

BAHRAIN

Party Portrait

Bahrain's monarchy has opted to focus on its security needs instead of creating a prosperous and open society for all. Sunni government policy routinely discriminates against its large Shia population. Bahrain feels threatened by Iran and the government views Shia Bahrainis as potential Iranian allies that may try to topple the monarchy at Iran's behest. Bahrain has historically sought an alliance with stronger nations to protect it from Iran. Today, the US acts as a guarantor of Bahrain security, especially in the face of Iran. While ISIS is seen as a threat to Bahrain, it is not treated with the same seriousness as Iran.

Key Interests

- Retain commitment from the US to the region and support to counter Iran
- Protect monarchy from a possible revolution; control Shia mobilization and organization
- Ensure economic troubles will not be exacerbated through a disruption of its oil refineries, economic aid cancelation from the GCC, or Iranian hostility in the Gulf

Sources of Leverage

Energy – Not a major oil producer, but has one of the largest refineries in the world with easy access to Saudi oil
Geographic – Location in the Gulf where most of world's oil is shipped, major powers will attempt to keep the shipping lanes open
Military – US 5th Fleet is stationed in Bahrain. Bahrain could use this as leverage in its relationship with the US. Provides Bahrain with significant security assurances and prestige
Convening Power – Sought to emulate other Gulf nations by hosting a series of international conferences (e.g. Manama Dialogue)

Regional Strategy

Bahrain has sought to deepen its alliance with the US/Britain by allowing increased military presence. The monarchy has continued to rely on the GCC and Saudi Arabia for economic and military support. Bahrain has joined military alliances against ISIS and other possible Iranian proxies (e.g. the Houthis in Yemen). Bahrain views their Shia population as a possible Iranian pawn in an attempt to destabilize the region. Bahrain oppresses and harasses its Shia population in order to negate their ability to challenge the monarchy, with the tacit approval of some its allies.

Powerful Individuals

Al Khalifa Monarchy: Hamad bin Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa (King of Bahrain), Salman bin Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa (heir apparent). Pro-government figures: Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa (Prime Minister), Sheikh 'Abd al-Latif al-Mahmoud (leader of the National Unity Assembly), Ali Ahmed Abdulla (Al-Minbar leader), Salah 'Ali (Al-Minbar Secretary General).
Major Human Rights players: 'Abd al-Hadi al-Khawaja, Nabeel Rajab, Sayed Ahmed Alwadaei.
Key opposition/Shia players: Isa Qassim, Ali Salman (Secretary General of the Al Wefaq), Matar Matar (Senior member of Al Wefaq)

Potential Negotiation Moves

Sunni-Shia Reconciliation – Bahrain could protect the rights of Shia Bahrainis, thus bringing them away from Iran and protecting the monarchy in the process
Use American Bases as leverage – US 5th fleet, located in Bahrain, is key to American regional strategy. Bahrain could use this to elicit concessions like deeper regional commitment and softening Saudi control in Bahrain
Convening power to bring in new actors – Invite South Asian nations, whose citizens are a large migrant presence in Bahrain, and Russia and China as actors in combating ISIS and playing a larger role in the region in general in order to inspire new thinking and mitigate sectarian and regional tensions

Internal Conflicts

Struggles with intense sectarianism. The government has aligned with Sunni groups and political parties with links to the Muslim Brotherhood. The government inhibits the work of human rights campaigners and civil society when deemed too closely aligned with the Shia opposition. While several Bahrainis have joined ISIS, Bahrain has not openly addressed the topic. ISIS routinely calls on its

Memberships

GCC, IAEA, Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, League of Arab States, OIC, UN (Member)

Allies

OMAN, SAUDI ARABIA, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, UNITED KINGDOM, UNITED STATES, YEMEN Government, KUWAIT

Partners

CHINA, HOLY SEE, INDIA, JAPAN, RUSSIA, QATAR, NATO, HUMANITARIAN ACTORS

Rivals

N/A

Adversaries

IRAN, SYRIA Government, YEMEN Houthis

Active Armed Opponents

ISIS

Proxy

Various rebel groups the GCC supports in Syria, Anti-Houthi forces in Yemen (Bahrain's contribution minimal in both instances)

External Sponsor

SAUDI ARABIA, GCC member countries

Aid Recipient

N/A

Aid Donor

UNITED STATES, UNITED KINGDOM