



## Sectarian Discrimination and Extremism in Bahrain's Security Forces *Questions for US Policy*

### **I. Introduction: Is the US Supporting a Sectarian Fighting Force in Bahrain?**

The United States (US) and Bahrain have a deep and longstanding security partnership, most prominently represented by the American Fifth Fleet base in Manama, the bilateral Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) signed in 1991, and former President George W. Bush's decision to designate the kingdom a major non-NATO ally (MNNA) in 2002.<sup>1</sup> Both the Obama and Trump administrations have maintained this relationship to varying degrees, providing approximately \$124 million in security aid<sup>2</sup> and issuing notifications for more than \$4 billion in arms sales since 2009.<sup>3</sup> According to the Congressional Research Service, it is currently estimated that roughly 85 percent of Bahrain's defense material is of US origin.<sup>4</sup>

Yet, while the US Government typically frames this partnership as necessary for combating terrorism and preserving stability in the region, the Bahraini security establishment consistently contravenes American interests, and is itself a primary driver of sectarian division, extremism, and intercommunal conflict.

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<sup>1</sup> In November 2017, the Trump administration decided to again extend the DCA with Bahrain. The pact is classified, and details are difficult to ascertain, though it is suspected to contain terms for a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), basing access, joint operations, and training programs, among other items.

<sup>2</sup> "Bahrain: Security Aid Pivot Table – Programs," Security Assistance Monitor, 2017, <https://securityassistance.org/data/program/military/Bahrain/2009/2018/all/Global/>

<sup>3</sup> "Bahrain: Arms Sales Dashboard," Security Assistance Monitor, 2017, <https://securityassistance.org/content/arms-sales-dashboard>

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth Katzman, *Bahrain: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy*, Congressional Research Service, 29 September 2017, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/95-1013.pdf>

## 1. Background: A History of Discrimination

Bahrain's defense sector is marked by severe sectarian discrimination ranging from biased hiring practices to the dissemination of radical anti-Shia training materials. The various security services, which are some of the largest employers in Bahrain,<sup>5</sup> largely refuse to hire Shia as a matter of informal policy, drawing disproportionately on local and foreign Sunni recruits.<sup>6</sup> According to a leaked diplomatic cable dating to 2006, King Hamad explained the country's military recruitment procedures to American officials in explicitly sectarian terms: "as long as [Iranian Ayatollah Ali] Khamenei has the title of Commander in Chief, Bahrain must worry about the loyalty of Shia who maintain ties and allegiance to Iran."<sup>7</sup> As is often the case in Bahrain – an effectively absolutist monarchy ruled by the Sunni Al Khalifa royal family – the king's words manifest policy. By 2017, defense analysis and scholarship has come to virtual consensus that sectarianism is among the core organizing principles of Bahrain's armed services. A 2016 review of the relevant academic and policy literature conducted by Dorothy Ohl, a military analyst and official at the US Department of Defense, revealed a clear consensus that Bahrain's security services are considered "cohesive...par excellence...by virtue of the fact that its members share a Sunni religious identity...It is empirically true that Sunnis have dominated critical coercive positions in Bahrain."<sup>8</sup> As Zoltan Barany, a scholar and Senior Associate at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, puts it: Bahrain's military "is a fighting force of Sunni Muslims who are charged with protecting a Sunni ruling family and Sunni political and business elites in a country."<sup>9</sup> Though the composition of the security apparatus has nominally shifted over the years to adapt to changing threat perceptions within the Bahraini monarchy – including, notably, an influx of Persian personnel to offset leftist and Arab nationalist movements in the mid-to-late 20<sup>th</sup> Century<sup>10</sup> – nearly every security institution has become almost exclusively manned by Sunni, and increasingly foreign, personnel.<sup>11</sup>

The security sector's discriminatory hiring practices reflect clear sectarian prejudice, but also the historical origins of the country's modern armed services under British colonial authority, when they were staffed primarily with Sunni South Asian recruits and overseen by British officers.<sup>12</sup> Bahrain's foundational colonial Levy Corps, which originally consisted of approximately 100 Baluchi personnel recruited from Oman, was itself a transition from the feudal armed forces raised by individual Al Khalifa sheikhs, known as the

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<sup>5</sup> 2010 government statistics indicated that approximately 86,700 people (54,600 Bahraini citizens and 28,000 non-Bahrainis) work in "public administration and defense." In 2006, defense analysts Anthony Cordesman and Khalid al-Rodhan reported that Bahrain's overall defense/security sector manpower was 21,360. See K.T. Abdulhameed, "Bahrain's Migrant Security Apparatus," in Abdulhadi Khaladf, Omar al-Shehabi, and Adam Hanieh, *Labor Migration and Citizenship in the Gulf*, Pluto Press: 2015, Print. Anthony Cordesman and Khalid R. al-Rodhan, *The Gulf Military Forces in an Era of Asymmetric War*, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 28 June 2006, [https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy\\_files/files/media/csis/pubs/060728\\_gulf\\_bahrain.pdf](https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/media/csis/pubs/060728_gulf_bahrain.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Maryam al-Khawaja, "Beneath Bahrain's Shia-versus-Sunni narrative, only the tyrants benefit," *The Guardian*, 27 October 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/oct/27/bahrain-shia-versus-sunni-narrative>.

<sup>7</sup> "Luncheon with King Hamad," United States Embassy Manama to United States Department of State, 15 March 2006, [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06MANAMA409\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06MANAMA409_a.html)

<sup>8</sup> Dorothy Ohl, "Bahrain's 'Cohesive' Military and Regime Stability amid Unrest," in Eds. Holger Albrecht, Aurel Croissant, and Fred H. Lawson, *Armies and Insurgencies in the Arab Spring*, 2016, Print, 145-167.

<sup>9</sup> Zoltan Barany, "The Role of the Military," *Journal of Democracy*, 22, October 2011, 28-39, <http://www.journalofdemocracy.org/sites/default/files/Barany-22-4.pdf>; see also Zoltan Barany, *The Bahrain Defence Force: The Monarchy's Second-to-Last Line of Defense*, Center for Strategic International Studies, 9 December 2016, [https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/161214\\_Bahrain\\_Defence\\_Force.pdf](https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/161214_Bahrain_Defence_Force.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Fuad Khuri, *Tribe and State in Bahrain: The Transformation of Social and Political Authority in an Arab State*, 1980, Print.

<sup>11</sup> Dorothy Ohl, "Bahrain's 'Cohesive' Military and Regime Stability amid Unrest," in Eds. Holger Albrecht, Aurel Croissant, and Fred H. Lawson, *Armies and Insurgencies in the Arab Spring*, 2016, Print, 145-167; Kristin Smith Diwan, "Ruling Strategies and Sectarianism in Bahrain," in Ed. Lawrence G. Potter, *Sectarian Politics in the Persian Gulf*, 2014, Print, 143-177.; and and Laurence Louer, "Sectarianism and Coup-Proofing Strategies in Bahrain," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, May 2013, <https://americanuniversity.edu.ares.atlas-sys.com/ares/ares.dll?SessionID=O035453420U&Action=10&Type=10&Value=86648>

<sup>12</sup> K.T. Abdulhameed, "Bahrain's Migrant Security Apparatus," in Abdulhadi Khaladf, Omar al-Shehabi, and Adam Hanieh, *Labor Migration and Citizenship in the Gulf*, Pluto Press: 2015, Print.

*fidawis*.<sup>13</sup> Like their colonial successors, the *fidawis* were predominantly made up of “Baluchis, slaves of African origin, and ‘stray’ Arabs (mwalis) who had no clear tribal affiliation”<sup>14</sup> – or “non-tribal Sunnis.”<sup>15</sup> After the United Kingdom (UK) reorganized the Bahraini government in the 1920s, the Levy Corp and, later, the smaller Bahrain Police Force of “about fifty-four former Indian Army Punjabis headed by a British officer” were the primary agents of state authority until 1932, when the government established Bahrain’s first nominally “local” police force.<sup>16</sup> However, the practice of foreign recruitment remained ingrained in the kingdom’s security sector, and African personnel were specifically sought after for work in the police throughout the middle of the century.<sup>17</sup> As documented in Fuad I. Khuri’s definitive sociological study of the Bahraini state prior to independence – a book which remains banned in the kingdom<sup>18</sup> – less than a quarter of the police were of Bahraini origin in the 1960s; “the rest were Baluchis, Yemenis, Mascatis, Pakistanis, Yagais, Iraqis, and so on, in this order of frequency.”<sup>19</sup> The reliance on foreign manpower persisted through independence in 1971,<sup>20</sup> with the emerging Bahrain Defense Force (BDF) officer corps largely staffed by Jordanians and the police force supervised by British expatriates, such as Ian Henderson.<sup>21</sup> The remainder of the military was – and continues to be – drawn specifically from the Al Khalifa and its key tribal allies, such as the Al-Mussalam, Al-Ghatam, Al-Na’im, Al-Buflasa, and Al-Ka’bi in the Gulf, as well as the Al-Qeedat from Syria, Al-Shammari from Iraq, and Al-Amri from Jordan.<sup>22</sup> By the 1990s, overlapping with Bahrain’s largest mass uprising until the Arab Spring protest movement in 2011, the majority of remaining Shia personnel appear to have been effectively purged from the BDF, ultimately provided with other public sector work or forced into early retirement.<sup>23</sup>

## II. Contemporary Sectarianization

### 1. Discrimination in the Military, Intelligence, and Police

While the general opacity of the Bahraini state – and particularly the security institutions – makes it difficult to ascertain exact defense sector employment figures, analysis of limited government statistics, leaked data, and other open-source information yields satisfactory estimates. In 2010, for example, public government information indicated that approximately 86,700 people (54,600 Bahraini citizens and 28,000 non-Bahrainis) worked in “public administration and defense.”<sup>24</sup> Earlier estimates by international defense experts placed the total “combined manpower” – across the BDF, National Guard, Ministry of Interior (MOI) police forces,

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<sup>13</sup> Fuad Khuri, *Tribe and State in Bahrain: The Transformation of Social and Political Authority in an Arab State*, (1980), Print.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Kristin Smith Diwan, “Ruling Strategies and Sectarianism in Bahrain,” in Ed. Lawrence G. Potter, *Sectarian Politics in the Persian Gulf*, (2014), Print, 143-177.

<sup>16</sup> Fuad Khuri, *Tribe and State in Bahrain: The Transformation of Social and Political Authority in an Arab State*, (1980), Print, 114.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Justin Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain and the Arab Gulf: Rethinking the Rentier State*, Indiana University Press: 2015, Print.

<sup>19</sup> Fuad Khuri, *Tribe and State in Bahrain: The Transformation of Social and Political Authority in an Arab State*, (1980), Print.

<sup>20</sup> According to Khuri, the army was formed in 1968, with around 2,000 recruits. See: Fuad Khuri, *Tribe and State in Bahrain: The Transformation of Social and Political Authority in an Arab State*, (1980), Print, 122.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. See also: Eds. Ala’a Shehabi and Marc Owen Jones, *Bahrain’s Uprising*, 2015, print.

<sup>22</sup> This list is drawn from Khuri and Ohl, op. cit.

<sup>23</sup> Dorothy Ohl, “Bahrain’s ‘Cohesive’ Military and Regime Stability amid Unrest,” in Eds. Holger Albrecht, Aurel Croissant, and Fred H. Lawson, *Armies and Insurgencies in the Arab Spring*, 2016, Print, 145-167; and Laurence Louer, “Sectarianism and Coup-Proofing Strategies in Bahrain,” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, May 2013,

<sup>24</sup> K.T. Abdulhameed, “Bahrain’s Migrant Security Apparatus,” in Abdulhadi Khaladf, Omar al-Shehabi, and Adam Hanieh, *Labor Migration and Citizenship in the Gulf*, Pluto Press: 2015, Print.

and intelligence services – at a little over 21,000,<sup>25</sup> though this figure has grown by at least several thousand.<sup>26</sup>



*Plainclothes personnel during a January 2017 raid in Diraz, believed to be NSA agents*

Almost none of these personnel are recruited from Bahrain’s Shia Muslim population. The most recent independent national demographic survey, conducted by academic Justin Gengler in 2009, found that “not a single Shi’i [sic] of those randomly sampled for interview reported working for the police or armed services” compared to 17 percent of working Sunni male respondents.<sup>27</sup> In 2015, estimates placed Shia at approximately 2-5 percent of all security personnel – BDF, National Guard, MOI, intelligence<sup>28</sup> – contrasted with the country’s Shia population of between 58-70 percent.<sup>29</sup>

Like the broader defense sector, while the BDF does not publicly release detailed employment figures, the Bahrain Independent Commission of inquiry (BICI) estimated that the military – army, navy, air force and medical services – employed around 12,000 people in 2011,<sup>30</sup> including a substantial number of foreign personnel. Educated guesses put the percentage of Shia citizens in the BDF at less than five, and the number of foreign-born Sunni personnel at as much as 50 percent.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, a 2009 leak from the National Security Agency (NSA) – Bahrain’s primary intelligence agency which is implicated in torture, enforced disappearance and extrajudicial killing<sup>32</sup> – suggested that the percentage of Shia in its workforce did not exceed four percent, and that the majority of those who were employed worked in non-supervisory positions or as informants.<sup>33</sup> As in the NSA specifically, and the public sector more generally, those Shia individuals that are employed in

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<sup>25</sup> Anthony Cordesman and Khalid R. al-Rodhan, *The Gulf Military Forces in an Era of Asymmetric War*, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 28 June 2006, [https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy\\_files/files/media/csis/pubs/060728\\_gulf\\_bahrain.pdf](https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/media/csis/pubs/060728_gulf_bahrain.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> For example, the 2006 Cordesman and al-Rodhan estimate places the BDF’s total personnel at 8,500, while the BICI’s 2011 estimate places the figure at 12,000. Though this specific discrepancy could be the result of methodological differences, the security institutions have steadily grown in size, and there is strong evidence – see below – that the Government of Bahrain has hired thousands more personnel in the years since 2011.

<sup>27</sup> Justin Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain and the Arab Gulf: Rethinking the Rentier State*, Indiana University Press: 2015, Print.

<sup>28</sup> “Sectarian profiling and recruitment of foreign mercenaries have enabled the regime virtually to avoid recruiting Shias in the four main security agencies that are in charge of protecting the ruling elites and were hence directly involved in the repression of the 2011 uprising: the Bahrain Defense Force, the National Guard, the police forces depending on the Ministry of Interior and the National Security Agency [sic].” Laurence Louer, “Sectarianism and Coup-Proofing Strategies in Bahrain,” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, May 2013, pg. 246, <https://americanuniversity.ares.atlas-sys.com/ares/ares.dll?SessionID=O035453420U&Action=10&Type=10&Value=86648>

<sup>29</sup> Ian Siperco, “Bahrain’s Sectarian Challenge,” Middle East Policy Council, 22 October 2010, <http://www.mepc.org/articles-commentary/commentary/bahrain-s-sectarian-challenge?print>.

<sup>30</sup> Mahmoud Cherif Bassiouni, Nigel Rodley, Badria al-Awadhi, Phillipe Kirsch, and Mahnoush Arsanjani, *Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry*, Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, <http://www.bici.org.bh/BICReportEN.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> Brian Dooley, “Bahrain’s Soldier Sailor Sunni Shia Struggle,” *The Huffington Post*, 7 February 2014, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/brian-dooley/bahrain-s-soldier-sailor-s\\_b\\_4745595.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/brian-dooley/bahrain-s-soldier-sailor-s_b_4745595.html); and “Bahraini Shi’ites protest against settling Sunnis,” *Reuters*, 9 March 2011, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/03/09/us-bahrain-protests-idUSTRE7284W320110309>; and Confidential sources.

<sup>32</sup> Mahmoud Cherif Bassiouni, Nigel Rodley, Badria al-Awadhi, Phillipe Kirsch, and Mahnoush Arsanjani, *Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry*, Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, <http://www.bici.org.bh/BICReportEN.pdf>; and “The National Security Agency and Systematic Counter-terror Abuses in Bahrain,” ADHRB, 4 September 2017, [http://www.adhrb.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/HRC-36-ADHRB-Written-Statement\\_Bahrain-NSA.pdf](http://www.adhrb.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/HRC-36-ADHRB-Written-Statement_Bahrain-NSA.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> “Bahrain: Dangerous Statistics and Facts about the National Security Apparatus,” BCHR, 8 March 2009, <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/2784>.

the broader security services often occupy non-sensitive roles in the lower rungs of the hierarchy.<sup>34</sup> Ebrahim Sharif, the leader of the secular Wa'ad political society, testified that there was not a single Shia ranked higher than a brigadier in the Ministry of Defense in 2011,<sup>35</sup> and the Supreme Defense Council (SDC), the country's highest security body, is entirely made up of members of the Sunni royal family.



*MOI officers making an arrest, 2017*

The government has also failed to integrate Shia into the MOI, though the institution is nominally more inclusive than the military and intelligence services. Estimates of the MOI's size range widely,<sup>36</sup> from 11,000<sup>37</sup> to 30,000<sup>38</sup> people, with Shia – mostly in administrative roles – accounting for approximately 10 percent. In 2011, the MOI pledged to create thousands of new jobs in the Coast Guard, Traffic Directorate, and Civil Defense Directorate, among other divisions of the ministry, claiming that these hires would be drawn from a cross-section of the population.<sup>39</sup> However, the government has not released demographic information on MOI personnel to the public. On the contrary, there are reports of “sectarian profiling,” such as the MOI requiring job candidates to produce documents that indicate sect, and then additionally requiring that Shia candidates produce “a certificate of good behavior.”<sup>40</sup> Recent job advertisements for the MOI request that applicants submit their marriage certificates and those of their parents, for example. This is not a standard hiring practice in Bahrain, but marriage certificates are among the few documents that clearly display an individual's sect.<sup>41</sup> Further, as noted by the research collective Bahrain Watch,<sup>42</sup> even if Shia were successfully integrated into these divisions of the MOI, this would not rectify the imbalance in key law enforcement roles and senior positions: the Coast Guard and Traffic Directorate play little substantive role in everyday policing, and the Civil Defense Directorate handles broader public safety issues like firefighting.

In 2012, the government announced plans to form a new community policing program comprised of 500 recruits “from all communities.”<sup>43</sup> According to the authorities, a total of 1,500 community police had graduated from the Royal Police Academy by 2015.<sup>44</sup> While the US State Department reported in 2016 that its “contacts have confirmed that Bahraini Shia have been among those integrated into the community police and the police cadets” it found that this integration has not occurred “in significant numbers.”<sup>45</sup> Moreover, the Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED) determined that these new units play only a “marginal”

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<sup>34</sup> Justin Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain and the Arab Gulf: Rethinking the Rentier State*, Indiana University Press: 2015, Print.

<sup>35</sup> Eds. Ala'a Shehabi and Marc Owen Jones, *Bahrain's Uprising*, 2015, print.

<sup>36</sup> This is likely due to standard opacity of Bahraini state institutions, as well as methodology: the MOI is a sprawling institution with dozens of subdivisions and functions, from patrolmen to firefighters.

<sup>37</sup> K.T. Abdulhameed, “Bahrain's Migrant Security Apparatus,” in Abdulhadi Khaladf, Omar al-Shehabi, and Adam Hanieh, *Labor Migration and Citizenship in the Gulf*, Pluto Press: 2015, Print.

<sup>38</sup> Confidential source.

<sup>39</sup> Eds. Ala'a Shehabi and Marc Owen Jones, *Bahrain's Uprising*, 2015, print.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.; and Laurence Louer, “Sectarianism and Coup-Proofing Strategies in Bahrain,” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, May 2013, <https://americanuniversity.ares.atlas-sys.com/ares/ares.dll?SessionID=O035453420U&Action=10&Type=10&Value=86648>

<sup>41</sup> Confidential source.

<sup>42</sup> “Government Inaction: Recommendation 1722,” Bahrain Watch, 2016, <https://bahrainwatch.org/bici/1722e.php>

<sup>43</sup> *Steps taken by the Government of Bahrain to Implement the Recommendations in the 2011 Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry*, US Department of State, 21 June 2016, <http://pomед.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/State-BICI-Report.pdf>

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

policing role,<sup>46</sup> thereby succumbing to the same problems as the ostensive integration programs for the Coast Guard, Traffic Directorate, and Civil Defense Directorate. Activists in Bahrain additionally report that community police personnel are unarmed and typically operate under the strict supervision of standard security forces; community police are known to man checkpoints while armed MOI officers observe from nearby vehicles, for example.<sup>47</sup>

## 2. Foreign Recruitment

Aside from the limited number of Shia community police, there is no evidence to suggest that the government has taken further steps toward incorporating Shia into the security forces. This is especially true of the BDF and the NSA.<sup>48</sup> Rather, the government has purposefully exacerbated this disparity by maintaining its longstanding policy of hiring foreign-born Sunni personnel.<sup>49</sup> Over the past two decades – as hundreds of Shia have been arbitrarily denaturalized<sup>50</sup> – Bahraini authorities have recruited and expedited citizenship for tens of thousands of foreign Sunnis from countries like Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Yemen, and Pakistan.<sup>51</sup> While many of these expatriates find employment in the judiciary or the school system, the vast majority serve in the security forces. As revealed by a former adviser to the Cabinet Affairs Ministry, Dr. Salah al-Bandar, in 2006,<sup>52</sup> the government has granted citizenship to at least 100,000 foreign Sunnis in the last 15-20 years, with an accelerated pace of naturalization since 2011.<sup>53</sup> The path to expedited political naturalization for security officers – often earned through demonstrated loyalty to the monarchy – remains a key hiring incentive that “is virtually impossible for other migrants in the country”<sup>54</sup> who typically face significant hurdles to access even basic social services.

Just before the protest movement of 2011, the pro-government media outlet Gulf Digital News noted that approximately 40 percent of MOI employees were foreign nationals.<sup>55</sup> This proportion appears to have only increased during the state of emergency between March and May, when the government recruited over 2,500 former soldiers from Pakistan for service in both the MOI’s riot police and the National Guard,<sup>56</sup> a paramilitary force estimated to be several battalions in size.<sup>57</sup> According to Al-Jazeera, this move represented

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<sup>46</sup> “One Year Later: Assessing Bahrain’s Implementation of the BICI Report,” Project on Middle East Democracy, November 2012, <http://pomed.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/One-Year-Later-Assessing-Bahrains-Implementation-of-the-BICI-Report.pdf>, 13-14.

<sup>47</sup> Confidential source.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> *Apart in Their Own Land: Government Discrimination Against Shia in Bahrain, Vol. I*, ADHRB, BCHR, and BIRD, April 2015, <http://www.adhrb.org/2015/03/adhrb-bird-and-bchr-publish-new-report-on-shia-discrimination/>

<sup>50</sup> “Bahrain’s Third Cycle UPR: A Record of Repression,” *Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain, Bahrain Institute for Rights & Democracy, Bahrain Center for Human Rights*, 2016, accessed 19 April 2017, [http://www.adhrb.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/2017.2.28\\_Web-Version\\_ADHRB\\_BCHR\\_BIRD\\_Bahrain-3rd-Cycle-UPR-Assessment.pdf](http://www.adhrb.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/2017.2.28_Web-Version_ADHRB_BCHR_BIRD_Bahrain-3rd-Cycle-UPR-Assessment.pdf).

<sup>51</sup> Maryam al-Khawaja, “Beneath Bahrain’s Shia-versus-Sunni narrative, only the tyrants benefit,” *The Guardian*, 27 October 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/oct/27/bahrain-shia-versus-sunni-narrative>.

<sup>52</sup> “‘Al-Bandar Report’: Demographic engineering in Bahrain and mechanisms of exclusion,” BCHR, 30 September 2006, <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/528>; The al-Bandar papers, leaked by a civil servant, revealed an inter-ministry plan to employ foreign Sunni nationals and grant them citizenship at a fast rate, thereby proportionally reducing the Shia demographic from a majority to a minority.

<sup>53</sup> Justin Gengler, “Bahrain Drain: Why the King’s Sunni Supporters are Moving Abroad,” *Foreign Policy*, 5 September 2014, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2014-09-05/bahrain-drain>.

<sup>54</sup> K.T. Abdulhameed, “Bahrain’s Migrant Security Apparatus,” in Abdulhadi Khaladif, Omar al-Shehabi, and Adam Hanieh, *Labor Migration and Citizenship in the Gulf*, Pluto Press: 2015, Print.

<sup>55</sup> “Police jobs chance for Bahrainis,” Gulf Digital New, 1 February 2011, <http://archives.gdnonline.com/NewsDetails.aspx?date=04/07/2015&storyid=297440>

<sup>56</sup> Mujib Mashal, “Pakistani Troops Aid Bahrain’s Crackdown,” Al Jazeera, 30 July 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/07/2011725145048574888.html>

<sup>57</sup> Anthony Cordesman and Khalid R. al-Rodhan, *The Gulf Military Forces in an Era of Asymmetric War*, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 28 June 2006, [https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy\\_files/files/media/csis/pubs/060728\\_gulf\\_bahrain.pdf](https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/media/csis/pubs/060728_gulf_bahrain.pdf)

a 50 percent increase in the strength of these two units.<sup>58</sup> None of the new recruits were Shia.<sup>59</sup> Advertisements for positions in Bahrain's security forces were seen in Pakistan in 2014, and a Pakistani newspaper reported that over 10,000 Pakistani nationals were serving in them that same year.<sup>60</sup> Pakistanis make up at least 18 percent of the Royal Bahraini Air Force and a third of the police force.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, leaked documents listed the names and salaries of 499 Jordanian police officers employed by the MOI in 2014, and other contemporaneous reports estimated that up to 2,500 former Jordanian policemen were working in the Bahraini security services at the time.<sup>62</sup>

As well as special treatment for naturalization, the government typically provides Sunni security personnel with social services it often denies local Shia communities and other migrants.<sup>63</sup> Gengler notes that "new foreign recruits for the army and security services, namely Sunnis from Pakistan, Yemen, Syria, Jordan, and elsewhere" receive priority selection for government benefits such as housing.<sup>64</sup> The government has created free self-contained housing projects for the majority of foreign security personnel complete with their own "consumer outlets"<sup>65</sup> that include shops and restaurants run predominantly by other expatriates.<sup>66</sup> In contrast, many Bahraini Shia live in the peripheral-urban surroundings of Manama and in more rural villages which are characterized by "unpaved roads, battered houses, and dysfunctional sewage systems."<sup>67</sup> As of 2016, there were more than 50,000 people on the waitlist for public housing and a backlog of applications that estimated to take at least 15 years to process,<sup>68</sup> and a 2017 report by the US real estate group CBRE concluded that Bahrain has a housing shortage of approximately 75,000 units.<sup>69</sup> Academic K.T. Abdulhameed also finds that the designated compounds for security personnel segregate "them to a large extent from the indigenous Bahraini population living in towns and villages where the security forces are often stationed for duty," fostering sectarian and racial tensions.<sup>70</sup> This divide is further exacerbated by the fact that a large proportion of the South Asian security personnel speak only elementary Arabic. It is common to find significant numbers of comments on social media sites associated with the armed forces written in languages other than Arabic, such as Urdu, for example,<sup>71</sup> indicating that a substantial number of commenters are non-Bahraini, and likely members of the security institutions or their families.

Notably, although expatriate security personnel generally receive preferential treatment over the country's marginalized Shia communities, South Asian recruits do face certain levels of discrimination within the

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<sup>58</sup> Mujib Mashal, "Pakistani Troops Aid Bahrain's Crackdown," Al Jazeera, 30 July 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/07/2011725145048574888.html>

<sup>59</sup> Confidential Source.

<sup>60</sup> "King of Bahrain vows to enhance military cooperation at JSHQ," Dawn, 20 March 2014, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1094257/king-of-bahrain-vows-to-enhance-military-cooperation-at-jshq>

<sup>61</sup> Zoltan Barany, *The Bahrain Defence Force: The Monarchy's Second-to-Last Line of Defense*, Center for Strategic International Studies, 9 December 2016, [https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/161214\\_Bahrain\\_Defence\\_Force.pdf](https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/161214_Bahrain_Defence_Force.pdf)

<sup>62</sup> Nazgol Kafai & Ala'a Shehabi, *The Struggle for Information: Revelations on Mercenaries, Sectarian Agitation and Demographic Engineering in Bahrain*, JADALIYYA, 29 May 2014, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/17912/the-struggle-for-information-revelations-on-mercen>

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Justin Gengler, "Bahrain Drain: Why the King's Sunni Supporters are Moving Abroad," *Foreign Policy*, 5 September 2014, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2014-09-05/bahrain-drain>.

<sup>65</sup> K.T. Abdulhameed, "Bahrain's Migrant Security Apparatus," in Abdulhadi Khaladf, Omar al-Shehabi, and Adam Hanieh, *Labor Migration and Citizenship in the Gulf*, Pluto Press: 2015, Print.

<sup>66</sup> Zoltan Barany, *The Bahrain Defence Force: The Monarchy's Second-to-Last Line of Defense*, Center for Strategic International Studies, 9 December 2016, [https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/161214\\_Bahrain\\_Defence\\_Force.pdf](https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/161214_Bahrain_Defence_Force.pdf)

<sup>67</sup> *BTI 2016 — Bahrain Country Report*. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2016, [https://www.bti-project.org/fileadmin/files/BTI/Downloads/Reports/2016/pdf/BTI\\_2016\\_Bahrain.pdf](https://www.bti-project.org/fileadmin/files/BTI/Downloads/Reports/2016/pdf/BTI_2016_Bahrain.pdf)

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> "Bahrain said to suffer 75,000-unit housing shortage in 2017," *Arabian Business*, 25 June 2017, <http://www.arabianbusiness.com/bahrain-said-suffer-75-000-unit-housing-shortage-in-2017-678348.html>

<sup>70</sup> K.T. Abdulhameed, "Bahrain's Migrant Security Apparatus," in Abdulhadi Khaladf, Omar al-Shehabi, and Adam Hanieh, *Labor Migration and Citizenship in the Gulf*, Pluto Press: 2015, Print.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

armed services. Just after independence, it was commonplace for militaries across the Arab Gulf to maintain hierarchies based on ethnicity or origin: South Asian “migrants filled the bottom ranks...officers recruited from other areas of the Arab world served above them, and British (and American advisors) held the top positions.”<sup>72</sup> A comparable hierarchy largely remains in place in Bahrain, with an increased emphasis on citizenship status. Abdulhameed’s interviews with several Pakistani members of Bahrain’s security services in 2012 affirmed that “officer ranks are held by indigenous Bahrainis, while the positions below are held by naturalised Bahrainis, and the bottom ranks by foreign recruits [sic].”<sup>73</sup> Much of the officer corps is made up of members of the royal family, especially at the highest ranks – the minister of interior, the minister of defense, and the commanders of both the BDF and the Royal Guard are all Al Khalifas; the latter is Sheikh Nasser bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the king’s son, who is accused of personally torturing detainees in 2011. According to the personnel interviewed by Abdulhameed, naturalization effectively functions as a prerequisite for career advancement. Conversely, non-naturalized members of the lower ranks are at risk of deportation if they disobey orders or are accused of any infraction: in 2013, the government deported at least 180 Pakistani soldiers for allegedly “violating the disciplinary norms.”<sup>74</sup> A Pakistani officer stressed that the decision was a purely “administrative matter” rather than a “political” one, but he did not reveal the alleged transgression.<sup>75</sup> Other reports indicate that Bahraini officers are routinely tasked with ensuring that low-level foreign recruits engage in the physical work of torturing detainees or dispersing protests, disciplining them if they do not.<sup>76</sup>

### III. Propagation of Extremism

#### 1. State-Sponsored Materials

Sectarian prejudice in Bahrain’s military threatens to undermine the country’s long-term stability and fuel extremism, and there is evidence that Bahraini officials have directly propagated anti-Shia and other extremist views within the security forces. The BDF High Command, through its Department of Religious Education, financed and published a religious pamphlet entitled *Nur al-Sunna* that denounces several non-Sunni sects of Islam as heretical, for example, including Shiism.<sup>77</sup> *Nur al-Sunna*, which is presented below for the first time in English, provides purported religious justifications for violence and discrimination against these sects.<sup>78</sup> The author writes that “al-Rafidah” (a pejorative term for Shia that is often translated as ‘rejectionist’) are among the “misguided sects” that “go against the Sunna of the prophet Mohammed.”<sup>79</sup> A number of Shia religious practices are specifically labeled “forms of heresy,” including the Prayer of Raghieb, fasting on Mid-Sha’aban, and celebrating the birth of the Prophet Mohammed.<sup>80</sup> It goes on to describe other Shia worship and burial practices as “shirk,” ultimately declaring that those “who commit such acts should repent or else they must be killed.”<sup>81</sup> Members of the security services report the pamphlet is just one publication in a body of literature published by the BDF and distributed for free from military facilities, including mosques, where preachers announce and endorse new releases during Friday prayer services.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> “Bahrain deports 180 Pakistanis serving in defence,” *Dunya News TV*, 16 March 2013, <http://dunyanews.tv/en/Pakistan/164575-Bahrain-deports-180-Pakistanis-serving-in-defence>

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Dorothy Ohl, “Bahrain’s ‘Cohesive’ Military and Regime Stability amid Unrest,” in Eds. Holger Albrecht, Aurel Croissant, and Fred H. Lawson, *Armies and Insurgencies in the Arab Spring*, 2016, Print, 145-167

<sup>77</sup> Dr. Saeed Bin Ali Bin Wahaf Al-Qahtani. *Nur Al-Sunna*. Bahrain Defence Force and Department of Religious Education. Print. See ADHRB’s unofficial English translation below, in the Annex.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.



The extremist rhetoric in pamphlets like *Nur al-Sunna* matches the testimony of some officers recruited from Pakistan, who have reportedly stated that they were “called for jihad against the Shia community” in Bahrain,<sup>82</sup> as well as Syrian recruits who have expressed the belief that “fighting Shiites in Bahrain is equivalent to fighting the Assad regime in Syria.”<sup>83</sup> Social media channels associated with the security forces publish pages devoted to similar perspectives, with taglines like: “exposing Shia infidels and traitors” who oppose “monotheism.” Terminology like “Iranian dogs,” “Shia Criminal Monkeys,” “Shia criminal terrorists,” and “Iranian traitors” is common on these sites.<sup>84</sup>



Cover of *Nur al-Sunna*

The government’s production and distribution of material like *Nur al-Sunna* – combined with the targeted foreign recruitment of Sunni personnel; discriminatory domestic hiring practices; and the apparent ubiquity of bigoted discourse in the ranks – demonstrates at minimum a tacit policy of facilitating sectarian extremism within the security institutions. According to scholars like Marc Owen Jones,<sup>85</sup> Laurence Louer,<sup>86</sup> and Zoltan Barany,<sup>87</sup> this represents a conscious decision by the government – “the deliberate instrumentalization of sectarianism” in Jones’ terminology; “praetorianization” in Louer’s – to create a security apparatus loyal to the monarchy, and motivated by a specific religion or ideology over the country as a whole. Such an apparatus is expected to be more willing to inflict arbitrary and even excessive violence on dissident groups, and particularly to control the Shia majority population to which it has little or no connection, if not extant or cultivated animosity. According to interviews conducted by Ohl, it is widely believed that “some members [of the security forces] truly think that by killing them they are saving Shiites from a life of sin ... [while others] regime supporters implemented their orders for their salary as well as for God.”<sup>88</sup>

Likewise, Abdulhameed finds that the intersection of “support of Bahrain’s rulers” and a “discourse upholding a highly sectarian variant of Sunni Islam” serves as the “common ground” or shared organizing principle that personnel across the spectrum of nationalities can coalesce around.<sup>89</sup>

Yet, notably, ideological and monetary incentives are matched with the omnipresent threat of punishment: an average of 12 military intelligence agents, typically of Bahraini, Jordanian, or Syrian descent, are said to surveil each BDF unit, with the authority to imprison and torture officers suspected of dissenting views. For Bahraini personnel, the government also employs “family networks to indirectly coerce security force

<sup>82</sup> “Mercenaries in Bahrain: The cruel crackdown of the uprising,” Islamic Human Rights Commission, 29 April 2014, <http://www.ihrc.org.uk/publications/briefings/11005-mercenaries-in-bahrain-the-cruel-crackdown-of-the-uprising>; and Dorothy Ohl, “Bahrain’s ‘Cohesive’ Military and Regime Stability amid Unrest,” in Eds. Holger Albrecht, Aurel Croissant, and Fred H. Lawson, *Armies and Insurgencies in the Arab Spring*, (2016), Print, 145-167.

<sup>83</sup> Dorothy Ohl, “Bahrain’s ‘Cohesive’ Military and Regime Stability amid Unrest,” in Eds. Holger Albrecht, Aurel Croissant, and Fred H. Lawson, *Armies and Insurgencies in the Arab Spring*, (2016), Print, 145-167.

<sup>84</sup> K.T. Abdulhameed, “Bahrain’s Migrant Security Apparatus,” in Abdulhadi Khaladif, Omar al-Shehabi, and Adam Hanieh, *Labor Migration and Citizenship in the Gulf*, Pluto Press: 2015, Print.

<sup>85</sup> Marc Owen Jones, “Saudi Intervention, Sectarianism, and De-Democratization in Bahrain’s Uprising,” in *Protest, Social Movements and Global Democracy Since 2011: New Perspectives*, 9 June 2016, <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/abs/10.1108/S0163-786X2016000039011>

<sup>86</sup> Laurence Louer, “Sectarianism and Coup-Proofing Strategies in Bahrain,” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, May 2013, <https://americanuniversity.ares.atlas-sys.com/ares/ares.dll?SessionID=O035453420U&Action=10&Type=10&Value=86648>

<sup>87</sup> Zoltan Barany, “The Bahrain Defence Force: The Monarchy’s Second-to-Last Line of Defense,” *Center for Strategic International Studies*, 9 December 2016, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/bahrain-defence-force-monarchys-second-last-line-defense>

<sup>88</sup> Dorothy Ohl, “Bahrain’s ‘Cohesive’ Military and Regime Stability amid Unrest,” in Eds. Holger Albrecht, Aurel Croissant, and Fred H. Lawson, *Armies and Insurgencies in the Arab Spring*, (2016), Print, 145-167.

<sup>89</sup> K.T. Abdulhameed, “Bahrain’s Migrant Security Apparatus,” in Abdulhadi Khaladif, Omar al-Shehabi, and Adam Hanieh, *Labor Migration and Citizenship in the Gulf*, Pluto Press: 2015, Print.

members into subordination,” while these same Bahraini officers oversee foreign-born recruits to guarantee they “use sufficient force against demonstrators.”<sup>90</sup> Many units are likewise supervised by religious advisers, with Bahrain’s National Guard even maintaining a formal position of National Guard Advisor for Religious Affairs, which is held by the president of the country’s Sunni Endowments Council.<sup>91</sup>

## 2. Connections to Independent Militant Groups

However, these practices also foster extremist militancy in the armed services that is not readily sublimated to the aims of the state, and which contributes to the broader threat of terrorism in Bahrain and the region. The kingdom’s most prominent human rights defender, Nabeel Rajab, has warned that the security forces are an “ideological incubator” for violent extremism after a number of personnel defected to join terror groups like ISIS.<sup>92</sup> Rajab’s tweets referenced the appearance of a former police lieutenant, Mohammed Isa al-Binali, in ISIS propaganda films urging Bahraini security personnel to join and fight with the group.<sup>93</sup> The MOI later stated that al-Binali, a member of a “wealthy and important Sunni family with close ties to the Al Khalifa rulers,”<sup>94</sup> was fired for “failure to appear at work.”<sup>95</sup> In June 2017, the US Department of State formally classified al-Binali as a Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGTs), listing him as a “senior” member of ISIS that continues to specifically work to recruit members of Bahrain’s security services.<sup>96</sup> Rajab, meanwhile, is currently detained by the Bahraini authorities on charges related to interviews and other social media posts; he is serving a two-year prison sentence in one case and could receive a separate 15-year sentence in another ongoing trial.

According to scholar and activist Ala’a Shehabi, “there is a direct link between IS and Bahrain’s security services,” and the government has admitted that more than 100 Bahrainis had left to join the extremist group in 2014.<sup>97</sup> Turki al-Binali, a leading ISIS cleric from the same family as Mohammed Isa al-Binali,<sup>98</sup> is said to have traveled and preached freely in Bahrain until 2013;<sup>99</sup> before he was reported killed by the US-led coalition, some analysts expected him to succeed the extremist group’s current leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.<sup>100</sup> In December 2017, ISIS propaganda threatened to increase the organization’s activity in

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<sup>90</sup> Though it appears many foreign-born recruits express explicit sectarian beliefs or are receptive to sectarian training, others are coerced by Bahraini authorities to engage in abusive behavior. According to the testimonies collected by Ohl, some detainees report Yemeni guards assisting them in avoiding rounds of torture orchestrated by Bahraini officers. A detainee at the al-Grain military prison reported that “some Pakistanis were very sympathetic to the inmates and seemed to realize that disproportionate brutality was being used against the Bahrainis [in custody],” pg. 164. Another report suggested that “Pakistanis would not use torture against prisoners unless Bahraini supervisors were in the room monitoring them,” pg. 160. Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> “National Guard Commander receives President of Sunni Endowments Council,” Bahrain News Agency, 14 August 2017, <http://www.bna.bh/portal/en/news/797879>

<sup>92</sup> “Bahrain’s Prominent Human Rights Activist Arrested for Criticizing Police Defectors Who Joined ISIS,” Global Voices, 1 October 2014, <https://globalvoices.org/2014/10/01/bahrain-prominent-human-rights-activist-arrested-for-criticizing-police-defectors-who-joined-isis/>

<sup>93</sup> “Bahrain: Rights Activist Detained,” HRW, 3 October 2014, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/10/03/bahrain-rights-activist-detained>; and أبو سفيان السلمي في اعتصام أمام السفارة الأمريكية, YouTube, 17 September 2012,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7CKv56mqPBU#t=70>; and Justin Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain and the Arab Gulf: Rethinking the Rentier State*, Indiana University Press: 2015, Print.

<sup>94</sup> Georgio Cafiero, “Meet the likely successor of Islamic State’s Baghdadi,” Al-Monitor, 14 September 2016, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/09/turki-binali-bahrain-islamic-state-successor-baghdadi.html#ixzz4SwbqCUSv>

<sup>95</sup> “Bahrain: Rights Activist Detained,” HRW, 3 October 2014, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/10/03/bahrain-rights-activist-detained>

<sup>96</sup> “State Department Terrorist Designations of Mohammad Shafi Armar, Oussama Ahmad Atar, and Mohammed Isa Yousif Saqar Al Binali,” US Department of State, 15 June 2017, <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2017/06/271921.htm>

<sup>97</sup> Ala’a Shehabi, “Why Is Bahrain Outsourcing Extremism?” Foreign Policy, 29 October 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/10/29/why-is-bahrain-outsourcing-extremism/>; Justin Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain and the Arab Gulf: Rethinking the Rentier State*, Indiana University Press: 2015, Print.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid

<sup>99</sup> Georgio Cafiero, “Meet the likely successor of Islamic State’s Baghdadi,” Al-Monitor, 14 September 2016, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/09/turki-binali-bahrain-islamic-state-successor-baghdadi.html#ixzz4SwbqCUSv>

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

Bahrain, specifically calling for supporters to attack both the kingdom's Shia community and American personnel stationed at the US naval base in Manama. According to the Associated Press, the "video listed 14 purported fighters from the island who IS says died as suicide bombers or fighters in Iraq and Syria."<sup>101</sup>

#### IV. Conclusion and Recommendations for US Policy

The consistency and extent of sectarian discrimination within Bahrain's security forces suggest it is the result of deliberate institutional policy, rather than historical accident or isolated malfeasance. As a policy, its outcomes are disastrous for the country's long-term stability, as it undermines the efficacy and legitimacy of the armed services as national security institutions; dangerously widens the divide between the police and policed; and raises the risk of sectarian intercommunal conflict and violent extremism. Moreover, the sectarianization – and interrelated praetorianization<sup>102</sup> – of the security forces directly contributes to the wider human rights crisis plaguing Bahrain, creating an environment wherein torture, arbitrary detention, excessive force, and targeted religious discrimination are systematically employed to suppress political opposition and civil society activism with impunity.

Though the US is in the process of deepening its already close ties to the Bahraini security establishment, American officials have clearly acknowledged its sectarian policies and repeatedly expressed concern over continued discrimination. As early as 2011, current Secretary of Defense James Mattis, then heading US Central Command (CENTCOM), reportedly urged General Daij bin Salman Al Khalifa, then the BDF's Chief of Staff, to address the sectarianization of the armed forces, offering lessons learned from the American military's own history of racial integration. General Daij, who is now the Secretary-General of the SDC, Bahrain's chief defense body, declined Secretary Mattis' offer.<sup>103</sup> The US Government has also publicly urged Bahrain's authorities to implement BICI recommendation 1722e to "establish urgently, and implement vigorously, a programme for the integration into the security forces of personnel from all the communities in Bahrain," and recommendation 1724c to "undertake measures to prevent incitement to violence, hatred and sectarianism in violation of human rights, regardless of whether the source is public or private."<sup>104</sup> During Bahrain's second UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR) cycle in 2012, the US formally recommended that the government increase the diversity of the security forces so that they become more "reflective of society."<sup>105</sup> During Bahrain's third cycle in 2017, the US reiterated this recommendation in an Advance Question, additionally emphasizing the importance of demographic integration at the leadership level. In both the 2012 and 2017 UPR cycles, the US also joined dozens of other states in calling for the full implementation of the entire BICI reform package. Despite official Bahraini claims to the contrary,<sup>106</sup> the vast majority of these recommendations have not yet been implemented – specifically including 1722e and 1724c.

Moreover, in August 2016, while launching the State Department's 2016 International Religious Freedom report, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson explicitly named Bahrain as a leading violator of the right to free belief, criticizing the government for systematic and widespread discrimination against the Shia population

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<sup>101</sup> Jon Gambrell, "IS calls for attacks on US bases in uneasy island of Bahrain," Associated Press (AP), 8 December 2016, <https://apnews.com/418581186b0d43bb91ec0f720b67250c/calls-attacks-us-bases-uneasy-island-bahrain>

<sup>102</sup> Laurence Louer, "Sectarianism and Coup-Proofing Strategies in Bahrain," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, May 2013, <https://americanuniversity.ares.atlas-sys.com/ares/ares.dll?SessionID=O035453420U&Action=10&Type=10&Value=86648>

<sup>103</sup> Zoltan Barany, "The Bahrain Defence Force: The Monarchy's Second-to-Last Line of Defense," Center for Strategic International Studies, 9 December 2016, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/bahrain-defence-force-monarchys-second-last-line-defense>

<sup>104</sup> Mahmoud Cherif Bassiouni, Nigel Rodley, Badria al-Awadhi, Phillippe Kirsch, and Mahnoush Arsanjani, *Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry*, Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, <http://www.bici.org.bh/BICIREportEN.pdf>

<sup>105</sup> *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review*, United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 6 July 2012, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G12/150/49/PDF/G1215049.pdf?OpenElement>

<sup>106</sup> "Bahraini Government's Claims of Having Implemented all BICI Recommendations is Mere Lip Service," ADHRB, 13 May 2016, <http://www.adhrb.org/2016/05/bahraini-governments-claims-implemented-bici-recommendations-mere-lip-service/>

more broadly.<sup>107</sup> Specifically, the report confirmed that “the [Bahraini] government continued to recruit Sunnis from other countries to join the security forces, granted them expedited naturalization, and provided them with public housing while excluding Shia citizens.”<sup>108</sup> Similarly, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) in April raised Bahrain to a Tier 2 violator of religious freedom for the first time, finding that “amidst an overall worsening of human rights conditions during the past year, religious freedom for the majority-Shi’a community deteriorated” against a backdrop of longstanding structural discrimination, including in the security apparatus.<sup>109</sup> Current CENTCOM commander General Joseph Votel also recently called on “the government of Bahrain to reverse steps it has taken over the past year to reduce the space for peaceful political expression in its [Shia] population and ... [encourage] the Bahrainis to implement needed political reforms in the country.”<sup>110</sup>

However, despite the fact that Bahrain’s authorities have refused to adhere to either the private exhortations or public recommendations of the US Government, the Trump administration has removed existing reform conditions from a pending arms deal with the kingdom’s armed forces and even expanded the range of defense articles on offer. The US maintains an informal ban on security assistance to the MOI (excluding the Coast Guard) that could be used against peaceful demonstrators – and has cancelled planned anti-terror assistance over vetting concerns over abusive conduct as recently as 2014 – but the Department of State authorized a variety of sales to the BDF in September 2017, including: two 35-Meter Fast Patrol Boats at an estimated cost of \$60.25 million; 16-19 F-16V aircraft with support at an estimated cost of \$2.785 billion; TOW Missiles, equipment and support at an estimated cost of \$27 million; and the upgrade of F-16 Block 40 Aircraft to F-16V configuration at an estimated \$1.082 billion.<sup>111</sup> In October 2017, the US sent an official delegation to the Bahrain International Defence Exhibition and Conference (BIDEC), the kingdom’s first major arms expo, contributing warships to the display and authorizing the Navy SEALs to conduct joint demonstrations with units from the BDF, MOI, National Guard, Naval Special Forces, and Royal Guard Special Forces – all institutions implicated in sectarian discrimination, among other abuses. The conference, which was organized by Sheikh Nasser, the Royal Guard commander accused of torturing protesters, also received sponsorship from high-profile US companies, like Lockheed Martin.<sup>112</sup>



*MOI Coast Guard and other security personnel during a lethal boat raid, 2017. The Coast Guard is exempt from the informal US ban on arms sales to the MOI that could be used against protesters, etc.*

Amidst these sales and cooperative initiatives, the Bahraini security forces have implemented no new reforms, and have instead taken new discriminatory and abusive measures. In fact, since the election of President Donald Trump, Bahrain has seen a dramatic uptick in both institutional and extemporaneous lethal violence employed by the Bahraini security forces: just in 2017, among other abuses, the authorities ended a

<sup>107</sup> Rex W. Tillerson, “Remarks on the 2016 International Religious Freedom Annual Report,” US Department of State, 15 August 2017, <https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2017/08/273449.htm>

<sup>108</sup> *International Religious Freedom Report for 2016 – Bahrain*, US Department of State, 15 August 2017, <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>

<sup>109</sup> “USCIRF Releases 2017 Annual Report,” USCIRF, 26 April 2017, <http://www.uscirf.gov/news-room/press-releases/uscirf-releases-2017-annual-report>

<sup>110</sup> Anthony Cappacio, “Trump Drops Human Rights Demand in Bid to Sell Bahrain F-16 Jets,” Bloomberg, 30 March 2017, <https://www.bloomberg.com/politics/articles/2017-03-29/top-general-says-human-rights-shouldn-t-hold-up-u-s-arms-sales>

<sup>111</sup> “ADHRB condemns US \$3.8b arms sale to Bahrain amid human rights crisis,” ADHRB, 12 September 2017, <https://www.adhrb.org/2017/09/us-moves-forward-potential-3-8b-arms-sale-to-bahrain-amid-human-rights-crisis/>

<sup>112</sup> “Bahrain international defence exhibition and conference,” Government of Bahrain, 2017, <http://www.bahraindefence.com/welcome>

*de facto* moratorium on capital punishment by executing three men tortured into providing false confessions; amended the constitution to allow military courts to try civilians; restored domestic arrest powers to the NSA after this authority was revoked in accordance with BICI recommendation 1718; and launched two deadly raids on a peaceful sit-in in the town of Diraz, ultimately killing six demonstrators and injuring hundreds.<sup>113</sup> The second raid, on 23 May 2017, came just days after President Trump met with Bahrain's king and assured him that there would be no "strain" in the US-Bahrain bilateral relationship.<sup>114</sup> It was the bloodiest single security operation in Bahrain since before 2011.

As demonstrated by the persistent deterioration of Bahrain's human rights situation, deepening unconditional assistance to the security establishment will only embolden further discrimination and abuse. The US must instead reaffirm its commitment to creating strong, sustainable national armed services that are force for long-term stability and reconciliation in Bahrain, not a source of a division and extremism. As currently constituted, however, Bahrain's security forces remain sectarian institutions that directly undermine American objectives to establish sustainable security frameworks in the Gulf, combat terrorism, and advance democracy and human rights. Existing US security policy toward the kingdom fails to address these concerns, and risks directly arming and abetting sectarian extremism and repression.

We therefore call on the US Government to take the following steps to reduce these risks and encourage positive security sector reform in Bahrain.

To the administration:

- Impose new human rights and reform conditions on any future arms transfers to Bahraini security institutions with specific, measureable, and public criteria, including programs for demographic integration and the elimination of extremist and/or sectarian training materials.
- Vet thoroughly all Bahraini security units to verify eligibility for US assistance and to ensure full compliance with the intent of the Leahy Law and other end-use monitoring requirements to prevent American material from being utilized in the commission of human rights violations.
- Publicly raise concerns over sectarian discrimination within the Bahraini security forces and launch a multi-agency review of any training or instruction materials produced by, or disseminated within, units receiving arms and assistance from the US.
- Take steps to incorporate demographic integration support into Bahrain-US defense sector collaboration, modeled off of Secretary Mattis' proposal to mirror racial integration programs implemented by the US military.

To Congress:

- Vote to hold the current set of arms sales intended for Bahraini military until it meets the previous set of reform conditions removed by the administration, or an updated set of conditions agreed upon Congress.
- Legislate a ban on additional weapons transfers to Bahrain until it implements all 26 recommendations of the BICI.
- Request a report by the Department of State and/or the Department of Defense based on an official review of sectarian discrimination and extremist materials produced by, or disseminated within, the

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<sup>113</sup> "Bahrain Police Raid Duraz Sit-in, Killing Five and Injuring Dozens," ADHRB, the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD), and the European Centre for Democracy and Human Rights (ECDHR), 23 May 2017, <http://www.adhrb.org/2017/05/12478/>

<sup>114</sup> "Trump says ties with Bahrain won't be strained anymore," 21 May 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-saudi-bahrain/trump-says-ties-with-bahrain-wont-be-strained-anymore-idUSKCN18H05Y>

units of the BDF receiving arms and assistance from the US, as well as the broader Bahraini security establishment.

## Annex.

### *Nur al-Sunna (Light of the Sunna): State-Sanctioned Extremism in the Bahrain Defence Force Analysis and Translation of a Bahraini Military Religious Manual*

#### **I. Introduction**

Bahraini activists have long reported that the kingdom's armed services engage in deliberate religious discrimination, with Nabeel Rajab, the country's leading human rights defender, even prosecuted for describing the security apparatus as an "incubator" for violent extremism due to the rate of defections to militant groups like the Islamic State (also known as ISIS, ISIL, and Daesh).<sup>115</sup> This reporting has been increasingly borne out in recent scholarship, with analysts finding evidence of acute anti-Shia Muslim hiring bias;<sup>116</sup> "religious advising services ... to make sectarian divides more salient,"<sup>117</sup> and "mental advisors' within [security units] who gave hateful speeches against Shiites."<sup>118</sup> Members of the Bahraini military have stated in interviews that, in addition to religious supervisors, the government embeds "intelligence personnel within each BDF unit"<sup>119</sup> to monitor perceived dissent and enforce ideological conformity.<sup>120</sup> Still, there has been little primary documentation made available about the training or religious materials disseminated throughout Bahrain's secretive security establishment, which refuses to publicly release detailed information about its structure, budget, or even its size.



Cover of *Nur al-Sunna*

Working with local activists, however, ADHRB has been able to obtain one of these documents: *Nur al-Sunna (Light of the Sunna)*, a religious pamphlet published by the Bahrain Defence Force (BDF) through its Department of Religious Education, at the expense of the military's High Command. It is distributed for free at BDF facilities, including mosques, where preachers are reported to recommend literature to attending

<sup>115</sup> "Bahrain's Prominent Human Rights Activist Arrested for Criticizing Police Defectors Who Joined ISIS," Global Voices, 1 October 2014, <https://globalvoices.org/2014/10/01/bahrains-prominent-human-rights-activist-arrested-for-criticizing-police-defectors-who-joined-isis/>

<sup>116</sup> Justin Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain and the Arab Gulf: Rethinking the Rentier State*, Indiana University Press: 2015, Print.

<sup>117</sup> Dorothy Ohl, "Bahrain's 'Cohesive' Military and Regime Stability amid Unrest," in Eds. Holger Albrecht, Aurel Croissant, and Fred H. Lawson, *Armies and Insurgencies in the Arab Spring*, (2016), Print, 145-167.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> "The regime appears to have put in place coercion mechanisms to formally monitor soldier behavior and in doing so deter insubordination. A former BDF officer related in an interview that there are intelligence personnel within each BDF unit. These individuals are Bahraini, Syrian, and Jordanian, and there are perhaps nine to fifteen per unit. According to the former officer, these intelligence officials can check a soldier's phone and mail as well as who he talks to, what he says, and more. Intelligence officials are responsible for writing weekly or monthly reports about what they find. If a military member expresses antiregime [sic] ideas and intelligence officials have evidence, that member can be imprisoned. Worse yet, the BDF have torture facilities on its premises. If intelligence officers do not have sufficient evidence, they will make a note of the suspected behavior so they can put pressure on the security member in the future...It is reported that the regime uses family networks to indirectly coerce security force members into subordination." Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> "The BDF's own Military Intelligence (MI) corps, notwithstanding its name, is a 'full-service' spy organization: it is involved both in domestic and foreign intelligence operations. Naturally, one of the MI's key responsibilities is to ensure that the BDF is free of major dissent and remains loyal to the monarchy. Intelligence officers are embedded in BDF units and their surveillance of all aspects of the soldiers' lives are said to be thorough. Of all Bahraini law enforcement agencies, the MI has the most fearsome reputation." Zoltan Barany, *The Bahrain Defence Force: The Monarchy's Second-to-Last Line of Defense*, Center for Strategic International Studies, 9 December 2016, [https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/161214\\_Bahrain\\_Defence\\_Force.pdf](https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/161214_Bahrain_Defence_Force.pdf)

military personnel. ADHRB has reviewed *Nur al-Sunna* in its original Arabic, finding direct evidence to corroborate the reports of extremist religious instruction officially sanctioned by Bahraini security institutions: it is a religious text ostensibly intended to influence the behavior of military personnel and it contains explicit sectarian language, up to and including justifications for violence against non-Sunni sects of Islam. The production and propagation of such material – with the apparent approval of senior military leadership – is particularly alarming as the authorities move to further incorporate the BDF into civil governance, with a 2017 constitutional amendment authorizing military courts to try civilians accused of crimes related to national security.<sup>121</sup> Presented below is ADHRB’s brief summary of *Nur al-Sunna*’s contents, as well as an unofficial English translation.

## II. Summary and Analysis

Written by Dr. Saeed bin Ali bin Wahaf al-Qahtani, *Nur al-Sunna* is organized into two parts based on the description of the Sunna as “*nur*,” or light, and heresy as “darkness.” In the first part, “The Light of Sunna,” Dr. al-Qahtani provides an interpretation of the Sunna (the tradition of Prophet Mohammed and his companions). In the second part, “The Darkness of Heresy,” he argues that anyone who disagrees with the previous chapters – or anyone who does not commit to following this interpretation of the Sunna – is a heretic or apostate. The author provides a description of heresy and thereby denounces several sects of Islam as heretical. As Dr. al-Qahtani notes, the designation ‘non-believer/heretic/apostate’ can warrant abandonment/exile or even execution.

Dr. al-Qahtani cites a number of Shia religious practices as heretical, including the Prayer of Raghaeb, fasting on Mid-Sha’aban, and celebrating the birth of the Prophet Mohammed. He describes the purported reasoning behind these practices and asserts that they are based in “ignorance” and other “forms of heresy.” According to the argument, these deviations from the Sunna harm the Muslim community and presuppose that the religion is somehow incomplete; therefore, those who continue to propagate and engage in these practices are ostensibly challenging the authority of Allah.

On page 48, in the sixth section, on the “Religious Verdict of Heresy,” Dr. al-Qahtani defines heresy as coming in three forms of “evilness”: major sins, minor sins, and *Kufr* (disbelief). He suggests that many groups that claim to be Muslim are, in fact, disbelievers and sinners, as they fail to adhere to the Sunna. In the previous section, he explicitly names “al-Qadiyaniya, al-Bahaeya, and all the Batiniyya groups such as Ismailia, Nasiriya, Durooz, and Rafidah [a pejorative term for Shia]” as “misguided sects” that engage in heresy.

In the seventh section, on “Types of Heresy Near Graves,” Dr. al-Qahtani also describes certain Shia burial and worship practices as “shirk (believing in another God besides Allah).”<sup>122</sup> He goes on to write on page 50 that all those “who commit such acts should repent or else they must be killed.” In the eighth section, entitled “Contemporary Acts of Heresy,” Dr. al-Qahtani describes Shia as “Majoos/Zoroastrians” and states that the practices of “al-Rafidah...go against the Sunna of the prophet Mohammed.” A “rational person” could not turn away from the Sunna to “imitate al-Rafidah,” he concludes.

Ultimately, *Nur al-Sunna (Light of the Sunna)* emphasizes three key points:

- Sunnism is the pure or true form of Islam.

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<sup>121</sup> “Bahrain’s king approves military trials for civilians,” BBC, April 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-39478101>

<sup>122</sup> This is a religious concept referring to idolatry, or religious belief verging on polytheism. The Oxford Dictionary of Islam defines shirk as a “theological term referring to the association of someone or something with God, that is, putting someone or something in the place of God, thus deviating from monotheism.” See: “Shirk,” *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, edited by John L. Esposito. *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*, <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e2195>



- Any practice that is not found in the Sunna is heresy. Other sects of Islam – insofar as they are committed to these other practices – engage in different levels of heretical behavior.
- Heretical groups harm society and therefore – according to the author’s interpretation of the Sunna – acts of discrimination and possibly even violence targeting them can be justified.

*A note on translation: the following represents an unofficial translation of Nur al-Sunna from its original Arabic into English. It is not an official or exact translation, and it is presented in order to provide an English approximation of its contents. It is annotated by page number corresponding to the physical document. ADHRB is able to provide the original Arabic upon request.*