

OE Threat Assessment: Bahrain



[TRADOC G-2 Intelligence Support Activity \(TRISA\)](#)

Complex Operational Environment and
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Introduction

Bahrain is an island constitutional monarchy strategically located in the Persian Gulf between Saudi Arabia and Iran. It is the home base of the U.S. Fifth Fleet. The Sunni royal family controls all of the key political positions in the government, causing recent calls from the Shia majority population to demand more political rights, particularly in the wake of the Arab Spring uprisings in the region. Concerns over uprisings among its own Shia minority drove Saudi Arabia to send help to Bahrain to quash and control the pro-democracy protests that erupted in 2011. With Shia majority Iran to the east and Sunni majority Saudi Arabia to the west, Bahrain has become a small proxy ideological battleground. With limited oil and water reserves, Bahrain has incurred significant debt. Coupled with high unemployment among young Bahrainis, the ruling royal family will see continued social and political friction and pressure.

Political

Bahrain is a constitutional hereditary monarchy led by His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa al Khalifa since 6 March 1999. The United Kingdom granted Bahrain independence on 15 August 1971 and it officially adopted its current constitution on 14 February 2002. The island country has five administrative units, each administered by a governor: Asamah, Janubiyah, Muharraq, Shamaliyah, and Wasat. Political parties are illegal in Bahrain; however, per a law passed in July 2005, political societies are allowed.

Simmering just below the surface is always the tension between the minority Sunni Muslim-led government and the Shia Muslim majority. In recent years, the Shia have demanded greater power in government. The Arab Spring of 2011-2012 generated protests, but was easily quashed by the government with help from Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

The king functions as the head of state while the prime minister, appointed by the king, functions as the head of government. The cabinet is also appointed by the king. The Bahraini legislative branch consists of a bicameral National Assembly. The National Assembly is made up of a Shura Council or Consultative Council with 40 members appointed by the king and the Council of Representatives or Chamber of Deputies with 40 members directly elected to serve four-year terms.

The Council of Representatives last held two rounds of elections on 23 and 30 October 2010. The party make-up of the legislature with the number of seats held at that time was:

- Wefaq (Shia) 18
- Minbar (Sunni Muslim Brotherhood) 2
- Asala (Sunni Salafi) 3
- Independents 17



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Bahrain held an election in 2011 to fill 18 vacated seats. The seats were vacated by Wefaq, the government's largest opposition group, which did so to protest the treatment of demonstrators during the February 2011 political protests in Bahrain. The break-out for these 18 vacated seats was:

- independent (pro-government) 13
- Asala (Sunni Salafi) 1
- independent 1
- independent (Shia) 1
- Islamic Society League (Shia pro-government) 1
- Society for National Unity (Sunni pro-government) 1

The 1973 constitution gives the judiciary independent and separate powers within the government; however, the king still maintains ultimate power over pardons and appointments. The minister of justice and Islamic affairs is the highest judicial authority and he is appointed by and responsible to the prime minister.

Bahrain is a mixture of English common law and *Sharia* (Islamic) law systems. There exists in the Bahraini system a dual court system, consisting of civil and Sharia courts. Sharia courts deal primarily with personal status matters (such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance). Primary Sharia courts are located in all communities. A single Sharia Court of Appeal sits at the capital, Manama. Beyond the Sharia Court of Appeal, all appeals are taken to the Supreme Court of Appeal, which is part of the civil system.

The civil court system consists of summary courts and a supreme court. Primary summary courts are located in all communities and include separate civil and criminal sections. The supreme courts hear appeals from the summary courts. The Supreme Court of Appeal is the highest appellate court in the country and can also decide on the constitutionality of laws and regulations.

Military

Under the constitution, the king is the supreme commander of the armed forces. The minister of defense directs the armed forces through the chief of general staff. The National Guard has its own commander who reports directly to the minister of defense. The public security forces are all under the minister of interior (MOI). Many of those serving in the military are non-Bahraini. With the help of the U.S. and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Bahrain has made significant efforts to upgrade its defense systems and increase the capabilities of its armed forces. Since the 1991 Gulf War, the U.S. has provided military and defense technical assistance and training to Bahrain.



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Army

The Bahraini army numbers about 8,500 active duty personnel. It is not an offensive force and would be able to defend against conventional forces for no more than 48 hours. The foundation of the army is based on an infantry brigade, an armor brigade, and an artillery group. The army order of battle is:

- 1 Armor Brigade
 - 2 Tank Battalions
 - 1 Reconnaissance Battalion
- 1 Infantry Brigade
 - 2 Mechanized Battalions
 - 1 Motorized Infantry Battalion
- 1 Artillery Group
 - 1 Heavy Battery
 - 2 Medium Batteries
 - 1 Light Battery
 - 1 MRL Battery
 - 1 Target Acquisition Group
- 1 Special Forces Battalion
- 1 Air Defense Battalion
 - 2 SAM Batteries
 - 1 AA Gun Batteries
- Support Elements
 - 1 Transport Company
 - 1 Supply Company
 - 1 Medical Element
- 1 Engineer Company

Air Force

The Bahraini air force consists of 1,500 personnel. Its air force has a limited and short-term capacity to defend its national air space and provide support for the navy and army. Fighter and training squadrons are located at Shaikh Isa Air Base and helicopter squadrons are located at Riffa Air Base. Pilots generally accumulate 120 hours of flight time a year. Air bases are protected by a network of air defense Surface-to-Air Missile (SAM) systems under the command of the army. These weapon systems consist of the RBS-70 and Stinger (short-range), Crotale (medium-range), and I-HAWK (long-range).

- 1 Fighter Wing
 - 3 Fighter Squadrons
- 1 Helicopter Wing
 - 5 Helicopter Squadrons
- 1 Training Wing
 - 2 Training Squadrons

Navy

The Bahraini navy has 1,000 personnel. The navy is organized on the basis of squadrons that deploy a frigate, missile corvettes, patrol forces, and support forces (including amphibious



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shipping). A small naval air unit deploys helicopters. The coast guard is under the operational control of the MOI, except in wartime when it is under the command of the naval forces commander. There are about 260 personnel in the coast guard. Army ranks are used rather than naval ranks as the fleet is subordinate to the army. In 1977, Bahrain entered a partnership with Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Iraq, and the Libyan Jamahiriya to create the Arab Shipbuilding and Repair Yard Company (ASRY). Bahrain also shares the Mina Salman Naval Base with the U.S. Fifth Fleet.

Due to its long and close relationship with the United Kingdom's Royal Navy, most of its doctrine reflects the Royal Navy doctrine. The Bahraini navy includes the following vessels:

- 1 Frigate
- 2 Corvettes
- 4 Fast Attack Craft-Missile
- 4 Fast Attack Craft-Gun

ARMY					
Armored Equipment in Service		Artillery Systems in Service		AT/SAM Weapons in Service	
M60A3	180	ATACMS	30	BGM-71A TOW (anti-tank guided missile)	15
AML 90	22	155 mm M109A5	20	Javelin (anti-tank guided missile)	n/a
Saladin	8	203 mm M110A2	62	120 mm MOBAT (anti-tank recoilless rifle)	6
Ferret	8	155 mm M198	28	106 mm M40A1 (anti-tank recoilless rifle)	30
Shorland	8	105 mm Light Gun	8	Stinger FIM-92A (air defense MANPAD SAM)	20
Saxon	10	227 mm MLRS	9	RBS 70 (air defense MANPAD SAM)	60
M3	110	81 mm L16	12	I-HAWK (air defense low to medium altitude SAM)	6
Cobra	21			Crotale (air defense low level SAM)	7
Nimer-1	6			35 mm Oerlikon (air defense anti-aircraft [twin])	12
M113A2	100			40 mm L/70 (air defense anti-aircraft gun)	12
YPR-765	25				
AIR FORCE					
Fixed Wing Aircraft in Service		Rotary Wing Aircraft in Service		Missiles in Service	
F-16C Fighting Falcon	17	AH-1E HueyCobra	8	AIM-9P-3 Sidewinder	UNK
F-16D Fighting Falcon	4	AH-1F HueyCobra	12	AIM-9M Sidewinder	UNK
F-5E Tiger II	8	TAH-1P HueyCobra	6	AIM-7M Sparrow	UNK
F-5F Tiger II	4	S-70A Black Hawk	2	AIM-120B AMRAAM	UNK
T67M200 Firefly	3	UH-60M Black Hawk	9	AIM-120C AMRAAM	UNK



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Hawk Mk 129	6	212	9	AGM-65D Maverick	UNK
		Bo 105C	4	AGM-65G Maverick	UNK
				BGM-71 TOW	UNK
NAVY					
Surface Fleet		Auxiliaries		Naval Aviation	
Oliver Hazard Perry (Frigate)	1	RTK Medevac (Rescue Vessel)	2	BO 105 (Utility)	2
Al-Manama (MGB 62) (Corvette)	2	n/a (Diving Tender)	1		
Ahmed El Fateh (TNC 45) (Fast Attack Craft – Missile)	4	Tighatlib (Transport Craft - Personnel)	1		
Al Riffa (FPB 38) (Fast Attack Craft – Gun)	2				
Al Jarim (FPB 20) (Fast Attack Craft – Gun)	2				
Sea Keeper (Fast Landing Craft)	2				
LCU 1466 (Landing Craft Utility)	4				
Loadmaster II (Landing Craft Utility)	1				
Ajeera (Supply Ship)	1				

American Forces in Bahrain

U.S. Fifth Fleet is headquartered at the Mina Salman Naval Base in northern Bahrain, which it shares with the Bahraini navy. Fifth Fleet helps ensure peace and stability and protects America's vital interests in a 5 million square mile area of responsibility including the Red Sea, the Arabian Gulf, the Arabian Sea, and parts of the Indian Ocean. Its usual configuration includes a Carrier Strike Group, Amphibious Ready Group or Expeditionary Strike Group, and other ships and aircraft, with approximately 25,000 people serving afloat and 3,000 support personnel ashore.

Government Paramilitary Forces

The Bahraini National Guard was established in 1997 and serves as a defense force against both external and internal threats. It is currently commanded by Major General Mohammed bin Isa al Khalifa, brother of the current king of Bahrain. With a force of about 2,000, the National Guard was involved in some of the questionable tactics used against protesters during the government's crackdown on pro-democracy protesters in 2011-2012. The National Guard enlists non-Bahrainis to fill out its ranks and recruited heavily from Pakistan during the pro-democracy uprisings.



Bahraini Military Functions

Mission Command

The King and his family maintain tight control of all military and civil security forces, insuring an ultimate arbiter. The MOI controls the limited coast guard assets except in time of war when it comes under the operational control of the navy. The navy is subordinate to the army command. The Bahraini military has the capacity to conduct limited joint internal operations and multinational operations. The Bahraini military recruits non-Bahrainis for service in its security forces, which may cause problems with national loyalties and disrupting infiltration from foreign governments. The Bahraini military has had a long and effective training partnership with several governments that has increased the professionalism of the officer ranks.

Maneuver

The Bahraini military is not large enough to be an offensive force. Its doctrine allows for defense of the island for forty-eight hours. Utilizing its mechanized infantry, armor, and air assets, it can maneuver freely over the country's desert terrain for limited defensive operations.

Information Warfare

The relatively small population and tight control the government has of news outlets makes it easy for the Bahraini government to shape messages. Radio and television stations are owned by the government. Self-censorship among the privately-owned newspapers means that they avoid criticizing the government or covering controversial issues in order to stay in business.

RISTA

The Bahraini army has both air and mechanized reconnaissance assets to cover the small island.

Fire Support

The Bahraini military possesses sufficient fire support for limited defense of the island.

Protection

The Bahraini military has very limited capacity to withstand a chemical attack. Maneuver units would primarily operate from tanks or other armored vehicles. Support vehicles, however, may be soft-skinned and vulnerable to aerial attack.



Logistics

The limited maneuver space involved on the island and the limited amount of time the Bahraini military can withstand an attack negate the need for a sophisticated logistics system. Almost continual advisement by both military and civilian personnel since the first Gulf War has improved the capabilities of the Bahraini military to sustain its maneuver forces for the limited time the Bahraini military can withstand an attack.

Threat Actors in the OE

Non-state Paramilitary Forces

Insurgent Forces

There are currently no known major insurgent forces operating in Bahrain.

Guerrilla Forces

There are currently no known major guerrilla forces operating in Bahrain.

Criminal Organizations

The reported crime rate in Bahrain is low and violent crime is rare. However, burglary, petty theft, and robberies do occur.

Bahrain is listed as a Tier 2¹ on the U.S. State Department's 2012 "[Trafficking in Persons](#)" report. It is considered a destination country for men and women subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking. Men and women from India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, Ethiopia, and Eritrea migrate voluntarily to Bahrain to work as domestic workers or as unskilled laborers in the construction and service industries. Some, however, face conditions of forced labor after arriving in Bahrain, through the use of such practices as unlawful withholding of passports, restrictions on movement, contract substitution, nonpayment of wages, threats, and physical or sexual abuse. Non-government organizations (NGOs) report that Bangladeshi unskilled workers are in particularly high demand in Bahrain and are considered exploitable since they do not typically protest difficult work conditions or low pay.

¹ Tier 2 is defined as countries whose governments do not fully comply with the Trafficking Victims Protection Act's minimum standards but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those standards.



Private Security Organizations

There are a small number of private security organizations in Bahrain. As there are a number of foreign companies operating in Bahrain, security is generally limited to business-related security consulting and protection. Some companies working regionally in non-permissive environments, such as Afghanistan, have regional offices in Bahrain.

Non-Military Armed Combatants

Government response to recent political demonstrations related to regional calls for more democracy has resulted in clashes between protestors and government security forces. Spontaneous and at times violent anti-government demonstrations occur in some neighborhoods, particularly at night and on weekends. These demonstrations have included blockades of major highways, trashcan fires, and the establishment of unofficial checkpoints. Participants have thrown rocks and Molotov cocktails and used various other homemade weapons, including improvised explosive devices (IEDs). The MOI maintains official checkpoints in some areas and routinely uses tear gas and stun grenades, along with birdshot and other crowd-control measures, against demonstrators. Violent clashes between security forces and demonstrators can make travel in and around Bahrain dangerous without advance warning. There have been no direct attacks on U.S. citizens; however, Westerners and U.S. citizens have been caught in the middle of clashes. Anti-U.S. sentiment has been expressed on the streets and in some local press, and U.S. flags have occasionally been burned during demonstrations.

The Coalition of 14 February Youth² is one group threatening to increase violent attacks in the face of what it perceives to be political repression and human rights violations. The group is led anonymously using [social media sites](#) to organize protests and has, for the most part, limited itself to peaceful demonstrations. The growing tension between security forces and political and human rights activists, however, is creating an environment where escalation may encourage the increased use of IEDs, Molotov cocktails, and other insurgent-type weapons.

Force Protection Issues

Force protection issues are related to the developing political volatility. Increasing crackdowns by government security forces continue to target the majority Shia Muslim population, further contributing to feelings of political repression. Social media sites provide a venue for collaboration and organizing, particularly youth groups inspired by successes in other parts of the Middle East. There are no signs this volatility will end soon and it will likely increase.

² February 14, 2011 is the date of the first political Arab Spring protests in Bahrain.



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The larger force protection issue is the proxy dynamic being played out between Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shia Iran, the two biggest regional actors. The Sunni Bahraini royal family has received significant support from Saudi Arabia, most recently in gaining control of pro-democracy protesters. The majority Bahraini Shia population sees the intrusion of Saudi Arabia as a threat to its democratic aspirations. Saudi Arabia, for its part, fears a successful Shia revolution in Bahrain will fuel further dissent among its own Shia minority population.

The Bahraini government, for its part, has accused Iran of meddling in its internal affairs. During the 1980s and 1990s Iran attempted to violently export the Islamic Revolution to Bahrain. While relations have improved, the recent political protests in Bahrain renewed regime fears of Iranian influence on the majority Bahraini Shia population. In April 2011, Bahrain submitted a report to the United Nations alleging that Lebanese Hezbollah trained Bahraini opposition members in camps in Lebanon and Iran. In July 2011, Bahrain's high criminal court sentenced in absentia two Iranians and one Bahraini citizen, working in the Iranian embassy in Kuwait, for spying in Bahrain and abroad for Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

The internal Bahraini Sunni-Shia dynamic cannot be divorced from the larger Sunni-Shia events happening on the larger regional stage. While a small island, Bahrain has strategic importance because of its central location between Saudi Arabia and Iran and because of the U.S. military presence. Bahrain's political volatility will continue to be a serious force protection consideration.

Economic

Bahrain has one of the most diverse economies in the Persian Gulf. It is, however, still very dependent on petroleum production and refining, which accounts for more than 60% of export revenue and, with allied industries, 11% of GDP. Other major economic activities include the production of aluminum, finance, and construction. Additionally, Bahrain has highly developed communication and transportation facilities that make it home to numerous multinational firms with business in the Gulf. Bahrain competes with Malaysia as a worldwide center for Islamic banking.

Recent political unrest has caused some setbacks in Bahrain's reputation as a stable place for multinational firms. Bahrain is trying to insure it maintains its place as a financial hub and does not lose business to regional centers such as Doha or Dubai. Youth unemployment and growing debt may factor into Bahrain's ability to maintain its status as a friendly place for multinational business operations. Additionally, two serious problems will need to be addressed with a greater urgency into the future; neither potable water nor oil is in unlimited supply in Bahrain.



Social

The population of Bahrain is marked by a thriving diversity and mounting growth. The significant expatriate community comprises nearly 35% of Bahrain's inhabitants. Bahrain's strong economic opportunities and attractive conditions continue to draw people from all over the world. Bahrain includes residents from Iran, India, Pakistan, the Philippines, Britain, and the United States, as well as citizens from a number of other nations. The primary religion of indigenous Bahrainis is Islam, with 70% of those being Shia and 30% being Sunni. Literacy is over 85%.

Social life in Bahrain is still constrained by conservative Islamic values, patriarchal norms, and traditions; however, the country has made legal efforts to move in the direction of more equality and freedom. Women's education is often high, but employment opportunities remain limited. Discrimination in employment on the basis of gender is illegal in Bahrain, and the government has taken steps to increase women's participation in the labor market. However, women are prohibited from working in certain occupations because of the assumed dangers that these present to their health and the health of their future children, and are for the most part prohibited from working at night. The Constitution was amended in 2002 to provide equal rights for women and men and bans discrimination on the basis of gender, within the limits of Sharia law.

Men and women have the same political rights to vote and stand for election at local and national levels; however, women continue to be under-represented, particularly at the national level. In 2011 there were eleven women (27.5%) in the king-appointed Shura Council and one woman (2.5%) in the nationally-elected Council of Representatives. Women face significant obstacles in standing for office, including social norms that make it unacceptable to address mixed-gender groups of voters.

Recent political dissent may be related, in part, to a growing disparity between public goods and services being delivered to the population at large and the more privileged members of society. Bahrain has more limited resources than its more affluent neighbors and is beginning to be plagued by a growing debt. Its inability to satisfy public services expectations may point to continued social disparity in living conditions among Bahrainis and increased social upheaval.

Information

Information is regulated and controlled by the government of Bahrain. Radio and television stations are owned by the government. Tight government control requires self-censorship among the privately-owned newspapers in order to stay in business. This reality means that they avoid criticizing the government or covering human rights issues. Bahrain has modern fiber-optic integrated systems and a digital network with rapidly-growing use of cellular



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phones. Internet penetration in Bahrain is 77%, with a Facebook user penetration of 55.41%. Not surprising, the largest Facebook demographic age is 25-34.

Intelligence Services in the OE

Bahrain's intelligence service is called the National Security Agency (NSA). After complaints and an investigation into NSA actions during the February and March 2011 protests, the King issued a royal decree in November 2011 transferring its authority to make arrests to the MOI. Under the amendment, the NSA is confined to collecting intelligence information, and detecting and uncovering detrimental activities related to spying and collaboration with foreign countries in order to protect Bahrain's national security, institutions, and systems.

Capabilities are likely limited to unsophisticated means of monitoring the public and heavy-handed tactics to obtain information. Social media, such as Facebook, represents a relatively easy means to gather intelligence. Facebook was used to track down and arrest participants in the uprising in 2011. In October 2012, four Bahrainis were arrested for defaming public figures on Facebook.

Infrastructure

Bahrain has invested heavily in its infrastructure and gained a reputation as a business-friendly place. Its central location has made it an important trading and transportation hub. Bahrain International Airport has links to the principal global finance and business centers; is a regional distribution center for DHL; and is the regional hub for Lufthansa, Cathay Pacific, Air India, and Gulf Air. The Mina Salman Port and the New Khalifa Bin Salman Port provide shipping access to critical regional markets. The Bahrain Logistics Zone has been created adjacent to these ports and 13 miles from the Bahrain International Airport to provide one of the region's largest shipping and transport hubs. King Fahd Causeway is a 30-minute 16-mile causeway linking Bahrain to Saudi Arabia.

Physical Environment

Bahrain is an archipelago of 33 islands, with a total land area of 290 square miles. The seabed adjacent to Bahrain is rocky and, mainly off the northern part of the island, covered by extensive coral reefs. Most of the island is low-lying and barren desert. The central area is low-lying and barren limestone rock covered with saline sand, which supports only the hardiest of desert vegetation. Jabel Dukhan, the highest point on the island at 440 feet above sea level, is in this area, along with the majority of Bahrain's oil wells. Along the northern coast is a fertile strip three miles wide on which date, almond, fig, and pomegranate trees grow. Only about 1% of the island is arable. Winters in Bahrain are dry and average daytime temperatures in the low 70s, nighttime lows in the 50s. Spring and fall are pleasant, with dry weather and nights cooling



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off into the 60s after days of around 85. Summertime is very hot and muggy in Bahrain, with daytime temperatures from 95-110, and nights cooling down to anywhere from 75-80. The shallow waters around Bahrain are typically anywhere from 75 in winter to 85 in spring and fall, and usually around 90 in summer.

Time

Bahrainis have a more relaxed view of time; however, decades of working with Westerners has modified this somewhat. Working hours differ across different industries. Government offices are open from 0730 to 1400 and the private sector now tends to work from 0730 to 1800 or much longer for Asian expatriates. Friday and Saturday is the official weekend for all public sector establishments as well as government schools and universities. Bahrainis celebrate Muslim holidays, with some slight differentiation between Sunni and Shia Muslims, who have some separate holidays.

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