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“Authoritarianism in Bahrain: Motives, Methods and Challenges”

By: Nebil Ahmed Husayn

(Ph.D. Candidate, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ)

This investigation seeks to identify different elements in Bahraini society and government that indicate the existence of authoritarian rule and the methods which the state has utilized to maintain it. Drawing on Benjamin Smith, this investigation will search for coercive state apparatuses (CSAs) and alliances that encourage authoritarianism in normal life and in times of crisis. A number of sociologists have additionally identified ideological state apparatuses (ISAs) as mechanisms that maintain hegemonic worldviews and limit changes in an existing power structure. In addition to CSAs and alliances, the government of Bahrain has utilized the media, schools, mosques, private and public sector jobs as ISAs to influence and coerce public affirmation of the status quo. Tactics include the characterization of Bahrain as Arab, Sunni and loyal to the monarchy and the protestors as dangerous, deceitful, sectarian, and loyal to Iran. Hardliners in the government particularly promote anti-Shīʿī agendas that stigmatize, disenfranchise and repress the majority of its citizens. Various investigations have identified the claims of the state as largely fictitious; however, over a thousand citizens have been detained and some convicted and sentenced for crimes predicated upon these claims. The government carried out a systematic crackdown of protests and justified its

actions through discourses on loyalty. Protesters were publicly accused of treason, while pro-government partisans were portrayed as loyal and loving citizens. After analyzing the government's claims, this investigation will end by identifying recent developments both inside and outside of the country that have encouraged the reduction of repression in the country. Recent developments have included international challenges to ideological discourses as well as political and economic pressures from foreign governments and organizations.

Tensions between Hardliners and Reformers

As a country that receives more than half of its revenue from oil and minerals, Bahrain is economically a rentier state.¹ The number of its citizens is no greater than 700,000,² 60-70% of whom are Shi'ī.³ Both elements encourage authoritarianism in the country. Smaller populations are easier to repress.⁴ Rentier states are also able to obstruct democratization efforts by using their wealth to fund coercive apparatuses like secret police and modernization without liberalization.⁵

¹ Over 61% of Bahrain's GDP was dependent on oil and minerals in 1995, see Michael Ross, "Does Oil Hinder Democracy?" *World Politics* (53:3) April 2001, p. 326, 327. Rentier state is defined in this investigation as one in which rents are paid by foreign actors and only a few "are engaged in the generation of this rent (wealth), the majority being only involved in the distribution or utilization of it," see Ross, 329, especially n.8. According to the US embassy in Manama, although petroleum and its related industry comprised for less than 30% of Bahrain's GDP in 2006, oil revenue still made up almost 80% of the government's income, see "Despite economic diversification, Bahrain shares oil-based inflation pressures with GCC" *The Telegraph*, Feb 18, 2011.

² Alan Richards, John Waterbury, *A Political Economy of the Middle East*. Boulder: Westview Press, 2008, p. 46; Kenneth Katzman, "Bahrain: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy," *Congressional Research Service*, Nov 29, 2011, p. 28.

³ Katzman, 1.

⁴ According to Ross, there is some indication that small states tend to be less democratic than those with larger populations, see Ross, 345.

⁵ For the effects of the rentier state, see Ross, 327-330. Kiren Chaudhry argues that in the 1970s Gulf states used their oil revenues to develop programs that deliberately "destroyed independent civil institutions while generating others designed to facilitate the political aims of the state, see Kiren Aziz Chaudhry, "Economic Liberalization and the Lineages of the Rentier State," *Comparative Politics* 27 (Oct 1994), 9.

Various motives encourage hardliners in the monarchy to maintain authoritarian rule rather than shift power toward a more democratic, parliamentary state. The ideological discourse which defends the status quo of authoritarian rule is largely motivated by personal (wealth, ascendancy of the person and his clan) and strategic (sectarian and political alliances) interests. Opposition figures in Bahrain have identified hardliners in the government, such as Khalifa bin Salman al-Khalifa, who have staunchly defended these interests through authoritarianism.⁶ In contrast, King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa and his son, the Crown Prince, Salman bin Hamad al-Khalifa, are regarded as western-educated reformers, who publicly support granting citizens greater liberties and opportunities. Constitutional monarchies vacillate generally between authoritarian and parliamentary rule, some states eventually evolving into the latter.⁷ Obviously reformers face two conflicts in (1) wishing to expand the powers of the parliament, whilst maintaining their personal interests (e.g. political power) and (2) dealing with authoritarian hardliners. Hardliners were successful in escalating tensions in the country when they directed security forces to utilize violence against protesters at the start of the February protests, which resulted in a number of deaths. The violent deaths, which were shocking and rare to the small country, contributed to the radicalization of many protestors' demands from reform to regime change.⁸ Such a shift, according to the King, required a change in policy from reconciliation to repression. In this way, the policy of reconciliation was discredited and various hardliners in the security apparatus succeeded in resuming a violent campaign of containment. Before turning to an analysis, the following section provides a summary of the events in Bahrain

⁶ For exposés, see Laurence Louër "Government Hardliners Gain Favor in Bahrain" *CTC Sentinel* Vol.4 No. 11-12 (Nov 2011), p. 14-6; Patrick Cockburn, "Power struggle deepens divisions among Bahraini royal family" *The Independent*, Sep 27, 2011.

⁷ Herb, 368-372.

⁸ Although security forces were famous for torture, from 1977 until 2006, there were no executions in Bahrain, see Katzman, 17.

during the 2011 wave of protests and regime changes in the Arab world known as the “Arab Spring.”

Inspired by the popular demonstrations in Tunisia and Egypt, unidentified youth publicized a Facebook group calling on citizens to publicly protest for social justice in Bahrain on February 14, 2011, ten years after a national referendum guaranteeing human rights, social equality, and accountability in governance was famously adopted.⁹ Thousands of Bahrainis took to the streets only to be met with a violent raid on February 17 that left at least four dead.¹⁰ King Hamad and Crown Prince Salman began a process of negotiation with opposition leaders and withdrawal of security forces at the encouragement of the United States two days later. The state publicly sought a path of reconciliation led by reformers, but some opposition figures were emboldened to call for regime change after experiencing the violent crackdown and witnessing the overthrow of other leaders in the Arab world.¹¹ The cycle of funeral processions, demonstrations, and crackdowns which once propelled Iran's Shi'ī population toward revolution, similarly emerged in Bahrain.¹² Funerals for those killed by security forces always invite leaders of the opposition to utilize the tragedy as an example of government oppression and mobilize massive participation in a demonstration in conjunction with ritual funeral processions. Muslim culture greatly encourages participation in funeral processions, thus, funerals provide a poignant and powerful opportunity to flout any government prohibitions on demonstrations. Shi'ī culture also promotes marking the end

⁹ M. Bassiouni, N. Rodley, B. Al- Awadhi, P. Kirsch, M. Arsanjani. *Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry* (hereafter-BICI), 23 November 2011, p. 65.

¹⁰ Katzman 7.

¹¹ For example, the opposition group *al-Haq*, began calling for regime change by March 2011, see *ibid*; BICI, 85.

¹² Matthew Cassel, “Bahrain: Dying to Live” *al-Jazeera*, Dec 02, 2011; “Police clash with mourners in Bahrain” *al-Jazeera* Oct 8, 2011; Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI), 69-71 (for examples); cf. Iran in Feb. 18, Mar. 27, May 6, June 17 of 1978 and regularly thereafter. Nicholas M. Nikazmerad “A Chronological Survey of the Iranian Revolution” *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 1/4, Iranian Revolution in Perspective (1980), p. 327-68.

of a forty-day mourning period for the deceased.¹³ Both the burial and the commemoration of the deceased on the fortieth day offer opportunities for protest and the renewal of the cycle of violence and the escalation of tensions between the government and protestors, especially if security forces kill additional protestors on any of these occasions.

Efforts for dialogue in 2011 in Bahrain between moderate opposition figures and reformers in the government were derailed by both hardliners in the security apparatus and radical elements in the opposition. Some protestors began establishing blockades to the economic district and municipal buildings and refusing all efforts for dialogue.¹⁴ On the other hand, hardliners repeatedly ordered forces to respond violently to protests. Sectarian violence erupted in one neighborhood with unidentified individuals using knives in the conflict.¹⁵ Gangs with knives, swords and wooden planks began terrorizing neighborhoods, although no opposition party claimed responsibility for these groups. Some protestors were able to disable and seriously injure members of these armed gangs. When these armed men arrived at the hospital for treatment, doctors displayed their national identification cards to international media, which confirmed their employment for various security agencies and the Ministry of Interior (MOI).¹⁶ The concurrent occurrences of armed men causing violence in multiple neighborhoods indicated they were acting under orders. Many were plain-clothed agent provocateurs employed by security forces. State media claimed that some Shīʿī

¹³ The annual commemoration of the martyrdom of Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī, the grandson of the Prophet, is also an opportunity to inspire mobilization, see Jill Diane Swenson “Martyrdom: Mytho-Cathexis and the Mobilization of the Masses in the Iranian Revolution” *Ethos*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (Summer, 1985), pp. 121-149.

¹⁴ BICI, 76, 92-3, 96, 114-5.

¹⁵ BICI, 108.

¹⁶ BICI, 197-8.

protestors had formed armed gangs and were targeting naturalized and Sunni citizens. There is evidence that some Pakistani residents provoked violence, while others were targets.¹⁷

On March 14 2011, on King Hamad's request, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) sent defense forces to strategic oil and political sites in Bahrain, freeing various wings of the Bahraini security apparatus to begin a massive, violent crackdown. Over a thousand citizens were arrested and hundreds were given summary prison sentences in military tribunals, having neither due process nor a proper defense.¹⁸ Torture during the crackdown was severe and rampant.¹⁹ Prisoners have described extended psychological, verbal and physical abuse in their detention.²⁰ Doctors and nurses were given jail sentences spanning five to fifteen years for allegedly fabricating injuries to help protestors and refusing treatment to pro-government individuals.²¹ The United Nations has condemned the imprisonment of these medics.²² Protestors have received life sentences, while five have been sentenced to death in connection to the death of a police officer.²³ Prominent Bahrainis like Dr Ali al-Ekri and soccer athlete Muhammad Hubail, who were once recognized as national heroes, have also been imprisoned.²⁴ The United States postponed an arms deal with the country in

¹⁷ BICI, 367-71.

¹⁸ "Bahrain court hears medics' appeal" *al-Jazeera* Oct 27, 2011.

¹⁹ BICI, 282, 291-301

²⁰ "Bahrain: Medics Describe Torture in Detention" *Human Rights Watch*. Oct. 21, 2011. Web. Jan. 12, 2012. <www.hrw.org/news/2011/10/21/bahrain-medics-describe-torture-detention>; Matthew Cassel, "Bahraini doctors speak out against torture" *al-Jazeera*, Dec 2, 2011.

²¹ BICI, 188-90, 206.

²² "UN condemns jail sentence for Bahrain medics" *al-Jazeera*, Sep 30, 2011.

²³ Andrew Hammond, "Bahrain upholds life sentences for protest leaders" *Reuters*, Sep 28 2011; "Bahrain sentences more activists to jail" *al-Jazeera* Oct 4, 2011

²⁴ Matthew Cassel "From 'hero' to 'criminal' for Bahrain surgeon" *al-Jazeera*, Dec 2, 2011; "Football in Bahrain: A House Divided" *The Economist*. August 13 2011.

2011 after pressure from human rights organizations and Congress.²⁵ In May 2012 the US resumed providing military equipment to Bahrain.

The media has published feature stories on some of those who have received sentences.²⁶ Doctor Fatima Haji told *al-Jazeera* the integrity and experiences of medical professionals made them targets: “we were basically the main witnesses and we had the highest credibility internationally [to speak] about what was really happening,” she said.²⁷ The targeting of medics in the crackdown resulted in the international condemnation and negative media attention of Bahrain. Reports from the period indicate the government systematically violated the principle of medical neutrality by arresting and torturing physicians who treated protestors, militarizing Salmaniyya hospital, obstructing medical care, and even destroying medical reports from the period of the protests.²⁸ Due to the universal recognition physicians possess as individuals who uphold the Hippocratic oath, Bahrain's persecution and imprisonment of medical personnel effectively discredits any of the government's claims to moral authority or the presence of justice and due process.

Hardliner and Prime Minister Khalifa bin Salman al-Khalifa publicly ordered all ministries and companies to take punitive actions against all who participated in the demonstrations and condemned all protestors as conspirators of a coup.²⁹ A massive campaign of intimidation and

²⁵ Joel Beinin “Arms sales to Bahrain under the scanner” *al-Jazeera*, Nov 6, 2011; “US politicians seek to halt Bahrain arms deal” *al-Jazeera*, Oct 8, 2011; “US: Stop proposed arms sales to Bahrain” *Human Rights Watch*. Sep. 22, 2011. Web. Jan. 12, 2012. <www.hrw.org/news/2011/09/22/us-stop-proposed-arms-sales-bahrain>.

²⁶ Matthew Cassel, “Two weeks in Bahrain's military courts” *al-Jazeera*, Dec 2, 2011.

²⁷ “UN condemns jail sentence for Bahrain medics” *al-Jazeera*, Sep 30, 2011.

²⁸ Physicians for Human Rights. *Do No Harm: a Call for Bahrain to End Systematic attacks on Doctors and Patients*. April 2011.

²⁹ BICI, 333.

retaliation ensued. Thousands of employees lost their jobs in both the public and private sector,³⁰ while the University of Bahrain expelled 427 students.³¹ If managers were not forthright in providing such information, other employees and students were vigilant in informing the government of the names of peers who participated in the demonstrations.³² Bahrainis became unsafe even in other countries.³³ A number of students faced intimidation and cessation of their scholarships abroad for voicing support for the protests.³⁴ Finally, the government bulldozed thirty Shīʿī mosques and places of worship during the crackdown. The government claimed those places did not have building permits or royal deeds, but this was not true in many cases.³⁵

Over ten independent reports on human rights violations have been published in the aftermath of the crackdown.³⁶ The country has faced enormous criticism from human rights groups and some pressure from other countries to curtail its use of violence. The following section discusses dynamics in Bahraini society that have led to the demonstrations, repression, and recent moves for reconciliation.

Economic and political sources and methods of authoritarianism

³⁰ Over 2000 employees were dismissed in the private sector, see BICI, 341. Over 800 public sector employees were either dismissed or suspended, *ibid*, 334.

³¹ *Ibid*, 356.

³² BICI, 358 (for students).

³³ D. Parvaz, “Bahraini activists: Seeking refuge in a storm” *al-Jazeera*, Nov. 18, 2011.

³⁴ According to the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) all 97 study-abroad scholarships were reinstated on May 27, 2011, see BICI, 357.

³⁵ BICI, 320-1.

³⁶ For links to the reports published by Amnesty International, Doctors without Borders, Human Rights Watch, Human Rights Without Frontiers, International Crisis Group, Physicians for Human Rights, and others, see “Human rights reports on 2011–2012 Bahraini uprising,” *Wikipedia* <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_rights_reports_on_2011_2012_Bahraini_uprising>. Accessed Jan 11, 2012.

Benjamin Smith quantitatively finds a high correlation between oil wealth and a regime's durability.³⁷ He argues that increased protest and repression does not statistically cause regime failure in oil rich states. Furthermore, strong coalitions and alliances as well as successful state institutions that provide non-repressive and repressive responses to organized opposition are compelling sources for the survival of authoritarian regimes.³⁸

Bahrain has the lowest oil and gas reserves of all GCC states. Its independently owned onshore oil reserves will completely run out in fifteen years, leaving only an offshore reserve that it shares equally with Saudi Arabia.³⁹ The country has attempted to diversify its economy, but the number of citizens who are experiencing poverty and unemployment continues to grow. State actors have likely understood the difficulty they will soon face in dealing with citizens with an economy that is bereft of oil. Although the state has not relied on the distribution of oil rents to the majority of its citizens to maintain loyalty, fiscal health is very important in funding its security apparatus.⁴⁰ The regime's ability to continue to rule despite economic crises over the past three decades has depended on control of vital ministries, security forces, ideological state apparatuses (ISAs) and alliances with other powerful countries.⁴¹ Hardliners who support authoritarian rule have provided the *will* in addition to the *capacity* to halt democratization in the country. According to Eva

³⁷ Benjamin Smith, "Oil Wealth and Regime Survival in the Developing World, 1960-1999" *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 48, No. 2, April 2004, p. 232.

³⁸ Smith, 242-3.

³⁹ Katzman, 27.

⁴⁰ If soldiers and officers go unpaid, the apparatus generally "disintegrates from within," see Bellin, 144.

⁴¹ Eva Bellin states the importance of robust coercive apparatuses that stifle democratic transitions in countries in the Middle East, see Eva Bellin, "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East" *Comparative Politics*, January 2004, 142-3.

Bellin, authoritarianism is robust in countries where both elements are present.⁴² The following section analyzes the dynamics of authoritarianism in Bahrain.

Control of Coercive State Apparatuses

Louis Althusser describes the state apparatus through three elements: (1) the government and its administration, (2) the police and its specialized auxiliary corps, courts, and prisons, and (3) the army, which intervenes directly “as a supplementary repressive force in the last instance.” According to Althusser, state apparatuses can function massively to repress citizens by force (whether physically or legally).⁴³ Hardliners in Bahrain have relied on their control of key positions in the administration of the country and security apparatuses to maintain power and control citizens. Patrimonialism is prominent in the country with the royal family holding all strategic ministry positions and nearly half of the twenty-three cabinet positions. The Prime Minister (Khalifa bin Salman has occupied this position since the country’s independence in 1971), Minister of the Royal Court, Interior Minister, and Bahrain Defense Forces Chief of Staff are all hardliners who have not supported the reforms of King Hamad.⁴⁴

Monarchies generally lack legitimacy in their rule.⁴⁵ Thus, monarchies seeking the approval of their constituents have turned to creating constitutions and parliaments in their countries. However, there is a high correlation between the failure of constitutional monarchies and the manipulation of elections. Historically, monarchies that manipulated elections have either reverted

⁴² Bellin, 144.

⁴³ Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)” *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Trans. Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971, p. 137, 145.

⁴⁴ Katzman, 1.

⁴⁵ Michael Herb, “Princes and Parliaments in the Arab World” 370 n.10.

to absolutism or fallen to a coup or war.⁴⁶ Given that Bahrain is one of only six constitutional monarchies in the world today, it is important to consider the nature of its elections and parliament. Michael Herb judges the extent of monarchical authority through the existence of certain characteristics that are relevant to this study. They include monarchs who violate the constitution by dissolving the parliament, constitutions that provide insufficient powers to such a body, and distortions in the electoral system that lead to an underrepresentation of the opposition in the parliament.⁴⁷ The presence of all of these problems in the political system of Bahrain indicates the absolutist tendencies of the regime. Bahrain's current constitution, written in 2002, greatly limits the powers of its elected lower house of representatives.⁴⁸ Its parliament was suspended in 1975 and only reinstated with the death of the monarch, while its majority Shī'ī population is systematically underrepresented in elections.⁴⁹

Countries in which incumbent rulers appoint commanders rather than depend on an independent, institutionalized military produce soldiers whose allegiances are to the ruler rather than national interests. Militaries based on nepotism and cronyism are "less amenable" to reform and notorious for corruption.⁵⁰

Shī'ī citizens feel directly threatened by naturalized Bahraini citizens.⁵¹ Protestors claim that around half the security forces consist of immigrants from Pakistan, Jordan and Yemen,⁵² and that

⁴⁶ Herb, 372.

⁴⁷ Herb, 373-374.

⁴⁸ Herb, 376.

⁴⁹ The Crown Prince acknowledged this last point in March of 2011. See Bill Law, "Splits inside Bahrain's ruling al-Khalifah family" BBC, March 16 2011.

⁵⁰ Bellin, 145. Bellin explains that institutionalized systems are rule-governed, predictable and based on merit.

⁵¹ BICI, 367-368.

those with clear anti-Shīʿī sentiment are selected for naturalization.⁵³ The three aforementioned countries are overwhelmingly Sunni and possess security apparatuses that are feared for their ruthlessness. Anti-Shīʿī sentiment has been reported in all three countries.⁵⁴ The use of security personnel from these countries has facilitated systematic use of various forms of cruel and unusual punishment, including acute psychological and physical torture.⁵⁵ Their naturalization indicates the government has established a system in which (1) security personnel do not identify with citizens in the country, (2) Shīʿīs are subjugated to rising levels of state-sanctioned abuse and animosity, and (3) naturalization is used to alter the demographics of the country and strengthen its Sunni population.

The widespread repression and reprisals against protestors that occurred in 2011 is an indication of the control hardliners attained in the affairs of the government after March 14.

Ideological State Apparatuses

According to Althusser, a repressive state exercises its hegemony over ISAs, which function primarily by reinforcing ideologies. Families, religious institutions, schools and media may function as ISAs.⁵⁶ Social critics have identified the dual forces of “rule” and “hegemony” in society. “Rule” is defined by direct forms of governance and direct or effective coercion, in contrast to

⁵² Rezaul H. Laskar, “Bahrain National Guard to recruit former soldiers from Pakistan” *PTI*, Mar 13, 2011.

⁵³ Ian Black, “Bahrain security forces accused of deliberately recruiting foreign nationals” *The Guardian*, Feb 17, 2011.

⁵⁴ The bombing of Shīʿī mosques and processions have plagued Pakistan for decades. Yemeni forces have periodically waged war against Zaydī rebels in its northern regions. While King Abdulla of Jordan has expressed concerns over the growing power of Shīʿīs in the region, anti-Shīʿī sentiment is better gauged by the arrest, surveillance, and deportation of Shīʿīs. Propagation and conversion to Shiʿism is considered a threat to national security in Jordan due to tensions with Iran and Iraq, see Khalid Sindawi “Jordan's Encounter with Shiism”

⁵⁵ “Torture Redux The Revival of Physical Coercion during Interrogations in Bahrain” *Human Rights Watch*, Feb 2010, p. 26-58; BICI 282-93.

⁵⁶ Althusser, 145.

“hegemony,” which is made up of active social and cultural forces that dominate and subjugate individuals ideologically and symbolically rather than physically.⁵⁷

In support of the repression instituted by branches of the government, ISAs in Bahrain utilized patriotism as a reason to repress its population. Those who were loyal to the state were encouraged to identify all who participated in the protests through social media to facilitate their arrest. The government posted photos of protestors on Facebook and requested citizens to anonymously tag their faces.⁵⁸ State media claimed the following: medics were diabolical forgers of medical records. Protest was treason. Protestors deserved no leniency and the death penalty.⁵⁹ The editors of an opposition newspaper as well as international journalists were forgers of news. Iran was a logistical and financial source of the instability. Bahraini Shīʿīs were disloyal.⁶⁰ Shīʿīs generally were liars and specifically lying about injustices occurring in Bahrain. The protests in Bahrain, unlike those in other Arab countries, were illegitimate. Protestors were seeking sectarian strife, the persecution of Sunnis, or a Shīʿī theocratic revolution rather than social justice.⁶¹

Before *al-Jazeera*, state-run media may have been the only source of news for many Bahrainis, and thus, warped views regarding world politics may have unduly influenced peoples’ perception of

⁵⁷ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 109-110. Alternatively ‘hegemony’ is the complex interlocking the social, cultural and political forces. Ideology, in this context, is defined as a system of meanings and values projected by a particular group.

⁵⁸ BICI 391; Philip Walter Wellman, “Facebook Becomes Divisive in Bahrain” *Voice of America*, Aug 17 2011; Suzi Dixon and agencies “Facebook ‘used to hunt down Bahrain dissidents’” *The Telegraph*, Aug 4, 2011.

⁵⁹ Pro-government billboards sometimes showed a noose or pictures of prominent activists and the necessity of punishing them. For photos, see Karen Leigh “Bahrain's Hard Justice: Activists Sentenced to Death and Life” *Time*, June 29 2011 (for a billboard vilifying opposition leaders with their pictures, see photo by Hasan Jamali, AP); “Bahrain Sentences Shi'ite Activists to Death” *Voice of America*, Apr 28, 2011 (for billboard with a noose, photo by AP).

⁶⁰ BICI, 24.

⁶¹ BICI, 389-400 (for a detailed summary of the state media’s claims and activities).

their country, its citizens and the rest of the world. For example, Saddam Hussein (and his supporters in the Middle East, which included Bahrain) utilized xenophobic and Sunni-hemegonic discourses to galvanize support for his war against Iran throughout the 1980s.⁶² One cannot undermine the continued influence of anti-Iranian and anti-Shī'ī ideologies from the period in the discourse of hardliners in Bahrain. The most inflammatory rhetoric has precedents from the war era. The government places great pride in Bahrain's Arab and Sunni heritage. Its Persian history and population are not acknowledged and on Fridays only Sunni sermons are broadcast on state television.⁶³ Refusing to broadcast Shī'ī sermons continues to alienate the mostly Shī'ī population. The destruction of thirty Shī'ī mosques during the crackdown indicates the state's will to assert religious power and legitimacy over Shi'ism. Some Sunni scholars in the country teach their followers that Shi'ism is a heresy,⁶⁴ while the examples indicate government attempts to limit Shi'ism's public space in various ways.

An analysis of the claims and policies of the state has indicated that elements in the government fear the political and financial empowerment of Bahrain's Shī'ī population. The empowerment of such a population would greatly disrupt the unity of the GCC-led bloc against Iran, a paradigm that claims "pro-Arab must mean anti-Iran," and the triumphalist hegemony of Sunni-Arab cultural currents which dominate discourses on history, religion, and politics. During the 2011 crackdown, hardliners in the government utilized the media, schools, mosques, and private and public sector jobs to influence and coerce public affirmation of the status quo. Those who

⁶² He referred to his war as the Second Qādisiyya, an allusion to the strategic battle in which the 7th century Islamic empire conquered the Persians. See Jerry Long, *Saddam's war of words: politics, religion, and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait*. Austin : University of Texas Press, 2004, p. 72-3.

⁶³ The Safavids ruled Bahrain from 1602-1783 and the Persian community there currently does not have representation in the government, see BICI, 13, 95. Requests for the broadcast of Shī'ī sermons have not been granted, see *ibid*, 25.

⁶⁴ BICI, 24.

failed to uphold pro-government ideologies were alienated and targets of retaliation. The concurrent effects of all these elements have succeeded in obstructing changes to the balance of power generally and democratization specifically.

Strategic Alliances

Bahrain is a founding member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and enjoys warm relations with the United States. The country is of strategic importance to US, Iranian and Gulf interests. The US has maintained a large naval presence in Bahrain to maintain a military presence in the region for over sixty years. Bahrain has established defense pacts as well as provided assistance in both Gulf wars and other logistical support to the benefit of the United States and itself.⁶⁵ The Gulf states are allied to protect the shared interests of its ruling families and maintain centralized and unchanging power structures in spite of destabilizing forces from rival factions in a royal family, government officials, Islamist organizations, or socialist or democratic movements. Iran, since its Shīʿī Islamist revolution, has sought to export its pan-Islamic message and establish solidarity with other Shīʿī populations in the region. Shīʿīs in Bahrain, similar to those in Iraq and Iran, are the most populous group in their country. Their political ascendancy would likely result in warm relations with Iran. The United States has been instrumental in selling arms to Bahrain, while Saudi Arabia and the GCC have provided vital economic growth and aid.⁶⁶ Thus, Bahrain has excellent international and regional ties with powerful states that wish to contain Iran and its influence in the region. Both the GCC and the US support the continued existence of the current regime in Bahrain.

The Iranian Connection

⁶⁵ Katzman, 18-22.

⁶⁶ Katman, 18-22 (for weapons and military agreements with the US).

Underground Bahraini organizations, in addition to public political parties, have long been accused of receiving strategic or financial support from Iran. Despite the Bahraini government's claims, classified documents of the US embassy reveal that the government of Bahrain has not been able to provide any convincing evidence of the sort.⁶⁷ Iran has also repeatedly denied involvement in Bahraini affairs and has considered the accusations to be ploys in deflecting attention away from the problems Shī'īs face in the country.⁶⁸ Shī'ī clerics have been campaigning for democracy in the country for decades. The country openly refused such requests for many years under its previous ruler, Amir Isa b. Salman. A former foreign minister was quoted in regards to the country's rejection of calls for democracy during the 1990s stating, "we say openly: that won't work here. We are saying we have chosen our way forward ... We're going to do it our way."⁶⁹ Western diplomats⁷⁰ as well as analysts are skeptical about the role of Iran.⁷¹ After the fall of the Soviet Union, Western and Middle Eastern officials characterized Iran as the new "evil empire."⁷² As a result, much of the propaganda against it continues to be accepted without need for evidence.

⁶⁷ "The US embassy cables: Guide to Bahrain's politics" *The Guardian*, Feb. 15, 2011, paragraph 21. Web. Jan 12, 2012. <www.guardian.co.uk/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/168471>.

⁶⁸ In this vein, former Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati states, "Bahrain should respond to Shiite Muslim demands instead of charging Tehran with interfering in its affairs," see "Bahrain arrests 44 more in plot to set up a pro-Iranian regime" *Desert News*, June 6, 1996.

⁶⁹ "Bahrain's rulers take hard line on Shiite unrest" *Desert News*, Mar. 28, 1996. Web. Jan 12, 2012. <www.deseretnews.com/article/480446/ONLINE-DOCUMENT--BAHRAINS-RULERS-TAKE-HARD-LINE-ON-SHIITE-UNREST.html>.

⁷⁰ Katzman, 23; "More Arrests in Bahrain Crackdown" *Desert News*, Feb 5, 1996. Web. Jan. 12, 2012. <www.deseretnews.com/article/470120/ONLINE-DOCUMENT-MORE-ARRESTS-IN-BAHRAIN-CRACKDOWN.html>.

⁷¹ Hamid Dabashi "The role of the Islamic Republic in Bahrain" *al-Jazeera*, May 27, 2011.

⁷² Augustus Norton, "Introduction to Civil Society in the Middle East" *Civil Society in the Middle East*. Leiden: Brill, 1996, p. 20 n.32.

Juan Cole writes that Saudi and Iraqi Shiites have similarly been subject to false propaganda linking them to Iran. Saudi ministers have publicly accused Iran of “moving substantial numbers of men, as well as goods and material into Iraq.” Cole writes, “the charge in fact is absurd. But it mirrors the accusations of hard-line Iraqi Sunnis, who have never reconciled themselves to the Shiite majority in Iraq.”⁷³

Successful Challenges to Authoritarianism

The King & The Crown Prince

Bahrain allegedly experienced an attempted coup in 1981 and several terrorist attacks in the 1990s.⁷⁴ The 1990s was a period of unrest in which many radical Shī'īs were tortured and exiled. When King Hamad assumed power in 1999 he pardoned and freed hundreds of political prisoners in an effort toward reform. He also granted greater civil liberties to his citizens and reinstated a parliament, elections and a constitution.

Before the start of protests in the country and in response to the Arab Spring, King Hamad distributed one thousand dinars to each Bahraini family. The move indicated that he was aware of their discontent and financial difficulties. In February he granted a royal pardon to many political prisoners.⁷⁵ On many occasions he pulled back the security apparatus. After the 2011 crackdown, he initiated a fair, transparent and independent commission to investigate the events in the country, headed by well-respected international legal experts on human rights. The commission published a

⁷³ Cole, “A Shī'ī Crescent,” *Current History*, vol. 105 (Jan 2006), p.24.

⁷⁴ The now-defunct and extremist “Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain” claimed responsibility for bombing a hotel lobby that killed four people, see Adnan Malik “Hotel-lobby explosion injures 4 in Bahrain” *Desert News*, Feb. 12, 1996.

⁷⁵ BICI, 89.

report which transcribed the events of 2011 and detailed systematic human rights violations.⁷⁶ The report vindicates the role of King Hamad and Crown Prince Salman, who publicly and privately maintained an attitude of reconciliation until security clearly became a problem and radical elements began to call for revolution instead of dialogue. The King has publicly promised to follow the recommendations of the commission in reforming the country, however, reforms have been few. The government have permitted Bahrainis to hold limited demonstrations away from Manama proper, but security personnel continue vigilante attacks in Shīrī neighborhoods and those identified as perpetrators of torture have not been prosecuted.⁷⁷

Non-government actors

The state's history of human rights violations and torture has been recorded in reports published by various human rights organizations and news outlets over the past twenty years. The media coverage of its 2011 crackdown adversely affected Bahrain's economic and political reputation. Muhammad Hubail, the Bahraini soccer player, was sentenced to two years in prison in June 2011, in violation of FIFA laws, which revoked the membership of countries that imprisoned or barred athletes from playing for political participation. Human rights organizations contacted FIFA, which in turn launched a public enquiry that led to the release of Hubail before Bahrain was

⁷⁶ "Bahrain: Report confirms punitive campaign against protesters" *Human Rights Watch*, Nov. 23, 2011. Web. Jan. 12, 2012. <www.hrw.org/news/2011/11/23/bahrain-report-confirms-punitive-campaign-against-protesters>. "The 489-page report describes systematic patterns and practices of abuse by Bahrain's security, military, and judicial branches. These abuses included excessive use of force against protesters leading to dozens of deaths and hundreds of injuries, arbitrary arrests and detentions, psychological and physical abuse of detainees that in "many cases" amounted to torture, and a pattern of due process violations and unfair trials. The report also documented the unfair and summary dismissals of thousands of professionals, workers, and students."

⁷⁷ Justin Gengler "To Ban or Not to Ban...Al-Wifaq" *Religion and Politics in Bahrain*. Sep. 11, 2012. Web. Sep. 13, 2012; H. Atkinson, R. Sollom "Weaponizing Tear Gas: Bahrain's Unprecedented Use of Toxic Chemical Agents Against Civilians" *Physicians for Human Rights*. August 2012. Web. Sep. 13, 2012.

found guilty of any misconduct.⁷⁸ The US halted an arms sale with Bahrain, the quality of its bonds were downgraded, and Formula One cancelled a high-profile tournament in October 2011.⁷⁹ These examples highlight the importance of non-state and government actors in influencing the Bahrain government's treatment of its citizens.

Conclusions

Bahrain's Shi'ī citizens have been demanding economic and political reform for decades. However, hardliners in control of CSAs and influencing ISAs have succeeded in obstructing major reforms. Concerted efforts for reform must recognize the role of both ideological and coercive apparatuses in the alienation of many Bahraini citizens. Even if legal barriers were removed to empower Shi'īs financially or politically (e.g. win key cabinet positions), narratives expressed in the media, schools, and non-governmental associations would remain deep and ingrained sources of tension. Substantive reform would require that discourses which champion Arab superiority and domination over Persians be replaced with those that admire both. Bahrain's Persian history would need to be studied rather than ignored. State media has portrayed Sunnism as orthodoxy, while Shi'ism has not enjoyed equal representation. During the crackdown, ISAs encouraged Sunnis to negatively portray Shi'īs as dangerous and loyal only to Iran. ISAs continue to alienate Shi'īs and cause them to primarily fear persecution, radicalize, or disengage from participation in peaceful dialogue. The media and public education would need to revise narratives so that Sunnism and Shi'ism are presented as two historic orthodoxies in Islam. The population would have to learn that differences in beliefs and rituals do not necessitate animosity in pluralist societies. Public patronage of pluralism would provide an alternative to absolutist rhetoric of any hardliner or extremist groups.

⁷⁸ Michael Casey "Bahrain soccer stars pay price for protesting" *Bahrain Center for Human Rights*, Aug 25, 2011. Web. Jan. 12, 2012. <www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/4556>.

⁷⁹ Katzman, 21-2, 27.

Evidence indicates that Bahraini government reformers, opposition figures, and foreign players have challenged, if not discredited, some state ideologies. The BICI report has forced the government to admit its heavy use of violence and imprisonment against peaceful protestors. Furthermore, the United States, Formula One and Moody's have succeeded in incentivizing reform in the country by acknowledging news of violent repression of protestors as grounds for canceling agreements with Bahrain or downgrading government bond ratings.

Saudia Arabia has offered economic incentives and military aid to ensure the status quo in Bahrain. As a country well known for its own history of authoritarianism, discrimination and human-rights violations of religious minorities, migrant workers and women, Saudi Arabia opposes democratization in the Gulf. As a response to Saudi pressures, it is important that the United States incentivizes reform by denying countries with egregious human rights violations access to US visas or banking systems.⁸⁰ If the US's program of supporting democracy around the world is not enough for the administration to take such a stance, the prospect of increased anti-American sentiment, radicalization and terrorism should be considered the possible results of continued American support for the regime.⁸¹ Continued repression will encourage disenfranchised and persecuted protestors to begin attacking Bahraini, Saudi and American installations and succumbing to extremist or Islamist ideologies as alternatives to democracy. No country stands to benefit from repression over long periods as it encourages instability through the radicalization of the opposition. It is not in the best interests of the United States to appear to be legitimating authoritarianism in the Arab or Muslim world.

⁸⁰ "Backfire in Bahrain" Editorial. *Washington Post*. Aug. 7, 2012. Web. Sep. 13, 2012.

⁸¹ Emile Nakhleh writes that if hardliners "persist in opposing genuine reform, the window of compromise will rapidly close and hope for dialogue will vanish. Violence will escalate, calls for regime change will become more vocal and the U.S. will be blamed for the impasse. This is a recipe for lawlessness and terrorism." Emile Nakhleh "Bahrain Repression Belies Government Stand on Dialogue" Editorial. *IPSNEWS*. June 26, 2012. Web. Sep. 13, 2012.

This investigation essentially recognizes social, political and economic factors as contributing to the resilience of authoritarianism, but does not claim each of them to be necessary or sufficient conditions. Rather ISAs, coercive apparatuses and strategic alliances have reinforced one another and mutually enabled hardliners to promote authoritarian rule. Government, non-government and foreign players have all made concerted efforts to challenge state apparatuses and have achieved modest successes. Reformers are already convinced that the financial well-being of Bahrain depends on the successes of its own citizens and that continued repression will only hurt the country's international standing and lead to greater instability. Convincing hardliners of this framework will be an important component in encouraging democratization in the country.⁸²

Although some theorists dismiss the possibility of democracy “in countries that do not meet the standard economic, social and cultural preconditions,” Larry Diamond disagrees and believes the commitment of political elites is the only requisite.⁸³ He does not underestimate the ability of a rich resource like oil to aggravate divisions in a society, but contends that most countries that have established democracies in the past three decades have not fallen, even those with rich resources and ethnic divisions.⁸⁴ Diamond’s thesis provides hope for the different players in Bahrain seeking democratic reform.

⁸² Articles on democratization inspired by Dankwart Rustow stress that “democracy will emerge when incumbent authoritarians opposed to change (hard-liners)...come to see the uncertainty associated with free and fair electoral competition as the best option among other alternatives,” see Marsha Posusney, “The Middle East’s Democracy Deficit” *Authoritarianism in the Middle East* ed. M Posusney, M. Angrist. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2005, p.12.

⁸³ Larry Diamond, "What Went Wrong in Iraq" *Foreign Affairs* 83 n.5 (2004), p. 132.

⁸⁴ He cites Nigeria and Indonesia, see, Diamond, 132-133.