

BAHRAIN

Issued by the "Bahrain Freedom Movement" to promote human and constitutional rights

New realities will lead to democracy in Bahrain, Middle East

The fortunes of the despotic rule of the Akhalifa and Al Saud are waning. This is a natural consequence for regimes that have failed to adapt to modern standards of governance. The publication of the latest report by the UK Parliament's Foreign Relations Committee about the UK's relations with both Saudi and Bahrain, has altered the perceptions of the tribal rulers of both countries and caused anxieties among the senior figures of the Saudi and Khalifi regimes. It is unlikely that the relations between London and both Riyadh and Manama will suffer immensely but it is anticipated that there will be a psychological thaw between them. The assertion by the UK's report that the Bahraini regime has only itself to blame for the ills of the country has shocked senior figures within the Khalifi household and area of influence. The outrage is compounded by the fact that the criminal elements within its system who have committed torture and bloodshed are gradually getting their masks blown off and their identities becoming readily recognizable on the internet. Their role in serious human rights abuses is being exposed to shock the world who has hitherto remained silent about the crimes of the Alkhalifa regime in Bahrain. However the report is seen as a whitewash to UK's arms industry, as it approved the UK's policy of supplying arms to Saudi Arabia and Bahrain despite their dismal record in human rights and the possibility that they may be used for internal repression.

As the regional political map is redrawn in the wake of the accord signed by Iran and the 5+1 group, the future of dictatorships remains obscure. Saudi Arabia is at the forefront of the enemies of change. It has supported the military coup in Egypt against the Muslim Brotherhood and has intensified its supply of weapons to extremist groups in Syria and Iraq. As the accord was being discussed Iran witnessed a sudden outbreak of terrorist activities on its territory. Assassinations and bombings shattered the peace it has enjoyed for decades.

Iran's allies in Lebanon were also targeted with several bombing and missile attacks on Beirut causing death and destruction. Iraq also witnessed serious escalation in the daily bombings and carnage as Saudi Arabia wanted its presence felt in the region. Suddenly proxy wars were being

fought at large scales in several Arab and Muslim countries, like Pakistan. Sectarianism were fuelled and identity of people became an issue that determines their life and death. In addition to stretching regional role, the Saudis want to thwart the process of change that started with the Arab Spring in 2011. They are known for resisting real change in the political structures of the sheikhdoms comprising the Gulf Cooperation Council. They saw in the transformation of Egypt from dictatorship to democracy the main threat to the status quo which had allowed them to extend their influence and retain their autocratic tribal rule.

In the midst of these developments, Bahrainis have become resolute in their peaceful struggle to achieve a swift democratic transformation after decades of stagnation and dismal human rights record. They are aware of the regional obstacles to this change, especially the Saudis. In responding to the Parliamentary report the Saudi Embassy in London issued a statement implying Saudi resistance to the recommendations of the report and insisting that they would not allow any outside pressure on the ruling Alkhalifa family.

The situation has thus become so polarized between the urge for democratic change and the resistance by the autocratic rulers to this change that a climate of war remains in the skies. Few weeks ago the Sunday Times reported that Saudi Arabia and Israel were planning to attack Iran if the diplomatic approach fails to stop Iran's nuclear programme. The Saudis have threatened to produce nuclear weapons in response to the agreement signed between Iran and the six main world powers. The struggle is now between change and stagnation, democracy and dictatorship. It is a struggle which will persist for a long time as the people reclaim their rights to self-determination and democratic transformation. Political and military conflicts can be avoided if relations are based on mutual respect, recognition and logical discourse. This is one of the important lessons from the recent much-hailed accord between big powers and Iran. It must be emulated elsewhere.

The Bahraini regime is the worst of shapes. First it had handed over the sovereignty of Bahrain to the Saudis when they asked them to send their troops to quell the people's revolution in March 2011. On matters relating to internal political changes and

reforms the Saudis retain the veto power and will not allow real changes. This is counter to the peoples aspirations for a break with the past and the ending of tribal rule that has proven itself incapable of reform or protection of national sovereignty and rights. On the other hand the Alkhalifa regime finds itself face to face with Iran and Iraq having accused them of interference and abused their fellow-religionists of Bahrain. They can also detect a change in the international mood towards reforms and respect of human rights. They have very little to give and thus find themselves at odds with the rest of the world. They can also detect the sharp downturn in the Saudi political and strategic fortunes in the Middle East. They have declared war not only on Shia Muslims but on other movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood. They have decisively identified themselves as central players among the counter revolution forces. With their regional influence gradually eroding (in Yemen, Lebanon, Egypt, Tunisia, Syria, Iraq... Etc) their political fortunes are dwindling.

What will happen next? The Bahraini people are unlikely to accept anything less than real reforms. Even by the standards of the "moderate" opposition they are incapable of providing the most basic changes that will go somewhere to satisfy that sector of the opposition. The majority of the population are asking for the removal of the ruling family form power and replacing them with a new system based on "one-man-one-vote" system. It is clear that they are capable of providing neither of the two choices. The Bahraini opposition is thus becoming more united in the face of the joint Alkhalifa-Saudi aggression and are unlikely to be deterred by the intensive use of force by the regime against the people. The region is thus poised for more tension both on domestic and regional levels, but the forces of change are unlikely to retreat, having tasted freedom when they revolted en-masse in 2011.

This political turmoil is likely to continue for some time as the West rethinks its strategic interests in the region and re-draws the map of the political alliances. This has started with the accord with Iran and is likely to be extended to more robust policies that support human rights and democratic changes.

Torture intensifies two years after BICI said it was “systematic”

Torture is rampant in Bahrain, despite the passage of two years after the publication of the BICI damning report that confirmed that torture in Bahrain was “systematic”. The main recommendations of that report have not been implemented especially those related to ending impunity and discrimination against more than 70 percent of the population. Today, a Bahraini detainee pointed to one of the “prosecutors” present at the court saying: “He had forced me to sign false confessions and tortured me”. The “judge” who is himself an enemy of the victim ordered the immediate removal of the victim from the court. The lawyer of the group on trial, Mohsin Al Alawi, said that he had asked the “judge” to order examination of the victims on trial for torture marks but he waited more than two months until most torture marks disappeared. Another victim, Sajjad Al Alawi was convicted on basis of false confessions signed under torture. His lawyer had asked the “judge” to examine him for torture marks but he refused to do so. Another victim of torture at the hands of one of the prosecutors is Talib Ali[3]. He was asked by the prosecutor to sign the confessions or he would be returned to the torture cells. The boy shouted: I am not signing on something I had not done. The prosecutor became angry, pointed his gun to the victim’s face threatening to kill him, but the victim refused to sign. The prosecutor threw the cigarette ashtray on the victim.

In the early hours of 17th November Ebrahim Marhoon was abducted from his

home and taken to unknown location. Several others have been summoned to the torture rooms at the prosecution office. Among them is an elderly citizen who is a keen protester despite his age. He was threatened with serious revenge if he continued his protests. Also the fathers of the two martyrs; Sayed Hashim Sayed Saeed and Yaseen Al Asfoor were summoned to receive more threats and asked to stop calling for the prosecution of the killers of their sons. Another senior figure received the same treatment. Sheikh Ali bin Ahmad Al Jidhafi was also summoned and threatened by the prosecution office whose members also administer torture.

The Alkhalifa regime has refused to allow representative of the international human rights bodies entry to the country to observe the trial of human rights activist: Naji Fateel. The judicial system is tightly controlled by the royal court and its sessions are held under strict conditions. These courts have become a trap for many detainees who would be tortured severely after their trial if they contradicted the charges laid against them. They have no right to seek examination for torture marks or withdraw their consent to confessions drawn under torture.

In the past two weeks Bahrain became “theatre of operations” with running battles between Bahrainis and Alkhalifa troops and members of Death Squads. This year those mercenaries wreaked havoc in the country; tearing banners and terrorising natives who held religious commemorations for the martyrs of Karbala and

Bahrain. Police were video-taped removing banners, flags and images depicting the state-terrorism implemented against opponents of the state whether during Imam Hussain’s time or in today’s life.

On 17th November The Washington Post published an editorial titled: Bahrain crackdown intensifies amid U.S. retreat”. The paper said: In keeping with Mr. Obama’s new policy, the administration has ignored the Bahraini crackdown. As the president put it, “the United States will at times work with governments that do not meet, at least in our view, the highest international expectations, but who work with us on our core interests.” The paper ended its editorial saying: Mr. Obama’s 2011 speech spelled them out:

“A strategy based solely upon the narrow pursuit of these interests will not fill an empty stomach or allow someone to speak their mind. Moreover, failure to speak to the broader aspirations of ordinary people will only feed the suspicion that has festered for years that the United States pursues our interests at their expense.”

On Tuesday 19th November, BBC website published an article titled: (Bahrain opposition leadership “systematically targeted” BY Leana Hosea). It highlighted the regime’s attempts to split the opposition by claiming that part of it is engaged in terrorism. The writer quoted Sheikh Ali Salman, Secretary General of Al Wefaq Society, who blamed the regime for ill-treatment of Bahrainis and becoming more dictatorial.

BFM, 21st November 2013

Attacks on religious practices, persecution of opponents

As the Ashura processions and fervor were intensifying the regime’s forces waged several attacks to intimidate Bahrainis who have observed the occasion for centuries, long before the Alkhalifa occupied Bahrain. On Wednesday 13th November a wooden boat made to represent the salvation offered by following the Holy Prophet’s progeny was confiscated by members of the Death Squads operated by the royal court. They defaced the structure and threatened more abuse of Bahrainis if they tried to prevent the attacks on religious practices and symbols of native citizens. Documented video-taped evidence showing regime’s thugs tearing and defacing banners in the streets of towns and villages have convinced Bahrainis that the Al Khalifa and Al Saud were out to uproot the native Bahrainis, their culture and religious rituals. The situation was made more tense when Alkhalifa interior minister, Rashid bin Abdulla Alkhalifa threatened the Hussaini congregation Halls of more reprisals and revenge after the season has ended. His threats implied that centuries old religious

practices by over 70 percent of the population are a threat to others without specifying further. Bahrainis have defied the occupiers and took to the streets, defeating the regime’s thugs and Death Squads. They are now more emboldened to continue their Revolution to achieve fundamental political change in the country and rid it of the hereditary dictatorship. One of the main mouthpieces of the occupiers, Al Watan newspaper, has been beating drums of war urging the Death Squads to attack Bahrainis.

The attacks and intimidation of natives have continued unabated over the past few days. On 13th November, two Bahrainis returning from Kuwait were arrested at the airport. Sayed Ali Sayed Salman and Hussain Ashoor were snatched and taken to unknown destination. It is feared that they may have been taken to the torture houses which are not listed official offices. All police stations have denied holding the two citizens. They have not been allowed either to contact their families or their lawyers. On the same day, a young Bahraini, Sajjad Al Alawi, 23, was

arrested and tortured. Another young Bahraini was also kidnapped. Amin Ma’tooq from Iskan Aali was kidnapped on 11th November but nothing has been heard about him since.

Concern is rising for the well being of Ahmad Al Biladi and Akbar Ali from Bilad Al Qadeem after they were sentenced to five years in jail on trumpeted charges. Their total sentences are now 8 and 34 years respectively after they had been convicted of other charges.

On Sunday 10th November Alkhalifa court sentence two men to life in prison and two others to 15 years for an alleged car bomb attack outside a mosque in July. No one was hurt in the explosion outside a mosque in al-Riffa, south of the capital Manama, where some members of the royal family live. The mosque was not in use at the time as it is used only for official functions. Observers who checked the images released by the regime said they found no destruction resulting from the alleged explosion; no shattered glass or twisted metal.

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ADHRB applauds House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee hearing on US's Bahrain policy

WASHINGTON, DC – November 19, 2013 – Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB) applauds the House Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) for holding a hearing today entitled “U.S. Policy Toward the Arabian Peninsula: Yemen and Bahrain,” which featured testimony from U.S. Department of State Deputy Assistant Secretary (DAS) Barbara Leaf.

In opening remarks, Subcommittee Chairwoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL) argued that U.S. policy “must look ahead and try to anticipate problems before they arise by being proactive rather than reactive.” Chairwoman Ros-Lehtinen went on to call a “stable, unified and democratic Bahrain” a vital U.S. interest, while noting the Bahrain government’s lackluster implementation of the recommendations submitted by the Bahraini Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI).

Following Chairwoman Ros-Lehtinen’s remarks, Ranking Member Ted Deutch (D-FL) called the U.S. response to the situation in Bahrain “puzzling” and argued that U.S. strategies in the region must be based on both national security interests and a respect for human rights. In her testimony, DAS Leaf stated that a

“more stable, secure, and prosperous Bahrain” will enable the current bilateral security partnership to continue while promoting “reform, human rights, and dialogue.” Addressing the Bahrain government’s implementation of the BICI recommendations, DAS Leaf stated that “much remains to be done, particularly in the areas of accountability for police abuse, freedom of expression protections, and media incitement.”

DAS Leaf acknowledged that “certain measures by the government — the Ministry of Justice’s order regulating meetings between political societies and international diplomats, and the charges against senior opposition members including Al Wefaq leaders Khalil Marzooq and Ali Salman — have had a chilling effect on the dialogue and have restricted the space for opposition activity.” DAS Leaf concluded by calling on “responsible persons from all parts of Bahraini society to demonstrate leadership in the quest for reconciliation and real dialogue.”

Following DAS Leaf’s testimony, Ranking Member Deutch asked if Bahrain’s Crown Prince, often touted as a moderate voice within Bahrain, could bring about reform in the country, to which DAS Leaf responded by arguing that the ongoing unrest cannot be solved by one member of

the ruling family, but is a problem the entire Government of Bahrain.

During his remarks, Representative Ted Yoho (R-FL) urged US policy in Bahrain to focus on securing “national interests while promoting peaceful, democratic reforms,” while Representative Bradley Schneider (D-IL) asked DAS Leaf to elaborate on Iran’s influence in Bahrain. DAS Leaf expressed concern over Iranian involvement via media, but stated that the 2011 uprising originated with the Bahraini people. Representative Adam Kinzinger (R-IL) asked DAS Leaf to address the US Fifth Fleet’s significance in Bahrain, to which DAS Leaf responded by emphasizing the collaboration between the Fifth Fleet and the Bahrain military, as well as the role the Fifth Fleet has played as a forward base for staging operations.

“We commend the Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa for holding a hearing on the important issue of US foreign relations with and policy toward Bahrain,” said ADHRB Director Husain Abdulla. “We optimistic that this engagement will lead to an honest conversation regarding the need for U.S. policy towards Bahrain that forcefully encourages the promotion of and respect for democratic reform and basic human rights.”

After tear gas and jobs, medical care is weaponised

The health of one of the most prominent leaders of Bahrain’s Revolution has deteriorated because of ill-treatment and repression by Alkhalifa ruling family. Mr Abdul Wahab Hussain, 59, is suffering from chronic paresthesia (tingling and numbness) affecting his nerves and has difficulty moving. He is sentenced to life imprisonment for his role in calling for fundamental political reforms. Two other senior figures also suffer from serious illnesses but receive no real medical treatment. Hassan Mushaima, 65, had been treated for Cancer but was given no remission treatment since his arrest in March 2011. Dr Abdul Jalil Al Singace suffers from Polio since birth and has also developed heart problems and high blood pressure. They are all denied suitable medical treatment. When international pressure mounts on them the prison authorities take them to the clinic but no further treatment is given afterwards unless more pressure is mounted. Today Amnesty International issued an urgent Action which said: “Prisoner of conscience ‘Abdelwahab Hussain, one of the 13 jailed prominent Bahraini opposition activists, needs urgent access to specialised medical treatment. His health condition has deteriorated and his family’s last scheduled visit to the prison was cancelled without explanation.” AI also called for the immediate and uncondi-

tional release of Bahrain 13; the jailed leaders of the peaceful Revolution.

Denying detainees the necessary medical care is being used as a weapon by the Alkhalifa against Bahrainis. On 5th November Amnesty International issued an Urgent Action on the case of Hussain Hubail and Hassan Sudayf. Both are charged with using social media networks to incite hatred of the regime and calling on people to ignore the law. Hussain Hubail has a heart condition and he is not receiving adequate medical treatment. His health has deteriorated since his detention and he suffers from shortness of breath and frequently loses consciousness. He has been given medication by the prison clinic and was taken at least once before to hospital. However he told his family that his medication is being given to him randomly and he does not know what the medication is. Amnesty called for their immediate release, granting them access to medical treatment and investigating their torture ordeals.

Meanwhile the regime’s kangaroo courts have been in full swing, issuing lengthy jail sentences against activists and protesters, some of whom are children. Hussain Ali, 15, has been sentenced to two years imprisonment charged with taking parts in illegal gathering and protesting against the ruling family.

Concern is mounting for the plight of Ahmad Jum’a, from Al Malikiya, who had been snatched by members of Death Squads two weeks ago. No news have been received

about him and his family is seriously worried about his condition.

The STOP THE SHIPMENT campaign against the supply by South Korea of more than 1.6 million chemical and tear gas canisters to Alkhalifa has continued unabated. South Korean activists have joined the campaign with protests and letter writing to demand an immediate halt to the shipments. In London, protesters stood for two hours outside Downing Street yesterday to call for cancellation of the deal. South Korean Prime Minister had a two hours meeting with UK’s Prime Minister and was surprised to see protesters challenging her decision to export these lethal weapons to Bahrain where more than 60 people have been killed with those gases.

As the first anniversary of the revocation of the Bahraini nationality of 31 Bahraini natives approached, a Press Conference was held at the House of Lords on Tuesday 5th November. Lord Avebury invited the Press to cover the proceedings of the Conference which was addressed by human rights experts, victims and international law experts. Letters were sent to world leaders calling on them to take action against the rogue regime of the Alkhalifa which has weaponised every aspect of society, including nationality, jobs and medical care.

BFM, 8th November 2013

UK's Foreign Affairs Select Committee publishes its report

22 November 2013

UK right to maintain strong relationship with Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, but must work harder to explain its approach at home and abroad

Report: UK's relations with Saudi Arabia and Bahrain (HTML)

Saudi Arabia and Bahrain remain key partners for the UK but relations are complicated by the differences between our societies and the pressing need for reform in the Gulf. In reality, the UK is getting the balance of its interests and values broadly right in the region, but it is failing to explain its approach to the public, according to a report published today by the Foreign Affairs Committee.

Given the growing role of other important partners for the Gulf, the UK's influence in the region should not be over-estimated or taken for granted. The UK will need to work harder in the future to maintain its influence and secure its interests.

The report says the Government has rightly emphasised the historic warm relations between the UK government and the leaders of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. But there is worrying evidence that this warmth is not shared by the public in Saudi Arabia and the UK, and that the UK's reputation in Bahrain has also suffered since 2011. The Government must make its public profile and reputation a more central part of its work in the Gulf and ensure that constructive relationships are built with a wide cross section of society if it is to remain a principal partner in the future. The Government must consider how it can best support much-needed economic and political reforms, and how it can explain its policies and point to specific achievements when speaking to the public at home and in the Gulf. In Saudi Arabia, the Government must convert its promising steps so far in providing assistance on legal and judicial reform into solid and reportable programmes. In Bahrain, it must work to secure access for NGOs and the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, and press more strongly for swifter implementation of reforms.

The report recognises that Saudi Arabia's role as a key buyer for the UK defence industry is controversial. But it finds that, with other competitors in the market, there is little to suggest that ending defence sales from the UK would have any positive effect, and might actually reduce the UK's leverage and its ability to provide training programmes.

The aggressive way in which the Bahraini security forces handled events in 2011 has deeply dam-

aged Bahrain's reputation. The recommendations of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) were sensible and the Bahraini government's failure fully to implement them is inexplicable. The Government must press Bahrain to move forward urgently with reform, and if no greater progress is seen, it should designate Bahrain a Country of Concern in its next human rights report. Committee Chairman Rt Hon Richard Ottaway MP said:

"The UK's relations with Saudi Arabia and Bahrain require a sensitive and nuanced approach, taking into account our long history of relations and shared interests, as well as the differences between our societies. The Government is correct to focus on what is constructive and achievable by working with the leadership in both states, but it cannot simply ignore the charges of hypocrisy and criticism levelled against the UK. The FCO must find new ways to explain the UK's approach, to highlight its successes, and to present a more coherent strategy of engagement with these important allies."

"The Committee heard powerful accounts of very differing experiences in Bahrain, from across the political and social spectrum. We are deeply saddened by the impression of a society that is becoming increasingly polarised. It is not our place to adjudicate on the events of 2011 or how they should be resolved: it is a matter for the Bahrainis. However, the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry recommendations were accepted by all sides and the UK Government must continue to press for urgent progress on the implementation of these reforms, as well as encourage dialogue and reconciliation."

"Although there are undeniably many serious human rights concerns in these states, there is also some cause to be optimistic about reform. King Abdullah has made significant progress on reforms in Saudi Arabia, particularly on women's rights. Although this starts from a very low base, progress should be recognised and encouraged. In Bahrain, the Crown Prince is doing valuable work in promoting reform and reconciliation, and the UK is right to support his efforts. Nonetheless, the Government must be vigilant in monitoring progress in both states and be prepared to respond robustly where reforms stall or are reversed."

Bahrain: Schools 'need ministry approval' to publish news

(From BBC website, 26th November)

Schools in Bahrain have been asked to submit any news they want to publish in the local press, or distribute via social media, to the education ministry for approval, it's reported.

Head teachers in the small Gulf state are required to submit "all news and images to the public relations and media department", which will publish them "in line with the policies and directions of the ministry", the Al-Wasatdaily quotes the circular as saying. "No school shall be entitled to publish them directly in any media outlet, including Instagram," it continues.

Some people have apparently linked the decision to the proliferation of images showing the condition of schools after heavy rainfall last week. The Gulf Daily News says "scores of pictures" of "water-filled school playgrounds and parents carrying their children to avoid massive puddles" were posted online. Snapshots of the unusual weather and its aftermath can be found on Facebook as well as Instagram.

Bahrain is ranked 165th in the 179-country Press Freedom Index published by the Paris-based group Reporters Without Borders.

After tear gas and jobs

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One year after the Bahraini authorities had revoked the nationality of 31 opposition figures, Amnesty International has called for its reinstatement. It said: "Bahrain's Ministry of Interior must immediately rescind the decision to strip 31 members of the opposition of their Bahraini nationality made a year ago". Hassiba Hadj-Sahraoui, Deputy Director of Amnesty International's Middle East Programme, said: "Stripping away the nationality of government critics shows that the Bahraini authorities continue to lash out and discredit anyone they deem a threat. Instead of addressing the criticism leveled against them, the authorities have found no other way to respond than depriving Bahraini citizens of their nationality."

On another level the health of several jailed political leaders is rapidly deteriorating as a result of ill-treatment and lack of proper medical care. Mr Abdul Wahab Hussain suffers serious medical problems that have prompted several human rights bodies to demand immediate care for him. On 8th November Amnesty International issued an Urgent Action calling for his immediate release and provision of proper medical care. It urges the Bahraini authorities "to provide 'Abdelwahab Hussain urgent specialised medical care; calls on them to grant him immediate and regular access to his family; and urges them to release all 13 opposition activists immediately and unconditionally, since they are prisoners of conscience, convicted solely for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression and assembly."

Bahrain Freedom Movement
15th November 2013



Stop The Shipment
of tear gas to Bahrain