



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

Kenneth Katzman

Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs

November 6, 2012

Congressional Research Service

7-5700

www.crs.gov

95-1013

CRS Report for Congress

Prepared for Members and Committees of Congress

Report Documentation Page

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.

| | | | | | |
|---|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|---|---------------------------------|
| 1. REPORT DATE 06 NOV 2012 | | 2. REPORT TYPE | | 3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2012 to 00-00-2012 | |
| 4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Bahrain: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy | | | | 5a. CONTRACT NUMBER | |
| | | | | 5b. GRANT NUMBER | |
| | | | | 5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER | |
| 6. AUTHOR(S) | | | | 5d. PROJECT NUMBER | |
| | | | | 5e. TASK NUMBER | |
| | | | | 5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER | |
| 7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) The Library of Congress ,Congressional Research Service,101 Independence Ave, SE,Washington,DC,20540 | | | | 8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER | |
| 9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) | | | | 10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S) | |
| | | | | 11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S) | |
| 12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited | | | | | |
| 13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES | | | | | |
| 14. ABSTRACT | | | | | |
| 15. SUBJECT TERMS | | | | | |
| 16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF: | | | 17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT | 18. NUMBER OF PAGES | 19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON |
| a. REPORT unclassified | b. ABSTRACT unclassified | c. THIS PAGE unclassified | | | |

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, began a political crisis that has defied resolution. The crisis since 2011 has been more intense than previous periods of unrest in Bahrain, and demonstrates that the grievances of the Shiite majority over the distribution of power and economic opportunities have not satisfied by reform efforts instituted since 1999. The bulk of the Shiite majority in Bahrain says it demands a constitutional monarchy in which an elected parliament produces the government, but many in the Sunni minority government of the Al Khalifa family believe the Shiites want outright rule.

In March 2011, Bahrain's government rejected U.S. advice by inviting direct security assistance from other Gulf Cooperation Council countries, declaring a state of emergency, forcefully suppressing demonstrations, and arresting dissident leaders and pro-opposition health care workers. Although the state of emergency ended on June 1, 2011, a "national dialogue" held in July 2011 reached consensus on only 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 as well as the opposition's dismissal of all of the government's reform proposals. The government asserts it has implemented most of the BICI recommendations—an assertion corroborated by a national commission appointed to oversee implementation and a "follow-up committee." However, the upholding of prison sentences for prominent dissidents and government refusal to agree to more substantial political reforms, have stoked continued frequent demonstrations. Adding to the deadlock is that neighboring Saudi Arabia, which has significant political and economic influence over the Bahraini government, is backing hardline Al Khalifa officials that oppose compromise. Some fear that the unrest could evolve into violent insurgency, a concern increased by the discovery of bombs and other weaponry in 2012. Five bombs went off in Bahrain on November 5, 2012, killing two non-Bahrainis.

The Obama Administration has not called for an end to the Al Khalifa regime's past reforms, but it has criticized the regime's human rights abuses, urged the regime to undertake further political reform, and advanced ideas to narrow government-opposition differences. The U.S. position on has been criticized by those who believe the United States is downplaying regime abuses because of U.S. dependence on the security relationship with the Al Khalifa regime to containing Iranian power. Bahrain has provided key support for U.S. interests by hosting U.S. naval headquarters for the Gulf for over 60 years. Beyond that facility, 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 uprisings in Libya, Syria, and Yemen.

Fueling Shiite unrest is the fact that Bahrain is poorer than most of the other Persian Gulf monarchies. In September 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.

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| The Political Structure, Reform, and Human Rights | 1 |
| Some Separation of Powers Established | 2 |
| Post-Charter Elections and Political Groups | 3 |
| 2002 Elections | 4 |
| 2006 Elections: Allegations of Gerrymandering and “Importing Sunnis” | 4 |
| The 2010 National Assembly and Municipal Election: Prelude to the Uprising | 5 |
| 2011 Uprising: Origin, Developments, and Prognosis | 7 |
| Government Tactics Change, As Do Protester Demands | 8 |
| The Saudi-led Intervention and Crackdown | 8 |
| Post-GCC Intervention Situation/End of State of Emergency | 9 |
| Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) Formed, National Dialogue Held | 10 |
| BICI Report on Handling of the Unrest: Reaction and Implementation | 12 |
| Continuing Ideas and Efforts for Political Compromise | 16 |
| U.S. Posture on the Uprising | 17 |
| Other Human Rights Issues | 20 |
| Women’s Rights | 20 |
| Religious Freedom | 21 |
| Labor Rights | 21 |
| Human Trafficking | 22 |
| Executions and Torture | 22 |
| U.S.-Bahrain Security and Foreign Policy Relations | 22 |
| U.S. Navy Headquarters in Bahrain | 23 |
| Bilateral Defense Pact | 24 |
| Cooperation With U.S. Operations in Iraq and Afghanistan | 24 |
| Post-September 11 and Post-Saddam Cooperation | 25 |
| U.S. Arms Transfers and Military Aid | 25 |
| Purchases With National Funds | 27 |
| September 2011 Humvee and TOW Sale | 27 |
| Anti-Terrorism Cooperation | 29 |
| Relations with and Cooperation Against Iran | 29 |
| Bahrain-Iran Economic Ties and Bahraini Enforcement of Iran Sanctions | 31 |
| Other Foreign Policy Issues | 31 |
| Qatar Territorial Disputes | 32 |
| Arab-Israeli Issues | 33 |
| Economic Issues | 34 |

Figures

| | |
|-------------------------|----|
| Figure 1. Bahrain | 36 |
|-------------------------|----|

Tables

| | |
|---|---|
| Table 1. Comparative Composition of National Assembly | 7 |
|---|---|

Table 2. Some Basic Facts About Bahrain..... 34
Table 3. U.S. Assistance to Bahrain..... 35

Contacts

Author Contact Information..... 36

The Political Structure, Reform, and Human Rights¹

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.

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. 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%-70% of the approximately 1.25 million person citizenry.² There are, additionally, an estimated 235,000 expatriates in Bahrain, according to the Central Intelligence Agency's *World Factbook* July 2012 estimate. 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. Along with other family hard-liners including Minister of the Royal Court Khalid bin Ahmad Al Khalifa,³ his brother the Commander of the BDF Khalifa bin Ahmad Al Khalifa,⁴ and Interior Minister Rashid bin Abdullah Al Khalifa, the prime minister has long been skeptical of political accommodation with the Shiites. The royal court minister's protégé, Ateyatallah Al Khalifa, is considered an emerging and increasingly influential hardliner.

Some see the Prime Minister as less fixed in his position than other hardliners in that he would be willing to accept a political settlement with the Shiite opposition. 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. The more reform-minded allies of the Crown Prince within the ruling family—which include Deputy Prime Minister Muhammad bin Mubarak Al Khalifa (possible successor to the current prime

¹ 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.

² Government officials dispute that the Shiite community is as large a majority as the 70% figure used in most factbooks and academic work on Bahrain. The Shiite community in Bahrain consists of the more numerous "Baharna," who are of Arab ethnicity and descended from Arab tribes who inhabited the area from pre-Islamic times. Shiites of Persian ethnicity 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.

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

⁴ Together, Khalid and Khalifa are known as the "khawalids"—they hail from a branch of the Al Khalifa family that is traced to an ancestor Khalid bin Ali Al Khalifa.

minister)—assert that the level of unrest reached in 2011 would have occurred long ago had the king’s reforms not been enacted.

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 even before the unrest began, although well short of the hopes and expectations the Shiite majority had when he took office, are far more extensive than those made by his father Amir Isa during his rule. 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 new constitution because it established that the elected Council of Representatives (COR)⁵ and the all-appointed *Shura* (Consultative) Council were to be 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 (discussed later), 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, although 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).
- The COR can, by a two-thirds majority, vote no-confidence against sitting ministers, leading to their removal. The COR can also, by a similar super-majority, declare that it cannot “cooperate” with the prime minister, but the king

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

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.⁶ 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.

The National Assembly has tended to address primarily economic and social issues, and not national security issues. For example, in May 2010, it voted to ban sale of alcohol to Muslims, although subject to implementing regulations made by the king. Other legislation considered in the National Assembly in recent years 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. However, many of these bills stalled in the 2006-2010 parliament due to lack of consensus and broader Sunni-Shiite tensions, and have remained mostly stalled by the political crisis that has engulfed Bahrain since 2011.

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:

- The most prominent Shiite political society is *Wifaq* (formally, the Al *Wifaq* National Islamic Society, also known as the Islamic National Accord Association). It is a large faction, operationally led by Shaykh Ali al-Salman, who is about 38 years old, that 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 opposition. Qasim is considered resistant to many proposals to settle the crisis.

⁶ Before the May 2012 constitutional amendments, only the COR could draft legislation.

- Another Shiite faction, *Al Haq* (Movement of Freedom and Democracy), is outlawed because of its calls for a change of regime rather than reform. It is viewed as far harder line than *Wifaq* but also much smaller in membership, by most accounts. *Al Haq*'s leaders are perceived as having closer ties to Iran and to Islamist movements in the Middle East than do those of *Wifaq*. Its key leaders are Dr. Abduljalil Alsingace, who is wheelchair-bound, and Mr. Hassan Mushaima.
- A small Shiite faction, the Bahrain Islamic Action Society, is outlawed because 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.
- Among exclusively Sunni political societies, there are two that 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 not all aligned with opposition factions, and several were 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, accusing some of being part of a foreign-inspired plot to destabilize Bahrain. 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 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 still unfulfilled demand of Bahrain’s Shiites for greater political power and an end to economic discrimination, carried over to the 2010 election. The election was held on October 23, 2010, with a second round runoff for some districts on October 30. There were only a limited number of international observers, primarily from various international human rights organizations. Two Bahraini human rights watchdog groups, the Bahrain Human Rights Society and the Bahrain Transparency Society, reached agreement to jointly monitor the 2010 elections. 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 7 were women. However, one woman withdrew after registering, leaving a field of six female candidates. Of the six, only one was formally endorsed by a political society. Munira Fakhro, a prominent Shiite woman who was exiled prior to the political reform process begun by King Hamad, was endorsed by *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.

Some observers asserted that the government crackdown would drive Bahraini Shiites to politically support boycotting harder-line movements, such as *Al Haq*, and in so doing suppress the election turnout among Shiites. The crackdown did not prompt *Wifaq* to reverse its decision to compete. The crackdown might have helped the government's election strategy but it also led 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 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, among some protesters, replacing hard-line Prime Minister Khalifa. These moves would, to the mostly Shiite demonstrators, end the sense that they are "second class citizens" or "not trusted" as Bahraini citizens. On February 15, 2011, King Hamad spoke to the nation and 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 Demands⁷

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 re-entered 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 even larger. The February 22, 2011 demonstration followed by one day a large counter-demonstration by mostly Sunni supporters of the government.

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.⁸ The articulation of the seven principles gave *Wifaq* and other moderate oppositionists hope that many of their demands could 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 demand resignation of the monarchy.⁹ The regime's offer of dialogue was not taken up consistently or systematically by *Wifaq* and other moderate groups, and only informal meetings took place in search of a political solution.¹⁰

The Saudi-led Intervention and Crackdown

With no systematic dialogue begun, protests escalated and began to spark Sunni-Shiite clashes, which some Bahrainis believed were evolving into outright 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.

⁷ 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>

⁸ BICI report, op. cit., p. 165.

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

¹⁰ BICI report, p. 165-66.

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 to the request, 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, 2011.¹¹ In conjunction, seven hardline Shiite leaders were re-arrested, 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 in government or resigned outright. The Saudi intervention did not, as some feared, prompt a wider conflict by prompting Iranian intervention on the side of the Shiite 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.

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 were much higher. In early April 2011, the government closed the pro-opposition newspaper *Al Wasat*. The paper's editor-in-chief, Mansour al-Jamri, went on trial on May 18, 2011, for inciting violence and a number of well-known human rights and political activists were arrested. 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 could potentially be disbanded.

Perceiving the regime had gained the upper hand, the king announced in early 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

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

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, National Dialogue Held

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, but came under criticism from Shiite opposition figures who interpreted certain Bassiouni statements as a bias in favor of exonerating top government officials.

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 five belonged to *Wifaq*.¹² *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.

The dialogue concluded in late July 2011 after reaching consensus on a few recommendations, which were endorsed by the government on July 29, 2011. The core of the recommendations, which the government claimed adopted many of the “seven principles” articulated by the crown prince in March 2011, were:

- 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.

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

- 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. He and other officials conducted rounds of meetings with both houses of the National Assembly and with government ministries to begin implementation. The government began drafting amendments to the Bahraini constitution to implement the consensus recommendations. The proposed amendments 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, also discussed above in the context of the National Assembly's powers and operations, included the following provisions to implement the recommendations of the National Dialogue:

- Imposing 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.
- Giving the ability of either chamber of the National Assembly to draft legislation or constitutional amendments.
- Deciding that the overall chair of the National Assembly will be the speaker of the COR, not the appointed Shura Council.
- Giving 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 is an expansion of previous powers to vote no confidence against individual ministers.

The opposition immediately rejected the constitutional amendments as insufficient, because they do 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. That position was based on *Wifaq*'s decision that the national dialogue's reform recommendations were not sufficiently extensive. Several anti-government demonstrations took place in the run-up to the elections and on the days of the election, mostly in Shiite neighborhoods.

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 is that Sunnis now overwhelmingly dominate the COR, with 32 seats to only 8 Shiite seats. The special election resulted in the addition of three women COR deputies.

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 but, because of the large number of interviews required by the BICI, 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, including¹³

- 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.

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

- 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 recommendations (pp. 411-415) are generally confined to measures that would prevent future violence against peaceful protesters, and to investigate the abuses committed and compensate victims. In keeping with the BICI's mandate, the recommendations do 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.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ According to the government, the National Commission, and the Follow Up Unit, the government has, to date, implemented at least 18 of the 26 BICI recommendations, of which the most significant are:

- 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.
- Stripping the National Security Agency of law enforcement powers and limiting it to purely intelligence gathering.
- Creation by the minister of labor of a tripartite commission to address reinstating fired workers, and public sector employees dismissed for exercising their rights

¹⁴ The full text of the National Commission's March 20, 2012, report is at <http://www.biciactions.bh/wps/portal/BICI/>.

¹⁵ The Follow-Up Unit's June report can be found at: http://www.iaa.bh/downloads/bici_followup_report_en.pdf

- of speech have been reinstated. To date, 92% of the over 2,500 dismissed workers have been reinstated.
- Drafting 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.
 - Establishment of a compensation fund for the victims of torture. To date, a “Civil Settlement Office” has settled 17 cases awarding a total of \$2.6 million to claimants.
 - The rebuilding of 5 of the more than 50 Shiite religious sites demolished by the regime during the course of the uprising has begun, with work at another 17 sites planned or getting under way soon.
 - Permitting access to Bahraini prisons by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).
 - On September 17, 2012, the announced hiring of 500 police cadets “representing all communities in Bahrain”—an effort to address the recommendation that Shiites be better integrated into the security forces.

Still, some of the key recommendations have not been implemented to date. In particular, no senior official who might have ordered the use of excessive force has been prosecuted. On the other hand, 15 low-ranking officers have been charged with abuses during protests. And, in September 2012, seven police lieutenants were referred to criminal courts for alleged mistreatment and torture allegations against medical staff detained during the unrest.

Late 2011-Mid 2012 Unrest

Nor has the unrest abated, suggesting that some of the steps above have not fundamentally altered the government approach, and that the government’s efforts to portray Bahrain as having returned to “normal” can be questioned. On December 24, 2011, 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. It was held in part to derail the holding of the Formula One auto race in Bahrain, scheduled for April 22, 2012, which the government advertised 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. As noted at a hearing of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission on August 1, 2012, security forces continue to use tear gas against demonstrators and to conduct raids on homes of suspected dissidents and protesters.¹⁶ Security forces used tear gas against Molotov-cocktail throwing protesters on September 28, 2012. After demonstrations continued, resulting in two

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

teenagers and a police officer killed in September and October 2012, on October 30, 2012, the government imposed a ban on all public rallies and demonstrations in an effort to “calm things down,” in the words of government statements. Taking the same position as human rights groups, a State Dept. spokesman said the following day that the United States “is deeply concerned by the Bahraini government’s decision to ban all public gatherings...The decision to curb these rights is contrary to Bahrain’s professed commitment to reform, and it will not help advance the national reconciliation nor build trust among all parties.”

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. 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. |
| 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 9 other prominent dissidents were upheld on September 4, 2012. 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. Was injured by security forces during a protest in January 2012. Appeal adjourned until November 8, 2012. |
| 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. |
| 20 medical personnel from Salmaniya Medical Complex/other medics | On September 29, 2011, 20 medical personnel were sentenced by a military court to jail time ranging from 5 to 15 years, for inciting sectarian hatred, possession of illegal weapons, and forcibly occupying a public building. The personnel argued that they were helping wounded protesters. On October 5, 2011, the government announced they would be retried in a civilian court. On June 14, 2012, that court upheld the conviction of nine of them and sentenced them to between one month to five years in prison; the convictions of nine others were overturned. Of the nine sentenced, four were determined to have served their sentences during previous detentions. Sentences of the nine were upheld by the Court of Cassation on October 1, 2012, and the five who still have time to serve were taken into custody. State Department criticized the convictions and the upholding of the sentences as hindering reconciliation. Two of the 20 are in hiding or have left the country. On October 15, 2012, twenty-eight other medics had their verdicts postponed until January 2013. |
| 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. |
| 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.

Continuing Ideas and Efforts for Political Compromise

Although the Crown Prince's "seven principles," the national dialogue recommendations, the constitutional amendments, and the Manama Document all have many points in common, a political compromise has repeatedly failed to come to fruition. A widely discussed interim compromise has been the replacement of Prime Minister Khalifa, who is widely despised by the opposition, with a moderate opposition figure. Some oppositionists say they would even accept a Sunni, but not a member of the royal family, as a replacement for the current Prime Minister. The government has not agreed to this step even though, throughout the crisis, some Bahrain government supporters have said that the dismissal of Prime Minister Khalifa was likely.¹⁷ Another interim compromise, not adopted to date, could include a broad reshuffling of the cabinet to give Shiites many more ministerial posts and control of key economic ministries. *Wifaq* already holds the majority of seats on several elected municipal councils, although these bodies do not have national legislative authority. U.S. officials say there is likely to be some cabinet reshuffling later in 2012, but it is not clear how extensive it will be.

Others continue to put hope in dialogue using the various plans discussed above, including the Crown Prince's seven principles and the Manama Document. Some observers say that family hardliners including the royal court minister may have come to a tentative agreement on a compromise plan in March 2012, but it was apparently viewed by other hardliners as too conciliatory and was withdrawn. Compromise has been made more difficult by the apparent political eclipse of the Crown Prince. Still, on October 16, 2012, the king again stated that the "door for dialogue is open," suggesting that dialogue between the government and the opposition could restart at any time if both sides see potential for a breakthrough.

Some blame the current impasse on the opposition, saying the GCC intervention and continuing crackdown may have hardened Shiite demands to the point where an agreement is difficult. Harder line Shiite groups believe that no compromise is possible with the regime still in power, and that increased protests and actions intended to collapse the economy will force the government to fall. Complicating prospects for a deal is the observation that many Shiites are gravitating to harder line, anti-compromise factions. Still, deputy Prime Minister Mohammad Mubarak Al Khalifa (see above) held a meeting with *Wifaq* representatives on August 30, 2012, suggesting that ideas continue to be exchanged between the government and the moderate opposition.

The United States and some allies are continuing to push dialogue. U.S. officials have sought to begin some "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 is working with *Wifaq* on compromise ideas. The Bahrain government has 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.

¹⁷ Author conversations with representatives of and observers close to the regime. April 2011.

Alternative Scenarios if No Compromise is Found?

The overthrow of the government and the ascension of a Shiite-led regime is possible, although the GCC determination to prevent this makes this outcome less likely, at least in the short term. Still, some observers fear that, in the absence of an imminent solution, the uprising might evolve into an insurgency with use of violent attacks on security forces, government buildings, and other targets.

There have been some incidents suggesting a trend in a more violent direction. On April 9, 2012, an improvised 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. Some oppositionists say that these incidents of violence are a consequence of the government's refusal to make meaningful concessions, whereas pro-government Bahrainis say that violence shows intent of the opposition to overthrow the regime by any means necessary.

U.S. Posture on the Uprising

The Administration has not called for the Al Khalifa to 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 a long record of reform. The Administration asserts that it has been consistently critical of Bahrain's use of force against protesters and its continued imprisonment of dissidents. The Administration notes that Assistant Secretary of State (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor) Michael Posner has made five visits to Bahrain since early 2011 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 Democracy¹⁸—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. It is perhaps the critical perception of the U.S. stance that has caused some Bahraini Shiites to increasingly denounce U.S. policy and burn or defile the U.S. flag during demonstrations.¹⁹

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

¹⁸ Stephen McInerney. "Silence on Bahrain." *Washington Post* op-ed. November 5, 2012.

¹⁹ Kareem Fahim. "As Hopes for Reform Fade in Bahrain, Protesters Turn Anger on the United States." *New York Times*, June 24, 2012.

parties to take up the offer by the crown prince for a broad political dialogue on reform.²⁰ After the GCC intervention, on March 19, 2011, 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. At a May 5, 2011, House Foreign Affairs Committee hearing, State Department officials testified that the United States is "deeply concerned" by the "campaign of retribution" against the political opposition, adding that "security operations will not resolve the challenges Bahrain faces."

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. According to a White House statement, President Obama stressed to him that those Bahraini forces or officials responsible for human rights abuses should be held "accountable."

The criticism continued in the course of the U.N. General Assembly meetings in New York in September 2011; in his September 21, 2011, speech to the body, 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 Krajewski 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.

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 crisis began, giving support to the views of both the government and the opposition. 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.

²⁰ Secretary of State Clinton Comments on the Situation in the Middle East. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GbuCMZUg3Gc>.

During December 15, 2011, less than a month after the BICI report, Assistant Secretary of State Posner suggested that the Administration sees the government of Bahrain as attempting to implement the BICI recommendations, and “condemned” the use of violence by demonstrators “which the government has an obligation to stop.” Other State Department statements called the upholding of convictions of the medical personnel and high level dissidents, as well as the ban on protests in October 2012, discussed above, as obstacles to reconciliation.

During early 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, although U.S. officials say that objective was not achieved. The crown prince is reported to be planning another visit later in 2012, reflecting the degree to which the Administration is trying to promote him as key to a political solution.

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. Human rights groups also 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.

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.”²¹

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

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

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 opponents of the government. Bahrain allows freedom of worship for Christians, Jews, and Hindus although the constitution declares Islam the official religion.

There are several Bahraini human rights groups, mainly advocates for Shiite rights and causes. As noted above, two of the most prominent such groups are the Bahrain Human Rights Society and the Bahrain Transparency Society. Another is the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, founded by Abdul Hadi al-Khawaja, mentioned above.

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.

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 was added to the cabinet in 2012 as Minister of State for Media Affairs, Samira Rajab. 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 July-December 2010 State Department report on international religious freedom (released September 13, 2011), in the section on Bahrain, says that respect for religious freedom exhibited “no change” since the prior report. Most of the report focuses on Sunni-Shiite differences, which are discussed as political issues above. According to the report, non-Muslims have been able to practice their religion privately without government interference, and to maintain places of worship. 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 37 Jews in Bahrain, and no reports of anti-Semitic acts during the reporting period.

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 sentence 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.²² 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 Administration did not send a witness to testify at that hearing. 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.

U.S.-Bahrain Security and Foreign Policy Relations²³

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

²² Human Rights Watch. "Bahrain: Torture Redux." February 2010.

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

(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.

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 60th anniversary of a U.S. naval command presence in Bahrain; MIDEASTFOR (U.S. Middle East Force), its successor, NAVCENT (naval component of U.S. Central Command), as well as the Fifth Fleet (reconstituted in June 1995) are headquartered there, at a sprawling facility called “Naval Support Activity-Bahrain.” The facility now covers over 100 acres, and about 5,000 U.S. personnel, mostly Navy, are deployed in Bahrain.²⁴

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 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.

²⁴ http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/checkpoint-washington/post/after-iraq-pullout-us-serves-a-reminder-to-iran/2011/10/24/gIQAU7dGCM_blog.html.

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); and \$100 million was requested for FY2012 for two projects of nearly equal size. A Senate version of H.R. 2055 had cut the entire FY2012 request, possibly because of the unrest and the uncertainty created by it, and the cuts were contained in the final version that was enacted as 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 2011.²⁵ 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.²⁶

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

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

²⁶ Details of the U.S.-Bahrain defense agreement are classified. Some provisions are discussed in Sami Hajjar, *U.S. Military Presence in the Gulf: Challenges and Prospects* (U.S. Army War College: Strategic Studies Institute), March 2002, p. 27.

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.²⁷

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, 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 limited income, have supported

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

military assistance to Bahrain's small force. The unrest has caused the Administration to put on hold sales to Bahrain of any equipment that can be used against protesters, while continuing to provide equipment that can only help Bahrain defend itself from external threats or support U.S. operations in the region.

The main recipient of U.S. military assistance has always been the relatively small Bahrain Defense Force (BDF), which has less than 10,000 active duty personnel (including 1,200 National Guard). The BDF and the police are run by Sunni Bahrainis, but are said to supplement their ranks with unknown percentages of paid Sunni Muslim recruits from neighboring countries, including Pakistan, Yemen, Jordan, Iraq, and elsewhere. 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.

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.²⁸ Some funds have been used to build up Bahrain's Special Operations forces. The Defense Department estimates that, in part due to U.S. assistance, as of FY2008, about 45% 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 3** below, only \$10 million is likely to be provided for FY2012, due in large part to the Administration's intent to retain leverage against Bahrain to compel it 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 "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.²⁹ 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 3**, 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 or (57% of them), using FMF funds, in connection with the U.S. Foreign Military Sales program.

²⁸ "Bahrain Government's Ties With the United States Run Deep." Op. cit.

²⁹ <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/05/189810.htm>

Purchases With National Funds

Bahrain agreed to purchase \$91 million worth of U.S. arms through the Foreign Military Sales program in FY2010—a figure that far exceeds the funds it receives from FMF. Bahrain’s total government budget is about \$6 billion per year. 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.

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.) To allay congressional concerns about possible U.S. promotion of missile proliferation in the region, an August 2000 sale of 30 Army Tactical Missile Systems (ATACMs, a system of short-range ballistic missiles fired from a multiple rocket launcher) included an agreement for joint U.S.-Bahraini control of the weapon. (A notification of a possible sale to Bahrain of 30 ATACM missiles and associated equipment, valued at about \$70 million, was sent to Congress on November 4, 2010. Lockheed Martin is the prime contractor for the missiles.) A sale 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, was 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.

Some of these sales 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 was discussed extensively in two several State Department visits to the region—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, 2012,³⁰ on the missile defense issue. The issue was 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, is increasingly controversial because it 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.

³⁰ U.S. Department of State Daily Digest Bulletin, April 12, 2012.

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.³¹

Two joint resolutions were introduced in the 112th Congress to block the sale: S.J.Res. 28, introduced by Senator Ron Wyden, and H.J.Res. 80, introduced by Representative James McGovern. Both joint resolutions would prohibit 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 to be released November 23. 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.³²

May 11, 2012, Announcement of Possible Future Sales³³

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 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.³⁴

³¹ James Lobe. “Bahrain: U.S. Congress Urged to Reject Arms Sales.” IPS News Service, September 29, 2011.

³² Department of State. Taken Question: Bahrain’s Security Assistance. January 27, 2012.

³³ <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/05/189810.htm>.

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.³⁵

Anti-Terrorism Cooperation

Bahrain's cooperation in post-September 11 regional defense and security operations was discussed above. As far as terrorists operating inside Bahrain itself, the State Department's report on international terrorism for 2011 (released July 31, 2012) credits Bahrain with strongly cooperating with U.S. counterterrorism efforts, especially the investigations of several suspected domestic terrorist incidents. The State Department report 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.

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

Still, the Bahraini Ministry of Interior is the lead agency that receives NADR-ATA support and, according to the FY2012 budget justification, the Administration was "reviewing" the use of this aid 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.

Relations with and Cooperation Against Iran

As noted previously, Bahrain focuses its foreign policy intently on Iran, which the government believes is able to influence Bahrain's domestic politics to a greater degree than has any other regional power. Bahrain's government perceives Iran as willing and able to support Shiite groups against Bahrain's Sunni-dominated government.

The issue of alleged Iranian involvement in the 2011-2012 unrest has risen to the surface of the debate in Bahrain and the United States. Ambassador Krajeski 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.³⁶ On April 14, 2011, U.S. officials,

(...continued)

³⁴ Nicole Gaouette. "U.S. Resumes Bahrain Arms Sales Citing Security Interests." Bloomberg News, May 11, 2012.

³⁵ Sara Sorcher. "Arms Sales to Bahrain Anger Senators." National Journal Daily, May 14, 2012.

³⁶ <http://www.stripes.com/gates-protracted-bahrain-negotiations-allowing-greater-iran-influence-1.137532>.

speaking on background, told journalists that there was some information to indicate that Iran might have transferred small amounts of weapons to Bahraini oppositionists.³⁷

The BICI findings appeared to absolve Iran of direct involvement in the 2011 unrest, although the report blames Iran's media for incitement of the situation in Bahrain. Bahraini leaders have not directly contradicted the report's findings on these points but they clearly believe 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.

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 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 14th 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."³⁸

³⁷ Adam Entous and Matthew Rosenberg. "U.S. Says Iran Helps Crackdown in Syria." *Wall Street Journal*, April 14, 2011.

³⁸ Department of State. Transcript of Remarks by Secretary Clinton and Foreign Minister Al Khalifa. December 3, (continued...)

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. Bahrain regularly supports the invitation of high-ranking Iranian officials to the annual International Institute for Security Studies (IISS) conference in Bahrain called the "Manama Dialogue," held every December. 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 2011-12 unrest in Bahrain. Energy market observers say that Bahrain energy firms are still supplying gasoline to Iran, despite U.S. sanctions that might penalize such sales to Iran.³⁹ 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.⁴⁰ No sanctions have been imposed on any Bahraini gas traders under CISADA.

In March 2008, the U.S. Department of Justice sanctioned Future Bank, headquartered in Bahrain, because it is controlled and partially owned by Iran's Bank Melli. The sanctions, under Executive Order 13382 (anti-proliferation), prevent U.S. citizens from participating in transactions with Future Bank and require the freezing of any U.S.-based bank assets. The bank remains in operation. 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.

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

(...continued)

2010.

³⁹ CRS conversations with foreign diplomats, including some from the Gulf, July-September 2010.

⁴⁰ For a list of possible sanctions that could be imposed, see CRS Report RS20871, *Iran Sanctions*, by Kenneth Katzman.

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, 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 Disputes⁴¹

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 18th century, when the ruling families of both countries controlled parts of the Arabian peninsula. Qatar-Bahrain relations have improved since an International Court of

⁴¹ 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.

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.⁴² 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). 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

⁴² “Arabs Need to Talk to the Israelis.” *The Washington Post*. July 16, 2009.

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 2**. 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 2. 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*.

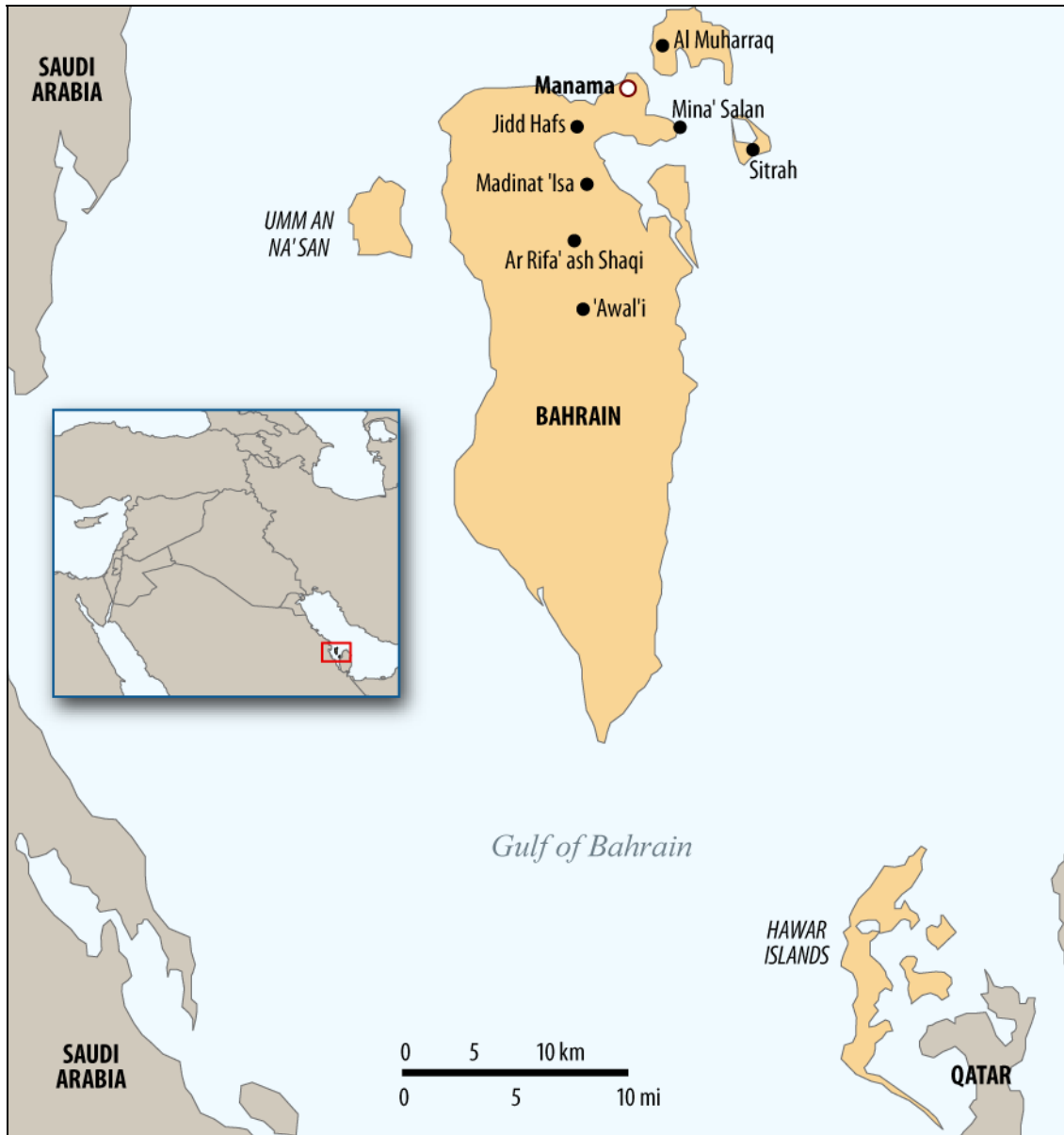
Table 3. U.S. Assistance to Bahrain

(\$ in millions)

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

Author Contact Information

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