



TURKEY AND QATAR

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Turkey has a military base in Qatar (Katar TSK Kara Unsur Komutanlığı). The two countries have been allies for many centuries. The Portuguese conquered Qatar in 1521 but left no artistic legacy. They did build fortresses on the coast, but some local populations rebelled in 1550 and submitted to the Ottoman Turks. This Turkish outpost was expelled in 1670. They returned in 1871 and Qatar became a Turkish protectorate. Turkey left Qatar peacefully in 1916 based on an agreement of the Young Turkish Movement with the British (proposed in 1913)

This is different from the neighbouring Gulf States which were British Protectorates in from 1820 to 1971. The reason for the protectorate was a common interest in fighting piracy and therefore let the sea route from India to the UK, via Cape Town, free of pirate attacks. Qatar was not part of this protectorate. While Castlereagh was minister of foreign affairs of the UK, a British ship (the Vestal) bombed Doha in 1821.

The period of direct collaboration between Qatar and Turkey is 1550-1670 and between 1871 and 1916. Qatar has not been directly concerned by the secularization process of Turkey promoted by Kemal Atatürk with the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1922. The ties had already been broken off.

President Erdoğan of Turkey has been increasing the collaboration between the two countries. The reason may be religious rather than secular. Starting with the Arab Spring (2011) this collaboration has accelerated. In 2015 a Turkish army base was established in Qatar. From 2017 to 2021 diplomatic ties were cut between Qatar and several nations (Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Bahrein, Egypt, Libya [Tobruk]). Turkey supported Qatar. Both Turkey and Qatar have open connections with the Muslim Brotherhood.



Erdoğan has promoted the collaboration based on a shared religious sentiment. If, in the future, Turkey's government and president do not stem from the AK Parti, and a secular party is in power, will those ties be reconsidered?

Africa is also at the centre of this collaboration. Turkey has expanded its influence in Somalia, where it now has a military presence, and it patrols and controls the national waters. Qatar has started to upgrade the port of Hobyo in Somalia in 2019. The UAE has been supporting the breakaway region of Somaliland as well as Ethiopia. Gulf dynamics, rivalries, and politics are visible outside the Persian Gulf.

Ancient Greek culture allows one to step back and look at the long term dynamics. An inscription has been found in Bahrain which gives the ancient name, Tylos, and indicates the presence of a governor on behalf of the Greek speaking Seleucid Empire (one of the successor states of Alexander the Great). The inscription reveals the presence of a temple dedicated to the Greek Gods, the Dioscuri (Castor and Pollux).

*ὑπὲρ βασιλέως Ἕσπασίνου | καὶ βασιλίσσης Θαλασσίας, | τὸν ναὸν Διοσκόροις σωτήρσι
Κη[φισό]δωρος στρατηγὸς | Τύλον καὶ τῶν νήσων | εὐχὴν*

Kephisodoros governor of Tylos and of the Islands offers a temple to the Dioscuri protectors and prayers on behalf of the king Hyspaosines and the queen Thalassia.

King Hyspaosines (141bC-124bC) was king of Characene (southern Iraq) and clearly had sovereignty over Tylos (Bahrein). There is no similar inscription in Qatar even though the name is attested in the Geography of Ptolemy as Katara (*Κάταρα*) as is Bahrein (Tylos *Τύλος*).

Ancient texts tell us that the gulf states are either connected with Mesopotamia or Persia. The Byzantines seemed to have no interest in the area and for this reason the main pre-Islamic and Christian archaeological finds are connected with the Christian sect of the Nestorians who were not much respected by Constantinople.

Turkey is now building bridges with Qatar. Will China and India promote such a collaboration in the future?