diplomacy" in the region during July 2017. A U.S. envoy appointed in 2017 to work on the issue, General (retired) Anthony Zinni, resigned in 2019. In July 2019, Jordan broke with the boycotting states by restoring diplomatic relations with Qatar,[23] and the then-Prime Minister of Qatar attended the annual GCC summit during December 10-11, 2019.[24] During October 2019-January 2020, Qatar and Saudi Arabia held high-level direct talks, but Qatar's Foreign Minister stated that the talks were suspended in early January 2020.[25] Reports in July 2020 suggested that the UAE is blocking a U.S. plan to reach an agreement to reopen Saudi and Emirati air space to Qatar airways—a step toward a possible end to the rift. [26] The dispute has to date thwarted U.S. efforts to assemble a new "Middle East Strategic Alliance" (MESA)—to consist of the United States, the GCC countries, and other Sunni-led states—to counter Iran and regional terrorist groups.[27]

The intra-GCC rift had roots in and implications for the broader region:

- Qatar supported, politically and financially, the government of Muslim Brotherhood-linked figure, Muhammad Morsi, who was elected president of Egypt in 2012. The UAE and Saudi Arabia backed Morsi's ouster by Egypt's military in 2013 and have financially backed the regime of former military leader and now President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.
- In Libya, Qatar joined the United States and several GCC and other partner countries in air operations to help oust Libyan leader Muammar al-Qadhafi in

Kuwait, and Qatar. The November 2014 agreement was among all the GCC states except Oman.

[21] The list of demands can be found at "List of demands on Qatar by Saudi Arabia, other Arab nations," *Associated Press*, June 23, 2017.

[22] Various press; author conversations with a wide array of Gulf officials and experts on the Gulf. 2017-2019.

[23] "Inching Away from Saudi-UAE Axis, Jordan Restores Ties with Qatar," Al Jazeera English, July 9, 2019.

[24] GCC summit calls for unity amid hopes of easing Gulf crisis, *Al Jazeera*, December 10, 2019.

[25] Qatar says talks to end GCC crisis were suspended in January, *Al Jazeera*, February 15, 2020.

[26] "UAE said to be holding up Gulf deal that could end Qatar blockade and protect US interests in Middle East," *Fox News*, July 9, 2020.

[27] The 2017 GCC rift occurred despite the earlier resolution of a territorial dispute between the ruling families of Qatar and Bahrain dating back to the 18th century. Qatar and Bahrain referred the dispute to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 1991 after clashes in 1986 in which Qatar landed military personnel on a disputed man-made reef (Fasht al-Dibal). In March 2001, the ICJ sided with Bahrain on the central dispute over the Hawar Islands, but with Qatar on ownership of the reef and the town of Zubara in Qatar, a burial site for some members of Bahrain's ruling family. Two smaller islands, Janan and Hadd Janan, were awarded to Qatar, which accepted the ruling as binding.

2011. Subsequently, Qatar, reportedly in partnership with Turkey, has supported the U.N.-backed government in Tripoli, which has Muslim Brotherhood-linked factions supporting it. The UAE, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia support ex-military commander Khalifa Hifter, who has taken control of large parts of eastern and southern Libya and who attempted to seize control of Tripoli in 2019.[28]

- In Yemen, in 2015, Qatar joined the Saudi-led military coalition to battle Iran-backed Zaidi Shiite Houthi rebels, including deploying about 1,000 military personnel, along with armor, to guard the Saudi border from Houthi incursions. The Qatari Air Force also flew air strikes against the Houthis.[29] As a result of the intra-GCC rift, in mid-2017 Qatar withdrew from the mission.
- In Syria, Qatar provided funds and weaponry to rebels fighting the regime of President Bashar Al Asad, including those reportedly linked to the Muslim Brotherhood and which competed with anti-Asad factions supported by Saudi Arabia.[30] Qatar also claimed that its ties to Jabhat al Nusra (JAN), an Al Qaeda affiliate that was designated by the United States as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO), were instrumental in persuading the group to sever its ties to Al Qaeda in 2016, and to release its Lebanese and Western prisoners.[31]

Iran

Qatari leaders have consistently pursued dialogue with Iran to reduce regional tensions, while simultaneously cooperating with U.S. efforts to counter Iran strategically. In February 2010, as Crown Prince, Shaykh Tamim visited Iran for talks with Iranian leaders, and as Amir, he has maintained direct contact with Iran's President Hassan Rouhani.[32] Qatar withdrew its Ambassador from Tehran in January 2016 during a Saudi-Iranian rift over the Saudi execution of a dissident Shiite cleric.

Iran has helped Qatar cope with the GCC rift by exporting additional foodstuffs to Qatar and by permitting Qatar Airways to overfly its airspace. In return, Qatar Airways pays Iran over $130 million per year in overflight fees.[33] In August 2017, Qatar formally restored full diplomatic relations with Iran, and Qatar did not support the May 8, 2018, U.S. withdrawal from the 2015 multilateral Iran nuclear agreement, instead stating that efforts to "denuclearize" the region should not lead to "escalation."[34] Through mutual visits of high-ranking officials, Qatar and Iran sought to de-escalate the U.S.-Iran tensions in the Gulf in 2019.[35] Qatar and Iran have shared a large natural gas field in the Persian Gulf without incident, although some Iranian officials have occasionally accused Qatar of cheating on the arrangement.[36]

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[28] U.N. Security Council, Final Report of the Panel of Experts on Libya Established Pursuant to Resolution 1973 (2011), March 9, 2016. For information on the conflict in Libya, see CRS In Focus IF11556, *Libya and U.S. Policy*, by Christopher M. Blanchard.

[29] Author conversations with Qatar Embassy personnel, 2019.

[30] "U.S. Relies Heavily on Saudi Money to Support Syrian Rebels," *New York Times*, January 23, 2016.

[31] "Analysts: Saudi Arabia, Qatar, pushed al-Nusra Front to break with al-Qaeda," *Agencia EFE*, July 29, 2016.

[32] "Iran, Qatar Seek Improved Relations despite Differences," *Al Arabiya*, June 19, 2015.

[33] "UN aviation ruling could deny Iran hundreds of millions of dollars," *Fox News*, July 14, 2020.

[34] Qatar Foreign Ministry Statement, May 9, 2018.

[35] The Latest: Qatar trying to defuse tensions amid Iran crisis, *Fox News*, May 16, 2019.

[36] "Iran, Qatar, Face Off Over North Field, South Pars, *Oil and Gas News*," June 6-12, 2016.

Israeli-Palestinian Issues/Hamas[37]

Qatar has maintained contact with all parties in the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. In 1996, then-Amir Hamad hosted a visit by then-Prime Minister of Israel Shimon Peres and in 2000, it allowed Israel to open a formal trade office in Doha. The trade office has been closed since the 2009 Israel-Hamas conflict, but small levels of direct Israel-Qatar trade, as well as visits to Doha by Israeli security officials, athletes, doctors, and other Israelis, reportedly continue.[38]

Despite these Israel-Qatar contacts, Amir Tamim regularly accuses Israel of abuses against the Palestinians and expresses consistent support for Palestinian efforts for full United Nations membership and recognition, while at the same time backing negotiations between the Palestinians and Israel.[39] Qatar reacted to the Trump Administration's January 2020 unveiling of its Israel-Palestinian peace proposals by saying that it welcomed efforts to broker "longstanding peace," but warned that was unattainable without concessions to the Palestinians.[40]

Qatar has engaged with the Islamist group Hamas, a Muslim Brotherhood offshoot and U.S.-designated terrorist group that has exercised de facto control of the Gaza Strip since 2007. Qatari officials assert that their engagement with Hamas can help foster Israeli-Palestinian peace. Some of Hamas's top leaders have been based in Doha, and the current leader of its political bureau, Ismail Haniyeh, reportedly relocated there in 2020.[41] Much of Qatar's leverage with Hamas and Israel comes in the form of substantial financial aid it provides to the people of Gaza, which Israeli officials support as a means of promoting calm on the Israel-Gaza border.[42] Qatar's aid is provided through a "Gaza Reconstruction Committee" headed by Qatari official Mohammad Al-Emadi, who serves informally as an envoy to Israel. In March 2020, Qatar donated $10 million to the Palestinian Authority to help it cope with the COVID-19 outbreak. In June 2020, Qatar reportedly threatened to suspend the payments to Gaza if Israel proceeded with its plans to annex some West Bank areas.[43] Qatar criticized the August 13, 2020 UAE-Israeli announcement of a commitment to normalized relations as a UAE betrayal of the Palestinian cause, despite the simultaneous Israeli suspension of its annexation plans. Hamas announced on August 31, 2020, that, through Qatari mediation, a deal had been reached to avoid Israel-Hamas escalations and restore calm along the border with Israel after several weeks of high tensions.[44]

Qatar's critics assert that Hamas leaders are too often featured on Al Jazeera and that Qatar's relations with Hamas constitute support for a terrorist organization. In the 115th Congress, the Palestinian International Terrorism Support Act of 2017 (H.R. 2712), which was ordered to be reported to the full House on November 15, 2017, appeared directed at Qatar by sanctioning foreign governments determined to be providing financial or other material support to Hamas or its leaders. Versions of that bill introduced in the 116th Congress, H.R. 1850 and S. 2680 do not

[37] See CRS Report R44245, *Israel: Background and U.S. Relations in Brief*, by Jim Zanotti, and CRS Report RL34074, *The Palestinians: Background and U.S. Relations*, by Jim Zanotti

[38] "Qatar cozies up to Israel, again," *Electronic Intifada*, February 26, 2020.

[39] "Israel Doesn't Want Peace: Emir," *Qatar The Peninsula*, September 29, 2015.

[40] Qatar welcomes US Mideast peace plan, but urges changes, *AFP*, January 29, 2020.

[41] "Hamas leader Haniyeh decides to settle in Qatar – report," *Jerusalem Post*, February 2, 2020.

[42] Neville Teller, "What Do You Make of Qatar?," *The Jerusalem Post*, September 19, 2019.

[43] "Qatar to suspend Gaza payments to pressure Israel over annexation," *Axios*, June 23, 2020.

[44] "Hamas Announces Qatar-brokered Deal to Avoid Escalation with Israel," *Haaretz*, August 31, 2020.

directly reference Qatar as supporting Hamas and contain exceptions if aid to Hamas or related groups is purely humanitarian.[45] H.R. 1850 passed the House on July 23, 2019 by voice vote.

Afghanistan/Taliban Office

Seeking to contribute to a potential political solution in Afghanistan, Qatar has brokered and hosted many rounds of talks between the United States and Taliban representatives. Even though Qatar did not recognize the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan when the movement ruled during 1996-2001, it allowed the Taliban to operate a representative office in Qatar in 2013. U.S.-Taliban talks led to the May 2014, exchange of captured U.S. soldier Bowe Bergdahl for five Taliban figures who subsequently joined the Taliban office in Doha. Doha hosted the U.S.-Taliban talks that culminated in a U.S.-Taliban peace agreement that was signed in Doha on February 29, 2020. Qatar is likely to host talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban on a political solution for Afghanistan that could begin later in 2020.[46] Qatar's contacts with the Haqqani Network, a U.S.-designated Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) that is a semi-autonomous component of the Taliban, bore some fruit in a November 2019 prisoner exchange that included the release from Afghan custody of Anas Haqqani, the brother of the deputy leader of the Taliban movement—a release that might have built confidence between U.S. and Taliban negotiators.[47]

Qatari ground forces have not deployed to Afghanistan, but Qatari facilities are used in U.S. operations there. Qatar's air force has delivered cargo and provided other logistical support to the U.S.-led security operations there.

Other Qatari Relationships and Mediation Efforts

Elsewhere in the region:

- In Sudan, Qatar provided funds and promises of investment to achieve a series of agreements ("the Doha Agreements") between the government and various rebel factions. Qatar's influence in Sudan in the aftermath of the ouster of longtime President Omar Hassan Al Bashir in 2019 is uncertain, amid competition with other GCC states for influence there.
- Qatar has forged relationships with several countries in Central Asia.[48] Amir Tamim exchanged visits with the President of Turkmenistan, Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov, in 2016 and 2017. The two countries are major world gas suppliers. The leader of Tajikistan, Imamali Rahmonov, visited Doha in February 2017 to reportedly discuss Qatari investment and other joint projects. Qatar funded a large portion of a $100 million mosque in Tajikistan's capital, Dushanbe, which purports to be the largest mosque in Central Asia.

[45] "Eliot Engel Weakens Hamas Sanctions Bill After Lobbying from Qatar," *New York Post*, September 21, 2019.

[46] "Qatar likely to host start of Taliban-Afghan govt talks: minister," *Agence France Press*, July 16, 2020.

[47] "Afghan Government Releases Militants In Apparent Exchange For American, Australian Captives," *RFE/RL*, November 11, 2019.

[48] See Natalie Koch. Qatar and Central Asia, PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 484, 2017.

U.S.-Qatar Defense and Security Cooperation[49]

U.S.-Qatar defense and security relations are extensive. The two countries established a "Strategic Dialogue" that first convened in January 2018 and senior U.S. officials have praised Qatar as a longtime friend and military partner for peace and stability in the region. The U.S-Qatar defense relationship emerged after the six Gulf monarchies formed the GCC in late 1981 to back Iraq against the threat posed by Iran in the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq War. In the latter stages of that war, Iran attacked international shipping in the Gulf and some Gulf state oil loading facilities, but none in Qatar. GCC forces participated in the U.S.-led military coalition that expelled Iraq from Kuwait in February 1991, and Qatari armored forces helped defeat an Iraqi attack on the Saudi town of Khafji in January 1991. U.S.-Qatar defense relations subsequently expanded.

Qatar is a member of the U.S.-led Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS (the Islamic State organization). In 2014, Qatar flew some airstrikes in Syria against Islamic State positions. However, by the end of 2014, the coalition ceased identifying Qatar as a participant in coalition strikes inside Syria. In 2019, Qatar indicated it would join the U.S.-led maritime security mission (Operation Sentinel) intended to deter Iran from further attacks on commercial shipping in the Gulf, which includes Bahrain, UAE, and Saudi Arabia.[50] There has been no announcement, to date, of Qatar's participation in that mission, which began operations in late 2019.

Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA)

The United States and Qatar signed a formal DCA on June 23, 1992, and it was renewed for 10 years, reportedly with some modifications, in December 2013. The text of the pact is classified, but it reportedly addresses U.S. military access to Qatari military facilities, prepositioning of U.S. armor and other military equipment, and U.S. training of Qatar's military forces.[51] More than 8,000 U.S. military personnel are deployed at the various facilities in Qatar, including Al Udeid Air Base, discussed further below.[52]

The DCA also reportedly addresses U.S. training of Qatar's military. Qatar's force of about 16,500 is the smallest in the region except for Bahrain. Of that force, about 12,000 are ground forces, 2,500 are naval forces, and 2,000 are air forces. Qatar has sought to compensate for the small size of its force with purchases of advanced weaponry such as U.S.-made combat aircraft and German-made Leopard tanks,[53] as discussed further below.

Al Udeid Air Base (Air Force/CENTCOM)[54]

Most of the U.S. military personnel in Qatar are U.S. Air Force personnel based at the large Al Udeid air base southwest of Doha.[55] Al Udeid Base also hosts the forward headquarters for CENTCOM. U.S. personnel deployed to Qatar participate in U.S. operations such as Operation

[49] Much of this section is derived from: Department of State, U.S. Security Cooperation With Qatar, March 20, 2020.

[50] Qatar, Kuwait told U.S. they will join naval coalition, official says. *Reuters,* November 25, 2019.

[51] U.S. Library of Congress. Country Studies: Persian Gulf States. Some provisions of DCA's with other GCC states are discussed in Sami Hajjar, *U.S. Military Presence in the Gulf: Challenges and Prospects* (U.S. Army War College: Strategic Studies Institute), March 2002, p. 27.

[52] State Department, Coordinator for Counterterrorism Ambassador Nathan A. Sales Travels to Qatar, August 12, 2020.

[53] "Qatar is now one of the most well-equipped military forces in the Middle East," *Army Recognition*, July 20, 2020.

[54] Department of State, Joint Statement of the Inaugural United States-Qatar Strategic Dialogue, January 30, 2018.

[55] "Biggest U.S. Base in Middle East is Getting Bigger," *Washington Post*, August 24, 2019.

Inherent Resolve (OIR) against the Islamic State organization and Operation Freedom's Sentinel in Afghanistan, and they provide a substantial capability against Iran. In conjunction with U.S.-Iran tensions since mid-2019, the United States deployed F-22 combat aircraft to Al Udeid.

The U.S.-Qatar Strategic Dialogue has produced agreements to expand defense and security cooperation, including the possibility of "permanent" U.S. basing there, centered on the expansion and improvements of Al Udeid over the next two decades. In January 2019, during the second U.S.-Qatar Strategic Dialogue, the Qatar Ministry of Defense and the U.S. Department of Defense signed a memorandum of understanding that DOD referred to as a "positive step towards the eventual formalization of Qatar's commitment to support sustainment costs and future infrastructure costs at [Al Udeid Air Base]."[56] Al Udeid has been steadily expanded and enhanced with Qatari funding (over $8 billion to support U.S. and coalition operations at Al Udeid since 2002) and about $500 million in U.S. military construction funding since 2003.[57] Qatar reportedly is providing another $1.8 billion for the Al Udeid expansion plan.[58] In March 2018, the State Department approved the sale to Qatar of equipment, with an estimated value of about $200 million, to upgrade its Air Operation Center.

As Saliyah Facility (Army) and Hamad Port

The U.S. Army component of U.S. Central Command prepositions armor (enough to outfit one brigade) at Camp As Sayliyah outside Doha. U.S. armor stationed in Qatar was deployed in Operation Iraqi Freedom that removed Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq in 2003. Because the ground force threat to the Gulf from Iraq has largely ended since the 2003 Iraq war, it is likely that the Defense Department will de-emphasize prepositioning armor in Qatar. Qatar has been expanding the Hamad Port to be able to potentially accommodate larger U.S. Navy operations.[59]

U.S. Arms Sales to Qatar

Over the past two decades, Qatar has shifted its weaponry mix more toward U.S.-made equipment.[60] According to the State Department military cooperation factsheet cited above, the United States has $25 billion dollars in active government-to-government sales cases with Qatar under the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) system, and, since 2014, the United States has authorized the permanent export of over $2.8 billion in defense articles to Qatar via the Direct Commercial Sales (DCS) process. Qatar has a 100% favorable rate on Blue Lantern end use monitoring (EUM) checks for direct commercial sales and a "satisfactory" rating for the FMS Golden Sentry EUM monitoring program.

- **Tanks.** Qatar fields 30 French-made AMX-30s main battle tanks and, since 2016, Germany has delivered 62 "Leopard 2" tanks to Qatar. Qatar has not purchased U.S.-made tanks, to date.
- **Combat Aircraft.** On November 17, 2016, based on a Qatari request in 2013, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) notified Congress of the potential

[56] Department of Defense, "U.S. and Qatar sign MoU Reaffirming Qatar's Commitment to Supporting U.S. Military Activities at Al Udeid Air Base."

[57] Figures compiled by CRS.

[58] "Biggest U.S. Base in Middle East is Getting Bigger," op. cit.

[59] Qatar Defense Attache in Washington, DC, press release, July 24, 2018.

[60] Information on Qatar's existing military forces and equipment is derived from The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). "The Military Balance: The Middle East and North Africa."

sale to Qatar of up to 72 U.S.-made F-15s, with an estimated value of $21 billion.[61] The approval came after an evaluation of the sale with respect to the U.S. legal requirement to preserve Israel's "Qualitative Military Edge" (QME).[62] During June-December 2017, the United States and Qatar signed agreements for Qatar to purchase of all 72 of them, with deliveries to be completed by 2023. Qatar signed a $7 billion agreement in May 2015 to buy 24 French-made Rafale aircraft,[63] and deliveries began in early 2019. In September 2017, Qatar signed a "Statement of Intent" with the United Kingdom to purchase 24 Typhoon combat aircraft.

- **Attack Helicopters**. In 2012, the United States sold Qatar AH-64 Apache, UH-60 M Blackhawk, and MH-60 helicopters, with an estimated value of about $6.6 billion. On April 9, 2018, DSCA announced that the State Department had approved a sale to Qatar of 5,000 Advanced Precision Kill Weapons Systems II Guidance Sections for use on the Apaches, with an estimated value of $300 million. On May 9, 2019, DSCA notified Congress of a possible sale of another 24 AH-64E Apaches to help Qatar defend its oil and gas platforms, at an estimated cost of $3 billion. S.J.Res. 26 was introduced on May 14, 2019, to prohibit the sale but, after the Administration stated an intent to veto the bill, a motion to discharge the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations from further consideration of the bill failed 42-57.
- **Short-Range Missile and Rocket Systems.** During 2012-2016, the United States sold Qatar Hellfire air-to-ground missiles, Javelin guided missiles, the M142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS), the Army Tactical Missile System (ATACMS), and the M31A1 Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System (GMLRS). The total value of the sales was about $665 million. On April 22, 2016, DSCA notified to Congress a potential sale to Qatar of 252 RIM-116C Rolling Airframe Tactical Missiles and 2 RIM 116C-2 Rolling Airframe Telemetry Missiles, at an estimated cost of $260 million.[64] The July 9, 2019 joint Trump-Tamim statement said that Qatar had recommitted to a 2018 agreement to buy 40 National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems (NASAM) at an estimated value of $215 million. On July 10, 2019, Raytheon announced that Qatar will be the first country to purchases its Advanced Medium Range Air-to-Air Missile – Extended Range (AMRAAM-ER) weapon.[65]
- **Ballistic Missiles.** At its national day parade in December 2017, the Qatari military displayed a newly-purchased SY400-BP-12A ballistic missile, which has a 120-mile range and is considered suited to a surface attack mission. [66]

[61] DSCA Transmittal Number 16-58. The FY2016 National Defense Authorization Act (Section 1278 of P.L. 114-92) required a DOD briefing for Congress on the sale, including its effect on Israel's QME.

[62] For information on the QME requirement, see CRS Report RL33222, *U.S. Foreign Aid to Israel*, by Jeremy M. Sharp

[63] Tom Hussain. "Is France Positioning Itself for Lead Role in Persian Gulf?" McClatchy, May 1, 2015; "Senators Begin Push for Jet Sales to Kuwait, Qatar," Defense News, January 22, 2016.

[64] Defense Security Cooperation Agency, Transmittal Number 16-07.

[65] Jane's Defence Weekly, July 11, 2019.

[66] "Why is Qatar Showing Off its New Short-Range Ballistic Missile Arsenal?" *Al Arabiya English*, December 20, 2017.

- **Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD).** Qatar has purchased various U.S.-made BMD systems, consistent with U.S. efforts to promote a coordinated Gulf missile defense capability against Iran's missile arsenal. In 2012, the United States sold Qatar Patriot Configuration 3 (PAC-3, made by Raytheon) fire units and missiles at an estimated value of nearly $10 billion. Also that year, the United States agreed to sell Qatar the Terminal High Altitude Area Air Defense (THAAD), the most sophisticated ground-based missile defense system the United States has made available for sale.[67] No THAAD purchase has been finalized.
- **Naval Vessels.** In 2016, DSCA transmitted a proposed sale to Qatar of an unspecified number of U.S.-made Mk-V fast patrol boats, along with other equipment, with a total estimated value of about $124 million. In August 2017, Qatar finalized a purchase from Italy of four multirole corvette ships, two fast patrol missile ships, and an amphibious logistics ship, estimated at $5 billion.[68]

Other Defense Partnerships

Qatar has developed defense relations with several other partners.

- Qatar established relations with NATO under the "Istanbul Cooperation Initiative" (ICI). Qatar's Ambassador to Belgium serves as the interlocutor with NATO, the headquarters of which is based near Brussels. In June 2018, Qatar's Defense Minister said that his country's long-term "ambition" is to join NATO.[69]
- *France*. Qatar has historically bought most of its major combat systems from France. In March 2019, France and Qatar signed agreements on defense information exchange, cooperation to combat cybercrime, and culture and education.[70]
- *Turkey*. Turkey has helped Qatar cope with the intra-GCC rift by increasing food exports to Qatar. Turkey also added more than 1,500 troops to its Tariq bin Ziyad base in Qatar, which was established in 2014, and it opened a second military base in Qatar in September 2019.[71] In part because Turkey, like Qatar, views Muslim Brotherhood-linked groups as positive forces in the region, one of the "13 demands" of the Saudi-led bloc has been that Qatar close the Turkish bases.
- *Russia.* Since 2016, Qatar has broadened its relationship with Russia, including with several visits to Russia by Amir Tamim, apparently in recognition of Russia's heightened role in the region. One of Qatar's sovereign wealth funds has increased its investments in Russia, particularly in the Rosneft energy firm, and Qatar Airways has bought a 25% stake in a Moscow's airport. Qatar is reportedly considering buying the S-400 sophisticated air defense system,[72] but U.S. opposition and the potential for U.S. sanctions for the sale apparently has

[67] Defense Security Cooperation Agency announcement, November 5, 2012, http://www.dsca.mil/major-arms-sales/qatar-terminal-high-altitude-area-defense-thaad.

[68] "Qatar's EUR5 Billion Naval Deal with Italy Sees Three Ship Types to Be Delivered," *IHS Jane's Navy International*, June 17, 2016.

[69] AFP, June 6, 2018.

[70] Xinhua, March 28, 2019.

[71] Turkey expands its military base and influence in Qatar, *The New Arab*, September 10, 2019.

[72] "Qatar still studying Russian defense system, minister says," *Reuters*, March 4, 2019.

contributed to Qatar's lack of movement to complete the purchase. Section 231 of the Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act (CAATSA, P.L. 115-44) sanctions persons or entities that conduct transactions with Russia's defense or intelligence sector.

Counter-terrorism Cooperation[73]

According to the State Department report on international terrorism for 2019, released in June 2020:

> The United States and Qatar continued to increase CT [counter-terrorism] cooperation in 2019, building on progress made after the U.S. Secretary of State and Qatari Foreign Minister signed a CT MOU [memorandum of understanding] in July 2017. At the U.S.-Qatar Counterterrorism Dialogue in November 2019, the two governments declared their fulfillment of the MOU largely complete and committed to set shared priorities for 2020.

The State Department report adds that

> U.S. technical assistance to Qatari law enforcement and judicial agencies increased during 2019." The U.S. Departments of Justice, State, and the Treasury, as well as the FBI, led or participated in several capacity-building initiatives involving [the Ministry of Interior, the Central Bank, and several other Qatari agencies]. A Department of Justice resident legal advisor has been stationed in Qatar since April 2018, providing technical assistance to Qatar's CT efforts and building prosecutorial capacity. In November 2018, Qatar began using its own funds to pay for a three-year U.S. Department of State Anti-Terrorism Assistance (ATA) training program, including training pertinent to Qatar's preparations to host the FIFA World Cup in 2022; the primary recipients are [Ministry of Interior and Internal Security Force] officers.

However, U.S. and Qatari officials sometimes differ over the threat posed to the region by some groups, such as Hamas. In an effort to implement the U.S.-Qatar MoU, in 2018, the Qatar Ministry of Interior issued list of 19 individuals and eight entities that it considers as "terrorists." The list includes 10 persons who are also are also named as terrorists by Saudi Arabia and the UAE. At least one high-ranking Qatari official provided support to Al Qaeda figures residing in or transiting Qatar, including suspected September 11, 2001, attacks mastermind Khalid Shaykh Mohammad.[74] None of the September 11 hijackers was a Qatari national. There were no terrorist incidents in Qatar in 2019 or thus far in 2020.

Terrorism Financing Issues

The State Department report states that Qatar is taking steps to prevent terrorism financing and the movement of suspected terrorists into or through Qatar. According to the report: "The Qatari government passed a new AML/CFT [anti-money laundering/countering the financing of terrorism] law in 2019 and sought feedback from the International Monetary Fund and the U.S. government during the drafting process. Qatar continued to maintain restrictions, imposed in 2017, on the overseas activities of Qatari charities, requiring all such activity to be conducted through one of two approved charities in an effort to better monitor charitable giving for terrorist financing abuse." The State Department announced on August 12, 2020 that the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, Ambassador Nathan Sales, met in Doha with Qatar's Attorney General and

[73] Much of the information in this section is taken from: Department of State, Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, "Country Reports on Terrorism: 2019," released June 2020.

[74] Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States.

other senior government officials to discuss Qatar's role as a partner in combating the financing of terrorism, including implementation of its new AML/CFT legislation.[75]

The country is a member of the Middle East North Africa Financial Action Task Force (MENAFATF), a regional financial action task force that coordinates efforts combatting money laundering and terrorism financing. In February 2017, Qatar hosted a meeting of the "Egmont Group" consisting of 152 country Financial Intelligence Units. Qatar is also a member of the Terrorist Financing Targeting Center (TFTC), a U.S.-GCC initiative announced in May 2017 and Qatar joined the United States and other TFTC countries in designating terrorists affiliated with Al Qaeda and IS later in 2017,

Countering Violent Extremism

According to the State Department report on terrorism: "Qatar has made significant strides in addressing state-sourced internal and external support for educational and religious content espousing intolerance, discrimination, sectarianism, and violence, although examples are still found in textbooks and disseminated through satellite television and other media." Qatar has hosted workshops and participated in regional meetings on the issue.

Economic Issues amid COVID-19 and the GCC Rift

Qatar has been wrestling with a decline in world energy prices since mid-2014, and the economic effects of the intra-GCC rift and the COVID-19 pandemic. As of mid-August 2020, Qatar has reported about 115,000 COVID-19 cases and 190 deaths from the disease. Qatar's 2020 budget, announced in December 2019, anticipated a surplus of about $1.2 billion,[76] but the economic effects of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 are expected to put the country's budget into deficit. As a public health crisis, observers have noted that the infection spread most rapidly among Qatar's expatriate labor population that often live in crowded conditions.[77]

Large oil and gas reserves and its small citizen population have combined to make Qatar the country with the world's highest per capita income. Oil and gas still account for over 90% of Qatar's export earnings, and over half of government revenues. Proven oil reserves of about 25 billion barrels enable Qatar to continue its current levels of oil production (about 700,000 barrels per day) for over 50 years. Its proven reserves of natural gas are about 13% of the world's total and it is the second largest exporter of natural gas in the world.[78] In 2018, Qatar withdrew from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in order to focus on its more high-priority natural gas exports. Qatar is the source of the gas supplies for the Dolphin Gas Project established by the UAE in 1999 and which became operational in 2007. The project involves production and processing of natural gas from Qatar's offshore North Field, which is connected to Iran's South Pars Field (see **Figure 2**), and transportation of the processed gas by subsea pipeline to the UAE and Oman.[79] Qatar has not reduced its gas supplies to the other GCC states as retaliation for the blockade.

[75] Department of State, "Coordinator for Counterterrorism Ambassador Nathan A. Sales Travels to Qatar," August 12, 2020.

[76] Qatar Announces 2020 Budget, its Biggest in Five Years, Al Jazeera, December 19, 2019.

[77] "Coronavirus spreads "exponentially" in Qatar's labor camps," *CBS News*, March 15, 2020.

[78] CIA, *The World Factbook*.

[79] Dolphin Energy website, http://www.dolphinenergy.com/en/6/about-dolphin-energy/about-us.

Qatar's main sovereign wealth fund, run by the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA), as well as funds held by the Central Bank, total about $350 billion, according to Qatar's Central Bank, giving the country a substantial cushion to weather financial demands.[80] The joint statement of the January 2018 U.S.-Qatar Strategic Dialogue "recognized" QIA's commitment of $45 billion in future investments in U.S. companies and real estate.

About 40% of Qatar's food was imported from Saudi Arabia pre-crisis, and there were reports of runs on stocks of food when the blockade began. The government's ample financial resources enabled it to procure similar goods from Turkey, Iran, and India. The effects of the rift on Qatar's international air carrier, Qatar Airways, have been significant because of the prohibition on its overflying the blockading states. In July 2020, the International Court of Justice decided in Qatar's favor on its complaint that the denial of air overflight rights is a violation of international civil aviation conventions.[81] Some economic data is presented in **Figure 1**.

U.S.-Qatar Economic Relations

In contrast to the two least wealthy GCC states (Bahrain and Oman), which have free trade agreements (FTAs) with the United States, Qatar and the United States have not negotiated an FTA. However, in April 2004, the United States and Qatar signed a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA). Qatar has used the benefits of the more limited agreement to undertake large investments in the United States, including the City Center project in Washington, DC. Also, several U.S. universities and other institutions, such as Cornell University, Carnegie Mellon University, Georgetown University, Brookings Institution, and Rand Corporation, have established branches and offices at the Qatar Foundation's Education City outside Doha.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's "Foreign Trade Statistics" compilation, in 2019, U.S. exports to Qatar were about $6.5 billion, and U.S. imports from Qatar were about $1.7 billion. U.S. exports to Qatar consist mainly of aircraft, machinery, and information technology. U.S. imports from Qatar consist mainly of petroleum products, but U.S. imports of Qatar's crude oil or natural gas have declined to negligible levels in recent years, reflecting the significant increase in U.S. domestic production. State-run Qatar Petroleum is a major investor in the emerging U.S. LNG export market.[82] The White House statement after the meeting between President Trump and Amir Tamim on July 9, 2019 stated that the Chevron-Phillips Chemical Company and Qatar Petroleum had agree to develop a petrochemical complex in Qatar. Qatar's airline, Qatar Airways, has been a major buyer of U.S. commercial aircraft, although the status of additional planned purchases of U.S. aircraft is unclear in light of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on air travel.[83]

Some U.S. airlines have challenged Qatar Airways' benefits under a U.S.-Qatar "open skies" agreement. The U.S. carriers assert that the airline's privileges under that agreement should be revoked because the airline's aircraft purchases are subsidized by Qatar's government, giving it an unfair competitive advantage.[84] The United States and Qatar reached a set of "understandings" on civil aviation on January 29, 2018, committing Qatar Airways to financial transparency and

[80] "Qatar Has $340 Billion in Reserves, Can Withstand 'Any Kind of Shock,' Central Bank Says," *Istanbul Sabah Online*, July 10, 2017.

[81] Press release, Qatar Airways Statement on Judgment of the International Court of Justice, July 15, 2020.

[82] Adam Schreck, "AP Interview: Qatar Energy Minister Wants 'Fair' Oil Price," *Associated Press*, May 24, 2016.

[83] The White House announced after the July 9 Trump-Tamim meeting that Qatar Airways would buy (1) five Boeing 777 Freighters; (2) large-cabin aircraft from Gulfstream; and (3) GE jet engines and services to power its 787 and 777 aircraft. White House, U.S.-Qatar Joint Statement, July 9, 2019.

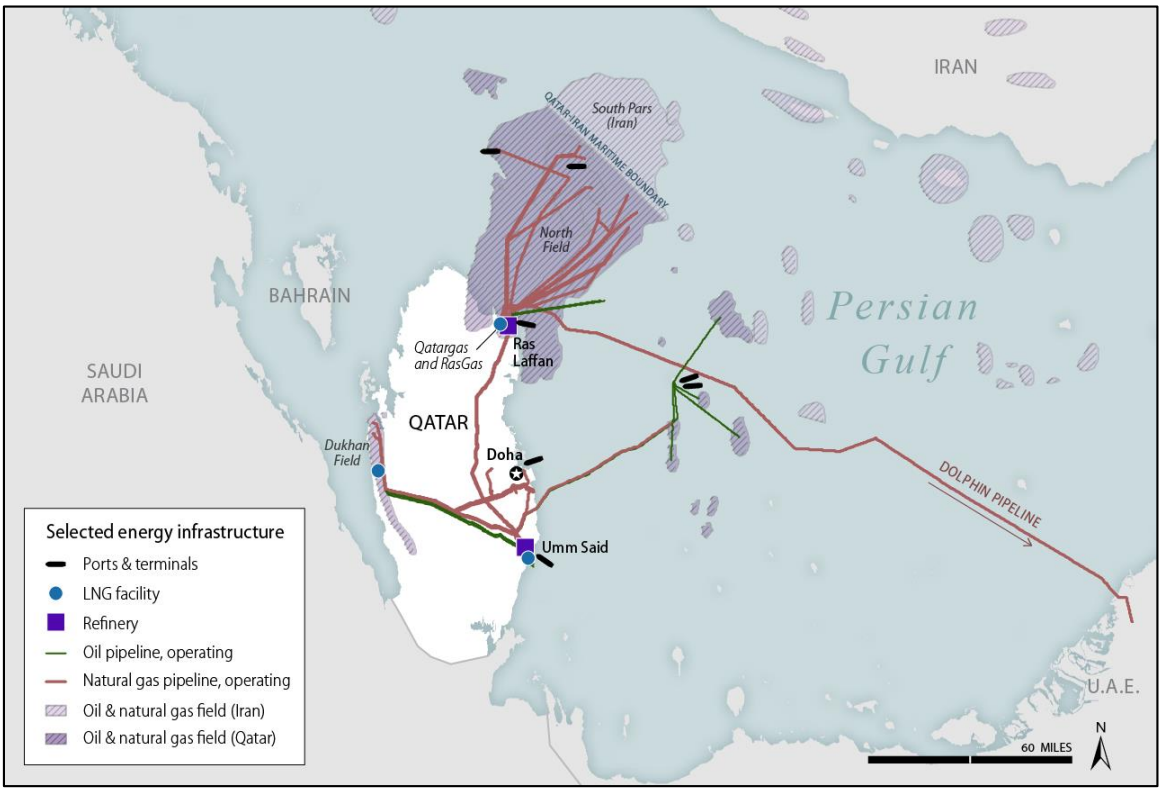
[84] "Open Skies Dispute Between US and Gulf Airlines Escalates," *UAE the National*, January 30, 2016.

containing some limitations on the airline's ability to pick up passengers in Europe for flights to the United States. Some assert that Qatar Airway's 2018 purchase of Air Italy might represent a violation of those limitations.

U.S. Assistance

Qatar, one of the wealthiest states in the world on a per capita gross domestic product (GDP) basis, receives virtually no U.S. military assistance. At times, small amounts of U.S. aid have been provided to help Qatar develop capabilities to prevent smuggling of arms and narcotics, and the movement of terrorists or proliferation-related gear into Qatar or around its waterways. In FY2016, the United States spent about $100,000 on programs in Qatar, about two-thirds of which was for counter-narcotics programming. In FY2017, the United States provided a total of $78,000 in aid to Qatar, of which $53,000 was for programs to support Qatar's counter-narcotics capabilities. The remainder was for maternal and other health programs. Virtually no U.S. aid of any kind was provided for Qatar programs in FY2018, the last fiscal year for which precise data is available.

Figure 2. Map of Qatari Energy Resources and Select Infrastructure



Source: U.S. Energy Information Agency, as adapted by CRS.

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