

SOFT POWER, HARD INFLUENCE: HOW QATAR BECAME A GIANT IN WASHINGTON

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BEN FREEMAN & NICK
CLEVELAND-STOUT



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Executive Summary

This brief explores Qatar's evolution into one of the more influential foreign lobbies in the United States. Qatar's story demonstrates how money begets influence in the United States.

Since Donald Trump was first elected president in 2016, Qatar has spent nearly \$250 million on 88 FARA-registered lobbying and public relations firms. From January 2021 to June 2025, Qatar's agents reported 627 in-person meetings with political contacts in the United States — more FARA-registered meetings than any other country in the world. The current Trump administration has deep ties to Qatar. Three cabinet-level members in the administration — Attorney General Pam Bondi, FBI Director Kash Patel, and EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin — have all previously held consultancy or lobbying positions on Qatar's behalf.

Qatar substantially increased its political influence efforts beginning in 2017, when it was blockaded and reportedly threatened with invasion by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. In response, Qatar began vigorous efforts to counteract anti-Qatar lobbying in the U.S. conducted by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and pro-Israel groups.

More recently, Qatar has used its lobbying influence to bolster its legitimacy and reputation as a global conflict mediator and reassert its importance to U.S. strategic interests and its defense posture in the Middle East. In the aftermath of the Hamas attack against Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, Qatar worked to combat claims of terrorist sympathies by successfully positioning itself as a mediator for ceasefire and hostage exchange negotiations between Israel and Hamas. The Qatar lobby has also helped to preserve the country's standing as a critical U.S. ally in the Middle East, heading off a congressional push to move Al Udeid Air Base out of Qatar, preserving Qatar's

designation as a major non-NATO ally, and strengthening defensive ties via lucrative arms sales.

Beyond the defense realm, Qatar is heavily invested in the U.S. In the past five years, Qatar has given upward of \$9.1 million to think tanks. Since 2001, it has provided \$6.25 billion to American colleges and universities. However, contrary to insinuations from some, its university-related funding and influence have primarily focused on educational efforts within Qatar, where the majority of students enrolled are Qatari.

Qatar has also invested more broadly in the U.S. economy. This past May, Qatar pledged to invest \$500 billion in the U.S. economy over the next decade, demonstrating its intention to retain its U.S. economic influence for the foreseeable future.

Introduction

Whether you call it the “palace in the sky,” a “\$400 million gift,” or “Bribe Force One,” the jet the Qatari government gifted to Donald Trump in May 2025, to be used as Air Force One, became an international scandal with few peers.¹ The plane, which might be the most valuable gift any foreign government has ever given to the U.S., quickly drew the ire of Trump’s critics and supporters alike.² Democrats on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee released a statement saying that accepting the jet “creates a clear conflict of interest, raises serious national security questions, invites foreign influence, and undermines public trust in our government.”³ Several Republican lawmakers, including Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky and Senate Majority Leader John Thune of South Dakota,

¹ Nik Popli, “Democrats Seize on Trump’s Qatar Plane Deal to Galvanize Voters,” *Time*, May 13, 2025, <https://time.com/7285261/trump-qatar-plane-democrats/>.

² Jonathan Karl and Katherine Faulders, “Trump Administration Poised to Accept ‘Palace in the Sky’ as a Gift for Trump from Qatar,” ABC News, May 11, 2025, <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/trump-administration-poised-accept-palace-sky-gift-trump/story?id=121680511>; Mike Wendling, “Trump’s Critics and Supporters Unite against Qatar Plane Deal,” BBC, May 14, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ckg4zk22n9wo>.

³ Chris Coons, “Coons, Schatz, Murphy, Booker Joint Statement on Qatar Luxury Jet Gift to Trump,” press release, May 12, 2025, <https://www.coons.senate.gov/news/press-releases/coons-schatz-murphy-booker-joint-statement-on-qatar-luxury-jet-gift-to-trump>.

also voiced discomfort over the gift.⁴ Qatar was quick to get into damage control mode, insisting on a Memorandum of Understanding stating that the plane was worth \$200 million (far less than the reported figure) and that the transfer was a government-to-government transaction, according to an official familiar with the matter.

While the plane garnered front-page headlines, Qatar has more quietly been establishing itself as a dealmaker in some of the thorniest U.S. foreign policy issues of our time. The tiny nation, with a native population less than that of Washington, D.C., has arguably become one of the best mediators of international crises, including efforts to peacefully resolve conflicts in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Darfur, Lebanon, and Yemen. As of July 2025, Qatar was running 10 active mediations.⁵ Alongside Egypt, Qatar has acted as a crucial mediator in securing the release of hostages and pursuing a lasting ceasefire in Gaza.

It is abundantly clear that the Qatari government has become an extraordinary power broker in Washington. And, unlike its Middle East neighbors Egypt, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, or UAE, who have all been caught red-handed orchestrating elaborate illicit influence operations in America, much of Qatar's influence has been earned through perfectly legal means.⁶

Most critically for the Qataris, the Trump administration has filled its ranks with individuals who have deep ties to Qatar. When Trump sought legal cover for accepting

⁴ Eric Bazail-Eimil and Robbie Gramer, "GOP Heavyweights Join Bipartisan Bashing of Trump Qatar Jet Deal," *Politico*, May 13, 2025, <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/05/13/senate-republicans-qatar-trump-jet-00345435>.

⁵ Nesrine Malik, "The Go-Between: How Qatar Became the Global Capital of Diplomacy," *The Guardian*, July 22, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jul/22/how-qatar-became-the-global-capital-of-diplomacy>.

⁶ Ben Freeman, "Israel's Covert Info Bots Targeting America Met with Hypocritical Silence," *Responsible Statecraft*, June 28, 2024, <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/israel-foreign-influence/>; Nick Cleveland-Stout, "Saudi Ringleader Gets Off Scot-free While Ex-Twitter Employee Faces Jail," *Responsible Statecraft*, August 11, 2022, <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2022/08/11/why-isnt-this-twitter-saudi-agent-ringleader-receiving-any-scrutiny/>; Ben Freeman, "Top UAE Officials Named in Illegal U.S. Influence Operation," *Responsible Statecraft*, September 30, 2021, <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2021/09/30/top-uae-officials-named-in-illegal-us-influence-operation/>.

the plane, for example, he turned to his attorney general, Pam Bondi, who deemed it “legally permissible” for the U.S. government to accept the plane and then transfer ownership of it to Trump’s presidential library before the end of his term.⁷ Bondi herself has close ties to Qatar, having previously registered under the Foreign Agents Registration Act, or FARA, to represent its embassy until 2021.⁸ While working as a lobbyist for Ballard Partners, Bondi provided “support regarding Qatari relations with U.S. government officials, U.S. business entities, and non-governmental audiences, in dealing with matters pertaining to combating human trafficking,” according to her FARA filing.⁹

Kash Patel, now the director of the FBI, revealed his consultant work for Qatar after his confirmation hearing. In an ethics disclosure, Patel disclosed that his firm, Trishul LLC, “provided consulting services for the Embassy of Qatar” until November 2024.¹⁰ In light of this, watchdog group Public Citizen filed a complaint with the FARA unit asking it to “examine whether Kash Patel and Trishul LLC should have registered under FARA and, if so, pursue appropriate remedial actions.”¹¹ On his ethics pledge, Patel said that he would recuse himself from issues related to former clients for a period of one year. A little over a month in office, however, Patel sought and received an ethics waiver to work directly on official FBI business related to Qatar.¹²

There is also Lee Zeldin, now the administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency. In early 2023, Zeldin authored an article for *Newsweek* in which he singled out Qatar as

⁷ Ivan Pereira, “Legality of Trump Potentially Accepting Gift of Qatari Plane Questionable: Experts,” ABC News, May 15, 2025, <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/legality-trump-potentially-accepting-gift-qatari-plane-questionable/story?id=121801837>.

⁸ Ballard Partners, “Short Form Registration Statement,” Department of Justice, March 26, 2020, <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/6415-Short-Form-20200326-128.pdf>.

⁹ Ballard Partners, “Short Form.”

¹⁰ Kash Patel, “Ethics Agreement,” January 28, 2025, [https://extapps2.oge.gov/201/Presiden.nsf/PAS+Index/730D7A12BBF6654785258C240032196E/\\$FILE/Patel%2C%20Kashyap%20%20finalEA.pdf](https://extapps2.oge.gov/201/Presiden.nsf/PAS+Index/730D7A12BBF6654785258C240032196E/$FILE/Patel%2C%20Kashyap%20%20finalEA.pdf).

¹¹ Craig Holman, “Letter to FARA Unit Regarding Patel,” Public Citizen, February 4, 2025, <https://www.citizen.org/article/letter-to-fara-unit-regarding-patel/>.

¹² Nick Cleveland-Stout, “He Took Qatar’s Money, now Kash Patel Handling Their FBI Files?” *Responsible Statecraft*, June 3, 2025, <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/kash-patel-qatar/>.

a major reason for the need to bring transparency to foreign influence.¹³ Shortly thereafter, Zeldin began consulting for Heritage Advisors, a venture capital firm established by Sheikh Sultan bin Jassim Al Thani, a former Qatari government employee.¹⁴ Since that *Newsweek* op-ed, the authors of this brief could not find any statements from Zeldin about Qatar's influence.

Qatar's deep roots in the current Trump administration stem from seeds that were planted during the first Trump administration. In June 2017, the Gulf Cooperation Council – led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE – blockaded Qatar, and the Saudis and Emiratis were reportedly contemplating an outright invasion of the nation.¹⁵ All of this caught the Qataris unawares, and they found themselves completely outmatched in a vital source of power: influence in America. Saudi Arabia and the UAE each spent nearly four times what the Qataris spent on lobbying and public relations firms in the year before the blockade began.¹⁶ Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, had also established a strong bond with the soon-to-be Saudi crown prince and de facto ruler, Mohammed bin Salman, and was instrumental in persuading Trump to make Saudi Arabia the destination of his first trip abroad as president in 2017.¹⁷ Unsurprisingly, Trump then

¹³ Lee Zeldin, "Let's Bring Greater Transparency to Foreign Influence on Policy Making," *Newsweek*, February 1, 2023, <https://www.newsweek.com/lets-bring-greater-transparency-foreign-influence-policy-making-opinion-1777547>.

¹⁴ Lee Zeldin, "Public Financial Disclosure Report," U.S. Office of Government Ethics, December 31, 2024, [https://extapps2.oge.gov/201/Presiden.nsf/PAS+Index/B4586F4FD7718EA485258C0F00336FAE/\\$FILE/Zeldin%2C%20Lee%20%20final278.pdf](https://extapps2.oge.gov/201/Presiden.nsf/PAS+Index/B4586F4FD7718EA485258C0F00336FAE/$FILE/Zeldin%2C%20Lee%20%20final278.pdf).

¹⁵ Alex Emmons, "Saudi Arabia Planned to Invade Qatar Last Summer. Rex Tillerson's Efforts to Stop it May Have Cost Him His Job," *The Intercept*, August 1, 2018, <https://theintercept.com/2018/08/01/rex-tillerson-qatar-saudi-uae/>.

¹⁶ Ben Freeman, "The Qatar Lobby in Washington," Center for International Policy, May 2020, https://static.wixstatic.com/ugd/3ba8a1_eae58acd2c11459894d8e45fbbe1552d.pdf.

¹⁷ Carol Leonnig, Shane Harris, Josh Dawsey, and Greg Jaffe, "How Jared Kushner Forged a Bond with the Saudi Crown Prince," *Washington Post*, March 19, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/how-jared-kushner-forged-a-bond-with-the-saudi-crown-prince/2018/03/19/2f2ce398-2181-11e8-badd-7c9f29a55815_story.html.

initially offered vehement support for the blockade in a series of posts on Twitter (now X).¹⁸

In response to the blockade, Qatar began investing heavily in lobbying, public relations firms, and think tanks to counter the robust anti-Qatar campaigns led by Israeli, Emirati, and Saudi interests. Qatar spent \$18 million on 33 different FARA-registered lobbying and public relations firms in a one-year period, many of which were run by Republican operatives, some with close ties to President Trump himself.¹⁹ A lobbyist working with the Qatari Embassy, who spoke on condition of anonymity, explained that this “was a wake-up call for Qatar. It was clear Qatar was caught flat-footed in the face of the power of lobbying in Washington by state and non-state actors, including Washington-based NGOs and individuals.”

For example, just two days after the blockade began, the Government of Qatar signed a \$2.5 million deal with former Republican Attorney General John Ashcroft’s firm.²⁰ Nick Muzin, a Republican strategist who worked on Trump’s presidential campaign, was also hired by Qatar to run a public relations campaign that targeted 250 “influencers” to change Trump’s opinion on the Gulf country.²¹ As Muzin’s business partner reportedly told Qatari officials, “We want to create a campaign where we are getting into his head as much as possible.”²² Part of that plan included offering those influential to Trump all-expenses-paid trips to Doha, the capital of Qatar. Following one such trip, former Fox

¹⁸ Joshua Geltzer, “What Trump’s Qatar Tweets Revealed,” *The Atlantic*, June 7, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/06/trump-qatar-saudi-arabia-terrorism-corker/529479/>.

¹⁹ Freeman, “Qatar Lobby.”

²⁰ Ashcroft Law Firm, “Exhibit A to Registration Statement,” Department of Justice, June 9, 2017, <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/6438-Exhibit-AB-20170609-3.pdf>.

²¹ Julie Bykowicz, “The New Lobbying: Qatar Targeted 250 Trump ‘Influencers’ to Change U.S. Policy,” *Wall Street Journal*, August 19, 2018, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-new-lobbying-qatar-targeted-250-trump-influencers-to-change-u-s-policy-1535554647>.

²² Bykowicz, “The New Lobbying.”

News commentator and Arkansas governor, Mike Huckabee, tweeted, “Just back from a few days in surprisingly beautiful, modern, and hospitable Doha, Qatar.”²³

By the end of Trump’s first administration, according to OpenSecrets, the Qatari government had more than tripled its spending on FARA–registered lobbying and public relations firms.²⁴ But Qatar’s influence operation in America is a decidedly bipartisan affair that didn’t end with Trump’s first presidency. Throughout the Biden administration, Qatar could count on more than a dozen high-level Democratic operatives in its lobbying stable, a Quincy Institute analysis of FARA records found. This included several former chiefs of staff for Democratic members of Congress – including Sen. Chris Murphy of Connecticut, Rep. Charlie Crist of Florida, and Rep. Bobby Rush of Illinois. Former Democratic members of Congress themselves have also turned lobbyists for Qatar, including former Reps. Bart Stupak of Michigan and Jim Moran of Virginia.

This influence, combined with Qatar’s growing role as Middle East mediator and hostage negotiator, has helped Qatar rise from something of an afterthought in U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East to a vital component of U.S. engagement in the region. That journey has not been without its scandals. Qatar’s agents in the U.S., for example, secretly established the seemingly humanitarian nonprofit “Yemen Crisis Watch” to draw attention to their rival Saudi Arabia’s devastating war in Yemen. The two former Trump–connected lobbyists that created Yemen Crisis Watch entered into deferred prosecution agreements with the Department of Justice²⁵ and retroactively registered under FARA after admitting that it was secretly a Qatari–funded project.²⁶

²³ Mike Huckabee (@GovMikeHuckabee), “Just got back from a few days in surprisingly beautiful, modern, and hospitable Doha, Qatar I will appear on @FoxNews,” X, January 12, 2018, <https://x.com/GovMikeHuckabee/status/951799683428573184>.

²⁴ “Foreign Lobby Watch,” OpenSecrets, <https://www.opensecrets.org/fara/countries/143?cycle=2020>.

²⁵ Caitlin Oprysko, “Watts Registers Retroactively for Qatar Work,” *Politico*, May 31, 2024, <https://www.politico.com/newsletters/politico-influence/2024/05/31/watts-registers-retroactively-for-qatar-work-00161076>.

²⁶ More recently, in an additional scandal, former Sen. Bob Menendez of New Jersey was sentenced to 11 years in prison for bribery, foreign agent, and obstruction offenses. While his case primarily centered on ties to the Egyptian government, Menendez also “made multiple public statements supporting the Government of Qatar,” to help a New Jersey developer curry favor with Qatari officials connected to an

While such scandals have grabbed headlines, nearly all of what Qatar has done to curry favor in the U.S. has, in fact, been perfectly legal. As stated, unlike other countries in the Middle East that have repeatedly been caught orchestrating illicit influence operations in the U.S. — including Egypt, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE — Qatar simply did what wealthy countries had been doing for decades: It bought influence in America.²⁷

Through lobbyists, public relations professionals, and think tanks, Qatar has quietly become one of the most influential foreign lobbies in America. As we document in this brief, Qatari interests have spent nearly a quarter-billion dollars on FARA-registered lobbyists and public relations firms since Trump was first elected president, Qatar is the largest foreign government donor to U.S. universities, the third-largest contributor to U.S. think tanks, its lobbyists report more in-person meetings with political contacts than any other country in the world, and numerous Trump administration officials count themselves as alumni of Qatar's lobbying and consultancy network.

The aim of this brief is to provide an overview of these myriad forms of Qatari influence that, collectively, have helped transform Qatar from a vilified "terrorist sympathizer" state to a well-connected and consequential force in U.S. foreign policy. The story of how Qatar did this is a story of how money begets influence in the U.S. foreign policy process. When it comes to garnering influence in the U.S., Qatar has spared little expense.

The Qatar lobby in America

The work of Qatar's 74 registered foreign agents largely prioritizes countering anti-Qatar campaigns — most notably, charges of funding terrorists — and touting

investment fund, according to the Department of Justice. The bribery was orchestrated by the real estate developer and no Qatari officials were charged by the Department of Justice, though some took the opportunity to cry foul and attack Qatar.

²⁷ However, unlike some work that has adopted a very liberal definition of Qatari influence — to include *all* real estate holdings and business investments — we focus in this brief solely on Qatari activities that have been shown to wield *political* influence in the U.S. That does include some real estate and business investments, such as the Kushner Companies' 666 Fifth Avenue investment in New York City, but Qatar's political influence is primarily driven by its surging influence in Washington, D.C.

Qatar's pivotal role in the Gaza hostage and ceasefire negotiations. But it has also evolved beyond countering narratives into promoting the U.S.–Qatar economic relationship and other foreign policy interests, in particular the defense relationship and the importance of U.S. forces at Al Udeid Air Base.

The Qatar lobby by the numbers

Currently, Qatar is represented by 28 firms registered under FARA, including some of the largest lobbying firms in the U.S. In fact, three of the top-earning firms in 2024 – Cornerstone Government Affairs, Holland & Knight, and BGR Government Affairs – all work for the Qatari Embassy. As part of their contract, Cornerstone even agreed to “not advise, represent, or accept engagement from any sovereign state in the MENA region, other than the State of Qatar.”²⁸

With this firepower on its payroll, it is perhaps unsurprising that Qatar's lobbying operation has reported securing more in-person meetings with political contacts than any other country in the world. Based on an analysis of political activities under FARA from 2021 to June 2025 – the most recent data available – Qatar secured 627 in-person meetings, the vast majority of which were with policymakers or high-level congressional staff.²⁹

²⁸ BGR Government Affairs, “Exhibit B to Registration Statement,” Department of Justice, January 3, 2025, <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/5430-Exhibit-AB-20250103-139.pdf>.

²⁹ “Political activities” are reported in FARA Supplemental Statements that are filed only every six months. Thus, the data included in this chart is only from Supplemental Statements that were filed in the first five months of 2025. More Supplemental Statements will be filed later this year, and include political activities that have already been conducted but, as that information was unavailable at the time of this writing, it is not included in Figure 1.

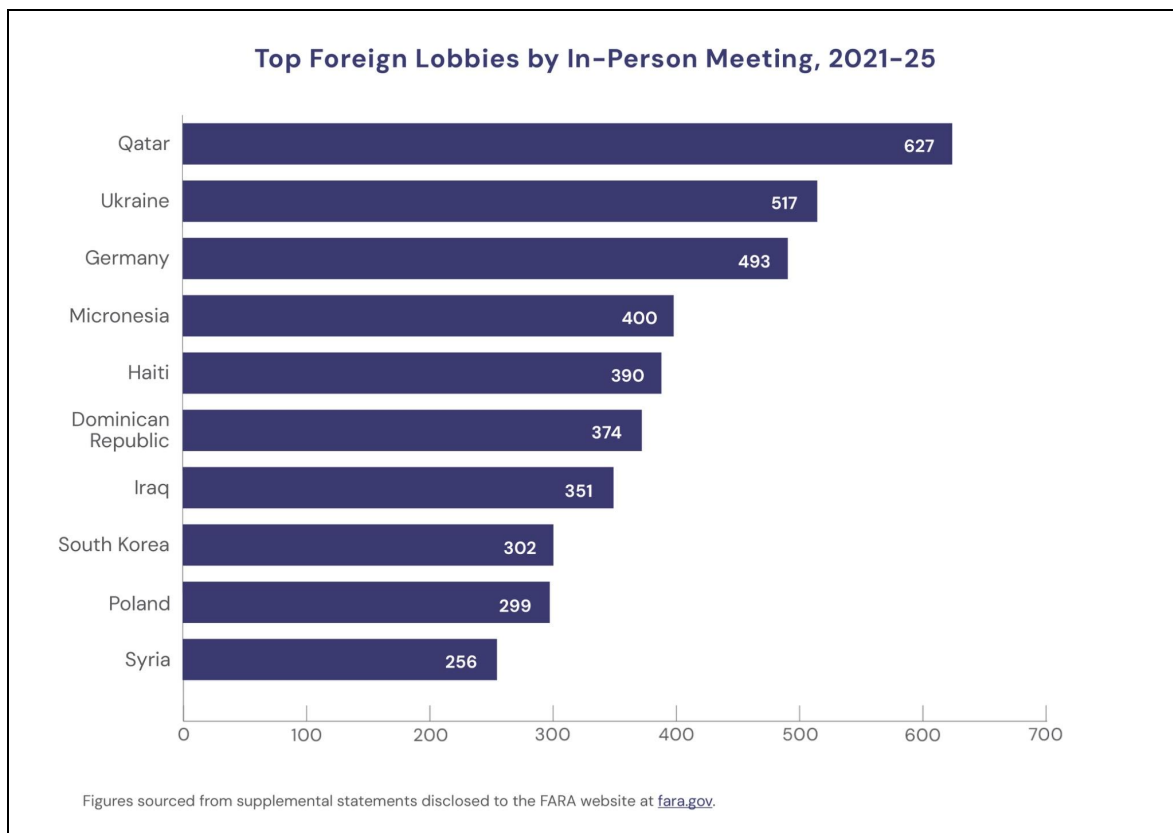


Figure 1

Qatar is able to secure more in-person meetings than any other country in part by hiring the most well-connected lobbyists in Washington: former members of Congress and their top aides. Currently, Qatar has at least three former members of Congress working on its behalf. This includes Democratic Rep. Jim Moran of Virginia, whose Moran Global Strategies receives some \$80,000 a month for lobbying his former colleagues. Former Republican Reps. Tom Davis of Virginia and Tom Reynolds of New York were hired in 2020 as part of a contract worth \$35,000 a month to focus on outreach to Republican members of the U.S. House and Senate.³⁰ Democratic Rep. Bart Stupak of Michigan and

³⁰ Holland & Knight, "Short Form Registration Statement," Department of Justice, February 20, 2020, <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/3718-Short-Form-20200220-98.pdf>.

Republican Rep. John Vincent Weber of New York also registered as foreign agents of Qatar in 2019 and 2021, respectively.³¹

Many congressional staffers also go on to lobby on Qatar's behalf. Qatar's current roster includes a former legislative assistant to Democratic Sen. Jeanne Shaheen of New Hampshire, a top political adviser to Democratic Rep. Josh Gottheimer of New Jersey, a former legislative director for Republican Rep. María Elvira Salazar of Florida, a former deputy chief of staff to Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, and the former chief of staff for Sen. Chris Murphy, Democrat of Connecticut. All of these listed members of Congress serve on national security committees and subcommittees.

Qatar also cultivates close relationships with offices by sponsoring congressional staffer trips to the country. In 2024, for instance, staffers from at least 48 different congressional offices flew to Doha.³² During these trips, lobbyists from BGR reported hundreds of political activities discussing Qatar's funding of American universities, role in mediating the hostage release and ceasefire in Gaza, and relationship with U.S. congressional staffers. Several offices sent multiple staffers to Doha as part of the trips in 2024, including House Majority Leader Steve Scalise, a Louisiana Republican; Sen. Tommy Tuberville, Republican of Alabama; and Sen. Jon Ossoff, Democrat of Georgia.

³¹ Mercury Public Affairs, LLC, "Short Form Registration Statement," Department of Justice, April 9, 2021, <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/6170-Short-Form-20210408-668.pdf>.

³² BGR Government Affairs, "Supplemental Statement," Department of Justice, December 18, 2024, <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/5430-Supplemental-Statement-20241218-54.pdf>; BGR Government Affairs, "Supplemental Statement," Department of Justice, June 26, 2024, <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/5430-Supplemental-Statement-20240626-53.pdf>.

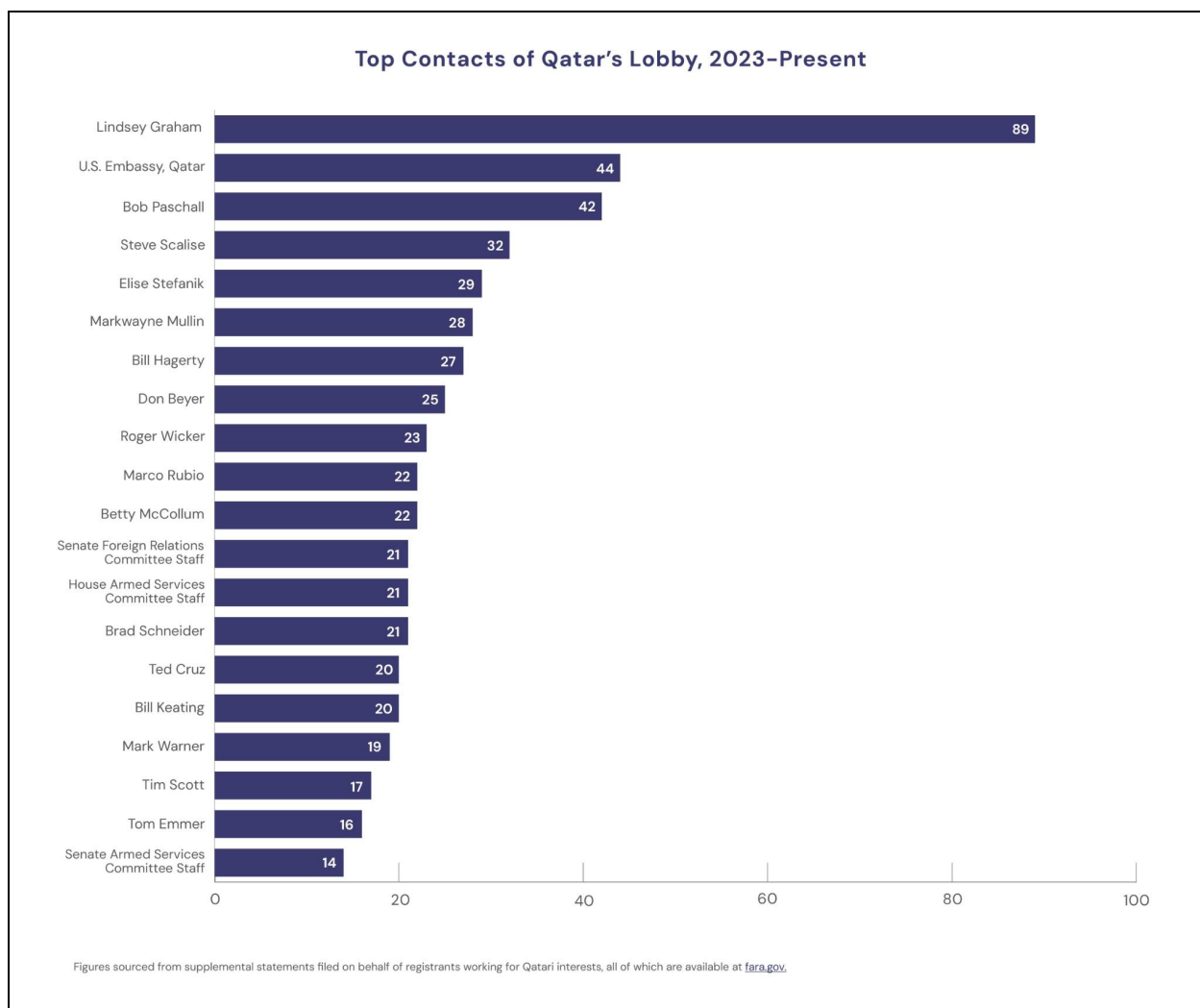


Figure 2

The top contact of Qatar's lobby is Sen. Lindsey Graham. Qatar's foreign agents, taken together, contacted Graham's office on 89 separate occasions since 2023 alone. Graham has long been one of the sharpest critics of Qatar and Iran, which maintain close relations. Following Hamas' attack on Oct. 7, 2023, Graham condemned Qatar, stating "it is time to stop covering for Hamas and other terrorist organizations if you really want peace."³³ The Qatari lobby sprang into action: A lobbyist from Neal Creek, representing the Qatari Embassy, spoke with Graham that very day, and reported several

³³ Lindsey Graham (@LindseyGrahamSC), "To the nations of Qatar and Saudi Arabia: It is time to stop covering for Hamas and other terrorist organizations," X, October 7, 2023, <https://x.com/LindseyGrahamSC/status/1710685537084846145>.

in-person meetings with the senator that month. Qatar’s lobby reported more contact with Graham that month than for the prior 10 months combined.

Qatar Airways’ purchases of aircraft from Boeing, which employs some 8,200 workers in South Carolina, offered additional incentives for Graham to be more supportive of Qatar.

³⁴ When Qatar Airways announced on May 14 that it was purchasing up to 210 Boeing 787 Dreamliners – jets that will be assembled in Charleston – Graham was ecstatic. “I appreciate our allies in Qatar for making this investment in Boeing aircraft and I appreciate everything the Trump administration has done to make this possible,” Graham stated. “This is truly a gamechanger for Boeing and South Carolina.”³⁵

Firms representing Qatar also contribute generously to congressional campaigns. Altogether, registrants representing Qatari interests contributed over \$4.1 million since 2023 to electoral campaigns in the U.S. This does not imply illegality or that funds from Qatar were used to make these contributions, which would be a violation of the Federal Elections Commission’s prohibition on foreign national contributions. These firms derive revenue from a number of clients, both domestic and foreign.

The top recipient of campaign contributions was Sen. Gary Peters, Democrat of Michigan, followed by several Republican House leaders, including Mike Johnson and Steve Scalise of Louisiana and Kevin McCarthy of California.

³⁴ Shaun Chornobroff, “Boeing Gets Largest Ever Order of South Carolina–Made Planes During Trump’s Qatar Visit,” *Washington State Standard*, May 14, 2025, <https://washingtonstatestandard.com/2025/05/14/boeing-gets-largest-ever-order-of-sc-made-planes-during-trumps-qatar-visit/>.

³⁵ Lindsey Graham, “Graham Welcomes Qatar Airways’ Investment in Boeing’s South Carolina Workforce,” press release, May 14, 2025, <https://www.lgraham.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/press-releases?ID=98A3731C-113D-4C6B-8350-2C40DD42ADE0>.

Top Recipients of Campaign Contributions from FARA Registrants Working for Qatari Interests, 2023–Present	
Recipient	Amount
Gary Peters	\$87,200
Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee	\$85,450
National Republican Senatorial Committee	\$49,067
Mike Johnson	\$44,000
Kevin McCarthy	\$34,300
Jon Tester	\$30,600
Martin Heinrich	\$24,950
Maria Cantwell	\$24,050
Steve Scalise	\$23,400
Kamala Harris	\$19,985
Tim Kaine	\$19,000
Lisa Blunt Rochester	\$18,400
Chris Murphy	\$17,100
Bob Menendez	\$16,700
Brian Jack	\$16,691
Ron DeSantis	\$16,500
National Republican Congressional Committee	\$15,220
Garret Graves	\$13,600
Mike Rogers	\$13,541
Tate Reeves	\$12,000

Figures sourced from supplemental statements filed on behalf of registrants working for Qatari interests, all of which are available at [fara.gov](https://www.fara.gov).

Figure 3

The Qatar lobby by the issues

Middle East mediator

Since Hamas' attack on Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, the Qatar lobby has focused on Qatar's role in mediation efforts for a ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas.

Qatar's strength as a mediator comes in part from its dialogue with groups such as the Taliban, the Muslim Brotherhood, and, most relevant for today, Hamas. After Qatar helped broker a temporary ceasefire in January 2025, Trump was unwavering in his praise, claiming that "Qatar is absolutely trying to help."³⁶ In a statement to the Quincy Institute, a consultant working with the Qatari Embassy said that "Mediation means talking to all parties and confronting uncomfortable ideologies. In this case, Qatar has to work with so many players in the region, many of whom are not looked favorably upon by members of Congress."

Qatar's detractors have often felt differently. The response of some in Congress to the devastating Oct. 7 Hamas attack was one of the greatest tests of the Qatar lobby's influence in Washington. Then-chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Texas Republican Rep. Michael McCaul, introduced a law a week after the attack that would impose sanctions on financial institutions that would allow Iran access to \$6 billion worth of its funds held in Qatar.³⁷ Rep. Andy Ogles, Republican of Tennessee, added a "sense of Congress" amendment expressing that Qatar "should condemn Hamas, turn

³⁶ Jacob Magid, "Doing Everything They Can': Trump Voices Appreciation of Qatar's Mediation Role," *Times of Israel*, February 5, 2025, https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/doing-everything-they-can-trump-voices-appreciation-of-qatars-mediation-role/.

³⁷ "No Funds for Iranian Terrorism Act," H.R.5961, Rep. Michael McCaul, 118th Congress, 1st sess., introduced October 16, 2023, <https://www.congress.gov/bills/118/congress/house/bills/5961?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%22%5C%22Qatar%5C%22%22%7D&s=4&r=9>.

Hamas leadership over to the United States and Israeli control, and pledge never to facilitate the transfer of any covered Iranian funds to Iran.”³⁸

For Qatar’s lobbyists, it was all hands on deck. On Nov. 30, the day the House was scheduled to vote on the bill, lobbyists from Neale Creek, Moran Global Strategies, Holland & Knight, and Bachner Group reported a flurry of activity to counter the effort; they contacted 17 different representatives about the legislation, including a series of phone calls with House Foreign Affairs Committee Ranking Member Greg Meeks, a New York Democrat.³⁹ It was too little too late, as the bill — including the Ogles amendment urging Qatar to turn over Hamas leadership — passed the House with overwhelming support (notably, Meeks voted against the bill).⁴⁰ Fortunately for Qatar, the bill promptly died in the Senate, after Qatar’s agents reported more than 30 contacts with Senate offices in the month after the bill passed the House, including in-person meetings with Democratic Sen. Mark Warner of Virginia and email exchanges with the chiefs of staff for multiple senators.

To get ahead of these measures, Qatar’s lobbyists frequently tout Doha’s role as a key negotiator for ceasefire and hostage exchanges. Since October 2023, 261 political activities reported under FARA specifically mention Qatar’s role in mediating the conflict and the release of hostages. For instance, a one-pager distributed to media contacts by GRV Strategies in October 2024 states that “Over the past year, Qatar has worked tirelessly with the United States, Egypt, and other international partners to de-escalate

³⁸ “No Funds for Iranian Terrorism Act,” H.Amdt.820 to H.R.5961, Rep. Andrew Ogles, 118th Congress, 1st sess., offered November 30, 2023, <https://www.congress.gov/amendment/118th-congress/house-amendment/820?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%22%5C%22Qatar%5C%22%22%7D&s=a&r=5>.

³⁹ Moran Global Strategies, “Supplemental Statement,” Department of Justice, May 30, 2024, <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/7255-Supplemental-Statement-20240530-2.pdf>; Neale Creeke, LLC, “Supplemental Statement,” Department of Justice, April 9, 2024, <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/6723-Supplemental-Statement-20240409-10.pdf>; Holland & Knight, “Supplemental Statement,” Department of Justice, April 1, 2024, <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/3718-Supplemental-Statement-20240401-43.pdf>; Bachner Group LLC, “Supplemental Statement,” Department of Justice, December 20, 2023, <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/7271-Supplemental-Statement-20231220-2.pdf>.

⁴⁰ Roll Call 687, H.R.5961, 118th Congress, 1st sess., November 30, 2023, <https://clerk.house.gov/Votes/2023687>.

the crisis in Gaza, mediating between Israel and Hamas to try to end the bloodshed, ensure humanitarian aid reaches innocent Palestinian civilians, and secure the release of hostages.”⁴¹ Right after the temporary ceasefire was announced in January 2025, Holland & Knight sent out an email blast to 48 different members of Congress about Qatar’s mediation role in the deal.⁴²

Qatar’s lobbyists have also pitched media outlets, explaining Qatar’s unique role in the conflict. GRV strategies, on behalf of the International Media Office of the State of Qatar, successfully placed an op-ed in *Newsweek* authored by Qatari Ambassador Meshal bin Hamad Al Thani on the one-year anniversary of Oct. 7.⁴³ The ambassador used the space to defend Qatar against accusations of supporting terrorism, saying that “Qatar’s engagement as a mediator has often been misunderstood as support, but we have always held that if you only talk to friends, peace will remain out of reach.”⁴⁴

Qatar’s lobbyists secured a major media hit on Feb. 28 this year when Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani went on the “Tucker Carlson Show” in an episode titled, “War With Iran? The Prime Minister of Qatar is Being Attacked in the Media for Wanting to Stop It.” The interview, arranged by Lumen8 Advisors on behalf of Qatar, touted Qatar’s role in the ceasefire negotiations and pushed back on narratives that it was supporting terrorism by hosting Hamas leaders in Doha, with the prime minister pointing out that it was successive U.S. administrations that asked them to keep the channel open. “If you have the presence of someone in your country and you are engaging and talking, it doesn’t mean that you are endorsing his

⁴¹ GRV Strategies LLC, “Informational Materials,” Department of Justice, October 28, 2024, <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/7458-Informational-Materials-20241028-3.pdf>.

⁴² Holland & Knight, “Supplemental Statement,” Department of Justice, February 28, 2025, <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/3718-Supplemental-Statement-20250329-45.pdf>.

⁴³ GRV Strategies LLC, “Supplemental Statement,” Department of Justice, April 30, 2025, <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/7458-Supplemental-Statement-20250430-1.pdf>.

⁴⁴ Meshal bin Hamad Al Thani, “A Hostage Deal and Ceasefire Is Still Possible. We in Qatar Won’t Give Up,” *Newsweek*, October 8, 2024, <https://www.newsweek.com/hostage-deal-ceasefire-still-possible-we-qatar-wont-give-opinion-1965156>.

ideas,” the prime minister noted. “How many peace deals have been brokered from that office through that channel? Many of them.”⁴⁵

From blockade to ally: How Qatar won arms and ally status

As mentioned in the introduction of this brief, the 2017 blockade and threat of invasion from Saudi Arabia and the UAE spawned a surge in lobbying spending by the Qatari government, with a considerable portion of it devoted to deepening and emphasizing Qatar’s military ties with the U.S. Qatar is home to the largest U.S. military base in the Middle East, Al Udeid Air Base, which hosts nearly 11,000 U.S. service members.⁴⁶

In 2017, Saudi Arabia and the UAE were pressuring the U.S. to move the Al Udeid base away from Qatar. The Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a D.C. advocacy organization that does not disclose its funding sources, hosted a high-profile conference ginning up support for moving the air base.⁴⁷ The Emirati ambassador to the U.S., Yousef al-Otaiba, invited allies in Congress to take up the issue: “Maybe someone in Congress should have a hearing and just say, you know, ‘Should we consider moving it?’”⁴⁸ At one point, Trump himself appeared to consider the idea, telling the Christian Broadcasting Network that “If we ever have to leave [Al Udeid], we would have 10 countries willing to build us another one, believe me, and they will pay for it.”⁴⁹

⁴⁵ “War with Iran? The Prime Minister of Qatar is Being Attacked in the Media for Wanting to Stop It,” The Tucker Carlson Show, YouTube, March 7, 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kut47PODRSs>.

⁴⁶ “Citing Hamas Links, Draft Defense Bill Pushes for Review of U.S.–Qatar Relations,” Foundation for Defense of Democracies, July 9, 2024, <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2024/07/09/citing-hamas-links-draft-defense-bill-pushes-for-review-of-u-s-qatar-relations/>.

⁴⁷ “Qatar and the Muslim Brotherhood’s Global Affiliates,” Foundation for Defense of Democracies, June 2, 2017, <https://medium.com/@FDD/qatar-and-the-muslim-brotherhoods-global-affiliates-36f4fb18f38b>.

⁴⁸ Josh Lederman, “Emirati Ambassador: U.S. Should Rethink Its Air Base in Qatar,” *Military Times*, June 13, 2017, <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2017/06/13/emirati-ambassador-us-should-rethink-its-air-base-in-qatar/>.

⁴⁹ Christopher Woody, “Trump: The U.S. Is Ready to Leave One of Its Most Important Military Bases if the Gulf Crisis Worsens,” *Business Insider*, July 19, 2017, <https://www.businessinsider.com/trump-us-is-ready-to-leave-al-udeid-military-base-amid-gulf-crisis-2017-7>.

Qatar's lobbyists fought back against the campaign by distributing embassy talking points to congressional contacts asserting that "Qatar is America's strongest ally in fighting ISIS."⁵⁰ Al Udeid, the embassy said, was "the tip of the spear in the fight against" the terrorist organization, flying 300 sorties per day.⁵¹ On another occasion, Qatar's lobbyists distributed an article from *The National Interest* defending Al Udeid: "in addition to having paid the overwhelming majority of costs pertaining to Al Udeid, the Qatari government has also given Washington an unfettered ability to operate," at the base.⁵²

By January 2024, Qatar had seemingly fended off these attacks, inking a deal with the U.S. to extend the U.S.' military presence in the country for another 10 years.⁵³ However, when the Senate Armed Services Committee's draft of the annual defense bill came out a few months later, in July, it became clear that some members of Congress still wanted to upend U.S.–Qatar cooperation at the base. Section 1287 of the draft bill would have required the secretary of defense "to submit a report and provide a briefing to the congressional defense committees on the operational value of Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, taking into consideration the relationship of the Government of Qatar with Hamas and other terrorist organizations."⁵⁴

Qatar's lobbyists jumped into action. Moran Global Strategies had a series of phone calls with House Armed Services Committee Chair Adam Smith, a Washington Democrat, about the "necessity of Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar," and conversations with then–Rep. Adam Schiff, Democrat of California; Democratic Reps. Bill Keating of

⁵⁰ Audience Partners Worldwide LLC, "Informational Materials," Department of Justice, July 28, 2017, <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/6448-Informational-Materials-20170728-3.pdf>.

⁵¹ Audience Partners Worldwide LLC, "Informational Materials."

⁵² Mercury Public Affairs, "Informational Materials," Department of Justice, December 15, 2017, <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/6170-Informational-Materials-20171215-2.pdf>.

⁵³ Jonathan Landay and Kanishka Singh, "U.S. Reaches Deal to Extend Military Presence at Qatar Base – Source," Reuters, January 2, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/us-reaches-deal-extend-military-presence-qatar-base-source-2024-01-02/>.

⁵⁴ "National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2025," draft bill, 118th Congress, 2nd sess., https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/fy25_ndaa_bill_text.pdf.

Massachusetts and Chris Pappas of New Hampshire; and Democratic Sen. Mark Warner of Virginia, among others. Venable, meanwhile, texted the chief of staff of Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Roger Wicker, a Mississippi Democrat, throughout the week to discuss the National Defense Authorization Act, or NDAA. BGR Government Affairs called the Senate Armed Services Committee to discuss “Qatar language in the SASC approved FY25 NDAA.” Among other talking points, Qatar’s lobbyists pointed out that “Unlike most U.S. bases abroad, Qatar provides full funding and gives the United States great freedom in its operations there.”⁵⁵

Qatar’s lobbyists faced opposition from some Republican hawks. Rep. Andy Ogles of Tennessee and Sen. Rick Scott of Florida urged leadership to keep the section in the final text. “Thousands of our brave service members serve at Al Udeid, and we have an obligation to ensure our nation’s military installations are in the hands of trustworthy allies — not bankrollers of terrorist organizations,” said Ogles.⁵⁶ Ultimately, Qatar’s lobbyists won the day and the section was scrubbed from the final version of the defense bill.

Qatar’s lobbyists have also lobbied in favor of arms sales and to defend their designation as a major non-NATO ally. These Qatari priorities were once again threatened in 2024 by Ogles, who introduced the “Trust but Verify Act,” which would temporarily suspend Qatar’s major non-NATO ally status over allegations that Qatar is “funding and supporting Hamas as its leadership enjoys political refuge in Doha.” A few weeks before the deadline to submit amendments for the NDAA for fiscal year 2025, the UAE’s lobbyists spoke with Ogles several times on issues such as “congressional concerns regarding counterterrorism” and to “discuss FY25 NDAA member

⁵⁵ Venable LLP, “Informational Materials,” Department of Justice, June 5, 2024, <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/5931-Informational-Materials-20240605-20.pdf>.

⁵⁶ Andy Ogles, “Ogles, Scott Demand Report on Operational Value of Al-Udeid Air Base,” press release, October 24, 2024, <https://ogles.house.gov/media/press-releases/ogles-scott-demand-report-operational-value-al-udeid-air-base>.

amendments of interest to MENA region.”⁵⁷ Ogles submitted the bill as an amendment to the defense bill.⁵⁸

Meanwhile, Republican Sen. Ted Budd of North Carolina introduced legislation on the Senate side seeking to overturn Qatar’s designation as a major non–NATO ally.⁵⁹ Firms representing Qatar quickly worked to stop the legislation. BGR Government Affairs spoke with staffers from several key Committee on Foreign Relations members, including Democratic Sens. Chris Murphy of Connecticut and Chris Van Hollen of Maryland, as well as the sponsor of companion legislation in the House, Rep. Ann Wagner, Republican of Missouri.⁶⁰ Neither bill passed.

Needless to say, the work of Qatar’s lobbyists is paying dividends by thwarting attacks on the monarchy, but they’ve also worked to proactively strengthen the U.S. and Qatar’s formal defensive ties. In fact, Qatar has also quickly become one of the chief importers of U.S. military hardware. According to the State Department, Qatar has over \$26 billion in active government-to-government cases with the U.S., making it the U.S.’ second-largest foreign military sales partner in the world.⁶¹

Barzan Holdings, the “strategic investment arm” of the Qatari Ministry of Defense, is even registered under FARA with the explicit goal of aiding “in the procurement/development of airborne ISR [Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance] systems.”⁶² Most recently, the State Department approved a \$2 billion

⁵⁷ Akin, Gump, Strauss, Hauer, & Feld, LLP, “Supplemental Statement,” Department of Justice, July 30, 2024, <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/3492-Supplemental-Statement-20240730-42.pdf>.

⁵⁸ Andy Ogles, “Ogles, Biggs Introduce The ‘Trust But Verify’ Act,” press release, November 17, 2023, <https://ogles.house.gov/media/press-releases/ogles-biggs-introduce-trust-verify-act>.

⁵⁹ “Reviewing Qatar’s Major Non–NATO Ally Status Act of 2024,” S.4093, Sen. Ted Budd, 118th Congress, 2nd sess., introduced April 10, 2024, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/senate-bill/4093/all-actions>.

⁶⁰ “Reviewing Qatar’s Major Non–NATO Ally Status Act of 2024,” H.R.8190, Rep. Ann Wagner, 118th Congress, 2nd sess., introduced April 10, 2024, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/8190/all-actions>.

⁶¹ “U.S. Security Cooperation with Qatar,” Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, Department of State, January 20, 2025, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-security-cooperation-with-qatar>.

⁶² Barzan has invested in a number of start-up companies working on airborne intelligence, including U.S.–based Electra.aero, U.K.–based Arilis, and Qatar–based BQ Solutions, according to Pitchbook data. Barzan Aeronautical LLC, “Exhibit A to Registration Statement,” Department of Justice, February 11, 2019,

sale of eight MQ–9 Reapers, a General Dynamics drone that can either be autonomous or remotely piloted. MQ–9 drones are currently operated by only 11 countries, with Qatar being the only operator in the Middle East.⁶³

The Qatari Embassy and its lobbyists argue that weapons purchases like these support American jobs. Asked for comment about arms sales lobbying, a lobbyist working with the embassy candidly explained that “The lobbying the Embassy does reminds them [members of Congress] of the value Qatar adds to them and their constituents, not only for security and regional stability, but for the huge amount of jobs these military sales create and support.” As evidence of this, a briefing pack from January distributed to congressional offices claims that Qatar’s purchase of F–15 fighter jets will support 24,000 U.S. jobs and “allowed for Boeing’s St. Louis manufacturing plant to continue operations.”⁶⁴ While job figures like these are notoriously inflated, they can be a powerful way to secure the support of senators and representatives whose states and districts would be seen to benefit from the job windfall.⁶⁵

Think tanks and higher education

Qatar is the third-largest donor to think tanks in the U.S., giving upward of \$9.1 million over the past five years.⁶⁶ As documented in the Quincy Institute brief “Big Ideas and Big

<https://efile.fara.gov/docs/6635-Exhibit-AB-20190211-1.pdf>; Federico Maccioni, “Qatar’s Defence Firm Barzan to Sign First Deal with Emirati Company,” Reuters, February 18, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/qatars-defence-firm-barzan-sign-first-deal-with-emirati-company-2025-02-17/>.

⁶³ Aaron Spray, “The Countries Acquiring MQ-9B SkyGuardian Drones,” *Simple Flying*, December 19, 2024, <https://simpleflying.com/countries-acquiring-mq-9b-skyguardian-drones/>.

⁶⁴ Venable LLC, “Informational Materials,” June 2024, <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/5931-Informational-Materials-20240605-20.pdf>.

⁶⁵ William Hartung, “Biden Tries to Outdo Trump in Using Jobs to Justify Arms Transfers,” *Forbes*, December 5, 2023, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/williamhartung/2023/12/05/biden-tries-to-outdo-trump-in-using-jobs-to-justify-arms-transfers/>.

⁶⁶ Ben Freeman and Nick Cleveland-Stout, “Big Ideas and Big Money: Think Tank Funding in America,” Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, January 3, 2025, <https://quincyinst.org/research/big-ideas-and-big-money-think-tank-funding-in-america/#executive-summary>.

Money,” foreign government-funded think tanks often make policy recommendations that would be beneficial to their donors.⁶⁷ As we document in that report, some foreign government donors stipulate a collaborative partnership, pay for specific research reports, and are given the opportunity to edit research before it is published.

But the Qatari government has taken a different approach to think tank engagement. The authors of this brief have reviewed a handful of recent funding agreements between the Qatar Embassy and Washington think tanks, all of which contain a clause stipulating they would not exercise any governance over the think tank recipients. For instance, one agreement with a prominent think tank, anonymized for the purposes of this brief, states that “for the avoidance of doubt, Embassy assumes no responsibility for the Project, and shall exercise no governance or management role with respect to the Project or the Grantee.”

⁶⁷ Freeman, “Big Ideas and Big Money.”

Top Think Tank Recipients of Qatari Funding, 2019–23	
Think Tank	Minimum Amount Received
Brookings Institution	\$6,000,000
Stimson Center	\$2,315,000
Middle East Institute	\$380,000
RAND	\$300,000
Center for Strategic and International Studies	\$100,000
Wilson Center	\$100,000
Aspen Institute	Unknown Amount

Figures sourced from think tank reports and available at thinktankfundingtracker.org.

Figure 4

However, that was not always the case. In 2007, Qatar began its relationship with the Brookings Institution, helping to found a Doha–based branch of Brookings. The document that established the Brookings Doha Center revealed a highly collaborative arrangement between the think tank and Qatar.⁶⁸ For instance, the center director was required to “engage in regular consultation with [the foreign ministry] regarding the development and ongoing operations of the Center.” The document also required the director and relevant personnel to submit its agenda to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

⁶⁸ Michael Shaffer, “He Tried to Reform the Way a Top D.C. Think Tank Gets Money. Now the FBI Is Looking Into Him,” *Politico*, June 17, 2022, <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2022/06/17/john-allen-brookings-institution-fbi-qatar-00040380>.

The relationship turned to scandal in 2022, when Gen. John Allen, Ret., at the time the president of Brookings, resigned amid an FBI probe into whether he had acted as an unregistered foreign agent of Qatar. Allen allegedly lobbied National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster to lift the blockade on behalf of Qatar and “agreed to solicit potential op-ed authors as mouthpieces for the Qatari view.” The influence strategy sought to leverage Qatar’s close defense relationship with the U.S. — including a pending F–15 fighter jet deal and the Al Udeid Air Base — in order to exert influence on the U.S. National Security Council.⁶⁹ The Department of Justice never brought formal charges against Allen, and the FBI closed the investigation in January 2023. Ironically, it was under Allen’s stewardship that Brookings wound down its Doha center and Qatari funding.⁷⁰ Brookings has not reported a contribution from Qatar in their annual reports since 2021.⁷¹

As with think tanks, Qatar has made extraordinary investments in the soft influence power of higher education. In fact, Qatar has given more money, by far, to American higher education than any other country in the world. According to the Department of Education’s Foreign Gift and Contract data, Qatar has given \$6.25 billion to American colleges and universities since 2001.⁷² Nearly all — 97 percent — of that money has gone to just six universities: Cornell (\$2.1 billion), Texas A&M (\$993 million), Carnegie Mellon (\$968 million), Georgetown (\$928 million), Northwestern (\$714 million), and Virginia Commonwealth (\$334 million), with the lion’s share of this funding going to support these universities’ branch campuses in Qatar’s Education City.

This funding has drawn the ire of lawmakers who allege that Qatar is funding pro–Palestine protests at U.S. universities. In a series of hearings before the House

⁶⁹ Case no. 2:22-MJ-1530, United States District Court for the Central District of California, April 15, 2022, <https://int.nyt.com/data/documenttools/dc-lobby-court-documents/df4dbfe3fd26ed7a/full.pdf>.

⁷⁰ Shaffer, “He Tried to Reform.”

⁷¹ “Country Page: Qatar,” Think Tank Funding Tracker, accessed August 7, 2025, <https://thinktankfundingtracker.org/donor/qatar/>.

⁷² “Section 117 Foreign Gift and Contract Data,” Department of Education, accessed August 7, 2025, <https://fsapartners.ed.gov/knowledge-center/topics/section-117-foreign-gift-and-contract-reporting/section-117-foreign-gift-and-contract-data>.

Committee on Education and Workforce, at least nine different members of Congress questioned university administration officials about Qatari funding of their universities. The organization that claimed credit for these hearings — the Institute for the Study of Global Antisemitism and Policy, or ISGAP — has been funded by the Israeli government itself.⁷³ *Forward* reported that, in 2018, ISGAP received 80 percent of its annual revenue from the Israeli government.⁷⁴ At a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing in May last year, then-Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines said she had not seen any evidence that Qatar was supporting the campus protests.⁷⁵

Crucially, approximately 90 percent of Qatar’s higher education funding remains in Qatar, and more than 75 percent of the students at these universities are Qatari citizens or the family members of expats living in Qatar.⁷⁶

⁷³ Lee Fang and Jack Poulson, “Israeli Documents Show Expansive Government Effort to Shape U.S. Discourse around Gaza War,” *The Guardian*, June 24, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/jun/24/israel-fund-us-university-protest-gaza-antisemitism>.

⁷⁴ Aiden Pink, “Think Tank Failed to Disclose Six-Figure Grant from Israeli Government,” *Forward*, August 31, 2020, <https://forward.com/israel/453339/israel-antisemitism-isgap-think-tank-foreign-funding/>.

⁷⁵ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Armed Services, Hearing to Receive Testimony on Worldwide Threats, 118th Cong., 2nd sess., May 2, 2024, <https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/5224fulltranscript.pdf>.

⁷⁶ Alex Usher, “Building the Future: Inside Qatar Foundation’s Vision for Education and Innovation,” Higher Education Strategy Associates, September 26, 2024, <https://higheredstrategy.com/building-the-future-inside-qatar-foundations-vision-for-education-and-innovation/>.

Top University Recipients of Qatari Funding, 2001–Present	
School	Amount
Cornell University	\$2,129,680,748
Texas A&M University	\$992,838,663
Carnegie Mellon University	\$967,574,837
Georgetown University	\$927,598,923
Northwestern University	\$713,686,025
Virginia Commonwealth University	\$333,798,012

Figures sourced from Department of Education Foreign Gift and Contract Reporting data at fsapartners.ed.gov.

Figure 5

The statistics above point to something ignored by Qatar’s critics: Criticism claiming that Qatar’s funding of higher education creates censorship relies heavily on correlation and frequently ignores the fact that the vast majority of funding does not go to U.S. campuses. To be sure, there are known instances of the Qatari government infringing on academic freedom, but these are all happening at universities *in Qatar*, which operate under Qatari laws that, among other things, prohibit criticism of the emir.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ “2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Qatar,” U.S. Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/qatar/>.

For instance, revelations surfaced that Texas A&M's contract with the Qatar Foundation did, in fact, include provisions that gave the foundation significant control of the university's activities in Education City. The contract included sections that give the Qatar Foundation "high-level governance of the Research program, including the strategic direction, scope, and priorities of the Research program," as well as a stipulation that, "The emphasis of the Research program shall be on issues of interest to the State of Qatar and the research priorities of Qatar and Qatar Foundation."⁷⁸ Ultimately, this controversy brought enough pressure that Texas A&M's board decided to shutter the Qatar campus by 2028.⁷⁹

But it is critical to recognize that these impacts on the educational environment are happening in Qatar — not the U.S., as Qatar's critics allege. Bill Bennett, President Reagan's former secretary of education, was hired as a lobbyist by Qatar in early July 2025 to tackle these allegations head-on.⁸⁰ In an op-ed for *The Hill* published in August, Bennett noted that when contractual agreements from Education City "are separated out, as the Department of Education's database itself does, Qatar ranks thirty-fifth in payments to U.S. colleges, behind countries like Thailand."⁸¹

⁷⁸ "Texas A&M and Qatar Foundation Agreement," uploaded to Scribd by Campus Reform, accessed August 7, 2025, https://www.scribd.com/document/758773266/Texas-A-M-and-Qatar-Foundation-Agreement#fullscreen&from_embed.

⁷⁹ Jim Vertuno, "Texas A&M to Close Qatar Campus as School's Board Notes Instability in Middle East as Factor," Associated Press, February 9, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/texas-am-qatar-campus-close-249608efa0df8f16fc2bf82f51a1bb12>.

⁸⁰ William Bennett, "Exhibit A to Registration Statement," Department of Justice, July 3, 2025, <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/7620-Exhibit-AB-20250703-1.pdf>.

⁸¹ William Bennett, "The Facts about Qatar's Role in Education and Why I Care," *The Hill*, August 15, 2025, <https://thehill.com/opinion/education/5448499-the-facts-about-qatars-role-in-education-and-why-i-care/>.

Qatari business investments beget political influence in the U.S.

In April 2017, Kushner Companies met with the Qatari finance minister to discuss a potential deal.⁸² Charles Kushner, the father of Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, was in trouble. His Kushner real estate empire had purchased 666 Fifth Avenue in New York City for a whopping \$1.8 billion in 2007 — a record for the highest amount of any New York office tower at the time — but the 2008 financial crisis halved the value of the building.⁸³ By 2017, Kushner needed help in refinancing the building, and, naturally, the oil-rich Gulf country of Qatar seemed a suitable option. Kushner met with the Qataris and asked them for nearly \$1 billion, which the Qataris declined.⁸⁴ But in doing so, the Qataris overlooked an important consideration in the deal: Charles' son Jared had just been named senior adviser to the Trump White House. A few weeks later, Jared Kushner met with the rulers of Saudi Arabia and the UAE and greenlit a secret plan to blockade Qatar.⁸⁵ One analyst present at the Kushner–Qatar meeting asked, “If they had given Kushner the money, would there have been a blockade? I don't think so.”⁸⁶

The Qataris learned their lesson: They would have to splash money around Trump World to make inroads with the administration. For starters, Brookfield Asset Management, whose second-largest investor is Qatar, bought out the problematic 666 Fifth Avenue property in 2018.⁸⁷ Qatar says it had “absolutely no involvement in the 666 Fifth Avenue

⁸² Ryan Goodman and Julia Brooks, “Timeline on Jared Kushner, Qatar, 666 Fifth Avenue, and White House Policy,” Just Security, March 11, 2020, <https://www.justsecurity.org/69094/timeline-on-jared-kushner-qatar-666-fifth-avenue-and-white-house-policy/>.

⁸³ Goodman, “Timeline on Jared Kushner.”

⁸⁴ Goodman, “Timeline on Jared Kushner.”

⁸⁵ Vicky Ward, “Jared Kushner May Have an Ethics Problem — to the Tune of \$90m,” *The Guardian*, June 16, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jun/15/jared-kushner-cadre-corruption-ethics-foreign-funding>.

⁸⁶ Goodman, “Timeline on Jared Kushner.”

⁸⁷ Goodman, “Timeline on Jared Kushner.”

development,” but some suspected a fusion of politics and business was at the heart of the decision.⁸⁸

Qatar’s sovereign wealth fund also invested heavily in Kushner’s private equity firm, Affinity Partners. Kushner revealed that in 2024 alone, Qatar and UAE–based Lunate contributed a combined \$1.5 billion to his firm.⁸⁹ But Qatar did not stop there. It also began investing in real estate properties with other figures in Trump World. In 2023, the Qatari Investment Authority, or QIA, snapped up the Park Lane Hotel in Manhattan from the UAE’s Mubadala and Steve Witkoff’s Witkoff Group. Witkoff is currently Trump’s special envoy to the Middle East and a friend of Trump going back some 40 years; Witkoff advised Trump on tax breaks during his first term, and Trump attended Witkoff’s son’s wedding in 2022.⁹⁰

Qatari Royal Sheikh Sultan bin Jassim Al Thani invested \$50 million in Newsmax, the Trump–endorsed media company, in 2019 and 2020. Two years later, Newsmax executives told employees to avoid discussion of human rights issues ahead of Qatar’s hosting the World Cup in 2022. “We were not allowed to criticize Qatar. We were told

⁸⁸ Chair of the Senate Committee on Finance Ron Wyden, Democrat of Oregon, and Chair of the House Committee on Oversight and Reform Caroline Maloney, Democrat of New York, asked for more information about the transactions: “The economic blockade of Qatar may have been used as leverage for the 666 Fifth Avenue bailout and was not supported by other officials, including the Secretaries of State and Defense,” they wrote. See Sen. Ron Wyden and Rep. Caroline Maloney, letter to Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, December 6, 2022, <https://oversightdemocrats.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/democrats-oversight.house.gov/files/2022-12-06.CBM%20Wyden%20to%20Austin-DOD%20re%20Kushner%20Conflict%20of%20Interest%20%281%29.pdf>. On Qatar’s denial of involvement, see Dmitry Zhdannikov, Herbert Lash, and Saeed Azhar, “Qatar Revamps Investment Strategy after Kushner Building Bailout,” Reuters, February 11, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/qatar-revamps-investment-strategy-after-kushner-building-bailout-idUSKCN1Q00W3/>.

⁸⁹ “Kushner’s Affinity’s Assets Jump to \$4.8 Billion after Gulf Cash Injection,” Reuters, March 28, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/business/finance/kushners-affinitys-assets-jump-48-billion-after-gulf-cash-injection-2025-03-28/>.

⁹⁰ On the tax breaks, see Erik Uebelacker, “Trump’s Longtime Buddy Testifies as Defense Expert in Manhattan Fraud Case,” Courthouse News Service, November 14, 2023, <https://www.courthousenews.com/trumps-longtime-buddy-testifies-as-defense-expert-in-manhattan-fraud-case/>; Katherine Kallergis, “Nuptials Mar-a-Lago Style: Donald Trump, Don Peebles, Barry Sternlicht among Real Estate Elite at Witkoff Wedding,” *The Real Deal*, May 3, 2022, <https://therealdeal.com/miami/2022/05/03/nuptials-mar-a-lago-style-donald-trump-don-peebles-barry-sternlicht-among-real-estate-elite-at-witkoff-wedding/>.

very clearly from the top down, no touching this,” one employee told the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists. An analysis of articles with “Qatar” in the title on Newsmax’s website suggests that the outlet underwent some change. Before the investment, Newsmax ran pieces with titles such as “Human Rights Abuses Rampant in Qatar” and “Amnesty Report Alleges Labor Abuse at Qatar World Cup Venue.”⁹¹ Since then, it has published articles with a much more favorable bent toward Qatar, including “Qatar: A Controversial but Invaluable U.S. Ally in the Mideast.”⁹² Since this investment comes from a citizen rather than the government, Newsmax has avoided some of the same criticism directed at the influential government-owned Al Jazeera network.

The QIA has also invested in a number of Elon Musk’s ventures. In 2022, the sovereign wealth fund pitched in \$375 million for Musk’s buyout of Twitter.⁹³ Qatar is also a major investor in Musk’s xAI, which merged with X in March 2025.⁹⁴ According to Pitchbook data, nearly half of the QIA’s investments are based in the U.S. This includes a number of national security companies such as Databricks (an AI company funded by the CIA’s venture arm), BETA Technologies, Advanced Integration Technology, and Snyk.⁹⁵ In 2020, Qatar also became an investor in several properties across Arlington, Virginia, including the skyscrapers that house the offices of RTX, Northrop Grumman, and U.K.–defense contractor BAE Systems. In 2023, the QIA even became the first sovereign wealth fund to invest in one of the major professional sports leagues in the U.S., when it

⁹¹ Jeffrey Goldberg, “Human Rights Abuses Rampant in Qatar,” Newsmax, March 17, 2014, <https://www.newsmax.com/jeffrey-goldberg/qatar-rights-jazeera/2014/03/17/id/559935/>; “Amnesty Report Alleges Labor Abuse at Qatar World Cup Venue,” NewsmaxWorld, March 30, 2016, <https://www.newsmax.com/world/globaltalk/ml-qatar-labor/2016/03/30/id/721573/>.

⁹² Bernard Kerik, “Qatar: A Controversial but Invaluable U.S. Ally in the Mideast,” Newsmax, December 31, 2024, <https://www.newsmax.com/bernardkerik/assad-damascus-doha/2024/12/31/id/1193453/>.

⁹³ “Qatar Fund Contributes \$375m to Elon’s Musk’ Twitter Buyout,” *The New Arab*, May 5, 2022, <https://www.newarab.com/news/qatar-fund-chips-375m-elon-musks-twitter-buyout>.

⁹⁴ Martin Peers, “Musk Solves X,” *The Information*, March 28, 2025, <https://www.theinformation.com/articles/musk-solves-x>.

⁹⁵ Jon Keegan, “These Are the AI Companies that the CIA Is Investing In,” *Sherwood*, September 20, 2024, <https://sherwood.news/business/ai-companies-cia-is-investing-in/>.

bought a stake in Monumental Sports, which owns D.C.'s professional hockey, men's basketball, and women's basketball teams.⁹⁶

In 2025, Qatar's economic investments in the U.S. have continued unabated. At the Qatar Economic Forum this year, for example, the QIA announced it would invest a whopping \$500 billion in the U.S. economy over the next decade.⁹⁷ A lobbyist working with the embassy was quick to argue that not all of that is overtly political. "The idea that every dollar Qatar spends in the United States is 'influence' is absurd," they said. However, on many occasions, their economic prowess has reaped political opportunity.

Conclusion

As documented in this brief, numerous Qatar critics — from Tucker Carlson to Mike Huckabee — are now singing Qatar's praises. And, most importantly for Qatar, Donald Trump has gone from seemingly cheering on a blockade of Qatar by its large, powerful neighbors to visiting Doha and receiving a luxury jet from the Qataris. While there are many reasons for Qatar's ascendance, the country's influence efforts in the U.S. were unquestionably a key driver of Qatar's transition from vilified pariah to powerhouse in U.S. foreign policy circles.

From skyscrapers to K Street lobbyists, Qatar has spared few expenses when it comes to garnering influence in America. The return on that investment has been extraordinary for Qatar. Qatar has deepened security and economic ties with the U.S., become one of the top recipients of U.S. arms sales, one of the top foreign investors in the U.S., and has inked billions of dollars of deals with companies run by Trump's family and his close associates.

⁹⁶ "Monumental Sports & Entertainment Announces Qatar Investment Authority as Minority Investor," Monumental Sports & Entertainment press release, July 10, 2023, <https://monumentalsports.com/2023/07/monumental-sports-entertainment-announces-qatar-investment-authority-as-minority-investor/>.

⁹⁷ Mohammed Sergie, "Qatar Pledges to Invest \$500B in the U.S.," *Semafor*, May 21, 2025, <https://www.semafor.com/article/05/21/2025/qatar-pledges-to-invest-500b-in-the-us>.

In return, the U.S. has received additional Qatari support for Al Udeid Air Base, and numerous politicians have commended Qatar's role as a mediator in a variety of international crises, most notably the Israel–Gaza war. Qatar's investments in U.S. firms will also undoubtedly benefit the U.S. economy. Perhaps most notably, Qatar Airways' agreement to purchase upward of 210 Boeing planes will bring tens of billions of Qatari dollars into the seemingly flailing U.S. airline manufacturer, as well as support thousands of jobs, if not the 400,000 jobs that Boeing has claimed.⁹⁸

While all of that is a boon to U.S. interests, as with any foreign influence operation, Qatar's unprecedented access to and influence on Trump, at the very least, presents a risk of the president putting personal gain over national gain when it comes to Qatar. While it's uncertain just how far the Trump administration will go to support Qatari interests, one thing is certain: Qatar is in a remarkable position to steer Trump, and U.S. foreign policy, in its favor. How they will use that influence remains unknown, but it is a factor that needs to be taken into account.

⁹⁸ "Boeing and Qatar Airways Announce Historic Order for up to 210 Widebody Airplanes," Boeing press release, May 14, 2025, <https://investors.boeing.com/investors/news/press-release-details/2025/Boeing-and-Qatar-Airways-Announce-Historic-Order-for-up-to-210-Widebody-Airplanes/default.aspx>.

About the authors

Ben Freeman is director of the Democratizing Foreign Policy program at the Quincy Institute. He investigates money in politics, defense spending, and foreign influence in America. He is the author of *The Foreign Policy Auction*, which was the first book to systematically analyze the foreign influence industry in the United States. Before joining the Quincy Institute, Ben founded the Foreign Influence Transparency Initiative at the Center for International Policy, served as deputy director of the National Security program at Third Way, and was a National Security Fellow at the Project On Government Oversight. At the latter, he spear-headed creation of the “Foreign Influence Database,” a repository of propaganda distributed by foreign agents that was previously unavailable online.

Ben earned a Ph.D. from Texas A&M University, where he taught in the political science department and the Bush School of Government and Public Service. He is currently a faculty member at the Institute for Defense and Business, where he teaches seminars on the defense budget process and the foreign influence industry.

His work has appeared in numerous media outlets, including the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Politico*. Ben has appeared on CNN, BBC, NPR, “Fresh Air with Terry Gross” and numerous other media outlets. He has also testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Nick Cleveland-Stout is a research associate in the Democratizing Foreign Policy program at the Quincy Institute. Previously, he conducted research on U.S.–Brazil relations as a 2023 Fulbright Fellow at the Federal University of Santa Catarina, with a particular focus on the influence of American think tanks in Brazil. Nick is also a former Marcellus Policy Fellow with the John Quincy Adams Society, where he authored “The Case for a ‘Green BRAC.’” His work has appeared in *Responsible Statecraft*, *The Nation*,

The Intercept, *The Brazilian Report*, *Inkstick*, and *The National Interest*. Nick earned his B.A. from Colorado College, where he studied political science.

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2000 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
7th floor
Washington, DC 20006

+1 202-800-4662
info@quincyinst.org
www.quincyinst.org