

BAHRAIN

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Bahrain's message to the world: Al Khalifa regime must go

Among the most remarkable achievement of the Bahraini revolution is its ability to tear apart the masks of the forces of the counter revolution. For almost a year, the people have been engaged in daily activism with the explicit aim of removing from power the notorious Al Khalifa clan that has ruled the people with terror, intimidation and absolute dictatorship. What makes this regime attractive to the self-proclaimed democracies remains a secret, despite the attempts by analysts to provide an explanation. A regime that has been proven to have committed crimes against humanity by its own fact-finding commission ought to be named, shamed and blamed. Yet, both UK and USA have, once again, made up their mind and decided to stand against reforms in the region, side with proven criminals and support the worst kind of dictatorships. The people's revolution has, however, proven its ability to withstand the onslaughts by the anti-democratic forces that have spared no effort to crush their courageous movement. With the Arab Spring being targeted by the forces of counter revolution, the scene is set for a complete overhaul of the regional political systems and ensure the total removal of the evil forces of hereditary dictatorships. The AlKhalifa regime has been proven by its own commission to have committed war crimes and crimes against humanity. It must be punished severely for doing that. Any leniency will only encourage it to commit more crimes against Bahrainis.

The advent of a new year may not have much to offer to those who remain incarcerated in the Al Khalifa's notorious torture centres, but it provides an opportunity to induce fresh air into the body of the revolution and push the campaign of reforms forward. It is now clear that those forced had not anticipated the revolution in Bahrain, and had hoped that it would go away soon after the 14th February, the day it erupted. But the spilling of blood from that day onward had given impetus to an already-charged atmosphere. Martyrs continued to fall, each adding more fuel to the revolutionary fire. It soon became clear to the outside world how vicious and criminal the regime had been and the public opinion worldwide became favourable to the people's demands. What

started as a limited political strife soon turned into a fully-fledged revolution whose aim is nothing less than a total regime change. The Al Khalifa clan has ruled the country by force, intimidation and human rights violations for decades and it was gradually becoming clear that it could no longer be allowed to remain in power. Within the revolutionary fervor spreading all over the Arab world, Bahrain was bracing itself for more bloodshed and human rights violations. As reports of those violations became more embarrassing to the regime and its backers the UN became under pressure to set up an inquiry and send a fact-finding mission to Bahrain. That would have been disastrous not only for the Al Khalifa senior figures but to also to their backers in Washington and London. They would have had to support the outcome of such inquiry including the possibility of referring senior regime's figures to the International Criminal Court. To avoid this eventuality, the regime was instructed by both capitals to set up its own investigation commission whose findings would not be binding. It was headed by Charif Bissioni, the Egyptian career human rights advocate. After four months of investigation, the commission confirmed that systematic torture had been used and excessive force had been deployed against demonstrators. It also found that Shia mosques had been intentionally destroyed and that Iran had no role in the fomenting the revolution.

It has now transpired that the Bissioni commission was not intended to correct the regime's behavior in the field of human rights, but as a means to protect the regime by forcing the opposition to engage in dialogue and find a way out for the Al Khalifa. To consolidate the Al Khalifa grip on power, both Washington and London decided to send police officers to lead the security forces to achieve better results by targeting the activists. The American and British intervention has now added dangerous dimensions to the situation in Bahrain. The people's recent dynamism may have convinced those forces that the Al Khalifa would be doomed if they are left to face their own fate. The people's resilience in the face of the Saudi occupation, Al Khalifa criminal behaviour and the Western support of the

regime is embarrassing those forces and directing the situation to uncertain future. For the Bahraini people, the atrocities that they have experienced at the hands of the dictator, his sons and relatives can only be ended if they are overthrown. Since the release of the Bissioni report, at least six martyrs have fallen and the vicious attacks by the regime's Death Squads have left hundreds more injured. In a video-taped recording of a vicious attack with knives and other tools on the people of Shakhoura on 17th December, those militias slashed the bodies of many people as they gathered them on the roof of one house. The crime was committed in the presence of Michael Posner, the US Under-Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labour and Alistair Burt, the UK Minister at the Foreign Office for the Middle East.

It is outrageous to reward those who had been engaged in systematic torture and extra-judicial killing with offers of support, impunity from prosecution and protection of the regime. It had been hoped that those findings would convince UK and USA to stop their support to the Al Khalifa clan and support a regime change as the people demand. But their approach has been in line with their long-standing policy of supporting oppressors, dictators and despots. Those regimes can never be reformed and have to be replaced by regimes chosen by the people. The right to determine their destiny is granted by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Bahrainis must be allowed to write their own constitution and form their government through the ballot box. These demands are legitimate and realistic. What is unrealistic is to support a dictatorial regime whose senior figures (including two sons of the dictator) are proven to have engaged in torturing prisoners, or to grant impunity to those who had committed crimes against humanity. Both UK and USA are advised against their continued policies of allying themselves with those hereditary dictatorships and, instead, they should support people's demands for regime change and the establishment of a modern state based on democratic practices and respect of human rights. It is immoral, unethical and senseless to do otherwise.

Appeals to human rights bodies for serious intervention

As the people's revolution continues unabated, Bahrainis have appealed to the international human rights bodies and political leaders to take a stand and force the Al Khalifa regime to release the prisoners of conscience. Among these victims of the tribal terror, Mr Hassan Mushaima, the leader of Haq Movement and who had served numerous jail terms in the past quarter of a century, stands out as a seriously sick man who is being persecuted for his political views. He suffers from Cancer for which he had been treated last year in London. Since his detention in mid-March Mr Mushaima has complained of various ailments due to lack of medical care and abusive language and violent treatment. He has been man-handled in aggressive ways and denied proper medication for his own ailment. He is also being subjected to psychological torture by forcing his son to cry out as they tortured him. Mr Mushaima's condition is said to be causing serious alarm among the senior figures of the opposition who have been behind bars since mid-March when the Saudis illegally invaded the country. Navi Pillay, the UN High Commissioner

for Human Rights, had dispatched an assessment team to Bahrain. Its members had met officials of the regime who denied any wrongdoing and members of the opposition and victims and their families. The team listened to two totally opposite stories but came back to Geneva with a stark message; Investigate the claims before it is too late. The team had found evidence of serious maltreatment of prisoners and protestors and suggested that there should be a new page of trust between the people and the ruling family. The Bissioni commission had concluded similar facts that condemn the regime and make him unable to move around. The government-financed and controlled BICI has itself indicated that senior figures, including the dictator himself could be liable for crimes against humanity. However, the regime's tools of deception have twisted the facts and procedures to present the criminals as worthy of praise. Both UK and USA have "commended" the dictator for permitting a fact-finding commission led by Charif Bissioni to investigate his crimes. When the commission confirmed those crimes, instead of condemning him and his regime they

praised them. A Bahraini human rights activist said: Can a murderer be praised? Does it matter how the guilt is proven, whether by voluntary confession or intensive interrogation? Meanwhile the killing has continued along with the people's revolutionary activism. Last week, an elderly person, Abd Ali Al Mawali, 68, was gassed to death. Ali Ahmad Al Qassab was killed by a passing car when the police shot him with a shotgun while crossing the road. The people were so outraged that they have now become more determined to pursue their revolutionary goals to achieve a regime change. In all towns and villages daily protests have been held. People's favourite slogans are: "People wants regime change" and "Down with Hamad, Down with Hamad". The response by the regime's brutal forces has been so vicious that many people are injured every day. Security forces have been instructed to deploy intensive amounts of chemical and tear gases that have led to serious injuries. Thick coloured clouds hover over towns and villages during persistent attacks by those forces. *Continued on Page 4*

If history is to be believed; Appointment of two police officers heralds new repression

Bahraini opposition have been outraged by the tactics of deception adopted by the Al Khalifa clan as they continue to divert attention away from their crimes and the people's calls for their downfall from power. Following the clear cut indictment of the dictator and his close lieutenants of torture crimes amounting to crimes against humanity, their allies, mainly in Washington and London came with the idea that killers may be "reformed" if they are helped by Western "experts". This policy is at the heart of the troubles and calamities befallen the Bahraini population since they started their modern civil resistance ninety years ago.

The announcement that the Al Khalifa would appoint two police officers; an American and a British to overhaul the security services following their exposed crimes against the people has been dismissed as mere gimmicks and diversionary tactics devoid of any real meaning or useful consequences. In addition to the bad record of each of the two officers, history has its own sad episodes of similar nature in Bahrian. After the first Baharna uprising of 1922 the British appointed Charles Belgrave as a "special financial advisor" to the newly-appointed ruler who has the same name as the present dictator; Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa. The situation gradually became more repressive as peo-

ple rose up to demand freedom, liberty and a constitution.

After 1954-56 uprising two British officers were brought into the country to help the Al Khalifa deal with the angry population. After 14 people were killed by police forces during the 1965 uprising, the British took the decision to "improve" the police performance by bringing Ian Henderson, the former colonial officer who had been expelled by Oginga Odinga soon after he took office as the Prime Minister of the liberated Kenya. Bahrain went through one of its bleakest periods in the following 35 years as the "Special Branch" tortured Bahrainis to death. During the 1994-1999 uprising more than 40 Bahrainis were killed, thousands tortured. The response by the Al Khalifa and their British backers was to bring yet another British "expert" to overhaul the notorious security apparatus. David Jump was recruited with big promises by the Foreign Office that a new ear would ensue, free from torture. However more Bahrainis continued to fall at the hands of the torturers, the last of whom during that period was Nooh Khalil Al Nooh. When the present dictator succeeded his father in 1999 the world was duped into believing that a new, democratic era had dawned on the country only to for the people to experience the shock of the life time. Soon after

the dictator tore up the country's constitution, he started a killing spree resulting in the martyrdom of at least five people and the arrest, kidnap and torture of hundreds more before the situation erupted on 14th February.

Bahrainis will not be lured again into believable and the ridiculous. For a dictator with people's blood on his hands to turn into a democracy-loving, human rights-respecting ruler the camel needs to be pushed into a needle's hole.

Bahrainis were greatly disappointed when individuals with international respectability and amicable records in human rights activism agreed to work in an officially-formed and financed commission of investigation. How could a person investigate his paymaster's corruption and human rights abuses? This crystal clear case of conflict of interests did not deter those people despite their respectable records. How could police officers with no so clean careers and with serious allegations on matter central to their future role maintain their integrity, independence and respectability. In modern world a young professional may care about his/her future, but why should retired officers (whose reputations had been smeared by allegation of professional misconduct, even though they may not have been proven) care about their future given their age, lavish income and promises of more freebies?

Bahrain Freedom Movement
3 December 2011

We Know What Happened in Bahrain: Now What?

DECEMBER 1, 2011 Toby Jones

Bahrain remains stuck in what seems an intractable political crisis. Since March its security services have waged a brutal campaign to suppress the country's pro-democracy movement. Thousands of citizens suffered injury, and dozens were killed in the violence. No one who supported the call for political reform was spared: journalists, well-known athletes, activists, students, teachers, and thousands of workers (even medical professionals who treated the wounded) suffered trauma—from widespread loss of employment to physical harm.

While the intensity of the violence has since diminished, the cycles of protest and recrimination continue. For the most part, however, the regime has succeeded in bottling up the protest movement by permanently establishing a security presence in the poor villages that are home to most would-be demonstrators. Police continue to use disproportionate force to break up funerals, protests, and otherwise peaceful political gatherings.

The country's rulers, however, do appear to understand that intimidation and violence are unsustainable. The costs of the crackdown have been considerable. The economy has slowed. Investors have moved capital abroad. And although the United States (to date) has refused to directly challenge the regime's excessive responses, there is the fear that American officials may be eventually compelled to rethink their long-standing strategic relationship should the crisis endure—or worsen. The BICI report has inadvertently provided the opposition with renewed power, and the only path forward is for the government to get serious about fundamental political reform.

The most significant sign of this recognition came in late June, when King Hamad issued a decree establishing the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI), an investigatory body chaired by the respected legal scholar Professor M. Cherif Bassiouni. Along with establishing a narrative timeline and context for the protests, the commission was asked "to determine whether the events of February and March 2011 (and thereafter) involved violations of international human rights laws and norms, and to make recommendations that it deems appropriate." Since the summer, activists and a wide range of opposition figures have expressed skepticism about whether the commission was capable of independent analysis. Bassiouni stoked uncertainty after making careless comments to the media that suggested the government was not responsible for March's horrors. Despite this skepticism, a great deal has been pinned on the commission's recommendations both locally and internationally. Most immediately affected in US-Bahrain relations has been a \$53 million

arms sale, which remains dependent on the Bahraini government's response to the report's recommendations.

On November 23, the BICI released its findings, and they are nothing short of remarkable. The BICI made clear that Bahrain's security services had used "excessive force" in breaking up the protests, documenting a devastating pattern of violence, torture, and systematic abuse. In exacting detail, the report confirmed virtually every criticism of the regime that surfaced in the past ten months. Contrary to the shrill cries of conspiracy in Manama and Riyadh, the commission concluded that there was no "discernable link" between protests in Bahrain and the Iranian government, and that the pro-democracy movement was not part of a broader international scheme.

To be sure, the report was also critical of demonstrators who used violence, and it criticized al-Wefaq and several other leading political societies for failing to seize an opportunity for dialogue offered by Crown Prince Salman in March.

The real political utility of the commission's findings remains unclear. It documents the excessive use of force and a scope of human rights abuses, but it is less clear on matters of accountability. The commission directed its most significant criticisms toward the security services at large rather than their political masters. It demands punishment for those who violated the criminal code and an end to military trials, but stops short of holding senior government officials responsible—let alone members of the ruling family. Bahrain's rulers have predictably given no indication that real political reform is even on the table, and on this, the commission provides no guidance. In his comments following the report's release, King Hamad indicated that he sought to turn the page. But in reality, officials appear to be looking for ways to evade the structural political issues facing them. One of the king's first directives was to establish a second commission to study BICI's recommendations: a project that could drag on indefinitely and

which was rejected by the opposition. The government has sought to implement minor security reforms, but these seem mostly cosmetic—gestures that technically comply with report's recommendations, but do little more. On November 29 the king sacked Sheikh Khalifa bin Abdullah, who had headed the National Security Agency. Authorities also announced that they would develop a code of conduct for police and bring in foreign security personnel to help with training.

Most telling about how far the ruling family may be willing to go is that the security presence on the streets has hardly diminished—if anything, state violence has intensified. Just hours before the public ceremony in which the commission outlined its findings, police killed Abdunabi Kadhem in the village of A'ali. At the same time Bassiouni was outlining the report's findings in front of the king at a public press conference, police brutally dispersed protesters in nearby villages.

Although the commission has avoided any direct political guidance, that it was created at all has certainly impacted the country's political landscape. It is widely believed that in the chaos of the spring Bahrain's long-serving Prime Minister Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa and the hardliners around him had asserted their primacy and marginalized more "moderate" figures within the ruling family—most notably Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, who in March had tried and failed to negotiate a political compromise with al-Wefaq. Many believe that the creation of the commission and its resulting recommendations would create a new opening for the Crown Prince and his supporters. It is clear that the report considers the opposition's failure to accept the Crown Prince's March offer for dialogue as the moment when the situation unraveled. Even so, and while implicitly casting the regime's hardliners in a bad light, the report does not offer a roadmap nor set of political mechanisms for more moderate figures to reassert themselves. *Continued on Page 4*

Martyrs of the month

On 8th December Zahra Saleh, 27, died as a result of wounds she had sustained on 18th November when members of Death Squads hit her with a metal skew in her forehead.

13th December: The six days old Sajida Faisal Jawad died after inhaling excessive amounts of gas fired into her home by Al Khalifa killers.

15th December: Ali Ahmad Al Qassab was hit by a car as he fell on the road after being hit by a police shotgun.

31st December: Sayyed Hashim Sayyed Saeed was killed by police rubber bullets.



Focus on torture hides deeper discrimination in Bahrain

Patrick Cockburn: The Independent
Shia leaders warn that a sense that they are being denied promotion will inevitably provoke a crisis

13 December

King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa reassured David Cameron yesterday that reform in Bahrain is under way after a devastating report confirmed the mass use of torture against pro-democracy protesters earlier this year. Mr Cameron will be glad to hear this since the UK and US have been embarrassed at having to explain why they have been outraged by human rights abuses in Libya and Syria, but far less critical when it comes to their ally in Bahrain.

But the opposition, drawn from the Shia who make up 70 per cent of the island's Arab population, say the focus on redressing grievances, stemming from the repression of peaceful protests, is masking a long-term policy of depriving the Shia of all decision-making jobs. "Every day Bahrainis of the Shia faith are being dismissed from decision-making positions," says Mansoor al-Jamri, a newspaper editor and Shia leader. "The emphasis on stopping torture is camouflage for establishing a confessional-based apartheid system."

Mr Jamri says that at the time the British withdrew from Bahrain in 1971, important jobs were split 50:50 between Shia and Sunni. Although the majority of citizens, the Shia have since seen their proportion of top jobs at the ministerial and senior civil servant level drop to 17 per cent by the year 2000 and to less than 5 per cent today, he says. All real power is in the hands of the Sunni al-Khalifa dynasty which is backed by Saudi Arabia.

Shia leaders say that, while they had always been excluded from top jobs in security, they are now being dismissed from decision-making positions in health, education and agriculture ministries. They fear this is a long-term policy that is unconnected to more than 2,000 Shia sacked from government service after the authorities moved to crush protests on 15 March, many of whom have been re-employed.

Bahrain's government yesterday flatly denied it is trying to establish a sectarian system in which the Shia would be the underclass. An official spokesman said: "It is simply not true that people are being dismissed on sectarian grounds from their jobs, and the government of Bahrain would abhor and condemn such a practice."

The perception by the Shia in Bahrain that, in the long term, the government wants to alter the balance against them

and in favour of the Sunni is an explosive issue. Shia leaders warn that a sense that they are being denied the chance of promotion to senior positions will inevitably provoke a crisis. The Arab Awakening in Bahrain started on 14 February with huge rallies taking place in Pearl Square. The al-Khalifas evidently interpreted the movement as an attempt to overthrow them and called in a Saudi-led 1,500-strong military force on 14 March. The following day, the government launched a ferocious campaign of arrests, imprisonment, beatings and torture.

The extent and severity of the brutality was detailed last month in a report commissioned by King Hamad and headed by the distinguished Egyptian-American lawyer Cherif Bassiouni. He received 559 claims of torture, all but nine of them from Shia, and forensic studies of victims showed a diverse range of torture techniques. Committees have been appointed to implement the findings of the report.

The UK and US have a further undeclared motive in talking to King Hamad and Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad. This is to buttress their authority, which has been severely eroded within the royal family this year by harder-line members led by the Prime Minister, Khalifa bin Salman.

Appeals to HR bodies

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The attackers have often targeted homes packed with women and children using poisonous gases. Bahrainis have appealed to the World Health Organisation (WTO) to send a team of investigators to assess those chemical gases that have caused people to vomit blood.

On another level, the Al Khalifa regime, backed by the Saudi occupiers have refused to release the political prisoners despite the recommendations by Bissioni's commission and Navi Pillay. The senior opposition figures such as Hassan Mushaima are suffering serious ailments due to ill-treatment. It has been reported that the life of Mr Mushaima is in grave danger as he is continuously denied proper treatment and medication. He suffers from lymphoma cancer and needs special medication according to the doctor who had treated him at the Royal Marsden Hospital in London. Navi Pillay has been personally urged to intervene and ask for the immediate release of those prisoners in accordance with the recommendations by Bissioni and her own team who recently conducted a field visit. She is also urged to dispatch a fact-finding mission and an inquiry to reveal the extent of the regime's violations.

Bahrain Freedom Movement
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We Know What Happened

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The BICI made clear that Bahrain's security services had used "excessive force" in breaking up the protests, documenting a devastating pattern of violence, torture, and systematic abuse.

Most importantly, though, the report's wrenching account of official brutality has emboldened a cross-section of Bahrain's opposition—raising expectations that sweeping changes are necessary. Opposition leaders, from al-Wefaq to those who have led small, but ongoing street protests since the spring, including those who identify with the youths who spearheaded the original February 14th movement, have already gone on record calling for the resignation of the government, a real commitment to fundamental political reform, and justice for those killed and tortured in the last ten months. Anything else, they aver, will render the report a lost opportunity.

The apparent hardening of al-Wefaq's position is a direct result of the BICI report. In October, along with several other opposition societies, the country's largest political organization sent signals that it would be willing to revisit the terms offered by the Crown Prince in March as a way out of the impasse. With the release of the BICI report, this may no longer be the case. For the thousands of Bahrainis who are not aligned with the formal opposition, and who have driven the protest movement, the report has had a similar effect, legitimizing their struggles and convincing them that they now possess a significant source of credible leverage to insist on sweeping political change. While the king and his supporters may have believed that the commission would alter the country's political landscape in their favor, it appears that they miscalculated, at least in the short term.

For now, Bahrain is stuck: the burden to act is clearly on the regime, which does not appear to possess the political will to move forward seriously. Their preference, it seems, is to turn the clock back to early March in the hope that they will convince the opposition to meet them half-way. Given their long-term track record, the consequences of their own brutal choices, and BICI's findings, this is wishful thinking. The BICI report has inadvertently provided the opposition with renewed power, and the only path forward is for the government to get serious about fundamental political reform. In the short term, it can send a clear signal by releasing political prisoners, reducing the security presence on the streets, and taking immediate measures to hold all of those responsible for torture accountable. Anything short of real reform will only ensure that Bahrain's crisis will go on.

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