

International cooperation is key to promoting security

Written by H.E. Ali bin Mohammed Al Rumaihi on 2 November 2018



Photo credit: Bahrain Ministry of Information Affairs

Winning the fight against state-sponsored international terrorism requires more than vigilance, enforcement and national unity - it needs international coordination and cooperation.

Security and stability are among the most fundamental responsibilities of any government.

Security provides the bedrock on which human rights rest. Without it, freedom of expression cannot be guaranteed; business cannot flourish and laws cannot be enacted or enforced.

In the past, a nation's security was the prerogative of its military and police forces. Each nation stood by itself, or with allies, usually its neighbours.

However, this is no longer the case. For nearly two decades, providing national security has necessitated international coordination and cooperation.

It is for this reason that Bahrain and the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) co-founded the IISS Manama Dialogue, the Middle East's premier security summit, which held its 14th annual conference on 26-28 October. Here, decision-makers from all over the world gather to share information and resources and to examine trends, with the goal of promoting greater security and prosperity throughout the Middle East.

Bahrain is in a unique position to host such an event. It has a diverse and open society. Respect and tolerance underpin its stability. Bahrain hosts the Combined Maritime Task Force, a 33-nation naval partnership to support peace and stability. It is actively involved in peacekeeping in the Arabian Sea and supports refugees in Jordan.

The Middle East is reeling from tensions. Terror and extremism have wracked Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria and Yemen.

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We are also witnessing efforts to undermine our own stability. For many years, Iran has tried to divide our people through sponsoring groups such as Al Mukhtar and Al Ashtar Brigades - both recognised as terror groups by the international community.

Iran's covert Quds Force operates behind the scenes, providing funds, training and weapons in Bahrain and elsewhere.

Iran's underhanded efforts to destabilise other nations in the Middle East are recognised not just within the region, but also across the world. US Secretary of Defence James Mattis acknowledged this in his keynote speech at the Manama Dialogue, telling participants the US has a hangar full of evidence of Iranian-supplied weapons found across the region. He also noted Iran's use of cyber-attacks to destabilise the region.

As any nation, we must remain vigilant against threats to our national security to protect peace and national unity. We must take steps to preserve security, and to uphold the rule of law to international standards. We have a strategy to defend ourselves against Iran as part of a broader strategy involving regional and international allies.

We remain committed to safeguarding individual rights and justice, including the right to free speech guaranteed by our constitution.

Alongside vigilance and enforcement, we have other tools to support unity. As a religiously diverse country, we sponsor interfaith dialogues both at home and abroad. We support our all citizens. Our economic policies aim to ensure jobs are available.

Our human development strategies help citizens improve their skills to boost their employment opportunities. We ensure everyone has access to decent housing and education.

Yet, we face a hostile foreign power using covert tactics to create divisions where there were previously none. Sectarianism is not the natural state of affairs for Bahrain. We are open, tolerant and respectful of cultural and religious diversity.

Sects have always co-existed peacefully and harmoniously in Bahrain, never clashing and always

uniting to make our nation stronger.

The Quds Force - considered a terror organisation by the US, the UK and other nations – is a clear threat not just to Bahrain, but also in other nations where it operates, such as Yemen. It is not confined to Arabia as the Quds Force, the covert wing of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guards, foments violence and terror in Iraq, Afghanistan, India, the United States and Germany.

It is for this reason that Bahrain supports the United States’ strategy towards Iran. It is why we participate in the Saudi-led coalition to restore UN-backed legitimacy in Yemen, in the global coalition to defeat Daesh. It is why we have welcomed Syrians fleeing the civil war as brothers and why we assist Jordan in supporting refugees by offering them education opportunities.

Success against state-sponsored international terror requires more than vigilance, enforcement and national unity.

It requires those nations who value tolerance, respect and freedom to work together and to develop common strategies to support our common interests.

This is why we support the Middle East Strategic Alliance (MESA). It will be a defensive and strategic alliance to strengthen collaboration, open to all in the region who accept its principles. As part of a shared commitment to shoulder the burden of regional challenges, its priorities will include combating terrorism, enhancing cybersecurity and defending against rogue states.

That is the purpose of the Manama Dialogue. As a well-established event hosted in collaboration with IISS, an esteemed global research institute, it is internationally recognised as the leading security summit in the region.

Through it, Bahrain can advance discussions around regional security and help facilitate the necessary strategic cooperation between stakeholders to achieve greater security and prosperity for all.

Bahrain remains ready to act in coordination with friends and allies to maintain stability across the region. While change is inevitable, it is our responsibility to guide it in the right direction. The citizens of the region should be the key stakeholders in their future. This will go a long way to contributing to the prosperity of all.

About the author

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