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

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Summary

Outward signs of the uprising against Bahrain's Al Khalifa ruling family that began on February 14, 2011, have diminished, but continued incarceration of dissident leaders, opposition boycotts of elections, and small demonstrations counter government assertions that Bahrain has "returned to normal." The mostly Shiite opposition has not achieved its goal of establishing a constitutional monarchy, but the unrest has compelled the ruling family to undertake some reforms, at least in part to avoid international isolation. Reflecting some radicalization of the opposition, underground factions, some of which might be backed by Iran, have claimed responsibility for bombings and other attacks primarily against security officials.

The Bahrain government's use of repression against the dissent has presented a policy dilemma for the Obama Administration because Bahrain is a longtime ally that is pivotal to maintaining Persian Gulf security. The country has hosted the U.S. naval headquarters for the Gulf region since 1946; 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 8,000 U.S. forces in Bahrain, mostly located at the continually expanding naval headquarters site. Apparently to address the use of force against protesters, since 2011, Administration policy has been to sell to Bahrain weapons systems that are tailored only for external defense, such as maritime patrol and surveillance equipment, and has reduced Bahrain's Foreign Military Financing (FMF) assistance. Bahrain's opposition asserts that the United States is downplaying regime abuses in order to protect the security relationship.

Bahraini leaders assert that their primary foreign policy concern is Iran. Bahraini leaders, with corroboration from U.S. official reports, accuse Iran for providing material support to violent opposition factions. Bahrain has expressed the same concerns about the Iran nuclear agreement ("Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action," JCPOA) that most of the other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, and Oman) countries have: that the JCPOA provides Iran with substantial sanctions relief that will further Iran's efforts to expand its regional influence. However, as part of a GCC consensus, Bahrain publicly supports the JCPOA as a means to preclude Iran from developing a nuclear weapon. Bahrain has supported a Saudi concept of increased political unity among the GCC countries and has joined Saudi Arabia-led military action to try to restore the government of Yemen that was ousted by Iran-backed Houthi rebels. Bahrain has flown strikes against the Islamic State organization in Syria, but not in Iraq. Bahrain has not provided material support to groups fighting President Bashar Al Assad in Syria.

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 – an effect compounded by the fall in oil prices since mid-2014. 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. 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 Rights¹

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, arrived from the Saudi peninsula and succeeded in capturing a Persian garrison controlling the island. In 1830, the ruling family signed a treaty establishing Bahrain as a protectorate of Britain, which was the dominant power in the Persian Gulf until the early 1970s. 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. Those findings were endorsed by U.N. Security Council Resolution 278, which was ratified by Iran’s parliament. Bahrain negotiated with eight other Persian Gulf emirates during 1970-1971 to try to form a broad federation, but Bahrain and Qatar each decided to become independent. The seven other emirates formed a federation called the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Bahrain declared itself independent on August 15, 1971, and a U.S. Embassy opened in Manama, Bahrain’s capital, immediately thereafter. The current U.S. Ambassador (since December 2014) is William V. Roebuck, a career diplomat.

The Ruling Family and Its Dynamics

Bahrain is led by King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa (about 65 years old), who succeeded his father, Shaykh Isa bin Sulman 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 Bahrain’s Shiite Muslims have long asserted they are treated as “second class citizens” and deprived of a proportionate share of political power and 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, the U.S. and U.K.-educated Crown Prince Shaykh Salman bin Hamad, who is about 45 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 the level of unrest reached in 2011 would have occurred long

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.

ago had the king's earlier reforms not been enacted. The Crown Prince and his faction was strengthened by his appointment to a newly created position of first deputy Prime Minister.

The "anti-reform" faction 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 80 years old but still highly active. The king is widely seen as being unwilling to remove him or to override his hardline royal family allies, who include Minister of the Royal Court Khalid bin Ahmad bin Salman Al Khalifa⁴ and his brother, BDF Commander Khalifa bin Ahmad Al Khalifa. These brothers are known as "Khawalids"—they hail from a branch of the Al Khalifa family that is traced to an ancestor Khalid bin Ali Al Khalifa—and are considered implacably opposed to compromise with the Shiites.⁵ The Khawalids reportedly have allies throughout the security and intelligence services and the judiciary, including Ahmad bin Ateyatallah Al Khalifa (another high-ranking royal court official). The hardliners assert that concessions to the Shiite majority cause the Shiites to increase their political demands. In September 2013, Bahrain appointed Lieutenant Colonel Abdullah bin Muhammad bin Rashid, a subordinate of the BDF commander, 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 seven of the 19 cabinet posts, including the defense, internal security, and foreign minister posts. Typically, there are about four or five Shiite ministers, but there were six in a 2012 cabinet, as a gesture to the opposition.

As Hamad's first reform steps upon taking office, he assumed the title of King—a leadership title that implies more accountability to the population than the traditional title "Amir." He held a referendum on February 14, 2002, that adopted a "National Action Charter," including the text of a constitution. However, many Shiites criticized the constitution because it established that the elected Council of Representatives (COR)⁶ and the all-appointed *Shura* (Consultative) Council were of equal size (40 seats each). Together, they constitute the National Assembly (parliament). The government has tended to appoint generally more educated, pro-Western, and pro-government members to the Shura Council. The opposition, correspondingly, seeks maximum authority for the COR. There is no "quota" for females in the National Assembly.

- The Assembly serves as only a partial check on government power, despite constitutional amendments of May 2012 that gave it 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. However, as a consequence of the May 2012 amendments, it does have 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 sitting ministers through a vote of no-confidence (requiring a two-thirds majority). The COR can also, by a similar super-majority, declare that it cannot "cooperate"

⁴ The name of this official is similar to that of the Foreign Minister, Khalid bin Ahmad bin Mohammad Al Khalifa.

⁵ 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.

⁶ This body is also referred to as the Council of Deputies (Majles al-Nawwab).

- with the Prime Minister, but the king then rules on whether to dismiss the Prime Minister or disband the COR. None of these authorities has ever been exercised.
- Either chamber of the National Assembly can originate legislation but enactment into law requires concurrence by the king.⁷ Prior to the May 2012 amendments, only the COR could originate legislation. The king’s “veto” can be overridden by a two-thirds majority vote of both chambers. A decree issued by the king on August 23, 2012, gives the National Assembly the ability to recommend constitutional amendments, which are then 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, his actions 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 anti-government 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.

Formal political parties are banned, but factions organize, for the elections and other political activity, as “political societies”—the functional equivalent of parties:

- *Wifaq*, formally, the Al *Wifaq* (Accord) National Islamic Society, is the largest and most prominent Shiite political society. It is considered a relatively moderate opposition faction and has participated in the formal national dialogues with the government and royal family since 2011. *Wifaq*’s leaders are Secretary-General and Shiite cleric Shaykh Ali al-Salman and his deputy Khalil al-Marzuq. Another top figure in the faction is the 79-year-old hardline Shiite cleric Isa Qasim, whose citizenship was revoked by the government on June 20, 2016. All these leaders, and others in the faction, have been repeatedly arrested or otherwise scrutinized and penalized. In July 2014, the government barred *Wifaq* from operating for a three-month period for alleged breaches of Bahrain’s law on political societies. On June 14, 2016, a court approved a government request to suspend *Wifaq*’s political activities, and on July 17, 2016, a Bahrain court dissolved the political society entirely. *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

⁷ Before the May 2012 constitutional amendments, only the COR could draft legislation.

the COR elections. Its key leaders are wheelchair-bound Dr. Abduljalil Alsingace and Hassan Mushaima; both of whom have been imprisoned since the 2011 uprising.

- The Bahrain Islamic Action Society, another 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 plans to forcibly overthrow the government in the 1980s and 1990s. Another IFLB offshoot, Amal, is known as the “Shirazi faction” for its ties to radical Shiite clerics loyal to Iran’s Ayatollah Shirazi. Amal’s leader, Shaykh Muhammad Ali al-Mafoodh, has been in prison since 2011 and Amal was outlawed in 2012.
- *Waad* (“promise”) is a left-leaning secular political opposition society whose members are both Sunni and Shiite. Waad’s leader is Ibrahim Sharif.
- Sunni opinion is generally, but not exclusively, represented by the government. However, there are two major Sunni Islamist political societies that criticize the government for refusing to seek a larger role for Islamic law and values in Bahraini society. The two are *Minbar* (Arabic for “platform”), which is an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, and *Al Asala*, which is a harder-line “Salafist” political society. Outspoken Salafist critic of the government Jassim al-Saeedi is an Asala member, although he runs as an independent. 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 pro-government Sunni political society—the National Unity Gathering/National Unity Association—was formed as a response to the Shiite-led 2011 uprising. Ten of its candidates ran in the 2014 COR election as the “Al Fatih Coalition.”
- Several Bahraini human rights groups advocate for Shiite rights and causes. 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) and its offshoot, the Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights (BYSHR). The latter organization was officially dissolved but remains active informally.

Pre-Uprising Elections

Several elections were held during 2002-2010, with tensions between the Shiite majority and the regime escalating with each successive vote.

- *October 2002 Election.* In the first elections under the National Charter, *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 eight women. Sunnis won two-thirds of the 40 COR seats, and none of the women was elected.
- *November 2006 Election.* Sunni-Shiite tensions escalated in advance of the COR and municipal elections, perhaps aggravated by the accession of a Shiite majority in Iraq through elections. The election was also clouded by a government adviser’s (Salah al-Bandar’s) revelations in August 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* did not boycott, helping lift turnout to 72%, and the faction won 17 seats (virtually all those it contested), making it the largest bloc in the COR. Sunnis won the remaining 23 seats; of

which eight were secular Sunnis and 15 were Islamists. One woman, who was unopposed in her district, was elected out of 18 female candidates. The king subsequently named a new Shura Council with 20 Shiites, 19 Sunnis, and 1 Christian (a female). Nine were women. In the post-election cabinet, a Shiite was named one of four deputy prime ministers and another, a *Wifaq* supporter, became minister of state for foreign affairs.

- *October 2010 Election.* Shiite oppositionists again accused the government of gerrymandering to favor Sunni candidates and 23 Shiite leaders were arrested the month before the election under a 2006 anti-terrorism law. *Wifaq* participated nonetheless. Of the 200 candidates, six were women, including *Waad* figure Munira Fakhro. Turnout was about 67%. The election increased *Wifaq*'s representation to 18 seats, reduced Sunni Islamists to five seats from 15; and empowered Sunni independents, who won 17 seats (up from nine in the previous COR). The same woman who had won in 2006 was elected. Municipal elections were conducted concurrently. The king reappointed 30 of the 40 serving Shura Council members and 10 new members. Of its membership, 19 were Shiites, including the speaker, Ali bin Salih al-Salih. The Council had four women, substantially fewer than the 2006-2010 Council. Among the four, one was Jewish (out of a Jewish population in Bahrain of about 40 persons) and one was Christian, of an estimated Christian population of 1,000.

2011 Uprising: Origin, Developments, and Prognosis

Shiite demands were demonstrated as unsatisfied when a major uprising began on February 14, 2011, immediately following the toppling of Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak.⁸ After a few days of confrontations with security forces, mostly Shiite demonstrators converged on the interior of a major traffic circle, "Pearl Roundabout," named after a statue there depicting Bahrain's pearl-diving past. The unrest escalated on February 17-18, 2011, when security forces using rubber bullets and tear gas killed four demonstrators. *Wifaq* pulled all of its 18 deputies from the COR. In part at the reported urging of the United States, on February 19, 2011, the government pulled security forces back, and on February 22 and 25, 2011, large demonstrations were held. The Crown Prince invited the representatives of the protesters to begin a formal dialogue, an effort supported by the king's pardon of 308 Bahrainis and dropping of two Al Khalifa family members from the cabinet.

The protesters and their leaders demanded altering the constitution to create a constitutional monarchy in which the Prime Minister and cabinet are selected by the fully elected parliament; ending gerrymandering of election districts to favor Sunnis; and providing more jobs and economic opportunities. These demands were encapsulated in the "Manama Document," a manifesto unveiled in October 2011 by the largest opposition groups, led by *Wifaq* and *Waad*.

The Manama Document went beyond an attempt by government moderates to meet at least some major opposition demands. The primary example was the March 2011 articulation by Crown Prince Salman of "seven principles" that would guide a national dialogue, including a "parliament with full authority;" a "government that meets the will of the people"; fair voting districts; and

⁸ 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>.

several other measures.⁹ The seven principles fell short of calling for a constitutional monarchy, as demanded by the opposition, but gave the moderate opposition reason to assert that some of their demands could eventually be met through dialogue.

King Hamad has repeatedly refused opposition demands to replace Prime Minister Khalifa. Moderate oppositionists have suggested they would accept a more moderate ruling family member or a Sunni figure non-royal as Prime Minister, but the king appears unwilling to risk unrest among Khalifa's hardline supporters in the family or the Sunni community more broadly.

Saudi-led Direct Intervention on Behalf of the Government

Despite the articulation of the seven principles, protests escalated. On March 13, 2011, protesters blockaded the financial district of Manama, triggering the government to request that the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, UAE, Qatar, and Oman) send security forces to protect key sites. On March 14, 2011, a GCC force (from its joint Peninsula Shield force) of 1,200 Saudi armored forces and 600 UAE police crossed into Bahrain and took up positions at key locations. Kuwait sent naval forces to help secure Bahrain's maritime borders. On March 15, 2011, King Hamad declared a three-month state of emergency. Bahrain's security forces, backed by the GCC deployment, cleared demonstrators from Pearl Roundabout and demolished the Pearl Monument on March 18, 2011.¹⁰ Perceiving it had restored order, the king announced that the state of emergency would end on June 1, 2011. The GCC forces began to depart in late June 2011, although some UAE police and other GCC security forces remained.

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, due by October 30, 2011, was released on November 23, 2011, and provided support for the narratives of both sides as well as recommendations. The report stated that¹¹

- 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.
- The government did not provide evidence to link Iran to the unrest.
- There was no evidence of human rights abuses committed by the GCC forces.

The report contained 26 recommendations (pp. 411-415) to try to prevent future violence against protesters and to hold accountable those government personnel responsible for abuses. King Hamad publicly accepted the report's findings and promised full implementation of its recommendations. *Wifaq* said the report failed to state that abuses of protesters were deliberate government policy. On November 26, 2011, the king issued a decree to establish a 19-member National Commission to oversee implementation of the recommendations, chaired by Shura

⁹ BICI report, op. cit., p. 165.

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ <http://files.bici.org.bh/BICIREportEN.pdf>.

Council Chairman Ali al-Salih (a Shiite). Subsequently, a “Follow-Up Unit,” headed by Ms. Dana Al Zayani, was established by the Ministry of Justice.¹²

Assessments of Government 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 or minimally 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 most, although not all, of the more than 53 Shiite religious sites demolished by the regime in 2011. In 2013, in line with the BICI report, the King issued a decree re-establishing the “National Institution for Human Rights” (NIHR) to investigate human rights violations. It has issued two annual reports thus far (late 2014 and late 2015).¹³

State Department. The conference report on the FY2013 defense authorization act (P.L. 112-239, signed January 2, 2013) directed the Secretary of State to report to Congress within 180 days of enactment (by July 2, 2013) on Bahrain’s implementation of the BICI recommendations. The resulting State Department report, released in August 2013, indicated that the government had fully implemented five of the recommendations, including:¹⁴

- Making the office of the inspector general of the Ministry of Interior independent of the ministry’s hierarchy.
- Stripping the National Security Agency of law enforcement powers and limiting it to purely intelligence gathering. That occurred with the issuing of an amendment to the 2002 decree establishing that agency and transferring its arrest powers to the Ministry of Interior.
- Providing compensate and other remedies for families of the deceased victims of the government’s response to the unrest. About \$6 million was budgeted by the government to provide the compensation.
- Ensuring 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.
- Development of educational programs to promote religious, political, and other forms of tolerance and promotion of human rights and the rule of law.

The report added that:

King Hamad deserves credit for initiating the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, for accepting the recommendations put forward in the report, and for committing to implement the reforms. While the Government of Bahrain has made progress in implementing recommended reforms put forward in the BICI report, there is still work to be done.

¹² The Follow-Up Unit’s June report can be found at http://www.iaa.bh/downloads/bici_followup_report_en.pdf.

¹³ The full text of the National Commission’s March 20, 2012, report is at <http://www.biciactions.bh/wps/portal/BICI/>.

¹⁴ The 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 Senate report on the FY2016 Foreign Operations Appropriations Act (S.Rept. 114-79), which was incorporated into the FY2016 Consolidated Appropriation (P.L. 114-113) requires another State Department report, to be submitted by February 1, 2016, on Bahrain's implementation of the BICI recommendations. The State Department publicly acknowledged that the report was overdue, attributing the tardiness to a desire that the report be accurate and complete. It submitted the report to Congress on June 21, 2016, stating the following:¹⁵

- The government has made progress toward implementing the BICI recommendations, including those measures presented in the Department's August 2013 report, above.
- The government needs to do more, including allowing oversight agencies greater independence, and implementing recommendations on freedom of expression.

Regarding pending BICI-related legislation, in the 114th Congress, S. 2009 and H.R. 3445, would prohibit 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 has certified that Bahrain has fully implemented all 26 BICI recommendations.

Outside Organizations. A study by the Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED), issued on the one-year anniversary of the BICI report, found that the government had fully implemented only three of the recommendations, partially implemented 15, not implemented six at all, and two others had "unclear" implementation.¹⁶ A November 2015 report by the group "Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain" asserted that the government had only fully implemented two of the BICI recommendations and that those fully or partially implemented did not address the issues that caused the uprising.¹⁷

The "National Dialogue" Process

The BICI process created conditions for the establishment of a "National Dialogue" process, which was inaugurated on July 2, 2011, under the chairmanship of COR speaker Dhahrani. About 300 delegates participated, of which 40-50 were member of the Shiite opposition, including five members of *Wifaq*.¹⁸ The several week dialogue addressed political, economic, social, and human rights issues that government officials said should outline a broad vision rather than specific steps. The detention of many oppositionists clouded the meetings, and *Wifaq* exited the talks on July 18, 2011. In the course of the dialogue, King Hamad pardoned some protesters.

The dialogue concluded in late July 2011 after reaching consensus on the following recommendations, which were endorsed by the government on July 29, 2011.

- an elected parliament (lower house) with expanded powers, including the power to confirm or reject a nominated cabinet; the power to confirm or veto the government's four-year work plan; the right to discuss any agenda item; and the power for the full COR to question ministers on their performance or plans. In

¹⁵ The text of 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>

¹⁶ POMED. "One Year Later: Assessing Bahrain's Implementation of the BICI Report." November 2012.

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.

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.
- efforts to reduce sectarian divisions.

Despite the opposition’s criticism of the dialogue, the government proceeded to implement the consensus recommendations. King Hamad announced draft amendments to the Bahraini constitution on January 16, 2012, which were adopted by the National Assembly, and ratified by the king on May 3, 2012. The amendments:

- 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.
- 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.

Following the amendments, and in the context of continued demonstrations, the government and the opposition considered additional dialogue. The State Department praised the Crown Prince’s speech at the December 7-8, 2012, Manama Dialogue (annual international security conference sponsored by the International Institute for Strategic Studies) calling for a resumption of dialogue. On January 22, 2013, the king formally reiterated his earlier calls for a restart of the dialogue and, the same day, *Wifaq* and five allied parties accepted the invitation.

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 pro-government organizations, and five members of the National Assembly (both the upper and lower house). To facilitate progress, on March 11, 2013, the King appointed Crown Prince Salman first deputy Prime Minister, increasing the Crown Prince’s authority. The dialogue quickly bogged down over opposition insistence that consensus recommendations be put to a public referendum, while the government insisted that agreements be enacted by the parliament. The opposition also demanded that the dialogue include representatives of the king rather than various ministers. Opposition participants began boycotting the talks in mid-September 2013, to protest lack of progress as well as the arrest of Khalil al-Marzuq, the deputy chief of *Wifaq* and *Wifaq*’s representative to the dialogue. The government formally suspended the dialogue on January 8, 2014.

The Crown Prince sought to quickly salvage negotiations by meeting with Marzuq and *Wifaq* leader Shaykh Ali al-Salman on January 15, 2014, despite the fact that both faced charges for their roles in the uprising. The meeting seemed to address *Wifaq*’s demand that political dialogue be conducted with senior Al Khalifa members. The Minister of the Royal Court Shaykh Khalid

bin Ahmad Al Khalifa subsequently met with opposition representatives and stated that any renewed dialogue would include a greater number of senior officials than was the case previously.

On September 19, 2014, Crown Prince Salman issued a five-point “framework” for a new national dialogue that would address some opposition demands, centering on (1) redefining electoral districts; (2) a revised 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 primarily because they did not satisfy the core opposition demand that an elected COR select the Prime Minister. No new national dialogue has convened to date.

Table I. Comparative Composition of the National Assembly

	2006	2010	Post-By-Election (October 2011)	2014
Council of Representatives (COR)				
Wifaq (Shiite Islamist)	17	18	0	0
Shiite Independent	0	0	8	14
Sunni Independent (mostly secular)	8	17	27	23
Minbar (Sunni Islamist, Muslim Brotherhood)	7	2	2	1
Asala (Sunni Islamist, Salafi)	8	3	3	2
COR Sect Composition	23 Sunni, 17 Shiite	22 Sunni, 18 Shiite	32 Sunni, 8 Shiite	26 Sunni, 14 Shiite
Women in COR	1	1	4	3
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

COR Elections in November 2014

In an effort to achieve “normalization,” the government urged the opposition to participate in the November 22, 2014, COR election. However, it 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 51% (according to the government, but 30%, according to the opposition). There was little violence during the vote or a November 29 runoff.

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 ten pro-government Al Fatih coalition candidates was elected. The 14 Shiites elected were independents, although some reportedly were members of *Wifaq* or other opposition factions. Ahmad Ibrahim al-Mulla was elected COR speaker, and the deputy speaker is 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 parity in the number of Shiites and Sunnis as well as one Christian and one Jewish representative. Of the 40 members, 23 were appointed to the body for the first time.

Prospects and Way Forward?

Unrest continues, although at far lower levels of intensity than during 2011-2012. Each year, including 2016, relatively large demonstrations have taken place on the anniversary of the uprising. But, a political settlement might still be possible because the opposition appears to realize it cannot substantially alter the government and the government appears to have concluded it cannot end the unrest entirely. The government and the opposition have discussed an interim compromise in which the opposition gains seats in a new cabinet. On the other hand, hardline Sunnis within and outside the government, some with support of Saudi officials, continue to urge the ruling family to refuse compromise. And, the opposition is unlikely to resume a dialogue with the government while opposition leaders, particularly *Wifaq* leader Salman, remain incarcerated. The unlikelihood of new talks have been increased by the government's move in June 2016 to disband *Wifaq* entirely. State Department statements and comments encourage the government to release opposition leaders and to reconsider moves to abolish *Wifaq*.¹⁹ Further decreasing the likelihood of talks, over the past year, the government has stepped up citizenship revocations and expulsions of such Bahrain's Shiites who are of Persian origin, accusing them loyalty to Iran.²⁰

Emergence of Violent Underground Groups Clouds Outlook

Possibly reducing the potential for a political settlement is the activity of violent, underground groups that, among their tactics, detonate bombs and Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) against security forces. Mainstream opposition factions deny any connection to these groups.

There are several violent groups that include²¹

- The "14 February Youth Coalition" (named for the anniversary of the Bahrain uprising) claims to be inspired by the "Tamarod" (rebel)-led protests in Egypt that prompted the Egyptian military to remove Muslim Brotherhood president Mohammad Morsi. The Bahrain government asserts that the group is a terrorist movement that seeks to overthrow the state. 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.
- Sayara al-Ashtar (Ashtar Brigades). It issued its first public statement in April 2013 and has since claimed responsibility for about 20 bombings against security personnel, including one in March 2014 that killed three police officers. One of

¹⁹ <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2016/02/252566.htm> and <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2016/06/258464.htm>.

²⁰ 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>.

²¹ Matthew Levitt. "Iran and Bahrain: Crying Wolf, or Wolf at the Door?" Washington Institute for Near East Policy, May 16, 2014.

them was a UAE police officer, part of the contingent that has helped Bahraini security forces since the 2011 GCC intervention.

- Popular Resistance Brigades. This group also claimed responsibility for the March 2014, bombing discussed above and openly affiliates with the 14 February Youth Coalition.
- Sayara al-Mukhtar (Mukhtar Brigades). It has claimed responsibility for several attacks on security forces, including use of IEDs.

The activities of violent groups continue. In December 2013, authorities seized a ship, originating in Iraq, allegedly carrying Iranian bomb-making material for the Bahrain opposition.²² In April 2015, the government arrested 29 persons for a December 2014, bombing that wounded several police officers; they were sentenced to prison in December 2015, and two of them had their citizenship revoked. A July 28, 2015 bomb attack killed two policemen, days after the government announced it had disrupted an alleged attempt by Iran to arm opposition groups. An April 16, 2016, bomb attack killed one policeman and critically injured two others. The State Department report on international terrorism for 2015 states that in 2015, the government of Bahrain “raided, interdicted, and rounded up numerous Iran-sponsored weapons caches, arms transfers, and militants.”²³

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 re-arrested and, in June 2015, convicted and sentenced to four years in prison. In May 2016, a court increased his sentence to nine years. 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, he his citizenship was revoked, but he remains in Bahrain pending appeals.
Bahrain Center for Human Rights Leaders and “Bahrain 13”	Abdul Hadi al-Khawaja, founder of BHCR, Arrested April 9, 2011, was one of 13 prominent dissidents (“Bahrain 13”) tried by state security court May 8, 2011, and sentenced to life in prison for conspiring to overthrow the government and for espionage on June 22, 2011. Daughters Zainab and Maryam also repeatedly arrested for opposition activities; Zainab released in May 2016 and left Bahrain. Khawaja’s successor as head of BCHR, Nabeel Rajab has been arrested and his travel banned several times for allegedly orchestrating anti-government activity. He was arrested most recently in June 2016. Among the other members of the “Bahrain 13,” four are sentenced to life in prison—Abdulwahab Ahmed, Mohammad al-Saffaf, Abduljalil Mansour, and Said Mirza Ahmad.
Ibrahim Sharif	Waad leader, imprisoned in 2011 and released on June 19, 2015, but re-arrested in July 2015 for “incitement” against the government. In February 2016, he was sentenced to one year in jail.
Salmaniya Medical Complex personnel	Twenty-one medical personnel were arrested in April 2011 and tried for inciting sectarian hatred, possession of illegal weapons, and forcibly occupying a public building. All were eventually acquitted, most recently in late March 2013, but have not regained their jobs.
Number of Protesters Killed	About 100 (since the uprising began in early 2011)
Citizenship Revocations	Over 300, including 72 revocations in 2015, and several expulsions, mostly Bahraini Shiites of Persian origin.
Number Arrested	Approximately 3,000 total detentions since 2011.

Sources: Various press and interest group reports.

²² Sandeep Singh Grewal. Arms Ring is Smashed by Police. Daily News, December 31. 2013.

²³ For text of the report, see: <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2015/index.htm>.

U.S. Posture on the Uprising

The Administration has not at any time called for the Al Khalifa regime to step down, asserting that Bahrain's use of force against demonstrators has been limited and that the Bahrain government has tried to address at least some opposition grievances. The Administration opposed the 2011 GCC intervention, it has repeatedly urged Bahraini authorities not to use force against protesters and release jailed opposition leaders, and it has called on all parties to engage in sustained dialogue.²⁴ The United States has not banned travel to the United States or imposed economic penalties on Bahraini officials, and high-level U.S.-Bahrain engagement has taken place uninterrupted.

Shortly after the outset of the uprising, in a September 21, 2011, speech to the U.N. General Assembly, President Obama said:

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.

In June 2015, State Department officials, referring to the conviction of *Wifaq* leader Shaykh Ali Salman, said that opposition parties play a vital role in “inclusive, pluralistic states and societies.” The Administration withheld some arms sales to Bahrain during 2011-2015. The U.S.-funded expansion of the large naval facility that the United States uses in Bahrain has continued without interruption. 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.

The United States has continued uninterrupted high-level engagement with Bahrain since 2011. Administration officials say this policy has enabled them to urge their Bahraini counterparts to address opposition grievances, but U.S.-Bahrain still, by all accounts, focus primarily on security issues. In May 2012, Crown Prince Salman visited Washington, D.C., and met with senior U.S. officials including Vice President Joe Biden. In December 2013, then-Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel attended the Manama Dialogue international security conference—the first U.S. Cabinet member to visit Bahrain since the uprising began. He returned for that conference in December 2014. Secretary of State John Kerry met with King Hamad in March 2015 during an economic conference in Egypt. The Crown Prince represented Bahrain at the May 13-14 U.S.-GCC summit at Camp David, organized in large part to reassure the Gulf states about a potential nuclear deal with Iran. Secretary of State Kerry visited Bahrain in April 2015 and King Hamad represented Bahrain at the April 21, 2016, second U.S.-GCC summit.

Critics of Administration policy toward Bahrain, primarily human rights-oriented groups such as Human Rights Watch and the Project on Middle East Democracy, say that the Administration has been insufficiently critical of Bahrain's handling of the unrest.²⁵ These and other critics assert that

²⁴ Secretary of State Clinton Comments on the Situation in the Middle East. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GbuMZUg3Gc>.

²⁵ Stephen McInerney. “Silence on Bahrain.” *Washington Post* op-ed. November 5, 2012.

the Administration is basing its policy primarily on concerns that a fall of the regime would increase Iran's influence and could cause the loss of the U.S. use of Bahraini military facilities.

Bahraini officials have asserted that Administration criticism has been too harsh. On July 7, 2014, the government ordered Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) Tom Malinowski out of Bahrain for meeting separately with *Wifaq* leader Shaykh Salman, asserting that he breached a requirement that all foreign official meetings with oppositionists be attended by a Bahraini official. Secretary of State Kerry, in a phone call to Bahrain's Foreign Minister, called that requirement "unacceptable" and contrary to international diplomatic protocol. 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 to Bahrain.²⁶ In September 2014, Bahrain refused to provide Representative Jim McGovern a guarantee of access to Bahrain, scuttling his planned visit to meet with all sides involved in the political disputes.²⁷ Suggesting that the two countries had resolved differences over the Malinowski visit, Malinowski and Assistant Secretary of State for the Near East Anne Patterson visited Bahrain in December 2014, holding meetings with the government as well as members of civil society. The Malinowski expulsion went well beyond the established Bahrain government pattern of criticizing then U.S. Ambassador Tom Krajeski for meeting with opposition political societies.

Multilateral Responses. Bahrain has drawn increasing attention from U.N. human rights bodies and other governments. In June 2012, 28 countries issued a joint declaration, during U.N. Human Rights Council debate, condemning the government's human rights abuses. The United States, Britain, and eight other EU countries did not support the initiative. 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, to date. In a decision widely criticized by the Bahrain opposition, the Arab League announced in September 2013 that Bahrain would host the headquarters of an "Arab Court for Human Rights."

Pre-2011 U.S. Posture on Bahraini Democracy and Human Rights

Well before the 2011 unrest, human rights groups and Bahraini oppositionists had accused successive U.S. Administrations of downplaying government abuses. Critics point to 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 ..."²⁸ In May 2006 Bahrain revoked the visa for the resident program director of the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and closed that office. NDI was conducting programs to enhance the capabilities of Bahrain's National Assembly.

The Administration counters the criticism with assertions that, for many years prior to the 2011 unrest, the United States sought to accelerate political reform in Bahrain and to empower its political societies through several programs. The primary vehicle has been the "Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI)," which began funding programs in Bahrain in 2003.²⁹ MEPI funds have been used for an American Bar Association (ABA) program to support the Ministry of

²⁶ Congress of the United States. Letter to King Hamad. July 18, 2014.

²⁷ http://mcgovern.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/us-rep-jim-mcGovern-issues-statement-on-refusal-of-bahraini-govt-to?utm_source=Project+on+Middle+East+Democracy+-+All+Contacts&utm_campaign=b2cd02f711-Bahrain_Weekly_Update_Nov_1_2012&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_75a06056d7-b2cd02f711-215946089.

²⁸ Department of State. "Remarks With Foreign Minister Al Khalifa After Their Meeting." December 3, 2010.

²⁹ Statement from the U.S. Embassy in Bahrain Concerning MEPI. June 17, 2014.

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 the BICI recommendations, including legislation on fair trial standards. 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. 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. Other MEPI funds have been used for AFL-CIO projects with Bahraini labor organizations, and to help Bahrain implement the U.S.-Bahrain FTA.

Other Human Rights Issues³⁰

Many of the criticisms of Bahrain's human rights practices relate directly to the government's response to unrest and its use of security forces as well as judicial and political mechanisms to discredit or suppress the Shiite-led opposition. The government, as have several of the other Gulf states, has increasingly used laws allowing jail sentences for "insulting the king" to silence opponents. The State Department human rights reports note additional problems in Bahrain for non-Muslims and for non-Shiite opponents of the government, as well other problems discussed below that might not be directly related to the unrest.

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 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, Bahraini practices and customs tend to limit women's rights. 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 King Hamad's wife, Shaykha Sabeeka, and the Supreme Council for Women, (a women's rights association in Bahrain) campaigned for a codified family law. However, the effort was thwarted by Bahraini clerics who opposed such reforms. Other women rights organizations in Bahrain include the Bahrain Women's Union, the Bahrain Women's Association, and the Young Ladies Association.

Religious Freedom³¹

The State Department report on international religious freedom for 2015 was similar to that of all post-2011 such reports by focusing extensively on Sunni-Shiite differences and the unrest. As have previous such reports, the report for 2015 is replete with assertions that the government and

³⁰ Much of this section is from the State Department's country report on human rights practices for 2015 and from reports by Human Rights Watch and other outside groups. The text of the State Department report is at: <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm#wrapper>.

³¹ This section is based on the State Department report on International Religious Freedom for 2015. The report can be accessed at: <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/256473.pdf>

society discriminate against the Shiite majority and Shiite clergy. In 2014, the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs, which regulates the affairs of Muslim organizations in Bahrain, dissolved the Islamic Ulema Council, the main assembly of Shiite clerics in Bahrain, asserting that it engaged 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. The amendment appeared to represent an effort to further weaken *Wifaq*.³²

According to the State Department report, 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 religious groups and institutions, including Christian churches and a Hindu temple. 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 remains in Bahrain, and apparently does not face any harassment or other difficulty.

The Baha'i faith, declared blasphemous in Iran and Afghanistan, has been discriminated against in Bahrain, although recent State Department human rights reports say that the Baha'i community can gather and operates openly.

Human Trafficking³³ 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 exploitation because they are largely unprotected under the labor law. The State Department "Trafficking in Persons Report" for 2016, for the second year in a row, placed Bahrain in "Tier 2." Bahrain's rating in the 2014 report was "Tier 2: Watch List," where it had been for the prior three years. In 2014, Bahrain was given an Administration waiver for a mandatory downgrade to Tier 3 (a requirement if a country is on the Watch List for three consecutive years) on the grounds that it had a written plan to bring its efforts against trafficking into compliance with international standards. The 2015 upgrade was based, according to the report, on "notable progress in [the government's efforts to investigate, prosecute, and convict trafficking offenses." The 2015 and 2016 reports assess the government as making "significant efforts" to comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of human trafficking, although it does not yet meet those minimum standards. During the year, the government identified an increased number of trafficking victims, and referred them to services, including a newly-established shelter.

Trafficking in persons and labor rights issues are closely related. 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 2,500 workers from the private sector, and almost 2,000 from the

³² "Bahrain King 'Bans Mixing Religion and Politics.'" <http://www.alaraby.co.uk>. June 12, 2016.

³³ Much of this section is derived from the State Department report on Trafficking in Person: 2016. The report can be accessed at: <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/258878.pdf>

public sector, including 25% of the country's union leadership. The government claims that virtually all were subsequently rehired. The State Department report on human rights for 2015 states that the government made efforts in 2015 to re-instate workers dismissed or suspended during the period of high unrest.

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.³⁴

Executions and Torture

Well before the 2011 uprising, Human Rights Watch and other groups asserted that Bahrain was going against the international trend of ending executions. From 1977 until 2006, there were no executions in Bahrain, but, in November 2009, Bahrain's Court of Cassation approved the execution of an expatriate (citizen of Bangladesh). In February 2010, Human Rights Watch issued a study alleging systematic use by Bahraini security forces of torture.³⁵

Post-uprising, witnesses at 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 and other cruel punishments during the state of emergency (March-June 2011). The government cancelled a planned May 2013 visit of the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Juan Mendez—the second such cancellation of a visit by that official. On June 7, 2013, 20 Senators and Representatives signed a letter to the king urging him to allow a visit by Mendez.³⁶

U.S.-Bahrain Security Relations³⁷

The U.S.-Bahrain security relationship dates to the end of World War II, well before Bahrain's independence, and has been central to U.S. military efforts to address regional threats. These threats include that posed by Iran and by global terrorist movements operating in the region, particularly the Islamic State, which has captured parts of Iraq and of Syria and has recruited small numbers of Bahrainis.

In addition to the long-standing U.S. naval headquarters presence in Bahrain, the United States and Bahrain signed a formal Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) in 1991. In March 2002, President George W. Bush designated Bahrain a "major non-NATO ally" (MNNA) in Presidential Determination 2002-10). The designation that qualifies Bahrain to purchase certain U.S. arms, receive excess defense articles (EDA), and engage in defense research cooperation with the United States that it would not otherwise qualify for. There are over 8,000 U.S. military

³⁴ Author conversations with Bahrain LMRA top officials. 2015-16.

³⁵ Human Rights Watch. "Bahrain: Torture Redux." February 2010.

³⁶ <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/wp-content/uploads/HRF-King-Al-Khalifa-Letter.pdf>.

³⁷ Information in this section obtained from a variety of press reports, and the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA).

personnel, mostly Navy, deployed in Bahrain implementing various Gulf security related missions and defense cooperation initiatives, an increase from about 6,500 in 2013³⁸ and reflecting the addition of U.S. personnel for operations against the Islamic State organization.

Differences over Bahrain's handling of its domestic unrest have not significantly affected U.S.-Bahrain defense relations. In September 2014, Bahrain joined the U.S.-led anti-Islamic State coalition and has been flying airstrikes on Islamic State positions in Syria. As a GCC member, Bahrain also engages in substantial defense cooperation with other GCC states, for example joining Saudi-led air strikes and ground combat in Yemen.

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), its successor, NAVCENT (naval component of U.S. Central Command), as well as the Fifth Fleet (reconstituted in June 1995) are headquartered there, 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.³⁹ The "on-shore" U.S. command presence in Bahrain was established after the 1991 Gulf war against Iraq; prior to that, the U.S. naval headquarters in Bahrain was on a command ship mostly docked in Bahrain - technically "off shore." In December 2014, the GCC announced it would establish a joint naval force based in Bahrain, presumably to facilitate cooperation with the U.S. Navy.

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 May 2013, the U.S. Navy added five coastal patrol ships to those already there.

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 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 anti-piracy 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.

To further develop the NSA-Bahrain, the U.S. military is implementing a planned \$580 million military construction program that began in May 2010 and is to be completed in 2017.⁴⁰ When this expansion is complete, the United States will have spent about \$2 billion total to improve the facility. The latest round of construction will double the size of the facility from 80 acres to over

³⁸ Hendrick Simoes. "Bahrain Expansion Latest Sign of Continued Presence." *Stars and Stripes*, December 16, 2013; Hendrick Simoes. "More Accompanied Tours Possible for Military in Bahrain." *Stars and Stripes*, June 8, 2015.

³⁹ 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.

⁴⁰ 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).

150 acres by integrating the decommissioned Mina (port) Al Salman Pier, leased by the Navy under a January 2008 agreement, and adding an administration building and space for maintenance, barracks, warehousing, and dining facilities. The expansion will support the deployment of additional U.S. coastal patrol ships and the Navy's new littoral combat ship, and permit larger U.S. ships to dock at the naval facility.⁴¹ The expansion has also allowed for infrastructure for families of U.S. military personnel, including schools for young children. The U.S. military reportedly is allowing increasing numbers of families to accompany U.S. personnel serving in Bahrain.

The NSA-Bahrain took on additional significance in December 2014 when Britain announced a deal with Bahrain to establish a fixed naval base in part of the Mina Al Salman pier. Under the reported agreement, facilities at Mina Al Salman are being improved to allow Britain's royal Navy to plan, store equipment, and house military personnel there.⁴²

Among other facilities, 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.⁴³ 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 are stationed. About \$19 million was used for a U.S. Special Operations Forces facility. The FY2016 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA, P.L. 114-92), authorized \$90 million for additional construction in Bahrain.

Exploration of Alternatives? Some say that the United States should examine alternatives to NSA-Bahrain on the grounds that the unrest in Bahrain poses threats to U.S. personnel deployed there, and that the Al Khalifa government could fall to a new regime that demands an immediate end to the U.S. presence. Some assert that the facility suggests U.S. support for the government's repression of its opponents. 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.⁴⁴ On July 22, 2011, the U.S. Navy in Bahrain refuted press reports that the Navy is planning to relocate the facility. In July and August 2013, then-Defense Secretary Hagel answered a Senator's inquiry about contingency planning in the event U.S. personnel at the facility come under threat. The enacted FY2016 National Defense Authorization Act, referenced above, 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.

Potential alternatives would include Qatar's New Doha Port, Kuwait's Shuaiba port, and the UAE's Jebel Ali.⁴⁵ All three are close U.S. allies, but none has stated a position on whether it would be willing to host such a facility. U.S. officials say that the potential alternatives do not currently provide large U.S. ships with the ease of docking access that Bahrain does, and that many of the alternatives share facilities with commercial operations.

Some Bahraini opposition leaders, including *Wifaq* leader Salman, publicly support a security relationship with the United States and a U.S. military presence in Bahrain. On the other hand, because the opposition accuses the United States of backing the Al Khalifa regime, it can be argued that the opposition to come to power might expel U.S. forces if it were to take power.

⁴¹ Hendrick Simoes. "Bahrain Expansion Latest Sign of Continued Presence." Stars and Stripes, December 16, 2013.

⁴² "U.K. to Boost Military Presence in the Persian Gulf." Associated Press, December 7, 2014.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Facebook posts of NSA-Bahrain from 2013. Accessed June 2016. <https://www.facebook.com/NSABahrain/?fref=nf>.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA)

Bahrain was part of the U.S.-led allied coalition that ousted Iraq from Kuwait in 1991. It allowed the stationing of 17,500 U.S. troops and 250 U.S. combat aircraft at Shaykh Isa Air Base 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. Bahrain and the United States subsequently agreed to further institutionalize 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.⁴⁶ The pact reportedly gives the United States access to Bahrain’s air bases and to pre-position 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.⁴⁷ 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 dismantled much of Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction arsenal.

U.S. pilots flew combat missions from Shaykh Isa Air 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 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 their own forces to Afghanistan; in January 2009, Bahrain sent 100 police officers to Afghanistan on a two-year tour to help U.S./NATO-led stabilization operations there. Their tour was extended until the end of the NATO mission in Afghanistan at the end of 2014.

Security Cooperation and Arms Transfers

Bahrain uses mostly national funds to buy U.S. weaponry, but the United States provides some military assistance as well, in order to support Bahrain’s ability to participate in regional security missions. The government’s response to the political unrest caused the Administration to put on hold sales to Bahrain of arms that could easily be used against protesters, primarily that used by the Interior Ministry, while generally continuing to provide equipment suited to external defense.

Assistance to the Bahrain Defense Forces/Ministry of Defense

The main recipient of U.S. military assistance has been the Bahrain Defense Force (BDF)—Bahrain’s regular military force—which has less than 10,000 active duty personnel, including 2,000 National Guard. The National Guard 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,

⁴⁶ “U.S.-Bahrain Defense Pact Renewed.” Agence France Presse, August 5, 2011.

⁴⁷ 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.

including Pakistan, Yemen, Jordan, and elsewhere. Some human rights groups say that BDF equipment, such as Cobra helicopters, have been used against protesters.

Foreign Military Financing (FMF) and “Section 1206” Funding

Most U.S. military assistance to Bahrain is Foreign Military Financing (FMF). This aid, coupled with funds provided under “Section 1206” of the National Defense Authorization Act of 2006, P.L. 109-163, helps Bahraini forces maintain U.S.-origin weapons, enhances inter-operability with U.S. forces, augments Bahrain’s air defenses, and improves 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.⁴⁸ Five Section 1206 programs spanning 2006 to the present—totaling almost \$65 million—have been used to provide coast patrol boats, equip and train Bahrain’s special forces, equip new coastal surveillance sites, and fund biometric equipment to help Bahrain detect movement of international terrorists through its territory. 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 retain leverage against Bahrain to compel it to make reforms. The Administration’s FY2012 aid request, made at the start of the unrest, asked for \$25 million in FMF for the country, but only \$10 million was provided. FMF was slightly increased for FY2013, but dropped back to \$10 million for FY2014. The Administration provided \$7.5 million for Bahrain FMF for FY2015 and is providing a similar amount for FY2016. The FMF request for FY2017 is \$5 million, to be used to support Bahrain’s maritime security capacity by assisting the Bahrain Coast Guard and upgrading the Coast Surveillance System, mentioned above. The United States has supplied Bahrain with a coastal radar system that reportedly provides Bahrain and the U.S. Navy a 360-degree field of vision around Bahrain.⁴⁹

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. In the State Department’s FY2012 budget request, the Administration supported providing another frigate (an “extended deck frigate”) to Bahrain as EDA because the *Subha* is approaching the end of its service life. The Administration said on May 11, 2012, that it continued to support that transfer, but the FY2014 foreign aid budget justification said that the BDF had put acquisition of a new frigate on hold, and would put U.S. military aid toward maintaining the *Subha* instead.

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 250 BDF students attend U.S. military schools each year, either through the IMET program (57% of them), or using FMF funds,

⁴⁸ “Revealed: America’s Arms Sales to Bahrain Amid Bloody Crackdown,” op. cit.

⁴⁹ “Bahrain Government’s Ties With the United States Run Deep,” op. cit.

in connection with the U.S. Foreign Military Sales program. For FY2017, the Administration has requested \$800,000 for the IMET program for Bahrain.

Major Foreign Military Sales (FMS)

Bahrain's total government budget is about \$6 billion per year, allowing only modest amounts of national funds to be used for purchases of major combat systems. About 85% of Bahrain's defense equipment is of U.S.-origin. Some of the sales to Bahrain have been in accordance with long-standing State and Defense Department efforts to promote greater defense cooperation among the GCC states. 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. Among the major past U.S. sales:

- *F-16s and other U.S.-made Aircraft.* In 1998, Bahrain purchased 10 U.S.-made F-16Cs from new production, worth about \$390 million. It later purchased 12 more of the system, bringing its F-16 fleet to 22. In 1999 and 2009, the United States sold Bahrain Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air Missiles (AMRAAMs) to arm the F-16s. In 2016, Bahrain submitted a request for 17 new production F-16Vs to replacing its aging F-5's.⁵⁰ Its request, as well as less recent requests to buy new U.S. aircraft by Qatar and Kuwait, await Administration action. Gulf diplomats say that the requests were discussed during the April 2016 U.S.-GCC summit and that there were implicit pledges to approve the requests in the near future, subject to congressional concurrence.⁵¹
- *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. In 2007, the United States sold Bahrain several hundred "Javelin" anti-armor missiles worth up to \$42 million; 9 UH-60M Blackhawk helicopters worth up to \$252 million; and 6 Bell search and recovery helicopters, valued at about \$160 million.
- *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 Administration announced a sale to the BDF and National Guard of 44 "Humvee" (M115A1B2) armored vehicles and several hundred TOW missiles of various models, of which 50 are "bunker busters." The proposed sale had an estimated value of \$53 million. When the sale was announced, State Department officials said the sale would not violate the intent of the "Leahy amendment," a provision of foreign aid and defense appropriations law that forbids U.S. sales of equipment to security units that have committed human rights abuses.⁵² Two joint resolutions introduced in the 112th Congress, S.J.Res. 28 and H.J.Res. 80, would have prohibited the sale unless the

⁵⁰ Craig Hoyle. "Bahrain Considering F-16V Order, Fleet Upgrade." Flight Global, January 26, 2016.

⁵¹ Tony Capaccio. "U.S. Fighter Sales to Gulf Allies Stalled for Up to Three Years." Bloomberg, June 23, 2016; author conversations with GCC diplomats.

⁵² James Lobe. "Bahrain: U.S. Congress Urged to Reject Arms Sales." IPS News Service, September 29, 2011.

Administration certified that Bahrain is rectifying alleged abuses. (To block a proposed arms sale would require passage of a joint resolution to do so, presumably with a veto-proof majority.) In October 2011, even though the sale had passed the congressional review period, the Administration told Congress it would delay the sale until it could assess the BICI report. In January 2012, the State Department said the sale was 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...” even though “We do not think that the human rights situation in Bahrain is adequate.”⁵³

- *Maritime Defense Equipment and Spare Parts.* The Administration did not at any time hold up sales to Bahrain of equipment suited only for external defense.⁵⁴ In January 2012 it released to Bahrain previously notified and cleared spare parts and maintenance for the BDF’s support of U.S. Fifth Fleet operations, with an estimated valued of \$1 million. On May 11, 2012, in conjunction with a visit to Washington, DC, by Bahrain’s Crown Prince Salman, the Administration announced the release of additional U.S. arms for the BDF, Bahrain’s Coast Guard (a Ministry of Interior-controlled force) and Bahrain’s National Guard. The Administration stated that the weaponry was not suited for use against protesters and supported Bahrain’s increased focus on maritime defense. The Administration did not release a complete list of weapons to be sold, but it gave a few examples as follows: (1) the Perry-class frigate, as EDA, discussed above, but later mooted; (2) harbor security boats for the Bahrain Coast Guard, as EDA; (3) an upgrade to the engines on Bahrain’s U.S.-made F-16s; and additional AMRAAMs (see above).⁵⁵ Some Members of Congress criticized the decision as forfeiting U.S. leverage on the government to enact reforms, but no legislation to block the sale was enacted.

Counter-Terrorism Cooperation/Ministry of Interior⁵⁶

The United States and Bahrain agree that Bahrain-based supporters of the Islamic State constitute a terrorism threat. Islamic State affiliates have claimed responsibility for bombings in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, but no Islamic State terrorist attacks have occurred in Bahrain, to date. Bahrain has arrested, charged, and in some cases stripped the citizenship of some Bahrainis accused of supporting the Islamic State. On June 23, 2016, Bahraini courts sentenced 24 supporters of the Islamic State for plots in Bahrain, including attacks on Shiites. Bahraini leaders often refer to hardline Shiite oppositionists as supportive of terrorism, but the United States has disagreed with Bahraini leaders on how to address the Shiite uprising, as discussed in detail above.

The United States works with Bahrain’s Interior Ministry on counter-terrorism issues, but U.S. cooperation with that Ministry has been subject to some restrictions since 2011 because of the ministry’s lead role in internal security. Still, the Ministry had reformed since the late 1990s, after the departure of Bahrain’s internal security services chief Ian Henderson, a former British

⁵³ Statement by State Department spokesman John Kirby. “Lifting Holds on Security Assistance to the Government of Bahrain.” June 29, 2015.

⁵⁴ Department of State. Taken Question: Bahrain’s Security Assistance. January 27, 2012.

⁵⁵ Nicole Gaouette. “U.S. Resumes Bahrain Arms Sales Citing Security Interests.” Bloomberg News, May 11, 2012.

⁵⁶ Much of the information in this section is derived from the State Department report on international terrorism for 2015, cited previously.

colonial police commander who had a reputation among Shiites for using excessive brutality. 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. The February 2014 expulsion of Malinowski, mentioned above, reportedly led the Administration to reduce its cooperation with the Ministry of Interior.⁵⁷ However, U.S. cooperation with the Ministry of Interior returned to nearly prior levels later in 2014, possibly in connection with Bahrain's joining the U.S.-led coalition fighting the Islamic State. U.S. assistance to MoI personnel has fluctuated as well, due to these same U.S. considerations.

- *Arms Sales to the MoI.* Since May 2012 the State Department has held “on hold” license requests for sales to Bahrain of small arms, light weapons, and ammunition⁵⁸—all of which could potentially be used against protesters. Appearing to refer to Bahrain, a provision of 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.”
- *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) monies. U.S. training helps the MoI confront violent extremists, terrorist groups, and explosive devices used by underground Bahraini opposition groups. U.S. officials assert that a general lack of training and antiquated investigative methods had slowed the MOI Police Force's progress on counter-terrorism and criminal investigations. At the start of FY2012, the Administration “reviewed” the use of NADR-ATA (Antiterrorism Assistance) funding—programming that has been used since 1987—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. The State Department terrorism report for 2015 states that one ATA-related course took place in 2015, indicating that program operations have resumed. The Administration has requested \$800,000 in NADR funds for FY2017 to train MoI personnel in investigative techniques, with a human rights focus, and to help MoI personnel respond to hardline groups' use of explosives. Some NADR-ATA funds have previously been used to augment the ability of Bahraini forces to protect U.S. diplomatic and military facilities in Bahrain, and to help train Bahrain's police contingent in Afghanistan guard Camp Leatherneck in Helmand Province.
- *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.

⁵⁷ Michael Gordon. “Expelled U.S. Official to Return to Bahrain.” New York Times, December 2, 2014.

⁵⁸ Email from the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Legislative Affairs, May 20, 2013.

Countering Terrorism Financing

Bahrain has been a regional leader in countering terrorism financing since well before the Islamic State organization became a perceived regional threat. Bahrain has hosted the Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force (MENA/FATF) secretariat, and its Central Bank, Financial Information Unit (within the Central Bank), and local banks cooperate with U.S. efforts against terrorism financing and money laundering. In 2013, the government amended the Charity Fundraising Law of 1956 to tighten terrorism financing monitoring and penalties. In April 2015, Bahrain hosted the 8th European Union-GCC Workshop on Combating Terrorist Financing. In November 2015, it hosted a workshop focused on preventing the abuse of the charitable sector to fund terrorism.

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.

Foreign Policy Issues

Bahrain is closely aligned with the other members of the GCC, which have political structures similar to that of Bahrain but none of the others of which has a majority Shiite population. Within the GCC, Bahrain is politically closest to Saudi Arabia, as evidenced by the Saudi-led GCC intervention in Bahrain in 2011. Many Saudis visit Bahrain to enjoy the relatively more liberal social atmosphere there, using a causeway constructed in 1986 that links 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 Saudi King Abdullah in 2011. Since the beginning of the Bahrain unrest, Saudi Arabia reportedly has donated at least \$500 million to help Bahrain's economy, in addition to continuing to make available to Bahrain revenues from joint Saudi-Bahrain Abu Safa oil field. In May 2012, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain announced they supported a plan to form a close political and military union among the GCC states ("Riyadh Declaration"), but the other four GCC states opposed blocked that proposal. Bahrain hosted the annual GCC summit held during December 9-10, 2015, which largely restated many of the GCC's consensus positions, including a commitment to forge greater GCC defense integration.

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 been touted as a potential mediator in the Bahraini political crisis, but Shiites in Kuwait's parliament argued that the Kuwaiti ruling family has sided firmly with the Al Khalifa. Kuwait, as noted, joined the GCC intervention in Bahrain in 2011 and has financially aided Bahrain.

In contrast to relations with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, Bahrain's relations with Qatar have been fraught with disputes, although the resolution of their territorial dispute over the Hawar Islands and other land in 2001 eventually eased tensions. The dispute 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 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 almost all the other GCC states who view the Brotherhood as a source of unrest within the GCC states. The dispute was resolved in November 2014 and the GCC ambassadors returned to Doha.

Iran

Bahrain focuses intently on the perceived threat from Iran, asserting that it is arming and advising the Shiite opposition. The State Department report on international terrorism for 2015 appears to back the Bahraini claims by stating that

Iran has also provided weapons, funding and training to Shia militants in Bahrain. In 2015, the Government of Bahrain raided, interdicted, and rounded up numerous Iran-sponsored weapons caches, arms transfers, and militants.

Appearing to confirm Iran's active interest in promoting Bahrain's Shiite opposition figures, Iranian leaders reacted harshly to the Bahrain government's June 2016 revocation of Shaykh Isa Qasim's citizenship. On June 19, 2016, Maj. Gen. Qasem Soleimani, the commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps – Qods Force (IRGC-QF), the force that directly supports Iran's regional allies and proxies, warned that the citizenship revocation would "...ignite a response...to make the Al Khalifa disappear."⁵⁹ Six days later, 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."

Bahrain sided decisively with Saudi Arabia in the Saudi-Iran dispute of January 2016 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 steps taken during earlier episodes of Bahrain-Iran tensions, such as during 2011-2012, in which Iran and Bahrain withdrew their ambassadors. In March 2016, all the GCC states declared Lebanese Hezbollah, a key Iran ally, a terrorist organization and encouraged 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). In May 2013, Bahrain had, on its own, declared Hezbollah a terrorist organization, accusing it of helping a Shiite-led "insurgency" in Bahrain.⁶⁰

Bahrain fully supported the U.S. strategy of placing economic pressure on Iran to compel it to limit its nuclear program. In March 2008, the United States sanctioned Future Bank, mentioned above, under Executive Order 13382 (anti-proliferation). Bahrain did not take direction action against Future Bank initially but, in April 2015, Bahrain seized control of Future Bank as well as the Iran Insurance Company. Bahrain's closure of the Bank outright in February 2016 came despite the fact that the United States "de-listed" the bank from sanctions in January 2016 in conjunction with the Iran nuclear agreement, which is discussed further below.

⁵⁹ Simon Henderson. "High Noon in Bahrain: Will Tehran Blink First?" Washington Institute for Near East Policy, June 27, 2016.

⁶⁰ 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.

As have the other GCC states, Bahrain expressed concern about Iran's nuclear program as well as about the U.S. diplomatic approach that manifested as the July 14, 2015, Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Bahrain 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."⁶¹ Bahrain has joined the GCC in both publicly supporting the JCPOA's nuclear curbs on Iran while at the same time calling for increased vigilance against Iran's "destabilizing regional activities." Perhaps out of concern that the United States might accept an enhanced regional role for Iran after a JCPOA was reached, King Hamad did not attend the U.S.-GCC summit at Camp David during May 13-14, 2015, and was represented by the Crown Prince. At the meetings, the Administration attempted to assuage GCC concerns by offering new sales to the GCC states of sophisticated weaponry and establishing expanded cooperation on maritime security, cybersecurity, missile defense, and other issues. The lifting of the hold on the Humvee and TOW sale, discussed above, came several weeks after that summit. Perhaps reflecting a degree of reassurance, King Hamad did attend the second U.S.-GCC summit in April 2016, which restated all the Camp David commitments as well as announced some new initiatives including U.S. training for GCC special forces, and a program of U.S.-GCC military exercises.⁶²

At the same time, Bahrain maintains normal trade with Iran, and some Bahrain energy firms may still be supplying gasoline to Iran. No U.N. Security Council Resolution barred such sales, but a 2010 U.S. law—the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2010 (CISADA, P.L. 111-195)—provided for sanctions against foreign firms that sell more than \$1 million worth of gasoline to Iran.⁶³ No Bahraini gasoline traders were sanctioned, and that provision has been waived in implementation of the JCPOA. A 2007 visit to Bahrain by then-president of Iran Mahmoud Ahmadinejad resulted in a preliminary agreement for Bahrain to buy 1.2 billion cubic feet per day (for 25 years) of Iranian gas via an undersea pipeline to be built. The deal would have involved a \$4 billion investment by Bahrain to develop Phases 15 and 16 of Iran's South Pars gas field, which would be the source of the gas supply. Largely because of Bahrain's suspicions of Iran, there has been no movement on the arrangement.

The Bahrain government expression of concerns about Iran are longstanding. 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 2009, Ali Akbar Nateq Nuri, 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 prior to its independence from Britain, the United Nations 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 the United Nations Security Council in Resolution 278 and Iran's legislature ratified the resolution.

⁶¹ Department of State. Transcript of Remarks by Secretary Clinton and Foreign Minister Al Khalifa. December 3, 2010.

⁶² 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>.

⁶³ For a list of possible sanctions that could be imposed, see CRS Report RS20871, *Iran Sanctions*, by Kenneth Katzman.

Iraq/Syria/Islamic State Organization

Bahrain cooperated with the U.S.-led effort in 2003 to overthrow Saddam Hussein of Iraq, despite publicly questioning that action. Bahrain did not contribute financially to Iraq reconstruction, but it participated in the “Expanded Neighbors of Iraq” regional dialogue that ended in 2008, and it posted its first post-Saddam ambassador to Iraq in October 2008. Bahrain-Iraq relations deteriorated after 2005 as Iraq’s Shiite-dominated government appeared to marginalize Iraq’s Sunni political leaders, and particularly after Iraqi Shiite leaders expressed support for the 2011 Bahrain uprising. On March 9, 2012, Iraqi Shiites rallied in support of Bahrain’s Shiites on the same day as Bahrain’s opposition mounted a major demonstration in Manama. Bahrain sent only 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 provoking the rise of the Islamic State organization in Iraq.

Similarly, Bahrain and the other GCC states have blamed Syrian President Bashar Al Assad for authoritarian policies that have alienated Syria’s Sunni Arab majority and fueled support for the Islamic State. In 2011, Bahrain joined the other GCC countries in withdrawing their ambassadors to Syria and in voting with other Arab League states to suspend Syria’s membership in the body. Bahrain’s government has not, by all accounts, been providing funding or weaponry to any of the Syrian opposition groups that are attempting to oust Assad.

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 has been conducting air strikes against Islamic State positions in Syria, as have Saudi Arabia, UAE, and, at least early on in the air campaign, Qatar. Neither Bahrain nor any of the other GCC members of the U.S.-led coalition have engaged in anti-Islamic State air operations in Iraq, apparently on the grounds that the Shiite-dominated Iraqi government is aligned with Iran. In November 2014, Bahrain hosted a meeting to coordinate joint international action against the Islamic State organization’s finances.⁶⁴

Other Regional Issues

Bahrain tends to act with GCC partners on other regional issues, in part because of Bahrain’s resource constraints and its focus on its internal situation. Unlike Qatar and UAE, Bahrain did not play a significant role in the effort to oust Libyan leader Muammar Al Qadhafi.

Yemen

Bahrain joined the GCC diplomatic efforts to persuade Yemen’s President Ali Abdullah Saleh to cede power to a transition process in 2012, but the successor government was weak. 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, to leave Yemen. 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 and compel them to accept a restoration of Al Hadi. Bahrain has contributed air strikes and some ground forces to the effort. 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. In March 2016, Hadi visited Bahrain to discuss the status of negotiations between his government and the rebels.

⁶⁴ Testimony of Secretary of State John Kerry before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. “U.S. Strategy on ISIL.” September 17, 2014.

Israeli-Palestinian Dispute

On the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, Bahraini leaders have on occasion taken positions outside a GCC consensus. In July 2009, Crown Prince Salman authored an op-ed calling on the Arab states to do more to communicate directly with the Israeli people on their ideas for peaceful resolution of the dispute.⁶⁵ In October 2009, Bahrain's foreign minister called for direct talks with Israel. Still, Bahrain supports the efforts of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas to obtain U.N. recognition for a State of Palestine. 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.

The Israeli-Palestinian dispute has sometimes become a political issue within Bahrain. In October 2009, the COR passed a bill making it a crime for Bahrainis to travel to Israel or hold talks with Israelis. The bill, which did not become law, was a reaction to a visit by Bahraini officials to Israel in July 2009 to urge the release of five Bahrainis that Israel imprisoned when it seized a ship carrying goods for the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip. In June 2010, Sunni and Shiite Islamists in Bahrain demonstrated against the Israeli seizure of a ship in a flotilla intended to run the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip. During a visit to Manama by Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas in July 2014, King Hamad criticized Israel and called for the international community to halt the Hamas-Israel conflict taking place at that time.⁶⁶

Economic Issues

Bahrain's economy has been affected by the domestic unrest and by the sharp fall in oil prices since mid-2014. Government revenues remain dependent on oil exports from a field that Saudi Arabia shares equally with Bahrain, the Abu Safa field, which produces 300,000 barrels per day and provides 70% of the funds for Bahrain's annual budget. And, its 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. The fall in oil prices in 2014-2015 has caused Bahrain to cut subsidies of some fuels, such as kerosene, and some foodstuffs, such as meat, in order to deal with fiscal deficits. 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 compensate for the small size of its oil export sector, Bahrain is emphasizing its banking and financial services sectors (about 25.5% of GDP combined).

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. Most of the workers who are citizens are Shiite Bahrainis, but many Bahraini Shiites own businesses and have done well economically.

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.

⁶⁵ "Arabs Need to Talk to the Israelis." *Washington Post*, July 16, 2009.

⁶⁶ "Fresh Challenge to U.S.-Bahrain Relations." op. cit.

In 2015, the United States exported about \$1.275 billion in goods to Bahrain and imported about \$900 million in goods from it. The exports to Bahrain exceeded the \$1.06 billion in U.S. goods exported to Bahrain, in 2014, and 2015 imports were lower than the \$965 million in goods imported from Bahrain in 2014. For In 2005, total bilateral trade was about \$780 million, suggesting that trade has more than doubled since the U.S.-Bahrain FTA.

U.S. Assistance. Some in Congress have sought to provide assistance to Bahrain for purposes that are not purely security-related. The report on a Senate foreign operations appropriations bill for FY2015 (S.Rept. 113-195 on S. 2499) states that the Appropriations Committee directs that at least \$3.5 million in Economic Support Funds (ESF) be made available for “programs and activities to promote reconciliation, democratic reform, and adherence to international human rights and labor rights standards in Bahrain.”

Table 3. Some Basic Facts About Bahrain

Population	About 1.3 million, of which slightly less than 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 basis, PPP)	\$65 billion (2015). Would be \$31 billion at official exchange rate.
GDP per capita (PPP basis)	\$51,200 (2015)
GDP Real Growth Rate	3.4% (2015) – about 1% slower than the 2014 growth rate
Budget	\$5.15 billion revenues, \$9.25 billion expenditures (2015)
Inflation Rate	2.0% (2015)
Unemployment Rate	4% (2014)

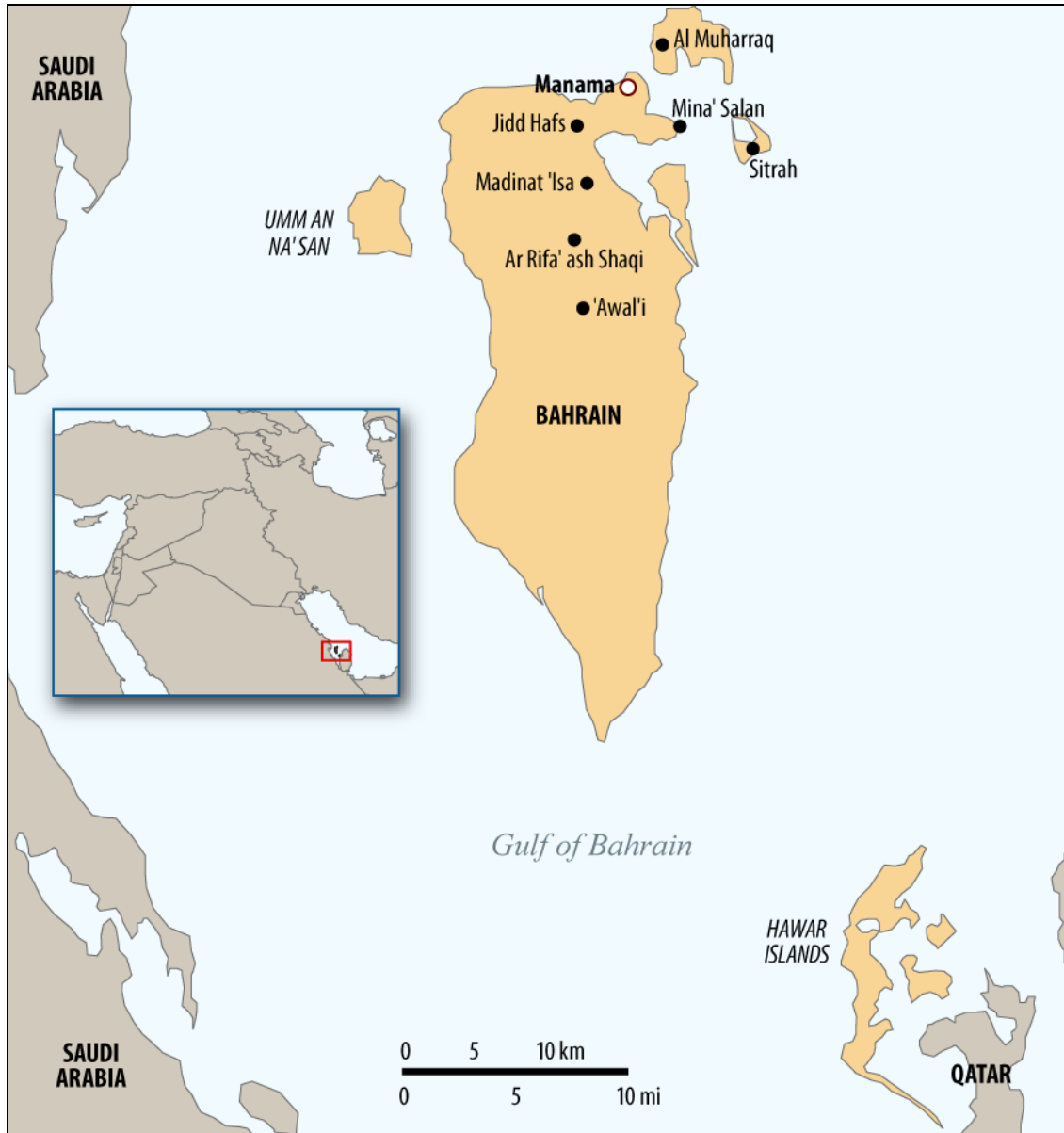
Source: CIA, *The World Factbook*.

Table 4. U.S. Assistance to Bahrain
(\$ in millions)

	FY2003	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
FMF	90.0	24.6	18.9	15.6	15	3.968	8.0	19.0	15.46	10	12.575	10	7.5	5.0	5.0
IMET	0.448	0.60	0.65	0.65	0.616	0.622	.661	.670	.435	.554	.487	.522	.577	.700	.800
NADR			1.49	2.76	.776	0.744	.500	1.10	1.5	.500	.450	.450	.450	.400	.800
“Section 1206”				5.3	24.54	4.3	16.2								
ESF/Dem. and Gov.												3.0			

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.) FY2017 figures represent the Administration request.

Figure I. Bahrain



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

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