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Turkish-Qatari Relations: Challenges & Prospects

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The Turkish-Qatari relations have witnessed a clear convergence of views on Arab, regional and international issues, including the issues of counterterrorism, Arab revolutions, the Palestinian issue, and ways of dealing with prominent international and regional crises. Among the features of the this convergence is the establishment of the Qatar-Turkish Supreme Strategic Committee (QTSSC) In 2014, which held its first meeting in Doha in 2015, co-chaired by Turkish President Erdogan and Prince of Qatar Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani.

The QTSSC has pushed the relations between the two countries to wide horizons at all levels through 22 agreements in various spheres of cooperation: political, military, economic, security, finance, industry, energy and education.

The cooperation between the two countries reached its highest level after signing a military cooperation agreement in 2014, which stated the establishment of a Turkish military base on the Qatari territory. The agreement also provides for the possibility of mutual deployment of forces in the two allied countries, the first of its kind.

Among the objectives of establishing the Turkish military base in Qatar, from the Qatari perspective, is to provide military protection for Qatar as a "small country" with no strategic depth, but floating on a sea of natural gas – especially after controversy in the U.S. about the possibility of closing Al Udeid military base on the Qatari territory, which is most likely to constitute a threat to Qatar's national security.

Therefore, Qatar has concluded the military agreement with Turkey in order to face any possible confrontation with neighboring countries, especially after escalation of the Gulf-Qatar crisis since 2014, before it exacerbated on June 5 2017.



With regard to the future of the base, according to Turkish and Qatari military and media spokesmen, it is expected to provide necessary support for the Qatari military institution, develop and modernize it, and train and rehabilitate its cadres. Moreover, the Turkish military base will assist Qatar in emergency crises to confront any possible challenges. Also, there is a possibility for increasing troops up to 3000 soldiers according to Turkish officials, and could be increased again up to 5,000 Turkish soldiers in the future.

Among the objectives of establishing the Turkish military base in Qatar, from the Turkish perspective, is to ensure Turkey's presence close to the waters of the Arabian Gulf and the Indian Ocean, which facilitates Turkish trade with Asia. In addition, the base will allow Turkey to come close to Iran, which helps in creation of a balance of power in the Middle East. The Iranian military militias are strongly present in southern Iraq and Syria, in addition to Hezbollah in Lebanon which is directly overlooking the Mediterranean Sea.

Moreover, the Turkish military presence in Qatar allows the Turkish forces to train in a different environment, in the desert, which will enable them to carry out operations outside the scope of the Turkish geography in the future.

Regional reaction to the Turkish military base in Qatar

The most prominent regional reaction to the Turkish military base in Qatar came from Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, UAE, and Egypt in their list of demands from Qatar, which included closure of Turkey's military base in Doha.

Turkish Defense Minister Fikri Isik commented on demands for closure of the Turkish military base in Qatar as interference in the bilateral relations of the two countries, stressing that there are no plans to re-evaluate the agreement on the military base in Qatar.



There are several scenarios for the future of the Turkish military base in Qatar, most notably:

First: Closure of the military base

This scenario is likely as the blockading countries (Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, UAE, and Egypt) could sever their economic and trade relations with Turkey in the event of not closing the base. Turkey could possibly close the base if losses were greater than the gains for the country, and if there is a change in the Turkish regime.

Second: Survival of the military base

The possibility of this scenario is confirmed through the striving Turkish attempts to reassure the Arab parties and the Gulf countries in particular that establishment of the base came in the context of joint cooperation agreements to face any challenges in the future.

Third: Development of the military base

Some regional parties, including the Gulf States, believe that the establishment of the Turkish military base in Qatar is an attempt to dominate the Gulf starting from Qatar. They fear that Turkey is seeking to revive the Ottoman Empire by imposing new equations in the Middle East amid President Erdogan's dreams of extending influence in the regional and international arena. If these explanations are proven correct, Turkey is expected to work on development of its military base in Qatar during the coming years.

There are several challenges and difficulties for Turkey and Qatar regarding their military relations due to the recent Gulf crisis and the attitude of the Gulf States that consider Qatar a rival country. However, the second scenario of 'the survival of the Turkish military base in Qatar is more likely⁽¹⁾.

⁽¹⁾The views expressed in this article are entirely those of the author's and do not necessarily reflect the views of EIPSS.