

## **Chapter IX — Allegations of Involvement by Foreign Forces and Foreign Actors**

### **A. Introduction**

1564. Developments in the Gulf affect the interests of numerous global and regional powers. This is due to the region's immense oil reserves and geostrategic location. It is therefore understandable that the events in Bahrain of February and March 2011 attracted considerable international attention. It is beyond the mandate and resources of the Commission to document the positions of all interested actors, much less to investigate the effects that policies adopted by foreign governments and by other foreign actors had on the situation in Bahrain. To fulfil its mandate, the Commission focused on two particular categories of allegations concerning foreign involvement while preparing this Chapter. First, there were assertions by the GoB about involvement of the Islamic Republic of Iran during the period under investigation by the Commission; and, second, there were assertions by a range of local and other sources about involvement of military units from GCC countries deployed in Bahrain, including allegations that GCC units committed human rights violations.

1565. International and regional interest in developments in Bahrain has continued beyond February and March 2011. Although the Commission's mandate is limited to examining allegations of foreign involvement during those months, the Commission is mindful of regional and interstate politics that might have affected perceptions of events during February and March. Some of these issues are touched upon in Chapter II on Historical Background. Extensive examination of anything beyond that would exceed the mandate of the Commission.

### **B. Allegations by the Government of Involvement by the Islamic Republic of Iran**

1566. The GoB has asserted that the Islamic Republic of Iran intervened in the domestic affairs of Bahrain during the events of February and March 2011. The GoB's position on this matter has been articulated publicly on numerous occasions by various high-level Bahraini officials. The GoB has reiterated its position during meetings held with the Commission.

1567. Allegations of Iranian interference in the domestic affairs of Bahrain are not new. As noted in Chapter II of this Report, the GoB has asserted that Iran has been implicated in either directing or instigating incidents of unrest in Bahrain since the Iranian Revolution of 1979. It is the position of the GoB that the alleged involvement by Iran during the events of February and March 2011 is part of a continuous policy of Iranian interference in the domestic affairs of Bahrain.

1568. The GoB has expressed its concerns about a possible Iranian armed intervention in Bahrain. The GoB indicated that these concerns were among

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the principal reasons that it requested the deployment of GCC forces in Bahrain starting on 14 March 2011. The GoB also stated that it feared that Iranian naval vessels would attempt to deliver weapons to Shia groups participating in demonstrations during February and March 2011. This, according to the GoB, was among the factors that necessitated naval reconnaissance and patrol missions by Kuwaiti naval vessels off the coasts of Bahrain.

1569. The GoB has asserted that diplomatic officers posted at the Iranian Embassy in Manama maintained contacts with Bahraini opposition leaders and groups. The alleged contacts, according to GoB sources, included encouraging leaders of the protest movement to continue their demonstrations and to escalate their demands. The GoB also asserted that officials from the Embassy of Iran urged opposition parties not to accept the invitation to hold a national dialogue. These alleged activities by the Iranian Embassy compelled Bahraini authorities to declare one member of the Iranian diplomatic mission *persona non grata*. Iran responded by requesting that a diplomat posted to the Bahraini Embassy in Tehran leave the country.

1570. The GoB has alleged that throughout the preceding years, Iranian intelligence operatives established financial and commercial organisations in Bahrain, including banks, to provide financial assistance to opposition groups. GoB reports also asserted that *Akhmas* charitable funds<sup>766</sup> gathered by Shia clerics are channelled to finance the activities of politically active opposition groups and figures and to finance anti-government demonstrations.

1571. Since the mid-1990s, the GoB has repeatedly asserted that opposition political groups maintained contacts with Hezbollah in Lebanon. These assertions include allegations of the provision of assistance and training by Hezbollah to members of Bahraini opposition factions.

1572. During the events of February and March 2011, the GoB claimed that certain opposition leaders, including some who had been residing abroad, consulted with the leadership of Hezbollah in Beirut in an effort to coordinate positions regarding the ongoing protests in Bahrain.

1573. The GoB has contended that the Iranian Government employed a variety of media outlets to influence the progression of demonstrations in Bahrain during the events of February and March 2011 and to broadcast what is described as false information about developments in Bahrain. Claims have also been made that Iranian operatives launched websites and pages on internet social media platforms, such as Facebook, calling for the removal of the political system of Bahrain and inciting protesters to resort to violence.

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<sup>766</sup> *Akhmas* (plural for *Khoms*), which literally means “a fifth”, is a religious obligation that Shia sects, including the Twelver Shia, espouse. According to Shia doctrine, individuals are obligated to pay as a form of Islamic tax a fifth of the value of certain categories of property including precious stones, minerals and unclaimed treasure. The funds collected from the *Akhmas* are then distributed to a number of beneficiaries, including to charity, descendants of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH), the poor of the descendants of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH), those descendants of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) who are orphaned and the Imam.

The content of programmes that appeared on these media outlets is examined in Chapter X.

1574. Numerous press releases and statements relating to developments in Bahrain were issued by Iranian officials and religious figures during the events of February and March 2011. Statements attributable to the Iranian Government were issued by a number of Iranian government agencies, including the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Defence.

1575. The arrival of GCC forces in Bahrain on 14 March 2011 was followed by a perceptible shift in the content and nature of press releases and statements issued by Iranian officials. Iranian government representatives criticised the invitation extended to GCC forces and warned of the repercussions that they said would have on regional stability and security. In addition to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, other government agencies and senior political leaders began to express opinions about developments in Bahrain. Specifically, on 16 March 2011 President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad denounced the arrival of GCC forces in Bahrain and advised “those who sent their forces to Bahrain to learn the lesson of Saddam Hussein’s fate.”

1576. On 18 March 2011, the Speaker of the National Consultative Council, Mr Ali Larijani, stated that “the treason of the Saudi regime and its massacres against the Muslim people of Bahrain will never be forgotten.” That same day, the Assistant to the Commander of the Iranian Air Force described events occurring in Bahrain as a “massacre” and stated that “the Saudi Arabian army will regret its perpetration of these massacres.” On 21 March 2011, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran summoned the Ambassador of Bahrain to request the departure of a member of the Bahraini Embassy in Tehran. It was announced that this measure was taken in response to Bahrain’s decision to declare an Iranian diplomat *persona non grata*.

1577. Speaking on 21 March 2011, the Valieh Faghih of Iran and Supreme Leader of the Iranian Revolution Grand Ayatollah Ali Khamenei stated that the “victory of the people of Bahrain was inevitable” and expressed the view that the ongoing events in Bahrain were similar to developments in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen. The Supreme Leader rejected accusations that Iran was “supporting the people of Bahrain because they are Shiite” and affirmed that the policy of the “Islamic Republic of Iran is predicated on defending the people and their rights against all dictatorial and egotistical rulers without distinguishing between Sunnis and Shiites.” Grand Ayatollah Khamenei added that “Saudi Arabia committed a mistake by sending its forces into Bahrain because this enrages the Islamic nations.”

### **C. Allegations of Human Rights Violations by GCC Forces**

1578. On 14 March 2011, His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa requested the deployment of GCC Jazeera Shield Forces (GCC-JSF) to assist

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the Bahraini armed services in the defence of the Kingdom of Bahrain against foreign threats and in securing vital locations in the country.<sup>767</sup>

1579. The GCC-JSF is a joint military force composed of units from the six member States of the GCC. It was established pursuant to a decision of the third session of the Supreme Council of the GCC on 10 October 1982 to assist the national armed services of the GCC States in defending against foreign threats and maintaining their security and stability.<sup>768</sup> The GCC-JSF is part of a broader security strategy adopted by the GCC, which is predicated on the belief that the national security of all the GCC member States is intertwined and that attacks or threats against any GCC State must be confronted by all the other members.<sup>769</sup>

1580. The total number of troops deployed by the GCC-JSF in Bahrain was approximately 5,000 persons. These included land and naval combat units, command and control units and support personnel of various specialisations. Forces from the Saudi Arabian National Guard were the first to arrive in Bahrain on 14 March 2011. In the following days, units from the United Arab Emirates and Qatar also joined the GCC-JSF stationed in Bahrain. According to reports received by the Commission from the GoB, the missions and tasks assigned to these forces were limited to preparing to assist the BDF in confronting any foreign armed intervention and assisting in protecting and securing certain vital locations, most of which were situated in central and southern Bahrain. The GCC-JSF units were based in BDF facilities that had been vacated by BDF units deployed in the field. Starting on 21 March 2011, naval vessels from Kuwait began reconnaissance operations off the coast of Bahrain, enforced a blockade of certain maritime zones, and established maritime checkpoints to monitor activity in those areas.

1581. Numerous allegations have been made in the news media and on internet social media platforms of human rights violations committed by the GCC-JSF units deployed in Bahrain. Some sources claimed that GCC-JSF units participated in the second clearing operation at the GCC Roundabout on 16 March 2011, while other accounts alleged that these forces confronted demonstrators in various areas of Bahrain.<sup>770</sup>

1582. Among the investigations and interviews with complainants undertaken by the Commission, there was one claim of a human rights

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<sup>767</sup> See Chapter IV on Narrative of Events of 14 February through 31 March 2011, events of 13, 14 and 15 March 2011.

<sup>768</sup> See General Secretariat of the GCC, *Military Cooperation* (الأمانة العامة لمجلس التعاون الخليجي): <http://www.gcc-sg.org/index8409.html?action=Sec-Show&ID=49> accessed 10 November 2011.

<sup>769</sup> Elements of this joint security strategy include the GCC Comprehensive Security Strategy, which was adopted by the GCC Supreme Council in 1987, and the 1994 GCC Security Agreement.

<sup>770</sup> See, for example, *Bahrain: These are the Marks of the Crimes of the Jazeera Sheild*, Turkey Al-Faisal, *البحرين*: هذه آثار جرائم درع الجزيرة يا تركي الفيصل، متوفر على الرابط التالي) (<http://www.elwatanandz.com/watanarabi/3459.html>) accessed 10 November 2011; Union of Islamic World Students, *المعارضة البحرينية تكشف وثائق عن جرائم قوات البحرين*، متوفر على الرابط التالي: <http://www.rohama.org/ar/pages/?cid=5059> accessed 10 November 2011.

violation allegedly committed by GCC-JSF units. This is the case of Baheya Abdelrasoul Al-Arady, who was killed at around 21:00 on 16 March 2001.<sup>771</sup> Statements submitted to the Commission claimed that the deceased was shot by a Saudi Arabian unit operating under GCC-JSF command. Commission investigations revealed, however, that the armed unit involved in the incident leading to the death of the deceased was a BDF unit deployed in the Al-Bodaye' Street. No GCC-JSF forces were stationed in the area.

1583. According to reports submitted by the GoB to the Commission, the GCC-JSF did not participate in any operations involving confrontations with Bahraini civilians, including the second clearing operation at the GCC Roundabout. These reports also state that none of the GCC-JSF units reported firing any weapons or engaging with any civilians at any time during their deployment in Bahrain. There are also no reports of any injuries in the ranks of the GCC-JSF units.

#### **D. Findings and Conclusions**

1584. The evidence presented to the Commission by the GoB on the involvement by the Islamic Republic of Iran in the internal affairs of Bahrain does not establish a discernable link between specific incidents that occurred in Bahrain during February and March 2011 and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Given that most of the claims made by the GoB related to allegations of intelligence operations undertaken by Iranian operatives, sources of which, by their nature, are not publicly available, the Commission has not been able to investigate or independently verify these allegations of Iranian involvement in the events of February and March 2011.

1585. The GoB has indicated to the Commission that it has further information in its possession that demonstrates involvement by the Islamic Republic of Iran in the internal affairs of Bahrain. Due to security and confidentiality considerations, however, the GoB has declined to share this information with the Commission.

1586. The Commission has not found any evidence of human rights violations committed by the GCC-JSF units deployed in Bahrain starting on 14 March 2011.

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<sup>771</sup> See Chapter V, Section A.