

Bahrain



Bahrain U.S. foreign assistance to Bahrain, where the U.S. Fifth Fleet is headquartered, contributes directly to the U.S. Government's effort to maintain security in the Persian Gulf. Bahrain is the only Arab state to have led one of the Coalition Task Forces that patrol the Gulf, and has offered to sail its flagship in support of the coalition counter-piracy mission. U.S. assistance helps Bahrain, which lacks the oil wealth of its neighbors, obtain the equipment and training it needs to operate alongside U.S. air and naval forces. U.S. military access to Bahrain also supports operations in Iraq, and this access has made Bahrain a primary option for relocating support for operations in Afghanistan. U.S. assistance will also contribute to counterterrorism and other security cooperation with Bahrain, which is a Major Non-NATO Ally.

FOREIGN RELATIONS: Since achieving independence in 1971, Bahrain has pursued a policy of close consultation with neighboring states. Bahrain became a member of the United Nations and the Arab League in 1971. In 1981 it joined its five neighbors--Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, the U.A.E. and Qatar--to form the strategic Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Bahrain has complied with GCC efforts steps to coordinate economic development and defense and security planning. In December 1994, for example, Bahrain concurred with the GCC decision to drop secondary and tertiary boycotts against Israel. Bahrain also responded positively to Kuwait's request to deploy the GCC collective defense force, "Peninsula Shield," during the build up and execution of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) in 2003.

In addition to maintaining strong relations with its largest financial backers, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the U.A.E., Bahrain has worked to improve its relations with Qatar and has proper, but not warm, relations with Iran. Bahrain-Iran relations have been strained since the discovery in 1981 of an Iran-sponsored coup plot in Bahrain. Bahraini suspicions of the Iranian role in local unrest in the mid-1990s remain. On March 16, 2001, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) announced its judgment on the long-standing maritime delimitation and territorial dispute between Bahrain and Qatar. The binding judgment awarded sovereignty over the Hawar Islands and Qit'at Jaradah to Bahrain and sovereignty over Zubarah (part of the Qatar Peninsula), Janan Island and Fasht ad Dibal to Qatar. The peaceful settlement of this dispute has allowed for renewed co-operation, including plans to construct a causeway between the two countries.

Bahrain's strategic partnership with the U.S. has intensified since 1991. Bahraini pilots flew strikes in Iraq during the 1991 Gulf War, and the country was used as a base for military operations in the Gulf. Bahrain also provided logistical and basing support to international Maritime Interdiction efforts to enforce UN sanctions and prevent illegal smuggling of oil from Iraq in the 1990s. Bahrain also provided extensive basing and over flight clearances for a multitude of U.S. aircraft operating in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). Bahrain also deployed forces in support of Coalition operations during both OEF and OIF. Bahrain has delivered humanitarian support and technical training to support the reconstruction of the Iraqi banking sector, and has offered support for each stage of Iraq's political transformation. Bahrain has also cooperated effectively on criminal investigation issues in support of the campaign on terrorism; the Bahrain Monetary Agency (which became the Central Bank of Bahrain in September 2006) moved quickly to restrict terrorists' ability to transfer funds through Bahrain's financial system. In October 2006, Bahrain joined the U.S. and 23 other countries in a **Proliferation Security Initiative** interdiction exercise in the Persian Gulf.

U.S.-BAHRAINI RELATIONS: The American Mission Hospital, affiliated with the National

Evangelical Church, has operated continuously in Bahrain for more than a century. Bahrain has also been a base for U.S. naval activity in the Gulf since 1947. When Bahrain became independent, the U.S.-Bahrain relationship was formalized with the establishment of diplomatic relations. The U.S. embassy at Manama was opened September 21, 1971, and a resident ambassador was sent in 1974. The Bahraini embassy in Washington, DC, opened in 1977. In October 1991, Amir Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa made a state visit to Washington. In 2001, Amir Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa made his first visit to the U.S. after succeeding his father in 1999. He returned to Washington on an official visit in January 2003. King Hamad made an official visit to Washington in November 2004 to meet with President Bush and cabinet-level officials. In January 2008, President Bush made the first visit by a sitting President to Bahrain. King Hamad visited Washington in March 2008.

Bahrain and the United States signed a Defense Cooperation Agreement in October 1991 granting U.S. forces access to Bahraini facilities and ensuring the right to pre-position material for future crises. Bahrain is the headquarters of the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet. The U.S. designated Bahrain a Major Non-NATO Ally in October 2001. Bahrain and the United States signed a Free Trade Agreement in 2004.

Peace and Security: Assistance to Bahrain will continue to sustain U.S.-origin equipment that Bahrain's forces use in coalition operations and support Bahrain's effort to upgrade its F-16 fleet and maintain its flagship in mission-ready status. Bahrain's ability to fulfill its offer to sail its flagship in support of counter-piracy operations is directly linked to financial support for its Navy. Military training efforts will enhance interoperability with U.S. forces, keeping Bahrain's F-16s sufficiently updated to operate effectively alongside U.S. warplanes. Training will also promote military professionalism, and reinforce the importance of a strong, cooperative political/military relationship with the United States among the Bahraini officer corps. In addition, U.S.-based courses will provide instruction in the democratic principles of civilian control of the military and help to encourage the political reforms already underway in Bahrain. This training provides military personnel with the skills necessary to maintain the stocks of U.S.-furnished equipment, and enhance Bahrain's value as a training and coalition partner. Finally, counter-terrorism training programs will continue to sustain Bahrain's capabilities and promote multilateral cooperation by conducting regional training courses.

Focus on Performance: One of the major goals of U.S. assistance to Bahrain is to ensure that Bahraini forces are capable of operating in tandem with U.S. military forces. At the same time, U.S. assistance and programs have the effect of showing Bahrain's leadership that there are tangible benefits to military cooperation, even when such cooperation may sometimes be unpopular on the street and in Parliament. To maintain important military-to-military relations, U.S. funding should increase over time to a level that will enable Bahrain to begin making its air and naval forces sustainable and fully interoperable with U.S. forces. These are large investments of foreign assistance, but the programs they support require high levels of funding to produce and sustain the necessary incremental steps in performance. Additionally, U.S. assistance levels in recent years have not been adequate to address the various maintenance and equipping needs of Bahrain, and therefore the targets for FY2009 and FY2010 reflect the need to carry out servicing of legacy systems while at the same time achieving progress on modernizing force capabilities.