

Qatar's air force modernization and its ramifications for Israel

written by Noa Lazimi | 20.10.2025

As part of its alignment with Trump's plan for Gaza, and thanks to its close ties with the United States, Qatar has received another security-related concession from Washington.

US Secretary of War Pete Hegseth recently met with his Qatari counterpart, thanked him for Doha's involvement in the ongoing talks, and announced that the United States would establish a fighter jet training facility at the Mountain Home Air Force Base in Idaho for Qatari pilots and fighter jets. This announcement comes shortly after the signing of a presidential order granting Qatar, possibly subject to congressional approval, a US commitment to defend it in the event of an attack by a foreign entity.

The significance of this step should be understood in light of Doha's considerable investments in recent years in modernizing its air force as part of a broader policy aimed at strengthening its military capabilities. The small emirate is known less for its military might and more for its immense wealth, given its status as a key player in the global gas market, its vast investments in infrastructure and assets abroad, and its deep penetration into Western academia and economies.

At the same time, Qatar is acutely aware of the volatile security environment in the Middle East and the growing need for both defensive and offensive capabilities - a need that intensified following Israel's attempted assassination of senior Hamas officials in Doha.

Accordingly, Qatar has focused its efforts on upgrading its air force, which has expanded dramatically over the past decade.

A monitoring report published by the Middle East Media Research Institute shows that in 2014, Doha's air fleet included only 12 fighter jets (nine of them operational) - a modest force compared to its regional competitors. Today, following an accelerated armament strategy, the fleet numbers roughly 100 combat aircraft, including US-made F-15QA jets, French Rafales, and Eurofighter Typhoons produced by a European consortium (a joint venture of the UK, Germany, Italy, Spain, and France).

Israel views these developments with concern, and justifiably so. While the Qataris are unlikely, at least in the foreseeable future, to use their fighter jets for

a direct attack on Israel, the trend of acquiring advanced offensive air capabilities could undermine Israeli interests in other forms.

Given that the United States and European countries remain Qatar's principal suppliers of defense technology and equipment, experts warn that Doha could serve as a conduit for the transfer of advanced Western technologies and tactics to actors hostile to Israel. This concern is heightened by the Qatari air force's occasional participation in joint exercises with countries such as Turkey and Pakistan, as well as by its proximity to Iran.

Moreover, the West appears increasingly willing to normalize Qatar's presence in the international security arena, including through its participation in joint exercises with Western nations. This trend risks obscuring the potential harm inherent in Qatar's emerging military relationships.

In May of this year, the Qatari air force took part in Anatolian Phoenix, a combined air exercise held twice annually since 2012 under Turkish auspices, attended by the United States, Germany, Italy, and others. A month earlier, Doha participated in the international Iniochos 2025 exercise in Greece, focused on air combat training, strike missions, and operational coordination - an exercise in which an Israel Air Force delegation also participated.

While enhanced defense cooperation with Qatar through arms deals and international forums has already become a fait accompli in both Europe and the United States, Israel would be wise to carefully examine the ways in which it may, directly or indirectly, be contributing to this process - whether through tacit acceptance and willingness to take part in such forums attended by Doha or by refraining from defining Qatar as a hostile state and the strategic implications such a designation entails.

Finally, Israel must consider the potential erosion of its qualitative military edge in the region. Thus far, Qatar's requests to acquire F-35 aircraft from the United States have been denied. However, if the current trend of deepening US-Qatari relations continues, driven by economic interests, among others, such a scenario cannot be ruled out in the future.

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