

## **Challenges Facing National Security in the Arab Gulf States: A Case Study of Bahrain**

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### **Abstract**

*The study tackled the concept of security, its development, and the intellectual schools that dealt with the concept of security. The researcher then discussed the concept of national security based on the comprehensive concept of security that links the military, economic, and social dimension. The National Action Charter, which was passed on February 14, 2001, states that Bahrain's national security is "the fence and fortress for protecting the country and maintaining its lands and economic, social, and political gains, along with supporting the process of comprehensive development; especially in light of contemporary regional and international conditions and changes. The study showed that Bahrain's national security suffers from difficulties and gaps, and it faces various challenges. The small size of Bahrain and Iran's expansionist ambitions have imposed on the former the alliance with the United States, the establishment of military bases there, and deployment of Gulf military forces to the country in the face of the violence that broke out in 2011. Despite the political reforms undertaken by Sheikh Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa after he took office in 1999, the opposition's rejection of these reforms and their demand for constitutional monarchy, the adoption of a multi-party system, the cessation of the naturalization policy aimed at changing the demographic structure, etc., and playing on sectarian tendencies (Sunni and Shiite) all show the social division in the political crisis that hit Bahrain in the wake of the Arab Spring revolutions, and the political situation coincides with the sectarian affiliation of large segments of Bahrainis*

### **Introduction**

In the period of the Arab revolutions, Bahraini security was exposed to severe crises that almost led to the collapse of Bahraini political system. There were a number of questions about the nature of the Bahraini political system as well as the foundations of the Bahraini national security system. As a result of these events, the regime sought to consolidate the existing relations of integration across the Gulf States and to build a common security policy, which was reflected in the pattern of interaction between Bahrain and the Gulf States, and it had repercussions on the country's policy towards neighboring countries, especially Iran. The Bahraini political system also sought to maximize its security gains through a policy of dialogue, partnership, and cooperation within the framework of its strategic environment with the Gulf States. First: The Problem of the Study: This study seeks to analyze modern security approaches and study the nature of the impact of the Arab spring revolutions on the national security alliance and its strategy towards the Gulf states on the one hand, and the neighboring countries on the other hand.

The research problem is to answer the following question:

- **What is the strategic perception of the Bahraini political system to national security after the revolutions of the Arab Spring? What are its security moves towards the Gulf states and neighboring countries (Iran)?**

This study is divided into the following research questions:

1. What theoretical security approaches emerged after the end of the Cold War?
2. What are the patterns of interaction between Bahrain and the Gulf States within the framework of the Gulf Union? And what are their implications for Iran's expansionist projects and ambitions towards the region?
3. What is Bahrain's perception of its strategic environment (partnership, cooperation, and conflict)?

**The importance of the study: This study is very important for the following considerations:**

**Scientific considerations:**

- A. The study is based on modern theories of international security, which are the theories of liberalism and realism and structural theory, to understand which is more appropriate to the current Bahraini reality.
- B. This study represents a contribution to the analysis of the relations between Bahrain and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, considering that the previous studies do not focus much on the study of security among the Arab countries compared to the study of the military dimension of national security and Arab national security.

- **Practical considerations:** The study is of great scientific importance by addressing a vital subject related to Bahrain's perception of national security and its implications for the Gulf states. The Gulf states do not pose a threat to Iran, but Iran poses a threat to international peace and security. Hence, the importance of Gulf security integration and cooperation, which give practical value to the study.

**Methodology:** The following methods were used in the study:

1. **The historical approach:** The study used the historical approach in tracking the emergence of the concept of national security, the development of its strategic concepts, and the development of the Bahraini national security policy, in addition to monitoring the pillars of the Bahraini national security and cooperation with the countries in its strategic environment.

**Methodology of Analysis of the International Political System** The study used the concept of the regional system as an analytical tool in many areas, including:

- a. Geographical Concept: A regional system is a subsystem.
- b. Qualitative concept: political system, economic system, social system
- c. Functional concept: GCC security system

**Fifth: The scope of the study:**

1. The time range: The study starts from the beginning of the revolutions of the Arab Spring - in 2011- and their impact on the nature of the Bahraini national security and the pattern of relations among its components
2. Spatial range (geographic): The study focuses on two types of issues:
  - A. Issues related to the level of total analysis, covering sub- system security and national security
  - B. Issues related to the level of partial analysis including a sub-system of the regional system, which is the Bahraini national security.

**Literature Review**

**1- Ahmed Al-Qudra study, entitled: Political and Social Variables and their Impact on the Bahraini Political System (2002-2013),**

The study showed the Bahraini political situation since the promulgation of the amended constitution in 2002 and the developments in the Bahraini arena. The study examined the most important social, economic, and political variables, and how they affected the work of the Bahraini political system, and reviewed the geopolitical and social determinants and how they influenced the formation of the political system. The study also sought to identify the position of the regime, the government, and the opposition on controversial issues, such as the constitution and the political system of Bahrain.

The study reached several results; the most important was the exposure of political life since the promulgation of the amended constitution for a range of political, economic, and social factors that affected the democratic process and delayed the transition to the constitutional monarchy. The study recommended the necessity of activating and implementing what was agreed upon in the National Action Charter and the contents of the amended Constitution of 2002, in order to consolidate the concept of citizenship and emphasize the democratic process and accelerate the implementation of the constitutional monarchy.

**1. Osama Ali Mohamed Abdelkader's study entitled: The Approach of Arab Revolutions and Foreign Interests: The Model of "Syria and Bahrain"<sup>i</sup>**

The study examined the political and legal crises in the Arab world as an input to the revolution. It also reviewed the reality of the Arab revolutions between internal repression and external interests, explaining the dimensions of foreign interests in Bahraini economy, and how the Peninsula Shield forces played a role in maintaining foreign interests in Bahrain since the events of “ 14 February 2011” .The study reached several conclusions, and the most important was that the United States and the West pay attention only to their interests, their democratic slogans, and their defense human rights only to cover up their projects and ambitions, which are translated into control of oil sources.

**2. Frederick Werie's Study entitled, The Unstable Fellow: The Bahrain Crisis and US Policy, 2013<sup>ii</sup>.**

The study revealed social divisions and violence in Bahrain and analyzed the government's strategic plan to deal with these divisions and violence. It concluded that the government was unwilling to implement fundamental political reforms. Internal divisions and a hard-line majority paralyze the country's three main political forces - the Shiite opposition, Sunni Islamists, and the ruling family. The study argued that these divisions require the United States to balance between the need for political reform and strategic interests and long-term military partnerships with Bahrain.

**3. Jane Cunningham study, entitled: Bahrain Beyond the Inertia, 2013<sup>iii</sup>.**

The study showed that the political stalemate that followed the uprising in Bahrain caused tensions far beyond the Kingdom, contributing to the increasing sectarian policy in the region and testifying to the ability of Western countries to define new policies towards the Middle East. In the absence of any serious process of political reform in Bahrain, violence is gradually rising. The study concluded that there would be no political consensus at any time in Bahrain, which made it even more urgent to start a political negotiation process to pave the way for resolving the political conflict without violence.

**4. Al - Mutairi study entitled : The role of the Gulf Cooperation Council in the preservation of the security of the Gulf region, 2010-2011<sup>iv</sup>.**

This study aimed to analyze determinants and variables affecting the security of the Gulf region and the nature of the role played by the Gulf Cooperation Council in the security and stability of the Gulf region, in light of the international competition for the resources of the region. The study showed that the structure of the role of the Gulf Cooperation Council is a weak structure in its security system, which requires recourse to an international force to protect the security of the Gulf, and that the challenges faced by the Arab Gulf countries require them to work with great awareness to all the changes and developments taking place on the international and regional arenas, and to rise to the challenge. The real wealth of these countries is not expressed by the abundance of oil, as expressed by the great projects that result from it. Citizens are the first line of defense for the security of these countries in facing the present and future challenges.

**National security: The emergence**

The concept of national security emerged with the emergence of the nation-state after the Treaty of Westphalia in 1846, followed by the emergence of other new terms, such as: sovereignty of the state, national interest, and national will; all of which are terms and concepts linked to the ability of the nation-state to protect its territory from external threats, especially military ones .The changes in the international system after the Second World War have imposed a new vision for the security of states, and new concepts have emerged such as: international balance, containment, deterrence, peaceful coexistence, and international polarization .During the Cold War stage, the concept of national security developed and expanded to all the comprehensive capabilities of the state, including military, industrial, economic, security, cultural and educational capabilities, and human power . Following the collapse of the former Soviet Union, a new era began and was known as: “the New World Order”, and the unipolarity of the United States.

The various sides began to study new principles of national security and their application, and the major powers turned to the international organizations and gave strength and effectiveness to their role in the new world order, while the smaller states tried to test the rigidity of this system and the limits of their role and their ability to benefit from the possibilities and margin of political, economic, social, and military maneuvering .

### **Security: concept and trends**

In this section, a linguistic and theological definition will be given to the concept of security, and schools of thought that dealt with national security will be presented.

#### **The linguistic and theological concept of security**

Security in language is the opposite of fear- security against fear. " The concept is mentioned in the Holy Quran: "Let them worship the Lord who fed them hunger and secured them from fear "v. The term national security emerged for the first time was in 1947, when the American National Security Council was created, after the end of the Second World War and the emergence of the term Cold War to indicate the state's ability to achieve its security so as not to sacrifice its legitimate interests to avoid war and the ability to protect those interests if forced by war .<sup>vi</sup>The concept was linked to the military dimension, so Raymond Aron saw security as the primary and paramount goal of every individual or political unit. There is a strong relationship between national interest and national security. The threat of communism coming from the Soviet Union, which threatens liberal values , played a major role in focusing on the military dimension in defining security<sup>vii</sup>. Later, the concept was linked to development; Robert McNamara defined security as development rather than military equipmen;, without development, there is no security. As a result of the end of the cold war, the concept of security has been redefined to relate to new international topics, such as: international terrorism, money laundering, organized crime<sup>viii</sup>, competition and economic blocs, tariff barriers, and development problems<sup>ix</sup>. The concept of security has evolved to include all military, economic, and political aspects, which is: the ability of the state to protect the homeland from the threats it faces and the ability of the state to protect its citizens, improve the quality of life, raise the standard of living of citizens, and increase the distributive capacity of the state, which limits the economic deprivation that leads to dissatisfaction and frustration<sup>x</sup>. Barry Bouzan defines national security as a quest for freedom from threat. This is done at two levels: national and international, and the ability of states and societies to maintain their independent identity and practical cohesion .<sup>xi</sup>National security is the ability of the State to maintain its territory, economy, natural resources, and various systems (social and political)<sup>xii</sup>, or its ability to defend its political independence and internal stability, and to defend its national interests and achieve its national objectives, to create the appropriate environment for sustainable development<sup>xiii</sup>, or its ability to survive and maintain its core values while continuing to grow according to predefined goals and strategies.<sup>xiv</sup>

#### **Theories that dealt with security**

There are three theories that dealt with the security policies of countries:

##### **Realism:**

In its approach to the concept of security, realist theory focused on the military dimension and the national interest of the State. The international system was an anarchic system for the absence of a centralized, peremptory international authority. States therefore took their own security and defended their interests through the acquisition and use of force<sup>xv</sup>. According to the theory of realism, security is state security. The focus should be on security policies, rather than the concept of security .<sup>xvi</sup>Realists have pointed out that security means the absence of threats against central values, and the absence of fear that these values are the subject of attack <sup>xvii</sup>. In other words, security is measured by its objective meaning and the absence of threats to the values acquired and its subjective meaning, which indicates the absence of fear that those values will be attacked.

##### **Liberalism**

The most important assumptions of liberalism, regarding national security, are to address national security issues from a cost-benefit perspective. They do not favor increased military spending as a threat to economic security. They're also concerned with securing strategic economic resources, the economics of war, and the ability of states to formulate their economic policies without external dictates." Without development<sup>xviii</sup>, there is no need to talk about security .According to liberalism, the state is not the only actor in international security relations. There are many institutions, groups, and individuals whose interests may vary and turn into compromises to reach general agreement on those interests.

It considers that the sources of the threat are not limited only to the external threat but also to the internal threat, and that the objective of the state of national security is to improve its relative economic, military, and political power.<sup>xix</sup>

### **Integrative theory**

It focuses on the comprehensive dimensions of security such as: political dimension, economic dimension, military dimension, environmental dimension, and social dimension<sup>xx</sup>.

Integrative theory also considers that the transformations in the international system are beyond the narrow military concept, expanding into all economic, social, and political fields, and becoming a general concept that includes everything affecting the state, its people, land, and authority. This theory shows that military spending comes at the expense of the country's economic growth and development, and therefore civilian solutions to security problems should be found, including: democratic transformation, state building, civil society development, economic growth, and interdependence.

### **The dimensions of national security**

There are many elements that constitute security; the presence or absence of these elements leads to the stability or instability of national security, which is already linked to its existence and its ability to protect the people against any internal or external aggression. It guarantees the integrity of the state against external aggressors or from within. These elements can be summarized as follows:<sup>xxi</sup>

- **The military dimension:** The military dimension is the most effective and clear aspect of national security. It focuses on the military side of the state, especially the armed forces, and their role in protecting the state against any foreign armed threat that sacrifices its entity or borders, and they have an external role, which is to show their strength to the outside world, in order to convince them that the country has the power to protect its vital interests externally and to achieve them in the event of recourse to armed force.<sup>xxii</sup> The weakness of the state, militarily, may cause it to be exposed to threats and challenges that may reach to the extent of its fall under foreign occupation, total collapse, dissolution and annexation to another State, or division into small states. This dimension is closely related to the other dimensions of national security, because the weakness of any other dimension affects and weakens military strength, while the strength of these dimensions increases the military power of the state, which is at the heart of its national security. On the other hand, the military balance of any state is relative, the status and influence of any state change depending on the change in its position in that balance and the military institution that has the ability and power that is reliable.<sup>xxiii</sup>
- **The Economic dimension:** It is pertained to the depletion of vital resources and markets necessary to maintain acceptable levels of welfare and power of the state, and it is particularly important in economic crises. The weakness of the economy of a state has a great influence on other aspects of national security, while the strength of the economy has a role, weight, and importance within the international system and creates regular internal stability and development. This dimension considers that development and security are two sides of one coin, and that the optimal exploitation of the limited wealth of a state is conducive to sustainable economic development. Although, the neglect of national wealth or its disruption leads to the disruption of economic security, which negatively affects national security in its comprehensive sense.<sup>xxiv</sup>
- **The Political dimension:** means the organizational stability of states, systems of governments, and the ideologies from which they derive their legitimacy<sup>xxv</sup>, which means preserving the political entity of a state by developing its capabilities and increasing its national strength. The political dimension of the national security of the state is linked to the extent to which democracy is achieved. Democratic systems allow the establishment of effective political institutions and lead to the expansion of political participation and equality among citizens and fill the gaps that could threaten it.

### **Bahraini national security and its challenges**

The challenges of national security differ from one country to another, according to the geopolitical location of the state, as well as in terms of its strength, capabilities, size, and role in the international arena. These challenges differ in terms of their internal and external sources, including military, political, economic, social and cultural challenges. The military challenges include the possibility of the state being subjected to external invasion or armed aggression, which is one of the most important sources of threat to the sovereignty and national independence of states and the preservation of their existence in the international arena.

The economic challenges include: weak infrastructure, underdevelopment, and economic stagnation, or poverty of countries in terms of potential and vital natural resources such as minerals and oil, therefore, economically weak countries will suffer from external dependence and political polarization, which is reflected on the entity and independence of the state. Social and cultural challenges include the problem of loyalty to the state and the multiplicity of ethnicities and nationalities within a single state. History has shown that multi-ethnic states are the least stable and most vulnerable to political problems and strikes.

### **The pillars of Bahraini national security**

The National Action Charter, adopted on February 14, 2001, devoted the fourth chapter to the Bahraini national security. According to the charter, the definition of national security is: "the fence and fortress for protection of the country and maintenance of its lands and economic, social, and political gains and support the process of comprehensive development, especially under the contemporary regional and international changes<sup>xxvi</sup>." The Charter addressed the most important pillars of Bahrain's national security as :

- First: Support and strengthen the Bahrain Defense Force to be able to perform its duties and responsibilities to the fullest.
- Second: Provide the equipment and basic elements of the public security forces, to ensure the performance of its duty to spread security and tranquility throughout the country, and to maintain order and public security.
- Third: Support and strengthen the National Guard to perform its role within the defense and security force as a military depth of the Bahrain Defense Force and a security shield for the General Security Forces in protecting the homeland. It is noticed that one of the most important pillars of national security, defined by the National Action Charter, is that it is based on the traditional concept of security that's based solely on the military dimension. Therefore, the role of the defense force, the security forces, the National Guard, the Bahrain Defense Force, and the Bahrain Defense Force, which is viewed as a symbol of national unity, a bond of brotherhood, and a support for the Arab and Islamic nation. The Charter sets the general framework for the development of the Bahraini national security system in the following elements:

1-Relying on policies to prepare an efficient human element.

2-Taking care of the personnel of the Defense Force to become an indispensable element in the security and protection of Bahrain.

3-Workin to increase the combat, administrative, and technical capacity of the defense force, by training and organization to reach the highest possible level.

Among the strategic issues in the vision of the National Action Charter for the Bahraini National Security is the need to have a clear defense policy, supported by detailed programs that aim to achieve these objectives, that need to be continuously reviewed, in order to develop the strategic vision and technological adaptation and identify the sources of danger on an ongoing basis, with the emphasis that the offensive war is prohibited in accordance with the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bahrain.

### **Bahrain's national security challenges**

Bahrain's national security suffers from significant difficulties and gaps, and it faces various challenges in many aspects that can be reviewed as follows:

#### **First: the challenge of land and borders: geographical security**

The Kingdom of Bahrain is a group of islands located off the south-central shores of the Arabian Gulf. The archipelago has 40 islands with a total area of about 710 square kilometers. The largest of these islands is the island of Bahrain, where the capital Manama is located, accounting for nearly 85 per cent of the country's total area. The second largest area is the southern archipelago known as Hawar(50 km<sup>2</sup>), which is not far from the Qatari coast, followed by the uninhabited island of Umm Na'asan (19 square kilometers), the heavily populated Muharraq Island (18 square kilometers), Sitra (10 square kilometers), an artificial island, is also connected to Bahrain by bridges, while the remaining small islands and coral reefs form the rest of the mass<sup>xxvii</sup> (about 5.1 per cent.)

As a result of the small size of the country and its multiple islands, Bahrain signed a US military deployment to the country and established military bases, in it "Command of the Fifth Maritime Fleet". This has caused direct concern and threat to the neighboring countries of Bahrain, especially Iran, which America is hostile to, and it threatens by war and direct military action from time to time .

The second aspect is the foreign interference in the internal affairs of Bahrain (Iranian intervention), which prompted it to request the Gulf military forces, (1500) soldiers, and deployed them to the country in face of the violence that broke out in 2011. Many opposition leaders in Bahrain, backed by Iran, have argued that this military and security decision in Bahrain has made the government of Bahrain a formative authority and an occupying power that lacks sovereignty, which is a flagrant challenge to the country's national security in a geopolitical way .

### **Second: the challenge of national identity and social security**

The total population of Bahrain is (1.234 million), according to the 2010 statistics, the population density is (1024) people / sq km, making Bahrain one of the most densely populated countries in the world. The country has experienced high rates of population growth and urbanization since the early 1960s, following the sudden increase in the country's revenues through oil, resulting in rapid growth in its economic base and improved living standards. The annual population growth rate was (4%) between 1980 and 1991, but dropped to 5.2% over the next 10 years. The crisis of establishing one identity is one of the most prominent crises that Arab states endure, as national identity has become a means for cleavage and conflict in light of tribal, sectarian, and ethnic conflicts,<sup>xxviii</sup> Bahrain is not an exception. The Bahraini society is divided into Sunnis and Shiites, in terms of religious sects, and this has become evident in the political crisis that hit the Bahrain, following the revolutions of the Arab Spring. Perhaps the most prominent manifestations of the division is that the political situation coincides with the sectarian affiliation of large segments of Bahrainis in the current period.<sup>xxix</sup> Bahraini society is divided into three sections:

- First: the Shiites, who are divided into three sections: The first is the so-called Baharna; they are the original inhabitants of Bahrain, and they are Shiites of Arab origin who settled in Bahrain at different periods of history, fleeing the religious and political persecution of the Umayyad and Abbasid days. They are residents of the east coast of the peninsula as well as the island of Bahrain<sup>xxx</sup>.
- The second section are the Shiites who came to Bahrain from Ahsa and Qatif, in Saudi Arabia, and lived in Bahrain during the intensification of the activity of the Wahhabi movement in the nineteenth century. The third are the Shiites who came from Iran and settled in Bahrain since the seventeenth century during the invasion of the Iranians .<sup>xxxi</sup> The Shiites in Bahrain have no religious reference, so they follow references abroad, such as: Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran, Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani in Najaf, Ayatollah Muhammad Taqi al-Din al-Madari in Karbala, Ayatollah Sadiq al-Shirazi in Qom, and Ayatollah Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah in Lebanon<sup>xxxii</sup>.

Sunnis: who are divided into the so-called Houla, they are the Sunni "converts", historically, to the eastern coast of the Gulf, and the so-called tribes, who are Sunnis from the Arabian Peninsula, such as the ruling family and others.

Ajam: They are Shiites of Persian origin. The proportion of the Sunnis to the Shiites is not exactly known, and for political reasons, no census data was collected regarding people's sects, but the only census that was based on sects was in 1940, and the proportion of Shiites estimated (52.5%) of the population, while other researchers estimated this ratio is about 70%<sup>xxxiii</sup>, and other statistics estimate the proportion of Shiites is (60%), while Arab Shiites make up 95%<sup>xxxiv</sup> of them, but the 2010 census shows that the percentage of Shiites is (49%)<sup>xxxv</sup>. Sectarianism and ethnicity did not exist in Bahrain until 1979, following the Iranian revolution under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini, whose main focus was to export the revolution to neighboring Arab countries, the rise of Saudi influence in the region, and the outbreak of the 1980 war in Afghanistan .<sup>xxxvi</sup> This is evidenced by the first parliamentary experience, when Bahraini Shiites were nominated in Sunni-majority circles and vice versa, as the influence of traditional leaders, religious or tribal, was more concentrated in the villages and regions of southern Bahrain .Following the sectarian polarization, Bahrainis are currently divided into Islamic currents based on sectarian affiliation. On the one hand, Sunnis are largely represented by the Salafis of the Association of Authenticity, the Muslim Brotherhood in the Islamic Forum of Manbar, and new blocs that have emerged since 2011, such as the National Unity Coalition and the Al Fateh Youth Coalition, as well as a group of independents in parliament, who do not belong to the currents of political Islam. All these parties share a sectarian affiliation and a political position that is opposed to the opposition. On the other hand, there is the National Islamic Accord Society, the largest and most influential political association in Bahrain, which enjoys the support of a large segment of the opposition and the Shiite Islamists in Bahrain, as well as other Shiite Islamist streams such as the Shiites and the Islamic Wa'ifah.

### **Third: the challenge of political security**

In the early 1990s, under the influence of the rise of the opposition forces, the demand for the return of the National Assembly, the effects of the Gulf War, and the formation of a Shura Council in 1992; the Council was formed by appointment and had only advisory powers. Thus, the country has been in a state of instability since the mid-1990s, and violence continued intermittently until the death of Shaikh Isa bin Salman al-Khalifa in 1999. Since Sheikh Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa assumed power in 1999, Bahrain has been experiencing an experiment of democratic transformation by launching Sheikh Hamad's reform project, to get out of this crisis. The National Action Charter, which was voted in during the 2001 referendum, was the basis for the reform project<sup>xxxvii</sup>.

The project continued to have a strong momentum for one year after the charter was voted on. Constitutional amendments were made in 2002, which constituted an important stage in the reform process. The political forces rejected these amendments and boycotted the parliamentary elections held on the basis of the amended constitution in October 2002, which left a new crisis between the government and the opposition<sup>xxxviii</sup>. Since then, the political movement has been represented by political associations and popular leaders who have declared their rejection of this constitution, which they considered to be in violation of the Constitution of 1971. The political struggle of all political associations and political forces continued to demand the reform of the political process that was announced by the King. Political associations were unable to participate in parliamentary elections in 2006 and 2010, before the outbreak of protests on February 04, 2011, or to make any progress in the reform of the provisions and laws of the Constitution of 2002. <sup>xxxix</sup> During the period (2011-2017), many international human rights organizations and investigative committees were sent to Bahrain to investigate the situation; the most important was the so-called Basiouni Report<sup>xl</sup>; it recorded violations of Bahraini human rights and demanded revision of the policies adopted by the government, especially the abolition of citizenship for indigenous people for political reasons. International human rights organizations also issued recommendations to the government of Bahrain to review its positions and respect for human rights in the country. In terms of expression issues, a number of Twitter users were arrested on the grounds that they insulted the king.<sup>xli</sup>

"The Video of a Slap" may be one of the most documented incidents seen in Bahrain. It depicted a citizen holding his young son in his arms, and he did not have the official identity card that the security man asked him to show. After a brief discussion between the two men, the security man beat the citizen, asking him to leave immediately<sup>xlii</sup>. The social media and the Western media have widely circulated this video. The authorities responded through interior minister Sheikh Rashid bin Abdullah al-Khalifa, who denounced the behavior of the security man and vowed to hold accountable anyone who exceeded his powers. The Minister also encouraged citizens to report any similar events immediately<sup>xliii</sup>. The "slap" case was later referred to the military courts, and the security man was sentenced to a two months' imprisonment, with a fine of 50 dinars and a one-year delay, but the case ended in the Court of Appeal, which acquitted the policeman at the end of the year. The case of 'the slap' is one of the frequent cases in which the government has been accused of arbitrary detention and torture by the detainee's family and international human rights organizations<sup>xliv</sup>.

### **Fourth: the challenge of economic security**

Bahrain's economy is a poor economy, compared to other Gulf Arab economies. Oil and natural gas are the only important natural resources in Bahrain, providing the economy with 40% of revenues. Bahrain is one of the largest aluminum manufacturers in the world; its annual aluminum production is estimated at 222,000 metric tons. Bahrain is located in the middle of the west coast of the Arabian Gulf and 44 kilometers from the eastern coast of Saudi Arabia. It is located in a central location, where international shipping and trade lines converge to the Arabian Gulf region. The country's economy depended on trade, in addition to earlier pearl mining, as well as ship repair and fishing, and its location gave it the opportunity to become an international hub for financial facilities and banking services.

### **Fifth: the challenge of foreign domination**

States usually seek to acquire their own strategic space to make it a field for the development of their interests and security across borders, while weak states aspire to not being controlled by foreign power, who turn them a part of their strategic space. Bahrain's unique geographic location has made it an important trading center for goods from Europe and India, to be re-exported to the interior of the Arabian Peninsula, with Indian exports to Europe on the one hand<sup>xlv</sup>, along with the efforts of many international and regional forces, historically, to control them. On the other hand, the Iranian revolution has represented the greatest threat to the Bahraini national security.

Bahraini-Iranian relations date back to the beginning of the seventeenth century, when the Safavid state ruled Bahrain for intermittent periods from 1601 to 1783. During that period, Bahrain was still a direct target of Iranian plans. Iran continued to view Bahrain as part of Iran's empire. In 1957, the Shah of Iran led the parliament to discuss measures to seize Bahrain. He also pointed to the possibility of renewing Iran's claims to Bahrain, following the British withdrawal from eastern Suez. The United Nations conducted a referendum for the Bahraini people, who voted for their independence from Iran, and Britain ended its colonization of Bahrain, while the latter declared its independence in August 1971<sup>xlvi</sup>. Over the three decades following Bahrain's independence, Iran helped its domestic clients with three subversive attempts to destabilize Bahrain:<sup>xlvii</sup>

- The first attempt was at the beginning of the eighties, and the Shirazi current was responsible for it. It was an attempt to reverse the situation in the country by introducing weapons and trainees (trained in special camps in Iran). The authority was able to hit the planners who made the attempt.
- The second attempt was in the middle of the 1990s (1994-1996). This attempt was spearheaded by the Bahraini branch of the Dawa party. The leaders of this party later formed the Al-Wefaq, the largest Shiite political association. This attempt was based on confusion, chaos, and arson, to motivate the Shiites to carry out a comprehensive revolution, simulating Khomeini's revolution.
- The third attempt started on February 14, 2011, in a clear attempt to simulate the Arab spring revolutions. The main factor in the failure of this attempt was that the other half of the people (Sunnis) addressed this attempt with a clear sectarian dimension, and then the entry of the island's shield forces to Bahrain in March 2011.

During the period from February 2011 until May 2013, Iran adopted many provocative positions aimed at destabilizing Bahrain. These attitudes intensified during this period, with about 160 statements and Iranian standstill towards Bahrain, most notably the statements of the Iranian Leader Ali Khomeini: "The Islamic Republic of Iran will not abandon the support of its friends in the region, the oppressed peoples of Palestine and Yemen, the people and governments of Syria and Iraq, and the oppressed people of Bahrain." There was also the statement of the Supreme Leader's advisor, Hossein Shariatmadari, who said that Bahrain was part of Iranian territory and had been separated from Iran following an illegal settlement between the Shah and Britain<sup>xlviii</sup>, bypassing the smuggling of explosives, weapons, and ammunition into the kingdom<sup>xlix</sup>, sheltering fugitives from justice, and opening Iranian camps to train terrorist groups seeking innocent lives as well as disinformation campaigns against the Kingdom of Bahrain. Iran has dealt with the protests in Bahrain as a duty to support and assist, and supported the demands of the demonstrators to establish constitutional monarchy, the adoption of multi-party, and stopping the policy of naturalization aimed at changing the demographic structure ... etc, and it has warned against harming them, and condemned the use of police violence in dealing with demonstrators, which led to deaths and injuries. When Bahrain used the forces of the Peninsula Shield to control the street, Iran criticized this development as severe as possible<sup>li</sup>.

During the period 2015-2017, tensions with Iran have increased, since the signing of the nuclear agreement between Tehran and the five plus one, in July 2015. In October 2015, after the discovery of a bomb-making plant south of Manama, connected to Iran, Bahrain accused the Islamic Republic of being a state sponsor of terrorism, expelled the Iranian ambassador, and summoned her special envoy from Tehran. In late November, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei called for democracy in Bahrain, describing the country's government as a tyrant minority, prompting further Bahraini diplomatic protest. In January 2016, after the attack on the Saudi embassy in Tehran, as a result of the execution of the hard-line Saudi sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, Bahrain followed the footsteps of Saudi Arabia and cut diplomatic ties with Iran. Until at least recently, Shiite moderates in Bahrain considered Iran a potential ally and sought support in their quest for political reform.<sup>lii</sup>

### **Ways to face Bahraini security challenges**

The acceleration of events has led to major shifts in the regional security structure of the Gulf and Bahrain's national security, forcing Bahrain to adopt new security approaches aimed at acquiring the elements of force. The issue of security in the Gulf region, in general, and Bahrain, in particular, is an international security issue of strategic importance and the importance of its natural resources to the whole world, but the responsibility for maintaining its security and stability lies, first and foremost, with its countries.

#### **1-Define a new strategic concept for security challenges**

Since the establishment of the Gulf Cooperation Council in 1981, the option of cooperation and coordination has been the consistent policy of the GCC countries.

However, when considering the question of national security and regional security of the GCC countries, the traditional tenets of regional security need to be reviewed and redefined<sup>liii</sup>, since the traditional view of the subject centered on the protection of the United States and Western European powers to the security of the region. This may be true at some time, but it is not valid for all times. The self-defense powers of the Gulf states is the desired goal, therefore, the GCC countries must not only deal with major changes in adopting the policies implemented since the establishment of the Council in 1981. Rather, they should develop new means of maintaining regional and national security, especially in dealing with the Iranian Republic, which does not believe in the concept of cooperation, and aspires to hegemony and expansion of influence, therefore it is imperative for the GCC States to work on achieving a common Gulf strategy through the adoption of a new concept of security (strategic concept) that does not conflict with US interests, and not granting it absolute hegemony.

The GCC has demonstrated its defense capability in protecting vital installations in the Kingdom of Bahrain and intervening in a timely fashion, enabling it to overcome the crisis. The events in Bahrain were a historic opportunity to implement this strategy. At a crucial moment and relative independence in decision-making, the Gulf decision differed from that of the US regarding the central threat to internal security, and the latter reversed its position. Iran could not keep up with the Saudi military and political decisiveness in Bahrain, and was assured without any doubt that the security and stability of Bahrain is an integral part of the security and stability of the GCC as a whole.<sup>liv</sup>

## **2-The transition from the era of cooperation to the stage of union in one entity**

This is done through the development of the Gulf Cooperation Council for the proposal of Saudi King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz at the summit of the Cooperation Council, to cooperate with the Union to contain the hotbeds of political, economic, and social tension and its possible political consequences.

## **3-Initiate internal reforms**

It is necessary to initiate Bahraini internal reforms within specific timetables, stemming from their internal conditions, which aim at fortifying the internal front and increasing social cohesion, in order to prevent external ambitions. Bahrain can in this regard, follow the Jordanian model in the process of political reform, Jordan's political reform path was based on constitutional reforms.<sup>lv</sup>. Should Bahrain make constitutional reforms based on democratic principles, these reforms will send a clear message to both the inside and the outside about the seriousness of reforms.

## **Conclusion**

Bahrain's national security was based on the comprehensive concept of security that links the military, economic, and social dimension. The National Action Charter adopted on February 14, 2001, states that Bahrain's national security is: "the bastion and fortress of the country's protection and the preservation of its lands and economy." The current regional and international conditions and variables have been constantly reviewed for the purpose of developing the strategic vision, technological adaptation, and continuous identification of risk sources with assurance that offensive war is prohibited according to the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bahrain. The study also revealed that the national security of Bahrain suffers from difficulties and gaps and faces various challenges. The small size of Bahrain imposed on it the alliance with the United States and the establishment of military bases there. The external interference in the internal affairs of the Bahraini (Iranian intervention) called for the request of the Gulf military forces to be deployed to the country in face of the violence that broke out in 2011. Furthermore, the division of Bahraini society into a Sunni and Shiite sects was clearly manifested in the political crisis that gripped Bahrain, in the wake of the Arab Spring revolutions and the political situation, in line with the sectarian affiliation of large segments of Bahrainis. Despite the political reforms undertaken by Sheikh Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa after he took office in 1999, the opposition's rejection of these reforms and their demand for constitutional monarchy, the adoption of a multiparty system, and the cessation of the naturalization policy aimed at changing the demographic structure, etc., led the country to a wave of political instability. Iran and its expansionist aspirations have represented the greatest threat to Bahrain's national security. Over the next three decades after independence, Iran destabilized Bahrain. The other half of the people (Sunnis) responded to this attempt with a clear sectarian dimension and then the entry of the Peninsula Shield troops to Bahrain in March 2011 was the main factor in the failure of this attempt. During the period from February 2011 until 2017, Iran has adopted many provocative positions aimed at destabilizing security and destabilizing the country.

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