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Captions: CODEL, SENSITIVE
Subject: Qatar: Scen setter for CODEL Stewart's September 3-4 Qatar Visit

~~1-(SBU)~~ **Key Points:**

- Embassy Doha warmly welcomes CODEL Stewart to Qatar.
- Qatar is the third largest customer of USG's defense sector systems globally, hosts CENTCOM's forward headquarters at Al Udeid Air Base (AUAB), and collaborates closely with the United States as a major regional security and trade partner.
- Qatar will host the 2022 FIFA Men's World Cup from November 21 to December 18. We anticipate this will strain Qatar's ability to support non-World Cup initiatives and impact other vital U.S. operations.
- The GOQ has supported our efforts to sanction the Iranian regime and supports the revival of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Amir Tamim and other senior leaders have engaged Iranian counterparts to de-escalate tensions between the United States and Iran.
- China was Qatar's top import and second largest export partner in 2020; Qatar strives to achieve a neutral stance on UN resolutions targeting China's abusive human rights practices.
- The Department of State transferred diplomatic operations for Afghanistan to Doha in late August 2021. Embassy Kabul is now known as the Afghanistan Affairs Unit (AAU). The AAU is joined in Doha by the diplomatic missions in absentia of 13 other like-minded countries.
- Since August 2021, Embassy Doha, the AAU, and CARE-Doha, formerly known as

Operation Allies Refuge (OAR), have facilitated the travel of nearly half the 120,000 Afghans out of Afghanistan through U.S. base Camp As Sayliyah (CAS) in Qatar. Starting March 1, 2022, CAS operations shifted to refugee processing and SIV adjudications.

- Qatar has prioritized using its regional advocacy and development/humanitarian assistance to promote de-escalation. It is working closely with Israel to provide targeted financial support to the people of Gaza and has contributed to ceasefire efforts between Israel, Hamas, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad in the last year and a half.
 - Qatar has the third largest proven reserves of natural gas in the world. The U.S.–Qatar energy partnership is a key pillar of the bilateral relationship. Qatar has invested over \$450 billion in the United States since 2015.
 - In January 2021, the Al-Ula agreement ended the Gulf rift; Qatar’s rapprochement efforts with Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the UAE, and Bahrain have progressed unevenly.
- End Key Points.**

Monarchy Centralizes Governance and Power in Qatar

2. ~~(SBU)~~ Qatar is a constitutional monarchy in which Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani exercises full executive power. Qatar held elections in October 2021 for the Shura (Consultative) Council, Qatar’s legislative body with limited authorities, which were the first such elections in the country’s history. Voters chose 30 representatives (all males) of the 45-member body, with the Amir appointing the other 15 members (one female who serves as deputy speaker). Observers considered these elections free and fair with 63 percent turnout, but with election laws that disenfranchised some tribal groups. The Amir appoints all cabinet members, including the prime minister.

Robust U.S.-Qatar Partnership

3. ~~(SBU)~~ Under Amir Tamim’s leadership, the United States has become one of Qatar’s top strategic and trade partners. Since the 2013 abdication of Amir Hamad, Qatar has synchronized its policies in a variety of fields with the United States, in part through an annual Strategic Dialogue chaired by Secretary Blinken and Deputy PM/FM Mohamed Abdulrahman Al Thani. Qatar has substantially contributed to U.S. military efforts – agreeing to virtually every USG request – including by hosting forces critical to delivering air power to combat ISIS in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan. Qatar has made the United States its top supplier of defense sector purchases, becoming in the process our third largest FMS customer globally, and hosts CENTCOMs forward headquarters at Al Udeid Air Base (AUAB).

World Cup

4. ~~(SBU)~~ Qatar will host the 2022 FIFA Men's World Cup (FWC) from November 21 to December 18. The U.S. Men's National Team qualified for the FWC and post expects an influx of tens of thousands of U.S. fans and high-level official interest. Qatar has completed construction for the eight stadiums and most new major road and highway projects. However, the expansion of Doha's Hamad International Airport and old Doha airport, the construction of several new hotels, and apartment buildings continue. The Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy (SCDL) expects to have at least 100,000 and no more than 120,000 rooms available per day. With more than 1.2 million fans expected to attend the tournament across the span of one month of games, most experts anticipate significant accommodation shortages. Qatar's population is expected to swell by up to 50 percent during the FWC. Transportation will be severely limited during this period, and major road closures are scheduled. Traffic and pedestrian congestion are expected to be particularly severe because Doha will need to contend with fans from all 32 participating countries, in contrast to prior FWCs where multiple cities hosted the tournament. The GOQ will strictly control traffic operations and expect visitors to rely heavily on Doha's metro and bus network, which will impact Post operations. Qatari officials have cautioned that they will be hard-pressed to support Afghan relocation operations at Hamad International Airport from approximately November 1 through December 18 and suggested commercial and military construction cease during that period, which would affect the new embassy compound project as well as vital U.S. military infrastructure.

Qatar Supports Deterring Iran and Advocates for Political Solution

5. ~~(SBU)~~ Qatar responded positively to our calls to stand up to Iranian regional activities by agreeing to host B-52s, B-1s, F-22s, and other U.S. military assets. Qatari officials emphasize the nature of their country's relationship with Iran, which grew during the Gulf rift. The Amir and other senior leaders have engaged Iranian counterparts to de-escalate tensions between the United States and Iran, and senior Qatari officials publicly support the revival of the JCPOA. In late June, Doha hosted proximity JCPOA talks between Washington, the EU, and Tehran. Iranian President Raisi visited Doha on February 22 – the first Iranian president to visit Doha in 11 years – and signed bilateral memorandums of agreement on shipping, air travel, maritime trade, and joint electrical grid connections.

Qatar and China

6. ~~(SBU)~~ Qatar strives to minimize political risk by remaining neutral in international fora and abstaining from joining either PRC or U.S.-endorsed statements on Hong Kong, Xinjiang, or Tibet. Notably, in 2020, rather than voting on a resolution to condemn or defend the PRC's human rights violations in Xinjiang and Hong Kong, Qatar – along with Kuwait and Oman – released a separate, general statement that called for respecting human rights, without condemning a specific government. In 2019, Qatar became the only country in the GCC to rescind support of a letter to the UNHRC that praised the PRC for its "remarkable achievements in the field of human rights" and defended the Xinjiang "re-education" camps. While official GOQ statements neither condemn nor endorse PRC practices, Doha-based and Qatari government-owned Pan-Arab network Al-Jazeera consistently criticized PRC mistreatment of

Uyghurs and other Muslims in China and has frequently featured analysts who criticized the PRC's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. The PRC overtook the United States as Qatar's top import partner due to a 25 percent drop in U.S. imports and an 11 percent increase in Chinese imports between 2019 and 2020. Qatar's leading export partner remains Japan, though the PRC's share of Qatari exports is steadily increasing with new LNG contracts. One of Qatar's two telecommunications firms has contracted Huawei to deploy 5G networks in Qatar, and a second telecom partners with Huawei in third countries. PRC firms including Huawei, Nuctech, and Alibaba are aggressively pursuing security, cybersecurity and internet-based data management contracts and associated World Cup and GOQ tenders.

Moscow is Pursuing Deeper Ties

7. ~~(SBU)~~ Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February, Qatar voted in favor of the March 24 UNGA resolution isolating Russia and abstained on the April 7 UNGA resolution that suspended Russia's membership in the UN Human Rights Council. Qatar also gave Ukrainian President Zelenskyy a platform to speak at the Doha Forum on March 26. Although the Qatari government continues to downplay relations with Russia as purely transactional, relations with Moscow have deepened, including in the military and financial sectors. The Qatar Investment Authority holds significant shares in Russian energy giant Rosneft and St. Petersburg's Pulkovo Airport. As of July 1, three Qatari nationals sit on the Rosneft board, including as the board chairman. During the Amir's January 31 visit to Washington, he signaled willingness to divert a portion of Qatar's spot LNG supplies to Europe to make up for anticipated interruptions in Russian gas supplies to Europe, in the wake of the emerging Ukraine crisis. The Amir cautioned, however, that most of Qatar's LNG supplies were tied up in long-term contracts, which complicates Qatar's ability to shore up supplies to Europe.

The Afghanistan Affairs Unit (Embassy Kabul) Operating from Embassy Doha

8. ~~(SBU)~~ On August 31, 2021, the State Department suspended the U.S. diplomatic presence in Kabul and transferred operations to Qatar. Known as the Afghanistan Affairs Unit (AAU), the AAU is the primary point of U.S. diplomatic engagement with the Taliban and the Afghan people. In addition to engaging local representatives of Taliban and relevant so-called Taliban authorities in Afghanistan, the AAU performs consular affairs (including Special Immigrant Visa issuances for Afghans who faithfully served the U.S. government), humanitarian assistance, and coordination with the international community. Key policy objectives that guide the AAU's work include: preventing terrorist groups in Afghanistan from threatening the United States or our allies; facilitating safe passage for U.S. citizens, LPRs, select Afghans, and foreign nationals who want to depart Afghanistan; facilitating assistance for the Afghan people and mitigating the growing humanitarian crisis; and advocating for U.S. values and international human rights standards, especially those of women, girls, and members of minority groups. The AAU presses regularly for the release of a U.S. hostage, as well as the release of U.S. citizens and Afghan civil society members who have been detained or held incommunicado by the Taliban. The AAU coordinates closely with and is a conduit for the messaging of the U.S. interagency, including the Special Representative for Afghanistan (SRA);

the Special Envoy for Afghan Women, Girls, and Human Rights; the Office of the Coordinator for Afghan Relocation Efforts (CARE); OAR; the Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs; and the interagency on these lines of effort.

Largest Noncombatant Evacuation Operation in History

9. ~~(SBU)~~ Since the onset of the U.S. evacuations of Afghans starting in summer of 2021, U.S. Army base Camp As Sayliyah (CAS) has served as a landing pad for Afghans being relocated from Afghanistan and then resettled – primarily to the United States. Over time, CAS's "lily pad" role has expanded to a longer-term operation, although the duration of operations, the role of each U.S. agency, and CAS's threshold for safe and efficient operations are all key issues currently under consideration.

10. ~~(SBU)~~ CARE in Doha received a stable inflow of relocation flights from Kabul and Islamabad since March 2022. However, CAS is facing a substantial backlog of cases. Although our agreement with the Qatari government allows up to 8,000 Afghans on base, U.S. and Qatari officials have agreed that 2,600 is the ideal capacity to ensure safe and humane accommodations for families. Currently, the Afghan population is hovering around 3,700, but at its peak has breached 4,000. We reduced the pace of flights into CAS at the GOQ's request, to allow CAS out-processing to work down the number of Afghans on base.

Resuming Monthly Aid to Gaza, Helping Broker Ceasefire between Israel and Hamas

11. ~~(SBU)~~ Amir Tamim is a strong supporter of Palestinian statehood. In early August, Qatar and Egypt helped broker an Israel-Gaza truce, with Qatar officials claiming its active diplomacy ended days of fighting between Israel and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad armed group. Qatari mediation helped broker a ceasefire between Hamas and Israel in 2021, and its diplomatic efforts restored calm in Jerusalem in April. Qatar disburses financial support to the Gaza Strip in coordination with Israel to improve socio-economic conditions in Gaza. On the humanitarian front, the Qatar Gaza Reconstruction Committee and multiple Qatari charities distributed urgent relief aid to hundreds of families left homeless by the 2021 fighting. Since November 2018, Qatar has distributed \$100 per month in cash assistance to as many as 100,000 Gazan households. Doha also arranged and funded \$5 million per month in fuel purchases for the Gaza Power Plant, more than doubling its electricity output. Total Qatari financial support to Gaza since 2018 totals about \$600 million.

12. ~~(SBU)~~ The U.S.-Qatar energy partnership is a key pillar of the bilateral relationship. Qatar's earnings from oil and gas account for over 70 percent of the GOQ's total revenues, despite efforts to diversify revenues through long-term infrastructure development and overseas investments. Qatar has the third largest proven reserve of natural gas in the world at 885 trillion cubic feet. The connected Qatari North Field and Iranian South Pars together form the world's largest natural gas field. As a global leader in LNG extraction, Qatar's national oil and gas company, Qatar Energy (QE), is an important player both in Qatar and globally. Amid its \$30 billion North Field LNG expansion, QE announced joint ventures with TotalEnergies, Eni,

ConocoPhillips, ExxonMobil, and Shell for North Field Expansion (NFE) contracts in June and July. ExxonMobil, TotalEnergies, and Shell will each hold 6.25 percent of the \$30 billion project, while ConocoPhillips and Eni will hold 3.12 percent apiece. QE will retain 75 percent of the project. In 2019, QE began to invest \$18 billion in the U.S. energy sector in the Golden Pass Terminal (\$10 billion) with ExxonMobil and a petrochemical plant on the Texas Gulf Coast (\$8 billion) with Chevron. Since the invasion of Ukraine, Qatar has expressed willingness to sign additional LNG contracts with European countries. Qatar continues to strive towards securing long-term contracts with European customers to diversify beyond their long-term Asian contracts.

Despite Gulf Rapprochement, Wariness about Neighbors Persists

13. ~~(SBU)~~ In January 2021, the Al-Ula agreement formally ended the Gulf rift. Qatar's individual rapprochement efforts with Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the UAE have progressed in varying degrees though relations with Bahrain remain tense. However, on July 16, the Amir met with the King of Bahrain for the first time since the 2017 rift, and Bahrain dropped its visa requirements for Qataris. Qatar's relationship with Saudi Arabia improved markedly in recent months, and Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman visited Doha and met the Amir in December 2021. On May 15, the Amir visited the UAE for the first time in five years and offered condolences to new Emirati President Mohammad Bin Zayed following the death of the late President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan. Despite the exchange of visits between senior Qatari and Emirati leaders, both countries remain wary of each other's regional policies.

Close Relationship with Ankara

14. ~~(SBU)~~ While the United States remains Qatar's top strategic partner, Turkey is Qatar's closest regional partner. Ankara became a key source of food imports during the rift, and Turkish President Erdogan typically visits Doha multiple times per year. During his December 2021 visit, he concluded 15 MOUs in all areas of bilateral cooperation and agreed to extend a currency swap through which Qatar had purchased \$15 billion in Turkish lira earlier in the year. In 2021, Qatar and Turkey formed a joint venture partnership in a bid to operate Afghan airports. The joint venture has thus far failed to secure a contract with the Taliban; media reports suggest that an Emirati firm is instead poised to conduct the bulk of airport operations in Afghanistan, although Taliban sources suggest the air space control contract could still be offered to Qatar.

Visa Administrative Processing is an Increasing Challenge

15. ~~(SBU)~~ Growing delays in administrative processing are adversely affecting our diplomatic, economic and educational cooperation efforts. The percentage of Qataris requiring administrative processing has increased quickly over the last year. We have a hard time explaining to applicants and senior Qatar officials why some male applicants receive a U.S. visa right away, while the spouse who does not work outside the house is pending administrative processing, or when parents are issued, and their minor children's visas are delayed. Qatari

interlocutors at the highest levels routinely complain that it is increasingly difficult to plan official, business or tourist travel as applicants are uncertain when or even if they will be allowed to travel. Many travelers in government, industry and media have been waiting for up to a year for an SAO clearance. The Consular Section spends a significant amount of time to request and scan supplemental questions, submit SAO requests, process cleared SAOs, and respond to communication from applicants whose visas had been delayed. While an expedited SAO process exists, D.C. clearing partners point to growing backlogs and staffing shortages for the delays. Furthermore, many students appear unlikely to be able to travel in time to attend class this fall. Most, if not all, risk losing their scholarships. Post has seen an uptick in Congressional inquiries for students and petition-based workers with verified employment opportunities.

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