

2011 ARAB UPRISING IN BAHRAIN:
PROTESTS AND POLITICS IN THE GULF KINGDOM

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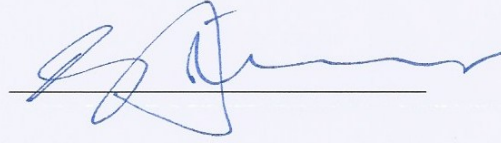
2011 Arab Uprising in Bahrain:
Protests and Politics in the Gulf Kingdom

2011 Bahreyn Arab Ayaklanması:
Körfez Krallığında Protestolar ve Siyaset

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Abstract

2011 events of the Arab Spring did not lead to a regime change in the tiny kingdom of Bahrain. The ruling family is a minority Sunni regime governing a majority Shia population that has not been treated equally with the rest of the population. However, the Shias are not the only ones calling for change as the numerous Sunnis, since country's independence and even earlier, demanded reforms from the Al-Khalifa monarchy. Events of 2011 were a grain of sand in a desert of protests in Bahraini history. I aim to place the 2011 uprising in a greater historical narrative and avoid the popular trends of sectarian politics and Arab exclusivism. To achieve this, I have relied on secondary sources namely books, articles, other academic works and news sites.

Özet

2011 Arap Baharı Bahreyn Krallığı'nda bir rejim deęişimin sebep olmadı. Azınlık Sunni hanedan tarafından yönetilen Şii çoęunluk eşitlik istiyor. Fakat Sunniler de Şiiler kadar El-Halife hanedanı'ndan eşitlik istiyorlar. 2011 yılının protestoları daha önce yapılan protestolarla karşılaştırılabilir. Mezhebcilik paradigmasından çıkarak 2011 protestolarını tarihsel bir çerçeveye yerleştirmeye çalışacağım. Referanslarım kitaplardan, akademik ve akademik olmayan makalelerden ve haber sitelerinden oluşmaktadır.

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Note on Transliterations

When using non-English words or terminology, I have tried to stay loyal to the format accepted by the International Journal of the Middle East Studies. I have used Italics for Arabic terminology and added 's' to make the Arabic terms plural. For the names of states, I have used internationally recognized names of modern era. For example, I have used Iran when talking about the country pre-1925. I have relied on personal transliterations for a few names as they change

Abbreviations

BAPCO - Bahrain Petroleum Company

BICI – Bahrain Independent Commission Inquiry

GCC – Gulf Cooperation Council

HEC – High Executive Committee

IFLB – Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain

MENA – Middle East and North Africa

U.S. – United States of America

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION to BAHRAIN

1.1 ABOUT

Bahrain is an archipelago of some thirty islands (eds Gasiorowski & Long & Reich 2013) situated in the Persian Gulf (hereafter the Gulf). Its capital, Manama, is the largest city. The total population of the country is around 1.3 million and like other countries in its immediate neighborhood, it hosts variety of ethnic and religious groups (International Crisis Group 2011). Having two large neighbors of Iran to the north and Saudi Arabia to the east and smaller neighbors to its northwest and the southeast, Bahrain is the tiniest of the Gulf nations. Geographical proximity and the King Fahd causeway built in 1986 is the only connection Bahrain has to a mainland territory.



(Political Map of Bahrain 2004)

1.2 DEMOGRAPHICS OF ETHNICITY AND RELIGION

Just as the other countries in the Middle East, being Bahraini defined by the state and the Bahraini identity accepted by the populace has changed over time. With the rise of faith-based sectarianism, the religious divisions seem to matter the most in defining identities in Bahrain and in the greater Middle East.

Bahrain's rich history and location at the crossroads of trade routes make it a melting pot of the region's diversity. Ethnically, the country's native population is Arab and the official language of the state is Arabic (despite English being the dominant daily language). Out of the total population, little more than 50% are the native Bahrainis. This makes around 700,000 people. The other half of the population is the expat population hailing from Europe, the United States (U.S.) and Asian countries.

In religious terms (which is how the people in the country most identify themselves as), 99% of the nation adheres to Islam (Population and Demographics 2014). Shia Muslims make up about 70% of the native population while the remaining Muslim population follows Sunni Islam. The split between the Shia and the Sunni Muslims goes almost to the inception of Islam. The divergence occurred over a succession crisis over the death of Prophet Muhammad. Those who favored his cousin and son-in-law, Ali, became the Shias while others who accepted the leadership of a close companion of the Prophet, Abu Bakr, became the Sunnis. As the split continues to this day, the Bahraini population remains largely Shia. Bahrain is one of few countries in the Middle East that not only hosts a Shia population but the Shias make up the majority of the country. Their co-religionists are predominant in neighboring Iran and Iraq, while in the Saudi kingdom next door, the Shias live as minorities under a Sunni banner. In domestic and foreign

affairs of Bahrain, the most relevant groups are the Shias and the Sunnis upon which this thesis is mostly based.

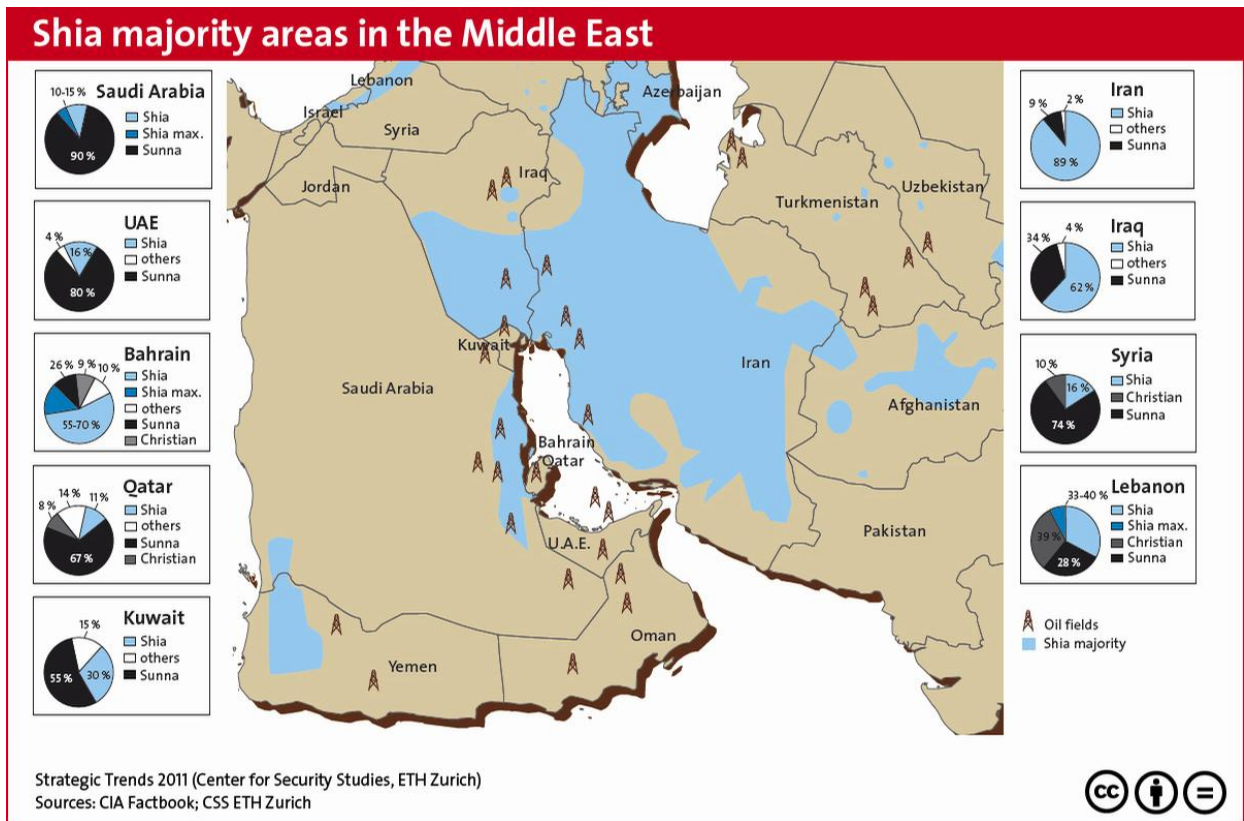
A characteristic shared by both the Sunnis and the Shias is the non-homogeneity. The *Hawala* are the migrants who settled in Bahrain during the 20th century by crossing the Gulf from Iran and claim Sunni and Arab lineage (International Crisis Group 2011). The *Baharna* are Bahrain's native Arab Shia community who has been living on the island pre-dating the Al-Khalifa rule (Jadaliyya 2015). They consider themselves to be the true inhabitants of Bahrain and the surrounding smaller islands (Washington Institute 2011). Another Shia group called the *Ajam* are Persian Shias who arrived at Bahrain during the 20th century and make up the merchant and intelligentsia circles. Although Bahraini by identity and loyalty, they have been denied citizenship until 2000. They have kept their distinctiveness by not inter-marrying with other groups of Shias (Wehrey 2013). The Sunni communities have increased in numbers in the last decade as many non-Bahrainis were granted citizenship from neighboring countries. More detailed explanation of this will be covered in the upcoming chapters. In socio-political terms, Shias of Bahrain are treated as second class citizens. They lack many rights and do not equally benefit from government subsidies. High unemployment, low standards of living and housing shortages are not unique to Shias but also shared by lower class Sunnis (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2013). The general picture in Bahrain is that the Sunnis are at the top, while the Shias are at the bottom. However, this is not always true as there are Shia businessmen on the corporate level and lower class Sunnis exist albeit few in numbers (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2011).

The demographic divide between the two Sunnis and the Shias have seen changes over the last two decades. The Shias blame the Sunni-dominated Bahraini government of attempting to change country's demographics by nationalizing foreign Sunnis from neighboring countries as well as far-away Pakistan.

The most obvious example is the extension of voting rights within Bahrain to citizens of Saudi Arabia (International Crisis Group 2005). The estimated number of these foreign nationals is around 200,000 (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2011). However, it is not the number but the function that strikes Bahrainis the most. Their employments in defense and security forces scare Bahrainis both in terms of security and future economic employment. The purpose of recruiting non-Bahraini Sunnis also serves the government since these people have no connection to the native Bahrainis, it would be easier for them to follow orders and show less mercy for any dissent. Even so, Bahraini Shias are not the only ones feeling awkward about this. The Sunnis complain that the newcomers are taking over jobs and live in areas historically populated by Bahraini Sunnis (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2011). This mercenary-like strategy was first used by the British who relied on its Indian and Baluchi subjects to quell tribal disputes. Granting foreigners citizenship and involve them within domestic politics is entirely a new phenomenon.

In a hierarchical view of society, the royal family of Al-Khalifas sits at the top along with their Sunni tribal allies. Below them rests the *Hawala*, The *Baharna*, although the majority, come in third, while both the Sunni and Shiite Persians make up the lower classes (International Crisis Group 2005). This hierarchy can be attributed to tribal characteristics of the ruling family. It is a good indication of the imposition of tribal

makeup on Bahraini society rather than considering the size of religious and urban settlements.



(Shia majority areas in the Middle East 2011)

Foreign workers have formed significant portions of Bahraini economy since the discovery of oil and the creation of the oil industry. As mentioned earlier, 45% the total population is made up of expat employees who come to work in this island nation (Gelvin 2012). This expat population can be further divided depending on race. Until the 1970s, expatriates were mainly from India, Iran, Britain and the US (Louer 2008). One group hails largely from European countries and the others are low-skilled job workers from mostly south-east Asia. The largest expatriate population is South Asian. The Asian expat trend started in the 1970s with the high oil boom. As the Arab and Iranian workers

left Bahrain, they were substituted by Asian workers (Louer 2008). In political terms, the expats are not part of and do not want to be part of the Bahraini society. Since non-citizen guest workers have no connections to the politics of the land in which they work, they are automatically the unlikely candidates to stage revolts (Gelvin 2012).

1.3 MONARCHICAL POLITICS IN BAHRAIN AND IN THE GULF

It doesn't come as a surprise to see that the political atmosphere of Bahrain shares similarities with the rest of the Gulf states. Taking its own system of rule, the British created monarchical systems of governance in their colonies (Gelvin 2012). The country's official name is Kingdom of Bahrain, referring to the king and his relatives who are running the country. The current dynasty of the Al-Khalifa family has been ruling Bahrain without disruption since 1783. Similar to Saudi Arabia, Bahrain's king Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa and the larger Al-Khalifa family populates the top government positions. King Hamad became the ruler after the death of the first ruler since independence, Sheikh Isa bin Salman Al-Khalifa, in 1999.

The traditional view holds that the ruler wields absolute power while his family members are appointed to key positions in the government (Peterson 2009, p. 157). While this has some truth to it, in practice, things are blurrier. The role of the king in Bahrain and in the greater Gulf does not signify absolute rule. Jon Alterman notes that the king is not a holder of power but is seen as an arbiter of disputes between different groups rather than serving as their master (Arab Monarchies Confront the Arab Spring 2011). In traditional sense, the king is above politics and does not align himself with any group

although this position has started to change in the last decade. He stands as a figure whose wisdom rather than power is respected among factions (Chatham House 2012).

Although the monarchy is a one big family, it certainly is not a totally happy one. The *Khawalids* are a branch of the Khalifa family who cling to monarchy as an institution more than any others. They form the most conservative wing of the royal family. Their conservatism stems from their dissatisfaction that the British sidelined them over accession to the throne. Yet, they hold many key positions in the government such as ministry of justice and defense forces (Matthiesen 2013). Besides Oman, all other Gulf monarchs are tied to each other via intermarriages. Albeit reluctantly, monarchs feel the duty to help each other in times of trouble (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2012).

Successful traditional states in the developing world have been those who managed to reinvent tradition, personality cult, religion and local culture without abandoning or sometimes controlling the forces of modernization (Davidson 2013). This explains the role of Gulf monarchies who seem to uphold traditions, Islam and the image of charismatic leadership while still remaining in power without much democratization. Mehran Kamrava mentions that the leaders in Kuwait, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia rely on Weberian traditional authority (Kamrava, cited in Common 2008). This strategy of being modern and ancient manifests itself due to number of factors. Religious life is monitored via appointments of clerics and sermons. Despite claiming to be traditional, this practice stands in contrast to pre-modern Middle East where the religious scholars would not be inclined to receive orders from any authority other than God.

Due to the nature of the rentier states (discussed soon), generosity instead of accountability becomes the main virtue of its ruler (Luciani 2013, p.114). Who wouldn't love a ruler who distributes money to the citizens and each citizen gets to be born as elite? What seems to be traditional dress code, white for men and black for women, is upheld by the ruling family as 'national dress code'. It helps to differentiate citizens from foreigners and gives the impression that modernity has not corrupted the people like it has done to the Arabs in the Eastern Mediterranean. However, prior to the oil era, current traditional clothes were not there and the people used to wear different colors and styles (Davidson 2013). As in the other Arab capitals and authoritarian states, the rulers' portraits are hung and distributed across billboards and government buildings. This enforces an image of omnipotence, benevolence and closeness to the populations (Davidson 2013). Museums celebrating local culture have been established in home countries as well as funds have been transferred to universities in Western cities to open Islamic Studies and Middle Eastern Studies programs.

More recently, the monarchy in Bahrain, as other states in the region, began to portray itself as a buffer zone between different factions. From its perspective, without the monarchy the society would descend into chaos and Islamist forces would take over the nation. Since 1979, monarchy has felt somewhat under attack from Iran either directly or indirectly. As one ministry official stated "without the monarchy, Bahrain would go the way of Iraq and Lebanon". (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2008). This logic is stated more often after the 2006 elections in Iraq that brought Shias into power. Portraying monarchy as arbiter of justice and security serves more the royalists than it does the public.

The Gulf countries have paid attention to their international image as much as domestic fame. In general, they have created strong foreign policies to help them survive. The Palestinians have been funded throughout in their struggle against Israel. Given the size of the Gulf countries, they have sought to forge good relations with fellow Muslim states. They have aided the U.S. in anti-terror efforts. Small size peace keeping missions abroad have all contributed to keep their image as friendly states (Davidson 2013).

1.4 POLITICAL ASSOCIATIONS

In legal terms, Bahrain has no competing parties. What we would consider political parties in the West competing to run the country are referred to as political societies or associations (International Crisis Group 2005). Despite unofficiality, Bahrain is still the most liberal Gulf country with diverse and serious opposition. It serves as an example to the rest of the region (Bahrain: A Conversation About Its Challenges and Opportunities 2013).

The largest political association in Bahrain is the Al-Wifaq. Its main constituency is derived from the Shia population, but also from non-Shia middle and lower classes (Wehrey 2013). Its leader during the 2011 uprising was Sheikh Ali Salman. Despite being led by a sheikh and largely a Shia political organization, its goals are far-reaching than just the Shia concerns (International Crisis Group 2005). The goals are directed at more secular gains such as equality, more transparency from the government and economic opportunities promoted within an Islamic framework. According to its leader, Al-Wifaq represents around 60% of Bahraini population (Wehrey 2013). Al-Wifaq's supporters are a mixture of Hezbollah and Al-Dawa trends (discussed later).

As a newcomer to the politics in 2005, Al-Haq feels frustrated with how Al-Wifaq has been doing politics and working with the government. It split from Al-Wifaq after the 2006 elections (Peterson 2009, p. 167) and calls for the re-establishment of the brief 1973 constitution. Al-Haq stands as a radical movement compared to Al-Wifaq as it openly calls for the removal of the ruling family altogether. Its supporters are lower class Shias who are not afraid of using violence, boycotts and small attacks for political gains (Wehrey 2013).

Al-Amal is another Shia organization that follows similar goals as Al-Wifaq. It used to be militant and more radical during the 1990s when they openly called for overthrow of the monarchy. Since the 2000s, they have been pursuing more conciliatory approach (Wehrey 2013). Their members belong to the *Shirazi* (discussed soon) trend of Shia politics.

Al-Minbar is an extension of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt although they are similar to Kuwaiti platform rather than the Egyptian group (Wehrey 2013). They are a Sunni political group standing somewhere between liberal cosmopolitanism and conservatism. Their stance is not concrete with regards to the Shia population of Bahrain. They share similar goals with Al-Wifaq but its supporters are from Sunni *Hawala* and the Sunni middle class. Al-Minbar is the only Muslim Brotherhood group in the Gulf region that is pro-regime (Matthiesen 2013).

Established in 2002, Al-Asala is another Sunni party that is closer to Salafi trend. Their base of supporters are the lower class Sunnis. Traditionally, they have been more critical of the ruling party because they have less to lose, however, as the Shia political groups became stronger and the Shia ascendancy more visible, royal family aligned

themselves with Salafis and appointed some as ministers. Despite being a Sunni group like the Al-Minbar, there are doctrinal and support base differences between the two groups (Wehrey 2013). The Saudi Arabian support has made the Salafis stand out compared to other Islamist groups ((International Crisis Group 2011). It is a leftist group that has its origins in the 1950s. It sided with Al Wifaq during the protests (Matthiesen 2013). They called for a cross-sectarian cooperation but remained a small group as the protests were from mostly Islamist leaning groups (Davidson. 2012).

Compared with the 1950s and 1960s, liberal political groups are either very small or completely absent from the political arena. The Islamist forces in Bahrain cover most of the political debate and institutionally do not leave space for liberals to operate (Peterson 2009, p. 182).

Other than Al-Haq, none of the political societies want the overthrow of the monarchy or its replacement with a republican form of government. They prefer to keep the current system running albeit with some necessary changes and reforms. Sunni parties differ from the Shias in their support for the monarchy. They all remain flexible rather than ideological based and believe that acceptable change is only the beginning. In any reform process or protests, Bahraini Islamists are able to organize themselves, raise their causes in the West and recruit support faster than other groups. They are also open for alliances with secular liberal groups (Peterson 2009, p. 182). It is also noteworthy to mention that in the Arab world, Shia political identity rests on three main trends. Al-Dawa came out of Iraqi politics and found footing in Bahrain and Kuwait. Branch from Al-Dawa broke off and became the Hezbollah trend. The Hezbollah trend follows the Iranian leadership in politics (Matthiesen 2013). Third group, *Shirazis*, originated in Iraq

and worked to Islamicize the society. After Saddam's oppression, they moved to Kuwait and then to Iran, creating transnational movement ready to use armed struggle to achieve their aims (International Crisis Group 2011).

1.5 NOTABLE PERSONALITIES OF BAHRAIN

The personalities related to 2011 protests start from the previous ruler of Bahrain, Sheikh Isa. He reigned from 1961 and oversaw the independence of Bahrain from Britain. Him and his brother Sheikh Khalifa ran the Bahraini affairs. He died in 1999, leaving the throne to his son and current king Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa. Sheikh Isa's role as mediator made him popular and at times a reformer ruler (Wehrey 2013).

Sheikh Khalifa has been running Bahraini affairs since 1970 making him the longest reigning prime minister in the world. He is known as a hardliner and represents the conservative order in Bahraini politics. He is the brother of Sheikh Isa and is the uncle of the current king. During his partnership with Sheikh Isa, he ran the state affairs, bureaucracy, appointed government officials and built the security forces. Sheikh Isa, at the same time, busied himself with building up his reputation as the good king by making himself available to the populace. Sheikh Khalifa became one of the richest, if not the richest, person in Bahrain during this time. He also built up his personal influence by enriching family and tribal allies (Peterson 2009, p. 158).

Bahrain's current king is Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa. As is the tradition in monarchical states, he inherited the Kingdom of Bahrain in 1999 after his father, Isa Bin Salman Al-Khalifa, passed away. In 2002, he changed his title from the traditional tribal

title of *emir* to king. His coming to power was hoped to bring millennial expectations of Bahrainis who were unhappy with the previous ruler and wanted change for the better.

Sheikh Salman Bin Hamad (hereafter Crown Prince to avoid confusion with Sheikh Salman below) is the son of King Hamad and the crown prince. In the monarchy, he is viewed as a modernizer (Open Democracy 2011) and took a softer approach dealing with the protestors and tried to reach an agreement (Independent 2011). His Western education and young age relative to his uncle makes him a likely candidate with whom it is easier negotiate and reach an agreement (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2012).

Sheikh Ali Salman is a Qom educated Shia cleric and one of the most influential people in Bahrain. He served as the leader of Al-Wifaq, the largest opposition movement in Bahrain. During the 1990s, he was exiled by the monarchy for allegedly supporting the uprising against the king. He was pardoned in 2001 and returned to Bahrain. He is known for his moderate political stance and non-violent opposition. He is influential but not all powerful which leaves him to build consensus (Wehrey 2013).

Sheikh Isa Qasim is the highest authority pertaining to religious matters in Bahrain. He serves as the spiritual leader of the Al-Wifaq and leads Bahrain's senior Shia clerical body, Islamic Scholars Council (Wehrey 2013). He is known as a representative of Ayatollah Khamenei in Bahrain (Mabon 2012). While ties to Iranian clerics is obvious, many Bahraini Shias' spiritual loyalties lie elsewhere, something Sheikh Isa Qasim tries to change.

1.6 BAHRAINI AND GULF ECONOMIES

The Gulf emirates distinguish their economies from other Arab states thanks to the abundance of oil and the almost inseparable connections between the rulers and the businessman. They all benefit from hydrocarbon reserves (Gelvin 2012). Oil was discovered in the early twentieth century and gave the region the importance it lacked compared to the Arab states in the Eastern Mediterranean. Outside powers such as Britain and various oil companies were interested in exploiting the oil riches of the region for their industrial needs and domestic consumptions. Presence of oil made the British pursue a strategy of divide and rule in the Gulf and they drew the borders of countries according to their own oil interests (Luciani 2013, p.109). The Gulf states lacked at first the right to use their own resources for their own needs and later (as today) became targets of outside meddling. By World War I, considering the possibilities for the potential existence of oil reserves in Bahrain, Britain signed informal oil exploration agreements with then-ruler Sheikh Isa to keep out any foreign explorers (Fuccaro 2009). Oil production before 1970s was centralized by foreign companies, then came independence and the oil nationalization (Luciani 2013, p.107). Over the course of the 20th century, the Gulf rulers slowly worked to nationalize their oil industries and reap the financial benefits of their own resources (Gelvin 2007).

Since the Gulf states today rely mostly on oil, their economies have been termed as rentier states. The rentier states derive their wealth not by taxing their populations but from natural resources. The states in turn distribute the wealth to the citizenry, to relatives and friends more than others, and finance certain projects. Spending rather than collecting becomes the function of the rentier state (Luciani 2013, p.114). Rentier economy is

viewed as the most central pillar to monarchical survival (Davidson 2013). Today, Bahrain used its oil resources to create a welfare state and distributed oil wealth among its citizens (Louer 2008), most visibly in form of housing (Davidson 2013). There have been many explanations of how rentier states work and what their impacts are. According to Hazem Beblawi's article in 1987, it leads to creation of an elite citizenry dependent on the state while diminishes the chances of a middle class from emerging (eds Beblawi & Luciani 1987).

In the domain of economics, Bahrain stands unique due to its depleted oil resources. There is a gradual transition into a post-oil economy (Chatham House 2012) which has forced Bahrain to depend on banking, tourism and Saudi finance (Wehrey 2013). The oil boom of the 1970s coupled with the Lebanese civil war posed an opportunity for Bahrain to attract the financial sector based on offshore establishments (Louer 2008). Bahrain hosts operation centers of over 100 banks (National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations 2002). It is becoming harder to keep up with governmental generosity in a monarchy like Bahrain with a declining resource for wealth and a growing population (Davidson 2013). Today, Bahrainis only constitute quarter of the workforce but the population is growing (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2011).

The discovery of oil in the Gulf started with Bahrain in 1934 (eds Gasiorowski & Long & Reich 2011). Despite the contemporary dominance of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain's oil riches were discovered earlier than those of the Saudis whose oil caught world's eye in 1935. After obtaining permission from the ruler of Bahrain at the time, Standard Oil Company of California started to drill oil via its sub-branch Bahrain Petroleum Company (BAPCO) (National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations 2002).

Bahrain's oil reserves, although near depletion, makes it attractive to the Saudis. It hosts BAPCO refinery, one of the largest in the world through which passes crude oil to Saudi Arabia via 54 km long pipeline (Nuruzzaman 2013). Financial links between the two kingdoms bind their economies further. With the rise of new cities in the Gulf such as Dubai and Doha, oil was put to good use in Manama to turn Bahrain into the region's business and banking center (Nuruzzaman 2013). Bahrain's GDP grew at a rate of 6.1% between 2000 and 2009 (Nuruzzaman 2013). Saudi investments constitute large parts of Bahraini development projects ranging from construction to tourism sector totaling U.S. \$1 billion annually (Nuruzzaman 2013). Each day around 45,000 trucks cross to Bahrain from Saudi Arabia (Bahrain: A Conversation About Its Challenges and Opportunities 2013). Bahrain is a major tourism destination for the Saudis who account for 70% of Bahraini tourists and view the Gulf region as a get-away with its loose attitude toward excesses. Many Saudis cross into Bahrain on Fridays in order to drink alcohol, something unthinkable back home (Mabon 2012). The Saudis who provide 77% of Bahrain's oil have further increased their investments since 2011 (Chatham House 2012). According to Paul Sullivan, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain will also be connected by railways and air networks (Bahrain: A Conversation About Its Challenges and Opportunities 2013).

CHAPTER 2

BAHRAINI HISTORY UNTIL INDEPENDENCE (1780s – 1970)

2.1 AS MODERNITY ARRIVES (1780s to 1900s)

One can say that Bahrain's location has been its greatest strength while its size has been its greatest weakness. Its location has made it a center of commerce and trade for centuries while its size has made it a shrimp among sharks. Since the 1500s, the Safavids of Iran held sway over the Gulf region and competed with the Ottomans in the domination of the Near East. With the advent of Portuguese naval expeditions, the Portuguese tried to set a foothold in the region but were driven out by the Safavids. The European approachment was due to the controlling of trade routes that yielded goods as products travelled from Asia to Europe. The Portuguese were followed by the Dutch only to be superseded by the British who managed to leave a lasting impact until the 1970s (eds Gasiorowski & Long & Reich 2013).

Al-Khalifa's arrival altered both the political and social structure of Bahrain. The successful invasion introduced tribal community customs as the socio-political forces in Bahrain during the nineteenth century (Fuccaro 2009). Previously, Shia peasants of Bahrain and the mainland Shias of Qatif and Ahsa formed a resistance against Sunni tribal invasions from the mainland Arabia. But in 1783, Al Khalifas were not stopped. More importantly, the arrival of Sunni tribes who ruled over Shia agriculturalists added an economic dimension over an already separate sectarian identity of the island. They brought and elevated their tribal version of politics upon a semi-agricultural land. The

new level of domination was exemplified by the separation of neighborhoods and the creation of new ones for the ruling tribe.

The British were mainly interested in protecting their maritime trade and secure their control over India, which was the crown jewel of the British empire (Kinninmont 2012, p.33). While the British was replacing other European powers as the big kid on the block, events in the Arabian interior were slowly spilling over to the coastal region. Al-Khalifa family was caught up in tribal disputes and moved out of central Arabia to the area of Kuwait today. Initially kicked out of Kuwait, they landed in Qatar but the tribal conflict still ensued (Davidson 2013). This land hopping ended in 1783 when Al-Khalifas made their way to Bahrain, captured the island from its Qajar governor and made it their new home (Jadaliyya 2015). The destinies of Bahrain and Britain were linked thanks to simultaneously intersecting mutual interests and the decline of Qajari influence. After its loss to Britain, Qajar rulers called for Bahrain's ownership in 1820s but the British might have overruled Persian diplomatic rhetoric (Mabon 2012).

As the piracy in the Gulf was disrupting the shipping lanes of the British East India Company and the inter-tribal disputes led to confrontations among the Gulf's inhabitants, the British first annihilated the threat of pirates and then secured treaties with the capable sheikhs who were seen influential enough to create stability (Davidson 2013). At the beginning of the 19th century, these sheikhdoms were called the Trucial states. Here onwards, their foreign policies were linked to the British interests who concomitantly kept things under control and secured each sheikh's right to rule in his own territory, thus granting semi-borders for each country in the Gulf today. The Perpetual Maritime Truce signed in 1853 guaranteed Britain's position vis-a-vis the Gulf

states permanently (Davidson 2013). Few Ottoman advances into the Gulf forced the British to sign exclusive agreements with the Gulf rulers. These took place as the British were slowly advancing towards Middle Eastern territories (Fuccaro 2009). Despite being a foreigner, the British rule did create stability which in turn fostered regional trade.

Pearling, fishing, animal husbandry and maritime commerce were the foundations of Gulf economy (eds Gasiorowski & Long & Reich 2013). The pearl trade was organized under the auspices of the Al-Khalifa family. The family continued tribal politics and located family members on key positions of the pearl production. With this economic nepotism, members of the ruling family became wealthiest merchants in Bahrain (Fuccaro 2009). Over the course of the century, this resulted in the negligence of the agricultural sector and the prominence of the pearl trade. By the 1900s, Bahrain became an importer of agricultural dates from neighboring Saudi Arabia while at the same time surpassed Muscat as the leading commercial capital of the Gulf (Fuccaro 2009).

2.2 BETWEEN THE TWO WORLD WARS (1900s – 1950)

The protection of the British Government has converted the island from a scene of chronic external aggression and intestinal feud into a peaceful and flourishing center of industry and commerce. (Curzon, cited in Fuccaro 2009).

During the World War I, Bahrain retained its importance. Manama was used as a base for carrying out operations against the Ottomans in Mesopotamia. In 1919, Manama was reorganized and reformed along modern state structure (Fuccaro 2009). This coincided with the establishment of mandate system and the indirect British rule in Mesopotamia. Although not a mandate, Bahrain was linked to Government of India and managed by the British Residency in Bushehr.

In this new order, the pearl merchants took on the responsibility of local affairs and aligned themselves with the ruling family. After the pearling industry collapsed, traditional economy centered on the pearl industry disintegrated which eventually ended the reform and reorganization of the 1920s. By the 1950s, the socio-economic realities created by the oil boom challenged the dominance of pearl merchants who in the zeitgeist of Pan-Arab nationalism stood for conservative old order along with the monarchy and their British overlords.

The 1934 discovery of oil in Bahrain was a game changer in many ways. It served to alter ways of living for many Bahrainis. Politically, it brought a new era in relations between Bahrain and its imperial master (Fuccaro 2009). The economy took a new turn as the seafaring and pearl trade based mercantilism and animal husbandry were being sidelined by oil fields. The glittering skyscrapers across the Gulf region we see today have their urban origins in the discovery of oil. With this new commodity, traditional port cities like Manama became new capitals and modern faces of the Gulf. Until the 1920s, Muharraq was the seat of government where the Al-Khalifa family resided. The capital had switched to Manama due to the oil discoveries (Fuccaro 2009). Oil, however, did not spare Bahrain from the effects of Great Depression. Later, the 1930s saw relative prosperity which lasted until the 1940s when due to World War II, trade restrictions were enforced on the island.

British aims in Bahrain did not end with the reorganization of the state structure along western lines. Talks flowed between London and the local Bahraini officers over whether the population at large should be educated and taught the ways of civilization for betterment of British presence in the Gulf. By 1939, oil in Bahrain and in the neighboring

Iran and Iraq became more important to supply the British arms (Kent 1993). After India's independence, British Residency was transferred from Bushehr to Manama. This put further emphasis on educating native population to create a more manageable Bahrain (Fuccaro 2009).

One of the side effects of the oil era was to create a larger rift between the rural and urban Bahrain centered on Manama. Oil mixed with connection to the outside world and westernization alienated the rural folks from their urban compatriots. The rural agricultural world was characterized by its poverty, dominant Shiism and traditions. Manama's modernity stood in contrast with rural countryside (Fuccaro 2009).

2.3 POPULAR MOBILIZATIONS OF PRE-INDEPENDENCE (1950s – 1971)

2.3.1 Nasserite Era and the Impact of Arab Nationalism

In the aftermath of World War II, Arab nationalism was the leading zeitgeist across the Arab World. The ideal unity of the Arab nation personified by the Egyptian leader of the time, Gamal Abdul Nasser, appealed to the hearts and minds of the post-mandate/independence Arab peoples. As the colonial states were gaining independence, the leftists groups of Arab nationalists and communists sought to gain their independencies from Britain and France. The popularity of these groups threatened both the Gulf monarchies and their western patrons (Matthiesen 2013). Nasser's ideology was not conceived of as a tool to destroy oil monarchies but its republican form was understood to that effect (Luciani 2013, p.119).

During the 1950s and 1960s, the Shias in Bahrain as well as other Shias in the greater Middle East embraced the non-sectarian appeal of Arab nationalism popularized

by the charismatic Egyptian leader Gamal Abdul Nasser. The rising tide of Arab nationalism offered previously apolitical groups the opportunity to be part of the newly independent states whose identities were either recently shaped or partially clouded in ideological lore (Nasr 2006). The Bahraini Shia, although not a minority and confident in their national identities, answered the call for the unity of the Arab nation and aligned themselves with Sunni Bahrainis in challenging the monarchy for political reforms. Many Shias joined these leftist groups to be on the equal footing as their fellow Sunni countrymen (Matthiesen 2013).

It wasn't too hard for political Arabism to become part of political rhetoric. It said no to sect, locality, and traditional leadership. Traditional ties continued for the populace at large however the urban educated leaders sought new language of nationalism for their interests. With the sole purpose of organizing military at popular levels and resist British occupation, Al-Ha'yah was established after the traditional *Majlis* was dissolved which was the last link tying the new elite to traditional structures (Fuccaro 2009).

Nationalism served to create a means to create a large-scale mobilization against the tribal government contrary to pre-modern Manama setting that fragmented popular politics along lines of patronage and locality. Before the oil era, those who had complaints appealed to different men of position when Al-Khalifa and by extension his family acted against resident's interests. Authority of the Al-Khalifas was not always intelligible to the common folks and at times even coercive (Fuccaro 2009). Most important note here is that while reigning as rulers in monarchical fashion, certain limitations were available to hold the royal family accountable for any injustices.

The Sunni *Hawala* working for Al-Ha'yah defied traditional way of doing things. A *Hawala* gentleman became resistant to listening authority elders for advice. He was educated and followed developments in the other Arab capitals. The Sunnis became the main opposition force against Al-Khalifas, accusing the family of corruption. Their concerns were more of an idealist trend (Fuccaro 2009). At the same time, the *Baharna* were busy with grievances of the Shia lower classes. They held onto traditional settings and used their connections for populist slogans. They disapproved the economic hierarchy under which they were deemed as lower classes. For employment, their connections to the merchant communities and religious leaders allowed them to get some jobs in the oil industry. Unlike the *Hawala*, their main concerns were more of practical nature (Fuccaro 2009). Even though different in aims, what united these two groups was the understanding of nationalism which in theory promised to bring equality and getting rid of non-Bahrainis like the Indians and the British from the economic fields. Local tools such as sports clubs and newspapers also helped to promote nationalism among the public.

The urban-rural divide continued and the Arab nationalism slowly waned in the region. By 1970s, this divide started to be expressed in the newly popular religious rhetoric (Fuccaro 2009).

2.3.2 1954 Protests

Small incidents between Sunni and Shia populations had resulted in riots and soon after the workers in BAPCO started to fight amongst themselves. Later on, the merchants, BAPCO employees and the administration's employees joined to create National Union

Committee. Soon it became a union and directly tackled the problem of having foreigners in the workforce. They viewed foreign workers as agents of imperial power and the monarchy. They were able to attract public attention further by connecting freedom in the workforce with the freedom of the nation from the British (Louer 2008).

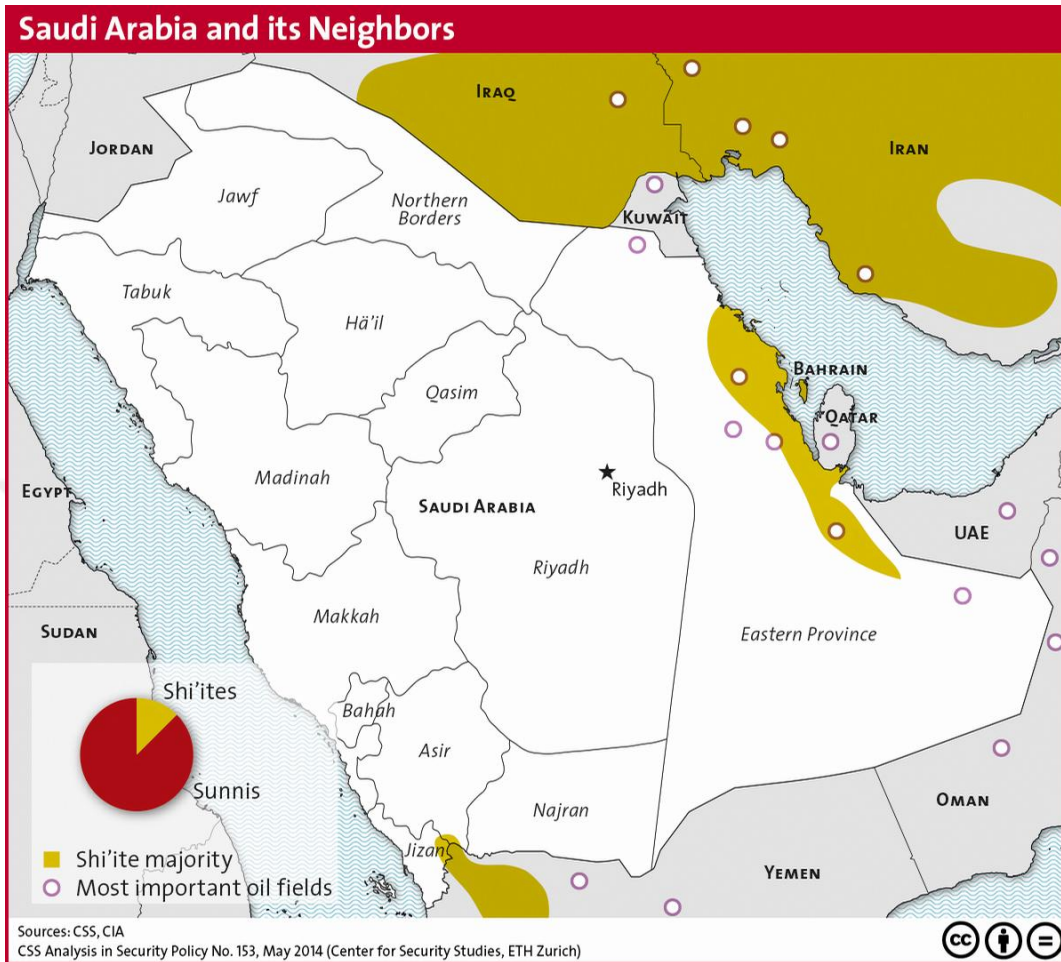
After series of meetings between Shia and Sunni community members, Higher Executive Committee (HEC) was established by four Shia and four Sunni leaders (Jadaliyya 2012). It was a nationalist organization and worked hard to blur the sectarian differences between Bahrain's religious communities. As the oil industry hosted workers from abroad and the native Sunni and Shia workers, cross-sectarian identities were being forged. HEC played a role in creating this working Bahraini identity which was further reinforced by the ideas of Arab nationalism. This was a period of cooperation among the different sects in Bahrain that is in contrast with today's political developments (Kinninmont 2012, p.36). Their demands included labor unions, establishment of Supreme Court and legal code. Although able to collect 25.000 signatures, the authorities did not take them too seriously and tried to play religious fervor against it. The British and French attack on Egypt in the Suez war led to more protests and helped to unite Shia and Sunni Bahrainis against imperialism (Bahry 1997). The protests were used as an excuse to dismantle the Committee.

2.3.3 Relations with the Outside World

After World War II, the British interest waned in the Indian subcontinent due to newly independent Pakistan and India. Around the same time, the importance of the Gulf rose as oil became a factor of politics. Iran, Iraq, Kuwait and other Gulf states rose in

importance (eds Gasiorowski & Long & Reich 2013). As mentioned earlier, Manama had become the headquarters of British politics.

Abdul Nasser had captivated the hearts of the Bahraini and the Gulf nationals in general. But, it was Iraq with its proximity to the Gulf, larger size, and its revolution in 1958 that challenged the security and stability in the Gulf (Anthony 2011, p.82). The 1958 revolution had brought Nasser's ideals closer to home and had shown that the other Gulf monarchies might be vulnerable. In 1957, Iranian parliament under the Shah passed a legislation claiming Bahrain to be Iran's province (Davidson 2013). Iran had claims on Bahrain based on Iran's historical influence in the region. Before the British, it was Qajar dynasty from Iran that partially ran the Gulf affairs (Anthony 2011, p.81). Therefore, when the time for independence came in 1971, Iran argued that Bahrain become part of Iran due to shared religious affiliations. Britain decided that it would be a great idea to ask the people of Bahrain what they would prefer. United Nations put forth a public referendum asking Bahrainis what kind of post-British scenario they would prefer. Most of the respondents chose independence instead of being ruled by a foreign power including Iran. Disappointed with the results, the Shah decided to get extra territory by annexing islands that belonged to Ra's al-Khaymah. This move placed Iran as an aggressor and opportunist in the eyes of the Gulf rulers that still remain to this day (Anthony 2011, p.84).



(Saudi Arabia and Its Neighbors 2014)

Compared to western Europeans, particularly the British, the United States is a newcomer to the Middle East. It was after World War II that the U.S. started to pay serious attention to the region to keep the Soviets out. Deterrence and defense against Soviet military threat was the most important thing in Western capitals (National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations 2002). The U.S. pressure on the invading forces of Britain, France and Israel helped to create an image of good guy U.S. The 1956 war allowed the U.S. to finally replace France and Britain in the Middle East as the major western power

(Gelvin 2007). Oil was one of the reasons that attracted the U.S. and as it does today, it stood imperative in U.S. circles both for its economic and strategic lure.



CHAPTER 3

INDEPENDENCE UNTIL THE ARAB SPRING (1970 – 2011)

3.1 BAHRAIN AND THE GULF BETWEEN INDEPENDENCE AND THE GULF WAR (1971 – 1991)

3.1.1 Continuation of British Politics in Bahrain

In August 1971, Bahrain was granted its independence after almost two centuries of British rule. The biggest legacy of British presence on Bahrain and in the Gulf was the introduction of modern systems of governance and legal practices. The Gulf remained culturally cosmopolitan as English was promoted to be the language of trade (eds Gasiorowski & Long & Reich 2013).

The period between 1973-1975 is the beginning point for reform in the Bahraini opposition (Wehrey 2013). After the independence, Sheikh Isa started the new country with promises of a constitution. Constitutional assembly was set in place to design a constitution with a parliament hosting forty-four members. Small quarrels existed between Sheikh Isa and the new parliament over foreign policy, U.S. presence and the national budget (Bahry 1997). But it was the State Security Law that caused the mayhem because the government did not want to relinquish the right to arrest and detain people without a trial.

First parliament was closed due to threat posed by unity of factions who were seen as detrimental to the rule by Al-Khalifa family. Sheikh Isa granted the government powers to arrest and imprison anyone who was thought to be a security threat (Louer 2008). It was an experiment with parliamentarianism rather than a step towards

democratizing Bahrain (Wehrey 2013). First experiment ended in 1975. As a result, leftist groups were suppressed while Islamic groups who were more interested in spirituality and ethics were tolerated, if not liked (Louer 2008).

3.1.2 International Relations in the Gulf

We should try hard to export our revolution to the world, and should set aside the thought that we do not export our revolution, because Islam does not regard various Islamic countries differently and is the supporter of all the oppressed people of the world. On the other hand, all the superpowers and all the powers have risen to destroy us. If we remain in an enclosed environment we shall definitely face defeat. We should clearly settle our accounts with the powers and superpowers and should demonstrate to them that, despite all the grave difficulties that we have, we shall confront the world with our ideology (MERIP Reports 1980).

Before the Iranian Revolution, the Shias in Bahrain called for equality within Bahraini society by relying on leftist and nationalist ideologies. After the 1960s and into the 1970s, religious leaders did start to get more voice and influence within Bahrain (Wehrey 2013). The slow death of Arab nationalism after the 1967 war (Dawisha 2003) coupled with the failure of left and secular ideologies to bring about their promises led the people in Bahrain as well as in the greater Middle East to turn to religiously charged hopes. The Iranian Revolution only added to the already blossoming faith-based Bahraini opposition.

Iran tried to export the revolution's fervor in its near abroad by relying on Islamist Shia groups in neighboring states. In 1981, a coup attempt by the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain (IFLB) against the Al-Khalifa rule was averted. The monarchy was quick to point fingers to Iran as similar activities took place elsewhere in the region. Some of the goals of IFLB to unify the Shias across the Gulf, challenge the Saudis on legitimacy over the Holy Places, and eventually the revival of classical Islamic

civilization (Mabon 2012). These Shias were specifically the Shirazis who had created a transnational Shia movement among Gulf nations in the 1970s and were followers of Muhammad Mahdi Al-Shirazi (Matthiesen 2013). The result of the coup attempt was the arrest of numerous Bahraini and Saudi nationals who took part and a watch-out warning to the Bahraini government for the loyalty of Shias inside the kingdom (Mabon 2012).

Those that had nothing to do with the coup attempt but were in opposition to the monarchy were wrongly portrayed as fifth columns for Iran, further driving them away from secular and liberal lines. Labeling opposition to suppress them had been a tool since 1920s when the opposition was called communists, Nasserites in the 1950s and since 1979, agents of Iran (Wehrey 2013).

According to John Duke Anthony, there are several reasons for the establishment of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) (Anthony 2011, p.77) in 1981. One event stands out as more important than others, the Iran-Iraq war. Its original goal was to prevent spillage of Iran-Iraq war into the Gulf states (National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations 2011). It was supposed to imitate a union like the European Union, including a common currency among the Gulf states (Davidson 2013). Its military side did not live up to its promise. The size was short of expected number of 10,000 servicemen. It still remains unclear how many soldiers remain active and who actually controls the command structure.

As mentioned in the introduction, Britain had served as the main foreign security guarantor of the Gulf kingdoms against their larger neighbors since the 18th century (Matthiesen 2013). In the post-independence Gulf, the U.S. was quick to fill in as the sheikhs' main foreign patron. The 400-year-old cycle of a great western power

administering international affairs of the Gulf continued without disruption (Anthony 2011, p.81).

Bahrain is the home to the U.S. Fifth Fleet. It is technically responsible for naval forces in the Gulf, the Red Sea, the Arabian Sea, and the coast of Africa (Matthiesen 2013). Even though the U.S. put great emphasis on the Gulf, its naval presence in Bahrain was, during its establishment and many years afterwards, symbolic in nature (National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations 2002). This characteristic of the American presence, despite being explicitly militaristic, did not amount to any offensive adventures. As the British Royal Navy was pulling out of the Gulf, the passive American navy was simply filling in the vacuum. It is technically responsible for naval forces in the Gulf, the Red Sea, the Arabian Sea, and the coast of Africa (Matthiesen 2013).

In the 1970s, the U.S.' main strategy was to secure access to oil by relying on the two big countries in the region, Iran and Saudi Arabia (Gause III 2013, p.296). The U.S. served as a mediator between Iran and Saudi Arabia who were more comfortable talking to U.S. than to each other (Anthony 2011, p.85). This twin pillar strategy lasted until 1979 when the Iranian Revolution removed one of the pillars. Iran started to wage ideological war on American allies in the Middle East. This brought Arab oil monarchies close to the U.S. for protection (Hudson 2013, p.331).

Small pockets of Bahraini assistance helped to relieve the U.S. on many occasions. During the Iran-Iraq war, Bahraini soldiers helped rescue American sailors from a boat sunken by Iraqi attack (National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations 2002). Few years on in the first Gulf War, Bahrain contributed to driving back Iraqi forces from Kuwait by allowing American forces to be stationed in the island. During the Desert

Shield and Desert Storm operations, Sheikh Isa air base was available for stationing American troops (National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations 2002). After Kuwait was secured, 1300 American military personnel continued to be present in Bahrain to contain further Iraqi aggression during the 1990s (Congressional Research Service 2012). Fearful of both Iraq and Iran, the GCC states felt they could not trust anyone in the region. U.S.' fight to protect tiny Kuwait made it the most attractive partner for the future of GCC (Arab-US Policymakers Conference 2013).

3.2 LAST PROTEST OF THE CENTURY (1990s – 2001)

The economic slowdown of the 1980s and 1990s brought together prominent Bahrainis whom included Sunni and Shia clerics as well as leftist groups. Their call was the reinstatement of the parliament and the release of political prisoners. As a gesture, the ruler only brought about an advisory council (Kinninmont 2012, p.39).

The 1994 uprising had a political tone similar to the leftist protests in 1950s and 1960s. This was no surprise since the opposition groups included nationalists, communists, liberals as well as more populist Shia Islamist groups (Bahry 1997). Although the majority were Shias, Sunni participants shared the same desire of reviving 1973 constitution and holding national assembly elections (International Crisis Group 2005). Continuing sectarian discrimination, corruption and nepotism led to clashes in Shia districts outside the capital (International Crisis Group 2005).

The opposition groups put forth their demands for the return of 1973 constitution and the need for a parliament. Despite the cross-ideological turnout and 25.000 petition signatures, the calls fell on deaf ears. The frustration with politics coupled with clashes

between Sunni and Shias after a marathon affair ended with the opposition leader Sheikh Salman being arrested and exiled. Most likely arrested due to organizing the petition (Bahry 1997), his arrest led to mass protests (Louer 2008) and after two weeks of unrest, activists were arrested (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2012). Things exacerbated in 1996 when Iranian hand was spotted in supporting Bahraini Hezbollah for a possible coup attempt (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2012). One of the first events of the uprising was an attack on Bengali workers which resulted in retaliation by non-Bahraini security forces that attacked villages. Many Bahrainis experienced torture after imprisonment (International Crisis Group 2011). Things seemed to calm down after the initial protests, yet a low level of violence emanating both from the government and the opposition persisted until 1999 when Sheikh Isa had died.

3.3. NEW MILLENNIUM, NEW POLITICS (2001-2011)

The first decade of the 21st century filled people's hopes with reform as the vanguard of the old order and Bahrain's first ruler since independence, Isa bin Salman Al-Khalifa, died in 1999 and his son took the throne. To start things anew and re-orient the country from the crisis of 1990s, King Hamad inaugurated reform plans for institutional changes under the National Action Charter. In 2001, the emir's promises on liberal reform were met with positivity as the larger world around Bahrain was caught in sectarian strife and polarization. To avoid being associated with the previous protests, King Hamad wanted to end the unrest (Peterson 2009, p. 160). Upon acceding the throne, he opened dialogue with opposition leaders and met with Shia leaders in his and in their homes. He also ordered releases of many others from previous unrests. Expansion of

freedom of speech and the press allowed Bahrainis to talk about democracy more openly and public space was conducive to discuss political matters (Peterson 2009, p. 161).

Security Law put in effect since 1974 that allowed government to suppress any political opposition was lifted. National Action Charter was approved by 98% of Bahrainis and constitutional changes were on the horizon (Open Democracy 2011).

However, the-would-be reforms only veiled the government's actions of keeping things as they were (Wehrey 2013). The ruling family kept the power it already had while the elected lower house of the parliament had limited powers. The lower house could not legislate laws, could not hold anyone accountable and could not track forms of corruption (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2012). The Shura Council, upper house of parliament, was created to legislate law and serve as life vest for the government.

Constitution was written by the government without involving the populace (Jadaliyya 2012). The visibility of the ruling family's power proved itself when King Hamad changed the name of the country from "State of Bahrain" to "Kingdom of Bahrain" and declared himself as the king (Matthiesen 2013). External reasons such as September 11 attacks in New York city made any formal change even harder. Any reform started to be seen as opening the doors to 'evil' Islamist forces thus making the monarchy more cautious (Peterson 2009, p. 172).

When Al-Wifaq decided to boycott the 2002 elections, the secular parties did not leave Al-Wifaq by itself and joined the boycott. They all boycotted because the election did not seem to be democratic enough (Peterson 2009, p. 159). Elections resulted in 28 Sunni members and twelve Shia members with close ties to the royal family. It is

important here to note that pro-regime Shia notables chose to run for office during this election to cover for the regime (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2011).

3.3.1 Bahraini Shias and Transnationalism

By the 2006 elections, Al Wifaq realized that a new strategy was needed. Boycotting the 2001 elections proved that being outside of politics does not yield any viable solution to the demands of the population. Participatory politics seemed more promising despite the setbacks from earlier experiences. Participation in 2006 elections can also be seen in a regional context. 2003 Iraq war and the sectarian battle fought in the aftermath eventually affected Bahraini politics. The Shias in Bahrain followed the developments in Iraq closely as the majority Shias were slowly wresting control away from the Sunni rulers. There was much to observe and learn from the sectarian politics in Iraq (Wehrey 2013). The Iraqi elections of 2006 one man-one vote strategy supported by Ayatollah Al-Sistani seemed to work in getting the Shias political power without a major bloodshed. It showed the Bahrainis that the participation in parliamentary politics is a good sign of politics as it shows the Shia willingness to work within current system rather than against it (Wehrey 2013). The Lebanese Shias had adopted the same strategy in 2005. Asking for democratic power shift by the Shias who make up the bulk of the Lebanese demographics brought them to power. In the case of Bahrain, the Shias have also been asking for more democratic reforms since the mid-20th century. While the major Shia blocs are not asking for removal of monarchy, their expectations revolve around more transparency which in the end will result in the Shias gaining more power (Nasr 2006).

3.3.2 2006 Elections: Back to the Ballot Box

The results of the 2006 parliamentary elections played significant roles in Bahraini politics. Unlike in 2001, this time Al-Wifaq ended political boycott and participated in the elections by building a coalition with liberal candidates. They realized that by not participating in elections, any power they hold becomes meaningless (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2008). Out of the forty seats in the parliament, they managed to gain seventeen while Sheikh Ali Salman became the leader of a recognized political opposition (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2008). The rest of the 22 seats went to Sunni groups. This was seen as a big step forward compared to the 1990s. King also announced the creation of consultative council appointed by himself over the elected parliament (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2008).

As other big steps forward in the world, the elections had rippling effects. First, the opposition believed that meaningful change was slowly becoming a reality. Second, offering elections served as a gesture by the government for more transparency and the opposition's acceptance of it meant pacification by legal means. In a region caught in conflict, bringing the opposition closer would also prevent any outsider to interfere in local politics. The monarchy became mediator of conflicts thus still holding power over possible change and reform (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2008). Third, the result of the elections did not reflect the social makeup of Bahrain. The Sunnis while being a minority were able to get more votes than Shias.

The biggest downfall of this result was the ability of Al-Wifaq to put forth legislation had still not materialized (Wehrey 2013). Al Wa'ad had no seats while the

Sunni Islamists had seven and eight seats respectively. Al-Wifaq faced opposition in the parliament and opposition in the street by Al-Haq (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2008). Despite the elections and striving to move forward, from 2006 to 2010, Al-Wifaq could not achieve any meaningful reform nor improve material being of the people it represented (Wehrey 2013).

Prior to the 2006 elections, an adviser to the Bahraini Cabinet Affairs Ministry, Salah Al-Bandar, leaked a report showing a plot by the royal family to alter the sectarian demographics of the island in favor of the Sunnis. It revealed plans to spy and monitor on Shia voters, future plans to Sunnify the Shias and more importantly grant citizenship to Sunnis from outside the country. This caused uproar among the Shia populations shortly before the 2006 elections. Although it did not affect Al-Wifaq's votes during the election, more serious concerns such as the possibilities of forming Al-Qaeda cells in Bahrain by those given citizenship alarmed Shias even further (Wehrey 2013).

3.3.3 U.S. and the Middle East: From Bush to Obama

In Bahrain last year, citizens elected their own parliament for the first time in nearly three decades. Oman has extended the vote to all adult citizens; Qatar has a new constitution; Yemen has a multiparty political system; Kuwait has a directly elected national assembly; and Jordan held historic elections this summer. Recent surveys in Arab nations reveal broad support for political pluralism, the rule of law, and free speech. These are the stirrings of Middle Eastern democracy, and they carry the promise of greater change to come (United States Chamber of Commerce 2003).

Things can be said to have begun with the developments that followed September 11 attacks in New York and later the invasion of Iraq. The Bush doctrine, as it came to be called, was aimed at ending terrorism with the spread of democracy in the Middle East (Luciani 2013, p.121). The following year, President Bush designated Bahrain as a major

non-NATO ally, giving it the right to purchase same weapons as other NATO allies (Congressional Research Service 2012). In the 2005 State of the Union address, President Bush declared once again that democracy was necessary from Morocco to Jordan to Bahrain (Washington Post 2005). Even during the democratization spree, U.S. understood that lack of democracy is better in Saudi Arabia if the lack of it means continuation of oil pumps (Gause III 2013, p.300).

During his 2008 trip to the Middle East, President Bush arrived in Bahrain to create a united front against Iran. His intention to keep good relations with the monarchy was not well received by the populace who staged protests upon his arrival due to his support for Israel and occupation of Iraq (Aljazeera 2008). He nonetheless praised the Bahraini government on their steps towards democracy and thanked them for holding free elections (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2011). Despite the ill will generated by the American occupation of Iraq, both the Sunnis and the Shias in Bahrain welcomed the democracy policy as a viable means to promote institutional reform (International Crisis Group 2005). However, the Bush doctrine professed democracy but worked with the Gulf monarchs to protect its interests. This was not the first time the American promises filled people in the Middle East with hope but fell short on delivering those promises.

In 2009, Barrack Obama stepped into the White House and took a more cautious stance in the Middle East. The Obama Doctrine, as opposed to the previous administration, abstained from new military adventures and instead aimed at defeating Al-Qaeda internationally and recover from the recession domestically. Obama, as everyone else, was caught off guard with the Arab Spring.

The change in, at least in attitude if not in full practice, between the proactive Bush and the cautious Obama doctrines is also tied to the global shifts in power. By 2009, U.S. did not occupy the same position it did at the turn of the millennia. The U.S.' dominance was challenged by Russia and China. Iran became a stronger contender (something America's doing) as its influence reached from Afghanistan to Lebanon. The year 2008 signaled many important events. In August, just before the Olympics, Russia under Vladimir Putin had invaded its southern neighbor Georgia and occupied its province of Abkhazia. Despite, European and American defiance, Russia got away with occupying territory of another sovereign nation without any major consequences. That year, it was China, the fastest growing country in the world, who hosted the Olympics. In November, American elections resulted in electing the first African-American president. Barack Obama had inherited a very different world than handled by his predecessor. Compared to 2000, when George Bush was elected, the world became more complicated. The 2008 Recession had crippled the American economy. The War on Terror had already drained billions. Russia was flexing its muscles in its near-abroad. The Chinese economy and with it its influence were building up globally.

Long story short, the unipolar world where the U.S. held sway turned into a multipolar one with many other players popping up in different regions. Barack Obama could not rest American foreign policy solely on military might therefore acted with caution and restraint. Two decades of unipolarity was giving away to multipolar world once again. The rare moment captured in 1990 was slowly disappearing. The Arab Spring managed to overthrow a few pro-American dictators and limited the U.S. ability to curve politics to its interests. The failure of the war in Iraq showed the policymakers that the

active engagement was not the answer. Isolating Iran strategy slowly altered to turn into giving Iran some space to operate and let the Saudis and Iranians compete in the region without causing a military conflict (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2014).

3.4 SAUDI AND IRANIAN COMPETITION IN THE REGION

The Saudi-Iranian relations can be divided into three parts. First, the pre-1979 era gives us a glimpse of relations between the two countries. Second, the 1979 Iranian Revolution is the major starting point. This was an event that led to a major diversion and a reconfiguration of Iran's foreign relations vis-à-vis its neighbors. Third major alteration of geopolitics came with the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq. The fall of Iraq meant that a new front for competition had been opened between the two states. The Arab uprisings bring us directly to the events that took place in Bahrain from February to March 2011.

3.4.1 Pre-1979: Strategic Friendship

As mentioned earlier, the ruling family of Bahrain originated in central Arabian region of Najd and later went on to settle in Bahrain. In doing so, they wrested the island away from its local Qajari ruler thereby ending its links with mainland Persia. History can be played here as both Iran and Saudi Arabia can claim ownership of Bahrain within national narratives. Old stories, however, do not provide an explanation for today's actions. Rivalry between the two countries rests upon conflicting political ideologies, government structures, sectarian politics and over protests that might take place in neighboring countries which by chance happen to be located between the two powers.

Prior to the 1979 revolution, relations between the two states could not be said to be healthy, yet they were not as disparate as they are today either. During the 1960s, both

monarchies rightly feared the anti-monarchist republican ideals of Gamal Abdel Nasser (Wehrey et al. 2009). Iran and Saudi Arabia were linked by similar political systems against the backdrop of rising communist and republicanism (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2014) and had common security threats. The problems did not lie in religious differences as we see today but according to Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp were rooted in Saudi Arabia's reluctance to be number two or even share the spot of being number one in regional hierarchy (Wehrey et al. 2009). The Saudis were jealous of the Shah who in the 1970s modernized country's military (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2014).

3.4.2 Post-1979: Rivalry Enters New Dimensions

The Islamic revolution of 1979 sent shockwaves throughout the Middle East as Ayatollah Khomeini sought to export the revolution across the region. Due to grievances of the Shia population in Saudi Arabia, the motivation that came with the revolution did inspire a vision for better economic and social conditions for the Shias in the Eastern province. The Shias were deprived of the oil wealth, were limited in expression of their faith, and had no constitutional equality with the rest of the country (Wehrey 2013).

The excitement of the Iranian Revolution shook the Saudi Eastern province. It galvanized the Shias and turned them from pacifists into activists. The Seven Day Uprising of 1979 started with public display of Ashura celebrations by the Shias. Shrouded in religious observance, the main concern of motivation was the lack of economic attention given to the Eastern province (Wehrey 2013). Such openly expressed religiosity was banned by the Saudi regime during the state's establishment. Nothing

stopped the authorities from a bloody crackdown. The 1979 uprising alarmed the Saudis of the lack of concern and isolation attached to the Shias in the Eastern province. Soon after the uprising, the Saudi authorities loosened their rhetoric on the Shias, allowed public display of rituals and turned a blind eye to sanctification of Ali (Wehrey 2013). The Iranian Revolution served as the igniter of grievances, not their cause. With the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, the revolutionary zeal and its export had ended. By the 1990s, the reduction in the oil prices brought Saudi Arabia and Iran closer and worked to cooperate within OPEC (Gause III 2013, p.294).

The 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq had the dual goals of removing a hostile dictator who believed to have been possessing nuclear weapons and creating a democracy that will lead to a more stable and terrorist-free Middle East. Today, the invasion is seen as a huge failure not because it failed to deliver its main purposes, but in due process it empowered a bigger anti-American adversary in the Middle East, Iran. Following the moderate Mohammad Khatami's presidency, a hardliner Mahmood Ahmadinejad was elected to be the president in 2005. Iran aimed for acquisitions of nuclear weapons, creating an arch of influence from Afghanistan to Lebanon and even called for destruction of state of Israel (Wehrey et al. 2009). These gains in no doubt come at the expense of Saudi Arabia. Both states see the Middle East as a zero-sum game theater. For the Saudis, American withdrawal from Iraq was seen as leaving ground for the Iranian takeover thus depriving Saudi Arabia of its main backer and relegating them to the status of junior partner in the region (Wehrey et al. 2009). The Saudis accepted Iranian victory in grabbing Iraq, yet this did not stop them from playing a role in the country. The Saudis prefer at least an Iraq that is nationalistic in tone rather than Shia centered. This would

lead to inclusion of Sunni communities and pacify the country. Building up Iraqi security based on non-sectarian participation was a way to curb Iranian influence.

Yet, Saudis and Iranians have skillfully downplayed sectarianism for mutual cooperation when necessary. The Gulf arena requires more cooperation than competition between the two countries. The presence of oil requires cautionary foreign policy from both nations as well as the access to the international markets. In the Gulf, the Saudis are trying to balance Iran through military spending and working closely within the GCC but stay away from any hostile military act. The Gulf states are afraid of a war between Iran and the U.S. or a possible alliance between the two. Either ways, there is room to be skeptical of any development that leave them vulnerable (Wehrey et al. 2009).

For Riyadh, one of the biggest concerns has been Iran's penetration into Sunni Arab affairs, especially with regards to the Palestinian plight. If one can categorize Iraq and the Gulf region as a battleground for material supremacy, then Palestine and the Levant region can be termed as a battle over regional legitimacy. Palestine is where the Arab heart beats (Filiu 2011). Saudi Arabia, standing as both a Sunni and an Arab power, sees itself as the defender of rights of Palestinians. Iran, with its proxy Hezbollah and popular rhetoric on Palestine, has been more successful at winning support of the Arab public. Following the victory of Hezbollah against Israel in 2006 with the Iranian backing, Iran gained immense prestige in the Middle East in the expense of Saudi Arabia. Iran's 'Arab street' strategy seemed to be better addressing the concerns of frustrated peoples and it also seemed to be dominating the post-Saddam Iraqi politics as Shiites were gaining more power. In order not to lose ground to Iran and save face in the Arab domestic and regional politics, Riyadh has tried to use sectarianism to paint Iran as a

hostile Shiite power intruding in the Sunni Arab affairs (Wehrey et al. 2009). Anti-Shia remarks from the Wahhabi clerics inside the kingdom followed soon after the Hezbollah victory. Despite tough rhetoric, Iran does not pose any physical threat to its neighbors. Rather, its main arsenal of influence comes from ideological and non-direct forms of power.

In the first decade of the 21st century, the Saudis watched as Iranian influence grew across the region. By 2011, Iran had more say in politics stretching from Afghanistan to Lebanon than did the Saudis. When the Arab Spring broke out, Saudis saw this as their golden opportunity to use against Iran. The Syrian case is the most obvious example as both sides support groups that are hostile to the other (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2014).

CHAPTER 4

EVENTS OF THE ARAB SPRING IN BAHRAIN

4.1 WHO ARE THE 2011 PROTESTORS?

Since the majority of Bahrain are Shia Muslims by faith, it is only natural that the bulk of the protestors be Shias. What is more important is that 50% of Bahraini nationals (Bahrain: A Conversation About Its Challenges and Opportunities 2013) participated in protests who also made up around 85% of all employees in Bahrain (Jadaliyya 2013). As the most organized and acknowledged opposition party, Al-Wifaq participated in the protests, led negotiations and tried to steer through politics by staying true to society's demands. Over time, it lost control and other societies/groups took the center stage. Among the Shia groups were the minority *Shirazis* who as mentioned earlier were behind 1981 coup attempt. Their presence did not amount to a huge boost to protestors but they showed support by mobilizing media networks (International Crisis Group 2011). The monarchy was all the more paranoid as the *Shirazis* served as a reminder of Iranian attempts at fostering Iranian brand of Islamism (Matthiesen 2013).

More than any other group, it was with the youth who had led the uprising. The dissatisfaction brought by the 2002 elections forced the Shia youth to turn away from political quietism to a restless population (Nasr 2006). The leader of Shia opposition in Bahrain, Sheikh Salman ceased to be seen as the leader of this disenfranchised youth. The loyalty of Bahraini youth slowly shifted to the leadership of Iraqi cleric Moqtada Al Sadr who is known for his tough rhetoric and confrontational style of politics. Some among the youth belonging to the Al-Haq faction sees Hezbollah as being successful in armed

struggle. Since 2006 war, Hezbollah became more attractive to the Bahraini Shia cause and for those who stopped believing in peaceful protests (Wehrey 2013). Separating themselves from mainstream opposition societies, the protestors from the younger generations formed a bloc themselves. As uncertainty grew, protestors spiraling out of control led to decentralization of the participants. The frustration of the youth groups led to avoidance of Al-Wifaq's leadership and expressing dissatisfaction not only with the regime but also with the Al-Wifaq's policies before and as the protests took place (Chatham House 2012). For the more radicalized youth movement, rejecting Al-Wifaq's leadership and openly calling for ousting of the monarchy have been at the forefront of their interests (Filiu 2011). Sectarianism and authority do not seem to affect this populist, generationally different segment of the protests (Wehrey 2013). As the protests continued, the youth lost the ground to more radicalized groups (International Crisis Group 2011).

4.2 DEMANDS & GOALS

The goals of the 2011 protestors were similar to the previous protests that erupted during the 20th century. Their core demands can be summarized as;

- ❖ Economic equality,
- ❖ Change in political system in favor of constitutional monarchy,
- ❖ End to political corruption (Chatham House 2012).

More specific demands can be listed as;

- ❖ Retirement of Sheikh Khalifa,
- ❖ End to the recruitment of Sunnis from abroad into the security forces,

- ❖ Access to government employment,
- ❖ End to the human rights abuses
- ❖ Fair distribution of lands for housing (Chatham House 2012).

4.3 PROTESTS

4.3.1 What went on?

Before the protests had begun on February 14th 2011, the government was detaining Shias from minor opposition movements and Al-Haq movement on the charges of terrorism and attempts to topple the government. This came one month before parliamentary elections of October 2010. The 40-member national assembly established in 2001 had the Shura Council in the upper house which was appointed by the government. The protests of 2011 were culminations of minor incidents of the earlier years (Aljazeera 2010).

Seeing the events in the neighboring countries, King Hamad offered 1000 dinars to each Bahraini family to avoid protests (Aljazeera 2011). That did not stop wave of protests from reaching the Gulf. Days before February 14th, the youth had started to organize protests via the social media platforms calling for meetings from the Shia villages and quarters. Concomitantly, protests started in Shia villages around Manama on February 14th. After they had occupied the Pearl Roundabout on February 14th and turned it into a place of protests, Shia groups soon joined with their members and organizational support (Matthiesen 2013). 150,000 Bahraini nationals poured into Manama's Pearl Square (Chatham House 2012). The pearl monument symbolized the pearl industry from which Bahrainis used to make a living prior to the discovery of oil. This roundabout was

not a public space as it lacked a public square but was the intersection point of financial center, old city of Manama, and some Shia villages (Matthiesen 2013). February 14th was chosen as it marked 10 years after King Hamad introduced reforms for constitutional monarchy (Wehrey 2013). The protestors asked for human rights, release of political prisoners and more political participation in what came to be called the ‘Day of Rage’ (Aljazeera 2011). They openly call for the resignation of the prime minister who has been in power since 1970.

The government did not wait too long to retaliate. The next day, riot police fired on the protestors as thousands of people were marching in the streets. King Hamad made a formal apology for the death of two protestors on TV and promised to investigate it. In the face of protests, Al-Wifaq suspended its participation in the government (Aljazeera 2011).

The government attacked the protestors camped in the Pearl Roundabout and drew international attention to the nation (Open Democracy 2011). The Pearl Roundabout, a monument symbolizing of region’s pearl industry before the discovery of oil had become a place of gathering similar to Cairo’s Tahrir Square. On February 17th, the police attacked protestors while they slept early in the morning and killed four. Next day, the army took control of the Pearl Roundabout and checkpoints were installed around the capital to control the protestors’ movements (Aljazeera 2011). While this was taking place, King Hamad had told the Crown Prince to open a dialogue with all parties involved. Sheikh Isa Qasim urged the protestors to remain peaceful and not resort to violence. Some civil society organizations sent out official statement condemning the

night raid on protestors and still continued to call for help from the King against the security forces (Jadaliyya 2011).

As the crackdown on the protestors continued, some started to call for downfall of the regime altogether (Jadaliyya 2011). On February 19th, the Crown Prince ordered the army to withdraw from the Pearl Roundabout. After the army had left, the protestors quickly occupied the roundabout once again. After taking on the Crown Prince's offer for dialogue, the opposition bloc Al-Wifaq became more interested in dialogue.

One week in to the protests, the monarchy staged its own protests by rallying Sunnis against the Shia. Sunni loyalists made up of Salafis, Brotherhood members, tribal and urban communities came out with banners of the Al-Khalifa family and showed support (Ulrichsen 2014, p. 337). The monarchy acted out of fear for Sunni and Shia unity that would directly threaten the regime (Matthiesen 2013).

On February 22nd, thousands of protestors encircled financial district and the Bahraini mall. The most common slogan heralded at the fall of the monarchy but demands were still about the re-installment of the constitution and the departure of the prime minister (Aljazeera 2011). The next day, 50 political prisoners were released to meet some of the demands of the protestors. Protestors saw this as the beginning of further concessions not the end. The leader of Al-Haq movement who lived in exile in London returned to Manama. As more deaths took place, on February 27th, all Al-Wifaq leaders had resigned from the parliament in show of protest. On February 26th, King Hamad fired two royal family members from their posts related to job opportunities and living standards (Congressional Research Service 2012).

As things continued in a stalemate between the government and the protestors, the Crown Prince kept going with his efforts to start a dialogue. Crown Prince Salman believed that the economy had started to suffer from the protests. Some pro-government protests had also begun to take place around the capital. The Crown Prince set the dialogues on seven principles that called for a parliament with full authority and a government that listens to the people (Congressional Research Service 2012). By March 4th, the opposition leaders were ready to accept dialogue (Aljazeera 2011). On the same day, the protestors largely made up of the youth marched on state television headquarters. These were Al-Haq supporters and other smaller groups had left Al-Wifaq to join them in asking for full resignation of the royal family. Their slogan ‘We are Sunni and Shia, and this country is not for sale’ clearly showed that they were post-religious identity and believed in national unity of Bahrainis (Aljazeera 2011).

The protestors were advancing further towards government areas. On March 6th, some had arrived at Prime Minister’s office and demanded that he step down. As things got more serious, the GCC chairman, Mansour Al-Arayedh, urged the government to work faster with protestors. He promoted the importance of stability for both Bahrain’s role in GCC and for U.S. interests (Aljazeera 2011).

On March 7th, Al-Wa’ad leader called for the need to strip the royal family of its powers and the continuation of their reign as symbolic monarchy. He argued that the government should belong to the people (Aljazeera 2011). Two days later, Al-Haq and the smaller revolutionary groups united under Coalition for Republic. They explicitly called for ousting the royal family and establishment of democratic republic. They aimed to bring a parliamentary republic in place of the monarchy (Matthiesen 2013). Less

radical protests who still formed the majority only wanted the removal of the prime minister and the ministers who were closely aligned to him. The statement is clear;

The Coalition believes that the main demand of the popular revolution is the downfall of the current oppressive regime and the establishment of a democratic republic that expresses the desires of the people and protects its dignity, interests and rights. For the revolution to achieve this demand, all people including the 14 feb youth need to awaken, become aware, organize themselves decentrally when making their decision and planning their activities. They must be independent in making crucial decision and not to be shy when telling the truth to anyone for this comes at the expense of the rights and interests of citizens (Jadaliyya 2011).

In order to rally support from greater part of the population, the February 14 Coalition marched towards Riffa which is an upper-class Sunni neighborhood. These Sunnis also happen to be royals so the intended purpose of the Coalition to garner support was misinterpreted as taking over the neighborhood (Matthiesen 2013).

A month after the protests, Bahrain asked its neighbors for help to protect important areas like oil facilities, financial and banking areas. A day earlier, protestors had blocked the financial district of the capital (Congressional Research Service 2012). On march 14th, 1000 soldiers from Saudi Arabia accompanied by 500 men from the UAE cross into Bahrain from the king Fahd causeway to restore order (Ulrichsen 2014, p. 337). They gave backup support to Bahraini security forces who cracked down on anyone contributing to the protests in the smallest ways. Journalists, activists, and even the medical staff who were helping the injured were prevented from curing the wounded. Sheikh Isa condemned this move on the grounds that it can only fuel sectarianism. U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates soon commented that this might internationalize the conflict (Aljazeera 2011). The Saudis countered any criticism by arguing that they had arrived on Bahraini invitation. From the government's perspective, it was a call of

frustration and panic. The King gave the green light for any means necessary for the safety of the country.

The King Fahd causeway serves Saudi Arabia economically but its most important feature has been seen during the protests. The main function of the causeway is strategic benefit. The Saudis can easily send troops over to Bahrain and reinforce the regime when necessary (Washington Institute 2011). During a summit in 2000, it was agreed that an attack on one member of the GCC would be counted as an attack on all members thus creating the need for all the members to provide military assistance (International Crisis Group 2011). Before its existence, Saudis never held back from flying their helicopters during Shia holidays to keep things under control.

According to Marina Ottoway, the arrival of Peninsula Shield Force has further reduced the legitimacy of the family and reduced its own ability to bring reform from the top (Arab Monarchies Confront the Arab Spring 2011). Unfortunately for the Crown Prince, this event completely sidelined his efforts and brought his uncle and the Saudis in the forefront of decision making (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2012). Hezbollah leadership from Lebanon and the Iranian Ayatollah Ali Khamenei voiced their disapprovals over the GCC troops (International Crisis Group 2011).

Two days ahead of the invasion, the protestors were driven out of the Pearl Roundabout for the second time. The result was several dead and hundreds injured. International condemnation on violence and foreign comments came from Iraq, Iran, the U.S. leadership and the Ayatollah (Aljazeera 2011). Despite the outcry, the Pearl Statue, the main point where protests had gathered, was destroyed on March 19th. Ironically, the six sails holding up the Pearl referred to six members of the Gulf Cooperation (Aljazeera

2011). The GCC troops hadn't come for a brief period. By March 30th, Sheikh Salman was still calling for Saudi troops to leave Bahrain which took place in June (Congressional Research Service 2012). Soon after the monument had been swept aside, the spirit of the protestors was broken and protests, besides a few clashes here and there, had largely died out along with 29 protestors since February 14th (Independent 2011). All in all, mosques were sacked, Salmaniyya hospital was under military occupation and martial law reined in Manama.

4.3.2 The Arab Spring Slogans & Discourse

The Arab Spring on Bahrain shows us how the politics of the uprising can be interpreted to suit political gains. Each side uses its own paradigm to view the protests, share this discourse with its support base and demonize the opposing groups. The monarchy's biggest card on the table is the importance it attaches to the stability of the current regime. The chaos and stagnancy created by the successful protests in the Eastern Mediterranean countries is given as an example of what awaits Bahrain if the government gives into the protests' demands. The Sunni Islamist parties see both the western orientation and the Shia nature of the protests and point at the United States for trying to divide Muslims as can be illustrated in neighboring Iraq since 2003. They throw their lot with the regime. The protestors, made up mostly by the Shias, portray the government as corrupt, sectarian based and not representing the entire population of the country (Book Launch: Sectarian Politics in the Gulf 2016). All these narratives trickle down to blaming the other for disturbing the status quo and generating divisiveness.

One of the most iconic symbols of people's unity in the Arab world during the Arab Spring were the common slogans that echoed across national boundaries. Leftist groups brought old anthems of the nationalists of national liberation, justice, freedom and socialism. Previously, small band of protestors in 2005 marched with the slogan "Labeik Khomeini" in the capital Manama with clear reference to loss of legitimacy of the Bahraini monarchy (Matthiesen 2013). By 2011, slogans of the public at large became 'no Shia, no Sunni, only Bahrainis'. Anger was directed at the prime minister more than anyone else by protestors who chanted 'down, down Khalifa!' (Ulrichsen 2014, p. 336).

Slogans heard in the other Arab capitals "The people want the fall of the regime" was substituted for "The people want the reform of the regime". At the beginning of protests, this was a common slogan. However, as protestors were killed by security forces, their protests grew more radical. Some did not shy away from outward calling for the end of monarchy (Matthiesen 2013). Two weeks into the protests, people called "Topple Hamad!" "Hey Khalifa, get out!" (Aljazeera 2011).

Some Shias used religious symbols reminiscent of Imam Hussein. It is easy to portray his struggle against monarchical Yazid in the 7th century to Shia struggle against Bahraini monarchy. Besides, "with our soul, with our blood, we will defend you o Hussesin" rhymes well with Bahrain. Secular chants such as "no to humiliation" were also attributed to Imam Hussein (Matthiesen 2013).

Some nativist Bahrainis tried to spread awareness on the origins of the Al-Khalifas. Slogans shouting the Arabian roots of Al-Khalifas and the nativism of the Shias who have been occupied by Al-Khalifas since 1783 tried to portray the protests as fight against foreign invaders who needed to be drawn out (Matthiesen 2013). Willingly or not,

this discourse also lashes out at Sunni Bahrainis from Iran and recent immigrants from Asia who come as migrant workers.

4.3.3 The Use of Media

Learning from the lessons of protests in Egypt, social media sites like Twitter, Facebook and YouTube were actively used during the Bahraini protests. By 2008, the use of information via internet and telephones in Bahrain was the highest in the GCC region (Economic Development Bahrain 2009). Throughout the protests, the government tried to censor, limit, and at times, completely ban the use of social media. This is no surprise as even before the protests had begun, Bahrain (along with Saudi Arabia) ranked among one of the worst countries in the world for censorship (Davidson 2013). This has not stopped the web surfers to find alternative ways to go around the censorships. The government continuously called for the end of media platforms other than the state media and labeled social media as a divisive factor. Those who spread rumors on the popular media outlets embraced by the opposition were labeled as traitors. Attempts from the government soon followed to establish a presence in Twitter and Facebook to counter protestors' narratives (Wehrey 2013). Prior to the protests, Shias from the villages already had their own networks and online platforms. Luckily for them, high smartphone usage kept the protestors united and informed about checkpoints, police presence and tear gas attacks (Matthiesen 2013).

For the younger generation, the traditional meeting places such as the *mataams* and *majaalis* were replaced by the use of the Internet. Various web forums and blogs served as tools of the youth. This has not stopped the web surfers to find alternative ways

to go around the censorships (Kinninmont 2012, p.46). The Qatar based news channel Aljazeera covered the protests throughout.

4.4 REGIONAL POLITICAL CONCERNS

4.4.1 Saudi Links to Bahrain

The current attention given to Bahrain by the Saudi authorities does not lie in traditional friendship but in shared concerns of regional developments, securing oil and ensuring survival for the Saudi monarchy. Marriage ties between the two monarchies bring this strategic friendship to familial level (Mabon 2012).

The 2003 American invasion of Iraq and the ensuing violence afterwards drew attention to differences between religious communities in Iraq, namely between the Sunnis and the Shiites (Matthiesen 2013). To understand the Bahraini uprising, it is also imperative to view the protests through the prism of sectarian conflict. This sectarian-based paradigm does two things. First, it places the Bahraini uprising in the regional context as there are Sunnis and Shiites across multiple countries and second, it partially portrays the interests of Saudi Arabia and Iran.

With a population of 20 million, the members of the royal Saudi family are Sunnis and follow the puritanical Wahhabi sect. The founder of Wahhabism, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, preached a return to 'authentic Islam' as it was practiced during the time of Prophet Muhammad (Matthiesen 2013). He branded the traditions of Shias and Sufis as corrupting Islamic values and thus labeling them as apostates who deserved either forced conversion or death. Simultaneously as he was preaching in the deserts of Najd, a tribal leader named Muhammad Ibn Saud was spreading his influence. Both Ibn

Saud and Abd al-Wahhab saw in each other tactical alliance that lasts to this day. When the kingdom of Saudi Arabia was established in 1932, the Wahhabi creed became embedded to state ideology. The subservience of periphery to the center clearly visible in the new modern states in the region also affected the periphery Shia relations with the center Sunni monarchy. Deal made in 1913 between Ibn Saud and the Shia notables in the Eastern province clearly set the boundaries of state and minority. The Shias accepted lordship of Ibn Saud while Ibn Saud allowed them to practice their religions in privacy (Matthiesen 2013).

Around 15 % of the Kingdom's population are made up of Shiites. What causes stir among the Saudi monarchy is not the size but the location of its Shia population. Both the Shias and the vast oil reserves are located in its Eastern province bordering Bahrain. It is in this province that 10% of world's oil is produced daily (Washington Institute 2011). Any development that might threaten stability in Bahrain is viewed as having a potential domino effect that can easily spillover the border and hit the heart of the Saudi economy. Familial linkages are strong between the Shias of Bahrain and Shias living in Qatif and Ahsa oasis (Wehrey 2013). Whether they embody any threat to the monarchy or not, the Shias in Saudi Arabia are viewed as potential fifth columns (Mabon 2012). Sectarianism further serves the Saudi clerical establishment as they enjoy strong ties with the government and does not want to see it challenged. Sectarianism also comes in handy for elites to rally support or deflect criticism for wrongdoings (Wehrey 2013).

The second-class citizen treatment endured by the Shias in Bahrain is also implied to their brethren in Saudi Arabia. Inside the kingdom's textbooks for school children, the Shiites are referred to as unbelievers. They are banned from serving in key sectors of

country such as the foreign and security services, the police, the national army and other sensitive positions that might empower the Shia minority (Matthiesen 2013). The socio-political forces imposed on them further strengthen religious ties binding the Shia communities in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia.

The Saudi government's fears of potential uprising in the Eastern province have roots in 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran. The kingdom has experienced small-scale protests in the past. Recently in 2009, the Eastern province was shaken by rebellious youth movements whose members were generally against any type of authority including their own families (Matthiesen 2013). This youth movement is similar to others we see during the Arab spring in neighboring states. They are modern, media savvy, internet surfers and do not hold the views of older generations with regards to communal identities (Matthiesen 2013). More importantly, they served as a precursor to 2011 uprising.

In Qatif city and particularly in Awamiyya region, protests erupted soon after the Bahrain uprising. Few activists were shot and killed, other arrested. The Saudi authorities were quick to label them as agents of foreign actors (pointing at Iran) thus ruling out any chance of reconciliation. The protestors were also unlucky to lose the support of the Shia clerics who were pressured from the Saudi government to call for a halt to protests (Matthiesen 2013). As the recipient of Saudi ulema's support for both internal and external legitimacy, the monarchy does not have much choice but to act on any secessionist behavior (Mabon 2012).

4.4.2 Iran's View of Arab Spring and Bahraini Protests

The Arab Spring not only caught everyone by surprise, but it also led countries in the region to pursue often conflicting foreign policy agendas. After the initial protests in Egypt and Tunisia, the Iranian government believed that new Islamist oriented parties were the fruits of seeds planted by Iran over the last three decades in one form or the other. Therefore, the new 'Muslim' politics were welcomed by Iran. When it came to Bahrain, there was reluctance to openly support the Shia-majority protestors over the Sunni rulers.

One can conclude that for Iran practicality triumphed over ideology in Bahrain. In the past decade, Iran has tried to improve relations with its Gulf neighbors and sought admission into the Gulf Cooperation Council. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad attended the GCC summit in 2007 and suggested formation of economic bloc that includes Iran (Khalaji 2011). Rhetoric failed to match the action. After the GCC intervention, Iran strongly criticized the crack down and called for end of discrimination against the Shias in the kingdom (Khalaji 2011). Nothing further followed from Iran in material assistance to the protestors nor any help for the Shias who were unjustly put in prisons.

4.4.3 The GCC's View of Protests

While the other Gulf states did not experience mass protests, once the Bahraini monarchy contacted them for help, they did not back down from contributing. Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and UAE all helped but it was Saudi Arabia as the big brother who felt the need to openly get involved (Matthiesen 2013). This shows that developments in Bahrain were watched, taken into consideration, and believed to sooner or later affect the other

Gulf states. After seeing leaders fall left and right, some influential residents in the Gulf felt the urge to at least reconsider their countries' positions vis-a-vis their populations (Matthiesen 2013). In April 2011, a Bahraini general, Abdul Latif Al-Zayani, was appointed secretary general of GCC (Matthiesen 2013).

4.4.4 Al-Khalifas' View of Iran

As in previous incidents involving Shias and protests in Bahrain, the monarchy was quick to point fingers at Iran's meddling in internal affairs of Bahrain. The portrayal of the Shias as serving potential fifth column activity in Bahrain did not make things easier for either side. While there was no direct link spotted between Iranian government and the activities of the protestors, the Al-Khalifas always believed that somewhere secretly strings were being pulled by Iran. The protestors carrying the Bahraini national flag were not enough to deter authorities from calling protestors Iranian agents (Filiu 2011). In recent memory, an adviser to Ayatollah Khamenei openly called for Bahrain to be under Shia Iranian sovereignty back in 2007. Such a statement not only alarmed the Bahraini government but also reverberated across MENA region (Reuters 2009). Similarly, in 2009, Bahrain's former position as one of the provinces of Iran echoed once again in the Iranian parliament. The Al-Khalifas interpreted this as infringement of sovereignty (Khalaji 2011). Blaming Iran for meddling in Bahraini affairs becomes self-destructive for those who notice that the same blaming also goes to the Muslim Brotherhood whose election victories in Egypt and Tunisia alarm the monarchical Gulf states (Matthiesen 2013).

The Bassiouni report commissioned by the King Hamad himself to report any human rights abuses inflicted during the protests came to the conclusion that there was no Iranian involvement in the protests (Bahrain Independent Commission Inquiry 2011). For both the Al-Khalifas and the Saudis, allocating more rights to protestors is tantamount to allocating more power to the Shias. The logic follows that even though there might not be a link between the protestors and the Iranian regime, the protestors will certainly be more receptive to Iran once they gain more influence inside Bahrain. This would put both the Bahraini and the Saudi monarchies in jeopardy (Mabon 2012). The Bahraini and the Saudi ruling families have used sectarian divisions in order to prevent cross-sectarian protest movements from emerging. Yet, the ruling families were not the only ones who were interested in deepening religious loyalties. Political, religious and economic elites all played roles to further improve their personal aims (Matthiesen 2013).

This power-centered mentality can only take Bahrain so far. Sooner or later, the ruling family will have to choose between its own interests and those of the Bahraini nation. The former option includes trying to hold onto absolute power over every aspect of the state by the members of the ruling family. By doing so, they will only further alienate their own populations and lead to stagnation. Sharing is seen as losing or giving up to weaker 'adversaries'. The latter alternative depends on power-sharing and building of trust between different influential groups who in turn will support each other to the benefit of entire Bahrain. This would, in the short-run, curb the absolute power of the monarchy, but in the long-run, create transparency so then the trust created will turn into consultation among groups. In this environment, the monarchy will be more likely viewed as a benevolent dynasty who work for the well-being of Bahrain. As seen during

the 1990s, the closer government hopes to work together with the opposition, the more the populace feels like its interests are aligned with the government (Wehrey et al. 2009). Therefore, keeping Iran out entails not just military capability but equality, transparency and equal political representation for the Bahraini Shias (Chatham House 2012).

4.4.5 The Protestors' View of Iran

As in other countries experiencing protests under the banner of Arab Spring, Bahraini protestors took to the streets with Bahraini national flags in their hands. They were nationals, who addressed national problems (albeit in ideological tones) and wanted solutions from their national rulers. For them, Iran stood as another country with which some of the protestors might have religious or ethnic affiliations. The Shia clerics loyal to Iran appealed for help from their big brother. A letter was sent to Iran by the “followers of Grand Ayatollah Khamenei in Bahrain” and was published in Iranian media. However, this genuine call for help fell on deaf ears as Iran did not or was unable to heed to the demands of Bahraini clerics (Mabon 2012). Some of the Shia religious leadership in Bahrain were trained in Iran and follow Iranian religious clerics but the Bahraini protestors mostly acknowledge Grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani in Iraq rather than the Iranian clerics (International Crisis Group 2011) who in the midst of all the discrimination endured by the Shias refrains from interfering with politics of other countries (Wehrey 2013). Sheikh Salman of Al-Wifaq had repeatedly denied any financial backing coming from Iran. Like the government’s portrayal of protestors as agents of Iran, the protestors themselves have grievances about the economic and political dependence Bahrain has with neighboring Saudi Arabia. They argue that it is

these connections that hinder any possibility for national dialogue and reforms. As long as the ruling family listens to the Saudi monarchy, outside meddling will likely prevent meaningful change within Bahrain (Chatham House 2012). For those who expected their big brother to help, their expectations met with disappointments (Washington Institute 2011).

4.4.6 The U.S. Attitude Towards the Uprising

I think that the commitment to democracy is paramount and I've heard that from a broad range of your leaders and your citizens. There seems to be a strong broadly-held commitment to democracy. Then how each country travels the road of democracy because it's not a destination; it is a constant journey. We are still perfecting our democracy. And as I look around the world, I see that most democratic countries are still working to improve. So the commitment you've made is very promising, but there are a lot of decisions that still will confront you. What is important is that the entire society work together to achieve democratic progress, and I hope that is what will happen over the next years here in Bahrain (Hillary R. Clinton 2010, state.gov, 3 December).

The U.S. attitude towards Bahrain revolved around three goals. First, the strategic presence of the Fifth Fleet could not be altered. Saudi Arabia was one of U.S.' closest allies. Last but not least, no one wanted Iran to get any stronger (Fault Lines: The US and the New Middle East, 2011). This pragmatic and realist stance was also applied to the 2009 protests in Iran (Hudson 2013, p.339).

Obama strategically refrained from being seen as either supporting the protestors or the kingdom. Without a cohesive strategy, the U.S. turned a blind eye to the suppression of the people who were calling for the very same freedoms that the United States is built and rests upon. Obama and Clinton have expressed light distress about the brute force used against 'universal rights of Bahrain's citizens' but refrained from any action (Washington Post 2011). The U.S. made its first concern heard on the second day

of protests (Aljazeera 2011). Few days on, Obama told King Hamad to respect human rights and hold those responsible for violence accountable. The administration justified its position on Bahrain by arguing that use of force Bahrain was not the same as what leaders in Libya and Syria did (Congressional Research Service 2012). Both Britain and the U.S. cut off military sales to Bahrain during the protests (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2014). It was only after the Bassiouni report did the U.S. call for serious reforms (Quandt 2014, p.427).

At times when the endgame seems to be isolating Iran, the U.S. looks the other way and accepts the sectarian turn the politics are headed in the Gulf. Efforts on behalf of the U.S. centered on creating a positive environment with minimum U.S. presence and energy. The U.S. hoped that the national dialogue initiated by the Crown Prince would ease things down (Aljazeera 2011). The opposition remained disappointed with American reluctance to get involved and criticized the U.S. of not supporting them as it did to people of Tunisia and Egypt (Aljazeera 2011).

As the monarchs portray the struggle between the Sunnis and the Shias and it happens to be the Shias and Iran at the losing end, U.S. can afford to stay silent (Matthiesen 2013). Preferring stability over democracy has been in U.S. circles even before the Arab Spring (Open Democracy 2011). This allowed Saudi Arabia unrestricted permission to roll in tanks and crush down the uprising in Manama. When the Saudis intervened, U.S. was not informed on Saudi decision of sending troops to Bahrain. The Saudis must have thought that U.S. would abandon Al-Khalifa as it did to Mubarak in Egypt. So the Saudis decided to take action themselves (Fault Lines: The US and the

New Middle East, 2011). The Gulf countries increasingly feel abandoned by the U.S. leadership (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2014).

The positioning of the Fifth Fleet in Bahrain is another reminder of Bahrain's importance to the U.S. It has played a key role in assisting operations in neighboring Iraq and Afghanistan. Its presence by the government is seen as a deterrent to Iran (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2013). It also has more functions under the skin. It serves as a form of non-sectarian employment opportunity and brings certain economic benefits. Removing it might have the effect of strengthening regime hard-liners who will cling to power even further. Gulf specialist Frederic Wehrey suggests that the U.S. should take an individual approach to the needs of Gulf nations. To enhance stability, the U.S. should push forth with reforms that are necessary to each country. In Bahrain, this concludes in more transparency between the populace and the monarchy. This would, in the long run, tame the opposition and prevent the rise of anti-Americanism. When the U.S. becomes a liked country by the Gulf populace, it will also help to postpone any American withdrawal from the region (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2014).

When the Arab Spring happened, no grand strategy emerged. Obama acted with caution, pragmatically and more attentive to domestic opinion (Quandt 2014, p.418). After all, the Arab Spring was not foreseen by anyone. There could not be any other strategy to deal with it. The Obama Administration did not know how to respond to the Arab uprisings since they occurred across many countries, were spontaneous in nature and a single vision would not sit well with each country's dynamics (Washington Post 2011). The unpredictability of the uprisings only added further confusion.

4.5 MONTHS AFTER THE PROTESTS

After the protests, the regime continued to keep a close eye on the potential rise of protests. The police were positioned in areas, especially in the Shia populated neighborhoods, to keep tight control and crackdown any potential descent. The news outlets were strictly censored and the national newspaper, Al-Wasat, was brought under government control (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2011). Several influential bloggers were arrested and tortured. The government systematically attempted at controlling the narrative of the protests to portray it as a sectarian clash rather than democratic uprising. In July 2011, government wanted to start the dialogue that was initiated during the protests by the Crown Prince. Elections were to be held in September to replace the 18 ministers who resigned during the protests (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2011).

After being portrayed as a cruel monarchy shooting its own citizens, Bahrain took small steps to clear its name and also to look more on the line with its Western backers. The Protests in Bahrain also took attention away from other countries who hosted oppressive regimes themselves (Matthiesen 2013). The National Dialogue was initiated and the Bahrain Independent Commission Inquiry (BICI) was established and paid by the king (Matthiesen 2013).

Besides clearing Iran of guilt, BICI report also showed the human rights abuses that took place during the protests. Around 3600 people were arrested and about 3.6% of Bahraini workforce was fired from their jobs (Chatham House 2012). Some were freed and those fired were allowed to return back to work. Despite putting the blame on the

security forces rather than the monarchy (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2011), the honest inquiry did not have strong political backing.

The U.S. made it very clear that it stands behind the Gulf monarchs as long as oil production continues and Iran is contained. The protests in the Gulf states are crucial to American hegemony who collectively contain two-thirds of the world's oil reserves and a third of the proven natural gas reserves. Additionally, these states are key arms purchasers and wealthy investors in Western economies. On the Christmas Eve of 2011, \$29.4 billion arms deal was struck with Saudi Arabia (Matthiesen 2013). For the EU, fight against the war on terror and Al Qaeda was more important than grievances of the Bahrainis. The Obama administration was still embarrassed internationally for democracy promotion among enemies but not among friends (Matthiesen 2013).

In December 2012, Saudi Arabia called for a Gulf Union that was aimed to limit and reduce the Shia populations in the Gulf region. More of a Saudi plot to create a super-Sunni state rather than a union, other Gulf states rejected the plan on the grounds that they would lose their statuses as free entities and take orders from Saudi Arabia (Royal United Services Institute 2012). Some hardliners were thrilled at the project who saw it as “strength through unity” project (Matthiesen 2013). The opposition leaders, Sheikh Salman and Sheikh Isa Qasim, showed their opposition by asking for a referendum similar to the country's independence (Wehrey 2013). It wasn't only the Bahraini opposition who wasn't thrilled about the union. Not much would change for most government supporters since Bahrain already receives much support from Saudi Arabia. As there would be no dramatic gain from the union and the assurance that Saudis would step in for Bahrain under any circumstance convinced the Bahraini monarchy not

to act forward (Royal United Services Institute 2012). Similar union was proposed by Britain back in 1971 when the Gulf states did not like Britain leaving their protection upon independence (Davidson 2005). That union was rejected by Bahrain and Qatar who did not want to unite with less developed Gulf states even though the Saudis worked to end their disputes with Qatar (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2012). The familial relations between monarchies also failed to create cohesion. Unity among tribes is a hard gamble.

4.6 WHY CHANGE IS HARD

Lack of liberalization during the mid-20th century was due to both the royal family and its foreign backer Britain. Today, the limitations are again from the domestic conservatives and from its neighbors, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. With Saudi support, conservative royals have sought to alienate the Crown Prince Salman who stands as the liberal side of the monarchy (Independent 2011). The conservatives within the royal family and their allies fear the loss of their privileged statuses and risk the exposures of their fraudulent business deals. As the leader of the hard-liners, Sheikh Khalifa had been extending his influence over the last thirty years, both during the time of his brother and during his nephew's reign (Peterson 2009, p. 171). As long as he is in power, the opposition is unlikely to take any steps to reconciliation seriously. To make things even harder, previously disunited conservatives are uniting due to events of the Arab spring (Independent 2011). In contrast to the monarchy, the opposition started to disintegrate during the protests. Al-Wifaq's leadership did not know how to deal with protestors and Sheikh Isa Qasim disagreed with Sheikh Salman who is seen as taking soft approaches

against the government brutalities. The regime hardliners were united in protecting the monarchy under any circumstances (Wehrey 2013).

Even before the protests, King Hamad had personal relations with Sheikh Zayid bin Sultan Al-Nuhayan, the emir of Abu Dhabi. Personal connections across the Gulf had financial benefits for King Hamad. It is not impossible to assume that since Sheikh Zayid did not initiate any reforms in Abu Dhabi or in the UAE, he did not give liberal advice or stand as a liberal example for King Hamad (Peterson 2009, p. 171). The Saudi factor and its influence on Sheikh Khalifa remain the biggest meddling (Independent 2011).

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND BAHRAIN AFTER THE PROTESTS

5.1 HOW TO VIEW THE EVENTS IN BAHRAIN

After all said and done, a question needs to be asked “what kind of paradigm should one use to evaluate Bahraini politics?” In this thesis, I have tried to capture the dynamics of the 2011 uprising through different paradigms of sectarianism, economy and geopolitics.

I have tried to show that the sectarian paradigm with which the Middle East is being viewed these days, do not strictly apply to Bahrain nor does it fit any other Middle Eastern country. Sectarianism in the region is a recent development rooted in international and domestic events. While separate identities existed, their meanings and roles have shifted around every 20 – 30 years. The paradigm of Shias vs. Sunnis both blurs and helps our understanding of the region. It can only serve as a starting point before diving into details and dynamics of each particular state. It is true that the opposition is largely Shia but as we have seen, many Sunnis are also involved in asking for changes within the government. For the monarchy, pointing at the Shias unnecessarily makes problems bigger than they are by giving the Bahraini Shias reasons to parallel their struggles with the *Bidun* of Kuwait and Shias in Saudi Arabia (Matthiesen 2013).

One can certainly see that economic grievances were at the heart of protests in 2011. As with the previous protests in Bahraini history, economic equality has been a major source of demands and grievances against the monarchy. The Shias are not only different from the ruling monarchy (or vice versa), they are also the most disenfranchised

group of the island. This can be traced back to the 1950s when leftist groups aimed for complete independence from the British and sought equal citizenship for everyone.

Seeing Bahrain as one of the many fronts in the proxy warfare between Iran and Saudi Arabia starts with the sectarian paradigm, isolates or completely ignores the domestic affairs of Bahrain, and turns the protests and their suppression into an international affair. The only attention Bahrain gets is being one of many battlegrounds between the Iranians and the Saudis. There is a certain truth to this view at least from the Saudi perspective and to a limited degree from the Al-Khalifa family and when looked at other areas where there is explicit competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia. What credits and discredits this paradigm is its negligence of the Bahrainis themselves.

I think Bahraini politics are a mixture of the above views. However, I believe that one paradigm stands taller than the others. I believe that Khaldunian cycle of interactions between the settled populations and the countryside fits Bahrain albeit a few changes. In Bahrain today, this paradigm can be viewed as an identity conflict. The monarchy's view of seeing the world meaning what it means of being Bahraini, rests on tribal way of doing things. It is hierarchical, within the family and those ruled are seen as subjects rather than fellow citizens of the same nation. The populace at large, on the other hand, believe in nationhood, equality, being Bahraini and national borders. While the opposition is worried about political modernization, the regime is worried about traditional tribal ruling methods. This should not be misinterpreted as tradition vs. modernity because from the monarchy's perspective, they are democratic enough (Bahry 1997). Frederic Wehrey explains, "The conflict is informed by two radically different models of government and

two very different visions of regional order.” (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2014).

The third group can be said to be those who try to balance these tribal politics with popular/national politics. Those are political players notably Al-Wifaq leader Sheikh Salman who represents not all but a big portion of the populace and King Hamad who as king, tries to manage family and state matters.

Shortly after becoming king, King Hamad pushed further for municipal and parliamentary elections. Claiming the title of king and amassing more influence than before, this event is seen today as state becoming more authoritarian. However, it does not explain why King Hamad pushed for further reforms upon becoming king. Further research is needed here to question whether King Hamad wanted more power vis-a-vis his uncle who have immense network of supporters. So, in order to carry out reforms more smoothly and with less interference, claiming to be king could have been a move to outdo his uncle’s influence. One familiar analyst argued that the King and the Crown Prince tried but failed to curb Sheikh Khalifa’s influence due to GCC arrival (International Crisis Group 2011). They were more successful in 2008 when the Crown Prince ruled out any outside interference to Economic Development Board and the King supported him. Deeper study of family relations is highly critical here but lies beyond the scope of this thesis.

The ways of tribal politics across the Gulf may find it hard to fit in the 21st century. In tribal politics, enacting on reforms that come from the population are seen as weaknesses by the monarchy (Neumann 2013). The logic follows that if the monarchy ‘bows down’ to certain reforms, the populace will see this as weakness and keep

demanding more. Therefore, the change must come from a top-down process where reforms will be gifts of the benevolent ruler (Peterson 2009, p. 183). This way, the monarchy can save face by not looking 'weak' and the populace will be happy.

An equation can summarize tribal paradigms:

a) Change must come from top-down by the top realizing that change is necessary.

+

b) People should respect and accept the ruler for being wise and benevolent.

=

c) Any change is monitored and implemented under control.

5.2 ARAB SPRING AND HOW IT AFFECTED THE MIDDLE EAST

With the help of globalization, one of the outcomes of the Arab Spring has been the rise of youth politics (Matthiesen 2013). The youth politics challenge our understanding of conventional politics. It has all the characteristics of being young and energetic. The Bahraini movement of February 14th was decentralized, lacked leadership, the youth were socially wired to each other, fast moving and freedom-seeking. Neither the political opposition figures nor the monarchy actually understood how to deal with them as Middle Eastern politics have been void of not just youth, but also of public participation. The Sunnis and the Shias from their traditional associations have broken up (Ulrichsen 2014, p. 347). The Arab Spring protests in general showed the great divide between the public and the political spheres.

In a way, the Arab Spring has given Middle Eastern politics a binary nature. For the governments dealing with the protestors there are two options. Either give in to the

demands of the protestors and possibly be ousted, or do anything necessary to stay in power. Unlike the disorientation of the Obama administration, the Saudis and the others in the Gulf do not have time for trial and error. Therefore, they do not see Bahrain as being a test case for American freedom and liberalism (Washington Institute 2011). Obama's tendency to keep quiet about Bahrain is rooted in the flow of oil, arms deals and keeping a strong foothold in the middle of Iran and the Arabian Peninsula. The GCC countries look to the U.S. as their main supplier of weapons and their protector against bigger neighbors. The most obvious example is the \$60 billion deal signed with Saudi Arabia in 2010 (Washington Institute 2011).

There have been many cultural explanations put forth that try to capture the role tribalism, kingship and Arab culture for the endurance of the not just Bahraini monarchy but for the reign of kings and the stability created by them across the Middle East (Gelvin 2012). This theory of cultural authenticity attached to the Gulf monarchies has certain truth to it. When looked at the most troublesome parts of the Middle East, one can draw a parallel between the republican systems of governance and their overthrown leaders. Therefore, the claim can be made to the durability of monarchies as being more in tune with region's history and beliefs. A notable scholar of the Muslim world at Columbia University, Richard Bulliet, has termed the revolutionized states in the region as neo-Mamluk states (Religion and the State in Islam: From Medieval Caliphate to the Muslim Brotherhood 2013). However, this generalization fails to explain monarchies like Morocco and Jordan who although did not have rulers deposed, nonetheless experienced protests who demanded reforms in their respective political spheres.

The protests and the following crackdown renders Bahrain unique in the region. As Ronald E. Neumann notes, the Arab Spring has had a different effect on Bahrain (Neumann 2013.). In states where the ruler/regime has been ousted, the protests have been between the people and the government. Inescapably, Bahrain has a sectarian dimension to its protests. The paradigm of the protests can be easily twisted as Shiite populace against a Sunni monarchy. Second, Bahrain cannot be left by itself due to financial and religious links it has to neighboring states. The rulers of Libya, Egypt, and Tunisia had no external backers to keep protests under control. The gulf monarchies are autocratic but despite everything going around them, have shown resilience (Davidson 2013).

The GCC intervention dealt the coup de grace to the protests on the streets. The crackdown solved the protests but failed to solve their demands (Chatham House 2012). For now, the hard security approached seemed to have worked. The protestors believed they could imitate their cousins in Egypt and Tunisia by standing up to the monarchy. They had every reason to believe for success. After all, the Arab Spring gave everyone hope for change and history seemed to be blowing in that direction. The miscalculation came with the entrance of Saudi Arabia. The protests could catch the fish, but not the whale.

From the 2011 Bahraini uprising, one can conclude that;

- There have been periodic protests in Bahrain since the 1920s (Ulrichsen 2014, p. 334).
- 2011 protests voiced similar concerns as their predecessors in the 20th century.

- The sectarian side has been fueled recently by both internal and external developments. Therefore, change is likely to be possible when things change both in domestic and external environments.
- No positive outcome has been achieved because the political sphere has become a zero-sum platform.

If the Gulf rulers do not solve their domestic problems in productive manner, it is likely to hurt their images of being centers of tourism, commerce and entertainment (Open Democracy 2011).

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