



Government Defence
Integrity Index



2020

Country Brief:

BAHRAIN

BAHRAIN

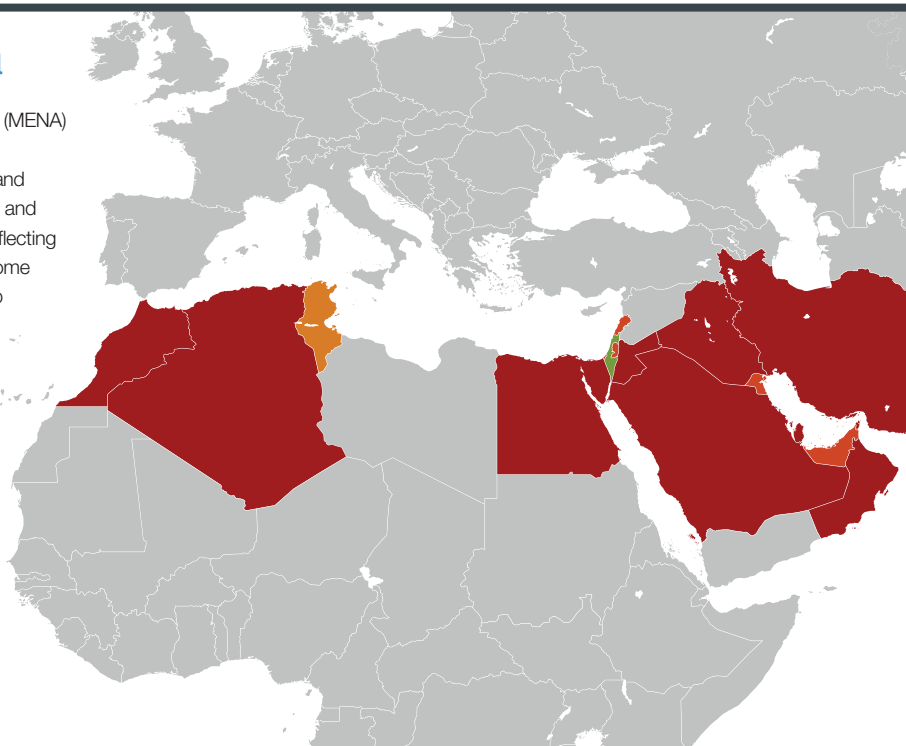
The kingdom of Bahrain's key location in the Persian Gulf with its deep-water port and airfield access, has made it a critical political and security partner for major powers such as the United States.¹ The kingdom's small size, population and limited access to natural resources make it highly dependent on maintaining good relations with neighbouring Saudi Arabia and on foreign support more generally.² Such dependence is particularly acute in relation to defence and security issues, which contribute to state fragility. The Sunni Al Khalifa family has ruled Shia-majority Bahrain since its creation, leading to a deeply antagonistic relationship between the two sides that has erupted into periodic conflict and demonstrations.³

Member of Open Government Partnership	No
UN Convention Against Corruption	Ratified in 2010.
Arms Trade Treaty	Has not ratified.

Large-scale protests in 2011 triggered the deployment of Saudi and Emirati military and police units to quell the unrest,⁴ although sporadic protests have continued ever since and bomb attacks have targeted vital infrastructure.⁵ Promised political reforms have not been fully implemented and evidence points to the political system becoming more oppressive,⁶ fuelling discontent in Shia majority areas.⁷ External security challenges are presented mainly by Iran, which Bahrain considers to be a potentially existential threat, suspected of arming and funding violent underground opposition groups.⁸ This fragility has fuelled high levels of defence and security spending, driven largely by a high volume of arms sales from partners such as the United Kingdom and United States.⁹ However, such spending is occurring within an institutional framework characterised by a total absence of oversight, transparency and accountability that greatly increases the risk of corruption. External oversight of defence, be it by parliament, audit bodies or civil society, is non-existent, while procurement and budgeting processes are highly confidential and opaque. Access to defence information is virtually impossible and defence and security force impunity highlights significant issues with personnel integrity and ethics frameworks.

Middle East & North Africa

Defence sectors across the Middle East & North Africa (MENA) region continue to face a high risk of corruption. At the same time, protracted armed conflicts in Syria, Libya, and Yemen persist, while public protests against corruption and authoritarianism continue in a number of countries – reflecting an overall context of insecurity and fragility. Although some governments have publicly committed to stepping up anti-corruption efforts, there remains a gap between existing legislation and implementation in practice. Military institutions in the region are characterised by a high degree of defence exceptionalism, resulting in a lack of transparency that precludes oversight actors from effectively scrutinising defence budgets and policies at a time when defence spending and arms imports continue to surge. These concerns are further compounded by authoritarian governance systems seen in many MENA countries. Resurgent protests and uprisings in the region after the 2011 Arab Spring demonstrate that corruption is a central and persistent public grievance.



¹ Richard McDaniel, 'No 'Plan B': US Strategic Access in the Middle East and the Question of Bahrain,' *Brookings Institution*, June 2013, pp. 1–2.

² Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI Country Report 2020 – Bahrain*, Gutersloh, Bertelsmann Stiftung, p. 4.

³ Bertelsmann Stiftung, *Bahrain*, p. 4.

⁴ Kori Schake, 'The GCC Shores up Bahrain', *Foreign Policy*, 15 March 2011.

⁵ Ahmad Majidyar, 'Bahrain Says Arrested 116 Members of IRGC-established "Terror Cell"', *Middle East Institute*, 5 March 2018.

⁶ Kenneth Katzman, 'Bahrain: Unrest, Security and US Policy', *Congressional Research Service*, April 2021, p. 5.

⁷ Bertelsmann Stiftung, *Bahrain*, p. 5.

⁸ Katzman, 'Bahrain', p. 7.

⁹ Jodi Vittori, 'Bahrain's Fragility and Security Sector Procurement', *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 26 February 2019.

BAHRAIN

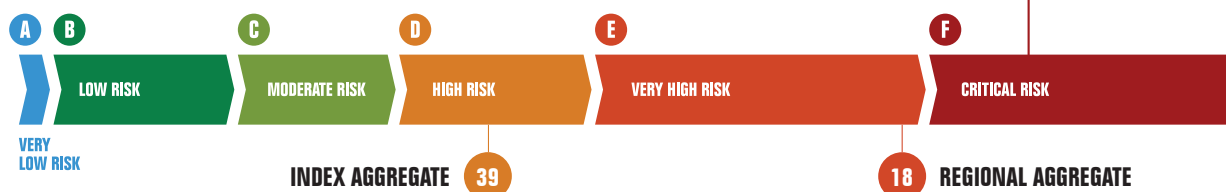
Overall scores

The size of the colour band corresponds to number of countries that fall into that category.

BAHRAIN SCORE CRITICAL RISK

F

11



A > 83-100 VERY LOW

B > 67-82 LOW

C > 50-66 MODERATE

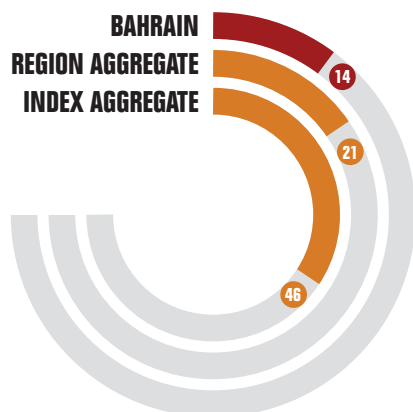
D > 33-49 HIGH

E > 17-32 VERY HIGH

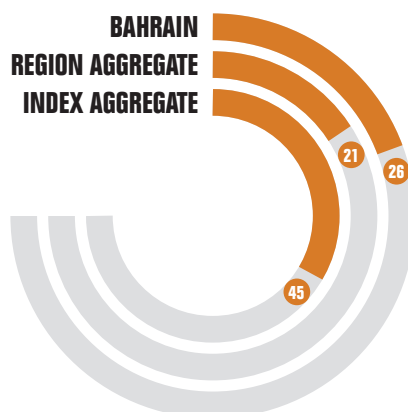
F > 0-16 CRITICAL

Risk Comparison

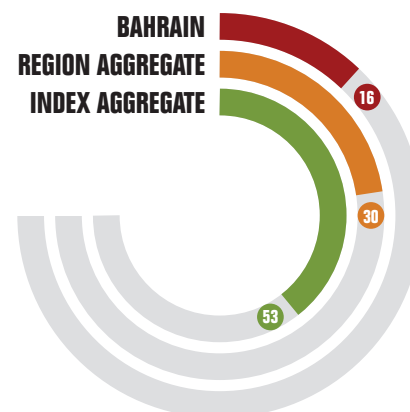
POLITICAL



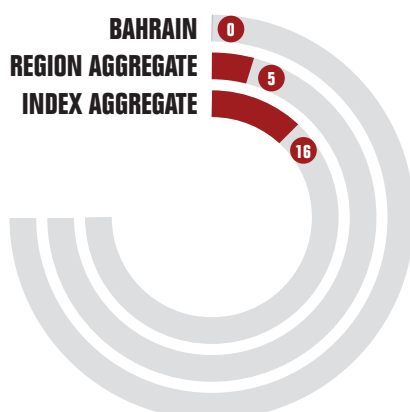
FINANCIAL



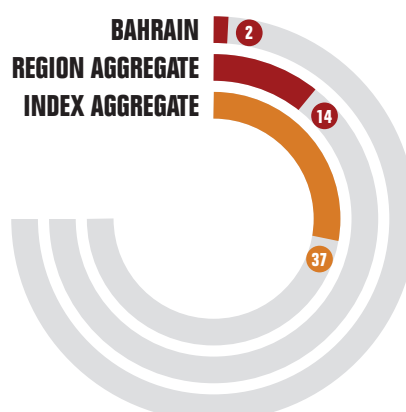
PERSONNEL



OPERATIONAL



PROCUREMENT



BAHRAIN

Parliamentary Oversight

Legislative oversight of budget (Open Budget Survey, 2019)	Not ranked.
Military expenditure as share of government spending (SIPRI, 2020)	12.5%
Committee members with defence expertise (%)	Data is not publicly available.
# of meetings/year	Data is not publicly available.*
Last review of defence policy/strategy	No such strategy exists.

* Last available data is from 2012, showing 18 meetings.¹⁰

After the adoption of the National Action Charter in 2002, Bahrain re-introduced a formally semi-democratic system, holding parliamentary elections for the elected upper house of parliament, the Council of Representatives.¹¹ However, excessive gerrymandering has restricted the ability of Shi'ite candidates to win parliamentary seats, and the dissolution of opposition movements seriously undermines the validity of election results.¹² Moreover, the lower house, the Shura (Consultative) Council is required to concur with any legislation passed by the upper house and its members are directly appointed by the king.¹³ In any case, parliament has extremely limited powers regarding legislation and oversight. Both chambers can only vote on draft laws proposed by the government and are barred from voting on draft texts without government approval, and the Council of Representatives is not designed to counterbalance the power of government.¹⁴ In relation to defence issues in particular, parliament's role is negligible. The National Assembly has no formal rights to formulate or scrutinise defence policy, which is tightly controlled by the King. Though there is a Defence and Foreign Affairs Committee within the Shura Council, there is no evidence it has formal rights of oversight as defence is considered entirely confidential. Instead, such issues are debated by the secretive Supreme Defence Council, with all fourteen members coming from the Al Khalifa family. There is no evidence of the committee conducting any debates, proposing legislation, reviewing budgets, or issuing recommendations on defence issues in the past three years. Auditing mechanisms are similarly nonexistent. There is no evidence of internal or external auditing of military expenditure, with the National Auditing Court expressly prohibited from auditing the Ministries of Defence and Interior.¹⁵ It appears as though defence accounts are not subject to any scrutiny whatsoever.

Financial Transparency

Defence-related access to information response rates	(1) % granted full or partial access: None. (2) # subject to backlog: None.
Defence-related complaints to ombudsman/commissioner #	No such body exists.
Does the commissioner have authority over the MoD?	No such body exists.
Audit reports on defence (2015-2020) #	None.
Open Budget Index (IBP, 2019)	Not ranked.
World Press Freedom Index (RSF, 2021)	168th out of 180.

Bahrain's rentier economy, combined with the tight control exerted by the ruling family over all matters of public importance, have severely curtailed the development of strong and transparent institutions. Financial transparency across government is particularly poor and the government releases very little data on planned or actual expenditures.¹⁶ This is especially the case in the defence sector, where financial and budgetary information is not subject to publication. The defence budget is wholly non-transparent¹⁷ and includes only a total figure for defence expenditure for a given year, with no breakdown or explanations. The budget is also not subject to parliamentary scrutiny, as the Defence Committee has no powers over budgetary matters, which are entirely the prerogative of the executive.¹⁸ Budget accuracy is also undermined by the prevalence of off-budget expenditure, which obscures the true size of defence spending. Strategic procurement for instance is mostly conducted off-budget and there are no figures on the size of this spending as a result, despite evidence it represents billions of dollars annually.¹⁹ Adding to the government's opaque financial management practices is the absence of legislation guaranteeing the public's access to information rights. Instead, all defence and security-related information is considered a state secret, and anyone found to share such information could be punished by law.²⁰ In fact, given Bahrain's highly repressive environment for media, civil society, and opposition groups, merely requesting such information is dangerous and many journalists have been given heavy prison sentences for questioning the regime.²¹

¹⁰ Kingdom of Bahrain, 'Committee Meetings', Foreign Affairs, Defence and National Security Committee.

¹¹ Bertelsmann Stiftung, Bahrain, p. 9.

¹² U.S. Department of State, *2020 Country Report on Human Rights: Bahrain*, March 2021.

¹³ Katzman, 'Bahrain', p. 2.

¹⁴ Bertelsmann Stiftung, Bahrain, p. 10.

¹⁵ Constitution of the Kingdom of Bahrain, Legal Affairs, No. 16, 2002.

¹⁶ Freedom House, 'Freedom in the World – Bahrain', 2020.

¹⁷ Bertelsmann Stiftung, Bahrain, p. 31.

¹⁸ "جنة الشؤون الخارجية والدفاع والأمن الوطني" (Foreign Affairs, Defence and National Security Committee), Kingdom of Bahrain Shura Council, accessed 13 October 2020.

¹⁹ Vittori, 'Bahrain's Fragility.'

²⁰ Kingdom of Bahrain, 'Cyber Crimes Penal Code 60/2014', 2014.

²¹ Reporters Without Borders, 'Bahrain.'

BAHRAIN

Personnel Ethics Framework

Whistleblowing legislation	No such legislation exists.
# defence-sector whistleblower cases	None.
# Code of conduct violations	Military: Data is not publicly available.
	Civilian: Data is not publicly available.
Financial disclosure system	# submitted: Financial disclosures are not required.
	# of violations: Financial disclosures are not required.

The systemic abuse of the Shia population by Bahrain's security forces has drawn international criticism²² and shone a light onto serious deficiencies in ethics frameworks for defence and security personnel. Impunity is a key issue, with defence and security officials shielded by the royal court. There is a total absence of consistent and transparent procedures to prosecute abuses of power amongst the security forces.²³ The military's code of conduct is highly secretive, and evidence suggests it is not widely known amongst personnel. Regardless, enforcement of the code and of the Military Penal Code is overwhelmingly weak due to political protection. The absence of legislation guaranteeing the rights of whistleblowers is a further obstacle to the development of a culture of integrity in the sector. There are no protections in place for whistleblowers coming forward and the highly politicised nature of the defence and security forces means any personnel reporting wrongdoing could face significant repercussions. There is no evidence of any guidance, training or communication around whistleblowing and no indication that the government is intending to strengthen whistleblowing protections. Furthermore, recruitment and promotion procedures are routinely used as vehicles for rewarding loyalty rather than competence. Objective selection criteria for positions are vague and standards are absent. As there is no external scrutiny of such processes either, the royal court has free reign to promote and recruit personnel as it sees fit, with political considerations paramount.

Operations

Total armed forces personnel (World Bank, 2018)	19,200
Troops deployed on operations #	Data is not publicly available.

Though Bahrain rarely deploys troops on operations, military forces are currently engaged in operations in Yemen as part of the Saudi-led coalition's deployment against the Houthi rebels.²⁴ Deployments such as this should require strong anti-corruption safeguards for personnel to counter corruption risks in a theatre where state presence is extremely weak and illicit economies are strong. However, such safeguards are completely absent from Bahrain's military operations. The country does not have a military doctrine that addresses corruption as a strategic issue for operations, as a result of which, corruption concerns are not addressed in the forward planning for deployments. These failings at the strategic level are echoed in relation to personnel. Commanders do not receive pre-deployment training on corruption risks in the field and personnel at all levels do not receive any guidance on how to identify and mitigate such risks. There is no policy of monitoring and evaluating corruption-related vulnerabilities in the theatre of operations and no strategies to counter such them, essentially leaving missions highly exposed to such threats.

²² Aya Majzoub, 'Nine Years After Bahrain's Uprising, Its Human Rights Crisis Has Only Worsened', *Human Rights Watch*, 25 February 2020.

²³ Bertelsmann Stiftung, *Bahrain*, p. 13.

²⁴ Human Rights Watch, 'Bahrain: Events of 2020', 2021.

BAHRAIN

Defence Procurement

Military expenditure (US\$ mil) (SIPRI, 2020)	1,405
Open competition in defence procurement (%)	Data is not publicly available.
Main defence exports – to (SIPRI, 2016-20)	N/A
Main defence imports – from (SIPRI 2016-20)	United Kingdom, Russia, United States, Turkey, Italy

Defence procurement consumes a significant portion of resources allocated to Bahrain's defence sector. A review of only publicly known defence procurement contracts signed with the United States in 2017 and 2018 found they amounted to over \$6 billion, a considerable amount for a country with an overall annual budget of \$10 billion.²⁵ This investment is all the more significant when set against the backdrop of Bahrain's financial struggles and expanding fiscal deficit, which has required a \$10 billion bailout from other states in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).²⁶ Regardless, Bahrain's defence spending has systematically hovered around the 12.5% mark as a percentage of total government spending, underlining how critical the authorities consider it and how seemingly impervious it is to budget constraints. Fundamentally, the complete lack of transparency around procurement makes it almost impossible to determine where such funds

originate from, as military accounts are kept strictly confidential to the royal house.²⁷ In fact, the entire defence acquisition process is conducted solely in the royal office, as the defence sector is exempted from legislation regulating other public sector acquisitions. There is no active internal or external oversight mechanisms for procurement. Though there is nominally a Procurement Oversight Committee, staffed with financial administrators from the Ministry of Defence, it is only summoned once a year to conduct a post-factum review of financial reports. Regardless, the committee has not conducted any checks over the past three years and appears inactive. The vast majority of goods are single-sourced through the royal office with preferred international suppliers, ensuring the contracting process and agreed requirements are shielded from any form of scrutiny. As a result, the entire procurement cycle is highly secretive and the authorities themselves do not release any data on planned or actual purchases, with the only details available coming from news outlets or international suppliers' press releases. Additionally, the absence of a defence strategy makes it impossible to assess whether individual purchases respond to specific strategic objectives, opening the door for sellers to exert influence over acquisition decisions, as has been the case with the United States. This risk is particularly acute given Bahrain's dependence on international support and the need to cultivate strategic relationships with powerful allies.

²⁵ Vittori, 'Bahrain's Fragility.'

²⁶ Davide Barbuscia, Aziz El Yaakoubi and Tom Arnold, 'Bailed-out Bahrain May Need More Gulf Support as Soon as This Year', *Reuters*, 4 May 2020.

²⁷ Vittori, 'Bahrain's Fragility.'

Version 1.0, October 2021

GDI data collection for **Bahrain** was conducted March 2020 to October 2020. The narrative discussion in this GDI brief was produced at a later time with the most recent information available for the country, which may not be reflected in the GDI country assessments or scores.

BAHRAIN 2020 GDI Scorecard

		Grade	Score
Political Risk		F	14
Q1	Legislative Scrutiny	F	0
Q2	Defence Committee	F	5
Q3	Defence Policy Debate	F	0
Q4	CSO Engagement	F	8
Q5	Conventions: UNCAC / OECD	C	63
Q6	Public Debate	F	13
Q7	Anticorruption Policy	C	50
Q8	Compliance and Ethics Units	F	0
Q9	Public Trust in Institutions	NS	
Q10	Risk Assessments	F	0
Q11	Acquisition Planning	F	0
Q12	Budget Transparency & Detail	F	13
Q13	Budget Scrutiny	F	0
Q14	Budget Availability	F	0
Q15	Defence Income	F	0
Q16	Internal Audit	F	8
Q17	External Audit	F	0
Q18	Natural Resources	F	15
Q19	Organised Crime Links	A	88
Q20	Organised Crime Policing	F	0
Q21	Intelligence Services Oversight	F	0
Q22	Intelligence Services Recruitment	F	0
Q23	Export Controls (ATT)	C	50
Q76	Lobbying	F	0

		Grade	Score
Financial Risk		E	26
Q24	Asset Disposal Controls	F	13
Q25	Asset Disposal Scrutiny	F	0
Q26	Secret Spending	F	0
Q27	Legislative Access to Information	F	0
Q28	Secret Program Auditing	F	0
Q29	Off-budget Spending	F	8
Q30	Access to Information	F	0
Q31	Beneficial Ownership	A	100
Q32	Military-Owned Business Scrutiny	A	100
Q33	Unauthorised Private Enterprise	C	63
Q77	Defence Spending	F	0

		Grade	Score
Personnel Risk		F	16
Q34	Public Commitment to Integrity	F	8
Q35	Disciplinary Measures for Personnel	D	38
Q36	Whistleblowing	F	0
Q37	High-risk Positions	F	0
Q38	Numbers of Personnel	D	33
Q39	Pay Rates and Allowances	F	0
Q40	Payment System	B	67
Q41	Objective Appointments	F	8
Q42	Objective Promotions	F	8
Q43	Bribery to Avoid Conscription	NA	
Q44	Bribery for Preferred Postings	D	38
Q45	Chains of Command and Payment	F	0
Q46	Military Code of Conduct	F	6

OVERALL COUNTRY SCORE

CRITICAL RISK



RISK GRADE

A • 83-100 VERY LOW
B • 67-82 LOW
C • 50-66 MODERATE
D • 33-49 HIGH
E • 17-32 VERY HIGH
F • 0-16 CRITICAL

		Grade	Score
Personnel Risk		F	16
Q47	Civilian Code of Conduct	E	19
Q48	Anticorruption Training	F	0
Q49	Corruption Prosecutions	F	0
Q50	Facilitation Payments	D	33

		Grade	Score
Operational Risk		F	0
Q51	Military Doctrine	F	0
Q52	Operational Training	F	0
Q53	Forward Planning	F	0
Q54	Corruption Monitoring in Operations	F	0
Q55	Controls in Contracting	F	0
Q56	Private Military Contractors	NS	

		Grade	Score
Procurement Risk		F	2
Q57	Procurement Legislation	NS	
Q58	Procurement Cycle	F	8
Q59	Procurement Oversight Mechanisms	F	0
Q60	Potential Purchases Disclosed	F	0
Q61	Actual Purchases Disclosed	F	0
Q62	Business Compliance Standards	F	0
Q63	Procurement Requirements	F	0
Q64	Competition in Procurement	F	0
Q65	Tender Board Controls	F	0
Q66	Anti-Collusion Controls	F	0
Q67	Contract Award / Delivery	F	13
Q68	Complaint Mechanisms	F	0
Q69	Supplier Sanctions	F	0
Q70	Offset Contracts	F	0
Q71	Offset Contract Monitoring	F	6
Q72	Offset Competition	F	0
Q73	Agents and Intermediaries	F	0
Q74	Financing Packages	F	0
Q75	Political Pressure in Acquisitions	NS	

KEY

NEI Not enough information to score indicator
NS Indicator is not scored for any country
NA Not applicable



ti-defence.org/gdi

GDI@transparency.org

Transparency International UK
Registered charity number 1112842
Company number 2903386

Transparency International Defence and Security (TI-DS) is a global thematic network initiative of Transparency International. It is an independent entity and does not represent any national TI Chapters. TI-DS is solely responsible for the 2020 iteration of the Government Defence Integrity Index (GDI) and all associated products, including the GDI Country Briefs.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the UK Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands for their generous financial support of the production of the Government Defence Integrity Index. Thanks are also extended to the many country assessors and peer reviewers who contributed the underlying data for this index.

Series editor: **Stephanie Trapnell**, *Senior Advisor*

Author: **Matthew Steadman**, *Research Officer*

Project Manager: **Michael Ofori-Mensah**, *Head of Research*

Design: **Arnold and Pearn**



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office



Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the
Netherlands