

Bahrain's Stalled Reforms and the Future U.S. Role

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Feb 8, 2016

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With tensions peaking between Iran and the conservative Arab states, the current calm in the island kingdom of Bahrain may prove only temporary. A longtime U.S. ally that hosts the Navy's Fifth Fleet headquarters, Bahrain plays a crucial role in ensuring regional security. Yet reforms of its political system have stalled, with the Sunni royal family refusing to concede a broader role for representatives of the country's substantial Shiite community, a dynamic suggesting an uncertain future.

This essay, the fourth in a series, [Beyond Islamists and Autocrats \(http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/beyond-islamists-and-autocrats-prospects-for-political-reform-post-arab-spr\)](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/beyond-islamists-and-autocrats-prospects-for-political-reform-post-arab-spr), that explores prospects for political reform throughout the region, considers Bahrain's outlook, particularly in the context of eventual succession from its king and prime minister. It argues that Washington must be ready to use its influence and local respect to help Bahraini leaders continue avoiding the perils of either harsh dictatorship or revolutionary chaos.

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