

## CSAG INFORMATION PAPER:

### ***Update on U.S.-Qatari Relations Amid Regional Turmoil***

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*The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of a number of international officers within the Combined Strategic Analysis Group (CSAG) and do not necessarily reflect the views of United States Central Command, nor of the nations represented within the CSAG or any other governmental agency.*

#### 1. **Subject: Update on U.S.-Qatari Relations Amid Regional Turmoil**

2. **Purpose:** The paper presents the status of the U.S. relationship with important partner Qatar in a time of regional conflict and instability. The paper also addresses the repercussions for Qatar of the 12-day war and the recent Israeli attack on Hamas leaders in Doha.

#### 3. **Introduction / Background:**

Qatar is an important partner for the U.S. within the CENTCOM AOR, with established diplomatic relations between the countries since 1973. In addition to overall areas of cooperation linked to the economy and development, military cooperation is important for stability in the region and American access to strategically important areas such as the Arabian Gulf.<sup>1</sup> Since 1992, a Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) has been in place, which was renewed in 2013. The DCA focuses on access, logistics, exercise and training, and enabling forward deployment. Qatar was designated as a "Major Non-NATO Ally" in 2022 and has been a major enabler for the U.S. in the fight against ISIS.<sup>2</sup> They have also been partnered with West Virginia in the State Partnership Program since 2018.<sup>3</sup>

#### 4. **Facts:**

##### **Meetings and Forums for Cooperation**

- a. President Trump's first major foreign trip in his second term was to the Middle East, where he visited Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates in May 2025. It was the first Doha-visit by a U.S. President since 2003.
- b. Major outcomes from the meeting in Doha were a \$200 billion deal between Qatar Airways and Boeing on 160 aircrafts and enhanced defense cooperation, including sale of military materiel to Qatar (MQ-9B drones and FS-LIDS air defense systems). In total, agreements were made which are expected to generate an economic exchange of approximately \$1.2 trillion.<sup>4</sup>
- c. Qatar has, together with the U.S. and Egypt, been an important mediator in the ceasefire negotiations between Hamas and Israel since the war in Gaza began in October 2023. The U.S. has consistently underlined Qatar's importance in the current negotiations, which is crucial given its influence over the group. Negotiations have repeatedly been hosted in Doha.<sup>5</sup>
- d. In the past, Qatar has also been a main facilitator and mediator of talks between the U.S. and the Taliban.<sup>6</sup>

- e. The U.S. and Qatar have several different forums for defense cooperation. In addition to those mentioned in the introduction, the main bilateral forum is the U.S.-Qatar Military Consultative Commission which held its last meeting in October 2024 in Washington DC.<sup>7</sup> There are also round tables, strategic dialogues, and more domain specific exchanges taking place when deemed suitable.

### **Bases and Materiel Cooperation**

- a. Qatar hosts Al-Udeid Air Base (southwest of Doha) and USCENTCOM Forward HQ, which is the largest U.S. installation in the Middle East. It also houses special forces, AFCENT, and the Combined Air Operations Center. In total, about 10,000 U.S. personnel are deployed on the base.<sup>8</sup> Before closing in 2021, As-Sayliyah Army Base outside of Doha was also used for prepositioning and humanitarian aid operations.
- b. In 2018, Qatar announced a \$1.8 billion renovation and upgrade of Al-Udeid. The investment reflects the intention of an enduring installation that will facilitate the growing and deepening strategic partnership with the U.S.<sup>9</sup>
- c. In terms of Foreign Military Sales (FMS), Qatar is currently the second largest trade partner to the U.S with over \$25 billion in active FMS cases. The most significant deals include IAMD (including Patriot, NASAMS and AN/FPS-132 Early Warning Radar), F-15QA Fighter Aircrafts, and AH-64E Apache Attack Helicopters.<sup>10</sup>

### **Operations, Training and Activities**

- a. The two countries conduct joint exercises and military training regularly to support regional security. Exercises such as Eagle Resolve and Invincible Sentry are conducted to increase interoperability, crisis response, and defense capabilities and include multiple domains.
- b. Some of the most prioritized areas of operational cooperation are IAMD and strategic airlift capabilities.
- c. The U.S. has had substantial cooperation with Qatar on counter terrorism since 2000. Qatar participates both within the Global Coalition against ISIS and the Counter ISIL-Finance Group. The two countries also have a program for sharing biometric and visa data to stem transnational terrorist threats.<sup>11</sup>
- d. Qatar regularly hosts port visits enabling crew liberty and logistic resupply for the U.S. Navy and participates in the Combined Maritime Forces, Combined Task Force 152 (CMF) to increase security in the region and deterrent effect.

### **The 12-day War and Israel's attack in Doha**

- a. During the 12-day Israel-Iran war, Qatar played a crucial role as a mediator where they facilitated communication between the U.S. and Iran in the ceasefire negotiations.<sup>12</sup>
- b. Qatar was targeted by an Iranian retaliatory strike during the end of the 12-day war. The attack was not considered escalatory in that stage of the conflict as there were no casualties and Iran had given early notice to Qatar and the U.S. Iran used short and medium-range ballistic missiles, which were mostly successfully intercepted by air defense (Patriot) but managed to strike a U.S. geodesic dome structure used for secure communications.<sup>13</sup>

- c. On September 9, Israel launched airstrikes on Hamas leaders in Doha as they were attending peace negotiations concerning Gaza. The attack ultimately failed to take out the key targets in the leadership but killed five Hamas members and injured a Qatari security officer.<sup>14</sup>
- d. The attack led to a pause in the peace negotiations, triggered outrage among the Arab nations, and was also condemned by other parts of the international community. The UN Security Council also issued a statement that expressed solidarity with Qatar, which gained support from all 15 members including the U.S.<sup>15</sup>

## 5. Analysis/Assessment:

- The geostrategic position of Qatar makes it an increasingly important partner to the U.S. in the strategic, operational, and tactical context in the region given the current instability. The U.S.-Qatari cooperation enables important access and rapid response capabilities for dealing with a variety of emerging threats, not least from Iran and their proxies but also to stem ISIS resurgence.
- Bolstering continued cooperation with Qatar is also crucial for the U.S. defense industry and other economic exchanges, given market insecurities.
- Despite its economic power, Qatar is a small country and it's clear how they position themselves as the U.S. go-to mediator in the region and prioritized business partner. For Qatar, this is ensuring continued U.S. support for security related challenges, and the partnership has a clear transactional nature which aligns with the current administration's approach and the goal of being a security integrator rather than guarantor.
- In relation to the 12-day war, Qatar's involvement had a de-escalatory effect on the conflict. The relationship Qatar has with numerous actors in the regional conflict dynamic includes some challenge for the U.S. The unclear status of Hamas' political office situated in Doha is one example, despite the opportunity it provides for dialogue.
- The Israeli attack on Qatar has inflicted a large diplomatic backlash not only for Israel but also for the U.S. for several reasons. As a close ally to the U.S., the Israeli actions could lead to distrust in the U.S.-Qatar relationship in terms of security guarantees. It has also raised questions regarding early warning and loyalty given the heavy U.S. footprint in Qatar through al-Udeid, as Qatar claim they did not receive a warning in time.
- In addition to the diplomatic tensions, there are operational concerns of how the strikes could bypass the advanced air defense systems in Qatar and surrounding areas, especially given the significant investments being made on U.S. materiel including Patriot, NASAMS and THAAD.

## 6. Conclusion:

- The consistent commitment that Qatar is making to the partnership with the U.S. on different levels shows the value it is placing on having the U.S. as the main partner for national and regional security objectives.
- The materiel cooperation is not only of economic importance to the U.S., but also crucial for Qatar in terms of capability development and their security. This cooperation is also pertinent for U.S.

interests when it comes to strategic competition, to avoid large net spenders turning to China for materiel purchases.

- The relationship will be important to maintain given the numerous security challenges in the region. Qatar will remain a trusted partner in negotiations with Iran, Hamas, and potentially also the Taliban depending on how the situation in Afghanistan develops.
- It is getting increasingly difficult for the U.S. to balance the relationship between their ally Israel and Middle Eastern partners, not least due to Israel's increased disregard for the sovereignty of other countries. Actions such as the recent strike on Qatar further increase the risk for horizontal and vertical escalation.

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