

CHAPTER III

BAHRAIN CITIZEN DEMONSTRATION

In this chapter the writer would like to describe how the Bahrain citizen demonstration against to their government. The uprising in Bahrain that began in February undoubtedly owed much of its initial inspiration and some of its tactics to the protest movements in Tunisia and Egypt that immediately preceded it. But it has far deeper origins. The Arab Sunni Al-Khalifa family has ruled Bahrain since the late 18th century, after driving out a Persian garrison that had been controlling the island. The family originates from Najd, which is now the central region of Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait. Bahrain was a British protectorate from the 1830s until independence in 1971. The exact demographic makeup of the country is the subject of considerable dispute, but it is generally accepted that a large Shiite majority, some of it ethnically Persian in origin, is governed by a minority Sunni Arab royal family and ruling elite. Sectarian divisions have been a source of tension for many decades. They led to significant uprisings against the ruling family, largely led by disenfranchised Shiites, in the mid-1950s and again in the mid-1990s. As with the present ongoing tensions, in both cases there were varying perceptions regarding the extent to which the protests were essentially sectarian in nature or more broadly focused on demanding greater constitutionalism and access for Bahraini citizens generally. The protest movement in Bahrain is, therefore, both a manifestation of a broader pattern of Arab uprisings for greater rights, democracy and human dignity, and also a reflection of country-specific tensions with far deeper roots and implications.

A. History of Bahrain demonstration

In 2011, inspired by the “Arab Spring” movements in countries across the Middle East, opposition groups in small island of Bahrain rise up in a series protest against the ruling Al Khalifa family. In months most of the demonstration were violently broken up by government forces. Many of protestor was killed and hundreds were jailed. In four years since the pro democracy movement has grown silence but never died away. Jailed opposition leader Sheikh Ali Salman waits trial next week for “promoting political change using illegal forceful means and threats.” Prominent Bahrain human rights activist Nabeel Rajab was just sentenced to six months in prison for “insulting public institutions.” (Taylor, 2015)

The protest begin since 14 February 2011 neither entirely sectarian in nature is aimed at overthrowing the government, but called for transition to constitutional monarchy. Furthermore the tensions and violence escalated, the sectarian nature of the political division in Bahrain society becomes increasingly pronounced. Moderates on both sides were surrounded by more extreme forces that pushed the uprising into became more overtly sectarian confrontation. This confiscate efforts at conciliation by moderates in the protest movements and forces in the government led by Crown Prince Salman Bin Hamad al-khalifa that appeared open to dialogue.

The turning point appears to has been the creation of the “Coalition of Bahraini Republic,” which by its very name sought to replace the monarchy altogether. The formation of this group was announced on 8 March by three of the more radical Shiite organizations involved in the protests: Al-Haq, Wafa and the Bahrain Freedom Movement. It was particularly the involve of Al-Haq leader of Hassan Al-Mushaima,

who the government has long regarded as an agent of Iranian influence, and who declared that the coalition had “chosen to fight for a complete downfall of the regime,” that caused the greatest alarm for the ruling family and its allies. In the eyes of royal family as well as its Sunni supports in Bahrain its Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) allies, the term “Republic” was seen as strongly implying “Islamic Republic,” meaning the replication of the Iranian theocratic system in Bahrain and, by extension, Iranian hegemony. Iran has had long-standing territorial claims on Bahrain, which were particularly a source of tension with the United Kingdom and Arab states, during the rule of the Shah in the 1960s. But there is a widespread belief among Sunni Arabs in the Gulf that Iranian political and territorial ambitions regarding Bahrain have never been fully abandoned. Indeed, the Bahraini government blamed Iranian “meddling” for the protest movement of the 1990s while it was in progress.

The reaction is huge, in short term, decisive on 14 March, over 1.000 Saudi troops crossed the causeway between two countries, followed by additional force from other GCC states. As Marina Ottaway, director of the Middle East programme at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, has noted, the “message was clear: Shias are a fifth column for Iranian ambitions and under no circumstances could a Shia-dominated government be allowed to form on the island. After a brief flirtation with conciliation, the government and its GCC allies returned to their initial approach of zero-tolerance towards protest and dissent, and even demolished the Pearl Roundabout, the main landmark of the capital Manama which had become a focal point of demonstrations. Many observers have noted the irony that the once-iconic pearl was upheld by six pillars representing the six GCC member states.

Twenty-one opposition leaders, from a wide ideological gamut, were subjected to a highly divisive mass trial that led to stiff prison sentences, including many life terms.

Perhaps the most instructive was the shockingly harsh five-year sentence imposed on Ibrahim Sharif, Secretary-General of the National Democratic Action Society, also known as AlWa'ad, who had never called for the overthrow the government and is a Sunni social democratic reformist. As blogger and journalist Sal Gentile observed, this harsh sentence might be best attributed to, the fact that a Sunni politician was among the leaders of the uprising severely undercut claims by the government that the uprising was a Shiite and Iranian-inspired plot, and revealed rifts in the powerful Sunni minority. In any event, the violent suppression of the protest movement and harsh sentences meted out against opposition leaders without distinguishing between different ideological strands left the country simmering with political and, increasingly, sectarian tensions. (Ibish, 2011)

B. Al Wifaq National Islamic Society

The Bahrain conflict isn't about the Sunni and Shi'a conflict, but is about the Al Wifaq Party. The Al Wifaq is the largest political party in Bahrain and also the leading Shi'a political society, Wifaq holds a plurality in the elected lower house of parliament, but coalitions of smaller, pro-government Sunni parties usually outvote Wifaq. Most Wifaq leaders were exiled following the unrest of the 1990's, and many continued oppositionist activities from London. With the amnesty of 2001, they returned to Bahrain and founded Wifaq. Wifaq led the 2002 opposition boycott of parliamentary elections. When it decided to run candidates in the 2006 elections, the party split; those who favored a continued boycott left and formed the Haq Movement. After boycotting the 2002 parliamentary elections, Wifaq won 17 seats in the 2006 elections. According to Wifaq, the population of the largest district, which it represents, differs from that of the smallest, represented by a pro-

government Sunni independent, by a factor of 13, yet each district only has one representative. Sheikh Ali Salman, a mid-level Shi'a cleric, officially leads the party. Sheikh Isa Qassim, Bahrain's most popular Shi'a cleric, claims to eschew politics but privately supports Wifaq and probably exerts considerable influence over it. Wifaq Secretary General Sheikh Ali Salman does not appear to be in any danger of being ousted as leader of the party, but he has expressed frustration with the day-to-day grind of leading the Wifaq bloc in parliament's lower house, the Chamber of Representatives (COR). He might at some point step back from his role in the COR to devote himself to his role as SecGen. Wifaq's second tier in parliament includes several MPs who would likely vie for the chance to succeed him as the face of the party in parliament.

Khalil Ebrahim Al-Marzook, at 43 in 2011 one of Wifaq's youngest and most active MPs, represents the Capital Governorate's 2nd district (Manama). He enjoys a close relationship with Ali Salman, and is popular with other Wifaq MPs and in the wider party. His outspoken personality and exceptional managerial skills have helped him become Wifaq's Deputy Chairman. Wifaq selected Al-Marzook to lead its successful campaign against the use of electronic voting in the 2006 parliamentary election because of his technology background. He obtained a bachelor's degree in computer science from King Fahd University in Saudi Arabia in 1990 and a master's degree in information technology from Sheffield University in the UK in 1998. In addition to his position as Deputy Chairman, he is also Chairman of the Legal Affairs and Legislation Committee. Well-spoken and always sharply dressed in Western suits, Al-Marzook often serves as the de facto spokesman for the party. During COR sessions, he can be seen coordinating strategy with, and calming down, other Wifaq MPs. Nizar Al-Qari, a member of

Wifaq's governing council, told poloff that Salman has already let Al-Marzook begin running the bloc's meetings and crafting its strategy.

Abduljalil Khalil represents the Capital Governorate's 4th district, which includes the villages of Sanabis and Karzakan, where many anti-government protests - often violent ones - have taken place. Khalil graduated from King Saud University in Saudi Arabia with a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering in 1985 and from the University of Heriot-Watt in the UK with a master's degree in building services administration in 1999. Like many leading Shi'a politicians of his age, Khalil, a founding member of Wifaq, served time in prison for opposition activities. He was pardoned in 2000 following the accession of Emir (now King) Hamad. While perhaps not as outspoken as Al-Marzook, Abduljalil Khalil is nonetheless recognized for his intelligence, management and administrative skills, and his oratory ability. As the longtime chairman of the Bahrain Society for University Students, Abduljalil maintains close associations with recent university graduates. Jawad Fairouz represents the 8th district of the Northern Governorate. As a founding member of Al-Wifaq, and one of its most active members, he served as the deputy chairman of the Northern Governorate Municipal Council before winning his parliamentary seat in 2006. He graduated from the University of Texas, El Paso, with a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering in 1986 and has a diploma from the University of Bahrain in business administration. His technocratic experience benefits him in parliament, where he serves as chair of the Public Utilities and Environment Committee. His arguments are clear, effective, and evidence-based. He played a key role in the controversial quizzing of Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Ahmed bin Atiyattallah Al-Khalifa over discrepancies in the GOB's population calculations. Jawad's older brother, Jalal,

also serves as an MP, however Jawad's influence is much greater than that of Jalal. Both have a great deal of exposure in the local media owing to their sometimes controversial statements. Jalal represents the 1st district of the Central Governorate. He obtained a bachelor's degree in engineering from the University of Texas at El Paso in 1986 and an MBA from Arabian Gulf University in 1991. His primary concerns are human rights and combating corruption. He serves as the head of Al-Wifaq's human rights and political freedoms committee, and also conducts research on behalf of Amnesty International. In parliament, he generally sits near Ali Salman, and provides him vocal and emotional support. Wifaq's base includes most of Bahrain's poorer Shi'a; well-off Shi'a gravitate toward more secular societies or avoid politics. Wifaq continues to demand a "true" constitutional monarchy in which elected officials make policy decisions, the prime minister is accountable to the parliament, and the appointed upper house loses its legislative power. Wifaq works to combat perceived discrimination by the Sunni-dominated government through legislation and disciplined street demonstrations. Wifaq has used its growing parliamentary skill and strong leaders to bolster its position as the leading political force in the Shi'a community. Government officials have privately praised Wifaq for its rejection of illegal demonstrations and respect for "the rules". Wifaq often works with other opposition societies, including Wa'ad, Al Minbar Progressive Democratic Society, and Amal. Al-Wifaq has sought to align itself with Al-Asala because it shares more common interests with Al-Asala than either of the other two blocs in parliament: Al-Mustaqbal, the small grouping of secular Sunnis close to the Prime Minister, and Al-Minbar, the Muslim Brotherhood party.

The 2006 parliamentary election was a significant step forward for democratization efforts as the most prominent Shi'a political society, Al-Wifaq,

opted to participate in the election and won 17 of forty seats. Al-Wifaq remained the largest bloc in the COR, but its inability to deliver significant gains for its constituents is causing frustration in the Shi'a community. Al-Wifaq faces a growing challenge from unregistered movements such as Al-Haq, which call on Bahrain's Shi'a majority to withdraw from politics and confront the government in the streets. Al-Wifaq's underwhelming performance during the previous legislative session bolstered those Shi'a who argue that extra-parliamentary opposition is the only way to address their grievances. The other political societies in the parliament, including Al-Asala, criticized Al-Wifaq for not cooperating with them toward shared objectives during the last session. Protests in 2007 illustrated the division within Bahrain's Shi'a community between those who believe, with Al-Wifaq, that political participation is the path to change, and those who, with al-Haq, see street violence as the only way to achieve redress for the grievances of Shi'a. Protesters denounced Al-Wifaq as "corrupt" and "no better than the government."

Bahrain's main Shi'ite opposition group won 18 out of 40 seats in the first round of parliamentary elections in October 2010. The results follow accusations of voter irregularities and mounting tension between the country's ruling Suni and Shi'ite majority. It is a one-seat increase for the Islamic National Accord Association, also known as al-Wifaq, which gained 17 seats in Bahrain's last election in 2006. The group claimed hundreds of its supporters were prevented from voting this year, but the government denied the accusations. The opposition group claims the government cut voting districts in a way that prevents it from gaining a majority in the assembly. The mainstream Shia opposition, Wifaq, remained committed to the political process and the parliamentary experiment had been largely successful. Shia rejectionist groups Haq and Wafa' inspire the youths who

occasionally clash with police, but before 2011 had not seriously threatened Wifaq's hold on the Shia street. The eighteen members of the leading Shi'ite al-Wefaq party quit parliament to protest the crackdown on demonstrators on 17 February 2011. They said they will return only when the king agrees to transform the nation into a constitutional democracy with an elected government. In line with the directives of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, on 18 February 2011 Justice and Islamic Affairs Minister Shaikh Khalid bin Ali bin Abdullah Al Khalifa called on Al Wefaq Bloc to continue participating in the legislature. He said HM the King stresses the importance of Al Wefaq Bloc's contribution, alongside the other parliamentary blocs, to boosting the democratic march, promoting the rule of law and building the state of institutions within the framework of the national reform project. Shaikh Khalid pointed out HM the King's keen desire to see the legislative power, with all its members, assume its role in fostering the national democratic dialogue for a better and well-deserved future. (Security, 2014)

C. Al Khalifa Regime

In early 17th century, the plain of Al-Haddar, east of east of Al-Afflage ridge near Wadi Al-Dowasser was a villages with full of gardens that inhabited by the Jumailah-Wail branch of the Anaza tribe. In the year 1670 A.D., differences took place among the members of the clans, which result in the separation and migration of a division thereof. In the division there's the ancestor of the Al-Khalifa, Al-Sabah, Al-Fadhel, and Al-Jalahma, and their other kinsmen and supporters who migrated with them. Migration brought them to the East Coast and the Gulf Region. Various other tribesmen joined them and all formed a united confederacy and called themselves by the name of Al-Utub. Consequently they were known as Banu-Utuba. Unions of this

kind were common among the different tribes in Arabia and when such greater confederacies were formed, all the tribes, clans or individuals felt as if they were members of one common ancestor. From Al Hasa province the Banu-Utub went to Qatar Peninsula and settled in Freha in the year 1672 and from there they made their first brief occupation of Bahrain in 1700. Around the year 1708 they settled and founded the city of Kuwait. The founder of the present Al-Khalifa family was known as Shaikh Khalifa bin Mohammed, who left after his death a son, Shaikh Mohammed bin Khalifa.

In mid 18th century the Al-Khalifa, led by Shaikh Mohammed bin Khalifa, parted from their cousins the Al-Sabah, the present ruling family of Kuwait. Returning south, they established the fortified settlement of Zubara on the North West coast of Qatar. In 1768 Shaikh Mohammed completed the building of his fort in Zubara and called it Sabha, which means dawn. After his death, his eldest son Khalifa succeeded him as Shaikh of Zubara. In his time Zubara expanded and flourished, especially after the destruction of El-Basra in Southern Iraq, when numerous merchants emigrated from Basra and settled in Zubara. Al-Basra was sacked by Sadiq Khan El-Zandy, brother of Karim Khan, the ruler of Persia. In 1783 Shaikh Nasser bin Mathcoor, the Governor of Bahrain and Abu-Shohar, attacked Zubara. It is said that most probably the fear of the new state's growth, and the competition in pearl fishing areas and in commercial activity led him to action. At that time Shaikh Khalifa was away in Mecca on pilgrimage and his brother Shaikh Ahmed was in charge of the cause of Zubara. Nasser bin Mathcoor lost the battle at Zubara and Shaikh Ahmed with his followers pursued the defeated army and seized Awal. Awal is the old name for the island of Bahrain. Shaikh Khalifa died in Mecca on his pilgrimage whereupon Shaikh Ahmed became the first Al-Khalifa ruler of the Bahrain Islands.

Modern history of Bahrain is very much alive today starting with Shaikh Ahmed the Conqueror. For the next half a century many battles were fought on land and sea between the Shaikhs of Bahrain and the Sultans of Muscat. They also fought with their Najdi brethren of the Wahabe sect, and their former ally Rahma Al-Jalahma who had become a notorious sea pirate in the Gulf. Shaikh Ahmed died around 1796 and was succeeded by his sons Sulman and Abdulla, who ruled jointly until 1825 when Sulman died. Abdulla later ruled jointly with his nephew Khalifa bin Sulman, until the latter's death in 1834. Khalifa's son Mohammed, born in 1813, was perhaps one of the most colourful personalities in his time. He was associated with his granduncle Shaikh Abdulla in the Shaikship, then made war on Abdulla and was expelled from Bahrain. Shaikh Abdulla established the Kuheila't Jellaby strain of horse in Bahrain and during his reign they multiplied. Mohammed bin Khalifa then invaded Bahrain 1843 and drove out his granduncle Abdulla who settled in Arabia proper and founded the Al-Abdulla branch of the family. Shaikh Mohammed was a contemporary of Abbas Pasha of Egypt and it was he who sent many mares of the Jellaby and Dahman strain to Abbas Pasha. Perhaps Shaikh Mohammed was not a popular ruler, because he had to flee from Bahrain and his brother Ali became the new Shaikh. Shaikh Ali reigned for only one year, as his brother Mohammed, with his followers, invaded Bahrain again to seize power. A battle on horseback was fought on Rufa hill where Ali was killed. Alas, Shaikh Mohammed was not accepted as the new Shaikh, was expelled again and died in the Hijaz in 1890. He left 26 sons. (Khalifa, 2015)

The Protest originally aimed to make the government fulfill the promises of the king. This promise was made in a referendum the king put in 2001. The referendum offered them to bargain, to turn Bahrain into a kingdom to emir into a

king. In return, the dreaded state of emergency law would be ended, and a parliament with full of legislative powers would be instead. They basically offered the opposition had been demanding throughout the uprising in the 1990's. The referendum was widely welcomed and approved.

The king reneged on his promise. On February 14, 2002, the king announced a new constitution in which he concentrated power in his own hands. The constitution did give them a parliament, but it also thoroughly rigged the system. The parliament, contrary to the promises in the referendum, has virtually no legislative powers. I call the king's existing power a triple veto system. In order to get to parliament, one has to go through gerrymandered constituencies, which dilute opposition votes. In response to this setup, the opposition parties boycotted the first parliamentary election in 2000. By 2006, they realized, okay, the government is not budging; they are ignoring the boycott. So they decided to run for elections. This caused a split in the opposition. It gave rise to the rejectionist camp, which recognized that political participation in such a thoroughly rigged system couldn't possibly work in bringing about the desired changes.

As the years went by, the regime plotted to permanently disempower the opposition and ensure the regime's power in the long term. This effort materialized in various forms. One way was political naturalization. A former confidant of the royal family leaked documents proving a government plan to naturalize large numbers of poor Sunni Arabs from Syria, Yemen, Jordan, and elsewhere. The regime employs a mercenary police force and a mercenary army that's almost entirely non-Bahraini and is invited for the sole purpose of occupying these positions. So the plan was basically to create a permanently loyal quasi-mercenary constituency. That way, the regime

also gets to expand its secret police, police force, and the army, in preparation for future challenges. The effects of political naturalization are profound. First, they exacerbate the already high level of unemployment in Bahrain. According to the Economist, unemployment in Bahrain's villages (which are small towns but are referred to as villages) was as high as 50 percent. Second, political naturalization increases the sense of xenophobia among Bahrainis, which is convenient for a regime that's eager to divide and conquer. Third, the sudden increase in population meant higher demand for homes which were already becoming out of reach for the working class. Worst of all, this policy revealed the regime's deep-seated distrust of its own people.

It appears that the royal family's hatched long-term plans to disempower the opposition and secure its power permanently, all the while keeping the opposition weak and divided. It all fell apart as their conspiracies began to leak to the public, just as WikiLeaks did with US embassy cables. Probably the most scandalous leak of all is a document that reveals a transaction between a businessman and the king's uncle, the prime minister. The latter, who is the world's longest-serving prime minister and is a universally hated figure in Bahrain, bought a state-of-the-art financial development project called the Bahrain Financial Harbor for one dinar. That's \$2.65 for skyscrapers in the capital's busiest district.

As all this became public knowledge, and as it became increasingly clear that the regime had no intentions of reforming the rigged political system, a lot of anger and resentment began building up. People within both wings of the opposition had been warning that this situation is not tenable and it would explode at some point. The government had been aggravating it with even more repression in the lead up to February 14. (Zill, 2011)

