



**Congressional
Research Service**

Informing the legislative debate since 1914

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

Kenneth Katzman

Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs

February 20, 2015

Congressional Research Service

7-5700

www.crs.gov

95-1013

Summary

An uprising against Bahrain's Al Khalifa royal family that began on February 14, 2011, has not achieved the goals of the mostly Shiite opposition to establish a constitutional monarchy. Demonstrations have diminished since 2012, although not ended, and the opposition's boycotts of elections and its denunciations of arrests of dissidents counter government assertions that the political situation in Bahrain has returned to "normal." The government and opposition have attempted to resolve the unrest through two "national dialogues" (2011 and 2013), but neither reached a comprehensive solution. The government has enacted some reforms that do not fundamentally dilute its authority, and it has successfully avoided any significant international isolation. Perhaps reflecting some radicalization of the opposition, violent underground factions have claimed responsibility for increasingly frequent bombings and other attacks primarily against security officials.

The unrest in Bahrain has presented a policy dilemma for the Obama Administration because Bahrain is a pivotal ally. It has hosted the U.S. naval headquarters for the Gulf region since 1946. The United States has had a formal Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) with Bahrain since 1991 and has designated it a "major non-NATO ally." There are about 7,000 U.S. forces in Bahrain, mostly located at the naval headquarters site. Apparently to pressure the government to reduce its use of force against protesters, the Administration has held up some sales to Bahrain of arms that could be used for internal security purposes, has implemented broader holds on weapons sales, and has somewhat reduced Foreign Military Financing (FMF) for Bahrain. Yet, the U.S.-Bahrain defense relationship apparently remains strong, as exemplified by Bahrain's active participation in U.S.-led air strikes against the Islamic State organization in Syria. Bahrain's opposition asserts that the United States is downplaying regime abuses in order to protect the U.S.-Bahrain security relationship.

Bahrain's primary foreign policy concern has been Iran. Bahraini leaders, with some corroboration from U.S. and other statements, blame Iran for providing material support to hardline, violent factions in Bahrain. Bahrain has supported Saudi and UAE criticism of Iran not only for its purported activities against Bahrain's government, but more broadly for Iran's unqualified support for pro-Iranian Shiite movements and governments in the region. Bahrain has supported a Saudi concept of increased political unity among the GCC countries and has generally deferred to Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries to resolve political crises in the region such as those in Libya in and in Yemen. Unlike Qatar, UAE, and Saudi Arabia, Bahrain has refrained from backing any opposition groups in the Syria conflict.

Fueling Shiite unrest is the fact that Bahrain is poorer than most of the other Persian Gulf monarchies and therefore has lacked ample resources to easily and significantly improve Shiite standards of living. 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). The unrest has further strained, although not crippled, Bahrain's economy.

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| The Political Structure, Reform, and Human Rights | 1 |
| The Ruling Family and Its Dynamics | 1 |
| Executive and Legislative Powers | 2 |
| Political Groups and Elections | 3 |
| Pre-Uprising Elections | 5 |
| 2011 Uprising: Origin, Developments, and Prognosis | 6 |
| Crown Prince Salman’s “Seven Principles” Reform Plan..... | 6 |
| The Saudi-led Intervention..... | 6 |
| “National Dialogue” Begun and Inquiry Commission Established | 7 |
| Dialogue Recommendations Produce Constitutional Amendments | 8 |
| The BICI Report and Implementation Process..... | 9 |
| Second National Dialogue..... | 11 |
| Recent Developments/Current Situation | 11 |
| Prospects and Way Forward? | 13 |
| U.S. Posture on the Uprising..... | 16 |
| Other Human Rights Issues | 18 |
| Women’s Rights | 19 |
| Religious Freedom | 20 |
| Media Freedoms..... | 20 |
| Labor Rights..... | 20 |
| Human Trafficking | 21 |
| Executions and Torture..... | 21 |
| U.S.-Bahrain Security and Foreign Policy Relations..... | 21 |
| U.S. Naval Headquarters in Bahrain | 22 |
| Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA)..... | 24 |
| U.S. Arms Transfers and Military Aid..... | 25 |
| Assistance to the Bahrain Defense Forces | 25 |
| Assistance to the Ministry of Interior..... | 28 |
| Other Foreign Policy Issues..... | 29 |
| Iran | 31 |
| Iraq/Syria/Islamic State Organization | 33 |
| Countering Terrorism Financing | 34 |
| Economic Issues | 34 |

Figures

| | |
|-------------------------|----|
| Figure 1. Bahrain | 37 |
|-------------------------|----|

Tables

| | |
|--|----|
| Table 1. Comparative Composition of the National Assembly..... | 13 |
| Table 2. Status of Prominent Dissidents/Other Metrics of the Uprising..... | 15 |
| Table 3. Some Basic Facts About Bahrain..... | 35 |

Table 4. U.S. Assistance to Bahrain..... 36

Contacts

Author Contact Information..... 37

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 began reducing its responsibilities in the Gulf in 1968, Bahrain and other Persian Gulf emirates (principalities) began deciding on their 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 1970-71 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 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 about 600,000 citizens.² Citizens are about half of the overall population, and the remainder are expatriates mainly from South and East Asia and other parts of the Middle East. Bahrain’s Shiite Muslims have long asserted they are treated as “second class citizens,” 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. However, the King is also widely assessed as unwilling to override hardline, anti-reform Khalifa family members.

Within the upper echelons of the ruling family, the most active proponent of reform and accommodation with the Shiite opposition is the King’s son, Shaykh Salman bin Hamad, about

¹ Much of the information in this section is from State Department Human Rights Report for 2013, released February 27, 2014 (<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2013&dliid=220348#wrapper>). 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.

45 years old, who is Crown Prince. On March 11, 2013, he was appointed first deputy Prime Minister concurrently. Shaykh Salman is U.S.-and U.K.-educated. The Crown Prince has a substantial network of allies, who assert that the level of unrest reached in 2011 would have occurred long ago had the King's earlier reforms not been enacted. Allies of the Crown Prince include deputy Prime Minister, Muhammad bin Mubarak Al Khalifa and Foreign Minister Khalid bin Ahmad bin Muhammad Al Khalifa.³ The faction was apparently strengthened by the March 2013 appointment of Crown Prince Salman to a new 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, has been in position since Bahrain's independence in 1971. He is about 80 years old but still highly active. He is aligned with family hard-liners that include Minister of the Royal Court Khalid bin Ahmad bin Salman Al Khalifa⁴ and his brother the Commander of the BDF Khalifa bin Ahmad Al Khalifa. The two 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 for example the Royal Court Minister's protégé, Ahmad bin Ateyatallah Al Khalifa (Royal Court minister for "follow-up affairs"). These and other hard liners assert that concessions made to the Shiite majority since 1999 caused the Shiites to increase their political demands and therefore caused the 2011 uprising. In September 2013, Bahrain appointed another purported hardliner 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. The King, through the Prime Minister, makes all cabinet appointments. Al Khalifa family members have consistently held about half of all ministerial slots, including all defense, internal security, and foreign policy positions. Before the 2011 unrest, there were only 4 Shiite ministers out of 23 cabinet positions (plus one out of the four deputy prime ministers), and those ministries run by Shiites have been considered less critical. The number of Shiite ministers was increased to six in 2012, in part as a gesture to the opposition. Shiites who serve in the security forces have generally been confined to administrative tasks. The King appoints all judges by royal decree and he has the authority to amend the constitution.

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 a National Assembly (parliament). The government has tended to appoint generally more educated and pro-Western members to the

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

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).

Shura Council, and it is generally more supportive of the government than is the COR, which explains why the opposition seeks maximum authority for the COR. There is no “quota” for females in the National Assembly.

- The Assembly serves as a partial check on government power, despite constitutional amendments adopted in May 2012 that gave the Assembly greater authority. The amendments declared the elected COR as the presiding chamber of the Assembly, thereby giving it the lead when the two chambers disagree.
- The National Assembly has 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” with the Prime Minister, but the King then rules on whether to dismiss the Prime Minister or disband the COR. None of these actions has ever been taken.
- 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. A royal “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 expectations of the Shiite majority, 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 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 within it. Amir Isa’s refusal to restore an elected Assembly contributed to the daily anti-government violence during 1994-1998, conducted mostly by Shiites.

Political Groups and Elections

COR elections have been held every four years since 2002—each time marked by substantial tension over perceived government efforts to prevent election of a Shiite majority in the COR. The Shiite opposition has sought, unsuccessfully to date, to establish election processes and district boundaries that would allow Shiites 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:

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

- *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, including Secretary-General and Shiite cleric Shaykh Ali al-Salman, have been pressured by the regime. Salman was slightly injured by security forces during a protest in June 2012 and he was arrested in late 2013 for "insulting authorities" and "incitement to religious hatred," respectively. He was arrested again in late December 2014, and has been incarcerated since. His deputy leader, Khalil al-Marzuq, was arrested in September 2013, for "inciting terrorism" in an anti-government speech, but was acquitted in June 2014. Another of *Wifaq*'s top figures, the 75-year-old Shiite cleric Isa Qasim, is considered a hardliner who has opposed government proposals to settle the crisis. His home was raided by the regime in May 2013 and again in late November 2014. On July 20, 2014, the government filed suit that barred *Wifaq* from operating for a three month period, during which time it could correct alleged breaches of Bahrain's law on political societies. *Wifaq* allies include the National Democratic Action Society, the National Democratic Assembly, the Democratic Progressive Tribune, and Al Ekhaa.
- *Al Haq* (Movement of Freedom and Democracy), a small Shiite faction, is outlawed because of its calls for outright change of regime and has boycotted all the COR elections. Its key leaders are wheelchair-bound Dr. Abduljalil Alsingace and Hassan Mushaima, both of whom are alleged by the government to have ties to Iran. Both have been imprisoned since the February 2011 uprising. Prior to the uprising, Alsingace had visited the United States several times to discuss the human rights situation in Bahrain.
- 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 purportedly linked Iran-backed extremist actions in Bahrain the 1980s and 1990s. Another IFLB offshoot, Amal, is known as the "Shirazi faction" for its ties to radical Shiite clerics in Iran linked to 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, Ibrahim Sharif, has been in prison since 2011.
- 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 candidates from this grouping ran in the 2014 COR election as the "Al Fatih Coalition."

Pre-Uprising Elections

Several elections were held during 2002-2010 which suggested to some outside observers that political differences in Bahrain could be resolved electorally and legislatively.

- 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 dilutes popular will. The boycott lowered turnout to about 52%, and Sunnis won two-thirds of the 40 COR seats. Of the 170 total candidates, 8 were women, but none was elected.
- November 2006 Election.* Sunni-Shiite tensions escalated in advance of the COR and municipal elections, perhaps aggravated by the perception that a Shiite majority had come to power in Iraq through elections. The election was also clouded by a government adviser's (Salah al-Bandar) revelations in August that the government had adjusted election districts to favor Sunni candidates and had issued passports to Sunnis in an attempt 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. Sunni Muslims won the remaining 23 seats; of which eight were won by secular Sunnis and 15 were won by 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 one 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.* The tensions in this COR and municipal council election foreshadowed the uprising that began in February 2011. Shiite oppositionists again accused the government of gerrymandering to favor Sunni candidates and 23 Shiite leaders were arrested the previous month under a 2006 anti-terrorism law, but *Wifaq* participated nonetheless. Of the 200 candidates, six were women, but only one, Munira Fakhro, was endorsed by a political society (*Waad*). Turnout was about 67%. The election increased *Wifaq's* representation to 18 seats, although still not a majority; reduced Sunni Islamists to five seats from 15; and empowered Sunni independents, who won 17 seats (up from nine in the 2006-2010 COR). The same woman who had won in 2006 was elected. In the municipal elections conducted concurrently, one woman was elected in the second round—the first woman to be elected to a municipal council. 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 (Nancy Khadouri), out of a Jewish population in Bahrain of about 40 persons, and one was Christian (Hala Qarrisah). Bahrain has an estimated 1,000 Christian citizens. Two Bahraini human rights watchdog groups, the Bahrain Human Rights Society and the Bahrain Transparency Society, jointly monitored the elections, along with some international observers.

2011 Uprising: Origin, Developments, and Prognosis

Shiite aspirations were demonstrated to have remained unsatisfied when a major uprising began on February 14, 2011, in the aftermath of the toppling of Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak.⁸ After a few days of minor 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 protesters demanded altering the constitution to expand the powers of the COR; ending gerrymandering of election districts to favor Sunnis; providing more jobs and economic opportunities; and replacing hard-line Prime Minister Khalifa. On February 15, 2011, King Hamad formed a committee to investigate the use of force against protesters, which had killed two by that time.

The unrest escalated on February 17-18, 2011, when security forces using rubber bullets and tear gas to clear Pearl Roundabout killed four demonstrators. *Wifaq* pulled all 18 deputies out of the COR, and Britain closed its embassy and banned arms exports to Bahrain. 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, demonstrations said to be the largest in Bahrain's history were held. *Wifaq* and other Shiite groups boycotted a September-October 2011 special election to fill those seats, producing a COR with 32 Sunni to only 8 Shiite-held seats.

The government, with Crown Prince Salman leading the effort, invited the representatives of the protesters to begin a formal dialogue. That effort was supported by a gesture by King Hamad on February 22, 2011, to release or pardon 308 Bahrainis, including *Al Haq* leader Mushaima, paving the way for him to return from exile. On February 26, 2011, the King dropped two Al Khalifa family members from cabinet posts as an apparent gesture to the opposition.

Crown Prince Salman's "Seven Principles" Reform Plan

On March 13, 2011, Crown Prince Salman articulated "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 several other measures.⁹ The articulation of the seven principles gave *Wifaq* and other moderate oppositionists hope that many of their demands could be met through dialogue. However, anger at the government's use of force appeared to shift many demonstrators closer to hardline groups such as *Al Haq* that demanded an end to the monarchy.¹⁰

The Saudi-led Intervention

With Shiite groups refusing to accept the offer of dialogue, protests escalated and sparked broader Sunni-Shiite clashes. On March 13, 2011, protesters blockaded the financial district of the capital, Manama, prompting governmental fears that this major economic sector could be harmed. Bahrain requested that the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), of which it is a member, send security forces to protect key sites and, on March 14, 2011, a GCC force (from the GCC joint

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>.

⁹ BICI report, op. cit., p. 165.

¹⁰ "Bahrain Hard-Liners Call for Royal Family to Go." Cable News Network website, March 9, 2011.

Peninsula Shield unit) spearheaded by a reported 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 Bahrain secure its maritime borders. On March 15, 2011, King Hamad declared (Royal Decree Number 18) a three-month state of emergency. Bahrain's security forces, freed up by the GCC deployment, cleared demonstrators from Pearl Roundabout and demolished the Pearl Monument on March 18, 2011.¹¹ That action caused many Shiites in the governing structure to resign. Most public protests in downtown Manama ceased.

Perceiving he had regained the upper hand, the King announced in May 2011 that the state of emergency would end on June 1, 2011, two weeks earlier than scheduled. The GCC forces began to depart in late June 2011, although some, including some of the UAE police, remained to bolster Bahraini security force ranks. King Hamad addressed the population on May 31, 2011 to mark the end of the emergency and to offer unconditional dialogue with the opposition beginning July 1, 2011. The GCC intervention represented an escalation from earlier steps to help the Bahrain government. They had earlier pledged about \$20 billion to help both Bahrain (and Oman, which also faced unrest) create jobs.

“National Dialogue” Begun and Inquiry Commission Established

On June 29, 2011, as a significant gesture toward the opposition and international critics, the king named a five-person “Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry,” (BICI) headed by highly regarded international legal expert Dr. Cherif Bassiouni, to investigate the government's response to the unrest. The BICI held a public forum on July 24, 2011, but came under criticism from Shiite oppositionists who interpreted certain Bassiouni statements as exonerating top officials.

The formation of the BICI set the stage for the “National Dialogue” on political and economic reform that began on July 2, 2011, under the chairmanship of speaker of the COR Dhahrani. About 300 delegates participated, of which the Shiite opposition broadly comprised 40-50 delegates, of which 5 belonged to *Wifaq*.¹² Over several weeks, the dialogue addressed political, economic, social, and human rights issues that government officials said was intended to outline a vision of Bahrain rather than specific steps. The detention of many oppositionists clouded the meetings, and *Wifaq* exited the talks on July 18, 2011. Others noted that the Crown Prince did not chair the meetings, suggesting he was eclipsed by hard line figures within the royal family.

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 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.”

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

¹² Mohamed Hasni. “Bahrain Opens Dialogue Buoyed by Shiite Attendance.” Agence France Presse, July 2, 2011.

- “fairly” demarcated electoral boundaries.
- reworking of laws on naturalization and citizenship.
- combating financial and administrative corruption.
- efforts to reduce sectarian divisions.

There were reportedly 82 economic recommendations, including new mechanisms to provide food subsidies to only the most needy citizens.

As a gesture of reconciliation after the dialogue concluded, in a speech on August 28, 2011, near the conclusion of the holy month of Ramadan, King Hamad pardoned some protesters and reinstated some of the approximately 2,700 of those who had been fired for alleged participation in unrest. On August 8, 2011, the government released the two jailed *Wifaq* COR deputies, Matar and Fairuz, along with several other activists.

“Manama Document” Opposition Proposal. *Wifaq* and other Shiite opposition groups rejected the outcome of the national dialogue as failing to fulfill even the Crown Prince’s offer of a parliament with “full authority.” The groups, led by *Wifaq* and *Waad*, unveiled their own proposals—the “Manama Document”—on October 12, 2011. The manifesto called for a fully elected one-chamber parliament with legislative powers, the direct selection of the prime minister by the largest coalition in the elected legislature, and the running of elections by an independent election commission. The opposition also viewed the government’s pledge of “fairly demarcated” election boundaries as vague, and likely to enable the government to continue to gerrymander districts to ensure a Sunni majority in the lower house.

Dialogue Recommendations Produce Constitutional Amendments

Despite the opposition’s criticism of the dialogue results, the government appointed a committee, headed by deputy Prime Minister Muhammad Mubarak Al Khalifa, to implement the consensus recommendations. After rounds of meetings between both houses of the National Assembly and various ministries, the King announced draft amendments to the Bahraini constitution on January 16, 2012. They 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.

The BICI Report and Implementation Process

In addition to the dialogue, the government looked to the BICI report to help resolve the crisis, even though the mission of the BICI focused on government handling of the unrest rather than on ideas for political reform. It was initially due by October 30, 2011, but was released on November 23, 2011. The 500+ page report provided some support for the narratives of both sides in the crisis, and recommendations, including the following:¹³

- There was “systematic” and “deliberate” use of excessive force, including torture and forced confessions, against protesters.
- The opposition articulated additional demands as the uprising progressed.
- The government did not provide evidence to establish a link between the unrest in Bahrain and the government of Iran. (p. 378)
- There was no evidence of human rights abuses committed by the GCC forces that intervened at the request of the Bahraini government. (p. 378)

The report contained 26 recommendations (pp. 411-415) to try to prevent future violence against peaceful protesters and to hold accountable those responsible for abuses against protesters. In keeping with the BICI’s mandate, the recommendations did not address the political structure of Bahrain. Apparently recognizing that it would be judged by the international community on its response to the report, King Hamad issued a statement accepting the criticism and promising full implementation of the recommendations. *Wifaq* criticized it as failing to state that abuse 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 Council Chairman Ali al-Salih (a Shiite). He also announced that the “National Human Rights Institution,” established in 2010, would be fully independent of the government. Subsequently, a “Follow-Up Unit,” headed by Ms. Dana Al Zayani, was established by the Ministry of Justice.¹⁴ According to these governmental bodies, the regime implemented the vast majority of the 26 BICI recommendations.¹⁵ However, a study by the Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED), issued on the one-year anniversary of the BICI recommendations, 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 This more critical assessment was supported by BICI chair Bassiouni in public comments marking the one-year anniversary of the report. 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. (A formal provision of the law to this effect was taken out in conference and substituted with conference report language to the same effect.) The report was submitted but not made public;¹⁷

¹³ <http://files.bici.org.bh/BICIREportEN.pdf>.

¹⁴ The Follow-Up Unit’s June report can be found at http://www.iaa.bh/downloads/bici_followup_report_en.pdf.

¹⁵ The full text of the National Commission’s March 20, 2012, report is at <http://www.biciactions.bh/wps/portal/BICI/>.

¹⁶ POMED. “One Year Later: Assessing Bahrain’s Implementation of the BICI Report.” November 2012.

¹⁷ Author conversation with congressional staff, July 2013.

press reports indicate that it concluded that the government had fully implemented five out of the 26 recommendations—a finding broadly similar to those of POMED.¹⁸

The recommendations that observers agree were fully implemented include

- 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. The head of the organization was removed and replaced by Adel bin Khalifa Al Fadhil, a nonroyal. The arrest powers were transferred to the Ministry of Interior.
- Drafting and providing training on a code of conduct for the police, based on international best practices. The government hired former Miami police chief John Timoney and former British police chief John Yates to teach Bahraini police tactics and techniques that conform to international standards of human rights practices. However, the State Department’s human rights report for 2012, issued on April 19, 2013, said that the Ministry of Interior’s enforcement of the code of conduct is unclear.¹⁹
- Training judiciary employees and prosecutors on preventing and eradicating torture and ill-treatment.

There appears to be broad agreement among observers that the government has not implemented several recommendations (5, 8, 10, 14, 22, and 24) that address investigation and prevention of torture, detention without prompt access to legal counsel, dropping charges on those who protested but did not use violence, and allowing the opposition free expression and access to media.

Most of the other recommendations fall into an intermediate category of partial implementation, including the following:

- Holding security officials accountable for abuses (recommendations No. 2 and No. 7).
- Referral of all cases of security personnel who committed major abuses to the public prosecutor for subsequent prosecution. In May 2014, the Ministry of Interior Ombudsman’s office, established in July 2013, issued its first report, stating that 45 Ministry personnel had been referred for prosecution by various courts.²⁰
- Establishment of new procedures to record interrogations of detainees (No. 13).
- Integrating Shiites into the security services (No. 11).
- Reinstatement of fired workers, public sector employees, and students (No. 18, No. 19, and No. 20). According to the government, almost all of the over 2,500

¹⁸ http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/10/14/the_peril_of_ignoring_bahrain_s_iron_fist.

¹⁹ <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm#wrapper>. p.11.

²⁰ http://ombudsman.bh/mcms-store/pdf/610-First%20Annual%20Report%20%202013-2014-2812251.pdf?utm_source=Project+on+Middle+East+Democracy+-+All+Contacts&utm_campaign=1e97a6b50f-Bahrain_Weekly_Update_Nov_1_2012&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_75a06056d7-1e97a6b50f-215946089

dismissed workers have been reinstated, although Bahraini labor organizations say some cases of dismissed laborers remain unresolved.

- Establishment of a compensation fund for the victims of torture and families of deceased victims (No.16 and No. 17). In August 2011, the King announced a “Civil Settlement Initiative” to provide \$25 million to compensate these victims.
- The rebuilding of destroyed religious sites (No. 21). About 22 of the more than 53 Shiite religious sites demolished by the regime during the course of the uprising have been mostly rebuilt.

Second National Dialogue

Continued demonstrations, use of force against them, and increasing incidents of anti-government violence caused the government and the opposition to seek to resume dialogue. Moderates on both sides stressed that the Crown Prince’s “Seven Principles,” the national dialogue consensus recommendations, and the Manama Document had many points in common. 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 national 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.

This 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—a new position that appeared intended to increase the Crown Prince’s authority.

The second national dialogue quickly bogged down and ultimately produced few results. The opposition insisted any consensus recommendations be put to a popular referendum, while the government insisted that agreements be enacted by the National Assembly. The opposition demanded that the dialogue include authoritative decision makers and representatives of the King—higher-level figures than the ministers that participated. 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.

Recent Developments/Current Situation

Crown Prince Salman sought to quickly revive the dialogue process by meeting with Marzuq and *Wifaq* leader Shaykh Ali al-Salman on January 15, 2014, despite the fact that both oppositionists faced criminal charges for their roles in the uprising. The meeting addressed *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 (see above) subsequently met with opposition representatives to discuss their proposals for altering the governing structure. The Royal Court Minister said 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 renewed 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 offer to further empower the COR by allowing it—rather than the King—to select a Prime Minister.

COR Elections in November 2014

No new national dialogue was convened, and the government subsequently sought to induce the opposition to participate in the 2014 COR election—a development that would give the elections substantial legitimacy. On September 22, the government announced the vote for November 22, with a runoff to be held a week later. The government also announced that there would be only four electoral districts instead of five by abolishing the “central governorate” district and redistributing its seat allocations. Experts said the redistricting might enable the Shiite opposition to win 50% of the 40 seats. The previous districts limited the Shiite opposition to 18 seats, even though *Wifaq* won 67% of the total vote in the 2010 election.

The redistricting did not have government’s intended effect, even though the redistricting did not clearly harm opposition electoral prospects. *Wifaq* and its allies announced in early October that they would boycott the COR election. Subsequently, the government went ahead with a three month ban on political activities by *Wifaq*. Candidate registration took place October 15-19. The boycott reduced the turnout significantly from most past elections (to 51%, according to the government, or 30%, according to the opposition), but there was little or no violence during the November 22 vote and November 29 runoff round.

Some experts noted that seats were mostly won by independent candidates, perhaps suggesting that those who voted seek a less polarized political climate. Only three candidates of the Sunni Islamist political societies won, and none of the 10 candidates of the pro-government Al Fatih coalition was elected. The 14 Shiite winners were independents, although some reportedly are members of *Wifaq* or other opposition political societies. Ahmad Ibrahim al-Mulla was elected COR speaker. Ali bin Salih Al Salih, a Shiite remained chairman of the Shura that was appointed on December 8, 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. The combined National Assembly convened on December 14.

After the election, the King reappointed Prime Minister Khalifa to form a new government. The King also paired the number of ministries down to 17 by eliminating some outright or combining some of them. However, the reappointment of Khalifa as Prime Minister appeared to represent a possible signal of unwillingness to compromise with the opposition. Some in the opposition, and in the broader international community, have in the past few years suggested that, as a gesture to the opposition, Prime Minister Khalifa might be replaced with a moderate Al Khalifa member.

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 |

Re-Arrest of Wifaq Leader and Demonstrations Revive

On December 28, 2014, about one month after the conclusion of the COR election process, the government re-arrested *Wifaq* leader Ali al-Salman. His lawyer states that he has been charged with “inciting hatred against the regime,” apparently reflecting his role in encouraging Shiites to boycott the election and for joining post-election demonstrations against the government. His arrest touched off several days of clashes between Shiite demonstrators and security forces. In early February 2015, the government revoked the citizenship of 72 persons for various anti-government activities, and shut down a new independent satellite TV station, Al Arab News Channel, for airing an interview with *Wifaq* deputy leader Marzuq.²¹ Additional demonstrations marked the February 14, 2015, fourth anniversary of the uprising.

Prospects and Way Forward?

Some experts express optimism that a political settlement is possible. The government and the opposition have at times discussed an interim compromise in which the opposition gains seats in a new cabinet. Saudi statements in 2014 appeared to signal a softening of Saudi resistance to

²¹ Ben Hubbard. “Channel in Bahrain Goes Silent After Giving Opposition Airtime.” *New York Times*, February 3, 2015.

concessions to the Bahrain opposition. And, despite the unrest, six Shiites ministers continue to serve in Bahrain's council of ministers. Others assert that conditions favor a settlement because the opposition appears to realize it cannot topple the government and the government appears to have concluded it cannot end forcibly demonstrations and unrest entirely.

Emergence of Violent Underground Groups Cloud Outlook

Some experts express pessimism about a political settlement on the grounds that the uprising might be evolving into an increasingly organized insurgency. One hardline group, 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 Bahraini government asserts that the 14 February Youth Coalition is a terrorist movement that seeks to overthrow the state, and the movement gave some support to that assertion when it claimed responsibility for an April 14, 2013, explosion in the Financial Harbour district. On September 29, 2013, 50 Shiites were sentenced to up to 15 years in prison for alleged involvement in the 14 February Coalition.

There are several violent groups that include²²

- Sayara al-Ashtar (Ashtar Brigades). It issued its first public statement in April 2013 and has since claimed responsibility for 20 bombings against security personnel. It claimed responsibility for a March 3, 2014, bombing that killed three police officers who were confronting protesters outside Manama. One of 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 3, 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 by implanted Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs).

Among other recent bombings carried out by these or other violent oppositionists are: a bomb on February 14, 2014, the third anniversary of the uprising, that killed one police officer; and a bomb on March 11, 2014, that wounded two Bahrain police officers. On two successive days (December 8 and 9, 2014), blasts in Bahrain killed a civilian and a Jordanian police officer assisting Bahrain's Interior Ministry forces, respectively.

In concert with the emergence of groups that use violent tactics, the use, storage, and manufacture of explosives against Bahraini security forces appears to be increasing. On June 14, 2012, the government discovered bomb-making materials in several locations. On April 29, 2013, the government claimed to have uncovered an arms warehouse used by oppositionists. On October 7, 2013, a Bahrain court convicted nine Bahraini Shiites linked to the bomb-making facilities discussed above. On December 30, 2013, authorities seized a ship, originating in Iraq, allegedly

²² Matthew Levitt. "Iran and Bahrain: Crying Wolf, or Wolf at the Door?" Washington Institute for Near East Policy, May 16, 2014.

carrying Iranian weaponry and bomb-making material for the Bahrain opposition.²³ Pro-government Bahrainis say that the bombings show intent of the opposition to overthrow the regime by any means necessary, whereas the opposition political societies insist they have no connection to violent underground groups.

Table 2. Status of Prominent Dissidents/Other Metrics of the Uprising

| | |
|--|---|
| Abdul Hadi al-Khawaja, founder of Bahrain Center for Human Rights | Arrested April 9, 2011, was one of 13 prominent dissidents 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. He conducted a hunger strike in prison in early 2012 but was force fed by Bahraini officials and remains alive. Daughters Zainab and Maryam have been repeatedly arrested for opposition activities and released, and have campaigned abroad for their father's release and for the Shiite opposition generally. His brother, Salah Abdullah al-Khawaja, was sentenced in June 2011 to five years in prison. |
| Hassan Mushaima and Dr. Abduljalil Alsingace, Al Haq leaders | Two of the 13 prominent dissidents tried by state security court May 8, 2011, sentenced to life in prison on June 22, 2011. Sentence upheld September 4, 2012. Mushaima's son was one of the 31 whose citizenship was revoked in November 2012. |
| Other prominent oppositionists sentenced on June 22, 2011 | Along with the Khawaja brothers, Mushaima, and Alsingace, the June 22, 2011, sentences of nine other prominent dissidents were upheld on September 4, 2012, and reaffirmed by the Court of Cassation on January 8, 2013. Four are sentenced to life in prison—Abdulwahab Ahmed; Mohammad al-Saffaf; Abduljalil Mansour; and Said Mirza Ahmad. |
| Nabeel Rajab | Successor to al-Khawaja as head of BCHR. Arrested February 15, 2012, for inciting illegal assembly and organizing unlicensed demonstrations, released, and rearrested on April 1, 2012. Sentenced on August 16, 2012, to three years in jail but, on December 11, 2012, sentence was reduced to two years on appeal. Released May 24, 2014. Rearrested in October 2014 for online posts alleging security force links to the Islamic State. |
| Sayed Yousif al-Muhafdha | Member of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, has catalogued and reported on protests over social media. Arrested December 17, 2012, and detained for two weeks in November 2012. |
| 21 medical personnel from Salmaniya Medical Complex | Twenty-one medical personnel were arrested in April 2011 and subsequently tried for inciting sectarian hatred, possession of illegal weapons, and forcibly occupying a public building. The personnel argued that they were helping wounded protesters. They were tried in a military court before the government announced their retrial in a civilian court. All were eventually acquitted, most recently in late March 2013 by an appeals court. However, they have not been able to regain their jobs at the medical center. |
| Matar Matar and Jawad Fairuz, members of the COR, Ayatollah Najati | Arrested May 2, 2011, and released August 8, 2011. Matar formally acquitted on February 19, 2012. Fairuz was one of the 31 whose citizenship was revoked in Nov. 2012. His brother, Jalal Fairuz, was another stripped of citizenship, as was Shiite Ayatollah Hussein al-Najati. Najati was ordered expelled from Bahrain on April 23, 2014, for acting as a representative of Iraqi senior Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani "without permission." |
| Deputy Secretary General of Wifaq, Khalil al-Marzuq | Arrested in September 2013 for "inciting terrorism," but released after 38 days and banned from leaving Bahrain. Was acquitted of all charges on June 25, 2014. |
| Number killed in the uprising to date | About 100 |
| Citizenship Revocations | About 115 |
| Number Arrested | Approximately 3,000 total detentions since 2011. |

Sources: Various press and interest group reports.

²³ Sandeep Singh Grewal. Arms Ring is Smashed by Police. Daily News, December 31, 2013.

U.S. Posture on the Uprising

The Administration has not 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—prior to and since the uprising began—undertaken reform. The Administration has repeatedly urged Bahraini authorities against using force against protesters, it opposed the GCC intervention, and it has called on all parties to engage in sustained political dialogue on reforms.²⁴ After the GCC intervention, on March 19, 2011, then Secretary Clinton said:

Bahrain obviously has the sovereign right to invited GCC forces into its territory under its defense and security agreements.... [The United States has] made clear that security alone cannot resolve the challenges facing Bahrain. As I said earlier this week, violence is not and cannot be the answer. A political process is. We have raised our concerns about the current measures directly with Bahraini officials and will continue to do so.

President Obama's May 19, 2011, speech on the uprisings in the Middle East said the prospects for success of a Bahrain government dialogue with the opposition were compromised by the jailing of opposition figures. 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.

After the release of the BICI report, then-Secretary of State Clinton said that the United States is

deeply concerned about the abuses identified in the report ... and believe[s] that the BICI report offers a historic opportunity for all Bahrainis to participate in a healing process that will address long-standing grievances and move the nation onto a path of genuine, sustained, reform.

On June 6, 2013, following a meeting between Secretary of State John Kerry and the Crown Prince, the State Department said: the United States and Bahrain “agreed that all sides should contribute constructively to reconciliation, meaningful dialogue, and reform that meets the aspirations of all Bahrainis. Secretary Kerry reiterated [the U.S.] belief that all sides must reject violence and pursue actions that will contribute to Bahrain's future growth and prosperity.” Then Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel visited Bahrain to speak before the 2013 Manama Dialogue (IISS security conference discussed above), becoming the first U.S. Cabinet member to visit Bahrain since the 2011 uprising began. (He returned for that same conference in December 2014.) On February 29, 2014, then Deputy Secretary of State William Burns praised the efforts of the Crown Prince to revive the national dialogue process.²⁵

²⁴ Secretary of State Clinton Comments on the Situation in the Middle East. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GbucMZUg3Gc>.

²⁵ http://www.state.gov/s/d/2014/221809.htm?utm_source=Project+on+Middle+East+Democracy+-+All+Contacts&utm_campaign=027fa1d218-Bahrain_Weekly_Update_Nov_1_2012&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_75a06056d7-027fa1d218-215946089

Critics of the Administration—primarily human rights-oriented groups such as Human Rights Watch and the Project on Middle East Democracy—say that U.S. criticism of Bahrain’s handling of the unrest has been insufficient—a result of the Administration’s perception of vital U.S. security interests in Bahrain.²⁶ Critics add that the Administration is concerned that a fall of the Al Khalifa regime and ascension of a Shiite-led government could increase Iran’s influence and lead to an unwanted loss of the U.S. use of Bahrain’s military facilities. As a possible example of a U.S. emphasis on security issues, the Administration publicly praised the Bahrain government for joining the anti-Islamic State organization in September 2014.

Critics add that continued U.S. military sales and aid to the government represents a tacit endorsement of the government’s stance on the unrest. The Administration counters that it has reduced or placed on hold some U.S. aid and sales. For example, \$25 million in military aid (Foreign Military Financing, FMF) was requested for Bahrain for FY2012 (figures determined just before the uprising began), but only \$10 million was provided. FMF for Bahrain has since continued to fall to a level of \$7.5 million being provided in FY2015, and another \$7.5 million requested for FY2016. After the February 2014 Malinowski expulsion (discussed above), the Administration apparently put on hold deliveries of some arms sales to the Defense Ministry and all assistance to the Interior Ministry.

Some human rights-related groups have suggested that the United States should go further and ban travel to the United States or freeze any U.S.-based assets of Bahraini officials determined by the Administration to have committed or authorized human rights abuses against peaceful protesters. Such sanctions have been imposed on members of adversary governments such as Syria and Iran, for example in the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2010 (P.L. 111-195). To date, the Administration has not imposed any sanctions on Bahrain or on Bahraini officials for human rights abuses.

The Bahrain government and its supporters assert that Administration criticism has been too harsh. Bahrain’s sentiment was exemplified on July 7, 2014, when it 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. The government asserted he breached a requirement that all foreign government meetings with opposition political societies have a Bahrain government official present. 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.²⁷

The Malinowski expulsion went well beyond the established Bahrain government pattern of criticizing then U.S. Ambassador Tom Krajeski for his meetings with opposition political societies. In July 2014, after Krajeski had served a normal three year term as Ambassador, the Administration nominated William V. Roebuck, another career diplomat, to succeed him. He was confirmed and took up his duties in mid-December 2014. 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.²⁸ Suggesting that the two countries

²⁶ Stephen McInerney. “Silence on Bahrain.” *Washington Post* op-ed. November 5, 2012.

²⁷ Congress of the United States. Letter to King Hamad. July 18, 2014.

²⁸ [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-\(continued...\)](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-(continued...))

had resolved differences over the Malinowski visit, Malinowski and Assistant Secretary of State for the Near East Anne Patterson visited Bahrain in early December 2014 to hold meetings with the government as well as members of civil society.

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

Well before the 2011 unrest began, human rights groups and Bahraini Shiite 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 ..."²⁹ In May 2006 Bahrain revoked the visa for the resident program director of the National Democratic Institute (NDI), and did not allow the office to reopen. NDI was conducting programs to enhance parliamentary capabilities through a local NGO. Successive State Department International Religious Freedom reports have noted that the U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the [Bahraini] government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

*MEPI Funding Uses in Bahrain.*³⁰ 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. MEPI funds have been used for an American Bar Association (ABA) program to support the Ministry of Justice's Judicial and Legal Studies Institute (JLSI), which conducts specialized training for judges, lawyers, law schools, and Bahrain's bar association. The ABA also provided technical assistance to Bahrain's implementation of the BICI recommendations, including legislation on fair trial standards. MEPI funds have also been used to fund U.S. Department of Commerce programs to provide Bahrain with technical assistance in support of trade liberalization and economic diversification. The Commerce Department program has also helped Bahrain modernize 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 were used for AFL-CIO projects with Bahraini labor organizations, and to help Bahrain implement the U.S.-Bahrain FTA.

Other Human Rights Issues³¹

Most of the human rights problems identified in Bahrain are directly tied to the government's response to the unrest, as noted in human rights reports such as those by the State Department,

(...continued)

Bahrain_Weekly_Update_Nov_1_2012&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_75a06056d7-b2cd02f711-215946089.

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

³⁰ Statement from the U.S. Embassy in Bahrain Concerning MEPI. June 17, 2014.

³¹ Much of this section is from the State Department's country report on human rights practices for 2013 (released February 27, 2014), <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2013&dliid=220348#wrapper>; the *International Religious Freedom Report* for 2013 (July 28, 2014), <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2013&dliid=222285#wrapper>; and the *Trafficking in Persons Report for 2013* (June 19, 2013), <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/210740.pdf>. See also: Human Rights Watch: World Report 2014.

Human Rights Watch, and other groups. The State Department human rights report for 2013, released February 27, 2014, notes additional problems in Bahrain for non-Muslims and for non-Shiite opponents of the government, as well as limitations in the rights of organized labor.

There are several Bahraini human rights groups, mainly advocates 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 remain active informally. As noted above, the government has arrested several leaders of these organizations.

Bahrain has drawn increasing attention from U.N. human rights bodies and other governments. On June 28, 2012, 28 countries issued a joint declaration, during U.N. Human Rights Council debate, condemning human rights abuses by the Bahrain government. The United States, Britain, and eight other EU countries did not support the initiative. Human rights groups criticized the Administration for refusing to block the September 28, 2012, vote in the U.N. Human Rights Council to fill one of its advisory committee vacancies with a Bahraini representative, Saeed Mohammad al-Faihani. That vote came nine days after the Human Rights Council accepted a Universal Periodic Review of Bahrain's human rights record, in which the government agreed to fully accept 140 out of 176 recommendations of the review. On September 9, 2013, 47 countries, including the United States, joined the U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in stating that the human rights situation in Bahrain remains an issue of serious concern.³² 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.

Women's Rights

As do the other GCC countries, 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. Some prominent Bahraini women have campaigned for a codified family law that would enhance and secure women's rights, but were blocked by Bahraini clerics who opposed such reforms. The campaign for the law was backed by King Hamad's wife, Shaykha Sabeeka, and the Supreme Council for Women, which is one association that promotes women's rights in Bahrain. Others include the Bahrain Women's Union, the Bahrain Women's Association, and the Young Ladies Association.

The government promotes women to high positions. Since 2005, there has always been at least two female ministers—Minister of Human Rights and Social Development Fatima bint Ahmad al-Balushi and Minister of Information and Culture Mai bint Muhammad Al Khalifa. A third, Samira Rajab, was added to the cabinet in 2012 as minister of state for media affairs. Huda Azar Nonoo, an attorney and formerly the only Jew in the Shura Council, was ambassador to the United States during 2008-2013. As noted above, a female—Dana Zayani—heads the “Follow Up Unit” that

³² http://pomed.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/Joint-Statement-on-the-OHCHR-and-the-human-rights-situation-in-Bahrain-FINAL.pdf?utm_source=Project+on+Middle+East+Democracy+-+All+Contacts&utm_campaign=52543e5858-Bahrain_Weekly_Update_Nov_1_2012&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_75a06056d7-52543e5858-215946089.

oversaw implementation of the BICI recommendations. The number of women in both chambers of the National Assembly is provided in **Table 1**, above.

Religious Freedom

The State Department report on international religious freedom for 2013 (released July 28, 2014) was similar to that of previous years in that it focuses extensively on Sunni-Shiite differences and the unrest. As an example, in September 2013 the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs, which regulates the affairs of Muslim organizations in Bahrain, filed a lawsuit against the main assembly of Shiite clerics in Bahrain, called the Islamic Ulema Council. The Ministry claimed it was an illegal organization and sought to halt its activities and liquidate its assets.

According to the 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. To date, 19 non-Muslim religious groups are registered, including Christian churches and a Hindu temple. In 2012, the government donated land for the Roman Catholic Vicariate of Northern Arabia to relocate from Kuwait to Bahrain.

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. According to the State Department human rights report for 2011, there are about 40 Jews in Bahrain, and no recent reports of anti-Semitic acts.

Aside from sectarian differences, religious conservatives, both Sunni and Shiite, are active in Bahrain. On September 14, 2012, about 2,000 Bahrainis demonstrated in the mostly Shiite district of Diraz against the U.S.-produced video "The Innocence of Muslims." Similar demonstrations took place throughout the Middle East and South Asia.

Media Freedoms

Media freedoms have been curbed since the uprising began. The State Department human rights reports states that the government suppresses critical speech. As have several of the other Gulf states, the government has made increased use of laws allowing jail sentences for "insulting the King," and has increased the penalty for that offense to five years, from two years. As noted above, in October 2014, the government rearrested Nabil Rajab for posting online reports that members of the Bahrain security forces had joined the Islamic State organization.

Labor Rights

On labor issues, Bahrain has been credited with significant labor reforms, including 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 their right is restricted in practice, including a prohibition on strikes 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). As a sign of the degree to which the GFBTU is dominated by oppositionists, during the height of unrest in 2011, the GFBTU called at least two general strikes to protest excessive force by security forces. In apparent retaliation by the government and employers, during March-May 2011, employers dismissed almost 2,500 workers

from the private sector, and almost 2,000 from the public sector, including 25% of the country's union leadership.

Human Trafficking

On human trafficking, the State Department "Trafficking in Persons Report" for 2014, released in July 2014, again placed Bahrain in "Tier 2: Watch List." This is the third year in a row that Bahrain is rated at that level.³³ The Tier 2 Watch List ranking is based on the government's failure to demonstrate increasing effort to address the human trafficking issue. However, it was given a 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 has a written plan to bring its efforts against trafficking into compliance with international standards. The 2014 report adds that the government has increased prosecutions for trafficking, as compared to 2013. The report for 2014 asserts that Bahrain is a destination country for migrant workers from India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, Ethiopia, Ghana, and Eritrea to be subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking.

Executions and Torture

Another issue that has been widely discussed in the context of the uprising, but which predated it, is that of executions and torture. Human Rights Watch and other groups long asserted that Bahrain had been going against the international trend of ending executions. In November 2009, Bahrain's Court of Cassation upheld the sentencing to death by firing squad of a citizen of Bangladesh. That sentenced was imposed for a 2005 murder. From 1977 until 2006, there were no executions in Bahrain.

In February 2010, well before the uprising began, Human Rights Watch issued a study alleging systematic use by Bahraini security forces of torture.³⁴ 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 the 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 cancellation of his visit since the unrest began. On June 7, 2013, 20 Senators and Representatives signed a letter to the King urging him to allow a visit by Mendez in order to demonstrate Bahrain's "commitment to help put an end to such abuses."³⁵

U.S.-Bahrain Security and Foreign Policy Relations³⁶

The U.S.-Bahrain security relationship dates to the end of World War II and, since the late 1970s, defense and security issues have been central to U.S.-Bahrain relations. In large part to keep

³³ <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/226845.pdf>.

³⁴ Human Rights Watch. "Bahrain: Torture Redux." February 2010.

³⁵ <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/wp-content/uploads/HRF-King-Al-Khalifa-Letter.pdf>.

³⁶ Information in this section obtained from a variety of press reports, and the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA).

powerful neighbors in check, Bahrain has linked its security to the United States, and has placed its facilities at U.S. disposal to address threats from Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, international terrorism, and piracy in the Gulf and Arabia Sea. Bahrain, as much as any GCC state, considers Iran's nuclear program a major potential threat. Since the U.S.-led ousting of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, the perceived threat from Iraq has receded because Iraq's military is far smaller and less well-armed than it was during the rule of Saddam Hussein.

In addition to the long-standing U.S. naval headquarters presence in Bahrain, the two countries signed a formal Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) in 1991. In March 2002, President Bush (Presidential Determination 2002-10) designated Bahrain a "major non-NATO ally (MNNA)," a designation that qualifies Bahrain to purchase the same U.S. arms that NATO allies can purchase. There are about 7,000 U.S. military personnel, mostly Navy, deployed in Bahrain implementing various missions and U.S.-Bahrain defense cooperation initiatives.³⁷ In December 2014, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) announced it would form a joint naval force based in Bahrain.

U.S. officials say that U.S.-Bahrain differences over Bahrain's handling of the unrest has caused Bahraini officers to become slightly less forthcoming with in-kind support to the U.S. military presence in Bahrain. This could represent resentment over the U.S. withholding of some arms sales to Bahrain or retaliation for U.S. criticism of the government's handling of the unrest. However, the continued strength of the defense relationship was displayed in September 2014 when Bahrain joined the U.S.-led anti-Islamic State coalition by flying airstrikes on Islamic State positions in Syria.

Opposition leaders, including *Wifaq* leader Salman, publicly support the security relationship with the United States, but they assert that the United States should use the leverage of its military presence in Bahrain to persuade the Bahraini government to enact significant political reforms. Others observers say that, were the opposition to come to power, Iran might influence its Shiite allies in Bahrain to expel U.S. forces from Bahrain.

U.S. Naval Headquarters in Bahrain

The cornerstone of U.S.-Bahrain defense relations is U.S. access to Bahrain's naval facilities. February 2008 marked the 60th anniversary of a U.S. naval command presence in Bahrain; 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-Bahrain." It is also home to U.S. Marine Forces Central Command, Destroyer Squadron Fifty, and three Combined Maritime Forces.³⁸ 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 and technically "off shore."

Some smaller U.S. ships (e.g., minesweepers) are home-ported there, but the Fifth Fleet consists mostly of U.S.-homeported ships that are sent to the region on six- to seven-month deployments. Ships operating in the Fifth Fleet at any given time typically include a carrier strike group, an

³⁷ Hendrick Simoes. "Bahrain Expansion Latest Sign of Continued Presence." Stars and Stripes, December 16, 2013.

³⁸ 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.

amphibious ready group, and some additional surface combatants, and operate in both the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean/Northern Arabian Sea. In March 2012, the U.S. Navy doubled its minesweepers in the Gulf to eight, and sent additional mine-hunting helicopters, as tensions escalated over Iran's nuclear program. In May 2013, the U.S. Navy move five coastal patrol ships to Bahrain to join five already there. The naval headquarters in Bahrain serves as the command headquarters for periodic exercises intended to signal resolve to Iran, such as a mine-sweeping exercise involving 41 countries on May 5-30, 2013.

The naval headquarters also 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. In March 2008, Bahrain took a turn in a rotation to command CTF-152, and it commanded again in December 2010. Bahrain commanded an anti-piracy task force in Gulf/Arabian Sea waters in October 2010. These operations are offshoots of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan, which ousted the Taliban after the September 11 attacks.

To further develop the naval facility (sometimes referred to as "Bahrain Island"), and other military facilities, the U.S. military is implementing a planned \$580 million military construction program in Bahrain.³⁹ That construction, which began in May 2010, will add 77 acres (the decommissioned Mina (port) Al Salman Pier, leased by the Navy under a January 2008 lease agreement) to the existing 80 acre facility. When completed in 2017, the expansion will provide a new administration building and additional 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.⁴⁰ A separate deep water port in Bahrain, Khalifa bin Salman, is one of the few facilities in the Gulf that can accommodate U.S. aircraft carriers and amphibious ships.⁴¹

Of the military construction program under way in Bahrain, \$45 million is being used to expand an apron at Shaykh Isa Air Base, where a variety of U.S. aircraft are stationed, including F-16s, F-18s, and P-3 surveillance aircraft. About \$19 million is being used for a U.S. Special Operations Forces facility.

The naval headquarters 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 will be improved to allow Britain's royal Navy to plan, store equipment, and house military personnel there.⁴²

Some say that the United States should begin examining alternate facilities in the Gulf region in the expectation that continued Bahraini hosting of the U.S. naval headquarters has become unstable. On July 22, 2011, the U.S. Navy in Bahrain issued a statement refuting a British press report that the Navy is planning to relocate the facility. Should there be a decision to take that step, likely alternatives in the Gulf would include Qatar's New Doha Port (to open in 2016),

³⁹ 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).

⁴⁰ Hendrick Simoes. "Bahrain Expansion Latest Sign of Continued Presence." *Stars and Stripes*, December 16, 2013.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

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

Kuwait's Shuaiba port, and the UAE's Jebel Ali.⁴³ None of these countries has publicly expressed a position on whether it would be willing to host such an expanded facility, but they have been highly cooperative with U.S. defense efforts in the Gulf and presumably would be willing to host the naval headquarters. U.S. officials say other Gulf state facilities, such as Jebel Ali in UAE, do not currently provide large U.S. ships with the ease of docking access that Bahrain does, and that many of the alternative possibilities inconveniently share docking and other facilities with large commercial operations. Such facilities could be improved, if necessary, by further construction.

Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA)

Bahrain was part of the U.S.-led allied coalition that ousted Iraq from Kuwait in 1991. Bahrain 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 over Iraq during the war, and Iraq fired nine Scud missiles at Bahrain during the war, of which three hit facilities there.

Bahrain and the United States subsequently decided to institutionalize the expanded cooperation by signing a Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) on October 28, 1991, for an initial period of 10 years. The DCA remains in effect.⁴⁴ The pact reportedly not only provides the United States access to Bahrain's air bases and to pre-position strategic materiel (mostly U.S. Air Force munitions), but also requires consultations with Bahrain if its security is threatened, and it expanded exercises and U.S. training of Bahraini forces.⁴⁵ The pact includes a "Status of Forces Agreement" (SOFA) under which U.S. military personnel serving in Bahrain operate under U.S., and not Bahraini, 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. Since the early 1990s, the United States has reportedly stationed two Patriot anti-missile batteries there.⁴⁶ Separately, Bahrain hosted the regional headquarters for U.N. weapons inspections in Iraq during 1991-1998.

Under the DCA, U.S. pilots flew combat missions from Bahraini air bases (Shaykh Isa Air Base) in both Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan (after the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States) and the war to oust Saddam Hussein in March-April 2003 (Operation Iraqi Freedom, OIF). During both OEF and OIF, Bahrain publicly 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 Gulf states to deploy their own forces to provide aid to Afghanistan. In January 2009, Bahrain sent 100 police officers to Afghanistan on a two-year tour

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ "U.S.-Bahrain Defense Pact Renewed." Agence France Presse, August 5, 2011.

⁴⁵ 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.

⁴⁶ Walter Pincus. "Bahrain Government's Ties With the United States Run Deep." *Washington Post*, February 22, 2011.

to help U.S./NATO-led stabilization operations there. Their tour was extended until the end of the NATO mission at the end of 2014.

U.S. Arms Transfers and Military Aid

To assist Bahrain's ability to cooperate with the United States on regional security issues, the United States has provided the country with small amounts of military assistance. Because U.S. military aid has been relatively small, Bahrain has mostly used national funds to buy the \$1.4 billion worth of U.S. weaponry it bought from 2000-2013.⁴⁷ The unrest has caused the Administration to put on hold sales to Bahrain equipment that could easily be used against protesters, primarily equipment provided to the Interior Ministry, while generally continuing to provide equipment that is suited to Bahrain's external defense capabilities.

Assistance to the Bahrain Defense Forces

The main recipient of U.S. military assistance has been the relatively small BDF—Bahrain's military force—which has less than 10,000 active duty personnel, including 1,200 National Guard. The BDF, as well as Bahrain's police forces, are run by Sunni Bahrainis, but supplement their ranks with unknown percentages of paid recruits from Sunni Muslim neighboring countries, including Pakistan, Yemen, Jordan, Iraq, and elsewhere. Some human rights groups say that BDF equipment, such as Cobra helicopters, have been used against protesters and that the United States cannot be sure that sales to and training of the BDF is not being used to crush unrest.

Foreign Military Financing (FMF)

Most of the U.S. assistance to the BDF is Foreign Military Financing (FMF). According to the Administration, FMF (and funds provided under "Section 1206" of the National Defense Authorization Act of 2006, P.L. 109-163) is provided to Bahrain to help it maintain U.S.-origin weapons, to enhance inter-operability with U.S. forces, to augment Bahrain's air defenses, to support and upgrade the avionics of its F-16 combat aircraft (see below), and to improve counterterrorism capabilities. 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.⁴⁸ 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.⁴⁹ The Defense Department estimates that, in part due to U.S. assistance, about 50% of Bahrain's forces are fully capable of integrating into a U.S.-led coalition.

The Administration's FY2012 aid request, made at the start of the unrest, asked for \$25 million in FMF for Bahrain. However, as shown in **Table 4** below, only \$10 million was provided for FY2012, due in large part to the Administration's intent to retain leverage against Bahrain to compel it to make reforms. A slightly increased amount was provided for FY2013 but the amount

⁴⁷ Justin Elliott. "Revealed: America's Arms Sales to Bahrain Amid Bloody Crackdown." Propublica, January 15, 2013.

⁴⁸ "Bahrain Government's Ties With the United States Run Deep," op. cit.

⁴⁹ "Revealed: America's Arms Sales to Bahrain Amid Bloody Crackdown," op. cit.

dropped back to \$10 million for FY2014. The Administration plans to provide \$7.5 million for Bahrain FMF for FY2015 and has again requested \$7.5 million for FY2016.

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, which is planned for 2014, subject to passage of authorizing legislation.⁵⁰ However, the FY2014 foreign aid budget justification says that the BDF has 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, in connection with the U.S. Foreign Military Sales program.

Major Foreign Military Sales (FMS) from Bahrain National Funds

Bahrain’s total government budget is about \$6 billion per year, allowing 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. 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 in subsequent legislation.)

Some of the sales to Bahrain have been in accordance with longstanding State and Defense Department efforts to promote greater defense cooperation among the GCC states and to deal with the GCC collectively rather than individually. The core of these initiatives involves missile defense integration, and it is primarily Bahrain’s wealthier neighbors, such as UAE, that are buying advanced U.S. missile defense equipment. That prevents Bahrain from becoming a major factor in the U.S. effort to assemble a Gulf-wide, coordinated missile defense network. That effort has been discussed extensively with the Gulf states, most recently during Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel’s meeting with GCC defense ministers in Jeddah during May 13-14, 2014. Among the major past sales:

- 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

⁵⁰ <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/05/189810.htm>.

- 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.
- 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 was reached in part to allay U.S. congressional concerns about possible U.S. promotion of missile proliferation in the region.
 - 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.
 - Sales of small arms are generally commercial sales, licensed by State Department with Defense Department concurrence. On September 10, 2011, the State Department licensed a sale of 250 pistols to the BDF and other firearms for the protection of a high ranking Bahraini official. Since 2012, the department has put “on hold” license requests for sales to Bahrain of small arms, light weapons, and ammunition.⁵¹

Post-Uprising FMS Policy

The Administration has adjusted its arms sales policy to Bahrain in response to Bahrain’s actions in the context of the Shiite-led uprising.

Humvee Sale Held Up. In September 2011, the Administration announced a sale to the BDF of 44 “Humvee” (M115A1B2) armored vehicles and several hundred TOW missiles of various models, of which 50 are “bunker busters.” Along with associated equipment and support, the proposed sale was worth an estimated \$53 million. Critics asserted that the sale represented U.S. downplaying of the abuses committed by the Bahraini government and that the Humvees could be used against peaceful protesters. 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 laws that forbids U.S. sales of equipment to security units that have committed human rights abuses.⁵²

Two joint resolutions were introduced in the 112th Congress to block the sale: S.J.Res. 28, introduced by Senator Ron Wyden, and H.J.Res. 80, introduced by Representative James McGovern. Both joint resolutions would have prohibited the sale unless the Administration certifies that Bahrain is rectifying the alleged abuses connected to its suppression of the uprising in 2011. To block a proposed arms sale would require passage of a joint resolution to do so, and with a veto-proof majority. The House bill attracted 14 co-sponsors, the Senate bill 2 co-sponsors. On October 19, 2011, even though the sale had passed the period of congressional review, and apparently addressing the criticism and legislative initiatives, the Administration told Congress it would delay the sale until it could review the BICI report discussed above. The State Department stated on January 27, 2012, that the Humvee sale would be placed on hold. The Administration stated in May 2012 that sales of other equipment that could be used against protesters (tear gas

⁵¹ Email from the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Legislative Affairs, May 20, 2013.

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

and rifles, for example) would similarly remain on hold. 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.”

External Defense-Related Sales in 2012. Asserting that sales of equipment suited only for external defense should proceed, the Administration announced in January 2012 that it was releasing to Bahrain previously notified and cleared spare parts and maintenance—worth a reported \$1 million—needed for the BDF’s support of U.S. Fifth Fleet operations. None of the released items can be used against protesters, according to the State Department statement.⁵³

On May 11, 2012, in conjunction with a visit to Washington, DC, by Bahrain’s Crown Prince Salman, the Administration announced that, despite continuing concerns about Bahrain’s handling of the unrest, it would release additional U.S. arms for the BDF, Bahrain’s Coast Guard, and Bahrain’s National Guard. The Administration stated that the weaponry is not suited for use against protesters but was instead supporting U.S.-Bahrain decisions for Bahrain’s forces to focus more on broader maritime defense. The Administration did not release a complete list of weapons to be sold, but it gave a few examples as follows:

- The Perry-class frigate, as EDA, discussed above; but later mooted;
- Harbor security boats for the Bahrain Coast Guard, as EDA;
- An upgrade to the engines on Bahrain’s U.S.-made F-16s; and
- Additional AMRAAMs (see above), according to press reports quoting U.S. officials knowledgeable about the decision.⁵⁴

Some Members of Congress publicly criticized the May 11, 2012, decision as yielding U.S. leverage on the government to enact more substantial reforms. Some threatened to try to block the proposed sales,⁵⁵ but no such legislation was enacted.

Malinowski-Related Holds. Subsequent to the expulsion of Assistant Secretary Malinowski in February 2014, the Administration reportedly suspended some arms sales to the BDF until he is allowed to return and until various progress on human rights was demonstrated. Malinowski’s return visit there in December 2014 might have satisfied the conditions to end the suspensions, although no new sales have been announced.

Assistance to the Ministry of Interior

The United States works with Bahrain’s Interior Ministry on counter-terrorism issues, but U.S. cooperation with that Ministry has been limited by the uprising because of its lead role in internal security. Still, many assess that the Ministry has reformed since the late 1990s, when Bahrain’s internal security services were run by a former British colonial police officer, Ian Henderson, who had a reputation among Shiites for using excessive brutality.

⁵³ Department of State. Taken Question: Bahrain’s Security Assistance. January 27, 2012.

⁵⁴ Nicole Gaouette. “U.S. Resumes Bahrain Arms Sales Citing Security Interests.” Bloomberg News, May 11, 2012.

⁵⁵ Sara Sorcher. “Arms Sales to Bahrain Anger Senators.” National Journal Daily, May 14, 2012.

At the start of FY2012, the Administration “reviewed” the use of NADR-ATA support to Bahrain to ensure that none was used “against protestors” in the 2011 unrest. The FY2014 and FY2015 budget justifications said that NADR-ATA support would continue to go to the Ministry of Interior primarily to help it investigate and respond to the use of explosives by “terrorists.” The budget document appears to be referring to the increased use of bombings and violence by underground oppositionists, discussed above. The State Department, as noted above, has placed on hold license requests for small arms and related equipment to the Bahraini government in general. Some of the NADR-ATA funds have previously been used to provide training to its counterterrorism institutions, in part 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.

The February 2014 expulsion of visiting Assistant Secretary Malinowski reportedly led the Administration to suspend assistance to the Ministry of Interior indefinitely.⁵⁶

Other Foreign Policy Issues

Bahrain is closely aligned with the other members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states as well as with the United States. Virtually all the GCC states have political structures similar to that of Bahrain. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have sizeable Shiite minorities, but no other GCC state has a Shiite majority. Within the GCC, Bahrain is particularly close to Saudi Arabia, as evidenced by the Saudi-led GCC intervention in Bahrain in 2011. Well before intervening in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and other GCC states had begun to express concerns that the Bahrain unrest could spread and create opportunities for Iran to acquire influence and leverage in the GCC. The Saudi position is that it will not permit a Shiite takeover in Bahrain, and the Saudi government is seen as backing hardline officials in the Bahrain ruling family. Beyond the strategic ties, a Saudi oil field (Abu Safa) provides a large portion of Bahrain’s government revenue. 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. On May 14, 2012, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain announced they supported a plan to form a close political and military union among the GCC states (“Riyadh Declaration”). The other four GCC states have opposed such a union and blocked the proposal.

Bahrain is also close to Kuwait because of historic ties between their two royal families. Kuwait has sometimes been touted as a potential mediator in the Bahraini political crisis. Both royal families hail from the Anizah tribe that settled in Bahrain and some of whom went on to what is now Kuwait. Kuwaiti Shiites in Kuwait’s parliament have argued against Kuwait’s siding firmly with the Al Khalifa regime. However, the Kuwaiti government did, as noted with its naval deployments, join the GCC position on the side of the government and it is giving financial aid to Bahrain.

Qatar. In contrast to relations with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, Bahrain’s relations with Qatar have been fraught with disputes. The resolution of their territorial dispute in 2001 eased one major

⁵⁶ Michael Gordon. “Expelled U.S. Official to Return to Bahrain.” New York Times, December 2, 2014.

source of tension between them. The dispute had roots in the 18th century, when the ruling families of both countries controlled parts of the Arabian peninsula. Both sides agreed to take the dispute to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 1991 after clashes in 1986 in which Qatar landed military personnel on a man-made reef (Fasht al-Dibal) that was in dispute, and took some Bahrainis prisoner. The ICJ ruled on March 16, 2001, in favor of Bahrain on the central dispute over the Hawar Islands. It ruled in favor of Qatar on ownership of 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 said it accepted it as binding, and the two have since cooperated on major regional issues. Saudi mediation of the issue during 1986-1991 proved fruitless.

More recently, Bahrain and Qatar have been at odds on regional policies. In March 2014, Bahrain joined Saudi Arabia and UAE in removing its ambassador from Qatar. The 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 themselves. The dispute was resolved in November 2014 and the GCC ambassadors who had left all returned to Doha.

Other Regional Issues. Bahrain tends to defer to a GCC consensus on many regional issues, in part because of Bahrain's resource constraints and its focus on the internal situation. Unlike Qatar and UAE, Bahrain did not play a significant role in the effort to oust Libyan leader Muammar Al Qadhafi. Had Bahrain intervened in Libya, doing so could have been viewed as a contradiction—supporting revolution in another Arab state while arguing that its domestic opposition lacks legitimacy. Bahrain did join the GCC diplomatic efforts to persuade Yemen's President Ali Abdullah Saleh to cede power to a transition process. He left Yemen in January 2012, although the security situation has deteriorated sharply since then, and pro-Iranian Houthi militia rebels have taken control of the capital, Sanaa, as of January 2015.

On the Arab-Israeli dispute, Bahrain has tended to act within a GCC consensus, although some Bahraini leaders have occasionally expressed independent positions. 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.⁵⁷ In October 2009, Bahrain's then 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, despite U.S. opposition to doing so prior to a peace settlement. 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 at that time follow 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 Arab-Israeli dispute has sometimes become a political issue within Bahrain. In October 2009, the COR passed a bill making it a crime (punishable by up to five years in jail) for Bahrainis to travel to Israel or hold talks with Israelis. The bill, which did not become law, apparently was a

⁵⁷ "Arabs Need to Talk to the Israelis." *Washington Post*, July 16, 2009.

reaction to a visit by Bahraini officials to Israel in July 2009 to obtain the release of five Bahrainis taken prisoner by Israel when it seized a ship bound with goods for Gaza, which is controlled by Hamas. In June 2010, Sunni and Shiite Islamists in Bahrain held a demonstration to denounce the Israeli seizure of a ship in a flotilla intended to run the Israeli blockade of the Hamas-run 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 conflict taking place at that time between Israel and Hamas.⁵⁸

Iran

Bahrain focuses intently on Iran, which the government asserts is supporting Shiite opposition groups. Bahrain has supported U.S.-led efforts to increase economic pressure on Iran to compel it to limit its nuclear program. In a joint news conference with then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on December 3, 2010, Bahrain's foreign minister restated Bahrain's support for Iran's right to nuclear power for peaceful uses, but 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."⁵⁹ Bahrain supported publicly the November 24, 2013, interim nuclear agreement between Iran and the international community, calling it "consistent with [Bahrain's] stances and policies which advocate diplomatic solutions to maintain stability." However, some Bahraini leaders are apparently concerned that a comprehensive deal being negotiated could cause the United States to reduce its commitment to the security of the Gulf. In a December 7, 2013, speech at the Manama Dialogue, then Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel attempted to reassure Bahrain and all the GCC states of U.S. resolve to maintain the security of the region. Bahrain and Saudi Arabia were the only two GCC states that did not host a visit by Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif or his associates after the interim nuclear agreement was signed, although Saudi Arabia subsequently invited Zarif.

Bahraini leaders have consistently asserted that Iran is actively stoking the Bahrain unrest. On March 21, 2011, King Hamad indirectly accused Iran of involvement in the unrest by saying a "foreign plot" had been foiled by the GCC intervention. Iran and Bahrain withdrew their ambassadors in mid-March 2011, but returned them in August 2012. On February 21, 2013, the government said that Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) had helped form a Bahraini cell to recruit other agents and store weapons in Bahrain for possible attacks on officials and key locations.⁶⁰ In May 2013, the government declared Lebanese Hezbollah a terrorist organization, accusing that organization of helping orchestrate a Shiite-led insurgency in Bahrain.⁶¹ Bahrain's accusations against Iran and Hezbollah, have not changed since the August 2013 accession of Iran's relatively moderate President Hassan Rouhani. Bahraini authorities used the ship interception of December 2013, discussed above, to underscore their point about Iranian support for radical Bahrain oppositionists.

U.S. officials publicly do not differ dramatically with the Bahraini assertions on Iran. On April 14, 2011, U.S. officials, speaking on background, told journalists that there was some information

⁵⁸ "Fresh Challenge to U.S.-Bahrain Relations." op.cit.

⁵⁹ Department of State. Transcript of Remarks by Secretary Clinton and Foreign Minister Al Khalifa. December 3, 2010.

⁶⁰ "Iran's Revolutionary Guard Behind Terror Cell, Says Bahrain." *Saudi Gazette*, February 22, 2013.

⁶¹ 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.

to indicate that Iran might have transferred small amounts of weapons to Bahraini oppositionists.⁶² U.S. officials reportedly assert that Iran has urged hardline Bahraini Shiite factions not to compromise.⁶³ In his January 29, 2014, “Worldwide Threat Assessment” testimony, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper stated that “In the broader Middle East, Iran will continue to provide arms and other aid to Palestinian groups, Houthi rebels in Yemen, and Shia militants in Bahrain to expand Iranian influence and to counter perceived foreign threats.”⁶⁴ The State Department report on terrorism for 2013, cited above, states that Iran has attempted to smuggle arms to Shiite oppositionists in Bahrain.⁶⁵

The recent Bahraini assertions build on earlier allegations of Iranian meddling in Bahrain and Iranian rejection of Bahrain’s independence. In December 1981, and then again in June 1996—times when Iran actively sought to export its Islamic revolution—Bahrain publicly accused Iran of trying to organize a coup by pro-Iranian Bahraini Shiites (the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain, IFLB). The group’s successor is the Bahrain Islamic Action Society, which is outlawed. A July 2007 Iranian newspaper article reasserted Iran’s claim to Bahrain, and in March 2009, Ali Akbar Nateq Nuri, an advisor to Iran’s Supreme Leader, referred to Bahrain as Iran’s 14th province. As a consequence of that statement, Morocco broke relations with Iran.

At the same time, Bahrain, like the other GCC states, tries not to openly or directly antagonize Iran. Bahrain permitted then Iranian President Ahmadinejad to visit Bahrain on November 17, 2007. Bahrain maintains normal trade with Iran, as do the other GCC states. In September 2012, Bahrain confiscated carbon fiber bound for Iran, an item that could contribute to Iran’s nuclear program. Energy market observers say that some Bahrain energy firms may still be supplying gasoline to Iran. No U.N. Security Council Resolution bars such sales, but a U.S. law signed on July 1, 2010—the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2010 (CISADA, P.L. 111-195)—provides for sanctions against foreign firms that sell more than \$1 million worth of gasoline to Iran.⁶⁶ No Bahraini gasoline traders have been sanctioned.

Foreign banks that deal with sanctioned Iranian banks or Iran’s Central Bank are subject to U.S. sanctions under several U.S. laws (see CRS Report RS20871, *Iran Sanctions*, by Kenneth Katzman). In March 2008, the U.S. Department of Justice sanctioned Future Bank, headquartered in Bahrain, because it is controlled and partially owned by Iran’s Bank Melli. The sanctions, under Executive Order 13382 (anti-proliferation), prevent U.S. citizens from participating in transactions with Future Bank and require the freezing of any U.S.-based bank assets. The bank remains in operation.

The Bahrain unrest has clouded the prospects for further energy cooperation between the two countries. The 2007 Ahmadinejad visit to Bahrain 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

⁶² Adam Entous and Matthew Rosenberg. “U.S. Says Iran Helps Crackdown in Syria.” *Wall Street Journal*, April 14, 2011.

⁶³ <http://www.stripes.com/gates-protracted-bahrain-negotiations-allowing-greater-iran-influence-1.137532>.

⁶⁴ Director of National Intelligence. Statement for the Record. Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, January 29, 2014.

⁶⁵ <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2013/224826.htm>

⁶⁶ For a list of possible sanctions that could be imposed, see CRS Report RS20871, *Iran Sanctions*, by Kenneth Katzman.

16 of Iran's South Pars gas field, which presumably would be the source of the gas that Bahrain would import. Largely because of Bahrain's suspicions of Iran, there has been no recent movement on the arrangement.

Iraq/Syria/Islamic State Organization

Bahrain cooperated with the U.S.-led effort in 2003 to overthrow Saddam Hussein of Iraq, despite the ruling family's opposition to that war. Bahrain did not contribute any of its limited funds to Iraq reconstruction, but it attended the "Expanded Neighbors of Iraq" regional conference process that ended in 2008. In October 2008, Bahrain's first post-Saddam ambassador to Iraq (Saleh Ali al-Maliki) presented his credentials in Baghdad, in line with King Hamad's pledge to President Bush in March 2008 to appoint an ambassador to Iraq.

Bahrain-Iraq relations deteriorated as Iraq's Shiite-dominated government appeared to sympathize with the Shiite uprising in Bahrain. 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. King Hamad did not attend the March 27-29 Arab League summit in Baghdad, instead sending a relatively low-level delegation. As have the other GCC states, Bahrain's government blamed former Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki for marginalizing Iraq's Sunnis and provoking the rise of the Islamic State organization in Iraq.

Bahrain, like the other GCC states, has also blamed Syrian President Bashar Al Assad for authoritarian policies that alienated Syria's majority Sunni population and stoked support for the Islamic State organization. In August 2011, Bahrain joined the other GCC countries in withdrawing their ambassadors to Syria. In November 2011, the GCC voted with other Arab League states to suspend Syria's membership in the body. Unlike several of the other GCC states, Bahrain's government has not provided funding or weaponry to any Syrian opposition groups, including those that are battling both the Islamic State and the Assad government.

Bahrain and the other GCC states assert that destroying the Islamic State organization requires Assad's ouster, in addition to military and other action against Islamic State positions in Syria. Even though the U.S. objective is to destroy the Islamic State organization and not necessarily oust Assad, on September 22, 2014, Bahrain (as well as GCC allies Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates) joined the U.S.-led anti-Islamic State coalition. Bahrain is conducting air strikes against Islamic State positions in Syria, as are Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and on some occasions Qatar. In early February 2015, following the Islamic State's execution of a captured Jordanian pilot, Bahrain redeployed at least some of its aircraft involved in the anti-Islamic State operations to Jordan as a show of support for that ally. Possibly in light of sensitivities of Iraq's Shiite-led government, neither Bahrain nor any of the other GCC members of the U.S.-led coalition are engaging in anti-Islamic State air operations in Iraq.

At a September 11, 2014, GCC meeting in Jeddah with Secretary of State John Kerry, Bahrain also offered to host a meeting to coordinate joint international action against the Islamic State organization's finances.⁶⁷ Bahrain hosted an international conference on that issue on November 9, 2014. In November 2014, the Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter the Islamic State organization, General John Allen, visited Bahrain to thank its leaders for steps

⁶⁷ Testimony of Secretary of State John Kerry before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. "U.S. Strategy on ISIL." September 17, 2014.

against the Islamic State, including the air strikes, efforts to halt the flow of foreign fighters to the organization, efforts to counter extremist messaging, and its declaration that it is illegal for Bahraini citizens to fight abroad.

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. That expertise made Bahrain a prime candidate to host the conferences against Islamic State financing discussed above. The State Department's report on international terrorism for 2013 (released April 30, 2014)⁶⁸ credited Bahrain with strongly cooperating with U.S. and international counterterrorism efforts. 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 have cooperated with U.S. efforts against terrorism financing and money laundering. In August and September 2013, the government amended the Charity Fundraising Law of 1956 to tighten terrorism financing monitoring and penalties. The State Department report for 2013 also credits Bahrain with working "proactively" to expand air, sea and Saudi-Bahrain causeway border control points.

Economic Issues

Like the other Gulf states, Bahrain was affected by the international financial crisis of 2008-2009, but perhaps to a lesser extent than the wealthier states of Kuwait, UAE, and Saudi Arabia. Bahrain did not experience the construction and real estate "bubble" to the degree that this occurred in, for example, UAE. It is also apparently being affected by the 2011 unrest; in May 2011 Moody's, a bond rating agency, downgraded the quality of Bahrain's bonds, thereby costing the government more to borrow funds.

Bahrain has little cushion to deal with economic downturns. It has the lowest oil and gas reserves of the Gulf monarchy states, estimated respectively at 210 million barrels of oil and 5.3 trillion cubic feet of gas. Some economic statistics are presented in **Table 3**. Without the ample oil or gas resources of its neighbors, Bahrain has diversified its economy by emphasizing banking and financial services (about 25.5% of GDP). At current rates of production (35,000 barrels per day of crude oil), Bahrain's onshore oil reserves will be exhausted in 15 years. However, Saudi Arabia shares equally with Bahrain the 300,000 barrels per day produced from the offshore Abu Safa field, which provides about 70% of the funds expended in Bahrain's annual budget.

The United States buys virtually no oil from Bahrain; the major U.S. import from it is aluminum. Aluminum and other manufacturing sectors in Bahrain account for the existence in Bahrain of a vibrant middle and working class among its citizens. However, these classes are largely composed of Shiites, and this has made many Shiites envious of the "ownership class" of Sunni Muslims. On the other hand, many 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).

⁶⁸ <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2013/224823.htm>

However, in light of the unrest, the AFL-CIO has urged the United States to void the FTA on the grounds that Bahrain is preventing free association of workers and abridging their rights.

In 2013, the United States exported about \$1.017 billion in goods to Bahrain, lower than the \$1.21 billion exported in 2012. The United States imported \$636 million in goods from Bahrain, slightly lower than the \$700 million imported in 2012. 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. Most U.S. assistance to Bahrain in military assistance under the Foreign Military Financing (FMF) program, discussed above. However, some in Congress seek to provide assistance to Bahrain for nonmilitary purposes, in order to support a political solution to the unrest. 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 1.25 million, of which slightly less than half are citizens |
| 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) | \$35 billion (2013) |
| Budget | \$8.14 billion revenues, \$9.23 billion expenditures (2013) |
| Inflation Rate | 3% (2013) |
| Unemployment Rate | 15% |
| GDP Real Growth Rate | 4.4% in 2013 |
| Size of Bahrain Defense Forces (BDF) | About 13,000, plus about 1,200 National Guard. Some personnel are expatriates, including other Arab and Pakistani. |

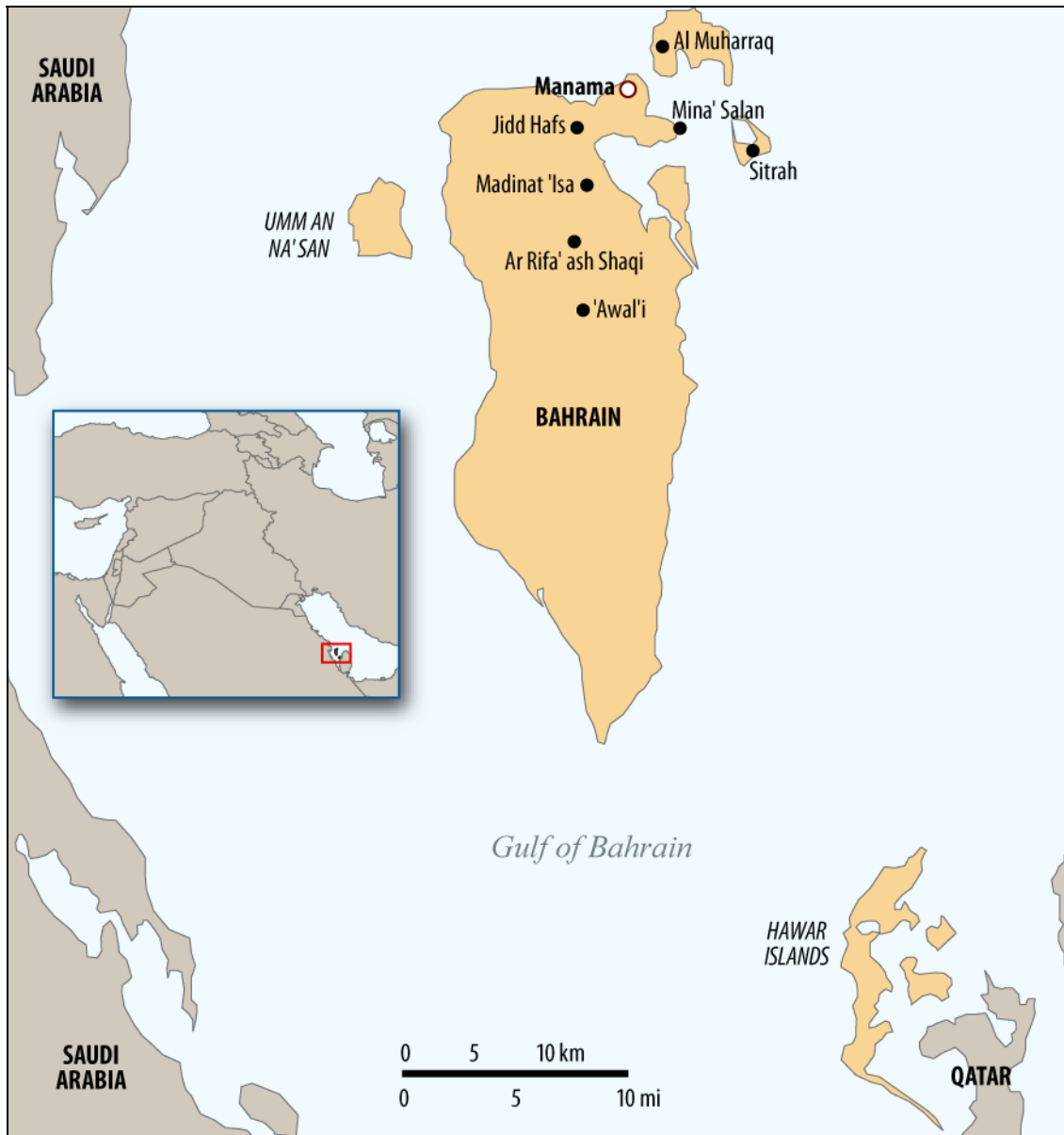
Source: CIA, *The World Factbook*.

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

| | FY2003 | 04 | 05 | 06 | 07 | 08 | 09 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 request |
|--------------------------|--------|------|------|------|-------|-------|------|------|-------|------|--------|------|------|---------------|
| FMF | 90.0 | 24.6 | 18.9 | 15.6 | 15 | 3.968 | 8.0 | 19.0 | 15.46 | 10 | 12.575 | 10 | 7.5 | 7.5 |
| IMET | 0.448 | 0.60 | 0.65 | 0.65 | 0.616 | 0.622 | .661 | .670 | .435 | .554 | .487 | .522 | .801 | .700 |
| NADR | | | 1.49 | 2.76 | .776 | 0.744 | .500 | 1.10 | 1.5 | .50 | .45 | .45 | .45 | |
| “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.).

Figure I. Bahrain



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

Author Contact Information

Kenneth Katzman
Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs
kkatzman@crs.loc.gov, 7-7612