

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

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December 30, 2015

Congressional Research Service

7-5700

www.crs.gov

95-1013

Summary

Outward signs of the uprising against Bahrain's Al Khalifa ruling family that began on February 14, 2011, have diminished since late 2012, but continued smaller demonstrations and opposition boycotts of elections counter government assertions that Bahrain has "returned to normal. The mostly Shiite opposition has not achieved its goal of establishing a constitutional monarchy, and the unrest has compelled the ruling family to undertake relatively minor political reforms. The opposition's ability to affect change has been reduced by consistent government prosecution and incarceration of key opposition leaders and activists. Perhaps reflecting some radicalization of the opposition, over the past few years underground factions have claimed responsibility for bombings and other attacks primarily against security officials.

The Bahrain government's use of repression against the unrest has presented a policy dilemma for the Obama Administration because Bahrain is a longtime ally that is pivotal to maintaining Persian Gulf security. The country has hosted the U.S. naval headquarters for the Gulf region since 1946, the United States and Bahrain have had a formal Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) since 1991, and Bahrain has been designated by the United States as a "major non-NATO ally." There are over 8,000 U.S. forces in Bahrain, mostly located at the naval headquarters site, which has been consistently expanded. Apparently to address the government's use of force against protesters, in 2011 the Administration held up sales to Bahrain of arms that could be used for internal security purposes, and has reduced Bahrain's Foreign Military Financing (FMF) assistance. The Administration lifted the arms sale hold in late June 2015, asserting that Bahrain's human rights record has shown improvement but coincident with U.S. efforts to reassure the Gulf states of U.S. support in conjunction with a comprehensive nuclear deal with Iran. Bahrain's opposition asserts that the United States is downplaying regime abuses in order to protect the security relationship.

Bahrain's primary foreign policy concern has been Iran. Bahraini leaders, with some corroboration from U.S. officials, blame Iran for providing material support to hardline, violent factions in Bahrain. Bahrain has expressed the same concerns about the Iran nuclear agreement "Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action," (JCPOA) that most of the other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, and Oman) countries have: that a nuclear deal that includes substantial Iran sanctions relief will not address Iran's efforts to expand its regional influence. However, as part of the GCC consensus, Bahrain has publicly expressed support for the JCPOA insofar as it is expected to prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear armed state. Bahrain has supported a Saudi concept of increased political unity among the GCC countries and has joined Saudi Arabia/GCC military action to try to achieve a favorable outcome in Yemen. Unlike several other GCC states, Bahrain has not provided material support to groups fighting President Bashar Al Assad in Syria. Bahrain has participated in U.S.-led air strikes against the Islamic State organization in Syria, but not in Iraq.

Fueling Shiite unrest is the fact that Bahrain has fewer financial resources than do most of the other Persian Gulf monarchies and therefore lacks the ability to significantly improve the standards of living of its Shiite majority. The unrest has, in turn, further strained Bahrain's economy by driving away potential foreign investment in Bahrain. Bahrain's small oil exports emanate primarily from an oil field in Saudi Arabia that the Saudi government has set aside for Bahrain's use. In 2004, the United States and Bahrain signed a free trade agreement (FTA); legislation implementing it was signed January 11, 2006 (P.L. 109-169). Some U.S. labor organizations assert that Bahrain's arrests of dissenting workers should void the FTA.

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The Political Structure, Reform, and Human Rights¹

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

The Al Khalifa family, which is Sunni Muslim and generally not as religiously conservative as the leaders of neighboring Saudi Arabia, has ruled Bahrain since 1783. That year, the family, a branch of the Bani Utbah tribe, arrived from the Saudi peninsula and succeeded in capturing a Persian garrison controlling the island. In 1830, the ruling family signed a treaty establishing Bahrain as a protectorate of Britain, which was the dominant power in the Persian Gulf until the early 1970s. In the 1930s, Reza Shah Pahlavi of Iran unsuccessfully sought to deny Bahrain the right to grant oil concessions to the United States and Britain. As Britain 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 1970-1971 to try to form a broad federation, but Bahrain and Qatar each decided to become independent. The seven other emirates formed a federation called the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Bahrain declared itself independent on August 15, 1971, and a U.S. Embassy opened in Manama, Bahrain’s capital, immediately thereafter.

The 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” and deprived of a proportionate share of political power and the nation’s economic wealth. About 25% of the citizen population is age 14 or younger.

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

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

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

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 Ahmad bin Ateyatallah Al Khalifa (another high-ranking royal court official). 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 Lieutenant Colonel Abdullah bin Muhammad bin Rashid, a subordinate of the BDF commander, as Ambassador to the United States. The king is seen as being unwilling to override hardline Al Khalifa family members.

Executive and Legislative Powers

The king, working through the Prime Minister and the cabinet, has broad powers, including the power of appointing all cabinet positions. Al Khalifa family members hold seven of the 19 cabinet posts, including the defense, internal security, and foreign minister posts. Typically, there are about four or five Shiite ministers; that number was increased to six in 2012 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 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 only 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.

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).

- 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. Amir Isa's refusal to restore an elected Assembly was at least partly responsible for sparking daily Shiite-led anti-government violence during 1994-1998.

Political Groups and Elections

COR elections have been held every four years since 2002—each time 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:

- *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 for similar alleged offenses in December 2014 and was convicted and sentenced in June 2015 to four years in prison. His deputy leader, Khalil al-Marzuq, was arrested in September 2013, for “inciting terrorism” in an anti-government speech, but was

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

- 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 a suit that barred *Wifaq* from operating for a three-month period for 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 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, was imprisoned in 2011 and released on June 19, 2015, but was re-arrested in July 2015.
 - 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's) 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 8 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 1 Christian (a female). Nine were women. In the post-election cabinet, a Shiite was named one of four deputy prime ministers and another, a *Wifaq* supporter, became minister of state for foreign affairs.
- October 2010 Election.* 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 5 seats from 15; and empowered Sunni independents, who won 17 seats (up from 9 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 (out of a Jewish population in Bahrain of about 40 persons) and one was Christian, of an estimated Christian population of 1,000.

2011 Uprising: Origin, Developments, and Prognosis

Shiite 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—and Shiite opposition leaders continue to demand—altering the constitution to create a constitutional monarchy in which the Prime Minister and cabinet are selected by the fully elected parliament; ending gerrymandering of election districts to favor Sunnis; and providing more jobs and economic opportunities.

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>.

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. 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.

Crown Prince Salman's "Seven Principles" Reform Plan. 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. On March 13, 2011, the Crown Prince 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 However, the Crown Prince's principles fell short of calling for a constitutional monarchy, as demanded by the opposition. Still, the articulation of the seven principles gave *Wifaq* and other moderate oppositionists hope that many of their demands could be met through dialogue. Yet, the government's use of force against protesters appeared to shift some demonstrators toward hardline groups demanding the monarchy end.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, contributing to a decision by Bahrain to formally request that the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, UAE, Qatar, and Oman) send security forces to protect key sites. On March 14, 2011, a GCC force (from the GCC joint 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, backed by the GCC deployment, cleared demonstrators from Pearl Roundabout and demolished the Pearl Monument on March 18, 2011.¹¹

Perceiving it had restored order, 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 UAE police and possibly other GCC security forces, remained. 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.

First "National Dialogue" 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 international legal expert Dr. Cherif Bassiouni, to investigate the government response to the

⁹ BICI report, op. cit., p. 165.

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

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.

unrest. At a public forum on July 24, 2011, the BICI 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 first “National Dialogue” on political and economic reform that began on July 2, 2011, under the chairmanship of COR speaker Dhahrani. About 300 delegates participated, of which the Shiite opposition broadly comprised 40-50 delegates—5 of them belonging to *Wifaq*.¹² Over several weeks, the dialogue addressed political, economic, social, and human rights issues that government officials said were 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.

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

As a gesture of reconciliation after the dialogue concluded, 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 Response. *Wifaq* and other Shiite opposition groups rejected the outcome of the dialogue as failing to fulfill the Crown Prince’s offer of a parliament with “full authority.” The opposition 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. It also called 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 rejection of the dialogue results, the government appointed a committee, headed by deputy Prime Minister Muhammad Mubarak Al Khalifa, to implement the consensus recommendations. After meetings between the National Assembly and various ministries, the king announced draft amendments to the Bahraini constitution on January 16, 2012, which were adopted by the National Assembly, and ratified by the king on May 3, 2012. The amendments:

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

- 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

The government looked to the BICI report to help defuse the political crisis, even though the mandate of the BICI focused on government handling of the unrest rather than on proposals for political reform. It was initially due by October 30, 2011, but the 500+ page report was released on November 23, 2011, and provided some support for the narratives of both sides as well as recommendations. The report stated that:¹³

- There was “systematic” and “deliberate” use of excessive force, including torture and forced confessions, against protesters.
- The opposition increased its demands as the uprising progressed.
- The government did not provide evidence to establish a link between the unrest 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. King Hamad publicly accepted the report's findings and promised full implementation of the recommendations, but *Wifaq* criticized the report 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 6 at all, and 2 others had “unclear” implementation.¹⁶ This more critical assessment

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.

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 State Department's conclusions were somewhat more favorable to the Bahrain government, indicating that the government had fully implemented five of the recommendations. Among those the State Department said were fully implemented included:¹⁷

- Making the office of the inspector general of the Ministry of Interior independent of the ministry's hierarchy.
- Stripping the National Security Agency of law enforcement powers and limiting it to purely intelligence gathering. That occurred with the issuing of an amendment to the 2002 decree establishing that agency and transferring its arrest powers to the Ministry of Interior.
- Providing compensate and other remedies for families of the deceased victims of the government's response to the unrest. About \$6 million was budgeted by the government to provide the compensation.
- Ensuring that dismissed employees were not dismissed because of the exercise of their right to freedom of expression, association, or assembly. This assessment was based on Bahraini assertions that almost all of the dismissed workers had been rehired.
- Development of educational programs to promote religious, political, and other forms of tolerance and promotion of human rights and the rule of law.

A November 2015 report by the group "Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain" was more critical than either the POMED or the State Department report. The group's report asserted that the government had only fully implemented two of the BICI recommendations and that those fully or partially implemented did not address the fundamental issues that caused the uprising.¹⁸

There appears to be broad agreement among all the various reports that the government has only partially—or minimally—implemented those recommendations 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, allowing the opposition free access to media, holding security officials accountable for abuses, referring all cases of security personnel who committed major abuses to the public prosecutor for subsequent prosecution, or integrating Shiites into the security services. There appears to be consensus that the government has rebuilt many, although not all, of the more than 53 Shiite religious sites demolished by the regime during the course of the uprising.

¹⁷ The State Department report, released in August 2013, can be found at: <http://adhrb.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/State-Report-on-Implementation-of-BICI-3-2.pdf>

¹⁸ The report can be found at: http://www.adhrb.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Shattering_the_Facade_Web.pdf

Second National Dialogue

Continued demonstrations 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 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 second dialogue began on February 10, 2013, consisting of twice per week meetings attended by the Minister of Justice (an Al Khalifa family member) and two other ministers, eight opposition representatives (*Wifaq* and allied parties), eight representatives of pro-government organizations, and five members of the National Assembly (both the upper and lower house). To facilitate progress, on March 11, 2013, the king appointed Crown Prince Salman first deputy Prime Minister—a new position that appeared intended to increase the Crown Prince's authority. The dialogue quickly bogged down over opposition insistence that consensus recommendations be put to a popular referendum, while the government insisted that agreements be enacted by the National Assembly. The opposition also demanded that the dialogue include authoritative decisionmakers 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.

More Recent Developments

After the termination of the second national dialogue, the Crown Prince sought to quickly revive negotiations by meeting with Marzuq and *Wifaq* leader Shaykh Ali al-Salman on January 15, 2014, despite the fact that both faced charges for their roles in the uprising. The meeting seemed to address *Wifaq*'s demand that political dialogue be conducted with senior Al Khalifa members. The Minister of the Royal Court Shaykh Khalid bin Ahmad Al Khalifa (see above) subsequently met with opposition representatives and stated that any renewed dialogue would include a greater number of senior officials than was the case previously.

On September 19, 2014, Crown Prince Salman issued a five-point "framework" for a new national dialogue that would address some opposition demands, centering on (1) redefining electoral districts; (2) a revised process for appointing the Shura Council; (3) giving the elected COR new powers to approve or reject the formation of a new cabinet; (4) having international organizations work Bahrain's judiciary; and (5) introducing new codes of conduct for security forces. Opposition political societies rejected the proposals primarily because they did not offer to satisfy the core opposition demand that an elected COR, not the king, select the Prime Minister. However, no new national dialogue has convened to date.

COR Elections in November 2014

As an apparent part of its strategy to portray an image of "normalization," the government sought to induce the opposition to participate in the November 22, 2014, COR election. The government reduced the number of electoral districts to four, from five, a change that was seen as continuing to ensure that Shiites would not win a majority of COR seats. *Wifaq* and its allies announced in early October that they would boycott the COR election and the government banned political

activities by *Wifaq* for three months. 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 Fatiḥ 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, 2014, which again had rough parity in the number of Shiites and Sunnis as well as one Christian and one Jewish representative. Of the 40 members, 23 were appointed to the body for the first time. 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 19 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, many of whom have suggested that Prime Minister Khalifa be replaced with a moderate Al Khalifa member as an interim step. Some oppositionists have suggested they might be willing to accept the appointment of a Sunni figure as Prime Minister as long as he is not an Al Khalifa member. However, the king has thus far not indicated a willingness to replace Prime Minister Khalifa.

Table 1. 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

Recent Developments, Prospects, and Way Forward?

Since the 2014 elections, unrest has continued, although at levels far lower and less obvious than was the case during 2011-2012. Demonstrators protested the December 2014 arrest, conviction, and sentencing of *Wifaq* leader Ali al-Salman, discussed above. He remains in prison and his continued incarceration likely prevents resumption of any sustained dialogue between *Wifaq* and the government. In 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.¹⁹ Demonstrations marked the February 14, 2015, fourth anniversary of the uprising, and there are expected to be demonstrations marking the fifth anniversary on February 14, 2016.

Some experts maintain that a political settlement remains possible. The government and the opposition have at times discussed an interim compromise in which the opposition gains seats in a new cabinet. Saudi Arabia has, at times, signaled a softening of resistance to concessions to the Bahrain opposition, although concerns about the July 2015 nuclear deal with Iran has likely returned Saudi Arabia to a more hardline stance on Bahrain. It can be argued that conditions favor a settlement because the opposition appears to realize it cannot substantially alter the government and the government appears to have concluded it cannot end unrest entirely. On the other hand, hardline Sunnis within and outside the government continue to urge the ruling family to refuse compromise and to continue to take any measures possible to suppress dissent.

Emergence of Violent Underground Groups Clouds Outlook

Other experts express pessimism about a political settlement in part because of the emergence of violent underground groups. These groups or individuals have used bombs, Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), and other weapons and tactics against security forces. Mainstream opposition political societies insist they have no connection to violent underground groups.

There are several violent groups that include²⁰

- 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 group is a terrorist movement that seeks to overthrow the state. The group claimed responsibility for an April 14, 2013, explosion in the Financial Harbour district. On September 29, 2013, 50 Shiites were sentenced to up to 15 years in prison for alleged involvement in the group.
- Sayara al-Ashtar (Ashtar Brigades). It issued its first public statement in April 2013 and has since claimed responsibility for about 20 bombings against security personnel, including one in March 2014 that killed three police officers. One of them was a UAE police officer, part of the contingent that has helped Bahraini security forces since the 2011 GCC intervention.

¹⁹ Ben Hubbard. “Channel in Bahrain Goes Silent After Giving Opposition Airtime.” *New York Times*, February 3, 2015.

²⁰ Matthew Levitt. “Iran and Bahrain: Crying Wolf, or Wolf at the Door?” Washington Institute for Near East Policy, May 16, 2014.

- 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 use of IEDs.

In concert with the emergence of these groups, the acquisition and use of explosives against Bahraini security forces continues. 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 carrying Iranian weaponry and bomb-making material for the Bahrain opposition.²¹ In April 2015, the government arrested 29 persons for a December 19, 2014, bombing that wounded several police officers. The 29 were sentenced to prison on December 30, 2015, and two of them had their citizenship revoked. On July 28, 2015, a bomb attack killed two policemen, days after the government announced it had disrupted an alleged attempt by Iran to supply arms to Bahrain opposition groups.

Table 2. Status of Other Prominent Dissidents/Other Metrics

(other than some of the political society leaders discussed earlier)

Abdul Hadi al-Khawaja, founder of Bahrain Center for Human Rights	Arrested April 9, 2011, was one of 13 prominent dissidents ("Bahrain 13") tried by state security court May 8, 2011, and sentenced to life in prison for conspiring to overthrow the government and for espionage on June 22, 2011. Daughters Zainab and Maryam also repeatedly arrested for opposition activities and have campaigned abroad for the opposition. A brother, Salah Abdullah, was sentenced in June 2011 to five years in prison.
Other members of the "Bahrain 13"	Among the nine other members of the "Bahrain 13," 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 repeatedly for allegedly orchestrating anti-government activity. Currently serving two year sentence with appeals pending.
21 medical personnel from Salmaniya Medical Complex	Twenty-one medical personnel were arrested in April 2011 and tried for inciting sectarian hatred, possession of illegal weapons, and forcibly occupying a public building. 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, but have not regained their jobs.
Number of Protesters Killed Since the Uprising Began	About 100
Citizenship Revocations	About 200
Number Arrested	Approximately 3,000 total detentions since 2011.

Sources: Various press and interest group reports.

U.S. Posture on the Uprising

The Administration has not at any time called for the Al Khalifa regime to step down, asserting that Bahrain's use of force against demonstrators has been limited and that the Bahrain

²¹ Sandeep Singh Grewal. Arms Ring is Smashed by Police. Daily News, December 31, 2013.

government has undertaken reform—both prior to and since the unrest began. 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 dialogue.²²

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.

The conclusion of the 2013 State Department report on the BICI recommendations, referenced above, states:

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

With the combination of praise and criticism of Bahrain's response to unrest and addressing opposition grievances, the Administration continued to engage the Bahrain government at high levels. The United States has not banned travel to the United States or imposed economic penalties on Bahraini officials that might have committed or authorized human rights abuses. As discussed later, the Administration had withheld some arms sales to Bahrain, but in late June 2015 it lifted that hold. The U.S.-funded expansion of the large naval facility that the United States uses in Bahrain has continued without interruption since the uprising began in 2011. In June 2015, the State Department publicly expressed it was "deeply concerned" by the conviction of Shaykh Ali Salman, who is discussed above, and that opposition parties play a vital role in "inclusive, pluralistic states and societies."

As far as high-level engagement, in May 2012, Crown Prince Salman visited Washington, DC, and met with senior U.S. officials including Vice President Biden. In December 2013, then Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel visited Bahrain to speak before the Manama Dialogue international security conference—the first U.S. Cabinet member to visit Bahrain since the uprising began. He returned for that conference in December 2014. Secretary of State John Kerry met with King Hamad in March 2015 on the sidelines of an economic conference in Egypt. And, reflecting continued U.S.-Bahrain security cooperation, the Crown Prince represented Bahrain at the May 13-14 U.S.-GCC summit at Camp David, organized in large part to reassure the Gulf states about U.S. commitment to Gulf security in light of a potential nuclear deal with Iran. King Hamad was scheduled to attend the meetings but he declined the invitation shortly after Saudi King Salman, a few days before the meetings were to begin, announced he would not attend. Deputy Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited Bahrain in October 2015 to attend the IISS

²² Secretary of State Clinton Comments on the Situation in the Middle East. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GbuCMZUg3Gc>.

Manama Dialogue security conference, discussed earlier, and he also met with King Hamad to discuss regional issues as well as the domestic situation.²³

Critics of the Administration—primarily human rights-oriented groups such as Human Rights Watch and the Project on Middle East Democracy—say that the Administration has been insufficiently critical of Bahrain’s handling of the unrest to protect perceived vital U.S. security interests in Bahrain.²⁴ Critics assert that the Administration is basing its policy primarily on concerns 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.

The Bahrain government has at times asserted that Administration criticism has been too harsh. As a possible signal of that sentiment, on July 7, 2014, the government ordered Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) Tom Malinowski out of Bahrain for meeting separately with *Wifaq* leader Shaykh Salman. 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.²⁵ 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.²⁶ Suggesting that the two countries had resolved differences over the Malinowski visit, Malinowski and Assistant Secretary of State for the Near East Anne Patterson visited Bahrain in December 2014 to hold meetings with the government as well as members of civil society.

The Malinowski expulsion went well beyond the established Bahrain government pattern of criticizing then U.S. Ambassador Tom Krajewski for meeting with opposition political societies. In July 2014, the Administration nominated William V. Roebuck, another career diplomat, to succeed him. He was confirmed and took up his duties in December 2014.

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 ...”²⁷ 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.

²³ <http://bahrain.usembassy.gov/pas-103016.html>

²⁴ Stephen McNerny. “Silence on Bahrain.” *Washington Post* op-ed. November 5, 2012.

²⁵ Congress of the United States. Letter to King Hamad. July 18, 2014.

²⁶ http://mcgovern.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/us-rep-jim-mcgovern-issues-statement-on-refusal-of-bahraini-govt-to?utm_source=Project+on+Middle+East+Democracy+-+All+Contacts&utm_campaign=b2cd02f711-Bahrain_Weekly_Update_Nov_1_2012&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_75a06056d7-b2cd02f711-215946089.

²⁷ Department of State. “Remarks With Foreign Minister Al Khalifa After Their Meeting.” December 3, 2010.

*MEPI Funding Uses in Bahrain.*²⁸ 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 Issues²⁹

Many of the criticisms of Bahrain’s human rights practices related directly to the government’s response to the unrest, for example prison conditions, arbitrary arrest, treatment of detainees, and restrictions on freedom of speech and assembly. The State Department human rights reports note 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.

Several Bahraini human rights groups advocate for Shiite rights and causes. The most prominent are the Bahrain Human Rights Society (the primary licensed human rights organization), the Bahrain Transparency Society, and the Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR) and its offshoot, the Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights (BYSHR). The latter organization was officially dissolved but 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. In June 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. 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

Experts and other observers have long perceived Bahrain as welcoming a high public profile for women and for advancing women’s rights, particularly relative to Saudi Arabia and some other GCC states. 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

²⁸ Statement from the U.S. Embassy in Bahrain Concerning MEPI. June 17, 2014.

²⁹ Much of this section is from the State Department’s country report on human rights practices for 2014 and from reports by Human Rights Watch and other outside groups.

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

Still, Bahraini practices and customs tend to limit women's rights to levels well below Western standards. 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.

Religious Freedom

The State Department report on international religious freedom for 2014 was similar to that of previous years in that it focuses extensively on Sunni-Shiite differences and the unrest.³⁰ As an example, in 2014 the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs, which regulates the affairs of Muslim organizations in Bahrain, dissolved the main assembly of Shiite clerics in Bahrain, called the Islamic Ulema Council, asserting that it engaged in illegal political activity.

According to the State Department report, the government allows freedom of worship for Christians, Jews, and Hindus although the constitution declares Islam the official religion. Non-Muslim groups must register with the Ministry of Social Development to operate and Muslim groups must register with the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs. 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. A small Jewish community of about 36-40 persons remains in Bahrain, and apparently does not face any harassment or other difficulty.

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

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.

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

³⁰ <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238662.pdf>

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. As noted above, the government claims that virtually all were subsequently rehired.

Human Trafficking

On human trafficking, the State Department "Trafficking in Persons Report" for 2015 placed Bahrain in "Tier 2," and upgrade from the previous rating of "Tier 2: Watch List." Bahrain had been at the lower ranking for the prior three years. In 2014, Bahrain was given an Administration waiver for a mandatory downgrade to Tier 3 (a requirement if a country is on the Watch List for three consecutive years) on the grounds that it had a written plan to bring its efforts against trafficking into compliance with international standards. The 2015 upgrade was based, according to the report, on "notable progress in [the government's efforts to investigate, prosecute, and convict trafficking offenses]." The report adds that the government is making "significant efforts" to comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of human trafficking. The report for 2015 asserts that Bahrain is a destination country for migrant workers from South and East Asia, as well as some countries in Africa.

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 sentence 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.³¹ 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."³²

³¹ Human Rights Watch. "Bahrain: Torture Redux." February 2010.

³² <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/wp-content/uploads/HRF-King-Al-Khalifa-Letter.pdf>.

U.S.-Bahrain Security Relations³³

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. Bahrain has made several of its military facilities available for U.S. military use to address past or current threats from Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, international terrorists, and piracy in the Gulf and Arabia Sea. Bahrain, in large part even more than do the other GCC states, considers Iran and its nuclear program as major potential threats. The perceived threat from Iraq has evolved from concerns about the strategic power of Saddam Hussein's regime to the threat to regional security posed by the Islamic State organization, which has taken over parts of Iraq and of Syria and has recruited some Bahrainis.

In addition to the long-standing U.S. naval headquarters presence in Bahrain, the United States and Bahrain signed a formal Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) in 1991. In March 2002, President Bush (Presidential Determination 2002-10) designated Bahrain a "major non-NATO ally (MNNA)," a designation that qualifies Bahrain to purchase certain U.S. arms, receive excess defense articles (EDA), and engage in defense research agreements with the United States that it would not otherwise qualify for. There are about 8,300 U.S. military personnel, mostly Navy, deployed in Bahrain implementing various Gulf security related missions and defense cooperation initiatives. This is an increase from about 6,500 U.S. military personnel in Bahrain in 2013³⁴—possibly reflecting the addition of U.S. personnel to support regional operations against the Islamic State organization in Syria and in Iraq.

Despite U.S.-Bahrain differences over Bahrain's handling of the unrest, U.S.-Bahrain defense relations remain strong. In September 2014, Bahrain joined the U.S.-led anti-Islamic State coalition by flying airstrikes on Islamic State positions in Syria. As a GCC member, Bahrain also engages in substantial defense cooperation with other GCC states, for example joining Saudi-led air strikes and ground combat in Yemen (action which has U.S. logistical support). As part of that effort, in April 2015, Bahrain held military exercises with Egypt, which is part of the coalition acting in Yemen.

U.S. Naval Headquarters

The cornerstone of U.S.-Bahrain defense relations is U.S. access to Bahrain's naval facilities. The United States has had a U.S. naval command presence in Bahrain since 1948; MIDEASTFOR (U.S. Middle East Force), its successor, NAVCENT (naval component of U.S. Central Command), as well as the Fifth Fleet (reconstituted in June 1995) are headquartered there, at a sprawling facility called "Naval Support Activity (NSA)-Bahrain." It is also home to U.S. Marine Forces Central Command, Destroyer Squadron Fifty, and three Combined Maritime Forces.³⁵ 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." In December 2014, the GCC announced it would establish

³³ Information in this section obtained from a variety of press reports, and the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA).

³⁴ Hendrick Simoes. "Bahrain Expansion Latest Sign of Continued Presence." *Stars and Stripes*, December 16, 2013; Hendrick Simoes. "More Accompanied Tours Possible for Military in Bahrain." *Stars and Stripes*, June 8, 2015.

³⁵ 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.

a joint naval force based in Bahrain—presumably locating a joint force there to facilitate cooperation with U.S. Navy operations headquartered in Bahrain.

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 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 in May 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. Bahrain has taken several turns commanding CTF-152, and it has led an anti-piracy task force in Gulf/Arabian Sea waters—operations that are offshoots of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) that ousted the Taliban from power in Afghanistan in 2001.

To further develop the NSA-Bahrain, the U.S. military is implementing a planned \$580 million military construction program in Bahrain.³⁶ That construction, which began in May 2010 and is to be completed in 2017, is nearly doubling the size of the 80-acre facility by improving the decommissioned Mina (port) Al Salman Pier, leased by the Navy under a January 2008 lease agreement and adding a new administration building and space for maintenance, barracks, warehousing, and dining facilities. The expansion will support the deployment of additional U.S. coastal patrol ships and the Navy's new littoral combat ship, and permit larger U.S. ships to dock at the naval facility.³⁷ 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.³⁸ An earlier military construction program, costing about \$45 million, expanded 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 was used for a U.S. Special Operations Forces facility. The expansion has also allowed for infrastructure for families of U.S. military personnel, including schools for young children. The U.S. military reportedly is allowing increasing numbers of families to accompany U.S. personnel serving in Bahrain. The FY2016 National Defense Authorization Act NDAA, P.L. 114-92), authorizes \$90 million for additional naval military construction in Bahrain.

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 are being improved to allow Britain's royal Navy to plan, store equipment, and house military personnel there.³⁹

³⁶ 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).

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

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ "U.K. to Boost Military Presence in the Persian Gulf." *Associated Press*, December 7, 2014.

Exploration of Alternatives? Some say that the United States should begin examining alternate facilities in the Gulf region on the grounds that Bahrain's hosting of the naval facility could become untenable due to threats to U.S. personnel, instability of the government, or the accession of a new regime that expels the U.S. presence. Some assert that the United States should not maintain so prominent a facility in Bahrain because of the government's use of repression against its opponents. 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. In July and August 2013, then-Defense Secretary Hagel answered a Senator's inquiry about contingency planning in the event U.S. personnel at the facility come under threat. The enacted FY2016 National Defense Authorization Act, referenced above, did not contain a provision of an earlier version (H.R. 1735) to mandate a Defense Department report on contingency planning in the event of an increase in instability in Bahrain, including analysis of alternative locations for the NSA-Bahrain.

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), Kuwait's Shuaiba port, and the UAE's Jebel Ali.⁴⁰ 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 share facilities with large commercial operations.

It should be noted that Bahraini opposition leaders, including *Wifaq* leader Salman, publicly support the security relationship with the United States and the U.S. presence in Bahrain, 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.

Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA)

Bahrain was part of the U.S.-led allied coalition that ousted Iraq from Kuwait in 1991. It allowed the stationing of 17,500 U.S. troops and 250 U.S. combat aircraft at Shaykh Isa Air Base that participated in the 1991 "Desert Storm" offensive against Iraqi forces. Bahraini pilots flew strikes during the war, and Iraq fired nine Scud missiles at Bahrain, of which three hit facilities there. Bahrain and the United States subsequently agreed to further institutionalize the defense relationship by signing a Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) on October 28, 1991, for an initial period of 10 years. It remains in effect.⁴¹ The pact reportedly gives the United States access to Bahrain's air bases and to pre-position strategic materiel (mostly U.S. Air Force munitions), requires consultations with Bahrain if its security is threatened, and provides for joint exercises and U.S. training of Bahraini forces.⁴² It reportedly includes a "Status of Forces Agreement" (SOFA) under which U.S. military personnel serving in Bahrain operate under U.S., and not Bahraini, law.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ "U.S.-Bahrain Defense Pact Renewed." Agence France Presse, August 5, 2011.

⁴² 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.

The DCA was the framework for U.S.-Bahrain cooperation to contain Saddam Hussein's Iraq during the 1990s. Bahrain hosted the U.S.-led Multinational Interdiction Force (MIF) that enforced a U.N. embargo on Iraq during 1991-2003 as well as the U.N. Special Commission (UNSCOM) inspection mission that dismantled much of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction arsenal. Since the early 1990s, the United States has reportedly stationed at least two Patriot anti-missile batteries there.⁴³

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 to help U.S./NATO-led stabilization operations there. Their tour was extended until the end of the NATO mission in Afghanistan at the end of 2014, and the Bahrainis departed.

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 provides relatively small amounts of military assistance—requiring Bahrain to use mostly national funds to buy the \$1.4 billion worth of U.S. weaponry it bought from 2000-2013.⁴⁴ The government's response to the political unrest 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. As noted below, a hold on a major 2011 sale was lifted in late June 2015.

Assistance to the Bahrain Defense Forces

The main recipient of U.S. military assistance has been the Bahrain Defense Force (BDF)—Bahrain's regular military force—which has less than 10,000 active duty personnel, including 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, 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 military assistance to Bahrain is Foreign Military Financing (FMF), which, coupled with some funds provided under "Section 1206" of the National Defense Authorization Act of 2006, P.L. 109-163, helps the BDF and other Bahraini forces maintain U.S.-origin weapons, enhances inter-operability with U.S. forces, augments Bahrain's air defenses, supports and

⁴³ Walter Pincus. "Bahrain Government's Ties With the United States Run Deep." *Washington Post*, February 22, 2011.

⁴⁴ Justin Elliott. "Revealed: America's Arms Sales to Bahrain Amid Bloody Crackdown." *Propublica*, January 15, 2013.

upgrades the avionics of its F-16 combat aircraft, and improves counterterrorism capabilities. In recent years, some FMF funds have been used to build up Bahrain's Special Operations forces and to help the BDF use its U.S.-made Blackhawk helicopters.⁴⁵ 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 United States has reduced FMF to Bahrain since the unrest began, in part to retain leverage against Bahrain to compel it to make reforms. The Administration's FY2012 aid request, made at the start of the unrest, asked for \$25 million in FMF for Bahrain, but only \$10 million was provided for that fiscal year. A slightly increased amount was provided for FY2013 but the amount dropped back to \$10 million for FY2014. The Administration is providing \$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, but the FY2014 foreign aid budget justification said that the BDF had put acquisition of a new frigate on hold, and would put U.S. military aid toward maintaining the *Subha* instead.

International Military Education and Training Funds (IMET)

As noted in **Table 4**, small amounts of International Military Education and Training funds (IMET) are provided to Bahrain to inculcate principles of civilian control of the military, democracy, and interoperability with U.S. forces. Approximately 250 BDF students attend U.S. military schools each year, either through the IMET program (57% of them), or using FMF funds, in connection with the U.S. Foreign Military Sales program.

Major Foreign Military Sales (FMS)

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. Some of the sales to Bahrain have been in accordance with long-standing State and Defense Department efforts to promote greater defense cooperation among the GCC states, for example to promote GCC missile defense coordination. However, Bahrain's limited budget largely precludes if a major role in the U.S. missile defense effort for the Gulf. 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 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.

⁴⁵ "Revealed: America's Arms Sales to Bahrain Amid Bloody Crackdown," op. cit.

- 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.
- 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.)
- 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.⁴⁶

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 and National Guard of 44 “Humvee” (M115A1B2) armored vehicles and several hundred TOW missiles of various models, of which 50 are “bunker busters.” The National Guard is a separate force of about 2,000 with a separate command, neither by the BDF or Ministry of Interior. 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.⁴⁷

Two joint resolutions were introduced in the 112th Congress to block the sale: S.J.Res. 28 and H.J.Res. 80. Both would have prohibited the sale unless the Administration certified that Bahrain is rectifying the alleged abuses in its suppression of the unrest. To block a proposed arms sale would require passage of a joint resolution to do so, presumably with a veto-proof majority. In October 2011, even though the sale had passed the period of congressional review, 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 was placed on hold.

On June 20, 2015, the State Department announced that the hold on the sale was being lifted because the government had “made some meaningful progress on human rights reforms and reconciliation,” even though “We do not think that the human rights situation in Bahrain is adequate.”⁴⁸ The lifting of the hold suggested the two countries had put aside the issue of the

⁴⁶ “Bahrain Government’s Ties With the United States Run Deep,” op. cit.

⁴⁷ James Lobe. “Bahrain: U.S. Congress Urged to Reject Arms Sales.” IPS News Service, September 29, 2011.

⁴⁸ Statement by State Department spokesman John Kirby. “Lifting Holds on Security Assistance to the Government of (continued...)”

expulsion of Assistant Secretary Malinowski in February 2014, which had caused the Administration to suspend some arms sales to the BDF until he was allowed to return and until various progress on human rights was demonstrated. Malinowski's return visit there in December 2014 might have partly satisfied those conditions.

Still, the Administration apparently has sought to avoid potential harm to the U.S.-Bahrain defense relationship. 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.⁴⁹

On May 11, 2012, in conjunction with a visit to Washington, DC, by Bahrain's Crown Prince Salman, the Administration announced that it was releasing additional U.S. arms for the BDF, Bahrain's Coast Guard (a Ministry of Interior-controlled force) and Bahrain's National Guard. The Administration stated that the weaponry 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.⁵⁰

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,⁵¹ but no such legislation was enacted.

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 since 2011 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.

As noted above, Bahrain's Coast Guard is under the Ministry of Interior. It polices Bahrain's waterways and contributes to the multilateral mission to monitor and interdict the seaborne movement of terrorists and weapons into and out of the country. Because its function is mostly focused on Bahrain's coastal waters, the restrictions on U.S. support for the Ministry of Interior forces have generally not applied to the Coast Guard.

(...continued)

Bahrain." June 29, 2015.

⁴⁹ Department of State. Taken Question: Bahrain's Security Assistance. January 27, 2012.

⁵⁰ Nicole Gaouette. "U.S. Resumes Bahrain Arms Sales Citing Security Interests." Bloomberg News, May 11, 2012.

⁵¹ Sara Sorcher. "Arms Sales to Bahrain Anger Senators." National Journal Daily, May 14, 2012.

Sales of small arms such as those sold to the Interior Ministry are generally commercial sales, licensed by State Department with Defense Department concurrence. Since May 2012 the State Department has put “on hold” license requests for sales to Bahrain of small arms, light weapons, and ammunition⁵²—all of which could potentially be used against protesters. The February 2014 expulsion of Malinowski, mentioned above, reportedly led the Administration to suspend assistance to the Ministry of Interior indefinitely,⁵³ and no lifting of that restriction has been announced to date. 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.”

At the start of FY2012, the Administration “reviewed” the use of NADR-ATA funding—programming that has been used since 1987 to support Bahrain’s Ministry of Interior forces—to ensure that none of the funding was used against protesters. Recent U.S. budget justifications say 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”—an apparent reference to the increased use of bombings and violence by underground oppositionists, discussed above. However, the State Department report on international terrorism for 2014 stated that the requirement to vet Bahrain personnel participating in ATA programs—a requirement of the so-called “Leahy law”—prompted the cancellation of nearly all planned ATA courses for Bahrain personnel in 2015. The report states that, as a result of a general lack of training and antiquated investigative methods, the MOI Police Force’s progress on counter-terrorism and criminal investigation has slowed. Some 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.

Foreign Policy Issues

Bahrain is closely aligned with the other members of the GCC, all of which 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. Bahrain hosted the annual GCC summit held during December 9-10, 2015, and which largely restated many of the GCC’s consensus foreign policy and defense positions and commitments.

Within the GCC

Well before intervening directly in Bahrain’s internal crisis in 2011, 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. 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

⁵² Email from the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Legislative Affairs, May 20, 2013.

⁵³ Michael Gordon. “Expelled U.S. Official to Return to Bahrain.” *New York Times*, December 2, 2014.

Hamad's fifth son, Khalid bin Hamad, married a daughter of Saudi King Abdullah in 2011. Since the beginning of the Bahrain unrest, Saudi Arabia reportedly has donated at least \$500 million to help Bahrain's economy, in addition to continuing to make available to Bahrain revenues from joint Saudi-Bahrain Abu Safa oil field. 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"), but the other four GCC states opposed blocked that proposal.

Bahrain is also particularly close to Kuwait because of historic ties between their two royal families. Both royal families hail from the Anizah tribe that settled in Bahrain and some of whom went on to what is now Kuwait. Kuwait has sometimes been touted as a potential mediator in the Bahraini political crisis, but Shiites in Kuwait's parliament argued that the Kuwaiti ruling family has sided firmly with the Al Khalifa. Kuwait, as noted, joined the GCC intervention in Bahrain in 2011 and has financially aided Bahrain.

In contrast to relations with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, Bahrain's relations with Qatar have been fraught with disputes. The resolution of their territorial dispute in 2001 eased one major 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. The dispute was resolved in November 2014 and the GCC ambassadors returned to Doha.

Iran

Bahrain, as do most of the other GCC states, focuses intently on the perceived threat from Iran. The Bahrain government has frequently asserted that Iran is supporting Bahrain's Shiite opposition, and has asserted on several occasions that intercepted weapons shipments originated in Iran. 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.⁵⁴ In May 2013, the government declared Lebanese Hezbollah a terrorist organization, accusing that organization of helping orchestrate a Shiite-led insurgency in

⁵⁴ "Iran's Revolutionary Guard Behind Terror Cell, Says Bahrain." *Saudi Gazette*, February 22, 2013.

Bahrain.⁵⁵ Bahrain's accusations against Iran and Hezbollah have not ceased since the August 2013 accession of Iran's relatively moderate President Hassan Rouhani.

U.S. assertions have differed in intensity, although not necessarily fundamentally, from those of the Bahrain government. On April 14, 2011, U.S. officials reportedly told journalists that there was some information to indicate that Iran might have transferred small amounts of weapons to Bahraini oppositionists.⁵⁶ U.S. officials reportedly assert that Iran has urged hardline Bahraini Shiite factions not to compromise.⁵⁷ Director of National Intelligence James Clapper has testified that "In the broader Middle East, Iran will continue to provide arms and other aid to ... Shia militants in Bahrain to expand Iranian influence and to counter perceived foreign threats."⁵⁸ The State Department report on terrorism for 2013 stated that Iran has attempted to smuggle arms to Shiite oppositionists in Bahrain,⁵⁹ but the report for 2014 did not repeat that assertion.⁶⁰

The Bahrain government's 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, Bahrain publicly accused Iran of trying to organize a coup by pro-Iranian Bahraini Shiites. In 2009, Ali Akbar Nateq Nuri, an advisor to Iran's Supreme Leader, referred to Bahrain as Iran's 14th province, reviving Bahrain's long-standing concerns that Iran would again challenge its sovereignty. Persian officials contested Bahrain's sovereignty repeatedly during the 19th and 20th centuries, including in 1957, when a bill was submitted to the Iranian Majlis (legislature) to make Bahrain a province of Iran. As noted above, when Iran reasserted its claim to Bahrain prior to its independence from Britain, the United Nations Secretary General dispatched a representative to determine the views of Bahrainis, who found that the island's residents overwhelmingly favored independence from all outside powers, including Iran. The findings were endorsed by the United Nations Security Council in Resolution 278 and Iran's legislature ratified the resolution.

Bahrain has fully supported the U.S. strategy of placing economic pressure on Iran to compel it to limit its nuclear program. In March 2008, the United States sanctioned Future Bank, headquartered in Bahrain, on the grounds that it is controlled and partially owned by Iran's Bank Melli. The sanctions, authorized by 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. In April 2015, Bahrain seized control of Future Bank as well as the Iran Insurance Company.

As have the other GCC states, Bahrain expressed concern Iran's nuclear program as well as about the U.S. diplomatic approach that manifested as the July 14, 2015, Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Bahrain has expressed support for Iran's right to nuclear power for peaceful uses, but it has said that "when it comes to taking that [nuclear] power, to developing it into a cycle for weapon grade, that is something that we can never accept, and we can never live with in this region."⁶¹ Bahrain supported publicly the November 24, 2013, interim nuclear agreement

⁵⁵ 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.

⁵⁶ Adam Entous and Matthew Rosenberg. "U.S. Says Iran Helps Crackdown in Syria." *Wall Street Journal*, April 14, 2011.

⁵⁷ <http://www.stripes.com/gates-protracted-bahrain-negotiations-allowing-greater-iran-influence-1.137532>.

⁵⁸ Director of National Intelligence. Statement for the Record. Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, January 29, 2014.

⁵⁹ <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2013/224826.htm>.

⁶⁰ <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2014/239410.htm>.

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

between Iran and the international community, and it has joined the GCC in publicly supporting the July 14, 2015, Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). However, the GCC support for the JCPOA has been coupled with a GCC call—repeated in the communique of the GCC summit of December 9-10, 2015, that was held in Manama—for increased vigilance against Iran’s destabilizing regional activities. The GCC concerns about Iran are predicated primarily on Iran’s support for President Bashar Al Assad of Syria and for Shiite Islamist movements such as Hezbollah, and come despite the fact that Iran is, like the GCC countries, also opposed to the Islamic State organization.

Perhaps out of concern that the United States might not work vigilantly against Iran’s regional influence, King Hamad did not attend the U.S.-GCC summit at Camp David during May 13-14, 2015, and was represented by the Crown Prince. At the meetings, the Administration attempted to assuage the GCC concerns about the emerging JCPOA by offering new sales to the GCC states of sophisticated weaponry and establishing expanded cooperation on maritime security, cyber-security, missile defense, and other issues. The lifting of the hold on the Humvee and TOW sale, discussed above, came several weeks after the Camp David summit, causing some observers to interpret the lifting as implementation of U.S. efforts to reassure Bahrain and the other GCC states about the JCPOA.

At the same time, Bahrain maintains normal trade with Iran, and 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.⁶² No Bahraini gasoline traders have been sanctioned.

A 2007 visit to Bahrain by then president of Iran Mahmoud Ahmadinejad resulted in a preliminary agreement for Bahrain to buy 1.2 billion cubic feet per day (for 25 years) of Iranian gas via an undersea pipeline to be built. The deal would have involved a \$4 billion investment by Bahrain to develop Phases 15 and 16 of Iran’s South Pars gas field, which would be the source of the gas supply. Largely because of Bahrain’s suspicions of Iran, there has been no movement on the arrangement.

Iraq/Syria/Islamic State Organization

Bahrain cooperated with the U.S.-led effort in 2003 to overthrow Saddam Hussein of Iraq, despite its disagreement with the U.S. decision. Bahrain did not contribute any of its limited funds to Iraq reconstruction, but it participated in the “Expanded Neighbors of Iraq” regional conference process for Iraq that ended in 2008. In October 2008, Bahrain’s first post-Saddam ambassador to Iraq (Saleh Ali al-Maliki) presented his credentials in Baghdad. Bahrain-Iraq relations deteriorated sharply as Iraq’s Shiite-dominated government appeared to marginalize Iraq’s Sunni political leader and sympathized 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 in Manama. Bahrain sent a low-level delegation to the March 27-29, 2012, Arab League summit in Baghdad. As have the other GCC states, Bahrain’s government blamed former Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki for marginalizing Iraq’s Sunnis and thereby provoking the rise of the Islamic State organization in Iraq.

⁶² For a list of possible sanctions that could be imposed, see CRS Report RS20871, *Iran Sanctions*, by Kenneth Katzman.

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 fuel support for the Islamic State. In August and November 2011, Bahrain joined the other GCC countries in withdrawing their ambassadors to Syria and in voting with other Arab League states to suspend Syria's membership in the body. Unlike several GCC states, Bahrain's government has not, by any account, been providing funding or weaponry to any of the Syrian opposition groups that are attempting to oust Assad. Bahrain and the other GCC states assert that destroying the Islamic State organization—which itself seeks to oust Assad—requires Assad's ouster, in addition to military and other action against Islamic State positions in Syria.

Apparently perceiving that the Islamic State poses a regional threat—and Islamic State affiliates have claimed responsibility for bombings in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia—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 has conducted some air strikes against Islamic State positions in Syria, as have Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar. In 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. 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, apparently on the grounds that the Shiite-dominated Iraqi government is aligned with Iran.

At a September 11, 2014, GCC meeting in Jeddah with Secretary of State John Kerry, Bahrain offered to host a meeting to coordinate joint international action against the Islamic State organization's finances,⁶³ and it did so on November 9, 2014. In November 2014, then Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter the Islamic State organization, General John Allen, visited Bahrain to thank its leaders for steps 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. Bahrain has arrested, charged, and in some cases stripped the citizenship of some Bahrainis accused of supporting the Islamic State.

Other Regional Issues

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

Yemen

Bahrain joined the GCC diplomatic efforts to persuade Yemen's President Ali Abdullah Saleh to cede power to a transition process. He left Yemen in January 2012, and the security situation has deteriorated sharply since then. Zaidi Shiite "Houthi" militia rebels, backed to some degree by Iran, took control of the capital, Sanaa, in January 2015, and continued to advance, causing Saleh's successor, Abdu Rabbu Mansur Al Hadi, to flee Yemen. In March 2015, Saudi Arabia assembled a coalition of Arab states to strike Houthi positions to try to cause a negotiation that would restore Al Hadi. Bahrain joined the Saudi-led coalition, at first with air strikes and later with ground forces as well. Eight members of the BDF have been killed in the engagement, to date, and a Bahraini Air Force F-16 crashed in the course of performing Yemen-related operations

⁶³ Testimony of Secretary of State John Kerry before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. "U.S. Strategy on ISIL." September 17, 2014.

on December 30, 2015. The pilot survived the crash. The United States is providing logistical support to this coalition.

Israeli-Palestinian Dispute

On the Israeli-Palestinian 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.⁶⁴ 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. 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 Israeli-Palestinian 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 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.⁶⁵

Countering Terrorism Financing

Bahrain has been a regional leader in countering terrorism financing since well before the Islamic State organization became a perceived regional threat. Bahrain has hosted the Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force (MENA/FATF) secretariat, and its Central Bank, Financial Information Unit (within the Central Bank), and local banks cooperate with U.S. efforts against terrorism financing and money laundering. In August and September 2013, the government amended the Charity Fundraising Law of 1956 to tighten terrorism financing monitoring and penalties.

Economic Issues

Like the other Gulf states, Bahrain was affected by the international financial crisis of 2008-2009, but Bahrain did not experience the construction and real estate "bubble" to the degree that this occurred in, for example, UAE. Bahrain's economy has been affected by the 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.

⁶⁴ "Arabs Need to Talk to the Israelis." *Washington Post*, July 16, 2009.

⁶⁵ "Fresh Challenge to U.S.-Bahrain Relations." op. cit.

Bahrain has little cushion to deal with economic downturns. Its oil exports come from a field that Saudi Arabia shares equally with Bahrain, the Abu Safa field, which produces 300,000 barrels per day. Bahrain's sales from that field provide about 70% of the funds for Bahrain's annual budget. And, its oil and gas reserves are the lowest oil and gas reserves of the GCC states, estimated respectively at 210 million barrels of oil and 5.3 trillion cubic feet of gas. The fall in oil prices in 2014-2015 has caused Bahrain to cut subsidies of some fuels, such as kerosene, and some foodstuffs, such as meat, in order to deal with the fiscal deficit in 2015. The financial difficulties have also contributed to a lack of implementation of government promises to provide more low-income housing (presumably for Shiites who tend to be among the poorer Bahrainis). To try to compensate for the small size of its oil export sector, Bahrain has diversified its economy by emphasizing banking and financial services (about 25.5% of GDP).

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). 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 2014, the United States exported about \$1.06 billion in goods to Bahrain, and imported \$965 million in goods from Bahrain. In 2005, total bilateral trade was about \$780 million, suggesting that trade has more than doubled since the U.S.-Bahrain FTA.

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

Table 3. Some Basic Facts About Bahrain

Population	About 1.3 million, of which slightly less than half are citizens
Religions	Nearly all the citizenry is Muslim, while Christians, Hindus, Bahais, and Jews constitute about 1% of the citizenry. Of the total population, 70% is Muslim, 9% is Christian, 10% are of other religions.
GDP (purchasing power parity basis, PPP)	\$62 billion (2014). Would be \$34 billion at official exchange rate.
GDP per capita (PPP basis)	\$51,700 (2014)
GDP Real Growth Rate	4.7% (2014)
Budget	\$7.8 billion revenues, \$8.9 billion expenditures (2013)
Inflation Rate	2.5% (2014)
Unemployment Rate	4% (2014)

Source: CIA, *The World Factbook*.

Table 4. U.S. Assistance to Bahrain

(\$ in millions)

	FY2003	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
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>.

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