

HOW STATESCRAFT EMPLOYED BY THE AL-KHALIFA MONARCHY  
OBSTRUCTS DEMOCRATIC REFORM IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN  
REGIME STABILITY IN BAHRAIN: A HISTORICAL REVIEW

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by  
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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how the monarchial regime of the al-Khalifa dynasty of Bahrain has skillfully tailored the tools of statecraft, both in international diplomacy and domestic policy, for one primary objective: to restrain attempts for democratic reform in order to sustain the regime's wealth and power. The al-Khalifa regime has shaped statecraft policies into a unique set in order to limit democratic initiatives. The monarchy blurs the lines between democratization as contrasted with taking a few steps toward liberalization in order to address the nation's continuing unrest. The regime exacerbates the Sunni-Shi'a divide by hiring Sunni foreigners to serve in the security forces and deliberately stokes sectarian conflict by blaming Iran for inciting the Shi'i population. The regime encourages the hiring of migrant workers, which benefits the monarchy's wealth and fosters competition for jobs between groups of workers; at the same time, the regime denies migrants steps toward citizenship. Through its foreign relations policies, the monarchy prudently balances its relationships with the United States and Saudi Arabia for the primary purpose of maintaining power. Unique circumstances, as revealed by Bahrain's history, have influenced the al-Khalifa's governance of the nation. These factors include: US military base on Bahrain's land, a Sunni minority ruling a Shi'i majority, a well-educated citizenry willing to protest for democratization and labor rights, dwindling oil resources, and a geopolitical position between two rival regional powers, Saudi Arabia and Iran.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iv
LIST OF FIGURES .....	vi
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Brief History and Geographic Location.....	7
2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	10
3. KHALIFA MONARCHY.....	20
4. SHI'A-SUNNI CONFLICT.....	37
5. HISTORY OF LABOR .....	43
Bahraini Labor .....	44
Migrant Labor.....	47
Foreigners in Army and Security Forces.....	51
Trade Unions.....	53
6. REGIME'S INTERACTIONS WITH FOREIGN POWERS.....	56
Gulf Cooperation Council .....	56
Saudi Arabia.....	57
Iran.....	60
United States.....	61
7. SPRING UPRISINGS 2011.....	65
Events before the Uprisings.....	65
Uprisings Begins.....	67
Mercenaries Hired by the Bahraini Government.....	71
Saudi Arabia Invades.....	72
Aftermath of the Uprisings.....	77
US Response.....	80
Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry.....	81
8. CONCLUSION.....	89
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	93

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. The Kingdom of Bahrain.....	8
2. Bahrain in Context.....	8

## **CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION**

Beginning in December of 2010 a wave of protests swept through the Middle East, starting in Tunisia, spreading to Egypt and erupting across the Arab world. The Arab Spring Uprising of 2011 created regime changes in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen. Massive demonstrations also broke out on the small island Kingdom of Bahrain, but neither regime change nor significant policy reforms occurred in that nation. Unrest continues to this day as protesters call for the regime to implement democratic changes. The ruling monarchy manages to hold onto the reigns of power, so the question persists: how is it possible for the al-Khalifa dynasty to maintain regime stability? A review of the history of Bahrain uncovers a pattern in which the monarchy deftly manages all the elements of governance by skillfully tailoring the tools of statecraft, in both international diplomacy and domestic policy, for one primary objective: to control attempts at democratization in order to sustain the regime's wealth and power. While other factors contribute to the regime's stability, the focus of this thesis examines the effective statecraft techniques of the ruling elite, which allows the monarchy to weather political challenges to its authority.

The study of Bahrain's unique circumstances uncovers the way in which the monarchy governs the nation and restrains democratic initiatives. The regime exacerbates the Sunni-Shi'a divide by hiring Sunni foreign security officers to serve in the military and stokes sectarian conflict by blaming Iran for inciting the Shi'i population. The regime enacts policies encouraging the hiring of migrant workers, which benefit the regime's wealth, but fosters competition between groups of workers for jobs while denying any

steps toward citizenship for guest workers. Through its foreign relations policies, the monarchy prudently balances its relationships with the United States and Saudi Arabia for the primary purpose of maintaining power. The al-Khalifa family implemented all of these methods during and in the aftermath of the Spring Uprisings of 2011.

The problem for historians and political scientists to consider is whether the al-Khalifa reforms are legitimate or are they liberalization tools toward the regime's agenda of holding onto power. Western nations, pointing to the regime's steps toward modernization, liberalization and economic freedom, consider the al-Khalifa regime one of the most liberal of the Gulf monarchies. In his visit to Bahrain in 2008, President George W. Bush made the following statements: "You're on the forefront of providing hope for people through democracy. Your nation has held two free elections since 2000."<sup>1</sup> The royal family presents Bahrain's history as a narrative that masks its authoritarian rule by introducing and then publicizing liberalization policies and promises of future reform; this thesis documents that many pledged reforms never materialized into democratic practice. The regime dangles so-called reforms as concessions to democracy while maintaining autocratic rule. For the historian to claim that the regime "institutes reforms" obscures actual practices. In previous decades, the royal family presented a few liberalization moves as "gifts" and has not yielded any authority over the parliament and key government agencies. Democratization represents the authority of the people to govern rather than rule by the king. By investigating regime practices, such as regulating

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<sup>1</sup> Office of the Press Secretary, "President Bush Arrives in Bahrain," news release, January 12, 2008, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2008/01/20080112-5.html>.



the parliament or seeking alliances with foreign powers, this thesis will identify those practices to determine to what extent reform has occurred.

This thesis provides information concerning the ways in which Bahrain's rulers use statecraft methods to maintain a positive public image against constant waves of protest for democratic reform. Theories of statecraft revolve around issues of diplomacy, intelligence, psychological strategy, political action, financial strategy, psychological strategy and public relations. Statecraft includes the study of how a nation exercises power and how and why leaders make certain decisions. The al-Khalifa royal family uses statecraft not only to maintain power but also to embrace liberalization while at the same time resisting democratization by maintaining a friendly business and public relations climate.

Statecraft refers to the "skillful management of state affairs."<sup>2</sup> A number of scholars address the issue of statecraft. According to political scientist Jonathan Ping, the actions of a state encompass both domestic and foreign actions and the creation and implementation of policy.<sup>3</sup> Alexander L. George, a political science professor, states that by studying statecraft, the historian and political scientist can add clarity to the processes of decision-making and strategic interactions of a country's leadership.<sup>4</sup> Lisa Anderson presents an overview of how monarchies remain in power in the modern world. Mary Ann Tetreault contributes to the argument that the monarchy uses illusions of reform

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<sup>2</sup> *Oxford Dictionaries Online*, "Statecraft," Accessed September 20, 2012, <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/statecraft>.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan H. Ping, *Middle Power Statecraft* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005), 14.

<sup>4</sup> Alexander L. George, "Knowledge for Statecraft: The Challenge for Political Science and History," *International Security* 22, no. 1 (Summer, 1997): 44, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2539327>.

rather than creating real change especially when establishing parliaments with no decision-making capabilities.

This thesis draws on theories of liberalization and democratization in order to demonstrate how the al-Khalifa regime practices limited liberalization in its statecraft techniques in order to maintain regime stability. In Bahrain, liberalization has promoted some degree of debate and free speech with some agency in various medias; some protections exist for civil and political freedoms, including the right to organize unions. With regard to social policy, the government has improved services in health, education and employment and instituted infrastructure improvements, although inequality and discrimination characterize the distribution of funding remains. Democratization, on the other hand, relies on political practices that allow citizens to vote and to elect representatives, thereby influencing public policies.<sup>5</sup> Transparency and accountability reduce corruption, one of the results of unaccountable power in authoritarian rule. The monarchy blurs the lines between instituting true democratic reform and taking a few steps toward liberalization in order to address the nation's continuing unrest and to impress Western supporters.

A number of scholars have written on what distinguishes liberalization from democratization. Political scientists, Steven Wright and Daniel Brumberg argue that ruling elites carefully manage liberalization policies to just the right degree in order to remain legitimate in eyes of the citizens but without sacrificing power. William Dobson suggests, "Modern authoritarians have successfully honed new techniques, methods and

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<sup>5</sup> Daniel Brumberg, "Beyond Liberalization?," *Wilson Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 47, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40261248>.

formulas for preserving power, refashioning dictatorship for the modern age.”<sup>6</sup> This thesis presents specific examples of statecraft, which demonstrates how the monarchy achieves its goal of limited liberalization without democratization in order to remain in power.

Using the historical method, I consulted a variety of resources including both primary and secondary sources. In gathering evidence for the thesis, I researched newspaper articles, cables, interviews, official records, statistical data, peer-reviewed journals, websites and blogs. For historiographic background, I studied scholarly publications, reports and books by historians and experts on the Middle East. Historical overviews of the origins of Bahrain and the al-Khalifa family served as the initial resources. These included a number of texts on Bahrain’s history, such *The Arab Uprisings: The Unfinished Revolutions of New Middle East* by Marc Lynch and *Bahrain: Political Developments in a Modernizing Society* by Emile Nakhleh, which presents a statistical overview of political development in Bahrain during the first five years after its independence in 1971. Researching the subject of the Sunni-Shi’a divide, Lawrence Davidson and Justin Gengler, who completed a political survey of Bahraini citizens as part of his dissertation research, provided specific information on ethnic membership and political action. Documentation on the migrant workers came from Andrew Gardner, who wrote his dissertation on Asian migrants in Bahrain, and followed up with the publication of a book. Scholarly articles by Laurence Louër provided background information on the political consequences of migration. Sources of information include CIA and World Bank statistical data.

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<sup>6</sup> William J. Dobson, *The Dictator’s Learning Curve* (New York: Doubleday, 2012), 5.

In addressing the issues of liberalization and democratization, Daniel Brumberg's scholarly publications and reports offer clarity on the distinction between liberalization and democratization. Brumberg argues that regimes implement strategies political liberalization and deliberalization in order to remain in power. Other essays by Amy Hawthorn, Jane Kinninmont and Steven Wright note specific examples of the regime's attempts at liberalization.

Three interviews provided first hand contexts about general labor and political conditions in Bahrain. I interviewed two American businessmen, who still have contacts in that country, therefore, remain anonymous. These two interviews confirmed news reports of how the al-Khalifa regime conducts business, including treatment of migrant workers. Nada Alwadi, Bahraini journalist, recounted her experiences during the protests, including her arrest and interrogation.

The research for documenting practices of the al-Khalifa family came from current articles from leading news organizations, such as *New York Times* and Reuters. WikiLeaks from the US embassy cables reveal insights into governmental policies. Kenneth Katzman has prepared several reports for the Congressional Research Service. The Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, an investigative report criticizing the Bahraini government's handling of the protests, provided documentation on the Spring Uprising of 2011.

This thesis is divided into eight chapters. After the Introduction in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 reviews relevant theories on statecraft, liberalization and democratization. Chapter 3 presents a historical overview of the al-Khalifa monarchy until just before the Spring Uprising of 2011. Chapter 4 covers the monarchy's role in the Shi`a-Sunni

conflict and suggests how the regime played on differences between the sects. Chapter 5 reviews the monarchy's role in regulating labor, both domestic and migrant, and how the regime has exacerbated tensions among the various worker categories. Chapter 6 covers the monarchy's strategies for dealing with Saudi Arabia, Iran and the US. Chapter 7 concentrates on the monarchy's approach to dealing with Spring Uprising of 2011 and how the regime remained in power while other Arab governments fell around them that same spring. Chapter 8 offers conclusions and analysis.

### **Brief History and Geographic Location**

Since 1783, the al-Khalifa dynasty has ruled Bahrain with the king holding supreme authority, assisted by members of his family, who are Sunni Muslims. Shi'a make up the majority of the population. The ruling elite signed a treaty with Britain in 1821, making Bahrain a British protectorate. Bahrain won its independence in 1971; since that time, the al-Khalifa regime has forged close links with the United States and other Western nations. The discovery of oil in 1932 brought wealth to the nation, but these oil resources have declined over the last few decades. Bahrain has been plagued with unrest over the years, culminating the in Spring Uprising of 2011 when the Peninsula Shield Force from the Gulf Council nations crushed demonstrations.

The Kingdom of Bahrain, located on the western shores of the Persian Gulf, consists of an archipelago of 33 islands, the largest being Bahrain Island, at 34 miles long, 11 miles wide [Figure 1].



**Figure 1. The Kingdom of Bahrain.** From the CIA World Factbook: “Bahrain.”

The islands fall close to Saudi Arabia and a 16-mile causeway that begins on the northern part of the island connecting the mainland of Saudi Arabia. Qatar lies about 20 miles to the west, and Iran lies a 100 miles across the Persian Gulf. [Figure 2]



**Figure 2. Bahrain in Context.** From CIA World Factbook: “Bahrain.”  
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ba.html>

Just a few miles from the Manama, the capital city, the US operates a major military base, which is headquarters of US Navy's Fifth Fleet. The base serves as the center of all US warships in the Gulf.

## CHAPTER 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter reviews the existing literature around the theories of statecraft and liberalization and democratization, outlining these theoretical approaches as they apply to the al-Khalifa monarchial regime's stability.

A number of scholars have explored the theories of statecraft seeking to understand the way in which governments conduct policy by investigating “preventive diplomacy, crisis avoidance, mediation and cooperation.”<sup>7</sup> For example, Alexander L. George writes about the intersection of history and political science as they relate to statecraft. Another political scientist, John E. Tashjean, suggests that whereas political theory focuses on “principles and problems of civic obligation, on actual and proposed public law, statecraft theory focuses on the art of leadership, on the key questions of public policy and on the problems of political and military strategy.”<sup>8</sup> Tashjean proposes studying political advice through case studies. The relationship between national security and economic issues is the focus in an article by Michael Mastanduno. Quoting Albert Hirschman, Mastanduno recommends that the textbook for the modern prince might include “efficient use of quotas, exchange controls, capital investment, and other instruments of economic warfare.”<sup>9</sup> In the case of Bahrain where oil wealth has decreased

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<sup>7</sup> George, 45.

<sup>8</sup> John E. Tashjean, “On Theory of Statecraft,” *Review of Politics* 35, no. 3 (July 1973): 382, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1406038>.

<sup>9</sup> Albert Hirschman, 1945, 1980, xv, in Michael Mastanduno, “Economics and Security in Statecraft and Scholarship,” *International Organization* 53, no. 4 (Autumn 1998): 825, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2601359>.



over the last few decades, efficiently managing income and investments becomes a primary objective. Lisa Anderson, political scientist, writes that the monarch has one single ambition: dynastic solidarity. The king's purpose centers on keeping successors on the throne. Depending on his extended family to fill supporting roles provides stability, as well as to "hobnob with international bankers and ride horseback with presidents—is useful indeed."<sup>10</sup> Mary Ann Tetreault, professor of International Affairs at Trinity University, offers additional insights into the workings of the Gulf monarchies. She writes that a monarch uses devices such as compromises and illusions of reform to stave off pressures to make real change. The al-Khalifa monarchy's response to protesters' demands for reform in powerless parliaments "exposes the myth for what it is, a strategy for monopolizing power."<sup>11</sup> For historians, understanding statecraft as a useful tool for how rulers and politicians create states and either stabilize or destabilize governments. The historian can identify patterns of statecraft behavior that maintains a ruler's power.

One assumption asserts a close relationship between liberalization and democratization, with liberalization viewed as a link toward democratic elections, representation and regime transformation. In addition, some American commentators and policy makers assume a direct link between a nation becoming democratic and more business friendly. Economic liberalization refers to liberalization of markets, not necessarily leading to political liberalization. In the last two decades, the government of Bahrain has liberalized the economy by passing laws permitting foreign property ownership, reducing taxes and tariffs and divesting government control in key industries

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<sup>10</sup> Lisa Anderson, "Absolutism and the Resilience of Monarchy in the Middle East," *Political Science Quarterly* 106, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 15, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2152171>.

<sup>11</sup> Mary Ann Tetreault, "The Winter of the Arab Spring in the Gulf Monarchies," *Globalizations* 8, no. 5 (October 2011): 637, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/14747731.2011.621658>.

including privatizing tourism, telecommunications, transportation, and other services.<sup>12</sup> However, the monarchy still monitors almost all aspects of the economy.

When faced with the choice of instituting democratic reforms or maintaining its authoritarian control, the latter always supersedes in Bahrain; however, the ruling elites permit a few liberalization policies. The regime allows freedom of worship, although Islam is the state religion. Promises of elections, fewer constraints on the media and the rise of nongovernmental organizations contribute to notions of a more liberal Bahrain. The regime grants women some legal rights, such as inheriting property and initiating divorce. Workers have the right to join unions and to strike. Bahrain maintains official policies with regard to these rights but restricts any activities it deems detrimental to the regime. The monarchy takes small steps toward liberalization, which appear as “reforms” toward democracy to placate its citizenry, as well as to impress Western nations looking for evidence of movement from authoritarian control. The al-Khalifa monarchy has sacrificed a degree of Bahraini independence in exchange for Saudi forces ready to intercede during demonstrations as in the Spring Uprisings of 2011.

A number of scholars explain ways in which liberalization differs from democratization. Writing for the *International Political Science Review*, Holger Albrecht and Oliver Schlumberger clarify that political liberalization does not encompass contests for political power including democratically elected representatives when the real

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<sup>12</sup> J. Adam Ereli, “Bahrain’s Economic Triad, Liberalization, Growth and Stability,” *Ambassador’s Review* (Spring, 2009): 50, <http://www.docstoc.com/docs/48553951/Bahrain-Economic-Triad-Liberalization-Growth-and-Stability>.

decision-making occurs at higher levels.<sup>13</sup> Steven Wright elaborates that in the case of King Hamad's reform agenda, "It is appropriate to view it as a clear example of a *controlled elite driven revolutionary reform*."<sup>14</sup> When King Hamad came into power in 1999, this resulted in a generational change and, therefore, reform momentum. The king would secure his regime legitimacy if he could make significant steps to liberalize Bahrain, especially if he could continue the al-Khalifa's privileged standing without an obvious dependence on intimidation or oppression. An effective statecraft policy includes liberalization and some partial facets of democratization, in order to bolster the regime's legitimacy and longevity.<sup>15</sup> Wright continues that the regime always limits any move toward democracy if that endangers its power.

The al-Khalifa monarchy sustains regime stability even after decades of unrest and protests. Examining the regime's diplomacy, governing strategies, opposition management, coercive power, business practices and administrative structure offers insight into the regime's aptitude in promoting liberalization while denying democratization. Larry Diamond, co-editor of the *Journal of Democracy*, suggests that Arab regimes implement authoritarian statecraft, not unlike many other rulers, but "have raised them to a high pitch of refinement, and wield them with unusual skill."<sup>16</sup> This

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<sup>13</sup> Holger Albrecht and Oliver Schlumberger, "“Waiting for Godot”: Regime Change without Democratization in the Middle East," *International Political Science Review* 25, no. 4 (October 2004): 371-392, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1601605>.

<sup>14</sup> Steven Wright, "Generational Change and Elite-Driven Reforms in the Kingdom of Bahrain," Durham Middle East Paper, Sir William Luce Publication Series, June 2006, <http://dro.dur.ac.uk/456/1/Wright.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Larry Diamond, "Why are There No Arab Democracies?," *Journal of Democracy* 21, no. 1 (January 2010): 99, [http://www.ipw.unisg.ch/org/ipw/web.nsf/syswebresources/dc+democracy+in+developing+countries+text+diamond/\\$file/diamond.pdf](http://www.ipw.unisg.ch/org/ipw/web.nsf/syswebresources/dc+democracy+in+developing+countries+text+diamond/$file/diamond.pdf).

statement applies to the al-Khalifa regime as this authoritarian regime practices skillful statecraft maneuvers toward liberalization while blocking democratic initiatives.

The Bahraini people, despite the regime's manipulations, remain unsatisfied and unhappy with the government, according to Daniel Brumberg. While the monarchy continues in power, the regime's hold on rule remains in a tenuous state with protests ongoing through the decades, requiring high levels of statecraft to assure the regime's lasting place. Although liberalized autocracies may be deeply entrenched, rulers cannot remain in power unless they finesse both international and internal management. While the regime would not endanger its position by acquiescing to democratic demands, it faces the ongoing problem of legitimacy in the eyes of the citizenry. Brumberg writes, "Little might be gained by an incrementalist strategy that offers few incentives for Arab leaders to move beyond the politics of day-to-day survival."<sup>17</sup> Without fair elections, the monarchy continuously struggles for popular support. The strategy of the al-Khalifa regime is to make promises of reform, while citizens wait for years for change as the monarchy continues to ignore, alter or dismiss reforms. Using the element of delay, while granting a few concessions, such as releasing political prisoners, keeps the citizenry hopeful while reforms remain at bay. Brumberg goes on to say, "liberalized autocracies use money and intimidation to both co-opt and repress potential opponents" and have built up extensive security establishments.<sup>18</sup> Liberalized autocracies allow a certain degree of freedom to NGOs, such as labor unions and civic organizations. The Bahraini regime uses a divide-and-rule strategy by playing one organization against another as in

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<sup>17</sup> Daniel Brumberg, "Democratization versus Liberalization in the Arab World: Dilemmas and Challenges for US Foreign Policy" (working paper, Democracy and Rule of Law Project, Carnegie Endowment for International Affairs, July 2005, <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/wp37.pdf>), 4.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

the Shi`a-Sunni conflicts and labor disputes.<sup>19</sup> Diamond suggests that the regime adapts these methods when pressures for change push on the regime; the monarchy permits more political participation and then returns once again to oppressive tactics of control by removing the democratic initiatives.<sup>20</sup>

Sean Yom, writing for the Foreign Policy Research Institute, states that the durability of the monarchies in the Gulf during the Arab Spring have held up because these regimes control the revenue from oil production.<sup>21</sup> The Bahraini regime administers budgets and distributes funds from these revenues with little transparency to its financial management. Administering finances spills over to control over employment practices. The constitution of Bahrain legitimizes the authority of the king to hire or fire anyone he wishes and to determining the employees' salaries; without a civil service system in which citizens achieve employment based on merit, the ruling elites undermine fair employment practices while keeping tight control over those who they employ in their service. The regime on many occasions has periodically dismissed lower-level ministers to appease unrest by giving the appearance of reform within the government. After the Spring Uprising of 2011, the government filled two ministerial positions with Shi`a as a gesture of appearing inclusive.<sup>22</sup> However, these ministers must follow the policies of the regime. Lack of transparency in labor practices and fiscal management undermines democratic reform.

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<sup>19</sup> Brumberg, 5.

<sup>20</sup> Diamond, 99.

<sup>21</sup> Sean Yom, "Understanding the Resilience of Monarchy during the Arab Spring," E-Notes, Foreign Policy Research Institute, April 2012, <http://www.fpri.org/enotes/2012/201204.yom.monarchy-arab-spring.html>.

<sup>22</sup> Ben Piven, "Demanding Equal Rights in Bahrain," *Al-Jazeera*, March 7, 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/02/201122711137430846.html>.

Bahrain falls in the category of *rentier* state, in which the political system benefits from the revenue of exported natural resources, namely petroleum in Bahrain's case. According to James L. Gelvin, although Bahrain has experienced a reduction in production of oil, the industry still provides with the country with 60% of its revenues.<sup>23</sup> Justin Gengler characterizes Bahrain as a dysfunctional *rentier* state, which he defines as “a state flush with historical level of resource revenues yet unable to buy the political acquiescence of its citizens—or, of a particular sort of its citizens.”<sup>24</sup> The regime provides income to its citizens through jobs or welfare payments and keeps the taxation rate low. Through such a system, the regime attempts to control citizens by keeping them indebted to the state. Although the monarchy uses this technique successfully, unrest simmers below the surface. Gengler writes that Bahrain still does not share all of its wealth in exchange for political acquiescence. The divide of resources and wealth is still unequal; even if the regime did share equally, some citizens would still not capitulate.<sup>25</sup> Even with financial resources, the regime must be clever in allocating resources strategically; in other words, distributing those resources sparingly but in such a way as to minimize citizen discontent. This technique thwarts citizens from pursuing democratic solutions to wealth distribution.

Mark Lynch writes in the *Foreign Policy* blog that regime stability in the Middle East will remain a “vibrant debate” among historians. Lynch argues that the regime

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<sup>23</sup> James L. Gelvin, *The Arab Uprisings: What Everyone Needs to Know* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 126.

<sup>24</sup> Justin J. Gengler, “Ethnic Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain and the Arab Gulf” (Doctorial Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2012), 5, [www-personal.umich.edu/~jgengler/docs/diss/Dissertation%20-%20Comibned,%20formatted.pdf](http://www-personal.umich.edu/~jgengler/docs/diss/Dissertation%20-%20Comibned,%20formatted.pdf), 2.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

perpetuates the misnomer that the sectarian divide between the Shi'a and Sunnis is responsible for unrest and that Iran led the protests in the spring of 2011.<sup>26</sup> Lynch affirms the regime's tactics, "the sectarian framing in Bahrain is a deliberate regime strategy."<sup>27</sup> During the years leading up to the 2011 uprisings, activists rejected sectarianism. The skill and finesse the regime commands in perpetuating the myth of Iran's meddling contributes to the al-Khalifa's ability to stay in power by masterminding a campaign aimed at dividing those advocating for reform.

As a marginalized community, migrant workers are frequently omitted from the analysis of regime stability, but the makeup of the population and the part they play in the regime's plan to exploit foreign labor in order to maximize economic interests are crucial factors for the regime to remain in power. John Chalcraft suggests that scholars have ignored migration policy studies. Chalcraft argues that in the 1950s and 1960s, migrant workers became a part of oppositional groups challenging the monarchy. From the 1970s to the 2000s, however, the situation for the migrants changed. Lynch writes,

A circular, menial labour force, segregated into compounds, denied political and collective rights and subject to deportation was a way to solve a question of political order: how to depoliticize and control the mass of a working population sought out for the development and diversification of oil economies.<sup>28</sup>

Gardner states that Bahrain's migration policies allows the country to profit from workers who, under other circumstances, would be somewhat protected by a nation's wage and

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<sup>26</sup> Marc Lynch, "Bahrain Brings Back the Sectarianism," *Foreign Policy*, March 16, 2011, [http://lynch.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/03/16/bahrain\\_brings\\_back\\_the\\_sectarianism](http://lynch.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/03/16/bahrain_brings_back_the_sectarianism).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> John Chalcraft, "Monarchy, Migration and Hegemony in the Arabia Peninsula" (Research Paper, Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance and Globalization in the Gulf States, London, October 2010), 29, [http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/32556/1/Monarchy\\_migration\\_and\\_hegemony\\_working\\_paper\).pdf](http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/32556/1/Monarchy_migration_and_hegemony_working_paper).pdf).

labor laws.<sup>29</sup> Gardner elaborates that because Bahrain lacks the wealth of other oil-rich states, and it cannot support a working class citizenry, which places them into job competition with foreigners. Migrants have a significant impact on Bahrain as they compete for jobs with nationals creating divisions between these groups. The monarchy has implemented such practices to enhance financial gain by lowering labor costs to the royal financial empire. The regime's migration policies place limitations on citizenship rights for migrant workers thereby denying them political participation.

J. E. Peterson best described a pattern in the royal management of the country. Sheikh 'Isa ibn Salman, became the ruler of Bahrain between 1961 and 1999, and became the family representative to the people, garnering some degree of favor from the citizenry. His brother, Khalifa ibn Salman, held the position of prime minister, and assumed the duties of decision-making, established a security force and accumulated immense personal wealth. Peterson characterizes this relationship as a "good guy, bad guy" partnership."<sup>30</sup> Jane Kinninmont agrees with this analysis suggesting that the monarchy may have conspired to portray these royal actors as wearing white or black hats.

Kinninmont writes,

There has always been some debate about the depth and seriousness of the apparent reformist-conservative split in the family; after all, such apparent internal divisions can in practice be used to alleviate pressure for reform (for instance by justifying failures to reform on the basis that good intentions were being thwarted by others).<sup>31</sup>

Davidson continues with that analysis writing, "Any portrayal of one member as more

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<sup>29</sup> Gardner, 161.

<sup>30</sup> J. E. Peterson, "Bahrain Reform—Promise and Reality," in *Political Liberalization in the Persian Gulf*, ed. Joshua Teitelbaum (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 158.

<sup>31</sup> Jane Kinninmont, "Bahrain," in *Power and Politics in the Persian Gulf Monarchies*, ed. Christopher Davidson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 42.



moderate than another is meaningless, as all operate within the very core of the regime.”<sup>32</sup> The good cop/bad cop strategy allows the regime to create the impression that the king is an ally to the citizenry giving the appearance that he is battling hardliner forces within the royal family. This particular method of statecraft obfuscates the power structure in such a way as to block or confuse channels of accountability for the citizenry.

The historians and political scientists presented in this chapter offer support that statecraft methods to implement limited liberalization policies as practiced by the al-Khalifa family contributes significantly to the stability of the regime, which in turn denies democratic process.

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<sup>32</sup> Christopher M. Davidson, “Lords of the Realm, *Foreign Policy* (February 21, 2011), [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/02/21/lords\\_of\\_the\\_realm?page=full](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/02/21/lords_of_the_realm?page=full).

### CHAPTER 3 AL-KHALIFA MONARCHY

This chapter reviews the history of the al-Khalifa dynasty's rule over Bahrain and provides examples of selected liberalization policies and statecraft techniques, which preserves the stability of the monarchy. Coming from desert origins in Mesopotamia, al-Khalifa became the ruling family of their adopted country through the intervention of the British. The history of the regime uncovers a colonial legacy in which a series of treaty agreements stipulated that the British would support the monarchy. The British also established the payments to the regime, allocating oil revenues to the Privy Purse. The monarchy offers the impression of economic and cultural liberalization by instituting a few reforms, but when translated to actual practice, these reforms prove to be temporary or ignored. The king approved a constitution that called for the establishment of a National Assembly, including one elected house, which never had actual legislative powers. The regime's promises of fair elections as well as playing on fears that instability brings provide Western nations and media the rationale to support the Bahraini regime.

The al-Khalifa family, Sunni Muslims from al-'Utub tribe, arrived in what is now Kuwait in the mid-eighteenth century. Several families became prominent in Kuwait; the al-Sabah tribe was the most powerful while the al-Khalifa clan was one of the wealthiest. According to the al-Sabah family resources, these two clans operated as pirates and gangs and acquired additional wealth through the lucrative pearling trade.<sup>33</sup> Sometime between

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<sup>33</sup> "History of Bahrain," *Wikipedia*, Last Modified 08/30/12. In *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, John Gordon Lorimer, Volume 1 Historical, Part 1, 1000, 1905, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_Bahrain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Bahrain).

1750-1760, a dispute arose between the two clans, and the al-Khalifa left Kuwait. The al-Sabah family became the rulers of Kuwait in the early 1800s, continuing to rule Kuwait to this day. The al-Khalifa family attacked and then captured the island of Bahrain from the Persians in 1783. In 1800, the al-Khalifa clan lost control of the island to the Omanis, but twenty years later recaptured the island and has remained in power since that time.

During the 1820s, the al-Khalifa family entered into a treaty with the British, the dominant military power in the Persian Gulf and accepted Britain's protection in 1914. Britain granted the title, Ruler of Bahrain, to the king, establishing a hereditary line of succession and promising to support the king's rule while protecting Bahrain from any attackers. Britain organized a government bureaucracy that served as a template for the monarchy to build an infrastructure to support its power base.

For the British, Bahrain offered unrestricted access to the Gulf and a partnership against piracy, an arrangement of protection called the Trucial System, which the British established in many of the other Gulf nations. By 1882, these treaties restricted the ruler's power, as they could not dispose of any territory except to the United Kingdom, which forbid the rulers to enter into relationships with foreign governments without British approval. In addition to establishing the monarchy in Bahrain, Britain established other monarchies in the region including in Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and United Arab Emirates. While some authorities have attributed the monarchies in the Arab world to tradition, religion or tribalism, in fact, the British established these individual kingdoms with monarchs at the head.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Gelvin, 121.

According to Abdulhadi Khalaf, a Bahraini political activist and specialist in politics of the region, the British devised several mechanisms to keep power in the hands of the ruling family. The regime consists of a ruling core, which from 1926 to 1957 consisted of the Amir and his British advisor, Sir Charles Belgrave.<sup>35</sup> From 1959 until 1971, three brothers, including the Amir, made up the core. Since 1971, the Amir, his brother al-Khalifa ibn Salman, prime minister, and his son, Hamad ibn Isa, ruled together. Rank and file members of the al-Khalifa family handle matters through the al-Khalifa Family Council. Family members cannot submit disagreements to the ordinary law courts and cannot enter into any major business contract without the approval of the family council.<sup>36</sup> The British established the Privy Purse, whereby the royal family would receive one-third of the revenue from oil production, and land registration ordinances, which gave unclaimed lands to the family council. The ruling core still controls the residual oil revenues as well as other resources; a detailed classification of family members determined their monthly stipend.<sup>37</sup> All of these mechanisms have allowed the regime to repress citizens through “effective use of strategies of penetration, fragmentation and marginalization,” as the ruling elite must approve all the important actions within the nation.<sup>38</sup> The discovery of oil on the island led to extensive drilling beginning in the 1930s, just as the Japanese perfected the cultivation of artificial pearls, collapsing the pearl market in Bahrain. While oil revenues brought improvements in

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<sup>35</sup> Abdulhadi Khalaf, “Contentious Politics in Bahrain: From Ethnic or National and Vice Versa,” Fourth Nordic Conference of Middle Eastern Studies, Oslo, Norway, August 13-16, 1998, <http://www.smi.uib.no/pao/khalaf.html>.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

health and education to the people, the British continued to be an ever-present force, building a naval base on the island in 1935.

In 1968, the British government decided to end its treaties with eight Trucial States with the goal of forming a union of Arab Emirates, which led to the eventual formation of the United Arab Emirates in 1971. Bahrain announced independence in August of 1971, preferring to remain independent of the Arab union. In December of that year, the Kingdom of Bahrain became formally independent.

A January 2011 article on the *Ikhras* website describes a lecture by Muhammad ibn-Mubarak al-Khalifa, the Foreign Minister of Bahrain, which illuminates the way in which the regime understands Britain's influence. The minister states that Britain's presence in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries was not colonialism but rather that Britain's presence was for Bahrain's "protection and security."<sup>39</sup> The minister's remark contrasts with how other Arabs view the British presence.

Arabs, just like the rest of the world, view the British presence in Bahrain, and the region at the time as a colonial power. The "lecturer" that evening may have confused the "*protection*" and "*security*" of his family, not to mention the establishment of its rule, with the protection and security of Bahrain.<sup>40</sup>

The article suggests that regimes in the Gulf replicate those associations of the past with the US today.<sup>41</sup> Most historians support the colonialism label on Britain. Adam Hanieh,

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<sup>39</sup> Qasim Lutfi and Thabit Al-Arabi, Eds. "Bahrain FM: British Colonialism is Not Colonialism," *Ikhras*. January 3, 2011, <http://ikhras.com/2011/01/bahrain-fm-british-colonialism-is-not-colonialism/>.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

author of *Capitalism and Class the Gulf Arab States*, for example, characterizes a description of the Gulf region as under “direct colonial domination in the 1900s.”<sup>42</sup>

According to A. A. Mohamoud, who wrote on the role of constitution building in Bahrain, the new Constitution of 1973 created a unicameral parliament called the National Assembly that consisted of 30-elected members plus fourteen royal appointees. Legislative power was limited, however, as the Assembly could not initiate or enact laws and could only give advice and consent to legislation suggested by the Council of Ministers. The Amir had the power to dissolve the National Assembly at any time, but with the stipulation that within two months elections were required or the National Assembly reinstated.<sup>43</sup> The power granted to the legislature to debate issues provided a small opportunity for democracy to get a foothold as the public became engaged with the debates. Three issues came into question: distribution of land, limitations on al-Khalifa’s family expenditures, and detention of political prisoners through the State Security Law. Mohamoud writes in a case study on Bahrain for the Institute of Democracy and Electoral Assistance that public discussions of these issues began “to worry the regime as they began to fear that the National Assembly was bent on eroding the moral legitimacy of the monarchy.”<sup>44</sup> Sheikh Isa ibn Salman al-Khalifa dissolved the National Assembly and suspended the constitution on the premise that the legislature was not cooperating with the government; he ignored the two-month grace period for holding new elections. From 1975-2002, Bahrain remained with a powerless parliament while the Amir ruled by

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<sup>42</sup> Adam Hanieh, *Capitalism and Class in the Gulf Arab States* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 3.

<sup>43</sup> A. A. Mohamoud, “The Role of Constitution-Building Process in Democratization: Case Study Bahrain,” International IDEA, 2005, 6, [http://www.idea.int/cbp/upload/CBP\\_Bahrain.pdf](http://www.idea.int/cbp/upload/CBP_Bahrain.pdf).

<sup>44</sup> Mohamoud, 7.

decree.<sup>45</sup> Mohamoud states that formulating the constitution legitimized the political dominance of al-Khalifa family in exchange for limited public participation. In a footnote, he writes that Bahraini scholar, Baquer S. al-Najjar, commented that the Amir manages the welfare of the Bahraini people by sharing in the country's wealth and in this way buys the citizens' loyalty from the sale of oil.<sup>46</sup> This example reveals how the regime used a technique of combining the bad news of dissolving the parliament with the good news of promises of personal economic security. This strategy, even with tensions simmering below the surface, allowed the monarchy to remain in power. The door to debate had opened, however, as the citizens experienced a small slice of democracy.

Sheikh Isa ibn Hamad al-Khalifa, who had been in power since 1961, titled himself *Amir* and appointed his brother, Khalifa ibn Salman al-Khalifa, as prime minister, and his son, Hamad, minister of defense; he selected other family members to key positions in the government. The Amir oversaw all aspects of the al-Khalifa family by supporting their financial enterprises and controlling allowances based on status. This control extended into the communities. Anthropologist Fuad I. Khuri called Bahrain a "metrocommunity," which is a type of ruling style that requires that the heads of state be personally knowledgeable about their constituents. With Bahrain's small population, the ruling family made it a point to know everything about the families that resided in the country. The al-Khalifas dispensed favors and gifts in order to co-opt rivals. Khuri describes how each member of the al-Khalifa family had a specific responsibility to talk

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

to one particular group, such as the oldest son communicating with young people.<sup>47</sup> Through oil revenues and an extensive security apparatus, the Amir controlled the country through the decades of the 1970s and 1980s. During this time, the king's brother took a more active part in policy decisions and governmental affairs. Peterson characterized this relationship as "good guy, bad guy partnership." The king cultivated loyalty by making himself available to his people while his brother made appointments, built up the security forces and, in the process, became the wealthiest person in the country, "while family and tribal allies grew rich with him."<sup>48</sup> Such a strategy presents the appearance that the king supports the people. Meeting with the king in person creates the appearance that concerns will be addressed, a strategy that blocks democratic initiatives as citizens misinterpret openness and accessibility as being genuine conduits to make change. The tactic of creating actors to play roles of hardliners versus liberals continues through 2012.

By the late 1970s, the oil began to dry up in Bahrain while other Middle East nations, UAE, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Oman and Qatar, managed to maintain high levels of oil production. After the economic boom of 1975-76, the monarchy had fewer sources to draw on to shore up its hegemony. The monarchy had to become astute at managing limited resources, depending more on Saudi Arabia and GCC for support and relying on diversification in industry and business.

In the 1990s, a coalition made up of primarily clerics and businessmen drew up two petitions, signed by representatives of Shi'a and Sunni and secular nationalists. This

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<sup>47</sup> Fuad I. Khuri, *Tribe and State in Bahrain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 245.

<sup>48</sup> Peterson.



coalition petitioned the Amir for reforms, such as restoration of the National Assembly and the constitution of 1975. To pre-empt the delivery of this petition to the Amir, the regime arrested several of the Shi'i cleric leaders. Through the mid-1990s, the Shi'a participated in riots, and the regime dealt with its opponents using severe repression through violence resulting in 40 deaths. Although security measures never entirely stopped the demonstrations, the Amir managed to contain the unrest.<sup>49</sup>

Hamad ibn 'Isa al-Khalifa inherited the throne in 1999, and two years later a referendum passed that turned Bahrain into a constitutional, hereditary monarchy and declared Hamad as king. The mislabeling of Bahrain as a constitutional monarchy, rather than as an absolute monarchy, serves as an example the regime's attempt to present the appearance of a progressive state. Writing on his blog and for the *Biographical Encyclopedia of the Modern Middle East and North Africa*, Abudlhadi Khalaf states that during that time, rising oil revenues enabled King Hamad to increase his standing among the upper classes, extending political favors (called *makrama* in Arabic) to local elites and pardoned political prisoners. Khalaf writes that the king's "effective political use of *makrama* has elevated it into a strategic instrument of rule."<sup>50</sup> One *makrama* granted approximately \$450 million (US) in housing allowances and another covered housing loans, benefiting 40 percent of Bahraini homeowners.<sup>51</sup> By implementing strategies of

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<sup>49</sup> *International Crisis Group*, "Popular Protests in North Africa and the Middle East (III): The Bahrain Revolt," April 6, 2011, 2, [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iran%20Gulf/Jordan/118-popular-protest-in-north-africa-and-the-middle-east-ix-dallying-with-reform-in-a-divided-jordan.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iran%20Gulf/Jordan/118-popular-protest-in-north-africa-and-the-middle-east-ix-dallying-with-reform-in-a-divided-jordan.pdf).

<sup>50</sup> Abudlhadi Khalaf, "Al-Khalifa, Hamad Ibn Isa (1950-), *Khalafiat*, May 10, 2012, <http://abdulhadikhalf.wordpress.com/2012/05/10/al-Khalifa-hamad-ibn-isa-1950/>.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

bestowing financial favors, the king garners support but deters democratic initiatives to make change.

Sheikh Hamad inherited discontent that plagued his father's regime in the 1990s. Sheikh Hamad attempted to defuse tensions by introducing steps toward political change by speaking with opposition leaders and supporting municipal council elections; he granted women the right to vote. He abolished the State Security Law and Court and appointed new members of the Consultative Council, with the promise that at the end of five years, elections would determine council membership. The sheikh supported conversations concerning the return to the 1973 constitution and formed a committee to draft amendments and to prepare a charter. Because of these changes, leaders of the opposition gave Sheikh Hamad their support; the sheikh was careful, however, not to relinquish true political freedom for the various constituencies. While advocating reform, the regime continued to restrict political access to both groups and individuals through manipulation of administrative bureaucracy and legal regulations.<sup>52</sup>

Through a series of interviews, Peterson details the history of these political interactions. At first, the regime supported a charter approved by carefully chosen Bahraini citizens; some members of the Supreme National Committee, thinking that this was an attempt "to give the appearance of democracy without substance," resigned and the idea of a referendum had to be tabled.<sup>53</sup> The Constitutional Committee, charged with drafting constitutional amendments, made decisions regarding government with little or no transparency and ignored community suggestions.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Peterson, 161.

In December of 2000, the committee proposed that Bahrain become a constitutional kingdom with a bicameral legislature with one elected house and the other appointed by the sheikh. The public vacillated in their support of the charter as vague language peppered the document with regard to how the formation of the legislature would take place through direct and free elections. The sheikh eagerly met with leading Shi'i religious figures just a week before the referendum. The clerics demanded that legislative power belong to the elected body alone whereas the Consultative Council's role would only be advisory; the sheikh agreed and signed the document. In January, the charter passed with a 98.4 percent of the vote in favor of the changes.<sup>54</sup> In addition to these reforms, freedom of press and speech expanded, and Bahraini's could now discuss democratic reforms openly. Despite these and other reforms, a year later the details of the new parliament as revealed by the government raised new concerns especially since the regime presented the amended constitution in a final form rather than as a document open to discussion.<sup>55</sup> All through this process, the monarchy played its strategy: agreeing to reforms while not following through on major democratic transformation. The sheikh created a positive atmosphere within the country, however, by pardoning exiles, visiting with religious leaders and granting citizenships. With Bahrain stabilized, Sheikh Hamad made his next move: declaring himself king on February 14, 2002.

In the steps toward parliamentary elections in 2002, a number of societies that behaved like political parties began to emerge. Political parties were illegal so groups adopted a cover, calling themselves "societies." Government regulations forbid these

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<sup>54</sup> Peterson, 163.

<sup>41</sup> Peterson, 160.

societies to organize by religion, class and profession or to receive funding from foreign sources. The Ministry of Justice retained authority to dissolve any society. The primary objective of the Shi`a centered on adhering to Islamic values rather than replacing the system. They cooperated with liberals, who were advocating a more secularist approach; therefore, they managed to maintain a loose coalition. The Sunni Islamist parties more often advocated working with the government and supporting the regime. All groups remained committed to making change.<sup>56</sup>

King Hamad drew up the 2002 constitution designating that the unelected upper house, or Shura Council, would have the authority to veto legislation passed by the elected parliament. To many Bahraini activists, this was a shocking blow to the country's democratic movement. Without the parliament having any authority to legislate laws or monitor corruption, it appeared to be no more than a debating society. The parties began to consider whether to boycott the 2002 elections, as the new reforms did not conform to the 1973 constitution as the king had promised. Four of the major parties decided to boycott the elections, as they believed that the new parliament would be weak.<sup>57</sup>

Between 2003 and 2004, the people felt disappointment as the ruling elites ignored implementing promised reforms.<sup>58</sup> The youth became more radicalized as unemployment and discrimination against Shi`a continued, and periodic violence broke out. The political parties divided over issues, such as the Shi`a-Sunni divide, differences between Islamic and liberal ideologies, and varying views on the king's intentions. King Hamad's hard-line uncle remained as prime minister, who endorsed policies of

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<sup>56</sup> Peterson, 166.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Peterson, 169.

discrimination against the Shi`a population. Questions arose again whether the king instituted attempts at reform out of genuine concern or just to calm unrest and to shore up international support.

In 2005, Bahrain considered itself one of the Middle East's most up to date on Internet technology. The government, however, shut down two popular web sites whose discussion forums contained criticism of the regime. On one forum, which received about 200,000 daily hits, users made allegations of state corruption to which King Hamad responded by saying, "There are no limits to freedom, but this freedom should be based on patriotism."<sup>59</sup> The king' rhetoric attempts to affirm freedom while denying free expression when the regime identifies criticism as unpatriotic. This rhetorical device of calling on patriotism to cover up repression of free speech reveals the limits of liberalization; the ruling elites forbid speech that challenges the regime directly.

Peterson reports that four years later, in 2006, two of the political parties announced they would not boycott the November election, causing some of the al-Wifaq hardliners to form al-Haq, a rejectionist party. The Bandargate affair broke in September of 2006 when an employee of the Bahrain government released documents detailing government corruption and its attempts to fix parliamentary elections. The government deported the employee who disclosed the corruption, closed the website and denied the authenticity of the documents. However, the affair confirmed opposition suspicions that the al-Khalifa regime would never permit free elections.<sup>60</sup> The Shi`a Islamist opposition did well enough in the 2006 election that tensions decreased for a time as the regime

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<sup>59</sup> *Foreign Policy*, "Caught in the Net: Bahrain," May 5, 2005, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2005/05/05/caught\\_in\\_the\\_net\\_bahrain](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2005/05/05/caught_in_the_net_bahrain).

<sup>60</sup> Peterson, 167.

addressed some of their grievances. Yet, many issues were unresolved, and the question remained whether King Hamad was a reformist or a pragmatist and were the royals continuing to replay and “good guy-bad guy” scenario. The king continued to promise reform, while his hardliner uncle, the prime minister, expanded both financial and social control over Bahrain.<sup>61</sup>

Although the king granted the right for women to vote in 2002 in a gesture of gender egalitarianism, four years later the king had appointed only a few women to ministerial positions and ten to serve on the Shura council, selected because of their close association with the al-Khalifa rulers. Ghada Jamsheer, a prominent women’s rights advocate, delivered a speech in the United Kingdom to the House of Lords in 2006 outlining the major political issues women face in Bahrain. First, she identified the problem that participation in elections had not transferred to creating legislation and making decisions. Second, she stated that government officials appoint women to selected positions because of their sectarian or family affiliations. Third, Jamsheer stated that, “The government used women’s rights as a decorative tool on the international level.”<sup>62</sup> Because of her criticism of the government, King Hamad ordered the media to stop publication of any news relating to Jamsheer. In attempts to appear Western and democratic, the regime continued to depend on superficial reforms of gender equality.

According to an article in the *Bahrain Monitor*, the monarchy uses a technique of making subtle changes to give the impression of making reforms and, therefore, placates

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<sup>61</sup> Peterson, 171.

<sup>62</sup> Ghada Jamsheer, “Women in Bahrain and the Struggle against Artificial Reforms” (speech delivered to House of Lords, United Kingdom, December 2006), <http://www.wluml.org/sites/wluml.org/files/Bahraini%20activist%20Ghada%20Jamsheer's%20speech%20of%20the%20House%20of%20Lords%202006.pdf>.

demands for change. For example, in 2008 the king decreed to abolish the Information Ministry and established the Bahrain Media Authority to oversee foreign media, press affairs, news agency, printing and publishing, supposedly a sign of loosening press censorship. Just weeks before, however, *Al-Jazeera* ran a story about Bahrain's poverty, which prompted the news agency's expulsion from the country.<sup>63</sup>

One technique the king implemented involved granting favors and using oppressive tactics at the same time. In a WikiLeaks document in 2008, the American embassy reported that the king "intervened forcefully against sectarianism and violent demonstrations."<sup>64</sup> His statements included a series of reprimands to the Shi'i community, which were in response to street conflicts between the police and Shi'i youth; the king then granted amnesty to 225 Shi'i prisoners. He also scolded the editors of Bahrain's newspapers for inciting the youth to protest and called in 50 clerics of both groups demanding that they preach national unity; the king created a "monitoring committee" to keep sectarian incitement out of sermons. A note in the cable states, "It is difficult to see how in practice the government will be able to influence Shi'i sermons. Almost all Shi'i clergy decline the government salaries that have been available for decades."<sup>65</sup> The Bahraini government affirms freedom of religion; but when tensions arise, the regime pressures religious institutions to capitulate to its demands. This cable from the embassy reveals how the king switches between granting favors and employing oppressive tactics in order to control the population.

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<sup>63</sup> *Bahrain Monitor*, "Flourishing Press amid Unsuitable Press Law," March 24, 2012, <http://www.bahrainmonitor.org/reports/p-024-01.html>.

<sup>64</sup> WikiLeaks, 08MANAMA510, "Tough King, Nice King: Stern Warnings to Shi'a, and then an Amnesty," July 31, 2008, <http://wikileaks.frontlawn.net/cable/2008/07/08MANAMA510.html>.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

Characteristic of a paternalistic culture, the regime represents a relationship to society in terms of familial bond by “portraying themselves as metaphorical fathers to their subjects.”<sup>66</sup> When the authorities arrested Nada Alwadi, Bahraini journalist, her interrogator asked her why she was ungrateful for all the benefits the king granted her.<sup>67</sup> This management style allows the king to appear as if he is listening to the concerns of citizens; the regime may address these concerns but only if making change does not limit the monarchy’s power.

The Shi`a have frequently raised the question of corruption in their arguments against the monarchy. One particular case, involving Alba, the Bahraini company, and Alcoa Aluminum, demonstrates how the regime scapegoats on suspects holding positions lower in the hierarchy while higher officials manage to escape scrutiny. In 2008, the Public Prosecution of Bahrain published a story that authorities detained two lower-level officials in the Alba Company on charges of receiving bribes from a foreign company in exchange for reducing the product’s sale price. The regime undertook a public campaign against these officials to demonstrate that authorities were committed to eliminating corruption.<sup>68</sup> The authorities released these officials from prison in June 2008 after they contracted tuberculosis while incarcerated. By appearing to investigate and uncover alleged crimes in this case, the government creates the appearance of administering justice. International scrutiny proved more thorough, however, and in July 2012 a fraud probe by the United Kingdom named Sheikh Isa ibn Ali al-Khalifa, cousin and advisor to

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<sup>66</sup> Laurence Louër, “The Political Impact of Labor Migration in Bahrain,” *City & Society* 20, Issue 1, American Anthropological Association, (2008): 47, <http://www.cerium.ca/IMG/pdf/Louër-Bahrain.pdf>.

<sup>67</sup> Nada Alwadi, Interview by John Kalwaic, Wallingford, PA, November 8, 2011.

<sup>68</sup> *Bahrain Center for Human Rights*, “Chasing Minor Suspects of Corruption while Senior Officials Enjoy Impunity,” January 10, 2010, <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/3019>.



the prime minister, co-conspirator for taking \$6 million in bribes from Victor Dahdaleh, a Canadian businessman.<sup>69</sup> A suit filed in Pittsburg Federal Court by Alba contends, “Alcoa paid \$9.5 million in bribes to Bahrain officials and Alba executives through affiliated companies controlled by agent Victor Dahdaleh that led Alba to overpay \$420 million for raw materials.”<sup>70</sup> UK and Switzerland prosecutors have also investigated the case. This case demonstrates the value of family loyalty as a means of control, including protecting family members from investigation.

Mike Diboll, former professor of English at the University of Bahrain until 2011, explains the attitude of the monarchy toward education, which replicates its statecraft methods in many areas. He states that the regime has a history of using international organizations as a public relations maneuver. According to Diboll, the monarchy exploits educational institutions, such as the University of Edinburgh, as a means of adding legitimacy and prestige to the regime. Diboll’s opinion is that such maneuvering is, in reality, meaningless with regard to genuine academic progress. The apparent purpose of such machinations is to create a façade of legitimacy and accreditation. Diboll writes in his blog that dealings with Bahrain are not appropriate without true academic freedom; he successfully petitioned the University of Edinburgh to end its association with the Kingdom of Bahrain.<sup>71</sup> This case is another example of how the regime’s statecraft

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<sup>69</sup> AhluBayt News Agency, “Bahrain Royal Accused in \$6M UK Corruption Case,” October 31, 2010, <http://abna.co/data.asp?lang=3&Id=275583>.

<sup>70</sup> Samuel Rubinfeld, “Alcoa Offer Cash Payment to Settle RICO Suit,” *Wall Street Journal Online*, July 11, 2012, <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/3019>.

<sup>71</sup> Mike E. Diboll, “University of Edinburgh and Bahrain,” *MikeDiboll.com*, January 28, 2012, <http://mikediboll.com/2012/01/28/update-university-of-edinburgh-and-bahrain/>.

techniques of employing public relations practices pervades all aspects of its dealings with other nations.

From the time the British granted the right of hereditary line of succession, the monarchy has maintained rule by deftly managing the affairs of state and implementing a few liberalization policies. The monarchy established a bureaucratic infrastructure headed by the king and the ruling core and supported by family members who occupy major posts in the government, thus assuring complete control from the top. As an American businessman reported in an interview, King Hamad manages every aspect of business in his country; his picture appears on every contract, tied up with fancy ribbons and stamped with seals. The highest levels of government must approve all business contracts.<sup>72</sup> The regime pardons political prisoners while the security forces employ strong-arm repression on political dissenters. The monarchy employs rhetorical devices on state media to convey its intentions of reform. While keeping a positive relationship with the US, the king plays on the fear of Iran's ascendance as a major power. Chapter 7 traces how the monarchy mimics many of the statecraft techniques of the past during the 2011 uprising in order to safeguard its rule.

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<sup>72</sup> Interview with American Businessman, by John Kalwaic, Wallingford, PA, July 27, 2012.

## CHAPTER 4 SHI`A -SUNNI CONFLICT

This chapter describes the efforts of the al-Khalifa monarchy to favor Sunni interests in order to maintain power in a nation with a Shi`a majority. After a review of statistics concerning the Sunni and Shi`a, the chapter summarizes religious differences. By using specific tactics to disenfranchise Shi`i citizens, the monarchy creates an extreme imbalance of wealth and power, resulting in a disproportionate Sunni influence, which tends to support the regime. The regime utilizes a number of statecraft tools to increase tensions in the nation, especially by focusing on Iran's connections to and purported influence over the Shi`a.

Two denominations of Islam, Sunni and Shi`a, play an important role in the politics of Bahrain. Although various Islamic factions debate the proportion of Sunni to Shi`a, Sunni make up about 75 percent of the world's Muslim population, while Shi`i membership accounts for 10-20 percent of the world's Muslims.<sup>73</sup> Out of all fifty Muslim countries, in only four—Iran, Iraq, Lebanon and Bahrain—do Shi`a make up the largest Islamic denomination. Even in those four countries, Iran is the only one where the Shi`a traditionally have had political hegemony. The Pew Research Center estimates that between 65-75% of Bahrain's population are Shi`a.<sup>74</sup> The two other nations most

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<sup>73</sup> "Religions," *CIA World Factbook*, 2012, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2122.html>.

<sup>74</sup> Pew Forum, "Estimated Percentage Range of Shi`a by Country," *Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life/Mapping the Global Muslim Population*, October 2009, 39, [http://www.pewforum.org/uploadedfiles/Orphan\\_Migrated\\_Content/Shiarange.pdf](http://www.pewforum.org/uploadedfiles/Orphan_Migrated_Content/Shiarange.pdf).

entangled in Bahrain's political unrest are Iran, with a majority of Shi'a, and Saudi Arabia with a majority of Sunni.

Throughout Bahrain's history, the Sunni and Shi'a engaged in conflict; however, both groups have attempted to put aside religious differences in order to address grievances, in both political and labor issues. The monarchy has exacerbated those differences, both economically and religiously, in order to divert attention from progress toward democratic reform.

The schism between Sunni and Shi'a has historical roots in a disagreement over the order of succession after the death of the prophet Mohammad in the year 632. According to Davidson, the Sunni majority has viewed Shi'a "as not quite orthodox, and so has often treated them in a discriminatory fashion."<sup>75</sup> Gengler attributes the Shi'a desire to struggle for democratic reform in the roots in Islam stating, "as the historical arc of Shi'ism being precisely one of struggle and self-sacrifice in the face of a more powerful but corrupt political-cum-religious oppressor."<sup>76</sup> Gengler claims that Shi'a Islamic teachings grant them the right to challenge injustices in politics.

According to Peterson, sectarian divisions caused political organizations to center around Islamic parties; this divide is one of reasons for the increased Islamist groups in Bahrain. In the 1990s, Shi'i Islamist groups began to form major opposition parties, which have continued up to the present. As a reaction to the newly formed Shi'i groups, Sunni Islamists parties also began to organize. Bahraini Islamists, as contrasted with

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<sup>75</sup> Lawrence Davidson, "Turning a Blind Eye to Bahrain's Abuse," *Consortium News*, May 11, 2011, <http://consortiumnews.com/2011/05/11/turning-a-blind-eye-to-bahrains-abuse/>.

<sup>76</sup> Gengler 5.

Islamists elsewhere in the Gulf region, advocated for women to participate in the political process and associated with leftist organizations.<sup>77</sup>

As the Sunni acquired more wealth because of discriminatory practices of the Sunni monarchy, the economic divide between the two sects intensified. Regime policies excludes Shi'a from all but a few low-level government posts and bans them from serving in security and military positions. The monarchy grants citizenship to Sunni immigrants in order to increase their representation in the population. While Sunni have benefited from favoritism, many Shi'a continue to live in poverty. The economic divide between the Sunni elite and the Shi'i majority is alarming, notes Toby Jones, editor at the Middle East Report political journal. "Nationally, Bahrain is a very poor country and the wealth that does get created is concentrated in the hands of the rulers and the influential," he said. "... I've never seen wretched poverty like I've seen in Bahrain."<sup>78</sup> The regime, on the other hand, points to infrastructure improvements as signs of modernization. Sheikh Mohammed ibn Essa al-Khalifa, the chief executive at Bahrain's Economic Development Board stated, "Eight years ago if you drove through the villages, half of the roads weren't paved . . . today, 90 percent are paved."<sup>79</sup> Calling attention to progress, a value of liberalism, does not translate to democratic process but gives the impression that the government responds to citizens' needs.

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<sup>77</sup> Peterson, 185.

<sup>78</sup> Mike Brunker, "Egypt, Bahrain Protests Differ in Key Ways," *NBC News*, February 17, 2011, [http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/41651773/ns/world\\_news-mideast\\_n\\_africa/t/egypt-bahrain-protests-differ-key-ways/#.UA7R6Gme52A](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/41651773/ns/world_news-mideast_n_africa/t/egypt-bahrain-protests-differ-key-ways/#.UA7R6Gme52A).

<sup>79</sup> Andrew England, "FT Report: Talk of Reform but Still Much to Do," *Financial Times*, November 9, 2009, <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/2974>.

Resentment among the Shi`a towards the monarchy has grown as prolonged discrimination continues in both jobs and educational placement. The loss of the privilege becomes a wedge between the two groups, which divide the sects even further. The government officials claim that economic reforms will solve Shi`i grievances. A Western diplomat claimed that the crown prince is committed to economic liberalization, but as for political liberalization says, “It can’t be rolled back but I’m not sure how far he wants to push it.”<sup>80</sup>

The major complaints of the Shi`a, all the result of the regime’s manipulation, fall into these categories:

1. High rate of Shi`i unemployment, especially among the youth.
2. Fair distribution of oil revenues.
3. Distribution of land and housing. Shi`i villages lack basic amenities. Wifaq and Haq advocate for more housing. A small flotilla attempted to land on Umm al-Na`san, the king’s private island. The government claimed that the island was essential for Bahrain Defense Forces training, therefore, remains off-limits to the public. The government restricts access to other islands as well as the southern section of the main island. Invoking national security to justify these restrictions, the monarchy reserves this land for their family members.<sup>81</sup> The king transferred national property to private owners “by a repertoire of 16 techniques,” including methods such as creating confusion in the inventory of national lands and withholding information relating to land use.<sup>82</sup>
4. Educational opportunities. Even when Shi`i students are in the top 10 percent of their class, admissions officers refuse admission to universities while accepting less qualified Sunni students. In the late 1990s, Bahrain University hired a new

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> WikiLeaks 07MANAMa950, Al-Haq A Challenges GoB on Land Access, October 18, 2007, <http://www.cablegatesearch.net/cable.php?id=07MANAMA950&q=07manama950>.

<sup>82</sup> Joseph Schechla, “Land Grabs and the Arab Spring: A Chronicle of Corruption as Statecraft,” Housing and Land Rights Network. Accessed 9/14/12. [http://www.hlrn.org/img/documents/Fasad\\_asas\\_al-umran2.pdf](http://www.hlrn.org/img/documents/Fasad_asas_al-umran2.pdf).

president who subsequently fired many of the Shi`i professors under false pretexts.<sup>83</sup>

5. Hiring of foreign workers at cheap wages that take jobs away from the native Shi`a. Insignificant Shi`i representation in government jobs. According to an article published in *The Christian Science Monitor*, Bahrain is practicing “a form of sectarian apartheid by not allowing Shi`ites to hold key government posts or serve in the police or military . . . and security forces are staffed by Sunnis from Syria, Pakistan, and Baluchistan who also get fast-tracked to Bahraini citizenship.”<sup>84</sup>
6. Reinstatement of the parliament. In an offer of compromise, Shi`a suggested a 50-50 Shi`a-Sunni split in representation in parliament along lines, but the regime rejected even this proposal.<sup>85</sup>
7. Corruption within the regime. Citizens are convinced that the regime is concealing the fact that oil revenues still do exist. Many Bahraini’s believe that if efficiently managed, the oil reserves could provide enough money to end the social crisis. Some point to the field of Abu Sa`fa, the offshore wells between the Saudi coast and the island of Bahrain, discovered by Saudi ARAMCO in 1963. In an arrangement between Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, the Bahraini government agreed to divide the revenues but relinquished ownership of the land.<sup>86</sup> Many Shi`a believe the regime should not have given Saudi Arabia sovereignty over the oil fields.<sup>87</sup>

Certainly religious differences between the Shi`a and Sunni have played a part in divisions in Bahrain. However, the al-Khalifa tribe has exacerbated those distinctions to the regime’s advantage, sustaining its power and maintaining its strategic interests. By promoting identity politics and extending privileges and positions to Sunni citizens, the regime manufactures the split between the two groups. By instituting electoral

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<sup>83</sup> *Islamic Insights*, “Oppressed and Neglected: the Shi`a’s of Bahrain,” April 13, 2008, <http://islamicinsights.com/news/international-news/oppressed-and-neglected-the-shias-of-bahrain.html>.

<sup>84</sup> Raymond Barrett. “Bahrain Emerging as Flashpoint in Middle East Unrest,” *Christain Science Monitor*, February 15, 2011, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2011/0215/Bahrain-emerging-as-flashpoint-in-Middle-East-unrest>.

<sup>85</sup> *Islamic Insights*.

<sup>86</sup> Barrett.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*.

gerrymandering, the regime tilts the parliament toward Sunni representation. As the Shi'a advocate for reforms, the regime criticizes these initiatives as sectarian. Frederic Wehrey, writing for the Carnegie Middle East Center, notes, "The regime has skillfully played the Shi'a card, saying that any move toward democracy is a Shi'i bid for power and a power play by Iran. It's working."<sup>88</sup> Despite these efforts by the monarchy to create tensions between these groups, both Sunni and Shi'i protesters claimed unity during the Spring Uprising of 2011 in advocating for reform.

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<sup>88</sup> Frederic Wehrey, "Bahrain's Lost Uprising," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 12, 2012, <http://carnegie-mec.org/publications/?fa=48475>.



## CHAPTER 5 HISTORY OF LABOR

This chapter divides Bahraini labor history into four sections: the Bahraini nationals, migrant workers, military hires and trade unions. The diverse demographic makeup of the labor force creates a limited reliance on the local population to fill jobs, helping the regime to avoid labor unrest, as guest workers are less likely to strike. According to Bahraini government estimates, overseas workers, mainly from Southeast Asia, make up 63 percent of the country's work force out of a population of 1.2 million.<sup>89</sup> The monarchy has instituted rules and regulations to control and monitor the labor segments and implemented policies that generate tensions between these groups.

Nationals occupy most of the jobs in the public sector, and a large foreign workforce makes up the private sector. According to *The World Factbook*, unemployment stands at 15 percent, 20 percent for youths between the ages of 15-25.<sup>90</sup> The Bahraini government, however, claims the unemployment rate for January 2010, at 3.7 percent.<sup>91</sup> The unemployment rate among Bahraini's contributes to tensions between guest workers and the native work force. Left out of the mainstream historical narrative in Bahrain, migrant workers remain on the political margins with no path toward citizenship. Bahraini citizens view migrants as a threat to the job market. The Shi'i

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<sup>89</sup> *International Organization for Migration*, "Bahrain," Last Updated April 20, 2012, <http://www.iom.int/jahia/Jahia/bahrain>.

<sup>90</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, Bahrain, *World Factbook*, Updated September 10, 2012, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ba.html>.

<sup>91</sup> Habib Toumi, "Bahrain's Unemployment Rate Down to 3.7 Percent," *Gulf News*, March 16, 2010, <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/bahrain-s-unemployment-rate-down-to-3-7-per-cent-1.597366>.

community mistrusts immigrants because the regime hires Sunni foreigners to fill positions in the security forces. The employment of naturalized individuals in the country's army and law enforcement agencies provokes sectarian strife and even xenophobic sentiments towards foreigners, especially during protests when the security forces use repressive tactics.

Rob Franklin's analysis of the ethnic makeup presents an understanding of how citizenship formalizes, and then rewards, a permanent relationship with the state. For centuries, major sea routes crossed Bahrain as the state served as a center for trade. Political control changed frequently and involved significant population movements. Franklin writes, "Until recently, it would have been impossible to determine who was "Bahraini" and who was not."<sup>92</sup> The British established borders for Gulf nations, which created obstacles to population movements and made residency as important as ethnic origin.<sup>93</sup> This construct establishes that certain groups secured rights of citizenship by residing in the country, which later became the basis for the kafala, a sponsorship system the monarchy had encouraged.

### **Bahraini Labor History**

Oil production significantly influenced the labor markets, as the industry required thousands of workers to operate the machinery of production. As the first oil wells began drilling, the pearl industry collapsed, providing a workforce for the new oil industry and a new era of labor activism. Workers experienced harsh working conditions in the oil fields and other industries as well, and strikes broke out in the 1940s, and continuing

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<sup>92</sup> Rob Franklin, "Migrant Labor and the Politics of Development in Bahrain," *MERIP Reports*, No. 132, (May, 1985): 7, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3011055>.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

sporadically into the 1980s. According to Louër, a series of conflicts between Sunni and Shi`a, including rioting of workers, motivated labor leaders to establish the National Union Committee, in order to quell sectarian strife as well as to confront the monarchy regarding labor rights. Membership significantly increased in the General Trade Union and the National Union Committee, which advocated for a constitution, elected assembly, penal code, constitutional courts and legalization of labor unions. Uniting behind the Committee, both Sunni and Shi`a joined to resist foreign workers in the labor market. The formation of a citizen labor movement promoted the idea that Bahraini people were “entitled to social and political rights that could be denied to foreigners.”<sup>94</sup> According to Khalaf, this caste system exacerbated differences between Sunni and Bahraini citizens as the two groups experienced unequal access to resources and political influence. Members of the Sunni sect monopolized the armed forces and security services. Without recruitment procedures, the al-Khalifa family controlled hiring through personal connections.<sup>95</sup> Strikes in 1965 and 1972 brought harsh reactions from the government, but in 1974, thirty-six strikes resulted in improved wages and working conditions. By 1985, a number of the regime’s decrees restricted labor actions by claiming that labor unrest had been endangering security or disturbing public order; these decrees pacified industrial workers.<sup>96</sup> Changes in the workforce also lead to pacification of foreign workers, who were less likely to strike because of fear of deportation. In 1971, non-

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<sup>94</sup> Louër, 38.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Abdulhadi Khalaf, “Contentious Politics in Bahrain: From Ethnic or National and Vice Versa,” Fourth Nordic Conference of Middle Eastern Studies, Oslo, August 13-16, 1998, <http://www.smi.uib.no/pao/khalaf.html>.

Bahraini's made up 17.5 percent of the population; by 1981, the percentage of foreigners increased to 32 percent, with the Indian subcontinent supplying most of these workers. In 1981, the number of Bahraini's in the work force fell from 63 percent in 1971 to 42 percent 1981.<sup>97</sup>

Over the years, the labor market continued to change and remained a serious concern for Bahraini's.<sup>98</sup> According to Louër, Bahraini's could not compete with foreigners in the job market, as migrants have much lower salary expectations and would work longer hours. Bahraini's expected wages that allowed them to live up to high social expectations and obligations. Bahraini workers frequently changed jobs in search of higher wages and better working conditions, while restrictive employment contracts prevented migrants from leaving jobs. In industries with high numbers of foreign workers, Bahraini's found it difficult to organize strikes, as employers would quickly replace strikers with guest workers<sup>99</sup> Bahraini's compete with foreigners at all levels of employment from waiters to bankers. Merchants, nicknamed "sleeping investors," hired foreign workers to run their shops, increasing profits, as these workers received minimal wages. Despite laws against these practices, merchants found ways around these regulations.<sup>100</sup> Over the last three decades, the regime has attempted to implement policies favoring employment of Bahraini's, but most of these initiatives have not been effective. Private firms used the wages paid to guest workers as the basis for determining wages for natives, which fell short of living standards for Bahraini's. In addition, the

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<sup>97</sup> Khalaf, 26.

<sup>98</sup> Louër, 42.

<sup>99</sup> Louër, 44.

<sup>100</sup> Louër, 48.

government did not enforce Ministerial Order 7 of 1996 mandating that companies employing ten or more workers and having less than 50% Bahraini citizens must increase native hiring by 5%.<sup>101</sup> In July 2012, the regime announced Bahrain planned to eliminate the existing Bahrainisation policy.

### **Migrant Labor History**

In this thesis the expression: guest workers, foreign worker, migrant workers, non-Bahraini nationals are terms that apply to a broad spectrum of temporary workers under the United Nations definition, “As any person who changes his or her usually country of residence.”<sup>102</sup> Bahrain’s officials avoid the terms migrant and immigrant and instead use terms such as guest workers or non-Bahraini nationals. The government offers no provisions for permanent settlements or paths toward citizenship for foreign workers, with the exception of Sunnis hired for the security forces. Without legal acknowledgement of the term *migrant*, it then becomes difficult to research migration information.<sup>103</sup>

Guest workers provide temporary, cheap labor and typically travel from a poorer country to a relatively wealthier country. The Gulf States have proportionately more guest workers than any other region in the world. Louër writes that in the 1960s and 1970s Arabs made up most of the migrant work force and brought with them ideas of pan-Arabism, Marxism and Islamism, fostering hostility toward monarchial regimes. As

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<sup>101</sup> Andrzej Kapiszewski, “Population, Labour and Education Dilemmas Facing GCC States at the Turn of the Century” (paper presented at the Higher Colleges of Technology Conference, April 9, 2000), <http://crm.hct.ac.ae/events/archive/tend/AndKP.html>.

<sup>102</sup> Department of Economic and Social Affairs Statistics Division, *United Nations, Recommendations on Statistics of Migration*, Revision 1, Annual Report, New York, 1998, 17, [http://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/SeriesM/SeriesM\\_58rev1e.pdf](http://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/SeriesM/SeriesM_58rev1e.pdf).

<sup>103</sup> Dito, 4.

a result, Bahrain, like the other Gulf monarchies, began to hire Asian laborers. The cultural, ethnic and language barriers made alliances difficult between native and guest workers.<sup>104</sup>

Employers hire migrants under a strict arrangement of sponsorship called kafala, a system monitoring foreign workers by giving their employer the power to confiscate their passports, restricting the ability to change jobs. Threatening migrants with deportation is another method of controlling workers, thus reducing labor conflicts. *Migrant Rights* website reports that the Bahraini government claimed abolishment of the kafala system in 2009, receiving worldwide praise; but the changes only amounted to technicalities. Two years later King Hamad restored the sponsorship system by preventing migrants from leaving employment until they fulfilled a one-year term.<sup>105</sup> Agencies become sponsors rather than employers; this arrangement still limits guest worker mobility between jobs because legal status remains contingent on contracts with employers.<sup>106</sup> For the most part, the royal family negotiates with the migrant-sending nations creating informal agreements, which serve to smooth over diplomatic relations when issues of fair labor practices arise. Rarely are these agreements enforced.<sup>107</sup> The monarchy, aware of the effect of negative publicity on tourism and human rights watchdog organizations,

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<sup>104</sup> Louër, 33.

<sup>105</sup> Bahrain News Agency, "HM King Hamad Issues Law 15/2011," June 16, 2011, <http://bna.bh/portal/en/news/461096>.

<sup>106</sup> "Do Promises to End the Sponsorship System Hold any Merit?" *Migrant Rights*, May 10, 2012, <http://www.migrant-rights.org/2012/05/10/do-promises-to-end-the-sponsorship-system-hold-any-merit/>.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

becomes concerned with its image rather than with the substance of real reform for improving migrant working conditions.<sup>108</sup>

Louër elaborates on common abuses under the sponsorship system, which benefits the regime's economic policies. Bahraini businessmen who have permits to hire guest workers in a particular industry can sell a "free visa." In some cases, a sale may not result in a migrant getting an actual job. Guest workers work at various illegal jobs while renting the visa from their sponsor. Although the regime has passed regulations regarding such practices, the government's campaigns against these abuses have been ineffective. Many Bahraini's believe that the regime's lack of enforcement is because the monarchy "has a stake in perpetuating it, as they suspect members of the al-Khalifa family to be among the main suppliers of the free visas."<sup>109</sup> Upholding the appearance of unfair practice prosecution, the regime attempts to affirm its democratic legitimacy when ineffective campaigns for migrant reform reveal true motivations.

Migrants are subject to exploitation through illegal working hours, unpaid overtime and arbitrary dismissals, especially in the fields of construction workers and domestic help.<sup>110</sup> According to a cable from the American embassy in Bahrain, "The Ministry of Labor is actively promoting construction sector safety and is reviewing the labor code to modernize safety standards, but struggles with insufficient and

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Louër, 49.

<sup>110</sup> Mohammed Dito, "Migration Policies and Challenges in the Kingdom of Bahrain" (Paper Prepared for Migrations and Refugee Movements in the Middle East and North Africa, The American University in Cairo, Egypt, 2007), 7, [http://www.aucegypt.edu/GAPP/cmrs/reports/Documents/Mohammed\\_Dito.pdf](http://www.aucegypt.edu/GAPP/cmrs/reports/Documents/Mohammed_Dito.pdf).

underqualified safety inspectors.”<sup>111</sup> Three years later, not much progress ensued. An American businessman observed migrants in 2011 working on construction projects adjacent to his hotel. The safety method employed when working on scaffolding was to have a fellow worker hold on to their shirt. He also observed that none of the workers had proper work shoes.<sup>112</sup> In the cable, the words “actively promoting safety” reveal where the regime’s intentions lie rather than enforcing worker safety regulations.

The regime has harassed the Migrant Worker’s Protection Society, shutting the organization down in 2010 claiming they had not registered properly when, in fact, the society had the proper registration, producing a copy to the ministry.<sup>113</sup> The regime implements bureaucratic regulations as a method of legitimacy in exercising control over migrant workers. When anti-government protests begin to escalate, the regime uses the expatriate workforce for political purposes in order to increase the size of the pro-monarchy demonstrations.<sup>114</sup> Generally, the majority of migrant workers remain on the sidelines of the conflicts as opposition rally participation could result in job loss or deportation.<sup>115</sup>

Andrew Gardner describes the regime’s vision of Bahrain’s future as a nation playing a significant role in global economics and focusing on modernization projects.

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<sup>111</sup> WikiLeaks, 08MANAMA537, “Labor Standards Improving, but Qualified Government Inspectors Lacking,” August 11, 2008, <http://wikileaks.frontlawn.net/cable/2008/08/08MANAMA537.html>.

<sup>112</sup> Interview with American Businessman, by John Kalwaic, Wallingford, PA, June 27, 2012.

<sup>113</sup> *Human Rights Watch*, “UPR Submission Bahrain,” November 2011, [http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/session13/BH/HRW\\_UPR\\_BHR\\_S13\\_2012\\_HumanRightsWatch\\_E.pdf](http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/session13/BH/HRW_UPR_BHR_S13_2012_HumanRightsWatch_E.pdf).

<sup>114</sup> *BBC News*, “Bangladeshis Complain of Bahrain Rally ‘Coercion’,” March 17, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12773696>.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*



Bahraini news sources advertise the regime's efforts in these capacities and reinforce "the idea of the royal family's benevolent stewardship of a nation during a period of dramatic change."<sup>116</sup> Gardner cautions, however, that these initiatives disguise Bahrain's reliance on guest workers and on the inequalities that hiring migrants brings.<sup>117</sup> Gardner analyzes the conceptualization the regime presents as stock imagery that highlights Bahrain with a cosmopolitan future that satisfies the elites. With the regime's primary focus on selling Bahrain as a lucrative investment opportunity and a modern society, these conceptualizations of modern landscapes omit the presence of both Bahraini's and migrant workers, on which the economy is dependent.<sup>118</sup>

### **Foreigners in Army and Security Forces**

The practice of employing foreigners began in the nineteenth century, when the British brought in soldiers from the Iranian province of Baluchistan and the Indian subcontinent to help establish control over the Trucial Coast. Employing foreigners reduces the possibility of the military siding with the local population during protests. When paid substantially, mercenaries remain loyal to their employers rather than to ethnic or religious groups.<sup>119</sup> Rather than a national army, the Bahraini military performs as a fighting force of Sunni Muslims charged with protecting a Sunni ruling family, its business and political interests. Many employed in the security forces are ex-soldiers from Sunni states, such as Jordan, Yemen and Pakistan. Political naturalization of these

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<sup>116</sup> Andrew M. Gardner, *City of Strangers: Gulf Migration and the Indian Community in Bahrain* (Ithaca: NY, Cornell University Press, 2010), 123.

<sup>117</sup> Gardner, 124.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Omar Al-Shehabi, "Demography and Bahrain's Unrest," Arab Reform Bulletin, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 16, 2011, <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/2011/03/16/demography-and-bahrain-s-unrest/z5>.

soldiers has caused friction and complaints from locals across the religious spectrum in Bahrain. The presence of naturalized Sunnis in the security forces has increased Shi'i resentment against policies that alter the sectarian demographic, diminishing the percentage of Shi'i citizens. Sunnis complain that politically naturalized foreigners occupy positions in the security forces normally earmarked for native Sunnis. Foreigners complete for housing as they frequently live in areas historically reserved for predominantly native Sunni.<sup>120</sup>

The Bahrain crown hires professional mercenaries, including former Philadelphia chief of police, John Timoney. Critics have accused Timoney, who works fulltime as a consultant for Bahrain's Ministry of the Interior, for past offenses that include "police abuse, illegal infiltration tactics, fear-mongering and a blatant disregard for freedom of expression."<sup>121</sup> The Bahraini government praised the hiring of Timoney, as well as John Yates, a London policeman who was fired because of his connection to the Rupert Murdoch scandal, "as a victory for human rights under a plan to eliminate torture and other police lapses."<sup>122</sup> According to Bahraini activist, Ala'a Shehabi, "the presence of Timoney and Yates is only to legitimize an ongoing brutal police crackdown."<sup>123</sup> The regime focuses on continual efforts to police demonstrations rather than to discuss steps

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ryan Devereaux, "John Timoney: the Notorious Police Chief sent to Reform Forces in Bahrain," February 16, 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/feb/16/john-timoney-police-chief-bahrain-protests>.

<sup>122</sup> "John of Arabia: How Philly's Ex-top Cop Puts down the Arab Spring," *Philly.com*, May 20, 2012, <http://www.philly.com/philly/blogs/attytood/John-of-Arabia-How-Phillys-ex-top-cop-puts-down-the-Arab-Spring.html>.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

toward democratic reform. The regime continually drives a wedge between two groups: those who protest and those who wait for the regime to move toward reform.

The armed forces have almost no autonomy, with little power over policies, budgets or even training. Fred H. Lawson notes that family members occupy most of the posts in the military's higher ranks, supported by contract officers from other countries. The regime, constantly aware of the threat that an autonomous military could represent, monitors the operations and officers closely.<sup>124</sup> The regime shores up its security by deliberately planning the domination of Sunni Muslims in the armed forces. Under the previous rule, Sheikh `Isa ibn Salman al-Khalifa employed Ian Henderson, whose heavy-handed tactics resulted in his eventual forced retirement. By design, little security reform has taken place under King Hamad's watch.<sup>125</sup>

### **Trade Unions**

The General Federation of Bahrain Trade Union (GFBTU) has been one of the most active in the Gulf Cooperation Council, representing a movement that has bridged national differences and included migrant workers into its ranks. The organization advocates democratic elections as well as worker rights. Membership of the migrant community remains a small fraction of the total membership, which numbers about 22,000, representing 66 unions and about 25 percent of the workforce.

After years of struggle to organize worker committees, the government passed new legislation in 2002, known as the Trade Union Law, recognizing freedom of

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<sup>124</sup> Fred H. Lawson, *Intraregime Dynamics, Uncertainty, and the Persistence of Authoritarianism in the Contemporary Arab World*, in *Debating Arab Authoritarianism: Dynamics and Durability in Nondemocratic Regimes*, ed. Oliver Schlumberger (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 119.

<sup>125</sup> Kenneth Katzman, "Security Sector Reform in Bahrain," *Open Security*, August 17, 2012, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/opensecurity/kenneth-katzman/security-sector-reform-in-bahrain>.

association. Bahrain took a historic step in 2003 with the adoption of legislation recognizing the right to freedom of association. However, the regime amended some of the articles in the legislation without consulting the GFBTU, including denying the right of public sector workers to join unions.<sup>126</sup> Another amendment prohibited strikes in twelve sectors under the pretext that these areas fit the definition of vital agencies. The International Labor Organization (ILO) limits the word *vital* to include only those sectors that would endanger human life.<sup>127</sup> In addition, the regime banned workers from organizing new unions. The GFBTU filed complaints with the ILO and the International Confederation for Trade Unions. For the regime to allow unions to organize demonstrates steps toward liberalization; however, limitations on unionization by the regime undermine the basic tenets of union organization. In an interview in 2010, Salman Ja`far al-Mahfudh, general secretary of the GFBTU, qualifies the limits of negotiations with government officials. Al-Mahfudh states that the union has met with the king on a number of occasions but admits that these meetings do not substitute “for the establishment of institutions that enable real negotiations between the two parties to take place with regards to planning of the economic policies of the country, including wage, prices, privatization and restructuring among others.”<sup>128</sup> Solidarity Center, an organization that supports the GFBTU, reported that the authorities in Bahrain have

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<sup>126</sup> Interview Secretary General of the GFBTU Salman Ja`far al-Mahfudh, “Workers’ Rights is a Red Line that cannot be Crossed,” *Bahrain Monitor*, February 2010, <http://www.bahrainmonitor.org/interviews/t-013-02.html>.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

“launched an all-out attack on the Bahraini trade union movement.”<sup>129</sup> Salman Ja`far al-Mahfudh said that their organization does not believe “there is a separation between the political movement and the labor movement.”<sup>130</sup> Their slogan is “democratic, free, independent and united.” Al-Mahfudh confirmed that the union did not advocate overthrowing the regime but promoted the cause for a new constitution based on a social agreement between the government and people.

The labor policies of the regime favor economic development and profit at the expense of workers. By increasing competition for jobs, the monarchy fuels political and social tensions. Policies deliberately limit opportunities for citizenship for migrant workers, therefore, also prevent political participation and social integration of immigrants. Employing mercenaries in the security forces to uphold the regime’s mandates continues to aggravate pressures between the Shi`a and Sunni.

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<sup>129</sup> Solidarity Center, Bahrain, Accessed 8/12/12.  
<http://www.solidaritycenter.org/content.asp?pl=863&sl=407&contentid=866>.

<sup>130</sup> Interview: Spotlight Interview with Salman Ja`far al-Mahfudh, March 2012, [http://www.ituc-csi.org/sponlight-interview-with-salman\\_10736.html](http://www.ituc-csi.org/sponlight-interview-with-salman_10736.html).

## CHAPTER 6 REGIME'S INTERACTIONS WITH FOREIGN POWERS

This chapter summarizes how the regime skillfully manages relationships between the US, Saudi Arabia and Iran. Derek Flood addresses this relationship writing, “Caught up in a labyrinthine of regional ethno-religious demographics, layered with energy sector rivalries, King Hamad will continue to keep up this complex geo-political dance, playing the larger powers off one another . . . .”<sup>131</sup> After an introduction to Bahrain’s relationship to the Gulf Cooperation Council, the following subchapters describe in more detail the interplay between the regime and these major powers.

### **Gulf Cooperation Council**

The Gulf Cooperation Council, a political and economic union of adjacent states, represents a unique arrangement in which these monarchies strengthen ties with each other. Bahrain became part of the GCC in 1981 with six other Arab states including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and United Arab Emirates. Members of the GCC share economic agreements and have formed a unified military, Peninsula Shield Force, to respond to aggression against GCC partners. According to political scientist Adam Hanieh, the ruling elites formed the GCC to back each other militarily should internal unrest become difficult to control. The regimes establish these regional networks to interlink its security apparatus, for they believe that if one monarchy would fail, political unrest would follow in the other nations.<sup>132</sup> Hanieh states, “The real importance is mainly

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<sup>131</sup> Derek Henry Flood, “The Island of the Center of the World: The Silencing of Bahrain’s Crisis,” In *The Arab Spring*, ed. Paul MacCaffrey (Ipswich, MA: H. W. Wilson, 2012), 197.

<sup>132</sup> Adam Hanieh, *Capitalism and Class in the Gulf Arab States* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 3.

psychological, as it reinforces the elites' sense of security and power over civil society."<sup>133</sup> In Hanieh's analysis, he further notes that the oil monarchies hold the reigns of power firmly in order to maintain power and privilege. To that extent, these ruling families consider themselves as 'owners' of their nations; ruling elites view any change in the power structure as a loss of their rights as tribal leaders. The inscription in the Bahraini passport, for example, states that the al-Khalifa regime is the owner of Bahrain.<sup>134</sup> Understanding this ownership mentality helps to clarify the monarchy's statecraft policies. The regime formulates policies to preserve dynastic rule by relying on nepotism and carefully crafting decrees for its political advantage.

### **Saudi Arabia**

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, a Sunni monarchy with the head of the House of Saud serving as the absolute monarch, formed a number of partnership arrangements with Bahrain, in addition to the GCC alliance. Having the world's largest repository of petroleum, Saudi Arabia accrues large profits from the sale of oil, bolstering the Saudi's power and influence in the Gulf. The expense of drilling is relatively minimal as the reserves are near the surface. With approximately one-fifth of the world's oil reserves and two-thirds of the GCC's total population, Saudi Arabia contributes nearly half of the region's gross domestic product.<sup>135</sup> As the oil reserves dried up and expenditures increased in the 1980s, Bahrain began to receive significant financial support numbering in the billions of dollars from Saudi Arabia. Some of that financial support went toward

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Anoushiraven Ehteshami and Steven Wright, "Political Change in the Arab Oil Monarchies: from Liberation to Enfranchisement," *International Affairs* 83, no. 5 (2007), 915, [http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/International%20Affairs/2007/83\\_5913-932.pdf](http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/International%20Affairs/2007/83_5913-932.pdf).

the construction of the King Fahd Causeway, linking the two nations by a 25-mile causeway. The monarchies further strengthen its bonds through royal marriages, most recently the wedding of King Hamad's son to the daughter of King Abdullah.

Preventing Iranian hegemony in the region remains one of the Saudi rulers' primary concerns. Nathan Gonzales writes, "Bahrain is too close to home not to anchor it strongly in the Saudi kingdom's corner."<sup>136</sup> As an example of how Saudi Arabia's propaganda immediately demonizes Iran when unrest develops, in early 2011 and again in July 2012, protesters in the predominately Shi'a Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia demanded an end of the system of discrimination that Saudi Shi'a face. The Saudi government responded by painting the entire protest movement as an Iranian plot to destroy the country.<sup>137</sup> The Saudis fear that if the Shi'a in Bahrain achieved majority representation through elections, this outcome might empower the millions of Shi'a in the Eastern Province.

Saudi Arabia, protective of its relationship with Bahrain, has exerted some pressure on the al-Khalifa regime to restrict its alliances with other nations. In one instance, Saudi Arabia foiled a plan to build a gas pipeline between Qatar and Kuwait via Bahrain, as they were fearful of losing the advantage in Bahrain.<sup>138</sup> According to diplomatic cables from the US embassy in Manama, "Bahrain's King Hamad complained

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<sup>136</sup> Nathan Gonzalez, *The Sunni-Shia Conflict: Understanding Sectarian Violence in the Middle East*, (Mission Viejo: Nortia Press, 2009), 23.

<sup>137</sup> "Two Die during Saudi Arabia Protest at Shi'a Cleric Arrest," *BBC News*, July 9, 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-18768703>.

<sup>138</sup> Daniel Fineren, "Politics Stymie Gulf's Hope of Sharing Qatari Gas," *Reuters*, April 25, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/03/07/gulf-gas-idAFL5E8E40CB20120307?edition=af>.



to the US ambassador that Saudi Arabia was blocking the proposed pipeline.”<sup>139</sup> The king appealed to Washington to pressure the Saudis to let Kuwait and Bahrain link to the North Field. In this instance, King Hamad used negotiations with the US as leverage with Saudi Arabia. Although Bahrain considers Saudi Arabia a strong ally, the king knows that the Saudi’s may not best represent his best interests. The project never moved forward, however. Saudi Arabia decided to extract gas from its own lands rather than depending on Qatar, and blocked the GCC pipeline because the Saudi’s believed the pipeline would have given the Qatar regime too much power over GCC countries. "They don't want Qatar to increase its regional economic and political influence, possibly to the detriment of their own," said Jonathan Stern, director of gas research at the Oxford Institute of Energy Studies.<sup>140</sup> Bahraini officials must deal with Saudi’s objective of maintaining hegemony in the region. As part of that power buildup, the Saudi’s purchased more than \$50 billion in arms packages during the three decades; in 2010, the Saudi’s requested between \$30-\$60 billion in military equipment including upgrades to its missile defense system to counter a perceived threat from Iran.<sup>141</sup> On another occasion, when the US signed a free trade agreement with Bahrain in 2004, the Saudi government objected to these closer commercial ties claiming that the trade agreement violated the terms of the GCC rules. One trade analyst surmised that competition between the US and Saudi Arabia underlies this conflict. Despite the Saudi’s reservations, the al-Khalifa

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<sup>139</sup> Reuters, “Politics Stymie Gulf’s Hope of Sharing Qatari Gas,” March 8, 2012, <http://alwatanadaily.kuwait.tt/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=141715>.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> “Gulf States Requesting ABM-Capable Systems,” *Defense Industry Daily*, July 29, 2012, <http://www.defenseindustrydaily.com/gulf-states-requesting-abm-capable-systems-04390/>.

family, exerting some independence from its powerful neighbor, went ahead and affirmed the free trade agreement.<sup>142</sup>

The complex relationship between Saudi Arabia and Bahrain cannot be summarized as simply a more powerful nation controlling a weaker neighbor. The al-Khalifa monarchy maintains a personal relationship with the House of Saud; however, that relationship does not guarantee that King Hamad will go along with every demand of the Saudi family and will seek support from other nations to maintain a balance of power in Bahrain's favor.

## **Iran**

Iran supports the Shi'a in Bahrain, which has increased tensions between the two nations. In 1957, the Iranian Parliament claimed that Bahrain was the 14<sup>th</sup> province of Iran, once part of the Persian Empire. After the British withdrew from Bahrain in 1971, the Shah tried to renew Iran's claims to Bahrain but came under pressure from the US and Britain to forgo those claims. In one example of a more aggressive tactic, in 1981 an Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain (IFLB), based in Iran, attempted a coup. In 2007, Iran and Bahrain signed a preliminary agreement for the purchase of Iranian gas for 25 years. However, Bahrain called off the deal when Iranian officials again reiterated Iran's claim that the island was its province. In 2009, the issue of Iran's claim to Bahrain returned when Ali Akbar Nateq Noori, an adviser to Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khameni, repeated the claim, setting off an exchange of angry words and temporarily derailing pipeline negotiations between the two nations. During the diplomatic row, the Bahraini government blocked Iranian ships' access to its territorial waters. In private,

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<sup>142</sup> Michelle Wallin, "US-Bahrain Accords Stirs Persian Gulf Trade Partners," *New York Times-Online*, December 24, 2004, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/12/24/business/worldbusiness/24gulf.html>.

however, Bahrain's regime did not feel this was a real threat, according to a WikiLeaks's documents.<sup>143</sup> Through diplomacy, Bahrain and Iran reconciled. During the 2009 uprising in Iran, Bahrain, taking the side of the Iranian government, issued a warning to other countries against meddling in Iran's affairs. Bahrain's foreign minister, Sheikh Khaled ibn Ahmad al-Khalifa, publicly sided with Iran's assertions that the United States, Britain and other countries "of fomenting unrest on the streets of Tehran following disputed elections."<sup>144</sup>

Bahrain has been careful in criticizing Iran in order to preserve trade relations and to allow for cooperation in the development of shared gas and oil interests. Trade between Iran and Bahrain is estimated at \$5 billion annually.<sup>145</sup> Bahrain's policy has been to avoid conflicts with Iran, knowing that the US will provide the necessary security, if needed.<sup>146</sup> Bahrain's Iranian-friendly policies are frequently overlooked when the regime uses the fear of Iranian intervention through influencing Bahraini Shi'a as a reason to oppress demonstrations.

### **United States**

The US considers the Kingdom of Bahrain strategically important, despite its small size and population. The headquarters of the US Navy's Fifth Fleet, including port and air facilities, consists of a 60-acre facility located near Manama. As of January 2012, the US has stationed 5,000 troops at the base. The US provides financial aid and sells

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<sup>143</sup> WikiLeaks, 09MANANA91, "Bahrain as Iran's Fourteenth Province," February 17, 2009, <http://wikileaks.frontlawn.net/cable/2009/02/09MANAMA91.html>.

<sup>144</sup> "Bahrain Appears to Back Iran on Foreign Meddling," Reuters, June 23, 2009, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2009/06/23/us-bahrain-iran-arabs-idUSTRE55M1IJ20090623>.

<sup>145</sup> Will Fulton and Ariel Farra-Wellman, "Bahrain-Iran Foreign Relations," *Iran Tracker*, July 14, 2011, <http://www.irantracker.org/foreign-relations/bahrain-iran-foreign-relations>.

<sup>146</sup> Aisis, 36.

arms to Bahrain. Amy Hawthorn, an associate in the Democracy and Rule of Law Project, writes that the US considers Bahrain strategic on many fronts, including having a place from which to protect access to Gulf oil and guard against radical uprisings. In addition, the US has concerns regarding Islamist election victories. The US strategy in Bahrain centers on regime stability rather than on democratic reform.<sup>147</sup> For the al-Khalifa family, maintaining a friendly relationship with the US provides security against external threats, especially from Iran. However, the regime will seek support elsewhere if the US criticizes the Bahraini government. According to Jane Kinninmont, the regime may have been sending a message to the US that Bahrain has other supporters they can depend on by inviting the GCC forces to intervene in the Spring 2011 Uprising; the monarchy can ignore US reprimands about the regime's violent responses to the protests.<sup>148</sup>

Not only does the US military have a strategic interest in Bahrain, but US corporations also do a hefty business with the sheikdom. The Boeing Case in 2008 is an example of the regime trafficking influences. The US Ambassador lobbied the king and crown prince to make a \$6 billion deal with Boeing thereby rejecting a proposal by Gulf Air, a company owned by the governments of Oman and Bahrain, to purchase Airbus. The deal coincided with a visit from the US president. Boeing thanked the Ambassador for being a strong advocate for Boeing.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Amy Hawthorne, "Can the United States Promote Democracy in the Middle East?," *Current History*, January 2003, 22, <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/pdf/files/2002-HawthorneCurrentHist.pdf>.

<sup>148</sup> Jane Kinninmont, "Bahrain: Beyond the Impasse," Chatham House, June 2012, 25, <http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Middle%20East/pr0612kinninmont.pdf>.

<sup>149</sup> WikiLeaks, 08MANAMA47, "Embassy Advocacy Helps Win \$6 Billion Boeing Deal," January 27, 2008, [http://wikileaks.frontlawn.net/origin/70\\_3.html](http://wikileaks.frontlawn.net/origin/70_3.html).

Before the uprisings in 2011, the US viewed King Hamad in a positive light. Dennis Blair, US ambassador, reported that the king was personable, ruling as a “corporate king” while handing over direction to his inner circle. Graduating from American University in 1985, the king appeared to Washington officials as Western in his approach. Washington viewed the king’s shifting power to his son and away from the conservative prime minister as another positive step toward modernization. In another message sent from the embassy in Manama regarding the king’s approval of the use of ‘Isa Air Base, the comment section reads, “Once again, King Hamad has come through for us with his customary good will and graciousness.”<sup>150</sup> The cable goes on to state, however, that the US should not take his support for granted and should follow a policy of including Bahrain’s government in any decisions or deployments.<sup>151</sup> These cables reveal how the king relates to US diplomats in such a way as to encourage positive responses to his leadership. The cables suggests the US cannot, however, make decisions about Bahrain without consulting the king.

The al-Khalifa regime has maintained close consultation with members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, especially with Saudi Arabia, friendly relationships with the US and an adversarial stance with Iran; these complex relationships requires the monarchy to strategize with statecraft techniques of diplomacy unique to each nation but with the ultimate goal to preserve monarchial rule. The Gulf Cooperation Council members support each other for the primary objective of maintaining regime stability. Saudi Arabia remains a staunch supporter of the al-Khalifa family through the crisis of

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<sup>150</sup> WikiLeaks, 10MANAMA57, “Bahrain’s King Hamad Approves USG Requests for Use of Isa Air Base,” February 1, 2010, <http://wikileaks.frontlawn.net/cable/2010/02/10MANAMA57.html>.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

the 2011 uprisings. The al-Khalifa regime supports Saudi Arabia's proposal for a stronger GCC union given that Washington backed the ouster of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. Bahrain leaders must consider whether the US will remain on the side of monarchical rule in Bahrain. The regime's relationship with the US centers on security for both those nations. For Bahrain, the US naval base provides funding for the use of the land and protection against aggression from Iran or other local powers. From the US perspective, Bahrain offers a place from which to secure the flow of oil and contain Iranian ambitions. Although the regime maintains cordial relationships with Washington, the regime leaders do not always follow diplomatic advice on moving reforms forward. The monarchy displays its efforts toward reform through forums such as the BICI report that they reference to bolster its legitimacy. Although Bahrain trades with Iran, the regime reacts negatively to any threats that Iran may influence domestic politics. The Bahraini government believes Shi'i initiatives toward reforms would bring the Shi'a greater representation and, therefore, closer to Iran's sphere of influence. The BICI report absolves Iran of any direct involvement in the Spring Uprising of 2011, but the regime continues to denounce Iran for causing the unrest and exaggerates the threat posed by Iran. The regime heightens anger and fear toward Iran to delegitimize the demands of the people for greater democracy while providing justification for US policies that also condemn Iran.

## **CHAPTER 7 SPRING UPRISING OF 2011**

This chapter describes the conditions and events that led to the Spring Uprising of 2011 and the subsequent machinations and pressures that the monarchy adopted to quell the uprisings. The monarchy attempted to dissuade protestors by offering financial benefits and jobs. The regime employed public relations organizations to spin the crises in its favor and hired mercenaries to put down protesters. The regime declared the protests as sectarian any time the Shi`a referenced Sunni advantages including the government hiring Sunni mercenaries. The al-Khalifa regime consistently referred to the specter of Iranian influences rousing unrest to manipulate world opinion as a justification for the crackdown on the demonstrations and for the presence of GCC troops. The ruling elites employed Internet sources such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter and contracted writers to develop press releases for these sites. In the aftermath of the uprisings, the king approves an investigation of the uprisings primarily to convince the US to reconsider an arms deal.

### **Events before the Uprising**

Even before the spring uprising, protests had been ongoing in Bahrain for more than two decades centering on a range of issues including labor rights, political concerns, such as the king's wavering assurances toward political reforms, violations of human rights and limitations on freedom of the press. Unemployment and poor housing sparked unrest among the Shi`a. Rebecca Santana reports that in the years leading up to the 2011 uprisings, the Shi`a complained that both social and political conditions were worsening.

In 2008, the Shi`a occupied 13 percent of the managerial positions in the government, a decrease of approximately 14 percent since 1999. Al-Wifaq, the largest political party that represents the Shi`a, won only 17 of the 40 seats in the elected parliament, which they attributed to deliberate gerrymandering favoring Sunni's.<sup>152</sup> Dilapidated apartment buildings characterize many of the Shi`a neighborhoods. Santara writes, "Posters of opposition leaders and graffiti bashing Bahrain's royal family plaster the walls."<sup>153</sup>

As tension rose on the eve of the uprisings, King Hamad announced that every Bahraini family would receive \$2,650.<sup>154</sup> The demonstrations continued despite the offer, and protest leaders proclaimed they would refuse bribes for money or jobs. "This is about dignity and freedom—it's not about filling our stomachs," said Ebrahim Sharif, one of the leaders of the protests.<sup>155</sup> The Interior Ministry, countered Sharif's statement, saying that the intensions were "not aimed at ending protests in Bahrain, but they do form part of an overall program to make necessary improvements for the benefit of all."<sup>156</sup> The regime tried to further mollify protesters announcing that the government would hire 20,000 people. The monarchy's statecraft technique to manipulate the populace undermines democratic reform by attempting to pay off citizens for their acquiescence.

In another attempt to appease demonstrators, King Hamad declared a reshuffle in his cabinet in which he replaced four less important ministers, two of them from the

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<sup>152</sup> Rebecca Santana, "Bahrain's Shites Push for Rights," *Bahrain Center for Human Rights*, May 2012, <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/2900>.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Gelvin, 127.

<sup>155</sup> Thomas Fuller, "Bahrain's Promised Spending Fails to Quell Dissent," *New York Times Online*, March 6, 2011, [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/07/world/middleeast/07bahrain.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/07/world/middleeast/07bahrain.html?_r=0).

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.



ruling family. Freedom House, an independent watchdog organization, labeled these changes as “cosmetic . . . aimed at pleasing domestic and international audiences, have done nothing to diminish the ruling family’s dominance of the government.”<sup>157</sup> The reorganization of the cabinet irritated both the Shi`a and Sunni communities. At a press conference, the head of the Sunni National Unity Gathering declared that the reshuffle was “a hidden deal between a segment of society and the government.”<sup>158</sup> He also stated that the regime implemented the change without including all the political parties in the decision. A spokesperson for al-Wifaq stated that the government should replace all positions and include “young blood.”<sup>159</sup>

### **Uprisings Begin**

The protesters selected February 14, the anniversary of King Hamad’s declaration of the National Action Charter and Constitution of 2002, to begin the demonstrations. According to Lynch, years of grass roots organizing for greater democracy produced this ground swell for reform. Bahraini’s organized many activist groups that knew how to use Internet networks, Bahrain having one of the most active in the Middle East.<sup>160</sup> In locations all over the country thousands of peaceful protesters marched in Bahrain’s streets while security forces responded with tear gas, rubber bullets and birdshot in attempts to disperse the rallies, killing several people. The next day, demonstrators

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<sup>157</sup> Freedom House, “Countries at the Crossroads: Bahrain,” 2012 Report, November 30, 2011, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/countries-crossroads/2012/bahrain>.

<sup>158</sup> *Khaleej Times*, “King Hamad Drops Four Ministers,” February 27, 2011, [http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticle08.asp?xfile=data/middleeast/2011/February/middleeast\\_February781.xml&section=middleeast](http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticle08.asp?xfile=data/middleeast/2011/February/middleeast_February781.xml&section=middleeast).

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> Lynch, 135.

gathered at the Pearl Roundabout, crowds growing to ten thousand by that evening. King Hamad did not interfere, allowing demonstrators to express sympathy for those killed.

A former Bahrain Defense Force officer and conservative Sunni, Mohammad Albuflasa, spoke to the protesters asking for unity between Shi`a and Sunnis. After the speech, he disappeared and a month went by before the government finally admitted he was in custody. Albuflasa's brother spoke to the *Times* concerning his brother's arrest:

Mohamed's speech was meant to reduce the fire going on where people create differences between Shiites and Sunnis. He was there to show there is no difference between them. We are all Bahraini. He is not against the royal family and government.<sup>161</sup>

Human rights activist Nabeel Rajab, commented on his disappearance saying, "Islamist Sunni's historically have supported the government . . . that's why they won't allow this to happen. They will punish him."<sup>162</sup> The government prosecuted Albuflasa without legal representation but eventually released him on July 24 after he began a hunger strike. This incident demonstrates the regime's apprehension of any Sunni-Shi`i alliance even to the extent of arresting a Sunni conservative, a statecraft strategy to restrict further unity between the sects. In February, demonstrators from both groups proclaimed, "No Sunni, no Shi`a," they chanted and waved banners declaring, "We are one."<sup>163</sup> The documentary, *Bahrain: Shouting in the Dark*, records the protesters on numerous occasions claiming brotherhood between the two sects.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Ned Parker, In Bahrain, Sunni Activist's Plight Seen as a Cautionary Tale, *Los Angeles Times Online*, February 25, 2011, <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/feb/25/world/la-fg-bahrain-sunnis-20110225>.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Karen Leigh, "How Bahrian's Government is Dividing the People," *Time*, April 13, 2011, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2064934,00.html#ixzz21MJ7ATFg>.

<sup>164</sup> *Bahrain: Shouting in the Dark*, Directed by May Ying Welsh, August 4, 2011, *Al-Jazeera*, Last Modified June 19, 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/2011/08/201184144547798162.html>.

On February 16, protesters remained on Pearl Roundabout, the atmosphere described as festive with speeches and food. On the next day, however, police forces stormed the area, armed with sticks and shotguns, killing four unarmed protesters. According to Gelvin, the brutality of the security forces changed the nature of the protests. Additional groups added to the ranks of the original protesters including “associations of engineers, lawyers, teachers, politicians and trans unionists.”<sup>165</sup> The rhetoric changed from demanding reform and dialogue to calling for an end to the monarchy even as the tenor remained inter-sectarian.<sup>166</sup> According to Gelvin, the organizers of the protest articulated their primary demands: constitutional reform, free elections, release of prisoners of conscience and an end of torture. Their demands also included formulating a representative council and ending naturalization of Saudi Arabs as citizens, referred to as “political naturalization”, which the monarchy implements this policy in order to increase the Sunni population. The regime hired sympathetic Sunni foreign mercenaries to serve in the security forces to assure they would not join the protesters.<sup>167</sup> The regime responded to the protesters’ demands by declaring the movement as sectarian, thus alienating them from support within the Arab communities.

In mid-February, the al-Khalifa regime hired Potomac Square Group, a business operated by former *Wall Street Journal* correspondent, Chris Cooper, to spin the crisis in the regime’s favor, for which their firm was paid \$20,000 a month.<sup>168</sup> One of

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<sup>165</sup> Gelvin, 137.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Paul Blumenthal, “Bahrain’s PR Team,” *Sunlight Foundation*, March 22, 2011. <http://sunlightfoundation.com/blog/2011/03/22/bahrains-pr-team/>.

Washington's largest public relations firms, Qorvis Communications, had previously been on a retainer with the kingdom, advising them since summer of 2010. Tom Squitieri, fired in 2005 by *USA Today* for plagiarism,<sup>169</sup> operated another public relations firm hired by the kingdom, TS Navigations LLC. Squitieri published an article in *The Huffington Post*, one of the most popular political websites, shedding an unfavorable light on the protesters inferring that the demonstrators were being manipulated and had no constructive purpose and hinting at Iran's influence by accusing protesters as foot soldiers for those who might have other agendas.<sup>170</sup> The regime's propaganda furthered the narrative of Iran's meddling discrediting the protesters and influencing Sunni as well as international opinion to its side, a strategic statecraft technique.

During the 2011 uprisings, the GFBTU called a general strike in March 2011 in which 60 percent of workers participated. Intimidation continued by the security forces including documenting the actions of every protest group by taking thousands of photographs. Al-Mahfudh reported,

Moreover, they tried to manipulate information and criminalize the union leaders among the public opinion, through the national media, all of which all are under the government's control. Unionists are portrayed as traitors of the country, as conspirators against the regime and as responsible for all the dismissals.<sup>171</sup>

Many businesses hired foreigners as substitutes for dismissed workers. The government drafted new legislation preventing unionists from running for election if charged by the

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<sup>169</sup> Scott Lucas, "Bahrain Propaganda 101: A Tale of Tom Squitieri, Ali Abbas Shamtoot MP, and the Latest PR in *The Huffington Post*," *EAWorldView*, October 11, 2011, <http://www.enduringamerica.com/home/2011/10/11/bahrain-propaganda-101-a-tale-of-tom-squitieri-ali-abbas-sha.html>.

<sup>170</sup> Tom Squitieri, "A Lighter Shade of Gray," *Huffington Post*, October 2, 2011, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/tom-squitieri/a-lighter-shade-of-gray\\_b\\_990071.html?](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/tom-squitieri/a-lighter-shade-of-gray_b_990071.html?)

<sup>171</sup> Interview: Spotlight Interview with Salman Ja'far al-Mahfudh, March 2012, [http://www.ituc-csi.org/sponlight-interview-with-salman\\_10736.html](http://www.ituc-csi.org/sponlight-interview-with-salman_10736.html).

court.<sup>172</sup> The “Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry” (BICI) confirmed that government officials condemned the protests, creating an atmosphere in which those who participated in strikes could face retaliation by employers. In addition, the Commission received anecdotal evidence implying that government officials encouraged companies to fire employees suspected of being involved in the events of February/March 2011.<sup>173</sup> The report also stated that Shi`i workers were subject to discrimination, as employers admitted not dismissing Sunni employees who participated in the protests.<sup>174</sup> These incidents reflect government practices that divide Sunni and Shi`i workers.

### **Mercenaries Hired by the Bahraini Government**

According to *Al-Jazeera* in March 2011 advertisements for military personnel began to show up in the Pakistani media. "Urgent requirement - manpower for Bahrain National Guard," read one. "For service in Bahrain National Guard, the following categories of people with previous army and police experience are urgently needed," stated another, with "previous experience" and "urgent need" underscored.<sup>175</sup> The categories listed in the advertisement included army drill instructors, anti-riot instructors and retired military police. Both Saudi and Bahraini representatives paid visits to Islamabad, and sources estimated that the regime brought in approximately 2,500 servicemen, enlarging Bahrain's security forces by 50 percent. Nabeel Rajab, president of

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Mahmoud Cherif Bassiouni, et. al, “Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry,” December 10, 2011, 352, <http://www.bici.org.bh/BICIREportEN.pdf>.

<sup>174</sup> Bassiouni, 254.

<sup>175</sup> *Al-Jazeera*, “Pakistani Troops aid Bahrain’s Crackdown,” July 30, 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/07/2011725145048574888.html>.

the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, told *Al-Jazeera*, “We know that continued (sic) airplanes are coming to Bahrain and bringing soldiers from Pakistan . . . we know that it is much more than 1,500 or 2,000 people.”<sup>176</sup> While these recent advertisements represented new evidence of the regime hiring Sunni Muslims as security forces, the regime had also hired mercenaries in previous years and granted citizenship to them. Al-Wifaq demanded the regime halt these political naturalizations as part of their list of reforms while the government claimed the regime had no such policy of political naturalization, contrary to the evidence. As a statecraft policy, the regime’s continuous pretense in denying the recruitment of Sunni soldiers makes it difficult for reformers to hold the monarchy accountable.<sup>177</sup>

### **Saudi Arabia Invades**

According to Peter Aisis, during the 2011 uprising, Iran sided with the protesters, condemning the government’s crackdown and demanding that the government respect the will of its citizens. In a show of support, a flotilla of activists, students and clerics from Iran sailed toward Bahrain but in the end turned back to Iran. Bahrain accused Iran of attempting to establish a Shi`i political state, requesting Arab support in thwarting Iranian influence.<sup>178</sup> Shaikh Khalid stated in November 2011, “Gulf countries should not have to stand alone facing Iran, (other) Arab countries must be responsible, and Arab public must pay attention to Iran’s dangers, which come under a thousand guises. The threat is

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Ian Black, “Bahrain Security Forces Accused of Deliberately Recruiting Foreign Nationals,” *Guardian*, February 17, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/feb/17/bahrain-security-forces-sunni-foreign>.

<sup>178</sup> Peter Aisis, Mar`Isa Allison, Anthony H. Cordesman, US and Iranian Strategic Competition in the Gulf States and Yeman: A Report of the SCIS Burke Chair in Strategy, Center for Strategic and International Studies, March 2012, 31, [http://csis.org/files/publication/120228\\_Iran\\_Ch\\_VI\\_Gulf\\_State.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/120228_Iran_Ch_VI_Gulf_State.pdf).

grave.”<sup>179</sup> While some Iranian immigrants support Iran and some of the Bahraini Shi`a have attended Iranian Schools, most of Bahrain Shi`a do not support an Islamic revolution or a religious supreme leader.<sup>180</sup>

The US government had been aware since 2008 that Bahrain’s claims that Iranian influences were stirring political unrest were unfounded. The US embassy reported in a secret dispatch in August of that year “to date, we have seen no convincing evidence of Iranian weapon or government money here since at least the mid 1990s . . . if the GOB had convincing evidence of more recent Iranian subversion, it would quickly share it with us.”<sup>181</sup> The Bahraini government’s allegations that Iran controls al-Haq were also unfounded. King Hamad informed the US diplomatic core that Hezbollah in Lebanon had been providing training to activists but confessed, “he had no definitive proof.”<sup>182</sup> Most of Bahrain’s Shi`a distrust Iran, a fact that Western diplomats acknowledge.<sup>183</sup>

Raising the specter of Iranian meddling, Bahrain requested military assistance from the GCC to put down the protest movement, accusing Iran of “jeopardizing Bahrain’s security and stability and sowing dissension among its citizens.”<sup>184</sup> On March 14, the regime moved to crush the demonstrations with the help of Saudi-GCC military, as thousands of troops crossed over the causeway between the two nations, invoking the

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<sup>179</sup> *Gulf Daily News*, “Time to Act,” November 2, 2011, <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/TIME+TO+ACT!-a0271386132>.

<sup>180</sup> Aisis, 31.

<sup>181</sup> Ian Black, “WikiLeaks cables show no evidence of Iran’s hand in Bahrain Unrest,” *Guardian Online*, February 15, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/feb/15/wikileaks-no-evidence-iran-bahrain>.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Derek Henry Flood, “Dangerous Change Rattles Bahrain,” *Asia Times*, April 7, 2011, [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle\\_East/MD07Ak01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/MD07Ak01.html).

<sup>184</sup> Bahrain News Agency, “GCC Chief Lauds Deployment of Peninsula Shield Troops in Bahrain,” March 15, 2011, <http://bna.bh/portal/en/news/449972>.

GCC mutual defense pact for the first time in thirty years. After storming Pearl Roundabout, the forces began a brutal crackdown. The government enacted martial law over the entire island, as wounded and the dead poured into hospitals. The government imprisoned anyone viewed as sympathetic to the protesters' cause, including activists, journalists and students and fired thousands of workers. Lynch reports, "The crackdown became one of the most comprehensive, brutal and oppressive of any in the region, while largely avoiding international condemnation."<sup>185</sup> On April 2, the government closed al-Wasat, the opposition newspaper, on the premise that the publication had been printing misleading stories that endangered security and stability of the country.<sup>186</sup>

Prime Minister Khalifa ibn Salman al-Khalifa invited the GCC forces into Bahrain shortly after Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates left the country after urging the regime to make real political reforms. The US supported the regime but urged restraint; some analysts noted that the US did not object to the Saudi invasion out of fear that a weakened monarchy might benefit Iran, especially since the US was withdrawing troops from Iraq.<sup>187</sup> The prime minister also objected to negotiations with the demonstrators, who were calling for his ouster. With a military 13,000 members, Bahrain would not need assistance from the GCC to handle the protesters. The mission, therefore, was symbolic: the rulers relied on the military assistance to frighten protesters and

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<sup>185</sup> Marc Lynch, *The Arab Uprising: The Unfinished Revolutions of the New Middle East*, 111.

<sup>186</sup> "Upheaval in the Arab World: Media as Key Witnesses and Political Pawns," *Reporters without Borders*, November 2011, 10, [http://en.rsf.org/IMG/pdf/rsf\\_moyen\\_orient\\_2011\\_gb.pdf](http://en.rsf.org/IMG/pdf/rsf_moyen_orient_2011_gb.pdf).

<sup>187</sup> Ethan Bronner & Michael Slackman, "Saudi Troops enter Bahrain to Help Put Down Unrest," *New York Times Online*, March 14, 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/15/world/middleeast/15bahrain.html?pagewanted=all>.



strengthen its position.<sup>188</sup> The regime, referencing perceived threats from Iran, maneuvers between the US and Saudi Arabia to maintain control.

When the Saudi troops fired on Bahraini demonstrators, Qorvis spun the story with a press release that selectively quoted Secretary of State Hilary Clinton: “She affirmed the ‘sovereign right’ of Bahrain to invite security forces from allied countries.”<sup>189</sup> What they omitted from the release was Clinton’s other remarks, “We’re alarmed by the situation in Bahrain, and we have spoken very forcefully against the security crackdown.”<sup>190</sup> Saudi Arabia also contracted Qorvis to prepare press releases and develop content for YouTube and Twitter. While it may be difficult to determine the extent the propoganda machines of both Saudi and Bahrain government’s sway on world opinion, nevertheless the misinformation reveals its attempts at manipulation of foreign powers.

On May 2, the regime began promoting a loyalty campaign, “we are all Hamad” in which government agents encouraged Bahraini citizens to demonstrate their loyalty to the king by signing pledge books or a Facebook page of the same name. The government announced that schools and youth groups “will participate in the campaign.”<sup>191</sup> The media spokesperson for the *Gulf Daily News* claimed that this campaign was initiated by citizens who wished to express their gratitude for the king’s leadership, claiming, “This is the least we can do to thank His Majesty who through his wisdom and statesmanship, met

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<sup>188</sup> William Fisher, “Saudi Troops in Bahrain: Sunni Rulers, Shi’a Subjects,” *Public Record*, March 15, 2011, <http://pubrecord.org/world/9081/saudi-troops-bahrain-sunni-rulers/>.

<sup>189</sup> Blumenthal.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Katerina Nikolas, “Bahrain Launches “We are all Hammad” Loyalty Campaign,” *Hel’um News*, May 2, 2011, <http://news.helium.com/news/13211-bahrain-launces-we-are-all-hamad-campaign-to-show-love-for-king-hammad>.

the aspirations of the Bahraini citizens and made their dreams come true.”<sup>192</sup> The spokesperson also claimed that the campaign would prove that Bahraini citizens were united in their support of “wise leadership.” This campaign went beyond propaganda by deliberately intimidating citizens, using its authority to co-opt even students.

While the regime ignored the plight of migrants, abused by their employers, injured or killed on the job due to either negligence or lack of enforcement of safety regulations in the months before the uprisings, the regime repeatedly pointed to violence toward migrant workers during the demonstrations. This strategy focused attention on the protesters as oppressors. However, as an example of the administration’s callous disregard for migrant workers, a Pakistani crane operator was crushed to death in the rush to destroy the Pearl Monument on March 18. According to independent journalist, Fahad Desmukh, the Foreign Minister Shaikh Khalid al-Khalifa made numerous trips to the migrant clubs in their communities reminding them of the strong ties that bind them to Bahrain. The regime controlled the airways and in an effort to bring migrants to the monarchy’s side, national television stations began to run newscasts in the different languages of the guest workers.<sup>193</sup> Accusations surfaced that the regime forced migrant workers to join counter-protests supporting the monarchy.<sup>194</sup> Although migrants were subject to violence during the uprisings, it is unclear if these incidents resulted from

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<sup>192</sup> *Gulf Daily News*, “New Campaign of Loyalty Launched,” May 2, 2011, <http://www.gulf-daily-news.com/NewsDetails.aspx?storyid=305127>.

<sup>193</sup> Fahad Desmukh, “Spare us Bahrain’s Sudden ‘Concern’ for its Asian Expat Workers,” *Guardian Online*, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/jun/18/bahrain-expat-workers-state-brutality>.

<sup>194</sup> “Bahrain further Restrict Migrant Rights while Publicly Expressing Concern for Migrants. *Migrant Rights*. June 29, 2011, <http://www.migrant-rights.org/2011/06/29/bahrain-further-restricts-migrant-rights-while-publicly-expressing-concern-for-migrants/>.

clashes with the pro-democracy demonstrators or the result of staged conflicts.<sup>195</sup> The regime applied a number of strategies to prevent possible alliances between migrant and national workers and generated negative publicity against the protesters.

### **Aftermath of the Uprisings**

King Hamad initiated the Bahrain National Dialogue in July 2011 with the purpose to encourage discussion of governance. According to Gelvin, the GCC troops remained on the streets, and the king did not participate in the national dialogue. Many of the protesters from Pearl Square remained in jail and could not participate in the discussions. Of the 300 seats at the dialogue, the regime allowed only 35 for opposition groups. Gengler further reported that the regime avoided opportunities to sanction or encourage Sunni and Shi`i political leaders to agree on any demands.<sup>196</sup> King Hamad received the testimony from the national dialogue, but the official government accounts found it difficult to report that this was a serious step in the direction of democracy.<sup>197</sup>

Writing for *Foreign Policy*, Joost Hiltermann speculates that it is difficult to determine whether the royal elites intervened to prevent compromises that Prince Salman offered to the protesters. Salman proposed seven principles to guide the national dialogue. Such reforms would clear the way for steps toward a constitutional monarchy, elected prime minister, and a Shi`i majority in the parliament. Prime Minister Khalifa, a strong ally of the Saudi's, would be dismissed; the prospect of a Shi`i parliament terrified the Saudi regime, which "sees a Shi`i ascendancy as tantamount to empowering the mullahs

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Justin Gengler, "The Securitization of "the Shi`a Problem" in Bahrain," *Religion and Politics in Bahrain (Blog)*, May 8, 2012, <http://bahrainipolitics.blogspot.com/2012/05/securitization-of-shia-problem-in.html>.

<sup>197</sup> Gelvin, 140.

in Tehran.”<sup>198</sup> Al-Wifaq remained hopeful but the more hardline party, Al-Haq began demanding the end of the monarchy altogether. The question remained whether Crown Prince Salman’s offer to the opposition was genuine or was he playing for time, encouraging the protesters to back off. Both the Obama administration and Bahrain’s legal opposition societies appeared to trust Prince Salman; many of the Pearl Roundabout protesters did not.<sup>199</sup>

According to Lynch, private and public negotiations between representatives of the moderate protesters and the government began in March with Saudi Arabia and the US contributing input toward an agreement of reform. Opposition leaders tried to maintain unity focusing on reforms rather than on regime overthrow. The crown prince appeared open to moves toward a constitutional monarchy, while the prime minister and his backers in Saudi Arabia railed against such a pact. A national dialogue seemed like a possibility with support from al-Wifaq, as well as other opposition groups. Drafts toward a constitutional monarchy moved forward. Credibility remained an issue on both sides with the crown prince carrying the monarchy’s reputation of unfilled promises of reform while al-Wifaq could not be certain that radical protesters would accept any compromises. Assistant Secretary of State Jeffrey Feltman, paid a visit to Manama with the hope of finishing the compromise.<sup>200</sup> However, just as an agreement seemed possible, the deal began to unravel.<sup>201</sup> Prime Minister Khalifa and his hardliner allies, including the Saudi’s,

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<sup>198</sup> Joost Hiltermann, “Pushing for Reform in Bahrain,” *Foreign Affairs*, September 7, 2011, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/68246/joost-r-hiltermann/pushing-for-reform-in-bahrain>.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Marc Lynch, *The Arab Uprising: The Unfinished Revolutions of the New Middle East*, 136.

<sup>201</sup> Marc Lynch, *The Arab Uprising: The Unfinished Revolutions of the New Middle East*, 137.

rejected the arrangement, and the crown prince appeared to be out of the loop of influence. The regime hardliners seized upon the rhetoric of al-Haq and other opposition movements, who escalated demands to oust the prime minister as well as the monarchy.<sup>202</sup> This resulted in the moderate Shi`a and the Sunni factions removing themselves from the alliance. The monarchy used these radical demands to discredit the reform movement.<sup>203</sup> Given the regime's past practice of offering reforms in the face of crisis, it raises the question whether the crown prince's proposals of reform and compromise were undertaken merely to halt the momentum of the protests. US officials communicated primarily with the crown prince whose Western education and liberal outlook made him appear amenable to change. On the other hand, officials had limited access to Prime Minister al-Khalifa and his hardliner allies. Reportedly, the Obama administration attempted to encourage steps to have the prime minister step down, but that attempt failed; the GCC-sponsored crackdown may have further entrenched al-Khalifa.<sup>204</sup>

According to Lynch, Bahrain began to divide into the Sunni and Shi`i camps. Sunni's supported the monarchy in order to preserve their privilege and political position, which might be at risk if a Shi`i majority controlled the parliament. This schism took a toll, demoralizing those pushing for reform. "People are busy fighting each other, getting frightened by each other, forgetting about reform and letting the government and the system have everything," said Munira Fakhro, a 69-year-old secular Sunni activist. "It's

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

an old game but it's still working.”<sup>205</sup> Twitter and social media became another battleground between reformers and regime supporters. The Bahraini administration had an effective propaganda machine that distanced Bahrain from the other uprisings in the Middle East, which swayed world opinion in favor of the regime; Bahrain proved to be the only instance where repression worked in the Arab uprisings of 2011.<sup>206</sup>

The International Trade Union Confederation came to the defense of workers who went on strike during the protest. TUC received information of attempts to replace workers who went on strike by other workers, including migrants. “It is a gross violation of the right to strike. Furthermore, these practices do not respect legal recruitment procedures. It is an unacceptable political exploitation of innocent migrant workers who have made the sacrifice of leaving their country of origin simply because they want to work” continued the ITUC General Secretary.<sup>207</sup> This was another way for the regime to insert a wedge between the foreign workers and the Bahraini work force.

## **US Response**

US Defense Secretary of State Robert Gates visited Bahrain on March 11, but the regime officials neglected to inform him that Gulf Council forces were preparing for an invasion. The Saudis were looking for total support for the al-Khalifa regime, but the US suggested “restraint.” US Secretary of State Clinton did not reassure the Saudis saying that the US felt what was happening in Bahrain was alarming.

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<sup>205</sup> Anthony Shadid, “Bahrain Boils Under the Lid of Repression,” *New York Times Online*, September 15, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/16/world/middleeast/repression-tears-apart-bahrains-social-fabric.html?pagewanted=all>.

<sup>206</sup> Marc Lynch, *The Arab Uprising: The Unfinished Revolutions of the New Middle East*, 112.

<sup>207</sup> *International Trade Union Confederation*, “Bahrain: Exploitation of Migrants Workers, Including for Political Reasons, put their Lives at Risk,” April 2011, <http://www.ituc-csi.org/bahrain-migrants-exploited-their.html?lang=en>.

According to Lynch, the US assumed a low profile during the uprisings in 2012, “a decision that badly crippled its credibility across the entire region.”<sup>208</sup> Keeping Iran in check remained the first priority of the US while Saudi Arabia informed the Obama administration that Bahrain was “within its sphere of influence.”<sup>209</sup> There were few options for the Obama administration; thus, the US capitulated to the Saudis. In his speech of May 19, 2011, Obama’s mild response to the Bahraini crackdown and Saudi invasion, “failed to appease an angry Arab public that saw Bahrain as the graveyard of American credibility in the Arab uprisings.”<sup>210</sup> According to Katzman, US security interests, the loss of a base, the risk of a Shi’i government and subsequent increase in Iran’s influence trumps human rights of the Shi’i protesters.<sup>211</sup> The al-Khalifa regime, aware of the US vulnerability to any threat from Iran, could invite GCC troops into Bahrain without fear of serious US repercussions.

### **Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry**

In order to make some amends toward the opposition and to convince the US to lift the hold on the \$53 million dollar arms deal,<sup>212</sup> on June 29, 2011, the king established the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, headed by highly regarded Egyptian international legal expert, Dr. Cherif Bassiouni, to investigate the government’s response

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<sup>208</sup> Marc Lynch, *The Arab Uprising: The Unfinished Revolutions of the New Middle East*. 140.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Kenneth Katzman, “Bahrain: Reform, Security, and US Policy” *Congressional Research Service*, May 14, 2012, 15.

<sup>212</sup> Paul Mutter, “Does US Believe Arms Deal with Bahrain will Encourage Human Rights?” *Foreign Policy in Focus*, February 1, 2012, [http://www.fpif.org/blog/does\\_us\\_believe\\_arms\\_deal\\_with\\_bahrain\\_will\\_encourage\\_human\\_rights](http://www.fpif.org/blog/does_us_believe_arms_deal_with_bahrain_will_encourage_human_rights).

to the demonstrations.<sup>213</sup> The king established the commission to investigate and report on the events of February 2011 to determine if there were violations of human rights. The BICI report, released on November 23, 2011, documents many of abuses and recommends reforms, but the report did not hold the al-Khalifa monarchy responsible for torture and violence; the Commission blamed those in the lower level positions. For example, in the Finding and Conclusions section [Part 3, 1112] states that security forces carried out riot control “in an excessive manner, that was, on many occasions, unnecessary, disproportionate, and indiscriminate.”<sup>214</sup> The report implies that the security forces are responsible rather than naming specific high-level functionaries giving the orders.

According to Kenneth Kratzman, realizing that the world was watching his response to the report, but most especially the US waiting on the arms deal, King Hamad diplomatically accepted the findings and agreed to proceed with the recommendations establishing a commission to implement the report’s recommendations.<sup>215</sup> While King Hamad vowed to protect free speech, he sandwiched his own perspective into the response, “You have recognized the need for our authorities to re-establish public order and you have understood the unprecedented challenges faced by our authorities . . . .”<sup>216</sup> The king goes on to suggest, “All forms of ill treatment are sanctioned by our criminal

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<sup>213</sup> Katzman, 8.

<sup>214</sup> Bassiouni, 268.

Colin S. Cavell, “US Back Dictatorial Regime in Bahrain to Retain Hegemony,” *Press TV*, August 8, 2012, <http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/08/02/254004/us-backs-al-khalifa-to-retain-hegemony/>.

<sup>215</sup> Katzman, 14.

<sup>216</sup> Bahraini New Agency, “HM King Hamad Receives BICI’s Report and Delivers a Keynote Speech,” November 23, 2011, <http://www.bna.bh/portal/en/news/481652>.



laws” by clarifying the definition of torture. The king uses rhetorical techniques of affirming free speech while strengthening his authority to rule.

The BICI report found no evidence that established a link between the unrest in Bahrain and the government of Iran. Bassiouni stated in an interview that the commission “did not discover any role of the Iranian Islamic Republic” in the protests, despite the government’s claims. Mr. Bassiouni went on to say that Iran neither funded nor agitated the protests.<sup>217</sup> Bahrain’s ambassador to the US, Huda Nonoo, supported her government’s claims of Iranian involvement because of Iran’s statements claiming Bahrain as being Iran’s 14<sup>th</sup> province. When asked about her direct evidence of Iran’s meddling, she said, “We don’t have that evidence, but it’s there,” Ms. Nonoo said. “It’s not evidence you can touch or see physically, but we know it’s there.”<sup>218</sup> Despite the implementation of some of the BICI recommendations, unrest continued. Issues such as detention, arrests, torture and civilian deaths still had not been thoroughly investigated. A coalition of NGOs wrote a report, “Bahrain: The Human Price of Freedom and Justice,” documenting the failures of the regime to completely implement the BICI recommendation.<sup>219</sup> Michael Mitchell, editor of the *Harvard International Review*, notes that before the GCC invasion, Secretary Gates discounted Iranian meddling in the Bahraini protests; supporting King Hamad’s declaration of Iranian influence, the State Department now suggests that Iran exploits the circumstances.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Ben Bimbaum, “No Iranian Role found in Bahrain Unrest,” *Washington Times Online*, November 23, 2011, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2011/nov/23/no-iranian-role-found-in-bahrain-unrest/>.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> *Amnesty International*, “Bahrain: Flawed Reforms: Bahrain Fails to Achieve Justice for Protesters,” November 2011, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE11/014/2012/en>.

<sup>220</sup> Mitchell, 5.

In an interview with the German Magazine, *Der Spiegel*, in February of 2012, King Hamad repeated the regime's rhetoric highlighting liberalization issues. When asked if he felt Bahrain was a role model for Arab countries, the king replied,

We are the number one in reforms of all the Arab countries. We introduced parliament so that a dictatorship would be impossible in Bahrain. Bahraini's are better off than many other Arabs. We have a welfare state, everybody gets a salary whether they have a job or not. Electricity and food are subsidized; school and healthcare are free. In addition, we do not differentiate between Bahraini's and foreigners. We are very proud of that.<sup>221</sup>

The king downplayed perceptions that any real organization opposes his rule stating that people in Bahrain just have different views and no opposition exists in Bahrain.<sup>222</sup> Using rhetorical devices such as repetition of his world view and because he holds prestige and power, the king bolsters and legitimizes his position. In generalizing about Bahrain, the Western media often repeats the king's narrative. In an article in the *Wall Street Journal*, Marian L. Tupy outlines the tensions created by economic liberalization without democratization in Bahrain. While Tupy notes criticism of the regime, she characterizes Bahrain as having relative freedom and "as a regional leader in the education and treatment of women."<sup>223</sup> Tupy mentions Western fashion, religious acceptance and social permissiveness as an indicator of a tolerant government. Generalizations mask the details of how liberalization operates in Bahrain.

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<sup>221</sup> *Der Spiegel*, "Arab Spring? That's the Business of Other Countries," February 13, 2012, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/spiegel-interview-with-the-king-of-bahrain-arab-spring-that-s-the-business-of-other-countries-a-814915.html>.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Marian L. Tupy, "The Bahraini Experiment," *Wall Street Journal Online*, August 16, 2011, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424053111903392904576509801902607900.html>.

In January of 2012, the Obama administration decided to resume the \$53 million arms deal to Bahrain even after some members of Congress and human rights activists back in October 2011 severely criticized the sale. The US took advantage of a loophole in order to circumvent any Congressional resistance by breaking up the sale in \$1 million increments rather than as a total package.<sup>224</sup> Wehrey, who in 2012 traveled to Bahrain, offered an analysis of the US arms' sale. The US position stated that the sale of equipment, such as patrol boats, jet upgrades and air to air missiles, served as upgrades for external defense. While Washington claimed that none of the items sold would be used against protesters, activists in Bahrain and the US expressed serious concern over the sale. The hardliners in the monarchy criticized the initial stoppage of the arms sale claiming that the US was not a reliable security partner. If Washington attempts any conciliatory actions toward the protesters, the Bahraini hardliners immediately claim that the US is siding with al-Wifaq or Iran.<sup>225</sup> Despite this take from the conservatives, the Bahraini opposition understands the US is willing to profit from this transaction, support the regime and ignore any promises of reform. "It's a direct message that we [US] support the authorities and we don't support democracy in Bahrain, we don't support protesters in Bahrain," says Mohammed Al Maskati, a Bahraini rights activist.<sup>226</sup> Although the sale of arms was supposed to represent support for the reform initiatives of the crown prince,

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<sup>224</sup> Josh Rogin, "Obama Administration using Loophole to Quietly sell Arms Package to Bahrain," *Foreign Policy*, January 27, 2012, [http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/01/27/obama\\_administration\\_selling\\_new\\_arms\\_package\\_to\\_bahrain](http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/01/27/obama_administration_selling_new_arms_package_to_bahrain).

<sup>225</sup> Wehrey.

<sup>226</sup> Kristen Chick, "US Resumes Arms Sales to Bahrain. Activists feel Abandoned," *Christina Science Monitor Online*, May 14, 2012, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2012/0514/US-resumes-arms-sales-to-Bahrain.-Activists-feel-abandoned>.

activists view the sale as a win for the regime hardliners.<sup>227</sup> The king secured the arms deal without sacrificing any substantial reform progress.

In December 2011, Saudi King Abdullah called on the GCC members to move “beyond the stage of cooperation and into the stage of unity in a single entity;” five months later King Abdullah announced a political union between Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. Leaders of the GCC gathered in Riyadh, supposedly concerned with increasingly Iran’s influence and uprisings across the region. Thousands of Bahraini protesters swarmed onto a major highway to protest the union. Demonstrators chanted, “The land is not for sale,” along with antigovernment slogans, in what activists said was the largest protest in months. King Hamad approved the union, but other Gulf States objected to the idea and their leaders eventually decided to delay a decision on the unity proposal.<sup>228</sup>

The brutal crackdown by the regime during and after the uprisings did have repercussions. Imprisoning doctors for treating wounded protesters or indiscriminate arrests of suspected activists shocked even hardened observers. Lynch reports that the regime secured short-term stability in exchange for ongoing unrest.<sup>229</sup> Despite the implementation of a few reforms in Bahrain, experts believe that the underlying fault lines in Bahraini society continue, and the potential for a political upheaval by the Shi`i population to topple the rule of King Hamad remains.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> Kareem Fahim, “Bahrain: Unity Plan Denounced,” *New York Times Online*, May 19 2012, [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/19/world/middleeast/bahrain-unity-plan-denounced.html?\\_r=2](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/19/world/middleeast/bahrain-unity-plan-denounced.html?_r=2).

<sup>229</sup> Marc Lynch, *The Arab Uprising: The Unfinished Revolutions of the New Middle East*, 138.

<sup>230</sup> *Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council*, “Bahrain’s Unrest—One Year On,” February 15, 2012, <http://www.ajiac.org.au/news/article/bahrain-s-unrest-one-year-on>.

Before, during and after the Spring Uprising of 2011, the al-Khalifa regime relied on its statecraft techniques of the past. As part of its propaganda campaign, the monarchy retained the services of public relations firms. The regime sought the support of the migrant workers by appealing to them through news sources and visiting their communities. The regime advertised available positions in the security forces in Sunni nations in order to build the military while increasing Sunni numbers in the general population. The regime offered protesters dialogue opportunities in order to quell disturbances while arresting and detaining demonstrators. The king offered supporting comments of reform after the investigation of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry while ignoring many of their recommendations. The king's promises of reform were enough to finalize the sale of arms from the US. The monarchy split the country along sectarian lines, making it difficult for protesters to organize a national opposition movement. Jane Kinninmont, senior research fellow for the Middle East and North Africa Program at Chatham House, writes that Egypt and Tunisia had successful revolutions because the protesters united different constituencies. Kinninmont further notes that, "Division in conflict is a powerful tool."<sup>231</sup> The Bahraini regime implemented divisive strategies to create a wedge between the Shi'a and Sunni communities by constantly warning Sunni supporters and international allies that Iran was seeking a foothold in the region and ultimately responsible for the demonstrations. Shadi Hamid, research director at the Brookings Doha Center, supports that assertion, "The Bahraini regime has increasingly adopted an us-versus-them attitude, seeing the Shi'a as intent on subverting the country. By repeating the same narrative over and over, more Sunnis start believing it,

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<sup>231</sup> Karen Leigh, "How Bahrain's Government is Dividing the People, *Time*, April 13, 2011, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2064934,00.html>.

and more Shi`a feel they are being painted as enemies.”<sup>232</sup> The regime weathered the protests; the use of force contributed to the monarchy remaining in power, but the violence could have been worse. The regime realized that outright bloodbath would have been intolerable in world opinion. Creating Iran as its scapegoat worked as a statecraft strategy to justify violence, even if Iran’s influence happened to be mostly a myth.

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

## **CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION**

Throughout Bahrain's history, the al-Khalifa regime implemented a variety of statecraft strategies to maintain its power base both politically and financially; these strategies have repressed political dissention and manipulated media venues to its favor by demonizing the opposition and cajoling the citizenry with promises for reform. Protests and waves of repression reoccur as the regimes continue to pledge reforms in the form of limited liberalization policies, a strategy that continued through the Spring Uprising of 2011. Crackdowns followed by attempts at dialogue, the regime continues with press restrictions and arrests while suggesting cosmetic reforms in order to quiet the opposition.

During the Spring Uprising of 2011, the regime imprisoned and tortured opponents, both perceived and suspected, and banned free press, while alleging that foreign terrorists were responsible for the protests. While Bahrain's opposition groups claim a few reforms, these initiatives function as concessions by the ruling elites and less as the restoration of rights by the people. King Hamad periodically allowed parliamentary elections, which were essentially meaningless, as he can veto legislation and dissolve parliament at will. Questions continue to surface regarding whether the king institutes supposed reforms just to calm unrest and shore up international support. From the 1960s, the regime played this statecraft scenario of failed promises and then stalling.

Farhad Khosrokhavar writes, “Shi`ites in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain engage in sectarian action every time they ask for more religious or political freedom,”<sup>233</sup> which is an accurate characterization of the of the dilemma the Shi`a face and one in which the monarchy of Bahrain continues to exploit. The monarchy justifies questioning the motives of the Shi`i population by suggesting that the Shi`a have a subversive plan to convert Sunnis by either manipulation or force. In addition, the regime claims that Iran has designs on expanding its authority throughout the region and provokes the Shi`a to protest.<sup>234</sup> The regime’s propaganda campaigns create divisions between the Shi`a and Sunni, who in the beginning of the protests tried to maintain a coalition for democratic reform. During the 2011 uprising, the Bahraini regime destroyed Shi`i mosques, which further eroded any hopes of unification of the two groups. In a never-ending cycle of asserting its supremacy and entrenching its rule, the regime protects its political power and wealth by propaganda campaigns against the Shi`a.<sup>235</sup>

The King Hamad’s statecraft manipulation skills, perfected on the home front, came into practice in international relations. The House of Saud, supported by conservatives in the royal family, invaded Bahrain on the pretext that a treaty entitles the GCC to invade. With Bahrain’s oil running low, the king had two choices: cut off financial ties with Saudi Arabia, endangering his wealth, or allow his country to build a path toward independence from its dictatorial neighbor, jeopardizing his power. The regime decided that allowing the GCC forces into the country was in its best political and

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<sup>233</sup> Farhad Khosrokhavar, *The New Arab Revolutions that Shook the World*, Boulder (CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2012), 127.

<sup>234</sup> Khosrokhavar, 128.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.



economic interests. The king anticipated that the US would acquiesce to the invasion; the US could blame Iran for stirring up discontent when the primary concern of the US centered around the regime's stability and the unknown outcome should the al-Khalifa family be routed from power.

Migrant workers sustain Bahrain's economy, but the regime continues to ignore their plight, demonstrated by the absence of enforced safety standards to restrictions on their movements. Migrants work under the threat of deportation, and they have few avenues of assistance in seeking redress of their grievances. Forbidding any roads to citizenship for guest workers, the regime perpetuates discrimination. The ethnic immigrant communities remain largely isolated from the citizen population, and Bahraini's view them with suspicion for taking jobs. The regime recruits mercenaries either to agitate protesters or to repress the demonstrations; the lines between these migrant groups meld, making it difficult for citizens to view imported workers in anything but a negative light. With the monarchy ignoring abuses within the guest worker system, the regime turns over the power of controlling the population to its citizenry, which encourages violence.<sup>236</sup> The regime immediately focuses news coverage on violence against the foreign workers by the demonstrators. Through manipulating the media coverage in its state-controlled venues, the regime manages to drive a wedge between migrants and Bahraini citizens in order to prevent these constituencies from forming a coalition.

The Bahraini uprisings are part of the Arab Spring of 2011, a history of people demanding democratic change from entrenched authoritarian regimes. Marc Lynch

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<sup>236</sup> Gardner, 70.

writes, “The Arab public saw the Bahraini protesters as part of its shared struggle, and the regime as equivalent to its own hated regimes.”<sup>237</sup> Over half of Bahrain’s residents participated in the spring uprising, which speaks to the level of discontent in that nation. Demonstrations have been ongoing since that time with marches and then clashes erupting in the streets. While the government claims that it has implemented most of the BICI recommendations, citizens observe only superficial attempts at compliance. Police brutality continues against protesters, and the regime has yet to hold security services to any consequential form of accountability. In order to counter negative news, the regime continues to rely on propaganda campaigns. In May of 2012, Nada Alwadi writes that the regime now employs twelve public relation firms to spin its ongoing narrative: “The government committed some mistakes, but it’s making amends. The situation is stable, and the opposition consists of nothing more than a minority backed by foreign powers against reforms.”<sup>238</sup> The regime has managed to replay this scenario in a form of statecraft that manifests itself in manipulation, corruption, violence and limited liberalization policies in order to preserve a semblance of stability. This propaganda influences US policy, making arms sales and support for the al-Khalifa regime more palatable. For generations, the al-Khalifa regime practiced well-honed policies in order to remain in power, but as dissent in the streets has become relentless, the monarchy’s statecraft strategies of the past may not be enough to hold back the sea of change in the future.

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<sup>237</sup> Marc Lynch, *The Arab Uprising: The Unfinished Revolutions of the New Middle East*, 110.

<sup>238</sup> Nada Alwadi, “The War of Words: Bahrain’s Struggle over Local Coverage,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, May 3, 2012, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2012/05/03/war-of-words-struggle-over-local-coverage-in-bahrain/aogp>.

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