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The Future of Bahrain's Uprising: The Saudi Role, plus Regional and International Bets

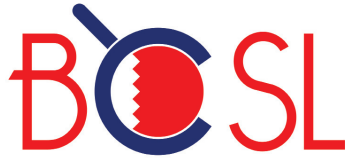
12 Jun 2012



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Introduction

There is a general impression among observers of Bahrain's crisis that a political immobility is covering it, despite the streets' bustle and the booming protests and demonstrations, on top of the escalated situation and the clash between security forces and protesters that is combined with killings, arrests, and abuses. International human rights organizations remain referring to and condemning these violations.

Until now, there are significant uncertainties regarding the application of all the recommendations of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) report (known as Bassiouni Report) which was formed in late June 2011 related to the events in Bahrain. Especially those recommendations related to political and sectarian discrimination, as in recommendation No.1725 (t), meant for conducting a national dialogue, which is supposed to open a skylight and is a way toward a political solution. The regime in Bahrain is still unwelcoming a dialogue between the both sides of the crisis (the royal family and the Shiite opposition, led by Wefaq Islamic Society). A dialogue that starts with high demands –from the regime's perspective– made by the opposition, with the continuous meetings that are always referred to between the two sides, with minimal demands that did not lead to any results whatsoever⁽¹⁾.

What appears in the surface is that both parties of the political conflict in Bahrain have their daily agenda. Where the government is preoccupied with two essential things : first, confronting the protest movement in the streets and run into it with escalated stringency if necessary; and second: organize a constitutional and legal situation -in the absence of

the opposition from the Representatives Council (parliament) and the state apparatus- in order to complete the procedures and the adoption of legislations within the so-called (the constitutional amendments), in accordance to the government specifications, which makes the issue of political consensus through national dialogue useless⁽²⁾. The opposition, on the other hand is busy conducting its daily activities from: brining together the street, to healing the wounds, and continuing media, political and human rights pressure.

The balance of the power of the public opposition and the authority in Bahrain, has led -as obvious so far- to extend the life of the crisis/revolution, with the consequent increase of the People's sufferings, as well as the distress of the royal family, in a painful game of biting fingers. And what helps extending the life of the crisis is that the United States and the countries of the European Union, has been able so far and through a policy of (double action pressure on both the opposition "Al-Wefaq" and the royal family) to put a limit to the conflict's prospects, where it has become possible not to expect surprises from both sides. In other words; the policy of the West in general, even if contained a certain amount of balance in dealing with the parties of the Bahraini crisis, was (to prevent an explosion) which means freezing the current political status. In addition, the West policy also adopted withdrawing some of the most detonators from the situation, insured by the Bassiouni Commission; alongside that policy's inability to achieve the ultimate goal of a (political solution). It is noted that the calls of the European Union and Washington to the government in Bahrain to accept a dialogue with the opposition has eased its pace recently, if not even fully stopped⁽³⁾.

In this context, one can say that the royal family in Bahrain, same as the opposition, is living a clogging political crisis. On one hand, the government officials consumed -and since the first months of the Revolution between February and April 2011- most, if not all, the force options and means of repression to stop the revolution, the opposition and the Shiite public, through teaching them a hard punishment lesson, which does not let them stand ever again (refer to Bassiouni report to see the level and types of violations and collective punishment). On the other hand, the authority has tried to thwart any demands -even if demands of reforms by the opposition- and tried also to make the opposition negotiate from the lowest position ever and under the pressure of repression. However, the street, and through Al-Wefaq Society's activeness, was able within an amazing pace to heal the wounds, and obtain its revolutionary resilience again. The regime in Bahrain does not hold any political project to solve the crisis, reshape the political system and achieve stability. The regime's means of deterrence cannot also stop the protests and demonstrations; neither can turn the clock again to committing the same violent and contrary-to-human-rights practices, which already have been committed in the beginning of the crisis.

The opposition, conversely, are not able to change the political reality with the power of the street alone, compared to the power of the regime and its coercive means of deterrence. Especially as the opposition -either believes; or is pressured by the West countries ambassadors- do not tend to escalate on the street level, in a way that leads to real changes and exert tremendous pressure on the regime to accept a political dialogue with them⁽⁴⁾.

So, why the political clogging did not lead to a compromise on a talk toward a solution? What is the solution prospect to the political crisis? And what the troupes in the opposition and the royal family are betting on?

The regional and international situation bet

Initially, it can be said that Bahrain's crisis has been internationalized and regionalized since its start. Seeing that what is happening from revolutions in the countries is no longer a purely internal matter like all major change movements, these revolutions are affecting the regional and perhaps the international status and interests. And are pushing those affected parties to intervene, as we have clearly seen in the revolutions of Yemen and Syria, where regional and international factors were serving actively in influencing the doom of these revolutions. However, the rate of internationalization or regionalization varies, partially due to the regime and opposition policies, and the extent of their desire to involve the external factor in self-favor; and not simply due to the desire of regional and international parties seeing their interest to intervene on behalf of the authority or the people.

In Bahrain, the regime found itself besieged by public discontent majority in outrageous demonstrations almost picked out the roots of the regime in March 2011. The regime did not find a justification for the public outcry, but to claim that there is a foreign interference and conspiracy against it; giving itself a moving space to justify an opposing intervention indeed⁽⁵⁾.

Two matters speeded up the process of the regionalization and internationalization of the Bahraini case, which came in by the regime itself:

1) Secterianizing the conflict, i.e., converting it from a political struggle of an opposition calling for democracy in a peaceful manner, to an internal Sunni-Shiite conflict. The Bahraini media "machine" (television in particular) has sponsored -and the government's policies of a collective punishment toward the Shiite majority- fabricating a risky sectarian rift not seen before in the history of Bahrain. Secterianization purpose of the political problem is to return the political crisis to the context of religious sectors; and to unite the Sunni minority behind the royal ruling Al-Khalifa family. And that is what has already occurred⁽⁶⁾.

2) Calling the Peninsula Shield Force, founded on 10/10/1982, to participate in an internal repression in Bahrain. The troops were formed primarily to face any external aggression, and not to suppress a peaceful protest movement seeking internal reform. And the regime

in Bahrain through summoning those forces, inset Saudi Arabia -with its regional conflicts- in the Bahraini matter, and has directly and deeply contributed in the expansion of regional and international interventions in Bahrain. Noting Bahrain's geographic location and its membership in the Gulf Cooperation Council, as well as the existence of the U.S. Fifth Fleet in its territory, and most significantly, the conflict and political competition between Saudi Arabia and Iran; and Iran with the West and Israel, are additional issues helped strongly involving the external factor in the crisis in Bahrain.

For its part, the Bahraini opposition which did not receive any official or public Arab sympathy as a decent spring revolution, found itself in front of public sympathy categorized as sectarian indeed, like in Iraq, Iran, east of Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and elsewhere. Despite its amazing national rhetoric compared to the regime's sectarian discourse, the opposition was unable to escape the sectarian classification made by the regime. The media, political and moral support to the Bahraini opposition have led to -in one of its aspects at least- to serving the government's plan in sectarian separation and distortion of the revolution.

Also, the opposition - Al-Wefaq specifically- opened its doors of communication with Washington and the capitals of EU member states. Indeed, this was even before the outbreak of the revolution in February 2011, where meetings of Sheikh Ali Salman, the Secretary General of Al-Wefaq Society, with the ambassadors of those capitals were publically released and published in local newspapers. They have also developed a network of connections on both Arab and international levels, and tried to take advantage of the international human rights organizations to serve its battle against the ruling regime of Al-Khalifa family; which has made the latter feel a degree of skepticism -at least in the first months of the revolution- that there was a conspiracy by the West against it!

What matters here, are the outcomes of the involvement of the external factor on the situation of Bahrain, as of now:

a) The royal family in Bahrain was betting on resolving the crisis through the contribution of foreign intervention using violence, political and financial cover which ever are available to it. This has not happened so far. The external factor has led to floating the problem (postpon-

ing it) instead of solving it.

b) The external factor contributed in robbing the official political decision significantly; where the conflict is no longer between the local players, as it is an international-regional conflict on Bahrain. The royal family has been marginalized and the decision-making was possessed by regional players, especially Saudi Arabia, who provides military support as well as political, media and financial cover to the ruling Khalifi regime.

c) What reinforced the foreign intervention was also the control of the militancy elements within the ruling system, and within the royal family, as in the opposition. And that has reduced the margin of intermediate solutions, or political solutions, if possible at all.

d) And most importantly, the Bahrain crisis has become a part of an international-regional conflict, where the royal family and the opposition alone cannot decide the outcome of the political system and its destination. Bahrain's crisis cannot be resolved apparently only after the resolution of many regional and international files, including the Syrian, Yemeni as well as the Iranian nuclear files. In addition, the future of the Saudi regime, and the fate of revolutions and counter-revolutions in the Arab world are also very determining. In other words: the future of Bahrain is just an outcome of the future situation of many countries in the region living constant and unusual variables since many years ago and that culminated in the so-called Arab Spring revolutions which did not stop until now.

Perhaps for this reason specifically, came the political deadlock in the Bahraini crisis; as if it is not allowed for the Bahraini people— from the regional and international players' perspective- to settle its options of change; and perhaps it is not allowed for the conflict parties, the opposition and the authority to propose any political concessions. This highlights the challenge of the opposition and the ruling Khalifi family in Bahrain: the deadlock and the waiting, perhaps future shall bring regional changes: either a negotiation improvement from one party's side, or a termination of the opponent's power altogether. The most likely: that the future -and by extrapolation of the current political situation in the region - does not serve the aspirations and the policy choices of the ruling family⁽⁷⁾ .

The Saudi role

Bahrain is a Saudi matter, more than any other Gulf country, or any country in the Arabian Peninsula (specifically, Yemen). Saudi Arabia finds itself concerned about what is going on in all its neighboring countries, especially in the vicinity of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, and especially Bahrain. The Saudi influence has seemed to be rusted even in the Gulf region -and not only the Arab and Muslim region- as it is clear from the strained relations, between Riyadh and Doha; Riyadh and Abu Dhabi; and even Riyadh on one hand, Kuwait, Muscat, on the other hand. These political and economical distresses, conflict upon the borders and Crossfire Media as well as border clashes, do not change the fact that Bahrain is (something else) from the Saudi's point of view, different from the rest of the countries of the Gulf.

The reasons of the degradation of the Saudi influence in the Gulf countries in general can be summed into:

I- An increase in the U.S. and Western political and military presence in the Gulf region and this presence which intensified since the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war has come at the expense of the Saudi role itself.

II- An existence of a crisis in Saudi Arabia that reflected itself in the form of deterioration in Saudi's external influence, on Arab, Islamic and international levels. Saudi being preoccupied with its internal problems, including security problems, has led the other Gulf States to believe that Riyadh is unable to provide protection to its neighbors as (a major sister), and also to fear that it moves or transfers its security problems, particularly those associated with extremism and religious violence to them.

III- The desire and aspiration of some Gulf countries to play an independent political role away from the Saudi Arabian shelter, and the rising resentment from the weight of what could be considered within a Saudi policy, especially in relation to the rich countries who want to activate its economy into a political stature. This is clear today for Qatar and the UAE, as it was clear yesterday for Kuwait in the seventies and even before the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait in 1990. This is the key factor that led to the failure of the project (Gulf Union), which was called by the Saudi king in December 2011, and which a consultative summit in Riyadh was held in order to discuss it on 14/05/2012. It has been only a failure.

Bahrain among other Gulf countries is quite different, and seemed pliant to Saudi Arabia more than any other Gulf state. This needs an explanation. Bahrain is an island, and islands generally are more defensible to protect themselves; and Bahrain on the other hand, is the base of the U.S. Navy Fifth fleet; so why it needs to a Saudi protection from any external aggression, while Saudi Arabia in itself is in need of such protection?

Two points of weakness of the regime in Bahrain, which can allow the Saudi influence through are:

- **The demographic factor**, where the majority population are of Shiites, Bahrain indigenous or better known by (Al-Baharna). The ruling family of Al-Khalifa did not succeed to change the pattern of its hostile relationship with them and make it a normal one, through establishing a participatory political system that is able to withstand the political challenges. In this sense, Bahrain shares with Saudi Arabia what could be considered an internal problem with the Shiite, both political and sectarian at the same time.

- **The economical factor**, where Bahrain is considered the least in its financial resources among all the Gulf states; though the Saudi and the Gulf support has enabled it to obtain an income rate per capita -in some years- more than its counterpart in Saudi Arabia itself⁽⁷⁾. What appears here as a success story tells a different one, when Bahrain lost - in favor to Saudi- much of its independent political and economical resolution, and perhaps the turning point came with the establishment of Bahrain-Saudi causeway on 1985.

The Causeway was the gate for the security, political and economical Saudi influence; and came to help with other issues in making Bahrain a supplement to Saudi Arabia different from the rest of the Gulf States. Today the economy of Bahrain is dependent on Saudi Arabia on a large scale, as Abu Saafa joint Oil Field is under full sovereignty and administration of Saudi Arabia, and it is not allowed even to the princes of the Al-Khalifa ruling family as well as others to entering the field. Most foreign financial institutions in Bahrain (415 Foundation until year 2011) are reliant in their activities and their clients on Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, Bahrain-Saudi Causeway brings in Saudi tourists and visitors and provides revenues estimated around 12-15% of the state budget⁽⁹⁾. This is in addition to Saudi Arabia covering the projects, and provid-

ing budget-supporting aid periodically, or, as is the case now where the political crisis is intensified, Saudi Arabia is providing an enormous financial support in order to confront the opposition.

These means of support for Bahrain can be a pressure factor on it, and Riyadh has been practicing some in the previous years, when it prevented on 3/11/2009 the export of (Sand!) to Manama. And therefore Manama was not strong enough to face Saudi Arabia nor to confront it or bear the results of the dispute with it. Even while Saudi was bypassing its limits in the recent years, and took over Bahraini islands (Bina and Labina), which is a subject of controversy since the fifties, and was a negotiation circle twice in London on 1951 and 1954.

The Revolution, a Bahraini-Saudi crisis

Saudi Arabia and Bahrain are more likely to be affected by the Arab Revolutions, or the so-called Arab spring than the rest of the Gulf States for political, cultural and economical reasons. In general, citizens of Bahrain and Saudi Arabia are the least luxurious and the most vulnerable to security and political repression. Furthermore, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia have enjoyed a long history of protest and opposition movements as well as attempts of military coups for long decades, which we do not find a similar example in other Gulf States. Yet, this is not enough to explain: Why Saudi is to be concerned about Bahrain's political situation more than any other Gulf countries; and especially after the crisis that erupted since February 2011 due to the revolution, and why it is the most enthusiastic advocate for the existing regime in facing the revolution. For many reasons, one can say that Saudi Arabia is not only the most influential player in the affairs of Bahrain, but it is the most vulnerable and affected by these affairs indeed.

a- On one hand, Bahrain is the closest to Saudi urban centers and densities than to Qatar or other states; and the people of Bahrain is very connected in terms of geography, population to the people of Saudi Arabia, more than to the people of other Gulf states, which means that the impacts of the Bahraini revolution are the closest to the neighboring Saudi Arabia.

b- The influence of the revolution grows in Saudi Arabia if we observe the Shiites factor in Bahrain and Saudi, where the majority of population is homogeneous and

relatively overlapping on social and cultural levels. And is suffering from the same problems of sectarian discrimination, and the aspirations of the population are similar. Additionally, the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia is the heart of its economic fields where the production fields, refineries and oil platforms, and that doubles the sensitivity toward what is happening in Bahrain.

c. Saudi Arabia - unlike other Gulf States- is more involved in conflicts over regional influence, being a key player in it, and a deeply affected party by its aftershocks; the success of the revolution in Bahrain has negative effects on Saudi Arabia's status more than other Gulf countries. These are the Saudi motives of military, political and security direct intervention to suppress the revolution in Bahrain; to an extent that it may be said that what is happening in Bahrain is a literal Saudi matter and the future of Bahrain and Saudi Arabia are coherent dramatically; as in the change in one leads to a fundamental change in the other.

Almost to the same motives, Saudi Arabia was not in favor of any political reform steps in Bahrain; and the reasons mentioned above represented the motives of the regime in Saudi Arabia to put pressure on Bahrain to abolish the parliament in 1975. Historically, Al Saud had intervened in Bahrain, and contributed to the political and sectarian strife in 1923, a crisis that has some similarities with what is happening today, led to offset the British to Sheikh Isa bin Ali Al Khalifa, and the expulsion of their fiercest supporters to Saudi Arabia, where they were the nucleus of forming the modern city of Al Khobar.

Saudi Arabia is a politically conservative country that cannot coexist with revolutions or with democratic changes. And Saudi Arabia feels that more liberty and justice in Bahrain, its effects will be reflected not only on the Shiite majority there, but also on its counterpart in Saudi Arabia to be also motivated to demand the same. In vain was the attempts of the king of Bahrain in making clear to the Saudis that their status is different from Bahrain, and that he had to do some reforms; but they did not understand that, and part of the dead end of those reforms that began in 2000 was due to Saudi Arabia itself. The failure of this political process led to the subsequent explosion of events in February 2011 and to the intervention of Saudi Arabia again -but this time through military force- under the name of the "Peninsula Shield".

The prospects for Saudi intervention in Bahrain

Perhaps it is sardonic to say that one of the goals of the Saudi intervention in Bahrain is to prevent the spark of the revolution's transmission to the eastern region, where the Shiite majority is lying above the oil fields. What has happened is that this military intervention rushed, and blew up an unprecedented political mobility in the region, continued to this time, as the demonstrations continue, despite the bullets and the fall of victims. The Shiites in the eastern region -especially in Al Qatif- were deeply and exceptionally influenced by Bahrain's events, and the violence used by the authorities against the population there push them out, carrying the flags of Bahrain in their demonstrations and demanding the departure of Saudi forces from there, as one of the most important goals of their political mobility.

In the overall assessment, Saudi Arabia does not seem to have won a lot from its overt military intervention in Bahrain; as it appeared as an enemy of democracy and human rights not only for its citizens, but to the citizens of another State -or States. Moreover, Saudi had to bear the international pressure because of its military intervention, and has become a model of a state, which contains anti-revolutions in more than one Arab country (Egypt, Yemen, and Bahrain)⁽¹⁰⁾.

But most of all this, is that the Saudi military intervention did not succeed in putting down the revolution, even if succeeded -so far- in preventing its victory. It is also important that Saudi Arabia, along with the hard-liners in the ruling family of Al-Khalifa who empowers its influence through the Saudi intervention, are standing as obstacles to the success of any real national Bahraini dialogue that can result in the restructure of the political system, in order to allow more freedoms, democracy and a greater participation of the Shiite majority in power.

Saudi Arabia does not have a solution to the problem of Bahrain through military presence, and has no clear approach to that, neither a specific project (except the abortive attempt to join Bahrain under the name of the Gulf Union). Saudi also appears not to be interested at all to reach a political solution; nor is interested in opening a dialogue with the Bahraini opposition to get to know another perspective. As if Saudi Arabia is working on the basis that the crisis is ongoing and all that it requires is to keep a permanent military presence in Bahrain. Perhaps

the endorsement of Saudi influence in Bahrain, including the military presence, is calculated as a turnover to Riyadh, yet, a turnover that is limited and subjected to damage too.

So there is an entangled regional-international network that somehow reinforced the Saudi role, but is subject to a change as well. It is true that the Kingdom today covers Bahrain's regime economically, politically, and on security, and media levels; but it is also true that the international factor (specifically the American and European) covers Bahrain as much as Saudi Arabia does; it also covers Riyadh. Thus, what is happening in Bahrain is not covered by only Saudi Arabia; as much as it is covered by Western countries to both Saudi and Bahrain and what is happening there.

There is a limited difference in the visions of Saudi Arabia and the Western allies to Bahrain, regarding the roots of the problem and how to get out of it⁽¹¹⁾. The West tends to hold the regime in Bahrain accountable for the problem, as a politically closed system and discriminatory against the majority, where such systems cannot continue forever opposing the desire of the majority population, keeping the latter under the grip of repression and violence. The way out in accordance to the West perspective is based on the survival of the ruling family through reforms in the political system towards a more democratic one. As well as allowing the participation of the majority by a reasonable rate, so that the ruling family of Al Khalifa can sustain for a longer time in the future, and avoids unexpected shocks.

In other words: the West wants from Al Khalifa a reform that respects human rights, and develops toward democracy through two mechanisms: the implementation of the recommendations of the Bassiouni Commission; and the dialogue with the opposition in order to develop the principles of a stable political system from the viewpoint of the West.

Saudi Arabia had a different opinion, where it believes that the Arab revolutions are just a foreign conspiracy; and that the West is involved therein; it has expressed strong dissatisfaction from Washington because they permitted the fall of Hosni Mubarak, similar to that resentment when Shah of Iran fell, where the official position was obvious from the Egyptian revolution⁽¹²⁾. In addition, Saudi Arabia felt that Washington -in the best

theories- did not turn the game as it should with its regional opponent (Iran) which allowed Iran to control the Iraqi decision. For this, Saudi has in mind, that there is a substantial risk of loss of Bahrain, as happened with the other, if the Western view strikes. So here, Riyadh convinced the ruling family of Al Khalifa that succumb to pressure from Washington and London in terms of reforms, will eventually lead to end its rule. The solution proposed by Riyadh -practiced on the ground with its own people- was to practice the security grip, and use it excessively in all fields so ultimately suppress the rogue majority.

Whether the intervention of the Saudi forces -under the Gulf title, Peninsula Shield- with the consent of Al Khalifa - some of them at least - or not, Washington did not feel comfortable with introducing the security solution before the political solution. But soon changed the situation, and expressed its support for it. We noted that from the negative-then-positive statements of the Secretary of State Clinton in regard to that intervention. But what is certain today, is that the approach of Western capitals to resolve the Bahraini crisis is unlike the vision of Saudi Arabia that is still prevalent.

While Western capitals insist on the issue of (The National Dialogue) between the opposition and the Khalifi family; but it is well aware that the pressure on Al-Khalifa is not feasible without the pressure on whose his hand hold the matter's keys, the princes in Riyadh.

However, regional conflict, especially with Iran, and the presence of multiple files with priority (Syria, Yemen and Egypt-after-Mubarak) and the Western need for all its allies and their presence in the battle field, as well as the existence of a Western tough economical crisis. These all pay the westerners to avoid any sensitivity with the Saudi part, and be content with only developing controls for the political game between the street/Bahraini opposition on one hand, and the security/Khalifi family on the other hand.

The Bahraini opposition: a blurred vision

To what extent the opposition was aware of the possibilities and motives of the Saudi intervention so it was reflected on its performance and the future of the movement of its people?

It should be emphasized that what is happening in Bahrain has all the specifications of a peaceful public revolution. Revolution, in its most basic definition, is a process of a total changing in the political, cultural, social, economical and even intellectual and psychological structures. The revolution in Bahrain -From the perspective of Al Wefaq- does not target (total change), which means changing the political system and its entire aspects, but, a gradual shift in the political system towards a participatory and more democratic one, and a reflector to the demographics and aspirations of the people of Bahrain. The goal of toppling the regime, which was called for by movements embraced the doctrine of radical change (Al Wafa, Al Ahrar, and Haq) fits perfectly with the description of the movement as a revolution. A revolution and yet not a (coup), as the regime, allegedly accused the imprisoned political leaders as planning for it, except to mean: a political coup using peaceful political tools. The military coup has further well-known specifications, and is made by the army or some armed sectors.

Also, what is happening in Bahrain is not a riot, as riots are short-lived and involve a minority, yet, recognizing that every revolution carries with it a riot and it cannot control all the details of the opposed public activity. In general, the peaceful state of Bahrain's revolution is an apparent feature more than what is found in all other Arab revolutions, including Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen. When we talk about the Bahraini opposition here, we focus on Al Wefaq Movement in particular, which represents the elite of the Bahraini Shiite community, and is engaged in political activity and its details more than any other opposition movement. So, the goal of gradual reform requires a political tool that is intertwined in relations with local and international actors, while those who target overthrowing the regime, whether in Bahrain or elsewhere, do not tend mainly to compromise, and do not find itself interested in topics of dialogue, and do focus usually on its popular tools in achieving its objective. The opposition in its various forms in Bahrain -and through its behavior- showed that it did not pay the regional and international factor any interest through its political activity; while it can be said that the ruling regime in Bahrain, paid that factor big effort and attention, regardless of the outcome it came out with.

The following observations in this regard could be included:

1- Bahraini opposition in its both wings (revolutionary and reformist) has not given enough attention to its allies, parties, states, nations, and the political, religious and social forces in achieving its goal.

2- Al Wefaq focused somehow on the Western position, their pressure, and the reduced marginal size for maneuver available to it. At the end of the day; the West does not want to change the regime in Bahrain; and does not see the opposition as closer to it from the royal family; nor does it trust the opposition if only to some extent, given the sectarian factor joint with Iranian, Iraqi and Lebanese sector.

3- The opposition estimations of the Saudi role in the conflict with Al-Khalifa family were very stumpy. Probably it did not think that the Saudi forces will land in Bahrain or take in permanent locations inside the country. It did not also expect Saudi Arabia to financially cover in a very obvious way the effort of the ruling family, which had an impact on the overall balance of power. The Saudi factor is almost in favor of the Khalifi regime; and the opposition did not open a channel of dialogue with Riyadh; while the Al Khalifa used the Saudi factor to its maximum levels, including invoke the Saudi factor for the lack of any concessions, even if minimal, although this is not necessarily true.

4- The Bahraini opposition has not made an effort at the Gulf level; as a start it may has come up with Kuwait and Qatar to mediate; but that was extinguished since the entry of Saudi forces, and the doors were closed to any independent- from-Saudi Gulf effort to contribute to solutions to the crisis.

5- On the Islamic level, a convincing effort by Al Wefaq has not been recorded, except for the initial attempts started with Turkey, which ended by Turkey being pulled out towards the other option in favor of Saudi Arabia.

6- The same may be said also for the countries of Arab spring; Al Wefaq has made an effort to have a presence in Cairo; through the visit of Sheikh Ali Salman in October 2011. But the regime on the other hand marveled at this move, and responded in a swift reaction through the King's visit to Cairo in the same month, a few days later. The king sought to connect relationships with the military personnel, resulting in closing the doors in front of the Bahraini opposition in Egypt, and prevent most Bah-

raini activists from entering Egyptian territory!

7- There are also initiatives to move towards China and Russia as international players, not resulted in any concrete solutions so far, yet these initiatives may be an opportunity to benefit from.

Finally, it must be said, that the strength of any party in the regional arena of conflict, is due largely to its strength on the ground. Although Al Wefaq and all the opposition parties proved an amazing public presence on the ground, through the continuation of the protests, and their ability to buildup an enormous street attendance, these actions are still (under the roof of the expected) for not creating a real pressure on a political level, other than just being a continuation of the revolution. The factor of "No surprises" makes the opposition not to be approached by influential regional and international forces, and less for its demand to be succumbing by the system. Without a shift in the mobility of the Bahraini street, the regional role shall be enlarged at the expense of the key players in the street. This lesson is to be taken in consideration, in order to come out with a solution to the Bahraini crisis, whether in accordance to Al Wefaq goal or by other opposition parties, which wants to overthrow the regime.

Footnotes

1. Sources close to the opposition had spoken that meetings has been held between their representatives and the Minister of the Royal Court, Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa, between the months of last February and March, but has not lived up to the level of dialogue. Officials in Bahrain welcomed –theoretically- the dialogue with the opposition, but that did not make them take any practical steps, or to invite the opposition to direct dialogue. See, for example, statement by the Minister of Justice Khalid bin Ali Al Khalifa to the BBC, Hard Talk program, late April 2012. Al-Wasat, 04/26/2012, at: <http://www.alwasatnews.com/3519/news/read/658541/1.html>.

The king of Bahrain has also called for dialogue and national reconciliation on 04/05/2012, but that did not follow any practical steps either. On 3/5/2012, he was willing for a dialogue during the launch of the constitutional amendments, without showing a real seriousness behind that call. From its part, Al-Wefaq Society has been calling for dialogue and reconciliation, and Sheikh Ali Salman expressed in an interview with Radio Monte Carlo last March for the opposition's readiness to start a dialogue with the authority in order to take Bahrain out from its political crisis, under the condition that this dialogue must be determined with a clear framework and its results are presented on a referendum. See, on 12/5/2012: <http://www.france24.com/ar/20120320-bahrain-opposition-ready-dialog-political-crisis-issues>.

2. The King of Bahrain approved constitutional amendments on 3/5/2012, and said to Bahrain TV that (the door for dialogue is open, and national reconciliation is the objective of this dialogue). See: BBC Arabic, 3/5/2012, at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/arabic/middleeast/2012/05/120503_bahrain_amendments.shtml.

3. There is a firm belief in Western countries, that there is no way out of the crisis in Bahrain without a dialogue between the opposition and the ruling family and without the ruling family providing concessions that might be painful for it.

The alternative from the West's perspective is the rise in violence as well as foreign interference (Saudi/and Iranian), and a continuation of the crisis for many years without a solution.

This was the point behind the repeated for months of the crisis' invitations to real, constrictive dialogue. On 23/5/2011, the European Union foreign ministers urged the government and the opposition to dialogue as soon as possible to resolve the political crisis in the country so that the reforms successfully address the challenges faced by Bahrain.

On 27/10/2011, the European Parliament called for a serious and meaningful dialogue between the government and the opposition without delay or preconditions.

On 13/2/2012, Catherine Ashton, the Minister of European Foreign Affairs saw that it is (essential of a constructive participation of all parties in the process of national reconciliation).

On 15/3/2012 the European Parliament recommended the Government of Bahrain to achieve (the process of national reconciliation through inclusive and building dialogue, which is necessary for the stability of democracy to the diverse community of Bahrain and that dialogue should ensure equal rights for all citizens).

On 7/1/2012 Victoria Nuland, the spokeswoman of the State Ministry of Foreign Affairs said: (The key to the future of Bahrain, as we have been discussing with officials there, lies in a genuine dialogue among Bahrainis that could be a basis for reconciliation, and to breathe new life in the edifice of national unity).

On 19/2/2012, Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy and Human Rights, Michael Posner said: (The aim of the Independent Committee and the implementation of its recommendations is to create a path to a genuine political dialogue and national reconciliation. We renew our call to all sides including the government and political societies and others to participate in the dialogue and negotiation, where all elements of society can have a real voice).

When the king met with Cameron, the British Prime Minister on 12/12/2012, and Cameron invited the king to implement the recommendations of Bassiouni and advancing the reform process through dialogue with the opposition as being part of this process).

When Alastair Burt, the British Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, called on 22/03/2012 to a political dialogue between the government and political groups and during his visit to Bahrain, on 3/4/2012 Bert said that (The Bahraini government should continue to make progress in the field of constructive and realistic political dialogue).

For its part (the German government strongly believes that a meaningful dialogue between the Bahraini political actors will lead to national reconciliation, and encourages both the government and opposition groups to engage in such dialogue), according to a statement to the German Foreign Office on 23/12/2012.

4. There appeared to be two attempts of salutation in the street, but they have been put down by (Al-Wefaq) itself. First, when Sheikh Isa Qassem made a speech on Friday, January 20, 2012 when he accused the regime of assaulting girls and women, saying: if you came by anybody assaulting a girl who believes In God, crush him. This sentence was out of expectation from Sheikh Isa Qassem, which frightened the authority, and pushed the Western ambassadors in Bahrain to put pressure on Al-Wefaq leadership to pull the fuse, and it did. When Al-Wefaq provided explanations to calm down the street, the most important, of course, the explanation provided by the Secretary General of Al-Wefaq Society, Sheikh Ali Salman on 14/02/2012, where he explained that it is true (in case of attack on the believers, and not a general situation. Here comes the defense even if that leads to the destruction of the aggressor).

The second attempt was linked to crowd on February 14, 2012, the anniversary of the revolution in Bahrain, when most people came out to the streets, and Westerners feared as much as the regime of establishing a case of flexural in the revolution. It was also reduced and contained, with the efforts of government security, and pressure from Western ambassadors in Manama on Al-Wefaq Society, when considered the demonstrations just a show of the opposition strength and its popularity in the street, which something does not need to prove or show. It was either a tool of escalation toward a real change in balance of power on the ground, or a new political approach used by the opposition.

5. King of Bahrain on 21/3/2011, after about a week of Saudi security forces intervention, said: that (a foreign conspiracy) against his country had been foiled! He added: (I announce here the failure of this hidden conspiracy) and continued: (this conspiracy was being prepared since twenty to thirty years!) in reference to Iran. See: BBC Arabic, 21/3/2012, at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/arabic/middleeast/2011/03/110321_bahrain_king.shtml.

It should be recalled here that Bassiouni Commission that was formed by the King did not prove this intervention, and said: (the evidence provided by the Government of Bahrain to the Committee regarding the intervention of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the internal affairs of the Kingdom of Bahrain does not make any significant linkage between the events took place in Bahrain during the months of February and March 2011 and the Islamic Republic of Iran) (report, paragraph 1584). At: <http://www.bici.org.bh/BICIreportAR.pdf>.

6. One can look at all the practices of the Bahraini regime since mid-March 2011 as politically and sectarian motivated; including the repression, torture, expulsion from work and education, collective punishments, defamation in the official media, arrests of journalists, destruction of religious facilities, and damage to property, and other practices reported in Bassiouni report. But the most obvious is the official media, especially the television, which has been publishing material based on sectarian incitement against the majority population, especially in the program (Al-Raised, The Observer). The report of Bassiouni confirmed the regime's usage of language that fuels sectarianism and hatred in paragraphs:

1629-1630. Moreover, Bassiouni's report called for the recommendations to deal with that: see paragraph 1724.

7. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia already lives harbingers of a political change crisis; and the file of Syria, though not finished, the bet on the overthrow of the regime there, moved away more than ever, because of the double-veto of China and Russia in the Security Council on February 4, 2012. As well as betting on a war against Iran, has become away too, which opens the door to a settlement on the Iranian nuclear file that does not serve the interests of Saudi Arabia and its allies. Moreover, the Yemeni crisis is still disturbing in its three dimensions: Al-Qaeda, Houthis and the Southern Movement calling for separation, which are all pressure elements on the Saudi-Gulf project. And finally, the results of the Egyptian presidential elections, which will begin in 23/5/2012, indicating considerable potential for the arrival of the Islamists to power, either through winning candidate of the Muslim Brotherhood, or the former member of the brotherhood and now independent, Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh, which could lead to dramatic changes in the regional situation.

8. For example, according to the World Bank, the income rate per capita in Saudi Arabia for the year 2010 amounted to 16,778 dollars; in Bahrain, 21,097 dollars; in Sultanate of Oman 20,332 dollars; the UAE 49,995 dollars; Kuwait 37,451 dollars; and Qatar 81,963 dollars. In other words, Saudi Arabia is ranked the lowest among the Gulf States. See: Al-Riyadh Newspaper 1/4/2011 at: <http://www.alriyadh.com/2011/04/01/article619197.html>, On 12/12/2012.

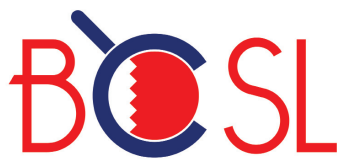
9. See for example: <http://arabic.arabianbusiness.com/business/travel-hospitality/2009/nov/10/31151/> <http://www.alwaqt.com/art.php?aid=203553>, On 12/5/2012.

10. See: Saudi Arabia is leading an anti-revolution against the Arab spring, Al Quds Al Arabi, 27/5/2011, citing New York Times. See also Tawfeeq Al Ebad, Saudi's anti-revolution in Bahrain, Journal of Al Hejaz, No. 104, June 2011, at: <http://www.alhejazi.net/seyasah/0110403.htm>, On 12/5/2012.

See also: Muhammad Qusti, why, how and where? Saudi Arabia and the anti-revolution, Journal of Al Hejaz, No. 104, June 2011, at: <http://www.alhejazi.net/seyasah/0110401.htm>, On 12/5/2012.

11. About this difference in attitudes between Washington and Riyadh, see: Farid Ayham, The Saudi and American influence on the crisis in Bahrain, Journal of Al Hejaz, No. 103, May 2011, at: <http://www.alhejazi.net/seyasah/0110302.htm>, On 12/5/2012.

12. See Saudi local press coverage of the Egyptian revolution events and its resentment of the role of the West, especially Washington. For example: Farid Ayham, the Egyptian Event in the local press (Al-Jazeera Newspaper an example). And Fahad al-Haazmi, Saudi intellectuals condemn the Egyptian revolution, and Mohammed Al Ansari, the revolution for a Saudi writer who is dripping out of ignorance. The three articles in the Journal of Al Hejaz, No. 100, February 2011, at: http://alhejazi.net/pdf/AlHejaz_100.pdf, On 12/5/2012.



BAHRAIN CENTRE FOR STUDIES IN LONDON
مركز البحرين للدراسات في لندن

www.bcsl.org.uk

About BCSL

There has been an increasing talk about the Kingdom of Bahrain and the political trends and challenges the country is facing since the increase of the political crisis started on February 14th 2011 when Bahrain emerged as a part of the so called “Arab Spring Revolts” that roiled Arab world in 2011.

This has raised fundamental questions about Bahrain’s sophisticated ever political issues, despite, that Bahrain is located and surrounded by, as described as, conservative and stabilized countries.

The international interest about Bahrain, and at the same time the lack of insightful readily available information, are behind the drive to establish, on the 3rd of May 2012, “The Bahrain Center for Studies in London (BCSL)”, as an independent research centre, aims to, study the case and status of the uprising in Bahrain, its influential factors and expected future affairs.

BCSL will prepare and publish researches and studies and will also organize debating sessions evolving around the domestic affairs of the Kingdom of Bahrain and its strategic aspects related to political, economic and security policies and including its relation at regional and international levels.

BCSL encourages discussions and dialogues in respect of Bahrain, and seeks to increase the interest of researchers, decision-makers, and actors in public opinion and motivate them to address the different aspects of the issues of Bahrain.

BCSL wishes that this will contribute to a sound understanding and insightful of Bahrain case.

BCSL interests

BCSL is mainly concerned with all issues related to Bahrain within the context of its regional and the international relations and politics in particular that relates to the Gulf Corporation Council (GCC) states.

Research interests programs include, but not limited to, the followings:

1. Political Issues.
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3. Human Rights Issues.
4. Legal and Constitutional Affairs.
5. The issues of Security, Defense and armed equipment
6. Media
7. The links and entanglements between Bahrain issues and other GCC States, in a regional and international context.
8. Economic and Oil

BCSL also pays particular attention to the political/ democratic development of the GCC states and other Arab countries.

For ideas of research, and if interested to write about one of the above listed topics, please communicate with the Head of BCSL through the following e-mail address: director@bcsl.org.uk

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The Future of Bahrain's Uprising: The Saudi Role, plus Regional and International Bets

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