

Qatar's Food Security during the GCC Diplomatic Crisis: New Agricultural Trade Agreements and their Implications

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an analysis of Qatari food security during the current Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) crisis, resulting in the embargo of Qatar by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, and Bahrain. It outlines viable strategies Qatar can take to strengthen its food security and investigates the diplomatic and strategic ramifications of Qatar's newfound trade agreements with Turkey and Iran that were formed during the blockade. The research was conducted by investigating the published data on food security and agriculture of the countries directly involved in the crisis, as well as their strategic partners and neighbors. The paper examines Qatar's relationships with Iran, Turkey, and its short-term and long-term prospects with each nation, respectively. It seeks to answer the question: What alternative food security measures has Qatar taken since the blockade?

Introduction

For much of its history, Qatar has been reliant on food imported over the land border it shares with Saudi Arabia.¹ However, on June 5, 2017, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt abruptly cut off diplomatic ties with Qatar, instituting an embargo of land, sea, and air,² and ending any existing trade agreements between these countries.³ The reasons provided by the blockading nations was that Qatar supported terrorism, interfered in the affairs of other nations, and maintained cordial relations with Iran. Qatar denied these accusations, stating that the blockade's justification has "no basis in fact."⁴ The crisis drove Qatar to seek out new agricultural trade agreements, ultimately strengthening its relations with Turkey and Iran—ironic, considering Qatar's relation with Iran was one of the grievances against Qatar.⁵ These new trade agreements have helped to ensure Qatar's short-term and long-term food security, and have also served to weaken Saudi's historical influence over Qatar.⁶ The intent of this study is to explore the question: What are the diplomatic, political, economic, and social implications of Qatar's new trade agreements with Iran and Turkey regarding its food security? What alternative food security measures has Qatar taken since the blockade?

¹Adam Taylor, "Qatar Could Face a Food Crisis in Spat with Arab Neighbors," *Washington Post*, June 5, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/06/05/qatar-could-face-a-food-crisis-in-spat-with-arab-neighbors/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.8c0ab671cb98.

² Ibid.

³Saudi Arabia, UAE, Egypt, Bahrain cut ties to Qatar," *Al Jazeera*, June 5, 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/06/saudi-arabia-uae-egypt-bahrain-cut-ties-qatar-170605031700062.html>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ "Kristian C. Ulrichsen, "Lessons and Legacies of the Blockade of Qatar," *Insight Turkey* 20, no. 2 (2018): 11-20. www.jstor.org/stable/26390304; Adiyaman, S. O., Albay, T., & Anadolu Agency. (2017, August 04). Turkey, Qatar, Iran to discuss land trade routes.

⁶Hafsa Adil, "Turkey, Iran, Pakistan See Big Trade Boost with Qatar," December 3, 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/12/turkey-iran-pakistan-big-trade-boost-qatar-171203175422055.html>.

Qatar's Food Security Before and After the 2017 Blockade

Qatar's food security was and is dependent on global trade channels.⁷ Before 2017, Qatar imported roughly \$180 million worth of food products via the United Arab Emirates (UAE), \$140 million via Saudi Arabia, \$60 million from Germany, and \$50 million from the United States (Figure 1).⁸ Even though an overwhelming 80 percent of Qatar's food supply was imported via Saudi Arabia and the UAE,⁹ these countries are by no means significant agricultural producers themselves, each importing the majority of their own food needs.¹⁰

There have been various flash points regarding Saudi Arabia's food supply to Qatar. For instance, Saudi ceased exporting poultry to Qatar in 2012 since the kingdom experienced its own domestic shortage.¹¹ The poultry shortage highlighted both the unreliability and the power of the Saudi state regarding food supplies to Qatar. Moreover, it could be further argued that the shortage demonstrated the potential for Saudi Arabia to pressure Qatar by threatening its food security. Saudi diplomats to Qatar were recalled two years later in 2014 in an attempt to stop Qatar from supporting the democratically elected Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt.¹² It could be argued that these two events were linked, and that Saudi Arabia banned the export of poultry to Qatar in order to pressure it.

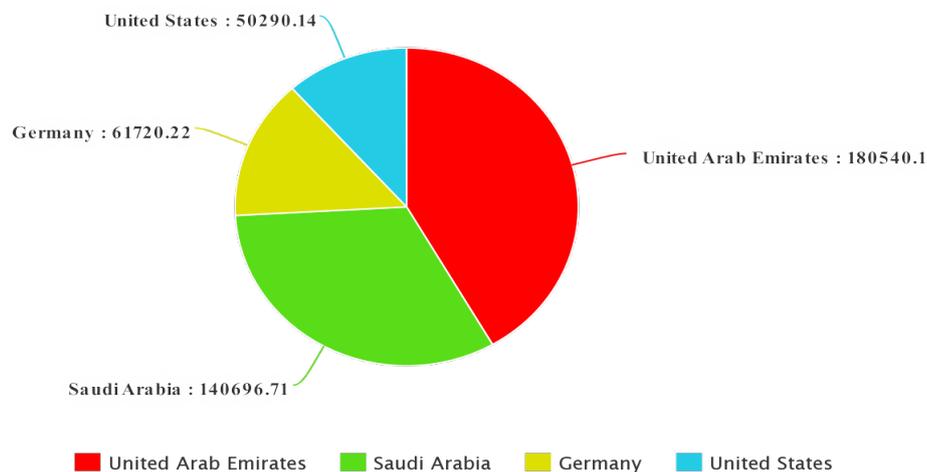


Figure 1. Top four food import sources for Qatar in 2016 (in USD thousands). *World Integrated Trade Solution*, 2016.

⁷ Walsh, C., Dr, Tucci, A. E., Captain, & Wellesley, L. (2017, July 29). Chokepoints and Food Security Threats: A Closer Look. www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/chokepoints-and-food-security-threats-closer-look

⁸World Bank, Qatar Food Products Imports By Country. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/QAT/Year/LTST/TradeFlow/Import/Partner/by-country/Product/16-24_FoodProd

⁹ Taylor, A. (2017, June 05). Analysis | Qatar could face a food crisis in spat with Arab neighbors. Retrieved from www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/06/05/qatar-could-face-a-food-crisis-in-spat-with-arab-neighbors/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.8c0ab671cb98

¹⁰ Reuters. (2017, June 05). UPDATE 1-Qatar food imports hit after Arab nations cut ties - trade. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/gulf-qatar-food/update-1-qatar-food-imports-hit-after-arab-nations-cut-ties-trade-sources-idUSL8N1J23IC>

¹¹"Campaign Urges Saudi Chicken Boycott over Price Rises." BBC News. BBC, October 5, 2012. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-19844291>.

¹² Gumuchian, Marie-Louise, and Saad Abedine. "Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain Withdraw Envoys from Qatar." CNN. Cable News Network, March 5, 2014. <https://edition.cnn.com/2014/03/05/world/meast/gulf-qatar-ambassadors/>.

Domestic Food Security Efforts

Prior to the blockade, only one percent of Qatar's food was produced domestically, but, since 2017, Qatar has increased its total food production by 400 percent—which is still a negligible proportion of the country's total food consumption.¹³ Since the blockade, Qatar has demonstrated the capacity to import its food needs by circumventing the Saudi land border as well as various regional air and maritime borders—and in the process has secured new food sources at lower cost.¹⁴ Thus, the case could be made that Qatar's trade agreements with Saudi Arabia and the UAE prior to the blockade were primarily political. It can be argued that Qatar's previous trade agreements with the UAE and Saudi Arabia emerged not out of economic necessity, but rather out of political obligation—the desire to have good relations with its neighbors. However, it is important to point out that while Qatar is no longer dependent on its neighbors for importation of food staples, any disruption of, or reduction in, food imports would prove detrimental to Qatari food security as a whole.¹⁵ Food security is largely reliant on Qatar's economic prosperity, and shortages of any foodstuffs, even short term, would likely have the effect of deterring potential investors, skilled workers, and tourists, as well as compromising the stability of the country and in turn decreasing food security.¹⁶

Qatar has a higher overall food security index score than both Saudi Arabia and the UAE, even after the Saudi-led blockade, as shown in Table 2. However, this is largely due to the country's 93.3 affordability score. The Global Food Security Index defines the following categories in its methodology:

Affordability measures the ability of consumers to purchase food, their vulnerability to price shocks and the presence of programmes and policies to support customers when shocks occur. *Availability* measures the sufficiency of the national food supply, the risk of supply disruption, national capacity to disseminate food and research efforts to expand agricultural output. *Quality and Safety* measures the variety and nutritional quality of average diets, as well as the safety of food.¹⁷

The overall score for Qatari food security decreased by six points from 2016—the second-largest decrease seen in the 2016–2017 period, and the largest by far in the Gulf region—which is largely attributed to the embargo in June 2017.¹⁸ This decrease is, by and large, unprecedented. By contrast, the overall score for the UAE increased by 0.2 points while Saudi Arabia's score decreased by 0.8 points, much lower compared to the change in Qatar.

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Shoeb, M. (2017, August 13). Qatar-Turkey trade route via Iran to cut transportation cost. Retrieved from <https://thepeninsulaqatar.com/article/13/08/2017/Qatar-Turkey-trade-route-via-Iran-to-cut-transportation-cost>

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Food security is the state in which all the citizens of a nation have social, economic, and physical access to nutritious and safe food that meets their preferences and dietary needs for an active and healthy life. See Coleman, Jensen, A., Gregory, C. A., & Rabbitt, M. P. (2017, October 04). Definitions of Food Security. Retrieved from <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/definitions-of-food-security/>

¹⁷ Abruzzese, L., Braimoh, A., Kennedy, E., Ph.D, Mohanty, S., Spielman, D., & Thompson, R. (n.d.). The Global Food Security Index. Retrieved from <http://foodsecurityindex.eiu.com/Home/Methodology>

¹⁸ Adiyaman, S. O., Albay, T., & Anadolu Agency. (2017, August 04). Turkey, Qatar, Iran to discuss land trade routes. Retrieved from <https://www.thepeninsulaqatar.com/article/04/08/2017/Turkey,-Qatar,-Iran-to-discuss-land-trade-routes>

Table 2. Food security index score for a selection of Middle Eastern nations in 2017.

Country	Overall score	Affordability	Availability	Quality & Safety
Kuwait	74.6	83.1	67.2	73.7
Oman	73.9	72.8	75.3	73.0
Qatar	73.3	93.3	54.8	74.1
Saudi Arabia	71.0	75.9	69.3	63.3
United Arab Emirates	70.9	84.9	59.1	68.6
Bahrain	68.6	77.9	63.3	59.5
Turkey	61.1	59.8	59.2	59.4
Jordan	58.2	56.0	61.8	54.2
Egypt	56.6	42.0	68.1	61.5
Morocco	52.8	47.9	56.0	56.4
Algeria	51.5	51.0	52.4	50.6
Syria	33.3	28.1	37.6	34.2
Yemen	28.8	33.4	28.7	17.5

Source: *Global Food Security Index*, 2017.

In the short term, both Saudi Arabia and the UAE have had their food security impacted by the blockade. The long-term impacts are yet to be seen, but it could be argued that unless a cohesive effort is made by all GCC countries to streamline supply lines, food security will remain a threat to all of them.

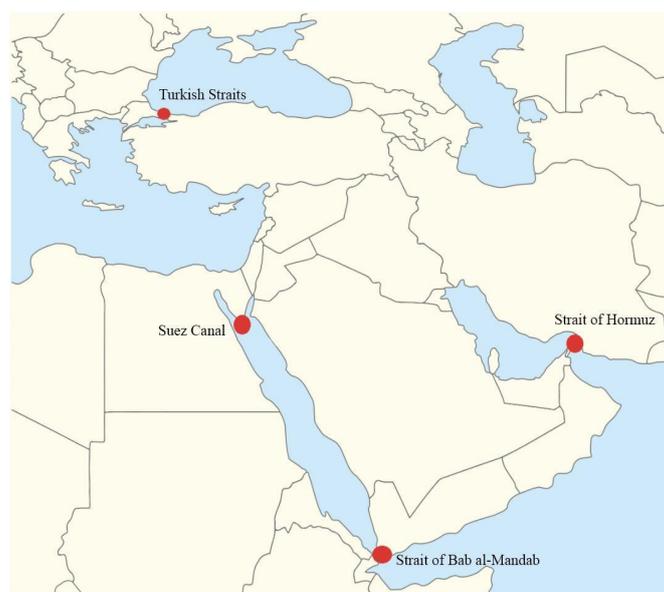


Figure 2. A map indicating the location of key maritime chokepoints for Qatari supply lines. Adapted from “Chatham House Report,” Rob Bailey and Laura Wellesley, 2017.

Vital chokepoints such as the Suez Canal, the Strait of Bab al-Mandab, the Strait of Hormuz, and the Turkish Straits, are essential to the transportation of grains from Russia to Qatar (see Figure 2). All chokepoints border maritime states that are directly involved in the Qatari diplomatic crisis, posing potential trade route disruption.¹⁹ There has not been any trade route disruption for the blockading nations, which have cut off supply chains emerging from other nations to Qatar has of 2020 been extremely limited, as evidenced by there being no reports of such a thing happening. However, it is possible that their ability to disrupt current trade routes gives them political leverage over Qatar. More specifically, there have been no reports of major supplies being seized along these supplies lines, whether by pirates or government-backed entities. Piracy around Bab al-Mandab is a real threat to Qatari supply lines,²⁰ however, the UAE government has taken significant measures to police the Bab al-Mandab area.²¹

Improved relations and communications between Russia and Qatar is essential to the food security of Qatar as a whole. In the long term, a restoration of relations between Qatar and its neighboring states is essential for food security in the region. Without a strategic cooperative plan for food supply and storage, the region is much more susceptible to food insecurity. The region would be better served if it prioritized food security over political concerns, as Qatar's Gulf neighbors suffer from the same food security problems as Qatar.²²

The New Trade Agreements with Iran and Turkey

Iranian Trade Agreements

Iranian exports to Qatar increased by 117.5 percent during the GCC crisis.²³ Tomatoes (\$6.61 million), milk and cream (\$4.1 million), cucumbers (\$3.9 million), and watermelon (\$3.8 million) were among top Iranian exports to Qatar in the four-month period between June and October 2017.²⁴ Iran is considered Saudi Arabia's regional rival, and both countries compete for influence in what experts sometimes refer to as the "Middle Eastern Cold War" or the "Iran-Saudi Arabia Cold War."²⁵ Both nations have fought for regional influence via their proxy wars in Syria, Yemen, and Iraq. While Qatar has historically supported Saudi Arabia in its conflict with Iran, this has been to a limited extent, as Qatar has also pursued an independent foreign policy.²⁶

¹⁹ Walsh, C., Dr, Tucci, A. E., Captain, & Wellesley, L. (2017, July 29). Chokepoints and Food Security Threats: A Closer Look. Retrieved from <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/chokepoints-and-food-security-threats-closer-look>

²⁰ The National, & Agence France-Presse. (2017, June 12). Amid attacks and piracy off Yemen, naval alliance boosts security in Bab Al Mandeb strait. Retrieved from <https://www.thenational.ae/world/amid-attacks-and-piracy-off-yemen-naval-alliance-boosts-security-in-bab-al-mandeb-strait-1.48667>

²¹ Ibid

²² Walsh, C., Dr, Tucci, A. E., Captain, & Wellesley, L. (2017, July 29). Chokepoints and Food Security Threats: A Closer Look. Retrieved from www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/chokepoints-and-food-security-threats-closer-look.

²³ ²³ Bukhari, I., & The Peninsula. (2017, June 09). Turkish diary & poultry products hit Qatar retail shelves to allay supply woes after blockade. Retrieved from <https://www.thepeninsulaqatar.com/article/09/06/2017/Turkish-diary-poultry-products-hit-Qatar-retail-shelves-to-allay-supply-woes-after-blockade>

²⁴ Bukhari, I., & The Peninsula. (2017, June 09). Turkish diary & poultry products hit Qatar retail shelves to allay supply woes after blockade. Retrieved from <https://www.thepeninsulaqatar.com/article/09/06/2017/Turkish-diary-poultry-products-hit-Qatar-retail-shelves-to-allay-supply-woes-after-blockade>

²⁵ Walsh, C., Dr, Tucci, A. E., Captain, & Wellesley, L. (2017, July 29). Chokepoints and Food Security Threats: A Closer Look. Retrieved from www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/chokepoints-and-food-security-threats-closer-look

²⁶ Gause, F. G., III. (2014). Beyond sectarianism: The new Middle East Cold War. *Brookings Institution Press*. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/research/beyond-sectarianism-the-new-middle-east-cold-war/>

It could be argued that Iran is a vital agricultural asset for Qatar's food security interests. According to Farid Ejlali, deputy minister in the Ministry of Agriculture Jihad, Iran has reached self-sufficiency in terms of essential agricultural products. In 2009, Ejlali noted: "At present, many products such as oil seeds, chicken and beef are not imported, and Iran has reached self-sufficiency in producing these products. This is while before the victory of the Islamic Revolution the country depended on the imports of many strategic goods."²⁷ Iran is one of the few significant domestic agricultural producers in the region, even though the country has severely outdated farming practices: wastage in the cultivation, harvesting, and post-harvesting practices in Iran's agriculture sector is high at 35 percent.²⁸ Iranian agricultural subsidies are considered unsustainable, largely due to the high degree of food wastage that occurs because the cost is passed onto the government.²⁹ It is possible that the mechanization and modernization of Iran's crude farming practices can happen with subsidies from the Iranian government in addition to investments by foreign firms, public and private.

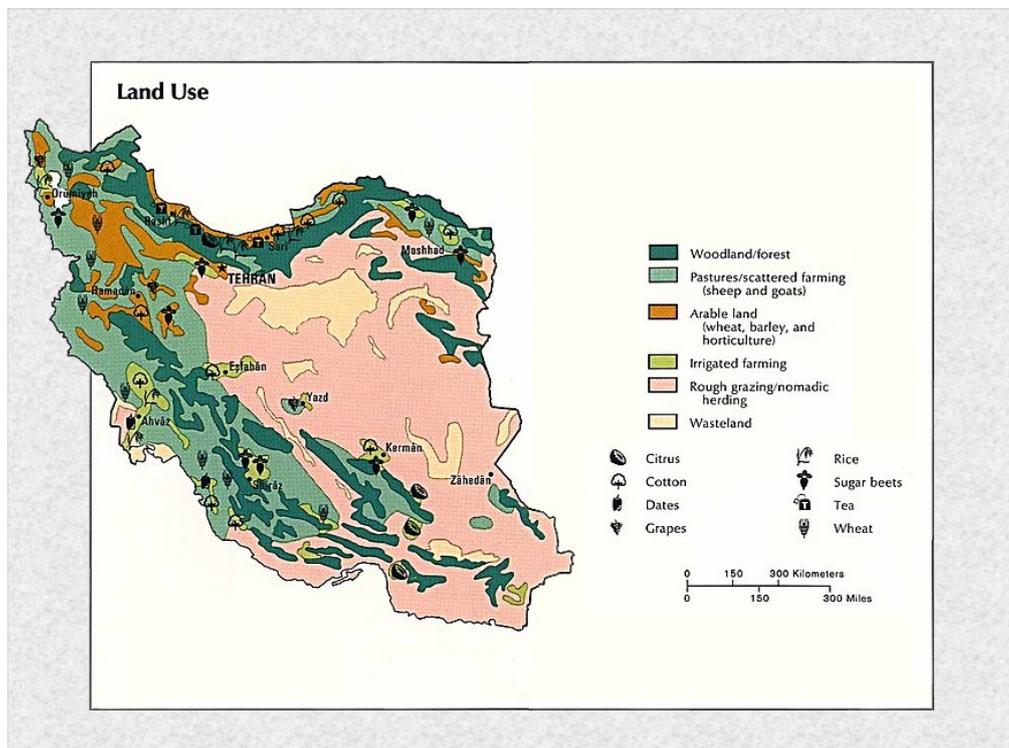


Figure 3. A map of the various agricultural areas of Iran. *Atlas of the Middle East*, January 1993, U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. Reprinted with permission.

If Iran's agricultural production capacity were to be fully realized, there exists the potential to roughly triple current production (see Figure 3). Around one-third of Iranian land is suitable for agriculture, yet due to the lack of good infrastructure, only 12 percent of it is currently under cultivation.³⁰ In 2017, the Iranian parliament

²⁷ Dehqan, S. (2009, January 22). Food Security Index at 96%. Retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/20091001021913/http://www.iran-daily.com/1387/3323/html/economy.htm>

²⁸ Rastegary, M. (2016, April 9). National outlook of Food waste in Iran. Retrieved from <http://www.writerbeat.com/articles/9404-National-Outlook-of-Food-Waste-in-Iran>

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ehlers, E. (2011, July 28). Agriculture in Iran. In *Encyclopædia Iranica*. Retrieved from <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/agriculture-in-iran>

called for foreign investment for its five-year development plan.³¹ Since Qatar needs to secure its food security, investing in Iran's agriculture production could prove to be beneficial for both countries in the long term.³² However, increasing the levels of food production in Iran might be unnecessary for Qatar's needs, aside from the potential economic and diplomatic benefits of such a trade deal. This is because Qatar's food consumption is negligible in comparison to Iran's food production in sum. The latest data despite its inefficiencies, Iran is already a leading producer of many foodstuffs, such as pistachios.³³

Turkish Trade Agreements

While Qatar has a higher rank than Turkey in the food security index score (73.3 vs. 61.1), this is mostly due to Qatar's high affordability score. This can be explained by Qatar's increased wealth compared to Turkey, as Qatar has approximately 128,060 PPP USD GNI per capita, whereas Turkey has 27,550. As seen in Figure 4, Qatar's agriculture is of significantly higher quality and safety, yet lower in terms of food availability.

Turkey is a major domestic food producer and plays a vital role in the Turkish Straits. In accordance to the 1936 Montreux Convention Regarding the Regime of the Straits, Turkey has sole authority over war ships passing through the straits, while all civilian ships are guaranteed passage.³⁴ Turkey, an ally of Qatar, de facto controls the straits which are a vital chokepoint, and so this helps increase Qatari food security.³⁵

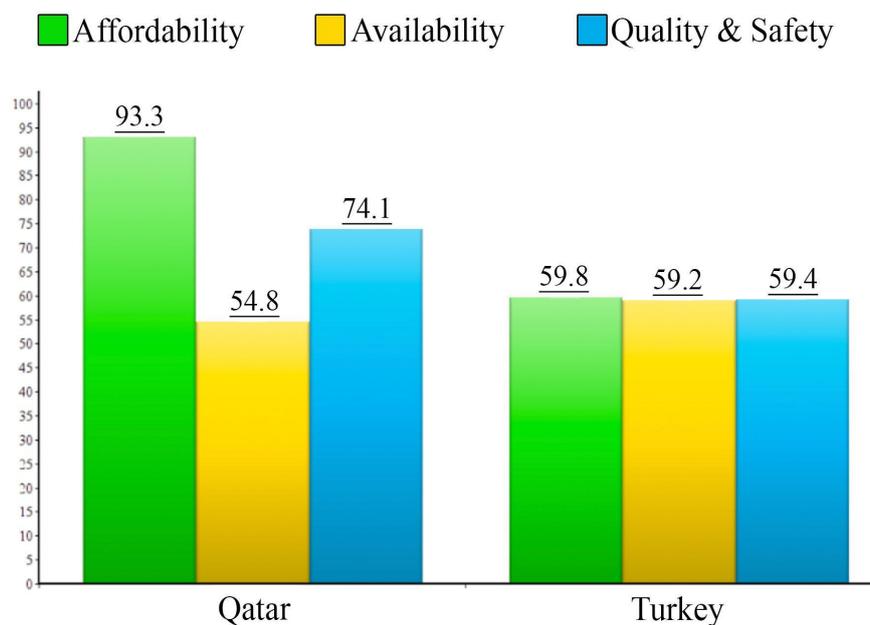


Figure 4. A comparison of Qatari and Turkish food security factors. Adapted from *Global Food Security Index*, 2017.

³¹ Reuters. (2017, January 15). Iran parliament stresses foreign investment in five-year economic plan. Retrieved from <https://uk.reuters.com/article/iran-economy-plan/iran-parliament-stresses-foreign-investment-in-five-year-economic-plan-idUKL5N1F408K>

³² Walsh, C., Dr, Tucci, A. E., Captain, & Wellesley, L. (2017, July 29). Chokepoints and Food Security Threats: A Closer Look. Retrieved from <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/chokepoints-and-food-security-threats-closer-look>

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Gokcikek, Bulent. "The Montreux Convention Regarding The Turkish Straits And Its Importance After The South Ossetia War ." *Naval Postgraduate School*, March 2009. <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a496759.pdf>.

³⁵ Ibid

Agricultural production in Turkey is extremely important for the long-term food security in the Gulf region. Turkey is a large nation with a population of almost 83 million, and it is estimated that the country produced approximately 60 percent of its own food consumption in 2019.³⁶ In contrast to Qatar's population of around 2.8 million, it is reasonable to argue that Turkey has the capacity to meet Qatar's food requirements; however, it is insufficient to measure Turkey's agricultural production for domestic consumption as a means of determining Qatar's reliance on Turkey. Because Qatar's population is small,³⁷ and the country ranks high on the affordability index (see Table 2), it is strategically plausible for Turkey to sell food to Qatar. It is not possible for any one nation to satisfy Qatar's food security entirely, as one nation supplying the entirety of another food requirements would mean that the latter is dependent on the former, and therefore not secure. Qatar should not be reliant on any single entity for its food security in order to avoid a situation where its dependence could be exploited. There is the potential for Iran to attempt to influence Qatar through the new Iran-Qatar trade route, much as Saudi Arabia had done in the past with its shared land border with Qatar.

Stability in the Gulf region is in the strategic interest of the United States in order to guarantee exports of hydrocarbons.³⁸ Thus, the Carter Doctrine guarantees American protection of Qatar against any outside force attempting to gain control of the Arabian Gulf, whether it be through Iran threatening the food security of Qatar or otherwise. Former President Jimmy Carter said in 1980:

Let our position be absolutely clear: An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Arabian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.³⁹

This doctrine is interpreted and upheld at the discretion of each US administration. The Carter Doctrine did consider hostility from the regional Gulf states, as stability in the region was vital for the procurement of oil and gas. This can still be said to be the policy of the US government in the long term, as the Pentagon issued statement contradicting the Trump administration with regards to the blockade. Assuming that the United States will in the long term follow its strategic interests, then stability of Qatar as well as amicable relations between all Gulf states is in the interest of the United States government, and so the Carter Doctrine will be for the most part followed.

The trade relationship between Qatar and Turkey cannot be reduced to purely agricultural terms. Different foods have different levels of importance to a state's security. There exists no differentiation in documentation between food that is considered to be "essential," "essential for trade," and "non-essential." There would be a significant difference if, for example, Qatar was unable to import basic grains versus if it could not import luxury items such as chocolate bars, for instance. Foodstuffs such as grains are deemed "essential" because they are necessary for the survival of the populace. "Essential for trade" foods, such as chocolate bars, while nonessential for the survival of the populace, are essential for investor confidence. There is no data providing the necessary documentation in order to take these factors into consideration when assessing trade between Turkey and Qatar. Qatar would be better able to meet its food security needs the more essential the foodstuff is, but at the same time be more food insecure, as increasing dependence on a nation for food security paradoxically makes the nation more food insecure. The reason for this is that the case could be made that it is more culpable to pressure and to reliance on a single state actor. However, it is possible that Qatar having more "options" cancels out any

³⁶ World Bank. "Product Imports by Turkey from Turkey." WITS, 2019.

<https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/TUR/Year/2018/TradeFlow/Import/Partner/TUR/Product/all-groups>.

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Calabrese, John. "China and the Persian Gulf: Energy and Security." *Middle East Journal* 52, no. 3 (1998): 351-66. www.jstor.org/stable/4329217.

³⁹ Peters, G., & Woolley, J. T. (1980, January 23). Jimmy Carter: The State of the Union Address Delivered Before a Joint Session of the Congress. - January 23, 1980. Retrieved from <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=33079>

insecurity Qatar might gain, as there are more nations are able to supply essential foodstuffs, the trade between Turkey and Qatar has increased substantially since the beginning of the blockade.⁴⁰ For example, according to a Turkish official, “Qatar-Turkey trade volume for the first 10 months of 2018...indicates \$1.7bn of total trade – higher than in all of 2017.”⁴¹

Since the blockade, five thousand Turkish troops have been deployed to Qatar,⁴² which suggests that relations between the two countries have improved considerably because of the new trade agreements. While Erdoğan remains in office, there exists opportunities for Turkey and Qatar to build long-lasting strategic agricultural partnerships, as well as the infrastructure for such projects. However, the current alliance between Qatar and Turkey might prove to be short lived. If the main opposition party, the Republican People’s Party, were elected into power, they could reverse President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s pro-Qatar policies.⁴³ Turkey and Iran being the primary suppliers of food to Qatar.⁴⁴ Figure 5 is indicative of Iran’s greater efficiency in the agricultural sector.

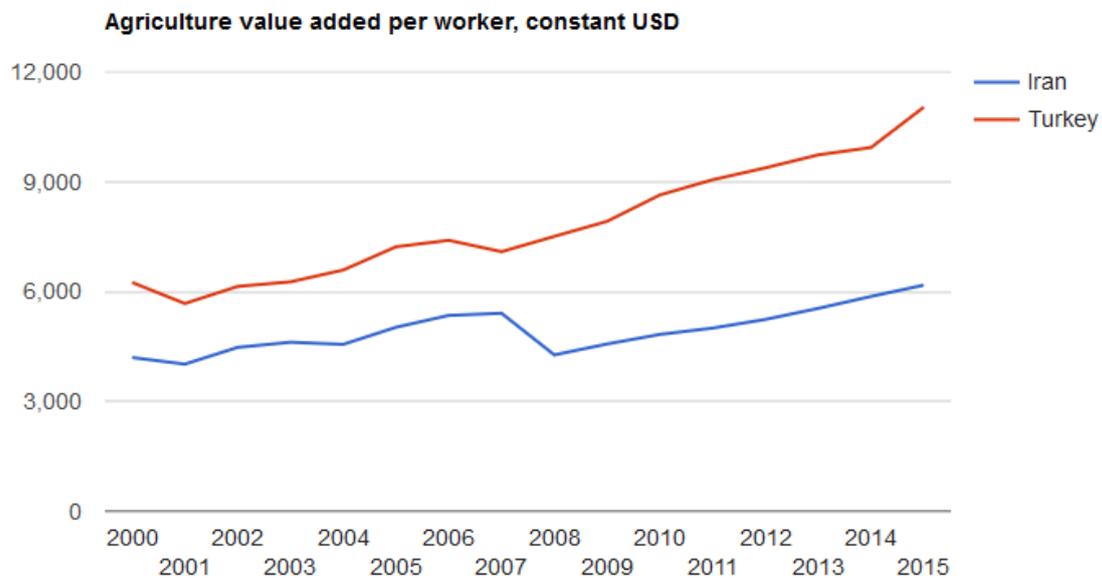


Figure 5. The growing agricultural industries of Turkey and Iran. Reprinted from *World Bank*, 2015. “Agriculture value added per worker” is a measure of agricultural productivity.

⁴⁰ Al Jazeera. “Qatar-Turkey Trade Surges to \$2bn amid Gulf Tensions.” Turkey News | Al Jazeera. Al Jazeera, January 17, 2019. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/01/qatar-turkey-trade-surges-2bn-gulf-tensions-190117070715033.html>.

⁴¹ Ibidz

⁴² Al Jazeera. “Erdogan: Turkey-Qatar Military Base Serves Regional 'Stability'.” Turkey News | Al Jazeera. Al Jazeera, November 25, 2019. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/11/erdogan-turkey-qatar-military-base-serves-regional-stability-191125154550144.html>.

⁴³ Bülent Arasand Pınar Akpınar “Turkish Foreign Policy and the Qatar Crisis” (Istanbul Policy Center-Sabancı University-Stiftung Mercator Initiative) ISBN: 978-605-9178-98-3

⁴⁴ Qatar Food Products Imports By Country. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/QAT/Year/LTST/TradeFlow/Import/Partner/by-country/Product/16-24_FoodProd

Additional Discussion

There is a myriad of factors to consider when assessing the food security of Qatar and the implications of newfound political alliances and agreements. The implications of new trade agreements is that the GCC as an institution has been severely weakened. Ultimately, Qatar's relationships with Iran and Turkey have been strengthened as a result of the blockade, ultimately going against the initial nominal demand by the anti-Qatar quartet to sever relations with Iran.⁴⁵ This breaks the traditional Sunni-Shia divide seen in the past, and creates a new Qatar-Turkey-Iran trifecta. Traditionally, the Sunnis and the Shias have been divided politically on the basis of religious lines, and so the Sunni Gulf states of Arabia have traditionally banded together against Shias, such as Assad, the Houthis, and Iran.⁴⁶ This was most apparent in the 2019 Kuala Lumpur Summit, where Muslim nations have congregated, including Qatar, Turkey, and Iran.⁴⁷ The purpose of the Kuala Lumpur summit was to discuss the emergence of failed states in the Islamic world, the displacement of Muslims, the plight of the Uighur Muslims, as well as a variety of issues facing the Islamic world.⁴⁸ Saudi Arabia's absence, along with Pakistan and the UAE, demonstrates shifting alliances and a new divide in the Muslim world.⁴⁹ The Kuala Lumpur Summit, effectively, could then be interpreted as damaging to Saudi hegemony.

It should be noted that the bulk of the research gathered for this paper was before the pandemic. It is still too early to accurately the impact of the pandemic on Qatari food security. However, the research that has been conducted show far has shown that despite shocks to global supply lines, the pandemic has not significantly weakened Qatari food security.⁵⁰

Conclusion

Turkey and Iran are both valuable allies for securing Qatar's food security, the region as a whole must make a collective effort to ensure long-term food security. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt have demonstrated the capability to prioritize political concerns over humanitarian ones in their blockade. Qatar must secure new international agreements to further protect its supply lines from foreign aggression, as well as reviewing the current infrastructure.

Acknowledgements

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⁴⁵“Saudi Arabia, UAE, Egypt, Bahrain cut ties to Qatar,” *Al Jazeera*, June 5, 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/06/saudi-arabia-uae-egypt-bahrain-cut-ties-qatar-170605031700062.html>

⁴⁶ Hokayem, Emile. “Iran, the Gulf States and the Syrian Civil War.” *Survival* 56, no. 6 (February 2014): 59–86. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2014.985438>.

⁴⁷ Al-Jaber, Khalid, and Giorgio Cafiero. 2019. “Kuala Lumpur Summit: A Challenge to Saudi Leadership?” Middle East Institute. Middle East Institute. December 18, 2019. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/kuala-lumpur-summit-challenge-saudi-leadership>.

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰“MME-QEERI Strategic Drive on the Implications of COVID-19 on Food Security: Sustainable Food, Water and Energy Nexus for the State of Qatar during COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond .” Ministry of Municipality and Environment , October 5, 2020. <http://www.mme.gov.qa/cui/view.dox?id=702>.

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