



# Qatar: Background and U.S. Relations

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## Summary

Qatar, a small peninsular country in the Persian Gulf, emerged as a partner of the United States in the mid-1990s and currently serves as host to major U.S. military facilities. Qatar holds the third-largest proven natural gas reserves in the world, and its small population enjoys the world's highest per capita income. The emir of Qatar, Shaykh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, has managed a course of major economic growth and very limited political liberalization since replacing his father in a bloodless palace coup in 1995. The emir has undertaken several projects to capitalize on Qatar's hydrocarbon resources, improve educational opportunities for Qatari citizens, and pursue economic diversification. As part of Qatar's liberalization experiment, the Qatari monarchy founded *Al Jazeera*, the first all-news Arabic language satellite television network, in 1995. The network has proven influential and controversial since its establishment, including during recent unrest in the Arab world. In an April 2003 referendum, Qatari voters approved a new constitution that officially granted women the right to vote and run for national office. Elections have been delayed for a national Advisory Council established by the new constitution, and no target date has been set. Central Municipal Council elections are planned for May 2011.

Following joint military operations during Operation Desert Storm in 1991, Qatar and the United States concluded a Defense Cooperation Agreement that has been subsequently expanded. In April 2003, the U.S. Combat Air Operations Center for the Middle East moved from Prince Sultan Airbase in Saudi Arabia to Qatar's Al Udeid airbase south of Doha, the Qatari capital. Al Udeid and other facilities in Qatar serve as logistics, command, and basing hubs for the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) area of operations, including Iraq and Afghanistan. In spite of serving as the host to a large U.S. military presence and supporting U.S. regional initiatives, Qatar has remained mostly secure from terrorist attacks. Terrorist statements indicate that energy infrastructure and U.S. military facilities in Qatar remain potential targets. U.S. officials have described Qatar's counterterrorism cooperation since 9/11 as significant; however, some observers have raised questions about possible support for Al Qaeda by some Qatari citizens, including members of Qatar's large ruling family.

Human rights concerns persist. The 2010 State Department human rights report on Qatar notes that basic civil liberties are restricted and states that the foreign workers who make up most of the country's population of 1.67 million "in many cases worked under circumstances that constituted forced labor." Since 2007, the State Department has reported that enacted safety and labor rights regulations remain largely unenforced, and foreign diplomats' visits to labor camps revealed "the majority of unskilled foreign laborers living in cramped, dirty, and hazardous conditions, often without running water, electricity, or adequate food."

Qatari officials have taken an increasingly active diplomatic role in recent years, seeking to position themselves as mediators and interlocutors in a number of regional conflicts. Qatar's deployment of fighter jets and transport planes to support NATO-led military operations in Libya signaled a new assertiveness, and experts are speculating about what role Qatar may take with regard to regional security issues in the wake of recent unrest. Qatar's willingness to embrace Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, and Hamas as part of its mediation and outreach initiatives has drawn scrutiny. Unrest in Syria and Hamas-Fatah reconciliation could create challenging choices for Qatar. The Obama Administration has not voiced public concern about Qatar's multidirectional foreign policy and has sought to preserve and expand military and counterterrorism cooperation with the ambitious leaders of this wealthy, strategically located country.

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## Country and Leadership Profile

Qatar, a small peninsular state bordering Saudi Arabia in the Persian Gulf, gained independence from the United Kingdom on September 3, 1971. It is a constitutional monarchy governed by the Al Thani family. Of the country's approximately 1.7 million people, only 225,000 are citizens; the rest are foreign residents and temporary laborers.<sup>1</sup> The Emir of Qatar, Shaykh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, has sought to increase the global profile and influence of his small, energy-rich country since he replaced his father as emir in a palace coup in 1995. Like King Abdullah II of Jordan, he was educated in the United Kingdom and holds degrees from Sandhurst Military Academy and Cambridge University. He is 59 years old, and has three wives and 24 children. His second wife, Shaykha Mohza, remains very active in Qatari public life, leading education, health, and women's initiatives. In 1997, the emir had kidney transplant surgery in the United States.

In practice, the emir's personal authority as Qatar's constitutional monarch is tempered only by the need to maintain basic consensus within the Al Thani family and among other influential interest groups. Qatar's small native population of 225,000 is politically active in private but not publicly restive, and members of the fluid expatriate population of 1.4 million have no political rights. Shaykh Hamad appoints members of his extended family and other notables to a governing Council of Ministers (cabinet), which is headed by his powerful cousin, Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al Thani.

The rule of the Qatari state is hereditary within the Al Thani family, and the constitution reflects the previously contested principle that future successors to the throne will follow the line of the emir's male offspring. The emir's fourth-oldest son, Tamim bin Hamad, is now the named successor to the Qatari monarchy; he is 30 years old. Most experts regard the Al Thani family as having some significant, if manageable internal rivalries. Religious conservatives have considerable social influence, and Qatar's military and security forces answer to the emir. Elections for the Central Municipal Council are scheduled for May 2011, although long-planned national Advisory Council elections remain delayed. Public debate on some issues is encouraged, although the 2010 U.S. State Department human rights report notes Qatar's ban on political parties and restrictions on freedom of speech, press, assembly, association, and religion.

The emir visited Washington, DC, in April 2011 for consultations with President Obama and congressional leaders. In the wake of the visit, U.S. Ambassador to Qatar Joseph LeBaron referred to "a deepening of the relationship in political terms" and stated his belief that President Obama's consultation with Shaykh Hamad moved the U.S.-Qatari relationship "in a direction that is qualitatively different from the past 10 years." The Administration has not elaborated on what new political arrangements or agreements, if any, were concluded during the emir's visit.

## Assertive Diplomacy and Economic Clout

Qatar's strategic location, its leaders' multifaceted foreign policy, and its explosive economic growth contribute to the small country's relatively large profile. Qatar's energy export-fueled

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<sup>1</sup> As of April 30, 2010, the Qatar Statistics Authority reported that the population had reached 1.67 million people, of which 1.27 million were male and 400,000 were female. The State Department 2010 report on human rights in Qatar estimates that there are 225,000 Qatari citizens.

GDP growth and small population have catapulted the country to the top of the global per capita GDP rankings, with a 2010 U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) estimate of \$145,300, the highest in the world. Extending northward from the central Arabian Peninsula into the Persian Gulf, Qatar hosts the forward headquarters of U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) at the Al Udeid air base outside of the capital city, Doha. The Emir has maintained close strategic relations with the United States as a balance to the influence of powerful neighbors in Saudi Arabia and Iran. Qatar and Iran share the large North Field/South Pars natural gas deposit, providing a basis for economic coordination and shared security interests with Tehran. Qatar's relatively ambiguous approach to some regional issues of U.S. concern and its willingness to maintain steady relations with Iran, Syria, and Hamas have generated some criticism among U.S. observers, including some Members of Congress in recent years. The Emir has prioritized efforts to raise Qatar's global profile, most recently by outbidding the United States and others to secure the right to host the FIFA World Cup (soccer) in 2022.

## **Qatar's Foreign Policy**

Qatar's approach to regional affairs is best described as a multi-directional balancing act. To the chagrin of Saudi Arabia and other regional powers, Qatar has sought to mediate regional conflicts and political disputes by engaging a wide range of parties in Yemen, Lebanon, Sudan, and Gaza, some of whom are hostile to the United States. Qatari leaders have responded boldly to recent political unrest in the region, while increasing Sunni-Shiite and Arab-Iranian tensions in the Gulf region have led Qatar to close ranks with its Sunni Arab allies in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Qatari leaders have embraced political change in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen, while offering support to their traditional rivals in Bahrain's ruling Al Khalifa family. The emir also has taken a measured approach to unrest in Syria, in light of his ongoing engagement with the Al Asad government on Lebanon and Israeli-Palestinian issues. While some regional voices clearly resent Qatar's assertive diplomacy, the Qatari government's agility in the face of uncertainty and the soft power of its government-supported *Al Jazeera* satellite television network have made Qatar a key player during the unfolding "Arab Spring." Some critics assert that despite Qatar's active foreign policy, its regional diplomacy has actually yielded few results with the exception of the 2008 Doha agreement that ended Lebanon's 18-month long political crisis.

## **Regional Unrest, Bahrain, and Yemen**

In general, Qatar has taken an open, flexible approach to recent regional unrest, highlighting its own modest reform efforts to date as broadly reflective of popular demands for effective, transparent government. Thus far, the emir has avoided much regional or domestic criticism of the centralized political system he presides over. Bahrain and Saudi Arabia remain exceptions to Qatar's embrace of "change," and Qatar has offered unspecified security support to Bahrain alongside military and police forces from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Some activists have criticized *Al Jazeera* for the tone and limited scope of its coverage of political debate and unrest in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Syria, in contrast to the network's enthusiastic coverage of unrest and debate in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and Yemen. In a bid for a formal regional leadership role, Qatar has nominated Qatari-national and former Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Secretary General Abdulrahman al Attiyah<sup>2</sup> to lead the Arab League after May 2011, when long-time Arab League chairman Amr Moussa plans to step down.

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<sup>2</sup> Al Attiyah was replaced by Abdel Latif Zayati.

With regard to Yemen, whatever good faith Qatar had accumulated from recent efforts to negotiate a resolution to the conflict between President Ali Abdullah Saleh's government and northern Al Houthi rebels has now evaporated. Yemeni officials roundly rejected Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Shaykh Hamad bin Jassim's public statement that the GCC member states hoped "to conclude an agreement with the Yemeni president to step down."<sup>3</sup> Although the GCC's April 10 call for a transfer of power and political negotiations in Yemen confirmed this position, President Saleh continues to accuse Qatar of attempting to undermine Yemeni sovereignty and reduce Saudi influence.<sup>4</sup> Yemen recalled its ambassador from Doha, and, in late April, Saleh rejected Qatari officials' presence at the signing of a GCC-negotiated agreement with the Yemeni opposition "because [Qatar] has conspired against Yemen."

### **Libya: Diplomacy, Humanitarian Support, and Military Operations**

Qatar's policy toward the conflict in Libya showcases the trends described above. Some Qatari officials have pointedly criticized a perceived lack of regional leadership on the part of Saudi Arabia and Egypt,<sup>5</sup> and Shaykh Hamad has linked the need for international intervention to the inability and/or unwillingness of Arab governments and the Arab League to act as the Libyan crisis escalated. Qatar was the first Arab state to formally recognize the Libyan opposition Interim Transitional National Council (TNC) and is one of two Arab governments contributing military aircraft to coalition operations to enforce U.N. Security Council Resolution 1973. Qatari C-17 aircraft and Mirage fighter jets are supporting the coalition air operations. Qatar also has offered a variety of humanitarian and material support to the Libyan opposition, agreeing to market oil on behalf of the TNC and deposit proceeds in an escrow account. To date, oil shipments and several refined product shipments have departed from opposition-held ports, although limited stockpiles may delay further shipments. Qatar is hosting opposition television channels that are now broadcasting via satellite from Doha under the auspices of *Al Jazeera*. On April 13, Qatar hosted the first meeting of the Libya Contact Group, including senior officials from the United States, the United Nations, the European Union, the African Union and key governments. Some unconfirmed reports suggest that Qatar has supplied defensive weaponry to some opposition forces. Qatar pledged \$400-500 million to support the temporary financial mechanism planned for the TNC at the second Contact Group meeting on May 5, 2011 in Rome, Italy.

### **Israel and the Palestinians**

Although Qatar and Israel do not have formal diplomatic ties, Qatar has supported the Arab League position backing indirect negotiations between the Palestinian Authority and Israel. In

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<sup>3</sup> Qatar News Agency (QNA, Doha), "GCC Countries Hope to Conclude Agreement With Yemeni President to Step Down," April 7, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> An April 10 GCC Foreign Ministers meeting in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia called for President Saleh to transfer power to his vice president and for the formation of a national unity government with the power to form economic, military, and political committees tasked with developing a constitution and holding elections. GCC Secretariat, Press Release: Ministerial Council, Thirty-second Session, April 10, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Qatari Air Force Chief of Staff General Mubarak al Khayanin said, "Certain countries like Saudi Arabia and Egypt haven't taken leadership for the last three years. So we wanted to step up and express ourselves, and see if others will follow." Jamey Keaten and Adam Schreck, "Tiny Qatar flexes muscles in no-fly Libya campaign," Associated Press, March 28, 2011.

April 2011, Emir Hamad bin Khalifa said during a visit to the White House that “the most important issue for us in the region is that Palestine-Israeli conflict and how to find a way to establish a Palestinian state.” He signaled his support for President Obama’s goal of “supporting the existence of two states peacefully living side by side.” Qatari leaders also have criticized recent Israeli decisions on settlements and Jerusalem that they feel undermine prospects for a two-state solution. Qatar has been in the forefront of Arab-Israeli talks on expanding economic ties during periods of progress in the peace process. However, Qatar’s position regarding the Arab boycott of Israel is governed by the September 1994 decision by the GCC to terminate enforcement of the indirect boycotts, while maintaining, at least in theory, the primary boycott. An Israeli trade office in Doha was shuttered by the Qatari government in response to the January 2009 Gaza war and has not been reopened.

In recent years, some observers have viewed Qatar’s diplomatic approach as supportive of Hamas and indirectly supportive of Iran and Syria, although Qatari officials view their approach as supporting a consistent policy of engagement with all sides in the interests of peace. In October 2006, the Qatari government launched an ultimately unsuccessful round of shuttle diplomacy aimed at resolving differences between Palestinian factions and securing the release of kidnaped Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit by his Hamas captors.<sup>6</sup> Qatar offered \$50 million in financial support to the then-Hamas-led Palestinian Authority government and has hosted Hamas officials for numerous talks and consultations since January 2006. Israel’s then-Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni declined a Qatari invitation to participate in an October 2006 democracy conference in Doha because of the presence of Hamas representatives, but an Israeli delegation participated in the conference, led by lower-ranking Foreign Ministry officials.<sup>7</sup> Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Shimon Peres visited Qatar in February 2007 and declined the emir’s reported suggestion that Israel negotiate directly with Hamas.<sup>8</sup>

Qatar continues to engage with Palestinian political leaders and has facilitated dialogue between Fatah and Hamas. The announcement of a Fatah-Hamas unity agreement in May 2011 renews questions about future engagement by regional states with Hamas leaders and individuals who may participate in a future Palestinian Authority government. Some observers have speculated that unrest in Syria could lead Hamas political and military leaders to seek alternate locations for their offices, possibly including Doha. Hamas political leader Khaled Meshaal and other Hamas leaders visited Doha in April and December 2010 and met with Emir Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani and Prime Minister Shaykh Hamad bin Jassem bin Jabr Al Thani. In the past, Senator John Kerry has voiced specific concerns about alleged Qatari government and private support to Hamas, arguing in April 2009 that “Qatar ... can’t continue to be an American ally on Monday that sends money to Hamas on Tuesday.”<sup>9</sup> In August 2009, Qatar offered \$10 million in cash payments via the Hamas Administration in Gaza to support thousands of unemployed Palestinians, including fishermen facing difficulty in relation to Israel’s blockade of Gaza’s coastal waters. It remains unclear whether Qatar would agree to host Hamas leaders if they decided to relocate from Damascus.

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<sup>6</sup> *Daily Star* (Beirut), “Qatari Mediation Fails to Bridge Hamas-Fatah Gap,” October 11, 2006.

<sup>7</sup> *Agence France Presse*, “Livni Shuns Qatar Conference, but Israel There,” October 29, 2006.

<sup>8</sup> Danna Harman, “Tiny Qatar Vies for Big Regional Role,” *Christian Science Monitor*, February 6, 2007.

<sup>9</sup> *US Fed News*, “Sen. Kerry Speaks on Middle East to Brookings Institute,” April 2, 2009.

## **Iran, Syria, and Lebanon**

Qatar has pursued a policy of engagement with Iran in recent years, based on the countries' shared energy reserves and Qatar's calculation that any regional conflict involving Iran could invite attacks on U.S. forces and installations based in Qatar. Qatari and Iranian officials signed a defense and security cooperation agreement in February 2010, and, in April 2010, Qatari military officers reportedly were invited to observe Iranian military drills in the Persian Gulf. In February 2010, Qatari Prime Minister Hamad bin Jassem Al Thani reportedly encouraged the United States to engage directly with Iran in order to resolve the ongoing dispute over Iran's nuclear program.<sup>10</sup> In 2009, Shaykh Hamad bin Jassim characterized Iran's election dispute as "an internal matter" and stated, "we must respect the right of each state to solve its own problems."<sup>11</sup> Neither he or the emir have publicly reconciled that view with Qatar's active approach to the unfolding unrest in the Arab world. Qatar's national news service has confirmed that two Iranian fishing vessels were detained in Qatari waters recently, but has stated that "reports about the seizure ...of two Iranian boats loaded with weapons are inaccurate."

Qatari diplomacy in the Levant over the last five years reportedly has been perceived by other Arab states in general, and by Saudi Arabia in particular, as a challenge to traditional patterns of regional leadership. In 2008, the Arab League and the Qatari government facilitated negotiations between rival Lebanese factions resulting in the "Doha Agreement" that guided the 2009 parliamentary elections. The emir has consulted with Lebanese officials during recent negotiations to form a new cabinet after the collapse of the Al Hariri government. Qatari engagement with Syria and Iran and its support for unity government arrangements in Lebanon that include Hezbollah and its allies have led some U.S. observers to place Qatar in the so-called "axis of resistance" vis-à-vis the United States, its Arab allies, and Israel.

## **Sudan and Darfur Mediation**

Sudanese President Omar Hassan al Bashir visited Doha in February 2010 to sign a ceasefire agreement with Darfur's Justice and Equality Movement (JEM).<sup>12</sup> The agreement marked an important milestone in nearly two years of Qatari effort as the leader of the Arab League's mediation group for the conflict in Darfur. In spite of the ceasefire agreement, further progress in the Sudan-JEM talks has been lacking. President Bashir visited Doha again in March 2011, in the run-up to a Doha stakeholders conference in late April 2011 for the government of Sudan, Darfuri rebel groups, Sudanese organizations, and international parties. The government of Sudan appeared to undermine the Qatar-sponsored negotiations by issuing a decree announcing that a referendum will be held in the three states that now make up the Darfur region on their future administrative status, as called for by the 2006 Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA). Current Darfur rebel groups that reject the DPA are seeking to determine the region's status through Qatar-backed negotiations with the Khartoum government. They oppose Khartoum's unilateral move

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<sup>10</sup> OSC Report GMP20100215135001, Mobin Pandit, "Talk Directly to Iran, US Told. Doha: Qatar Yesterday Urged the United States to Talk Directly to Iran on the Nuclear Issue," *The Peninsula* (Doha), February 15, 2010.

<sup>11</sup> OSC Report GMP20090624615003, "Qatari Premier Discusses Qatar's Mediations, Ties with Egypt, Israel, Al-Jazirah," June 24, 2009.

<sup>12</sup> President Bashir's 2010 visit was his second to Qatar since the issuance of an international warrant for his arrest by the International Criminal Court (ICC). Qatar has rejected the ICC decision and warrant, considering it disruptive to its efforts and those of others to mediate a peace agreement between the government of Sudan and a number of rebel groups in Darfur.



and seek continued talks. The Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) suspended its participation in the Doha process pending clarification and rejected draft agreements presented at the April 2011 meeting in Doha.<sup>13</sup> The Liberation and Justice Movement (LJM) participated in the talks and welcomed the draft agreement documents, while dismissing the Sudanese government's referendum plans. Some observers regard Khartoum's referendum announcement as an attempt to undermine plans for a unified regional government in Darfur as part of any peace agreement. As of early May 2011, talks were ongoing in Doha regarding draft agreements.

## **Qatar's Economy**

Qatar has backed its diplomatic approach up with its increasing financial resources and economic influence during a period of "unparalleled prosperity."<sup>14</sup> Oil and natural gas export proceeds provide over half of the government's revenue, and private sector growth has been robust in recent years, while slowing slightly from 2008 to present. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates that overall Qatari GDP growth reached 16% in 2010, and projects that growth may reach 20% in 2011 and remain strong for the medium term.<sup>15</sup> Qatar based its recently approved 2011-2012 budget and expected surplus of over \$6 billion on an assumed oil price of \$55 per barrel—near half the current global market price. The IMF estimates Qatar's 2011 surplus will be \$16.4 billion and predicts fiscal surpluses will continue through at least 2015. The Emir's government is investing surplus revenue abroad for future generations and investing in domestic infrastructure, housing, and health sector improvements. Qatari press outlets feature limited criticism of domestic budget transparency, spending priorities, foreign contractors, and government efficiency.

Many regional economic experts are arguing that although the global credit crunch and resulting recession significantly lowered the value of many Qatari real estate and local stock holdings, the experience may turn out to have been a net positive for economies like Qatar's, where rapidly expanding real estate sectors and inflows of speculative capital had driven inflation rates into the double digits (15% in 2008) and local banks were not exercising good management practices over their lending portfolios. In describing Qatar's response to the losses facing its banking sector, the *Middle East Economic Digest* described Qatar as having "probably the most interventionist government in the region." Qatar has invested close to \$6 billion to purchase several types of asset holdings from its domestic banks in an effort to ensure that the banks continue lending. The IMF praised the Qatari bailout program in its February 2010 Article IV staff report.

Some observers have raised questions about the long-term ability of Qatar to attract private sector investment and produce employment opportunities once the current phase of large state-supported infrastructure investment is complete. By all accounts, Qatari officials remain confident in their economic prospects and appear to have used the recent downturn as an opportunity to assess

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<sup>13</sup> JEM spokesman Gibreel Adam Bilal said, "The presidential decree related to the referendum on Darfur administrative [status] paralyzed completely the negotiating process in Doha. We, in JEM, do not see any interest to keep talking with the government if the status of Darfur will no longer be decided here." OSC Report AFP20110406577009, "Rebel JEM Suspends Talks With Sudan Over Decree on Darfur Administrative Status," Sudan Tribune Online (Paris), April 5, 2011.

<sup>14</sup> In February 2010, the *Middle East Economic Digest* judged that "Qatar is enjoying a period of unparalleled prosperity." *Middle East Economic Digest*, "Qatar's peaking energy market," February 12, 2010.

<sup>15</sup> IMF, Qatar: 2010 Article IV Consultation—Staff Report, IMF Country Report No. 11/64, March 9, 2011. Hydrocarbon sector growth is estimated at 29.5% for 2011, non-hydrocarbon growth is estimated at 9.5%.

lessons learned during the country's recent boom, to reconsider planned projects, and, where possible, to take advantage of lower input costs by delaying project start dates or renegotiating contracts. Managing the infrastructure and service needs created by the influx of laborers to the county remains the immediate challenge. In the short run, Qatari authorities are focused on completing a series of energy projects and expanding water, health, and electricity infrastructure to meet the needs of the population.

## **Oil and Natural Gas**

With proven oil reserves of 25.4 billion barrels, Qatar has far less oil than the major Persian Gulf producers, such as Kuwait (96.5 billion barrels), Iraq (112 billion barrels), and Saudi Arabia (252 billion barrels). However, Qatar has the third largest gas reserves in the world, an estimated 896 trillion cubic feet (Tcf).<sup>16</sup> Qatar Petroleum (QP), the state-owned oil company, increased its crude oil output from 593,000 barrels per day (b/d) in 1999 to approximately 824,000 b/d after an OPEC-coordinated production cut in December 2008.<sup>17</sup> As of January 2011, the U.S. Energy Information Administration estimated Qatari crude oil production was 850,000 b/d. However, with oil reserves likely to be exhausted before 2026 at current production rates, Qatar has rapidly moved to exploit its vast natural gas reserves. Japan, South Korea, and Singapore are the leading importers of oil from Qatar.

As part of a long-term development strategy, Qatar has tapped international financial markets and invited foreign investment in recent years in order to finance the expansion of its gas extraction and liquefied natural gas (LNG) production facilities.<sup>18</sup> The Export-Import Bank of the United States has provided over \$1 billion in loan guarantees to support the development of Qatar's gas production facilities in cooperation with a range of U.S., European, and Asian companies, banks, and export credit agencies.<sup>19</sup>

Qatar has expanded its yearly LNG output from 4.5 million tons annually in 2002 to 43 million tons in 2009, and is now the world's largest exporter of LNG.<sup>20</sup> By 2012, the final pending LNG projects are scheduled to be complete, bringing annual output capacity to 78 million tons. Although Qatar's LNG industry has low capital costs due to government investment, it has high operational costs, which has required Qatar to develop economies of scale in order to be more competitive with established LNG exporters such as Indonesia and Nigeria.<sup>21</sup> The large natural gas production and shipping facilities at the coastal city of Ras Laffan in northern Qatar serve as the main site for the country's gas development projects, with several independent gas production

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<sup>16</sup> Qatar's supply of natural gas doubled in 2002, when surveyors discovered new gas deposits in Qatar's North Field.

<sup>17</sup> *Economist Intelligence Unit*, "Qatar has cut oil production in line with OPEC's decision," December 8, 2008.

<sup>18</sup> Qatar's government has a 60%-70% stake in two joint partnerships with foreign firms, including ExxonMobil (USA), TotalFinaElf (France), KoGas (South Korea), and Matsui (Japan). In February 2005, Qatar Petroleum signed a \$7 billion agreement with Shell and a \$12 billion agreement with ExxonMobil to export natural gas to the United States and Europe.

<sup>19</sup> For example, since 1996, the Export Import Bank has provided loan guarantees to support the export of U.S. equipment and services for the construction of facilities at Ras Laffan, including most recently, the construction of natural gas liquefaction plants and facilities associated with the QatarGas II and III projects. See Export Import Bank of the United States, "Ex-Im Bank \$930 Million Guarantee Supports U.S. Exports to Build LNG Plant in Qatar," November 18, 2004; and Export Import Bank of the United States, "Ex-Im Bank Finances QatarGas 3 Liquid Natural Gas Complex, December 15, 2005.

<sup>20</sup> *Middle East Economic Digest*, "Doha continues to shine," October 30, 2009.

<sup>21</sup> Meeting with Qatar Petroleum, Qatar Gas, and Ras Gas executives, Ras Laffan, Qatar, January 2005.

and conversion “trains” linked to corresponding fields and contracted export markets. Long-term contracts at fixed prices have ensured that Qatar has earned steady returns from its exports even in light of the global economic downturn. Qatar participates in and hosts the headquarters of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum, an assembly of major gas exporting countries that some have described as a potential natural gas OPEC.<sup>22</sup>

Qatar has signed several agreements with U.S. energy companies (ConocoPhillips and ExxonMobil) and other international companies to develop facilities to export LNG to the United States, the United Kingdom, Spain, Italy, South Korea, Taiwan, and India. Under Project Dolphin, Qatar has begun exporting natural gas via an underwater pipeline to the United Arab Emirates, although objections from Saudi Arabia have limited progress in other areas. Qatari government officials reported that natural gas revenues exceeded oil income for the first time in 2008. Qatar also is in the midst of gas-to-liquids (GTL) projects and aims to become the largest GTL producer in the world.<sup>23</sup> In February 2007, Qatar Petroleum and ExxonMobil announced that a planned joint-GTL production facility project would be cancelled in the wake of rising cost projections. Other GTL plans are proceeding.

## **U.S.-Qatar Relations and Key Issues**

A U.S. embassy opened in Doha in 1973, but U.S. relations with Qatar did not blossom until after the 1991 Persian Gulf war. In the late 1980s, the United States and Qatar engaged in a prolonged diplomatic dispute regarding Qatar’s black market procurement of U.S.-made Stinger anti-aircraft missiles.<sup>24</sup> The dispute froze planned economic and military cooperation, and Congress approved a ban on arms sales to Qatar (Section 566(d), P.L. 100-461) until the months leading up to the 1991 Gulf War, when Qatar allowed coalition forces to operate from Qatari territory and agreed to destroy the missiles in question.<sup>25</sup> In January 1991, Qatari armored forces helped coalition troops repel an Iraqi attack on the Saudi Arabian town of Khafji, on the coastal road leading south from Kuwait into Saudi Arabia’s oil-rich Eastern Province.<sup>26</sup> In June 1992, Qatar signed a defense cooperation agreement with the United States, opening a period of close coordination in military affairs that has continued to the present.

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<sup>22</sup> In February 2010, GECF Secretary General Leonid Bokhanovsky told Qatar’s *Gulf Times*, “Naturally, the positive experience of OPEC was taken into consideration in the process of development of the GECF organizational structure, though characteristic properties of oil and gas necessitate different angles of approach.” Specifically, Bokhanovsky highlighted the transportation and storage requirements of natural gas and the corresponding use of long-term supply and delivery contracts as key differences influencing the approach of GECF members.

<sup>23</sup> For more information on GTL and Qatar’s GTL projects, see U.S. Energy Information Administration, Qatar Country Analysis Brief, January 2011. Available at: <http://www.eia.doe.gov/countries/cab.cfm?fips=QA>.

<sup>24</sup> Qatar defended its procurement of the missiles in protest of the sale of similar missiles by the United States to Bahrain, with which Qatar had an unresolved border dispute until 2001. Elaine Sciolino, “Qatar Rejects U.S. Demand For Return of Illicit Stingers,” *New York Times*, June 28, 1988; Patrick E. Tyler, “U.S. Drawn Into Gulf Dispute - Stray Stingers Tied To Qatar-Bahrain Tiff,” *Washington Post*, October 6, 1988.

<sup>25</sup> The ban was formally repealed by the Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs Appropriations Act of 1991 (Section 568(b), P.L. 101-513). The conference report on H.R. 5114, Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 1991 (H.Rept. 101-968) inserted Senate language (Amendment No. 144) that repealed the ban based on information provided by the Secretary of Defense “that it is in the national interest to reestablish United States-Qatari security relations because of their support for United States troops in the Middle East.”

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Ferraro, “Allies Retake Saudi City,” *United Press International*, January 31, 1991; and Joseph Albright, “Marines Take Credit for Khafji Victory,” *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, February 3, 1991.

The United States promptly recognized the assumption of power by Shaykh Hamad in June 1995 and has welcomed Qatar's defense cooperation, as well as its political, economic, and educational reform efforts. Today, Qatari-U.S. relations remain cordial and close. Qatari-U.S. defense relations have expanded over the last 15 years to include cooperative defense exercises, equipment pre-positioning, and base access agreements. U.S. concerns regarding alleged material support for terrorist groups by some Qataris, including members of the royal family, have been balanced over time by Qatar's counterterrorism efforts and its broader, long-term commitment to host and support U.S. military forces being used in ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Qatari officials are quick to point out their commitment to the general goal of regional peace and their support for U.S. military operations, even as they maintain a conservative approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict. In June 2009, U.S. Ambassador to Qatar Joseph LeBaron explained Qatar's policy in the following terms: "I think of it as Qatar occupying a space in the middle of the ideological spectrum in the Islamic world, with the goal of having doors open to it across that ideological spectrum. They have the resources to accomplish that vision, and that's rare."<sup>27</sup> By all accounts, Qatar's balancing strategy toward its relationship with the United States and regional powers such as Iran and Saudi Arabia is likely to persist, which may continue to place Doha and Washington on opposing sides of some important issues even amid close cooperation on others.

The U.S. has provided limited counterterrorism assistance to Qatar to support the development of its domestic security forces (see **Table 1** below), and the Export-Import Bank has provided over \$2 billion in loan guarantees to support various natural gas development projects in Qatar since 1996. The Obama Administration has phased out limited U.S. foreign assistance and continues to request military construction funds for facilities in Qatar. Since September 2005, Qatar has donated \$100 million to victims of Hurricane Katrina in the U.S. Gulf states.

## **U.S. Military Cooperation and Foreign Assistance**

With its small territory and narrow population base, Qatar relies to a large degree on external cooperation and support for its security. With a personnel strength of 11,800, Qatar's armed forces are the second-smallest in the Middle East.<sup>28</sup> France has provided approximately 80% of Qatar's arms inventory. Since the 1991 Gulf war, Qatar has pursued a limited program of force modernization. To date, however, it has not purchased significant U.S. weapons systems, although the Qatari government may be considering the purchase of U.S. air and missile defense systems in line with regional trends. The U.S. military has deployed Patriot anti-ballistic missile defense systems to some publicly unnamed Gulf countries, ostensibly to defend against potential missile attacks from Iran.

Qatar invested over \$1 billion to construct the Al Udeid air base south of Doha during the 1990s; it did not have an air force of its own at the time. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers also awarded over \$100 million dollars in Military Construction Air Force (MCAF) contracts for the construction of U.S. storage, housing, service, command, and communication facilities. Qatar's financing and construction of some of the state-of-the-art air force base at Al Udeid and its granting of permission for the construction of U.S.-funded facilities facilitated gradually deeper cooperation with U.S. military forces.

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<sup>27</sup> Carrie Sheffield, "Tiny nation, global clout," *Washington Times*, June 24, 2009.

<sup>28</sup> Bahrain, with an estimated 11,000-member force, has the smallest.

The Al Udeid airbase now serves as a logistics, command, and basing hub for U.S. operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Nearby Camp As Sayliyah houses significant U.S. military equipment pre-positioning and command facilities for the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) area of operations.<sup>29</sup> Both Qatar and the United States have invested in the construction and expansion of these facilities since the mid-1990s, and they form the main hub of the CENTCOM air and ground logistical network in the AOR. As a result of ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, U.S. and partner nation facilities in Qatar and elsewhere have received higher use in recent years and may require further investment to meet current and potential future needs.

**Table I. U.S. Foreign Assistance to Qatar FY2005-2010 and FY2011 Request**  
(\$ thousands)

Account	FY2005	FY2006	FY2007	FY2008	FY2009	FY2010 Estimate	FY2011 Request
IMET <sup>a</sup>	-	-	-	-	-	10	10
NADR-ATA <sup>b</sup>	1,379	788	1,120 <sup>c</sup>	268 <sup>c</sup>	-	-	-
NADR-CTF	-	118			-	-	-

**Source:** U.S. Department of State, Congressional Budget Justifications for Foreign Operations, FY2007-FY2011.

- a. Qatar did not participate in the IMET program prior to FY2010. The Bush Administration requested the provision of nominal IMET assistance because Qatari participation in the IMET program would make Qatar eligible to purchase other U.S. training at a reduced cost. The Obama Administration continued this request for FY2010. Section 21(c) of P.L. 90-629, the Arms Export Control Act (AECA) as amended, states that IMET recipient countries are eligible to purchase non-IMET training at reduced cost. Section 108(a) of P.L. 99-83 amended the AECA to provide this reduced cost benefit to IMET recipients. The U.S. Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) implements the authority provided in P.L. 99-83 to apply a lower cost to U.S. military training purchased by Qatar and other IMET recipient countries through the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program. At present, the "incremental rates" applied to the FMS training purchases of IMET recipient countries are calculated according to the terms outlined in Department of Defense Financial Management Regulation (FMR), Volume 15, Chapter 7 (Sections 0711 and 0712).
- b. Through the end of FY2006, over \$3.3 million in Nonproliferation, Anti-terrorism, De-mining and Related Programs - Anti-terrorism Assistance (NADR - ATA) has been provided to train over 500 Qatari security officers and officials since FY1987.
- c. Aid allocation amounts released by the State Department did not distinguish between NADR sub-accounts.

From FY2003 to FY2007, Congress appropriated and authorized \$126 million for U.S. military construction activities in Qatar. The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008 (P.L. 110-181) authorized \$81.7 million in FY2008 spending to build new Air Force and Special Operations facilities in Qatar. The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009 (P.L. 110-417) authorizes \$69.6 million in FY2009 spending to build new Air Force and Special Operations facilities. The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010 (P.L. 111-84) authorizes \$117 million in FY2010 spending to build new Air Force recreational, dormitory, and other facilities at Al Udeid. The Administration's FY2011 military construction request for Qatar

<sup>29</sup> According to the U.S. Department of Defense, "Qatar continues to host the Combined Air Operations Center, which provides airpower command and control for Afghanistan. Qatar also hosts USCENTCOM's forward headquarters, which has a crucial command and control responsibility for Afghanistan." U.S. Department of Defense, Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan, (P.L. 110-181), April 2010, p. 85.

was \$64.3 million, for Air Force facilities and a National Security Agency warehouse. The FY2012 request includes \$37 million to continue the dormitory and recreation facility project.

The Administration also requested \$10,000 in International Military Education and Training (IMET) assistance funds for Qatar in FY2010, and requested an additional \$10,000 for FY2011. The nominal amount of IMET assistance has the administrative effect of making Qatar eligible to purchase other U.S. military training at a reduced cost level that is available only to IMET recipients.

## **Counterterrorism**

### **Recent Cooperation**

The U.S. State Department has characterized Qatar's counterterrorism support since September 11, 2001, as "significant,"<sup>30</sup> but noted in its August 2010 report on terrorism issues that U.S. officials "continued to strive for increased cooperation – and particularly information sharing" with their Qatari counterparts.<sup>31</sup> Qatar's Combating Terrorism Law, passed in March 2004, established definitions of terrorism and terrorist financing and broadened the government's power to detect and prevent terrorist threats and to investigate and prosecute terrorists and their supporters. Qatar also established the Qatar Authority for Charitable Activities (QACA) in March 2004 to monitor the activities of all Qatari domestic and international charitable organizations, including prominent organizations such as the Qatar Charitable Society and the Shaykh Eid bin Mohammed Al Thani Charitable Association. All international financial charity transfers and project verification fall within the jurisdiction of the new QACA.<sup>32</sup> However, Article 24 of the law establishing the authority allows the emir to grant an exemption from QACA oversight to any organization at any time. Qatar's central bank operates a financial intelligence unit (FIU) which monitors activity in Qatar's banking system and serves as a liaison office to similar units in the United States and around the world.<sup>33</sup>

### **Historic Concerns**

According to the 9/11 Commission Report and former U.S. government officials, royal family member and current Qatari Interior Minister Shaykh Abdullah bin Khalid Al Thani provided safe harbor and assistance to Al Qaeda leaders during the 1990s, including the suspected mastermind of the September 11 hijacking plot, Khalid Shaykh Mohammed.<sup>34</sup> Former U.S. officials and

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<sup>30</sup> U.S. State Department - Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, Country Reports on Terrorism, 2004, April 27, 2005.

<sup>31</sup> U.S. State Department - Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, Country Reports on Terrorism, 2009, August 5, 2010.

<sup>32</sup> Author interview with QACA Chairman Abdul Aziz bin Abdul Rahman bin Hasan Al Thani, Doha, Qatar, April 2005.

<sup>33</sup> Meeting with QCB Governor Abdallah bin Khalid Al Attiyah, Doha, Qatar, April 2005.

<sup>34</sup> According to the 9/11 Commission Report, Khalid Shaykh Mohammed provided financial support to a co-conspirator in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing while living in Qatar and later moved his family to Qatar at Shaykh Abdallah bin Khalid Al Thani's suggestion. The Report also states that Mohammed "claims that Sheikh Abdallah was not a member, financier, or supporter of al Qaeda," and that Mohammed admitted "that Abdallah underwrote a 1995 trip [Mohammed] took to join the Bosnia jihad." Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (The 9/11 Commission Report), pp. 73, 147-8, 488-9. The Emir named (continued...)

leaked U.S. government reports state that the late Osama Bin Laden also visited Doha twice during the mid-1990s as a guest of Shaykh Abdullah bin Khalid, who then served as Qatar's minister for religious endowments and Islamic affairs, and, later, as minister of state for internal affairs. During a January 1996 visit to Doha, Bin Laden reportedly "discussed the successful movement of explosives into Saudi Arabia, and operations targeted against U.S. and U.K. interests in Dammam, Dharan, and Khobar, using clandestine Al Qaeda cells in Saudi Arabia."<sup>35</sup> According to other accounts, Shaykh Abdullah bin Khalid welcomed dozens of so-called "Afghan Arab" veterans of the anti-Soviet conflict in Afghanistan to Qatar in the early 1990s and operated a farm where some of those individuals lived and worked over a period of several years.<sup>36</sup>

In January 1996, FBI officials narrowly missed an opportunity to capture Khalid Shaykh Mohammed in Qatar, where he held a government job at Qatar's Ministry of Electricity and Water. Mohammed had been targeted for arrest in connection with an investigation of his nephew—1993 World Trade Center bombing mastermind Ramzi Yousef.<sup>37</sup> The FBI dispatched a team to arrest Mohammed, but he fled Qatar before he could be detained. Some former U.S. officials have since stated their belief that a high-ranking member of the Qatari government alerted Mohammed to the impending raid, allowing him to flee the country.<sup>38</sup>

Any discussions by U.S. officials with the government of Qatar regarding these allegations have not been made public. U.S. security officials working to ensure the safety and security of U.S. facilities, citizens, and assets in Qatar have reported that their relationships with Ministry of Interior officials, including serving Minister of State for Interior Affairs Shaykh Abdullah bin Nasir bin Khalifah Al Thani, are positive and cooperative. The emir reappointed Shaykh Abdullah bin Khalid as minister of interior in April 2007 and did not alter his status in a 2008 expansion of the cabinet or in a 2009 cabinet reshuffle.

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(...continued)

Shaykh Abdullah bin Khalid Al Thani to the post of Minister of Interior in January 2001, a post he continues to hold. His deputy, Minister of State for Interior Affairs Abdallah bin Nasir bin Khalifa Al Thani, currently serves as the official ministry liaison to foreign governments, including the United States. James Risen and David Johnston, "Qaeda Aide Slipped Away Long Before September 11 Attack," *New York Times*, March 8, 2003; Josh Meyer and John Goetz, "Qatar's Security Chief Suspected of Having Ties to Al Qaeda," *Los Angeles Times*, March 28, 2003.

<sup>35</sup> Memorandum from the Department of Defense to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence partially reprinted in Steven F. Hayes, "Case Closed," *Weekly Standard*, November 24, 2003. Pentagon spokesmen responded to the publication of the excerpts from the memorandum in the Hayes article by indicating that the memorandum was a collection of intelligence data from various sources which did not constitute a finished intelligence product. It is unclear if Bin Laden's reported visit was related to preparations for the June 1996 attack on the Khobar Towers military barracks in Saudi Arabia that killed 19 U.S. servicemen. Press reporting from the late 1990s cites a former U.S. intelligence official as indicating that the "Qatari individual" who hosted Bin Laden was Abdullah Bin Khalid Al Thani. See James Risen and Benjamin Weiser, "U.S. Officials Say Aid for Terrorists Came Through Two Persian Gulf Nations," *New York Times*, July 8, 1999.

<sup>36</sup> James Risen and Benjamin Weiser, "U.S. Officials Say Aid for Terrorists Came Through Two Persian Gulf Nations," *New York Times*, July 8, 1999. James Risen and David Johnston, "Qaeda Aide Slipped Away Long Before Sept. 11 Attack," *New York Times*, March 8, 2003; Josh Meyer and John Goetz, "Qatar's Security Chief Suspected of Having Ties to Al Qaeda," *Los Angeles Times*, March 28, 2003.

<sup>37</sup> According to the 9/11 Commission Report (p. 147), Khalid Shaykh Mohammed "engaged in extensive international travel during his tenure [at the Ministry of Electricity and Water]... much of it in furtherance of terrorist activity."

<sup>38</sup> "The U.S. Attorney obtained an indictment against KSM in January 1996, but an official in the government of Qatar probably warned him about it... In January 1996, well aware that U.S. authorities were chasing him, he left Qatar for good and fled to Afghanistan." *9/11 Commission Report*, p. 73. The Report provides the following citation: "Intelligence report, interrogation of KSM, July 23, 2003."

## **U.S.-Qatar Trade**

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. exports to Qatar amounted to \$3.2 billion in 2010, consisting mainly of machinery and transport equipment. U.S. imports from Qatar, mainly fuel and fertilizers, totaled \$464.3 million during 2010. On April 6, 2011, Qatar Airways signed a \$1.4 billion contract with Boeing for five 777 airplanes. ExxonMobil and an affiliate of Qatar Petroleum cooperated in the construction of a large LNG terminal (known as Golden Pass) on the Texas coast that was damaged by Hurricane Ike and received its first shipment of Qatari LNG in October 2010.<sup>39</sup> According to the 2011 U.S. Investment Climate Statement for Qatar, “Qatar has not entered into a bilateral investment, trade, or taxation treaty with the U.S. However, Qatar and the U.S. did sign a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) in April 2004.”

## **Political Reform and Elections**

Shaykh Hamad and his advisers have embarked on a limited political reform program designed to gradually make Qatar’s government more participatory and accountable. Although a series of national elections have been held (see below), the government continues to maintain strict limits on freedoms of assembly and association; a series of new laws allow for individuals to organize political demonstrations and public gatherings, but organizers must obtain a permit from the government, and Qatari authorities may impose restrictions on the topics of discussion. Political parties are not allowed in Qatar, and all private professional and cultural associations must register with the state and are monitored.

Qatari authorities have allowed a series of national elections as components of the country’s gradual transition toward greater democratic participation. The elections also have provided a “trial and error” setting for the creation and improvement of Qatar’s national electoral infrastructure. In April 1998, 3,700 business community leaders participated in an election for a national Chamber of Commerce, selecting 17 members from a slate of 41 candidates. In a March 1999 Central Municipal Council election, 248 candidates (including six women) competed for 29 seats, and all adult Qatari citizens, with the exception of members of the police and armed forces, were allowed to vote and run for office. The election marked the first time a Persian Gulf country had enfranchised all of its male and female citizens in a nationwide election.<sup>40</sup>

In April 2003, national elections for the Municipal Council’s new term resulted in the first electoral victory for a Qatari female candidate, Shaykha Yousef Al Jiffri, an appointed officer at the Education Ministry who ran unopposed.<sup>41</sup> The latest round of elections was held in April 2007, and voter turnout was higher than in previous elections. Authorities announced that 51% of 28,000 eligible Qatari voters cast ballots—nearly 90% of the country’s population of 1.7 million are ineligible to vote because they are foreign nationals.<sup>42</sup>

Over 34,000 voters are registered to vote in elections scheduled for May 10, 2011. Although the Municipal Council functions primarily in an advisory role to the Ministry of Municipal and Agricultural Affairs, some observers view it as a stepping-stone to the wider political

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<sup>39</sup> *The Peninsula* (Doha), “Golden Pass LNG Terminal to receive first Qatar shipment by Oct,” April 1, 2010.

<sup>40</sup> All six female candidates were defeated in the 1999 election.

<sup>41</sup> “Qatar Elects First Woman to Council Doha,” *Gulf News*, April 8, 2003.

<sup>42</sup> *Dow Jones*, “Qatari Officials Pleased With Voter Turnout In Municipal Poll,” April 2, 2007.



liberalization implied by the creation of the Advisory Council in the new constitution. Similarly, the national elections for the Municipal Council are seen by Qatari officials as test cases for future Advisory Council elections.

The constitution states that national legislative authority will reside in the hands of a 45-member Advisory Council (*Majlis Al Shura*), two-thirds of which will be directly elected and one-third appointed by the emir from among ministers or others.<sup>43</sup> The emir appoints all of the members of the current Advisory Council; members serve four-year terms at the emir's discretion. A special electoral law for new Advisory Council elections was passed in May 2008 after concerns about voter franchise extension were resolved.<sup>44</sup> Although national elections for the new Advisory Council have been delayed and a target date has not been set, administrative preparations reportedly continue, and women will have the right to vote in the elections and to run for office. The Advisory Council would have oversight authority over the Council of Ministers and would be able to propose legislation and review budgets. The constitution also empowers the Advisory Council to issue motions of no-confidence against government ministers; no-confidence motions must be approved by two-thirds of the Advisory Council. Council members will serve four-year terms.

In the interim, the term of the current Advisory Council has been extended through 2011. Some observers doubt that the Qatari leadership intends to fully implement the changes implied in the 2003 constitution because democratic decision making could disrupt existing patronage relationships that ensure the support of rival social and royal family factions for the monarchy.<sup>45</sup> It is unclear how the recent regional unrest will affect Qatari citizens' views of municipal or potential advisory council elections, or how the unrest will shape Qatari leaders' calculations about the necessity of holding elections and instituting changes outlined in the 2003 constitution.

## **Human Rights and Social Issues**

### **Human Rights and Labor Conditions**

The U.S. State Department *Country Report on Human Rights for 2010* states that Qatar's government "placed restrictions on civil liberties, including freedoms of speech, press (including the Internet), assembly, association, and religion."<sup>46</sup> The report also states that "there were prolonged detentions in overcrowded and harsh facilities, often ending in deportation." According to the report, the rights of non-citizens are at times abused, particularly among domestic servants

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<sup>43</sup> Prior to the establishment of a partially elected national assembly, Qatar had a fully appointed, 35-member advisory council that could only make recommendations to the Council of Ministers. Qatar's old Provisional Constitution provided for a modified electoral procedure in choosing members of the Council and a three-year term; nevertheless, the Council remained appointive in practice, and terms of the Council members were extended in three or four-year increments since 1975.

<sup>44</sup> Reportedly some members of the Al Thani family sought to restrict voting rights to so-called "native" Qataris whose families have lived in Qatar since 1930 or before. The 2007 U.S. Department of State Human Rights report for Qatar estimated that an electorate with that criteria could be "less than 50,000." Under a compromise, post-1930 naturalized citizens who have been citizens for ten years will have voting rights and will be eligible to run for office if their fathers were born in Qatar. *Economist Intelligence Unit*, "Advisory Council approves new electoral law," June 1, 2008.

<sup>45</sup> Mehran Kamrava, "Royal Factionalism and Political Liberalization in Qatar," *Middle East Journal*, Volume 63, Issue 3, July 1, 2009.

<sup>46</sup> U.S. State Department, 2010 Country Report on Human Rights Practices in Qatar, April 8, 2011. Available at: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/nea/154471.htm>.

from the Philippines and Southeast Asia. As in other Gulf countries, expatriate laborers are vulnerable to exploitation by employers who capitalize on their fear of deportation. Citizenship is withheld from foreign workers, who outnumber native Qataris in the labor force by an estimated ratio of nearly seven to one.<sup>47</sup>

In December 2004, Qatar announced that it was banning the use of children as camel jockeys, a practice long decried by the international community. Qatar remained a Tier 2 Watch List country in the U.S. State Department 2010 *Trafficking in Persons Report*.<sup>48</sup> According to the report, as of June 2010, “the government did not show evidence of overall progress in prosecuting and punishing trafficking offenders and identifying victims of trafficking.” A draft law anti-trafficking law reportedly was in the final stages of consideration as of April 2011, in line with long-standing Qatari pledges that have been noted in consecutive U.S. reports on trafficking in persons.

In May 2004, the emir issued a new labor law, which gives Qatari nationals the right to form associations with legal status and allows workers to strike. The legislation also bans employing youth under the age of 16, sets the working day at eight hours, and grants women equal rights with men, in addition to a paid 50-day maternity leave. Some observers have criticized the new legislation for not extending legal protections to Qatar’s large foreign workforce. Critics charge that the labor law places additional restrictions on guest workers by prohibiting non-citizens from forming labor unions and restricting their ability to bargain collectively and to strike. Law Number 7 of 2007 established a labor court to hear the grievances of foreign laborers.

The 2010 State Department human rights report concludes that “authorities severely restricted worker rights, especially for foreign laborers and domestic servants.” The report also states that “circumstances that constituted forced labor” are evident in the construction and domestic labor sectors. Since 2007, the annual State Department reports have cited foreign diplomats’ visits to labor camps as having revealed “the majority of unskilled foreign laborers living in cramped, dirty, and hazardous conditions, often without running water, electricity, or adequate food.”

### **Islam and Religious Freedom<sup>49</sup>**

Islam is the official religion of the state of Qatar. Conditional freedom of worship is protected under the constitution, although proselytizing by non-Muslims is illegal. Qatar, like Saudi Arabia, officially adheres to the Wahhabi version of Sunni Islam; however, in contrast with Saudi Arabia, Wahhabi social tenets are not publicly enforced or strictly adhered to in many public settings.<sup>50</sup> Qatar hosts a number of conservative Islamic clerics, including Dr. Yusuf Al Qaradawi, a controversial figure whose views on the conditional legitimacy of suicide bombing and whose outspoken critiques of Israel, the United States, and terrorism have made him a target of criticism from a wide range of observers. Qaradawi returned to Egypt briefly after the fall of former President Hosni Mubarak in February 2011, and he has been outspoken in his advice to Egyptians and his criticism of other governments during the recent unrest. During the summer 2006 Israel-

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<sup>47</sup> The new Qatari constitution does not address the rights of foreign guest workers.

<sup>48</sup> U.S. State Department 2010 *Trafficking in Persons Report* on Qatar available at <http://www.state.gov/tip/rls/tiprpt/2010/index.htm>. Released on June 14, 2010.

<sup>49</sup> U.S. State Department 2009 *International Religious Freedom Report* on Qatar available at <http://www.state.gov/drl/rls/irf/2009/127356.htm>. Released on October 26, 2009.

<sup>50</sup> For more on Sunni Islam and Wahhabism, see CRS Report RS21745, *Islam: Sunnis and Shiites*; and CRS Report RS21695, *The Islamic Traditions of Wahhabism and Salafīyya*, both by Christopher M. Blanchard.

Hezbollah war and 2008-2009 Israel-Hamas war, Qaradawi publicly argued that Muslims should support the activities of Hezbollah and Hamas as legitimate resistance activities, based on Quranic injunctions to defend Muslim territory invaded by outsiders.<sup>51</sup> Qaradawi hosts a popular weekly call-in television show on *Al Jazeera* and frequently delivers sermons in Qatari mosques.

Qaradawi has worked with a charitable umbrella organization known as the Union of Good that coordinates the delivery of relief and assistance to Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In November 2008, the U.S. Department of the Treasury designated the Union of Good as a financial supporter of terrorism pursuant to Executive Order 13224. According to the Treasury, “The Union of Good acts as a broker for Hamas by facilitating financial transfers between a web of charitable organizations—including several organizations previously designated under E.O. 13224 for providing support to Hamas—and Hamas-controlled organizations in the West Bank and Gaza.”<sup>52</sup>

According to State Department reports on international religious freedom, Qatar has officially recognized the Catholic, Anglican, Greek and other Eastern Orthodox, Coptic, and Indian Christian churches, and permits private worship for other denominations and religions. In November 2005, the emir donated a plot of land for the construction of a \$7 million Anglican church; construction began in April 2006.<sup>53</sup> A new Roman Catholic church opened in March 2008 and others remain under construction. Qatar established diplomatic ties with the Holy See in November 2002. Qatar does not ban alcohol, which is available in licensed premises such as the bars of major hotels and clubs.

## ***Al Jazeera and the Qatari Media***

### ***Al Jazeera***

Shaykh Hamad helped establish the *Al Jazeera* satellite television news network in 1996 with a \$140 million grant. Since then, the Qatari government has provided most of the channel’s funding, as advertising revenue reportedly does not support the entirety of *Al Jazeera*’s annual operating expenses. In the past, Qatari government officials and *Al Jazeera* executives have argued that the station’s inability to attract sufficient advertising revenue was a function of the channel’s controversial status across the Middle East. These officials and executives alleged that other Arab governments exerted pressure on companies based in or operating in their countries to refrain from advertising on *Al Jazeera*, because the channel was providing coverage of internal political, social, and economic developments that may have been unflattering to ruling regimes or less biased or censored than traditional government-run media outlets.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> “Islamic Cleric Al-Qaradawi Supports Hizballah, HAMAS,” *Al-Jazirah Television* (Doha), OSC Document GMP20060730638004, July 30, 2006. Qaradawi is regarded as conservative by many Muslims, although his declared views on the legitimacy of “struggle” and “martyrdom operations” against “occupation forces” have made him controversial to some in the Islamic world as well as many in the United States and Israel. He has been criticized by violent Islamic groups for his condemnations of terrorist attacks on civilians.

<sup>52</sup> For more on the Union of Good, see <http://www.treas.gov/press/releases/hp1267.htm>.

<sup>53</sup> Michael Theodoulou, “Muslim State to Build first Christian Church for 1,400 Years,” *The Times* (London) November 2, 2005.

<sup>54</sup> Author meeting at Al Jazeera headquarters, January 2005.

As *Al Jazeera* became more widely accepted in the region and stepped back its criticism of some regional governments, these concerns became less relevant. The proliferation of similar satellite news channels in the region also has increased competition and created outlets for other views. Some parties may continue to disagree with what they perceive to be *Al Jazeera's* editorial position on controversial subjects like Iran, Iraq, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Since its founding, *Al Jazeera* has devoted considerably less of its air time to coverage of Qatari affairs than to coverage of the internal affairs of other Arab states. *Al Jazeera* launched an international English language satellite channel in 2006 that now broadcasts in the United States. It has won praise from some media observers for its coverage of international affairs, including conflicts and issues often overlooked by other media outlets. Others have criticized the international English channel as carrying the same alleged biases reflected in the programming of its Arabic language affiliate. *Al Jazeera's* coverage of the 2011 uprisings in various Arab countries has drawn considerable attention, both from those observers who note the impact that televised images have had on demonstrations and government responses and those observers who question whether *Al Jazeera's* editorial decisions reflect a specific political agenda that may or may not be shared by its state sponsors in the Qatari government.

## **Media Freedom**

Although the Qatari government lifted formal censorship of the Qatari media by decree in 1995, the U.S. Department of State reports that journalists tend to exercise a degree of self-censorship, particularly with regard to the emir and his immediate family.<sup>55</sup> Internet service in Qatar is monitored for pornography and other material considered insulting to Islam. In January 2008, Qatar signed an agreement with Reporters Without Borders to create the Doha Media Freedom Center, an organization intended to spread “the culture of freedom of the press and media and in defending the press and media people who are subjected to harassment, detention and ill-treatment because of their professional activity.”<sup>56</sup> Its director, former Reporters Without Borders head Robert Menard, resigned in a public spat with Qatari leaders in June 2009 after he claimed that the Center “has been suffocated,” and alleged that “some Qatari officials never wanted an independent Center, free to speak out without concern for politics or diplomacy, free to criticize even Qatar.”<sup>57</sup> Qatari observers alleged mismanagement by Menard and criticized him as having pursued an agenda that jeopardized Qatar’s diplomatic relationships. The Center remains active, and in early April 2011, a Dutch journalist named Jen Keulen was named its new Director-General.

## **Education**

Qatar has invested heavily in improving the educational opportunities available to its citizens in recent years. The investment is designed to support the emir’s program of “Qatarization,” which seeks to prepare the next generation of Qatari citizens to assume leadership roles in the country’s economy and political and military institutions. Prominent Qatari women have taken a leading role in a number of education reform programs,<sup>58</sup> and, in 2002, Shaykha Mohza Bint Nasser Al

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<sup>55</sup> U.S. State Department, 2010 Country Report on Human Rights Practices in Qatar, April 8, 2011. Available at: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/nea/154471.htm>.

<sup>56</sup> *Qatar News Agency*, “Deal on media freedom signed,” January 4, 2008.

<sup>57</sup> *Agence France Presse*, “French head of Qatar media watchdog quits,” June 23, 2009.

<sup>58</sup> On May 5, 2003, Shaykh Hamad appointed Shaykha Bint Ahmed al Mahmoud, daughter of the Minister of State for (continued...)

Missned, the emir's second wife, helped launch Qatar's Education City, a state-of-the-art campus complex in Doha. Shaykha Mohza serves as the chairperson of the Qatar Foundation, which directs Education City's activities.<sup>59</sup> Education City and its university programs sit at the top of a diverse Qatari public and private education system, which serves both Qatari citizens, resident expatriates, and visiting students from around the world. Qatari citizens receive tuition support for participation in primary, secondary, and university education, and the Qatari government offers significant financial support to many institutions to facilitate their establishment and operation.

Education City houses the Qatar Academy, which offers a pre-kindergarten through high school program, and a number of university programs, which offer degrees from several U.S. partner-universities such as Weill Cornell Medical College, Georgetown University's Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, Texas A&M University, Virginia Commonwealth University, Northwestern University, and Carnegie Mellon University. Qatar Foundation officials indicate that the programs, while of immediate benefit to Qatari students, also are intended to serve as centers of educational excellence for students from elsewhere in the region. The U.S.-partner university programs are consistently ranked among the most competitive and demanding undergraduate programs in surveys of colleges and universities in the United States. Carnegie Mellon University inaugurated a new facility on the campus in 2009, and the Qatar Foundation plans to complete new facilities for the Georgetown University and Northwestern University programs within the next three years.

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(...continued)

Foreign Affairs, as Minister of Education. This appointment signified the first appointment ever of a female cabinet minister in any Gulf state. She resigned in April 2009 and was replaced by a member of her family Saad Bin Ibrahim al Mahmoud.

<sup>59</sup> For more on Education City and the Qatar Foundation, which oversees its activities, see the Foundation's website, available at <http://www.qf.edu.qa/output/Page1.asp>.

## Appendix A. Qatar in Brief

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<b>Area:</b>	11,437 sq km (slightly smaller than Connecticut)
<b>Population (April 2010):</b>	1.67 million
<b>Literacy:</b>	89%
<b>Religion (2004 Census):</b>	77.5% Muslim, Christian 8.5%, other 14%
<b>Ethnic Groups:</b>	40% Arab, 18% Pakistani, 18% Indian, 10% Iranian, 14% other
<b>GDP (2010):</b>	\$145,300 per capita (based on \$122.2 billion GDP PPP)
<b>Inflation (2010):</b>	-4.9%
<b>Oil Reserves (2010):</b>	25.4 billion barrels
<b>Gas Reserves (2009):</b>	25.47 trillion cubic meters
<b>Armed Forces:</b>	11,800 active personnel, 30 main battle tanks, 18 fighter aircraft

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**Sources:** U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, *World Factbook - Qatar*, May 2011; Qatar Statistics Agency, May 2010; Armed forces data - International Institute for Strategic Studies, *Military Balance 2010*, February 2010.

## **Appendix B. Chiefs of State and Cabinet Members of Qatar**

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Emir	Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani
Heir Apparent	Tamim bin Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani
Prime Minister	Hamad bin Jassem bin Jabr Al Thani
Deputy Prime Minister	Abdallah bin Hamad Al Attiyah
Foreign Minister	Hamad bin Jassem bin Jabr Al Thani
Energy Minister	Muhammad Salih Al Sada
Interior Minister	Abdallah bin Khalid Al Thani <sup>a</sup>
Finance Minister	Youssef Hussein Al Kamal
Ambassador to the United States	Ali Fahad Al Shahwany Al Hajri

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- a. Minister of State for Interior Affairs Abdallah bin Nasser bin Khalifa Al Thani conducts the official business of the Ministry of Interior, including serving as liaison to foreign governments and security services.

**Figure B-1. Map of Qatar**



**Source:** U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, World Factbook, November 2009.

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