



Center for Strategic and International Studies

Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy

1800 K Street, N.W. • Suite 400 • Washington, DC 20006

Phone: 1 (202) 775-7325 • Fax: 1 (202) 457-8746

Web: www.csis.org/burke

The Gulf Military Forces in an Era of Asymmetric War

Qatar

Anthony H. Cordesman
Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy
acordesman@aol.com

Khalid R. Al-Rodhan
Visiting Fellow
kalrodhan@csis.org

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Introduction

Qatar may be a small country, with a total population of only 863,000 in mid-2005, and territory of only 11,437 square kilometers, but it has a strategic location in the Southern Gulf. As **Map 1** shows, Qatar is a peninsula in the middle of the Southern Gulf that shares a 60-kilometer border with Saudi Arabia and is directly opposite Iran.

Qatar has been ruled by the Al Thani family since the mid-1800s. Its current ruler, Amir Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, gained power when he overthrew his father, when, as crown prince, he ousted his father, Amir Khalifa bin Hamad al-Thani, in a bloodless coup on June 27, 1995. While Qatar is a monarchy, it has held municipal elections and is converting its appointed Majlis as Shura to a body that will be elected.

Map 1: Qatar



Source: CIA, "Qatar," 1980, available at http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/qatar.jpg

While Iran is the primary potential threat to Qatar, and Qatar shares a massive offshore natural gas formation with Iran, there have been no serious recent tensions between the two countries. Qatar's main entanglements have instead been with other Southern Gulf states. Qatar accused several of its Southern Gulf neighbors of supporting a failed coup attempt by the present emir's father, who tried to return to power in 1996. Qatar had a long-standing border dispute with

Bahrain that was resolved in 2001. And, Qatar had several clashes with Saudi Arabia before the two countries finally agreed on a border settlement in 2001.

Qatar makes no pretense to be a major Gulf military power, but maintains just enough forces to provide minimal border defense against Saudi Arabia and some deterrent to Iran. Qatar's military forces only have a total of 12,400 men, plus reserves. Qatar derives its security primarily from the fact it is the site of the main U.S. air base and headquarters in the Gulf, and of the equipment for one US prepositioned brigade. The country also hosts about 6,540 United States personnel. For all intents and purposes, Qatar is under de facto US protection.

Military Spending & Arms Imports

In spite of its small forces, Qatar has comparatively large defense expenditures. Its spending averaged well over \$1 billion a year during the mid to late 1990s, and rose to \$2 billion a year in the early 2000s.¹ The IISS estimates that Qatar spent \$1.2 billion in 2000, \$ 1.3 billion in 2001, \$1.9 billion in 2002, \$1.92 billion in 2003, \$2.06 billion in 2004, and \$2.91 billion in 2005.

If the IISS estimate is correct, Qatar spends a great deal on military forces for such a small power. Jane's asserted that, "between 2000-2004, Qatar allocated an average of 32.5 percent of its current expenditure to defense and security, the third highest in the Arab world after Oman and Bahrain."²

Qatar is, however, a wealthy oil and gas power. The CIA estimates that earnings from these sources account for more than 60% of its \$22.47 billion GDP in 2005, and that they were roughly 85% of export earnings, and 70% of government revenues.³ They gave Qatar exports worth \$29.4 billion versus imports of \$6.7 billion. Government revenues were \$17.1 billion versus expenditures of \$11.3 billion.⁴

Oil and gas have also given Qatar a per capita GDP of \$26,000 -- about 80% of that of the leading West European industrial countries. The CIA also estimates that Qatar's proved oil reserves of 16 billion barrels will allow output at current levels for another 23 years. The CIA also estimates that its proved natural gas reserves exceed 14 trillion cubic meters, more than 5% of the world total and third largest in the world.

Qatar has never been a major arms importer by Gulf standards. Its recent arms imports and new agreements have averaged under \$50 million dollars a year in recent years. New arms agreements totaled less than \$50 million during 1997-2000, and less than \$50 million during 2001-2004. Arms deliveries totaled \$1,800 million during 1997-2000, and less than \$50 million during 2001-2004.⁵ They did, however, reach much higher levels during peak years in the 1990s: \$1.4 billion in 1992, \$1.3 billion in 1994, \$625 million in 1997, and \$1.0 billion in 1998.⁶

Jane's Defence Weekly described Qatar's procurement program as follows in 2005:⁷

Qatar's big-ticket procurement programme has been largely in abeyance for some time. Giat has been trying to sell Qatar 30 Leclerc MBTs for some time but financial problems have apparently blocked that effort. The air force is looking for 20 multirole helicopters to replace its ageing Westland Commandos. Bell Helicopter and AgustaWestland are offering the AB139, while Sikorsky is pushing the UH-60L Black Hawk. Eurocopter is also in the running, reportedly with the EC 725.

Qatar's main foreign supplier is France, which has provided some 80% of the country's military requirements,⁸ although the country has deepened ties with both the United Kingdom and the United States. The UK is trying to secure a contract for supplying Hawk training/fighter aircraft and has already supplied the Qatari army with Piranha APCs and the navy with "Vita" fast patrol

craft. Its company Vickers is also thought to want to sell the Challenger II MBT to replace the ageing AMX-30s. The United States, meanwhile, has sought to sell Qatar F-16s and the Patriot air defense system.⁹

Military Manpower

Qatar's armed forces are organized into three branches: Qatari Amiri Land Force (QALF), Qatari Amiri Navy (QAN), Qatari Amiri Air Force (QAAF). Like most Southern Gulf states, high command is held by members of the royal family and their supporters. Amir Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani also holds the positions of Minister of Defense and Commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces. Major General Sheikh Had bin Khalifah Al-Thani is both minister of defense and commander in chief of the armed forces. Brigadier General Hamad bin Ali al-Attiyah is chief of general staff, Colonel Saif Ali al-Hajiri is commander of ground forces, General Ali Said al-Hawal al-Marri is commander of the air force, and Captain Said Muhammad al-Suwaidi.¹⁰

Qatar only had a total military age manpower pool of 238,566 in 2005, including foreigners (fit males, ages 18-49.). At least 70% of this pool is non-Qatari, and large elements are non-Arab. The CIA estimates that the total population is Arab 40%, Pakistani 18%, Indian 18%, Iranian 10%, and other 14%. Only about 7,800 native Qatari males a year reach 18 years of age. Under these conditions, it is not surprising that most enlisted personnel are largely nonprofessional foreign nationals (2005).¹¹

Total military manpower has never significantly exceeded 12,000, and has varied by year according to Qatar's policy in accepting foreign enlistments. Manning levels were as low as 8,000 in the early 1990s, but rose to today's levels by 1999.

The Qatari Army

The Qatari Army has only 8,500 personnel and Qatar's entire army is a fraction of other Gulf armies. The majority of its forces are located at the North Camp and Barzan Camp military areas. In 2006, its force structure consisted of a tank battalion, four mechanized infantry battalions, a Special Forces company, a field artillery regiment, a mortar battalion, an anti-tank battalion, and a Royal Guard regiment divided into three sub-units. These formations are very small.

Figure 1 provides a detailed analysis of the trends in the army's manpower, force structure, and equipment from 1990 to 2006. Present equipment holdings are small and of limited quality. Qatar has 30 obsolescent AMX-30 main battle tanks and 40 AMX-10P armored infantry fighting vehicles. Its reconnaissance forces are composed of 16 VBL, 12 AMX-10RC, 8 V-150 Chaimite, 20 EE-9 Cascavel, and 12 obsolete Ferrets. It has 36 Piranha light armored vehicles as well as 160 VAB and 30 training AMX-VCI APCs.

The IISS *Military Balance* estimated that Qatar has 48 HOT anti-tank missiles (24 on VABs), while Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment puts that figure at 40; the IISS Military Balance reports that Qatar has 40 84mm Carl Gustav recoilless rifles, with Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment offering no number estimate for these rifles. Both sources agree that Qatar has 100 Milan anti-tank guided weapons. Land-based air defense weapons are under the operational control of the air force.

Qatar's artillery force consists of 28 self-propelled 155mm Mk F3, 12 towed GS 155mm, 4 ASTROS II multiple rocket launchers, 30 81mm L16 mortars (some on vehicles), and 15 120mm Brant.

Qatar has improved its force strength over the years. It added a mechanized infantry battalion and a mortar battalion in the 1990s. Between 2000 and 2005, Qatar added an anti-tank battalion. The number of Qatari tanks rose from 24 in 1990 to 44 in 2000, but then dropped to 30 in 2006. The AIFV fleet also increased, though the additions took place in the 1990s. The armored reconnaissance vehicle (ARV) fleet also rose from 10 in 1990 to 68 in 2006, due to the addition of AMX-10RCs, EE-9 Cascavels, V-150 Chaimites and VBLs; most of the AFVs are from post-1990. Its artillery force also increased after 1990, going from 14 in 1990 to 89 in 2006. Qatar has also expanded its anti-tank arsenal to 188 in 2006 from 112+ in 1990.

Qatari training and readiness is good for such a small force, but the army is capable of operating largely at the battalion level, with limited combined arms capability and negligible capability for maneuver warfare and combined arms. It also has so many types of major weapons that it presents support and sustenance problems, even when based near its peacetime casernes. The Qatari Army can project small forces and played a small role in the Gulf War. It is, however, incapable of engaging any significant Iranian, Saudi, or other regional land force.

Figure 1: Qatari Army's Force Structure, 1990-2006

	1990	2000	2005	2006
Manpower	6,000	8,500	8,500	8,500
<i>Active</i>	6,000	8,500	8,500	8,500
<i>Reserve</i>	0	0	0	0
Combat Units (Battalions)	5	7	8	8
<i>Mechanized Infantry Battalion</i>	3	4	4	4
<i>Special Forces Company</i>	1	1	1	1
<i>Tank Battalion</i>	1	1	1	1
<i>Mortar Battalion</i>	0	1	1	1
<i>Anti-Tank Battalion</i>	0	0	1	1
Combat Units (Regiments)	2	2	2	2
<i>Fortified Artillery Regiment</i>	1	1	1	1
<i>Royal Guard Regiment</i>	1	1	1	1
Main Battle Tanks (MBT)	24	44	30	30
<i>AMX-30</i>	24	44	30	30
Armored Infantry Fighting Vehicles (AIFV)	30	40	40	40
<i>AMX-10P</i>	30	40	40	40
Reconnaissance (RECCE)	10	36	68	68
<i>AMX-10RC</i>	0	12	12	12
<i>EE-9 Cascavel</i>	0	0	20	20
<i>Ferret</i>	(10)	0	12	12
<i>V-150 Chaimite</i>	0	8	8	8
<i>VBL</i>	0	16	16	16
Armored Personal Carriers (APC)	168	208	226	226
<i>AMX-VCI</i>	0	12	30	30
<i>VAB</i>	160	160	160	160
<i>LAV Piranha II</i>	0	36	36	36
<i>V-150 Commando</i>	8	0	0	0
Artillery	14	83	89	89
<i>TOWED 88mm 25 pdr</i>	8	0	0	0
<i>TOWED 155MM G-5</i>	0	12	12	12
<i>SP 155mm Mk F3</i>	6	28	28	28
<i>MRL ASTROS II</i>	0	4	4	4
<i>81mm MOR L16</i>	?	24	30	30

<i>120mm Brandt</i>	0	15	15	15
Anti-Tank Weapons	100+	100+	188	188
<i>HOT MSL</i>	?	?	48	48
<i>Milan MSL</i>	100	100	100	100
<i>84mm RCL Carl Gustav</i>	?	?	40	40

Note: * indicates that *Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment* offers a different estimate—these differences are shown in the text.

Source: IISS, *Military Balance*, various editions including 1989-1990, 1999-2000, 2004-2005, 2005-2006.

The Qatari Air Force

Qatar's Air Force had 2,100 personnel in 2006. Qatar based its air force squadrons at Al-Udeid Air Base, though operations were also conducted from Doha IAP.

Figure 2 shows the structure of the Qatari air force in 2006. The air force had one squadron with 9 M-2000ED Mirage, one squadron with 3 M-2000D Mirage, and 1 squadron with 6 Alpha Jet.¹² *Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment*, however, described Qatar's air forces' structure as "1 Fighter Wing has two squadrons, 7 (Air Superiority) Squadron with Mirage 2000-5 fighters used in interdiction and ground attack roles and 11 (Close Support) Squadron deploying Alpha Jet in an attack role."¹³

Qatar has reported signed a deal to sell India its 12 Mirage 2000-5 multi-role aircraft. According to reports, Qatar may buy F-16s, though no deal has been announced yet.¹⁴

Qatar has French Magic R-550 and some MICA air-to-air missiles. It also can load its fixed wing combat aircraft with AM-39 Exocet anti-ship missiles.

Qatar's helicopter fleet consists of 10-11 SA342L Gazelle with HOT air-to-surface missiles, and 8 Commando Mark 3 armed with Exocet AM-39 anti-ship missiles.¹⁵ Two of these helicopters have been fitted for Exocet AM-38.¹⁶

There are no advanced sensor, battle management, reconnaissance, and maritime surveillance aircraft and UAVs.

Qatar's transport fleet consists of two B-707s, one B-727, two Falcon 900s, and one Airbus A340. The Qatari Emiri Flight, which is geared to VIP transport, operates four Airbus aircraft in civilian markings.¹⁷ Qatar's air force also has 3 Commando MK 2A, 1 Commando MK 2C, and 2 SA-341 Gazelle support helicopters, which are classified as training helicopters.

The air force structure has remained relatively constant since 1990, with small changes in the transport (from 3 in 1990 to 6 in 2006) and helicopter fleet (from 26 in 1990 to 25 in 2006). The air force's small air units have low to moderate readiness, with reasonable to good pilot training for basic missions. The air force must rely on foreign support for most ground activities.

Figure 2: Qatari Air Force's Force Structure, 1990-2006

	1990	2000	2005	2006
Manpower	800	2,100	2,100	2,100
<i>Active</i>	800	2,100	2,100	2,100
<i>Reserve</i>	0	0	0	0
Fighter Ground Attack	12	12	12	12
<i>M-2000D Mirage</i>	1	3	3	3
<i>M-2000ED Mirage</i>	11	9	9	9
Training Craft	6	6	6	6
<i>Alpha Jet 1E</i>	6	6	6	6
Transport	3	6	6	6
<i>Airbus-340</i>	0	1	1	1
<i>Boeing-707</i>	2	2	2	2
<i>Boeing-727</i>	1	1	1	1
<i>Falcon 900</i>	0	2	2	2
Helicopters	26	23	23	25
<i>ASUW Commando MK 3 with Exocet</i>	8	8	8	8
<i>ATK SA-342L Gazelle with HOT</i>	12	11	11	11
<i>SPT Commando MK 2A</i>	3	3	3	3
<i>SPT Commando MK 2C VIP</i>	1	1	1	1
<i>SPT SA-341 Gazelle</i>	2	?	?	2

Source: IISS, *Military Balance*, various editions including 1989-1990, 1999-2000, 2004-2005, 2005-2006.

Qatar Air Defense

Battlefield and tactical air defense is undertaken by army personnel but is under the operational control of the air force.¹⁸ **Figure 3** shows the equipment holding in Qatari land-based air defenses. Qatar has no medium or major surface-to-air missiles or advanced air defense ground environment assets. In 2006, it had a total of 75 lighter surface-to-air missile fire units, including 24 Mistral, 9 Roland, 10 Blowpipe, 12 FIM-92A Stinger, and 20 SA-7. A significant number of these systems, particularly the MANPADS, may have limited or no operational capability.

Qatar has made some additions to its air defense posture since 1990, although Qatar's overall force structure has not changed during the last decade or so. Most increases in its air defense systems, however, came in the 1990s, as the total weapons went from 30 in 1990 to 65 in 2000, then increasing to 75 in 2006. Between 1990 and 2006, Qatar added 20 SA-7 Grail, ten Blowpipe, three Rolland II, and 24 Mistrals, but lost/decommissioned 12 Rapiers.

Figure 3: Qatari Air Defense's Force Structure, 1990-2006

	1990	2000	2005	2006
SAM	30	65	75	75
<i>Mistral</i>	0	24	24	24
<i>Roland II</i>	6	9	9	9
<i>Blowpipe</i>	0	0	10	10
<i>FIM-92A Stinger</i>	12	12	12	12
<i>SA-7 Grail</i>	0	20	20	20
<i>Rapier</i>	12	0	0	0

Source: IISS, *Military Balance*, various editions including 1989-1990, 1999-2000, 2004-2005, 2005-2006.

The Qatari Navy

Qatar has a small 1,800-man navy, including its marine police force and coastal defense artillery. Since 1990, the Qatari Navy has increased its manpower from 700 in 1990 to 1,800 in 2006. It has added some patrol and coastal combatants, though the overall force posture has remained relatively stable with a reduction in PFM from 9 in 1990 to 7 in 2006.

The navy is headquartered at Doha and has a base at Halul Island. Given that Qatar has only a small land border with Saudi Arabia the rest of the country is surrounded by sea, and Qatar depends on energy exports by ship. the Navy plays an important role in the country's defense. Much of the sea around the coast is un-navigable or uncharted, however, complicating the deployment of the country's naval forces.¹⁹

Figure 4 shows the trends in Qatar's naval manning, force structure, and major weapons. It 2006, it included three 396-ton Damsah (Combattante III) class missile patrol boats. Each is equipped with 8 MM-40 missiles and one 76mm gun. The vessels were delivered in the early 1980s, but were refitted in 1997-1998. All are operational.

The Qatari Navy also had four relatively modern and capable 376-ton Barzan (British Vita) class vessels. Each is equipped with 8 Exocet MM-40s, a 76mm gun, a six-round Matral Sandral

launcher carrying Mistral surface-to-air missiles, and four torpedo tubes. They have modern electronics and radars and were delivered in the mid-1990s. These ships are operational, but some sources indicate that Qatar is still training some crew and bringing its crews to full readiness.

The navy recently purchased four DV 15 fast interceptor craft, armed with machine guns, from a French shipbuilder.²⁰ Qatar has 20+ small craft, which are operated by the Marine police. These forces include: six Damen Polycat 1450 (of which at least one is reported non-operational), 15 Fairey Marine Spear coastal patrol craft, and one Rabha landing craft tank.²¹

Its coastal defense forces have four batteries with three quad Exocet MM-40 missile launchers.

These are small forces with limited readiness for naval combat, but are suitable for patrol, anti-smuggling, and anti-terrorism missions. Like the other services, the Qatari Navy benefits from US basing on Qatari soil, and implicit US security guarantees.

Figure 4: Qatari Navy's Force Structure, 1990-2006

	1990	2000	2005	2006
Manpower	700	1,730	1,800	1,800
<i>Active</i>	700	1,730	1,800	1,800
<i>Reserve</i>	0	0	0	0
PFM	9	7	7	7
<i>Barzan with Exocet SAM</i>	6	4	4	4
<i>Damash</i>	3	3	3	3
Patrol and Coastal Combatants	0	40+	20+	20+
<i>Misc and Small Craft</i>	0	40+	20+	20+
Amphibious	1	0	0	0
<i>LCT</i>	1	0	0	0
Coastal Defense	3	3	3	3
<i>MM-40 SSM bty with 3 quad</i>	3	3	3	3

Source: IISS, *Military Balance*, various editions including 1989-1990, 1999-2000, 2004-2005, 2005-2006.

Paramilitary, Security, and Intelligence Services

Like the other Gulf States, Qatar faces a challenge from Islamist extremists and terrorists, although terrorist activity has so far been relatively limited. It also faces problems with tribal elements, and at least some Qataris who oppose Qatar's relatively progressive moves towards reform. Qatar is a Wahhabi country and even some members of the royal family feel that Qatar is moving away from its Islamic roots.

The Qatari police force is estimated at about 8,000-strong with its headquarters in Doha and with territorial commands around the country, and is under the control of the Ministry of the Interior.

There is also a secret police force charged with espionage and sedition, while the army's intelligence is charged with terrorism and surveillance of political dissidents.²²

There are three Special Force-type units under army command: Oil Well Guard Units, located in the Dukhan and Umm Bab areas and charged with securing pipelines, Doha and Umm Said; a Border Guards Regiment deployed to protect the borders; and a Static Guard Regiment stationed throughout the country. Each of these units is at company strength (between 300 and 400 personnel).²³ The Qatari police also operate three Halmatic M160s, four Crestitalia MV-45s, and three Watercraft P1200s.

As is discussed shortly, a series of terrorist attacks in March 2005 led Qatar to tighten its security at the border and at key installations. It has passed a law according to which all nationals and expatriates will be required to have national ID cards.²⁴ Qatar is also cooperated with other countries to develop crisis management, civil defense and crowd control capabilities for the Asian Games in 2006. The country's tourism infrastructure will also be the first in the world to be developed with post-September, 11 2001 counterterrorist features incorporated at the design level.²⁵

Continuing Strategic Challenges

Qatar is a country of opposites—it is home to Al-Jazeera and to CENTOM; its population is conservative, while its leaders are some of the most modernizing in the region; it has close ties to Israel, whilst acting as a safe haven for religious extremists deemed too radical and expelled from other Middle Eastern countries; it exerts soft power through Al-Jazeera but receives the virility of the neighborly governments that Al-Jazeera criticizes.

Qatar has outsourced its defense to the United States, counting on CENTOM to provide de facto protection against external predators. But Qatar's position remains precarious because its strategy depends on the careful balancing of many competing forces—religious extremism, the West, the GCC, Iran, and its own population. Qatar's future trajectory is a function of how well it manages to chart its own course without allowing any of these forces to get in the way. How well Qatar can maintain these contradictions without any of them getting beyond control, however, remains an outstanding uncertainty.

Qatar, the GCC, and the Broader Middle East

Relations between Saudi Arabia and Qatar are strained. This is attributable to “the alleged anti-Riyadh stance of the Qatari Al-Jazeera TV channel, the growing Qatari role as a US ally, the expulsion of thousands of Qatari tribesmen of Saudi origin over the past two years [from Qatar] and Qatar's growing anger at Saudi Arabia's hegemony and domination in the GCC.”²⁶

This deterioration in relations has been manifested in several ways: Saudi Arabia blocked a proposed \$2 billion 600 kilometer natural gas pipeline running from Qatar's North Field to Mina Al Ahmadi in Kuwait. The pipeline would be built in international waters off the coast of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, but the approval of these two countries would be required given the proximity to their shores.²⁷

In July 2005, Saudi Arabia also rejected the building of a causeway between Qatar and the United Arab Emirates: “A few days after a GCC summit in December 2004, the UAE and Qatar unveiled plans to construct the world's longest causeway that will link their capitals and save travelers from having to take a risky 125 km drive through Saudi territory.”²⁸ Prince Nayef,

Saudi Minister of Interior, said that, “regarding the bridge, Saudi Arabia had to deliver a protest note to the governments of Qatar and the UAE because this is not acceptable, as this bridge would pass through Saudi territorial waters.”²⁹

In late 2005 the GCC decided to abolish its joint military unit, Dir’ Al-Jazeera or Peninsula Shield, 20 years after it was created.³⁰ The main reason cited for this action was the growing rift between Saudi Arabia and Qatar, as well as the reality that the force had not proven as effective as was initially hoped. Many in the region believe that dismantling the force was a Saudi initiative that based on the Saudi view that the other Gulf States were not contributing to the forces and that it was largely a Saudi operation, which the Kingdom could do on its own.

Qatar has also had territorial disputes with its other Gulf States. The most noticeable one was the dispute with Bahrain over the Hawar Islands and several other territories. These Islands are located west of the Qatari coast, but they have been controlled by Bahrain. The dispute is not new—it is in fact 200 years old—but this came to surface in 1986 when the two nations nearly went to war. Qatar then submitted this dispute to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague. In March 2001, the ICJ ruled against Qatar and awarded the control of the Hawar Islands to Bahrain, while ruling in favor of Qatar for another disputed area.

People who see Qatar as having tried to provoke “generational” quarrels with its GCC neighbors have argued that the worsening of relations between Qatar and the GCC are threatening to substantially weaken the GCC as an effective forum,³¹ particularly given the threat the six members face from Iran, instability in Iraq, and the ongoing struggle against terrorism.

Qatar, Iran, and the North Field

Qatar’s economic development plans center around natural gas exports. Qatar has proven reserves of 910 trillion cubic feet (Tcf) natural gas resources, ranking third in size behind Russia’s and Iran’s. Almost all of Qatar’s natural gas, however, is located in the offshore North Field, which is the largest known non-associated natural gas field in the world. Qatar’s onshore Dukhan field contains only an estimated 5 Tcf of associated and 0.5 Tcf of non-associated gas. The gas reserves in the Id al-Shargi, Maydan Mahzam, Bul Hanine, and al-Rayyan offshore oil fields are relatively small.³²

Qatar now plans to develop the North Field to provide major addition trains for exporting natural gas liquids, pipeline gas to other Southern Gulf states, and Gas-to-Liquids (GTL). The North Field, however, is connected to an Iranian gas formation, and the two countries share what is to some extent a common resource.

Qatari and Iranian claims have never been fully resolved and potential tensions exist between Qatar and Iran: “in 2004, Iran warned Qatar to slow down its exploration of the North Field and South Pars gas reserves that the two countries share or Iran would ‘find other ways and means of resolving the issue.’”³³ Although there has not been outright hostility between the two countries, and Qatar is closer to Iran than other GCC states, the potential for conflict is ever-present.

Qatar’s Uncertain Domestic Environment

In June 1995, Sheikh Hamad orchestrated a coup against his father, Sheikh Khalifah, and became emir of Qatar. The agenda Sheikh Hamad has pursued is modernizing, trying to open up Qatar’s politics, diversify its economy and chart an independent foreign policy. Here is how Emir Hamad summarized, in 2000, the challenges facing Qatar: “We have simply got to reform ourselves.

We're living in a modern age. People log on to the Internet. They watch cable TV. You cannot isolate yourself in today's world. And our reforms are progressing well. In a tribal country like Qatar, however, it could take time for everyone to accept what we've done. But change, more change, is coming."³⁴

The reforms that Sheikh Hamad has undertaken are multifaceted. The local elections in 1999 were the first in the GCC to allow women to stand for office or to vote. Sheikh Hamad put forth a draft constitution that called for the establishment of a 45-member unicameral parliament (Majlis al-Shura) in July 2002, and 96.6 percent of voters approved it in a referendum in April 2003. The new constitution provides for freedom of expression, freedom of religious practice and freedom of association. The first elections for the Majlis al-Shura are expected in 2006.³⁵

In August 2003, Sheikh Hamad also clarified the line of succession, appointing his fourth son Sheikh Tamim as heir apparent. The Emir's third son, Sheikh Jasim, apparently resigned his position, though it is possible that Sheikh Hamad replaced him because he was not satisfied with his performance.³⁶

Sheikh Hamad has spoken out on the need for other Arab governments to introduce reform in their countries. In a July 2005 visit to Italy, he stated that corruption, lack of vision and the absence of democracy were causing under-development and violence in the Arab world; he also stressed that Arab leaders should not blame Israel for their problems. In August 2005, Qatar established a Human Rights Department, in part to quell criticism about human trafficking in the country, but also to support its reform program.³⁷

Qatar's boldest move was to found and host Al-Jazeera. The television channel started broadcasting in 1996, after an alliance between Saudi Arabia and the BBC collapsed and freed a large number of journalists—Sheikh Hamad took them in and gave them money to start Al-Jazeera. The lack of editorial censorship, which is otherwise prevalent in the region, has made Al-Jazeera a vocal opponent of Middle Eastern governments, while stopping short of criticizing the Qatari government, which finances Al-Jazeera.

By 2000, all of the Arab League member states, save Lebanon, had issued protests against Al-Jazeera's programming or panelists. Libya, Tunisia, and Morocco even withdrew their ambassadors from Doha.³⁸ Saudi Arabia has constantly expressed its displeasure with Al-Jazeera, primarily because the Kingdom is a frequent target of the station's journalism. There is an unofficial but total ban on Saudi advertising on the channel, a great financial impediment given that Saudi Arabia accounts for four-fifths of Arab advertising budget.³⁹ In 2005, Saudi Arabia refused entry to more than 1,250 Al-Jazeera employees to travel to Mecca for the Hajj.⁴⁰

The greatest unknown for Qatar is whether the population will accept the Emir's modernization program. *Jane's Intelligence Review* summarized this dilemma as follows in November 2005:⁴¹

Although Qatar is generally a tolerant, multicultural society, the rapid advance of religious freedom has caused dissent among Islamic conservatives as construction has begun on Qatar's first Christian, Hindu, Buddhist and Bahai churches. Qatar's annual inter-faith conference brushed up against a 'red line' when its organisers suggested the inclusion of Jewish participants at future conference sessions. Political reform has also led to disagreements between conservatives and modernisers. The Commission for the Constitutional Draft continues to clash over the question of whether Sharia law would be the sole source of jurisprudence in Qatar's new constitution. Conservative Islamists are periodically imprisoned for their opposition to reform efforts.

Sheikh Hamad withstood a coup attempt in 1996 and again one in October 2002.⁴² In general, the emir is perceived as popular with the people, who have seen their standard of living increase dramatically during his reign. GDP has doubled between 1999 and 2004, and per capita GDP is estimated at more than \$43,000 in 2005, the higher in the Arab world and one of the highest in the region.

Qatar and Terrorism

Qatar offers potent targets for terrorist attack. It has about 18,000 Western expatriates, many of whom are employed in the country's natural gas sector. While the physical infrastructure of natural gas may be hard to hit because it is narrowly concentrated, the foreign labor on which it depends is an easier target.⁴³

The country's non-energy investment plans also depend on a stable security environment. Sheikh Mohammed bin Ahmad Al-Thani, the minister of trade and finance, announced the holding of a conference in April 2006 meant to attract \$130 billion in investment over five years: "the new investment plan is believed to allocated \$80 billion for the gas sector, \$20 billion for tourism, \$10 billion for infrastructure and \$10 billion in property projects, according to officials in Doha."⁴⁴ These plans make both the attraction as well as the impact of a terrorist attack that much greater.

The clerical establishment is relatively moderate, and officials and intellectuals have often spoken out against certain extreme actions committed by insurgents in Iraq—for example, kidnappings, civilian bombings and attacks on churches.⁴⁵ After September 11, 2001, Emir Hamad tried to minimize the influence of religious extremists in his government, including his sons. It has been reported that the Emir of Qatar has removed two of his sons, Sheikh Fahad bin Hamad and Sheikh Jassim bin Hamad, from the position of Crown Prince out of fear of their affiliation with Arab Afghan veterans.⁴⁶

Despite these efforts, Qatar has, however, acted as a safe haven for religious extremists expelled by other countries. For example, Qatar hosts the radical Egyptian cleric Yousef al-Qaradhawi.⁴⁷ Traditionally, Qatar has harbored religious fugitives from Saudi Arabia, a trend accentuated after the seizure of the Grand Mosque in Mecca in 1979. In the past, it has also been accused of hosting Neo-Salafi militants with ties to al-Qaeda. According to Jane's:⁴⁸

In addition to fugitives from many Palestinian, Algerian and Sudanese factions, Qatar hosted increasing numbers of individuals who would later be linked to Al-Qaeda....Although Qatar sent almost none of its own sons to fight in Afghanistan in the 1980s, it was a crossroads for militant leaders and a critical fundraising node for many Arab, Afghan and Pakistani terrorist entrepreneurs such as Al-Qaeda operatives Ayman al-Zawahiri and Khalid Sheikh Mohammed. Numerous reports suggest the use of Qatar as a waypoint for senior Salafist terrorists transiting to or from Afghanistan, utilising the homes of Qatari notables as safehouses. Conservative Qataris also provided a haven for the Taliban consul to Abu Dhabi and his family during Operation 'Enduring Freedom'."

The wave of extremists militant Islamism that has rippled through the Arab World has not spared Qatar. In November 2001, a man who was later identified as belonging to the Qatari military, Abdullah Mubarak Tashal al-Hajiri, fired an assault rifle at the Al-Udeid airbase; he later shot and wounded two US contractors near the base. In February 2002, an unnamed attacker rammed the main gate at the Al-Udeid airbase, though he did not penetrate the facility and was stopped and killed in the attack. In October 2002, a Saudi citizen who wanted to hijack a plane headed to Jeddah was stopped in Khartoum; the investigations showed he intended to crash the plane on the Al-Udeid airbase.⁴⁹

Qatar experienced its first major attack in March 19, 2005, when a suicide bomber, Omar Ahmed Abdallah, used an improvised explosive device to destroy the Doha Players theatre. Although only one person was killed and a dozen were injured, the attack could have caused more deaths had the device being detonated at a better time. Omar Ahmed Abdallah was an Egyptian who found shelter in Qatar after not being permitted to return; his two collaborators were also expatriates. This reality underscores the potential danger from radicals to whom the Qatari government has chosen to offer safe haven.⁵⁰

The attack was condemned in Qatar in a demonstration attended by 5,000 people including Emir Hamad, his sons, and the influential Al-Qaradawi, who condemned the suicide bombing. At the same time, the attack underscores the potential for disruption that the terrorists pose to Qatar.

The Youth Explosion, and the Radicalization of its Youth

The country's demographics could pose another problem. As is the case with most countries in the Middle East and North Africa, Qatar faces a demographic time-bomb. In 2005, Qatar's population was estimated to be 810,000 people. This is estimated to grow to 1.4 million in 2020, 1.26 million in 2040, and 1.33 million in 2050. This means that Qatar's population is estimated to grow at 64 percent in the next four decades.⁵¹

It is equally important, however, to note that Qatar is facing a youth explosion—albeit at a lesser extend than the other Gulf States. It is estimated that the Qatari population's median age in 2005 was 30.9, and is estimated to reach 40.4 by 2050.⁵² The importance of this goes to heart of internal stability. Qatar is estimated to have 2.7 percent “direct: unemployment rate,⁵³ but many of its jobs can be considered “disguised” unemployment that can reach 15.0 percent.⁵⁴ Qatar's total labor force is estimated at 140,000, which is growing by an estimated 6,471 people every year. Most of this labor force is foreign, and this adds another element of uncertainty and risk for Qatar's internal stability.

Estimates of the composition of Qatar's population do, however, differ. For example, in 2005, Jane's estimated that Qatar's indigenous population was approximately 150,000 (17 percent),⁵⁵ the IISS *Military Balance* estimated the number of nationals at 250,000 (29 percent).⁵⁶ It is estimated that 40 percent Qatar's population are Qatari or other Arabs, 18 percent are Indians, 18% are Pakistanis, and 10 are percent Iranians.⁵⁷ Regardless of the source, it is clear that the vast majority of the population are non-nationals with diverse religious and ethnic background. While diversity may be desirable, it remains uncertain whether Qatar's social cohesion can be impacted by this composition. Qatar's efforts to reduce the foreign population have been only partly successful, as the private sector continues to rely on expatriate labor which is less experience and more skilled.

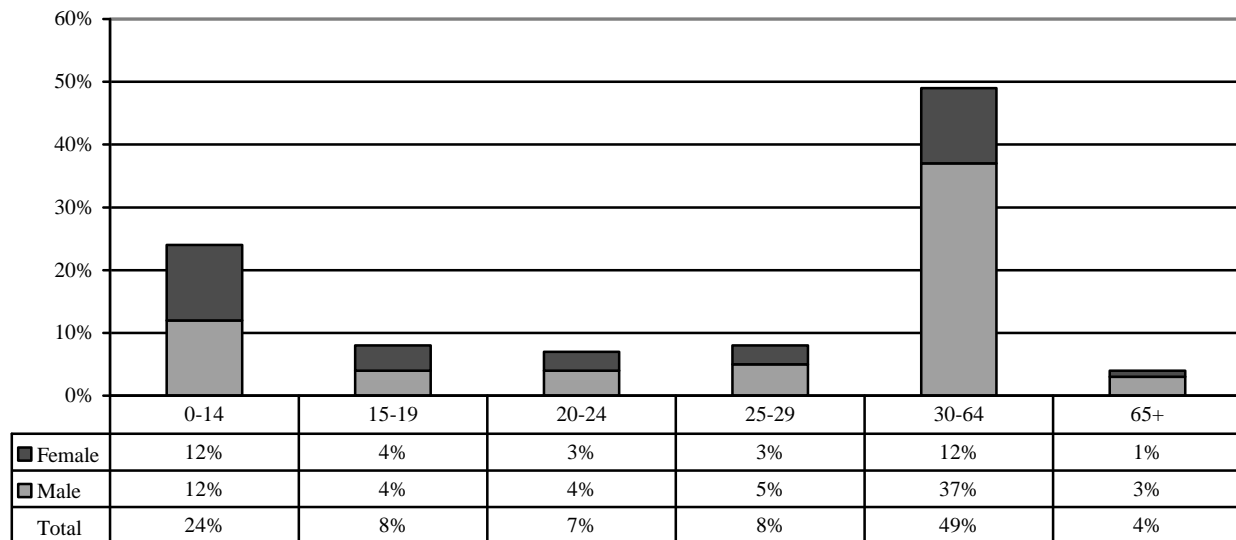
These demographics are not entirely encouraging, although the country's fast-paced economic growth has prevented, up to now, the emergence of any domestic challenges. In addition to the economic challenge Qatar's reliance on foreign labor presents, it is also a security risk. While its foreign workers have not yet presented a security challenge to Qatar's internal security apparatus, a concerted terrorist campaign can drive many of these workers to flee that threaten Qatar's most important sectors—oil and gas—where most of the foreign labor work.

The demographic dynamics also present a problem in dealing with its own population. In addition to the unemployment problem Qatar may face due to its reliance on foreign labor and its high population growth, Qatar is experiencing a youth explosion. As shown in **Figure 5**, nearly

half of Qatar's population is under the age of 30. In the next two decade, this population will enter the job market, and Qatar's economy will have to deal with large influx of job applicants.

This presents a risk of radicalization. As is the case with the other Gulf States, Qatar has been a welfare state. Its population expects jobs, free health care, and free education. Given the lack of economic diversification in its economy, Qatar may face an unemployment problem. While its oil/gas wealth may provide of its small population, the overall trends its demographics is one areas where radical groups can exploit given the regional dynamics in Iraq, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the overall struggle against extremism.

Figure 5: Qatar's Demographic Distribution, 2006



Source: IISS, *Military Balance 2005-2006*.

In addition, there are many elements in Qatar's domestic and foreign policy, that many believe might drive some of Qatar's youth to become a target of recruitment by terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda. These forces include:

- The presence of the U.S. military on Qatari soil:** One of the key complaints that Osama bin Laden had against Saudi Arabia was the existence of United States forces in the Arabian Peninsula. Qatar now houses the United States Central Command in its al-Udeid air base, which was built at the cost of \$1.0 billion. The U.S. conducted its air campaign for the Afghan and the Iraq War. It is important, however, to note that unlike other Gulf States, Qatar does not hide the fact that CENTCOM is based in Doha, partly to send a message to its more powerful neighbors. While Qatar's close association with the United States may protect her from conventional threats from Iran or Saudi Arabia, it may force extremist organizations to target Qatar for its association with the United States. As note earlier, it is important, however, to note that Qatar's internal security forces are largely untested. It remains uncertain how well its paramilitary and intelligence forces can handle a concerted, and recruitment campaign by groups such as al-Qaeda.
- The Israeli-Palestinian conflict:** As mentioned in earlier chapter, the Arab-Israeli conflict remains a key determinant of regional attitudes toward the West and the people-government relations, particularly those governments that are considered allied of the United States. In addition to the general regional attitudes, Qatar has made steps toward "normalizing" diplomatic as well as commercial relations with Israel. Qatar has maintained a low-profile Israelis consulate in Qatar, has hosted Michael Melchior, Israel's Deputy Minister of Education in February 2005, and asked Israel to support Qatar's candidacy for a rotating seat on the United Nations Security Council.⁵⁸ These moves have angered many in the region, who consider Qatar's move as undermining the Arab Peace initiative of 2002. While there are no reliable polls showing

how the Qatari population thinks about its government's policies toward the Palestinians, such moves may turn many in Qatar against the government—even in a violent way.

- **The Iraq War and insurgency:** The impact of the conflict in Iraq to the Gulf is hard to predict. The ongoing insurgency in Iraq, however, may become a threat to Qatar in three different ways. First, it could spillover to neighboring states and impact domestic stability. Second, the “foreign fighters” component of the insurgency, while limited in percentage compared to the overall insurgency, has a sizable number of fighters from the Gulf States—including Qatar. No one knows the exact number of the precise composition, but Qatar—and the rest of the Gulf—face a challenge of those fighters when return home. The problem of the Afghan Arabs presented a problem to their home countries; it remains uncertain, however, whether the alumni from the Iraq conflict will assimilate in the population or continue their struggle at home. Finally, the Iraq War is also radicalizing the Arab street. Many associate the United States occupation with that of Israel's occupation of Palestine. Extremists have also attempted to link those conflicts, and use this rhetoric as a calling for fighters to join against “corrupt rulers.” This adds one area of risks that Qatar and the rest of the Gulf States have to plan for.
- **The local religious establishment:** The Qatar's religious establishment has been largely silence on Qatar's domestic and foreign policies. It is equally uncertain how powerful such establishment is, but, as noted earlier, Qatar has hosted radical clerics that have been expelled by other Arab governments. In addition, they have given a platform to radical religious figures such as Yousef al-Qaradhawi. While Qatar's establishment has not played a major role in domestic politics, the speed of domestic reforms and Qatar's regional policies could alienate such establishment and push them toward extremisms. The Qatari government has taken some steps toward easing the influence of extremism in its government, but it is remain a key area of uncertainty in the near future.

Even if Qatar's domestic religious establishment remains supportive of the Emir's domestic and foreign policies, the possibility exists that radicals in neighboring states may be part of networks that could threaten Qatar. Michael Knights argued in an article in *Jane's Intelligence Review*, that Qatar may face more challenges from extremists groups in the Gulf, and noted the actions and words of the head of al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia, Al-Oufi, before the attacks of March 19, 2005 against the theater in Doha:⁵⁹

Circumstantial evidence hints at a wider connection. Days before the attack, Saleh Mohammed Al-Oufi, an operational leader of one terrorist faction in Saudi Arabia, called on "the brothers of Qatar, Bahrain, Oman and the Emirates, and all the lions of the jihad in the countries neighbouring Iraq" to attack whatever targets are available. Al-Oufi's ordering of the Gulf states is a strange coincidence, apparently intimating advanced notice of action in Qatar. Alternately, the 19 March execution date may have been chosen by a local cell of individuals 'disconnected' from the broader jihad simply because it was the second anniversary of the commencement of Operation 'Iraqi Freedom.' Aspects of the recent travel history of the attackers (comprising visits to Egypt, and possibly Saudi Arabia or Pakistan) may eventually provide future clues concerning the possibility of outside influence. Although an internet claim was posted by the relatively unknown Tanzim Jund al-Shaam (The Army of the Levant), it was not widely credited due to various unconvincing features of the communiqué and the group's previous statements. Since the attack, there has been little in open-source literature or in the chatter of regional and Western security personnel to suggest the collapse of a broader network within Qatar or directly attached in Saudi Arabia.

Such relations have angered Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain in addition to other Arab countries. The question, however, remain: what impact will they have on its internal stability. The answer to this question largely depends on Qatar's ability to balance its reform efforts without rattling its long-term internal and regional stability.

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