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The Bahrain Defence Force: The Monarchy's Second-to- Last Line of Defense

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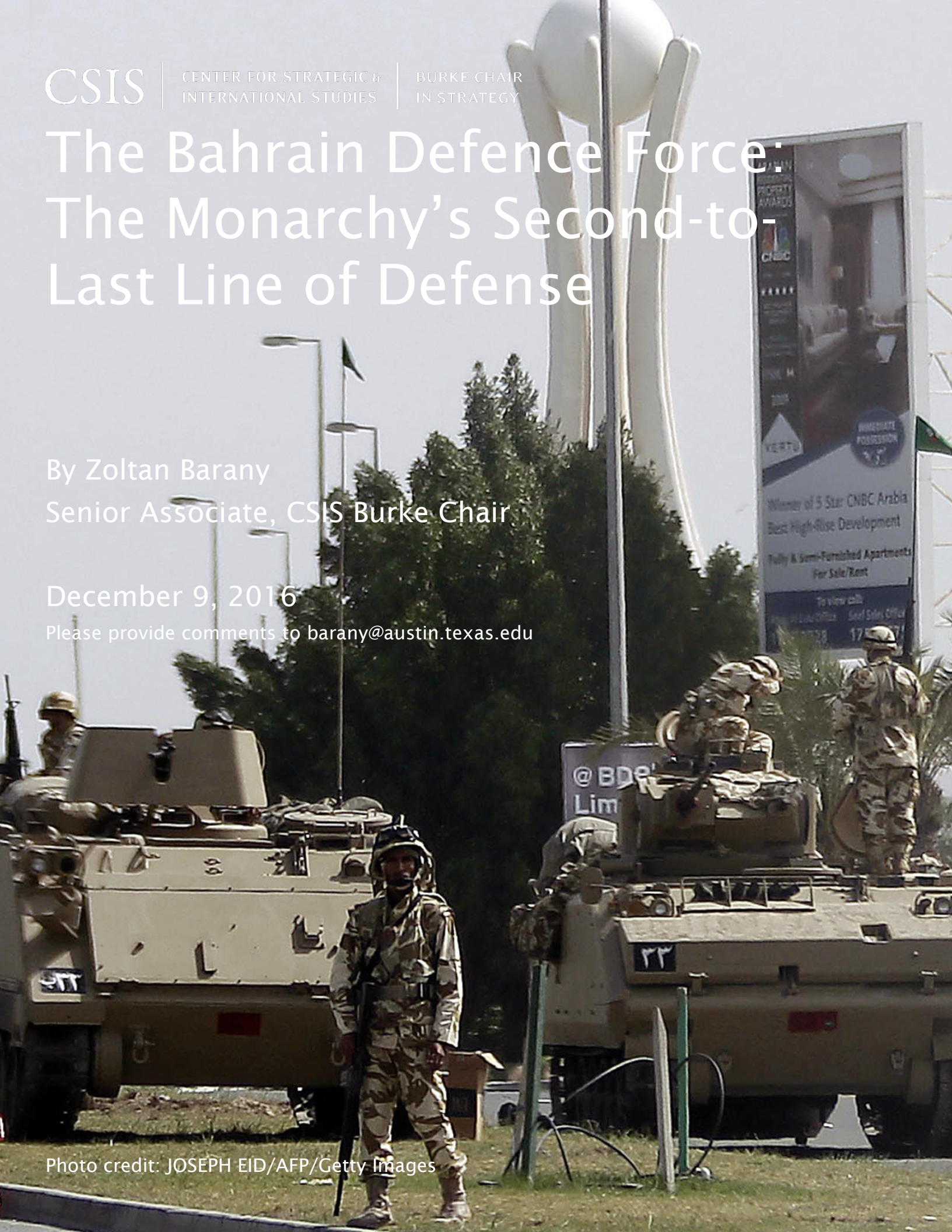


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Executive Summary

This report seeks to paint a comprehensive portrait of the Bahrain Defence Force (BDF), the monarchy's principal military organization. The bulk of the study examines the BDF's place in the monarchy, focusing on the role of the state and the royal family while also devoting attention to its mission, effectiveness, composition, and foreign relations. The BDF is a highly professional, well equipped, and, judging by the available evidence, effective army. Nevertheless, it is virtually closed to Shi'a Muslims, the majority of Bahrainis, who are considered potentially disloyal to the monarchy, and therefore are shut out from armed service. Two concise sections of the report analyze the BDF's role in the 2011 uprising—the only major upheaval among the eight Arab monarchies—and reform proposals and outcomes in its aftermath. Although the uprising was brutally suppressed, the BDF did not participate in the crackdown but rather secured strategic areas cleared by other law enforcement agencies. In the wake of the uprising, the regime did implement some of the recommendations of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, but it held to account few culpable individuals, and has failed to address the underlying problems that inspired the revolt.

The report makes three principal arguments. First, Bahrain's army is the army of the royal family and is not a *national* army. Second, the BDF's participation in the suppression of the 2011 uprising was minimal; that task was mainly executed by the National Guard and the police. Third, the Bahraini state, and by extension, its military, has been impacted more than any other army involved in the Arab Spring—and quite possibly more than any of its Arab counterparts—by its external environment, which should hardly be surprising given Bahrain's size, location, and geostrategic significance.

The BDF is also in the unique situation that while it is the army of an autonomous state, the monarchy it serves is highly dependent for its prosperity and security on its much larger, richer, and more powerful neighbor, Saudi Arabia.

Introduction

Bahrain's military is the servant of the absolute monarchy. It is not a *national* army, but rather the army of Sunni Muslim state and the regime. Aside from a few mostly token exceptions, the Bahrain Defence Force (BDF) is essentially closed to a large proportion of Bahrain's population, the Shi'a Muslims, who are generally expected to be less loyal or supportive of the kingdom than Sunnis, and therefore are considered unfit for armed military service. Put differently, the BDF is the fighting force of Sunni Muslims who are charged with protecting a Sunni ruling family and Sunni political and business elites. Moreover, a large proportion of the armed forces is comprised of foreign nationals. Compared with the armies of most Arab republics, the BDF—especially its officer corps—has attained a respectable level of professionalism: it is relatively well supplied, and it enjoys the esteem of Sunni Muslim citizens. Bahrain's army is also in the unique situation that while it is the army of an autonomous state, the monarchy it serves is highly dependent for its prosperity and security on its much larger, richer, and more powerful neighbor, Saudi Arabia.

In this report, three principal arguments are made, along with supporting assertions regarding the BDF's above-mentioned attributes. First, Bahrain's army is the army of the royal family and is not a *national* army. Second, the BDF's participation in the suppression of the 2011 uprising was minimal. Third, the Bahraini state, and by extension, its military has been impacted more than any other army involved in the Arab Spring—and quite possibly more than any of its Arab counterparts—by its external environment which should hardly be surprising given Bahrain's size, location, and geostrategic significance.

Part I. The Monarchy and the BDF

Bahrain, an island kingdom just off the coast of Saudi Arabia in the Persian Gulf is by far the smallest Arab state. At 295 square miles (765 square miles) it is barely larger than the city of Austin, Texas or Singapore, and its area is not quite one-fifteenth of that of its Gulf neighbor, Qatar. Bahrainis are a minority in their land: according to the latest (2010) census, they only make up 46% of the total population of 1,234,571; the rest are 54% non-citizens. Just as importantly, in a Sunni Muslim-ruled state, Sunni Bahrainis are a minority: although reliable numbers are hard to come by and precise figures are virtually impossible to obtain, the most reasonable estimate is that between 53% and 62.3% of the citizen population are of Shi'a Muslim faith.¹ Bahrain's strategic importance, however, is disproportionate to its small population and physical size. By speedboat it is only a couple of hours away from the coast of the Islamic Republic of Iran, it is connected by the 16-mile King Fahd Causeway to Saudi Arabia, and it hosts the largest naval base in the region, occupied by the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet.

The modern history of Bahrain is customarily dated to 1783, when the Sunni Muslim Al Khalifa family—originally from Kuwait—and its allies from mainland Arabia subjugated the island's mostly Shi'a population, and established a sheikhdom.² Until that point Bahrain was under Persian control, a fact many contemporary Iranian politicians have yet to resign themselves to. British recognition in 1820 solidified the Al Khalifa's rule over the island. Starting with the 1861 signing of a *Friendly Convention with (the)*

Independent Ruler on Bahrain, the country became and for 110 years remained a British protectorate.³ Bahrain was used as a military base during the British invasion of the Ottoman Empire via Basra in 1914, and the island's strategic importance would continue to grow as Britain extended its power across the whole Gulf.⁴ In 1971, Bahrain gained its independence with the withdrawal of British forces. Although Bahrain has maintained its sovereignty since the late 1980s, and particularly since Bahrain's oil deposits have precipitously plummeted around the turn of the millennium, Saudi Arabia has attained increasing influence over the country's political and economic life as well as military-strategic position.

Sheikh Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa, Bahrain's long-standing ruler—his reign began in 1961, ten years before the British left the island—died in 1999 and was succeeded by his son, the politically (relatively) moderate Hamad. The new emir embarked on a tentative reform program that included constitutional reforms laid out in a National Action Charter approved in a referendum, the return of an elected assembly in 2002 (27 years after an ill-fated two-year experience), and the establishment of a constitutional monarchy with Hamad taking the title “king.” One must be careful before taking these reforms at face value. In fact, popularly elected representatives in Bahrain enjoy no real power to bring about significant political change.

Still, until relatively recently Bahrain has been more politically liberal than other states in the Gulf region—with the possible exception of Kuwait—though admittedly that bar is rather low. Women's rights, particularly when set against the abysmal standards of some other Arab states, such as Saudi Arabia, have been generally extensive. In fact, some of the first NGOs in the region—including five women's organizations—were established in Bahrain, as early as 1955.⁵ Even the media was comparatively free until the recent upsurge in censorship.⁶ Repression, by and large, has not been constant and at times the reform proposals of some of the royal family members—especially the Crown Prince and the King—have been genuine. Still, they tended not to materialize owing mainly to the resistance of hardline royals and/or the shortcomings of the opposition, such as internal divisions and poor political strategy.

There are several major points in this section of the report. First, following the British withdrawal, the royal family could tend to the business of state-building. One of the key components of this effort was the building of an army that raised several questions. Given the sectarian division in the country, it had to be an army dominated by Sunnis. And, given Bahrain's small population and its location in a very dangerous neighborhood, the military could never be expected to protect the island from a potential invading force (most probably Iran) yet it had to be strong enough to defend the monarchy from its internal foes *and* to hold off the intruders until help arrived (from Saudi Arabia).

A closely related second point is that even though the army was kept small, the proportion of national wealth spent on defense was relatively large in order to link the army with its potential protectors. More specifically, Bahrain, and other Gulf monarchies have devoted considerable resources to building and maintaining bases on their territory for the use of foreign armies, buying expensive weapons, and hiring thousands of mercenaries.

Third, there are three readily identifiable critical junctures in Bahrain's short history as an independent nation: the 1981 conspiracy to overthrow the monarchy, the accession of Emir (later King) Hamad to the throne in 1999, and the 2011 uprising. They were formative moments as they motivated the monarchical regime to make policy changes that had far-reaching and long-term future consequences.

Fourth, in many ways, the BDF is typical of the armed forces of small Arab monarchies (Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, United Arab Emirates) to the extent that it is well-equipped, its officers are well taken care of, and much of the army's control is in the hands of various members of the royal family. The latter point is also important because links to the royal family is an important predictor of one's professional success in the BDF as well as in the other armies of Arabia.

The BDF's Place in the State and Regime

When assessing the Bahraini ruling family's hold over the state, it is hard not to invoke Louis XIV's axiomatic declaration ("*L'État c'est moi!*") that has depicted absolute monarchies ever since. The royal family has no real limitations on its power because the supposedly representative political institutions in the country have little genuine political influence. Fundamentally, the royal family's hold over the regular armed forces, the Bahrain Defence Force, and the state's other defense-security organizations is unbridled. The only domestic check on King Hamad's power over the military – and, indeed, over his entire domain – is posed by various factions within the ruling family. Given that the royal family is deeply divided on numerous issues, at least a cursory understanding of internal regime dynamics is important to understand contemporary Bahraini politics and military affairs.

The Royal Family

In recent years Bahrain watchers have distinguished between three distinctive power centers, all comprised of members of the broader Al Khalifa clan.⁷ King Hamad and Crown Prince Salman head what is considered the *moderate* faction. By temperament and political proclivity, Hamad eschews harshness and iron-fist policies and tends to be more willing to consider reaching compromises and accommodation. Especially in opposition circles and among the diplomatic community Hamad is thought to be more interested in state visits, pomp and circumstance, and recreational activities than in the more tedious and arduous aspects of ruling.⁸ This may be unfair: his supporters claim that the king is well aware of everything that is going on in Bahrain and he just happens to be very good at delegating responsibilities. In any event, during his seventeen-year rule Hamad has probably done more than any other Gulf monarch "in attempting a mixed strategy of political and economic cooptation."⁹

Hamad has also done his best to promote Crown Prince Salman—his oldest son—assigning him important tasks and naming him to significant posts. Salman is Western-educated, articulate, and the most liberal major member of the royal family. Unsurprisingly, he has been the favorite of both Western diplomats and opposition leaders. In 2013, the king boosted his son's standing by appointing him to the new position of First Deputy Prime Minister, at least in part owing to his desire to see the National Dialogue with the opposition bear fruit.¹⁰ One might also speculate that the Crown Prince's new position will pave his way to succeed the octogenarian Prime

Minister, his great uncle, one of the monarchy's key hardliners. Major figures in this moderate group also include the Deputy Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister. It ought to be emphasized that this moderate faction emblemized by Hamad and Salman is just that: moderate, *relative to* the other two factions. It is by no means a *liberal* group.

The second power center coalesces around Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, the prime minister. His is a more conservative but pragmatic approach to politics. Born in 1935, he is the brother of Shaikh Isa and the uncle of King Hamad. The Prime Minister has held his unelected office since it was established upon independence thus, at this writing, for 45 years. He is the royal family's connection to the past, a symbolic representative of the old guard. The Prime Minister's power is based in three different constituencies. The first is his extensive networks in state administration and his decades-long personal acquaintance with literally everyone who matters in Bahrain's bureaucracy. The second is his long-standing connections to the business community and the more traditional merchant class who are, first and foremost, interested in political stability.

Finally, Prince Khalifa has also enjoyed close ties to the Saudi royal family. Nevertheless, the 2012 death of his good friend, Prince Nayef bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud, the Saudi Crown Prince and long-serving Minister of Interior (1975-2012)—the two were quite alike in their conservative pragmatism—was a blow to him personally and probably somewhat diminished his influence. Driving around Bahrain, no one can miss the near-ubiquitous “cult-of-personality triptychs”: large portraits placed by the side of the road or on highways medians of the King, the Crown Prince, and the Prime Minister. These displays are a constant irritant to the Shi'a population and a constant reminder that they are the subjects of a Sunni monarchy.¹¹

The third power center is led by two brothers, Khalid bin Ahmad bin Salman Al Khalifa the Minister of the Royal Court and Field Marshal Khalifa bin Ahmad Al Khalifa, the Commander-in-Chief of the BDF.¹² As their names suggest, they come from a different branch of the Al Khalifa clan than the triumvirate. This branch is customarily referred to as the Khawalids, in reference to their ancestor, Khalid bin Ali Al Khalifa.

What makes this group distinctive is their uncompromising attitude, some say visceral hatred, of the Shi'a population. Their support lies primarily in the numerous agencies and institutions of the security apparatus that includes the police, the National Security Agency, and of course, the regular armed forces (the BDF). One Al Khalifa allied with this group wrote a notorious poem in 1995, proposing spilling the Shi'as' “blood until they all die” and deporting them to outlying islands.¹³

The 2011 uprising, the failure of National Dialogue process, and the ineffective conciliatory measures of the Crown Prince had served to elevate the political clout of this faction. All in all, throughout King Hamad's reign the Khawalids' political influence has increased even though their political agenda “runs precisely opposite to the ostensible process of liberalization and constitutional reform.”¹⁴

Power relations are dynamic, but in contemporary (late-2016) Bahrain, those between the five most influential man of the land can be diagrammed as King > Minister of the Royal Court and the BDF Commander > Prime Minister > Crown Prince.¹⁵ Not being in the same power center does not necessarily imply personal animosity. For instance, King

Hamad and Field Marshal Khalifa bin Ahmad—who was Hamad’s chief of staff during his formative years in the army—are known to share a close personal friendship.¹⁶

Although the survival of the monarchy is the shared objective of all three factions, they have disagreed on just how to achieve it. Conflicts within the Al Khalifa clan have seldom been aired in public as the royal family endeavors to maintain the appearance of a united front. Nonetheless on occasion family feuds simmering under the surface burst out into the open. The most memorable of these instances must have been the “*High Noon*-style shoot-out, in May 1978, between the Prime Minister and his younger brother Mohammed, in the middle of [a] commercial area in Manama.”¹⁷ All three of these groups, but none more than the third, are closely associated, connected, and identified with the regime’s coercive apparatus, particularly the BDF.

The State and the BDF

That the military is a critical institution in any authoritarian state is a truism that is all the more relevant to Bahrain given its strategic location. To be sure, the army was not a state-builder in Bahrain in the sense that it was in some of the Arab republics, such as Egypt or Syria. Nevertheless, military muscle was obviously indispensable in the Al Khalifa’s conquest of the island and without their coercive apparatus they could have hardly maintained their control over a majority of the population that considers its rule illegitimate. After their arrival, the island was mainly protected by tribal allies who accompanied the Al Khalifa when they took over Bahrain.¹⁸ During the decades under British protection the Al Khalifa did not have a proper army.

The Bahrain Defence Force was established only in 1969, with independence already looming on the horizon, when Shaikh Isa charged his eldest son, the then-19-year old Hamad (the current ruler), to help create the BDF. Two years later the Emir appointed Hamad as the BDF’s first Commander-in-Chief, a position he held until his ascension to the throne three decades later.

As King Hamad explains, “[A]t the beginning, the Defence Force did not occupy more than a singly office” but as more and more colleagues completed their military studies—mostly in Britain and in the United States—the army started to grow, with the help of British advisers and instructors and with the hiring of both citizens and contract soldiers from abroad.¹⁹ In 1970, Hamad became the head of Bahrain’s Department of Defense and from 1971 to 1988 he was the Minister of State for Defense.²⁰ In 1999, Crown Prince Salman, Hamad’s eldest son, took over as Commander-in-Chief. Salman relinquished that position in 2008 to another member of the royal family, Field Marshal Khalifa bin Ahmed Al Khalifa.

Since then, the most important defense official in Bahrain has been the Field Marshal Khalifa bin Ahmad. In recent years the government’s top defense position has been repeatedly re-defined. In 2008, the defense minister portfolio was removed from the cabinet, as the BDF’s commander became the de facto minister. To fill the void, a new position, Minister of State for Defense was created, a job that actually became a liaison between the BDF commander and the government. The position was held by General Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdullah Al Khalifa until the most recent reorganization in December 2014. At that point the minister-of-state position was replaced by that of a defense minister once again, a job that went to Major General Yusuf bin Ahmed Al

Jalahma. Since all sensitive cabinet posts—deputy prime ministers, foreign affairs, interior, finance, justice and Islamic affairs, etc.—tend to go to Al Khalifa family members, Al Jalahma's appointment might signal that the new defense minister position is not considered particularly influential.

In 1999 Crown Prince Salman followed his father as the BDF's Commander-in-Chief, a position he relinquished in 2008 (at that point he became Deputy Commander-in-Chief). In contemporary Bahrain no one can encroach on the authority Field Marshal Khalifa bin Ahmad exercises over the BDF. The BDF's Chief of Staff is another royal family member, General Daij bin Salman Al Khalifa—although his deputy, Lieutenant General Dheyab bin Saqr Al-Nuaimi, is not. The sum of the Field Marshal's "command experience" has been the suppression of the 2011 uprising. Since then, and especially since 2013, his influence has only grown and he has become more active on the political scene, receiving foreign dignitaries and increasing attention from the media. This timing has much to do with the 2013 emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) as a major threat in the region: American and other Western generals and politicians now seek audiences with the Field Marshal whose stature has been enhanced by such interactions.

The BDF is different from the Arab armies that it has not dominated the state in the way the Egyptian or Syrian armies have. Nevertheless, it is the supreme institution in the entire security-defense apparatus. The BDF is first and foremost the army of the monarchy—virtually all consequential positions in its leadership and officer corps are held by Al Khalifa family members—and its primary mission is the protection of the Sunni monarchical, political, and business elites. Thus, the BDF's development followed a different path than that of republics: it has not evolved from private dynastic guards to national army. That said, like most armies, the BDF reinforces nationalist sentiments—mainly among the Sunni population—and thereby generates a symbolic but important dividend for the state. It is also important to recognize that the ultimate guarantor of the Bahraini monarchy's survival is *not* the BDF—which, given its modest size could hardly be expected to repel a major invading force from its archenemy, Iran—but Saudi Arabia along with other members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

In a sense, Bahrain's army is the kind of cocooned military—typical to the militaries of Gulf monarchies—described by Nazih Ayubi: it is comparatively rich and controlled entirely by the "princely class," citizens who serve in it are extremely carefully vetted for their family/tribal background, political orientation and history, it cannot be staffed entirely from locals, and its combat units are small, hand-picked, and commanded by members of the royal family.²¹

Mission #1: Defending the Monarchy

As in most authoritarian states and all Arab monarchies, the army's crucial domestic mission is to be the regime's last *domestic* line of defense versus its political foes. To be sure, the Bahrain Defence Force is seldom deployed against the people and it does not ordinarily perform police functions. Nevertheless, if the various police and security organizations are unable to suppress a domestic revolt, the BDF will be called in to defend the regime with whatever means necessary.

The most important thing to grasp about the Bahraini regime is that virtually all powerful and sensitive positions in the regime are set aside for the members of extended royal family. One might remember that this is a very large family: its size has been estimated from 3,000 to 6,000 individuals.²² Needless to say, not all branches of the family are equally influential or wealthy, but there is no doubt that the Al Khalifa constitutes the most exclusive elite of Bahrain. Exceptions aside, the point that no non-Al Khalifa tribal person was selected to a cabinet post until June 1996 hints at the tightness of the royal family's control over Bahrain's governance.

In fact, the constitution does not provide a mechanism to separate the regime and its ruling core from the government: all state organs are extensions of formal and informal powers of the ruling core.²³ As any regime would, especially one that shares Bahrain's precarious security context, the Al Khalifa have made a consistent and concerted effort to keep the army close through various methods.²⁴ This is done not just by the obvious pro-Sunni bias but also through cementing the links of royal family members with the security forces, but most especially the BDF.

Members of the royal family enjoy exclusive *de facto* control over the armed forces; the BDF is free of any independent civilian oversight. Opposition legislators—discussing their experience in parliament in 2007-2011—say that their repeated requests to the executive branch regarding the BDF's budget, in particular inquiries about purchasing programs and operational expenses led nowhere.²⁵ They only received, after repeated pleas, aggregate data on items such as pension costs and salaries.

The BDF includes the Royal Guard, a battalion-plus sized special forces component commanded by Prince Nasser bin Hamad al Khalifa, the eldest son of King Hamad with his second wife. The Royal Guard is a combined arms unit with its own tanks, artillery, and infantry. Aside from being an elite force, it is also charged with the protection of the royal family and their properties.

The Royal Guard's Special Force—a unit that has recently seen action and has performed well in Yemen—is commanded by Major Khalid bin Hamad Al Khalifa, another one of the king's sons. The BDF's own Military Intelligence (MI) corps, notwithstanding its name, is a “full-service” spy organization: it is involved both in domestic and foreign intelligence operations. Naturally, one of the MI's key responsibilities is to ensure that the BDF is free of major dissent and remains loyal to the monarchy. Intelligence officers are embedded in BDF units and their surveillance of all aspects of the soldiers' lives are said to be thorough.²⁶ Of all Bahraini law enforcement agencies, the MI has the most fearsome reputation. Although all employees of the state's coercive apparatus are well cared for by their masters, none are more privileged than those who work for the BDF.

While the BDF is the most important of Bahrain's security services, it is only one of four major independent agencies. The Emir, Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa established the National Guard in 1997 with the dual purposes of assisting the BDF in neutralizing external threats and as an internal security forces. The National Guard's current manpower is about 2,000 and it is commanded by the King's brother, Major-General Mohammed bin Isa Al Khalifa, who reports directly to him. It is an independent body that used to be subordinated to the BDF. The main day-to-day mission of the National Guard is critical infrastructure (airport, oil fields, field depots) protection. It is also

deployed as a supplemental force if the Ministry of Interior needs extra personnel – chiefly for dealing with protests and demonstrations.

The Ministry of Interior’s ordinary “troops” are the Bahraini police forces. The current minister, Lt. Gen. Sheikh Rashed bin Abdulla Al-Khalifa, is a former BDF general. His career trajectory demonstrates that there is some migration between the realms of defense and interior, as in numerous Arab republics (e.g., Egypt, Tunisia) as well. The police force has traditionally cared about public relations and one occasionally sees policemen helping stranded motorists change tires, etc. The Ministry of Interior includes the Coast Guard, the Special Security Forces Command (SSFC), the traffic police, as well as customs and immigration.

The SSFC is a paramilitary force that actually does much of the direct engagement with insurgents and the hostile segment of the opposition. They man the checkpoints and have become active in a new, post-2011 community-policing program (which now involves around 1,000 personnel) whose main caseload is composed of low-intensity incidents, such as domestic disturbances. Crucially, the community police personnel is not equipped with firearms: this detail is important because it allows the authorities to boost the number of Shi’a in the police—thereby scoring points with foreign critics—without actually creating a potential force of armed opponents.

Finally, the National Security Agency is an entity that formerly was part of the Ministry of Interior but has also become an autonomous body. Created by King Hamad in 2002, the NSA is charged mainly with conducting domestic and foreign espionage. It replaced the General Directorate for State Security Investigations (GDSS) that was established in 1966, five years before independence.

For over three decades, the head of the GDSS was Ian Henderson, a British policeman known for his role in suppressing the Mau Mau Uprising in Kenya in 1954 and as “the Butcher of Bahrain” for the many human right violations that took place under his watch.²⁷ Since Henderson’s retirement in 1998 until 2011 all five NSA directors were royal family members. The current chief, Major General Adel bin Khalifa bin Hamad Al Fadhel, who is not a royal, was appointed in November 2011.

Given their fixation with external threats, particularly the threat from Iran, Gulf States tend to conflate domestic and foreign security.²⁸ Bahrain’s security agencies—with the partial exception of the police—certainly display this attribute of sharing internal and external security concerns. The highest level defense authority of the land is the Supreme Defense Council (SDC).

The SDC was founded in 1973 and chaired by the then-and-current Prime Minister, Khalifa ibn Salman Al Khalifa, who passed on the position to Hamad when he became Emir in 1999. The king also appoints the body’s fourteen members: the commander and the deputy commander of the BDF, the NSA’s director, and the ministers of the Royal Court, defense, National Guard, interior, national economy, foreign affairs, council of ministers affairs, information, and finance.

Following the sacking of NSA director Shaikh Khalifa bin Abdulla bin Mohammed Al-Khalifa in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising—as a response to widespread international criticism—King Hamad issued Royal Order 47 for 2011 appointing him to the newly

established position of Secretary General of the Supreme Defence Council and advisor to the King for national security affairs with the rank of minister.²⁹ All members of the SDC are drawn from the Al Khalifa family that maintains a very close, one might say, organic relationship with Bahrain security apparatus. It must be underscored, that while the Al Khalifa are united in their wish to preserve the monarchy, they do disagree as to how best to achieve that objective.

The Army and Its Effectiveness and at Home and Abroad

This part of the analysis assesses the armed forces as “just another” state bureaucracy and seek answers to questions one would ask to evaluate any other state sector. How effective has the army been in fulfilling the role it was entrusted with? How faithfully did it husband the resources it was given?

Economic Aspects: Budgets, Size, Weapons

Bahrain is a perfect fit into the type of state Ayubi described thus: “owing to the richness of their resources combined with their limited military capability ... [they] are susceptible to a number of external dangers that render them extremely vulnerable.”³⁰ One of the dangers is that without complementing the armies of these states with foreigners—whether mercenaries or the elements of foreign armies—they could not be realistically defended. The other danger is that many of these states are overcorrecting, as it were, for their small size and often ineffective armies by purchasing unnecessarily large quantities of sophisticated weapons.

National defense and internal security have been the only areas in which the Bahraini state has continuously expanded since 1971. In recent decades the country’s security apparatus has expanded even faster, mainly in response to Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait and the 2011 uprising. The navy and the air force have received priority treatment and have been repeatedly enlarged and their training standards have been elevated.

In the first decade of the 21st century Bahrain had a respectable annual GDP growth of 6.1%.³¹ Although not a major oil producer—its largest oil field, the off-shore Abu Safa, is co-owned with Saudi Arabia—Bahrain has significant refining capacity. Bahrain’s economic fortunes are directly tied to its closest ally, Saudi Arabia. The other main ally of the island state, the United States, also contributes to Bahrain’s treasury. The United States contribution of the naval base and associated activities have been estimated at \$150 million per year, roughly the equivalent of 1% of Bahrain’s GDP. The US base employs approximately 1,300 Bahraini citizens.³²

Based on the size of its defense budget in proportion to its GDP, Bahrain has been one of the most heavily militarized states in the world. For instance, in the period that corresponds more or less with the first decade of Bahraini sovereignty (1974-83), the annual budget of the security sector increased from 19.18% to 28.76% of government expenditures and had grown more than tenfold (from US\$22.5 million to US\$236.4 million).³³ According to data compiled by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Bahrain recorded the eleventh highest military expenditures in the world in the first decade of the 21st century.³⁴ The BDF’s budget has grown steadily in recent years, and especially since the 2011 uprising. The defense budget had tripled, from US\$478 million in 2006—i.e., five years before the uprising—to US\$1.53 billion in

2015. (In the same period US Foreign Military Aid to Bahrain decreased from US\$15.5 million to US\$ 7.5 million.)

The BDF's active-duty personnel of 8,200 is small in absolute numbers but quite large when considered in proportion to the country's modest population. This personnel figure includes the army (6,000), the navy (700) and the air force (1,500) but not the paramilitary National Guard of 11,600.³⁵ According to the annual data published by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), these numbers have not changed in at least a decade. Unlike in many republics, the armed forces of Arab monarchies are not involved in economic activities.

The comparative prosperity of Gulf monarchies allows them to provide their security personnel with generous salaries and decent conditions. Bahraini soldiers have no existential reasons to make money outside of their jobs; their level of professionalism is also correspondingly higher than that of many of their colleagues elsewhere in the Arab world. Nevertheless, the BDF does play important though less tangible economic role of as a provider of public sector employment to its retired personnel with long and distinguished service records.

The BDF is an expensive army and it is relatively professional, well-trained, and well-equipped to fulfil its missions. Around 90% of its weapons come from the United States.³⁶ The army, for instance, is equipped with 180 American M60A3 (Patton) main battle tanks, 25 US-made YPR-765 armored infantry fighting vehicles, about 200 American M113A2 armored personnel carriers, and its reconnaissance units with 22 French AML-90 (Panhard) armoured cars.

As far as the air force's fighting component is concerned, the BDF's two fighter squadrons fly F-16C/D Fighting Falcons, the fighter ground attack squadron uses F-5E/F Tiger II supersonic light fighters, and there are two additional squadrons equipped with AH-1E/F and TAH-1P Cobra attack helicopters.

The BDF is currently constructing a large new base in the northern part of Sitra Island.³⁷ For several years now, but so far inconclusively, Bahrain's government has been in discussion with the UK about the purchase of 12-14 Typhoon fighter jets—a type of aircraft the Saudi air force also operates.³⁸ In 2017 the BDF will be able to boast with a brand new hospital whose construction is overseen by the royal medical services director Major General Khalid bin Ali Al Khalifa.³⁹

Nevertheless, the plummeting global crude oil prices have negatively affected the Gulf states' defense budgets and for 2016 significant cuts were to be expected.⁴⁰ Due to its financial constraints, Bahrain's government has not been spending as lavishly on military's equipment as some other states in the region have in recent years. Nevertheless it has “slowly built up a mix of regular, paramilitary, and internal security forces that have a significant capability to deal with internal threats.”⁴¹

It is difficult to say with any measure of confidence how efficiently the BDF has used its resources. There has been no corruption scandals associated with the BDF; in other words, if there had been gross misuse of funds, they were effectively hushed up.

That said, the Al Khalifa have been well-served by their well-remunerated and carefully selected security personnel and, unlike many Arab republics, they have been largely—though certainly not entirely—immune to coup attempts.

The 1981 Coup Attempt and Its Impact on the BDF

The most important modern bid to overthrow the royal family took place in December 1981, a few months after the establishment of the Gulf Cooperation Council. On December 13, the government announced the arrest of 73 alleged conspirators and thanked Dubai authorities for providing the crucial intelligence that led to their apprehension. The coup attempt was organized by a Shi'a Islamist movement, the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain, which tried to take control of Bahrain with logistical support from Iran.⁴² The Prime Minister, not unreasonably, blamed the incident on Iran's then new revolutionary regime.

The 1981 coup attempt was one of the formative moments of post-independence Bahraini political history. It was critical to the regime's threat perception: this was the moment when the Emir Isa and her brother, the prime minister, decided that finding an accommodation with the island's Shia population may not be a realistic future prospect. According to Abdulhadi Khalaf, an exiled Bahraini Marxist scholar, the ridding of the BDF of its Shi'a elements began in the post-coup purge of the military.⁴³

The BDF plays a crucial role Bahrain's defense even if the state's last-line defender is the Saudi armed forces and, one imagines, the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet. Anxiety-inducing challenges (for the regime) to Bahraini security are not exceptional or even unusual occurrences. For example, in April 2013, the government claimed to have discovered a warehouse storing weapons used by the opposition, six months later a Bahraini court convicted nine Shi'a linked to a bomb-making facility, and in April 2015, the authorities apprehended nearly thirty people allegedly involved in planning armed action against the state.⁴⁴

In July 2015, the Bahraini Coast Guard in coordination with the Bahrain Royal Naval Force intercepted a vessel heading to Bahrain carrying personnel who received training in manufacturing and using explosives in Iran.⁴⁵ Analysts have noted that a militant strand of the February 14th Youth Coalition—a radical group that emerged in early 2011—and the Ashtar Brigades are becoming more brazen in their actions, and are able to detonate increasingly sophisticated explosive devices. Equally disturbing, they have become more hostile to the presence of the U.S. Fifth Fleet.⁴⁶

Bahraini citizens have long been involved in armed conflicts supporting different causes. Many Bahraini leftists, for instance, fought in the Dhofar Rebellion (1962-1976) supporting South Yemen's Soviet-backed Marxist regime against Oman. They fantasized about liberating the Arab Peninsula, Palestine, and eventually the entire Arab world from tyranny.⁴⁷ More recently, a number of Bahrainis joined the fight of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in Syria and Iraq.

Perhaps the best-known case is that of Turki al-Bin'ali, the "Caliphate's scholar-in arms," a jihadist ideologue and sharia expert of great influence within the movement.⁴⁸ The government's policy has been to revoke the citizenship of those who joined the fight in Syria if they did not return within two weeks to Bahrain. Withdrawal of citizenship has

been a punitive measure the regime has increasingly used against domestic opposition activists thereby avoiding the need to incarcerate them and face long-term criticism from local and international human rights organizations.

BDF Deployments and Military Cooperation

The first quasi-deployment of the BDF forces occurred during the October 1973 Arab-Israeli War (a.k.a. Ramadan War in the Arab world), when the Joint Defence Council of the Arab League tasked the BDF of supporting the operations and maintaining close liaison with Saudi forces. The BDF, of very modest size and strength at the time, formed its first combat group for the occasion composed of the 1st Battalion and support elements. This force carried out various mobilization exercises that were stopped due to the ceasefire.⁴⁹ The war in Bahrain—and most everywhere else in the Arab world—is officially considered “a great achievement” notwithstanding the far higher numbers of dead, injured, aircraft lost, etc. on the Arab side.

The BDF did not actually enter combat in any wars until recently, but it has regularly participated in joint military exercises, many within the framework of the GCC Joint Defence Pact that has also included non-GCC nations, most importantly and most frequently, Egypt.⁵⁰ The BDF has participated enthusiastically in several international operations. It did not fight in Iraq in the 1990s and 2000s, but its navy participated in protecting Kuwait’s waters.

The Bahraini navy and air force have been particularly active in exercises with various elements of the U.S. Fifth Fleet. The BDF is a part of the coalition that fights ISIL and has deployed its F-16 fighter jets to Jordan to support the anti-ISIL air campaign.⁵¹ According to a U.S. Central Command statement, the Bahraini air force has destroyed multiple ISIL targets in north-central, eastern, and northeastern Syria.⁵²

The BDF’s presence is even larger in Yemen where it has been fighting the Houthi insurgents side by side its closest allies, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. About 300 soldiers from the BDF’s Royal Guard are involved. BDF soldiers are closely integrated and apparently even share quarters with their Emirati comrades.

Reports indicate that the BDF—which is present with an air, sea, and ground contingent—has performed well, both in terms of professionalism and effectiveness. The BDF Air Force’s F-16s have participated in bombing runs, a Bahraini ship joined the blockade that is intended to deny supplies to the enemy coming through the sea, and BDF soldiers have been very active in combat.

The BDF lost five soldiers in a rocket attack that also claimed the life of 45 of their mates from the UAE on 4 September 2015. The monarchy celebrated their martyrdom extensively.⁵³

The government has used the Royal Guard’s deployment to Yemen to stoke the personality cult around Prince Brigadier Nasser—an accomplished athlete whose exploits are frequent subject of news items—and, by extension, to highlight the martial traditions of the Al Khalifa.⁵⁴ Although in June 2016 the UAE announced that the “war is over” for Emirati troops in Yemen, Bahrain has yet to make a similar decision. In fact, in late June Prime Minister Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa held talks with Yemeni Vice President,

Lieutenant General Ali Mohsen Al-Ahmar in Manama to discuss how to make the Kingdom's participation in the efforts to restore security across Yemen more effective.⁵⁵

The Army and Society

Notwithstanding the Al Khalifa's long rule of the island, many if not most of the majority Shi'a population continue to view them as invaders. Labor unrest, work stoppages, demonstrations, and uprisings have long been a feature of Bahraini public life as marginalized Shi'a opposition groups—protesting discrimination and, to a lesser extent, Sunni organizations desiring more rights and a move toward democracy—have voiced their demands.⁵⁶

The Shi'a – Sunni Divide in Bahrain and in the BDF

As Fuad Khuri wrote, “Since the twenties, protests and rebellions have become expected features of Bahraini polity, as if they were seasonally ongoing processes.”⁵⁷ In the absence of genuine resolutions, opposition activity has been more or less constant since 1961—when the rule of Amir Isa, Hamad's father, commenced—and occasionally gained expression in violent upheavals that at times lasted for years, most recently in 1994-1999.⁵⁸ The regime responded with stepping up its systematic policy of Sunnitization. The details of that policy have been the subject of numerous studies and articles.⁵⁹ Perhaps the most famous is the 2006 report of by Salah Al Bandar, an adviser to the Minister of Cabinet Affairs, who accused his boss, Ahmed bin Ateyatalla Al Khalifa, of financing and organizing a conspiracy to foment sectarian strife mainly through the Central Informatics Organization of which he was President.⁶⁰ The secret activities of the conspirators included subsidizing and encouraging conversion from Shi'a to Sunni faith, maintaining hate-filled anti-Shi'a websites, and election rigging. The Manama regime denied Bandar's allegations and deported him.

The government has been very clever at appointing token representatives of a minority or of the marginalized Shi'a majority community into important posts. These selections reflect deliberate and pragmatic political/diplomatic objectives expected to signal to Bahraini and foreign critics the regime's supposed progressivism. One clear pattern that emerges from these selections is that overtly or covertly, a trusted clan member exercises close supervision over the token appointee. An apt recent example with military overtones is Houda Nonoo, one of the less than 40 Jewish Bahraini citizens at the time, who was Bahrain's Ambassador to Washington in 2008-13.⁶¹ The long-serving defense attaché at the same embassy, however, was an Al Khalifa—Lt. Col. Abdullah bin Muhammad bin Rashid Al Khalifa, an active-duty officer and former F-16 pilot—who succeeded Nonoo in September 2013. He is an ally of the hardline group and is closest to BDF Commander Khalifa bin Ahmad Al Khalifa. Currently (December 2016) there is one Shi'a cabinet member of Persian origin (Minister of Electricity and Water Affairs Dr. Abdulhussain bin Ali Mirza) and three Shi'a ministers and one deputy prime minister of Arab origin (Baharnah) in the government. None of them is supposed to have much influence.⁶²

Notwithstanding their majority status in Bahraini citizenry, the Shi'a has been distinct minority in the BDF from its inception. Their numbers were further reduced in the 1981-1982 post-coup attempt purge of the BDF and the security apparatus. Still, numerous

Shi'a remained in the BDF in non-sensitive positions until the mid-1990s, when the regime faced what remains to date the longest uprising. Since then, they have not entirely disappeared from the military and the security services—a list provided by the government of employees fired from the defense sector following the 2011 uprising contains Shi'a names—but their representation has amounted to little more than tokenism.⁶³ There are still some Shi'a in the BDF, but in fields such as administration and logistics where they bear no arms.

It would be easy to write off this point as just another aspect of discrimination against the Shi'a population. Nevertheless, the regime's view, that young Shi'a men—those who would be prime candidates for employment in the coercive apparatus—are not to be trusted with weapons and military/paramilitary training ought not be dismissed, especially in view of recent security threats and the radicalization of many in this segment of the population.

The regime suppressed the uprising that began on February 14, 2011 employing various elements of its coercive apparatus and with the help of Saudi National Guard and Emirati police units. In 2011 General James Mattis, then the head of the U.S. Central Command, reportedly told the BDF's then Chief of Staff—Daij bin Salman Al Khalifa, a three-star general—about the integration of blacks in the U.S. military and how the BDF could consider this example in its policies toward the Shi'a, but his suggestion fell on deaf ears.⁶⁴

The Officer Corps

The BDF's officer corps is the preserve of Bahraini nationals, though naturalized Bahraini citizens can also join them. Most Bahraini military officers share an at least a middle class background. There are a large number of BDF officers for whom the military career has become a family tradition: second and third generation officers are quite common. Many future officers are recruited by family networks, through serving BDF personnel.

The regime wants prominent Sunni families to have some members in the military and, therefore, attempts to spread positions around so that as many of these families would have a stake in the survival of the monarchy as possible. One of the most important though implicit functions of the BDF is its role as a major vehicle in the promotion of national identity and belonging (among Sunnis) that also reinforces the allied families' loyalty to the monarchy.

The BDF's command is exceedingly centralized. Even high-ranking officers tend to be anxious about making relatively low-level decisions lest they should displease their superiors. U.S. commanders note that when they invite even high-ranking BDF officers to social functions they must get permission from higher-ups. Their American and British colleagues generally consider BDF officers highly motivated and competent.⁶⁵

The training of the BDF's professional personnel—both in Bahrain and abroad—has been of consistently high quality especially in the past 25 years. The BDF has maintained its own cadet school for at least a decade. Virtually all BDF officers have received some of their professional education abroad, usually in the UK or the U.S. “An entire generation of BDF mid- and senior-level officers have passed through” U.S. staff and war

colleges; indeed, “the BDF’s promotion system into the senior ranks is tied to attendance at one of these U.S. military schools.”⁶⁶ Skill levels are maintained and improved by frequent drills, many together with National Guard and Interior Ministry units.⁶⁷

The rank structure in the BDF suggests that promotions are frequent and more or less routine. “Once you become an officer, you will make it to colonel or even brigadier general if you don’t do anything really stupid,” is how BDF career trajectories are often described. BDF personnel are well taken care of: they receive above-average pay, housing, health-care, and educational benefits. Generally there is no incentive to retire early.

In Bahrain public sector retirement comes after forty years of employment; for BDF (and other security service personnel), retirement comes after thirty-two years. The BDF gives its officers an excellent retirement package. Retired officers are generally held in high esteem—at least among the Sunni population—and do not need to take a job once they left the service. Those who do tend to take high-level executive positions; a retired colonel would be frowned upon to take a middle-managerial job. Many retired officers move from the BDF to civilian administrative structures in government or government-affiliated entities.

The BDF’s NCOs—many of them Bahraini nationals—are often viewed as “time-servers” as in “if you’ve served long enough you will be a sergeant, irrespective of performance.” Soldiers and NCOs appreciate their secure employment status and decent salaries but complain about being overworked and treated with little respect by their superiors.⁶⁸

Foreign Mercenaries

One of the key attributes of Bahrain’s security agencies is that they employ a large number of foreign nationals. The reason for their employment is the same as everywhere in the Gulf: there are not sufficient number of locals who would want to serve in the armed forces *as enlisted soldiers* (serving as officers is a different matter) and because foreigners are expected to have fewer qualms shooting at protesters than their co-nationals would.

Nevertheless, the hiring of foreigners to protect the Gulf monarchies has been a controversial issue, especially in Bahrain, where the main task of such personnel is to protect the regime from its domestic opponents. Opposition activists claim with good reason that the monarchy invites foreigners to serve in its coercive apparatus because they would be more willing to shoot at or punish protesters than Bahraini citizens.

Others claim that the government grants citizenship to Sunni Muslim foreigners in order to increase the Sunni population’s proportion versus Shi’a Muslims. There is no doubt—and Bahrain’s own census data confirms—that since King Hamad’s accession the naturalization of Sunnis has accelerated, perhaps to offset the impact of his political reform project. Since the 2011 uprising this process has speeded up even further, some observers maintain that in the first three years following the upheaval as many as 100,000 Sunnis received Bahraini citizenship.⁶⁹

All of this may well be true, but the charge that this is a post-independence phenomenon is not. Bringing in or inviting bureaucrats, merchants, skilled tradespeople, and

mercenaries from abroad are legacies of the pre-colonial and colonial eras. Bahrain has been an important center of commerce for many centuries and it has had a long tradition of welcoming foreigners.⁷⁰ Oman—an important regional power in the Gulf in the 16th-20th centuries—has been recruiting mercenaries from Balochistan (a province in contemporary Pakistan) since the 17th century.⁷¹

The British colonial government brought in clerks and administrators from the Subcontinent to Bahrain as early as the second half of the 19th century and policemen from Yemen already in the 1950s. In fact, British military personnel—mostly involved in training activities—have been continuously employed in the BDF since before independence.

Most of the foreigners serving in the BDF have been from Pakistan (especially from Balochistan but recently from all over Pakistan), Jordan, and, more recently, Syria.⁷²

Pakistanis and Syrians tend to serve as ordinary soldiers, their strength is said to be primarily maintenance and other skills not requiring sophisticated training. Jordanians, on the other hand, have a stellar reputation as security professionals; many of them fill the NCO ranks. Pakistan has had a long involvement in Gulf and Arab security—Pakistanis participated in the training of Saudi military personnel during the 1980s and 1990s when Pakistani forces were stationed in the Desert Kingdom.⁷³

Problems of conduct among Pakistanis serving in the BDF, however, are not unknown. In March 2013, for instance, 180—the largest number ever—were sacked and deported for violating disciplinary norms.⁷⁴ Most Pakistanis serving in the security sector rarely speak more than most basic Arabic, which makes their interaction with the public difficult.

Bahrain seeks to fill the vacancies in its security apparatus with Pakistanis who are former servicemen in their countries armies. According to recent interviews, their duties included training military personnel and their working conditions and remuneration were very attractive: in the BDF they receive 430 Bahraini Dinars (about Rs 120,000 or about US\$1,200 in 2014) at the beginning of their service and were on duty for only 10 days per month; in the police department they had to work around 22 days in a month.

Many times more people usually apply than there are available jobs.⁷⁵ The vast majority of the foreign security service personnel live in separate compounds (they receive free housing) and have minimal contact with Bahrain-born citizens (they tend to patronize shops, restaurants, etc., run by the large ex-pat community who hail from the Indian Subcontinent themselves).

There is no publicly available comprehensive data on how many foreigners serve in Bahrain's security sector. One observer has claimed that the “rank and file in the Bahraini military, police and security forces consist *almost entirely* of foreign recruits.”⁷⁶

The proportion of foreign personnel is especially high in the police and in the National Guard. Pakistanis alone are said to constitute one-third of the police force, which continues also to be the bailiwick of Yemenis.⁷⁷ According to the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, 64% of the NSA's personnel were non-Bahrainis and only 4% were Shi'a in 2009.⁷⁸ After the 2011 uprising the BDF and the National Guard embarked on a fresh recruitment campaign in Pakistan to hire as many as 2,500 riot police officers, drill

instructors, and security guards.⁷⁹ High-level delegations traveled from Manama to Islamabad to underscore the traditional Bahrain-Pakistan security alliance and the “urgent need” for new recruits.⁸⁰

In 2014 a Pakistani source revealed that Pakistani personnel made up 18% of the Bahraini air force and altogether 10,000 Pakistani nationals were employed by Bahrain’s coercive apparatus.⁸¹ King Hamad’s unprecedented trip to the Pakistan Army’s Joint Services Headquarters in Rawalpindi in March 2014 signaled Bahrain’s continuing domestic tensions. The purpose of the royal visit was “to enhance military cooperation between the two countries” and, one would assume, to ensure a steady flow of mercenaries from the Subcontinent.⁸²

Women in the BDF and the Issue of Conscription

Bahrain has been a Gulf pioneer in integrating women to its military and (especially) police forces. The BDF has opened its doors to women more than three decades ago. Most women work in administration as well as medical and health services, but the BDF has continuously expanded the fields women could enter, adding, most recently, military aviation.⁸³ Perhaps the first female Bahraini fighter pilot—like the UAE’s Maj. Mariam Al-Mansouri—is not too far off in the future.⁸⁴ Women’s participation in the security sector has been a source of pride for the regime. Several women in the royal family, most importantly Princess Sabeeka bint Ibrahim Al Khalifa, King Hamad’s first wife, are sponsors and supporters of their role.

In his book, *First Light*, King Hamad writes that during the planning stages of the BDF the question of whether the manpower of the new force should be based on conscription or on volunteers was the topic of serious discussion. Ultimately it was decided that a volunteer force would be more suitable mainly because “a volunteer is an individual with motivation and his professionalism make him continue to serve and acquire expertise in his profession.” The choice favoring volunteers, Hamad goes on, does not mean “that our minds are closed about the two systems.”⁸⁵ Given the forum, one should not be surprised that Hamad did not mention one of the more obvious reasons of having a volunteer army: to avoid putting weapons in Shi’a hands.

One should not expect conscription to be introduced in Bahrain anytime soon. In fact, until recently Kuwait was the only Gulf state that tried to implement mandatory conscription.⁸⁶ The program was unsuccessful and was suspended in 2001. But things are changing. In March 2014, Qatar’s Emir signed legislation (Law #5 of 2014) that required male Qatari citizens, aged 18-35, to serve in the armed forces for three months if they were high school graduates and for four if they were not. Three months later, the UAE followed suit, introducing compulsory military service to male citizens age 18-30; nine months for high school graduates and two years without completed secondary education (women may volunteer). And in April 2015, Kuwait re-introduced mandatory military service, with a starting date of 2017.⁸⁷ It is important to recognize that none of these three countries has the sort of sectarian division that has virtually eliminated the prospects of the draft in Bahrain.

Culture

One of the most important non-military objectives of the BDF is to reinforce support for the Al Khalifa by promoting nationalism and national identity and making more “tangible” the claimed threat from Iran and, more generally, from the Shi’a.⁸⁸ In Bahraini culture, the BDF and the other agencies of the country’s security sector occupy an exalted place. (This position, of course, refers to the army’s status among the Sunni Muslim community; the Shi’a population tends to view the coercive apparatus with deep distrust.) Sunni Imams pay rich tributes to service members and especially to martyrs, lauding their patriotism and praising their sacrifice for the country.⁸⁹ The Bahraini media often reports about military exercises, royal visits to various BDF units, and armed services’ exploits, mostly in glowing terms.

A large number of Bahraini royals are graduates of the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst in the UK *and* some additional American institute of higher learning. For instance, Royal Guard commander Prince Nasser is a graduate of both Sandhurst and the Marine Corps Command and General Staff College in Quantico, Virginia.

Crown Prince Salman’s second son, Mohammed, is a 2015 graduate of King’s College London with honors in War Studies; he also attended Sandhurst and trained for a year with the Royal Lancer’s Brigade of the British Army.⁹⁰ Sandhurst actually has a King Hamad Hall named after Bahrain’s ruler, an alumnus and benefactor.

The graduation of royal family members from these institutions is faithfully reported by the Bahraini media. Major General Al Khalifa’s son is a 2013 graduate of the Intermediate Level Education program at the U.S. Army’s Command and General Staff College in Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas. He is apparently groomed to replace his father.⁹¹ (Incidentally, King Hamad is also a CGSC alumnus.)

As noted above, the BDF has played a major role in nationalist mobilization. The most important and most readily visible aspects of this campaign have been the stress on the martial traditions of the Al Khalifa. This policy has received renewed emphasis in the post-2011 counter-mobilization drive. The main components of this marketing strategy have been to play up the existential threat contemporary Iran is supposed to represent to the island and, directly or indirectly, emphasize the obligation of ordinary citizens’ (Sunni citizens, that is) to make personal sacrifices for the regime.

A part of this campaign has been the opening, by King Hamad himself, of the new BDF Military Museum in February 2013. Located in Riffa, near the Shaikh Ahmed Al Fateh Fort, the museum includes numerous documents—including the first, 1968 budget (US\$265,000) of the BDF—paintings, and weapons. The displays are complemented by highly informative and explanatory remarks that are surprisingly balanced, particularly when contrasted with other Arab military museums, such as the one in Cairo.⁹²

The BDF and the Outside World

No Arab state and no Arab army has been more heavily impacted by concerns beyond its geographical boundaries than Bahrain. This should not come as a surprise given that Bahrain a) is tiny; b) is situated in a sensitive and highly unstable neighborhood; c) has a small population affected and afflicted by deep-seated divisions with powerful supporters

of each side nearby; d) is not particularly wealthy; and e) its military is dwarfed by the size of the forces at the disposal of its key adversary. This section considers Bahrain's security environment by looking at its most important relationships.

Iran

Since its independence, Bahrain's relations with Iran have been fraught with deep tensions which, considering the historical ties between the two countries, their proximity, Bahrain's close relations with Iran's archenemy, Saudi Arabia, and the Manama regime's treatment of its large Shi'a population are hardly surprising. A recent news item about the Manama-Tehran nexus is typical: Bahrain cut diplomatic ties with Iran on January 4, 2016, the day after Iranian protesters attacked Saudi Arabia's embassy in Tehran (an action motivated by Riyadh's announcement of the impending execution of Shi'a religious figure Nimr al-Nimr along with 46 other convicts on terrorism charges).⁹³

Iran's interest in Bahrain has been long-standing, given the many residents of the island nation with Persian ethnic heritage and Shi'a Muslim religion and, of course, Bahrain's strategic location. Although it is not a winning conversation topic in Sunni company, for long stretches of its history Bahrain *was* a part or dominion of Persia/Iran and only following the Al Khalifa's arrival and the subsequent establishment of the British Protectorate, was this link conclusively severed.⁹⁴

Iranian officials have repeatedly and publicly claimed Bahrain as Iran's province even in recent years.⁹⁵ The Tehran-Manama relationship became particularly conflict-ridden after the triumph of the 1979 Islamic Revolution. From that point on, the Iranian state and some influential Shi'a clerics have tried to radicalize Bahrain's Shi'a population, apparently with some success.⁹⁶ On the other hand, the regime in Bahrain has blamed Iran for political upheavals—ignoring as root causes its own decades-long and consistent marginalization of the Shi'a community—including the 2011 uprising and the ongoing conflict since then.

For Bahrain's royal family, keeping Iran at bay is a fundamental existential issue. The conservative elements of Bahrain's Sunni political and business elites believe, rightly or wrongly, that if given the chance, Bahraini Shi'a Muslims would replace the Al Khalifa's monarchy with a radical Islamist republic along Iranian lines. Many Western experts on Bahrain believe that while the Sunni elites might exaggerate the threat from Iran, Bahrain's Western allies may well underestimate or even trivialize a very real and very serious security concern. In particular, most close observers of the Bahraini political scene are exceedingly skeptical about what some journalists have called Bahrain's Shi'a Muslim "democracy movement." "Democracy," they claim, is the last thing the Shi'a political opposition desires.⁹⁷

Saudi Arabia and the GCC

Bahrain is right in the middle between two large regional powers and archenemies, Saudi Arabia and Iran.⁹⁸ Since 1958, when Bahrain's ruler visited Saudi Arabia and reached an agreement settling boundary issues the two countries have shared a close relationship.⁹⁹ The Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, the one that lies closest to Bahrain, is also its most strategically vulnerable given that it is where its marginalized Shi'a Muslim minority live whose proportion is variously estimated between 10% and 15% of the Saudi population

of nearly 30 million.¹⁰⁰ The Eastern Province is also where the Kingdom's largest oil deposits are. It is hardly surprising then, that political stability and continued Al Khalifa rule in Bahrain, just across the strategically important King Fahd Causeway—the \$500 million project opened in November 1986—is a prime foreign policy consideration for Riyadh.

To the Al Saud ruling family Bahrain has always been like a part of Saudi Arabia.¹⁰¹ Saudi Arabia dominates Bahrain politically and economically. Bahraini living standards are kept at a reasonably high level owing to enormous Saudi subventions and direct and indirect subsidies to the island's economy.¹⁰² At the same time, for many Saudis Bahrain serves as a “safety valve,” a friendly state nearby where they can blow off some steam (with relatively liberal rules and free access to alcohol and prostitutes).

All major policy decisions made in Bahrain must be squared with the Saudis.¹⁰³ Recognizing Riyadh's unrivalled leverage over Manama, U.S. policy makers desiring political change in Bahrain need to ask for Saudi support for their initiatives. Saudi Arabia and Bahrain are also interlocked through marriage. Hamad's son, Khalid—a Sandhurst-graduate military officer who commands the Royal Guards' Rapid Intervention Forces—is married to Princess Sahab, one of the daughters of Saudi King Abdullah. His older brother, Nasser—another Sandhurst graduate who commands the Royal Guards—is married to Shaikha, a daughter of the Emir of Dubai.

Saudi Arabia is the de facto leader of the GCC, though its supremacy has been occasionally challenged by the far richer but far smaller Qatar. The GCC was formed in 1981 by the six monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula in large part as a protection from the virus of the Iranian Revolution across the Gulf. Defense collaboration within the GCC had not moved beyond rhetoric until the Arab uprisings in 2011.

In the May 2012, the Riyadh Declaration proposed a plan for Saudi Arabia and Bahrain to form a closer political and military union that floundered on the other four members' opposition. At the same meeting the potential federation of Saudi Arabia with Bahrain was one of the main topics of discussion. Such a merger would have allowed the Saudis to block potential compromises between the Manama regime and its Shi'a population, would have changed the sectarian balance and rendered the Bahraini Shi'a a minority in the unified state, and allow Riyadh to station their troops permanently in Bahrain.¹⁰⁴

The military cooperation of the GCC received further impetus by the crisis in Yemen, a notoriously unstable republic bordering on Saudi Arabia and Oman. As noted above, in March 2015, a Saudi-led coalition of Arab states began the campaign to liberate Yemen from anti-regime forces. Operation Storm of Resolve has been conducted within the framework of the GCC's Joint Defence Pact although non-GCC Arab states (Egypt, Sudan, Morocco, and Jordan) also belong to the coalition.

As the smallest, and together with Oman, one of the less prosperous Gulf monarchies, Bahrain is particularly dependent on the GCC's goodwill and its efforts to ingratiate itself with the organization are good politics. Bahrain has been upgrading and developing its already excellent naval facilities to promote maritime cooperation. In February 2016, King Hamad inaugurated a new Unified Naval Operation Center which is going to be under the supervision of the GCC Unified Military Command.

The US and the UK

Just as the last two companies of British soldiers left on 18 July 1971, the United States secured long-term access to Bahraini port facilities. In late 1971, the U.S. Navy agreed to pay \$4 million per year for naval and military facilities. Although the Juffair Agreement was not officially a secret, the royal family avoided publicizing it suspecting that it might provoke protests locally. They were right; the accord spurred protests of politicians and religious leaders alike.¹⁰⁵

Only two years later, the U.S. Navy was nearly evicted from Bahrain. In January 1970 U.S. President Richard Nixon proclaimed what became the “Nixon Doctrine,” essentially a commitment to honor treaty agreements, but to reduce the involvement and presence in other nations’ affairs. In the Middle East, the U.S. wanted to rely on Saudi Arabia and Iran to maintain stability and provide for the defense of the large Gulf region, but the two states had different visions of their role—the Shah’s Iran more eager to dominate militarily while the Saudis taking a more measured approach eschewing a overassertive role.

Nevertheless, the U.S. interfered one-sidedly (and very effectively) to support Israel in the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, an action Arab states considered unforgivable. Saudi Arabia and other oil-exporting Arab nations established an oil embargo against the United States. On October 20, 1973, Bahrain’s ruler decided to expel U.S. forces from Bahrain, invoking Article XIV of the Stationing Agreement that allowed the U.S. one year to withdraw its forces from the country. After nine months of careful and on-going diplomatic activity, Emir Isa took the courageous position—in the face of much domestic opposition—to let the U.S. stay and let the termination notice lapse.¹⁰⁶

The 1979 Iranian Revolution had a large impact not just on Bahrain’s domestic politics but also on the international politics of the Gulf and U.S.-Bahraini relations.¹⁰⁷ Following the revolution, U.S. ties to Bahrain and Saudi Arabia became closer, and while the presence of the naval base has occasionally stoked displays of popular discontent on a diplomatic level, it became far less controversial. By 1987 Bahrain became the center of the expanding U.S. presence in the Gulf.¹⁰⁸ Bahrain has hosted the U.S. Navy’s Fifth Fleet since 1995 that currently includes about 7,000 US military personnel. The U.S. base has undergone several expansions including one on-going currently.¹⁰⁹

Bahrain’s preferential status was confirmed in early 1987 when the Reagan administration announced that it was supplying Manama with 12 advanced F-16 fighter jets, a weapon theretofore provided only to Israel and Egypt.¹¹⁰ Fifteen years later, President George W. Bush formalized the U.S.-Bahraini security relationship when he designated Bahrain a “major non-NATO ally” in March 2002.

This status allows Manama to purchase the same kind of weapons from the United States that are available to NATO members. This is not to say that American-Bahraini relations have been cloudless in the last decade. Leading U.S. politicians have repeatedly urged King Hamad to liberalize his policies toward the Shi’a population. The Bahraini response to U.S. criticism has been occasionally heavy handed, such as the expulsion of Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Tom Malinowski and the media campaign against Ambassador Tom Krajeski throughout his tenure (2011-14), mostly for getting too cozy with opposition figures and (needlessly) antagonizing the

royal family.¹¹¹ In a July 2011 interview Field Marshal Khalifa bin Ahmad even declared that the uprising was “a conspiracy involving Iran with the support of the United States” later elaborating in another interview that the “‘coup plot’ had been supported by twenty-two different NGOs ‘all operated, funded, and trained by the U.S. and a[n unnamed] Gulf country’.”¹¹²

The U.S. response, if any, to the Field Marshal’s comments was not made public. It might have been written off as pandering to militant (and often anti-Western) Sunni leaders. In any event, U.S. arm sales to Bahrain were suspended in response to the regime’s suppression of the 2011. Human rights groups reacted to the resumption of U.S. sales in May 2012 with cries of outrage.

The bottom line of U.S.-Bahraini relations is that geostrategic interests trump human rights considerations: Washington might “gently prod” the Al Khalifa about how they run their state, but its first and foremost objective is continued access to one of the world’s most strategically important harbor. Stability in Bahrain, even at the price of continued anti-Shi’a discrimination, is the objective the United States and Bahrain share. At a March 2006 luncheon with US Ambassador William T. Monroe, King Hamad said, “we feel we are protected by your presence. Without you, we’d be squashed.”¹¹³ The King referred to the threat from Iran, and in the decade since nothing happened that would have made the Al Khalifa less concerned. In sum, the United States has been Bahrain’s indispensable ally and will surely remain so in the foreseeable future.

In 2015 the U.K. began constructions on its first permanent naval base abroad since 1971. Located at the Mina Salman Harbor in Manama, virtually next door to the U.S. naval facility, the Royal Navy’s new base, HMS Juffair, will help battle the Islamic State and other jihadist and extremist groups present in the region.¹¹⁴ The US\$23.5 million project will allow warships as large as the new 65,000-ton aircraft carrier Queen Elizabeth to berth at the new port.

British Ambassador Ian Lindsay noted that Britain is a “strategic partner of choice” for Bahrain and called the base deal “arguably the most important” since Bahraini independence.¹¹⁵ The bulk of the new base’s cost will be paid from Bahraini funds, the U.K. is to contribute £9 million over three years.¹¹⁶ The project has been highly controversial both in Britain and among Bahrain’s Shi’a population owing to Manama’s human rights record.

II. The 2011 Uprising and the BDF

The revolt in Bahrain was exceptional among the eight Arab monarchies both in terms of its magnitude and in terms the violence that accompanied it.¹¹⁷ On February 12, 2011, King Hamad decided to grant every Bahraini family 1,000 Bahraini Dinars (about \$2,700) to commemorate the tenth anniversary of Bahrain's National Action Charter—a document ending the popular uprising of the 1990s. The real reason behind the gesture was to placate the population touched by the revolutionary fever coming in from Tunisia and Egypt.¹¹⁸ In any event, this measure failed to stifle the long pent-up frustrations and energies of the opposition and a loose umbrella coalition comprised mostly of young activists called for a demonstration two days later. (Their name, hence, became the “February 14 Youth Coalition.”)

Although initially there were some Sunnis among the protesters—their numbers were exaggerated by most observers—the revolt quickly took on a sectarian character as it became an exclusively Shi'a Muslim affair.¹¹⁹ At first the demonstrators converged on Pearl Roundabout (or *al-dawār*) in the city center though later the unrest spread to the mostly Shi'a neighborhoods.¹²⁰ The first gatherings were spontaneous and cheerful and the crowds chanted “*silmīyya, silmīyya*” (“peaceful, peaceful”) as they did elsewhere during the first stages of the uprising. Protesters initially called for the creation of a constitutional monarchy, political reforms, and an end to anti-Shi'a discrimination.

On February 15, King Hamad spoke to the nation and promised to create a commission that would look into allegations of the police using force against demonstrators. The protesters were camping out at the Pearl Roundabout and for the first couple of days there seemed to be little obvious police presence. From the beginning, however, there were intense behind-the-scenes discussions among the political leadership as to how to respond to the developments.¹²¹

After the pre-dawn police raid of peaceful protesters on February 17 in which four of them were killed and hundreds—including forty police personnel—injured, the crisis escalated and protesters became more radicalized, taking an increasingly anti-monarchical character, notwithstanding King Hamad's repeated offers of dialogue and the government's release of some political prisoners. On the same day, the GCC held an emergency meeting in Manama with Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal other members pledging to Bahrain that they will stand “united in the face of challenges.”¹²²

Opposition forces—once the main opposition party, Al-Wefaq, chose to walk away from the dialogue and withdraw its representatives from the legislature¹²³—soon became dominated by young radicals and others who shunned the regime's offers. Their explicit goal was to bring down the monarchy. On February 22, the largest (Shi'a) demonstration in Bahrain's history took place followed by a Sunni counter-demonstration.

In response, the Crown Prince invited the representatives of the opposition to begin a formal dialogue about a package of political reforms—that included much greater say for the Shi'a population in government—and King Hamad released or pardoned 308 political prisoners.¹²⁴ Even these measures failed to satisfy the protesters. In what is now recognized as a major tactical error, opposition leaders—including the leaders of the more moderate Al-Wefaq not just those of the increasingly radical February 14

Coalition—refused to meet the Crown Prince, their natural ally in the royal family. As they became more militant and their expectations that the regime would offer yet more concessions “to save itself” began to seem more realistic, the opposition lost its way.¹²⁵ There was a grievous miscalculation that has dealt a severe blow to a potential Sunni-Shi’a reconciliation.

The protests continued in March and occasionally turned into violent riots with demonstrators blocking the entrance to the parliament building and blockading the city’s financial district. Numerous rallies were organized to voice specific grievances. For instance, thousands of those outraged by the regime’s policy of increasing the proportion of Sunnis by granting foreigners citizenship, gathered on March 8 in front of the Immigration Office in Manama chanting “The naturalized must get out!”¹²⁶ Some of these events were quite large, with over 100,000 people participating.¹²⁷

On March 15, after more than a month of chaos, the royal family reached the end of its patience: King Hamad declared martial law that gave BDF Commander Field Marshal Khalifa bin Ahmad greatly increased powers. The latter supervised the repression of the revolt relying almost entirely on police and National Guard forces. On March 18 security forces bulldozed the symbolic center of the uprising, the Pearl Roundabout, and the Pearl Monument—raised in 1982 to commemorate the GCC’s third meeting—near Manama’s Financial District.

Numbers regarding the dead and injured are seldom beyond dispute. According to the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, the suppression of the revolt resulted in thirty-five dead, including five police officers.¹²⁸ The Bahraini Minister of Interior, Lieutenant General Shaikh Rashid bin Abdullah Al Khalifa, reported that four security officers, seven civilians and 13 protesters had perished in the weeks of unrest. In addition, “391 security officers, 56 citizens and expatriates were also injured while four other security officers were “abducted and tortured.”¹²⁹ According to the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, at least 95 people were killed by the authorities in the three year period that began with the uprising.¹³⁰ The number of injured was in the thousands.

Approximately 3,000 people were arrested, 700 of them were still behind bars at the end of 2011, and over 4,000 people lost their jobs owing to their participation in the conflict.¹³¹ Martial law was lifted two weeks earlier than initially planned, on June 1, 2011. The bottom line is that this was an unusually brutal repression of an uprising that was mishandled by a frightened regime. The royal family could have seized the upheaval as an opportunity to engage in meaningful discussions with the opposition about real political reforms. The opposition, too, as mentioned above, made numerous tactical mistakes that contributed to its increasing post-revolt political marginalization.

Military Factors

The main task of the BDF during the uprising was to guard key government sites (such as ministries) and hold areas from where police, National Guard, NSA, and other Ministry of Interior personnel already removed demonstrators. BDF units were placed on alert but did not participate in the February 17 raid on the protesters. On March 16 the BDF’s armored units were on site to provide assistance if requested, but did not engage the demonstrators. Two BDF assault helicopters were hovering over the Pearl Roundabout but did not use any of their weapons.¹³² In March some BDF units enforced curfew in

some areas and manned roadblocks but were not involved in any riot control operations. Soldiers did arrest some curfew violators but no claims of excessive use of force were lodged against them.¹³³ In fact, the BDF's role in the suppression of the 2011 uprising was so minor that a 340-page recent book on the uprising mentions the army just once, and then in connection with its deployment during the 1972 strikes.¹³⁴

During the uprising the BDF was not hampered by any serious internal cohesion issues even though it is far from a homogeneous organization. First, many members from different branches of the Al Khalifa family serve in the BDF: some are affiliated with the more moderate line represented by the King while others are closely related to the more conservative branches. Second, there could also be friction between the Al Khalifa generally and officers who hail from other Bahraini families.¹³⁵ Third, aside from Bahrainis a large number of people of different nationalities—Jordanians, Syrians, Pakistanis, etc.—serve in the force. Another source of potential conflict is between Pakistanis whose Arabic is rudimentary versus mercenaries who are native speakers of the language. None of these cleavages produced any noteworthy tension.

As in other armies there are generational tensions within the officer corps, though this is to some extent alleviated by the aforementioned practice of personnel staying for the duration of the 32-year career and being promoted regularly. In this sort of setting advancement in the ranks is virtually assured and, therefore, conflicts are mitigated. Experts have noted that junior officers in the BDF, too, tend to be more liberal than their more senior colleagues.¹³⁶ In any event, no tension or serious conflict has been reported from within the BDF though, given that it is a rather secretive organization, such issues, if any, would likely not be aired through the media. Most importantly, there is no doubt, that the BDF's personnel would remain loyal to the regime under virtually any circumstances.

There is little known animosity between the various agencies of Bahrain's coercive apparatus for several reasons. Personnel in all of them are well taken care of by the state, they have distinctive missions—though some of these somewhat overlap during times of domestic upheaval—and prominent members of the Al-Khalifa family command them who are in frequent contact with one another both through formal—through the meetings of the Supreme Defence Council—and informal occasions. The potentially fractious dichotomy between enlisted soldiers and conscripts that is so important elsewhere does not exist in Bahrain since all personnel are professional soldiers.

Regime Factors

BDF personnel and, indeed, the personnel of Bahrain's entire coercive apparatus, appear to harbor no doubt about the legitimacy of the Al Khalifa's regime. Their personal needs are more than met by the regime that has also been generous with its security services in terms of equipment, facilities, the assignment of clear missions. When it comes to maintaining domestic security the government has taken care to deploy units with an overwhelming majority of mercenaries and foreign-born personnel who might not have the same qualms about engaging Bahraini protesters and rioters than their co-nationals might. Thereby the monarchy circumvented one potential source of disquiet in the ranks.

The regime's directions to its security force were clear. In a 2012 interview King Hamad refused criticisms of his handling of the popular revolt.¹³⁷ For over four weeks prior to

the declaration of martial law, the monarchy was willing to engage the demonstrators in a constructive dialogue. The King declared the State of National Safety (i.e., martial law) only on March 15, *after* Crown Prince Salman—whom the royal family charged with negotiating with the opposition—failed. It was then that authority was transferred to BDF Commander Field Marshal Khalifa bin Ahmad. The latter held supreme power and was in charge of the *entire* coercive apparatus during the martial law period.

Societal Factors

Moderate Shi'a activists, represented primarily by the al-Wefaq movement, have worked for a shift toward a constitutional monarchy for decades. They want free elections, constitutional amendments to expand the authority of the Council of Representatives and to make it truly representative, and the replacement of the hard-line Prime Minister. Following the repression of the protests in March 2011, however, a growing proportion of the Shi'a community transferred its allegiance to radical opposition activists emblemized by the "Coalition of February 14th Youth."

Their principal objectives are to "liberate Bahrain from Saudi occupation," overthrow the monarchy, and let the population choose their own political and economic system.¹³⁸ Given the fears of Bahrain's Sunni population, political and business elites, the Al Khalifa and the Saudi ruling family, as well as of the United States and other western powers that free elections would eventually result in a Shi'a Islamic state, Bahrain's radical political opposition is destined to fail in the foreseeable future.

During the 2011 upheaval (and since) there was no fraternization between security personnel and demonstrators in Bahrain. Here it is important to reiterate that the majority of the policemen and other law enforcement agents actually facing the protesters were not Bahrainis but mercenaries, mostly from Pakistan. Demonstrators, well aware that most of the Pakistani policemen and National Guards spoke little Arabic, were taunting them in their language, Urdu, yelling "the police are crazy!" and "go back to Baluchistan!"¹³⁹

The Application of Violence

The regime resorted to violence on February 17, 2011 to end the protests: security forces used rubber bullets and tear gas on peaceful demonstrators, many of them asleep at what had become something like a street fair, killing at least four and injuring many.¹⁴⁰ Following the declaration of martial law, security forces—primarily the police and the National Guard—dispersed the demonstrators and demolished their makeshift headquarters. Field Marshal Khalifa bin Ahmad famously warned the activists that if they attempted to return, they could expect no mercy from the regime that would hit them with 200% of the force of the initial raid.¹⁴¹ Many cases of brutality, torture, and the withholding of medical attention were documented by human rights organizations and objective observers alike: clearly the regime used excessive force against the demonstrators.¹⁴² These abuses were committed chiefly by police and National Guard personnel. Members of Bahraini regime's coercive apparatus were far more willing to shoot at protesters than their colleagues in Tunisia or Egypt. Again, most of them were *not* Bahrainis but mercenaries who had little contact with the local population. Still, Pakistani security personnel seem to be on the same page as other Sunnis when

appraising the prospects of a potential Shi'a-run Bahrain: "they would pop out one eye of every Sunni in the country," one of them surmised.¹⁴³

Foreign Dimension

During the uprising Bahrain benefited greatly from the Gulf Cooperation Council's largesse. While the GCC was by far the most important foreign actor for the monarchies, diplomatic support from farther away—particularly from the United States and Western Europe—also boosted the confidence of ruling elites in some of the countries. The GCC played a major role in responding to the upheaval by providing and coordinating financial and security aid to its members.¹⁴⁴

Foreign Intervention

When King Hamad lost his confidence in his ability to restore order, he asked for GCC assistance, which promptly arrived, on March 14, in the shape of over 1,000 Saudi National Guards and 500 policemen from the United Arab Emirates. The GCC asked Kuwait to send troops as well but the request was controversial because it pitted Sunni and Shi'a members of Kuwait's parliament against one another. In the end, the Kuwaiti government offered mediators and a naval contingent of a few ships.¹⁴⁵

In spite of what some analysts wrote, the Saudi soldiers *did not* engage the demonstrators in any way, let alone "disperse them."¹⁴⁶ The GCC contingent secured strategic locations and buildings while domestic forces suppressed the resistance. The GCC also promised a \$20 billion aid package to Bahrain and Oman, two of the less wealthy member states, to finance development projects to alleviate social discontent.¹⁴⁷ In April 2011, in yet another supportive nod to Bahrain, the GCC appointed Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani—a Sandhurst graduate and retired BDF Lieutenant General with a Ph.D. from the US Naval Postgraduate School—as the organization's General Secretary. Since then Zayani has focused on promoting joint military cooperation among GCC states.

Foreign Affairs

The turmoil in Bahrain was widely viewed as a proxy conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran.¹⁴⁸ First, the Saudi state has a tremendous influence on Bahrain, which is only accessible on land from Saudi Arabia, through the King Fahd Causeway. Second, the Saudis are understandably worried about the effect of Bahrain's Shi'a uprising on their own Shi'a minority in their Eastern Province where, incidentally, the bulk of the country's oil deposits are. Third, Shi'a majority Iran, the Sunni monarchies' arch-enemy, has not only been keenly interested in the fate of its religious brethren in Bahrain but Iranian officials have claimed Bahrain as Iran's province in public statements.¹⁴⁹

At the May 2012 Riyadh meeting of the GCC the potential union of Saudi Arabia with Bahrain was one of the main topics of discussion. Such a merger would allow the Saudis to block potential compromises between the Manama regime and its Shi'a majority, would change the sectarian balance and render the Bahraini Shi'a a minority in the unified state, and allow Riyadh to station their troops permanently in Bahrain.¹⁵⁰ The GCC was active in supporting all Arab monarchies—including non-GCC members Jordan and Morocco—during the 2011 upheaval.

During the uprising in Bahrain the US found itself in a sensitive spot. It could not afford to antagonize Bahraini ruling elites but, at the same time, it also needed to express its support for democratic reform in the kingdom. In March 2011 U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates went to Bahrain to offer support to but also to urge the royal family to enter a dialogue with the protesters.¹⁵¹ In her memoirs then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recalled repeatedly urging the Bahraini leaders and their Saudi allies to pursue a political solution to the crisis but in vain.¹⁵²

The U.S. position was hardly strengthened by the poor performance of the above-mentioned Ambassador Tom Krajewski, who was considered not only too close to Shi'a politicians but also incapable of running his embassy effectively.¹⁵³ In fact, the embassy's own human rights officer, Ludovic Hood, even brought a box of donuts to the demonstrators as they were preparing for another protest. Later, Hood had to be evacuated owing to the mainstream Sunni media's attacks against him.¹⁵⁴ Criticisms of Bahrain's human rights record aside, the Obama Administration continued to engage the Bahraini government throughout the early 2010s and did not impose formal sanctions on Bahrain or Bahraini officials.¹⁵⁵

Revolutionary Diffusion

As elsewhere in the region, after the success of the Tunisian revolution and the revolt to bring down Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, Bahraini activists also began to believe that they might be able to elicit some political concessions from the absolute monarchy. The quick succession in which copycat protests were organized—often on social media—in country after country, including Bahrain, confirms the power of this strength of the revolutionary virus, that is to say, the power of contagion, the demonstration effect. But, as in so many anti-regime uprisings in the past, opposition forces in Bahrain overestimated their capacity to force political change.

Rather than aiming for realistic goals—as they did at the beginning of the process—they quickly became more radical and lost their sense of what was realistically attainable. To believe, that Shi'a protesters would be able to topple the Al Khalifa's rule while Bahraini security forces and their Saudi sponsors looked on was simply delusional. For the Saudis Bahrain is a quasi-domestic issue and it is hard to imagine that they would ever allow Bahrain to become a Shi'a-ruled state – no matter under what guise.¹⁵⁶

III. Post-Uprising Reforms and Developments

Perhaps the most surprising concession an Arab ruler made to the political opposition was King Hamad's appointment of a commission to investigate the Bahraini security forces' handling of the protests. In late June 2011, days after he lifted the state of emergency, King Hamad invited an independent investigation of the government's role in the suppression of the uprising.¹⁵⁷

Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI)

The monarchy's invitation to an independent and objective body—the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI)—from abroad to, in effect, hold its government to account, is unprecedented. Moreover, the regime gave Cherif Bassiouni, a highly regarded Egyptian-American professor of international and human rights law, and his colleagues unlimited access to government facilities—such as prisons, police and military bases, etc.—and fully cooperated his commission.¹⁵⁸

Bassiouni had weekly meetings with King Hamad to discuss BICI's work and the access to individuals, institutions, and documents he needed. The two mostly conversed in Arabic and the King often called his ministers (mostly of justice, interior, and defense) in Bassiouni's presence. Talking about the experience four years later, Bassiouni had only good things to say about the openness and integrity of the process.

On November 23, 2011 the BICI released its findings in an unexpectedly candid report that charged the regime with widespread human rights violations, using excessive force in breaking up the protests, torturing demonstrators in custody, and punishing the Shi'a community collectively. King Hamad was sitting next to Bassiouni as he was reading the summary of his critical report on national television—many observers commented that few if any Arab leaders would have been willing to voluntarily subject their regime to this kind of outside scrutiny. Afterwards the king expressed hope that the report would offer a real chance for reconciliation. More importantly, he pledged to adopt most of the document's recommendations.¹⁵⁹ What measures have been taken by the regime? What reforms have been implemented?

The presence of security agencies on Bahraini streets has only increased since the uprising which, given the on-going and often destructive protests—mostly at night and involving, usually, low-level violence—is hardly surprising. According to Shi'a community activists the main reason for the somewhat lower intensity of protests between mid-2014 and late-2015 is that more of the ring-leaders have been put in jail, usually for long stints.¹⁶⁰ At the same time, of the 200 cases of security forces abusing protesters only nine went to trial and only one conviction was handed down; only a handful of police and no senior officials lost their jobs.¹⁶¹

Put simply, the regime has not dealt a blow to the culture of impunity that has long characterized Bahrain's security sector. King Hamad continues to insist that Bahrain is a constitutional monarchy, that “we are the number one in reforms of all the Arab countries,” that he imposed martial law because “our women were very scared and it is the duty of a gentleman to protect women,” and that members of the royal family occupy

most influential positions in government “because of merit.”¹⁶² Every one of these claims sounds spurious.

Addressing the Causes

Most importantly, the government has not addressed the underlying causes of the uprising, the systematic and institutionalized discrimination against and marginalization of the Shi’a Muslim community. To be sure, King Hamad did not ask the BICI to investigate the roots of the revolt only to examine the behavior of the security apparatus and recommend ways to remedy the mistakes that were made. Clearly, as long as the monarchy’s treatment’s of the Shi’a does not fundamentally change, the potential of sectarian serious conflict will not be far from the surfacing.

On the positive side of the ledger, already on November 29, not quite a week after the findings became public, King Hamad sacked a family member, Khalifa bin Abdullah Al Khalifa, the director of the NSA, the agency that received the most criticism in the Bassiouni Report. (To save face, he actually received a promotion as he was appointed as Secretary General [in fact, the head] of Supreme Defence Council.) His replacement, Major-General Abdel bin Khalifa al-Fadhel, is thought to espouse more moderate views and his selection was expected to mollify the opposition.

New regulations curtailed the NSA’s law enforcement powers and established an Ombudsman’s Office in the Ministry of Interior. More specifically the 2008 Royal Decree that endowed the NSA with the power to make arrests was revoked already by another Royal Decree already in November 2011.¹⁶³ The regime also began to fund a National Institution for Human Rights and continued to support a Special Investigative Unit in the Public Prosecutor’s Office. Of course, these institutions could certainly do more to force the regime to satisfy human rights standards and to hold more rogue police officers accountable, respectively, their very (continued) existence holds out the promise that they might be more successful in the future.

The introduction of a community policing program—mostly undertaken by the Ministry of Interior’s Special Security Forces Command—was another one of the BICI report’s recommendation. This, too, was heeded by the regime and now there are over 1,000 officers are participating in this initiative. Nevertheless, some analysts suggest that results have been largely superficial.¹⁶⁴

The regime also made significant headway in overhauling the security forces that engage protesters face to face. The government boosted security forces reform by hiring two Western police leaders, John Yates from London and John Timoney from Miami as well as a Bahraini moderate, Tariq al-Hasan, the former Commandant of the Royal Police Academy to become Chief of Public Security.¹⁶⁵

In a late-2015 interview Bassiouni was critical of the regime *not* so much for not doing enough to respond to the BICI Report’s recommendations but for not publicizing the reforms and policy modifications that it did implement. For instance, Bassiouni pointed out, most observers know that 1,200 students were dismissed from universities for their political actions but few were aware that all but 12 of those students returned to the classrooms (and the 12 who did not were engaged in violence and were prosecuted). Similarly, of the 4,000 people who lost their jobs during and after the uprising, more than

3,000 were quickly reinstated following the Report but this measure, too, was not publicized. Some, including Bassiouni, speculate that the moderate wing of the regime did not want to “advertise” these actions lest it should provoke the ire of the hardliners.¹⁶⁶ The majority of Shi’a mosques destroyed by the regime during the unrest have been reconstructed.¹⁶⁷

The BICI’s criticisms were reserved for the police, the National Guard, the NSA, and other law enforcement agencies. The Bassiouni Report largely exonerated the BDF whose involvement in the suppression of the uprising was extremely limited. The BDF did not abuse its power and conducted its operations with professionalism. The only dent on its record was that a few protesters were mistakenly put into military prison for a short while. BICI investigators talked to these prisoners who complained of being mistreated but later it was established that they were only roughly handled when picked up by military police.

Even before the BICI report’s release, Bassiouni noted, the BDF holding facilities were spruced up and a common room with entertainment facilities was established.¹⁶⁸ Still, some observers have tended to paint all security agencies with the same brush. For instance, Laurence Louër incorrectly states, without supportive evidence, that the “BDF... was used extensively in the repression of the 2011 uprising.”¹⁶⁹ No wonder that many in the BDF have resented having to pay the price for the internal security forces’ abuses.¹⁷⁰ Still, to avoid such mistaken reports and to streamline its mission, since 2011 the BDF has been withdrawn entirely from dealing with the public and is no longer involved in any routine domestic operations.

All in all, it is hard to dismiss the monarchy’s foreign and domestic critics who consider that Hamad’s solicitation of the BICI Report was, first and foremost, a shrewd political move. It generated a lot of positive publicity in the West even in respected new organizations like *The Economist* and deflected focus from the brutality with which the demonstrators were handled. The hope of democracy and human rights activists was that, simply put, the report would name names, heads would roll, and the monarchy would implement substantive alterations in its policies. Looking back five years later, these hopes now seem naïve. In many ways the situation has become worse, the changes have been mostly cosmetic, and the few leaders in the regime’s coercive apparatus who were demoted or dismissed seemed to have ended up with promotions or in positions no worse than they were before. More generally, the handling of the BICI Report highlighted the increased influence of hardliners in the regime.

Notwithstanding some positive developments, most human rights activists agree that since 2011 key recommendations of the BICI Report have not been implemented and in many respects both the letter and the spirit of the document has been ignored. There is no shortage of examples. In 2014, courts dissolved the Shi’a Islamic Ulema Council after ruling it was an unlicensed organization that engaged in illegal political activity. In 2016, another court dissolved Al-Wefaq, accusing it of helping to foster violence and “terrorism.” Many human rights activists and politicians have been jailed, exiled, and stripped of their Bahraini citizenship.

IV. Conclusion

The objective of this report was to demonstrate that Bahrain's army has been an able defender of, in descending order, the royal family and its rule, the Sunni political and business elites, and the Sunni population. It is an army not of the entire Bahraini nation but of its privileged part. The report also argued that during the 2011 uprising the BDF ably performed the duties—mainly protecting precious “real estate”—it was asked to perform. In contrast to some inaccurate reports, it could not have committed the large-scale abuses as it suppressed the uprising for the simple reason that it was not part of the force charged with that task. Finally, the report aimed to explain and underscore the decisive impact the outside world has had on the BDF. Bahrain's strategic location, modest size, its long and contentious history with Iran, its close alliance with Saudi Arabia and the United States, and the fact that a large part of its population is comprised of foreign nationals all suggest its extraordinary level of interconnectedness with the world beyond its shores.

Monarchies have weathered the “Arab Spring” far better than republics. The eight Arab kingdoms remained stable, even Bahrain, that experienced the most intense upheaval. In fact, the resilience of Arab monarchies is quite remarkable; the last to fall was Libya in 1969. There are quite a few ways to explain this notion, but Arab rulers themselves would likely agree with Edward Banfield:

A monarchy is the best kind of government because the king is then the owner of the country. Like the owner of a house, when the wiring is wrong, he fixes it... In a republic, the country is like a house that is rented. If the lights go out, well, that's all right... it's not his house. The renter does not fix it. So with the men who govern a republic. They are not interested in fixing things. If something is not quite right and if they are turned out for it, well, meanwhile they have filled their pocketbooks.¹⁷¹

Several political scientists have made the connection between the durability of regimes and the kind of opposition they face.¹⁷² In Bahrain, the protesters had no chance: not only were they handicapped by their sectarian identity but they could present no palatable alternative to the Al Khalifa's rule for the population. Even if the Bahraini opposition's objective were “democratization”—and it was most certainly not—that goal had been seen by the Sunni population and its supporters in Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Gulf as tantamount to surrendering rule to a Shi'a majority and Iran's influence. To succeed, an uprising must have the backing of the regime's armed forces and coercive apparatus. It is hard to imagine an army more unlikely to turn against the state and the regime that it was supposed to serve than the BDF.

BIOGRAPHY

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Notes

¹ See Justin Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain and the Arab Gulf* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 96. There are many different estimates, see, for instance, Steven Cook, “Fear and Loathing in Bahrain,” posted on 28 April 2011.

² For more on the tribal and geographical origins of the Al Khalifa, see Rosemarie Said Zahlan, *The Making of the Modern Gulf States: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 48, 82-84; and, more broadly, Fuad I. Khuri, *Tribe and State in Bahrain: The Transformation of Social and Political Authority in an Arab State* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

³ See Andrew Wheatcroft, *The Life and Times of Shaikh Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifa, Ruler of Bahrain 1942-1961* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1995), 39-41. See also Shaikh Abdullah bin Khalid Al Khalifa, and Michael Rice, eds. *Bahrain through the Ages: The History* (London: Kegan Paul, 1993).

⁴ Ali Al-Jamri, “Assessing the Administrative and Social Transition in Bahrain from Pre-Modern to Modern during the Reign of Sheikh Isa bin Ali, 1869-1923,” MA thesis, School of Oriental and Asian Studies (London), September 2014, 15.

⁵ See May Seikaly, “Women and Social Change in Bahrain,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 26:3 (August 1994): 415-26; Louay Bahry, “The Socioeconomic Foundations of the Shiite Opposition in Bahrain,” *Mediterranean Quarterly*, 11:3 (2000): 129-43; and Dunya Ahmed Abdulla Ahmed, “Bahrain,” in Sanja Kelly and Julia Bresley, eds., *Women’s Rights in the Middle East and North Africa* (New York: Freedom House, 2010), 59-88.

⁶ See, for instance, Adel Darwish, “Rebellion in Bahrain,” *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, 3:1 (March 1999): 84; and Nada Al-Wadi, “The War of the Words: Bahrain’s Struggle over Local Coverage,” CEIP/SADA, May 3, 2012.

⁷ See, for instance Justin J. Gengler, “Royal Factionalism, the Khawalid, and the Securitization of ‘the Shi’a Problem’ in Bahrain,” *Journal of Arabian Studies*, 3:1 (June 2013): 53-79.

⁸ Interviews with politicians, diplomats, and public intellectuals in Bahrain (December 2012, October 2014, and December 2015).

⁹ Gengler, “Royal Factionalism,” 56. That said, notwithstanding his protestations – see “Arab Spring? That’s the Business of Other Countries – Interview with the King of Bahrain,” *Der Spiegel*, 13 February 2012, available at <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/spiegel-interview-with-the-king-of-bahrain-arab-spring-that-s-the-business-of-other-countries-a-814915.html>.

¹⁰ Kenneth Katzman, “Bahrain: Reform, Security, and US Policy,” (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 8 May 2015 [7-5700, 95-1013].), 2; and Frederic

Wehrey, “With Friends Like These: Bahrain’s U.S.-Backed Military and the National Dialogue,” *World Politics Review*, 14 March 2013.

¹¹ Conversations with Bahraini citizens in 2012-2015. They also remind one of the ubiquitous display of large pictures of communist party leaders in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. They were similarly unnecessary and irritating to hapless citizens.

¹² Bahrain is likely to be the only country in the world where a 8,200-strong military is commanded by a “Field Marshal.”

¹³ See Gengler, “Royal Factionalism,” 63; and Heiko Wimmen, “Divisive Rule: Sectarianism and Power Maintenance in the Arab Spring,” *SWP Research Paper #4* (Berlin, March 2014).

¹⁴ Gengler, “Royal Factionalism,” 63.

¹⁵ Interviews and conversations in Bahrain (December 2015).

¹⁶ In Hamad’s book on the establishment of the BDF, *First Light: Modern Bahrain and Its Heritage* (London: Kegan Paul, 1994), Khalifa bin Ahmad is mentioned in glowing terms (e.g., 83). I am grateful to Justin Gengler for this point.

¹⁷ Abdulhadi Khalaf, “Contentious Politics in Bahrain: From Ethnic to National and Vice Versa,” paper presented at the Fourth Nordic Conference on Middle Eastern Studies, Oslo 13-16 August 1998; available at <http://org.uib.no/smi/pao/khalaf.html>.

¹⁸ For a discussion of these allies, see Zahlan, *The Making of the Modern Gulf States*, 47; and, more generally, Khuri, *Tribe and State*.

¹⁹ See Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, *First Light: Modern Bahrain and Its Heritage* (London: Kegan Paul, 1994), 72-74.

²⁰ For the early history of the BDF, see Hamad, *First Light*, especially 63-98.

²¹ See Nazih H. Ayubi, *Over-stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1995), 278-88.

²² Interviews with Bahraini journalists and politicians.

²³ Khalaf, “Contentious Politics.” See also Simon Bromley, “The Prospects for Democracy in the Middle East,” in David Held, ed., *Prospects for Democracy: North, South, East, West* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 380-404.

²⁴ Philippe Droz-Vincent, “From Fighting Formal Wars to Maintaining Civil Peace?” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 43 (2011): 393.

²⁵ Confidential interviews in Bahrain (October 2014 and December 2015).

²⁶ See the discussion in Dorothy Ohl, “Bahrain’s ‘Cohesive’ Military and Regime Stability amid Unrest,” in Albrecht, Croissant, and Lawson, eds., *Military Engagement in Mobilizing Societies: Armies and the Arab Spring* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 145-167; and confidential interviews with BDF officers (Bahrain, December 2015).

²⁷ See, for instance, Jamie Merrill, “Government Refuses to Release Details of Relationship with Authoritarian Bahrain,” *Independent*, 10 March 2015, available at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/government-refuses-to-release-details-of-relationship-with-authoritarian-bahrain-10099197.html>.

²⁸ Frederic Wehrey, “The Jittery Gulf Needs More than Washington’s Reassurances,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (Washington, DC, 13 May 2015).

²⁹ “HM King Hamad Appoints Supreme Defence Council Secretary General,” *Bahrain News Agency*, 28 November 2011.

³⁰ Ayubi, *Overstating*, 281.

³¹ Mohammed Nuruzzaman, “Politics, Economics and Saudi Military Intervention in Bahrain,” *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 43:2 (2013): 367.

³² Yousif Albinkhalil, *America and Bahrain in Winter: Analysis of the Relationship between the USA and the Sunnis in Bahrain* (Xlibris LLC, 2013), 103-104; and interviews with US Embassy personnel (Manama, 12 December 2012). See also David F. Winkler, *Amirs, Admirals, and Desert Sailors* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2007), 174-180.

³³ Abdulhadi Khalaf, “Labor Movements in Bahrain,” *MERIP Reports* #132 (May 1985): 29.

³⁴ See SIPRI’s database, available at www.sipri.org/databases/milex. See also Christopher M. Davidson, *After the Sheikhs: The Coming Collapse of the Gulf Monarchies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 167.

³⁵ *The Military Balance 2016* (London: IISS, 2016), 321-322. I use these figures for consistency; other, differing estimates have been published by, among others, Cordesman and Al-Rodhan.

³⁶ Analysis of the *Military Balance, 2016*, 322; Brian Dooley, “Four Years On, U.S. Should Push Bahrain to Reform Security Forces,” *Huffington Post*, 13 February 2015; and interviews with US officers stationed in Bahrain (October 2014).

³⁷ Interviews with Bahraini military experts (Manama and Cairo, October 2014).

³⁸ See, for instance, Andrew Chuter, “UK-Bahrain Base Deal Could Lead to Typhoon Sales,” *Defense News* (London), 13 December 2014; and Richard Norton-Taylor, “Saudi Arabia and Bahrain: UK Arms Sales Trump Human Rights,” *Guardian*, 15 January 2015.

³⁹ “BDF Signs \$56m Healthcare Project Agreement with KMC,” *Gulf Digital News Online* (Manama), 20 September 2015, available at www.gdnonline.com/Details/24261.

⁴⁰ “Gulf Defense Spending Trimmed for First Time in a Decade,” *Al Defaiya: Arabian Defense and Aerospace Business*, 22 December 2015.

⁴¹ Anthony H. Cordesman, and Khalid R. Al-Rodhan, “The Gulf Military Forces in an Era of Asymmetric War: Bahrain,” Center for Strategic and International Studies (Washington, DC, June 2006), 4.

⁴² See Matteo Legrenzi, *The GCC and the International Relations of the Gulf: Diplomacy, Security, and Economic Coordination in a Changing Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 80; Lenore G. Martin, *The Unstable Gulf: Threats from Within* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1984), 48; and Hasan Tariq Alhasan, "The Role of Iran in the Failed Coup of 1981: The IFLB in Bahrain," *Middle East Journal*, 65:4 (Autumn 2011): 603-17; and Claire Beaugrand, "In and Out Moves of the Bahraini Opposition," in Abdulhadi Khalaf, Omar Al Shehabi, and Adam Hanieh, eds., *Transit States: Labour Migration & Citizenship in the Gulf* (London: Pluto Press, 2015), 198-219.

⁴³ See Khalaf, "Contentious Politics," and e-mail message to one of the authors.

⁴⁴ Katzman, "Bahrain," 14.

⁴⁵ Habib Toumi, "Bahrainis Reject Iranian Interference," *Gulf News*, 26 July 2015. See also "Bahrain: Five Are Convicted of Conspiring with Iran to Carry Out Attacks," *Reuters*, 5 November 2015. Some Western diplomats apparently question the authenticity of this incident. (E-mail message from Justin Gengler, 7 June 2016). The US military personnel I discussed it with in Bahrain in December 2015 did not doubt that it was genuine.

⁴⁶ Frederic Wehrey, "The Gulf's Achilles' Heel," Carnegie Endowment, March 27, 2014, available at <http://carnegieendowment.org/2014/03/27/gulf-s-achilles-heel/h5y6>.

⁴⁷ Interview with two elderly Bahraini leftists, participants in the Dhofar Rebellion (Manama, December 2015). See also Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 10.

⁴⁸ See Cole Bunzel's essay on al-Bin'ali on *Jihadica: Documenting the Global Jihad* at <http://www.jihadica.com/the-caliphate's-scholar-in-arms/>; and "The Millennial ISIS Preacher Radicalizing the Next Generation of Jihadis," *New York Post*, 28 January 2015.

⁴⁹ Hamad, *First Light*, 81-82

⁵⁰ See "Egypt, Bahrain Joint Military Training Continues," 28 May 2014; and "Egypt to Participate in Joint Air Force Training in the Gulf," 27 April 2014, both in *Daily News Egypt*.

⁵¹ "Military Chiefs for Anti-IS State Talks," *Daily Tribune* (Bahrain), 17 February 2015.

⁵² Sandeep Singh Grewal, "Bahraini Jets Join Syria Strikes," *Gulf Daily News*, 24 September 2014 and "Bahrain Deploys Warplanes to Jordan for Anti-ISIS Fight," *Al-Akhbar*, 16 February 2016.

⁵³ See Habib Toumi, "Through Prayers, Bahrain Pays Tribute to Fallen Heroes," *Gulf News*, 11 September 2015.

⁵⁴ See, for instance, "HM King Visits Royal Guard," *Bahrain News Agency*, 23 March 2016; "Nasser bin Hamad 8th in South Africa Ironman Championship," *Bahrain News Agency*, 10 April 2016; "Crown Prince Awards Service Medals to Brave BDF Personnel Who Have Served as Part of the Saudi-Led Coalition Forces to Restore Legitimacy in Yemen," *Bahrain News Agency*, 12 July 2016;

⁵⁵ "Premier Stresses Bahrain's Support for Yemen's Legitimacy," *Bahrain News Agency*, 30 July 2016.

⁵⁶ See Nelida Fuccaro, *Histories of City and State in the Persian Gulf: Manama since 1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 152-157, 160-163; and Miriam Joyce, *Bahrain from the Twentieth Century to the Arab Spring* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 83.

⁵⁷ Khuri, *State and Tribe*, 194-95.

⁵⁸ This period is widely known in Bahrain as the *Intifada* during which 40 people were killed. See Marc Valeri, "Contentious Politics in Bahrain: Opposition Cooperation between Regime Manipulation and Youth Radicalization," in Hendrik Jan Kraetzschmar, ed., *The Dynamics of Opposition Cooperation in the Arab World* (London: Routledge, 2013), 137-138. See, also Toby Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the Arab Spring that Wasn't* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), 6-7; and Frederic M. Wehrey, "Bahrain's Decade of Discontent," *Journal of Democracy*, 24:3 (July 2013): 116-126.

⁵⁹ See, for instance, Louay Bahry, "The Opposition in Bahrain: A Bellwether for the Gulf?" *Middle East Policy*, 5:2 (May 1997): 42-57; Adel Darwish, "Rebellion in Bahrain," *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, 3:1 (March 1999): 83-87; and, most importantly, Frederic M. Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 39-102.

⁶⁰ The report, published by the London-based Gulf Centre for Democratic Development in 2008, is available at <https://file.wikileaks.org/file/bandargate-report-2008.pdf>

⁶¹ Interviews at the Embassy with Assistant Defense Attaché LTC Mohamed Ali E. Ahmed (27 November 2012) and with Ambassador Nonoo (8 January 2013).

⁶² This, at least, is the shared opinion of the numerous Shi'a opposition leaders I talked with (Manama, December 2015).

⁶³ See the results of Gengler's 2009 survey in his *Group Conflict*, 114, 150, 154, etc. The book also supplies some interesting data (espec. 148-154) clearly demonstrating that there is no more than token representation of Shi'a in the Bahraini police and armed forces.

⁶⁴ Confidential interviews in Cairo (October 2014).

⁶⁵ Interviews with UK and US military personnel (Bahrain, October 2014 and December 2015).

⁶⁶ Wehrey, "With Friends Like These."

⁶⁷ See, for instance, "Commander-in-Chief Attends Military Drill," *News of Bahrain*, 29 April 2015.

⁶⁸ This paragraph is based on numerous interviews with US and UK officers serving in Bahrain and elsewhere in the Gulf and with former BDF enlisted soldiers and NCOs (2012-2015).

⁶⁹ See Youseff Harb, "Bahraini Monarchy Manufactures Demographic Changes," *Al-Akhbar*, 5 April 2014; and Catherine Shakdam, "How Bahrain's Regime Continues to Play Ethno-Sectarian Games to Suffocate Democracy," *American Herald Tribune*, 17

November 2015.

⁷⁰ See for instance, Shaikh Abdullah bin Khalid Al-Khalifa and Michael Rice, eds., *Bahrain through the Ages: The History* (Abingdon, England: Kegan Paul, 1993).

⁷¹ Interview with an Omani military historian at the Sultan's Armed Forces Museum (Muscat, 8 December 2012). See also Beatrice Nicolini, "The Baluch Role in the Persian Gulf during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*, 27:2 (2007): 84.

⁷² Syrians have also been recruited by the Bahraini regime and often get naturalized. Many ordinary soldiers come from the impoverished eastern Deir ez-Zor Governorate. See, for instance, Matthiesen, 36; and Laurence Louër, "Sectarianism and Coup-Proofing Strategies in Bahrain," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 36:2 (2013): 249.

⁷³ F. Gregory Gause, III, *Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1994), 125.

⁷⁴ "180 Pakistanis Deported," *Pakobserver*, 17 March 2013. Available at www.bahrainobserver.com/en/page/857/180+Pakistanis+deported.html. For a more general account, see K. T. Abdulhameed, "Bahrain's Migrant Security Apparatus," in Khalaf, et al., eds., *Transit States*, 153-169.

⁷⁵ Ikram Junaidi, "Bahrain Recruiting Former Military Men to Quell Protests," *Dawn.com*, 14 March 2014; available at www.dawn.com/news/1093230; and Abdulhameed, "Bahrain's Migrant Security Apparatus," 160-161.

⁷⁶ My italics. See Abdulhadi Khalaf, "Bahrain's Military Is Closely Tied to the Monarch," *New York Times*, 28 August 2012, available at www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2012/08/28/the-staying-power-of-arab-monarchies.

⁷⁷ Alex Delmar-Morgan and Tom Wright, "Bahrain's Foreign Police Add to Tensions," *Wall Street Journal*, March 25, 2011.

⁷⁸ BCHR, "Bahrain: Dangerous Statistics and Facts about the National Security Apparatus," 8 March 2009, available at www.bahrainrights.org/node/2784.

⁷⁹ Rafia Zakaria, "No Soldiers for Sale," *Dawn.com*, 16 August 2013, available at www.dawn.com/news/1036256.

⁸⁰ See, for instance, Bruce Riedel, "The New Bahrain-Pakistan Alliance," *National Interest*, 2 August 2011; Mujib Mashal, "Pakistan Troops Aid Bahrain's Crackdown," *Aljazeera*, 30 July 2011.

⁸¹ "King of Bahrain Vows to Enhance Military Cooperation at JSHQ," *Dawn.com*, 20 March 2014, available at www.dawn.com/news/1094257.

⁸² See, for instance, "Ties with Bahrain Based on Mutual Trust, Says PM," *APP* (Islamabad), 19 March 2014; and "Pakistan Not Sending Troops to Bahrain or Saudi: PM," *Dawn.com*, 20 March 2014.

⁸³ See Mohammed Al A'ali, "Military Service Plan for Women,"; and Basma Mohammed, "Women 'Are Taking up Senior Army Positions'," both articles in *Gulf*

Daily News, and “Honour for Women in Security Forces,” *Daily Tribune News*, all on 1 December 2014.

⁸⁴ Heather Saul, “‘One of the First’ Female UAE Fighter Pilots Leads Attacks against Isis in Syria,” *Independent*, 25 September 2014.

⁸⁵ *First Light*, 77.

⁸⁶ The reason Kuwait installed conscription was “an attempt to offset the numerical weight of its Bedouin and Shi’i/Irqi soldiers”. See Ayubi, *Over-stating*, 281.

“Kuwait to Suspend and Review Military Conscription,” *Gulf News*, 20 June 2001.

⁸⁷ See Nada Badawi, “Qatari Men Report for First Day of Mandatory National Service,” *Doha News*, 1 April 2014; “UAE Introduces Compulsory Military Service,” *Aljazeera*, 8 June 2014; and Mary Sophia, Kuwait Reintroduces Compulsory Military Service For Citizens 9 April 2017; respectively.

⁸⁸ We are grateful for Justin Gengler who urged us to emphasize this point.

⁸⁹ Toumi, “Through Prayers.”

⁹⁰ “Shaikh Mohammed Graduates with Top Honors,” *Gulf Digital News*, 21 July 2015, available at www.gdnonline.com/Details/14799.

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⁹² Personal visits to the museums in October 2014 (Cairo) and December 2015 (Riffa).

⁹³ “Bahrain cuts diplomatic ties with Iran,” *Al-Jazeera*; and Simeon Kerr and John Aglionby, “Bahrain and Sudan Sever Diplomatic Ties with Iran,” *Financial Times*, both on 4 January 2016.

⁹⁴ See for instance, Sani Ali Bashir, “A Study of Al-Khalifa’s Rule in Bahrain, 1783-1820,” Thesis, McGill University (Montréal), 1981, 6-9; Khuri, *Tribe and State in Bahrain*; and Husein al-Baharna, *Legal Status of the Gulf States: A Study of Their Treaty Relations and Their International Problems* (Manchester, UK: University of Manchester Press, 1968), 31.

⁹⁵ See, for instance, “Bahrain as ‘Iran’s Fourteenth Province’,” *Telegraph*, 17 February 2011; and Edward Gordon, “Resolution of the Bahrain Dispute,” *American Journal of International Law*, 65:3 (July 1971): 560-568.

⁹⁶ See, for instance, Ali Alfoneh, “Between Reform and Revolution: Sheikh Qassim, the Bahraini Shi’a, and Iran,” *Middle Eastern Outlook* (AEI for Public Policy Research), #4 (July 2012), 11 pp.

⁹⁷ Interviews with Western political experts and Shi’a opposition politicians in Bahrain (December 2012 and December 2015).

⁹⁸ See Simon Mabon, “The Battle for Bahrain: Iranian-Saudi Rivalry,” *Middle East Policy*, 19:2 (Summer 2012): 84-97.

⁹⁹ See more on Shaikh Salman's historic visit in Andrew Wheatcroft, *The Life and Times of Shaikh Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifa, Ruler of Bahrain 1942-1961* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1995), 201.

¹⁰⁰ See Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future* (New York: Norton, 2006); "The Sword Unsheathed," *Economist*, 18 October 2014.

¹⁰¹ Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 19.

¹⁰² See, for instance, Frederic Wehrey, "The Gulf's Achilles' Heel," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 27 March 2014.

¹⁰³ Interview with Western experts on Bahrain and three Bahraini politicians (Manama, December 2015).

¹⁰⁴ Nima Khorrami Assl, "The Kingdoms United?" *SADA/CEIP*, 22 May 2012, available at <http://carnegieendowment.org/2012/05/22/kingdoms-united/b4pk>. See also, "Saudi Arabia 'To Announce Union with Bahrain'," *Al Akhbar*, 13 May 2012; and "Gulf Considers Bahrain and Saudi Arabia Union," *Telegraph*, 14 May 2012.

¹⁰⁵ See Zahlan, *The Making of the Modern Gulf States*, 60-61; and Malcolm C. Peck, *The A to Z of the Gulf Arab States* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 159.

¹⁰⁶ This paragraph is based on David F. Winkler, *Amirs, Admirals, and Desert Sailors: Bahrain, the U.S. Navy, and the Arabian Gulf* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2007), 63-72.

¹⁰⁷ See, for instance, Gary Sick, *All Fall Down: America's Tragic Encounter with Iran* (New York: Random House, 1985).

¹⁰⁸ Fred H. Lawson, *Bahrain: The Modernization of Autocracy* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1989), 121.

¹⁰⁹ Greg Fountain, "Bahrain Open to Defence Alliances," *Gulf Daily News*, 1 December 2014.

¹¹⁰ David B. Ottaway, "US to Sell F16 Jets to Bahrain," *Washington Post*, 21 January 1987.

¹¹¹ Kenneth Katzman, "Bahrain: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy" (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 8 May 2015 [7-5700, 95-1013]), 16. Incidentally, Krajeski also had American critics. See Phillip Swarts, "Poor Leadership at Key Diplomatic Post in Bahrain, State Department Watchdog Warns," *Washington Times*, 27 March 2014.

¹¹² The interviews in Egypt's *Al-Ahram* and the Bahraini *Gulf News*, respectively, are cited in Gengler, "Royal Factionalism," 74.

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¹¹⁴ See "British Navy Begins Construction on New Base in Bahrain," *Gulf News Journal*, 3 November 2015.

¹¹⁵ Chuter, “UK-Bahrain.” For a fine study on British-Bahraini relations, see *Tinkering around the Edges: British Foreign Policy in Bahrain, 2011-16* (London: Bahraini Institute for Rights and Democracy, 2016).

¹¹⁶ Patrick Wintour, “Bahrain Paying for Royal Navy Base despite Human Rights Criticism,” *Guardian*, 15 June 2016.

¹¹⁷ For a comparative analysis of the 2011 revolts in the eight Arab monarchies, see Zoltan Barany, “Unrest and State Response in the Arab Monarchies,” *Mediterranean Quarterly*, 24:2 (Spring 2013): 5-38.

¹¹⁸ Valeri, “Contentious Politics,” 144.

¹¹⁹ See, for instance, Zainab Al-Khawaja, “Bahrain: Protesters Reject Sunni-Shi’a Spit Claims,” *Institute for War and Peace Recording*, Arab Spring Issue 7 (March 23, 2011); and James L. Gelvin, *The Arab Uprisings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 10.

¹²⁰ Kenneth Katzman, “Bahrain: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy” (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 21 March 2011 [7-5700, 95-1013]), 5.

¹²¹ Conversations with Mansoor Al-Jamri and other opposition figures (Manama, December 2015).

¹²² Henry Meyer, “Saudi Arabia Risks Shiite Unrest in Wake of Bahrain Turmoil,” *Bloomberg*, 20 February 2011.

¹²³ See “Shura Committee Calls Upon Al Wefaq to Withdraw Resignation,” *Bahrain News Agency*, 27 February 2011, available at [http://www.shura.bh/en/MediaCenter/News/Committees/Pages/28-02-2011\(2\).aspx](http://www.shura.bh/en/MediaCenter/News/Committees/Pages/28-02-2011(2).aspx).

¹²⁴ See Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 48; Katzman (2011), 6; and Frederic M. Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf: From the Iraq War to the Arab Uprisings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 78-79.

¹²⁵ Interviews with Bahraini opposition leaders and with American diplomats (Bahrain, December 2012 and October 2014). See also, Abdulhadi Khalaf, “On the Prelude to the 14 February Uprising,” in Ala’a Shehabi and Marc Owen Jones, eds., *Bahrain’s Uprising* (London: Zed Books, 2015), xvi.

¹²⁶ Charles Tripp, *The Power and the People: Paths of Resistance in the Middle East* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 114.

¹²⁷ Katja Niethammer, “Calm and Squalls: The Small Gulf Monarchies in the Arab Spring,” in Muriel Asseburg, ed., *Protest, Revolt, and Regime Change in the Arab World* (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 2012), 15.

¹²⁸ According to the BICI, altogether 35 deaths occurred that can be linked to the February-March 2011 events: 19 were attributed to security forces, 2 civilian deaths attributed to other civilians, 9 not to any specific perpetrators, and 5 deaths were members of security personnel. The death-toll has been overestimated by several writers. See, for instance, Valeri, “Contentious Politics,” 145.

¹²⁹ Andy Sambidge, “Bahrain Minister Says 24 People Dead in the Uprising,” *Arabian Business*, 29 March 2011.

¹³⁰ “Individuals Killed By Government’s Excessive Use of Force Since 14 February 2011,” Bahrain Center for Human Rights, available at <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/3864>.

¹³¹ “Arab Spring?” *Der Spiegel* interview.

¹³² These were the conclusions reached by the BICI’s investigation. See the *BICI Report* (final revisions 10 December 2011), 51-52; available at www.bibi.org.bh

¹³³ *BICI Report*, 263.

¹³⁴ See Ala’a Shehabi and Marc Owen Jones, eds., *Bahrain’s Uprising: Resistance and Repression in the Gulf* (London: Zed Books, 2015), 106.

¹³⁵ E-mail message from Abdulhadi Khalaf (1 October 2012).

¹³⁶ See Wehrey, “With Friends Like These,” and interview with US and UK officers stationed in Bahrain (December 2012).

¹³⁷ “Arab Spring?” *Der Spiegel* interview.

¹³⁸ Toby Jones, “Bahrain’s Revolutionaries Speak: An Exclusive Interview with Bahrain’s Coalition of February 14th Youth,” *Jadaliyya*, 22 March 2012, available at www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/4777/bahrain-revolutionaries-speak-an-exclusive-interv.

¹³⁹ See, for instance, Riedel, “The New Bahrain-Pakistan Alliance,” and interviews with protesters (Bahrain, October 2012).

¹⁴⁰ Katzman (2011), 5.

¹⁴¹ Al-Gharīrī, “Ithā ‘adtum ‘adnā 200% wa law ba’d ‘ām!” *Al-Watan*, 29 June 2012, cited by Gengler, “Royal Factionalism,” 73-74.

¹⁴² See, for instance, the reports of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights (at “Monthly Archive”), available at <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/month>; and Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics*, 78.

¹⁴³ Cited in Davidson, *After the Sheikhs*, 141

¹⁴⁴ On the GCC countries’ foreign relations and intra-GCC dynamics, see F. Gregory Gause, III, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); and Matteo Legrenzi, *The GCC and the International Relations of the Gulf* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011).

¹⁴⁵ David Roberts, “Kuwait,” in Davidson, ed., 11.

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¹⁴⁷ Mehran Kamrava, "The Arab Spring and the Saudi-Led Counterrevolution," *Orbis*, 56:1 (Winter 2012): 98.

¹⁴⁸ See, for instance, Margaret Coker and Farnaz Fassihi, "Iran, Saudi Arabia Tensions Spur Fears of a Proxy War," *Wall Street Journal*, 17 March 2011; Michael Slackman, "The Proxy Battle in Bahrain," *New York Times*, 19 March 2011; and, more broadly, Curtis Ryan, "The New Arab Cold War and the Struggle for Syria," *Middle East Report*, 42:262 (2012); available at www.merip.org/mer/mer262/new-arab-cold-war-struggle-syria.

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¹⁵⁰ Nima Khorrami Assl, "The Kingdoms United?" *SADA/CEIP*, 22 May 2012, available at <http://carnegieendowment.org/2012/05/22/kingdoms-united/b4pk>. See also, "Saudi Arabia 'To Announce Union with Bahrain'," *Al Akhbar*, 13 May 2012; and "Gulf Considers Bahrain and Saudi Arabia Union," *Telegraph*, 14 May 2012.

¹⁵¹ See Robert M. Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War* (New York: Knopf, 2014), 517.

¹⁵² See Hillary Rodham Clinton, *Hard Choices* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 355-60.

¹⁵³ A March 2014 Report by the US Department of State's Inspector General criticized Krajeski for, among other things, "his disdain for planning," "his lack of access to some key government officials, his poor media image, and the lack of an effective strategy to address these issues have created friction with principal officials in Washington." See Al Kamen, "Bahrain Official Wants US Ambassador out 'Immediately'," *Washington Post*, 21 March 2014; available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/in-the-loop/wp/2014/03/31/bahrain-official-wants-u-s-ambassador-out-immediately/> and Phillip Swarts, "Poor Leadership at Key Diplomatic Post in Bahrain, State Department Watchdog Warns," *Washington Times*, 27 March 2014.

¹⁵⁴ Elizabeth Flock, "Bahrain Diplomat Brought Home because of Threats, Ethnic Slurs," *Washington Post*, 1 June 2011; and Ben Piven, "The US and Bahrain: Sending Ludo Home," *Aljazeera*, 10 June 2011; and

¹⁵⁵ Katzman, (2015), 15-16.

¹⁵⁶ This is the opinion of all of the dozens of US, Saudi, and Bahraini security experts I interviewed.

¹⁵⁷ "The King's Risky Move," *Economist*, 26 November 2011; and Toby Jones, "We Know What Happened in Bahrain: Now What?" *SADA/CEIP*, 1 December 2011.

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Prof. Bassiouni (10 October 2015).

¹⁵⁹ See "The King's Risky Move," *Economist*, 26 November 2011.

¹⁶⁰ Personal observations and interviews in Bahrain in 2012-2015. See also Heiko Wimmen, "Divisive Rule: Sectarianism and Power Maintenance in the Arab Spring: Bahrain, Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria," *SWP Research Paper 4* (Berlin, March 2014), 7.

¹⁶¹ See Alex Delmar-Morgan, "Bahrain Is Criticized for Slow Pace of Change," *Wall Street Journal*, 23 November 2012; and Marc Owen Jones, "Rotten Apples or Rotten Orchards: Police Deviance, Brutality, and Unaccountability in Bahrain," in Shehabi and Jones, eds., *Bahrain's Uprising*, 207-238.

¹⁶² "Arab Spring?" *Der Spiegel* interview.

¹⁶³ Decree No. 115 of the Year 2011 on Amending Some Provisions of Decree No. 114 of the Year 2002," *Official Gazette of the Kingdom of Bahrain*, 18 November 2011. See Louër, 255.

¹⁶⁴ See Staci Strobl, "Bahrain," Mahesh K. Nalla and Graeme R. Newman, *Community Policing in Indigenous Communities* (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2013), 3-15; and *idem*, "Bahrain's Sectarian Police Force," Carnegie Endowment, 30 July 2015, available at <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/?fa=60897>.

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¹⁶⁶ Interviews with Bassiouni (October 2015) and Bahraini political analysts (December 2015).

¹⁶⁷ Anthony H. Cordesman, *Stability in the Gulf Region in 2016: Strategic Net Assessment*, CSIS (Washington, DC, Working draft, 15 June 2016), 158-59.

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Bassiouni (10 October 2015).

¹⁶⁹ Louër, 254.

¹⁷⁰ Aly Verjee, "Bahrain: National Dialogue Continues, But Reform Is in Doubt," available at <http://www.ssrresourcecentre.org/2013/03/05/bahrain-national-dialogue-continues-but-reform-is-in-doubt/>; and interview with BDF officers and NCOs (December 2012 and December 2015).

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