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THE SITUATION IN BAHRAIN

SECURITY REPORT: THE ONGOING RELEVANCE OF THE BAHRAINI PEOPLE

SECURITY REPORT

THE SITUATION IN BAHRAIN

JULY 2014

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction and Background	3
Demographics.....	3
Governance	3
Economics.....	4
Bahraini Political Actors.....	5
The Regime and Royal Family	5
The Shia Opposition.....	6
The Sunni Islamists.....	8
The 2011 Uprising.....	10
Triggers and causes	10
Religious discrimination and political marginalization.....	10
Lack of resources / corruption	11
The Opposition Demands.....	12
Government Response.....	13
External Actors.....	17
Regional.....	17
Iran	17
Gulf Countries	18
The United States	19
Human Right’s Violations and Abuses.....	20
A Future Outlook.....	21
Bibliography.....	23

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

DEMOGRAPHICS

The Kingdom of Bahrain (Bahrain) is a small island located centrally in the Persian Gulf off of the eastern coast of Saudi Arabia. Home to over 1.3 million residents, Bahrain's immigrant population constitutes more than 55% of the total population. The ethnic composition includes 46% Bahraini, 45.5% Asian, 4.7% other Arabs, 1.6% African, and 1% European. More than 70% of the 1.3 million Bahrainis are Muslims, the dominant majority of which are Shia. (CIA 2014).

GOVERNANCE

Bahrain gained its independence from the United Kingdom in 1971 and has since defined its government as a constitutional monarchy. However, a simple analysis of the government's organization and functions renders a conclusion that Bahrain is far from a constitutional monarchy and can more accurately be described as a hardline kingdom ruled with an iron fist. Most of the power is vested in the chief of state, King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa who rose to power in 1999 and his heir, Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifa. Next in the hierarchy is Khalifa bin Salman Al-Khalifa, the King's uncle who is the longest tenured prime minister in the world, serving since 1971. Khalifa bin Salman is head of the government, overseeing the cabinet elected by the King. Bahrain also has a legislative branch, the bicameral National Assembly, which consists of the Shura Council/Consultative Council and the Council of Representatives/Chamber of Deputies. The Shura Council is comprised of 40 members appointed by the King while the Council of Representatives holds 40 seats that are up for election every four years. As for the judicial branch, Bahrain's highest courts are the Court of Cassation (consist of three judges and a chairman) and the Constitutional Court (consists of six members and a President). The Judiciary in Bahrain includes both civil law and sharia law. (CIA 2014).

ECONOMICS

Despite declines in its oil reserves, oil production remains the cornerstone of the Bahraini economy. In 2012, 77% of exports and 87% of government revenues were attributed to petroleum production and refining. The government has attempted to diversify the economy and has made great progress thus far. Today, Bahrain prides itself as a major economic and financial hub in the region, competing with Malaysia as a center for Islamic banking and attracting global financial firms. In 2011, the economy took a dip due to the domestic unrest but in 2012-2013, the economy saw promising recovery that was a result of increased tourism. However, unemployment remains the underlying problem that has plagued the economy and is one of the determining factors that sparked the 2011 protests. (CIA 2014).

BAHRAINI POLITICAL ACTORS

THE REGIME AND ROYAL FAMILY

Originally from Saudi Arabia, the Al-Khalifa family travelled through Qatar in its conquest of Bahrain in 1783. They found the majority of the natives to be Shia farmers. Very quickly, the Al-Khalifa's set up a semi-feudal system "where they acted almost like absentee landlords over the Shia farmers." (Gwertzman 2011).

Modern day Bahrain has a lower elected house but most power is still vested in the King and his extended Royal family. Next in line after the King is Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifa and Prime Minister Khalifa bin Salman Al-Khalifa. The crown prince is characterized as a moderate reformer as opposed to the conservative hardline prime minister. The rise of the crown prince came at the expense of his great-uncle. While the Western educated crown prince led economic reforms to involve the youth in the private sector and impose taxes on the use of expatriate workers, his great-uncle was struggling to maintain his relationships with the elite merchant families, which have been a supporting pillar for the ruling family. (Ottaway and Muasher 2011).

According to the New York Times, the Crown Prince was described by a diplomatic cable exposed by Wikileaks as, "very Western in his approach" and "closely identified with the reformist camp in the royal family — particularly with respect to economic and labor reforms designed to combat corruption and modernize Bahrain's economic base." (Salman 2014). Another United States official described him as "credible" and "seems to want to do the right thing." (Salman 2014) . After the 2011 protests broke out, the Crown Prince was reported to have pledged commitment and effort to lead dialogue with the opposition groups and launch a series of reforms that can address the legitimate concerns of the protestors. However, his efforts were interrupted by the intervention of the Saudi Troops and the GCC forces that were deployed to join the crackdown on the protesters. (Ottaway and Muasher 2011). On the other hand,

THE SITUATION IN BAHRAIN

Prime Minister Khalifa bin Salman is known as a staunch conservative, uncompromising and a source of a great deal of fear for the opposition groups and protestors. Alongside the Prime Minister Khalifa, there are two more royal officials who have played a vital role during the unrest. The duo brothers, Royal Court Minister Khaled bin Ahmed Al-Khalifa and the Minister of Defense and Commander-in-Chief of the Army Khalifa bin Ahmed Al-Khalifa, are a rising force in the Bahraini political scheme. (Ottaway and Muasher 2011). Both are considered as uncompromising and responsible for cracking down on the protestors with extreme measures of violence and aggression.

THE SHIA OPPOSITION

Al-Wefaq National Islamic Society

The Al-Wefaq National Islamic Society (Al-Wefaq) is a state recognized political society that represents the disenfranchised Shia majority in the country. Known for their diplomacy and non-violent approach, the Al-Wifaq has been calling for reforms and has welcomed “US democracy promotion efforts in Bahrain.” (Al Wifaq National Islamic Society 2014). The conservative organization is closely affiliated with the Islamic Scholar’s Council, the main Shia clerical institution. Founded in 2001, Al-Wefaq promotes political reform within the government, empowering the Bahraini parliament, redrawing electoral districts, and protecting civil and public freedoms for all constituents. In 2006, the party won a plurality of seats in the Chamber of Representatives, garnering 17 out of 40 seats, to become the largest party with members and political influence at the polls. (Al Wifaq National Islamic Society 2014).

With the breakout of the massive anti-government and pro-reform protests in 2011, Al-Wefaq maintained its non-violent approach, scrutinizing the government for lacking to institute progressive reforms that can remedy years of disenfranchisement and targeted discrimination directed at the Shia majority which has suffered from high unemployment, lack of political participation and limited public freedoms. (Williams 2013). Al-Wefaq has been calling for a Constitutional Monarchy with an

elected government by the people. (Jones and Shehabi 2012). Protesting the violent crackdown on the protestors and the effortless response to their legitimate demands, Al-Wefaq took its opposition to the next level by boycotting the Chamber of Representatives. However, they did take part in the national dialogue that was initiated in February of 2013 but soon pulled out seven months after following the imprisonment of one of its prominent leaders, Khalil al-Marzooq, a former MP. As of today, the once dominant party in the Chamber of Representatives is currently out of power, with a number of its members either exiled or made stateless. (Muasher, et al. 2011).

February 14 Youth Movement

The February 14 Youth Movement is a coalition of youth that organize themselves and plan protests and demonstrations via social media through the likes of Facebook, twitter etc. Prior to the 2011 uprising, the loosely organized but highly coordinated group called for reforms under a credible Constitutional Monarchy. However, in reaction to the anti-protests crackdowns that resulted in numerous casualties, the coalition voiced more radical demands, calling for the removal of Al-Khalifa from power and a termination of the alliance with the United States. According to Foreign Policy, the collation “relies on a broad base of supporters who first generate ideas for dissent or particular kinds of activism in various digital forums. Once they achieve consensus, members turn to grassroots campaigning.” (Bahrain profile 2014). As the uprising escalated, the movement became widespread and popular, eclipsing the highly organized Al-Wefaq opposition who many view as ineffective and crippled by their diplomacy. (Bahrain profile 2014).

Al-Haqq and Al-Wafaa

The Al-Haqq and Al-Wafaa are Shia blocs that are unrecognized and unregistered by the government and thus, do not share the same privileges as Al-Wefaq. Al-Haqq was found by former leaders of Al-Wefaq who opposed the party’s parliamentary participation. Al-Haqq advocates for the revocation of the 2002 constitution, the

THE SITUATION IN BAHRAIN

enactment of a new constitution drafted by elected delegates and calls for a Bahraini Republic that dispenses of the current Al-Khalifa dynasty. (Ottaway and Muasher 2011). Sharing similar sentiments, Al-Wafaa is also a Shia minority party that is anti-government participation. Its leadership has been involved in calling for the youth to organize, demonstrate, and defy government forces. (Williams 2013). Both Al-Haqq and Al-Wafaa respective leaders are currently serving life sentences.

THE SUNNI ISLAMISTS

The National Unity Gathering (NUG)

Prior to the 2011 crisis, most of the Sunni factions, including the Muslim Brotherhood (Al-Minbar) and the Salafis (Al-Asala) were loosely united to overpower the largest political block in parliament, the Shia Iran-accused-affiliate Al-Wefaq. With the uprising in 2011, the dynamic shifted as new Sunni Islamist groups emerged. The National Unity Gathering, led by Abd al-Latif al-Mahmud organized at Bahrain's largest Sunni mosque to call for "increased legislative power, stigmatizes the Shi'a-led opposition for its anti-Sunni tendencies and subservience to Iran, and demands that Sunnis receive a full voice in negotiations to solve the crisis." (Ottaway and Muasher 2011). The group has been mischaracterized as pro-regime because of their anti-Shia sentiments when in fact they support reform and change. (Ottaway and Muasher 2011).

Al-Fatih Awakening

The Al-Fatih Awakening is a youth movement that split from the National Unity Gathering (NUG). The movement has attributed their split to wanting to remain independent unlike the NUG who it accuses of being sponsored by the government. Al-Fatih's self proclaimed independence is questioned as some have linked the group to the Muslim Brotherhood and claimed they are "youth-oriented proxy of the Brotherhood-affiliated Al-Menbar National Islamic Society." (Wehrey, The March of Bahrain's Hardliners 2012). The group has made it clear that it opposes Western

foreign intervention in Bahraini politics and has demanded more aggressive action to counter the opposition's movement. (Ottaway and Muasher 2011).

THE 2011 UPRISING

The 2011 uprising was inspired by the Arab Spring, which witnessed the downfall of the regimes in Tunisia and Egypt. The Bahraini citizens took to the streets on February 14th 2011 demanding progressive reforms to address the various political, economic, and social problems that have plagued the country for many years. The peaceful protests were met with an aggressive military crackdown, leaving a number of casualties and injuries escalating the conflict and leaving the country in a state of turmoil.

TRIGGERS AND CAUSES

Religious discrimination and political marginalization

Similar to the Shia in other Gulf countries, the Shia majority in Bahrain has suffered decades of systematic religious discrimination and political marginalization orchestrated by the royal family. Many youth were disappointed by an stagnant status quo and broken promises made in the turn of the century to advance reforms that can provide more equal opportunity for all citizens. (Wehrey, *Ominous Divide: Shiite Iran v Sunni Gulf* 2014).

Inherent in the Bahraini governance is sectarian tension. The Shia majority, which comprises over 70% of the population, is ruled by a Sunni Royal family and elite that make up only 30% of the population. The Shia firmly believe they have inadequate access to the wealth and resources of the state, deprived of equal opportunity, and politically sidelined with unfair discriminatory practices. (Rubin 2014).

This undying discrimination and political persecution sparked a wave of peaceful protests inspired by similar protests in Tunisia and Egypt. Thousands of citizens took to the streets calling for reforms to put an end to the political and economic discrimination. The Bahraini's were peacefully chanting for a government that is more

inclusive and embraces principles such as rule of law, equal protection under the law, and equal rights for all. The Shia were especially aspiring for a government that can respect and embrace their rights similar to all of their citizens. “The grievances of the Shia in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Kuwait are more political than religious and largely stem from being treated as less than full citizens.” (Rubin 2014).

The regional sectarian strife increased the sectarian divide in Bahrain. As Frederic Wehrey, of the Carnegie Endowment explained, “the regional sectarian strife deepened the wound by adding more fuel to the fire. (Wehrey, *Ominous Divide: Shiite Iran v Sunni Gulf* 2014). However, it is critical for anyone concerned about the situation not to fall into the rhetoric the Royal Family in Bahrain along with other gulf governments and media outlets has perpetuated to paint the protests as motivated by an imported Iranian agenda. Iran does indeed have an interest in Bahrain like all of the other regional neighbors, particularly Saudi Arabia and the United Emirates, but that interest in no way, shape, or manner characterize the conflict and the demands of the Bahraini protestors. “The Shi’ites in Bahrain have real grievances. They face discrimination in almost every sector: economic, political, and security.” (Carpenter n.d.). Unless that reality is accepted, then there will be no hope for any steps that can be taken to advance a viable solution to the crisis.

Lack of resources / corruption

The Shia community has suffered from unequal access to wealth and a disproportionate share of the resources. According to Michael Rubin of the American Enterprise Institute, “ninety-five percent of Bahrain’s unemployed are Shi’ite, and the state prevents Shi’ites from purchasing land or living in certain portions of the island.” (Carpenter n.d.). Moreover, similar to the other Gulf States, the Shia have very limited access to government jobs, especially in security forces and ministries, which has proliferated the unemployment rate even more. With many of those jobs, the Bahraini Shia find themselves on the sidelines watching imported foreign workers take what they naturally see as their right. This institutionalized deprivation was one of the catalysts that triggered the 2011 uprising.

THE SITUATION IN BAHRAIN

In addition to the economic discrimination, the government has received persistent backlash for its self-serving corrupt practices that advance the economic agenda of a tight nit group of individuals comprised of the royal family and its affiliates. Land in the 766 square kilometer island is scarce because more than 50% of the land mass is reserved for lavish royal mansions and international military facilities. The scarcity in land and exponential growth in the population has resulted in housing shortages and overcrowding. Sarah Chayes of the Carnegie Endowment indicated in an article published in 2013, "41 percent of Bahrainis said they had lacked the money to provide adequate shelter for their families... It is in this context that indications of gross corruption in the attribution of public land so infuriated Bahrainis in the years leading up to the 2011 protests." (Gengler 2012). These grievances are not limited to the Shia but are also "shared by lower class Sunnis who resent housing shortages, high unemployment, and low standards of living." (Kinninmont, The Problem is Political Will 2013).

The Bahraini royal family is also accused of devastating the fishing communities by privatizing coastland, which has resulted in limiting the fisherman's access to those coasts, crippling them economically. Moreover, Bahrainis have ridiculed the royal family for accruing more than 1/3 of the oil revenues while being irresponsible to all of the economic problems that has crippled many communities across the country. (Gengler 2012).

THE OPPOSITION DEMANDS

There is a spectrum of demands by the opposition ranging from calls for reforms to establish a true constitutional monarchy to radical voices asking for the obliteration of the Al-Khalifa dynasty. However, the common denominator amongst the various groups is serious measures of reforms have to be pursued in order to transform the tiny country from decades of discriminatory policies to fair and equal practices that embraces the rights of all citizens. On a very fundamental level, both hardline opposition and moderate reformers agree that a true constitutional monarch is a necessity. (Malashenko 2011). The majority of the opposition called for political and

economic reform that can reverse the discrimination and injustice, establish a more inclusive government, ensure greater effective political participation for the disenfranchised Shia, promote economic opportunity for the marginalized groups, especially the Shia and lower class Sunnis, and foster a national culture of equal rights and opportunities for all. In the beginning of the uprising in 2011, these were the causes that most groups advocated for, however, as the government escalated the situation by cracking down on the protestors and disregarding those legitimate demands, some of the opposition took a more hardline approach and started to champion more radical agendas. (Gengler 2012).

Many of the opposition, especially the youth movements are also calling for an end to the dominance of lengthy authoritative figures and the infusion of young visionary leadership that can build a forward looking and prosperous future for the Bahrainis. (Kinninmont, The Problem is Political Will 2013). Thus, the opposition has been more receptive and friendly to Crown Prince Salman Bin Hamad Al-Khalifa who is viewed as a moderate reformer as opposed to Prime Minister Khalifa Bin Salman who is characterized as a hardline conservative. The Prime Minister has been accused of spearheading the radical crackdown on the protestors in the wake of uprising.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

The Bahraini government reacted with violence and force towards the peaceful protests. Instead of embracing the protests and using them as an inspiration for positive reform, the government did not hesitate to use military measures and aggressive tactics to silence the protest, leaving protestors killed, injured, and more infuriated with what they witnessed as an illegitimate and repressive government. As soon as the protests commenced on February 14, 2011, the government responded with a security crackdown that killed and injured some of the protestors. (Alwasat News 2011). Just on the first day of the protests, more than 30 protestors were brutally injured and one was killed due to tear gas, rubber bullets, and birdshots. (Randeree 2011). The next day, as thousands marched in the funeral of Ali Abdulhadi Mushaima, the police forces opened fire at the mourners, killing one person and

THE SITUATION IN BAHRAIN

injuring more than 25. This violent crackdown did not deter protestors from exercising their right to protest in resentment. The protests picked up greater momentum, as tens of thousands were even more disappointed with the manner in which the government reacted to the initial protests. Protestors took the streets of Manama and other major cities, set up their tents overnight, and continued to call for reform and change while suffering from attacks of tear gas, rubber bullets, and open fire that left more protestors killed and injured.

With the protests gaining momentum every day, reaching an unprecedented 150,000, and the violent tactics of the security forces failing to reverse the state of unrest and havoc, the Bahraini government appealed to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) for military support. In March of 2011, the GCC sent Saudi Arabia military personal to bolster the ranks of the Bahraini security forces in their crackdown on the protestors. This move further delegitimized the government in the eyes of the Bahraini people who viewed those forces as unwelcomed foreign intruders. Furthermore, King Hamad Al-Khalifa declared emergency martial law, banning all protests and demonstrations, and taking severe legal action against leaders of the pro-democracy protests. (Hadar n.d.).

The Bahraini forces continued with a wave of violent crackdowns, most severe of which were during mid-march of 2011. On March 16-18, Bahraini tanks and helicopters bolstered by the Saudi forces invaded the opposition stronghold in Pear Roundabout, where protestors have been camping for over a month, arresting more than 1,000 protestors. Some of the prisoners included notable opposition figures such as Abduljalil al-Singace, Abdulwahab Hussain, and Ibrahim Sharif. (Fisk 2011). What was even more tragic was the barbaric invasion of the Salmaniya Hospital by the security forces who showed no mercy to the workers, doctors, and even the patients. There were many accounts of verbal and physical abuse of doctors, health workers, and patients. It was also reported that over 47 health workers were detained. Those workers arrested with the other protestors detained were abused and some were brutally tortured. (Fisk 2011).

Amidst of all these developments on the ground, the government continued its repression and censorship. As Mr. Matar Ibrahim Matar explains, “the regime has an “absence of maturity” that drives its “revenge policy” against the opposition.” (Louer 2012). Two of the major Shia parties, Al-Wefaq and Islamic Action were banned. (Alwasat News 2011). Major newspapers such as the opposition Al-Wasat was discontinued but then was allowed to resume. The repression took a different turn when 28 mosques and religions institutions were attacked and demolished with no apparent legitimate justification other than what can be explained as revenge and hate against the anti-government protestors. (97 killed since 14th February 2011 n.d.). On another front, the government continued a series of incarcerations of key individuals such as Abdulhadi al-Khawaja, the former president of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights and Mohammed al-Tajer, a human rights attorney, amongst many more cases.

The repression and transgression by the security forces continued in different forms and wavelengths into 2012 and 2013. The government failed to adequately address the protests and instead of focusing on the real problems at issue such as political discrimination and unequal economic opportunity, it has played the blame game, particularly accusing Iran for inspiring the unrest and violence. (Aiyar 2011).

The opposition has lost any sense of real hope and optimism especially with Prime Minister Khalifa remaining as the stronghold power he is. Many had glimmers of hope in “the crown prince, considered to be the member of the royal family most open to the idea of responding to the unrest with reforms and dialogue,” however, he “has seen his influence steadily decline since mid-201.” (Wehrey, Sadjadpour, et al. 2013). The conservative members of the royal family have committed to crush the opposition. “This is plainly visible in new arrests, media censorship, warnings to Shia clerics, and more aggressive counter-demonstration tactics.” (Wehrey, Sadjadpour, et al. 2013).

There was a sign of a light at the end of the tunnel when peaceful reconciliation efforts culminated in the commencement of national dialogue talks between the

THE SITUATION IN BAHRAIN

government and opposition in an attempt to end the unrest. The dialogue was initiated in February of 2013, two years after the eruption of the protests. However, the talks were not very effective and progress was nowhere in sight. The national dialogue was described as “slow, halting, government-controlled, and included only a limited range of players that the government found acceptable...talks were preoccupied with methodology, with little progress on substantial issue.” Every time there was a step taken forward by the government, you find that 10 steps (Muasher, et al. 2011) are taken backwards, which goes to demonstrate the government’s ineffectiveness to spearhead any institutionalized change that can change the direction of the country. The appointment of the crown prince as deputy prime minister in March of 2013 was a step forward but further incarcerations of key opposition leaders and the government suspending talks with the Shia opposition groups in January of 2014 brought everyone back to a dark tunnel with little, if any, glimmers of hope for a real solution. (Muasher, et al. 2011). All of this has resulted in the government losing any sense of legitimacy it once possessed. The violent reaction to the protests and lack of willingness to remedy the issues solidified the notion that the royal family is not in the business of reform and will take any measures to hold strong to its powers and eradicate any dissidents. (Malashenko, Possible Trajectories of the Arab Spring 2011).

EXTERNAL ACTORS

REGIONAL

Iran

Contrary to how the Bahraini government is framing the crisis, political analysts seem to come to a consensus that Iran did not invent or even inspire the Bahraini uprising, even though it remains invested and concerned about the outcome. “The uprising today is not Iranian-inspired...the case for reform in Bahrain--and the other Persian Gulf states--is real,” explains Michael Rubin of the American Enterprise Institute. (Rubin, Revolutionary Guard Chief exacerbates UAE-Iran island dispute 2012). However, he continues and adds, “the Iranian regime may try to hijack it,” a possibility that until now has not been substantiated or validated by the accusers. This is a point that Frederic Wehrey emphasized in a piece written for the Carnegie Endowment when he stated, “despite such accusations, there is little evidence that Iran provides material or lethal support to the Bahraini opposition.” (Wehrey, A Local Solution for a Local Conflict 2013).

As much as the Bahraini officials have attributed the unrest to an imported Iranian agenda, the opposition has been staunch in rejecting such sentiments. The Bahraini protestors took the streets holding the Bahraini flag and famously chanting “Sunni and Shia brothers, we will never sell our land” and “we are not Shia, not Sunni, we are one nation.” These slogans are an accurate reflection of the core of this national movement. The people on the streets are patriotic, love their country, and simply calling for equal rights and opportunity for all. Now this does not undermine the fact that Iran remains a force that is invested in the outcome in Bahrain. The Shia dominated country will naturally sympathize with the disenfranchised Shia majority in Bahrain and provide them with moral support. But to say that Iran is fueling the protests and causing the unrest, is doing grave injustice to the Bahraini people and their patriotic cause.

Gulf Countries

The Gulf Countries remain highly anxious and concerned with the outcome. Saudi Arabia remains as the leader of the pack and the most vested state in the conflict. The Saudi Kingdom is interested in preserving the status quo with Al-Khalifa in command, to ensure that the Shia opposition has little breathing room to gain any political momentum. Saudi officials view the conflict through sectarian lens, fearing that any change in the balance of power in Bahrain might be a score for its longtime regional adversary, Iran. Thus, it did not take long after the eruption of the protests for Saudi Arabia to call for an urgent meeting where the GCC “pledged full political, economic, security, and defense support for the Al Khalifa of Bahrain.” (Hadar, *The U.S. Should Stay Neutral in the Sunni-Shiite Conflict 2011*). As the Hoover Institute published in one of its articles, “Riyadh was understandably anxious—even desperate—to make sure that the Bahraini royal family survived its most serious challenge to date.” (Hadar, *The U.S. Should Stay Neutral in the Sunni-Shiite Conflict 2011*).

When the situation quickly escalated and the monarchy’s stability was at stake, the GCC deployed more than 1,000 Saudi Arabian and 500 Emirate troops to bolster the demoralized Bahraini security forces. (Bandow 2011). King Hamad appealed to his counterparts in the Gulf Countries and they responded swiftly with no hesitation. The support is unconditional and open ended. A Saudi official spoke with the New York Times about the scope of the aid, “this is the initial phase...Bahrain will get whatever assistance it needs...it’s open-ended.” (Bandow 2011).

Saudi Arabia and the Emirates justified their direct military intervention as supporting the Bahraini security forces and promoting a solution to the crisis. However, many observers saw the ill move by the GCC as an extension of the military aggression that the Bahraini security forces perpetuated. The opposition viewed the GCC’s claimed advocacy for a solution between the Bahraini people and the ruling family as one “on the Khalifa family’s terms.” (Bandow 2011). It became evident that Saudi Arabia was using Bahrain as a frontline for its regional battle with Iran. The Al-Suad wanted to ensure that Iran does not capitalize from any success that the Shia in Bahrain can

achieve thus, their priority was “to stifle Bahrain’s growing democracy movement and preserve the Khalifa family dictatorship.” (Bandow 2011).

THE UNITED STATES

The United States was left in a dilemma between two options that had serious ramifications on its interest in the region. On one hand, the United States has to preserve its image as a champion for pro-democracy and human rights in the region. On the flipside, the Washington is vested in preserving the stronghold of Al-Khalifa because it cannot afford a regime change that can threaten the strategic presence of its Fifth Fleet in Bahrain. The latter seemed to take priority, as American officials remained on the sidelines reluctant to show any manifestations of sympathy towards the pro-democracy movement. Furthermore, the “Obama administration quietly backed the Saudi intervention.” (Carpenter, *Syria’s Civil War and the Dangers of the Middle East Power Struggle* 2012). This led many Muslims to believe that the United States applied a double standard “between Washington’s vehement condemnation of brutal, undemocratic behavior in such countries as Iran, Syria, and Gaddafi’s Libya—all adversaries of the United States—and the solicitous U.S. treatment of Bahrain’s repressive regime.” (Carpenter, *Syria’s Civil War and the Dangers of the Middle East Power Struggle* 2012).

Many criticized the United States for its imbalanced approach in Bahrain. With the change in the socio-political climate in Bahrain, the United States had to devise a new strategy in which it can secure its political and security interests but not at the cost of brushing off its democratic ideals. The United States could have leveraged its power to pressure the government to go to the dialogue table with a willingness to institute effective reform and change that can conform to the people’s demands. In an article published early in the uprising, Michael Rubin made some recommendations pertaining to where the United States should stand in the conflict. He wrote, “preserve the monarchies...but they should no longer be above the law. Governments should be elected, not dismissed on the whims of a hereditary ruler...Promoting a constitutional transformation in Bahrain may present the best hope for renewed

THE SITUATION IN BAHRAIN

stability and preservation of regimes that are essential to U.S. national security.” (Rubin, What To Do about Bahrain 2011). This is a more balanced approach will afford the United States to make a decision of choosing between Al-Khalifa or the Bahraini people.

HUMAN RIGHT’S VIOLATIONS AND ABUSES

The number and extent of the casualties in the Bahraini crisis demonstrate the brutality of the security forces towards their own people. Whether its fatalities, injuries, torture, incarcerations, expulsions, media censorship, etc.; all of these were human right abuses and violations that ought to be condemned and stopped. As of 2014, the uprising resulted in more than 160 deaths and 2,908 injuries. (Parvaz 2012). Doctors reported that they were treating more than 50 injuries per week and that many injured would not seek medical assistance in hospitals out of fear of retaliation by the government. (Clashes mark anniversary of Bahrain protests 2014). The Bahraini Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) also published reports that show the level of human right’s violations that were perpetuated. The BICI reported that many prisoners were victims of physical and psychological abuse and torture. This torture resulted in the death of at least five detainees. (Parvaz 2012). Moreover, thousands of protestors were detained and prisoned without arrest warrants and fair trials. All of these atrocities contributed to rage and anger that only escalated the crisis and trumped any hopes of reconciliation.

A FUTURE OUTLOOK

Hopes of optimism emerged in the hostile political climate when the national dialogue was initiated in February of 2013. Unfortunately, it did not last for too long as talks were halted and discontinued due to the government's unwillingness to advance any substantive reform. Although the conflict is no longer in the headlines, the conflict in no way, shape, or manner resolved. Violence targeted dissidents who took the streets marking the third annual anniversary of the 2011 uprising. Anti-government protestors who marched towards the symbolic Pearl Roundabout were welcomed with birdshots and tear gas that caused tens to be wounded. Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR) also indicated that there were 36 arrests that were documented. Many international human right organizations took the headlines to warn of the escalation of violence and requested the government to put a stop to it. Amnesty International condemned what it classified as "relentless repression" and "feared a violent crackdown on the anniversary demonstrations", (Dooley 2014). Furthermore, the International Federation of Human rights "urged Bahrain to take immediate measures to restore the rule of law, to put an end to ongoing human rights violations." In the meantime, the Bahrain opposition led by Al-Wefaq showed great measures of restraint and wisdom calling for "overall political process to rebuild the state... free elections...and an independent judiciary." (Dooley 2014).

The underlying problems that have halted efforts of national reconciliation between the government and the opposition are "continued opportunism sectarian rhetoric that have fostered a sense of constant threat among all actors." (Wehrey, Sadjadpour, et al. 2013). Matar Ebrahim Matar summarized what he views as the only avenue for a resolution to the ongoing crisis when he stated, "negotiations will continue to fail until the ruling family is ready to share their wealth, power, and resources with the people of Bahrain." (Wehrey, Sadjadpour, et al. 2013). He later added that Al-Khalifa "carry the burden of productive engagement" in this process. (Wehrey, Sadjadpour, et al. 2013).

THE SITUATION IN BAHRAIN

The United States has to play its role as an influential player in the region. Brian Dooley director of human rights defenders, wrote a letter published in the New York Times suggesting that the Obama administration ought to step up and condemn Bahrain's unacceptable behavior. He explained that "the Bahrain monarchy has abused the trust of its American ally...it's time for the United States government to admit that the Bahrain government is not reforming, and judge the ruling family by its behavior rather than its promises." (Dooley 2014). The United States should feel more compelled to address the Bahraini regime after its despicable decision expelling American State Department official Tom Malinowski, who visited Bahrain and met with top options officials in an effort to promote dialogue. This reckless behavior and instability does not serve your interests in the tiny island.

Bahrain will remain as a key player in the region and an important ally for the United States. The regime's institutionalized practices of politico-economic discrimination and marginalization have alienated a majority of the country's Shia and Sunnis, inspiring grass root protests that culminated in the 2011 uprising. The government has a track record of intolerance, violence, and violations of human rights. Unless the regime is genuine and determined to instill effective reform and change, Bahrain will remain as an unstable state with an unpredictable future.

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ABOUT UMAA

Vision

The vision of the Universal Muslim Association of America (“UMAA”) is to be an expert, professional and intellectual organization that shall enrich American society by engendering an appreciation of Shia Ithna-Asheri Islamic values, ethics, and ideals.

Mission

UMAA seeks to provide a forum to foster unity among Muslims, to participate in civic and political responsibilities, for the purpose of dispelling misgivings about Islam and Muslims in order to help fellow Americans better understand Islam in the light of the Qur’an and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad and his Ahl-ul-Bait. UMAA also seeks to take all necessary measures to help implement this mission and other objectives, which include the social, economic and political advancement of Muslims in America. Specifically, UMAA shall endeavor to:

1. Unify the Shia community in North America;
2. Help and serve in social, economic, and political activities;
3. Be a forum to foster an effective civic participation by Muslims in the United States;
4. Enhance and build our intellectual heritage and facilitate interaction amongst intellectuals;
5. Encourage communication and facilitate networking with other organizations;
6. Strive to ensure civil liberties;
7. Promote an accurate portrayal of the Muslim faith and people through intra-faith and interfaith activities and dialog;
8. Encourage and facilitate education;
9. Provide a forum and a platform for Shia Muslim youth;

THE SITUATION IN BAHRAIN

10. Promote humanitarian causes;
11. Facilitate research on contemporary issues unique to living in the United States;
12. Enable and facilitate health and human services; and
13. Participate in efforts to counter defamation.

Goals & Objectives

1. In furtherance of its mission UMAA objectives are to:
2. Organize conventions, seminars, and workshops to help achieve its objectives.
3. Cooperate and coordinate with other organizations pursuing similar goals.
4. Publish magazines, websites, newsletters, brochures and written materials.
5. Raise funds for the organization.
6. Create Secretariat and other infrastructure to help implement the objectives of the organization.
7. Engage in any legal activities.



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