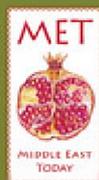




BAHRAIN FROM THE TWENTIETH CENTURY TO THE ARAB SPRING



MIRIAM JOYCE



BAHRAIN FROM THE TWENTIETH
CENTURY TO THE ARAB SPRING





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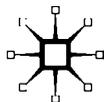
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ARAB SPRING

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In Memory of My Beautiful Son
Adam Ben Haron



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INTRODUCTION

Located in the Persian/Arab Gulf midway between the Qatar peninsula and Saudi Arabia, the Kingdom of Bahrain is composed of 33 small islands, with a territory of approximately 717 square miles. Only two of these islands, Bahrain and Muharraq, are populated. For more than a thousand years, Bahrain has served as an Arab Gulf trading center, which has attracted an ethnically mixed population, composed of former African slaves and both Shia Persians and Sunni Arabs.¹ In the early nineteenth century, the British Empire, committed to securing its route to India, successfully subdued the activities of pirates in the Gulf region and established the General Treaty of Peace, signed by Bahrain in 1821. Eventually, in 1853, most ruling shaikhs of the region agreed to cease warfare at sea and signed a Perpetual Maritime Truce with the British. Bahrain, however, did not sign on until 1861, when Bahraini shaikhs agreed not to participate in any form of hostility at sea. In return, Britain promised to protect Bahrain from attack.²

As a result of the treaties between Britain and the Gulf shaikhs, the British closely managed the external affairs of the region's shaikhdoms, which in addition to Bahrain included Oman, Qatar, and the seven Trucial States: Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Dubai, Fujairah, Ras Al Khaimah, Sharjah, and Umm al Qaiwain. However, as far as possible, Britain avoided involvement in the shaikhdoms' internal affairs, leaving traditional rule intact. The Gulf ruler with his *majlis* remained the foundation of society. *Sharia* law, although it was sometimes eclipsed by tribal custom, remained in place.

Nevertheless, if asked by a Gulf ruler to take a role in resolving a dispute with one or more of his brother rulers, British

officials did so.³ In order to maintain its position in the region, Britain assigned officials to the various shaikhdoms. These officials, known as political agents, were supervised by a political resident. According to Sir Rupert Hay, who served as political resident in the 1940s:

The close personal contact maintained between the Political Agents and the Rulers is an outstanding feature of the British position in the Persian Gulf. They meet each other frequently, and more often socially than for official talks. Possibly the social meetings are more important than the official ones, as a hint dropped here and in the course of a casual conversation is often more effective than formal advice, and the Rulers, being Arabs, are quick to resent any attempt to teach them their business.⁴

After 1873, the British government of India had assumed responsibility for Gulf affairs and established the political resident's Bushire headquarters in southern Iran.⁵ Until 1946 the Political Residency remained in Bushire, but that year the office was moved to Bahrain.⁶ According to retired Political Agent David Roberts, "the Pax Britannica successfully defended the area and ensured its security for more than a century and a quarter, a remarkable record by any standard."⁷

In 1923, the British political resident deposed the long-serving ruler of Bahrain, Shaikh Isa bin Ali al-Khalifa, who was replaced by his son, Shaikh Hamad bin Isa. Soon after, the British introduced a series of reforms, including the appointment of Charles Dalrymple Belgrave as adviser to the new ruler. Belgrave became very close to the Al-Khalifa family and remained a prominent figure in Bahrain for the next 30 years. However, many Bahrainis were unhappy with British domination and formed the Bahrain National Congress, which called for the restoration of the deposed Shaikh Isa bin Ali and the establishment of a consultative council to advise him. The British quickly arrested the leaders of this opposition movement and sent them to exile in India.⁸

Americans arrived in Bahrain in the nineteenth century, after the British were well established. Initially their goal was to

convert the region's Muslim residents to Christianity. They failed. However, these missionaries established the first hospitals in the area and thus won the gratitude, if not the souls, of the Gulf Arabs. Missionary Doctor Samuel Zwemer rented a small room in 1891, where he sold Bibles and provided medical treatment.⁹ In addition, in 1892, the American Arabian Mission opened the first modern school in Bahrain, a primary school for girls. Among the Arab Gulf states, Bahrain was at the forefront of providing educational opportunities for its citizens; in 1928, the first Bahrainis began their studies at the American University of Beirut.¹⁰ The shaikhdom initially sent seven students, all Sunni, at state expense to prepare them to assume government jobs after they completed their studies and returned home.¹¹

Meanwhile, frequently claiming that the island of Bahrain belonged to Persia, Tehran was unhappy with Britain's position in the shaikhdom.¹² When in 1928 the Persian Government claimed sovereignty over Bahrain and protested Britain's role there, London explained that the Persians had invaded Bahrain in the seventeenth century, but that Arab tribes led by a direct ancestor of the present Al-Khalifa ruler had reestablished control in approximately 1783.¹³ Thus, in the twentieth century the indigenous inhabitants, who like their Persian neighbors were mostly Shia, were ruled by the Sunni Al-Khalifa.¹⁴

As a result of Britain's long relationship with the Al-Khalifa family, underlined by the first agreement with the shaikhdom signed in 1820, the British Foreign Office stated, in 1928:

The numerous supplementary agreements entered into between the British Government and the Rulers of Bahrain between 1869 and the present day have equally proceeded on the assumption that a claim to sovereignty in Bahrain on the part either of the Government of the Shah or of the Turkish Government could not possibly be admitted by His Majesty's Government.¹⁵

CHAPTER 1



OIL, IRAN, AND PALESTINE

Following World War I and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Britain's role in the Arab world expanded. The British government was awarded League of Nations mandates for Iraq, Jordan, and Palestine. At the same time, Britain continued to fulfill its role as guardian of the Gulf, while protecting its route to India. In the Gulf region's nine small shaikhdoms, which included Bahrain, the British political resident and his political agents maintained their relationships with local rulers, providing guidance, encouragement, and sometimes criticism. While the United States had no official diplomatic relationship at the time with Bahrain or the other Gulf shaikhdoms, the possibility of locating oil in the region began to attract American interest.

In 1926, transportation was an issue in the Gulf region. British authorities noted that throughout Bahrain there were roads "suitable for light cars." Approximately 120 private cars of various models used Bahraini roads, and additional cars were available for hire.¹ After World War I, air power too became a concern. Bahrain served as an important link on the air route between Basra, Iraq, and Karachi, India. Bahrain now looked especially attractive to London because, at the end of 1927, Persia rejected a British request for airport facilities there. In addition, an air agreement with Bahrain would provide the British with "an antidote to Ibn Saud's expanding influence and

the evidence which it would afford to the Trucial Chiefs that H.M. Government is not without the means of maintaining its prestige in the Persian Gulf.”²

Oil too became an important factor in the region. British officials did not want Americans to control oil concessions in the Gulf. A May 1929 telegram from the Viceroy of India, who held British jurisdiction over the area, to the Secretary of State for India stated that “any increase of American influence, which already is very strong, is to be deprecated.”³

Nevertheless, Standard Oil Company of California received the right to search for oil in Bahrain and, in 1932, was successful in discovering oil. According to oil company records, at 6:00 a.m. on June 1, “the drill pierced a layer of blue shale. The men smelled oil and heard an ominous rumbling.”⁴ After making its first discoveries, Standard Oil was joined by the Texas Oil Company (Texaco) to form the Bahrain Petroleum Company (BAPCO), which was an American company; however, legally its concession was held by a Canadian subsidiary of Caltex.⁵ Concerned about American influence in the oil company, London acted to enforce its special relationship with the shaikhdom. Henceforth, according to a June 1930 agreement between the Bahraini Ruler and BAPCO, the oil company was required to station an official representative in Bahrain, whose appointment needed the approval of the British government and who was empowered to deal directly with local leaders. Major Frank Holmes, a mining engineer from New Zealand, was the first official to fill that position.⁶

Holmes was a member of a small group in London who, in 1920, had formed a company, the Eastern and General Syndicate (EGS), to search for oil in the Middle East.⁷ Bahrain’s Ruler, Shaikh Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa, granted EGS a two-year license. Early in 1926, EGS sold its options to an American company, the Gulf Oil Corporation of Pennsylvania (GOC), which soon transferred its concession to the Standard Oil Company of California (SoCal). London now insisted that Britain required a British nationality clause in any Bahraini oil concession. Washington was not pleased. After extensive negotiations,

the two sides compromised. Among the provisions of the compromise was that since BAPCO was a subsidiary of SoCal, it would become a British company registered in Canada. However, SoCal soon sold half of its shares to Texaco and established Caltex, which was chartered in the Bahamas.

The British continued to resist American control of oil interests in the Gulf. But, of course, Bahrain was not a British colony, nor was it completely under Britain's physical control. British officials, however, were satisfied to underline that Bahrain had a treaty obligation to obtain British approval prior to granting any oil concession.⁸

Despite Britain's influence in Bahrain, by the early 1930s the development of Bahrain's oil industry was "firmly in the hands of the United States."⁹ Initially, Major Holmes, who now served as BAPCO's representative in Bahrain, had won the admiration of the Al-Khalifa family because he was successful in a search for sweet water, drilling artesian wells, which permitted farmers to cultivate more land.¹⁰ However, too many wells resulted in a decrease in the water level.¹¹ The company then turned its full attention to the search for oil and found its initial Bahraini oil well on June 1, 1932. Sir Charles Belgrave, who had served as the Ruler's adviser since 1926, bestowed on Holmes the nickname *Abu Naft*, father of oil.¹²

British officials were not satisfied with Major Holmes, complaining that he did not spend sufficient time in Bahrain and was not available to carry out his responsibilities.¹³ Foreign Office official G. W. Rendel complained to London in June 1933 that Holmes was not doing his job. According to Rendel, Holmes had failed to protect British interests. However, it was feared that if Holmes was removed from his position, he might do even more damage to British interests.¹⁴

The discovery of oil provided opportunity for both foreigners and natives. Bahrain's new oil wells helped the shikhdom manage the collapse of its pearl industry and the difficulty of the global depression of the 1930s.¹⁵ At the beginning of the twentieth century, Bahrain's economy had depended on the success of its pearl diving fleet, which employed at

least one-half of its male population. Before the beginning of the May-to-September diving season, dhow captains paid their crew in advance. Frequently divers were unable to earn enough to repay these loans and remained indebted to their captains.¹⁶ But others associated with the pearl industry lived comfortably, including numerous merchants, boat builders, and bankers. However, in the 1930s, the entire Bahraini pearling industry dramatically declined. Japan had begun to produce cultured pearls, severely reducing the demand for those from the Gulf.¹⁷

Although the discovery of oil dramatically improved Bahrain's economy, it was never sufficient to totally dominate the shaikhdom's economic life. It did, however, spur the government to invest in human resources. In addition, Bahrain established a local oil refinery, the first refinery built in the Gulf.¹⁸

British authorities continued to express concern about the security of the region. In 1928, Britain's Air Ministry emphasized to the Colonial Office that because of its location on the route between Basra and Karachi and its isolation from the mainland, Bahrain was of "great potential importance." In addition, given the presence of a British political officer in the shaikhdom, it appeared that Bahrain was less likely than other locations on the Arab coast to be the site of an anti-British political movement.¹⁹

As the 1930s progressed, both the British Air Force and the Admiralty wanted to acquire land in Bahrain in order to expand their bases. The political agent in Bahrain, Colonel G. Loch, and the shaikh's British adviser, Sir Charles Belgrave, discussed the possibility of His Majesty's Government (HMG) buying Bahraini real estate. Both Loch and Belgrave agreed that prior to negotiating any land purchase, it was important to consult the Ruler quietly in order to explain that Britain wished to obtain his cooperation. At the same time, Loch underlined that to prevent a sudden jump in real estate prices, the information that HMG was interested in buying Bahraini land had to be kept secret. According to Loch, it would be best if the Bahraini

government purchased the land and afterward transferred it to the British. He emphasized that it was important to move quickly.²⁰

When the shaikh was informed of Britain's intentions, he expressed his willingness to assist HMG, claiming that the British presence assured the safety of Bahrain.²¹ Although the shaikh wished to cooperate with HMG, Bahrain was short of funds. Hence, to expedite the purchase of the required land, HMG deposited the necessary amount into Bahrain's Lloyd's Bank account in Bombay.²²

After the successful, quiet purchase of the desired Bahraini property, the British India Office expressed Britain's appreciation for the "invaluable assistance" of Shaikh Hamad, his brother Shaikh Abdullah, and both Political Agent Loch and the Ruler's adviser Belgrave.²³ Pleased that Britain now had the land necessary to enhance his shaikhdom's security, Shaikh Hamad wrote to Political Resident Colonel T. C. Fowle: "I hope that [the British government] may be protected by the Almighty God against all harm and that our ties and friendly relations may continue for ever."²⁴

During World War II, protected by the British, Bahrainis did not fear an Axis invasion. Nonetheless, in October 1940 the Italian Air Force bombed the shaikhdom, targeting its oil fields and refinery. The bombs missed their targets. Concerned about their safety, American dependents of BAPCO employees left the country; the men, however, remained.²⁵ Later, the new Ruler of Bahrain, Shaikh Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifa, indicated his support for the Allied war effort. In 1942, he decreed that a new Bahraini government hospital, funded by oil revenue, be reserved for the treatment of those wounded in the Allied war.²⁶

Despite relinquishing India after World War II, Britain was not prepared to leave the Gulf, nor was there any indication that the Gulf rulers wanted the British to go. Persia, now called Iran, however, had never lost interest in Bahrain and from time to time claimed that Bahrain belonged to Tehran. Whitehall explained to the India Office, at the end of 1945, that Iran might take its claim to the United Nations and that it was

difficult to predict how Washington would respond. London was concerned that if the matter was on the United Nations' agenda, a "great disaster, a Persian victory, is a possibility."²⁷

While Iran was unhappy with Britain's presence in Manama, Bahrain's Ruler, Shaikh Salman, continued to be pleased that the British remained in his territory. Shaikh Salman relied on his British adviser Belgrave, who since his arrival, in 1926, had gradually acquired more and more power and had become "a virtual autocrat." British officials had earlier noted that he was "quite ignorant of administration" and that outside the ruling circles he was unpopular.²⁸

Although Washington did not have diplomatic relations with Manama, US officials in nearby Saudi Arabia maintained contact with members of the Al-Khalifa family. Visiting Bahrain in December 1946, American Consul in Dhahran, Waldo Bailey, accompanied by Vice-Consul Francis Meloy, called on Shaikh Salman, who appeared pleased to receive his American guests. However, after extending a warm welcome, he took out a large map of the world and with his fingers provided a brief tour of all the territory in Europe and Asia that had once belonged to the Arabs. Pointing at Palestine, he declared that for "3,020 years" Palestine had been occupied by Arabs. Shaikh Salman expressed the hope that American representatives serving in the Arab world would carefully study Arab concerns. Bailey assured Shaikh Salman that all of the Americans serving in the region worked diligently to understand the Arab perspective.²⁹

Meloy again visited Bahrain in February 1947. During this visit, he learned that BAPCO wished to clarify the status of the disputed Hawar Islands, which both Bahrain and its neighbor Qatar continued to claim. The general manager of BAPCO, Russell Brown, told Meloy that he soon intended to begin exploratory drilling operations on the Hawar Islands, a move that would force the British to take a position on whether the Hawar Islands belonged to Qatar or to Bahrain.³⁰

Palestine, rather than oil, assumed center stage in Bahraini-British relations after the November 29, 1947, UN General Assembly vote to partition the country and to establish two

states, a Jewish state and a Palestinian state. Arab anger spread to Bahrain. On December 4, 1947, a large mob, composed largely of Iranian and Trucial Coast sailors, ran through the Bahraini *sūq* (shopping area), charging into Jewish homes and shops. The mob smashed furniture, and during the riot “one Jewish woman was either killed, or died from fright.”³¹

The Gulf Political Resident Sir Rupert Hay told London that Bahraini authorities had not anticipated that the UN vote to partition Palestine would cause such an uproar in Bahrain. Taken by surprise, the authorities were not prepared. Political Agent Cornelius James Pelly visited Shaikh Salman on December 7 and expressed his concern. Although annoyed that Pelly had raised the issue, Shaikh Salmon accepted personal responsibility for the safety of his Jewish subjects and noted that such riots had not occurred in either Kuwait or Saudi Arabia. Shaikh Salman now suggested that Persians were responsible for the looting and denied “that the people for whose conduct he is responsible, were involved.”³² According to a British intelligence report from Bahrain, “The Jewish community is allowing itself to be mulcted of large sums of protection money paid, invariably by cheque, to those who profess, in most cases quite falsely, to be able to shield them from further disturbance.”³³

Bahrain’s small Jewish community numbered between 300 and 400 members. Prior to the UN Partition Plan, relations between Bahraini Muslims and their Jewish neighbors had been good, and a Jew had long served as a member of the Manama Municipal Council.³⁴ Shaikh Salman’s British adviser Belgrave personally took part in an effort to protect Manama’s Jews and later complained that while he was active in that difficult endeavor, young Jewish men were absent from the scene.³⁵ The Jewish community was devastated by the riots. As a result, many of its members wished to leave the shaikhdom and seek asylum elsewhere. One Jewish resident later wrote that on December 4, all 40 Bahraini Jewish homes were attacked and 27 were looted.³⁶

Via an American friend in Syracuse, New York, one Bahraini Jew Ezra Zeloof sent a letter to the Jewish Agency for Palestine.

He said that it was impossible to mail his letter directly to Palestine and requested that a reply be sent to him through Syracuse. Zeloof wrote that Bahraini Jews had been falsely accused of providing financial assistance to the Zionist organization. According to Zeloof, as a result of the riots,

[s]ome of us who owned houses or shops and were well-to-do now find ourselves quite poor and have to beg for shelter and food. We find ourselves helpless in spirit, broken in hearts, not knowing when the tragic and barbarous atrocities will be repeated.³⁷

At the same time, Zeloof praised Shaikh Salman and Belgrave. Despite considerable evidence of Belgrave's personal disdain for Jews, Zeloof believed that during the 1947 riots, he acted courageously:

The adviser himself was in action against the criminals and has risked his live [*sic*] many a time. He is deserving of praise and sincere gratefulness, otherwise the whole Jewish community would have been slaughtered.³⁸

As a result of Washington's support for the UN Partition Plan for Palestine, it appeared possible that Americans in Bahrain might also become targets. After American officials in Dhahran reported "actual violence to Jews and ominous threats to American lives as well as installations," Washington expressed concern to the British government about the safety of American citizens working in Bahrain. American officials in Dhahran suggested that Washington ask London to permanently station a naval vessel in Bahrain and to quickly send a supply of tear gas.³⁹

Some Americans in the region also wanted Washington to dispatch a naval destroyer to the Saudi port of Ras Tanura. However, the US Ambassador in Saudi Arabia doubted the possibility of convincing the Saudi King Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud to accept such a vessel. Earlier, the King had proclaimed that he would not allow demonstrations in Saudi Arabia. Thus, the ambassador feared that the arrival of a US destroyer to protect either Americans in Saudi Arabia or Jews in neighboring

Bahrain might be misinterpreted. According to Ambassador J. Rives Childs, the King would consider the vessel an indication of Washington's lack of confidence in his ability to maintain order.⁴⁰

From Washington, Acting Secretary of State Robert Lovett informed his embassy in London that the British authorities in Bahrain admitted that, in the event of further riots, the local police might not respond adequately. Hence, the British political agent agreed that BAPCO should import tear gas.⁴¹ At the same time, British officials expressed their confidence that unless Washington supplied the Zionists with weapons, or sent US military forces to Palestine to assist the Jews, Bahrain would remain calm.⁴² Nevertheless, Washington remained concerned. Law enforcement in Bahrain depended on the Ruler's native police force, and Shaikh Salman was now not confident that this force would protect Americans. At the same time, the British political agent told BAPCO that the British planned to protect Americans "only after local authority collapses."⁴³

American Jews too were concerned about violence in Bahrain. Fearing for the safety of Bahrain's Jewish families, the American Jewish Congress sent a telegram to the State Department at the beginning of 1948 requesting that Washington quickly ask the British to protect these Jews, their homes, and their synagogues.⁴⁴ According to the American Consul in Dhahran, the December 1947 riots in Manama had been aimed against Jews, but these riots were also an expression of anti-American sentiment and, most important, an opportunity to loot. After the December violence, American officials had requested that Britain tighten security in Bahrain. Hence, at the beginning of April 1948, the US consulate in Dhahran considered further attacks on Bahraini Jews unlikely in the near future and did not consider it appropriate to intervene with the British on the issue of Jewish security. However, a consular official was authorized to travel to Bahrain to check on the situation.⁴⁵

Vice-Consul Meloy reported to Washington that as a result of his inquiry, he had obtained information about two groups that might cause trouble in Bahrain. One group, composed

of unemployed Arabs, had illegally entered Bahrain from the Sultanate of Oman. These Arabs were not motivated by any particular cause, but by an interest in deriving profit from looting. The second group was composed of Muslims from India and Pakistan, recent arrivals in Bahrain, where BAPCO unofficially favored Muslim rather than Hindu employees. Given Bahrain's Muslim identity, Sikhs and Hindus employed in Bahrain feared the possibility of violence against them. In addition, the Palestine issue remained a powerful source of tension.⁴⁶

Once again, in May 1948, the US consulate in Dhahran addressed the subject of Jews in Bahrain as well as how Bahrainis viewed the Americans employed in their country. Many Arabs working with Americans in Bahrain had developed close relationships with them and volunteered information about possible demonstrations. Some Bahraini Arabs claimed that Washington had dictated policy to the United Nations. Hence, they suspected the United States was responsible for the partition of Palestine. As the British prepared to leave Palestine, Palestinian Arabs employed in Bahrain expressed their growing resentment toward Jews.

Anticipating an outbreak of violence as soon as the establishment of the State of Israel was declared, Bahraini authorities ordered the shops in the *sug* closed and stationed troops in the area. In order to increase the size of its military force, the government provided uniforms to reliable civilians, who joined the troops. At the same time, most school-age boys were sent out of Manama on school trips, including a trip to a soccer match in Saudi Arabia. The government also closed the causeway between Manama and Muharraq. Although the Ruler prevented violent behavior on May 14, 1948, Israel's Independence Day, Americans in Bahrain continued to receive warnings that a new outbreak of violence against Bahraini Jews would soon begin. Bahrain's small Jewish population lived "under a constant strain."⁴⁷

Although Palestine remained an issue of concern, British attention moved in June 1948 to Iran's renewed focus on its claim that Bahrain belonged to Tehran. The Iranian Foreign

Office sent the British Embassy in Tehran two notes that proclaimed that Bahrain was part of Iran. After receiving the initial note, British Chargé d'Affaires M. J. Creswell decided to ignore it. But soon after, the British received a second note, which complained that Britain had allowed refugees from Pakistan to enter Bahrain without receiving Bahraini visas from the appropriate Iranian authorities. Thus, Tehran charged that Britain was interfering in Iran's internal affairs. Creswell met with the Acting Iranian Foreign Minister and returned both notes to him. Calling the notes "childish," Creswell suggested that the way to raise the question of Bahrain was through the Iranian Ambassador in London or through the British Foreign Minister and Creswell himself.⁴⁸

Iran's claim to Bahrain did not fade away. During a meeting of the shaikh's *majlis*, Bahrain's foreign minister reviewed the history of the Iranian claim. He cited a note from the Persian government in 1930 complaining that the shaikh of Bahrain had no right to grant oil concessions. He also cited a 1934 note from Persia to the United States, which declared that the oil concession granted by Bahrain to Standard Oil Company of California was not valid. Meanwhile, Iran's foreign minister asked American Ambassador to Iran John C. Wiley about Washington's position on the issue. According to Ambassador Wiley, the United States had no interest at all "in questions involving sovereign rights in the Persian Gulf." The foreign minister was disappointed with Wiley's response. Further pressed on the matter, Wiley informed the foreign minister that it was unlikely that the Iranian claim to Bahrain "had much future anyhow."⁴⁹

Whitehall now moved to insure that Washington would continue to stand firmly with London against a future Iranian attempt to press its claim to Bahrain. The British underlined that for both Britain and the United States, the Gulf shaikhdoms were essential as sources of oil and potential military bases. One possibility was to insist the issue be resolved by the International Court of Justice at The Hague, moving the matter "from political to the legal sphere." London was convinced that if the International Court took the case, Iran would

lose. Now the Foreign Office wanted US State Department lawyers to look at the relevant documents and provide their assessment. London also considered the possibility that Iran might take the issue of Bahrain's sovereignty to either the UN Security Council or the General Assembly, which would give Tehran an opportunity to bash Britain "at endless length with great malice." London also suggested that, given Iran's position, an Anglo-American agreement be reached to avoid raising the issue of Bahrain in an international form. However, in the event that Tehran was able to raise the issue, London wanted Washington to take a strong stand against any Iranian claim.⁵⁰

As the 1940s progressed, American sailors became a small but growing presence in the Gulf. These sailors, both officers and men, were permitted to use British recreational facilities at Jufair, located outside Manama. The Americans were also invited to share the Royal Navy's beer, which apparently did not meet US standards. As a result, when US Navy ships left home for the Persian Gulf, they carried a supply of American-made beer.⁵¹

Since India had obtained independence in 1947, Iran and other states in the region assumed that Britain was now ready to leave the Gulf. Initially, Britain had sought influence in the Gulf to protect its sea route to India. India was now no longer a factor. The Foreign Office decided that the best course was to impress on the local rulers and their people that the recent show of American strength in no way indicated a relaxation of vigilance on Britain's part. Whitehall assured British officials in the Gulf that the Foreign Office understood their concerns. Hence, it was important to refrain from giving the impression that Britain was unwilling to cooperate with the United States in the Middle East, an area of vital interest to both countries. At the same time, London wanted British officials in the Gulf to underline that Britain was not handing over the Gulf to the United States. "It is not the case that if the power and prestige of one of us increases, that of the other must necessarily decrease." The Foreign Office argued that having such a powerful ally, the United States, served to strengthen Britain's position.⁵²

Nevertheless, some Foreign Office officials could not completely contain their annoyance at Washington's display of power. During a visit to London in October 1948, Political Resident Sir Bernard Burrows was asked by Foreign Office officials to consider the possibility of organizing a joint Anglo-American Naval visit to the Gulf. After returning to Bahrain, Burrows discussed the idea with senior British naval officers, who rejected the suggestion of an Anglo-American naval visit and instead proposed a completely British demonstration, an aircraft carrier escorted by two destroyers.⁵³

Of course, despite British concerns about American naval activity and growing American influence in the Gulf, London was far more concerned about Soviet efforts to win Arab friends in the region. Russian propaganda programs broadcast in Arabic were available daily. These broadcasts were "violently anti-British."⁵⁴

Treatment of Indian workers in Bahrain also provided ammunition for groups that opposed both London and Washington. In January 1949, Indian officials who visited Bahrain complained that the foreign oil companies operating in Bahrain discriminated against Indian employees because of their color. The American consulate in Dhahran looked into the issue. American officials noted that housing facilities were segregated and that BAPCO operated a dining room for its American and British employees, but excluded Indian employees. Referring to the Indians, one BAPCO official explained that "we don't eat or sleep with them."

American Vice-Consul Meloy defended BAPCO, pointing out that the treatment of Indians was not really bad because their wages were much higher than wages in India. In addition, Indian workers received many benefits including home leave and free hospital care. Meloy pointed out that "it can be readily appreciated that any general leveling up to the American standard of living of large numbers of people who have heretofore existed so far below it, is impracticable." Now BAPCO decided to stop hiring Indians, which according to Meloy was a wise decision. Oblivious to blatant racism, he speculated that some

of those Indian complaints had been “inspired by Communist activity.”⁵⁵

In spring 1949, when the USS *Duxbury Bay* visited the British naval base in Jufair, which was now available to the US Navy, the British political resident did not complain. Instead he exchanged visits with the captain. In addition, the American officers invited their British colleagues to a cocktail party. According to the political resident, “It is understood that the facilities afforded by the Naval Base in Jufair are in future to be made available freely to the officers and men of the U.S. Navy.”⁵⁶

Shaikh Salman had no objection to the consumption of liquor on foreign ships. However, according to Bahrain’s liquor laws, any Bahraini drinking or even carrying liquor could be sentenced to six months in prison. As a result, a proposed modern hotel planned for Bahrain was not built because the Ruler refused to grant the would-be developers a liquor license. Unfortunately, for those who pressed for a change in the liquor laws, Shaikh Salman had recently been upset by the behavior of one of his cousins, Ali Bin Abdullah, who assaulted a Roman Catholic priest and drove his car through a bazaar after drinking too much liquor.⁵⁷

Some American businessmen with no direct connection to the oil industry were attracted to Bahrain despite the absence of a modern hotel. Intending to sell more than 300 sewing machines, a representative of the Singer Sewing Machine Company, John Marshall, arrived in October 1949. Bahraini customs officials refused to allow his machines into the country because he planned to sell the machines cheaply to BAPCO employees and at a higher price to the general public. The Bahraini government opposed such discrimination.⁵⁸

An American pearl merchant also visited Bahrain. Prior to the discovery of oil in Bahrain, approximately 50 percent of male Bahrainis had been connected to the pearl industry. Claiming that the sale of cultured pearls stimulated the demand for real pearls, the visiting American stated that Bahrain and its neighbor Dubai had the largest number of available pearls removed

from the Gulf oyster beds. He further explained that now that pearls were less expensive in the United States than in Europe, European buyers were crossing the Atlantic to purchase them instead of buying pearls from the Gulf.⁵⁹

The issue of Palestine once again took center stage in the spring of 1949. The plight of uprooted Palestinians was underlined in April at the annual Bahrain horse race, where it was announced that the proceeds of the race would be donated to the Palestine Refugee Fund.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, despite public expressions of sympathy for the Palestinians, the Bahraini government did not want to permit large numbers of Palestinian refugees to settle in Bahrain. Manama agreed to employ a small number of them as agricultural workers and to hire a few qualified teachers for state schools. However, Shaikh Salman's government was unwilling to cover the cost of bringing these displaced Palestinians to his country.⁶¹

Bahrain wanted no connection with the new state of Israel. Arab animosity was so strong that the British expressed concern when, in May 1949, an Alaskan Airlines plane, carrying a number of Jewish passengers who pretended to be en route to Nicosia, landed in Bahrain and later took off for Tel Aviv. Crew members on subsequent flights used the same cover story, distressing the British officials in Bahrain.⁶² In addition, some Jews who had emigrated from Bahrain took their Bahraini passports with them to Israel. Bahraini officials had no objection to this Jewish exodus, but were annoyed that the departing Jews did not leave these passports behind.⁶³

The Bahrainis shared a strong commitment to their Arab identity. Nevertheless, despite the growth of Arab nationalism after World War II, Bahrain's Ruler continued to be pleased that the British remained in his territory. Shaikh Salman still relied on Belgrave, who for many years had gradually acquired more and more power and continued to be called "a virtual autocrat." Although Shaikh Salman was happy with his adviser, British officials dealing with the Gulf region were not. Numerous Bahrainis too were dissatisfied with Belgrave. Hence, in December 1949, Political Resident Sir Rupert Hay

encouraged Belgrave to retire as soon as he reached 55, the retirement age for the Indian Political Service. At the same time, Whitehall official Jack Troutbeck considered it unlikely that the small Gulf states, including Bahrain, would be able to remain immune from the “Arab awakening” that was moving from larger neighboring Arab states into the Gulf’s “petty kingdoms.” Troutbeck predicted that soon Bahrainis would insist that they too should assume control of their country’s affairs. According to Troutbeck,

It seems to me that there must be some consistency in our approach toward the coloured races. In our own empire all our efforts are extended towards giving the natives more and more independence. I can not see how we can hope to move successfully in an opposite direction in the Arab world.⁶⁴

Although some British officials understood that Gulf Arabs might no longer be pleased with HMG’s position in the region, British officials in Bahrain did not welcome competition from Washington and had been unhappy, in September 1948, when several American battleships commanded by Admiral Richard Conolly visited the region. Nevertheless, the British community had provided suitable hospitality to the visiting Americans. So too did Shaikh Salman. But, according to Political Agent Pelly, the shaikh speculated about why the Americans were displaying their naval power and assured the British political agent that “his people have always been quite content with the Royal Navy alone.”⁶⁵

Whitehall proceeded with its attempt to soothe British officials and informed the Admiralty that Washington’s attention to the Gulf was good for Britain and that it was important for American interest in the region to continue. The Foreign Office stated, “we must impress on the local Rulers that a show of American strength does not mean that our position is thereby weaker but rather the contrary.”⁶⁶

Since American sailors were now a small but growing presence in the Gulf, Washington asked for recreational facilities

for them in Bahrain. The US government wanted to obtain a small space to store equipment and wished to provide funds to maintain swimming pools.⁶⁷ London agreed. At the same time, some British officials suggested that after Washington's display of naval power in the Gulf, London ought to organize "a really imposing visit by British ships."⁶⁸

A group of US senators visiting the shaikhdom in November 1949 called at the Residency. The chairman of the American delegation, Louisiana Senator Allen Joseph Ellender, suggested to one British official that the United Kingdom was finished and "that 20 millions of its inhabitants want to migrate to South Africa."⁶⁹ Despite the prediction of Senator Ellender, Britain continued to maintain its position in the Gulf. As US oil interests expanded, some Americans wanted Washington to play a larger role in the region. Meanwhile, Shaikh Salman remained satisfied with his British connection. In July 1949, he clearly emphasized his opposition to the appointment of any representative of a foreign country in Bahrain, explaining that "he wished to have dealings with the British only."⁷⁰

CHAPTER 2



ARAB NATIONALISM AND THE BRITISH DECISION TO DEPART

Despite the prediction of Senator Ellender, Britain continued to maintain its position in the Gulf region. As the 1950s progressed, one of Whitehall's difficulties in Bahrain was the continued presence of the Ruler's far too powerful British adviser, Sir Charles Belgrave. With the support of Shaikh Salman, Belgrave had continued to remain in office. During the winter of 1956, an opposition group, the Committee of National Union (CNU), was active in the shaikhdom. Members of CNU organized demonstrations against the government. British Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd arrived in Bahrain for a short visit on March 2, 1956. His arrival coincided with news reports that Jordan's King Hussein had fired his British military adviser, General John Bagot Glubb. As Foreign Secretary Lloyd and the British delegation left the airport in Muharraq for the Royal Palace, crowds lined the route shouting anti-British slogans and throwing sand and rocks.¹ According to Political Resident Bernard Burrows, both the foreign secretary and the Permanent Undersecretary Sir Harold Caccia were passengers in his car. As a result of interference by the large angry crowd that had gathered on the route to Manama, the cars had to travel slowly. During the journey, Sir Harold Caccia was hit,

fortunately not by a stone, but by a handful of sand that entered the car from the top of the window.²

Embarrassed by how these British dignitaries were greeted, Belgrave complained about the activities of CNU. He reported that those rabble-rousers received considerable support from President Abdul Gamal Nasser's Egypt, where Arab nationalism was continuing to spread. He also warned that the committee wanted to force Britain out of Bahrain and seize control of the shaikhdom. He noted: "Unfortunately they [the CNU] are persuasive speakers and manage to get their point of view across so that in spite of all that the shaikh has done for the people, schools, hospitals, housing etc., many now seem to believe they are badly treated."³

Some members of CNU were arrested. One of them, Abd al-Rahman al-Bakir, requested that an Egyptian lawyer who he had hired be permitted to enter Bahrain. British officials advised against doing so. One official claimed that al-Bakir had a close relationship "with the notorious Anwar Sadat."⁴

London continued to consider Belgrave's presence in Bahrain a focus for local discontent. In May 1956, Whitehall assured Political Resident Burrows that "we are entirely at one with you in thinking that the process of removing Belgrave must be got on with as quickly as possible." London was now concerned about who would be appointed adviser to the Ruler of Bahrain after Belgrave was ousted and if it was even sensible to replace him with another Englishman.⁵ Official D. M. H. Riches warned that a new British adviser would arouse Arab nationalist ire. These nationalists would embarrass Bahraini moderates by claiming that the shaikh and his supporters were "subservient to the British and not good Arabs."⁶ Meanwhile, Belgrave was in no hurry to leave Bahrain. He told the vice president of BAPCO that "he would of course be going sometime but that he wasn't going to be run out!"⁷

Belgrave was supported by Shaikh Salman, who, according to Political Agent Charles Gault, "has always had Belgrave to lean on and hide behind." Gault considered it unfortunate that his government had allowed Belgrave to remain in Bahrain for

so many years. He explained to Whitehall that "in many ways, we are now paying for the thirty years' existence of a strong, if stubborn, and even pig-headed, British Adviser, who has, not of course wittingly, emasculated the titular Ruler."⁸

Convinced that Belgrave had to go, Political Agent Gault advised the Foreign Office that London ought to pressure Shaikh Salman rather than his adviser. Although Gault considered Belgrave's capacity for self-delusion unlimited, he stated that if the British convinced the Ruler that his adviser ought to retire, there would be nothing Belgrave could do to retain his position.⁹

Meanwhile, CNU also pressed for the retirement of Belgrave, who in July 1956 declared yet again that he was not leaving Bahrain. Political Agent Gault reported that if Belgrave did not leave, the committee would call for a strike. Gault suggested to London that as a "last resort," Britain could take the initiative and announce Belgrave's departure.¹⁰ Finally, in August 1956, Political Resident Burrows assured London that at last Belgrave understood that he had to retire. Burrows reported from Bahrain that the announcement of Belgrave's retirement "did a lot of good here."¹¹

One leading Bahraini, Husain Yateem, did not consider the far-too-long tenure of Belgrave to be Britain's only failure in Bahrain. According to Yateem, Abdul Gamal Nasser's Egypt had a propaganda advantage in the shaikhdom in part because Cairo was funding energetic young people to work in the Gulf, while those the British employed in the area "were too old to be effective." Yateem suggested to London that the government encourage active 40-year-olds to take positions in Bahrain and that, if necessary, the government should supplement their salaries.¹²

Belgrave, of course, was only one of many Bahraini concerns. Throughout 1956, Iran again pressed its claim to Bahrain. Iran's Foreign Minister Dr. Ali Qoli Ardalan held a press conference on April 7 and claimed that Bahrain belonged to Iran. After the press conference, Dr. Ardalan told British Ambassador Sir Roger Stevens that relations between the two

countries “had never been so friendly” and that his government wanted the question of Bahrain to be resolved affably. He also assured Ambassador Stevens that the issue of Bahrain “had no relation to the Baghdad Pact.”¹³

London was convinced that even if Her Majesty’s Government (HMG) decided to leave Bahrain, the shaikhdom would not move toward Iran, but toward the Arab world. According to the British, despite the Shah’s statement that there were 100,000 Iranians living in Bahrain, the Bahraini population in 1956, which numbered 110,000, included only 7,000 Iranians. Earlier, in 1954, Tehran had claimed that Iran had the authority to control the landing of foreign aircraft in Bahrain. London had disagreed. British officials agreed that even an attempt to discuss Iran’s claim to Bahrain would cause considerable damage to Britain’s position in the Gulf and throughout the Arab world. Washington supported the British view, and even before World War II, had informed Iran that its claim to Bahrain was not valid. Now, Washington firmly supported the British position.¹⁴

Although committed to preventing an Iranian takeover of Bahrain, London attempted to avoid distressing the Shah’s government. In 1956, Bahrain suffered from a shortage of trained policemen. As a result, the British sought Arabic-speaking recruits from outside the shaikhdom. Egyptian recruits were available, but, fearing Egyptian leader Nasser’s influence, Manama did not wish to employ them. Bahrain turned to Iraq for assistance, and a group of Iraqis joined the Bahraini police force. Britain assured Iran that the presence of these individual Iraqi policemen was not a sign that Iraq was plotting to take over Bahrain.¹⁵

Nevertheless, guided by its government, the Iranian press continued to claim that Bahrain belonged to Iran. British Ambassador in Tehran Roger Stevens suggested that although Britain’s presence in the Gulf prevented an Iranian advance into Bahrain, the presence of HMG also prevented Saudi domination of the Gulf’s southern shore. Hence, “a weakening of British influence in the Gulf may be viewed with mixed

feelings.” At the same time, Ambassador Stevens complained that the Foreign Office had not kept him informed about events in Bahrain. As a result when, on April 7, he met with the Shah, who wanted to discuss the issue, Ambassador Stevens protested that he (Stevens) was “the idiot boy.”¹⁶

Iran’s claim to Bahrain continued, and the Shah’s government attempted to involve the United States. At the end of April, Foreign Minister Ardalan asked US Ambassador Selden Chapin about Washington’s position on the Iranian claim to Bahrain. Ambassador Stevens was delighted by his American colleague’s response. Ambassador Chapin asked if Iran had inquired about the views of both Saudi and Iraqi governments. Did these governments want Iran to control Bahrain? Dr. Ardalan responded that he had never asked for the views of either government.¹⁷

Meeting with British Ambassador Stevens, in August 1956, the Shah once again focused attention on Bahrain. He expressed his wish that Egypt’s President Nasser be removed. However, the Shah said it appeared unlikely. The likely scenario was that Nasser would become so powerful that he would dominate the entire Arab world. According to the Shah, with Nasser serving as the leader of the Arabs, London would need support from “non-Arab Muslim friends.” Clearly, Britain would not want Bahrain under the influence of a hostile Nasser. Hence, the Shah proposed that HMG recognize Tehran’s claim to Bahrain. Responding to the Shah, Ambassador Stevens emphasized that Britain was not leaving the Persian Gulf. He also noted that Bahrainis did not wish to be taken over by either Saudi Arabia or Iran.¹⁸

Britain continued to oppose any Iranian claim to Bahrain. Speaking to the House of Commons on November 27, 1957, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Ormsby Gore said, “Her Majesty’s Government will continue to fulfill their obligation to safeguard the independence of Bahrain and the Ruler of Bahrain has received an assurance to this effect.”¹⁹

Despite British actions during the October 1956 Suez Crisis, Bahrain’s ruling family continued to rely on the British. After

a confident Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal, a waterway located on Egyptian soil, Britain, France, and Israel organized an attack on Egypt to seize control of the canal. American President Dwight D. Eisenhower refused to support this coordinated effort against Nasser and, together with the Soviet Union, utilized the United Nations to halt the attack. Throughout the Arab world, demonstrations against Israel, France, and Britain took place. As a result, British authorities in Bahrain were concerned about the safety of their citizens. Indeed, there was reason for concern. A series of riots occurred in both Manama and Muharraq. Protesters destroyed property and attacked British nationals. In addition, a few Americans, mistakenly assumed to be British, were also attacked. At the same time, BAPCO workers called a strike.²⁰

Political Resident Burrows later wrote that the situation in Bahrain became “overtly dramatic.” Bahrain’s police had been unable to maintain order. The shaikh wanted the political resident to request that British forces be dispatched to assist the Bahraini police. British troops immediately responded. They patrolled the roads and protected oil installations. The British also attempted to drop leaflets from a helicopter. These leaflets urged peaceful behavior. However, bundles of leaflets were not falling down in a satisfactory manner and “risked causing injury if they happened to hit one of the demonstrators on the head.” Despite the outburst of violence in Bahrain, according to Political Resident Burrows, “the relationship between the United Kingdom and the Persian Gulf States settled down fairly quickly into its normal tenor.”²¹

During the violence sparked by the Suez Crisis, Shaikh Salman, claiming that members of CNU were involved in a plot to kill him, had ordered several arrests, including the arrests of Abd al-Rahman al-Bakir, Abd al-Aziz Shamlan, and Abd al-Ali Aliwat. Shaikh Salman asked Political Resident Burrows to take the three to a prison outside Bahrain. Burrows explained that it would be easier for Britain to take custody of the three if they were first convicted of a serious crime. Members of the shaikh’s family served as judges, and the three activists were, of course,

found guilty. At the end of December 1956, they were imprisoned on the island of St. Helena.²² However, these prisoners did not fade away. They continued to gain attention, including attention from members of the British Parliament. Finally, after successful legal action brought by members of Parliament, on June 13, 1961, the three imprisoned Bahrainis were released from St. Helena and traveled to London, where they were entertained at the House of Commons.²³

Earlier, in 1959, the living conditions of members of the British military serving in Bahrain came to the attention of the political resident in the Gulf, George Middleton. He called attention to the Air Force personnel stationed in the shaikhdom, who lived on an air base that operated 24 hours a day and, therefore, required three work shifts. The station's buildings were "appallingly run-down and shabby" and needed considerable maintenance. Middleton considered it "absurd" that although there were "virtually no aircraft" based there, 450 men were needed to operate the station.²⁴

Responding to Middleton's concern, at the end of 1959, Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd asked Lady Marie Tedder, the vice president of an organization that provided clubs for military men serving in the British forces, to visit Bahrain. After her visit, Lady Tedder wrote to the foreign secretary about the awful living conditions British troops had to endure. She wrote that even the "canteen is unbelievably sordid." Lady Tedder also noted that British residents were uneasy because they feared that riots were likely a concern, which she considered justified. Hence, in order to improve morale, she suggested that she be authorized to establish one of her organization's clubs, a Malcolm Club.²⁵

Political Resident Middleton agreed that the British serving in Bahrain lived in unpleasant accommodations, suffered through extremely hot summers, and were denied alcohol, except when frequenting small military canteens. While most British maintained their stiff upper lips, Middleton noted that "there are occasional unpleasant incidents, e.g. when young wives take to pandering to the single men's boredom and to

the blandishments of shaikhs and this kind of trouble can be dangerous.” Therefore, the political resident agreed that a Malcolm Club was a good idea. He underlined that such clubs were managed by middle-aged ladies, who played the role of “local mommas.”²⁶

While a few British citizens serving in Bahrain may have stepped out of line, occasionally a Bahraini visiting Europe created a problem. In August 1961, one of the Bahraini shaikh’s many distant cousins, Shaikh Hamad Bin Abdullah, who served as a judge in the Junior Court, impersonated the Bahraini Ruler while traveling abroad. After drinking too much, the young Shaikh Hamad attended a circus in Amsterdam. He enjoyed the experience so much that he invited the circus to visit Bahrain and even inquired about how much it would cost to transport the circus to Manama.²⁷ According to an article in the newspaper *Al Hayat*, published on August 3, 1961, the circus staff members, animals, and vehicles expected to travel to Bahrain on a private ship that Shaikh Hamad would provide.²⁸ As a result, the Amsterdam circus together with an American circus followed up with inquiries about the possibility of performing in Bahrain. The ruling Shaikh Salman said no to both circuses. As a result, after his return home, the embarrassed Shaikh Hamad maintained a low profile.²⁹

At the beginning of November 1961, Shaikh Salman died. Leading members of the royal family gathered to appoint his successor and selected his son, Shaikh Isa bin Salman Al-Khalifa. The new Ruler of Bahrain asked Political Resident Sir William Luce to assure London that he wished to continue Bahrain’s relationship with Britain, a relationship that his father treasured. Sir William advised that HMG should immediately recognize the new Ruler, Shaikh Isa bin Salman Al-Khalifa.³⁰

Shaikh Isa used the traditional open *majlis* to remain accessible to the public. Most mornings, he arrived in his Rolls Royce at the courtyard of his residence in West Riffa, where Bahrainis and foreigners stood waiting for him. After his arrival, he walked along the line of petitioners, shaking hands. Those assembled

entered the building where Arabic coffee with cardamom seeds was served. Speaking in both Arabic and English, the shaikh accepted the petitions of all those present.³¹

Although before Shaikh Salman's death no American circus was invited to the shaikhdom, Washington's interest in the region continued. At the same time, inspired by Nasser, Arab nationalism continued to spread throughout the Gulf region. Occasionally, a problem arose that had an impact on Westerners. As a result of BAPCO's attempt to fire redundant workers, in March 1965, violence erupted in Bahrain. The Bahrain Arab Nationalist Movement continued to distress Bahrain's rulers and British authorities. During one demonstration, a crowd of approximately 500 schoolboys, joined by a few girls, threw stones and burned cars owned by Europeans. Claiming that Bahrain's police force would be unable to restore order, Political Resident Sir William Luce asked the Foreign Office for permission to use British forces to suppress the riots if necessary. Permission was granted and, before the end of the demonstrations, British helicopters dropped "vomit gas" on protesters in Muharraq. The political resident insisted that no bullets had been fired at the demonstrators and that the action taken was necessary.³²

In March 1966, Whitehall informed the US Embassy in London that, with London's consent, Bahrain's Ruler had agreed to permit the USS *Valcour* to use Bahrain as its home port. The *Valcour* would serve as the flagship of Washington's Middle East Force (MIDEASTFOR).³³ Prior to Shaikh Isa's decision to welcome the presence of the USS *Valcour*, in February, Bahraini rulers had been shaken by Britain's announcement that HMG planned to drastically reduce its military commitment in the region and to withdraw from its Aden colony by December 1968. Since the early 1960s, civil war had divided Aden's neighbor, Yemen, and unrest had also spread into Aden. Britain sent additional troops to Aden, but these troops had been unable to end the violence.³⁴ Distressed by the British announcement, Shaikh Isa asked if in addition to pulling out of Aden, Britain also intended to leave the Gulf. British officials

assured Bahrain's Ruler that London had no such plans and even wished to move additional troops into the shaikhdom.³⁵

From Dhahran, American Consul General Arthur Allen told Washington that he was concerned about the activities of the Arab Nationalist Movement in Bahrain. Britain had increased its military presence, which would likely incite Bahraini members of the National Liberation Front to act against their rulers. Aware of the possibility of an outbreak of violence, BAPCO had increased workers' wages and introduced new benefits, including improved housing. However, it was extremely difficult to protect Bahrain's oil installations against sabotage. The refinery employed 6,000 workers, "any one of which might be a potential saboteur."³⁶

Members of the Al-Khalifa family too were concerned about security. In May 1966, Shaikh Isa was distracted by a visit from the Ruler of Kuwait Amir Sabah. Bahrain's Ruler told Sir William Luce that the Kuwaiti Ruler was too close to Nasser. Kuwait had obtained its independence from Britain, in June 1961, after HMG halted an Iraqi attempt to annex the country. Shaikh Isa hosted a state dinner for his Kuwaiti visitor and included a few British officials among the guests. After dinner, Amir Sabah, whose country's independence had so recently been protected by the British, criticized Shaikh Isa's relations with HMG. According to Amir Sabah, Bahrain's Ruler ought not to have left his place at the dinner to welcome British officials. In addition, the seating arrangements were inappropriate because the British political resident had been placed between two Arab Rulers. "After the Amir left Bahrain loyal Shaikh Isa told his British friends that he was sorry he had not invited one hundred Englishmen, rather than only six to that state dinner."³⁷

Shaikh Isa truly appreciated his British connections. As US oil interests expanded, some Americans wanted Washington to play a larger role in the Gulf. Writing to the State Department, in July 1966, mechanical engineer John W. Sarvis suggested that since oil was so very important, a resident American consul ought to be stationed in Bahrain.³⁸ State Department official

Colbert Held assured Sarvis that Washington had not neglected US interests in Bahrain. He explained that Dhahran was very close to Bahrain and that whenever necessary an American official stationed in Dhahran could quickly travel there. Held wrote that routinely, several times a week, US officials visited Bahrain, where "we confer with our British colleagues and with Americans in the petroleum industry and in our Middle East Forces."³⁹

Although Bahrain was still dependent on Britain, the brother of Bahrain's Ruler, who was also the Director of the Bahrain Finance Department, Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman Al-Khalifa, was also interested in strengthening his country's American connection. In August 1966, Shaikh Khalifa considered a visit to Washington. London had no objection to such a visit, but asked that State Department officials avoid "speculative discussions of the future of the Gulf" during conversations with the Bahraini shaikh. Whitehall also advised that, while in Washington, the Bahraini Ruler's brother be received "at the Assistant Secretary level or lower."⁴⁰

Invited by BAPCO, Shaikh Khalifa arrived in New York in November 1966. State Department officials preparing for his arrival in Washington noted that the United States had considerable interest in Shaikh Khalifa's small country. They also commented that the Bahraini ruling family refused to provide "any meaningful form of representative government" to its people and that, while the unemployment rate in Bahrain was high, the family spent a considerable amount of the shaikhdom's revenue on itself.⁴¹

From the American Embassy in Jeddah, Ambassador Hermann Eilts suggested how Washington could assist Bahrain. He proposed that Washington encourage investments in Bahraini industry and provide student grants. At the same time, Ambassador Eilts recommended that the Saudis be persuaded to finance scholarships that would enable Gulf students to study in either Europe or the United States.⁴²

These numerous issues that occupied Bahrain's rulers were abruptly overshadowed in June 1967, when once again another

Arab-Israeli conflict began, the Six Days' War. Bahrain had faithfully supported the Arab boycott of Israel, which even included banning both Elizabeth Taylor's movies and Frank Sinatra's records because both stars supported Israel.⁴³ After Arab radio stations reported what soon became known as the "Big Lie," that both Washington and London took part in Israeli air attacks on Egyptian bases, angry Bahrainis gathered outside the British Political Agency. But the Bahraini shaikh, ever loyal to Britain, acted quickly to prevent violence. Shaikh Isa pulled up in front of the agency, climbed on to the hood of his car, and demanded that the crowd disperse. His subjects obeyed.⁴⁴ In addition to insuring that order was maintained on the streets, the shaikh continued to support his Arab allies as well and offered to pay the transportation costs to the war zone for any resident of Bahrain who was committed to fighting the Israelis.⁴⁵

Although Israel's 1967 victory was distressing for Bahrain and the entire Arab world, at the beginning of 1968, Bahrain's rulers received another unexpected blow. London announced that as a result of serious economic difficulties, HMG planned to withdraw from the Gulf region. Ironically, in November 1967, as the last British troops departed from Aden, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Goronwy Roberts had traveled through the Gulf to assure the shaikhdom's rulers that Britain intended to maintain its position there. The Gulf rulers had been pleased, because neither Manama nor its neighbors wanted to dispense with British protection.

But Britain was on the verge of bankruptcy. In November, the Treasury devaluated the pound sterling and HMG turned to the International Monetary Fund to request an emergency loan.⁴⁶ Once again, Minister of State Roberts traveled to the Gulf. In Bahrain, he met with leading members of the Al-Khalifa family on January 8, 1968. Britain had changed course, he explained. HMG, led by the Labour Party, had decided to withdraw from the Gulf by March 31, 1971. Roberts underlined the importance of bringing all of Gulf states together to plan for the post-British era.⁴⁷

Before publicly announcing its intention to withdraw from the Gulf, the Labour government sent Foreign Secretary George Brown to inform American officials. After returning from his visit to Washington, Foreign Secretary Brown reported that he had “a disturbing and distasteful discussion” with US Secretary of State Dean Rusk. According to Brown, he carefully explained London’s decision to withdraw from the Persian Gulf by the end of 1971. Secretary of State Rusk was clearly shocked. He responded using the phrase “For God’s sake act like Britain.” Brown emphasized to his colleagues that the news of their plan to withdraw from the Gulf had seriously shaken American confidence in the new British government.⁴⁸

Britain’s Conservative Party leaders expressed their opposition to the planned British departure from the Gulf and claimed that once they returned to office, they would revoke it. However, after returning to power, the Conservatives followed the plan laid out by their Labour opponents.⁴⁹

Bahrain’s rulers considered it unlikely that the small Gulf shaikhdoms would be able to achieve unity. From the perspective of the Al-Khalifa family, HMG’s decision to leave the Gulf was a betrayal. Hoping to convince the British to stay, Shaikh Isa offered to forego the 350,000 pound annual payment by Britain for the use of Bahraini military facilities. According to Shaikh Khalifa, “the British were leaving Bahrain to be kicked like a football between the players in the Gulf game.”⁵⁰ However, from the perspective of Defense Secretary Denis Healey, it would be a serious mistake to permit British troops to assume the role of mercenaries. During a BBC television interview, he said, “I don’t very much like the idea of being a sort of white slaver for Arab shaikhs.”⁵¹

US officials too were unhappy with Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson’s decision to leave the Gulf. President Lyndon Johnson expressed his displeasure and wrote to the Labour Prime Minister:

I cannot conceal from you my deep dismay upon learning this profoundly discouraging news. If these steps are taken, they will be

tantamount to British withdrawal from world affairs, with all that means for the future safety and health of the free world. The structure of peace-keeping will be shaken to its foundations. Our own capability and political will could be gravely weakened if we have to man the ramparts alone.⁵²

British diplomats serving in the Gulf were also distressed by their government's decision. Political Resident Sir Stewart Crawford claimed that the announcement shattered confidence in British diplomacy. In London, members of the Conservative opposition showed their solidarity with these diplomats by joining the chorus of those expressing their displeasure with Prime Minister Wilson's decision.⁵³

Bahrain's rulers wanted the British government to reconsider its decision. Approximately 3,000 members of the British military were stationed in Bahrain. In addition, another 3,000 British subjects, businessmen and professional men with their families, also resided there. According to Political Agent Anthony Parsons, who served in Manama from 1965 to 1969, under British protection "the way of life of the Bahrainis, shaikhs, merchants and people as a whole, went on in a variety of traditional patterns, apparently unaffected by the pressures of foreign influence."⁵⁴ Thus, Bahrain enjoyed British protection, and its leaders were not yet prepared to agree to its removal.

There was also concern that the Shah might once again claim Bahrain as a province of Iran. On March 9, 1970, the Shah asked the United Nations to investigate the issue. The Secretary-General appointed a mission to ascertain the wishes of the Bahraini people. Did Bahrainis, with a population of approximately 200,000, want their shaikhdom annexed by Iran, or did they wish their shaikhdom to become an independent state? The UN Secretary-General appointed Italian diplomat Vittorio Winspeare Guicciardi to head the mission formed to study the question. After traveling to Bahrain and seeking Bahraini views, the UN mission reported that the vast majority of the population rejected Iran's claim and wanted an independent state.⁵⁵ According to Iranian Prime Minister Abbas Hoveyda, Iran

wished to maintain excellent relations with its Muslim brothers on the other side of the Gulf, “especially people of Bahrain.”⁵⁶

Meanwhile, Washington feared that Bahrain and its neighbors would now request that the United States agree to step in and assume Britain’s military responsibilities in the Gulf. US Consul General Allen was instructed that if Shaikh Isa asked about Washington’s future plans in the area, he should say that the United States was not prepared to take on “Britain’s protective role.”⁵⁷

Bahrain’s Foreign Affairs Director Shaikh Mohamed bin Mubarak Al-Khalifa visited Washington in May 1970. He called on Assistant Secretary of State Joseph Sisco, who asked what Washington could do to assist Bahrain. Shaikh Mohamed stated that his shaikhdom wanted “more direct contact” with the United States. Shaikh Mohamed warned that his country was under Soviet pressure to establish closer relations. Hence, although Bahrain enjoyed an excellent relationship with American diplomats serving in Dhahran, Bahrain did not want the United States to wait until the British officially departed before opening a consulate or at least a trade office in Manama. Assistant Secretary of State Sisco told his Bahraini visitor that the United States did not want to import the Cold War into the Gulf and that Washington looked “to enlightened leadership from Shah, Faisal, and other leaders, including Bahrainis.”⁵⁸

Bahraini leaders were now uneasy. They did not want Iran to annex their country, nor did they wish to open their borders to Soviet infiltration. They strongly identified with the Arab world, but at the same time desired Western protection, either through the continuation of a substantial British role or through closer relations with the United States.

CHAPTER 3



FROM INDEPENDENCE TO THE RAMADAN/YOM KIPPUR WAR

The Persian Gulf Review Group of President Nixon's National Security Council (NSC) met in spring 1970 to discuss Washington's strategy toward the Gulf after Britain's withdrawal from the region. Members of the group considered four possibilities: replacing Britain as protector of the Gulf, supporting either Saudi Arabia or Iran for a leading position in the area, advocating for a joint Saudi-Iranian role, or promoting a regional security pact. In its report to National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger, the group agreed that the logical solution was to support Iran "as the unquestioned power in the region" and, at the same time, to urge cooperation between influential Tehran and the much weaker Riyadh.¹

At the beginning of the year, US Secretary of State William Rogers had favored the Iranian idea of Gulf security arrangement that included Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the small Gulf states, claiming that such an arrangement would promote stability and "perhaps even more important it might tend to discourage adventurous undertakings on part of certain radical Arab states such as Iraq . . ." ² Britain's last Political Resident in Bahrain, Sir Geoffrey Arthur, later wrote: "We have kept Arab and Persian apart. What happens when we leave? It seems easy: Saudi Arabia and Iran must agree. So we have fostered the growth of their

friendship, not entirely without success; but the soil in which it is rooted is sour, and it is doubtful whether the plant will ever be strong enough to bear fruit.”³

In June 1970, the President’s NSC Persian Gulf Review Group advised that it was unwise to rely totally on Saudi-Iranian cooperation. Hence, the Americans looked at what sort of presence Washington ought to develop in the Gulf. It appeared clear that the wealthy Gulf region needed both technical and educational assistance.⁴

At the same time, the group considered the small American naval force, MIDEASTFOR, which since 1949 had been based in Bahrain after the British provided Washington with access to the Royal Navy’s Bahraini base. The American base had slowly expanded, and in 1966, Americans serving there were permitted to bring their families to Bahrain.⁵ After London announced its departure plans, Washington received word that the Iranian government would be pleased if the US naval force would also depart.⁶ From Tehran, US Ambassador Douglas MacArthur II reported that knowledgeable observers agreed that after Britain left the Gulf, there would be an opportunity for radical Arab groups, encouraged by the Soviet Union, to step in. These observers were confident that the future stability of the Arab side of the Gulf would depend on Iran.⁷

Elections were held in Britain on June 19, 1970. The results, a Conservative Party victory, were unexpected. Prior to the election, the Conservative Party had pledged to revisit the Labour-led government’s decision to withdraw from the Gulf. The Iranian government strongly opposed any suggestion that the British might change their plans and remain in place. Iranian Prime Minister Hoveyda told US Ambassador MacArthur that, in 1968, during conversation with Edward Heath, Hoveyda had made it “crystal clear” that Iran wanted Britain to remain firm in its commitment to leave the Gulf.⁸

Ignoring the possibility that Britain might cancel its withdrawal from the Gulf, Ambassador MacArthur told Washington that since neither the United States nor any of its democratic allies were prepared to replace Britain in the Gulf, Iran was the

only solution, “virtually [our] only really dependable friend” in the Middle East. Ambassador MacArthur admitted that some shaikhs might privately welcome a continuation of Britain’s role. However, these shaikhs “fear being branded as lackeys of colonialists and imperialists.”⁹ But from London, US Ambassador Walter Annenberg reported that, according to British officials, the Gulf shaikhs were not at all unhappy with the idea that the British might stay. After the Conservative victory, the Bahrainis assumed that now Britain would not withdraw from their region, that plans for Britain’s departure would be shelved.¹⁰

The newly installed British government turned to its own diplomats serving in Arab states for their views on whether or not Her Majesty’s Government (HMG) ought to proceed with plans to end its treaties with Gulf rulers, to withdraw its military, and to leave the region. Nearly 100 percent of those asked replied that London should move forward with its departure schedule. According to the deputy political resident in Bahrain, whether or not the 1968 announcement that Britain would leave the Gulf was a wise decision, it was too late to renounce it because “to remain would be disruptive factor in increasingly fragile situation.”¹¹

Ignoring Tehran’s wishes, Washington decided to keep MIDEASTFOR in place. During Anglo-American discussions about the Gulf area, on November 18, 1970, Assistant Secretary of State Joseph Sisco emphasized that although Britain’s special relationship with the Gulf was coming to a close, the United States intended to work closely with the British government to insure the stability of the region.¹²

Earlier, when discussing the future of the Gulf, on January 27, 1968, Iran’s Prime Minister Hoveyda had declared that Tehran would not allow any country outside of the region to interfere in the Gulf. According to Hoveyda, “Britain’s exit from one door must not result in American entrance from the other door—or in the British re-entry in another form.”¹³ Members of the State Department’s Persian Gulf Review Group, however, insisted that although the American

force in Bahrain had little military value, it was prudent to keep it in place.¹⁴

At this juncture, there was also an established American presence, dominated by BAPCO, in Bahrain's private sector. In addition to BAPCO, numerous American companies had established regional headquarters in the Amirate. Most were engaged in oil field service. From the conclusion of World War II, Washington had encouraged American business to compete with British commercial interests in the region, and the competition continued.¹⁵

Secretary of State William P. Rogers recommended to President Nixon on July 2, 1971, that in light of American strategic and economic interests in the Gulf, Washington should extend recognition and establish diplomatic relations with Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates as soon as the three states became completely independent.¹⁶ General Alexander Haig Jr. reminded President Nixon, on July 14, 1971, that prior to London's soon-to-arrive departure date, Britain had tried to establish a federation of the small Gulf shaikhdoms. It was clear that a union of all nine shaikhdoms was politically impossible to achieve. However, arrangements had been made for the emergence of a federation of seven states—Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Dubai, Fujairah, Ras al-Khaimah, Sharjah, Umm al-Qaiwain—and two independent states—Bahrain and Qatar. According to General Haig, Bahrain was waiting for approval from Saudi King Faisal before announcing its independence.¹⁷

President Nixon accepted Secretary of State Rogers's recommendations that the United States extend recognition to Bahrain. At the same time, the president approved accrediting Washington's ambassador to Kuwait, William Stoltzfus, as nonresident ambassador to the newly independent states of Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates.¹⁸ The son of Presbyterian missionaries, Stoltzfus was born in Beirut in 1924. Fluent in Arabic, he continued to serve as nonresident ambassador until August 1974. Prior to Stoltzfus's appointment, a member of Henry Kissinger's NSC staff, Harold H. Saunders, noted that the newly independent Gulf states

represented a mixture of traditional Arab culture and “the winds of change.” According to Saunders, change in the region was made possible by a new generation of educated Gulf Arabs. Saunders was confident that Stoltzfus was the appropriate diplomat for the position because he understood and admired traditional Arab society, while at the same time he could easily relate to the first generation of educated young Arab men.¹⁹

On August 15, 1971, Britain and Bahrain exchanged formal notes that concluded the special relationship between the two countries and established a treaty of friendship. Britain also agreed temporarily to continue running Bahrain’s airport and to manage its postal service. While Bahrain’s leaders were pleased that the British agreed not to relinquish their role in either the airport or the post office, they did not want that information made public. After sharing details of the arrangement with Washington, HMG also asked that the arrangement be kept confidential.²⁰

Earlier, Congress had criticized the State Department for spending money on embassies in small African states. But, in 1971, it appeared prudent to post a Chargé d’Affaires in each new state, and in Oman too. To save money and blunt Congressional criticism, Washington relied on traveling Ambassador Stoltzfus, whose headquarters remained in Kuwait. Learning about the American Foreign Service’s funding difficulties, one Gulf ruler said that he would be happy to pay the cost necessary to maintain an American ambassador in his country. According to diplomat Joseph W. Twinam, who in 1974 became the first resident American ambassador in Manama, the idea of a roving ambassador was clever; however, “it flopped.” Ambassador Twinam explained that Gulf rulers appreciated Ambassador Stoltzfus. “But they always viewed him as a respected visitor rather than their American ambassador.”²¹

The problem of funding concerned Secretary of State Rogers. In November 1971, he speculated that the newly independent Bahrain might call on the United States to provide military or economic assistance. Rogers underlined that

it was important for US officials in Manama to avoid giving the impression that, after an agreement for the continuation of MIDEASTFOR was signed, Washington would be receptive to granting either free technical or military assistance to Bahrain. Of course, the Navy would agree to pay a reasonable rent for its base in Bahrain, a rent that would exceed the commercial rental value of the leased properties.²²

In December 1971, the chairman of the Senate's Committee on Foreign Relations, J. William Fulbright, had voiced concern about the continuation of Washington's naval presence in Bahrain after Britain's departure. The White House told Senator Fulbright that pulling out the small US force, which since 1949 had been present in the Gulf, would send the erroneous signal that Washington was no longer interested in the region. At the same time, the White House assured Senator Fulbright that the stationing agreement with Bahrain would "not contain any explicit or implicit United States military or political commitments to Bahrain or any other government."²³

Senator Fulbright was also disturbed that the arrangement to maintain the American naval force in Bahrain had been reached by Executive Agreement, thus bypassing the Senate. Congress had provided neither advice nor consent. Responding to this criticism, the administration replied that Arab states would be uncomfortable signing treaties with Western powers. "In our view the Government of Bahrain would tend to imply some security commitment on our part, whereas what we in fact are seeking in Bahrain is a simple administrative arrangement for logistic support."²⁴

Washington and Manama concluded an agreement on December 23, 1971. The first American chargé in Manama, John Gatch, played a leading role in the negotiations, which provided for the continued presence of US Naval Forces in the Gulf region.²⁵ The negotiations took six months to complete. Negotiations took place with Bahrain's Minister of Development and Industry Yusuf bin Ahmad Al-Shirawi, who Whitehall considered to be Manama's most outstanding Bahraini official.

The British referred to him as intelligent and competent, and claimed that he did the work “of about six men.”²⁶

Minister Al-Shirawi, who called himself “the Chairman of the Committee for the Liquidation of the British Empire,” emphasized two issues: rent and education. The issue of rent was settled when Washington agreed to pay Manama their desired annual rent in Bahraini dinars. In addition, the Americans pledged the continuation of their support for the Department of Defense School in Bahrain, a school that not only enrolled American children, but also educated Bahraini children, including Al-Shirawi’s daughters.²⁷

John Finney, correspondent for *The New York Times*, wrote an article about the agreement, which was published on January 6, 1972. Finney noted that the agreement with Bahrain was an Executive Agreement and that some members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee opposed such agreements, claiming that the executive branch was attempting to make foreign commitments without the Senate’s consent.²⁸ State Department officials explained that the agreement was not a treaty and contained neither military nor political commitments. Washington was merely renting one-tenth of Bahrain’s Jufair base, which included a soccer field, in order to show the US flag in the Persian Gulf and in the Red Sea.²⁹

The Iranian press carried editorials expressing displeasure that Washington was replacing London in the Gulf. Tehran’s press claimed that the American warships did not help secure the region, but instead jeopardized regional security. The US embassy in Tehran insisted that these editorials did not reflect the Iranian government’s true position. Tehran wanted an American naval presence, but wished to keep up appearances and stand together with its Muslim neighbors. At the same time, Iran did not want to leave an opening for a Soviet naval presence in the region.³⁰ US Ambassador in Tehran Douglas MacArthur II discussed these editorials with the Iranian publisher Senator Massoudi and asked the Iranian press to refrain from criticizing Bahrain’s arrangement with the United States. Massoudi agreed to the American request.³¹

According to the US Consul in Dhahran, in the lower Gulf region, the focus on the United States-Bahraini agreement was ebbing. However, staunch critics continued to insist that the agreement was evidence that the United States was stepping in to assume Britain's imperialist role. At the same time, those who were pleased with the American presence saw the US Navy as a shield for small Arab states that feared Iran's desire to expand. The US Consulate in Dhahran suggested that when discussing MIDEASTFOR, it was best to call Bahrain its "Home Port" rather than its "Base."³²

On February 15, 1972, the very last British troops stationed in Bahrain left the country. Reporting on their departure, Britain's first ambassador to Bahrain, Alexander Stirling, said that although the dismantling of Britain's military presence had been extremely complicated, the British forces left behind a legacy of goodwill. He underlined that the Royal Air Force was now especially missed because Bahraini officials "had found it comforting to have the Hunters overhead."

During the complicated task of arranging for their departure, the British also had to take into account MIDEASTFOR. According to Stirling, dealing with the Americans "caused near apoplexy to both sides and gave us more trouble than all the British and Bahraini authorities combined." Ambassador Stirling praised his Head of Chancery, Peter Raftery, claiming that Raftery's diplomacy so impressed Bahraini ministers that the final withdrawal of British forces "left our relations with Bahrain on the best possible footing." However, Stirling warned that the British departure gave communist powers an opportunity.³³ Whitehall praised the smooth handover to Bahrain and complimented Ambassador Stirling and his staff.³⁴

Indeed, Moscow now saw an opportunity to engage the newly independent Gulf states. British control had long stood as an impediment to Soviet penetration. Hence, as the British departed, the Soviet Union quickly offered to establish diplomatic relations with Qatar, with the United Arab Emirates, and with Bahrain. Although the United Arab Emirates appeared

willing to establish relations with Moscow, both Qatar and Bahrain declined to do so.³⁵

Meanwhile, Bahrain's agreement to allow the continuation of an American naval presence continued to garner publicity. Unhappy that the stationing agreement had not been submitted for US Senate approval, Senator Clifford P. Case introduced a rider to a Senate Appropriations committee bill that precluded any assistance to Bahrain unless the base agreement was now submitted to the Senate. Manama complained that the ongoing attention given to the base was embarrassing. Kuwait's Foreign Minister Shaikh Sabah had earlier suggested that Bahrain cancel the agreement and, referring to the rent charged Washington, said, "If you really need 600,000 dollars a year, Kuwait will give it to you." According to American Chargé Gatch, Bahrain's foreign minister was "as close to anger as I have yet observed."³⁶

Bahrain's security remained a matter of concern to both London and Washington. British Ambassador Stirling discussed the issue of costal surveillance with American diplomat Gatch. Although the British had no recent evidence of disloyalty within the Bahrain Defense Force, Stirling said that HMG had advised the Bahraini Ruler against maintaining such a force because an armed force without a clear mission was inviting trouble for the ruling family. Yes, costal surveillance was essential, but according to Stirling, the task ought to be assigned to the police force.³⁷

US Ambassador Stoltzfus visited Bahrain in April 1972, where he met with the Ruler, Shaikh Isa, and his Foreign Minister, Shaikh Mubarak. Although Shaikh Isa was not concerned about the publicity focused on MIDEASTFOR, Foreign Minister Mubarak complained that publicity about the stationing agreement was not good for Bahrain and suggested that if the publicity continued, Washington ought to consider an alternative arrangement for MIDEASTFOR. Foreign Minister Mubarak also called the ambassador's attention to the continuing activity in neighboring Oman of the Soviet-supported Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman (PFLO).³⁸

Soon after, as he prepared for the end of his tenure in Manama, Alexander Stirling, Britain's first ambassador to Bahrain, called the Bahrainis "the nicest Arabs that I have met." He reviewed the country's progress and claimed that "Bahrain has been brought safely through the shocks of losing our apron strings and, tiny though it is, it will repay our continued active attention." Ambassador Stirling was convinced that the British were truly popular in Bahrain, and thus their influence would continue. Since HMG withdrew from the Gulf, the British population of Bahrain had almost doubled to 3,500. These British were engaged in business activities and in providing technical assistance. However, Stirling remained concerned that it might not be possible to keep communist influence out of the Gulf.³⁹

Dedicated to preventing such communist expansion, US Secretary of State William Rogers traveled to London in June 1972 to attend the annual meeting of ministers representing the member states of the Central Treaty Organization, CENTO, which included representatives from Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. At the meeting, Secretary Rogers stated that the US ships now stationed in the Gulf were outdated and would be replaced. Soon after, the American Secretary of State visited Manama to reinforce Washington's commitment to the Gulf.⁴⁰

After providing the Amir with a letter from President Nixon, Secretary Rogers assured Bahrain's rulers that even the US Senate did not question the importance of the American naval presence in Bahrain. The difficulty between the Congress and the president only involved the issue of executive agreements that bypassed the Senate. The ties between the two countries now rested on a firm foundation.⁴¹

While Washington maintained its presence in Bahrain, London too continued its interest in the newly independent country and in the entire Gulf region. The British agreed with the American assessment that Bahraini cooperation with Iran was essential.⁴² In a meeting with Foreign Office officials during a visit to London in August 1972, Foreign Minister Shaikh Mubarak noted that the United Arab Emirates was

working effectively. However, Bahrain was concerned that perhaps Dubai's Ruler, Shaikh Rashid, might decide to leave the union, and thus destroy it. Meanwhile, Abu Dhabi's Ruler, Shaikh Zaid, was still occupied with working out differences with Saudi Arabia, which had to be settled before he could reach an understanding with Iran. According to Shaikh Mubarak, if the state on the Arab side of the Gulf were effectively able to unite, it would be easier to achieve a meaningful agreement with the Shah. In order to transport Saudi oil, King Faisal wanted access to the sea via Abu Dhabi's territory. Bahrain considered it prudent for Shaikh Zaid to agree to the Saudi request.⁴³

As Bahrain encouraged Arab Gulf cooperation with Saudi Arabia, London continued its ongoing efforts to assist Manama by agreeing to accept Bahraini candidates in British military courses and to train Bahraini policemen.⁴⁴ Earlier, Washington too had participated in an effort to prepare the Bahraini military, admitting the Ruler's son, Shaikh Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa, to an officers' training course at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. After his son completed the year-long course at the US Army General Staff College, Shaikh Isa sent a letter of appreciation to Washington saying: "The twelve months our son has spent at Fort Leavenworth have been of immeasurable value in advancing his knowledge of military affairs and will be of the greatest benefit to him in his duties as commander of the defense force of the State of Bahrain."⁴⁵ In August, when young Shaikh Hamad, now Bahrain's minister of defense, was planning to visit Jordan, underlining the future of MIDEASTFOR, US officials in Manama informed their embassy in Amman that Shaikh Hamad "will inevitably play a major role in continuation of warm relationship now existing between GOB and USG."⁴⁶

Ties with Washington were growing, but London was not forgotten. One indication of the excellent continuing relationship between Britain and Bahrain was an invitation to visit the Amirate extended by Manama to former Political Agent Anthony Parsons. After accepting the invitation, Parsons asked Whitehall to provide him with an update on conditions in Bahrain. He learned that the country's first popular elections

had been held on December 1, 1972, and that the voters selected 22 members to serve in the nation's Assembly together with an equal member of members appointed by Ruler Shaikh Isa. The task of the Assembly was to draft a constitution within six months.⁴⁷ According to scholar Emile Nakhleh, Shaikh Isa "viewed the Constitution as a gift from him to the people—an expression of royal benevolence."⁴⁸

On Bahrain's second independence day, December 17, 1972, the Amir opened the first session of Bahrain's constitutional Assembly. The Ruler emphasized that all of the Assembly's members, both those elected and those appointed, were Bahraini nationals. He also discussed the question of Palestine, calling on all Arabs to unite to resolve the problem of Palestine, and all other mutual difficulties. According to American Chargé Gatch, the Assembly represented the main elements of Bahraini society, including the educated elite. The average age of the members was 40. But among the Assembly's members were also a few "respected elders from both commercial and governmental spheres." In addition, Sunni and Shia were equally represented with each religious sect holding 21 seats.⁴⁹

Prior to traveling to Manama, Parsons also learned from Whitehall about the ongoing problems plaguing relations between Bahrain and Qatar. Whitehall was convinced that Qatari Ruler Shaikh Khalifa Al-Thani sincerely wanted to improve the relationship and "made somewhat feeble attempts to woo the Bahrainis with offers of economic help."⁵⁰

At the beginning of January 1973, Parsons spent four days in Bahrain. As a result of his earlier experience in the country, he knew that Shaikh Isa, who had ruled since 1961, was astute, but had only a primary education. Bahrain's Ruler was a man who favored tradition and was distrustful of change. At the same time, he was brave and extremely generous. Critics pointed to his weakness for European women, a weakness he made no effort to hide.⁵¹ He took an interest in attractive foreign women, who he observed on a local beach. "Female beachgoers who caught his eye were routinely invited to join the Emir for coffee on a terrace overlooking the Persian Gulf."⁵²

Parsons reported that relations between London and Manama “have never been better.” At the same time, Parsons was favorably impressed with Bahraini accomplishments since he had left the Gulf, including the Assembly that was working on writing a constitution. Parsons noted that one of the members of that Assembly was Abd al Aziz Shamlan, who had been among the group of three Bahrainis imprisoned on the Island of St. Helena. Parsons also noted that a variety of ministries had been established and appeared to function “with an efficiency unknown elsewhere in the Arab world.”⁵³

Parsons observed that as a result of foreign investment, there were more than ample employment opportunities for both men and women. He praised the British teachers working in Bahrain and pointed out that offices were now “full of girls in European dress hammering at typewriters.” In addition, the British-inspired Gulf Technical College was flourishing, producing students prepared for available employment opportunities.⁵⁴ Parsons failed to note that despite the presence of women in the work place, women had not been permitted to vote in Bahrain’s December 1972 elections. Women’s groups protested their exclusion and attempted to promote a change in Bahraini election laws. Shaikh Isa expressed an interest in the issue, but did not take steps to make the necessary change.⁵⁵

American officials in Manama now turned their attention to improving their chancery and the residence of their chargé. They asked Washington for funds to increase the height of the walls surrounding the chancery’s compound, to build an out-house for the three police guards on duty after closing hours, and to repaint the embassy’s official sedan black in order “to make it less conspicuous.” In addition, the officials suggested that accommodations suitable to house two servants be constructed at the chargé’s temporary residence, a residence that was owned by the British government. The officials wondered if London would be willing to share the cost for upgrades to their building. At the same time, US officials in Manama noted that Washington paid London rent for the premises that was below the current market value, so perhaps not!⁵⁶

Oil production in Bahrain was a primary concern at this juncture; it was declining, down 8 percent from the previous year. Efforts to locate new wells failed. Saudi Prince Sultan visited Bahrain in early 1973. Bahraini shaikhs stressed the importance of Saudi economic support, underlining the fact that Manama's oil resources were dwindling. At the same time, Bahrain was engaged in increasing its capacity to refine oil. However, refining oil was not especially lucrative; in April 1973, the Amirate considered increasing the price from the established rate of four cents a barrel.⁵⁷

Bahrain required additional income. Defense Minister Prince Hamad wished to improve his country's defenses, but Bahrain's limited resources were used for necessary social and health programs. Concerned about the growing strength of communist groups in both Aden and Iraq, Prince Hamad was interested in a recent US government coastal survey report of the Gulf. He agreed with the report's suggestion that the Gulf states needed sea and air capability. Unfortunately, the estimated cost for that capability was between five to six million dollars. Commenting to Washington on Prince Hamad's concerns, an American official suggested that Bahrain appeal to Saudi Arabia or Kuwait for funds, "both of whom have strategic interests in their smaller and poorer neighbor."⁵⁸

Apprehension about Bahrain's security increased after Bahraini security police, directed by Englishman Ian Henderson, arrested approximately 40 members of the Marxist Popular Front for the Liberation of the Arab Gulf (PFLOAG). Those arrested included two women. Amir Isa stated, "he was determined to act firmly against the few who wish to destroy everything which has been built up in Bahrain."⁵⁹

At this juncture, in April 1973, Bahraini authorities were not convinced that they had the capacity to prevent Arab radicals from carrying out terrorist attacks against a variety of foreign targets, including the US Embassy, the US Navy, and BAPCO. The American Embassy in Manama noted that the Palestinian Black September organization was present in the area and stressed the importance of providing the Bahraini police with

any information Americans had about Black September's operations in the Gulf.⁶⁰

Despite the possibility of terrorist acts, some members of the Bahraini elite appeared to sympathize with the PFLOAG. Nevertheless, Director Henderson promoted a hard line. He warned that if the government appeared to deal leniently with the PFLOAG, the danger of terrorist activity would increase.⁶¹

Amir Isa was firmly opposed to permitting any terrorist organization to gain a foothold in the Gulf region. When American General Andrew Goodpaster visited Shaikh Isa, in April 1973, the Amir discussed his concerns about terrorism. He wanted the Gulf states to do more to combat the threat. Amir Isa planned soon to visit Saudi Arabia. He intended to ask King Faisal to use his influence to convince the Gulf states to cooperate. According to Shaikh Isa, "he was proud of Bahrain's contacts with the U.S. and wanted them to expand, despite what Arab trouble makers might think."⁶²

In addition to its growing concern about terrorism since Britain's departure from the Gulf, Bahrain was distressed that Qatar once again claimed the Hawar Islands. In April 1973, Bahrain's Ruler Shaikh Isa planned to travel to Riyadh to consult Saudi King Faisal, who was attempting to resolve the Qatari-Bahraini dispute. Shaikh Isa later suggested that the British had permitted the dispute to continue for many years "because they did not wish their small fish to swim in clear water."⁶³

London noted, in May 1973, that although Bahrain's relations with Gulf states were generally good, Bahrain continued to distrust Qatar. As a result of Saudi pressure, both states agreed to hold twice-monthly talks in order to increase cooperation. Among the topics discussed was a union between Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. However, such a union appeared "a very remote possibility."⁶⁴

Qatar's Ruler wanted British Ambassador David Crawford to pressure Bahrain's Ruler. Whitehall said no. Prior to Britain's departure from the Gulf, HMG's policy had been to accept frontier changes in the region if these changes had been agreed

upon by the area's rulers. Now Whitehall was prepared to counsel both sides to settle their differences, but refused to pressure one side, which "could of course be construed as unjustified interference."⁶⁵

London, meanwhile, continued efforts to maintain good relations with Manama. After two senior Bahraini ministers sitting in a VIP lounge at Heathrow airport were searched while waiting to board a BOAC airplane, the Foreign Office made arrangements to insure that in future such checks would take place more discretely. British authorities were, of course, concerned about security, but at the same time did not want to antagonize the Amir or alienate valuable customers.⁶⁶

Amir Isa's son, Minister of Defense Shaikh Hamad, who was "happiest when discussing military matters," was among the Bahraini dignitaries planning to travel to London during the summer of 1973. Whitehall noted that Shaikh Hamad had "his father's weakness for women," but, since his 1968 marriage, he had settled down. According to Whitehall, Shaikh Hamad played both football and basketball and had recently started to play golf. He also enjoyed horses and wanted to introduce polo to Bahrain.⁶⁷

According to British Ambassador Robert Tesh, Shaikh Hamad planned to concentrate on policy matters during his visit and, therefore, was not accompanied by his wife, Shaika Sabeeka. Tesh assured the Foreign Office that Shaikh Hamad was seriously interested in arranging for British assistance to train Bahrain's military. In addition, despite his experience in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, Shaikh Hamad wanted to buy British rather than American defense items.⁶⁸

Amir Isa also traveled to London in spring 1973. Prior to his trip to England, Amir Isa stopped in Amman to visit King Hussein. Speaking to the Jordanian press, he praised the Hashemite Kingdom and criticized the Arab states, led by Egypt and Syria, who had severed relations with Jordan. Pointing to the 200-year dispute between Iran and Bahrain, he emphasized that quarrels can be settled and that the Arab states ought to come together and resolve their differences.⁶⁹

Anticipating the arrival of Amir Isa in London for medical treatment, the Foreign Office wished to arrange a meeting between the Bahraini Ruler and British Prime Minister Edward Heath. Shaikh Isa's visit would be his first since Bahrain's independence. According to Middle East Department official Patrick Wright, "although Bahrain is not a leading actor on the world stage, the Bahrainis value their relationship with us highly, and Britain and the British continue to play an important part in the life of Bahrain."⁷⁰

Arrangements were made for Shaikh Isa to lunch with both the Queen and Prime Minister Heath. In addition, Bahrain's Ruler was invited to attend the "Trooping of the Colour ceremony." The British considered Bahrain's economy to be satisfactory because investors continued to be attracted to the Amirate and to recognize its opportunities for growth. Bahrain now had an operating aluminum smelter and would soon have a new dry dock. London conveyed to Shaikh Isa Britain's desire that a stable Bahrain move forward as a hub of commerce. One example that illustrated the growing joint efforts in the Gulf was the local airline, Gulf Air, in which the British airline, BOAC, held shares. The United Arab Emirates had proposed that BOAC be excluded, and BOAC expressed its willingness to leave if its departure from Gulf Air was officially requested. However, it appeared that Bahrain did not agree.⁷¹

Clearly, Bahrain was progressing. Oil reserves, however, were small. Production only amounted to 75,000 barrels daily, far less than the amount produced in either Saudi Arabia or Qatar. However, the second largest oil refinery in the Middle East was located in Bahrain, and Saudi crude oil flowed into that refinery. In addition, the Bahrainis had constructed a large aluminum smelter and a flourmill. They were also engaged in manufacturing paper, prefabricated houses, tiles, cement pipe, and asphalt. A new international airport had just been completed, and a new hospital was under construction. In addition, a British firm was in the midst of constructing a desulphurization plant.⁷²

Always mindful of the importance of Saudi Arabia, in July Amir Isa visited King Faisal. At the conclusion of his three-day visit, the two rulers issued a joint communiqué. King Faisal expressed support for construction of a dry dock in Bahrain, and both agreed that plans for construction of a causeway between their two countries would proceed. Finally, the two rulers stated that they were prepared to join brother Gulf leaders to prevent “the infiltration of any elements which aim at eliminating the Islamic faith and the eternal Arab heritage.” They also emphasized their desire to liberate the Holy Land from the “Zionist usurper” and called upon the entire Muslim world to join them.⁷³

During the summer of 1973, the Nixon White House was in the process of evaluating Washington’s role in the Gulf. The NSC concluded that it was important to maintain the US presence in the area and that for too long Washington had deferred to London in the region. The small states needed the United States. “Although the Shaykhs are not physicists, they know that there is a relentless trend to fill vacuums and they see too many willing to fill that vacuum.” At the same time, the Nixon administration had no wish to increase either the scope or the size of MIDEASTFOR. Washington was concerned that a larger US presence would lead to an increased Soviet presence and also “bring the wrath of the leftist-nationalist press to bear on Bahrain.”⁷⁴

At the same time, Bahrain was in the process of moving toward constitutional government. In July, Amir Isa signed a decree stipulating that elections for a National Assembly, consisting of 30 elected members, be held before December 16, Bahrain’s National Day. All male citizens, age 20 and older, were granted the right to vote. Women, however, were denied that right, leading to speculation that Bahrain’s rulers wished to avoid offending the Saudis. Candidates for National Assembly seats had to be Bahraini citizens, at least 30 years old, and able to read and write Arabic. Members of the elite, who represented Bahrain’s leading commercial families, had earlier served as appointed members of the Constitutional Assembly, but now appeared reluctant to serve if first they had to run for

office. According to the US Chargé d'Affaires R. Stein, "the absence of appointed members [in the new Assembly] confronts these families with a difficult choice."⁷⁵

In October 1973, attention throughout the Gulf was diverted from all other issues. War broke out between the Arab states and Israel, the war that began during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan and on the Jewish holy day of Yom Kippur. The US Embassy in Manama reported to Washington, on October 11, that while closely following events, the American community in Bahrain appeared to be relaxed. Although the local population was focused on the war, as yet there was no indication of anti-American sentiment.⁷⁶ The American embassy in Manama later advised the State Department that it was unnecessary to issue a warning against travel to Bahrain, nor was it necessary to encourage the approximately 400 Americans residing there to leave the country.⁷⁷

Nevertheless, fearing that Arab anger might yet be directed against the United States, in Bahrain US Admiral Robert J. Hanks ordered all military personnel to wear civilian clothing. He also met with the wives of his sailors, telling them to remain calm and to avoid the *sug*. Soon after, demonstrators in the *sug* carried signs calling for the Americans to leave their Bahraini naval base. After the demonstration, Shaikh Isa asked both diplomat Samuel Starrett and Admiral Hanks to visit him at Rifaa Palace. Noting that Washington was supplying both weapons and funds to Israel, Shaikh Isa told his American visitors that his government had reluctantly decided to expel MIDEASTFOR.⁷⁸

Later, Shaikh Hamad claimed that the Bahrain Defense Force played a role "in the glorious Ramadan War." He wrote that Bahrain had formed a combat group to discharge the "sacred duty" of supporting Saudi Arabia if the Saudis had found it necessary to enter the battle, which, of course, they did not. However, according to Shaikh Hamad, "For me personally, our readiness to join the war and the heroism displayed by the Arab troops helped to heal the wounds of the disaster of June 1967."⁷⁹

Following the 1973 Ramadan/Yom Kippur War, the American Embassy in Manama counseled the State Department that it was unnecessary to advise against travel to Bahrain.⁸⁰ As for the British, who did not assist Israel during the recent war, British Ambassador Robert Tesh later recalled that Arab success in battle and the implementation of the oil embargo stirred Arab pride, but many Bahrainis “would have been embarrassed to have had to apply the embargo to us.”⁸¹

Although on October 20, 1973, Manama had asked Washington to remove its naval force from Bahrain, the Amir changed his mind. In November, Amir Isa insisted that he would like MIDEASTFOR to stay. He did not want the October War to have a negative impact on Bahraini-American relations. Speaking to the American Chargé, on November 13, the Ruler explained that he was very unhappy about the cancellation of the US Navy stationing agreement. He also expressed contempt for Iraqis. According to Shaikh Isa, during the October war, Baghdad had threatened that if Bahrain’s airport was used to supply material to Israel, Iraq would bomb it. The Amir now insisted that the termination notice sent to the US Navy was not final, that the matter would be considered further, and the US Navy would remain in Bahrain.⁸²

The Amir explained that during the course of the war some of his ministers, including his foreign minister, overreacted. Amir Isa’s brother, Prime Minister Shaikh Khalifa, however, had agreed that MIDEASTFOR ought to remain in Bahrain.⁸³ Speaking to British Ambassador Tesh, on November 18, 1973, Shaikh Khalifa complained that “Egypt had cheated Bahrain.” Despite the Ramadan War, President Sadat had resumed diplomatic relations with Washington. Hence, Bahrain ought not be required to cancel MIDEASTFOR.⁸⁴

While discussion concerning the future of MIDEASTFOR continued, on December 16, 1973, National Day, Bahrain’s first elected Parliament was inaugurated. Amir Isa addressed the members, emphasizing that Bahrain was a part of the Arab Nation and also a member of the International community. He underlined Bahrain’s commitment to the Palestinians

and to defending the rights of all Arabs. He discussed the importance of both education and public health. In addition, he also emphasized economic issues, explaining that the government could not rely on oil revenue and that, therefore, a diversified Bahraini economy was essential. Amir Isa reported that in the previous five years more than 400 million dollars had been invested in Bahrain. According to the Ruler, committees had been established to work together with other Gulf States.⁸⁵

Bahrain's new Parliament included a substantial number of leftists. The election of these individuals distressed both the Amir and the Prime Minister. However, other notables now insisted that Bahrain had the ability to establish a genuine democracy where criticism is open and all opinions are discussed. Viewing the members of the new Parliament, Ambassador Tesh reported to London that his "main preoccupation will now be to try to educate them without appearing to play old-style British Political Agent." According to the British Ambassador,

Our line should be that Bahrain has had popular, peaceful, honest and well-organized elections, that the Government is competent and able to work with a Parliament in which public feeling can find an outlet and that the more friendly support it gets the better for the Gulf.⁸⁶

The continuing good will toward MIDEASTFOR in Bahrain had been underlined when, despite the Arab oil boycott, which included the discontinuation of the supply of Saudi crude oil to BAPCO's refinery throughout the October war and its aftermath, BAPCO still supplied fuel for MIDEASTFOR ships.⁸⁷ Listing the arguments in favor of MIDEASTFOR, the American Embassy in Manama reported to Washington that the force was small and did not indicate an American effort to meddle in Gulf affairs. Nevertheless, the US naval presence balanced the increasingly more frequent visits of Soviet ships into the area, and if the United States withdrew, it might provide the impression that it was abandoning the Gulf to the Soviets.⁸⁸

While MIDEASTFOR's presence continued to remain an issue of concern, Bahrain's oil industry did not suffer as a result of the agreement among oil producing states to withhold oil from those countries that supported Israel. The Arab oil-producing countries agreed that since Bahrain produced very little oil, it was not required to cut production, but was required to ban exports of products produced in its refinery. Since oil prices had rapidly escalated because of the oil boycott, it was estimated that Bahraini income from its oil would climb to approximately 100 million dollars in 1974, an increase of 50 million from the previous year. According to British Ambassador Tesh, "An extra US\$50 million is going to make a good deal of difference to Bahrain's financial position." BAPCO now decided to proceed with plans to move forward with studies for the expansion of its refinery. According to Ambassador Tesh, it appeared that Bahrain would not suffer any setbacks, but in the short term might gain from "recent events."⁸⁹

The first American resident Ambassador to Bahrain, Joseph Wright Twinam, reminded Washington, on June 23, 1974, that before the end of the month, rent had to be paid to Bahrain or the Navy would be in default of its lease obligations. After discussions with Admiral Hanks, Twinam reported that there was no possibility that the issue of MIDEASTFOR's presence in Bahrain would be resolved before that date. Hence, he advised that the rent be delivered to the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Development "in routine manner without comment or discussion."⁹⁰

Serious discussions between Washington and Manama began about how best to insure continuation of the American naval presence in the small Gulf state. In July 1974, the terms of the agreement were still under discussion. During a private visit to Bahrain, former Chargé Gatch called on the Amir and several other Bahraini ministers. The Bahraini Foreign Minister explained that his government was in an uncomfortable position because Washington had not officially responded to Bahrain's request to terminate the naval agreement. Foreign Minister Al-Mubarak told Gatch that if the naval agreement

was to continue, Manama required some indication of approval from both Saudi Arabia and Iran. The Amir and his Prime Minister underlined that they wanted MIDEASTFOR to stay, but that it was crucial for Washington and Manama to work out the details. Among the issues that had to be resolved was the question of rent.⁹¹

Meeting alone with Ambassador Twinam, on July 3, 1974, Bahrain's Prime Minister Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman stressed the importance of improving Bahraini-American economic and commercial relations. He apologized for the previous October's emotional reaction to the 1973 war, which resulted in Manama's notice to Washington that Bahrain wished to terminate MIDEASTFOR's stationing agreement. According to Shaikh Khalifa, had he not been out of the country, he would have prevented that notice from being delivered. He explained to Ambassador Twinam that his government's leaders were assuring their people that Washington had no designs on Bahrain and that these leaders intended "to knock some sense into the heads of those who have difficulty getting the picture."⁹²

Meeting with the Amir on July 10, Ambassador Twinam congratulated him on the recent establishment of a Bahraini National Assembly. Amir Isa responded by expressing his commitment to friendship with the United States and underlined how very welcome Americans were in Bahrain. He also extended that welcome to include the US Navy. The Amir told Ambassador Twinam that he wanted the Navy to remain in his country. Twinam responded that "this news would be greeted with relief in Washington since USG was growing quite concerned about Navy's status here."⁹³

Twinam and the Iranian ambassador in Manama discussed MIDEASTFOR, on July 17, after the Iranian had held a long meeting with the Amir. According to the Iranian Ambassador, Bahrain's Foreign Minister continued to oppose the American naval presence. However, the Amir announced that he had enough debate on the issue and would himself make the decision. Commenting on the Amir's perspective, Twinam told

Washington, "Constitutional government is new here, and Amir sometimes displays nostalgia for a simpler, less vexing way of making decisions."⁹⁴

At the same time, in an ongoing attempt to convince Bahrain to uphold its 1973 decision to terminate the American naval presence, Kuwait continued to offer Bahrain large sums of money to eject the American Navy. Ambassador Twinam informed Washington that if Bahrain insisted on the departure of US naval forces, the Kuwaiti Government would provide Manama with a stipend of twice the yearly rent that Washington paid.⁹⁵

US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger instructed his embassy in Manama to avoid engaging with Kuwaitis on the issue of MIDEASTFOR. According to Kissinger: "Even if our maximum expectation was to induce them to stay out of this affair we fear our approach would run risk of being misinterpreted by GOK [the Government of Kuwait] as a sign of weakness at best or interference in GOK-Bahraini relations at worst."⁹⁶

Bahrain rejected Kuwait's offer and when Ambassador Twinam called on the Amir on July 19, Shaikh Isa told him, "I just want to reassure you the Navy will be staying in Bahrain." Shaikh Isa was planning a trip to London and complained to his American guest that he doubted that he would have an opportunity to get much rest there in July because so many Arabs would be "hanging around."⁹⁷

Prior to leaving Bahrain for his vacation, on July 20, the Amir instructed his cabinet to resolve the MIDEASTFOR lease issue, "including jurisdiction, rent and how to finesse termination notice." Development Minister Shirawi underlined that continuation of the American naval presence in Bahrain created a special relationship between Washington and Manama. He claimed that the United States ought to make a noteworthy gesture of friendship in terms of technical support.⁹⁸

Now the Bahraini Government asked Washington formally to acknowledge that in October 1973, it had received an official termination notice, and to request that Manama reconsider that notice.⁹⁹ Foreign Minister Al-Mubarak told Ambassador

Twinam that Bahrain “hated” to charge the US rent. However, MIDEASTFOR’s status in Bahrain could not imply a treaty or some sort of open-ended commitment. The Foreign Minister emphasized that the presence of the American Navy had to be totally separated from the strong Bahraini-American economic ties, which he hoped would evolve. Although Manama did not want American financial aid, the Foreign Minister insisted on evidence of Washington’s interest in Bahrain’s technical development. “In view of enormous US interests in Gulf he wondered if time had not come for imaginative new concept of US technical assistance here.”¹⁰⁰

It was not an easy decision, but the Bahraini Cabinet agreed to rescind its request that MIDEASTFOR depart. However, Shaikh Al-Mubarak asked Washington not to publish that decision until all of the details had been worked out. According to Ambassador Twinam, it was clear that both Iran and Saudi Arabia had “played most helpful role in moving GOB to this difficult decision.”¹⁰¹ After Bahrain made the decision to allow MIDEASTFOR to remain, Twinam continued discussions with Bahraini officials, who emphasized the importance of Washington showing evidence of its interest in Bahraini development. Technical assistance was especially important and Manama wished to have access to qualified US advisers when the need arose. For now, US help to develop Bahrain’s coast guard was a priority.¹⁰²

While the Amir was engaged in working out arrangements to maintain the American naval presence in Bahrain, he was not interested in safeguarding the status of Bahrain’s elected Assembly. Members of the Constitutional Assembly, elected in 1971, had agreed on a draft constitution that provided for the establishment of a National Assembly composed of both appointed and elected members who were authorized only to approve or to reject laws initiated in the cabinet. Elections for members of the National Assembly were later held in December 1973. After the election, it was clear that although not a majority, the left was well represented. Ambassador Twinam discussed the results with Prime Minister Al Khalifa, who was unhappy with them.

So too was the British Security Chief Ian Henderson. Prior to the first meeting of the new National Assembly, the government released 17 political detainees, but 15 others remained in custody. Bahraini rulers continued to be uneasy about their new Assembly.¹⁰³

Later, in August 1975, Assembly members refused to ratify two significant items, one a state security decree, the other extension of MIDEASTFOR's lease. As a result, the cabinet resigned. In response, Amir Isa dissolved the National Assembly and reinstated the cabinet, granting it legislative powers. "With this move, Bahrain's short-lived experiment in parliamentary government came to an end."¹⁰⁴ But underlining the Ruling Al-Khalifa family's security concerns, MIDEASTFOR remained in place.

CHAPTER 4



OLD PROBLEMS AND NEW CHALLENGES

While some members of Bahrain's ruling family were happy that, at least temporarily, they had been able to keep MIDEASTFOR in their country, they were not pleased when, pressed by his Arab brothers, Amir Isa agreed to permit the establishment of a Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) office in Bahrain. One Bahraini official told British Ambassador Robert Tesh that Manama could not reject such an office, that Bahrain had "to fall in line with the rest of the Arab world."¹ The PLO opened its Bahraini office in June 1974. Ambassador Tesh reported to London that the PLO office secretary, Wafa Nabhan, had earlier been his Arabic teacher "and has probably got me tangled up for life." However, Tesh noted that the secretary, soon-to-be assistant director, was "certainly not a very terrifying terrorist."²

Tesh later assured London that the Bahraini government would not permit the PLO office to exert much influence.³ Acting Director Wafa Nabhan, who drove a new Mercedes, was now invited to fashionable receptions. According to Amir Isa, Nabhan wanted Bahraini policemen to be stationed in front of the PLO office. His request was refused. Ambassador Tesh suggested that, of course, the authorities did not consider it necessary to guard the PLO office because the major reason

police guards were stationed at foreign embassies was to protect these embassies from the PLO.⁴

The Hawar Islands once again became an issue of concern at the beginning of 1975. British Ambassador in Doha, David Crawford, discussed the dispute with Qatar's Ruler Shaikh Khalifa. Qatar's Ruler accepted London's position that the British would not attempt to convince Manama to drop the Bahraini claim and relinquish the islands. However, Shaikh Khalifa asked for a British attempt to bring the two countries together in order to achieve a solution. Insofar as Saudi mediation efforts were concerned, Shaikh Khalifa had no news. Ambassador Crawford expressed the hope that Qatar would "let matters ride" until Bahrain's Ruler held at least one more meeting with the Saudi Ruler.⁵

Dejected about the lack of progress on the Hawar Islands issue, in February 1975, Yusuf Shrawi told Ambassador Tesh that during the Qatari Ruler's recent visit to Bahrain, there was a degree of progress. Unfortunately, Qatar had leaked a few details to the press and, as a result, movement toward a solution came to an abrupt halt. Ambassador Tesh asked if Saudi Arabia was willing to help. According to Shrawi, King Faisal would not impose a solution. However, during an earlier conversation between Shaikh Isa and British official Sir William Luce, the Amir said that in the Hawar Islands dispute the Saudi Ruler supported Bahrain.⁶

American focus moved again to the issue of how long MIDEASTFOR would be welcome to remain in Bahrain. In June 1975, Ambassador Joseph Twinam told Washington that despite his requests that Manama reconsider terminating the stationing agreement, the Bahraini government still wanted the American naval presence removed by June 1977. Bahrain was the only Arab state that provided a home port for the US Navy. As a result, Bahraini rulers were under a great deal of pressure, both domestic and external, to terminate their relationship with MIDEASTFOR. Bahrain's Foreign Minister explained that, for political reasons, occasionally Bahrain would publicly refer to its decision to end Washington's naval

presence. Ambassador Twinam advised the State Department: "As Department considers this issue I must stress my conviction that GOB feels it is being as forthcoming as present situation will permit in trying to balance its desire for good relations with USG and its need to survive among larger neighbors and with its own Parliament and people."⁷

Bahrain's Government formally presented a letter allowing the continuation of MIDEASTFOR in Bahrain only until June 30, 1977. A National Security Council memorandum for Secretary of State Henry Kissinger suggested that it was unwise to continue to press Manama further on the matter because Washington did not want MIDEASTFOR "to become a major irritant" in Bahraini-American relations. Initially, MIDEASTFOR had been used to "show the flag" in the Gulf. Now MIDEASTFOR was involved in training soldiers and even in joint exercises with regional fleets. It was also used as a base to collect intelligence on Soviet activity in the region. Nevertheless, a senior staff member of the National Security Council, Robert B. Oakley, told Kissinger "that there is no point in pressing the GOB further on this issue."⁸

As the Americans focused on their naval presence, in July 1975, completing his third and final year as Britain's ambassador to Bahrain, Tesh reviewed his tenure. He cited as one area of concern the established British expatriate community living in Bahrain, which he claimed generated some jealousy because these British competed with Bahrainis for jobs and housing. As a result, soon Manama would prohibit most foreign firms from operating in Bahrain without a Bahraini partner. In addition, every firm in the country would be required to train and promote Bahrainis. Tesh noted that although opportunities for corruption to flourish were expanding, "evidence of graft so far is slight."⁹

The retiring Ambassador was pleased to report few indications of xenophobia or arrogance. He referred to the Bahrainis as friendly and cheerful. Nonetheless, he cautioned that Britain was considered to be very close to the United States. Hence,

“anti-American feeling could rub off on us if things went wrong over Israel or oil.”¹⁰

Washington continued to focus on maintaining the US naval presence in Bahrain. The State Department continued to emphasize that Bahrain, the only Arab country that provided a home port for the American Navy, was under considerable pressure to discontinue doing so. Reviewing the history of MIDEASTFOR in Bahrain, a State Department official explained that after the announcement of the British decision to leave Bahrain, Washington had negotiated a stationing agreement, which included a one-year termination clause. That clause was invoked during the October 1973 Arab-Israeli war after Washington provided military aid to Israel. Later, the government of Bahrain decided that MIDEASTFOR would not be required to leave by October 1974. However, in the summer of 1975, Bahrain remained concerned about MIDEASTFOR's presence. The two largest countries in the Gulf, Iran and Saudi Arabia, appeared to be pressing Bahrain finally to end that stationing agreement. Hence, in August 1975, Bahrain informed Washington it would set a two-year limit on the American naval presence. Thus, MIDEASTFOR could stay until June 30, 1977.¹¹

Washington considered how to deal with Manama's request that the US naval force leave no later than June 1977. In September 1975, the State Department prepared a draft of a joint statement that could be used if needed. According to the proposed statement: “The two governments have agreed that, while periodic US Naval visits to Gulf ports will continue to be in the mutual interest, they can foresee that the US Navy presence in Bahrain need not be maintained indefinitely.”¹²

Arab media continued to publish reports stating that Manama had asked Washington to withdraw its naval force. At the end of September 1975, American Assistant Secretary of State Alfred Atherton met in New York City with Bahrain's Foreign Minister. They talked about how to deal with press inquiries. Both officials agreed that they would publicly acknowledge that Bahrain had set a date for MIDEASTFOR's

departure, "limiting further comment, in very general language, that consultations on this matter are underway."¹³

Although the Bahraini government was unwilling to extend MIDEASTFOR's presence beyond 1977, it appeared that Manama wanted Washington to assist its military. Jordan's King Hussein had agreed to provide training for Bahraini officers in his country and the King asked if the United States would provide Bahrain with military equipment, including heavy lift helicopters. Ambassador Twinam cautioned the State Department that Bahrain's crown prince, who commanded his country's defense force, had a desire to obtain far more weapons than his government truly wanted. In addition, there was the issue of who would pay the cost of new weapons. According to Ambassador Twinam, Manama planned to ask the Saudis for economic assistance. Hence, Twinam advised Washington that it would be prudent to consult Riyadh prior "to agreeing to finance GOB acquisition of military equipment."¹⁴

Appointed to replace retiring Ambassador Tesh, Jock Given, who had earlier served as political agent in Manama, returned to Bahrain in December 1975 after an absence of 16 years. He was impressed with the large number of girls studying in schools and the numerous ladies who did not wear veils, and who even attended dinner parties. He also noted that arranged marriages were less frequent.¹⁵ According to another British observer, Linda Blandford, some Bahraini young women, wearing jeans or miniskirts, worked together with men in a variety of business offices and after work drove their own cars home.¹⁶

Liquor was now sold openly in Bahrain. The new British ambassador observed that although the government did not serve liquor at its official functions, Gulf Arabs were drinking in public.¹⁷ Three years later, British author Molly Izzard confirmed Given's observations, stating that as a result of the tolerance of the Al Khalifa family, everyone who wished to drink could do so. However, she expressed concern that the planned causeway, which would link Bahrain to Saudi Arabia, might increase Wahhabi influence from Saudi Arabia and impose "a duller future," one without movies, discotheques, bands, or

floor shows, all of which were currently available in Bahraini hotels used by business men and expatriates.¹⁸

Speculating on the impact of the future causeway between Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, Ambassador Given suggested the possibility that Bahrain might serve the Saudis as “an off-shore quarantine station where foreigners can provide their useful services without contaminating the faithful on the mainland.”¹⁹ Later, Given emphasized that the Saudis clearly realized the importance of a stable Bahrain and, therefore, were willing to provide substantial financial support.²⁰

Bahrain selected a new ambassador to Britain, Ali Ebrahim al-Mahroos, in December 1975. Discussing the appointment, the head of the British Middle East Department, Ivor Lucas, recommended that al-Mahroos be accepted by Her Majesty’s Government. According to Lucas, few Bahrainis wanted to serve as ambassador in London because the position involved acting as a travel agent for a considerable number of elite Bahrainis who left Bahrain during the hot summers to enjoy a vacation in Britain.²¹

British Secretary of State James Callaghan visited Bahrain at the end of 1975. Ambassador Given expressed surprise that high-ranking Bahrainis avoided discussing the Arab-Israeli conflict with the Foreign Secretary. According to Given, Bahrainis usually took every opportunity “to force the extreme Arab line down my throat.” He speculated that the Bahrainis now avoided the volatile subject with the Secretary of State Callaghan in order not to “chill the warm glow” of Anglo-Bahraini friendship. Although the Amir generally spoke English to foreign guests, he spoke Arabic during his meetings with Foreign Secretary Callaghan, an indication that their conversations were serious, not simply an exchange of pleasantries.²²

At the beginning of 1976 the Amir’s son, Minister of Defense Shaikh Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa, visited London. Head of the Middle East Department Lucas called on him at the Dorchester Hotel. Shaikh Hamad told his British visitor that Bahrain would appreciate advice on how to develop a military force, which

combined the responsibilities of both a navy and a coast guard. In addition, Shaikh Hamad wished to establish an air force that relied on helicopters. Then Shaikh Hamad turned to a personal passion, horses. He wanted arrangements made to have two Arab mares that had been bred in Britain sent to Bahrain. Apparently British breeders did not want their horses to leave the country. Hence, Shaikh Hamad asked for Foreign Office intervention. Lucas suggested that since Shaikh Hamad was scheduled to visit the royal stables at Buckingham Palace, he raise the subject there. Shaikh Hamad agreed and told Lucas that after returning to Bahrain he intended to establish a Bahraini polo and riding club and hoped that the Queen's sister, Princess Anne, would agree to become a patron of that club.²³

Connections between Britain and Bahrain were further emphasized, in January 1976, with the inauguration of the Concorde's first commercial service from London to Manama. Passengers on the flight included the Duke of Kent and Minister of State Ennals, both among the dignitaries invited by the Amir, and various trade officials.²⁴

While representatives of Her Majesty's Government were enjoying their strong ties with Manama, American officials expressed dissatisfaction that in June 1977, Bahrain still planned to require MIDEASTFOR's departure. Although he continued efforts to reverse Bahrain's decision, the Commander of MIDEASTFOR, Rear Admiral Thomas J. Bigley, wrote in March 1976: "Unless we are prepared to go begging to the government of Bahrain, I see little chance of our presence here being extended under any circumstances."²⁵

Despite excellent relations between Britain and Bahrain, in early 1976 Whitehall expressed concern about its financial interests in the Amirate. The Saudis were demanding a larger percentage of oil revenue from ARAMCO, which suggested to London that Bahrain would not long "rest content" with its present 60 percent of BAPCO. The British were concerned about the possibility of a move against their assets in Bahrain and in the entire Gulf region. In addition, London noted that

although UK firms were doing well in the Amirate, recently some important contracts had been lost.²⁶

Interested in maintaining good relations with Bahraini leaders, the Foreign Office was pleased to learn from Ambassador Given, at the beginning of February 1976, that after returning home from his trip to London on the Concorde, Yusuf Shirawi had been very happy. He told Ambassador Given that meeting with British officials was like meeting with "old friends." According to the British ambassador, "the Bahrainis are sensitive about this sort of thing and on this occasion they really feel that they had the red carpet."²⁷

However, one member of the Bahraini ruling family, Shaikh Hamad, was interested in more than the usual red carpet treatment. He wanted to establish an equestrian center in Bahrain and repeated his wish to invite the Queen's daughter, Princess Anne, to visit the Amirate. Shaikh Hamad continued to hope that Princess Anne would agree to serve as a patron of his equestrian center. A member of the Foreign Office's protocol department, R. W. H. du Boulay, was open to Shaikh Hamad's suggestion, explaining to a colleague that anything that promoted better relations between nations was worthy of consideration. According to Boulay, Shaikh Hamad's requests were more interesting than "Mrs. Marcos's shopping, pig meat and long woolen underwear, all of which have absorbed the attention of numerous diplomats in the recent past." But, du Boulay noted, Princess Anne had no plans to travel in the near future. He also noted that the Foreign Office had discouraged female members of the Royal Family from traveling to the Middle East. However, du Boulay suggested that if the Foreign Office was now prepared to change its perspective, in the future such a visit was a possibility.²⁸

In the 1970s, Bahrain had continued to develop as an international financial center. In June 1976, Amir Isa made some changes in his Council of Ministers. His new appointments favorably impressed Ambassador Given. The Minister of Commerce and Agriculture, Habib Ahmed Kassim, had been educated at the American University of Beirut. The British

ambassador also noted with satisfaction a change in the Ministry of Finance. Appointed by Sir Charles Belgrave, Minister of Finance Sayyed Mahmoud Al Alawi had served in the cabinet since the 1920s. Sayyed Mahmoud had assumed office prior to the discovery of oil and throughout his long tenure had advocated “ultra-cautious financial policies.” His influence had long been declining. He was now replaced by Ibrahim Abdul Karim.²⁹

The British ambassador referred to Ibrahim Adul Karim as “one of the new men.” A protégé of Yusuf Shirawi, Ibrahim Adul Karim, was educated in Baghdad. He was a dedicated Arab nationalist, but not attracted to either the Ba’athists or the Communists. Some British officials in Manama hoped that the new ministers would introduce reforms in the civil service, reforms “which have been held up by the old man and some of his British back-room boys.” The new cabinet also indicated a power shift to Sunnis and toward a group of “trousered technocrats” led by Yusef Shirawi.³⁰ According to British journalist Linda Blandford, Shirawi claimed that two Arab groups, Palestinians and Bahrainis, were impossible to govern. “They’re both intelligent, educated, and they won’t take no for an answer.”³¹

In June 1976, after the Government of Bahrain appointed 37-year-old Abd al-Aziz Abdul-Rahman Buali as Manama’s first Ambassador to the United States, Washington too focused on the issue of Bahraini personalities. The new ambassador had attended university in both Iraq and London. In 1972, Buali had been appointed to serve as Bahrain’s first Ambassador to Iran. According to a National Security Council memorandum, Buali was a handsome man, who looked like “movie actor Omar Sharif and is immensely pleased when that fact is noted.” Some State Department officials were not impressed with how Buali had represented his country in Tehran and expressed reservations about how he would perform in Washington. However, Washington approved his appointment because the State Department found “nothing in his background on which we could base a rejection.”³²

At the time of Ambassador Buali's appointment, MIDEASTFOR's future presence in Bahrain remained uncertain. However, discussions continued. The US fleet, consisting of three ships, still remained the only permanent American military force in the Gulf region. It was suggested, however, that "a naval presence could be maintained at greater cost and reduced effectiveness by adopting an afloat staff concept and rotating forces more frequently."³³

Fortunately, it proved unnecessary to find an alternative to stationing the American naval force in Bahrain. Washington learned that the Al-Khalifa family had looked again at MIDEASTFOR and that the Bahraini Ruler had finally decided to withdraw his request that the US force pull out. In June 1976, as his assignment in Bahrain drew to close, Admiral Bigley called on Prime Minister Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman, who told him that the Bahraini government had changed its position. Now MIDEASTFOR was welcome to remain in Bahrain. Alas, not all American officials were completely satisfied. A few State Department officials were unhappy that the Bahraini decision to allow MIDEASTFOR to stay had been conveyed first to the Admiral rather than to Ambassador Twinam.³⁴

Ambassador Given often expressed confidence in the stability of Bahrain. However, in July 1976 when the Amir, the prime minister, the minister of foreign affairs, and the minister of development and industry traveled together to Abu Dhabi in the same plane, the British Ambassador speculated about "what would happen if the aircraft crashed in spite of the Amir's usual caution in having a British captain." Given concluded that Bahrain was stable and hence would emerge intact, which meant the continuation of Al-Khalifa rule.³⁵

At the same time, Ambassador Given noted that trade unions were banned and the press was censored. The National Assembly had been dismissed the year before and the Al-Khalifa shaikhs had no plans for new elections. Given blamed Saudi influence for the reluctance of Bahrain's ruling family to move toward representative government. While at present the country appeared content, Given expressed concern about the number

of Bahraini students returning from study abroad who had been exposed to Soviet influence. In addition, inflation was a problem. Except for fish and petrol, the country had to import everything it needed. As a result, the lower classes suffered. The gap between the wealthy shaikhs, the established merchants, and other Bahrainis continued to widen. Given was impressed by the willingness of Bahraini people to accept "hard and dirty jobs," positions outside of comfortable air-conditioned offices.³⁶ However, every year the number of young people finishing school increased. These school-leavers sought employment and the British Ambassador speculated that within four or five years, even if foreign workers were no longer participating in the job market, there would not be sufficient opportunities for these young, well-educated Bahrainis.³⁷

Once again in July 1976, the Qatar-Bahrain boundary dispute attracted British attention. Washington too became involved. American officials told their British colleagues that as a result of Saudi pressure, the United States was now officially concerned. Three years earlier, London had decided to refrain from any comment on the issue. However, recently there had been successful oil drilling close to the disputed area. Whitehall agreed to provide the parties with archival documents, but otherwise London did not wish to do more.³⁸

No Bahrainis lived on the Hawar Islands, however, Manama had a small police post there. Perhaps, wishing to observe what was happening opposite the islands on the Qatari coast, some Bahrainis, including shaikhs, regularly went fishing on the islands. Focused on maintaining its position, Manama asked BAPCO to extend the road from their oil fields to the coast, where Bahrain planned to build a pier for small vessels. Ambassador Given reported to London that the Bahraini coast guard had recently purchased new vessels, one of which could be equipped with light armament. However, at present the coast guard was not trained to use such weapons.³⁹

Returning to Manama from a short leave, in August 1976, American Ambassador Twinam stopped in London and called at the Foreign Office. Although personally gloomy about

Bahrain's prospects, he claimed that Washington was more positive, "and that in any case the US was powerless to change the situation."⁴⁰

In September 1976, Bahrain expressed a desire to obtain jet planes and advanced military equipment. A National Security Council memorandum suggested that Washington ought to consider responding positively to some requests from the smaller Gulf States for advanced military equipment, if in return these states agreed to ongoing access to military facilities in the area.⁴¹

British officials continued to discuss their appropriate role in Bahrain. Writing to the Foreign Office, in October 1976, Ambassador Given said that, prior to Bahrain's independence, the political agency had "nannied" Bahraini leaders, but insofar as assisting in Bahraini political development, the British had failed. Given explained that he encouraged conversation with Bahraini officials, but did not offer advice. In the event advice was requested, he attempted to analyze all of the factors and put forward the available choices. However, he would not indicate to the Bahrainis which of those choices he considered best.⁴²

Whitehall assured Given that it was indeed unwise for the British to offer advice. At the same time, Middle East Department official Ivor Lucas noted that Bahrain's 1972 attempt at democracy had failed. He suggested that given Gulf circumstances, traditional family rule might be more appropriate than "Westminster-style" democracy.⁴³

The role of foreign workers in the country now became a contentious issue. In October 1976, Bahrain published a new Labor Law, which required all of the country's workers to register. Employers were obliged to notify the Ministry of Labor of any vacancies and the ministry then selected candidates for these vacancies. Bahraini citizens were to have preference; Arabs were next in line. As a result, opportunities for expatriate workers were severely limited, but Ambassador Given assumed that these regulations were aimed at Pakistanis, Indians, Palestinians, and Iranians, not at Europeans.⁴⁴

One group of Europeans, pretty women, had a special place in Shaikh Isa's schedule. As a result, he created a special beach guarded by soldiers and opened only to westerners.⁴⁵ British Journalist Linda Blandford wrote articles for the British press, which included references to the Amir's penchant for western women. According to Ambassador Given, "the Amir was bitterly hurt by the publication in a Sunday newspaper of ill-mannered comments about him by a woman journalist to whom he had unwittingly shown some slight civility. He could not accept that Her Majesty's Government could do nothing about this."⁴⁶

At the beginning of 1977, a more serious issue demanded the Bahraini Ruler's attention. Bahrainis were shocked by a rare occurrence, a murder. On November 18, 1976, a well-known Bahraini journalist, Abdulla Shaikh Mohammed Ali Al-Mandani, was kidnapped from his home and later found stabbed to death in an isolated area a few miles away from the village of Jidhaf. Al Mandani was the founder and editor of a weekly newspaper that consistently supported Al-Khalifa rule and the religious authorities. The police feared that Al-Madani's friends might now attack members of the left wing who resided in northern villages.

Three young members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arab Gulf were soon arrested. Ambassador Given reported that the interrogation was severe, but "by no means rough by Middle Eastern standards." One of the young men, Muhammed Ghuloom Bucheery, was moved to a hospital where he died. Officially, the cause of death was a heart attack, which resulted from asthma. More arrests followed and a few members of the Bahrain Defense Force were found to be part of a Popular Front cell. Another detainee, Sayeed Al-Onainati, also died in detention. In December 1976, six men, all Shias, were tried in connection with Al-Madani's murder. Two of the men received death sentences.⁴⁷

Member of the British Parliament, Stanley Newens, wrote to Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary Anthony Crosland, pointing to the deaths of two of the Bahrainis taken into

custody. He expressed concern about the employment of a British citizen, Ian Henderson, as head of Bahrain's Special Branch. Newens understood that Her Majesty's Government was not responsible for the behavior of British subjects employed by foreign governments, but expressed apprehension that Henderson's activities might tarnish Britain's reputation.⁴⁸

Newens letter embarrassed the Foreign Office because Manama had not publicly admitted Al-Onainati's death. The late Al-Onainati had served in Bahrain's Defense Force and had been interrogated by that force, not by the police. Ambassador Given was informed of his death "in the strictest confidence." Hence, if British authorities publicly acknowledged that Al-Onainati had died while in custody, they would be compromising their relationship with Bahrain.⁴⁹

Responding to MP Newens' letter, Minister of State Frank Judd wrote that he could not confirm that Al-Onainati died as a result of interrogation. According to Judd, British citizens served in Bahrain's police force, "but at no stage has there been any suggestion of misconduct by them in this case."⁵⁰ The execution of the two Bahrainis sentenced to death took place on March 7, 1977. According to Ambassador Given, these executions would likely discourage "violent conspiracy for some time to come."⁵¹

During the investigation of Al-Madani's murder, investigators learned that, contrary to their past experience, it was now Baghdad and not Aden which was encouraging the Popular Front. Since it was now clear that Iraq was engaged in an attempt to destabilize the Gulf States, Manama decided that the Bahraini government would no longer send Bahraini students to Iraqi universities.⁵²

Saudi influence, however, remained an important factor in Bahraini affairs. In January 1977, Given had noted that during the previous year, Saudi power in the Amirate continued to expand. Foreigners residing in the Amirate, together with Bahrainis who enjoyed drinking alcohol, were concerned that the planned causeway that would connect Saudi Arabia and Bahrain might result in the imposition of Wahhabi Islam.

However, Amir Isa insisted that, on the contrary, the Saudis would become more tolerant or else they would be relieved to contain “the dirty sinful foreigner on an offshore Island, near enough to use his services, without having to put up with his nasty ways.”⁵³

Amir Isa continued to retain confidence in the British. Flying to Geneva via London’s Heathrow airport, in February 1977, Bahrain’s Ruler told Foreign Office official Lucas that Bahrain appreciated its British connection and wanted more products and additional personnel from Britain, including teachers and doctors. He also advised that Her Majesty’s Government might benefit from Bahrain’s example and close newspapers that “made rude remarks about their friends.”⁵⁴

According to Ambassador Given, in March 1977, 28 British consultants and 13 British contractors were employed in Bahrain. Given noted that many of the projects constructed in Bahrain were funded by the Saudis. The Bahraini press continued to be very respectful toward Saudi Arabia, whose wealth paid for numerous projects, including “grotesquely expensive sports facilities.” Ambassador Given was concerned that Bahrain was becoming “a Saudi pensioner.” He advised that Whitehall send its officials to visit Manama and that the Foreign Office host visiting Bahrainis. “It is important to have Labour as well as Conservative interest, for the Bahrainis share the general suspicion that the Labour Party has close links to Israel.”⁵⁵

British officials in London began to consider sending Members of Parliament to visit Bahrain. Officials suggested that, because such a trip was expensive, other Gulf States be included in the itinerary as well, among them Qatar and the UAE. Of course, traveling in the summer would not be sensible. It was far too hot and most established Gulf Arabs would be traveling abroad. In addition, Ramadan in 1977 began on August 15.⁵⁶

British companies continued their interest in pursuing economic opportunities in the Gulf region. Plans for the promised Saudi/Bahraini Causeway sparked considerable interest. The British Steel Corporation asked assistance from Britain’s Department of Trade to help its company obtain a

contract. The Department of Trade wrote to Bahraini Minister for Development and Industry Yusuf Shirawi. However, the Saudis, not the Bahrainis, were funding the project. Advising the British company, Saudi businessman Adnam Khashoggi now suggested that British Steel send a letter to Saudi authorities, if possible a letter from Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer to Saudi Arabia's Minister of Finance, Aba al Khail, who served as Chairman of the Joint Ministerial Committee for the Causeway. According to F. D. Evans at the Department of Trade, "it is likely that Mr. Khashoggi will make some discreet financial arrangements, but such practices are an inescapable concomitant of business in the Middle East."⁵⁷

As Whitehall considered how to strengthen Anglo-Bahraini relations, the economy of the Amirate gradually declined. Rents decreased as numerous flats remained vacant. The port of Manama, which earlier was often overcrowded, now had empty berths. Embarrassed merchants had too much stock and no funds to pay for what they had previously ordered. Manama was concerned about the economy and also distressed that the Saudis had not yet started work on the planned causeway between their two countries. Bahrainis, including the Amir, were looking forward to an influx of Saudi weekend guests. At the same time, some Bahrainis worried that Bahrain's commerce would be unable to compete with Saudi businesses, "whose resources and corrupt methods will enable them to take over Bahrain."⁵⁸

Although Manama continued to promote the causeway, Ambassador Given noted that Bahraini merchants were not confident about either the future of Bahrain or the potential benefit of the causeway. In addition, although political opposition had declined after the 1976 murder of newspaper editor Al-Mandani, there was now concern that the weak economy would lead to renewed opposition. Worry increased because the British police officers "on whom the security apparatus depends to an unhealthy degree" might soon be returning home.⁵⁹

In his annual review of events in Bahrain during 1977, Ambassador Given noted that Bahrain had developed as a

Gulf financial center, but as a result of an ongoing recession, appeared to be losing the self-confidence, which together with support from Saudi Arabia, had made it possible for Manama to maintain its position "among its rich neighbors." Housing prices fell and it was now easy for foreigners to rent reasonably priced property. But new offices and shops were vacant. At the same time, new hotels were opening. The British Ambassador questioned how these hotels would make money. However, there were a few positive developments. The Arab Ship Repair Yard, built by the Korean Hyundai Construction Company, opened and received its first ship. In addition, an aluminum extrusion plant was planned. Nevertheless, for the majority of its revenue, Bahrain continued to depend on oil.⁶⁰

At the beginning of 1978, the issue of the construction of the causeway between Saudi Arabia and Bahrain continued to generate discussion. From Whitehall, Ivor Lucas expressed the view that those Saudis who would use the causeway were "likely to be of the liberated variety who may have a bottle of whisky in one hand but probably not a Koran in the other." At the same time, Lucas suggested that Saudis visiting Bahrain would be tactful and avoid offending their religious authorities.⁶¹ Nevertheless, Bahrainis continued to express concern about the future impact of the yet-to-be-constructed causeway. They feared that visiting Saudis would drink too much alcohol and as a result, Bahraini women would no longer be comfortable walking on the streets or driving cars.⁶²

In Washington, Soviet flights over the Gulf now became a concern. In April 1978, the American Embassy in Manama reported that a Russian plane overflew both Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. The embassy speculated that the likely reason was poor weather. However, the Russian pilot refused to respond to Manama's control tower. Bahraini air controllers alerted the Saudis in Dhahran, warning that a Soviet aircraft would soon enter Saudi airspace. According to the American Embassy in Manama, the Saudis told the Bahrainis that their Air Force defense system did not operate on Fridays. Bahrain's minister of defense stated the incident underlined the importance of

Gulf security cooperation, which clearly needed improvement, including American arms.⁶³

However, as 1978 progressed, Iran again became the focus of attention in Manama. Most Bahrainis had close connections with Iran and were emotionally engaged by events across the Gulf. At the end of 1977, President Jimmy Carter had visited Tehran where he praised Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. President Carter told the Shah that his country was, “an Island of stability in one of the more troubled areas of the world.” The American President claimed that the Iranian people loved, respected, and admired their leader.⁶⁴ President Carter was wrong. Muslim clerics, opposed to the Shah’s efforts to introduce western reforms, incited riots in February 1978. The leader of Britain’s Conservative party, the future Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who visited Tehran in April 1978, later wrote: “Within a year, the Shah would have fled the county, the Ayatollah Khomeini would have returned, an Islamic Republic would have been proclaimed, and bloodshed and terror would prevail.”⁶⁵

In November 1978, Washington noted that earlier the Shah had relinquished Iran’s claim to Bahrain and expressed concern that, if he was toppled, a new “more chauvinistic” Iranian government might once again revive that claim.⁶⁶ A Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) report underlined that approximately half of Bahrain’s population was composed of Shia Muslims, considered to be “mildly unsympathetic to the Shah.” According to the CIA, with the approach of the Muharram holiday, which marked the murder of Husayn, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad and the third Imam of Shiite Islam, Bahrain’s government was concerned about the possibility of violence during the event. Previously, Bahrain’s ministry of interior had controlled the annual Muharram demonstrations. In December 1978, as the holiday approached, the Bahraini authorities became increasingly apprehensive as it appeared that the Shah’s loss of power might lead to demonstrations in Bahrain against the Al-Khalifa family. The Bahraini government cautioned local religious leaders to exercise restraint. In addition, worried about

the possibility that Iranian clerics visiting Bahrain might inspire antigovernment action, Manama delayed issuing visas to the Iranian clerics who wanted to celebrate Muharram in Bahrain.⁶⁷

As violence directed against the Shah spread in Iran, Bahrainis were concerned that Tehran would no longer be able to serve as its protector against the Soviet Union. In addition, according to Ambassador Given, the last *Ashura* processions in Bahrain had been sparsely attended because “the Shias thought that they would have to shout for one side or the other in Iran, and feared to back the losers, so they opted out.”⁶⁸

Despite the progress of the Islamic revolution in Iran, at the beginning of 1979, Ambassador Given assured London that notwithstanding some minor problems, Britain continued to benefit from Bahraini goodwill. Although in 1978 Bahrainis had been disappointed by Her Majesty’s Government’s initial reluctance to grant the local airline, Gulf Air, permission to fly to Hong Kong, the matter had been resolved and permission was granted. British businesses remained Bahrain’s largest suppliers of “bread-and butter items.” Although Bahrain had a population of only 300,000, it ranked twenty-sixth among Britain’s customers.⁶⁹ At the same time, deeply concerned about the fall of the Shah and the future of Iran, Washington was pleased that finally Bahrain had agreed that MIDEASTFOR could retain its Gulf home port on the Bahraini coast.

CHAPTER 5



AFTER THE SHAH'S DEPARTURE

After the Shah fled Iran on January 16, 1979, the question of how his removal from power would affect Bahrain continued to be a matter of concern in both London and Washington. Young Bahrainis studying abroad had been exposed to revolutionary propaganda, and Whitehall advised Ambassador Given that “we shall need to keep a watchful eye.”¹ Bahraini supporters of Iran’s new Ruler, Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini, who returned to Iran from exile in France on February 1, 1979, organized demonstrations in Manama, where pro-Khomeini graffiti covered the walls in many streets. At the same time, during the night, supporters of the exiled Shah had pasted portraits of the ousted Ruler on the Iranian Embassy’s walls, images that were quickly removed by Manama’s police, who “never expected to be tearing down portraits of the Shah.”² By mistake a group of pro-Khomeini demonstrators approached the PLO office shouting slogans. A Shia political leader explained to the demonstrators that they had chosen the wrong location and directed them to the Iranian Embassy, which was now designated the “Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran.” Tehran’s ambassador, Ismail Farboud, addressed the group, which then dispersed without incident.

As the end of Ambassador Given’s tenure in Manama approached, he once again called attention to the country’s

economy, suggesting that Bahrain's most successful industry was "the production of babies." He predicted that in a few years, there would be a shortage of employment opportunities for "half-educated school leavers." Bahrain lacked the resources of its richer neighbors who hired foreigners to do the "real work." Hence, he predicted that the Al-Khalifa would be unable to turn "unemployables into pensioners."³

While stressed by events in Iran, some Gulf leaders had the opportunity in March 1979 for a pleasant distraction when Great Britain's Queen Elizabeth toured the Gulf states. She was presented with a gift of a gold palm tree decorated with pearls that had been found in the area's water. With modern equipment, these pearls were easy to locate. However, the cost was very high. As a result, new Bahraini pearls were now rarely sought.⁴

Traveling with Her Majesty's entourage, Foreign Minister Frank Judd underlined the presence of expatriates, including a large number who held senior posts, and the great extent to which Gulf countries relied on them. According to Judd, it sometimes seemed that "the Queen was in India or Pakistan." Judd advised that Britain not simply look at the Gulf states as a source of fast profit, but that London attempt to help these states acquire technological expertise. At the same time, despite the economic benefit for Britain, he advised against continuing arms sales to the Gulf region. According to Judd, "our present policy could well prove cynical and politically counter-productive having encouraged the rulers to develop a self-deceptive sense of security." In addition, while Judd did not object to the idea that British naval vessels visited the Gulf and engaged in training locals, he warned against a "drift back into an East of Suez commitment."⁵

Together with the rest of the global community, in March 1979, Bahrain turned its attention to a major breakthrough in Arab-Israeli relations, the planned signing in Washington of a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel. President Jimmy Carter's National Security Adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, sent a message from President Carter to numerous states, including Bahrain,

underlining the importance of their support for the treaty. Amir Isa replied that he hoped the treaty would be signed quickly, but that he was unable to say so in public prior to checking with Saudi Arabia. Alas, he feared yet another summit where Arab leaders would gather to express opposition to the soon-to-be-signed peace treaty.⁶ It was clear that most Bahrainis “were genuinely appalled” by the Egyptian-Israeli Treaty and were unhappy with Washington.⁷

After Ambassador Given's successor, Ambassador Harold Walker, settled in Bahrain, he reported to London in May 1979 that prior to his arrival, he had been unaware that Bahraini leaders were so deeply suspicious of Iraq. But during one of his early meetings with Amir Isa, Bahrain's Ruler told him that Iraq's President Bakr was now attempting to reach out to Bahrain. However, Bahrain was not interested. Shaikh Isa claimed that Iraq “was like an Alsatian: you never knew when it might turn round and bite you.”⁸

Meeting with Bahrain's Minister of Foreign Affairs Shaikh Mohammed Bin Mubarak, on May 24, the British ambassador asked about recent remarks Shaikh Mohammed had made to a Kuwaiti journalist that the Al-Khalifa family was discussing political reform. Shaikh Mohammed said that personally he wished to begin the process by holding municipal elections and that he opposed appointing members to the assembly. He also underlined that any reform in Bahrain would have to be in step with what was taking place throughout the region. Ambassador Walker noted the variety of practices in the region, but suggested “it is possible that the Gulf rulers are intermittently discussing with each other how to satisfy local aspirations without upsetting the shaikhly apple-cart.”⁹

Ambassador Walker observed the wide division between Bahraini Shia and Sunni. His immediate impression was that the Shia were not pleased with the Al-Khalifa family. Although the Al-Khalifa had assumed control of Bahrain in 1782, many Shia continued to view their descendants as invaders, recent arrivals on their island. According to Ambassador Walker, since the Iranian revolution Shia religious leaders had been energized

by Imam Khomeini, whose “works sell like hot cakes.” Bahrain’s Shia religious leaders were now taking orders from Khomeini, behavior that Bahraini Sunni considered unacceptable. The British ambassador was concerned that tension between Shia and Sunni might result in a violent incident near a mosque. However, there were some positive signs, which provided hope that a local confrontation could be avoided. Bahrain’s economy was now stable and its police force was competent.¹⁰

Although Iran was Bahrain’s primary concern, Ambassador Walker reported that Foreign Minister Mohammed Bin Mubarak discussed the Egyptian-Israeli peace agreement with him at the end of May. The Arab world was outraged. Many Arabs wanted Anwar Sadat ousted from office. However, Bahrain’s foreign minister assumed that it was unlikely Sadat would soon be removed from power. The ball was in Washington’s court. The United States had to insist that Israel satisfy Arab demands.

The foreign minister was skeptical about moving the Israelis without threatening “their vital interests.” Shaikh Mohammed Bin Mubarak explained that the Arab states wanted European countries, especially Britain, to take an active role in ending the Arab-Israeli conflict and he praised the French for making an effort. He suggested that the rest of Europe follow their example, warning that otherwise the Arab world would turn to the Communist countries.¹¹ Bahrain’s Foreign Minister continued to emphasize the danger of the Arab-Israeli conflict and in addition pointed to the danger of the ongoing conflicts in both Syria and Lebanon. He told Ambassador Walker that European countries ought to pressure Washington to work out a final Arab-Israeli settlement.¹²

At this juncture, the White House was reviewing how best to operate in the Gulf region, how to keep the Russians out, and also how to deal with “Gulf Schizophrenia.” Bahraini officials claimed that although there was strong local demand for Washington’s support, there was also an equally powerful opposition to the presence of American bases or other visible American military activity. According to a June 1979 National

Security Council White House report, by maintaining carriers in the Indian Ocean rather than in the Persian Gulf, Washington could signal US strategic concern about the Russians and "still pay lip service to the idea of 'collective self-reliance' in the Gulf."¹³

Senior Bahraini officials told their American friends that the Iranian Revolution clearly showed that military equipment and planning did not guarantee security. According to Bahraini officials, "there is a tremendous need for more cooperation with the U.S. in public administration, education, cultural affairs, agricultural development, fisheries, desalination with all the Gulf States, especially the poor such as Bahrain, Dubai, the lesser Emirates, Oman."¹⁴

The impact of the Iranian revolution continued to influence Bahrain as once again, in June 1979, Iran claimed Bahrain. The editor of a Bahraini newspaper, Ahmad Salman Kamal, wrote an article denouncing Iran's new claim to his country. Kamal emphasized that the United Nations-sponsored plebiscite, held in 1970, had provided overwhelming support for Bahraini independence. Speaking privately, Kamal suggested that Iran had resurrected its claim to Bahrain in order to distract attention from internal problems. He emphasized that Manama refused to become "the clothes-hanger on which Iran could hang its internal crises."¹⁵

Whitehall noted that Bahrain's recently appointed ambassador to Britain, Ali Al-Mahroos, was a Shia Muslim. According to London's Middle East Department official, D. E. Tatham, since the fall of the Shah, the issue of how Bahrain's Shia population was treated "aroused increased interest and some speculation." Hence, it was important that from the outset those who wished to discuss Bahraini Shia with Ambassador Al-Mahroos be aware of his religious affiliation.¹⁶

Bahrain's attention briefly moved away from Iran and focused on Libya at the beginning of July, when Colonel Muammar Qadhafi visited the country. According to Ambassador Walker, the diplomats serving in Bahrain were offended "by the dress and table manners" of Colonel Qadhafi's aides. The Arab-Israeli

conflict was among the issues discussed during the Libyan leader's visit. In the course of their discussions, both the Libyan and Bahraini rulers reiterated their rejection of the treaty signed by Egypt and the "Zionist enemy." At the same time, they expressed complete support for the PLO.¹⁷

In July, leaflets that spelled out Shia religious demands were widely distributed to government officials. Supporters of the new Islamic Government of Iran demanded that Bahrain be ruled by Islamic law and that men and women be completely separated in both hospitals and schools. In addition, the leaflets called for a total ban on alcohol in hotels and cafes. The leaflets also stipulated that women be required to wear suitable clothing and that a moral police be established to enforce these requirements.¹⁸ Slogans were written on walls, including one that claimed, "The Ruler is a Savak agent," and another that asked, "Who is the Khomeini of Bahrain and when will he appear?"¹⁹ At the same time, supporters of an Islamic state demanded that music no longer be taught in schools. In their mosques, some Shia mullahs preached sermons that appeared to be "calls to insurrection." According to Ambassador Walker, Bahrain's government initially permitted the Shias "to blow off Steam."²⁰

As Ramadan approached, Bahraini authorities responded to religious pressure by ordering restaurants to remain closed until after dark and by banning the sale of alcohol. However, hotels were excluded from the ban and kept their restaurants open. Since Bahraini official planned to cancel the ban on alcohol after Ramadan, Ambassador Walker hoped that the matter would not receive publicity because such publicity would provide a stumbling block to lifting the ban.²¹

Soon after, Shaikh Mohammed Bin Mubarak told Ambassador Walker that a British Conservative government would likely be more sympathetic to the Arabs than a Labour Government. Earlier, referring to the British Conservatives, Shaikh Khalifa Bin Salman explained: "We feel that they are our kind of people." Ambassador Walker reported to London that since the Conservative government of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher

was in office, "the Bahraini authorities expect more from us, and will be correspondingly the more disappointed if we don't deliver."²²

Bahraini leaders continued to focus on Iran. Speaking to a reporter for a Manama newspaper, *Akhbar Al-Khaliq*, in August, Bahrain's prime minister declared that Manama wanted to establish "strong and solid relations" with Iran. He claimed that Bahrain was prepared to cooperate with the new government in Tehran, but strongly objected to Iranian declarations claiming Bahraini territory. "While we wish the Muslim Iranian people every good fortune and progress we shall allow nobody whomsoever to interfere in our internal affairs or to come between us and our people, for we are one family."²³

Throughout the Gulf region, Iran remained an issue of grave concern. Visiting London, in September 1979, Qatar's Amir Khalifa Al-Thani met with Prime Minister Thatcher. Qatar's Ruler underlined that the Iranian Shia were trying to export their revolution. They were stimulating religious extremists to reject secular leaders and replace them with clerics. According to the Qatari Ruler, "two-thirds" of Bahrain's population was Shia and were, therefore, likely to be influenced by the new Iranian regime. Claiming that she had been "a great admirer" of the fallen Shah, Prime Minister Thatcher wanted to insure that the revolution would not spread beyond Iran.²⁴

Bahraini Minister of Foreign Affairs Shaikh Mohammed Bin Mubarak spoke in New York at a meeting of the UN General Assembly on October 5. He did not refer to Iran. In the course of his remarks, he condemned racism in Zimbabwe and apartheid in South Africa, but devoted most of his speech to supporting the Palestinian quest for statehood. According to Foreign Minister Mohammed: "But certainly there will be no peace in the Middle East, if the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people are excluded, including their right to establish a Palestinian state on Palestinian soil."²⁵

Speaking to Ambassador Walker on October 17, however, Prime Minister Khalifa emphasized the Iranian danger. Claiming that previously he had not been especially concerned about

threats from Bahraini Shia, now he was worried about the possibility that Iran would use local Shia to create discord. He considered the possibility of an outbreak of violence locally. He speculated that just one explosion in Bahrain would result in front page coverage in the western press and that his country's economy would suffer a serious blow, "just what the country could not afford."²⁶

The Air Marshal of Iraq's Revolutionary Command Council visited Bahrain in October and offered to provide Shaikh Isa with airplanes. At the same time, he expressed Iraqi suspicion of Iranian intentions. Although together with other Arab Rulers in the Gulf region Shaikh Isa was, indeed, concerned about an Iranian threat, he also continued to remain suspicious of Iraq. Once again speaking to the British ambassador, Bahrain's Ruler compared Iraq to that Alsatian.²⁷

Tension between Bahrain's Sunni authorities and Bahraini Shia continued. After returning home from a visit to Iran at the end of August, a Bahraini Shia leader, Mohammed al-Akri, was arrested. The authorities announced that no future demonstrations would be permitted. Ignoring the warning, protesters staged a large demonstration on August 24. For the first time, the police used tear gas to disperse the demonstrators and continued to depend on tear gas to end several demonstrations that followed. According to Ambassador Walker, although diplomats in Bahrain feared that the beginning of the school year in September might provide an opportunity for massive student protests, peace was maintained. At least temporarily, "the Government had won the battle of wills."²⁸

However, after Ramadan, large protest demonstrations took place in Bahrain. Minister of the Interior Shaikh Mohammed Bin Khalifa Al Khalifa insisted that the press, especially the western press, exaggerated the size and the intensity of these demonstrations. Explaining that a series of demonstrations had taken place earlier in support of the Iranian Revolution, the minister emphasized that these earlier demonstrations had been orderly and nonviolent. He also noted that Bahrainis, like other Arabs, had demonstrated on Jerusalem Day. However,

insofar as concerned the *Id Al-Fitr* demonstrations, the minister underlined that unlike the earlier demonstrations, they had not been authorized by the authorities, but were led by individuals whose goal was to create instability and disturb confidence in the authorities. Hence, although the police warned the demonstrator to disperse, they did not comply. As a result, arrests were made and rightfully so, the Minister of the Interior continued. Most of those arrested had been quickly released after they agreed to cease their disruptive activities.²⁹ Although the demonstrations gradually faded, seditious pamphlets continued to be distributed. These pamphlets not only attacked the Bahraini government, but also specifically attacked the Amir.³⁰

Prime Minister Khalifa told Ambassador Walker, on October 17, that he remained worried about the impact of Iran on Bahraini Shias. He feared the possibility of a terrorist act and repeated that if an explosion were to take place in Bahrain and was reported in the western press, his country's economy would suffer. According to Shaikh Khalifa, he had made it "crystal clear" to Iran that Bahrain would not tolerate interference in its internal affairs.³¹

Concerned about the recent Iranian interest in renewing Tehran's claim to Bahrain, Whitehall decided to review Britain's role in the negotiations that, in 1970, had resulted in Iran's withdrawal of that claim. According to British records, the Shah had been willing to drop Iran's claim to Bahrain, a claim that the Iranian government "saw as an albatross." In October 1968, it appeared that the UN Secretary General had been willing to become involved in resolving the issue. Later, during a press conference while visiting New Delhi, in January 1969, the Shah stated that Iran had no intention of obtaining territory by force and would agree to accept the "will of the people of Bahrain."³²

At the end of November 1979, as the festival of *Ashura* approached, westerners in Bahrain were apprehensive about the possibility of violence erupting in the Amirate. Earlier, on November 4, crowds of angry students in Tehran had stormed the American Embassy and continued to hold the American staff members as hostages. Aware that a number of Americans

had left Bahrain, Her Majesty's subjects asked their embassy in Manama for advice. British officials expressed confidence that the locals would not turn against them unless Ayatollah Khomeini directly encouraged them to do so. Hence, Ambassador Walker reported to London: "We are giving enquirers advice that amounts to suggesting they should keep their heads down during *Ashura*."³³

When Ambassador Walker discussed *Ashura* with Foreign Minister Mohammed Bin Mubarak, the Bahraini official claimed that he was much more concerned about the Americans held hostage in Iran and how Washington would respond. Shaikh Mohammed asked the British ambassador to call him any-time that he received information about the hostage situation. According to the Bahraini foreign minister, the moderate Arab states had not publicly expressed their condemnation of Iran's takeover of the American Embassy, but they had privately expressed their disapproval to Tehran, reasoning that if they publicly condemned the occupation of the embassy, they would eliminate "any faint possibility that at some stage they could be useful as mediators."³⁴

Americans were outraged at the behavior of the Khomeini government. In Washington, President Carter's advisers carefully studied how to deal with Iran. According to National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, the United States was faced with three connected problems, including how to free the hostages, how to get rid of Khomeini, and how to "get on with the Moslem world."³⁵

Meanwhile, the traditional *Ashura* processions in Bahrain proceeded without incident, but now police officers expressed concern about the recent appearance of pamphlets denouncing the Bahraini government.³⁶ Unfortunately, on December 4, a bomb exploded outside the Manama office of the Royal Dutch airline, KLM. No one was killed and damage to the surrounding buildings was minor. Ambassador Walker speculated that the bombing was carried out by a religious extremist organization and suggested the Islamic Front For The Liberation of Bahrain was a possible candidate.³⁷

Reviewing events in Bahrain during 1979, Ambassador Walker wrote that fortunately the Shia community, approximately 55 percent of the population of 340,000 Bahrainis, was divided and “no local Ayatollah Khomeini arose.” The British Ambassador noted that Khomeini had not issued “a direct call” to the Shia to oust the Al-Khalifa rulers. In addition, there was no evidence of an effort by the Shia and the Bahraini secular opposition to form an alliance, “perhaps because no self-respecting left-winger wanted to be associated with the excesses of Shia rule the other side of the Gulf.”³⁸

Celebrating National Day, on December 16, 1979, the Amir bestowed amnesty on 22 prisoners, including seven political prisoners. Ambassador Walker doubted that the political prisoners had been rehabilitated. He considered the release of those prisoners an indication of the Bahraini government’s growing confidence.³⁹

Ambassador Walker noted that that it had been a difficult year for a small country that lacked both military and economic power. The fall of the Shah heartened Bahrain’s Shia, who now presented a list of demands to their government, demands that if met would impose an Islamic state on Bahrain, led by mullahs. According to Ambassador Walker, there was no danger that the Shia opposition could destroy the present state, but sectarian violence might in future destroy international business confidence in Bahrain’s stability. The British ambassador reported that it was fortunate that the Ayatollah Khomeini did not call on Bahrain to topple its rulers. In addition, Bahraini Shia continued to be divided; “no local Khomeini arose.” Meanwhile, other Arab government rallied to express their support for the Al-Khalifa family. Finally Ambassador Walker praised the ruling family, which “showed an effective blend of firmness and flexibility.”⁴⁰

Looking back at the economic issues of 1979, Ambassador Walker noted the often-repeated Shia claim that expatriates took jobs away from qualified Bahrainis. According to Ambassador Walker, the issue of hiring Bahrainis was truly a dilemma. Although it was politically essential to offer jobs to local

residents, Bahrain's success as a regional center depended on its efficiency, which would be hurt "by over-rapid Bahrainisation." The good news was that, during 1979, Bahrain's status as a financial center increased. By the end of the year, 54 offshore banking units had registered in the Amirate. Business became more competitive and, in addition to banks, a number of new offshore companies registered in Bahrain.⁴¹

Reviewing 1979, Ambassador Walker noted that in a small Arab country personal contacts were extremely important. He underlined that Bahrainis appreciated British expertise, which was applied to assist both Bahrain's military and police force. He also emphasized the goodwill that was so very apparent when last February the Queen visited Bahrain.⁴²

During talks with Ambassador Walker, in January 1980, Amir Isa expressed unhappiness with how Washington responded to both the hostage crisis in Iran and the recent Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Prior to these events he had not realized that "the Americans could be so weak." The British Ambassador defended Washington, suggesting in regard to Iran that restraint could be considered a sign of strength. He also claimed that the US response to Afghanistan was "as tough as could reasonably have been expected." Ambassador Walker asked the Amir how he would have advised Washington to respond. According to Amir Isa, in Iran the Americans ought to have supported Khomeini's opposition. He also advised that the US media ought to stop bashing the Saudis. Washington could play a positive role in the region by entering into "genuine consultation with the Arabs."⁴³

Britain's Minister of State Douglas Hurd planned to visit Manama in January 1980. Soon after his arrival, he met with the Amir, who looked back to Britain's departure from the Gulf and recalled that he had felt sad. Then Amir Isa expressed pride in Anglo-Bahraini friendship, but once again repeated his concern about the role of the Soviet Union in the region. In addition, he was worried about the situation in neighboring Iran. Noting that although the Gulf States ought to act in unison, they did not; he praised British support for Oman's Sultan Qaboos.

Prime Minister Khalifa, who attended Amir Isa's meeting with Hurd, also underlined the situation in Iran where earlier "the Shah had put his faith in the West but had then been abandoned." Claiming that it was impossible to predict who would emerge as the new Iranian leader, Shaikh Khalifa took the opportunity to complain to his British guest that rather than focus on good news from the Gulf, the western media continued to emphasize problems in the region. He noted that the Afghan president referred to the BBC as "the world's biggest liar." According to Hurd, the British considered the Gulf more important than Afghanistan. But the Soviets had sent soldiers to Afghanistan and the Soviet Union now had new opportunities in the Gulf.⁴⁴

Despite Soviet activity in the region and unease about the future of Iran, during his meeting with Hurd the Minister of State Shirawi emphasized that he was not too concerned about stability in the Gulf. The region was crucial to the West and hence "the West would feel bound to protect it from outside aggression—the Elbe and the Straits of Hormuz were in the same category."⁴⁵

Relations between Bahrain and Saudi Arabia were also discussed. Minister Shirawi explained that plans for a causeway between the two countries continued to move forward. Although there was as yet no schedule set to complete the proposed causeway, referring to the proposed tunnel to connect Britain and France, Shirawi stated "it would be before the Channel Tunnel!" Hurd took the opportunity to suggest that British firms be hired to participate in the causeway's construction.⁴⁶

A Whitehall memorandum stated that the envisioned causeway, which was expected to be constructed by 1983 or 1984, would improve business in Bahrain and provide much-needed employment opportunities for Bahrainis. The number of school graduates in Bahrain continued to grow and, unlike its rich Gulf neighbors, Bahrain could not offer sufficient employment opportunities. Nevertheless, there remained concern about a possible downside to the causeway project. There continued to be many Bahrainis who feared that when Saudi

Arabia became so closely linked to Bahrain, the Saudis might impose their fundamentalist version of Islam.⁴⁷

During his visit to Bahrain, Hurd also met with Minister of Foreign Affairs Shaikh Mohammed Bin Mubarak, who emphasized his concern with Iran. The Minister of Foreign Affairs expressed his frustration that there was no longer a suitable Iranian to talk to. Bahrain had enjoyed good relations with the Shah's government, but the present situation was uncomfortable and Shaikh Mohammed expected trouble. As yet Iran had not revived its claim to Bahrain, but Bahrain's foreign minister did not rule out that possibility. Leaving the situation in Iran, Shaikh Mohammed turned to the question of Palestine, which he claimed occupied "60 to 70%" of his time. He warned that Washington's attempts to avoid the problem might result in a decline of its influence in the region. According to Hurd, Shaikh Mohammed's message was "that there could be no proper cooperation with the West in the face of the Russian advances in the region unless the Palestine problem was settled." He underlined that the Arabs considered Jerusalem more important than Afghanistan, and Israeli statements that some areas of disagreement were nonnegotiable only increased the difficulty.⁴⁸

Afghanistan became an issue during discussions between Hurd and Bahraini Prime Minister Shaikh Khalifa bin Sulman. Shaikh Khalifa complained that rather than focus on Afghanistan, the west should concentrate on the Gulf. According to Prime Minister Khalifa there was a wide security gap in the region. It was important to keep the communists out, and the best path to achieve that goal was economic development. Minister Hurd assured his Bahraini host that Britain recognized the importance of the Gulf and would be prepared to provide assistance.⁴⁹

After returning to London, Minister Hurd wrote to Amir Isa expressing how very impressed he was with the development in Bahrain that had taken place since his earlier visit ten years before. Minister Hurd thanked the Amir for his warm hospitality and also expressed satisfaction "that the traditional

ties of close friendship between our two countries continue as strong as ever.”⁵⁰

Pleased with the Minister Hurd's successful visit to Bahrain, the Foreign Office expressed the wish that his trip would be the first of numerous such journeys by high-level British officials and that Bahrain's leaders, including Amir Isa, would visit London. The Foreign Office expressed the hope that Bahrain's Ruler would permit “his taste for England to overcome his distaste for its Arab visitors!” The British Government was committed to keeping close ties with the Gulf States and continued to look for ways to enhance cooperation in numerous fields, including military training.⁵¹

Meanwhile, Washington was once again concerned about its naval presence in Bahrain. MIDEASTFOR's flag ship the USS *La Salle* was scheduled to leave the Gulf and sail to Virginia. Since the *La Salle* was equipped with electronics that the other American ships in the region lacked, naval officials wanted the *La Salle* to remain in the Gulf. American Ambassador Robert Pelletreau requested permission for additional ship-days in Mina Sulman. Happily, Bahraini authorities agreed.⁵²

Following Minister Hurd's January visit to Bahrain, Ambassador Walker had suggested to Whitehall that the Secretary of State invite Prime Minister Khalifa Bin Salman to London. The Foreign Office supported the suggestion, underlining that as a result of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan it was prudent to reassure the Gulf States that they could rely on British support. In addition, links between Britain and Bahrain were strong, and after the Iranian Revolution it was wise for London to demonstrate support for Manama. Although Bahraini ministers had often visited Britain in recent years, their visits had not been official. Bahrain's prime minister was an excellent candidate for an official visit. He was the Amir's brother and had often suggested that the West was unreliable. Hence, it would be prudent to win him over.⁵³ Whitehall agreed with Ambassador Walker's suggestion, noting that such visits were very helpful in strengthening ties with the Gulf States. Prime Minister Thatcher had met Shaikh Khalifa during a brief stopover in Bahrain the previous

July, and she agreed that a visit to Britain by a Bahraini Minister was overdue.⁵⁴

The Hawar Islands once again received London's attention when in April Britain's Ambassador to Qatar, Colin Brant, underlined that conflicting claims to the Islands remained a barrier between Doha and Manama. According to Ambassador Brant, it was important to resolve the problem because "with external dangers to the Gulf looming so large, this ancient squabble over territory" interfered with Gulf unity. During a meeting with Ambassador Brant, Qatar's Amir Khalifa Al-Thani stated that while Qatar's economy was expanding, Bahrain's was declining. Although the Amir expressed a desire to assist his neighbor, according to the Qatari Ruler "his attempts at rapprochement had been consistently rebuffed by the Bahrainis." Amir Khalifa complained that Bahrain's Foreign Minister took the position that he alone understood the Hawar Island issue. Ambassador Brant, who considered the dispute "a most unfortunate relic of the previous era," asked if Britain might serve as a mediator and work out a solution acceptable to both states. The Ruler refused to commit himself, but agreed to consider the offer.⁵⁵

The dispute continued and, in July 1980, Britain's Ministry of Defense noted that Bahrain had constructed two jetties and had stationed a detachment of soldiers on the Islands. In addition, the Bahrainis had started to drill for oil there.⁵⁶ They had also built a substantial number of underground ammunition storage dumps. According to British military authorities, Bahrain now needed heavy transport planes. Earlier, Minister of Defense Shaikh Hamad had visited Paris and, following Shaikh Hamad's return home, the French Minister of Defense visited Manama. As a result, the British speculated that the French government was interested in selling military aircraft to Bahrain.⁵⁷

Once again British attention had turned to Tehran, at the end of April 1980, when Iran continued to broadcast messages intended to incite Bahraini Shias. Ambassador Walker reported to London that demonstrations were taking place in Shia

villages and that some demonstrators had burned police cars. As a result, the police had responded with tear gas. The British ambassador advised his staff to avoid visiting the central *sug* or Shia villages.⁵⁸ As a result of the demonstrations, 20 police cars were damaged and the Bahraini police detained 64 people. In addition, crowds stoned cars driving west from Manama. Unrest spread to villages outside Manama. The Bahraini government claimed that the police intended to strike back, and had planned a series of raids to illustrate to "disaffected elements" that the authorities remained in charge.⁵⁹

Likely motivated by the recent unrest, Bahrain's Foreign Minister Mohammed spoke to the Kuwaiti paper *Al-Qabas* in May about how best to incorporate popular representation in government. According to the Foreign Minister, there was no one ideal form of democracy. At present, Bahrain's priority was internal stability and thus "there was a need for popular representation." Hence, it was now important to reestablish parliamentary life. Bahrain would not introduce a completely democratic system, but take a small step in the direction of democracy, perhaps introduce an appointed assembly or one that was composed of both appointed and elected representatives.⁶⁰

Again violence erupted in Bahrain when, in the middle of May, a Shia prisoner was beaten to death while in custody. Approximately 1,000 Shia gathered to take his body to the cemetery. Some carried ritual swords indicating the possibility of a "revenge killing." Nevertheless, the funeral was peaceful. Afterwards, however, large groups of Shia gathered in the *sug*, burning tires and forcing stores to close.⁶¹

At the end of May, as the one-year lease of the American Navy's Administrative Support Unit at Jufair approached its expiration date, American officials in Bahrain turned their attention to its yearly renewal. British Ambassador Walker explained that the usual renewal routine involved the American presentation of a check to the Bahraini authorities. After the check was cashed, Washington considered the lease renewed. Walker also noted that the Bahrainis had agreed to bring in a new

barge in order to provide US ships with electricity. Nevertheless, Walker underlined that some ranking Bahrainis were in “an anti-American mood,” because the Americans did not spend money locally, nor did they provide training for Bahrainis.⁶²

Ambassador Walker once again took up the issue of representative government. He noted that Minister of Health Dr. Ali Fakhro claimed that he had convinced the Amir to introduce elected municipal councils. These councils were to be “purely local.” According to Dr. Fakhro, “the councils should be free to do their own thing and if the funds provided by the government were not sufficient they would have to ask for funds from those who elected them. In that way it could be hoped that a sense of responsibility could be developed.”⁶³

As summer began, Bahraini leaders expressed confidence that the Shia problem was manageable and that they would be able to maintain tranquility. Prime Minister Khalifa lamented that prior to the fall of the Shah, the Shia/Sunni divide had faded, but that since the Iranian Revolution traditional antagonisms had reappeared. In addition, Bahrain’s Chief of Staff was concerned about “weekly seditious broadcasts” from Iran. He expressed surprise that the British did not jam these programs.⁶⁴

Prior to taking his summer leave, at the end of June 1980, Ambassador Walker asked Amir Isa if he was planning a trip to London. Although the Amir replied that he doubted that he would have time, the British ambassador assumed that it was likely that the Ruler would at least spend a short period at London’s Dorchester hotel. Walker suggested to the Foreign Office that if Amir Isa did, indeed, come to London, it would be appropriate to invite him to Buckingham Palace. Ambassador Walker reviewed the Amir’s previous contact with the Queen, during her official visit to Bahrain in 1979. According to Ambassador Walker, if the Amir traveled to London, it would be unwise for the palace to ignore him.⁶⁵

As it turned out, the Amir’s brother, Prime Minister Khalifa Bin Sulman, was invited to London by Prime Minister Thatcher. Prime Minister Khalifa’s office asked if, in addition to meeting with the prime minister, he could have the opportunity to

meet the Queen or a member of the Royal Family. According to Whitehall's Middle East Department, Shaikh Khalifa Bin Sulman Al-Khalifa was "probably more important than the Amir, who takes relatively little interest in political affairs." The Foreign Office noted that Prime Minister Khalifa would be available for tea.⁶⁶ At Whitehall, the Middle East Department made arrangements for receiving Bahrain's Prime Minister.⁶⁷

Ambassador Walker's home leave was extended and his hotel bill at the Savoy paid so that he would be available during the upcoming September visit of Shaikh Khalifa.⁶⁸ As the Foreign Office planned for the visit, the Queen's sister, Princess Anne, agreed to invite Prime Minister Khalifa to tea at Buckingham Palace. Following that tea, Princess Anne's Private Secretary phoned the Foreign Office to report that the Princess had enjoyed her Bahraini guest. Foreign Office official David Miers later wrote that it was rare "that we get unsolicited bonuses of this kind."⁶⁹

Prior to Shaikh Khalifa's arrival in London, the Bahraini ambassador told the Foreign Office that three security men would be traveling with his Prime Minister. The Foreign Office wanted the Bahrainis to understand that these security men would be required to leave any weapons they carried at Heathrow airport and that during Shaikh Khalifa's visit London's Special Branch would provide protection.⁷⁰ Arrangements for the official Bahraini visit moved forward with some concerns, including just how much time Prime Minister Thatcher should set aside for her meeting with Prime Minister Khalifa.

In September, an additional issue arose. At the end of his visit, Shaikh Khalifa planned to host a dinner in honor of Secretary of State Lord Carrington. All of London's Arab ambassadors had been invited. The representative of the PLO in London, Nabil Ramlawi, also received an invitation. According to Whitehall official Keith Passmore, "the Bahrainis should have known better than to invite Ramlawi to this function."⁷¹ Foreign Office official John Moberly agreed with Passmore. He asked the Bahraini Ambassador to arrange events at the party

in a manner that avoided the possibility that the PLO representative would be formally introduced to Secretary of State Lord Carrington.⁷²

Meeting with Prime Minister Khalifa and his delegation, on September 16, 1980, Prime Minister Thatcher emphasized that the friendship between Britain and Bahrain was important for the stability of the Gulf “and the greater stability of the whole Western world.” Calling the Gulf “at present a focus of world affairs,” she underlined the importance of maintaining contact and increasing trade. Shaikh Khalifa assured Prime Minister Thatcher that since she became prime minister Bahraini confidence in Britain had increased. Turning to Tehran, Prime Minister Khalifa expressed his government’s concern. Prime Minister Thatcher replied that if the Ayatollah Khomeini released the American hostages who Khomeini continued to hold, London would be willing “to develop closer relations with Iran.” Emphasizing the importance of Saudi Arabia, Shaikh Khalifa now turned to the role of the United States in the Gulf and complained that rather than just focus on Iran, Washington ought to take more interest in all the states of the region.⁷³

The following day, Lord Carrington and a group of Foreign Office officials, including Minister Hurd, met with Prime Minister Khalifa and several of his ministers, including Foreign Minister Shaikh Mohammed Bin Mubarak Al Khalifa. Once again Prime Minister Khalifa emphasized the Palestine question, which he called a “major influence on stability in the whole Middle East.” He insisted that waiting for US election results was not sensible because, regardless of who won, it was unlikely Washington would change its policy. Foreign Minister Mohammed added that waiting for US election results had been an argument used for 30 years. Meanwhile, Egypt had made concessions at Camp David, but Israel continued to expand settlements in the occupied territories and, in addition, had annexed Jerusalem. According to Foreign Minister Mohammed, Bahrain desired a moderate Middle East, but the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty, those Camp David Accords,

encouraged extremists. At the same time, the Russians were moving forward in the region, "being in Afghanistan, Aden and perhaps, next Iran." Minister Hurd referred to the issue of Palestine and suggested that it would be useful if Bahrain and other Arab countries would convince the Palestinians "to refrain from extremist utterance, such as calling for the total destruction of Israel."⁷⁴

Leaving the conversation about Palestine, the officials moved to discuss the question of Afghanistan. Lord Carrington expressed concern that Pakistan, which had initially stood firm against the Soviets, was no longer willing to resist. Foreign Minister Mohammed claimed that now even resistance inside Afghanistan was growing weaker. Lord Carrington disagreed, saying that "the situation seemed more or less static." Shaikh Khalifa suggested that, since Afghanistan was in the Russian sphere of influence, perhaps Britain was too concerned about the military occupation. Lord Carrington emphasized that there was a sharp difference in being in a sphere of influence and having 100,000 Soviet troops occupying the country.⁷⁵

The Iraq-Iran war began in September 1980, and as it progressed, Ambassador Walker observed that Bahraini Shia showed little indication of support for Ayatollah Khomeini. Amir Isa claimed that there were now no demonstrations in support of Khomeini because he was losing, "the thorn was broken." In addition, Bahrainis realized that after the Iranian revolution, life in Iran was not "a bed of roses." Ambassador Walker suggested that another factor might be that Bahraini Shia were not Persian, but Arab. However, Amir Isa disagreed that Arab identity was a factor.⁷⁶

In October 1980, Ambassador Walker's attention turned to the resignation of Bahrain's Minister of Labour, Shaikh Isa bin Mohammed Al Khalifa. Referring to the United States as an example, Shaikh Isa stated that the formation of workers' committees in every company was essential. He underlined that the formation of such committees did not contradict capitalism. The former Minister of Labour criticized those Bahrainis who designated anyone who championed rights for workers

as a communist. He stressed the need for “popular participation in decision-making,” and rejected the argument that since Bahrain was a very small country, where every resident could contact the Amir, that popular participation in government was unnecessary. He understood that earlier attempts to establish a democratic assembly had failed and blamed this failure on both the rulers and the members of the National Assembly. According to Shaikh Isa Bin Mohammed, it was necessary to try again. “His personal view was that a new assembly should consist of representatives elected by various societies and institutions in Bahrain: direct elections demanded a degree of political maturity that Bahrain had not yet reached.” He also wanted Bahraini women to have the right to vote and even to run for office.⁷⁷

Shaikh Isa was replaced as Minister of Labour and Social Affairs by Shaikh Khalifa Bin Sulman bin Mohammed Al-Khalifa, who at age 33 was Bahrain’s youngest Cabinet member. It appeared that prior to the young shaikh’s decision to accept the post, several other notables had rejected it. According to Chargé d’Affaires Michael Copson, “it is considered by many an unenviable appointment in view of Bahrain’s ever present unemployment problems and growing demands for trade unions and a bigger and better social welfare programme.”⁷⁸

After returning from London to Bahrain, Ambassador Walker had assured Whitehall that the Bahrainis who had wished to be consulted by western powers were pleased with their reception in London. According to the British ambassador, “the invitation gave them the feeling that we were genuinely consulting them on events in this part of the world.” However, Ambassador Walker also noted that “the Bahrainis were a bit disappointed at the lack of UK media interest.”⁷⁹

In November, concerned that Iran’s goal was to create a Persian-dominated Shia Empire in the Gulf region, Bahrain’s Crown Prince Shaikh Hamad Bin Isa traveled to London, where he invited Douglas Hurd to tea. According to Shaikh Hamad, Iran continued to spread propaganda, bashing Gulf Rulers, and Iranian activity had caused problems in Saudi Arabia’s Shia-populated eastern province. The Crown Prince emphasized that

of all the Gulf States, Bahrain alone always showed respect for Shia traditions. However, the Shia village leaders were expected to maintain order in their areas and to keep their followers from creating disturbances in Manama.

Shaikh Hamad also discussed the importance of cooperation among the Gulf States. He noted that the younger generation of Gulf leaders wanted closer cooperation. Minister Hurd asked if the Gulf States would invite Iraq to join them. According to Shaikh Hamad, including Iraq "would be like introducing a member of the Soviet bloc into NATO." Turning to Washington's presence in the Gulf, Shaikh Hamad expressed satisfaction "with the unobtrusive American facilities in Bahrain," but claimed that the Gulf States were unhappy that Europeans appeared to be willing to operate "only under an American umbrella."⁸⁰

Although Whitehall officials appeared to be devoting time and effort to visiting Bahrainis, not every Bahraini official was satisfied. Bahrain's Minister of Development Shirawi complained that during several private visits to London, he was not received by British officials. Whitehall assured Minister Shirawi that during his next visit to England, Her Majesty's Government would do its very best to arrange for him to meet with British Ministers.⁸¹ Ambassador Walker expressed surprise that Shirawi had complained about his lack of access to the Foreign Office. According to the British Ambassador, at an earlier time, Shirawi had insisted that he wanted to "be in the UK incognito." However, now that the minister had complained, Ambassador Walker asked Shirawi to please inform him prior to his next visit to London and he would definitely have access to "Ministerial attention."⁸²

In November 1980, Bahraini Shia marked *Ashwra*. Shia neighborhoods were covered with black banners. Although the authorities had been concerned that violent demonstrations might take place, the police maintained a low profile and the holiday passed quietly. Ambassador Walker speculated that the Arab Bahraini Shia appreciated the religious freedom they had in Bahrain and did not want to provide the authorities with an

excuse to curtail it. In addition, a rumor had circulated that Saudi troops had entered Bahrain to support the ruling family. According to Ambassador Walker, “the Saudis inspire considerable fear among the Bahraini Shias.” However, the British Ambassador suggested that if the Iranians had been prevailing in their ongoing war against Saddam Hussein, the *Ashura* festival might not have been as peaceful.⁸³

Although *Ashura* passed quietly, after its conclusion Bahrain’s leaders decided to take action against the Shia who were considered activists. Prime Minister Khalifa ordered the arrest of 850 Shia. These men were held without trial. The head of Bahrain’s Security Service, Ian Henderson, opposed these arrests, but Shaikh Khalifa ignored him.⁸⁴

As 1980 drew to a close, Iran remained Bahrain’s major concern. At the same time, Bahrain’s Sunni leadership did not know how to deal with the country’s large Shia population. The Al-Khalifa family appreciated Bahrain’s independence. But Bahrain’s rulers, leading a small country in a region that remained in the global spotlight, continued their commitment to strong ties with London and, despite disagreeing with Washington’s support for Israel, with America.

CHAPTER 6



FROM THE GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL TO THE ARAB SPRING

Although the British, before leaving the Gulf region, had failed to unite the nine small shaikhdoms under their protection, in the years that followed, events in the region brought the former British-protected states together. Motivated by their common interest in safeguarding the region from both communism and Khomeini, in May 1981, the UAE, Qatar, and Bahrain were joined by three neighboring states, Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Kuwait. While these six states wished to safeguard their independent status, they understood that unity would serve their interests. Thus, they established the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The GCC charter expressed “their desire to effect coordination, integration and interconnection between them in all fields.”¹

Meeting in Riyadh in November 1981, representatives of the GCC states were concerned about the ongoing Iran-Iraq War, and discussed military cooperation. As a result, the GCC defense ministers began to hold frequent meetings, and in 1983 they also held what became an annual joint military exercise.² The danger that Iran posed to Bahrain was underlined in December 1981, when a group of young men waiting in Dubai’s airport for a flight to Manama aroused suspicion. After airport authorities checked their passports, the authorities

contacted Bahraini officials. The young men were identified as an advanced team of trained saboteurs. According to their plan, at least 150 men would enter Bahrain equipped with weapons that had already been smuggled by dhow into the Amirate. Their goal was to abolish the monarchy and establish an Islamic Republic. Ultimately, 73 young men were arrested and tried in connection with the failed plot.³

Bahraini officials accused the Iranian government of providing these men, members of Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain (IFLB), with equipment, which included Israeli-manufactured Uzi submachine guns and fabricated Bahraini police uniforms. The IFLB frequently declared its loyalty to Imam Khomeini and its dedication to spreading the Islamic revolution. According to IFLB leaders, violence was needed to end Al-Khalifa rule, “even if this leads to bloodshed and killing of the believers.”⁴

Concerned about the security of their country, Bahraini leaders wished to develop a national Air Force. With the assistance of the US Army Corps of Engineers, in 1984, Bahrain began construction of a military airfield in the southern portion of its main island. At this juncture, Bahrainis were sent to Saudi Arabia to learn to fly US F-5 aircraft. Soon after, Washington approved the sale of American tactical fighters, and other necessary equipment, which cost the Bahraini Ministry of Defense more than \$114 million. After providing for its new Air Force, Manama wished to strengthen its Army and paid General Dynamics \$90 million for new tanks.⁵

Bahraini concern with defense continued and so too did its interest in close relations with its GCC neighbors. Residents of each Gulf state now had easier access to other member states. In November 1986, the long-awaited half-billion-dollar Saudi-funded causeway between Saudi Arabia and Bahrain opened.⁶ After arriving in Bahrain from across the causeway, Saudi men celebrated, drinking in legal bars and enjoying mixed beaches. In the first weeks that the Saudis had access to the causeway, reckless driving was the norm. In just one hour, Bahraini police issued 84 speeding tickets. Within eight months after

the causeway opened, Bahrain had become a popular Saudi vacation spot. On weekends, approximately 10,000 cars traveled from Saudi Arabia to Bahrain.⁷ At the same time, Bahrainis used the causeway to travel to Dammam in order to take advantage of cheaper prices on numerous items, “from food to engine parts.” As a result of Bahrain’s membership in the GCC, goods purchased in Saudi Arabia could be shipped home to Bahrain duty-free. Journalist Liesl Graz also noted that, in the event of a future Iranian threat to Bahrain, within three hours Saudi military forces could reach Manama.⁸

Speaking to the press at a meeting of the GCC, which took place in Bahrain in December 1988, Bahrain’s foreign minister said: “We hope the day will come when we can say that there is a comprehensive GCC force.”⁹ However, on August 2, 1990, when Iraq’s Army invaded Kuwait, it was immediately clear that the GCC countries were unable to protect one of their own. Washington quickly responded and, with Britain’s assistance, led a multinational coalition that, in an operation known as Desert Storm, forced Iraqi troops to leave Kuwait. Shaken by Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, Bahrain now agreed to provide a base for a permanent contingent of US officers. Bahrain’s information officer explained: “I’m giving you a clear commitment that we will support any decision taken based on the commitment the United States had made to the area.”¹⁰

Discussing his tenure as political/military officer in Bahrain from October 1990 to July 1991, US diplomat Lawrence H. Hyde noted that he had the opportunity “to watch the war from a ring side seat.” Hyde claimed that Bahrain was more pro-American than the other Gulf shajkhdoms, “but it can’t get too far out in front of them. So there’s always a lot of sensitivity.” Hyde emphasized that a strong relationship with Washington was necessary to protect Bahrain from both the Saudis and the Iranians.¹¹

After the liberation of Kuwait, Bahrain was the first member of the GCC to urge its Arab neighbors and Washington to improve relations with Iraq. The Bahraini newspaper, *Akhbar al-Khalij*, called for the immediate lifting of the blockade that

prevented food from reaching the starving Iraqi people. At the same time, Manama remained in step with its GCC neighbors and insisted that Iraq comply with UN resolutions.¹²

Although various plans were presented after the Gulf War, it remained clear that the GCC states could not protect themselves. According to Historian Haggay Ram, at the end of 1993, when the leaders of the GCC states met in Riyadh, they reinforced the impression “that the protective embrace of the GCC was but an empty shell.” Bahrain continued to depend on Western protection. As a result, Manama maintained close contact with senior American defense officials, including US Secretary of Defense Les Aspin. Considering the importance of the Gulf region to the security of the United States, Washington agreed to provide Bahrain with considerable military equipment, including F-16 jets and frigates.¹³

In 1994, David M. Ransom was appointed US Ambassador to Bahrain. During his three-year term, Ransom enjoyed an excellent relationship with Bahrain’s Ruler, Shaikh Isa bin Sulman al-Khalifa, who met with him every Friday afternoon for long talks over a cup of tea. According to Ambassador Ransom,

Shaikh Isa was a man I came to love very much, a canny, humorous, generous, charming man who had been on the throne for many years. He liked people to think that he didn’t do much. In fact, his tactic was to wait until there was agreement among his brothers, uncles, and others in the government and then confirm it. But I saw that when there was no agreement, he would decide. But he would wait. He would decide very carefully.¹⁴

According to Ambassador Ransom, when he initially arrived in Bahrain, it was a peaceful island with no public indication of dissatisfaction. But during his three years there, the Shia population organized disturbances, which spread throughout the country. These demonstrations were the worst in the history of the Amirate.¹⁵ One such incident was sparked by an annual marathon sponsored by a western company. In November 1994, men and women participating in the race, both Arabs and westerners, were accosted by Shia protesters, who

objected to the race through their villages, the mixing of men and women, and the immodest clothing worn by the participants. Bahraini police made several arrests, which resulted in a large number of Shia protest demonstrations. Tension between Shia and Sunni continued to escalate.¹⁶

A movement demanding democracy had also developed after Desert Storm. Large numbers of respected Bahraini professionals requested restoration of the National Assembly. Under pressure, in December 1992, Amir Isa established an advisory Consultative Council composed of 30 male members, 15 Sunni and 15 Shia. Among those appointed were doctors, lawyers, religious judges, one journalist, and one university professor.¹⁷ However, the Consultative Council did not satisfy the Bahraini desire for genuine democracy. Meanwhile, the Amirate's economy steadily declined, especially in Shia areas. As a result, a new petition circulated. At the beginning of 1994, the government responded by arresting the Shia cleric, Shaikh Ali Salman, who was considered to be the movement's leader. As a result of his arrest, protests escalated. Writing in 1998, historian Rosemarie Said Zahlan stated:

Although at times the problems have been sectarian, most demonstrations have called for the reinstatement of the constitution and the National Assembly, for the rescinding of the dreaded security law, for the improvement of economic conditions, and for the release of prisoners some of whom have been held for many months without charge and access to lawyers.¹⁸

Meanwhile, Washington emphasized the importance of maintaining the security of the entire Gulf region. The United States and Bahrain had signed a ten-year security agreement in 1991. On May 4, 1995, US Secretary of Defense William J. Perry approved creation of the first new American fleet in 50 years, the Fifth Fleet, and Bahrain became the US Navy's Fifth Fleet operational headquarters.¹⁹ While the Bahraini government was pleased, Iran expressed its displeasure. According to Tehran, the Fifth Fleet was "symbolic of America's aggressive designs in the Gulf."²⁰

While Washington and Manama appeared to agree on defense matters, they had serious disagreements on human rights issues. Citing reports of abuse, including torture, forced exile, and detention without trial, 18 members of the US Congress signed a letter in 1995 that urged the Bahraini Government “to uphold international standards of human rights.” Nevertheless, according to Human Rights Watch, American officials dealing with the Middle East refrained from public comment on Bahrain’s human rights record. Secretary of State Warren Christopher met with Crown Prince Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa and Foreign Minister Mohammad bin Mubarak Al-Khalifa in Washington, on March 8, 1996. The issue of human rights was not addressed. According to Secretary of State Warren Christopher, “Bahrain is a good friend to the United States and an important defense partner of the United States in the Gulf region.” Christopher underlined that the two countries would work together to insure the security of the region.²¹

Washington did, however, note unrest in Bahrain. In January 1996, Assistant Secretary of State Robert Pelletreau attributed protests in Bahrain to two major factors: high unemployment and Iranian instigation. Later, in August 1996, again addressing the question of Iran’s role in Bahraini unrest, Pelletreau wrote that the source of dissatisfaction appeared domestic and involved hope for expanded political participation and an increase in employment opportunities. At the same time, Pelletreau noted that there was evidence that Bahraini militants who were dedicated to overthrowing the Al-Khalifa family had the blessing of Iran, which provided them with training and assistance.²²

Security in the Gulf region remained a crucial issue for Washington. In June 1996, a truck bomb exploded in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, hitting Khobar Towers, a barracks that housed American military personnel. Nineteen Americans were killed. As a result, Bahrain’s Amir met with the US Ambassador and the commander of the Fifth Fleet. Amir Isa agreed to enlarge the Jufair naval facility. Bahrain’s Ruler and the two American officials concluded that the walls of the facility had to be

extended in order to limit the damage that might be caused by a future bomb explosion.²³

Striving to increase support for US efforts to maintain sanctions on Saddam Hussein's Iraq, in November 1997, Secretary of State Madeline Albright embarked on a trip that included stops in several Gulf States. After the Secretary of State's meeting with the Amir Isa at a press conference held in Bahrain, a reporter asked Albright if she had convinced the Bahraini government to support military strikes against Iraq. She did not answer the question, but stated that Manama supported Washington's insistence that Saddam Hussein permit UN inspections to insure that he was not hiding weapons of mass destruction.

Later, Secretary of State Albright referred to Bahrain's Amir Isa as "a gentle old man." Shortly before her departure, as the US Secretary of State and the members of her entourage returned to their airplane, they were presented with gifts from the Amir. Opening the boxes they found that all of the America visitors had received Rolex watches. The one intended for the Secretary of State was encrusted with diamonds. According to Albright: "Under State Department rules, we couldn't accept them. Under the rules of Arab diplomacy, we couldn't reject them." As a result, the watches were later sold at auction and the funds sent to the US Treasury.²⁴

Amir Isa, Bahrain's Ruler since 1961, died in March 1999. After the death of his father, Shaikh Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa acceded to the throne. The new Amir established a committee to create a plan on how to transform Bahrain into a constitutional monarchy. The resulting "National Action Charter" was presented to the Bahraini public in a referendum in February 2001. Following the favorable vote, Amir Hamad declared Bahrain a constitutional monarchy and changed his title from Amir to King. He also announced that the first municipal elections since 1957 would be held in May 2002, and that a bicameral Parliament, with a representative lower house, would be established.²⁵

On March 16, 2001, the Hawar Islands again took center stage when the long-running dispute between Bahrain

and its neighbor Qatar was settled—not by either London or Washington—by the International Court of Justice in The Hague, which had accepted the case in 1991. The Court issued a decision at the end of what it called “the longest case in its history: Qatar v. Bahrain: Maritime and Territorial Delimitation Questions Between Qatar and Bahrain.” Earlier, both sides had agreed that the ICJ decision would be binding. The court ruled that Bahrain had no claim to Zubara, the ancestral base of the Bahraini ruling family located on the mainland of what was now Qatar, but that the Bahraini-occupied Hawar Islands, just off the Qatari coast, belonged to Bahrain.²⁶

The Hawar Islands dispute had finally been peacefully resolved, but the conflict between Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein and the United States continued to escalate. US President George Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair agreed that Saddam Hussein posed a serious threat to the region. Bahrain’s King Hamad traveled to Washington. On February 3, 2003, during a meeting with President Bush, King Hamad urged the president to find a peaceful solution. King Hamad also met with Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. Following their meeting, Rumsfeld expressed his appreciation for Bahrain’s cooperation and support.²⁷

As the United States and its coalition partners prepared for war against Iraq, which became known as Operation Iraqi Freedom, the US Marine Forces Central Command located in Hawaii was transferred to Bahrain, which became an important base for coalition members. As the number of allied troops grew, the State Department feared that anti-American sentiment would increase. Therefore, Washington warned its citizens living in the Arab world of the potential danger, and advised them to return home. Most Americans ignored the warning. According to the president of the American Association of Bahrain: “I don’t feel any sense of danger whatsoever. People over here have been very friendly.”²⁸

Neither Americans nor British were uncomfortable in Bahrain, where members of two major groups of Bahrainis, Sunni and Shia, welcomed them, but often appeared to be in

conflict with each other. When Bahrainis marked their National Day on December 16, 2006, correspondent Neil MacFarquhar described happy Bahrainis gathered on the lovely landscaped boulevards of Manama listening to bands and watching fireworks as they celebrated their country's independence. Their city was decorated with Bahrain's national colors, red and white. In addition, pictures of the Ruling Al-Khalifa princes were posted throughout the area. But not all Bahrainis celebrated. A well-known blogger, Ali Abdulemam, who lived in a crowded Shia village and had earlier spent time in jail, expressed the unhappiness of hundreds of Bahraini Shia, who opposed the domination of their Sunni rulers.

King Hamad had promised democracy when he assumed the throne in 1999. However, movement toward democracy did not truly progress. Earlier, his predecessor had attempted to appease the population by issuing a decree, in December 1992, that called for the formation of an appointed Consultative Council. This had been the first effort by the Al-Khalifa family to enlarge the scope of political participation since 1975, when Bahrain's two-year-old elected National Assembly was abolished. The mandate of the Consultative Council was to provide advice on draft laws prepared by the cabinet, but it had no power to legislate.²⁹

At the beginning of his reign, King Hamad had agreed to provide amnesty for exiles, permitting them to return to Bahrain. The new King had also eliminated the State Security Courts. But King Hamad did not continue on the road to democracy. In 2002, he imposed a new constitution on the country, which stipulated that Parliament could propose laws, but not write them. As a result, young people who opposed to the government turned to the internet to express their views, and Ali Abduleman's site BahrainOnline gained a large following.³⁰

Relations between Bahraini Sunnis and Shia continued to be strained. Nevertheless, King Hamad reached out to his very small Jewish population—only 37 Jews remained in Bahrain. In July 2008, the Ruler appointed a Bahraini Jewish

woman, Huda Ezra Ebrahim Nonoo, Ambassador to the United States. Ambassador Nonoo had completed her university education in London. Returning to Bahrain, she had served as managing director of Gulf Computer Services and was appointed by King Hamad to serve as a member of the *Shura* Council.³¹

During an interview in March 2011, Houda Nonoo, who was not only the first woman to serve as a Bahraini ambassador, but also the first Jewish ambassador to represent any Arab country, explained that she is Jewish, but not Israeli. According to Ambassador Nonoo, she had never experienced religious prejudice in Bahrain. Ambassador Nonoo underlined that she had never visited Israel nor did she identify with Israel. However, she expressed interest in the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict.³²

Bahrain had consistently opposed the recognition of Israel. Speaking at the United Nations, on November 29, 2002, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Bahrain, Mohammed Saleh, condemned Israeli aggression against the Palestinians. According to the Bahraini representative, Israel maintained settlement policies that gathered people from all over the world to replace expelled Palestinians. "It continued its war crimes, crimes against humanity and State terrorism against the Palestinian people, who were suffering bitterly from Israeli practices."³³

Nevertheless, King Hamad was able to distinguish between support for Israel and friendship with Jews. Prior to Nonoo's appointment, in August 2008, while on a trip to London to attend his son's graduation from Sandhurst, King Hamad met at the Dorchester Hotel with a group of Bahraini Jews, who had settled in Britain. Expressing pride in his Jewish subjects, the King announced that he had reactivated a law that permitted them to hold both Bahraini and British citizenship. Discussing the new Bahraini ambassador in Washington, the King claimed: "We never take notice of religion. It is the citizens that count. It is nothing to do with Israel. It is our normal business with America."³⁴

Elections were scheduled in Bahrain for October 23, 2010. These elections were to be the third since constitutional changes in 2001. In August 2010, preceding the scheduled elections, the Bahraini government arrested Shia activists. The arrests sparked violence in the streets. Incidents involved an attack on an electric power installation, and on a newspaper editor who supported the government. In addition, Molotov cocktails were thrown and tires were burned. The US Embassy in Manama issued warning to its citizens to avoid some neighborhoods, including central sections of the capital, at specific times. Bahrain's Shia majority once again expressed frustration with its government. Bahraini Shia objected to the government's policy of hiring foreign Sunni security forces, who were permitted to take a fast track toward citizenship. In addition, the Shia objected to establishment of electoral districts that were drawn to favor Sunni candidates.³⁵

Elections took place as scheduled, and 146 candidates competed for 40 seats in the lower house of Parliament. Members of Shia parties complained that the assembly did not have sufficient power because legislation it passed needed to be approved by the Parliament's upper house, which was appointed by King Hamad, who favored Sunnis. Khalil Al Marzooq, a candidate from the largest Shia opposition group, Al-Wefaq, declared that citizens were not treated equally, but he explained that the country was in a transition period towards democracy. According to Abdulaziz Abul, a 60-year-old independent member of parliament who was not running in these elections: "We don't have a democracy yet."³⁶

Bahrain's Shia population continued to express dissatisfaction. Then, in early 2011, uprisings, which began in Tunisia, spread throughout the Arab world. Bahrainis joined the masses that called for democracy. In February, Shia protestors in Bahrain demanded job opportunities and democratic changes in government, changes that included a new constitution and a truly representative Parliament.³⁷ They also wanted their Al-Khalifa rulers, who were interested in increasing the number of Sunni subjects, to discontinue the practice of providing

citizenship to Sunni foreigners who agreed to settle in Bahrain and serve in either the military or the police force.³⁸ In one village, protesters carried a sign that displayed pictures of Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, and Gandhi. The police attacked these demonstrators with tear gas and rubber bullets.³⁹

The Al-Khalifa banned public gatherings and ordered tanks into the streets. Crowds of protesters gathered in Manama's Pearl Square, where a large monument celebrated Bahrain's pearl diving history. Quickly, the square became a symbol of the battle for democracy. Thousands of people set up tents and occupied the square until, in the early hours of the morning, police surrounded the square and attacked the peaceful protesters. "The entire field was trampled. Canvas tents and a speaker's podium lay crushed. The sound of ambulances continued to wail, and a helicopter circled the square."⁴⁰

As the protests continued, the number of casualties increased. On February 16, the Ministry of Health estimated that 231 protesters were wounded and 5 were killed. US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton called Bahrain's foreign minister to express disapproval of the crackdown on peaceful demonstrations.⁴¹ Fearing reprisals, a doctor who did not want to be identified said that the Ministry of Health had prevented ambulances from traveling to the scene to help victims. The doctor stated that, early in the morning during the assault, policemen beat a paramedic and a doctor. After the beatings, the police refused to allow medical personnel to treat the wounded. News agencies in Bahrain reported that the health minister, Faisal Al-Hamar, resigned after doctors demonstrated to protest his order prohibiting ambulances from going to the square.⁴²

Nevertheless, the crackdown continued. Ignoring their government's ban, on February 18 thousands of Bahrainis once again marched to Pearl Square. Soldiers fired both tear gas and bullets. Many protesters were wounded.⁴³ Soon after, the Bahraini government attempted to appease the protesters by permitting the return of an exiled Bahraini opposition leader, Hassan Mushaima, who had been living in London. After his

arrival, Mushaima called for peaceful protests and referred to the networking sites, Twitter and Facebook, as the “deadly weapons of today.”⁴⁴ In March 2011, Emile Nakhleh, the shaikhdom’s first Fulbright Research Scholar, who had resided in Bahrain from 1972–1973, wrote about the protests. Forty years after his Fulbright year, Nakhleh noted, members of the ruling family had not eliminated their differences about the appropriate manner to reconcile Al-Khalifa rule with the desire of Bahrainis “for justice, dignity, and equal access to economic opportunity.”⁴⁵

On a mission to assure the Al-Khalifa rulers of Washington’s continued support, but at the same time to advise that change was now essential, US Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates traveled to Manama in March. During a meeting with King Hamad and Crown Prince Salman, he warned that if Bahrain’s Government did not quickly move the reform process forward, it was likely that Iran would interfere and “create more chaos.” He also noted that during the recent protests in Bahrain approximately 100,000 demonstrators had gathered in the streets.⁴⁶

Shortly after Secretary Gates concluded his visit, Saudi troops entered Bahrain, responding to the request of the Bahraini government. Referring to the Saudi troops as the Gulf Cooperation Peninsula Shield coalition force, Bahrain’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that Saudi military involvement in Bahrain “follows the principle of unity and the interdependence of the security of the GCC and the common responsibility of the GCC countries in maintaining security and stability.”⁴⁷

British Prime Minister David Cameron telephoned King Hamad and urged him to respond to protests by listening to the voices of the protesters. The British Prime Minister pressed the King to pursue political dialogue with demonstrators. Cameron’s official spokesman told reporters in Westminster that the prime minister expressed his serious concern at the deteriorating situation in Bahrain and urged restraint from all parties, claiming that it was crucial that the King and Bahraini authorities respond “through reform, not repression.”⁴⁸

Saudi troops numbering approximately 2,000 had entered Bahrain using the causeway that linked the two countries. According to one Saudi official, his county's troops were needed to protect the financial district and other important facilities. In addition, Saudi officials expressed concern about a possible Iranian attempt to seize Bahrain saying "we don't want Iran 14 miles off our coast."⁴⁹ Earlier, retired Political Agent Anthony Parson had written that it was generally accepted that the existence of the causeway would have a positive impact on Bahrain and in the event of a threat to the country, it would enable the passage of Saudi and other GCC forces quickly to provide support.⁵⁰

Approximately 600 policemen from the UAE joined the Saudi forces, which were stationed at the Shaikh Isa air base. The mission of the GCC Force was to support the government against its domestic challengers and to discourage Iran from becoming engaged in the conflict.⁵¹ Although Qatar did not send its soldiers, Qatari officials fully supported the movement of Saudi and UAE forces into Bahrain. According to Qatari authorities, "the arrival of Saudi and UAE troops in Bahrain is in line with a GCC defense agreement that calls for all members to oblige when needed and to fully cooperate."⁵²

As soon as the Saudi troops had arrived in Bahrain, King Hamad had declared a state of emergency to remain in effect for three months. Writing in *The Wall Street Journal*, Simon Henderson, an academic, stated that Washington had to underline the need for reform in Bahrain and, at the same time, press the numerous groups opposing the Al-Khalifa rulers to accept compromise. The United States wanted to maintain good relations with all sides in order to secure the Bahraini headquarters of the US Fifth Fleet, which "is a crucial part of the efforts to block Iran's nuclear ambitions and counter any interference with the flow of oil."⁵³

Demands for movement towards democracy continued in Bahrain, and the symbolic center of the protests remained Pearl Square. On March 17, using armed vehicles, the police entered the Square and destroyed its centerpiece, the tall monument,

which had represented an important chapter of Bahrain's history. According to Bahraini officials, the monument was dismantled in order to improve the flow of traffic.⁵⁴

Bahrain's Ministry of Interior Security announced, on March 21, that in order to insure the safety of all citizens and residents throughout the country, policemen were patrolling the major roads. The ministry claimed that many Bahrainis had returned to work, that life was returning to normal. The Ministry also confirmed that Bahrain's largest public hospital, the Salmaniya Medical Complex, site of earlier confrontations, had resumed medical services.⁵⁵

Earlier, on March 15, Bahrain's military had occupied the Salmaniya Medical Complex, and stationed tanks at the entrance. As reports of government-sponsored violence against patients and doctors escalated, delegates from the United States-based Physicians For Human Rights (PHR) prepared to travel to Bahrain. They arrived at the beginning of April and conducted 47 anonymous interviews with both members of the medical staff and those who had witnessed abuse. They also reviewed medical records and examined victims in order to secure independent verification of each incident. Responding to the PHR investigation, during a BBC interview, "the Minister of the Interior claimed that physicians performed unnecessary surgeries or made small wounds larger to dramatize the protesters' case."⁵⁶

As events unfolded, London agreed with Washington that reform was necessary in Bahrain, that absolute monarchy had to be replaced with democratic representative government. At the same time, Prime Minister Cameron continued to maintain good relations with Bahrain's rulers. As a result, Crown Prince Salman was invited to London to attend the wedding of heir to the throne, Prince William, and his bride Kate Middleton. Fearing that possible protests against his presence would tarnish the happy occasion, Prince Salman declined the invitation. After the wedding, however, he traveled to London and met with Prime Minister Cameron, who once again urged that Bahrain dispense with repression and embrace reform. Reacting to that

meeting, former Labour Foreign Minister Denis MacShane criticized Cameron, stating that Britain ought not to be “rolling out the red carpet for Bahrain’s torturer-in-chief.”⁵⁷

Visiting Bahrain in early April, Britain’s Secretary of State for Defense, Dr. Liam Fox, underlined British interest in strengthening ties between the two countries, and emphasized the importance of cooperation on defense issues.⁵⁸ During a meeting with Dr. Fox, King Hamad expressed appreciation for British support and emphasized Bahrain’s strong ties with HMG. In addition, Undersecretary for Regional and GCC Affairs Hamad Ahmed Al-Amer pointed to Bahrain’s difficulties with Iran, complaining that Tehran continued efforts to interfere in the internal affairs of the GCC countries, “by conspiring against their national security and sowing seeds of sedition and sectarianism.”⁵⁹

As protests continued in Bahrain, a junior American diplomat in Manama, Ludovic Hood, who worked on human rights issues and whose wife was identified as Jewish on a local blog, received threats. In May, Secretary of State Clinton complained to Bahrain’s foreign minister about these threats against the American couple. A further indication of anti-American sentiment was apparent in an article published in a Bahraini newspaper on June 4, which claimed that US Chargé d’Affaires, Stephanie Williams, cooperated with the moderate Shia opposition group Al-Wefaq. Two days later, a government-sponsored newspaper published an editorial that claimed, “American black fingers are aiming to weaken the Gulf.”⁶⁰

Following King Hamad announcement on June 1 that he had lifted the state of emergency and would soon begin discussions on reform in Bahrain, Crown Prince Salman met in the White House with President Obama. The President emphasized that stability depended on “respect for universal human rights.” Later, speaking to reporters, Prince Salman said, “we are committed to reform in both the political and economic spheres.”⁶¹

Nevertheless, pressure on the opposition continued. On June 22, a military court convicted 21 men, all but one

was Shia, of conspiring with Iran and attempting to overthrow the government. Human rights organizations criticized the proceedings as “purely political.” These men had taken part in street demonstrations. Eight of the convicted men were sentenced to life in prison. In response to the sentences, crowds gathered to protest and the police fired tear gas. Hence, although on June 1, 2011, King Hamad had declared the end of Bahrain’s state of emergency, the situation remained tense with a large number of checkpoints and numerous clusters of policemen visible throughout the country.⁶²

Bahrain’s rulers proposed beginning serious dialogue with leaders of the opposition on July 1. However, Shia cleric Shaikh Isa Qassim warned that such dialogue was impossible until the authorities ceased oppressing those seeking political rights. Shaikh Qassim denounced Bahrain’s Sunni rulers who continued to discriminate against the Shia population, now representing approximately 70 percent of Bahrain’s citizens. According to Shaikh Qassim: “The reactions of the security forces result in damaging the country, but the people are patient and peaceful.”⁶³

Attempting to improve Bahrain’s image, Information Affairs Authority President Shaikh Fawaz bin Mohammed Al-Khalifa disputed claims that Bahrain’s Shia represented the majority of Bahraini subjects. He claimed that the total population of his country was 1.2 million, but only approximately 600,000 were citizens and they were “divided in almost equal ratio between Sunnis and Shiites.” Shaikh Fawaz claimed that the Kingdom was committed to religious tolerance. He emphasized that in Bahrain there were a considerable number of both mosques and churches, “and even a Jewish synagogue dating back more than one hundred years.”⁶⁴

A message from the Bahraini Embassy in Washington, dated June 24, 2011, stated that the reform progress would continue, that the King would insure the protection of all Bahrainis, encourage transparency, and, “respect the rule of law in light of national unity, the principles of human rights, justice, equality, and ensuring the dignity and welfare of citizens.”⁶⁵ Responding

to King Hamad's message, an editorial in *The New York Times* stated that, since so many members of the opposition remained in Bahraini jails, it was difficult to take King Hamad's promises seriously. In light of the recent crackdown on the opposition and the imposition of harsh sentences, the editorial asked: "Why would anyone trust the government after that?" The editor turned to Washington and criticized the Obama administration for its failure to speak out "more forcefully."⁶⁶

Washington continued to encourage dialogue. However, by the middle of July the Shia party, Al-Wefaq, withdrew from talks with Bahrain's rulers. Al-Wefaq had demanded that all those detained during the recent protests be released and that all those convicted as a result of charges stemming from those protests be cleared. The government said no. According to the Shia leader, Khalil Ebrahim Al-Marzooq, his party concluded that the Al-Khalifa rulers were not sincerely interested in political reform.⁶⁷

As summer progressed, unrest continued. The renowned international relief organization, Doctors Without Borders, discontinued working in Bahrain after Bahrain's security forces raided its facilities on July 28, damaging property and seizing medical supplies. Human rights activists condemned the Bahraini government's ongoing efforts to prevent wounded protesters from obtaining medical assistance by either jailing them or by intimidating medical personnel who attempted to provide treatment. According to Bahrain's Health Ministry, it took action against Doctors without Borders because the organization had not been issued a permit to operate a health facility.⁶⁸

Under considerable pressure, King Hamad responded to critics at the end of July by establishing a Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI). He invited a well-known international legal scholar, Distinguished Research Professor of Law Emeritus at Chicago's Depaul University, Cherif Bassiouni, to lead an investigation into how Bahraini authorities responded to the mass protests that were taking place. Bassiouni, born in Egypt, had earlier served on commissions that had investigated war crimes in several other countries, including Afghanistan and

Libya. Before issuing a report and recommendations to King Hamad, Bassiouni planned to hear testimony from members of the government and from those in opposition.⁶⁹

Observing the situation in Bahrain, Britain's former Special Forces commander and Iraq's Multinational Force deputy commander, General Sir Graeme Lamb, declared that given its long connection to Bahrain, Britain had a "special responsibility in helping Bahrain return to an acceptable global society."⁷⁰ However, there was no immediate solution. During a protest at the end of August a 14-year-old boy, Ali Jawad Ahmad, was killed. Thousands of angry Bahrainis marched to his funeral in the town of Sitra, six miles south of Manama. Referring to their Ruler, the mourners shouted, "Down, down, Hamad!" Following the funeral, hundreds of protesters tried unsuccessfully to retake the central square in Manama that had earlier been a focus of the protests. In order to disperse the crowd, Bahraini security officers fired tear gas and blocked roads with buses.⁷¹

The Bahraini government acted quickly to defend itself from accusations that it had been responsible for the boy's death. From Washington, Ambassador Nonoo sent out a statement claiming that, at the time of Ali's death, there had been no incidents involving the police in Sitra. According to the Bahraini government, the Interior Ministry announced a sizeable financial reward for any information leading to the arrest of those responsible for Ali's death.⁷²

Anti-government protests continued. Writing for *The New York Times* on September 15, reporter Anthony Shadid discussed the ongoing confrontations between protesters and government forces. He noted that "American willingness to look the other way has cast Washington as hypocritical."⁷³ Responding to Shadid's article, Ambassador Nonoo wrote that her country was unfairly accused of repression when its officials were only working to maintain law and order. According to Bahrain's ambassador in Washington, "no government—not even the world's most respected democracies—would or could permit armed gangs to run rampant in the streets."⁷⁴

Writing for *The Guardian*, British commentator Ian Birrell, who had worked as a speechwriter for candidate David Cameron during his 2010 election campaign, criticized Cameron's government. Birrell claimed that the Conservative government was hypocritical. It supported the Libyans who rebelled against the dictatorship of Colonel Gaddafi, but at the same time denied support to opponents of the oppressive Bahraini Sunni establishment. Birrell wrote, "This makes no sense." He emphasized that Bahrainis demanding democracy deserved British support.⁷⁵

Former British Ambassador to Bahrain, Sir Harold Walker, was not prepared to condemn Prime Minister's Cameron's position. Walker emphasized that Iran remained a threat to Bahrain and that the West did not truly understand the seriousness of that threat. Walker considered Bahrain the most progressive Gulf country. He claimed that "of all the Gulf states, Bahrain is the most liberal and progressive in terms of upholding women's rights, freedom of worship, and provision of health-care and schooling." Walker criticized the Western media for unbalanced reporting, favoring those who opposed the Bahraini government. He suggested that the best course forward was not revolution, but rather evolution. He advised that the British government work to support "a step by step approach to a more representative form of government."⁷⁶

Earlier, on September 21, 2011, speaking before the United Nations General Assembly, President Obama had expressed his views on Bahrain:

In Bahrain, steps have been taken toward reform and accountability. We're pleased with that, but more is required. America is a close friend of Bahrain, and we will continue to call on the government and the main opposition bloc—the Wifaq—to pursue a meaningful dialogue that brings peaceful change that is responsive to the people. We believe the patriotism that binds Bahrainis together must be more powerful than the sectarian forces that would tear them apart. It will be hard, but it is possible.⁷⁷

In an effort to reduce criticism, on November 21, Bahraini officials admitted that their security forces had earlier used

excessive force and, during the protests, had abused detainees. Hence, the government announced that it had initiated prosecutions against 20 officers who were involved in these incidents. Meanwhile, concerned about the safety of its citizens, Washington's embassy in Manama continued to issue advisories telling American to avoid areas where demonstrations might occur. On November 20, the embassy also warned that publication of the BICI report would likely inspire protests throughout the country. "Demonstrators plan to burn tires, disrupt traffic, and have threatened to use Molotov cocktails against police."⁷⁸

Bassioni's investigation resulted in a 500-page report completed on November 23, 2011. His commission detailed physical and psychological mistreatment of protesters that in numerous cases amounted to torture. The report described how hooded prisoners were whipped and subjected to electric shock. "At least five prisoners, it said, died under torture. Female prisoners were threatened with rape."⁷⁹ Responding to the commission's report, Bahrain's government declared that there would be no immunity for crimes. "All those who have broken the law or ignored lawful orders and instructions will be held accountable." British Foreign Secretary William Hague expressed the hope that Bahrain's government would act quickly "to address the serious abuses identified."⁸⁰

From Washington, Ambassador Nonoo announced that the Ministry of Interior would arrange for a mechanism to carry out the recommendations contained in the BICI report, including achieving security performance that conformed to international standards. Reforms would be introduced that would both protect public security and at the same time maintain stability. The government understood its "overriding duty to respect human rights and basic freedoms." According to Ambassador Nonoo, the Minister of the Interior announced that his ministry would soon sign contracts with both American and British experts to assist in developing a satisfactory police force trained to respect human rights. "This will lead to the drafting of a Code of Conduct for police work that would include details on how a policeman should perform his duties according to international and local legal criteria and rules."⁸¹

Visiting London, on December 12, King Hamad met with Prime Minister Cameron at 10 Downing Street. Referring to the Bassioni report, the British leader urged Bahrain's Ruler quickly to improve relations with his Shia subjects. As a result of British concern about possible protesters gathering to oppose the king's visit, the meeting between the two leaders had not been announced in advance. Foreign Secretary William Hague supported Prime Minister Cameron's decision to invite the King to Downing Street, claiming that "engagement is [the] best way to encourage reform [and] Bahrain is [an] important partner." The two leaders also discussed trade and how to insure smooth operations. In addition, Prime Minister Cameron expressed willingness to assist in reforming the Bahraini judicial system.⁸²

As the Al-Khalifa family continued its diplomatic efforts, Bahrainis maintained their protest movement. In the middle of December, Zainab al-Khawaja, the daughter of a leading activist, was detained during a rally outside Manama. The previous June, her father, Abdulhadi al-Khawaja, had been sentenced to life in prison. He had been convicted of crimes against the state by a special security tribunal set up under emergency law.⁸³ After the arrest of Zainab al-Khawaja, demonstrations continued. The leader of the Wefaq party called on the government to free Zainab al-Khawaja, complaining that despite the BICI report, Bahrain's government was continuing to oppress its people. "It sends a bad message from the regime that it does not respect the recommendations of the report."⁸⁴ After five days in custody, Zainab was released.⁸⁵

Attempting to soothe discontent, the National Commission chaired by Ali bin Saleh Al-Saleh, which had been established to implement the recommendations of the BICI Report, now announced plans to reinstate employees who had been dismissed from both the public and private sectors. Al-Saleh also assured the public that students, who had been expelled from school during earlier demonstrations, would be permitted to return to their classrooms. In addition, the commission chairman noted that Bahraini leaders planned to introduce legislation that would bring existing laws up to international standards.⁸⁶

While Bahrain's rulers attempted to save face and maintain their position, once again Bahraini gifts of jewelry became an issue. Before Christmas 2011, members of the British Royal Family, Prince Edward and his wife Sophie, traveled to Afghanistan to visit British troops. On route home, they stopped in Bahrain and were guests of King Hamad at a palace banquet. Following Arab tradition, the British visitors were presented with gifts, including a pearl cup and jewelry. News of these gifts resulted in negative publicity in England. Members of the British public, distressed by the Al-Khalifa oppression of pro-democracy supporters, insisted that the royal couple return the gifts or sell them and donate the proceeds to assist victims of the regime's brutality. Labour Member of Parliament Denis MacShane declared: "I'm afraid that when it comes to international relations diamonds are not a girl's best friend."⁸⁷

King Hamad continued his efforts to win support at home. Appearing on Bahraini television, on January 15, he announced that the elected Parliament would have greater authority, including the right to approve members of the cabinet. However, it appeared that this new concession did not apply to King Hamad's uncle, Prince Khalifa bin Sulman, who had served as prime minister since 1971, achieving the designation of "the world's longest serving unelected prime minister."⁸⁸

Hence, as winter followed the "Arab Spring," in Bahrain there were signs of tentative steps towards democracy, and at the same time indications of continued repression. The Al-Khalifa rulers remained firmly in control, but recognized that it was now in their interest to respond to criticism. At the same time, the long connection between Bahrain and both Britain and the United States remained secure. Concerned with containing Iran, and maintaining the flow of oil, both Washington and London continued to view the Al-Khalifa rulers as reliable partners.

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