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Bahrain: Unrest, Security, and U.S. Policy

Updated December 4, 2018

Congressional Research Service
https://crsreports.congress.gov
95-1013

CRS REPORT
Prepared for Members and
Committees of Congress

Summary

An uprising against Bahrain's Al Khalifa ruling family that began on February 14, 2011, has diminished in intensity, but punishments of oppositionists and periodic demonstrations continue. The mostly Shiite opposition to the Sunni-minority-led regime has not achieved its goal of establishing a constitutional monarchy, but the unrest has compelled the ruling family to undertake some modest reforms. The mainstream opposition uses peaceful forms of dissent, but small factions, reportedly backed by Iran, have claimed responsibility for bombings and other attacks on security officials. Elections for a legislative body, held most recently during November 24-December 1, 2018, have been marred by the banning of opposition political societies and allegations of gerrymandering to prevent opposition victories.

The Bahrain government's repression has presented a policy dilemma for the United States because Bahrain is a longtime ally that is pivotal to maintaining Persian Gulf security. The country has hosted a U.S. naval command headquarters for the Gulf region since 1948; the United States and Bahrain have had a formal Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) since 1991; and Bahrain was designated by the United States as a "major non-NATO ally" in 2002. There are over 7,000 U.S. forces, mostly Navy, in Bahrain. Bahrain relies on U.S.-made arms, but, because of the government's use of force against protesters, the Obama Administration held up some new weapons sales to Bahrain and curtailed U.S. assistance to Bahrain's internal security organizations. In 2014, Bahrain joined the U.S.-led coalition against the Islamic State and flew strikes against the group's fighters in Syria that year, and has expressed willingness to join a U.S.-backed concept for a broad Arab coalition to counter Iran, the "Middle East Strategic Alliance."

The Trump Administration has prioritized countering Iran and addressing other regional security issues, aligning the Administration closely with Bahrain's leadership on that issue. In keeping with that approach, the Administration lifted conditionality on major arms sales to Bahrain's military and has corroborated Bahrain leadership assertions that Iran is providing material support to violent opposition factions in Bahrain. Critics of the policy assert that the Administration is ignoring human rights concerns in the interests of countering Iran.

Within the Gulf Cooperation Council alliance (GCC: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, and Oman), Bahrain generally supports Saudi policies. In March 2015, it joined Saudi Arabia-led military action to try to restore the government of Yemen that was ousted by Iran-backed Houthi rebels. In June 2017, it joined a Saudi and UAE move to isolate Qatar for its purported support for Muslim Brotherhood-linked Islamist movements, accusing Qatar of hosting Bahraini dissidents and of allying with Iran.

Bahrain has fewer financial resources than do most of the other GCC states and has always had difficulty improving the living standards of the Shiite majority. The unrest has, in turn, further strained Bahrain's economy by driving away potential foreign investment in Bahrain, compounding the effect of a decline in oil prices from 2014 levels. In October 2018, three GCC states assembled an aid package of $10 billion to reduce the strain on Bahrain's budget. Bahrain's small oil exports emanate primarily from an oil field in Saudi Arabia that the Saudi government has set aside for Bahrain's use, although a major new oil and gas discovery off Bahrain's coast was reported in early 2018. In 2004, the United States and Bahrain signed a free trade agreement (FTA); legislation implementing it was signed January 11, 2006 (P.L. 109-169). Some U.S. labor organizations assert that Bahrain's arrests of dissenting workers should void the FTA.

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The Political Structure, Reform, and Human Rights[1]

The site of the ancient Bronze Age civilization of Dilmun, Bahrain was a trade hub linking Mesopotamia and the Indus valley until a drop in trade from India caused the Dilmun civilization to decline around 2,000 B.C. The inhabitants of Bahrain converted to Islam in the 7th century. Bahrain subsequently fell under the control of Islamic caliphates based in Damascus, then Baghdad, and later Persian, Omani, and Portuguese forces.

The Al Khalifa family, which is Sunni Muslim and generally not as religiously conservative as the leaders of neighboring Saudi Arabia, has ruled Bahrain since 1783. That year, the family, a branch of the Bani Utbah tribe, left the Saudi peninsula and captured a Persian garrison controlling the island. In 1830, the ruling family signed a treaty establishing Bahrain as a protectorate of Britain, which was then the dominant power in the Persian Gulf. In the 1930s, Reza Shah Pahlavi of Iran unsuccessfully sought to deny Bahrain the right to grant oil concessions to the United States and Britain. As Britain reduced its military presence in the Gulf in 1968, Bahrain and the other smaller Persian Gulf emirates (principalities) sought a permanent status. A 1970 U.N. survey (some refer to it as a "referendum") determined that Bahrain's inhabitants did not want to join with Iran, a finding that was endorsed by U.N. Security Council Resolution 278 and recognized formally by Iran's parliament. Bahrain negotiated with eight other Persian Gulf emirates during 1970-1971 to try to form a federation, but Bahrain and Qatar each ultimately decided to become independent, and Bahrain became independent on August 15, 1971. The seven other emirates formed the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

The Ruling Family and Its Dynamics

Bahrain is led by King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa (68 years old, born January 1950), who succeeded his father, Shaykh Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa, upon his death in March 1999. Educated at Sandhurst Military Academy in Britain, King Hamad was previously commander of the Bahraini Defense Forces (BDF). The king is considered to be a proponent of accommodation with Bahrain's Shiites, who constitute a majority of the citizenry[2] but many of whom have long asserted they are treated as "second class citizens," deprived of political power and of a fair share of the nation's economic wealth. About 25% of the citizen population is age 14 or younger.

Within the upper echelons of the ruling family, the most active proponent of accommodation with the Shiite opposition is the king's son and designated successor, the U.S.- and U.K.-educated Crown Prince Shaykh Salman bin Hamad, who is about 50 years old. The Crown Prince and his allies, including Deputy Prime Minister Muhammad bin Mubarak Al Khalifa and Foreign Minister Khalid bin Ahmad bin Muhammad Al Khalifa,[3] assert that further reforms should be considered in order to calm Bahrain's internal strife. The Crown Prince and his faction were strengthened by his appointment in 2013 to a newly created position of First Deputy Prime Minister, staffed with young, well-educated reformists. A younger son of the king, Shaykh Nasser

[1] Some of the information in this section is from recent State Department human rights reports. CRS has no means of independently investigating the human rights situation in Bahrain.

[2] Government officials dispute that the Shiite community is as large a majority as the 70% figure used in most factbooks and academic work on Bahrain. The Shiite community in Bahrain consists of the more numerous "Baharna," who are of Arab ethnicity and descended from Arab tribes who inhabited the area from pre-Islamic times. Shiites of Persian ethnicity, referred to as Ajam, arrived in Bahrain over the past 400 years and are less numerous than the Baharna. The Ajam speak Persian and generally do not integrate with the Baharna or with Sunni Arabs.

[3] The foreign minister's name is similar to, but slightly different from, that of the hardline Royal Court Minister.

bin Hamad Al Khalifa, who is about 32 years old, could potentially succeed King Hamad should Salman step aside as heir apparent.[4] The Crown Prince's wife, Shaykha Hala, age unknown, passed away in June 2018.

The "antireform" faction—who assert that concessions to the Shiite majority cause it to increase its political demands—is led by the King's uncle (the brother of the late Amir Isa), Prime Minister Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, who has been in position since Bahrain's independence in 1971. He is about 82 years old but still active, and the King is likely unwilling to risk unrest within the ruling family by removing him. The Prime Minister's allies include Minister of the Royal Court Khalid bin Ahmad bin Salman Al Khalifa[5] and his brother, BDF Commander Khalifa bin Ahmad Al Khalifa. These brothers are known as "Khawalids"—they hail from a branch of the ruling family traced to a Khalid bin Ali Al Khalifa—and oppose compromise with the Shiite opposition.[6] The Khawalids reportedly have allies throughout the security and intelligence services and the judiciary. In September 2013, Bahrain appointed BDF Lieutenant Colonel Abdullah bin Muhammad bin Rashid Al Khalifa as Ambassador to the United States.

Executive and Legislative Powers

The king, working through the Prime Minister and the cabinet, has broad powers, including appointing all ministers and judges and amending the constitution. Al Khalifa family members hold 12 out of 26 cabinet posts, including the ministries of defense, interior (internal security), and foreign affairs. Typical Bahrain cabinets include five or six Shiite ministers.

Upon taking office, Hamad assumed the title of king—a title that implies more accountability than the former title "Amir." He held a referendum on February 14, 2001, that adopted a "National Action Charter," provisions of which were incorporated into a new constitution issued by the King in 2002. However, many Shiites and reform-minded Sunnis criticized the government for not putting the new constitution to a ratification referendum and for deviating from the 1973 constitution by establishing an all-appointed *Shura* (consultative) *Council* of equal size (40 seats each) of the elected *Council of Representatives* (COR).[7] Together, these bodies constitute the National Assembly. The government has tended to appoint generally more educated, pro-Western, and progovernment members to the Shura Council. There is no quota for women in the body.

- The Assembly only partially checks government power, despite constitutional amendments of May 2012 that gave the body greater authority. The amendments declared the elected COR as the presiding chamber of the Assembly, enhancing its authority on issues on which the two chambers disagree.
- The National Assembly does not have the power to confirm individual cabinet appointments, but as of 2012, it has had the power to reject the government's four-year work plan—and therefore the whole cabinet. The COR has always had the power to remove individual ministers through a vote of no-confidence (by two-thirds majority). The COR can also, by a two-thirds majority, declare "non-

[4] Simon Henderson. "Gulf Succession: Qatar's Model Could be a Way Forward." Washington Institute for Near East Policy, October 25, 2016.

[5] The name of this official is similar to that of the Foreign Minister, Khalid bin Ahmad bin Mohammad Al Khalifa.

[6] Differences between the *khawalids* and others in the family are discussed in, Charles Levinson. "A Palace Rift in Persian Gulf Bedevils Key U.S. Navy Base." Wall Street Journal, February 20, 2013.

[7] This body is also referred to as the Council of Deputies (Majles al-Nawwab).

cooperation" with the Prime Minister, but the king rules on whether to dismiss the Prime Minister or disband the COR. These authorities have not been used.

- Either chamber of the National Assembly can originate legislation but enactment into law requires concurrence by the king.[8] Prior to the May 2012 constitutional amendments, only the COR could originate legislation. The king's "veto" can be overridden by a two-thirds majority vote of both chambers. A 2012 decree gives the National Assembly the ability to recommend constitutional amendments, which are vetted by a "Legislation and Legal Opinion Commission" before consideration by the king.

The adoption of the National Charter and other early reforms instituted by King Hamad, although still short of the Shiite majority's expectations, were more extensive than those made by his father, Amir Isa. Amir Isa's most significant reform was his establishment in late 1992 of a 30-member all-appointed Consultative Council, whose mandate was limited to commenting on government-proposed laws. In June 1996, he expanded it to 40 members. However, that body did not satisfy the demands of both Shiites and Sunnis for the restoration of the elected national assembly that was established under the 1973 constitution but abolished in August 1975 because of Sunni-Shiite tensions. Amir Isa's refusal to restore an elected Assembly was at least partly responsible for sparking daily Shiite-led antigovernment violence during 1994-1998.

Political Groups and Elections

COR elections have been held every four years since 2002, each time generating substantial tension over perceived government efforts to deny Shiites a majority in the COR. The Shiite opposition has sought, unsuccessfully to date, to establish election processes and district boundaries that would allow them to translate their numbers into political strength. If no candidate in a district wins more than 50% in the first round, a runoff is held one week later.

Political parties are banned, but factions organize as functionally equivalent "political societies":

- *Wifaq* (Accord National Islamic Society) is the most prominent Shiite political society. Its officials have, at times, engaged with the government in and outside of formal "national dialogues" since the 2011 uprising began. *Wifaq*'s leaders are Secretary-General and Shiite cleric Shaykh Ali al-Salman and his deputy Khalil al-Marzuq. Shaykh Salman remains jailed. Another top figure in the faction is the 79-year-old Shiite cleric Isa Qasim, whose citizenship was revoked on June 20, 2016. In 2016, Bahraini courts approved government requests to dissolve *Wifaq* entirely and to seize and auction off its assets. *Wifaq* allies include the National Democratic Action Society, the National Democratic Assembly, the Democratic Progressive Tribune, and Al Ekhaa.
- *Al Haq* (Movement of Freedom and Democracy), a small Shiite faction, is outlawed because of its calls for outright change of regime and has boycotted all the COR elections. Its key leaders, Dr. Abduljalil Alsingace and Hassan Mushaima, have been imprisoned since the uprising, and there have been allegations that they are sometimes denied adequate medical care.
- The *Bahrain Islamic Action Society*, a small Shiite faction, also is outlawed. It is a successor to the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain (IFLB), a party linked to alleged Iran-backed plots to overthrow Bahrain's government in the 1980s and 1990s. Another IFLB offshoot, *Amal*, has ties to radical Shiite clerics

[8] Before the May 2012 constitutional amendments, only the COR could draft legislation.

in Iran. Amal's leader, Shaykh Muhammad Ali al-Mafoodh, has been in prison since 2011, and Amal was outlawed in 2012.

- *Waad* ("promise") is a secular opposition group that includes both Sunnis and Shiites. Its former leader, Ibrahim Sharif, has been repeatedly arrested, released, and rearrested. Its current leader is Sami Fuad Sayedi. On May 31, 2017, the High Civil Court approved a government request to dissolve it.
- *Sunni Islamists*. Among the prominent Sunni factions are *Minbar* (Arabic for "platform"), an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, and *Al Asala*, which is a harder-line "Salafist" political society. Smaller Sunni Islamist factions include *Al Saff*, the *Islamic Shura Society*, and the *Al Wasat Al Arabi Islamic Society*. In June 2011, a non-Islamist, generally progovernment Sunni political coalition—the *National Unity Assembly (NUA)*—was formed as a response to the uprising.

Preuprising Elections

In several elections held during 2002-2010, which are generally held in the fall of the year they are held, tensions between the Shiite majority and the regime escalated.

- *October 2002*. In the first elections under the National Charter and constitution, *Wifaq* and other Shiite political groups boycotted on the grounds that establishing an elected COR and an appointed Shura Council of the same size diluted popular will. There were 170 candidates, including 8 women. Sunnis won two-thirds of the 40 COR seats, and none of the women were elected.
- *November 2006.* Sunni-Shiite tensions escalated in advance of the COR and municipal elections amid a government adviser's revelations that the government had adjusted election districts to favor Sunni candidates and had issued passports to Sunnis to increase the number of Sunni voters. *Wifaq* participated, helping lift turnout to 72%, and the faction won 17 seats (virtually all it contested) to become the largest COR bloc. Sunnis won the remaining 23 seats, of which 8 were secular and 15 were Islamists. One woman, who ran unopposed, was elected (out of 18 women candidates). The King appointed a Shura Council with 20 Shiites, 19 Sunnis, 1 Christian, and 9 women. A *Wifaq* supporter was subsequently appointed minister of state for foreign affairs.
- *October 2010*. Even though oppositionists again accused the government of gerrymandering to favor Sunnis, and despite the arrest of 23 Shiite leaders a month before the election, *Wifaq* participated. Of the 200 candidates, 6 were women. Turnout was about 67%. The election increased *Wifaq's* representation to 18 seats, reduced Sunni Islamists to 5 seats from 15; and greatly increased the number of Sunni independents to 17 seats (from 9 in the previous COR). The one female incumbent was reelected. The king reappointed 30 of the 40 Shura Council incumbents. Of the total membership, 19 were Shiites, including the speaker. Four were women, of which one was Jewish and one was Christian. Municipal elections were held concurrently.

2011 Uprising: Origin, Developments, and Prognosis

The aspirations of Bahraini Shiites were demonstrated as unsatisfied when a major uprising began on February 14, 2011, following the toppling of Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak.[9] After a few days of confrontations with security forces, mostly Shiite demonstrators converged on the interior of a major traffic circle ("Pearl Roundabout"). The unrest escalated on February 17-18, 2011, when security forces using rubber bullets and tear gas killed four demonstrators. All 18 *Wifaq* deputies in the COR resigned. Following large demonstrations in late February, the Crown Prince invited protester representatives to formal dialogue, many demonstrators were released, and two Al Khalifa family members were dropped from the cabinet. In March 2011, the Crown Prince advanced a "seven principles" proposal for a national dialogue that would agree on a "parliament with full authority"; a "government that meets the will of the people"; fair voting districts; and several other measures.[10] Protest leaders welcomed dialogue but asserted that the seven principles fell short of their demands for a constitutional monarchy in which the Prime Minister and cabinet are selected by the fully elected parliament. They also demanded ending gerrymandering of election districts to favor Sunnis, and more jobs and economic opportunities—demands encapsulated in the October 2011 "Manama Document" unveiled by *Wifaq* and *Waad*.

On March 13, 2011, protesters blockaded the financial district of Manama, triggering the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, UAE, Qatar, and Oman) to send forces into Bahrain on March 14, 2011. Members of the GCC's joint Peninsula Shield force, including 1,200 Saudi armored forces and 600 UAE police, took up positions at key locations and Kuwait sent naval forces to help secure Bahrain's maritime borders. On March 15, the King declared a three-month state of emergency. Security forces backed by the GCC force cleared demonstrators from Pearl Roundabout and demolished the Pearl Monument on March 18.[11] The king ended the state of emergency as of June 1, and the vast bulk of the GCC force departed in June 2011, with some UAE police and other GCC forces remaining.

Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI)

On June 29, 2011, as a gesture toward the opposition and international critics, the king named a five-person "Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry" (BICI), headed by international legal expert Dr. Cherif Bassiouni, to investigate the government response to the unrest—and not the broader sources of the unrest. The 500+ page BICI report, released on November 23, 2011, provided support for the narratives of both sides as well as recommendations. It stated that[12]

- there was "systematic" and "deliberate" use of excessive force, including torture and forced confessions, against protesters;
- the opposition increased its demands as the uprising progressed; and
- the government did not provide evidence to link Iran to the unrest.

[9] The events of the uprising, and the government's political and security reaction, are examined in substantial detail in the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) report released November 23, 2011. Text of the report is at http://files.bici.org.bh/BICIreportEN.pdf.

[10] BICI report, op. cit., p. 165.

[11] Some accounts differ on the involvement of the Peninsula Shield force, with some observers arguing that members of the force participated directly in suppressing protests, and others accepting the Bahrain/GCC view that the GCC force guarded key locations and infrastructure.

[12] http://files.bici.org.bh/BICIreportEN.pdf.

The report contained 26 recommendations to hold accountable those government personnel responsible for abuses during the uprising. King Hamad promised full implementation of all recommendations. *Wifaq* said the report failed to state that abuses of protesters were deliberate government policy. On November 26, 2011, the king established a 19-member National Commission to oversee implementation of the recommendations, chaired by the Shura Council Chairman (a Shiite). A "Follow-Up Unit" was established by the Ministry of Justice.[13]

Assessments of Compliance with the BICI Recommendations

Bahrain Government. Bahrain officials assert that the government has fully implemented the vast majority of the 26 BICI recommendations. However, other assessments broadly agree that Bahrain has only partially implemented those recommendations that address prevention of torture, provision of legal counsel, allowing free access to media, holding security officials accountable, or integrating Shiites into the security services. There appears to be consensus that the government has rebuilt almost all of the 53 Shiite religious sites demolished in 2011.

State Department. The FY2013 defense authorization act (P.L. 112-239) directed the Secretary of State to report to Congress on Bahrain's implementation of the BICI recommendations. The FY2016 Consolidated Appropriation (P.L. 114-113) also required such reports. The latest such report, submitted to Congress on June 21, 2016,[14] indicated that Bahrain's government had

- made the office of the inspector general of the Ministry of Interior independent of the ministry's hierarchy;
- stripped the Bahrain National Security Agency (BNSA) of arrest powers through an amendment to the 2002 decree establishing that agency;
- provided compensation and other remedies for families of the deceased victims of the government's response to the unrest. About $26 million was budgeted by the government to provide the compensation;
- ensured that dismissed employees were not dismissed because of the exercise of their right to freedom of expression, association, or assembly. This assessment was based on data that almost all of 2,700+ workers who had been fired for participating in the unrest had been rehired; and
- developed programs to promote religious, political, and other forms of tolerance and promotion of human rights and the rule of law.

The report recommended that the government needs to allow oversight agencies greater independence, and implement recommendations on freedom of expression.

Outside Assessments. Reports and testimony by the staff of the Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED) have asserted that the government has fully implemented only three BICI recommendations, partially implemented about half of them, and not implemented at all at least six.[15] The group characterized the June 2016 State Department report referenced above as "a real effort to pull punches and avoid clear evaluations of progress, in order to avoid antagonizing the

[13] The Follow-Up Unit's June report can be found at http://www.iaa.bh/downloads/bici_followup_report_en.pdf.

[14] An earlier State Department report, released in August 2013, can be found at http://adhrb.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/State-Report-on-Implementation-of-BICI-3-2.pdf. The State Department's June 2016 report on BICI implementation can be found at http://pomed.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/State-BICI-Report.pdf.

[15] POMED. "One Year Later: Assessing Bahrain's Implementation of the BICI Report." November 2012.

Bahraini government."[16] A November 2015 report by Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain asserted that the government had only fully implemented two of the BICI recommendations, and that that the issues that caused the uprising had not been addressed.[17]

BICI-Related U.S. Legislation. In the 114th Congress, S. 2009 and H.R. 3445 would have prohibited specific U.S. weapons and crowd control equipment sales to Bahrain (tear gas, small arms, light weapons and ammunitions for same, Humvees, and "other" crowd control items) until the State Department certified that Bahrain has fully implemented all BICI recommendations. A Senate-passed State Department operations authorization bill, S. 1635, would have required another State Department assessment of Bahrain's implementation of the BICI recommendations, and the effect of such findings on the U.S. defense posture in the Gulf. The provision was not included in P.L. 114-323.

The "National Dialogue" Process

The BICI process created conditions for a government-opposition "National Dialogue" process, which was inaugurated on July 2, 2011. Chaired by the COR speaker, about 300 delegates participated, of which 40-50 were members of the Shiite opposition (including five *Wifaq* members).[18] The weeks-long dialogue addressed political, economic, social, and human rights issues, but the detention of senior oppositionists caused *Wifaq* to exit the talks on July 18, 2011. The dialogue concluded with the following consensus recommendations, which were endorsed by the government on July 29, 2011:

- an elected parliament (lower house) with expanded powers, including to confirm a nominated cabinet; to vote on the government's four-year work plan; to discuss any agenda item; and to question ministers on their performance or plans. In addition, the overall chairmanship of the National Assembly should be exercised by the elected COR, not the Shura Council;
- a government "reflecting the will of the people";
- "fairly" demarcated electoral boundaries;
- reworking of laws on naturalization and citizenship;
- combating financial and administrative corruption; and
- efforts to reduce sectarian divisions.

Despite the opposition's assertions that the consensus dialogue recommendations did not resolve core issues, the National Assembly adopted significant elements of them in January 2012 and the King signed them into law on May 3, 2012, as constitutional amendments that

- imposed limitations on the power of the king to appoint the members of the Shura Council, and a requirement that he consult the heads of the two chambers of the National Assembly before dissolving the COR;
- gave either chamber of the National Assembly the ability to draft legislation or constitutional amendments;
- changed the overall chair of the National Assembly to the speaker of the elected COR instead of the chairman of the appointed Shura Council; and

[16] Statement of Cole Bockenfeld, Deputy Director for Policy, POMED, before the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission. September 9, 2016.

[17] The report can be found at http://www.adhrb.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Shattering_the_Facade_Web.pdf.

[18] Mohamed Hasni. "Bahrain Opens Dialogue Buoyed by Shiite Attendance." Agence France Presse, July 2, 2011.

- gave the COR the ability to veto the government's four-year work plan—essentially an ability to veto the nomination of the entire cabinet—without the concurrence of the Shura Council. This was an expansion of previous powers to vote no confidence against individual ministers.

Second National Dialogue. In January 2013, *Wifaq* and five allied parties accepted the King's call to restart political dialogue. The second dialogue began on February 10, 2013, consisting of twice per week meetings attended by the Minister of Justice (an Al Khalifa family member) and two other ministers, eight opposition representatives (*Wifaq* and allied parties), eight representatives of progovernment organizations, and five members of the National Assembly. The talks quickly stalled over opposition insistence that consensus recommendations be put to a public referendum, while the government insisted that agreements be enacted by the National Assembly. The opposition also demanded that the dialogue include representatives of the King rather than ministers. In September 2013, the opposition began boycotting the talks, citing the arrest of *Wifaq's* deputy chief, and the dialogue was suspended on January 8, 2014.

The Crown Prince sought to revive negotiations by meeting with *Wifaq* leaders in January 2014, despite the fact that the two top leaders were charged for their roles in the uprising. The meeting addressed *Wifaq's* demand that political dialogue be conducted with senior Al Khalifa members. In September 2014, the Crown Prince issued a five-point "framework" for a new dialogue including (1) redefining electoral districts; (2) revising the process for appointing the Shura Council; (3) giving the elected COR new powers to approve or reject the formation of a new cabinet; (4) having international organizations work Bahrain's judiciary; and (5) introducing new codes of conduct for security forces. Opposition political societies rejected the proposals as not satisfying a core demand for the selection of a prime minister by an elected COR, and no further national dialogue has convened to date.

COR Elections in November 2014

In an effort to present an image of "normalization" of the domestic political situation, the government urged the opposition to participate in the November 22, 2014, COR election. However, the government reduced the number of electoral districts to four, from five, further reducing the chances that Shiites would win a majority of COR seats. *Wifaq* and its allies boycotted, reducing the turnout to about 50% (Bahrain official figures). There was little violence.

The seats were mostly won by independent candidates, suggesting that voters sought a less polarized climate. Only three candidates of the Sunni Islamist political societies won, and none of the 10 progovernment Al Fatih coalition candidates was elected. The 14 Shiites elected ran as independents, although some reportedly were members of *Wifaq* or other opposition factions. Ahmad Ibrahim al-Mulla was elected COR speaker, and the deputy speaker selected was Jawad al Ra'id, a Shiite. Ali bin Salih Al Salih, a Shiite, remained chairman of the Shura that was appointed on December 8, 2014, which again had rough Sunni-Shiite parity.

Table 1. Comparative Composition of the National Assembly

	2006	2010	2011	2014	2018
Council of Representatives (COR)					
Wifaq (Shiite Islamist)	17	18	0	0	0
Shiite Independent	0	0	8	14	10-15 (est.)
Sunni Independent (mostly secular)	8	17	27	22	20+
Minbar (Sunni Islamist, Muslim Brotherhood)	7	2	2	2	0
Asala (Sunni Islamist, Salafi)	8	3	3	2	3
National Uinity Assembly (NUA)				0	1
COR Sect Composition	23 Sunni, 17 Shiite	22 Sunni, 18 Shiite	32 Sunni, 8 Shiite	26 Sunni, 14 Shiite	Majority Sunni
Women in COR	1	1	4	3	6
Shura Council (Upper House, appointed)					
Sectarian, Religious Composition Upper House (Shura Council)	20 Shiite, 19 Sunni, 1 Christian	19 Shiite, 19 Sunni, 1 Christian, 1 Jew	No change	roughly equal numbers of Sunnis and Shiites, 1 Christian, 1 Jew	
Number of Women	9	4	11	9	

Current Situation and Prospects

Unrest continues, although at far less intensity than in 2011, and observers have accused the government of backsliding in its implementation of the BICI recommendations and other human rights reforms. In 2017, the King signed a National Assembly bill amending the constitution to allow military courts the right to try civilians accused of terrorism, and the government returned arrest powers to the BNSA (see above). As noted below, the government also has stepped up citizenship revocations and expulsions[19] and continues to incarcerate opposition leaders. Each February 14 anniversary of the uprising has been marked by demonstrations.[20]

The government and the opposition have, at times, discussed confidence-building measures such as appointments of oppositionists to the cabinet. The King appears to have ruled out replacing the Prime Minister even though some oppositionists have suggested they would accept a more

[19] CRS conversation with Shiite opposition activist Matar al Matar in Washington, DC, March 2016; and http://www.amnestyusa.org/news/press-releases/bahrain-alarming-spike-in-expulsion-of-citizens-arbitrarily-stripped-of-their-nationality.

[20] http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/02/clashes-mark-anniversary-bahrain-2011-uprising-180214075612644.html.

moderate ruling family member or a Sunni nonroyal in that role. Hardline Sunnis within and outside the government, reportedly with the support of Saudi officials, continue to urge the ruling family to refuse compromise.

COR Elections in 2018

Observers have sought to gauge the state of Bahrain's politics from the 2018 COR elections, held on November 24, 2018, and December 1, 2018, Municipal council elections were held concurrently. As was widely predicted, the elections produced significant tensions, and the outcome was widely derided by Bahraini oppositionists and regional and international observers as neither free nor fair.

In May 2018, the National Assembly enacted legislation banning dissolved political societies (*Wifaq* and *Waad*) from participating, and the government decreed that no members of banned parties could run. Yet, in part to try to instill legitimacy to the elections, the government reportedly encouraged Shiites to compete as independents. *Wifaq* members boycotted the vote, but a small *Wifaq* ally, the Democratic Progressive Tribune, participated. Several Sunni groupings, including the National Unity Assembly (NUA, see above), Minbar, and Asala, competed in order not to cede representation to independent Sunnis. One liberal political society composed of both Shiites and Sunnis, the National Action Charter Society (*Mithaq)*, competed as well.

The final list of candidates was announced on November 7. There were 293 approved candidates for the COR elections, of whom 41 were women—the highest number of women candidates in any Bahrain COR elections. There were 137 candidates for the 30 seats on Bahrain's three municipal councils, of which eight candidates were women. Only nine COR seats were decided on November 24, including victories by two women. Also undecided were 23 municipal council seats. Final results awaited a runoff for the 31 undecided seats (no candidate received a majority) on December 1. The government claimed turnout was very high at 67%, but oppositionists—who widely derided the election as a sham and urged a broad boycott—claimed turnout was only about 30%.[21]

Following the December 1 runoff, the government released results, emphasizing developments that present a picture of election legitimacy.[22] The government noted that five political societies participated but that 85% of the seats were won by independents. Government officials noted that only five incumbents retained their seats, and that the victories by six women resulted in the highest number of women to ever sit in Bahrain's COR. No breakdown by sect was available immediately, but the *Wifaq* boycott ensured that Sunnis won a majority of the seats. The new COR will select a new speaker and two deputy speakers; all three incumbents did not run. Bahrain's cabinet resigned after the final round pending new appointments. Also to be appointed within a few days is a new Shura Council.

Violent Underground Groups Cloud Outlook

Aggravating government-opposition tensions is the activity of apparently small but violent underground groups that have periodically attacked security forces with bombs and improvised explosive devices (IEDs). These groups have not targeted civilians, although on at least one occasion civilians have been killed or injured. In April 2015, the government arrested 29 persons

[21] https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/bahrain-s-farce-of-an-election-heads-to-run-off-as-israel-signals-warming-ties-1.6691045.

[22] Bahrain government press release provided to CRS, December 3, 2018.

for a December 2014 bombing that wounded several police officers. On December 25, 2017, six Bahraini Shiites were sentenced to death for allegedly forming a terrorist cell and plotting to assassinate a senior Bahrain military official. On January 1, 2017, 10 detainees who had been convicted of militant activities such as those discussed above broke out of Bahrain's Jaw prison with the help of attackers outside the jail. According to the State Department international terrorism report for 2017, "Terrorist activity in Bahrain increased in 2017," citing Shiite militant attacks that the report says killed four police officers in 2017.[23] Mainstream opposition factions deny any connection to underground violent groups, the most active include the following:[24]

- *Al Ashtar Brigades (AAB)*. This group, the most well-known of the underground groups, issued its first public statement in April 2013. It has claimed responsibility for about 20 bombings against security personnel, including a March 2014 attack that killed three police officers, including a UAE officer. In January 2017, the government executed three Shiites for that attack—the first executions since the 2011 uprising began. On March 17, 2017, the Trump Administration designated two Ashtar Brigades members, one of which is Iran-based, as Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGTs) under Executive Order 13224, which blocks U.S.-based property of entities that conduct terrorism. On July 10, 2018, the State Department named the Al Ashtar Brigades as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) under Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act. The group was also named as an SDGT under E.O. 13224. On August 13, 2018, the Trump Administration designated Qassim Abdullah Ali Ahmad, a purported Al Ashtar leader, as an SDGT.
- The *"14 February Coalition"* (named for the anniversary of the Bahrain uprising) claims inspiration from antiregime protesters in Egypt in the uprising there in 2011. The group claimed responsibility for an April 14, 2013, explosion in the Financial Harbour district. In September 2013, 50 Shiites were sentenced to up to 15 years in prison for alleged involvement in the group. On November 10, 2017, militants allegedly from the group attacked a key pipeline that supplies Saudi oil to the Bahrain Petroleum Company refinery in Sitra, Bahrain.
- *Others:* Other groups, using the names Bahrain Liberation Movement, the Resistance Brigades, the Mukhtar Brigades, the Basta organization, and the Imam Army, are offshoots of the Al Ashtar Brigades, or separate small cells. In late September 2018, the government charged 169 persons with forming a "Bahrain Hezbollah"—a Bahrain version of Lebanese Hezbollah—with Iranian backing.

A major question is the degree of outside support, if any.[25] Oppositionists accuse the government of exaggerating Iran's support for these groups, but the State Department reports that some Bahraini groups are working with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Qods Force (IRGC-QF), which reportedly supplies the militants with weapons. In late 2016, Bahraini authorities uncovered a large warehouse containing equipment, apparently supplied by Iran, suitable to constructing "explosively-forced projectiles" (EFPs) such as those Iran-backed Shiite militias used against U.S. armor in Iraq during 2004-2011. No EFPs have actually been used in Bahrain,

[23] State Department "Country Reports on Terrorism: 2017." https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2017/282844.htm.

[24] Matthew Levitt. "Iran and Bahrain: Crying Wolf, or Wolf at the Door?", Washington Institute for Near East Policy, May 16, 2014.

[25] See Michael Knights and Matthew Levitt. "The Evolution of the Shi'a Insurgency in Bahrain." CTC Sentinel, January 2018.

to date.[26] In March 2018, authorities arrested 116 persons allegedly part of an armed network supported by the IRGC-QF.[27]

Table 2. Status of Prominent Dissidents/Other Metrics

Wifaq Leaders	Secretary-General Ali al-Salman was arrested in 2013 for "insulting authorities" and "incitement to religious hatred." He was rearrested and, in June 2015, convicted and sentenced to four years in prison. In May 2016, a court increased his sentence to nine years. In November 2017, the government charged him additionally with spying for Qatar. He was acquitted of this charge on June 21, 2018, but the acquittal was overturned on November 4 and he was sentenced to life in prison. Deputy leader Khalil al-Marzuq was arrested in September 2013, for "inciting terrorism," but was acquitted in June 2014. Isa Qasim's home was raided by the regime in May 2013 and again in late November 2014. In June 2016, his citizenship was revoked, and he remains under house arrest.
Waad Leaders	*Waad* leader Ibrahim Sharif was imprisoned in 2011, released in June 2015, and rearrested in July 2015 for "incitement" against the government. In February 2016, he was sentenced to one year in jail, but was released in July 2016. He was detained again for several days in November 2016.
Salmaniya Medical Complex Personnel	Twenty-one medical personnel were arrested in April 2011 and tried for, among other charges, forcibly occupying a public building. All were eventually acquitted, most recently in late March 2013, but have not regained their jobs.
Protesters Killed	About 100 since the uprising began
Citizenship Revocations and Expulsions	About 750 persons since 2012, of which over 230 citizenships have been revoked in 2018. There have also been several expulsions, mostly Bahraini Shiites of Persian origin. In January-February 2018, eight Bahrainis whose citizenship was revoked in 2012 were expelled to Iraq, and 24 citizens had their citizenship revoked for "forming a terrorist group."
Number Arrested	Approximately 3,000 total detentions since 2011.

Sources: Various press and interest group reports.

U.S. Posture on the Uprising

The United States has repeatedly urged Bahraini authorities not to use force against protesters and to release jailed opposition leaders, but has not at any time called for the Al Khalifa regime to step down, asserting that the government has tried to address many opposition grievances. High-level U.S. engagement with Bahraini leaders has continued and no sanctions have been imposed on any Bahraini officials.

The Obama Administration withheld or conditioned some arms sales to Bahrain, but U.S. military cooperation with Bahrain continued without interruption. In a September 21, 2011, speech to the U.N. General Assembly, President Obama said the following:

> In Bahrain, steps have been taken toward reform and accountability. We're pleased with that, but more is required. America is a close friend of Bahrain, and we will continue to call on the government and the main opposition bloc—the *Wifaq*—to pursue a meaningful dialogue that brings peaceful change that is responsive to the people. We believe the patriotism that binds Bahrainis together must be more powerful than the sectarian forces that would tear them apart. It will be hard, but it is possible.

[26] Souad Mekhennet and Joby Warrick. "In Bahrain's Militant Cells, U.S. Sees Iran." *Washington Post*, April 2, 2017.

[27] Washington Post, March 4, 2018.

Then-Secretary of State Kerry stated upon the July 17, 2016, dissolution of *Wifaq* that

> This ruling is the latest in a series of disconcerting steps in Bahrain.... These actions are inconsistent with U.S. interests and strain our partnership with Bahrain.... We call on the Government of Bahrain to reverse these and other recent measures, return urgently to the path of reconciliation, and work collectively to address the aspirations of all Bahrainis.

Critics said that the Obama Administration was insufficiently critical of Bahrain's leaders,[28] citing then-Secretary of State Clinton's comments in Bahrain on December 3, 2010, referring to the October 2010 elections, saying "I am impressed by the commitment that the government has to the democratic path that Bahrain is walking on.... "[29] On July 7, 2014, the government ordered then-Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) Tom Malinowski out of Bahrain for meeting with *Wifaq* leader Shaykh Salman. Then-Secretary Kerry, in a phone call to Bahrain's Foreign Minister, called that expulsion "unacceptable." A July 18, 2014, letter to King Hamad, signed by 18 Members of the House of Representatives, called on the king to invite Assistant Secretary Malinowski back.[30] Bahrain reversed its position, and he and Assistant Secretary of State for the Near East Anne Patterson visited Bahrain in December 2014.

Trump Administration Policy

As part of its stated goal of pressuring Iran, the Trump Administration has downplayed U.S. concerns about Bahrain's human rights record, dropped human rights conditions on the approval of new sales to Bahrain's military,[31] and imposed new U.S. sanctions on some Bahraini militant groups (discussed above). In May 2017, during his visit to the region, President Trump assured King Hamad that U.S.-Bahrain relations would be free of the "strain" that characterized U.S.-Bahrain relations on human rights issues during the Obama Administration.[32] Crown Prince Salman visited Washington, DC, in late November 2017 and discussed with President Trump a wide range of regional and bilateral issues, including defense and economic relations.

Still, in 2017, the State Department criticized the dissolution of *Waad* as unhelpful to political reconciliation.[33] Bahrain opposition figures have expressed concerns that Trump Administration policy that they describe as far too favorable to the Bahrain government could cause the mainstream opposition to draw closer to Iran.

U.S. Programs to Promote Political Reform/Civil Society

The United States has funded programs to accelerate political reform in Bahrain and empower its political societies since long before the uprising. The "Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI)" began funding prodemocracy programs in Bahrain in 2003,[34] including for programs such as an American Bar Association (ABA) program to support the Ministry of Justice's Judicial and Legal Studies Institute (JLSI), which conducts specialized training for judges, lawyers, law schools, and Bahrain's bar association. The ABA also provided technical assistance to help Bahrain implement

[28] Stephen McInerny. "Silence on Bahrain." *Washington Post* op-ed. November 5, 2012.

[29] Department of State. "Remarks With Foreign Minister Al Khalifa After Their Meeting." December 3, 2010.

[30] Congress of the United States. Letter to King Hamad. July 18, 2014.

[31] http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2017/feb/7/trump-ready-to-approve-weapons-packages-to-saudi-a/.

[32] "After Assurances by Trump, Bahrain Stages Deadly Raid Against Opposition." *Washington Post*, May 25, 2017.

[33] https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2017-05-31/court-orders-last-main-opposition-group-in-bahrain-dissolved.

[34] Statement from the U.S. Embassy in Bahrain Concerning MEPI. June 17, 2014.

the BICI recommendations, including legislation on fair trial standards. MEPI funds are also used to train Bahraini journalists. The National Democratic Institute (NDI) had received some U.S. funds for its programs to enhance the capabilities of Bahrain's National Assembly. For example, in FY2016, the United States provided about $350,000 for democracy and human rights promotion programs in Bahrain, of which about $250,000 was provided through NDI.

Other Human Rights Issues[35]

The bulk of worldwide criticism of Bahrain's human rights practices focuses on the government response to the unrest, including relative lack of accountability of security forces, suppression of free expression, and treatment of prisoners. The government, as have several of the other Gulf states, has increasingly used laws allowing jail sentences for "insulting the king" to silence opponents. However, State Department human rights reports and outside assessments note additional problems in Bahrain for non-Muslims and for non-Shiite opponents of the government, as well as other issues that might be unrelated to the unrest.

Several organizations are chartered as human rights groups, although the government characterizes most of them and their leaders as advocates for or members of the opposition. The most prominent are the Bahrain Human Rights Society (the primary licensed human rights organization), the Bahrain Transparency Society, and the Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR, a U.S. grantee in FY2016) and the Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights (BYSHR), which was officially dissolved but remains active informally. Some of the leaders of these organizations have been repeatedly arrested.

In 2013, in line with the BICI report, the king issued a decree reestablishing the "National Institution for Human Rights" (NIHR) to investigate human rights violations. It issues annual reports.[36] In October 2016, King Hamad issued a decree enhancing the NIHR's powers, including the ability to make unannounced visits to detention centers and to request formal responses by the various ministries to NIHR recommendations. There is also a quasigovernmental Commission on Prisoner and Detainee Rights (PDRC).

Bahrain has drawn increasing attention from U.N. human rights bodies and other governments. Each March since the uprising began, the U.N. Human Rights Council has issued statements condemning the government's human rights abuses. The United States, Britain, and eight other EU countries have sometimes opposed these statements on the grounds that the government has sought to address international concerns on this issue. Opposition activists reportedly have requested the appointment of a U.N. Special Rapporteur on human rights in Bahrain and the establishment of a formal U.N. office in Bahrain that would monitor human rights practices there. These steps have not been taken. Bahrain has often denied entry to international human rights researchers and activists, including from U.S. organizations such as Human Rights Watch.

Women's Rights

Experts and other observers have long perceived Bahrain as advancing women's rights, particularly relative to Saudi Arabia. The Council of Ministers (cabinet) regularly has at least one, and often several, female ministers. The number of women in the National Assembly is provided

[35] Much of this section is from the State Department's country report on human rights practices for 2017 and from reports by Human Rights Watch and other outside groups. https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2017&dlid=277237#wrapper.

[36] The full text of the National Commission's March 20, 2012, report is at http://www.biciactions.bh/wps/portal/BICI/.

in **Table 1**. Huda Azar Nonoo, an attorney and formerly the only Jew in the Shura Council, was ambassador to the United States during 2008-2013.

Still, traditional customs and some laws tend to limit women's rights in practice. Women can drive, own and inherit property, and initiate divorce cases, but religious courts may refuse a woman's divorce request. A woman cannot transmit nationality to her spouse or children. Some prominent Bahraini women, backed by the wife of the King and the "Supreme Council for Women," have campaigned for a codified family law. Other women's rights organizations in Bahrain include the Bahrain Women's Union, the Bahrain Women's Association, and the Young Ladies Association.

Religious Freedom[37]

The State Department's recent reports on international religious freedom focus extensively on abuses related to the unrest, asserting that the government discriminates against the Shiite majority and Shiite clergy. In 2014, the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs, which regulates Islamic affairs, dissolved the Islamic Ulema Council, the main assembly of Shiite clerics in Bahrain, for allegedly engaging in illegal political activity. A Court of Cassation upheld that dissolution in April 2015. In June 2016, the king signed an amendment to a 2005 law regulating political societies, banning persons who are active in religious positions from engaging in political activities—an amendment that appeared to be an effort to further weaken *Wifaq*.[38] On the other hand, the government does offer some financing for Shiite seminaries (*hawzas*).

In July 2017, Bahrain became the first country in the region to enact a unified personal status law, covering both Shiites and Sunnis, and thereby weakening the power of religious courts to regulate matters such as marriage and divorce. However, the law was enacted despite opposition from Shiite legislators who argue that only senior Shiite clerics, such as Iraq-based Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, have the authority to legislate on such matters.[39]

According to the recent State Department reports, the government allows freedom of worship for Christians, Jews, and Hindus although the constitution declares Islam the official religion. Non-Muslim groups must register with the Ministry of Social Development to operate and Muslim groups must register with the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs. There are 19 registered non-Muslim religious groups and institutions, including Christian churches of a wide variety of denominations, and Hindu and Sikh groups. The government donated land for the Roman Catholic Vicariate of Northern Arabia to relocate from Kuwait to Bahrain. A small Jewish community of about 36-40 persons—mostly from families of Iraqi Jews who settled in Bahrain in the 19th century—remains in Bahrain, and apparently does not face any harassment or other difficulty. Some of Bahrain's Jews came from southern Iran.

Members of the Baha'i faith, which is declared blasphemous in Iran and Afghanistan, have been discriminated against in Bahrain. However, members of that community can worship openly.

Human Trafficking and Labor Rights

Bahrain remains a destination country for migrant workers from South and East Asia, as well as some countries in Africa. Domestic workers are highly vulnerable to forced labor and sexual

[37] This section is based on the State Department report on International Religious Freedom for 2017, https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper.

[38] "Bahrain King 'Bans Mixing Religion and Politics." http://www.alaraby.co.uk. June 12, 2016.

[39] http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/bahrain-s-shura-approves-unified-family-draft-law-1.2061301.

exploitation because they are largely unprotected under the labor law. The State Department's "Trafficking in Persons Report" for 2018 upgraded Bahrain to "Tier 1," from the "Tier 2" rating it had for the three previous years. The upgrade was based on an assessment that the government had made "key achievements" on this issue in the reporting period,[40] including the first ever conviction of a national for forced labor and the first ever conviction of a complicit government official. In 2014, the Obama Administration waived a mandatory downgrade for Bahrain to Tier 3 after it was assessed for three consecutive years as "Tier 2: Watch List." Bahrain subsequently was assessed as making notable progress on the issue.

Regarding the related issue of labor rights, U.S. government reports credit Bahrain with significant labor reforms, particularly a 2002 law granting workers, including noncitizens, the right to form and join unions. The law holds that the right to strike is a legitimate means for workers to defend their rights and interests, but that right is restricted for workers in the oil and gas, education, and health sectors. There are about 50 trade unions in Bahrain, but all unions must join the General Federation of Bahrain Trade Unions (GFBTU). The GFBTU has many Shiite members, and during the height of the unrest in 2011, the federation called at least two general strikes to protest use of force against demonstrators. During March-May 2011, employers dismissed almost 5,500 workers from both the private and public sectors, including 25% of the country's union leadership. The government claims that virtually all were subsequently rehired. The State Department has asserted that the government made efforts in 2015 to reinstate workers dismissed or suspended during the period of high unrest. Some U.S. MEPI funds (see above) have been used for AFL-CIO projects with Bahraini labor organizations.

The architect of some recent labor reforms is the Labor Market Regulatory Authority (LMRA), which is separate from and considered more forward looking than the Ministry of Labor and Social Development. The LMRA has made strides to dismantle the "sponsorship system" that prohibited workers from changing jobs, and has helped institute requirements that every expatriate worker must be provided with health insurance. The LMRA has also instituted public awareness campaigns against trafficking in persons and has established a publicly funded "labor fund" to upgrade worker skill levels.[41]

Torture

Well before the 2011 uprising, Human Rights Watch and other groups asserted that Bahraini authorities were practicing torture, allegations that continue today, including in the State Department human rights report for 2017. A May 13, 2011, hearing of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission asserted that torture was being used regularly on those (mostly Shiites) arrested in the unrest. The State Department human rights report for 2011 said there were numerous reports of torture during the state of emergency (March-June 2011). In 2013, the government cancelled planned visits by the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.[42]

[40] The text of the State Department report can be accessed at https://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2018/index.htm.

[41] Author conversations with Bahrain LMRA top officials, 2015-2016.

[42] http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/wp-content/uploads/HRF-King-Al-Khalifa-Letter.pdf.

U.S.-Bahrain Relations[43]

U.S.-Bahrain ties are long-standing. The American Mission Hospital was established in 1903 as the first hospital in what is now Bahrain. A U.S. Embassy opened in Manama, Bahrain's capital, immediately after Bahrain became independent. Hundreds of Bahraini students come to the United States each year to study. The U.S.-Bahrain security relationship dates to the end of World War II, well before Bahrain's independence, and remains central to the U.S. ability to address regional threats such as those posed by Iran and by terrorist movements in the region.[44] There are over 7,000 U.S. military personnel deployed in Bahrain, mostly Navy, implementing various missions discussed below, including against the Islamic State. Bahrain signed a formal Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) with the United States in 1991.

In March 2018, Secretary of Defense James Mattis met with King Hamad and Crown Prince Salman in Bahrain and expressed "appreciation for Bahrain's continued support of the U.S. military presence in the Kingdom since shortly after World War II."[45]

As a GCC member, Bahrain also engages in substantial defense cooperation with other GCC states. Bahrain also has formal relations with NATO under a 2004 NATO-GCC "Istanbul Cooperation Initiative" (ICI). As do the other GCC members in that forum (Kuwait, UAE, and Qatar), Bahrain has opened a diplomatic mission at NATO headquarters in Brussels.

The U.S. Ambassador to Bahrain is Justin Siberell, a career diplomat.

U.S. Naval Headquarters

The cornerstone of U.S.-Bahrain defense relations is U.S. access to Bahrain's naval facilities; the United States has had a U.S. naval command presence in Bahrain since 1948. MIDEASTFOR (U.S. Middle East Force) and its successor, NAVCENT (naval component of U.S. Central Command), as well as the Fifth Fleet (reconstituted in June 1995), have been headquartered in Bahrain, at a sprawling facility called "Naval Support Activity (NSA)-Bahrain." It is also home to U.S. Marine Forces Central Command, Destroyer Squadron Fifty, and three Combined Maritime Forces.[46] The "on-shore" U.S. command presence in Bahrain was established after the 1991 U.S.-led war against Iraq; prior to that, the U.S. naval headquarters in Bahrain was on a command ship docked and technically "off shore."

Some smaller U.S. ships (e.g., minesweepers) are home-ported there, but the Fifth Fleet consists mostly of ships that are sent to the region on six- or seven-month deployments. Generally operating in and around the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean/Northern Arabian Sea are an aircraft carrier strike group, an amphibious ready group, and surface combatants. In March 2012, the U.S. Navy began augmenting the fleet by doubling the number of minesweepers to eight, and sending additional mine-hunting helicopters. In 2013, the U.S. Navy added five coastal patrol ships.

NSA-Bahrain coordinates the operations of over 20 U.S. and allied warships in Combined Task Force (CTF) 151 and 152 that seek to interdict the movement of terrorists, pirates, arms, or

[43] Information in this section obtained from a variety of press reports, and the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA).

[44] A very small number of Bahrain nationals have joined the Islamic State organization.

[45] Department of Defense. Readout of Mattis Meeting with King of Bahrain Hamad and Crwon Prince Salman. March 15, 2018.

[46] For an extended discussion of the U.S. military presence in Bahrain, see Brookings Institution, Center for 21st Century Security and Intelligence, Policy Paper "No 'Plan B': U.S. Strategic Access in the Middle East and the Question of Bahrain. June 2013, by Commander Richard McDaniel, U.S.N.

weapons of mass destruction (WMD)-related technology and narcotics across the Arabian Sea. Bahrain has taken several turns commanding CTF-152, and it has led an antipiracy task force in Gulf/Arabian Sea waters—operations that are offshoots of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) that ousted the Taliban from power in Afghanistan in 2001. The coalition conducts periodic naval exercises, such as mine-sweeping drills, intended at least in part to signal resolve to Iran. On Saturday, December 1, Fifth Fleet commander Vice Admiral Scott Stearney was found dead in his home and U.S. naval officials said there was no evidence of foul play. He was replaced by Rear Admiral Paul Schlise.

To further develop the NSA-Bahrain, the U.S. military implemented a $580 million military construction program that ran from 2010 until the end of 2017.[47] The latest construction doubled the size of the facility (to over 150 acres) by integrating the decommissioned Mina (port) Al Salman Pier, leased by the Navy under a 2008 agreement, and added buildings for administration, maintenance, housing, warehousing, and dining. The expansion supports the deployment of additional U.S. coastal patrol ships and the Navy's new littoral combat ship, and the docking of larger U.S. ships.[48] The expansion has also allowed for infrastructure for families of U.S. military personnel, including schools for young children. The United States has spent over $2 billion to improve the facility. A separate deep water port in Bahrain, Khalifa bin Salman Port, is one of the few facilities in the Gulf that can accommodate U.S. aircraft carriers and amphibious ships.[49]

In December 2014, Bahrain agreed to allow Britain to establish a naval base in part of the Mina Al Salman pier, and facilities there have been improved to allow Britain's Royal Navy to plan, store equipment, and house military personnel at the location.[50] Also in December 2014, the GCC announced it would establish a joint naval force based in Bahrain to cooperate with the United States and other navies.

Alternatives? Some urge the United States to examine alternatives to NSA-Bahrain on the grounds that the unrest in Bahrain poses threats to U.S. personnel deployed there, or that the Al Khalifa government could fall to a regime that demands a U.S. departure. The U.S. military has, through social media and other directives, instructed its personnel in Bahrain to avoid any areas of Bahrain where demonstrations are taking place.[51] The enacted FY2016 National Defense Authorization Act did not contain a provision of an earlier version (H.R. 1735) to mandate a Defense Department report on alternative locations for the NSA-Bahrain. But, the Defense Department reportedly has done an assessment of the security situation in Bahrain and contingency planning to move the NSA; the assessment has not been released publicly.[52] Still, continued funding for and performance of military construction to enhance the NSA would indicate that the Administration has no plans to relocate the facility in the near future.

Should there be a decision to relocate the NSA, potential alternatives could include Qatar's New Doha Port, Kuwait's Shuaiba port, and the UAE's Jebel Ali.[53] All three are close U.S. allies, but none has stated a position on whether it would be willing to host such a facility. The alternatives

[47] Among the recent appropriations to fund the expansion are: $54 million for FY2008 (Division 1 of P.L. 110-161); $41.5 million for FY2010 (P.L. 111-117); $258 million for FY2011 (P.L. 112-10). $100 million was requested for FY2012 for two projects, but was not funded in the FY2012 Consolidated Appropriation (P.L. 112-74).

[48] Hendrick Simoes. "Bahrain Expansion Latest Sign of Continued Presence." *Stars and Stripes*, December 16, 2013.

[49] Ibid.

[50] "U.K. to Boost Military Presence in the Persian Gulf." Associated Press, December 7, 2014.

[51] Facebook posts of NSA-Bahrain from 2013. Accessed June 2016. https://www.facebook.com/NSABahrain/?fref=nf.

[52] Bockenfeld statement to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, September 9, 2016. op. cit.

[53] Ibid.

do not provide large U.S. ships with the ease of docking access that Bahrain does, and many of the alternatives share facilities with commercial operations.

Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) and Major Non-NATO Ally Designation

Bahrain was part of the U.S.-led allied coalition that ousted Iraq from Kuwait in 1991, hosting 17,500 U.S. troops and 250 U.S. combat aircraft that participated in the 1991 "Desert Storm" offensive against Iraqi forces. Bahraini pilots flew strikes during the war, and Iraq fired nine Scud missiles at Bahrain, of which three hit facilities there.

After that war, Bahrain and the United States institutionalized the defense relationship by signing a Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) on October 28, 1991, for an initial period of 10 years. It remains in effect.[54] The pact reportedly gives the United States access to Bahrain's air bases, enables the United States to preposition strategic materiel (mostly U.S. Air Force munitions), requires consultations with Bahrain if its security is threatened, and provides for joint exercises and U.S. training of Bahraini forces.[55] It reportedly includes a "Status of Forces Agreement" (SOFA) under which U.S. military personnel serving in Bahrain operate under U.S. law.

The DCA was the framework for U.S.-Bahrain cooperation to contain Saddam Hussein's Iraq during the 1990s. Bahrain hosted the U.S.-led Multinational Interdiction Force (MIF) that enforced a U.N. embargo on Iraq during 1991-2003 as well as the U.N. Special Commission (UNSCOM) inspection mission that worked to dismantle Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

Shaykh Isa Air Base, improved with about $45 million in U.S. funds, hosts a variety of U.S. aircraft, including F-16s, F-18s, and P-3 surveillance aircraft. About $19 million was spent to construct a U.S. Special Operations Forces facility there. U.S. pilots flew combat missions from the base in both Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan (after the September 11, 2001, attacks) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) to oust Saddam Hussein (March 2003). During both operations, Bahrain also deployed its U.S.-supplied frigate warship (the *Subha*) to help protect U.S. ships, and it sent ground and air assets to Kuwait in support of OIF. Bahrain and UAE have been the only GCC states to deploy forces to Afghanistan; Bahrain deployed 100 police officers to Afghanistan during 2009-2014.

Major Non-NATO Ally Designation

In March 2002, President George W. Bush designated Bahrain a "major non-NATO ally" (MNNA) in Presidential Determination 2002-10. The designation qualifies Bahrain to purchase certain U.S. arms, receive excess defense articles (EDA), and engage in defense research cooperation with the United States for which it would not otherwise be eligible.

U.S. Security Assistance and Arms Transfers

Bahrain's small annual government budget (approximately $10 billion) allows for only modest amounts of national funds to be used for purchases of major combat systems. The United States provides a small amount of military assistance that goes toward Bahrain's arms buys from the

[54] "U.S.-Bahrain Defense Pact Renewed." *Agence France Presse*, August 5, 2011.

[55] Details of the U.S.-Bahrain defense agreement are classified. Some provisions are discussed in Sami Hajjar, *U.S. Military Presence in the Gulf: Challenges and Prospects* (U.S. Army War College: Strategic Studies Institute), March 2002, p. 27. The State and Defense Departments have not provided CRS with requested information on the duration of the pact, or whether its terms had been modified in recent years.

United States, in order to enhance Bahrain's ability to participate in regional security missions. The government's response to the political unrest caused the Obama Administration to put on hold sales to Bahrain of arms that could easily be used against protesters, primarily those used by the Interior Ministry, as well as to hold up or condition the sale of combat systems such as combat aircraft. The Trump Administration has maintained restrictions on sales of equipment that could be used against protesters, while dropping conditions or holds on sales of most major combat systems.

Assistance to the Bahrain Defense Forces/Ministry of Defense

The main recipient of U.S. military assistance is the Bahrain Defense Force (BDF)—Bahrain's regular military force—which totals about 8,000 active duty personnel, of which 2,000 are Bahraini Air Force and Navy personnel. There are another 2,000 personnel in Bahrain's National Guard—a unit that is separate from both the BDF and the Ministry of Interior. The BDF, as well as Bahrain's police forces, are run by Sunni Bahrainis, but supplement their ranks with unknown percentages of paid recruits from Sunni Muslim neighboring countries, including Pakistan, Yemen, Jordan, and elsewhere. Some human rights groups say that BDF equipment, such as Cobra helicopters, has been used against protesters.

Most U.S. military assistance to Bahrain is in the form of Foreign Military Financing (FMF), used to help Bahrain buy and maintain U.S.-origin weapons, to enhance interoperability with U.S. forces as well as with other GCC forces, to augment Bahrain's air defenses, and to improve counterterrorism capabilities. In recent years, some FMF funds have been used to build up Bahrain's Special Operations forces and to help the BDF use its U.S.-made Blackhawk helicopters.[56] The Defense Department estimates that about 50% of Bahrain's forces are fully capable of integrating into a U.S.-led coalition.

The United States has reduced FMF to Bahrain since the unrest began, in part to try to compel the government to undertake political reforms. The Obama Administration's FY2012 aid request, made at the start of the unrest, included $25 million in FMF for Bahrain, but only $10 million was provided. FMF amounts provided or requested since are depicted in the table below. FY2017 funds were used to support Bahrain's maritime security capacity by assisting the Bahrain Coast Guard and upgrading the Coast Surveillance System that reportedly provides Bahrain and the U.S. Navy a 360-degree field of vision.[57]

Some funds are provided under "Section 1206" of the National Defense Authorization Act of 2006, P.L. 109-163. Five Section 1206 programs spanning 2006-2015—totaling almost $65 million—were used to provide coast patrol boats, equip and train Bahrain's special forces and coastal surveillance sites, and fund biometric equipment to help Bahrain detect movement of international terrorists through its territory.

Excess Defense Articles (EDA)

The BDF is eligible to receive grant "excess defense articles" (EDA), and it has received over $400 million worth of EDA since the program began for Bahrain in 1993. In June 1995, the United States provided 50 M-60A3 tanks to Bahrain as a "no cost" five-year lease. Bahrain later received title to the equipment. In July 1997, the United States transferred the FFG-7 "Perry class" frigate *Subha* (see above) as EDA. The Obama Administration supported providing another frigate (an "extended deck frigate") as EDA because the *Subha* is approaching the end of its

[56] "Revealed: America's Arms Sales to Bahrain Amid Bloody Crackdown," op. cit.

[57] "Bahrain Government's Ties With the United States Run Deep," op. cit.

service life, but Bahrain decided instead to devote U.S. military aid to maintaining the *Subha*. The transfer of frigate-sized ships as EDA requires legislative enactment.

International Military Education and Training Funds (IMET)

As noted in **Table 4**, small amounts of International Military Education and Training funds (IMET) are provided to Bahrain to inculcate principles of civilian control of the military, democracy, and interoperability with U.S. forces. Approximately 100 BDF students attend U.S. military schools each year through the IMET program. A roughly equal number train in the United States under the U.S. Foreign Military Sales program (using FMF). Amounts provided are shown in the table below.

Major Foreign Military Sales (FMS)

About 85% of Bahrain's defense equipment is of U.S.-origin, as discussed below.

- *F-16s and other U.S.-made Aircraft.* Since 1998, Bahrain has purchased 22 U.S.-made F-16 Block 40 aircraft. In 2016, Bahrain requested up to 19 new production F-16Vs, with an estimated value of nearly $4 billion.[58] The Obama Administration notified the sale to Congress with the condition that it would not finalize approval until Bahrain improves its human rights record.[59] The Trump Administration dropped that condition, asserting that maintaining the conditionality is not the optimum way to influence Bahrain's policy on its domestic unrest.[60] On September 8, 2017, the Administration notified Congress of a potential sale of 19 F-16Vs at an estimated value of $2.785 billion, and of an upgrade of Bahrain's existing F-16 Block 40s to the F-16V configuration, at an estimated cost of $1.082 billion.[61] The sale process was far along enough to avoid Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Corker's July 2017 restriction on providing informal concurrence to arms sales to the GCC states—a restriction imposed in connection with the intra-GCC rift discussed below. That restriction was dropped by Chairman Corker on February 8, 2018.[62]
- *Air-to-Air Missiles.* In 1999 and 2009, the United States sold Bahrain Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air Missiles (AMRAAMs) to arm the F-16s. In 2012, the Obama Administration approved a sale of additional AMRAAMs.
- *Anti-Armor Missiles/Rockets*. An August 2000 sale of 30 Army Tactical Missile Systems (ATACMs, a system of short-range ballistic missiles fired from a multiple rocket launcher), valued at about $70 million, included an agreement for joint U.S.-Bahraini control of the weapon. That arrangement sought to allay U.S. congressional concerns about possible U.S. promotion of regional missile proliferation. On September 28, 2018, the State Department approved a potential sales to Bahrain of 110 ATACM missiles and 720 Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System rockets, with a total estimated value of $300 million. A joint resolution, S.J.Res. 65, was introduced to block the proposed sale, on the grounds

[58] Craig Hoyle. "Bahrain Considering F-16V Order, Fleet Upgrade." *Flight Global*, January 26, 2016.

[59] Anthony Capaccio, Bloomberg News, September 30, 2016. http://www.bloomberg.com/politics/articles/2016-09-30/bahrain-s-lockheed-f-16-purchase-said-to-come-with-u-s-strings.

[60] http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2017/feb/7/trump-ready-to-approve-weapons-packages-to-saudi-a/.

[61] DSCA Transmittal numbers 16-60 and 16-59.

[62] Letter to Secretary of State Rex Tillerson from SFRC Chairman Bob Corker. February 8, 2018.

that arms sales contributes to Bahrain's participation in the Arab coalition in Yemen (see below). The Senate voted on November 15, 2018, not to advance the resolution (by a vote of 77-21).

- *Stingers.* Section 581 of the FY1990 foreign operations appropriation act (P.L. 101-167) made Bahrain the only Gulf state eligible to receive the Stinger shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missile, and the United States has sold Bahrain about 70 Stingers since 1990. (This authorization has been repeated subsequently.)
- *Humvees and TOWs.* In September 2011, the Obama Administration announced a sale to the BDF and National Guard of 44 "Humvee" (M115A1B2) armored vehicles and several hundred TOW missiles of various models, including 50 "bunker busters," with an estimated total value of $53 million. State Department officials said the sale would not violate the intent of the "Leahy amendment," a provision of U.S. law that forbids U.S. sales of equipment to security units that have committed human rights abuses.[63] But, two joint resolutions introduced in the 112th Congress (S.J.Res. 28 and H.J.Res. 80) would have prohibited the sale unless the Administration certified that Bahrain is rectifying alleged abuses.[64] In October 2011, even though Congress did not formally block the sale, the Obama Administration told Congress it would delay it pending assessment of the BICI report. In January 2012, the Administration put the sale on hold indefinitely. On June 20, 2015, the State Department announced that the sale would proceed because the government had "made some meaningful progress on human rights reforms and reconciliation."[65] Separately, on September 8, 2017, the Trump Administration notified Congress of a potential sale of 221 TOW missiles of various types, with an estimated valued of $27 million.
- *Maritime Defense Equipment and Spare Parts*. In May 2012, in conjunction with a visit to Washington, DC, by Bahrain's Crown Prince, the Administration announced the release of additional U.S. arms for the BDF, Bahrain's Coast Guard (a Ministry of Interior-controlled force), and the National Guard, stating that the weaponry was not suited for use against protesters and supported Bahrain's maritime defense. The Administration gave examples of weapons approved for sale to Bahrain: (1) the Perry-class frigate, as EDA, discussed above, but later mooted; and (2) harbor security boats for the Bahrain Coast Guard, as EDA.[66] No legislation to block the sale was enacted. Separately, on September 8, 2017, the Trump Administration notified Congress of a potential sale of two 35-Meter Fast Patrol Boats, at an estimated cost of $60 million. Bahrain is also upgrading six naval vessels under a $70 million contract with Italy's Leonardo firm.
- *Attack Helicopters*. On April 27, 2018, the Defense Department notified Congress that the State Department had approved a potential sale to Bahrain of

[63] James Lobe. "Bahrain: U.S. Congress Urged to Reject Arms Sales." IPS News Service, September 29, 2011.

[64] To block a proposed arms sale would require passage of a joint resolution to do so, presumably with a veto-proof majority.

[65] Statement by State Department spokesman John Kirby. "Lifting Holds on Security Assistance to the Government of Bahrain." June 29, 2015.

[66] Nicole Gaouette. "U.S. Resumes Bahrain Arms Sales Citing Security Interests." Bloomberg News, May 11, 2012.

up to 12 AH-1Z ("Cobra") attack helicopters and associated munitions to the Royal Bahrain Air Force. The estimated value of the sale is $911 million.[67]

- *Missile Defense*. U.S.-made Patriot missile defense batteries are deployed in Bahrain. However, Bahrain's limited budget largely precludes it from any major role in the U.S. effort to forge a coordinated missile defense for the Gulf.

Counterterrorism Cooperation/Ministry of Interior[68]

Bahrain is assessed by U.S. reports and officials as facing a terrorist threat from Iran-backed underground groups, discussed above, as well as Sunni groups such as the Islamic State. Bahrain has arrested, charged, and in some cases stripped the citizenship of some Bahrainis accused of supporting the Islamic State, and no terrorist attacks by that group have been reported in Bahrain. On June 23, 2016, Bahraini courts sentenced 24 supporters of the Islamic State for plots in Bahrain, including attacks on Shiites. Critics assert that the security services use antiterrorism laws and operations to suppress Shiite dissidents, even those who do not use violence.

The United States cooperates with Bahrain's Interior Ministry on counterterrorism issues, although U.S. cooperation with the ministry has been subject to restrictions since 2011 because of the ministry's role in internal security. The ministry has retained a reputation among the Shiite population for brutality, despite the departure in the late 1990s of security services chief Ian Henderson, a former British colonial-era commander known for favoring brutal tactics. The February 2014 expulsion of Malinowski led the Obama Administration to suspend most cooperation with the Ministry,[69] but U.S. cooperation with it resumed later in 2014 after Bahrain joined the anti-Islamic State coalition. The Trump Administration has retained restrictions on working with the Ministry and on selling it arms, according to September 12, 2017, testimony by Ambassador Justin Siberell during his confirmation hearing.

Arms Sales to the MOI/Bahrain Coast Guard

Sales of U.S.-made small arms such as those sold to the Interior Ministry are generally commercial sales, licensed by State Department, with Defense Department concurrence. In May 2012, the State Department put "on hold" license requests for sales to Bahrain of small arms, light weapons, and ammunition[70]—all of which could potentially be used against protesters. Apparently referencing Bahrain, the FY2014 Consolidated Appropriation Act (P.L. 113-76) prohibited use of U.S. funds for "tear gas, small arms, light weapons, ammunition, or other items for crowd control purposes for foreign security forces that use excessive force to repress peaceful expression, association, or assembly in countries undergoing democratic transition." The Trump Administration has maintained the hold on new sales of U.S. arms and equipment to MOI forces.

Bahrain's Coast Guard. This force, which is under the Ministry of Interior, polices Bahrain's waterways and contributes to the multilateral mission to monitor and interdict the seaborne movement of terrorists and weapons. U.S. restrictions on support for the Ministry of Interior forces have generally not applied to the Bahrain Coast Guard.

[67] Defense Security and Cooperation Agency. Transmittal Number 16-36. April 27, 2018.

[68] Much of the information in this section is derived from the State Department report on international terrorism for 2017. https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2017/282844.htm.

[69] Michael Gordon. "Expelled U.S. Official to Return to Bahrain." *New York Times*, December 2, 2014.

[70] Email from the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Legislative Affairs, May 20, 2013.

U.S. Training/NADR Funding

The United States provides assistance to the MOI primarily through programs funded by Nonproliferation, Antiterrorism, Demining and Related Programs (NADR) funds, to help the MOI confront violent extremists and terrorist groups. U.S. officials assert that a general lack of training and antiquated investigative methods had slowed the MOI Police Force's progress on counterterrorism and criminal investigations. The ministry's role in putting down unrest prompted an Obama Administration "review" of the use of NADR-ATA (Antiterrorism Assistance) funding for the ministry to ensure that none of the funding was used against protestors. The State Department report on international terrorism for 2014 stated that the "Leahy Law" requirement to vet Bahrain personnel participating in ATA programs prompted the cancellation of planned ATA courses for Bahrain in 2015. However, that report for 2015 stated that one ATA-related course took place that year; the report for 2016 and 2017 did not mention any courses in those years.

The Trump Administration is providing $400,000 in NADR funds for FY2018 and requested an equivalent amount for FY2019 to train MOI personnel in investigative techniques, with a human rights focus, and to help MOI personnel respond to terrorist's use of explosives. Some NADR-ATA funds have previously been used to augment Bahrain's ability to protect U.S. diplomatic and military facilities in Bahrain.

Countering Terrorism Financing and Violent Extremism

Bahrain has been a regional leader in countering terrorism financing since well before the Islamic State organization emerged as a threat. Bahrain has hosted the Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force (MENA/FATF) secretariat. Bahrain's financial intelligence unit is a member of the Egmont Group. Bahrain's banks cooperate with U.S. efforts against terrorism financing and money laundering. In 2013, the government amended the Charity Fundraising Law of 1956 to increase terrorism financing monitoring and penalties. In October 2017, King Hamad issued a series of decreases mandating extensive prison sentences and financial penalties on persons found guilty of raising funds for groups engaged in terrorist activities in Bahrain or internationally.[71]

In April 2015, Bahrain hosted the 8th European Union-GCC Workshop on Combating Terrorist Financing, and Bahrain is a member of the U.S.-led anti-Islamic State coalition's Counter-ISIS Finance Group. In 2015, Bahrain hosted a workshop focused on preventing the abuse of the charitable sector to fund terrorism, and a U.S.-GCC anti-Hezbollah workshop in 2016. In 2017, Bahrain jointed the U.S.-GCC Terrorist Financial Targeting Center, which coordinates GCC counterterrorism financing efforts. In October 2017, in concert with that Center, Bahrain imposed sanctions on persons and entities linked to the Islamic State and Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAO). However, in part due to the intra-GCC dispute discussed below, Bahrain did not allow a Qatari representative to participate in a MENA/FATF meeting in Manama.

Countering Violent Extremism. Bahrain's Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs heads the country's efforts to counter radicalization. It has organized regular workshops for clerics and speakers from both the Sunni and Shiite sects. The ministry also reviews schools' Islamic studies curricula to evaluate interpretations of religious texts. In 2016, the country drafted a National Countering Violent Extremism strategy.

[71] Release by the Embassy of Bahrain in Washington, DC. October 4, 2017.

Foreign Policy Issues

Bahrain's foreign policy is similar to several other GCC states, but Bahrain is unique in the GCC in having a majority Shiite population, and the country generally takes the hardest line on Iran of any of the GCC states.

Relations with other GCC States

Bahrain is politically closest to Saudi Arabia, as demonstrated by the Saudi-led GCC intervention to help the government suppress the uprising in 2011, and Bahrain's joining of the June 2017 Saudi-led move to isolate Qatar. That dispute remains unresolved. King Hamad did not attend the December 5, 2017, annual GCC summit in Kuwait, convened in part to try to resolve that rift.

The rift threatens to undermine the Trump Administration's reported plan to forge a "Middle East Strategic Alliance" consisting of the GCC, Egypt, and Jordan that will, according to a National Security Council spokesperson, "serve as a bulwark against Iranian aggression, terrorism, extremism, and will bring stability to the Middle East."[72] This concept is reportedly to be discussed at a planned U.S.-GCC summit, which has been postponed several times due to the lack of resolution of the intra-GCC rift and is planned for early 2019.

Many Saudis visit Bahrain to enjoy the relatively more liberal social atmosphere there, using a causeway constructed in 1986 that links Bahrain to the eastern provinces of Saudi Arabia, where most of the kingdom's Shiites (about 10% of the population) live. King Hamad's fifth son, Khalid bin Hamad, married a daughter of the late Saudi King Abdullah in 2011. In May 2012, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain announced a proposal to form a political and military union among the GCC states ("Riyadh Declaration"), but opposition by the other four GCC states caused it to languish.

Bahrain is also politically close to Kuwait, in part because of historic ties between their two royal families. Both royal families hail from the Anizah tribe that settled in Bahrain and Kuwait. Kuwait has sometimes sought to mediate the Bahrain political crisis, but Shiites in Kuwait have expressed resentment at what they say is the Kuwait ruling family's alignment with the Al Khalifa regime. Kuwait, as noted, joined the GCC intervention in Bahrain in 2011 and has financially aided Bahrain. In early October 2018, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and UAE announced a $10 billion aid package to stabilize Bahrain's budget and finances.

Perhaps in part explaining why Bahrain joined the June 2017 Saudi-led move against Qatar, Bahrain's relations with Qatar have frequently been fraught with disputes. The two had a long-standing territorial dispute over the Hawar Islands and other lands, which had roots in the 18th century, when the ruling families of both countries controlled parts of the Arabian peninsula. In 1991, five years after clashes in which Qatar landed military personnel on a Bahrain-constructed man-made reef (Fasht al-Dibal) and took some Bahrainis prisoner, Bahrain and Qatar agreed to abandon fruitless Saudi mediation efforts and refer the issue to the International Court of Justice (ICJ). The ICJ ruled on March 16, 2001, in favor of Bahrain on the central dispute over the Hawar Islands but awarded to Qatar the Fasht al-Dibal reef and the town of Zubara on the Qatari mainland, where some members of the Al Khalifa family were long buried. Two smaller islands, Janan and Hadd Janan, were ruled not part of the Hawar Islands group and were also awarded to Qatar. Qatar expressed disappointment over the ruling but accepted it as binding.

In March 2014, Bahrain joined Saudi Arabia and UAE in removing its ambassador from Qatar, a disagreement centered on Qatar's support for Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated opposition

[72] https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-gulf-alliance/trump-seeks-to-revive-arab-nato-to-confront-iran-idUSKBN1KH2IK.

movements in several Middle Eastern countries. Qatar views the Brotherhood as a constructive movement that can help bring peaceful transition to democracy in the region. That stance runs counter to the views of Saudi Arabia and the UAE, in particular, that iew the Brotherhood as a source of unrest within the GCC states. The dispute eased in November 2014 with the return of GCC ambassadors to Doha.

Iran

Bahrain has long blamed Iran for encouraging Bahrain's Shiite opposition to rebel against the government, and for supplying the violent opposition with arms and explosives. In December 1981, and then again in June 1996, Bahrain publicly accused Iran of trying to organize a coup by pro-Iranian Bahraini Shiites. In September 2018, Bahrain's government came close to reviving such accusations against Iran with the charging of 169 persons for allegedly forming "Bahrain Hezbollah" with the backing of the IRGC-QF.

Bahrain's leaders cite Iranian statements as evidence that Iran seeks to promote the overthrow of the government. In June 2016, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamene'i called the revocation "blatant foolishness and insanity" that would mean "removing a barrier between fiery Bahrain youths and the state." As noted above, the Trump Administration has firmly backed the government view that Iran is arming Shiite militants in Bahrain, and Bahrain's leaders praised the Trump Administration's July 2018 designation of the Al Ashtar Brigades as a terrorist organization (see above).

Bahrain backed Saudi Arabia in its January 2016 dispute with Iran in which Iranian protesters attacked two Saudi diplomatic facilities in Iran in response to the Saudi execution of dissident Shiite cleric Nimr al-Baqr Al Nimr. As did Saudi Arabia, Bahrain broke diplomatic relations with Iran, going beyond a 2011-2012 cycle of tensions in which Iran and Bahrain withdrew their ambassadors. In March 2016, the GCC states declared Lebanese Hezbollah, a key Iran ally, a terrorist organization and discouraged or banned their citizens from visiting Lebanon. Bahrain simultaneously closed Future Bank, a Bahrain bank formed and owned by two major Iranian banks (Bank Saderat and Bank Melli). Earlier, in 2013, Bahrain declared Hezbollah a terrorist organization, accusing it of helping a Shiite-led "insurgency" in Bahrain.[73]

On Iran nuclear issues, Bahrain has expressed support for Iran's right to civilian nuclear power, but it said that "when it comes to taking that [nuclear] power, to developing it into a cycle for weapon grade, that is something that we can never accept, and we can never live with in this region."[74] It publicly supported the 2010-2016 global economic pressure on Iran to compel it to limit its nuclear program. Bahrain abandoned a preliminary agreement for Bahrain to buy 1.2 billion cubic feet per day (for 25 years) of Iranian gas via a planned undersea pipeline and for Bahrain to invest $4 billion to develop Phases 15 and 16 of Iran's South Pars gas field (the source of the gas supply). That agreement was reached after a 2007 visit to Bahrain by then-President of Iran Mahmoud Ahmadinejaded. At the same time, Bahrain always maintained relatively normal trade with Iran, including supplying gasoline to Iran (which was subject to U.S. sanctions during 2010-2016 but Bahrain was not sanctioned). Bahrain did not take immediate action to close Iran-linked Future Bank or the Iran Insurance Company until 2016, long after Future Bank was sanctioned by the United States in 2008 under Executive Order 13382 (antiproliferation). By the time Bahrain closed that Bank in February 2016, the United States had already dropped sanctions

[73] The United States designated Hezbollah as a Foreign Terrorist Organization, FTO, in 1997 when that list was established by the Immigration and Naturalization Act, 8 U.S.C. 1189.

[74] Department of State. Transcript of Remarks by Secretary Clinton and Foreign Minister Al Khalifa. December 3, 2010.

on it in accordance with the Iran nuclear agreement (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, JCPOA).

As did the other GCC states, Bahrain expressed initial concern that the JCPOA might indicate that the United States would accept an enhanced regional role for Iran. As the JCPOA was in its final stages of negotiation, King Hamad announced that he would not attend the U.S.-GCC summit at Camp David during May 13-14, 2015—a meeting intended to soothe GCC concerns about an Iran nuclear deal—and sent the Crown Prince in his stead. At the summit, the Administration offered new sales to the GCC states of sophisticated weaponry and establishing expanded cooperation on maritime security, cybersecurity, missile defense, and other issues. King Hamad attended the second U.S.-GCC summit in April 2016, which announced some new initiatives including U.S. training for GCC special forces, and U.S.-GCC military exercises.[75] Bahrain joined the GCC in publicly supporting the JCPOA while calling for increased vigilance against Iran's "destabilizing regional activities." Yet, Bahrain's leaders publicly supported the May 2018 Trump Administration withdrawal from the JCPOA.

Bahrain's animosity toward Iran also stems from issues that predate the formation of the Islamic Republic in 1979. In 2009, an advisor to Iran's Supreme Leader, referred to Bahrain as Iran's 14th province, reviving Bahrain's long-standing concerns that Iran would again challenge its sovereignty. Persian officials contested Bahrain's sovereignty repeatedly during the 19th and 20th centuries, including in 1957, when a bill was submitted to the Iranian Majlis (legislature) to make Bahrain a province of Iran. Bahrain considers the independence issue closed: when Iran reasserted its claim to Bahrain in 1970, prior to the end of British rule in Bahrain, the U.N. Secretary-General dispatched a representative to determine the views of Bahrainis, who found that the island's residents overwhelmingly favored independence from all outside powers, including Iran. The findings were endorsed by U.N. Security Council Resolution 278 and Iran's Majlis ratified them.

Iraq/Syria/Islamic State Organization

Bahrain cooperated with the U.S.-led effort in 2003 to overthrow Iraq's Saddam Hussein militarily, but Bahrain's relations with the post-Saddam Iraq deteriorated after 2005 as the Shiite-dominated Iraqi government marginalized Sunni leaders. Iraqi leaders also expressed support for the 2011 Bahrain uprising. Bahrain did not contribute financially to Iraq reconstruction, but it participated in the "Expanded Neighbors of Iraq" regional dialogue on Iraq that ended in 2008, and it posted its first post-Saddam ambassador to Iraq in October 2008. Bahrain sent a low-level delegation to the March 27-29, 2012, Arab League summit in Baghdad. As have the other GCC states, Bahrain's government has blamed Iraqi government policy toward its Sunni minority for the rise of the Islamic State organization.

Similarly, Bahrain and the other GCC states blamed Syrian President Bashar Al Assad for authoritarian policies that alienated Syria's Sunni Arab majority and fueled support for the Islamic State. In 2011, Bahrain and the other GCC countries withdrew their ambassadors from Syria and voted to suspend Syria's membership in the Arab League. Bahrain's government has not, by all accounts, been providing funding or weaponry to any Syrian rebel groups.

Asserting that the Islamic State poses a regional threat, on September 22, 2014, Bahrain and the other GCC states joined the U.S.-led anti-Islamic State coalition. Bahrain conducted air strikes against Islamic State positions in Syria, as did several other GCC states, but the State

[75] White House Fact Sheet. April 21, 2016. For text, see https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/04/21/fact-sheet-implementation-us-gulf-cooperation-council-strategic.

Department's report on terrorism for 2016 stated that Bahrain "has not contributed substantively to coalition [anti-ISIS] military efforts since 2014." None of the GCC states engaged in anti-Islamic State air operations in Iraq, on the grounds that the Shiite-dominated Iraqi government is aligned with Iran.

Yemen

Bahrain joined the GCC diplomatic efforts to persuade Yemen's President Ali Abdullah Saleh to cede power to a transition process in 2012. In 2015, Zaidi Shiite "Houthi" militia rebels, backed to some degree by Iran, took control of the capital, Sanaa, and forced President Abdu Rabbu Mansur Al Hadi into exile. In March 2015, Saudi Arabia assembled a coalition of Arab states, including Bahrain and all the other GCC countries except Oman, to combat the Houthis in an effort to achieve a restoration of the Hadi government. Bahrain has conducted air strikes and contributed some ground forces to the effort. At least eight members of the BDF have been killed in the engagement, to date, and a Bahraini Air Force F-16 crashed in Yemen-related operations on December 30, 2015. The pilot survived.

Israeli-Palestinian Dispute

On the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, Bahraini leaders have on occasion taken positions outside a GCC consensus. In a July 2009 op-ed, Crown Prince Salman called on the Arab states to do more to communicate to the Israeli people ideas for peaceful resolution of the dispute.[76] In October 2009, Bahrain's then-foreign minister called for direct talks with Israel and in September 2017, King Hamad called for the Arab states to forge direct ties to Israel and an end to the Arab boycott of Israel. Following the October 2018 visit of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to Oman, Israel's Minister of Economy, Eli Cohen, stated that he had received an invitation to visit Bahrain. Such a visit would continue the evolving trend of broadening contacts between Israel and the GCC countries—a trend at least partly directed against the common adversary, Iran.

Still, Bahrain supports the efforts of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas to obtain U.N. recognition for a State of Palestine. Bahraini leaders publicly criticized the announcement by President Trump on December 6, 2017, recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital as an obstacle to forging an Israeli-Palestinian peace.

Earlier, Bahrain participated in the 1990-1996 multilateral Arab-Israeli talks, and it hosted a session on the environment (October 1994). In September 1994, all GCC states ceased enforcing secondary and tertiary boycotts of Israel, but Bahrain did not join Oman and Qatar in exchanging trade offices with Israel. In conjunction with the U.S.-Bahrain FTA, Bahrain dropped the primary boycott and closed boycott-related offices in Bahrain.

Economic Issues

Bahrain's economy has been affected by the domestic unrest and by the decline in oil prices during 2014-2018. Hydrocarbons still account for about 80% of government revenues, mostly from oil exports from a field that Saudi Arabia shares equally with Bahrain, the Abu Safa field, which produces 300,000 barrels per day. Bahrain's oil and gas reserves are the lowest of the GCC states, estimated respectively at 210 million barrels of oil and 5.3 trillion cubic feet of gas.

[76] "Arabs Need to Talk to the Israelis." *Washington Post*, July 16, 2009.

However, Bahrain's energy export potential might be revived if Bahrain's 2018 discovery of a shale oil field containing an estimated 80 billion barrels of shale oil proves commercially viable.[77]

The fall in oil prices during 2014-2018 has caused Bahrain to cut subsidies of some fuels and some foodstuffs. The financial difficulties have also contributed to a lack of implementation of government promises to provide more low-income housing (presumably for Shiites, who tend to be among the poorer Bahrainis). To try to diversify, Bahrain is investing in its banking and financial services sectors (about 25.5% of GDP combined). To help Bahrain cope with its budgetary difficulties, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE announced in early October 2018 a $10 billion aid package. A comprehensive assessment of Bahrain's economy is provided in Economist Intelligence Unit country reports.[78]

U.S.-Bahrain Economic Relations

U.S.-Bahrain economic relations have expanded, even though the United States buys virtually no oil from Bahrain. The major U.S. import from the country is aluminum: that product and other manufacturing account for the existence in Bahrain of a vibrant middle and working class, which consists mostly of Shiite Bahrainis. About 180 U.S. companies do business in Bahrain. In concert with Crown Prince Salman's visit to Washington, DC, in November 2017, Bahrain-based companies in several sectors signed trade deals with U.S. based firms, including a memorandum of understanding between Aluminum Bahrain (Alba) and General Electric. More than 200 American companies operate in Bahrain, and Amazon Web Services is slated to open its first regional headquarters in Bahrain.[79]

To encourage reform and signal U.S. appreciation, the United States and Bahrain signed an FTA on September 14, 2004. Implementing legislation was signed January 11, 2006 (P.L. 109-169). However, in light of the unrest, the AFL-CIO has urged the United States to void the FTA on the grounds that Bahrain is preventing free association of workers and abridging their rights. In 2005, total bilateral trade was about $780 million, and, as depicted in the table below, U.S.-Bahrain trade has more than doubled since the U.S.-Bahrain FTA to about $2 billion in 2017.

Some U.S. funds have been used to provide assistance to Bahrain for purposes that are not purely security related. In 2010, MEPI supported the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Small Business Administration and Bahrain's Ministry of Industry and Commerce to support small and medium enterprises in Bahrain. MEPI funds have also been used to fund U.S. Department of Commerce programs ("Commercial Law Development Program") to provide Bahrain with technical assistance in support of trade liberalization and economic diversification, including modernization of the country's commercial laws and regulations.

[77] Columbia University's Center on Global Energy Policy. May 3, 2018.

[78] http://country.eiu.com/FileHandler.ashx?issue_id=1644685748&mode=pdf.

[79] "Bahrain Signs $10 million Worth of Trade Agreements with US Firms." Constructionweekonline.com.December 3, 2017.

Table 3. Some Basic Facts About Bahrain

Population	About 1.4 million, of which about half are citizens. Expatriates are mainly from South Asia and other parts of the Middle East.
Religions	Nearly all the citizenry is Muslim, while Christians, Hindus, Bahais, and Jews constitute about 1% of the citizenry. Of the total population, 70% is Muslim, 9% is Christian, 10% are of other religions.
GDP (purchasing power parity, PPP)	$70 billion (2017). Would be $34 billion at official exchange rate.
GDP per capita (PPP basis)	$51,800 (2017)
GDP Real Growth Rate	2.5% (2017)—slightly lower than 3% in 2016
Budget	$5.5 billion revenues, $9.3 billion expenditures (2017)
Inflation Rate	0.9% (2017)
Unemployment Rate	3.8% (2017)
U.S. Exports to Bahrain	$907 million (2017), roughly equal to the amounts in 2016
U.S. Imports from Bahrain	$996 million (2017), up from $768 million in 2016

Source: CIA, *The World Factbook*. June 2017.

Table 4. U.S. Assistance to Bahrain

($ in millions)

FY	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
FMF	3.968	8.0	19.0	15.46	10	13.0	10	7.5	5.0	0	0	0
IMET	0.622	.661	.670	.435	.554	.487	.522	.577	.416	.641	.400	.400
NADR	0.744	.500	1.10	1.5	.500	.900	.790	.610	.800	.400	.400	.400
"Section 1206"	4.3	16.2										
ESF/Dem. and Gov.						.300	.52	.685	.350			

Notes: IMET = International Military Education and Training Funds, used mainly to enhance BDF military professionalism and promote U.S. values. NADR = Non-Proliferation, Anti-Terrorism, De-Mining and Related Programs, used to sustain Bahrain's counterterrorism capabilities and interdict terrorists. Section 1206 are DOD funds used to train and equip Bahrain's special forces, its coastal surveillance and patrol capabilities, and to develop its counterterrorism assessment capabilities. (Named for a section of the FY2006 Defense Authorization Act, P.L. 109-163.) FY2018 figures represent the Administration request.

Figure 1. Bahrain

Source: https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ba.html.

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