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Bahrain's Fragility and Security Sector Procurement

Jodi Vittori

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Potential instability in Bahrain poses a significant threat to U.S. strategic interests. The United States gains immensely from basing rights in Bahrain, which is a key location in the Persian Gulf with its deepwater port and good airfield access. Nowhere else in the region provides such useful geography or facilities.¹ Yet another sudden uprising by Bahrainis could endanger U.S. military personnel and their families living in Bahrain and could threaten the ability of the United States to keep its bases.

Aside from relying on the United States for protection, Bahrain also prioritizes its own security sector as it faces both internal and external threats. Internally, the country was roiled by protests sparked by the Arab Spring in 2011, with smaller-scale protests continuing to this day. Externally, it considers Iran to be a potential existential threat, and Bahrain is also taking part in operations against Yemeni rebels.

Especially since restrictions on U.S. arms sales to the country were lifted by the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump, Bahrain has been on a massive military spending binge: in 2017 and 2018, just the publicly known defense procurement contracts with the United States amounted to over \$6 billion. That is a tall order for a country with an overall budget of about \$10 billion per year.

This military procurement splurge is occurring against a backdrop of long-term Bahraini financial trouble. Bahrain spends much more money than its oil, financial, and other sectors bring in. It is thus in the midst of negotiating a five-year, \$10-billion bailout package with its Arab allies that will include low-interest loans, spending cuts, and a new value-added tax. The \$10-billion aid package will help the country plug fiscal holes in the short term, but will not substantially alter the long-term rent-seeking activity by the country's elites that keeps Bahrain in dire economic straits.

As Bahraini citizens are being asked to tighten their financial belts due to the country's economic constraints, there are legitimate questions of how Bahrain will come up with the money to pay for new military purchases, as well as what they contribute to the kingdom's defense.

The answer is that no one outside the Bahraini royal family seems to know. The Bahraini royal family is not obligated to put many public accounts—including security sector procurement—to scrutiny, so there is little transparency or accountability to these purchases. This breakneck but unaccountable security sector procurement spending may create pressures on the legitimacy and, ultimately, the stability of the Bahraini regime. Large purchases of weapons come at the expense of paying for other items like housing and economic development. Those same arms are also often turned on the population itself, especially the politically marginalized Shia majority, to repress dissent. The lack of transparency and accountability over the security sector, as well as the repression it metes out, allows the regime to largely resist both internal and external calls for democratic reforms. With a population holding significant grievances with the monarchy and a political

economy on shaky ground, large purchases without clear national security purposes, means to pay for them, or public accountability only further hurt the legitimacy of the regime.

This potential for instability has important strategic ramifications for the United States, given Bahrain's role as a key basing location and ally in the Persian Gulf. It is thus in the United States' interest to strongly encourage the Bahraini royal family to improve its security sector accountability and transparency, lest the lack thereof fuels domestic political grievances that may boil over and jeopardize U.S. objectives in the region.

Bahrain's monarchy has ruled through a combination of coercion, patronage, and sectarianism while extracting significant rents from Bahrain's economy. Yet this extractive and absolutist regime has fostered discontent among Bahrain's Shia majority and the population at large. The Bahraini security sector—and in particular its unaccountable purchases of security-related equipment and services—contributes decisively to the problem of state fragility. Given its pivotal role in providing for Bahrain's security and supplying nearly all its weapons, the United States has leverage. It should use that leverage to push the Bahraini monarchy to reform its security sector procurement practices. Otherwise, unchecked security spending and endemic corruption will threaten to destabilize the Bahraini regime and imperil U.S. interests.

The Political and Economic Anatomy of the Bahraini Regime

Bahrain is one of the smallest authoritarian states in the world—both in terms of population and geographic area—and it is in some ways an efficient regime with strong capacities to maintain order. Yet its monarchy stands in a uniquely precarious position, as the country is the only remaining Arab state where a minority Sunni population rules over a majority Shia one. Though Bahrain keeps data on the demographics of its Sunni and Shia communities a closely guarded secret,² a statistical analysis conducted in 2017 suggests that Shia represent between 55 and 60 percent of the population.³

Coercion, Patronage, and Sectarianism: The Pillars of Bahraini Regime Survival

Above all, the Sunni royal family maintains its power through absolute control over politics. The king, Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, has the power to appoint all ministers, judges, and one of the two houses of a very weak parliament. He can amend the constitution at will. His family holds twelve of twenty-six cabinet posts, including the roles of prime minister, deputy prime ministers, and ministers of interior, finance, justice, and foreign affairs.⁴ Most political organizations have been ruled illegal, nonviolent opposition leaders are regularly arrested or exiled, and the last relatively free media outlet was closed in 2017. The Bahraini population is not quiescent; protests have been a near

constant reality over the decades, including widespread demonstrations that threatened the monarchy's hold on power during the Arab Spring in 2011. However, the regime's practice of surveilling, arresting, and punishing its citizens keeps a lid on larger protests, so small-scale protests are the norm.

Second, the monarchy selectively distributes patronage from oil rents to preserve a small but crucial coalition of supporters, particularly within the security sector. Thus, while Bahrain has a per capita gross domestic product (GDP) of nearly \$50,000 per year,⁵ the nation's oil wealth is highly unequally distributed throughout the population, as is the case in many other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Many GCC states, Bahrain included, maintain various overstuffed and inefficient state agencies to absorb much of the labor force and spend huge sums on relatively large, well-equipped militaries.⁶

By providing targeted patronage to the security sector, the monarchy keeps its ruling coalition as small as possible and protects the regime from any potential challengers. As scholar Justin Gengler notes:

Indeed, why waste limited resources chasing citizens opposed to the status quo when they might be used to reward those who already have a material stake in its preservation? Rather than deploy limited resources inefficiently upon the whole of society, rulers of distributive states such as those of the Gulf generally seek to maximize their own share by rewarding disproportionately a finite category of citizens whose support is sufficient to keep them in power, while the remaining population is comparatively excluded from the private rentier benefits of citizenship.⁷

In determining which citizens may be most loyal to the regime and deciding questions of resource allocation, the Bahraini regime deliberately exploits sectarian divisions. The regime's policy, as described by Gengler, can be described as an "ethnic subsidy," whereby a ruler co-opts one's co-ethnics as a relatively cheap support base that is large enough to ensure regime survival.⁸ Thus, rather than trying to temper sectarianism in Bahrain, the regime reinforces it. The government uses electoral and legislative rules, plus hiring practices and the media, to institutionalize sectarian cleavages rather than ameliorate them. The regime also moves aggressively against cross-sectarian political movements and leaders, limiting their ability to unite under common grievances.

Using the politics of fear so common in authoritarian states, the monarchy portrays the Shia majority not as an aggrieved group of fellow Bahraini citizens but as a mob backed by Bahrain's arch enemy, Iran, that poses an existential threat to Bahrain. In a version of "protection racket politics,"⁹ the regime portrays democracy as dangerous to the Sunni minority and stirs up fear that the Shia majority could vote in an Iranian-style government. The Bahraini regime can also point to the

results of other Arab Spring revolutions in places like Syria, where civil war and chaos resulted. The regime can thus win the allegiance of its key supporters by highlighting that it is better for Sunnis to remain under the security umbrella of an oppressive state and receive the regime's largesse rather than risk civil war or subservience under Shia rule.¹⁰

Given its reliance on the three pillars of coercion, patronage, and sectarianism, the Bahraini regime has created three distinct groups. First is the Sunni monarchy and the inner circle of key supporters, including elites within the security sector, who receive an outsized share of the overall rents. Second is the larger Sunni population who are generally supportive of the regime. Though this group receives a greater share of rents than Shia, it is still rather poorly compensated by the regime for its support. Last are the Shia, who make up the majority of the country but receive the fewest benefits.¹¹

The Privy Purse: The Monarchy's Dominance Over Bahrain's Economy

Control of state resources, including the massive security procurement budget, is at the core of this model. The same people who control Bahrain's economy, and especially its oil and natural gas wealth, also control the security sector.¹² A key aspect of maintaining control for authoritarian regimes is restricting access to information on state finances and economic activity, and Bahrain is no different. It is thus unclear how much money is actually in state coffers and how much of the state's resources are expropriated by the monarchy and its key supporters.¹³ It is clear, however, that the royal family can extract billions in rents each year from sources as diverse as oil revenues, land titles, a sovereign wealth fund, shares in companies, and tax revenues.

There are some specifics available. Public debt is 88 percent of GDP, and the \$2.3 billion Bahrain has in foreign reserves is barely enough to cover a month of imports.¹⁴ All three major rating companies rate its debt as junk, and investors are betting that the Bahraini dinar is likely to be unpegged from the dollar.¹⁵ It does not help that 70 percent of government revenue is based on oil¹⁶—with its highly volatile price swings—or that Bahrain needs oil prices to rise to \$125 a barrel to balance its budget (oil has hovered over \$60 per barrel so far in 2019).¹⁷

As a result, hydrocarbons are critical to the budget.¹⁸ All mineral wealth on the surface and underground in Bahrain is owned by the state.¹⁹ Historically, in an agreement originally reached among the British colonial administrators, oil companies, and the monarchy, one-third of oil revenues went to the privy purse, another third to the state budget, and the final third to a reserved fund.²⁰ However, when the Abu Sa'afa oil field was discovered in 1966, which at the time became the largest source of oil revenue for Bahrain, its revenues went straight to the privy purse, rather than the government budget, in addition to the previously allocated third of oil revenues.²¹ This lopsided distribution of oil rents between the privy purse and the public budget was typical of countries that

now comprise the GCC prior to their independence and the 1973 oil crisis, when most countries ceased to publicly account for revenues.²²

It is impossible to know with any surety how much oil revenue the monarchy receives, but a 2016 study found the total value of Bahrain's oil exports to be \$92.8 billion dollars between 2002 and 2011, compared to total declared public oil and gas revenues over the same period of \$39 billion dollars. That leaves a gap of \$53.8 billion. In most of those years, the value of the oil exported was at least double the declared public revenue. While these estimates do not provide a definitive number for how much money is off-budget in Bahrain, they do highlight the large gaps between publicly listed amounts and the actual value of exports.²³

But the monarchy has more resources available than just oil and natural gas. The next most obvious is land because, especially in a place as small as Bahrain, large landowners are particularly noticeable. The king and the prime minister (the king's uncle) own two relatively large islands off the coast of Bahrain, as well as a number of other palace compounds.²⁴ A 2010 Bahraini parliamentary investigation documented that about one-quarter of the country's land did not have complete records. The Land Registration Board, whose director is appointed by the king, is accused of re-registering public and sometimes even private lands to the royal family, which has then turned over the deeds to developers for new offices or hotels. Prime Minister Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa is reportedly known as "Mr. 50 Percent" because he takes that share in the businesses to which he provides public land.²⁵

The monarchy also controls Mumtalakat, Bahrain's sovereign wealth fund, which holds \$11 billion in assets worldwide. Established in 2006, the organization has twenty-nine commercial assets, including some of the largest firms in the country, such as Gulf Air, the Bahrain Telecommunications Company (Batelco), and the National Bank of Bahrain.²⁶ The revenue from Mumtalakat does not go into the government budget.²⁷ And though the fund is recognized for the transparency of its accounts, as Ravi Shankar Chaturvedi of Tufts University noted in 2016, "The fund's transparency is of little good when its parent, the sovereign, is shrouded in a veil of corruption."²⁸

Beyond its official holding company, the royal family is believed to have a stake in a number of other companies, often secretly held through cut-outs. A 2014 investigation by the *Financial Times* showed, for instance, that a private investment vehicle called Premier Group, believed to be owned by the royal family, had shares in projects worth at least \$22 billion.²⁹ In other cases, the monarchy's role in various businesses is public. For example, Shaikh Mohammed bin Isa bin Mohammed Al Khalifa, described as a political and economic adviser to the crown prince, is the executive chairman of the McLaren Group Limited holding company, which includes the McLaren luxury car brand

and Formula One racing team. The largest shareholder, with a 62.6 percent share of this \$3.1 billion business, is Mumtalakat.³⁰

On top of all of this, the royal family ultimately controls the tax revenues. To further help plug gaps in the budget, the government announced a 5 percent value-added tax that is beginning a phased rollout in 2019. Bahrain has received loans and other direct financial assistance from Saudi Arabia in the past.³¹ The country will presumably receive more direct assistance as part of the \$10 billion bailout. Yet even that may not be enough, as the chief Middle East economist for Bloomberg Economics, Ziad Daoud, estimates Bahrain will need at least \$12.7 billion to cover its expenditures, and possibly quite a bit more.³²

Thus, while it is impossible to know exactly how much money is going to the Bahraini monarchy's inner circle, it is clearly many billions more than the billions estimated to be derived just from oil rents. This creates a massive, unaccountable slush fund for whatever the monarchy chooses to spend it on, including expensive security sector purchases. And amid all of this, average Bahraini citizens are being asked to tighten their belts.

The Regime's Discontents: Sectarian and Cross-Sectarian Grievances

During the Arab Spring, Bahrain was often a center of global attention as over one hundred thousand protesters demanded democratic reforms, many of which had been previously promised by the royal family. The Bahraini protests began on February 14, 2011,³³ and at first they were largely nonsectarian with broad calls to reform the Bahraini regime (though as the protests continued, they became increasingly more sectarian). The monarchy soon found itself unable to cope, and on March 14, Saudi troops and Emirati policemen from the GCC Peninsula Shield Force arrived in Bahrain. The government soon declared martial law with mass arrests, a curfew, a ban on rallies, and other repressive measures.³⁴ This crackdown became a symbol of how brutal a regime's response could be: not only were the protester camps bulldozed and protest leaders imprisoned, but even the doctors who treated the wounded were arrested. More broadly, thousands of workers were fired, nearly all of them from state or semi-state entities.³⁵ Since then, small-scale protests have occurred regularly in Shia areas, and low-level attacks against police and other security forces continue.³⁶

But 2011 was hardly the first time there had been mass mobilization against the regime. The majority Shia had engaged in waves of uprisings and protests against the Khalifa regime for decades.³⁷ The current protest movement is made up largely of Shia groups, though Wa'ad, a recently disbanded leftist group with both Sunni and Shia participation, is also prominent. A small number of Shia groups are solidly pro-Iranian, and some of them are willing to use violence. The

vast majority, however, eschew violence, and instead seek reforms to allow greater representation, accountability, and equality.

Shia Grievances

Shia grievances center primarily on their political and economic marginalization under the Bahraini regime, particularly a lack of voice and representation. Bahrain's political system has been designed to exclude the Shia majority, as well as the regime's opponents more generally. While Bahrain has a parliament, it is advisory only and its upper house is entirely appointed. Moreover, severe gerrymandering has been used to ensure the election of supposed independents who are friendly to the royal family.³⁸ When even that was not enough, the Bahraini government made it illegal for anyone in the opposition to actually run for parliament. Opposition leaders of peaceful political "societies" (since political parties are illegal) are regularly imprisoned, stripped of their citizenship, or sent into exile. The prominent political societies have all been dissolved by the government.

Sunni and Shia communities are very segregated,³⁹ so another significant grievance involves the lack of housing and access to basic public services, with many Shia villages missing even paved roads. Furthermore, in Shia communities, many basic services are supplied by local charities rather than the state.⁴⁰ According to a 2009 poll, Shia respondents were much more likely than Sunnis to report difficulty in claiming official documents, enrolling a child in public school, receiving medical treatment, or receiving help from the police when needed.⁴¹ The ghettoization of many Shia also has a secondary benefit for the regime: by pushing most Shia into isolated villages, protest movements are easy to contain in local areas with a few roadblocks, preventing larger protests from reaching the city center, as they did in 2011.⁴²

The lack of employment opportunities is also a major grievance. Shia are explicitly forbidden from working in some sectors, and informally barred from others.⁴³ Anyone seeking a sensitive job position in the bureaucracy needs a "certificate of good history and conduct" from the police to show they have never been arrested or detained, including for political reasons. This discourages many Shia applicants and restricts many others to only the lower rungs of state jobs.⁴⁴ Shia have many fewer opportunities for public sector employment than Sunnis with identical employment attributes, while Shia were likely to be in lower paying, lower prestige jobs than equally qualified Sunnis.⁴⁵ A 2003 survey found that Shia held only 18 percent of the 572 high-ranking government posts,⁴⁶ and in a 2009 survey, all those surveyed who were employed in semi-skilled, unskilled, or agricultural labor were Shia.⁴⁷

One of the job sectors largely unavailable to Shia is the security sector.⁴⁸ A leaked March 2009 confidential list of over 1,000 employees in Bahrain's security sector showed that only 4 percent of employees were Shia while 64 percent were "non citizens, most of Asian nationalities." The

aforementioned 2009 survey did not find a single Shia who worked for the police or armed forces, despite the fact that the security sector is one of the largest employers on the island.⁴⁹ The Ministry of Interior is believed to employ the most Shia of any security agency, yet even here the personnel is only estimated to be about 10 percent Shia.⁵⁰

Furthermore, the Bahraini regime has stocked the lower ranks of the security sector with non-Bahrainis.⁵¹ As early as 1998, a *Financial Times* article reported that 8,000 to 10,000 Sunnis and their families had been brought from Jordan, Pakistan, Syria, and Yemen into the Bahraini security sector,⁵² and they continue to be the most common groups, along with a smattering of British in senior positions. In 2011, a pro-government media outlet reported that about 40 percent of the Ministry of Interior was composed of foreign nationals.⁵³ In addition, the National Guard and police force are thought to be primarily staffed by foreigners, especially Pakistanis and Yemenis. In 2009, the Bahrain Center for Human Rights reported that almost two-thirds of the National Security Agency's personnel were non-Bahraini.⁵⁴ Shia are also concerned that foreign Sunnis are being brought in to change the sectarian makeup of Bahrain. In a country of less than 1.4 million people, it does not take many new immigrants to change the sectarian balance, especially when Shia hold only a slight majority of the country.⁵⁵

Grievances over the security services were a major motivator in the 2011 uprisings, and thus were a central aspect of the reforms promised by the monarchy in 2012. These reforms quickly stalled, however, in part because the exclusion of Shia from the security sector is fundamental to the Bahraini regime's strategy of survival.⁵⁶ According to a leaked 2006 U.S. diplomatic cable, "The King noted that many Shia complain that there are no Shia in the military leadership of the country. This is a question of loyalty, he stated. As long as [Iranian Supreme Leader] Khamenei has the title of Commander-in-Chief, Bahrain must worry about the loyalty of Shia who maintain ties and allegiance to Iran."⁵⁷

Shia exclusion from the security sector exacerbates discontent with the Bahraini state overall in three ways. First, it ensures Sunnis, especially the royal family, maintain control over the organs of power, despite being a minority of the population. Second, the Bahraini security sector is a major employer in the country, and exclusion from that sector means fewer good, middle-class jobs for Shia. And third, with an enlisted force largely made up of noncitizens, and very recently naturalized citizens, who speak little or no Arabic and have no social ties to the areas they patrol, the Bahraini security sector leadership can better oppress civilians where locals might balk. Locals blamed non-Bahraini security members for much of the violence during the Arab Spring protests.⁵⁸

Cross-Sectarian Grievances

More worrying still for the Bahraini regime is that it is not just the Shia who have grievances against the monarchy; many concerns are cross-sectarian. Issues such as repression, corruption, and the naturalization of noncitizens, including in the security services, anger Sunnis as well.⁵⁹

The regime's increasingly authoritarian behavior, in particular, has caused discontent across sectarian lines. While Shia have suffered the bulk of the repression, Sunnis protesting the regime were also arrested during the 2011 uprising.⁶⁰ As of 2018, the number of Sunnis being arrested, interrogated, and censored on social media seemed to be increasing,⁶¹ and even pro-government groups, especially those that had spoken out on corruption issues, were under increasing pressure. Parliamentary elections were held on November 24, 2018 (with a runoff on December 1), but political opposition was not allowed,⁶² and many leaders—both Sunni and Shia—have been imprisoned. New laws passed in 2018 prohibit anyone who has ever been a member of any illegal political societies or who has been sentenced to prison for more than six months from seeking to hold office, thereby disqualifying many protesters and political prisoners.⁶³

And while the standard of living for Sunnis is higher than that of most local Shia, they, too, suffer from the poor economy. The 5 percent value-added tax will further add to that burden,⁶⁴ and subsidies for meat, cooking oil, and other necessities have been eliminated.⁶⁵ Despite the roughly \$50,000 per capita GDP, wages have been flat and the median income is only \$13,300 per year for private sector jobs and \$18,600 for public sector ones.⁶⁶

Furthermore, the lack of affordable housing is ranked as one of the leading issues facing all Bahraini families, regardless of religion or tribe.⁶⁷ Bahrain has the world's second-highest population density.⁶⁸ Over 1 million people are crammed into a location one-quarter the size of the U.S. state of Rhode Island, which would make for a tight fit under the best of circumstances, but half the island is reserved for vast royal properties and military facilities. In a 2011 Gallup poll, 41 percent of Bahrainis said they did not have the money they needed for shelter.⁶⁹ In 2016, 50,000 Bahrainis were on a waiting list for public housing with a backlog of applications that would need at least fifteen years to process.⁷⁰ The naturalization of non-nationals further exacerbates this problem. Sunnis as well as Shia resent how non-nationals receive free housing and can jump to the head of the queue for scarce housing, as members of the security services get automatic priority.⁷¹

Bahrain's Security Sector and Risks to Stability

The Bahraini Security State

The Bahraini security sector is essential to maintaining the monarchy's power. A tiny coterie of the closest members of the monarchy and key supporters firmly control all major security sector bodies via the fourteen-member Supreme Defense Council, which is chaired by the king and consists almost entirely of members of the royal family.⁷²

Domestic Security Sector Bodies

The security sector is divided into four parts: the Bahrain Defense Forces (BDF), Ministry of Interior (MOI), National Guard, and National Security Agency (NSA). The Bahraini government does not publish much basic information on its security sector, but sources have put the combined security sector forces at over 21,000, of which approximately 8,200 are in the BDF and the rest in the other three branches.⁷³ The regime also does not disclose basic personnel issues like salaries and promotion standards.⁷⁴ There is no evidence of promotion boards, and rank seems to be associated with sect and citizenship rather than merit.⁷⁵ In the past, the regime has imprisoned those publishing the names and salaries of public sector officials.⁷⁶

The BDF is generally well-equipped, professional, and well-compensated. Given Bahrain's military weakness relative to potential aggressors, the BDF's role has always been less about protecting the island from invasion and instead it is to protect the regime from internal foes and stave off any attackers for forty-eight hours until outside help arrives.⁷⁷ The royal family occupies the most senior positions in the BDF, while the rest of the officer corps consists of a princely class of Bahraini Sunnis who are carefully vetted according to their family background, history, and political orientation.⁷⁸

The MOI includes the Coast Guard, traffic police, customs and immigration officials, and the Special Security Forces Command. The MOI also runs the community policing program. This program, with at least 1,500 members, was established in 2005 and is the only branch to allow Bahraini Shia to join, though its members are unarmed.⁷⁹ However, according to a 2016 U.S. State Department report, it does not appear that a significant segment of the force is Shia.⁸⁰

The third branch in the Bahraini security sector is the National Guard, whose main mission is to guard critical infrastructure such as the airport and oil fields. It can provide extra forces to the Ministry of Interior if needed, and a 2016 report put the number of personnel at about 2,000.⁸¹ It is commanded by the king's brother who reports directly to the king.⁸²

The fourth branch is the NSA, which conducts both domestic and foreign espionage. It is headed by Lieutenant General Adel bin Khalifa Al Fadhel, the only senior leader of the various branches who is not a member of the royal family.⁸³ The NSA was largely blamed for the worst civil rights abuses in the 2011 uprisings and was subsequently stripped of much of its authority, but in January 2017, the agency had its powers reinstated, including its authority to conduct arrests.⁸⁴ The demographics of the NSA are unclear, but a leaked 2009 report indicated that Shia did not make up more than 4 percent of it.⁸⁵

Further bolstering the security sector are an unknown number of private security contractors, many of whom appear to provide state-like security services involving guarding key infrastructure such as oil, gas, and industrial enterprises plus major airports and seaports. Some also advertise expertise in electronic security. Their customers include most Bahraini security agencies, the U.S. Navy, and Bahrain's Royal Court.⁸⁶

Key Foreign Backers

Despite multi-billion-dollar investments in the domestic security sector, it is foreign powers who play an outsized role in Bahrain's security and have since its earliest days. Great Britain occupied Bahrain in the late nineteenth century and signed a treaty with the ruling Al Khalifa family. Britain ensured that the pro-British monarchy was fully entrenched when it established a naval base there. When Britain withdrew from the region in 1971 as Bahrain and other British protectorates became independent, the United States stepped in as the security guarantor, and the U.S. Navy Fifth Fleet took over the British base.⁸⁷ Now, however, Britain is making a comeback. In early 2018, it opened a new naval facility in Bahrain, the HMS Juffair.⁸⁸

Bahrain's most important regional protector is Saudi Arabia, whose support is supplemented by the other members of the GCC. The Bahraini monarchy reportedly runs all major policy decisions past the Saudi regime, and the Bahraini economy is largely propped up by Saudi Arabia.⁸⁹ Today, Bahrain's oil production predominantly relies on Saudi Arabia's economic largesse: it receives half of the net proceeds of the Abu Sa'afa oil field located on the maritime boundary between the two. These profits make up between one-half and two-thirds of total government revenue.⁹⁰ Bahrain also refines Saudi crude oil, which it receives at discounted prices.⁹¹ Of equal importance, in March 2011, as Bahrain's monarchy teetered under the strain of Arab Spring protests, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) deployed security forces to help stabilize the regime. These forces secured strategic locations, allowing the Bahraini police to use its manpower against the protesters.⁹²

But Bahrain's ultimate security guarantor is the United States. Besides hosting the U.S. Naval Support Activity with the U.S. Naval Forces Central Command and Fifth Fleet Headquarters,⁹³

Bahrain has received preferential status for arms procurement from the United States since 1987, and the United States officially designated Bahrain a major ally in March 2002.⁹⁴ The two nations extended the defense cooperation agreement for an unspecified period of time during the monarch's visit to Washington, DC, in November 2017,⁹⁵ though prior agreements have been extended for ten-year periods.⁹⁶

As part of its relations with the United States, Bahrain has long seen its security-related purchases from the United States, and to a lesser extent other Western countries, as a form of insurance. As noted in a leaked diplomatic cable reporting on a 2006 luncheon between the Bahraini king, the U.S. ambassador, and the then U.S. Naval component commander for Central Command Admiral Patrick Walsh:

Turning to Admiral Walsh, the King noted the US Navy's long presence in Bahrain and the vital role it has played in preserving Bahrain's security in a difficult regional environment. 'We feel we are protected by your presence,' he said. 'Without you, we would be squashed.' Returning to this theme later in the conversation, he also had high praise for the US military equipment that the US has provided to Bahrain under FMS/FMF [Foreign Military Sales and Foreign Military Financing] programs. Other countries might be able to match the US in terms of price and quality, he stated, but nobody comes close in terms of support.⁹⁷

Since 2006, the regime's belief in their need for U.S. support has not diminished.⁹⁸ Not surprisingly, about 85 percent of its weapons come from the United States.⁹⁹

Extravagant Security Sector Procurement

While the budget for defense spending and procurement in Bahrain is described by *Jane's Defence Weekly* as "opaque at best,"¹⁰⁰ the publicly declared portions of the security sector budget are significant and have continued to rise over the past few decades. The declared BDF budget has risen from \$308 million in 1988 to \$958 million on the eve of the Arab Spring in 2010 to \$1.397 billion in 2017 (all in constant 2016 dollars), or 11.8 percent of all government spending.¹⁰¹ These totals do not include money for the other three branches of the security services nor for the off-budget portions of the security sector like procurement and construction.¹⁰² And yet, even with this large chunk of the Bahraini budget, defense spending still exceeds its officially budgeted amount.

Although the Bahraini government does not publish figures on procurement, the limited information available indicates that the procurement budget dwarfs that of overall declared security spending. Much information can be gleaned from sales notifications from other countries, especially the United States, and from leaks and other defense analysis. One trend is that the procurement

budget does not seem to match the overall defense budget nor move in any smooth, predictable pattern. Instead, it appears to spike whenever aid or other funding is available.

Procurement spending has skyrocketed recently, due in large part to the Trump administration's decision in September 2017 to end export conditions related to Bahrain's human rights record that were enacted under former president Barack Obama.¹⁰³ The amount of weapons and the cost of Bahrain's current spending spree are very high, as the list of U.S. sales since 2017 indicates (see table 1).

Just the known U.S. purchases between September 2017 and September 2018 amount to \$6.22 billion, or over four and a half times the publicly declared \$1.4 billion defense budget for 2017. Adding the declared budget to the cost of U.S. purchases yields a total of \$7.62 billion, or over three-quarters of the entire \$10 billion government budget for a typical year.¹⁰⁴ And this number still does not include the other three security services, construction and research and development budgets, or any other secret procurement spending.

These purchases are in addition to other significant, recent purchases. For Bahrain's navy, there was also the sale of two 35-meter fast patrol boats from the United States for \$60 million and a \$70 million contract with the Italian firm Leonardo to upgrade six naval vessels, both signed in 2015.¹⁰⁵ Bahrain also bought two C-130J transports from Great Britain for an unknown amount; these are Bahrain's first transport aircraft.¹⁰⁶ In 2015, Bahrain purchased upgrades to its AH-1 Cobra helicopters from Turkey (worth \$24.8 million),¹⁰⁷ mortars from Spain (at an unknown cost),¹⁰⁸ and unknown quantities of anti-tank missiles from Russia.¹⁰⁹

In addition to these expensive procurements, the BDF spends significant sums on infrastructure and personnel. For instance, the BDF is currently building a new base and a new hospital.¹¹⁰ Moreover, the GCC announced in 2014 that it would establish a joint naval force based in Bahrain, which will presumably require additional infrastructure.¹¹¹ Finally, there is purely domestic procurement, such as massive housing compounds with high concentrations of security personnel and their families, including foreigners. With no public oversight of the sector, however, it is impossible for Bahraini citizens to know how many units are being built, at what cost, and for how many troops and their families.¹¹²

TABLE 1
U.S. Arms Sales to Bahrain (2017-2018)

Date	Items Purchased	Price
August 2017	HMMVW (better known as Humvees) tactical vehicles; unknown quantity	Unknown ¹
September 2017	Upgrade existing F-16 Block 40s to the F-16V configuration	\$1.08 billion ²
September 2017	221 TOW missiles	\$27 million ³
January 2018	1 guided missile frigate	Transfer; Bahrain is only responsible for costs of any repair or refurbishment ⁴
April 2018	12 Bell Ah-1Z Viper helicopters and associated sustainment and support equipment	\$911.4 million ⁵
May 2018	Bombs for F-16s	\$45 million ⁶
June 2018	19 F-16V fighters to be delivered through 2023 by Lockheed Martin	\$3.86 billion (includes all options for ancillary equipment, training targeting pods, and weapons; base cost is \$1.2 billion) ⁷
September 2018	120 Guided Multiple Launch Rocket Systems, 110 Army Tactical Missile Systems, plus associated publications, personnel training, software, engineering, technical, and logistics support	\$300 million ⁸
2017-2018	Total U.S. Purchases Announced	\$6.22 billion

1 The Bahrain HMMVW contract is part of a much larger \$2.2 billion Foreign Military Sales contract to nine countries, but quantities and costs to Bahrain are unknown. Because the price is not available, the cost of the HMMVWs is not considered in the total for Bahraini procurement 2017-2018. Sydney J. Freedberg Jr, "The EMP-Proof Truck: AM General Doubles Down On Humvee," *Breaking Defense*, October 3, 2017, <https://breakingdefense.com/2017/10/the-emp-proof-truck-am-general-doubles-down-on-humvee/>.

2 Name redacted, "Bahrain: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy," Congressional Research Service, 20, accessed September 24, 2018, https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20180809_95-1013_ae6bad204895e0481c45dcdcfecbf1617e820fe69.pdf.

3 *Ibid.*, 21.

4 "John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019," H.R. 5515, section 1020, 2018, <https://www.congress.gov/115/bills/hr5515/BILLS-115hr5515enr.pdf>. Given the lack of details on any repair costs and small amount relative to other, much larger purchases, this frigate is not included in total purchases.

5 Gareth Jennings, "Bahrain Cleared to Procure AH-1Z Attack Helos," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, April 30, 2018, https://janes-ihs-com.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/DefenceNews/Display/FG_912321-JDW.

6 Jeremy Binnie, "US Approves Bahraini Aerial Bomb Sale," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, May 24, 2018, https://janes-ihs-com.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/DefenceNews/Display/FG_942634-JDW.

7 Gareth Jennings, "Bahraini F-16V Contract Awarded," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, June 25, 2018, https://janes-ihs-com.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/DefenceNews/Display/FG_961727-JDW. Larger, total amount used to calculate total purchases.

8 "Bahrain - M31 Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System (GMLRS) Unitary and Army Tactical Mission System (ATACMS) T2K Unitary Missile," Defense Security Cooperation Agency, September 28, 2018, <http://www.dscs.mil/major-arms-sales/bahrain-m31-guided-multiple-launch-rocket-system-gmlrs-unitary-and-army-tactical>.

The High Potential for Security Sector Corruption

The lack of transparency and oversight in Bahrain's defense procurement process raises the likelihood that this multi-billion-dollar budget is rife with corruption. According to the 2015 edition of Transparency International's Government Defence Anti-Corruption Index, Bahrain was in the highest risk category for corruption in the defense and security sector, with procurement as the highest risk within that. Though the monarchy provides a total defense budget expenditure to the public, there is no further breakdown of it.¹¹³ Bahrain exempts all military procurement from public tender, and information on military procurement can only be shared with the Supreme Defense Council. Neither parliament nor the National Audit Court is permitted to examine the security sector, nor does the Ministry of Defense have its own audit function. There are also no restrictions on the use of agents or intermediaries in procurement contracts (a key pathway for defense corruption around the world) and no anticorruption requirements for suppliers.¹¹⁴ With the security sector consuming so much government spending with no independent oversight or accountability, the potential for corruption is very high.

Aggravating the risk of corruption is that anyone in the country publicizing any information about corruption associated with the security sector is punished severely. While there is an ombudsman in the Ministry of Interior, there are credible reports that people have been arrested and tortured for reporting corruption to it.¹¹⁵ Arrests in March 2018 of five individuals who had previously reported corruption and government abuses, along with new restrictions on social media, indicate that corruption is likely to be significantly underreported.¹¹⁶

And if other Bahraini economic sectors are a guide, there is reason to suspect malfeasance. Aside from the aforementioned corrupt land deals, there was also a major scandal that first broke in 2011 involving the state-owned aluminum company, Alba, when a forensic audit uncovered tens of millions of dollars in bribes. The chairman of Alba at the time, Sheikh Isa bin Ali Al Khalifa, a member of the royal family, was a co-conspirator yet did not face charges.¹¹⁷ There were also allegations that the prime minister was involved, though these were never investigated.¹¹⁸

The Risk of Instability

The very high levels of spending for Bahrain's security sector and significant risk of corruption therein pose a risk to the country's economic and political stability. In the short term, military procurements sustain the regime's capacity for coercion, provide patronage for key regime allies, and entrench sectarian divisions, while buying the monarchy continued support from the United States. All three pillars of the regime—coercion, sectarianism, and patronage—are at least in part bolstered by the lack of transparency and accountability in security sector procurement. Yet in the long run,

unchecked security sector spending threatens to aggravate sources of discontent that could put the Bahraini regime's stability at risk.

Short-Term Stability

Spending in the security sector provides near-term stability in four ways. First and foremost, this largesse serves to maintain the monarchy's capacity for coercion, a key pillar of the regime. With a need for a large coercive apparatus, it is no surprise that the security budget consumes a remarkable amount of the state's declared and undeclared resources. As Zoltan Barany notes, "Bahrain's military is the servant of the absolute monarchy. It is not a national army, but rather the army of the Sunni Muslim state and the regime."¹¹⁹

Second, unaccountable security spending serves as a source of patronage for regime supporters. The security sector consumes by far the largest part of Bahrain's public budget and is also one of the largest employers of Sunnis. A 2009 survey found that 13 percent of households that provided occupational data had someone working in the Bahraini security sector.¹²⁰ The good salaries and retirement plans ensure that members of the security forces themselves are invested in the regime. And by ensuring that many Sunni extended families have someone in the security sector, the government ensures that these families have a continued stake in the monarchy's survival.¹²¹ Furthermore, big ticket defense contracts provide ample opportunity to divert revenue to key regime supporters to help buy their loyalty. Such patronage can come from artificially inflating prices and using that for kickbacks to various actors. It can also come from hiring local companies, especially via offset contracts, who may provide overpriced contracts for poor quality work or even no work.

Third, security sector spending plays a crucial role in maintaining sectarian animosities. The exclusion of Shia from these contracts is a major source of grievance and enables an "us versus them" mentality on the island. Moreover, the contracts for security services performed by various foreign members from places like Jordan and Pakistan, as well as the procurement contracts to support them, divorce the enlisted and noncommissioned officer corps in particular from the Bahraini population writ large.

Finally, and of particular importance, Bahrain's procurement budget keeps the United States and other patrons committed to the monarchy's survival. The United States not only relies on the regime for continued basing rights but also benefits from lucrative arms sales. While Bahrain may not necessarily need so many U.S.-supplied F-16V fighter jets for defense, it is clear the regime sees these aircraft purchases as a sound investment for ensuring continued backing from the United States.

Long-Term Vulnerability

In the long term, however, Bahrain's procurement practices are causing fiscal problems, aggravating societal grievances, and obstructing reforms that would shore up the monarchy's legitimacy. First, very high levels of security sector spending and the associated potential for corruption have imperiled Bahrain's long-term fiscal stability. It is unclear where Bahrain's regime will get the money for the purchases—whether from the privy purse, Saudi Arabia, or some other donor. In addition, neither parliament nor the populace know whether the country will need to make an immediate one-time payment or pay in various installments.¹²² The needed funds will not be coming from the United States: all U.S. assistance to Bahrain amounted to just a bit more than \$1 million in 2017.¹²³

Second, excessive spending on security depletes funding for social programs that could address sectarian and cross-sectarian grievances. Only the leftovers from defense spending are available to provide housing, education, or infrastructure for the average Bahraini citizen. Within even that paltry allocation to larger social needs, Shia then receive the barest minimum state resources required for basic social order.

Third, arms purchases have been used to put down protests and peaceful calls for reform, thereby preventing democratic and economic reforms that would enhance the regime's legitimacy. Despite the repression, the protests continue to pressure the current Bahraini political settlement. Bahrain's monarchy has thus backed itself into a corner: in order to achieve its primary goal of maintaining an absolute monarchy, it fears opening up even a bit to the needed democratic and economic reforms that would give the regime greater legitimacy. The royal family must therefore rely on a combination of coercion, patronage, and sectarianism. A regime reliant on such a foundation is threatened if any of those three pillars should fall. Should the coercive apparatus of the state fail for any reason, localized demonstrations might swell again, as witnessed in 2011. Without patronage to key actors, those actors may seek other, better options.

Sectarianism, in particular, is far from a sturdy pillar for the regime. Sunni and Shia could overcome the animosity by rallying around grievances common to both groups. There have been several occasions when reformists from the two sects have worked together, including in 1996 when both jointly protested the Bahraini government's decision to renege on promised democratic reforms.¹²⁴ During the initial days of the 2011 uprisings, the protests were largely nonsectarian, and the General Federation of Bahrain Trade Unions, the main trade union in the country, which has both Sunni and Shia members, twice called for general strikes to protest the use of force against demonstrators.¹²⁵ The Wa'ad society, a left-leaning, secular opposition society that was disbanded in May 2017 by the government,¹²⁶ included both Shia and Sunnis and continued a long-running trend of cross-sectarian movements that advocate for unity across religions being especially targeted

by the Bahraini security sector.¹²⁷ Reformists have overcome sectarian divides to demand government action and could do so again—it would not be easy, but it is also not impossible.

Alternatively, if the regime increases its demonization of Shia, especially in the armed forces, it could accidentally ignite a sectarian conflict in a country where its co-religionists are the minority.¹²⁸ The regime has been publishing and distributing hyper-sectarian material to the BDF that encourages discrimination against non-Sunnis and even labels Shia as heretics who must repent or be killed.¹²⁹ One indicator of rising anti-Shia extremism is that over 100 Bahrainis joined the self-proclaimed Islamic State, including a former police lieutenant from a family close to the monarchy.¹³⁰ By relying excessively on sectarianism to maintain its power, the monarchy, combined with various sectarian identity entrepreneurs on all sides, could accidentally light the very spark of an uprising it seeks to avoid.

Policy Recommendations for the United States

Under the Obama Administration, the United States made some limited steps to check the Bahraini regime's authoritarianism. His administration withheld some arms purchases from Bahrain following the 2011 uprisings and publicly chastised the Bahraini regime in 2016, though no sanctions were imposed on any Bahraini officials nor was military cooperation interrupted. Since 2012, the United States had an administrative hold on providing weapons to the Ministry of Interior, though that hold did not apply to the Coast Guard or to the military, nor did it affect U.S. training for the MOI.¹³¹ In 2017, the Trump administration dropped human rights conditions for arms sales, though some restrictions remain on weapons that can be used for crowd control.¹³²

The United States and other Western powers have tremendous leverage over Bahrain, which receives almost all its weapons from the United States and relies on its more powerful security partners to defend it from a major attack by Iran. The United States can mitigate its strategic risks by using that leverage to nudge the monarchy toward greater reform before it is too late. Security sector procurement reform will encounter fierce resistance from the monarchy as well as from its local patron, Saudi Arabia. But slow, painful reforms now can help lessen the chances of popular unrest and political instability in Bahrain, which would be highly detrimental to U.S. interests in the region.

Start With Security Sector Procurement Reform

For decades, Western governments have usually focused on efforts to integrate the Shia into the security sector as a means of enhancing the Bahraini government's legitimacy. This is a noble goal that Western countries should continue to pursue. Fixing this problem, however, is a long-term task:

even if Shia were recruited into the security services today, it would be a decade until they made it to mid-level ranks. And many Shia may not even apply given the poor opinion they hold of the regime and the likelihood of being seen as traitors by their own communities. Efforts to foster Shia integration will also be wrenching for society and have encountered resistance from the Bahraini monarchy.

In the meantime, working on procurement issues is a less controversial place to start, and the results can be seen more quickly without as much social turmoil. In order to build the legitimacy of the Bahraini monarchy and make it more accountable to the population in a shorter timeframe, Western governments should use their leverage to influence the Bahraini monarchy to improve security sector procurement transparency and accountability. Procurement reform is a less controversial and more advantageous place for larger government reforms for several reasons.

First, issues of transparency and accountability, as well as security sector abuses, already crosscut most of Bahraini society. Focusing on common ground can build more trust between Sunni and Shia communities. Bahraini society has already shown a clear concern for procurement: on social media, Bahrainis raise doubts about large military purchases, especially about where the country will get the money, and parliamentarians have tried to raise such questions as well.¹³³

Second, the procurement sector is so large that even limited reforms would go a long way toward fixing Bahrain's fiscal imbalances and freeing up resources for social programs. In 2012, the Bahraini parliament tried to formulate a strategy to handle the budget deficit and the country's debt, and it highlighted that military spending was reducing the resources available for spending on health and education.¹³⁴ Yet without the basic facts and figures of security sector procurement, parliament cannot hope to balance the overall budget.¹³⁵

Third, procurement reform would be an important start in addressing larger civil-military relations issues by gradually bringing the security sector under a level of civilian, nonmonarchical control.

Action Items for Procurement Reform

The first efforts should focus on influencing Bahrain to publish a national security strategy. The strategy should be unclassified, though there may be a need for some classified annexes. With that strategy in hand, Bahraini citizens and Western powers can better evaluate how Bahraini security sector procurement contracts are or should be aligned with Bahrain's national security goals, as well as U.S. interests such as containing Iran and fighting terrorism. This step can help ensure that Bahrain's budget is more rationally spent, ideally leaving more money for economic and social development projects.

Second, given how Western defense contracts can be abused to bolster the Bahraini regime's coercive apparatus, Western governments should insist on extra scrutiny of all contracts associated with Bahrain. Governments should mandate that all contracts associated with the Bahraini state be published to improve transparency and accountability. Any U.S.-associated contracts or contract licenses that cannot be made public due to national security concerns should have to be reported to Congress, along with the national security justification. Offset contracts should be forbidden, and the beneficial owners of all subcontractors, agents, and other intermediaries should be made publicly known. All contracts should include corruption clauses to make contract termination easier should malfeasance be discovered, thereby incentivizing better contract delivery.

Third, Western countries should encourage Bahrain to develop a timeline and action plan for adherence to international contracting standards like the Open Contracting Partnership standards, including their data standards. These standards lay out best practices for the entire contracting process, from contract tenders to eventual contract completion. Some contracts will need to be classified, but those contracts should be the exceptions, not the rule. Which contracts will remain secret should be explicitly spelled out to the public and approved by parliament. Parliamentary committees should be established with clearances and the legislative authority to be briefed on and approve secret security contracts, just as is done in the United States. The timelines involved must be enforced with credible sanctions for noncompliance.

Signing up to such standards would signal to key actors within Bahrain that this particular form of patronage would be ending. The Bahraini government would build legitimacy, as the public could better see that Bahraini security spending is more accountable. And public tendering and fewer secret contracts could improve the Bahraini economy, as smaller contractors could compete on price and quality rather than on connections, helping to bring in new economic actors and bolstering existing, smaller ones.

Eventually, along with better contracting, the government should be required to submit audited statements of security sector procurement, with an eye to ultimately putting the entire government budget to public audits, with limited, specified exceptions for national security concerns. Bahrain already has a National Audit Court that produces a professional and detailed annual public report on financial and administrative activities and irregularities. Unfortunately, it does not cover all government revenues, nor can it report on royal court expenditures, much of the security sector, or the sovereign wealth fund.¹³⁶ Various scandals, like the aforementioned land scandals, indicate it is not capturing all spending either.

However, the example of Bahrain's GCC ally, Kuwait, demonstrates that auditing Bahrain's expenditures is feasible. Kuwait has a relatively open and transparent system of publicly available audited accounts. While some money may not be accounted for, the declared value of oil and gas

exports compared to oil and gas revenues showed deviations that were within typical international norms, indicating that much less of the country's revenue was being illicitly siphoned off.¹³⁷

Use U.S. Leverage

Given that security procurement is a key component of the regime's survival strategy, the monarchy will fight back with threats to revoke Western basing rights or to buy weapons from other suppliers, especially Russia and China. There is precedent for this: when Congress froze a sale of small arms to Bahrain in 2011, Bahrain bought the small arms elsewhere.¹³⁸ When the United States froze sales of Humvees that same year, Bahrain purchased Turkish-made Cobra armored personnel carriers instead (though in September 2017, Bahrain announced it was purchasing U.S. Humvees again).¹³⁹ Bahrain also publicly stated that it would buy Russian S-400 missiles, though no details of the purchase were offered.¹⁴⁰ Bahrain should be reminded that such purchases would endanger the U.S. security umbrella overall and jeopardize Western military aircraft operations there. Bahrain, as well as its patron Saudi Arabia, recognize that they need the U.S. bases in Bahrain at least as much as the United States does, and the United States should be willing to use that leverage to push for security procurement-related reforms. Using its leverage over procurement should be coupled with other leverage, such as limiting high level engagement, additional audits of prior weapons deliveries, and heightened congressional scrutiny of purchases to further pressure Bahrain.

At the same time, the United States should explore viable alternatives to basing the Navy's Fifth Fleet in Bahrain. This is prudent planning, given the importance of the base and the potential risks to the stability of the regime. Viable basing alternatives would lessen the Bahraini regime's leverage for unconditional support. There have been a few proposals in this direction. In 2013, a U.S. Navy captain published a paper on Fifth Fleet basing alternatives.¹⁴¹ That same year, former director of national intelligence Admiral Dennis Blair argued for moving the Fifth Fleet headquarters back aboard a U.S. Navy flagship (as it was before 1993) both to signal U.S. resolve for the need for Bahraini government reforms and because of the vulnerability of U.S. bases there given prior instability.¹⁴² The House version of the FY2016 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) contained a provision to require the Department of Defense to report on alternative locations for the U.S. Navy, but the final bill did not contain the provision.¹⁴³ That provision should be reinstated in the FY2020 NDAA. After all, Bahrain does not have a viable external protector besides the United States: neither China nor Russia at this time has the willingness or capability to take on that role. Thus, the time is now while the balance of power is in the United States' favor.

The United States continues to support the Bahraini regime without demanding reform, despite the fact that the monarchy's form of rule violates democratic principles and engenders risks to Bahrain's stability. As the United States learned from the Arab Spring, deals with such dictatorships can rapidly collapse, and the domestic conflicts that ensue can lead to much larger strategic dilemmas.

Thus, though fraught and difficult, the reasonable approach is to use existing Western leverage to push for gradual reforms that give the Bahraini people hope for a better future under a constitutional monarchy. A relatively stable, legitimate constitutional monarchy will be a better guarantee of Western interests in the region in the long run, especially when compared to the potential results of continuing to support a brittle, absolute monarchy.

Given the size of the security sector procurement budget, the importance of these purchases in sustaining coercion, the role the security sector plays in the Bahraini people's grievances, and the leverage Western governments have, security sector procurement reform is a good place to start. Gradual reform can act as a catalyst to rein in a free-spending regime, giving foreign investors more confidence that Bahraini debt may be worth purchasing and keeping the state better afloat. It can also help bring more accountability to the regime and reduce human rights abuses, thereby improving the legitimacy of the monarchy. Such measures to mitigate against popular unrest can help better ensure in the long term that the United States maintains its basing rights and freedom of movement in the Persian Gulf region. The reforms will not be easy, but the rewards can be substantial, and the consequences of not doing so disastrous.

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Notes

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- ³⁹ Note that this segregation is not a new phenomenon, but has existed for at least generations, so much so that different villages tend to have very distinct dialects. With additional security checkpoints since 2011, especially around Shia villages, this segregation has intensified. Gengler, 90–91; Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 54–56; Justin Gengler, “Segregation and Sectarianism: Geography, Economic Distribution, and

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- ⁴⁰ Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization*, 91.
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- ⁴² Ibid., 91–92; Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 54–56.
- ⁴³ Gengler, “The Political Economy of Sectarianism in the Gulf,” 57–58; Interview with Brian Dooley, June 5, 2018.
- ⁴⁴ Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization*, 58.
- ⁴⁵ Gengler, “Segregation and Sectarianism: Geography, Economic Distribution, and Sectarian Resilience in Bahrain,” 48.
- ⁴⁶ Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization*, 57.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., 108–19. At the highest levels of education, both Shia and Sunni had the same chance of working in the private vs public sector.
- ⁴⁸ The exclusion of the Shia from the Bahraini security sector is not new. A 1980 book on Bahrain noted that, prior to the discovery of oil, Bahraini Shia were taxed because they did not serve in the military nor were invited to do so. Ibid., 59.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., 57, 114.
- ⁵⁰ “Sectarian Discrimination and Extremism in Bahrain’s Security Forces: Questions for US Policy,” Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain, November 2017, 5, https://www.adhrb.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/2017.Sectarianization-of-Security-Forces_White-Paper.pdf.
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- ⁵² Ibid., 44–45.
- ⁵³ “Sectarian Discrimination and Extremism in Bahrain’s Security Forces,” Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain, 6.
- ⁵⁴ Barany, “The Bahrain Defense Force,” 19.
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- ⁶¹ Michael Payne, interview by Jodi Vittori, May 23, 2018.
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