

# **Qatar: Issues for the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress**

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## **Qatar: Issues for the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress**

The State of Qatar is a small, energy-rich monarchy, strategically located near the center of the Persian Gulf. Defense and diplomatic cooperation anchor close U.S. Qatari relations: Qatar hosts thousands of U.S. troops, allows U.S. military use of Qatari facilities, and consults with U.S. officials on engagements with third parties in the Middle East region and beyond. In January 2022, President Joseph Biden and Emir Tamim bin Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani reaffirmed the multifaceted partnership between the United States and Qatar, and the Biden Administration designated Qatar as a Major Non-North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Ally.

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Qatar holds the third-largest proven natural gas reserves in the world, and is a major exporter of liquefied natural gas (LNG): LNG revenues have fueled change in Qatar and enabled Qatar's active foreign policies. Qatar's fewer than 300,000 citizens enjoy one of the world's highest per capita income levels, and, as with other Gulf states, a large expatriate population is critical to Qatar's domestic economy. Since the mid-1990s, Qatari leaders have overseen rapid, expansive economic growth; transformed the global media environment through the founding of the Al Jazeera satellite networks; engaged in complex and at times controversial diplomacy with U.S. partners and adversaries; and pursued a course of limited domestic political liberalization.

While Qatar supports many U.S. priorities, its leaders' pursuit of Qatar's sovereign interests and initiatives have presented both opportunities and challenges. Successive U.S. Administrations have sought to expand military, security, diplomatic, and economic cooperation with Qatar. Issues of immediate priority for the United States include shaping Qatari choices with regard to energy production and exports, sustaining and strengthening U.S.-Qatari defense cooperation, encouraging stability in Qatar's relationships with fellow members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and other Arab states, and leveraging Qatar's diplomatic engagement with the Taliban government in Afghanistan and with neighboring Iran. Qatar has not joined the Abraham Accords between some Arab states and Israel but has instead conditioned normalization of relations with Israel on substantial progress toward resolving Israel-Palestinian disputes.

In terms of its approach to Russia and China, Qatar voted to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine at the United Nations, stated its "respect for Ukraine's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity," and called for a ceasefire and a peaceful resolution to the conflict in accordance with international law. Emir Tamim and People's Republic of China (PRC) leader Xi Jinping met in Saudi Arabia in December 2022 in conjunction with the Arab States-China Summit and the GCC-China Summit. PRC state-owned firms have provided infrastructure and construction services for some major projects in Qatar. Qatar exports oil products and LNG to China.

Since 2012, successive Administrations have proposed several major U.S. arms sales to Qatar, marking a shift in Qatar's defense planning toward the use of advanced U.S. attack and transport helicopters and other weapons systems, including items for air defense and missile defense. Qatar is investing in its military facilities to meet current and potential future needs, with planned Qatar-funded development projects at Al Udeid Air Base valued at \$8.4 billion through 2033.

Qatar and the United States have not negotiated a Free Trade Agreement, but Qatar has used a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) to undertake large investments in the United States. U.S. exports to Qatar consist mainly of aerospace equipment. U.S. imports from Qatar consist mainly of petroleum products.

Qatar's constitution provides for elections to a consultative *Shura* Council. The government limits freedom of assembly, expression, religion, the press, and association. Labor and migrants rights concerns have long drawn public and official attention as Qatar has implemented large-scale infrastructure projects including in preparation for hosting the 2022 FIFA soccer World Cup. The U.S. State Department notes reports of human rights violations in Qatar and credits Qatar with taking some steps to improve human rights and labor conditions.

In Congress, legislative action related to Qatar remains relatively limited with the exception of appropriations and authorization legislation that affects U.S. defense programs and congressional review of proposed foreign military sales. Foreign affairs, defense, and intelligence committees monitor Qatar's foreign and domestic policies, while Qatar's resources, sovereign wealth, and associated geo-economic clout fuel congressional interest in Qatar's energy and investment policies and in U.S.-Qatari trade and investment ties. In the 117th Congress, a Congressional Caucus on Qatari-American Strategic Relationships was active. Members of Congress and congressional staff frequently visit Qatar to attend conferences, consult with U.S. civilian and military personnel, and to conduct oversight of U.S. regional policy and U.S. military operations.

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## Overview and Bilateral Relations

The State of Qatar is a small, energy-rich monarchy, strategically located near the center of the Persian Gulf (see **Figure 1**); its natural resources and active foreign policy give it global influence. Qatar holds the third-largest proven natural gas reserves in the world, and is a major exporter of liquefied natural gas (LNG).<sup>1</sup> From 2000 to 2021, Qatar's GDP increased tenfold from \$17 billion to an estimated \$179 billion. The country's population, including expatriates, more than quadrupled between 2000 and 2022, growing to over 2.7 million in 2022.<sup>2</sup> Its fewer than 300,000 citizens enjoy one of the world's highest per capita income levels, and, as with other Gulf states, a large expatriate population is critical to Qatar's domestic economy. Since the mid-1990s, Qatari leaders have overseen rapid, expansive economic growth; transformed the global media environment through the founding of the Al Jazeera satellite networks; engaged in complex and at times controversial diplomacy with U.S. partners and adversaries; and introduced constitutional changes to formalize succession and limited consultative governance. International attention focuses on Qatar's roles as an energy exporter and diplomatic catalyst.

U.S. officials recognized Qatar's independence in September 1971 and established diplomatic relations in 1972. Since the 1990s, successive U.S. Administrations have sought to expand military, security, diplomatic, and economic cooperation with Qatar. Qatari leaders' pursuit of Qatar's sovereign interests and initiatives have presented both opportunities and challenges over time. Past U.S. Administrations have scrutinized Qatari policy with regard to some armed conflicts and political unrest in the Middle East and North Africa region and some Qataris' relationships with Islamist groups: at present Qatar supports many U.S. priorities and U.S. officials welcome Qatar's partnership (see below).

Issues of immediate priority for the U.S. government include shaping Qatari choices with regard to energy production and exports, sustaining and strengthening U.S.-Qatari defense cooperation, encouraging stability in Qatar's relationships with fellow members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and other Arab states, and leveraging Qatar's diplomatic engagement with the Taliban government in Afghanistan and with neighboring Iran. Qatar has not joined the Abraham Accords that some other Arab states have signed with Israel since 2020, but has instead conditioned normalization of relations with Israel on substantial progress toward resolving Israel-Palestinian disputes.

In January 2022, President Joseph Biden and Emir Tamim bin Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani reaffirmed the multifaceted partnership between the United States and Qatar, and the Biden Administration designated Qatar as a Major Non-North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Ally. A Biden Administration official said that the designation "reflects U.S. commitment to the strategic partnership and the role that we envision for Qatar in the region."<sup>3</sup>

Qatar hosts U.S. military forces under the terms of a defense cooperation agreement, including the forward headquarters of U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM). U.S.-Qatar security ties have

<sup>1</sup> In 2015, Qatar National Bank estimated that at then-prevailing production rates, Qatar's gas reserves could last 138 years. Sergio Chapa, "U.S. Holds World's Top LNG Exporter Spot on European Energy Crisis," *Bloomberg*, February 1, 2022; and, Agence France Presse, "Qatar vast gas reserves 'to last 138 years': report," June 21, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Based on figures available from Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, "World Population Prospects: The 2022 Revision," accessed February 2023.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of State, Special Online Briefing with Major General Matthew McFarlane, Commander, Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve, and Dana Stroul, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, February 28, 2023.

deepened since the mid-1990s, and in May 2022, CENTCOM commander General Erik Kurilla described U.S.-Qatar defense cooperation as “a critically important strategic partnership.”<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 1. Qatar at-a-Glance**



<b>Area</b>	11,586 sq. km (slightly smaller than Connecticut)
<b>People</b>	Population: ~2.7 million, of which nearly ~90% are expatriates Religions: Muslim 65.2%; Christian 13.7%; Hindu 15.9%; 3.8% Buddhist; and 1% other. Figures include expatriates. (2020 est.)
<b>Economy</b>	Gross Domestic Product (GDP): \$249 billion on purchasing power parity (PPP) basis (2021 est.) GDP per capita: \$92,900 on PPP basis Inflation: 2.3% (2021) GDP Growth Rate: 1.59% (2021)
<b>Oil and Gas</b>	Oil Exports: ~900,000 barrels per day (2022) Gas (LNG) Exports: 127.9 billion cubic meters per year (2021)

**Sources:** Graphic created by CRS using data from Department of State and Esri. At-a-glance information from CIA World Factbook (March 2023), U.N. Population Division (March 2023), International Monetary Fund, and Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF) Annual Statistics Bulletin (October 2022).

On several occasions, U.S. officials have acknowledged Qatar’s role in supporting U.S. diplomatic efforts globally. In July 2022, Secretary of State Antony Blinken praised Qatar for its role in supporting the Lebanese Armed Forces, assisting the United States with Afghanistan, and

<sup>4</sup> U.S. CENTCOM, “CENTCOM Commander meets with Qatar Armed Forces Chief of Staff,” May 17, 2022.

holding indirect talks with Iran.<sup>5</sup> In January 2023, Blinken again acknowledged Qatar for diplomatically engaging on Ukraine, Afghanistan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.<sup>6</sup>

## U.S.-Qatar Defense and Security Relations

In the late 1980s, the United States and Qatar engaged in a years-long diplomatic dispute regarding Qatar's black market procurement of U.S.-made Stinger anti-aircraft missiles.<sup>7</sup> The dispute froze then-planned economic and military cooperation, and Congress approved a ban on arms sales to Qatar (§566(d), P.L. 100-461) that lasted until the months leading up to the 1991 Persian Gulf War, when Qatar allowed coalition forces to operate from Qatari territory and agreed to destroy the missiles in question.<sup>8</sup>

Deep U.S. defense and security relations with Qatar did not begin until after the 1991 war. In January 1991, Qatari armored forces helped coalition troops repel an Iraqi attack on the Saudi Arabian town of Kafji, on the coastal road leading south from Kuwait into Saudi Arabia's oil-rich Eastern Province.<sup>9</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. In June 1995, Shaykh Hamad bin Khalifa deposed his father and became Emir. The United States promptly recognized Shaykh Hamad's assumption of power, and welcomed his decision to subsequently expand U.S.-Qatar defense cooperation. Shaykh Hamad faced a counter-coup attempt in 1996.

With its small territory and narrow citizen population base, Qatar relies to a large degree on external cooperation and support for its security. With 16,500 personnel, Qatar's armed forces are the second smallest in the Middle East.<sup>10</sup> Since 2013, the government has imposed mandatory short-term (3-4 month) military training and service for Qatari males.

Qatari-U.S. defense relations have expanded since 2001 to include cooperative defense exercises, equipment pre-positioning, and base access agreements. Qatar hosts the forward headquarters for U.S. Central Command. In December 2013, U.S. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel visited Doha, met with Emir Tamim, and signed a 10-year bilateral defense cooperation agreement. The

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Secretary Blinken's Call with Qatari Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Al-Thani," July 3, 2022.

<sup>6</sup> In January 2023, Qatar had proposed hosting Democratic Republic of the Congo President Felix Tshisekedi and Rwandan President Paul Kagame for talks over ongoing conflict in eastern Congo, but the talks did not materialize. U.S. Department of State, "Secretary Blinken's Call with Qatari Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Al Thani," January 21, 2023.

<sup>7</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>8</sup> The ban was formally repealed by the Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs Appropriations Act of 1991 (§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>9</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.

<sup>10</sup> Bahrain's armed forces are the smallest. Source: International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance* 2022.



text of the agreement is classified.<sup>11</sup> Qatar is a member of the Combined Maritime Forces coalition, which operates Combined Task Forces (CTF) 150 (maritime security and counter-terrorism), CTF 151 (counter piracy), CTF 152 (Gulf security and cooperation), and CTF 153 (Red Sea security). The Qatari military and the West Virginia National Guard cooperate under the U.S. National Guard Bureau's State Partnership Program.

Qatar's 2022 designation as a Major Non-NATO Ally qualifies Qatar to purchase certain U.S. arms, receive excess defense articles (EDA), and engage in defense research cooperation with the United States, for which it would not otherwise be eligible.

Over the past several years, the number of U.S. military personnel who are deployed at the various facilities in Qatar, including Al Udeid Air Base (see below), has ranged from about 8,000 to more than 10,000.<sup>12</sup>

## Arms Sales

Since 2012, successive Administrations have proposed several major U.S. arms sales to Qatar, marking a shift in Qatar's defense planning toward the use of advanced U.S. attack and transport helicopters and other weapons systems, including items for air defense and missile defense (see **Table 1** in **Appendix** below). France previously had provided approximately 80% of Qatar's arms inventory. Qatar collaborates with Italy and Turkey in support of its naval development efforts.<sup>13</sup> Qatar's purchase of U.S. weapons systems, including U.S. air and missile defense systems, corresponds to increased interest in such systems from some other governments in the region, ostensibly to defend against and respond to potential attacks from Iran. In 2021, the U.S. Department of State reported

Qatar has over \$26 billion in active government-to-government cases under the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) system making Qatar the United States' third largest FMS partner in the world. Recent and significant FMS sales focused on integrated air and missile defense and include the PATRIOT long-range air missile system, the National Advanced Surface to Air Missile System, and the AN/FPS-132 Early Warning Radar; F-15QA fighter aircraft - the most advanced F-15 in production; and AH-64E Apache attack helicopters. Each of these programs includes facility construction and extended munitions, logistics, and training support.<sup>14</sup>

## Al Udeid Air Base and Military Construction

Qatar invested over \$1 billion to construct the Al Udeid air base southwest of Doha during the 1990s. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers also awarded over \$100 million in Military Construction Air Force (MCAF) contracts for the initial construction of U.S. storage, housing,

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Department of State, "U.S. Security Cooperation with Qatar," Fact Sheet, July 30, 2021. In addition to this agreement, as of 2021, the United States and Qatar had the following agreements for defense cooperation: 2012 General Security of Military Information Agreement, 2013 Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement, 2013 Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geospatial Intelligence, 2016 Communications Interoperability and Security Memorandum of Agreement, and 2020 Maritime Implementing Agreement.

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Country Reports on Terrorism 2021: Qatar," February 2023, available at <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2021/qatar>; U.S. Department of State, "Coordinator for Counterterrorism Ambassador Nathan A. Sales Travels to Qatar," August 12, 2020; and Department of Defense, "U.S. and Qatar Sign MOU Reaffirming Qatar's Commitment to Supporting U.S. Military Activities at Al Udeid Air Base," January 14, 2019.

<sup>13</sup> Agnes Helou, "Qatari navy's new amphibious ship to help fulfil nation's 'unique' needs," *Breaking Defense*, February 2, 2023.

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Qatar Integrated Country Strategy*, July 2022.

service, command, and communication facilities. Qatar's financing and construction of the runways and most of the facilities 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.

In April 2003, the U.S. military moved its Combat Air Operations Center for the Middle East from Prince Sultan Airbase in Saudi Arabia to Al Udeid. Al Udeid then served as a logistics, command, and basing hub for U.S. operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other parts of the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) AOR.<sup>15</sup>

Qatar has invested more than \$8 billion to support U.S. and coalition operations at Al Udeid since 2003, expanding and enhancing the facility in conjunction with U.S. military construction funding.<sup>16</sup> From FY2003 to FY2011, Congress appropriated and authorized more than \$457 million for U.S. military construction activities in Qatar.<sup>17</sup>

Qatar plans further investment in its military facilities to meet current and potential future needs. Planned Al Udeid development projects are valued at \$8.4 billion with construction plans through 2033 set to adapt base facilities from an expeditionary to an enduring nature and to enable them to house more than 15,000 personnel and support additional fighter, transport, and helicopter aircraft.<sup>18</sup>

Nearby Camp As Sayliyah housed significant U.S. military equipment pre-positioning and command facilities for the CENTCOM area of operations prior to its closure and a repositioning of U.S. equipment in mid-2021.<sup>19</sup> Facilities at As Sayliyah serve as the main operations center for U.S. resettlement efforts in Qatar for evacuees from Afghanistan. As of December 2022, thousands of Afghans remained in Qatar awaiting onward travel. In October 2022, press reports said Qatar planned to suspend additional flights from Afghanistan under the program until the completion of the December 2022 FIFA World Cup; flights reportedly resumed in January 2023.<sup>20</sup> A U.S.-Qatar bilateral agreement provides terms for the hosting in Qatar of evacuees from Afghanistan under U.S. auspices.<sup>21</sup>

## Counterterrorism Cooperation

U.S. concerns regarding alleged material support for terrorist groups by some Qataris, including reported past support by members of the royal family, have been considered over time alongside Qatar's counterterrorism efforts and its broader, long-term commitment to host and support U.S. military forces.<sup>22</sup> U.S. officials have described Qatar's counterterrorism cooperation since 2001 as

<sup>15</sup> Rebecca Grant, "The Short, Strange Life of PSAB," *Air and Space Forces*, July 1, 2012

<sup>16</sup> U.S. Department of State, "U.S. Security Cooperation with Qatar," Fact Sheet, July 30, 2021.

<sup>17</sup> Specific legislative text available from CRS.

<sup>18</sup> U.S. CENTCOM response to CRS Inquiry, January 2023.

<sup>19</sup> Staff Sgt. Neil W. McCabe, "Curtain falls on ASG-Qatar after three decades supporting readiness, resilience," U.S. Army 310th Expeditionary Sustainment Command, June 24, 2021.

<sup>20</sup> Dan De Luce, Julia Ainsley, and Courtney Kube, "Qatar plans to suspend evacuation flights for U.S.-bound Afghan refugees while it hosts World Cup, sources say," *NBC News*, October 22, 2022; and, Kylie Atwood, "US rolls out tool for Afghans in US to reunify with family members," *CNN*, January 12, 2023.

<sup>21</sup> U.S. State Department, Office of Treaty Affairs, *Qatar (22-919) – Protocol Amending the Temporary Relocation Transit Agreement of November 12, 2021*, September 19, 2022; and, *Qatar (21-1112) – Temporary Relocation Transit Agreement*, November 12, 2021.

<sup>22</sup> In 2022, media reports described a lawsuit involving allegations of terrorist financing by Qatar Charity and Qatar National Bank, and a reported investigation of similar allegations concerning the Emir's half-brother. See Alan Suderman, "Qatar, key US ally, faces new accusations of terror funding," May 13, 2022; and, Sotloff et al v. Qatar



significant, and the State Department report on terrorism for 2021 states that “Qatar has made strides in addressing state-sourced internal support for educational and religious content espousing intolerance, discrimination, sectarianism, and violence, although examples can still be found in textbooks and disseminated through satellite television and other media.”<sup>23</sup>

Qatar uses its own funds to pay for participation of Qatari personnel in the U.S. State Department’s Anti-Terrorism Assistance (ATA) training program, including training that was pertinent to Qatar’s preparations to host the 2022 International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) soccer World Cup. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security reached cooperative security agreements with Qatar related to the World Cup, and in July 2022 signed memoranda on border and cyber security cooperation.<sup>24</sup>

## U.S. Security Assistance

The Administration of President George W. Bush requested \$10,000 in International Military Education and Training (IMET) assistance funds for Qatar in FY2010, and requested an additional \$10,000 for FY2011 but did not allocate funds for Qatar during that fiscal year. The nominal IMET assistance had the administrative effect of making Qatar eligible to purchase other U.S. military training at the reduced cost level available only to IMET recipients.<sup>25</sup> The Obama, Trump, and Biden Administrations have not requested IMET assistance for Qatar, though Qatari personnel continue to participate in IMET and other U.S. training programs.

## U.S.-Qatar Economic Relations

Qatar and the United States have not negotiated a Free Trade Agreement, but Qatar has used a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) to undertake large investments in the United States. The joint statement of a 2018 U.S.-Qatar Strategic Dialogue “recognized” the Qatar Investment Authority’s (Qatar’s sovereign wealth fund) commitment of \$45 billion in future investments in U.S. companies and real estate. U.S. exports to Qatar consist mainly of aerospace equipment. U.S. imports from Qatar consist mainly of petroleum products. Total bilateral trade in 2022 was valued at \$6.5 billion.<sup>26</sup> Qatar Petroleum has jointly developed LNG export infrastructure at the Golden Pass facility in Texas with ExxonMobil.<sup>27</sup>

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Charity et al, U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Florida, May 12, 2022. According to the 9/11 Commission Report and former U.S. government officials, Qatari royal family member and later Interior Minister Shaykh Abdullah bin Khalid Al Thani provided support to Al Qaeda figures, including the suspected mastermind of the September 11 attacks, Khalid Shaykh Mohammed. Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (The 9/11 Commission Report), pp. 73, 147-8, 488-9. See also, 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>23</sup> U.S. Department of State, “Country Reports on Terrorism 2021: Qatar,” February 2023, available at <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2021/qatar>.

<sup>24</sup> U.S. Department of Homeland Security, “DHS to Expand Security Cooperation with Qatar and the United Arab Emirates,” July 12, 2022.

<sup>25</sup> The Senate version of the FY2013 National Defense Authorization Act (S. 2467, 112<sup>th</sup> Congress) would have amended existing law to make Qatar, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia eligible for such reduced cost purchases without having to receive IMET. §1204 of S. 2467 would have amended Section 546(b) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (22 U.S.C. §2347e(b)).

<sup>26</sup> U.S. Census Bureau data via U.S. International Trade Administration, TradeStatsExpress, February 2023.

<sup>27</sup> ExxonMobil, “QatarEnergy and ExxonMobil to independently market Golden Pass LNG,” October 27, 2022; and, at <https://www.goldenpasslng.com/about/about-golden-pass>.

Qatar's airline, Qatar Airways (QA), has been a major buyer of U.S. commercial aircraft and in January 2022 announced that it would purchase up to 50 cargo aircraft and up to 50 737 Max passenger aircraft from Boeing.<sup>28</sup> Qatar Airways and Airbus in 2023 announced they had reached a settlement of their dispute over paint on QA-purchased Airbus aircraft.<sup>29</sup> In the past, some U.S. airlines challenged Qatar Airways' benefits under a U.S.-Qatar "open skies" agreement based on the Qatari government's support for QA aircraft purchases.<sup>30</sup> The United States and Qatar reached a set of "understandings" on civil aviation on January 29, 2018, committing Qatar Airways to financial transparency and containing some limitations on the airline's ability to pick up passengers in Europe for flights to the United States. European officials reached an open skies agreement with Qatar in 2021, but not all European Union member states have ratified it.<sup>31</sup>

Several prominent U.S. universities have established satellite faculty campuses in Doha at Qatar's Education City, where Qatari, American, and other students pursue undergraduate and graduate coursework across a broad range of subjects: Carnegie Mellon, Virginia Commonwealth University, Georgetown University, Texas A&M, Weill Cornell Medicine, and Northwestern University.

## **Congress and Qatar**

In Congress, legislative action related to Qatar remains relatively limited with the exception of appropriations and authorization legislation that affects U.S. defense programs and congressional review of proposed foreign military sales to the Qatari military. Congressional foreign affairs, defense, and intelligence committees monitor Qatar's foreign and domestic policies, while Qatar's resources, sovereign wealth, and associated geo-economic clout fuel congressional interest in Qatar's energy and investment policies and in U.S.-Qatari trade and investment ties.

In the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress, a Congressional Caucus on Qatari-American Strategic Relationships was active. The Senate in 2022 adopted S.Res. 390, expressing appreciation for Qatar's "pivotal role and support of Operation Allies Refuge; and ... support to temporarily house thousands of evacuees [from Afghanistan] until they are cleared for follow-on movement." In 2022, Congress designated U.S. veterans who served on active duty in Qatar and several other countries on or after August 2, 1990, as "covered veterans" under the Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act of 2022 (P.L. 117-168), which expands health care eligibility for veterans subject to toxic exposure. The FY2022 National Defense Authorization Act P.L. 117-81 did not include a provision from the House-passed version of the bill (Section 1251 of H.R. 4350) on U.S.-Qatar relations, but the joint explanatory statement accompanying the bill repeated that provision's operative statement that "the United States should continue to strengthen the relationship between the United States and Qatar, including through security and economic cooperation."

## **Qatari Politics and Government**

Qatar declared its independence from the United Kingdom on September 3, 1971.<sup>32</sup> It is a constitutional monarchy governed by the Al Thani family; in an April 2003 referendum, Qatari

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<sup>28</sup> "Boeing lands huge airplane order from Qatar Airways." Associated Press, January 31, 2022.

<sup>29</sup> Airbus, "Qatar Airways and Airbus reach amicable settlement in legal dispute," February 1, 2023.

<sup>30</sup> Frank Kane, "Open Skies Dispute Between US and Gulf Airlines Escalates," *The National*, January 30, 2016.

<sup>31</sup> European Commission, "Aviation: EU and Qatar sign landmark aviation agreement," October 18, 2021.

<sup>32</sup> Treaties signed in 1868 and 1916 between the Al Thani family and the United Kingdom recognized the Al Thani

voters approved a new constitution that outlined plans to elect some members of the consultative National Assembly (*Majlis al Shura*) and recognized women's right to vote and run for national office. The Emir of Qatar, Tamim bin Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani (age 42), began his rule in June 2013 when his father, Shaykh Hamad bin Khalifa, abdicated, marking the first voluntary and planned transition of power in Qatar since its independence.<sup>33</sup> Al Thani family members lead several government ministries and hold board seats on important state and private companies; the ruling family retains ultimate political authority but its relationships with other leading families appear cooperative. In March 2023, Emir Tamim bin Hamad announced a cabinet reshuffle and named Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani as Prime Minister: Sheikh Mohammed has served as Qatar's Foreign Minister since 2016.<sup>34</sup>

Qatari authorities delayed the holding of national elections envisioned in the 2003 constitution until October 2021, when Qatari voters selected 30 members for the 45-seat National Assembly. The onset of political unrest in other regional countries from 2011 onward, the 2013 transition from former emir Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani to his son Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, and the 2017-2021 confrontation between Qatar and some neighboring states may have contributed to Qatari decisions to delay the election. Turnout in the 2021 election exceeded 63% of eligible voters. Citizens categorized as naturalized, including members of the numerous Al Murra tribe, were ineligible to stand as candidates or vote, leading to some protests and arrests in the run up to the election.<sup>35</sup> Qatari officials argued that procedural remedies were available to challenge election-related complaints and that the new Shura Council could review "any amendments to the laws governing the elections process."<sup>36</sup> None of the female candidates who stood for office were elected, but the Emir appointed two women among the 15 additional members whose appointments he controls in accordance with the constitution. Qatar last held Central Municipal Council elections in 2019. Qatar convicted four protestors on related charges in May 2022, sentencing two individuals to life terms.<sup>37</sup>

Although the constitution provides for an independent judiciary, the Emir appoints all judges.

## Human Rights

The 2021 U.S. State Department Country Report on Human Rights in Qatar cites

credible reports of: restrictions on free expression, including the existence of criminal libel laws; substantial interference with the freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association, including overly restrictive laws on the organization, funding, or operation of nongovernmental

family's authority in Qatar but placed mutually agreed restrictions on Qatari sovereignty from 1868 through 1971.

<sup>33</sup> The former emir, Shaykh Hamad bin Khalifa, raised Qatar's global profile and influence after replacing his own father in a palace coup in 1995. Qatar's constitution reflects the previously contested principle that successors to the throne will follow the hereditary line of Shaykh Hamad's male offspring (Article 8).

<sup>34</sup> Andrew Mills, "Qatar's emir names top diplomat as premier, reappoints energy and finance ministers," Reuters, March 7, 2023.

<sup>35</sup> Some members of the Al Murra tribe have contested the leadership of Emir Tamim bin Hamad and his father, and Qatari authorities have stripped some members of the tribe of their Qatari nationality in related disputes. In 2017, some Al Murra tribal figures supported Saudi efforts to isolate Qatar. Human Rights Watch, "The Shura Council Elections," September 9, 2021; and Reuters, "Qatar's new electoral law stirs up tribal sensitivities," August 12, 2021. For more background see Jill Crystal, "Tribes and Patronage Networks in Qatar" in Uzi Rabi (ed.), *Tribes and States in a Changing Middle East*, Oxford University Press, June 2016, pp. 37–56.

<sup>36</sup> Qatar Government Communications Office statement in response to HRW report regarding "The Shura Council Elections," September 9, 2021.

<sup>37</sup> Reuters, "Qatar jails four election protesters, including three for life," May 13, 2022.

organizations and civil society organizations; restrictions on migrant workers' freedom of movement; inability of citizens to change their government peacefully in free and fair elections; serious and unreasonable restrictions on political participation, including prohibitions on political parties; lack of investigation of and accountability for gender-based violence; existence of laws criminalizing consensual same-sex sexual conduct; and prohibitions on independent trade unions.<sup>38</sup>

A National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) investigates allegations of human rights abuses and appears to operate independently. It is funded largely by the Qatar Foundation that is run by the Emir's mother, Shaykha Moza bint Nasser Al Missned. The non-governmental organization Freedom House classifies Qatar as "not free."<sup>39</sup>

The European Parliament (EP) in December 2022 suspended consideration of Qatar-related legislation pending resolution of allegations of corruption involving Qatari nationals, the NHRC, and some EP Members.<sup>40</sup>

## Women's Rights

Women in Qatar drive and own property, and work in the government and private sector. Qatar's constitution recognizes the right of women to vote and hold office. According to the State Department, social and legal discrimination against women continues, despite the constitutional assertion of equality.<sup>41</sup> The application of Islamic law, which is not gender-neutral on marriage, divorce, child custody and guardianship, and inheritance, contributes to this gender inequality, as does a lack of laws against domestic violence.<sup>42</sup> Guardianship laws require young women to obtain permission from their male guardians to travel alone, as well as "to marry, obtain a government scholarship to pursue higher education, work in government, and obtain some reproductive health care."<sup>43</sup> In the labor market, as of 2021, women (citizens and expatriates) constitute nearly 57% of the workforce.<sup>44</sup> The World Economic Forum's 2022 Global Gender Gap Report ranked Qatar 137 out of 146 countries assessed and found that Qatar was one of five countries where health and survival outcomes demonstrate a 5% or more gap between men and women, but also praised Qatari women's educational attainment.<sup>45</sup> Qatar is a member of the executive board of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women).

## Labor Issues and Trafficking in Persons

Domestic and international observers and officials have raised labor and migrants' rights concerns for decades as Qatar has implemented large-scale infrastructure projects, including in preparation for hosting the 2022 FIFA soccer World Cup. Press analysis citing government data

<sup>38</sup> U.S. Department of State, *2021 Country Report on Human Rights: Qatar*, April 2022.

<sup>39</sup> Freedom House, *Freedom in the World*, 2022.

<sup>40</sup> Joshua Posaner, Mari Eccles and Hanne Cokelaere, "EU Parliament to stop work on Qatar airline, visa laws," *Politico*, December 15, 2022; and, Eddy Wax and Ana Fota, "How Qatar used a secret deal to bind itself to the EU Parliament," *Politico*, February 17, 2023.

<sup>41</sup> U.S. Department of State, *2021 Country Report on Human Rights: Qatar*, April 2022.

<sup>42</sup> For more information and sources, see CRS Report R46423, *Women in the Middle East and North Africa: Issues for Congress*, by Zoe Danon and Shannon L. Smith.

<sup>43</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Women and Qatar's Male Guardianship Rules*, March 29, 2021.

<sup>44</sup> World Bank, Labor force participation rate, female (% of female population ages 15+) (modeled International Labor Organization estimate) – Qatar, December 2022.

<sup>45</sup> World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report 2022, Table 1.1, July 13, 2022.

from labor source countries reported in 2021 that thousands of foreign workers had died while employed in Qatar since 2011, but cited statistics that were not categorized “by occupation or place of work.”<sup>46</sup> Amnesty International has said some labor conditions have amounted to the equivalent of “forced labor;” Qatari officials have highlighted labor law changes, acknowledged some shortcomings, and rejected some foreign criticism.<sup>47</sup> Qatari officials emphasize their commitment to ending abusive and exploitative labor practices and have established minimum wage rules and banned some components of the *kafala* [migrant labor sponsorship] system. Official enforcement reportedly has remained uneven and some reports suggest continuing abuses by private employers, including firms that supported World Cup-related projects.<sup>48</sup>

According to the State Department’s 2021 human rights report, “the government made efforts to prevent and eliminate forced labor but did not in all cases effectively enforce the law; the *kafala* system left migrant workers vulnerable to exploitation.” The State Department’s 2022 Trafficking in Persons report classifies Qatar as a Tier 2 country and describes several announced and implemented reforms to Qatar’s sponsorship system. The report notes, “the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas,” but observes that authorities “prosecuted a variety of cases exhibiting trafficking indicators under the labor laws, residency laws, or penal code.”<sup>49</sup> In November 2022, the International Labour Organization (ILO) issued a report describing “significant progress” in Qatar’s efforts to reform its labor system and noting “universal recognition that the work is not complete.”<sup>50</sup>

## Religious Freedom

Qatar’s constitution guarantees the freedom to practice religious rites in accordance with “the maintenance of public order and morality.” Islam is the state religion and *sharia* is “a main source” of legislation. Most citizens are Sunni Muslims, and some citizens are Shia Muslims. Non-Muslims comprise most of Qatar’s non-citizen expatriate population, including Hindus, Buddhists, Catholics, Protestants, Copts, Orthodox Christians, Baha’i, and others. Expatriate non-Muslim religious groups must register with the government. The law prohibits public worship or proselytization by non-Muslims. The State Department’s 2022 report on religious freedom conditions in Qatar during 2021 reported that Qatar

continued to host the headquarters of the International Union of Muslim Scholars (IUMS), a group widely viewed in the press and academia as being affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, a Sunni transnational organization that promotes political Islam. Although IUMS stated it was an independent association of scholars, observers said its close relationship with the government helped it to serve as an instrument of the country’s soft power.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>46</sup> “Revealed: 6,500 migrant workers have died in Qatar since World Cup awarded,” *The Guardian*, February 23, 2021.

<sup>47</sup> Amnesty International, “Qatar: Security guards subjected to forced labour,” April 7, 2022; Reuters, “Qatar minister slams hypocrisy of people calling for World Cup boycott,” November 4, 2022.

<sup>48</sup> Migrant Rights, “Job mobility in Qatar is still a mirage despite reforms; domestic workers most affected,” October 5, 2021; and, Pramod Acharya, “Months before World Cup, workers forced to return home early and with pending dues,” Migrant Rights, September 4, 2022.

<sup>49</sup> U.S. Department of State, *2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Qatar*, July 2022.

<sup>50</sup> ILO, *Labour reforms in the State of Qatar: Coming together around a shared vision*, November 3, 2022.

<sup>51</sup> U.S. State Department, 2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: Qatar, June 2, 2022.



## Qatar's Foreign Policy

Qatar's multidirectional foreign policy, financial resources, and unique international relationships have raised its global diplomatic profile since the early 2000s, and appears to lead other governments to view Qatari initiatives variously as useful or vexing depending on their discrete perspectives and interests. Qatar's 2011 deployment of military aircraft to support NATO-led operations in Libya signaled a new assertiveness, as did reported Qatari support for armed elements of the Syrian opposition during the height of Syria's civil war. Some of Qatar's positions have drawn U.S. attention and have been scrutinized by some of Qatar's Arab neighbors, including its contacts with the government of Iran and groups such as Lebanon's Hezbollah, the Palestinian group Hamas, various other Islamist groups (including members of the Muslim Brotherhood movement), and Afghanistan's now-ruling Taliban.

## Qatar and Russia's War against Ukraine

In response to Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Qatar has stated its "respect for Ukraine's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders" and called for a ceasefire and a peaceful resolution to the conflict in accordance with international law.<sup>52</sup> Qatar also has provided \$5 million to support humanitarian aid to Ukrainian refugees and displaced persons and in December 2022 participated in a Ukraine solidarity conference organized by the government of France.<sup>53</sup> Qatar's diplomatic statements on the Russia-Ukraine war and related humanitarian crises outline the Qatari government's "full readiness to contribute to any international and regional effort aimed at alleviating the Russian-Ukrainian crisis and is in line with its position supporting peaceful solutions through dialogue and mediation."<sup>54</sup>

Qatar's Foreign Minister visited Moscow in March 2022 to offer mediation, and, in October 2022, the Emir spoke with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky by telephone and separately met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Kazakhstan during a meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).<sup>55</sup> Qatar has signed a memorandum of understanding to become a SCO Dialogue Partner, as have Egypt and Saudi Arabia.<sup>56</sup>

Qatar has voted in favor of U.N. General Assembly resolutions condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but abstained, along with other GCC members, in the April 2022 vote on expelling Russia from the U.N. Human Rights Council. Qatar has had close energy related ties to fellow natural gas exporter Russia, and has considered closer security cooperation with Russia at times in the past.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Qatar "calls for a ceasefire and the start of seeking a peaceful solution to the conflict, based on its keenness on the Charter of the United Nations and the well-established principles of the international law, its obligations stipulated in the Charter to settle international disputes by peaceful means, and its commitment to the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of states." Qatar Foreign Ministry, "Qatar Participates in Humanitarian Meeting of Senior Officials on Ukraine," September 27, 2022.

<sup>53</sup> Qatar Information Office, "Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Affirms Qatar's Support for UNHRC in Facing Global Challenges," February 28, 2022; and, *Gulf Times*, "Ukraine's envoy hails Qatar's humanitarian support," August 18, 2022.

<sup>54</sup> Qatar Foreign Ministry, "Qatar Participates in 'Solidarity with Ukrainian People' Conference in Paris," December 13, 2022.

<sup>55</sup> "Foreign Minister meets Russian Foreign Minister." *The Peninsula*, March 14, 2022.

<sup>56</sup> Abhishek G Bhaya, "SCO to induct Egypt and Saudi Arabia as dialogue partners," *CGTN*, July 15, 2021.

<sup>57</sup> *Al Jazeera*, "Qatar FM: Doha buying S-400s 'not anyone's business,'" March 4, 2019.



Qatar has committed to maintaining (and expanding as possible) its supplies of natural gas to Europe during the crisis. However, Qatari officials have said they will not divert to Europe gas already contracted for delivery to Asia, emphasizing that, “Qatar is absolutely committed to the sanctity of contracts.”<sup>58</sup> Entities purchasing Qatari gas may have discretion to divert gas to Europe, which Qatari officials have not said they oppose. Qatari energy officials have stressed that no combination of major gas exporters can supply enough natural gas to Europe, on short notice, to completely compensate for a shutoff of gas supplies from Russia. Qatar’s Minister of Energy warned in October 2022 that while European gas storage may prove sufficient through early 2023, European countries may face significant challenges after that in replenishing stocks and providing gas for current use until more global supplies come online.<sup>59</sup> Qatar has announced plans to expand its gas output and exports in coming years and has discussed new long-term purchase agreements with European customers.<sup>60</sup> (See “Fiscal, Economic, and Energy Issues” below.) In January 2023, Qatar announced it would replace a Russian firm in a joint natural gas exploration venture in Lebanese waters in partnership with ENI of Italy and TotalEnergies of France.<sup>61</sup>

Qatari officials at times have observed that multilateral financial sanctions could motivate some energy producers to develop alternative, non-U.S. dollar-based means of marketing oil and gas exports.<sup>62</sup>

## Qatar and China

Emir Tamim and People’s Republic of China leader Xi Jinping met in Saudi Arabia in December 2022 in conjunction with the Arab States-China Summit and the GCC-China Summit. PRC firm China Railway Construction Corporation partnered with Qatari firms to build the Lusail stadium that hosted the 2022 World Cup final. China Harbour Engineering Company (CHEC) played a central role in Qatar’s Hamad Port and Emiri Naval Base construction projects.<sup>63</sup> In 2015, Qatar launched the first *renminbi* clearing hub in the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) region, primarily to settle payments in China’s currency for exports of oil and gas.<sup>64</sup> Oil, natural gas, and petroleum products comprise most of Qatar’s exports to China. In November 2022, China’s Sinopec and QatarEnergy agreed to a 27-year LNG supply deal. Press reports suggest that China National Petroleum Corp (CNPC) and Qatar-Energy may soon sign a similar 30-year deal.<sup>65</sup>

## Qatar and Afghanistan

Following the Taliban’s August 2021 takeover of Afghanistan, Qatari diplomats in Kabul helped U.S. evacuation efforts, including by escorting small groups of Americans into the Kabul

<sup>58</sup> QatarEnergy CEO Saad Al Kaabi quoted in Andrew Mills, “QatarEnergy expanding in LNG, won’t divert supplies to Europe,” Reuters, October 18, 2022.

<sup>59</sup> Andrew England, “Europe at risk of ‘much worse’ energy crisis next year, warns Qatar,” *Financial Times*, October 18, 2022.

<sup>60</sup> “Germany agrees gas deal with Qatar to help end dependency on Russia,” *The Guardian*, March 20 2022.

<sup>61</sup> Bassem Mroue, “Qatar boosts influence in Lebanon amid multiple crises,” Associated Press, February 4, 2023.

<sup>62</sup> “Ukraine-Russia crisis is driving countries to explore new ways of pricing oil, Qatar says,” *CNN*, March 26, 2022.

<sup>63</sup> Qatar New Port Project at <http://www.npp.com.qa/Construction.html>.

<sup>64</sup> SWIFT, “The United Arab Emirates and Qatar drive RMB adoption in the Middle East,” press release, January 28, 2016.

<sup>65</sup> Chen Aizhu and Marwa Rashad, “Exclusive: China’s CNPC set to seal mega Qatari LNG deal –sources,” Reuters, February 13, 2023.

airport.<sup>66</sup> Since the completion of the U.S. withdrawal on August 30, 2021, Qatar Airways charter flights have evacuated additional U.S. and other nationals. President Biden and senior U.S. officials have thanked Qatar for its help in U.S. relocation efforts and for Qatar's ongoing engagement in talks with the Taliban on issues of mutual concern to Qatar and the United States. U.S. Embassy Kabul closed in conjunction with the U.S. withdrawal and Taliban takeover, and its diplomats transferred to Embassy Doha, where they operate an Afghan Affairs Unit. The Biden Administration sought \$41.9 million in FY2023 State Department funding to support the Protecting Power Arrangement (PPA) between Qatar and the United States to protect certain U.S. interests in Afghanistan.

Qatar has maintained contact with Taliban officials and in January 2023, Qatar's Foreign Minister described Taliban actions to impose limits on the education and employment of girls and women as "very disappointing."<sup>67</sup>

As noted above, Qatar and the United States have a bilateral agreement regarding Qatar's hosting of Afghan nationals for a limited period to complete their vetting and processing for onward migration.<sup>68</sup> Qatar's Camp As Sayliyah, a former pre-positioning site for U.S. military equipment, has served as the main operations center in Qatar for U.S. resettlement efforts of evacuees from Afghanistan.

## Qatar and its Neighbors

### *Gulf Cooperation Council and other Arab States*

The United States has encouraged intra-Arab rapprochement following a period from 2017 through 2020 in which Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt worked to isolate Qatar diplomatically and economically in the hopes of changing Qatari officials' policies toward sensitive regional political issues.<sup>69</sup> By 2019, having realized few benefits from the blockade, Saudi Arabia and the UAE apparently began to look for a resolution—an outcome urged by the Trump Administration.<sup>70</sup> At the 41<sup>st</sup> GCC summit in Al Ula, Saudi Arabia, on January 5, 2021, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the UAE, and Egypt announced that they would restore diplomatic relations with Qatar, though Qatar did not commit to meeting any of their demands.

Following the Al Ula summit, Qatar reengaged with its former antagonists, and Emir Tamim visited Egypt in June 2022 and participated in the GCC+3 Summit in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, where he met with President Biden. Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al Sisi visited Doha in September 2022. Qatar joined other Gulf states in announcing billions of dollars of planned

<sup>66</sup> "Biden says safe zone around Kabul airport to expand, as Pentagon enlists commercial airlines to aid evacuations," *Washington Post*, August 22, 2021.

<sup>67</sup> Reuters, "Davos 2023: Qatar says engagement with Taliban needed despite 'disappointing' actions," January 17, 2023.

<sup>68</sup> U.S. State Department, Office of Treaty Affairs, *Qatar (22-919) – Protocol Amending the Temporary Relocation Transit Agreement of November 12, 2021*, September 19, 2022; and, *Qatar (21-1112) – Temporary Relocation Transit Agreement*, November 12, 2021.

<sup>69</sup> In June 2017, those countries cut diplomatic relations with Qatar and imposed limits on the entry and transit of Qatari nationals and vessels in their territories, waters, and airspace. The group initially demanded that, as a condition for ending the boycott, Qatar close the Al Jazeera satellite network, sever relations with Muslim Brotherhood organizations, downgrade relations with Iran, and end the deployment of Turkish military personnel in Qatar. See "List of demands on Qatar by Saudi Arabia, other Arab nations," Associated Press, June 23, 2017.

<sup>70</sup> "US Secretary of State in Qatar urges end to Gulf diplomatic rift," *Deutsche Welle*, January 13, 2019.

investments in Egypt in 2022, as the Egyptian government sought Gulf-state financial support in exchange for Egyptian state assets, including Egyptian government-held stakes in several companies. In February 2023, Saudi Arabia hosted officials from Qatar and Bahrain to launch talks to resolve a series of outstanding issues between Qatar and Bahrain.

## Iran

Qatari leaders have pursued dialogue with Iran, while cooperating with U.S. efforts to counter Iran strategically. Qatar hosted Iranian President Ibrahim Raisi in February 2022, and the two sides signed several agreements.<sup>71</sup> Qatar turned to Iran to help it cope with the GCC rift, including by importing Iranian foodstuffs and by overflying Iranian airspace, a privilege for which Qatar Airways paid Iran over \$130 million per year in overflight fees.<sup>72</sup> Qatar did not support the May 8, 2018, U.S. withdrawal from the 2015 multilateral Iran nuclear agreement, the JCPOA, instead stating that efforts to “denuclearize” the region should not lead to “escalation.”<sup>73</sup> Qatar and Iran exchanged mutual visits of high-ranking officials in 2019 in an initiative reported as seeking to de-escalate U.S.-Iran tensions,<sup>74</sup> and Qatar has encouraged dialogue between the GCC countries and Iran to lower Gulf tensions.<sup>75</sup> Qatar and Iran share the large North Field natural gas reserve in the Persian Gulf.

Qatar has supported Biden Administration efforts to restore full Iranian and U.S. adherence to the JCPOA; the Emir visited Iran in May 2022, and in June hosted U.S. negotiators for indirect talks. In January 2023, Qatar’s Foreign Minister visited Iran and is reported to have said he shared a message from the U.S. government “about a topic related to the [2015 nuclear] agreement that may not be directly linked to it.”<sup>76</sup> In February 2023, NBC News reported that Qatari officials have served as intermediaries in U.S.-Iran talks about possible prisoner exchanges.<sup>77</sup>

## Israel and the Palestinians

Qatar has had high-level contacts with Israel since the mid-1990s, and has allowed some small-scale direct Israel-Qatar trade and visits to Doha by Israeli security officials, athletes, doctors, and other Israelis, in spite of abiding policy differences.<sup>78</sup> Emir Tamim and other Qatari officials have accused Israel of abuses against the Palestinians and express support for Palestinian efforts to establish a state with East Jerusalem as its capital.<sup>79</sup> Qatari officials say they have ruled out

<sup>71</sup> Anna L. Jacobs, *Qatar and Iran Expand Ties Amid Broader Gulf De-escalation*, Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, March 11, 2022.

<sup>72</sup> “UN aviation ruling could deny Iran hundreds of millions of dollars,” *Fox News*, July 14, 2020.

<sup>73</sup> Qatar Foreign Ministry Statement, May 9, 2018.

<sup>74</sup> The Latest: Qatar trying to defuse tensions amid Iran crisis, *Fox News*, May 16, 2019.

<sup>75</sup> Erin Cunningham, “Qatar urges dialogue between Persian Gulf states,” *Washington Post*, January 19, 2021.

<sup>76</sup> Amwaj Media, “Qatar carries US ‘message’ to Tehran as IAEA chief set to visit Iran,” January 31, 2023.

<sup>77</sup> Dan De Luce and Abigail Williams, “The U.S. and Iran are holding indirect talks on a possible prisoner exchange, with the help of the U.K. and Qatar, sources say,” NBC News, February 15, 2023.

<sup>78</sup> Uzi Rabi, “Qatar’s Relations with Israel: Challenging Arab and Gulf Norms,” *Middle East Journal*, vol. 63, no. 3 (Summer, 2009), pp. 443-459; and, Guy Azriel, “Qatar-Israel talks fail over Israeli demand to go public,” *i24 News*, August 31, 2022.

<sup>79</sup> See, for example, “Israel Doesn’t Want Peace: Emir,” *The Peninsula*, September 29, 2015. In March 2023, Qatar’s permanent representative to the United Nations in Geneva stated Qatar’s position “supporting the Palestinian people and their just cause until they reclaim all their legitimate rights, and establish full sovereignty as independent state based on the borders of 1967 with East Jerusalem as the capital.” Qatar Foreign Ministry, “The State of Qatar Reiterates Position of Supporting Palestine,” March 3, 2023.

joining other Arab states in normalizing relations with Israel through the Abraham Accords until there is substantial progress toward resolving the Israel-Palestinian dispute.<sup>80</sup>

Qatar has engaged with the Islamist group Hamas, a Muslim Brotherhood offshoot and U.S.-designated terrorist group that has exercised de facto control of the Gaza Strip since 2007. Qatari officials asserted in 2017 that their engagement with Hamas can help foster Israeli-Palestinian peace.<sup>81</sup> Some of Hamas's top leaders have been based in Doha, and the current leader of its political bureau, Ismail Haniyeh, relocated there in 2020.<sup>82</sup> As of January 2023, Haniyeh continued to host official meetings in Doha.<sup>83</sup> Qatar's main engagement with the Palestinians appears to come through the substantial financial aid it provides to the people of Gaza, which Israeli officials have supported as a means of promoting calm on the Israel-Gaza border.<sup>84</sup> Aid efforts are provided through a "Gaza Reconstruction Committee" headed by Qatari official Mohammad al Emadi, who serves informally as an envoy to Israel.

Qatar was a key mediator to end eleven days of clashes between Israel and Hamas in May 2021, efforts that were reportedly facilitated, in part, by additional Qatari pledges of aid to Gaza.<sup>85</sup> Before the conflict, Qatar had provided cash assistance for Gaza, but due to Israeli concerns about the potential for its diversion, Qatar agreed to arrangements in late 2021 to provide money transfers for needy families through the United Nations, and send fuel from Egypt into Gaza so it can be sold to pay for civil servants' salaries.<sup>86</sup>

In August 2022, Qatar supported Egyptian efforts to broker a ceasefire between Israel and Palestine Islamic Jihad (another U.S.-designated terrorist group) militants in Gaza, while expressing "strong condemnation and denunciation" of Israeli settlers' actions at the Al Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem.<sup>87</sup> In December 2022, the Qatari government expressed "its strong condemnation and denunciation of the Israeli government's plans for settlement expansion, its continued attempts to Judaize Al Quds [Jerusalem] and Al Aqsa mosque, considering them a severe violation of the UN Charter, international law principles, related UN resolutions, and a blatant assault on the rights of the brotherly Palestinian people."<sup>88</sup> The Qatari government made a similar statement in February 2023 in response to announced Israeli settlement plans and called on international actors "to compel Israel to stop its settlement policy in the occupied Palestinian territories."<sup>89</sup>

<sup>80</sup> "Interview: Qatar's FM rules out normalization with Israel, Syria." *Axios*, February 2, 2022.

<sup>81</sup> Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Press Conference of His Excellency Minister of Foreign Affairs in Paris," June 12, 2017.

<sup>82</sup> "Hamas leader Haniyeh decides to settle in Qatar – report," *Jerusalem Post*, February 2, 2020.

<sup>83</sup> Ma'an News Agency, "'Haniyeh meets Wensland and a number of his aides in Doha,'" January 12, 2023.

<sup>84</sup> Neville Teller, "What Do You Make of Qatar?" *The Jerusalem Post*, September 19, 2019.

<sup>85</sup> "Israel and Hamas Near Cease-Fire Amid Mounting Pressure," *Wall Street Journal*, May 19, 2021.

<sup>86</sup> Aaron Boxerman, "UN to begin dispensing Qatari cash to needy Gazan families Monday under new deal," *Times of Israel*, September 12, 2021; Ahmad Abu Amer, "Egypt, Qatar agreement with Israel, Hamas provides boost for Gaza economy," *Al-Monitor*, November 23, 2021.

<sup>87</sup> Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs (@MofaQatar\_EN), "Qatar Strongly Condemns Settlers Storming Al-Aqsa Mosque," Twitter, August 7, 2022, 5:34 AM.

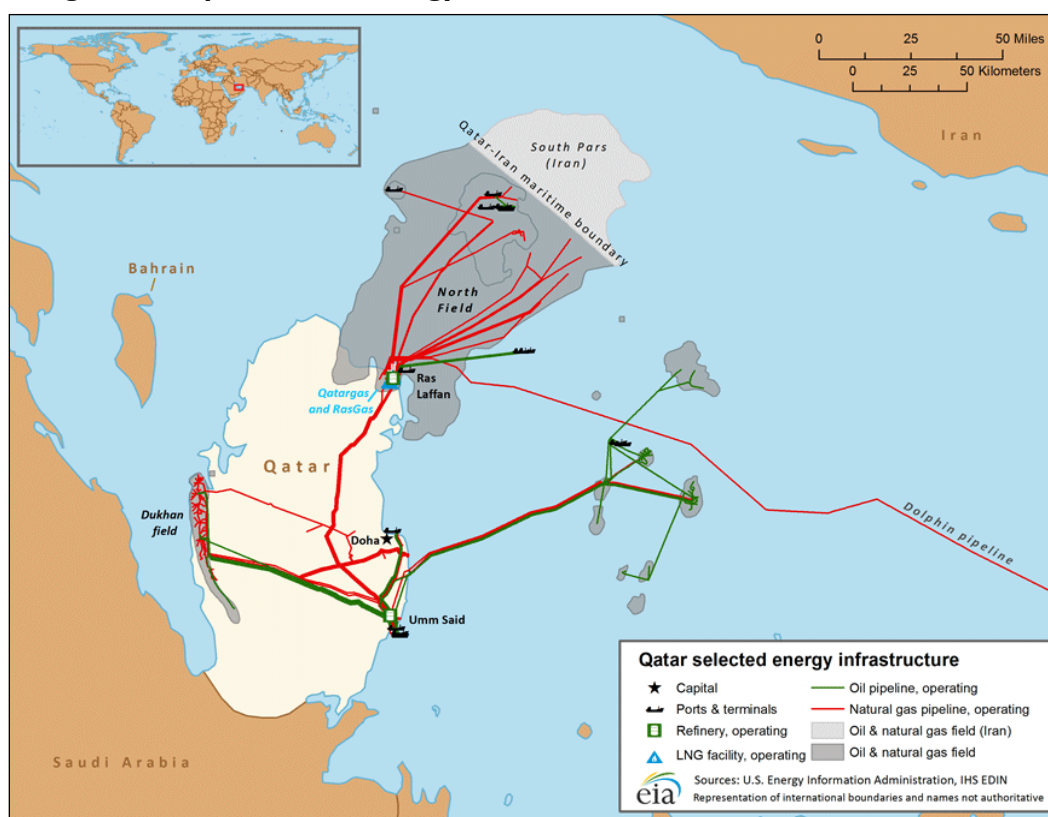
<sup>88</sup> Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs Media and Communication Department, "Qatar Condemns Israeli Government's Plans on Developing Settlements," December 30, 2022.

<sup>89</sup> Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs Media and Communication Department, "Qatar condemns in the strongest terms the occupation government's vote to legalize settlement outposts," February 13, 2023.

## Fiscal, Economic, and Energy Issues

Qatar's active diplomacy is at least in part a result of its considerable financial resources and economic influence. In June 2022, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) praised Qatar's response to the economic pressures of the COVID-19 pandemic, noted non-hydrocarbon growth in Qatar's economy, and projected that the planned large-scale expansion of natural gas production and exports from Qatar's North Field (Figure 2) would support state finances over the medium term.<sup>90</sup> The IMF describes the North Field project as "the largest single LNG expansion ever" and expects the project to "further increase Qatar's reliance on fossil fuel."<sup>91</sup> According to the IMF, non-oil and gas revenues provide only roughly 20% of the government's revenue.<sup>92</sup> Qatar does not have a value added tax (VAT).

**Figure 2. Map of Qatari Energy Resources and Select Infrastructure, 2015**



**Source:** U.S. Energy Information Administration, Qatar Country Analysis Brief, October 2015.

New challenges have accompanied Qatar's economic success in areas such as social cohesion; education; labor; preservation of local traditions; national infrastructure; and energy, water, and food supplies. To respond to these challenges, Qatari authorities have pursued a series of national development strategies based on a comprehensive national vision document that seeks balanced,

<sup>90</sup> International Monetary Fund (IMF), Qatar Article IV Consultation and Staff Report, IMF Country Report No. 22/175, June 2022.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.



sustainable growth by the year 2030.<sup>93</sup> Emir Tamim bin Hamad chaired the implementation oversight body for the *Qatar National Vision 2030* project in his former role as heir apparent. The national development strategy for 2018 through 2022 set targets for economic infrastructure development and diversification, natural resource protection and use, performance management, and international partnership informed by Qatar's experiences in implementing its first national development strategy from 2011 to 2016.<sup>94</sup> Qatar's isolation by neighboring Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates from 2017 through 2020 may contribute to Qatar's pursuit of greater self-sufficiency in some areas, and of extra-regional economic partnerships. Preparations for the 2022 World Cup and preservation of Qatari culture were core elements of the 2018-2022 strategy.

With proven oil reserves of 25.2 billion barrels, Qatar has far less oil than the major Persian Gulf producers. QatarEnergy, the state-owned oil and natural gas company, increased crude oil output from 593,000 barrels per day (b/d) in 1999 to approximately 1.3 million b/d in November 2022.<sup>95</sup> Qatar withdrew from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) as of January 2019.<sup>96</sup> Qatar also withdrew from the 25-member OPEC+ group in 2019. Qatar has not coordinated its production decisions with OPEC or OPEC+ since, as Qatari officials have prioritized LNG development and criticized both OPEC and OPEC+ as primarily reflecting the influence of larger producers.<sup>97</sup> Leading importers of Qatari oil include Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, and Singapore.

Qatar has the third-largest natural gas reserves in the world, an estimated 23.86 trillion cubic meters (tcm).<sup>98</sup> Qatar borrowed internationally and invited foreign investment in order to expand gas extraction and liquefied natural gas (LNG) production and export facilities in the late 1990s and early 2000s.<sup>99</sup> The Export-Import Bank of the United States provided more than \$1 billion in loan guarantees to support the early 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>100</sup> Qatar expanded annual natural gas production from 29.6 billion cubic meters in 2002

<sup>93</sup> According to Qatari authorities, Qatar's *National Vision 2030* initiative "aims at transforming Qatar into an advanced country capable of sustaining its own development and ensuring high living standards for its people for generations to come by seeking to develop a diversified economy coupled with diminishing dependence on hydrocarbons, where investment is moving towards a knowledge-based economy and the private sector is growing in importance....The QNV 2030 identifies five main challenges: modernization and preservation of traditions; balance between the needs of this generation and those of future generations; managed growth and uncontrolled expansion; the size and quality of the expatriate labor force and the selected path of development; and economic growth, social development and environmental management." For more information, see the Qatar Government Communications Office at <https://www.gco.gov.qa/en/about-qatar/national-vision2030/>, and Qatar Planning and Statistics Authority website at <https://www.psa.gov.qa/en/qnv1/Pages/default.aspx>.

<sup>94</sup> For Qatar's National Development Strategy documents see <https://www.psa.gov.qa/en/nds1/Pages/default.aspx>.

<sup>95</sup> U.S. International Trade Administration, *Qatar - Country Commercial Guide*, November 2022.

<sup>96</sup> Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, "Opinion: Why Is Qatar Leaving OPEC?" *New York Times*, December 10, 2018; and Verity Ratcliffe and Simone Foxman, "Qatar Says Rejoining OPEC Would Not Fit With Its Strategy," *Bloomberg*, October 11, 2021.

<sup>97</sup> In 2020, Qatari Minister of State for Energy Affairs Saad bin Sherida Al Kaabi said, "The big players make the decisions in OPEC. We didn't see a place for us there because we are a gas producer, and we are really growing in gas." S&P Global, "INTERVIEW: Qatar thrives outside OPEC as minister warns over market flood legacy," April 20, 2020.

<sup>98</sup> U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, World Factbook, 2021 estimate. Qatar's supply of natural gas doubled in 2002, when surveyors discovered new gas deposits in Qatar's North Field.

<sup>99</sup> See Kohei Hashimoto, Jareer Ellass and Stacy Eller, "Liquefied Natural Gas from Qatar: The Qatargas Project," Stanford University Program on Energy and Sustainable Development and Rice University James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy, December 2004.

<sup>100</sup> See Export Import Bank of the United States, "Ex-Im Bank \$930 Million Guarantee Supports U.S. Exports to Build



to 167 billion cubic meters in 2019, and since 2020 has been the world's top exporter of LNG alongside the United States.<sup>101</sup> South Korea, Japan, and China were the top importers of Qatari LNG by volume in 2021.<sup>102</sup> Qatar is a member of Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF) and hosts the GECF headquarters.

Following a pause in development of gas production and LNG export infrastructure in the 2010s, Qatari authorities embarked in 2020 on a further expansion of North Field operations and LNG facilities under a \$30-\$50 billion initiative that seeks to expand LNG export capacity by 60% to 126 million tons per year by 2027. Qatar in 2021 raised \$12.5 billion for this expansion through a series of international bonds.<sup>103</sup> The North Field-East expansion project includes four LNG trains and the North Field-South expansion project includes two LNG trains.<sup>104</sup> U.S. companies, particularly ExxonMobil, have long been partners in Qatar's LNG operations: Qatari officials chose ExxonMobil to participate in the North Field-East project along with ConocoPhillips.

In addition to its domestic expansion, QatarEnergy is increasing its presence globally, including through marketing, liquefaction, regasification, and shipping.<sup>105</sup>

## Outlook

Qatari-U.S. security cooperation appears likely to continue to anchor the bilateral relationship, with U.S. officials paying close attention to Qatar's energy exports and its multidirectional foreign policy. Congress may continue to conduct oversight of the U.S. military's presence and programs in Qatar and may monitor Qatari foreign and domestic policies, especially with regard to Russia's war on Ukraine, China, Iran, Afghanistan, the Israel-Palestinian conflict, and human rights. Qatari officials may continue to seek defense, economic, and diplomatic coordination with the United States while pursuing Qatar's discrete interests and priorities.

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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>101</sup> BP Statistical Review of World Energy, 2022.

<sup>102</sup> S&P Global Commodity Insights, "Infographic: Where do Qatar's LNG exports go?" April 12, 2022.

<sup>103</sup> Yousef Saba, "Qatar Petroleum grabs \$12.5 bln in emerging market bonds record," Reuters, June 30, 2021.

<sup>104</sup> Andrew Mills and Maha El Dahan, "QatarEnergy signs deal with TotalEnergies for North Field South expansion," Reuters, September 24, 2022.

<sup>105</sup> Rafiq Latta, "QatarEnergy 2.0: The New LNG Industry Hegemon," Energy Intelligence Group, February 28, 2023.

## Appendix. Proposed Major U.S.-Qatar Arms Sales 2012-2022

**Table 1. Proposed Major U.S.-Qatar Arms Sales 2012-2022**

Items	Estimated Cost (\$, million)	Notification Date
UH-60M BLACK HAWK Helicopters	\$1,112	June 13, 2012
MH-60R and MH-60S SEAHAWK Helicopters	\$2,500	June 26, 2012
AH-64D APACHE Block III Longbow Helicopters; Related Missiles	\$3,000	July 12, 2012
HELLFIRE Missiles	\$137	July 12, 2012
Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) Fire Units	\$6,500	November 5, 2012
PATRIOT Configuration-3 Missile Fire Units and Missiles	\$9,900	November 7, 2012
M142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS); M57 Army Tactical Missile System (ATACMS) Block 1A T2K Rockets; M31A1 Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System (GMLRS) Rockets	\$406	December 24, 2012
Javelin Guided Missiles	\$122	March 28, 2013
Large Aircraft Infrared Countermeasures (LAIRCM) Systems	\$110	May 15, 2013
C-17 Globemaster III Equipment and Support	\$35	June 27, 2013
A/N FPS-132 Block 5 Early Warning Radar	\$1,100	July 29, 2013
RIM-116C and RIM-116C-2 Rolling Airframe Missiles	\$260	April 21, 2016
Javelin Guided Missiles	\$20	May 24, 2016
Mk-V Fast Patrol Boats	\$124	August 23, 2016
Logistics Support Services and Equipment Continuation	\$700	December 8, 2016
Spare C-17 Engines	\$81	December 8, 2016
F-15QA multirole fighter aircraft	\$1,100	November 1, 2017
Upgrade of Qatar Air Operations Center	\$197	March 7, 2018
Advanced Precision Kill Weapon Systems (APKWS) II Guidance Sections	\$300	April 9, 2018
Advanced Medium Range Air-to-Air Missiles (AMRAAM) for National Advanced Surface to Air Missile System (NASAMS)	\$215	November 27, 2018
AH-64E Apache Attack helicopters and related equipment	\$3,000	May 9, 2019
AN/AAQ-24(V)N Large Aircraft Infrared Countermeasures (LAIRCM) systems for Head of State Aircraft	\$86	September 24, 2019
Fixed Site-Low, Slow, Small Unmanned Aircraft System Integrated Defeat System (FS-LIDS)	\$1,000	November 29, 2022

**Source:** U.S. Defense Security Cooperation Agency. Does not reflect Direct Commercial Sales approved by U.S. Department of State.

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