

Big spender: Qatar continues extensive military modernisation

[Content preview – Subscribe to *Jane's Defence Weekly* for full article]

Bucking the norm of cautious, incremental upgrades and replacements, Qatar is planning a complete overhaul of its armed forces largely unseen outside of wartime. *Jeremy Binnie* reports

In peacetime most militaries must carefully phase their modernisation process, spreading costs as evenly as possible and often stretching legacy assets to the limit of obsolescence before replacing them.

Qatar is doing things differently, spending about USD50 billion over the past decade or so to buy new systems to replace most of its existing military equipment, regardless of its age, and to significantly expand its inventories, as well as establishing an entirely new military branch. In many cases Qatar is not just buying the best systems on the market; it is paying to develop new capabilities that no other country will have.



Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani stands with QEAF personnel during a ceremony held to welcome the first Rafales to the new Dukhan Air Base in June 2019. Qatar is on a military spending spree, upgrading and replacing its equipment at an unusual speed. (Amiri Diwan)

1766391

Much of this modernisation – especially Qatar's new ballistic missile defences and ability to counter small fast attack boats – is ostensibly aimed at countering Iran. Although Doha maintains cordial relations with Tehran, it also hosts a major US military presence, making it a target if regional tensions escalate into war. However, the campaign led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to isolate Doha may have given Qatar's rearmament process new emphasis.

At the same time the vast sums being spent ensure the foreigners building and maintaining the systems and training personnel have a growing stake in Qatar's future. The main European beneficiaries have been France, Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom, while an even more strategic alliance is also being built with Turkey. However, it is the US military presence at Al-Udeid Air Base that remains the surest guarantor of Qatar's security.

Land forces

One of the early signs of Qatar's modernisation plans came in April 2013, when Krauss-Maffei Wegmann (KMW) – now KMW and Nexter Defense Systems (KNDS) – announced that Doha had ordered 62 of its latest Leopard 2A7 main battle tanks (MBTs) and 24 PzH 2000 155 mm/52 calibre tracked self-propelled howitzers (SPHs). The German company said the contract was worth EUR1.89 billion (USD2.08 billion), including spares, crew training, and other support activities.

It was subsequently confirmed that the contract also included 32 Fennek reconnaissance vehicles, 14 Dingo 2 HD mine-resistance ambush-protected vehicles (MRAPs) in three different variants, six Wisent 2 armoured recovery/engineering vehicles, and almost 100 Actros 4058 tank transporters. Qatari Dingos have been seen fitted with the Hensoldt Spexer ground-surveillance radar, with others configured as command posts.

The tanks and SPHs were publicly unveiled in the annual Qatar National Day parade on 18 December 2015. Together with the Fenneks, they replaced the Qatar Emiri Land Forces' (QELF's) French-made AMX-30 tanks and 155 mm Mk F3 SPHs acquired in the 1970s and various older reconnaissance vehicles, providing a massive uplift in capability.

A replacement for the QELF's large fleet of VAB armoured personnel carriers (APCs) – which include the VCAC UTM 800 anti-tank variant – remains an outstanding requirement. Patria confirmed the existence of a competition to supply a significant number of infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs) to Qatar in 2016 when it said its AMV 8x8 was a contender and that some vehicles could be delivered with its 120 mm NEMO turreted mortar system.

The Finns appeared to have lost out to the French when the Élysée announced in December 2017 that Qatar had signed a letter of intent for the purchase of 490 Nexter VBCI 8x8 IFVs: a potential deal worth EUR1.5 billion. This would also be the first export order for the VBCI, sustaining its production line for years.

During the DIMDEX defence show held in Doha the following March it was announced that the VBCIs would be delivered by a joint venture set up by Nexter and the Qatari Ministry of Defence's (MoD's) Barzan Holdings. It was also announced that Qatar had selected Kongsberg's unmanned Protector Medium Calibre Turret (MCT) for the VBCIs rather than Nexter's T40: a two-man turret armed with the 40 mm Case Telescoped Armament System (CTAS) that was also displayed at the show on a VBCI labelled as a QELF asset.

French hopes that the VBCI deal would be finalised were dashed when Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, Qatar's emir, visited Paris in September 2019, according to several reports. This was possibly due to a French judicial investigation into the bidding process that resulted in Doha hosting the World Athletics Championships in 2019 or German company Rheinmetall's attempts to undermine the decision in favour of its Boxer 8x8 or Lynx tracked IFV.

[Continued in full version...]

(714 of 4639 words)

For the full version and more content:

Intelligence that Matters

With more than 100 years of experience in factors such as shifting defence spending and the capabilities of the world's militaries, Jane's delivers unparalleled data and insight. Our renowned open-source intelligence and potent analytical tools, backed by our deep industry expertise, is used by militaries, national security and defence industry organisations across the world to anticipate and respond to threats; identify and capture new business opportunities; and sustain defence capabilities.

To learn more visit <http://janes.com/products>