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

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Summary

The State of Qatar has employed its ample financial resources to exert significant regional influence and avoid domination by Saudi Arabia, the de facto leader of the alliance of six Gulf monarchies called the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Oman). Qatar has intervened in several regional conflicts, including in Syria and Libya, and has engaged with both Sunni Islamist and Iran-backed Shiite groups in Lebanon, Sudan, the Gaza Strip, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Qatar has maintained consistent dialogue with Iran while also supporting U.S. and GCC efforts to limit Iran's regional influence.

Qatar's independent policies, which include supporting regional Muslim Brotherhood organizations and establishing a global media network called Al Jazeera, have injured Qatar's relations with Saudi Arabia and some other GCC members. The differences erupted into a crisis on June 5, 2017, when 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 United States, as well as Kuwait and other countries, are attempting to mediate the dispute, in large part because the rift threatens efforts to counter Iran and regional terrorist groups. However, mediation efforts have not produced sustained direct talks between Qatar and its antagonists, let alone a full resolution. Qatar has countered the Saudi-led pressure with new arms buys and deepening relations with Turkey and Iran.

As do the other GCC leaders, Qatar's leaders apparently view the United States as the guarantor of Gulf security. Since 1992, the United States and Qatar have had a formal Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) that 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 about 10,000 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 in Qatar participate in all U.S. operations in the region, including Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) against the Islamic State organization in Iraq and Syria. Members of Congress have taken into account a broad range of Qatar's policies in consideration of U.S. arms sales to Qatar, such as a sale of F-15s signed in mid-2017. In late January 2018, Qatar and the United States held the inaugural "Strategic Dialogue" in Washington, DC, in which U.S. officials hailed a strong U.S.-Qatar partnership on many fronts and signaled the potential for permanent U.S. basing there. Qatar signed a broad memorandum of understanding with the United States in 2017 to cooperate against international terrorism. That MOU appeared intended to counter assertions that Qatar's ties to regional Islamist movements support terrorism and that Qatari leaders condone private Qatari citizen contributions to Islamist extremist organizations.

The voluntary relinquishing of power in 2013 by Qatar's former Amir (ruler), Shaykh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, departed from GCC patterns of governance in which leaders generally remain in power for life. However, Qatar is also the only one of the smaller GCC states that has not yet formed a legislative body that is at least partly elected, even though such elections have long been promised. Further, U.S. and international reports criticize Qatar for failing to adhere to international standards of human and labor rights practices, and for failing to protect expatriate workers from abuses by Qatari employers.

As are the other GCC states, Qatar is wrestling with the downturn in global hydrocarbons prices since 2014, now compounded by the Saudi-led embargo. Qatar is positioned to weather these headwinds because of its small population and substantial financial reserves. But, Qatar shares with virtually all the other GCC states a lack of economic diversification and reliance on revenues from sales of hydrocarbon products.

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Brief History

Prior to 1867, Qatar was ruled by the leaders of neighboring Bahrain, the Al Khalifa family. That year, following an uprising against the Al Khalifa, Britain, then the main Western power in the Persian Gulf region, installed the head of a leading Qatari family, Muhammad bin Thani Al Thani, as ruler of what is now Qatar. In 1916, in the aftermath of World War I and the demise of the Ottoman Empire, Qatar and Britain 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. 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 U.S. Ambassador to Qatar, Dana Shell Smith, resigned from that post in June 2017, explaining that decision with postings on social media that appeared to criticize the Trump Administration.

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.

Table I. Senior Leaders of Qatar

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

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

¹ Information in this section is taken from Bernard Haykel. “Qatar and Islamism.” Policy Brief: Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre. February 2013.

Figure I. Qatar At-A-Glance



Area	11,586 sq km (slightly smaller than Connecticut)
People	<p><i>Population:</i> 2.3 million (July 2017 estimate), of which about 90% are expatriates</p> <p><i>Religions:</i> Muslim 68%, of which about 90% are Sunni; Christian 14%; Hindu 14%; 3% Buddhist; and 1% other. Figures include expatriates.</p> <p><i>Ethnic Groups:</i> Arab 40%; Pakistani 18%; Indian 18%; Iranian 10%; other 14%. Figures include expatriates. Virtually all citizens are Arab.</p>
Economy	<p><i>Gross Domestic Product (GDP):</i> \$341 billion (2017) on purchasing power parity (ppp) basis</p> <p><i>GDP per capita:</i> \$125,000 (2017) on ppp basis</p> <p><i>Inflation:</i> 1% (2017)</p> <p><i>GDP Growth Rate:</i> 2.5% (2017)</p> <p><i>Export Partners:</i> (In descending order) Japan, South Korea, India, China, Singapore, UAE</p> <p><i>Import Partners:</i> (In descending order) United States, China, UAE, Germany, Japan, Britain, Italy, Saudi Arabia (pre-2017 GCC rift)</p>
Oil and Gas	<p><i>Oil Exports:</i> Slightly more than 700,000 barrels per day. Negligible amounts to the United States</p> <p><i>Natural Gas Exports:</i> Almost 125 billion cubic meters in 2014</p>

Sources: Graphic created by CRS. Map borders and cities generated by (name redacted) using data from Department of State, 2013; Esri, 2013; and Google Maps, 2013. At-a-glance information from CIA, *The World Factbook*.

Governance and Human Rights

Governance

Qatar's governing structure approximates that of the other GCC states. The country is led by a hereditary Amir (literally "prince," but interpreted as "ruler"), Shaykh² Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani. Amir Tamim became Amir in June 2013 when his father, Amir Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, relinquished power voluntarily. 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 family or of prominent allied families. Amir Tamim serves concurrently as Minister of Defense, although most of the defense policy functions are performed by the Minister of State for Defense, a position with less authority than that of full minister. In November 2014, Amir Tamim appointed a younger brother, Shaykh Abdullah bin Hamad, as deputy Amir and the heir apparent. The Prime Minister, Shaykh Abdullah bin Nasir bin Khalifa Al Thani, serves concurrently as Interior Minister, assuming those posts when Amir Tamim became ruler. Observers note that there are dissidents within the Al Thani family—mostly those of lineages linked to ousted or other former Qatari rulers—who question Amir Tamim's legitimacy and policies, but no organized or serious challenge to his rule is apparent as of now. Some experts assess that the Saudi-led move to isolate Qatar, discussed in detail below, might have been intended, at least in part, to produce the ouster of Amir Tamim by a royal family member that is inclined to reflexively follow Saudi policies.

As is typical in the GCC states, political parties are banned. Unlike Kuwait and Bahrain, in Qatar there are no well-defined or publicly active "political societies" that act as the equivalent of parties. Unlike in Bahrain and Oman, there were no significant protests in Qatar during the "Arab Spring" uprising of 2011, and there have not been any public demonstrations critical of the government in recent years. Disputes and disagreements within the leadership, and between leaders and citizens, tend to be aired in private as part of a process of consensus building.³

Then-Amir Hamad put a revised constitution to a public referendum on April 29, 2003, and it achieved a 98% "yes" vote. Nevertheless, it left in place significant limitations: for example, it affirms that Qatar is a hereditary emirate. Some Western experts also criticize Qatar's constitution for specifying Islamic law as the main source of legislation.⁴ Further, the constitution's stipulation that a national legislative authority will consist of a 45-person Advisory Council (*Majlis Ash-Shura*), of which two-thirds (30 seats) will be elected, has been repeatedly delayed. In 2008, the government and the existing advisory council reached agreement on the criteria for suffrage and candidacy: naturalized Qataris who have been citizens for at least 10 years will be eligible to vote, and those whose fathers were born in Qatar will be eligible to run. In 2013, then-Amir Hamad issued a decree extending the term of the current, all-appointed Council. If and when the Council is formed, the government says it will have the ability to remove ministers (two-thirds majority vote), to approve a national budget, and to draft and vote on proposed legislation that can become law (two-thirds majority vote and concurrence by the Amir). Qatar's failure to hold

² Shaykh is an honorific term.

³ The Economist. "Qatar: Democracy? That's for Other Arabs." June 8, 2013. <http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21579063-rumours-change-top-do-not-include-moves-democracy-democracy-thats>.

⁴ Amy Hawthorne. "Qatar's New Constitution: Limited Reform from the Top." August 26, 2008. <http://carnegeiendowment.org/sada/?fa=21605>.

elections for a new Advisory Council makes it the only GCC state other than Saudi Arabia to have not held elections for any of the seats in a national legislative body.

Qatari officials note that the country holds elections, for a 29-seat Central Municipal Council. Elections for the fourth Council (each serving a four-year term) were held on May 13, 2015. The Council advises the Minister of Municipality and Urban Affairs on local public services. Voter registration and turnout—21,735 voters registered out of an estimate 150,000 eligible voters, and 15,171 of those voted—were lower than observers expected.⁵ The relatively low participation rate in the latest election could suggest that Qatari citizens view the Council as lacking influence. The State Department human rights report for 2016 stated that “observers considered [the municipal council elections] free and fair.”⁶

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

⁶ <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/265728.pdf>.

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, 2014, when Amir Hamad stepped down voluntarily to pave the way for the accession of a new generation of leadership. Amir Tamim was educated at Great Britain's Sherbourne School and graduated from its Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst in 1998, from which his father graduated in 1971. Concurrently, Amir Tamim heads the Qatari Investment Authority, which has billions of dollars of investments in Europe, including in Harrod's department store in London, the United States, and elsewhere. He reportedly is highly popular for resisting Saudi-led pressure in the intra-GCC crisis.



Shaykh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani

Amir Tamim's father, *Shaykh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani*, took power in June 1995, when his father, Amir Khalifa bin Hamad Al Thani, was in Europe. Amir Hamad took power in a fashion similar to his father. 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—and the current Amir's grandfather—Khalifa bin Hamad died in October 2016.

Sources: <http://www.mofa.gov>, author conversations with Qatari and U.S. officials.

Human Rights Issues⁷

Recent State Department reports on human rights in Qatar identify several major human rights problems, including restrictions on freedoms of speech, the press, assembly, and access to a fair trial for persons held under the “Protection of Society Law” and “Combating Terrorism Law.” Other human rights concerns expressed by the State Department include restrictions on freedom of religion and movement, legal and institutional discrimination against women, and the unresolved legal status of so-called “stateless persons,” or “*bidoons*.”⁸ There is a nominally independent National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) that investigates allegations of human rights abuses in the country, but it is administratively under the authority of the broader Qatar Foundation that was founded and is still run by the Amir’s mother, Shaykha Moza.

Freedom of Expression

Like virtually all the other GCC states, since the 2011 “Arab Spring” uprisings, Qatar has issued new laws that severely restrict freedom of expression and increase penalties for criticizing the ruling establishment. In 2014, the government approved a new cybercrimes law that provides for up to three years in prison for anyone convicted of threatening Qatar’s security, and compels Internet providers in Qatar to block “objectionable” content. A November 2015 law increased penalties for removing or expressing contempt at the national flag or the GCC flag. However, the country continues to host and subsidize the Al Jazeera satellite television network, which has evolved into a global media conglomerate. The government has sometimes blocked the websites of independent media, such as the English language *Doha News*.⁹

Women’s Rights

According to recent State Department human rights reports on Qatar, institutional discrimination against women continues. No specific law criminalizes domestic violence, and a national housing law discriminates against women married to noncitizen men and divorced women. Testimony by women in court cases is either dismissed or carries less weight than that of a man. On the other hand, women in Qatar drive and own property, and constitute about 15% of business owners and more than a third of the overall workforce, including in professional positions. There is one female minister (the Minister of Public Health); most of the other small GCC states now have more than one female minister. The law criminalizes rape, with the penalty being death if the perpetrator is a relative or guardian of the victim.

Trafficking in Persons and Labor Issues¹⁰

The State Department’s Trafficking in Persons report for 2017 upgraded Qatar’s ranking to “Tier 2” from Tier 2: Watch List. The 2017 report assesses that the government is not fully complying with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking, but that has made increased efforts to do so over the past year, including by establishing a coordinating body to oversee and facilitate

⁷ Much of the information in this section is based on: Department of State. Country Reports on Human Rights for 2016: Qatar 2016 Human Rights Report. <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/265728.pdf>.

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

⁹ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/12/qatar-blocking-of-doha-news-website-is-an-outright-attack-on-media-freedom/>.

¹⁰ This section is based on the State Department “Trafficking in Persons” report for 2017. <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/271344.pdf>.

anti-trafficking initiatives and enacting a law that reforms the sponsorship system to significantly reduce vulnerability to forced labor. The government also approved legislation to better protect domestic workers and strengthened enforcement against passport retention. It also increased the number of prosecutions and convictions for trafficking-related offenses. Qatar remains a destination country for men and women subjected to forced labor and, to a much lesser extent, forced prostitution. Female domestic workers are particularly vulnerable to trafficking due to their isolation in private residences and lack of protection under Qatari labor laws. In the course of the January 2018 U.S.-Qatar “Strategic Dialogue,” the two countries signed a memorandum of understanding to create a framework to combat trafficking in persons.

The State Department assesses Qatar’s labor rights as not adequately protecting the rights of workers to form and join independent unions, conduct legal strikes, or bargain collectively. The labor code only allows for one trade union, the General Union of Workers of Qatar, which the State Department assesses as “not a functioning entity.” Qatari law does not prohibit anti-union discrimination or provide for reinstatement of workers fired for union activity. In October 2015, the government enacted a reform to its labor policy—which went into effect December 13, 2016—to offer greater protections for the large population of foreign workers. The law changes 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 when their contracts end. Nevertheless, some critics say that, in practice, the reform will likely only modestly increase freedoms for foreign workers.¹¹ In a further step, in late August 2017, Amir Tamim signed a new law extending the protection of Qatar’s labor laws to domestic workers. Under the new law, domestic workers will be able to sign a legal employment contract with their employers.

International criticism of Qatar’s labor practices has increased as Qatar makes preparations to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup soccer tournament; additional engineers, construction workers, and other laborers have been hired to work in Qatar. Some companies report not being paid for work and a lack of dispute resolution, causing salary delays or nonpayment. Some reports suggest the government is worried about being cheated by international corporations.¹² Some human rights groups have criticized Qatar for allowing outdoor work (primarily construction) even when hot weather poses a significant health threat.¹³

Religious Freedom¹⁴

Qatar’s constitution stipulates that Islam is the state religion and Islamic law is “a main source of legislation,” but Qatari laws incorporate secular legal traditions as well as Islamic law. The law recognizes only Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. Jews and adherents of unrecognized religions, such as Hindus, Buddhists, and Baha’is, are allowed to worship privately but do not have authorized facilities in which to practice their religions. The overwhelming majority (possibly as much as 95%) of Qatari citizens are Sunni Muslims, possibly explaining why there have been no outward signs of sectarian schisms within the citizenry. Since 2015, the government has permitted eight registered Christian denominations to worship publicly at the Mesaymir Religious Complex

¹¹ James Dorsey. “New Qatari Labour Law: Too Little, Too Late.” *Huffington Post*, October 28, 2015.

¹² Qatar ranks 68th on the World Bank’s ease of doing business rankings. *Doing Business 2016, Measuring Regulatory Quality and Efficiency*, p. 228. Available at <http://www.doingbusiness.org>. “Qatar building boom proves a challenge for foreign construction firms.” *Reuters*, June 23, 2016.

¹³ Statement by Human Rights Watch, September 27, 2017.

¹⁴ This section is based on the State Department report on International Religious Freedom for 2016. <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/269154.pdf>.

(commonly referred to as “Church City”), and in 2015 the government allowed the Evangelical Churches Alliance Qatar to build a new church.

Foreign Policy

Qatar uses its financial resources to implement a foreign policy that engages and attempts to influence a wide range of regional actors that are often at odds with each other. Qatari officials talk with Israeli officials while at the same time Qatar hosts leaders of Hamas, and the country maintains consistent ties to Iranian leaders while at the same time hosting U.S. forces that contain Iran’s military power. Qatar has hosted an office of the Afghan Taliban movement and facilitated talks between the United States and the Taliban. As have some of the other GCC states, Qatar has sought, in some cases using its own military forces, to shape the outcome of regional uprisings since 2011, for example in Libya. Its policies have enabled Qatar to mediate some regional conflicts and to obtain the freedom of captives held by regional armed groups. At the same time, these policies have been perceived by de facto GCC leader Saudi Arabia and other GCC states an attempt by Qatar to exert its own independent regional influence at the risk of GCC unity and the stability of the other GCC countries.

Qatar and its Disputes with Other GCC Countries

A consistent source of friction within the GCC has been Qatar’s embrace of Muslim Brotherhood movements—including featuring them on the Qatar-based Al Jazeera news network—as representing a moderate political Islamist movement that can foster regional stability. Qatar has hosted Islamic scholars who adhere to the Brotherhood’s traditions, including the aging, outspoken Egyptian cleric Yusuf al-Qaradawi, but Qatari officials assert that these activists do not pose threats to any GCC state. In 2013-2014, differences over this and other issues, discussed in greater detail below, widened to the point where Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Bahrain withdrew their ambassadors from Doha in March 2014, accusing Qatar of supporting “terrorism.”¹⁵ The Ambassadors returned in November 2014 in exchange for a reported pledge by Qatar to fully implement a handwritten November 2013 “Riyadh Agreement” that committed Qatar to noninterference in the affairs of other GCC states and to refrain from supporting any Muslim Brotherhood-linked organizations.¹⁶

These same disputes erupted again—but more intensely—two weeks after a U.S.-Gulf summit held during the May 20-22, 2017, visit of President Donald Trump to Saudi Arabia. During that trip, President Trump held what White House officials called a “very productive” meeting with Amir Tamim, but also appeared highly supportive of Saudi leaders and their approach to regional issues. On June 5, 2017, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Bahrain, joined by Egypt, the recognized government of Yemen, and later Jordan and a few other Muslim countries, severed 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.¹⁷ They accused Qatar of supporting terrorist groups and of supporting Iran’s regional interventions, including against the government of Bahrain. Qatar called the move an attempt to violate Qatar’s

¹⁵ Author conversations with GCC officials. 2013-2015.

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ For information on the diplomatic rupture, see CRS Insight IN10712, *Qatar and its Neighbors: Disputes and Possible Implications*, by (name redacted) and (name redacted)

sovereignty. Some press reports indicated that a trigger for the Saudi-led move was a UAE-orchestrated hack of Qatari media that falsely quoted Qatar's Amir with making statements that challenge Saudi and UAE regional policies.¹⁸ The UAE denied involvement in the hacking.

On June 22, 2017, the Saudi-led group presented Qatar with 13 demands,¹⁹ including closing the Al Jazeera network, severing relations with terrorist groups including the Muslim Brotherhood, scaling back relations with Iran, closing a Turkish military base in Qatar, and paying reparations to the Saudi-led bloc. Secretary of State Tillerson described some of the demands as excessive—an apparent rebuke to Saudi Arabia and the UAE—and he indicated that Qatar should agree to implement those demands that were more measured, which many experts assess as perhaps expelling Muslim Brotherhood or Hamas figures. On July 3, 2017, Qatar submitted, via Kuwait, a response to the demands indicating that Qatar is amenable to negotiations on the demands, but that it would not “surrender.” On July 5, the Saudi-led group reframed their demands as six broad “principles” for Qatar to “combat extremism and terrorism” and prevent their financing; suspending “all acts of provocation”; fully complying with the commitments Qatar made in 2013 and 2014 (see above); and “refraining from interfering in the internal affairs of states.”²⁰ Subsequently, Saudi Arabia allowed Qatari pilgrims to visit the Kingdom, and one of the countries that backed the Saudi effort, Senegal, restored relations with Qatar. Qatari officials assert that the country's ample wealth is enabling it to limit the economic effects of the Saudi-led move, but that the blockade has separated families and caused other significant social disruptions.

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has taken the lead within the Trump Administration to mediate the dispute, working closely with Kuwaiti leaders. He conducted “shuttle diplomacy” in the region during July 10-13, and forged a U.S.-Qatar accord to combat terrorism that appeared intended to refute Saudi-led charges that Qatar sponsors terrorism. President Trump initially appeared to back the Saudi-led move by criticizing Qatar for supporting militant groups, but has more recently engaged with Amir Tamim and undertaken efforts to settle the rift.²¹ On September 7, 2017, President Trump met with Kuwait's Amir Sabah al-Ahmad Al Sabah at the White House, and the GCC rift reportedly was a central topic. After the Kuwait leadership visit, the President reportedly was pivotal to arranging the first direct talks on the crisis—a phone call between Amir Tamim and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman on September 9, 2017.²² However, the direct dialogue broke off immediately when the Qatari and Saudi sides disputed which of them had initiated the talks. President Trump met again with Amir Tamim on September 20, 2017, on the sidelines of U.N. General Assembly meetings in New York. That meeting, as well as the October 2017 trip to the region by Secretary Tillerson, did not produce any sustained dialogue between the parties to the dispute, but the Saudi-led bloc appeared to respond to the mediation by pledging not to escalate the dispute. The late January 2018 U.S.-Qatar inaugural “Strategic Dialogue” was accompanied by statements by senior U.S. officials including Secretary Tillerson and Defense Secretary James Mattis that Qatar is “a strong partner and longtime friend” of the United States.²³ Amir Tamim reportedly will visit the United States in April 2018 following visits

¹⁸ Karen DeYoung and Ellen Nakashima. “UAE Orchestrated Hacking of Qatari Government Sites, Sparking Regional Upheaval, According to U.S. Intelligence Officials.” *Washington Post*, July 16, 2017.

¹⁹ The list of demands can be found at https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/list-of-demands-on-qatar-by-saudi-arabia-other-arab-nations/2017/06/23/054913a6-57d0-11e7-840b-512026319da7_story.html?utm_term=.5bde2f68b6b1.

²⁰ The text of the joint statement can be found at <http://www.bna.bh/portal/en/news/792679>.

²¹ White House Office of the Press Secretary. Readout of President Donald J. Trump's Call with Amir Sheikh Tameem Bin Hamad Al Thani of Qatar. June 7, 2017.

²² <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-41209610>.

²³ “In Charm Offensive, Qatar is Pushing for a Comeback in Washington.” *New York Times*, February 10, 2018.

by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman and UAE de facto leader Mohammad bin Zayid Al Nuhayyan that apparently will focus on resolving the schism.

The rift has cast the future of the GCC into doubt. Amir Tamim and the host, Shaykh Sabah of Kuwait, were the only two GCC leaders that attended the December 4-5, 2017, GCC summit in Kuwait, a meeting held annually. The other GCC countries sent foreign minister-level representatives to the meeting, which adjourned on December 4 after only two hours of discussions. Qataris reportedly have rallied around their leadership to resist Saudi-led demands, and Qatar has displayed new military hardware and ordered other weaponry as an apparent show of strength against Saudi-led intimidation. And, as a consequence of the rift, Qatar has restored diplomatic relations with longtime GCC nemesis Iran. In December 2017, Saudi Arabia “permanently” closed its Salwa border crossing into Qatar, which had been closed temporarily since the crisis erupted in June.

Qatar’s disputes with other GCC countries have come despite the resolution in 2011 of a long-standing territorial dispute between Qatar and Bahrain, dating back to the 18th century, when the ruling families of both countries controlled parts of the Arabian peninsula. Qatar and Bahrain agreed to refer the dispute to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 1991 after clashes in 1986 in which Qatar landed military personnel on a man-made reef (Fasht al-Dibal) that was in dispute. In March 2001, the ICJ sided with Bahrain on the central dispute over the Hawar Islands, but with Qatar on ownership of the Fasht al-Dibal reef and the town of Zubara on the Qatari mainland, where some members of the ruling Al Khalifa family of Bahrain are buried. Two smaller islands, Janan and Hadd Janan, were ruled not part of the Hawar Islands and awarded to Qatar. Qatar expressed disappointment over the ruling but accepted it as binding.

Iran

Even though the Saudi-led bloc justified its blockade of Qatar in part on the assertion that Qatar had close relations with Iran, Qatar had long joined the other GCC states and the United States in countering Iran strategically. Qatar enforced international sanctions against Iran during 2010-2016, and no Qatar-based entity has been designated by the United States as an Iran sanctions violator. Amir Tamim attended both U.S.-GCC summits (May 2015 at Camp David and April 2016 in Saudi Arabia) that addressed GCC concerns about the July 2015 U.S.-led multilateral agreement on Iran’s nuclear program (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, JCPOA).²⁴ Qatar withdrew its Ambassador from Tehran in January 2016 in solidarity with Saudi Arabia, which was in a dispute with Iran over the Saudi execution of a dissident Shiite cleric, and Qatar joined the February 2016 GCC declaration that Lebanese Hezbollah is a terrorist organization.

Yet, Qatari leaders have always argued that dialogue with Iran is key to reducing regional tensions. 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 with regard to the arrangement.²⁵ In February 2010, Shaykh Tamim, who was at that time the Crown Prince/heir apparent, visited Iran for high-level talks with Iranian leaders, and as Amir, Tamim has

²⁴ The U.S.-GCC summits have resulted in new U.S. commitments to assist the GCC states against Iran and other regional threats, including through new arms sales, counterterrorism cooperation, countering cyberattacks, joint military exercises, and other measures. See White House Office of the Press Secretary. “Annex to U.S.-Gulf Cooperation Council Joint Statement.” May 14, 2015. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/05/14/annex-us-gulf-cooperation-council-camp-david-joint-statement>.

²⁵ “Iran, Qatar, Face Off Over North Field, South Pars. Oil and Gas News,” June 6-12, 2016. http://www.oilandgasnewsworldwide.com/Article/35647/Iran,_Qatar_face_off_over_North_Field,_South_Pars.

maintained direct conversations with Iran's elected President Hassan Rouhani.²⁶ On March 8, 2017, in connection with an initiative by Kuwait and Oman to try to reduce tensions with Iran, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif visited Doha and met with Amir Tamim. The previous month, Rouhani visited Kuwait and Oman but was not invited to visit Qatar. Apparently perceiving that the June 2017 intra-GCC rift provided an opportunity to drive a wedge within the GCC, Iran supported Qatar in the dispute and has exported additional foodstuffs to Qatar to help it compensate for the cutoff of Saudi food exports. It has permitted Qatar's flagship airline, Qatar Airways, to overfly its airspace in light of the Saudi, UAE, and Bahraini denial of their airspace to that carrier. In August 2017, Qatar formally restored full diplomatic relations with Iran.

Saudi official statements also cited Qatar's alleged support for pro-Iranian dissidents in Bahrain as part of the justification for isolating Qatar in June 2017. Contributing to that Saudi perception was Qatar's brokering in 2008 of the "Doha Agreement" to resolve a political crisis in Lebanon that had resulted in fighting between Lebanon government forces and Hezbollah. In 2017, Qatar also reportedly paid certain Iraqi Shiite militia factions several hundred million dollars to release Qatari citizens, including royal family members, who were kidnapped in 2016 while falcon hunting in southern Iraq.²⁷ Qatar's acceptance by the various Lebanese factions as a mediator stemmed, at least in part, from Qatar's role in helping reconstruct Lebanon after the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war, and from then-Amir Hamad's postwar visit to Hezbollah strongholds in Lebanon.

Egypt

In Egypt, after the fall of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in 2011, the Muslim Brotherhood-linked party there won a parliamentary majority and one of its leaders, Muhammad Morsi, won presidential elections in 2012. Qatar supported Morsi's government with about \$5 billion in aid,²⁸ contributing to the 2014 and 2017 rifts between Qatar and the other GCC states. Saudi Arabia and the UAE strongly backed Morsi's ouster by Egypt's military in 2013. Because of its support for Morsi, Qatar's relations with former military leader and now President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi have been strained, and Egypt joined the Saudi-led move against Qatar in June 2017.

Libya

In Libya, Qatar joined the United States and several GCC and other partner countries in air operations to help oust Qadhafi in 2011. Subsequently, however, Qatar has supported Muslim Brotherhood-linked factions in Libya opposed by the UAE, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia.²⁹ This difference in approaches in Libya among the GCC states contributed to the Saudi-led move to isolate Qatar in June 2017.

Yemen

In 2015, Qatar joined the Saudi-led military coalition that is battling Iran-backed Zaidi Shiite Houthi rebels in Yemen, including conducting air strikes against Houthi and allied positions. This

²⁶ "Iran, Qatar Seek Improved Relations Despite Differences." Al Arabiya, June 2015. <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2015/06/19/Iran-Qatar-seek-improved-relations-despite-differences-.html>.

²⁷ <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/21/world/middleeast/big-ransom-and-syria-deals-win-release-of-royal-qatari-hunters.html>.

²⁸ <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Final-PDF-English.pdf>.

²⁹ U.N. Security Council. Final Report of the Panel of Experts on Libya Established Pursuant to Resolution 1973 (2011). March 9, 2016. http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2016/209.

was a departure from Qatar's 2006-2007 failed efforts to mediate between the Houthis and the government of President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who left office in 2012 following an "Arab Spring"-related uprising in Yemen. In September 2015, Qatar deployed about 1,000 military personnel, along with armor, to Yemen. Four Qatar soldiers were killed fighting there. As a result of the intra-GCC rift, Qatar withdrew from the Saudi-led military effort in Yemen.

Syria and Anti-Islamic State Operations

In Syria, Qatar has been providing funds and weaponry to rebels fighting the regime of President Bashar Al Asad.³⁰ The factions Qatar has supported, such as Ahrar Al Sham, compete with and sometimes fight anti-Asad factions supported by Saudi Arabia and UAE. Qatar also has built ties to Jabhat al Nusra (JAN), an Al Qaeda affiliate that was designated by the United States as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO).³¹ Qatari officials assert that their intent was to induce the group to sever its ties to Al Qaeda, which it formally did in July 2016, although observers perceive the group is still aligned with Al Qaeda leadership. Qatari mediation also succeeded on a few occasions in obtaining the release of Lebanese and Western prisoners captured by the group.

In the wake of Russia's intervention in the Syria conflict in September 2015, Amir Tamim visited Russia in January 2016 and reiterated Qatar's support for a negotiated solution to the conflict. In November 2016, Qatar's Foreign Minister stated that Doha would continue to arm Syrian rebels even if the Trump Administration ceased support for rebel factions, adding that Qatar would not supply the rebels with shoulder-held anti-aircraft weaponry absent a multilateral decision to do so.³² However, Asad regime gains in Syria likely render Qatar's commitment to the rebels immaterial to the outcome of the conflict.

Qatar is a member of the U.S.-led coalition combating the Islamic State. In 2014, Qatar flew some airstrikes in Syria against Islamic State positions. However, after several weeks, the coalition ceased identifying Qatar as a participant in coalition strikes inside Syria. Neither Qatar nor any other GCC state has participated in coalition air operations against the Islamic State inside Iraq. In April 2017, Qatar reportedly paid ransom to obtain the release of 26 Qatari ruling family members abducted while on a hunting trip in southern Iraq in 2015, reportedly by Iraqi Shiite militias. The Iraqi government stated in June 2017 that it, not the Shiite militias, has possession of the Qatari ransom monies.

Israeli-Palestinian Issues/Hamas

Qatar has attempted to play a role in Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations by engaging all parties. In 1996, then-Amir Hamad welcomed then-Prime Minister of Israel Shimon Peres and allowed Israel to open a formal trade office in Doha. That step went beyond Qatar's dropping of the secondary Arab League boycott of Israel, a step it took in 1993 in concert with all the GCC states. In April 2008, then-Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni attended the Qatar government-sponsored Doha Forum conference and met with then-Amir Hamad.³³ Qatar ordered the Israeli offices in Doha

³⁰ Mark Mazzetti and Matt Apuzzo. "U.S. Relies Heavily on Saudi Money to Support Syrian Rebels." *New York Times*, January 23, 2016. http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/24/world/middleeast/us-relies-heavily-on-saudi-money-to-support-syrian-rebels.html?_r=0.

³¹ Al Jazeera, December 2, 2015. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/12/lebanese-hostages-released-prisoner-swap-151201072408599.html>.

³² "Qatar will Help Syrian Rebels even if Trump Ends U.S. Role." *Reuters*, November 26, 2016.

³³ "Qatar and Israel: A Strategic but Complicated Alliance." *Fanack Chronicle of the Middle East and North Africa*. April 27, 2013.

closed in January 2009 at the height of an Israel-Hamas conflict that broke out that month and the offices have not formally reopened because of the stagnation in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process in recent years. Amir Tamim has regularly criticized Israel, accusing it of severe abuses against the Palestinians and insincerity in seeking a political solution to the dispute.³⁴ Still, small levels of direct Israel-Qatar trade reportedly continue; Israeli exports to Qatar consist mostly of machinery and technology, and imports from Qatar are primarily plastics.³⁵

Qatar has allowed senior leaders of the Islamist group Hamas—a Muslim Brotherhood offshoot that has exercised de facto control of the Gaza Strip since 2007—to operate in Doha. Hamas supporters and leaders also regularly appear on Al Jazeera. Qatari officials assert that engagement with Hamas is part of the country’s efforts to broker reconciliation between Hamas and the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority (PA). However, Qatar’s hosting of Hamas leaders and its financial aid to the Gaza Strip have drawn U.S. and other Gulf state criticism as support for a terrorist organization. Qatari officials assert that the country funds only humanitarian and civilian projects that benefit the residents of the Gaza Strip and have no military applications. Qatar’s leaders express consistent support for Palestinian efforts for full United Nations membership and recognition, while at the same time backing negotiations between the Palestinians and Israel. Qatar reportedly asked former Hamas political bureau chief Khalid Meshal to leave Qatar after the intra-GCC rift erupted as part of an effort to accommodate the demands of the Saudi-led bloc. 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, appears directed at Qatar by mandating sanctions on entities, including agencies of foreign governments, that the Administration determines are providing financial or other material support to Hamas or its leaders.

Afghanistan

Qatar did not deploy forces to support U.S.-led military operations in Afghanistan, but its facilities and forces support U.S. operations there and Qatar has facilitated talks between the United States and Taliban representatives. In June 2013, the Taliban opened a representative office in Qatar, but it violated U.S.-Qatar-Taliban understandings by raising a flag of the former Taliban regime on the building and Qatar, at U.S. request, immediately closed the office. Taliban officials remained in Qatar, and revived U.S.-Taliban talks led to the May 31, 2014, exchange of captured U.S. soldier Bowe Bergdahl for five Taliban figures held by the United States at the prison facility in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The five were banned from traveling outside Qatar until there is an agreed solution that would ensure that they could not rejoin the Taliban insurgency. Since May 2015 various nongovernment organizations and unofficial mediators have assembled talks in Qatar between Taliban representatives and Afghan officials. As a result of these sessions, the Taliban reopened its office in Qatar in 2015,³⁶ headed by Sher Mohammad Stanekzai. Unlike Saudi Arabia and UAE, Qatar did not recognize the Taliban as the legitimate government of Kabul when the movement ruled during 1996-2001.

Qatar might also have some contacts with the Haqqani Network, a U.S.-designated Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) that is allied with the Taliban. In January 2016, Qatari mediation

³⁴ “Israel Doesn’t Want Peace: Emir.” *Qatar The Peninsula*, September 29, 2015. <http://www.thepeninsulaqatar.com/news/qatar/353598/israel-doesn-t-want-peace-emir>.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Author meeting with Pugwash representatives. June 2015.

reportedly caused the Haqqani Network to release a Canadian hostage, Colin Rutherford.³⁷ The mediation did not as Qatar hoped, lead to the freedom of the Coleman family, also held by that group, which was rescued from the group by a U.S. and Pakistani operation in October 2016.

In January 2018, Qatar's air force completed the first two flights of its C-17 (Globemaster) cargo aircraft to Afghanistan and back. According to Defense Secretary Mattis, the flights provided logistical support to the NATO "counterterrorism" campaign there.

Other Qatari Relationships and Mediation Efforts³⁸

Somewhat outside the traditional Middle East, Qatar has played an active role in mediating conflict over Sudan's Darfur region. In 2010, Qatar helped broker a series of agreements, collectively known as the Doha Agreements, between the government and various rebel factions. Qatar's grants and promises of investment reportedly were pivotal to achieving these outcomes.

As noted above, Qatar has broadened its relationship with Russia since early 2016 in conjunction with efforts to resolve the conflict in Syria, and 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 its large Rosneft energy firm.

Qatar also has forged relationships with several countries in Central Asia based on shared—or potentially competing—interests in shaping energy delivery routes in the region.³⁹ Amir Tamim has exchanged leadership visits with the President of Turkmenistan, Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov. The Amir visited Turkmenistan in March 2016 and Berdymukhamedov visited Doha in March 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 is funding a large portion of a \$100 million mosque in Dushanbe, which purports to be the largest mosque in Central Asia.

U.S.-Qatar Defense and Security Cooperation

U.S.-Qatar defense and security relations are long-standing and extensive—a characterization emphasized by senior U.S. officials in the course of the late January 2018 inaugural U.S.-Qatar "Strategic Dialogue" in Washington, DC. The U.S.-Qatar defense relationship emerged during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war. The six Gulf monarchies formed the GCC in late 1981 and collectively backed Iraq against the threat posed by Iran in that war, despite their political and ideological differences with Iraq's Saddam Hussein. In the latter stages of that war, Iran attacked international shipping in the Gulf and some Gulf state oil loading facilities, but none of the facilities it attacked were in Qatar.

After Iraq invaded GCC member Kuwait in August 1990, the GCC participated in the U.S.-led military coalition that expelled Iraq from Kuwait in February 1991. In January 1991, Qatari armored forces helped coalition troops defeat an Iraqi attack on the Saudi town of Khafji. The Qatari participation in the U.S.-led coalition largely ended U.S.-Qatar strains over Qatar's illicit

³⁷ <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/12/us/politics/militants-free-american-woman-and-family-held-for-5-years-in-afghanistan.html>.

³⁸ For more information on Qatar's mediation efforts, see Sultan Barakat, Brookings Doha Center publication "Qataru Mediation: Between Ambition and Achievement." <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Final-PDF-English.pdf>.

³⁹ See Natalie Koch. Qatar and Central Asia. PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 484, 2017.

procurement in the late 1980s of U.S.-made “Stinger” shoulder-held anti-aircraft missiles.⁴⁰ After the expulsion of Iraq from Kuwait, U.S.-Qatari defense relations deepened and the two countries signed a formal defense cooperation agreement (DCA), discussed below. Since then, defense cooperation has expanded and deepened, including through U.S. sales of increasingly sophisticated arms and missile defense systems. CENTCOM Commander General Joseph Votel testified on February 27, 2018, that U.S. regional operations have not been affected by the intra-GCC rift.

Qatar, one of the wealthiest states in the world on a per capita gross domestic product (GDP) basis, receives virtually no U.S. security or economic assistance of any kind. At times, small amounts of U.S. aid through various programs have been provided to help Qatar develop capabilities to prevent smuggling and the movement of terrorists or proliferation-related gear into Qatar or around its waterways.

Qatar has also developed 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.

Qatar’s defense relationship with Turkey has become an element in Qatar’s efforts to resist the Saudi-led pressure in the intra-GCC crisis. In 2014, Qatar allowed Turkey—a country that, like Qatar, often supports Muslim Brotherhood—to open a military base (Tariq bin Ziyad base) in Qatar⁴¹—an initiative that might have contributed to Turkey’s support for Qatar in the June 2017 intra-GCC rift. One of the “13 demands” of the Saudi-led anti-Qatar coalition has been that Qatar close the Turkish base in Qatar—a demand Qatari officials say will not be met and which might no longer be an obstacle to a solution to the intra-GCC rift. Turkey has demonstrated its support by sending additional troops to Qatar and conducting joint exercises in August 2017, and by increasing food exports to replace some of those previously provided by Saudi Arabia. Turkey added to its Qatar troop contingent in December 2017. In addition to allowing more Turkish troops to deploy in Qatar, the Qatari military has displayed short range ballistic missiles in parades in late 2017 and completed orders for new combat aircraft.

Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA)

The United States and Qatar signed a formal defense cooperation agreement (DCA) on June 23, 1992. The DCA 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.⁴²

Approximately 10,000 U.S. troops are currently deployed at the various facilities in Qatar. Most are U.S. Air Force personnel based at the large Al Udeid air base southwest of Doha, working as part of the Coalition Forward Air Component Command (CFACC).⁴³ The air field, which also

⁴⁰ Elaine Sciolino. “Qatar Rejects U.S. Demand for Return of Illicit Stingers.” *New York Times*, June 28, 1988. Congress responded to the Qatari Stinger acquisition by enacting a ban on arms sales to Qatar (Section 566(d) of P.L. 100-461). The ban was repealed by Section 568 of the foreign aid appropriations act for FY1991 (P.L. 101-513).

⁴¹ “Turkey Opens First Mideast Military Base in Qatar.” *Voice of America News*, May 10, 2016. <http://www.voanews.com/content/turkey-opens-first-middle-east-military-base-in-qatar/3323653.html>.

⁴² U.S. Library of Congress. Country Studies: Persian Gulf States. Some provisions of DCA’s with other GCC states are discussed in Sami Hajjar, *U.S. Military Presence in the Gulf: Challenges and Prospects* (U.S. Army War College: Strategic Studies Institute), March 2002, p. 27.

⁴³ See <http://www.afcent.af.mil/>.

hosts the forward headquarters for U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), has been steadily expanded and enhanced with Qatari funding as well as about \$450 million in U.S. military construction funding since 2003.⁴⁴ Qatar invested about \$1 billion to construct the base in the 1990s. The U.S. Army component of U.S. Central Command prepositions armor (enough to outfit one brigade) at Camp As Sayliyah,⁴⁵ and that armor was deployed in Operation Iraqi Freedom that removed Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq in 2003. The U.S. personnel deployed to Qatar participate in U.S. operations such as Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) to combat the Islamic State organization in Iraq and Syria. Qatar's own air force participated in some of the first OIR air strikes against Islamic State forces in Syria in late 2014, but, after a few weeks of such operations, Qatar curtailed its participation in the air operations, according to U.S. military press releases.

The DCA also reportedly addresses U.S. training of Qatar's military. Qatar's force of about 11,800 is the smallest in the region except for Bahrain. Of that force, about 8,500 are ground forces, 1,800 are naval forces, and 1,500 are air forces. A 2014 law mandates four months (three months for students) of military training for males between the ages of 18 and 35, with a reserve commitment of 10 years (up to age 40).

U.S. CENTCOM Commander General Joseph Votel testified before the House Armed Services Committee on February 27, 2018, that Qatar is seeking to expand its military both in size and capacity. According to General Votel, the intra-GCC rift has impacted Qatar's participation in Gulf state multilateral exercises, thereby hindering U.S. efforts to improve the Qatari force's proficiency.

Permanent U.S. Basing in Qatar?⁴⁶

The January 2018 Strategic Dialogue resulted in a number of U.S.-Qatar announcements of expanded defense and security cooperation, including Qatari offers to fund capital expenditures that offer the possibility of an "enduring" U.S. military presence in Qatar and to discuss the possibility of "permanent [U.S.] basing" there. In particular, Qatar reportedly is planning to gradually expand and enhance the Al Udeid facility over the next two decades—an effort that would facilitate an enduring U.S. presence there.

U.S. and Other Arms Sales to Qatar

Qatar's forces continue to field mostly French-made equipment, such as the AMX-30 main battle tank, but Qatar is increasingly shifting its weaponry mix to U.S.-made equipment.⁴⁷ According to General Votel's February 27, 2018, testimony, Qatar is currently the second-largest U.S. Foreign Military Sales (FMS) customer, with \$25 billion in new FMS cases. And, Qatar is "on track" to surpass \$40 billion in the next five years with additional FMS purchases. The joint statement of the U.S.-Qatar Strategic Dialogue in January 2018 said that Qatari FMS purchases had resulted in over 110,000 American jobs and the sustainment of critical U.S. military capabilities.

⁴⁴ Figures compiled by CRS.

⁴⁵ See Global Security.org at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/camp-as-sayliyah.htm>.

⁴⁶ Department of State. Joint Statement of the Inaugural United States-Qatar Strategic Dialogue. January 30, 2018.

⁴⁷ Information on Qatar's existing military forces and equipment is derived from The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). "The Military Balance: 2016." Chapter 7: The Middle East and North Africa.

- **Tanks.** Qatar’s 30 main battle tanks are French-made AMX-30s. In 2015, Germany exported several “Leopard 2” tanks to Qatar. Qatar has not purchased U.S.-made tanks, to date.
- **Combat Aircraft.** Qatar currently has a small inventory of combat aircraft—18 aircraft, of which 12 are French-made Mirage 2000s. In July 2013, Qatar submitted a letter of request to purchase 72 U.S.-made F-15s. After a long delay reportedly linked to the U.S. commitment to Israel’s “Qualitative Military Edge” (QME), on November 17, 2016, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) notified Congress of the potential sale which, along with support, training, and related equipment, has an estimated value of \$21 billion (Transmittal Number 16-58). The FY2016 National Defense Authorization Act (Section 1278 of P.L. 114-92) required a Department of Defense briefing for Congress on the risks and benefits of the F-15 sale, including the effect of such a sale on the U.S. commitment to maintain Israel’s QME. On June 14, 2017, Secretary of Defense Mattis and Qatar’s Minister of State for Defense Khalid al-Attiyah signed an agreement for a reported 36 of the F-15 fighters, likely an initial purchase that might later expand to the 72 that were originally planned.⁴⁸ The sale negotiations predated (and therefore were not covered by) Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Senator Bob Corker’s June 26, 2017, letter to Secretary of State Tillerson saying he would not provide informal concurrence to sales to the GCC until a path to resolution of the intra-GCC rift becomes clear. (Senator Corker revoked that blanket hold in a letter to Secretary Tillerson dated February 8, 2018.) In December 2017, the Defense Department announced that Qatar would buy the second group of 36 F-15s under the sale agreement. Deliveries of all aircraft are to be completed by the end of 2022. In addition to purchases of the U.S.-made aircraft, Qatar signed a \$7 billion agreement in May 2015 to purchase 24 French-made Rafale aircraft,⁴⁹ and, in September 2017, Qatar signed a “Statement of Intent” with Britain to purchase 24 Typhoon combat aircraft.
- **Helicopters.** In 2012, the United States sold Qatar AH-64 Apache attack helicopters and related equipment; UH-60 M Blackhawk helicopters; and MH-60 Seahawk helicopters. The total potential value of the sales was estimated at about \$6.6 billion, of which about half consisted of the Apache sale.
- **Missile and Rocket Systems.** Qatar is not known to have any extended range missiles, but various suppliers have provided the country with short range systems that can be used primarily in ground operations. During 2012-2013, 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 potential value of the sales was estimated at about \$665 million. On April 22, 2016, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency 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, plus

⁴⁸ “Qatar Says Fighter Jets Deal Shows Deep U.S. Support.” *Reuters*, June 15, 2017.

⁴⁹ Tom Hussain. “Is France Positioning Itself for Lead Role in Persian Gulf?” *McClatchy*, May 1, 2015; “Senators Begin Push for Jet Sales to Kuwait, Qatar.” *Defense News*, January 22, 2016.

associated equipment and support, with an estimated sale value of \$260 million.⁵⁰ On May 26, 2016, DSCA notified to Congress an additional sale of 10 Javelin launch units and 50 Javelin missiles plus associated equipment and support. The potential sale has an estimated value of \$20 million.⁵¹ At its national day parade in Doha in mid-December 2017, the Qatari military displayed its newly purchased SY 400-BP-12A ballistic missile, which has a 120-mile range and is considered suited to a surface attack mission. The display was widely viewed as an effort to demonstrate to the Saudi-led bloc Qatar's capabilities to resist concerted pressure.⁵²

- **Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) Systems.** Qatar has purchased various U.S.-made BMD systems, consistent with U.S. efforts to promote a coordinated Gulf missile defense capability against Iran's missile arsenal. In 2012, the United States sold Qatar Patriot Configuration 3 (PAC-3, made by Raytheon) fire units and missiles at an estimated value of nearly \$10 billion. Also that year, the United States agreed to sell Qatar the Terminal High Altitude Area Air Defense (THAAD), the most sophisticated ground-based missile defense system the United States has made available for sale.⁵³ The UAE ordered that system in 2011, and the delivery and training process for the UAE's THAADs began in late 2015.⁵⁴ However, because of Qatar's budget difficulties and operational concerns, the THAAD sale has not been finalized to date.⁵⁵ In February 2017, Raytheon concluded an agreement to sell Qatar an early warning radar system to improve the capabilities of its existing missile defense systems, with an estimated value of \$1.1 billion. In December 2017, the Defense Department awarded Raytheon a \$150 million contract to provide Qatar with services and support for its PAC-3 system.
- **Naval Vessels.** In August 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, with an estimated value of over \$5 billion.⁵⁶

Counterterrorism Cooperation

U.S.-Qatar's cooperation against groups that both countries agree are terrorist groups, such as the Islamic State organization, is extensive. However, as noted above, some groups that the United States considers as terrorist organizations—such as Hamas—are considered by Qatar to be

⁵⁰ Defense Security Cooperation Agency. Transmittal Number 16-07.

⁵¹ Defense Security Cooperation Agency. Transmittal Number 16-20.

⁵² Why is Qatar Showing Off its New Short-Range Ballistic Missile Arsenal?" *Al Arabiya English*, December 20, 2017.

⁵³ Defense Security Cooperation Agency announcement. November 5, 2012. <http://www.dsca.mil/major-arms-sales/qatar-terminal-high-altitude-area-defense-thaad>.

⁵⁴ Adriane Elliot. "Antiballistic Missile System Shared with U.S. Partner." Homepage of the U.S. Army. January 13, 2016. https://www.army.mil/article/160912/Antiballistic_system_shared_with_international_partner/.

⁵⁵ "Lockheed Says Qatar Budget Woes Could Delay Defense Deal." *Wall Street Journal*, April 26, 2016. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/lockheed-says-qatar-budget-woes-could-delay-defense-deal-1461692108>.

⁵⁶ "Qatar's EUR5 Billion Naval Deal with Italy Sees Three Ship Types to Be Delivered." *IHS Jane's Navy International*, June 17, 2016.

legitimate Arab movements pursuing goals with which Qatari officials and citizens often agree. In statements made at the start of the intra-GCC rift, President Donald Trump criticized Qatar for the funding of terrorist groups to a significant extent. Perhaps in part as a means to strengthen the U.S. ability to resolve the intra-GCC rift, on July 10, 2017, Qatar's foreign minister and Secretary Tillerson signed in Doha a Memorandum of Understanding on broad U.S.-Qatar counterterrorism cooperation, including but going beyond just combatting terrorism financing.⁵⁷ The joint statement of the January 2018 Strategic Dialogue noted "positive progress" under the July 2017 MOU, and thanked Qatar for its action to counter terrorism and violent extremism in all forms. The statement also noted the recent conclusion of a memorandum of understanding between the U.S. Attorney General and his Qatari counterpart on the fight against terrorism and its financing and combating cyber-crime.

Qatar participates in the State department's Antiterrorism Assistance (ATA) program to boost domestic security capabilities, and it has continued to participate in and host Global Counterterrorism Forum (CGTF) events. Under the ATA program, participating countries are provided with U.S. training and advice on equipment and techniques to prevent terrorists from entering or moving across their borders. However, Qatari agencies such as the State Security Bureau and the Ministry of Interior have limited manpower and are reliant on nationals from third countries to fill law enforcement positions—a limitation Qatar has tried to address by employing U.S. and other Western-supplied high technology.⁵⁸

In the past, perhaps before the global threat from the Al Qaeda organization was acute, 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.⁵⁹ However, Qatari officials note that none of the September 11 hijackers was a Qatari national.

Terrorism Financing Issues

U.S. officials have stated that Qatar has taken steps in recent years to prevent terrorism financing and the movement of suspected terrorists into or through Qatar, although terrorist financiers in Qatar are able to exploit Qatar's informal financial system. The country is a member of the Middle East North Africa Financial Action Task Force (MENAFATF), a regional financial action task force that coordinates efforts combatting money laundering and terrorism financing. In 2014, the Amir approved Law Number 14, the "Cybercrime Prevention Law," which criminalized terrorism-linked cyber offenses, and clarified that it is illegal to use an information network to contact a terrorist organization or raise funds for terrorist groups, or to promote the ideology of terrorist organizations.

Nevertheless, according to U.S. officials, "entities and individuals within Qatar continue to serve as a source of financial support for terrorist and violent extremist groups, particularly regional Al Qaeda affiliates such as the Nusra Front."⁶⁰ In October 2016, Daniel Glaser, then Assistant Secretary for Terrorist Financing in the Office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence, told a Washington, DC, research institute that, over the past decade, Qatar had made less progress in countering terrorism financing than had Saudi Arabia.⁶¹ The United States has imposed sanctions

⁵⁷ Carol Morello. "Qatar Agrees to Curb Terrorism Financing Under Deal with U.S." *Washington Post*, July 11, 2017.

⁵⁸ Department of State. Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism. "Country Reports on Terrorism: 2014."

⁵⁹ Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States.

⁶⁰ State Department report on international terrorism for 2015.

⁶¹ Barbara Slavin. "U.S. Treasury Official Praises Saudi Cooperation Against Terror Funding." *Al Monitor*, October 14, (continued...)

on several persons living in Qatar, including Qatari nationals, for allegedly raising funds or making donations to both Al Qaeda and the Islamic State.⁶² In late February 2017, perhaps in an effort to demonstrate increased cooperation, Qatar hosted a meeting of the “Egmont Group” global working group consisting of 152 country Financial Intelligence Units. The State Department’s 2016 report on international terrorism says that, in 2015 and 2016, Qatar prosecuted and convicted Qatari terrorist financiers for the first time.

Countering Violent Extremism

Qatar has hosted workshops on developing plans to counter violent extremism and has participated in similar sessions hosted by the UAE’s Hedayat Center that focuses on that issue. Also in 2015, Qatar pledged funding to the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to help address violent extremism and radicalization among youth and vulnerable populations. However, some experts have noted that the government has violated a pledge to the United States not to allow Qatari preachers to conduct what some consider religious incitement in mosques in Education City, where several U.S. universities have branches.⁶³

Economic Issues

Even before the June 2017 intra-GCC rift, Qatar had been wrestling with the economic effects of the fall in world energy prices since mid-2014—a development that has caused GCC economic growth to slow, their budgets to fall into deficit, and the balance of their ample sovereign wealth funds to stagnate or decline. Oil and gas reserves have made Qatar the country with the world’s highest per capita income and perhaps the lowest unemployment (less than half of 1%). Qatar is a member of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), along with other GCC states Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and UAE and other countries.

The economic impact on Qatar of the June 2017 intra-GCC rift is difficult to discern. About 40% of Qatar’s food is imported from Saudi Arabia, and there were reports of runs on store stocks of food when the crisis erupted. However, the government’s ample financial resources enabled it to quickly arrange substitute sources of goods from Turkey, Iran, India, and elsewhere, and to thereby mitigate the effects of the Saudi-led isolation efforts. The effects on Qatar’s growing international air carrier, Qatar Airways, have been significant but manageable. In November 2017, Iran and Turkey signed a deal with Qatar intended to help Qatar cope with the blockade by facilitating the transit of goods among the three countries.

Qatar’s main sovereign wealth fund, run by the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA), has an estimated value of about \$300 billion, according to Qatar’s Central Bank governor in July 2017. The fund, as well as an estimated \$40 billion held by the Central Bank, gives the country a substantial cushion to weather not only the Saudi-led efforts to isolate Qatar but also the relatively low energy prices that have prevailed since 2014.⁶⁴ QIA’s investments consist of real

(...continued)

2016.

⁶² U.S. Treasury Department: “Treasury Designated Twelve Foreign Terrorist Fighter Facilitators,” September 24, 2014; “Treasury Designated Al-Qa’ida Supporters in Qatar and Yemen,” December 18, 2013; “Treasury Targets Key Al-Qa’ida Funding and Support Network Using Iran as a Critical Transit Point,” July 28, 2011.

⁶³ David Weinberg. “Hate Preachers on Qatar Campus: Obama Gives Qatar Undeserved A+ on Fighting Incitement.” *The Huffington Post*, May 2, 2016.

⁶⁴ Qatar Has \$340 Billion in Reserves, Can Withstand ‘Any Kind of Shock,’ Central Bank Says. *Istanbul Sabah Online*, July 10, 2017.

estate and other relatively illiquid holdings, such as interest in London's Canary Wharf project. In May 2016, Qatar offered \$9 billion in bonds as a means of raising funds without drawing down its investment holdings.⁶⁵ Qatar also has cut some subsidies to address its budgetary shortfalls. In early October 2017, it was reported that QIA is considering divesting a large portion of its overseas assets and invest the funds locally—a move that is at least partly attributable to the economic pressures of the intra-GCC rift.⁶⁶

Qatar also remains able to earn ample funds from energy exports, despite the Saudi-led move. Proven oil reserves of about 25 billion barrels are far less than those of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, but enough to 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 exceed 25 trillion cubic meters, about 13% of the world's total and third largest in the world. Along with Kuwait and UAE, in November 2016 Qatar agreed to a modest oil production cut (about 30,000 barrels per day) as part of an OPEC-wide production cut intended to raise world crude oil prices.

Oil and gas still account for 92% of Qatar's export earnings, and 56% of government revenues.⁶⁷ Qatar is the world's largest supplier of liquefied natural gas (LNG), which is exported from the large Ras Laffan processing site north of Doha. That facility has been built up with U.S.-made equipment, much of which was exported with the help of about \$1 billion in Export-Import Bank loan guarantees. Qatar is a member and hosts the headquarters of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF), which is a nascent natural gas cartel and includes Iran and Russia, among other countries. State-run Qatar Petroleum is a major investor in the emerging U.S. LNG export market, with a 70% stake (Exxon-Mobil and Conoco-Phillips are minority stakeholders) in an LNG terminal in Texas that is seeking U.S. government approval to expand the facility to the point where it can export over 15 million tons of LNG per year.⁶⁸ In addition, other LNG suppliers, such as Australia, are challenging Qatar's market leadership; Australia has the advantage of being geographically close to Qatar's main gas customers, Japan and South Korea. 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.⁶⁹ Its gas industry gives Qatar some counter leverage against the Saudi-led group, but Qatar has said it will not reduce its gas supplies under existing agreements with other GCC states.

Because prices of hydrocarbon exports have fallen dramatically since mid-2014, in 2016 Qatar ran its first budget deficit (about \$13 billion). It was the only GCC state to avoid running a deficit for 2015. Qatar's GDP growth rate also slowed to below 3% in 2016, down from over 4% during each of 2013-2015.⁷⁰ As have other GCC rulers, Qatari leaders assert publicly that the country needs to diversify its economy, that generous benefits and subsidies need to be reduced, and that government must operate more efficiently. At the same time, the leadership apparently seeks to minimize the effect of any cutbacks on Qatari citizens.⁷¹ Still, if oil prices remain far below their

⁶⁵ <https://finance.yahoo.com/news/saudi-arabia-might-pull-qatar-174900348.html>.

⁶⁶ Qatar Fund Explores Asset Sales as it Looks Homeward. Bloomberg News, October 3, 2017.

⁶⁷ CIA, *The World Factbook*. June 2016. https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/print_qa.html.

⁶⁸ Adam Schreck. "AP Interview: Qatar Energy Minister Wants 'Fair' Oil Price." *Associated Press*, May 24, 2016.

⁶⁹ Dolphin Energy website. <http://www.dolphinenergy.com/en/6/about-dolphin-energy/about-us>.

⁷⁰ Economist Intelligence Unit, May 2, 2016; CIA, *The World Factbook*, accessed in late May 2016.

⁷¹ Giorgio Cafiero. "Qatar Cuts Spending to Cope with Low Oil Prices." Middle East Institute, March 1, 2016. <http://www.mei.edu/content/article/qatar-cuts-spending-cope-low-oil-prices>.

2014 levels, it is likely that many Qatari citizens will be required to seek employment in the private sector, which they generally have shunned in favor of less demanding jobs in the government.

The national development strategy from 2011 to 2016 focused on Qatar's housing, water, roads, airports, and shipping infrastructure in part to promote economic diversification, as well as to prepare to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup soccer tournament, investing as much as \$200 billion. In Doha, the result has been a construction boom, which by some reports has outpaced the capacity of the government to manage, and perhaps fund. A metro transportation system is under construction in Doha.

U.S.-Qatar Economic Relations

In contrast to the two least wealthy GCC states (Bahrain and Oman), which have free trade agreements 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. In 2005, Qatar donated \$100 million to the victims of Hurricane Katrina. 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.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's "Foreign Trade Statistics" compilation, the United States exported \$4.9 billion in goods to Qatar in 2016 (about \$600 million higher than 2015), and imported \$1.16 billion worth of Qatari goods in 2016, slightly less than in 2015. 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 of those commodities. U.S. exports to Qatar for 2017 ran at about half the level of 2016, but U.S. imports from Qatar in 2017 were about the same as in 2016.

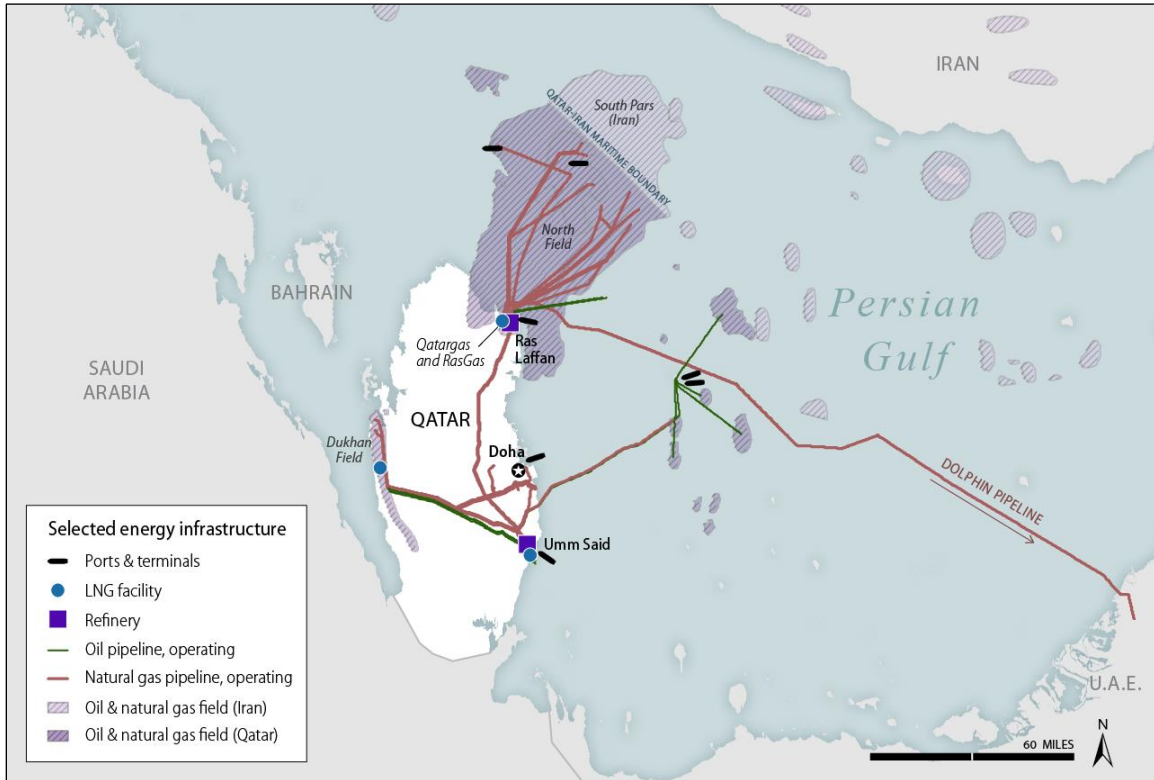
Qatar's growing airline, Qatar Airways, is a major buyer of U.S. commercial aircraft. In October 2016, the airline agreed to purchase from Boeing up to another 100 passenger jets with an estimated value of \$18 billion—likely about \$10 billion if standard industry discounts are applied. However, some U.S. airlines are challenging 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.⁷² The Obama Administration did not reopen that agreement in response to the complaints, and the Trump Administration, including during President Trump's February 2017 meeting with airline executives, has not indicated it would do so either. The U.S.-Qatar Strategic Dialogue joint statement said the two countries had reached a set of "understandings" on civil aviation on January 29, 2018, aimed at ensuring healthy competition on civil aviation while maintaining the Open Skies framework.

⁷² "Open Skies Dispute Between US and Gulf Airlines Escalates." *UAE the National*, January 30, 2016.

U.S. Assistance

As one of the wealthiest countries per capita in the world, Qatar gets negligible amounts of U.S. assistance. In FY2016, the United States spent about \$100,000 on programs in Qatar, about two-thirds of which was for counternarcotics programming. In FY2015, the United States spent \$35,000 on programs in Qatar, of which two-thirds was for counternarcotics.

Figure 2. Map of Qatari Energy Resources and Select Infrastructure



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

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