



BAHRAIN CENTRE FOR STUDIES IN LONDON  
مركز البحرين للدراسات في لندن

[www.bcsl.org.uk](http://www.bcsl.org.uk)



## The footholds of the “Scheme of Change” in Bahrain

26 August 2014



Saeed Al-Shehabi  
(Bahraini Researcher)



BAHRAIN CENTRE FOR STUDIES IN LONDON  
مركز البحرين للدراسات في لندن

---

## **The footholds of the “Scheme of Change” in Bahrain**

26 August 2014

---

The debate has fulminated, particularly since the outbreak of the current revolution on 14 February 2011, among those who are concerned of the situation in Bahrain between two schools of thoughts; that supports the political solution and the second pertains to the principled comprehensive solution.

Despite that the supporters of both parties have been working in consensus and cooperation manner that inflates sometimes and deflates on others, the ideational argument has never been away from the scene, especially when the regime pretends the desire in the so called “dialogue”, or when directs one of its agents to communicate with part of the political opposition.

### **1.Regime Attempts To End The Revolution**

Since the first week of the revolution, the crown prince called for the «dialogue». The call was launched in an absolute different atmosphere than now, where people were entirely mastering the scene, and Al-Khalifa family was trapped in its palaces. Simultaneously, the atmospheres of the Arab Spring wafting the scent of democratic change and exude an aura of hope in the hearts of many. At then the initiative of the dialogue was nothing rather a strong will to put an end to the revolution and try the best to break its hegemony.

After the first session of the dialogue, many issues had clearly turned to conclude that:

Firstly, the dialogue was absolutely not serious, but rather an attempt to settle the situation down and to end the public movement.

Secondly, the dialogue was nothing but to assess the intents of the political opposition, and whether it influenced by the public movement that had been escalating so fast day by day. The movement was never affected by the repression and murder techniques committed by the regime against the citizens at the early days.

Thirdly, the political opposition was truly convinced of the weaknesses and powerless of the Crown Prince though he pretended to be the decent among a ruthless regime that never hesitates to commit murder and practice violence.

Fourthly, the political opposition was on the other side confined with the high demands of the public revolution that came out of the ordinary forms of protest and overcame fear.

Fifthly, the opposition was rushing to reach a political solution to satisfy a wide segment of the public, yet within the frameworks set out by the Gulf ruling families and supported by Western powers, especially Britain.

Sixthly, exploring the possibility of a political solution had come late, was weak-willed and surrounded by external warnings, in particular from the “big brother- Saudi Arabia”. Furthermore, the regime’s representative in the dialogue was indeed the weakest party in the circle of decision; consequently there was no guarantee that any agreement reached will ever find its way to implementation.

### **2.Revolutionary Tide Imposed its Agenda**

The so-called “Crown Prince Initiative”, and its seven clauses, was the beginning of the crack in the oppositions’ front. This crack got expanded gradually, especially after the emergence of two diverse paths in the demands not only on a political level, but also through the tactic approach and the extent of the confrontation with the ruling family i.e. at the time where a revolutionary trend exceeded the norms in its clashes with the ruling family, the opposition –consists of a few political associations led by Al Wafaq Islamic National Society –had been circumscribed to work within the restricted and official framework that was launched by the King and was accepted by the opposition ten years ago.

### **3.Abolish of Fear barriers**

These political associations circumscribe by the laws imposed by the government– have been already applied to the ministries and official institutions– which prevent any movement that could either challenge the legitimacy of the ruling family or seek a change. Hence, the political associations were demarcated with these laws and regulations and opt not to confront with the rul-

ing family. In contrast, the revolutionary tide was rising daily and was imposing a broader agenda than what the political associations were seeking to achieve or what the regime was allowing.

In summary, the escalating pattern of the revolution was seeking to create a new reality within innovative and unprecedented frameworks, including the following:

1. The revolution came to abolish the barriers, limitations and restrictions forced by the ruling family through the constitution imposed on the country in 2002, where they –the family- work beyond the “allowed” and authorize themselves to impose all political taboos, which are limitless.

2. The popular movement deliberately worked to eliminate the so-called “obedience of the state”, which is already viewed as an authoritarian state, practicing arbitrariness, tyranny and confiscate the natural rights of citizens. This movement deliberately targeted the regime in its most painful spots. A country that is not respecting the rights of its citizens and is stateless; must be broken through contempt, challenge its symbols and disobey its arbitrary orders. There is never an obedience for a state whereby the citizens lose their security, rights and humanity.

3. What happened in the first week after the start of the revolution made the political reality jump to unprecedented levels, where all barriers of fear got completely broken that was because the regime used most of its weapons, and the rebels got used to and manage to deal with. When the regime resorted to the use of force, especially using live bullets to kill protesters in the first two days (14 and 15 February), it exhausted its deterrent strength, where no longer threats of death terrified the rebels, who now challenge the regime after infiltrating its first defence line. Those rebels faced and still are facing death openly not minding the fierce repressions practice by the regime’s forces.

4. A new culture imposed itself on the masses and got widely spread due to the collective intellect that mastered the fields. While there was a culture spread by the political associations to

practically adopt the Khalifi Constitution, by registering themselves according to its provisions, and participate in the “parliamentary” elections in accordance to its provisions too, a new culture emerged adopting the need for fundamental political change in the identity of the state and its ideology and system of government. Moreover, that culture was reflected in the huge gap that was and still is increasing between the native Bahraini people (both from Shia and Sunni sects) and Al-Khalifa family who controls with an iron fist and derives its legitimacy from its physical power and force.

5. The revolution deepened the national indignation for majority of citizens. It began by understanding the risk of the Khalifi project founded mainly to change the demographic composition of the country, and got even deepened through the emergence of naturalization and discrimination, and the adoption of a sectarian project which bisects the community along the lines of religious affiliation, and distorting the history of the country to cancel all pre-Khalifi-occupation events in 1783, and adopting media policies targeting indigenous people who are historically known as “Al Baharna”. The revolution contributed in broadcasting a popular awareness that the survival of the people requires maintaining the historical, religious, and culture identity, as well as addressing the blockade of the ruling family, and refusing to return to the pre-revolution stage or accepting the coexistence within a political system dominated by that family.

6. The culture of confrontation and sacrifice for the nation and the right to liberty and religion got deepened. A sense of national religious duty and blending of contemporary cultural taste got mixed with the heritage dating back to centuries ago, which the grandparents contributed to raise, both at the level of science, writing, belonging to the school of Ahlulbayt (the family of the prophet of Islam), or at the level of the character associated with the life such as diving, art, agriculture, and riding the sea.

7. A Bahraini young person today feels a big difference between himself and those naturalized

for political purposes brought by the royal family to replace the indigenous population. Day after another, this young Bahraini feels the real need to survive in the face of what “Al Khawaled” are seeking to impose on the country from sectarian split, cede sovereignty to foreigners, and calling for external forces to confront the indigenous population. The political battle has turned into a war of extermination waged by the ruling family against the natives, after the revolution of February 14 marked a turning point for the relationship between the two parties in all aspects. Day after another, these two parties realize the impossibility of living together. The ruling family discovered that ruling the people of Bahrain, which came into conflict with them since ninety years ago will not reconcile one day, and therefore it has to double its political equivalent to the extent of extermination.

As a result, the regime has used the methods mentioned above, particularly the political naturalization, where the people have also realized that “reforming the political system under the ruling family” is impossible, preventing the establishment of a democratic system in the country as long as the Al Khalifa are rulers. Therefore, they can either give in to what they want, and stay silent on policies that will surely lead to the weakening of their existence altogether, or to stand up reunited and struggle to seek to topple the regime of family. Here came the revolution to manifest the change project in an unprecedented way, as what happened in the past three years of targeting the people showed the depth of hostility of the ruling family to the people of Bahrain. It is clear that a large segment of the people in Bahrain have made up their mind and decided to fight in this existence battle until the end, and that it is useless to count on reforming a system that is resistant to change and reform.

#### **4. What do the reformists want?**

Since the current king imposed the country’s constitution in 2002, a huge rift has occurred in the public, where two parties were formed: one sought to co-exist with the king and his consti-

tution in accordance with many statements, including: “salvage what you can”, or “Take and demand” or “minimize the damage”. These statements stand on a firm conviction of not being able to obtain more than what is already available, and that the Khalifi regime is backed by regional and international powers, making it pointless to continue to make sacrifices without any success. These statements are based as well as on political and physical calculations that show the physical superiority of the regime in exchange to the opposition and public forces. These statements have been translated in many positions.

The first is the implicit recognition of the constitution imposed by the ruler while continuing to criticise him and demanding his change. Second, the differing-ideologies political groups therefore rushed to officially register themselves as political associations, according to the ruling family rules and conditions. Here, a great clamour and fuss occur building for the future controversy at the time. Additionally, when it was time for the Parliament elections, which its affairs are regulated by the Khalifi Constitution, a crack occurred in the Shiite Islamic movement represented then by Al Wefaq National Islamic Society, between supporters to participate in the elections and those opposing it.

Reformist believed that it is illogical to continue opposing the regime from outside its system, when it is possible to achieve some of the achievements and reforms from within, and the least that can be achieved, though the electoral participation is to minimize the damage, and that the participation allow Islamic cadres to practice and gain experience in the political and diplomatic action, where the participation and access to the largest parliamentary bloc will also open doors to connect with the world through diplomatic institutions and field visits.

Those political reformists believe that a big change is difficult, whether from within or from outside the system, but working from within shall provide an opportunity for some of reform, which may be small or large. They also believe that the current local and regional situation is not

in favour of a fundamental change in the political system, and that the system has more cards and power than the opposition. They also feel that the majority of the people do not want to enter into the maze of political struggle that continues for decades, and that it is better to pursue to develop better living standards and try to gain of expertise that will gradually lead to the development of the level of political representation of the Shiites citizens.

### 5. Calls for an “entire transformation”

This party came after the occurrence of cracking in the body of Al Wefaq in 2006, after it became clear that the society is moving towards participation in the parliamentary elections. The society’s resolution this time was different from the decision taken in 2002 to boycott these elections. A bit by bit, this party was featured by its events through its symbols, especially Mr. Abdul Wahab Hussein and Hassan Mushaima as well as Dr. Abdul Jalil Singace. The work of this party continued to an extent where it frightened and worried the Khalifi regime pretty much. In the summer of 2010, the regime has committed an error that could lead to his downfall later. It has launched a wide campaign of arrests in the ranks of power that included leaders and activists in the field, and treated them in a brutal unprecedented way. As part of this arrest campaign, which lasted for nearly two months, more than seventy activists were kidnapped for periods ranging from one day to five days, during which all of them were subjected to the worst torture varieties. This campaign has created an atmosphere of popular discontent that erupted in anger after less than six months. Were it not for those ferocious campaign against the people, the call for a revolution might have not succeeded.

Since the revolutionary youth launched the slogan “The people want to topple the regime” and the daily favourite motto has become “Our motto forever, Down Hamad, Down Hamad”, it became clear that the country has entered a new phase in its history, which shall be crucial. Either the people perish or the Khalifi regime top-

ples. It is true that the regime has taken in many measures in the recent years to protect itself and ensure its survival, especially that of the demographic change project, but the problematic presence of its very existence is way stronger than any attempts to preserve it. Therefore demands to change the political system or topple the regime have escalated. With the continued authoritarian repression has deepened the conviction of the need for a certain change. So, what are the cornerstones from which advocates for a total change stand on!

Some of these cornerstones are as follows:

First, that more than ninety years of national struggle against the Khalifi rule confirmed the ability of the Bahraini people to continue the struggle, and the failure of the Khalifas and their supporters to break the people. Thus, continuing to struggle and not to retreat is a must to topple this regime.

Second, the suffering of the people in recent years, and the method of which the Khalifas has dealt and is still dealing with the people showed beyond any doubt a deep hostility to Bahrainis. Torture practiced against scholars, symbols, youth, women, and children reached to unprecedented levels of brutality and sadism, as well as bringing in Saudi occupation troops uncovered the truth of its intentions and willingness to commit the worst crimes against the country and its people. Whereas the demolition of mosques, murdering people, and using chemical gases, have all become prohibitive precludes coexistence with the Khalifas, no matter what are the costs of standing still in front of their aggression.

Third, that the experience of participating within the framework of the Khalifi system proved the inability to achieve any significant change. The first time was when the Bahrainis admitted the Khalafi governance in the Constitution of 1973, when the British used to rule the country practically between 1820 and 1971, 150 years ago, where the Khalifas were not true rulers, but in the sense of British agents. That was when the current governor cancelled that document and replaced it with his constitution that was imposed on the

people in 2002.

Advocates for the total change see the need to deprive the Khalifas from the popular legitimacy and not allowing them to rule again. Whatever the justifications are, the words of Imam Zainul Abidin to one of his companions, "What they have given you is the least compared to what they have taken from you, and what they have built for you is so little compared to what they have ruined on you" shall always remain binding on the faithful not to remain indifferent towards the injustices of oppressors and the agony of the oppressed.

Fourth, that depriving the Khalifas from the popular legitimacy through boycotting their system is a must to topple them down in the future. As for reconciliation with them under any roof will not provide the basic demands of the people, which remain in answering two questions: Who rules Bahrain? And how? Thus, advocates of total change will still insist on boycotting the Khalifi regime similar to what happened with Saddam Hussein's regime for 35 years. That boycott was a must to topple him when proper conditions exist. Whereas, reconciliation with it is nothing but extending its residence visa needed to stay in power.

Fifth, that the complete rupture between the people and the Al-Khalifa family means, if it continues, deepening the culture of freedom and shall lead gradually to persuade its allies not to support it as long as it is totally unacceptable by the people who are governed by it. The experience of participating in the elections before the revolution proved that it was a lifeline for the Khalifi rule making it appear to the world that it is accepted by the people and has a popular constitutional base practicing democracy through elections, and that it is no one's right to oppose outside the provisions of the 2002 Constitution, bringing the opposition in that period to their lowest levels. In addition, the participation then did not lead to significant results, where the participants were unable to question one official responsible for torture, or release of hundreds who were arrested in the summer of 2010. They could

not stop the political naturalization, which is an advanced step on the road to exterminate the natives, as well as not being able to end discrimination. All that can be claimed by the participants that they may have contributed to the achievement of a slight improvement in pension issues, where even that is not the task of politicians, but the responsibility of labour unions. The Khalifas have benefited a lot from that experience showing them as a system based on a legitimate constitution to allow participation and accountability. That experience was bitter in the eyes of the people who exploded with rage in the spring of 2011.

Sixth, the fall of the regimes do not happen in one way, where many ways can lead to the fall of dictatorships, as well as many local, regional and international factors, which combine to topple the heads of tyranny. Bahrain is not an anomaly, and by cutting off all lines of communication with the Al Khalifa family, and blocking main roads in front of any attempt to prolong the life of their system, the change mission will become a lot easier, especially in light of the expected regional changes. One who does not believe in the inevitability of these developments is not reading and actually looking around him. Who could ever believe that Gulf Cooperation Council would split on itself twice publicly in two months? The first was in "Manama Dialogue" when Oman refused the Gulf Union project, which seeks to impose itself by Saudi Arabia. And the second, when three Gulf families withdrew their ambassadors from the Doha in protest against the national Qatari policy to support the Muslim Brotherhood, and its insistence on the operation of Al-Jazeera.

These developments occur without interruption, if the Bahraini popular movement continued against Al-Khalifa family with a complete boycott, the circumstances for change will be available one day. Regional and local conflicts are not excluded, but very much expected, especially in the absence of parliamentary systems where people can exercise their rights through. The contradictions lived by countries in the region are capable of creating favourable conditions for change one day. Because abandoning

the project of change and rely on dialogue with the controlling ruling gang will not achieve anything and will not lead to real change.

Seventh, any political change less than toppling the rule of the family, according to what the political associations plans, must pulls the reasons of force giving the Khalifi family the ability to always suppress the people. There are five sectors that must be freed from the hands of Al-Khalifa, the military, security, police, the judiciary and media. These sectors must be in the hands of the people, not in the hands of the ruling family who used, abused and turned their functions from being national-orientated into tools of repression in the hands of the ruling family. This means that any future agreement with this family will continue as long as their interests are granted by this agreement, if not, then these five sectors shall be used to crackdown on the people. This is what happened in 1975, when the Khalifas saw that the continuation of the work based on the articles of the Constitution and the activation of the National Council would hurt their interests in the long run. That is when the former governor and with a stroke of a pen issued, under the guidance of his brother the prime minister, a decision to suspend articles of the constitution, resolve the National Council, and making the people enter into that dark era continued for decades.

Eighth, overthrowing the regime has become a national slogan, raised and continued by the rebels insisting to achieve it. This represents a change in the public culture, which was before this time wary from directly criticizing the ruling family and their symbols.

Whereas, today demanding to topple the regime and the slogan “Down with Hamad” have become the title of the popular movement that never stops, day and night. Despite the great sacrifices made by the people between martyrs, prisoners, and those chased it is clear that the escalating suffering has deepened the conviction of toppling the regime. This project is fully compatible with the popular slogan, and do not conflict with the aspirations of the people, whom their struggle made them more aware and

confident of the certainty of victory.

Ninth, advocates of regime overthrow believe that getting rid of a corrupt rule is religious and humanitarian necessity, and that it is impossible to bring in justice under the shadow of a tribal rule based on the principle of succession where the ruler can do whatever he wants as he pleases.

These advocates do not believe that the relationship between the people of Bahrain and Al-Khalifa family was meant to be “eternal” and a “national obligation”. They see the current rule inconsistent with the modern development, which requires political partnership based on the principles of pluralism, oversight and accountability. Therefore, they believe that toppling the Khalifi regime, in addition to being a great responsibility, is very possible, both in accordance with the physical laws that prevents the continuation of unjust rule (rule survives with disbelief but does not with injustice) or from the perspective of the religious inevitability that asks believers to be patient“(3:125) If you are steadfast and mindful of God, even though the enemy should suddenly fall upon you, your Lord will help you even with five thousand marked angels.”, or from the perspective of regional developments, which saw the rise of the oppressed forces and the fall of the rulers practiced injustice without limits and possessed treasures of Karun“(28:58) And how many habitations have We destroyed whose people exulted in their means of subsistence ! Just see those dwellings of theirs only a few of which have been inhabited after them. At last, we alone became the heirs”.

Advocates of total change faith stems from the ongoing field, political, educational and political analysis work on which refers to the fall of some regional powers that have failed to develop itself and insists on keeping its political system lags behind (notably Saudi Arabia). Before and after everything these advocates have been working hard and preparing according to possibilities“(8:60) And prepare against them whatever you are able of power”, and leave the rest for God’s promised help.



BAHRAIN CENTRE FOR STUDIES IN LONDON  
مركز البحوث والدراسات في لندن

[www.bcsl.org.uk](http://www.bcsl.org.uk)

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:

- Political Issues.
- Political Association & Parties, Trade Unions and Civil Society Institutions.
- Human Rights Issues.
- Legal and Constitutional Affairs.
- The issues of Security, Defense and armed equipment
- Media
- The links and entanglements between Bahrain issues and other GCC States, in a regional and international context.
- 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](mailto:director@bcsl.org.uk)

For general inquiries, you may please contact BCSL on the following email address: [info@bcsl.org.uk](mailto:info@bcsl.org.uk)



[Facebook.com/bhcsl](https://www.facebook.com/bhcsl)



[Twitter.com/bhcsl](https://www.twitter.com/bhcsl)



Saeed Al-Shehabi

Born in Bahrain and he lives in London, United Kingdom. he is a Political activist, journalist, commentator, and researcher and a member of the Bahrain Freedom Movement. Saeed al-Shehabi earned his BSc and PhD (in Control Engineering) from the City University London. According to the London-based, Centre for the Study of Terrorism, of which he is Trustee, Al-Shahabi edited the London-based Pan-Arabic weekly Al Aalam from 1983-1999 and in addition to being Chairman of the Gulf Cultural Club, serves as a trustee of two Muslim charities

# The footholds of the “Scheme of Change” in Bahrain

26 August 2014

---

Copyright ©

---



BAHRAIN CENTRE FOR STUDIES IN LONDON  
مركز البحرين للدراسات في لندن

---

[www.bcs1.org.uk](http://www.bcs1.org.uk)  
[info@bcs1.org.uk](mailto:info@bcs1.org.uk)