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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 sought a resolution of the dispute, in part because the rift was 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. On January 5, 2021, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt agreed to lift the blockade, and Qatar agreed to drop its pursuit of legal cases against those countries in international organizations.

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, which has been used extensively in the U.S. operation to evacuate U.S. personnel and Afghan allies from Afghanistan in August 2021. 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 early April, Qatar has reported about 178,000 infections and 290 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 Greta Holtz, appointed to that post on June 14, 2020.

Table 1. Senior Leaders of Qatar

Position	Leader
Amir (ruler) and Minister of Defense	Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani (since 2013)
Deputy Amir and Crown Prince (heir apparent)	Abdullah bin Hamad Al Thani (since 2014)
Prime Minister and Minister of Interior	Khalid bin Khalifa bin Abdulaziz Al Thani (since 2020)
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defense Affairs	Khalid bin Mohamed Al Attiyah (since 2017)
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs	Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani (since 2017)
Minister of Finance	Ali Sharif al-Imadi (since 2013)
President of the Shura Council	Ahmad bin Abdallah bin Zaid Al Mahmoud (since 2017)
Ambassador to the United States	Mishal bin Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani (since 2017)

Source: Qatari Government Websites.

[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:* 0.6% *GDP Growth Rate*: 1.5% in 2019; -3% in 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 World Factbook, Economist Intelligence Unit Country Report: Qatar; World Bank; http://www.statista.com.

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 is 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 authorities prohibit politically oriented associations. 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 *Majlis* would be able 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). In October 2019, the Amir ordered the establishment of a committee, chaired by the Prime Minister, to organize the first Council elections.[4] In November 2020, the Amir announced the first Advisory Council elections will take place in October 2021. An election law adopted in early August 2021 to govern the upcoming Advisory Council elections requires voters to be above 18 years old, be "original" Qataris, be born in Qatar, and have Qatari grandfathers. That definition excludes from voting many members of the Al Murrah tribe, which is nomadic, and many of whom do not have Qatari citizenship. Several hundred Al Murrah protested the election law on August 9.[5]

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 was lower than expected; roughly 1 in 13 Qatari adults cast ballots.[6]

Human Rights Issues[7]

The State Department human rights report for 2020 identifies the most significant human rights problems in Qatar as

[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] "Protests in Doha: The Qatari Citizenship Is Not Enough for Voting," *Al Bawaba*, August 10, 2021.

[6] Justin Gengler, "Qatar's first elections since 2017 reveal unexpected impact of GCC crisis," Al Monitor, April 24, 2019.

[7] Much of the information in this section is based on U.S. Department of State, *2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Qatar*, March 30, 2021.

> restrictions on free expression, including criminalization of libel; restrictions on peaceful assembly and freedom of association, including prohibitions on political parties and labor unions; restrictions on migrant workers' freedom of movement; limits on the ability of citizens to choose their government in free and fair elections; lack of investigation of and accountability for violence against women; criminalization of consensual same-sex sexual conduct; 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 Amir's mother, Shaykha Moza. Among the NHRC's functions is to monitor the situation of about 1,000-2,000 stateless residents ("*bidoons*"),[8] 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.

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 2020 State Department human rights report, the government owns and partially funds the Al Jazeera Media Network, which has evolved since its establishment in the mid-1990s into a global media organization. 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.[12] 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.[13] 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).[14]

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

[9] Amnesty International, "Qatar: Repressive new law further curbs freedom of expression," 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] See, e.g., "Renewed Calls for Qatar to Address Treatment of Migrant Workers," Al Jazeera, September 19, 2019.

[12] U.S. Department of State, *2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Qatar*, March 30, 2021.

[13] Jared Malsin, "In the Eye of the Storm: Can Al Jazeera Survive the Gulf Crisis?" *Time*, August 21, 2017.

[14] Office of Senator Tom Cotton, "Lawmakers Seek FARA Evaluation of Qatari-owned Al Jazeera," 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 a 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. 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 during 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 Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Women's Rights

According to the State Department, social and legal discrimination against women continues, despite the constitutional assertion of equality.[15] The World Economic Forum ranks Qatar 142nd out of 156 countries for achieving gender parity across economic, political, social and health measures.[16] The application of Islamic law, which is not gender-neutral on marriage, divorce, child custody and guardianship, and inheritance, as well as a lack of laws against domestic violence, contribute to this gender inequality.[17] Laws prevent women from passing citizenship to their children, though a 2018 permanent residency law has created a mechanism for children born to Qatari women married to non-Qatari men to access government health and education. Guardianship laws require women to obtain permission from their male guardians to travel alone before the age of 25 if they are unmarried, as well as "to marry, obtain a government scholarship to pursue higher education, work in many government jobs, and obtain some reproductive health care."[18]

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. Qatar's constitution recognizes the right of women to vote and hold office, and two women have been elected at the municipal council level. In November 2017, the Amir appointed four women to the *Majlis As-Shura* for the first time in the body's history.[19] 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).[20]

Trafficking in Persons and Labor Issues[21]

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.[22]

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 anti-union discrimination or provide for reinstatement of workers fired for

[15] U.S. Department of State, *2020 Country Report on Human Rights: Qatar*, March 2021.

[16] World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2021*, March 30, 2021.

[17] CRS Report R46423, *Women in the Middle East and North Africa: Issues for Congress*, by Zoe Danon and Sarah R. Collins.

[18] Human Rights Watch, *"Everything I Have to Do is Tied to a Man": Women and Qatar's Male Guardianship Rules*, March 29, 2021.

[19] Inter-Parliamentary Union, "IPU welcomes appointment of four women to Qatar's Parliament," November 13, 2017.

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

[21] This section is based on the U.S. Department of State, *2020 Trafficking in Persons Report*, June 25, 2020.

[22] U.S. Embassy in Qatar, "Joint Statement of the Inaugural United States-Qatar Strategic Dialogue," media note, January 30, 2018.

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 of 1,000 Qatari riyals ($275) 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 from September 2019 alleged that workers sometimes are not paid for work and adequate dispute resolution mechanisms are lacking.[23] 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. The State Department reported that during the initial outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, "the government gave the private sector the right to alter employee contracts without legal liability due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Companies forced workers to take a combination of unpaid leave, decreased salaries, or premature contract terminations, negatively affecting tens of thousands of workers." The government also instructed directed state employers to "reduce monthly costs for non-Qatari employees by 30%, by either cutting salaries or laying off workers with a two-month notice."[24] Some studies suggested that crowded conditions for expatriate laborers in Qatar fueled a relatively high per capita infection rate from COVID-19 in the spring of 2020.[25]

Religious Freedom[26]

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."

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

[24] U.S. Department of State, *2020 Country Report on Human Rights: Qatar*, March 2021, p. 24.

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

[26] This section draws from the U.S. Department of State, *2019 Report on International Religious Freedom*, June 10, 2020.

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.[27]

Qatar and the Intra-GCC Dispute

A consistent source of friction within the GCC has been Qatar's relationship with 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. 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.[28] The differences erupted again in June 2017 when Saudi Arabia, the UAE, 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.[29] 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.

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,[30] and the then-Prime Minister of Qatar attended the annual GCC summit during December 10-11, 2019.[31] 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.[32]

At the 41st GCC summit in Al-Ula on January 5, 2021, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the UAE, and Egypt announced that they would be restoring diplomatic relations with Qatar, while Qatar agreed to drop its pursuit of legal cases against those countries in international organizations. The Al-Ula Declaration does not make direct reference to the 13 demands originally articulated in June 2017,

[27] U.S. Embassy in Qatar, "Joint Statement of the Third U.S.-Qatar Strategic Dialogue," media note, September 18, 2020.

[28] Cable News Network released the text of the November 2013 agreement, which was signed between Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Qatar. The November 2014 agreement was among all the GCC states except Oman.

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

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

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

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

but rather to restoring "collaboration among all Member States" and strengthening "the bonds of brotherhood among them."[33] Direct flights between Doha and Riyadh resumed on January 11, and flights between Qatar and the other blockading nations resumed on January 18.[34] A senior UAE official visited Qatar on August 26, the first such visit in over four years, to discuss "bilateral relations and ways to further develop cooperation between the two countries, especially in the economic and trade fields and vital investment projects."[35] Analysts expect the normalization between GCC countries to boost Qatar's tourism sector, improve attendance at the 2022 World Cup in Doha, and improve economic cooperation in the region more generally.[36] It is not clear whether the Biden Administration will continue the Trump Administration'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.

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 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 Haftar, who has taken control of large parts of eastern and northern Libya and who attempted to seize control of Tripoli in 2019.[37]
- 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.[38] 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.[39] Qatar also claimed that its ties to Jabhat al Nusra (JAN), an Al Qaeda

[33] Tuqa Khalid, "Full transcript of AlUla GCC Summit Declaration: Bolstering Gulf unity," *Al Arabiya*, January 6, 2021; Sultan Barakat, "Qatar-GCC agreement: A victory for measured diplomacy," opinion, *Al Jazeera*, January 8, 2021.

[34] Isabel Debre, "Qatar-Saudi Arabia direct flights resume amid Gulf detente," AP News, January 11, 2021; Egypt, UAE resume first Qatar flights after blockade," *Al Jazeera*, January 18, 2021.

[35] "Emir of Qatar receives delegation led by Tahnoun bin Zayed," Emirates News Agency, August 26, 2021.

[36] Davide Barbuscia and Saeed Azhar, "Gulf economy gets a boost from healing of Saudi-Qatar rift," *Reuters*, January 5, 2021; Aarti Nagraj, "AlUla agreement: What does resetting ties with Qatar mean for the GCC region?" Gulf Business, February 11, 2021.

[37] 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.

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

[39] Anand Gopal and Jeremy Hodge, *Social Networks, Class, and the Syrian Proxy War*, International Security Report,

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.[40]

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.[41] Qatar withdrew its Ambassador from Tehran in January 2016 during a Saudi-Iranian rift over the Saudi execution of a dissident Shiite cleric.

Iran 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 has paid Iran over $130 million per year in overflight fees.[42] 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."[43] Through mutual visits of high-ranking officials, Qatar and Iran sought to de-escalate the U.S.-Iran tensions in the Gulf in 2019.[44] 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.[45]

Israeli-Palestinian Issues/Hamas[46]

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.[47]

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.[48] Qatar reacted to the Trump Administration's January 2020 unveiling of

New America, April 6, 2021.

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

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

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

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

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

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

[46] 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.

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

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

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.[49]

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.[50] 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.[51] 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.[52] 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.[53] 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.[54]

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 did not directly reference Qatar as supporting Hamas and contained exceptions if aid to Hamas or related groups is purely humanitarian.[55] H.R. 1850 passed the House on July 23, 2019, by voice vote. The act has been reintroduced in the 117th Congress (H.R. 261).

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 open 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 has hosted several rounds of talks between the Afghan

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

[50] Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Press Conference of His Excellency Minister of Foreign Affairs in Paris," June 12, 2017.

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

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

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

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

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

government and the Taliban on a political solution for Afghanistan since September 2020.[56] 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.[57]

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. Following the fall of Kabul to the Taliban in mid-August 2021, Qatar has worked closely with the United States to assist in the evacuations of U.S. and Afghan citizens from Kabul. A Qatari diplomat to Afghanistan was reportedly escorting small groups of Americans into the Kabul airport for evacuation.[58] Following a meeting in Washington on August 19, Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin "offered deep gratitude to Minister Al-Attiyah for Qatar's help in facilitating the transit of U.S. citizens and Embassy Kabul personnel out of Afghanistan through Qatar."[59]

By August 26, over 40,000 evacuees had been processed through Qatar's Al Udeid air base, many bound for the United States or a third country. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, all evacuees who do not immediately transit have been provided a PCR test for COVID-19, a COVID-19 vaccine (if requested), transportation, temporary accommodation, health care, meals, and basic necessities.[60] Reports from the first week of evacuations found that evacuees were facing unsanitary and crowded conditions at Al Udeid. DOD and Department of State officials told news outlets that they were working to reduce bottlenecks and deploy extra staff to alleviate the "dire conditions" at Al Udeid; as of August 24, the situation was "improving" but still overwhelmed by the number of arrivals.[61]

Security screening processes at Al Udeid have detected at least one Afghan evacuee with potential ties to ISIS, and at least 100 others have been flagged through the biometric system intended to identify individuals with potential matches to intelligence agency watch lists. In most of those cases, the individuals were ultimately cleared by follow-on screening.[62]

Doha has remained a locus of negotiations between parties to the conflict. U.S. military commanders have met face-to-face with Taliban leaders in Doha to negotiate evacuation efforts,[63]

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[56] Mjuab Mashal, "Afghanistan Peace Talks Open in Qatar, Seeking End to Decades of War," *New York Times*, September 12, 2020. See also CRS Report R45122, *Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy: In Brief*, by Clayton Thomas.

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

[58] "Biden says safe zone around Kabul airport to expand, as Pentagon enlists commercial airlines to aid evacuations," *Washington Post*, August 22, 2021.

[59] Department of Defense, "Readout of Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin's Meeting with Qatar Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defense Affairs, His Excellency Dr. Khalid bin Mohammed Al-Attiyah," press release, August 19, 2021.

[60] Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Qatar Evacuates More than 40,000 people Safely Out of Kabul," press release, August 26, 2021.

[61] Jordan Williams, "Afghan refugees living in 'dire conditions' at US air base: report," The Hill, August 24, 2021.

[62] Tara Copp, "Kabul Evacuee With Potential ISIS Ties Detained at Qatar Base," *Defense One*, August 24, 2021.

[63] Eric Schmitt, "The top U.S. officer in Afghanistan talks with the Taliban almost every day," *The New York Times*, August 23, 2021.

as have European diplomats.[64] Qatari officials also have attempted to use their diplomatic relations with the Taliban to pressure the group to respect rights and protect civilians, and to achieve a comprehensive political settlement and peaceful transfer of power.[65] Calls from Qatari officials for the Taliban to adopt a ceasefire went unheeded as recently as August 14.[66] The head of the Taliban's political office, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, whom many expect to play a leadership role in a future Taliban-led government, returned to Afghanistan on August 17 from his residence in Qatar.[67]

Other Qatari Relationships and Mediation Efforts

Elsewhere in the region

- Reports in March 2021 suggest that Qatar, along with Turkey and Russia, have launched a new trilateral consultation process to reach a political settlement to the Syrian civil war, in line with U.N. resolutions, as well as to discuss mechanisms to deliver humanitarian aid.[68]
- In Sudan, Qatar provided funds and promises of investment to achieve a series of agreements between the government and various rebel factions in Darfur.[69] 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.[70] 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.

U.S.-Qatar Defense and Security Cooperation[71]

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

[64] "Afghans with legal papers will be able to travel beyond Aug. 31, Taliban tell Germany," *Reuters,* August 25, 2021.

[65] "Qatar calls on Taliban to protect civilians," AFP, August 17, 2021.

[66] "Qatar urges Taliban to cease fire at meeting in Doha," *Reuters,* August 14, 2021.

[67] "Qatar's Taliban efforts position Doha as a key mediator: Analysts," *Al Jazeera,* August 20, 2021.

[68] "Turkey, Russia, Qatar to push for political resolution in Syria," *Reuters,* March 11, 2021.

[69] UNAMID, "Doha Document for Peace in Darfur," May 31, 2011.

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

[71] Much of this section is derived from: U.S. Department of State, "U.S. Security Cooperation With Qatar," fact sheet, January 20, 2021.

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.[72] The Qatar government has not announced whether it is participating 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.[73] More than 8,000 U.S. military personnel are deployed at the various facilities in Qatar, including Al Udeid Air Base, discussed further below.[74]

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,[75] as discussed further below.

Al Udeid Air Base (Air Force/CENTCOM)[76]

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.[77] Al Udeid Base also hosts the forward headquarters for CENTCOM. U.S. personnel deployed to Qatar participate in U.S. operations such as Operation 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

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

[73] U.S. Library of Congress, *Country Studies: Persian Gulf States,* 1994. 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.

[74] U.S. Department of State, "Coordinator for Counterterrorism Ambassador Nathan A. Sales Travels to Qatar," media note, August 12, 2020.

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

[76] U.S. Department of State, "Joint Statement of the Inaugural United States-Qatar Strategic Dialogue," media note, January 30, 2018.

[77] Adam Taylor, "As Trump tries to end 'endless wars,' America's biggest Mideast base is getting bigger," *The Washington Post,* August 21, 2019.

the eventual formalization of Qatar's commitment to support sustainment costs and future infrastructure costs at [Al Udeid Air Base]."[78] 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 2003) and about $500 million in U.S. military construction funding since 2003.[79] Qatar reportedly is providing another $1.8 billion for the Al Udeid expansion plan.[80] The FY2021 National Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 116-283) authorized $790 million for military construction projects for Al Udeid, pursuant to an agreement with the State of Qatar for required in-kind contributions. In 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.

U.S. Arms Sales to Qatar

Over the past two decades, Qatar has shifted its weaponry mix more toward U.S.-made equipment.[81] 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 sale to Qatar of up to 72 U.S.-made F-15s, with an estimated value of $21 billion.[82] 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).[83]

[78] U.S. Department of Defense, "U.S. and Qatar sign MoU Reaffirming Qatar's Commitment to Supporting U.S. Military Activities at Al Udeid Air Base," press release, January 14, 2019.

[79] Figures compiled by CRS.

[80] "' America's biggest Mideast base is getting bigger," op. cit.

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

[82] Defense Security Cooperation Agency (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.

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

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,[84] 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.[85]
- **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.[86] 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.[87]
- **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.[88]
- **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

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

[85] Marianne Levine, "Senate fails to block arms sales to Bahrain and Qatar," *Politico*, June 13, 2019.

[86] DSCA Transmittal Number 16-07.

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

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

most sophisticated ground-based missile defense system the United States has made available for sale.[89] 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.[90]

Other Defense Partnerships

Qatar has developed defense relations with several other partners.

- *NATO.* 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.[91]
- *France.* Prior to 2000, Qatar 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.[92]
- *Turkey.* Turkey 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.[93] Given Turkey's support for Qatari regional policies, one of the "13 demands" of the Saudi-led bloc has been that Qatar close the Turkish bases.[94]
- *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,[95] but U.S. opposition and the potential for U.S. sanctions for the sale apparently has 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.

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[89] DSCA announcement, November 5, 2012, http://www.dsca.mil/major-arms-sales/qatar-terminal-high-altitude-area-defense-thaad.

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

[91] Benas Gerdziunas, "NATO dashes membership hopes of Qatar," *Politico*, June 6, 2018.

[92] "Qatar, France sign 5 defense, security deals," Xinhua, March 28, 2019.

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

[94] "UAE official says Turkish base in Qatar destabilises region," *Reuters*, October 10, 2020; "How Qatar and Turkey came together," *The Economist*, January 21, 2021.

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

Counter-terrorism Cooperation[96]

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.

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 a 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.[97] None of the September 11 hijackers was a Qatari national. There were no terrorist incidents in Qatar in 2019 or 2020.

Terrorism Financing Issues

The State Department 2019 report on terrorism 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 then-Coordinator for Counterterrorism, Ambassador Nathan Sales, met in Doha with Qatar's Attorney General and

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

[97] 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.[98]

The country is a member of the Middle East North Africa Financial Action Task Force (MENAFATF), a regional body 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 2019 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 late August 2021, Qatar has reported about 231,600 COVID-19 cases and 600 deaths from the disease. After an initial spike of COVID-19 cases in the spring of 2020, government-mandated lockdowns, social distancing, and travel restrictions resulted in a relatively low number of deaths through the end of 2020. An increase in cases led the government to announce new measures in February 2021 to reduce communal spread.[99] Close to 4.3 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine have been administered, fully vaccinating approximately 72% of the population; both the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines have been approved for emergency use.[100] Qatar's 2020 budget, announced in December 2019, anticipated a surplus of about $1.2 billion,[101] but the economic effects of COVID-19 and an expected oil price of $40 per barrel are expected to put the country's budget into deficit in 2021.[102] 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.[103]

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

[98] U.S. Department of State, "Coordinator for Counterterrorism Ambassador Nathan A. Sales Travels to Qatar," media note, August 12, 2020.

[99] World Bank, *Macro Poverty Outlook for Middle East and North Africa: Qatar*, April 2, 2021.

[100] World Health Organization, "Qatar," Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Dashboard, accessed April 2, 2021; State of Qatar, Ministry of Public Health, "Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)," 2021.

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

[102] David Barbuscia, "Qatar expects $9.5 billion deficit next year on lower revenues," *Reuters*, December 11, 2020.

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

and it is the second largest exporter of natural gas in the world.[104] 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.[105] Qatar did not reduced its gas supplies to the other GCC states as retaliation for the blockade.

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.[106] 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 in June 2017. 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.[107] 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 2020, U.S. exports to Qatar were about $3.4 billion, and U.S. imports from Qatar were about $1.2 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.[108] 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 agreed to develop a petrochemical complex in Qatar. Qatar Petroleum announced

[104] CIA, *The World Factbook*.

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

[106] "Qatar Has $340 Billion in Reserves, Can Withstand 'Any Kind of Shock,' Central Bank Says," *Istanbul Sabah Online*, July 10, 2017; Arwa Ibrahim, "Beating the blockade: How Qatar prevailed over a siege," *Al Jazeera*, June 5, 2020.

[107] "Qatar Airways Statement on Judgment of the International Court of Justice," press release, July 15, 2020.

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

in early 2021 that it will boost LNG output by about 40% by 2026 through expansion projects at its North Field.[109]

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.[110] 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.[111] The United States and Qatar reached a set of "understandings" on civil aviation on January 29, 2018, committing Qatar Airways to financial transparency and 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

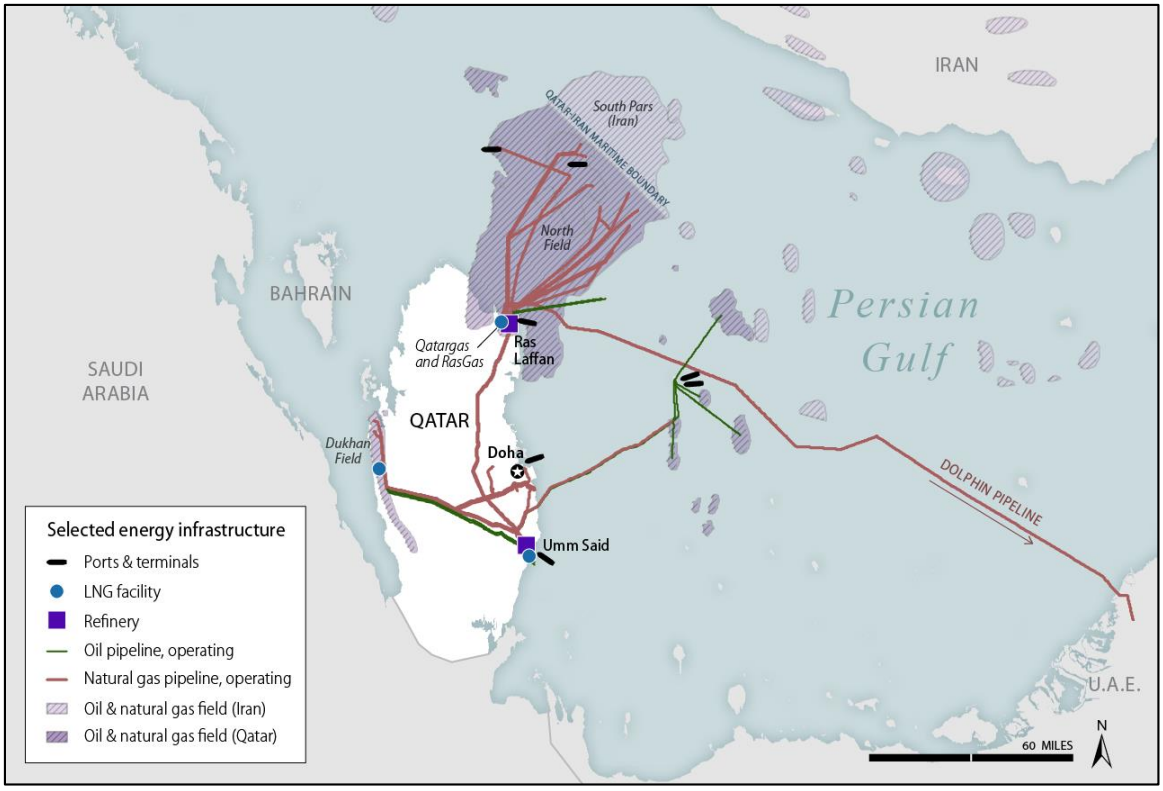
Qatar, one of the wealthiest states in the world on a per capita gross domestic product (GDP) basis, receives virtually no U.S. assistance. At times, small amounts of U.S. aid have been provided to help Qatar develop capabilities to prevent smuggling of arms and narcotics, and the movement of terrorists 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 FY2019, the last fiscal year for which precise data is available.

[109] Jessica Jaganathan, "Analysis: Qatar tightens global gas market grip with bold expansion moves," *Reuters*, March 16, 2021.

[110] 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.

[111] Frank Kane, "Open Skies Dispute Between US and Gulf Airlines Escalates," *The National*, January 30, 2016.

Figure 2. Map of Qatari Energy Resources and Select Infrastructure



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

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