



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

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April 1, 2013

**Congressional Research Service**

7-5700

[www.crs.gov](http://www.crs.gov)

95-1013

**CRS Report for Congress**

*Prepared for Members and Committees of Congress*

## Summary

The uprising that began in Bahrain on February 14, 2011, at the outbreak of the uprisings that swept several Middle Eastern leaders from power, has not come close to changing Bahrain's regime into a constitutional monarchy. However, the mostly Shiite opposition shows no signs of ending its campaign to achieve that goal or, at the very least greatly increased political influence and rights. The crisis has demonstrated that the grievances of the Shiite majority over the distribution of power and economic opportunities were not satisfied by reform efforts instituted since 1999.

Even though demonstrations against the government continue, the two sides have engaged in dialogue as well. A "national dialogue" held in July 2011 reached consensus on a few modest political reforms. Hopes for resolution were raised by a pivotal report by a government-appointed "Independent Commission of Inquiry" (BICI) on the unrest, released November 23, 2011, which was critical of the government's actions against the unrest. The government asserts it implemented most of the 26 BICI recommendations, but outside human rights groups assessed that overall implementation was modest and incomplete. In January 2013, the perception within the government and the opposition that the political system could split apart entirely caused both sides to restart that dialogue. The two sides remain far apart, but the new, ongoing dialogue could produce some additional modest reforms and potentially represent incremental progress toward a solution to the crisis.

The Obama Administration has not called for an end to the Al Khalifa regime, but it has criticized the regime's human rights abuses, urged it to undertake further political reform, and advanced ideas to narrow government-opposition differences. The U.S. criticism has angered some Al Khalifa officials but it has also been insufficient for human rights activists who assert that the United States is downplaying regime abuses because of U.S. dependence on the security relationship with Bahrain. Bahrain has provided key support for U.S. interests—particularly the containment of Iran—by hosting U.S. naval headquarters for the Gulf for over 60 years. The United States signed a formal defense pact with Bahrain in 1991 and has designated Bahrain a "major non-NATO ally," entitling it to sales of sophisticated U.S. weapons systems. Partly to address criticism from human rights advocates and some Members of Congress, the Administration put on hold a proposed sale of armored vehicles and anti-tank weapons. However, in mid-May 2012 the Administration announced a resumption of other arms sales to Bahrain that it can potentially use to protect itself and support any military effort against Iran. Consumed by its own crisis, Bahrain has joined with but deferred to other GCC powers to resolve political crises in Libya, Syria, and Yemen.

Fueling Shiite unrest is the fact that Bahrain is poorer than most of the other Persian Gulf monarchies and therefore lacks the resources to significantly improve Shiite standards of living. In 2004, the United States and Bahrain signed a free trade agreement (FTA); legislation implementing it was signed January 11, 2006 (P.L. 109-169). The unrest has further strained Bahrain's economy.

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## **The Political Structure, Reform, and Human Rights<sup>1</sup>**

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. The family's arrival from the Saudi peninsula to take control ended a century of domination by Persian settlers. The Al Khalifa subsequently received political protection from Britain, which was the dominant power in the Gulf until the early 1970s. Bahrain became independent from Britain in August 1971 after a 1970 U.N. survey (some refer to it as a "referendum") determined that its inhabitants preferred independence to Iranian control. Shiite Muslims are a majority (about 60% of the population) but maintain they are treated as "second class citizens" who are deprived of a proportionate share of political power and the nation's economic wealth.

Bahrain is led by King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa (about 61 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 reformer, but some observers consider him a relatively weak leader unwilling to override hardline, anti-reform Khalifa family members.

The king's son, Shaykh Salman bin Hamad, about 42 years old, is crown prince and, as of March 11, 2013, is concurrently first deputy Prime Minister. Shaykh Salman is U.S.- and U.K.-educated and, like the king, has long been considered a proponent of accommodation with Bahrain's Shiite majority—about 60% of the approximately 1.25 million person citizenry.<sup>2</sup> There are, additionally, an estimated 235,000 expatriates in Bahrain. About 25% of the population is age 14 or younger.

The king's uncle (the brother of the late ruler), Prime Minister Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, has been in position since Bahrain's independence in 1971. He is nearly 80 years old but believed to be in stable health. He is considered aligned with—although somewhat more politically flexible than—a group of family hard-liners including Minister of the Royal Court Khalid bin Ahmad Al Khalifa<sup>3</sup> and his brother the Commander of the BDF Khalifa bin Ahmad Al Khalifa. Khalid and Khalifa 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 disparaging of and implacably opposed to compromise with the Shiites.<sup>4</sup> The khawalids reportedly have allies throughout the security and intelligence services and the judiciary. The royal court minister's protégé, Ateyatallah Al Khalifa, is considered an increasingly influential hardliner. The harder line family members reportedly believe that the concessions that King Hamad made to the Shiite majority prior to the 2011 unrest caused the Shiites to increase their political demands rather than satisfy them.

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<sup>1</sup> Much of the information in this section is from State Department reports: 2011 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices (May 24, 2012). CRS has no means to independently investigate the human rights situation in Bahrain or confirm allegations of specific human rights abuses there.

<sup>2</sup> 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 are less numerous, and arrived in Bahrain over the past 400 years. They speak Persian and generally do not integrate with the Baharna or with Sunni Arabs.

<sup>3</sup> The name of this official is similar to that of the Foreign Minister, Khalid bin Ahmad bin Mohammad Al Khalifa.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

The more reform-minded allies of the crown prince within the ruling family—which include a deputy Prime Minister, Muhammad bin Mubarak Al Khalifa (possible successor to the current prime minister)—assert that the level of unrest reached in 2011 would have occurred long ago had the king’s reforms not been enacted. The reformists within the family were strengthened by the March 2013 appointment of Crown Prince Salman as first deputy Prime Minister, a new position.

Al Khalifa family members have consistently held at least half of all ministerial slots, including all strategic ministry positions. Even before the 2011 unrest that has seen most senior Shiites in government resign, there were only 4 Shiite ministers out of 23 cabinet positions (plus one out of the four deputy prime ministers), and those ministries run by Shiites have been considered less critical. Shiites have also been highly underrepresented in the security forces, serving mainly in administrative tasks.

The reforms instituted by King Hamad before the unrest began, although well short of the hopes and expectations the Shiite majority had when he took office, were more extensive than those made by his father, Amir Isa. In December 1992, Amir Isa established a 30-member appointed Consultative Council to comment on proposed laws. In June 1996, he expanded it to 40 members. These reforms did not come close to quieting the demands of either Shiites or Sunnis for the restoration of an elected national assembly, even though Bahrain’s Sunnis are considered less hungry for “democracy” than are the Shiites. An elected assembly was provided for under the 1973 constitution but abolished in August 1975 because of fear of sectarian competition and tensions over control of the body. In the years just prior to Shaykh Hamad’s accession to rule, there was daily anti-government violence during 1994-1998, mostly by Shiites.

## Some Separation of Powers Established

As Hamad’s first reform steps upon taking office, he changed his title to “king” from “amir”—a change that implies more accountability to the population, and held a referendum (February 14, 2002) on a new “National Action Charter (including a constitution).” However, the Shiite majority population criticized the constitution because it established that the elected Council of Representatives (COR)<sup>5</sup> and the all-appointed *Shura* (Consultative) Council were of equal size (40 seats each). Together, they constitute a National Assembly (parliament). There is no “quota” for females in the National Assembly.

- Constitutional amendments adopted in May 2012 gave the Assembly greater authority, but the Assembly still serves as only a partial check on government power. The amendments set up the elected COR as the presiding chamber of the Assembly, thereby giving the COR the lead position when the two chambers disagree on legislation.
- The king, through the prime minister, makes all cabinet appointments and thus exercises direct rule. The National Assembly does not appoint—or have power to reject—cabinet appointments. However, as a consequence of the May 2012 constitutional amendments it now has the power to reject the government’s four-year work plan (and therefore the whole cabinet).

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<sup>5</sup> This body is also referred to as the Council of Deputies (Majles al-Nawwab).

- 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 subsequently must rule on whether to dismiss the prime minister or disband the COR. None of these actions has occurred since the COR was formed.
- Either chamber of the National Assembly can draft and pass legislation but enactment into law is subject to concurrence by the king.<sup>6</sup> His “veto” can be overridden by a two-thirds majority vote of both chambers. The king has the authority to amend the constitution. 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 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 elected COR. This explains why the opposition has always sought more powers for the COR.

## Post-Charter Elections and Political Groups

A dispute between the government and the opposition that predates the 2011 uprising has been over the organization of elections to the COR. The Shiite opposition has sought to establish electoral processes that would allow Shiites to translate their numbers into political strength. Elections have been held every four years since 2002, each time marked by substantial tension over perceived governmental efforts to block achievement of a Shiite majority in the COR. In the COR elections, if no candidate in a contested district wins more than 50% in the first round, a runoff is held one week later.

Formal political parties are banned, but factions compete as “political societies,” which serve as the functional equivalent of parties for election purposes:

- *Wifaq* (formally, the Al *Wifaq* National Islamic Society, also known as the Islamic National Accord Association) is the most prominent Shiite political society. Formally led by Shaykh Ali al-Salman, who is about 40 years old, *Wifaq* forms the core of the Shiite opposition. In part because he is a cleric, Shaykh Salman has not run in any parliamentary elections, and he is considered open to a compromise. Shaykh Salman was slightly injured by security forces during a protest in June 2012. Many consider Isa Qasim, a 75-year-old fiery Shiite cleric, as de-facto leader of the *Wifaq* and the overall Shiite opposition. Qasim is considered resistant to many proposals to settle the crisis.
- *Al Haq* (Movement of Freedom and Democracy), another Shiite faction, is outlawed because of its calls for a change of regime rather than reform. It is harder line than *Wifaq* but also much smaller in membership, by most accounts. *Al Haq*'s leaders are perceived as having ties to Iran and to Islamist movements in the Middle East. Its key leaders are Dr. Abduljalil Alsingace, who is wheelchair-bound, and Mr. Hassan Mushaima.

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<sup>6</sup> Before the May 2012 constitutional amendments, only the COR could draft legislation.

- The Bahrain Islamic Action Society, a small Shiite faction, also is outlawed. It is a successor to the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain (IFLB), a party purportedly linked to Iran that allegedly committed or planned extremist actions in the 1980s and 1990s.
- *Waad* (“promise”) is a left-leaning secular political society whose members are both Sunni and Shiite and is generally aligned with *Wifaq* as an opposition party.
- Sunni opinion is generally represented by the government. There are some Sunni political societies, and two are considered Islamist. *Minbar* (Arabic for “platform”), which is an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, and *Al Asala*, which is a harder-line “Salafist” political society. As noted below, in the 2006-2010 parliament, *Asala* and *Minbar* members held a combined 15 seats. In June 2011, another Sunni grouping formed as a response to the Shiite-led 2011 uprising, organized as a pro-government political society called the National Unity Gathering/National Unity Association.

## 2002 Elections

The first elections under the Charter were held in October 2002. In the 2002 election, many Shiite opposition political societies, including *Wifaq*, boycotted the elections on the grounds that setting the COR and the Shura Council at the same size dilutes popular will. The 2002 boycott lowered turnout (about 52%) and helped Sunnis win two-thirds of the 40 COR seats. Of the 170 total candidates, 8 were women, but none of the women was elected.

## 2006 Elections: Allegations of Gerrymandering and “Importing Sunnis”

As was widely expected by experts, Sunni-Shiite tensions escalated again in the run-up to the November 25, 2006, parliamentary and municipal elections. The tension was aggravated by the Shiite perception that a once-repressed Shiite majority came to power in Iraq through U.S.-backed elections and that Bahrain’s Shiite majority was entitled to a similar result. The election was clouded by allegations, publicly corroborated by a government adviser (Salah al-Bandar) in August 2006, that the government was adjusting election districts so as to favor Sunni candidates. It was also alleged the government had issued passports to Sunnis in an attempt to shift the demographic balance to the Sunnis’ advantage.

In the November 2006 elections, two Shiite opposition societies, *Wifaq* and the National Democratic Action Association, participated, raising voter turnout to 72%. *Al Haq* boycotted. The opposition, led by *Wifaq*, won 17 seats, virtually all those it contested, and became the largest single bloc in the COR, although still short of a majority.

The government was heartened that Sunni Muslims won 23 total seats. Of those, 8 were won by secular Sunnis and 15 were won by Islamist Sunnis (8 from the Salafists trend and 7 Muslim Brotherhood members). Only one woman (Latifa al Qaoud, who was unopposed in her district) won, out of 18 female candidates (up from 8 in the 2002 elections). As evidence of continued friction, *Wifaq* boycotted the speakership contest, and incumbent COR Speaker Khalifa al-Dhahrani was reelected speaker. The king subsequently named a new Shura Council with 20 Shiites, 19 Sunnis, and 1 Christian (a female). Ten women were appointed. However, the Shiites appointed were generally considered “pro-government.”



In a nod to the increased Shiite strength as a result of the elections, the government appointed a Shiite (Jawad al-Araidh) as one of the four deputy prime ministers and another (who is close to *Wifaq*) as a minister of state for foreign affairs. Three other Shiites remained in the cabinet.

Heightened political tensions continued in between national elections. In December 2008, the government made numerous arrests of Shiite demonstrators and, on January 26, 2009, the government arrested three leading Shiite activists, including *Al Haq* leaders Alsingace and Mushaima. They were tried during February-March 2009 but, along with other Shiite activists, were pardoned and released in April 2009. Alsingace has visited the United States several times to highlight the human rights situation in Bahrain. As noted below, both were rearrested and have been sentenced in connection with the 2011 uprising.

### **The 2010 National Assembly and Municipal Election: Prelude to the Uprising**

The resentments over the 2006 election, and the underlying Shiite grievances, carried over to the 2010 election. The two-round vote was held on October 23 and October 30, 2010. Two Bahraini human rights watchdog groups, the Bahrain Human Rights Society and the Bahrain Transparency Society, reached agreement to jointly monitor the 2010 elections, and there were a limited number of international observers. Municipal elections were held concurrently.

The electorate was about 300,000 persons, voting in 40 districts spread throughout 5 governorates. As was the case in the 2006 elections, Shiite oppositionists accused the government of drawing district boundaries so as to prevent the election of a Shiite majority. Registration of candidates took place during September 12-16, 2010. About 200 people registered to run, of whom six were women. Of the six, only Munira Fakhro, a prominent Shiite woman who was exiled prior to the political reform process begun by King Hamad, was endorsed by a political society (*Waad*). In 2006, she narrowly lost to a Sunni Islamist of *Minbar*. At least four candidates in districts where there was no opposition were declared winners by September 28, 2010. One of them was a *Wifaq* member.

*Wifaq* fielded candidates, but candidates linked to *Al Haq* again boycotted. In the run-up to the election, on September 4, 2010, 23 Shiite leaders were arrested on charges of attempting a violent overthrow of the government. They were among about 160 Shiites arrested in August and September 2010 under a 2006 anti-terrorism law that gives the government broad arrest and prosecution powers. Those arrested included Dr. Alsingace (see above), on August 13, 2010, upon his return from abroad. A prominent Shiite cleric, Ayatollah Hussein Mirza al-Najati, said to be close to the most senior Iraqi Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, had his Bahrain citizenship revoked on September 20, 2010.

The crackdown did not prompt *Wifaq* to reverse its decision to compete, but it did lead to stepped up demonstrations by Shiite youth in Shiite neighborhoods as well as a bombing that damaged four police cars on September 15, 2010. The tensions over the 2010 election almost certainly contributed to the major unrest that began in February 2011.

### **2010 Election Results**

Despite the pre-election tensions, the election was held without major reports of violence. Turnout was about 67% between the two rounds. The results, some unexpected, included

- The increase of *Wifaq*'s representation to 18 seats, although still not a majority.

- Unexpected losses by Sunni Islamist factions, reducing their total to 5 seats from 15. *Minbar* and *Asala* each saw dramatic reductions in their seats from 2006: *Minbar* decreased to 2 seats (from 7) and *Asala* decreased to 3 seats (from 8). Most of the seats were picked up by Sunni independents, who won 17 seats, up from 9 in the 2006-2010 parliament. *Waad* won no seats. These results appeared to represent a rejection of Islamist ideology, and even all ideological candidates, in favor of pragmatists who would address Bahrain's economic difficulties.
- The same one woman won who had won in 2006.
- In the municipal elections conducted concurrently, one woman was elected in the second round—the first woman to be elected to a municipal council.

In advance of the December 14, 2010, start of the parliamentary term, the king named the 2010-2014 Shura Council. Thirty of the 40 serving Council members were reappointed, leaving only 10 newly appointed members. A total of 19 Shiites were appointed, including the speaker, Ali bin Salih al-Salih, who was reappointed. The Council has four women, substantially fewer than the 2006-2010 Council that had nine women. Among the four, one is Jewish (Nancy Khadouri), out of a Jewish population in Bahrain of about 40 persons, and one is Christian (Hala Qarrisah). Bahrain has an estimated 1,000 Christians.

**Table I. Comparative Composition of National Assembly**

	2006	2010	Post-By-Election (October 2011)
Council of Representatives (COR)			
Wifaq (Shiite Islamist)	17	18	0
Shiite Independent	0	0	8
Sunni Independent (mostly secular) in COR	8	17	27
Moderate Sunni Islamist (Minbar, Muslim Brotherhood)	7	2	2
Conservative Sunni Islamist (Asala, Salafi)	8	3	3
COR Sect Composition	23 Sunni, 17 Shiite	22 Sunni, 18 Shiite	32 Sunni, 8 Shiite
Women in COR	1	1	4
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	Same as before
Number of Women	9	4	same

## 2011 Uprising: Origin, Developments, and Prognosis

King Hamad's 12-year effort to satisfy Shiite aspirations was demonstrated to have failed when a major uprising began on February 14, 2011, in the wake of the success of the uprising in Egypt

against President Hosni Mubarak. After a few days of protests and relatively minor confrontations with the mostly Bahraini Sunni and expatriate Sunni security forces, the mostly Shiite demonstrators converged on the interior of a major traffic circle, “Pearl Roundabout,” named after a statue that depicted Bahrain’s pearl-diving past. The uprising took place after King Hamad had authorized that year’s iteration of an annual \$2,700 payment to citizens.

The initial demands of the protesters centered on altering the constitution to expand the powers of the COR; ending gerrymandering that prevents Shiites from winning a majority in the COR; providing more jobs and economic opportunities; and, for some protesters, replacing hard-line Prime Minister Khalifa. On February 15, 2011, King Hamad announced the formation of a committee to investigate the use of force against protestors, which had killed two until that time.

The unrest took on new dimensions in the early morning of February 17, 2011, when security forces surrounded the thousands of demonstrators in Pearl Roundabout, many of whom were asleep, and used rubber bullets and tear gas to remove them from the location. At least four demonstrators were killed; others died subsequently. The government asserted it had warned of the impending move, which it said was intended to avoid a “sectarian abyss”—all-out civil conflict between the Shiites and Sunnis. Additional protests took place on February 18, 2011, and security forces shot several demonstrators. *Wifaq* pulled all 18 of its deputies out of the COR immediately thereafter. Britain closed its embassy and banned arms exports to Bahrain.

### **Government Tactics Change, As Do Protester Demands<sup>7</sup>**

In part at the reported urging of the United States, on February 19, 2011, the government pulled security forces back from confronting protesters. That day, demonstrators reentered Pearl Roundabout and held large demonstrations at or around that location subsequently. A February 22, 2011, demonstration was said to be perhaps the largest in Bahrain’s history, although some accounts say that a demonstration three days later, which spanned miles of downtown roads, was larger. The demonstration came one day after a large demonstration by government supporters.

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 Hassan Mushaima, paving the way for him to return from exile a few days later. On February 26, 2011, King Hamad dropped two Al Khalifa family members from cabinet posts that influence job opportunities and living conditions.

### ***Crown Prince Salman’s “Seven Principles” Reform Plan***

On March 13, 2011, Crown Prince Salman articulated “seven principles” that would guide a national dialogue, including a “parliament with full authority”; a “government that meets the will of the people”; fair voting districts; and several other measures.<sup>8</sup> The articulation of the seven principles gave *Wifaq* and other moderate oppositionists hope that many of their demands could

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<sup>7</sup> 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>

<sup>8</sup> BICI report, op. cit., p. 165.

be met through dialogue. However, the protesters did not leave Pearl Roundabout and long-standing splits in the opposition were exposed, such as that between *Wifaq* and *Al Haq*. Anger at the government's use of force appeared to shift many demonstrators closer to *Al Haq* and six smaller hardline Shiite political groups that demanded resignation of the monarchy.<sup>9</sup>

## The Saudi-led Intervention and Crackdown

With Shiite groups refusing to accept the offer of dialogue, protests escalated and began to spark Sunni-Shiite clashes, which some Bahrainis believed were evolving into sectarian conflict at the mass level. On March 13, 2011, despite the crown prince's articulation of his "seven points," protesters blockaded the financial district of the capital, Manama, prompting governmental fears that the unrest could choke this major economic sector. Security forces appeared overwhelmed.

Later that same day, Bahrain requested that the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), of which it is a member, send additional security forces to protect key sites. In response, 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 in and around Manama. Kuwait sent naval forces to help Bahrain secure its maritime borders. On March 15, 2011, King Hamad declared (Royal Decree Number 18) a three-month state of emergency. Bahrain's security forces, freed up by the GCC deployment, cleared demonstrators from Pearl Roundabout and demolished the Pearl Monument on March 18, 2011.<sup>10</sup> In conjunction, seven hardline Shiite leaders were rearrested, including *Al Haq*'s Mushaima. The remaining Shiite ministers in the cabinet, many of the Shiites in the Shura Council, and many Shiites in other senior posts in the judiciary, suspended their work or resigned outright. The Saudi intervention did not, as some feared, prompt Iranian intervention on the side of the protesters.

Well before intervening in Bahrain, the GCC states, particularly Saudi Arabia, had begun to fear that the Bahrain unrest could spread to other GCC states. It was also feared that Iran might be able to exploit the situation. None of the other GCC states has a Shiite majority (like Bahrain), but most of them, including Saudi Arabia, have substantial Shiite minorities. The Saudi position has been not to permit a Shiite takeover in Bahrain, and the Saudi government is seen as backing hardline, anti-compromise officials in the Bahrain ruling family.

Perhaps to reinforce this position, 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—a signal to Bahrain's Shiite opposition that the Bahrain government has unconditional Saudi backing. At a GCC leadership meeting in Riyadh that day, the other four GCC states opposed such a union and the GCC as a whole formally deferred a decision on the Saudi-Bahraini plan. Earlier, shortly after the Bahrain crisis began, the GCC states had pledged aid (some reports mention \$20 billion) to help Bahrain (and Oman, which also faced unrest) try to defuse unrest through job creation.

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

<sup>10</sup> 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.

## Post-GCC Intervention Situation/End of State of Emergency

Most public protests in downtown Manama ceased subsequent to the GCC intervention, but the government continued its crackdown. At that time, over 1,500 people, mostly Shiites, had been dismissed from their jobs, and 30 Bahraini protesters had died, although opposition figures for protester deaths were higher. In April 2011, the government closed the pro-opposition newspaper *Al Wasat*, and its editor-in-chief, Mansour al-Jamri, went on trial on May 18, 2011, for inciting violence. On April 15, 2011, the government announced that *Wifaq* and another Shiite political society, the Islamic Action Association (see above) were being investigated for harming national unity and might be disbanded.

Perceiving the regime had gained the upper hand, the King announced in May 2011 that the state of emergency would end on June 1, 2011, two weeks earlier than scheduled. The government held to that schedule; the GCC forces that deployed to Bahrain, including the Kuwaiti naval force, reportedly began to depart in late June 2011. The departures were reportedly completed, although some reports suggest some elements of the force might remain. King Hamad spoke to the population on May 31, 2011, to mark the end of the emergency, offering unconditional dialogue with the opposition beginning July 1, 2011.

## Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) Formed

On June 29, 2011, as a further gesture toward the opposition, the king named a five-person “Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry,” (BICI) headed by highly regarded international legal expert Dr. Cherif Bassiouni, to investigate the government’s response to the unrest that began in February, and to file its report by October 30, 2011. It held a public forum on July 24, 2011, but came under criticism from Shiite opposition figures who interpreted certain Bassiouni statements as a bias in favor of exonerating top government officials.

## National Dialogue Held

The naming of the BICI set the stage for the “National Dialogue” on political and economic reform to begin on July 2, 2011, under the chairmanship of speaker of the COR Dhahrani. About 300 delegates participated, of which the Shiite opposition broadly comprised 40-50 delegates, of which 5 belonged to *Wifaq*.<sup>11</sup> *Wifaq*’s participation was prompted by the government’s release of about 150 of those who had been imprisoned for the unrest.

Over several weeks, the dialogue addressed political, economic, social, and human rights issues; each had 15 sub-themes and each sub-theme had 90 topics. Senior Bahraini officials said the intent of the dialogue was to outline a vision of Bahrain rather than necessarily reach agreement on specific steps. Still, the continuing detention of many oppositionists hung over the meetings. Prospects further diminished on July 18, 2011, when *Wifaq*, which had always asserted that it would pull out of the talks if and when it became clear that its proposals for a constitutional monarchy would not be met, withdrew entirely. Others took note of the fact that the crown prince, the principal champion of dialogue within the upper ranks of the regime, did not chair the meetings, suggesting he was eclipsed by hard line figures within the royal family.

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<sup>11</sup> Mohamed Hasni. “Bahrain Opens Dialogue Buoyed by Shiite Attendance.” Agence France Presse, July 2, 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.
- There were reportedly 82 economic recommendations, including new mechanisms to provide food subsidies to only the most needy citizens.

In part as a gesture of reconciliation after the dialogue concluded, in a speech on August 28, 2011, near the conclusion of the holy month of Ramadan, King Hamad announced the pardoning of some protesters. He also 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 jailed activists.

### ***Dialogue Recommendations Implemented By Constitutional Amendment***

The government subsequently appointed a committee to implement the national dialogue consensus recommendations, headed by deputy Prime Minister Muhammad Mubarak Al Khalifa. After rounds of meetings between both houses of the National Assembly and various ministries, the government drafted amendments to the Bahraini constitution to implement the consensus recommendations. They were announced by the king on January 16, 2012, and adopted by the National Assembly and ratified by the king on May 3, 2012. The amendments, included the following:

- 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.
- Decided that the overall chair of the National Assembly will be the speaker of the COR, not 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 opposition immediately rejected the constitutional amendments as insufficient, because they did not fulfill the core of the crown prince's seven points for a parliament with "full authority," nor did the amendments meet the demands contained in the "Manama Document," adopted on October 12, 2011, by several opposition parties, led by *Wifaq* and *Waad*. The document called for a fully elected one-chamber parliament with legislative powers, the direct selection of the prime minister by the largest coalition in the elected legislature, and the running of elections by an independent election commission. The opposition viewed the 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.

### ***September 24-October 1 Special Election***

Following the conclusion of the National Dialogue—but before the issuing of the BICI report on the government handling of the unrest—there was a special election to fill the seats vacated by the 18 *Wifaq* COR deputies that had resigned at the outset of the unrest. The elections were scheduled for September 24, 2011, with a second round to be held on October 1, if needed. However, the legitimacy of the special elections was clouded by the announcement by *Wifaq* on August 14, 2011, that it would boycott the elections.

In advance of the elections, four winners were declared (including one woman) because they were running unopposed. In both rounds of voting, turnout was assessed as very low, at about 20%, although the government put out official turnout figures of close to 50%. After the first round on September 24, five additional seats were decided. The October 1 runoff decided the remaining nine seats. As shown in **Table 1**, of the 18 seats decided in the special election, 10 were won by Sunnis, largely because of the *Wifaq* boycott and low turnout. This suggests that most Shiites viewed the special election as illegitimate, but the net result was that Sunnis overwhelmingly dominate the COR, with 32 seats to only 8 Shiite seats. The special election resulted in the addition of three women COR deputies.

The special election did not revive the basic legislative work of the Assembly, which has been largely stalled since the uprising began in early 2011. Prior to the uprising, the Assembly tended to address primarily economic and social issues, but not national security issues. In May 2010, it voted to ban sale of alcohol to Muslims, although subject to implementing regulations made by the king. Other legislation considered prior to the uprising included bills to combat cyber crime, regulate the pharmaceutical sector, regulate the press, create an anti-corruption body, and establish a higher council on social security.

### **BICI Report on Handling of the Unrest: Reaction and Implementation**

The next major benchmark in the crisis was the release of the BICI report. It was initially due by October 30, 2011 but, because of the large number of interviews conducted, was delayed until November 23, 2011. Although the focus of the BICI mission was the handling of the unrest—and not on competing ideas for political reform—the release was viewed by both the government and the opposition as pivotal. The 500+ page report provided some support for the narratives of both sides in the crisis, and recommendations, including<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> <http://files.bici.org/bh/BICIreportEN.pdf>.

- There was “systematic” and “deliberate” use of excessive force, including torture and forced confessions, against protesters.
- The opposition articulated additional demands as the uprising progressed.
- The government did not provide evidence to the BICI that established a link between the unrest in Bahrain and the government of Iran. (p. 378)
- The BICI did not find evidence of human rights abuses committed by the GCC forces that deployed at the request of Bahrain’s government. (p. 378)
- The BICI’s twenty-six recommendations (pp. 411-415) focused on measures that would prevent future violence against peaceful protesters and the holding accountability of those responsible for abuses against protesters. In keeping with the BICI’s mandate, the recommendations did not address the political structure of Bahrain.

### *Implementation Oversight by a National Commission and “Follow-Up Unit”*

Apparently recognizing that it would be judged by the international community on its response to the report, King Hamad issued a statement the day of the report’s release, accepting its criticisms of the government and promising implementation of its recommendations. *Wifaq* supported the parts of the report that support its accounts but criticized it as failing to state that abuse of protesters were deliberate government policy. The bulk of the opposition, including *Wifaq*, expressed skepticism that the recommendations would be fully implemented, and *Wifaq* refused to participate in cooperation with the government on specific implementation steps.

Government implementation of many of the recommendations began after the report was released. On November 26, 2011, King Hamad issued a royal order to establish a 19-member National Commission to oversee implementation of the recommendations, chaired by Shura Council speaker Ali al-Salih (a Shiite). The king also announced that the “National Human Rights Institution,” appointed in 2010, would be fully independent of the government.

On March 20, 2012, the National Commission issued its final report, generally supporting the government’s assertions of its implementation steps to that date.<sup>13</sup> In the cover letter to its report, the National Commission stated that “the reader will see that in less than 100 days this Commission has worked hard with the Government to reform the justice, human rights, policing, security services and media sectors in a way that accords with best international practice.”

Subsequently, a “Follow-Up Unit,” headed by Ms. Dana Al Zayani, was established by the Ministry of Justice.<sup>14</sup> According to the government, the National Commission, and the Follow Up Unit, the government has, to date, implemented the vast majority of the 26 BICI recommendations. 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 fifteen of them, not implemented six of them at all, and two others had “unclear” implementation.<sup>15</sup> This more critical

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

<sup>14</sup> The Follow-Up Unit’s June report can be found at [http://www.iaa.bh/downloads/bici\\_followup\\_report\\_en.pdf](http://www.iaa.bh/downloads/bici_followup_report_en.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> POMED. “One Year Later: Assessing Bahrain’s Implementation of the BICI Report.” November 2012.



assessment was supported by BICI chair Bassiouni in public comments related to the one-year anniversary of the BICI report. The conference report on the FY2013 defense authorization act, H.R. 4310 (P.L. 112-239) directs the Secretary of State to report to Congress within 180 days of enactment 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 recommendations that human rights groups and other observers agree have been fully implemented include:

- Stripping the National Security Agency of law enforcement powers and limiting it to purely intelligence gathering. That occurred with the issuing of an amendment to the 2002 decree establishing that agency. The then-head of the organization, Shaykh Khalifa bin Abdullah Al Khalifa, was removed and made an advisor to the king; he was replaced by Adel bin Khalifa Al Fadhil, a non-royal.
- Drafting and providing training on a code of conduct for the police, based on international best practices. The government hired former Miami police chief John Timoney and former British police chief John Yates to teach Bahraini police tactics and techniques that conform to international standards of human rights practices.
- Training judiciary employees and prosecutors on preventing and eradicating torture and ill-treatment.

There appears to be broad agreement among observers, including the State Department, human rights groups, Bassiouni, and others, that the government has not implemented recommendations 5, 8, 10, 14, 22, and 24. These recommendations address full investigation and prevention of torture, detention without prompt access to legal counsel, dropping charges on those who protested but did not use violence, and allowing the opposition free expression and access to media.

Most of the recommendations fall into an intermediate category in which implementation has been incomplete:

- Some of the recommendations (No.2 and 7) concern holding security officials accountable for abuses. There appears to be agreement that the government has shielded high-ranking officials from prosecution, while allowing prosecution of lower-ranking officers. In September 2012, seven police lieutenants were referred to criminal courts for alleged mistreatment and torture allegations against medical staff detained during the unrest.
- Referral of all cases of security personnel who committed major abuses to the Public Prosecutor, for subsequent prosecution.
- Abolition of the military court system and transfer of all cases to ordinary courts.
- Establishment of new procedures to record interrogations of detainees (no. 13).
- Reinstatement of fired workers, public sector employees, and students (No. 18, 19, and 20). To date, 92% of the over 2,500 dismissed workers have been reinstated.

- Establishment of a compensation fund for the victims of torture and families of deceased victims (No.16 and 17).
- The rebuilding of destroyed religious sites (No. 21). To date, five of the more than 53 Shiite religious sites demolished by the regime during the course of the uprising have been mostly rebuilt. Rebuilding of another 17 sites is in various stages of planning or construction.
- Integrate Shiites into the security services (No. 11). On September 17, 2012, the government announced hiring of 500 police cadets “representing all communities in Bahrain”—an effort to address this recommendation.

### **Post-BICI Report: Continued Unrest And Deadlock**

The implementation of at least some of the BICI recommendations did not end the crisis. And, continued abuses by Bahraini security forces suggest that the main goal of the BICI process was not accomplished. This analysis has prompted many experts to say that implementation of the BICI recommendations should not constitute the central criteria by which to evaluate the course of the political crisis in Bahrain.

On December 24, 2011, about one month after the BICI report, security forces fired at *Wifaq* headquarters after it challenged a ban on its weekly protests. Security forces confronted protesters who tried to march to Pearl Roundabout to mark the February 14, 2012, first anniversary of the uprising. One of the largest demonstrations to date was held on March 9, 2012, marking the anniversary of the GCC intervention and intended to derail the holding of the Formula One auto race in Bahrain on April 22, 2012. The government advertised the race as a hallmark of “normalization” of the situation in Bahrain. Demonstrations took place in the days leading up to and including the race, but the event was held, although spectator turnout was low. On some occasions, protesters have attempted to occupy the large Budaiya highway or conduct other major demonstrations, leading to clashes with police and a few protester deaths. In response, in June 2012 the government ceased issuing permits for demonstrations in downtown Manama.

The Bahrain opposition and human rights activists report that security forces continue to use tear gas against demonstrators and to conduct raids on homes of suspected dissidents and protesters, despite the enhanced training and prosecutions of some officers. These views were expressed at an August 1, 2012, hearing of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission<sup>16</sup> and in communications by oppositionists and human rights groups since. After two teenagers and a police officer were killed during protests in September and October 2012, on October 30, 2012, the government imposed a ban on all public rallies and demonstrations. On November 7, 2012, the government revoked the citizenship of 31 dissidents on November 7, 2012, on the grounds that they had done “damage to state security.” The government temporarily lifted the ban on public demonstrations in advance of the security conference called the “Manama Dialogue” on December 7-8, 2012. The meeting is held in Bahrain annually, but was not held in 2011 because of the unrest. High-ranking officials from many governments typically attended the forum; the U.S. delegation was led by Deputy Secretary of State William Burns.

Contradicting the government’s attempts to portray an image of normalization throughout 2012, some oppositionists began resorting to guerrilla tactics. On April 9, 2012, an improvised

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<sup>16</sup> “Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Holds Hearing on Human Rights in Bahrain.” August 1, 2012.

explosive device killed seven police (who were all Sunnis). The next day, Sunni citizens ransacked a supermarket owned by a Shiite business group (Jawad Group). On June 14, 2012, the government discovered bomb-making materials in several locations. On November 5, 2012, two non-Bahrainis were killed in five explosions from homemade bombs that the government termed acts of terrorism. Several police officers were wounded by a roadside bomb on January 31, 2013. On February 21, 2013, the government said that Iran's Revolutionary guard had helped form a Bahraini cell—part of a group called the “Imam Army”—to recruit other agents and store weapons in Bahrain for possible attacks on officials and key locations.<sup>17</sup>

Some oppositionists say that these incidents of violence are a consequence of the government's refusal to make meaningful concessions. *Wifaq* and most other opposition activists say there is broad agreement among the mainstream Shiite groups not to use violence to promote their political aims. Pro-government Bahrainis say that the increasing instances of violence and bombings shows intent of the opposition to overthrow the regime by any means necessary. Should the uprising evolve into a violent uprising, the ascension of a Shiite-led regime is possible, although the GCC determination to prevent this makes this outcome unlikely.

### Dialogue Resumes in February 2013

By early 2013, continued demonstrations and use of force against them, as well as increasing incidents of insurgent-style bombings, apparently caused the government and the opposition to see potential for escalation and to work to resume dialogue. Moderates on both sides stressed that the crown prince's “seven principles,” the 2011 national dialogue recommendations and constitutional amendments, and the Manama Document all had many points in common. Deputy Prime Minister Mohammad Mubarak Al Khalifa held a meeting with *Wifaq* representatives on August 30, 2012. The U.S. State Department sought to foster momentum for resumed dialogue by promoting “Track 2” meetings that might float ideas for a compromise. A British national, Jonathan Powell, formerly chief of staff to then-Prime Minister Tony Blair, reportedly provided *Wifaq* activists with reconciliation training. The Bahrain government rejected an idea pushed by U.S. officials to accept the appointment of a high-level international facilitator or mediator who might narrow the differences between the parties.

Firm signs of compromise on both sides came on October 16, 2012, when the King reiterated that the “door for dialogue is open.” The State Department praised the Crown Prince's speech at the December 7-8, 2012, Manama Dialogue (see above) calling for a resumption of dialogue, as well as *Wifaq*'s subsequent statement expressing openness to that invitation. Some saw in the King and Crown Prince's statements evidence that Saudi Arabia was easing its anti-compromise stand, possibly as a result of assessments that continued deadlock would worsen violence. On the other hand, the affirmation by the Court of Cassation (last form of formal appeal) of the sentences of 13 prominent dissidents (see **Table 2**) on January 8, 2013, caused many to dampen hopes of compromise.

On January 22, 2013, the King formally reiterated his call for a restart of the national dialogue and, the same day, *Wifaq* and five allied parties (Waad, the National Democratic Gathering Society, the Unitary National Democratic Assemblage, the Democratic Progressive Tribune, and the Ekhaa National Society) accepted the invitation. The United States, the U.N. Secretary-General, the European Union, and other major regional countries welcomed the restart of

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<sup>17</sup> “Iran's Revolutionary guard Behind Terror Cell, Says Bahrain.” Saudi Gazette, February 22, 2013.

dialogue. The meetings began on February 10, 2013, consisting of the Minister of Justice and two other ministers, eight oppositionists, eight pro-government representatives, and eight members of the National Assembly (both the upper and lower house). The participation of the three ministers was intended to at least partly meet opposition demands that renewed dialogue include authoritative decision makers who have the power to implement decisions made by the dialogue. Wifaq insisted that the dialogue quickly agree on an agenda for the talks, which are to take place several days each week, or it would pull out of the talks. The first six weeks of the dialogue have reportedly not moved beyond discussions of the agenda, and on February 19, 2013, two pro-government Sunni organizations pulled out of the talks.

Despite setbacks and some additional protester deaths, Wifaq and other oppositionists have remained in the dialogue, and the talks might be benefitting the overall political climate in Bahrain. The March 11, 2013, appointment of the Crown Prince to a new position, first deputy Prime Minister, appears intended to signal a new willingness by the government to compromise. Observers report that some senior Saudi officials have been meeting with Bahraini opposition figures—a sign of possible softening of the Saudi position that has been against any Bahraini government compromise with the Shiite opposition. On March 13, 2013, two police officers were sentenced to 10 years in prison for fatally beating protesters in 2011. On March 28, 2013, the convictions of 21 medical personnel arrested in April 2011 were overturned. On the other hand, in early March 2013 the Ministry of Education fired Jalila al-Salman, a Shiite and vice president of the Bahrain Teachers' Association, from her teaching job for organizing teacher strikes in October 2012.

### *Opposition Moderating Its Demands?*

Some experts express optimism for the latest dialogue on the grounds that the opposition may be displaying increasing pragmatism and reducing its demands. Some evidence for that moderation came in late January 2013, before the dialogue began, in which *Wifaq* leader Shaykh Ali Salman offered an interim compromise short of the longstanding demands for a constitutional monarchy in which the government is selected by an elected parliament. In a January 19, 2013, statement, Salman indicated that one way to resolve the national crisis could be the formation of a “national unity government” in which the opposition gains half the seats in a new cabinet. Since the dialogue began, observers of Bahrain’s politics have noted that the statements of both the government and the opposition have discussed negotiations on “power sharing,” suggesting the government might be open to bringing the opposition into the cabinet. On the other hand, the opposition is insisting that any constitutional amendments that might be agreed during the dialogue be ratified in a public referendum.

Earlier, a widely discussed interim compromise was the replacement of Prime Minister Khalifa, who is widely despised by the opposition, with a moderate opposition figure. Some oppositionists have said they would even accept a Sunni, but not a member of the royal family, as a replacement for the current prime minister. The government did not agree to this step even though, throughout the crisis, some Bahrain government supporters have said that the dismissal of Prime Minister Khalifa was likely.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Author conversations with representatives of and observers close to the regime. April 2011.

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

Abdul Hadi al-Khawaja, founder of Bahrain Center for Human Rights	Arrested April 9, 2011, was one of 13 prominent dissidents tried by state security court May 8, 2011, and sentenced to life in prison for conspiring to overthrow the government and for espionage on June 22, 2011. He conducted a hunger strike in prison in early 2012 but was force fed by Bahraini officials and remains alive. Daughters Zainab and Maryam have been repeatedly arrested for opposition activities, and have campaigned abroad for their father's release and for the Shiite opposition generally. His brother, Salah Abdullah al-Khawaja, was sentenced that day to five years in prison. Both sentences upheld September 4, 2012.
Hassan Mushaima and Dr. Abduljalil Alsingace, Al Haq leaders	Two of the 13 prominent dissidents tried by state security court May 8, 2011, sentenced to life in prison on June 22 2011. Sentence upheld September 4, 2012. Mushaima's son was one of the 31 whose citizenship was revoked in November 2012.
Remainder of the 13 prominent oppositionists sentenced on June 22, 2011	Along with the Khawaja brothers, Mushaima, and Alsingace, the June 22, 2011, sentences of nine other prominent dissidents were upheld on September 4, 2012 and reaffirmed by the Court of Cassation on January 8, 2013. Of the nine, four are sentenced to life in prison—Abdulwahab Ahmed; Mohammad al-Saffaf; Abduljalil Mansour; and Said Mirza Ahmad. State Department said on September 4, 2012, it was "deeply troubled" by the upholding of the sentences.
Nabeel Rajab	Successor to al-Khawaja as head of BCHR. Arrested February 15, 2012, for inciting illegal assembly and organizing unlicensed demonstrations, released, and rearrested on April 1, 2012. Sentenced on August 16, 2012, to three years in jail but, on December 11, 2012, sentence was reduced to two years on appeal.
Mohammad al Maskati	President of the Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights, arrested October 16, 2012, for taking part in illegal gatherings. Released the following day.
Sayed Yousif al-Muhafdha	Member of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, has catalogued and reported on protests over social media. Arrested December 17, 2012, and detained for two weeks in November 2012.
21 medical personnel from Salmaniya Medical Complex	Twenty-one medical personnel were arrested in April 2011 and subsequently tried for inciting sectarian hatred, possession of illegal weapons, and forcibly occupying a public building. The personnel argued that they were helping wounded protesters. They were tried in a military court before the government announced their retrial in a civilian court. All were eventually acquitted, most recently in late March 2013 by an appeals court. However, they have not been able to regain their jobs at the medical center.
Matar Matar and Jawad Fairuz, members of the COR	Arrested May 2, 2011, and released August 8, 2011. Matar formally acquitted on February 19, 2012. Fairuz was one of the 31 whose citizenship was revoked in Nov. 2012. His brother, Jalal Fairuz, was another stripped of citizenship.
Number killed in the uprising to date	60+

**Sources:** Erika Solomon. "Bahrain Sentences 8 Activists to Life Terms." Washington Post, June 23, 2011; press release from the Embassy of Bahrain, September 4, 2012.

## U.S. Posture on the Uprising

The Administration has not called for the Al Khalifa to step down and yield to a political transition. The Administration asserts that there is no justification for doing so because Bahrain's use of force has been dramatically less severe than that used by Muammar Qadhafi in Libya or Bashar al-Assad in Syria, and that the Bahrain government has undertaken reform. The Administration asserts that it has consistently criticized Bahrain's use of force against protesters and its imprisonment of dissidents. The Administration notes that the State Department's Assistant Secretary of State (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor) Michael Posner –

made six visits to Bahrain between early 2011 and his leaving that position in early 2013, in an effort to prod the government on reforms and broker a political settlement.

Critics of the Administration—primarily human rights-oriented groups such as Human Rights Watch and the Project on Middle East Democracy<sup>19</sup>—say the U.S. response has been colored by the vital U.S. security interests in Bahrain rather than an impartial commitment to promoting the human rights of the mostly Shiite demonstrators. Critics add that the Administration is concerned that a fall of the Al Khalifa regime and ascension of a Shiite-led government could increase Iran’s influence and lead to an unwanted loss of the U.S. use of Bahrain’s military facilities.

To support its assertions of its commitment to promoting human rights in Bahrain, the Administration notes that it has directly and repeatedly warned its Bahraini counterparts against using force against the protesters, that it opposed the GCC intervention, and that it called on all parties to take up the offer by the crown prince for a broad political dialogue on reform.<sup>20</sup> After the GCC intervention, on March 19, 2011, then Secretary Clinton said:

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

On April 30, 2011, according to the White House, President Obama spoke by phone to King Hamad and reportedly stated that Bahrain’s stability depends on respect for the universal rights of the people of Bahrain, and a process of meaningful reform. President Obama’s May 19, 2011, speech on the uprisings in the Middle East said the prospects for success of a Bahrain government dialogue with the opposition were compromised by the jailing of opposition figures. This U.S. position was restated in separate June 7, 2011, meetings between the Crown Prince and Secretary Clinton and President Obama. In his 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.

The same day, Ambassador-nominee to Bahrain Thomas Krajeski testified in confirmation hearings before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, saying the government “overreacted” to the unrest. He also praised the government’s long record of reform and accommodation of some Shiite demands. He was confirmed and is Ambassador to Bahrain.

Many experts awaited the Administration reaction to the BICI report as a harbinger of the direction of U.S. policy toward Bahrain. The U.S. reaction reiterated the U.S. stance since the

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<sup>19</sup> Stephen McInerney. “Silence on Bahrain.” *Washington Post* op-ed. November 5, 2012.

<sup>20</sup> Secretary of State Clinton Comments on the Situation in the Middle East. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GbuMZUg3Gc>.

crisis began, giving support to the views of both the government and the opposition. Then Secretary of State Clinton said the day of the release that the United States is

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

On December 15, 2011, less than a month after the BICI report, then Assistant Secretary of State Posner suggested that the Administration sees the government of Bahrain as attempting to implement the BICI recommendations. During May 2012, Crown Prince Salman visited Washington, DC, and met with Secretary of State Clinton, Secretary of Defense Panetta, and Vice President Biden. As discussed further below, a resumption of some U.S. arms sales to Bahrain was announced on May 11, 2012, which represented an Administration effort to strengthen the reformist crown prince politically.

As noted, during their visit to Bahrain to attend the Manama Dialogue in December 2012, both Deputy Secretary of State Burns and then Assistant Secretary Posner welcomed the Crown Prince's speech at that forum to restart the national dialogue. At the same time, suggesting some government upset over U.S. criticism, the Crown Prince's speech omitted the United States from a list of countries that he said had supported Bahrain during its time of difficulty. The State Department welcomed the restart of the national dialogue in February 2013. In a March 2013 visit to Bahrain, deputy Assistant Secretary of State Melia welcomed Bahrain's invitation to the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment to visit Bahrain in May 2013.

Although the Obama Administration has continued military and anti-terrorism assistance and some arms sales to Bahrain, some U.S. aid and sales are on hold or are at reduced levels from what was expected before the unrest began. For example, \$25 million in military aid (Foreign Military Financing, FMF) was requested for Bahrain for FY2012 (figures determined just before the uprising began), but only \$10 million is being provided. The FY2013 budget presented on February 13, 2012, asks the same \$10 million in FMF for FY2013. Still, Administration critics have said that continued military sales and aid to the government represents a tacit endorsement of the government's stance on the unrest.

The Administration has not imposed any sanctions on Bahrain or on Bahraini officials for human rights abuses. Some have suggested that the United States ban travel to the United States or freeze any U.S.-based assets of Bahraini officials determined by the Administration to have committed or authorized human rights abuses against peaceful protesters. Such sanctions have been imposed on members of adversary governments such as Syria and Iran, for example in the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2012 (P.L. 111-195).

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

Well before the 2011 unrest began, successive U.S. Administrations have been accused by human rights groups and Bahraini Shiites of downplaying abuses against Bahraini Shiites. Critics point to 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. It takes time; we know that from our own experience.”<sup>21</sup>

On the other hand, 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 to help Bahrain build an independent judiciary, to strengthen the COR, to empower women, to conduct media training, and to promote legal reform. MEPI funds have also been used to fund AFL-CIO projects with Bahraini labor organizations, and to help Bahrain implement the U.S.-Bahrain FTA. 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. In February 2010, the MEPI office of State Department signed a memorandum of understanding with Bahrain to promote entrepreneurship there and promote opportunities for trade with U.S. small businesses. According to the State Department’s International Religious Freedom report for July-December 2010 (September 13, 2011), “the U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the [Bahraini] government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.”

## **Other Human Rights Issues**

The human rights issues in Bahrain are directly tied to the schism between the Sunni-led regime and the Shiite majority, as noted in the State Department reports on human rights and religious freedom in Bahrain. Beyond that issue, State Department reports, such as the human rights report for 2011 (released May 24, 2012, but covering only the 2011 calendar year), note problems for non-Muslims and for non-Shiite opponents of the government.

There are several Bahraini human rights groups, mainly advocates for Shiite rights and causes. The most prominent are the Bahrain Human Rights Society, the Bahrain Transparency Society, and the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, founded by Abdul Hadi al-Khawaja. As noted above, the government has arrested several leaders of these organizations.

## **U.N. Views**

As the uprising has unfolded, Bahrain has drawn increasing attention from U.N. human rights bodies. On June 28, 2012, 28 countries issued a joint declaration, during U.N. Human Rights Council debate, condemning human rights abuses by the Bahrain government. The United States, Britain, and eight other EU countries did not support the initiative. Human rights groups criticized the Administration for refusing to block the September 28, 2012, vote in the U.N. Human Rights Council to fill one of its advisory committee vacancies with a Bahraini representative, ex-Bahrain diplomat Saeed Mohammad al-Faihani. His nomination was accepted by acclamation. That vote came nine days after the Human Rights Council accepted a Universal Periodic Review of Bahrain’s human rights record, in which the government agreed to fully accept 140 out of 176 recommendations of the review. In early December 2012, a team from the United Nations Human Rights Council visited Bahrain to assess the human rights situation; it met with the government as well as the opposition. Opposition activists reportedly requested that the U.N. team recommended

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<sup>21</sup> Department of State. “Remarks With Foreign Minister Al Khalifa After Their Meeting.” December 3, 2010.



the appointment of a 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.

## **Women's Rights**

Bahrain has tended to be relatively progressive as far as law and regulations. However, as is the case with its neighbors, Bahrain's practices and customs tend to limit women's rights. Women can drive, own and inherit property, and initiate divorce cases, although religious courts may refuse a woman's divorce request. Some prominent women are campaigning for a codified family law that would enhance and secure women's rights, running into opposition from Bahraini clerics who are against granting more rights for women. The campaign for the law is 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.

To try to showcase its progressiveness, the government has promoted several women to high positions. The number of women in both chambers of the National Assembly is provided in **Table 1**, above. Since 2005, there have been two female ministers—Minister of Human Rights and Social Development Fatima bint Ahmad al-Balushi and Minister of Information and Culture Mai bint Muhammad Al Khalifa. A third female, Samira Rajab, was added to the cabinet in 2012 as minister of state for media affairs. A previous female minister of health, Nada Haffadh, resigned in October 2007 following allegations of corruption in her ministry by conservatives who oppose women occupying high-ranking positions. Ms. Huda Azar Nunu, an attorney and formerly the only Jew in the Shura Council, is ambassador to the United States. As noted above, a female – Dana Zayani—heads the “Follow Up Unit” that is continuing to oversee implementation of the BICI recommendations.

## **Religious Freedom**

On freedoms for religions other than Islam, the State Department report on international religious freedom for 2011 (released July 30, 2012), in the section on Bahrain, generally focused on Sunni-Shiite differences and the 2011 unrest, discussed as political issues above. According to past State Department reports on religious freedom in Bahrain, the government allows freedom of worship for Christians, Jews, and Hindus although the constitution declares Islam the official religion. However, the government requires licenses for churches to operate, and has in the past threatened to shutter un-licensed churches serving Indian expatriates. 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 now gathers and operates openly. According to the State Department human rights report for 2011, there are about 40 Jews in Bahrain, and no recent reports of anti-Semitic acts.

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

## **Labor Rights**

On labor issues, Bahrain has been credited with significant labor reforms, including a 2002 law granting workers, including noncitizens, the right to form and join unions. The law holds that the right to strike is a legitimate means for workers to defend their rights and interests, but their right is restricted in practice, including a prohibition on strikes in the oil and gas, education, and health sectors. There are about 50 trade unions in Bahrain, but all unions must join the General Federation of Bahrain Trade Unions (GFBTU). As a sign of the degree to which the GFBTU is dominated by oppositionists, during the height of unrest in 2011, the GFBTU called at least two general strikes to protest excessive force by security forces. In apparent retaliation by the government and employers, during March-May 2011, employers dismissed almost 2,500 workers from the private sector, and almost 2,000 from the public sector, including 25% of the country's union leadership.

## **Human Trafficking**

On human trafficking, the State Department "Trafficking in Persons Report" for 2011, released June 19, 2012, places Bahrain in "Tier 2: Watch List"—a downgrade from the simple Tier 2 placement of the previous year. The downgrade was based on the government's failure to produce results in reducing human trafficking during 2011-2012, despite commitments and pledges to proactively address the issue. The placement represents a setback from the 2010 "Trafficking in Persons Report" (June 14, 2010), when the "Watch List" designation was dropped. The 2009 report (June 16, 2009) assessed Bahrain as "Tier 2: Watch List," with explanatory language similar to that of the 2008 report.

## **Executions and Torture**

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

Allegations of torture against Shiite opposition figures have been widespread. In February 2010, more than one year before the uprising began, Human Rights Watch issued a study alleging systematic use by Bahraini security forces of torture.<sup>22</sup> Witnesses at the May 13, 2011, hearing of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission asserted that torture was being used regularly on those arrested in the post-GCC intervention crackdown. The State Department human rights report for 2011 said there were numerous reports of torture and other cruel punishments during the state of emergency in 2011. As noted above, the government has invited the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment to visit Bahrain in May 2013.

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<sup>22</sup> Human Rights Watch. "Bahrain: Torture Redux." February 2010.

## U.S.-Bahrain Security and Foreign Policy Relations<sup>23</sup>

In large part to keep powerful neighbors in check, Bahrain has long linked its security to the United States, and U.S. efforts to address threats in Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan have benefitted from access to Bahraini facilities. In recognition of the relationship, in March 2002, President Bush (Presidential Determination 2002-10) designated Bahrain a “major non-NATO ally (MNNA),” a designation that qualifies Bahrain to purchase the same U.S. arms that NATO allies can purchase.

Bahrain-U.S. relations have been somewhat strained by the U.S. criticism of the government’s handling of the unrest, but U.S. officials say that U.S. defense cooperation has not suffered significantly. Still, the Bahrain government is said to be slightly less forthcoming with in-kind support to the U.S. military presence in Bahrain than it was before the unrest began. U.S. officials add that there are few, if any, security cooperation initiatives that the United States can use as leverage to obtain Bahrain government flexibility on the unrest issue.

The opposition says that U.S.-Bahrain defense relations are not at risk should the Shiite opposition achieve greater influence in Bahrain; *Wifaq* leader Salman has said in interviews that he supports continuing the security relationship with the United States. Some observers assert that the opposition sees the continued U.S. presence in Bahrain as leverage the United States can use to persuade the Bahraini government to offer concessions to the opposition.

A U.S. Embassy in Manama, Bahrain’s capital, opened in September 1971 in conjunction with Bahrain’s independence. At that time, the threat level in the Persian Gulf was perceived as relatively low. Since then, defense issues have become a central feature of U.S.-Bahrain relations. Iran’s nuclear program is considered a growing threat to the Persian Gulf states, not only Bahrain. There is also the issue of terrorism and piracy in the Gulf. Iraq no longer poses a strategic threat to the GCC states following the U.S.-led ouster of Saddam Hussein in 2003.

### U.S. Navy Headquarters in Bahrain

The cornerstone of U.S.-Bahrain defense relations is U.S. access to Bahrain’s naval facilities. February 2008 marked the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of a U.S. naval command presence in Bahrain; MIDEASTFOR (U.S. Middle East Force), its successor, NAVCENT (naval component of U.S. Central Command), as well as the Fifth Fleet (reconstituted in June 1995) are headquartered there, at a sprawling facility called “Naval Support Activity-Bahrain.” The facility now covers over 100 acres, and about 5,000 U.S. personnel, mostly Navy, are deployed in Bahrain.<sup>24</sup>

Some smaller U.S. ships (e.g., minesweepers) are homeported 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 mid-March 2012, the U.S. Navy announced it is

<sup>23</sup> Information in this section obtained from a variety of press reports, and the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA).

<sup>24</sup> [http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/checkpoint-washington/post/after-iraq-pullout-us-serves-a-reminder-to-iran/2011/10/24/gIQAU7dGCM\\_blog.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/checkpoint-washington/post/after-iraq-pullout-us-serves-a-reminder-to-iran/2011/10/24/gIQAU7dGCM_blog.html).

doubling its minesweepers in the Gulf to eight, and sending additional mine-hunting helicopters, as tensions escalated over Iran's nuclear program and its threatened reaction to new sanctions.

To further develop the naval facility (sometimes referred to as "Bahrain Island"), and other military facilities, the U.S. military is implementing a planned \$580 million military construction program in Bahrain. Construction began in May 2010 to allow larger ships to dock at the naval facility; the project is expected to be completed, in several phases, by 2015. A January 2008 lease agreement between the United States and Bahrain allowed for the expansion by making available the decommissioned Mina (port) Salman. U.S. officials say they are requesting further expansions of the facility, as of June 2012.

The bulk of the construction program is to expand the naval facility, but \$45 million of the funds is to be used to expand an apron at Shaykh Isa Air Base, where a variety of U.S. aircraft are stationed, including F-16s, F-18s, and P-3 surveillance aircraft, and \$19 million is to be used for a Special Operations Forces facility. Recent appropriations and requests to fund the construction include \$54 million for FY2008 (Division 1 of P.L. 110-161); no funds for FY2009; \$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 of nearly equal size, but was not funded (accepting a Senate provision of H.R. 2055) in the FY2012 Consolidated Appropriation (P.L. 112-74).

Some say that the United States should begin examining alternate facilities in the Gulf region in the expectation that continued Bahraini hosting of the U.S. naval headquarters has become unstable. On July 22, 2011, the U.S. Navy in Bahrain issued a statement refuting a British press report that the Navy is planning to relocate the facility. Should there be a decision to take that step, likely alternatives would include UAE or Qatar, although neither has expressed a position on whether it would be willing to host such an expanded facility. U.S. officials say other Gulf state facilities, such as Jebel Ali in UAE, do not provide large U.S. ships with the ease of docking access that Bahrain does, and that many of the alternative possibilities inconveniently share docking and other facilities with large commercial operations.

## **Bilateral Defense Pact**

Bahrain was part of the U.S.-led allied coalition that ousted Iraq from Kuwait in 1991, hosting 17,500 troops and 250 combat aircraft at Shaykh Isa Air Base (mentioned above). Expanding on the agreement under which Bahrain hosted U.S. naval headquarters, Bahrain and the United States signed a 10-year defense pact on October 28, 1991, seven months after the ousting of Iraqi troops from Kuwait. The pact was renewed in October 2001, and was presumably to be up for renewal in October 2011. However, press and expert accounts in August 2011 indicate that, a few months after the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States, the Bush Administration may have extended the pact a further five years, to 2016. The U.S. Defense Department has not publicly confirmed these stories, although one U.S. official, on background, said the pact was previously extended beyond October 2011.<sup>25</sup> The pact not only provides the United States access to Bahrain's air bases and to pre-position strategic materiel (mostly U.S. Air Force munitions), but also requires consultations with Bahrain if its security is threatened, and it expanded exercises and U.S. training of Bahraini forces.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> "U.S.-Bahrain Defense Pact Renewed." Agence France Presse, August 5, 2011.

<sup>26</sup> Details of the U.S.-Bahrain defense agreement are classified. Some provisions are discussed in Sami Hajjar, *U.S.* (continued...)

## Cooperation With U.S. Operations in Iraq and Afghanistan

Following the liberation of Kuwait in February 1991, there were about 1,300 U.S. military personnel in Bahrain during the 1990s to contain Saddam Hussein's Iraq, and Bahraini pilots flew strikes over Iraq during the war; Iraq fired nine Scud missiles at Bahrain during the war, of which three hit facilities there. Bahrain hosted the regional headquarters for U.N. weapons inspections in Iraq during 1991-1998, and the U.S.-led Multinational Interdiction Force (MIF) that enforced a U.N. embargo on Iraq during 1991-2003. Since the early 1990s, the United States has reportedly stationed two Patriot anti-missile batteries there.<sup>27</sup>

### Post-September 11 and Post-Saddam Cooperation

The naval headquarters, mentioned earlier, has been used to coordinate the operations of over 20 U.S. warships performing support missions for U.S. and allied naval operations related to the U.S. military operations in Iraq (2003-2011) and Afghanistan (2001-present). These ships are part of Combined Task Force (CTF) 151 and 152 that seek to interdict the movement of terrorists, arms, or weapons of mass destruction (WMD)-related technology and narcotics across the Arabian Sea. These task forces also seek to counter piracy in the Arabian Sea. In March 2008, Bahrain took a turn in a rotation to command CTF-152, and it commanded again in December 2010. Bahrain commanded an anti-piracy task force in Gulf/Arabian Sea waters in October 2010. These operations are offshoots of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan, which ousted the Taliban after the September 11 attacks. Bahrain allowed the United States to fly combat missions from its bases (Shaykh Isa Air Base) in both OEF 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 hosted about 4,000 U.S. military personnel during major combat of OEF (October 2001-May 2003).

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 at the end of 2014.

Bahrain's participation in OIF came despite domestic opposition in Bahrain to that war. Because of its limited income, Bahrain has not contributed funds to Iraq reconstruction, but it attended the "Expanded Neighbors of Iraq" regional conference process which last met in Kuwait on April 22, 2008. That process was suspended in late 2008 as Iraq stabilized and the United States began the process of withdrawal, completed on December 18, 2011. On October 16, 2008, Bahrain's first post-Saddam ambassador to Iraq (Saleh Ali al-Maliki) presented his credentials in Baghdad, in line with King Hamad's pledge to President Bush in March 2008. However, relations have become tense to the extent that Iraq's Shiite-dominated government and its newly empowered Shiite clerical establishment are perceived as sympathetic to Bahrain's opposition. On March 9,

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(...continued)

*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.

<sup>27</sup> Walter Pincus. "Bahrain Government's Ties With the United States Run Deep." *Washington Post*, February 22, 2011.

2012, Iraqi Shiites rallied in support of Bahrain's Shiites on the same day as Bahrain's opposition mounted a major demonstration, discussed above. King Hamad did not attend the March 27-29 Arab League summit in Baghdad, and Bahrain, as did most of the other GCC states, sent a lower level delegation. Kuwait's Amir Sabah al-Ahmad Al Sabah was the only GCC leader to attend.

## U.S. Arms Transfers and Military Aid

To assist Bahrain's ability to cooperate with the United States on regional security issues, Congress and successive Administrations, citing Bahrain's financial resources, have supported military assistance to Bahrain's small force. According to the State Department, the United States has sold \$1.4 billion worth of weaponry to Bahrain since 2000,<sup>28</sup> based on the small amounts of U.S. military aid provided to Bahrain, the overwhelming majority of the arms were purchased with Bahrain's national funds. The unrest has caused the Administration to put on hold sales to Bahrain equipment that could easily be used against protesters, while continuing to provide equipment that is suited to Bahrain's external defense capabilities and its support for U.S. operations in the region. The main recipient of U.S. military assistance has been the relatively small Bahrain Defense Force (BDF), which has less than 10,000 active duty personnel (including 1,200 National Guard). The BDF, as well as Bahrain's police forces, are run by Sunni Bahrainis, but supplement their ranks with unknown percentages of paid recruits from Sunni Muslim neighboring countries, including Pakistan, Yemen, Jordan, Iraq, and elsewhere. Some human rights groups say that BDF equipment, such as Cobra helicopters, have been used against protesters and that the United States cannot be sure that sales to and training of the BDF is not being used to crush unrest.

According to the Administration, FMF (and funds provided under "Section 1206" of the National Defense Authorization Act of 2006, P.L. 109-163) is provided to Bahrain to help it maintain U.S.-origin weapons, to enhance inter-operability with U.S. forces, to augment Bahrain's air defenses, to support and upgrade the avionics of its F-16 fleet, and to improve counter-terrorism capabilities. As an example, 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.<sup>29</sup> Some FMF funds have been used to build up Bahrain's Special Operations forces and, in April 2012, U.S. military teams reportedly provided additional training to the BDF on the use of its Blackhawk helicopters.<sup>30</sup> 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 FY2012 request, made at the start of the unrest, asked for \$25 million in FMF; as shown in **Table 4** below, only \$10 million was provided for FY2012, due in large part to the Administration's intent to retain leverage against Bahrain to compel it to make reforms. The same lower amount, \$10 million, was requested for FY2013.

Bahrain is eligible to receive grant "excess defense articles" (EDA). The United States transferred the FFG-7 "Perry class" frigate *Subha* (see above) as EDA in July 1997. In the State Department's FY2012 budget request, the Administration supported providing another frigate (an

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<sup>28</sup> Justin Elliott. "Revealed: America's Arms Sales to Bahrain Amid Bloody Crackdown." Propublica, January 15, 2013.

<sup>29</sup> "Bahrain Government's Ties With the United States Run Deep." Op. cit.

<sup>30</sup> "Revealed: America's Arms Sales to Bahrain Amid Bloody Crackdown," op.cit.

“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 continues to support that transfer, which is planned for 2014, subject to passage of authorizing legislation.<sup>31</sup> In 1996, the United States gave Bahrain a no-cost five-year lease on 60 M60A3 tanks; title subsequently passed to Bahrain. Foreign Military Financing (FMF) was suspended for Bahrain in FY1994 but restarted in appreciation of Bahrain’s support in OEF and OIF.

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 Bahraini military 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 Systems Purchases**

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. In 1998, Bahrain purchased 10 U.S.-made F-16Cs from new production, worth about \$390 million. In 1999, the United States sold Bahrain 26 Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air Missiles (AMRAAM) to arm the F-16s, although some Members were concerned that the AMRAAM sale could promote an arms race in the Gulf.

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. Sales of up to 180 “Javelin” anti-armor missiles and 60 launch units, 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, were notified August 3, 2007. An additional 25 AMRAAMs (Raytheon Missile Systems Corp.) and associated equipment, valued at about \$74 million, was notified for sale to Bahrain on July 28, 2009. Section 581 of the FY1990 foreign operations appropriation act (P.L. 101-167) made Bahrain the only Gulf state eligible to receive the Stinger shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missile, and the United States has sold Bahrain about 70 Stingers since 1990. (This authorization has been repeated in subsequent legislation.)

Some of the recent sales to Bahrain are in accordance with the State Department’s “Gulf Security Dialogue,” begun in 2006 to counter Iran, and under which a total of about \$20 billion worth of U.S. weapons might be sold to the Gulf monarchy states. Much of the initiative involves missile defense integration, and it is primarily Bahrain’s wealthier neighbors, such as UAE, that are buying advanced U.S. missile defense equipment. That prevents Bahrain from becoming a major factor in the U.S. effort to assemble a Gulf-wide, integrated missile defense network. That effort has been discussed extensively with the Gulf states; on March 31, 2012, Secretary Clinton attended the first ministerial meeting of the U.S.-GCC Strategic Cooperation Forum in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, which focused on the integrated Gulf missile defense plan. Subsequently, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Frank Rose spoke in Abu Dhabi on April 12, 2012,<sup>32</sup> on the missile

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<sup>31</sup> <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/05/189810.htm>

<sup>32</sup> U.S. Department of State Daily Digest Bulletin, April 12, 2012.

defense issue. The issue was also discussed between the United States and the GCC countries as well at a meeting on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly meetings in September 2012.

### **September 2011 Humvee and TOW Sale**

One sale, notified on September 14, 2011, was announced seven months after the unrest began, and has been agreed to despite U.S. criticism of Bahrain's crackdown. It is for a proposed sale of 44 "Humvee" (M115A1B2) armored vehicles and several hundred TOW missiles of various models, of which 50 are to be "bunker busters." Along with associated equipment and support, the proposed sale is worth an estimated \$53 million. Although not considered large in dollar terms, or of particularly sophisticated equipment, the sale incurred opposition from several human rights groups and from the Bahraini opposition who assert that the sale represents U.S. downplaying of the abuses committed by the Bahraini government in the course of the unrest. Human rights groups and Bahraini opposition figures say the regime could use the Humvees, in particular, in their efforts to crack down on protests. 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.<sup>33</sup>

Two joint resolutions were introduced in the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress to block the sale: S.J.Res. 28, introduced by Senator Ron Wyden, and H.J.Res. 80, introduced by Representative James McGovern. Both joint resolutions would have prohibited the sale unless the Administration certifies that Bahrain is rectifying the alleged abuses connected to its suppression of the uprising in 2011. To block a proposed arms sale would require passage of a joint resolution to do so, and with a veto-proof majority, because President Obama could veto a joint resolution of disapproval in order to complete the sale. The House bill attracted 14 co-sponsors, the Senate bill two co-sponsors. On October 19, 2011, even though the sale had passed the period of congressional review, and apparently addressing the criticism and legislative initiatives, the Administration told Congress it would delay the sale until it could review the BICI report that was released November 23, 2011. Still, the State Department spokesperson stated on January 27, 2012, that "we are maintaining a pause on most security assistance to Bahrain pending further progress on reform." At the same briefing, the department said it was releasing to Bahrain previously notified and cleared spare parts and maintenance—worth a reported \$1 million—needed for Bahrain's external defense and support of Fifth Fleet operations. None of the items can be used against protesters, according to the State Department statement.<sup>34</sup>

### ***May 11, 2012, Announcement of Possible Future Sales***<sup>35</sup>

As discussed above, on May 11, 2012, in conjunction with a visit to Washington, DC, by Bahrain's Crown Prince Salman, the Administration announced that, despite continuing concerns about Bahrain's handling of the unrest, it would open up Bahrain to the purchase of additional U.S. arms for the BDF, Bahrain's Coast Guard, and Bahrain's National Guard. The Administration stated that weaponry that could be sold is not typically used in crowd control or riot control, and that the TOW and Humvee sale discussed, as well as any sales of equipment that

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<sup>33</sup> James Lobe. "Bahrain: U.S. Congress Urged to Reject Arms Sales." IPS News Service, September 29, 2011.

<sup>34</sup> Department of State. Taken Question: Bahrain's Security Assistance. January 27, 2012.

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/05/189810.htm>.



could be used against protesters (tear gas and rifles, for example), would remain on hold. The Administration did not release a complete list of weapons categories that might be sold, but it gave a few examples as follows:

- The Perry-class frigate, as EDA, discussed above;
- 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.<sup>36</sup>

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 said they might seek legislation to block the proposed sales.<sup>37</sup>

## **Anti-Terrorism Cooperation**

The United States does provide some assistance to internal security forces under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Interior, primarily to help Bahrain cooperate with the United States against terrorist groups moving throughout the region. The U.S. aid to the Interior Ministry-controlled forces has become controversial because of the role of these forces in suppressing the unrest. Until 1998, Bahrain's internal security services were run by a former British colonial police officer, Ian Henderson, who had a reputation among Shiites for using repressive measures. The current director of the internal security service is Shaykh Khalifa bin Abdullah Al Khalifa, considered a hardliner in the royal family. According to the FY2012 budget justification, the Administration was "reviewing" the use of NADR-ATA support to Bahrain to ensure that none was used "against protestors" in the 2011 unrest. The FY2013 budget justification said that NADR-ATA support will continue to go to the Ministry of Interior "on a limited basis," and in part to prod the ministry on security sector reform and implementation of the BICI recommendations. The State Department's report on international terrorism for 2011 (released July 31, 2012) notes some of the government responses to the BICI report, particularly ending the National Security Agency's arrest and detention authorities. The agency has largely transferred those authorities to the Ministry of Interior.

As far as terrorists operating inside Bahrain itself, the State Department terrorism report for 2011 credited Bahrain with strongly cooperating with U.S. counterterrorism efforts, especially the investigations of several suspected domestic terrorist incidents. Bahrain continues to host 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. As noted by the State Department in the FY2013 budget justification, some of the U.S. assistance to Bahrain (NADR Ant-Terrorism Assistance funds) is used to provide training to its counterterrorism institutions and to augment the ability of Bahraini forces to protect U.S. diplomatic and military facilities in Bahrain. In the past, these funds have been used to help train Bahrain's police contingent in

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<sup>36</sup> Nicole Gaouette. "U.S. Resumes Bahrain Arms Sales Citing Security Interests." Bloomberg News, May 11, 2012.

<sup>37</sup> Sara Sorcher. "Arms Sales to Bahrain Anger Senators." National Journal Daily, May 14, 2012.

Afghanistan to perform its missions there, which include helping guard the key Camp Leatherneck base in Helmand Province.

## **Relations with and Cooperation Against Iran**

Bahrain focuses its foreign policy intently on Iran, which the government believes is supporting Shiite groups against Bahrain's Sunni-dominated government. The issue of alleged Iranian involvement in the unrest has been part of the debate in Bahrain and the United States about the Bahrain situation. Ambassador Krajcski testified on September 21, 2011, that the United States "saw no evidence of Iranian instigation" of the unrest, but that the United States is concerned "about Iranian exploitation" of it. U.S. officials reportedly believe that Iran has urged hardline Bahraini Shiite factions not to compromise.<sup>38</sup> On April 14, 2011, U.S. officials, speaking on background, told journalists that there was some information to indicate that Iran might have transferred small amounts of weapons to Bahraini oppositionists.<sup>39</sup>

Bahraini leaders assert that Iran's role has been more extensive than that cited by the BICI report. 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 assistance, and on April 17, 2011, the Bahraini government sent a letter to U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon formally alleging that the pro-Iranian Shiite faction Hezbollah is seeking to destabilize Bahrain with "logistical help" from unnamed countries (but clearly referring to Iran). The two countries withdrew their ambassadors in mid-March 2011, although Bahrain returned its ambassador to Tehran in August 2012. However, the government assertions were undercut by the BICI report, which largely absolved Iran of direct involvement in the unrest, although the report blamed Iran's media for incitement of the situation in Bahrain. As noted above, in February 2013 the government claimed Iran's Revolutionary Guard is setting up militant cells in Bahrain.

Well before the 2011 unrest, Bahrain's fears about Iran had been infused by lingering suspicions, sometimes fed by Iranian actions, that Iran never accepted the results of the 1970 U.N. survey giving Bahrain independence rather than integration with Iran. Those findings were endorsed by U.N. Security Council Resolution 278, which was ratified by Iran's parliament. After these official determinations, Bahrain had considered the issue closed, after over a century of Persian contestation of Bahraini sovereignty. Those contests included an effort by Reza Shah Pahlavi of Iran in the 1930s to deny Bahrain the right to grant oil concessions to the United States and Britain. In December 1981, and then again in June 1996—a time when Iran was actively seeking to export its Islamic revolution—Bahrain publicly accused Iran of trying to organize a coup by pro-Iranian Bahraini Shiites (the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain, IFLB). The group's successor is the Bahrain Islamic Action Society, which is outlawed.

In recent years, Bahrain's leadership—and other countries in the region—have reacted strongly against statements by Iranian editorialists and advisers to Iranian leaders appearing to reassert Iran's claim. One such example was a July 2007 Iranian newspaper article reasserting the Iranian claim to Bahrain. However, that article, along with the Bahraini crown prince's November 3, 2007, comment that Iran is developing a nuclear weapon (Iran claims it is developing only

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<sup>38</sup> <http://www.stripes.com/gates-protracted-bahrain-negotiations-allowing-greater-iran-influence-1.137532>.

<sup>39</sup> Adam Entous and Matthew Rosenberg. "U.S. Says Iran Helps Crackdown in Syria." *Wall Street Journal*, April 14, 2011.

civilian nuclear power), did not mar the visit of Iranian President Ahmadinejad on November 17, 2007. In March 2009 by former Iranian parliament speaker Ali Akbar Nateq Nuri, now an advisor to Iran's Supreme Leader, again referring to Bahrain as Iran's 14<sup>th</sup> province. Iran's Foreign Ministry immediately tried to limit any diplomatic damage by asserting respect for Bahrain's sovereignty and independence, but some Arab governments sharply criticized the Nateq Nuri comments. Morocco broke relations with Iran as a response.

In connection with its own concerns about Iran, Bahrain has supported the U.S. position that Iran is not fully cooperating with U.N. Security Council requirements to suspend enrichment of uranium. In the joint news conference with Secretary Clinton on December 3, 2010, referenced earlier, the foreign minister restated Bahrain's support for Iran's right to nuclear power for peaceful uses, but that "when it comes to taking that [nuclear] power, to developing it into a cycle for weapon grade, that is something that we can never accept, and we can never live with in this region."<sup>40</sup>

At the same time, so as not to provide Iran a pretext to pressure Bahrain, Bahrain's leaders have sometimes tried to silence voices in Bahrain that publicly attack Iran. An example is the one-day suspension in 2009 of the newspaper *Akhbar al Khaleej* (*Gulf News*) for running an editorial by a Bahrain Shura Council member who criticized Iranian leaders. Prior to the uprising, Bahrain regularly supported the invitation of high-ranking Iranian officials to the annual "Manama Dialogue" strategy conference, discussed above. At times, there have been expectations that U.S. officials might meet with Iranian officials at the margins of the conference, although such meetings have not taken place in practice.

### **Bahrain-Iran Economic Ties and Bahraini Enforcement of Iran Sanctions**

Despite its political difficulties with Iran, Bahrain maintains normal trade with Iran, probably to avoid antagonizing Iran into undertaking more assertive action on behalf of Bahrain's opposition. There are no indications that Iran-Bahrain general commerce has been affected by the unrest in Bahrain. On the other hand, in mid-September 2012, Bahrain confiscated carbon fiber bound for Iran, an item that could contribute to Iran's nuclear program.

Energy market observers say that some Bahrain energy firms may still be supplying gasoline to Iran. No U.N. Security Council Resolution bars such sales, but a U.S. law signed on July 1, 2010—the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2010 (CISADA, P.L. 111-195)—provides for sanctions against foreign firms that sell more than \$1 million worth of gasoline to Iran.<sup>41</sup> No sanctions have been imposed on any Bahraini gas traders under CISADA.

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

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<sup>40</sup> Department of State. Transcript of Remarks by Secretary Clinton and Foreign Minister Al Khalifa. December 3, 2010.

<sup>41</sup> For a list of possible sanctions that could be imposed, see CRS Report RS20871, *Iran Sanctions*, by Kenneth Katzman.

transactions with Future Bank and require the freezing of any U.S.-based bank assets. The bank remains in operation.

And, the unrest has clouded the prospects for further energy cooperation between the two countries. A 2007 Ahmadinejad visit to Bahrain resulted in a preliminary agreement for Bahrain to buy 1.2 billion cubic feet per day (for 25 years) of Iranian gas via an undersea pipeline to be built. The deal would have involved a \$4 billion investment by Bahrain to develop Phases 15 and 16 of Iran's South Pars gas field, which presumably would be the source of the gas that Bahrain would import. The March 2009 comments of Nateq Nuri, discussed above, led to the suspension of this deal. On October 21, 2009, Bahrain's Minister of Oil and Gas Abd al-Husayn Mirza said talks on the deal would "resume soon." There has been no movement on the arrangement since, but Bahraini officials said in June 2011 that it had not been cancelled outright.

## **Other Foreign Policy Issues**

Bahrain has close relations with the other GCC states, in particular Saudi Arabia, as evidenced by its turn to Saudi Arabia to help it deal with the 2011 unrest. Virtually all the GCC states have political structures similar to that of Bahrain, and several have substantial Shiite minorities (although not majorities, as Bahrain does). Saudi Arabia's Shiites (about 10% of the population) are located mostly in the eastern provinces, across a causeway constructed in 1986 that connects the two countries. This linkage partly explains Saudi concerns about the unrest shaking the royal family in Bahrain.

The Saudi commitment to Bahrain's government largely explains its push, at the December 2011 GCC summit and then a separate May 14, 2012, GCC leadership meeting, to turn the GCC into a political union ("Riyadh Declaration"). Doing so would further commit all the GCC states to ensuring that Shiites do not come to power in Bahrain. The Saudi and Bahraini leaderships went into the May 14, 2012, meeting proposing a Bahrain-Saudi union that would be expanded to all six GCC states. However, opposition from Kuwait, Oman, and UAE caused the Saudis and Bahrainis to shelve the concept of any union, even between Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, at least temporarily.

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

On other regional issues, unlike Qatar and UAE, Bahrain did not play a significant role in assisting the Libyan opposition to the rule of Colonel Muammar Al Qadhafi. Had Bahrain intervened in Libya, doing so could have been viewed as a contradiction—supporting a revolutionary movement in another Arab state while arguing that its domestic opposition's grievances lacked legitimacy. As part of the GCC, Bahrain also joined the GCC efforts, which yielded success in November 2011, to persuade Yemen's President Ali Abdullah Saleh to cede power to a transition process. He left Yemen in January 2012.

As to Syria, the GCC sees Syria as Iran's main Middle Eastern ally and seeks the ouster of President Bashar Al Assad. In August 2011, Bahrain joined the other GCC countries in withdrawing their ambassadors to Syria. In November 2011, the GCC voted with other Arab

League states to suspend Syria's membership in the body. In April 2012, the GCC states also proposed giving the Syrian opposition \$100 million in funding that it can use to buy weaponry, although most of that funding reportedly is being provided by the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. Some of the GCC states, but not Bahrain, are said to be providing weapons as well.

### **Qatar Territorial Disputes<sup>42</sup>**

The United States cooperates closely with both Qatar and Bahrain, which is why the Bahrain-Qatar territorial dispute was closely watched by U.S. policymakers. The resolution of the dispute has partly removed these tensions as an issue for U.S. Gulf policy. Qatar, like Bahrain, is a GCC monarchy; however, their relations have been sometimes acrimonious because of territorial disputes with roots in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when the ruling families of both countries controlled parts of the Arabian peninsula. Qatar-Bahrain relations have improved since an International Court of Justice ruled on March 16, 2001, on the disputes. The ICJ ruled in favor of Qatar on some of the issues, and in favor of Bahrain on others, but the central dispute—over the Hawar Islands—was decided in favor of Bahrain. Qatar expressed disappointment over the ruling but said it accepted it as binding, and the two have since muted mutual criticism and cooperated on major regional issues. The territorial disputes were referred to the ICJ by Qatar 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. Saudi mediation in the 1986-1991 period proved fruitless. That reef was awarded to Qatar in the ICJ ruling. However, the ICJ ruled against Bahrain's claim to 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 awarded to Qatar.

### **Arab-Israeli Issues**

On the Arab-Israeli dispute, Bahrain has not been as significant a mediator or broker as have its larger neighbors in the Gulf or broader Middle East. Bahrain has not taken a leading role in recent efforts to reconcile Hamas and Fatah to rebuild Palestinian unity, for example. On the other hand, Bahrain is not inactive on the issue: on July 16, 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.<sup>43</sup> Following on that idea, on October 1, 2009, the foreign minister called for direct talks with Israel. In the previously cited December 3, 2010, joint press conference with the foreign minister, Secretary of State Clinton expressed appreciation for Bahrain's support of Palestinian Authority leaders who are trying to build viable institutions and rule of law in the Palestinian territories. However, like most Arab states, Bahrain is supporting the efforts of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas to obtain U.N. recognition for a State of Palestine, despite U.S. opposition to doing so prior to a Palestinian-Israeli peace settlement.

Earlier, Bahrain participated in the 1990-1996 multilateral Arab-Israeli talks, and it hosted a session on the environment (October 1994). Bahrain did not follow Oman and Qatar in exchanging trade offices with Israel. In September 1994, all GCC states ceased enforcing secondary and tertiary boycotts of Israel while retaining the ban on direct trade (primary boycott).

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<sup>42</sup> See The Estimate. Dossier: The Bahrain-Qatar Border Dispute: The World Court Decision, Part 1 and Part 2. March 23, 2001, and April 6, 2001.

<sup>43</sup> "Arabs Need to Talk to the Israelis." *The Washington Post*. July 16, 2009.

In conjunction with the U.S.-Bahrain FTA, Bahrain dropped the primary boycott and closed boycott-related offices in Bahrain.

Still, the Arab-Israeli dispute always has the potential to become a political issue within Bahrain. Islamist hard-liners in Bahrain have accused the government of trying to “normalize” relations with Israel, citing the government’s sending a delegate to the November 27, 2007, summit on Middle East peace in Annapolis, the foreign minister’s meeting with Israeli officials at U.N. meetings in September 2007, and its October 2009 proposal of a “regional organization” that would group Iran, Turkey, Israel, and the Arab states. That proposal has not been implemented to date. In late October 2009, the elected 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 (concurrence by the upper house, and acceptance by the king), apparently was a reaction to a visit by Bahraini officials to Israel in July 2009. The visit was 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.

## **Economic Issues**

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

Bahrain has little cushion to deal with economic downturns. It has the lowest oil and gas reserves of the Gulf monarchy states, estimated respectively at 210 million barrels of oil and 5.3 trillion cubic feet of gas. Some economic statistics are presented in **Table 3**. Without the ample oil or gas resources of its neighbors, Bahrain has diversified its economy by emphasizing banking and financial services (about 25.5% of GDP). At current rates of production (35,000 barrels per day of crude oil), Bahrain’s onshore oil reserves will be exhausted in 15 years, but Saudi Arabia shares equally with Bahrain the 300,000 barrels per day produced from the offshore Abu Safa field. 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 2011, the United States exported \$1.21 billion worth of goods to Bahrain, about the same amount as in 2010. The United States imported \$518 million in goods from that country, substantially more than the \$420 million imported in 2010. In 2005, total bilateral trade was about \$780 million, suggesting that trade has expanded significantly following the FTA.

**Table 3. Some Basic Facts About Bahrain**

Population	About 1.25 million, of which about 1 million are citizens
Religions	81% Muslim, 9% Christian, 10% other
GDP (purchasing power parity)	\$30.8 billion (2011)
Budget	\$7.93 billion revenues, \$8.3 billion expenditures (2011)
Inflation Rate	0.3% (2011)
Unemployment Rate	15%
GDP Real Growth Rate	1.5% in 2011, less than half the 4.1% of 2010
Size of Bahrain Defense Forces (BDF)	About 13,000, plus about 1,200 National Guard. Some personnel are expatriates, including other Arab and Pakistani.

Source: CIA, *The World Factbook*.

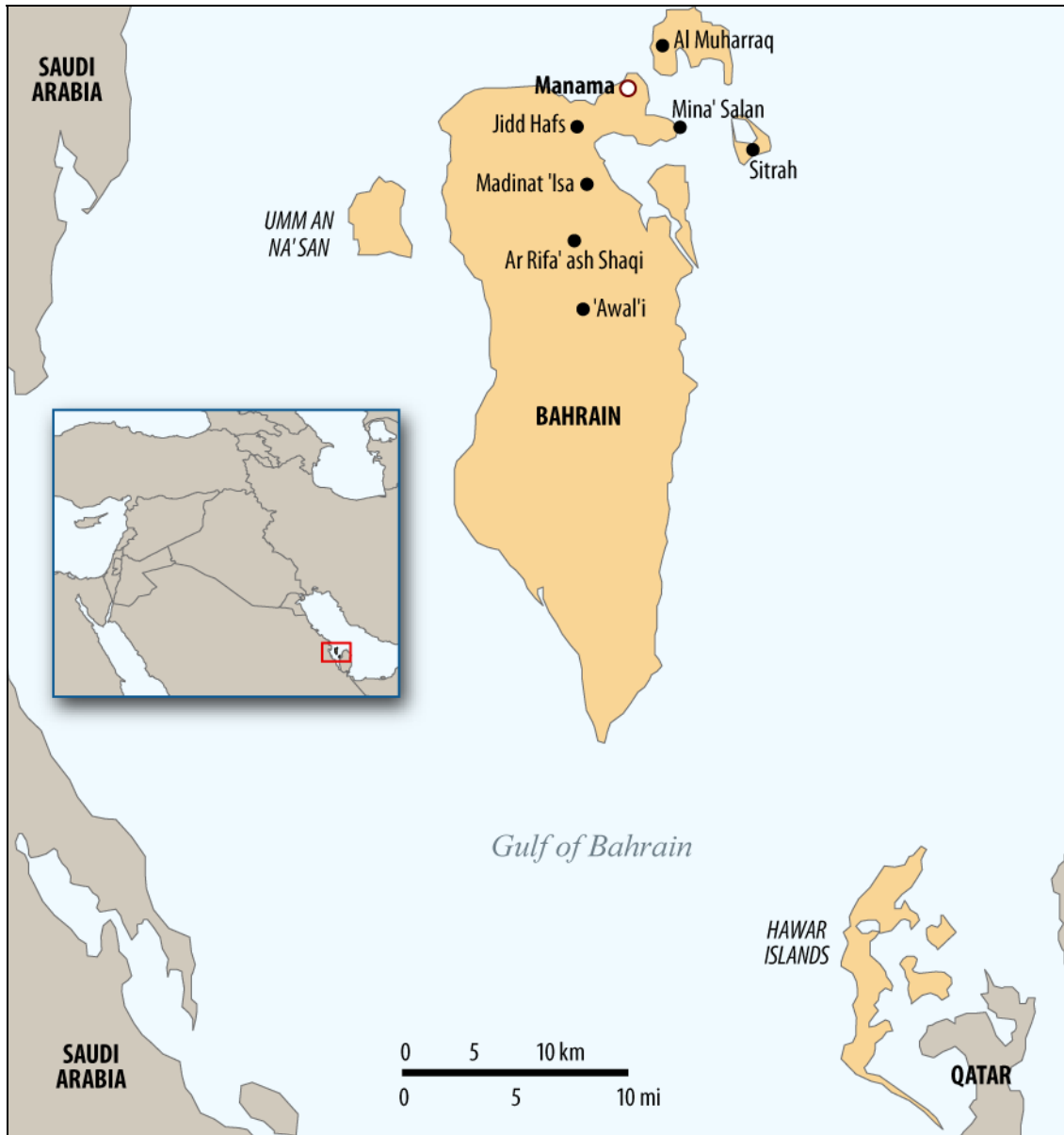
**Table 4. U.S. Assistance to Bahrain**

(\$ in millions)

	FY03	FY04	FY05	FY06	FY07	FY08	FY09	FY10	FY11	FY12	FY13 (request)
<b>FMF</b>	90.0	24.6	18.847	15.593	14.998	3.968	8.0	19.0	15.46	10.0	10.0
<b>IMET</b>	0.448	0.600	0.649	0.651	0.616	0.622	.661	.670	.435	.700	.725
<b>NADR</b>			1.489	2.761	.776	0.744	.500	1.10	1.5	.500	.45
<b>“Section 1206”</b>				5.3	24.54	4.3	16.2				

**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 counter terrorism assessment capabilities. (Named for a section of the FY2006 Defense Authorization Act, P.L. 109-163.) FY2008 funds derived from FY2008 supplemental (P.L. 110-252), and the Consolidated Appropriation (P.L. 110-329). FY2009 funds included funding from FY2008 supplemental (P.L. 110-252) as well as regular appropriation (P.L. 111-8). FY2010 funds are from Consolidated Appropriation (P.L. 111-117). FY2011 funds are appropriated by P.L. 112-10, Continuing Appropriations for FY2011.

Figure I. Bahrain



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

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